

REGION

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**AAP DELEGATION MEETS GOVERNOR ON CHANDIGARH CHIEF SECRETARY ISSUE, SAYS CENTRE IS TREATING PUNJAB UNFAIRLY**

## Food sector in Punjab holds an Immense Potential for Investment: Cabinet Minister Sond

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab's Minister for Industry, Commerce, and Investment Promotion, Tarunpreet Singh Sond, extended an invitation to domestic and international food companies to invest in Punjab. Addressing nearly 40 Managing Directors and CEOs of food sector companies during the 8th Indus Food Fair in Noida, organized in collaboration with the Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) and the Ministry of Commerce, Government of India, he highlighted the bright prospects for investment in Punjab's food sector.

He stated that Punjab holds immense potential in the food sector, given the global recognition of its culinary heritage. He emphasized the worldwide appeal of Punjabi cuisine and flavors, which attract people from across the globe. Sond mentioned that the Chief Minister of Punjab, Bhagwant Singh Mann, aims to elevate the state's food sector to a global level. The Punjab govern-



ment is making special efforts to establish brands like Verka, Sohna, Five Rivers, and others on an international platform. He also noted the growing global demand for Punjabi food and food products.

On this occasion, he shared information about the single-window system and initiatives undertaken by Invest Punjab to facilitate investors and industries. He assured that the Punjab government is fully committed to supporting investors in every possible way. Several company repre-

sentatives expressed interest in investing in Punjab and promised to present proposals soon, focusing on spices, food processing, and fruit and vegetable processing.

The Industry Minister also held separate meetings with investors from Canada, Australia, China, and the USA, encouraging them to invest in Punjab. He interacted with representatives from renowned companies, including Manohar Lal, owner of Haldiram's.

Later, Tarunpreet Singh

Sond visited several stalls among the approximately 1,500 exhibitions at the fair. He also explored food stalls from Lebanon, Portugal, China, and Turkey, savoring the flavors of their cuisines. He was accompanied by Punjab Food Commission Chairman Bal Mukund Sharma, Invest Punjab CEO DPS Kharbanda, and TPCI Chairman Mohit Singla.

Additionally, notable participants in the meeting included Suresh Vaidhyanathan from Abu Dhabi Food Hub, Rupesh Mehta from Khimji Ramdas (Oman), Kallai Meyyappan Ramalingam from Murugan Group (Singapore), Alferova from Auchan (Russia), Ananda Kumar from Al Madina Group (UAE), Ashok Kumar from Zepto, Himanshu Wahi from Swiggy, Ashish Agarwal from Bikanervala Foods, Akash Shah from Everest Spices, Sanjay Singhal from Wagh Bakri Tea Group, Mithun Apaiya from Wow! Momo, and other representatives from leading food companies.

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY

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**PRIVATE EQUITY INVESTMENTS IN INDIA SURGE TO \$15 BILLION IN 2024, A 46.2 PC GROWTH**

## India to Continue as Fastest-Growing Major Economy Globally: Report



**NEW DELHI:** India will continue to stand out as the fastest-growing major economy globally in the coming years with growth momentum to improve in 2025 as government spending is picking up again and consumer sentiment stays resilient, according to a Franklin Templeton report.

The structural growth outlook for India's economy remains very much intact, with various signs indicating that the slowdown in 2024 will be transitory, the report said. "All in all, we believe India can comfortably maintain its position as the world's fastest-growing major economy, with GDP growth of around 6.5 per cent until at least 2029. Income growth and the rise of the middle class will likely continue in tandem. We expect India's wealthy and middle-class populations to expand by 400 million people. In particular, the number of people in India's wealthiest class could grow three-fold,"

the report said.

"We also stay positive on India's vibrant digital economy and its beneficiaries, as well as the structural growth potential in the healthcare sector," it said.

India's economic growth slowed in 2024, with gross domestic product (GDP) year-on-year growth of just 5.4 per cent in the fiscal second quarter (July-September), the lowest in seven quarters. As a result, growth for the full fiscal year ending March 2025 will likely be 6.6 per cent, moderating from 8.2 per cent from a year earlier, based on Reserve Bank of India (RBI) forecasts.

The report said the slowdown is temporary, with deferred government spending in a general election year the primary cause. Heavy monsoon rainfall during the summer also proved disruptive to economic activities. Several high-frequency data points are showing improving underlying conditions for a recovery in growth.

Government spending has been picking up since September, suggesting that it is gradually ramping up its spending on priority initiatives, particularly infrastructure and rural development. Importantly, a pickup in government spending and activities should synergise capital expenditure (capex) growth in the private sector. For instance, faster approvals for construction and engineering projects will bolster company confidence to invest and hire more actively.

Private consumption is a major driver for India's economy and it is showing stronger growth momentum in the second half of this year. Consumer sentiment also remains resilient and year-ahead optimism has held firm, indicating a post-election recovery. Consumption growth should find further support if inflation cools in 2025. The Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation rate will moderate from 5.7 per cent in the October-December quarter of 2024 to 4 per cent in the July-September quarter of 2025, based on RBI forecasts, the report added.

The resumption of government spending, private sector capex growth and the resilience of domestic consumption, among other factors, may help India's economy return to normalcy in 2025. As growth accelerates again, the stage is set for earnings recovery, the report added.

POTPOURRI

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**HRITHIK ROSHAN CELEBRATES 51ST B'DAY WITH EX-WIFE SUSSANNE KHAN, LADYLOVE SABA**

## Finally SAD working committee accepts resignation of Sukhbir Singh Badal



**CHANDIGARH:** As per the strict order from Sri Akal Takht, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) working committee accepted the resignation of Sukhbir Singh Badal as the party president on Friday. Shiromani Akali Dal spokesperson Daljeet Singh Cheema announced this here after the working committee meeting.

New development comes two days after the Akal Takht Jathedar took a tough stance on the issue in a meeting with the SAD leaders, who had not implemented his directions on re-organisation of the party. The SAD had been arguing that the party's constitution and its registration as a political party under the Constitution demanded it to remain secular; so receiving and implementing the directions of the Akal Takht would amount to violating the conditions of the registration. Sukhbir Singh Badal had stepped aside from "actively" leading the party on August 30 last year, when he handed over the charge of running the party affairs to the working committee under Balwinder Singh Bhundar. On November 16, he had resigned from the post of president ahead of receiving religious punishment from the Akal Takht.

## Union Budget Falls on Saturday this Year, Stock Exchanges to Remain Open



**NEW DELHI:** As the preparations for the Union Budget 2025-26, which generally comes on February 1, are in full swing, all eyes are now on the official confirmation from the government about presenting the budget over the weekend this year.

There have been occasions in the past when the Union Budget was presented on Saturdays and the domestic stock markets were open. On February 1, 2020, and February 28, 2015, the markets were open on Saturday due to the presentation of the Union Budget. In a circular dated December 23, the National Stock Exchange (NSE), has already said that due to the presentation of the Union Budget, a special trading session has been kept for Saturday, February 1, 2025.

## India's Forex Reserves Decline USD 4.11 Billion amid RBI Interventions

**NEW DELHI:** India's foreign exchange reserves have continued their downward trajectory, marking the twelfth decline in thirteen weeks, according to the latest data released by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

The reserves decreased by USD 4.112 billion to reach USD 640.279 billion in the week ending December 27, reflecting the central bank's active involvement in currency market stabilisation.



The recent decline represents a significant shift from September's all-time high of USD 704.89 billion, with reserves falling approximately 10 percent since then.

The RBI's strategic intervention in currency markets, involving both buying and selling of dollars to manage the rupee's volatility, has been identified as the primary factor behind this reduction.

Current figures show that foreign currency assets, the largest component of the reserves, stand at USD 551.921 billion, while gold reserves are valued

at USD 66.268 billion. Despite the recent downturn, India's foreign exchange position remains robust, with current reserves sufficient to cover nearly a year's worth of projected imports.

The country's reserve management has shown mixed patterns over recent years, with an addition of approximately USD 58 billion in 2023, contrasting with a USD 71 billion decline in 2022. The reserves had gained over USD 20 billion in 2024 before the current decline began.

The RBI's approach to foreign exchange management focuses on maintaining market stability rather than targeting specific levels. As the central bank responsible for monitoring foreign exchange markets, the RBI holds assets primarily in reserve currencies, with the US Dollar comprising the majority, followed by smaller holdings in Euro, Japanese Yen, and Pound Sterling.

The transformation of the Indian rupee from being one of Asia's most volatile currencies a decade ago to one of its most stable today highlights the effectiveness of the RBI's management strategy.

## President Murmu urges Indian diaspora to contribute towards Viksit Bharat mission

**BHUBANESWAR:** President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said that the Indian diaspora can make significant contributions towards the realisation of India's mission of Viksit Bharat - a developed India by 2047, when the country will celebrate 100 years of its Independence.

Speaking at the valedictory session of the three-day Pravasi Bharatiya Convention here on Friday, President Murmu said: "Our nation today is marching towards Viksit Bharat - a developed India - by the year 2047. It is a National Mission that requires proactive and enthusiastic participation of every Indian, including those living abroad. The Indian Diaspora is an integral part of this vi-



sion. Their global presence gives them a unique perspective, and their achievements place them in a position to significantly contribute to the realization of

a developed India."

She also said that the Indian diaspora represents the best of our country.

The President also noted that the Indian diaspora have carried with them not just the knowledge and skills acquired in this sacred land but also the values and ethos that have been the foundation of Indian civilisation for millennia.

President Murmu said that the Indian diaspora has made a mark in the fields of technology, medicine, arts, or entrepreneurship, which the world acknowledges and respects.

She expressed happiness over the fact that the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention has turned into a platform where

ideas converge, collaborations are forged, and the bonds between India and its diaspora are strengthened.

Referring to India's timeless philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, the President said that this vision is about creating an ecosystem that not only meets our needs, but also contributes to global well-being.

President Murmu said that India seeks to be a nation that balances economic progress with social justice and environmental stewardship, ensuring a bright future for generations to come.

She stated that the Indian Diaspora would play an essential role in achieving this vision.

## Platform to Propel India's Indigenous Cleantech Manufacturing Growth

**NEW DELHI:** India marked a significant milestone in its journey toward achieving climate goals and economic self-reliance with the launch of the Bharat Climate Forum on Friday here.

A national platform dedicated to unifying stakeholders from policy, industry, finance, and research to accelerate cleantech manufacturing in India, the Bharat Climate Forum aims to drive sustainable economic growth and innovation. Hosted by the Centre for Indigenous Economic Understanding (CIEU) and Dalberg Advisors, the Bharat Climate Forum is supported by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), NITI Aayog, and International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Addressing the launch of the forum, Minister for Railways Ashwini Vaishnav said: "Atmanirbhar Bharat embodies India's drive for economic sovereignty and technological leadership through innovation and collaboration. Our 4G-5G telecom stack showcases this spirit which the cleantech sector can imbibe, with public-private partnerships enabling world-class, competitive solutions. I thank the Bharat Climate Forum organizers for highlighting India's commit-



ment to cleantech innovation for a sustainable future."

The forum comes at a time when India is pursuing ambitious climate targets, including achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 and scaling up non-fossil fuel capacity to 500 GW by 2030. Despite progress in renewables, challenges such as reliance on imports for solar and wind infrastructure persist. Ashwani Mahajan, National Convener of Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Member-Secretary of the Bharat Climate Forum, emphasised the need for a comprehensive manufacturing policy to address these challenges.

"India's cleantech manufacturing sector holds immense potential to reduce import dependencies, stabilise energy transitions, and create millions of jobs. A robust policy framework is crucial in ensuring economic growth aligns

with sustainability goals. By advancing solar, wind, and EV technologies, India is boldly pursuing Atmanirbhar Bharat, reinforcing the ethos of self-reliance and charting a roadmap to tackle the climate crisis for global benefit," he said.

The forum also spotlighted the economic opportunities in cleantech. By 2030, Dalberg estimates suggest that cleantech manufacturing could create a domestic market worth \$120-150 billion annually and generate export opportunities of \$40-45 billion while generating 50 million new jobs by 2070. Jagjeet Singh Sareen, Partner, Global Climate Practice at Dalberg Advisors and Member-Secretary of the Bharat Climate Forum, added: "Achieving the 1.5-degree target requires urgent acceleration in our efforts. We need innovative financing mechanisms, such as green bonds and impact bonds, to raise capital efficiently, linking climate benefits to funding solutions."

"Additionally, localising the supply chain could save nearly \$2 trillion in imports by 2047, reducing India's reliance on fossil fuels and external technologies. Through the Bharat Climate Forum, we hope to advance these critical conversations."

## Punjab's final electoral roll 2025 published

**RAJU WILLIAM**  
Chandigarh

Punjab's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Sibin C has handed over the CDs of final electoral roll (without photographs) to all the representatives of the recognized political parties of Punjab.

At a meeting in his office here on January 7, 2024, Sibin C said that the total number of voters in Punjab in final voter lists as on 7 January, 2025 are 2,13,80,565. Out of which, male voters are 1,12,31,744, female voters are 1,01,48,076, third gender 745, NRI 1611, PWDs 1,56,130 and service voters are 1,01,257.

At present, the total num-



ber of polling stations in Punjab is 24,446. Out of these 8062 are the urban polling stations and the number of rural polling stations is

16,384. All the polling stations are facilitated with coverage of assured minimum amenities such as ramps, drinking water, lighting, chairs and toilets have been arranged for voters.

The CEO urged the representatives of the political parties to appoint their booth level agents at each polling station so that the process of publishing voter list can be continue in a transparent manner.

Additional CEO Harish Nayar, Joint CEO Sakatar Singh Bal, Election Officer Anju Bala, other officials of CEO office and representatives of political parties were present in the meeting.

## Digital Personal Data Protection Rules prioritise India's citizen-centric governance: PM Modi

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025, prioritise India's commitment to citizen-centric governance as they aim to safeguard personal data while driving growth and inclusivity.



The Prime Minister, in his comments on X, referred to Minister for Electronics and IT Ashwani Vaishnav's explanation on the draft rules which seek to protect personal data of individuals and empower citizens. Union Minister Vaishnav highlighted that the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection Rules reflect India's leadership in shaping global data governance norms. "Unlike some international models that lean heavily towards regulation, our approach is pragmatic and growth-oriented. This balance ensures that citizens are protected without stifling the innovative spirit that drives our startups and businesses. Small businesses and startups will face lower compliance burdens," the Minister observed.

"When we talk about the global future, then human-centric approaches should be foremost."

These words by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the recent

United Nations Summit of the Future reflect India's vision of putting people first. "This philosophy has guided our efforts in shaping the Draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules. The rules, after being finalised, would operationalise the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023, bringing to life our commitment to safeguarding citizens' right to personal data protection," the Minister further stated. The rules are designed with simplicity and clarity, ensuring that every Indian, regardless of their technical know-how, can understand and exercise their rights, he added. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on Friday released the draft rules for the Digital Personal Data Protection Act which make it mandatory for a Data Fiduciary to ensure the verifiable consent of a parent before processing any personal data of a child. The Act was passed in Parliament in August 2023 and the government is seeking feedback on the draft rules through the MyGov portal till February 18, 2025.

## Statistics reveal that 45% of Indian women are facing domestic violence

**SATISH HANDA**  
New Delhi

A home is often believed as just a heaven, a safe place where all family members live peacefully, but facts reveals that many times it also become a center of violence and becomes a dangerous place for the family, especially for female members live in anxiety, terror, stress and in great danger in their so called own house. Their human rights are violated and the couples live by facing threat of sexual, physical



and psychological violence occurring against women which include epidemic and disaster-related tension, insecurity and fear, along with social exclusion and movement constraints, which is a matter of concerns due to increase in gender-based violence result-

## AAP Delegation Meets Governor on Chandigarh Chief Secretary Issue, Says Centre is Treating Punjab Unfairly

**CHANDIGARH:** On the issue of the central government appointing a Chief Secretary in Chandigarh instead of an Advisor, a delegation of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) met Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria. The AAP leaders appealed to the Governor to intervene in the matter, stating that the central government is treating Punjab unfairly. They asserted that this issue highlights the discriminatory attitude of the Centre towards Punjab.

