

REGION

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DELHI METRO MAKES SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT FOR BOARD EXAMS STUDENTS



MCD presents ₹17,000 cr budget for 2025-26, prioritizes sanitation and infrastructure

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Thursday unveiled its budget for the next financial year, proposing an outlay of Rs 17,000 crore, with the highest allocation of Rs 4,907.11 crore directed towards sanitation. Apart from sanitation, the budget emphasises infrastructure development, education, and waste management.



In a significant move towards waste management, MCD has announced the establishment of waste-to-energy plants in Narela-Bawana (3,600 TPD) and Ghazipur (3,000 TPD). Additionally, bio-CNG plants in Okhla, Ghogha Dairy, and Ghazipur will process 750 metric tons of waste daily. The civic body is also working on setting up bio-methanisation plants with a capacity of 200 metric tons

per day, expected to be operational by March 2025. As part of its green initiatives, MCD has planted over 1.8 lakh trees by December 2024 and developed eight Miyawaki micro-forests. However, the horticulture department's budget has been reduced to Rs 393.26 crore from Rs 586.58 crore last year.

While presenting the budget for 2025-26, MCD Commissioner Ashwani Kumar high-

lighted key allocations across various sectors. The education department has been allotted Rs 1,693.73 crore, with major initiatives including the procurement of 12,234 desks for MCD schools, the launch of the 'Gyanodaya' YouTube channel, and an enhanced sports infrastructure with a Rs 3 crore budget.

In the healthcare sector, MCD hospitals recorded 58 lakh patient visits between

April and December 2024, while 180 new medical officers were recruited. The corporation aims to generate Rs 4,300 crore in property tax revenue for 2024-25, with total projected income for 2025-26 standing at Rs 16,70,104.70 lakh. Additionally, MCD has secured a BBB(-) credit rating and settled Rs 450 crore in outstanding dues under the Seventh Pay Commission.

Key infrastructure projects include the Rs 64.38 crore Sultanpuri railway crossing project, the Rs 48.77 crore expansion of Kishanganj R.U.B., and a nearly completed Rs 116 crore building in Karkardooma. The construction of Lajpat Nagar Colony Hospital has been finalized, while 36 waste disposal sites have been earmarked for development.

A budget of Rs 37 crore has been allocated for transforming Rawta and Daurala into model villages.

BANKING & FINANCE

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GOVT & RBI ACTIVELY MONITORING CURRENCY FLUCTUATIONS AMID GLOBAL VOLATILITY: FINMIN NIRMALA SITHARAMAN



BSNL Bounces Back Into Profit for First Time Since 2007

NEW DELHI: State-owned telecom major Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) on Friday reported a profit of Rs 262 crore in the third quarter of the current financial year, marking its first return to profitability since 2007.

This milestone reflects the company's focus on innovation, aggressive network expansion, cost optimisation, and customer-centric service improvements, the BSNL said in a statement.

BSNL chairman and managing director A. Robert J. Ravi, said: "We expect revenue growth to improve further, exceeding 20% by the end of the financial year. Revenue from Mobility, FTTH, and Leased Lines has increased by 15 per cent, 18 per cent, and 14 per cent, respectively, over Q3 of the previous year."

Additionally, BSNL has successfully reduced its finance cost and overall expenditure, leading to a decline in losses



long-term sustainability. As we continue on this growth trajectory, we remain committed to delivering higher value to our shareholders, expanding market opportunities, and driving innovation," he added.

The BSNL posted a robust double-digit growth across also its services with mobility services revenue growing by 15 per cent during the October-December quarter. Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH) revenue increasing by 18 per cent and leased line services revenue clocking a 14 per cent jump over the same quarter of the previous year.

The BSNL has been aggressively expanding its network with an accelerated 4G rollout and fiber-optic infrastructure upgrades.

It has also strengthened connectivity across urban and rural areas and introduced customer-centric digital innovations with national WiFi roaming for seamless internet access across networks, the BSNL chief added.

POTPOURRI

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VICKY KAUSHAL & RASHMIKA MANDANNA SEEK BLESSINGS AT THE GOLDEN TEMPLE AMIDST 'CHHAAVA' PROMOTIONS



HM Shah Reviews Implementation Of Three New Criminal Laws In Maharashtra



NEW DELHI: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday chaired a review meeting on the implementation of three new criminal laws in Maharashtra, asking the state to establish a model Directorate of Prosecution system in line with the new criminal laws.

In the presence of Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, HM Shah reviewed the implementation and present status of various new provisions related to police, prisons, courts, prosecution, and forensics in the state.

The meeting was attended by the Union Home Secretary, the Chief Secretary and Director General of Maharashtra, the Director General of the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD), the Director General of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), and other senior officials from the Union Home Ministry and the state government.

MSMEs Get USD 100 Mn Green Financing from SIDBI-AFD deal



NEW DELHI: The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has entered into a significant credit facility agreement with the French Development Agency (AFD), securing a USD 100 million funding commitment to enhance green financing solutions for Indian micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

This strategic partnership is designed to accelerate sustainable growth initiatives and facilitate India's transition toward a low-carbon economic model.

The credit line will enable SIDBI to expand its financial support to MSMEs seeking to implement energy-efficient technologies, adopt renewable energy solutions, and incorporate climate-friendly business practices.

Mounting public pressure forced Biren Singh to resign: Rahul Gandhi



IMPHAL: Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi reacting to the Manipur Chief Minister N.Biren Singh's resignation, said that he quit the post following "mounting public pressure".

The LoP, who visited Manipur three times after the ethnic violence broke out on May 3, 2023, in a post on the X said: "For nearly two years, BJP's CM Biren Singh instigated division in Manipur. PM Modi allowed him to continue despite the violence, loss of life, and the destruction of the idea of India in Manipur."

He added that the resignation of Biren Singh shows that mounting public pressure, the SC investigation and the no-confidence motion by the Congress have forced a reckoning.

"But the most urgent priority is to restore peace in the state and work to heal the wounds of the people of Manipur. PM Modi must visit Manipur at once, listen to the people and finally explain his plan to bring back normalcy," he said.

The LoP's third visit came during the second leg of his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which started from Manipur on January 14 last year. The 67-day-long Yatra ended in Mumbai covering 85 districts of 14 states.

The Congress kicked off the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from Manipur with a promise to "bring peace and harmony" to the ethnic violence-hit state.

LoP Rahul Gandhi in his speech in the parliament and outside the parliament urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Manipur and restore peace and normalcy.

Meanwhile, Congress General Secretary and parliament member Jairam Ramesh said that the Congress was all set to move a no-confidence motion against the Chief Minister and his Council of Ministers in the Manipur Assembly on Monday and sensing the climate, the Manipur CM has resigned.

"This was a demand that the Congress has been making since early May 2023, when Manipur erupted. The Chief Minister's resignation was belated. The people of Manipur now await a visit by our Frequent Flier PM who is off to France and the USA now - and who has found neither the time nor the inclination to go to Manipur these past twenty months," Ramesh, who also visited Manipur several times during the past two years after the ethnic violence started, said in a post on the X.

Delhi BJP slams Kejriwal for 'Digital Loot' over CMO X handle conversion

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Delhi BJP President Shri Virendra Sachdeva has strongly condemned Arvind Kejriwal for converting the X (formerly Twitter) account "CMO Delhi" - which was created, expanded, and recognized using public funds - into his personal X account under the name "Kejriwal at Work".

Shri Virendra Sachdeva alleged that during his ten-year tenure, Arvind Kejriwal was involved in multiple scams, including ration card fraud, the Sheesh Mahal scandal, auto permit scams, and the liquor policy scam. Furthermore, he accused Kejriwal of misusing government funds by appointing party workers as government employees. This latest act, described as "digital loot," is unprecedented in Indian politics. "It is unlikely that any outgoing Chief Minister in the country has ever done some-



thing like this," said Sachdeva, adding that labeling Kejriwal a "digital looter" would not be an exaggeration given his actions immediately after his government's downfall.

The Delhi BJP President has urged the Lieutenant Governor to demand a report from the Delhi Government's Social Media and IT Department on how the "CMO Delhi" X handle - developed using public funds - was renamed for personal use by Arvind Kejriwal. He further called for an immediate halt to this alleged digital misuse.

Sachdeva also highlighted that millions of people followed the "CMO Delhi" X handle, believing it to be the official Chief Minister's account. By orchestrating what he termed a "digital heist," Kejriwal has not only misused government resources but also compromised people's private information, for which he must face legal action.

With mounting criticism from opposition parties, the controversy over the CMO Delhi X handle is expected to spark further political debate in the coming days.

President Murmu Inaugurates 10th Int'l Women's Conference in Bengaluru



BENGALURU: President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the inaugural session of the 10th edition of the International Women's Conference at the Art of Living centre here on Friday. Over 500 delegates from 50 countries are expected to take part in the conference.

Speaking at the programme, President Murmu suggested every woman to look within and find a treasure trove of virtues, talents, mental and spiritual strength to make a positive and long-lasting impact on the society.

"It is not possible to break barriers and stereotypes without mental strength," she underlined. "Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and the Art of Living have inspired and helped people around the world to find inner peace through meditation and humanitarian services," President Murmu said.

"We are at the edge of technological disruption. In such a competitive world, we should ensure our human values remain intact. This is where the role of women becomes im-

portant, because they lead with compassion and kindness."

Speaking about the need to work on mental health, President Murmu said: "You can break silence by creating safe spaces and support systems for everyone to share and express. It is not possible to break barriers and stereotypes without mental strength."

Celebrated actress and Member of Parliament Hema Malini said: "Many people ask how I manage dance, performance, and public service? I say, 'Just Be'. Yoga, dance, and meditation - taught by Gurudev - help me center myself."

Annappurna Devi, Union Minister for Women and Child Development, speaking at the event, said: "Just Be is a reminder to stay grounded while chasing material success. Meditation and pranayama help us find balance and clarity. When women accept themselves fully, they gain confidence and independence."

ment, Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises spoke about a paradigm shift in India's policy-making, which has changed focus from women's development to women-led development. In governance, business, and science, women are leading the way, she said.

The Union MoS said that it was a matter of pride that India's invaluable contribution and leadership in the world is through its wisdom and human values and "never through conquest".

In this, the work done by The Art of Living in bringing spiritual solace to millions of people across the globe with its stress-relief programmes and service projects, Shobha Karandlaje said.

Patricia Scotland, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, stated: "We are in a state of flux, facing pain, difficulty, and challenge. Never before have we needed this message of peace and tranquility more than today. With determination, will, and the practice of yoga and meditation, we can break barriers and navigate the challenges of our times. Every ceiling I have shattered was not by me but through my faith in God."

"Uniquely themed 'Just Be,' the conference called for a conscious pause, balance, acceptance of oneself, and resilience as avenues for navigating life's challenges and driving meaningful change in the world," she said.

BJP govt's swearing-in likely on February 19-20, focus on clean water and civic infrastructure

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The swearing-in ceremony of the newly elected Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Delhi is likely to take place on February 19 or 20, with the new dispensation prioritizing clean drinking water supply and improved civic infrastructure, party leaders said on Wednesday.

Newly elected BJP MLA and party national secretary Manjinder Singh Sirsa stated that observers for the BJP legislature party meeting would soon be appointed following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's return from his foreign visit.

"The new government will start functioning around February 19-20," said Sirsa, the Rajouri Garden MLA, who is considered a strong contender for the post of Chief Minister or a ministerial berth. He further indicated that the BJP legislature party meeting was expected to be held around February 18-19, with the government formation likely to be completed by February 20, after the swearing-in ceremony.



However, BJP legislators dismissed speculations about a contest for the Chief Minister's post, terming them as mere media conjecture.

"There is no race for the post of Delhi Chief Minister. In our party, the CM or the leader of the legislature party is chosen in a meeting of the MLAs," said Abhay Verma, a second-time MLA from Laxmi Nagar. Verma, a Purvanchali leader, is also seen as a potential candidate for the top post.

"We are here to serve the people and address pressing issues such as development, clean water supply, and clean air, as well as to free the Yamuna from pollution," he added.

BJP MLAs also emphasized that the Ayushman Bharat health scheme, previously ob-

structed by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, would be implemented in Delhi during the first meeting of the new Cabinet.

"The Prime Minister has already assured that the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme will be approved in the first Cabinet meeting," Sirsa confirmed.

He further stated that within the first 100 days of assuming power, the new government would focus on providing clean drinking water, improving sanitation in the city, and initiating measures to tackle air and Yamuna pollution.

Sixth-time MLA Mohan Singh Bisht confirmed that the new Chief Minister of Delhi would be elected from among the 48 BJP legislators.

Punjab CM opposes move of GOI to again land plane carrying deported Indians at Amritsar



JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Opposing the move of Government of India to land plane carrying deported Indians at Amritsar airport, the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Friday described it as a conspiracy of union government to defame Punjab and Punjabis. Interacting with the media persons here on February 14, the Chief Minister said that despite of Punjab being food bowl and sword arm of India, BJP led government has started a tirade to defame state. He said that the move to land plane carrying deported Indians from US in Amritsar is just another attempt of the Government of India to tarnish image of Punjab globally. He questioned the move of MEA to choose Amritsar for landing these this plane here whereas there are hundreds of other airports in the country. The Chief Minister said that he has already raised this issue with the MEA and MHA but hasn't received any positive response from them. He said that one plane had landed a few days back and now two more planes are being landed without any proper justification.

New simpler Income Tax Bill slashes volume of Income Tax Act, 1961 by half

NEW DELHI: The Income-Tax Bill, 2025 tabled in Parliament on Thursday, marks a significant step toward simplifying the language and structure of the Income-tax Act, 1961 based on global best practices, according to a statement issued by the Finance Ministry.

The review has led to a substantial reduction in the Act's volume, making it more streamlined and navigable. The total number of words in the new Income Tax Bill has been reduced to 259, 676 in the new Income Tax Bill from a massive 512, 535 words in the existing Income Tax Act, 1961. This close to 50 per cent cut has resulted in a reduction of 252, 859 words, the statement said.

Accordingly, the number of chapters in the new Income Tax Bill has come down to 23 from 47 in the existing Income Tax Act, 1961. Similarly, the number of sections has been cut to 536 from 819 earlier which has resulted in removing as many as 283 sections, the statement explained.

This massive reduction has taken place with the simplification of language, making the law more accessible while the consolidation of amendments has reduced fragmentation.

There has also been a struc-



tural rationalisation through tables and formulae for improved readability. Besides, the preservation of existing taxation principles has ensured continuity while enhancing usability, the statement said.

Consultations were held with industry experts and tax professionals and simplification models from Australia and the UK were studied for best practices.

The simplification exercise was guided by three core principles which include textual and structural simplification for improved clarity and coherence, ensuring continuity and certainty with no major tax policy changes and no modifications of tax rates to preserve predictability for taxpayers, the finance ministry said.

A three-pronged approach

was adopted with a focus on eliminating intricate language to enhance readability, removing redundant and repetitive provisions for better navigation and reorganising sections logically to facilitate ease of reference, according to the statement.

The government also ensured widespread stakeholder engagement, consulting taxpayers, businesses, industry associations, and professional bodies. Out of 20, 976 online suggestions received, relevant suggestions were examined and incorporated, where feasible.

The Income-tax Bill, 2025 reflects the Government's commitment to enhancing ease of doing business by providing a tax framework that is simple and clear, the statement added.

Delhi Metro makes special arrangement for Board exams students

NEW DELHI: With the CBSE Board Examinations 2025 for Classes 10 and 12 scheduled from February 15 to April 4, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has decided to give them priority during security checks and ticket sale metro stations, an official said on Friday.

As approximately 3.30 lakh students and thousands of school staff will be commuting across the city, DMRC in partnership with the CISF is implementing special facilitation measures at metro stations to accommodate the increased footfall on examination days.

Anuj Dayal, Principal Executive Director, Corporate Communications, Delhi Metro, said that students showing their admit cards will also be prioritised while purchasing tickets at Ticket Office Machines (TOM) and Customer Care (CC) centres.



Dayal urged students to plan their travel in advance and asked them to visit DMRC's official website (www.delhimetrorail.com) and DMRC Momentum to plan their journey.

He said DMRC staff visited schools, interacted with principals, and informed them about the nearest metro stations and the support available for students. The DMRC has also requested schools to display

official mobile application for easy reference, he said.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) will commence the Class 10 and Class 12 board exams for 2025 on Saturday. This year, nearly 42 lakh students are expected to appear in the exams across 7, 842 centres in India and 26 countries abroad.

