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CENTRE HASN'T DONE ANY WORK IN DELHI, ELSE PM WOULDN'T CURSE AAP GOVT: ARVIND KEJRIWAL

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BALANCING AI AND HUMAN-CENTRIC SKILLS FOR TALENT MANAGEMENT AT BATA INDIA

Targeting AAP on graft, misrule, PM Modi sounds BJP bugle for Delhi Assembly polls

NEW DELHI : Sounding the BJP's poll bugle for Delhi Assembly elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday compared the ruling AAP government to a calamity or "AAPada" destroying the city and unveiled a new slogan "AAPada ko hatana hai, BJP ko lana hai".

In an hour-long speech at the inauguration of EWS flats for slum dwellers in Ashok Vihar in North Delhi, PM Modi, without naming the AAP or its leader Arvind Kejriwal, pilloried the Delhi government for alleged corruption in 'Sheesh Mahal', Yamuna cleaning, liquor policy and failure to improve schools and health facilities.

Sheesh Mahal is a reference made in Delhi political circles to the allegedly corruption-riddled renovation of the official residence of AAP leader and former Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

"Ek toh chori upar se seena Jori (They are shameless and



show no remorse for misdeed), he said, highlighting that the AAP government has failed to utilise even half of the Central government funds given for improving the education sector in Delhi. Listing the alleged obstructive actions, poor and corrupt governance of the AAP government, PM Modi said, "Delhi voters want to rid the city of this AAPada and are saying, 'AAPada ko nahin sahenge, badal ke raheing'"

PM Modi's focus on energising the BJP cadre with a new slogan is significant, consid-

houses for the poor were more important.

PM Modi hit out at the AAP and Kejriwal for misleading Delhiites with hollow promises of fighting graft. "They used Anna Hazare's anti-corruption campaign as a front and pushed the city towards corruption," he said, adding that Delhiites have been cheated by people who took fake oaths to fight corruption.

Hinting at strict punishment for the corrupt, especially for the AAP leaders facing alleged corruption and money laundering cases, he said, "When AAPada goes and the BJP government comes, these issues will also be tackled."

He promised to give Delhiites the benefits of the nationwide health insurance under Ayushman Bharat and highlighted the plans of the central government to pay up to Rs 75,000 subsidy to every household which joins the free power scheme linked to PM - Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana.

Modified RBI Regulations about UPI, Credit Cards, FDs Take Effect from Jan 1, 2025



NEW DELHI: Several significant financial changes have come into effect from January 1, 2025, impacting various banking services, digital payments, and pension disbursement systems across India.

These modifications encompass revised fixed deposit regulations, enhanced UPI transaction limits, and new credit card lounge access policies.

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has doubled the transaction limit for UPI 123Pay from

Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000, following the Reserve Bank of India's regulatory policy announcement from October 2024.

This enhancement is expected to significantly benefit feature phone users across India who have limited internet access, expanding their digital payment capabilities.

Credit card holders will experience changes in airport lounge access policies, with RuPay implementing a new tiered spending criteria system for complimentary access.

Similarly, BOBCARD members will face revised domestic lounge access rules, requiring cardholders to meet minimum spending thresholds in the preceding quarter to qualify for free lounge visits.

The Reserve Bank of India has introduced modified regulations for fixed deposits offered by home finance companies and non-banking financial institutions, with the new guidelines taking effect from the beginning of 2025. These changes aim to strengthen the regulatory framework for non-banking financial companies.

In a move to enhance convenience for pensioners across India who have limited internet access, the Employees Pension Scheme has implemented a significant change allowing EPS pensioners to access their pension from any bank branch across India, eliminating the need for Pension Payment Order transfers and simplifying the pension disbursement process.

BJP has no CM face, issue for Delhi polls: Kejriwal launches counter-attack on PM Modi



NEW DELHI: Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Friday launched a scathing counter-attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the latter criticised the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), labeling its governance as "Aapada" (disaster) earlier in the day. Kejriwal stated that the BJP was faced with three "Aapadas" as it has no CM face, narrative, issue for Delhi polls.

Speaking at a press conference, Kejriwal accused PM Modi of using his 43-minute speech to malign a democratically-elected government instead of addressing pressing issues.

He pointed out the dual governance structure in Delhi, where residents elect both a central and a state government, with the BJP controlling the Centre and AAP helming the state administration.

Kejriwal highlighted the AAP's achievements over the past decade, contrasting them with what he termed as the BJP's lack of progress. He specifically criticised the Central government for failing to deliver on key promises.

"In 2020, the Prime Minister promised homes for all in Delhi by 2022. However, in five years, only 4,700 houses have been built, while the city has 4 lakh slums. At this pace, their manifesto seems more like a 200-year plan than a five-year one," Kejriwal quipped.

He also accused the BJP of demolishing slums and rendering people homeless under the guise of development. Referring to housing provided by the BJP in Kalkaji, Kejriwal claimed the condition of these units was substandard. Kejriwal further criticised PM Modi for what he described as a token gesture of development. "The Prime Minister came to Delhi to lay the foundation stones for three colleges after 10 years. In contrast, our government has delivered real results -- we have set up three universities, built 22,000 classrooms, and established five new hospitals. Our focus is on work, not ceremonies," he said.

Never directed to end Jagjit Singh Dallewal's hunger strike: Supreme Court



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday said that it has never directed to end the hunger strike of farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal, who is on a fast unto death, but is only concerned with his health.

"There appears to be a deliberate attempt in the entire media where state government officers (of Punjab) are trying to create an impression that there is a persuasion by this court to Mr. Dallewal to break his fast. Our directions were not to break his fast. We only said that let his health be taken care of and he can continue his peaceful protest even when he is hospitalised," a Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant told Punjab's Advocate General (AG) Gurinder Singh.

The Bench, also comprising Justice Ujjal Bhuyan, said that shifting Dallewal to the hospital should not mean that he will not continue his fast but the medical facilities which will ensure that no harm is caused to his life. In response, AG Gurinder Singh submitted that the state government officials tried to convince Dallewal to take medical aid in terms of the apex court order. However, Dallewal remained firm that he would take medical aid only if the Union government was ready for talks. At this, the Justice Kant-led Bench remarked, "Please don't force us to say many things. Your attitude is that there should be no reconciliation. That is the whole problem".

India Forms High-Level Panel to Review Wholesale Price Index

NEW DELHI : The Government of India has announced the formation of a high-level Working Group tasked with revising the base year of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) from 2011-12 to 2022-23.

The group will be chaired by Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member, NITI Aayog, the country's premier policy think tank.

The Working Group's mandate encompasses several crucial aspects of price index computation. They will review and recommend changes to the commodity basket of both WPI and Producer Price Index (PPI), taking into account structural changes in the economy.

The group is also tasked



with improving the existing price collection system and determining appropriate computational methodologies for both indices.

A key focus area for the Working Group will be examining the potential transition from WPI to PPI, including developing a roadmap for this switch.

They will also review and suggest improvements to the method of computing linking factors between different base year series.

The government has given the Working Group 18 months from the notification date to submit its final report to the Office of the Economic Adviser.

The Chairman has been empowered to co-opt additional experts or representatives from other agencies as needed to fulfill the group's objectives.

The Working Group comprises a diverse mix of government officials, regulators, and private sector experts.

Key government representatives include senior officials from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Department of Economic Affairs, Department of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare, and the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas. The Reserve Bank of India will also have representation in the group.

Alka Lamba of Congress to take on CM Atishi in Kalkaji seat



NEW DELHI: The Delhi Congress has fielded ex-legislator from Chandni Chowk Alka Lamba from the Kalkaji seat against AAP nominee and Chief Minister Atishi, a decision that promises a thrilling contest in the South Delhi constituency dominated by low-income people and middle class Punjabi families.

Lamba, who is also the president of All India Mahila Congress, had joined the AAP when it was launched in 2012 after an anti-corruption campaign. She had also won as an AAP legislator from Chandni Chowk.

Earlier on December 24, the Congress' Central Election Committee (CEC) released its second list of 26 candidates for the upcoming Delhi Assembly polls.

The party had released its first list of 21 candidates on December 12, fielding ex-MP Sandeep Dikshit from New

Delhi, setting up a contest between him and AAP National Convener Arvind Kejriwal.

Before the second list, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and party MP and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi participated in the CEC meeting via video conferencing while Delhi in-charge Qazi Mohammad Nizamuddin and Delhi unit chief Devender Yadav, among other members of the CEC, were physically present at the AICC headquarters here.

With the Congress and the ruling AAP not contesting together as an alliance in the Delhi Assembly elections, the grand old party has fielded Farhad Suri to take on the AAP's Manish Sisodia from Jangpura. Haji Ishraq Khan has been given a ticket for the Babarpur seat.

Rajesh Liloitha will be contesting from the SC reserved seat, Seemapuri.

Maldives 'Concrete Expression' of India's 'Neighbourhood First' Policy : EAM Jaishankar



NEW DELHI: External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar on Friday said that Maldives remains a "concrete expression" of India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and New Delhi has always stood by the Indian Ocean archipelago, especially when it comes to giving financial support during challenging times.

"We have increased our engagements in various sectors, and I want to emphasise that India has always stood by the Maldives. You are a concrete expression of our 'Neighbourhood First' policy,"

October 2024, following-up on issues that need further focus.

"I believe we have some important and positive developments to report, and certainly, there is much more that we need to do. I see that the framework to promote the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions has been signed. We have increased our engagements in various sectors," said Jaishankar in his opening remarks at the start of bilateral discussions. Khaleel, on his part, appreciated the timely emergency financial assistance extended by India to Maldives in times of need, reflecting India's role as the "First Responder" of Maldives. He reaffirmed Muizzu government's firm commitment to work closely with the Government of India in realising the Joint Vision for India-Maldives Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership.

Both sides signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects under Phase-III in Maldives through grant assistance by the Government of India and also took stock of progress made on the understandings reached during the State Visit of Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu in

Mamata Banerjee to write to Centre on BSF's role in infiltration from Bangladesh



KOLKATA: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Thursday that she would write to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the alleged involvement of the Border Security Force (BSF) in facilitating illegal infiltration from neighboring Bangladesh.

"The state police do not guard the borders, the BSF is responsible for that. At times, they are complicit in aiding such illegal infiltration," Banerjee stated.

She added, "Miscreants are crossing the borders illegally, entering the state, and killing innocent people. The state police director general, Rajeev Kumar, has gathered specific intelligence on this issue, along with additional information at the local level. Once I receive all the details, I will formally communicate with the Union government."

According to Banerjee, the districts of Malda and Nadia, both sharing international borders with Bangladesh, are the primary entry points for illegal infiltrators. "I have repeatedly cautioned the Union government about this issue in the past. This time, I will be sending a more detailed report," she emphasized.

The BSF has not issued a response to the Chief Minister's allegations so far.

Committed to Make India a Chip Manufacturing Hub, Prepare Skilled Workforce: Ashwini Vaishnav



GUWAHATI: The Central government is committed to transforming India into a leading hub for semiconductor manufacturing, while preparing a skilled workforce that meets the evolving demands of the industry, Union Railways and Electronics and IT Minister, Ashwini Vaishnav, said here on Friday.

After inaugurating the National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), deemed to be a university at 12 locations including five locations in the northeastern states, the minister said the university is set to play a crucial role in equipping students with the necessary skills to thrive in a rapidly changing technological environment.

He added that now the meaning of northeast is "New Engine", to lead the development and growth of the country. At the event, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) was also signed between NIELIT and Tata Electronics Private Ltd (TEPL) to collaboratively enhance the



semiconductor skilling ecosystem in India.

The MoU was signed by Dr M.M. Tripathi, Director General, NIELIT and Dr Randhir Thakur, CEO and MD, TEPL.

The partnership aims to establish skill centres, develop diploma and certification programmes and conduct workshops in semiconductor ATMP (Assembly, Testing, Marking, and Packaging) technologies.

TEPL will offer technical expertise and internship opportunities, while NIELIT will focus on education, training, and outreach.

Both organisations will also jointly pursue research and funding initiatives, with a special emphasis on creating opportunities in the northeastern region, said the government.

The minister announced the launch of NIELIT University, highlighting that it is inspired by the vision of the Prime Minister to prepare professionals in cutting-edge fields such as Semiconductor Manufacturing, Artificial Intelligence, Industry 4.0, and Quantum Computing.

Vaishnav said the new campus of NIELIT will be developed in Jagiroad town near Guwahati, which will focus on semiconductor manufacturing and electronics manufacturing.

EPFO rolls out centralised pension system

NEW DELHI: Retirement fund body EPFO has completed the Centralised Pension Payments System (CPPS) rollout in all its regional offices across the country that will benefit over 68 lakh pensioners, the labour ministry said on Friday.

The CPPS is a paradigm shift from the existing pension disbursement system that is decentralised, with each zonal/regional office of EPFO maintaining separate agreements with only three to four banks, the ministry explained in a statement. Under CPPS, a beneficiary will be able to withdraw pension from any bank and there will be no need for him to visit the bank for verification at the time of commencement



of pension, and the amount will be immediately credited upon release, it stated.

The CPPS system January 2025 onwards will also ensure disbursement of pension throughout India without any need for transfer of pension payment orders (PPO) from one office to another even when the pensioner moves from one location to another or changes his bank or branch, it said. This will be a great relief to pensioners who move to their hometown after retirement. The first pilot of CPPS was completed in October last year in Karnal, Jammu, and Srinagar regional offices with

the pension disbursement of about Rs 11 crore to more than 49,000 EPS pensioners, a ministry statement said.

The second pilot was taken up in November in 24 regional offices where about Rs 213 crore in pension was disbursed to more than 9.3 lakh pensioners, it stated. According to the statement, in a landmark move towards enhancing pension services, the EPFO completed full-scale rollout of the new CPPS under Employees' Pension Scheme 1995 in December. About Rs 1,570 crore pension was disbursed to more than 68 lakh pensioners pertaining to all 122 pension-disbursing regional offices of the EPFO for December 2024.

Centre hasn't done any work in Delhi, else PM wouldn't curse AAP govt: Arvind Kejriwal

NEW DELHI: The BJP-led Centre has not done any development work in Delhi or else Prime Minister Narendra Modi would not spend 39 minutes of his 43-minute speech cursing the people of the capital and the government they elected with the largest mandate, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal said here on Friday.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal, in response to Modi's remarks on the AAP government in Delhi, said the BJP only engages in "abusive politics" and "personal attacks".



spent 39 minutes doing nothing but abusing the elected government and people of Delhi.

"Even two-three hours

would be insufficient to list the work done by our government in the last 10 years. On the other hand, the BJP government has not done any work

that Modiiji could have talked about in his speech. If it had done any work, he would not just abuse the people of Delhi. The party would not try to win the election by abusing the residents of Delhi," the former chief minister said.

At an event at Ashok Vihar earlier in the day, Modi called the AAP an "aapda" (disaster) for Delhi, saying this "aapda" has taken the national capital in its grip in the last 10 years.

The prime minister also exuded confidence that the BJP would emerge victorious in the Delhi Assembly polls due next month, defeating the AAP.

BJP planning to demolish worship places in Delhi: CM Atishi

NEW DELHI: Accusing BJP of planning to demolish Hindu temples and a Buddhist religious place in the city, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi on Wednesday said AAP has on the other hand promised to provide Rs 18,000 monthly honorarium to the priests and granthis.

No immediate reaction was available from BJP and Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G) VK Saxena's office on the Chief Minister's allegations.

