

REGION **2**



KEJRIWAL ACCUSES ELECTION COMMISSION OF BIAS, SUBMITS FRESH RESPONSE IN YAMUNA POLLUTION ROW

Battle for Outer Delhi: BJP and AAP, Congress gear up for a fierce electoral showdown

YOGESH KANT
New Delhi

As Delhi braces itself for the assembly elections, the political battle in the city's rural and semi-urban areas—particularly Outer Delhi—has become a focal point of intense competition and has witnessed remarkable transformation over the past decade.

Once firmly loyal to Congress, the region has undergone a significant political transformation. In the aftermath of 2014, the rise of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has disrupted the electoral dynamics in areas such as Narela, Najafgarh, Bawana, and Mehrauli, previously known for their support for Congress. However, as the BJP looks to regain its foothold in these areas, the political contest has intensified.

Historically, these regions leaned towards Congress due to its pro-farmer policies, but AAP's rise disrupted this trend. By promising transparency, better governance, and improvements in education and healthcare, AAP gained a strong foothold among rural



voters. However, as cracks begin to appear in its governance model, the BJP is working to capitalize on voter dissatisfaction and shift the political momentum in its favor.

A key strategy for the BJP has been aligning national development narratives with local concerns. Government data indicates that flagship schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) facilitated the construction of over 8,000 kilometers of rural roads in neighboring states between 2018 and 2023, positively impacting Outer Delhi's connectivity.

Similarly, the Jal Jeevan Mission significantly improved piped water supply to rural households, with coverage rising from 49% in 2019 to 72%

by the end of 2024. Under the Saubhagya Yojana, electricity connections have reached over 98% of rural households, compared to 84% in 2017. These developments have been extensively highlighted in the BJP's outreach efforts to showcase tangible improvements in living standards. Organizational strength has been another pillar of the BJP's strategy. With a network of over 15,000 booth-level workers and 500 local leaders embedded in the region, the party has systematically built trust within tightly knit village communities. Engagement with panchayat leaders and farmer organizations has bolstered the BJP's grassroots presence. Additionally, data-driven campaign strategies, door-to-door

outreach programs, and micro-targeting of voter preferences have reinforced its connection with the electorate.

The role of cultural identity in Outer Delhi's politics cannot be overlooked. According to a 2024 survey by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), nearly 68% of respondents in Outer Delhi cited cultural preservation as a major electoral concern. The BJP has leveraged this sentiment by championing religious and cultural causes, positioning itself as the protector of traditional values. The party has also countered AAP's secular and inclusive image by emphasizing law and order issues, citing a 12% decline in communal incidents in rural Delhi between 2021 and 2024, as per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data. Agriculture remains central to Outer Delhi's economy, and both AAP and BJP have engaged in fierce competition for the rural vote. "While AAP initially gained support by waiving electricity bills for farmers, the BJP has sought to position itself as the true champion of rural prosperity.

BANKING & FINANCE **6**



PENAL CHARGES IMPOSED BY BANKS AND NBFCs WILL NOT ATTRACT 18% GST: FINANCE MINISTRY

POTPOURRI **8**



WHEF CONFERENCE AT MAHAKUMBH: CONFLUENCE OF RELIGION, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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 Motilal 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.

Delhi court to pronounce verdict in Sajjan Kumar case on February 7



NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Friday reserved its verdict in a 1984 anti-Sikh riots case against former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar in connection with the murder of two persons in the Saraswati Vihar area of the national capital. After hearing additional submissions made by Public Prosecutor Manish Rawat, Special Judge Kavari Baweja said she would pronounce the verdict on February 7. On January 21, the Special Judge had deferred the judgment after the prosecution sought time to further argue on certain points raised by the defence counsel on January 8. Kumar is currently serving a life imprisonment in another anti-Sikh riots case in Tihar Jail. Special Judge Baweja had reserved the verdict after hearing the final arguments in the case related to the killings of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarun Singh on November 1, 1984. The Punjab Bagh police station registered the case, and the probe was subsequently taken over by a special investigation team.

PM Modi Attacks Kejriwal over 'Sheesh Mahal' Row



OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing a public meeting in Delhi's Dwarka, launched a scathing attack on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, accusing him of being disconnected from the plight of the poor. Modi took a direct swipe at Kejriwal over the alleged extravagant renovation of his official residence, dubbed the "sheesh mahal" by political opponents. "People who live in 'sheesh mahals' will never understand the pain of those who don't own a house," Modi said, reinforcing his claim that he does not own a house himself but dreams of providing a concrete home for every poor citizen. The prime minister accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government of deliberately withholding thousands of houses built by the central government from the poor in Delhi. He asserted that only a BJP-led government in the national capital could ensure proper housing for the underprivileged. Kejriwal has been under fire over reports that his official residence at 6 Flagstaff Road underwent renovations costing Rs 45 crore. The issue has drawn criticism not only from the BJP but also from the Congress. Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi recalled Kejriwal's early promises of clean and transparent governance, contrasting them with the alleged liquor scam in Delhi and his expensive home renovation.

Govt committed to welfare of poor, middle class: 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 Mauni 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.

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

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bangaluru

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-1E and joins four operational satellites, ensuring the continued functionality and expansion of India's indigenous navigation 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.

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.

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 midair 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 sur-



vivors in the collision in the mid-air collision between an American Airlines regional jet and a US Army Black Hawk helicopter in the Washington, DC, area. The collision is the deadliest since 2001.

Trump also placed the blame on Democratic policies. He blamed diversity policies implemented 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 midair

collision with 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?"