AAP delegation included the party's state president Aman Arora, Cabinet Ministers Harpal Singh Cheema, Harbajan Singh ETO, Hardeep Singh Mundian, and Barinder Goyal, along with AAP leaders Dr. Sunny Ahluwalia, Deepak Bali, Neel Garg, Govinder Mittal, Parminder Goldy, and Ferry Sofat.

Addressing the media after meeting the Governor, Aman Arora said that the appointment of a Chief Secretary in-



stead of an Advisor exposes the Centre's anti-Punjab mindset. He said that the Aam Aadmi Party strongly opposes this decision, as it is an attempt to weaken Punjab's rightful claim over Chandigarh. He asserted that the party will not accept this decision under any circumstances.

Arora said that historically, politically, and socially, Chandigarh rightfully belongs to Punjab. He pointed out that Chandigarh was built by dis-

placing 27 villages of Punjab. At the time of the state's partition, it was said that the Union Territory status of Chandigarh was temporary. Even the Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal Accord stated that Chandigarh would be handed over to Punjab within five years, but this has not happened yet.

AAP leader questioned the BJP-led central government's discriminatory treatment of Punjab, asking why Punjab is being subjected to such unfair-

ness. He also criticized both the BJP and Congress, stating that both parties have been in power at the Centre but did nothing to address the matter. Instead, they have tried to snatch Punjab's rightful claims.

Arora further stated that the Governor assured the delegation that he would raise their concerns and the voice of three crore Punjabis with the central government and the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Centre's Policies Aim to Dismantle Punjab's Mandi System, AAP Will Not Let Farmers Be Exploited by Capitalist Friendly BJP: Harpal Cheema

Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, in response to a media query, strongly criticized the central government for its continuous anti-farmer policies. He said that the Centre is bringing laws aimed at dismantling the agricultural system, particularly the mandi system, which forms the backbone of Punjab's farming economy.

## Punjab Tourism and Cultural Affairs Department celebrates "Dhiyan Di Lohri" in Khanna



**CHANDIGARH:** Cabinet Minister Tarunpreet Singh Sond on Friday stated that celebrating 'Dhiyan Di Lohri' can significantly improve the sex ratio in the Punjab.

While presiding over the "Dhiyan Di Lohri" event at A.S. College (Women), Khanna organized by the Tourism and Cultural Affairs Department, Sond emphasized the importance of such gatherings in supporting girl children to live their

lives with dignity and pride. He highlighted that this, in turn, will contribute immensely to the socio-economic development of the state.

Sond described 'Dhiyan Di Lohri' as a vital initiative that can transform the destiny of girls in society. He underscored the necessity of holding such sustainable efforts throughout the year to effectively spread this message. He further stated that these functions align with the teach-

ings of the great Sikh Gurus, who advocated for the respect and honour of women, as they give birth to kings and future leaders. Sond noted that girls today are excelling in several fields including academics, medical, science, sports and etc. He remarked that the country is making progress, with more girls reaching new heights in their careers. The Minister also mentioned that the Punjab government, led by Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, is implementing numerous initiatives aimed at women's empowerment. He added that efforts are underway to raise awareness about improving the gender ratio, with many girls currently holding top level government jobs and other prestigious positions.

Present at the event were Secretary Tourism and Cultural Affairs and Information and Public Relations, Malwinder Singh Jaggi, Director Tourism and Cultural Affairs Amrit Singh, senior district officials and other dignitaries.

## Haryana to purchase 750 buses soon says Transport Minister Anil Vij



**GULSHAN KUMAR**  
Chandigarh

Haryana Transport Minister, Anil Vij said that the state's transport department will soon purchase 750 buses. Electronic centers will also be set up to ensure the fitness of all buses. Residents of Gurugram will soon get a state-of-the-art Millennium Bus Terminal equipped with all necessary passenger facilities.

Anil Vij was interacting with the journalists after a surprise inspection of the bus terminal in Gurugram today. During a surprise inspection Anil Vij directed General Manager, Haryana Roadways, Pradeep Kumar to improve cleanliness at the bus stand.

## BJP's Promise to set up Guru Gobind Singh University in Haryana, still unfulfilled says Ashok Mehta

**PARVESH HANDA**  
Ambala

On 12th February 2017 to Sikh, then Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar during a state level religious function on the eve of 350th Parkash Gurburab Utsav at Karnal had publicly announced to establish Guru Gobind Singh Uni-

versity in Ambala Lok Sabha area at Ambala, Panchkula or Yamunanagar still awaiting action by the state government, said President of Rashtriya Punjabi Mahasabha Ashok Mehta a senior Congress leader and a former Information Commissioner in Haryana demanding immediate action in this regard.

Mehta also reminded the promise made by the Bhartiya Janta Party in their poll manifesto during 2014 assembly polls for developing University in the name of Guru Gobind Singh Ji in the state when comes to the power, but no action was taken by the government as such entire Punjabi community in the state has expressed deep concern over ignoring the issue and not fulfilling the promises made years ago, demanding action on the eve of Parkash Gurburab' being celebrated all over the world on 6th January 2025 by the present Chief Minister Saini and fulfill the promises made by the former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar to Sikh and Punjabi communities in the state. Rashtriya Punjabi Mahasabha president Ashok Mehta said that establishing a University in the name of Guru Gobind Singh Ji will not only be a positive step in the field of education in the state but also provide sources of employment to youths as well as bring developments in the state.

## Justice delayed: 4.32 lakh under trial cases pending in high court due to shortage of judges

**PARVESH HANDA**

Information reveals that Punjab and Haryana high court, Chandigarh has more than 4,32,227 pending cases under trial at present, of these 2,68,279 cases are related to civil matters and 1,63,948 criminal cases, thus delaying justice to the people directly impacting life and liberty. Alarming, nearly 85 per cent of these cases have remained unresolved for over a year. Information also reveals that there is a 40 per cent shortage of judges causing the problem. The high court currently has 51 Judges against the sanctioned strength of 85, moreover no less than



three Judges are retiring this year upon attaining the age of superannuation. Though the high court collegium is in the process of recommending the names of nine district and sessions Judges from Punjab and

Haryana, the process is likely to take much time due to the lengthy and time consuming system taking months.

Information reveals that 65,165 pending cases (nearly 15 percent of the total fall in

the category of less than one year. Whereas, 76,433 cases (nearly 18 per cent) have been awaiting adjudication for one to three years. According to available information 34,653 cases (nearly 8 per cent) have been pending for three to five years, while 1,29,122 cases (nearly 30 per cent) remain unresolved for five to ten years and as many as 1,26,854 cases (nearly 29 per cent) of the total number of cases have been pending for over a decade. It is believed that the high court is currently in the process of considering the names of advocates for elevation to the Bench to meet the urgency since justice hangs in the balance.

## Fraud on Farmers: Huge crop payments diverted, four arrested



**RAJU WILLIAM**  
Chandigarh

Punjab Police's State Cyber-crime Division has unearthed a payment fraud with the arrest of four individuals involved in manipulating the Anaj Kharid Portal by diverting farmers' crop payments to their own bank accounts.

Those arrested have been identified as Manish, Jasvir Singh, Anprej Singh and Balwinder Singh. Police teams have also recovered digital devices and routers used by them to commit the fraud. Explaining their modus operandi, Additional Director General of Police (AGDP), Cybercrime Division, V Neeraj said here on Thursday January 9, 2024 that the accused used to divert the payments to farmers by fraudulently replacing farmers' mobile numbers with their own. Thereafter, they used the same to update bank account information of the farmers. To avoid detection, the accused would restore the original details immediately after the payment was processed. The total diverted amount detected so far during the investigation is about Rs. 25 lakh. The amount is likely to go up as the investigation progresses. A statewide operation is being conducted to nab other accused persons involved in the fraud, added the ADGP.

As per the information, a complaint was received from

Food and Civil Supplies Department, Punjab in which it came to light that some farmers have not received the payment of their crops procured during the 2024 paddy season. Further verification revealed that the payment of these farmers has been credited to various bank accounts belonging to different persons. Citing preliminary enquiry, the ADGP further said that the IP records and other data was scrutinized and information regarding the bank accounts revealed the details about unauthorized access of the Anaj Kharid Portal and the diversion of the crop payment to different accounts.

During the investigation, it was also revealed that a mobile number and a mobile device was purchased from SAS Nagar district on fake identity, which was used to obtain OTPs for altering the bank accounts of farmers on Anaj Kharid Portal. The gang was running their operation from remote areas of Sri Muktsar Sahib. An internet connection was also installed for the purpose of unauthorized access of the portal and altering the bank records of the farmers. Three teams from Cybercrime Division headed by Inspector Jujhar Singh, Inspector Deepak Bhatia and Sub-Inspector Ranjit used multiple OSINT techniques to establish the whereabouts of the accused which led to the arrest of the accused from Moga and Sri Muktsar Sahib districts.

## Congress party functions like a monarchy under Gandhi family, not a democratic party

**SATISH HANDA**  
Chandigarh/Ambala

Haryana Energy, Transport, and Labor Minister Anil Vij said that the Congress Party operates like a monarchy under the Gandhi family, rather than being a democratic party. While interacting with media persons today, Vij responded to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi wants to destroy the Constitution. Vij said sarcastically said that "Ultra chor kotwal ko dante." He accused the Gandhi family of violating the Constitution, urging Rahul Gandhi to reflect on his family's history. "His grandmother, Indira Gandhi, imposed an Emergency in 1975, suspending fundamental rights, censoring newspapers, and jailing 1.5 lakh people," he said.

Vij further remarked that Congress speaks of the Constitution but has often violated it by imposing Article 356 to dismantle elected governments. "Congress has always played with the Constitution. Even within the party, there is no democracy; the Gandhi family rules at the top like royalty. This is not a democratic party; it's a monarchy. In contrast, the BJP is democratic, where even a tea seller can become the Prime Minister," he stated.

Responding to Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda's criticism that the BJP follows a "thief accuses the cop" policy, Cabinet Minister Anil Vij retorted that during Hooda's government, Below Poverty Line (BPL) cards were only issued to those favored by the administration, leaving others helpless. "The BJP government improved the system by opening centers for card issuance, benefiting the people. If our government is providing food grains and rations to the poor, it is surprising that Sh. Hooda has a problem with this," he said.

## SAD delegation submits representation to Sri Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar

**JAGMOHAN SINGH**  
Amritsar

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) today submitted a representation to Sri Akal Takht Sahib Jathedar Giani Raghbir Singh to make him aware of the legal hurdles being faced by the party in implementing the directive to form a seven member committee to hold organizational elections of the party even as it briefed the Takht chief that the party's Working Committee would meet shortly to announce the schedule for the forthcoming organizational elections.

Disclosing this in a statement, senior party leader Daljit Singh Cheema said a party delegation apprised the Jathedar that the SAD had always accepted all the directives of the supreme temporal seat with utmost humility. He said all party leaders had undergone the religious punishment



awarded to them by Sri Akal Takht Sahib and that SAD president S Sukhbir Singh Badal had also submitted his resignation to the party.

Cheema said however technical issues were coming in the way of formation of the seven member committee as directed by the Takht. He said while these issues had been explained to the Takht earlier also, a delegation of the

party took time to explain the entire issue to the Jathedar in detail today. "All constitutional amendments, Supreme Court directives and Election Commission guidelines were submitted to the Takht in this regard", he added.

The SAD leader also took on forces which were inimical towards the SAD for misleading the people that there was no hurdle in implementing

the directive on formation of a committee to monitor the organizational elections of the party. "Such forces are now in the process of registering their own parties. I challenge them to make their applications public so that the people can understand how different they are vis a vis what they preach and what they will actually practice".

Cheema said as per the Perfora for registration of new parties, it was mandated that there would not be any religious or caste overtone in the name of the party and that its objectives would be in line with the constitution of the country. "It is also mandated that all decisions of the parties would reflect the democratic spirit and that socialism and secularism would serve as tenets of the party. It is also clearly mentioned that all decisions would be taken in a democratic manner and that there will not be any veto power".

## Drugs of value worth Rs 34-50 crore seized in 117 NDPS cases at Ambala



**PARVESH HANDA**  
Ambala

Drugs of value worth Rs 34.50 crore seized by police in Ambala division was inspected at the police godown (Malkhana) prior to destroying the same jointly by a committee comprising of IGP Ambala Division Sibus Kabir, Surinder Singh Bhorla and Tajat Gulia DSP in the presence of senior police officers in the division. DCP Ambala Bhorla said that the stocks of drugs were seized from the drug smugglers and suppliers during raids in 117 cases registered under NDPS Act, which will be destroyed shortly.

Drugs seized by the po-

lice included 5 quintal 593 gm Chura-post seized in 25 cases, Sulpha seized in a case, 6 kg 788 gm Charas seized in six cases, 28 kg 85 gm ganja seized in eight cases, 4 kg 65 gm Heroin seized in 44 cases, 28 kg 772 gm opium seized in 22 cases and huge quantity of intoxicated tablets, capsules and injection of total value of stocks worth Rs 34.50 crore. According to information Panchayat of two villages Matehri Jattan and Behbool Pur in Ambala district have been declared drugs-free and campaign against drugs smuggling and the sale has been launched by DGP Haryana in Ambala district.

## Major drop in crime graph during 2024 in Haryana, witnessed reduction of 23341 FIRs, says DGP

**SATISH HANDA**  
Chandigarh

The major drop in crime rate in Haryana has given a sigh of relief to the residents of the state. Director General of Police Shatrughan Kapoor while talking to media persons said there has been an overall 14.62 percent decrease in crimes in 2024 as compared to previous year 2023 reduced by 14.62 percent. DGP Kapoor said there has been a big decline in crime cases in the state during the year 2024, as compared to the year 2023. He said, while one lakh 59 thousand 610 cases were registered in the year 2023, one lakh 36 thousand 269 cases have been registered in the year 2024, which is 23 thousand 341 less than last year. Similarly, there has been a 19.24 percent decrease in crimes against women such as rape, 43.72 percent in rape attempts, 36.82 percent in molestation and 14 percent in dowry deaths. Director General of Police Shatrughan Kapoor said that a total of 1042 cases of murder were registered in the year 2023, while a total of 950 were registered in 2024 as such



a decline in murder cases in the state has been seen after 15 years due to the activeness of Haryana Police, crime cases decreased during 2024 as compared to 2023.

DGP Kapoor said, to deal with crimes against women cases, state police identified 1979 crowded hotspot areas and 443 sensitive places and 1381 CCTV cameras have been installed at these places and policemen without uniform were deployed outside the educational institutes so that prompt action can be taken against miscreants. Police assistance is being provided in an average of 6 minutes 41 seconds on complaints received on Haryana Police helpline 112, which have proved very beneficial to control crimes

in the state. DGP said cases of rape against women have come down from 1772 to 1431, gangrape cases too reduced from 199 to 112, molestation cases from 2265 to 1431. He said, cases under SC/ST Act have come down from 1539 to 995. So far, 4943 rowdy persons have been identified by the police in the state who are under constant surveillance.

DGP said, robbery cases in Haryana state have come down from 122 to 74, vehicle thefts cases have been reduced from 17,860 to 15,577 in the past year, extortion cases dropped from 487 to 416 during the year. He said, there has been a decrease of 657 incidents of road accidents during the year 2024 in which 279 deaths and 432

injuries were recorded. He said under the campaign against drug smugglers, 950 big smugglers have been arrested by registering 438 cases of commercial quantity. A total of 3331 cases have been registered under the NDPS Act and 5094 criminals have been sent behind bars during the year 2024. Apart from this, property worth Rs 7 crore of 25 drug smugglers has been seized.

