

REGION

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PUNJAB TO HOST 'CHILD MARRIAGE-FREE INDIA' CAMPAIGN

Punjab CM solicits support of World Bank to further combat major problems being confronted by state

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Friday solicited fulsome support and cooperation from the World Bank to further combat the major problems being confronted by the state.

During a meeting with World Bank Country Director for India Auguste Tano Kouamé, the Chief Minister presented a strong case for financial assistance to the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann highlighted the state government's commitment to fiscal and institutional resilience besides emphasising the need for financial support to drive growth, improve public services and enhance the overall quality of life for its citizens. He showcased state's strong reform agenda, focusing on fiscal prudence, improved governance and enhanced service delivery as a key factor in its quest for financial assistance.

The Chief Minister said that proposed financial assistance is expected to support Punjab's development priorities, including infrastructure development, human resource development and social welfare initiatives. He said that with this significant development, Punjab is poised to take a major leap forward in its journey towards prosperity and growth. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that environment is the major thrust area of the



state government and it is giving top priority to conservation of Ground water.

The Chief Minister said that state government is reviving old water resources and trying to provide canal water to maximum part of the irrigation land thereby reducing the consumption of electricity on one hand and checking the depletion of ground water on the other hand. He said that lining of canals, reviving of old Water courses (Khals) and other initiatives are being taken so that farmers can able to use maximum surface water. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that due to strenuous efforts of the state government in last two years ground water level has increased by around one metre.

The Chief Minister further said that the state government has designed a program for solarisation of Agricultural pump sets adding that it will increase the income of farmers manifold. He said that in five years the state government can rapidly solarize the major part of the Agricultural pump sets. Dwelling on another issue Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state government is mulling to incentivise the farmers to switch out the paddy.

The Chief Minister said that Rice is not the staple diet of Punjab but the farmers of state are cultivating paddy to meet the need of entire nation. He said that there are alternative crops such as pulses, Maize and others but need of the hour for

value addition of these crops to encourage the farmers. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state government is already mulling in various projects to save the environment.

The Chief Minister said that the state government is committed for developing Punjab as export hub for fruits and vegetables. He said that due to hard working and resilient farmers of the state and the fertile soil, Punjab's agricultural productivity is higher in the World and state government is looking for crop diversification. Expressing concern over presence of lead and Heavy Metal presence in ground water, Bhagwant Singh Mann urged the world bank to launch a project on the lines of one launched in Uttar Pradesh to facilitate the people.

Giving an affirmative response to the issues raised by the Chief Minister, Auguste Tano Kouamé said that they are mulling the idea to cooperate in this sector as world bank already cooperated a project in Uttar Pradesh. Barring for regular meetings with the state government, he said that this will streamline major things. The Chairman said that World Bank team was impressed by Punjab's determination to implement transformative reforms.

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY

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VYAPAR MANDAL CLAIMS 48 PER CENT OF MSMEs SHUT DOWN IN 7 YEARS

Govt Investing ₹1,435 Crore to Make PAN Single Unified Digital Identifier

NEW DELHI: In a significant move towards digital governance, the Indian government has approved the PAN 2.0 Project, a comprehensive initiative aimed at transforming taxpayer registration services through technological innovation.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has sanctioned a financial investment of Rs 1,435 crore for this groundbreaking project.

The project seeks to elevate the Permanent Account Number (PAN) into a unified digital identifier across multiple government agency systems, aligning with the Digital India vision. Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw highlighted



Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME), Neeraj Kedia terms the development business friendly in principle. "A single identity for all the regulatory and tax compliances could definitely result into ease of doing business. The multiplicity of identities for PAN, TIN, DIN, CIN etc. along with PF and ESI regulations is a nightmare for MSME owners," he added. The project represents a comprehensive re-engineering of PAN/TAN services, upgrading the current ecosystem to provide an enhanced digital experience for taxpayers. Currently, approximately 78 crore PANs have been issued, with 98 per cent allocated to individuals.

that the initiative will enable technology-driven transformation of taxpayer services, focusing on enhanced accessibility, expedited service delivery, and improved overall quality.

Key objectives of the PAN 2.0 Project include establishing a single source of truth for data consistency, implementing eco-friendly processes, optimising costs, and strengthening infrastructure security.

Reacting to the development, Chairman of Banking and Finance Committee of

Urban Estates will be set up in Punjab cities too: Housing Minister

CHANDIGARH: On the lines of big cities, Urban Estates will be developed in smaller cities, equipping them with state-of-the-art facilities, Punjab Housing and Urban Development Minister Hardip Singh Mundian said.

A survey of every city is being done and these will be developed soon by the Department, an official statement quoting the minister said on Friday. He said development authorities have



earned Rs 5,000 crore through e-auction of properties twice. Laying the roadmap for his department, Minister Mundian said efforts were being made to prioritise the planned urban development and to solve the problems of the people associated with this sector, especially city dwellers. He said for creat-

ing Urban Estates, a survey of every city is being done. "The main priority of the government was to provide accountability and transparency. For the first time, it was decided to organise special camps for the disposal of long-pending cases, under which, the first camp was organised and 51 promoters and builders were handed over colony licenses, completion certificates and layout plans.

POTPOURRI

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BOLLYWOOD MAESTRO PIYUSH MISHRA GRACED 'KITAB UTSAV 2024' AT LPU

'All PMs have offered chadar', Ashok Gehlot criticises BJP over Ajmer dargah issue



JAIPUR: Congress leader and former Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot has criticised the BJP after a petition filed in an Ajmer court claimed that a Shiva temple exists within the dargah premises.

"People from across the country offer prayers at the Ajmer Dargah. Even all the Prime Ministers, including PM Modi, have offered 'chadar' at the dargah. On one hand, chadar is being offered, while on the other, members of their party are approaching courts and creating confusion. What kind of message is being sent?", Gehlot said.

Gehlot further said, "Where there is unrest, there can't be development."

He reiterated that as per the law, religious places established before August 15, 1947, should remain as they are and should not be questioned.

Highlighting the dargah's historical significance, Gehlot said, "The Ajmer Dargah is 800 years old. It has been a place of worship for people worldwide, including Hindus and Muslims. Since the time of Pandit Nehru, it has been customary for Prime Ministers -- whether from Congress, BJP or any other party -- to offer chadar at the dargah. Offering a chadar carries its own meaning and significance. However, while doing so, members of the ruling party are also filing cases that create confusion. What kind of thinking does this reflect?"

Gehlot accused the ruling party of exploiting religious sentiments for electoral gains, stating, "Whether it's the Maharashtra elections, Haryana elections, or Parliament elections, victories are being achieved through polarization. Tickets are openly distributed on the basis of religion. The situation in the country is serious and demands introspection from those in power."

He stressed that questioning religious sites established before Independence was unwarranted and divisive.

A lower court in Ajmer has admitted a petition filed by Vishnu Gupta, National President of Hindu Sena, asserting that the Sankat Mochan Mahadev temple exists within the premises of the Ajmer Sharif Dargah. The court presided over by Civil Judge Manmohan Chandel, has deemed the matter admissible and on Wednesday issued notices to the Ministry of Minority Affairs, the Dargah Committee Ajmer, and the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), asking them to present their responses.

Punjab AAP to accept application for municipal polls from Dec 1



CHANDIGARH: Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Punjab President Aman Arora held meetings with party leaders, legislators, and ministers to discuss the elections to five municipal corporations and 42 municipal councils, saying applications for candidates will start from December 1.

Arora said like the by-elections, the party would also win the municipal elections by a significant margin. "We are confident that we will achieve a significant lead in these elections as well," he said, adding, "The victory in the by-elections has boosted the morale of party workers, and this will positively impact the municipal elections too."

Arora said that the state government is committed to the all-round development of Punjab's cities. He highlighted the importance of municipal elections in planning and implementing development projects for cities. Expressing hope for free and fair elections, he said that post-elections, the pace of development work in cities would accelerate. "We will pave the way for transparent and honest governance in local administration as well," he said.

He said the party "is preparing separate plans for each city. Some issues are common everywhere, but every area has unique problems, and these are also being considered." Arora announced that starting December 1, the party will begin accepting applications for councillor candidates in all municipal corporations and councils. He said the selection process would prioritise merit, loyalty to the party, the social composition of the area, and the candidate's winning potential. He urged party members aspiring to contest the elections to contact their local party officials or legislators to submit their applications. "Each application will be thoroughly reviewed," he said. During the meeting, Arora announced the appointment of AAP ministers as observers for the five municipal corporations -- Amritsar, Patiala, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, and Phagwara.

S&P Lowers India' GDP Growth Projections for 2025-27 to 6.8%

NEW DELHI: S&P Global Ratings on Monday maintained its forecast for India's GDP growth at 6.8 per cent for the current fiscal year (2024-25) but revised down its projections for the next two years.

The rating agency now expects the country's GDP to grow at 6.7 per cent in 2025-26 and 6.8 per cent in 2026-27, marking a reduction of 20 basis points from previous estimates. For 2027-28, India's GDP is projected to expand at 7 per cent.

The rating agency cited high interest rates and a lower fiscal impulse as key factors contributing to a moderation in growth. While India's Purchasing Manager Indices (PMIs) remain firmly in expansion territory, high-frequency indicators signal a temporary slowdown. This is especially evident in the construction sector, which took a hit during the September quarter.



Despite these concerns, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) remains optimistic. The RBI, in its latest bulletin, stated that the economic slowdown observed in the second quarter of 2024-25

EV Manufacturing in India gets a Boost with revised Incentive Plan

NEW DELHI: India is set to broaden its electric vehicle (EV) incentives, extending benefits to automakers utilising existing factories instead of limiting them to those building new plants, a move aimed at accelerating EV adoption and investment.

The revised policy, currently under finalisation, marks a departure from its initial design, which sought to attract new market entrants like Tesla but faced setbacks earlier this year.

The updated approach reflects India's pragmatic stance in leveraging existing automotive infrastructure. Automakers such

as Toyota and Hyundai have expressed interest in tapping into these incentives, highlighting the potential for a broader industry shift toward EV production.

According to meeting minutes from the Ministry of Heavy Industries, the government aims to accommodate investments in separate EV production lines at existing facilities, provided they meet local sourcing criteria.

The incentives remain substantial. Automakers investing at least USD 500 million in EV production with 50 per cent locally sourced components are eligible for significant import tax reductions -- from up to 100 per cent to 15 per cent for up to 8,000 EVs annually.

However, the revised policy ensures equitable treatment, requiring manufacturers to meet defined EV revenue targets. The policy also introduces

flexibility for investments in machinery and tools for dual-use (EVs and other vehicles) at new facilities. This reflects an understanding of the capital-intensive nature of EV production and aims to attract diverse stakeholders, including global players like Volkswagen, which seeks adjustments in investment timelines and supplier contributions. Notably, automakers have raised critical questions during consultations. Toyota queried the inclusion of separate EV assembly lines and charging infrastructure within the investment threshold.

Earlier this year, India's Economic Survey projected a more conservative growth range of 6.5-7.0 per cent. India's economy grew by an impressive 8.2 per cent in the 2023-24 fiscal year, continuing to lead global growth. However, inflation remains a challenge, particularly food inflation, which has breached the RBI's tolerance level.

Minister Piyush Goyal Launches Innovative Business Portal to Enhance Regulatory Processes

NEW DELHI: In a significant move to improve the business ecosystem, Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal unveiled the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Ease of Doing Business (EoDB) and Regulatory Affairs portal on November 28.

The launch took place during the second DPIIT-CII National Conference on Ease of Doing Business held in Delhi, marking a pivotal moment for streamlining business processes in India.

The newly introduced portal is designed to provide comprehensive insights into the current business environment and establish a robust mechanism for receiving and tracking suggestions for continuous improvement.



Minister Goyal emphasised the government's commitment to cooperative federalism, highlighting the administrator's dedicated efforts to create a more conducive environment for businesses and citizens. During his address, Goyal stressed the critical importance of the National Single Window System (NSWS), urging industry stakeholders to actively engage with the platform. He candidly expressed that without substantial industry participation, input,

and utilisation, the initiative risks potential abandonment.

The minister underscored the necessity of industry feedback to refine and optimise the system, particularly in relation to investor approvals and industrial land bank development.

Technological modernisation emerged as a key theme of Goyal's speech. He called for comprehensive upgradation of both state and central government portals, advocating for more agile, faster, and contemporary digital infrastructure.

Additionally, the minister emphasised the need to combat misinformation and encouraged stakeholders to identify and implement impactful changes with nationwide implications.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge calls for "harsh decisions" at CWC meet, also questions ECI duty

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge today called for "harsh decisions" in view of some recent electoral setbacks after encouraging performance in the parliamentary elections.

In his opening remarks at the Congress Working Committee (CWC) meeting in New Delhi, Kharge also referred to questions being raised whether the Election Commission of India was performing its constitutional duty. Kharge warned that the Congress cannot let the fascist forces deepen and strengthen their roots and that is why it was important and necessary for the party to win elections and defeat these forces.

Asserting that the Congress



has to defeat the divisive forces, he said, "we have to defeat the divisive forces ruling the country at all costs and restore peace, progress, brotherhood and harmony." "we have built a beautiful and a glorious nation and people of the country are ready to repose their faith in us...they are waiting for us and we cannot disappoint

them" he added. Kharge also accused the BJP government of trying to divert the attention of people from its repeated failures. Referring to violence in Manipur and Sambhal, he said there were so many sensitive and serious issues country was facing.

Kharge said that during the last eleven years of the BJP rule

at the centre a huge section of "have-nots" has come up in the country which has been hit by massive unemployment, inflation and grave economic disparities.

"We have to become their voice", he noted, adding, "it is also important for the Congress party to form the government so that the agenda for progress of the country and the deprived people is pursued and implemented". Assuring that there was no need to feel desperate or dejected, he said, there was a need for complete change from the grassroots level to block, district and the AICC levels. "We will have to bring in the changes according to the changing times", he said, while asserting, "we have successfully faced the challenges in the past and we will face these challenges in future also and move ahead".

Punjab to host 'Child Marriage-Free India' campaign

CHANDIGARH: In a significant step towards eradicating child marriage, Punjab will host a statewide oath-taking ceremony on November 27 as part of the 'Child Marriage-Free India' campaign.

The event will be broadcast live via a webcast link, uniting participants from across the state in a shared commitment to end this social evil.

Announcing the initiative, Minister for Social Security, Women and Child Development Baljit Kaur highlighted its mission to eliminate child marriage and safeguard the future of children. She called for enthusiastic participation from Women Self-Help Groups, Anganwadi Workers, ASHA Workers and Helpers, ANMs, Child Marriage Prohibition Officers, local community leaders, teachers, students from schools and colleges, elected representatives from



Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies, community health practitioners, doctors, members of civil society organisations, members of state and district Bar councils, legal service authorities and religious leaders.

Kaur stressed the vital role of collective action, urging

said: "A child marriage-free state is not just an aspiration but a critical necessity for the holistic development of our children and society. This initiative is a historic opportunity for all stakeholders to contribute towards a brighter, safer future for our youth."

