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NEWLY APPOINTED IN-CHARGE OF PUNJAB BHUPESH BAGHEL PAID OBEISANCE AT SRI HARMANDIR SAHIB



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Punjab cabinet approves new excise policy

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Cabinet led by the Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann gave nod to the Excise policy 2025-26 which aims to collect excise revenue of Rs. 11020 crores during the financial year 2025-26, projecting an increase of Rs. 874.05 crores (8.61%) over the previous financial year's targets. A decision to this effect was taken by the Council of Ministers in a meeting held under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister here at his official residence today.

The opposition parties have slammed AAP government for bringing old system of bringing tender system and AAP government would go a long way to help the liquor mafias in Punjab. BJP and Congress have questioned the motives of Bhagwant Mann government behind excise policy and called it extension of corrupt model of AAP government in Delhi. Congress said the claims of Bhagwant Mann to make Punjab drug free before Independence Day of 2024 has proved hollow.

Projecting the excise policy as revenue generating model, a spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office said that against



the target of Rs 10,145 crore set during the Excise policy 2024-25, the state government has collected Rs 10,200 crore, so far. Excise collection is witnessing steady surge in the state during the current regime as for the first time the collection has crossed the mark of Rs 10,000 crores. It is worth mentioning that the collection from Excise in the last year of SAD-BJP alliance was Rs 4405 crore and in last year of Congress regime was merely Rs 6254 crore.

The new policy stipulates that in order to balance the existing retail trade and to provide opportunity to ensure better and widespread participation, fresh allotment of L-2/L-14A vends

mote tourism, the possession limit of license holder of farm stays has been increased from 12 quarts of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) to 36 quarts of IMFL with increase in possession quantity of Beer, Wine, Gin, Vodka, brandy, RTD and other liquor products. To give better consumer experience, one Model Shop in each group has been made mandatory for retail licensees in Municipal Corporation Areas.

The fee of Standalone Beer shops has been reduced from Rs. 2 lakh per shop to Rs. 25,000 per shop. To promote new investment in the State, new Bottling plants have been allowed to be set up in Punjab. Likewise, Cow Welfare Fee has been increased by 50% from Rs. 1 per PL to Rs. 1.5 per PL. With this, collection of Cow Welfare Fee will increase from Rs. 16 crores to Rs. 24 crores. To strengthen enforcement, there is a proposal to set up Excise Police Stations in the coming financial year. To promote ease of doing business, the liquor brands where no increase in EDP is there, automatic approval of these brands through e-abkari portal has been introduced.

India and EU looking at sealing FTA this year: Von der Leyen



NEW DELHI: A free trade agreement between the EU and India would be the largest deal of its kind anywhere in the world and both sides are looking at firming it up by this year, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen said on Friday.

In an address at a think-tank, the top leader of the 27-nation bloc also said that the EU is exploring a future security and defence pact with India in line with its partnerships with Japan and South Korea. Von der Leyen's comments came ahead of her wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "This world is fraught with

mission president said cooperation in trade and technology, security and defence and connectivity and global partnership can take EU-India partnership to next level.

On the free trade agreement, Von der Leyen said she has full commitment for it. "A free trade agreement between the EU and India would be the largest deal of this kind anywhere in the world. I am well aware it will not be easy." "But I also know that timing and determination counts, and that this partnership comes at the right moment for both of us," she said. "This is why we have agreed with Prime Minister Modi to push to get it done during this year. And you can count on my full commitment to make sure we can deliver," Von der Leyen said.

On connectivity, the European Commission president said the India-Middle East-Europe corridor can be a modern golden road directly connecting India, Arabian Gulf and Europe. "I believe 2025 is a historic window of opportunity to build an indivisible partnership between Europe and India", she said.

India's GDP grows 6.2% in Q3; economy to expand at 6.5% in FY25: Govt data



NEWDELHI: India's economic growth decelerated to 6.2 per cent in the third quarter of 2024-25, mainly due to poor performance by the manufacturing and mining sectors. The Indian economy recorded a growth of 6.2 per cent in the third quarter of the current fiscal (October-December 2024) against 9.5 per cent in the year-ago period, according to data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Friday. Indian economy grew at 5.6 per cent in the July-September quarter this fiscal. The NSO, in its second advance estimate of national accounts, pegged the country's growth at 6.5 per cent for 2024-25. It had projected a growth of 6.4 per cent for the current fiscal in its first advance estimates released in January 2025.