To ensure the smooth conduct of the exams, the CBSE hosted a webinar on its official YouTube channel. The session provided guidelines for centre superintendents, deputy centre superintendents, assistant superintendents, city coordinators, and observers. It also covered evaluation protocols and the responsibilities of all officials involved.

CBSE experts said students appearing for the exams must carry their admit cards along with their school ID cards.

BJP MLA says Mohalla Clinics to be renamed 'Ayushman Arogya Mandir'



OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

BJP MLA Manjinder Singh Sirsa from Rajouri Garden announced on Friday that Mohalla Clinics in Delhi would be renamed as "Ayushman Arogya Mandir" to transform them into genuine healthcare centers for the public.

Speaking to news agencies, Sirsa alleged that during the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government's tenure, Mohalla Clinics were marred by fraudulent medical tests and ghost patients, turning them into "money-making ATMs."

He asserted that under the BJP's leadership, these clinics would function effectively to serve people, especially in marginalized areas.

He further stated that the BJP government in Delhi plans to set up Ayushman Arogya Mandirs near JJ clusters to provide free primary healthcare services to residents. The initiative aligns with the Delhi BJP's first Sankalp Patra (manifesto), which promised to enhance healthcare infrastructure in underserved communities.

Meanwhile, Delhi's outgoing Chief Minister Atishi accused

the BJP of being preoccupied with internal power struggles over ministerial positions, claiming they were seeking to "exploit public funds." She alleged that the BJP had no genuine intent to fulfill its electoral promises.

"Our sources suggest that the BJP is preparing to blame AAP for its failure to deliver on promises. They will likely claim that the previous AAP administration left the Delhi government with insufficient funds," Atishi said during a press conference.

The BJP, which secured a resounding victory in the recently concluded 70-member Delhi Assembly elections, has yet to declare its chief minister and cabinet. The party won 48 seats, while AAP saw a sharp decline in its tally, securing just 22 seats—down from 62 in the 2020 elections.

Delhi's new CM to be chosen from MLAs, no deputy CM post



NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will finalise the name for the Chief Minister's post in Delhi only after Prime Minister Narendra Modi returns from his US visit, sources said on Thursday, adding that the pick will be from the MLAs and there will be no deputy CM.

According to party insiders, BJP National President J.P. Nadda has stated that the Chief Minister will be selected from among the elected MLAs, and the Legislature Party meeting to decide the leader will take place only after the PM's return.

Sources have indicated that one of the foremost priorities of the new BJP-led government will be the cleaning of the Yamuna River. Work on this front has already started, with the party keen on delivering on its promise of rejuvenating the heavily polluted river.

Additionally, the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme, which provides financial protection for medical expenses to underprivileged citizens, will be implemented in Delhi—something the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government had not done.

Nadda also hinted that some major policy decisions are expected to be taken in the first cabinet meeting which is likely to be held immediately after the swearing-in ceremony.

Sources have also said that there will be no Deputy Chief Minister in the new BJP government in Delhi.

The party has held a series of meetings after the declaration of results involving top leaders. Another round of meetings is likely to take place in two days.

The term of the current Delhi Assembly will conclude on February 26 and the new government must take charge by then.

In the recently concluded Delhi Assembly elections, held on February 5, the BJP secured a landslide victory, winning 48 out of 70 seats. The AAP, which had ruled the national capital for the last 10 years, suffered a major setback, managing to win only 22 seats. The Congress drew a blank, the third time in a row. The election results were announced on February 8.

New Government Must Strive to Make Delhi a Model City for All: JIH Vice President Malik Moatasim Khan



KAVIDA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Vice President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), Malik Moatasim Khan, has commented on the recently concluded Delhi State elections and spelt out expectations from the newly elected government of Delhi State.

In a statement to the media, the JIH Vice President said, "The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) governed Delhi for over a decade. However, despite getting two terms in power, it failed to present a clear ideological position on critical issues like social justice and the rights of religious minorities. In many instances, it remained a silent spectator when the constitutional rights of Delhi citizens, especially those of the Muslim minority community, were endangered. While welfare schemes and subsidies played a role in its governance, they were insufficient to ensure sustained public confidence. The AAP government also failed to keep many promises regarding clean drinking water, a clean environment, removing landfills, cleaning nalas and garbage, women's safety, and housing for slum dwellers."

"Decoding BJP-RSS's mutual efforts winning the National Capital"

YOGESH KANT
New Delhi

As the battle for Delhi's political landscape unfolded, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) executed a meticulously planned electoral strategy, led by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva. Sources reveal that an internal survey was conducted to assess the party's standing before finalizing candidates, rejecting an initial list presented by the Delhi unit in December.

Following the Delhi polls, a follow-up meeting in January, attended by the top brass, ultimately shaped the final ticket allocations. The delay in announcing candidates—despite receiving a staggering 2,100 applications—was a calculated move to minimize internal conflicts and consolidate support.

From MCD loss to strategic resurgence: BJP's electoral playbook took shape soon after its defeat in the 2022 Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) elections, where it won 104 out of 250 seats, losing to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which secured 134 seats. A senior BJP strategist remarked, "The setback in civil polls prompted the party to shift its approach—moving away from communal rhetoric to a grassroots-driven model that expanded its vote share beyond 40%."

The transformation hinged on building 27 specialized cells and seven fronts, tailored to engage caste, regional, and religious groups. An active member of the BJP noted, "The Purvanchal Morcha and the newly

established Temple Cell played a pivotal role, fostering BJP's connection with communities through religious outreach, including weekly Hanuman Chalisa recitations in residential welfare associations (RWAs)." More than 100 religious events, spanning Gurbani recitals to Shivratni celebrations, were strategically organised across the capital to attract youth and women voters.

Caste equation: BJP's micro-targeting: Beyond religious outreach, the BJP fine-tuned its voter segmentation along caste and regional lines. The party categorized Delhi's migrant population, recognizing the distinct political behavior of Purvanchal and Uttarakhandi voters. The Purvanchal electorate, comprising 25% of Delhi's voters, had long been a stronghold for AAP leaders such as Sanjay Singh and Durgesh Pathak.

A BJP functionary explained, "We realized that retaining Manoj Tiwari as our key Purvanchal face, while replacing other candidates, would prove effective." Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was roped in for rallies, and BJP leveraged alliances, allocating the Burari seat to JD(U) and the Deoli seat to LJP. Visual campaigns featured prominent Purvanchal leaders, and cultural touchpoints—like Litti-Chokha conferences and the Yamuna-cleaning promise before Chhath Puja—cemented BJP's appeal among this voter base.

Similarly, the Uttarakhandi electorate was prioritized, with Mohan Singh Bisht and Ravindra Singh Negi securing tickets.



A senior BJP leader stated, "By deploying Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami for targeted campaign rallies, we ensured a consolidated outreach to this crucial voting bloc."

Jat-Gujjar mobilization: The key to outer-Delhi: In rural and border constituencies, BJP orchestrated an aggressive Jat and Gujjar outreach by organising Mahapanchayat held on December 22, 2024, in Mangolpuri saw key community leaders declaring their demand for a "native Chief Minister" for Delhi. This sentiment was reinforced just two days before polling when Jat and Gujjar representatives met Amit Shah, leading to an endorsement from 360 villages and 36 community groups.

A political analyst noted, "Jats, in particular, were disillusioned with AAP's sidelining of leader Kailash Gahlot, and BJP capitalised on this frustration." The party allocated 14% of its tickets to Jats and 11% to Gujjars, contrasting with AAP's 11% allocation for both groups. This shift impacted around 22 to 25 assembly seats directly. BJP's OBC Morcha was instrumental in activating Ramesh Bidhuri and Parvish Verma—both key Jat and Gujjar leaders—to bolster support.

Beyond Delhi, BJP drew reinforcements from neighbouring states. Alka Gujjar, former vice president of Rajasthan BJP, was called in to rally Gujjar voters, while senior OBC leaders from Uttar Pradesh campaigned in strategic constituencies.

Shift from Hindutva to Caste-based politics: BJP's strategy moved away from a broad Hindutva appeal to caste-based voter mobilization. While AAP held ground in Central Delhi, BJP dominated the outer and border areas, a pattern similar to its success in rural Haryana.

A senior BJP leader stated, "We tactically downplayed communal rhetoric in favor of welfare-driven messaging." The party's manifesto focused on social upliftment, with strategic outreach to Dalit groups. The defection of key AAP Dalit leaders—Sandeep Valmiki, Rajendra Pal Gautam, and Raj Kumar Anand—further weakened AAP's influence in this segment.

BJP tailored its approach to Dalit subgroups, including Jatavs, Valmikis, and Dhobis. A BJP strategist revealed, "The Valmiki community, a traditional AAP stronghold, was targeted with direct welfare initiatives." Amit Shah's move to regularize 4,400 NDMC sanitation workers' jobs in May 2023 was

a strategic push to sway this voter base.

RSS factor - Silent but influential mobilisation: The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) emerged as an invisible but crucial force in BJP's campaign. While its official stance remained the same—urging citizens to vote for the 'best' candidate and the 'best' party—its ground-level engagement significantly shaped voter sentiment.

An RSS functionary commented, "Under the banner of the 'Save Delhi Campaign,' we mobilised voters with the tagline 'Shat-Pratishat Matdaan Karein, Behtar Delhi, Behtar Bharat' (100% Voting for a Better Delhi, Better India)." This call for maximum voter participation was not just a civic message; it was a calculated effort to ensure a high turnout among sections of society that traditionally lean towards BJP's policies.

Key issues that tilted the scale: RSS strategists identified a set of hyper-local concerns that resonated deeply with voters. These included sanitation, access to clean water, healthcare services, women's safety, road infrastructure, the deteriorating condition of the Yamuna River, air pollution, illegal immigration, sewage systems, and employment opportunities.

An RSS Karyakarta Delhi-based remarked, "One of the most potent issues raised was the worsening condition of the Yamuna over the past decade." Similarly, the 'water crisis' emerged as a compelling concern. An RSS worker noted, "More than 43% of residents in Jhuggi-Jhopri clusters are forced to purchase potable water from private tankers or bottled water vendors."

Another critical issue was the failure of Delhi's healthcare infrastructure. "Seventy percent of patients are compelled to seek treatment in private hospitals," an RSS volunteer stated, countering AAP's much-hyped Mohalla Clinic model.

Strategy of positive engagement: Unlike conventional political campaigns, RSS cadres refrained from directly attacking AAP or Congress. A Karyakarta explained, "We focused on issue-based discussions rather than personal or party-based criticisms."

Interestingly, on polling and counting days, no RSS functionary was visibly involved in BJP's booth management. A BJP worker noted, "While BJP workers handled election logistics, the RSS had already ensured a robust groundwork by shaping voter perceptions well in advance."

Takeaway - Winning combination of strategy and groundwork: The BJP's electoral success can be attributed to a blend of strategic candidate selection, hyper-local issue targeting, and the silent but effective mobilization by RSS. By focusing on key pain points such as water, healthcare, security, and governance, BJP was able to dismantle AAP's narrative in several crucial constituencies.

Ultimately, a BJP worker summarized, "The BJP-RSS ecosystem operated in a synchronised yet distinctly separate manner, with the former managing the electoral machinery and the latter shaping voter sentiment. This alignment of strategy, grassroots mobilization, and controlled messaging proved to be the formula for BJP's success in the election."

Prostitution racket busted at Murthal's Spa during police raid, arrested 8

SATISH HANDA
Sonipat

Murthal Police raided a high-end spa on the third floor of a building on the 51 Mile Stone in Murthal in Sonipat district, busting a prostitution racket running in a spa centre on GT Road. Police arrested four accused including the spa operator. ACP Ajit Singh said, four women including two foreigners have been taken under protection. Police had sent fake customers to catch the accused red handed. Women during police interrogation accused two operators of Spa centre of forcing them to do immoral things, both operators were sent to police custody on three-day remand, however one was granted bail. Earlier, a fake customer was sent to verify the information that illegal prostitution was going on, who confirmed the illegal activities are going on in this Spa centre having a 5 star look, named 'Reborn' on the third floor of the building. The raid resulted in the detention of four women, including two foreign nationals, and four men. Abhi Jain, a resident of Sonipat's Gurmandi area, was identified as the operator of the establishment. A case was registered allegedly about the dirty business of prostitution going on in the Spa centre



and further investigations underway.

Assistant Commissioner of Police Ajit Singh stated that the police received information about prostitution being run under the guise of a spa centre. A fake customer was sent to verify the information, which confirmed the illegal activity. Police seized Rs 62,000 from the premises. The women present, claiming to be local residents, revealed they were involved in prostitution, receiving Rs 500 per customer from the spa's operator. The establishment housed nine rooms and a person sitting at the counter. During the raid, the police found an individual in a compromising position in one of the rooms. The police arrested four accused including the spa operator. Four women including two foreigners have been taken under protection. The women

100 per cent increase in HIV patients in 5 years in Haryana, recorded 34,000

The number of HIV patients receiving treatment in Haryana has more than doubled in the past five years, with the rise greater among males (over 144% as compared to females (close to 98%).

SATISH HANDA
Rohtak

According to state health department data, the number of patients suffering from HIV receiving treatment in Haryana hospitals has witnessed more than a hundred percent increase in the past five years, which include over 144 per cent rise among males recorded over 144 per cent as compared to females recorded as nearly 98 per



cent. Information reveals that the number of HIV patients receiving treatment in Haryana has more than doubled in the past five years. As per government record on 1st December 2024, it was stated that 15,371 HIV patients were receiving treatment under the National AIDS and STD Control Programme (NACP) in Haryana in 2019-20, which included 8,813 men, 6,525 women and 33 third-gender patients and the number increased to 16,085 in 2020-21 having 4.6

per cent rise. However, an increase in HIV patients was seen in 2021-22 when the number of patients increased to 21,796 with a 35.5 per cent jump comprising 12,767 men, 8,960 women and 69 third-gender patients.

According to data from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the number of HIV patients in Haryana increase in the state continued rising in 2022-23 also, witnessed a further increase of 31.6 per cent bringing in HIV patients increased to 28,677, which included the number of male patients rose to 17,427, female patient reached 11,161 and 89 third-gender individuals had treatment. Similarly, in 2023-24 the total number of HIV patients getting treatment in hospitals further increased to 34,535 having a 20.4 per cent rise, which included 21,526 male patients, 12,899 female patients and 110 third-gender patients. According to data, in comparison to Haryana, the Punjab state reported higher numbers of 63,554 HIV patients in 2023-24 reflecting a 12.4 per cent rise from 2022-23, Himachal Pradesh had 5,640 patients receiving treatment in 2023-24 having 7.4 per cent increase of patients suffering from HIV as compared to the previous year. According to available data, Chandigarh is the only state or union territory to record a decline in the number of HIV patients over the past five years with a decrease in the number of HIV patients from 6,480 in 2019-20 to 5,120 in 2023-24.

Like America, India should also think about deporting of illegal immigrants: Anil Vij



SATISH HANDA
Ambala/Delhi

There is a ruckus in the country on the issue of 104 NRIs deported from America. On this issue, Haryana minister Anil Vij said that like America, India should also think about deporting lakhs and crores of illegal immigrants in the country. He said that every country has the right to deport illegal immigrants, such people are born somewhere else, but why do we feed them? The Cabinet Minister was talking to media persons here and said the way 104 illegal immigrant Indians deported from America have returned to the country, has created a ruckus in the country. Some are raising questions on the government, while others are blaming America. This issue is being raised from the Parliament to every street and locality. The Cabinet Minister rightly has said that like the US, India should also think about deporting the 'lakhs and crores' of illegal immigrants in the country, since every country has the right to deport illegal immigrants and US President Donald Trump has not made any mistake by doing so.

Acharya Satyendra Das' demise an irreparable loss to spiritual world: CM Yogi

NEW DELHI: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed deep sorrow on Wednesday over the demise of Acharya Satyendra Das, the Chief priest of Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

In a heartfelt tribute on social media platform X, CM Yogi wrote: "The demise of Acharya Shri Satyendra Kumar Das Ji Maharaj, the supreme devotee of Lord Ram and the chief priest of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, Shri Ayodhya Dham, is extremely sad and an irreparable loss to the spiritual world. Humble



tribute! We pray to Lord Shri Ram to grant a place to the departed soul at his feet and give strength to the grief-stricken disciples and followers to bear this immense loss. Om peace!"

Lucknow, after suffering a brain stroke. His disciple Pradeep Das confirmed the news of his demise.