The minister reiterated the vision of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann to transform Punjab into a vibrant and progressive state. She emphasised that achieving this vision requires the collective effort of all to eradicate the deep-rooted menace of child marriage.

She said the government aims to eliminate this practice and pave the way for a more equitable society.

She invited everyone to join the webcast and pledge their support, reinforcing the state's commitment to creating a brighter, child marriage-free Punjab.

Women drug smuggling network in Haryana: 914 arrested in 3 years

SATISH HANDA Chandigarh

According to a lawyer of Punjab and Haryana High Court, as observed 47% of women get into drug trafficking after getting addicted to drugs and are unable to pay the amount for the drugs. Women involved in drug trafficking usually also start taking drugs themselves. The most commonly used drugs among women include cocaine, sulphur, smack, opium, morphine and injecting drugs with syringe in their body, usually in arms. During a survey, it was found that female students living in hostels or working women staying in PG houses start taking drugs. According to information, 914 women have been arrested in three years allegedly running a drug smuggling network in Haryana.



According to collected data, two women were arrested for supplying ganja from Naraingarh police station area in Ambala district on 20 June 2024, in another case a woman was arrested by the police for drug trafficking from Shadipur village in Yamunanagar district. On 13 September 2024, the police caught three minor girls from Yamunanagar railway station on charges of drug trafficking. Such incidents recorded in the police records indicate that the trend of female drug smugglers is increasing in Haryana. About two years ago Ambala police busted a gang of smuggling and selling drugs all over in the state led by a

woman when Haryana state police had demolished the godown with bulldozers in Deha Colony Ambala Cantt and seized huge quantities of drugs. Similarly, City police station Ambala also arrested several females while supplying consignments of drugs in bulk or door-to-door sale.

Information reveals, in the past three years, the Haryana police have arrested 914 women drug smugglers. This year, the police have arrested 20 women in Kurukshetra and 14 women in Hisar in the case of drug smuggling. 70% of these women smugglers were found to have gotten into the drug smuggling after getting addicted to drugs themselves and meeting financial demand for the same. As seen the age of women caught in drug smuggling is between 25 to 60 years and most of these are women belonging to the families below poverty line.

Farmers Protest: Indefinite fast to continue, says Jagjit Singh Dallewal



CHANDIGARH: Farm leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal was taken to Khanauri after his discharge from DMC Hospital here on Friday evening. Several farm leaders, including Sarwan Singh Pandher, had reached the hospital to receive him.

Addressing the media at the hospital, Jagjit Singh Dallewal said he was not admitted to the hospital, but was detained there. The CM played a shrewd role in connivance with the Centre by detaining him in a hospital with a motive to sabotage the farmers' agitation.

"Since I had announced to start an indefinite fast for the sake of farmers, I did not eat anything even in the hospital. Police officials and other persons lobbying at the behest of the government tried to convince me to break my fast, but I didn't. I am going to Khanauri now and will continue my fast there," Dallewal said.

"The bulletin released by the hospital authorities about my health was a complete lie. The day I was taken to the hospital, I didn't undergo any medical test. I even refused to get my blood pressure measured or blood samples taken. I am quite hale and hearty," he said.

Gold worth Rs.1,50,32,167 seized by Customs Department



JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

The Customs department has seized 24 Kt. Gold at Shri Guru Ramdas International Airport which was smuggled here from Dubai.

An official statement issued here today, Custom official said that Saturday on November 23, a passenger who was travelling from Dubai to Amritsar by Spice Jet Airlines Flight No. SG-56 was intercepted by the officers at around 8.30AM at Amritsar Airport on the basis of his suspicious behaviour.

Official further stated that on the basis of suspicion having concealed any contraband or dutiable goods with him he was served a notice under Section 102 and personal search of the passenger was conducted in presence of two independent Panchas which resulted in to recovery of gold in paste form (four pouches) totally weighing 2674 gms (gross weight) which were concealed in his underwear and knee straps tighten on his both legs.

He further stated that the extraction process was conducted and the paste was converted into two 24 kt gold bars weighing 1935.14 Grams (net weight) which is valued at Rs.1,50,32,167/-. The smuggled gold was seized under panchanama and a seizure memo dated 23.11.2024. The passenger was also placed under arrest 1.15 hrs on 24.11.2024 under Section 104 of the Customs Act, 1962. Further investigation is under process.

Akal Takht urged to revive Akali Dal

FW DESK Chandigarh

In view of the ongoing crisis within the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), Misl Satluj, the socio-political body representing the Sikh community, has written to the Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar for an urgent intervention and guidance.

Misl Satluj President Ajaypal Singh Brar on Saturday emphasised that the SAD, in its current form, has strayed from its founding values and Panthic traditions of selfless service and commitment to Sikh rights.

He wrote in the letter that there is an urgent need for the Akali Dal to reconnect with the core principles of Sikhism, which have historically guided the party's mission to protect



the dignity of the Sikh Panth.

The Misl Satluj has proposed the expulsion of 11 leaders, including Sukhbir Badal, Prem Singh Chandumajra and Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, from the Akali Dal whose political opportunism, personal greed and lack of the true Akali spirit have undermined the party's integrity.

"They not only shirked their responsibility during critical

incidents such as the 2015 sacrilege, some of them were seen openly supporting the sacrilege perpetrators," reads the letter.

It also highlights the necessity of returning to the original constitution of the Akali Dal, which was rooted in Sikh values and social justice, ensuring that the leadership is accountable and transparent.

Brar underscored the im-

portance of reopening the membership to Sikhs worldwide, allowing the Akali Dal to once again reflect the collective will of the global Sikh community.

He also called for the revival of the struggle for the core objectives passed in the 1974 Working Committee at Sri Anandpur Sahib, focusing on such as Gurmat, social equality, economic justice, and the promotion of physical fitness for the Sikh community.

The Misl Satluj emphasised that only through these steps can the Akali Dal regain its relevance and truly serve the needs of the Sikh Panth.

In addition, Misl Satluj submitted a draft document to Akal Takht for review and finalization to guide the future path and actions of the Panth.

Shiromani Akali Dal seeks elections for Panjab University's senate



CHANDIGARH: Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Bikram Singh Majithia on Tuesday expressed solidarity with Panjab University student organisations demanding elections for the varsity's Senate and urged Chandigarh administrator Gulab Chand Kataria to intervene and scrap the false cases registered against students.

The Akali leader, who interacted with student organisations and sat on a sit-in protest in the university, called for convening a special session of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha to pass a resolution to demand the holding of elections, besides registering a

protest against the allocation of land in Chandigarh to Haryana for building a separate legislative Assembly.

Majithia, who held a copy of the Constitution during his speech on campus, made an appeal for upholding the Constitution as well as the democratic structure of the country.

He also asserted, "I want to remind the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that you need to uphold the Constitution in the real sense of the word instead of just pledging loyalty to it. The Constitution came into being to protect the democratic rights of the people they should have the right to elect the Senate." Praising the student bodies for rising above party lines to protest against the manner in which the Central government was seeking to do away with democratic bodies of the varsity, Majithia also condemned the police action against students when they tried to proceed to meet Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann when he was visiting the campus recently.

CM Saini urges youngsters to study Constitution to know rights, duties

SATISH HANDA Kurukshetra

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini on Tuesday while addressing students at the Constitution Day event at Kurukshetra University urged youngsters to study the Constitution to understand their rights, duties on which modern India is built. The CM was addressing a gathering on the occasion of the State-Level Amrit Mahotsav Celebrations organised on Constitution Day at Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra. He also inaugurated an exhibition organised by the Information, Public Relations, Languages, and Culture Department.

Saini said the youngsters of this country are making their presence felt in every field including sports, information technology, digital payments, and startups and to further increase their understanding



regarding the constitution, the youngsters should actively participate in the political debates. The state government is actively advancing democratic principles through its progressive social and economic policies, guided by the core values of the Constitution, since Haryana is committed to realising the vision of Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya's

Integral Humanism and Antodaya. The Chief Minister paid homage to Dr BR Ambedkar and other visionaries who played a key role in drafting and framing the Constitution of India. While emphasizing the significance of the 'We the People' in the Preamble of the Constitution, he said that this phrase is a testament to Unity

and Integrity. These three words represent India's collective voice, a pledge of unity and integrity, and a manifestation of people's trust in the Republic, which is known as the 'Mother of Democracy.'

Saini said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic decision to abrogate Articles 370 and 35A has fulfilled the dream of an Akhand Bharat, symbolises the realisation of 'One Nation, One Constitution, One Flag and One Leader'. He said, the Constitution gives us rights emphasizing the importance of duties and one must have a balance between duties and rights to ensure constitutional values and expectations. CM further said that Amrit Mahotsav provides an opportunity to reflect, understand and adopt its values in daily life, demonstrating true citizenship and reverence for the Constitution.

Haryana's 1000 ponds to be renovate: Panchayats Minister

Open gyms to be opened in 250 villages and Library facilities will be established in 1000 villages

GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

Haryana Development and Panchayats Minister, Krishan Lal Pawar, expressed confidence that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's program on December 9 will be a resounding success and a significant milestone in empowering women. He further highlighted that the Haryana government will organize a large-scale employment fair in Panipat in December to provide job opportunities for the youth. Prominent industrialists will be invited to the fair to ensure maximum employment for the youth. The government's goal is to equip as many young people as possible with the skills needed to stand on their own feet, and to support this, library facilities will be established in 1,000 villages across the state.

The Minister shared these details while reviewing the preparations for the Prime Minister's program with officials in Panipat on Monday. He said that providing basic



facilities in rural areas is a key priority for the government. As part of this initiative, 250 open gyms will be set up in villages to encourage youth to stay healthy and gain valuable knowledge. The Minister also said that the state government will establish cultural centers for women in more than 6,500 villages, with 1,000 cultural centers expected to be operational by next year.

He further revealed plans to improve and beautify 1,000 ponds in the first phase. Officials have been instructed to ensure proper seating arrangements and the planting of flowers around these ponds, ensuring that the ponds across the state

will soon be transformed into attractive and well-maintained spaces.

Additionally, the Minister stated that the phirnis in 1,000 villages will be cemented, and special arrangements will be made for street lighting. The Haryana government is working to create an urban-like atmosphere in rural areas, and all promises will be fulfilled on time.

He also reaffirmed the government's commitment to supporting farmers, stating that every year, farmers are honored through the Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme. He said that the scheme provides an annual financial support of Rs. 6,000 to 12 crore farmers.

Bye-election for a Rajya Sabha seat in Haryana to be held on December 20

GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has announced bye-elections schedule for vacant Rajya Sabha seat in Haryana along with three other states. The bye-election will be held on December 20, 2024 for a Rajya Sabha seat in Haryana.

Notably, the Rajya Sabha seat in Haryana became vacant due to the resignation of Krishan Lal Panwar, for which the bye-election will be held.

As per the election schedule issued by the Election Commission of India, the notification will be issued on December 3. Nominations can be filed until December 10. The scrutiny of nominations will be done on December 11, and nominations can be withdrawn until December 13. Voting will take place on December 20 from 9 AM to 4 PM, and the counting of votes will be held on the same day. The election process will be completed on December 24.

Two explosions outside the two night clubs in Chandigarh by two miscreants on motorcycles threw crude bombs



SATISH HANDA Chandigarh

Two blasts took place one after the other near two night clubs De.orra night club and another owned by rapper Badshah's night club Seville in Chandigarh on Tuesday. According to the CCTV footage camera installed outside the club's two miscreants, having covered their faces with a blanket, riding on motorcycles threw country-made bombs. The intensity of the blast was very low, so there is no news of anyone being injured, except window glasses of the club and a couple of surrounding buildings were broken. Local police from nearby Sector 26 police station as well as the NIA team reached the spot to investigate the matter. The incident took place a few days prior to the

visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Shah's visit to Chandigarh on 3rd December. Kanwardeep kaur SSP Chandigarh said that police have started search for the miscreants and night vigil by police has been increased. Club employee Purna Chand said that two blasts happened at around 3:15 in the night when the visitors had already left, except a couple of employees were present.

According to information a similar bomb attack was also seen in Chandigarh on 11 September 2024, when two youths attacked a bungalow in Sector-10 with a hand grenade and the glass panes of the bungalow were broken in the blast. Investigation had revealed that this attack was done by mistaking the house of a police officer.

Later, the police arrested two accused youths in this case. The forensic teams of Chandigarh Police have started investigating the matter of twin explosions near two nightclubs including Badshah's Seville rock city. According to sources from Chandigarh police, the incident cannot be classified as a bomb, as the substance used was potash with crackers, which was in a very large quantity. It said that an attempt was made to explode country-made bombs outside Chandigarh's night clubs by using potash used in firecrackers. Some thin jute ropes were also recovered from the spot. Since the night clubs were closed at the time of the blasts, it is believed that these blasts were carried out only to spread terror.

The sources further said that it is a case of extortion. The initial investigations suspect that the angle behind these blasts is extortion by spreading terror among the owners of night-clubs. The forensic teams of Chandigarh Police are currently investigating the matter. DSP Dilbag Singh Dhalwal said, they got information in the control room that there was a bomb explosion. The forensic team has arrived and the FIR has been lodged.

Justice Lalit Batra assumed office as Chairperson of HHRC



GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

Justice Lalit Batra today assumed office as the Chairperson of the Haryana Human Rights Commission (HHRC), along with two newly appointed members, Kuldeep Jain and Deep Bhatia.

Haryana government has appointed Justice Lalit Batra (Retired) Punjab and Haryana High Court as the Chairperson of the Haryana Human Rights Commission along with Kuldeep Jain, a retired District and Sessions Judge and Deep Bhatia as Members.

Justice Lalit Batra is a former Judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court. Kuldeep Jain, a retired District and Sessions Judge, and Deep Bhatia, a senior advocate. Deep Bhatia has also remained a member and acting Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission.

Priyanka Gandhi takes oath as Lok Sabha MP

On arrival at Parliament House she said, 'I am very happy today'

NEW DELHI: It is another milestone for the Nehru-Gandhi family as Priyanka Gandhi Vadra took the oath of affirmation as a member in the Lok Sabha on Thursday.

Wearing an off-white saree with a golden border and holding the Constitution booklet, which has become a familiar sight in this Parliament session after Rahul Gandhi and other MPs of the INDIA bloc started carrying it, Priyanka Gandhi was greeted with loud cheers and chants of Bharat Jodo as she took the oath. Earlier, she was accompanied by her mother Sonia Gandhi, brother Rahul Gandhi and Congress MPs when she reached the Parliament House, saying, "I am very happy today". Her resounding victory in the Wayanad bypoll is not only her successful electoral debut but another big achievement for the family as for the first time, three members of the Nehru-Gandhi family are simultaneously in the Parliament. Her brother Rahul Gandhi - the former Wayanad MP - is pres-



ent as the MP from the family through Rae Bareilly, which he chose to retain after winning both in the Lok Sabha elections this year. Their mother Sonia Gandhi is a member of the Rajya Sabha. This marks a significant step for Priyanka Gandhi, aligning her political journey with her mother Sonia Gandhi and brother Rahul Gandhi, both pivotal figures in the Congress party.