Punjab Government Cracks Down on Human Trafficking: Dhaliwal



JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Cabinet Minister for Non-Resident Indian Affairs, Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, informed that the Punjab government has taken decisive action against travel agents involved in human trafficking. As part of the ongoing campaign, the Punjab Police has inspected 1274 locations and registered cases against 24 travel agents. In a press conference he stated that 7 travel agents have been arrested since February 5, when the US began repatriating illegal Indian migrants. He said that 337 Indians living illegally in America have been deported, with 131 being of Punjabi origin. He informed that the Punjab government has reached out to the Ministry of External Affairs, offering assistance in bringing back Indians sent to Panama. Dhaliwal emphasized the need for a compassionate approach, stating that these individuals were victims of rogue travel agents, not criminals.

CM Mann commits to make Punjab drug-free in three months

CHANDIGARH: Announcing a crusade against the drug menace, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday asked Commissioners of Police, Deputy Commissioners and Senior Superintendent of Police to make Punjab drug free in three months.

He said the government would set up special courts to ensure speedy trial of drug cases and ensure conviction of the culprits. Taking part in deliberations at a meeting with the top police officers, CM Bhagwant Mann said, "This is a historic moment as the Punjab government has adopted a zero-tolerance policy against drugs and is launching a crusade against this menace."

CM Mann said Punjab Police has a long and glorious history of tackling hostile law and order situations, and expressed hope that the police force would up-



hold its glorious tradition and make the state completely drug-free, with the active support and cooperation of the public. CM Mann said there is no dearth of funds and assured full support and cooperation to the police and the civil administration for this cause. He said preventive measures should be taken in schools and colleges so that the youth of Punjab doesn't fall prey to the scourge of drugs.

CM Mann said the supply line of drugs should be snapped and those selling the drugs should be put behind bars.

CM Mann said the government will also ensure that the drug peddlers and their families do not get any sort of subsidy in terms of free power, water

or healthcare so that this factor acts as a deterrent for criminals.

CM Mann said all the necessary formalities regarding it would be finalised soon, adding if any further amendment in the NDPS Act will be required to ensure exemplary action against drug peddlers, it would be flagged up with the Union government.

He said the war against drugs should be transformed into a mass and social campaign for which the officers must plan big.

Citing the example of Narangwal village where the illegal property of a drug smuggler was razed on Thursday, Mann said a library would be constructed over the 'shamlat (common) land where the house was razed.

CM Mann said the war against drug has to be won by planning and execution at the micro level, for which the officers have to play a proactive role.

India Has Potential to Play Key Role in New World Order, Says Nirmala Sitharaman



NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said that India will need to play a crucial role in the "global reset" as the new world order will not be determined by the developed nations.

"Developed countries have the money to invest, but that is not going to be sufficient for them either. Trade and technology will play a crucial role in the new world order and India will need to participate," the Finance Minister said at a media event in the national capital. She highlighted that India has to make a meaningful contribution to the global

reset as much as make continuous efforts towards moving up the ladder in terms of per capita income and becoming a business destination furthering global growth.

"India is very well placed with respect to the advancement of technology. We can be leaders in many aspects of technology. We have proven to the world that wherever deployment of technology is concerned, we do it at large scale," FM Sitharaman pointed out. "India can also extend a helping hand to friends with whom we want to strengthen our bilateral relationship. It can also create a sort of global technology group.

Such a group, with India's leadership, can make a big difference across the world," she added. The Finance Minister further stated that multilateral institutions and their contributions are fading away. So, by default and also by choice, for many countries bilateralism is at the top of the agenda. India also needs to ramp up its bilateral relationships with countries, not just for trade and investment but also for strategic relations, she added. She also pointed out that India cannot move ahead if it constantly looks at itself as a nation which is as it was when the British left.

"Therefore, we are very clear, we want to promote Indian manufacturing. We will be enabling the products coming into the country if it helps our manufacturing," Sitharaman said. The Finance Minister also highlighted the need for the country's states to feel part of the call for economic reforms. States are part of India's larger economy which will take us forward. Therefore, reforms cannot be an agenda just for the Union government, it has to be taken seriously by every state government, she said.

India's Q3 GDP shows upward bias due to High Govt Spending, Improved Consumption

NEW DELHI: India's GDP growth in Q3 FY25 is expected to show an upward bias and is likely to be in the range of about 6.3-6.4 per cent, primarily driven by increased government spending and improved household consumption during the festive season, experts said on Wednesday.

