

REGION

2

REKHA GUPTA GOVT TERMINATES AAP VOLUNTEERS, OTHER STAFF POSTED BY KEJRIWAL, ATISHI OFFICES



BANKING & FINANCE

6

INDIA POISED TO STAY WORLD'S FASTEST GROWING ECONOMY IN 2025-26: RBI CLAIMS IN MONTHLY BULLETIN



POTPOURRI

8

'ILLNESSTO WELLNESS' HANDWASHING AWARENESS EVENT PROMOTES TO PREVENTING DISEASES & SECURING GOOD HEALTH



After assuming office, CM Rekha Gupta reiterates commitment to mission 'Viksit Delhi'

NEW DELHI: Promising to promptly launch mission 'Viksit Delhi', new city Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Thursday assured citizens that each commitment made by the BJP before the election will be fulfilled.

Addressing media persons soon after assuming office at the Delhi Secretariat, Chief Minister Gupta said that her government will not waste even a single day and put in persistent efforts to achieve the dream of 'Viksit Delhi'.

Taking a dig at the previous AAP government and slamming the restrictions imposed by it on media's entry into the Players' Building, the seat of the Delhi government, she said, "I have assumed charge today and I welcome you all to this office which you would not have managed to enter in the past few years."

"This is a public office and its doors will remain open for all, including the media," she said. The Chief Minister also shared



her plan to visit the Yamuna, seek Yamuna maiya's blessings and chair the first Cabinet meeting later in the day, saying, "The agenda for the meeting will be decided collectively."

Earlier, Gupta, 50, the MLA from Shalimar Bagh, took the oath of office at Ramlila Maidan along with her six Cabinet ministers, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Ministers and top NDA leaders present. Ending the suspense over the

a new energy and motivation in me. I pledge to strive with total honesty, commitment and dedication for the welfare of the residents of Delhi. I am fully committed to the significant responsibility of taking Delhi to a new pinnacle," Gupta said in a post on X in Hindi.

She was chosen as the new Chief Minister at a meeting of the BJP legislature party on Wednesday at the state party office at Pant Marg this evening, under the supervision of two central observers - former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and BJP national Secretary Om Prakash Dhankhar. As the meeting began to elect the BJP legislature party leader, there was intense speculation about a woman legislator taking over the mantle. And it was proved right with the election of Gupta, who will be the fourth woman Chief Minister of Delhi after Sushma Swaraj (BJP), Sheila Dikshit (Congress), and Atishi (AAP).

India to Transform Into High-Income Country with GDP of \$23-\$35 Trillion By 2047



NEW DELHI: India is set to transform into a high-income country with a projected GDP of \$23-\$35 trillion by 2047, driven by sustained annual growth of 8-10 per cent, according to a report on Thursday.

This will be powered by India's demographic dividend, technological innovation, and sectoral transformation, according to the report by Bain & Company and Nasscom.

With nearly 200 million individuals expected to enter the workforce in the coming decades, India has a unique opportunity to drive high-value job creation and unlock significant economic po-

tential. Five key sectors, including electronics, energy, chemicals, automotive, and services, would act as strategic growth levers due to alignment with global trends and scalability, with the potential to address India's unique challenges and advantages.

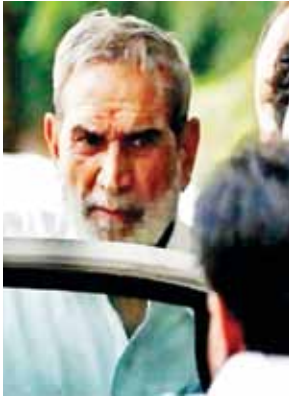
Rising income, a growing pool of skilled workers, and continuous improvements in infrastructure are some of the key factors that can fuel this growth, said the report. "By investing in digital and transport infrastructure, enhancing domestic manufacturing, and driving collaborative R&D, we can position India as a leader in future technologies and

global trade. A multi-pronged, tech-driven approach will be key to unlocking inclusive and sustainable growth," said Sangeeta Gupta, Senior Vice President at Nasscom.

Advances in AI-driven chip design, touchless manufacturing, and backward integration into component manufacturing and design could enhance cost competitiveness and innovation, driving the sector's export share from 24 per cent to 45 per cent-50 per cent by 2047 and its GDP contribution from 3 per cent to 8 per cent-10 per cent.

India's share of renewables in overall energy generation has the potential to rise from 24 per cent in 2023 to 70 per cent in 2047 backed by modernising energy infrastructure, and scaled investments in green energy. India is also likely to transition from a net energy importer to a net exporter. "AI-powered molecular design and digital twin technologies, along with other tech-driven improvements can lead to a potential increase India's share in global value chain from around 3 per cent to over 10 per cent in 2047," said the report.

Sikh Genocide-1984: Court reserves order on quantum of sentence against Sajjan Kumar



NEW DELHI: A court here on Friday reserved for February 25 the order on the quantum of sentence against Congress leader Sajjan Kumar in a Sikh Genocide-1984 case.

During the hearing, the complainant, whose husband and son were killed by a mob instigated by Kumar, urged the Delhi court to award death penalty to the former Congress MP.

The complaint made the submission through her lawyer before special judge Kavari Baweja, who reserved for February 25 the order on the quantum of sentence against Kumar.

"The accused being the leader of the mobs instigated others to commit a genocide and crime against humanity and cold-blooded murders, and he deserve nothing less than capital punishment," senior advocate HS Phoolka, appearing for the complainant, told the court. The court has asked the counsel for Kumar to file his written submission within two days.

Sonia Gandhi discharged from hospital



Congress leader was admitted to the hospital for a regular check up on February 20 morning. Congress leader Sonia Gandhi was discharged from Sir Ganga Ram Hospital here on Friday morning, sources said. The Congress leader was admitted to the hospital for a regular check up on Thursday morning. She was under observation of a team of doctors, the source said.

Canada's \$20 million gold heist: ED raids one of suspects premises in Chandigarh & Mohali



CHANDIGARH: The Enforcement Directorate on Friday searched residential premises in Chandigarh and Mohali in Punjab of an alleged suspect in Canada's biggest-ever gold heist of more than \$20 million in 2023 on fake documents, officials said.

The suspect, Simran Preet Panesar, a former warehouse facility manager with Air Canada, has been staying in Chandigarh's Sector 38 and Sector 79 of Mohali, near here.

He has been facing a Canada-wide warrant for his alleged role in the robbery at the Toronto Pearson International Airport.

The raids were conducted simultaneously on both residences of Panesar. According to media reports, an air cargo container with gold bars was stolen from a storage facility at the airport. India's prime central agency that probes financial crimes, the ED, has launched the money-laundering probe as the accused resides in the country. The reason, as per sources, is to investigate if the gold or its proceeds made their way to the country. On April 17, 2023, fake paperwork was used for the heist.

Canada's Peel Regional Police (PRP), which said it was the biggest gold heist in Canada ever, charged 10, including Panesar, in April 2024, and issued an arrest warrant against him. Panesar and another accused, Parampal Sidhu, lived in Brampton and worked at Pearson's warehouse facility.

Canadian authorities are yet to recover the gold. From the stolen cargo, only 90,000 CAD is learnt to have been recovered by the police. The Peel police in November last year issued a bench warrant for the arrest of one of the suspects charged in connection with the heist.

Prasath Paramalingam, 35, was arrested for allegedly assisting Durante King-McLean, the suspect accused of driving off with nearly \$20 million in stolen gold bars. The police said 6,600 gold bars were stolen from Air Canada's cargo facility on April 17, 2023 by a suspect who arrived at the warehouse in a five-tonne delivery truck. The gold, along with about \$2.5 million in foreign currency, had been shipped to Toronto from Zurich in an Air Canada plane.

Need to Revive Freedom Movement's Spirit for Viksit Bharat: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday reviving the spirit of the freedom movement to create new leadership will help achieve the aim of Viksit Bharat.

Addressing the first edition of the School of Ultimate Leadership (SOUL) Leadership Conclave 2025, he said India's freedom struggle was the best illustration of a shared purpose, noting that it produced leaders not just in politics but in other sectors as well.

Highlighting the importance of shared purpose, PM Modi said it not only brings out the best in individuals but also enhances their capabilities according to the larger objective.

Reiterating the need for rapid progress in all sectors to build a Viksit Bharat, he stressed the



importance of creating leadership for conventional sectors like sports, agriculture, manufacturing, and social service.

Emphasising the need to develop strength and spirit in public policy and social sectors, the Prime Minister remarked

on the necessity of preparing leadership for emerging sectors such as deep-tech, space, biotech, and renewable energy.

PM Modi also shared how despite lacking natural resources, Gujarat became a top state due to good leadership driven by its

human capital. The Prime Minister also highlighted the critical role of both human and natural resources and their role in the progress of any nation.

Quoting a Sanskrit verse, the Prime Minister emphasised that there is no word which cannot be turned into a mantra, no herb that cannot become medicine, and no person who is incapable, and highlighted the need for a planner to utilise and guide individuals.

Emphasising the different levels of development: personal success through self-development, organisational growth through team development, and explosive growth through leadership development, he said that these principles should always remind everyone of their duties and contributions.

'Modi's guarantee means every guarantee will be fulfilled': JP Nadda

Delhi govt implements 'Ayushman Bharat' Yojana

NEW DELHI: Union Minister and BJP President J.P. Nadda has said that Prime Minister 'Modi's guarantee means every guarantee will be fulfilled' as he thanked the Delhi government for its decision to implement 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana' in the first Cabinet meeting.

In a post on X, BJP President Nadda said, "Modi's guarantee means every guarantee will be fulfilled. I thanked the Delhi government for the decision to implement the 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana' in the first Cabinet meeting."

In the first Cabinet meeting, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said that her government will implement the Centre's flagship scheme in the national capital.

The implementation of Ay-



ushman Bharat Yojana was a pre-poll promise of the BJP, which had targeted the AAP government for not implementing the scheme.

The BJP President accused the previous Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government of depriving the people of Delhi of 'Ayush-

man Bharat Yojana' for 10 years due to its narrow politics.

"The AAP government, due to its narrow politics, maliciously deprived the people of Delhi of this public welfare scheme for 10 years, due to which lakhs of citizens of Delhi were deprived of good treatment in difficult

circumstances. The Bharatiya Janata Party had pledged to implement this scheme in the 'Sankalp Patra' of 'Developed Delhi'.

This decision of the first cabinet is proof that under the guidance of the Prime Minister @narendramodi ji, the BJP government of Delhi is committed to realising its goal of development work," Nadda said in the post on X.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta also announced the tabling of CAG reports, which had not been tabled by the AAP government.

"In the first Cabinet meeting, we discussed and passed two agendas - to implement in Delhi the Ayushman Bharat scheme with Rs 5 lakh top up and tabling of 14 CAG reports in the first seating of the Assembly. We will fulfil all the commitments that we have made to the people," she said.

Government Forms Seven-Member Panel to Overhaul Insurance Act, 1938

NEW DELHI: In a significant move towards reforming India's insurance sector, the government has constituted a seven-member expert panel to review and propose amendments to the Insurance Act, 1938.

Originally enacted during British India, the Insurance Act, 1938, serves as the foundational legal framework for the insurance sector, governing life, general, and health insurance policies while empowering the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) to oversee its

implementation. The government's renewed focus on reforms comes after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her FY26 Budget speech, proposed increasing the foreign direct investment (FDI) cap in the insurance sector from 74 per cent to 100 per cent.

She emphasised safeguarding citizens' premium payments within India while aiming to boost sectoral growth. M Nagaraju, Secretary of Financial Services, revealed that internal consultations are complete and that the next step involves

presenting the amendment bill in Parliament. The proposed reforms include composite licences, reduced solvency norms, changes in investment regulations, and provisions for captive licences. Additionally, a one-time registration for intermediaries and permissions for insurers to distribute other financial products are under consideration.

The government had earlier mulled repealing the Insurance Act, citing its complexity due to multiple amendments over the decades. However, it now plans to

streamline the Act through targeted amendments, aligning with its broader goal of replacing outdated pre-Independence laws with modern legislation.

The panel includes industry veterans such as NS Kannan, former MD and CEO of ICICI Prudential Life Insurance; Girish Radhakrishnan, former CMD of United India Insurance; Rakesh Joshi, former member of Irdai; Saurabh Sinha, former executive director of RBI; Alok Misra, MD and CEO of MFIL; and legal expert L Vishwanathan.

Delhi CM Rekha Gupta slams Opposition, promises 100 pc development



NEW DELHI: Delhi's newly sworn-in Chief Minister, Rekha Gupta, has hit back at the Opposition over questions on women's security and governance. She accused previous administrations of neglecting Delhi's development and engaging in corruption.

Responding to the Opposition's queries on when security measures for women would be implemented, CM Gupta said, "These are the same people who ruled Delhi for years, riddled with corruption cases. Now they

fear that when the first CAG report is presented in the Assembly, many hidden details will be exposed."

She criticised the Congress and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for their long tenures in power, saying, "Congress ruled for 15 years, AAP for 13 years, yet they pushed Delhi backwards. Now they question us within just one day of taking office. It was our government that held a Cabinet meeting on the very first day, and we implemented the Ayush-

man Bharat scheme, which was stopped by Kejriwal. Under the leadership of PM Modi, we will give the people of Delhi what they truly deserve." "Our agenda is clear, we will work under the leadership of PM Modi and fulfil every promise made to the people of Delhi with 100 per cent commitment," she added. Regarding Delhi's infrastructure, CM Gupta emphasised her government's commitment to improving road conditions and essential services.

"In the coming days, we will hold meetings with PWD and Jal Board officials to address road construction and repair potholes that Delhi's citizens have long suffered from," she said. Taking another swipe at the Opposition, she added, "The Opposition's job is to raise questions, but what did they do when they were in power? They should focus on their own party, as many of their leaders are on the verge of switching sides."

Rekha Gupta Govt Terminates AAP Volunteers, Other Staff Posted By Kejriwal, Atishi Offices

NEW DELHI: The BJP's new government in Delhi led by Rekha Gupta has relieved from duties all officials or employees who were deployed by the previous AAP government in diverted capacity in the offices of Chief Minister and Ministers and sent them back to their respective departments, said an official on Friday.



Chief Minister and Ministers.

Accordingly, the deployment and appointment of officers has to take place afresh after taking of oath and assumption of office by the new Chief Minister and Cabinet Ministers, it said.

While terminating the services of the AAP government's appointees — mostly consultants, advisers or officers on special duties — Deputy Secretary

Dutt cited the Central government's instructions for the appointment of co-terminus staff.

"Whenever new Ministers are appointed, Ministries/Departments of Government of India have been authorised to create, on their personal staff, posts of various grades. Such posts are to be continued by the Ministries/Departments as long as the Ministers con-

cerned hold office and are to be treated as automatically abolished on their demitting office," it said.

In other words, the posts created on the personal staff of the Ministers are co-terminus with the tenure of the Ministers.

Accordingly, all co-terminus appointments made earlier in the office(s) of former Chief Minister/Cabinet Ministers stand terminated. The offices of the Chief Minister and Ministers will submit fresh proposals to the General Administration Department (GAD) for co-terminus appointments, according to the government order.

To avoid confusion, regular staff of DANICS/DSS/Steno cadre will continue to work in their respective offices under the newly sworn-in Chief Minister/Ministers till further orders, it said.

'Happy that Delhi will be led by a woman': Atishi congratulates new CM Rekha Gupta



NEW DELHI: Aam Aadmi Party National Convener Arvind Kejriwal and party leader Atishi Congrejo congratulated Rekha Gupta, who was named as the next chief minister of Delhi.

The suspense over the next Delhi Chief Minister ended on Wednesday evening with first-time MLA Rekha Gupta being chosen as the leader of the BJP legislature party, paving the way for her to take over the post.

Gupta, the MLA from Shalimar Bagh, was chosen at a meeting of the BJP legislature

party under the supervision of two central observers — former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and BJP national Secretary Om Prakash Dhankhar.

