

REGION

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DELHI GOVT LAUNCHES ANTI-OPEN BURNING CAMPAIGN TO COMBAT RISING AIR POLLUTION



Delhi govt tests drone-based mist spraying to combat pollution



NEW DELHI: To curb rising air pollution in the national capital, the Delhi government on Friday tested 'drone-based mist spraying' at Anand Vihar, one of the city's pollution hotspots.

During the testing, Delhi Environment Minister Gopal Rai said that pollution levels in the hotspots are higher than the average AQI in the capital. "Today's demonstration at Anand Vihar—a known pollution hotspot—aims to address this issue," Rai said.

"Pollution levels are elevated at 13 hotspots across Delhi, and this pilot project allows us to test drone-based mist spraying in areas where conventional anti-smog guns can't reach," the minister said.

The drones used in the testing can carry up to 15 litres of water and release a fine mist to control airborne pollutants,

especially in the congested and inaccessible areas.

A report on the effectiveness of the mist-spraying drones will be submitted to the environment department and the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) to assess further steps, Rai said.

He also said this pilot is part of the broader Winter Action Plan introduced on September 25, which focuses on 21 key actions to manage winter pollution. As part of these initiatives, drone technology is being explored as a modern solution to reach the pollution-prone areas which the traditional spraying methods struggle to cover. According to Rai, there are specific action plans for Delhi's 13 hotspots where 13 coordination teams will address localised sources of pollution.

Eighty mobile anti-smog

guns and 68 static anti-smog guns have been deployed across these hotspots to control dust on the roads and in the open areas, the minister said. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has been instructed to intensify inspections in these areas, while officials from 13 departments are monitoring the construction sites across the city to check compliance with the anti-pollution guidelines, Rai said.

He also pointed out that 200 mobile anti-smog guns are operating across all the 70 Assembly constituencies in the national capital, while 146 anti-smog guns have been installed atop high-rise apartments to counteract dust in the air.

"Drone technology offers a valuable approach to target and control pollution sources, especially in dense urban spaces and industrial areas where traditional spraying isn't feasible," Rai said.

"If successful, this pilot will pave the way for broader deployment of drones to combat pollution throughout the capital," he added.

Meanwhile, Delhi's air quality is deteriorating each day, with more than 15 monitoring stations currently reporting AQI levels in the "severe" category.

BANKING & FINANCE

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SBI FORECASTS SLOWER ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR INDIA IN Q2 FY25



Foreign Exchange Reserves Drop By USD 3.4 Bn: RBI



NEW DELHI: India's foreign exchange reserves witnessed a significant decline of USD 3.463 billion, settling at USD 684.805 billion for the week ending October 25, according to the latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

This movement marks a notable shift in the country's foreign exchange holdings.

The decrease was primarily driven by a substantial reduction in foreign currency assets, which constitute the largest component of the reserves.

These assets fell by USD 4.484 billion, reaching USD 593.751 billion during the

reporting period.

However, the decline was partially offset by a positive movement in gold reserves, which saw an increase of USD 1.082 billion to reach USD 68.527 billion.

Other components of the reserves also experienced downward movements.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) decreased by USD 52 million to USD 18.219 billion, while India's reserve position with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) saw a marginal reduction of USD 9 million, settling at USD 4.307 billion for the week under review.

POTPOURRI

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IMANE KHELIF, 2024 OLYMPIC GOLD-WINNING BOXER, CONFIRMED AS MAN



Corruption an Obstacle to Economic Progress: President Murmu

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu on Friday highlighted the need for integrity and honesty in the nation's fight against corruption which is an obstacle to economic progress.

Addressing the Vigilance Awareness Week function organised by the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi, President Murmu said corruption reduces trust in society and adversely affects the feelings of fraternity among people.

"It also has a widespread impact on the country's unity and integrity," she said, commending the ongoing Preventive Vigilance campaign under the CVC. She expressed her appreciation for the initiative which aims to instil a culture of vigilance and transparency in government institutions.

"As we all know, the Vigilance Awareness Week is observed during the week of the birth anniversary of Bharat Ratna Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who inspired millions to dedicate themselves to the nation's development," President Murmu said. She drew a connection between Sardar Patel's vision for a unified India and the ongoing efforts to build a corruption-free nation, emphasising that the fight against corruption was not just a ritual but a responsibility shared by every citizen.

Cautioning against a pessimistic attitude that considers the elimination of corruption as impossible, she expressed confidence that the government's policy of "Zero Tolerance Against Corruption" will eradicate graft from its roots. The President highlighted the



words of the ancient Greek historian Megasthenes, who, over 2,300 years ago, praised the disciplined and law-abiding nature of the Indian people.

"About 2,300 years ago, Megasthenes wrote that Indians do not indulge in discipline and strictly follow laws. This spirit still endures today," President Murmu remarked, noting the relevance of this year's Vigilance Week theme: 'Culture of Integrity for Nation's Prosperity.'

She stressed that upholding integrity is fundamental to ensuring the prosperity and success of the nation, adding, "Every year, on Sardar Patel's birth anniversary, we reinforce our commitment to unity and integrity. This is not just a ceremonial act but a solemn duty of every citizen."

In a personal reflection, the President, who hails from a tribal background, spoke of the values of contentment and simplicity she observed among her people, despite limited resources. President Murmu noted that true prosperity comes from honesty and integrity, not from corruption

or the exploitation of resources.

"I come from a community where, despite limited resources, people live happily and with contentment. Corruption is rooted in bad intentions. Those who indulge in it live in constant fear of being exposed," she said.

Highlighting the government's steps in combating corruption, President Murmu pointed to key legislative measures such as the 2018 amendment to the Prevention of Corruption Act.

"In the last decade, the government has seized over \$12 billion worth of properties under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act of 2002," she said.

The President expressed confidence that India's "zero tolerance for corruption" approach would be successful in creating a transparent, accountable, and ethical environment.

"Eradicating corruption from India is like cleaning our country — it requires effort, commitment, and the support of every citizen," the President said.

78 Lakh EPS Pensioners to Benefit as New Payment System Clears Pilot Run



NEW DELHI: Union Minister of Labour and Employment, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya, on Friday announced the successful completion of pilot run of the new Centralised Pension Payments System (CPPS) under the Employees' Pension Scheme 1995 aimed at enhancing pension services.

He said that the pilot run was completed on October 29-30 with the pension disbursement of about Rs 11 crore for October to more than 49,000 EPS pensioners of Jammu, Srinagar and Karnal regions.

The new system enables pensioners to receive their pension from any bank, any branch, anywhere in the country. This addresses the long-standing challenges faced by pensioners and ensures a seamless and efficient disbursement mechanism, the minister said.

The new CPPS system will be fully rolled out as part of EPFO's ongoing IT modernization project Centralised IT Enabled System (CITES 2.01) by January 2025 and will benefit more than 78 lakh EPS pensioners of EPFO.

Earlier, during the announcement of the new CPPS system, Mandaviya had said, "The approval of the Centralised Pension Payment System (CPPS) marks a significant milestone in modernization of the EPFO. This is a crucial step in our ongoing efforts to transform the EPFO into a more robust, responsive, and tech-enabled organization, committed to serving the needs of its members and pensioners better." The CPPS is a paradigm shift from the existing pension disbursement system that is decentralised, with each Zonal/Regional Office of EPFO maintaining separate agreements with only 3-4 banks. In the new CPPS, there will also be no need for pensioners to visit the bank for any verification at the time of commencement of pension and the pension will be immediately credited upon release.

India Should Join Major Trade Blocs, Says NITI Aayog Chief

NEW DELHI: Niti Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam advocated for India's participation in major regional trade agreements, emphasising that membership in both the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) would benefit the nation's economy.

India's absence from significant trade partnerships has become noteworthy, particularly following its withdrawal from



RCEP negotiations in 2019 after six years of discussions. The RCEP currently encompasses 15 Asia-Pacific nations,

including the 10 ASEAN member states and their key trading partners: China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. Subrahmanyam specifically highlighted the potential advantages for India's Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector, which currently accounts for 40 percent of the country's exports.

"That will be best for India's MSME sector," he stated, noting that large corporations are not the primary drivers of India's export market.

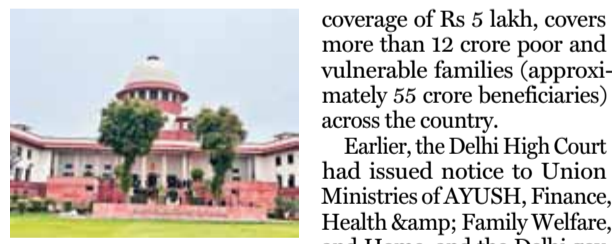
SC Issues Notice on PIL Seeking Inclusion of Ayurveda, Yoga in Ayushman Bharat Scheme

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking the inclusion of ayurveda, yoga, and naturopathy in the Union government's public health insurance scheme, Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

"We will issue a notice. Let us have the view of the government," said a bench presided over by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud.

The Bench, also comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, requested Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to assist the court and posted the PIL for further hearing after three weeks.

The plea said that Indian healthcare systems (ayurveda,



yoga, and naturopathy) should be included under the Ayushman Bharat scheme. The PM-JAY was launched by the Union government to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) and Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in line with the recommendation of the National Health Policy 2017.

The scheme, providing health coverage of Rs 5 lakh, covers more than 12 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 55 crore beneficiaries) across the country.

Earlier, the Delhi High Court had issued notice to Union Ministries of AYUSH, Finance, Health & Family Welfare, and Home, and the Delhi government on an identical plea.

After the Union government had filed an affidavit assuring that Indian healthcare systems will be included in the scheme, the Delhi HC had directed to consider the PIL, filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, as a representation and pass a reasoned order as expeditiously as possible.

The plea had contended that

the Ayushman Bharat scheme is currently limited to allopathic hospitals and dispensaries, excluding various indigenous medical systems like ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy, siddha, unani, and homoeopathy, which are deeply rooted in India's traditions and effective for addressing modern healthcare needs.

The PIL had stressed the need to recognise and integrate indigenous medical systems into public health schemes, as they are deeply rooted in the country's traditions and culture, and the importance of providing citizens with the right to choose their preferred treatment and doctor while ensuring widespread accessibility and quality of healthcare services.

E-way bills for goods soar to record high as trade surges in October

NEW DELHI: The e-way bill generation for the transportation of goods from production centres to markets across the country soared to a record high of 11.7 crore during October, representing a 17 per cent jump over the same month of the previous year, data from the Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) showed.

The surge in e-way bills reflects the increase in economic activity as the manufacturing sector accelerates to meet the growing demand in the economy during the festive season.

The figures are in line with the HSBC survey, released earlier this week, which showed that India's manufacturing sector growth accelerated in



October, fuelled by faster increases in total new orders and international sales leading to the creation of more jobs during the month.

The upturn in performance was boosted by stronger demand for Indian goods. Companies noted a quicker increase in order book volumes that was stronger than the average seen in nearly 20 years of data collection. Anecdotal

evidence suggested that the introduction of new products and successful marketing initiatives helped enhance sales performances, the report said.

The rise in e-way bill generation, driven by an increase in transport activity, also matches the growth captured in the HSBC PMI survey for the services sector.

Pranjul Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC, said: "India's services PMI recovered from its ten-month low in September to reach 58.5 last month. During October, the Indian services sector experienced strong expansions in output and consumer demand, as well as job creation, which achieved a 26-month high."

PM Modi's 'Bharat 6G Vision' Poised to Get another Booster

NEW DELHI: In a bid to boost the Bharat 6G Vision, the government is working towards the development of a multi-port switch for a single broadband antenna that can cover all 2G, 3G, 4G and 5G bands.

The developed technology can be used to cover all the bands like 2G, 3G, 4G, 5G and beyond in a single antenna without noise. Towards this goal, the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT), the telecom R&D centre of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), has collaborated with CSIR-Central Electronics Engineering Research Institute (CEERI), Pilani.

The institutions will jointly develop the "Multiport Switch with Tuneable Impedance Matching Network for a Single Broadband Antenna". The project is funded under the Telecom Technology Development Fund (TTDF) scheme of the DoT. This scheme is designed to fund Indian startups, academia and R&D institutions and is a crucial enabler for designing, developing, and commercialising telecommunication products and solutions.



It will focus on developing a micro-electromechanical technology-based switching network to cover multiple communication bands with enhanced antenna performance. This is aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Bharat 6G Vision'. Under this, the government is already evaluating 470 proposals on 'Accelerated research on 6G Ecosystem'. The DoT has funded two next-generation testbeds to advance the 6G research. PM Modi has envisaged India to be a front-line contributor in the design, development and deployment of 6G technology by 2030. After successfully deploying 5G across the nation in record time, the country is fast advancing

on 6G technology, and now ranks in the top league when it comes to filing patents related to 6G. According to a government-led panel, India can achieve a share of 10 per cent of all 6G patents along with one-sixth contributions to global standards in the next three years. The first-ever International Telecommunications Union-World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly (ITU-WTSA 2024) concluded in the national capital last month. India has successfully proposed groundbreaking resolutions and contributed to the modification of existing ones, receiving widespread endorsement from member nations.

India deserves to be in list of global superpowers: Putin

India deserves to be included in the list of global superpowers as its economy is currently growing faster than in any other country, Russian President Vladimir Putin has said.

Addressing the plenary session of the Valdai Discussion Club in Sochi on Thursday, Putin said Russia is developing relations with India in all directions and there is a great degree of trust in bilateral ties.

"India should undoubtedly be added to the list of superpowers, with its billion-and-a-half population, the fastest growth among all economies in the world, ancient culture and very good prospects for further growth," he said.

Calling India a great country,



Putin said: "We are developing relations with India in all directions. India is a great country, now the largest in terms of population: 1.5 billion people"

is increasing many times over, every year," Putin was quoted by Russian news agency Tass as saying. Putin added that the contacts between India and Russia in the security and defence sphere are developing. "Look at how many types of Russian military equipment are in service

with the Indian armed forces. There is a great degree of trust in this relationship. We don't just sell our weapons to India; we design them jointly," he said.

Putin named the BrahMos cruise missile project as an example. "In fact, we made it [the missile] fit for use in three environments - in air, in sea and on land. These projects, conducted for the benefit of India's security, are ongoing," he said. "This is widely known and no one has issues with that, but these projects demonstrate a high level of mutual trust and cooperation. So this is what we will keep doing in the near term, and, I hope, will continue to do in the more distant future," he said.

Delhi Govt Launches Anti-Open Burning Campaign to Combat Rising Air Pollution

NEW DELHI: As Delhi-NCR continues to witness a worsening air quality with the onset of winter, the month-long anti-open burning campaign is set to kick off in the national Capital from Wednesday.

The decision to kick off the anti-open burning campaign was taken by the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi after Environment Minister Gopal Rai he held a review meeting of the Winter Action Plan with all stakeholders and officials concerned on Tuesday.

To strictly enforce the month-long anti-open burning campaign that will continue till December 6, as many as 588 patrolling teams will be deployed to tackle pollution, inspect construction sites and create awareness among farmers to prevent stubble burning. "Beginning Wednesday, the campaign will be led by



the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Revenue Department, New Delhi Municipal Council, Delhi Development Authority, Irrigation & Flood Department, and Delhi State Industrial and Infrastructure Development Corporation, with 588 teams across these departments for coordinated action," Gopal Rai said.

Rai added that teams will be on the ground to monitor and prevent open burning incidents across the city around the clock. Additionally, government departments, Resident Welfare Associations, and construction agencies have been instructed to provide electric heaters to security guards to reduce the need for open burning of bio-

mass during winter. Rai urged neighbouring BJP-ruled states of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana to intensify their pollution control efforts, emphasising that collective action will have a stronger impact. Recently, the Delhi government announced a comprehensive 21-point Winter Action Plan to tackle pollution in the national Capital.

Delhi's Environment Minister said that last year's 14-point plan has been expanded to a broader 21-point strategy to combat the menace of air pollution, including emergency measures such as drone monitoring, anti-dust campaigns, road-sweeping machines etc. The Minister claimed that incidents of stubble burning have reduced by 50 per cent in Punjab since the AAP government took office, following discussions with Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann.

Delhi's air quality remains 'very poor'

NEW DELHI: Delhi's air quality remained in the 'very poor' category on Friday morning, with the AQI reaching 387 while more than 15 monitoring stations reported air quality levels in the worst zone.

At 9 am, the AQI stood at 387, according to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data.

The 24-hour average AQI, recorded until 4 pm daily, was reported at 367 on Thursday.

CPCB's Sameer app data, which provides hourly AQI updates, showed that out of 38 monitoring stations, 18 were in the 'severe' category with readings above 400.

The stations included Anand Vihar, Wazirpur, Rohini, Punjabi Bagh, Nehru Marg, Mundka, Jahangirpuri, Ashok Vihar, Bawana, DTU, Narela, Nehru Nagar, Moti Bagh, Patparganj, RK Puram, Sonia Vihar, Sirifort, and Vi-



vek Vihar among others.