Government capital expenditure surged to Rs 2.7 lakh crore, marking about a 30 per cent increase compared to the average of the first two quarters which was a bit muted due to gen-

eral elections. "This boost was aimed at stimulating economic growth amid uneven household consumption trends. Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE), which constitutes 58 per cent of GDP, is expected to rise to 6.4 per cent in Q3, following moderation in Q2 (5.4 per cent), benefiting from festive season demand," said Mahendra Patil, Founder and Managing Partner, MP Financial Advisory Services. Agricultural output remained strong, supported by favourable monsoons and higher Kharif crop yields, positively impacting rural consumption. The higher consumption (due to the festive season), higher government capital expenditure, and better agri-produce also helped the services sector in Q3 FY25. Besides, services exports have also shown an upward trend in

Q3 FY25, he mentioned.

The SBI economists have pegged India's GDP growth at 6.2-6.3 per cent for Q3 (October-December) of 2024-25 driven by buoyant demand and Capex trends along with the increase in EBIDTA and corporate GVA recorded by India Inc. According to a Bank of Baroda report, India's GDP is expected to grow at 6.6 per cent in the October-December period which remains robust with support from agriculture, government spending, and services.

Indian Retail Market set to Reach Rs 190 Lakh Crore by 2034 as Consumption Surges

MUMBAI: India, the fastest-growing major economy, is set to become the third-largest by GDP by 2030, driving a Rs 190 lakh crore retail market by 2034, according to a report released on Friday 27.

Consumption in the country has been expanding at a pace ahead of other large economies. The Indian retail market is growing and this expansion has outpaced overall consumption, highlighting the sector's resilience and strong momentum, according to the report by Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and the Retailers Association of India (RAI).

India's retail market has grown from Rs 35 lakh crore to Rs 82 lakh crore in the last decade, witnessing a 9 per cent growth. "It is expected to be Rs 200 lakh crore in the next decade and will offer diverse opportunities which are all at scale and need very different operating models to deliver a winning proposition. There is



an opportunity for multiple trillion-rupee turnover retailers by 2035," BCG Managing Director and Senior Partner, Abheek Singh, said.

Affluent households are projected to triple by 2030, creating significant opportunities in premium and luxury retail, while the mass segment remains a dominant consumer base.

Despite occasional periods

of sharp volatility, the overall growth trajectory remains strong, with organised retail consistently outpacing the broader market, said the report.

Women's workforce participation has doubled in the past 5 years, closing the gap with men, and this has driven growth in women-centric categories such as beauty, personal care, and fashion.

Gen Z and millennials form large consumer cohorts, necessitating alignment with their values and digital-first habits. Meanwhile, over the next decade, the 45+ age group will become the largest cohort leading to new consumer demands emerging, including preventive consumer health, said the report.

Despite rapid e-commerce growth, with online shopping penetration reaching 50 per cent, 58 per cent of purchase pathways remain purely offline. Consumers navigate between global aspirations and local pride, necessitating a harmonised approach that blends international trends with culturally relevant offerings.

Indian retailers have successfully navigated a rapidly evolving market by making strategic choices that align with both demographic shifts and changing consumer behaviours, said the report.

HC extends stay on National Herald case trial proceedings



NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Thursday extended the stay on trial court proceedings in the National Herald case, which involves Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and others.

Justice Vikas Mahajan scheduled the next hearing on July 28 on a plea filed by former BJP MP Subramanian Swamy. The court directed all parties to submit their written arguments regarding Swamy's plea, which seeks permission to lead additional evidence in the trial court.

Govt appoints Tuhin Kanta Pandey as New SEBI Chief for 3 Years



NEW DELHI: The appointments committee of the Cabinet on Thursday approved the appointment of Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey as the new Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Pandey will assume office for an initial tenure of three years. He replaces current SEBI Chairperson, Madhabi Puri Buch, whose tenure ends on March 1.

"The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Tuhin Kanta Pandey, IAS (OR:1987), Finance Secretary and Secretary, Department of Revenue to the post of Chair-

man, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), initially for a period of three years from the date of assumption of charge of the post or until further orders, whichever is earlier," the government order stated. In January, the government invited applications for the position, setting February 17, 2025, as the deadline for submissions.

The Finance Ministry's newspaper advertisements invited applications from qualified candidates for the appointment to the top post at the capital markets regulator.

SEBI chief shall have the option to receive pay as admissible to a Secretary to the Government of India or a consolidated salary of Rs 5,62,500 per month without house and car.

The tenure of the current SEBI Chairperson ends on March 1. She assumed office on March 2, 2022, for a three-year term, becoming the first woman to lead the markets regulator.