Indian Bank Targets 95% 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 liability products. Currently, 92 per cent of the bank's transactions are conducted digitally, and Kumar

aims to push this figure to 95 per cent within the next two to three years. The bank has made impressive strides in the digital space, especially on the asset side, and plans to extend this success to the liability side, enhancing customer convenience. Another major initiative is the development of a next-generation call center. This will help streamline customer service, enabling the bank to handle grievances more effectively and reduce branch escalations. 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.

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."

Kejriwal accuses Election Commission of bias, submits fresh response in Yamuna pollution row

FW DESK New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal on Friday accused the Election Commission of India (ECI) of bias, claiming that the poll body was unfairly targeting his party for raising concerns over the contamination of the Yamuna River. Kejriwal, accompanied by Delhi Minister Atishi and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, visited the ECI office in the capital to submit his second response on the matter. The AAP leader alleged that the poll body was "shooting the messenger" instead of addressing the real issue. "I want to congratulate the people of Delhi that our struggle has been successful. The ammonia level in the Yamuna, which was 7 ppm since January 26-27, has now come down to 2.1 ppm," Kejriwal stated, as reported by PTI. Kejriwal's visit came a day



after the Election Commission served him a fresh notice, stating that his initial 14-page response lacked factual details. The Commission had directed him to file a revised reply by 11 AM on Friday, warning of potential consequences in case of non-compliance. In his latest response, Kejriwal did not hold back in his criticism of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar, accusing him of favoring the ruling party and eyeing a post-retirement position. "If no action is taken against the Haryana government and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders involved in corrupt practices, it will be amply clear that the CEC prioritizes the ruling party's interests over public welfare. Unfortunately, I cannot be expected to remain silent out of fear or any expectation of favor," Kejriwal's response read, as quoted by a news agency. The former Delhi Chief Minister reaffirmed his commitment

to protecting the health and well-being of Delhi's residents. "Whatever illegal punishment you may impose on me under BJP's instructions is a small price to pay for standing up for democratic principles, and I welcome it with open arms," he stated. Kejriwal further demanded that a criminal case be registered against the Haryana government and Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini for allegedly "sending poisonous water" to the national capital. He accused the Haryana administration of deliberately creating an artificial water crisis in Delhi. "Haryana CM Nayab Singh Saini has committed a crime by supplying contaminated water to Delhi and endangering public health," he charged. With tensions escalating over the issue, the AAP leader's latest remarks are expected to fuel further political confrontations in the run-up to the elections.

Kejriwal urges voters to reject Congress, accuses party of aiding BJP in Delhi elections

OUR CORRESPONDENT New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Chief Arvind Kejriwal urged not to waste their votes on the Congress party on Wednesday, claiming it indirectly supported the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections. Addressing a 'janasabha' in Badli, Kejriwal told supporters, "Why waste your votes on the Congress? The Congress will not win, it will just cut our votes. The Congress and the BJP are fighting this election together to defeat the AAP. Vote to make someone win, not to make someone lose." His comments come as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) faces a direct challenge from both the Congress and the BJP in the constituency. Kejriwal further defied his party's welfare schemes, citing a survey suggesting 70 percent of women support AAP. He



urged women to convince the men in their families to vote for his party, claiming that the BJP and Congress often swayed men. In Badli, AAP has fielded sitting MLA Ajesh Yadav, who has won the seat in the past two elections (2015 and 2020). His main rival is Congress' Delhi unit president Devender Yadav, who previously held the seat in 2008 and 2013. The BJP has nominated Deepak Chaudhary as its candidate. Kejriwal also took aim at the BJP over the rising ammonia levels in the Yamuna River, accusing the Haryana government

of "poisoning" Delhi's water supply. "The BJP has crossed all limits in politics. The BJP-led Haryana government has put poison named ammonia in the water. But we saved the people of Delhi by diverting the toxic water," Kejriwal said. He added that people in Delhi and Haryana were all "one." Kejriwal's comments on Congress come amid tensions within the INDIA alliance, which have escalated following a public exchange with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Gandhi had recently accused Kejriwal of being "afraid" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and being involved in the "liquor scam." Kejriwal responded sharply on social media, stating, "Don't preach on fear and bravery. The country knows who is a coward and who is brave." He also took the opportunity to target Congress over the National Herald case and the land-grab allegations involving Robert Vadra.

Sandeep Dikshit slams Arvind Kejriwal over Yamuna poisoning remarks



NEW DELHI: Congress candidate Sandeep Dikshit on Wednesday lashed out at the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) National Convener, Arvind Kejriwal over his claim that the Yamuna River was being "poisoned", calling it a "blatant lie" and demanding a criminal investigation into the statement. Sandeep Dikshit accused Kejriwal of misleading the public with false claims and said the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) had already denied the allegations. "This is a very serious statement from his side, and I feel that he has told a white lie. The DJB has denied it. We have filed a complaint with the Election Commission, but more importantly, I have written to the Lieutenant Governor to launch an enquiry and register an FIR over this," he told to media. The controversy erupted after Kejriwal alleged that the BJP-led Haryana government was "poisoning" the Yamuna River, affecting Delhi's water supply. Delhi Chief Minister Atishi and Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had approached the Election Commission, stating that the water supplied from Haryana to Delhi contained high levels of ammonia. Dikshit, however, dismissed Kejriwal's allegations and said, "Arvind Kejriwal has a long history of making false claims. It's nothing new. He believes that the more lies he tells, the more votes he will get. But the truth is, none of his claims have ever been proven. It is unfortunate that someone like him can stand in the political arena and seek votes from the people." Backing Congress MP and Lok Sabha Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi's "Sheesh Mahal" attack on Kejriwal, Dikshit said the AAP had failed in governance and did not deserve to be in power. When asked whether the BJP or the AAP was the tougher competition for the party in the Assembly elections, Dikshit said, "The BJP and AAP are different. We will target the Chief Minister who has been running the government. The Delhi government is not run by the BJP; it is run by the AAP. "When we raised questions about the BJP's governance, the people of Delhi removed them from the MCD. Now, the people will do the same to AAP because they have failed to run the Delhi government."