The bypoll in Wayanad was necessitated after Rahul Gandhi vacated the seat. The only talking point during the campaign was whether Priyanka Gandhi could surpass her brother's impressive 2019 victory margin of 4.30 lakh votes. Although she fell slightly

the party's campaigns.

Though she had been actively campaigning for her mother and brother, it wasn't until 2019 that she took on a formal role when she was appointed party General Secretary for Uttar Pradesh. However, her stint as UP in-charge did not yield any positive result and the party has not been able to even sustain itself independently in the state. Priyanka Gandhi's parliamentary debut comes at a critical juncture for Congress, as it grapples with the political dominance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

However, her presence in the Lok Sabha adds a new dimension to the party's strategy, particularly in the South. Critics may reignite debates over dynastic politics, but her supporters highlight her strong public connect and articulate advocacy of grassroots issues. Her entry signals a renewed hope for Congress in regions where its campaigns have recently shown promise.

For Wayanad, Priyanka Gandhi's victory is more than a win; it symbolizes a fresh opportunity to bolster Congress' position in the South, amplifying her political journey on a national stage.

JMM raises doubts on EVMs, claims party would have got more seats through ballot papers



RANCHI: The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) has stirred a debate over the credibility of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), claiming that elections conducted via ballot papers would have resulted in more seats for the INDIA bloc, which would have got 75 out of 81 seats in Jharkhand.

The party made this assertion in a post on its official handle on the social media platform X, which was also shared by Acting Chief Minister Hemant Soren.

In the post, the JMM stated: "There is immense anger among the people of Jharkhand against the 11 years of BJP's dictatorial rule, which the BJP fails to grasp. If they wish to regain

Jharkhand's trust, they should first return the Rs 1.36 lakh crore dues owed to the people of this state."

In the recent state elections, the JMM-Congress-RJD-CPI(ML) alliance secured a historic victory, winning 56 seats - 34 by the JMM, 16 by the Congress, 4 by the RJD, and 2 by the CPI-ML-L.

This marks a record-breaking performance by any coalition in Jharkhand's 24-year history.

Despite this success, Hemant Soren and other JMM leaders have consistently expressed concerns over the reliability of EVMs, a sentiment echoed by Congress leaders.

During the campaign, JMM

Centre Govt. spent Rs 3,623 cr on steps to curb burning of crop stubble



NEWDELHI: The Centre has spent Rs 3,623.45 crore on crop residue management, since 2018, in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh, Union Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Kirti Vardhan Singh informed in the Lok Sabha.

Punjab has been allocated the highest amount of Rs 1,681.45 crore, followed by Haryana with Rs 1,081.71 crore. Uttar Pradesh was allocated Rs 763.67 crore, NCT of Delhi Rs 6.05 crore, and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) got Rs 83.35 crore, according to the figures tabled in the Lower House.

The funds have been used to subsidise crop residue management machinery and set up custom hiring centres (CHCs) to curb stubble burning and promote sustainable practices, the minister told the Lower House.

Over three lakh machines have been distributed, including 4,500 balers and rakes for collecting paddy straw for ex-situ utilisation, he said.

The government has also committed to up to Rs 1.4 crore for pelletisation plants and up to Rs 2.8 crore for torrefaction plants, depending on the plant's capacity. So far, 17 applications for such plants have been approved, with 15 of them expected to process up to 2.70 lakh tonnes of paddy straw annually, the minister stated.

In 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare launched a scheme aimed at supporting the purchase of crop residue management machinery and the establishment of CHCs in NCT of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, and Uttar Pradesh for in-situ management of paddy straw. In 2023, the Ministry revised the scheme's guidelines to enhance support for establishing a crop residue/paddy straw supply chain, providing financial assistance for the capital cost of machinery and equipment.

Congress demands Adani's arrest for defaming India



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress demanded immediate arrest of Gautam Adani for defaming India across the world and eroding the credibility of governance.

It also asked the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, its leaders, ministers and MPs to stop defending the man because of whom, the credibility of India's corporate governance had come under questioning. The Chairperson of the Social Media and Digital Platforms, Supriya Shrinete pointed out, after US's Department of Justice brought charges against Adani, his projects are being cancelled, halted or reviewed in almost all the countries where these are in operation.

She also wondered as to why the investigating agencies like the ED, the CBI, the SEBI, Income Tax and Revenue Intelligence had turned their back on the issue. She said, in fact the SEBI was duty bound to probe the charges against the Adani since it has a mutual bilateral agreement with the US Securities Exchange Commission about such matters. Shrinete pointed out, ever since warrants have been issued by the US agencies, the Adani group has decided that it will not make any fresh investments in the Adani group. Total Energies, one of the top seven energy companies in the world, has a 20% stake in Adani Green.

She said US agencies are also reviewing whether the funding should be allowed or should not be allowed for the Sri Lankan port that has been allotted to Adani. She said, Sri Lanka itself is reviewing the Adani power deal, one that was facilitated by Prime Minister Modi.

Similarly, she added, the Kenya government has already cancelled an airport, and a power deal. Bangladesh court has ordered a probe into the Adani power deal. Australia has seen rampant charges of corruption and rampant protests all across the country against Adani. Switzerland has frozen about 2,617 crore rupees connected to Adani on charges of misdeeds.

The Congress spokesperson pointed out that rating agencies like Moody's, and Fitch have downgraded Adani stocks and have kept the outlook as negative. The rating agencies have also said it is unlikely that the outlook will be revised to positive; it is very likely that it will be downgraded further. Shrinete took a dig at the senior lawyer who sought to defend Adani suggesting that the Department of Justice order does not name Adani.

Entire system against country's 90% population says Rahul Gandhi

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi said that the entire system was working against the 90 percent population in the country.

He said, that is why 'caste census' was important, which will mark a paradigm shift in the development process of the nation.

Addressing the 'Samvidhan Rakshak Abhiyan' function at the Talkatora Stadium in New Delhi Rahul said, no matter how hard the BJP and the RSS try against it, the caste census will be carried out in the country and the fifty percent bar on reservations will be removed.

The senior Congress leader accused the BJP/RSS of trying to make the "fifty percent" wall against reservation stronger. He said, although the UPA government tried its best, it still could not achieve the desired results of "weakening the wall", which he said, was a barrier for progress



of the "90 percent population" of the country. But, he added, the RSS and the BJP were only cementing it further.

Pointing towards Rohit Vemula's picture on the stage, Gandhi said he wanted to speak but his voice was gagged. "Every day in India, the Adivasi youth, the Dalit youth, the OBC youth dream of becoming engineers, doctors, lawyers or want to join the media or the IAS, but the reality is that the entire system in the country is up against the Adivasis, the Dalits and the Backward Classes", he observed.

He pointed out, twenty-first century is the age of data. He said, the caste census will provide the data about the exact number of dalits, adivasis and OBCs. "The day we get the data, the paradigm of development will shift and there will be a new approach towards development in the country", he said.

Referring to the Telangana state's caste census, he said, the party's policy will be based on the caste census data. He said the BJP was scared of it as it wants 4-5 percent people and a few billionaires to con-

trol India. He said, this control can be taken away from them by two ways; caste census and removing the fifty percent bar on reservations.

"Whatever the BJP and RSS do, caste census will be done and fifty percent reservation barrier will be removed", he said, adding, "I have promised it in the Lok Sabha that we will get the caste census passed in the same Lok Sabha. We want to protect the constitution".

Rahul Gandhi appealed to the people present at the function to spread the message of need for the caste census and removing the fifty percent bar on reservations in every nook and corner of the country. "Your message should be only that in this country, 90 percent people are subjected to injustice every day", he told the gathering.

Taking a dig at the BJP and the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Gandhi said that he could say with guarantee that Narendra Modi has not read the constitution.

Constitution Day: Mallikarjun Kharge calls for renewed commitment to constitutional ideals

NEW DELHI: Congress National President Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday extended warm wishes to the nation as India marked the 75th year of the adoption of its Constitution.

Known as Samvidhan Divas, Constitution Day celebrates the adoption of the Indian Constitution by the Constituent Assembly on November 26, 1949. The Constitution officially came into effect on January 26, 1950.

Declared an observance in 2015, Constitution Day honours the foundational principles of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity that underpin India's democracy.

"The 75th year of adoption of the Constitution has begun today. I extend my warmest wishes to all Indians on this historic occasion," Kharge wrote on X.

He emphasised that the Constitution, meticulously crafted by the visionaries of the Constituent Assembly, is the "lifeblood of our nation," guaranteeing social, economic, and political rights to every citizen. "It constitutes India into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic," he added.

Kharge reiterated the enduring relevance of the Constitution's core values, stating, "Justice, Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity are not just ideals or ideas, they are the way of life for us - 140 crore Indians."

He paid tribute to the remarkable efforts of the Constituent Assembly, saying, "Today, we recall the tremendous contribution of the Constituent Assembly and its prolific members. We are forever indebted



to their vision and wisdom."

Highlighting the contributions of key figures, Kharge mentioned, "Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, K.M. Munshi, Sarojini Naidu, Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, and several eminent personalities are not just revered national icons for us; they are inspiring personalities who become the torchbearers of hope for generations together."

He also acknowledged the role of women in shaping the Constitution, stating, "No mention of the Constituent Assembly should be complete without recalling the contribution of the 15 women members who provided equally important inputs for an inclusive India."

Kharge underscored the participatory nature of the Constitution's drafting process, noting, "We must also not forget that the Constituent Assembly received uncount-

able suggestions from ordinary citizens, which are a matter of record."

Referencing historic milestones in the Assembly's deliberations, he remarked, "The Objectives Resolution moved by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Babasaheb Dr Ambedkar's momentous last speech to the Constituent Assembly form the Magna Carta in protecting the tenets of the Constitution."

The Congress leader urged all citizens to actively uphold and defend the Constitution, saying, "We, the patriotic citizens of India, now have the onerous task of protecting the ethos of the Constitution. We, the people of India, should therefore come together to protect each and every thought expressed in the Constitution."

Calling for a renewed commitment to the nation's foundational values, he concluded, "In the 75th year of adoption, the struggle to defend India's inherent philosophy must be reinvigorated and reignited, just like the era of the National Movement."

Plea in Supreme Court for probe into US indictment of Adani



NEW DELHI: A fresh plea has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a probe into the indictment of billionaire industrialist Gautam Adani who has been charged in the US for alleged bribery and fraud, saying the move "unveiled malpractices carried out by the conglomerate". The plea has been filed by advocate Vishal Tiwari as an interlocutory application in the batch of pleas in the Adani-Hindenburg row over the allegations of stock price manipulation by the Indian corporate giant. The US Department of Justice has accused Adani of being part of an elaborate scheme to pay \$265 million (about Rs 2,200 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange for favourable terms for solar power contracts in four states. The Adani Group has denied the charge, saying the allegations levelled by the US prosecutors are baseless and that the conglomerate is compliant with all laws. It also vowed to pursue all possible legal recourse. In his plea before the apex court, Tiwari contended the allegations against Adani were of "serious nature" and should be investigated by the Indian authorities. "SEBI has to inspire confidence by concluding the investigations and placing on record the report and conclusion of the probes. As there were allegations of short-selling in the SEBI investigation and the present allegations levelled by the foreign authorities might have connection or may not have, but SEBI's investigation report should clear this so that the investors may not lose confidence," the plea said.

Centre sanctions Rs 1,000 crore outlay for disaster mitigation projects in 15 states

NEW DELHI: The Centre has approved an outlay of Rs 1,000 crore for various disaster mitigation and capacity-building projects to tackle natural calamities in 15 states, according to an official statement.

A sum of Rs 139 crore each was approved for Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, Rs 100 crore for Maharashtra, Rs 72 crore each for Karnataka and Kerala, Rs 50 crore each for Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, and Rs 378 crore for the eight Northeastern states - Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura.

The decision was taken by a high-level committee headed by Home Minister Amit Shah with Union Ministers for finance and agriculture and the vice chairman of the NITI Aayog as members. They



considered the proposal to mitigate landslide risk in 15 states for funding from the National Disaster Mitigation Fund (NDMF).

The committee also gave the go-ahead to a project for training and capacity building of civil defence volunteers in all states and union territories at a total outlay of Rs 115.67 crore. The funding window of

the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) will be used to finance the project.

Earlier, the committee approved Urban Flood Risk Mitigation Projects in seven cities at a total outlay of Rs 3,075.65 crore and Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) risk management projects in four states at a total outlay of Rs 150 crore from the NDMF.

Mann Ki Baat: PM Modi highlights India's maritime history

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised the significance of Lothal in India's maritime history during the 116th episode of his monthly radio programme Mann Ki Baat on Sunday.

Known as the site of the world's first dockyard, Lothal situated on the Gujarat coast, is now witnessing the construction of the National Maritime Heritage Complex (NMHC), under the Union Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, a grand museum dedicated to showcasing India's 5000-year-old maritime history that began with the Harappan civilisation.

Speaking on the initiative, PM Modi said, "Lothal is a proud symbol of India's maritime brilliance and ancient



trading capabilities. The museum being developed here will become a global hub for learning and appreciating our rich seafaring heritage. I urge everyone to contribute by preserving and sharing manuscripts, historical documents, or artefacts with the National

Archives of India." The Prime Minister further highlighted the Oral History Project, which documents the experiences of Partition survivors. With only a few witnesses of the Partition era remaining, this initiative aims to preserve their stories for future generations.



Billionaires, bribes & the rule of law

The allegations by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) that bribes were offered to officials across Indian states in connection with deals involving the Adani Group demand a clear-eyed response from Indian authorities. While the Adani Group, on November 27, 2024, stated that its chairman Gautam Adani, nephew Sagar Adani, and senior executive Vneet Jaain have not been charged with violations of the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA), the need for a domestic investigation remains undiminished. Adani Green, a key firm in this controversy, has labeled media reports linking its leadership to bribery as “incorrect,” as per its latest stock exchange filing. However, these denials, no matter how emphatic, do not obviate the necessity for accountability. India cannot afford to remain complacent. The Modi government’s consistent reluctance to investigate the Adani Group, even after the Hindenburg Research revelations and now the U.S. DOJ indictment, raises troubling questions. Calls for a joint parliamentary committee probe have been brushed aside, with sporadic probes by domestic agencies yielding little by way of resolution. This lack of action risks being seen as a tacit shield for the billionaire’s corporate interests. At the center of the allegations is Rs 2,029 crore (\$265 million) purportedly earmarked as bribes, including Rs 1,750 crore allegedly meant for a ‘foreign official’ in Andhra Pradesh. State governments, including Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, have denied direct links to the Adani Group, pointing instead to the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI). Yet, internal communications cited in the indictment suggest concerted efforts to influence discoms. The truth must be brought to light through an impartial investigation. While the Adani Group insists on its innocence, the issue transcends individual fortunes. It concerns the credibility of India’s governance and its institutions. Shielding one individual or entity undermines the rule of law. A transparent probe is not merely desirable — it is imperative.