Atishi on Tuesday wrote to the lieutenant governor and claimed that a religious committee under him in its meeting on November 22 ordered for demolition of six religious structures, including Hindu temples and a Buddhist worship place, in different parts of the city. The L-G's office rebutted the Chief Minister's charge, accusing her of indulging in "cheap politics" and claimed that no place of worship was being demolished as no file in this regard was received by it.

Addressing a press conference here, Atishi termed the L-G's office rebuttal as "complete lie" and showed a copy of minute of the meeting of the religious committee. "The file of committee's order was sent to the BJP-led Centre's representative L-G. The L-G has given approval



to the decision," she claimed. The Chief Minister said MCD, DM offices and police have been informed and they are gearing up for demolishing the places of worships.

A Buddhist religious structure in Sunder Nagri planned to be demolished housed a statue of Dr BR Ambedkar, she added. Atishi said the religious committee since its formation by a Supreme Court order worked under the Home Minister of the Delhi Government and its decisions were approved by the minister. The Chief Minister said Saxena, however, directed last year that demolition or shifting of any religious place was a matter of law and order and came under the purview of the Centre and the lieutenant governor. She claimed the religious

BSP likely to contest all 70 seats in Delhi Assembly polls



NEW DELHI: The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is likely to contest all 70 seats in the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi, with the first list of candidates likely to be released by mid-January.

A party official said the city has been divided into five zones and the process of finalising candidates in all the zones is underway. Talking to media, he said the Delhi Assembly polls, due in February, are both "interesting and challenging".

He said coordinators have been assigned to each of the zones to oversee the candidate-selection process. "These central coordinators will finalise their recommendations and send them to Behenji (BSP chief Mayawati). The final decision on the candidates will be based on these recommendations," the official said. The list of candidates is expected to be finalised by January 15. The BSP contested all the 70 seats in Delhi in the 2020 Assembly election but failed to win any, securing a vote share of 0.71 per cent.

The party contested all 70 seats in the capital in 2015, 2013 and 2008 as well. In 2003, it contested 40 seats, according to the official. The BSP's vote share was 1.13 per cent in 2015, 5.35 per cent in 2013, 14.05 per cent in 2008 and 5.76 per cent in 2003. The party achieved its highest vote share in Delhi in 2008 and won two seats.

Currently, small-scale meetings are being held at the ground level, where key issues and agendas are discussed, and the candidates will be selected based on these discussions, the BSP official said. He also revealed that the poll campaign is likely to be launched on January 5. Once the election dates and candidates are announced, Mayawati and her successor will actively participate in the campaign, holding rallies under the guidance of the coordinators. The elections to the 70-member Delhi Assembly are likely to witness a direct contest between the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which has been in power in the capital since 2015, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

ACB Report: 104 bribery cases against government employees including 34 police officers in Haryana during 2024



SATISH HANDA
New Delhi/Chandigarh

Of the 104 trap cases during 2024 where officials were caught red-handed by the Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) of Haryana, among them 34 involved were police officials, the highest number of cases against any single department. In one of the cases a police inspector from Faridabad was caught red-handed accepting a bribe of Rs 12.5 lakh and an additional amount of Rs 7.47 lakh was recovered from his vehicle on November 21 last year accepting the bribe to facilitate bail for two cheats in a cyber fraud case. Information reveals that of the 90 inquiries conducted in 2024, the ACB recommended criminal cases against 47 gazetted officers, 57 non-gazetted officials and 29 private individuals in eight cases. Moreover, in 24 inquiries departmental action was recommended against 31 gazetted officers and 52 non-gazetted officials. In another 29 both criminal cases and departmental action was recommended against 33 gazetted officers, 43 non-gazetted officials and three private individuals. Rightly said, where the future stands when 'Rakshak Ban-jayen Bhakshak'.

Police likely to question family members, in-laws in Delhi bizman suicide case

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police are likely to question the family members and in-laws of Puneet Khurana, a cafe owner who allegedly died by suicide in northwest Delhi's Model Town area, sources said on Friday.

A team will visit Khurana's home, and also meet his friends and in-laws to ascertain the facts of the case.

Police sources earlier said Khurana had recorded a 54-minute video in his mobile phone before hanging himself.



An about 2.5-minute clip from the video is being shared on social media in which Khurana can be heard saying that he was depressed and also listing

the reasons for his depression. A source said on Friday that several videos "went viral on social media".

"We are checking all the facts. Multiple teams have been formed to investigate the matter. The teams will question his wife, in-laws and friends," the source added. Khurana hanged himself at his residence on Tuesday. His family members have alleged that he was being harassed by his wife and in-laws, the police have said.

'Extremely tortured by in-laws, wife': Delhi cafe owner's last video before suicide

NEW DELHI: In a video he recorded before committing suicide, a 40-year-old Delhi cafe owner has alleged he was "extremely tortured" by his in-laws and wife, and accused them of not respecting court's orders in their divorce case.

Puneet Khurana died by suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan at his residence in the Model Town area of north-west Delhi on Tuesday. His family members have alleged Khurana was being harassed by his wife and in-laws, police said in a statement. Investigators said the allegations are yet to be verified.

Police sources said Khurana recorded a 54-minute video in his mobile phone before hanging himself to death. An about 2.5-minute clip from the video is being shared on social media in which Khurana said he was depressed and also lists the reasons.

The clip surfaced online on Thursday. The police will add this video as a part in their



further investigations, the official said.

"I am recording my final statement. I am about to commit suicide because I am extremely tortured by my in-laws and my wife. We have already files for a mutual divorce and signed before the court with some terms and conditions," Khurana says in the video.

"We at least committed to respect the court and fulfil those conditions within the period of 180 days. We have already passed 90 days and other 90 days to go. But my

in-laws and wife are already pressuring me with new set of conditions which are beyond my capacity. They are asking for another Rs 10 lakh and I don't have the capacity to pay. I cannot ask my parents because they have already suffered enough because of me," Khurana says in the video.

The police sources said they have conducted the post-mortem examination and handed over his body to his family.

Police sources said the police may call Khurana's wife and father for questioning. There

I am recording my final statement. I am about to commit suicide because I am extremely tortured by my in-laws and my wife. We have already files for a mutual divorce and signed before the court with some terms and conditions"

was no immediate reaction from the wife and in-laws.

"Khurana's father Trilok Nath has produced his (Puneet's) mobile phone and other related articles... (which) were taken in police possession. The body will be handed over to the family members after post-mortem," Northwest Delhi Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) Bhisam Singh said.

Accused of smuggling 52-kg ganja of value worth ₹10 lakh held

SATISH HANDA
Bhiwani

Addressing a press conference, DSP Aryan Chaudhry said that in a major crackdown on drug trafficking, the police seized approximately 52 kg of ganja of value worth an estimated Rs 10 lakh, from the residence of

Kuldeep alias Somi at Kharak Kalan village of the district on Tuesday. He said the police had received a tip-off after which the CIA-I team raided the house and arrested the accused a habitual offender with 10 cases registered against him including charges of assault, snatching, robbery and attempted murder.



DSP Chaudhry revealed that the haul, weighing 70 kg, had been supplied to Kuldeep by Vikram, a known drug supplier from Rajasthan. Out of the total, 52 kg of ganja was recovered during the raid. Police teams have been formed to apprehend Vikram and further dismantle the supply chain. Kuldeep was

previously associated with a hard core criminal Vinod Mithal. The accused was produced in the court on Wednesday and remanded to police custody on a three-day police remand and efforts are underway to identify and apprehend other individuals involved in the drug supply network, he said.

Rohingya Muslims will be wiped out from Haryana; verification campaign started

SATISH HANDA
Delhi

The Haryana government has started preparations to take action against Rohingya Muslims living in the state. The police and CID have started identifying Rohingya Muslims by running a campaign across the state. The government has set a deadline of 12 January 2025 for their verification. The government has inputs that the number of Rohingya Muslims is fast increasing in Nuh. Talking to media persons, chief minister Naib Saini held a meeting with the senior police and CID officers directing to start a campaign to wipe out Rohingya Muslims mushrooming in Haryana state arrived from Bangladesh about 12 years ago and most of these families settled in districts near Delhi at Rewari, Nuh, Mahendergarh, Palwal, Gurugram and Faridabad.



According to the secret agencies alert, many of these people are involved in criminal and anti-national activities. Information reveals that between 600 to 700 Rohingyan families having a population of nearly 2000 persons are residing only in Mewat, disturbing law and order posing a threat in the state. As per CID report most of the Rohingya Muslim residing in the state have prepared their Aadhar cards as well as Ration cards illegally. PAN cards were also recovered from many Rohingya citizens living in the country. CID has started a campaign across the state. Police teams are now

constantly visiting slums and identifying Rohingyas. RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad leaders met former Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and the present Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini regarding their demand. Leaders have many times demanded from the government that Rohingya Muslims should be driven out not only from Haryana but from the entire country as they are a big threat to the security of the country.

According to VHP national spokesperson Vinod Bansal, their number is in lakhs. He said they are also present in many districts across the state, but it is difficult to suspect them quickly because they have Aadhaar cards, ration cards and voter cards. Vishwa Hindu Parishad has been fighting to expel these Rohingyas Muslims from the country since 2008. At that time, when they were expelled from Delhi, most of the Rohingyas Muslims took refuge in Mewat in Haryana and Uttar Pradesh adjacent to Delhi. Many people started living there by forming small settlements. Now when the strictness increased again, the Muslims of Mewat gave them shelter. Information reveals, in 2008 these Rohingyas wanted to settle permanently in India by getting refugee status. For this, they also demonstrated outside the office of the UN Human Rights Commission. Then, citing the then working president of VHP, Praveen Togadia, Vinod Bansal had written a 40-page letter with complete documents to the concerned ministries, departments and state governments and the central government. In this, along with the demand of not giving refugee status to the Rohingyas, their presence was said to be dangerous.

Dalit girl student facing harassment for fee by college management commits suicide

SATISH HANDA
Bhiwani

A political controversy in the case of suicide of a Dalit girl student in Bhiwani in Haryana has started. BA final year girl student of Bhiwani women college was being harassed by the college management for not paying the fees. Tired of this harassment, a student of private women college took step to commit suicide by hanging. On the complaint to the police by the girl's father Jagdish a resident of Fartia Bhima village against four people including the college principal have been accused of forcing her to commit suicide. The family members along with various social organizations also demonstrated to demand justice for the victim. The student's father alleges that the college staff used to put pressure on the student to pay the outstanding fees, she was also harassed too much due to this the student facing torture committed suicide. The student's father Jagdish said that his daughter had to



appear for her fifth semester examination this month, but the college authorities did not allow her to do so due to pending fees. He said that he was unable to pay her fees on time due to some financial constraints. Demanding justice for daughter, he also alleged that the college principal and some others harassed and tortured her, compelling to end her life.

Loharu police station in-charge Inspector Jitendra said, many aspects have come to light during the investigation. An FIR has been registered and the investigation is ongoing. When asked about the allegations of harassment of the student, po-

lice officer said the investigation are going on, no suicide note has been found the post-mortem report is also pending. However, on the complaint of victim's family, a case has been filed against four persons including the college Principal under BNS section 108 for abetment to suicide and action will be taken against whoever is found guilty in the investigation. Meanwhile, Congress leader Randeep Singh Surjewala and Sirsa MP Kumari Selja said that it is sad that a Dalit girl in Haryana had to commit suicide due to not being able to pay the examination fee. Surjewala posted on Twitter, "This incident is not only sad

but also extremely shameful. The victim's family should get justice and this case should be thoroughly investigated."

The suicide case of a girl student from a deprived society in Bhiwani district of Haryana has created a political uproar. Congress leaders have accused the BJP-ruled states of increasing oppression on the deprived, while Social Justice Minister Krishna Bedi has hit back. He said that a case has been registered against the culprits.

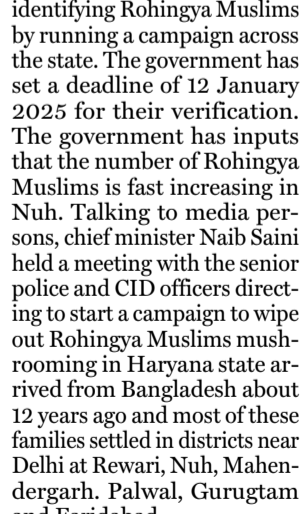
Political uproar has intensified in Haryana over the suicide of a student from a deprived community Politics has heated up over the suicide case of a girl student from a deprived society studying in a college in Loharu of Bhiwani district in Haryana. Meanwhile, Kumari Selja said that incidents of oppression of the deprived society have increased in BJP-ruled states, which the governments are proving unsuccessful in stopping. The deprived are not even being heard. BJP-ruled states have become laboratories of atrocities on the deprived for some time.

Haryana stands first in PRAGATI Dashboard: Chief Secretary reviews crime tracking system

GULSHAN KUMAR
New Delhi / Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Secretary Dr Vivek Joshi presided over the 29th meeting of the State Apex Committee for Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) here today.

It was revealed in the meeting that Haryana has consistently topped the PRAGATI Dashboard 29 times in the past 39 months, showcasing the sustained excellence and commitment of the state police force since June 2021. The portal is supervised by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) for all states and union territories. In addition, Haryana Police has also achieved a perfect 10/10 score on the RTS dashboard for citizen services provided through the HarSamay portal.



ONDC empowering small businesses, revolutionising e-commerce: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: The government-run Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) has empowered small businesses and revolutionised e-commerce, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday.

ONDC -- a network of more than 200 apps, including buyer apps and seller apps -- was launched in 2021 to democratise e-commerce in India.

The PM said that ONDC has been enabling growth and prosperity in the country.

"ONDC has contributed to empowering small businesses and revolutionising e-commerce, thus playing a vital role in furthering growth and prosperity," said PM Modi, in a post on social media platform X.

The Prime Minister said this



quoting a post by Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry. Goyal noted that ONDC has revolutionised the country's e-commerce landscape; and has bridged the gap between sellers and buyers.

ONDC has built "a robust and inclusive digital marketplace", Goyal said. He added that in

the last year, the network has "not only achieved numerous milestones but also empowered businesses, especially small enterprises, by creating a level playing field for them on the network".

"By bridging the gap between sellers and buyers, ONDC continues to revolutionise the nation's e-commerce landscape," Goyal said. In the last three years, ONDC has seen more than 150 million transactions, over 200 networks.

The platform has over 7 lakh sellers and service providers, with sellers from over 600 cities and towns. Consumers from over 1,100 cities and towns have transacted through the network. Further, more than 7,000 farmer-producer organisations are part of the platform, representing 35 lakh farmers. About 50 per cent of beneficiaries at the MSME Trade Enablement and Marketing Initiative (MSME-TEAM), which aims at assisting five lakh Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) are women-owned enterprises.

Arvind Kejriwal writes to RSS chief on BJP's politics, raises questions

NEWDELHI: AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal has written a letter to Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat seeking answers to some questions on the BJP's politics.

In the letter, Kejriwal has posed questions like -- Does RSS support whatever wrong BJP has done in the past few days? BJP leaders are openly distributing money, does RSS support vote buying? Dalit and Purbanchali votes (from the voter list) are being cut on a large scale. Does RSS think this is good for democracy? Doesn't RSS feel that the BJP is weakening democracy?

The former Delhi Chief Minister had on December 29 launched a scathing attack on the BJP, accusing the party of



attempting to manipulate the voter lists, and also claimed that 'Operation Lotus' has been going on since December 15 in his Assembly constituency. He highlighted voter deletion issues in the Shahdara constituency, where the BJP allegedly submitted applications to remove 11,008 voters.