As the meeting began to elect the BJP legislature party leader, there was intense speculation about a woman legislator taking over the mantle. And the speculation was proved right with the election of Gupta, who will be the fourth woman Chief Minister of Delhi after Sushma Swaraj (BJP), Sheila Dikshit (Congress), and Atishi (AAP).

Responding to the development, Kejriwal wrote on X, "Many congratulations to Rekha Gupta ji on becoming the Chief Minister of Delhi. I hope that she will fulfil all the promises made to the people of Delhi. We will support her in every work for the development and welfare of the people of Delhi."

Former Delhi CM Atishi also took to X to congratulate the new CM. She said, "Congratulations to Rekha Gupta ji on becoming the Chief Minister of Delhi. It is a matter of happiness that Delhi will be led by a woman. I hope that the promises made to the people of Delhi will be fulfilled. You will get the full support of the Aam Aadmi Party for the development of Delhi. Rekha Gupta, the new Chief Minister will take oath at a grand swearing-in ceremony at the city's iconic Ramliya Maidan at noon on Thursday. She will be administered the oath of office and secrecy by Lt Governor Saxena, amid the presence of top BJP brass and leaders of allied parties on the dais.

Delhi CM keeps finance, revenue; Parvesh Verma gets PWD, water



NEW DELHI: Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta announced allocation of portfolios among members of Council of Ministers on Thursday evening, keeping with her finance, services, vigilance, revenue, women and child development among other departments. Addressing her first press conference as CM after the Cabinet meeting of the new government, Gupta said her Cabinet colleague Parvesh Verma was given the charge of PWD, water, legislative affairs, irrigation and flood control, while Ashish Sood got home, power, urban development and education portfolios. Minister Kapil Mishra got law and justice, labour and employment and tourism, while his cabinet colleague Manjinder Singh Sirsa received industries, forest and environment, food and supply departments.

Appoint Dalit MLA as leader of opposition in Delhi: Swati Maliwal to Kejriwal



NEW DELHI: Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Wednesday wrote a letter to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal, demanding that a Dalit MLA be made the leader of opposition (LoP) in the Delhi Assembly.

Maliwal's request comes at a time when discussions are underway regarding the formation of the opposition leadership in Delhi after the recent elections.

In her letter, Maliwal expressed hope that Kejriwal is doing well and focusing on his health and peace of mind after the Delhi election results.

She also reminded him of a promise made during the 2022 Punjab elections, where Kejriwal had vowed to appoint a Dalit Deputy Chief Minister if the AAP won the election. However, Maliwal pointed out that this promise has not been fulfilled even after three years.

"You will recall that during the Punjab elections of 2022, you promised that after winning, we would appoint a Dalit Deputy Chief Minister. It is unfortunate that even after three years, this promise remains unfulfilled," said Maliwal.

She further emphasised that now, with the need to appoint the Leader of Opposition in Delhi, it would be an ideal opportunity for Kejriwal to make good on his earlier commitment.

She urged him to "appoint a Dalit MLA from the party as the Leader of Opposition in Delhi".

Maliwal stressed that the appointment of a Dalit as the LoP would not just be a political decision but also a significant step toward fulfilling the core values of equality and justice that the AAP claims to stand for.

She urged Kejriwal to prove that his party is committed to implementing the politics of equality and justice in practice, not just in words.

"I urge you to stand by your promise this time and show that you do not just talk about equality, but actually implement it," she wrote.

Maliwal advised Kejriwal to avoid repeating the failure to deliver on promises made in Punjab and to make this historic decision for Delhi.

Meanwhile, the swearing-in ceremony of the new Chief Minister and cabinet ministers of Delhi is set to take place at the Ramliya Maidan on Thursday. The BJP won the Delhi Assembly election nearly a fortnight ago by bagging 48 seats in the 70-member Assembly.

The AAP, which ruled Delhi for 10 years, could win just 22 seats as several of its top leaders, including Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain and Saurabh Bharadwaj, lost in their respective constituencies. The Congress party failed to secure a single seat for the third consecutive time.

Ensure peace and security during upcoming festivals in UP: CM Yogi Adityanath to officials

LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday directed officials to ensure that the upcoming festivals, including Holi, Shab-e-Barat, Ramzan, Navroz, Chaitra Navratri, and Ram Navami, are held peacefully with proper security arrangements in place.

The Chief Minister said that in the past eight years, festivals of all religions and communities have been celebrated in the state peacefully and this harmony must be maintained in the future as well.

He instructed officials to remain especially vigilant and cautious on Holi, which falls on March 14 (Friday), an official statement issued here said.

Referring to law and order concerns, Adityanath noted that Holika Dahan on March 13, followed by prayers and Holi the next day, is a sensitive period.

He warned that "mischievous elements" may attempt to provoke tensions and directed strict vigilance to prevent any untoward incidents.

He also ordered officials to identify illegal intruders and Rohingyas and take appropriate actions against them.

CM Yogi Adityanath also sought immediate action against the complaints received regarding the use of



illegal loudspeakers at religious places.

He said that sound from loudspeakers should not extend beyond the premises of religious sites and asked officials to issue a notice in case of violations. If non-compliance continues strict action must be taken. He also reviewed preparations for the final bathing festival of the Maha Kumbh on Mahashivratri on February 26 and directed officials to ensure smooth traffic management with a route plan.

He asked officials to prevent roadside parking and plan measures to minimise walking distance for devotees heading to the Sangam for the holy dip.

Coordination between the

Maha Kumbh Mela administration, Prayagraj administration, and neighbouring district authorities, should be seamless, CM Yogi Adityanath said.

He emphasised that daily wage workers play a crucial role in the success of Maha Kumbh and their honorarium should be paid without delay.

"No payments should remain pending. If an outsourcing agency is causing delays, immediate discussions should be held to ensure timely disbursement," he added. Additionally, the payment process for these workers should be reviewed at the government level to ensure accountability, he said. On Mahashivratri, an estimated 15 to 25 lakh devo-

tees are expected to visit Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham in Varanasi, he said, adding that administration must implement a well-structured action plan tailored to the specific needs of the region.

"This Mahashivratri, a grand procession of revered Akharas will also take place at Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham. Co-ordination with the seers of the Akharas is essential to ensure smooth darshan experience for common devotees and Akhara members," he said.

The Chief Minister also directed officials to prepare a crowd management plan for multiple processions to Nageshwar Nath Dham, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple and Mahadeva in Barabanki, on the day of Mahashivratri.

Bank Officer among Two Held from Delhi for Facilitating Cyber Criminals



GURUGRAM: A team from the cyber cell of the Gurugram Police has arrested two accused including a bank official for allegedly providing bank accounts to cybercriminals, an official said. Priyanshu Diwan, Assistant Commissioner of Police (cybercrime), said that the arrested accused have been identified as Avinash Sharma and Aditya Chaturvedi, both residents of Delhi. According to the police, a man filed a complaint at the Cyber Crime Police Station East in November 2024, that he was duped of Rs 4.97 crore in the name of investing in the stock market. During the probe, the police arrested the suspects from different parts of Delhi for the alleged involvement in the crime on Wednesday. During interrogation, the accused disclosed that Aditya Chaturvedi had been working as a business development manager at IndusInd Bank located in Gujranwala Town-2 in Delhi since 2023. "The bank account used in the fraud was opened by Aditya Chaturvedi and sold to Avinash for Rs 25,000 to commit fraud. Chaturvedi took Rs 10,000 to open a savings account and Rs 50,000 for a current account," Sandeep Kumar, a spokesperson of the Gurugram Police said.

Former Delhi CM Kejriwal failed to appear in Sonapat court on Feb 17

Further action will be taken as per law

SATISH HANDA
Sonapat

Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal did not appear in court over his statement on poison in Yamuna river. The court had ordered him to appear in a complaint filed on January 29, 2025 against him under Section 2 (D) and 54 of the Disaster Management Act. In the absence of Kejriwal not appearing during the hearing in the case on February 17, but he did not appear before the Sonapat court in the complaint registered under various sections of Disaster Management Act. It was considered that he has nothing to say in the matter and now further action by the court will be taken as per law. A petition was filed on his statement of mixing poison in the Yamuna river water by the State Disaster Management Authority, Haryana. The court had ordered Arvind Kejriwal to appear in CJM court Sonapat where security arrangements were made tight in the court for his arrival. However, his advocate Sanjeev Nasyar appeared in the court.

Ashish Kaushik, Executive Engineer of Rai Water Ser-



vices Division, on behalf of the State Disaster Management Authority, had filed a case in the Sonapat court. In his complaint, he said that on January 28, a crowd of people from the surrounding villages along the Yamuna river gathered in the premises of the Irrigation Department and started asking why the Haryana government had poured poison into the Yamuna river? This poison can cause severe health disorders as well as the death of many people and animals. When people were asked what was the source of their information, some people showed a video circulating on social media in which Arvind Kejriwal was seen making a statement that the Haryana government had mixed poison in the water of the Yamuna river. After which a case was filed on his behalf.

The dream of 77,000 poor families of Haryana to own a house will soon come true



SATISH HANDA
New Delhi

The dream of 77,000 poor families of Haryana to build their own house will soon come true. While reviewing the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural), Chief Minister Naib Singh Saini has directed to the Deputy Commissioners in the state that the work of Geo Tagging of the applications submitted by nearly 77,000 beneficiaries pending under this scheme should be completed within 15 days. Under this scheme, installments will be issued to these beneficiaries as soon as possible for building the houses. The Chief Minister directed the Deputy Commissioners to identify places for common markets to ensure availability of all facilities for the products being prepared by self-help groups. According to information, in the meeting, it was announced that under the Chief Minister Rural Housing Scheme launched by the government aiming to provide housing facilities to poor families hav-

ing annual income up to Rs 1.80 lakh and plots of 50 square yards have been made available in 'Mahagram Panchayat' and plots of 100 square yards made available in general 'Gram Panchayat' scheme. In the first phase, plots have been allotted to 4533 families through a draw in 62 Gram Panchayats which include 61 general Gram Panchayats and one in 'Mahagram Panchayat' scheme. These beneficiaries will be provided funds to build houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural). 1,000 Panchayats have been identified for the next phase.

Chief Minister Saini directed the officials to ensure that the public welfare schemes and policies of the central and state governments are implemented at the ground level in a timely manner so that the common people get immediate benefits under this scheme and make the lives of citizens easy and prosperous. The concerned officials were directed by the chief minister, gave these instructions while chairing the

meeting of the State Level Direction Committee through video conferencing with Administrative Secretaries and District Deputy Commissioners. Haryana Chief Minister Saini on Wednesday again while chairing the state level District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committees (DISHA) committee meeting via video conferencing with Administrative Secretaries and Deputy Commissioners, directed officers to ensure the timely implementation of public welfare schemes and policies of both the central and state governments. The meeting was co-chaired by Development and Panchayats Minister Krishan Lal Panwar. In the meeting, it was also informed by the officials that under the 'Har Ghar Grihini Yojana', aimed at providing gas cylinders to poor families for Rs 500, as many as 15 lakh beneficiaries have registered so far.

The CM directed officers to promote the scheme extensively to ensure that more people benefit from it. He also suggested that local public representatives should actively encourage the community to take advantage of this initiative. During the meeting, various schemes sponsored by the central government were reviewed in detail. Information revealed that 2,987 villages in Haryana have been declared ODF Plus Model Villages, and by March 31, 2025, a total of 3,646 villages will be declared as ODF Plus Model Villages.

Odisha CM presents 2.90 lakh crore budget



ARUBINDA MOHAPATRA
Bhubaneswar

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday presented a budget of Rs 2.90 lakh crore in the state assembly. This includes a proposed outlay of Rs 14,701 Crore for Agriculture and Farmers Empowerment Department.

More than 80 per cent of the population reside in rural areas, where agriculture is the principal source of income, Majhi said in his budget speech. Keeping in view the need of farmers, he proposed to increase the allocation under agriculture and allied sector to Rs.37,838 crore in 2025-26, which is about 12 per cent more than the previous year's allocation.

Of total allocation in budget for Agriculture department, the CM proposed to enhance the provision from Rs. 5000 crore to Rs. 6000 crore under

Samrudha Krushak Yojana. The State Government has already implemented the scheme for the Kharif Marketing Season 2024-25 and more than Rs.4500 crore has been disbursed till 15th February, 2025. About 13 lakh farmers have been benefited under the scheme so far.

He proposed a sum of Rs 2020 crore for the year 2025-26 under CM-KISAN for timely financial assistance and input support to the farmers in the state.

He said that an area of about 2 lakh ha has been planned to be diversified to different non-paddy crops in the ayacut of Mega Lift Irrigation Projects. Under this programme, his government's approach is to double the income of small and marginal women farmers by establishing model Agriculture Production Clusters (APC).

the state government would highlight programme to support Rabi potato cultivation. This year, the government has set a target to cover 1.80 lakh farmers under this initiative. Under the programme, the department has supplied 1.60 lakh quintals of certified seed potatoes to farmers in Rabi Season this year.

He allocated an amount of Rs 600 crore for Odisha's flagship scheme "Shree Anna Abhijan" to promote millets addressing nutrition and sustainability in agrifood system. He said that scheme has been extended to 177 blocks in all 30 districts. The state government has decided for an additional budgetary support of Rs.210 per quintal over and above the existing MSP of Rs.4290 per quintal for the current year, thereby the procurement price of Ragi is fixed at Rs.4500 per quintal.

The government announced Rs.252 crore towards financial assistance to cold storages for the period from 2025-26 to 2029-30.

He proposed an allocation of Rs.425 crore under the scheme, 'Farm Mechanization and Agriculture Entrepreneurship'. Under the scheme, Mukhyamantri Krushi Udyog Yojana (MKUY) promotion of agri-enterprises are being facilitated through ease of doing agri-business. Rs.264 crore has been allocated for the scheme.

Hooda slams BJP government in Haryana for lacking developments



SATISH HANDA
Rohtak

Congress will take all issues related to lack of developments to the public during the present municipal elections in the state, will highlight the poor condition of roads, sewerage, and cleanliness and the collapse of law and order among the public in most of the districts across the state, Congress leader and former chief minister Bhopinder Singh Hooda slams ruling BJP government in the state while addressing public meetings. He said that the BJP did not do a single development in most of the prominent districts including Hisar during its 10-year tenure, where he was addressing a large gathering. He said the Congress would take up the collapse of civic services and law & order in the state as primary issues to the public during the mayoral elections. Along with this, the party will also highlight the poor condition of roads, sewerage, and cleanliness and the collapse of law and order among the public, Hooda stated.

India Set to Unveil EV Incentive Guidelines to Attract Global Automakers

NEW DELHI: India is set to unveil detailed guidelines for its electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing incentive scheme next month, offering global automakers, including Tesla, a flexible pathway to enter and invest in the Indian market.

The Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India (SMEC), first announced in March 2024, aims to bolster EV production and attract significant foreign investment.

Officials revealed that the upcoming guidelines will include an "on-tap" facility, enabling companies to explore the market before committing to full-scale local manufacturing.

This move is expected to benefit companies like Tesla, which is currently scouting for showroom spaces and



recruiting staff in India but has yet to commit to domestic production.

"The SMEC guidelines will be finalised within a fortnight and announced next month," a senior government official told ET.

The window to apply for incentives could remain open for 120 days or longer and may be reopened periodically, allow-

ing automakers to time their market entry strategically. The scheme offers a major incentive: automakers investing a minimum of USD 500 million to set up local manufacturing will benefit from a reduced 15 per cent import duty on completely built-up (CBU) electric cars priced above USD 35,000 for up to five years.

Industry experts view the flexible framework as a calculated move to accelerate India's EV adoption while minimizing risks for global automakers. With the final guidelines imminent, the government anticipates receiving applications as early as next month, marking a pivotal step in India's green mobility ambitions.

provision will allow companies like Tesla to test consumer demand through imports before establishing manufacturing units. In a further boost to existing players, the scheme will also recognize investments made in setting up EV assembly lines within current factory premises, enabling legacy manufacturers to transition into the EV space without building entirely new facilities.