Uttar Pradesh Deputy CM Brajesh Pathak also expressed his condolences, saying: "Today, I received the saddening news that Ayodhya Dham's chief priest, revered Satyendra Das Ji, is no more. His demise is an irreparable loss. He dedicated his entire life to the Ram Lalla temple movement."

Former litigant in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid case, Iqbal Ansari, also mourned his loss, stating:

PM Modi to flag off first train to Srinagar on February 17

FW DESK
Jammu

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the Vande Bharat Express to Kashmir on February 17, marking a major milestone in the completion of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project.

Government official confirmed that the Prime Minister will inaugurate the specially designed train from the Jammu division, fulfilling a long-awaited dream of rail connectivity to the Valley.

As part of the USBRL project, Indian Railways has con-



ducted multiple successful trial runs over some of India's most

iconic railway bridges. These include the Anji Khad Bridge, featuring a 331-meter-high pylon, and the Chenab Bridge, which, at 359 meters, is the world's highest railway bridge, surpassing the height of the Eiffel Tower.

Train specially designed to withstand Jammu and Kashmir's extreme winter conditions and equipped with advanced climate-resistant technologies. It includes heating systems to prevent water and bio-toilet tanks from freezing, an optimized air-brake system for smooth operations in sub-zero temperatures.

DSGMC demands Capital punishment for Sajjan Kumar

Committee welcomes decision to convict Sajjan Kumar after 41 years

TANVIR KAUR
New Delhi

Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) has welcomed decision of the Rouse Avenue Court to convict Congress leader Sajjan Kumar in 1984 Sikh genocide case and has demanded that he be awarded Capital punishment in view of gravity of the crime.

DSGMC President Harmeet Singh Kalka and General Secretary Jagdip Singh Kahlon said that though the decision of the court has come 41 years after the 1984 Sikh genocide but it is surely a big relief for Sikh community. They also disclosed that this case pertains to mur-



der of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh and FIR No 458/91 was registered at Saraswati Vihar Police station u/s 147, 148, 149, 302, 308, 323, 395, 397, 427, 436 and 440 IPC.

They said that they welcome the decision of the court and urge the Court to award capital punishment to the guilty. Court will hear arguments and

'Nothing has changed in Kashmir': PDP leader Iltija Mufti daims she's under house arrest



SRINAGAR: People's Democratic Party leader Iltija Mufti on February 8 alleged that she and her mother, party chief Mehbooba Mufti, were placed under house arrest in Kashmir. Iltija Mufti said she had planned to visit Kathua, while Mehbooba intended to travel to Sopore to meet the family of Waseem Mir, a truck driver killed in an army firing incident on Wednesday. However, both were allegedly prevented from leaving their residence.

In a social media post, Iltija shared images of their locked front gate and accused the authorities of restricting their movement. "Our gates have been locked up because she was meant to visit Sopore, where Waseem Mir was shot dead by the army," she wrote on X. She also expressed disappointment over the political situation in Kashmir, saying, "Nothing has changed in Kashmir even after elections. Now, even comforting the families of victims is being criminalized." Iltija tagged Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Union Home Minister Amit Shah in her post. The controversy comes after the killing of Waseem Majeed Mir, a truck driver, in army firing at Sangrama in Baramulla district. The army claimed that Mir had jumped a checkpoint and was shot after a 23-kilometer chase. Iltija questioned the army's explanation, asking how a misfire could have resulted in his death.

Trinamool to contest 2026 Bengal elections alone: Mamata Banerjee



KOLKATA: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, on Monday, informed party legislators, that Trinamool Congress will be contesting alone in the Bengal Assembly elections in 2026 without having any understanding with another party including Congress.

She told party legislators while having a meeting with the members of the party's legislative team in the West Bengal Assembly before the commencement of the first day of the budget session of the house on Monday afternoon. "Congress has nothing in West Bengal. So there is no question of having an alliance with Congress in the state. Trinamool Congress will be contesting alone in West Bengal. We will form the government again for the fourth time in 2016 securing a two-thirds majority," the Chief Minister said at the meeting as claimed by a senior member of the state cabinet.

However, the state cabinet member added that during the meeting the Chief Minister had squarely blamed Congress for the result of the recently concluded Delhi Assembly polls where BJP came to power winning 48 out of 70 seats in the state assembly there.

"In Delhi, Congress did not help the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Again in Haryana AAP did not help Congress. As a result, BJP emerged as the victor in both the states. Had Congress and AAP remained united in Delhi and Haryana, the results would not have been such for the opposition in both the states," the state cabinet minister said quoting Mamata Banerjee.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister also reportedly cautioned some of the party legislators whose recent statements made in public had posed immense embarrassment for the party leadership.

The state cabinet member said that the Chief Minister cautioned the leaders on this count that the same mistake repeated again and again cannot be pardoned.

367 vacancies of Judges in High Courts: Law Minister Meghwal

NEW DELHI: There are 367 vacancies of judges in various High Courts and a shortage of 5, 320 Judicial Officers in the district and subordinated judiciary in different states, the Parliament was informed on Thursday.

Minister of State for Law and Justice, Arjun Ram Meghwal told Lok Sabha that while every effort is made to fill the existing vacancies expeditiously, vacancies of Judges in High Courts keep on arising on account of retirement, resignation or elevation of Judges and increase in their sanctioned strength.

He said, "Since May 2014, the Government has increased the sanctioned strength of High Court Judges from 906 to 1, 122 (as on date). Under the collaborative effort between the Government and the Judiciary, 1, 013 Judges have been appointed in vari-



ous High Courts since 2014 till February 10, 2025." As per the data provided by Meghwal in a reply in Lok Sabha, there are two vacancies of Judges in the Supreme Court against a sanctioned strength of 34.

He said the maximum number of 81 vacancies exist in Allahabad High Court, followed by Punjab and Haryana High Court with 34, Calcutta High Court 29, Bombay High Court

26, Delhi High Court 22 and Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat High Courts with 20 each. The total sanctioned strength of High Court judges stands at 1, 114, the MoS said. The highest judicial vacancies in lower courts exist in Uttar Pradesh at 1, 002. The state has a sanctioned strength of 3, 700 Judicial Officers in subordinate courts. The second-highest judicial vacan-

cies in lower courts exist in Gujarat at 535, followed by Bihar with 483, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan with 346 each and Madhya Pradesh 336. The National Capital of Delhi has 94 vacancies. Replying to another question on Fast Track Special Courts (FTSCs), the MoS said as per the inputs received from the High Courts, as on December 31, 2024 as many as 747 FTSCs, including 406 exclusive POCSO Courts (e-POCSO), are functional in 30 States/UTs. "These courts have disposed of around 3, 00, 000 rape and POCSO Act cases as of December 31, 2024," he said. Meghwal said the centrally-sponsored scheme for the establishment of FTSCs, including exclusive POCSO Courts for expeditious disposal of rape and POCSO Act cases, has been extended till March 31, 2026, targeting the establishment of 790 courts.

Two Army soldiers killed in IED attack by terrorists in Jammu & Kashmir

FW DESK
Jammu

Two Indian Army soldiers lost their lives in a suspected improvised explosive device (IED) attack by terrorists in the Akhnoor sector of Jammu and Kashmir today. The attack occurred while the soldiers were on a "fence patrol" along the Line of Control (LoC), the Indian Army confirmed.

As per the official statement posted on X, the Army's White Knight Corps expressed its condolences, saying: "White Knight Corps salutes and pays tribute to the supreme sacrifice of two gallant soldiers."

The army official also added that troops are currently dominating the area, and search operations are underway to track down the perpetrators. This incident follows a series of recent security challenges



along the LoC.

A soldier was also critically injured after being hit by gunfire in the Rajouri district's Nowshera sector on February 10. Preliminary reports suggest the firing originated from across the LoC. The injured soldier was promptly evacuated to a military hospital for treatment.

Last week on February 8, an army patrol in the Keri sector came under fire from terrorists positioned in a forest across the LoC. Indian troops retaliated, and the anti-infiltration grid was reinforced to maintain heightened vigilance in the region.

HAL Unveils Upgraded Hindustan Jet Trainer 'Yashas' at Aero India 2025



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has officially rebranded its upgraded Hindustan Jet Trainer (HJT)-36 as 'Yashas', marking a new milestone in India's indigenous aviation capabilities. The announcement was made by Sanjeev Kumar, Secretary (Defence Production), in the presence of Dr. D.K. Sunil, Chairman and Managing Director, HAL, along with senior officials at the ongoing Aero India 2025.

The transformation of the HJT-36 into Yashas follows extensive modifications that have significantly enhanced its performance, particularly in departure characteristics and spin resistance. These changes ensure a more robust and reliable platform for Stage-II pilot training, offering superior safety and handling characteristics essential for modern military aviation.

"The large-scale changes to the baseline intermediate

training platform have led to significant improvements in its capabilities. As a result, we have taken the opportunity to rename it in alignment with its continued relevance in advanced pilot training. Henceforth, the HJT-36 will be known as 'Yashas', signifying success and excellence," said Dr. D.K. Sunil, CMD, HAL.

To ensure seamless integration with contemporary training needs, Yashas has been upgraded with cutting-edge avionics and a modernized cockpit. These enhancements include: Advanced Glass Cockpit: Featuring Multi-Function Displays (MFDs) and a Heads-Up Display (HUD) for improved situational awareness. Stepped-Up Rear Cockpit & Drooped Nose: Providing exceptional all-around vision, essential for training and operational safety. FADEC-Controlled AL-551 Jet Engine: Offering optimal thrust management, high reliability, and best-in-class thrust-to-weight ratio.

Centre Warns Telcos of Fine Up to ₹10 Lakh Over Failure to Curb Spam

NEW DELHI: In order to further strengthen consumer protection, the government has warned telecom services providers of fine up to Rs 10 lakh over failure to implement revised regulations dealing with unsolicited commercial communication (UCC) and SMSes.

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has introduced amendments to the Telecom Commercial Communications Customer Preference Regulations (TCCCPR), 2018 that aim to deal with evolving methods of misuse of telecom resource and promote a more transparent commercial communication ecosystem for consumers.

"A financial disincentive (FD) of Rs 2 lakh for first instance of violation, Rs 5 lakh for second instance of violation and Rs 10 lakh per instance for subsequent instances of violation, shall be imposed on access providers in case of misreporting of the count of UCC," said TRAI.

These FDs shall be imposed separately for registered and unregistered senders. Moreover, these FDs will be in addition to the FD imposed on access providers against invalid closure of complaints, and not fulfilling their obligations in respect of registration of Message Headers and



Content Templates, said the telecom regulator.

The amendments aim to the legitimate commercial communication occur through registered entities, based on the preference and consent of the customers, thereby, balancing the interests of consumers with the need for supporting legitimate economic activities in the country, according to the Ministry of Telecommunications.

Consumers will now be able to make complaint against spam (UCC) calls and messages sent by unregistered senders without the need of first registering their preferences for blocking or receiving commercial communications.

"To make the complaint process simpler and more effective, it has been mandated that if a complaint made by a customer contains bare minimum essential data such as

number of the complainant, number of Sender from which the Spam/UCC has been received, date on which spam is received and a brief about the UCC Voice Call/Message, the complaint shall be treated as a valid complaint," according to revised norms.

Further, a customer can now make a complaint about spam/UCC within 7 days of receiving spam as compared to earlier 3-day time limit.

"Time limit for taking action by the access providers against the UCC from unregistered senders has been reduced from 30 days to 5 days. To ensure prompt action against the senders of UCC, the criterion for taking action against them has been revised and made more stringent," said TRAI.

As compared to earlier criterion of having 10 complaints against the sender in last 7 days' to trigger action, it has been modified to "having 5 complaints against the sender in last 10 days'.

This would enable faster action and at the same time, covering more number of spammers, according to the regulator.

The revised regulations will enable TRAI in safeguarding consumer interests while promoting a more secure and trusted digital communication environment.

Large states must be cut down to promote urbanisation: Montek Singh Ahluwalia



BENGALURU: Former Deputy Chairman of the erstwhile Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia on Wednesday advocated carving out two to three states from large States like Uttar Pradesh to give a new impetus to urbanisation.

He also suggested picking up some tier-2 towns and developing them into "near-metros".

Ahluwalia shared his views at a fireside chat with economist and author Salman Anes Soz on "Resilient Pathways: Charting Economic Growth Amid Global Challenges" at the Global Investors' Meet 'Invest Karnataka 2025' here.

"We should seriously consider cutting down many of the larger states into two or three," he said.

Ahluwalia recalled that former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and BSP leader Mayawati had suggested splitting her state into three. "Had this been done, there would have been a political willingness instantly to create three new good cities. People have said this could be done in many other states. In Maharashtra, for example, there are people who said that the Vidarbha region should be made a separate state with Nagpur as its capital," he said.

"The main reason we have to think about this is that the resistance to doing...building a new city...land acquisition that it involved sharply goes down when whoever is doing it says that it's a capital of a new state," Ahluwalia said.

But he also acknowledged that interesting reforms and tough decisions such as this are not politically easy.

Ahluwalia also noted that all the states in the country are highly centralised.

However, he pointed out there is evidence to suggest that the performance of new states has improved.

Responding to a question on rising public debt, he said the states have all become fiscally very weak because of scale of debt relative to both revenue generation and their gross domestic product is too high.

He expressed the view that the nature of reforms needed for India to achieve an eight per cent annual growth for two decades to realise its vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 has not been spelt out and said there are some challenges to achieve this goal.

"Earlier in 1991, initiating reforms was easy because the world was speaking one language. We started the reforms after Eastern Europe had abolished communism... there was only one thing to do which was integrate with the global market. That has become much more complex now," he said.

Ahluwalia said geopolitical tensions are now rising, the US has its own problems not only with its closest allies, like Canada and Mexico, but also with China. China is cosying up to Russia. Russia is becoming more dependent on China. Europeans are very scared of Russia. They are not that bothered about China.

"India is faced with a world all of a sudden fragmented. We didn't have that problem in 1991 at all. If India is to grow at eight per cent then the urban population is going to grow very rapidly," he said.

"I think you have to recognise that India will not be 'Viksit' if it does not largely reduce the numbers staying in villages," he said.

He added that good Gandhians should recognise that this is not undermining the views of Mahatma Gandhi, who expressed these views 100 years ago but did not mean that it will continue to do so 100 years later.

Sikh Genocide-1984: BJP MLA Sirsa demands apology from LoP Gandhi after Sajjan Kumar's conviction

NEW DELHI: Newly-elected Delhi BJP legislator Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Friday wrote to Congress leader Rahul Gandhi seeking expulsion of his party colleague Sajjan Kumar after the latter's conviction in the third 1984 anti-Sikh riots case.

Sirsa asked Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi to prove his commitment to justice and communal harmony by issuing "a public apology to the Sikh community and the entire nation for the Congress' role in sheltering and empowering criminals like Sajjan Kumar."

The BJP legislator from Rajouri Garden said as LoP, Rahul Gandhi should bring



a resolution in Parliament thanking the government for forming the Special Investigation Team (SIT) and ensuring that the 1984 riot accused were brought to justice.

Describing the 1984 genocide as one of the darkest and

most shameful chapters in India's history, Sirsa wrote, "For nearly four decades, victims and their families have relentlessly fought for justice against those who orchestrated, enabled, and shielded the massacre of innocent Sikhs. Now,

with the court confirming his (Sajjan Kumar's) crimes for the third time, the onus is on you to act with moral courage and political accountability." Reminding LoP Gandhi about his visit to Sri Darbar Sahib (Golden Temple), wearing a head scarf and his attempt to project himself as an ally of the Sikh community, Sirsa said that despite the conviction of Sajjan Kumar there has been no official condemnation from the leadership of the party.

"Sajjan Kumar was not just a Congress member, he was protected, promoted, and shielded by your party for decades," he said.

The BJP's Sikh leader wrote, "Justice delayed is justice de-

nied. The Sikh community and the nation have neither forgotten nor forgiven. This is not merely a legal matter - it is a moral test for your leadership. Will you choose justice over political convenience? Or will you continue to follow the same path of denial and evasion that Congress has treaded for decades?"

A Delhi court on February 12 convicted Sajjan Kumar in connection with the killing of a father-son duo in the Saraswati Vihar area on November 1, 1984 during the riots.

Special Judge Kaveri Baweja pronounced the conviction order and fixed the arguments on the quantum of the sentence for February 18. This case is re-

lated to the killing of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh in the Saraswati Vihar area during the riots.