Kejriwal also alleged that "Operation Lotus" began in his own New Delhi constituency on December 15. "In 15 days, they submitted applications to delete 5,000 voters and add 7,500. My constituency has 1,06,

000 voters, so they are trying to delete 5 per cent and add 7.5 per cent. If 12 per cent of the votes are manipulated, what's the point of elections? This is blatant tampering in the name of democracy."

This was refuted by the BJP, which claimed that the AAP had included illegal Bangladeshis and Rohingyas in the voter list. "We openly state that you have added 8,000 to 10,000 illegal votes per constituency. In houses where five people live, you've registered up to 50 fake votes. We will remove every single one of these illegal votes," BJP spokesperson Manjinder Singh Sirsa had said in response.

The BJP leader further accused AAP of harbouring and supporting infiltrators for political gain.

Nitish Kumar responds with folded hands to Lalu's 'invite' for joining Mahagathbandhan



PATNA: Hours after RJD Chief Lalu Prasad's statement that his "doors are open" for Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the JD(U) leader responded with folded hands.

Lalu's remark welcoming CM Nitish to the Mahagathbandhan fold created a flutter in Bihar's political circles.

When media persons questioned CM Nitish about Lalu's offer, the Chief Minister kept mum. Instead, he smiled and folded his hands, avoiding any clear indication of his intentions. The Chief Minister's gesture, made while standing between Governor Arif Mohammad Khan and Deputy CM Samrat Choudhary, has fueled further curiosity about his political future. However, the BJP leaders have asserted that the NDA remains united.

Union Minister Lallan Singh dismissed Lalu's remarks and termed them inconsequential. He said: "India is an independent country, and Lalu has the freedom to say anything. He can say whatever he wants, but we are in the NDA, and it is intact." Following the swearing-in ceremony of Bihar's new Governor Khan, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and senior BJP leader Vijay Kumar Sinha visited Chief Minister Nitish at his residence.

The political atmosphere in Bihar has intensified following Lalu's remarks about his willingness to reconcile with CM Nitish. When asked if his door was open for the Bihar Chief Minister, Lalu responded, "My door is always open; Nitish Kumar should also keep his door open."

On whether he would forgive CM Nitish if he returned, Lalu said, "Forgiving has been my job. If he comes back, I will forgive him without any problem. Everyone will work together."

However, RJD leader and Lalu's son Tejashwi Yadav has firmly rejected the idea of aligning with CM Nitish. Tejashwi earlier said, "Our door is closed for Nitish Kumar forever. We do not need him."

Tejashwi added, "There is nothing left in Nitish now. The people of Bihar trust me, and this time we will form the government on our own."

Protests Intensify In Bihar against BPSC 70th PT Exam; Political Support Grows



PATNA: The agitation for the re-conduct of the Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) 70th Preliminary Test (PT) gained significant momentum on Friday as protests erupted across Bihar, drawing widespread participation from students' unions, political parties, and activists.

The protest saw dramatic scenes in Patna as students broke barricades at the JP roundabout in Gandhi Maidan and marched towards Dak Bungalow Chowk, aiming to proceed to the Chief Minister's residence.

Members of the CPI-ML, Congress, and All India Students Union (AISU) joined the students, amplifying the demand for justice.

Purnea MP Rajesh Ranjan alias Pappu Yadav, a vocal supporter of the movement, led a separate protest by blocking railway operations at Sachivalay Halt earlier in the day.

Rajesh Ranjan and his supporters then marched to the Income Tax roundabout, intending to block Bailey Road and Veerchand Patel Path.

Rajesh Ranjan's aide, Raju Danveer, reinforced their determination to disrupt the BPSC examination scheduled for January 4, stating, "We went to the Income Tax roundabout to block the road. The examination

scheduled for tomorrow will be disrupted. Protests will be held near the examination centre. We will ensure a re-examination at any cost."

The statewide protest has drawn support from diverse groups, including political workers who marched alongside students to demand accountability from the BPSC and the Nitish Kumar-led Bihar government.

Paliganj MLA Sandeep Saurabh criticised the state government for its inaction, stating, "The agitation has been going on for 17 days, but the government has not resolved this issue. Evidence of irregularities has been presented. Instead of addressing the issue, the government resorts to lathi charges on the aspirants. We aim to make this deaf and dumb government

aware of the issues faced by the youth." CPI-ML MLA Ajit Kushwaha also joined the protests, condemning the alleged irregularities as anti-democratic. He emphasised the historical strength of Bihar's movements against oppressive measures, saying, "Attempts to suppress the voices of Bihar with sticks and force have always failed. We will confront the Chief Minister to demand justice for the youth." Supporters of Rajesh Ranjan intensified their protests by blocking major roads and railway routes in Bihar.

Jamaat-e-Islami Hind suggests MGNREGA-like program for Urban Joblessness in Union Budget



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), Syed Sadatullah Husaini spelt out comprehensive suggestions for the upcoming Union Budget at the JIH Monthly Press Conference at their headquarters. Briefing the media, the JIH President said, "We urge the government to present a transformative Union Budget 2025-26 that addresses the pressing issues of unemployment, inequality, and poverty. The nation is grappling with a livelihood crisis, evidenced by 45% youth-unemployment, 20% of the population in poverty, and stagnant agrarian growth at 2.8% (CMIE). We want the government to shift from business-centric policies to citizen-focused solutions that enhance welfare, stimulate demand, and promote inclusive development. Social security schemes must be bolstered to ensure economic justice for marginalized and minority communities."

Elaborating further, Syed Sadatullah stated, "On the expenditure side, we call for increased allocations to critical sectors. We recommend reversing budget cuts to MGNREGA, introducing MGNREGA-like programs for urban unemployment, and establishing Rural Employment Hubs to promote renewable energy and agro-processing. Healthcare spending must rise to 4% of GDP, while education funding should be raised to 6% of GDP under a comprehensive "Mission Shiksha Bharat." To empower minorities and SC/ST communities, we suggest reviving scholarships, creating skill zones, and launching programs to improve access to land and entrepreneurial opportunities. In agriculture, the government must prioritize debt relief, guaranteed MSP, and expanded irrigation projects. Additionally, we propose a phased rollout of Universal Basic Income (UBI) for vulnerable groups. Revenue measures should ensure fairness and resource optimization."

Prez Murmu asks NIMHANS to Integrate Yoga for Combating Mental, Physical Distress

BENGALURU: President Droupadi Murmu on Friday called on the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS) that it can successfully incorporate traditional methods such as Yoga to alleviate mental and physical distress.

Addressing the gathering on the golden jubilee of the health institute here, she said: "NIMHANS can successfully incorporate traditional methods such as Yoga to alleviate both mental and physical distress. Different meditations are also useful in countering negative mindsets and could be integrated into the mental health care models."

Asserting that traditional medical approaches are beneficial, she said: "The wisdom and life lessons from our ancestors and seers can help us all develop a spiritual framework with which we can make sense of the ups and downs of life." "Our scriptures tell us that the mind is the root of everything we perceive in the world. A healthy mind is the foundation of a healthy society," she underlined.



Hailing increased awareness about mental health, President Murmu said: "In the past, issues concerning mental health were not given enough attention in some societies. In recent times, however, awareness of mental health has been rising. Unscientific beliefs and stigmas attached to mental illness are a matter of the past, making it easier for those suffering from various ailments to seek help."

She also mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic in particular led to a spike in mental health concerns. "Every age group is facing problems and people react to it. Teenagers and youngsters face more issues in their studies today due to social pressure. Working professionals face more stress and a large number of elderly

people suffer from loneliness due to social challenges. Whoever meant to bear the burden of domestic responsibilities and caregiving for the family is prone to a range of mental illnesses that usually go unnoticed," President Murmu stated.

She hailed NIMHANS' initiatives like Tele MANAS to facilitate counselling anywhere anytime and the SAMVAAD platform to address child and adolescent mental health problems and noted: "Your dedication to the services towards mental health has played an exemplary role in our society. The innovative research and rigorous academic programme with exceptional patient care has made it an undisputed leader in the field of mental health and neurosciences."

PM Narendra Modi wishes Happy New Year to countrymen

NEW DELHI: Reflecting the mood of a confident India eager to march ahead, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday wished a Happy New Year to countrymen in a post on X and recounted the remarkable progress and transformation achieved in 2024.

Calling it a "poetic celebration", PM Modi, in his post in Hinglish, said, "Mera Bharat Badh raha (My India is taking big strides of progress). "From space to soil, railways to runways, culture to innovation, #IndiaIn2024 marked a year of remarkable progress

& transformation!" wrote PM Modi in a heartfelt message. "A poetic celebration as we stride confidently into 2025," said the Prime Minister as he leads the nation into 2025.

The PM's New Year post also carried a 2.41-minute video animation clip depicting the achievements made in an eventful 2024. The milestones depicted in the video included the country's space launches, super-computing, a boost in defense manufacturing, growth in the aviation industry, and infra marvels like the underwater Howrah Maidan Metro,



Rameswaram rail bridge, and Vande Bharat rail.

The video also highlighted increased medical colleges and

improved health facilities for the public, Atal Pension scheme, PM Awas, the first temple in Abu Dhabi, and the introduction of the three new criminal laws. In a virtual report card of the government's performance in 2024, the animation clip had special information on the economy. Besides highlighting the \$700 billion foreign reserves, it also showcased the country's emergence as the third biggest force in Asia and 24.82 crore people emerging from poverty.

On the job creation front, the video highlighted the Rs 2 lakh crore package for 4.1 crore

youth. In the sports domain, the PM's video on 2024 highlighted the record 29 medals won by India in the Para-Olympics.

For the environment, the PM's video gave the message of "Ek ped Maa ke Naam" which has led to the plantation of 102 crore saplings and highlighted the boost in India's green power generation capacity.

Known to celebrate his September 17 birthday with military jawns, PM Modi also likes to wish countrymen the New Year hoping that it would bring forth prosperity, peace and health for all.

Telangana Assembly passes resolution for Bharat Ratna to Manmohan Singh

HYDERABAD: The Telangana Assembly on Monday unanimously resolved to recommend Bharat Ratna to former Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh who passed away recently.

A resolution moved by Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy was unanimously adopted by the Assembly to confer India's highest civilian honour on Dr. Manmohan Singh.

The special session of the Assembly paid tributes to the former Prime Minister, expressing condolences over his demise and acknowledging his invaluable contributions to the nation's progress and the formation of the state of Telangana.

The Assembly approved a proposal to install a statue of Dr. Manmohan Singh in Hyderabad to commemorate him as a great leader who fulfilled the 60-year aspirations of the Telangana people.

The Assembly expressed deep condolences to Dr. Manmohan Singh's family, recognizing him as an internationally acclaimed economist who served the country in various capacities, including Chief Economic Advisor, RBI Governor, Deputy Chairperson of the Planning Commission, Finance Minister, and Prime Minister. It noted that his tenure as Finance



Minister (1991-1996) marked a turning point in India's economic history, with key reforms in liberalisation, privatisation, and globalisation.

As Prime Minister (2004-2014), he initiated transformative social programs such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Right to Information Act, the National Rural Health Mission, and the Aadhaar program. He introduced significant amendments to the Land Acquisition Act in 2013 to protect displaced individuals and revised the Forest Rights Act in 2006 to support tribal communities.

The Assembly also took note of the fact that Dr. Manmohan Singh was instrumental in the creation of Telangana state. During his tenure as Prime Minister, the Andhra Pradesh

Reorganisation Act of 2014 was passed in Parliament, fulfilling a decades-long aspiration of the people.

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy said that Telangana owes a debt of gratitude to Dr. Manmohan Singh for his pivotal role in the state's formation.

He highlighted the late former Prime Minister's vision and leadership in elevating India's global stature, emphasising the importance of honoring him as a guiding figure for future generations.

Members cutting across party lines paid rich tributes to Manmohan Singh and recalled his close association with Telangana.

Main opposition Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) fully supported the demand for conferring Bharat Ratna on Manmohan Singh. BRS leader K.T.

Rama Rao said they believe that the late leader deserves the highest honour.

The Chief Minister also suggested that a statue of the late Prime Minister be installed in the Financial District in Hyderabad to honour his memory and in recognition of the close association he had with Telangana.

The Chief Minister said installing the statue at a prominent place will enable people to pay tributes to the late leader on his birth and death anniversaries and take inspiration from him.

Terming Manmohan Singh's demise a great loss for the country, Revanth Reddy said his services to the country can never be forgotten.

Revanth Reddy recalled that it was at Mahabubnagar that, as the Prime Minister, he had launched Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for 100 days of assured employment in a year.

KTR recalled that when the son of Telangana P.V. Narasimha Rao was the Prime Minister, he brought Manmohan Singh into the government through lateral entry. Manmohan Singh, who had served in the Reserve Bank of India, was made the finance minister.

Kiren Rijju offers 'Chadar' at Nizamuddin Dargah ahead of Ajmer Sharif visit



NEW DELHI: Ahead of his visit to the Ajmer Sharif Dargah to offer the "Chadar" on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the 813th Urs of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Union Minister for Minority Affairs Kiren Rijju visited the Nizamuddin Aulia Dargah in Delhi on Friday to offer his prayers.

The Union Minister was accompanied by the National President of the BJP Minority Morcha, Jamal Siddiqui to offer the chadar at the Dargah. Speaking to reporters, Rij-

ju explained, "Before departing for Ajmer Sharif to offer the chadar that PM Modi has given, I thought it would be good to visit Nizamuddin Dargah first; that's why I came here today. I prayed for everyone, for the future."

Rijju stated that he was going to Ajmer Sharif with PM Modi's message on brotherhood and peace in the country and confirmed that he would offer the chadar from Prime Minister Modi at Ajmer Sharif on Saturday at 11 am.



SHASHANK REDDY & SHRUTI MITTAL EXPLAIN HOW PHONEPE AND GOOGLE PAY ARE HINDERING UPI'S DUOPOLY

Market flaws in UPI's growth



(WHO FCTC), to which India is a signatory, recommends that all tobacco products be taxed comparably to prevent substitution between them.

Concerns from the tobacco industry about increased illicit trade due to higher taxes are unfounded. Evidence, including from India, shows

Key considerations for GST Council

As the GST Council considers the GoM's recommendations, it should use this opportunity to reform the taxation of harmful products. Raising GST rates to 40% for tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages would enhance public health benefits while aligning with the peak rate under GST law. Pairing this with higher excise taxes would create a mixed tax structure, proven more effective at reducing consumption than relying predominantly on ad valorem taxes. Reducing the discrepancy in tax burden between beedis, cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco is also crucial to discourage substitution and follow global best practices. These steps could significantly reduce the health and economic impacts of tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages while generating vital revenue for development.

Rijo M. John is a health economist and professor at the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kochi, Kerala. Views are personal.

all, this could generate an additional 43 billion annually, provided the industry does not "over-shift" the tax burden, which can result in excess profits at the expense of government revenue and public health.

The GoM's recommendation to raise GST rates to 35% is a positive step but falls short of the 40% peak rate allowed under GST law. A 40% rate would have a greater impact, leading to sharper price increases, larger consumption reductions, and an additional 72 billion in revenue. It would also lower the risk of the industry over-shifting the tax burden. Currently, the tax burden on tobacco products is uneven, with taxes accounting for only 22% of the retail price of beedis, while it accounts for 49.5% for cigarettes and 64% for smokeless tobacco. The 35% GST rate would narrow this gap slightly, raising their respective tax shares to 26%, 51%, and 65%, but a 40% rate could reduce this disparity further. The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

that tax hikes have minimal impact on illicit trade. Instead, factors such as tax administration quality, regulatory frameworks, government commitment, governance strength, social acceptance, and informal distribution networks play a far more significant role in determining the scale of illicit markets.