Congress demands Vaishnav's resignation over Delhi stampede



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress demanded immediate resignation of the union Railway Minister Ashwani Vaishnav over the death of 18 people during a stampede at New Delhi railway station on Saturday night. The party expressed profound condolences with the bereaved families saying that the lives were lost due to the criminal negligence of the government. "Rail minister Ashwani Vaishnav must resign with immediate effect", Congress spokesperson and Chairperson of the Social and Digital Media Platforms Ms Supriya Shrinete told a press conference at the party office here today. "This is not an accident but mass murder", she remarked, while adding, the railway minister does not have any moral right to stay in his position after last night's deadly incident that left 18 innocent and helpless people dead.

Mysuru MUDA Case: Lokayukta Gives Clean Chit to CM Siddaramaiah and Family

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru/Mysuru

In a significant development, the Karnataka Lokayukta has given a clean chit to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, his wife Parvathi, and two others in the alleged scam concerning the allotment of sites by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA). The Lokayukta police, after a detailed investigation, found no evidence to substantiate the charges against them and have submitted their final report to the High Court.

According to sources, the probe officers examined the allegations under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, the



Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act, 1988, and the Karnataka Land Grabbing Prohibition Act, 2011. After thorough scrutiny, the investigation concluded that the matter was more of a civil dispute rather than a criminal offense. The final report states that there was insufficient proof to support the claims made against Siddaramaiah, his wife Parvathi, her brother Mallikarjuna Swamy, and landowner Devaraj.

The Lokayukta police have

clarified that compensatory land allotments made by MUDA between 2016 and 2024 under its 50:50 scheme are still under investigation. Any further findings will be submitted to the court under Section 173 (8) of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) once the probe is fully completed.

The clean chit from the Lokayukta comes as a major relief to CM Siddaramaiah, especially after the Karnataka High Court recently dismissed an appeal by RTI activist Snehamayi Krishna to transfer the case to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). The court's decision further reinforces the stance that the allegations lacked concrete evidence.

Congress hits back at BJP over foreign funding



Questions BJP's silence, connivance in Ford Foundation funded 2012 Anna movement to destabilise UPA govt

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress today hit back at the Bharatiya Janata Party over its baseless allegations against it for receiving foreign funding through agencies like the USAID.

The party accused the RSS of having taken money from the CIA to destabilise the Congress governments led by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Ms Indira Gandhi.

"The RSS has always been a puppet of the US", party spokesperson and Chairman of the AICC Media and Publicity Department Pawan Khara remarked while addressing a press conference here today.

He also referred to the massive Ford Foundation funding for the Anna Hazare-Kejriwal led protests in 2012 to destabilise the Congress led UPA government at the centre.

The Congress spokesperson took a dig at the BJP government including its National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, over its baseless allegations of

\$21 million USAID for voter turnout in India. Referring to a newspaper report proving these allegations to be false, he asked Doval, as what was he doing if the USAID really pumped \$21 million into India. It is a slap on your face that you have been caught unawares, he told the government.

He pointed out, this aid was actually sent to Bangladesh by the USAID. He asked, what were the IB and the RAW doing when the USAID pumped so much funds into a neighbouring country to destabilise the government there. In a pithy remark, he said he felt bad for Modi's friend Guatam Adani who suffered losses due to the regime change there, allegedly funded by the USAID.

Questioning the audacity of the BJP to accuse the Congress of taking foreign aid, Khara referred to the revelations made by a former CIA agent wherein he revealed that the RSS received massive aid for its "cow protection" protests, whose actual aim was to destabilise the government led by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He said the RSS had even planned the murder of the then Congress president K Kamaraj.

Union Home Minister reviews implementation of 3 new criminal laws in J&K



NEW DELHI: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday chaired a review meeting on the implementation of three new criminal laws in Jammu and Kashmir. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who attended the meeting, later said that some weak areas were pointed out as needing immediate attention.

CM Abdullah said in a Union Territory the elected government is not responsible for implementing the law but indicated that it might play a role in raising awareness about the new law. Before the review of the implementation of the new laws in Jammu and Kashmir, HM Shah had undertaken a similar exercise with regard to 11 states, he said, adding that there was no discussion on J&K's security situation during the meeting. Earlier on February 14, HM Shah 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 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 Police 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. HM Shah said that the Narendra Modi government is committed to providing a speedy and transparent justice system to the countrymen. He said that to strengthen law and order, it is essential for crimes to be registered, so there should not be any delay in filing FIRs. HM Shah emphasised that efforts should be made to achieve over 90 per cent conviction rate in cases with sentences of more than seven years and the police, government lawyers, and judiciary should work together to ensure that the guilty are punished as swiftly as possible.

Former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, his family meet PM Modi

NEW DELHI: Former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his family met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday. Both dignitaries had a wonderful conversation on many subjects.

PM Modi said that Sunak is a great friend of India and is passionate about even stronger India-UK ties. Taking to X, the Prime Minister wrote, "It was a delight to meet former UK PM, Mr. Rishi Sunak and his family! We had a wonderful conversation on many subjects.

Mr. Sunak is a great friend of India and is passionate about even stronger India-UK ties."

Earlier in the day, Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Nirmala Sitharaman met former Rishi Sunak here and the two discussed potential new avenues to strengthen market-based financial ties and drive economic growth. The Finance Minister stressed the importance of leveraging the Commonwealth to bring issues of mutual interest to the G7 agenda for the benefit of the



Global South.

Rishi Sunak also visited Parliament House with his wife

Akshata Murty and daughters Krishna and Anoushka, on Tuesday. They were ac-

companied by Sudha Murthy, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha. Secretary General, Lok Sabha, Utpal Kumar Singh welcomed Sunak and his family. Secretary General, Rajya Sabha, P C Mody was also present on the occasion.

During their visit, the Sunak family explored the Parliament House Complex, admiring its architectural grandeur. They visited notable sites like the Galleries, Chambers, Constitution Hall, and Samvidhan Sadan. Rishi Sunak, who is

currently visiting India, called on External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar in New Delhi on Monday. "Nice to meet former UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in Delhi today. Appreciate his constant support for strengthening India-UK relations," EAM Jaishankar posted on X.

Born to Indian parents in Southampton with roots in Punjab, Sunak is the first Indian-origin person to have served as the UK Prime Minister from 2022 to 2024.

TALE OF TWO DEMOCRACIES

A Weakling Becomes CEC in India, Invincible Patel to Lead FBI in US



GOPAL MISRA

Kash Patel, an irrepressible campaigner, author and confidant of President Donald Trump, finally gets approval of the US Senate to lead the key American investigation agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). During the same period, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi successfully imposes his one of the cronies, Gyanesh Kumar, as the chief election commissioner (CEC). It is considered, the ruling party's bid for seeking an institutional support for preventing its further political decline. It, perhaps, could have been inspired by the rulers of Pakistan, where the election commission is often accused of rigging and manipulating elections.

It, however, may be recalled that a few years ago, the present ruling establishment had ensured removal of one of the election commissioners, Ashok Lavasa, respected for his uprightness, before he could be elevated to the position of the CEC.

Lavasa, according to the political whispers in the capital, had to be eased out from the commission, before he could be elevated for the coveted position of the CEC. The decision of his removal was immaculately planned to be accompanied by the time-tested trick of implicating his family members, wife Noel, or son, or both, in some cooked up income tax enquiry.

Lavasa had faced the anger of the ruling establishment for taking cognizance of the violation of the election code or norms, also following the reports of the recovery of huge unaccounted money from the ruling party.

In Washington, breathtaking political battle was being witnessed this week, when finally Kash Patel succeeded in obtaining clearance of the US Senate. Interestingly, two Senators of the ruling Republican Party, Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) and Susan Collins of Maine, defected to the opposition. They voted against him.

It, however, has made Kash Patel, more assertive. He not only has promised to trigger off the process of cleansing the investigation agency, but he has also stated that he would be assisting Krishti Noem, who has already got clearance from the Senate to become Homeland Security Secretary.

The Democrats, including some Republicans, are apprehensive that Patel would now soon be expediting the investigations regarding their corruption and also would be exposing the child sex trafficking. This crime was pioneered by Jeffrey Epstein in New York having the blessings of eminent politicians like Bill Clinton, a former American president and other prominent Americans.

As soon as his name was ratified in the Senate, Patel promised Senator, Marsha Blackburn, that he would not allow any further delay in booking the criminals, including prominent American



politicians, to face the consequences for luring young teenage girls for submitting to their sexual desires, violating and exploiting them.

Ignoring Parliamentary Conventions

In India, the much-claimed invincibility of the ruling BJP under the leadership of Narendra Modi suffered partial political eclipse in the 2024 Lok Sabha poll. The BJP had not only failed to obtain a majority in 543-strong House with just 240 seats, it also abandoned the process of electing Modi as the leader of the BJP Parliamentary party before being declared the leader to lead a coalition government. Instead, Modi promptly formed an alliance under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and after being declared the leader of the NDA, he got his name ratified in the BJP Par-



liamentary Party as the new leader. Modi, however, chose to ignore the established parliamentary practice. He didn't care to adhere to the established convention that he should have tendered resignation after losing the majority in the House. Later, he should have explored the possibility of setting up a minority government with allies. However, the reluctance of Modi in adhering to the democratic norms has amused the political pundits in India as well as in other political capitals; but his yearning to cling to power has even hurt a large number of the 240 MPs of the ruling BJP, including the 100 members facing criminal charges such as murder and rape in different Indian courts. Their legitimacy is under the cloud despite the support of the mainline news channels indulging in false propaganda

regarding the narrative of the USD 21 millions propaganda for ousting a section of the American deep state to get BJP defeated. In fact, seeking full details regarding it, the Indian channels are quoting President Donald Trump without explaining the context.

Before being elected the leader of his parliamentary party, Modi successfully stitched a coalition by luring the Telugu Desam, Janata Dal (U) and a section of the Shiv Sena under the banner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA); thus ensuring his support for his minority government.

The Strategy

Earlier, Modi had ensured that the role of the Chief Justice of India in the selection of the election commissioner should be ended, and for this he got a new law enacted and invoked it before it could face judicial scrutiny in the apex court.

Under this new legislation, he expedited the appointment process by selecting the new incumbent just a day before the hearing on this issue before the Supreme Court of India.

On the other hand, Kash Patel finally succeeded in getting the approval of the US senate in a keenly contested voting. He was confirmed for the top position for a 10-year tenure with a slim margin getting just 51 votes in a 100-member Senate.

In India, the executive is also busy diluting the laws for ensuring transparency

and accountability of the system. On the other hand, in the US, the FBI and the Homeland Security would soon be initiating vigorous campaigns against Sextortion, which has increased by 700 percent in recent years. Since in this crime a number of top Americans, including politicians, tycoons like Bill Gates and Robert Murdoch, have figured for being close to Jeffrey Epstein, the mastermind behind this crime, the concerned authorities didn't take strong measures.

According to the information available, they used to enjoy his hospitalities and had travelled in his private jet with pretty teen-age girls to his islands and luxury hotels. Later, Jeffrey Epstein was found guilty and convicted, but before he could complete his jail term, he was found dead in a New York jail. It, however, goes to the credit of Modi that he ensured that Lavasa peacefully migrates to the Asian Development Bank. The income tax enquiry was also quietly dropped following the reports that the supporters of Lavasa might release the offshore investments of the leaders of the ruling party.

In the US, the Trump Administration is full of vigour. It is hoped that in coming weeks, more political fireworks could be witnessed in the US and India.

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

Congress Slams PM Modi for failing to defend Indian interest during US visit

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge today flagged the issue of "voter list manipulations" by the Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of elections in different states.

He also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for failing to defend India's trade and business interests during his recent visit to the United States.

In his opening remarks at the meeting of AICC General Secretaries and in-charges here today, the Congress president also said that the in charge of different states will be accountable for the organisation and the electoral performances in the respective states.

"I would like to tell you one very important thing about accountability. All of you will be accountable for the organisation and the future election results of the states under your charge", he told the general secretaries and in-charges.

Referring to the new challenge of "voter list manipulation", he said, it was happening on a large scale in elections, and Rahul Gandhi had also raised the issue in the Lok Sabha.

Asserting that this rigging has to be stopped at all costs, he pointed out how the names of Congress supporters were deleted from the voter list or the names were removed and added in a different polling booth at the last moment. He accused the BJP of adding fresh names just before the elections.

The Congress president also



referred to the manipulation of the selection process of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) by the government by excluding the Chief Justice of India from the selection committee.

He said the Chief Justice was also included in the selection committee of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) by the order of the Supreme Court, but Modi removed him as well. "The government does not even trust the impartiality of the Chief Justice of the country", he observed, while referring to Rahul Gandhi questioning the purpose of the committee, where the government was trying to use the Leader of the Opposition merely for "certification".

Referring to PM Modi's visit to the United States, Kharge said, he (the PM) had failed to protect India's trade and business interests. He pointed out, the PM did not protest the imposition of tariffs by the US on Indian goods. "They are forcing a loss-making deal on us, which our government is silently accepting. This is clearly an insult to India and its people", he observed, while adding, "America is hurting us deeply even in economic matters".



India must push back to protect its interests

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Washington was brief yet impactful, with significant developments marking his engagement with U.S. President Donald Trump. Taking place less than a month after Trump assumed office, the meeting positioned India among the first few nations to establish high-level diplomatic engagements with the new administration. The joint statement released post-meeting reflected a mix of economic and strategic discussions, with a notable emphasis on trade and investment. The launch of 'Mission 500', aimed at achieving \$500 billion in bilateral trade by 2030, alongside initial talks on a free trade agreement, underlined the economic focus of the visit. India's commitment to purchasing more U.S. energy, oil, and defence equipment is expected to contribute towards reducing America's \$45.7 billion trade deficit with India. A significant structural shift came with the introduction of the COMPACT framework, aimed at fostering military, commerce, and technological cooperation. The rebranding of the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) to TRUST further reinforced commitments in semiconductor, AI, and quantum computing collaborations. Additionally, the approval of Tahawwur Rana's extradition to India marked a crucial development in counterterrorism cooperation. Beyond the optics of camaraderie, the visit underscores the pragmatic nature of India-U.S. relations. The transactional aspects, particularly on trade, energy, and defence, recall elements of Trump's previous term. Notably, Modi's visit did not seem to ease concerns over counter-tariffs or immigration policies affecting Indians in the U.S. As India moves forward in engaging with the new administration, a balanced approach—asserting its interests while fostering collaboration—will be crucial in navigating potential challenges and leveraging opportunities for deeper bilateral ties. The upcoming Quad Summit in Delhi will serve as another platform to reinforce these commitments and further strengthen strategic cooperation between the two nations.

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RAJEEV KUMAR BELIEVES GENUINE CARE AND INTEGRATION FOSTER A COMPASSIONATE, FEARLESS EDUCATION SYSTEM

Redefine success in education



Students invest immense efforts in securing admission to premier educational institutions. While many are able to turn their dreams into reality, others get left behind. There are times when both students who are unable to get admission and those who join these institutes take extreme steps. A victim's mother once said, "I gave him an IIT dream." Despite various preventive measures, students ending their lives is a tragic loss.

In 2024, around a dozen suicides were reported from the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT); there have already been over 100 cases in the decade, 2014 to 2024. In 2025, there have been incidents reported from IIT Indore, IIT Kharagpur, and the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, and six cases of admission-seekers in Kota in Rajasthan, which is famous for its coaching institutes. According to the 2022 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, there were 13,044 student suicides in India, or 7.6% of all suicide cases. Among these, 2,095 were linked to examination failure.

