

REGION 2

AAP, BJP EXCHANGED VERBAL VOLLEYS OVER REINSTATEMENT OF BUS MARSHALS



“Certificate of Honesty”: Kejriwal left CM’s residence moves to new abode in Lutyens’ Delhi

OUR CORRESPONDENT New Delhi

Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday vacated his official residence after nearly nine years, moving to a new bungalow in the Lutyens’ zone of New Delhi.



“The change comes as Kejriwal prepares for a challenging political battle leading up to the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections, amidst political and legal challenges. Kejriwal, who heads the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), has moved with his family to 5, Ferozeshah Road near Mandi House. His family includes his wife Sunita, son, daughter, and parents.

Delhi in the forthcoming elections. His decision to step down and leave his official residence is aligned with this larger electoral strategy, setting the stage for a high-stakes contest.

BANKING & FINANCE 6

RBI DEPUTY GOVERNOR CAUTIONS SMALL FINANCE BANKS ON HIGH COST DEPOSITS



‘Democracy will be in danger if...’: SC raps Delhi LG over MCD standing committee election

OUR CORRESPONDENT New Delhi



The Supreme Court on Friday raised concerns over the urgency shown by the Delhi Lieutenant Governor’s (LG) office in conducting the election for the sixth member of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi’s (MCD) standing committee. It also questioned the LG’s interference in the electoral process.

danger if you keep interfering like this.” The court sought a response from the LG’s office within two weeks on a plea filed by Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi, who challenged the September 27 election of the standing committee. It warned the LG’s office that it would take the matter seriously if the election for the standing committee chairman until the next hearing.

POTPOURRI 8

FIRST-EVER ‘KHO KHO WORLD CUP’ TO TAKE PLACE IN INDIA



Gold, silver witness festive surge



NEW DELHI: Gold and Silver prices rebounded on Thursday due to fresh demand from stockists and retail consumers for the ongoing festive season. The precious metal rose Rs 200 to revisit the all-time high level of Rs 78,300 per 10 gm, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Jaishankar meets President Dissanayake, assures support in Lanka’s economic rebuilding



COLOMBO: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Friday and discussed “ways to deepen ongoing cooperation and strengthen India-Sri Lanka ties, as assured India’s continued support to the island nation’s economic rebuilding.”

No response from govt, Wangchuk to go on indefinite fast from Saturday

NEW DELHI: Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk said he and other protesters from Ladakh would sit on an indefinite fast from Saturday since they have not received any response from the government over their demand of meeting the President, Prime Minister or the Union Home Minister.



Wangchuk was leading the ‘Delhi Chalo Padyatra’, which began from Leh a month ago. The ‘padyatra’ was organised by the Leh Apex Body, which along with the Kargil Democratic Alliance, has been spearheading an agitation for the last four years for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

response from the government. So we will sit on an indefinite fast from tomorrow,” Wangchuk said. Ladakh MP Mohamad Haneefa and other members of the Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance, including Sajjad Kargili, Asgar Karbalai, Tseering Punchok, and Ashraf Ali Barcha, were present on the dais.

President Murmu urges tribal community to prioritise education of children



JAIPUR: President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said that the people of the tribal community should educate their children and give them opportunities to move forward in life and spread their wings in multiple spheres.

“Congratulations to those who received the honour today, the number of women who were honoured here outnumber men, which is a matter of pride. The development of women is a mirror of the development of society. Tribal people have a lot of potential,” she added.

Ashok Tanwar joins Congress, Expresses faith in Rahul’s mission to save constitution

KAVITA SHARMA New Delhi

Former MP, Ashok Tanwar have said that the BJP did not have any faith in the constitution or Baba Saheb Ambedkar.

hendragarh in presence of the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi. Welcoming him back into the Congress, Maken said, Tanwar’s joining the party will further strengthen the fight initiated by Rahul Gandhi to save the constitution and take forward the ideals of Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar.



Tanwar said he had joined the BJP just a few months ago but had realised and found that the desired faith in the Constitution

and the teachings of Dr Ambedkar was lacking there. He said, in contrast to that, Rahul Gandhi had launched a nationwide campaign to propagate the ideals and teachings of Dr Ambedkar and also to save the Constitution and reservations.

28 Naxalites killed in encounter in Chhattisgarh’s Bastar region

NEW DELHI: In one of the biggest operations against Maoists in Chhattisgarh, security personnel killed 28 Naxalites in a fierce encounter in the Bastar region on Friday, a senior police official said.



The gunfight broke out around 1 pm in the forest between Thulthuli and Nendur villages in Abhujmaad on the Narayanpur-Dantewada inter-district border, when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P told PTI over the phone.

In a post on X, CM Sai said, “There is news of 28 Naxalites gunned down in an encounter with security forces in the border area of Narayanpur-Dantewada districts. The great success achieved by the soldiers is commendable. I salute their courage and valour.”

30 lakh defence pensioners linked to SPARSH portal: Rajnath Singh

NEW DELHI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said that of 32 lakh defence pensioners, 30 lakh have been successfully linked to the SPARSH portal- System for Pension Administration (RAKSHA).



Addressing the annual day celebrations of Defence Accounts Department (DAD), he said despite numerous challenges, the department has been successful in the implementation of this web-based system, which processes pension claims and credits the pension directly into bank accounts of defence pensioners without any external intermediary.

across over 90 nations, giving a push to the ‘Make in India’ programme. Defence export is projected to grow at an 18 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from FY24-FY30. About Rs 6 lakh crore worth of defence equipment has been procured from Indian companies in the past decade, doubling the country’s defence production.

# AAP, BJP exchanged verbal volleys over reinstatement of bus marshals

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) exchanged verbal volleys on Friday over the reinstatement of former bus marshals in Delhi. Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj criticized the BJP for allegedly backtracking on their stance, accusing the party of failing to support the marshals' reinstatement. "Not a single BJP MLA showed up to meet the Lieutenant Governor (LG) yesterday. Neither did the LG give time to meet, nor did the BJP MLAs appear to save the jobs of the marshals," Bharadwaj stated.



The controversy follows a two-day session of the Delhi Assembly, which began on September 26, where the issue of bus marshals' termination sparked heated debates. Despite the initial disagreements, both AAP and BJP members ultimately supported a resolution calling for the marshals to be reinstated. The assembly passed a resolution stating that AAP and BJP MLAs would meet LG VK Saxena on October 3 at 11 a.m. to press for the reinstatement. However, no meeting took place.

Bharadwaj condemned the absence of the LG and BJP members, accusing the LG of behaving like a "dictator." He questioned, "Does this kind of dictatorship happen in any other state where the governor refuses to meet ministers and allows police to thrash them when they try to meet him?" Bharadwaj further accused the LG of imposing unemployment on the youth of Delhi.

On Thursday, former bus marshals held a protest near the LG's residence, demanding their jobs back. Delhi Ministers Saurabh Bharadwaj, Imran Hussain, Mukesh Ahalawat, and other AAP MLAs joined the protest. The police, citing the lack of permission for the demonstration, detained several protesters, including Bharadwaj and other AAP leaders.

minated. "Now they are misleading these poor people by not reinstating them," Gupta remarked.

Escalating his criticism, Gupta pointed to the current leadership, asking, "Now there is a new Chief Minister, Atishi. Why doesn't she reinstate these civil volunteers?" He announced that BJP MLAs would meet Atishi on October 5, urging her to issue a cabinet note to approve the reinstatement. Gupta also suggested introducing reservation provisions for OBCs, SCs, STs, and EWS categories in the bus marshal appointments.

On Thursday, former bus marshals held a protest near the LG's residence, demanding their jobs back. Delhi Ministers Saurabh Bharadwaj, Imran Hussain, Mukesh Ahalawat, and other AAP MLAs joined the protest. The police, citing the lack of permission for the demonstration, detained several protesters, including Bharadwaj and other AAP leaders.

# Ten killed in truck-tractor collision in UP, PM Modi expresses condolences



**LUCKNOW:** At least ten people were killed and three others injured after a truck collided with a tractor-trolley on GT Road at the Mirzapur-Varanasi border. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed their condolences to the bereaved families.

According to police reports, the tractor-trolley was carrying 13 labourers returning from construction work in the Bhadohi district when it was

struck from behind by the truck, which reportedly lost control. The injured individuals have been referred to the Trauma Centre in Varanasi for treatment.

Meanwhile, an FIR has been registered regarding the accident, and legal proceedings are underway. Authorities are conducting a thorough investigation to determine the circumstances surrounding the collision.

PM Modi expressed deepest condolences on his social media

'X' on Friday and said, "The road accident in Mirzapur, Uttar Pradesh is extremely painful. My deepest condolences to the bereaved families of those who lost their lives in it. May God give them strength to bear this pain. Along with this, I wish for the speedy recovery of all the injured. Under the supervision of the state government, the local administration is engaged in helping the victims in every possible way."

CM Yogi also instructed district administration officials to ensure that the injured receive prompt and proper medical care, extending wishes for their swift recovery.

The UP CM also emphasised the need for expedited relief efforts at the accident site, urging officials to provide all necessary assistance to those affected.

Anupriya Patel, Union Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare, also expressed grief over the unfortunate incident in the Mirzapur district of Uttar Pradesh. Patel wished for the speedy recovery of those injured in the accident.

# Kejriwal's "Janta ki Adalat" political drama says Virendra Sachdeva



OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi:

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva stated that the people of Delhi are fed up with Arvind Kejriwal's corruption-ridden, inefficient government, and they want him to stop this political drama under the name of "Janta ki Adalat" every few days. Instead, he should be prepared to hear the real people's court verdict in February 2025 because the people of Delhi are ready to reject him.

Sachdeva further said that no matter how much MP Sanjay Singh and Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj try to portray Arvind Kejriwal as a symbol of sacrifice, the people of Delhi know that Kejriwal has not made any sacrifice by resigning. He has only passed the blame for the defeat, caused by 10 years of anti-incumbency, onto Ms. Atishi Marlena.

The Delhi BJP President said that instead of delivering speeches to AAP workers and enacting the drama of "Janta ki Adalat," it would be better if Arvind Kejriwal answers the six questions of Delhi's people:

- 1 Why hasn't Arvind Kejriwal provided even a single new hospital in Delhi in 10 years, and why were there scams in the name of hospital construction?
- 2 Why hasn't he delivered a single complete new school or college in 10 years?
- 3 Why has the Delhi government not added new buses to the DTC fleet in 10 years?
- 4 Why is the Delhi Jal Board, once a Navratna company, now running a deficit of over Rs 60,000 crore?

5 Why, when Delhi is emerging as a national capital 10 years ago, is it now infamous as the most polluted capital in the world?

6 Why is Delhi, once known for its flyovers and roads from 1957 to 2013, now infamous for broken and destroyed roads?

BJP Delhi president added that these six questions are just the beginning. Every street in Delhi has citizens who have a question for Arvind Kejriwal, and on that day, the court will evict him from Delhi.

# Drugs, mobile phone, surgical blades and needles recovered in district jail Jind



SATISH HANDA  
Jind

On the complaint of the jail Deputy Superintendent, Civil Lines police station registered a case against nine prisoners under the Narcotics Control Act and the Prisoner Act, including a tractor driver Sandeep, a resident of village Kapad, who brought construction material for the construction work going on in the district jail by Police House Corporation being carrying out in jail complex. According to a guard of security staff the driver of the tractor bringing construction material, was bringing drugs inside the jail in connivance with the prisoners and throwing them in the jail park from along the boundary wall. On this basis, when the jail administration searched, packets were found in the water drainage pipe, which included two strips of intoxicating pills, a mobile phone, battery charger, 15 surgical blades, 25 needles. After finding intoxicating pills and other drugs, Jail Deputy Superintendent Surendra made a complaint to police.

During investigation, it was found that prisoners Manjeet and Dinesh had hidden the packets in the water pipe. Investigation officer Rajkumar of Civil Line Police Station said that on the complaint of Jail Deputy Superintendent Surendra, a case has been registered against prisoners Jatin, resident of village Ramrai, Ashok, resident of Safidon Gate, Surendra, resident of village Rajgarh, Bunty, resident of village Peepaltha, Ravindra, resident of village Budayan, Monu Thakur, resident of village Sufalparva, UP, Dinesh, resident of Shyam Nagar, Manjeet, resident of village Nidani and tractor driver Sandeep under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act and other sections.

# Three Killed, 7 Injured in a explosion in fire in firecrackers 'illegal' unit in Sonipat district



PARVESH HANDA  
Sonipat

In view of the arrival of festival season illegal manufacturing of firecrackers has started. Three persons including two women and a child were charred to death in a blast on Saturday at a house in Sonipat's Rikhau village of Kharkhoda in Haryana. According to the police, the place was being used as an illegal firecracker unit. Three persons killed and 7 others injured in the explosion at the house used as illegal firecracker manufacturing unit Haryana.

The injured were admitted to PGIMS hospital in Rohtak. A probe has been launched into the incident. Sonipat ACP Jeet Singh said that the police team found materials used in making firecrackers when they searched the spot. The owner of the property has also been rounded up and investigation is underway. According to residents in the area a cylinder exploded. The FSL team was called and reached the spot immediately. Three burnt bodies were recovered and seven injured were admitted to hospital. Some of the family members and workers were present at the site when the blast happened at the illegal factory. The police officer also said that the deceased include two women and a child. Though the cause of the fire that led to the blast is being investigated, it is believed that the chemical used in preparing firecrackers appeared to have caught fire.

# Delhi HC Addresses Legal Intersection of MSMED Act and Arbitration Act in Landmark Ruling

**NEW DELHI:** In a significant ruling, the Delhi High Court has clarified key legal principles concerning the interplay between the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 (MSMED Act), and the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996.



Justice Sanjeev Narula delivered the judgment while hearing a petition seeking to quash notices issued in arbitration proceedings, bringing much-needed clarity on the limitation period under Section 18(5) of the MSMED Act and the impact of MSMED registration after contract issuance.

In its detailed judgment, the Court held that the MSMED Act applies to services provided after the registration of a supplier as an MSME, even if the contract

was issued beforehand. Finally, the bench clarified that the limitation period under Section 18(5) of the MSMED Act concerns the reference to arbitration and does not apply to the arbitration timeline itself. Any extensions or breaches of timelines under Section 29A must be examined by the arbitral tribunal, not the court.

The Division Bench later dismissed an appeal challenging this judgment, reinforcing the Single Judge Bench's decision.

The case stems from a contractual dispute between Cortech International Pvt. Ltd (the petitioner) and Respondent No. 3, which was referred to arbitration by the Delhi International Arbitration Centre (DIAC).

Respondent No. 3, a subcontractor engaged in work under a tender issued by GAIL, filed a complaint with the Micro and Small Enterprise Facilitation Council (MSEFC) alleging non-payment of dues. The conciliation process under Section 18 of the MSMED Act failed, leading to the initiation of arbitration proceedings.

# Delhi CM Atishi, ministers to inspect roads; promise pothole-free roads by Diwali

**NEW DELHI:** Delhi Chief Minister Atishi said that all the cabinet ministers led by her will start inspecting the roads in the capital from Monday after AAP convenor Arvind Kejriwal wrote a letter urging her to repair the damaged roads.



Government engineers and local MLAs will also be present along with the ministers. After inspection, repair work on these roads will be started immediately.

The decision came after a meeting of all the ministers, chaired by the CM, was conducted at Delhi Secretariat on Sunday. Delhi Chief Secretary and officials of the PWD Department were also present during the meeting. A comprehensive review of 1400 kilometres

of PWD roads was done. During the meeting, it was discussed which roads of PWD are completely damaged and need to be rebuilt; which are the roads where some parts like 100-200 meters have to be repaired. Along with this, those roads were also discussed where there are potholes and they need to be repaired.