Election Commission seeks proof from Kejriwal over Yamuna poisoning claims

SATISH HANDA New Delhi

The Election Commission cited various judgments and legal provisions to warn Kejriwal that he can face up to three years of imprisonment if his claims are found to be misleading people. The Election Commission has sought proof from the Arvind Kejriwal led Aam Aadmi Party of their claims that Haryana was poisoning the water of Yamuna river by dumping industrial waste into it. Kejriwal and Delhi Chief Minister Atishi have blamed Haryana government mixing poison in the river water to disrupt water supply to the national capital to cause harm to the residents of Delhi mixing poison in the river water. Haryana CM Naib Singh Saini threatened defamation suit over water terrorism remarks by Kejriwal and chief minister Atishi. The poll body has asked Kejriwal to submit his response by 8 pm on Wednesday regarding his comments over water terrorism by Haryana and warned Kejriwal about various judgments and legal provisions liable to face up to three years of imprisonment if his claims are found to be misleading. According to the commission, such allegations may have serious effects to create enmity between the regional groups, residents of neighbouring states and is a threat to law and order situation. Before this the poll panel had directed the Haryana government to submit a factual report by January 28 to Kejriwal's allegations of increased ammonia in the water supplied from Haryana to Delhi. Meanwhile, sources reveal Haryana CM Naib Singh Saini is planning to file a defamation suit against Kejriwal, demanding he should immediately apologise to the people of Haryana and Delhi for his nasty statement, failing which a defamation suit will be filed against him.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal detained for dumping garbage outside Kejriwal's residence

NEW DELHI: Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal was detained by the police Thursday afternoon after she dumped three mini-truckloads of garbage outside the residence of former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in protest.

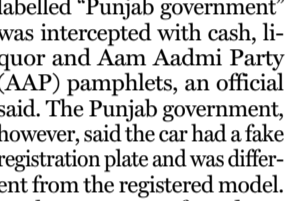


Earlier in the day, Maliwal visited Vikaspuri, where she claimed that the streets were choked with waste, posing severe health and hygiene issues for residents. Maliwal, along with a group of supporters, collected the garbage in three mini trucks and headed to Kejriwal's residence at 5, Ferozeshah Road. Accompanied by hundreds of women holding placards that

read, "Muskuraiye, AAP Delhi Mein Hain," Maliwal dumped the garbage outside Kejriwal's house, using a shovel to throw waste onto the ground. Soon after, she was confronted by female police personnel and removed from the site. She was subsequently detained and taken to the Parliament Street Police Station. According to Maliwal, she was released after a few hours and an FIR was registered

Delhi Police seizes 'Punjab Government' car with Cash & Liquor, Mann says 'fake'

NEW DELHI: Delhi Police have filed a case after a vehicle labelled "Punjab government" was intercepted with cash, liquor and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) pamphlets, an official said. The Punjab government, however, said the car had a fake registration plate and was different from the registered model.



The car was found on Wednesday and a large amount of cash and liquor was seized, police said. The car had a "Punjab government" sticker, said the officials, adding that AAP pamphlets were also found in the car. Delhi Police said the vehicle was found parked outside Punjab Bhawan on Copernicus Marg in the national capital. When searched, the cops said they found cash amounting to Rs 8 lakh, liquor bottles with Punjab stamps, and AAP pamphlets inside the car. As per the model code of conduct in force in Delhi ahead of the Assembly elections, people are barred from carrying more than Rs 50,000 in cash. A case has been registered at the Tilak Marg police station. The Punjab government soon issued a denial after the news came out. The government said in a statement that as per the official record, the car was registered in the name of Major Anubhav Shivpuri, who was posted at the Army Dental College, Pathankot, three years ago. He is a permanent resident of Khadki in Maharashtra, it said. "It has come to the knowledge

of the Department of Transport (Govt of Punjab), that a vehicle carrying registration number PB35AE1342 has been apprehended in Delhi carrying illegal liquor and some unaccounted cash. It has been alleged in the media reports that the vehicle has a sticker of Punjab Govt on it," the statement read. The Punjab government said the registered vehicle model on the registration number PB35AE1342 was the Ford Eco Sport of make year 2018 but the actual vehicle apprehended by the police belongs to the Hyundai Creta series. "This confirms that the vehicle's number plate is forged and fake. High-Security Registration Plate (HSRP) is mandatory for all vehicles and the registration plate visible in the video is an ordinary one, without the features of HSRP, hence easy to forge. Also, we have searched our records and found that no such vehicle is owned or hired by Govt of Punjab. The apprehended vehicle does not belong to Govt of Punjab at all." The AAP also released a statement, saying the car seizure was a "planted stunt and utterly bogus".

Yamuna water contamination: Delhi CM Atishi says EC has assured help in public interest

NEW DELHI: Amid the controversy over Yamuna water quality, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi said on Tuesday that the Election Commission of India (ECI) has suggested checking the water quality at the point of entry into Delhi and point of release in Haryana.