Balancing GST and excise taxes

Another key issue is the reliance on GST, a purely ad valorem tax, to regulate tobacco consumption. Ad valorem taxes are less effective than specific excise taxes in curbing tobacco use as they are tied to product prices, which the industry can manipulate. Since the introduction of GST, the share of excise taxes in total tobacco taxation has declined, reducing the tax system's effectiveness in discouraging tobacco use. Many countries with GST or value-added tax (VAT) supplement these with specific excise duties on harmful products such as tobacco. India should consider raising excise taxes alongside the GST revision

Over the past seven years, since the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), there have been no significant increases in GST rates on harmful products such as tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages, except for two minor hikes in National Calamity Contingent Duties (NCCD) on tobacco. This has made these products more affordable, undermining efforts to curb their consumption. In this context, the proposal by the Group of Ministers (GoM) to raise the highest GST tier on tobacco and sugar-sweetened beverages from 28% to 35% is a welcome step. However, further tax reforms are essential to effectively tackle the public health and fiscal challenges associated with these products.

India is the second-largest consumer of tobacco globally, with 28.6% of adults above 15 years and 8.5% of students aged 13 to 15 years using tobacco in some form. Tobacco is a leading risk factor for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and causes over 3,500 daily deaths in India. In 2017, the annual economic burden of tobacco use and second-hand smoke was estimated at 2,340 billion, or 1.4% of GDP — far exceeding the 538 billion collected annually in tobacco tax revenue.

The proposed GST hike to 35% is expected to reduce tobacco consumption and boost tax revenues. Preliminary estimates suggest the 35% rate would lead to a 5.5% price increase, a 5% drop in consumption, and an 18.6% revenue rise for beedis. For cigarettes, prices would increase by 3.9%, consumption decline by 1.3%, and revenue grow by 6.4%. Smokeless tobacco prices would rise by 3%, consumption drop by 2.7%, and revenue increase by 1.9%. Over-



DINESH GUNDU RAO EXPLAINS WHY THE UNION GOVERNMENT MUST HELP STATES TO IMPROVE DRUG QUALITY

The danger of poorly manufactured drugs



Over the last few years, there have been a number of incidents across India involving not of standard quality (NSQ) drugs, the most recent being the deaths of five young mothers in Ballari district, Karnataka, allegedly due to contaminated drugs manufactured by a pharmaceutical company in West Bengal.

Due to the unique nature of India's Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940, the pharmaceutical company located in West Bengal can sell its drugs in all States across the country, despite being licensed and inspected only by drug inspectors in the State where its manufacturing facility is located. Since each State is responsible for licensing and inspecting pharmaceutical manufacturing units located within its territory, it means that there is little that States such as Karnataka can do to stop poorly manufactured drugs from other States flooding their pharmacies. Data supports this assertion. Out of the 894 samples randomly tested by our State drug laboratories over the last three years, an overwhelming 601 samples that failed testing were from manufacturers located in States other than Karnataka.

Information sharing is a way out

The only regulatory tool at the disposal of my department to deal with these NSQ drugs manufactured outside Karnataka is to prosecute the pharmaceutical company. But criminal prosecutions take a very long time. During the pendency of the trial, there is nothing that we in Karnataka can do to stop the pharmaceutical company from continuing to manufacture and sell its drugs within Karnataka. As in the law, only the drug inspectors in the home States of these

pharmaceutical companies can take steps to cancel or suspend their manufacturing licences. Given this reality of drug regulatory laws in India, it is imperative that we think of solutions to improve the situation urgently.

A simple and cost-effective measure, which may help improve the quality of drugs across the country, is to promote greater information sharing between the drug control departments of State governments and various public procurement agencies. Currently, there is no way for drug inspectors of the Karnataka Drugs Control Department or the Karnataka State Medical Supplies Corporation Ltd. (KSMSCCL) to verify the antecedents of pharmaceutical manufacturers located outside our State. For example, it would be of great help if all central and State drug testing laboratories made available their test results in a centralised database. This would enable a drug inspector or a procurement official in Karnataka or any other State to track the number of times a pharmaceutical company's drugs have failed testing across the country in any government laboratory. It will become easier for drug inspectors to adopt a risk-based approach

while making enforcement and procurement decisions. **Have a centralised database** Similarly, it would be very helpful if all State drug inspectors made available inspection reports and licensing information for all manufacturers in their respective States in one centralised database. By making available this information in a single database, it will become easier for procurement agencies such as the KSMSCCL to verify the antecedents of pharmaceutical companies before purchasing drugs from them and avoid scenarios such as the recent scandal in Maharashtra where dubious suppliers sold spurious antibiotics to a public hospital. Such a database will also help procurement officers to understand the quality of inspections across States and prioritise manufacturers from States with a reputation for conducting more rigorous inspections of their manufacturing units. In the absence of such a verifiable database, most procurement agencies have to just take the word of pharmaceutical companies submitting tenders. The KSMSCCL does not have an independent way to validate the claims of pharmaceutical companies located outside Karnataka when making public procurement decisions. This impacts public health.

Apart from inspection and test reports, it would also help if the Union Ministry of Health could create a central register which records all pharmaceutical manufacturers blacklisted by different procurement agencies for supplying NSQ drugs. This would be

very helpful in weeding out the bad players from the market and improving the quality of drugs available in public hospitals.

Most tenders require pharmaceutical companies to disclose if they have been blacklisted by any entity. But, currently, there is no way for procurement officers to verify the authenticity of this information independently.

States and legal powers

A third simple reform is to equip individual States with the legal powers to block manufacturers from outside the State to continue selling drugs within their State, while they are under investigation for the sale of drugs that may have caused deaths or other serious adverse events to patients within the State. State drug controllers should have the power to bar pharmaceutical manufacturers, located out of State, from selling their drugs within their State until the manufacturer is able to demonstrate that it has rectified the problems that led to the manufacture of NSQ drugs.

However, since the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 is central legislation, there is little that an individual State such as Karnataka can do to amend the law or its enforcement in other states. The initiative for legislative reform must come from the Union Health Ministry. Karnataka will be happy to support any reforms that will help improve the quality of drugs in Karnataka and across the country.

I will shortly write a letter to the Union Health Minister, J.P. Nadda, to address this critical issue.

Dinesh Gundu Rao is Health Minister, Karnataka. Views are personal.

LETTERBOX

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BOOKS: REVIEW

New book tells unflinching tale of the Gujarat riots

Zara Chowdhary's *The Lucky Ones* is a profound and haunting memoir that takes readers into the heart of one of the darkest chapters in modern Indian history — the 2002 Gujarat riots. At the age of 16, Chowdhary's life was irrevocably changed by the violence that engulfed her state, and in this gripping narrative, she shares a deeply personal account of survival, loss, and resilience. Now a teacher at the University of Wisconsin, Chowdhary's story is both a poignant reflection on personal trauma and a broader commentary on the socio-political forces that continue to shape India.

The memoir begins with the fateful event that catalyzed the riots: the Godhra train fire, which killed over 50 Hindu kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya. This incident sparked a wave of targeted violence against Muslims across

Gujarat, leaving over 2,000 people dead (though official figures remain disputed) and displacing more than 50,000. Chowdhary recounts these events with unflinching clarity, painting a vivid picture of the fear and chaos that consumed her community.

From the initial days of curfews and panic to the harrowing violence that followed, Chowdhary vividly recounts her family's experience as they huddled together in their flat at Jasmine Apartments in Ahmedabad. In a particularly striking moment, an elderly neighbor, Mrs. Pant, shields the family when police officers come knocking, exemplifying rare acts of humanity amidst the madness.

What sets *The Lucky Ones* apart from other works on the Gujarat riots, such as Revati Laul's *The Anatomy of Hate* or Manoj Mitta's *The Fiction of Fact-Finding*, is its deeply

personal lens. While those books explore the structural and political dimensions of the violence, Chowdhary's narrative focuses on the emotional toll of the riots. She does not shy away from recounting the horrors of the Gulbarg Society massacre, where Congress leader Ehsan Jafri was killed, or the unspeakable violence faced by survivors like Bilkis Bano. At the same time, she weaves these tragedies into a broader exploration of India's fraught political history, particularly the rise of right-wing ideologies and their impact on democracy.

Intertwined with the larger narrative of communal violence is the story of a teenager coming of age amidst turmoil. Chowdhary candidly discusses her growing awareness of her parents' strained relationship, a subplot that adds depth to the memoir. Her father, a principled government servant,



The Lucky Ones by Zara Chowdhary
Context/Westland Books, 324 pages Rs699.

faced frequent punishment postings due to his uncompromising ethics, creating a family dynamic filled with both love and tension.

Amidst the darkness, *The Lucky Ones* also captures moments of unexpected beauty. Chowdhary's love for Sanskrit, a language she studied for three years, shines through in her description of its fluidity and otherworldly quality. These reflections serve as a poignant reminder of the cultural richness that endures even in times of strife.

What makes *The Lucky Ones* so compelling is its lack of bitterness. Despite the unspeakable horrors she witnessed, Chowdhary writes with grace and humanity, focusing on the strength and resilience of those

who survived. The title itself is a testament to this outlook: while much was taken from her, Chowdhary considers herself among the "lucky ones" for having survived and for finding the strength to share her story.

Chowdhary's prose is unflinching yet deeply empathetic, balancing raw emotional honesty with measured reflection. Her ability to intertwine personal and political narratives makes *The Lucky Ones* both an intimate memoir and a crucial historical document. It not only recounts the events of 2002 but also forces readers to confront the ongoing implications of communal violence and political polarization in India.

In conclusion, *The Lucky Ones* is a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the human cost of the Gujarat riots. Zara Chowdhary's story is one of survival, but it is also a powerful call for empathy and remembrance. Through her words, the voices of those who suffered and survived echo loudly, urging us to never forget and to work toward a more inclusive future.

Falling Indian rupee calls for urgent action

The Indian rupee has recently faced significant depreciation pressures, reaching an all-time low of 85.8075 against the U.S. dollar on December 27, 2024.

This decline is attributed to several factors, including sustained foreign portfolio outflows, overstretched stock valuations, and a widening trade deficit. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has actively intervened in the foreign exchange market to curb volatility, utilizing the country's forex reserves, which have consequently fallen to a seven-month low of \$644.39 billion as of December 20. The strengthening of the U.S. dollar, bolstered by rising U.S. Treasury yields and expectations of inflationary policies under President Donald Trump's administration, has further exacerbated the rupee's depreciation. Additionally, concerns over India's economic growth, reflected in faltering consumption and hesitant investments, have intensified the currency's downward trajectory. While a depreciating rupee can enhance export competitiveness, it also poses risks such as imported inflation, particularly for essential commodities like crude oil and edible oils.

The RBI's interventions, though effective in providing short-term relief, are not sustainable long-term solutions, especially given the finite nature of forex reserves. Policymakers must address underlying economic challenges to bolster the rupee's stability. This includes implementing structural reforms to stimulate domestic consumption and investment, thereby reducing reliance on foreign capital inflows. Furthermore, clear communication regarding India's stance on currency matters is essential to maintain investor confidence and mitigate speculative attacks on the rupee. To sum it up, while external factors have undeniably impacted the rupee's value, strengthening domestic economic fundamentals remains crucial. A multifaceted approach, combining prudent fiscal policies with strategic market interventions, is imperative to navigate the complexities of the global financial landscape and ensure the rupee's resilience in 2025 and beyond.

It's high time the government took the rupee depreciation seriously and acted decisively, as nothing concrete has been done so far.

THINK BIG.
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YOURSELF
AND MAKE
IT HAPPEN

THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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India-EU Trade Agreement Set for Implementation in 2025: Piyush Goyal

NEW DELHI: India's landmark trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is on track for implementation by the end of 2025, according to Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal.

The Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), signed on March 10, 2024, between India and the four EFTA nations - Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland - represents a significant milestone in international trade relations.

The agreement has already gained substantial momentum in its ratification process, with the Swiss Council of States recently approving the pact.

The next crucial step involves approval from Switzerland's National Council, reflecting what Minister Goyal describes as 'overwhelming support in political circles' for the partnership.

The minister indicated that the agreement is expected to enter into force by autumn 2025.



to create one million direct jobs in India, marking the first such commitment in India's trade agreement history.

The agreement provides significant benefits for Indian consumers, who will gain access to premium Swiss products at reduced prices.

Items such as watches, chocolates, biscuits, and clocks will see their customs duties gradually eliminated over a ten-year period.

This investment is projected

period. Notably, the agreement includes a safeguard mechanism allowing India to suspend duty concessions if the promised investments fail to materialise.

The implementation timeline reflects the complex ratification processes required across different jurisdictions.

While India's approval process involves Cabinet authorisation, EFTA member states must secure parliamentary approval.

Meanwhile, Minister Goyal has maintained active engagement in trade negotiations with other partners, including recent discussions with the UK's new trade minister and the European Union's Trade Commissioner Maros Sefcovic.

Minister Goyal emphasised India's commitment to protecting national interests in all trade negotiations, stating that agreements must be 'equitable, fair and balanced' to receive India's approval.

India's Employment Grows by 36% In Last 10 Years : Labour Ministry

NEW DELHI: Union Labour Minister Mansukh Mandaviya announced on Thursday that overall employment in the country surged by 36 percent, rising from 47.15 crore in 2014-15 to 64.33 crore in 2023-24.

According to the Reserve Bank of India's KLEMS database released in July, employment growth across agriculture, manufacturing, and services sectors showed marked improvement under the NDA administration compared to the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) era.

The KLEMS dataset, which encompasses both public and private sectors, reveals that job creation during the UPA's decade in power (2004-2014) was limited to 2.9 crore positions, while the current government reports creating 4.9 crore jobs in 2023-24 alone. Sectoral analysis presents a striking contrast between the two administrations. Agriculture employment, which declined by 16 percent under the



UPA government (2004-2014), witnessed a 19 percent growth during the Modi government's tenure (2014-2023).

The manufacturing sector demonstrated similar trends, with 15 percent growth under the current administration compared to 6 percent during the UPA period. The services sector emerged as the strongest performer, achieving 36 percent growth between 2014 and 2023, surpassing the previous decade's performance by 11 percentage points. Ministry data indicates significant improvements in key employment metrics, with the unemployment rate report-

edly declining from 6 percent in 2017-18 to 3.2 percent in 2023-24.

The employment rate, or worker population ratio, showed substantial growth from 46.8 percent to 58.2 percent during the same period, while the labour force participation rate increased from 49.8 percent to 60.1 percent. Youth employment statistics also reflect positive trends, with the employability of graduates rising from 33.95 percent in 2013 to 54.81 percent in 2024, according to the India Skill Report.

The youth employment rate increased from 31.4 percent to 41.7 percent between 2017-18 and 2023-24, while youth unemployment decreased from 17.8 percent to 10.2 percent.

Further substantiating these trends, over 4.7 crore young individuals aged 18 to 28 years have enrolled in the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation between September 2017 and September 2024.

BRGIL coming out with Rs 85.21 cr IPO



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

B R Goyal Infrastructure Limited (BRGIL) is coming out with its Initial Public Offering (IPO) of 63,12,000 equity shares priced at Rs 128 to Rs 135 per share - aggregating to Rs 85.21 crores - which will open on January 9, 2025 and close on January 9, 2025.