"In the meeting, it was decided that the Delhi government will provide pothole-free

roads to the people before Diwali," Atishi affirmed. "Due to rain, there are potholes at many places on the roads. Agencies like Delhi Jal Board, Tata Power, and BSES dug roads but did not repair them after doing their work. Due to this, the condition of Delhi's roads has deteriorated," she added.

Atishi said that Arvind Kejriwal had handed her a letter in the Assembly on Friday, requesting the government to work on repairing the roads of Delhi on a war footing. Chief Minister Atishi will inspect the roads in South and South East Delhi. Saurabh Bharadwaj has been given the responsibility of inspecting the roads in East Delhi. Gopal Rai will inspect the roads in North East Delhi.

**NEW DELHI:** The Centre on Thursday told the Supreme Court that the prohibitory orders issued by Delhi Police have been withdrawn.

Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta, the second highest law officer of the Centre, made the above statement before a bench headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud when senior advocate Menaka Guruswamy mentioned a plea challenging the prohibitory orders for urgent listing.

"The Commissioner prohibits gatherings of five or more persons. This impacts the city. Navratri season is on, Dussehra is on, and Ramleela cannot take place. Devotees come from Haryana and Uttar Pradesh," submitted Guruswamy.

At this, CJI Chandrachud said, "Solicitor General says that order by the Commissioner of Police has been withdrawn."

SG Mehta said that similar matters are listed for hearing on Thursday before a bench headed by the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court.

The position was rebutted by Guruswamy who sought the recording of the statement made by the law officer, CJI Chandrachud said that police are a central subject in the national capital and prohibitory orders have been withdrawn.

A public interest litigation was filed before the top court seeking quashing of the order passed on September 30 by the Commissioner of Police under Section

163 of the Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023, equivalent to erstwhile Section 144 of the CrPC, in the districts of New Delhi, North and Central, as well as on all state borders of Delhi till October 5. The plea filed by the priest of the famous Kalkaji temple said that in light of the prohibitory order passed by the Delhi Police, the "commencement of festivities across the city and long-standing traditions observed by innumerable residents of Delhi is in jeopardy for no constitutionally valid reason".

"Given that the highly religiously significant period of the Navratri begins on October 3, any assemblies to celebrate the festivities in the notified areas will be adversely affected," it added.

The plea, filed through advocate Prateek Chadha, said that the impugned orders will have a chilling effect on the rights of the petitioner as well as those of many other citizens who are celebrating the Navratri in these areas under Articles 14, 19, 21 and 25 of the Constitution of India. "The petitioner is constrained to file the instant writ petition on account of the wholly illegal, perverse, and unnecessary action of the respondent (authorities) while promulgating the order since the same is not on account of any urgent nuisance, apprehended danger, or other public safety concerns that Section 163 of BNS requires," contended the petition.

# DISCOMs can provide new electricity connection without approval from authority: DDA

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
New Delhi

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) permitted the DISCOMs to provide new electricity connections to several categories, including urbanized villages and colonies regularized by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), without needing further approval from the authority, according to Raj Niwas officials informed.



This decision followed instructions from Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena, who received appeals from Delhi MPs, certain MLAs, and multiple resident welfare associations.

The DDA has authorized these connections for areas where a No Objection Certificate (NoC) has already been issued by the DDA or any other government agency, or where development plans have been approved, officials said.

A decision was taken in June last year where no new connections were to be allowed within the development areas of 105 urbanised villages in the land pooling areas since authorisation for new constructions in these areas was to be issued by the DDA subsequent notification of sectors in these areas as per the Land Pooling Policy, they said.

In this order of June 2023, the exemption was given to Lal Dora, extended Lal Dora and PM-UDAY colonies within the land pooling areas.

Certain areas within the development area have been reported which have sanction or prior approval of various government bodies.

# India's First 3D Selfie Science Museum Launched at IBR International Convocation

**FARIDABAD:** India's first-ever 3D Selfie Science Museum was launched during the Annual International Convocation of the India Book of Records (IBR), which concluded at its corporate office. The two-day event celebrated the exceptional accomplishments of record holders and achievers who arrived from across India and abroad.

The chief guests of the ceremonies were former minister of state for health Ashwini Kumar Choubey, Delhi MLA Somnath Bharti, and senior deputy mayor of Faridabad Devender Chaudhary. Dr RR Fuliya, retired IAS, joined in as a special guest.

Esteemed guests from Nepal, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Malaysia attended the convocation, including Dr Nguyen Hoang Anh, Vice President of the Vietnam Records Organization (VietKings), Nguyen Thi Tuong Van, Head of the International Relations Division of VietKings, and artist Chu Bao Que, a promoter of Vietnamese cultural values. The Chief Editor of Nepal Book of Records, Deepak Chandra Sen, also graced the ceremony. Vietnamese record holders who attended the event included Tran

Thanh Toan, Nguyen Thi Ha, Le Huynh My Tram, and Le Que Minh. Speaking at the much-anticipated event, Dr Biswaroop Roy Chowdhury, Editor-in-Chief of the India Book of Records, emphasized the significance of the newly inaugurated 3D Selfie Science Museum. He stated, "The 3D Selfie Science Museum offers an engaging and interactive way to understand science, allowing visitors of all ages to explore scientific concepts enjoyably. This makes it a valuable addition to modern education, inspiring a deeper interest in science among students and learners nationwide."



Addressing the audience with great enthusiasm and pride, Neeraj Roy Chowdhury, the Managing Editor of the India Book of Records, remarked, "This year's convocation not only celebrated the brilliance and achievements of individuals who have pushed the boundaries of excellence, but it also showcased the unwavering spirit of innovation, dedication, and knowledge that IBR stands for. Through these extraordinary accomplishments, we continue to build a community of record holders who exemplify the essence of perseverance and the pursuit of excellence."

The event saw record holders like Rakesh Chandola, Retvik Agarwal, Devansh Singhal, Sharmistha Chakraborty, Piyali Ghosh, Dr Harshit Tiwari, Rakesh Kumar, Anand P Sharma, Binip K Shah, S Sindhu, Kajal B Danicha, Angelica Das, Kancharla Srimahitraj, Jidhink, Daulatram Gupta, Sarthak Goyal, Arun Y Kulkarni, Saivi Singh, Vishalini NC, Hemant Kumar, Dr Ranjit Das, A Dharsini, Purvika Dugarwal, Yash Shekhar, Rajkamal, Jaysha Yadav, Atul Kumar, Vijay K Devarbhyan, Pawan Bansal, Ashutosh Panigrahi and Lt Col Manoj Kumar Nair being honored.

Other notable record holders included Jayasree Venugopal, Capt Rohit Malik, Kushagra Pandey, Richi Sharma, Raj Saini, Dr. Wazir Chand Goyal, Santosh C Rajeshirke, Sameena Shaikh, Raja Sudhanthan, Vanita Borade, Manas M Bagh, Yajath G, Dr. Bhagwan Singh, Divisha Rathi, Vandana Garg, Kapil Kishore, Aradhya Modanwal, Vishnu Gupta, Krishna Modanwal, Kushvidharth, Vedansh T Parikh, Lt Col Hemendra Bansal, TJG Srinivasa Rao, Sandeep Boyat, Ajas KA, Dr. Sumeet Patil, Nikhil Bothra, Pradeep Khanal, Partho Sarkar, Ritu Insan and Yesh K Thaker.

Distinguished IBR Achievers and Grand Masters in attendance included Suryavardhan Singh Dhirawat,

Angel U Malewar, Subala Maharana, Debojyoti Bandyopadhyay, Advita M Tivrekra, Munnaluri T Samaikhya, Dr SA Mohan Krishna, Mrityunjaya Chakrawarty, Vaibhav Raj, Aaryav Chaurasia, Julfina Ali, Pallavi Rani, Pragyan Maity, ADNSV Prasad, Ganesh Tiwari, Rahul Kumar, Rajveer C Shah, Mente Suryansh, Prince Chaudhary, Rishu Raj, Manahsi A Allanki, Rakshit Rihan, Pericherla R Sree, Dr Chittaranjan Boraiah, Maanvir Thakral, Chiraaksh Bhoopalam, Dr Bhagwan Singh, Aman Mishra, Aranya Chhabra, Nitu Verma and Sima Singh.

The India Book of Records, a premier record-keeping organization and custodian of Indian records since 2006, publishes an annual book featuring over 10,000 entries and a monthly magazine in both English and Hindi showcasing the stories of record holders. Monthly convocations are held to honor these achievers regularly. The organization adheres to the International Protocol for New Records guidelines. Some IBR record holders are nominated for the Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar Award each year and are felicitated during the Republic Day celebration.

# Supreme Court bans caste-based discrimination in prisons

Quashes jail manual rules of 10 states

**NEW DELHI:** In a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court on Thursday banned caste-based discrimination like division of manual labour, segregation of barracks and bias against prisoners of de-notified tribes and habitual offenders by holding as “unconstitutional” the jail manual rules of 10 states for fostering such biases.

Observing that “right to live with dignity extends even to the incarcerated”, a bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said, “Criminal laws of the colonial era continue to impact the postcolonial world.”

It asked the Centre and the



states to amend their prison manuals and laws within three months, and file compliance reports before it.

It dealt with certain discriminatory provisions of jail manuals of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Kerala, Maharashtra Karnataka

and Himachal Pradesh and set them aside.

It said Article 17 enunciates that everyone is born equal.

“There cannot be any stigma attached to the existence, touch or presence of any person. By way of Article 17, our Constitution strengthens the equality of status of every citizen...” it said.

Referring to an instance, it said convicts from communities lower in the caste hierarchy were expected to continue with their customary occupations in jail and the caste hierarchy outside the prison was replicated within the prison.

“Rules that discriminate among individual prisoners on the basis of their caste specifically or indirectly by referring to proxies of caste identity are violative of Article 14 on account of invalid classification and subversion of substantive equality,” it held.

For instance, rules assigning sweeping work which stipulate that “sweepers shall be chosen from the ‘Mehtar or Hari caste’, also is part of discrimination, it said.

# Cabinet approves classical language status for Marathi, Bengali, 3 other languages



at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“This is a historical decision and this goes very well with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the NDA government’s philosophy of taking pride in our culture, taking pride in our heritage and taking pride in all the Indian languages and the rich heritage that we have,” Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said at a cabinet briefing.

The classical languages serve as a custodian of Bharat’s profound and ancient cultural heritage, embodying the essence of each community’s historical and cultural milestone, the government says

The classical languages serve as a custodian of Bharat’s profound and ancient cultural heritage, embodying the essence of each community’s historical and cultural milestone, the government says

New Delhi : The Union Cabinet on Thursday approved the status of classical language for Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali.

The decision was taken

historical and cultural milestone, the government said.

The Government of India decided to create a new category of languages as “classical languages” on October 12, 2004 declaring Tamil as classical language and thereafter Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Odia languages were given the classical language status.

A government statement said that a proposal from the Maharashtra government in 2013 was received in the ministry requesting classical language status to Marathi, which was forwarded to the Linguistics Experts Committee (LEC). The LEC recommended Marathi for classical language.

The assembly elections are due later this year in Maharashtra and this was a major poll issue in the state.

# Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi extend greetings on Navratri Festival



**NEW DELHI:** Congress supremo Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Rahul Gandhi extended their greetings and best wishes on the commencement of the auspicious occasion of the nine-day Navratri festival on Thursday. General Secretary of All India Congress Committee, Priyanka Gandhi took to X and expressed her wishes to the devotees. “From today’s auspicious day, Shardiya Navratri is starting - the great festival of worship of Shakti Svaroop Maa Durga. Many congratulations to the devotees of Maa spread across the country and abroad on this series of festivals,” she wrote, as translated from Hindi. Adding to her greetings, she went on: “May the whole country be blessed with wealth and prosperity; people be free from diseases, grief, old age and death. May the loving blessings of Maa be showered on all the children.” She concluded her message with the Sanskrit shloka in praise of the goddess: “Om Jayanti Mangala Kali Bhadrakali Kapalini. Durga Kshama Shiva Dharti Swaha Swadha Namostu Te.”

Her brother and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi too took to X and wished devotees on the grand occasion. “Best wishes to everyone on the auspicious festival of Navratri. May the blessings of Maa Durga always be upon you and your life be filled with happiness. Jai Mata Di,” he wrote in Hindi. The festival of Shardiya Navratri begins with the worship goddess Shailputri on the first day. Shailputri, the daughter of the mountain king Himavat, is a form of the Hindu mother goddess Mahadevi, representing herself as the pure form of goddess Parvati.

# PM Modi extends greetings on the auspicious occasion of Navratri



**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Thursday, extended wishes on the auspicious occasion of Navratri, a nine-day festival dedicated to Goddess Durga.

“I wish all my countrymen a very Happy Navratri. May this holy festival dedicated to Shakti Vandana prove to be auspicious for everyone. Jai Mata Di!”, PM Modi wrote on his X handle.

He also wished for blessings for all, saying, “On the first day of Navratri, I pray to Ma Shailputri with folded hands! May everyone be blessed by her grace. This prayer to the Goddess is for all of you...”

Home Minister Amit Shah prayed for the happiness and peace of the entire world. In his post on X, he wrote, “Heartiest greetings to all countrymen on the sacred festival of Navratri. Navratri is a great festival of worship of Shakti, accumulation of spiritual energy and worship of nine forms of Mother Ambe, the mother of the universe. I pray to Mother Durga for the welfare, happiness and peace of the entire world.”

As the 9-day Shardiya Navratri festival began, devotees thronged to various temples across the country to seek blessings of Goddess Durga.

A large number of devotees had darshan at Mata Vaishno Devi temple in Jammu and Kashmir on the first day of Shardiya Navratri. The temple is one of the holiest sites for Hindu pilgrims, dedicated to ‘Vaishno Devi’, one of the forms of Goddess Durga.

# Maintain balance between personal ambitions and social sensitivity: Prez Murmu to students

**JAIPUR:** President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said education was the best mode of empowerment, and advised students to maintain a balance between their personal ambitions and social sensitivity.

She said that one’s welfare is easily achieved by doing good to others.

Addressing the 32nd convocation programme of Mohanlal Sukhadia University at Udaipur, she said, “Education is the biggest mode of empowerment. This institute has been scripting stories of empowerment as there is a big list of students coming out from this university who have extended their contribution in diverse areas by making a mark. One amongst these students is Punjab Governor Gubabhand Kataria.”

The President urged students to extend their cooperation to realise the dream of a developed India by 2047. “We have set



a goal of ‘Developed India by 2047’ and this goal will be attained by your dedicated efforts. I am confident that you will extend your cooperation in this regard,” she added.

“The great personalities of Mewar and Udaipur have played an important role in the freedom struggle and nation-building. This region has been witness to the struggle for national identity for centuries. This

region of Rana Sanga, Maharana Pratap, and the great saint poetess of the Bhakti period Mirabai can be called the region of the confluence of power and devotion,” she said.

The President further said that this institute is educating over one lakh students out of which many students are tribals. “The tribal community has enhanced the country’s pride,” she said and asked

students to study the profile of dignitaries. “You will get introduced to personalities who can be ideal to you,” President Murmu added.

She recalled Ambedkar’s words and said Constitution maker and nation builder Babasaheb Ambedkar believed that character is more important than education.

“Ambedkar used to say that an educated person, who lacks education and humbleness, is more dangerous than a violent animal. I request you all that you should not do any such work which brings a bad name to your character. You should have integrity in all your work. All your work should be justified. You have to make a mark in the 21st century in this fast-changing world. You will have to maintain the spirit of the student and pave a mark of success by hard work and dedication,” she told the students.