After meeting EC representatives along with Punjab CM Bhagwant Singh Mann, CM Atishi said that the poll panel is reported to have assured a decision in the interest of people soon. "The EC is awaiting a response from Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini after which it assured us that a decision would be taken," CM Atishi said after the meeting with EC officials. She expressed hope that the poll panel will ensure that an artificial water shortage is not allowed to be created in election-

bound Delhi, in the interest of fair play. Earlier, CM Atishi accused the BJP-led Haryana government of "deliberate and indiscriminate" release of untreated water into the Yamuna. She said that the intent was to derail Delhi's water treatment and supply. Punjab CM Mann said, "Stopping water supply ahead of elections would deny a level playing field to the ruling AAP in the election." He said they requested the EC to intervene on humanitarian grounds and prevent any disruption of water supply in election-bound Delhi. CM Atishi said that Haryana CM Saini has been making

contradictory statements on the issue of high level of ammonia in Yamuna water supply from the Wazirabad barrage. She claimed the high level of ammonia had brought three water treatment plants of Delhi "near closure" and threatened to disrupt the water supply to 30 per cent of city residents. As the allegations of the 'Yamuna poisoning' by the Delhi CM created a political furore, Haryana CM Saini responded with a defamation threat for baseless charges. Several Haryana ministers and MPs have dismissed AAP's charge of Haryana unleashing 'water terrorism' on Delhi as a political gimmick ahead of Delhi Assembly elections. Haryana Transport Minister Anil Vij accused the Delhi government of stoking needless controversy with baseless claims.

Delhi Elections: Fight is between hatred and harmony says Rahul



Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi today said that there was an ideological fight going on in the country between the Congress and the BJP. He said, while the Congress was for the constitution, harmony, brotherhood and love, the BJP was spreading hatred and fear in the country. Addressing an impressive public meeting at Madipur here this evening, Gandhi also took on the Aam Aadmi Party leadership including Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia, saying that they had committed the biggest liquor scam and indulged in corruption. He reminded people how Kejriwal landed in the parking of the Sheesh Mahal, while traveling in a small Wagon-R car. The senior Congress leader appealed to people to vote for and support the Congress, reminding them of the glorious era of progress and development under Sheila Dikshit's rule. He said, all the infrastructure that Ms Dikshit had created in Delhi has been destroyed by the AAP government. Accusing the BJP government of spreading hatred and violence in the country, he asserted that their purpose was to divert public attention from the pressing issues like unemployment and rising prices. He said, even the media did not talk about such issues. Gandhi called for representation with participation and power to the marginalised people including the Dalits, the Backwards, the tribal people and the minorities. He said, despite constituting about 90 percent of the country's population, their say in the decision-making was just about 6 percent. Referring to the AAP, he displayed a poster of the party, where there were the photographs of nine leaders being described as "9-ratan" (nine jewels).

Case filed against Kejriwal in court under sections 2-D and 54 of the Disaster Management Act



The Haryana government has taken strong cognizance of Arvind Kejriwal's statement making allegations regarding poisoning the Yamuna river water flowing to Delhi via Haryana, and has filed a case against former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the court of Sonpat CJM Neha Goyal under sections 2-D and 54 of the Disaster Management Act, allegedly accusing Haryana government for poisoning the water of the Yamuna river. The court has fixed February 17 for the next hearing in the case. According to legal experts, the Act provides for imprisonment of one to two years and fine if the charges are proved, Haryana Disaster Management Minister Vipul Goyal said while talking to media persons that court has issued a notice to Kejriwal to appear before it and fixed February 17 as the next date of hearing in the case.

Cong blames UP Govt for Maha Kumbh Tragedy



Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee president Ajay Rai said that the tragedy at the Maha Kumbh stampede in Prayagraj occurred due to the improper arrangement for lakhs of devotees who came for the holi dip at Prayagraj by the UP Government. Addressing a press conference at the DPCC office, Rajiv Bhawan here today, Ajay Rai said that the Yogi Government only made tall claims without creating proper facilities to accommodate crores of devotees at such a limited place, as the BJP Government had made it a political show,

Yamuna bank, which will be declared as a separate district, were very encouraging for Poorvanchalis. Ajay Rai said that BJP president J.P.Nadda and AAP convener Kejriwal insulted Poorvanchalis, though they play a vital role in the progress and development of Delhi, by equating them with Bangladeshis and Rohingyas, and accusing them of coming to Delhi with a Rs 5 ticket to get Rs 5 lakh worth of free treatment. He asked the Poorvanchalis to vote for Congress in the upcoming Assembly elections as only the Congress will fulfil its "guarantees" to protect their interest and uplift their life. He said that Poorvanchalis mostly live in slum clusters, unauthorized colonies and resettlement colonies, but when the Congress returns to power, it will not only allot the nearly 55,000 flats constructed to resettle the poor, but will also revive the in-situ construction of flats started by the Congress Government, which was shelved by the Kejriwal Government after getting the votes of Poorvanchalis with false promises.

