

REGION

2

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY

5

INTERNATIONAL

8



CORRUPTS WILL NOT BE SPARED IN HARYANA: CHIEF MINISTER NAIB SINGH SAINI

CM expresses shock over tragic road mishap on Ferozepur-Fazilka road



CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Monday expressed deep shock and anguish over tragic road accident on Ferozepur-Fazilka road in which 11 people were killed and 15 were injured.

Expressing profound grief and sorrow over this disastrous accident, the Chief Minister shared his heartfelt sympathies with the members of the bereaved families and prayed to the Almighty to give them courage to bear this irreparable loss in the hour of crisis and grant peace to the departed souls. Meanwhile, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that he was in constant touch with the administration and was regularly monitoring the situation. The Chief Minister said that he had already directed district administration to provide free treatment to all the injured adding he wished them a speedy recovery.

Sonia Gandhi respects President, remarks twisted by media: Priyanka



NEW DELHI: Amid a row over former Congress president Sonia Gandhi's reaction on President Droupadi Murmu's address, party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday said her mother has the utmost respect for the President and that it is very unfortunate that her remarks have been "twisted by the media".

She also hit out at the BJP's demand for an apology over the issue, saying it should first apologise for "ruining the country".

"My mother is a 78-year-old lady. She simply said that 'the President must have been tired reading such a long speech, poor thing'. She fully respects, in fact she has the utmost respect for her (the President). It is very unfortunate that this kind of a thing is twisted by the media," Priyanka told reporters here. "They are both respected people, they are older than us, they are at a certain age now and it is pretty clear that she (Sonia Gandhi) means no disrespect," the Congress MP said while exiting the Parliament House complex after attending a committee meeting.

Union Budget set to lay down blueprint of PM Modi-led reform journey ahead

NEW DELHI: The Union Budget 2025-26 has higher significance than an annual budget, as it will be the first full-year budget of the NDA's new term and the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government has utilised the first full-year budget as a platform for signalling structural, strategic policy intent and laying down a blueprint of its journey ahead, rather than only attempting to balance tactical fiscal trade-offs, a report showed on Friday.

The NDA government, over the past decade, has pivoted from the low-hanging fruit of a 'consumption push' to embracing a supply-side reform strategy.

It orchestrated landmark reforms, which included GST, digitisation, financial inclusion, affordable housing and sweeping social reform.

The government's emphasis on infrastructure-led investments has set a strong foundation for economic resilience and growth, said Mo-



tilal Oswal Financial Services in its note. "Nominal GDP posted a 10 per cent CAGR (FY14-FY24), while inflation moderated, creating a stable macroeconomic environment. "These reforms translated into tangible market outcomes, as the market cap of the listed universe surged at a 15 per cent CAGR to Rs 302 trillion by January 2025 from Rs 80 trillion in July 2014. "Aggregate PAT followed suit, expanding at a 12 per

cent CAGR (FY14-FY24), to Rs 12.5 trillion from Rs 3.9 trillion," the note read.

In the Union Budget 2025-26, any allocation above Rs 11 trillion for Capex, backed by convincing commentary, could positively surprise the market.

"Also, after a series of promises for freebies across multiple state elections, market participants are concerned that Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman may tilt more towards easy handouts," said the

report. Given the consumption trends and soft corporate commentary, the market expects some relief measures for consumption growth (especially urban).

"We believe that the government will focus more on improving household income growth through slab adjustments. Further, indirect taxes on items deemed non-essential consumption may be raised to fund forbearance on items of middle-class consumption," the report mentioned.

Unlike the past few years, the budget could go easy on LTCG/STCG from equity markets. FM Sitharaman may use some leeway on fiscal, given the macro backdrop.

"It will not be too surprising if the FM considers a modest countercyclical fiscal overstretch. FY25 fiscal deficit is likely to be lower at 4.8 per cent vs. the budgeted 4.9 per cent. This slack may also help to provide some headroom for the FY26 Union Budget," said the report.

CRACKING SAIF ALI KHAN'S CASE IN A JIFFY!



Govt committed to welfare of poor, middle class says President Murmu in Parliament

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu in her address to the joint sitting of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha on Friday highlighted the government's various schemes and goals. She said the government was committed to fulfilling the welfare of the poor and the dreams of the middle class and also was aiming to make India a global innovation powerhouse.

President Murmu said, "Our aim is to make India a global innovation powerhouse...In the area of artificial intelligence, India's AI Mission has been started." Addressing the joint session, President Murmu said, "Today our youth is bringing glory to the country in every field from startups to sports to space...India is showing the way to the world in the fields of Artificial Intelligence and the adoption of technology."

She said it is a matter of great pride for the Parliament that today women in large numbers are flying fighter aircraft, joining police and also leading corporates in the country. "Our daughters are making



the country proud by winning Olympic medals...My government believes in women-led development in the country... The government aims to have three crore Lakhpati didis..."

The President said that the government is committed to fulfilling the dream of the middle class of having their own house.

She offered condolences over the stampede incident at the ongoing Maha Kumbh in Uttar Pradesh's Prayagraj that killed at least 30 people on Wednesday.

"The historic Maha Kumbh is going on. It is a festival of our

cultural traditions and social awakening. Crores of devotees from India and the world have taken a holy dip in Prayagraj. I express my condolences on the accident that occurred on Mau-ni Amavasya and pray for the speedy recovery of the injured."

The President also paid tribute to the former prime minister, Manmohan Singh, who passed away on December 26 last year.

Addressing the joint sitting of Parliament, President Murmu also extended greetings on the occasion of the country celebrating 75 years of adopting the Constitution.

PM Modi expresses grief on Washington DC Plane Collision

'Deeply Saddened, We Stand in Solidarity with US'

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday expressed grief over the loss of lives in the Washington DC mid-air plane-helicopter collision and said that India stands in solidarity with the people of the US.

PM Modi in his post on X wrote that he was deeply saddened by the loss in the collision. "Deeply saddened by loss of lives in the tragic collision in Washington DC. Our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims. We stand in solidarity with the people of the United States," the PM said. Earlier, President Donald Trump said there were no survivors in the collision in the mid-air collision between an American Airlines regional jet and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter during a nighttime training exercise.

The incident occurred at approximately 9.00 p.m. (0200 GMT) on Wednesday as the aircraft was making its final approach to Washington's Reagan National Airport following its



departure from Wichita, Kansas. Less than 30 seconds before the collision, an air traffic controller at Reagan National Airport issued a call to the military helicopter: "PAT25, do you have the CRJ in sight?" Moments later, another directive was given: "PAT 25 pass behind the CRJ." Seconds later, the two aircraft collided. A pilot observing the incident made an urgent call over the radio: "Tower, did you see that?" Authorities launched a large-scale search and rescue operation immediately following the crash. Emergency crews, consisting of more than 300 personnel, were deployed to the scene.

mented during the Obama and Biden administrations for compromising air safety standards. This statement came after it was found that there were no survivors in the devastating mid-air collision between an American Airlines passenger jet and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter. A US passenger jet carrying 64 people crashed into the Potomac River after a mid-air collision with a US Army Black Hawk helicopter during a nighttime training exercise.

Political parties express sorrow over Maha Kumbh tragedy; Kharge slams 'half-baked' arrangements

NEW DELHI: Following the tragic stampede at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj in the wee hours of Wednesday, which left several people critically injured and caused distress among devotees, Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge expressed sorrow over the tragedy and blamed the arrangements, calling them "half-baked".

Congress chief Kharge expressed his sorrow over the tragedy in a post on X, writing, "During the Maha Kumbh, the news of the stampede on the banks of Tirthraj Sangam

in which several people lost their lives and many others got injured is extremely heart-rending. Our deepest condolences to the families of the devotees and we wish for the speedy recovery of the injured."

Kharge also criticised the arrangements, adding, "Half-baked arrangements, VIP movement, paying more attention to self-promotion than management and mismanagement are responsible for this. Despite spending thousands of crores of rupees, such arrangements are condemnable." Kharge urged both the



Centre and the Uttar Pradesh governments to improve the arrangements, stating, "There are still many important royal baths left, so the Central and state governments should

wake up now and improve the arrangements so that such unpleasant incidents do not happen in future."

He further called for expanded provisions for accom-

Indian Bank Targets 95 per cent Digital Transactions and MSME Loan Growth

CHENNAI: Indian Bank, the public sector lender based in Chennai, has unveiled its roadmap for the next three years, emphasising stable growth across all key performance indicators.

The bank's vision revolves around accelerating digital adoption and increasing its support for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

In his first exclusive media interaction since taking over as MD and CEO on January 16, 2025, Binod Kumar shared insights into the bank's forward-looking strategy.

"We've been performing well, which shows our current strategy is working," Kumar said, adding that the bank would focus on areas with potential for further growth while maintaining stability.

Digital transformation is a central pillar of the bank's plan, with a focus on increasing digital adoption in its

AAP's Counter to Ravneet Bittu's Statement: BJP is Constantly Trying to Defame Punjabis

CHANDIGARH: The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) hit back at the statement made by Union Minister and BJP leader Ravneet Bittu regarding the raid on the residence of Punjab's Chief Minister. AAP MP and senior

spokesperson Malvinder Singh Kang criticized the incident, stating that the BJP is continuously trying to defame Punjabis as part of its larger conspiracy.

Malvinder Kang said that ever since the Delhi elections were announced, the BJP has been targeting Punjabis. "Sometimes they have problems with vehicles from Punjab, and at other times, they target Sikhs and people from Punjab. The statements of BJP leaders reflect their hatred towards Punjabis," Kang said.

Indian Bank's digital channels have already processed over Rs 2 lakh crore in transactions in the past few years, with a notable 70 per cent adoption rate in the RAM sector—retail, agriculture, and MSME.

Kila raipur rural olympics kicks off with a bang



LUDHIANA: The Kila Raipur Rural Olympics 2025, one of Punjab's premier sporting events, got off to an exciting start on Friday with Tourism and Cultural Affairs Minister Tarunpreet Singh Sond inaugurated the games in the local stadium.

In his address, Tarunpreet Singh Sond emphasized that the state government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, is dedicated to elevating sports in Punjab to ensure it becomes a leader in the nation. He noted that the government has been making significant efforts to foster a sports-friendly environment in the state, prioritizing the restoration of Punjab's previous sports glory.

Minister Sond also announced that the Punjab government has kept a substantial budget of Rs. 75 lakh for organizing these historic games, which will significantly benefit

sports and athletes in the state. He expressed optimism that the event will contribute positively to establishing a sports culture throughout Punjab, uncovering talent from every corner of the state. Additionally, he mentioned that the government has also increased cash awards for athletes securing medals at the Olympics and other international competitions.

Additionally, the annual "Kheda Watan Punjab Diyan" event has garnered an overwhelming response from the youth. The Minister announced that the state government will soon resume bullock cart races at the famous rural Olympics. He mentioned that these races have been a very popular sport and a major attraction at the games. The government is considering issuing a notification regarding this and he has also requested the Chief Minister's support for the same.

ISRO's Historic 100th Rocket Launch: A New Era of Space Ambitions

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has reached a significant milestone with the successful launch of the GSLV-F15 rocket, marking its 100th rocket launch from the Sriharikota spaceport. The mission, which successfully placed the NVS-02 navigation satellite into a geosynchronous transfer orbit, represents a new chapter in India's space exploration journey.

A Journey of Six Generations- Taking nearly 46 years to achieve this feat, ISRO has evolved through six generations of launch vehicles. The journey began in 1979 with the first Satellite Launch Vehicle

(SLV) mission, led by visionary leaders like Dr. Satish Dhawan and Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam. Over the decades, ISRO has developed sophisticated launch vehicles, sending 548 satellites into space, including 433 for international clients. These missions have collectively placed over 120 tonnes of payloads into orbit, underscoring India's growing presence in the global space industry.

Aiming for the Next 100 in Just Five Years- With its legacy firmly established, ISRO has set an ambitious target: achieving the next 100 launches in just five years. This goal is backed by upcoming missions, including the launch of the NISAR satellite on a GSLV rocket and the highly



anticipated Gaganyaan uncrewed mission. Furthermore, ISRO is gearing up for groundbreaking projects such as Chandrayaan-4 and 5, along with a pioneering Mars landing mission.

The Significance of NVS-02-

The NVS-02 satellite, weighing 2,250 kg, is a crucial addition to India's navigation satellite network. It replaces the IRNSS-IE and joins four operational satellites, ensuring the continued functionality and expansion of India's indigenous naviga-

tion system. Notably, NVS-02 carries both an indigenous and a procured atomic clock, enhancing its precision capabilities. ISRO has also secured approvals for three additional navigation satellites, with one expected to be launched in the next five to six months.

The Challenges and Triumph of GSLV-F15- Weighing 420.7 tonnes, the GSLV-F15 rocket successfully completed its mission in 19 minutes, keeping ISRO scientists at the edge of their seats in the mission control complex. The flawless execution of the launch demonstrated ISRO's technical prowess and operational efficiency.

ISRO's Vision for the Future- ISRO Chairman V.

Narayanan emphasized the organization's confidence in achieving its ambitious target of 100 launches in five years. "That is the target, and it is possible," he affirmed. He further highlighted that accelerating activities related to newly approved projects will be a key priority in the coming years.

With an impressive track record, a rapidly expanding portfolio of projects, and an unyielding commitment to innovation, ISRO is poised to redefine India's space exploration capabilities. As the organization embarks on this ambitious journey, it continues to inspire generations and solidify India's position as a global space leader.

Corrupts will not be spared in Haryana: CM Naib Singh Saini

SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Addressing media persons Haryana chief minister Naib Singh Saini said that is no mercy for the corrupts in Haryana, the file of the registry scam that happened during the period spread of epidemic outbreak Corona in the state will be opened again; the list is being prepared for the corrupt employees involved in the registry scams that took place during the Corona period in Haryana, which will now be investigated more deeply. After the list of corrupt Patwaris involved in illegal practices has been prepared, now the complaints against Naib Tehsildars, Tehsildars, Kanungos and Auditors are being investigated. It is also being ascertained whether their names are in the list of those tainted revenue officers who are involved in the registry scam. Preparations are on to reopen the file of the registry scam that



took place during the Corona period in Haryana, after the list of corrupt Patwaris has already been prepared, now the complaints against Naib Tehsildars, Tehsildars, Kanungos and Auditors, who are accused of corruption, are being investigated. Information reveals, the Revenue and Disaster Management Department is also investigating whether their names are in the list of those tainted revenue officers who are involved in the

registry scam. On the report of the Special Investigation Committee constituted to investigate the registry scam that took place during the Corona period, the government had held 232 revenue officers, including kanungos, auditors, registry clerks and patwaris, besides 34 tehsildars and naib tehsildars, found guilty of manipulating the revenue records. After action against patwaris, the government is considering

re-examining the files and other records like CM window, pending complaints, source reports given by Anti Corruption Bureau and other internal vigilance agencies to identify corrupt revenue officials. At the same time, the government's investigation is going on in the matter of the leaked list of 370 corrupt Patwaris. The CID is scrutinizing the inputs received from the districts and there is a possibility that the list issued by the Revenue Department to the DCs of the districts has been leaked from the district headquarters itself.

Along with this, intelligence agencies are also keeping an eye on internet media platforms. Some groups have also been identified in the investigation so far. However, the government has made it clear that the leaked list will not be withdrawn at any cost, it is likely that by next week the DC will prepare his report in this matter and send it to the government.

IMA Haryana decides to suspend treatment in private hospitals under Ayushman Bharat due to outstanding of Rs 400 crore

SATISH HANDA



SATISH HANDA

The Indian Medical Association (IMA), representing nearly 600 private hospitals empaneled under the Ayushman Bharat scheme (PMJAY) in Haryana, has warned of suspending treatment services under the scheme from February 3, 2025 if their dues worth Rs 400 crore are not cleared. As per the reports, there are around 1300 hospitals eligible for the Ayushman Bharat scheme of which 600 are private facilities. The Ayushman Bharat scheme launched by the BJP government in 2018 aims to provide free access to health insurance coverage for low-income earners and of age above 70 in the country.

On Sunday, 26th January, the Indian Medical Association (IMA) in Haryana stated that around 600 private hospitals in the state have decided to stop treating patients under the Ayushman Bharat scheme from February 3rd, 2025 since the private hospitals have Rs 400 crore pending dues from the government under Ayushman Bharat. The IMA's Haryana unit said that the patients at the private hospital relying on the slated government health scheme would hardly benefit

from the scheme as the doctors would not treat them under the said scheme. The IMA's Haryana unit said that this is because the government has not yet cleared the reimbursement of the hospitals worth Rs 400 crores. As per the reports, there are around 1300 hospitals eligible for the Ayushman Bharat scheme of which nearly 600 are private facilities. The Ayushman Bharat scheme launched by the BJP government in 2018 aims to provide free access to health insurance coverage for low-income earners as well as to those of age above 70 as per revised scheme in the country. In the state of Haryana, there are over 1.2 crore people who are registered under the scheme. The association opined that the private hospitals were not able to manage their expenses while treating the patients under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, given no reimbursement from the government.