The net proceeds from the IPO will be utilized for funding capital expenditure requirements, working capital requirements, expenditure for inorganic growth through acquisitions, other strategic initiatives and general corporate purposes.

BRGIL specializes in road construction and infrastructure projects as EPC contractors and construction service providers through management of all project phases from design and engineering to procurement and site execution.

BRGIL's diverse portfolio includes asphaltic and concrete roads, buildings, bridges and civil works. The company is involved in wind power generation, ready-mix concrete manufacturing and Toll Collection Contracts, besides holding a diverse portfolio of government projects and strategic joint ventures.

Brij Kishore Goyal, Chairman and Managing Director, (BRGIL), said that managing working capital effectively has been one of the key challenges to the Company's growth and the IPO funds would not only help overcome this hurdle, but also be strategically allocated towards capital expenditures, acquisitions and other growth-oriented initiatives.

"These investments will enable us to embark on a transformative new phase of growth and expansion," he said, adding that the Company presently has an orderbook of Rs 900 crores.

In FY24, the Company achieved a Revenue of Rs 58,875.91 lakhs, EDITDA of Rs 3,245.58 lakhs and PAT of Rs 2,187.75 lakhs.

Ambuja Cements-Adani Merger Receives No Objection Letter from Stock Exchanges



MUMBAI: Ambuja Cements Ltd has received an observation letter with 'no objection' from the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and 'no adverse observations' from Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) with regards to merger with Adani Cements Ltd.

The proposal for a merger between Adani Cements and Ambuja Cements had received approval from the board in June 2024. According to the stock exchange circular on January 1, "The Scheme remains subject to various statutory and regulatory approvals and of the respective shareholders and creditors (where applicable) of the companies involved in the scheme."

EPEC India Proposes Faceless GST Audit to Empower MSMEs

NEW DELHI: In line with the successful implementation of faceless assessments by the Income Tax Department, EPEC India (Engineering Export Promotion Council of India) has urged the government to introduce a faceless GST audit system aimed at empowering the MSME sector.

The proposal, part of EPEC India's pre-budget recommendations, highlights the transformative potential of leveraging technology to streamline compliance and reduce costs for smaller businesses.

Pankaj Chadha, Chairman of EPEC India, emphasised the benefits of the proposed system.

"The faceless GST audit system, by using technology and ensuring anonymity, will reduce compliance costs. A faceless system will streamline procedures, allowing MSMEs to focus on growth and innovation," he said. The move reflects a growing trend toward adopting digital frameworks to enhance transparency and



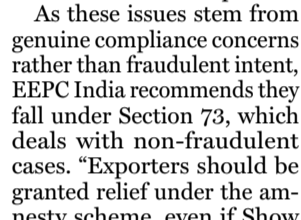
growth and exports but often struggles with complex regulatory requirements.

EPEC India has also called for an amnesty scheme to address issues under the Reverse Charge Mechanism (RCM), particularly for exporters. The organisation pointed out challenges such as foreign bank

charges and services, which are often billed without clear communication to exporters. As these issues stem from genuine compliance concerns rather than fraudulent intent, EPEC India recommends they fall under Section 73, which deals with non-fraudulent cases. "Exporters should be granted relief under the amnesty scheme, even if Show Cause Notices (SCNs) are issued under Section 74," said Chadha. He noted that several EPEC members have reported receiving SCNs related to RCM liabilities, underscoring the urgent need for a fair resolution mechanism.

This remarkable growth is attributed to sustained investments in digital infrastructure and supportive policy frameworks that have strengthened India's position as a global leader in digitally delivered services. The country's digital service exports have demonstrated extraordinary growth over the past two decades, escalating from USD 30 billion in 2005 to a substantial USD 257 billion in

Digital Infrastructure Services Push Exports by 22%, hits USD 34 Billion in Oct 2024



NEW DELHI: India's services exports achieved a historic milestone in October 2024, reaching an unprecedented USD 34.31 billion, marking a 22.3 percent increase from the same month last year, according to commerce ministry officials.

The sector experienced particularly robust growth between 2010 and 2014, when exports quadrupled from USD 20 billion to USD 80 billion, maintaining steady growth to reach USD 191 billion by 2019 before the pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic, rather than hindering progress, served as a catalyst for the sector's expansion, with exports nearly doubling from pre-pandemic levels by 2023. This growth trajectory reflects the remarkable resilience and adaptability of India's digital services industry, supported by the country's large pool of skilled IT professionals, competitive pricing, and favorable business environment.

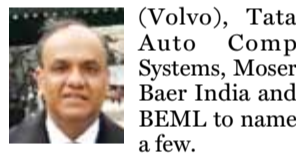
Manish Singhal appointed ASSOCHAM's Secretary General

Manish Singhal appointed ASSOCHAM's Secretary General

NEW DELHI: Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), the country's apex business chamber, said that Manish Singhal, an industry leader with over 35 years of experience in Chamber and Corporate India, today took

over as Secretary General.

Singhal had earlier worked as Deputy Secretary General of The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). He also worked with various Indian transnational companies, including Tata Motors, Eicher



(Volvo), Tata Auto Comp Systems, Moser Baer India and BEML to name a few. Manish Singhal succeeds Deepak Sood, who successfully helmed the chamber for the

last five years and has stepped down to pursue other interests.

"We thank Deepak for his immense contributions to rebuilding the Chamber, which now boasts a healthy balance sheet and delivers quality," said Sanjay Navar, President of ASSOCHAM.

FY24 REVIEW

Attrition and Employee Turnover in Top Indian Pharmaceutical Companies



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH
A higher attrition rate is a major concern across industries. Most recently, in the Report on Trend and Progress of Banking in India 2023-24 released by the RBI in December 2024, it was observed that employee attrition rates are high across select private sector banks and Small Finance Banks (SFBs). Attrition rate was about 25 per cent in select cases. It was observed that high attrition and employee turnover rate pose significant operational risks, including disruption in customer services, besides leading to loss of institutional knowledge and increased recruitment costs. Realizing this, technology companies have launched predictive tools to enable companies in different sectors to gain a better understanding of likely attritions and undertake preventive measures for employee turnover.

F. Leigh Branham in his book, 'Keeping the People Who Keep You in Business: 24 Ways to Hang On to Your Most Valuable Talent' mentioned the cost of losing an employee anywhere between 25 per cent to 200 per cent of that employee's salary. Employees' turnover (voluntary or involuntary) has huge costs involved comprising Direct turnover costs such as cost of leaving, replacement costs, and transition costs, and Indirect turnover costs such as loss of production and reduced performance.

Business Responsibility & Sustainability Report (BRSR) of companies must give details on employee turnover rate. BRSR of top pharmaceutical companies in India reflects interesting trends. Among

Table 1: Employee Turnover Rate in Top Pharmaceutical Companies in India

	FY 2023-24			FY 2022-23			FY 2021-22		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Sun Pharma									
Permanent Employees	13.90%	11.29%	13.59%	13.20%	13.90%	13.20%	10.00%	15.70%	10.40%
Permanent Workers	7.11%	2.82%	6.78%	6.20%	2.20%	6.10%	10.30%	10.50%	10.30%
Cipla									
Permanent Employees	16.41%	2.33%	19.37%	2.60%	19.14%	2.55%			
Permanent Workers	4.34%	1.45%	2.50%	-	5.06%	0.56%			
Mankind									
Permanent Employees	18.00%	27.00%	18.00%	22.62%	22.38%	22.63%	19.48%	19.74%	19.49%
Permanent Workers	22.00%	13.00%	21.00%	9.2%	1.85%	8.8%	11.06%	0	10.48%
Alkem									
Permanent Employees	27.7%	25.9%	27.6%	28.2%	30.6%	28.3%	19.7%	29.9%	20.0%
Permanent Workers	10.2%	7.5%	10.1%	10.5%	0	10.4%	8.7%	0	8.6%
Divi's Labs									
Permanent Employees	8.11%	14.64%	9.05%	17.69%	23.70%	18.52%	15.72%	27.90%	17.39%
Permanent Workers	0	0	0	1.72%	0	1.72%	0	0	0
Lupin									
Permanent Employees	18.36%	22.50%	19.00%	24.31%	27.35%	24.47%	-	-	-
Permanent Workers	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	12.4%	0	12.21%	-	-	-
Torrent									
Permanent Employees	15.8%	26.0%	16.6%	10.9%	25.2%	12.2%	10.8%	24.4%	12.0%
Permanent Workers	2.4%	12.5%	3.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
DRL*									
Permanent Employees	18.2%	19.0%	18.4%	21.1%	19.2%	20.8%	20.5%	21.4%	20.6%
Permanent Workers	8.0%	34.1%	9.7%	23.6%	44.7%	24.9%	21.8%	28.6%	22.2%
Zydus Lifesciences									
Permanent Employees	20.0%	21.0%	20.0%	22.0%	23.0%	22.0%	25.0%	21.0%	24.0%
Permanent Workers	18.0%	12.0%	18.0%	26.0%	13.0%	24.0%	18.0%	14.0%	17.0%
Aurobindo									
Permanent Employees	15.0%	28.0%	16.0%	19.0%	19.0%	19.0%	17.0%	15.0%	17.0%
Permanent Workers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Annual Report 2023-24 of respective pharmaceutical companies
*Besides employees and workers, the company has another column - 'Others', and total column gives weightage to that too
Note: For FY 2022-23, turnover rate was given for the previous year, and for FY 2021-22, turnover rate in the year prior to previous Financial Year was reported by Torrent Pharma, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, and Zydus Lifesciences.



major Indian pharmaceutical companies, Employee Turnover Rate was the highest in case of Alkem Labs at 27.6% among permanent employees in FY 2023-24 and it was the lowest in case of Divi's Labs at 9.05% among permanent employees in FY 2023-24. For FY 2023-24, employee turnover rate among permanent employees was also higher for Zydus Lifesciences (20.0%), Lupin (19.0%), followed by Dr. Reddy's Labs (18.4%), Mankind (18.0%), Torrent Pharma (16.6%), Aurobindo Pharma (16.0%), and Sun Pharma (13.59%). Cipla Limited reported Total Permanent Employee and Worker Turnover Rate of 18.6% for FY 2023-24.

Employee Turnover Rate regarding Permanent Employees has gone up for Sun Pharma, Alkem Labs and Torrent Pharma from 10.40% to 13.59%, 20.0% to 27.6%, and 12.0% to 16.6% respectively during three-year period from FY 2021-22 to FY 2023-24. Divi's Labs has shown significant progress in a short span of time as Employee Turnover Rate went down to 9.05% in FY 2023-24 from a high of 18.52% in FY 2022-23.

Improvement has been observed in case of Lupin as

Employee Turnover Rate for Permanent Employees of the company went down from 24.47% in FY 2022-23 to 19.00% in FY 2023-24 followed by Zydus Lifesciences (from 24.0% to 20.0%), Cipla (from 21.70% to 18.74%), Dr. Reddy's Labs (from 20.6% to 18.4%), Mankind Pharma (from 19.49% to 18.00%) and Aurobindo Pharma (from 17.0% to 16.0%) during three-year period from FY 2021-22 to FY 2023-24.

From FY 2021-22 to FY 2023-24, Employee Turnover rate of permanent employees was higher than employee turnover rate of permanent workers in top pharmaceutical companies in India. Higher employee turnover rate of 10.30% was found among male permanent workers in Sun Pharma for FY 2021-22 which has declined to 7.11% in FY 2023-24. In last three years, a higher employee turnover rate of 22.0% among male permanent workers as compared to 18.0% for permanent employees was found in case of Mankind Pharma for FY 2023-24. For Zydus Lifesciences, a higher employee turnover rate of 26.0% among male permanent workers was

found as compared to 22.0% for permanent employees. For Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, a higher employee turnover rate was observed among permanent workers (male as well as female) as compared to permanent employees in FY 2021-22 as well as in FY 2022-23. In FY 2023-24, employee turnover rate has gone down to just 8.0% among male permanent workers but remained high at 34.1% among female permanent workers in DRL.

Among Permanent Employees (Female), employee turnover rate was the lowest for Cipla, i.e., 2.33% in FY 2023-24 as compared to 2.60% in FY 2022-23. Employee Turnover rate for Permanent Employees (Female) was the highest at 28.0% in Aurobindo Pharma for FY 2023-24 followed by 27.0% in Mankind Pharma, Torrent Pharma (26.0%), Alkem Labs (25.9%), Lupin (22.50%), Zydus Lifesciences (21.0%), DRL (19.0%), Divi's Labs (14.64%) and Sun Pharma (11.29%).

Sun Pharma could curtail Permanent Employees (Female) employee turnover rate from 15.70% in FY 2021-22 to 11.29% in FY 2023-24. In contrast to this, there was visible deterioration on this count for

Mankind Pharma as the employee turnover rate has gone up from 19.74% in FY 2021-22 to 27.0% in FY 2023-24.

Most of these pharmaceutical companies have reported that these companies are making efforts to contain employee turnover rate, e.g., Sun Pharma reported that multiple channels of communication with employees include employee focused web portal, e-mail, employee engagement surveys, and town-halls. Further, it has recognized that employee well-being and satisfaction is an integral part of the company's growth strategy. Key areas of interest for employees comprise Learning and Development, Professional Growth, Well-being initiatives, Employee recognition, Fair remuneration, and Work-life balance. On employee engagement and frequency, Cipla reported that it is continuous (one-to-one manager interaction, grievance redressal mechanism), Periodic (trainings, skip level meetings, webinars), Quarterly (townhalls), and Annual (awards and appraisals, and employee engagement surveys). Intra-company and inter-company comparison of measures undertaken and effectiveness of those measures can offer valuable insights for remedial action. It was not without reason that Cognizant made headlines in November 2024 when the CEO declared that 'the mojo of the company is back' as 13,000 associates who had earlier worked with the company, wanted to come back.

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.

Indian Stock Market Slides as Investors Remain Cautious In New Year

MUMBAI: After a bumper start to the New Year, the Indian stock market's upward trend came to a halt on Friday amid mixed global cues as heavy selling was seen in the IT, financial services and pharma sectors.

Sensex ended at 79,223.11, down by 720.60 points or 0.90 per cent and Nifty settled at 24,004.75 down by 183.90 points or 0.76 per cent.

Nifty Bank ended at 50,988.8, down by 616.75 points, or 1.20 per cent. The Nifty Midcap 100 index closed at 57,931.05 after declining 177.15 points, or 0.30 per cent, while the Nifty Smallcap 100 index closed at 19,033.70 after declining 46.65 points, or 0.24 per cent.

According to market experts, the Indian stock market experienced a significant downturn which was primarily



driven by losses in key sectors such as IT, pharmaceuticals, healthcare and banking.

"Despite earlier optimism regarding potential earnings growth for the upcoming quarter, recent economic indicators have dampened expectations, contributing to the market's volatility as investors remain cautious heading into the New Year," they added.

On the Bombay Stock Ex-

losers. Whereas, Tata Motors, Titan, Nestle India, Hindustan Unilever, Maruti Suzuki, NTPC, IndusInd Bank and Tata Steel were the top gainers.

FIIIs bought equities worth Rs 1,506.75 crore on January 2 and domestic institutional investors bought equities worth Rs 22.14 crore on the same day.

Rupak De from LKP Securities, Nifty was unable to break above the 50 EMA on the daily timeframe, resulting in a market correction.