Kejriwal has a habit of levelling baseless allegations on others, must apologise: Saini

PARVESH HANDA New Delhi



Haryana chief minister Nayab Singh Saini strongly condemned Kejriwal's statement that 'Haryana poisoning Yamuna'. He said, Kejriwal has a habit of levelling baseless allegations on others. While talking to media persons Saini rebuffed Delhi AAP's claim that the ruling BJP in Haryana state is 'intentionally' draining industrial waste into the Yamuna that supplies water to the national capital alleging that it is trying to kill people by mixing poison in the river. Saini also hit out at former Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, saying that he is in the habit to level baseless allegations and blame others, saying that Kejriwal should apologise to the people of Delhi and Haryana or face legal action for his baseless allegations. The Haryana CM accused Kejriwal of failing to make proper arrangements for water distribution, which has forced Delhi residents to consume contaminated water. Targeting Kejriwal for systematically diverting 28 highly polluted drains into the Yamuna river due to his poor management, Saini claimed that the people of Delhi would teach him a lesson in the upcoming Assembly polls. "Kejriwal has a habit of levelling baseless allegations on others and then running away," and asked Kejriwal to send his chief secretary and officers to Haryana, specifically to Sonapat, from where Haryana supplies water to Delhi to inspect the quality of the water being provided to Delhi residents. Saini said, there is no shortage of water, it is the mismanagement of the Delhi government that has left residents without access to clean water.

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.

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 Ghata 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.

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 Jawaharlar 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

out, Baba Saheb wanted equality in society and made so many laws for it.

He ridiculed the BJP leaders' charges that the Congress got Ambedkar defeated. He quoted Ambedkar's letter to a friend in which he (Ambedkar) had mentioned that he was supported by the Congress, while Savarkar conspired to get him defeated.

Accusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Amit Shah, RSS and BJP workers of abusing the Congress leaders who built the nation, Kharge said they did not have any contribution towards fighting for the freedom of the country. He asserted that while the Congress was fighting for freedom, the RSS people were working and collaborating with the British.

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 THAKHEN

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 Bhador 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

on Feb 10 to explain to them the need for rejecting NPFAM and its other demands. SKM reaffirmed its resolve to build joint movements with other mass organizations as they develop in the process and announced that in case the Union Government does not relent, it shall call for a Grameen Bharat Hartal.

SKM has already called upon the farmers to conduct the Tractor/ Vehicle/ Motorcycle Parade on 26th January 2025, the 76th Republic Day at district/sub division level across the country.

The Farmers' will Parade demanding the Prime Minister to immediately convene discussions with all the Kisan organisations on struggle and immediately withdraw the Anti-Farmer, Anti-Federal NPFAM, enact law for MSP@ C2+50% with legally guaran-

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 Thakhen 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

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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.

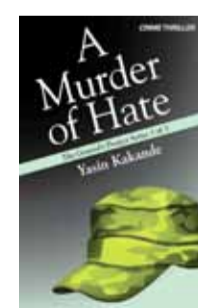
The strength of *A Murder of Hate* lies in its well-developed characters. Lisa Garcia's professionalism and inner struggles as a single mother are portrayed with authenticity. Her partnership with Bus brings depth to the story as the two navigate their cultural differences and shared commitment to justice.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

NEVER START A BUSINESS JUST TO 'MAKE MONEY'. START A BUSINESS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.
MARIE FORLEO

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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 be-



fore 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 Closes 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 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.

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 Evaluation 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.

able growth. Ketan Sanghvi, chairman, India International and Textile Machinery Exhibitions (ITME), said here recently that GITES 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 GITES 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 GITES 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.

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 special-ty 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).

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

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 Tie up 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).

Table 1: - ARV Formulations Revenue Trend of Aurobindo Pharma (In Rs. crore)

| FY | FY20 | FY21 | FY22 | FY23 | FY24 |
|---------|------|-------|------|------|------|
| Revenue | 1252 | 1,863 | 833 | 976 | 868 |

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



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-

dents want the option to make tax payments through foreign banks, which would ease compliance for NRIs. There is also a need to better operationalise tax refunds to overseas banks and for the use of e-verification with OTPs being sent to foreign mobile numbers, for taxpayers living abroad.

In terms of domestic tax compliance, 56 per cent of respondents seek an increase in the income threshold for tax filing to reduce the tax return filing burden on small taxpay-

ers. 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.

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-

counts 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

borne this burden themselves, while some have not. I think the government needs to intervene in the matter.

This loss can be compensated by increasing the number of incomes taxpayers or the bank employees can be given options like performance-based bonus or compensation which is tax exempt or increasing the cash component of the salary in place of this loss. It is believed that this provision may negatively affect the performance of bank employees, because they work in a stressful environment. The reduction in benefits may reduce their morale and the profit of banks may decrease, which may also have a partial negative impact on the country's economy.

It can be said that the performance of the banking sector has improved in the recent years and a significant reduction in NPA has also been recorded. However, at present, the bank is facing a crisis of deposits. After banking facilities have become digital, the incidents of online fraud have increased a lot, due to which the trust of investors in banks has decreased. The expected reduction in NPA has also not happened due to the weakness of the recovery mechanism of banks. On the other hand, the deduction of TDS on the benefits given to bank employees has led to a reduction in their morale, which has increased the possibility of a negative impact on the performance of the bank. Therefore, provisions to solve these problems need to be made in the budget.

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

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.

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 Suwannakhom, 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 Hovsjo 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 Hovsjo 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 Malmo 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



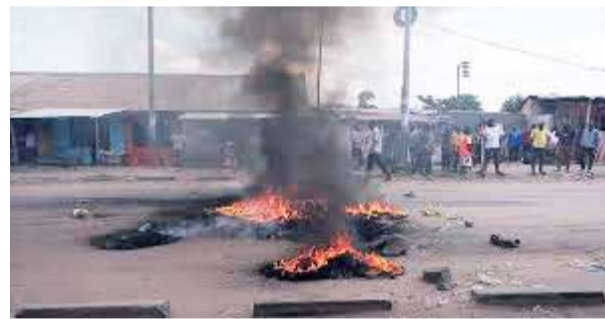
PHNOM PENH: Cambodia urged people to be extra vigilant against high air pollution, saying that they should wear masks for outdoor activities. Seasonal air quality in the capital Phnom Penh and three other provinces, namely Banteay Meanchey, Koh Kong and Siem Reap provinces, had reached a "red level," 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

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.