Dr Mahavir Jain, president of IMA (Haryana) commented on the matter and said that the speed of reimbursement from the government is very sluggish. He demanded that the payment of the hospitals should be released immediately as it is exceedingly difficult for doctors to operate hospitals without funds. Dr Jain said, around Rs 400 crore is pending and these medical bills are already discounted by the hospitals. "How will they survive if they do not receive the bare minimum," he added that the government to date has issued only 15-20% reimbursement of the total bills raised by the hospitals. As per the reports, the hospitals treat the patients at their cost under the slated scheme and then raise the payment to the government through online portals. As per the doctors, the government has only issued 15% of the total bills raised. "It is extremely unfortunate that even after 15 days, the members have not received any significant amount and the funds received have 'substantial unwarranted deductions'," Dhirendar K Soni, secretary of IMA-Haryana said several hospitals in Gurugram, including Park Hospital, Centre for Sight, Pushpanjali Hospital, and Kamla Hospital, are among those affected by the decision. He said the Ayushman Bharat scheme was launched by the Narendra Modi-led government in the year 2018 to provide free healthcare up to Rs 5 lakh per family per year. About 1.2 crore individuals in the state have enlisted under the initiative, which covers everything from regular testing to surgery. "The scheme can be availed by families with annual incomes of less than Rs 2.5 lakh, the elderly, and other eligible criteria. However, with the government's delay in releasing payments, hospitals are finding it challenging to manage their expenses", Dhirendar K Soni said.

Funds coming for Development work are being sacrificed at the altar of corruption: Kumari Selja

PARVESH HANDA
Ambala



PARVESH HANDA
Ambala

The General Secretary of All India Congress Committee, former Union Minister, and Member of Parliament from Sirsa Kumari Selja said that the BJP government in Haryana has completely failed to curb corrupt bureaucracy. The funds coming for development work are being consumed by corruption, and to fulfill promises made to the public, the government is increasingly borrowing money. The state, already drowning in debt, is getting deeper into this debt trap, and the government is imposing more financial burdens on the public to save its own skin. The government must arrange funds before making any new announcements.

In a statement released to the media, Kumari Selja said that the BJP government is sinking further into debt. The situation is such that to pay off existing debts, the government has to borrow more money. For the sake of votes, the government doesn't hesitate to make promises, but when it comes to fulfilling them, it fails due to lack of funds. Now, to implement new guarantees and free schemes, the government needs to rethink. If the government does not borrow more money to fulfill its commitments, it will place an additional economic burden on the public.

Punjab : Arrest of six gangsters averts possible target killing



RAJU WILLIAM
Chandigarh/Amritsar

Counter Intelligence (CI), Amritsar has foiled a possible target killing plan with the arrest of six members of Kaushal Chaudhary gang, including two key shooters identified as Puneet Lakhnawal and Narinder Kumar alias Lalli.

Both were involved in the murders of Kabaddi player Sandeep Singh Nangal Ambian and Sukhmeet Singh alias Deputy, said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab, Gaurav Yadav here on Monday, January 27, 2024.

The other four arrested gangsters have been identified as Harpreet Singh alias Happal of Guru Har Sahai in Ferozepur, Gurbhinder Singh of Chattivind Lehal in Amritsar, Sandeep Singh of Village Rajdhan in Amritsar and Maninderjit Singh alias Shinda of Badawal Jhande in Ludhiana.

Punjab Police teams have also recovered six .30 bore foreign-made pistols along with 40 rounds from their possession.

This gang was also involved in the incident of indiscriminate firing at Highway King Hotel in Rajasthan and an extortion demand of Rs 5 crore in September 2024. All the arrested accused persons have a criminal history and they had been evading arrests for the last three years, he added.

Preliminary investigation has revealed that the arrested persons are professional shooters of the organised criminal network of Kaushal Chaudhary gang, which is active in Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab, etc. They execute criminal activities on the directions of their foreign-based handlers.

On Sunday, a team of CI Amritsar received a reliable input about members of the gang including Amarjit Singh alias Amar, Jagjit Singh alias Gandhi, Balwinder Singh alias Doni, Prabhdeep Singh alias Prabh Dasuwal, and others, were planning a target killing in the state from abroad with the assistance of local operatives.

It was learnt that the local members of the gang, equipped with lethal weapons, were reportedly roaming near Haveli restaurant in Jandiala Amritsar. Acting swiftly on the input, police teams laid a special checkpoint and arrested six gangsters. Six pistols and ammunition were recovered from their possession.

Further investigation is on to uncover deeper links within their criminal network, which spans multiple states and involves illegal activities including extortion, arms smuggling, and organised violence.

Haryana's tourism will be brought on the world map: Union Minister Shekhawat

Discussion held on enhancing the grandeur of Surajkund Mela
GULSHAN KUMAR
Chandigarh

Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, said that an action plan will be prepared to bring Haryana's rich civilization, culture, and tourism on the global stage. He also emphasized the need to enhance the grandeur of the 38th Surajkund International Crafts Mela and to involve major partner countries in the event in the future.

Haryana's Heritage and Tourism Minister, Dr. Arvind



Sharma, met Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, in New Delhi. During the meeting, Dr. Sharma formally invited Shekhawat to the inauguration of the 38th Surajkund International Crafts Mela, scheduled

to be held in Faridabad from February 7. The two Ministers also discussed various topics related to tourism and cultural initiatives.

Union Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat stated that the time has come to showcase Haryana's tourism on the global stage, similar to the recognition of the Surajkund International Crafts Mela. He emphasized that the Central and Haryana Governments will collaborate to develop a special action plan to ensure that the world experiences and appreciates the richness of Haryana's culture and tourism.

Union Minister Ramdas Athawale inspects statue of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar in Amritsar

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Union Minister of State for Social Justice and Empowerment Ramdas Athawale today visited Amritsar to take stock of the situation after the incident of desecration of the statue of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar.

Athawale first visited Heritage Street in Amritsar and paid floral tribute to Dr. Ambedkar. He said that the desecration of the statue of Constitution maker Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar will not be tolerated.

He held a meeting with Police Commissioner Gurpreet Singh Bhullar and Deputy Commissioner Sakshi Sahni alongwith other district officials and issued guidelines



for strict action in the matter. He informed that he has been assured by the district administration that proper arrangements will be made to prevent

such incidents in future. Talking to media, Athawale said that Baba Saheb Ambedkar is not only the creator of the Constitution but also a

great leader of the country. He said that attempts were made to demolish the statue of Baba Saheb Ambedkar, but his ideas are so strong that can never be erased.

He asked the State Chief Minister of the state should pay attention to such serious incident and proper arrangements should be made to prevent such incidents in future. He said that this incident took place January 26, which raises several questions on the functioning of the police.

Athawale said that the number of communities belonging to Scheduled Castes is higher in Punjab than other states, keeping it into consideration, it is very sad that such an incident has happened in the state.

Massive protest after the disrespect to the Statute of Baba Sahib Ambedkar

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Massive protest was organized by various Dalit and Balmiki communities here today due to the disrespect to the Statue of Baba Sahib Ambedkar by the accused who was arrested by the police on the spot last evening.

During the protest almost complete Bandh was seen in the



city of Amritsar, even educational institutions were forced to shut,

the people of the community were seen moving in groups forcing people to shut down their establishments. Protest organized by the Balmiki Samaj was well supported by the SAD (Akali Dal Badal) Congress leadership and many other outfits. Sant Baba Malkit Nath, leader of Balmiki

Samaj urged the Government for strict punishment to the accused who extended disrespect to the statue of Baba sahib last evening. A massive protest was held at the busiest area Bhandari Bridge where anti government slogans were also raised. Meanwhile heavy security deployment of troops was seen all around the city particularly the spot where the incident occurred yesterday.

R-Day: Punjab CM vows to crush forces inimical to peace

RAJU WILLIAM
Patiala

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann has vowed to crush the forces inimical to the state and foil their conspiracies for disturbing peace, communal harmony, brotherhood and amity in the state.

CM Mann was addressing the gathering after unfurling the national tricolor flag during a function to commemorate 76th Republic Day at local Polo Ground. Maintaining the hard earned peace in the state is the first and foremost priority for his government, he said warning that no one will be allowed to disturb it. He solicited fulsome support and cooperation of the people in foiling any conspiracy to derail peace, progress and prosperity of the state.

Indians especially the Punjabis have thwarted every attempt aimed at endangering



the hard earned sovereignty of the country. Apart from safeguarding the country during wars in 1947, 1962, 1965, 1971 and the Kargil war our brave patriots have made supreme sacrifices to protect the dignity and sovereignty of the nation.

However, in last more than seven decades since independence, Punjab had to suffer in inexplicable discrimination from the governments at the Centre in the form of regressive and ruinous policies. It is unfortunate that the food growers, who made

the country self reliant in food production have been forced to agitate on this day too due to the apathetic attitude of the central government, he alleged. On the occasion, CM Mann said the Centre should accept the demands of the food growers and stop the step motherly treatment towards Punjab and its hard working people. Citing an example of this alleged indifferent attitude towards Punjab, he said the Centre had not released the state's pending share of RDF worth Rs 5500 crore.

Jatinder Singh Bhatia of AAP becomes Amritsar's Mayor

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Jatinder Singh Bhatia of the Aam Aadmi Party became the Mayor of Amritsar city on Monday.

A former Congressman now in AAP Jatinder Singh Bhatia has been elected as mayor of Amritsar amidst chaos. Likewise, Priyanka Sharma has been elected senior deputy mayor and Anita Rani as Deputy Mayor. Both the candidates also belonged to AAP.

However the Congress party which was very hopeful to elect its own mayor remained failed to elects its candidate, accusing the AAP for using wrong means in mayoral elections. Earlier, AAP had managed to secure a win in mayoral polls in Jalandhar and Ludhiana. However, a majority of 46 councilors was required in Amritsar's 85 wards to secure a win to appoint mayor in the Municipal Corporation, where-



as Congress managed to fetch 40 seats. After the elections of Mayor Jatinder Singh Bhatia and other two key positions senior deputy mayor and Deputy Mayor which were also retained by AAP, the frustrated Congress party launched a massive protest soon after the announcement. State Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring and leader of the opposition (LOP) in the Punjab assembly Partap Singh Bajwa organized a DHARNA

outside the Government Medical College in Amritsar, where the meeting for mayor elections was held. Accusing the State machinery led by AAP, LOP Partap Singh Bajwa alleged that the democratic system was badly ruined. He said that names of the mayor and other two key posts were announced without holding a proper voting process as they have chosen the mayor while raising their hands. The gross misuse of

police machinery can't be ruled out here. The party would approach the State High Court to seek justice.

AAP Punjab President Aman Arora expressed his heartfelt congratulations on this historic win. "Heartiest congratulations to AAP Punjab for winning the Amritsar Municipal Corporation by securing all three posts of Mayor, Senior Deputy Mayor, and Deputy Mayor. This is a proud moment for the party and a responsibility to serve the holy city of Amritsar with dedication," he tweeted. In a press conference, Aman Arora said, "Today, AAP has been entrusted with the opportunity to serve the holy land of Guru Sahib. Our team will begin work immediately to transform Amritsar into a beautiful and well-developed city. The guarantees in our corporation manifesto will be implemented without delay."

Statute of Baba Sahib Ambedkar sanitized with Milk

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Statue of Baba Sahib Ambedkar sanitized with Milk by Congress leadership here today.

The prominent leaders who were cleaning the statue were Amritsar Member Parliament Gurjeet Singh Aujla, former Punjab cabinet minister Dr. Raj Kumar Verka and various Dalit leaders.

They have also sanitized a book (statue of symbolic Book of Indian constitution) which was also attempted to damage while setting it ablaze but saved by the passerby who were present on the spot. However, last evening Police arrested an alleged mischievous element who attempted to damage the statue of Baba Sahib Bhimrao Ambedkar at the Town Hall, the heritage street that goes to Golden Temple.

Police commissioner Amritsar, Mr. Gurpreet Singh Bhullar said that arrested accused Akash Singh son of Bhupinder Singh of Dharmkot, district Moga of Punjab has been arrested by the Police station A division under sections of 333, 299, 326 (F), 324, 196 BNS, 3,4,5 SC/ST ACT 1989. He said the mobile of the accused



which was seized on the spot was being scrutinised.

On being asked about the ladder used by the accused who climbed on the statue with a hammer in order to break it, Bhullar said that it was already there, since some members of civil society had organized a program there. But the ladder was not removed from the statue even after the program was over and the same was misused by the culprit. But this issue would also be investigated. Bhullar said that various outfits have given the BANDH call, requesting them to maintain peace and tranquility in the city.

A Congress Dalit leader and former Punjab Cabinet Minister Dr. Raj Kumar urged the police to take stringent action

against the culprit since the incident took place on the eve of Republic day and matter should be thoroughly investigated. MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla has today condemned the insult of Baba Bhim Rao Ambedkar Ji. He says that it is because of him that everyone in India has got the right to equality today. MP Gurjeet Singh Aujla strongly condemned the incident of those who tried to break and set fire to the statue of Baba Bhim Rao Ambedkar Ji outside the Town Hall of Amritsar and said that today when the whole country was celebrating the 76th Republic Day, insulting those who gave the country the right to equality and celebrated the Constitution is an insult to the people of every country.

India set to become the world's **third largest economy** soon: President Murmu

NEW DELHI: India is set to become the world's third-largest economy, President Droupadi Murmu declared while addressing the joint sitting of Parliament on Friday.

She emphasized that the government is implementing key decisions at an accelerated pace to drive economic growth and development.

Highlighting the government's commitment to supporting farmers, President Murmu stated that Rs 41,000 crore has been distributed to millions of farmers under the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme. This initiative continues to provide direct financial assistance to farmers, ensuring agricultural stability and rural economic growth.

She also underlined major policy reforms, including the proposal for 'One Nation, One Election', which aims to syn-



chronize elections across the country, and the Waqf Bill, which seeks to introduce transparency in the management of Waqf properties.

Her address was also dedicated to youth empowerment and employment generation. She stressed the government's

continued efforts to expand educational opportunities and create new jobs to harness India's demographic dividend.

The President also reaffirmed the government's commitment to homeownership for the middle class, ensuring that housing schemes enable

families to achieve their dream of owning a home.

She pointed out that government initiatives have successfully lifted 25 crore people out of extreme poverty, reinforcing the administration's focus on economic inclusion and social upliftment. In a significant move towards women's financial and technical empowerment, President Murmu highlighted the 'Drone Didi' scheme, which provides women with training in drone technology, offering them new employment avenues in the agricultural and logistics sectors.

President Murmu expressed deep condolences for the tragic loss of lives in the Maha Kumbh Mela stampede in which at least 30 people died.

She extended her sympathies to the affected families and wished a speedy recovery for the injured.

Mamata Banerjee blames Congress for BJP's success in 2024 LS polls



KOLKATA: In her new book, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has squarely blamed Congress for the BJP's return to power at the Centre for the third consecutive term in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

A total of three new books penned by the Chief Minister were released on the first day of the Kolkata International Book Fair on Tuesday afternoon and one of the three books titled 'Banglar Nirbachon o Amra (Bengal elections and us)', she has made an analysis of the results of the 2024 general elections.

As per her observations in the book, despite wholehearted attempts by the Trinamool Congress, the opposition INDIA bloc was unable to gain electoral success because of the failure on the part of Congress.

"We earnestly wanted a strong opposition bloc against BJP at the national level combining all anti-BJP forces. Since the beginning, we had insisted on a common minimum programme and common manifesto. The name of the opposition bloc too was my proposal. Congress was offered the chair of the leader of the national bloc. But despite that, there was neither a common minimum programme nor any common manifesto.

Rahul Gandhi: BJP- RSS want to take back India to pre-Independence era

KAVITA SHARMA
Mhow (MP)

The Congress held a mammoth 'Jai Bapu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan' rally at the birthplace of Dr Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar.

The party president Mallikarjun Kharge condemned Union Home Minister Amit Shah for insulting Dr Ambedkar in the Rajya Sabha.

Speaking on the occasion Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi warned that the BJP and the RSS wanted to take India back to the pre-independent era as they were against the constitution. Kharge and Gandhi also paid obeisance at the memorial of Baba Saheb Ambedkar after the rally.

Appealing to people to reject



the ideology of Golwalkar, Savarkar and Hedgewar, Kharge urged people to follow the ideology of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Baba Saheb Ambedkar.

He reiterated that the BJP and the RSS were trying to change the constitution. He warned that if the constitu-

tion was changed the poor, the Dalits, the backwards and the Adivasis will lose all their rights.