LETTERBOX

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ZUBAIR NAZEER EXPLAINS WHY FOSTERING EXPERTS WITHIN ENSURES RESILIENT, EFFECTIVE CIVIL SERVICE

Civil service requires domain experts

In August 2024, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) initiated the recruitment process through the lateral entry scheme by issuing a notification for the recruitment of 45 Joint Secretaries, Directors, and Deputy Secretaries as specialists in government departments. The initiative faced significant opposition from various groups, particularly political parties, which argued that the scheme compromised the reservation rights of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs). The strong opposition compelled the government to shelve the plan. This was not the first time that the Union Government has recruited specialists through the lateral entry scheme. In 2018, 63 specialists were appointed through lateral entry in various ministries. Currently, around 57 specialists are working with the government. Even then, recruitment through the lateral entry scheme was excluded from the reservation system. The decision to withdraw the notification has reignited the debate on the need for domain experts within the civil service and highlights the necessity of developing an appropriate approach to civil service reform.

Need for domain experts

It has long been recognised that specialised skills are much needed in the civil service. In fact, the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2005) recommended the need for lateral entry into the higher echelons of the government to bring in specialised knowledge and skills, though it did not specify a method of recruitment. The ongoing representation issues of SCs and STs within the civil service further complicate the narrative. Despite existing reservations, the number of SC and ST officers in higher positions remains low. SCs and STs constitute only around 4% and 4.9% of top bureaucratic positions in the Union government at the level of Deputy



Secretaries, Directors, Joint Secretaries, and beyond. One reason is that the entry age of officers during the recruitment process is often higher than that of general category candidates, and these officers frequently retire before reaching the top positions.

The lateral entry scheme is likely to further limit the representation of these marginalised communities, as the scheme is unlikely to attract domain experts from these communities due to their limited access to such positions in the private sector. For better or worse, the lateral entry debate has been politicised. With caste-based reservations being significant factors in elections, the government is unlikely to reignite this debate, as doing so could have substantial political repercussions. For now, the discussion around lateral entry appears to have reached an impasse.

But there is no denying the reality that there is a need for domain experts in the public sector, as each sector is becoming specialised, requiring close collaboration with technical experts. Civil servants are generally generalists, not specialists. Lateral entry, with or without reservation as it existed, was essentially a short-term solution. The need is for domain

experts within the civil service itself. It is these domain experts who would cultivate a resilient and effective civil service. To realise this objective, there is a need to develop long-term strategies that prioritise academic-industry-civil service collaboration, capacity building, and institutional development.

Integrated model for domain expertise

In order to effectively develop domain expertise within the civil service in India and address the ever more complex needs of governance, a collaborative framework that brings together civil service, academia, and industry is needed. This collaboration would facilitate the exchange of knowledge and best practices, allowing civil servants to engage with the latest developments in their respective fields and develop much-needed domain expertise. Civil servants with public sector experience and decision-making capabilities would imbibe insights from academia and industry about emerging trends, skills, and technologies. But this collaboration must differ from the current refresher and mid-career training offered to civil servants. These training programmes for civil servants often act as temporary fixes. Even though such programmes inculcate valuable skills, they fail to create a robust framework for domain expertise. Domain expertise, unlike training programmes, is not an isolated event but must be an integral part of a civil servant’s career trajectory. For domain expertise, an integrated model that aligns with individual career paths and areas of interest is essential.

The critical components of an integrated model for developing domain expertise among civil servants include strategic planning, memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with institutions, a rigorous selection process, and specialised postings with fixed tenures.

Strategic planning

Domain expertise starts with the drafting of a strategic plan to create efficient public policy analysts within the civil service, with locus in the public sector and focus on skills and knowledge from the private sector/industry, facilitated by academia. The objective is to enhance the capacity of civil servants in terms of technical expertise and strategic vision to formulate and implement policies efficiently and effectively in specific sectors, contributing to good governance and improved public service delivery.

Strategic planning represents a long-term vision for the civil service and requires identifying the number of sector-specific domain experts needed for better alignment of resources and priorities. Academic institutions must be involved in the strategic planning at the initial stages only. This integrated model has significant advantages for academic institutions as well, as they would receive fresh impetus and motivation to contribute richly to public service delivery. One critical aspect of domain expertise is staying focused on ever-changing innovations and technologies in industry and incorporating these into the public sector. Strategic planning would include an element of circular response planning, with feedback and adjustments continuously incorporated. This element promotes flexibility and adaptability in the face of changing circumstances.

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ABHIJIT SINGH EXPLORES HOW INDIA’S BIODIVERSITY DEAL SIGNING FACES STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES AHEAD

Between hope and hurdles on the high seas

India’s recent signing of the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement — better known as the High Seas Treaty — has drawn both praise and scepticism from maritime observers. Hailed as a landmark step in ocean governance, the treaty seeks to protect marine ecosystems and promote the sustainable use of resources in areas beyond national jurisdiction. However, despite its laudable intentions to address critical gaps in international maritime regulation, the pact’s structural complexities and potential challenges warrant closer examination.

As the third implementing agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the BBNJ treaty follows earlier accords on deep-sea mining and fisheries management. Its provisions focus on three objectives: conserving marine biodiversity, ensuring equitable sharing of benefits from marine genetic resources, and mandating environmental impact assessments for harmful activities. Yet, like many ambitious multilateral agreements, it risks faltering against geopolitical rivalries, jurisdictional overlap, and weak enforcement mechanisms.

A framework fraught with challenges

The treaty’s ambitious goals are tempered by its lack of a clear implementation roadmap. With only 14 of its 104 signatories having ratified the agreement, it remains far from the required threshold of 60 needed to come into force. Much of the hesitation stems from disputes over maritime territories, particularly



in regions such as the South China Sea, where overlapping claims complicate consensus on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Southeast Asian nations remain divided on whether high-seas “national parks” could affect territorial claims or limit economic opportunities for coastal communities that depend on marine resources. Similar apprehensions about MPAs affecting livelihoods and resource access are echoed by states bordering the Bay of Bengal, underscoring the broader regional hesitations surrounding the treaty’s implementation.

One of the treaty’s most contentious provisions involves marine genetic resources. The treaty obligates nations to share the profits derived from exploiting these resources through a global fund. However, without robust accountability measures, this provision risks being undermined by wealthier nations underreporting their activities. The

pact also risks conflicting with regimes like the Convention on Biological Diversity, potentially disadvantaging smaller states and fragmenting enforcement.

Capacity-building and technology transfers present yet another challenge for low and middle-income countries. The treaty calls for equitable partnerships in ocean science, but lacks enforceable mechanisms, leaving less capable nations vulnerable to being sidelined. Asymmetry threatens to perpetuate inequalities in maritime research and governance.

A narrow focus

The treaty’s focus on the high seas overlooks the interconnectedness of marine ecosystems, where harmful activities in EEZs often spill over into international waters. While the BBNJ Agreement aspires to reshape global ocean governance, its potential hinges on bridging the gap between ambition and action. Its greatest limitation lies in failing to reconcile high-seas governance with coastal regulations, assuming international waters can be managed in isolation despite the impact of pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction in EEZs.

More troubling is the reluctance of coastal states to assume greater responsibility for activities within their waters. While the treaty mandates environmental

impact assessments (EIAs) for planned activities, it remains silent on the damaging harms during oil and gas exploration — that the pact does not cover — which constitutes an important economic interest of states. This gap, compounded by the disinclination of states to accept an international review of EIAs, exposes the inherent weaknesses in the treaty’s enforcement framework, particularly in regions with weak institutional capacity and conflicting domestic and international legal standards.

Bridging the divide

For the High Seas Treaty to succeed, it must overcome its structural and political limitations. This requires a radical shift in maritime governance — one that integrates high-seas and coastal regulations into a cohesive framework. Coastal states, particularly those in the Global South, need incentives to align their domestic laws with international norms, while wealthier nations must commit to providing technical and financial support to ensure the treaty’s benefits are equitably shared.

The treaty’s success ultimately hinges on fostering a collective commitment among nations to safeguard the oceans as a shared global resource. Without political consensus, clear strategies, and enforceable mechanisms, the BBNJ risks becoming an ineffective instrument — an outcome the oceans, already under immense stress, cannot afford.

Abhijit Singh is Head of the Maritime Policy Initiative at ORF, New Delhi. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

From passion to profits: A tale of cricket’s ethical decline

Ravi Mandrekar’s *Bouncer* lands as a hard-hitting exposé on the alleged corruption within the Mumbai Cricket Association (MCA), shedding light on the underbelly of one of India’s most celebrated cricketing institutions. As a former office bearer of the MCA and president of the Hindu Gymkhana Club, Mandrekar brings an insider’s perspective to the table, unearthing troubling irregularities that challenge the integrity of cricket’s governance in Mumbai.

The MCA, a permanent member of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) and home to its headquarters at the iconic Wankhede Stadium, boasts a rich cricketing legacy. Founded in 1930, the MCA is the cornerstone of Indian cricket history, having produced nearly 70 Test cricketers and dominated the Ranji Trophy with a staggering 41 wins. However, Mandrekar’s narrative reveals a steep decline in

the institution’s sporting and ethical standards, reflecting broader concerns about corruption in Indian cricket.

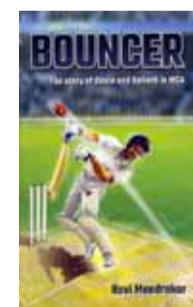
Mandrekar meticulously dissects the MCA’s governance, focusing on the distribution of complimentary passes for high-profile matches like the 2019 India-West Indies game. Through data-driven analysis—complete with charts, graphs, and detailed break-ups of ticket allocations—he highlights discrepancies in the issuance and auditing of tickets. These irregularities, he alleges, extend to the printing of tickets, raising questions about transparency and accountability. This granular examination of stadium operations serves as a microcosm of the systemic issues plaguing the MCA.

The book does not shy away from critiquing the culture that enables such corruption. Mandrekar recounts scenes of elite members discussing accountability over drinks but failing to take

substantive action. This critique extends to the broader ecosystem of cricket administration, where political influence, nepotism, and a lack of professionalism have created fiefdoms that prioritize profits over the game’s values.

One of the book’s most striking elements is its juxtaposition of past and present. Mandrekar recalls an era when Mumbai cricket was managed by middle-class enthusiasts driven by their love for the game. Figures like M.V. Chandgadhkar, a professor and former BCCI secretary, embodied the spirit of dedication and integrity. In contrast, today’s cricketing administration, Mandrekar argues, has succumbed to commercialism and cronyism, epitomized by the Indian Premier League’s (IPL) mammoth financial clout.

The narrative gains depth from Mandrekar’s personal anecdotes, including his resistance to under-valuing the Wankhede Stadium’s facilities during Pepsi’s promotional events in the 1990s. These



Bouncer: The Story of David and Goliath in MCA by Ravi Mandrekar Granthali 386 pages; Rs 400

moments underscore his commitment to preserving cricket’s dignity amid mounting external pressures.

While the book focuses on the MCA, its implications are far-reaching. Mandrekar’s critique resonates with broader concerns about the governance of cricket in India. The message is clear: the sport has become a lucrative business devoid of the professionalism required to sustain its integrity. Mandrekar urges cricketing bodies to revisit their roots, emphasizing the importance of character, excellence, and the people who uphold these values.

Bouncer is not just an exposé; it’s a call to action. Mandrekar’s writing combines investigative rigor with a deep love for the sport, making the book both a critical analysis and a lament for

what has been lost. His argument for greater accountability and transparency in cricket administration is compelling, and his call for similar books on other cricketing associations is both timely and necessary.

The book serves as a wake-up call for cricket lovers, administrators, and policymakers alike. It questions the erosion of ethical standards in sports and challenges the reader to imagine a cricketing ecosystem that values integrity as much as performance. Mandrekar’s passion for the game shines through, and his insights make *Bouncer* a must-read for anyone interested in the intersection of sports, governance, and ethics.

In conclusion, *Bouncer* stands as an essential critique of the commercialization of cricket and a tribute to the values that once defined the game. It is a powerful reminder that sports, at its core, is about more than just money and power—it is about people, their character, and their pursuit of excellence. Mandrekar’s work, while focused on the MCA, opens a broader conversation about the state of cricket in India, making it a vital contribution to the discourse on sports governance.

STAY POSITIVE.
STAY FIGHTING.
STAY BRAVE.
STAY AMBITIOUS.
STAY FOCUSED.
STAY STRONG.

...MENTALITY IS EVERYTHING.

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Vyapar Mandal Claims 48% of MSMEs Shut Down in 7 Years

NEW DELHI: In a concerning revelation, Bajrang Garg, the national chief general secretary of the All-India Vyapar Mandal, stated that nearly half of the country's Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have ceased operations over the past seven years.

Citing data from global institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and corroborating figures from the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, Garg highlighted a steep decline in the number of small industries.

"In 2016, India had 6.25 crore MSMEs, but now, this number has plummeted to just 3.25 crore units—a drastic reduction of 48%," he said. Garg attributed this alarming trend to frequent policy shifts, overly complicated regulations, and what he termed "misguided government deci-



sions." He specifically pointed to the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) and demonetisation as major disruptors for small businesses. "The sharp increase in taxes following GST and the liquidity crunch triggered by demonetization have dealt a severe blow to small-scale industries. These sectors, which

which employs millions and significantly contributes to the country's GDP.

While government initiatives like the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) were launched to support MSMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic, industry leaders argue that such measures have fallen short of addressing systemic challenges.

Experts warn that the decline of MSMEs could have cascading effects on employment and the overall economy, urging policymakers to prioritize simplification of tax structures, enhanced financial aid, and long-term policy stability.

This report adds to the ongoing debate about the impact of government policies on economic growth, particularly in sectors dependent on local entrepreneurship and small-scale manufacturing.

India Clocks Double-Digit Surge in Steel Consumption amid Global Slowdown



NEW DELHI: India is the only large economy showing robust growth in the consumption of steel with a double-digit jump of 13.5 per cent in the first half of 2024-25, according to a statement of the Ministry of Steel issued on Wednesday.

Even with a conservative demand growth of 10 per cent, the country will need 300 million tonnes of capacity by the year 2030 to cater to about 265 million tonnes of demand. If adequate domestic steel pro-

duction capacity is not created, the country will become a net importer of steel and will depend on imports of steel for its infrastructure creation, the statement pointed out.

As per the National Steel Policy, the country aims to achieve 300 million tonnes of steel production capacity by the year 2030 with the present capacity at about 180 million tonnes. This means an additional capacity creation of 120 million tonnes, which corresponds to

investment of estimated \$120 billion or over Rs 10 lakh crore.