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 karkars.

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.

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.

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, Masayoshu 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.

WHEF conference at Mahakumbh: Confluence of religion, economic development



FW DESK
New Delhi

The World Hindu Economic Forum (WHEF) is thrilled to announce the first-ever economic conference in the modern history of the Kumbh, scheduled for February 8, 2025, at the Maha Kumbh, the world's largest spiritual gathering.

This unique program will take place against the backdrop of the sacred Triveni Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati rivers, offering participants an unparalleled opportunity to immerse themselves in a timeless Dharmic tradition while engaging in economy-centered discussions to propel Uttar Pradesh and Bharat toward achieving the goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

The Maha Kumbh, held once every twelve years, is not only a significant Dharmic & spiritual occasion but also an opportunity for Dharmic practitioners from different backgrounds & vocations to assemble and discuss issues in their area of expertise and those affecting the common good.

Traditionally, the convergence of diverse groups led to the sharing of ideas and practices related to trade, agriculture, education, culture, and social welfare. Ancient texts and historical accounts indicate that during such gatherings, merchants and scholars would engage in discussions

about trade & commerce and other economic initiatives to accelerate the economy and strengthen the culture. The presence of learned scholars at these gatherings promoted discussions on education and knowledge dissemination. Topics often included advancements in science, philosophy, trade & arts, reflecting a holistic approach to societal growth.

This year, WHEF aims to revive the ancient tradition of economic deliberation at the Maha Kumbh by integrating it into this revered gathering. The one-day WHEF @ Maha Kumbh 2025 conference will feature prominent decision-makers from business, industry and finance who will convene to discuss critical policies and programs aimed at fostering innovation and sustainability in pursuit of a prosperous Bharat by 2047.

"Maha Kumbh is the ideal platform to discuss the economy, as Vikas and Virasat go hand in hand," said Honorable Chief Minister Mahant Yogi Adityanath ji during the World Hindu Economic Forum (WHEF) 2024, on December 14th in Mumbai. In his keynote address, the Honorable CM proposed hosting a WHEF conference at the Maha Kumbh 2025 and invited the Forum to organize an economic conference during the Maha Kumbh.

The agenda of the conference encompasses a series of engaging discussions and

sessions aimed at shaping the future of Uttar Pradesh and Bharat. The conference will delve into Uttar Pradesh's pivotal role in driving economic and social development, while exploring Bharat's path towards becoming a developed nation by 2047 through key reforms and growth strategies. A special focus will be given to the cultural, social, and economic significance of the Maha Kumbh, highlighting its power to unify people, promote cultural pride, and drive economic prosperity.

In addition to the engaging discussions, attendees will have the opportunity to experience the spiritual richness of the Maha Kumbh through the Triveni Sangam Snan (holy dip), symbolizing regeneration and renewal.

The World Hindu Economic is an organization dedicated to economic development and collaboration among the global Hindu community. With the vision of 'Making Society Prosperous', and mission of 'Creating and Sharing Surplus Wealth', WHEF has been holding annual forums since 2012 in different parts of the world where successful industrialists, business persons, bankers, traders, technocrats, investors, economists, thinkers and other professionals come together to share their knowledge, expertise and resources with others, and encourage, support and mentor budding entrepreneurs.

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



The tragic events at the Maha Kumbh and the escalating pollution of our rivers are symptomatic of broader systemic issues. Addressing these challenges requires a proactive and multifaceted approach.

The recent tragedy at the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, where a stampede on Mauni Amavasya led to the loss of numerous lives and injuries to many others, serves as a stark reminder of the perils associated with managing massive gatherings. Despite old incidents, such as the 2013 stampede at the same event, lessons have not been fully internalized. The recurrence of such tragedies underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive reevaluation of crowd management strategies at large-scale events.

The exponential growth of India's population amplifies the challenges inherent in organizing events that attract millions. While the spiritual significance of the Kumbh Mela is undeniable, the safety of the devotees must be paramount. Proactive measures are essential to prevent such mishaps. Implementing crowd control mechanisms, such as restricting the number of pilgrims allowed in specific areas at any given time, can mitigate the risk of overcrowding. Drawing parallels to the Chardham Yatra, where the number of visitors is regulated, similar strategies could be employed to ensure the safety of attendees at the Kumbh Mela.

In the aftermath of the recent stampede, the state government's decision to designate the Kumbh Kshetra as a vehicle-free zone, ban external vehicles from entering the city, and revoke VIP passes are commendable steps. How-