# Valmiki community votes for 1st time in Assembly elections of J&K



**NEW DELHI:** Expressing their joy at this historic moment, the Valmiki community members said they had been granted voting rights after waiting for decades. It is a momentous day for the first time in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections.

They also voiced hopes for a brighter future for their community, saying, “We want the government to do more for the upliftment of our society. We believe that after this change, better opportunities will open up for our people.”

Laal Chand, an 85-year-old first-time voter of the community, said, “I am very happy, but also concerned about the future of my children, who are educated but still unemployed. I cast my vote with the hope of a better future for them.”

Ekta, a young woman from the Valmiki community, expressed her gratitude, “Every government seeks votes, but as we didn’t have voting rights, how could we participate? I am thankful to the Modi government for abrogating Article 370, which opened up many opportunities for us. After this change, I was able to enrol in an LLB programme. I urge people to elect a government that understands and works for their future, not one that promotes terrorism and creates hurdles.”

Another member of the community, a 45-year-old man, remarked, “I am very happy to

have finally cast my vote. Our country is one of the largest democracies, but due to Articles 370 and 35A, we were deprived of our rights. After their abrogation, we not only gained voting rights but also domicile status. I hope the Valmiki community will now receive land allotments, job opportunities, loans, and avenues for businesses.”

He further added, “I dream of a healthy and peaceful life for our community. After seven decades, I voted, and I trust that our voice will not go unheard as we have faith in the Modi government, which cares for every section of society.”

Granting the right to the Valmiki community to be able to vote in the Assembly elections marks a significant political and social shift in the union territory, and is a step towards empowering communities that have long been marginalised.

Meanwhile, as the final phase of polling is underway, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called upon the people, especially first-time voters and women in the Union Territory, to come out and vote in large numbers.

Polling for the third and final phase of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections began at 7 a.m. across 40 constituencies, with 24 in the Jammu division and the rest in the Kashmir Valley. Voting will continue until 6 p.m. and the votes will be counted on October 8.

# Distasteful and disgraceful: HM Amit Shah slams Kharge over remarks on PM

**NEW DELHI:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday criticised Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge over his remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying it was “distasteful and disgraceful”.

Taking this to social media X, HM Shah stated, “Yesterday, the Congress President Shri Mallikarjun Kharge Ji has outperformed himself, his leaders and his party in being absolutely distasteful and disgraceful in his speech.”

“In a bitter display of spite, he unnecessarily dragged PM Modi into his personal health matters by saying that



he would die only after removing PM Modi from power. It just shows how much hate and fear these Congress people have of PM Modi, that they are thinking of him constantly,” said HM Shah.

HM Shah further stated, “As for the health of Kharge, PM Modi prays, I pray and we all pray that he lives a long, healthy life. May he continue to live for many years and may

he live to see the creation of a Viksit Bharat by 2047.”

Earlier on Sunday, during a poll rally in J&K’s Kathua district, the Congress President nearly fainted while addressing the crowd. As he gathered strength, he commented that he wouldn’t die before seeing PM Modi being ousted from power.

“We will fight to restore statehood. I am 83 years old. I am not going to die so early. I will stay alive until Prime Minister Narendra Modi is removed from power. I wanted to talk. But due to dizziness, I have sat down. Please excuse me,” Kharge remarked resuming his speech.

# Challenges surrounded for new police commissioner of twin cities



ARABINDA MOHAPATRA Bhubaneswar

Senior IPS officer Suresh Dev Dutta Singh, known for his efficiency, has taken charge as the new police Commissioner of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, the move being hailed by the residents of the twin cities.

The 1998 batch IPS officer was earlier posted as ADG (Operations) and tasked with the challenging job of curbing Maoist menace. Born in Uttar Pradesh Singh is the winner of President’s police medal for his distinguished service. Always willing to help people he has told the people of twin cities that they can approach him freely.

Singh replaces Sanjeeb Panda who had to quit under controversial circumstances following allegations of an Army captain and his fiancée being physically abused and humiliated in a city police station. A graduate of Allahabad University Singh is known for his no-nonsense approach which he would have to continue with in dealing with the varied challenges that his new job entails.

One of his biggest challenges will be schooling his own force and instilling in them a sense of discipline, the lack of which has left to multiple problems in the past. There have also been allegations of corruption against the force, a disease which plagues the men in khaki in many parts of the state.

However, maintaining law and order in Bhubaneswar is a bigger challenge as it is a city in transition, moving towards becoming a metropolis. Besides Bhubaneswar has a huge floating population which offers a challenge of a very different kind. The city offers a kind of anonymity to new people which makes crime easy and its detection difficult.

# Prashant Kishor launches Jan Surraaj party, sets ‘humanity’ its core ideology

**NEW DELHI:** Political strategist Prashant Kishor launched his new political party, Jan Surraaj party, on Wednesday with ‘humanity’ as the ‘main ideology’ and quality education as the ‘supreme goal’.

Addressing a large gathering, he noted that people had been curious about when his ‘Jan Surraaj’ campaign would officially form a political party. With the Election Commission’s recognition of Jan Surraaj as an official party, he took the opportunity to present his vision for Bihar’s future. Prashant Kishor said, “This party is a collective movement, representing all communities - Dalits, backward classes, Hindus, and Muslims.”

He claimed that the gathering signifies the commitment of people from every background to develop a state that had been neglected by traditional political forces. “People gathered here are focused on restoring the historic pride of Bihar,” he added.

He addressed a key question on the party’s ideology, stating that “humanity” will be the core principle, drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and B.R. Ambedkar. “Humanity First” is Jan Surraaj’s guiding philosophy,” he said. Prashant Kishor also



emphasised that the goal is to see Bihar so developed that people from states like Haryana and Gujarat come to Bihar seeking employment.

He also questioned the current state of Bihar’s leadership, saying, “What is the way forward? Leaders come here and demean each other without any blueprint for Bihar’s development.” He shared his experience of travelling during the Jan Surraaj campaign, creating awareness among people to choose leaders who would work for the future of their children.

“Jan Surraaj’s top priority will be on quality education for children,” he said. He urged people to think about their children’s future, stating, “How many times have you voted for the education and employment of your

children? Education quality and employment were never prioritised in Bihar because you never voted for these things.”

He alleged that the people, for the greed of 5 kg of cereals, voted for PM Modi. “Loot was done, but cereals were given. The Ayodhya Mandir was built, but no factories or hospitals were built in Bihar,” he said. He said that many people voted for Lalu Yadav, and during his reign, there were no roadways, electricity, or water. The poor and backward communities were promised progress and respect. Did they get it? Yes, but were their basic needs fulfilled,” he said.

He further acknowledged that under Nitish Kumar’s reign, electricity reached every village, though citizens now face issues

with smart meters. He also noted that many people voted for PM Modi, seeing the work he did in Gujarat, where he established factories by leveraging funds from across the world. “Biharis are working in these factories, but what matters is the reason for which you vote,” Prashant Kishor added. Kishor asserted that his focus is not just on rhetoric but on actionable plans: “I am not just speaking about development; I am discussing the strategy as well.” He reminded the audience that when people voted for a temple, it was built. When they voted for electricity, it came. “But none of you voted for the education of your children, and that is why no one provided it to Bihar.”

His key question to the people was: “Do you care about the future of your children or not? According to scholars, only through education, land, and wealth can poverty be eliminated.” He pointed out that Bihar lacks all three: “If you look clearly, Bihar has none of these. In the name of education, children go to school for khichdi (mid-day meals) and then leave. In colleges, degrees are being sold for money. Bihar needs quality education, and Jan Surraaj will invest in and prioritise improving education.”

# Dalits should not waste their votes on BJP, Cong: BSP chief Mayawati



**NEW DELHI:** Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Sunday called upon the people of Haryana and Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) to vote for the BSP, highlighting the purported neglect and disdain shown by both the Congress and the BJP towards Dalits.

She urged voters to be mindful of this historical neglect when casting their votes in the forthcoming elections. In a post on X, Mayawati stated, “The continuous ne-

glect and contempt of Dalits by the Congress during the Assembly elections in Haryana shows that things are not right within the party. If things are not right now, what can be expected in the future? Dalits should not waste their vote on the Congress or the BJP.”

that continuously fights to protect their interests, ensure their welfare, and secure their constitutional rights.”

The BSP supremo also directed her appeal to the Dalit community in J&K, warning them against being swayed by false promises by the Congress, BJP, or any other alliances.

“Given their anti-Dalit history, Dalit voters should cast their valuable votes solely for the BSP,” she added.

The BSP is contesting the Haryana Assembly elections on October 5 in alliance with the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), fielding candidates in 37 of the 90 seats. Currently, the Haryana Assembly has no BSP legislators, while INLD’s Abhay Chautala is the party’s sole MLA.

Chautala, who previously served as the Leader of Opposition in the Haryana Legislative Assembly from 2014 to 2019, remains INLD’s only representative in the current Assembly.

# Two militants killed in gunfight in South Kashmir’s Kulgam



**FW DESK**  
Two unidentified militants have been killed in the ongoing gunfight in Adigam Devsar village in south Kashmir’s Kulgam, reports said. Earlier, four army personnel and a traffic police official suffered injuries during the operation. Quoting a senior police officer, a local news agency reported that two unidentified militants were killed by security forces. The gunfight comes amid the ongoing elections being held after a gap of ten-years in Jammu and Kashmir.

## Look deep into rural recovery & urban woes

India's remarkable 8.2 per cent GDP growth in 2023-24, while impressive, hides two troubling trends. First, the agriculture sector is faltering, impacted by an unfavorable monsoon. Second, private consumption expenditure—a key driver of growth—expanded by just 4 per cent, less than half the pace of overall economic growth. This consumption slowdown is the weakest since 2002-03, barring the COVID-19 year of 2020-21. Much of this deceleration can be attributed to sluggish rural demand, hit hard by rain deficits. At the same time, economists highlight a “K-shaped” consumption pattern, where demand for higher-end goods outstrips that for everyday items. Hopes for a recovery rest on a normal monsoon and rising rural demand, which would spur consumption across the board, increase industrial capacity, and attract private investment—fueling the much-needed virtuous cycle of growth. Recent signs are encouraging: consumption grew at 7.4 per cent in the first quarter, and rural wage growth turned positive in July. Yet, there is a growing concern that urban demand is waning. S&P Global Ratings noted that high interest rates are curbing urban spending, a concern mirrored in the Reserve Bank of India's July consumer confidence survey, which showed a decline in urban buyers' optimism. The Finance Ministry also flagged falling passenger vehicle sales as an indicator of this cooling demand. To counter these headwinds, policymakers must act swiftly. High food inflation and shrinking wallets are squeezing discretionary spending, making this festive season a critical moment for recovery. The government should consider meaningful cuts to fuel taxes, passing the benefit of lower global oil prices to consumers. A significant reduction in fuel costs could reignite demand, supporting both consumption and the broader economy, ensuring that the growth momentum does not stall. It will also ease the financial burden of common people a bit.

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HENRY FORD

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**MUKUL SANWAL** SAYS DEVELOPING NATIONS MUST UTILIZE U.N. SYSTEM OPPORTUNITIES

## Bridging global inequality gap

The Summit of the Future raises a set of fundamental questions on global governance: should the focus be on great power competition or continuing imbalance in the institutions, agenda setting, and global inequality? The former looks at the means and not the ends with a continuing debate on the meaning of justice.

Global goals do not resolve challenges; they support new forms of cooperation. The Summit resulted in a Global Digital Impact initiative and a Declaration on Future Generations, an inspirational call for national action. The concrete impact is an International Scientific Panel and a Global Dialogue on AI. An implementation map and intergovernmental consultations mirror how climate change came onto the global agenda 30 years ago. Climate change is now relegated to scaling up adaptation finance, and GDP will include sustainability. Developed countries continue to have the capacity to shape the global agenda.

The Summit did not agree to a clear pathway for Security Council reform and has called for categories of members. Reform of governance of global financial institutions is limited to a pledge to give developing countries a greater say in decision making and review of sovereign debt has been reiterated. Concerns of developing countries have got a short shift.

The problem here is one of definitions. Should the G-7, which continues to set the global agenda, be described as a club of victors of the Second World War or a group of former colonial powers? The U.S. established the G-7 in 1973 to set the global agenda in the United Nations as an anti-developing country body. The clash between Western capitalism and Soviet communism provided the former colonies who became the world's poor



more space and voice. While the world's political geography was reshaped, the 'poor' remained trapped at the bottom of the economic and geopolitical hierarchy. The imbalance in the wider world is reflected in the United Nations.

For example, recent figures from the U.N. show that only 17% of the Sustainable Development Goals are on track. Developing countries hold \$29 trillion in public debt, with \$847 billion in net interest payments, and experienced a negative net resource transfer in 2022. In July, the first joint declaration by G-20 finance leaders on international tax cooperation ended with disagreement over whether the U.N. or the OECD is the right forum to advance the agenda.

Real change began with the re-emergence of China and India and their BRICS grouping, in 2009, but it still awaits the reversal of colonial imbalances in key areas. In 1950, the U.S. used 40% of the world's natural resources having hegemonic power to set up multilateralism in a unilateral manner. With the reconstruction of Europe

by 1970, their share had come down to 26%. Multilateralism evolved into treaties, having the authority to impact national policies. The G-7 share decreased to one-fifth in 2010, when Asia used half of global resource use. In a more equal world, the interests of the Global South gained a voice but not the ability to set the agenda. South Africa in 2023 had

to file a case to determine obligations under the climate regime and this is a severe indictment of conference diplomacy.

### Foundations of power

The foundations of power will remain with the West for a few decades even as the global trend is in favour of the Global South. In 1800, Asia consumed more energy than the rest of the world. In 1850, it consumed as much energy as the West. In 1950, the West's consumption was three times the rest of the world. In 2000, the West consumed as much energy as the rest of the world. The imbalance in the sphere of technology and endogenous capacity is even more severe with China and India as outliers becoming global leaders only in certain areas. The trend is towards a more equal world in all its dimensions. In 2000, 4.6 billion people lived in countries whose combined GDP was just 20% of the 755 million people who lived in the G-7. By 2016, the GDP share of 17 developing countries as a percentage

of the G-7 countries tripled to 63%. The Summit accepts this imbalance but focuses on how progress is measured rather than on measures to bridge the gaps.

The Summit recognises that GDP focuses on the economic performance of societies but seeks to link it to sustainability. A broader understanding of prosperity considers non-monetary factors such as infrastructure, municipal services, affordable energy, educational opportunities, health care, and access to drinking water that better represent the urban living standards in a country. A focus on comparable levels of well-being is overdue.

The big lesson from the Summit is that developing countries have yet to exploit the opportunities presented by the U.N. system. While the international political process is open in procedural terms, it has been informed by consensual science developed by 'official experts', and this will be the case for global governance of AI and modification of GDP. Experts frame issues in a manner that determines the "problem" and how it should be "resolved".

As global power shifts back to Asia, both giants are conscious that their ideas are different from the dominant view espoused by the West on how societies work, change, and can be influenced. In a nod to geopolitics, Asia needs to be involved more deeply from the very beginning in expert bodies on AI and GDP to shape global governance by defining global priorities, cooperation, and justice.

*Mukul Sanwal served as policy adviser to the Executive Director of UNEP and later to the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC and was closely associated with Inter-Agency Relations in the Chief Executives Board of the United Nations. Views are personal*



**TAKAYUKI HAGIWARA** ON HOW WASTE CAUSES ECONOMIC LOSS, HITS SUSTAINABLE AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS

## Put the lid on colossal food loss and waste

Food loss and waste represent one of the most pressing challenges to sustainable global food systems. According to the estimates of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 13% of food produced globally is lost before it reaches the retail stage, while an additional 19% is wasted at the retail, food service, and household levels. This results in 32% of global food production being discarded. In a world where more than 700 million people suffer from hunger, this scale of waste is unacceptable.