These tragedies have sparked much concern. In 2023, the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, called for a humanitarian approach, urging "all stakeholders to help students beat negative thinking and take study pressure in a positive way". The Supreme Court of India has directed academicians to explore innovative out-of-the-box solutions. The Council of Indian Institutes of Technology has proposed a slew of measures while the University Grants Commission (UGC) has included a representative of the vulnerable group in the Grievance Redressal Committee to effectively safeguard their interests.

In January 2025, the Supreme Court, addressing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by the families of victims, directed the UGC to collate data on the establishment of Equal Opportunity Cells (EOCs), complaints received, and action taken reports from all universities, as per its 2012 regulations. Despite these interventions, the effectiveness of these measures remains questionable.



Cause analysis

Academic stress and caste-based discrimination remain the primary causes of these tragedies. But there are several other factors. It is a misconception that this is an issue that concerns only academically weaker students. There are cases of high achievers, including an Olympiad winner, taking drastic measures. Additionally, students face societal pressure to "succeed", along with the 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) syndrome and constant comparison with peers. Setbacks and mental health struggles that young people experience are often stigmatised, while failure is viewed as a personal flaw. Institutional policies tend to be reactive rather than preventive, leaving students to chase unrealistic standards with little room for recovery or personal growth. This creates a cycle of isolation, despair, and hopelessness.

A Lancet Commission Report (2022) acknowledged that many of us experience some degree of mental ill health in our lifetime, but tackling stigma and discrimination is essential to changing the status quo. Stigma and discrimination in mental health not only violate basic human rights but also deepen marginalisation and social exclusion. To reduce stigma effectively, policies based on social contact should be prioritised, empowered, and supported to drive meaningful change.

The effectiveness of existing measures

So, are the measures-in-place counter-productive? Current prevention measures

such as counselling, complaint handling, remedial classes, and reduced academic load have their limitations. This stems mainly from the unintended consequence of these measures which end up isolating these individuals in their time of need.

Counselling plays a crucial role in promoting wellness skills and improving mental health during normal times. However, challenges may arise during critical moments such as when depression escalates. An IIT Jodhpur study, using data from the 75th Round National Sample Survey (2017-18), revealed that self-reporting of mental illness in India is less than 1%, primarily due to societal stigma, leading to isolation during such critical phases.

Combating caste-based discrimination through a complaint-driven approach has significant flaws. It often results in no action in time, delayed or punitive actions, and instils fear of repercussions. The case of a student from IIT Kharagpur, in June 2024, exemplifies this, where the victim allegedly made a complaint and was later found dead. Later, a medical report showed murder, and not suicide. In another instance, at IIT Delhi, in 2023, in the case of two students, the Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe cell saw no complaints, despite administrative efforts. It shows that a complaint-based system can discourage victims, only to worsen their suffering, and isolate complainants.

A similar issue exists with remedial classes and tutorials for academically weaker students, who are identified based on semester-end results. While these classes may help some students improve their academic performance, there is an inherent flaw. Participants are labelled as being academically weak, causing isolation from their peers. Although most manage to pass, some may struggle due to the stigma and other factors, which when combined with underlying mental health triggers, could lead to tragedy.

Thus, the prevention measures have inher-

ent built-in-flaws. They unintentionally label vulnerable individuals, leading to isolation and exclusion.

The need for a change in approach

Exclusionary approaches worsen the struggles of victims and hinder integration. A paradigm shift is needed to ensure immediate and inclusive support in critical moments. The key to prevention lies in keeping students integrated, and free from stigma or fear.

There is also the point of early detection and flexible assessment. Instead of labelling weaker students at semester-end, early detection through performance in initial assignments or behavioural signs such as missed classes and reduced interaction can help before there is a crisis. A flexible assessment system that is tailored to the varying strengths and interests of students is an effective solution. It should be noted that the same size does not fit all. Offering assignments of different difficulty levels is an approach that supports vulnerable students, boosts their confidence, and ensures that no one is left behind. The writer's successful implementation of this method over three decades highlights its potential to transform student outcomes.

This approach does not require reducing academic rigor for all, as doing so has its pros and cons. While it may ease stress for some, it could also affect the global competitiveness level and reputation of elite institutions.

Rajeev Kumar is a former computer science professor at Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kharagpur, Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Kanpur, Birla Institute of Technology And Science (BITS) Pilani, and the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), and a former scientist at the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Department of Science and Technology (DST), with over 40 years of experience in academia and research and development. Views are personal.



APAR GUPTA SAYS RANVEER ALLAHBADIA AND SAMAY RAINA ARE JUST PAWNS IN DIGITAL MEDIA BATTLE

The danger of a digital censor board



There is a moral panic over a show called India's Got Latent. Much of the furore centres around some crude remarks made by a YouTuber, Ranveer Allahbadia. His remarks have been condemned by Chief Ministers, a Parliamentary Standing Committee, and even the Supreme Court.

On India's Got Latent, which was conceptualised and hosted by comedian and YouTuber Samay Raina, judges attempt to critique the "latent" talents of aspiring performers. Dank humour defines the show. Both Mr. Allahbadia and Mr. Raina enjoy immense popularity as YouTubers, especially with young people. Mr. Raina is a rising sensation who shared the KBC stage with Amitabh Bachchan and Mr. Allahbadia was extolled by the Prime Minister himself as 'Creator of the Year'. While many may say that their online reach is the reason behind the moral panic, the two YouTubers are mere pawns in the great game for control of our digital media.

Notwithstanding the Supreme Court's curt remark that Mr. Allahbadia has "a very dirty mind," the law separates moral repugnancy from criminality. In Apoorva Arora v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi (2024), the Court quashed criminal prosecutions for foul language in an OTT show called College Romance. The Court demanded an objective test for obscenity, focusing on whether sexual or lustful thoughts were aroused and not on whether words were "decent". The Court further explained that coarse language, however distasteful or improper, does not automatically become obscene.



Its ruling is directly relevant here: Mr. Allahbadia's comments, at worst, constitute a risqué jest rather than actual obscenity. Yet fury and legal intimidation often eclipse constitutional principle.

The second legal provision which has been invoked against India's Got Latent is Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which provides the Indian government with the power to block access to a website, as revealed by Kanchan Gupta, a Senior Advisor, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Curiously, "decency and morality" do not fall under the grounds for blocking websites under Section 69A. This statutory limit was exposed as far back as 2010, when the government tried to block the pornographic website Savita Bhabhi. Legality, however, has not stood in the way of the Union government's expanding appetite for censorship, as seen in the surge of blocking orders, which has been aided by the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. Blocking decisions remain

shrouded in secrecy; courts typically avoid striking them down.

Question of regulation

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting's push for a sweeping Broadcasting Bill gathered steam before the general elections and then returned in a form that placed online creators in the same bracket as traditional broadcasters. Earlier, there was a public outcry against provisions of the Bill. Now, thanks to the recent clamour for stronger censorship, the Bill has received momentum. The Parliamentary Standing Committee of Information Technology, headed by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey, has now urged the Ministry to propose new regulations and amendments. The recent controversy has different actors playing to a familiar script: a public uproar leads to new rules which arm the government with sweeping powers.

On January 15, 2021, Amazon Prime's Tandav released, and was immediately accused of insulting religious sentiments. This led to criminal complaints, government intervention, and an apology from the creators, who cut supposedly offensive scenes. Yet multiple FIRs persisted, targeting actors, producers, and Amazon Prime's India head. Amid calls for censorship, the government on February 25, 2021, introduced the Information Technology Rules. Part III now covers digital news media and OTT platforms, albeit under ambiguous jurisdiction. However, what is interesting is that to escape the clutches of criminal prosecution, OTT platforms have entered into a Faustian bargain. They now

invite censorship powers of the Ministry to escape a visit to the police station or writ petitions before different High Courts. The price to pay is the discontinuation of any web series which, through its themes or dialogues, poses difficult questions to our society or political leadership. Hence, it should not come as a surprise if popular online creators, including those associated with India's Got Latent, plead for clemency in the coming weeks by pleading for "regulation" on digital platforms such as YouTube.

This present moment in time is not simply an outcome of a single controversy. Nor is it just an example of rising online vulgarity fuelled by cheap data and ubiquitous teleconnectivity. As Yamini Aiyar and Neelanjan Sircar have argued, the Indian state has undergone a fundamental change in its political economy where technology has enabled direct benefit transfers as a form of tribal allegiance rather than a right guaranteed by the constitution. Calling it techno-patrimonialism, they state that it has advanced within a framework of the Prime Minister's political appeal that relies on "a mix of cultural nationalism and welfareism populism". Hence, it should come as no surprise that political parties, after competing on direct benefit transfers, are now advocating for digital censor boards. This may explain why the entire state and large sections of society have been spurred into action by a distasteful joke.

Apar Gupta, advocate and founder-director of the Internet Freedom Foundation. Views are personal.

BOOKS: REVIEW

New book explores three centuries of short stories

Salman Rushdie's depiction of a 'Sea of Stories' in Haroun and the Sea of Stories resonates deeply with the essence of the contemporary short story—a fluid and ever-evolving entity shaped by myth and history. A.J. Thomas, in his meticulously curated anthology of Indian short stories spanning three centuries, emerges as a modern-day Scheherazade, weaving together tales that captivate and challenge in equal measure.

A major strength of this collection is the presence of familiar yet ever-enchanting narratives. Readers will find themselves revisiting cherished classics, such as Tagore's Kabuliwala, where the heart-wrenching call of "Mini, batcha, Oye Mini batcha" immortalized on film remains unforgettable. S.K. Pottekkatt's On the Riverbank transports us to childhood innocence with Unni's search for a dragonfly's red tail, while Premendra Mitra's The Discovery of Telenapota draws readers into a mysterious journey, mirroring the

allure of adventure tales. Satyajit Ray's Two Magicians leaves us spellbound, a testament to his genius in storytelling beyond cinema.

Beyond nostalgia, the anthology's power lies in its ability to immerse the reader. Many stories evoke the darkness of a pre-electricity era, their eerie atmospheres bringing to mind Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's The Blue Light, where readers become active participants, gripped by terror and anticipation. The ability of these stories to transport us back to childhood wonder and fear makes them particularly compelling.

While the collection celebrates human resilience, love, and memory, it does not shy away from pain. The oppressive weight of caste, the deeply ingrained inequities of privilege, and the horrors of Partition-era loyalties find space in these pages. The presence of poverty is an ever-looming specter, portrayed with stark realism. The contrast between tenderness and suffering ensures that the collection is as thought-

provoking as it is entertaining.

The arrangement of stories, moving from older authors to contemporary ones, also allows for an evolving narrative—one that shifts from the lyrical and mythic to themes of modern-day struggles. Thomas acknowledges the influence of early publications, such as The Illustrated Weekly of India, in shaping his literary journey. Having also edited The Greatest Malayalam Stories Ever Told (2023) and served as an editor for Indian Literature, his experience in curating voices from varied backgrounds shines through in this anthology.

As the collection progresses, modern concerns take center stage. Themes of patriarchy, environmental degradation, and social stigmas gain prominence, demonstrating how short stories remain relevant in addressing the pressing issues of our time. In Yeshe Dorjee Thongchi's The Smell of Bamboo Blossoms, translated from Assamese by Aruni Kashyap, the cyclical flowering of bamboo unleashes an infestation of



100 Indian Stories: A Feast of Remarkable Short Fiction from the 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries Edited by A.J. Thomas. Alpha. 856 pages. Rs 1,499

rats, destroying crops in Arunachal Pradesh, paralleling a rat plague in Surat, Gujarat. This interplay of folklore and real-world crises underscores how intricately human lives remain tied to nature's unpredictable rhythms.

Ruskin Bond's words in the foreword ring true: "Honour the writers. Salute the translators. Celebrate the short story." Whether it is a grandmother who transforms into a crocodile or a metaphysical duel between magicians, the anthology offers a rich tapestry of narratives that demand to be savored at leisure. Each story is an invitation—one that rewards patience and curiosity in equal measure.

For readers seeking a blend of nostalgia, social critique, and literary brilliance, A.J. Thomas' anthology is an invaluable addition to any bookshelf. Its stories, drawn

from multiple languages and eras, remind us of the timeless power of storytelling in understanding the past, confronting the present, and imagining the future.

One of the anthology's most commendable aspects is its attention to translation, which acts as a bridge between linguistic cultures. The translations retain the original charm, wit, and depth of the stories, allowing them to reach a wider audience. Thomas ensures that the richness of each regional tale is preserved, making them accessible to those unfamiliar with the original language. By doing so, he highlights the sheer diversity of Indian literature and reinforces the idea that storytelling transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Moreover, the translators play a crucial role in not only maintaining the authenticity of the stories but also in capturing the nuances that make each tale unique. The anthology pays tribute to their meticulous work, recognizing that the art of translation is as significant as the act of writing itself. This collection, therefore, stands as a testament to the value of translation in fostering cross-cultural appreciation and literary unity.

Google Opens Ananta, Its Largest Global Campus in Bengaluru

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Google is excited to announce the opening of its new campus, "Ananta" (meaning "limitless" in Sanskrit), in Bengaluru. This state-of-the-art facility is one of Google's largest globally and represents a significant investment in India's tech ecosystem.

India has long been a strategic nerve center in the global tech landscape. From a booming startup ecosystem to digital public infrastructure that is reshaping lives, India's technological evolution is nothing short of remarkable. The country is also home to a diverse and thriving community of creators, innovators, and problem-solvers. For over two decades, Google has been proud to contribute to this transformation, whether through AI-powered flood forecasting, cutting-edge tuberculosis detection models, or Google Pay's role in integrating millions into the formal economy.



As we continue to build from India, for the world, we are thrilled to mark a significant milestone with the inauguration of Ananta—one of Google's largest offices globally. Nestled in Bengaluru, a city renowned for its dynamism and innovation, Ananta is a testament to our commitment to India's tech ecosystem. Designed as a collaborative effort between Google India and local development teams, this state-of-the-art campus reflects our latest thinking in workplace design and sustainability.

The name 'Ananta,' derived from Sanskrit, translates to 'infinite' or 'limitless'—a reflection of the boundless opportunities technology offers to improve lives. True to this spirit, the campus is more than just a workspace; it is a hub of innovation, sustainability, and accessibility. Thoughtful design elements such as tactile flooring, braille-integrated features, and fully accessible amenities ensure an inclusive environment for all.

Drawing inspiration from Bengaluru's identity as the 'Garden City of India,' Ananta integrates extensive green landscapes with walking and jogging paths—perfect for informal brainstorming sessions or moments of tranquility amidst a bustling workday. Sustainability is at the heart of its design, with features that significantly minimize environmental impact. The campus recycles 100% of its wastewater, harnesses rainwater, and boasts one of India's largest smart glass installations to optimize energy use. Additionally, locally sourced materials dominate the interiors, reinforcing our commitment to responsible construction and community engagement.

For Google, India has always represented a unique opportunity—one where ingenuity meets impact. With Ananta, we take another bold step in shaping the future, reinforcing our dedication to building with and for India, and driving technological advancements that resonate worldwide.

Number of EVs on Indian Roads Likely to Cross 28 Million in 2030: Report



NEW DELHI: The cumulative number of EVs on Indian roads will likely cross 28 million units in 2030, generating significant demand for energy from the grid, according to the India Energy Storage Alliance (IESA), a leading industry body focused on e-mobility, energy storage and hydrogen.

India's cumulative EV sales have crossed 4.1 million units in the fiscal year 2023-2024 and the future outlook for electric vehicle sales continues to be positive, driven by increasing environmental awareness, customer interest, advancements in Battery technology, and readily available and easily accessible EV charging infrastructure, according to an IESA statement. "It is predicted that 83 per

cent of the annual sales would be e-2-wheelers, 10 per cent would be e-4-wheelers, and commercial vehicles such as trucks, buses while three-wheelers would contribute to 7 per cent of sales," IESA said.

India continues to make significant and sustained inroads in its decarbonisation journey, with the rapid increase in sales of electric vehicles, supported by demand and supply incentives, growing consumer demand, and a focus on developing charging infrastructure.

