

REGION

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DELHI CHIEF MINISTER ATISHI BLAMES BJP FOR SHELTERING ROHINGYAS



Arvind Kejriwal promises Rs 2,100 for Delhi women if AAP wins polls, BJP takes 'lollipop' jibe

NEW DELHI: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday announced that every woman of the capital will get monthly monetary assistance of Rs 1,000/- and this would be raised to Rs 2,100 if the party is voted to power in upcoming Assembly elections.



transfer of money couldn't be done now, however the registration process for availing the benefits under the scheme will begin from tomorrow.

Notably, AAP is contesting the upcoming elections solo, having ruled out any alliance partnership with the Congress. The party's top leadership, embroiled in controversy over series of scandals including liquorgate and sheeshmahal is faced with a tough task of convincing the voters on its 'clean politics' plank and getting elected to power for fourth time in a row.

Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said, "This is just a lollipop as elections come closer." "You must tell who is ruling Punjab. You had promised the same thing in Punjab but no one got anything there," he said.

BANKING & FINANCE

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RBI GOVERNOR OPTIMISTIC ABOUT UNIFIED LENDING INTERFACE REVOLUTIONISING LENDING PRACTICES



India's GDP Set to Reach USD 9 Trillion by 2030: Chairman 16th Finance Commission

NEW DELHI: In a comprehensive economic assessment, Arvind Panagariya, chairman of India's 16th Finance Commission, has outlined an optimistic trajectory for the nation's economic growth, projecting the country's gross domestic product (GDP) to expand to between USD 6.5 and USD 9 trillion by 2030.



potentially push GDP growth in current dollars to 11-12 per cent. Even with a conservative estimate of 8 per cent growth, Panagariya projects the economy will exceed USD 7 trillion, positioning India significantly ahead of the next competing nation.

performance, with GDP growth slowing to 5.4 per cent in the September quarter and 6.7 per cent in the first quarter of the current fiscal year, compared to 8.2 per cent in the previous year. Addressing concerns about economic inequality, Panagariya challenged prevalent narratives about uneven recovery.

POTPOURRI

8

SINGLE ENDOSCOPIC PROCEDURE USED TO TREAT DUAL OBSTRUCTION AT FOOD PIPE WITH ADVANCED LIVER CIRRHOSIS



SC refers to CJJ Cong leader's petition for verification of EVMs used in Haryana polls

NEW DELHI: A 2-judge Bench of the Supreme Court on Friday directed the apex court registry to place before the Chief Justice of India (CJI) for passing an appropriate order to list a plea filed by Congress leader seeking verification of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) used during Haryana Assembly polls.

Congress picks Sandeep Dikshit for Kejriwal's New Delhi Assembly seat

NEW DELHI: The Congress party on Thursday released its first list of 21 candidates for the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections.



key constituencies. Devender Yadav, the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee (DPCC) president, will contest from the Badli constituency.



Lal Bahadur Shastri, has been given the ticket for the Dwarka seat. Haroon Yusuf, a senior party leader, will contest from Ballimaran, while Anil Bhardwaj has been named the candidate

for Sadar Bazar. Bhardwaj is the chairman of the party's communication department for the Delhi unit. Congress spokesperson Ragini Nayak has been fielded from Wazirpur.

Jain (Shalimar Bagh), Mudit Agrawal (Chandni Chowk), PS Bawa (Tilak Nagar), Abhishek Dutt (Kasturba Nagar), Rajinder Tanwar (Chhatarpur), Jay Prakash (Ambedkar Nagar), Garvit Singhvi (Greater Kailash), Anil Kumar (Patparganj), and Ali Mahndi (Mustafabad).

Onion Exporters Call for Rollback of 20% Duty amid Expected Surge in Crop Arrivals

NEW DELHI: Onion exporters are urging the Indian government to revoke the 20 per cent export duty on onions, as they anticipate a substantial increase in the arrival of fresh crops in the coming months.



planning of these varieties has surged this year, with expected arrivals set to increase from next month.

In order to strengthen the integrity of the election process in the country, a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna (now CJI) and Dipankar Datta, in April this year, had passed a direction for checking and verification of the burnt memory/microcontroller in 5 per cent of EVMs for any tampering or modification on a written request made by candidates securing second and third highest votes in an election.

Kin of Bahadur Shah Zafar-II seeks possession of Red Fort

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Friday rejected the plea of the widow of the great-grandson of Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar-II, seeking possession of the Red Fort on account of being the legal heir.

India's Retail Inflation Declines to 5.48 % in November

NEW DELHI: India's retail price inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) declined to 5.48 per cent in November as the increase in prices of food items eased during the month bringing relief to household budgets, said the Ministry of Statistics on Thursday.



The easing in inflation is a welcome sign as it was the first time that the rate of retail inflation crossed the RBI's upper limit of 6 per cent in October. The RBI is waiting for retail inflation to come down to 4 per cent on a durable basis before it can go in for an interest rate cut to propel growth.

cash reserve ratio (CRR) for banks by 0.5 per cent to make more funds available for lending to spur economic growth but kept the key policy repo rate unchanged at 6.5 per cent with an eye on inflation.

Government Calls for Competitiveness in Domestic Industry amid Tariff Debate

NEW DELHI: The government has urged the domestic industry to reflect on its competitiveness as calls for higher import tariffs persist, despite India's tariff rates aligning with global averages.

Women-Owned MSMEs record over 2.2 Crore Registrations since 2020

NEW DELHI: The revised definition of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), adopted on July 1, 2020, has catalysed a surge in women-owned enterprises across India.



To boost participation, the government has launched special drives to promote registration of women-owned MSMEs through URP and UAP.

Priyanka Gandhi delivers an impressive speech in Lok Sabha, emphasized the importance of Constitution

KAVITA SHARMA New Delhi Congress General Secretary and Member of Parliament from Wayanad, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, today delivered her maiden speech in the Lok Sabha amidst cheers from party members.



this country cannot be run with fear. Maintaining that our country has a tradition of dialogue, debate, and discussion for thousands of years, Priyanka said this tradition is seen in every religion, philosophical texts, the Vedas, and the Upanishads.

for freedom together," she observed. In a jibe at the treasury benches, she, while pointing towards the opposition, said that those who believed in hope and courage fought against the British, while those (pointing towards the treasury benches) who were scared cooperated with the British.



RBI keeps rates stable amid shift in priorities

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has once again held the benchmark interest rate steady at 6.50 per cent, marking the eleventh consecutive pause. While this decision underscores caution, it comes amid an increasingly challenging economic backdrop. Inflation has resurged, driven by volatile food prices, while growth momentum has weakened, with second-quarter GDP expanding at just 5.4 per cent—a stark drop from the RBI's earlier projection of 7 per cent. Governor Shaktikanta Das aptly highlighted the delicate balance between inflation control and growth stimulation. Persistently high inflation erodes household spending power, dampening consumption, and indirectly impacting growth. The central bank is bound by its inflation-targeting mandate, which prioritises headline inflation, making it clear that food price shocks cannot be ignored. Yet, the narrow 4:2 vote within the MPC signals growing debate over the path forward, with some members advocating rate adjustments to rekindle growth. The government, on its part, insists the growth blip is temporary. However, economic indicators suggest that more decisive action may be required to restore confidence. Rolling back import duties on essential commodities, such as edible oils, could offer immediate relief to consumers. Simultaneously, targeted measures to boost consumption and investments might accelerate the recovery. While the RBI remains cautiously optimistic, revising its growth forecast for 2024-25 to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent, this optimism may hinge on external factors and proactive fiscal measures. The current status quo on interest rates underscores the MPC's careful navigation of economic uncertainties. However, both inflation and growth trajectories demand closer scrutiny and adaptive policy responses. The government and the apex bank must work in concert to ensure economic stability while paving the way for sustainable growth. This is the only way out.

LETTERBOX

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Never stop learning, because life never stops teaching.



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RAJESH RANJAN ON HOW RIGHT TO DISCONNECT BOOSTS PRODUCTIVITY AND EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Indians need right to disconnect

Soon after death of an EY employee in September, allegedly due to work pressure, MP Shashi Tharoor had said that he would raise the issue in Parliament. He said that "inhumanity at the workplace must be legislated out of existence." A recent media report revealed that Indian women in professional jobs, such as auditing, Information Technology, and media, work more than 55 hours a week. The working hours vary for those who belong to the marginalised sections of society and work in the unorganised sector. According to a study by ADP Research Institute, 49% of Indian workers said workplace stress negatively impacts their mental health. As French politician Benoit Hamon said, "Employees physically leave the office, but they do not leave their work. They remain attached by a kind of electronic leash like a dog. The text, the messages, the emails colonise the life of the individual to the point where he or she eventually breaks down".