In India, the situation is concerning. As per the 2022 study of NABARD Consultancy Services (NABCONS), there are significant production losses across all food categories: fruits (8.1%); vegetables (7.27%), and plantation crops (7.18%) suffer the highest percentage of food losses.

Food loss as a percentage of production by category in India is as follows: livestock produce 1.29%; cereals 4.44%; oilseeds 5.66%; eggs 6.03%; pulses 6.36%; plantation crops 7.18%; vegetables 7.27% and fruits 8/1% (Source: NABCONS (2022)).

Food loss in India not only undermines national food security but also translates into substantial economic loss. The total monetary value of food lost is close to Rs 1.52 lakh crore (\$18.41 billion), which is about 3.7% of the gross value added to the agricultural sector in the country. These estimates are likely conservative since they do not account for the deterioration in food quality, and other studies suggest even higher proportions of food loss.

On the International Day for Food Loss and Waste 2024 — it is observed on September 29 — the FAO calls for increased financing to strengthen efforts to reduce food loss and



waste to build sustainable food systems and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### Wasted food equals wasted resources

The consequences of food loss go beyond food itself. Wasted food means wasted resources as land, water, energy, and labour. Agriculture consumes nearly 70% of the world's freshwater, and when food is lost, so are critical water resources. Similarly, energy inputs are required at every stage of the food supply chain, from mechanised farming to transport, processing and storage, and every instance of food wastage squanders this energy.

Food systems contribute approximately 26% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Food loss alone accounts for 6% of global emissions. When food waste decomposes in landfills, it produces methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide. Reducing food loss and waste is thus not only a matter of food security but a critical measure in combating climate change.

### Reducing food loss to mitigate climate change

As concerns over climate change intensify, the need to curb food loss and waste becomes more urgent. Achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets 12.3.1 (halving food loss) and 12.3.2 (halving food waste) is now a global imperative.

The Government of India has taken commendable steps to improve logistics and cold chain infrastructure in recent years through various initiatives under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sam-pada Yojana (PMKSY) which provides subsidies for the transportation/storage of eligible crops. Under the PMKSY, the government is providing financial incentives to various stakeholders such as the private sector, self help groups, farmer producer organisations, local bodies, and cooperatives to build modern cold chains and warehouses. Furthermore, the government's Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure Scheme promotes cold chain facilities without any break from the farm gate to the consumer. The Rural Godown Scheme specifically focuses on improvement in storage infrastructure in rural and remote areas to reduce storage losses. However, more needs to be done to promote efficient storage, grading and transport of agricultural produce. Public-private partnerships, fostering start-ups and innovative financing solutions are crucial in scaling interventions and ensuring sustainable outcomes.

Identifying and addressing key stages of the food supply chain where losses are acute are most important. The FAO is currently preparing a project to be funded by the Green

Climate Fund (GCF) to target reduction in food loss and retail waste in India together with the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI). As part of the project, the FAO in collaboration with the National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management (NIFTEM), is undertaking a study to enhance India's agrifood resilience by addressing the climate impact of food loss and retail waste in post-harvest operations. The focus is on identifying points of loss within the food supply chain, quantifying the losses, and evaluating the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions resulting from food loss. The study will provide a range of tailored solutions for different commodities and help design targeted interventions under the GCF project by the public and private sectors, which will not only make processing value chains more efficient but also lead to a significant reduction in GHG emissions.

### A critical issue

Reducing food loss and waste is vital to building sustainable food systems and addressing climate change. The environmental impacts of food loss and waste, particularly in terms of GHG emissions and resource depletion, make it a critical issue for governments, businesses and individuals alike. By reducing food loss and waste, we can make significant strides toward India's climate goals, enhance food security, and improve the lives of millions of people worldwide.

*Takayuki Hagiwara is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Representative in India, and part of Team UN in India. Views are personal.*



### BOOKS: REVIEW

## New book delves into women's struggles and aspirations

"Fly into the Sky" takes its evocative title from the saintly Muktabai's abhang, a Marathi devotional hymn that speaks of miracles, where an ant flies into the sky and a barren woman gives birth to a son. This metaphor beautifully captures the essence of the novel, which tells the story of three girls navigating their lives in early 20th-century Maharashtra, amidst societal change, personal struggles, and cultural expectations.

The story revolves around three sisters—Surekha, Malati, and Kamala—growing up in Ratnagiri at the dawn of a new century. Each sister embodies a different trajectory within a patriarchal society. Surekha, the eldest at 15, is thrust into marriage with Vilas Rao, a man significantly older than her and already married, thereby sealing her fate as the second wife in a rigid social structure.

Meanwhile, the younger sisters, Malati and Kamala, are given the rare opportunity to "fly into the sky," defying the norms by pursuing an education and shaping their own futures. They grow up at a time when figures like Gandhi, Maharishi Karve, Annie Besant, and Mohan Malaviya are championing women's education and public participation in the national movement, providing the socio-political backdrop for their personal journeys.

The novel begins with striking authenticity and tenderness, depicting the lives of women constrained by traditional roles yet yearning for change. The character of Aye, the sisters' mother, embodies this paradox, believing herself to be the legitimate "ardhangini" (half of her husband) while simultaneously sacrificing her life for the conception of a male heir. The other women, such as the isolated Maa Saheb, who

is dismissed due to her "divine madness," also reflect the varied roles and fates of women in a patriarchal world. The cruel realities of Surekha's marriage, particularly her nuptial submission, are depicted with a raw honesty that pierces the heart.

The two younger sisters, Malati and Kamala, present a counterpoint to Surekha's life. Their path, as they journey from a boarding school to Elphinstone College in Bombay, represents the burgeoning possibilities for women at the time. They not only choose their own life partners but also become involved in the freedom movement, which adds a layer of historical significance to their individual stories. This slow-burn romance and political awakening are handled with sensitivity, allowing the reader to become invested in their futures.

However, halfway through the novel, the narrative falters. What



*Swallowing the Sun*  
By Lakshmi  
Murdeshwar Puri  
Aleph;  
424 pages; Rs 899.

begins as a nuanced portrayal of three distinct female experiences suddenly narrows its focus. The other characters are pushed to the periphery, and the story shifts almost entirely to Malati and her romantic entanglement with Guru, overshadowing the other threads. Significant events, such as Malati's brother's marriage—a child whose conception resulted in Aye's death—are mentioned in passing, diluting their impact. The plot begins to meander, and the author, once skillfully weaving together personal and political narratives, starts to slip into didacticism. The insertion of contemporary vocabulary like "PDA" and "B-team" into a pre-Independence setting jars the reader out of the historical con-

text and disrupts the otherwise immersive experience.

One of the novel's most remarkable achievements, however, is its transcreation of Marathi poems. The use of Marathi, seamlessly accompanied by English translations, elevates the prose and adds an authentic cultural flavor to the narrative. These poetic interludes not only enhance the story but also emphasize the delicate balance between tradition and modernity, a theme that runs through the novel.

As the novel draws to a close, the reader is left pondering the larger message. Malati and Kamala, encouraged to "fly into the sky" and "swallow the sun," mirror their mother Aye's relentless pursuit of a son, despite the personal cost. Is the novel suggesting that the aspirations of these modern women are, in the end, not so different from those of their mother's generation? Even Baba, the stoic patriarch who defends his family only to be killed by dacoits, seems to echo this theme of striving for a seemingly unattainable goal—flying into the sky, like the ant in Muktabai's abhang.

## Surge in Electric Vehicle Registrations Drives Need for Enhanced Charging Infrastructure

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian government is actively working to address the growing demand for electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, as public charging stations (PCS) experience a significant surge in power consumption.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) is in advanced discussions with the Ministry of Power to develop strategies that will help optimise the charging process for EVs, particularly in large urban centres where electric vehicle adoption is rapidly increasing. Kamran Rizvi, Secretary of MHI, highlighted the issue during an interview with Businessline.

He noted that in major cities like Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, where EVs are most concentrated, the increased demand for electricity has added 3 per cent to overall power



consumption, especially during peak load periods.

To alleviate the strain on the grid during peak hours, Rizvi explained, "We are in touch with the Ministry of Power on how to shift charging of these vehicles to the daytime instead of nighttime."

Rizvi further clarified that not all vehicle segments can transition to daytime charging,

However, the ministry is focusing on electric two-wheelers and four-wheelers as the starting point. Discussions are underway to determine how best to implement these changes in collaboration with the Ministry of Power.

Addressing concerns about whether battery swapping stations, particularly those for two-wheelers and three-wheelers,

were contributing to the increased power demand, Rizvi downplayed their impact, noting that swapping infrastructure accounts for only a small percentage of the overall EV energy consumption.

The rapid rise in electricity demand from public charging stations is underscored by recent data from the Central Electricity Authority (CEA).

During the April-June quarter of FY25, PCS consumed 176.87 million units (MU) of energy, a 108 per cent year-on-year increase from 84.95 MU in Q1 FY24. This surge is directly linked to India's exponential growth in EV adoption.

The country witnessed a 23 per cent annual increase in EV registrations in September 2024, totalling 1.59 lakh units, compared to 1.29 lakh units in September 2023.

## HAL Delivers First AL-31FP Aero Engine to IAF, Marking a New Era of Atmanirbharta



**ARUN KUMAR RAO**  
Bengaluru

In a landmark achievement for India's aerospace and defence sector, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) handed over the first AL-31FP Aero Engine to the Indian Air Force (IAF) at its Koraput facility yesterday. The event, held in the presence of Sanjeev Kumar, Secretary (Defence Production), and Dr. D K Sunil, CMD of HAL, marked the

beginning of a crucial project under which HAL will manufacture 240 such engines for the Sukhoi-30MKI fleet. According to press statement released here.

The ceremony saw Saket Chaturvedi, CEO of MiG Complex, presenting the engine to Air Vice Marshal K Harisankar, who received it on behalf of the IAF. The official documentation for the handover was presented by R B Nagaraja, ADG AQA (Koraput). The contract

for manufacturing these 240 engines, signed just two weeks prior on September 9, 2024, is scheduled for completion over the next eight years.

In his address, Sanjeev Kumar praised HAL for its swift action and impressive delivery within two weeks of the contract's signing. "This key milestone reflects HAL's aero engine manufacturing competency and its dedication to supporting the Su-30MKI fleet. The Koraput Division has mastered cutting-edge technologies in engine manufacturing, setting it on par with global OEMs. I am confident that the division will not only serve the IAF but also grow as a global supplier," he said.

He encouraged HAL employees to focus on self-reliance and adopt innovative Quality 4.0 processes. His message resonated with India's mission for self-reliance, or "Atmanirbhar Bharat," in defence manufacturing.

## Merger won't affect Vistara services : Air India



**NEW DELHI:** Air India on Wednesday said flights operated with Vistara aircraft would have numbers starting with the prefix 'AI2' after the merger next month while Vistara's planes, crew and service would continue to operate as before. The Tata Group-owned full service carrier also emphasised that the Vistara experience would remain post merger. The merger of Vistara — a joint venture between Tata and Singapore Airlines — with Air India is scheduled for November 12. This will mark a major consolidation in the Indian aviation space. There are concerns in certain quarters on whether Vistara passengers will continue to get the same services like now, as Air India, which is in the transformation phase, has been facing certain service issues in recent times.

## Garuda Construction & Engineering Limited has Rs 264 crore IPO

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
Mumbai

Garuda Construction & Engineering Limited is coming out with its Initial Public Offering (IPO), priced at between Rs 92 and Rs 95 per Equity Share — aggregating totally Rs 264 crores — opening on October 8, 2024 and closing on October 10, 2024.

Pravin Agarwal, Managing Director, GCEL, said he recently that the net proceeds from the fresh issuance will be utilized through Rs 100 crore going towards working capital requirements, and the balance for general corporate purposes including unidentified inorganic acquisitions.

Describing the company as being into +niche+ projects, Agarwal highlighted one such project — the 'iconic' Delhi Po-



lice Headquarters — being constructed within five years, while being situated in a Hi-Security Zone barely 500 metres from the Indian Parliament.

"We are concentrating on niche projects across India without a topline being our focus, and are also into backward integration also through operations and maintenance services, mechanical, electrical and plumbing services and finishing works as part of our construction services," he said, adding that the company is maintaining the 'Delhi Police Headquarters' building for the period of 13 years.

## BEL and ISRO's SAC Sign MoU to Boost Indigenous Production of Space-Grade Technology

**ARUN KUMAR RAO**  
Bengaluru

In a significant move towards strengthening India's self-reliance in space and defence technology, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), a Navratna Defence PSU, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Space Applications Centre (SAC) of ISRO, Ahmedabad. The MoU aims to indigenise and develop infrastructure for the production of space-grade Travelling Wave Tube Amplifiers (TWTAs) within India. The collaboration will not only advance domestic capabilities but also contribute to significant foreign exchange savings.

The agreement was formalised at SAC Ahmedabad, with Mr. Nilesh M Desai, Di-



rector of SAC, and Mrs. Niti Pandit, General Manager (Strategic Planning), BEL Corporate Office, signing the MoU in the presence of senior officials from both organisations.

TWTAs, a complex and cutting-edge technology, involve the controlled interaction of microwaves with electron beams under ultrahigh vacuum conditions. These devices are essential components of

satellite communication and navigation payloads, microwave remote sensing radar, scientific missions, and inter-spacecraft communication systems. BEL has already established a state-of-the-art facility for the fabrication and manufacturing of TWTAs, enabling the company to play a crucial role in the country's space technology ecosystem.

The TWTAs, developed by SAC and manufactured by BEL, will be deployed in a variety of satellite payloads, including those used for communication, navigation, and microwave remote sensing. This collaboration is a critical step in boosting India's indigenisation efforts in the space sector, aligning with the government's vision of reducing dependence on foreign technology.

## Anil-led group forays into Bhutan, to set up 1,270 MW green projects

**NEW DELHI:** Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group on Wednesday announced its foray into Bhutan and said it would set up 1,270 megawatt solar and hydroelectric projects in the Himalayan Kingdom.

"We have entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Druk Holding and Investments Ltd (DHI), the commercial and investment arm of the Royal Government of Bhutan, to undertake various initiatives aimed at bolstering investment in the renewable and green energy landscape of Bhutan," the group said in a statement.

The partnership between Reliance Group and Druk Holding will focus on green energy generation, specifically solar and hydropower initiatives, while also exploring innovative sus-



tainable technologies. The Indian group has set up a new company, Reliance Enterprises, for investments in Bhutan's renewable and green energy sector. Reliance Enterprises will be jointly promoted by Mumbai-listed Reliance Infrastructure Ltd and Reliance Power Ltd.

It will set up a 500 MW solar plant in two phases of 250 MW each over the next two years. Reliance Power and Druk

Holding will also jointly develop the 770 MW Chamkharchhu-1 hydro project. The project has been classified as a run-of-the-river project and under a concession model in accordance with Bhutan government policy.

"Reliance Group will collaborate with government-owned companies in Bhutan to implement infrastructure projects that support Bhutan's net-zero goals," the statement read.