Vinayak Walimbe, president (interim), IESA said that India has witnessed a substantial rise in the electricity consumption, reaching 1,543 TWh in 2023-24 (7 per cent increase over last year).

"According to the Central Electricity Authority (CEA), electricity consumption at pub-

lic charging infrastructure was 465 GWh from April to October 2024 which has more than doubled compared to 204 GWh in 2022-2023," he mentioned.

"Additionally, with the majority of EV users opting for the convenience of home charging, the IESA estimate of energy demand for EV charging in FY 2024-2025 is 4,000 GWh and likely to increase to 38 TWh by FY 2031-2032 with maximum power demand estimated at 366.4GW," he added.

The Ministry of Power has prepared a National Electricity Plan, which is a comprehensive 10-year roadmap, crucial for advancing future strategies and helping ensure energy security. India is the third-largest producer and consumer of electricity in the world.

The National Electricity Plan forecasts total annual demand on the Indian power grid to rise to 2133 TWh by 2031-32 and as per IESA estimation, EV charging would likely constitute around 3 per cent of this demand.

India Turns Food-Surplus Powerhouse Driven by Robust Farm Sector Growth: Report



NEW DELHI: India has evolved from a food-scarce nation to a food-surplus powerhouse with a strong export performance on the back of robust growth in agriculture, reflecting the farm sector's resilience and its significant role in the global agricultural trade landscape, according to a study released by apex business chamber PHDCCI.

The report, titled 'India's Agricultural Transformation: From Food Scarcity to Surplus', projects the country's foodgrain production growth at 2 per cent, to about 3,357 lakh tonnes for the year 2024-25.

The business chamber's projections indicate a significant expansion in agricultural and processed food products exports, with exports reaching \$125 billion by FY2030, \$250 billion by FY2035, \$450 billion by FY2040, and \$700 billion by FY2047.

The PHDCCI study projects that India's food processing sector is expected to reach \$700 billion by FY 2030, \$1,100 billion by FY 2040, \$1,900 billion by FY 2040, and \$2,150 billion by 2047.

The report states that while some states excel in agricultural performance, their overall economic growth remains modest. This highlights an opportunity to better leverage agricultural success to drive broader economic development. By strengthening linkages between agriculture and other sectors, these states can unlock new avenues for growth, fostering more inclusive and balanced economic growth, the report points out.

Overall, the analysis suggests that foodgrain production in India is significantly influenced by factors such as electricity availability, warehousing capacity, and gross irrigated area.

Rainfall does not appear to have a statistically significant impact, which contrasts with the traditional view of India's heavy reliance on the monsoon for agriculture. The report is of the view that they have a moderate degree of association. This points to a more resilient agriculture having emerged in the country.

Number of Active Companies Registered In India Crosses 18.17 Lakh in January



NEW DELHI: A total number of 28,05,354 companies were registered in the country as of January 31, of which 65% (18,17,222) companies are active, an increase of 0.14 per cent in the total proportion of active companies when compared to December 2024, according to the latest data compiled by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs.

As on January 31, there were also 5,216 foreign companies registered in the country and out of them, 63 per cent or 3,281 entities were active.

Private limited companies account for 96 per cent of the total companies with 38 per cent of the total paid-up capital. In comparison, public limited companies are smaller in number (4 per cent) but comprise 62 per cent of the total paid-up capital, according to the Ministry's data.

GTRI Cautions about Petrochemical Risks in India-Qatar CEPA Talks

NEW DELHI: The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has advised India to exercise caution in pursuing a potential free trade agreement with Qatar, particularly regarding the petrochemical sector where both nations maintain strong market positions.

The economic think tank issued this guidance on Wednesday following high-level diplomatic discussions between the two countries.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani recently discussed the possibility of establishing a bilateral Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

The proposed agreement aims to double bilateral trade to USD 28 billion by 2030, according to the joint statement released after their meeting.

Typical CEPA arrangements involve substantial reduction or elimination of customs duties on 90-95 percent of traded goods, alongside measures to facilitate services trade and investment.

GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava emphasised that India's well-established domestic pet-



rochemical industry could face significant challenges if tariff reductions lead to increased competition from Qatari imports.

The existing trade relationship already shows a marked imbalance, with India's imports from Qatar reaching USD 12.34 billion in 2023-24, while exports remained at just USD 1.7 billion.

across metro and non-metro cities. APNA will post job listings on the NCS Portal, connecting employers with candidates across formal and informal sectors. The partnership will also promote equal opportunities for women and persons with disabilities, ensuring a fair recruitment process. APNA will access NCS's vast candidate database, while MoLE will facilitate smooth integration via a user-friendly online and offline interface. "This initiative aligns with NCS's mission to create a dynamic, inclusive job ecosystem, helping job seekers from all backgrounds find suitable opportunities," said the ministry.

"This collaboration marks a significant step in bridging the gap between talent and employment, fostering economic growth and workforce development in India," it added.

Labour Ministry partners APNA to open 10 lakh job offers annually on NCS portal

NEW DELHI: In a significant step towards enhancing employment prospects for young job seekers, the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE) has partnered with the job recruitment platform APNA.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between APNA and Labour Ministry is expected to bring over 10 lakh job opportunities annually to the National Career Service (NCS)



Portal. This will help boost domestic employment avenues, said the Ministry.

The MoU aims to help job seekers on the NCS portal to gain broader employment options

across metro and non-metro cities. APNA will post job listings on the NCS Portal, connecting employers with candidates across formal and informal sectors. The partnership will also promote equal opportunities for women and persons with disabilities, ensuring a fair recruitment process. APNA will access NCS's vast candidate database, while MoLE will facilitate smooth integration via a

user-friendly online and offline interface. "This initiative aligns with NCS's mission to create a dynamic, inclusive job ecosystem, helping job seekers from all backgrounds find suitable opportunities," said the ministry.

"This collaboration marks a significant step in bridging the gap between talent and employment, fostering economic growth and workforce development in India," it added.

Trump, Tariffs and Trade of Pharmaceuticals from India

DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

In FY 2023-24, export of pharmaceuticals touched US \$27.85 Bn from US \$15.07 Bn in FY 2013-14. For April-December 2024, export of Drugs & Pharmaceuticals stood at US \$21.67 Bn. Bain & Co. in a recent report that was published in collaboration with IDMA, IPA and Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexil) stated that India is the 3rd largest nation in terms of pharma exports by volume (measured in thousands of tons) for the year 2023 with pharmaceutical exports of about 1,520 tons (in thousands) closely followed by the USA (about 1,510 thousand tons) and Germany (about 1,500 thousand tons). First and Second rank is occupied by China and France with 8,500 (thousand tons) and about 1,710 (thousand tons) respectively.

Drugs & Pharmaceuticals are the 4th largest commodity exports from India. Export of Drugs & Pharmaceuticals account for about 7 per cent of India's total merchandise exports by value for April to Dec. 2024 period.

The USA alone forms about one-third of total export of drugs and pharmaceuticals from India. This reflects importance of the USA market for India. In a way, this shows the dependence of the USA on drugs & pharmaceuticals exported from India.

Due to exports of drugs &

Table 1: Exports from India - Top Five Commodities April - December 2024

Commodities	Exports (\$ Mn)	% Share in selected criteria's total exports
Engineering Goods	87,129.97	27.32
Petroleum Products	46,521.86	14.59
Electronic Goods	26,107.02	8.19
Drugs & Pharmaceuticals	21,673.86	6.80
Gems & Jewellery	21,354.09	6.69

Source: Compiled from National Import-Export Record for Yearly Analysis of Trade

pharmaceuticals, if gainers are Indian pharmaceutical companies, then the same is the case for the U.S. economy. The Association for Accessible Medicines (AAM) which is a trade association that represents generic and biosimilar manufacturers released its 2024 U.S. Generic & Biosimilar Medicines Saving Report on September 5, 2024. The report revealed that due to use of approved generic and biosimilar medicines, there was savings to the tune of US \$445 billion in the year 2023 alone for stakeholders including patients, employers, taxpayers, and the healthcare system. In past ten years, total generic & biosimilar savings amounted to more than US \$3.1 Trillion. The role of generics and biosimilars can be gauged from the fact that generics & biosimilars represent 90 per cent of prescriptions filled in the U.S. but form only 13.1 per cent of prescription drug spending. Moreover, inflationary pressure is evident due to implementation of Inflation Reduction Act in the USA.

If tariffs are imposed at a higher rate, then medicines will become costlier, and ultimately, patients' access to care will be adversely affected.



Indirectly, the cost of healthcare will go up for patients. The National Health Statistics Group within Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services of the USA conduct a comprehensive review & revision of the National Health Expenditure Accounts (NHEA) on five-yearly basis. The NHEA are the official estimates of total health care spending in the U.S. This data reflects that health spending accounted for 17.6 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the U.S. economy. Further, the U.S. healthcare spending grew 7.5 per cent in 2023, with a total amount of US \$4.9 trillion. This comes to

approximately \$14,570 per person. One major concern for the U.S. may be India's Goods Trade Surplus which has touched \$35.33 Bn in FY24 as Exports from India during this period stood at US \$77.52 Bn and Imports were to the tune of \$42.19 Bn. In last five years, India's Goods Trade Surplus has more than doubled as the surplus stood at \$17.3 Bn in FY20, \$22.75 Bn in FY21, \$32.29 Bn in FY22, and \$27.45 Bn in FY23.

Union Budget 2025-26 introduced cuts on Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on more than dozen items. 37 medicines and related 13 Patient

Table 2: Export of Drugs & Pharmaceuticals - Top Five Destinations April - December 2024

Country	Exports (\$ Mn)	% Share in selected criteria's total exports
USA	7,104.30	32.78
UK	682.26	3.15
Brazil	573.35	2.65
France	532.49	2.46
South Africa	513.68	2.37

Source: Compiled from National Import-Export Record for Yearly Analysis of Trade

Assistance Programs (PAPs) which were added in the list of items exempt from Basic Customs Duty (BCD) also benefited American pharmaceutical companies such as MSD Pharmaceuticals (known as Merck & Co., Inc., within the U.S. and Canada), Pfizer, Johnson & Johnson, and Bristol-Myers Squibb.

Many prominent Indian pharmaceutical companies have significant revenue from the U.S. market, e.g., Sun Pharma, the largest pharma company in India, was the 13th largest generics pharmaceutical company in the U.S. and held second position by prescriptions in the U.S. dermatology market in FY 24. In FY24, US business contributed 32 per cent to the company's consolidated revenue. In Rupee terms, the company's revenue in FY24, from the US market grew by 13.4 per cent Y-o-Y basis to reach Rs 153,493 Million. By March 2024, Sun Pharma had 3 out of 27 Finished Dosage facilities and 1 out of 14 API facilities in the U.S. itself. This partially lowers the impact of tariff.

As per IQVIA MAT March 2024, Aurobindo Pharma is the largest generic pharma

company in the US by Rx dispensed. In FY24, segment-wise contribution reflects that the U.S. market contributed 48 per cent to the total revenue of the company. Zydus Lifesciences is another prominent pharmaceutical company that is the 5th largest generic company in the USA and distributes over 200 generic products. In FY 2023-24, the company launched 28 generic products in the USA.

North America business of Cipla Limited had delivered the highest ever revenue of US \$906 Mn in FY24. The North America core formulation business contributed 30 per cent of the company's revenue. YoY growth was 24.0 per cent in FY 2023-24. Cipla has presence in the U.S. through Cipla USA Inc. (a wholly owned step-down subsidiary) that was certified as 'Great Place to Work' in the U.S., the recognition achieved by only generic company in the U.S. Cipla is part of a joint venture (JV) - MKC Biotherapeutics Inc., USA with the percentage stake owned by MNI Ventures, Cipla (EU) Limited and Kemwell Biopharma UK Limited in the ratio of 45.4 : 35.2 : 19.4. This purpose of this JV is to develop and commercialize novel cell therapy products for major unmet medical needs in the U.S. as well as in Japan and European Union (EU) regions. Such JVs de-risk any company from tariffs altogether when such products are manufactured and sold in any specific market.

By March 2024, Lupin was

the 3rd largest pharmaceutical company in the U.S. by filled prescriptions, with a 5.2 per cent market share in generics. Lupin ranked as the 2nd largest generic pharmaceutical company by sales in the U.S. respiratory segment. In FY 2023-24, the U.S. market contributed to 34 per cent of the overall company's sales. With a revenue of Rs 67,628 million from the U.S. market, Lupin had 30 per cent growth over FY23. Moreover, the company has started focusing on complex generics as can be observed from the launch of Tiotropium (Gx Spiriva) in August 2023. It was the first Dry Powder Inhaler from India for the U.S. market.

For Torrent Pharma too, the USA is among top four markets with 10 per cent revenue coming from the US market in FY 2023-24. The breakup of revenues under key territories for FY 2022-23 shows that Torrent Pharma had 12 per cent of its revenue from the USA which fell by 7 per cent in FY 2023-24. The company earned 53 per cent of its revenue in FY 2023-24 from domestic market only. In absolute amount, Torrent Pharma earned Rs 1,078 Crore from the US market in FY 2023-24, down from Rs 1,162 Crore in FY 2022-23.

Indian pharmaceutical companies are likely gainers in near future too as the U.S. market is undergoing significant transformation. Due to impending losses of exclusivity, brand spending is likely to reduce by US \$145 Bn over the five years from FY 2024-25. So, impact of tariff,

if any, will get nullified in the medium-term.

Imposition of tariffs at a much higher rate, e.g., proposed rate of 25 per cent, will not be productive as pharmaceutical companies will pass it on to the customers only. Reciprocal tariff is not possible as product basket of American companies in India and Indian companies in the USA is entirely different. Even Dilip Shanghvi in a recent Summit held on February 15-16, 2023, expressed optimism that generic pharma products might be exempt from the tariffs as Sun Pharma supplies essential medications in the US market.

The U.S. market is the most important market for major Indian pharmaceutical companies given the fact that the U.S. pharma market is the largest globally in terms of dollar value - US \$ 446 Bn in 2023 that had a CAGR of 5.3 per cent in previous five years. But branded medicines constitute a majority part of the market value. In comparison to that, unbranded generics dominate in terms of prescription volume. In that way, Indian pharmaceutical companies have advantage. Any tariff hike will be more negative for the U.S. patients, taxpayers, and the overall U.S. healthcare system.

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.

India Poised to Stay World's Fastest Growing Economy in 2025-26: RBI claims in monthly bulletin

MUMBAI: High frequency indicators point towards a sequential pick-up in momentum of India's economic activity during the second half of 2024-25, which is likely to sustain moving forward, according to the latest RBI monthly bulletin.

In a challenging and increasingly uncertain global environment, the Indian economy is poised to sustain its position as the fastest growing major economy during 2025-26 as per the IMF and World Bank estimates of GDP growth of 6.5 per cent and 6.7 per cent, respectively, the report points out.

It further states that the Union Budget 2025-26 prudently balances fiscal consolidation and growth objectives by continued focus on Capex alongside measures to boost household incomes and consumption.

The effective capital expenditure/GDP ratio is budgeted to improve to 4.3 per cent in 2025-26 from 4.1 per cent in 2024-25 (revised estimate).



Retail inflation moderated to a five-month low of 4.3 per cent in January, mainly due to a sharp decline in vegetable prices driven by the arrival of winter crops in the market, the report states.

High frequency indicators show that the economy is on a path of recovery during H2:2024-25 from the loss of momentum witnessed in H1.

Industrial activity has recorded an improvement over the previous quarter, as reflected in the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) in January.

Pick-up in tractor sales growth, and fuel consumption,

and sustained growth in air passenger traffic also point to a recovery in overall momentum, according to the bulletin.

It also highlights that rural demand continues to hold up, buoyed by increased farm incomes.

In rural areas, sales of Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies grew by 9.9 per cent in Q3:2024-25, much higher than 5.7 per cent in Q2.

Urban demand also exhibited a recovery with 5 per cent growth in Q3, being nearly double of 2.6 per cent in the previous quarter.