Earlier on January 31, the Rouse Avenue Court reserved its verdict after hearing additional submissions advanced by Public Prosecutor Manish Rawat.

On the other hand, Advocate Anil Sharma had submitted that Sajjan Kumar's name was not there from the very beginning and there was a delay of 16 years in naming him as an accused by the witness.

It was also submitted that a case in which Sajjan Kumar was convicted by the Delhi High Court is pending appeal before the Supreme Court.



POOJA RAMAMURTHI EXPLAINS HOW NEW DELHI'S GLOBAL SOUTH LEADERSHIP GROWS BY LISTENING TOO

Bridging the Global North and South



In his address in January 2025, in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, while addressing the 18th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, said, 'Today's India not only firmly asserts its own point but also strongly amplifies the voice of the Global South'. Similarly, when India held the 3rd Voice of Global South Summit 2024, last August, Mr. Modi said that India aspires to lead the required reforms to take developing countries into a new, more inclusive structure of global governance.

What has influenced India's renewed enthusiasm to champion the cause of the developing world? And, how can the country influence change to become an effective global development partner?

Unlike the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), India's motivation does not appear to be based on decolonisation or strong criticism of the West. Rather, as India attempts to increase its presence in the Global South, it is simultaneously deepening its relationships with traditional partners such as the United States and Europe. The high-level visit of Jake Sullivan, the former U.S. National Security Adviser, in January, reflects this. Mr. Modi's visit to Poland, in August 2024, also shows India's attempt to create new alliances.

The China factor argument

The cynical answer often circles back to India trying to counter China's growing global dominance. Trends of foreign direct investments in Africa indicate that India appears to be in a race with China, mainly focusing on countries which already have a significant Chinese presence. Further, industrialised countries are thought to be strategically partnering with India to contain China's rising international footprint. The Quad partnership, an on-

going dialogue between Japan, India, Australia and the U.S., for a free and fair Indo-Pacific, is seen as one such attempt. However, the India-China competition does not give the full picture.

India is trying to create an individual identity as an emerging power in its own right to forward its own strategic trade, defence, and geopolitical interests. Global South countries are disillusioned with present economic paradigms, burdened with debt and conditionalities. They are not looking for another China or a new western institution. India can fill this gap while being a bridge between the Global North and Global South. To be successful, India needs to back up its rhetoric with the right strategies.

Steps that India must take

The first is for India to double-down on its call for an alternate paradigm of development cooperation that is not solely top-down, dictated by the Global North. India often lays emphasis on equal partnerships with other developing countries, trying to set itself apart from traditional powers. In practice, it signals otherwise by putting forward strategies with an India-first approach.

The newly announced 'Global Development Compact' aimed at facilitating growth

in the Global South, was described as rooted in Indian experiences and strategies. India's development story as an emerging power and being the world's largest democracy makes it unique. However, it does not hold all the policy answers. It would merit India to not only assert itself as a provider of knowledge but also be open to learning from other Global South countries to address its domestic challenges. Countries are bound to be more receptive toward a country that views them as partners. Otherwise, India may also be perceived as a big brother imposing traditional donor and recipient relationships.

Second, New Delhi has laid stress on a more human-centric approach to tackle developmental challenges. This has been defined at international fora towards promoting behavioural change via Mission LiFE ('Lifestyle For Environment'), which encourages low consumption lifestyles. While important, the need is to rebrand human-centric development in order to focus on building human resource and capacity, especially to tackle future sustainability challenges. Skill India or schemes that mainstream women into entrepreneurship, will be attractive for countries in the Global South which are also seeking to grow their domestic industry. India's capacity building strategy has tended to revolve around the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme, which implements sector-specific short-term activities. It would be more effective for longer term engagement to assist countries in creating their own institutional capacity to create a better workforce. India can leverage its experiences with micro, small and medium enterprises to foster exchanges. A focus on

digital infrastructure, climate and energy solutions as well as water and food security are key areas for cooperation.

The goal ahead

Lastly, India has called for more inclusive global governance. The nation demonstrated this intent by championing the addition of the African Union into the G-20 (in 2023) during India's presidency. India should not be content with facilitating changes in established international institutions but also learn to build domestic capacity. As India aspires to become a stronger global development player, it must establish norms, standards and systems to work with partner countries. Initially, it is beneficial to use existing institutional channels of partners such as the United Nations or Germany and France that are more experienced in development cooperation. However, the long-term goal should be for India to create its own robust domestic systems for international cooperation. Trilateral partnerships and increased engagement with new partners need to be seen as a learning by doing process, where India imbibes its experiences to scale up India-led global initiatives.

India aspires to be the 'Voice' of the Global South, but it also must 'listen' to be a good leader. When India spearheaded NAM, the country showed the world that there is a new, third option for developing countries. India should not miss out on an opportunity to do the same thing now.

Pooja Ramamurthi is an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), New Delhi. Views are personal.



SUSAN FERGUSON TELLS HOW GENDER-RESPONSIVE BUDGETING EMPOWERS WOMEN AS DRIVERS OF GROWTH

Budgeting for gender-inclusive 'Viksit Bharat'

The Union Budget 2025-26 emphasises the government's commitment to inclusive development, balanced growth and prioritising the well-being of four key population groups: the poor, youth, farmers, and women. In a welcome announcement, the Finance Minister set forth a holistic vision for Viksit Bharat (or Developed India) with 'zero poverty, universal good quality school education, 100% skilled labour with meaningful employment, 70% women in economic activities, and India as the food basket of the world'. The explicit inclusion of women as a priority group within this national development framework is commendable and reinforces the government's pledge towards women-led development.

One of the most notable advancements in the Budget is the increase in the gender budget to 8.8% of the total Budget, a significant jump from 6.8% in the previous year. This is the highest allocation in two decades, with 4.49 lakh crore spread across 49 Union Ministries and departments. It reflects a strong commitment to creating a more supportive and empowering environment for women and girls. Further strengthening this commitment, 12 additional central Ministries — many from non-conventional sectors such as railways, ports, shipping and waterways, land resources, pharmaceuticals, and food processing industries — have integrated gender budgets, reflecting a whole-of-government approach to gender mainstreaming.

As in the Periodic Labour Force Survey, India's female labour force participation



rate (FLFPR) measured at usual status has steadily risen, reaching approximately 42% in 2023-24 from 33% in 2021-22. This is approaching the global average of 47%, as reported by the International Labour Organisation. However, a 37-percentage point gap remains when compared to men's labour force participation of 79%. Achieving the ambitious target of 70% women's participation in economic activities by 2047 necessitates increased investment in skilling, employment, entrepreneurship, access to productive resources, and social security entitlements — areas that the Budget has acknowledged through its various schemes. Key initiatives such as the Skill India Programme, Entrepreneurship and Skill Development Programme (ESDP), National Skill Training Institutes, Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), PM Employment Generation Programme, PM Vishwakarma, and Krishonnati Yojana have seen a combined increased allocation

from 1.19 lakh crore to 1.24 lakh crore this year. Approximately 52% of these funds are directed toward women and girls. Additionally, new schemes such as the Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana, first-time entrepreneurs' scheme, sustainable livelihood for urban workers initiative, and Centres of Excellence for Make in India, will play a critical role in fostering women's workforce participation.

A focus on gig workers

With 90% of India's working women engaged in the informal sector, the Budget's proposal to formalise gig workers by issuing identity cards and registering them on the e-Shram portal is a significant step. This initiative has the potential to empower millions of women by providing them with formal identity, access to social security entitlements, and financial inclusion benefits.

While the gig economy has offered women financial independence and flexible work arrangements, it often comes with low wages, job insecurity, and a lack of employment rights, including maternity benefits. The enforcement of labour codes and the provision of comprehensive social security measures, including progressive parental entitlements across informal and formal sectors, will be critical to ensure women's economic security.

The establishment of a Centre of Excellence on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for the education sector and a dedicated 600 crore gender budget under the India AI Mission, demonstrate the government's intent to harness AI for social good. As technological advancements redefine the

future of work, investing in digital education, skills, and enterprise training for women will be imperative to ensuring equitable outcomes in the workforce and benefits for the entire economy.

A diversity of economic roles

Financial institutions must recognise women's diverse economic roles, particularly in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and employment. For example, simplifying documentation requirements for economic and social security provisions, such as delinking Kisan Credit Cards from land ownership, would help women farmers avail loans and credit facilities that they can use to improve crop yields, productivity and expand their agricultural and allied operations. Tracking access and usage of such schemes through gender-disaggregated data would further enhance their effectiveness.

As per the government's Udyam portal, 20.5% of the micro, small and medium enterprises are women-owned employing about 27 million people. Unlocking finance for women-owned enterprises through collateral-free loans, alternative credit scoring models, and targeted financial literacy programmes will catalyse economic growth. Bain and Company, and Google, claim that establishing 30 million additional women-owned businesses could generate 150-170 million jobs, accounting for over 25% of the job creation needed for India's working-age population by 2030.

Susan Ferguson is Country Representative at UN Women India. Views are personal.

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BOOKS: REVIEW

Novel delves into the haunting realms of memory and identity

Sabin Iqbal's *Tales from Qabristan* is a deeply evocative novel that transforms the graveyard into a metaphor for memory, history, and identity. The narrative follows Farook, the protagonist, who returns to his childhood village after his father's death. In doing so, he unearths not only personal family legacies but also suppressed histories, exposing the weight of familial and societal inheritance.

At its core, *Tales from Qabristan* is a meditation on grief, belonging, and the shifting contours of home. Farook's journey back to his roots forces him to confront the silent tragedies embedded in his family's past. His father's failure in the Gulf, his mother's quiet suffering, and his cousin Jami's unfulfilled promise all contribute to a rich tapestry of human struggle and resilience. Iqbal weaves a non-linear narrative where time folds and unfolds, drawing together the pain of migration, the erosion of traditional values, and the deep-rooted scars

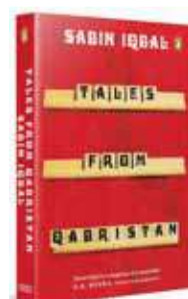
of societal expectations. One of the novel's most striking aspects is its nuanced exploration of masculinity and tradition. Farook's circumcision, a symbolic moment in his childhood, underscores the imposition of societal roles upon him. Unlike the women in his family, who are spared from such rituals, he feels trapped in an inherited identity he cannot escape. This extends to his relationship with his father, who, despite his intellectual richness, is perceived as a failure due to his inability to accumulate wealth abroad. Through this, Iqbal critiques the materialistic expectations placed upon Gulf returnees, exposing the emotional and physical toll of migration.

The novel's treatment of caste and religious identity is equally compelling. Through characters like Pankan and Kochukarumban, *Tales from Qabristan* highlights the struggles of marginalized communities attempting to navigate a rigid social hierarchy. Pankan, a victim of caste violence, subverts

expectations by embracing a non-conforming gender identity, becoming a living symbol of defiance. Meanwhile, Kochukarumban's attempt to escape caste discrimination through religious conversion ultimately fails, reinforcing the deeply entrenched nature of social exclusion.

Iqbal's prose is both lyrical and haunting, rich with evocative imagery that lingers in the reader's mind. His ability to capture the quiet moments of pain and resilience elevates the novel beyond a mere story of loss—it becomes a powerful commentary on memory, displacement, and the struggle for identity. The novel does not offer easy resolutions; rather, it forces readers to confront the ghosts of the past that shape the present.

The novel also engages deeply with themes of migration and economic disparity, shedding light on the experiences of Gulf returnees. Farook's father represents a group of men who leave their homeland in search of prosperity but return



Tales from Qabristan
by Sabin Iqbal.
Vintage Books.
354 pages, Rs599.

empty-handed, burdened by unrealized dreams. Unlike those who amass wealth, he comes back with books and knowledge, which are undervalued in a society that equates success with financial gain. This disillusionment is a recurring theme in *Tales from Qabristan*, as it explores how migration, often seen as a path to upward mobility, can lead to a sense of personal failure and societal rejection.

Another remarkable element in the novel is its portrayal of women and their quiet yet powerful resistance to patriarchal structures. Farook's mother, though confined by societal expectations, carries immense resilience, enduring the humiliation and judgment of relatives who criticize her husband's financial struggles. Her silent protests, whether in the

form of withholding emotions or declining financial assistance, highlight the everyday defiance that women in traditional societies practice. This adds a subtle but strong feminist undertone to the narrative.

Furthermore, *Tales from Qabristan* presents the graveyard not just as a final resting place but as a living archive of stories, where past and present coalesce. It becomes a space where unspoken histories emerge, where forgotten voices reclaim their place, and where the weight of ancestry shapes individual identities. In this way, the novel challenges the notion of death as an end, suggesting instead that it is a continuation of memory and legacy.

Iqbal's storytelling is deeply immersive, drawing the reader into a world where time is fluid, and history is an active force shaping contemporary realities. His ability to blend social critique with deeply personal narratives makes *Tales from Qabristan* a standout work in contemporary Indian literature. The novel's strength lies in its ability to evoke nostalgia, pain, and an urgent need for reflection on societal changes and the lingering weight of the past.

HAL and Safran Aircraft Engines Sign Long-Term Contract for LEAP Engine Parts at Aero India 2025

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has taken a significant step in reinforcing India's aerospace manufacturing capabilities by signing a long-term contract with Safran Aircraft Engines (SAE), the world's leading aircraft engine manufacturer. The agreement, finalized at Aero India 2025, covers the supply of turbine-forged parts for Safran's advanced LEAP engines.

This milestone follows a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in October 2023, under which both companies pledged to enhance industrial cooperation in commercial engine parts manufacturing. The collaboration aligns with the Indian Government's 'Make in India' initiative and marks the first major contract under this industrial partnership.



Under the agreement, HAL will manufacture high-precision forged parts for LEAP engines at its state-of-the-art Ring Rolling facility within its Foundry & Forge Division in Bengaluru. This move will support the LEAP program's production ramp-up, meeting

the rising demands of global airline operators. The contract was signed by Anil Kumar, General Manager of HAL's Foundry & Forge Division, in the presence of Jayakrishnan S, CEO (Bengaluru Complex), HAL, and Mr. Dominique Dupuy, Vice President of Purchasing at Safran Aircraft Engines.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr. D.K. Sunil, Chairman &

Managing Director of HAL, emphasized the longstanding partnership between HAL and Safran. "Over the past decades, HAL and Safran have built a strong relationship through the joint development of the 'Shakti' helicopter engine, which also laid the foundation for the co-design and co-development of the IMRH engine. We are delighted to elevate this collaboration further by contributing critical Nickel Ring forgings to the LEAP engine program," he said.

Expressing enthusiasm for the partnership, Dominique Dupuy stated, "We are excited to continue working with HAL. This agreement is in perfect alignment with the objectives set forth in our 2023 MoU for producing high-quality forged components."

SEBI Releases New Manual for Industry Standards Implementation

MUMBAI: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has unveiled its Industry Standards Recognition Manual, marking a significant step towards standardising the operations of Industry Standards Fora (ISFs).

The manual, released on Wednesday, provides comprehensive guidance on the formation and functioning of these regulatory implementation bodies.

The new manual addresses these challenges by establishing uniform self-guiding principles for ISFs. These principles aim to streamline operations across different forums, particularly in areas such as regulation selection for implementation standards, consultation procedures with Sebi, and methods for gathering industry perspectives. "The standardisation initia-



tive comes at a crucial time when different ISFs have been operating with varying mechanisms for their functioning," noted a Sebi release. The manual is expected to enhance uniformity in compliance procedures while maintaining operational efficiency across all market segments. The development follows Sebi's initial pilot programme launched in July 2023, which introduced ISFs to facilitate the implementation of regulatory guidelines.

The programme, which originally focused on listed com-

panies and stock brokers, has since expanded to include various market participants such as portfolio managers, custodians, designated depository participants, and alternative investment funds.

Market feedback has been notably positive, with participants highlighting the ISFs' effectiveness in promoting good governance and ensuring high-quality regulatory compliance while maintaining operational simplicity. However, the pilot nature of these forums has led to varying operational approaches, creating inconsistencies in their formation and functioning processes.

This strategic move by Sebi represents a significant step towards creating a more structured and efficient regulatory implementation framework in India's financial markets.

Amritsar Textile Manufacturers to Exhibit at Bharat Tex 2025 with SIDBI Support



NEW DELHI: The Textile Manufacturers' Association (TMA) of Amritsar, in partnership with the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), has announced its participation in the prestigious Bharat Tex 2025 exhibition.