Kapoor said, Haryana Police's relentless efforts to bolster cybersecurity have yielded significant results, with the recovery of rupees several crore in recent cyber fraud cases. He said, through proactive measures and public awareness campaigns via social media platforms, aiming to prevent individuals from falling prey to cyber criminals, the Haryana Police has intensified its efforts to educate citizens about the modus operandi of cybercriminals. He disclosed that in 2023, police made about 1900 cyber crime related arrests which increased to 5156 in 2024. He said in 2023 cyber fraud of Rs 602 crore was reported in Haryana and the figure increased to 980 crore in 2024.

## Suspected blast in Amritsar Gumtala police station, Police denied



**JAGMOHAN SINGH**  
Amritsar

Panic gripped the city when around 8.20 p.m a powerful defining sound was heard outside the Gumtala police station having close proximity with the Air force station in Amritsar. However, Deputy Commissioner of Police Mr. Alam Vijay Singh while denying about the blast, said no such incident occurred at Police station

Gumtala as he himself visited the spot.

Talking to media ACP Amritsar (West) Shivdarash Singh denying the any kind of blast by saying that it was sound that occurred after the car radiator which due to overheated blasted, broken the front windshield of the Zen Estilo car belonged to the Police Assistant Sub Inspector Harjinder Singh was on duty in the same police station.

# Record 2.79 crore registrations for 'Pariksha Pe Charcha'

**NEW DELHI:** With just five days left for the closure of registration, a record 2.79 crore students, teachers, and parents across India and abroad have already registered for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' (PPC) 2025 - an initiative to foster students' positive outlook towards examinations.

In 2024, 2.26 crore participants (2.06 crore students, 14.93 lakh teachers, and 5.69 lakh parents) took part in the programme. The latest 8th edition of Pariksha Pe Charcha is scheduled to take place this month or early February just before annual examinations commence across the country.

In the previous edition held on January 29, last year, PM Modi had advised the students: "Do not waste time watching reels, get adequate sleep". The seventh edition of PPC was held at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi,



in a town hall format and received widespread acclaim.

The online registration for this year's PPC 2025 commenced on December 14, last year and will remain open till January 14, 2025.

The programme's immense popularity highlights its success in addressing the mental well-being of students and fostering a positive outlook towards examinations.

The interactive event, organ-

ised annually by the Department of School Education and Literacy under the Ministry of Education, has become a much-anticipated celebration of education.

In line with the spirit of PPC, a series of engaging school-level activities are scheduled from January 12, 2025 (National Youth Day) to January 23, 2025 (Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Jayanti). The activities aim to fos-

ter holistic development and inspire students to celebrate examinations as an Utsav. These activities include: Indigenous games sessions, marathon runs, meme competitions, nukkad natak, Yoga-cum-meditation sessions, poster-making competitions, inspirational film screenings, mental health workshops and counselling sessions and poetry/song performances.

Through these activities, PPC 2025 aims to reinforce its message of resilience, positivity, and joy in learning, ensuring that education is celebrated as a journey rather than a pressure-driven task.

For PPC 2025, two students (classes 9 to 12) and a teacher from each State/UT, along with winners of Kala Utsav, and participants from Veer Gatha, Prenana alumni, and PM SHRI schools will be invited as special guests for the main event.

# SC: Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Eidgah Dispute: Consolidation of Suit Should Benefit Both Sides



**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Friday remarked that the decision of the Allahabad High Court to consolidate all suits pertaining to the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Eidgah dispute of Mathura should benefit both sides.

"Why should we intervene in the issue of consolidation of suits? It doesn't make a difference. It is to the benefit of both sides, so multiple proceedings are avoided," remarked a bench of CJI Sanjay Khanna and Justice Sanjay

Kumar as it heard a plea filed by the management committee of the Shahi Masjid Eidgah against an order passed by the Allahabad High Court in January last year "in the interest of justice" directing that all 15 suits filed by the Hindu side be consolidated.

In the course of the hearing, the counsel appearing on behalf of the mosque management committee submitted that suits not similar in nature were also consolidated and the impugned decision will

bring complications in trial proceedings.

Expressing its prima facie disapproval with the submission, the CJI Khanna-led Bench adjourned the proceedings and posted the matter for hearing in April 2025.

Earlier, the mosque management committee had petitioned the top court against another order passed by the Allahabad High Court transferring to itself a clutch of petitions seeking various reliefs with respect to the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Eidgah dispute.

The Supreme Court had then remarked that it was "difficult" to accept the contention raised by the mosque management committee that all the parties do not have the wherewithal to travel to the Allahabad High Court.

"It is not acceptable to us that you can come to Delhi but could not go to Allahabad," the top court had said.

# RSS Chief to be on 10-day visit to Bengal in February



**KOLKATA:** Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) Chief Mohan Bhagwat will be on a 10-day visit to West Bengal next month and hold meetings with the Sangh functionaries in the state during that period, sources said.

He will be accompanied by eight other RSS functionaries, including the RSS Sarkaryawah or General Secretary Dattatreya Hosabale.

Sources said that this is for the first time that so many top functionaries of RSS will be visiting the state at the same time, therefore making it clear how seriously West Bengal is being viewed at by the Sangh authorities before the crucial state Assembly elections next year. The tour will start from February 9 and continue till February 16. Sources added that for the first three days, Mohan Bhagwat and the other top RSS functionaries will hold several rounds of meetings focusing on the Sangh's activities in different districts in the southern sector of West Bengal. On February 11, Mohan Bhagwat and the other national functionaries of RSS will move to Burdwan in the East Burdwan district of West Bengal. They will be holding a series of meetings there with a focus on districts located in central Bengal. In this session in Burdwan, Bhagwat is expected to focus on RSS's activities in the tribal-dominated pockets in the different central Bengal districts. On February 16, the RSS Chief will be addressing a public rally at Burdwan which will mark the end of the 10-day tour.

# Monitoring the Silent Threat: Two HMPV Cases Detected in Karnataka



**ARUN KUMAR RAO**  
Bengaluru

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has confirmed two cases of Human Metapneumovirus (HMPV) in Karnataka as part of its routine surveillance of respiratory pathogens. The Union Health Ministry highlighted that while HMPV is not new, its presence in these cases underscores the need for vigilance. The cases involve two infants admitted to Bengaluru's Baptist Hospital with bronchopneumonia. A three-month-old female infant was diagnosed with HMPV and discharged after treatment, while an eight-month-old male infant, who tested positive on January 3, is currently recovering. Neither child has a history of international travel, pointing to local circulation of the virus. HMPV, a globally prevalent respiratory virus, has been linked to illnesses resembling influenza. However, the Health Ministry reassured the public, stating that data from the ICMR and Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) show no unusual surge in influenza-like illness (ILI) or severe acute respiratory illness (SARI) in India.

# Uncrewed Gaganyaan, GSVL Launches Among ISRO's 2025 Space Missions: Jitendra Singh

**NEW DELHI:** Uncrewed Gaganyaan and GSVL launches are among ISRO's 2025 space missions, said Dr Jitendra Singh, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology.

Singh said this while chairing a high-level review of ISRO's major upcoming space missions for 2025, alongside outgoing Chairman Dr. S. Somnath, his successor Dr. V. Narayanan, and other senior officials, including Pawan Kumar Goenka, Chairman of IN-SPACe. With ambitious projects on the horizon, including the first "uncrewed" orbital mission under "Gaganyaan", India's space exploration efforts are poised for groundbreaking achievements.



In 2025, the Indian space sector has major projects lined up including the Gaganyaan human spaceflight, said Singh. The launch of Gaganyaan's uncrewed orbital test mission will pave the way for India's human spaceflight programme. This

will validate systems for crew safety and recovery. Other key plans include two GSVL missions, a commercial launch of LVM3, and the much-anticipated ISRO-NASA collaboration on the NISAR satellite. In January, the GSVL-F15

mission will carry the NVS-02 navigation satellite to augment the NavIC constellation. It will bolster India's positioning and navigation capabilities with indigenous developed atomic clocks. In February, the GSVL-F16 mission will launch NISAR - a sophisticated Earth observation satellite co-developed with NASA. NISAR is equipped with advanced radar imaging technology. It aims to provide critical data on agriculture, natural disasters, and climate monitoring. In March, the commercial LVM3-M5 mission will deploy BlueBird Block-2 satellites under a contract with the US-based AST SpaceMobile. This underscores ISRO's growing stature in the global space market.

# Modi Sarkar has your back: Jaishankar at PBD convention

**BHUBANESWAR:** External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar highlighted that hosting the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) Convention in Odisha "reflects the Modi Sarkar's 'Poorvudaya' policy," emphasising the development and prominence of eastern India.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the 18th PBD Convention on Thursday in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, in the presence of EAM Jaishankar, Odisha Governor Hari Babu Kambhampati, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Union Ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and Ashwini Vaishnav, among other dignitaries.

The event commenced with a performance by three-time

Grammy Award winner Ricky Kej.

Addressing the gathering, EAM Jaishankar expressed pride in the achievements of the Indian diaspora. "You all not only feel proud of your achievements but also enhance India's global respect."

"In a globalised era, the diaspora becomes more important with each passing year. Whether it is technology, best practices or resources, be it tourism, trade or investment, the two-way flows you enable are invaluable. As we strive to make a global workspace, this will be even more so in the times to come," he said.

# Unexpected: Fasting Dallewal gets rival body's support...!

**RAJU WILLIAM**  
Chandigarh

Fasting veteran farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewa has received unexpected voice of support from opposing farmer body Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU) led by former Rajya Sabha member Bhupinder Singh Mann.

Monday, January 7, 2024 BKU (Mann) chief and Chairman, All India Kisan Coordination Committee (AIKCC) welcomed what

Dallewal told the committee constituted by the Supreme Court. In a statement today, Mann quoted Dallewal as saying "Agriculture reforms priority, my health secondary".

What Dallewal said is in line with our understanding that only reforms and liberalization is the solution to bring agriculture sector out of distress. Farmers



need access to technology and markets and most importantly farmers need to be freed from the regulatory, constitutional and

legal shackles, said Mann while requesting Dallewal to call off his fast.

Having requested so and while urging Dallewal to initiate the process of dialogue with all the stakeholders, the ex-MP came down heavily on those farmer leaders who have been creating hurdles in letting this process of dialogue take place.

Reforms are bound to happen in every sphere of life. These can, at best, be delayed by the vested

interests but not stopped, he maintained.

Joining Mann, Shetkari leader Gunvant Patil referred to key recommendations of the much talked about Swaminathan Report which, he alleged, "is being read in convenient bits and pieces by few farmer leaders to misguide the farmers at large."

National Commission for Farmers (NCF) or Swaminathan Commission as it called suggested the following measures:

# 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas kicks off in Bhubaneswar



**ARABINDA MOHAPATRA**  
Bhubaneswar

The 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) kicked off here on Wednesday with the first day being devoted to the youth and aptly titled Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2025. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will formally inaugurate this congregation of non-resident Indians (NRIs) and People of Indian Origin (PIOs) tomorrow.

Chief minister Mohan Charan Majhi pointed out how the Odisha government is striving hard to achieve the goal of Samruddha Odisha by 2036 and Viksit Bharat by 2047. "A key component of the Prime Minister's vision of Viksit Bharat is Purvodaya development of the Eastern Indian States. Odisha is the front runner of this effort," he said. The latest edition of PBD, a biennial event, is being held in Odisha for the first time, marking the Purvodaya Mission and Act East policy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Highlighting the significance of the three-day event and the spotlight on Odisha at a media conference here Secretary (CPV&OIA) in the Ministry of External Affairs Arun Kumar Chatterjee said the central government decided to organise the convention in Odisha under its Purvodaya initiative to showcase the potential the state holds in the field of culture, economy and commerce. "Odisha has been recognised as a leader in various sectors including mining, marine economy, sports, skilled manpower and knowledge economy. With its abundant mineral and other natural resources, the state is also rich in culture, history, religious sites and spiritual heritage. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas will provide an opportunity to Odisha to showcase its potential as a key tourism destination," Chatterjee said.

The minister also ointed to the Modi government's commitment to Purvodaya, the renaissance, revival and rejuvenation of the East. "India was historically at the greatest point when the eastern parts of India were at the height of glory and I will tell you one of the earliest commitments in this third term of Modi Government was to take practical decisions to enable the Purvodaya to happen, and a crucial fulcrum of that in many ways is the state of Odisha," Jaishankar said.

Pointing out that the potential for trade based from Odisha is enormous, Jaishankar said "What a blessing Odisha has in terms of resources, but resources do not automatically translate into trade. Resources need investment, resources need facility,

# A farmer leader's life at stake: Why the Indian Government so adamant?



**JAG MOHAN THAKEN**

To save the life of the farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on fast unto death since November 26 last year, central govt should hold talks with struggling farmers organizations; raising the demand Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) Maha Panchayat held at Moga, Punjab on Thursday said that the draft National Policy Framework for Agriculture Marketing is a dangerous form of re-enforcing the repealed 3 black Farm Laws and it should be withdrawn immediately.

Noticing that the central government is not heading towards the life of the farmer leader, whose breath line is hanging on a thread, and any untoward incident may happen any time, the major farmers' unions under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) have decided to launch an agitational program.

SKM strongly asserted that it is the central govt, especially Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Agriculture Minister Shivraj Chauhan who are responsible for the present impasse and condition of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on a fast unto death. SKM appealed to the central govt that to save the life of Dallewal they should hold talks with the struggling organizations. The Morcha warned the central govt that if anything untoward happens to Sri Dallewal, it will take strong action.

Having no personal interest, Dallewal is fighting for the

common cause. Whether he will survive or not, but a stigma will stick forever on the face of the present government, the democratic institutions and the people responsible for turning no ear towards the issue, if something untoward happens with his life.

The farmer leader, Jagjit Singh Dallewal is on fast-unto-death since November 26 for the lifeline demands of the farmers, including MSP; more than one and half month has gone past, but the central government, the only capable authority to fulfil the demands of the farmers, is behaving like a deaf and dumb clay sculpture.

Not to talk about the acceptance of the demands, the BJP led government not even extending hand to start a dialogue to resolve the issue. It seems to be taking the cover of the supreme court, as is evident that its union minister, Shivraj Singh Chauhan says that they will follow the court directions.

Media reports quote that Union agriculture minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on January 1 said the government will abide by the Supreme Court's decision on the ongoing farmers protest at Punjab-Haryana border and will take steps accordingly.

Here arises a question—Whether the government is not competent to take decisions on such issues or the court will have to take notice and decision in each and every executive work?

However, keeping in mind the stack of a precious life, the honourable supreme court is monitoring the Dallewal's health issue and constituted a high-power committee, which



on January 6 met the fasting farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, but the farmer leader declined the medical aid.

Rather, the farmer leader Dallewal, who is camping at the Khanauri border between Punjab and Haryana, as per media reports, requested that the committee should press the Supreme Court for a direction to the Centre: "I respect Justice Surya Kant but how do I ask him why he does not give any direction to the Centre, when our issue is to be sorted by Centre? When the Punjab Advocate General (AG) asks him to direct the Centre, then Surya Kant ji does not listen. The Union Minister (Shivraj Singh Chouhan) says if the SC tells them, they will comply with orders. IfSC is not ready to give this direction to the Centre, then we do not have hope from anywhere."

The farmer unions associated with Dallewal are clearly demanding that Dallewal will be ready to accept the medical aid, if the central government starts a dialogue.

India Today web portal on 31st December reported that the Punjab government on Tuesday informed the Supreme Court of a proposal that farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who has been on an indefinite

fast since November 26, would accept medical aid if the Centre spoke to the protesting farmers.

**Shouldn't the supreme court, as requested by Dallewal, direct the central government to have a dialogue with the agitating farmers?**

Doesn't the response of the fasting leader to the high-power committee appeal to the court - "I respect Justice Surya Kant but how do I ask him why he does not give any direction to the Centre, when our issue is to be sorted by Centre?" Will the court heed towards the feeble but logical voice of the farmer leader?