Right to disconnect laws

Such tragic incidents, research, and statements highlight how the right to disconnect is an important right. It allows employees to disconnect from their employer outside of working hours. The Labour Chamber of the French Supreme Court ruled in 2001 that an employee is under no obligation to work from home or take home files and working tools. This decision was subsequently confirmed by the Cour de Cassation (the highest court in the French judiciary), which said, "The fact that [the employee] was not reachable on his cell phone outside working hours cannot be considered as a misconduct". Portugal has a Right to Disconnect law,



which makes it illegal for employers to contact employees outside working hours, except in emergencies. Similarly, according to Article 88 of the Organic Law 3/2018 on the Protection of Personal Data and Guarantee of Digital Rights in Spain, "Public workers and employees shall have the right to switch off devices in order to guarantee that, outside of legal or conventionally established working hours, their time off, leave and holidays are respected, in addition to their personal and family privacy, with the aim of promoting a good work-life balance". This year, the Australian Parliament passed the Fair Work Legislation Amendment, which gave employees the right to disconnect from work outside of working hours. Ireland has also recognised the right to disconnect for employees.

Where does India stand?

India does not have specific laws recognising the right to disconnect from work. However, the Constitution, the Directive

Principles of State Policy, and various judicial pronouncements have spoken of the right to work in a conducive and healthy environment. Article 38 of the Constitution mandates that "the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people". Article 39(e) of the Directive Principles of State Policy directs the state to direct

its policy towards securing the strength and health of its workers. The Supreme Court, in *Vishakha v State of Rajasthan* (1997), ruled that sexual harassment at the workplace violates fundamental rights, recognised the right to dignity at the workplace, and issued guidelines to ensure that there is a safe working environment for women and gender equality. In *Ravindra Kumar Dhariwal and Ors v. Union of India* (2021), the Court read Article 14 to include ideas of inclusive equality to reasonably accommodate persons with disabilities. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud said that an employer must consider an employee's individual differences and capabilities. In *Praveen Pradhan v. State of Uttaranchal* (2012), the High Court of Uttarakhand held that "under the pretext of administrative control and discipline, a superior officer cannot be left to enjoy extreme liberty to make the intense humiliation and scolding inhumanity in front of all the subordinate staff members for a little lapse." Despite the clear recognition of the right to dignity at the workplace and

a direction for employers to be sensitive towards mental health concerns, and also laws that fix accountability in the case of breaching working hours, violating dignity is unfortunately common in Indian workplaces.

Prolonged working hours

In 2018, MP Supriya Sule introduced a Private Member Bill in the Lok Sabha, which delineated the right to disconnect from work after working hours. The bill included the provision of a penalty of 1% of the total remuneration of all employees to be paid by companies for noncompliance with its provisions.

However, in recent years, there has been no significant legislative effort to recognise employees' right to disconnect from work outside working hours or to impose a duty on employers to be mindful of employee well-being and avoid overworking them. Research by Harvard Business Review shows that working prolonged hours causes stress, coronary heart diseases, and impacts overall health. Contrary to the widespread belief that overworked human beings bring in productivity, research by the University of Oxford in collaboration with British multinational telecoms firm BT found a conclusive link between happiness and productivity. Therefore, employers need to take into account psychological factors while dealing with employees. In its march towards becoming the third largest economy by 2030, India must recognise that the right to disconnect will increase productivity and ensure the growth and well-being of both employees and employers.

Rajesh Ranjan, Lawyer and researcher and former co-convenor, Constitutional Law Society, National Law University, Jodhpur. Views are personal.



ASHWIN PRASAD VIEWS SPACE AS AN EMERGING SECTOR WITH GREAT POTENTIAL FOR COMMERCIALISATION

India's growing footprint in space exploration

India has set ambitious goals for its space programme in the next two decades. These goals hinge on powerful, reusable rockets such as the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)'s upcoming Next Generation Launch Vehicle (NGLV). In addition to the NGLV, India must tap into its private sector to develop more such rockets in order to secure strategic autonomy in its access to outer space.

From an infant space programme in the 1960s, India has grown into a powerful space-faring nation. Preparations for the Gaganyaan mission are underway. Gaganyaan will take an Indian crew to space for the first time, demonstrating Indian human-spaceflight capability. By the end of the next decade, India aims to have a more sustained presence in space by having its own space station in orbit around earth. It also aims to expand its human-spaceflight capabilities to the moon.

Realising these objectives effects a road map that consists of multiple uncrewed missions to the moon, mastering human-centric technologies for space travel and developing powerful new rockets. These rockets have to carry heavier payloads to support humans in space. They should also be financially viable as it will take many test flights to reach the safety and the reliability standards for human-spaceflight to the moon. ISRO is fulfilling these requirements with its upcoming NGLV, which has been recently approved for development by the Union Cabinet.

The significance of the NGLV lies in its heavy lift capability and reusability. The NGLV will triple the payload capacity of the LVM3 (Geosynchronous Satellite



Launch Vehicle Mk III), which is India's most powerful rocket. This comes with numerous benefits. Heavy lift rockets ease restrictions related to weight and volume. It frees up the focus of engineers and scientists that would otherwise have to be spent on miniaturisation or weight reduction. It greatly increases the potential of space-related missions. The possibilities increase exponentially.

In contrast to all of India's existing rockets which are expendable as they are built for one-time use, a major part of the NGLV will be reusable. Reusability requires that the rocket keep some of its fuel for controlled descent back to the earth's surface. This reduces the capacity of the rocket to carry heavier loads but offers massive cost savings. Reusability has become necessary for rockets to remain competitive.

The immediate need

The NGLV's development phase will last

for the next eight years. In the meantime, the need for heavy lift capability is already felt. India's next uncrewed moon mission is slated to use not one, but two rockets. Two LVM3s will carry the requisite modules. They will then be assembled in space to form one composite vehicle that will go to the moon.

In another instance, GSAT-N2, a communication satellite built by ISRO, was launched on SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket. It weighed 4,700 kg while the maximum weight that an LVM3 can carry to the Geostationary Transfer Orbit (GTO) is 4,000 kg. A reusable Falcon 9 from SpaceX, a U.S. company, can carry up to 5,500 kg to the Geostationary Transfer Orbit (GTO). Foregoing reusability, an expendable Falcon 9's capacity increases to 8,300 kg. Even this figure is dwarfed in comparison to SpaceX's Falcon Heavy and Starship rockets.

The Starship, which completed its sixth test flight recently, has already achieved significant milestones surrounding heavy lift and reusability. Its mind-boggling capacity to lift over 21,000 kg to the GTO (1,00,000 kg to the Low Earth Orbit) while remaining reusable, shows that the Starship is already past the level of advancement that the NGLV hopes to achieve at the end of its eight-year development phase.

Leveraging the private industrial base

This is no surprise given ISRO's wider scope, capability and focus. However, it

also raises questions about why India is not exploring more paths to produce multiple reusable, heavy lift rockets.

In parallel to developing the NGLV, the Department of Space can give out contracts to the private industry in India to design and develop reusable, heavy lift rockets of their own. Space is an emergent sector with massive potential for commercialisation.

There is likely to be strong private sector interest in India to take up these contracts with the right incentives. Even with a lack of existing faculty in rocket technology among Indian corporations, they can explore foreign collaboration. For instance, various rocket engines are already sold commercially.

A milestone-based funding mechanism where the Department of Space pays private players after they meet certain objectives at every stage is a great way to ensure accountability and reduce cost overruns. In the best case, India may end up with multiple NGLV-like rockets alongside the NGLV, resulting in much-needed redundancy and greater launch frequency. In the worst case, there may be delays but that is accompanied by positive spillovers of innovation, technical capability and infrastructure which will ultimately yield positive outcomes.

The entire gamut of space activities, which ranges from using satellite data for development to extending Indian presence to the moon and Mars, hinges on a resilient supply of space transportation services. India must foster a strong ecosystem for the growth of a specialised industrial base that can cater to India's needs and ambitions in outer space.

Ashwin Prasad is a Research Analyst at The Takshashila Institution. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

New book chronicles India's environmental heritage

In *Speaking With Nature*, historian Ramachandra Guha reminds us that environmentalism is not merely an intellectual idea but an active pursuit deeply rooted in social and political thought. Through portraits of ten individuals, Guha explores the foundation of environmentalism in India, offering an unexpected and compelling narrative that bridges disciplines and time periods.