Buch succeeded former IAS officer Ajay Tyagi, whose term as SEBI chief ended after a two-year extension that followed his regular three-year stint. Tyagi had served in key posts in the Finance Ministry.

She was the first person from the private sector to head SEBI. Her career started in 1989 with ICICI Bank. Between 1993 and 1995, Buch worked as a lecturer at West Cheshire College in England. She worked in various profiles across companies for 12 years, including sales, marketing and product development. She also led operations. In 2006 she joined ICICI Securities and later went on to become their CEO from February 2009 to May 2011.

Newly appointed in-charge of Punjab Bhupesh Baghel paid obeisance at Sri Harmandir Sahib

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Newly appointed in-charge of Punjab, former Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel paid obeisance at Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple).

During his visit, he was accompanied by the Punjab LOP (Leader of Opposition) Partap Singh Bajwa, Punjab Congress President Amarinder Singh Raja Warring and other local congress leaders.

Baghel also paid obeisance at holy Shri Durgiana Temple and holy Bhagwan Valmiki Temple at Ram Tirath along with senior Punjab leaders.

Talking to media, Baghel said that it was his aim that



before taking over the work of the Punjab Congress, he will pay obeisance at the Darbar Sahib. After this, he will hold meetings with party leaders in Chandigarh on March 1.

Launching a scathing attack at former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal,

Sabha from Punjab just after losing Delhi Elections. All that proved that he is power hungry.

Ruling out the rumors to replace LOP Partap Singh Bajwa, he said that Mr. Bajwa enjoys full support from the Congress High Command which was satisfied with his work in the State and he will remain LOP. He said that Punjab Congress President Amarinder Singh Raja Warring was also working well in the State and Congress High Command is also happy with his work.

Earlier, Baghel has reached Amritsar at Sri Guru Ramdas International Airport today, where he was accorded a cozy welcome by Congress workers.

Farmers are the backbone of our economy, caretakers of our land and custodians of our food security": Union Minister



Jagmohan Singh "Farmers are the backbone of our economy, caretakers of our land and custodians of our food security": Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri, at program for Release of 19th installment of PM Kisan Scheme

Government is trying to increase ethanol blending across the country, this will benefit farmers: Union Petroleum & Natural Gas Minister

Puri attended a programme at which the Prime Minister released the 19th installment of PM-KISAN Samman Nidhi at Bhagalpur, Bihar. The Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister joined the programme virtually from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, along with several farmers and dignitaries.

Addressing the farmers and other members of the audience at Guru Nanak Dev University, the Union Minister said that farmers' welfare is the top priority of

the Union Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. «Farmers are the backbone of our economy. They are the caretakers of our land and the custodians of our food security.»

The Minister said that farmers have now become energy producers and that the government is striving to increase ethanol blending across the country for their benefit. «Our farmers have now become Energy Producers. The total ethanol blending earlier was 1.5%, but now it has reached 19.6%, following which the farmers have been paid more than 90,000 crore rupees. The Union Government is continuously striving to increase ethanol blending across the country, which will ultimately benefit the farmers.» He added that in the last three years, prices of petrol and diesel have come down.

Prime Minister's housing scheme has completely failed on the ground says Kumari Selja



PARVESH HANDA
Chandigarh

The General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee, former Union Minister, and Member of Parliament from Sirsa Kumari Selja said that on April 1, 2016, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs launched the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Gramin. The objective of this scheme was to provide permanent homes to those without shelter or living in slums by 2022. However, this scheme has completely failed on the ground. Under the Congress government in Haryana, the poor were provided 100 square-yard plots free of cost, but today, the BJP government is giving plots of only 30 or 50 square yards, and that too at collector rates. The BJP must fulfill every promise made to the public.

In a statement released to the media, Kumari Selja said that the central government's Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin aimed to build 1.1 crore houses in its first phase, but only 34 lakh houses have been built. She said that in 1996, the Indira Awas Yojana was introduced to provide permanent homes to the country's poor, under which free 100 square-yard plots were given to poor families. Not only that, but the government also ensured that possession of the plots was granted, and funds were made available to build homes. However, after the BJP government came into power, they did not pay attention to this. The government introduced the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin in 2016 with the objective of providing permanent homes to those without shelter or those living in slums by 2022, but the poor still haven't received homes. Kumari Selja said that the Haryana BJP government started the Chief Minister's Rural Housing Scheme for families with an annual income of up to 1.8 lakh rupees, as verified by the family identity card. The scheme promised 50 square-yard plots in Mahagram Panchayats and 100 square-yard plots in Gram Panchayats.