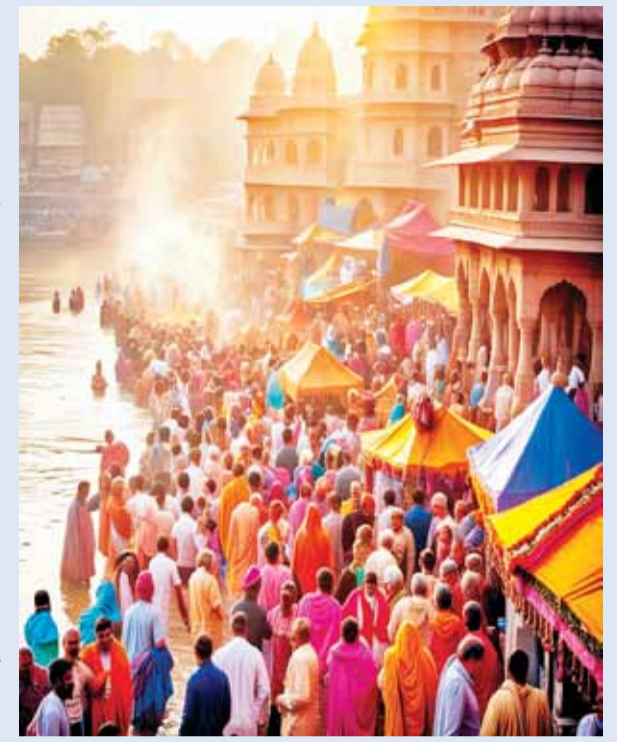
ever, these measures would have been more effective if implemented proactively rather than reactively. The Mahakumbh administration's forward-thinking approach is crucial to preventing future tragedies.

Water Pollution: Concurrently, the issue of river pollution, particularly in the Yamuna, has come to the forefront. Recent political debates have highlighted the alarming levels of contaminants in the river in Delhi, with accusations being exchanged between state governments regarding the source of the pollution. The presence of toxic foam and pollutants poses severe health risks to residents and devotees alike. The situation is exacerbated during festival seasons when rituals involve direct contact with the river water.

The central and state governments must prioritize the cleanliness and purity of our rivers. The Yamuna River, for instance, has been reported to contain ammonia levels six times above the normal, rendering the water hazardous for consumption and ritualistic purposes. This not only endangers human health but also threatens the ecological balance. Neglecting such critical issues, often overshadowed by political agendas, is a disservice to the populace.

Environmental conservation is not merely a policy agenda but a necessity for human survival. Degradation of air quality, water resources, and forest cover directly affects public health and biodi-

Crowd Control Needs Proactive Measures



versity. Political leaders must transcend partisan politics and collaborate on sustainable solutions. Public awareness campaigns, stringent enforcement of environmental regulations, and adopting sustainable practices are essential steps in this direction.

Air Pollution: As winter descends upon Delhi NCR, the region becomes engulfed in a thick blanket of toxic smog, turning the air into a hazardous mix of pollutants. Every year, the Air Quality Index (AQI) plunges to 'severe' levels, causing respiratory ailments, eye irritation, and a spike in hospital visits due to lung and heart complications. The primary culprits remain unchanged: stubble burning in neighboring states, vehicular emissions, industrial pollution, and adverse weather conditions that trap

pollutants near the ground.

Despite repeated emergency measures, the problem persists. Temporary solutions fail to address the root cause, leading to a recurring public health crisis. The Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) activates restrictions at different pollution levels, but without long-term policy and strict enforcement, these measures are merely reactive. The tragic events at the Maha Kumbh and the escalating pollution of our rivers are symptomatic of broader systemic issues. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach encompassing proactive governance, environmental stewardship, and public engagement.

The author is a senior journalist and columnist, views are personal. Twitter @narvijayyadav

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 @dharmafilms 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!"

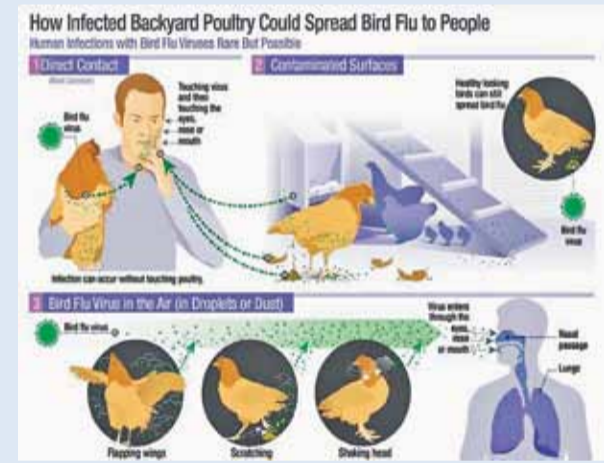
He added, "With Saif, it was in Anand Mahendru's office where I first met him. Young, suave, charming & effortless...VERY much like the first time I met Ibrahim. And a strong friendship that continues from our generation to luckily our kids!!!"

Will Bird Flu Spark a Human Pandemic? Scientists Say the Risk is Rising: British Journal "Nature"

DR R B CHAUDHARY

It is a matter of worry that the risk of Bird Flu Pandemic Sparks Global Concern is raising. According to most popular and international scientific research journal- "Nature", 27th January, 2025, Ten months on from the shocking discovery that a virus usually carried by wild birds can readily infect cows, at least 68 people in North America have become ill from the pathogen and one person has died.

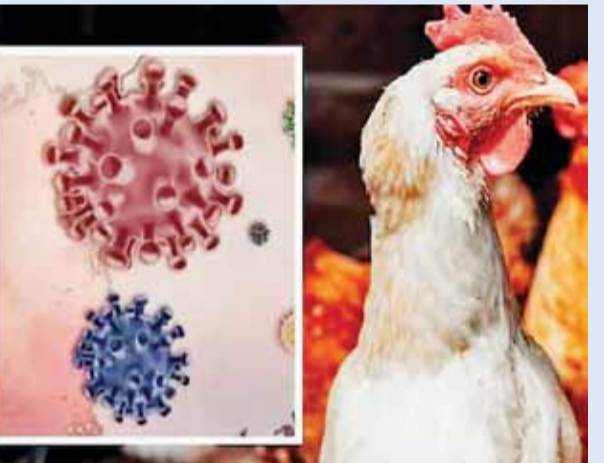
Bird flu outbreak in US cows has been a very serious concern. Medical scientist and veterinarians are so worry. A virus that has killed hundreds of millions of birds has now infected cattle in six US states, but the threat to humans is currently low. The H5N1 avian influenza virus, typically carried by wild birds, has been infecting cows and other mammals, increasing the risk of a human pandemic and therefore, H5N1 is adapting to new mammal hosts, raising the possibility of the virus spreading between humans.