The event, scheduled to take place at Bharat Mandapam, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, from February 14 to 17, will feature eight leading textile MSME units from Amritsar showcasing their technological advancements and manufacturing capabilities.

TMA General Secretary Rajiv Khanna revealed on Wednesday that these participating enterprises will present their latest innovations in technical textiles, underscoring Amritsar's growing prominence in this high-value sector.

The exhibition will serve as a platform for these manufacturers to demonstrate their advanced fabric solutions and next-generation textile applications, highlighting India's evolving manufacturing excellence and technological sophistication.

SIDBI's Cluster Intervention Programme has been instrumental in preparing these MSMEs for such a significant industry event.

The program has provided crucial support through technical knowledge transfer, access to advanced manufacturing methodologies, and market development initiatives.

This comprehensive assistance has enabled these enterprises to implement global best practices, enhance their product quality standards, and strengthen their competitive position in both domestic and international markets. The collaboration between TMA Amritsar and SIDBI exemplifies a successful public-private partnership model aimed at elevating India's textile manufacturing capabilities and expanding its market presence.

This participation in Bharat Tex 2025 represents a significant opportunity for Amritsar's textile sector to showcase its technological advancement and manufacturing excellence on a national platform.

Orkla India appoints Girish Kumar Nair as the new Chief Executive Officer of Eastern

FW DESK
India

Orkla India, a subsidiary of Norwegian industrial investment firm Orkla ASA, announces the appointment of Girish Nair as the Chief Executive Officer for the Eastern Business Unit. Eastern is one of the well-known brands in Kerala's pure spices and masala market. Based in

Kochi, Girish Nair will lead the Eastern business team, focusing on expanding Orkla India's presence in Kerala and driving strategic growth initiatives for the Eastern brand. With more than three decades of expertise in the food and consumer goods industry, Girish brings a wealth of experience and proven leadership to his new role. Commenting on the appointment, Sanjay Sharma, Chief Executive Officer, of Orkla India, stated, "We are excited to welcome Girish Nair to the Orkla India family as the new CEO of Eastern Business Unit. His extensive industry expertise makes him uniquely positioned to guide the Eastern to its next phase of growth and success."

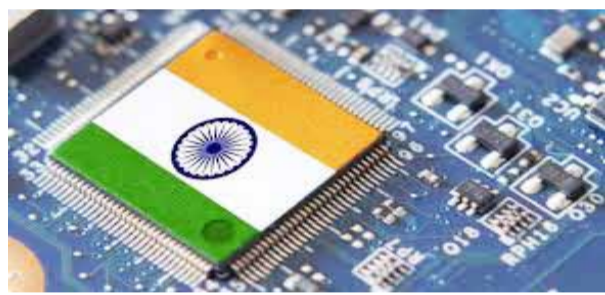
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India's semiconductor consumption market to grow at a 13 pc CAGR through 2030

NEW DELHI: Driven by the government's production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme, India's semiconductor consumption market which is valued at \$52 billion in 2024-25 is expected to grow at a robust CAGR of 13 per cent through 2030.

Sectors like automotive and industrial electronics present significant value-addition opportunities. Mobile handsets, IT, and industrial applications, which together contribute nearly 70 per cent of the revenue, remain the primary growth drivers, according to Dr V Veerappan, Chairman of the Indian Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA).

India's semiconductor market is projected to grow to \$103.4 billion by 2030, power-



ing the \$400+ billion electronics market.

The government's targeted incentives for FABs and OSATs, increased R&D investments, and collaborative industry initiatives are key to propelling India's semiconductor sector forward, with significant projects Investment commitment of over \$21 billion by IESA

member companies in last one year, according to Ashok Chandak, President, IESA.

Focusing on local semiconductor design and manufacturing while reducing import dependency is crucial to strengthening India's position in the global electronics ecosystem and retaining economic value in the country.

Karnataka Emerges as Key Investment Hub for Japanese Firms with ₹7,500 Cr Commitments

BENGALURU: Karnataka is rapidly solidifying its position as a prime investment destination for Japanese companies, with 15 major firms pledging investments worth approximately ₹7,500 crore.

This announcement was made during the Invest Karnataka 2025 summit, reinforcing the state's role as a hub for industrial expansion, technology collaboration, and global partnerships. Leading Japanese



enterprises have committed investments across diverse sectors, particularly in automobile manufacturing, industrial automation, and advanced technology.

These investments are expected to stimulate employment opportu-

nities, drive innovation, and contribute to Karnataka's economic growth, officials stated. Among the key investors, Toyota Kirloskar Motor leads with a commitment of Rs 3,748 crore. Other significant investments include Rs 600 crore from Nidec Industrial Automation India, Rs 600 crore from Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India, Rs 400 crore from JFE Shoji Corporation, and Rs 107 crore from

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. To facilitate these investments, a high-level meeting was held between M B Patil, Karnataka's Minister for Large and Medium Industries, S Selvakumar, Principal Secretary for Commerce and Industries, and Gunjan Krishna, Commissioner for Industrial Development, with Keichi Ono, Japan's Ambassador to India, and Tsutomu Nakane, Consul General of Japan.

Make in India: PLI for Pharmaceutical Industry

DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

Indian pharmaceutical industry is the 3rd largest in the world by volume. 3.5 per cent of total drugs and medicines exported globally are from India. But in value terms, the industry does not fall even in top 10 countries. At the same time, India is also dependent on import of some of the basic raw materials, i.e., bulk drugs which are used to produce the finished dosage formulations. During FY 2018-19, bulk drugs formed 63 per cent of the total pharmaceutical imports in India. 53 bulk drugs/Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) were identified by a Committee on Drug Security for which India is heavily dependent on imports only.

In that background, to attain self-reliance as well as to reduce dependence on imports, a Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme was notified on July 21, 2020, for promotion of domestic manufacturing of critical Key Starting Materials (KSMs)/Drug Intermediates (DIs) and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) in India.

On July 21, 2020, itself, another Scheme for Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks was notified with three objectives namely, (i) to promote setting up of bulk drug parks in the country for providing easy access to world class common infrastructure facilities to bulk drug units located in the parks in order to significantly bring down the manufacturing cost of bulk drugs and thereby make India self-reliant in bulk drugs by increasing the

competitiveness of the domestic bulk drug industry, (ii) to help industry meet the standards of environment at a reduced cost through innovative methods of common waste management system, and (iii) to exploit the benefits arising due to optimization of resources and economies of scale. Maximum assistance under the Scheme for one Bulk Drug Park was kept limited to Rs. 1000 Crore.

Second PLI Scheme on Pharmaceuticals related notification was issued on March 3, 2021 with the objective to enhance India's manufacturing capabilities by increasing investment and production in the sector and contributing to product diversification to 'high value goods' in the pharmaceutical industry. Another objective was to create global champions out of India who have the potential to grow in 'size and scale' using cutting-edge technology and thereby penetrate the global value chains.

Total quantum of incentives worth Rs. 15,000 Crore was to be allocated among target groups as Rs. 11,000 Crore to Group A applicants, Rs. 2,250 Crore to Group B applicants, and Rs. 1,750 Crore to Group C applicants.

Notification related to the Scheme for Promotion of Medical Devices Parks was issued on July 21, 2020, and this superseded earlier notification. Maximum assistance for one Medical Device Park was limited to Rs. 100 Crore and total financial outlay for the Scheme was kept as Rs. 400 Crore. The tenure of the scheme was from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25. The objective of the scheme was to boost domestic manufacturing and attract large investments in the Medical Devices Sector.

Table 1: Target Segments under PLI Scheme for KSMs/DIs/APIs (PLI 1.0)

Category	Target Segments	Applicant with Global manufacturing Revenue (Rs. Cr. in 2019-20)
I	Fermentation based KSMs/Drug Intermediates	Penicillin G, 7-ACA, Erythromycin, Thiocyanate (TIO) and Clavulanic Acid
	Fermentation based niche KSMs/Drug Intermediates/APIs	Neomycin, Gentamycin, Betamethasone, Dexamethasone, Prednisolone, Rifampicin, Vitamin B1, Clindamycin Base, Streptomycin and Tetracycline
II	Key Chemical Synthesis based KSMs/Drug Intermediates	1,1 Cyclohexane Diacetic Acid (CDA), 2-Methyl-5Nitro-Imidazole (2-MNI), Dicyandiamide (DCCA) and Para amino phenol
		Meropemem, Atorvastatin, Olmesartan, Valsartan, Losartan, Levofloxacin, Sulfadiazine, Ciprofloxacin, Ofloxacin, Norfloxacin, Artesunate, Telmisartan, Aspirin, Diclofenac Sodium, Levetiracetam, Carbidoopa, Ritonavir, Lopinavir, Acyclovir, Carbamazepine, Oxcarbazepine, Vitamin B6 and Levodopa
IV	Other Chemical Synthesis based KSMs/Drug Intermediates/APIs	

Source: Compiled from Notification on PLI Scheme dated July 1, 2020



Final approvals for financial assistance were granted to the States of Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh. On November 29, 2024, Lok Sabha was informed that the proposal for setting up of the Medical Device Park at Nalagarh (Himachal Pradesh) has been withdrawn by the State Government.

On July 27, 2020, guidelines were issued regarding

Table 2: Eligibility Threshold Criteria under PLI Scheme for KSMs/DIs/APIs (PLI 1.0)

Category	Target Segments	Threshold Investment (Rs. in Cr.)
I	Fermentation based KSMs/Drug Intermediates	400
II	Fermentation based niche KSMs/Drug Intermediates/APIs	50
III	Key Chemical Synthesis based KSMs/Drug Intermediates	50
IV	Other Chemical Synthesis based KSMs/Drug Intermediates/APIs	20

Source: Compiled from Notification on PLI Scheme dated July 1, 2020

Table 3: Target Group under PLI Scheme (PLI 2.0)

Group	Applicant with Global manufacturing Revenue (Rs. Cr. in 2019-20)
Group A	≥ 5,000
Group B	500 - 5,000
Group C	<500

Source: Compiled from Notification on PLI Scheme dated March 3, 2021

Table 4: Category of Pharmaceutical goods covered under PLI 2.0

Category	Pharmaceutical Goods Covered
1	Bio-pharmaceuticals, Complex generic drugs, Patented drugs or drugs nearing patent expiry, Cell based or gene therapy drugs, Orphan drugs, Special empty capsules like HPMC, Pullulan, enteric etc., Complex excipients, Phyto-pharmaceuticals, and Other drugs as approved
2	Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients, Key Starting Materials, Drug Intermediates
3	Repurposed drugs, Auto immune drugs, anti-cancer drugs, anti-diabetic drugs, anti-infective drugs, cardiovascular drugs, psychotropic drugs and anti-retroviral drugs, In-vitro diagnostic devices, Other drugs as approved, and Other drugs not manufactured in India.

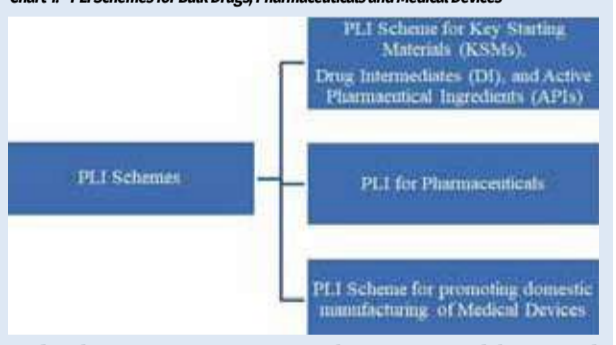
Source: Compiled from Notification on PLI Scheme dated March 3, 2021

and (iv) All implants including implantable electronic devices. Tenure of the Scheme is from FY 2020-21 to FY 2028-29 which included the period for processing of applications (FY 2020-21) and optional gestation period of one year (FY 2021-22).

In Group A, there were 9 domestic companies (Sun Pharma, Aurobindo, Dr. Reddy's Labs, Lupin, Cadila Healthcare, Cipla, Glenmark Pharma, Intas Pharma, and Torrent Pharma) and 2 MNCs (Mylan Labs and

Amneal Pharma) out of 11 applicants approved under PLI Scheme for Pharmaceuticals. In Group B, 9 domestic pharmaceutical companies namely Biocon, MSN Labs, Wockhard, Alembic Pharma, Emcure Pharma, Macleods Pharma, Biological E, Natco Pharma, and Strides Pharma Science) got approval. In Group C, 35 applicants which included 20 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and 15 Non-MSMEs, got approval. On February 21, 2023,

Chart 1 - PLI Schemes for Bulk Drugs, Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices



under the PLI 1.0, an investment of Rs. 2,019 Crore was reported against a committed investment of Rs. 4,138 Crore. About 1,900 persons got employment under the scheme. By early December 2024, investment touched the figure of Rs. 4,155.77 Crore, and employment generated under the Scheme increased to 4,241 persons. Further, the cumulative sales made by applicants touched Rs. 1,330.82 Crores that included exports amounting to Rs. 389.82 Crores. By mid-February 2023, i.e., in the first year of PLI Scheme 2.0 implementation, an investment of Rs. 16,199 Crore was made by 55 applicants against expected investment of Rs. 17,425 Crore. By that time, about 23,000 persons got employment under the PLI Scheme. The first tranche of incentives was also released.

Under PLI Scheme for Medical Devices, 21 applicants were selected. An investment of Rs. 714 Crores was reported against the committed investment of Rs. 1,059 Crores by February 21, 2023. About 2,900 persons got employment under the Scheme. On March 2, 2024, on inauguration of 27 greenfield bulk drug park projects and 13 greenfield manufacturing plants for medical devices under the PLI

Scheme, it was widely reported that on introduction of the PLI Scheme, the net imports of medical devices decreased for the first time in 2023. Up to September 2024, the number of applicants stood at 32, out of which number of greenfield projects were 19 for 44 products. Committed investment increased to Rs. 1,356.96 Crores, and investment realized stood at Rs. 1,057.47 Crores. Gains were visible in terms of cumulative sales too which stood at Rs. 8,039.63 Crores out of which exports formed Rs. 3,844.01 Crores, i.e., exports as a percentage of cumulative sales formed 47.81 per cent of the total.

To conclude, it can be said that initial results are promising under these PLI schemes. PLI 2.0 has the tenure till FY 2028-29 so next four years will determine the direction of Indian pharmaceutical industry to take up lead in value-added products as well as attaining self-sufficiency in critical bulk drugs.

Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish - Associate Professor (Finance and Accounting), Department of Pharmaceutical Management, NIPER S.A.S. Nagar (Mohali), DISCLAIMER: Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.

Govt & RBI Actively Monitoring Currency Fluctuations amid Global Volatility: FinMin Nirmala Sitharaman

NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman addressed concerns regarding the Indian rupee's depreciation during her response to the FY26 Budget discussion in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

The Finance Minister assured that both the government and the Reserve Bank of India are actively working to stabilise the currency while maintaining continuous oversight of its fluctuations. In her comprehensive address, Sitharaman emphasised the complex relationship between currency valuation and economic competitiveness.

She noted that overvalued currencies can potentially undermine national competitiveness by making exports more expensive, necessitating additional support for domestic companies. This observation comes amid ongoing discussions about the rupee's value relative to other currencies, particularly the US dollar. The Finance Minister highlighted that the fourth quarter of 2024 experienced significant currency volatility



across major economies, not exclusively affecting India.

She explained that the Indian rupee's movement, similar to other Asian currencies, has been influenced by multiple factors, including the dollar index, capital flow trends, interest rate levels, and crude oil price movements. The depreciation against the US dollar was attributed to prevailing uncertainty in the global macroeconomic environment.

Addressing the broader context of the FY26 Budget, Sitharaman emphasised its strategic preparation in light of

Sitharaman also addressed the complex dynamics of global trade, noting the paradox between free market rhetoric and the reality of aggressive tariff and non-tariff barriers implemented by various countries.

In terms of fiscal management, the Finance Minister highlighted debt consolidation as a key priority in the Budget, alongside efforts to strengthen states' liquidity positions.

She drew attention to the availability of unused funds, emphasising the importance of utilising existing resources effectively before seeking additional funding.

This approach underscores the government's commitment to prudent financial management while maintaining growth momentum.

The Finance Minister's comprehensive response reflects the government's balanced approach to managing currency stability while pursuing broader economic objectives in an increasingly complex global environment.

significant external challenges.

She particularly noted the uncertainty surrounding critical Indian imports essential for the country's growth trajectory.

The Finance Minister acknowledged the dynamic nature of current economic conditions, stating that traditional modeling approaches face limitations in predicting trends accurately.