This is possible only if the steel industry, both large and small, has adequate capital investment capacity and low steel prices, due to dumping of steel in the international market, will adversely impact the capacity creation objective of the country, the statement said.

India's steel imports have increased significantly for the first half of 2024-25 as compared to the same period last year.

While the steel imports for the first half of 2023-24 were 3.32 million tonnes, the imports have increased to 4.73 million tonnes this year, a 41.3 per cent increase.

While the overall volume of steel imports, as compared to total consumption in the country, is not significant, cheaper imports lead to depression of domestic steel prices and affect steel producers, both large and small, the statement explained.

CII Calls for 40% Internship Quota in MSMEs to Boost Inclusive Growth



NEW DELHI: The pilot phase of the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme concluded on November 15, 2024, with 6.5 lakh applications for 1.27 lakh internship positions.

While the scheme aims to provide one crore internships over five years, industry leaders stress that its success hinges on expanding opportunities to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

MSMEs, often referred to as the backbone of India's economy, employ over 11 crore people and contribute significantly to GDP.

Experts believe these enterprises hold the key to overcoming several challenges plaguing the scheme, such as limited scalability, insufficient absorption of interns into the job market, and the economic strain of migration without sustainable income.

M Ponnuswami, Chairman of the CII Southern Region MSME, has strongly advocated for integrating MSMEs into the initiative.

"CII recommends that the government allots at least a 40 per cent reservation—40 lakh internships—to MSMEs over the next five years to ensure inclusive growth," he said.

This measure, he argued, would not only address regional disparities but also strengthen local economies by distributing opportunities beyond urban centres.

Under the current framework, the scheme is open to youth aged 21 to 24 who are not enrolled in full-time education or employment.

Eligible applicants include high school and higher secondary graduates, polytechnic diploma holders, ITI certificate holders, and undergraduate degree holders in fields like arts, science, and commerce. The internships, lasting 12 months, aim to enhance employability through practical skill-building.

However, experts contend that focusing heavily on large industries and urban placements limits the program's reach. MSMEs, with their presence in rural and semi-urban areas, could create a decentralised and sustainable internship ecosystem, bridging the urban-rural divide while addressing talent shortages in smaller enterprises.

FISME-IPFC Starts Operations to Assist MSMEs with IPR Reimbursement and Filing Support



NEW DELHI: The Steering Committee of Intellectual Property Facilitation Centre (IPFC) under the Federation of Indian Micro and Small and Medium Enterprises (FISME) and Chairmanship of R.K. Bharti, Director, MSME-DFO has officially become operational, marking a significant step in supporting MSMEs in India.

The centre is now ready to assist MSMEs in securing reimbursement for their Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) filings, providing critical financial support and guidance to help them navigate the complexities of IPR.

The FISME-IPFC aims to enhance the competitiveness of MSMEs by equipping them with the necessary tools and knowledge to protect their intellectual property and compete in the global market.

The centre will focus on raising awareness among MSMEs regarding IPR issues and offer detailed guidance on the creation, ownership, and protection of intellectual property.

It will assist businesses with filing patents, trademarks, and designs, ensuring they have the resources needed to protect their innovations.

Mobile broadband market in Asia-Pacific to reach \$296 billion in 2029

NEW DELHI: Driven by 5G service expansions, the mobile broadband services revenue in the Asia-Pacific region is likely to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5.2 per cent from \$229.6 billion in 2024 to \$296.2 billion in 2029, according to a new report.

It will mainly be driven by the growing availability and adoption of 5G services across several countries, according to GlobalData, a leading data and analytics company. The unique mobile user penetration of the population in Asia-Pacific will reach 82.9 per cent in 2029, driven by mobile network coverage expansions, particularly in underserved countries and promotional/discounted plans



offered by operators to drive subscriber growth.

According to the report, in developed Asia, the number of mobile users will increase at a sluggish CAGR of 0.4 per cent, due to saturated nature of these markets. In emerging Asia, on the contrary, the number of mobile users will grow at a faster rate,

supported by the growing availability of affordable handsets and local governments' efforts to improve and extend mobile network coverage. "With 5G services already available in most of the developed countries like China, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, India, and Korea, and set to be launched soon in emerging mar-

kets like Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, revenue prospects for the mobile data segment will remain strong throughout the forecast period," said Sarwat Zeeshan, telecom analyst at GlobalData. Government support for 5G expansion will also strengthen the mobile data services market in the region. Taiwan, Singapore, China, South Korea, and Japan are the key 5G markets in terms of 5G subscriptions as a percentage of total subscriptions. Taiwan will have 94.6 per cent of mobile subscribers on 5G by 2029, thanks to the government's efforts to promote 5G technology in the country. "APAC has also become the centre of a technological race for 5G+ supremacy," said Zeeshan.

India turning into world's Deep Tech Hub as reforms reverse brain drain: Hardeep Singh Puri



NEW DELHI: India's image as the 'IT Outsourcing Centre' has now transformed into a new identity as a 'Deep Tech Hub' due to the reforms undertaken by the government to promote innovation, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on November 24.

"As a result of the dedicated focus of PM Modi making India a hub for innovation, even the most cutting edge, deep tech & frontier tech startups, led by Indian students with PhDs from major global universities are now taking root in India," the minister said in a post on X.

Instead of just being proud of working for MNCs, Indians are now daring to create their own multinational companies in a defining change which will fuel our next stage of economic growth, Puri said.

"For the past many decades, while Indian engineers & scientists were recognised for their talent and dedication in global technology companies and universities, they couldn't dare to incubate their tech startups in India, owing to our onerous patents framework,

lack of funding, crumbling infrastructure and lack of government support," he added.

These new developments, of a reversal in the brain drain, are part of a larger fabric of technological innovation in India. A gradual journey of reforms and schemes to promote the entrepreneurial spirit in the early years of the Modi Govt has resulted in a technological boom, the minister pointed out. He said that this transformation is visible in the energy sector too. The India Energy Week began in 2023 as a novel initiative to leverage this increasing prominence of India in the global energy landscape through collaborative dialogue and opening up the horizon for India's talented young professionals.

Puri pointed out that in the Green Hydrogen segment, several Indian PSUs showcased new electrolyser technologies. At the same time, start-ups have demonstrated their membrane-less electrolyser for green hydrogen. Other firms have focused on building CCUS technologies, including direct air capture and enhanced oil recovery methods. There was also considerable progress made in advanced battery storage solutions, including solid-state batteries, lithium-ion improvements, and flow batteries, which promise better efficiency, longevity, and reduced costs. All eyes are now on the future as it takes shape in India.

Godrej Enterprises Group unveils new colour brand

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Godrej Enterprises Group (GEG), a leading diversified engineering and design-led conglomerate, unveiled here recently a refreshed Purple colour brand identity aimed at 'unlocking new worlds for customers and other stakeholders.'

"The new visual identity honours GEG's rich legacy, which embodies its commitment to actively participate in the building of a Viksit Bharat by 2047 through design-led innovation - enhancing consumer experience and shaping preferences for sustainable choices," said Jamsheed Godrej, Chairman



& Managing Director, GEG.

Noting that the key to GEG's sustained growth is its ability to remain relevant in India's development needs, he said the company aspired to unlock greater value for customers by delivering solutions and experiences that positively impacted lives, while also its core remained rooted in high quality and complex engineering with the brand remaining dynamic.

Hettich India Receives Prestigious 'Great Place to Work' Certification

MUMBAI: Pioneering furniture fittings solutions brand Hettich India is proud to announce that it has been officially certified as a Great Place to Work, a recognition that celebrates the company's unwavering commitment to creating an ecosystem where everybody thrives.

This honor is especially meaningful, with an overwhelming 95% participation from employees, helping Hettich India. It reflects a shared commitment to creating a family-like environment where professional growth and personal well-being go hand in hand.

"At Hettich, we believe the magic isn't just in the interiors we



create. Being certified as a Great Place to Work is a testament to our continuous efforts in building a high-performance ecosystem where trust, collaboration, and growth thrive," said Amit Prasad, Chief Human Resources Officer. "At Hettich India, we remain committed to fostering a culture that empowers our people to excel and succeed together," added Prasad.

Indian Pharmaceutical Industry in Consolidation Mode



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH
In economic literature, it has been observed that fragmented industries consolidate as they mature. Deans et al. (2002) in their paper titled, 'The Consolidation Curve' published in Harvard Business Review had stated that once an industry forms or is deregulated, that industry will move through four stages of consolidation. With emergence of a single start-up or monopoly, competitors come up thereby affecting the concentration. To defend first mover advantage, industry players go in for consolidation. This is opted to build scale, to create global footprint, and to establish entry barriers. 2nd stage of consolidation is mainly for building scale. In third stage, companies focus on expanding their core business and attempt to outgrow the competition. In the 4th stage, the growth becomes challenging so large companies may form alliances with their peers.

1st stage of consolidation was observed in e-Pharmacy. NetMeds became the first player in this space as NetMeds.com was founded in 2015. The Dadha family as founders had many firsts to their credit. Sri Lalchand

Dadha founded the group and ran pharmaceutical business. In 1926, he was instrumental in the formation of the Chemists & Druggist Federation that became All India Organization of Chemists & Druggists (AIOCD). It was M/s Dadha & Co. which was known as Tamil Nadu's first registered importers of drugs, pharmaceuticals and patented medicines from different parts of the world. Another first to their credit was the import of penicillin. Img was also founded in 2015. Within interval of few months, Dhaval Shah and Dharmil Sheth founded PharmEasy. Medlife was another prominent player specializing in the healthtech sector that was established by Ananth Narayanan, Prashanth Singh and Tushar Kumar.

Then came the wave of consolidation in the sector. In August 2020, Reliance Retail Ventures Limited, a wholly owned subsidiary of Reliance Industries Limited acquired a majority equity stake in Vitalic Health and 100% direct equity ownership its subsidiaries. Subsidiaries included Tresara Health Private Limited, Netmeds Market Place Limited and Dadha Pharma Distribution Pvt. Limited. Medlife was acquired by PharmEasy in May 2021. In June 2021, PharmEasy also acquired majority stake in diagnostics chain - Thyrocare. In June



2021 itself, Tata Digital Limited, a 100% subsidiary of Tata Sons, had entered into an agreement to acquire majority stake in IMG Technologies Private Limited. By September 2023, Tata Img had a 31 per cent market share whereas in October 2022, market share of Tata Img was 19 per cent. In contrast to this, market share of PharmEasy went down to 15 per cent in September 2023 from almost 33 per cent in October 2022.

Recent trends in Indian Pharmaceutical Industry reveal that the industry is in consolidation mode. As on May 29, 2020 there were 8,532 pharmaceutical units present in States and Union Territories in India. Gujarat was the leading state with 3,332 pharmaceutical units followed by Maharashtra with 929 pharma units. Other states which had

pharma units in three units included Himachal Pradesh (555), Telangana (523), Tamil Nadu (514), Uttar Pradesh (408), Karnataka (376), Madhya Pradesh (267), Andhra Pradesh (261), Uttarakhand (220), West Bengal (180), Punjab (156), Rajasthan (128), and Kerala (100). It is widely cited that India has more than 3,000 pharma companies with over 10,500 manufacturing facilities (*Invest India*). This shows that industry is highly fragmented. No single player holds market share of Indian pharmaceutical industry in two digits.

Most recent example pointing towards consolidation is of Mankind Pharma that completed acquisition of 100 per cent stake in Bharat Serums and Vaccines Limited for an enterprise value of about Rs. 13,630 crore (*Press release of*

Mankind Pharma dated July 25, 2024) thereby establishing Mankind Pharma as a market leader in Indian women's health and fertility segment. In March 2024, Nirma completed the acquisition of a 75 per cent stake in Glenmark Life Sciences (GLS). Through this acquisition, Nirma strengthened presence in the pharmaceuticals and life sciences sector as GLS was the manufacturer of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs).

There are many examples from similar transactions in recent years which signal consolidation in the pharmaceutical industry in India, e.g., in May 2022, Eris Lifesciences acquired 100 per cent stake in Oaknet Healthcare, and Oaknet Healthcare became a wholly owned subsidiary of Eris Lifesciences. In September 2022, Torrent Pharmaceuticals entered into definitive agreements to acquire 100% of Curatio Healthcare for Rs. 2,000 crores. Curatio had a strong presence in the cosmetic dermatology segment with a portfolio of over 50 brands. Dermatology accounted for 82 per cent of Curatio's revenue.

In February 2024, Novartis announced strategic review of Novartis India, its listed entity in India. In September of 2024, Alkem Labs was said to be in talks to acquire Novartis India. Prior to that, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories was

also said to be in fray for acquisition of 70.6 per cent stake in Novartis India from Novartis AG. As per media reports, private equity firms such as Apollo Global Management, Kedaara Capital, ChrysCapital and Multiples Equity were also evaluating acquisition of Novartis India's stake.

The failure of small and medium pharma enterprises to meet quality management systems is an important development that can have impact on consolidation of pharmaceutical industry. This includes lack of documentation, and validation processes, or absence of quality control laboratories to name a few. Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises consider quality management systems as a part of entry barriers. In June 2024, while the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) was speaking at Global Pharmaceutical Quality Summit, 2024 conducted by the Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance, the DCGI stated that about 400 pharmaceutical units were inspected and nearly 36 per cent had to be closed as those units failed to meet the standards. Further, he stated that of those units which had to temporarily shut down, around 10 per cent of the units were permanently moved out of the system. Units which came back had put in place corrective and preventive action plans. Indirectly, it

lowered the count of the sub-standard facilities. But it has implications for the industry consolidation given the fact that about 80 per cent of about 10,500 manufacturing units, are micro-small and medium-scale facilities.

Since December 2022, risk-based inspections of manufacturing facilities were initiated by the Central Drug Standards Control Organization (CDSCO). More than 300 measures which included production halt order, suspension, cancellation of licences/products licences among others, were ordered based on the risk-based assessment of the drug firms by the State Licensing Authorities and the Central Drugs Standard Control Organization. It is pertinent to understand the background that 'Good Manufacturing Practices and Requirements of Premises, Plant and Equipment for Pharmaceutical Products' rules were announced in July 2023 and these rules were notified on December 28, 2023. As per these rules, drugmakers termed as 'larger manufacturers' with an annual turnover of more than ₹250 Cr. had to compulsorily follow these rules within six months. Drugmakers with turnover less than ₹250 crore termed as small and medium manufacturers, were expected to follow these rules within a 12-month

period. The revised version of the Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) was more comprehensive and stringent. Pharma industry associations from different states appealed to the government for extending the deadline to meet the revised Schedule M norms of GMP. Their key argument was regarding investment only as it was felt that there was need for securing additional financing for the required upgrades. Industry associations feared the closure of numerous small units in absence of extension of deadline for SMEs.

Indian Pharmaceutical Industry has a wide range of therapeutic categories and has numerous players. Consolidation in the industry has implications for stakeholders such as the patient as end-user, Competition Commission of India (CCI) due to impact on competition intensity, and regulatory bodies. Product market concentration, pace of consolidation, merger & acquisition deals, stringent enforcement of GMP norms for SMEs, are going to be key drivers for consolidation.