According to AQI classifications, a 0-50 range is considered 'good', 51-100 'satisfactory', 101-200 'moderate', 201-300 'poor', 301-400 'very poor', and 401-500 'severe'.

Meanwhile, a thick layer of morning mist and smog blanketed the city as the minimum temperature dropped to

18.1 degrees Celsius, 3.8 degrees above normal. At 8.30 am, humidity levels stood at 96 per cent, according to the India Meteorological Department. The weather office has forecast mainly clear skies during the day, with the maximum temperature expected to reach around 32 degrees Celsius.

UP Govt to Independently Appoint DGP: Cabinet Approves New Policy



LUCKNOW: In a major administrative shift ahead of the bye-elections, the Uttar Pradesh government, led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, has decided to take control of appointment of the state's Director General of Police (DGP), bypassing the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) panel process. This move, approved at a Cabinet meeting late on Monday, means the UP government will now select the DGP independently, a decision previously overseen by the Centre. The Yogi government has established a committee led by a retired High Court judge for the DGP's selection. The committee will comprise the Chief Secretary, a UPSC-nominated member, the Uttar Pradesh Public Service Commission Chairman or their nominee, the Additional Chief Secretary or Principal Secretary (Home), and a retired DGP. This change also sets a two-year fixed tenure for the DGP's position. Following Punjab, UP becomes the second state in India to implement its own system for appointing the DGP.

Jamaat-e-Islami Hind welcomes the SC judgement of upholding the Minority status of AMU



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), Syed Sada-tullah Husaini has welcomed the SC decision upholding the the Minority Status of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU). By overruling the 1967 judgment in S. Azeez Basha vs. Union Of India which held that an institution incorporated by a statute cannot claim to be a minority institution, the apex court has delivered a landmark judgment that is bound to preserve the minority character of thousands of similar institutions that could have faced legal challenges and leading to a severe dilution of their educational and cultural rights as recognised in the constitution. This will lead to the protection and preservation of the rights of all religious, linguistic and cultural minorities in this country. As the Constitution Bench of the SC has relegated the matter to a regular bench "to examine who established the University and who was the "brain" behind it, we are confident that the minority status of AMU should be safeguarded by the Court. It is established and uncontested history that the AMU was founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan for the educational upliftment of the minority Muslim community by."

Delhi Police during raids arrested 5 persons making fake desi ghee of reputed brands at Jind in Haryana and selling in Delhi-NCR

SATISH HANDA
New Delhi

Crime Branch of Delhi Police busted a gang making fake Desi Ghee by favouring Vanaspathi ghee and refined oil was being prepared in a factory in Jind, Haryana and used to supply in Delhi-NCR. Police has arrested five accused and seized a large quantity of fake Ghee in tins, tetra packs and boxes of reputed brands: Amul Ghee, Verka Ghee, Nestle Everyday Ghee, Madhusudan Ghee, Anand Ghee, Param Desi Ghee, Mother Dairy Ghee, Milkfood Desi Ghee, Patanjali Cow Ghee, Saras, Madhu Ghee, Shweta Ghee and Lakshya Ghee along with heavy stocks worth 2500 litres and packing materials,



wrappers, raw material and equipment. They were also manufacturing fake products manufactured under the 'Eno' brand.

The accused manufacturing fake ghee in a factory in Jind, Haryana involved in the entire supply chain arrested by the police were identified as Hrithik Khandelwal (24),

resident of Mathura, UP, Sanjay Bansal (48) of Kanti Nagar, Shahdara, Rohit Agarwal (44) of Ghaziabad, Krishna Goyal (32), resident of Jind in Haryana and Ashwini alias Ashu (32) of Jind. DCP (Crime) Satish Kumar said that SI Rajaram received information about the supply of fake 'Amul Ghee' in Delhi-NCR.

A team of Inspector Pawan Kumar, Ajay Kumar and SI Anupama Rathi formed under the supervision of ACP Naresh Kumar raided several locations in Delhi-NCR, three accused were arrested from Delhi and two from Jind on Tuesday. After investigation, officials of Amul and Eno companies said that the goods are fake and have not been manufactured by their companies. Police seized 23,328 pouches of adulterated and fake Eno and 240 liters of fake Amul Ghee packets from Delhi. Raw material, machines and other equipment for making 2500 liters of fake Ghee were seized from a Jind factory and finding out how much material has been sold in the market so far.

Couple robbed people while giving them lift in car, arrested & confessed to 10 crimes in a few days

SATISH HANDA
Fatehabad

Couple who robbed on the pretext of giving lift on Ratia Road, Fatehabad arrested by Fatehabad police during interrogation confessed to 10 crimes of robbing in three days. DSP Kulwant Singh said that the husband and wife used to commit robbery in a car after making a plan. The arrested accused were identified as Kamalpreet, resident of Nahar Colony Ratia and his wife Happy both were married about two years ago. During interrogation, the couple revealed 10 crimes in the past few days. According to the latest victim, an Anganwadi worker Karmjit Kaur a resident of village Aharwan had lodged a complaint on October 28 stating that she was going from her house to the Anganwadi centre in the village when she took a lift from a young car driver sitting along with a woman in the car gave her a lift her outside the Anganwadi centre, but did not dropped her.

Victim said that the accused had beaten her and injured her with a sharp weapon when she resisted, meanwhile both snatched her earrings (tops) and her mobile phone. The police on the complaint took swift action in the case and arrested the couple. Sadar police presented both the accused in the court. From there, Happy was sent to jail while accused Kamalpreet was remanded on two days police custody, who confessed the crime during preliminary interrogation and said that about a week ago, an old man from village Aharwan was made to sit in a car and Rs 2,000 were robbed from him. Both admitted that about a week



ago, they robbed an old man near village Ayalki on the pretext of giving him a lift.

Among other cases of robbing people while offering them lift in the car admitted by the accused included an old man given lift in a car from Sardulgarh from whom amount worth Rs 4,000 was robbed from and he was dropped near Nagpur village. About four to five days ago, on the pretext of giving a lift to an old woman from Dhani Chanchak bus stand, they snatched her gold earrings. About a week ago, an old man from village Aharwan was made to sit in a car and snatched a mobile phone and Rs 4,000 from him. About a week ago, an old man from village Aharwan was made to sit in the car and a mobile phone and Rs 4,000 were robbed from him. Among few other robbing cases in past few days admitted by Kamalpreet alongwith his wife Happy included a mobile phone stolen from a youth near Deep Singh College on Ratia Road, a pregnant woman and her child were given lift near the bus stand in their car and her silver anklets were robbed, a woman was made to sit in car from the Daryapur bus stand and her mobile phone alongwith Rs 200 she was carrying in her purse were robbed from her near the village Gillakheda, robbed a youth whose motorcycle ran out of fuel near Ratia bridge his mobile phone and Rs 4,000 on the pretext of giving him a lift to bring petrol from a oil filling station.

In First Video Message after Leaving Jail, Kejriwal Sounds Poll Bugle in Delhi

NEW DELHI: In his first video message to Aam Aadmi Party workers after stepping out of prison two months ago, former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday called upon party workers to put in their best over the next three months to bring the party back to power for the third time in Assembly polls. "We will fight collectively and win," said Kejriwal, asking party members to oppose divisive forces in a video address laced with names of Gods and phrases in an attempt to use the religion card to reach out to voters. "If you feel angry at some point, you may pray to Ram. If you belong to other religions, you may find solace in the name of your Gods," said the AAP leader, who has been holding padayatra across Delhi for the past few weeks to highlight the party's governance model. With an eye on Dalit voters, the former Chief Minister also praised B.R. Ambedkar and raised the "Jai Bhim" slogan in the video, with a Tricolor and a photo of Ambedkar in the background.

Flying squad attached to EC Seizes Food Kits Bearing Rahul & Priyanka Gandhi's Photos



WAYANAD: The flying squad attached to the Election Commission on Thursday seized food kits with pictures of Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress-led UDF nominee Priyanka Gandhi. An official said that the food kits were seized in the Tholpatty area near the residence of the local Congress leader Sasikumar Tholpatty. A local CPI-M youth wing leader that Congress is distributing these kits to please the voters around Tholpatty areas. However, Congress denied these charges. "Our party does not resort to such tactics to win the election," said Congress leaders manning the election campaign of Priyanka Gandhi. Priyanka, who arrived in Kerala on Sunday, has been travelling to every nook and corner of the Wayanad where she is addressing more than five meetings every day. Women have come out in huge numbers to listen to the Congress nominee in these rallies. The election campaign will end on November 11 while voting will take place on November 13. Rahul Gandhi won the 2019 general elections with a margin of 4.60 lakh from Wayanad which came down to 3.64 lakh in the 2024 general elections. However, he decided to vacate the Wayanad seat for Raebarali and Congress pitched in Priyanka Gandhi for the Wayanad bypolls.

Three arrested allegedly fired at cloth store owner demanding Rs 20 lakh ransom

SATISH HANDA
Fatehabad

Police arrested three youths covered their faces with mask involved in firing at a cloth store Prem Vadhra Bhandar at village Majra about 10 km from Fatehabad the day after Diwali on 2nd November, demanding a ransom amount of Rs 20 lakh from the owner of the shop Prem Chand threatening to kill him in case the amount will not be paid throwing a letter in the cloth store. Jaipal Singh DSP said that police arrested three accused on the basis of footage of CCTV in the area. The arrested accused were identified as Rinku a resident of Ayalki, Surendra from Azad Nagar and Lakhwinder Singh from Bhirdana. During preliminary questioning, the suspects revealed that their motive was to make quick money for leisure activities, and this was the first time they had planned such ransom demand crime. The police are also investigating the involvement of another person Rahul, also a member of a gang involved in this conspiracy, who may have written the note.



Kuldeep Singh SHO Sadar police station said that police after registering a complaint by the owner of cloth store presented the alleged accused in the court remand three on two days police remand to further investigate their involvement in the crime, including questioning them about weapon and the whereabouts of fourth youth Rahul yet absconding as well as other details. He said, three masked youths arrived on a bike at Prem Vadhra Bhandar, at around 4 pm, one of them fired shots at the store, while another threw a note demanding Rs 20 lakh in ransom. The note, written by Surendra, warned that failure to pay

the amount could result in further violence, threatening the safety of the store owner and his family. Later, the youths fled the scene. Information reveals, Majra is becoming a commercial hub with popular clothing stores that ship products nationwide as well as also having the growing business of furniture showrooms, attracting customers from Fatehabad and surrounding places.

DSP Jaipal Singh said the police acted swiftly, forming a crime scene investigation team and registering a case based on the complaint filed by the shop owner. The note thrown in the cloth stores had a chilling message, "I am Surendra from Fatehabad,

need Rs 20 lakh. You decide how to give it, this is just a trailer, else something worse could happen. You and your family will be responsible for your own safety. If the police intervene, remember, I will be the last one you see. Ram-Ram." Investigation during police remand revealed that absconding youth Rahula, a resident of Fatehabad had written the letter, Surinder was the mastermind in the case who had planned the conspiracy in jail in the recent past when he was arrested in a drug smuggling case. Information also revealed that all arrested youths were involved in smuggling and sale of drugs.

In response to the incident, Bajrang Das Garg, president of the Haryana Pradesh Vypar Mandal, after the incident visited Fatehabad and met the shopkeeper. During a press conference, he warned the police to take quick action in response to the incident as well as several other similar incidents reported in the past sometime in the area including Hisar and Hansi. He warned the police to take quick action, threatening a shutdown of Fatehabad if the matter was not resolved soon.

Dedine in crimes against women in Haryana witnesses 52.0% decrease in SC/ST Act cases, 14.50 per cent drop in rape cases

SATISH HANDA
Panchkula

Haryana has witnessed a continuous decline in major crimes this year as compared to last year. According to the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) report, there has been a significant reduction in crimes under the SC/ST Act, crimes against women and children, robberies and murders, Shatruijit Kapoor DGP Haryana said that according to the report a 52.94% decrease in the SC/ST Act cases, a 14.50% reduction in rape cases, a 19.51% drop in dowry deaths, a 29.57% decrease in molestation cases, a 22.58% decline in dacoities, a 29.72% reduction in robberies, a 9.96% decrease in snatching and a 21.45% drop in extortion and blackmail cases has been recorded. He said, there have been reduction in cases of murder, offences under the POCSO Act, vehicle thefts, and kidnappings also.

DGP Kapoor said that with effect from January to August 2024, the STF has successfully apprehended 121 most-wanted criminals, 36 gangsters and their gang members and 264 hard core criminals involved in serious offences and crime units have been established in the districts for crime control operating under



the guidance of senior police officials. Kapoor said, to maintain law and order 53 special weapons and tactics (SWAT) teams have been prepared in the state, check points have been set up at various locations at night to monitor suspicious and criminal activities, especially thoroughly checking the vehicles. He disclosed that operations like 'Operation Akraman' were launched periodically to dismantle criminal activities in the state and during 2024, in which state police teams registered 2743 FIRs and arrested 4768 criminals under Operation Akraman by 7,957 police teams.

DGP Kapoor said that to provide a safe environment for women in the state, 2153 hotspot areas and 292 hot routes have been identified where incidents of eve-teasing are more likely to occur. He said special police duties have been assigned in these areas and routes for swift action against offenders. "The Haryana Police have also intro-

duced a trip-monitoring service to ensure the safety of women travelling alone who can register themselves on Haryana-112 in emergency and their journey will be monitored until they reach their destination safely," DGP said the Haryana Police have trained four women police officers in every district for women and child safety and these officers are conducting sensitisation programmes in schools and colleges, educating women and children about good touch and bad touch, as well as their fundamental rights. DGP said, Gram and Ward Prabharies have been directed to monitor criminal activities in rural and urban areas, strict actions are taken against those who engage in hooliganism and harass people unnecessarily. "The Haryana Police also monitors social media platforms for posts by gangsters, keeping a close watch on those who like or share such posts," Kapoor added performance evaluation forms had been introduced to promote healthy competition among police officers, which set standards for enhancing police efficiency and decisions related to ACRs and other important matters based on performance evaluations. He said regular review meetings with district and senior officials are held to ensure better law and order.

President Droupadi Murmu Extends Warm Greetings on Chhath Puja

***Emphasizing Spiritual and Ecological Values**

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu shared her greetings with fellow citizens, devotees and believers on the occasion of the second day of Chhath Puja on Wednesday.

In her message, she said, "On the auspicious occasion of Chhath Puja, the holy festival of faith, fasting and devotion, I extend my hearty congratulations and warm wishes to all my fellow citizens."

The President went on to shed light on the spiritual and ecological significance of the occasion.

"Chhath Puja, one of the oldest festivals of the country, is an occasion to worship the Sun. This festival also worships the rivers and ponds, the unique gifts of nature. Through rigor-



ous fasting, this festival purifies our minds and souls," she expressed.

She added that this festival "inspires us to protect and preserve our environment."

Concluding her message by urging citizens to conserve nature to keep culture thriving, President Murmu expressed:

"On the occasion of Chhath Puja, let us re-affirm our faith in Bhagwan Surya, our rivers and the bounty of nature. May this festival bring happiness in our lives and may our reverence for nature continue to grow."

The second day of the four-day-long Chhath Puja is marked by the pivotal 'Kharna' Puja, a

day when devotees, particularly Chhath vrati (the main individual performing the puja) observe a strict fast without food and water, before performing key rituals to honour the Sun God.

The four-day festival represents more than just a religious observance—it's a time for familial bonding and a call for the well-being of their loved ones.

Beyond its religious and cultural significance, Chhath Puja also carries an ecological message. The festival's connection to water resources is profound, as devotees gather near rivers, ponds, or other water bodies to offer prayers and perform rituals.

The reverence for nature and the Sun is woven into the fabric of Chhath, symbolising the interconnectedness between humanity and the environment.

PM Modi honors Veterans on 10 years of OROP for their Courage & Sacrifice



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed the government's commitment to honouring India's armed forces, praising the 'One Rank, One Pension' (OROP) as a tribute to the courage and sacrifices of veterans and ex-service personnel, as the scheme marked its 10 years on Thursday.

Taking to X, PM Modi posted, "On this day, 'One Rank, One

Pension' (OROP) was implemented. This was a tribute to the courage and sacrifices of our veterans and ex-service personnel who dedicate their lives to protecting our nation. The decision to implement OROP was a significant step towards addressing this long-standing demand and reaffirming our nation's gratitude to our heroes."

"It would make you all happy

that over the decade, lakhs of pensioners and pensioner families have benefitted from this landmark initiative. Beyond the numbers, OROP represents the government's commitment to the well-being of our armed forces," he added.

The Prime Minister also reiterated the government's commitment to do every possible thing to strengthen the armed forces and further the welfare of those who serve the nation.