Haryana is running a govt of paper leaks scams: Hooda



SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Now with the leak of the 12th class board exam paper, it is clear that the paper leak mafia has established its dominance at every level in the present BJP government in the state. It seems that the government is being run not by the BJP, but by the paper leak mafia, while addressing media persons the former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda said that the government of paper leaks and scams is running government in Haryana, adding that the papers from school board to recruitment, group-D to HCS have been leaked during the BJP government in the state. "Now with the leak of the recent 12th class board exam paper, it is clear that the paper leak mafia has established its dominance at every level in this government. It seems that the government is being run not by the BJP, but by the paper leak mafia," the former Chief Minister said.

"Just a few days ago, a new name was added to the chain of paper scams - Rohtak University MBBS paper. New revelations are being made every day in the MBBS paper scam exposed in Pandit BD Sharma University of Health Sciences. The papers which had irregularities were made to disappear. Rs 3 to 5 lakh were being taken from the students for each subject to get them passed. To commit fraud in the paper, pens were used whose ink was dried and later cleaned," Hooda added that for this, the copy of the paper was sent out of the university and after writing the correct answer there, it was again submitted to the center. This fraud was not only happening in the MBBS paper, but also in NEET-UG and Foreign Medical Graduates paper. Hooda said there should be a high level impartial investigation of all the paper leak scams of this government in the state.

"Congress raised this demand at every level from the road to the assembly. but the government always seems to run away from the investigation as it also knows that the day it will be investigated, many big names can also get caught in the trap," Hooda added this is not the first paper scam of the BJP government. Even before this, this government has committed dozens of paper and recruitment scams. Not only this, after the continuous paper leaks, this government also found a new way of paper leak by copying and pasting the questions, that is paper copying. The former Chief Minister said it was during the BJP government that the officers caught with money in HPSC and the employees caught changing the results in HSSC were caught. He said the Deputy Secretary of HPSC was caught with Rs 90 lakh in November 2021. After this, about Rs 2.75 crore was recovered from him. Hooda said, in the year 2018, five people were caught on charges of tampering with the results in the HSSC office.

Punjabi was not removed from list of regional language subjects for Class 10: CBSE

NEW DELHI: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Wednesday issued a clarification refuting the claims that Punjabi was removed from its list of regional language subjects for Class 10.

Earlier in the day, allegations of removal of Punjabi from Class 10 subjects list by CBSE triggered an uproar in Punjab, prompting parties such as the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), Congress and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) to condemn the move

Refuting the allegations levelled against it, CBSE issued a clarification and said: "No subject has been removed from Class 10. All other subjects, including Punjabi will remain as before."

The allegations came after the CBSE issued a draft policy on Tuesday for the proposed Dual Board Exams for Class 10 from the 2025-26 academic session



under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

The board has made this draft policy public for feedback on Tuesday. The AAP, Congress and SAD have raised questions regarding this move by the Central government and alleged that Punjabi as a subject is missing in the CBSE's draft policy.

According to CBSE Controller of Examinations Sanyam Bhardwaj, there will be no change in the current list of subjects of the board.

"All the subjects currently being made available will continue as before. These subjects will be in both the stages of board examination," Bhardwaj added.

According to CBSE, the subjects list given in the draft in this regard is only indicative.

On Tuesday evening, CBSE had released the draft to conduct board exams twice a year. The draft of the new examination system is available for review on the official website of CBSE.

All stakeholders, including schools, teachers, parents, students and general public can give their feedback on the proposed policy.

CBSE said that the draft policy has been developed after extensive discussion and has been uploaded on the CBSE website.

Stakeholders can provide feedback on the draft policy till March 9, 2025. The responses will be examined and the policy will be finalised later.

The CBSE has announced major changes in the class 10 board examination system from next year.

According to this rule, for the first time every year, class 10 board examinations will start from February 15. The examinations for the first time will be completed by March 6. The second phase of the board exam will be conducted from May 5 to May 20.