**Why is the centre not taking the agitation of the farmers seriously?**

The farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Majdoor Morcha (KMM) are agitating at Punjab-Haryana border at two places since February 13, 2024 and the farmer leader Dallewal is on hunger strike since November 26, but the central government is not heeding the voice of the farmers. Why it is not holding a dialogue with the agitating farmers, when it is clearly visible that the life of the fasting farmer can be saved by just holding a dialogue? Shouldn't the Prime

Minister himself come into the fore? Shouldn't he intervene?

The Indian express web portal on January 6, 2025 quotes the case of hunger strike of Mamta Banerjee back in 2006, wherein to resolve the issue the then President and Prime Minister both appealed Mamta Banerjee to call off the fast.

"In 2006, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee used a hunger strike to protest against alleged forcible land acquisition by the Left government in West Bengal for the Tata Group's Nano factory. She called off her 25-day hunger strike following appeals by then President A P J Abdul Kalam and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and the Tatas eventually withdrew from the state. The incident proved to be a turning point for Bengal politics and catapulted Mamata to power five years later in the 2011 Assembly polls, which ended the Left's rule of over three decades."

**Shouldn't the present constitutional and executive heads of the nation follow the example and set another example?**

Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann, in his tweet on January 2, has also advised the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to leave the stubborn attitude and talk to the farmers. "Punjab is a part of the country. Punjab contributes the most in terms of agriculture. Modi Sahab, you are the Prime Minister of the country, farmers are also a part of the country. You should leave your stubborn attitude and talk to the farmers."

Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, PPCC president on his

tweet dated January 7 says,

"The callous approach of PM @narendramodiji and the Union Government towards the deteriorating health of Farm Leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal Ji is a testament to @BJP4India

's disregard for farming issues. One cannot help but wonder if they would have responded similarly if it were a prominent businessman like Adani demanding tax cuts or loan relaxation."

The Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) senior leader Dr Daljit Singh Cheema, in a statement on January 7, said it was shocking that even though the Supreme Court was monitoring the fast unto death of the Kisan leader almost on a daily basis, both the union government as well as the State government in Punjab were resorting to a blame game and playing politics on such a sensitive issue.

Dr Daljit Cheema appealed to P M Modi to take the lead and create an atmosphere which could lead to the end of Jagjit Singh Dallewal's fast. "For this to take place the Prime Minister should notify the guarantee on Minimum Support Price (MSP) immediately. This is in keeping with the assurance made to the people of the country when the Prime Minister withdrew the three agricultural laws which led to the end of the Kisan Andolan".

Will PM Modi listen to the advice of the Punjab political leader?

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

## Economic red flags call for urgent action

The past week's economic data delivers a sobering message to the Finance Ministry and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), complicating their aspirations for a robust growth rebound in the latter half of 2024-25. GDP growth has tapered to 5.4% in the second quarter, prompting reassurances that it is merely a transient dip. However, the slowdown in consumption demand, exacerbated by restrained urban spending, raises serious questions about the depth of recovery expected in the October-December quarter. While policymakers hope for a festive-season boost and resilient rural demand, the latest data paints a less optimistic picture. Bank credit growth has decelerated for the fifth consecutive month in November, casting a shadow over investment and consumption prospects. Meanwhile, core infrastructure sectors, despite recording a four-month high expansion of 4.3 per cent, reported production levels 3.3 per cent below October's output, with six of eight sectors operating below capacity. The Purchasing Managers' Index reveals factory activity has slumped to its worst levels in 2024, compounded by rising input costs that threaten to stifle demand further.

Adding to these challenges are dismal Goods and Services Tax (GST) receipts for December, which stood at a three-month low of 1.77 lakh crore. With year-to-date revenue growth at just 8.6 per cent, meeting the 11 per cent growth target set in the Union Budget appears increasingly unlikely. Particularly concerning are sluggish revenue upticks in major consumer states such as Uttar Pradesh (1 per cent) and Gujarat (4 per cent), alongside contractions in Andhra Pradesh and northeastern states.

As the government prepares the Union Budget for 2025-26, it must scrutinize these indicators and address the underlying pain points. High inflation, tightening credit flows, and uneven consumption trends need targeted interventions to reinvigorate growth and ensure economic momentum is sustained across regions and sectors. Bold, well-calibrated measures are imperative for turning the tide.

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VIBODH PARTHASARATHI TELLS HOW PLATFORMS AMPLIFY PUBLISHERS TO SUSTAIN THEIR ENGAGEMENT CYCLES

## Platforms, publishers, & policy gaps

Last month, *The Australia Today's* coverage of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit was discussed less for its substance and more for being inaccessible on Facebook in Canada. Coming on the back of diplomatic tensions between India and Canada, were Mr. Jaishankar's interview and joint press conference, covered in *The Australia Today*, inaccessible in Canada due to a nudge by the Trudeau government? Or was it part of Meta's strategy to block news on social media platforms in Canada?

Some argue that this is a casualty of Canada's approach to mitigate asymmetries between all-pervasive platforms, such as Facebook and Google, and news publishers, such as *The Australia Today*. The blackout has less to do with the politics of foreign policy and more to do with the politics of Meta's corporate strategy. Mostly, it has to do with the geopolitical ramifications of developments in Canada's media policy.

Let's start with the actors involved. Platforms facilitate publishers to reach a very large audience, and publishers offer platforms a stream of content to incessantly engage users. In this seemingly symbiotic relationship, only platforms know the true popularity of the news distributed to their users and therefore, the incremental advertising revenues trickling in from the content produced by publishers. Platforms are also known to change the metrics to gauge popularity and audience preference. These problems raise questions about transparency, accountability, and parity in the dealings between platforms and publishers.

### Governing frenemies

In June 2023, Canada devised a bargaining framework for platforms to duly remunerate news outlets. The resultant



Online News Act (ONA) sought to protect publishers from losing income that is justifiably due to them from Meta and Alphabet. These platforms are legally obliged to fashion commercial agreements with one or a group of publishers. If either party disagrees, a bargaining process ensues with the involvement of a mediator. If no agreement is arrived at despite this, each party can propose a final offer, and an arbitration panel is empowered to choose which offer becomes binding.

Canada was the second country to move on this matter, after the Australian initiative of 2021, known as the 'Bargaining Code'. While concerns over the financial health of local news websites led to the enactment of the ONA, the Bargaining Code has been criticised for legitimising a mechanism that safeguards the interests of giants in the news business. After initial opposition, Meta and Google negotiated deals with many, but not all, Australian news outlets.

In Canada, Google complied with the ONA by agreeing to pay publishers and journalist associations. Meta adopted a contrary route: from August 2023, it foreclosed news

offerings on its platforms, Facebook and Instagram, in Canada. However, web pages of journalists can still be accessed on both platforms.

Since the ONA does not define a news website, Meta decides which is a news site and which is an opinion or community site. For instance, Baaz, a Canada-based news outlet catering to the Punjabi and Sikh diaspora, was inaccessible for a while on Facebook and Instagram. After it switched to Substack, a subscription-based platform, and rechristened defined itself a 'community page', Baaz became visible on both platforms.

### Interrupting global flows

Following the uproar over Mr. Jaishankar's interview, Meta maintained that it blocks news in Canada, irrespective of its geographical origins. However, the editor of *The Australia Today* pointed out that prior to the interview, the content of the site was visible, suggesting that Meta restricted the site around the time the interview was posted. Such experiences render Meta vulnerable to criticism of selective compliance with the ONA.

The unavailability of the Jaishankar interview on Facebook in Canada also uncorks the geopolitical ramifications of national media policy. Regulations in Australia, Canada, and Indonesia have tackled the imbalances between platforms and publishers, as seen in

their respective news markets. Consequently, they vary in normative considerations, policy priorities, and institutional design. Recently, Australia disincentivised platforms which refrain from, or do not renew, agreements with publishers. Its News Bargaining Incentive (NBI) policy proposes to penalise platforms harvesting revenue of \$250 million and more and failing to finalise agreements. This is to ensure, inter alia, that Meta does not replay its Canadian strategy in Australia, since earlier this year, it had announced plans to discontinue paying news outlets there. What is interesting is that the NBI also incentivises platforms by offsetting payments to publishers against some of their fiscal liabilities in Australia.

How is India tackling publisher-platform asymmetries? Since 2022, the Competition Commission has been inquiring into the conduct of platforms, following pleas by news associations. We don't know if their efforts factor in geopolitical dimensions of the matter. If the policy paralysis continues, India's news outlets will continue to be devoid of fair shares of online advertising revenues, and vulnerable to the whims of the Alphabet-Meta duopoly.

Meanwhile, structural censorship, seen in the Jaishankar interview case, could recur. It will proliferate if Meta replicates its Canadian strategy in the U.K., South Africa, and Germany, where fair compensation regulations are being evolved. If so, interviews by Indian Ministers to news outlets in those countries will be inaccessible on Meta's platforms there. Therefore, policy pundits must weigh in urgently on fair compensation.

*Vibodh Parthasarathi teaches media policy at the Centre for Culture, Media and Governance, Jamia Millia Islamia. Views are personal.*



MUKUL SANWAL EXPLAINS HOW DISCONNECT ENABLES G7 DOMINANCE IN CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

## Shared prosperity in a post-G7 world

The climate conference in Baku in 2024 turned the climate treaty on its head by scrapping the defining feature of the post-colonial world divided between 'donors' and 'recipients' and suggesting the need for an alternate global sustainability forum. The shift requires that developing countries take charge of their own destiny.

The purpose of the climate treaty in 1992 was to collectively deal with a common concern. In an unequal world, this was defined by the G7 reducing future emissions of carbon dioxide despite the treaty acknowledging cumulative emissions alone matter. Developing countries agreed to take on a problem they did not create in exchange for technology transfer and funds, not realising that the imbalance in research capacity had set the stage for shifting the burden.

The backbone of the current arrangement is the disconnect between academic treatment and rules and practice, providing continuing advantage to the G7. The way global concerns have been selected, agenda defined, and rules implemented — all the time dealing with the symptoms rather than the causes of problems — provides continuing advantages to the G7. The pressure to provide incentives for private finance and dealing with trade restrictions at the same time was never part of the 'grand bargain'. The G7 have now absolved themselves of any responsibility for climate change with, in India's words, the "optical illusion" of providing financial support by 2035.

### Two world views

The former colonial powers morphed into the G7 in 1973. Climate change with its



reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide is only for the G7 who have overused their fair share of the common atmospheric resource. For the others, the greatest challenge is sustainable development, that is, modifying pathways, lifestyles and energy transition. The way the agenda was set masks the injustice within the climate crisis and the extent it is underestimated.

The impact of the Global South, representing four-fifths of the global population and half the GDP, no longer following the lead of the G7 has been felt most significantly in climate change with growing calls for climate justice. The Nationally Determined Contributions of 72 countries explicitly include the concept of a "just transition", reflecting recognition of the social dimensions of climate action.

Climate justice is not about perceptions of fairness of specific policies. It questions the framing of existing distinctions between global and local levels and between mitigation and adaptation. It is not just the disproportionate continuing levels of emissions but

also solutions such as carbon pricing and trade restrictions that widen the income gap and increase inequality. Current global rules do not reflect the interests of the Global South.

These views reflect conflicting visions of how society is organised and what constitutes progress. Distinguishing between total emissions of countries and trends, drivers, and patterns of natural resource use as causes of climate change masks the impact of the most stable global trend of urbanisation covering three-quarters of global emissions and natural resource use. A middle class and more equal world is adopting opinions, pathways, and actions distinct from those who developed earlier.

The foundational fact is that patterns of urban natural resource use of the G7 are not being followed by the Global South. The G7 with one-fifth the population was consuming three-quarters of global resources in 1950, with the U.S. alone consuming 40%. By the 1970s, three-quarters of the population of the G7 had shifted to cities and their lifestyles based on commodity prices kept low by the former colonial powers directly led to climate change. The real price of the most traded commodity, oil, was not allowed to increase over a century, leading to its wasteful use. In 2050, the G7 will account for 25% of global emissions with a 10% share of the global population, while Asia is expected to account for 55% of the world's emissions equal to its share of the global population. The time is ripe for new foundational

principles of sustainability with justice at its centre. India would have to match the strategic thinking of the U.S. in setting up interlinked voluntary arrangements of the 'rules-based order', with the rules determined by the G7, for a new order for 'shared prosperity' seeking comparable levels of well-being within ecological limits.

### Global governance

With global cooperation itself in danger, three initiatives are suggested. First, BRICS and partner countries should take the strategic leap for an alternate sustainability forum to support each other in the urban energy transition. This would not be an anti-G7 forum, but focused on units located in member countries in different continents researching sustainability science, urbanisation, monitoring G7 climate policy and supporting exchange of experiences.

Second, the UN Climate negotiations should be limited to reviewing emissions reductions in the G7 and grants in the \$300 billion to the most vulnerable — Small Island States and Least Developed Countries.

Third, international fora should be seen as what they are: annual stocktaking that helps the world assess its position and decide course-correction accordingly. The World Trade Organization with its dysfunctional dispute settlement could also be allowed to wither away.

The BRICS playing a bridging role in the new multilateralism will entitle them to their rightful place in the UN Security Council.

*Mukul Sanwal is a Former U.N. diplomat. Views are personal.*

### BOOKS: REVIEW

## New book explores pandemic's art, anxiety and resilience

Garth Greenwell's *Small Rain* is a deeply introspective and evocative exploration of the human condition amid the unprecedented uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic. Set in the tumultuous year of 2020, the novel captures the pervasive anxiety of the time through the eyes of a nameless narrator, whose emergency trip to a hospital becomes a catalyst for profound personal transformation. Through its poetic prose and emotional depth, *Small Rain* is a remarkable meditation on art, relationships, and resilience in the face of collective and individual crises.

### A Mirror to Collective Anxieties

Greenwell's narrator embodies the fears and uncertainties that defined the pandemic era. A sharp pain forces him to seek medical care, plunging him into what he perceives as the most dangerous place amid a global health crisis—the hospital. This internal struggle mirrors the larger societal disarray, as he re-

flects on decisions like reopening colleges despite surging COVID-19 cases: "It's like watching a car drive straight off a cliff, a friend said, but slowly, deliberately, a slow-motion suicide." Such observations encapsulate the collective unease of a world grappling with its fragility.

The hospital setting is not just a backdrop for the narrator's physical ordeal but also a stage for his emotional and intellectual revelations. In a time when human connections are fraught with fear and separation, the narrator turns to art as a sanctuary. The medieval song 'Westron Wynde,' which inspires the book's title, becomes a bridge between him and Alivia, a compassionate nurse. This shared appreciation for art transcends their roles as patient and caregiver, offering a poignant commentary on the redemptive power of shared humanity.

### The Role of Art in Survival

Art, particularly poetry, emerges as the narrator's anchor in *Small Rain*. Greenwell portrays the nar-

rator as someone who has devoted his life to art, which in turn sustains him through his isolation and fear. Poetry becomes not merely a form of expression but an object of contemplation and devotion. The narrator muses, "All art is a message, we want to communicate something but not entirely graspable something, maybe there's a kind of sense only non-sense can convey." This sentiment underscores how art can provide solace and meaning when life feels incomprehensible.

Greenwell masterfully illustrates how art shapes the narrator's relationships and self-perception. Longing for his partner, L., the narrator channels his emotions through artistic reflection, rediscovering the depth of his connection. As he navigates the challenges of his hospital stay, art becomes a spiritual lens through which he reimagines his body, his work, and his relationships.

### Layers of Brokenness

The narrative unfolds against



*Small Rain*  
By Garth  
Greenwell;  
Picador,  
320 pages; Rs 750.

a backdrop of multi-layered brokenness—physical, emotional, and societal. The narrator resides in a damaged house with his partner, in a country fracturing under the weight of the pandemic and racial tensions. Beyond these personal and national struggles lies a world devastated by climate change, where even the natural order is collapsing with the disappearance of bird species. This intricate layering of brokenness reflects the interconnected fragility of human existence and the planet.