At first glance, one might anticipate a focus on tribal leaders, professional conservationists, or activists spearheading environmental movements. Instead, Guha presents a diverse group, including iconic figures like writer Rabindranath Tagore, sociologist Radhakamal Mukherjee, Gandhi disciple Mira Behn, Hindutva thinker K.M. Munshi, and anthropologist Verrier Elwin. These individuals, each a scholar in their own right, linked their understanding of

nature to broader socio-political frameworks. By drawing from a variety of sources such as letters, talks, and papers, Guha crafts a narrative that is both scholarly and accessible.

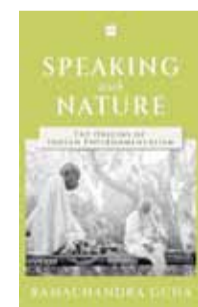
A notable chapter focuses on Mira Behn, one of only two women highlighted in the book. Mira's concerns, particularly about the ecological imbalance caused by the introduction of pine trees in Himalayan oak forests and the disappearance of the Haldu tree, remain strikingly relevant today. Her critiques of an unthinking forest department underline the systemic challenges that persist in modern India. Guha's account transforms these historical appraisals into reflections on contemporary environmental issues, making the book both timely and timeless.

The chapter on Tagore is equally illuminating, with Guha recounting the poet's view of cities as "parasites" on nature—a perspective that resonates in

today's discussions on urban sustainability. Similarly, Verrier Elwin's observations on the Gond people's nuanced relationship with nature, characterized as both beautiful and savage, feel particularly poignant in an era marked by climate crises.

Guha's narrative is enriched by his insightful framing of environmentalism as a discipline deeply intertwined with economics, agriculture, and public welfare. His portrayal of M. Krishnan, a naturalist who celebrated the uniqueness of Indian wildlife, exemplifies this interdisciplinary approach. Guha humorously labels Krishnan as "India's John Muir," highlighting his advocacy for untrammeled nature and his disdain for the use of Western labels for Indian species—a critique that underscores the colonial underpinnings of conservation discourse.

What sets *Speaking With Nature* apart is its ability to ground



Speaking With Nature By Ramachandra Guha. Fourth Estate, 440 pages, Rs 799.

environmentalism in practical and political realities, rather than treating it as an abstract or aesthetic ideal. Guha's argument for an ecological approach to development, as opposed to the crumbs offered by industrial growth, feels prescient. His ability to synthesize ideas from diverse sources and weave them into richly detailed narratives lends the book a refreshing and authoritative tone.

Importantly, *Speaking With Nature* also challenges readers to think about their personal relationship with the environment. By presenting environmentalism through the lives and ideas of these diverse individuals, Guha inspires reflection on the role of culture, values, and community in shaping ecological consciousness. His work serves as a re-

minder that environmentalism is not confined to specific regions or professions but is a shared responsibility that cuts across societal boundaries.

The book also invites the reader to engage with broader questions. As a conservation biologist, one might wonder how Guha's approach could be applied to contemporary movements like the Rights of Nature or the political and environmental history of India's iconic banyan tree, which he references repeatedly. These avenues could serve as a natural extension of his work, connecting historical insights with emerging environmental philosophies.

Speaking With Nature is a masterful exploration of environmentalism's roots and relevance. Guha's interdisciplinary approach and keen insights make it essential reading for anyone interested in understanding how ecological thought can inform broader socio-political frameworks. At Rs 799, the book is an investment in both knowledge and inspiration—a call to action for a more sustainable and thoughtful engagement with nature.

Corporate India Must Strengthen Ties with MSMEs to Drive Economic Growth: FM Sitharaman

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday emphasized the critical role of small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in shaping India's economic priorities for the coming decade. Speaking at the CII Global Economic Policy Forum, she urged corporate India to collaborate with MSMEs to bolster large-scale industries, generate employment, and address evolving global challenges. The minister underlined the pressing global issue of inflation, which has surged to 6.21 per cent in India for October, marking a 14-month high. Highlighting its global nature, Sitharaman stated, "Inflation is a challenge that no country can tackle in isolation. Restoring global normalcy should be the priority for this decade." Sitharaman stressed that MSMEs, long the backbone of India's economy, must integrate



with large industries to achieve a balance of scale, spread, and job creation. "Economic success must blend large, medium, and small industries to ensure equitable distribution of benefits," she said. The government, in this regard, has invited private partnerships for 20 MSME technology centers to spur innovation

and growth. Additionally, Sitharaman encouraged industries to invest in workforce training in collaboration with the government. "Without specific skill training, industries will struggle to secure the manpower they need," she cautioned. Addressing global economic disruptions, the finance minister

called for a collective effort to restore stability. "Commercial considerations must align with political and strategic priorities. The lessons of the past decade urge us to realign policies accordingly," she stated, urging industries to adapt to new challenges. India's advances in digital infrastructure, including the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), and Agri Stack, were highlighted as transformative tools democratising market access. Farmers, for instance, are now able to tap into global markets due to technological innovations, with Agri Stack poised to revolutionize agriculture. Concluding her address, Sitharaman reaffirmed India's commitment to fostering collaboration across sectors to achieve sustainable growth and job creation in the decade ahead.

EEPC India Proposes Tax Relief, Financial Incentives for MSMEs in Pre-Budget Recommendations



NEW DELHI: The Engineering Export Promotion Council of India (EEPC India) has submitted a comprehensive pre-Budget memorandum to the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, recommending significant tax and financial incentives to bolster the manufacturing sector. The proposals aim to provide strategic support to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and enhance their contribution to India's economic

growth. At the core of EEPC India's recommendations is a proposal to introduce a uniform 25 per cent income tax slab for MSME manufacturing units structured as partnerships, limited liability partnerships (LLPs), or sole proprietorships. Currently, private limited companies benefit from a 25 per cent tax rate, while other business entities face approximately 35 per cent taxation after surcharges. The organisation suggests

that the additional 10 per cent tax savings should be mandatorily reinvested into the business. Pankaj Chadha, Chairman, EEPC India, emphasised the critical importance of these proposed policy interventions. He highlighted that such measures are essential for increasing MSMEs' share in India's GDP and export landscape, ultimately creating more employment opportunities. The proposal reflects a strategic approach to supporting the country's manufacturing ecosystem and addressing youth employment challenges. Beyond the taxation proposal, EEPC India has also recommended expanding the Interest Equalisation Scheme (IES) benefits from Rs 50 lakh to Rs 100 crores. Additionally, the organisation advocates for 100 per cent depreciation on solar power generation investments by MSME units, signalling support for sustainable manufacturing practices.

Air India places order to purchase 100 more Airbus planes, Eyes Global Expansion



NEW DELHI: Air India on Monday confirmed it has placed an order to purchase 100 more Airbus aircraft, comprising 10 widebody A350 and 90 narrow-body A320 aircraft, including A321neo. These 100 new aircraft are in addition to the firm orders of 470 aircraft that Air India had placed with Airbus and Boeing last year. The latest order takes the total number of aircraft that Air India ordered with Airbus in 2023 from 250 aircraft, comprising 40 A350 and 210 A320 Family aircraft, to 350, the airline said. Air India also announced it has selected Airbus' Flight Hour Services-Component (FHS-C) to support the maintenance requirements of its growing A350 fleet. The new materials & maintenance contract will help Air India to optimise the reliability and performance of its A350 fleet, with comprehensive engineering services and integrated component services including on-site stock at Delhi provided by Airbus. Tata Sona and Air India Chairman Natarajan Chandrasekaran said: "With India's passenger growth outpacing the rest of the world... These additional 100 Airbus aircraft will help to position Air India on the path to greater growth and contribute to building Air India into a world-class airline that connects India to every corner of the world." Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury said: "Having personally witnessed the formidable growth of the Indian aviation sector in recent months, I am glad to see Air India renew its trust in Airbus with this additional order for both our A320 Family and A350 aircraft." With the order for 100 additional aircraft, Air India currently has a total of 344 new aircraft incoming from Airbus, having received six A350s so far. Air India, in 2023, had also placed orders for 220 widebody and narrowbody aircraft with Boeing, of which 185 aircraft remain to be delivered. Air India is the first Indian airline to operate the Airbus A350, powered by Rolls-Royce Trent XWB engines. Delivering exceptional fuel efficiency, passenger comfort, and long-range capabilities, the A350s now offer an all-new Air India flying experience to travellers flying non-stop from Delhi to London and New York, the airline said.