Paying tributes to Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Kharge said, he (Ambedkar) single handedly fought for the rights of the Dalits, the Backward Classes/OBCs and poor. He pointed

Amit Shah: Maha Kumbh unique symbol of the uninterrupted flow of Sanatan culture



NEW DELHI: Union Home Minister Amit Shah said Maha Kumbh is a unique symbol of the uninterrupted flow of Sanatan culture and he was eager to take a dip in the confluence and seek the blessings.

The Union Minister is set to attend the Maha Kumbh, where he will take a holy dip in the Triveni Sangam, the sacred confluence of the Ganga,

Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers.

In a post on X, Amit Shah wrote (in Hindi), "Mahakumbh is a unique symbol of the uninterrupted flow of Sanatan culture. Kumbh reflects our eternal philosophy of life based on harmony. Today, I am eager to take a dip in the confluence and seek the blessings of the saints in this great festival of unity and integrity in the holy city of Prayagraj."

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath will accompany the Home Minister during this significant event. HM Shah performs the ritual bath on the 15th day of the Maha Kumbh.

As per the schedule, Amit Shah arrived at Bamrauli Airport at 11.25 a.m. He then proceeds to the DPS helipad by helicopter at 11.50 a.m. and reach Arai Ghat at noon. From there, he boards a boat to the VIP Jetty, arriving at 12.15 p.m.

Speaking during his recent visit to Gujarat, Shah highlighted the cultural significance of Maha Kumbh, urging everyone to attend this event, which occurs once every 144 years.

"Kumbh gives the message of harmony and unity. It does not ask which religion, sect, or caste you belong to. Food is available without discrimination. No event in the world conveys a stronger message of unity than Maha Kumbh," he had said.

Rahul hits out at Modi for dividing people and Kejriwal for liquor scam



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi lashed out at the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Aam Aadmi Party, saying while one party was dividing people, another was most corrupt and had miserably failed the people of Delhi. Taking a dig at former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Gandhi remarked, he (Kejriwal) trembles at Modi's name.

Addressing largely attended public meetings at Patparganj and Okhla this evening, Gandhi pointed out how the BJP and the RSS were trying to divide people in the name of religion and caste.

"We don't want an India of hatred, fear and violence, but an India of love, harmony and brotherhood", he said amidst thunderous applause from the crowd. He said during his Bharat Jodo Yatra, the slogan of unity had emerged, 'nafrat ke bazaar mein, mohabbat ki dukan'. He said, the Congress party will spread love and harmony everywhere.

Lashing out at the AAP government in Delhi and Arvind Kejriwal who had been Chief Minister for over ten years, he pointed out how he (Kejriwal) had promised to usher in a new kind of politics with transparency. However, he added, Kejriwal forgot everything and was involved in the biggest liquor scam. He reminded the people how he would travel in a small car, climb over the electric poles and proclaim to practice neat and clean politics with complete transparency.

But, Gandhi added, he started living in a palace, the 'Sheesh Mahal'. He also took a dig at Kejriwal for issuing the "certificate of honesty" to himself. He observed, an honest man does not need to proclaim his own honesty. The certificate of honesty should be issued by the people, he remarked. In Patparganj, appealing to the people to ensure the victory of party candidate Anil Chaudhary, he said the sitting MLA Manish Sisodia had run away as he was the architect of the liquor scam.

Referring to the complete failure of the AAP government in Delhi, he said, the pollution was at its worst and people were suffering from diseases like asthma and cancer. He said, there was no development as roads were broken.

India Nearing to achieve USD 5 Trillion Economy: PM Modi



BHUBANESWAR: Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised India's commitment to domestic value addition during his address at the 'Utkarsh Odisha, Make in Odisha Conclave' in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday, expressing strong opposition to the practice of exporting raw materials while importing finished products.

The Prime Minister articulated India's economic trajectory, highlighting the nation's proximity to achieving its USD 5 trillion economy target.

Speaking at the Janata Maidan venue, the Prime Minister identified eastern India, particularly Odisha, as a crucial driver of the nation's economic growth.

In his comprehensive address, Modi outlined a transformative vision for India's industrial ecosystem, citing specific concerns about current trade practices.

"The minerals are extracted here and exported to some other country where value addition is done and finished products are then sent back to India. This trend is not acceptable to Modi," he stated, emphasising the need to de-

velop robust domestic supply and value chains to minimise vulnerability to global market fluctuations.

He identified innovation in services and product quality as the twin pillars supporting India's economic growth, while emphasising the expanding opportunities in green technology sectors, including solar, wind, hydro, and green hydrogen initiatives, which he described as crucial for India's development as an advanced economy.

Addressing infrastructure development, Modi underscored the significance of connected infrastructure and multi-modal connectivity in the 21st century. He noted that India's unprecedented pace of specialised infrastructure development would enhance its appeal as an investment destination.

The Prime Minister also highlighted growing interest from ASEAN countries in strengthening trade relations with Odisha, announcing plans for expanded petrochemical sector development and dedicated industrial parks in Paradip and Gopalpur.

PM Narendra Modi urges investors to invest in Odisha

ARABINDA MOHAPATRA
Bhubaneswar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on January 28 inaugurated Make-in-Odisha-Utkarsh Odisha conclave, the biennial investment summit of the state, with an assurance to industrialists that state's industrialization process would accelerate further with a double-engine (BJP both in state and at the Centre) government in charge. He praised the efforts of Mohan Charan Majhi-led maiden BJP government in the state for its efforts to



take the state forward.

"I want to make eastern India is the growth engine of the country. Odisha plays a key role in this", said Modi while addressing industry leaders at the Janata Maidan here. He

described Odisha as the perfect combination of heritage and development. The Prime Minister said that this was the biggest business summit in Odisha till date with participation of investors in the meet this time being

five to six times more than in the conclaves held in the past. The state government is expecting investments worth Rs.5 lakh crore from the summit.

Modi called upon all the investors gathered at the venue to invest in Odisha. "Now is the right time to invest," he said, adding that investors should become part of the state's growth journey. Modi said Odisha was a priority for him which was evident from the fact that he had visited the state nearly 30 times since becoming Prime Minister of the country for the first time in 2014.

Will United Force of Farmers Succeed to Compel The Central Government to Bow Down?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN

However, a section of farmers in Punjab are still in stir under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) (SKM-NP) and Kisan Majdoor Morcha (KMM) since February 13 last year and the farmer leader Jagjeet Singh Dallewal is on fast since November 26. But noticing the sluggish attitude of the government, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella union of large segment of Indian farmers unions to pressurize the adamant central government for acceptance of farmers' demands, has decided to fuel the farmers stir and chalked out the several action points to be taken across the country.

On January 24, 2025, SKM General Body unanimously rejected the NPFAM stating this as reincarnation of 3 Black Farm Laws, which were forced to repeal during 13-month long farmers' agitation in 2020-21, informed Angrej Singh Bhadour SKM Punjab leader.

Now the SKM has planned to fight tooth and nail to get Draft of National Policy Framework for Agricultural

Markets (NPFAM) rejected and withdrawn. It will organize Dharna in front of Member of Parliament offices and go for Grameen Bharat Hartal if Govt does not withdraw it. Other issues are legal guarantee for MSP of all crops at C2+50%; Debt waiver for all farmers and Agri workers; Pending issues of Dec 9, 2021.

In Friday meeting it has also been agreed that SKM will build 'Pakka Morchas' in every state at district level and capitals to demand Vidhan Sabhas Resolutions rejecting the draft of NPFAM.

SKM General Body Meeting was held Friday, 24 January 2025, at HS Surjeet Bhawan, New Delhi and attended by 165 Delegates from 73 Farmer Organisations from 12 states decided unanimously and firmly rejected Central Govt's National Policy Framework for Agricultural Marketing as a reincarnation of the 3 Black Farm Laws being forced through the back door via state govts.

The press release by media cell of SKM states that in one voice the leaders labelled the policy as a crude attack on Govt Mandis, privatising them to help MNC and Corporate growth in Agri retail trade and Agri processing corporate industry. It attaches local Grameen Mandis through



FPOs and e-NAM and will enforce Contract farming via FPOs, Cooperatives and SHGs ensuring cheap supply to Food Processor Value Added Chains. All these are as per WTO and World Bank prescriptions.

SKM also questions that NPFAM has no provision for MSP declaration, No provision for Govt Procurement and No provision for Food Storage for supply to PDS. It caters only to Buffer stocks. The umbrella union has announced that it will build Pakka Morchas in all the states as a step of this movement and in all state's capitals, also holding Maha panchayats and conventions as part of the build-up.

To put pressure on elected public representative, SKM has called for protest dharnas in front of MPs offices

teed procurement, comprehensive scheme for loan waiver to farmers and farm workers, no privatisation of electricity, no smart meters, provide free electricity up to 300 units, implement LARR Act 2013 among others.

Dr. Balbir Singh, a farmer activist from Bhiwani district of Haryana, associated with All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), told that the preparations for the agitational programs are going on at Tehsil level and the farmers are ready to jump into the stir to bow down the central government.

But as the Modi government has dropped its hint time and again showing its adamant attitude during the last four years by turning deaf ear to the farmers' demands, it shall be a very hard stone to crack for the farmer unions to bend the central government. Now the farmers will have to adopt the path of do or die and aggravate their stir even with more strength and skill than their last 13-month long gherao of Delhi border.

Will all the associations jolt down unitedly to Compel the Central Government to Bow Down?

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

Rashtrapati Bhavan Reacts to Sonia Gandhi's 'Poor Thing' Remark

NEW DELHI: Rashtrapati Bhavan has strongly responded to Congress MP Sonia Gandhi's remark referring to President Droupadi Murmu as a "poor thing".

In a statement, Rashtrapati Bhavan clarified that the President was not fatigued at any point during her address to the joint sitting of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on Friday.

"Nothing could be further from the truth. The President was not tired at any point. Indeed, she believes that speaking up for marginalized communities, women, and farmers, as she was doing in her address, can never be tiring," the statement read.

The President's office also suggested that some political leaders might have misunder-



stood the nuances of Indian languages like Hindi, leading to an incorrect impression. "In any case, such comments are in poor taste, unfortunate, and entirely avoidable," the statement added.

Furthermore, Rashtrapati Bhavan condemned statements from prominent Congress leaders that allegedly demeaned the dignity of the President's office. These leaders had claimed that President Murmu appeared exhausted by the end of her speech and could hardly speak.

The controversy erupted

when Sonia Gandhi, a veteran Congress leader and former party president, made the remark while speaking to reporters outside Parliament. Asked for her reaction to the President's address, she responded, "The President was getting very tired by the end. She could hardly speak, poor thing."

She was accompanied by Congress MPs Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. Rahul Gandhi dismissed the President's speech as "boring," adding, "No comments. Repeating the same thing again and again."

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) launched a sharp attack on the Gandhis, calling their remarks an insult to the dignity of the President and reflective of Congress' "feudal mindset".

NHRC Report : West Bengal -- bordering Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal is a key trafficking hub where more than 50,000 girls are missing

SATISH HANDA

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), India report reveals that criminal action against 23 persons involved in selling minor girls on a stamp paper in Rajasthan for physical abuse and sexual assault in various parts of the country as well as in abroad. The Commission suggested setting up in every State Anti-Human Trafficking Nodal Officer of the rank of the Secretary or Inspector General of Police for



strict monitoring and coordination with the government i centre to take effective measures to curb the menace and also ensure the rehabilitation of the victims.

NHRC, India has observed that the practice of selling of girls in some communities in the country

in the recent past, including minors, is still continuing and this practice requires to be curbed forthwith in totality requiring stringent steps be taken against such practices. The Commission also stated that girls were still being sold on stamp paper in few districts of Rajasthan and sent to Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Mumbai, Delhi and few Gulf countries in abroad subjected to physical abuse, torture and sexual assault in slavery and forced into the sex trade.

ABDUL WASEY EXPLAINS HOW NEW METHODOLOGIES COMPLICATE INDIA'S POVERTY ESTIMATION



Poverty beyond numbers

Revising the poverty line



The debate over poverty estimation also centres on the adequacy of existing poverty lines. The Rangarajan methodology, applied to the latest HCES data, estimates poverty at 25 per cent, significantly higher than other estimates. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), using a \$2.15/day poverty line, estimated India's poverty rate at 12.9 per cent in 2019. These disparities highlight the need for a unified methodology.

While revising the poverty line is crucial, it must be supported by consistent application and government endorsement. Without a stable benchmark, poverty estimation risks becoming an exercise in statistical interpretation rather than a tool for policymaking. India's multidimensional poverty index (MPI) has added depth to poverty measurement by incorporating indicators such as bank accounts and maternal health. However, some criticisms remain valid. Certain indicators, such as child-related metrics, may not apply to all households, skewing results. Additionally, once households gain access to amenities like electricity or bank accounts, they rarely lose them, causing MPI-based poverty estimates to remain perpetually low.

A more robust approach would include measures of income vulnerability and dynamic deprivation, capturing the fluidity of poverty over time.

Conclusion

India's journey in poverty reduction is commendable, but questions about the accuracy of estimates and the adequacy of methodologies persist. The divergence between data sets, evolving consumption patterns, and the complexity of rural-urban classifications necessitate a re-evaluation of how poverty is defined and measured.

Poverty is more than just a statistical figure; it reflects the lived experiences of millions. To address it effectively, India must adopt a transparent, comprehensive, and unified methodology that aligns with current realities. Strengthening data collection, revising poverty lines, and incorporating dynamic measures of deprivation can ensure that poverty estimates guide meaningful

policy interventions. Above all, reducing poverty requires sustained efforts to boost incomes, improve public delivery systems, and address structural inequalities.

Furthermore, the integration of technological advancements in data collection and analysis can enhance the accuracy of poverty assessments. Utilizing tools such as machine learning and remote sensing can provide real-time insights into poverty dynamics, allowing for more responsive and effective policy interventions. For instance, recent studies have explored the use of deep learning to estimate living conditions in India, achieving promising results across various outcomes.

Additionally, fostering collaboration between governmental agencies, academic institutions, and international organizations can lead to the development of more holistic poverty measurement frameworks. Such partnerships can facilitate the sharing of best practices, the harmonization of methodologies, and the creation of comprehensive data systems that capture the multifaceted nature of poverty. For instance, the collaboration between policymakers and academics in Indonesia has been instrumental in designing effective policies and programs to combat poverty.

Moreover, integrating qualitative insights from those experiencing poverty can enrich quantitative data, leading to more nuanced and effective interventions. Participatory approaches, where the voices of the poor are included in the analysis, have been shown to provide valuable perspectives that traditional metrics might overlook. This inclusive strategy ensures that policies are grounded in the lived realities of individuals, thereby enhancing their relevance and impact.

To sum it up, while India's progress in reducing poverty is commendable, it is imperative to continually refine our measurement tools and methodologies. By embracing collaborative, multidimensional, and participatory approaches, we can develop a more accurate and comprehensive understanding of poverty. This, in turn, will inform policies that are more targeted and effective, ultimately leading to sustainable poverty alleviation and improved quality of life for all citizens.

Abdul Wasey, Editor-in-chief, The Financial World. Views are personal.

The 2023-24 Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) factsheet, released by the government, has reignited debates surrounding poverty estimation in India. The findings, which suggest a decline in poverty across both urban and rural areas, have sparked discussions on the methodologies, definitions, and reliability of the data. Let's delve into the changing definition of poverty, the methodologies for its estimation, and their broader implications.

India's definition of poverty has evolved significantly over the decades. From the late 1970s to 2005, poverty was primarily measured based on the expenditure required to sustain a minimum calorie intake. This method was periodically updated every five years using data from the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). However, as the NSSO's estimates of private expenditure began to diverge from the figures provided by the National Accounts, questions arose about the accuracy and consistency of these measurements.

In response, the Tendulkar Committee introduced new benchmarks, shifting the focus from calorie intake to broader consumption patterns. Later, methodologies such as the Mixed Reference Period (MRP) and Modified Mixed Reference Period (MMRP) were adopted to improve recall accuracy in expenditure surveys. While these changes enhanced data quality, they also introduced challenges in comparing data across time periods. Moreover, the absence of official poverty estimates after 2011-12 and reliance on alternative datasets and multidimensional poverty indices have further complicated the poverty narrative.

Has poverty declined?

India has witnessed a substantial reduction in poverty over the last two decades, regardless of the methodology used. High GDP growth, targeted welfare programmes, and improved public delivery systems have contributed to this decline. Schemes such as the National Food Security Act, which covers nearly 800 million people, have played a significant role in alleviating extreme poverty. Estimates suggest that poverty rates have dropped to single digits, with recent data indicating a decline of over 17 per cent between survey rounds.