Greenwell delves into the asymmetry of relationships, particularly the dynamic between patients and caregivers. The narrator becomes emotionally attached to Alivia, whose acts of care hold profound significance for him. Yet, for Alivia, he is just one among many patients. This asymmetry poignantly illus-

trates the inherent vulnerability and subjectivity in human connections.

### Transformation and Redemption

The narrator's hospital experience becomes a crucible for transformation. By the end of his stay, he begins to care for the body he once loathed and appreciates the small but vital joys of his romantic relationship. His longing to reunite with his partner, L., signifies a re-kindled appreciation for love and connection. Greenwell's portrayal of this journey is tender and compassionate, reminding readers of the resilience of the human spirit.

### Conclusion

*Small Rain* is a profound and poetic exploration of life, love, and art in the shadow of a global crisis. Greenwell's lyrical prose and introspective narrative invite readers to reflect on their own experiences of isolation, connection, and renewal. The novel is not just a testament to the power of art but also a compassionate chronicle of humanity's enduring quest for meaning in times of turmoil. By blending the personal and the universal, Greenwell crafts a literary work that resonates deeply with the anxieties and hopes of our time.

## THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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## Private Equity Investments in India Surge to \$15 Billion in 2024, a 46.2 Pc Growth

**NEW DELHI:** Driven by sectors such as healthcare and pharmaceuticals, consumer-related industries and technology — amid stable political scenario and favourable policy environment — private equity (PE) investments in India surged to \$15 billion in 2024, marking a 46.2 per cent increase from the previous year, according to a report on Wednesday.



India's expanding middle-class population, robust startup ecosystem, and strong IPO market provided ample opportunities for investors, according to the data shared by LSEG, a global financial markets infrastructure and data provider.

"India remains one of the top markets in the Asia Pacific for financial sponsor activity, accounting for at least 28 per cent of the region's total equity investments during this period, up from a 15 per cent

market share the previous year," said Elaine Tan, senior manager, LSEG Deals Intelligence.

The total PE funds raised over the last three years reached approximately \$23 billion, earmarked for deployment in India.

"Favourable government initiatives, anticipated global monetary easing, diverse sector opportunities, and a rising interest in integrating ESG into growth strategies are some

of the key factors expected to drive private equity activity in India in 2025," according to the report. Stable political scenario, favourable policy, infra push to drive Indian economy in 2025

According to recent projections by global brokerages and financial institutions, the Indian economy is poised to be supported by a stable political scenario, favourable policy environments, the effects of production-linked incentive

(PLI) programmes, possibilities brought about by changes in the global supply chain and government emphasis on infrastructure spending.

The Indian macro remains strong among large markets except for the growth part. The Current Account Deficit (CAD) has improved significantly and is expected to be 1 per cent for FY25.

Moreover, robust services exports and healthy remittances flow should help keep the country's CAD in the safe zone during the current financial year (FY 2024-25), according to a Crisil report.

Most domestic macro and micro indicators remain steady. Given these aspects, the domestic equity market remains focused on earnings, according to industry experts. Government spending has resumed, employment is on the rise, and supply bottlenecks are lessening.

## India Strengthens Global Trade Strategy with Focus on 20 Key Nations



**NEW DELHI:** Senior officials from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, along with representatives from the commercial wings of Indian Missions in 20 countries, wrapped up a crucial meeting on Wednesday, aimed at boosting India's exports of goods and services.

The deliberations, chaired by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, addressed country-specific and sector-specific opportunities in trade, technology, investment, and tourism.

"Together, we explored ways

to strengthen India's global leadership and foster deeper international collaborations," Goyal shared on X, summarising the event's significance.

Discussions centred on overcoming non-tariff barriers, logistics challenges, WTO-related matters, and leveraging the Market Access Initiative (MAI) to expand India's global reach. Officials highlighted six key focus sectors, covering both goods and services, for enhanced export strategies targeting 20 major countries, including the US, Australia, China, Russia, and France. These nations, which include prominent EU members and economic hubs such as Japan and South Korea, account for a substantial portion

of India's trade.

The ministry aims to tap into this potential by promoting exports of products like engineering goods and electronics while boosting services in IT/ITeS, tourism, and other priority sectors. The meeting gains importance amidst fluctuating export trends. After recording robust growth in October 2024, India's merchandise exports contracted by 4.85 per cent year-on-year in November, reaching USD 32.11 billion. However, services exports have shown resilience, achieving a record USD 34.31 billion in October, up 22.3 per cent year-on-year. Cumulatively, India's exports during April-November of this fiscal year rose by 2.17% to USD 284.31 billion, while imports surged by 8.35 per cent to USD 486.73 billion.

This widened the trade deficit to USD 202.42 billion from USD 170.98 billion during the same period last year.

## 'Genome India Project' a key biotechnology revolution towards Viskit Bharat: PM Modi

**NEW DELHI:** The 'Genome India Project' marks a defining moment in the country's biotechnology landscape and the combination of biotechnology and biomass is an important part of the foundation for 'Viskit Bharat', Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday.

Addressing experts and scientists via video message, PM Modi said the project was approved 5 years ago and our scientists have diligently worked and completed the project, despite the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

More than 20 research institutions such as IISc, IITs, CSIR and DBT-BRIC have played a major role in this research. The data consisting of the genome sequences of 10,000 Indians is now available at the Indian Biological Data Centre.



## Parmeshwar Metal Makes Strong Market Debut at BSE SME Platform With 38% Premium



**NEW DELHI:** Parmeshwar Metal Ltd. made a debut on the BSE SME platform on January 9, with its shares listing at Rs 84.50, marking a 38.52 percent premium over its initial public offering (IPO) price. The company's market capitalisation reached Rs 129.34 crore following the listing. The successful IPO, which was priced between Rs 75 and Rs 61 per share, raised Rs 25 crore and garnered extraordinary investor interest, achieving a subscription rate of over 563 times during its three-day bidding period from January 2 to January 6. The Gujarat-based manufacturer has outlined strategic plans for utilising the IPO proceeds, primarily focusing on expanding its production capabilities. The company intends to establish a new manufacturing facility in Dehgam for the production of bunched copper wire and 1.6 MM copper wire rod.

## SAIL strengthens Maha Kumbh with 45,000 tonnes of steel



**PRAYAGRAJ:** Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), a Maharatna, has supplied approximately 45,000 tonnes of steel for the upcoming Mahakumbh Mela in Prayagraj.

Ministry of Steel said in a release that the total quantity of steel supplied includes chequered plates, hot strip mill plates, mild steel plates, angles and joists.

SAIL had supplied steel during the Mahakumbh Mela of

2013, demonstrating the company's consistent support for the notable public event.

The steel supplied by SAIL will play a crucial role in supporting the construction of various temporary structures essential for the smooth and successful conduct of the Mahakumbh Mela 2025.

These include pontoon bridges, passages, temporary steel bridges, substations and flyovers. Major customers for this

steel supply include the Public Works Department (PWD), Uttar Pradesh State Bridges Corporation, the Electricity Board and their suppliers.

SAIL said it is proud to contribute steel for such a large-scale event, a symbol of the nation's rich cultural heritage.

"The company remains committed to contributing to national projects that enhance the country's infrastructure and promote its cultural and social well-being," the release said.

The Maha Kumbh Mela, one of the largest spiritual gatherings in the world, serves as a confluence not only of rivers but also of cultures, traditions, and artistic expressions.

The grand event, celebrated every twelve years, transcends the boundaries of religion and spirituality, offering a platform to showcase India's rich cultural heritage.

## Markets regulator SEBI sends notice to Ola Electric for violating disclosure norms



**NEW DELHI:** Electric vehicle (EV) company Ola Electric Mobility Limited has received an administrative warning from the markets regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), for violating disclosure norms. The reason cited is that Ola Electric announced its e-scooter expansion plans first on social media instead of announcing it on the stock exchanges. In an administrative warning, sent via email on January 7 for violating various sections of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, the regulator asked the EV firm to ensure "equal, timely, cost-efficient access to relevant information for all investors" via stock exchanges. "By failing to first disseminate the information on the stock exchanges and instead announcing it on social media platforms, you have failed to provide equal and timely access to information to all investors," read the SEBI warning.

## Adani Group, ISKCON to start 'Mahaprasad Seva' in Maha Kumbh



**AHMEDABAD:** The Adani Group and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) have joined hands to serve meals to devotees at the Mahakumbh Mela in Prayagraj. The Mahaprasad Seva will be offered for the entire duration of the Mahakumbh Mela, from January 13 to February 26.

To thank ISKCON for this initiative, Adani Group Chairman Gautam Adani met Guru Prasad Swami, the Chairman of ISKCON Governing Body Commission (GBC), on Thursday.

Speaking about ISKCON's support in offering the Mahaprasad Seva, Gautam Adani said, "Kumbh is a sacred place of seva, where every devotee gets involved in the name of seva to God. It is my good fortune that we are starting the 'Mahaprasad Seva' for the devotees at the Maha Kumbh in collaboration

with ISKCON."

"With the blessings of Maa Annapurna, free food will be provided to lakhs of devotees. Today, I got the opportunity to meet Guru Prasad Swamiji of ISKCON and I deeply experienced the power of dedication towards seva. In the true sense, seva is the highest form of patriotism. Seva is meditation, seva is prayer and seva is God," he added.

He also elaborated on collaboration with ISKCON.

"We have a wonderful experience and attachment with ISKCON. And even when we are thinking, what we can do from a Kumbh Mela standpoint, and when it was about the Prasad, then immediately, the first thought was that the institution which can do it in the best manner is ISKCON,"

Guru Prasad Swamiji, one of

the outstanding preachers of the International Krishna Consciousness Society, said, "The Adani Group has always been a shining example of corporate responsibility and social service. What makes Gautam Adaniji outstanding is his humility - he never waits to be called but moves forward to serve selflessly. We are extremely grateful for his contribution. His work inspires us to give back to the society and unite in the service of humanity."

He cited ancient texts and said it duty of every person to undertake tasks which assist others.

"According to our shastras, this is the most wonderful thing that one can do...with our life, with our energy, with our wealth and with our words, we should serve the Supreme, and we are all part of that Supreme," he said.

The Mahaprasad Seva will be offered to 50 lakh devotees and the meals would be prepared in two kitchens in and outside the Mela area. The Mahaprasad will be distributed at 40 places in the Mahakumbh area and 2,500 volunteers will be involved in this initiative.

Golf carts have been arranged for the differently abled, elderly and mothers with children. Five lakh copies of Geeta Saar will also be distributed among the devotees.

# Make in India and a Sunrise Sector - Medical Devices



**DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH**

**M**edical devices market in India is valued at about \$14 bn and it is expected to grow to \$30 bn by 2030. Market size was around \$11 bn (approx. Rs 90,000 Cr) in 2020 and at that time, its share in the global medical devices market was estimated to be 1.5 per cent. There are 6,000 plus different kinds of medical devices and the number is increasing day by day. India is considered among top 20 global medical devices market in the world, and the 4th largest market in Asia after Japan, China, and South Korea. Indian Medical Devices sector is recognized as a sunrise sector due to its growth potential. As per the 50th Report of the Standing Committee on Chemicals and Fertilizers (2024, February), 2262 manufacturing units licenses have been issued from January 1, 2018, till February 2024 out of 3413 applications. The report further mentioned that India's import dependency in medical devices sector is about 80 per cent of its requirements. Many reports put import dependency at higher level, e.g., the Medical Technology Association of India highlighted more than 86 per cent dependency in the 50th Report of the Standing Committee as cited above.

Import-Export data of Medical Devices falls under five segments namely Con-

sumables & Disposables, Electro-Medical equipment, Implants, In-Vitro Diagnostics, and Surgical Instruments. Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of imports for these five segments was 8.79 per cent between FY 2019-20 and FY 2023-24 whereas CAGR of exports stood at 13.35 per cent during the same period. Therefore, growth rate of exports of medical devices was higher in comparison to growth of imports. In absolute terms, import was 2.16 times of exports in FY 2023-24 alone.

Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices have been recognized as prominent sectors in the category of Manufacturing Sectors under the 'Make in India' initiative that was launched on September 25, 2014. Multi-pronged strategy to encourage manufacturing of medical devices in India during last decade included permitting FDI up to 100 per cent, discouraging imports, boost to domestic production, notification of Medical Devices Rules, promotion of Medical Devices Parks, launch of Production Linked Incentive Scheme, establishment of dedicated Export Promotion Council and other supporting mechanism.

In December 2014, 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) was approved in medical devices sector via automatic route in both Greenfield and Brownfield projects for manufacturing of medical devices. This move gave impetus and capital to

**Table 1: India's Import & Export of Medical Devices**

Financial Year	Export	Import
2019-20	2293	5845
2020-21	2532	6242
2021-22	2923	8540
2022-23	3391	7492
2023-24	3785	8188

Source: Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence & Statistics (DGCI&S), Ministry of Commerce and Industry

focus on capacity building and product development in medical devices industry (MDI). Participation of companies like Philips Global Business Services LLP, Siemens Healthcare in PLI Scheme is a positive move.

To encourage 'Make in India' for Medical Devices, several interventions have been made. For example, in January 2016 import duty on medical devices used for surgical, dental and veterinary use was increased from 5.0 per cent to 7.5 per cent. Special Additional Duty (SAD) of 4.0 per cent was also imposed on these items. At the same time, basic customs duty was reduced to 2.5 per cent on raw materials, parts and accessories of these items. This was done to encourage domestic production of medical devices. At the same time, it has been highlighted by various industry associations that import duty on components is much higher as compared to finished product/equipment as a whole. Production Linked Incentive Scheme dealt with some of these components as applicants were selected who

**Table 2: Major destinations for export of Medical Devices from India**

Country	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
USA	521.85	600.01	631.48	714.12	714.30
Germany	123.74	133.7	127.29	176.63	199
China	130.27	133	146.94	144.57	166
Netherlands	33.78	43.87	93.68	110.44	145
Japan	30.63	27.21	31.84	38	42.17

Source: DGCI&S, Ministry of Commerce and Industry



were manufacturing key components constituting major part of medical devices.

Medical Devices Rules, 2017 were notified on January 31, 2017, which came into force on January 1, 2018. Under these rules, medical devices were classified as Class A (low risk), Class B (low moderate risk), Class C (moderate high risk) and Class D (high risk). Global Harmonisation Task Force (GHTF) was following this classification. GHTF was founded in 1993 by the governments and industry representatives of the USA, European Union (EU), Japan, Canada and Australia. This Task Force provided guidelines to meet standards for safety and quality of medical devices.

On February 11, 2020, all the medical devices intended for use in human or animals have been notified as drugs under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act with effect from April 1, 2020. Four medical devices have been included in the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) and in the Schedule-I of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 to bring these devices under price control. The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) also put a price cap on trade margins at Price to Distributors (PTD) at 70 per cent of devices such as Pulse Oximeter, Glucometer, Nebulizer, Blood Pressure Monitor, Digital Thermometer, and Oxygen Concentrator.

**Table 3: India's Import of Medical Devices**

Country	FY 2019-20	FY 2020-21	FY 2021-22	FY 2022-23	FY 2023-24
USA	1190.08	984.08	1464.73	1418	1519
China	622.2	1110.92	1657.67	1246.82	1332
Germany	732.07	668.5	782.35	797.49	908
Netherlands	347.51	228.51	398	416	460
Japan	280.08	236.99	343.08	321.77	372

Source: DGCI&S, Ministry of Commerce and Industry

On March 20, 2020, the Scheme - Promotion of Medical Device Parks was approved to provide easy access to world-class common infrastructure facilities to medical device units located in the parks. Approvals were given for creation of common infrastructure facilities in the proposed medical device parks in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI) for promoting Domestic Manufacturing of Medical Devices was notified on July 21, 2020. Target Segments of medical devices comprised Target Segment 1 (Cancer Care/Radiotherapy medical devices), Target Segment 2 (Radiology & Imaging medical devices and Nuclear Imaging Devices), Target Segment 3 (Anaesthetics & Cardio-respiratory medical devices including Catheters of Cardio-Respiratory Category & Renal Care Medical devices), and Target Segment 4 (all implants including implantable electronic devices like Pacemakers). Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI) for Pharmaceuticals related notification dated

March 3, 2021, covered pharmaceutical goods under three categories, and Category 3 included in-vitro diagnostic devices. Overall incentive allocated for this category was Rs. 1,750 Cr. The rate of incentive on incremental sales (over base year) for pharmaceutical goods covered in Category 3 was kept 5 per cent for FY 2022-23 to FY 2025-26, 4 per cent for 2026-27 and 3 per cent for 2027-28. This Scheme is in early phase of implementation.