Retail vehicle sales rise 11.2 pc in Nov



NEW DELHI: Retail sales of vehicles across categories in India grew by 11.21 per cent to 32,08,719 units in November, as compared to 28,85,317 units in the same month last year riding on surging two-wheeler demand, according to figures compiled by the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations.

Retail sales of two-wheelers rose to 26,15,953 units in November from 22,58,970 units in the same month last year, which represents a robust 15.8 per cent growth. However, passenger vehicle (PV) retail sales fell 13.72 per cent at 3,21,943 units, as against 3,73,140 units in the year-ago month. The PV segment faced notable headwinds, the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations (FADA) said in a statement. "While November was initially expected to build on its prior momentum, particularly due to the marriage season, dealer feedback suggests that this segment underperformed overall expectations," FADA president, C.S. Vigneshwar said in a statement.

Mamata Machinery Limited coming out with Rs 178.39 crore IPO

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Mamata Machinery Limited (MML) is opening its Initial Public Offering (IPO) priced at Rs 230 to Rs 243 per equity share - aggregating Rs 178.39 crores - which will open on December 19 and close on December 23, 2024. The total Offer Size of equity shares comprises of Offer for Sale up to 7,382,340 shares by the Promoter Selling Shareholders. Describing the 35-year-old Company as the "first in Gujarat to get ISO certification", he said here recently that it is the third largest exporter of plastics-related machinery in India, with

its machinery global footprint in 75 countries, and sales agents in Europe, South Africa and Asia. "Our Revenue is well-diversified and we are not dependent on a single geography as they all generate equal amount of sales," he said. "We have taken to technological integration with the ability to process recyclable films," he said while highlighting one product - Extrusion Blown Film - that uses nine layers of plastic for protection of the film from oxygen and moisture. "The share-selling Promoters are unlocking value while holding substantial shares in the Company, which is set to grow robustly financially this year," he said.

Wardwizard Innovations & Mobility Ltd launches e-vehicles

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Wardwizard Innovations & Mobility Limited (WIML) has introduced a new range of "Made in India" passenger and commercial electric three-wheelers under the brand 'Joy e-rik', and also a new high-speed electric scooter 'Nemo' under the brand 'Joy e-bike'. The Joy e-rik V1 (L5) is priced at Rs 3.85 lakhs; Joy Bandhu (L3) Rs 1.34 lakhs; Joy Sahayak +Rs 4.24 lakhs; Joy Eco Loader (L3) Rs 1.30 lakhs; and Electric 2-wheeler 'Nemo' Rs 99,000 - all show-

room prices. Yatin Gupte, Chairman and Managing Director, WIML, said here recently that these new models, under business verticals, marked a significant 'milestone' in the company's commitment to advancing India's transition to green and eco-friendly mobility. He said the Company would be collaborating closely with fleet operators in India to provide sustainable and cost-effective transportation solutions for electrified 'last-mile delivery', shared mobility and logistics sectors, thus accelerating the adoption of electric vehicles (EVs).

Auto parts industry in Haryana & Punjab facing crisis due to increasing cost of production

Tough competition, higher taxes need immediate support-Industry
SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Auto parts manufacturing industry in Haryana and Punjab having over 4000 units providing employment to nearly 50 lakh persons facing severe crisis due to increasing cost of production, tough competition among manufacturers, higher rate of GST now looking for government support for their survival. According to information, there are more than 4000 auto parts manufacturing units in Haryana and Punjab manufacturing auto parts and nut bolts used in automobiles doing business worth crores of rupees in the country as well as exports, in spite of the fact more than 25% auto parts are being imported from China and nearly 60% automobile accessories being imported from abroad. According to Guru Pargat Singh Kahlo, President Auto Parts Manufacturing Association of India, the government has proposed to impose a 25% duty on steel, which is basic raw material for manufacturing auto parts, which will be extremely harmful for the auto parts industry in the



country already facing a crisis. Meanwhile, President of Apex Chamber of Commerce & Industry Ludhiana, Rajnish Ahula while talking to media persons said the replacement market of auto parts has witnessed 60% decline in demand at present with the arrival of modern range of automobiles introduced by the automobile manufacturers in the country. He demanded immediate reduction in GST on auto parts from 28% at present to 12% to keep auto parts industry alive, made available loans at lesser rate of interest, ease of doing business should be encouraged and GST refunds should be made at an early to this industry by the government providing employment to lakhs of people, besides having 7.1% share in country's GDP. Auto Parts manufacturers said that steel being the basic raw material used in manufacturing auto parts, the Union Government's decision to impose 25% safeguard duty on steel will adversely affect the auto parts industry.

IKS highlighting U.S. healthcare Industry with Rs 2,498 crore IPO

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Inventurus Knowledge Solutions Limited is highlighting its initial public offering (IPO) of Equity Shares priced at between Rs 1,265 and Rs 1,329 - aggregating to Rs 2,498 crore - which will open on December 12, 2024 and close on December 16, 2024. Inventurus Knowledge Solutions Limited is a technology-enabled healthcare solutions provider that offers a care enablement platform assisting physician enterprises in the US,



Canada and Australia, with a focus on the US markets. The Company offers a comprehensive platform to enable healthcare enterprises across outpatient and inpatient care, while also enabling healthcare organizations to deliver superior clinical care, improve population health outcomes, and transition to the "fee for value" model alongside optimizing their revenue and reducing operating costs. Sachin Gupta, Whole-Time Director and Chief Executive Officer, Inventurus Knowledge Solutions Limited) told media at the IPO press

conference here recently that the Company's focus is on the U.S. healthcare industry, presently valued at \$4.8 trillion and growing between 7%-8% annually due to population ageing or sick due to sedentary lifestyles. With the U.S. economy at 20% GDP, the U.S. is spending more than any economy on healthcare even as macro changes are pushing its healthcare needs to continuous growth, he said, adding that patient experience is the differentiator, beside also the addition of technology-enabled globalised delivery layer to the care delivery pyramid.

A Brief History of Drug Price Control in India



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH
Partial similarity of the title used in this article to 'A Brief History of Time' by Stephen W. Hawking is intentional as it attempts to present the history of drug price control in India but not in non-technical terms as Hawking's work presented the structure, origin, development, and eventual fate of the Universe. In India, the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 regulates the import, manufacture, distribution and sale of drugs and cosmetics. Section 3(b) of the Act defines the drug that includes (i) all medicines for internal or external use of human beings or animals and all substances intended to be used for or in the diagnosis, treatment, mitigation or prevention of any disease or disorder in human beings or animals, including preparations applied on human body for the purpose of repelling insects like mosquitoes; (ii) such substances (other than food) intended to affect the structure or any function of the human body or intended to be used for the destruction of vermin or insects which cause disease in human beings or animals, as may be specified from time to time by the Central Government by notification in the Official Gazette; (iii) all substances intended for use as compo-

nents of a drug including empty gelatin capsules; and (iv) such devices intended for internal or external use in the diagnosis, treatment, mitigation or prevention of disease or disorder in human beings or animals, as may be specified from time to time by the Central Government by notification in the Official Gazette, after consultation with the Board. This background is necessary as this forms the sphere of influence under Drug Price Control. In the wake of the Indo-Chinese War, the Drugs (Control of Prices) Order, 1963 was issued to cap drug costs. This Order was issued under the provisions of the Defence of India Act of 1915. Main aim of this Order was to make pharmaceuticals affordable and available. Pharmaceutical industry was critical of the freeze order on the ground that the prices of relevant APIs were not frozen. In 1966, a system was put in place that permitted selective increases thereby replacing total freeze. Additionally, 18 essential drugs were identified and referred to the Tariff Commission for examining the 'cost structure' and recommending 'fair selling prices.' The Drugs Prices (Display & Control) Order was notified in 1966 (NPPA full book, p.31). Manufacturers of pharmaceutical products were under obligation to obtain prior approval of the Government before increasing the prices of all formulations in their



lists as on June 30, 1966. In August 1968, generic drugs were exempted from price approval. The Drug (Prices Control) Order 1970 was issued under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955. This was aimed at lowering the prices of essential pharmaceuticals by limiting excessive profits. The Government of India constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Sh. Jaisukhlal Hathi, Member of Parliament, in 1974 which submitted its report titled, 'Report of the Committee on Drugs and Pharmaceutical Industry' (popularly known as Hathi Committee Report) in 1975. Out of 224 recommendations, a key recommendation was about introduction of a list of essential medicines. 44 drugs derived from synthetic sources were identified as essential drugs by the Committee, and overall 116 essential drugs were listed. The first Drug Policy of India was formulated in March 1978. This was followed by the Drugs (Price Control) Order,