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh also expressed appreciation for OROP, calling it a core aspect of PM Modi's policy towards the armed forces.

"The 'One Rank, One Pension' (OROP) has been an important pillar of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's policy towards the Armed Forces. The Government under his leadership is committed to take care of the soldiers and their families," Singh stated.

Rahul backs caste census again, promises to remove 50% quota limit



KAVITA SHARMA
Nagpur

Asserting and reaffirming his position on the 'caste census', the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi said that the actual name of the caste census was justice and it will set a new paradigm of development in the country. Speaking at the Samvidhan Samman Sannam here on Wednesday, Gandhi said that come what may, he will ensure that the caste census is carried out in the country and the 50% bar on the reservations is removed. The Leader of Opposition maintained that the caste census was important because 90 percent of the population of this country had practically no say in the power and owned no wealth, both of power and wealth were being controlled by a select few people. He said that once the caste census is carried out, every Dalit, every OBC, every Adivasi, every member of the minority class, the poor from the general caste and the women will come to know how much resources they own and how much power they have. Quoting an economist who told him that India was among the countries with most inequality, Gandhi suggested it was because of caste discrimination. He said, it is not being felt by those from the general castes, but is very much felt everyday by people belonging to the Dalit, the backward or the Adivasi communities. Countering Prime Minister Narendra Modi's charge that he (Rahul) by seeking caste census was trying to divide the country, Rahul Gandhi said, he only wanted to tell the 90 percent of the country's people where they stood in terms of owning wealth or having control over power and resources.

Mango kernel controversy persists despite Odisha govt probe

ARABINDA MOHAPATRA
Bhubaneswar

The controversy over death of two tribal women from Kandhamal district allegedly after consuming mango kernels continues to dominate news despite chief minister Mohan Majhi ordering an inquiry by the revenue divisional commissioner (RDC) into the tragedy. The incident, which occurred at Mandipanka village in Daringbadi block on recently, also left six other women ill, with two in critical condition. The deceased have been identified as Runi Majhi (25) and Ramita Majhi (32).

The controversy over death of two tribal women from Kandhamal district allegedly after consuming mango kernels continues to dominate news despite chief minister Mohan Majhi ordering an inquiry by the revenue divisional commissioner (RDC) into the tragedy. The incident, which occurred at Mandipanka village in Daringbadi block on recently, also left six other women ill, with two in critical condition. The deceased have been identified as Runi Majhi (25) and Ramita Majhi (32).

My husband can bring peace to J&K: Yasin Malik's wife writes to Rahul Gandhi

NEW DELHI: Mushaal Hussein Mullick, the wife of jailed Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief, Yasin Malik, wrote to Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi, urging him to initiate a debate in Parliament for her husband, who she claims can bring peace to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

Mullick, a former assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on human rights and women empowerment, believes that Yasin Malik's role in the ongoing peace process in J&K is critical and that his plight must be addressed urgently.

"Rahul Ji, Yasin Malik could be a force for peace in Jammu and Kashmir, if only he is given a fair chance," Mullick wrote, urging the Congress leader to



intervene before Malik's deteriorating health leads to irreversible consequences. "The ongoing treatment of my husband is nothing short of torture, and I request you to help us secure justice for him," she added.

In a letter to Gandhi, Mullick drew attention to the ongoing legal battles her husband faces, particularly a decades-old sedition case in which the National

Investigation Agency (NIA) has now demanded the death penalty. Malik, who has been at the forefront of Kashmir's separatist movement, is currently involved in challenging the NIA's appeal for capital punishment in a terror funding case.

The NIA's charges stem from a 2017 investigation into terror financing involving Malik along with several others. In 2022,

Malik was sentenced to life imprisonment by a trial court after he pleaded guilty to the charges.

However, according to Mullick, Malik's detention and the demand for his death sentence are "part of a broader political vendetta." She claimed that since 2019, the BJP-led central government has subjected Malik to "inhumane" treatment, and his trials have been "politically motivated." "Malik is being tried for waging war against India in a 35-year-old case, and now, fabricated charges are being used to demand his execution," Mullick alleged in the letter. She further stated that her husband, who once advocated for armed struggle, had renounced violence years ago, embracing the path of non-violence and peace.

Priyanka gets overwhelmingly warm response across Wayanad

KAVITA SHARMA
Wayanad

Congress general secretary and the UDF candidate from Wayanad parliamentary constituency, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has been getting an overwhelmingly warm response from people across the constituency.

Given her gentle and affable disposition and demeanour, people easily connect with her and feel very comfortable in talking to her frankly without any inhibitions, while listing their issues and problems. They also feel free to ask her all sorts of questions. It may be recalled that Ms Priyanka Gandhi Vadra had promised the people of Wayanad on the day of filing her nomination papers that she will be directly reaching out to them and she has been fulfilling her promise every day, meeting a cross section of people from morning till evening. During a visit that affirms



her commitment to understanding the grassroots issues of Wayanad's farmers, Ms Vadra spent the morning with a local farmer in Manjoora, Padijarathara Grama Panchayath. The farmer has dedicated over 35 years to banana cultivation, working on 20 cents of wetland and an acre of dryland. During the visit, she listened keenly to the challenges faced by banana farmers, particularly regarding the impacts of rising costs and other farming hardships in the region. She assured the farmer of her commitment to raising these issues and advocating for solutions that support the livelihoods of Wayanad's agricultural community.

Haryana Congress: Will Rahul Dare to Kick Out the Black Sheep?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN

The Haryana Congress party, which was flying high after winning half the seats in the Lok Sabha elections, is stunned by the results of the Assembly elections held just six months after that were highly contrary to its expectations. The Congress was not even dreaming of getting anything less than a two-thirds majority. The supporters of a Haryana leader had started sleeping with the Chief Minister's seat in their lap. That leader himself had also started speaking every word of his address in the manner of a Chief Minister. But the tables turned and the statement given by the then and BJP's declared future Chief Minister, Nayab Saini, -- "We have made all the arrangements for the victory", shown a thumb to all the hopes and imaginations of the Congress by securing an absolute majority.

Now the situation is such that the Congress, which has been defeated by an unexpected seat margin, is not even able to decide the name of the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Assembly even after almost a month has passed. People have started jokingly saying that if God forbid it had got the majority, would they have decided the name of the Chief Minister? The problem is not that it does not have the desired number of MLAs, but the problem is that to take this decision has become a noose around the neck of the weak high command. The repeated wrong decisions of the high command have axed the feet of the high command itself, paralyzing its decision-making and control power and has left it as a puppet in the hands of the only one person in the state.

Who is that person, in front of whose aura the light of the high command fades? What is the reason that the high command is not able to come out of the state of indecisiveness? Why has this person become so powerful?

To find the answer to all these questions, political analysts consider the initial step taken by the Congress high command, buoyed by the massive victory in the 2005 assembly elections, to hand over the Chief Minister's throne to Bhupinder Hooda, a Jat leader, by thrashing Bhajan Lal, the leader of non-Jats. In this election, which was fought under the leadership of former Chief Minister Chaudhary Bhajan Lal, the Congress had won 67 out of 90 seats. The high command, worried about the growing stature of Bhajan Lal, handed over the throne to a person, Bhupinder Hooda, who could be directed by the high command as per its desire, to cut Bhajan Lal's wings.

From the very beginning, the Congress had been getting support from all castes and classes. Although the Brahmin community remained dominant there, the Dalit and backward classes also considered the Congress as their well-wisher. The Jats had accepted the farmer leader, who emerged in the form of Chaudhary Devi Lal, as their umbrella leader, taking advantage of which Bhajan Lal expanded his sphere of influence by starting Jat-non-Jat politics. As, the Jats had started moving away from the Congress, so to reunite them and to narrow down the growing circle of Bhajan Lal, the congress high command used Hooda, an alternative to cut Bhajan Lal's wings. The Congress high command did not realize at that time that the weapon they were sharpening to cut Bhajan Lal would one day weaken the high command itself and force it to bow down.

And the results of this move started coming in the very next assembly elections. Though Bhajan Lal was ignored by the Congress party and forced to leave the party, his supporters were infuriated by this decision of the high command and the 2009 elections, which were fought under the leadership of Hooda, gave a glimpse of the result of this move by squeezing Congress to only 40



seats out of 90. Although Bhajan Lal's own separate party, Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC), won 7 seats and kept Congress below the majority mark, but a few power-hungry MLAs, who are usually readily available all the time in Haryana, snubbed the Haryana Janhit Congress (HJC) and supported Congress to facilitate Hooda back to power. The move of the Congress high command to reinstate Hooda further angered the non-Jat community and in the 2014 assembly elections, which were again fought under Hooda's leadership, the Congress was restricted to 15 seats. The high command began to realize its mistake and re-inducted Bhajan Lal's political heir Kuldeep Bishnoi in 2016 to bring the angry non-Jat community to its side. This also had an impact and in the 2019 assembly elections, the Congress's seats increased from 15 to a respectable 31, but the Congress's move to separate Dalit community leader Ashok Tanwar from the Congress under pressure from Hooda's strategy also alienated the Congress from a particular community. To attract this class again, Congress made Kumari Selja take charge of the state Congress, which Hooda did not like and he slowly started reducing Selja's stature to and finally, by preventing Selja from being sent to Rajya Sabha again, he got his own son Deepender Hooda nominated and by removing further Selja from the post of president, he got his own yes man Uday Bhan crowned and strengthened his hold on the state party.

Hooda's next target was former Chief Minister late Chaudhary Bansi Lal's daughter-in-law Kiran Chaudhary, he not only deprived her of the post of Congress Legislature Party leader and got himself seated on this chair, but also forced her to leave the Congress. Before this, Bhajan Lal's son Kuldeep Bishnoi was also forced to leave the party again. Now only Randeep Surjewala and Kumari Selja are left as the opposing voices of Hooda in the state party. To prevent Surjewala from being made a Rajya Sabha candidate from Haryana, Ajay Maken, who is close to the high command, was made the party's nominee, but the neglected Kuldeep Bishnoi and Kiran Chaudhary gave Hooda a hard blow and Hooda's candidate Maken had to face defeat despite having the sufficient number of MLAs. Later, the high command had to send Surjewala to Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan.

In the recently held assembly elections, Hooda alone grabbed 72 out of 90 tickets to keep Kumari Selja and Surjewala away from claiming the Chief Minister's chair in the state. Neglected in ticket distribution, Selja sat in 'Kopphavan' (dissociating from election campaign) for 10 days during the assembly election battle and showed her displeasure to the high command, but the high command did not pay any attention to Selja's indifference for 10 days. And this indifference of Selja showed the Congress its true colours. Either the high command was unaware of this matter or was pretending to be unaware and not giving any attention to Selja, but the question here is whether the high command was so

confident that it could see a huge victory in Haryana even without Selja or was the high command under someone's pressure and was forced to overlook Selja's indifference? In both the cases, the high command's weakness and powerlessness in decision making is clearly indicated.

Why the name of the leader of the legislative party not being decided?

The Congress high command felt that the slogan of 'Kisan- Pehlawan- Agniveer' would give it a majority on the ground. Political thinkers believe that so much ruckus was created by the influential Jat community of Haryana that the high command felt that the Jat leader Hooda would conquer the stronghold. Hooda too, taking the sloganeering of the Jat voters as support for the Congress, was making arrangements to secure his seat as the Chief Minister and was engaged in a way to defeat his rival group instead of defeating BJP. It was appearing throughout the election as if the Congress party had turned into Hooda Congress, this election was not being fought for the party but for the personal interests.

As the Jat community getting more preference repeatedly, the OBC and the Dalit community turned away from the Congress due to Selja's indifference. On the other hand, seeing the factionalism in Congress, the Jat community also put aside their animosity towards BJP and gave 30% votes to the BJP. As a result, Congress was left helpless and BJP got win.

Ground level political thinkers analyse that the Jats are always a divided house. While voting they never use their verdict unitedly in favour of a single candidate, rather they vote according to their village level politics, which never allows them to unite. BJP has understood this fact, whereas congress failed as its booth level roots have become defunct due to non-functioning of its organisational wings. The political analysts suggest that if the congress wants to regain its past glory in Hary-

ana, it must have to woo its old-time core supporters such as OBC and SC categories voters by giving them a freehand representation as Leader of Opposition (LoP) and State Party President. Better they appoint a strong Ahirwal leader as state chief to get the strength in OBC, especially Yadav community and an SC leader as LoP.

After the big blow in Haryana assembly elections, now the high command felt that the local leaders of the party have ruined the party. Rahul Gandhi himself had to say - In Haryana, the leaders ignored the party's interest and gave importance to their own interest. But what's the use crying over the spilled milk. If Rahul Gandhi has recognised the Black Sheep, 'Will He Dare to Kick Them Out?'

Now the high command is facing a situation of snake and shrew. They neither can shake Hooda off nor embrace him. On one hand, there is a fear of the spark of disintegration in the party and on the other hand, there is a fear of losing non-Jat votes. If Hooda is again made the leader of the legislative party, then there is a danger of the non-Jat community, especially the Dalit community, getting alienated and if Hooda or the person nominated by him is not made the leader of the legislative party, on the strength of the numbers of his supporting MLAs, Hooda may divorce the Congress and become the leader of the legislative party himself and as a result of this development in Haryana, the Congress may lose access to power in Maharashtra also. In this state of confusion, the Congress is keeping the name of the leader of the legislative party hanging. This is a very difficult situation for the Congress and the gains and losses of this decision are now reflecting not only in the state but also in the politics of the country. Let us see which way the wind blows!

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

Union Govt Allocates Funds for Rural Local Bodies in Haryana, Tripura, and Mizoram



NEW DELHI: The Union government has released the 15th Finance Commission Grants during the financial year 2024-25, for the rural local bodies of Haryana, Tripura and Mizoram, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj announced on Tuesday.

Panchayati Raj institutions of Haryana have been given untied grants amounting to Rs 194.867 crore as part of the first instalment. These funds have been disbursed for 18 eligible district panchayats, 139 eligible block panchayats and 5, 911 eligible gram panchayats in the state that fulfilled the mandatory conditions for release, according to the official statement.

For the rural local bodies in Tripura, the first instalment of untied grants amounting to Rs 31.40 crore and first instalment of tied grants amounting to Rs 47.10 crore has been released. These funds are for all the 1, 260 rural local bodies including (Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council), HQ; 40 block advisory committees; and 587 village committees, the statement said.

The fifteenth Finance Commission has also released funds for Panchayati Raj institutions of Mizoram, as part of the second instalment of untied grants of the financial year 2022-23 amounting to Rs 21.30 crore. These funds are for all 834 village councils including Autonomous District Council areas.

The untied grants are uti-

lised by rural local bodies for location-specific felt needs, under the 29 subjects enshrined in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution, except for salaries and other establishment costs. While the tied grants can be used for the basic services of sanitation and maintenance of ODF status, and this should include management and treatment of household waste, and human excreta and fecal sludge management in particular. The supply of drinking water, rainwater harvesting and water recycling is also included in the list.

The Fifteenth Finance Commission grants aim at strengthening rural local self-governance by empowering rural local bodies. These funds help them to become more capable, accountable, and self-reliant, driving sustainable development in rural areas. Aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Viswas, Sabka Prayas', this initiative supports inclusive growth and participatory democracy, vital for development of the country, the official statement observed.

The Centre, through the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Ministry of Jal Shakti (Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation), recommends release of finance commission grants to states for rural local bodies, which are then released by the Ministry of Finance. The allocated grants are recommended and released in two instalments in a financial year.



Reforms crucial to balance GST gains and gaps

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue trends this financial year have been marked by a series of highs and lows, reflecting fluctuating economic activity. April set an impressive record with collections surpassing 2 lakh crore, supported by strong year-end filings, while July and October followed with notable peaks. However, these periods of robust growth were offset by slower months, with gross revenue growth hitting a three-year low of 7.3% in June and further declining to 6.5% in September. Although October's receipts showed an encouraging 8.9% year-on-year growth, the overall net GST revenue growth has now slipped to 9%, down from around 10.2% in August. For fiscal policymakers, these trends present both a challenge and an opportunity. While indirect tax revenues need to accelerate to meet budgetary targets, direct taxes and non-tax revenue collections remain strong, providing some cushion against potential shortfalls. Tight control over revenue and capital spending has also helped manage fiscal pressures. Notably, GST collections reflect the previous month's consumption trends, offering early insights into the festive season's impact on private spending. October's numbers suggest some recovery, but November's receipts, covering the major festive period with Dussehra and Deepavali, will offer a clearer view of whether improved consumer sentiment is driving sustained demand. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recently highlighted sluggish GST revenue growth as a possible indicator of slowing economic momentum. Yet, the central bank remains cautiously optimistic about the effects of seasonal spending. Initial car sales data, showing stronger growth in premium SUVs than overall categories, suggests a K-shaped recovery, with certain consumer segments rebounding faster. As the GST Council prepares to meet, it must consider accelerating rate rationalisation. Lowering taxes on essential items like cement and insurance could spur demand and, in turn, offset potential revenue losses through higher volumes. A balanced policy approach could strengthen GST collections and support broader economic stability.