The enterprise surveys conducted by the Reserve Bank

corroborate this assessment. Listed non-government non-financial companies recorded acceleration in sales growth during Q3 as per early results.

On a sequential basis, operating profit margins have also turned out to be higher in line with improved sales growth, according to the report.

It further states that investment intentions of the private sector remained stable, with the total cost of projects sanctioned by banks/financial institutions (FIs) at close to 1 lakh crore in Q3:2024-25.

External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) and Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) for Capex purposes also recorded an uptick during Q3.

Uncertainty surrounding global trade and geopolitical landscape have had a bearing on domestic equity markets. The benchmark and broader markets declined on account of selling pressures from Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) as sentiments remained weak.

Indian Overseas Bank Launches Aadhaar-OTP Account Opening & API Banking Services



CHENNAI: Public sector lender Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) has introduced Aadhaar-OTP based account opening and API banking services to mark its 89th Foundation Day celebrations. These initiatives aim to simplify banking services for both individual and corporate customers.

The Chennai-headquartered bank has rolled out an Aadhaar-OTP based savings account opening facility, allowing customers to open accounts seamlessly via the bank's website. The digital onboarding process complies with the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Aadhaar OTP-based eKYC

(Know Your Customer) guidelines, ensuring a secure and hassle-free experience. With minimal documentation, customers can swiftly open accounts, subject to transaction limits as per regulatory norms.

To meet the rising demand for automation in corporate banking, IOB has also launched its API (Application Programming Interface) Banking service. This facility enables corporate customers to conduct transactions and intra-bank transfers in real-time directly from their accounting systems. API Banking provides a secure gateway for corporates to automate, optimize, and

enhance financial workflows. Transactions initiated within corporate accounting systems integrate directly with the bank's Core Banking System, eliminating redundant data entry and manual intervention.

Ajay Kumar Srivastava, Managing Director and CEO of IOB, emphasised the bank's dedication to digital transformation. "As we celebrate another milestone in IOB's journey, our focus remains steadfast on delivering seamless, secure, and customer-centric banking solutions."

The introduction of Aadhaar OTP-based account opening and API Banking aligns with our commitment to making banking simpler and more efficient for individuals and businesses alike," he stated.

With these digital initiatives, IOB aims to enhance customer experience and strengthen its presence in the evolving banking landscape, reinforcing its position as a forward-thinking financial institution.

GST & Customs Outreach Programme for MSMEs Held in Mumbai



MUMBAI: A significant seminar focusing on GST and customs regulations for MSMEs was conducted on February 18, 2025, in Navi Mumbai.

The event, titled 'GST & Customs Outreach Programme on Ease of Doing Business - Focus on MSMEs,' was jointly organised by the Directorate

General of Taxpayer Services (DGTS), Mumbai Zonal Unit, and the Navi Mumbai Branch of the Western India Regional Council (WIRC) of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI). Chief Guest Shri Mahesh Kumar Rustogi, Director General of Taxpayer Services, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), emphasised the federal nature of GST and its consensus-driven approach through the GST Council. He noted that this collaborative framework has successfully addressed the previous challenges of varying state tax rates while establishing a more equitable business environment. During the proceedings, Shri Sumit Kumar, Principal Additional Director General of DGTS, Mumbai Zonal Unit, provided a comprehensive overview of India's GST evolution. He highlighted the system's enhanced transparency and simplified procedures since implementation, particularly noting the reduced direct interaction between taxpayers and government officials. Kumar emphasised the critical role of tax practitioners in facilitating various processes, including registration, returns, refunds, and appeals, while explaining how the self-assessment-based system has effectively streamlined compliance for small businesses. The government's commitment to MSME development was detailed by Shri Milind Barapatre, Joint Director and Head of Office at the MSME Development and Facilitation Centre, Mumbai. He outlined various export-oriented initiatives, including a notable collaboration with the Postal Department, which has facilitated MSME access to global markets. Barapatre also discussed the 'Viksit Bharat' initiative, which aims to develop 6,000 products and strengthen micro-industries, thereby enhancing MSME competitiveness internationally.

As per the approved framework, the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) will provide 60 percent guarantee coverage to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs) for credit facilities extended to eligible MSMEs. This guarantee specifically applies to loans sanctioned for the purchase of equipment or machinery, addressing a critical need for capital investment in the MSME sector. The scheme incorporates several important eligibility criteria and operational parameters. To qualify, borrowers must be registered MSMEs with valid Udyam Registration Numbers, ensuring that benefits reach legitimately established enterprises. While the guaranteed amount is capped at Rs 100 crore per borrower, the scheme allows for projects with higher total costs, providing flexibility for larger capital investments.

DSP Mutual Fund Launches DSP Nifty Private Bank Index Fund



MUMBAI: DSP Mutual Fund today announced the launch of the DSP Nifty Private Bank Index Fund, an open-ended scheme replicating/tracking the Nifty Private Bank Index aiming to provide investors with a focused approach to investing in the private banking sector.

Investors who are bullish on the banking sector can invest in this fund, whose concentrated approach gets them exposure to the four largest private banks which comprise approximately 80% of the index. DSP believes that the concentration of larger banks within the Nifty Private Bank Index can be an advantage. Customers tend to trust & prefer larger banks more than other smaller peers. This facilitates higher credit growth, better access to capital and economies of scale - thereby helping these banks sustain and grow further. The market share of Indian private banks has also doubled in the last two decades*.

Indian Stock Market Ends Lower Amid Broad-Based Weakness, Weak Global Cues

MUMBAI: The Indian stock market closed lower on Friday and on a weekly basis, the Nifty and the Sensex extended their losses amid weak global cues and broad-based weakness.

At the closing bell, Sensex closed 424.90 points, or 0.56 per cent, down at 75,311.06 while the Nifty shed 117.25 points, or 0.51 per cent, to close at 22,795.90.

Nifty Bank closed at 48,981.20, down 353.35 points or 0.72 per cent. Overall, Nifty closed lower in 12 out of the last 13 trading sessions. Sectoral indices struggled, with 12 of 13 major indices closing in the red. The NSE Nifty Auto was the worst-performing sector,



while the NSE Nifty Metal rose the most. The Nifty Auto index dropped 2.5 per cent following reports that the government may slash import duties on electric vehicles.

Vikram Kasat of PL Capital-Prabhudas Lilladher said that Indian equity benchmarks opened lower, tracking weakness in global markets. Concerns over US retaliatory tariffs and persistent foreign selling continued to weigh on

sentiment. "Overnight losses on Wall Street, driven by a rise in US jobless claims and weak corporate outlooks, added pressure," he mentioned.

Hindalco Industries, Tata Steel, and Eicher Motors were the top gainers, while Mahindra & Mahindra, ICICI Bank, and Bharat Petroleum were among the top losers in the index. According to market experts, the domestic market continued to exhibit broad-based weakness, primarily influenced by investor concerns over the hawkish tone of the US Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) minutes, which signalled prolonged higher interest rates that could

constrain liquidity in emerging markets (EMs).

The rupee traded weak by 0.05 at 86.70 despite the dollar index slipping to 106.60, as foreign institutional investor (FII) selling continued, keeping pressure on the currency.

Going forward, the rupee is expected to trade in a range of 86.45-87.10, with global sentiment and capital flows playing a key role in determining direction, according to market watchers. Meanwhile, gold traded weak and remained volatile within a range, with Comex gold fluctuating between \$2,920 and \$2,935. At MCX, gold moved between Rs 85,900 and Rs 85,400.

India's Wholesale Inflation Eases to 2.3 pc In January amid Falling Food Prices

NEW DELHI: India's wholesale inflation showed a modest decline in January 2025, easing to 2.3 per cent from 2.4 per cent in December, according to data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry on Friday.

The slight moderation in the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) primarily reflects softening food prices and improved supply conditions.

The ministry attributed January's positive inflation rate to in-



creased prices across several key sectors, including food product manufacturing, food articles, other manufacturing activities, non-food articles, and textile

manufacturing.

This development coincides with recent National Statistical Office data showing retail inflation, measured by the Consumer Price Index, reaching a five-month low in January, largely due to moderating food prices.

A detailed analysis of food articles reveals inflation in this category decreased to 5.9 per

cent in January from 6 per cent in December. Notably, vegetable prices experienced significant relief, with inflation dropping to 8.4 per cent from the previous month's 28.7 per cent.

While potato inflation showed some improvement, declining to 74.3 per cent from December's 93.2 per cent, onion prices saw an uptick with inflation rising to 28.3 per cent from 16.8 per cent.

Low inflation Boosting Development



SATISH SINGH

Due to reduction in prices of food items, the retail inflation rate based on Consumer Price Index (CPI) came down to 4.31 percent in the month of January, which is the lowest in the last 5 months. It was at 5.22 percent in the month of December, while in January 2024 it was at 5.1 percent. Earlier in the month of November, the inflation rate was at 5.48 percent.

Food items contribute about 50 percent to the inflation basket. Their inflation came down to 6.02 percent in January on a month-on-month basis. In December, it came down from 9.04 percent to 8.39 percent, which was at 8.30 percent in January 2024. At the same time, rural inflation came down from 5.95 percent to 5.76 percent in December and urban inflation also came down from 4.89 percent to 4.58 percent in December.

The biggest reason for the current decline is the sharp reduction in vegetable prices. According to the data, inflation in food and beverages was at 5.68 percent in January, while it was at 7.7 percent in December. Especially the prices of vegetables have come down from 25.6 percent to 11.35 percent, which has brought great relief to the common man. In the same sequence, the inflation of grains was at 6.24 percent

in January, which was at 6.5 percent in December. The inflation of meat and fish came down to 5.25 percent in January, which was at 5.3 percent in December.

It is worth noting that in December, the Reserve Bank of India had lowered the inflation forecast for the financial year 2024-25 to 4.8 percent, whereas earlier the central bank had estimated it to be at the level of 4.5 percent. At the same time, inflation is expected to remain within the tolerance limit set by the Reserve Bank of India in the financial year 2025 and financial year 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 a person and the demand for goods and services decreases. Then, their sales decrease, their production decreases, the company incurs 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 the pace of development can be accelerated only by reducing inflation.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) has projected the GDP growth rate to be 6.4 percent in its first advance estimate of 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 GDP to grow at the rate of 6.6 percent during the financial year 2024-25. Earlier, the GDP growth rate was minus 6.60 percent during the financial year 2020-21. Subsequently, 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.

However, despite the low GDP growth rate of India, 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.

Meanwhile, India Industrial Production (IIP) growth rate declined to 3.2 percent in December 2024 due to weak performance of mining and manufacturing sectors. Also,

the government has revised the IIP data for November 2024 from 5.2 percent to 5.00 percent.

In view of the slow pace of mining and manufacturing sector and the slow pace of GDP in the last two quarters, the government wants to increase the pace of development. Therefore, the budget has also emphasized on increasing investment, savings and consumption, because only by accelerating these economic activities be accelerated and development can be accelerated.

To boost economic activities, the Reserve Bank of India reduced the repo rate by 0.25 percent in the monetary policy review conducted on February 7, bringing it down from 6.50 percent to 6.25 percent. It is worth noting that the repo rate has been reduced after about 5 years. The central bank was avoiding reducing the repo rate till now mainly due to inflation.

After having loan growth between 14 percent and 16 percent in the last two years, overall credit growth has been slowing down for the last few months and it has come down

to 11.2 percent in December 2024. A major reason for this is the high lending rate. Banks do not have cheap capital. Therefore, they are forced to lend at high rates and due to the availability of loans at high 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.

Due to reduction of 0.25% in repo rate by Reserve Bank of India, banks will get capital at cheaper rate and they will be able to give loan at cheaper rate and when loan is available at cheaper rate, then both common people and businessmen will take loan, due to which both investment and savings will increase and consumption will increase along with increase in economic activities.

In the budget, the government has clearly stated that its aim is to accelerate development. Despite the GDP growth rate falling in two quarters, the Indian economy remains strong, and India's growth rate is also higher than that of developed countries. Therefore, to further increase the growth rate, the Reserve Bank of India has cut the repo rate. Owing to the reduction in inflation in the month of January, the way has been cleared to cut the repo rate in the upcoming monetary reviews, which will boost the country's growth pace.

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

Union FinMin Hands over Keys to Homebuyers in Mumbai



MUMBAI: At a post budget interaction event in Mumbai, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman today handed over keys to homebuyers from select projects in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), whose long-stressed residential projects have been completed under the "Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing (SWAMIH I) Investment Fund". This milestone marks the completion of 50,000 homes,

reaffirming SWAMIH's mission to provide relief to stressed homebuyers and revive stressed residential projects across the country.

Homebuyers from projects including Avant Hillways, Vision Heights and Shubham Trident received their keys at the event, symbolizing the transformational role of the SWAMIH Fund in restoring hope and stability to families impacted by stressed housing

developments.

Established in 2019 and managed by SBI Ventures Ltd., a State Bank of India Group company, the SWAMIH Fund is sponsored by the Ministry of Finance. As India's largest social impact fund for the real estate sector, it addresses critical funding gaps for stressed and brownfield residential projects. With no precedent or comparable peer globally, the Fund is a pioneering initiative for impact-driven investing.

Prem Prabhakar, MD and CEO of SBI Ventures Ltd, said that "With the vision and support of the Government of India, this fund has paved the way for the completion of numerous housing projects, ensuring that thousands of families can finally call these homes their own".

RBI Raises Financial Awareness at Rose Festival 2025

TANVIR KAUR
Chandigarh

The Reserve Bank of India, Chandigarh Regional Office, is conducting a financial awareness campaign at the ongoing Rose Festival from February 21 to February 23, 2025. The campaign aims to educate the public about various financial frauds and safeguard measures to prevent them.

As part of the initiative, a Nukkad Natak is being performed to creatively engage the audience and effectively spread awareness messages. The street play highlights different types of financial frauds and encourages people to stay vigilant. Additionally, a digital financial awareness quiz was orga-



nized for the students of Government High School, Maloya Colony, Chandigarh. This quiz aims to familiarize students with secure digital banking practices and encourage them to exercise caution while conducting online financial transactions. Visitors at the festival are also being pro-

vided with financial literacy and awareness materials to enhance their knowledge of secure banking practices. Furthermore, officials from the Reserve Bank of India are sharing crucial information on safe digital banking methods to help people protect themselves from financial frauds.

INTERNATIONAL

Zelensky responds to Trump's claim of falling ratings, says US President living in 'disinformation space'

KYIV: Hours after US President Donald Trump alleged that Volodymyr Zelensky holds a "4 per cent approval rating", the Ukrainian President responded on Wednesday saying that Trump was living in a "disinformation space".

"Unfortunately, President Trump, who we have great respect for as leader of the American people, lives in this disinformation space," Zelensky told reporters in Kyiv.

Local media in Kyiv also highlighted a poll, carried out between February 4 to 9 and published after Trump's comments, to highlight Zelensky's popularity. "Around 57 % of Ukrainians trust President Volodymyr Zelensky as of February, marking an increase of five percentage points since December, according to a survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) published on February 19... The latest survey shows that Zelensky continues to enjoy support from the majority of Ukrainians,



even marking a slight increase in trust after a year of steady decline in popularity throughout 2024," reported the Kyiv Independent on Wednesday. Interestingly, Keith Kellogg, the US Special Envoy for Ukraine and Russia, has also arrived in Kyiv on Wednesday and is scheduled to meet Zelensky soon. The Ukrainian media quoted Kellogg as describing his trip as "a chance for good

potential negotiations." Part of my mission is to listen before returning to the United States to report to President Donald Trump, Kellogg reportedly said. He also emphasised that the United States recognises the importance of security guarantees for Ukraine. Zelensky's scathing comment came less than 24 hours after top officials from Russia and the United States held discussions

for nearly five hours in Saudi Arabia's Riyadh on Tuesday.