On September 21, 2022, the Department of Commerce approved the establishment of a separate Export Promotion Council (EPC) for Medical Devices (EPC-MD) at YEIDA, Uttar Pradesh to give the boost to the Medical Devices Sector. EPC-MD was launched on May 26, 2023. National Medical Devices Policy, 2023 was also unveiled on the same day. The Union Cabinet had approved the National Medical Devices Policy, 2023 in April 2023 to facilitate an orderly growth of the medical device sector to meet the public health objectives of access, affordability, quality and innovation.

By September 30, 2024,

there were almost 300 surgical items sold through 13,822 Janaushadhi Kendras under Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PM-BJP). This is a key growth driver along with other growth drivers such as higher government health expenditure, rising income levels, growth in medical tourism, a growing burden of chronic diseases, expansion in healthcare insurance coverage, etc.

Most recently, on November 8, 2024, a new Scheme namely 'Strengthening of Medical Device Industry' has been launched with five sub-schemes - 'Common Facilities for Medical Devices Clusters', 'Marginal Investment Scheme for Reducing Import Dependence', 'Capacity Building and Skill Development for Medical Devices', 'Medical Device Clinical Studies Support Scheme', and 'Medical Device Promotion Scheme'.

From policy initiatives and recent data, it appears that 'Make in India' is showing results but still we have trade deficit with respect to all major five countries with which India has maximum Import or Export of Medical Devices. Positive outcome of policy initiatives is likely to materialize in next few years.

**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.**

# Centre releases over Rs 1.73 Lakh Crore to states as Share in Taxes

**NEW DELHI:** The Union Government released a tax devolution of Rs 1,73,030 crore to state governments on Friday, up from the devolution of Rs 89,086 crore in December 2024.

A higher amount is being devolved this month to enable states to accelerate capital spending and finance their development and welfare-related expenditures, the Finance Ministry said.

As many as 26 states have been listed in the package announced on Friday.

The funds released include Rs 13,017.06 crore for West Bengal, Rs 7,002.52 crore for Andhra Pradesh, Rs 6,310.40 crore for Karnataka, Rs 5,412.38 crore for Assam, Rs 5,895.13 crore for Chhattisgarh, Rs 1,436.16 crore for Himachal Pradesh, Rs 3,330.83 crore for Kerala,



Rs 3,126.65 crore for Punjab, and Rs 7,057.89 crore for Tamil Nadu.

Among the other states, Uttar Pradesh has got Rs 31,039.84 crore, Maharashtra Rs 10,930.31 crore, Gujarat Rs 6,017.99 crore, Madhya Pradesh Rs 13,582.86 crore, Manipur

Rs 1,238.9 crore, and Meghalaya 1,327.13 crore.

The tax devolution is the process of distributing the net proceeds of taxes collected by the Union government to the states. The Union government distributes taxes to states in regular instalments based on

the recommendations of the Finance Commission.

The Finance Commission recommends the share of states in the total net proceeds of all taxes, including corporation tax, personal income tax, and central GST.

The 15th Finance Commission recommended that 41 per cent of the Central government's divisible tax pool be allocated to states for the period 2021-26. This is known as vertical devolution.

It also recommended criteria for distributing the funds among states, known as horizontal devolution. These criteria included "income distance" which reflects the difference in a state's income from the state with the highest per capita income, the size of the population of the state as per the 2011 Census, and the share of dense forest in each state

# RBI purchased another 8 tonnes of gold in Nov as safe-haven asset

**MUMBAI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) bought another eight tonnes of gold in November 2024 as Central banks around the world continued their buying spree with a collective purchase of 53 tonnes of the precious metal during the month, according to the latest World Gold Council (WGC) report.

The decline in gold prices during November, following the US election, may have provided some central banks with the added impetus to accumulate the precious metal, the report pointed out.

RBI has, like other central banks, been buying gold as a safe-haven asset. The strategy of holding gold is primarily aimed at hedging against inflation and reducing foreign currency risks, especially in times of uncertainty triggered by geopolitical tensions.

With the addition of eight



tonnes of gold to its reserves in November, the RBI has increased its buying to 73 tonnes in the first 11 months of 2024 and its total gold holdings to 876 tonnes, maintaining its position as the second largest gold holder in the world after Poland.

The People's Bank of China (PBoC) has resumed gold purchases after a six-month gap, adding five tonnes of gold to its reserves, increasing its year-to-date net purchases to 34 tonnes and its total reported gold holdings to 2,264 tonnes (5 per cent of total reserves), the report said.

Meanwhile, the Monetary Authority of Singapore was the

month's largest seller, reducing its gold reserves by 5 tonnes, bringing the year-to-date net sales to 7 tonnes and overall gold holdings to 223 tonnes, it added.

The RBI's gold purchases have shot up by five-fold over the quantity of the precious metal bought in the same period of 2023, according to WGC figures.

According to the data, the RBI's total gold reserves have now gone up to 890 tonnes, of which 510 tonnes are held in India.

According to WGC, the central banks that bought gold during the month are those of Poland adding 21 tonnes and Uzbekistan buying nine tonnes.

These large purchases of gold by central banks have also been driving up prices of the precious metal in the global market.

# India Plans New Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs, Covering Loans Up to Rs 100 Crore



**NEW DELHI:** Financial Services Secretary M Nagaraju announced on Thursday that the government is preparing to launch a comprehensive credit guarantee scheme for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector, which will cover loans up to Rs 100 crore.

Speaking at the concluding session of Grameen Bharat Mahotsav, Nagaraju revealed that existing enterprises would be eligible for loans without requiring traditional guarantees under this new initiative.

The scheme, originally unveiled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the 2024-25 Budget, is awaiting Cabinet approval. According to the Finance Minister's budget announcement, the program will operate through a pooling mechanism for credit risks and will be managed by a self-financing guarantee fund.

This initiative aims to facilitate term loans for MSMEs to purchase machinery and equipment without requiring collateral or third-party guarantees, though borrowers will need to pay both an upfront guarantee fee and an annual fee based on the declining loan balance.

The MSME sector has demonstrated remarkable growth and resilience in recent years, with exports surging from Rs 3.95 lakh crore in 2020-21 to Rs 12.39 lakh crore in 2024-25.

The sector currently employs 50 million people and has maintained a significant contribution to India's GDP, with its Gross Value Added (GVA) increasing from 29.7 per cent in 2017-18 to 30.1 per cent in 2022-23. Nagaraju emphasised the government's commitment to rural entrepreneurship through various lending schemes. He outlined four key focus areas for the country's progress including quality improvement, export linkage development, capacity building, and support mechanisms to achieve the vision of Vikshit Bharat.

These initiatives align with the government's broader strategy to strengthen India's MSME sector and enhance its global competitiveness.

# Credit Bureau Records to Be Updated Every 15 Days: RBI



**NEW DELHI:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced new regulations requiring all lenders to update credit bureau records every 15 days, starting January 1, 2025, marking a significant shift from the current monthly reporting system. This initiative aims to create a more dynamic and accurate credit information framework. The new directive is designed to establish standardised protocols for credit information reporting and dissemination while ensuring the confidentiality and security of sensitive financial data. The framework also includes provisions for consumers to access their credit information and seek redress for credit reporting-related grievances. Under the current monthly reporting system, missed payments or defaults can take up to 40 days to appear in credit records, potentially leading to outdated information and imprecise creditworthiness assessments. The new 15-day reporting cycle will enable faster reflection of both timely payments and defaults in credit scores, allowing lenders to make decisions based on more current financial behavior. The RBI has also addressed concerns regarding Credit Information Companies (CICs) sharing credit information with non-Specified Users (SUs) based on individual consent.

# Higher Govt Spending, Robust Investment to Boost IIP Growth in H2 FY25: Economists

**NEW DELHI:** Given the expectation of higher government spending followed by improvement in investment in the second half (H2), the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) growth is likely to be higher in H2 FY25, economists said on Friday.

The attention will now shift towards upcoming Budget and the RBI policy which is expected to be growth conducive, said Jahnvi Prabhakar, economist, Bank of Baroda. IIP growth registered a robust growth of 5.2 per cent in November 2024 against a growth of 3.7 per cent in October. "This was supported by improvement across all the sectors. Manufacturing sector expanded by 5.8 per cent, with over 15 sub-sectors registering stronger growth than last year. Both mining and electricity sector registered strong growth in November," said Prabhakar. Within use-based classifica-



tion, capital goods, infra good and consumer durable goods registered a healthy increase in November. "A festival push during this period, supported by production. In the coming months, we expect a steady pick up in production level. This has been reflected by high frequency indicators," Prabhakar added. Dharmakirti Joshi, Chief Economist at Crisil, said the festive season led to a sharp rise in production of consumer dis-

cretionary products. "Consumer durables saw the strongest rise in the index (13.1 per cent in November) among major production sectors. The rise was seen across low and high value items, including clothing, electronics, furniture and automobiles," said Joshi. The resumption of government capital expenditure (capex) also boosted production of infrastructure and construction goods (10 per cent IIP growth), and capital goods (9

per cent) in November.

IIP growth has been better in the third quarter so far. Further, the first advance estimate for gross domestic product (GDP) pencils in higher overall economic growth in the second half of this fiscal (6.8 per cent) than in the first half (6 per cent).

"The effects of good agricultural output, easing food inflation and improving government capex are expected to support growth in the second half of this fiscal," according to Joshi.

Arsh Mogre, Economist Institutional Equities, PL Capital-Prabhudas Lilladher, said the manufacturing sector recorded the fastest pace of expansion, driven by infrastructure emphasis and construction demand.

"On net basis, the November IIP data is an encouraging sign, but decisive action will be critical and all eyes will be on Union Budget 2025-26," Mogre noted.

# Small Restaurants Demand 12-18 Pct GST with ITC

**NEW DELHI:** The National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) has submitted key recommendations to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, seeking support for the restaurant sector in the forthcoming Union Budget.

Among the key recommendations, NRAI proposed the restoration of GST input tax credit, suggesting a new GST slab of 12-18 percent with ITC for restaurants not located in premium hotels.

The association also requested a review of GST notification



on commercial leases through RCM, citing inflationary pressure on smaller establishments and MSME owners.

Additional proposals included the reinstatement of the Service Export from India Scheme

with a 5 percent duty credit on forex earnings, and GST reduction on eco-friendly packaging materials.

The association, representing over 500,000 restaurants nationwide, emphasised the industry's significant economic contribution, with an annual turnover of INR 5.69 lakh crores, making it the third-largest segment in the services sector after retail and insurance.

In its submission, NRAI highlighted the industry's role as a major employer, currently providing direct employment to more than 8.50 million Indians. The association stressed that the sector not only contributes substantially to direct and indirect tax revenues but also drives consumption, promotes tourism, and supports numerous allied industries. NRAI President Sagar Daryani emphasised the need for structural reforms, including the establishment of a dedicated ministry or department for the restaurant industry.

# Boosting Revenue by GST



**SATISH SINGH**

**T**he Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has increased the GST rate on the profit margin of the sale of old and used vehicles, to 18 percent. After this announcement of the GST Council, there is confusion among the public regarding its recovery. People are confused, will they have to pay GST at the rate of 18 percent on selling their old vehicle or will this tax be levied only on the profit margin of the registered vehicle seller or dealer on selling of old & used vehicles? Here, I would like to clarify that only the registered vehicle dealer will pay GST on their profit margin. If a person sells his old or used vehicle to another person or to a vehicle dealer, then he will not have to pay GST on it.

This can be understood by an example. If a person buys a car for Rs 15 lakh and uses it for 3 years, then sells it to someone for Rs 10 lakh, then he will not have to pay GST on the sale price. Similarly, if a person sells his old and used car to a registered vehicle dealer at the same price, then also he will not have to pay GST on the sale amount. However, when the dealer sells the same car to a

customer for Rs 11 lakh, then that dealer gets a profit of Rs 1 lakh, which is called margin here, but 18 percent GST i.e. Rs 18,000 will have to be paid as tax. This tax will have to be paid by the registered vehicle dealer because he has earned this profit through the business.

In this sequence, if the registered vehicle dealer claims depreciation on the vehicle sold under section 32 of the Income Tax Act, 1961, then also he will have to pay GST on the profit margin. Here margin means (Selling price - Remaining price after depreciation). If this margin is negative then the dealer will not have to pay GST, but if it is positive then he will have to pay GST on the difference between the selling price and the purchase price margin.

This can be understood with an example. The price of a vehicle is Rs 20 lakh and the seller claims a depreciation of Rs 9 lakh and fixes the selling price of the vehicle at Rs 10 lakh. In such a case, subtracting the selling price of the vehicle, which is Rs 10 lakh, from the price after depreciation, which is Rs 11 lakh, results in a negative margin, so no GST will have to be paid on it, but if the vehicle is sold for Rs 12 lakh instead of Rs 10 lakh, then a positive margin of Rs 1 lakh will come out and at the rate of 18 percent GST will be levied on car dealer



& dealer will have to pay Rs 18,000 as GST.

It is pertinent to mention that Taxing margin is not a new thing. Even during the UPA regime, tax was levied on margin in the process of buying and selling old or used vehicles, which was known as 'Service Tax'. It is worth mentioning that this tax has been levied till 2017.

Before this decision of the GST Council, old vehicles with engine capacity of 1200 CC or more, which were running on petrol, LPG or CNG and diesel vehicles with engine capacity of 1500 CC or more were being charged GST at the rate of 18 percent since 2018. Not only this, GST is also being charged at the rate of 12 percent on old electric vehicles. Therefore, there is no need to create a ruckus over the latest decision of the GST Council. Infact, through this initiative, the government has worked to bring uniformity in the collection of GST on

the purchase and sale of all old vehicles, including electric vehicles, which can be called a commendable and praiseworthy initiative of the government.

The used car market in India is growing continuously. Obviously, the expansion of the market will also increase the revenue of the government. According to the Indian Blue Book (IBB) 2023 report, the used car market in India was US\$ 31.33 billion in FY 2022-23, which is estimated to grow to US\$ 70.48 billion by FY 2027-28. The report also states that the average growth rate of the used vehicle market was 6 percent during FY 2017 and FY 2022, but the market is expected to grow at a rate of 16 percent during the period between FY 2023 and FY 2028. In comparison, the new car market is expected to grow at a rate of just 1 percent to 6 percent during this period.

Today's youth want to live their life in a luxurious way. Earlier people used to buy a car in middle age after working for 20 or 25 years, but now as soon as they get a job, even if it is through a loan, the youth are buying a car and a house immediately. When money is short, the youth are not even averse to buying old vehicles. In such a situation, there is immense possibility of expansion of the old vehicle market, which the government cannot ignore at all.

It can be said that the collection of GST at the rate of 18 percent on the profit margin on the sale of all types of old and used vehicles for the second or third time will increase the government's revenue. This decision of the GST Council will not put any tax burden on the common man. It is also appropriate to say here that tax was already being collected on old or used vehicles in the name of GST or some other name.

If seen, the latest initiative of the government has brought uniformity in tax structure. In such a situation, it must be said that due to the increase in revenue, the government will be able to spend on developmental works, which will ultimately benefit the common people.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad Based Senior Columnist, views are personal.

# Indian Stock Market Ends Lower, IT Sector Shines

**MUMBAI:** India's domestic benchmark indices closed lower on Friday as the IT sector closed in the green after a gain of 3.44 per cent.