However, the credibility of these estimates depends on the poverty line and data quality. For instance, using a higher expenditure estimate based on revised methodologies and applying it to older poverty lines naturally lowers poverty rates. Critics argue that these adjustments could underestimate the actual extent of deprivation.

Key concerns

One major concern with the HCES data is the divergence between NSSO per capita household consumption expenditure and National Accounts estimates. Changes in recall periods and survey methodologies have made it difficult to compare data across time. The recent shift to collecting data in three sittings has improved accuracy but has also inflated expenditure estimates. Without revising poverty lines to reflect these changes, poverty may appear lower than it is.

Another issue lies in the composition of the consumption basket. Food items now constitute less than 50 per cent of total household expenditure, indicating a shift towards services and other essentials. This evolving consumption pattern necessitates a re-examination of the methodology used to define poverty.

The gap between rural and urban consumption is narrowing, reflecting improvements in rural living standards. However, these changes may be overstated due to outdated definitions of rural and urban areas based on the 2011 Census. Many peri-urban regions, classified as rural, exhibit consumption patterns similar to urban areas. A revised classification could reveal faster declines in urban poverty.

PRAVEEN CHAKRAVARTY ADVISES ECI TO ENSURE ELECTORAL INTEGRITY WITH AADHAAR



Maharashtra's election mystery: Real voters or ghosts?

The executive Government is instructing or managing things in such a manner that those people who do not belong to them either racially, culturally or linguistically, are being excluded from being brought on the electoral rolls. Electoral rolls are a most fundamental thing in a democracy... Independence of elections and avoidance of any interference by the executive should be regarded as a fundamental right," said Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in June 1949 in the Constituent Assembly while introducing the Constitutional provision to set up the Election Commission of India (ECI). All of India's founding leaders agreed with this unanimously. Tomorrow (January 25) is the 75th anniversary of the birth of the ECI — also celebrated as National Voters Day (January 25). Sadly, India's founding leaders will feel let-down by the ECI and not deem it to be a happy 75th birthday.

Dr. Ambedkar was prescient in his warnings about electoral roll manipulation by the executive. While he was more concerned about exclusion of voters through identity discrimination, government interference in electoral rolls can also be through a process of mass inclusion of voters to tilt an election — as seen in the recently held Maharashtra State elections.

The ECI enrolled 9.7 crore voters for the 2024 Maharashtra State election. The Narendra Modi government's Ministry of Health report estimated the entire adult population of Maharashtra (18-plus years),



in 2024, as 9.54 crore. The ECI, by its own admission, registered 16 lakh more voters than the official estimate of the total adult population. Even if one were to accept that the government's estimate is only a projection, and can vary, it still implies that nearly 100% or more of all the adults in Maharashtra were registered as voters for the State election. This is very strange because the ECI neither enrolled nearly all adults as voters for the Maharashtra Lok Sabha election held just six months earlier, nor ever before in any of the other large States. Then, how were more people than the entire estimated adult population of Maharashtra enrolled as voters only for the State election?

Mass enrolment in just months

This is because 48 lakh people were registered as new voters in just six months between the Lok Sabha and the State elections. For context, between 2019 to 2024, only 32 lakh new voters were enrolled. In other

words, 50% more people were enrolled as voters in just six months vis-à-vis the previous five-year period. What led to this sudden, and intriguing, rush by Maharashtrians to register and vote in the State election alone?

Clues emerge upon careful analysis of the outcome. The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance gained 72 lakh more votes in the State election compared to the Lok Sabha election. One would logically presume that this gain by the BJP alliance was largely due to voters that voted for the Congress-led Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance in the Lok Sabha election who then shifted allegiance to the BJP alliance for the State election. But that is not the case. Only 24 lakh such voters moved away from the Congress alliance between the two elections. So, where did the BJP alliance get its remaining 48 lakh (72 lakh - 24 lakh) votes from for the State election?

What explains the sudden rush of new voters in six months for the State election? Are they real voters? Or are they ghosts? Were their documents verified when they were enrolled as voters? How is it that all the new voters enrolled seem to have voted for just one alliance?

Regardless of one's political affiliations, to a rational mind, it is amply evident that there is something amiss with the electoral rolls in the Maharashtra election. Perhaps, there are sincere answers to these questions. If so, is it not logical to expect the ECI to release all the data in the public domain and issue clarifications in a transparent manner? But the ECI is conspicuously silent and arrogantly dismissive of these questions. A

counter, which includes one by the Chief Election Commissioner, is that if there was such a large-scale addition of dubious or ghost voters, why were the Opposition parties with their war-rooms, not alert enough to catch this in time? This is a duplicitous way to absolve the ECI using the line of a political party's organisational inefficiencies.

It is unfair and illegal to add vast numbers of dubious voters to influence an election and its outcome. It is the ECI's constitutional responsibility to run a fair election. This is why India's founding leaders entrusted an independent ECI with the responsibility of preserving India's electoral sanctity and not to be reliant on political parties.

The Maharashtra incident reveals the importance of using Aadhaar to 'unghost' and de-duplicate electoral rolls and use its biometric verification for voting. Of course, not even a single eligible citizen should be denied his vote, and an appropriate backup process can be evolved for those whose biometric verifications fail. The sanctity of electoral rolls is of supreme importance and is the foundation of India's electoral democracy. Aadhaar verification of electoral rolls and voting is the birthday cake that the ECI must be given to preserve and strengthen India's electoral democracy. It is an idea that even Dr. Ambedkar and other founding leaders may approve of.

Praveen Chakravarty is the Chairman of Professionals' and the Data Analytics wings of the Congress party. Views are personal.

LETTERBOX
Readers' feedback adds value to the newspaper. Please email comments on reports, features and columns to fwletters@gmail.com. We will publish them on this page.

BOOKS: REVIEW

New novel tells a thrilling tale of justice & prejudice

Yasin Kakande's *A Murder of Hate* is a gripping and harrowing tale that combines elements of mystery, social commentary, and human vulnerability. The novel delves into the disturbing murder of Sheila Musinga, a Ugandan student in Boston, and the ripple effects her death has on the lives of the people involved in the investigation, her family, and the broader community.

The prologue sets a chilling tone, recounting how an abandoned red SUV in a quiet Massachusetts cornfield becomes the starting point for an unsettling mystery. The story follows the perspectives of key characters: Lisa Garcia, the dedicated detective leading the investigation; Bus, a Ugandan-American officer with deep ties to Sheila's homeland; and Shawn Wayles, a college student initially implicated in the crime. The narrative weaves their lives together as they confront the trauma and challenges that arise from Sheila's

brutal murder. The novel is not merely a crime thriller—it serves as a lens through which Kakande examines larger societal issues such as racial prejudice, cultural identity, and power dynamics. The investigation uncovers Sheila's privileged yet complex background, rooted in her family's political prominence in Uganda. Her life represents the intersection of personal ambition and the burdens of cultural and familial expectations. Kakande paints her as a multi-dimensional figure, and her tragic death becomes a microcosm for exploring systemic inequalities and human frailty.

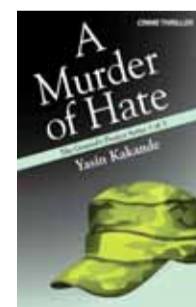
The strength of *A Murder of Hate* lies in its well-developed characters. Lisa Garcia's professionalism and inner struggles as a single mother are portrayed with authenticity. Her partnership with Bus brings depth to the story as the two navigate their cultural differences and shared commitment to justice. Bus, with his Ugandan heritage, adds an international

dimension to the investigation, reflecting on how global and local issues intertwine.

Shawn Wayles, the falsely accused suspect, embodies the vulnerability of young Black men in America, often viewed with suspicion despite their innocence. Kakande uses Shawn's character to critique societal prejudices and highlight the emotional toll of being wrongfully implicated.

Kakande doesn't shy away from depicting the influence of wealth and political connections. Sheila's family, particularly her uncle—Uganda's Foreign Minister—looms large over the investigation, raising questions about the interplay of justice and privilege. Through these elements, the novel critiques how power can manipulate outcomes, both in Sheila's homeland and in her adopted country.

The prose is sharp, with vivid imagery that brings the setting and emotions to life. From the snow-covered cornfields to the bustling streets of Boston, Kakande creates



A Murder of Hate (The General's Project Book 1) By Yasin Kakande Black Writers Ink LLC Kindle Edition 255 pages; Rs83

a rich, atmospheric backdrop that enhances the tension and drama. The pacing is methodical, ensuring that each detail of the investigation unfolds with precision.

Another standout element in *A Murder of Hate* is its nuanced portrayal of cultural displacement and identity struggles. Through Sheila's backstory and Bus's reflections, Kakande dives into the dualities faced by immigrants navigating between their heritage and the expectations of their adopted countries. Sheila's privileged background contrasts with the challenges she faces in America, offering a lens into how cultural misunderstandings and prejudice shape the immigrant experience. Similarly, Bus's internal conflict—balancing his Ugandan roots with his role as an American law enforcement officer—adds complexity and poignancy to the

narrative. Kakande's ability to highlight these tensions enriches the story, making it as much about justice as it is about prejudice.

Beyond its engaging plot, *A Murder of Hate* acts as a mirror to society, reflecting the unspoken prejudices, systemic inequalities, and failures of institutions. The novel challenges readers to consider how deeply ingrained biases can influence outcomes, whether in the form of snap judgments about individuals like Shawn or in the subtle privilege afforded to those with wealth and connections. The media's role in shaping narratives and public perceptions also comes under scrutiny, urging readers to question the stories they consume. By blending fiction with these stark realities, Kakande ensures that the novel is not just a story but also a call for introspection and change.

Kakande uses the crime and its investigation to critique the inefficiencies and biases within legal systems. The tension between local police and federal agencies highlights how political and bureaucratic interests can sometimes hinder justice. The novel also raises ethical dilemmas, asking readers to consider how far they would go to seek justice in a flawed system.

Revise and start again.
"Failure is just the opportunity to begin again; this time more intelligently."
HENRY FORD

THE FINANCIAL WORLD

RNI NO. CHAENG/2001/03736
PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY SWINDER PAL SINGH BAJWA ON BEHALF OF FW MEDIA
PRINTED AT JAGJIT PUBLISHING CO. PVT LTD D-12, INDUSTRIAL AREA, PHASE-1, MOHALI, PUNJAB 160059
PRINTER & PUBLISHER SWINDER PAL SINGH BAJWA OWNER* : FW MEDIA
PUBLISHED AT: PLOT NO-F5, IT PARK, CHANDIGARH CHANDIGARH 160101; PHONE: 9888040061
EDITOR* ABDUL WASEY
(*RESPONSIBLE FOR SELECTION OF NEWS UNDER THE PRB ACT)

Supreme Court Mandates CCI Approval before Insolvency Resolution Plans Involving Mergers

NEW DELHI: In a game-changing ruling, India's Supreme Court has significantly altered the country's insolvency landscape by mandating that any Resolution Plan involving mergers or acquisitions (termed "combinations") must first obtain approval from the Competition Commission of India (CCI) before being reviewed by the Committee of Creditors (CoC).

This decision, passed by a three-judge bench, reinforces the importance of competitive markets and ensures that antitrust concerns are addressed early in the insolvency process.

Under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), companies undergoing Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) receive bids from potential buyers.

These Resolution Plans are then evaluated by the CoC before



being presented to the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) for final approval.

However, the Supreme Court's ruling now dictates that if the plan involves substantial market changes—such as mergers or acquisitions—the CCI's approval is essential before the CoC can consider the proposal.

The case stemmed from a

dispute over the approval of a Resolution Plan for Hindustan National Glass and Industries Ltd. (HNGIL), where CCI had greenlit the merger with AGI Greenpac without following the due process. The Court emphasised that the CCI must issue a Show Cause Notice (SCN) to both the acquirer and the target company, particularly when the combination

could have significant effects on market competition. The failure to do so was deemed a procedural lapse that could undermine the fairness of the approval process.

This ruling highlights the intersection of insolvency and competition law, requiring businesses to comply with both frameworks. Legal experts note that by mandating CCI approval upfront, the Court aims to prevent market distortions that could arise from large players acquiring distressed assets without full antitrust scrutiny.

The decision is expected to have wide-reaching implications for insolvency cases involving large-scale mergers, with experts stressing that businesses must now prioritise compliance with competition laws to avoid penalties or delays in resolution processes.

Bharat Electronics Limited Achieves Remarkable Growth in Q3 FY 2024-25



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has achieved a remarkable turnover of Rs 5,643.25 crore in the third quarter of FY 2024-25, marking an impressive growth of 36.97% compared to Rs 4,120.10 crore in the same period last year. Company press release said. Profitability surged as Profit Before Tax (PBT) rose by 49.64% to Rs 1,754.15 crore, up from Rs 1,172.26 crore in Q3 of the previous year. Similarly, Profit After Tax (PAT) increased by 47.33% to Rs 1,316.06 crore, compared to Rs 893.30 crore in the corresponding period last year. For the first three quarters of FY 2024-25, BEL reported a cumulative turnover of Rs 14,173.68 crore, a significant rise from Rs 11,484.92 crore in the previous year. Profits saw a strong uptick, with PBT climbing to Rs 4,242.37 crore from Rs 2,948.95 crore and PAT reaching Rs 3,183.47 crore, compared to Rs 2,236.48 crore in the same period last year. With a robust order book of Rs 71,100 crore as of January 1, 2025, BEL continues to strengthen its position as a leader in the defence electronics sector. This impressive performance underscores the company's commitment to innovation, self-reliance, and national security, setting the stage for sustained growth in the years ahead.

Adani Ports Clocks 14 Pct Net Profit Growth in Q3, PAT crosses Rs 8,000 Cr in 9 months of FY25

AHMEDABAD: Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) on Thursday reported a 14 per cent net profit jump in the October-December quarter this fiscal (FY25) at Rs 2,518 crore, from Rs 2,208 crore in the same period last fiscal (FY24).

In the nine months of FY25, the flagship company of the Adani Group posted an impressive 32 per cent rise in net profit at Rs 8,038 crore from 6,089 crore in the same period of FY24.

The company also increased EBITDA guidance for FY25 to Rs 18,800-Rs 18,900 crore (from Rs 17,000-Rs 18,000 crore).

The revenue for the nine-month period in FY25, which ended December 31, grew 14 per cent and EBITDA grew 19 per cent, Adani Ports said in a statement.

"I am excited to share the fantastic momentum we have achieved during 9M FY25, driven by exceptional execution across three key areas of our business — market share gains coupled with volume-price mix increase, traction in logistics vertical, and operational effi-



ciencies along with technology-led gains," said Ashwani Gupta, Whole-time Director and CEO, APSEZ.

Operating revenue grew by 14 per cent (on-year) to Rs 22,590 crore. Ports revenue increased by 11 per cent to Rs 17,172 crore and logistics revenue increased by 22 per cent to Rs 1,852 crore.

"On the logistics front, in line with our commitment earlier in the year, we launched a new trucking platform, which is being integrated across the rest of the logistics value chain and will make us a true integrated Transport Utility," he added.

APSEZ clocked 332 million metric tonnes (7 per cent

increase year-on-year) cargo volume in the nine months this fiscal, led by growth in containers (+19 per cent), liquids and gas (+8 per cent) and dry and bulk cargo (iron ore, limestone, minerals, coking coal, etc.), partially offset by a decline in imported non-coking coal.

"We have also upgraded our FY25 EBITDA forecast to Rs 18,800-Rs 18,900 crore. Moreover, it is incredibly gratifying to be recognised by S&P Global CSA as one of the Top 10 companies globally in the transport industry. This prestigious recognition reflects our focus on imbuing sustainability across our operations," said Gupta.

Union Budget to address MSMEs' concerns about funds, Tech-Upgrade & Delayed Payments: Minister



NEW DELHI: Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi has announced comprehensive measures aimed at micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) challenges in the upcoming Union Budget 2025.

Union MSME Minister outlined initiatives targeting funding constraints, technological advancement, and delayed payments that have historically impeded the sector's growth.

The government's strategic vision positions MSMEs as instrumental in addressing income inequality while driving economic growth.

Manjhi, who represents Bihar's Gaya constituency, emphasised that empowering small businesses is fundamental to bridging income disparities across the nation.

This focus comes at a crucial time as India, despite celebrating its 76th Republic Day, continues to grapple with economic inequality challenges.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who will present the budget on February 1, has prioritised MSME sector reforms according to Manjhi.

The ministry is implementing significant changes to bank guarantee requirements and promoting collateral-free lending to enhance credit accessibility. This initiative includes government-backed loan guarantees designed to instill confidence in financial institutions lending to MSMEs.

The sector has demonstrated remarkable expansion, with MSME units multiplying fifteenfold over the past five years. Current data indicates that MSMEs contribute approximately 35 per cent of India's manufacturing output and account for 40-45 per cent of the country's exports.