Both countries stated that they will soon announce teams to negotiate a path to ending the war in Ukraine besides also ensuring the "earliest possible appointment" of ambassadors in both Moscow and Washington.

"Russia and the United States will hold regular consultations on Ukraine after both sides appoint negotiating teams," Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said at a press briefing following talks with US officials in Riyadh, on Tuesday. A meeting of deputy foreign ministers will be scheduled in the near future to "remove barriers" to the work of embassies, Lavrov said following the talks with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz and US special envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff.

On the Russian side, senior political, intelligence, and economic officials participated, including Yuri Ushakov, the Kremlin's foreign affairs advisor.

EAM Jaishankar Meets Counterparts from Russia and China during G20 Meeting



JOHANNESBURG: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met several foreign ministers, including Sergei Lavrov (Russia), Wang Yi (China), Penny Wong (Australia), on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers Meeting in Johannesburg on Thursday.

He also held discussions with Ethiopian Foreign Minister Gedion Timotheos, Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira, Singapore FM Vivian Balakrishnan and many other dignitaries attending the event.

"Good to see colleagues from across the world," the EAM

posted on X along with several photographs of him holding informal discussions with the foreign ministers.

"Catching up with counterpart Foreign Ministers at the G20 meeting," Jaishankar said in another post. Earlier, the EAM met Brazilian Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira, discussing bilateral ties, global developments, work in the G20 and Brazil's BRICS Presidency.

Brazil assumed the presidency of BRICS, the promising forum for political and economic cooperation among nations of the Global South,

on January 1, 2025. BRICS, an acronym representing Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has recently expanded its membership to include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Ethiopia, Iran and Indonesia.

India and Brazil share a very close and multifaceted relationship both at bilateral level as well as in multilateral fora such as BRICS, BASIC, G-20, G-4, IBSA, and International Solar Alliance. EAM Jaishankar also met Minister for Foreign Affairs of Singapore Vivian Balakrishnan on the sidelines of the G20 FMM. "Always a good conversation with Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan of Singapore, this time in Johannesburg on the sidelines of G20 FMM. Discussed the state of the world and our work in furthering bilateral ties," he posted on X. India-Singapore relations were elevated to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Singapore in September 2024.

Why are we giving \$21 million to India? They got lot more money: Trump on voter funds row



WASHINGTON: As the US Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) cancelled \$21 million funding for "voter turnout in India," US President Donald Trump voiced in favour of the decision. Speaking at his Mar-a-Lago residence in Florida, Trump raised the question of why \$21 million was given to India, a country with a lot more money.

"Why are we giving \$21 million to India? They got a lot more money. They are one of the highest taxing countries in the world in terms of us; we can hardly get in there because their tariffs are so high. I have a lot of respect for India and their Prime Minister, but giving \$21 million for voter turnout? In India? What about voter turnout here?" Trump remarked.

The controversy erupted after the DOGE, led by Elon Musk, announced the cancellation of the \$21 million grant on February 16. In a post shared on X, DOGE outlined several foreign assistance programmes that had been deemed unnecessary or excessive, with the India voter turnout project topping the list.

KIIT Nepal student commits suicide, campus unrest



ARABINDA MOHAPATRA Bhubaneswar

The alleged suicide of a B. Tech student from Nepal in her hostel room has triggered unrest on the campus of a private university in the city. The deceased Prakriti Lamsal was a third year student at the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT). She was found dead in her room on Sunday afternoon. Prakriti (20) was pursuing a B.Tech in computer science from the university. She committed suicide by hanging herself from the ceiling fan. The suicide is being attributed to her strained relations with her boyfriend. One of her relatives filed a police complaint alleging that she was being blackmailed by a male student which forced her to take the extreme step.

The death triggered unrest on the campus, with Nepalese students blocking the road near the campus. On Monday morning, the university was closed sine die for students from Nepal who were asked to vacate the university campus immediately.

Mexican President says she does not fear Trump's threats



MEXICO CITY: Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum has said that she does not fear US President Donald Trump and his threats of mass deportations, steep trade tariffs, and military "intervention" to combat the drug cartels, as she has the backing of the Mexican people.

During a daily press conference, when asked if the Mexican President feared Trump's threats, Sheinbaum on Wednesday responded, "No. I have the support of the people. When one has certainty and conviction and knows what one's principles are, why would one be afraid?"

She allayed concerns over Trump's measures, noting there is ongoing dialogue between the two governments, Xinhua news agency reported.

The President said she would never allow Mexico's sovereignty to be violated, but "if it were to be violated, there is an entire country to defend the homeland".

Sheinbaum's statements come one day after Trump said Mexico "is run by drug cartels, criminal organisations the US government has designated as terrorists. Trump also accused Mexican authorities of "allowing millions of people" to enter the United States illegally and offered his "help" to stem the flow of immigration. Officials from both countries will meet in Washington this week to negotiate the suspension of tariffs on Mexican products and strategies to combat drug trafficking, particularly the flow of fentanyl into the United States.

Trump 'very frustrated' with Zelensky, says National Security Advisor Mike Waltz

National Security Advisor Mike Waltz said US President Donald Trump was "very, very frustrated" with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, as he highlighted the growing rift between the Trump administration and Kyiv.

Waltz on Thursday didn't answer a question about whether Trump believes Russian President Vladimir Putin or Zelensky is more responsible for the ongoing war in Ukraine, CNN reported.

"(Trump's) goal here is to bring this war to an end, period, and there has been ongoing fighting on both sides—it is World War I-style, trench warfare," Waltz told reporters at the White House briefing.

"His frustration with President Zelensky—that you've heard—is multi-fold. One, there needs to be a deep appreciation



for what the American people, what the American taxpayer, what President Trump did in his first term, and what we've done since. So some of the rhetoric coming out of Kyiv, frankly, and insults to President Trump, were unacceptable."

On Truth Social on Wednesday, Trump called Zelensky a "dictator without elections", prompting the Ukrainian Presi-

dent to say that Trump "lives in this disinformation space" and is "helping) Putin out of his isolation".

During the White House briefing, Waltz wouldn't answer whether Trump believes Putin is a dictator.

"Look, President Trump is obviously very frustrated right now with President Zelensky—the fact that he hasn't come to the table, that he hasn't been willing to take this opportunity that we have offered. I think he eventually will get to that point, and I hope so very quickly," he said.

"But President Trump is, as we made clear to our Russian counterparts, and I want to make clear today—he's focused on stopping the fighting and moving forward, and we could argue all day long about what's happened in the past."

Macron to Visit US for Talks with Trump over Ukraine & Tariffs

PARIS: French President Emmanuel Macron will travel to the United States for discussions with his US counterpart, Donald Trump, focusing on the Ukraine issue and impending US tariffs, French Minister Delegate for European Affairs Benjamin Haddad confirmed on Thursday.

Speaking to French television channel LCI, Haddad revealed that Macron had already spoken with Trump twice this week regarding Ukraine. "Our approach is to maintain dialogue with the president of the United States to ensure that the voice of the Europeans is heard in this negotiation," he said.

Macron is expected to emphasise to Trump that "the future of Ukraine cannot be decided without the Ukrainians, and the future and security of Europe cannot be negotiated and decided without the Eu-



ropeans." Haddad stressed that Europe has contributed more to Ukraine than the United States, and therefore, must have a say in the process. Moreover, Macron will also address tariffs that Trump plans to impose on European products. "A trade war, protectionism is not in anyone's interest," the minister warned.

This week, Macron has hosted European and non-European partners twice to coordinate a common stance on Ukraine. Both meetings concluded with a unified position that any

peace talks should include both Ukraine and Europe, Xinhua news agency reported.

On Wednesday, Macron said that France is not preparing to send ground troops to Ukraine.

Macron, however, did not rule out the possibility that if a peace agreement is reached between Kyiv and Moscow, France could send experts or even a limited number of troops to non-conflict zones to "support Ukrainians and demonstrate solidarity." He also emphasised that there would be "no lasting peace without the Ukrainians and the Europeans." On Monday, Macron hosted a meeting on Ukraine, bringing together leaders from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Commission, along with representatives from France, Germany, Britain, Poland, Spain, Italy, Denmark, and the Netherlands.

US planning to reallocate \$50 billion of Pentagon budget, fire generals: Reports

NEW YORK: President Donald Trump's administration is planning to cut \$50 billion in various areas of the Pentagon budget and reallocate them to others considered priority areas like preventing illegal migration.

A list of generals and admirals who could be fired had been drawn up and circulated to Republican members of Congress.

Acting Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Salesses asked defence officials to find at least \$50 billion that can be cut and transferred to "programmes aligned with President Trump's priorities", Military Times reported. NBC reported that the allocations for the Indo-Pacific region would not be touched.

Earlier reports said the cuts would be 8 per cent and gave the impression that they would



be net cuts to the overall budget which is now \$849.8 billion.

NBC said that according to officials, the list for firings targets those closely associated with former Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, worked on minority-oriented programmes, or "have voiced opinions that Trump's allies viewed as politically out of line with his agenda".

It was not known if the top military official, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff CQ Brown, was on the list.

All 80 onboard have miraculous escape as jet crashes, flips over in Toronto

TORONTO: Eighty passengers had a miraculous escape when their jet crashed here and flipped while landing in heavy wind in a snowed-in airport.

The Delta flight flying in from Minneapolis in the US lost one wing when it hit the runway, turned over on Monday afternoon, and lay on its back as the crew helped the passengers safely off the plane.

Officials said that 18 people, including a child, were taken to hospitals and two were in a critical, but not life-threatening, condition.

Videos of the crash showed crew members shepherding passengers out of the plane on a snow-swept airfield while firefighters rushed to coat the plane and the surrounding area with foam to prevent a fire outbreak.

The Canadian-made Em-



braer CRJ-900 jet was operated by Delta subsidiary Endeavor Air.

Canadian Transportation Safety Board will conduct an investigation into the unusual accident where a large passenger jet flipped over. It will



be assisted by the US Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board.

Delta CEO Ed Bastian said in a statement. "We are working to confirm the details and will share the most current informa-

tion on news.delta.com as soon as it becomes available".

Canada's weather service that there were wind gusts of 61 kilometres per hour when the plane was trying to land.

John Nelson, a passenger on the plane who posted on Facebook dramatic videos of the crash and passengers escaping the plane, scene said, "We just landed. Our plane crashed. It's upside down. Fire department is on site. We're upside down. Everybody, most people appear to be OK".

The Delta crash caps a series of aircraft accidents in North America that began on January 29 when a military helicopter hit an American Airlines jet in Washington, sending them both into the Potomac River and killing all 67 on the two planes.

Dengue outbreak declared in Philippine capital's most populous city

MANILA: The Mayor of Quezon City, the most populous city in the capital region of the Philippines, declared a dengue outbreak on Saturday, citing a nearly 200 per cent surge in cases.

From January 1 to February 14, the city's health department recorded 1,769 dengue cases, nearly 200 per cent higher than last year, said Quezon City Mayor Joy Belmonte. Belmonte said 10, including eight minors, have died from the disease.

"Our declaration of a dengue outbreak ensures that we are on top of the situation, and we are doing everything we can to protect our residents from this deadly disease, especially our children," Belmonte said.

Fifty-eight per cent of the reported cases involve school-aged children aged five to 17, while 44 per cent are children aged one to 10. As a primary action to address the late diagnosis of dengue, all 66 city health centres



will be open during the weekends from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. to accommodate possible dengue patients, Belmonte said.

The city's outbreak declaration came one day after the Philippines' Department of Health noted increased water and food-borne diseases, influenza-like illnesses, leptospirosis, and dengue. According to government data, Quezon City has a population of nearly 3 mil-

lion as of 2020, Xinhua news agency reported. Dengue virus is the most important arbovirus among humans. With around half the world population at risk and recent estimates of about 60–100 million symptomatic infections per year.

Dengue is a major public health problem in the Philippines and is endemic in all regions of the country. The country's outbreaks are largely

seasonal, with most episodes occurring during the wet season (June–February). Recent data from 2023 emphasise escalated dengue outbreaks in several countries, particularly Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Fiji, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Viet Nam. Additionally, non-endemic countries are increasingly facing dengue as a significant public health concern.

Dengue prevention and outbreak response involves several agencies in the public health sector. Addressing these challenges requires a multidisciplinary and multisectoral integrated approach, especially at national level to achieve its goal of reducing the impact on public health. The strain on epidemic response capacity due to simultaneous concurrent outbreaks coupled with political crises highlights the need for robust emergency response mechanisms and strengthened collaboration among stakeholders.

US, Japan, South Korea discuss security scenarios in Indo-Pacific and North Korea

MUNICH: Security scenarios in the Indo-Pacific and North Korea were discussed by the United States, Japan, and South Korea on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference 2025.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Japanese Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi, and South Korean Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yul stressed their shared commitment to ensure the safety, security, and prosperity of the three countries and the Indo-Pacific region, a joint statement issued by the US State Department said.

Expressing their serious concerns over and the need to address together the DPRK's nuclear and missile programmes and malicious cyber activities, they reaffirmed their resolute commitment to the complete denuclearisation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Reso-



lutions (UNSCRs).

Condemning the gross violations of human rights in North Korea and its nuclear and missile programmes, the trilateral cooperation pledged to take decisive actions to counter threats, enhance economic resilience, and advance shared interests. Reaffirming their commitment to bolstering defence and deterrence, they emphasised their shared commitment to the safety, security, and prosperity of their three countries and the broader

Indo-Pacific region. Opposing any unilateral attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the waters of the Indo-Pacific, including the South China Sea, they emphasised their commitment to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific and ensuring international law prevails.

The partnership mainly aims to counter China's aggressive policy in the Indo-Pacific and nuclear threats from North Korea. In the North China Sea,

China and Japan are at loggerheads for the territorial sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands. The trilateral cooperation collaborates to advance its security infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific to counter the assertiveness of China and maintain peace and stability in the region.

Last week, President Donald Trump and Japan Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba met in Washington, DC during which they affirmed their determination to pursue a new golden age for the relations between the two nations that uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific and ensures peace and prosperity.

Notably, North Korean President Kim Jong Un never shied away from issuing nuclear threats against the United States and South Korea in case of a conflict.

In October 2024, Kim threatened to destroy South Korea permanently with nuclear weapons if provoked.

Priyanka Chopra channels her inner Urmila Matondkar



MUMBAI: Priyanka Chopra stays on top of her social media game. Recently, the diva took to the stories section of her IG and dropped a stylish mirror selfie.

Posing in a gray crop top with matching baggy pants, PeeCee wrote, "Channeling my inner @urmilamatondkarofficial".

We can hear the track "Mangta Hai Kya" from Urmila Matondkar and Amir Khan's 1995 movie "Rangeela" playing in the background.

Prior to this, she used social media to drop a bunch of nostalgic pictures from her childhood, teens, and the initial phase of her career.

Not just that, the stunner also penned the story behind each and every photograph in the

- 8: Boston. major upgrade in confidence 1997
 - 9: 90s baby. Stylin' with @irf.ahm 1997
 - 10: My first modelling shoot in Bareilly. Hair and makeup by me 1999
 - 11: First portfolio shot. Bareilly. 1999
 - 12: Miss India official portrait shot by @atulkasbekar 2000
 - 13: Miss india contestant. 2000
 - 14: Baby steps into movies.. Paper clipping my grandma saved of the mahurat of a shelved film called Asar with @ajaydevgn and the late Yusuf sahib approx 2002
 - 15: Dostana Miami post shoot shenanigans, why don't ask! 2008
- There's so much more that happened after that, but will require another post and another break between shots. See you soon with some more nostalgia".
- Work-wise, Priyanka Chopra is reported to be in India to shoot for SS Rajamouli's next, temporarily named, "SSMB29", alongside Mahesh Babu.

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



Indian train passengers face increasing risks due to overcrowding, vandalism, and a lack of security. Recent incidents, including stampedes and violence, highlight the urgent need for safety measures.