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Business Quotes

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DR KR ANTONY HIGHLIGHTS NEED FOR EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT TO DEAL WITH AIIMS, RURAL HEALTH VACANCIES



We do not need any more AIIMS. We do not need any more CHCs. Look at whatever is available now. Make them work first and then build new ones. Deliver on your promises, make them complete and then make new promises in the Budget. This is sound advice.

From the outside, 11 out of 18 All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) built recently are impressive to look at. They are gigantic structures built in the cities of various States as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) under the Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission. But what lies inside is hollow and a disappointment for patients. These academic institutions have 40% vacancy in teaching and research faculties.

How do students get trained in specialities with such a vacancy rate of teachers? These academic centres are supposed to provide specialist doctors to district and Community Health Centres (CHC). Roughly, when it comes to specialist posts, two thirds in the rural areas and one third in the urban areas are vacant. Thus, instead of creating more new AIIMS we need to strengthen existing medical colleges.

The ground reality

The Health Dynamics of India 2022-23 report presents a shocking and sad picture — 79.9% vacancy in 5,491 rural CHCs in 757 districts in India. Further, only 4,413 specialists are available against the 21,964 staff needed. Since the year 2014, the shortfall of specialists in CHCs has hovered around the 17,500 mark despite more post-graduate medical seats having been created — 72,627 in 731 medical colleges. Specialists are unwilling to work for want of important conditions such as decent staff quarters, schools for children and complementary peer doctor's support. If there is a specialist available, the poor from rural and tribal areas need not travel to far-away district headquarters hospitals or a medical college hospital. In a CHC, there is supposed to be a first referral unit of 30 beds with four to five specialists for every 1.6 lakh to 2 lakh population. CHCs are crippled as there is a perennial shortage of specialists — a problem that has persisted for many years. Yet, States construct more CHCs to utilise the



funds available under the CSS. Ever since the National Rural Health Mission (NHRM) was launched, in 2005, till last year, 2,145 CHCs have been added in Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

There is another catch. States have to draw 60% of this fund from the 15th Finance Commission allocation, and not from the regular annual central allocation. Moreover, this is a capital infrastructure investment and the recurrent expenditure for maintenance of these new infrastructure facilities has to be met out of the annual health budget of the State. Apart from construction, the cost of human resources for medical education and health services can be met partially from the CSS. The dearth of skilled human resources for the health sector in service and non-availability in the open market for appointment, makes utilisation of budgetary provisions difficult. There was a deplorable 29% budgetary utilisation of the CSS in 2022-23 and only 50% in financial year 2023-24. Only the construction contractors made gains from such capex intensive allocation.

The lesson is this: do not reduce the central health Budget to only a capex pool for infrastructural activities, without having matching funds for other components such as drugs, diagnostics, ambulance facilities, emergency care and salaries of temporary staff recruited for the operationalisation of such health institutions built with CSS funds. If the aim of the CSS is to improve the health of the people, it must target the operational outcomes rather than sinking capital only in the mere construction of buildings that are under lock and key for years.

Emergencies and specialised care for

referred cases from primary care institutions cannot wait for these white elephants to become live and operationalised. They seek 'purchased care' from the exploitative and unregulated private sector. There is the risk of patients facing a "debt trap" for patients. There is already a patient flow to over-utilised and strained tertiary care institutions in district hospitals or medical college hospitals. Current needs are being met "somehow". There is no denial of this. But things can be much better if there are specialists.

Ghost CHCs

There are 785 districts in the country (as in local government directory data by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the National Informatics Centre, Government of India) but only 714 have a district hospital that provides tertiary care. There was a model of subdistrict specialised care in the form of a first referral unit, or FRUs — four per district in 600 districts of the country to provide emergency obstetric and neonatal care. Other requirements were having an obstetrician, anaesthetist, paediatrician with operation theatre and blood bank or blood storage unit. This was designed and partially operationalised under the Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme (1992-97).

CHCs are 30 bed units with five specialities — physician, surgeon, obstetrician, paediatrician and anaesthetist — to ideally serve a population of 1.6 lakh to 2 lakh. There are 5,491 CHCs in 785 districts, i.e., seven CHCs in a district, which is unnecessary. With the availability of only 4,413 specialists in India, it is obvious that these are ghost CHCs with less than one (0.8) specialist per CHC available. It is a mockery of public health. If we assume, for theoretical sake, that there is a uniform distribution of all five specialities in equal number in the pool of 4,413 specialists, we can afford to have just 882 sets of specialists to operationalise just one CHC other than a district hospital for specialised care. All those surgical theatres, labour rooms, and other amenities that have been built are a sheer waste of tax-payer's money.

There must be careful planning with the available number of specialists, with the best infrastructure created for a joint placement of five sets of specialists in one or two CHCs at the sub district level for specialised care. Period. There should be no room for any political pressure. When specialists are jointly posted, there is team support for professional achievement and family life. Having decent staff quarters with running water and 24-hour power backup will go a long way in boosting staff morale and stemming employee attrition.

Discussion on and addressing the issue of generating more specialists for postings at the sub-district level is another issue that can go on in parallel.

Students and medical service

From this point on, all government service sponsored seats for post-graduate medical education must be linked to a CHC or district hospital posting. The government must ensure this and there has to be an undertaking by the medical student aspirants. There can be a priority reservation for those aspirants who undertake a seven- to 10-year service bond in CHCs in underserved districts or areas. Those who are willing to go in for only a short-term assignment can be posted under the National Health Mission (NHM) — the NHRM and the National Urban Health Mission have been merged as the NHM — with a higher incentive package but without pension benefits. In the crisis now, this is a crucial step that will meet staff needs.

Creating a cadre of family medicine specialists with specialised skill training in essential and emergency surgical interventions, trauma care, emergency obstetrics and newborn care, and intensive medical care are only short cuts as it takes a lot more time to ensure that the shortage of specialists is resolved.

What is needed now is to manage things with the resources that are available in a smart and efficient manner.

Dr. K.R. Antony is a paediatrician and public health consultant in Kochi, Kerala, and formerly with UNICEF. Views are personal.



ABDULLAH NASSER ABUTHNAIN EXPLAINS HOW INITIATIVES BOOST WORKFORCE QUALITY, ENHANCING PROSPECTS FOR INDIANS



The future of Saudi-India labour cooperation

Saudi Arabia and India enjoy a special relationship that reflects decades-old economic and socio-cultural ties.

Diplomatic relations were established in 1947, and central to the enduring partnership is the significant exchange and collaboration that have greatly contributed to the development and prosperity of both nations.

Our two countries continue to share a close and mutually beneficial relationship, and Saudi Arabia is very proud to be a popular migration destination for Indian workers who have a strong affinity for the Kingdom. With over two million Indian expatriates working in the Kingdom, the ties between our nations have never been stronger or more productive.

Contributions of Indian expatriate workers

For decades, Indian expatriate workers have been an integral part of Saudi Arabia's workforce, bringing their skills, dedication, and resilience to various sectors. From construction to health care, education to engineering, their contributions have worked alongside the domestic workforce to build the Kingdom's infrastructure and enhance its social fabric.

In both countries we are focusing on our respective strengths in information



technology, space science, and other frontier technologies. This opens enormous opportunities for mutually beneficial collaboration. India possesses one of the largest pools of scientific and technical manpower in the world and is well-known for its technological prowess. Many Indian expatriates, who are specialists in IT, can contribute further to the growth of Saudi IT and knowledge-based industries as we step closer towards the goals set out in Vision 2030.

Recent high-level talks between Saudi and Indian leadership marked a pivotal moment in our ongoing relationship. These discussions paved the way for substantial Saudi investments in India, reflecting a shared commitment to economic collaboration and mutual prosperity.

Transforming the labour market

Our collaboration with India has helped pave the way for initiatives that have transformed the labour market in the Kingdom. The Labor Reform Initiative (LRI) in 2021 marked a significant leap forward, promoting free mobility, improving contractual relationships, and solidifying the legal rights of millions of workers.

Saudi Arabia has also focused on improving the well-being of expatriate workers through various initiatives, including greater protection of workers' wages, improved living conditions, and comprehensive health insurance, ensuring that Indian workers can thrive in a secure and supportive environment.

To further enhance the skills and employability of Indian workers, India has signed up for the Skills Verification Program with Saudi Arabia. This program aims to certify the qualifications and competencies of Indian workers, ensuring they meet the standards required by the Saudi job market. Such initiatives not only improve the quality of the workforce but also enhance the prospects of Indian workers in Saudi Arabia.

Other initiatives

Moreover, our bilateral relationship extends beyond labour collaboration. Saudi Arabia and India have engaged in numerous cultural exchange programmes, joint ventures in technology and innovation, and collaborative efforts in education, vocational training, and research. These initiatives have strengthened the socio-cultural bonds between our peoples and have paved the way for a more integrated and holistic partnership.

On the sidelines of the Global Labor Market Conference (GLMC) in Riyadh in December 2023, a memorandum of understanding was signed between Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development and the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in India to exchange knowledge and experience on the skills system and workforce development.

Looking ahead, it is crucial to continue these collaborative efforts to ensure the opportunities for Indian workers in the Kingdom's labour market continue to flourish.

This strong bilateral relationship underscores the benefits of cooperative engagement and shared goals. By working together, both nations can achieve greater economic stability and development, building a more prosperous future for all.

Abdullah Nasser Abuthnain is the Vice-Minister for Labour, Saudi Arabia. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

Melodies and liberation: Lata, Rafi's contribution

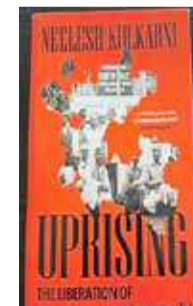
In *Uprising: The Liberation of Dadra and Nagar Haveli*, author Neelash Kulkarni uncovers a remarkable slice of history that intertwines art, patriotism, and the struggle for independence. This compelling narrative brings to life the little-known 1954 concert featuring legendary Indian singers Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammed Rafi, who, through their art, contributed to the liberation of Dadra and Nagar Haveli from Portuguese rule. Kulkarni's meticulous research, supported by interviews, archival records, and personal letters, crafts an in-depth look at a forgotten chapter in India's journey toward freedom.

Dadra and Nagar Haveli, now a Union Territory, were seized by the Portuguese in the late 18th century and remained under their rule until 1954, when an armed revolt, independent of Indian military intervention, finally liberated the enclaves. The official

incorporation of the territories into India, alongside Goa and Daman and Diu, followed in 1961. However, as Kulkarni reveals, the road to freedom was paved not only by arms but also by the collective spirit of those who felt the weight of foreign oppression. Kulkarni introduces readers to music director and freedom fighter Sudhir Phadke, who sought help from India's finest musical talents to fundraise for the armed resistance. Initially, Phadke's plan seemed too ambitious, especially when he approached Mangeshkar for support. However, Mangeshkar's connection to Goa and her frustration with the Portuguese harassment of devotees at her family's temple in Mangeshi swayed her resolve. Deeply moved, she vowed to lend her voice to the cause, stating, "I wish I could come and fight by your side, but since I cannot, I will help you raise resources."

Her commitment ignited enthusiasm, leading her to suggest inviting Mohammed Rafi to join her in this patriotic endeavour. Rafi's response, as documented by Kulkarni, was nothing short of inspirational. When Phadke's associate offered to pay for his travel, Rafi declined, declaring that it was his duty as an Indian to support the movement. "This country is also mine," he said. Rafi's sincerity was evident as he peppered Phadke with questions about the movement's plans and logistics, demonstrating an unexpected level of involvement and support beyond just performing.

The concert, however, faced initial setbacks. On the day of the performance, Mangeshkar was involved in a road accident, leading to a cancellation that left the venue dark and empty. Nonetheless, she remained steadfast, rescheduling the



Uprising: The Liberation of Dadra and Nagar Haveli
By Neelash Kulkarni
Westland;
250 pages; Rs399

performance for May 2. The eventual concert, though smaller in attendance than the first attempt, raised substantial funds. This money became instrumental in purchasing five rifles and three pistols on the black market — arms that would become crucial in the subsequent battle against the Portuguese.

Kulkarni doesn't simply narrate a patriotic tale; he intricately reconstructs the entire liberation effort, from the planning and procurement of weapons to the final confrontation that saw a band of 29 rebels confront over 300 well-armed Portuguese soldiers. These gripping scenes of courage and determination reveal the broader dimensions of India's freedom struggle, where

patriotism extended beyond geographical boundaries and into the hearts of artists like Mangeshkar and Rafi.

Kulkarni's *Uprising* is a fascinating and significant addition to the history of India's fight for freedom, shedding light on the powerful role that culture and art played in the liberation efforts. By drawing on interviews with descendants and survivors, as well as archival records, the author paints a vivid picture of an overlooked part of India's independence story.

Through the lens of Mangeshkar and Rafi's contributions, *Uprising* honours those who used their talents for a greater cause, reminding readers of the indelible impact that artists and musicians can have on social and political movements. This book not only fills a gap in historical knowledge but also provides a deeper understanding of how cultural icons have shaped national identity. For readers interested in Indian history, patriotism, or the arts, *Uprising* is a powerful and inspiring read that celebrates the spirit of resistance and the transformative power of music.

Ministry of MSME successfully Concludes Special Campaign 4.0

NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) has announced the completion of Special Campaign 4.0, conducted throughout October 2024.

The campaign achieved notable success in file management, cleanliness initiatives, and technological integration across its departments and field formations. In a significant administrative achievement, the Ministry reviewed over 10,000 physical files, leading to the disposal of 2,209 outdated documents. The campaign also saw the review of 905 e-office files, with 329 being closed. The Ministry reported 100 per cent accomplishment in ten key parameters, including the disposal of PMO references and public grievances, while maintaining over 80 per cent success in handling MP references and



parliamentary assurances.

The cleanliness aspect of the campaign yielded impressive results, with 654 cleanliness drives conducted nationwide, covering 43,342 square feet of office space. The Mahatma Gandhi Institute for Rural Industrialisation (MGIRI) alone cleaned over 10,140 square feet, generating revenue of Rs 21.84 lakh through the disposal of

and legal matters.

The campaign also focused on women's health and hygiene, with initiatives including the installation of sanitary pad disposal machines at strategic locations in Maharashtra and New Delhi. Environmental consciousness was demonstrated through the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' plantation drive and innovative waste management projects, including MGIRI's creation of a robot sculpture using 150 kg of scrap material.

Public participation was encouraged through an online Swachhata pledge, which garnered over 35,000 pledges from entrepreneurs, staff members, and organisations. The Ministry's comprehensive approach to the campaign demonstrates its commitment to administrative efficiency, environmental sustainability, and public welfare.

obsolete items. In a notable technological advancement, the Ministry implemented a new SCDPM portal instance, enabling real-time updates and better coordination among field formations. An Executive Dashboard was also integrated with six crucial APIs to streamline administrative processes and improve efficiency in handling public grievances, RTI requests,

Adani Group Stocks Surge, Add Rs 54,381 Cr in Market Cap



NEW DELHI: The share price of all the companies in the Adani Group surged on Wednesday, adding Rs 54,381.06 crore worth of wealth to the investors' kitty. The market cap of Adani Group companies rose to Rs 16 lakh crore. Shares of Adani Group companies gained, while the NSE Nifty 50 recorded the best session since September 20 and the BSE Sensex since October 28. The Nifty 50 ended 270.75 points or 1.12 per cent higher at 24,484.05, and the Sensex closed 901.50 points or 1.13 per cent up at 80,378.13. Earlier on Wednesday, Adani Energy Solutions rose 7.48 per cent to Rs 1,090.95 apiece, while Adani Green Energy rose as much as 5.46 per cent to Rs 1,733.95 per share. This comes after Nuvama's forecast that Adani Energy Solutions could be added to the MSCI index in the November rejig. Adani Enterprises Ltd. also rose 5.3 per cent to Rs 3,070 per share and closed 4.48 per cent higher. The share in the last one year has risen 35.63 per cent.

Niva Bupa Health Insurance Company Limited has Rs 2,200 cr IPO

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Niva Bupa Health Insurance Company Limited, one of India's largest and fastest growing standalone retail health insurer (SAHI) based on overall health GDP in Fiscal 2024, is coming out with its maiden IPO priced at Rs 70 to Rs 74 per Equity Share -- aggregating to Rs 2,200 crores.

The IPO -- which will open on November 7, 2024 and close on November 11, 2024 -- is a mix of fresh issue of upto Rs 800 crore and an offer of sale upto Rs 1,400 crore by Bupa Singapore Holdings Pte. Ltd., Fettle Tone LLP.