The Budget's core objectives remain focused on accelerating growth, ensuring inclusive development, stimulating private sector investments, and enhancing the spending power of India's expanding middle class.

RBI supersedes New India Cooperative Bank board for 12 months



MUMBAI: Reserve Bank of India superseded the Board of Directors of New India Co-operative Bank Ltd, Mumbai, for a period of 12 months, the central bank said in a statement on Friday, a day after it imposed several restrictions on the lender.

Consequently, the RBI has appointed Shreekanth, former Chief General Manager of State Bank of India (SBI) as 'Administrator' to manage the affairs of the bank during this period.

The RBI has also appointed

a 'Committee of Advisors' to assist the Administrator in discharging his duties. The members of the Committee of Advisors are Ravindra Sapra (former General Manager, SBI) and Abhijeet Deshmukh (Chartered Accountant).

The action was necessitated "due to certain material concerns emanating from poor governance standards observed" in the Mumbai-headquartered New India Co-operative Bank Ltd.

This morning, customers gathered in hundreds out-

side Mumbai-headquartered New India Co-operative Bank Limited branches to withdraw their hard-earned savings, soon after the Reserve Bank of India imposed several restrictions on the lender.

Panicky account holders converged outside the bank branches spread across Mumbai city, worried over the fate of their bank savings and lockers.

Late on Thursday, the RBI directed New India Co-operative Bank Limited, Mumbai that it shall not, without prior written approval of the central bank, grant or renew any loans and advances, make any investment, incur any liability including borrowing of funds and acceptance of fresh deposits, disburse or agree to disburse any payment whether in the discharge of its liabilities and obligations or otherwise, enter into any compromise or arrangement and sell, transfer or otherwise dispose of any of its properties or assets except as notified by the RBI.

RBI to Inject Rs 2.5 Lakh Cr to Enhance Liquidity in Banking System



MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) was all set to inject Rs 2,50,000 crore through its Variable Rate Repo (VRR) auction on Wednesday to enhance liquidity in the banking system.

The Central Bank has stated that the amount has been decided based on an assessment of the liquidity conditions. The Reserve Bank also said it will be conducting daily Variable Rate Repo (VRR) auctions on all working days in Mumbai with reversal taking place on the next working day, until further notice. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra had announced on Friday, after the monetary policy meeting, that the central bank was committed to provide sufficient liquidity in the economy and would take steps to ensure durable liquidity to meet the requirement of the system.

The RBI Governor also said that the RBI was keeping a close watch on the rupee and was taking all steps to keep the Indian currency stable. According to a Morgan Stanley report, the RBI is expected to proactively manage liquidity and take up some additional measures (OMO purchases/FX swaps) as liquidity deficit rises towards end-March. We see risk of a longer rate cut cycle, if growth recovery is lacklustre, driven by weaker domestic demand and uncertainty from global factors.

To support its point, the report referred to the RBI governor's statement highlighting that on the regulatory front, there is a trade-off between stability and efficiency which should be kept in mind. He said that this trade-off will be kept in mind while formulating regulations. In a big relief for banks, RBI Governor Malhotra announced that the implementation of the proposed Liquidity Coverage Ratio (LCR) as well as project financing norms will be deferred by a year and will not be implemented before March 31, 2026.

He said that the step has been taken as the earlier deadline March 2025 deadline does not give sufficient time for the implementation of these guidelines. The RBI does not want to cause disruption in the financial system and will ensure a smooth transition, added.

WPI Inflation Slows to 2.31 % in January as Food Prices Ease



NEW DELHI: The country's annual rate of inflation based on the all-India Wholesale Price Index (WPI) slowed to 2.31 % in January this year compared to 2.37 per cent for the previous month of December, according to data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry on Friday.

The month-over-month change in WPI for January stood at (-) 0.45 per cent compared to December as food prices eased. The index for the primary articles group decreased by 2.01 per cent in January as the price of food articles decreased (-3.62 per cent) during January 2025 as compared to December 2024. The Price of crude petroleum and natural gas (6.34 per cent), non-food articles (0.66 per cent) and minerals (0.22 per cent) increased in January 2025 as compared to December 2024. Inflation for the fuel and power group increased by 0.47 per cent during the month although the price of coal remained the same as in the previous month.

Stock market opens high as Trump indicates 'wonderful trade deals' for India, US

MUMBAI: The Indian benchmark indices opened higher on Friday as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump announced plans to cement "some wonderful trade deals" for India and the US.

The Sensex was trading 279.95 points or 0.37 per cent up at 76,418.92 while the Nifty climbed 84 points or 0.36 per cent at 23,115.40.

Nifty Bank was up 196.75 points or 0.40 per cent at 49,556.60. Nifty Midcap 100 index was trading at 51,014.20 after climbing 133 points or 0.26 per cent. Nifty Smallcap 100 index was at 15,953.60 after dropping 20.25 points or 0.13 per cent. "The Nifty 50 has formed a



red candle on the daily scale, which indicates selling pressure at higher levels," said Hrishikesh Yedve from Asit C. Mehta Investment Intermediates Ltd.

"The 21-Days Simple Moving Average is placed at 23,270,

making the 23,270-23,300 zone a strong hurdle. On the downside, 22,780 will act as a key support level," he added.

He advised traders to adopt a buy-on-dips strategy as long as the index holds 22,780.

Meanwhile, in the Sensex

pack, Tata Steel, ICICI Bank, M&M, HCL Tech, Tata Motors, Bajaj Finserv, IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Infosys and Bajaj Finance were the top gainers. Sun Pharma, UltraTech Cement, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank were the top losers.

In the last trading session US markets settled higher, Dow Jones gained 0.77 per cent to close at 44,711.43. The S&P 500 added 1.04 per cent to 6,115.07 and the Nasdaq climbed 1.50 per cent to close at 19,945.64.

In the Asian markets, Jakarta, China, Seoul, Bangkok and Hong Kong were trading in green. Whereas Japan was trading in red.

US Chip Company Lam Research to Invest Rs 10,000 Cr in India: Ashwini Vaishnav

NEW DELHI: US-based semiconductor company Lam Research will invest Rs 10,000 crore in India, Union Minister for Railways and Electronics and IT, Ashwini Vaishnav, announced on Tuesday.

Lam Research Corporation last year announced plans to expand its global chip fabrication equipment supply chain to include India.

"One more milestone in our semiconductor journey: Lam Research announces major investment of over Rs 10,000 crore in India," Minister Vaishnav posted on X social media platform. "Big vote of confidence in PM @narendramodi Ji's semiconductor vision," he added.

Last year, Lam Research Corporation pledged nearly Rs 241 crore in software licenses to upskill 2,800 students in the country, in collaboration with the Indian Semiconductor Mission (ISM) and Indian Institute of Science, to prepare a future-ready workforce.

The setting up of a semiconductor manufacturing base in the country has been an important part of 'Make in India', which India has been attempting to achieve for over six decades.

With the launch of the India Semiconductor Mission and the five major projects which



have been approved, starting with Micron, the two projects by Tata Electronics, the one project by CG Power, and the last project by Keynes, a real manufacturing base of semiconductor in this country is being established in India.

India's semiconductor market is projected to grow to \$103.4 billion by 2030, powering the over \$400 billion electronics market, according to the Indian Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA). The government's targeted incentives for fabrication facilities (Fabs) and outsourced semiconductor assembly and testing (OSATs), increased R&D investments and collaborative industry initiatives are key to propelling India's semiconductor sector forward, with significant investment commitments of over \$21 billion by the IESA member companies in last one year.

'India Poised for \$30 Trillion Economy by 2047 through Centre-State Collaboration'

BENGALURU: Underlining that the progress of states is the progress of the nation, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said that if the Central and state governments work together in a spirit of partnership and cooperation, India will grow into a \$30 trillion economy by 2047.

Addressing the gathering at the Global Investors' Meet (GIM) 2025 Invest Karnataka event, Union Minister Piyush Goyal assured that the Central



government will extend full support to Karnataka in this regard. He highlighted that last year,

Rs 11 lakh crore was allocated for infrastructure development. A Plug and Play model Industrial Smart City is being developed across 8,000 acres in Tumakuru, with the first phase covering 1,736 acres set to be completed by the end of 2026.

Goyal emphasised that India is a prime investment destination globally, backed by five key strengths: democracy, demand, population, digitisation, and diversity.

He announced upcoming projects, including 75 new air-

ports, air connectivity to 120 cities under UDAN-2, 114 waterways, a doubling of existing ports, and the development of 50 tourism destinations — all of which will benefit Karnataka.

India's exports have now reached \$800 billion, with Karnataka playing a significant role in this growth. The central government has allocated Rs 20,000 crore for innovation, Rs 74,000 crore for the Semiconductor Mission, and Rs 2 lakh crore for PLI-based industrial incentives.

Emphasis on Boosting Development in Monetary Review



SATISH SINGH
The Reserve Bank of India has cut the repo rate by 0.25 percent in the monetary review done on February 7, bringing it down from 6.50 percent to 6.25 percent. It is worth noting that the repo rate has been cut after about 5 years.

The central bank was refraining from cutting the repo rate till now mainly due to inflation. At present, there is instability in the market due to changes in global policies, such as tariff, protectionism, the stance of the Federal Reserve Bank of US in terms of policy interest rates, etc. Also, in view of the slow pace of GDP in the last two quarters, it is necessary for the government to promote development.

Therefore, in the budget too, emphasis has been laid on increasing investment, savings and consumption, because only by accelerating these, economic activities can be accelerated, and development can be accelerated.

It is worth noting that the National Statistical Office (NSO) has projected the GDP growth rate to be 6.4 percent in its first advance estimate for the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the financial year 2024-25, which is lower than the last 3 financial years. During the last financial year, the GDP growth rate was 8.2 percent. At the same time, the

Reserve Bank of India has projected the GDP to grow at the rate of 6.6 percent during the financial year 2024-25.

Earlier, the GDP growth rate during the financial year 2020-21 was minus 6.60 percent. Thereafter, the GDP growth rate during the financial year 2021-22, financial year 2022-23 and financial year 2023-24 was 8.70 percent, 7.2 percent and 8.2 percent respectively, while in the first quarter of the financial year 2024-25, it was 6.7 percent and in the second quarter it was 5.4 percent.

Retail inflation has come down to 5.22 percent in December, which is the lowest level in 4 months. Earlier in November, the inflation rate was at 5.48 percent. Food items contribute about 50 percent to the inflation basket. Their inflation has come down from 9.04 percent to 8.39 percent on a month-on-month basis, while rural inflation has come down from 5.95 percent to 5.76 percent and urban inflation has come down from 4.89 percent to 4.58 percent.

It is worth noting that last month the Reserve Bank of India had raised the inflation forecast for the financial year 2024-25 to 4.8 percent, while earlier the central bank had projected it to be at the level of 4.5 percent. However, inflation is expected to remain within the tolerance limit set by the Reserve Bank of India in FY 2025 and FY 2026.

Inflation plays an important role in determining one's purchasing power. When inflation increases, the prices



of both goods and services increase, which reduces the purchasing power of the person and reduces the demand for goods and services. Then, their sales decrease, their production decreases, the company suffers losses, workers are laid off, employment generation decreases, etc. As a result, economic activities slow down, and the pace of development is hampered. In such a situation, it would be appropriate to say that only by reducing inflation can the vehicle of development move forward at a fast pace.

If we compare the Indian economy with the growth rate of the global economy, then our economy is much above the global level. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the global GDP growth rate was 3.2 percent in 2024 and can be 3.3 percent in 2025, whereas, according to the IMF, the global economy can grow at the rate of 3.1 percent in 2024 and 3.2 percent in 2025.

In the second quarter of the current financial year, China's GDP growth rate was

4.6 percent, while in Japan this growth rate was 0.9 percent. According to the IMF, the growth rate in England is estimated to be 1.1 percent in the financial year 2024 and 1.5 percent in the financial year 2025, whereas the growth rate in Germany is estimated to be minus 0.1 percent in the financial year 2024 and 0.7 percent in the financial year 2025.

The Indian economy is in a better position than the world's most powerful country, US, and it is expected to remain strong in the coming years as well. The growth rate in US is estimated to be 2.7 percent during the financial year 2024 and 2.0 percent in the financial year 2025.

After having loan growth between 14 percent to 16 percent in the last two years, the overall credit growth has been slowing down for the last few months and in December 2024 it has come down to 11.2 percent. A major reason for this is the high lending rate.

Banks do not have cheap capital. Therefore, they are forced to lend at expensive rates and due to the availabil-

ity of loans at expensive rates, common people and businessmen are avoiding taking loans. Because of this, companies are short of capital, due to which they are not able to produce at full capacity.

By cutting the repo rate by 0.25 percent by the Reserve Bank of India, banks will get capital at a cheaper rate and they will be able to lend at a cheaper rate and when loans are available at a cheaper rate, both common people and businessmen will take loans, which will accelerate both investment and savings and consumption will grow as well as economic activities will also upsurge.

In such a situation, it would be appropriate to say that it was necessary to cut the repo rate to accelerate economic activities. However, inflation is also within the tolerance limit and a decline has been recorded in the month of December.

In the budget, the government has clearly stated that its aim is to accelerate development. However, despite the decline in GDP growth rate in two quarters, the Indian economy remains strong, and India's growth rate is higher than even developed countries. Despite this, the government wants that it is necessary to accelerate the growth rate to make India a developed country by the year 2047. To achieve this goal, the GDP growth rate should be at least 8 to 9 percent.

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

India's Banks Require USD 4 Tn Fresh Capital to Power 'Viksit Bharat' Vision: HSBC Report

NEW DELHI: India's banking sector will require USD 4 trillion in fresh capital over the next two decades to support the nation's ambitious goal of becoming a developed economy by 2047, according to a comprehensive report released by HSBC Mutual Fund.

This substantial capital requirement is deemed essential to facilitate India's transformation into what the government terms 'Viksit Bharat' or developed India.

The report emphasises that India's financial and banking sectors must expand at a pace that significantly outstrips GDP growth to achieve these develop-



ment objectives. While India's current GDP stands at USD 3.4 trillion, projections indicate a nearly nine-fold increase to USD 30 trillion by 2047.

To support this massive economic expansion, the country's financial assets must grow from their current value of USD 6.4 trillion to approximately USD 120 trillion, representing a

nineteen-fold increase. Banking assets are expected to follow a similar trajectory, expanding from USD 3.1 trillion to USD 45 trillion.

The scale of this financial transformation becomes apparent when compared to other major economies. The United States currently leads with USD 135 trillion in financial assets, followed by China with USD 78 trillion and Germany with USD 21 trillion.

For India to achieve its development goals, its financial sector must rapidly expand to comparable levels, with the banking sector playing a pivotal role in this growth story.

PHDCCI projects UP as USD 1 trillion economy

RAJU WILLIAM
New Delhi

Uttar Pradesh has emerged as the strong economic powerhouse of India's economy with robust growth of GDP. Ease of Doing Business, attractive destination for investments and state of the art infrastructure, says the industry body, PHDCCI on Monday February 10, 2025.

This projection is based on the research report prepared by PHDCCI on Uttar Pradesh - Marching towards USD 1 trillion Economy.

Sharing findings of the report, Dr Ranjeet Mehta, Secretary General and CEO of PHDCCI while meeting Abhishek Prakash, CEO Invest UP and Secretary, Department of Infrastructure and Industry, said it indicates the state is poised to achieve this economic feat.



With the diverse industrial base, rich cultural heritage, and a growing consumer market, Uttar Pradesh's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) has seen impressive growth, rising from Rs16.44 lakh crore in 2020-21 to over Rs 25.47 lakh crore in 2023-24. The economy of the state between 2017-18 and 2019-20 (current prices) expanded at an average rate of 9.6%, and despite setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic, Uttar Pradesh rebounded strongly, recording growth of 15.7% (average) from 2021-22 to 2023-24, said Dr Mehta. PHDCCI projects that Uttar Pradesh is on a strong path towards one

trillion dollar economy, positioning it as a key economic hub for both domestic and international investors with its increased significant role in India's journey towards Viksit Bharat by 2047. The state's economy is driven by three key sectors: services, agriculture, and industry. The services sector, which includes tourism, real estate, finance, and hospitality, contributes 46.5% to the GSDP. Agriculture remains crucial, with two-thirds of the workforce engaged in farming, contributing 27% to the economy.