Indian Railways, one of the world's largest and most vital transportation networks, is facing a growing safety crisis. While the government continues to expand railway infrastructure, the fundamental issue of passenger security remains unresolved. Shocking incidents of unruly crowds vandalizing trains, assaulting passengers, and creating stampedes expose the vulnerabilities of train travel in India.

The recent stampede at New Delhi Railway Station, caused by overselling general category tickets and poor crowd management, was a tragic reminder of the system's inefficiencies. Hundreds of passengers, desperate to board overcrowded trains, found themselves trapped in chaos, leading to injuries and panic. Despite past warnings, authorities failed to implement effective crowd control measures.

Meanwhile, violent incidents have been reported across various train routes, particularly those linked to major religious events like the Maha Kumbh. Angry passengers, unable to board due to overcrowding, resorted to vandalism—breaking windows, throwing stones, and even inserting sticks through the train's iron grilles to attack those inside. Such incidents raise serious concerns about

the absence of proper security personnel at railway stations and inside compartments.

Safety First: The railway is often called the nation's lifeline, yet its passengers' safety is frequently neglected. Despite repeated appeals, railway police personnel are rarely seen patrolling platforms or compartments, leaving travelers vulnerable to theft, violence, and accidents. It is unacceptable that such a crucial mode of transport operates with little to no visible security presence. The responsibility for this crisis lies with unlawful passengers who resort to violent behavior and the railway authorities who fail to enforce the order. If this trend continues, public confidence in train travel will further deteriorate, forcing people to look for alternative modes of transport.

The railways must take immediate and decisive steps to ensure the safety of its passengers. Every train should have designated Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel on board, particularly in general compartments and high-risk routes. Additionally, security personnel must be deployed in more significant numbers at major railway stations to prevent crowd mishandling and ensure law and order. To avoid dangerous overcrowding, the railway authorities

Train Travel Crisis: Safety at Stake



must limit the sale of general category tickets based on train capacity. Digital ticketing systems should be optimized to monitor and regulate the number of passengers.

Take Precautions: Railway stations need automated entry and exit systems to regulate passenger flow and prevent stampedes. Additionally, well-marked zones for boarding and deboarding should be introduced to avoid dangerous congestion at platform edges. To track and manage passenger movement, AI-based crowd monitoring through CCTV cameras should be implemented at key railway stations. Real-time monitoring will allow railway staff to intervene immediately in case of disruptions, ensuring a more secure travel environment. Strict penalties should be enforced against individuals guilty of damaging

railway property or endangering passengers. Public awareness campaigns must also be launched to educate travelers about the consequences of unruly behavior and vandalism, reinforcing discipline and responsibility.

Will Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw take the necessary steps to make Indian trains safer? While the government is expanding railway networks and modernizing stations, these developments are meaningless if passengers do not feel secure while traveling. The focus should not just be on more trains and better infrastructure but also on ensuring law and order inside and around railway premises. The authorities must act now before another tragedy unfolds on the tracks.

The author is a senior journalist and columnist. Views are personal.

Raj Kundra and Geeta Basra commence shooting for Rakesh Mehta's Punjabi film 'Mehr'



MUMBAI: Raj Kundra and Geeta Basra will be seen sharing the screen for the first time in Rakesh Mehta's latest Punjabi film, "Mehr".

The duo has already kick-started filming for their next. Speaking about this film, filmmaker Rakesh Mehta said, "Punjabi cinema is at a turning point, and Mehr is a film that mixes emotion, drama, and heart. Raj and Geeta bring so much depth to their roles, and I can already see the magic unfolding on set. This one's going to stay with people for a long time."

Raj Kundra, who will be making his Punjabi film debut with "Mehr" shared, "This story had me hooked the moment I heard it. Punjabi cinema has an unmatched warmth and soul, and Mehr captures that beautifully. Working with Rakesh Mehta and this brilliant team is an incredible experience. I can't wait for audiences to see what we're creating."

Raj Kundra announced "Mehr" during Lohri this year. Sharing a motion poster of the film on social media, he wrote in the caption, "This Lohri, we are overjoyed to announce Mehr—a tale of relationships, love, and life, inspired by the blessings that surround us. As Mehr means blessings, we humbly seek your love and prayers for this special journey. May Wahe Guru's Mehr be with us all as we bring this heartfelt story to life."

The motion poster also included the voice-over, "Kaahani sirf hero ki nahi hoti, zero ki bhi hoti hai... (It's a story about zero and not a hero)." "Mehr" is touted to be a tale of love, relationships, and second chances, wrapped in the rich cultural fabric of Punjab. The drama enjoys a stellar cast with Raj Kundra as the lead, accompanied by Agamveer Singh, Geeta Basra, Baninder Bunny, Savita Bhatti, Rupinder Rup, Deep Mandep, Ashish Duggal, Hobby Dhalwal, Tarsem Paul, and Kulvir Sony as the ancillary cast.

Bobby Deol: his 'Ek Badnaam Aashram' character is the most vulnerable in new part of the show

MUMBAI: Actor Bobby Deol, who essays the lead in the streaming show 'Ek Badnaam Aashram', has said that his character is the most vulnerable in the new part of the show.

The show is set to return with the 2nd part of its third season. The trailer was unveiled on Wednesday. The trailer gives a glimpse into the cracks forming in Baba Nirala's empire, the tensions flaring with his close allies to Pammi's fearless return and Bhopa Swami's thirst for power.

Reflecting on his role and



him even more dangerous. Every decision he makes adds layers to his character, making the story even more gripping. It's an emotionally intense, action-packed ride, and I can't wait for audiences to experience it".

Directed and produced by National Award-winner Prakash Jha, 'Ek Badnaam Aashram' season 3 part 2 also stars Aaditi Pohankar, Darshan Kumaar, Chandan Roy Sanyal, Vikram Kochhar, Tridha Choudhury, Anupriya Goenka, Rajeev Siddhartha, and Esha Gupta in key roles.

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Samantha loves her own company, spends three days in silence



MUMBAI: Actress Samantha Ruth Prabhu has spoken about loving her own company and that she can spend time in silence sans her phone.

Samantha took to her Instagram stories, where she shared that she has gone for a "Silence sadhna". She posted a picture of a card, which read "Silence". Alongside the image, she wrote: "Three days in silence. No phone. No communication. Just me for company. "Somehow being alone with ourselves has become one of the scariest things. Would I do it again? A million times, yes. Would I recommend you try it? A million times, yes."

She also took a poll for her fans, from which around 88 percent said that they would like to try it as well. Last month, the actress talked about the importance of meditation in her everyday life and says that for her it has become "her anchor".

Samantha took to Instagram, where she shared a video of her meditating.

For the caption, she wrote: "Meditation. If there's one thing I wish all of you would try, it's this. Just 15 minutes of meditation every day — in whatever way works for you. Sit in silence, focus on your breath, or follow a guided meditation on YouTube. There's no right or wrong way, nothing formal — just the simple act of tuning in."

"For me, meditation has become my anchor — a way to return to the ocean of calm and peace that's always within."

She added that no matter how chaotic the world gets, I know that quiet spot inside her is "always there, waiting."

"When you learn to find your way home to yourself, the noise outside loses its grip. Try it. Just for today. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and see what happens. PS: Don't bother about the chatter in your mind. The trick is to simply watch your thoughts and let them pass. Don't get entangled with them. PPS: Don't forget to tell me how it goes. Let's do this!!"

Hrithik Roshan and Ameesha Patel's Reunion Ignites Fans' Wishes For 'Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai 2'

MUMBAI: Actors Hrithik Roshan and Ameesha Patel's recent reunion sparked a wave of excitement among fans on social media.

The duo, who shared screen space in the iconic "Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai", has left fans eagerly hoping for a sequel. As photos and videos from their reunion went viral, many are now demanding "Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai 2." Ameesha also took to her Instagram handle and shared a heartwarming photo of herself posing with Hrithik, adding their popular song "Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai" to the post.

In the image, both flaunted radiant smiles as they posed together. For the caption, the 'Gadar' actress wrote, "About last night — lovely evening with SONIA's ROHIT — for me, you'll always be my Duggu BROSNAH first and then @hrithikroshan the superstar later." Notably, fans were quick to react, with many demanding "Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai 2."

Echoing similar sentiments, one fan commented, "Really looking forward to watching them together as a lead pair opposite each other! Really wish a producer-director is reading this!! Big fan of @



ameeshapatel9 & @hrithikroshan." Another said, "Vote for - Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai 2." A third user wrote, "My favorite couple, pliss Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai 2 plissss, we

wait." "Part 2 banana chaiye," read another comment.

Directed and produced by Rakesh Roshan, "Kaho Naa Pyaar Hai" marked the Bollywood debut of both Hrithik and Ameesha. The 2000 romantic thriller also featured Anupam Kher, Dalip Tahil, Mohnish Bahl, Ashish Vidyarthi, Satish Shah, Farida Jalal, Asha Patel, Rajesh Tandon, and Tannaz Irani. Upon its release on January 14, 2000, the film became an instant blockbuster, grossing over Rs 800 million worldwide. It went on to become the second-highest-grossing film of 2000

globally.

At the star-studded success bash of Netflix's 'The Roshans,' Hrithik shared a heartwarming moment with Ameesha. The glitzy event was attended by an array of celebrities, including Rekha, Neetu Kapoor, Ameesha Patel, Anu Malik, Saba Azad, Shabana Azmi, Javed Akhtar, Bhushan Kumar, Sam Kaushal, Mallika Sherawat, Pashmina Roshan, Jeetendra, Alka Yagnik, Jackie and Tiger Shroff, Anupam Kher, Vaani Kapoor, Siddharth Anand, Udit Narayan, and David Dhawan, among many others.

'Illness to Wellness' Handwashing awareness event promotes to Preventing Diseases & Securing Good Health

ASSOCHAM Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility and Air Force Golden Jubilee Institute organize interactive handwashing awareness activities for school children

TANVIR KAUR
New Delhi

In a strong effort to promote good health practices and hygiene habits among students, the ASSOCHAM Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility (AFCRSR), the social arm of ASSOCHAM, along with the Air Force Golden Jubilee Institute, Subroto Park, New Delhi organized an "Illness to Wellness" handwashing awareness demonstration activity.

Supported by the hygiene brand Savlon, the initiative focused on educating students about the importance of proper handwashing and its preventive power to keep illnesses at



bay and maintain overall good health and well-being.

Around 650 primary students from grade III to grade V and 80 specially abled children participated in the event. The students were actively engaged through a series of activities - interactive demonstrations led by health experts, informative sessions on hygiene,

and activities to help students understand the significance of clean hands in reducing the spread of germs and infections.

Teachers and staff also participated with a lot of enthusiasm in guiding the students on the correct handwashing techniques using soap and water. The participating students, in turn, took a pledge

to adhere to best practices for handwashing and maintain hygiene to ward off infections and diseases. They also took part in an exciting quiz, further reinforcing their understanding of the importance of hand hygiene.

Speaking about the initiative, Anil Rajput, Chairperson, ASSOCHAM National Council on CSR said, "School children can be a force multiplier as they will not only change their own habits but will effectively bring about a change in the entire ecosystem that they inhabit. I am pleased to see that under the 'Illness to Wellness' campaign, more and more schools, with the Air Force School, Subroto Park being the latest addition, carrying out impactful activities to raise awareness among children about handwashing.

Nimrat Kaur Immerses Herself in Mysticism of Mahakumbh

MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Nimrat Kaur recently embarked on a spiritual journey to the Mahakumbh.

The "Sky Force" actress took to Instagram handle to offer a glimpse into her unique experience. She shared vibrant snapshots, including moments from the rituals and the picturesque journey. Through photos and videos, Nimrat beautifully captured the energy of Mahakumbh, including an impactful clip of the aarti and the profound aura that surrounds the place. In one of the videos, Nimrat is seen performing the aarti, fully immersed in the spiritual experience. One of the photos shows her posing against the backdrop of the vibrant surroundings, capturing the essence of the place. Meanwhile, on the work front, the 'Airlift' actress was recently seen in the patriotic action thriller "Sky Force," where she shared screen space with Ak-



shay Kumar, Veer Pahariya, and Sara Ali Khan. Nimrat portrayed Akshay's on-screen wife in the action thriller. Interestingly, the 'Dasvi' actress treated her house help and their children to a special screening of the film. She shared the heartwarming experience on social media, posting adorable photos of them enjoying the movie together. Nimrat will be next seen in the upcoming political thriller "Section 84," where she will be seen alongside Bollywood megastar Amitabh Bachchan and Diana Penty. She was last seen in the film "Sajini Shinde Ka Viral Video," where she played the role of Bela Barot.

Akshay Kumar on 'Mahakal Chalo': Want to make songs that bring people closer to their calling

MUMBAI: Bollywood star Akshay Kumar shared his thoughts about singing and shooting 'Mahakal Chalo' and said that he wants to make songs that bring people closer to their calling.

"Some connections are beyond words, beyond time. Last year, it was 'Shambhu,' and now, 'Mahakal Chalo'—both of these journeys brought me closer to my faith," Akshay said.

He added: "That's all I wish to do for others, I want to make songs that bring people closer to their calling, to help make them feel like they can face the day ahead."

'Mahakal Chalo' is a devotional track that expresses Ak-



shay's undying faith in Lord Shiva. The song joined forces with Palash Sen and Vikram Montrose to create the track. Akshay added: "Every moment spent creating this with Palash Sen and Vikram Montrose has been filled with faith and devotion. Singing for Mahadev is a reminder that He chooses the moments, and we simply surrender."

Meanwhile, 'Mahakal Chalo' is a spiritual track fused with

upbeat music that connects listeners across ages, especially the Gen-Z. The song carries the roaring aura of Lord Shiva, and the whole energy of the track is amplified by Akshay's vocals.

Ahead of Maha Shivratri, Akshay on February 18 dropped a divine musical track, titled "Mahakal Chalo". The song is a perfect anthem to celebrate the festival on February 26.

The lyrics have been penned by Shekhar Astitwa, paired with Vikram Montrose's soulful composition. The track has been choreographed by Ganesh Acharya. "Mahakal Chalo" features Akshay Kumar singing passionately in praise of Lord Shiva.

Swiggy Partners with Delhi Traffic Police for Road Safety Awareness Session and Rally for delivery executives

DELHI: Swiggy India's pioneering on-demand convenience platform, partnered with the Delhi Traffic Police to conduct a Road Safety Awareness Session and Bike Rally for delivery partners at Chilla Border, Noida Link Road. The session and rally were organized as a part of the Delhi Police Week being organized from February 16-22, 2025.

At Chilla Border, under Mayur Vihar Traffic circle, delivery partners participated in an interactive session which was designed to encourage safer, proactive driving habits, reinforce the importance of adhering to



traffic regulation and reducing risky behaviours through better time and route planning. Additionally, a bike rally was also organized. This initiative was led by the DCP Eastern Range Traffic, Sh. Rajeev Kumar IPS, ACP Traffic East District - Shri Dinesh Kumar, along with In-

importance of road safety.

Speaking about the initiative, DCP Eastern Range Traffic said, "Ensuring road safety is a shared responsibility of both citizens, and the police alike, and awareness programs like the ones conducted by Swiggy for its delivery partners help create a culture of responsible driving. This session and rally on following road safety regulations, traffic rules, and informing delivery partners about the penalties for violations help ensure that more and more delivery partners follow the rules and are delivering to the consumers without risking their safety."

"India has witnessed an increase in the number of road accidents and fatalities over the

last 2 years. India has the highest number of road accidents fatalities globally. Under the charter of Delivering Safely, Swiggy is committed to the welfare and safety of its delivery partners and partners with police authorities to conduct various road safety awareness programs across the country. The objective is to enhance traffic road safety and ensure that delivery partners follow traffic rules at all times. We are thankful to the support extended by the Delhi Traffic Police and hope to improve traffic sensitization and enhance safety of delivery partners who are one of the key pillars of our business," said Shalabh Shrivastava, Senior Vice President, Drivers Organization, Swiggy.