At least 68 people in North America have been

infected with the H5N1 virus, with one reported death. Variants of the virus are adapting to new hosts, including cows and other mammals. Severe infections and deaths have been reported, particularly when the virus is transmitted directly from birds to humans.

"The risk has increased as we've gone on — especially



in the last couple of months, with the report of severe infections," says Seema Lakdawala, an influenza virologist at Emory University School of Medicine.

The World Health Organization (WHO) coordinates the global response to health emergencies. However, the recent announcement by US President Don-

ald Trump to withdraw the United States from the WHO has raised concerns among researchers.

Dr R B Chaudhary, Editor in Chief-Pashu Mitra (Hindi-English Bimonthly), Former Chief Editor, Assistant Secretary-Animal Welfare Board of India, Govt of India.

Newborn Undergoes Life-Saving Heart Surgery at Fortis Escorts, Okhla

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

A one-day-old newborn suffering from Transposition of the Great Arteries (TGA), a rare and life-threatening congenital heart defect, underwent a high-risk arterial switch operation at Fortis Escorts Heart Institute, Okhla, New Delhi, Wednesday.

The defect was detected during a prenatal scan, prompting urgent medical intervention. A team led by Dr. Neeraj Awasthy successfully performed the complex surgery using advanced pediatric cardiac techniques, ensuring the baby's survival.

The abnormality was first detected during a routine 20-week ultrasound scan, which raised concerns about possible cardiac defects. A subsequent fetal echocardiogram confirmed the presence of severe congenital heart disease, necessitating a well-coordinated medical plan before birth.

Under the care of Dr. Meenakshi Ahuja, Senior Director, Obstetrics & Gynaecology at



Fortis La Femme, the mother underwent a planned C-section delivery, ensuring both maternal and neonatal safety. Immediately after birth, the newborn was transferred to Fortis Escorts Heart Institute for specialized cardiac evaluation and urgent intervention. On the second day of life, Dr. Awasthy performed a Balloon Atrial Septostomy, a minimally invasive procedure aimed at stabilizing the baby by improving oxygen levels. This procedure involved inserting a catheter with a balloon into the heart to create a hole between the upper chambers, allowing better circulation. This critical step ensured the baby's survival until the major corrective surgery could be performed.

Following stabilization, Dr. Awasthy and Dr. K.S. Iyer,

Chairman of Paediatric & Congenital Arterial Surgery, led a high-risk Arterial Switch Operation. This intricate open-heart surgery, lasting three hours, successfully restored normal blood flow by repositioning the arteries. Given the infant's low birth weight of 1.8 kg, the medical team initiated gavage feeding—a method of tube feeding through the nose—to help the baby gain weight and build strength before the operation. By the time of surgery, the baby had reached 2.3 kg, significantly improving her chances of recovery. Dr. Awasthy emphasized the importance of early diagnosis through fetal echocardiograms, stating that prenatal detection played a crucial role in saving the infant's life. Dr. Iyer highlighted the complexity of the case, noting that without timely intervention, the baby would not have survived. Dr. Vikram Aggarwal, Facility Director at Fortis Escorts, commended the medical team's expertise and the use of advanced technology in pediatric cardiology.

Team India's Triumphant PD Champions Trophy 2025 Victory Celebrated by DCCI & Jaypee Group



NEWDELHI: In a momentous celebration of sporting triumph, DCCI (Differently Aabled Cricket Council of India) and Manoj Gaur, Chairman of Jaypee Group honored Team India's extraordinary victory in the Physical Disabled Champions Trophy 2025 held in Sri Lanka at Jaypee Vasant Continental, New Delhi.

The distinguished event was attended by key DCCI officials including Squadron Leader Abhay Pratap Singh, Joint Secretary of DCCI, Rajesh Bhardwaj, Chairman

of the Corporate Affairs Committee for PD & Wheelchair Cricket, and Ravi Chauhan, General Secretary of DCCI. These esteemed dignitaries converged to recognize and commemorate Team India's exceptional performance in the prestigious PD Championship Trophy 2025, symbolizing a powerful testament to the capabilities of differently-abled athletes.

Manoj Gaur, Chairman of Jaypee Group, emphasized corporate commitment to disability sports by saying,

"Our partnership with DCCI demonstrates our unwavering dedication to celebrating extraordinary athletic potential. This victory is not just a sporting achievement, but a powerful testament to human resilience and the transformative power of inclusive sports."

The gathering not only celebrated a sporting victory but also highlighted the growing recognition and support for disability sports in India, showcasing the nation's commitment to inclusive athletic excellence.

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 & @pareshrawlofficial."

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 :) @pareshrawlofficial @suniel.shetty @priyadarshan.official" Previously, the 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa' actor shared a picture with the director, along with the note, "Happy



Birthday, Priyan Sir! What better way to celebrate 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. Doctors suspect organophosphorus poisoning after patients responded positively to atropine injections, commonly used as an antidote for such poisoning.

"Atropine was initially given to two patients to manage their heart rates, and they showed marked improvement, pointing us toward organophosphorus poisoning as a possible cause," a senior doctor said.

The investigation is ongoing as authorities work to confirm the cause of the deaths.