Sensex ended at 77,378.91, down by 241.30 points, or 0.31 per cent, and Nifty settled at 23,431.50, down by 95 points or 0.40 per cent.

Nifty Bank ended at 48,734.15, down by 769.35 points, or 1.55 per cent. The Nifty Midcap 100 index closed at 54,585.75 after dropping 1,160.15 points, or 2.08 per cent, while the Nifty Smallcap 100 index closed at 17,645.55 after declining 472.80 points, or 2.61 per cent.



According to market experts, domestic market sentiment remained subdued due to rising crude oil prices, driven by supply concerns and a strengthening dollar index.

"Despite the IT sector's resilience following positive early Q3 results, broader indices bled due to uncertainties sur-

rounding US President-elect Donald Trump's policies and high valuations. Consolidation may persist in the near term, yet investors are closely watching the US non-farm payroll data today for further guidance," they added.

Buying was seen in the IT sector after strong Q3 results of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), which saw its stock jumping 5.60 per cent at Rs 4,265 apiece.

On the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), 829 shares ended in the green and 3,162 shares in the red, whereas there was no change in 87 shares.

# MSME Credit Deployment Grows 13.5% YoY: RBI

**NEW DELHI:** Bank lending to the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector demonstrated strong momentum, with gross credit deployment reaching Rs 26.48 lakh crore in November 2024, marking a 13.5 percent increase from Rs 23.32 lakh crore in the corresponding period last year, according to the Reserve Bank of India's latest sectoral credit deployment data.

The MSME sector accounted for 15.5 percent of the total non-food credit of Rs 170 lakh crore extended by scheduled commercial banks.

Within the MSME segment, micro and small enterprises (MSEs) attracted the lion's share of credit at Rs 20.92 lakh crore, registering an 11.7



percent growth compared to November 2023.

Medium enterprises witnessed even more robust growth, with credit deployment surging by 20.7 percent to reach Rs 5.56 lakh crore, up from Rs 4.60 lakh crore in the previous year.

The lending landscape for MSMEs is poised for transformation with the Reserve Bank of India's upcoming launch of the unified lending interface (ULI),

designed to facilitate bank credit based on alternative data.

The platform, currently in its pilot phase, has already demonstrated significant traction, processing over 6 lakh loans totaling Rs 27,000 crore as of December 6, 2024.

Of these, MSMEs have benefited from 1.60 lakh loans amounting to Rs 14,500 crore, as reported in the central banks comprehensive banking report.

The sector's growing significance in India's credit ecosystem is further emphasised by the total outstanding bank credit to MSMEs, which stood at Rs 27.25 lakh crore at the end of March 2024, representing 19.3 percent of the total adjusted net bank credit (ANBC).

# INTERNATIONAL

## US: Five Killed in California Wildfires

**CALIFORNIA:** Multiple major wildfires raging across Los Angeles County, the most populous US county, has killed at least five people and damaged at least 1,100 buildings, authorities said.

The Palisades fire, a devastating wind-driven brush fire in Pacific Palisades starting Tuesday, spread to 15,800 acres (63.9 square km) as of Wednesday afternoon with zero containment, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire) on Wednesday.

"Extreme fire behaviour, including short and long-range spotting, continues to challenge firefighting efforts for the Palisades Fire," noted Cal Fire in an update.

The blaze destroyed about 1,000 structures, including many expensive homes built between the Santa Monica Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, and forced thousands to flee with new evacuation warnings issued for Malibu, reports Xinhua news agency. In a rich community located



32 km west of Los Angeles downtown, many landmarks, including the sumptuous Getty Villa museum showcasing Greek and Roman antiquities and the mid-century modern Eames House, were threatened by fire.

Three schools in Palisades were reportedly significantly damaged by the blaze.

The Eaton fire, which broke out Tuesday evening, had burned more than 10,600 acres (42.9 square km) near Altadena and Pasadena, two

neighbouring cities of Los Angeles, killed five people and seriously injured many others, according to fire and police officials.

Cal Fire said that firefighters are working aggressively to slow the spread of the blaze and protect critical infrastructure under extreme conditions.

Meanwhile, the Hurst fire, which spread quickly during high winds overnight in Sylmar, scorched over 700 acres (2.83 square km) as of Wednesday afternoon.

The authorities blamed the dangerous wildfire situation in Southern California on the combination of strong winds, very low relative humidity and dry vegetation as extraordinarily powerful winds and gusts — of up to 160 kph — were reported overnight.

A Particularly Dangerous Situation red flag warning will remain in effect across the region through Thursday afternoon, and a high wind warning will remain in effect through Wednesday evening.

Local TV station KTLA reported that widespread power outages caused by wildfires in Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside and San Diego counties in Southern California were impacting more than 4 million customers as of Wednesday afternoon.

California governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency on Tuesday after tens of thousands of people were ordered to evacuate due to a fast-moving wildfire in Southern California.

## Putin Open to Contact With Trump After January 20 : Kremlin



**MOSCOW:** Russian President Vladimir Putin would welcome contact with Donald Trump if Trump's political will remains after his inauguration as US president on January 20, said the Kremlin on Thursday.

There are currently no requests for contact from the US side, said Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov. However, it would be reasonable to wait until Trump takes office, he added.

At a recent press conference

at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, President-elect Trump said he was aware that the Russian leader would like to meet, adding that such a meeting would only be appropriate after his inauguration.

Trump said that he can "understand the Russians' feelings" about President Joe Biden allegedly breaking a "deal" to deny Ukraine NATO membership.

Discussing the causes of the war, Trump said that the pros-

pect of Ukraine joining NATO had been "a major issue for Russia for many, many years".

"You know, a big part of the problem was Russia for many, many years, long before (Russian President, Vladimir) Putin said, you could never have NATO involved with Ukraine. Now they've said ... that's been like written in stone. Somewhere along the line (US President Joe) Biden said no, they should be able to join NATO. Well, then Russia has somebody right on their doorstep and I could understand their feeling about that," Trump told reporters on Tuesday at Mar-a-Lago in Florida.

"There were a lot of mistakes made in that negotiation. When I heard the way that Biden was negotiating, I said you're going to end up in a war and it turned out to be a very bad war. That war could escalate to be much worse than it is right now," he said in response to a question.

## Korean American Senator Andy Kim Advocates for Stability in South Korea Amid Political Uncertainty



**WASHINGTON:** Andy Kim, the first Korean American senator, has emphasized the urgent need for stability in South Korea, following political turmoil stemming from former President Yoon Suk Yeol's failed martial law attempt and subsequent impeachment.

Kim pledged to protect US-South Korea alliances, stressing the importance of coalition-building over isolationist rhetoric. He vowed to oppose any military or economic coercion in the Indo-Pacific, referencing concerns about Donald Trump's foreign policy approach. Bipartisan Pushback:

Kim warned of bipartisan resistance if Trump pursues a withdrawal of US troops from South Korea. He underscored the strategic importance of US military presence in South Korea for regional deterrence, particularly regarding China and the Taiwan Strait. Global Implications:

Kim highlighted that the US benefits significantly from its partnership with South Korea, countering narratives that suggest otherwise. He remains committed to fostering alliances, both bilaterally and through multilateral frameworks like the Quad, despite uncertainties about Trump's foreign policy direction.

Kim highlighted that the US benefits significantly from its partnership with South Korea, countering narratives that suggest otherwise. He remains committed to fostering alliances, both bilaterally and through multilateral frameworks like the Quad, despite uncertainties about Trump's foreign policy direction.

## Imran's PTI agrees to third round of talks with Pak govt



**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's jailed former minister Imran Khan's party on Wednesday said it will participate in the third round of talks with the government to help ease political tensions in the country. The development came a day after PTI leaders on Tuesday demanded unrestricted access to Khan as a precondition for engaging in the next round of talks with the government. The government and PTI leaders began formal talks last month and the third was expected this week but differences popped up after the PTI leaders were not allowed to meet Khan on Tuesday.

## Myanmar army airstrike on village killed at least 40



**NEW DELHI:** An airstrike by Myanmar's army on a village under the control of an armed ethnic minority group killed about 40 people and injured at least 20 others, officials of the group and a local charity said Thursday. They said hundreds of houses burned in a fire triggered by the bombing.

The attack occurred on Wednesday in Kyauk Ni Maw village on Ramree island, an area controlled by the ethnic Arakan Army in western Rakhine state, they said. The military has not announced any attack in the area. The situation in the village could not be independently confirmed.

## Two Indian Americans elected to Virginia state legislatures

**NEW YORK:** Two Indian Americans were elected in special elections to Virginia's legislatures, ensuring the Democratic Party keeps its slender majority despite the national Trump wave in last year's election.

Kannan Srinivasan was elected to the State Senate and J.J. Singh to the State House of Delegates on Wednesday.

In what seems like a round of musical chairs, Singh takes the seat held in the House by Srinivasan, who in turn succeeds Suhas Subramanyam, who resigned the State Senate seat and was elected to Congress in November. The races featured another Indian American, Republican Ram Venkatachalam, who lost to Singh. Srinivasan will join another



Indian American, the Hyderabad-born Ghazala Hashmi, in the State Senate. He grew up in Tamil Nadu and was a chartered accountant in India before emigrating to the US, where he built a 30-year career in business and finance. Srinivasan was elected to the Virginia House in 2023. J.J. Singh, who was born in



Virginia, will probably be the first legislator in the US to wear a turban, although other Sikhs have been elected. Singh worked in the White House Office of Management and Budget under former President Barack Obama. He had earlier served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Bolivia and as a senior US Sen-

ate advisor. The elections were crucial to the Democrats, who had only a one-seat majority in both chambers in a state where the governor is a Republican.

Vice President Kamala Harris defeated President-elect Donald Trump in the state, but there are concerns among the Democrats that his national victory could seep into the races.

The election was a shocking disappointment for Kamala Harris, who stepped in to carry the Democratic Party torch after President Joe Biden dropped out as questions arose over his mental and physical capabilities.

The Democrats put more resources into the race than the Republicans to ensure their candidate's victory.

## Judge Rules No Prison Term for Trump in 'Hush Money' Case



**NEW YORK:** In a landmark decision, Judge Juan Marchan announced that President-elect Donald Trump would avoid a prison sentence despite upholding his conviction in the controversial "hush money" case. The sentencing, scheduled for January 10—just 11 days before Trump's inauguration—will see him granted an "unconditional discharge."

Key Highlights of the Case Conviction Details: Trump was accused by Manhattan prosecutor Alvin Bragg of falsifying business records to classify payments to Stormy Daniels, a porn star, as legal expenses. These payments were made to secure Daniels' silence about an alleged affair.

34 Counts: Bragg treated each payment as a separate offense, leading to a conviction on 34 counts. Dismissal of Immunity Argument: Judge Marchan rejected Trump's lawyers' argument that presidential immunity applied, as the actions were unrelated to official duties. Political Backdrop and Implications Election and Public Perception: Despite the allegations, voters elected

Trump, who framed himself as a victim of politically motivated prosecutions. Potential Presidential Impact: The conviction casts a shadow over Trump's presidency, with his inauguration scheduled for January 21. Trump's Reaction- On his platform, Truth Social, Trump dismissed the ruling as a "Rigged Charade" and criticized Marchan for alleged conflicts of interest, citing the judge's daughter's ties to Vice President Kamala Harris's campaign.

Other Legal Cases - Dropped Federal Cases: Two federal cases, one concerning retention of official records and another related to the January 6 riots, were dropped by a special counsel. Georgia Election Interference: Another local case in Georgia remains stalled amid accusations of impropriety by the Democratic prosecutor. Conclusion - While Trump avoids prison, the conviction underscores ongoing legal and political controversies surrounding his rise to power. His claims of persecution and politically driven charges continue to resonate with his base, shaping his narrative as he prepares to assume office.

## Trudeau ending 11-year Canadian leadership marred by confrontation with India

**OTTAWA:** Justin Trudeau is ending his 11-year leadership role, nine years as Canada's Prime Minister, that was marred by his confrontation with India and deference to Khalistanis Activists.

He announced on Monday that he will step down as Prime Minister and the leader of the Liberal Party, but will continue in office till a new leader is elected. Speaking outside his official residence here he said, "I intend to resign as party leader, as Prime Minister, after the party selects its next leader through a robust, nationwide, competitive process".

He said that the House of Commons will be prorogued till March 24, which means it will be dormant and the opposition cannot force a vote of no-confidence against him. Egged on by his one-time

ally Jagmeet Singh, leader of the opposition, New Democratic Party, he accused India of orchestrating a deadly campaign against Khalistanis Activists. Some in his government made personal allegations against some Indian leaders without presenting proof, linking India to the killing of Khalistani leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar. But that was not enough to mollify Singh, on whose support his minority government relied on to stay in power.

Singh joined the chorus for Trudeau's resignation, as his poll ratings cratered and his party and the government plunged into chaos with the ouster of Deputy Prime Minister Chrystia Freeland. That, in turn, led to Liberal Party MPs calling for Trudeau's resignation.



The Trudeau government's campaign against India did nothing to salvage his reputation. A visit to India by Trudeau to India exposed his government's entanglement with Khalistanis.

Trudeau's penchant for showmanship backfired during the trip when he and his family dressed in Bollywood glam, and it was overshadowed by an invitation sent for

a reception he was hosting to Jaspal Atwal, a Khalistani convicted of involvement in an assassination plot against the then-Punjab Minister Malkiat Singh Sidhu. The Liberal Party has only 153 seats in the 338-member, far short of the 170 needed for a majority. Trudeau's government was on life support after the New Democratic Party broke an agreement in September to

support him without joining the government.

Any leader succeeding him will have to get the support of the minority parties. If this is not possible, an early election before the October deadline could become inevitable giving an edge to the opposition Conservative Party. Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre is waiting in the wings and if he becomes Prime Minister a reset of Canada's policies can be expected.

Polilievre has blamed Trudeau for ruining relations with India by being "unprofessional". He said in an interview with Toronto's Namaste Radio last year, that Trudeau "is so incompetent and unprofessional that now we are in major disputes with almost every major power in the world and that includes India".

### NEW PM IN CANADA

## Anita Anand in Race, Trudeau Quits before Being Toppled in Parliament, Rebellion in the Ruling Alliance

GOPAL MISRA



**A**mong the leaders of the ruling party, Anita Anand, presently Transport Minister, the former Finance Minister, Chrystia Freeland, and former central banker Mark Carney (a position equivalent to the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India), have emerged as the front-runners for the prime minister's office in Canada.

The present incumbent Justine Trudeau, has already announced his intention to quit the coveted office, but is expected to remain in office till March 24 this year.

The recently held opinion polls indicate that if a Canadian election were to be held today, the country's main Opposition, Conservative Party, under the leadership of Pierre Poilievre, would win decisively. Since 2022, Poilievre has successfully been able to brand himself as anti-elite and anti-Trudeau, a down-to-earth everyman.

His suspension in April, 2024 after refusing to apologise for calling Trudeau a "wacko" and "extremist" during a question period could not adversely affect his political position.

It is being stated that Trudeau's intention to quit the office of the prime minister and the presidency of the party should have been accompanied by allowing the ruling Liberal Party to select a new leader without, especially in this election year. It may be recalled that his political fortune was at its zenith, when he had led his party to power in 2015.

Justin Trudeau's recent intention to quit, perhaps, have amused political observers across the continents, especially from Washington and London. They have close ties with Canada. It is stated that even being entrenched in the office for a decade, he could not really attain the stature of a statesman, but his decision to prorogue the House of Commons till March 24, has shown that he just wanted time to avoid being toppled in a no-confidence motion in



the Canadian parliament. In this process, if the ruling party fails to elect a leader promptly, he might remain in the office till his successor is chosen, but the final decision has to be taken before March 24.

His supporters, however, considered it a political master-stroke by being toppled immediately in a no-confidence motion. In the Canadian history, he might be remembered for his histrionics being played in the strife-stricken Canadian politics of a hero before fading in the history.