Every promise of 'Sankalp Patra' will be fulfilled says Haryana CM Saini

SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini said the Haryana Government has fulfilled 18 promises of the 'Sankalp Patra' in the first 100 days while work is going on 10 promises. He assured that every promise of the 'Sankalp Patra' will be fulfilled. He said, people's trust in the government has increased. State government is giving jobs to youth without 'parchi-kharchi' and development work is being done at a rapid speed in the state. Government will work at three times the speed after local body elections. Haryana will move ahead on the path of development at a faster pace and will realize the dream of Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi of making a 'Viksit Bharat'. The Chief Minister was addressing a large gathering in Karnal and Panipat on Tuesday. Targeting the Opposition, Saini said the Congress has always tried to spoil brotherhood, whereas the present government is continuously getting development work done at a fast pace. He said under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the people of the coun-



try are continuously expressing their trust in the welfare policies of the government and recently, in the Delhi elections, the people put their stamp of trust on the policies of the government. He said after the formation of a government in local body elections, the state government will work at three times the speed.

Haryana Chief Minister Saini, while attacking the opposition, said Congress leaders had talked about selling jobs during the Assembly elections, which adversely affected the morale of the youth, hence the public rejected the Congress. He said the present state government in Haryana has done the work of giving jobs to the youth on merit without 'parchi-kharchi'. "Today, the

trust of the youth in the government has increased and a perception has been created that whoever is eligible, will get selected in the recruitment process," Saini said while addressing the people present at a programme organized in Panipat on Tuesday. Saini said when the process of giving jobs to the youth was going on during the Assembly elections, the Congress leaders went to the Election Commission and stopped the recruitment process, but the ruling government fulfilled the promise and gave employment to more than 25,000 youths to join service before taking oath as the Chief Minister.

He said Panipat is a religious, historical, industrial and commercial city and keeping this in mind, development work is being done at a rapid pace in this area so that people associated with various businesses can be benefitted. He said there are immense possibilities in industry in the Panipat region and MSME industries can prove to be very effective in this direction. The government has implemented the concept of one block-one product, following the cluster approach to promote the MSME industry.

Four more deportees arrived at Amritsar's Sri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Four more deportees arrived at Amritsar's Sri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport.

Confirming the arrival of four deportees, Deputy Commissioner Amritsar Ms. Sakshi Sahwney said that they were from Patiala, Jalandhar and Gurdaspur districts.

Adding further she said that they have arrived here from Delhi via commercial flight.

However, sources from Airport said that Harpreet Singh and Maninder Dutt were from Gurdaspur District. Jugraj Singh from Jalandhar and Jatinder Singh were from Nabha Patiala district of Punjab.

All the four deportees who arrived here were deported under the new US immigration regulations as three flight of US Air Force had already landed with deportees here recently.

Haryana Cyber frauds reduced in January 2025 : DGP

Rs 14 crores drop as compared to last year with 571 arrests

PARVESH HANDA
Chandigarh

Haryana Police has tightened grip on cyber criminals. Due to strict monitoring and prompt action by the Haryana Police, the amount of cyber fraud has come down by Rs 14 crore in January 2025. Haryana Director General of Police (DGP) Shatruejt Kapoor while talking to media persons said that cyber fraud of Rs 86.18 crore was done in January 2024, while in January 2025 it came down to Rs 72.84 crore. He said not only this, the police have arrested four times more cyber criminals and sent them behind bars due to the active and effective strategy of



the police that there has been a significant reduction in cases of cyber fraud.

Haryana Police has made cyber helpline 1930 more effective to control cyber crimes. If a person lodges a complaint within six hours of being a victim of fraud, up to 70% of his cheated amount is being blocked immediately. According to DGP Kapoor, till

September 2023, Haryana was ranked 23rd in the country in preventing cyber fraud, but now the state has reached the first position. Union Home Minister Amit Shah has also honored the department, praising the achievement of Haryana Police in this regard. Information reveals, Haryana Police arrested four times more cyber criminals in January 2025 arresting

571 cyber criminals in January 2025 as compared to 138 cyber criminals were arrested in January 2024. Among the arrested criminals, 130 are from Haryana and 441 from other states, of which include many big gangs who were cheating people by running fake call centers.

Cyber criminals are usually adopting different measures to cheat people including the offers of attractive interest on loans and gift schemes, part time jobs, facebook friendship with females, many more beneficial offers and, preparing nude videos and making threats posing as a police, ED and CBI officer. In a recent big scam, students changed the answer sheets of the examination using erasable ink and hair dryers.

NABARD sees Rs 2.8 lakh crore priority sector lending potential in Punjab

CHANDIGARH: February 28 (ANI): NABARD has estimated a credit potential of Rs 2.79 lakh crore towards Priority Sector Lending in Punjab.

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is India's apex development bank, established in 1982, to promote sustainable and equitable agriculture and rural development.

A state-focused paper for the state of Punjab for 2025-26 was launched during a State Credit Seminar organized by NABARD on Friday.