## Dividend Policy dynamics of Pharmaceutical Companies in India



**DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH**  
**DIKSHA SINGH**

**D**ividend payment by pharmaceutical companies like companies from

other sectors, gets influenced by multiple factors. These factors include use of retained earnings for Capital Expenditure requirements, use of funds for acquisitions, investment in new businesses as part of strategic plans, debt payment obligations, debt equity ratio, liquidity position of the company, operating cash flow, past dividend patterns, reserves and surpluses of the company, return on invested capital, working capital requirements, macro-economic conditions in an economy, statutory requirements, competitive conditions, among others. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is well known for its track record of generous dividend payouts. It is also worthwhile to note that promoter holding in TCS is more than 70 per cent, 71.77 per cent in June 2024 quarter to be precise. Higher promoter holding results into higher dividend payment to promoters.

Cash balance as a Liquidity Measure, Total Debt as a Leverage Measure, and 'Profit after Tax', 'Capital Expenditure', 'Retained Earnings', 'Earnings per Share', 'Dividend per Share' and 'Dividend Payout Ratio' have been found as key determinants of the dividend policy of pharmaceutical companies in India. For this write-up, emphasis is on impact of promoter holding, dividend distribution tax (DDT), type of capital expenditure in pharmaceutical sector on dividend payout ratio.

Pharmaceutical companies have to incur capital expenditure on multiple activities, e.g., in 2023-23, Sun Pharma acquired the remaining shares of Taro, a company in which Sun Pharma already had a controlling stake. In 2021-22, Sun Pharma acquired Uractiv Port-



folio from Fiterman Pharma in Romania Pipeline projects in 2021-22. In the same year, it launched Brillo, a first-in-class oral lipid-lowering drug in India. In 2020-21, Sun Pharma entered into a licensing agreement with Eli Lilly to expand access to Baricitinib, helping alleviate the burden of Covid-19 in India.

In last four years, promoter holding in Sun Pharma has remained constant whereas dividend payout ratio has fluctuated. In FY2019-20, DPR was 37 per cent which went up to 54 per cent in FY20-21. It must be seen in the background that Dividend Distribution Tax (DDT) was abolished in February 2020. In Divi's Labs, promoter holding has not changed significantly in last five years, but dividend payout ratio has shown immediate decline in 2020-21 and 2021-22 but again started showing upward trend. From 2019 to 2022, Divi's Labs completed the brownfield DC and DCV SEZ units and de-bottlenecking programs became operational, besides modernization of waste water treatment plants at manufacturing site.

For Cipla, promoter holding got reduced in last five years from 36.68 per cent in 2019-20 to 33.46 per cent in 2023-24. Pattern is similar to Divi's Labs as DPR went down to 17 per cent in 2020-21 from 21 per cent in 2019-20 and further declined to 16 per cent in FY22. In 2022-23, Cipla acquired 21.05 per cent stake in Achira Labs for the access of 'Point of Care' diagnostic medical testing. In FY21-22, the company had signed a non-exclusive licensing agreement with MSD for manufacturing and distribution of Molnupiravir. In FY21, the company

announced acquisition of the prescription drug ZEMDRI from Achaogen Inc besides acquiring novel anti-infective Elores from Venus Remedies, and acquisition of brand name and trademark rights for Vysov of the anti-diabetic drug.

In Dr. Reddy's Labs, there is marginal change in promoter holding in last five years but DPR declined significantly from 21 per cent in FY20 to 12 per cent in FY24. After abolition of DDT, DPR remained stable in FY21 and went up to 23 per cent in FY22 but declined thereafter. Capital expenditure activities included opening up of a new 70,000 sq ft facility in Hyderabad to focus on development and manufacturing of proteins used in drugs in 2023-24, launch of Sorafenib tablets in 2022-23, and acquisition of portfolio of branded and generic hospital injectable products from Eton Pharma, based in Illinois in the same year. Substantial capital expenditure is expected to affect the dividend paying capacity. In contrast to this, in FY22, the company had entered into a voluntary licensing agreement with Eli Lilly to manufacture and commercialize Baricitinib in India, launch of Sputnik V in Indian market, collaboration with ICICI Lombard pilot launch of first-of-its-kind integrated and cashless digital health solution in India, and launch of Minoxidil topical solution for the treatment of female pattern hair loss.

In Torrent Pharma, decline in DPR was observed in FY21 to 47 per cent from 53 per cent in FY20. In FY22, significant rise was observed in DPR whereas there was decline in DPR in FY23, and FY24. In FY23, Torrent Pharma ac-

Table 1: Promoter Holding in Top pharma companies in India and Dividend Payout Ratio (DPR)

	Sun Pharma				
FY	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Promoter Holding (%)	54.69	54.48	54.48	54.48	54.48
DPR (%)	37	54	66	30	31
Divi's Labs					
Promoter Holding (%)	51.97	51.95	51.94	51.94	51.92
DPR (%)	31	21	18	43	50
Cipla					
Promoter Holding (%)	36.68	36.73	33.63	33.55	33.46
DPR (%)	21	17	16	24	25
Dr. Reddy's Labs					
Promoter Holding (%)	26.75	26.74	26.72	26.69	26.65
DPR (%)	21	21	23	15	12
Torrent Pharma					
Promoter Holding (%)	71.25	71.25	71.25	71.25	71.25
DPR (%)	53	47	104	30	29
Zydus Lifesciences					
Promoter Holding (%)	74.88	74.88	74.88	74.98	74.98
DPR (%)	25	24	30	40	8
Abbott India					
Promoter Holding (%)	74.99	74.99	74.99	74.99	74.99
DPR (%)	90	85	73	73	73
Alkem Labs					
Promoter Holding (%)	65.88	60.16	57.13	57.16	56.74
DPR (%)	26.5	22.6	25.0	48.5	56.74
Aurobindo Pharma					
Promoter Holding (%)	52.01	51.94	51.83	51.84	51.84
DPR (%)	6.2	4.4	10.0	23.0	8.3

quired 100% stake in Curatio Health Care, a leading player in the cosmetic-dermatology segment with a portfolio of over 50 brands marketed in India. In FY22, the company introduced new products, particularly in the space of NDDS, Fixed Dosage Combinations (FDC), and line extensions, thereby leveraging ensuing patent expiry in the chronic space.

In Zydus Lifesciences, there was marginal decline in DPR in FY21 to 24 per cent from 25 per cent in FY20. In FY22 and FY23, DPR increased to 30 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Decline in DPR was observed in FY24 as the company acquired UK-based LiqMed Group for Rs. 690 crore. In FY23, the company launched 32 products in the US generics market, and the company was the first player to launch the generic version of Topiramate Extended-Release capsules. In FY22, the company extended the Joint Venture — Bayer Zydus Pharma Private Limited with Bayer by

three years. In FY21, it signed a non-exclusive licensing agreement with Gilead Sciences Inc., to manufacture and market Remdesivir.

In Abbott India, promoter holding has remained constant at 74.99 per cent in last five years. In FY21, there was marginal decline in DPR to 85 per cent from 90 per cent in FY20. Further, in FY22, DPR declined to 73 per cent and then it remained at same level of 73 per cent. In FY24, the company launched the XIENCE Sierra Everolimus Eluting Coronary Stent System in India. In FY23 too, the company launched New PediaSure with Nutri-Pull System to help support catch up growth and overall, health in children. In FY22 too, the company launched Amplatzer Piccolo Occluder in India. In FY21, the company announced a collaboration with Img to make FreeStyle Libre Pro available online.

In Alkem Labs too, decline in DPR was observed in FY21 to 22.6 per cent from 26.5 per cent in FY20. In FY22, DPR

increased to 25 per cent and then further increased to 48.5 per cent in FY23. Decline in DPR was observed in FY24. In FY23, the company launched the world's 1st biosimilar for Cetuximab, which is used for treatment of head and neck cancer, and also launched a unique patented technology for the treatment of Diabetic Foot Ulcer. In FY22 too, the company launched inhalation device Innohaler for COPD patients, Ibuprofen and Famotidine Tablets in US market.

In Aurobindo Pharma too, decline in DPR was observed in FY21 to 4.4 per cent from 6.2 per cent in FY20. In FY22 and FY23, DPR went up and declined in FY24 to 8.3 per cent. In FY21, the company acquired the business and certain assets of Veritaz Healthcare.

In 7 pharmaceutical companies including Lupin, out of top 10 listed pharmaceutical companies, DPR declined immediately after roll back of Dividend Distribution Tax as shareholders would be taxed on dividends received as income. Thus, promoters who were the major shareholders in the firms were affected as the rate of DDT was lower as compared to tax on dividend income. Except for Alkem Labs and Cipla, there was no substantial change in promoter holding. In FY24, for 5 out of top 10 companies namely Sun Pharma, DRL, Torrent, Zydus Lifesciences, and Abbott India, DPR has declined as compared to FY20. In contrast to this, DPR for Divi's, Cipla, Alkem, Aurobindo and Lupin, has gone up in FY24 as compared to FY20. Impact of Capex on DPR was visible as funds got deployed in acquisitions, expansion of facilities, acquisition of brands, among others.

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

## ixigo Launches 'Price Lock' for Flights: Lock Fare Now, Book Later

**NEW DELHI:** ixigo, India's leading OTA for the next billion users, has introduced its innovative "Price Lock" feature for flights, allowing travellers to lock airfares for up to 2 days and book later, once their travel plans are confirmed. Currently available for domestic flights, this feature offers users added flexibility and protection from fluctuating airfares, making travel planning more convenient and stress-free. With Price Lock, booking flights becomes easier and more secure, giving travellers peace of mind while finalising their trips.

The Price Lock feature, starting at just Rs 99 per passenger, allows travellers to lock in airfares and pay later, offering protection against sudden price increases and avoids buyer's remorse in case fares drop. If fares rise, the feature provides price protection of up to Rs 4,000 per passenger. If prices drop, travellers benefit by paying the new lower fare. This ensures that they either pay the locked-in price or a reduced price, but



never more, providing reassurance when booking flights. Price Lock is currently available on domestic flight bookings, across all the ixigo Group apps.

Commenting on this, Rajnish Kumar, Group Co-CEO, ixigo, said, "We are thrilled to launch the Price Lock feature, designed to give travellers the freedom to plan their trips without the stress of dealing with sudden fare hikes. This feature offers both flexibility and peace of mind, ensuring users can secure the best fares without the pressure to book immediately. Our goal is to make flight travel more flexible, hassle-free, and budget-friendly for all, enhancing the overall travel experience."

## FISME, NPC Facilitate B2B Partnerships for Indian and Taiwanese SMEs

**NEW DELHI:** In a significant move to promote technological advancement and sustainability among Indian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) and IFCI Ltd, under the Ministry of Finance, have established the 'Centre of Excellence for Aspiring SMEs'.

The visit, organised under the Asian Productivity Organisation (APO) framework and in collaboration with the India National Productivity Council (NPC) and Taiwan's China Productivity Centre (CPC), aims to strengthen bilateral cooperation on smart green technologies.

The delegation of Taiwanese experts from various sectors like fertiliser, solar energy, trade promotion, electronics and construction, specialising in cutting-edge environmental technologies, presented their innovations at a meeting held on October 1, 2024, at the NPC office in New Delhi.

This initiative, aimed at assisting fast-growing Indian SMEs in acquiring advanced technologies and forming joint ventures (JVs) both domestically and internationally, marks a strategic step in India's MSME modernisation drive. The Centre is expected to focus on creating partnerships with key East and Southeast Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

The discussion centred around areas critical to Indian industry, including wastewater treatment for Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs), e-waste recycling, solar waste management, and circular biotech solutions for the pharmaceutical and agricultural sectors.

Notably, Taiwanese expertise in wastewater management could prove transformative for India's efforts to achieve Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) and Zero Waste Disposal (ZWD) standards in CETPs, ensuring sustainable water use and improved industrial efficiency.

## RBI Deputy Governor Cautions Small Finance Banks on High Cost Deposits

MUMBAI: In a pointed address to the financial sector, Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Swaminathan J, has urged small finance banks (SFBs) to critically evaluate their reliance on high-cost deposits and reconsider their operational practices to ensure long-term stability.

Speaking at a recent conference, Swaminathan emphasized the importance of SFBs in driving inclusive growth and providing financial services to underserved populations. However, he raised alarms over some concerning trends within the sector.

Swaminathan highlighted the potential pitfalls of overdependence on high-cost term deposits and bulk deposits sourced from a limited number of institutions. He warned that such practices could jeopardise the stability of these banks in the long run.

“The expectation behind the licensing of SFBs was that they would play a crucial role in



fostering entrepreneurship and supporting economic progress,” he stated, stressing that sustainability in funding sources is vital for these banks to fulfill their mandate effectively.

Moreover, the deputy governor cautioned against the imposition of high-interest rates and usurious fees on borrowers. He pointed out that some SFBs have been reported to charge excessive interest rates and to collect loan instalments in advance without adjusting them against the outstanding amounts.

“It is disheartening to come across egregious practices by some SFBs,” Swaminathan remarked, referring to these exploitative tactics as detrimental to the very populations SFBs are meant to serve.

Swaminathan urged the banks to adopt innovative technologies, such as the Unified Lending Interface, to enhance efficiency and provide cost-effective services.

By leveraging technological advancements, SFBs can streamline operations and improve accessibility for their

clients, thus fulfilling their role in promoting inclusive financial growth.

In addition to financial practices, Swaminathan underscored the need for improved grievance redressal mechanisms within SFBs. He noted that many institutions are lacking adequate processes to address customer complaints, which can erode trust and impede growth. “The grievance redressal mechanism is far from adequate in most SFBs,” he added, highlighting the urgent need for banks to prioritize customer service.

As SFBs navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing financial landscape, the RBI’s guidance a

ims to promote a more stable and equitable banking environment. The call for sustainable practices and inclusive growth aligns with broader objectives of fostering economic development and ensuring that all segments of society have access to essential financial services.

## India’s Current Account Deficit Marginally Widens to \$9.7 Billion in Q1 FY2024-25: RBI

MUMBAI: India’s current account deficit (CAD) widened slightly to USD 9.7 billion, or 1.1 per cent of GDP, in the first quarter of FY2024-25, compared to USD 8.9 billion (1 per cent of GDP) in the same period a year ago, according to data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday.

This represents a shift from the surplus of USD 4.6 billion (0.5 per cent of GDP) recorded in Q4 FY2023-24. The surplus for Q4 FY2023-24 was revised down from the previously reported USD 5.7 billion due to adjustments in merchandise import data, highlighting the impact of higher import figures on the nation’s external balance.

The year-on-year (YoY) widening of the CAD was primarily attributed to an increase in the merchandise trade deficit, which expanded to USD 65.1 billion in Q1 FY2024-25, up from USD 56.7 billion in Q1 FY2023-24. The RBI noted that both oil and gold imports, along with rising non-oil imports, contributed to



this widening trade gap.

On a more positive note, net services receipts grew to USD 39.7 billion from USD 35.1 billion a year earlier, driven by strong exports across major sectors, including IT services, business services, and travel.

Private transfer receipts, primarily remittances from overseas workers, also rose to USD 29.5 billion from USD 27.1 billion YoY. In the financial account, net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows increased to USD 6.3 billion, up from USD 4.7 billion in the corresponding period last year.

However, foreign portfolio investment (FPI) inflows moderated sharply to USD 0.9

billion from USD 15.7 billion in Q1 FY2023-24. External commercial borrowings (ECBs) also fell to USD 1.8 billion from USD 5.6 billion YoY.

Despite these shifts, India added USD 5.2 billion to

its foreign exchange reserves during the quarter, though this was significantly lower than the USD 24.4 billion added in Q1 FY2023-24. Commenting on the results, Madan Sabnavis, Chief Economist at Bank of Baroda, noted that while the CAD had widened slightly, it remained within manageable limits. “The CAD at 1.1 per cent of GDP is fairly comfortable, and we may see it hover around 1.5 per cent for the year,” Sabnavis said, attributing the trade deficit primarily to higher oil and gold imports.