Unlike large corporations concentrated in metropolitan regions, these enterprises have established a substantial pres-

ence in rural areas, generating significant employment opportunities for local communities.

To advance technological capabilities, the government has established MSME Tool Rooms and Technology Centres nationwide. These facilities are producing globally competitive products and fostering innovation throughout the country.

Complementing these efforts, the MSME ministry is enhancing the Udyam Portal system to streamline credit access. The portal currently boasts over 22 crore MSME registrations, with an additional 3 crore entities registered under Udyam Assist, marking substantial progress in sector formalisation.

The PM Vishwakarma Loan Yojana has emerged as a cornerstone initiative supporting traditional artisans and craftsmen.

According to Manjhi, this program is projected to benefit more than 30 lakh traditional artisans and grassroots entrepreneurs, providing essential liquidity support and fostering entrepreneurial development within these communities.

The scheme represents a targeted approach to addressing specific needs within the MSME ecosystem while promoting traditional craftsmanship and entrepreneurship.

Adani Total Gas' operational revenue up 12% in Q3, connects over 9 lakh homes with PNG



AHMEDABAD: Adani Total Gas Ltd (ATGL) on Monday reported a 12 per cent increase in revenue from operations in the third quarter of FY25 at Rs 1,397 crore.

EBITDA for the nine months of the current fiscal stood at Rs 893 crore, up by 6 per cent (year-on-year), India's leading energy transition company said in a statement. "ATGL maintained its growth trajectory, focusing on customer centric approach and delivering a robust operational performance with a notable 15 per cent year-on-year increase in volume," said Suresh P Manglani, ED and CEO, ATGL.

Despite the reduced APM gas allocation, "Team ATGL ensured an uninterrupted supply of CNG to our large masses of consumers by sourcing additional supplies of gas through alternative options," he mentioned. For ATGL, the allocation of APM gas for the CNG (T) segment was reduced from 63 per cent to 51 per cent from October 16, 2024, and then further from 51 per cent to 37 per cent, effective November 16 onwards.

Tata Motors' Q3 profit drops 22 pc, EV sales up 19 pc

MUMBAI: Tata Motors on Wednesday reported a 22 per cent decline in its net profit for the third quarter (Q3) of FY25 at Rs 5,451 crore, down from Rs 7,025 crore in the same period last fiscal.

The drop in earnings was primarily due to higher discounts offered to boost sales and weaker margins, despite a slight improvement in overall revenue.

Revenue from operations rose by 2.7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 1,13,575 crore, supported by a modest increase in sales, according to its filing.

However, the company's earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) margins declined by 60 basis points to 13.7 per cent.



Earnings before interest and tax (EBIT) stood at Rs 10,000 crore which is a slight improvement of 60 basis points compared to the previous year.

Automotive free cash flow stood at Rs 4,700 crore, supported by improved sales, while finance costs shrank by Rs 760 crore to Rs 1,725 crore.

Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), Tata Motors' luxury vehicle subsidiary, reported record quarterly revenue of 7.5 billion pounds up by 1.5 per cent

increase from last year.

The segment's EBIT margin stood at 9 per cent, the highest in a decade, but its EBITDA margin declined by 200 basis points to 14.2 per cent.

Profit before tax (PBT), excluding exceptional items, stood at ₹523 million, lower than the 627 million pounds recorded a year ago.

In the commercial vehicle (CV) segment, revenue dropped by 8.4 per cent year-on-year to Rs 18,431 crore due to weaker sales and an unfavourable product mix.

However, EBITDA margins improved to 12.4 per cent due to a support by material cost savings and benefits from the government's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme.

RSRPL and ACL Tieup to Revolutionize Plastic Recycling



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

ReSustainability and Recycling Private Limited (ReSRPL) and Aarti Circularity Limited (ACL) have tied up in a transformative +first of its kind+ in India Joint-Venture Company (JVCo) highlighting development of Plastic Materials Recycling Facilities (PMRFs) across India. Re Sustainability and Recycling Private Limited (ReSRPL) is a Re Sustainability Company (ReSL), while ACL is a wholly owned subsidiary of Aarti Industries Limited (AIL), a prominent player in specialty chemicals. Masood Mallick, Managing Director & CEO of Re Sustainability, said that the PMRFs, while aiming to revolutionise plastic resource recovery and sustainable resource management practices, will focus on segregating, extracting and recycling resources from diverse waste streams, including plastics, to produce Advanced Circular Materials (ACM).

Indian textile market growth trajectory of \$350 billion by 2030

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

The Indian textile market is poised on a growth trajectory of \$350 billion by 2030, besides textile exports expected to reach \$100 billion, even as the 'Global Textile Technology & Engineering Show' (GTTES) 2025 takes centerstage to drive

technological innovation in achieving this vision through its event this year.

This textile industry's landmark third edition show is being held at the Bombay Exhibition Centre from February 21 to February 23, 2025 for highlighting global textile innovation including state-of-the-art advancement in weaving, processing,



finishing, garments, knitting and technical textiles with eco-friendly practices and sustain-

able growth. Ketan Sanghvi, chairman, India International and Textile Machinery Exhibitions (ITME), said here recently that GTTES is a transformative event responding to the global textile and machinery industry's changing needs, while transforming India into a global leader in textile technology and engineering by 2047.

"The GTTES is an exclusive forum to explore the fascinating world of textiles through stunning displays, interactive installations and thought-provoking artwork," Sanghvi said while noting that the textile industry accounts for 13% of industrial production, 2.3% of GDP and 12% of foreign exchange inflows into the nation, besides India

having a 4% share of the global trade in textile and apparel. Besides GTTES 2025 bringing in 175 exhibitors across eight major categories, including 42 exhibitors in weaving and 38 in processing, he said the event would become a hub for advanced textile technologies in also highlighting green technologies and sustainable solutions.

Trump, PEPFAR and Indian Pharmaceutical Industry

DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is overseen by the Bureau of Global Health Security and Diplomacy (GHSD). Since its launch by the U.S. President George W. Bush in 2003, PEPFAR has supported lifesaving treatment for people living with AIDS and has saved 26 million lives and enabled 7.8 million babies to be born HIV-free as per PEPFAR Factsheet (2024, December 1). Through working with partners in 55 countries, the plan involved ending HIV/AIDS as a public health threat by 2030. Result is evident as there were 52% fewer new HIV infections in 2023 as compared to 2010 across PEPFAR-supported countries as UNAIDS estimates. During 2010-2023, AIDS-related deaths also decreased by 59% in PEPFAR-supported countries. The U.S. government has invested over \$110 billion in the global HIV/AIDS response through PEPFAR.

Office of Global Policy and Strategy (OGPS) of the United States Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) serves as the agency lead for PEPFAR issues. Center for Drug Evalua-

tion and Research (CDER) of the U.S. FDA reviews marketing applications for ARVs for the PEPFAR program through a Tentative Approval/Approval Program. CDER also maintains a PEPFAR database on the U.S. FDA website.

As a result of executive order dated January 20 from the U.S. President Donald Trump, the State Department halted virtually all U.S. foreign assistance for at least 90 days pending review of all programs. States spokesperson Tammy Bruce went on to say that "the US is no longer going to blindly dole out money with no return for the American people." Immediate impact was on workers, employees and contractors at the global health bureau of USAID.

PEPFAR Database lists 264 applications, and 252 approved and tentatively approved products as on January 29, 2025. Approved or Tentatively Approved ANDAs stood at 134, Approved or Tentatively Approved NDAs stood at 70, withdrawn NDAs stood at 19 whereas withdrawn NDAs stood at 72. Further, product categories list Single Dose (101), 2-Fixed Dose Combination (54), 3-Fixed Dose Combination (47), 4-Fixed Dose Combination (3) and Co-Packaged (4).

Indian pharmaceutical companies have significant pres-

ence in Anti-retroviral (ARV) segment. PEPFAR program application list is dominated by Indian companies such as Mylan Laboratories, Aurobindo Pharma with Supplier as Aurobindo Pharma USA, Inc., Cipla, Strides Pharma Science Limited, Hetero Labs Limited, Macleods Pharma, Micro Labs, Centaur Pharma, Laurus Labs, Emcure Pharma, and Lupin Limited. There are very few manufacturers from other countries such as Barr Laboratories (US), Zhejiang Huahai (China), Sushine Lake Pharma (China), Shanghai Desano (China), and Aizant Drug Research (South Korea and India).

A triple anti-retroviral therapy in HIV/AIDS at less than a dollar per day in Africa way back in 2001 is acknowledged as having contributed to bringing inclusiveness, affordability and accessibility to the centre of the HIV movement (AR 2023-24, p.3). Cipla's initiative Cipla Global Access (CGA) has extended the reach of affordable care for HIV/AIDS in addition to Malaria patients since 2001. In FY 2023-24, the company delivered lifesaving medicines to 64 countries. Exports Sales of South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa and Cipla Global Access (SAGA) stood at Rs. 1,048.73 Crores or just 6.59 per cent out of total revenue of Rs.

Table 1: -ARV Formulations Revenue Trend of Aurobindo Pharma

FY	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Revenue	1,252	1,863	833	976	868

Source: Integrated Annual Report (2024) of Aurobindo Pharma (p.140)



15,924.20 Crores for FY 2023-24. In FY 2022-23 too, SAGA sales formed 6.27 per cent of total revenue of Rs. 14,690.14 Crore. So, standalone sales of only antiretrovirals are much less.

Aurobindo Pharma sells ARVs to over 125 countries by participating in global tenders floated by international organizations such as Global Fund, USAID/PEPFAR in addition to country-specific Ministry of Health.

In FY24, Aurobindo Pharma had significant revenue from ARV formulations including the revenue from supply in both the Global Fund and PEPFAR allocation, e.g., in the Global Fund, Aurobindo Pharma was selected as a strategic supply partner for three years duration from January

2023 to December 2025. And in PEPFAR, Aurobindo Pharma was selected under both Lot-1 and Lot-2 allocation. Even with this, Antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) contributed just 3% to the total revenue mix for FY24 as per Integrated Annual Report of the company.

Just a week before implementation of Order that halted U.S. foreign assistance, Lupin received tentative approval from the United States Food and Drug Administration under the PEPFAR for its Abbreviated New Drug Application (ANDA) for the fixed-dose combination of Abacavir, Dolutegravir and Lamivudine Tablets for Oral Suspension, 60 mg/5 mg/30 mg, to market a generic equivalent of Triumeq Tablets for Oral Suspension of ViiV Healthcare

Company. This suspension is a once-daily single-pill regimen and indicated for the treatment of HIV-1 infection in paediatric patients aged at least 3 months and weighing at least 6 kg.

Cipla and Aurobindo Pharma have reduced their reliance on ARVs through change in their product portfolio. Hence, impact of halting PEPFAR for the time being is not very high for these two companies. Laurus Labs has carved a niche in the antiretroviral domain and is world's leading third-party API supplier for antiretrovirals. Satyanarayana Chava, founder and CEO of Laurus Labs on January 30, 2023, had stated that by FY 2025, the ARV business will be 1/3 of Laurus business. He anticipated that rest of the divisions will grow faster than ARVs. So, the company had diversification plans. On Q3 of FY 2023, ARV APIs formed 22 per cent of the company's revenue, and ARV formulation formed about 10 per cent of the company's revenue for nine months so 35 per cent of the revenue came from ARVs — both APIs and Formulations in nine months' period. In this background only, the company issued clarification that the overall ARV market is \$1.5 bn, which is 10 per cent of the total HIV financing budget annually. So, AIDS funding

freeze will not have significant impact.

Impact of halt on PEPFAR was compounded with another Executive Order of January 20, 2025, from the White House regarding the US intention to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO). This was an important development for not only the US but the global healthcare as the USA contributes almost 18% of the WHO funding. The Order cited the reasons as the organization's mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic that arose out of Wuhan, China, and other global health crises, its failure to adopt urgently needed reforms, and its inability to demonstrate independence from the inappropriate political influence of WHO member states. The Order also stated that "the WHO continues to demand unfairly onerous payments from the US, far out of proportion with other countries' assessed payments. China, with a population of 1.4 billion, has 300 per cent of the population of the US, yet contributes nearly 90 per cent less to the WHO".

Given the fact that the U.S. spent \$110 bn since 2003, so PEPFAR represented an opportunity for companies manufacturing generic drugs or providing API for formulations. Temporary halt as

of now shows the reality of VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) world. The way DeepSeek jolted US reign as Tech stocks such as Nvidia, Oracle, Microsoft and Alphabet tumbled, stocks of listed Indian pharmaceutical companies which supplied ARVs to PEPFAR felt the impact of PEPFAR halt by Trump administration. This has lessons to offer on product portfolio too. Indian pharmaceutical companies such as Cipla, Aurobindo have reduced their dependence on ARVs through diversification of their product portfolio so these companies could minimize impact. Those who could not lower their dependence on ARVs, are likely to remain affected for the short run.

On January 25, 2025, the US President said that he may consider rejoining the WHO so the PEPFAR halt may also be temporary, but it has offered an important lesson to remain cautious while there is regime change in important markets, and portfolio re-balancing.

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.

Penal Charges Imposed by Banks and NBFCs will not attract 18% GST: Finance Ministry

NEW DELHI: In a significant move for both borrowers and financial institutions, the Ministry of Finance clarified on Tuesday that penal charges imposed by banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) for non-compliance with loan terms will not attract an 18 per cent Goods and Services Tax (GST).
This announcement comes after the 55th GST Council meeting, where the matter was discussed in response to concerns raised by various stakeholders.
These stakeholders had sought clarification on whether GST would apply to such charges, following the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) directive issued on August 18, 2023.



The RBI had instructed regulated entities to cease using the term "penal interest" in relation to borrowers who fail to meet loan terms. Instead, the central bank urged institutions to replace "penal interest" with the more neutral term "penal charges."

This change was introduced to enhance transparency and ensure clearer communication between borrowers and lenders. The Ministry of Finance's clarification now ensures that these charges, which are typically levied for late payments

or other non-compliance with loan agreements, will not be subjected to the 18 per cent GST rate.
This comes as a relief to borrowers who were concerned that such charges could be further burdened by additional taxes, raising the cost of non-compliance.
The clarification addresses ongoing confusion and provides much-needed clarity, ensuring that both financial institutions and borrowers can move forward with a better understanding of how these charges will be treated under the current tax framework.
This decision is expected to ease compliance issues for both parties and ensure that the financial ecosystem remains transparent and balanced.

RBI's USD 77 Bn War-chest to Stabilize Rupee May Suck Liquidity

NEW DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India has executed substantial market interventions, utilising USD 77 billion from its foreign exchange reserves to maintain the stability of the Indian rupee.
This strategic intervention has proven effective, positioning the rupee as one of the least volatile currencies among its international peers. Official RBI data indicates a significant decline in India's foreign exchange reserves, which fell from USD 701.176 billion on October 4, 2024, to USD 623.983 billion as of January 17, 2024. During this period, the rupee experienced moderate depreciation, moving from 83.8213 to 86.3550 against the US dollar, representing an approximate decline of 2.97 per cent over the three-month period.
Multiple factors have contributed to the rupee's recent depreciation trajectory, including an expanding trade deficit, elevated crude



oil prices, and the US Federal Reserve's indication of fewer rate cuts in 2025.
Additional pressure has stemmed from India's subdued economic growth in Q2FY25 and the outflow of foreign investment from equity markets. The situation has been further complicated by rising Brent crude oil prices, leading to the currency reaching successive record lows against the US dollar. Despite these challenges, Bloomberg data reveals that the Indian rupee has maintained remarkable stability relative to its Asian counterparts. It ranks as the third least volatile currency in the region, following only the

Hong Kong Dollar and Taiwanese dollar, which experienced depreciation of 0.25 per cent and 2.57 per cent respectively between October and January.
The RBI's December 2024 report acknowledged that strengthening US dollar conditions had created depreciation pressure across emerging market currencies, resulting in a 0.7 per cent month-on-month decline in the rupee's value.
The central bank's intervention strategy, while effective in stabilising the currency, has had notable implications for domestic banking liquidity. The mechanism of selling dollars and purchasing rupees in the forex market has resulted in a reduction of liquidity within the banking system. This intervention, executed through banking channels, has contributed to tighter liquidity conditions in the domestic financial sector.