Raghunath B, Chief General Manager, NABARD Punjab chaired the seminar. Varsha Vajpayee, General Manager, RBI, K S Maya Devi, General Manager, NABARD Haryana; Vinod Kumar Arya, General Manager, NABARD Punjab, R.K. Meena, Deputy General Manager, PNB, SLBC and other representatives from line departments, banks and agriculture universities participated in the seminar.

A potential of Rs 2.79 lakh crore has been estimated for lending towards priority sectors - agriculture, MSMEs and other priority sector areas such as education, export, housing, renewable energy, among others.

Approximately 43 per cent of credit potential - Rs 1.20 lakh crore has been identified for agriculture sector.



Raghunath B, CGM, NABARD explained in detail about the process of preparation of Potential Linked Credit Plan at district level and culmination of the same as State Focus Paper (SFP) at state level.

He expressed that the vision to provide institutional financial services to the smallest actor of the economy.

Varsha Bajpayee, General Manager, RBI advocated diversification of crops for sustainable development of agriculture in Punjab. She also emphasised on the need of financial awareness and financial literacy especially among women who constitute 50 percent of population gets better income to run their households.

She also expressed the need of digitization of land records so that everybody is given access to land records.

R.K. Meena, DGM, SLBC Punjab informed the house about the banking profile of the state and also assured dovetailing of Potential identified by NABARD to Annual Credit Plan prepared by State Level Bankers' Committee.

HP govt partners with Crack Academy for statewide competitive examination in April

Initiate to empowering students with quality education, career guidance across schools, colleges

KULBIR SINGH KALSİ
Chandigarh

In a landmark initiative to enhance educational opportunities, the state government has directed its education department to collaborate with Crack Academy to conduct a comprehensive competitive examination across all schools and colleges in the state in mid-April.

This initiative aims to help students assess their strengths and guide them towards suitable career paths. It aligns seamlessly with Crack Academy's vision of social upliftment, providing quality education to students across the



state. The examination is open to all students, including job seekers looking to enhance their career prospects. Participants will also have the opportunity to enroll in specialized courses offered by Crack Academy, designed to prepare them for various competitive exams.

This collaboration builds on previous successful initiatives

between the Academy and the HP government.

In November 2024, a Rs 34 crore scholarship program was launched to provide coaching to 6,800 students for various competitive exams. Additionally, the "Mere Sheher Ke 100 Ratan" scholarship program was introduced to support underprivileged students in accessing quality coaching.

Teacher accused of raping a student declared guilty in the court after about four years

SATISH HANDA
Hisar

A drawing teacher Rajbir accused of raping a female student of government school in Hisar in the court of Additional District and Sessions Judge Sunil Jindal has been convicted in the court allegedly kidnapping, hostage taking, rape and threatening to kill. The victim's lawyer, Rajat Kalsan said that in her statement to the police, the victim had said that she was studying in class 9 in the government school of the village in 2015. However, the court convicted the accused teacher



The victim alleged, "the teacher Rajbir used to teach drawing in the school, the teacher had a bad eye on me. He used to tease me in private by giving me chocolates, toffees, pens and pencils. The accused teacher took me to a field some distance away from the school and forcibly raped me there. He threatened to kill me if I told anyone." She said, Inspector threatened her in the police station and doctors made her wait for three and half hours in the hospital during the medical examination. The victim told her parents about this. Her parents went to the school and explained to the accused drawing teacher Rajbir not to harass their daughter. Despite this, the accused drawing teacher continued to harass student.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Thanks PM Modi for Successful Maha Kumbh

Your Guidance, Good Wishes Always Provide New Energy, CM Yogi to PM Modi

LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday attributed the successful completion of Maha Kumbh 2025 to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, calling the grand religious gathering the "Maha Yagya of unity, equality, and harmony."

Quoting the Prime Minister's social media post about Maha Kumbh, CM Yogi expressed gratitude for PM Modi's guidance, stating, "Respected Prime Minister, it is the result of your successful guidance that the 'Maha Yagya of unity, equality, harmony' — Maha Kumbh 2025, Prayagraj — has concluded today, setting new standards in security, cleanliness, and management along with grandeur and divinity."



He highlighted the massive participation in the event, adding, "In the last 45 holy days, more than 66 crore devotees, including revered saints and sages, have been blessed by taking a dip of faith in the holy Triveni."