He also highlighted increased FDI inflows and anticipated stronger FPI flows as debt market inclusion boosts confidence.

## SBI to add 600 branches in current fiscal



NEW DELHI: State Bank of India (SBI) is planning to open 600 branches across the country in the current financial year in a bid to tap business opportunities in emerging areas including large residential townships.

“We have strong branch expansion plans...this would be mainly focused on emerging areas. A lot of residential colonies are not covered by us. Around 600 branches is something we are planning in the current year,” SBI Chairman C S Setty said.

The country’s biggest lender opened 137 branches last fiscal. Of the total, 59 new rural branches were inaugurated. SBI has a network of 22,542 branches across the country as of March.

SBI has 65,000 ATMs and 85,000 business correspondents.

## New RBI Monetary Policy Committee to Hold First Meeting under Reconstituted Team

NEW DELHI: The newly reconstituted Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is set to commence its inaugural meeting on Monday.

The committee, which now includes three newly appointed external members, will conduct deliberations over three days. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, who chairs the MPC, is scheduled to announce the outcome on Wednesday, October 9.

Despite the change in composition of external members, analysts widely anticipate that the MPC will maintain the current interest rate. Should this prediction materialise, it would mark the tenth consecutive instance of the RBI holding rates steady. The last adjustment to the policy rate occurred in February 2023, when it was raised to 6.5 per cent.

The MPC comprises both internal and external members. Alongside Governor Das, the internal members include RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra, who oversees monetary policy, and Rajiv Ranjan, Executive Director of the RBI’s monetary policy department. On Tuesday, the government appointed three new external members to the MPC. Ram Singh, Director, Delhi School of Economics, holds a PhD from Jawaharlal



Nehru University and completed post-doctoral studies in Economics at Harvard University.

His academic career includes teaching positions at Bucerius Law School, Heidelberg University, and Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Saugata Bhattacharya, a senior fellow at the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), brings over three decades of experience in economic and financial markets analysis, policy advocacy, and related fields. Prior to joining CPR, he served as chief economist and executive vice president at Axis Bank.

Nagesh Kumar, currently the Director and Chief Execu-

utive of the Institute for Studies in Industrial Development (ISID), previously held positions at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and as Director-General of the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS).

It is noteworthy that the extended tenures of two ex-officio members, Governor Das and Deputy Governor Patra, are set to conclude in December and January, respectively.

The upcoming MPC meeting and its outcome are likely to be closely watched by financial markets and economic observers for insights into India’s monetary policy direction.

## Retail loans by banks, finance companies in India may triple by 2030

MUMBAI: Retail loans by banks and finance companies in India could triple by 2030, driving household leverage to 34 per cent by fiscal year 2031 from about 23 per cent at the end of 2024, according to a new report.

Finance companies will sustain loan growth stronger than the banking sector, which is expected to grow at 14 per cent, according to the S&P;P Global Ratings report.

The finance companies’ loan book is unseasoned. Strong economic growth has supported retail repayment capacity.

“We see the strength in retail lending as a competitive edge, with finance companies dominating in some retail products,” said Geeta Chugh, credit analyst, S&P;P Global Ratings.

Generally, upper-layer finance companies have strong capital levels, which will support credit growth over the next two years and provide downside buffers.

Chugh added the recent actions by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will curtail lenders’ overexuberance, enhance compliance and safeguard customers.

Indian lenders’ strong underwriting will support asset quality. This is reflected in their focus on lending primarily to low-risk customers and generally low loan approval rates, the report noted.

Funding for finance companies remains sensitive to confidence levels, but companies



with strong parentage have better access to competitive rates. Emerging co-lending models are easing funding pressure.

Rated and unrated finance companies have strong capital levels to support high loan growth, according to the report.

As per the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Indian financial system remains resilient and is gaining strength from broader macroeconomic stability.

The banking sector’s well-capitalised and unclogged balance sheet is reflective of higher risk absorption capacity while the NBFC sector and the Urban Cooperative Banks also continue to show improvements.

However, amid the stable financial sector conditions, the emphasis cannot shift away from proactive identification of potential risks and challenges, if any, according to the Central Bank.

## BharatPe settles Rs 88 cr fund misappropriation case with Ashneer Grover

NEW DELHI: After a long-standing and dramatic courtroom battle, BharatPe on Monday said it has arrived at an agreement with its former co-founder Ashneer Grover, who was charged, along with his family members, by the fintech company for alleged misappropriation of funds worth Rs 88.67 crore. In a statement to IANS, the company said that as part of the settlement, Grover will not be associated with BharatPe in any capacity nor be a part of the shareholding of the company. “Certain shares of Grover shall be transferred to the Resilient Growth Trust for the benefit of the Company and his remaining shares will be managed by his family trust,” said a company spokesperson.

BharatPe further added that both parties have decided not to pursue the cases filed. “We wish Grover well. BharatPe continues to focus on delivering industry-leading solutions to its merchants and customers driving growth with profitability,” the company added. In a post on X social media platform, Ashneer said he has “reached a decisive settlement with BharatPe”. “I repose my faith in the management and board, who are doing great work in taking BharatPe forward in the right direction. I continue to remain aligned with the company’s growth and success,” said Ashneer.

## MSME Bank Credit Rises 14.8% YoY in August 2024: RBI

NEW DELHI: In a significant development for India’s economic landscape, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reported a substantial increase in bank credit to the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector.

According to data released on Monday, priority sector lending to MSMEs by scheduled commercial banks saw a 14.8 per cent year-on-year growth in August 2024, reaching Rs 25.5 lakh crore compared to Rs 22.2 lakh crore in August 2023.

The growth was particularly pronounced in the medium enterprises segment, which experienced a 20.8 per cent increase,

with credit rising to Rs 5.29 lakh crore from Rs 4.38 lakh crore in the previous year.

The micro and small enterprises (MSE) segment also showed strong performance, with a 13.5 per cent growth, as credit expanded to Rs 20.2 lakh crore from Rs 17.8 lakh crore.

In the current financial year, priority credit to the MSME sector has grown by 3.7 per cent since March 2024, with the medium enterprise segment outpacing the MSE segment at 7.9 per cent and 2.7 per cent growth, respectively. Despite the robust growth, financial experts at Crisil anticipate a moderation in the credit growth



rate for MSMEs in the current fiscal year. Projections suggest a growth rate of around 15 per cent, down from approximately 19 per cent in fiscal 2024.

RBI Governor Shaktikanta

Das has highlighted the upcoming Unified Lending Interface (ULI) platform as a key initiative to facilitate ‘frictionless credit’ to various sectors, with a particular focus on MSMEs

and agriculture. The platform is expected to exit its beta phase soon. RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra recently shed light on the significant finance demand in the MSME sector, estimated at USD 1.9 trillion. Of this, USD 1.5 trillion represents debt-based demand.

Currently, formal credit lenders, including banks, fulfil USD 289 billion of the viable USD 819 billion debt demand from MSMEs.

This data underscores the critical role of the MSME sector in India’s economy and highlights the ongoing efforts to bridge the financing gap in this vital segment.

## Finance Ministry to Waiver GST Related Interest and Penalties for Non-Fraudulent Cases



NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Finance has announced the implementation of several key provisions of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act, including the highly anticipated Section 128A, effective November 1, 2024.

This development comes as part of the broader fiscal reforms outlined in Budget 2024. Section 128A, a newly introduced provision, offers significant relief to GST-registered individuals and companies.

The measure introduces a conditional waiver scheme that allows for the complete remission of interest and penalties on specific non-fraudulent GST demand notices pertaining to the fiscal years 2017-18 through 2019-20.

It is important to note that while the scheme provides for the waiver of interest and penalties, the underlying tax demand remains payable.

The implementation timeline was detailed in a notification issued by the Ministry of Finance on September 27,

## Revolutionary shift: FM Sitharaman hails rise in credit-driven consumption in rural India

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has lauded the meteoric rise in credit-driven consumption in small cities and towns, calling it a “revolutionary shift” that has been made possible due to the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY).

A definitive surge has been reported in household consumption in tier 2, 3 and 4 cities and even beyond, evidenced by the sales growth of two-wheeler, ACs, refrigerators, smartphones and FMCGs in small towns and cities.

According to FM Sitharaman, “Rural India is no longer a passive observer of India’s growth, it is an active driver of it”. The Finance Minister said that under the PMJDY, which recently celebrated its 10th anniversary, over 53 crore bank accounts have been opened, bringing millions of rural Indians into the formal financial system for the first time.

With more than 80 per cent of Indian adults now holding formal financial accounts, up from a mere 50 per cent in 2011, PM Modi has spearheaded the



most transformative financial inclusion drive in modern Indian history, she noted.

Reports mention that 62 per cent of two-wheeler purchases in rural India are now driven by credit, crossing urban figures at 58 per cent. There has been a noticeable growth in electronics and smartphone sales too. According to the industry, various consumer financing options have made this stupendous growth possible.

According to the government, 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.

## 65% of Self-Employed Women in India Rely On Personal Savings for Business Funding: Survey

NEW DELHI: A recent survey conducted by Crisil and DBS Bank India has shed light on the financing preferences and challenges faced by self-employed women entrepreneurs in India.

The study, which polled 400 respondents, offers insights into funding sources, desired support from financial institutions, and utilisation of government schemes. According to the findings, personal savings and financial assistance from family or friends remain the primary source of business funding for 65 per cent of self-employed women. Bank loans, preferred by 21 per cent of respondents, emerged as the second most popular option. Other financing avenues, including government schemes, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), and venture capital, each garnered 3-4 per cent preference among the surveyed entrepreneurs.

The survey also highlighted areas where self-employed



women seek additional support from banks beyond traditional loans. Mentorship programs were requested by 26 per cent of respondents, while 18 per cent expressed interest in guidance navigating government schemes.

Additionally, 15 per cent called for assistance in digitalising financial processes. Government schemes, despite their potential benefits, appear to be underutilised. The survey revealed that 34 per cent of respondents had not availed themselves of any government initiatives for their businesses, with 24 per cent citing lack of awareness as a primary reason.

## Resilient domestic growth, continued policy support give India Inc a strong credit boost

NEW DELHI: Leading credit ratings agencies on Tuesday highlighted the sustained strengthening of India Inc’s credit quality, reflecting resilient domestic growth supported by the government’s continued policy support.

Crisil Ratings upgraded 506 companies in the first half of the current fiscal compared to 184 downgrades, which is an upgrade-to-downgrade ratio of 2.75 from 1.79 times in the second half of last fiscal.

The annualised upgrade rate of 14.5 per cent outpaced the average of 11 per cent for the past decade, while the downgrade rate of 5.3 per cent was lower than the 10-year average of 6.5 per cent. Notably, the rating reaffirmation rate continued to be stable at 80 per cent.

“Rating upgrades continued to surpass downgrades, reflecting resilient domestic growth, supported by the government’s continued policy support to-



wards infrastructure build, the revival of rural consumption demand and leaner corporate balance sheets,” said Subodh Rai, Managing Director, CRISIL Ratings.

As many as 38 per cent of the upgrades were from the infrastructure and linked sectors. The primary drivers include acquisitions by strong sponsors and lower-than-expected debt, particularly in the renewables sector, reduction in project risks as road projects achieve critical milestones, progressive order execution in construction and a healthy order book in the capital goods sector, Rai explained.

ICRA said that the overall credit conditions in the cor-

porate and the financial sector have remained conducive in the past three years, which has contributed to a much higher proportion of rating upgrades than downgrades.

The rating actions in the first half of the current fiscal (FY25) marked a continuation of these trends.

The credit ratio of ICRA-assigned ratings, defined as the ratio of the number of upgrades to that of downgrades, stood at 2.2 times in H1 FY 2025 (2.1 times in FY 2024), an outcome of the largely benign operating environment, demand buoyancy in select sectors, improvement in risk profiles as assets transitioned from project-stage to operational-stage, and a broader trend in de-leveraging.

K. Ravichandran, Chief Rating Officer, ICRA said that the credit quality of India Inc remains steady, and in the past six months, there hasn’t been an imperative to change the outlook on any sector.

## INTERNATIONAL

## India, US ink pact on critical minerals: Commerce Minister Goyal

WASHINGTON: Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal has announced that India and the US have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on critical minerals that will pave the way for cooperation between the Indian Ministry of Mines with its US counterpart to secure the supply chains in these materials that are critical to the production of clean energy technologies and equipment.

The MoU will also pave the way for the two countries to launch joint projects in a third country and seek investments from other countries, the Commerce Minister said at a news conference to review his meetings with US officials.

The MoU was signed on Thursday at the sixth India-US commercial dialogue that was hosted by the US and chaired by Commerce Minister Goyal and his US counterpart Gina Raimondo.

"We executed the MOU on critical minerals to keep the supply chains open and for greater engagement between the Ministry of Mines in India and the US government," the Commerce



Minister told reporters at the news conference. These critical minerals include lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, graphite, rare earth elements, and copper, which are critical to the production of clean energy technologies.

India is the only developing economy in an elite group of countries called the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) that includes the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Norway, Sweden and the European Union, which

recently launched a financial vehicle to rally and mobilize public and private sector for funding in this sector.

The MSP was launched in June 2022 with the unstated goal of securing this supply chain of these minerals from China. India joined the group exactly a year later during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit in June 2023.

The MoU opens yet another area of bilateral cooperation between the two countries that have already an exhaustive list

of corporations, ranging from climate to emerging technologies, trade, strategic, education, health and space.

The Commerce Minister also met with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai for the Trade Policy Forum meeting, and he co-chaired the India-US CEO Forum with Raimondo on Wednesday.

"All these institutions are now regularly interacting with each other," Commerce Minister Goyal told reporters. "There was a time that these were sporadic interactions. Many years would go by without any meetings. Now they are very outcome-oriented, with a focused agenda, and the periodicity has been made very regular."

He recounted recent visits by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. He misspoke, however, about Ajit Doval, the National Security Advisor, saying he came with the Prime Minister. He did not. Commerce Minister Goyal corrected himself at prompting by Vinay Kwatra, Ambassador to the US, that it was the US NSA Jake Sullivan, who visited India.

## Global Trade Faces Uncertainty as West Asia Conflict Intensifies



NEW DELHI: The ongoing escalation of conflict in West Asia is expected to have far-reaching consequences on global trade and logistics, according to industry experts and exporters.

The intensifying tensions are likely to exacerbate already high logistics costs and adversely affect trade in key sectors such as oil, electronics, and agriculture, reported BS.

Exporters have expressed concerns that insurance costs for shipments to countries directly involved in the conflict may rise, potentially straining the working capital of Indian exporters.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), a prominent think tank, has reported that

the conflict is already impacting India's trade relations with countries like Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon.

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) has highlighted the potential for significant disruptions to world trade and the global economy.

FIEO Director General Ajay Sahai noted that Iran's crucial role in the oil market means any escalation could lead to supply disruptions and higher prices, with oil prices already having increased by USD 4 per barrel.

This development could have far-reaching effects on global economies, particularly those dependent on oil imports.

Sahai further warned that increased tensions could desta-

bilise the Middle East, affecting vital trade routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, through which a substantial portion of the world's oil transits.

Such disruptions could result in higher shipping costs and delays, impacting global supply chains across various industries, from electronics to agriculture.

The potential imposition of sanctions or trade restrictions by Western nations could further complicate global trade dynamics, adding to market volatility.

S C Ralhan, Chairman, Hand Tool Association, expressed apprehension that orders to affected countries would likely be put on hold, making trade in the region increasingly risky and challenging.