1979 under which bulk drugs as well as formulations were classified as scheduled and non-scheduled. For scheduled formulations (about 4,000 in number), retail price was to be determined by using 'mark-ups' over material and other costs. In contrast to this, maximum selling prices of regulated bulk drugs (347 in number) was to be determined by taking into consideration stipulated rates of return on net worth/capital employed. Due to different mark-ups, pharmaceutical business entities curtailed production in those categories which offered lower allowable mark-ups. In this background, a committee - Kelkar Committee (named after Sh. Vijay Kelkar) was constituted in 1984 which recommended the reduction in the number of drugs under price control. This was followed by the Drug Policy, 1986 and DPCO, 1987. Under DPCO, 1987 the number of regulated bulk drugs came down to 142. Two key arguments, i.e., India becoming one of the cheapest drug

makers in the world since the early 1980s, and the rate of increase of drug prices being lower than general price level, formed the basis for reduction in the number of drugs under price control. Economic reforms of 1991 resulted into modification of the Drug Policy of 1986. In 1995, new DPCO was announced under which just 74 bulk drugs remained under price control. The criteria applied included market competition and annual turnover. In 1997, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) was formed and the task of price fixation, revision and other related matters for bulk drugs and formulations were transferred to NPPA which used to be dealt by the Bureau of Industrial Costs & Prices (BICP) earlier. In March, 1999 the Government constituted a Drug Price Control Review Committee (DPCRC) to review the existing drug price control mechanism and to suggest alternate models, if any, with a view to reducing the rigours of price control where they had become counter-productive. On December 7, 2012 the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Policy (NPPP, 2012) was announced. The National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) - 2011 and the Report of Task Force headed by Dr. Pronab Sen formed the basis of NPPP, 2012. Task Force headed by Dr. Sen had the mandate to "Explore Options other than Price Control for Achieving the Objectives of Making Available Life-saving Drugs at Reasonable Prices." By 2005, the number of bulk drugs under price control came down to 74. It was realized that the DPCO, 1995 overly focused on the bulk drugs and affected the bulk drug manufacturers so several bulk drugs went out of production due to such price controls. Another major development during this period was related to shift from process patent regime to product patent regime due to obligations under TRIPS. Post NPPP, 2012 the DPCO,

Schedule-I of DPCO, 2013 was amended through adoption of NLEM, 2015 that consisted 377 medicines. By July 2021 the NPPA had fixed ceiling prices of 355 medicines and 882 formulations for medicines under NLEM, 2015 and the number went up to 890 scheduled formulations of medicines by June 30, 2022. Additionally, the NPPA had fixed retail price (applicable only to the applicant manufacturing/marketing companies) of 2,023 new drugs under DPCO, 2013 by June 30, 2022 and this number went up to 2,607 by December 29, 2023. The NPPA had also fixed ceiling prices of Stents (February 2017), Knee Implants (August, 2017), and capped trade margin on selected 42 anti-cancer drugs (February, 2019). By December 29, 2023 the NPPA had fixed the ceiling prices of 915 formulations comprising 700 formulations under NLEM 2022 and 215 formulations under NLEM 2015 and ceiling prices of 131 anti-cancer formulations were effective. Due to the fixation of ceiling prices of scheduled formulations listed in NLEM 2022 alone, the consumers saved Rs. 3,588 crore. **Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish - Associate Professor (Finance and Accounting), Department of Pharmaceutical Management, NIPER S.A.S. Nagar (Mohali), DISCLAIMER: Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.**

INTERNATIONAL

'Maverick diplomacy': Trump invites Xi Jinping to inauguration for 'open dialogue'

NEW YORK: Continuing with his maverick diplomacy, U.S. President-Elect Donald Trump has invited China's President Xi Jinping to his inauguration next month for "open dialogue" with adversaries, his spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said on Thursday.

The invitation to the leader of China which had been his target during the campaign and after is in keeping with the unconventional diplomacy that Trump practiced in his first term reaching out to North Korea's dictator Kim Jong Un.

Without being specific about Xi, Trump said of the invitations that are being sent out, "Some people said, 'Wow, that's a little risky, isn't it?' And I said, 'Maybe it is. We'll see. We'll see what happens.' But we like to take little chances".



Leavitt said in an interview with Fox News, "This is an example of President Trump creating an open dialogue with leaders of countries that are not just our allies but our adversaries and our competitors too."

She added: "He had done this in his first term and he got a lot of criticism for it, but it

led to peace around the world. He is willing to talk to anyone. He will always put America's interest first."

Beijing had not reacted to the invitation as of Thursday night.

Throughout his campaign for presidency and after his election, Trump had criticised China for its predatory

trade practices, and its role in the narcotics network that is behind the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans.

He has threatened to increase tariffs on China's imports if it did not end the export of materials used to make synthetic narcotics.

He has also complained about China continuing to have "developing country" status at the World Trade Organization giving it favourable export status.

Trump has named David Perdue as his Beijing Ambassador, who is considered to be a hawk on China.

Earlier, David Perdue, warned in a newspaper article, "Americans first have to realise the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) actually is at war with us."

Israel Says Destroyed over 90 Pct of Syria's Surface-to-Air Missile Systems



JERUSALEM: The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that it has "severely damaged" Syria's air defences, destroying over 90 per cent of identified strategic surface-to-air missile systems.

In a statement, the IDF revealed that it had been conducting a comprehensive assessment of Syria's situation, taking into account the potential downfall

of Bashar al-Assad, Xinhua news agency reported. "In preparation for such a scenario, the Air Force has developed an extensive strike plan aimed at neutralising Syria's military capabilities, including strategic weaponry," the statement read.

Over the past several days, hundreds of Israeli fighter jets and aircraft have launched coordinated strikes, delivering signifi-

cant blows to Syria's most strategic weapons, including fighter jets, helicopters, missiles, UAVs, radars, and rockets.

The strikes also targeted several key Syrian air bases. The T4 Airport, near northern Damascus, was significantly damaged, with the complete destruction of the SU-22 and SU-24 fighter squadrons stationed there. The "Ble" Airport, housing three additional fighter squadrons, and a nearby weapons storage site were also hit in the Israeli strikes. "In 48 hours, the IDF struck most of the strategic weapons stockpiles in Syria to prevent them from falling into the hands of terrorist elements," IDF said in a post on X. In addition, manufacturing and storage facilities, including a critical one in Syria's Homs area, which was identified as a pivotal component of Syria's Scud missile program, were targeted.

Syrians to determine their country's future: United Nation Chief



UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said that the future of Syria is a matter for the Syrians to determine and that there is much work to be done to ensure an orderly political transition to renewed institutions.

The UN chief on Sunday reiterated his call "for calm and avoiding violence at this sensitive time, while protecting the rights of all Syrians, without distinction."

The inviolability of diplomatic and consular premises and personnel must be respected in all cases in accordance with international law, Xinhua news agency reported, quoting the UN Secretary-General.

"We will need the support of the international community to ensure that any political transition is inclusive and comprehensive and that it meets the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria, in all their diversity. Syria's sovereignty, unity, independence and territorial integrity must be restored," said Guterres.

United Nations stands against any violation of territorial integrity of Syria: Spokesman



UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations stands against any violation of the territorial integrity of Syria, a UN spokesman said, after Israel seized a buffer zone in the Golan Heights following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad government.

When asked about media reports that recently the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) targeted 320 Syrian military targets, Stephanie Dujarric, spokesperson for the UN secretary-general, said at a daily press briefing, "It is very clear that we stand against any violation of the territorial integrity of Syria. We are against these types of attacks."

In the wake of the fall of al-Assad's government, Israel ramped up its military operation in Syria, launching airstrikes against military weaponry and seizing control of a demilitarised buffer zone in the Golan Heights, Xinhua news agency reported. Dujarric said that the United Nations continues to consider Golan Heights to be the occupied territory of Syria. "I think we were very clear about the violation of the disengagement agreement following the IDF occupation of the buffer zone," he added.

"I think this is a turning point for Syria. It should not be used by its neighbours to encroach on the territory of Syria," the spokesman said.