RBI Steps in to Inject Rs. 1.5 Lakh Cr to Ensure Liquidity

NEW DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) unveiled on Monday its largest monetary easing initiative since the pandemic, announcing measures to inject over Rs 1.5 lakh crore into money markets.
This significant intervention aims to address the liquidity constraints that emerged from the central bank's efforts to stabilise the rupee through dollar sales.
The liquidity shortage developed as RBI reportedly sold more than USD 50 billion from its foreign exchange reserves in response to foreign institutional investors' stock sales.
This intervention had consequently tightened short-term interest rates and elevated borrowing costs across the financial system.
The central bank's comprehensive liquidity infusion strategy encompasses three key measures. RBI will conduct a government bond buy-back program worth Rs 60,000 crore, executed in three tranches on January 30, February 13, and February 20, 2025.
Additionally, a long-term 56-day variable rate repo auction for Rs 50,000 crore is scheduled for February 7. The third component involves a US dollar-rupee buy/sell swap auction of USD 5 billion with a six-month tenure, where RBI will borrow dollars against rupees with the interest cost determined by the agreed repurchase price.
In preparation for the upcoming monetary policy review in early February, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra recently convened with private bank leaders. During these discussions, Malhotra emphasised critical priorities including maintaining financial stability, expanding financial inclusion, enhancing digital literacy, and improving access to affordable credit. He also stressed the importance of strengthening customer service and grievance redressal mechanisms. The governor expressed particular concern regarding the increasing instances of digital fraud, urging banks to implement robust preventive systems.

Paytm Payments Services CEO Nakul Jain Resigns, Firm Looking for Suitable Replacement



MUMBAI: Nakul Jain, the CEO and Managing Director (MD) of Paytm Payments Services Ltd (PPSL), has resigned from his post, the company announced in a stock exchange filing.
In the filing, One97 Communications which is the parent company of Paytm, said that "Paytm Payments Services Limited (PPSL), our wholly owned material subsidiary company, has informed us on January 27, 2025 at 10.50 p.m. (IST) that Nakul Jain, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of PPSL, has resigned from his position w.e.f. close of business hours on March 31, 2025 or an earlier mutually agreed date."
Jain has decided to pursue an entrepreneurial journey, which has led him to this decision, according to the company filing.
"PPSL is actively working on identifying a suitable replacement and will announce the new appointment in due course. In the interim, PPSL remains focused on driving its growth and continuing to meet its business objectives," the company added.

Budget 2025-26: Income tax payers want FM Sitharaman to cut rates

NEW DELHI: A pre-budget survey reveals that individual taxpayers want relief on the personal tax front to increase their disposable income in Budget 2025-26 to be presented in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1.
A majority of respondents, 57 per cent, want lower tax rates, while 25 per cent advocate for higher exemption limits, according to the survey carried out by consulting and services firm Grant Thornton Bharat.
Based on the latest data available, a significant number of taxpayers have switched to the simplified new personal (default) tax regime. In fact, currently, 72 per cent of taxpayers have opted for this, and only 28 per cent remain in the old tax regime.
However, to further enhance the appeal of the new tax regime, about 46 per cent of respondents advocate for lowering tax rates, while 26 per cent



believe exemption limits can be increased, the survey states.
Despite the government's indication that the old tax regime may eventually be phased out, it appears that 63 per cent of the taxpayers still seek an increase in incentives under the old tax regime, the survey points out.
As digitalisation reshapes financial processes, taxpayers are increasingly seeking a more efficient tax filing and compliance system. Grant Thornton Bharat's pre-budget survey indicates that 38 per cent of respon-

ders. About 32 per cent of the respondents desire a reduction in the additional tax applicable in case of updated tax returns, and 12 per cent would like an extension in the timeline provided for filing the revised Income Tax Returns (ITRs). These findings suggest that taxpayers are seeking changes that would make tax compliance less burdensome, especially for those living abroad, the survey observes.
What changes should the government make in Union Budget 2025-26 to maximise tax return filing compliance?
As many as 53 per cent of taxpayers are calling for more flexible withdrawal rules and higher tax exemptions under the National Pension Scheme (NPS) on premature withdrawals or annuity payouts. These changes would make the NPS more attractive, driving greater participation and securing long-term financial well-being for individuals.

UPI Dominates India's Digital Payments Landscape with 83 pc Market Share: RBI Reports



NEW DELHI: India's digital payments ecosystem has witnessed a dramatic transformation, with the United Payments Interface (UPI) emerging as the cornerstone of financial transactions, according to the latest Reserve Bank of India's Payments System Report.
UPI now commands an overwhelming 83 per cent share of total payment volume in 2024, a substantial increase from 34 per cent in 2019, while traditional payment methods including RTGS, NEFT, IMPS, and card-based transactions have declined to 17 per cent of the market.
The growth trajectory of UPI has been nothing short of remarkable, with transaction volumes soaring from 375 crore in 2018 to 17,221 crore in 2024.
In monetary terms, UPI transactions escalated from Rs 5.86 lakh crore to Rs 246.83 lakh crore during the same period, demonstrating exceptional compound annual growth rates of 89.3 per cent in volume and 86.5 per cent in value over the five-year span.
The broader Indian payment ecosystem has experienced substantial expansion, with the total transaction value rising from Rs 1,775 lakh crore in 2019 to Rs 2,830

lakh crore in 2024.
Particularly noteworthy is the growth in retail digital payments, which have multiplied nearly 100-fold over the past 12 years, reaching 16,416 crore transactions in fiscal year 2025.
This digital transformation is further evidenced by the RBI's Digital Payment Index, which has more than quadrupled from its base value of 100 in March 2018 to 445.50 in March 2024.
RBI Deputy Governor T. Rabi Sankar attributes this remarkable progress to a combination of innovation and supportive regulatory frameworks, which have elevated India's payment systems to rank among the world's most sophisticated.
The overall digital payments landscape has maintained robust growth rates, recording a five-year CAGR of 45.9 per cent in volume and 10.2 per cent in value, highlighting India's successful transition toward a digital economy.

CRED Launches e₹ Wallet in Partnership with RBI

Select CRED Members Can Now Participate in Shaping the Future of Money
NEW DELHI: CRED has launched a beta version of its e wallet, developed in collaboration with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and YES BANK as the sponsor bank. This milestone makes CRED the first



fintech platform to implement RBI's Central Bank Digital

Currency (CBDC), advancing India's sovereign digital currency vision. YES BANK's role as the first sponsor bank to enable CBDC issuance for a Third Party Application Provider (TPAP) like CRED exemplifies its commitment to driving innovation and supporting the future of digital payments.

Getting Started with CRED e-Wallet: The CRED e-wallet combines the trust and safety of a sovereign currency with the frictionless CRED payments experience. CRED members whitelisted for the beta can pay UPI-linked bank accounts, and send/receive money to other CBDC wallets.

Banking sector's expectations from Union Budget



SATISH SINGH
The Union Budget for the year 2025 is to be presented on February 1, in which provisions will be made for the upcoming financial year, with the help of which development can be accelerated as well as appropriate measures can be taken for the betterment of the deprived sections and farmers. Sectors like manufacturing, construction, education, health, road, rail etc. have played an important role in ensuring the development of the country, but the role of banks has been more important than all these sectors and they are deciding the direction of development of all these sectors.
To make the budget effective, suggestions have been sought from all important stakeholders, including banks. Since independence, banks have been playing an important role in making the country economically strong. Therefore, it is important that the government should make provisions in the budget to strengthen the banks. Only when the banks are strong, they will be able to make the country economically strong & ensure inclusive growth of the country.
Today, the biggest problem facing banks is the lack of cheap capital. Broadly speaking, the job of a bank is to take deposits from customers and distribute the same deposits in the form of loans among the needy and businessmen. Banks pay low interest on deposits and charge high interest on loans. The bank earns

profit from the difference in interest rates. At present, the government is collecting tax on the interest earned on savings, recurring and fixed deposits. Banks have also invested the bank's deposits in mutual funds and insurance to increase their earnings. Here, due to the strong economy for the last few years, the Sensex of the stock market is continuously going up and people are getting better returns on investments in the stock market and mutual funds. In such a situation, domestic investors are avoiding investing in banks.
Due to the shortage of deposits, banks have to raise capital from the market at higher interest rates to give loans and there is a vulnerability of liquidity crisis in the market. Due to the decrease in borrowing, economic activities have declined, and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has decreased significantly. Therefore, to encourage personal savings, there is a need to make the interest earned on savings, recurring and fixed deposits tax-free.
Currently, the interest earned on these is being considered as income and tax is being levied on them. Also, tax exemption should be given on all bank deposits under Section 80C of the Income Tax Act. To encourage deposits, government-backed savings schemes with guaranteed returns should be started in rural areas, because rural people still avoid investing in the stock market and mutual funds. In this sequence, to encourage savings, arrangements should be made to give tax-free interest on deposits made by women, senior citizens and farmers.



There is also a need for government-backed awareness campaigns to educate citizens about the importance of saving and using formal banking channels. This can also increase bank deposits. The government should sell attractive long-term government savings bonds through banks to increase bank deposits and help meet borrowing needs of big companies & corporates.
The government needs to make strong laws to prevent incidents of online fraud, because due to the increasing frequency of cybercrime, the common men are avoiding keeping deposits in banks. Due to the frequent collapse of cooperative banks & private banks, there is a fear in the minds of customers. To assure them that their money will be safe, the deposit insurance limit needs to be increased from Rs 5 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. In case of bank failure, the process of deposit insurance claims should be made simpler. This can also promote deposits.
The government should create a strong framework for the expansion of schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY). The concept of financial inclusion can be realized by opening more and more savings ac-

count by the common men. By connecting with the bank, the deprived sections will be able to get the benefits of government schemes, and they can be made financially literate, which will increase their chances of becoming self-reliant. This will also give strength to the digitalization campaign of the country, they will also be able to get facilities like crop insurance, agricultural loan etc.
There has been a significant reduction in the non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks in the past years. However, recovery mechanisms like SARFAESI, Bank Adalat etc. need to be strengthened further. In contrast, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) was established under the Companies Act, 2013 to recover NPAs from large defaulting companies, but its performance has also not been as expected. The excessive delay in reaching a decision and the settlement amount being 15 to 25 per cent of the principal loan amount raises questions on its success.
Following the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court, TDS (Tax Deducted at Source) on benefits given to bank employees is going to be introduced from January 2025. Some banks have currently

RBI's Circular on Cooperative Banks: Unlocking Opportunities in Digital Payments

DEEPAK CHAND THAKUR

"India currently has over 450 million UPI users, yet person-to-merchant transaction processing remains concentrated among a few large banks. The recent RBI circular allowing cooperative banks to offer acquiring services marks a significant turning point in this landscape. Historically, these banks have served rural and semi-urban populations, but the new regulations open the door to their active participation in the rapidly expanding digital payments ecosystem. This move promises to enhance financial inclusion by enabling cooperative banks to diversify their offerings and better serve their customers through digital channels.
However, the challenge lies in the inherent complexity of the acquiring business. Acquir-



ing services demand large-scale infrastructure, low margins, and sophisticated technology to handle high transaction volumes efficiently. Cooperative banks, often constrained by budgets and limited access to the latest technologies, may struggle to build or implement these systems independently.
In this context, the Payment Platform-as-a-Service (PPaaS) model emerges as a highly effective solution. By adopting PPaaS, cooperative banks can bypass the technology and financial barriers that

might otherwise impede their ability to participate in the acquiring business. The PPaaS model provides an end-to-end technology infrastructure that requires minimal upfront investment, making it an ideal choice for banks that lack the internal expertise or financial resources to build such systems from scratch.
NPST stands as a key player in this space, offering comprehensive technology stacks to facilitate the seamless integration of acquiring services. By partnering with NPST, cooperative banks can focus on their core strengths—acquiring merchants, scaling their operations, and expanding their market reach—while NPST manages the complex tasks of technology development, compliance, and infrastructure management.

WEF 2025: India grabs investment commitments worth over ₹20 lakh cr



NEW DELHI: In a clear show of its economic strength amid geo-political uncertainties, India bagged investment commitments worth more than Rs 20 lakh crore at the annual World Economic Forum (WEF) summit in Davos.
Maharashtra managed to get the biggest pie of almost 80 per cent investments proposals at the global event. Led by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, Maharashtra signed at least 61

MoUs worth Rs 15.7 lakh crore, with the potential to generate over 16 lakh jobs. Telangana delegation, led by CM Revanth Reddy, grabbed 20 MoUs worth at least Rs 1.80 lakh crore.
Kerala and Uttar Pradesh also showcased their ambitious future plans and secured significant investment commitments.
Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu held fruitful discussions with chief executive officers (CEOs)

of various globally-renowned companies and representatives of different nations. During meetings with heads of different business houses, the Chief Minister explained in detail the opportunities available in the state for making their investments. At the event, IT major Infosys also announced to expand its presence in Hyderabad and create 17,000 jobs.
Union Railways and Electronics and IT Minister, Ashwini Vaishnav, highlighted India's balanced approach to economic development with both manufacturing and services driving the nation's growth in his speech at the World Economic Forum. He emphasised India's transformation from focusing solely on import substitution to adopting a "Make in India, Make for the World" approach.

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

INTERNATIONAL

House Foreign Affairs Committee to review America's policy towards India

WASHINGTON: The powerful House Committee on Foreign Affairs will review the US policy towards India and the continued expansion of bilateral cooperation, particularly in the defence sector.

India appears on the 11th list of priorities for the House Committee on Foreign Affairs for the current Congress.

The committee said it "will review US policy towards India and the continued expansion of bilateral cooperation rooted in shared democratic values while countering the influence of US adversaries in South and Central Asia."

"Particular attention will be paid to the US-India defence relationship, including security and technology cooperation, opportunities for expanded roles, missions, and capabilities, and counterterrorism efforts," it said.

The committee will also focus on efforts to effectively enhance US-India economic



relations, including discussions surrounding bilateral efforts in the technology, telecommunications, and pharmaceutical industries.

"The committee will also focus on efforts to bolster India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue efforts and review the implications of India's rapidly growing energy demands," it said.

The top priority for the committee will be the dangers posed by China.

Adopting its authorisation and oversight plan for the 119th Congress, the committee said it will review the international agreements and treaties China has signed and its violations thereof.

This will encompass the human rights agreements China has violated through its genocide of the Uyghurs and persistent abuse of human rights, the violations of its obligations to Hong Kong under the Basic Law, actions incon-

sistent with its World Trade Organisation and other trade and investment obligations, non-proliferation regimes, cyber agreements, and other bilateral and international agreements.

After China, the second on top of the priority is an examination of the State Department's participation in multilateral forums such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and closely monitor any discussion of trade agreements in the Indo-Pacific region.

It will also conduct regular review and oversight over the State Department and US Agency for International Development resourcing in the Indo-Pacific.

Among the top 10 issues for the committee are Taiwan, Europe, Russia and its war against Ukraine, the Middle East and North Africa, Israel, Iran, Africa and Afghanistan.

Hamas Frees Eight Hostages in Gaza; Israel Delays Prisoner Release



JERUSALEM: Palestinian militants in Gaza, led by Hamas, released eight hostages, three Israelis and five Thais, on Thursday. But Israel delayed the release of 110 Palestinian prisoners in a swap agreed under the ongoing temporary ceasefire, citing chaotic scenes during the handover.

The hostages were released in two groups. Agam Berger, a 20-year-old Israeli soldier, was freed first. Video showed her, wearing a khaki uniform, emerging from damaged buildings in Jabalia, northern Gaza, escorted by Hamas militants,

before walking to a Red Cross vehicle. She was then taken to a compound outside Gaza to reunite with her parents.

Later, in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, two Israelis, Arbel Yahoud, 29, and Gadi Mozes, 80, along with five Thai nationals, were handed over to the Red Cross. Footage showed chaotic scenes as hundreds of Gazans gathered, and militants struggled to control the crowd and clear a path for the hostages.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu condemned the "shocking scenes" and called on international mediators to

ensure the safety of hostages in future releases.

The Israeli military identified the Thais as Thenna Pongsak, Sathian Suwannakham, Sriaoun Watchara, Seathao Bannawat, and Rumnao Surasak. They were farm workers abducted from southern Israel during the October 7 attack that triggered the war. The military said the seven hostages crossed into Israel and underwent medical assessments. The Israelis were reunited with their families, while the Thais were met by Thai officials, Xinhua news agency reported.

Shortly after the seven hostages' release, Netanyahu's office said the Palestinian prisoner release was delayed "until the safe departure of our hostages in the upcoming phases is assured." Israeli media reported that buses carrying Palestinian prisoners were ordered to turn back. Hamas said it was in contact with mediators to "compel" Israel to release the prisoners.

Quran burner Salwan Momika Shot Dead in Sweden, 5 arrested



STOCKHOLM: Salwan Momika, the 38-year-old man who held several demonstrations in Sweden and was accused of burning the Quran, has been shot dead in the city of Soder-talje in Stockholm County in east central Sweden, Swedish media reported on Thursday.

Momika was allegedly shot dead while he was conducting a live broadcast on social media from his apartment in Hovsjö late on Wednesday, a day before a verdict was scheduled to be announced by the Stockholm District Court in an incitement case against him.

"I can confirm that five people have been arrested, suspected of murder," prosecutor Rasmus Ohman was quoted as saying by Sweden's leading daily Dagens Nyheter.