Data from the first seven months of 2024 reveals significant challenges in India's trade with countries directly impacted by the conflict.

Exports to Israel declined sharply by 63.5 per cent, while Jordan experienced a 38.5 per cent decrease due to spill over effects. Lebanon also saw a 6.8 per cent reduction in trade with India.

## Lloyd Austin reaffirms US support to Israel, warns Iran of 'serious consequences'



WASHINGTON: US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin reiterated America's strong support for Israel's right to defend itself against Hezbollah and prevent attacks similar to those on October 7.

In a phone conversation with Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, Austin emphasised the need for a diplomatic resolution to protect civilians on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border.

In a post on X, Austin stated, "I made it clear that the United States supports Israel's right to defend itself," adding that both sides agreed on the importance of "dismantling attack infrastructure along the border to ensure that Lebanese Hezbollah cannot conduct October 7-style attacks on Israel's northern communities."

The US Defence Secretary also stressed that a diplomatic resolution is necessary to ensure the safe return of civilians to their homes.

Further warning Iran of "serious consequences," Austin said that he "made clear that the United States is well-positioned to defend US personnel, partners, and allies in the face of threats from Iran and Iran-backed terrorist organisations and determined to prevent any actor from exploiting tensions or expanding the conflict."

"I reiterated the serious consequences for Iran in the event Iran chooses to launch a direct military attack against Israel," he added, reinforcing the US's commitment to support Israel in case of any expansion of the conflict.

Earlier on Monday, US State Department Spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters that Israel had informed the US it was carrying out "limited operations focused on Hezbollah infrastructure near the border".

The Washington Post, citing US security officials, reported that Israel had informed the White House of plans for an imminent, limited ground campaign in Lebanon.

Additionally, US President Joe Biden also said on Sunday that he would speak with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as tensions in the Middle East increase following Israel's assassination of Hezbollah Chief Hassan Nasrallah.

He added, "We really have to avoid" all-out war in the Middle East, saying, "We've already taken precautions relative to our embassies and personnel who want to leave, but we're not here yet. But we're working like hell with the French and many others."

## 'Gravely concerned' over Israeli strikes in Beirut: UN chief



UNITED NATIONS: United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that he was "gravely concerned" over the rising violence in the Middle East, urging all sides to halt the cycle of violence immediately.

Sharing a post on X, Guterres said, "I'm gravely concerned by the dramatic escalation of events in Beirut in the last 24 hours. This cycle of violence must stop now. All sides must step back from the brink."

He added, "The people of Lebanon, the people of Israel, as well as the wider region, cannot afford an all-out war."

Meanwhile, Unicef has sounded the alarm over the strikes in Beirut, condemning the recent escalation that has claimed thousands of lives.

Sharing a post on X, Unicef said, "Tragedy upon tragedy in Lebanon. The recent escalation has killed and injured thousands and instilled an unimaginable fear in people. The children of Lebanon need an immediate de-escalation."

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) also eliminated senior Hezbollah intelligence array terrorist Hassan Khalil Yassin in a precision strike in the Dahieh district in Beirut on Saturday, the military reported, according to a report by Jerusalem Post.

## Singapore's private economy expands for 19 consecutive months

SINGAPORE: The seasonally adjusted S&P Global Singapore Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) was 56.6 in September, marking a continued improvement in private business conditions for 19 straight months, the S&P Global said Thursday. It added that the growth rate eased to a three-month low but remained marked, Xinhua news agency reported.

The accumulation rate was the most pronounced in eight months, partly due to supply constraints. Inventory levels



also declined amid a worsening of supply delays. Input prices

continued climbing last month as firms reported higher raw materials, transport, and labour costs, but at a moderate pace from August.

Though easing from an over three-year peak in August, the confidence levels among Singaporean private sector firms remained above the long-run average and reflected hopes for better business activities.

A PMI reading of 50 and above indicates expansion, while a reading below 50 indicates contraction.

## Biden says he'll speak with Netanyahu, vows all-out war in the Middle East must be avoided

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden has said that he would speak with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as tensions in the Middle East increase following Israel's assassination of Hezbollah Chief Hassan Nasrallah.

"Yes, I will be talking to him," Biden said on Sunday as he headed for the White House from Dover Air Force Base.

He added "we really have to avoid" all-out war in the Middle East, saying, "We've already taken precautions relative to our embassies and personnel who want to leave, but we're not there yet. But we're working like hell with the French and many others."

The US backed Israel's operation, saying that Hassan Nasrallah's death "is a measure of justice for his many victims".

In a statement, Biden had said, "Hassan Nasrallah and

the terrorist group he led, Hezbollah, were responsible for killing hundreds of Americans over a four-decade reign of terror. His death from an Israeli airstrike is a measure of justice for his many victims, including thousands of Americans, Israelis, and Lebanese civilians."

The statement further said, "The strike that killed Nasrallah took place in the broader context of the conflict that began with Hamas's massacre on October 7, 2023. Nasrallah, the next day, made the fateful decision to join hands with Hamas and open what he called a "northern front" against Israel."

Following Nasrallah's death, Netanyahu had issued a warning to Iran's Ayatollah regime and asserted that those who target Israel will face consequences and that no location in Iran or the Middle East is



beyond Israel's reach.

He called Nasrallah as "main engine of Iran's axis of evil" and added, "Nasrallah was not just another terrorist, he was the terrorist. He was the axis of the axis, the main engine of Iran's axis of evil. He and his people were the architects of the plan to destroy Israel. He was not only operated by Iran, he also frequently operated Iran."

The US President's statements come as Israeli air-

strikes across Lebanon killed dozens of people on Sunday.

The Iran-backed Hezbollah sustained a string of deadly blows to its command structure, including the killing of its overall leader, Hassan Nasrallah, as part of a wave of increasingly brazen Israeli strikes meant to undercut the group's capacity to attack its territory.

Before Nasrallah's killing, Netanyahu brushed off a ceasefire proposal brokered by the US and France that called for a 21-day pause in fighting across the Israel-Lebanon border, infuriating American officials who had been led to believe he was on board.

Israel informed the US that it was launching its major operation in Beirut only after it was underway -- again, to the frustration of some American officials.

## WITH EACH SUCCESS OF ISRAEL

## Prospects of Kamala Harris Improve in the US Presidential Race

GOPAL MISRA

The recent elimination of the Hezbollah chief Nasrallah in Beirut appears to have paved the way for the Democratic Party nominee, Kamala Harris, a woman of Indian-African bloodline, to make history.

She is expected to be the first woman with a rare feline aggressive posture to become the American President, when next month the polls for POTUS, as of now the most powerful political office on the earth, take place. With the election campaign reaching to its peak, she appears to have successfully engaged her Republican Party nominee Donald Trump, perhaps, a trusted tomatcat in the Battle for the political supremacy.

It all began last month, when Kamala Harris, calling herself a childless cat, supported abortion as a woman's right, has not only received attention from the American tomatcats, but from many across the continents. India is no exception.

In recent weeks, the popularity gap between Kamala

Harris and Donald Trump was decreasing, but her decision to support the woman's right regarding abortion could have been supported by the conservative voters, but her support to Israel has improved her chances to be elected to the coveted office.

The opposition to abortion has been rooted in the American psychological mindset since the colonial era. The British wanted to increase their presence in the New World. However, the non-white immigration has redefined the American dream. Kamala being an inheritor of the Indian genius from her mother appears to be the new standard bearers of the cherished American dream. She represents those who despite being a victim of both racial and gender biases could rescript the US as a land of the people having the merit overcoming the racial and gender biases.

Few in the US are aware of the fact that Indian women have been enjoying democratic rights since 1947, when the British finally left the Indian shores. On the other hand, the American women got their voting rights on August 26, 1920,



while it became an independent country on July four, 1776. It took 244 years for the American women to be inducted in the system of governance as a voter. The American's inability to elect even a brilliant woman like Hillary Clinton to become president speaks volumes of the American mindset.

The decision of the Biden administration to support Israel has had an impact on the geopolitics, but it might also usher in Kamala Harris, Vice President, to become the President. It is going to be a watershed not only in US politics, but also hit the traditional mindset of the discriminating women rooted or embedded

in all the faiths having the Abrahamic roots. In a few Islamic countries, women have the voting rights, but the value of their ballot is less than that of men. Pakistan and Bangladesh could be exceptions, where the brilliant women Muslim leaders took them to the path of political stability and prosperity, but they were either assassinated or toppled with the help of the Muslim clergy.

It cannot be denied that Kamala Harris has embarked upon a mission like Don Quixote, the outbursts of the American oligarchy even against allowing women to go for abortion.

However, it is difficult to predict the impact of her endorsement of abortion on the election prospects.

In a display of innocent humor, an Indian diplomat has jokingly remarked that Kamala's commitment to a woman's right to go for abortion, perhaps, could have been more forceful, if she could consult India's most cherished tomatcat i.e. PM Narendra Modi.

Since Modi didn't meet Trump, the American tomatcat, in Indian politics, the feline presence has always been influencing politics as much prior to independence as in later years. For Indians, even those converted to any Abrahamic faith believe in the theory of karma, and respect for the daughters. Their beauty has to be admired and respected.

In the Indian politics, Kamala's relentless pursuit for changing the mindset of the Americans, is indeed a formidable task. It is yet to be known how the Americans will react to her observation as a childless cat, but in India the abusive language against the then PM Indira Gandhi, used by none other but the

President Richard Nixon is well archived in her elephantine memory.

He and his security advisor, Henry Kissinger, called her a bitch. It may be a little embarrassing for a country famous for Hollywood and fashion shows to admire the beauty God has given to mankind, not to commit the sin of procreation, but to lead a meaningful life on the earth. The pregnancy heralds the arrival of spring in life, but the American mindset has to be emancipated.

Kamala Harris, who shares Indian genes being daughter of a highly accomplished woman, should have also supported the right of an American woman to choose a partner for giving birth to a child only from an accomplished person. It is hoped that the childless cat would dare to induct reforms if she is allowed to occupy the Whitehouse.

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

## MEA hails nation's humanitarian efforts in first 100 days of PM Modi 3.0 govt

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, has highlighted the contribution of India's efforts in supporting different countries in times of crisis through its Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations during the first 100 days of Prime Minister Narendra Modi 3.0 government.

Sharing a post on Sunday on X, Jaiswal said, "India - Vishwabandhu, a friend to the world. Extending a helping hand during humanitarian situations. Take a look at India's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Operations in the first 100 days of the Government."

Sharing a video, Jaiswal elaborated on India's HADR operations during the first 100 days of the government. He added, "Kuwait (provided support during the fire incident in June); Papua New Guinea (assistance of supplies in June); Haiti (medical supplies in July); El Salvador (relief materials in August); Syria (anti-cancer drugs in August); Ukraine (four BHISHM cubes in August); Chad (essential life-saving drugs, antibiotics and general medicines in September); Lao PDR (emergency



flood relief assistance as part of Operation Sadbhav in September); Malawi (consignment of rice in September); Myanmar (relief material and ration as part of Operation Sadbhav in September); Namibia (consignment of maize and rice in September); Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (sleeping bags and hygiene products in September); Vietnam (relief goods as part of Operation Sadbhav in September); Zambia (shipment of maize in September); and Zimbabwe (consignment of rice in September).

Notably, India has been among the first responders in providing HADR to impacted countries. Operation Sadbhav is part of India's broader effort to contribute to HADR within the ASEAN region, in line with its longstanding 'Act East Policy'.

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



As the world's largest democracy and one of the fastest-growing economies, India plays a crucial role in maintaining peace and equilibrium on the international stage. Let's take a moment to remember those who are suffering in war zones around the world.

As we stand on the cusp of the 21st century's third decade, the world faces an unprecedented confluence of challenges—ranging from escalating conflicts to the looming threat of climate change. The fragile balance of global peace is increasingly under threat as several regions around the world find themselves embroiled in political and military turmoil. From the long-standing tensions in West Asia to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, humanity seems to be standing at the edge of a precipice.

West Asia, often referred to as the tinderbox of the world, is once again engulfed in tensions. The ongoing Israel-Iran conflict, coupled with the fragile political situation in Lebanon, has not only destabilized the region but also triggered global economic ripples. Meanwhile, in Europe, the Russia-Ukraine war continues to ravage both nations, causing widespread devastation and loss of life.

Despite international calls for peace, this conflict seems to be dragging on indefinitely, with little hope of resolution in sight.

Amidst this turmoil, one country has consistently emerged as a beacon of stability: India. As the world's largest democracy and one of the fastest-growing economies, India has found itself playing a crucial role in maintaining peace and equilibrium on the international stage. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in particular, has gained global recognition as a symbol of peace and harmony. Under his leadership, India has actively engaged in diplomacy, attempting to mediate conflicts and foster dialogue between warring nations.

Despite its efforts, India has not remained untouched by global unrest. The recent escalation of the Israel-Iran conflict has had a significant impact on India's financial markets, with stock prices plummeting as investor confidence wavers. The global economy's interde-

Festivals Amidst Turmoil



pendence means that regional conflicts, no matter how distant, can have far-reaching consequences for nations across the world. India, with its close ties to West Asia, has felt the tremors of this instability firsthand.

Amidst these growing tensions, the political landscape in India is also heating up. Several states are in the throes of elections, and political campaigns have taken on a confrontational tone, with rival parties engaging in fierce battles of rhetoric and strategy. While elections are the cornerstone of democracy, the atmosphere has become so charged that it resembles a war-like situation in some regions. The stakes are high, and the political heat is palpable, adding to the already heavy atmosphere of global uncertainty.

Worryingly, the world seems to be inching towards an even more catastrophic scenario. If the situation in West Asia and

Europe continues to deteriorate, the possibility of a larger global conflict becomes all too real. The fear of a widespread war—one that could draw in major powers like the US, China, and Russia—looms large on the horizon. The specter of a full-scale war, potentially involving nuclear-armed nations, is a nightmare scenario that the world can ill afford.

Yet, as the world grapples with violence and discord, a unique contrast emerges in the festival season in India. The arrival of this season, marked by joy, unity, and celebration, stands in stark contrast to the negativity swirling around the globe. The festival season is a time for families and communities to come together, for prayers to be offered, and for hope to be rekindled. It is a reminder of the power of togetherness and the resilience of the human spirit, even in the darkest of times.

In these troubled times, perhaps what the world needs most is a collective moment of reflection and prayer. While diplomacy, dialogue, and peace talks are crucial, there is a growing sense that something more intangible is needed to restore balance to the world. Sometimes, when all other efforts fail, prayer works in ways that are beyond human comprehension. It offers a sense of solace and can foster a spirit of healing in the midst of strife.

As we celebrate the festivals with our loved ones, let us take a moment to remember those who are suffering in war zones around the world. Citizens caught in the crossfire, families torn apart, and children growing up amidst gunfire and bombs—these are the true victims of conflict. Our prayers should not only be for peace between nations but also for the well-being of every living being affected by violence and war. The world may be passing through a difficult phase, but the power of hope, unity, and prayer can guide us toward a better future. Let us all hope for peaceful resolutions to conflicts, for the well-being of all nations, and for a time when the festival of peace can be celebrated worldwide.

The writer is a senior journalist and columnist. Views are personal. Twitter @narvijayyadav.