Justin's political misfortunes, according to some political observers, began when he got himself being identified with Islamists and the Sikh separatists, perhaps, being advised by the American Deep State. The majority of the ruling party did not approve his opportunistic alliances with the separatists at the cost of annoying India, a long-term friend. It may be noted that apart from being a sizeable presence of people of Indian origin, India has always been grateful to Canada for setting up a nuclear reactor in

Trombe, Mumbai, helping her to explore the high-ending technologies.

The resignation of Chrystia Freeland in December 2024 has further exposed his political weakness; thus, turning the political crisis into a tsunami. Being a scion of one of the most well-known families of Canada, Justin was expected to resolve the political issues, he could have made an impact on the world politics. It may be recalled when he was born of December 25, 1971, his father Pierre Trudeau was the prime minister of Canada. Interestingly, he also represented the two prominent European cultures, French and Scottish. His ancestry is also quite illustrious. Among his grandfathers, Charles-Emile Trudeau was a businessman and Scottish-born, James Sinclair was a minister of fisheries in the Canadian government during PM, Louis St. Laurent. One of Justin's ancestors, Major-General William Farquhar, had played a key-role in establishing modern Singapore. By announcing his intention

to quit, Trudeau has thwarted a defeat of his government on the floor at least for the time being. The government needs the backing of a majority of the 338 members of parliament in a no-confidence vote. The Liberals are facing a deficit 17 seats requiring the support from members of Canada's other parties. The government has been surviving with the support of the left-leaning New Democratic Party (NDP). However, after Trudeau announced he would step aside, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said he would vote to bring down the Liberal Party Government, no matter who the leader is. "They do not deserve another chance," he said. However, if Anita Anand is chosen, the NDP might revise its decision. The federal elections in Canada are scheduled in October.

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

## Antony Blinken admits US sent arms to Ukraine ahead of conflict

**WASHINGTON:** US Secretary of State Antony Blinken admitted that the United States had "quietly sent a lot of weapons to Ukraine" five months ahead of the conflict.

"We saw it coming," Blinken said in an interview with The New York Times, noting the United States made sure that "Ukraine was prepared" by sending it billions of dollars and weapons since September 2021.

"What we've had to look at each and every time is not only should we give this to the Ukrainians but do they know how to use it? Can they maintain it?" he added. When asked whether it is time to end the conflict, Blinken said a cease-fire would likely give Russia a break, and that any cease-fire must ensure Ukraine can "deter further aggression," which, he noted, could be achieved through NATO membership.

"Russia has been talking about this for many years," said Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova on Saturday in response to Blinken's remarks, noting that they underscored "the rationale behind Russia's objective on the



demilitarisation of Ukraine." "We voiced concerns over the United States and Britain pouring arms into Ukraine, the endless NATO exercises in the Black Sea that violate Russian borders, and the dangerous proximity of Western military aircraft to civilian airliners in our airspace," she added.

The Kremlin has repeatedly criticised Western arms shipments to Ukraine, claiming they escalate the conflict, obstruct peace efforts, and drag NATO members into direct involvement. Xinhua news agency reported. According to the US Department of State, as of Monday, the United States has provided Ukraine with \$61.4 billion in military assistance since the conflict.

# Hrithik Roshan Celebrates 51st B'day With Ex-Wife Sussanne Khan, Ladylove Saba



**Hrithik and Sussanne were childhood sweethearts. They got married in 2000 and 14 years later they separated. The duo share two sons together.**

**MUMBAI:** As Bollywood's Greek God Hrithik Roshan turned 51 on Friday, his former brother-in-law Zayed Khan shared a picture from the celebrations which included his ex-wife Sussanne Khan and his ladylove Saba Azaad among many others. Zayed took to his Instagram, where he wished the

star and said that Hrithik has never failed to be an honest sounding board to him his whole life. The "Main Hoon Na" actor also shared a picture which featured Sussanne, her beau Arsalan, Zayed, Hrithik, Saba and some friends.

He wrote: Happy birthday my brother Duggs!! To a guy a greatly admire! Who's will power is simply stunning to say the least. Who has never failed to be an honest sounding board to me my whole life. Whose advice I take sincerely and introspect deeply. Shine on my brother into this

year and many more to come. Big hug. Always stay as kind as you are! @hrithikroshan #happybirthday #family #friendslikefamily."

Hrithik and Sussanne were childhood sweethearts. They got married in 2000 and 14 years later they separated. The duo share two sons together.

Talking about Zayed, who is the son of Sanjay Khan, he made his screen debut in 2003 in the film Chura Liya Hai Tumne. He starred in Main Hoon Na starring Shah Rukh Khan. The film was one of the biggest hits in his

career. He was then seen in films such as Vaada, Shabd, Dus and Shaadi No. 1.

He starred in Sohail Khan's action multi-starrer, Fight Club - Members Only in 2006. Next, he appeared in Rocky: The Rebel. He was next seen in Cash, Speed, Mission Istanbul, Yuvraaj, Blue.

In 2011, the actor ventured into production with his co-owned production house, Born Free Entertainment along with friend and actress Dia Mirza and her former husband, Sahil Sanga. Their first film, Love Breakups Zindagi. In 2012, Khan played a supporting role in Tezz, which stars Anil Kapoor and Ajay Devgan in the lead.

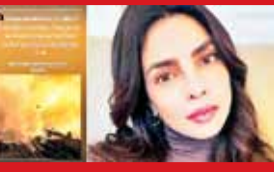
He was last seen on screen in the 2015 film "Sharafat Gayi Tel Lene", a comedy thriller film directed by Gurmmeet Singh and produced by Devinder Jain and Akhilesh Jain. It also features Rannvijay Singh and Tina Desai in lead roles.

The film revolves around Prithvi is shocked when his account is mysteriously credited with Rs. 100 crores. His world turns upside down when he receives a call asking him to deliver the sum to various places.



Girls perform Punjabi folk dance 'Giddha' and fly kites ahead of the upcoming 'Lohri' festival, in Amritsar on Friday, January 10, 2025. PHOTOS: PRABHJOT GILL

## Priyanka Chopra gives a shout out to 'brave' first responders



**MUMBAI:** Indian actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas praised "brave" first responders for working through the night and continuing to help affected families in the wake of the Palisades Fire in Los Angeles.

Priyanka took to her Instagram stories, where she shared a post of "first responders" trying to control the wildfire, which has destroyed thousands of acres of land.

Thanking them, she wrote: "A huge shoutout to the incredibly brave first responders. Thank you for working tirelessly overnight and continuing to help families affected. I @lasdhq @losangelesfiredepartment @lapdhq."

The actress had earlier shared a clip of the wildfire engulfing the Los Angeles neighbourhood.

She could be heard saying in the video, "it's crazy." Her post also included the caption, "My thoughts are with everyone affected. Hope we are all able to be safe tonight."

Priyanka dropped another glimpse of the Palisades Fire in Los Angeles, "Fast-moving Palisades fire in LA scorches thousands of acres, destroys homes".

A massive wildfire took over Los Angeles on January 7, 2025, forcing above 30, 000 residents to leave the place. Numerous videos of the fire have been doing rounds on social media, leaving everyone concerned. Meanwhile, California Governor Gavin Newsom has declared a state of emergency in Los Angeles. On the work front, the global head turned has several exciting projects lined up, including "Heads of State", where she stars alongside Idris Elba and John Cena. "Heads of State" is an action comedy film directed by Ilya Naishtuller. She will also portray a 19th-century Caribbean pirate in "The Bluff", which is a swashbuckler drama film co-written by Frank E. Flowers and Joe Ballarini, with Flowers also directing.

## Alia Bhatt thanks Bipasha Basu and the reason will melt your heart



**MUMBAI:** Bollywood beauty Alia Bhatt recently thanked fellow actress Bipasha Basu for making daughter Devi wear a dress from her brand Edamamma. Bipasha Basu is presently in the Maldives with her husband Karan Singh Grover and their little munchkin Devi. She had taken to the stories section of her official Instagram handle and dropped a clip where little Devi can be seen playing on the beach and guess what she is wearing? The little one can be seen in a pink and white co-ord set from Alia Bhatt's kids clothing brand Edamamma.

Reacting to this, Alia Bhatt also reshared the clip on her Instagram stories, along with the caption, "this is soo adorable!! thank you for choosing @edamamma for your little angle" She further added an angel baby and red heart emoji.

On another front, Alia Bhatt will next be seen leading the much-anticipated spy drama "Alpha". The latest installment in the Yash Raj spy universe will be made under the direction of Shiv Rawail. The diva will be seen sharing screen space with Sharvari in her next.

In addition to this, Alia Bhatt will further be a part of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's forthcoming drama titled "Love and War". Aside from her, the project will also see Vicky Kaushal and Ranbir Kapoor as leads. The official announcement for the drama was made in January 2024.

## Adah Sharma to Perform Shiv Tandav Stotram at Mahakumbh Mela

**MUMBAI:** Adah Sharma has managed to carve a niche for herself in the industry with some power-packed performances over the years. The "Kerala story" actress will next be seen performing live the vigorous Shiv Tandav Stotram at the MahaKumbh mela.

The Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 will commence on 13th January this year with the Paush Purnima Snan and will conclude on 26th February 26, 2025, on Maha Shivratri. This year's Maha-Kumbh Mela is expected to be a star-studded affair with some big names including Amitabh Bachchan, Alia Bhatt, Ranbir Kapoor, Shankar Mahadevan, Kailash Kher, Hariharan, and Mohit Chauhan, along with others. Adah Sharma has become the latest celebrity to join the long list. Refreshing your memory, a video of the 'Commando 2' actress chanting the Shiv Tandav Stotram live in her melodious yet powerful voice was shared on social media some time back. The clip left the netizens presently surprised that the actress knew



the whole thing by heart and went viral on social media. This is the first time that Adah Sharma is visiting the Mahakumbh.

In the meantime, Adah Sharma was last seen in the highly-acclaimed web show, "Reeta Sanyal". Loved by cinephiles, it turned out to be one of the most-watched OTT shows of 2024. All in all, 2024 was a great year for Adah Sharma who appeared

in four projects including "The Kerala story", "Bastar", "Sunflower 2" and "Reeta Sanyal". With "Reeta Sanyal" becoming such a huge success, fans are eagerly waiting for the sequel. Reacting to the same, the actress revealed, "It's lovely that people want sequels of Commando, Sunflower, Reeta Sanyal, and 1920. I promise there are a lot of sequels in the making."

## It's a wrap for Vikram Bhatt's 'Tumko Meri Kasam'

**MUMBAI:** Vikram Bhatt is presently tied up with his forthcoming drama "Tumko Meri Kasam" Recently, the team has concluded the shoot for the project and announcing the same. Anupam Kher took to his official Instagram handle and shared a hilarious post.

The veteran actor dropped a clip that featured him styling Esha Deol's hair, while the latter says, "Ek to main itni Khubsurat, upar se meri Haasi. (I am so beautiful and on top of that God has gifted me with such beautiful laughter)" followed by a high-pitch laugh. She added "Oh God! Itni sundar hasti hu main (Oh God! My laugh is so beautiful)"

Anupam Kher captioned his latest IG post, "It is a wrap for us for #VikramBhatt's #TumkoMeriKasam. Had to make this crazy reel with #EshaDeol. What an amazing journey this has been. Till we meet again my dearest. Will miss you and your laughter!! #LoveAndLaughter."

Along with Anupam Kher and Esha Deol, "Tumko Meri Kasam" will also star Adah Sharma and Ishwak Singh in the lead.

Anupam Kher will also be a part of Vivek Agnihotri, "The Delhi file: The Bengal Chap-



Anupam Kher captioned his latest IG post, "It is a wrap for us for #VikramBhatt's #TumkoMeriKasam. Had to make this crazy reel with #EshaDeol. What an amazing journey this has been. Till we meet again my dearest. Will miss you and your laughter!! #LoveAndLaughter."

year. Aside from Anupam Kher, the project will also feature Mithun Chakraborty, Pallavi Joshi, Puneet Issar, and Govind Namdeo in significant roles.

Furthermore, Anupam Kher will also star in Kangana Ranaut's highly-anticipated flick, "Emergency". Directed by Kangana Ranaut, the movie is a cinematic adaptation of the infamous Indian Emergency. With Kangana Ranaut as former Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, the film will also star Shreyas Talpade, Vishak Nair, Mahima Chaudhry, Milind Soman, and Satish Kaushik in important roles. "Emergency" is slated to reach the audience on 17th January 2025.

Jointly bankrolled by Abhishek Agarwal and Pallavi Joshi, the movie has been presented by Tej Narayan Agarwal & I Am Buddha Productions. The film is slated to be released across the globe on 15th August this

## Kalgidhar Society Baru Sahib Establishes 'Dr. Manmohan Singh Chair in Development Economics' at Akal University

**KULBIR SINGH KALSI**  
Talwandi Sabo (Punjab)

With the sudden passing of Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India, the nation has lost a remarkable son. Renowned for his unwavering integrity, humility, and profound understanding of public policy, Dr. Singh steered the country out of economic turmoil and set it on a path of high growth and development through his liberalization policies.

In recognition of Dr. Singh's immense contributions to academia and his service to society and the nation, The Kalgidhar Society - Baru Sahib has decided to establish the 'Dr. Manmohan Singh Chair in Development



Economics' at Akal University, Talwandi Sabo (Punjab). This chair will undertake advanced research on his visionary ideas, fostering a deeper understanding of economic development and inspiring future generations to follow in his footsteps.

About The Kalgidhar Society The Kalgidhar Society, also

known as Baru Sahib, is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to providing quality low-cost education through 130 Akal Academies, healthcare, and social welfare. Founded with the vision of socio-economic upliftment, the society has been instrumental in transforming rural areas in North India through its

various initiatives. The Kalgidhar Society operates the largest Women empowerment initiative of Free Teachers Training for rural Girls, numerous educational institutions including two Universities, healthcare facilities, and social service projects, all aimed at creating a better and more equitable society.

"We are honored to establish this chair in memory of Dr. Manmohan Singh, whose legacy of economic reform and public service continues to inspire us all," said the President of The Kalgidhar Society Baru Sahib. "Through this initiative, we aim to perpetuate his vision and contribute to the academic and socio-economic development of our nation."

## Haryana IAS Officers Association hosts New Year Lunch

**GOVERNOR, CHIEF MINISTER ATTEND AS SPECIAL GUESTS**

**GULSHAN KUMAR**  
Chandigarh

On the occasion of the New Year, the Haryana IAS Officers Association organized a luncheon at Haryana Niwas on Saturday. Governor, Bandaru Dattatraya and Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini attended the event as special guests. Cabinet Ministers, Shyam Singh Rana and Ranbir Gangwa, also remained present. The Association's President and Chief Secretary, Dr. Vivek Joshi and Secretary Dr. Amit Agrawal welcomed the Governor and the Chief Minister.

On this occasion, Governor, Bandaru Dattatraya said that special dishes made from millets were included in the lunch. Millets have been a part of our heritage for centuries. The



state government is continuously working to promote the cultivation of these crops and the use of products made from millets, he said. The Chief Minister extended

heartfelt New Year wishes to the Haryana IAS Officers Association. He encouraged the officers to work with new resolutions and vision in the new year, ensuring that the benefits

of government schemes reach every eligible beneficiary. He said that dishes made from millets are not only beneficial for health but are also helping farmers become eco-

nomically stronger by selling millet-based products. Millets are necessary for both health and the environment, said Nayab Singh Saini.

The President of the Haryana IAS Officers Association and Chief Secretary Dr. Vivek Joshi, while welcoming the Governor and Chief Minister said that the Association regularly organizes seminars, training programmes, and other events to enhance administrative efficiency. Today's event is part of this ongoing initiative, said Dr. Vivek Joshi.

On this occasion, Chief Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, Rajesh Khullar, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister, Arun Kumar Gupta, Director General, Information, Public Relations, Languages and Culture Department, K Makrand Pandurang and members of the Association were present.

A complete **KNOWLEDGE CAPSULE**

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