Krishnan Ramachandran,



MD & CEO, said that Rs 1,500 crore from its fresh issuance will be utilized for augmentation of capital base to maintain and strengthen solvency levels; and general corporate purposes.

Highlighting Niva Bupa Health Insurance Company Limited's effort to enable customers to navigate their health-

care journey by accessing its health insurance products and services, he said Niva Bupa adopts a "digital-first" approach in their business and implements technology integration across every step of the customer journey including customer onboarding, underwriting, claims and renewals.

ACME Solar Holdings Limited has IPO of Rs 2,900 crores

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

ACME Solar Holdings Limited, a renewable energy company in India with a portfolio of solar, wind, hybrid and firm and dispatchable renewable energy ("FDRE") projects, is coming out with its Initial Public Offering (IPO) priced at Rs 275 to Rs 289 per Equity Share --



aggregating to Rs 2,900 crores. The IPO, which will open on November 6, 2024 and close on

November 8, 2024, is a mix of Fresh Issue of up to Rs 2,395 crore and an Offer For Sale up to Rs 505 crore by ACME Cleantech Solutions Private Limited.

Manoj Upadhyay, Founder & Chairman, ACME Solar, said that Rs 1,795 crore from the fresh issue will be utilized for

investment in its subsidiaries for repayment/prepayment, in full or in part, of certain outstanding borrowings availed by its subsidiaries; and general corporate purposes.

Upadhyay told this correspondent that while the company had been dependent on China for most of its solar modules needs, India stepping in as manufacturer of solar panels has reduced this need.

Jet Airways Fiasco: Fate of 1.48 Lakh Retail Shareholders in Limbo



MUMBAI: The fate of around 1.48 lakh retail shareholders who hold around 20 per cent stake in the beleaguered Jet Airways remains uncertain after the Supreme Court ordered the liquidation of Naresh Goyal-led grounded airline.

At the current market capitalisation of Jet Airways at Rs 386.69 crore, retail shareholding in the airline is around Rs 74.6 crore. Retail shareholders held around 20 per cent stake in Jet Airways (as of September

30). Other major shareholders include Etihad Airways (24 per cent) and the erstwhile promoters (25 per cent).

The stock of Jet Airways, locked in a 5 per cent lower circuit following the order, ended at Rs 34.04 apiece on Thursday. The share hit a high of Rs 63.15 in March but has lost more than 46 per cent since then. A Bench, headed by CJI DY Chandrachud, allowed the lenders' plea against the transfer of ownership of the grounded airline to Jalan Kal-

rock Consortium (JKC). The Bench invoked its extraordinary powers under Article 142 of the Constitution "for doing complete justice" between the parties and ordered the appointment of a liquidator forthwith. Further, it ordered the forfeiture of Rs 200 crore infused by the JKC and directed lenders to invoke the Rs 150 crore Performance Bank Guarantee (PBG). In the plea filed before the apex court, the Committee of Creditors (CoC), led by the State Bank of India, has said that the proposed revival plan was not in the best interest of lenders and questioned the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) order upholding the resolution plan.

Due to severe financial distress, Jet Airways, once one of India's largest and most popular airlines, entered the corporate insolvency resolution process under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) in June 2019.

India faces barriers to expanding Renewable Energy capacity: ISA Report



NEW DELHI: India, the world's fourth-largest renewable energy market, is facing significant challenges in scaling up its renewable energy (RE) capacities, according to a new report from the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

While India has made remarkable strides in solar power, hurdles such as higher taxes, land acquisition issues, and regulatory uncertainties are slowing the pace of growth.

One of the key obstacles is the rise in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on essential solar components. As of October 2021, the Indian government raised the GST on solar cells and modules from 5 per cent to 12 per cent.

This increase has elevated overall project taxes from 8-9 per cent to 12-13 per cent. Moreover, a 40 per cent customs duty on imported solar modules, effective from April 2022, threatens to push the tax burden on projects up to 30 per cent, significantly raising costs for developers.

Land acquisition is another pressing issue. The report highlights that India's small average landholding size -- just 1.16 hectares -- makes it challenging to acquire large tracts of land for solar projects. This complicates negotiations, as multiple stakeholders must be involved, slowing project execution.

Regulatory inconsistency is also a barrier. The ISA report points out that varying net metering policies across states and a lack of support from local power distributors have led developers to move away from the rooftop solar market.

Financing remains a challenge, with higher interest rates and longer approval processes for rooftop solar loans, making them less attractive despite their superior financial returns.

Despite these challenges, the report commended India's role in driving down solar energy auction prices.

Google India Partners with MeitY to Empower 10,000 Startups Across 7 Cities

NEW DELHI: India is solidifying its position as a global AI leader, driven by a thriving tech ecosystem and unparalleled talent pool. A recent report by NASSCOM underscores this rapid growth, showing a 3.6X rise in generative AI startups since 2023.

This surge spans diverse sectors, from foundational AI models to practical applications, hinting at a major transformation in industries ranging from healthcare to finance. To support this momentum, Google has joined forces with the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) Startup Hub, aiming to empower 10,000 Indian startups in their AI journey. As part of this initiative, Google recently announced the launch of the "Google for Startups AI Academy India," a dedicated program to provide resources, mentorship, and strategic support for budding AI ventures across the country.

Aligned with India's ambitious IndiaAI Mission, the program seeks to accelerate the development of homegrown,



human-centered AI solutions that directly benefit Indian society. Starting in November and running through December 2024, the AI Academy will host bootcamps across seven Indian cities: Bangalore, Hyderabad, Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Thiruvananthapuram. Google has partnered with leading incubators and accelerators for the initiative, including Kerala Startup Mission, T-Hub & MATH, IHFC-IIT Delhi, NSRCEL at IIM Bangalore, SINE at IIT Bombay, IIT Madras Incubation Cell, and IIMA Ventures.

The program offers a three-day, intensive bootcamp designed specifically for early-stage startups addressing key societal challenges in sectors such as healthcare, climate change, agriculture, education, financial inclusion, cybersecurity, and public infrastructure.

Pharmapreneurs in India and their Career Transition



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH



DIVYA TREHAN

Pharmapreneurship has gained attention from many prominent institutions, e.g., The University of Maryland School of Pharmacy has got the word, 'Pharmapreneurship' registered. Their initiative, 'The Pharmapreneurs Farm' is a dedicated space for their faculty, staff, and students to collaborate, nurture, and develop their pharmapreneurial ideas.

Career Transition has played significant role in nurturing pharmapreneurs in India as it is the interaction of career transitions and entrepreneurship which represents a critical link where individuals navigate changes in their professional lives while they explore opportunities to pursue entrepreneurial endeavours. Multiple factors such as shift in labour market dynamics, accumulated experience, understanding of market dynamics, technological advancements, etc drive this convergence. Entrepreneurs have their own circumstances and justification regarding their plunge into entrepreneurship stream. For example, Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, shared 'regret minimization framework'. Bezos explained that he asked himself what he would regret more when he was 80 years old: Trying to build something he had strong conviction in and failing, or failing to give it a try? Bezos realized that not trying would haunt him every day.

Qualification, work experience, self-realisation and motivation had huge impact on career transitions of pharmapreneurs in India. As pharmaceutical industry is complex, and highly regulated at each stage of value chain so educational qualification and experience contributes a lot to the success of pharmapreneurs. As majority of Indian pharmaceutical companies are family-owned or are dominated by promoters so career transition of the founders and promoters of prominent pharmaceutical companies in India provides interesting insights.

Late Dr. Khwaja Abdul Hamied, the founder of Cipla Limited had learnt tricks of the trade with his father who started a shop -- Alison Chemists & Druggists after his retirement. Dr. Hamied taught at Jamia Millia too while managing the shop. He had extensive training in chemical and technical analysis of food stuffs, drugs and medicines while he stayed in Germany after his Ph.D. He even ran an agency of Seidel & Naumann, Dresden for typewriters at Bombay before entering into an agreement with Homo Pharma, Berlin in 1929 for the agency of 'Okasa', a fast-selling drug in Europe as an outstanding restorative tonic. It was in 1935 that the Chemical, Industrial & Pharmaceutical Laboratories (CIPLA) Limited was registered as a public limited company.

Dr. Desh Bandhu Gupta had PG degree in Science (Chemistry) and taught at the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) in Pilani, Rajasthan for some time. He worked for a British pharma company that became part of Sanofi-Aventis (now Sanofi). It was in 1968 that he started Lupin Limited with just Rs.



5,000 at that time taken from his wife. Lupin's first manufacturing plant started supplying iron and folic acid tablets for the flagship programme of the Government of India. Cadila Labs was founded by Ramanbhai Patel and Indravadan A. Modi. Ramanbhai Patel was a pharmacy professor and co-founder Indravadan A. Modi had his degree in Pharmaceuticals and Chemicals before joining as the Chief Chemist in a Chemical manufacturing unit. Founders had complementary skill set. They came together to set up Cadila Labs and started making vitamins to treat anemia as vitamins were in short supply at that point of time. In 1995, Ramanbhai Patel and I.A. Modi parted ways to set up their own companies -- Cadila Pharmaceuticals -- Cadila Healthcare (now, Zyds Lifesciences) respectively.

Dr. Kallam Anji Reddy, founder of Dr. Reddy's Labs was a B.Sc. graduate from Bombay University with specialization in Pharmaceutical Science and Fine Chemicals. He obtained Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from National Chemical Laboratory (NCL), Pune. His career transition was unique as he joined the state-owned

Indian Drugs & Pharmaceuticals Limited (IDPL) when he left in 1973. He became part of founding team of bulk drug manufacturing ventures in late 70s and early 80s, and in 1984, he formed Dr. Reddy's Labs (DRL). Samprada Singh, founder of Alkem opened a medical store in 1953, and formed a pharmaceutical distribution company in the name of Laxmi Pharma after about six years. Then Magadh Pharma was started as a pharmaceutical distribution company in Patna (Bihar). His younger brother, Basudeo N. Singh completed his graduation and opted for teaching initially and joined the business on receiving a call from his elder brother.

Uttambhai Nathalal Mehta (U.N. Mehta), founder of Torrent Group initially worked as a medical representative with Sandoz in 1940s and founded Torrent in 1959. He pioneered the concept of niche marketing when all players in the pharma sector used to focus on the masses. Ramesh Juneja, founder of Mankind Pharma graduated with a Science degree from a Meerut-based college and joined pharma sector in 1974 as a sales representative with Kee Pharma. He became a

Regional Sales Representative for Lupin Limited in 1975. After resigning from Lupin in 1983, he and his brothers, Rajeev Juneja, Gresh K. Juneja along with their sister Prabha Arora and an external partner, founded BestoChem. Ramesh Juneja, Rajeev Juneja, and Prem Kumar Arora left BestoChem in 1995 to launch Mankind Pharma.

Hasmukh Chudgar, founder of Intas Pharma, had his Bachelor of Pharmacy in 1954 from a prominent college under Gujarat university. After graduation, he worked in Mumbai for International Pharmaceutical Agency which ultimately inspired the name of his own company -- INTAS. The firm, in which he worked had two partners out of which one was an American citizen. After death of the local partner, the US-based partner went back to the US and entire responsibility was with Hasmukh Chudgar. International Pharmaceuticals was founded in 1977 as a sole proprietary organization and name was changed to Intas Labs Pvt. Ltd. In May 1985, and subsequently to Intas Pharmaceuticals Limited in March 1995.

Journey of Kiran Mazum-

dar -- Shaw is remarkable as she obtained B.Sc. (Hons.) degree in Zoology from Bangalore University in 1973 and graduated as a Master Brewer from Ballarat university in 1975 to follow her father's footsteps who was a master brewer. She was denied the job of heading the brewery because of gender bias. Her entrepreneurial journey took off when Ireland-based Biocon Biochemicals approached her for a partnership to source some enzymes from India, and a joint venture was formed in 1978. She started her own company, Biocon, in a rented garage in Bangalore. Stake of Irish partner was acquired by Unilever, UK in 1989. Unilever kept on insisting that she should dilute her stakes but could not be convinced. In 1998, she and her husband John Shaw bought the sharehold of Unilever in Biocon to form an independent company -- Biocon.

Glenmark was established by the founder Gracias Saldanha in 1977 who had master's degree in science, and a Diploma in Management Studies. The founder had worked with different pharmaceutical companies such as Abbott Labs, E.Merck for more than 12 years before setting up Glenmark Pharma named after his two sons -- Glenn and Mark. Satish Ramanlal Mehta had a Post-graduate degree in Chemistry from Pune University and a PG diploma in Management from IIM-Ahmedabad founded Emcure Pharma in 1981. His experience with his father, in the distribution business of pharmaceutical products groomed him.

Alembic which was initially formed as Alembic Chemicals Works in 1907 had founders namely Prof. T. K. Gajjar, the

first renowned chemist in Western India, Prof. A. S. Kothbasker, a gold medalist in Technological Chemistry and B.D. Amin. Founders of Macleods Pharma had extensive experience in health/pharma as Girdhari Lal Bawri worked as a MR for a pharma company, and Rajendra Agarwal was a medical doctor. Initially, their family owned a Pharmacy in Jaipur. Murali Divi, founder of Divi's Labs holds Doctorate degree in pharmaceutical sciences and was a long-term partner of Dr. K. Anji Reddy before forming his own eponymous venture -- Divi's Labs.

Mahendra Prasad, founder of Aristo Pharma initially worked with Samprada Singh (Alkem) and later took up trading in pharmaceutical products before starting Aristo Pharma in 1971. Founder of J.B. Pharma, Jyotindra Bhagwanlal Mody established pharma distribution agency along with his siblings. Amit Bakshi, founder of Eris Lifesciences had served in Intas Pharma. Eris Lifesciences was founded by him along with his three colleagues. He realized the potential of the industry and started selling specialty drugs in cardiology and diabetology segments which he knew well as he had been working in the pharma industry since 1996.

There are exceptions too where founders came from different educational background. But in all these cases, prior experience had direct bearing on entrepreneurs to become pharmapreneurs. Before founding Sun Pharmaceutical Industries in 1983, Dilip Shingvi, otherwise a Commerce graduate, had exposure in pharmaceutical business as his father ran a small, wholesale medicine shop in Dawa bazaar in

Calcutta (name changed to Kolkata in 2001). USV was initially started as US Vitamin and Pharmaceutical by Vithal Balkrishna Gandhi who had his master's degree in economics from Columbia University. His initial venture was dealing in medical products and radio accessories when the company was named as American Products Company Limited. G.C. Surana, founder of Micro Labs even though worked as an accountant but it was a pharmaceutical distribution company, and became distribution partner initially before starting Micro Labs in 1973. P. V. Ramprasad Reddy, founder of Aurobindo Pharma had his bachelor's and master's degree in commerce. He had a brief stint with Dr. K. Anji Reddy. Co-founder K. Nityanand Reddy studied Chemistry so complementary strength helped in formation of Aurobindo Pharma in 1986.

There is a long list of pharmapreneurs in India but to generalize, education and experience of working in family pharma business on a small scale or working in pharmaceutical industry, remained two turning points in the life of almost all pharmapreneurs who founded the companies which now collectively hold more than 2/3rd market share of pharmaceutical industry in India.

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

SBI Forecasts Slower Economic Growth for India in Q2 FY25

NEW DELHI: India's GDP growth is projected to slow to 6.5 percent in the second quarter of the current fiscal year, according to economists at the State Bank of India (SBI), the country's largest lender.



The forecast comes amid broader discussions about the trajectory of India's economic growth, with analysts anticipating full-year FY25 growth to approach 7 percent.

The projection follows a notable deceleration in the April-June quarter, which recorded GDP expansion of 6.7 percent, marking the lowest growth rate in 15 quarters.

This trend has prompted several analysts to revise their growth expectations downward, raising questions about a potential cyclical slowdown in the economy.

SBI's analysis of 50 key economic indicators across agri-

cultural, industrial, and service sectors suggests mounting pressure on the domestic economy.

The bank's research indicates that the proportion of indicators showing acceleration declined to 69 percent in Q2FY25, compared to 80 percent in Q2FY24 and 78 percent in Q1FY25, though aggregate demand continues to grow at a reduced pace.

Despite the anticipated slowdown, SBI economists characterize this as a 'temporary impasse' and expect a shift in economic narrative from the December quarter onward.

Their optimism is supported by emerging signs of rural recovery, evidenced by increased tractor sales in October and consistent growth in two-wheeler and three-wheeler

sales. Additionally, rural agricultural wage growth showed acceleration in August.

Addressing concerns about urban demand, the economists suggest that current metrics may not adequately capture evolving urban consumption patterns, particularly in the quick commerce sector.

They also note that recent regulatory measures on unsecured lending and refinancing restrictions are helping to moderate the post-pandemic credit surge, especially in urban areas.

The report concludes with a cautionary note against implementing policy measures such as farm loan waivers or excessive reliance on minimum support prices, which the economists argue could distort credit culture and lead to unsustainable agricultural practices.