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

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das Hospitalised, RBI Says 'No Cause for Concern'

CHENNAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das was hospitalised here earlier in the day with a minor health issue. The Central Bank said that "there is no cause for concern".

According to the RBI, Das "experienced acidity" and was admitted to the Apollo Hospital in the state capital.

"Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das experienced acidity and was admitted in Apollo Hospital, Chennai for observation," said an RBI spokesperson.

"He is now doing fine and discharged after 2-3 hours. There is no cause for concern," the spokesperson added, assuring that his condition is stable. Apollo Hospital was yet to issue the latest health update on Das.

Last week, Das said that the Indian economy is strong enough to handle any adverse fallout from global events. "Today, the growth of the Indian



economy presents a picture of stability and strength," Das said while addressing an event at the launch of the Kochi International Foundation here.

The country's external sector is also strong and the current account deficit (CAD) has remained within manageable limits as it presently stands at 1.1 per cent of GDP. Earlier, in 2010 and 2011, it was in the range of six to seven per cent, he added.

The central bank chief also pointed out that India has one

of the largest foreign exchange reserves in the world at about \$675 billion. He further stated that the country's inflation was expected to be moderate despite periodic humps.

India's inflation rose to 6.2 per cent in October from 5.5 per cent in September because of food inflation, he said.

Referring to inflation as an elephant in the room, Das remarked: "Now the elephant has gone out of the room for a walk, then it will go back to the forest."

SBI Funds Management Ltd. appoints Nand Kishore as Managing Director & CEO

MUMBAI: SBI Funds Management Limited, a joint venture between State Bank of India and Amundi, Europe's largest asset manager, today announced the appointment of Nand Kishore as Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer. Nand Kishore, Deputy



Managing Director of State Bank of India, takes over as the Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer of SBI Funds Management Limited from Shamsheer Singh. Nand Kishore has more than 34 years of rich experience working with State Bank of India across major banking verticals such as Branch Banking, International Operations, Treasury Operations & Investment Banking, Corporate Banking and Retail Operations. He began his career at the State Bank of India as a Probationary Officer in 1990 and moved up the ranks to become Deputy Managing Director, demonstrating effective leadership across various domains.

India Takes Concrete Steps to Regulate Fintech Industry in Line with FATF Recommendations

NEW DELHI: India is making significant strides in regulating its fintech industry, as part of efforts to align with global standards set by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

Vivek Agrawal, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, highlighted these efforts during the ongoing 41st plenary meeting of the Eurasian Group (EAG) in Indore on Wednesday.

Agrawal, who is also the head of India's delegation and Director of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), emphasised that India is among the few nations actively working to implement FATF's recommendations, which aim to ensure robust oversight of financial technologies. "The development of financial technology is crucial for the growth of digital payment systems, but the potential misuse of this technology can lead to cybercrimes and financial frauds," he said.



As part of these measures, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has issued detailed guidelines to regulate payment aggregators and payment gateways, helping to ensure the integrity of digital transactions. Furthermore, virtual asset service providers (VASPs) are now required to register with the FIU, a move designed to enhance monitoring and traceability. Agrawal also underscored India's commitment to fostering innovation within fintech, ensuring that regulations are designed to support the sector's growth while addressing security concerns.

"We want regulation to be done in such a way that it does not hamper the growth of the industry, enhances ease of doing business, and keeps India at the forefront of global digital technology," he added.

The EAG meeting, which will run until November 29, brings together about 200 foreign and 60 Indian delegates, including representatives from the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank.

India's Real Estate Sector to Cross \$4.8 Trillion by 2047: Report



NEW DELHI: The Indian real estate sector is set to cross \$4.8 trillion in market size by 2047, contributing over 18 per cent to the projected \$26 trillion GDP target for the year, according to a joint report by real estate body CREDAI and Ernst & Young released on Tuesday.

The report expects PropTech to grow at a sustained rate to touch \$600 billion in market size by 2047, comprising approximately 12-13 per cent of the entire real estate industry. The study backs the ongoing and projected technological revolution in real estate, given that currently, PropTech makes up less than 5 per cent of the \$300 billion real estate sector.

The report highlights how innovations like Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), and Building Information Modelling (BIM) are revolutionising operations, enhancing efficiency, and ensuring transparency across the real estate value chain. This transformation supports India's projected \$26 trillion GDP by 2047, with the real estate sector projected to contribute over 18 per cent, up from its current 7 per cent share of the GDP.

Employing over 77 million people – approximately 14-15 per cent of India's entire workforce – India's real estate sector has consistently been a key economic pillar and is set to grow in prominence over the next decade, the report states.

Macro-level Infrastructure initiatives, including the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP) and PM Gati Shakti, are closely linked to this growth. The NIP aims for targeted investments of \$1.4 trillion over the next decade in transport, energy, communication and social infrastructure. These projects, spanning roads, railways, airports, and ports, are unlocking opportunities in adjacent real estate markets, according to the report.

Govt's Bank Guarantee Waiver to Cut Financial Burden on Telcos, Boost Digital Infra: Industry

NEW DELHI: Hailing the government's landmark decision to waive bank guarantees for telecom spectrum acquired before 2022, industry players on Tuesday said such supportive policy measures are instrumental in creating an enabling environment for technological innovation and boost digital infrastructure, especially in rural areas.

The decision is expected to offer significant relief to leading telecom companies, especially Vodafone Idea, which collectively owe over Rs 30,000 crore in bank guarantees to the government. "We welcome the Union Cabinet's move and thank the government on approving the waiving of bank guarantee for telecom operators on spectrum purchased before 2022. This landmark decision will significantly help reduce the financial burden on the telecom operators in the country," said Lt Gen Dr SP Kochhar, Director General, Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI).



The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) had earlier proposed the move, responding to industry demands for relief. Telecom companies had written to the DoT, urging the removal of bank guarantee requirements for pre-2022 spectrum acquisitions. This decision builds on the 2021 Cabinet reforms, which waived the need for bank guarantees on spectrum acquired prospectively. "While we are studying the details of the decision and will be able to have a more substantial view of the same, we feel positive that this decision will enhance cash flow, free up capital and enable capital investments in network expansion and technology upgrades, ensuring a stronger and robust rollout of telecom networks in the future," said COAI.

Share Market Opens in Green, Media and Pharma Stocks Shine

MUMBAI: The Indian stock market opened in green on Friday as buying was seen in the Media and Pharma sector in early trade.

At around 09.44 a.m., the Sensex was trading at 79,369.57 after gaining 325.83 points or 0.41 per cent, while the Nifty was trading at 24,019 after rising 104.85 points or 0.44 per cent.

The market trend remained positive. On the National Stock Exchange (NSE), 1345 stocks were trading in the green, while 876 stocks were in the red. Nifty Bank was up 224.45 points or 0.43 per cent at 52,131.30. Nifty Midcap 100 index was trading at 56,397.95 after gaining 97.20 points or 0.17 per cent. Nifty Smallcap 100 index was at 18,585.40 after gaining 73.85 points or 0.40 per cent.

According to market experts, "It is better for investors to wait and watch. Lots of stock-specific actions are likely starting today



in response to the inclusion of 45 new stocks to the F&O list."

Buy on dips strategy may not yield short-term gains in this market. However, this strategy can be applied by investors with a medium to long-term time horizon. Large Caps in financials, IT, capital goods and telecom are ideal for accumulation from a medium to long-term perspective," they said.

In the Sensex pack, Sun Pharma, Adani Ports, M&M, Bharti Airtel, L&T, Bajaj Finance, Titan and HCL Tech were the top gainers. Power

Grid, ITC, TCS, Maruti, Tata Steel and Tech Mahindra were the top losers.

In Asian markets, the markets of China and Hong Kong were trading in green. Whereas, the markets of Bangkok, Jakarta, Seoul and Japan were trading in red. The US stock markets closed in red on the previous trading day.

Mandar Bhojane, Research Analyst of Choice Broking said, "In the Nifty 50, the daily chart shows a bearish candle, reflecting profit booking after a pull-back from key support levels.

Caution save being cheated in UPI Transactions



SATISH SINGH
According to the Finance Ministry, the payments being made through Unified Payments Interface (UPI), developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), are increasing significantly every year. In November 2024 alone, Rs 200 lakh crore was paid through UPI and the number of UPI transactions crossed 10 thousand crores. In the current financial year, during the period from April to July, transactions worth Rs.81 lakh crore were done through UPI, which is 37 percent more than the transactions done in the same period last year. Also, it is more than the digital transactions done in major countries of the world.

With the help of UPI, India is continuously setting an example in the world in terms of digital payments. UPI is being used not only in cities but also in remote villages or remote areas. Most importantly, it is very popular in rural and remote areas. The main reason for its popularity is the simple & secure method of its use.

To use UPI, the user needs a smart phone, SIM card, internet and bank account and to make a transaction, the user has to link his phone number to the bank account. Thereafter, the user can transfer money to anyone in real time with the help of phone number and QR code from Google Pay, Phone-Pe, Bhim App etc.

Today, illiterate, farmers, laborers, clerks, officers, bureaucrats, police, judges, doctors, engineers, leaders and actors are all making payments through UPI, but due to the increase in the incidents of fraud in this digital

medium, fear is increasing in the minds of the people. In the last two and a half years, more than 27 lakh frauds were committed in UPI transactions, in which people lost Rs 2,145 crore. At the same time, during the 6 months of the current financial year i.e. April to September, people had to lose Rs 485 crore in 6.32 lakh fraud cases committed through UPI, while during the financial year 2022-23, people lost Rs 573 crore in 7.32 lakh cases of fraud.

To prevent fraud, the Reserve Bank of India launched the facility of Central Payment Fraud Information Registry in March 2020. All the units working under the control of the Reserve Bank have to share the information about fraud in digital transactions with the Reserve Bank, so that the central bank can curb the incidents of fraud with the help of an effective strategy.

In the financial year 2022-23, a total of 8,371 crore transactions were done through UPI, in which Rs 139.15 lakh crore was paid. At the same time, during the financial year 2023-24, 13,112 crore transactions were done, in which a total of Rs 199.96 lakh crore was paid, while in the current financial year, 8,566 crore transactions were done through UPI, in which Rs 122.05 lakh crore has been paid. However, there was a significant increase in cases of fraud during this period. During the financial year 2022-23, 7.25 lakh fraud incidents occurred, in which UPI users suffered a total loss of Rs 573 crore, while in the financial year 2023-24, 13.42 lakh fraud incidents occurred, in which UPI users suffered a loss of Rs 1,087 crore, while in the current financial year 2024-25, during the months of April to September, 6.32 lakh fraud incidents occurred, in which UPI users suffered



a loss of Rs 485 crore.

Today, a large number of digital transactions are being done through UPI in countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, France, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland etc. and due to its popularity, other countries of the world also want to buy this technology from India.

According to the global payment centre "Pay-Secure", 3,729 transactions were processed every second through UPI in September 2024, which was 2,348 in 2022. If UPI transactions processed between the period 2022 and September 2024 are compared, then there was an increase of 58 percent during this period. In terms of digital transactions, India's UPI has surpassed China's Alipay, PayPal and Brazil's PIX. According to "Pay-Secure", UPI processed 1,176 crore transactions in 2023, which was the highest in the world. At the same time, in July 2024, UPI processed transactions worth Rs 20.6 lakh crore, which is the highest monthly transaction value till date. Not only this, the monthly value of transactions has been consistently more than Rs 20 lakh since the month of May.

Currently 40 percent of payments in India are being made through digital means,

most of which are being made through UPI. According to a report by PwC India, an organization working on monitor the digital payments in India, UPI transactions will increase 3 times from 13,100 crores in 2023-24 to 43,900 crores in 2028-29, which will be 91 percent of digital retail transactions. It is clear from these figures that in the coming days, all digital transactions will be done through UPI.

Even though UPI users are being cheated, it is a very secure payment technology. UPI is considered safe for digital transactions due to its advanced encryption. Sensitive information such as bank account details and personal identification number, called "PIN", is protected in it. Also, every UPI transaction requires authentication through a PIN, which comes on the user's mobile in the form of OTP. Only then the transaction is executed. Even after these strong layers of security, if fraud is happening, then the reason for this is our lack of vigilance. In the current environment, it is very easy for cyber fraudsters to get the mobile number and personal details of the user, because people keep sharing phone numbers and personal information at places like e-shopping, restaurants, malls, parking lots, etc., which makes cyber fraud easy. UPI ID can also be hacked through phish-

ing or malware attack. Apart from this, users often share their UPI credentials or devices with others, which also increases the chances of UPI ID being hacked.

To avoid cyber fraud, it is very important to keep UPI credentials safe and not share them with anyone. The Central Government and the Reserve Bank of India are also working continuously to prevent online fraud, but they cannot be called expected.

In the past years, banking transactions have undergone a radical change, especially on the digital front. Today digital transactions are being done through many mediums such as Internet Banking, YONO, Cards, etc., but after the introduction of UPI, the use of other means of digital transactions has decreased significantly, because it is very easy to transact through UPI. Today, illiterate, unorganized sector workers, vendors of vegetables, fruits, clothes, toys etc. on carts and on footpath, taxi and rickshaw drivers, laborers, farmers, etc. are transacting through it in large numbers, but when cheated, they are unable to recover their money.

In short, it can be said that the most effective way to avoid digital fraud is to be cautious during digital transactions, not to share UPI credentials with anyone else and to always remain alert. Generally, people from the underprivileged sections are not aware of the ways to avoid fraud. Therefore, banks and other financial institutions, media, police, other related government departments etc. should keep making everyone aware in this matter, only then the incidents of fraud in UPI transactions can be reduced.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad Based Senior Columnist, views are personal

SEBI Intervenes in C2C Advanced Systems' SME IPO Listing

NEW DELHI: C2C Advanced Systems, a prominent defence and aerospace systems developer, has temporarily deferred its initial public offering (IPO) following regulatory intervention from the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

The company has extended an unprecedented opportunity for investors to withdraw their applications from the ongoing small and medium enterprise (SME) IPO.

In a formal notice, C2C Advanced Systems announced that investors, excluding anchor investors, can withdraw their bids from November 26 to November 28.

The withdrawal windows are strategically timed: qualified institutional buyers (QIB) and non-institutional investors (NII) can withdraw until 4:00 pm, while retail investors have until 5:00 pm on the first day, with similar timings available on the subsequent two days.

Prior to SEBI's intervention, the IPO had garnered exceptional market interest,



being oversubscribed nearly 96 times. Priced between Rs 214 and Rs 226 per unit, the issue was set to close for subscription on Tuesday.

SEBI has reportedly requested the company to appoint independent auditors and obtain an independent financial audit report.

The listing schedule has been adjusted, with the IPO now expected to list on or before December 3. The company anticipates finalising share allotment by November 29.

Additionally, the National Stock Exchange (NSE) will establish a monitoring agency to oversee fund utilisation post-listing.