Industry, contributing 26.5% to the GSDP, has become a strong accelerator for economic growth. Uttar Pradesh has emerged as a major manufacturing hub, particularly in sectors such as electronics, textiles, handicrafts and handlooms, automobiles, leather, food processing, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and among others.

INTERNATIONAL

UN chief Antonio Guterres calls for democratising Artificial Intelligence, avoiding geopolitical divide



UNITED NATIONS: Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Tuesday called for democratising Artificial Intelligence (AI), warning that the "growing concentration of AI capabilities risks deepening geopolitical divides".

"While some companies and countries are racing ahead with record investments, most developing nations find themselves left out in the cold," he said at the AI Action Summit in Paris co-hosted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "The power

of AI carries immense responsibilities," he said. "Today, that power sits in the hands of a few".

"Let us move for an AI that is shaped by all of humanity, for all of humanity," he said. Guterres, who has made AI one of his priorities, called for giving the UN a central role in determining the future of AI, recalling the proposal in the Global Digital Compact adopted by world leaders at last year's Summit of the Future. The Compact suggested the creation of an Independent International Scientific Panel on

AI, and Guterres said it would be essential for ensuring that "technology serves humanity, not the other way around".

"By pooling global expertise, this Scientific Panel will promote a common understanding of AI risks, benefits and capabilities, and help bridge knowledge gaps," he said. "AI must bridge the gap between developed and developing countries - not widen it", Guterres said. For this, he said, a "global AI capacity-building network is an economic necessity and a moral imperative". That was one of the proposals made by the High-Level Advisory Body on AI. "In what seems like the blink of an eye, AI has gone from the stuff of science fiction to a powerful force that is transforming our world", but the world is not ready for it, he said.

While noting its positive breakthroughs in education, health and agriculture, he said it is "also testing our shared values and rights".

India not neutral, it is on side of peace: PM Modi on Russia-Ukraine conflict

PM Modi also recalled his message to Russian President Vladimir Putin that it is not the era for war

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has welcomed US President Donald Trump's efforts to end the war in Ukraine, insisting that a solution to the conflict cannot be found on the battlefield and that dialogue and diplomacy is the only way to bring peace.

After his wide-ranging talks with Trump at the White House on Thursday (Friday India time), Modi said India has not been neutral on the war and that it is on the side of peace.

"I have always been in close contact with Russia and Ukraine. I have met the leaders of both countries. The world somehow feels India has been neutral, but I want to reiterate that India has not been neu-



tral," he said at a joint media briefing with Trump.

"In fact, India has been on the side of peace," he said, adding "I support Donald Trump's efforts towards finding a possible solution to end the war."

Modi also recalled his message to Russian President Vladimir Putin that it is not the era for war.

"When I met President Putin, I had even said that 'this is not the era for war'. I had also said that solutions cannot be

found on the battlefield. They can only come when all parties sit at the table for dialogue," the prime minister said.

"India believes that the solution to the war can be found only when the issue is discussed in a forum where both countries (Russia and Ukraine) are in attendance."

On Wednesday, Trump said he held a lengthy and productive phone call with Putin and that they agreed to move

forward towards negotiations to end the war.

The US president even said he and Putin "agreed to have our respective teams start negotiations immediately".

India has all along been pressing for resolution of the Ukraine conflict through dialogue and diplomacy.

In his summit talks with Putin on July 9 last year in Moscow, Modi told the Russian leader that a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield and peace efforts do not succeed in the midst of bombs and bullets.

Weeks later he travelled to Ukraine.

In his talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Modi said both Ukraine and Russia should sit together without wasting time to end the ongoing war and that India was ready to play an "active role" to restore peace in the region.

Bangladesh hopes of Yunus-PM Modi meet during BIMSTEC summit



DHAKA: Bangladesh interim government led by Muhammad Yunus is scheduled to attend the 6th Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit in Bangkok, Thailand, from April 2-4. This gives hope for the first-ever in-person meeting between Yunus and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the summit.

There is still a possibility that the two leaders can meet, taking advantage of the BIMSTEC platform, however, nothing is finalised yet, a Bangladeshi official was quoted as saying by the country's leading daily, Prothom Alo. Bangladesh will take as the next chair of BIMSTEC at the summit. "As the chair, Bangladesh will have the opportunity to lead BIMSTEC, take initiatives for cooperation in different sectors by working together in tandem with all the member states, and this will be an opportunity for Bangladesh to re-demonstrate its commitment to the world," BIMSTEC Secretary General Indra Mani Pandey was quoted as saying by Bangladesh's leading newspaper, The Dhaka Tribune.

Thailand is set to host the summit in Bangkok. BIMSTEC is a regional organisation that was established in 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.

Initially known as BIST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation), the regional grouping expanded and came to be known as BIMSTEC and comprises seven member states with the admission of Myanmar in December 1997 and Bhutan and Nepal in February 2004.

Ukraine 'may be Russian someday', wants Kyiv to trade natural resources for US aid says Trump



WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump has suggested Ukraine may fall under Russian control "someday", as he called for the war-torn country to share its natural resources in exchange for US assistance.

Trump, whose return to power has thrown doubt over billions of dollars in US aid to Ukraine, told Fox News on Monday that he had told Kyiv he wanted "\$500 billion worth of rare earth". Ukrainian officials had "essentially agreed" to the proposal, he claimed. Ukraine has "tremendously valuable land in terms of rare earth, in terms of oil and gas, in terms of other things," Trump said.

"I want to have our money secured because we're spending hundreds of billions of dollars." "They may make a deal, they may not make a deal. They may be Russian someday, or they may not be Russian someday. But we are going to have all this money in there and I say I want it back." Trump, who has been vocal about the need for a quick end to the conflict, had earlier floated the idea of meeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy this week.

Further, CNN in its report said that these remarks of Trump are likely to please the Kremlin, which has illegally annexed four Ukrainian regions since launching its invasion. US envoy to Ukraine and Russia, General Keith Kellogg, announced he would discuss their vision for peace in Ukraine with allies at the Munich Security Conference, on February 14-16.

UN welcomes efforts to resolve Ukraine conflict following Trump-Putin phone call

UNITED NATIONS: The United Nations welcomes all efforts to resolve the Ukraine-Russia conflict and sees the phone call between the US and Russian leaders as a "positive thing," a UN spokesman said.

"What we would appreciate is any efforts to resolve the war in Ukraine that would involve the Russian and Ukrainian sides. And so obviously, if both of them are willing to be involved in a process, that would be a welcome development," said Farhan Haq, deputy spokesman for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, on Wednesday, speaking of the phone conversation.

"Given the importance of the United States and the Russian



Federation, the UN welcomes any efforts to resolve issues through regular contact," the spokesman said at a daily press briefing, calling the conversation between the two leaders "a positive thing."

The White House and the Kremlin announced separately on Wednesday that US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin held a phone conversation, reports Xi-

nhua news agency.

After his first official phone call with Russia's President Vladimir Putin after he became President, Trump posted on Truth Social, "We both agreed, we want to stop the millions of deaths taking place in the War with Russia/Ukraine."

PM Modi's 'MAGA, MIGA' equation for India-US 'MEGA' ties

WASHINGTON: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said that India and the US have a 'MEGA' partnership for prosperity.

During a joint briefing with President Donald Trump on Thursday, PM Modi linked India's Viksit Bharat vision, which he said translates into 'Make India Great Again (MIGA)' with Trump's 'Make America Great Again (MAGA)' slogan.

PM Modi said that a joint vision of 'MAGA' and 'MIGA' became a 'MEGA' partnership for prosperity.

"The people of America are well aware of President Trump's motto 'MAGA - Make America Great Again.' The people of India too are focusing on heritage and development as they move forward at



a fast pace and with a firm resolve towards the goal of Viksit Bharat 2047. In the language of America, it's Make India Great Again - MIGA. When America and India work together, this MAGA plus MIGA becomes a 'mega partnership for prosperity' and it is this mega spirit that gives new scale and scope to our objectives,"

the PM said.

The two leaders also announced that India and the US have set a USD 500 billion target for bilateral trade by 2030. "Today, we have also set a

target to increase our bilateral trade to more than double, reaching USD 500 billion by 2030. Our teams will work on finalising very soon a mutually beneficial trade agreement," PM Modi said, adding that the two countries are moving forward in the direction of joint development, joint production, and transfer of technology.

Eleven Labourers Killed in Bomb Blast in Pakistan

QUETTA: At least 11 labourers were killed and seven others critically injured when a bomb, planted on a road in the Shahrag area of Harnai in Pakistan's Balochistan province, exploded on Friday.

As per details, the bomb exploded when a vehicle carrying coal miners was passing nearby. "The explosives are suspected to be an improvised explosive device (IED), which was planted on the road," said Hazrat Wali Kakar, Deputy Commissioner of Harnai.

The security forces cordoned off the area as the bodies of the killed and the injured were shifted to the hospital.

Hospital authorities confirmed the number of fatalities, out of which, at least nine were brought to the hospital dead, while two succumbed to their injuries.



The hospital authorities also confirmed that the condition of the injured was critical.

The Shahrag area of Harnai, Balochistan has witnessed multiple incidents of bomb blasts in the past. It is believed that the bomb blasts were targeted at disrupting the mining work going on in the area as the majority of deceased in the blasts were coal miners.

The other suspected reason for targeting coal miners is that the workers were not Balochistan natives.

As per the Mines Department, the majority of the killed coal miners belong to Swat and Shangla of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

No militant group has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, the separatist

group from Balochistan, BLA (Baloch Liberation Army) has been active in carrying out similar attacks in the past.

The Balochistan provincial government condemned the attack and announced that an immediate investigation had been launched.

"Terrorists who target innocent citizens do not deserve any forgiveness. Strict action will continue against the elements damaging the peace of Balochistan," said Chief Minister Balochistan, Sarfaraz Bugti.

"The intentions of the enemies of peace will not be allowed to succeed under any circumstances. Balochistan government is taking all possible steps to protect the lives and property of the people," he added.

Pakistan Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi also condemned the attack and vowed to bring

the culprits to justice and be held accountable for their misdeeds.

"The beasts who target innocent civilians should not be shown any mercy," he said.

In the past, it has been seen that labourers and workers from Punjab province, working in different parts of Balochistan, have been killed after identification of their origin by militants.

Balochistan province has been a witness to many targeted attacks by militant groups, keeping the government, law enforcement agencies and the security forces on their heels.

Pakistan has maintained that the groups operating in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) are getting their support and facilitation from the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan, who Islamabad insists, is providing support to anti-Pakistan groups and their activities in Pakistan.

Leading Australian expert calls for urgent action to reduce impacts of climate change



SYDNEY: Australia and other high-emissions countries must take drastic climate action following a record-breaking year in 2024, a world-leading expert has said.

Mark Howden, director of the Institute for Climate, Energy and Disaster Solutions (ICEDS) at the Australian National University (ANU), on Thursday said that global greenhouse gas emissions must be cut rapidly to prevent the impacts of climate change from becoming irreversible.

In comments released ahead of his final annual State of the Climate address, Howden - who will step down as ICEDS director 10 years later in 2025 - said that Australia has the natural resources and means to become a global leader in renewable energy and climate adaptation, reports Xinhua news agency.

He said that the world "is paying the price of the escalating impacts" of climate change after average global temperatures exceeded 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels for the first time in 2024.

"Not only was 2024 the hottest year on record, but each of the last 10 years is the hottest 10 years on record - the change is unrelenting," Howden, who is also vice-chair of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), said on Thursday.

"Record heat is dramatically changing how water moves around the planet, accelerating the global water cycle and amplifying climate extremes." He said that the world has reached "uncharted territory" and that with that territory comes new and larger risks from climate extremes.

Howden said that Australia

is not implementing its options to adapt to climate change and lessen the risks to the extent that the country could or rationally should.

Additionally, another research has found that the behaviour of Australia's crocodiles is changing as their body temperature increases with global warming.

The research, which was published on Thursday by the University of Queensland (UQ), analysed 15 years of data from sensors and trackers on 203 wild saltwater crocodiles in rivers on the Cape York Peninsula, Australia's northernmost point.

Researchers found that the crocodiles are spending more time at or near their critical thermal limit of 32-33 degrees Celsius, at which point their diving and swimming performance is impacted.

The study found that since 2008, the temperature peaks experienced by the crocodiles have increased by 0.5 degrees Celsius and their median body temperature has increased by 0.11 degrees Celsius.

Of the crocodiles that were studied, 45 experienced body temperatures above 34 degrees Celsius at least once.

As cold-blooded animals, crocodiles cannot regulate their body temperature, relying instead on external sources.

Kaitlin Barham, a co-author of the research from UQ's School of the Environment, said that the warming environment means crocodiles are spending more time on cooling behaviours. "But if their time and energy is dominated by the need to stay cool, activity necessary for hunting, keeping safe from predators or reproducing is reduced," she said on Thursday.

AI writing code for humanity in this century, time to democratise tech: PM Modi



PARIS: Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now writing codes of humanity in this century and its potential in transforming millions of lives is absolutely amazing to see and perceive, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Tuesday.

Addressing the jam-packed, two-day 'AI Action Summit' alongside French President Emmanuel Macron and other global leaders, PM Modi said the world must democratise technology and AI can help meet that goal.

"AI is already reshaping our polity, economy, security and even our society. AI is writing the code for humanity in this century," said the Prime

Minister.

PM Modi further stated that AI is developing at an unprecedented scale and speed, and being adopted and deployed faster than ever before globally, including in India.

"Governance is also about ensuring access to all, especially in the Global South. It is where AI can help transform millions of lives by improving health, education, agriculture and more," said PM Modi, adding that there is a need for collective global efforts to establish governance and standards.

India and France have worked together for years through initiatives like the International Solar Alliance (ISA),

"As we advance our partnership in AI, it is a natural progression from sustainability to innovation to shape a smarter and responsible future. AI models must also be efficient and sustainable in size, data needs and resources requirements," the Prime Minister noted.

Hailing the country's digital public infrastructure (DPI) which is built around an open and accessible network, the Prime Minister said it offers wide range of applications to "modernise our economy, reform governance and transform the lives of our people."

The AI Action Summit has brought together global leaders and top tech CEOs to discuss the future of AI, with a strong emphasis on innovation and ethical development.

PM Modi arrived in Paris on Monday, landing at Orly Airport before heading to the Elysee Palace for a dinner hosted by President Macron. The dinner saw the presence of several dignitaries, including US Vice President JD Vance.

During their meeting on the sidelines of the dinner, PM Modi congratulated Vance on his victory in the US Presidential elections.

Bank customers rush to buy gold amid woes over rates, Donald Trump policies

SEOUL: Bank customers are rushing to buy gold on dashed hopes for early rate cuts by the Federal Reserve (Fed) and woes over the policies of US President Donald Trump's administration, industry data showed on Wednesday.

According to the data, the country's top five banks -- KB Kookmin, Shinhan, Hana, Woori and NH Nonghyup -- have sold a combined 24.2 billion won (\$16.7 million) worth of gold bars this month, sharply up from 7.96 billion won a year earlier.

The tally also marks a sharp rise from 12.4 billion won during the same period of last month, reports Yonhap news agency.

The dim outlook for the Fed's early rate cuts, along with increased uncertainties triggered by the Trump administration's high tariffs, among other factors, is prodding bank customers to seek safe assets, such as gold.

As of Tuesday, the price of 1 gram of gold stood at 156,230 won, the highest since March



2014, when the country's gold exchange was launched, and nearly double from 86,000 won on Feb. 13 last year.

The daily trading volume of gold in the country came to 102 billion won Tuesday, breaching the 100 billion-won threshold for the first time.

Meanwhile, South Korean stocks finished higher on Wednesday, led by gains of tech shares and shipbuilders, as investors digested US President Donald Trump's new tariff scheme. The local cur-

rency fell against the US dollar. The benchmark Korea Composite Stock Price Index (KOSPI) added 9.34 points, or 0.37 per cent, to close at 2,548.39, extending a winning streak to a second session.

Trade volume was moderate at 453.32 million shares worth 13.19 trillion won (\$9.08 billion), with losers outnumbering winners 551 to 332.

Eyes are also on U.S. inflation data for January, which was to be released on Wednesday (US time).

Why Kejriwal lost in Delhi Assembly Elections?