Indian Stock Market Opens Flat After US Fed Rate Cut



MUMBAI: The Indian benchmark indices opened flat on Friday after the second consecutive rate cut by the US Fed, as selling was seen in auto, PSU bank, media, oil and gas sectors.

Sensex was trading at 79,522.39 after slipping 19.40 points or 0.02 per cent. At the same time, Nifty was trading at 24,179.85 after slipping 19.50 points or 0.08 per cent.

The market trend remained negative. On the National Stock

Exchange (NSE), 746 stocks were trading in green, while 1463 stocks were trading in red. Nifty Bank was at 51,897.05 after slipping 19.45 points or 0.04 per cent. The Nifty Mid-cap 100 index was trading at 57,116.50 after gaining 7.35 points or 0.01 per cent. The Nifty Smallcap 100 index was trading at 18,749.75 after slipping 14.10 points or 0.08 per cent. Tata Motors, Reliance, ICICI Bank, Asian Paints, Maruti and NTPC

were the top losers in the Sensex pack. Infosys, Tech Mahindra, HDFC Bank, HCL Tech, Titan and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the top gainers. According to market experts, Nifty erased the gains from the previous session, closing near 24,200. Global markets showed mixed sentiment, with some moving higher after the Federal Reserve announced a rate cut. However, persistent selling by foreign institutional investors (FIIs) continues to weigh on the markets, they said.

In Asian markets, except Shanghai and Hong Kong, markets in Jakarta, Tokyo, Seoul and Bangkok are trading in the green. At the same time, US stock markets closed in the red on the previous trading day.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) sold equities worth Rs 4,888 crore on November 7, while domestic institutional investors bought equities worth Rs 1,786 crore on the same day.

Bitcoin Expected to Hit \$80,000 as Crypto fan Trump Edges Closer to Victory



NEW DELHI: As Donald Trump edged closer to victory in the US presidential election, Bitcoin surged to a record high of \$75,060, fuelling investors' excitement in the cryptocurrency sector.

The world's most valuable digital asset saw 7 per cent growth on Tuesday alone (US time).

Trump made Bitcoin a focal point during his campaign, saying he would make the US the "crypto capital of the world". Bitcoin hit a new record above \$75,000, almost surpassing \$1.5 trillion in valuation.

On Wednesday (India time), Bitcoin was hovering around \$73,000 per coin.

According to deVere Group CEO Nigel Green, the intersection of politics and cryptocurrency would play a defining role in shaping market trends.

"We've said for months that Trump's stance on cryptocurrency, combined with the uncertainty surrounding the election, would push Bitcoin to new heights," he said.

"This rally isn't just about the election; it's about the fundamental shifts happening in the digital financial system, of which Bitcoin is the leader. People are waking up to the fact that traditional systems are changing," Green added.

On the campaign trail, Trump vowed to end what he calls the "persecution" of the cryptocurrency industry and to position the United States as the "Bitcoin superpower of the world".

"Trump's open support of cryptocurrency has triggered this surge, as many investors anticipate that a Trump victory would clear the path for mainstream adoption and regulation that is both favourable and necessary for Bitcoin's continued growth," Green contended.

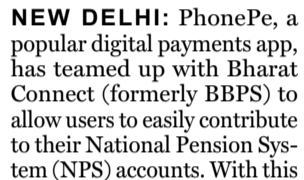
According to trade analysts, Bitcoin could climb as high as \$80,000 in the near future, driven by a combination of heightened demand, market sentiment and policy expectations under a Trump administration.

World Bank's IFC Extends USD 400 Mn Loan to Bajaj Finance for Green Initiatives



NEW DELHI: The International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector investment arm of the World Bank Group, has announced a USD 400 million loan facility to Bajaj Finance aimed at boosting electric vehicle adoption and sustainable consumer goods financing in India. The agreement will enable Bajaj Finance to expand its lending portfolio for electric two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and four-wheelers, marking a significant push toward sustainable transportation solutions. The strategic partnership also emphasises financial inclusion by strengthening Bajaj Finance's capacity to support women-owned microenterprises and women micro borrowers. This initiative aligns with both organisations' commitment to promoting gender equality in financial services across India.

PhonePe and Bharat Connect Join Hands to Simplify NPS Contributions for Users



NEW DELHI: PhonePe, a popular digital payments app, has teamed up with Bharat Connect (formerly BBPS) to allow users to easily contribute to their National Pension System (NPS) accounts. With this new feature, PhonePe makes retirement savings simple, accessible, and secure, giving millions the chance to plan their financial future directly from their phones.

Why It Matters: The NPS is a smart choice for retirement planning, offering tax benefits and a reliable savings corpus. Previously, people had to visit specific websites to make NPS contributions, but now they can do it directly through the PhonePe app. This feature also supports those who may not have had access to easy, digital payment methods for their retirement savings before.

Key Benefits: Convenience - PhonePe users can now contribute to NPS anytime, anywhere.

Security - PhonePe's secure payment system ensures safe transactions.

Inclusion - This partnership is designed to make financial planning accessible to everyone,

even those less familiar with traditional banking platforms.

How to Contribute to NPS on PhonePe: Open the PhonePe app and go to 'recharges and pay bills'. Choose 'National Pension System' in the 'Financial Services and Taxes' section.

Enter your 12-digit PRAN or mobile number, date of birth, tier, and the amount you want to contribute.

Confirm the details, agree to the terms, and select your payment method to complete the process.

Expert Insights: Noopur Chaturvedi, CEO of NPCI Bharat Bill Pay, says the integration aims to make retirement planning easier and more accessible.

Sonika Chandra, Chief Business Officer at PhonePe, highlights how this partnership enhances the user experience by offering a secure, user-friendly NPS contribution process.

Progcap offers new Fintech Solutions to Indian MSMEs



NEW DELHI: Progcap, a rapidly growing fintech specialising in supply chain financing, announced an ambitious plan to transform India's Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector by digitizing supply chains and enhancing access to capital. By developing user-friendly mobile applications and tech solutions, the company aims to empower small businesses to manage transactions, access credit limits, and request disbursements seamlessly. "We are building a comprehensive ecosystem for MSMEs, helping them digitise operations and integrate into the formal economy," said Pallavi Shrivastava, cofounder of Progcap. With India's MSME sector contributing about 30 per cent to the GDP and 45 per cent to exports, the company's efforts align closely with the government's financial inclusion initiatives to drive job creation and economic growth. India's MSMEs, which employ around 62 per cent of the country's workforce, often struggle with access to formal credit due to a lack of credit history and collateral, leaving a significant segment underserved by traditional banks.

Over 98% of Rs 2000 Notes Returned as Withdrawal Process : RBI



MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reported that 98.04% of the Rs 2000 banknotes that were in circulation as of May 19, 2023, have now been returned. As of October 31, 2024, only Rs 6,970 crore worth of these notes remain outside the banking system, marking significant progress in the withdrawal process announced last year.

Initially, the total value of Rs 2000 notes in circulation was Rs 3.56 lakh crore when the withdrawal plan was initiated in May 2023, leaving less than 2% still in circulation. Despite the withdrawal process, the Rs 2000 notes continue to be recognized as legal tender.

The facility for exchanging Rs 2000 notes remains available at the 19 RBI Issue Offices. Starting October 9, 2023, individuals and entities have also been permitted to deposit these notes directly into their bank accounts. Additionally, citizens can mail their Rs 2000 notes from any post office to RBI Issue Offices for bank credit, according to the official statement.

The RBI initially announced the withdrawal of the Rs 2000 denomination on May 19, 2023, and has since provided periodic updates on the progress. The last update was released on October 1, 2024. While deposit or exchange facilities were previously available across all bank branches until

October 7, 2023, the process is now primarily managed by RBI Issue Offices.

The Rs 2000 denomination was first introduced in November 2016 to meet urgent currency needs after the demonetization of Rs 500 and Rs 1000 notes. However, printing of the Rs 2000 notes ceased in 2018-19, as other denominations became available in sufficient quantities to support the economy. Most Rs 2000 notes in circulation were issued before March 2017 and have since reached their estimated lifespan of 4-5 years.

The decision to withdraw the notes aligns with the RBI's Clean Note Policy, which seeks to maintain high-quality currency for the public. The RBI observed that Rs 2000 notes were rarely used in daily transactions, further supporting the decision to phase them out as smaller denominations are deemed sufficient for public currency needs.

This update underscores the RBI's ongoing efforts to enhance currency quality and streamline the circulation of commonly used denominations.

RBI's intervention in regulating the value of rupees is erroneous



DR P S VOHRA There hasn't been much change between the Indian rupee and the US dollar during the past two or three years. It appears that both are priced around the same. In Indian money, one dollar has historically held a steady value of approximately Rs 84. Initially, this suggests that despite global upheavals—whether the Russia-Ukraine conflict or recent tensions between Israel and Iran—the Indian Rupee has held stable at a particular level. This stability appears favorable for the Indian economy, as it supports the nation's consistently growing economic growth rate by maintaining the Dollar at a controlled rate. This reasoning is widely accepted, as a stable Rupee against the Dollar means that Indian imports won't become costlier, thereby helping control inflation in the domestic market. It's essential to highlight that rising import costs and domestic inflation are directly linked to crude oil prices. Increases in crude oil prices affect nearly all costs in the domestic market, impacting food items, vegetables, fruits, transportation costs, and more. India faces a unique economic challenge because it imports more than 80 percent of its crude oil demand. If the Rupee continues to weaken against the Dollar, greater foreign currency outflows will be required for crude oil imports, gradually depleting the Dollar reserves at the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). This situation introduces various economic uncertainties, with the most pressing concern



being a potential increase in global dependence for future import payments. However, this perspective often overlooks the adverse impact on Indian exports when the Rupee remains steady against the Dollar.

In reality, a weakening Rupee is often viewed as an indicator of economic challenges. No government prefers such a scenario, but maintaining this stability indefinitely is also challenging. It's observed that whenever the Rupee weakens, it becomes a media focus, and the opposition criticizes the government. Before 2014, during the Manmohan Singh administration, when the Rupee was steadily weakening against the Dollar, the opposition criticized the government heavily, claiming that under a new administration, the Rupee would be valued between 40 and 50 against the Dollar. This clearly shows that governments prefer not to let the Rupee weaken against the Dollar. However, it's important to note that historically, both the government and the RBI have exercised minimal control over the Rupee's global valuation, allowing it to find its own equilibrium. This policy continued even after the economic reforms of 1991. Only once, during the

2006 global recession, did the RBI attempt to control the Rupee against the Dollar, preventing a potentially severe economic crisis. The 2006 recession was triggered by the bankruptcy of a U.S. bank. So, how has the Indian Rupee managed to remain stable against the Dollar since 2022? This seems unlikely, given the consistently uncertain global conditions in recent years. First, there was the economic crisis due to COVID, leading the U.S. Federal Reserve to make significant policy changes to control sky-high inflation in the U.S. Then, the economic issues stemming from the Russia-Ukraine war kept global conditions unstable. Additionally, recent Middle Eastern crises, initially involving Palestine and now potentially Iran, could pose future economic challenges. These developments have led to speculation that the Rupee is being deliberately stabilized against the Dollar. A renowned economist, who previously served as the chief economic advisor to the Modi government, recently commented that the RBI has been selling Dollars in the Indian market from its foreign exchange reserves over the past two years to keep

the Rupee stable. So far, the RBI has sold approximately 130 billion U.S. Dollars to control Dollar demand relative to the Rupee to prevent further weakening. Between February and October 2022, the RBI sold 150 billion U.S. Dollars, and between July and October 2023, it sold another 25 billion U.S. Dollars, to prevent the Rupee from weakening further.

Now, a debate is emerging on whether it's appropriate for the RBI to intervene in this way. Has the RBI done this to avoid a perceived weakening of the Rupee? It's evident that the RBI can control the Rupee's global value, but it does so only during significant global economic crises. Some discussions have also raised the point that if the RBI hadn't sold 130 billion U.S. Dollars, India's foreign exchange reserves, currently at 700 billion U.S. Dollars, would have certainly exceeded 830 billion Dollars. The main argument here is that stabilizing the Rupee has negatively impacted income from various Indian exports. Essentially, if the Rupee had weakened beyond 84 per Dollar, foreign export income would have been more than 130 billion Dollars, which didn't happen. From 1994 to 2018, India's annual export growth rate hovered around 10 percent. Since 2019, this rate has dropped to around 4.5 percent, directly reducing foreign exchange reserves. In terms of foreign exchange reserves, the Vajpayee government is credited the most since the economic reforms of 1991. In 2002, India's foreign exchange reserves were 59 billion U.S. Dollars, reaching 400 billion U.S. Dol-

lars by 2018. Undoubtedly, during these two decades, the 2006 global recession could have significantly weakened the Indian Rupee against the Dollar, but the RBI managed to control it in time.

Now, it's essential to understand whether the Rupee is being protected from weakening against the Dollar to maintain the growth rate of India's GDP. In this context, it's crucial to clarify that for several years, China has been deliberately devaluing its currency against the Dollar to make its exports cheaper in the global market, attracting various global investors and industrial houses to set up their units in China. The U.S. frequently criticizes China's economic policy, and if Trump returns as president, this criticism may intensify. Here, it's also worth mentioning that the RBI's effort to keep the Rupee stable against the Dollar is certainly aimed at preventing Indian imports from becoming more expensive. However, if Indian exports had been allowed to grow, and the government adjusted import duty or tax policies accordingly, this might have created a better scenario for the economy. In that case, foreign exchange reserves could have reached higher levels, though the government would have needed to reduce import duties or taxes to control inflation domestically. Ultimately, it's a reality that all economic policies eventually become a part of political debates, and their benefits or drawbacks become evident only in the future.

Dr. P. S. Vohra is a Writer, columnist and financial thinker. View are personal

CBDT: Tax Officials Granted Authority to Reduce or Waive Interest Penalties

NEW DELHI: In a significant move to provide relief to taxpayers, the Income Tax Department has introduced new guidelines allowing tax officials to reduce or completely waive interest payments on delayed tax submissions, subject to specific conditions and hierarchical approval processes.

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), through a circular issued on November 4, has established a structured framework for interest reduction based on monetary thresholds.

Under this system, Principal Chief Commissioners can adjudicate cases involving interest dues exceeding Rs 1.5 crore, while Chief Commissioners are authorised to handle cases ranging from Rs 50 lakh to Rs 1.5 crore. Cases with interest dues up to Rs 50 lakh fall under the jurisdiction of Principal



Commissioners or Income Tax Commissioners. This discretionary power stems from Section 220(2A) of the Income Tax Act, which typically mandates a one percent monthly interest charge on delayed tax payments following a demand notice.

However, the relief measures are contingent upon three crucial conditions including, the payment must pose a genuine hardship to the taxpayer, the delay should result from circum-

stances beyond the taxpayer's control, and the taxpayer must have demonstrated full cooperation during assessment or recovery proceedings. The new guidelines represent a balanced approach between tax compliance and taxpayer considerations, providing a structured mechanism for addressing genuine cases of financial hardship while maintaining administrative oversight through clearly defined authority levels.

Challenges in Repayment System Prompt Lenders to Call for GeM Sahay Reforms

NEW DELHI: Lenders who have provided loans to small businesses through the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) are pressing for enhanced repayment channels to ensure sustainability, several industry sources revealed to media.

GeM, a digital procurement platform created in 2016 for government ministries and agencies, launched GeM Sahay in 2021 to enable cash-flow-based lending for MSMEs (Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises) against government purchase orders. This initiative, a pilot project under the Open Credit Enablement Network (OCEN), has dis-



bursed over Rs 23 crore to more than 14,000 sellers as of January 2024.

However, despite the portal's success as a lead generator, lenders say it has yet to facilitate a structured repayment system. "When lenders disbursed money, they also needed repayment routed through GeM. This did not happen, causing some accounts to turn delinquent," an

industry executive explained, noting the challenges posed by fluctuating outstanding payments.

Sharad Sharma, co-founder of iSPIRIT, which incubated OCEN, acknowledged the iterative nature of pilot programs like GeM Sahay. "Each pilot has provided insights for refining our models," Sharma said in an email, adding that GeM Sahay 2.0 is expected soon.

This new version aims to improve digital financing for MSME suppliers through a competitive auction model, supported by a network of loan agents and lenders.

INTERNATIONAL

Xi Jinping congratulates Trump; says China-US should manage differences

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday congratulated President-elect Donald Trump on his election victory and called for China and the US to find the right way to manage the differences by strengthening dialogue and communication.

Trump won the US presidential election for a second term on Wednesday in one of the most remarkable comebacks in American electoral history.