According to the spokesperson for the Stockholm Police Region, the police received a report of the shooting in Hovsjö at 11:11 pm, local time.

The newspaper detailed that the crime scene was investigated overnight and the apartment building remains cordoned off on Thursday with several police officers on site. It was reported that drones have also been sent up over the area.

"The police have been questioning me and they confirmed that he has died," Salwan Najem, a friend of Salwan Momika, told Swedish state broadcaster SVT. Najem, who said that he has been told "you're next", had also spoken during the night with Momika's girlfriend.

"She started crying and said they killed him," Najem told SVT. The desecration of the Quran had sparked an angry reaction from several countries, including Saudi Arabia, which strongly condemned the burning of a copy of the Islamic holy book in the Swedish city of Malmö by Momika, an individual of Iraqi origin, in October 2023.

The Saudi Foreign Ministry had "reiterated the Kingdom's rejection of such flagrant acts," and said such a move had inflamed the feelings of millions of Muslims worldwide.

Cambodia urged people to be extra vigilant against high air pollution



PHNOM PENH: Cambodia urged people to be extra vigilant against high air pollution, saying that they should wear masks for outdoor activities. Seasonal air quality in the capital Phnom Penh and three other provinces, namely Banteay Meanchey, Koh Kong and Siem Reap provinces, had reached a "red level," meaning that air pollution was "high" in these regions. The Ministry of Health said people should stay indoors when air quality in their areas is classified as high pollution (red level) or very high pollution (purple level), or when the sky is foggy caused by an increase in polluted air. "Windows and doors should be closed to prevent bad air from entering your homes," the ministry said in a statement. "People should reduce outdoor activities during periods of high air pollution or very high air pollution, or wear masks if it's necessary," the ministry added.

East African Leaders Appeal For Urgent Ceasefire In Congo As Fighting Escalates

NAIROBI: East African leaders have called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) amid fighting that has hampered humanitarian operations in the city of Goma.

Leaders from the East African Community (EAC), who held an emergency summit by video link, also called on the DRC government to engage directly with all stakeholders, including the M23 rebel group, to peacefully resolve the escalating conflict.

"The summit called on all parties to the conflict in eastern DRC to cease hostilities and observe an immediate and un-



conditional ceasefire and facilitate humanitarian access to the affected population," the leaders said in a statement issued in Nairobi, the capital of Kenya.

President Felix Tshisekedi of the DRC, an EAC member state,

did not take part in the summit convened by Kenyan President William Ruto, who rotates as the chairman of the EAC.

Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni, Tanzanian

President Samia Suluhu Hassan, Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Burundian President Evariste Ndayishimiye and South Sudanese President Salva Kiir attended.

Participants at the emergency gathering discussed the worsening security situation in eastern DRC and the city of Goma, where fighting between the DRC army and M23 rebels intensified, Xinhua news agency reported.

The leaders condemned attacks on diplomatic missions in Kinshasa, the DRC capital, and urged the government to protect the embassies and property as well as their staff.

Sikh delegation meets Vice President of European Parliament to discuss their difficulties

TANVIR KAUR
New Delhi

The Sikhs living in Europe are facing religious and social problems for the past several years and one gets to read and hear about the



abuses happening to them in the newspapers. Sardar Binder Singh President European Sikh Organization is trying to get rid of these difficulties. In this connection, they have informed about their difficulties with a high-level Sikh delegation to European Parliament Vice President Antonella Sberna, and they have asked for some details in response. Giving information about this to the media, he said that because our Sikh religion is not registered in Europe, we have to be a victim of religious discrimination, in which in many places, we are prohibited from wearing kakash.

After meeting delegation said that we have told our

point in detail to the Vice President and "she assured us she will make her best efforts to help solve this matter". It has to be said here that on this very serious issue, the participation of Jathedar Akal Takht Sahib ji in the Parliament of Europe for Sikh issues has become necessary because without his presence, this issue will not be resolved, but despite the program being made twice in a row some technical reasons, they could not attend due to which this matter has become more serious. On this occasion, European Sikh Organization President Binder Singh honored Vice President Antonella Sberna with a commemorative memento.

Australia's rate of inflation has slowed to the lowest level in over three years

CANBERRA: Australia's rate of inflation has slowed to the lowest level in over three years, official figures have revealed.

According to data published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on Wednesday, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) - the headline measure of inflation - rose by 2.4 per cent in the 12 months to the



end of the quarter ending in December 2024 compared

to 2.8 per cent in the year to September.

It marks the lowest rate of inflation in a 12-month period to the end of any quarter since March 2021 when annual inflation was 1.1 per cent, and a sharp decline from the peak of 7.8 per cent reported in the year to December 2022.

Treasurer Jim Chalmers

said in a statement posted on social media that the figures show "substantial and sustained progress in the fight against inflation".

He said that headline inflation is around the middle of the 2-3 per cent target band set by the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA), the nation's Central Bank.

DeepSeek

China Asserts Supremacy in AI, Trump Takes Belated Initiative



GOPAL MISRA
US President Donald Trump, the leader of the world's most powerful democracy, is worried about Beijing's growing supremacy in the key technologies, especially Artificial Intelligence or AI.

India, on the other hand, just ignores the growing threats from her northern borders. She finds more at home with her so-called glorious past, perhaps, living in a make believe world. The New Chinese platform, DeepSeek, shakes the American stock exchanges, forcing Trump to reassure the free world that the US would pick up the gauntlet by investing more in the technologies. Only 10 days before Trump's crucial press conference at White House, Elon Musk had taken Indian techs to his Texas establishment, a rare recognition of the Indian talent, but in India the budgetary cuts for scientific research have already hit hard. It is estimated that even IITs are facing paucity of funds for research.

Meanwhile, with the exit of the rudderless Biden Administration, the new American establishment has decided to curtail wasteful expenditures for adopting a new policy by committing much larger financial allocations in the key fields focussing on the development of robotics, artificial intelligence and in the related areas.

It was natural for Trump not to concede the supremacy of China in these key areas at the recently held press conference. He, perhaps, camouflaged the American

agenda by pretending that his administration is going to use AI for an early detection of cancer and accordingly the treatment would be conducted by developing the patient-specific vaccine within 48 hours. It means that the AI could be used for offering much cheaper treatment to patients instead of using broad spectrum medicines.

It is interesting to note that the Indian media has chosen to ignore these recent claims of Beijing and its worldwide reactions and ramifications. Instead, Indian media is seen weaving a narrative without any substance, trumpeting and stressing upon that the US under Trump would be ignoring Pakistan and thus India would be finding solace under the American patronage.

The Apprehension: The knowledgeable sources in India have confided that the AI supported medical treatment would be needing a big database, perhaps, comprising the total population of a given area.

If this data could be accessed by the enemy country or a terrorist group, it could be used to develop a specific virus for destroying the entire population of the targeted area before any preventive measures could be taken.

In other words, if a few corporations decide to unleash a new strain of any virus, they may easily repeat a Covid-19 epidemic on a much larger scale focusing on a specific population. It may be recalled that the Spanish invaders in Latin America had used quilts, having been infected with the smallpox virus, which had decimated more than 10 million natives. A recent Harvard University study regarding the use of smallpox against



the natives of the northern states, especially in New York and New Jersey, has been hushed up.

A Robot that Thinks: The artificial intelligence platforms like Google Gemini, Chitchat or the open AI-GPT have already penetrated among school children in the private Indian schools. The school children can write an essay without any effort with the help of the AI. It means children need not to learn any specific skill. It is expected that the AI might soon infect other schools in coming months. The parents aware of this menace are already finding it difficult to dissuade their children from using the AI.

It must be understood that with an unprecedented computing power, a thinking robot might even trigger a nuclear holocaust. For example, if the robot comes to a conclusion on the basis of its analysis that a missile with nuclear weapons is going to hit soon, it may reciprocate with nuclear weapons, thus without any caution or human intervention, the human race will be wiped out from the earth.

Opportunity Missed: Professor Ramamurthy of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore,

once bemoaned that the successive governments in India only indulge in rhetoric and seldom support higher studies in science and technology. In recent years, the situation has worsened in the country with the strong presence of criminals in Parliament. In the 2024, polls as many as 251 newly elected in members of the Lok Sabha are facing serious charges like murders and rape. Of the 250 members of the House, the ruling BJP has a share of 39 percent that the AI might soon infect other schools in coming months. The parents aware of this menace are already finding it difficult to dissuade their children from using the AI.

With this background, it is not surprising that India, which had an edge in the field of science and technology against China 10 years ago, has now been relegated to become almost a non-descript country in the field of technologies and may soon be competing with Pakistan and Bangladesh or some African country.

For this, only the political leaders should be blamed. It may be noted that the leaders

of the present day ruling BJP were led by L.K. Advani before Narendra Modi arrived on the national scene, who had opposed the introduction of computers and cell phones in India. In his speech before the Rajya Sabha, he had stated that the government under Rajiv Gandhi was committing a blunder by introducing the high technologies in India. He further ridiculed Rajiv Gandhi that his government believed that poor farmers and domestic help would soon be using the cell phones. Later, Advani, who is remembered for calling the founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a secular, was later elevated to the coveted position of the Deputy Prime Minister in Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. Recently despite his regarded views, the Narendra Modi government has anointed him with Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award.

In this context, it is not surprising that India, which had an edge against China in the key fields of computer science, rocketry and in exploration of space, especially in the development of software, during the last decade of the 20th century has suddenly lost her presence in these high-tech areas, especially under the BJP rule.

Apart from the backward looking senior leaders, this setback could also be attributed to the excessive indulgence in rhetoric or self-praise by the ruling elite instead of harnessing the country's resources for genuine work. It will be a challenging task for any government in future to prevent the country's continuous decline in the key areas of academics.

Trump's Initiative: Within a fortnight of being sworn-

in, Trump held a joint press-conference at White House with the Oracle CEO, Larry Ellison, and the CEO of Soft-Bank, Masayoshi Son.

Interestingly, neither Trump nor his associates at the press conference confessed that their decision to invest billions of US dollars in AI have been prompted by the recent success of the Chinese artificial intelligence platform, DeepSeek. The Chinese have also claimed that they have developed it within two months by investing just six million US dollars.

Neither Trump nor Ellison cared to explain that the impact of DeepSeek has already hit the American Stock Exchange market NASDAQ and American companies have lost huge money, perhaps, in billions of the US dollars.

India, No More in Race: In recent years, India has changed her priority from becoming a scientifically advanced country to a land of sadhus in quest of God. With this shift in her policy, it is natural for India to lose her initial edge in the fields such as technology and science. They consider it irrelevant to devote energy in the fields of science and technology, they now prefer being a follower of the Sanatan or the ancient religion and rituals.

Meanwhile, Indian techs have the option either to bask in the glory of the past or seek jobs in the Chinese universities or try to seek employment under Musk.

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

United Nations chief speaks with presidents of Rwanda, DR Congo over conflict



UNITED NATIONS: UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres talked over the phone with the presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Rwanda to discuss the escalating conflict in the DRC, a UN spokesman said.

When asked about the content of the conversations, Stephane Dujarric, chief spokesman for the UN secretary-general, replied at a regular briefing. "The secretary-general obviously discussed the situation in the DRC, and he's been very clear both publicly and privately for the need for Rwanda to cease support to the M23 (March 23 Movement) and withdraw from the DRC."

The M23 rebels occupy portions of Goma, the largest city of eastern DRC, while Rwanda has been denying allegations its troops were in the DRC, supporting M23, Xinhua news agency reported. The spokesman added that during the call with Rwandan President Paul Kagame, Guterres emphasised the need to protect civilians in the DRC's fighting. In a statement released on Sunday, the UN chief said that he was deeply concerned by the escalating violence in the eastern DRC, and reiterated his strongest condemnation of the M23's ongoing offensive and advances toward Goma. He called on the M23 to immediately cease all hostile actions and withdraw from occupied areas.

Dujarric also said at the briefing the situation in Goma remains tense and fluid. "M23 forces, we are told, are inside

the city, and UN peace-keeping personnel and troops have largely been forced to shelter in their bases," he told reporters. "Medical facilities in Goma are reportedly overwhelmed, and essential services have

obviously been disrupted." The spokesman said the M23 controls the airport, and armed clashes continue in multiple regions, including in Masisi, Rutshuru, and Nyiragongo, further displacing civilians. He said there were risks of a breakdown in law and order in the city, given the proliferation of weapons. The UN mission in the DRC, known as MONUSCO, said it has seen credible reports of escapees from the prison in Goma, as well as looting by civilians.

The movement of essential supplies and personnel is an urgent concern as hostilities complicate humanitarian efforts, Dujarric said. Non-essential UN personnel have been temporarily relocated from the south Kivu province capital city and the surrounding area. "Our peacekeeping colleagues also report that protests in Kinshasa over the ongoing situation in the DRC have turned violent, with demonstrators setting fire outside of UN premises -- both the peacekeeping and some of our agencies -- as well as targeting several embassies," the spokesman said. "Looting has also been reported in Kinshasa." The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said the humanitarian situation in and around Goma remains worrying. Hospitals in Goma continue to be overwhelmed, struggling to manage the influx of wounded people. Two ambulances from a local NGO (non-governmental organisation) were targeted while attempting to evacuate wounded people.

Cracking Saif Ali Khan's case in a jiffy!

JULIO RIBEIRO

It was in 1975 (or perhaps the first half of 1976) that I first set eyes on Saif Ali Khan. He was fast asleep on the upper berth of a coupe on a Mumbai-Ahmedabad train. The berth was booked in the name of his father, the Nawab of Pataudi, Mansoor Ali Khan, a former captain of India's cricket team.

The Nawab and I had dinner on the lower berth, which was booked in my name. Ten years later, he came to my Chandigarh bungalow to interview me. He recalled our train journey and I inquired about his son.

A few years ago, I met Saif and his wife, Kareena, at the Mahalaxmi Race Course. It was the day of the Indian Derby. Saif and I were guests of our mutual friend, Faruq Rattansay, whose horses had won the race in two successive years previously. I took advantage of the occasion to recount to him that train journey.

Earlier this month, I found his name and pictures splashed across newspapers and news channels for his brush with an intruder in his 11th-floor suburb of Bandra, where many Bollywood actors live. Saif was stabbed when he confronted the intruder. He had to go to a private, well-known hospital close to his home for medical treatment, including a surgery in close proximity to the spine. It was a delicate operation expertly performed by the hospital's competent doctors. Saif recovered in five days and was discharged.

An unnecessary controversy was kicked up in the electronic and print media on unrelated issues like why his wife did not accompany him to the hospital and why he chose an autorickshaw over an Uber or an Ola. (Answer: It was easily available outside his residence).

The worst was yet to come. In the days following the assault, critics of the Maharashtra Government went to town proclaim-



ing a total collapse of law and order. They denigrated my city of Mumbai as the most dangerous place to live in and its police force as the pits as far as security of life and property was concerned. Arnab Goswami, the doyen of sensation-seeking newshounds, found fault with every move the police made to nab the culprit. He was still smarting from the fact that the Mumbai Police had dared to arrest him and put him behind bars for a few days for trying to build up viewership through sensationalism.

Politicians went even further, making all sorts of inferences and insinuations, going to the extent of asserting that Saif was not stabbed or injured at all, but was merely playing the 'gallery'! BJP leader Nitesh Rane, recently inducted into the Mahayuti government, tried to introduce a communal angle into the episode. Nitesh is a known Muslim-baiter and poor Saif is consequently condemned in the minister's eyes. I am sure that the minister is aware that Saif's mother is Sharmila Tagore and his wife Kareena Kapoor. How much of Islam Saif himself has imbibed or follows is uncertain. As far as my knowledge goes, religion has never been a contentious issue in Bollywood.

The criticism of the police is even more disturbing. Doubts have been expressed about the identity of the man arrested, to the extent of asserting that he does not resemble the person shown entering and exiting through the staircase in the CCTV footage. The doubts have been created

by elements who want to disparage the government at any cost, particularly on an occasion when a golden opportunity to berate it in the public eye presents itself, like it does when a prominent person is attacked. Level-headed and fair-minded citizens will pat the back of the city police's crime busters for the systematic and patient efforts they made to nab the culprit despite the tremendous pressure they faced from the onset of the investigation. It is not easy to get rid of public and political pressures to trace culprits quickly on such occasions. I have experienced such pressures myself all through my working years and hence can relate and sympathize with the officers and men entrusted with the job.

The officer who merits special mention is the DCP (Deputy Commissioner of Police) of Zone IX, Dikshit Gedam, in whose jurisdiction Bandra police station is located. He must have worked 18 hours a day in the week after the crime. He answered every question asked by the media without giving away clues that would hamper the arrest of the attacker. It was clear to an old policeman like me that he was on the right track and supervising the investigation carefully while simultaneously fending off the 'attacks' of the media and politicians with admirable equanimity. It is a difficult balancing act, but a dedicated police officer has to learn to navigate such obstacles if he has to succeed. Gedam appears to have passed that test with distinction. His immediate boss, Paramjit Dahiya, Addi-

tional Commissioner of Police (West Region), also had a major role to play in the investigation.