This incident mirrors a previous regulatory action earlier this year when SEBI halted the listing of Trafiksol ITS Technologies due to concerns about potential fund misuse.

Such interventions underscore the regulatory body's commitment to protecting investor interests and maintaining market integrity.

Sales under Telecom PLI reach Rs 65,320 Crore, Exports at Rs 12,384 Crore

NEW DELHI: The production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme for telecom and networking products has seen 42 applicant companies (including 28 MSMEs) with a cumulative investment of Rs 3,925 crore and exports reaching Rs 12,384 crore (till September 30), the government informed the Parliament on Wednesday.

This PLI scheme was launched in June 2021 with a total financial outlay of Rs 12,195 crore.



Till September, the applicant companies had clocked

networking products, incentives ranging from 4 to 7 per cent, an additional 1 per cent incentive for MSMEs for the first 3 years, and an additional 1 per cent incentive for products 'Designed in India'. The minister informed that to bolster local manufacturing, the Telecom Technology Development Fund (TTDF) scheme was launched in 2022 with the aim of funding research and development of technologies, products and services for providing telecom services in rural and remote areas.

Salient features of the scheme are 33 telecom and

INTERNATIONAL

India and China move closer to resolving border standoff: Beijing

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun had a positive and constructive meeting in Vientiane on the sidelines of a regional security conclave.

New Delhi: The militaries of China and India are making "great progress" in implementing the disengagement agreement to end over four-year-long standoff in eastern Ladakh, China's Defence Ministry said Thursday.

"We also look forward to harmonious dance between the Chinese dragon and Indian Elephant with concerted steps," Defence Ministry spokesperson Sr Col Wu Qian said while addressing the monthly media briefing here.



He said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun had a positive and constructive meeting in Vientiane, the capital city of Laos, on the sidelines of a regional security conclave, last week.

The two sides are implementing the settlement reached between the two countries, he said, answering a question on the progress of the execution of the agreement reached between the two countries last month to end the standoff in eastern

Ladakh. "Now, we are making great progress," he said. The two ministers agreed to implement the important consensus reached between the top leaders and promote stable relations between the two countries, the spokesman said. Wu said the two militaries should strictly abide by the recent common understandings reached by the two sides to de-escalate tensions at the border areas, make efforts to bring down the tensions and focus on enhancing mutual trust and exchanges between the two countries.

"We hope the two sides can seize the opportunity and build new momentum to make new progress in the military-to-military relations," he said.

Mexico to stop flow of illegal immigrants into US: Trump



President-elect Donald Trump on Thursday said Mexico has agreed to immediately stop illegal immigrants from going to his border with the US.

This comes days after Trump

threatened to impose a 25 per cent tariff on all imports from Mexico and Canada for their inability to stop the flow of illegal immigrants into the United States. In a post on his Truth

Mexico will stop people from going to our Southern Border, effective immediately. This will go a long way toward stopping the illegal invasion of the USA"

Social platform, Trump said he spoke to Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo on the phone and the two had a productive conversation.

"Mexico will stop people from going to our Southern Border, effective immediately. This will go a long way toward stopping the illegal invasion of the USA. Thank you," Trump said in his post.

UN Secretary-General Calls for Urgent Action to End Violence Against Women



UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has made a strong appeal for immediate action to end violence against women and girls, describing it as an "epidemic that shames humanity." The call was made on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, observed on November 25.

Guterres highlighted alarming statistics, noting that on average, 140 women and girls are killed daily by family members, and about one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence. This situation, he warned, is worsening due to crises including conflict, climate change, and hunger, which exacerbate existing inequalities. He further noted the use of sexual violence as a weapon in war, underscoring the severity of the issue. The UN's Spotlight Initiative and the UNiTE to End Violence against Women by 2030 initiative are both mobilizing efforts to address and eradicate violence against women and girls. Guterres urged global cooperation and emphasized the need for justice, accountability, and advocacy to address this crisis. Reflecting on the nearly three-decade-old Beijing Declaration, which pledged to eliminate violence against women, he stated, "It's beyond time to deliver."

Nine Killed, 40 Houses Buried by Landslides in Uganda



KAMPALA: Nine bodies have been recovered, and more fatalities are feared following landslides in Uganda's eastern district of Bulambuli, an official said on Thursday.

Ramazan Twalla, the assistant chief administrative officer for Bulambuli, told Xinhua over the phone that the landslides swept through three sub-counties on Wednesday night, burying around 40 houses.

"I can confirm that nine bodies have so far been recovered this morning. The residents are still digging the soil and we expect to recover more bodies because many houses were buried," Twalla said.

"We expect the government to send in official search and rescue teams as well as humanitarian assistance in the form of food and temporary shelters," he added, Xinhua news agency reported.

The landslides were triggered by days of heavy downpour in the mountainous region, said Twalla.

Australia Passes World-First Social Media Ban for Under-16s

CANBERRA: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that social media companies now hold a social responsibility to protect children, following the passage of groundbreaking legislation that bans anyone under the age of 16 from using social media platforms.

The Senate passed the legislation late Thursday night, with final approval from the House of Representatives on Friday morning. The new law is set to take effect in 12 months. Social media companies that fail to prevent under-16s from accessing their platforms will face fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars (\$32.5 million).



Albanese's Remarks

Albanese emphasized the importance of safeguarding young Australians, stating: "Platforms now have a social responsibility to ensure the safety of our kids is a priority for them." Acknowledging potential en-

forcement challenges, he added: "We don't argue that its implementation will be perfect, just like the alcohol ban for under 18s doesn't mean that someone under 18 never has access, but we know that it's the right thing to do."

Industry Concerns- Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, expressed concern over the rapid progression of the legislation, stating: "We are concerned about the process which rushed the legislation through while failing to properly consider the evidence, what industry already does to ensure age-appropriate experiences, and the voices of young people."

Next Steps- A government-funded trial of age verification technologies is expected to determine how the law will be enforced, aiming to balance security with usability while ensuring children's safety online.

US Customs Seizes Over 3,000 Fake Gibson Guitars Worth \$18 Million

LOS ANGELES: In the largest counterfeit musical instrument bust on record, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers have seized over 3,000 fake Gibson electric guitars at the Los Angeles/Long Beach Seaport. If authentic, the guitars would have had an estimated retail value of \$18 million, according to CBP officials.

Gibson, an iconic American guitar manufacturer founded in 1902 in Kalamazoo, Michigan, produces all its instruments in the US. Genuine Gibson guitars typically retail from \$500 to over \$10,000, depending on the model.

The counterfeit guitars, destined for e-commerce platforms,



were flagged for using inferior materials that could pose health risks, as well as faulty electrical components that increase the likelihood of fires.

"This seizure is a critical reminder of the dangers associated with buying fraudulent products from unverified sources," said Port Director Africa Bell. "These knockoffs are part of a massive scheme to deceive American consumers."

Spain and Germany Join DHL Plane Crash Investigation in Lithuania

VILNIUS: Investigators from Spain and Germany will assist Lithuanian authorities in determining the cause of a DHL plane crash near Vilnius airport. Laurynas Naujokaitis, Director of the Lithuanian Justice Ministry's Transport Accident and Incident Investigation Division, confirmed the involvement of international experts.

Germany's aviation safety authority has dispatched four investigators to Lithuania, while Spain is sending two experts. The investigation, which will prioritize aviation safety, is expected to take at least a year. The US aviation administration has also been



notified since the crashed Boeing 737-476 (SF) was manufactured in the United States.

The plane, owned by Spanish airline Swift Air, was operating on behalf of German shipping company DHL. It crashed into a residential area near Vilnius airport while flying from Leipzig, Germany, resulting in the death of a pilot and injuries to three others.

World Bank Appoints Judith Green as New Country Manager for Malaysia to Boost Development

NEW DELHI: The World Bank Group has appointed Judith Green as the new country manager for Malaysia, a move aimed at enhancing the organization's support for Malaysia's public and private sector priorities. This role, which consolidates World Bank Group leadership at the country level, aims to improve coordination and access to the organization's full range of products and services, enabling quicker and more impactful support for Malaysia's development goals.

Green, a Jamaican national, brings experience from her recent position as country manager for the Pacific Islands, Papua New Guinea, Australia, and New Zealand with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private-sector arm of



the World Bank Group. In her role there, she focused on driving private-sector investments to create jobs and foster growth.

Her appointment aligns with Malaysia's economic diversification efforts, which have shifted the country from an agriculture and commodity-based economy to one increasingly driven by manufacturing and services.

Russia Bans Entry for 30 British Nationals amid Rising Tensions

MOSCOW: In a retaliatory move, Russia's Foreign Ministry has imposed entry bans on 30 British nationals, citing "hostile actions" by the UK government. The list includes senior political figures such as Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves, and Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, along with officials from military, high-tech sectors, and media outlets.

This decision comes on the heels of escalating diplomatic tensions. Earlier on Tuesday, Russia summoned the British ambassador to lodge a formal protest and expelled a British



diplomat, Wilkes Edward Prior, accusing him of espionage and sabotage activities. According to Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB), Prior must leave the country within 48 hours.

Moscow criticized London for what it described as foster-

ing "aggressive anti-Russian rhetoric," imposing "illegitimate sanctions," and supporting Ukraine's government, which Russia labeled as a "neo-Nazi Kyiv regime."

In response, the UK Foreign Office rejected the accusations as "malicious and baseless" and promised to retaliate. "This is not the first time Russia has made such accusations against our staff. We will respond in due course," a Foreign Office spokesperson said.

Russia has warned that it may expand the sanctions list further in response to ongoing tensions with the British authorities.

INFLUENCED BY MUSK AND RAMASWAMY

India Seeks Dismantling of Top-Heavy Bureaucracy, Reduction of Political Cost



GOPAL MISRA

It is being increasingly asked in India, whether the PM Narendra Modi's policies could really usher in a transparent people-friendly cost-effective system of governance. A series of informal exchanges of ideas among academicians, top civil servants, both working and also have superannuated reveal that his administration despite having a stable political system continues to be in an election mode indulging in false narratives of Modi's successes.

The cost of the administration has gone up in the past 10 years, and so the black money; it has mushroomed through the shell companies, including the huge funds being siphoned off to the accounts in the Swiss Banks, and recently it has recorded unprecedented deposits from Indians.

Interestingly, this disquiet has recently been noticed crystallizing among the non-political, but experienced people having a thorough knowledge of the governance and the geopolitics. These mute voices seldom vocal on the media and public platforms, expect that being a parliamentary democracy, the opposition parties should have picked up the gauntlet for challenging the government for bet-

ter governance, but instead they have been indulging in accusations without offering substantial evidences against the government as well as the prime minister personally.

On the other hand, the President-elect, Donald Trump, has already usher in live debates for stopping wasteful expenditures in different departments of the Federal government, even two months before his formal inauguration as the President scheduled on January 20, 2025. During this on-going period of transition, Trump's team of DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) comprising have already seen working for restructuring federal agencies slashing wasteful spending and cut down excess regulations.

The National Taxpayers Union Foundation of the US has noticed that the unnecessary expenditures coast 546 billion USD per year, almost two percent of the country's gross domestic product. It is a voluntary organization, but in India, the statutory role of the Public Accounts Committee is being undermined. Meanwhile, Vivek Ramaswamy has stated that "the slapping the bureaucracy on the wrist won't solve the problems, the only right answer is a massive downsizing."

Public Accounts Committee or PAC

The Indian constitution has



provided an impartial auditing system of the government under the Competent and Auditor General of India, who submits his reports to Parliament through the Public Accounts Committee. Interestingly, its present chairman, K.V. Venugopal, a leader of the Congress Party, but it is not known whether he has made any substantial contribution in disciplining government expenditures in recent years.

It, naturally has caused dismay in the civil society. A senior bureaucrat has recently confided to *The Financial World* (FW) that a sense of helplessness has percolated even within the ruling establishment comprising the BJP and its allies. It has disrupted the fragile sensitive balance of power within the members of Parliament in the ruling party. It was witnessed, when for his third Modi got himself leader of the National Democratic Alliance and later the docile MPs of the ruling party endorsed the PM for his third term; according to the established parliamentary procedure, he should have been endorsed for the coveted post only after being chosen by his own party. Thus, the role of selecting the new prime minister was denied to the newly elected BJP MPs.

In this denial process, the party leaders like the Defense Minister, Rajnath Singh, and other cabinet ministers, including the Lok Sabha speaker, Om Birla, were seen functioning like a deputy secretary in the PMO. It appeared that before the meeting of the parliamentary party, they were handed over the text to adhere to from the powers that be to toe the political line, as prescribed to them. Thus, there is little hope for any improvement from the honorable members of parliament.

System Hijacked

In the American system, both Elon Musk and Vivek

Ramaswamy are established billionaires and they oppose crony capitalism i.e. offering level playing ground to all competitors, but in the present Modi regime, the company for road building or a powerhouse is often chosen before the government invites tenders. The top bureaucrats assigned to regulate the system are being emasculated, who have little option but to obey the diktat from the above.

The tax collectors are being used to serve the political interests in India; recently, the income tax authorities issued notice to a senior bank official, because her husband, a former secretary in the Union Finance Ministry, later elevated as the member of the Election Commission, had dared to unearth the web of the black money being used by the ruling party. Instead, he finally decided to quit the Election Commission. His wife, however, was exonerated only after the ruling party's bigwigs were told that the details regarding their financial bungling and parking of the country's funds abroad would soon be released on the international media. It had the desired effect. The income tax notice was finally withdrawn.

It is difficult to ascertain the possible impact of the personal chemistry between Modi and Mukesh Ambani on the country's governance.

Most of the political observers in India as well as abroad were stunned, when during the oath-taking ceremony Ambani expressed his appreciation for Modi by keeping his hand on the shoulders of the prime minister, indeed a friendly gesture. Since 1947, no businessman ever dared to violate the established protocol and norms towards the head of the government.

Another reason that few can even debate the policies of the present regime is due to the fact that there is no political challenge from the disparate outfits being run like a family business from Tamil Nadu to UP and Bihar. In this context, if any policy shift for introducing economy in the governance, it has to come from Narendra Modi himself.

Few can teach him the art of governance to his all-knowing establishment, he, however, continues to enjoy his decade old rhetoric of ushering in a corruption-free regime, and Indian economy is poised to supersede China soon. The situation is alarming, because the Modi establishment has started believing in its own propaganda.

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

Trump Cabinet Nominees Targeted by Bomb Threats and Swatting Incidents



WASHINGTON: Several nominees and appointees of US President-elect Donald Trump have been targeted by bomb threats and "swatting" attacks, according to a statement from Trump transition spokeswoman Karoline Leavitt.

"Last night and this morning, several of President Trump's Cabinet nominees and administration appointees were subjected to violent, un-American threats to their lives and the safety of those living with them," Leavitt said on Wednesday.

Nature of the Threats- The incidents include Bomb threats directed at Cabinet nominees.

Swatting attacks—false emergency reports intended to provoke a heavily armed police response.