Xi, in his congratulatory message to Trump, called for the two countries to strengthen dialogue and communication, properly manage differences and expand mutually beneficial cooperation, official media reports here said. "I urge China and the US to expand mutually beneficial cooperation," Xi said. "I call for the right way for China, and the



US to get along in the new era," he said, adding that both the countries, the top two economies of the world, should strengthen dialogue and communication. History teaches that China and the United States gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation, Xi said, noting that

win cooperation, strengthen dialogue and communication, properly manage differences and expand mutually beneficial cooperation. Also on Thursday, Chinese Vice President Han Zheng congratulated J D Vance on his election as vice president of the United States, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

As the results of the US presidential elections poured in on Wednesday pointing to a sweeping victory for Trump, who pursued a tough policy against China in his first term including clamping tariffs on over USD 380 billion Chinese exports to the US, Beijing reacted guardedly and said that it respects the choice of the American people.

"Our policy towards the United States has been consistent

and we will continue to view and handle the China-US relations in accordance with the principles of mutual respect, peaceful co-existence and win-win cooperation," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here.

She dismissed the question on Trump's campaign promise to sharply raise tariffs on Chinese imports, higher than his first term. "We do not respond to hypothetical questions," she said.

The return of Trump as US President for a second term after a gap of four years has increased Beijing's anxieties especially when the Chinese economy faced a serious slowdown resulting in a declining growth rate and business environment with job losses and increased unemployment.

Israel Signs 5.2-Billion USD deal to purchase 25 F-15 Fighter Jets



JERUSALEM: The Israeli Defence Ministry announced Thursday that it has signed a \$5.2 billion deal with US-based Boeing to acquire 25 advanced F-15 fighter jets.

The ministry said in a statement that the deal is part of a broader aid package approved by the US administration and Congress earlier this year. The agreement includes an option for 25 additional aircraft. The deal, finalised on Wednesday with the US administration and Boeing, involves the delivery of F-15A fighter jets equipped with weapon systems integrated with Israeli

weapons, enhanced range, and greater payload capacity. "These advantages will enable the Israeli Air Force to maintain its strategic superiority in addressing current and future challenges in the Middle East," the ministry said.

Delivery is set to begin in 2031, with four to six aircraft expected to be supplied each year, Xinhua news agency reported.

Eyal Zamir, director-general of the Israeli Defence Ministry, emphasised that the acquisition of the new F-15 squadron, in addition to the third F-35 squadron procured earlier this year, represents "a historic enhancement of our air power and strategic reach — capabilities that proved crucial during the current war."

Zamir noted that since the onset of the war in the Gaza Strip on October 7, 2023, Israel has secured procurement agreements worth nearly \$40 billion.

President Biden Congratulates Trump, Commits to Smooth Transition of Power



NEW YORK: President Joe Biden has congratulated his predecessor Donald Trump on his election and offered to work for a "smooth transition".

"President Biden expressed his commitment to ensuring a smooth transition and emphasised the importance of working to bring the country together", the White House said in a terse statement on Wednesday.

Trump's Spokesperson Steven Cheung acknowledged the call and said, "President Trump looks forward to the meeting, which will take place shortly, and very much appreciated the call". That was a normal courtesy that Trump, stewing from his defeat, had not extended Biden when he was elected in 2020 and stayed away from his inauguration.

Trump had viciously attacked Biden during his campaign, nicknaming him "Sleepy Joe" and calling him a "weak and pathetic man". Biden didn't spare him either, and called him a "convicted felon" a "loser" and a "sucker". But Trump also made a show of sympathy for Biden after Democratic Party leaders made him drop out of the presidential race. He told his campaign audiences that the president was the victim of a "coup". Nikki Haley, who had served on his cabinet and waged a long battle against him for the party's nomination, said Trump's comeback victory "defied gravity". "Throughout the campaign, he let the American people know exactly where he stood and they gave him a second term", she said in an X post. "Now, it's time for the American people to come together, pray for our country, and start the process of a peaceful transition", she said.

Several business leaders added their messages to the stream of X posts congratulating Trump and looking towards new opportunities.

Google CEO Sundar Pichai said in his message to Trump, "We're looking forward to engaging with you and your administration to drive innovation forward that creates new growth and opportunity for the United States and the world".

US Election outcome comes as a relief for Benjamin Netanyahu



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his supporters celebrated Donald Trump's election as president, hailing what a leader of the Israeli settler movement called an ally who would support them "unconditionally".

Congratulating Republican Trump, Netanyahu said the former president had made "history's greatest comeback".

The outcome is a relief for Netanyahu's coalition, which has clashed with Biden's Democratic administration over the conflicts in Gaza and Lebanon that have fuelled protests worldwide and left Israel increasingly isolated internationally.

As the world watched the US election on Tuesday night, Netanyahu took the opportunity to sack his Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, one of the Biden administration's and the US military's favoured interlocutors in the government. "The current administration trusted minister Gallant," said Ephraim Sneh, a former brigadier general in the Israeli army. The removal of Gallant, in the middle of a multi-front war that threatens to escalate into a full-scale confrontation with Iran, drew protesters to the streets in Israel.

Israel Katz, Gallant's replacement who had been serving as foreign minister, said Trump's victory would strengthen the alliance with Israel and help to secure return of the 101 hostages still remaining in Gaza.

US Polling Misses Mark Again in 2025 Presidential Election, says Trump Defies Predictions

SACRAMENTO: For the third consecutive presidential election, US polling organisations struggled to accurately predict Donald Trump's electoral performance, with some surveys dramatically underestimating his support in crucial battleground states.

The most notable polling miss came from veteran Iowa pollster J. Ann Selzer, whose final poll showed Vice President Kamala Harris leading Trump by 3 percentage points in Iowa, according to a New York Times article published on Monday, one day ahead of Election Day.

According to AP News' election result, the poll missed by 16 points, with Trump winning the state by 13.2 points (55.9 per cent to Harris's 42.7 per cent).

"The poll findings we produced for The Des Moines Register and Mediocrum did not match what the Iowa electorate ultimately decided in the voting booth today," Selzer acknowledged in a statement on Tuesday. "I'll be reviewing data



from multiple sources to learn why that happened."

Another significant miss came from The New York Times/Siena College poll released on Sunday, two days before the election, which showed Harris clearly leading in Georgia, North Carolina, Nevada, and Wisconsin, with Pennsylvania and Michigan tied.

However, Trump ended up winning or leading in all these states. Even in reliably Democratic states, polls showed significant errors, Xinhua news agency reported. In New Jersey, the polling discrepancies were particularly severe, with a Rutgers survey in mid-October

missing Trump's final percentage by double digits. In Maryland, Trump overperformed his polling average by 4.1 per cent, while Harris underperformed by 1.2 per cent, according to The Independent. James Johnson, founder of J.L. Partners, one of the few polling firms to accurately predict Trump's victory, told Newsweek Wednesday that the error stemmed from familiar problems: "The key thing is people made the same mistakes they did in 2016. They underestimated the Trump voter who is less likely to be engaged politically, and crucially, more likely to be busy, not spending 20 minutes talking to pollsters."

New York Times chief polling analyst Nate Cohn noted that "white Democrats were 16 per cent likelier to respond than white Republicans," suggesting a structural bias in their survey response rates, as reported by Vox. Some pollsters still argued that the aggregate polling data wasn't entirely wrong despite the misses.

UN Chief Guterres Congratulates Donald Trump, Pledges Constructive Partnership with New U.S. Administration



UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has congratulated Donald Trump, a critic of the world organisation's work, on his re-election as President of the United States and said the UN was ready to "work constructively" with his administration.

"I reaffirm my belief that the cooperation between the United States and the United Nations is an essential pillar of international relations", he said in his message.

"The United Nations stands ready to work constructively with the incoming administration to address the dramatic

challenges our world is facing", he said. He added, "I commend the people of the United States of America for their active participation in the democratic process".

Trump, a sceptic of both multilateralism and climate change, pulled the US out of the Paris Climate Accord reached under the auspices of the UN, and the UNESCO.

Guterres' Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric downplayed the differences of opinion between the Secretary-General and Trump and said that they "had very good relations".

"The fact that they had different opinions about a number

of issues was clear to all. I think the Secretary-General stated his opinions. The US Administration (of Trump) had its policies. It did not stop the Secretary-General from engaging with the United States government, just as all of the previous Secretary-Generals have", Dujarric said.

Besides being the host of the UN, the US is its biggest funder, contributing 22 per cent of its annual budget and 26 per cent of its peacekeeping budget.

If the US, which is the world's biggest emitter of greenhouse gases, leaves the Paris Agreement, Guterres told the Guardian newspaper, the pact would still survive but could be "crippled". He told the paper that it was important for Washington to remain in the pact, but more important for it to adopt policies needed to keep global warming under the 1.5 Celsius limit.

Trump said during his campaign that his administration would scrap or limit the measures adopted by President Biden to fight climate change and would encourage drilling for oil and gas.

World Leaders Extend Congratulations to Donald Trump on His "Historic" Presidential Victory

Global Leaders Congratulate Trump on Presidential Win: After Donald Trump's remarkable victory in the US presidential election, leaders worldwide congratulated him, signaling optimism for continued or renewed partnerships.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a longstanding ally, expressed eagerness to strengthen the India-US Comprehensive Global and Strategic Partnership. PM Modi's congratulatory message

highlighted Trump's "historic" achievement and reinforced India's commitment to global peace and prosperity.

Expressions of Optimism from the UK, Israel, and More: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer affirmed the "special relationship" between the UK and the US, emphasizing shared values like freedom and democracy. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu lauded Trump's return as "history's greatest comeback" and



anticipated a renewed commitment to the US-Israel alliance.

Broader Global Reactions: French President Emmanuel Macron and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged to work closely with the US on issues spanning peace and prosperity. Italy's Giorgia Meloni and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz emphasized the longstanding partnerships between their nations and the US, expressing

hopes for continued collaboration. Continued Commitments: With congratulatory messages from Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and NATO's Secretary-General Mark Rutte, world leaders acknowledged Trump's influence on international relations. Their statements reflect global anticipation for a stable, cooperative geopolitical environment under Trump's leadership.

TRUMP IS BACK

Economy's Restoration, Immediate Reconstruction of the War-hit Eastern Europe Could be Agenda of 2025



GOPAL MISRA

It is estimated that the war-ravaged Ukraine, according to the World Bank, the European Commission and the UN, needs USD 486 billion in next decade for the rehabilitation of its refugees estimated about six million spread in different parts of the world, especially in Europe and the USA.

The cost of the rehabilitation of Ukrainians and their industries is about 2.8 times of the current GDP of the country.

With the return of the Trump Administration in the US an optimism for peace is expected to dawn in 2025, but the path to end the conflict is full of challenges, especially in the contemporary geo-politics.

The US reluctance to end the avoidable Russian-Ukrainian conflict is hardly a secret. It is also attributed to the industrial-military complex, especially the American weapon manufacturers. They have already provided more weapons and explosives estimated to be worth billions of the US dollars from the American treasury; and thus, for liberally funding Ukraine in the war, this lobby has contributed more than 2.5 billion USD to Trump's

political opponent, Kamala Harris. On the other hand, his supporters could raise only a few million USD in this keenly contested election.

The campaign witnessed unprecedented bitterness between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. It included assassination attempts against Trump, misinformation campaign and efforts to implicate him in cooked up legal cases. Earlier, during his tenure in the Whitehouse, he and his associates were ensnared without any evidence that they were in collusion with the Russians. They, however, were finally exonerated during the enquiry headed by special counsel, Robert Mueller.

With the spectacular victory in the polls, the world had witnessed a mini revolution on the small hours of November 5, when Donald Trump, a Republican nominee, finally trounced his formidable rival, Kamala Harris, a Democratic party nominee in the one of the most controversial elections held in the past half-a-century for the American presidency.

It is called a mini revolution, because it may revert the contemporary role of Washington, as the sole policeman of the earth, to be more focused for rehabilitation of its economy; which has been suf-



fering due to the greed of more profits by promoting conflicts. The successive Administration have been promoting conflicts and wars as a key component of the American strategic policy worldwide. It also has been catering to a section of its corporate world engaged in inventing deadly weapons and technologies.

Admittedly, it is a Herculean task for any US Administration to reorient this policy. Donald Trump is no exception. It is to be seen how he embarks upon to usher in paradigm reforms, promised during the intense election campaign. He has already announced his agenda for seeking a new term in Whitehouse; and the issue is whether he would really be able to take forward the agenda of curtailing the funds

being liberally extended to the American proxies, whether for fanning up fratricide in Eastern Europe between Russia and Ukraine, or radical Islam from West Asia to Bangladesh, including the military establishment of Pakistan, is going to be one of challenging assignments for the new Administration.

The efforts for rehabilitation requires resource mobilization at an unprecedented scale.

Being an astute businessman having a worldwide experience in the construction business, Donald Trump, may try to reposition American companies, for rehabilitation of the people suffering due to the conflicts instead of indulging in weapon manufacturing.

At present, only the European Union has committed itself to raise the much-needed

financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. The US is giving liberal military assistance to the country facing aggression from Russia, but the war-hit people need more humanitarian assistance.

Admittedly, the war industries, estimated to be numbering about 100, most of them US-based, have been in an upbeat mood since the Eastern European War flare up with the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. They have so far made a business to the tune of 592 billion USD in 2023 alone. The notable among them are Lockheed Martine (USA), Raytheon Technologies (USA), Boeing (USA) others. Lockheed Martine alone sold weapons to the tune of 60.34 billion USD in the past two years.

During his previous tenure, Donald Trump had initiated peace process in West Asia bringing Israel and the Arab World closer to end their perennial conflict. It had begun with the Abraham Accord i.e. the religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam having common roots should cooperate with each other instead of following the medieval agenda of being at war with each other, perhaps extending the era of the conflict of the cross and crescent.

He, however, could not pursue his peace agenda by losing the presidency to Joe Biden of the Democratic Party. In spite of being a key figure in the evolution of the American foreign policy, as the head of the foreign affairs committee of Senate for 12 years, he did little to promote peace in the world. He, despite his old age was keen to contest for a second term. He, however, was dissuaded from joining the election fray, perhaps, by the former US President, Barack Obama; thus, Kamala Harris, the current vice-president, was fielded even without being endorsed by the primaries.

It is believed that the proposed reconstruction might offer opportunities to the real estate developers across the continents, especially in India; and China. China has recently show-cased a new series of the building materials, at the Canton fair.

The funds for the reconstruction might also be mopped up from the oil-rich gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia and UAE.

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

Pakistan Unlikely to Figure Prominently on Trump's Foreign Policy Radar

ISLAMABAD: Foreign policy experts in Pakistan believe that the victory of Donald Trump in the US Presidential election is unlikely to trigger any change in the tough stance adopted by Washington towards Islamabad over the past many years.

Analysts maintain that the US policy towards Pakistan was never based on good personal terms and would not be any different under the incoming Trump administration.

Interestingly, Trump's triumph has been linked to the potential release of former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is incarcerated in Rawalpindi jail over multiple cases of corruption and sedition.

On Wednesday, as Trump announced his win in faraway West Palm Beach, celebrations broke out in the Pakistan, Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) camp with several leaders highlighting Trump's "good personal relations" with party founder Imran Khan.

They insist that the new US President would use his office to influence the Shehbaz Sharif government and force Pakistan to release Khan from jail.

"A myth has been created that Trump had very close personal ties with Imran Khan. This is



not true. The fact is that Pakistan did not have good terms with the US when Trump was the president. He wanted to get out of Afghanistan for which he sought help from then Pakistan PM Imran Khan in order to talk to the Taliban," Touqir Hussain, a former ambassador, wrote in Dawn on Thursday.

"It was because of Trump's desire to leave Afghanistan that Imran Khan was given a visit to Washington and a warm, exceptional public praise from Trump. But once the deal with the Taliban was done, Trump turned his back on Pakistan, leaving no imprints on the relationship," he added.

Analysts opine that Pakistan's relationship with the US, coupled with Islamabad's domestic political dynamics, do not fall in the list of high public interest issues for Trump to look into.

Imane Khelif, 2024 Olympic Gold-Winning Boxer, Confirmed as Man

ALGERIA: Imane Khelif, the Algerian boxer who claimed a gold medal in women's boxing at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, has become embroiled in a gender controversy. A leaked medical report obtained by French journalist Djaffar Ait Aoudia revealed that Khelif possesses internal testicles and an XY chromosomal structure, pointing to a rare condition known as 5-alpha reductase deficiency. The condition affects biological males, leading to ambiguous genitalia, typically including a micropenis, and internal testicles instead of a uterus.



The Medical Report and Findings The report, drafted through a collaborative effort between Kremlin-Bicêtre Hospital in Paris and Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Hospital in Algiers in June 2023, revealed specific biological markers associated with Khelif's condition. The MRI results showed Khelif lacks a uterus but has internal testicles, while chromosomal analysis confirmed her karyotype as XY, which generally characterizes male biology. The condition, 5-alpha reductase deficiency, is an intersex variation that impacts prenatal and pubertal sexual development and is recognized as a primary cause of ambiguous genitalia in some individuals. The medical team suggested potential treatments, including surgical correction and hormone therapy, to align Khelif's biological and gender identity.