Reading between the lines, I suspect that the vital clue about the intruder's identity came from the owner of the agency that had helped Shariful Islam, a Bangladeshi national, obtain employment in a bar in Mumbai's suburbs. He appears to be a police informer. Shariful had been removed from his first job on the charge of theft in a restaurant. That had alerted the agency's owner.

The fact that the intruder had crossed the India-Bangladesh border some eight months ago set off another raucous round of conjectures and accusations. Infiltration of Bangladeshis into India has taken root ever since the Pakistan Army unleashed its depredations there in 1971. Infiltration continued thereafter for economic reasons. It tapered off when Bangladesh's economy improved and took off again when the agitation against the Sheikh Hasina government gathered steam. To give other slants to immigration except the obvious economic one are games that politicians play. Infiltrators should be rounded up and sent back. The Mumbai Police have been doing this from the days I was its Police Commissioner and that is a good 40 years ago or more.

We have had enough of politics and amateur sleuthing in the Saif case. His Afghan ancestors had helped the East India Company win the war against the Marathas. In gratitude, the company bestowed on the Barech tribe of Pashtuns, led by Faiz Talab Khan, an ancestor of Saif, the princely state of Pataudi with 40 villages thrown in. Saif is the titular Nawab today, even though the intruder was unaware of his identity. He chose Saif's flat because the actor had carelessly kept the bathroom window open.

The author is former Police Commissioner Mumbai. The article was first published in the Tribune.

Punjab's Harike Wetland calling nature lovers...!



RAJU WILLIAM
Harike Wetland (Tarn Taran)

On February 2, 2025, environmentalists are again converging at Punjab's Harike Wetland to celebrate World Wetlands Day with a Bada Yatra (water safari) and a nature walk.

This is third time in a row when such event is being organized at village Karmuwal near Harike Pattan Wetland in Tarn Taran district by a group of environmentalists under the banner of Bhoomitra and Public Action Committee (PAC) Satluj-Mattewara-Buddha Dariya at village Karmuwal near Harike Pattan Wetland.

Located at the confluence of the Sutlej and Beas rivers, Harike is one of India's most important wetlands and a haven for wildlife.

Known Indian sufi singer Rabbi Shergill and saxophonist from France Nicolo Vacchi had participated and performed as part of the celebration in the last two editions of this event.

This year Claire Nicolet, a handpan musician and a psychologist from France will join and perform at the event which has been gaining popularity since inception. Jeanette Satpel, a social media consultant from Bahrain will be present to document the event.

France-based the prime mover behind Bhoomitra movement, Dr Sunny Sandhu informed that they were quite excited to announce a special celebration of nature at Harike Pattan, featuring a serene boat ride and bird-watching experience.

The event offers an opportunity to witness the incredible diversity of migratory birds, including Siberian cranes, bar-headed geese, northern shovellers, and other remarkable species that travel thousands of



kilometers in the winter season.

However, Harike Pattan is also home to the endangered freshwater Indus River dolphins, a species that thrives in the cleaner waters of the Beas River. Sadly, while the Beas remains relatively pristine and supports these dolphins, the Sutlej River faces severe pollution challenges due to industrial effluents and un-

treated sewage. "This stark contrast between the two rivers highlights the urgent need to address the growing issue of river pollution," added Sandhu.

"Through this unique initiative, we aim to not only celebrate the rich biodiversity of Harike but also draw attention to the importance of conserving these critical habitats. Wetlands like Harike are facing the brunt of polluted Sutlej waters and if we can tame polluters of the Buddha Dariya, Kala Sanghia drain and Chitti Bein then we can achieve a much cleaner Satluj just like the Beas river which is far better and in turn a cleaner Harike Wetland," said Jaskirat Singh of the PAC.

The success of this event in last two years and the rising interest of environmental activists, musicians and poets to promote and



protect wetlands and rivers is a testament to the fact that people of Punjab are resisting the pollution and plunder of rivers and natural ecosystems of Punjab. This will also save people of Punjab and Rajasthan from a toxic drinking water which has given rise to movements like 'Kale Pani Da Morcha' over pollution of Ludhiana's Buddha Dariya.

Karan Johar Confirms Ibrahim Ali Khan's Bollywood Debut



MUMBAI: Filmmaker Karan Johar has officially confirmed that Ibrahim Ali Khan is set to make his debut in the film industry.

Announcing the same on social media, Johar revealed that Saif Ali Khan's son is ready to step into the world of cinema, following in the footsteps of his famous parents. On Wednesday, Karan took to his Instagram handle and shared candid shots of Ibrahim alongside a lengthy note where he recalled his first meeting with Ibrahim's mother Amrita Singh and father Saif Ali Khan.

For the caption, the director wrote, "I met Amrita or Dingy, how the loved ones like to call her...when I was just 12 years old. She did a film for @dharmaMovies with my father called Duniya, and I remember so vividly the grace, the energy & the commandment over the camera she had. BUT, what I remember the most is the warmest chinese dinner with her and her hairstylist of the time after our first meeting, followed by a James Bond movie! She treated me like her own the second we met and that was the power of her grace...which lives on through her and her children too!"

He added, "With Saif, it was in Anand Mahendru's office where I first met him. Young, suave, charming & effortless...VERY much like the first time I met Ibrahim. And a strong friendship that continues from our generation to luckily our kids!!!"

Amritsar man gets new lease of life post complex Whipple surgery

FW DESK
Chandigarh



PRABHJOT GILL
Amritsar

Vikramjit Singh (50) a patient from Amritsar, who was suffering from deep jaundice and a tumour in stomach and small intestine, got a new lease of life after a successful complex Whipple surgery at Max Hospital, Mohali.

Giving information, Dr Manmohan Bedi, associate director general surgery said that Vikramjit was brought to Max in a critically deteriorating condition. He was suffering from yellowish discoloration of his eyes. He was diagnosed with deep jaundice which led to further evaluation of the patient and disclosed a tumour in the duodenum (small intestine). The biopsy was taken from the tumour to determine its nature. The patient's condition continued to deteriorate further as he started to pass blood through motion thus causing a dangerous fall in his blood pressure level due to continuous bleeding from the affected intestine. All efforts to stop the bleeding failed despite repeated endoscopy and efforts through interventional radiology. Furthermore, his haemoglobin dropped down to 3 grams despite transfusing 20 units of blood. The drugs to maintain the blood pressure too failed to maintain the level.

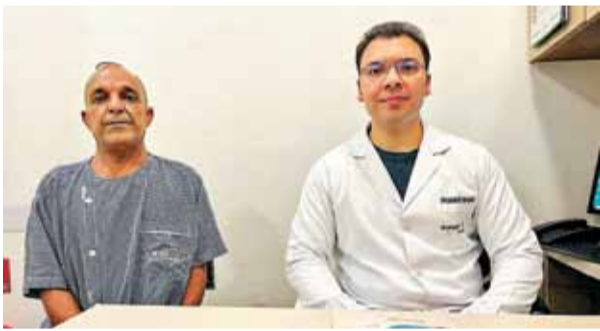
Dr Bedi said, "The surgery was extremely challenging and complex. It required the removal of the bleeding part of the intestine, along with a major portion of the head of the pancreas, the lower end of the common bile duct, and part of the stomach, to control the bleeding." Given the poor health condition of the patient, which was deteriorating with time, the surgical option was opted for by the patient by understanding the high complications of the case. "The major challenge in this highly complex surgery was the patient's critical condition and administering anaesthesia to maintain stability during the procedure, ensuring the removal of the affected organs with minimal blood loss,"

Triumph of Expertise and Care: A Complex Case Successfully Treated at Ojas Hospital Panchkula

FW DESK
Chandigarh

A 53-year-old male Patient from Himachal Pradesh faced a daunting medical challenge. He was diagnosed with chronic kidney disease (CKD), he had been suffering from kidney stones for the past two years. His condition was compounded by the non-functional state of his left kidney, while his right kidney, the only functioning one, was completely filled with stones. Adding to the complexity, the patient's platelet count was dangerously low, and he had uncontrolled high blood pressure, making any surgical intervention a high-risk endeavor.

A Dire Situation: Several hospitals had declined to take up the case due to the significant risks involved. The combination of CKD, high blood pressure, and thrombocytopenia (low platelet count) presented a formidable challenge. With nowhere else to turn, the patient approached **Ojas Hospital, a unit of Alchemist Hospitals,**



seeking hope and relief.

Comprehensive Evaluation at Ojas Hospital: The case was entrusted to **Dr. Sumeet Devgan**, Consultant Urologist and Andrologist at Ojas Hospital. A thorough and multidisciplinary approach was initiated. The patient underwent necessary investigations, including advanced imaging and detailed blood work, to understand the severity of his condition and develop a tailored treatment plan. Strategic and Patient-Centered Care: Despite the high risks, Dr. Devgan and the dedicated team at Ojas Hospital devised a meticulous strategy to manage the patient's complex condition.

Their primary goals were to safeguard the remaining kidney's function, reduce the risk of complications, and improve the patient's overall health. The team included nephrologists, anesthesiologists, and critical care specialists to address the interconnected challenges. Pre-procedure optimization included stabilizing the patient's blood pressure and improving platelet count through medical management and transfusions. Leveraging minimally invasive techniques, Dr. Devgan successfully performed the surgical procedure to clear the stones from the patient's functional kidney, minimizing trauma

and reducing recovery time. **A Remarkable Outcome:** The patient's surgery was a success. Post-operative care was diligently provided, ensuring a smooth recovery. The patient's kidney function showed improvement, and he was discharged with a comprehensive follow-up plan to maintain his health and monitor his condition.

Why Ojas Hospital stands Out: This case exemplifies Ojas Hospital's commitment to taking on challenging medical cases that others might deem untreatable. The hospital's combination of cutting-edge technology, skilled professionals, and patient-centered care ensures that even the most complex conditions are managed with precision and compassion.

Message of Hope: For patients facing seemingly insurmountable health challenges, Ojas Hospital remains a beacon of hope. With the expertise of doctors like Dr. Sumeet Devgan and the hospital's unwavering dedication to quality care, no case is too complex to tackle.

IIT Ropar develops world's first biodiversity sensor

RAJU WILLIAM
Rupnagar (Punjab)

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Ropar has developed the world's first biodiversity sensor for the farm. This advanced device is designed to transform the way of monitoring the environment and assess biodiversity.

This latest tech solution - Biodiversity Sensor and Scanner - is developed by Technology and Innovation Foundation (TIF) popularly known as AwaDH (Agriculture and Water Technology Development Hub) headed by its Project Director and Dean R&D, IIT Ropar, Dr Pushpendra Pal Singh.

AwaDH, an innovation centre set up by the Government of India (GoI) has collaborated with international partners like Syngenta Group, the University of Zurich, Biodiversity Lifesciences, Fraunhofer Institute, INRAE France, and others to create the device offering a groundbreaking



solution for conservation efforts worldwide.

This device is designed to change the way we protect nature. It can keep track of insects and measure things like temperature, humidity, and light in the environment, all in real time with high accuracy. This will make it easier for scientists, conservationists, and policymakers to study nature, protect wildlife, and understand the health of our planet better than ever before.

This effort highlights IIT Ropar's strong commitment to using advanced technology to support nature and promote sustainable development. "With the Biodiversity Sen-

sor, we aim to help conservationists, researchers, and policymakers around the world protect and preserve the delicate balance of life on Earth," said Dr Radhika Trikhia, Chief Executive Officer, IIT Ropar, TIF (AwaDH).

About its deployment and commercial use, she informed that this device has been put to use at over 30 locations around the world, including places like Spain, Germany, France, the UK, and Nasik, India. "Its worldwide rollout has shown how well it meets the need for accurate and reliable tools to monitor biodiversity on a large scale," she added.

Key Features:
Modular Design: Built with three main parts—a processing unit for data, a power system for energy efficiency, and a high-quality camera for capturing clear images of insects.
Smart Controller: Gathers and manages data about temperature, humidity, and light levels while running the sensors efficiently.

Haryana CM inaugurates the In'l Saraswati Mahotsav at Adi Badri

GULSHAN KUMAR
Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini inaugurated the International Saraswati Mahotsav-2025 at Adi Badri, Yamunanagar on wednesday. The Mahotsav will be held from January 29 to February 2, 2025.

On this occasion, the Chief Minister also inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of 29 development projects worth Rs. 54.71 crore. These include the inauguration of 15 projects worth Rs. 26.71 crore and the foundation stone for 14 projects worth approximately Rs. 28 crore.

While speaking on the occasion, Nayab Singh Saini said that the International Saraswati Mahotsav is being inaugurated at Adi Badri, the original place of the Saraswati River. The Mahotsav aims to draw global attention to India's rich civilization and preserve our culture and traditions for future generations.

He said that according to the Mahabharata, the Saraswati



River originally emerged from Adi Badri, located below the Shivalik Hills. It once flowed through Haryana, Rajasthan, and Gujarat for approximately 1,600 kilometers before merging into the Arabian Sea. However, over time, the river disappeared.

Efforts to revive the Saraswati River- Chief Minister said that recognising the importance of the Saraswati River, Prime Minister, Narendra Modi initiated the efforts to revive it by linking it with Narmada and Sabarmati rivers when he was the Chief



Minister of Gujarat. Similarly, efforts are being made by the Haryana Government to revive Saraswati river by connecting rivers, constructing Saraswati Sarovars and reservoirs. Out of 633 archaeological sites mentioned along the Saraswati River's path, 444 are in Haryana alone. The Survey of India and Haryana's revenue records provide clear evidence of the river's historical existence. Therefore our government has taken up the task to revive the river.



Minister of Gujarat. Similarly, efforts are being made by the Haryana Government to revive Saraswati river by connecting rivers, constructing Saraswati Sarovars and reservoirs. Out of 633 archaeological sites mentioned along the Saraswati River's path, 444 are in Haryana alone. The Survey of India and Haryana's revenue records provide clear evidence of the river's historical existence. Therefore our government has taken up the task to revive the river.

Akshay Kumar, Suniel Shetty, Paresh Rawal starrer 'Hera Pheri 3' announced

MUMBAI: The wait is finally over! Commemorating his birthday on 30th January 2025, ace filmmaker Priyadarshan confirmed working on the much-anticipated sequel, "Hera Pheri 3".

After Akshay Kumar took to his official IG to wish him on his birthday, Priyadarshan penned a thank you note for the actor in the stories section. The 'Airlift' actor penned, "Thank You so much for you wishes @akshaykumar. In return I would like to give you a gift, I'm willing to do Hera Pheri 3. Are you ready Akshay, @suniel.shetty & @pareshrawalofficial."

Elated by Priyadarshan's announcement, Akshay Kumar wrote on his Instagram stories, "Sir!!! Your birthday and I got the best gift of my life. Chalo karte hain phir thodi hera pheri 3 :) @pareshrawalofficial @suniel.shetty @priyadarshan.official." Previously, the 'Bhool Bhulaiya' actor shared a picture with the director, along with the note, "Happy Birthday, Priyan Sir! What better way to cel-



brate than by spending the day on a haunted set, surrounded by ghosts...both real and unpaid extras? Thank you for being a mentor, and the only person who can make chaos look like a masterpiece. May your day be filled with fewer retakes. Wishing you a fantastic year ahead! @priyadarshan.official."

Following the massive success of "Hera Pheri", and "Phir Hera Pheri", movie buffs have been eagerly waiting for the third installment in the popular franchise. In the meantime, Akshay Kumar, and Priyadarshan have

joined hands for yet another horror comedy, "Bhooth Bangla." Akshay Kumar recently used social media to post a behind-the-scenes photo from their forthcoming drama. The photograph features the actor and director duo sharing a good laugh over something.

"Bhooth Bangla" also marks the reunion of the filmmaker with Paresh Rawal. Apart from Akshay Kumar and Paresh Rawal, the project will also see Wamiqa Gabbi, Tabu, Rajpal Yadav, and Govardhan Asrani in significant roles.

Suspected Organophosphorus poisoning in Rajouri deaths in J&K



FW DESK
Jammu

Authorities in the Badhaal village of Rajouri district suspect organophosphorus poisoning as the cause of 17 mysterious deaths reported over the last two months.

No new cases have emerged in the past five days, signaling a stabilizing situation. Officials confirmed that three siblings undergoing treatment at GMC Jammu and SMGS Srinagar have been discharged and returned home under observation, along with their families and close contacts.

Another patient, Aijaz Ahmad, receiving treatment at PGI Chandigarh, is also recovering, while other patients admitted to GMC Rajouri have shown significant improvement.