First-ever 'Kho Kho World Cup' to take place in India



KAVITA SHARMA New Delhi

The Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI), in association with the International Kho Kho Federation, is thrilled to announce the 1st Kho Kho World Cup in 2025, set to take place in India! This historic event will witness the participation of 24 countries from 6 continents and will feature 16 men's and 16 women's teams who will come together to celebrate the spirit of Kho Kho and foster global unity. Kho Kho has its roots in India, and this World Cup will highlight the rich cultural heritage and competitive spirit of the sport. Today, the sport that started in the mud and has gone to the mat now has a global presence with 54 countries playing the sport across the world. Ahead of the World Cup, the

KKFI plans to take the sport to 200 elite schools across 10 cities to promote the sport. The federation will also run a membership drive for the school students with the aim of registering atleast 50 lakh players ahead of the World Cup. Sudhanshu Mittal, President of the Kho Kho Federation of India, expressed his enthusiasm for the upcoming event. "We are incredibly excited to host the inaugural Kho Kho World Cup. This tournament is not just about competition; it's about bringing nations together, promoting cultural exchange, and showcasing the beauty and intensity of Kho Kho to the world. Our ultimate goal is to see Kho Kho recognized as an Olympic sport by 2032, and this World Cup is the first step towards that dream."

My divorce was amicable, Samantha tells Telangana minister



HYDERABAD: Clarifying that her divorce was with mutual consent and amicable, actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu on Wednesday lashed out at Telangana minister Konda Surekha for linking Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president K. T. Rama Rao with her divorce from actor Naga Chaitanya.

The actress took to microblogging site X to react strongly to the minister's comments and urged her not to trivialise her journey and be responsible and respectful of individuals' privacy.

In her statement posted on social media, Samantha highlighted her journey and fight in the glamorous industry. "To be a woman, To come out and work, To survive in a glammers industry where women are more often than not treated as props, To fall in love & prop; to fall out of love, To still stand up and fight..." reads her post.

"It takes a lot of courage and strength, Konda Surekha Garu, I am proud of what this journey turned me into -- please don't trivialise it. I hope you realise that your words carry significant weight as a minister. I implore you to be responsible and respectful of individual's privacy," she wrote. "My divorce is a personal matter, and I request that you refrain from speculating about it. Our choice to keep things private doesn't invite misrepresentation. To clarify: my divorce was mutual consent and amicable, with no political conspiracy involved. Could you please keep me out of political battles? I have always remained non-political and wish to continue doing so," the actress added. Meanwhile, Naga Chaitanya's step-mother Amala Akkineni has lashed out at Konda Surekha for her comments. "Shocked to hear a woman minister turn into a demon, conjuring evil fiction allegations, preying on decent citizens as fuel for a political war. Madam Minister, do you rely on and believe people with no decency to feed you utterly scandalous stories about my husband without an iota of shame or truth? This is really shameful. If leaders lower themselves into the gutter and behave like criminals, what will happen to our country?" she asked on X.

Utkarsh SFB Brand Ambassadors Mary Kom & Sunil Chhetri



DOMINICK RODRIGUES Mumbai

Utkarsh Small Finance Bank announced the "on-boarding" of legendary Indian boxer Mary Kom and well-known Indian footballer Sunil Chhetri as its 'Brand Ambassadors.' Welcoming both sportspersons, Parveen Kumar Gupta, Chairman, Utkarsh SFB, said at a press conference here recently that Mary Kom and Sunil Chhetri have overcome significant challenges to achieve global recognition - mirroring Utkarsh SFB's mission of uplifting underserved segments by providing accessible financial services. Govind Singh, MD & CEO, Utkarsh SFB, said Mary Kom and Sunil Chhetri are synonymous with resilience, discipline and commitment - qualities that resonate with Utkarsh SFB's core values of financial inclusion, empowerment and trustworthiness. Trail-blazing Boxer Mary Kom, while lauding Utkarsh SFB's commitment to driving financial inclusion within underprivileged communities, expressed pride in being part of the Bank's journey in inspiring people to achieve their dreams, where persistence and proper support are key factors for success. Utkarsh Small Finance Bank also launched its Supercard and WhatsApp Banking Service during the press conference.

MedTech Mitra paves the way for Make in India products in diagnostics industry for healthcare system : Dr. V K Paul

FW DESK New Delhi

Promoting Atmanirbhar Bharat in manufacturing can make India a hub for diagnostics said Chief guest Dr.(Prof.) V K Paul, Member, Niti Aayog at the ASSOCHAM Conference on Diagnostics highlighting the significance of diagnostics as the heart of healthcare. The realisation of Vision Viksit Bharat 2047 necessitates self-sufficiency through Make in India focus. The Make in India thrust in healthcare by the Govt of India has been well catalysed by initiatives like National Med Tech policy; R&D in pharma and biotech sectors; PLI schemes.

Medtech Mitra is an overarching and inclusive initiative launched by ICMR which will encourage more regulatory aligned and sustainable innovation in diagnostics for national and global markets. It is an end-to-end guidance from ideation to delivery for start-ups as well as organisations expanding into diagnostics.

There is a need for advanced diagnostic equipment to diagnose the early signs of a condition or disease. Frontline technology and individual care with integrated systems needs to be improved, he added.

Delivering his keynote address Dr. Jitendra Sharma, MD & Founder CEO, AMTZ Ltd. focused on how Private consultation within the healthcare industry is increasingly leveraging AI variables to revolutionize diagnostics. The democratisation of diagnosis through technology ensures that advanced healthcare becomes



accessible to all, regardless of location. By embracing the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, we can accelerate this transformation, integrating private expertise and public resources to create scalable, sustainable diagnostic solutions. He continued by saying "Together, these innovations are shaping the future of healthcare, driving efficiency, reducing costs, and improving patient outcomes across the nation."

In his special address Dr. Harsh Mahajan, Founder & Chairman, Mahajan Imaging & Labs talked about Integrated diagnostics, which combines pathology, lab medicine, microbiology, and radiology, is rapidly gaining traction as the ideal approach for healthcare. The vision is to move towards a unified diagnostic model, where a single diagnosis streamlines patient care. With advancements in deep learning and machine learning, this future is within reach, empowering faster and more accurate healthcare solutions. Supported by the 'Make in India' initiative, we have the potential to not only revolutionize healthcare delivery but also position India as a global leader in integrated diagnostics and cutting-edge medical technologies.

Shahid Kapoor gives a peek into his 'happy morning' amidst nature

MUMBAI: Bollywood star Shahid Kapoor, who seems to be on a vacation, has given a glimpse into his "happy morning". Shahid took to Instagram stories, where he shared a picture of himself dressed in a gray T-shirt paired with gray sweatpants and a black half jacket. He completed his look with sunglasses and posed standing near some green plants. The actor is seen looking into the camera and smiling as he struck a pose for the camera. He wrote: "Happy morning."

The actor, who did not reveal the destination, on Wednesday had shared a string of pictures and videos from the flight, where he was seen gorging on paneer kathi roll, which he said was "har vegetarian ka go to!!". He had then shared a video of himself chomping on the roll and said: "Kha daala." Shahid also shared a video of himself making faces at the camera, which he captioned: "I don't react to turbulence." Recently, Shahid was seen performing at the 24th edition of IIFA. He event spoke about if he would ever work in south Indian cinema.

He said, "I'm game for it but I have a fear of what if the audience down south is not happy with my usage of the language pertaining to correct enunciation of the dialogues. I don't want to leave any loose ends, Hindi, I have (a good command on)". When asked which particular cinema from south, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam or Kannada he likes in particular, the actor said: "It's the same for me because I don't know any of them. So whichever filmmaker from south can trust me, explain to me properly and deal with all my questions, I'm ready to do it. Shahid will be next seen in 'Deva' in which he has been paired opposite Pooja Hegde. The film, directed by Rossan Andrews, will see Shahid in the role of a cop.

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Alia Bhatt, Sharvari-starrer 'Alpha' to release on Christmas 2025

MUMBAI: The makers of the upcoming spy film "Alpha" starring Alia Bhatt and Sharvari have finally revealed the release date. The movie will hit the screens on Christmas - December 25, 2025.

The banner Yash Raj Films took to Instagram, where they made the announcement along with a poster carrying the release date. The poster was captioned: "On Christmas 2025, #ALPHA will rise! Get ready for an action-packed holiday... 25th Dec, 2025. @aliaabhatt | @sharvari | #YRFSpUniverse"



In September it was reported that the two actresses were prepping hard for their next physically challenging schedule of "Alpha" in Mumbai. A source had back then



said: "The most dangerous, physically taxing schedule of Alpha awaits for Alia and Sharvari." The source shared that a heavily secured set has been

put up for the schedule, which will take place for 15 days. "A heavily guarded set has been put up in Mumbai and the two will need to be in the best physical fitness to be able to pull off the massive stunts that have been planned for the two." According to the source Alia and Sharvari will be seen doing a lot of action in the film. "Alia has put in months of training for this demanding film. A video that was uploaded by her trainer a few days back showed how she is getting stronger by the day for Alpha. The reason why Alia is pushing her body so much now is because of this schedule," the source said.

Biz Integration Hosts Zealous and Vehement 10th Edition of the India Legal Awards

The legal industry is at a pivotal juncture, and events like these push us to keep raising the bar. The awards are not just a celebration of achievement but a recognition of the transformative role legal professionals play in shaping our society.

Delhi, India - Biz Integration is proud to announce the successful completion of the highly anticipated 10th edition of the India Legal Awards 2024 held at the luxurious Radisson Blu Plaza, near Delhi International Airport. Biz Integration is led by Urvashi Neogi and Prabir Neogi. The event brought together the top minds in the legal industry, showcasing the best in legal excellence and innovation. The night was still young as attendees fostered a spirit of excellence and innovation throughout the event, ensuring that professionals were not only recognised for their contributions but also inspired to continue their pursuit of legal excellence. To get in the lines of the gala evening, the host welcomed everyone to the 10th edition of the Legal Awards, produced, and organised by Biz Integration along with a big thanks



was extended to the Platinum Partner, Lexicon Law Partners (Advocates and Solicitors), the Gold Partner, eMudhra, and the Supporting Partner, SILF (Society of Indian Law Firms). The India Legal Awards, one of the leading awards in the country for the rapidly growing legal sector, was successfully conducted by Biz Integration. The organisation is committed to achieving further milestones like this in the future with fervor and enthusiasm. "Light is the universal symbol of truth, knowledge, and understanding. To honor this spirit during the award night, the traditional Indian lamp-lighting ceremony took place. The dignitaries present for the occasion were Biju Varghese, Executive Vice President at eMudhra; Dr. Gopalakrish-

nan B, Founder of BGK Law Associates, Advocates and Legal Advisors; Shiraj Salelkar, Associate Partner at Lexicon Law Partners; Urvashi Neogi, Founder of Biz Integration; and Rajeev Mohan, Executive Director of IOCL, Corporate Law Department." Nevertheless, with an opening keynote welcoming address by Dr Lalit Basin, President Society of Indian Law Firms, Immediate past President of the Bar Association of India, indeed drawn strength among the participants and sharpened the contour engagement between the attendees of the award night. He made the night meaningful with an air of a legal triumph. Biju Varghese, Executive Vice President of eMudhra, delivered a phenomenal

presentation on Leveraging eSignatures and eStamping to Go Paperless with Legal Contracts. A group monologue presentation by Shiraj Salelkar, Associate Partner; Aishwarya Painaik, Senior Associate; Sahil Namavati, Senior Associate; and Aarya Thackeray, Associate, all from Lexicon Law Partners. Their presentation focused on 'Navigating the Conundrum of Dissenting Members - Law, Negotiation, and Development. They provided valuable insights for the strategic development of the legal arena. The pinnacle of the evening came when Hon'ble Shri Tushar Mehta, Solicitor General of India, crowned the event with his warm regards and greetings to all the dignitaries and Urvashi Neogi, Founder of Biz Integration, during his virtual address. He emphasised his association and commitment to the Biz Integration's India Legal Awards since its inception. His eloquent words and heartfelt greetings for the attendees and participants conveyed a deep sense of pride and a plethora of harmonious emotions, making us all feel jovial during the award night. This event featured a thorough brainstorming session by the

jury members, as noted by Hon'ble Shri Tushar Mehta, Solicitor General of India. Selecting the winners proved challenging, but through collective decision-making, they successfully navigated the professional journey of upgradation. Following his speech, a warm welcome note was delivered by Dr. Gopalakrishnan B, Founder of BGK Law Associates, Advocates and Legal Advisors, who graciously joined us for the official award night. He emphasised the importance of self-regulation in the legal industry, criminal justice in India, and addressing white-collar crimes. His insights into the manifesto of the legal sector were discerning and astute, providing us with a deeper understanding of these critical issues. Concluding with a motivational note from Dr. Lalit Basin, we began recognising the winners among the participants and presenting their awards.

- Affairs, Government of India
  - Dr. Gopalakrishnan B, Founder | BGK Law Associates, Advocates and Legal Advisors
  - Dr. Sanjeev Gemawat, Managing Director & Group General Counsel, Essar
- And the winner is!!!!**
- Lifetime Achievement Award: R. Venkataramani, Attorney-General of India
  - Best Boutique Law Firm of the Year: Sagar Chandra and Associates
  - Leading Lawyer - Juvenile Justice and Protection of Children's Rights: Rachna Tyagi, Ethicus Legal
  - Litigation & Dispute Resolution Team of the Year: Lexicon Law Partners
  - Managing Partner of the Year: Amit Meharia, MCO Legals
  - Best Young Achiever - White Collar Crime: Digvijay Singh, Lex Jurists
  - Best Young Achiever In-House: Prashant Singh, Max Life Insurance Company Ltd.
  - Best Intellectual Property Firm: Lexorbits
  - Real Estate Law Firm of the Year: Lexicon Law Partners
  - Regional Law Firm of the Year - Karnataka: Law-Assist
  - Regional Law Firm of the Year - Telangana: Tatva Legal
  - International Law Firm of the Year - Singapore: Rajah & Tann Singapore LLP
  - Best Initiative of the Year: Re Sustainability Ltd.
  - Best Use of Technology - In-House Legal Team: HCL Technologies Ltd.
  - Best Business Support Legal Team: Flextronics Technologies India Pvt Ltd.
  - Best Fraud Prevention Team for Insurance Industry: IndiaFirst Life Insurance Company Ltd.
  - Legal Counsel of the Year - Banking: Shilpa Thakur, Sberbank India
  - In-House Counsel of the Year - IT: Arif Jamal, HCL Infosystems Ltd.
  - General Counsel of the Year - Real Estate (New Business Concept): Ranju Goyal, Awfis Space Solutions Ltd.
  - General Counsel of the Year - Female: Mangal Krishnarao Kulkarni, Sonata Software Ltd.
  - General Counsel of the Year - Financial Services: Suraj Shetty, Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd.
  - General Counsel of the Year - FMCG: Santosh Mane, Zydus Wellness Ltd.
  - Best In-House Counsel - Food Service Sector: Vishwak

- Nand, Compass Group India
  - 24. Legal Team of the Year - FMCG: Zydus Wellness Ltd.
  - 25. Legal Team of the Year - IT: Hexaware Technologies Ltd.
  - 26. Legal Team of the Year - ITES: Tech Mahindra Ltd.
  - 27. Legal Team of the Year - Financial Services: Avanse Financial Services Ltd.
  - 28. Legal Team of the Year - Insurance: Star Union Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company Ltd.
  - 29. Legal Team of the Year - Real Estate: DLF Home Developers Ltd.
  - 30. Legal Team of the Year - BPO & KPO: Firstsource Solutions Ltd.
  - 31. Legal Team of the Year - Telecommunications: Bharti Airtel Ltd.
  - 32. Legal Team of the Year - PSU: Indian Oil Corporation Limited (Corporate Law Department)
- To describe this award night as merely amicable would be an understatement. Metaphorically, the event concluded on a powerful note—loud, prolonged, and a fitting summation of the impressive discussions surrounding the flourishing legal industry. It was a strong and memorable ending that left the audience with much to ponder. Thank you and sign off!