It should be used by all those in the region and beyond to support the Syrian people, so they can choose their own path, so they can work on a transition that is Syrian-led, Syrian-owned, and inclusive, he said.

Former Pak PM Imran Khan and Wife Bushra Bibi Indicted in Toshakhana Case

ISLAMABAD: Trouble continues to mount for former Pakistan premier and founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party as he and his wife Bushra Bibi were indicted in the Toshakhana 2.0 case, on Thursday. Pakistan's National Accountability Bureau (NAB) had alleged that the Saudi royal family gifted a Bulgari jewellery set - including a ring, bracelet, necklace and earrings - to Imran Khan's wife during her visit to the kingdom in May 2021 that was illegally retained by the former first couple instead of submitting it to the government's Toshakhana where all such gifts to government officials are kept.

It was the country's Deputy Military Secretary at that time who had informed the special investigation court that the jewellery was retained by Imran Khan's wife.

On Thursday, a special court read the charges to Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi - both were present during the hearing - initiating legal proceedings into the case.

Khan is currently facing



multiple charges and is serving jail term in Rawalpindi's Adiala jail. However, his wife Bushra Bibi was granted bail in the infamous Iddat case and other cases.

NAB maintained that Khan and Bushra Bibi had deliberately undervalued the actual price of the jewelry set.

NAB revealed that Bulgari sold the necklace to a Saudi Arabian franchise on May 25, 2018 for 300,000 Euros and earrings for 80,000 Euros. The total value of the jewelry set was valued in Pakistani currency at Rs 75,661,600. However, according to the investigating agency, the necklace and earrings were valued by Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi, thus incurring a loss of at least Rs 35,765,800 to the national treasury.

The indictment of Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi in the Toshakhana 2.0 case comes at a time when the PTI founder is facing multiple cases, including fresh ones filed against him for ordering and orchestrating the recent violent protest in Islamabad.

Khan faces a tough road ahead as one confession by former ISI chief Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Faiz Hamed, who has been accused of supporting former PM and even being the mastermind behind the targeted attacks by PTI workers on military installations across the country on May 9 last year, could lead to more hearings, this time in military courts.

Pak court indicts Imran, wife Bushra Bibi in 2nd Toshakhana case

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani court indicted imprisoned former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his wife on fresh charges of illegally selling state gifts on Thursday, local broadcaster Geo reported. The indictment was the latest in dozens of cases against the 72-year-old former cricket star, who has been in jail since late last year. Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi have already been granted bail in the case, which is one of a series of state treasury charges known as Toshakhana. These charges revolve around allegations that Khan and his wife illegally procured and then sold gifts worth more than 140 million rupees (\$5,01,000) in state possession, which he received during his 2018-22 premiership. They have denied committing an offence.

Australia's Largest Telco, Telstra, Fined Over Emergency Service Disruption



SYDNEY: Telstra, Australia's largest telecommunications provider, has been fined 3 million Australian dollars (\$1.9 million) by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) for failing to comply with emergency call protocols during a March 1 outage of the country's Triple Zero (000) emergency network.

Details of the Incident

During the 90-minute outage, Telstra's Triple Zero call centre faced operational challenges, resulting in:

- 127 emergency calls failing to connect to the relevant emergency services due to outdated backup phone data.
- 346 emergency calls being transferred successfully but without essential digital location information, critical for swift emergency responses.

Telstra, as the national operator of the Triple Zero service, is legally required to ensure seamless handling and transfer of emergency calls.

ACMA's Statement

ACMA member Samantha Yorke criticized Telstra's fail-

ure, stating: "As the emergency call provider, Telstra is at the centre of this critical public safety service. Its systems and contingency plans failed people in real need."

She acknowledged Telstra's apology and efforts to improve its contingency measures to avoid future disruptions.

Broader Context

This fine follows a 12 million AUD (\$7.6 million) penalty imposed on Telstra's competitor Optus in November 2023, when thousands of customers were unable to reach Triple Zero during a significant outage.

These incidents highlight ongoing vulnerabilities in Australia's telecommunications infrastructure and its impact on public safety.

Future Measures

Telstra has pledged to implement robust safeguards to prevent a recurrence, emphasizing its commitment to public safety and maintaining trust in its role as the national emergency call provider.

'Joy Bangla' no longer Bangladesh national slogan



DAKHA: Bangladesh Supreme Court has stayed a High Court verdict that declared Joy Bangla - popularised by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - as the country's national slogan. Following the change of government, the state moved to suspend the High Court's ruling and on December 2 filed the leave to appeal petition with the SC seeking stay on the High Court verdict of March 10, 2020. A four-member bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed Rezaul Karim on Tuesday passed the order on the ground that the national slogan is a matter of the government's policy decision and the judiciary cannot interfere in this issue.

Trump Revives '51st State' Joke, Calls Justin Trudeau "Governor of Canada"

NEW YORK: President-elect Donald Trump caused a stir by referring to Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau as the "Governor of the Great State of Canada" on his social media platform, Truth Social, after a dinner meeting.

Trump wrote: "It was a pleasure to have dinner the other night with Governor Justin Trudeau of the Great State of Canada. I look forward to seeing the Governor again soon so that we may continue our in-depth talks on Tariffs and Trade, the results of which will be truly spectacular for all!" The comment quickly went viral, with reactions ranging from amusement to confusion. Some saw it as a deliberate dig, while others debated whether it reflected a genuine geopolitical jest.

Background : The '51st



State' Remark

Trump's comment echoes his longstanding proposal suggesting Canada could join the US as its 51st state, especially if economic pressures like proposed 25% tariffs were to destabilize the Canadian economy. The quip reportedly resurfaced during an unscheduled dinner at Mar-a-Lago, where Trudeau sought to address the tariffs. Trump used the occasion to reiterate his criticisms of Canada's handling of illegal migration and drug trafficking, arguing that these issues negatively impact the US.

"Subsidies and States"

Trump has previously claimed that the US "subsidises" Canada by over \$100 billion annually and Mexico by nearly \$300 billion. During a recent interview, he suggested these countries should consider joining the US if they continue to benefit disproportionately.

Trudeau's Response

Prime Minister Trudeau dismissed the "Governor" remarks lightly but firmly stated that Canada would defend its economic interests. He warned that US tariffs would lead to retaliatory measures, ultimately hurting American consumers through higher prices.

Diplomatic Implications

The meeting at Mar-a-Lago was seen as a precursor to potentially contentious negotiations between the US and Canada after Trump's inauguration on January 20. While Trump's remarks appear lighthearted, they highlight deeper tensions around trade, security, and border issues.

The lighthearted jab has reignited discussions about US-Canada relations, setting the stage for a challenging diplomatic landscape in 2025.

Oman Oil Marketing Company Highlights Safety Excellence During HSEQ Week

FW DESK
Muscat (Oman)

The Oman Oil Marketing Company (OOMCO) commenced its Annual Health, Safety, Environment, and Quality (HSEQ) Week from December 8 to December 12, 2024. The five-day event highlighted OOMCO's dedication to promoting a culture of health and safety by involving employees, stakeholders, and the wider community through significant initiatives, awareness workshops, and strategic partnerships.

The week began with a distinguished Kick-Off Ceremony, presided over by Brigadier General Engineer Ali bin Saif Al Maqbali, Chief of the Civil Defense and Ambulance Authority (CDA), and included the HSEQ Contractor Forum, attended by notable stakeholders, such as representatives from the Ministry of Labor, Oman Energy Association (OPAL), and Civil Defense. This event facilitated the sharing of ideas, showcased best practices, and



encouraged collaboration in health and safety management.

During HSEQ Week, OOMCO's leadership team will visit important partners to align health and safety objectives, collect vital feedback, and enhance partnerships.

OOMCO employees participated in an array of activities designed to enhance awareness and encourage healthy habits. These included a Daily Safety Quiz, blood donation drives, medical checkups, and

awareness sessions on critical topics such as breast cancer and diabetes prevention. One of the standout initiatives was the session titled "No to Amputation for Diabetic Foot Patients," which addressed the importance of early intervention and preventive care for diabetic patients.

Reinforcing its commitment to the community, OOMCO collaborated with leading organizations such as the Blood Bank, Oman International Hospital,

and the Cancer Association to extend the impact of its health and safety efforts beyond the workplace. These partnerships exemplify OOMCO's dedication to promoting well-being across all sectors of society.