Targeted Officials

According to CBS News, the following individuals were among those targeted:

- Susie Wiles, senior Trump adviser.
- Pam Bondi, Trump's incoming White House chief of staff and former Florida attorney general, who has been nominated as the next US Attorney General.
- Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, nominee for US Ambassador to the United Nations.
- Howard Lutnick, nominee for Secretary of Commerce.
- Brooke Rollins, nominee for Secretary of Agriculture.
- Law Enforcement Response
- Authorities responded swiftly to secure the safety of the affected individuals and their families. Investigations are ongoing, and law enforcement agencies are coordinating efforts to identify and apprehend those responsible for the threats.
- Swatting incidents are particularly dangerous as they can escalate quickly and put innocent lives at risk due to the involvement of heavily armed Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams.
- These attacks come amid heightened tensions surrounding the upcoming transition of power, with security concerns growing for Trump's incoming administration.



Punjab police personnel distribute helmets to schoolgirls during a road safety campaign at a government school in Amritsar on Wednesday. Schoolgirls hold helmets distributed by Punjab police personnel during a road safety campaign at a government school in Amritsar on Wednesday. Schoolgirls wear helmets distributed by Punjab police personnel during a road safety campaign at a government school in Amritsar on Wednesday. PHOTO: PRABHJOT GILL AMRITSAR



Indian Army's Sikh Regiment personnel lay wreaths as they pay tributes on the Saragarhi Monuments at the Golden Gate on the outskirts of Amritsar on Thursday. The Saragarhi Foundation has established Saragarhi Monuments to honor the extraordinary bravery of the 21 Sikh soldiers who fought and gave their lives against Afghan tribesmen 127 years ago. PHOTO: PRABHJOT GILL

Zarina Wahab Says She Wants Prabhas as Her Son in Her Next Life



MUMBAI: Veteran actress Zarina Wahab has heaped praise on star Prabhas and said that she wants him as a son in her next life.

In a conversation on Lehren TV, Zarina shared that she is doing a film titled "Raja Sahab" with Prabhas and then went on to praise the star. "I'm doing one film with Prabhas also. Raja Sahab. You must see that movie. Abhishek Kishore, he's releasing the film in April. But let me tell you one thing about a person like Prabhas... There's no one like him. He's such a nice person. I say, I want two sons in my next birth. One Prabhas and one Suraj. Such a nice person. Such a lovely person." She revealed that Prabhas "doesn't have any ego." "He'll come on set, there are three heroines in this film. Then there are character artists also. But after the pack-up, he'll say bye to everyone. He'll say bye to everyone after the pack-up. What's the need to say bye to him? And the work is done. In the next scene, he's not there. He will not go to his van." The star said that he will call his home to order food for people on set.

"He'll sit in the corner. If you say, I'm hungry. He'll call home and order food for 40-50 people. Not just you, I'll feed everyone. No, I'll feed everyone. Really? I can't tell you how nice a person he is. May God give him a long life and good health. He's such a darling." "He's such a lovely person. I never thought I'd work with Prabhas. He made me so comfortable on the first day. Not only me. There were new heroines. I spoke to them nicely. He's got a smiling face. We've done seven schedules. I've never seen him misbehaving. I've never seen him talking loudly. Excellent person he is."

Bollywood maestro Piyush Mishra graced "Kitab Utsav 2024" at LPU

Kitab Utsav 2024 at LPU Campus Features Renowned Indian Authors FW DESK Jalandhar

"Gen Z is an unguided missile, and it's our responsibility to fuel it with the right literature, cinema, and music to ensure it soars in the right direction," remarked Piyush Mishra, the celebrated actor, lyricist, author, and theatre maestro of Bollywood. His words set the tone for Lovely Professional University's (LPU) three-day literary festival, Kitab Utsav - A Festival of Stories, organized by The School of Liberal & Creative Arts (Social Sciences and Languages) in collaboration with Rajkamal Prakashan Samuh. The event, themed #KitabDost, brought together literary pio-



neers, renowned authors, and creative visionaries to inspire and engage students. Dr. Ashok Kumar Mittal, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) and Founder Chancellor of LPU, along with Col. Dr. Rashmi Mittal, Pro-Chancellor of LPU, warmly welcomed notable guests. Dr. Ashok Mittal stated, "Reading is the foundation of personal growth and academic excellence". LPU's central library, with its extensive collection of books, reflects our dedication to cultivating a culture of learning and knowledge.

Udyamotsav: Fostering Visionaries, Shaping Futures



Entrepreneurship is rapidly emerging as a pivotal career path for the youth, and recognizing this, the Department of Pharmaceutical Management, NIPER S.A.S. Nagar (Mohali), in collaboration with TIE Chandigarh, organized a five-day festival of entrepreneurship, Udyamotsav - From Vision to Venture. The event aimed to ignite the entrepreneurial spirit among students and provide essential insights into the journey from idea to execution. Each day of the event featured a distinguished speaker sharing their expertise on critical aspects of entrepreneurship.

On Day 1, the event began with an insightful session by Mr. Atul Pathria, CEO and Founder of Quinji Tech, on 'Entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial Mindset.' A cybersecurity expert and author of 2 books, he shared examples of Indian-origin companies like Biocon and PharmEasy to illustrate how opportunities can be leveraged. He emphasized networking, learning from failures, and identifying solutions to problems, inspiring students to see the world as a treasure trove of ideas. Day 2 featured Ms. Ritika Singh, CEO and Founder of Kontent Factory, delivered an engaging talk on 'How to Present a Business Plan'. She introduced the PERSISTENT Framework for crafting impactful business plans, stressing the importance of storytelling, validation, and understanding the expectations of investors and mentors. Mr. Sahil Makkar, Managing Director at Punjab Angels Network, on day 3 discussed Startup Challenges and Funding. He explored how passion and funding align, offering vivid examples of valuation and its varying perspectives. He also shared his vision of transforming Punjab into a startup hub. On day 4, Mr. Nitin Jain, Director at VT Netzwerk, spoke on Lean Canvas/Business Plan, emphasizing how 99% of startups fail due to improper plan-

ning. He discussed how a lean canvas can be beneficial in making an efficient business plan. Through a practice exercise, he encouraged attendees to create a lean business canvas, making the session highly interactive. On last day, the event concluded with a motivational session by Ms. Kanika Raajdev, CEO and Founder of Mindcog, who shared her entrepreneurial journey. She highlighted the importance of being open to new ideas, leaving students inspired by her real-life success story. With the presence of distinguished dignitaries like TIE Chandigarh President Mr. Satish Kumar Arora, Treasurer & Joint Secretary Mr. Advait Upadhyay, and members Ms. Navsudeep and Mr. Mehakdeep, Udyamotsav reflected a dynamic event. The leadership of Prof. Pramil Tiwari, Prof. Anand Sharma, and Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish ensured the event's success by fostering an environment where students could dream big, plan better, and prepare for a promising entrepreneurial future. The seamless execution of Udyamotsav was a testament to the dedication and meticulous planning of the Organizing Committee (Komal Bhardwaj, Aarti Prakash, Prathamesh Jambhulkar, Mahendra Mahajan, Preshit Bhamare, Sagar Sarode, Dev Jani, Shrestha Saha and Riya), whose efforts ensured every session was impactful and inspiring for all attendees.

Understanding Retrograde Intrarenal Surgery

FW DESK

Retrograde Intrarenal Surgery (RIRS) is a non-invasive procedure used to treat kidney stones and other kidney-related conditions. This advanced technique has gained popularity due to its effectiveness and reduced recovery times compared to traditional surgical methods. Here's an in-depth look into what RIRS entails, its benefits, and considerations:

What is RIRS? Retrograde Intrarenal Surgery (RIRS) involves accessing the kidney through the urinary tract without the need for any surgical incisions. It is typically performed using a flexible ureteroscope, a thin and flexible tube equipped with a camera and laser fiber. This device allows urologists to visualize the kidney stones directly and perform precise maneuvers to break them down and remove them.

How RIRS Works **PREPARATION:** Before the procedure, imaging tests such as CT scans help



the urologist locate and assess the size and location of kidney stones. **PROCEDURE:** During RIRS, the flexible ureteroscope is inserted through the urethra and guided up into the urinary tract towards the kidney. Once the stones are located, a laser fiber inserted through the ureteroscope breaks down the stones into smaller fragments. **STONE REMOVAL:** The fragmented stones are either extracted using small baskets or allowed to pass naturally through urine.

Post-Procedure: Patients typically recover quickly with minimal discomfort. Some may experience mild discomfort during urination or notice small stone fragments in their urine, which is normal.

Advantages of RIRS

Minimally Invasive: RIRS avoids the need for large surgical incisions, reducing recovery time and risk of complications. **HIGH SUCCESS RATE:** It is highly effective for treating stones of various sizes and compositions.

Preservation of Kidney Function: Unlike traditional surgeries, RIRS minimizes trauma to surrounding kidney tissue, preserving kidney function.

Considerations

Size and Location of Stones: RIRS is most effective for smaller stones within the kidney or upper ureter. Larger stones or those deeply embedded may require alternative treatments. **Post-Procedure Care:** Patients are advised to drink

plenty of fluids to help flush out stone fragments and prevent new stone formation.

Conclusion

Retrograde Intrarenal Surgery (RIRS) represents a significant advancement in the treatment of kidney stones, offering patients a less invasive option with excellent outcomes. Its ability to effectively treat stones while minimizing recovery times makes it a preferred choice for many urologists and patients alike. As technology continues to evolve, RIRS continues to improve, further enhancing its role in kidney stone management. Whether you're a patient considering treatment options or a healthcare professional exploring innovative procedures, understanding RIRS can help facilitate informed decisions and optimal care.

Input by - Dr. Rajiv Goyal - Sr. Consultant Urology and Kidney Transplant Surgeon, Alchemist Hospital Panchkula

Harmful effects of smog on youths, aged and even unborn child

SATISH HANDA Rohtak

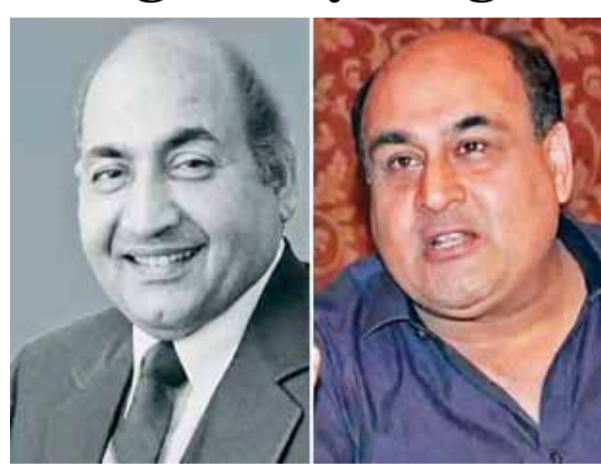
The entire North is in the grip of severe smog leaving an ill effect on the health of youngsters, old people, newborns and unborn children in the womb causing suffocation, heart attack and brain stroke. The level of pollution in North India has become dangerous, having a very bad effect on people's health. Experts of Rohtak's PGIMS say that due to smog, the pollution particles present in the air are getting mixed in the blood, due to which people's memory is decreasing and through women, poisonous air is also reaching the fetus growing in the womb as such not only the children are at greater risk from air pollution in Haryana and Delhi, smog is most dangerous for pregnant women also. While talking to media persons expressing concern Dr. Dhruv Chaudhary, Dean Academic Affairs of PGIMS Rohtak said that the danger is increasing due to the presence of pollution particles in the blood and around 130 cases related to lungs are coming every day in OPD at the hospital. He said there is a 35 percent increase in respiratory patients. Dr Chaudhary said that because of smog, the pollution particles present in the



air are getting mixed in the blood. People from young to old are losing their memory. The poisonous air is also reaching the foetus in the womb through women. He said the number of patients suffering from respiratory and brain related problems due to smog is the highest, as such many times new born children have to be kept on oxygen for two to three days after birth, the cases of premature delivery are also increasing, at the same time, the OPD of patients affected by smog has reached eight thousand at present.

According to Dr Chaudhary, patients with high blood pressure are at risk of brain stroke (paralysis) and asthma patients are at risk of heart attack. The poisonous mixture of smog reaches the eyes and lungs through breathing. The most poisonous gas in smog is sulphur dioxide as well as carbon monoxide in high quantities which directly enters the body through breathing, which mixes with the blood and starts expelling oxygen and takes in carbon dioxide. This causes

Mohammad Rafi's Son Shahid Announces Biopic on Legendary Singer



MUMBAI: Music icon Mohammad Rafi's son Shahid Rafi has announced a biopic on his iconic father. Shahid also shared that filmmaker Umesh Shukla, known for making films such as "OMG-Oh My God!" and "Dhoonde Reh Jaoge", is in talks for helming the upcoming movie. The biopic will officially be announced next month, as December 24, 2024 will mark Rafi's 100th birthday. Known for crooning classics such as "Likhe Je Khat Tujhe", "DardEDil DardEJigar", "Aaj Mausam Bada Beimaan", "Main Zindagi Ka Saath Nibhata Chala Gaya", "Kaun Hai Jo Sapnon Mein Aaya", "Aaja Aaja", "Parda Hai Parda", "Gulabi Aankhein" and "Kya Se Kya Ho Gaya", the legendary singer in his illustrious career has lent his vocals to over 1,000 films across Indian and foreign languages.

It was at the ongoing International Film Festival of India (IFFI), where a tribute was paid to Rafi along with several personalities including Raj Kapoor, Tapan Sinha and Akkineni Nageshwar Rao. His son Shahid shared during the session titled 'Aasmaan Se Aaya Farishta - Mohammad Rafi - The King of Mel-

J&K CM Omar Abdullah, Dr Farooq Abdullah in Saudi Arabia to perform pilgrimage



SRINAGAR: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, father Dr Farooq Abdullah and the other senior leaders of the



ruling National Conference (NC) are in Saudi Arabia to perform pilgrimage. Other National Conference leaders include Nasir



Wani, Javed Dar, Tanvir Sadiq, and Mushtaq Guroo. They are visiting the two holy cities of Madina and Mecca as part of their spiritual journey. Upon their arrival in Madina, the leaders visited Masjid-e-Nabawi, the second holiest site in Islam, where

they offered prayers, seeking divine guidance, and peace for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. «Alhamdulillah, we have arrived in the blessed city of Madina. Prayed at Masjid-e-Nabawi, seeking guidance, mercy, and peace for all.» senior National Conference leader Tanvir Sadiq posted on Twitter. Omar Abdullah had also taken to Twitter to announce his pilgrimage, his first since taking over as the J&K chief minister. Earlier, in January also, Omar along with Dr Farooq Abdullah had performed Umrah.

At the event, which commenced on November 20, paid a tribute to Rafi for his contribution to Hindi cinema. Several of his old classics were presented on the stage. Sonu and Sharmila were seen singing the song, which is from the film "An Evening In Paris". The track is originally picturised on Shamma Kapoor and the veteran star.