"However, sentiment remains positive as the index closed above 24,000. The RSI shows a bullish crossover. On the upside, the index may rise towards 24,200-24,220, with a break above 24,220 potentially pushing it to 24,500. Conversely, a decisive move below 24,000 could lead the index towards 23,700," he added.

India's GST Revenue Reaches Rs 1.77 Lakh Crore in December



NEW DELHI: The Finance Ministry reported on Wednesday that India's gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections for December 2024 reached Rs 1.77 lakh crore, marking a 7.3 percent increase compared to the previous year.

This achievement maintains the streak of collections remaining above Rs 1.7 lakh crore for the tenth consecutive month, demonstrating sustained revenue performance.

Despite this milestone, December witnessed the slowest pace of year-on-year growth

while import-related collections amounted to Rs 3.96 lakh crore, increasing by 6 percent. December specifically showed domestic collections growth of 8.4 percent, while import-related collections grew by just 3.9 percent. The slower-than-anticipated growth has prompted discussions about potential policy interventions in the upcoming 2025-26 Budget.

PwC India partner Pratik Jain suggests that GST rate rationalisation, currently under consideration by the GST council, could be one approach to stimulate consumption in the economy. A significant increase in refund disbursements was observed in December, rising by 45.3 percent year-on-year to Rs 22,490 crore.

This led to net collections of Rs 1.54 lakh crore, representing a modest 3.3 percent growth

Indian banks to see range-bound 12.5% credit growth in 2024-25: HSBC



NEW DELHI: Credit growth of Indian banks are expected to witness a range-bound 12.5 per cent growth in the current financial year 2025, HSBC Global Research said in a report, attaching a rider that slowdown in GDP growth remains a downside risk.

HSBC Securities and Capital Markets (India) Private Limited, in the report dated January 2, said it expects 2024-25 credit growth to remain range-bound. "Multiple headwinds like tight liquidity conditions, muted growth in deposits, GDP slowdown and high loan-to-deposit ratio remain key risks to credit growth," HSBC said.

Retail loan growth increased in November 2024, driven by unsecured personal loans, home loans and sustained growth in gold loans. There has been some reprieve in credit to NBFCs too.

In November 2024, non-food credit grew by 12.2 per cent year-on-year and 1.3 per cent month-on-month compared to 12 per cent year-on-year and 0.7 per cent month-on-month in October 2024.

Retail loans grew by 13.3 per cent year-on-year and 1.5 per cent month-on-month, MSME loans by 13.8 per cent year-on-year and 0.7 per cent month-on-month and corporate loans by 9.6 per cent year-on-year and 1.5 per cent month-on-month in November 2024.

There was a broad-based growth pick-up across most major retail loan segments, the report asserted.

Home loans grew by 12.2 per cent year-on-year and 1.3 per cent month-on-month (0.9 per cent in October 2024). Growth in the home loan segment should remain stable driven by healthy demand for residential housing, the HSBC report said.

Vehicle loans declined by 1.8 per cent month-on-month in November, largely impacted by muted vehicle sales. Gold loans increased by 6.7 per cent month-on-month and contributed to 12 per cent of incremental retail loans in November 2024. "In our view, slowdown in micro-finance loans has increased the demand for gold loans as an alternate source of borrowings," the report argued.

Federal Bank Transforms Corporate Banking Landscape with FedOne



MUMBAI: Federal Bank, one of India's leading private sector banks has taken a step forward in its digital transformation journey with the successful launch of FedOne. The bank has implemented Nucleus Software's cutting-edge transaction banking platform FinnAxia. This partnership signifies a transformative moment in modernizing Federal Bank's corporate banking services, focusing on delivering exceptional value to corporate and SME customers. The implementation of this advanced transaction banking platform was achieved after an intensive 10-month collaboration, highlighting both organizations' commitment to operational excellence and innovation. By implementing this transaction banking platform, Federal Bank is poised to capitalize on emerging business opportunities while establishing itself as a market leader in providing swift, reliable, and innovative financial solutions to its clients. "At Federal Bank, we recognize that the future of banking is digital and customer-centric. The successful implementation of FedOne developed in collaboration with Nucleus Software's FinnAxia, not only strengthens our corporate banking capabilities but also reinforces our commitment to delivering hyper personalized solutions that meet the evolving needs of our clients.

FISME Pushes for Financial Reforms to Support MSME Growth

NEW DELHI: Leading industry associations representing India's micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have submitted comprehensive budget recommendations focusing on regulatory relief and improved financial access.

The proposals aim to address key challenges facing the sector, which plays a crucial role in the nation's economy. The India SME Forum, representing over 98,200 MSMEs, has proposed exempting businesses with turnovers below Rs 5 crore from routine audits and inspections, reserving such oversight for cases with significant discrepancies.

The organisation also advocates for a more lenient approach to compliance, including a formal error-forgiveness program for minor GST-related infractions and simplified processes for reinstating canceled



GST registrations.

To streamline payment systems, industry bodies have recommended integrating the Trade Receivables Discounting System (TReDS) with the GST framework and Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal.

This integration would enable automatic flagging of unpaid invoices on buyers' GST portals after payment deadlines expire, following recommendations from the Standing Committee

on Finance led by Jayant Sinha.

The Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) has highlighted critical concerns regarding the Special Mention Account (SMA) framework, noting that the current system often leads to business closures rather than revival.

The organisation emphasises the need for comprehensive guidelines focused on rehabilitating struggling enterprises

rather than merely identifying stressed accounts.

FISME has also proposed reforms in banking practices, suggesting a shift toward need-based financing that incorporates cash flow analysis.

The organisation advocates for reduced collateral requirements for MSMEs demonstrating consistent financial responsibility, arguing that this would enable businesses to reinvest in growth while maintaining fiscal discipline.

The recommendations come at a significant moment as India's services exports surpass merchandise exports for the first time. With MSMEs contributing approximately 50 percent of goods exports, FISME has urged the EXIM Bank to revise its lending criteria, particularly the requirement that exports must constitute more than 10 percent of total sales.

India's Q2 Growth Slows to 5.4% Ahead of Union Budget 2025-26



NEW DELHI: India's economic growth decelerated to an unexpected 5.4 per cent in the second quarter of FY25, sparking discussions among economists about the need for targeted reforms in the upcoming Union Budget 2025-26.

Key drivers of this slowdown include weak capital formation, subdued consumption, and adverse weather conditions, highlighting vulnerabilities in the nation's economic framework.

This downturn has raised concerns, especially as India seeks to maintain its position as a rapidly growing economy amidst global uncertainties.

The lacklustre growth underscores the urgent need for measures that not only stabilise the economy but also reignite the momentum across critical sectors like consumption and manufacturing. Economists, including Rumki Majumdar, emphasise the importance of prioritizing skill development and employment generation in the forthcoming budget.

"We anticipate the govern-

ment will continue to prioritize and enhance efforts towards skill development and employment generation, maintaining the positive momentum. This would help harness the demographic dividend, drive economic growth from both supply and demand sides, and boost consumption through higher incomes," Majumdar stated. Experts believe the budget should focus on policy initiatives that stimulate domestic demand while addressing structural challenges in manufacturing.

Enhancing public investment in infrastructure and creating a conducive environment for private sector participation could also play a crucial role.

Simultaneously, targeted interventions in rural development and agriculture may be necessary to mitigate the adverse effects of erratic weather patterns. To revive consumer confidence, measures to enhance disposable incomes, such as tax reliefs or social welfare programs, could be instrumental.

CBDT Extends Deadline for Revised ITR to January 15

NEW DELHI: The last date for filing an Income Tax Return (ITR) for the financial year 2023-24 was July 31, and for those who could not, the time was for filing a revised ITR with late fees was December 31, but now, the Central Board of Direct Taxes has extended this deadline to January 15.

As the last date for filing the GST annual return for the finan-



cial year 2023-24 is December 31, GST-registered taxpayers will be required to submit it to

consolidate their annual transactions.

For not filing a GST Annual Return (GSTR-9), a company, with a turnover up to Rs 5 crore, will have to pay a maximum penalty of Rs 50 per day (Rs 25 each under CGST and SGST) or 0.04 per cent of turnover.

A company with a turnover of Rs 5 crore to Rs 20 crore will have to pay a maximum penalty

of Rs 100 per day (Rs 50 each under CGST and SGST), or 0.04 per cent of turnover. Similarly, a company with a turnover of over Rs 20 crore will have to pay a maximum penalty of Rs 200 per day (Rs 100 each under CGST and SGST), or 0.50 per cent of turnover.

A business with a turnover of more than Rs 2 crore will have to file GSTR-9.

Rupee will continue to weaken in the New Year



SATISH SINGH

The fall in the exchange rate of rupee against the dollar is a major obstacle in the path of development. It is necessary to overcome this to ensure smooth development. The Reserve Bank of India is using foreign exchange reserves to prevent the fall in the exchange rate. Since the dollar is the most powerful currency in the world, it is largely through it that trades are conducted across the world.

The rupee witnessed its biggest fall in 2 years during day trading on 27 December 2024 and became one of the worst performing currencies in Asia. The rupee has consistently closed at a weak level at the end of the calendar year against the dollar in the last 7 years. The rupee has fallen by 2.7 percent so far in the year 2024. The rupee weakened to a low of 85.82 and has now come down to 85.54 per dollar, which is the lowest level of the rupee so far. Again, this is the biggest fall in the exchange rate of rupee against the dollar since the global recession of 2008.

Due to the use of foreign exchange reserves to reduce the weakness of the rupee, a decrease of \$ 8.48 billion was recorded in the foreign exchange reserves on 27 December 2024. Last week, on 20 December, \$ 1.99 billion was withdrawn from the foreign exchange reserves. In the month of September, the foreign exchange reserves had increased to the level of \$

704.88 billion. Since then, it has been continuously declining and now it has reached the level of \$ 644.87 billion.

Right now, the level of foreign exchange reserves cannot be considered worrisome, but if the foreign exchange reserves keep decreasing like this, it will not be good for the health of the economy. Decrease in foreign exchange reserves means that investors are not investing in India, which cannot be considered a good sign at all. Usually, as soon as the dollar strengthens, foreign investors turn to the US market in the hope of higher returns and when it weakens, investors again turn to the markets of other countries in the hope of higher returns.

There are some other important reasons for the fall in the value of rupee against the dollar in India, such as, India's trade deficit is constantly increasing. This usually happens due to reduced exports and more imports. Since, India still does not produce all the goods needed and is completely or partially dependent on the import of many products.

Most of the transactions in the international market are done through the US dollar. Therefore, dollars are needed for imports, which directly affects the market and the production of various goods. For example, if an industry is dependent on raw material for production which is not found in India or if an essential product is not available in India, then it is imported to meet the need of the people.

After coming to power, the positive & convincing speech-



es of the US President have increased the confidence of investors in the US market, due to which the dollar has strengthened. Now foreign investors have started investing in US by withdrawing their investments in other countries. Meanwhile, the US Federal Reserve recently hinted at bringing changes in its benchmark interest rate and said that it can cut interest rates twice in 2025. After this announcement, the dollar index reached 108.086, which is the highest level in the last two years. This has also increased the confidence of investors in the dollar.

The fall in the rupee has a direct impact on the cost of imported goods, which includes the raw material or parts for the manufacture of a product in addition to the imported product. For example, if someone had to spend Rs 8300 earlier to buy a product worth \$100, then after the rupee weakened, he or she would have to spend Rs 8,500. Obviously, this will affect both the budget and investment of the common man.

The dollar becoming expensive has a direct impact on the price of crude oil. Since India does not produce enough fuel

to fulfil its requirement, it is dependent on imports to ensure the availability of crude oil. Therefore, when the cost of crude oil increases, the cost of transportation increases, which increases the price of essential items, especially food products, which spoils everyone's household budget.

The cost of those who go abroad for the purpose of studies or tourism also increases due to the weakening of the rupee. The cost of products of businesses that are dependent on imports also increases and the profitability of the company decreases. However, exporters will benefit from the weakening of the rupee. For example, businesses in sectors like IT, pharma, and gems and jewellery will benefit because their businesses export and they get higher prices for their products due to the strengthening of the dollar.

The weakening of the rupee also has a negative impact on the stock market because foreign investors invest in the US dollar instead of the rupee in the hope of higher returns and for this, they withdraw their investments from the Indian market. Investors who have invested in the US

stock market benefit. In this context, to avoid the ill effects of the weakening of the rupee, investors can reduce their losses to some extent by changing their portfolio.

For the past few quarters, the performance of the manufacturing sector in our country has been poor and a decline has been recorded in industrial production. Due to inflation, consumer expenditure has decreased, as it has reduced the purchasing power of the people. This is also likely to have a negative impact on the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In such a situation, the weakness of the rupee is making the situation even more serious.

It can be said that the benefits of weakening of the rupee are less and the disadvantages are more. Therefore, to take corrective measures in the matter, the Reserve Bank of India will have to make efforts to increase the foreign exchange reserves, which is certainly a challenging task, as India is still dependent on imports to meet many of its needs. At present, the possibility of increasing political and economic instability at the international level cannot be ruled out. There is also a possibility of the Federal Reserve cutting interest rates in the coming months. In such a situation, it is being speculated that by the end of the last quarter of the current financial year, the exchange rate of rupee against the dollar may reach the level of Rs 86 per dollar.

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

India's Q2 Growth Slows to 5.4% ahead of Union Budget 2025-26

NEW DELHI: India's economic growth decelerated to an unexpected 5.4 per cent in the second quarter of FY25, sparking discussions among economists about the need for targeted reforms in the upcoming Union Budget 2025-26.

Key drivers of this slowdown include weak capital formation, subdued consumption, and adverse weather conditions, highlighting vulnerabilities in the nation's economic framework. This downturn has raised concerns, especially as India seeks to maintain its position as a rapidly growing economy amidst global uncertainties. The lacklustre growth underscores the urgent need for measures that not



only stabilise the economy but also reignite the momentum across critical sectors like consumption and manufacturing.

Economists, including Rumki Majumdar, emphasise the importance of prioritizing skill development and employment generation in the forthcoming budget. "We anticipate the government will continue to prioritize and enhance efforts towards skill development and employment generation, maintaining the positive momen-

Major Regulatory Overhaul Planned to Address Economic Slowdown

NEW DELHI: The Indian government is conducting a comprehensive review of regulations across sectors, aiming to streamline rules and boost economic growth amid signs of slowdown, according to multiple sources with direct knowledge of the matter who requested anonymity.

The initiative comes as part of broader efforts to reduce regulatory burden on businesses, with officials specifically examining the impact of existing regulations and the actions of regulatory bodies on entities under their supervision, reported Livemint. Sources indicate that areas deemed over-regulated will be targeted for reform, though specific sectors and regulations under review have not been disclosed. The government



has maintained silence on these deliberations, with queries sent to the finance ministry, NITI Aayog, and the Prime Minister's Office remaining unanswered.

This regulatory overhaul is expected to feature in Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's upcoming budget presentation for fiscal year 2025-26, scheduled for February 1. The timing of these reforms appears crucial, given India's recent economic indicators. GDP growth decelerated to 5.4 per cent in the September

quarter, marking its slowest pace in seven quarters, compared to 8.1 per cent in the same period last year and 6.7 per cent in the previous quarter. Urban consumption has also shown signs of weakening.

The push for deregulation gained additional momentum during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent budget consultation with economists, where improving ease of doing business emerged as a key priority. The government aims to create a more dynamic business environment by reducing compliance requirements, with specific measures likely to be announced in the upcoming budget, according to sources familiar with the discussions.