In reference to the importance of HSEQ Week, Tarik Mohammed Al Junaidi, CEO of OOMCO, remarked: "Our Annual Health and Safety Week exemplifies our unwavering dedication to safeguarding the health and welfare of

our employees, partners, and the community." We strive to exemplify health and safety as essential elements of our operations through such programs, while cultivating a culture that emphasizes the well-being of all those we serve.

OOMCO's Annual HSEQ Week underscores the company's leadership in health and safety, demonstrating its comprehensive commitment to workplace and community welfare. These initiatives correspond with OOMCO's overarching objective to establish new standards in operational excellence and community involvement.

Oman Oil Marketing Company, a pioneer in fuel marketing, has been at the forefront of industry innovation for over two decades. Its modern service stations, strategic partnerships, and high-quality petroleum products cater to the evolving needs of customers across Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and United Republic of Tanzania.

Corporate Bankruptcies in Japan Continue to Rise

TOKYO: Japan witnessed 834 corporate bankruptcies in November 2024, marking a 7.9% increase from the same month in 2023, according to data released by Teikoku Databank. This is the highest number of November bankruptcies since 2013 and represents the 31st consecutive month of year-on-year increases, signaling ongoing challenges in the business environment.

Year-to-Date Trends

From January to November 2024, 9,053 bankruptcies were recorded, the highest annual total since 2015, with December still to be accounted for.

Total liabilities surged by



liabilities of 14,761 billion yen. Additionally, two cases exceeding 10 billion yen significantly drove the increase in total liabilities.

Economic Implications

The data highlights the pressures on businesses across various sectors, reflecting Japan's challenging economic environment. Factors such as rising operational costs, slowing demand, and economic uncertainties are exacerbating financial difficulties for companies. With this sustained trend, analysts and policymakers are closely monitoring the situation to mitigate further economic fallout.

72.7%, reaching 152,244 billion yen (approximately \$1 billion), compared to 88.15 billion yen in November 2023.

Key Contributors

The largest bankruptcy was that of Nippon Denka Co., a Tokyo Stock Exchange Growth-listed manufacturer of electrolytic copper foil, with

liabilities of 14,761 billion yen. Additionally, two cases exceeding 10 billion yen significantly drove the increase in total liabilities.

Economic Implications

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India Supports UNGA Resolution for Ceasefire in Gaza

UNITED NATIONS: India joined 157 nations in voting for a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution demanding an "immediate, unconditional, and permanent" ceasefire in Gaza.

Key Points of the Resolution:

- Ceasefire in Gaza: The resolution was passed with 158 votes in favour, including India.
- Nine countries, including the US and Israel, opposed it, while 13 abstained.

UNRWA Support: A second resolution backing the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) was approved by 159 votes in favour, with nine opposing and 11 abstentions.

UNRWA faces criticism from Israel, alleging ties between some staff members and Hamas militants.

Global Opinion: The resolutions reflect overwhelming



global support for a ceasefire and humanitarian aid in Gaza. The General Assembly resolutions, though non-binding, highlight the urgent need for peace.

India's Stance: Condemnation of Terrorism: India has strongly condemned the October 7 Hamas attacks on Israel.

Support for Peace: India

calls for a ceasefire, adherence to international law, and dialogue-based resolution.

Humanitarian Concerns: New Delhi emphasised the importance of unhindered aid delivery in Gaza.

This move underscores India's commitment to a balanced approach, supporting peace while condemning acts of terrorism.

Single endoscopic procedure used to treat dual obstruction at food pipe with advanced liver cirrhosis

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

A patient with advanced liver cirrhosis from Himachal Pradesh, who suffered from a complex dual obstruction in the food pipe (two separate esophageal), was treated while using a single endoscopic procedure to address the conditions at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital.



and the diverticulum while also ensuring that we avoided bleeding from the prominent dilated veins at gastro oesophagus junction."

The medical team, in collaboration with interventional radiologists Dr. Arun Gupta, Dr. Ajit Yadav, and Dr. Raghav Seth, devised a meticulous treatment plan. They first embolised the varices to reduce the risk of bleeding and then proceeded with endoscopic evaluation, confirming that the varices had been obliterated. The next step was a combined peroral endoscopic myotomy (POEM) procedure, which addressed

both achalasia cardia and the diverticulum simultaneously.

Dr. Anil Arora explained that the POEM procedure is a minimally invasive endoscopic treatment that involves four key steps: mucosal entry, creation of a submucosal tunnel, myotomy (cutting of the esophageal muscle) of the diverticulum, and myotomy of the lower oesophageal sphincter (LES) for achalasia cardia. During the procedure, special care was taken to coagulate and fulgurate any varices that were encountered, preventing bleeding during the treatment.

Dr. Arora remarked, "This successful treatment is a remarkable achievement, not only for its complexity but also for the novel approach we employed. The patient, who had previously struggled with swallowing, is

now able to consume a normal diet and has a new lease on life within a span of week after our innovative treatment

Dr. Shivam Khare added, "This is the world's first case where two oesophageal diseases — achalasia cardia and oesophageal diverticulum — were treated in a patient with advanced cirrhosis and varices using a single endoscopic procedure." The patient, who had previously visited several major medical centers without success, was discharged within three days after the procedure, and is now able to swallow seamlessly without any difficulty. Dr. Ajay Swaroop, Chairman of Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, is committed to use it for innovative procedure to benefit such patients.

Tata Mumbai Marathon 2025 highlights "Queens Necklace" merchandise



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

The Tata Mumbai Marathon 2025 preparations highlighted celebrating the spirit of endurance and performance with ASICS sports icons Rohan Bo-

panna (tennis), Saurav Ghosal (Squash) and Actor/Triathlete Saiyami Kher unveiling the 20th edition of the Marathon's official merchandise here recently.

Anil Singh, Managing Director, Procam International

which organizes the Marathon, said the ASICS merchandise reflected raising the bar as marathoners' treasured collection.

Recalling that this marathon had witnessed participation of over 65,000 runners, he said they were the ones who 'walked the talk' and 'ran the race' in their belief in this sport.

Rajat Khurana, MD, ASICS India and South Asia, said that besides echoing the vibrant spirit of Mumbai and resilience of every participant, the limited 20th edition merchandise drew inspiration from "The Queens Necklace" (the iconic 'Marine Drive' of Mumbai), and the 'Tetrapods' lining the shore coastline.

A Monk for Wealth : Guru Vinod Swaran Presents a Spiritual Blueprint for Prosperity Before the Nation

GOPAL MISRA

Dr. Vinod Swaran also known as Swami Girijanand ji, is a spiritual teacher with a difference. He does not wear the traditional attire in saffron mostly worn by monks in India. It is a symbol of sacrifice, sanctity and detachment from material things, but this unassuming spiritual leader has huge followings within India and abroad. He is also lovingly called guruji by his followers.

Girijanand ji could easily be mistaken as a professional corporate executive or an academic in a gathering, but he represents India's ancient tradition of having a life committed to live in its fullness and grandeur. During his brief sojourn in New Delhi during the first week of December, his impact was visible. He drew attention as well as curiosity among Delhi's high-profile audience, when his sudden presence redefining the traditional perception of a religious leader.

At one of such gatherings on Saturday, December 7, 2024, in New Delhi, Girijanand ji, offered a convergence model of an ideal family life committed to resolve the challenges of the day-today existences being faced by each of us. Unlike other spiritual leaders or gurus, he does not advocate a detached life for attaining spiritual gains, but he unleashes a process of bringing all the elements contributing to the individual and as well as social development. His concept of development is based on an all-inclusive approach against any effort



Comedy film "Martbaan" will tickle Punjabis settled across the world at OTT Chaupal

KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Chandigarh

Punjabi comedy film "Martbaan" directed by renowned director

Bobby Bajwa caught the attention of the audience and media at an event held at Chandigarh Press Club today. The entire team of the film was present

on the occasion, including lead actors Gurchet Chitrakar, Malkit Malanga, and Rajinder Rozi who shared interesting information about their roles.

Bengaluru Real Estate Boom: Magicbricks Revolutionizes Property Buying with Scaled Site Visit Product



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

In response to Bengaluru's rising demand for residential properties, Magicbricks, India's leading real estate platform, has significantly expanded its Site Visit Product in the city, forging partnerships with over 100 developers, including prominent names such as Sumadhura Developers, Provident Group, and Epitome Builders. This strategic move has transformed property exploration into a seamless experience for homebuyers while driving sales for developers. Launched just a year ago, Magicbricks' Site Visit Product has made an impressive impact, facilitating more than 7,500 site visits across 150+ residential projects in Bengaluru. These efforts have translated into 400+ confirmed home bookings, with an average ticket size of Rs 1.25 crore—underscoring the effectiveness of this customer-centric approach.