Background of Khelif's Athletic Career and Gender Disputes Khelif's gender has been a subject of scrutiny since 2023 when the International Boxing Association (IBA) barred her from competing in the World Championship Gold Medal match in New Delhi. Despite this, Khelif went on to win gold at the 2024 Paris Olympics, drawing widespread media attention. Following the leak, social media erupted with strong reactions, with users calling for her disqualification and for the awarding of her title to Italian boxer Angela Carini, whom Khelif defeated in the competition.

Political and Social Reactions: Khelif's Gender as a Flashpoint in Global Debates The controversy has spilled into international discourse, especially in the United States. Former President Donald Trump referenced Khelif in his criticism of the Biden-Harris administration's sports policies on gender identity, urging stricter regulations to prevent individuals born male from competing in female-only sports categories. Republican leaders such as Vivek Ramaswamy and JD Vance echoed Trump's stance, framing Khelif's case as emblematic of the need for clear policies on gender participation in sports.

Khelif, for her part, has repeatedly asserted her identity as a woman. "I was born as a woman, I live as a woman, and I am qualified," she stated in response to the controversy. She also claimed the scrutiny from public figures such as Trump, author J.K. Rowling, and Tesla CEO Elon Musk led her to file a criminal complaint in France, alleging "aggravated cyber harassment." The complaint accuses these individuals of inciting further harassment and public attacks on her character.

The Ongoing Debate: Athlete Rights and Gender Classification in Sports Khelif's case has become a significant example in the evolving discourse surrounding intersex and transgender athletes in competitive sports. Advocates argue that individuals with intersex conditions or non-binary gender identities should have the freedom to compete according to their gender identity, while critics emphasize the importance of biological differences in ensuring fair competition. As the sporting world grapples with these issues, Khelif's experience has become a symbol of the challenges facing sports organizations, athletes, and policymakers alike.

Punjabi Singer Diljit Dosanjh Departs Jaipur after Electrifying Concert

JAIPUR: Punjabi singer Diljit Dosanjh on Monday departed from Jaipur after his Jaipur concert which was held on Sunday.



Diljit was seen wearing a red turban and black sweatshirt (T-shirt) at the airport. This sweatshirt had Jaipur written in red on it. While at airport, he showed his love for Jaipur by pointing towards the city name written on his T-shirt at Jaipur airport and said- I have received a lot of love from Jaipur. I will never forget this love. Diljit in fact also shared a post on his X handle and said, "Thank You So Much Jaipur. A lot of love and respect for everyone Thanks to @jaipur_police for Your Cooperation & Support DIL-

comed Diljit and soon after Diljit thanked everyone with folded hands. It is worth noting that Diljit's concert was held at JECC on Sunday in which he gave mesmerising performance. He also reached City Palace for a royal dinner. Diljit stayed at Oberoi Rajvillas Hotel for four days. During check-out from here, he got a photo clicked with the hotel staff and gave an autograph and message in the hotel message book. On Sunday, Diljit made a rocking performance and mesmerised thousands of audience. While many enjoyed the show at the venue, there were hundreds of others sitting and enjoying the show from the roofs of their houses.

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Chhath, a Festival of Faith & Enthusiasm

SATISH SINGH Chhath festival is celebrated immediately after Diwali on Amavasya in Kartik month. This festival starts from the third day of Bhaiyya Dooj. According to the Panchang, every year Chhath Mahaparva starts with Chaturthi Tithi of Shukla Paksha in Kartik month, which ends with offering water to the Sun on Saptami Tithi. The most important date in this is Shashthi Tithi. This festival is mainly celebrated in Bihar and Purvanchal, but at present this fast is being celebrated with great pomp and show across the country and in many other countries as well.



This is one of the most difficult festivals of Hindus, because during this the fasting Vrat and the common people follow the strictest rules. The fasting people keep a waterless fast for 36 hours. Chhath is a apbhansh of Shashthi. This festival is celebrated twice a year. First time in Chaitra month and second time in Kartik month. The Chhath festival celebrated on Chaitra Shukla Paksha Shashthi is called Chaiti Chhath and the festival celebrated on Kartik Shukla Paksha Shashthi is called Kartik Chhath. Chaiti Chhath is considered more difficult because it is very difficult to keep a continuous waterless fast for 36 hours during the summer days.

wearing dhoti. Usually, after starting Chhath festival, it has to be performed every year until a married woman or man of the next generation is ready to perform it. This festival is not performed if someone dies in the family.

There are many mythological and folk tales that explain the tradition of Chhath Puja and its importance. According to one belief, on the day of establishment of Ramrajya after the victory of Lanka, Lord Ram and Mother Sita fasted and worshipped Sun God on Kartik Shukla Shashthi. On Saptami, at sunrise, they performed the ritual again and received blessings from Sun God. According to another belief, Chhath festival started during the Mahabharata period. Surya Putra Karna was the first to worship Sun God. Karna was an ardent devotee of Lord Sun. He used to stand waist deep in water for hours every day and offer Arghya to the Sun. It was only by the grace of the Sun that he became a great warrior. Even today, this method of offering Arghya is prevalent in Chhath.

In some stories, there is mention of Pandavas' wife Draupadi also worshipping the Sun. She used to worship the Sun regularly for the good health and long life of her family. According to a legend, King Priyavard had no children. Then Maharishi Kashyap performed Putryashthi Yagna and gave the kheer prepared for the Yagna to his wife Malini. Due to its effect, they had a son, but he was born dead. Priyavard took his son to the crematorium and tried to suicide in the separation from his son. At that very moment, God's daughter Devsena appeared and said that I am called Shashthi because I am born from the sixth part of the basic nature of the creation. King, you worship me and inspire others to do the same. Thereafter, the king observed the fast of Goddess Shashthi on Kartik Shukla Shashthi with the desire to have a son and he was blessed with a son.

Even in today's modern times, Chhath Vrat remains synonymous with a tough penance. Earlier, women who wanted a son and for the well-being of their son generally kept this fast, because it was believed that women who kept the fast of Chhath festival get a son. However, in the changing environment, this festival is celebrated to fulfill any wish. Now, devotees have started observing Chhath festival to get a daughter as a child. Men are also observing this fast with full devotion to fulfill any wish or with devotion.

The woman who keeps the fast is also called Parvaitin. In this four-day fast, the devotee has to fast continuously. Along with food, comfortable bed is also given up. The devotee spends the night on the floor with the help of a blanket or sheet in the room made for the festival. In this festival, the devotee wears such clothes which do not have any kind of stitching. Women observe Chhath wearing saree and men

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad Based Senior Columnist, views are personal

On the second day, Kartik Shukla Panchami, the devotees observe a day-long fast and then eat in the evening. This is called 'Kharna'. Friends, neighbours and relatives are invited to receive the Kharna Prasad. Rice pudding made in sugarcane juice and milk, rice pitha and roti are prepared as Prasad. Both sides of the roti are smeared with ghee. Salt or sugar is not used in this. During this, special attention is paid to the cleanliness of the entire house. On the third day, Kartik Shukla Shashthi, Chhath Prasad is prepared during the day. Apart from Thekua, which is also called Tikri in some areas of Bihar basically Magadh region, rice laddus, which are also called Ladua, are made as Prasad. Apart from this, batasha made of sugar, moulds made of sugar, fruits, sugarcane etc. are also included as Chhath Prasad. In the evening, the basket of arghya is decorated and the devotee along with the family and the neighbours proceed towards the ghat to offer arghya

to the setting sun. All the Chhath devotees gather on the banks of a pond or river and collectively perform the arghya donation. Now people also make a haud (place to store water) in their homes and offer arghya to the sun. Water and milk arghya are offered to the sun and Chhathi Maiya is worshipped with a sieve filled with prasad. On the fourth day, on the morning of Kartik Shukla, arghya is offered to the rising sun. The devotees gather again at the same place where they had offered arghya in the evening. The evening process is repeated. In the end, the devotees complete the fast by drinking raw milk sherbet and eating prasad.

Ranbir Kapoor's Epic 'Ramayana' to Hit Theaters on Diwali 2026



The highly anticipated two-part epic Ramayana, starring Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram, is set for Diwali releases in 2026 and 2027. Directed by Nitesh Tiwari and produced by Prime Focus Studios, this cinematic retelling of the ancient Indian epic aims to bring one of India's greatest stories to life on a grand scale. The first poster, showcasing Ranbir as Lord Ram with a glowing golden arrow, has been unveiled, stirring excitement among fans.

Cast and Characters:

- Ranbir Kapoor as Lord Ram
- Sai Pallavi as Sita
- Yash as Raavan
- Lara Dutta as Kaikeyi
- Sunny Deol as Hanuman
- Sheeba Chaddha as Manthara

Director's Vision and Statement: Namit Malhotra from Prime Focus Studios, who has previously worked on films like

Dune and Inception, expressed his excitement, noting that Ramayana is a project over a decade in the making. Malhotra aims to deliver an "authentic, sacred, and visually stunning adaptation" that resonates globally. Poster Reveal and Story Vision: The first poster, revealed on Malhotra's Instagram, features a mystical arrow with a golden glow. The poster, labeled "Namit Malhotra's Ramayana," highlights the grandeur and reverence the team is aiming for. The project is positioned as a celebration of Indian culture and history, with the promise of an epic cinematic experience. **CONCLUSION:** Fans can look forward to this visually captivating adaptation of Ramayana, releasing in two parts across Diwali 2026 and 2027. With a star-studded cast and a seasoned production team, the film aims to redefine Indian mythology on the big screen.

WhatsApp bans more than 85 lakh accounts in India in September



NEW DELHI: Meta-owned WhatsApp banned more than 85 lakh "bad" accounts in India in the month of September for violating its policies. Between September 1-September 30, the company banned 8,584,000 accounts and 1,658,000 of these accounts were proactively banned, before any reports from users, according to the social media platform's monthly compliance report under the new IT Rules 2021. The popular mobile messaging platform, which has more than 600 million users in India, received 8,161 grievances from the country, and the records "actioned" were 97. The account "Actioned" means complaints where WhatsApp took remedial action. WhatsApp also received two orders from the Grievance Appellate Committee in the country and complied with both, according to its monthly compliance report. "We will continue with transparency to our work and include information about our efforts in future reports," said the company. It employs a team of engineers, data scientists, analysts, researchers, and experts in law enforcement, online safety, and technology developments to oversee these efforts.

Vidya Balan's Dream of Becoming "Junior Madhuri Dixit" and Her Return in Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3

MUMBAI: Vidya Balan's Admiration for Madhuri Dixit: In a nostalgic interview, actress Vidya Balan revealed that Madhuri Dixit's performance in Tezaab inspired her dream of acting. Reflecting on her school days, Balan recalled being so captivated by Madhuri's role that she wanted to be a "junior Madhuri Dixit." Now a prominent actress herself, Vidya expressed gratitude for achieving her dream of working in films, even if she couldn't exactly replicate Madhuri's journey.



Reunited in Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3: Balan and Dixit recently shared the screen in Bhool Bhulaiyaa 3, a long-awaited installment in the horror-comedy series. Vidya reprises

her haunting role as Manjulika, while Madhuri appears as Mandira, reincarnating an iconic character. The film also features Sanjay Mishra, Tripti Dimri, and Rajpal Yadav, and opened in theaters on November 1, competing with Singham Again. The Legacy of Bhool Bhulaiyaa: The original Bhool Bhulaiyaa (2007), starring Akshay Kumar and Vidya, became a Bollywood classic, with Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2 starring Kartik Aaryan and Kiara Advani following in 2022.

Two terrorists killed in North Kashmir's Sopore, arms and ammunition seized



Two terrorists were killed on Thursday in an encounter with security forces in North Kashmir's Sopore area of Baramulla district, according to officials. The joint operation, conducted by the Indian Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police, began Thursday night following intelligence about suspicious activity in the region. Kashmir Zone Police shared an update on X, stating, "Two terrorists have been neutralized in the Sopore encounter. Identification and affiliation are being verified. Incriminating materials, arms, and ammunition have been recovered." According to officials, the operation was launched after receiving specific information about the presence of terrorists in Panipora, Sopore. During the search, an exchange of gunfire ensued, leading to the elimination of the terrorists, the officials said.

Sidhu Moosewala's parents shares new video of slain singer's younger brother Shubhdeep



MUMBAI: The parents of the late Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala have shared a video of their youngest child Shubhdeep. In the video, Shubhdeep appears wearing a turban. Sidhu Moosewala's father, Balkaur Singh and his wife, Charan Kaur welcomed a baby boy in March this year. He was seen feeding milk to the newborn with a spoon. A video uploaded on Instagram showed a team of medical professionals bringing the baby into the world. Balkaur

for showering us with their support". Moosewala's real name was Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, which explains the reference to Shubhdeep in the announcement. Sunday's announcement by Balkaur Singh is accompanied by a picture of the proud father with the newborn. Balkaur Singh, incidentally, broke his silence on his wife Charan Kaur's pregnancy -- she's 58 and got pregnant via the IVF route -- on Facebook just a few days ago. He appealed to the well-wishers of the family to not believe the rumours circulating about the pregnancy. He pleaded: "There are so many rumours going around about our family, but they are not to be believed. Whatever news is there, the family will share with you all". The rapper was shot dead by six assailants on May 29, 2022, a day after his security cover was pared down, at Jawahar Ke village in Punjab's Mansa district.

was also seen cutting a cake with a team of doctors in the video. Earlier, he had announced the arrival of the baby on Instagram and writing in Punjabi, Balkaur Singh said: "Thanks to the good wishes of the lakhs and crores of Shubhdeep's followers and fans, Akal Purakh has sent Shubh's little brother to our laps. My wife's health is fine, thanks to the blessings of the Almighty, and we both are beholden to our well-wishers

Facebook India's net Profit climbs 43% to Rs 505 Crore in FY24 on Digital Ad Revenue



NEW DELHI: Facebook India reported a robust 43% increase in net profit for FY24, reaching Rs 505 crore, driven by strong gains in digital advertising revenue and support services for Meta, its parent company in the U.S. Revenue from operations grew by 9.3% to Rs 3,034.8 crore, up from Rs 2,775.7 crore in FY23, according to filings with the Registrar of Companies (RoC). Operating expenses also saw a modest increase, rising by 2.4% to Rs 2,349.6 crore, with employee benefit expenses contributing Rs 476.1 crore—up by 7.8% from FY23. Despite a rise in expenses, depreciation and amortization costs decreased by 10.8% to Rs 271.3 crore, reflecting cost management efforts. While Facebook India enjoyed profitable growth, Meta's global operations are navigating heightened infrastructure costs, expected to accelerate in 2025. Meta recently reported a revenue increase of 19% year-over-year for its Q3, reaching \$40.59 billion, with net income rising by 35% to \$15.7 billion.

Anupam Kher Overwhelmed by Heartfelt Note from Mentor Mahesh Bhatt on 40 Years in Film

MUMBAI: Veteran actor Anupam Kher took to social media to pen a heartfelt note for his "guru and friend" Mahesh Bhatt. The filmmaker congratulated Kher on completing 40 years in the Indian film industry with a special note. On Friday, the Special 26 actor took to his Instagram handle and dropped a photo featuring him and Bhatt. He also posted a picture of the handwritten note given by Mahesh. Alongside the image, the actor expressed his emotions through a lengthy note where he called Mahesh Bhatt a man who gave him his identity as an actor on screen.



Anupam wrote, "Sometimes pictures don't capture all the emotions...What you can see is how excited I'm to receive this from my guru, friend, philosopher & guide #MaheshBhattSaab who congratulated me on completing 40 years in the Indian film industry! I have been fortunate to have received a lot of love for my work over the years but today, I feel, I have received the ultimate prize." He added, "What you don't see in this picture are the many drops of tears that fell when this unfolded. You don't see my emotions, you don't see how this gesture of love and kindness from Bhatt Saab totally overwhelmed me and brought

back so many memories. I kept reading what he has written for me and I was speechless. I couldn't speak a word and sat down holding his hand in gratitude." "BhattSaab is a man who gave me my identity as an actor on screen. He guided me to be the human and the artist that I grew into. He transformed me on every level. I'm forever indebted to him for making me believe in myself.. THANK YOU BHATT SAAB! Thank you Mahesh Bhatt for making me

feel like this on the release day of my most special film #Vijay69 You are the reason I'm here... #Vijay69onNetflix #YRFEntertainment @yrf @netflix_in," the post further read. Kher recently completed his 40 years in cinema- The actor played the role of a 69-year-old angry man, Vijay Mathew, who dares to dream big in the film Vijay 69. The film, which also stars Chunky Panday in supporting role, released on Netflix on November 8.