INTERNATIONAL

Israeli strikes kill 50 in Gaza as Netanyahu OKs delegation to talks in Qatar

War has caused widespread destruction and displaced some 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, many of them multiple times

Israeli airstrikes killed at least 50 people, including several children, across the Gaza Strip, hitting Hamas security officers and an Israeli-declared humanitarian zone.

As the bombardment continued on Thursday and into Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said he had authorised a delegation from the Mossad intelligence agency, the Shin Bet internal security agency and the military to continue negotiations in Qatar toward a ceasefire deal. Israeli media said the delegation would depart on Friday. There was no immediate Hamas comment. The US-led talks have repeatedly stalled during 15 months of war.

The Israeli strike in the sea-side humanitarian zone known



as Muwasi occurred as hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians have been huddling there in damp winter weather. "Everyone was taking shelter in their tents from the cold, and suddenly we found the world turning upside down. Why, and for what?" said Ziyad Abu Jabal, displaced from Gaza City. The early morning strike killed at least 10 people, including three children and two senior Hamas police officers. Israel's military said it targeted a senior police

military. In southern Gaza, the military killed five policemen in eastern Khan Younis. Israeli government spokesman David Mencer said the strike targeted the head of the Hamas internal security force in southern Gaza. "Where did we find him? Where else, but of course hiding in the humanitarian zone in Khan Younis, where Gazans are sheltering from this war," Mencer said. Israel has repeatedly targeted Gaza's police during the war, contributing to a breakdown of law and order that has made it difficult for humanitarian groups to deliver aid. Israel accuses Hamas of hijacking aid for its own purposes.

The Hamas-run government had a police force numbering in the tens of thousands that maintained a high degree of public security before the war, while also violently suppressing dissent. Now officers have largely vanished from the streets in many areas.

True Statesman, Kind, Dedicated Public Servant: Biden Pays Tribute to Dr Manmohan Singh



WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden expressed his heartfelt condolences over the passing of Dr. Manmohan Singh, India's former Prime Minister, describing him as a "true statesman," a "kind and humble person," and a "dedicated public servant." Dr. Singh, one of India's most respected economists and the 14th Prime Minister, passed away on Thursday night at the age of 92 at AIIMS in New Delhi. Widely known as the "Architect of India's Economic Reforms," he led the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government from 2004 to 2014, leaving an indelible

mark on India's economic and diplomatic trajectory. In a statement issued by the White House, President Biden said, "Jill and I join the people of India in grieving the loss of former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh." Biden emphasized that "the unprecedented level of cooperation between the United States and India today would not have been possible without the Prime Minister's strategic vision and political courage." He credited Dr. Singh for pivotal milestones, including the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement and the foundation of the Quad,

a strategic partnership between Indo-Pacific allies.

"He was a true statesman, a dedicated public servant, and above all, a kind and humble person," Biden noted, recounting personal meetings with Dr. Singh during Biden's time as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2008 and later as Vice President.

"During this difficult time, we recommit to the vision to which Prime Minister Singh dedicated his life. Jill and I send our deepest condolences to former First Lady Gursharan Kaur, their three children, and all the people of India," Biden added. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also expressed sorrow, calling Dr. Singh "one of the greatest champions of the US-India strategic partnership." Blinken highlighted Singh's crucial role in advancing the US-India Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement and fostering India's rapid economic growth.

US Court Upholds \$5 Million Verdict against Trump in Sexual Abuse Case



WASHINGTON: A US federal appeals court has upheld a jury's decision ordering President-elect Donald Trump to pay \$5 million for sexually abusing and defaming writer E. Jean Carroll. The verdict, reached after a nine-day civil trial in New York last year, found Trump guilty of sexually abusing Carroll in a Manhattan department store in 1996. The jury awarded Carroll \$2 million for the abuse and an additional \$3 million for defamation after Trump publicly denied her claims. Trump appealed the ruling, arguing that the testimonies of two other women who had accused him of sexual assault should not have been admitted as evidence. However, the Second US Circuit Court of Appeals dismissed his appeal, stating, "Mr. Trump has not demonstrated that the district court erred in any of the challenged rulings. Further, he has not carried his burden to show that any claimed error or combination of claimed errors affected his substantial rights as required to warrant a new trial." In a separate case brought by Carroll, a jury awarded her \$83 million in damages. Trump has also appealed that verdict. Steven Cheung, a spokesperson for Trump, announced plans to appeal the \$5 million judgment. In a statement, Cheung accused Democrats of politically targeting Trump, calling the case a "hoax" and asserting that the "American people re-elected President Trump with an overwhelming mandate."

Pak reduces pension benefits of civil, armed forces personnel



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan government has drastically reduced pension benefits of retired civil and armed forces personnel to reduce a growing pension bill which has already swelled over Rupee One trillion. The Pakistan government has drastically reduced pension benefits of retired civil and armed forces personnel to reduce a growing pension bill which has already swelled over Rs 1 trillion. The Ministry of Finance on Wednesday issued three separate notifications to discontinue multiple pensions, reducing both the first home take pension and also lowering the base for determining future increases in pensions. After debt servicing, defence and development, the pension is the fourth largest expenditure in the budget, the paper said. According to the Ministry of Finance's notification, on the recommendations of the Pay and Pension Commission of 2020, "it has been decided that henceforth, in an event where a person becomes entitled to more than one pension, such person shall only be authorised to opt to draw one of the pensions".

Israel to Send Delegation to Qatar for Gaza Ceasefire Talks: Netanyahu

JERUSALEM: Israel announced that it will send a delegation of senior security officials to Qatar next week to discuss a Gaza ceasefire deal. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu confirmed in a statement that "a delegation of professional officials from the Mossad, Shin Bet, and the IDF (Israel Defense Forces)" will travel to Doha to continue the negotiations. Xinhua news agency reported.



Earlier this week, the Israeli state-owned Kan TV reported that Hamas had proposed a one-week ceasefire, during which it would locate the whereabouts of hostages still held in Gaza and provide a list of those who could be released. Israel has not officially commented on the proposal. The talks, mediated by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States, have been ongoing for more than a year. Earlier on Wednesday Israeli Defence Minister Israel

fail to permit the release of Israeli hostages, the group would face "blows of an intensity not seen in Gaza for a long time." He emphasised that Israel's military would "escalate and intensify" its efforts against militant strongholds in Gaza until the hostages are freed and Hamas is "eliminated."

Hamas seeks to prolong the truce, while Israel insists on the right to resume military action if it perceives a security threat. Another point of contention is Hamas's demand for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, which Israel opposes, asserting the need for a continued military presence to maintain security control.

New Orleans Attacker Linked to ISIS Influence, Investigators Probe Las Vegas Cybertruck Explosion



WASHINGTON: Authorities are investigating the New Orleans New Year's Eve attack that claimed 15 lives, suspecting ISIS influence. Possible connections to a Las Vegas explosion involving a Tesla Cybertruck outside a Trump Organization property are also under scrutiny.

Elon Musk, Tesla CEO and ally of former President Donald Trump, suggested a possible link. "Appears likely to be an act of terrorism. Both this Cybertruck and the F-150 suicide bomb in New Orleans were rented from Turo, possibly linking the incidents," Musk said in a post on X (formerly Twitter).

Details of the New Orleans Attack

The attacker, identified by the FBI as Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old US citizen from Texas, had reportedly posted videos on social media expressing his allegiance to ISIS just hours before plunging into crowds of New Year's Eve revelers in a popular area. An ISIS flag was found in the vehicle used in the attack, prompting FBI investigations into potential affiliations with terrorist organizations.

Las Vegas Tesla Explosion

The same night, a Tesla Cybertruck exploded outside a Trump Hotel in Las Vegas, injuring several people. The FBI and intelligence agencies are investigating whether this incident is connected to the New Orleans attack.

Presidential Address

President Joe Biden, addressing the nation from Camp David, stated, "This situation is fluid, and the investigation is in its preliminary stage. I have directed my team to ensure every resource is made available to federal, state, and local law enforcement to complete the investigation swiftly." Biden confirmed that authorities are exploring all angles to determine if there is a coordinated terror plot.

Rising Death Toll

The death toll from the New Orleans attack has risen to 15, with dozens injured. The attacker's motives and any connections to broader terrorist networks are under active investigation.

World Leaders Pay Tribute to Former US President Jimmy Carter



WASHINGTON: Former US President Jimmy Carter, who passed away at the age of 100, was remembered by world leaders and politicians for his lifelong dedication to peace, humanitarian efforts, and leadership. Carter, who brokered the historic Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, was also awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his post-presidential humanitarian work.

Vietnam's birth rate hits record low in 2024

HANOI: Vietnam's birth rate hit a record low in 2024 with the total fertility rate dropping to just 1.91 children per woman, marking the third consecutive year below replacement level.



The decline in birth rates has been steady over the past few years: From 2.11 children per woman in 2021 to 2.01 in 2022, and further down to 1.96 in 2023. Xinhua news agency reported quoting the Vietnam News Agency that cited the Vietnam Population Authority under the Ministry of Health on Monday.

According to Pham Vu Hoang, deputy director of the authority, Vietnam's population could begin to shrink after 2054 if the low fertility rate persists.

Projections indicate a potential annual population decline of 0.04 per cent between 2054 and 2059 and 0.18 per cent between 2064 and 2069, equating to an average loss of 200,000 people per year. By contrast, maintaining the replacement-level birthrate allows a slight annual growth of 0.17 per cent, adding approximately 200,000 people per year, he said. The Ministry of Health is drafting the Population Law which is expected to be submitted to the National Assembly in 2025.

The draft law proposes measures to maintain the 2.1 replacement fertility level including abolishing penalties for having a third child,

encouraging women to get married before the age of 30 and have two children before the age of 35. The Southeast Asian country began the population golden period in 2007 after formally reaching the replacement fertility in 2006.

Priorities include enhancing public awareness about family planning and gender equality, encouraging families to have two children and invest in raising healthy, educated, and well-rounded children, and integrating population targets into provincial resolutions and plans. Deputy Minister Huong also called for reinforcing the organisational framework of population departments across provinces and cities to improve efficiency in addressing demographic challenges.

NEW YEAR 2025 Shadow of New Orleans Massacre & Las Vegas Explosion to Haunt Trump's Inauguration



GOPAL MISRA Almost two weeks before the inauguration of Donald Trump's second term in the Whitehouse, the two explosions; the detonation of a cybertruck in front of the Trump's hotel in Las Vegas and the massacre of 15 people, just before the dawn of the New Year, has caused worldwide concerns.

found an ISIS flag in the attack on the truck. It had led to the killing of 15 persons on the spot; more than 30 people had suffered serious wounds. The authorities do not rule out more deaths in coming days.

According to the FBI, a driver, later identified as Shamsuddin Jabbar, behind the wheel of a pick-up truck rammed New Year's revelers celebrating in the city's Canal and Bourbon streets at around 3:15 a.m. After stopping the vehicle, Jabbar emerged from the truck and opened fire on the police officers responding to his attack. The officers, however, succeeded in neutralizing the terrorist.

The ISIS and Syrian Crisis

Later, the FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Alethea Duncan told journalists that the possibility of more accomplices in this crime cannot be ruled out. According to the federal agency, "Jabbar is unlikely to be the only person involved in the attack".

In a bid to obtain more details about the terrorists active in the region, Duncan has asked the public to contact his office, if they could get any information about him and also if other



suspects or conspirators could be traced. Earlier, he had asserted that "We do not believe that Jabbar was solely responsible". Meanwhile, the police have initiated thorough enquiry about his known associates for any possible lead.

They hope to succeed in tracing the conspirators within next 72 hours. The public may send a picture or any detail regarding them.

Mystery of the Las Vegas Explosion

On January one, the explosion in a Tesla Cybertruck in front of the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas is yet to be explained. In this tragedy, one person died on the spot and seven others having injuries, and a few of them with grievous injuries, were rushed to the hospital for treatment. The incident had taken place in

vehicle itself," Musk wrote in a post that "All vehicle telemetry was positive at the time of the explosion."

Gas canisters and large fireworks mortars were found in the vehicle, according to the authorities confirmed. The sheriff has also noted that the walls of the electric vehicle remained fully intact during the explosion and that damage to the surrounding area was limited because of "the fact that this was a Cyber-truck." Further, the front glass doors of the Trump hotel "were not even broken," according to the authorities. They stated that the vehicle was rented in Colorado, arrived in Las Vegas at 7:30 a.m., and "went up and down" Las Vegas Boulevard before finally parking at the Trump Hotel. It was parked for 15-20 seconds before it exploded.

Meanwhile, the authorities have already identified the person who had rented the Cyber-truck and declined to release details. It is also claimed that the concerned authorities were already alert when the fiery explosion happened. Only a few hours before the explosion, the iconic French Quarter of New Orleans had faced the terrorist attack.

Deep State and ISIS

The recent cooperation between the American deep state with the Islamists in Syria to Bangladesh could have emboldened the al-Qaeda and the ISIS, but much details are being awaited. Meanwhile, Musk has speculated that the Las Vegas incident was perhaps "linked in some way" to the New Orleans attack, noting that both the vehicles were borrowed from rental car company Turo, but the authorities have not connected the two incidents.

The close proximity of the deep state with Islamists during the outgoing Biden Administration is no more a secret. In 2024, an elected prime minister in Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, was evicted by the army and the Islamists having the blessings of the Whitehouse.

In New Delhi, the knowledgeable sources are concerned whether the Biden supporters in the Deep State i.e. CIA would cooperate with the new administration.

Australia Records Second-Hottest Year in 2024, Authorities Warn of Extreme Fire Danger



SYDNEY: Australia experienced its second-hottest year on record in 2024, with national temperatures soaring to levels not seen since 2019, according to the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM).

Record-Breaking Temperatures Data from the BoM reveals that the national mean temperature in 2024 was 1.46°C above the 1961-1990 baseline average, making it the second-hottest year since records began in 1910.

Minimum temperatures hit an all-time high, with overnight lows averaging 1.43°C above baseline, surpassing the previous record from 1998.

The mean maximum temperature was 1.48°C above the baseline, ranking as the fourth-highest figure after 2019, 2013, and 2018.

Monthly Variations : August witnessed the most significant temperature spike, with a mean temperature 3.03°C above average.

October followed closely at 2.51°C higher. Only April re-

corded a mean temperature below the long-term average.

Perth's Record Year Perth, Western Australia's capital, recorded its hottest year on record in 2024: Mean temperatures exceeded 20°C for the first time : Average maximum temperatures surpassed 26°C, a first in recorded history.

Fire Danger Warnings : Australian authorities have issued warnings of Extreme Fire Danger, marking the worst conditions since the Black Summer of 2019-2020. Extreme Fire Danger implies rapid fire spread and heightened risk to communities and fire crews.

Communities across Australia are bracing for days of severe bushfire danger, with emergency services ramping up preparations.

Global Implications : The 2024 heatwave reflects broader global warming trends, as Australia grapples with rising temperatures and their severe consequences.

Music-lovers in for a 'Harmonium' musical treat

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

The Harmonium has produced legendary melodies at the hands of music stalwarts in India over the ages and music-lovers are presently in for a treat as the Haribhau Vishwanath Group of Musical Industries (HVGMI) is organizing its centenary celebration on January 5, 2025 in a programme featuring a symphony of instrumental performances.

The event will feature a mesmerizing recital by Santoor Maestro Rahul Sharma with Ojas Adhiya on tabla, Harmonium jugalbandhi by Aditya Oke and Satyajit Prabhu with Anil Karanjvkar (dholki) and Prasad Pathye (tabla), and Dholki jugalbandhi by renowned duo Nilesh Parab and Krishna Shale.

"Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma performed at HVGMI's 75th anniversary, and now his son Rahul Sharma will be performing



at the centenary celebrations," said Dinesh Diwane of HVGMI told media.

"The harmonium market has been witnessing increasing exports over the years with music-lovers globally seeking a genuine instrument. However, the internet is drawing Indian +fly-by-night+ operators supplying bad pieces to

the international web-order market and thus giving Indian manufacturers a bad name," Dinesh Diwane told this correspondent recently.

"People from USA, Holland, Paris, Germany and even African countries have been ordering the harmonium, while Japanese buyers have been coming personally to India to buy custom-made ones," he said while noting that the centenary celebrations would also create awareness about the 'fake-makers' and the genuine manufacturers.

Meanwhile, the harmonium topic evoked cherished memories from Padma Diwane of HVGMI. "Bharat Ratna Pandit Bhimsen Joshi's random visits from Pune to the HVGMI's then lone Dadar store in Bombay transformed it into a gathering place for the musical artistes community, as he used to phone his friends to meet him there."

Punjabi singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh meets PM Modi



NEW DELHI: Punjabi singer-actor Diljit Dosanjh on Wednesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the first time and termed the meeting a fantastic start to 2025. The singer, who had re-

cently concluded his month-long pan-India Dil-Luminati tour, took to social media and posted glimpses of his meeting with the PM.

"A fantastic start to 2025. A memorable meeting with PM

@narendramodi ji. We talked about a lot of things, including music of course!," Dosanjh wrote on X and shared some pictures where he is seen wearing a black suit with a black turban.

"A fantastic start to 2025. A memorable meeting with PM @narendramodi ji. We talked about a lot of things, including music of course!"

The PM also responded to Dosanjh's X post and wrote, "A great interaction with Diljit Dosanjh! He's truly multifaceted, blending talent and tradition. We connected over music, culture and more..."

In the video shared by Diljit Dosanjh, he is seen entering a room with a bouquet of flowers, which he then hands over to the Prime Minister Modi.

Balancing AI and Human-Centric Skills for Talent Management at Bata India



NEW DELHI: Across industries, AI is redefining traditional job roles, making hybrid skills – a blend of technical proficiency and human-centric capabilities – more critical than ever. As automation takes on routine tasks, the roles of today demand adaptability, emotional intelligence, and a deeper understanding of how to work alongside AI. While AI enhances efficiency, it is essential to ensure that technology-driven processes do not erode creativity, empathy, and human connection – the very qualities that make the people and culture of an organisation unique.

At Bata India, we are navigating this transformation with a focus on mind-set change, encouraging employees to embrace AI as a tool and partner in driving excellence. AI is now embedded throughout the employee journey – from the interview stage where AI matches key skills in resumes with the job requirement, to on-boarding, performance feedback, and even post-exit processes. AI-driven tools like our pulse bot provides real-time insights into employee experience, helping us identify talent needs. However, we believe that while AI elevates employee experience and efficiency, human interaction remains equally vital to maintain trust, creativity, and engagement. Our upskilling initiatives emphasize both understanding AI applications while nurturing essential human qualities such as emotional sensitivity, critical thinking, and adaptability.

Looking ahead to 2025, AI's role in HR will be pivotal in transforming how training and talent management are approached. AI will be integral in mapping an employee's entire training journey, curating personalized development programs based on real-time feedback.

Diljit Dosanjh Dedicates His Guwahati Concert to Manmohan Singh

MUMBAI: Punjabi superstar Diljit Dosanjh, who has been scooping adulation across the world courtesy his live shows, dedicated his recent show in Guwahati to the former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

The actor-singer took to his Instagram on Sunday, and shared a video from his show. In the video, Diljit paid a moving tribute to the former PM, and said that MMS was a man of grace, who always conducted himself in a sophisticated manner, and never answered anyone in an uncivilised manner.

He said, "Today's concert is dedicated to former late Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. He led a very simple life. He never used to answer back or talk ill which is quite impossible in a profession like politics". He then went on to say a shayari once used by MMS, as he said, "Hazaroo'n jawabo'n se meri khamoshi acchi, na jane kitne sawalo ki aabru dhak leti hai". The superstar urged



the youth including himself to learn such etiquettes from him.

He wrote in the caption, "Today's Concert is dedicated to Dr. Manmohan Singh Ji. DIL-LUMINATI TOUR Year 24".

MMS passed away on December 26 after prolonged illness. Several members of the film fraternity condoled his demise, and thanked him for his service to the nation and materialising several key moments in modern India.

Earlier, Diljit addressed the "conspiracy" that has been alleged against him over the spelling of the In-



dian state of Punjab. The actor-singer took to his X, formerly Twitter, and spoke about the same.

He penned a long note in which he also spoke about how English is a very tricky language, and can particularly cause trouble to those whose first language is not English.

He wrote, "Punjabi. If I mistakenly didn't put up India's flag after writing 'Panjab' in a tweet then it becomes a conspiracy. In a tweet from Bengaluru, I forgot to mention the Indian flag after writing 'Panjab', it became a conspiracy".

He further mentioned, "If you write 'Panjab' instead of 'Punjab', it will remain 'Panjab'. Panj Aab – 5 Rivers. Bravo, those who create conspiracy around the usage in a language of the Englishmen. You know what, I will write 'Panjab'. How many times do we prove that we LOVE INDIA. Bring something new, or is creating conspiracy is what you get paid for? #Vehley".

The superstar has seen a meteoric rise in the last couple of years with the box-office success of his films in Hindi and Punjabi cinema. The singer-actor also performed at the Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival in April 2023 making him the first Indian performer to achieve the feat. He was followed by fellow Punjabi artiste A. P. Dhillon at Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival in April 2024.

Meanwhile, Diljit is set to conclude the India leg of Dil-Luminati tour in Ludhiana.

KKFI Unveils Spectacular Trophy, Mascots Tejas & Tara for Inaugural Kho Kho World Cup 2025

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Kho Kho Federation of India (KKFI) marked a historic moment today unveiling the prestigious trophies for the first-ever Kho Kho World Cup, scheduled for January 13-19, 2025. Under the aegis of the Sports Authority of India (SAI), the tournament will showcase 21 men's and 20 women's teams from 24 countries across six continents at the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in New Delhi.

The World Cup will feature two magnificent trophies – a blue trophy for the men's championship and a green trophy for the women's event. Both trophies embody the dynamic spirit of Kho Kho through their contemporary design, featuring flowing curves and golden figures. The blue trophy symbolizes trust, determination, and universal appeal, while the green trophy represents growth and vitality. Both pieces feature intricate crystal detailing that symbolizes the precision and excellence demanded at the highest level of competition.

The Federation also proudly introduced 'Tejas' and 'Tara,' a dynamic duo of gazelles serving as the official mascots for the tournament. These mascots embody the sport's core attributes of speed, agility, and teamwork. Tejas, symbolizing brilliance



and energy, and Tara, representing guidance and aspiration, are depicted in vibrant blue and orange sporting attire adorned with traditional Indian motifs, celebrating both the sport's heritage and its modern appeal.

The KKFI has assembled an impressive roster of partners to ensure the tournament's success. EaseMyTrip joins as the execution partner, managing travel logistics for all participants. The broadcast reach will be maximised through Star Sports Network and Doordarshan as TV broadcast partners, while Disney+ Hotstar will serve as the OTT broadcast partner. GMR Sports has come on board as the Silver Sponsor, while District by Zomato will handle ticketing services through their platform.

Shiv Naresh will outfit the participants as the official kitting partner. The ceremonial dress partners include Blackberry and Tata Taneira. Meanwhile,

adding a cultural dimension, Nayan Naveli Gallery joins as the contemporary art partner. The tournament's strategic framework will be supported by Grant Thornton as the strategic sports development partner, while Deloitte will serve as the knowledge partner, bringing their expertise in analytics and operational efficiency.

"We are very grateful to all our stakeholders who will be supporting the inaugural edition of the Kho Kho World Cup 2025. The World Cup will be live streamed free on Disney+ Hotstar and broadcast for free on DD Sports as well, in what is a massive boost to a sport indigenous to India. This World Cup is the first step towards taking the sport to the Olympics, and with the help of all our partners, we hope to show the world the beauty of Kho Kho. Our mascots Tejas and Tara symbolise the sport's core attributes of speed, agility, and teamwork."

Kamal Taori, now Kamalanand, Faces the Wrath of the Vested Interests

GOPAL MISRA

Kamal Taori, who has been a weather-beaten civil servant, is now in his new avatar as Swami Kamalanand, perhaps, to reassert his agenda for transforming present day agriculture into an eco-friendly mode.

Taori's decision to become an ascetic could be an attempt to project that his agenda is not for any material or political profit, but to promote the cause of chemical-free cultivation. War, he may now be a lone warrior opposing the imports of chemical fertilizers and insecticides. He is now betraying the rare courage by his refusal to be cowed down by the formidable lobby of this business, where stakes are in billions of the US dollars.

During his years in the service, he was involved in the promotion of the Khadi business in the UP Government and later as the chief executive of the Khadi and Village Industries Commission in Mumbai. He is remembered for promoting handmade paper.

Being an ardent follower of Mahatma Gandhi, during his tenure in the coveted IAS, as well as after being superannuation as a Secretary to the Union Government, he continued in his agenda of promoting Gandhi ji's eco-friendly economic model of the rural industries and agriculture.

The high point of his career, perhaps, was his brief stay in the Planning Commission, where his proposal for inducting information technology in rural development was approved by the then Deputy Chairman of the Commission, K.C. Pant, a postgraduate in Physics and one of the enlightened political leaders in India.

Angers Powers that Be

It is not surprising that Swami Kamalanand's support for rural industries and farmers' empowerment programme, has invoked wrath among the international producers of chemical



fertilizers as well as the local players, engaged as the distributors of this huge business having the patronage of the political bosses. The successive governments have successfully unleashed the subsidy modals; all this being promoted for befooling the farmers and the consumers.

It is estimated that India has imported chemical fertilizers from Russia (2.73 USD Billion), Saudi Arabia (2.46 B), China (2.18 B), Morocco (1.74 B) and Oman (1.26B) in 2024. Apart from these imports, and in spite of much noise regarding the use of the biological fertilizers, the Modi Government had imported 31 millions tonnes of Urea at a whopping cost of Rs. 38,000 crores last year. It may be noted that the imports could meet only 20 percent of the domestic requirement. In other words, the consumption of Urea is much larger than is being talked about.

Interestingly, he has continued his agenda of promoting local and eco-friendly industries even after his superannuation. During his long innings in the service and also later in the post retirement years, he has continued his advocacy in this sector with zeal.

Noticing Neo-colonial Agenda

For him, his intense campaigning and advocacy of the ingenious cows, Indian seeds and the promotion of Khadi has been a part of the anti-colonialism well seeded in the Gandhian perception of the world. According to some independent studies in the 21st century, the world economy is likely to be controlled and managed by a few corporations. Even in the contemporary

past, his colleagues continue to retain even today.

It has never been confirmed, but it is believed that the continuation of the civil services established during the colonial era was one of the conditions of the transfer of power in 1947 to the Indian hands. It had also included the partition of India on communal lines.

Interestingly, Kamal Taori, who was born in a middle class family at Wardha in Maharashtra, has always been known for thinking different from his peers. Much to the opposition of his family, he enrolled himself as a short-service commission officer to fight for democracy during the 1971 Bangladesh war. It must have been surprising that a youth from a prosperous business family, also a devout Gandhian, decided to wear the uniform.

Later, when the war was over, he qualified in the IAS, and got UP cadre. Later, he was shifted to the Uttarakhand cadre.

Health Hazard

Another reason for opposing the unrestricted use of the fertilizers such as Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium is due to the growing incidences of cancer in the states like Punjab, Haryana and Western UP. These regions are known for achieving green revolution, but the leaders of the so-called green revolution are facing multiple health hazards including cancer, birth defects and infection in lungs, liver, kidney and even neurological challenges.

It is difficult to foresee any substantial success in discouraging the use of chemicals in the agricultural sector, but we may soon be witnessing intense political circus offering subsidies to the hapless farmers.

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

"From Crime Buster to Spiritual Crusader: Suhaib Ilyasi Finds Purpose in the Bhagavad Gita"

GULSHAN KUMAR
Yamuna Nagar

Suhaib Ilyasi, once the iconic face of India's first crime reality show India's Most Wanted, has embarked on a remarkable new journey, exchanging the world of high-stakes crime busting for the profound teachings of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. This transformation has captivated the attention of millions, rekindling the admiration of his ardent fans.

A Life Once Lived in the Limelight

For those aged above 36 in India, Suhaib Ilyasi needs no introduction. Known for his intense and gripping storytelling, Ilyasi's groundbreaking show, India's Most Wanted, aired every Thursday on Zee TV, dominating the airwaves and the hearts of millions. The show helped apprehend 135 wanted criminals, making him a household name. Streets would empty during his broadcasts, much like during the epic television adaptations of Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Yet, fame often comes with its challenges. In 2000, Ilyasi's life took a tragic turn when his wife's suicide led to his implication in a dowry-related case. After a prolonged legal battle, he was acquitted in 2019, emerging with a renewed purpose and perspective. During his incarceration, Ilyasi discovered the transformative power of the Bhagavad Gita—a sacred Hindu scripture that would redefine his life's mission.



A Miraculous Awakening

In his recent public addresses, Ilyasi has passionately described how the Gita changed his life. In his own words: "Shrimad Bhagavad Gita is a miraculous book. It is a celestial scripture that has worked wonders in my life. Today, I stand before you to share the extraordinary power of your very own book—its mystical energy that can transform lives overnight."

From addressing financial hardships to restoring inner peace, Ilyasi emphasizes that the Gita holds the answers to life's deepest challenges. He recounts: "If you are unwell, the Gita's magical power can heal you. If you are struggling financially, it can fill your pockets and uplift your circumstances. If you feel aimless or despondent, the Gita's divine wisdom can bring purpose and joy to your life. It is not just a book; it is a life-changing force."

A New Role as an Author and Advocate

Inspired by his spiritual jour-

ney, Ilyasi authored a book titled Shrimad Bhagavad Gita: Jeene Ki Raah (The Path to Living). The book was launched last year by Indresh Kumar, senior RSS functionary and convenor of the Rashtriya Muslim Manch, in New Delhi. The work has also received the endorsement of RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat, who applauded Ilyasi's efforts to bridge spiritual teachings with modern life.

Lessons for Modern Times

Drawing from the Gita's lessons, Ilyasi underscores the importance of self-realization and authentic living. He reflects: "The Gita teaches us to look beyond our social roles and material possessions. It asks us to connect with our inner selves to find lasting peace and fulfillment. Like Arjuna, who learns his true identity beyond being a warrior, we too must seek our higher purpose, guided by dharma and authenticity."

A Legacy Reimagined

With his newfound spiritual mission, Suhaib Ilyasi has emerged as a beacon of hope and transformation. Once celebrated as a fearless crime fighter, he now dedicates his life to unveiling the divine mysteries of the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita. His speeches and writings resonate with people across faiths, serving as a testament to the universal power of this ancient scripture.

Suhaib Ilyasi's journey from television celebrity to Gita learner is not just a tale of redemption but an inspiring narrative of how one can turn life's adversities into a profound purpose. As he aptly puts it, "My life's mission now is to share the miracles of the Gita with the world, and in doing so, I have found unparalleled happiness."