The growing housing demand in Bengaluru is driven by a mix of urbanization, increasing disposable incomes, and evolving aspirations for homeownership. Sudhir Pai, CEO of Magicbricks, emphasized the program's success, saying: "Traditionally, residential demand would taper off in December following the festive season. However, over the past 2-3 years, the aspiration for homeownership has remained robust, with prospective buyers actively seeking their dream homes year-round. With India's first Property Visit Fest, we are poised to harness this sustained demand, connecting builders with a highly relevant and intent-driven audience while simplifying the decision-making journey for homebuyers.

The initiative is not just about simplifying the homebuying process for consumers; it also delivers tangible benefits to developers. By connecting them with high-intent buyers, the Site Visit Product ensures a more focused and effective sales funnel. Interestingly, repeat visits have become a key indicator of buyer interest, with some homebuyers exploring 4-5 properties in a single day—cutting decision-making time by nearly half. Developers have praised the initiative for its ability to bring serious buyers directly to their doorsteps, enabling quicker closures and better engagement. This partnership-centric approach has created a strong synergy between Magicbricks and Bengaluru's real estate developers.

Congress flags pollution in Ganga ahead of Maha Kumbh



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress party has raised the issue of severe pollution in the Holy River of Ganga in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand ahead of the Maha Kumbh scheduled early next year.

Congress leader and Media Coordinator Abhay Dubey disclosed how casual and careless callousness of the BJP governments in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand had polluted the sacred waters of Holy Ganga.

He has asked the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi whether he can guarantee that the sanctity of the Holy Water of Ganga will be restored before Maha Kumbh.

Abhay Dubey said that though PM Modi had stated that he had been called by Maa Ganga, but even in his constituency Varanasi, gutter

water is being poured into the holy river. He asked whether PM will seek apology from the country and take immediate steps required to maintain the purity of Ganga. He said that as per UP government's compliance report submitted to NGT, in the Prayagraj Municipal Corporation, there are sewage treatment plants only for 340 MLD (Million Litres per Day) out of 468.2 MLD of sewage. This means that about 128 MLD of untreated sewage water is being directly discharged into Ganga River. He said, this is a grave sin, especially because the Kumbh Mela is going to be held in Prayagraj.

He revealed that the fecal matter was found even in the Ganga water collected from Gangotri, the source of river Ganga. Holding the BJP governments at the centre and party-ruled states of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand responsible for polluting the holy Ganga, Dubey asked whether the UP CM will give an assurance to the devotees that Ganga water will be made suitable for drinking and bathing before the Kumbh. The Congress leader said, the reason for this much pollution was inefficiency of the governments as they had not enforced the pollution control norms nor had they followed the NGT guidelines. He said, most of the sewage treatment plants in both the states were non-functional or not up to the mark.

Quoting the official reports that sample surveys of the Holy Water of Ganga had revealed that it contained huge quantities of human and animal fecal matter, Dubey disclosed that samples of Ganga water were

collected from 41 locations in Uttar Pradesh. In 16 places, it was found that there were more than 500 MPN Fecal Coliform bacteria per 100 ml of water, while at 17 places there were more than 2500 MPN per 100 ml.

Dubey expressed shock that the holy water that people consume and will consume in the upcoming Kumbh with great faith contains fecal matter and held the Uttar Pradesh government responsible for it.

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Shawl made of yak and goat wool reaches Amritsar from Ladakh

Apricots recipe shared and served from Ladakh, First time, Several Traders arrived in PITEX from UT, Ladakh
JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar



Ladakh after getting UT status by the central government, has now started spreading its trade to other parts of the country. Women from Ladakh are becoming independent and have started doing trade in neighbouring states as well.

The Punjab International Trade Expo, which formally started in Amritsar, is providing

to be a boon for exhibitors from Ladakh. Last year, only three exhibitors from Ladakh attended PITEX. This time

the number has increased to eleven. "Brand Ladakh Emporium" is giving a new identity to its Ladakh Local traders.

Assistant Handicraft Training Officer Liaqat Ali said that Ladakh after getting the status of UT, several changes have been seen in the living of the people. Now with a new identity, Local traders mark their presence across the country. This year, four women from Ladakh arrived at PITEX with their products. Moreover, He said that Ladakh is one of the coolest regions in the country. That's why they bring winter clothes such as sweaters, shawls and other products made from yak wool.

Apart from this, the Pashmina wool of goat is found only in the upper region of Ladakh. Due to this they bring handmade Pashmina shawls here. A woman from Ladakh lobbing wangmo showcase their handmade toys made up from wool. She is still knitting toys while sitting at her stall. Sadiq Ali, who set up his stall here, said that apricots are usually eaten as a dry fruit, but in Ladakh people like to eat after boiling it. This is the new way of serving apricots recipes at their stalls in PITEX.

A tale of development of Hindi Language

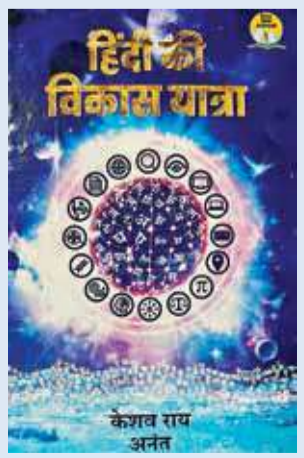
SATISH SINGH

Many Hindi lovers and common people are still not familiar with the development journey of Hindi language. Hence, for a long time, the need of such a book was being felt, which contains the horoscope of the development of Hindi. From this point of view, the creation of the two authors Keshav Rai and Anant, "Hindi Ki Vikas Yatra" seems to fulfil the expectations of the people.

There is a total of 36 chapters in this book, in which the account of the development of Hindi has been presented. In this sequence, an attempt has been made to know and

understand the appropriate description of other Indian languages, analysis of Hindi literature according to its chronology such as ancient period, medieval period and modern period, discussion about the changes coming in Hindi language, discussion of the obstacles in the path of development of Hindi language, history of Indian education etc.

The authors believe that the efforts to make Hindi the national language gained momentum after independence. However, even after independence, Hindi was not made the national language as per the expectations of the public and it remained only a state language. The dominance of English re-



mained intact in the country and it continued to be the language of employment. The so-called intellectuals could not get out of the spell of English. As a result, Hindi

remained a folk language i.e. the language of the poor and deprived sections.

The book also discusses the English Hatao Andolan, opposition to Hindi in the southern states, Hindi Prachar Sabha in the south, eminent personalities promoting Hindi in the south, Indian Hindi Parishad, Indian Language Council, Central Hindi Directorate etc. It also throws light on the positive role of theatre and films in the development of Hindi. Many people in non-Hindi states have learned to speak Hindi by watching Hindi films. Khichdi language or Hinglish has also helped in expanding the opportunities of Hindi. Social media is also enriching it.

Being flexible and easy, Hindi is being used easily in the fields of computers, internet, mobile, various means of communication etc. The acceptance of Hindi has increased rapidly at the national and global level. At present, it is a major language of many countries. Hindi is progressing and its future is very bright. I opine, there is no exaggeration in the arguments of both the authors.

Book - "Hindi Ki Vikas Yatra" Author-Keshav Rai and Anant Publisher-Story Mirror Infotech Pvt. Ltd. Publication Year-September 2024 Price (Hardbound)- Rs.499/- Reviewer-Satish Singh,

Knowledge of Gita is important for the young generation says Shivraj Singh Chouhan

GULSHAN KUMAR
Chandigarh

Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Shivraj Singh Chouhan said that 5161 years ago, Lord Krishna delivered the message of the Bhagavad Gita to the entire world through Arjuna. He emphasized that the message of performing one's duties without attachment to the results, as taught in the Bhagavad Gita, is not only spiritually profound but also aligns with scientific principles. Shivraj Singh Chouhan was speaking at the ongoing International Gita Mahotsav in Kurukshetra, today.

He said that a person who works with a desire for the



outcome is constantly troubled, whereas one who works selflessly reaches the heights of success. The future generation of the country must read, understand, and adopt the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita in today's context. By embracing its wisdom, the youth should aim to set ambitious goals in their lives and

follow the path of action to achieve them. While praising the efforts of Gita Manishi Swami Shri Gyananand Ji Maharaj in spreading the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita, Union Minister Sh Shivraj Singh Chouhan highlighted that India has been a sacred land of sages and saints for thousands of years.