PRAVEEN RAMAN
 In his first statement after losing the Delhi assembly elections, AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal congratulated the BJP on the victory and said, "I wish that the hope with which the people of Delhi have voted for the BJP, the party will fulfil it." He further stated that his party has always worked for the welfare of the city and will play a crucial new role of the Opposition. "We will play the role of constructive opposition but will also be available to the people of Delhi," Kejriwal added. But this is a great moment for people who take politics as a research topic. While there are several takeaways from these election results, one lesson for Kejriwal is quite clear: don't try to become an expert in everything and honour your place where the people have voted to sit.



dishonoured the massive mandate he got in the 2025 elections but he was also voted to solve the problems of Delhi at that time. But Kejriwal wanted to position himself as a national hero through political shortcuts. He blatantly ignored INDI alliance promises and fought on his own while ignoring two terms of pending work. Let's understand some more reasons behind his defeat. Arvind Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) faced a significant defeat in the 2025 Delhi Assembly elections, losing power

Unfulfilled Promises: AAP's failure to deliver on key commitments, such as cleaning the Yamuna River, disappointed many supporters who had high expectations from the party. BJP's Strategic Campaign: The BJP effectively capitalised on AAP's shortcomings by promising financial aid, including payments for women, elderly pensions, and youth exam preparations. This strategy resonated with a broad spectrum of voters. Middle-Class Discontent: Economic challenges, such as sluggish job growth and urban consumption, led to dissatisfaction among middle-class voters. The BJP's recent tax breaks and promises of improved services appealed to this demographic, contributing to AAP's decline in support. These factors collectively undermined AAP's standing in Delhi, paving the way for the BJP's return to power in the capital.

Praveen Raman is Editor, Morning India English daily newspaper, Views are Personal.

'Tkk Vaari' from Arjun Kapoor-starrer 'Mere Husband Ki Biwi' is dance track of the season

MUMBAI: The song 'Ik Vaari' from the upcoming movie 'Mere Husband Ki Biwi' has been released on Thursday. This is the second song from the film to be released after 'Gori Hai Kalaiyan'. 'Ik Vaari' is a peppy number and promises to get everyone on the dance floor. The song features Arjun Kapoor, Rakul Preet Singh, and Bhumi Pednekar donning ethnic attires against a grand saangeet backdrop. With its infectious beats and lively vibe, 'Ik Vaari' is all set to become a chartbuster. It is sung by Romy, with Tanishk Bagchi as its composer. The



music production is handled by Tanishk Bagchi, Ganesh Waghela, and Shubhobarta Kundu. The lyrics are penned by Mudassar Aziz, and Eric Pillai is at the helm as its mix and master. Meanwhile, 'Gori Hai Kalaiyan' continues to receive positive response from all quar-

ters having already crossed 20 million views within just four days of its release. The song has been sung by Badshah and Kanika Kapoor, with music composed by Akshay & IP. While the film's songs are winning hearts, the trailer has also left audiences in splits. With Arjun Kapoor, Rakul Preet Singh, and Bhumi Pednekar leading the fun-filled chaos, the film promises to be the ultimate family entertainer. They are joined by Harsh Gujral, Shakti Kapoor, and Dino Morea, adding even more humor and excitement.

NPST wins Multiple Awards at Bharat Fintech Summit for Its Disruptive RegTech & PayTech Solutions

FW DESK Mumbai
 Network People Services Technologies Ltd. (NPST), a leading provider of digital banking and payment processing solutions, has secured three prestigious accolades at the Bharat Fintech Summit's Fintech & Digital Excellence Awards. This recognition highlights NPST's commitment to

innovation and its leadership in India's rapidly evolving digital payments landscape. NPST won the Best RegTech Award for its Risk Intelligence Decisioning Platform (RIDP). Powered by artificial intelligence and advanced machine learning algorithms, RIDP enables merchant-acquiring institu-



tions—including banks, payment aggregators, and payment gateways—to implement counter-fraud strategies, enhance risk governance, and ensure compliance.

The company was also honoured as the Runner-Up in the Best Payment FinTech category and received a Special Jury Award for Emerging FinTech Company of the Year for its significant impact on the payments industry. NPST's Payments-Platform-as-a-Service (PPaaS) solution, EvoK. The platform streamlines online transaction processing while offering value-added

services such as risk and fraud management, reconciliation, dispute resolution, and advanced analytics. Speaking on this achievement, Deepak Chand Thakur, CEO & Co-founder of NPST, said, "Winning three prestigious awards at the Bharat Fintech Summit reaffirms our dedication to advancing payments technology across the financial ecosystem."

Vicky Kaushal & Rashmika Mandanna seek blessings at the Golden Temple amidst 'Chhaava' promotions

MUMBAI: Vicky Kaushal and Rashmika Mandanna offered prayers at the famous Golden Temple in Amritsar as they landed in the city to promote their next, "Chhaava". While Rashmika Mandanna looked beautiful in a pink salwar kameez with golden embellish, Vicky Kaushal wore a white kurta and pajama. Expressing his experience of visiting the Golden Temple, Vicky Kaushal penned a note on his Instagram that read, "There's something about #SriHarmandirSahib! The peace, the divinity, the power of prayer. As we bring #Chhaava to the world, I hope it reflects even a fraction of the strength and devotion this sacred place inspires. Rabb meher bakshe. Satnam Wahguru." He also dropped a few snippets from the religious visit on social media. A couple of hours back, as



the two co-stars landed in Amritsar as part of the film's promotional tour, Rashmika Mandanna took to the stories section of her IG and posted a picture where she can be seen posing with her co-star Vicky Kaushal in the backdrop of an aircraft. "Amritsar... Ki Haal aaaa!!!", she penned as the caption. The 'Varisu' actress posed in a cream T-shirt, along with baggy blue denim, whereas Vicky Kaushal faced the camera in a black sweatshirt and black sweatpants, paired with a matching sports cap. Vicky Kaushal also shared a similar post on his Instagram. Vicky Kaushal started the promotional tour for "Chhaava" by seeking blessings at Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj's city. The 'Raazi' actor offered prayers to Lord Shiva at the Shri Grishneshwar Jyotirlinga in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar.

Padma Bhushan to Dikshit: Award to a Non-RSS Archeologist Surprises Academics

GOPAL MISRA
 Historians and Archaeologists in India as well as abroad were surprised, when the name of a Lucknow-born scholar, K.N. Dikshit, figured in the list of the Padma awardees this year. Dikshit is credited for re-kindling worldwide interest in Greater India having footprints across the then known world from the Far East to West Asia. During the ancient times, Europe, except Greece and Roman rulers, was inhabited by wild barbaric tribes. They were pagans and yet to be brought under a prophet for bringing them under a religious order under the discipline of a holy text. However, during the period, later called dark ages by the European colonizers, Indian scholars and ascetics were trying to introduce the then known world to the mysteries of the cosmos through scientific thinking and approach. However, later the Abraham religions, comprising Judaism, Christianity and Islam influenced Europe and West Asia. Interestingly, Dikshit, who is awarded the Padma Bhushan is known as a scholar opposed to the concept of enchainment of mankind under a faith governed by a holy text and to be slaughtered for serving the imperial or political ambitions of the rulers. At the same time, he never cared to endorse the contemporary Hindutva loaded with any sectarian approach; interpreting the past for supporting a political agenda. He also never hobnobbed with the leftists, who enjoyed state patronage during the era of pampered historians of the JNU brand. They like their peers in the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, which were en-



gaged in weaving the historical narratives for justifying the colonial agenda across the continents. They may be representing different ideologies, but they never accepted the scholarship of the Dacca University historian, Kalidas Nag, who had travelled to various parts of the South Asian region to re-establish the fact that close cultural ties existed in the ancient times between the region and India. It may be recalled, however, that in 1942, perhaps under influence of the British colonizers, the Christian Association of India and the Communist Party of India had endorsed the demand of the Muslim League for the division of India. Later, even after independence, a section of the Christian missionaries under the spell of the old colonial agenda had continued to work for snapping deep cultural ties with the rest of India. The tribes of India's northeastern region that were being told that they were never a part of greater India's cultural web. Similarly, the Communist Party of India had endorsed the partition of India. They even accused Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru of representing the Indian bourgeoisie. On the other

hand, for them Muhammad Ali Jinnah and his Muslim League were 'progressive'. Even its leader P.C.Joshi had refused to topple the League government in the undivided Bengal in 1946 despite the massacre of Hindus in the 1946 Kolkata riots. In this context, it is not surprising that Dikshit's admirers and peers appear to feel satisfied that instead of the Padmashree, he has been honoured with Padma Bhushan, third highest award of India. Maybe, a rare honour for a non-RSS scholar in the Modi regime, according to a senior historian, who confided to the Financial World recently. In 2024, his name had figured as one of the Padma awardees, perhaps for a Padmashree, but the proposal was dropped just before the announcement. It is believed that the conservatives within the contemporary ruling establishment have always been wary of the secular approach of Dikshit. In fact, in his writings as well as in the journals he edited, Dikshit was following Grace Morley, a well-known historian who believed in cultural democracy. Grace was one of the key figures of the San Francisco Museum, now named San

Francisco Museum of Modern Art. It goes to the credit of Dikshit that he could have a working relationship with the conservatives among the present establishment without succumbing like the British archaeologist, Sir Mortimer Wheeler, who is being ridiculed even today for his publication, Five Thousand Years of Pakistan. It is not known whether he has compromised his academic contribution to please the powers that be in Westminster or to his new employers in Pakistan. The leadership of Pakistan, which came into being only in 1947, have always been keen to claim an ancient past of their nascent state. It may also be noted that Mortimer had led the excavation of Mohenjodaro. Earlier, he also had served as a director of the National Museum, New Delhi. For many, the decision to honour Dikshit with the Padma Bhushan is also a belated recognition or an effort within the ruling establishment that the all-inclusive approach of Dikshit in the fields of culture and ancient Indian history could be more credible than indulging in the repetitive rhetoric of the greatness of India as a propaganda. According to a number of historians, who neither subscribe to the approach of the historians of the left ideology nor support the logic of the RSS that India has been a great nation since the ancient times, believe that this honour, though belated, could be indicative of the new approach within the ruling establishment. Amidst these differences of opinion, it is quite surprising that Dikshit has finally been honoured. It is being felt that he could have received the Padma Bhushan during the lifetime of his wife, Ajai Lakshmi, the woman who always had stood by him during his challenging career.

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

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav

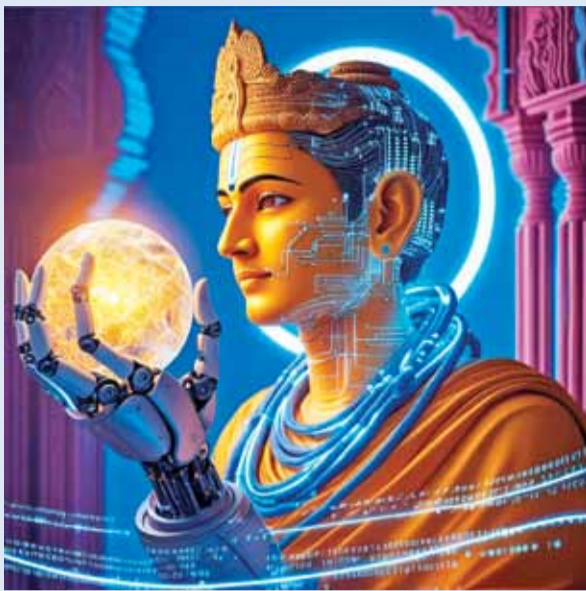


India must develop an AI model that integrates ancient Vedic wisdom with modern technology. This model should be culturally rooted, ethical, and inclusive, distinct from Western and Chinese AI models.

As artificial intelligence reshapes the world, different nations are steering its development in their ways. Silicon Valley's AI is largely capitalistic, designed for commercial success, and often reflects a Western perspective. China's DeepSeek AI, on the other hand, follows a state-controlled model that serves government interests and policies. In this evolving landscape, India has the opportunity to introduce a more balanced and ethical AI system rooted in its rich heritage and inclusive philosophy. With global AI models reflecting their respective national priorities, India's unique strength lies in its philosophical depth and knowledge systems. Ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayana, Puranas, and Kautilya's Arthashastra offer unparalleled insights into ethics, governance, strategy, and human consciousness. By incorporating this intellectual wealth, India-developed AI can be more holistic, inclusive, and human-centric, unlike AI models solely relying on commercial or state interests. **Indigenous AI Model:** Recognizing the potential of a homegrown AI model, the Government of India has officially announced its plans to develop a foundational AI model. Union IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw

recently confirmed that India will build its generative AI model, setting the stage for the country's entry into global AI competition. This initiative aligns with India's broader vision of self-reliance in technology and reducing dependence on foreign AI models. India is expected to launch its first homegrown foundational AI model by the end of this year, aimed at competing with global AI giants like OpenAI's ChatGPT and China's DeepSeek AI. This strategic push toward indigenous AI development is crucial for ensuring that India's AI aligns with its cultural, ethical, and governance frameworks rather than being influenced by external narratives. PM Modi's recent discussions on AI in Paris underscore India's commitment to playing a significant role in AI governance and ethics. These international collaborations can help India shape AI policies that balance innovation with responsible usage, ensuring that AI benefits society without leading to exploitation or bias. **Ancient Wisdom:** A significant step in India's AI journey would be digitizing and integrating its ancient texts into AI training models. Currently, most AI models are trained on modern datasets that lack historical and philosophical depth. India can change this by feeding thousands of years of docu-

Ancient Wisdom to Power India's AI



mented wisdom into AI systems, ensuring they offer insights beyond profit-driven or state-controlled decision-making. For example, the Bhagavad Gita provides deep insights into moral dilemmas, decision-making, and self-discipline, which could help AI systems develop a more ethical reasoning framework. Kautilya's Arthashastra contains advanced knowledge of governance, strategy, and economic policies, which could be used to create AI models capable of policy analysis and financial forecasting. Similarly, Ayurveda and Yoga could be integrated into AI-driven healthcare solutions, making them more holistic and wellness-oriented. India's AI strategy should leverage its cultural strengths while ensuring its competitiveness in global advancements. The challenge is how effectively India can merge this traditional wisdom with modern AI architecture, en-

sureing it remains relevant, scalable, and globally competitive. **Regulation Frameworks:** With AI advancing rapidly, the risk of misuse is a growing concern. Deepfakes, misinformation, biased decision-making, and data privacy threats pose significant challenges. India must take a proactive approach in formulating AI regulations and ethical guidelines to ensure responsible AI use. Additionally, India should encourage open-source AI models, ensuring that AI development remains transparent and accessible rather than being monopolized by a few corporations or government entities. India, with its deep-rooted traditions of knowledge, spirituality, and inclusivity, is well-positioned to develop an AI model that is both technologically advanced and morally responsible. *The author is a senior journalist and columnist. Views are personal.*

PBT makes history in filing India's largest DFRD on National SSE

DOMINICK RODRIGUES Mumbai
 The Prashanti Balamandira Trust (PBT) has made history with the filing of India's largest Draft Fund Raising Document (DFRD) on the National Social Stock Exchange (SSE) platform recently. Sri Madhusudan Sai, trustee of the PBT, told media here that the project aims to raise Rs 18 crores for the construction of a vital state-of-the-art Emergency and Trauma Care Wing at its upcoming 600-bed hospital in Muddenhalli, Chikkaballapur, Karnataka. This milestone builds on the Trust's registration with the NSE's Social Stock Exchange in February 2024. The PBT is a renowned Public Charitable Trust that is at the forefront of offering quality education and healthcare to underserved communities. Highlighting the "Sarkar, Samaj and Sanstha" (or 3S formula) model, Sai said policymakers needed to create the right policies, society should provide resources and charitable organisations must implement social welfare schemes. Noting that this hospital will offer free medical educa-



tion in disciplines like MBBS, post-graduate studies, super specialty courses, and allied health sciences, he said this initiative further strengthened healthcare delivery in rural India and empowered the next generation of medical professionals committed to service in underserved regions. The PBT, under Sai's visionary leadership, has impacted the lives of millions across 80 countries through free healthcare, nutrition and education, while also drawing international recognition for integrating spirituality with service to the community. It operates 28 educational campuses including India's first free-of-charge medical college, a private university

and a vocational training centre. The Social Stock Exchange is a regulated platform within the Exchanges that connects social enterprises with investors and donors to drive social impact, while also enabling non-profit organisations (NPOs) and for-profit social enterprises (FPSEs) to raise funds through instruments like Zeru Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP) instrument. The SSE ensures that funds are effectively utilized for sustainable development goals (SDGs), while also democratizing 'giving' by allowing retail donors, institutional investors and philanthropists to support causes like education, healthcare, climate action and women's empowerment etc.