CM Yogi emphasised the spiritual significance of the festival, describing it as a celebration of humanity that spreads the message of 'all people are one' and strengthens global unity under the sacred sentiment of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

"Your guidance and good wishes always provide new energy to all of us. Thank you very much, Prime Minister!" he added. PM Modi, in his blog on Maha Kumbh, praised the successful organisation of the event and urged the nation to "unite and come together for the Maha Yagya of a Viksit Bharat."

Acknowledging the efforts of the Centre, the Uttar Pradesh government, and the people of Prayagraj, PM Modi expressed

appreciation for their relentless service to the millions of devotees who participated in the once-in-144-year spiritual gathering.

Recognising the challenges of hosting such a grand event, the Prime Minister also humbly sought forgiveness from the public.

"I know, organising such a huge event was not easy. I pray to Maa Ganga, Maa Yamuna, Maa Saraswati... O Maa, if we have fallen short in our worship, please forgive us. If we have fallen short in serving the devotees, who are God to me, I seek forgiveness from the public as well," he wrote.

The Maha Kumbh 2025, which witnessed an unprecedented gathering, has been hailed as a historic event that not only showcased India's spiritual and cultural richness but also demonstrated its exceptional capacity for large-scale event management.

PM Modi extends Maha Shivratri wishes, calls for 'Viksit Bharat'

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday extended warm greetings to the nation on the auspicious occasion of Maha Shivratri,



expressing his wishes for happiness, prosperity, and a stronger resolve towards building a Viksit Bharat.

Sharing a video on X, PM Modi wrote, "I wish all my countrymen a very happy Mahashivratri, a festival dedicated to Lord Shiva. May this divine occasion bring happiness, prosperity, and good health to all of you and also strengthen the resolve for a Viksit Bharat. Har Har Mahadev!"

Union Home Minister Amit Shah also conveyed his Maha Shivratri greetings, emphasising the festival's deep spiritual and introspective significance.

FORM IV

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SWINDER BAJWA
(Publisher)

JIH Vice President, Malik Moatasim Khan voices concern over selective targeting of Muslim-owned Universities

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi:

The Vice President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), Malik Moatasim Khan has voiced concern over the selective targeting of Muslim-owned Universities by various governments in BJP-ruled states.

In a statement to the media, the JIH Vice President said, "We have serious concerns over the recent spate of arrests and legal actions targeting Muslim-run educational institutions across India in BJP-ruled states. From the midnight arrest of USTMA Chancellor Mahbubul Hoque in Assam to the persecution of Maulana Azad University chairperson in Rajasthan, the attachment of Glocal University assets, and the relentless crackdown on Mohammad Ali Jauhar University in Uttar Pradesh, there appears to be a pattern of selective targeting of Muslim-owned educational centers of higher education. It appears that these institutions are being deliberately vilified to repress Muslim-led educational progress. The issue becomes even more serious when these actions are accompanied by regular attempts from politicians to stereotype and stigmatize these institutes under a completely false and misleading narrative of radicalization."

Malik Moatasim Khan added, "We feel that such actions not only tarnish the reputations of these universities but also jeopardize the futures of thousands of students and faculty members striving for academic excellence. The targeting of these universities, despite their recognized academic achievements, threatens the fundamental right to education and equal opportunity in the country. The witch-hunt against these Universities damages our reputation as a constitutional democracy where all are treated equally regardless of class, caste, and creed. If NAAC-accredited 'A' grade universities are going to become victims of political opportunism and communal bias, then the fate of higher education in India is in serious crisis. Our quest to become a global leader in education and invite foreign universities to open campuses in India is bound to receive a serious setback. We demand an end to this selective targeting of Muslim-owned institutions of higher learning and hope state governments refrain from doing such communal and vote-bank politics as it is endangering the educational interests of thousands of students."



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India's Growth Model Can Be a Template for Other Nations: CEA Nageswaran

NEW DELHI: India's developmental journey within a democratic and federal framework could serve as a model for other nations, according to Dr V. Anantha Nageswaran, Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) to the Indian government.

Speaking at a seminar here attended by South African and Indian business leaders, Nageswaran said, "India is a country with the largest population trying to transform itself into a developed nation within the context of a democratic polity and also within the context of a federal governance structure. Therefore, India's experiences will be very useful templates for many countries, including South Africa."

Nageswaran also discussed the Viksit Bharat vision, which aims to take India from \$3 trillion to a \$13 trillion economy over the next 25 years. He high-

lighted that India is laying the groundwork for development through infrastructure, deregulation, and education investments. "Ultimately, when we have goals for the economy, we should remember that these outcomes are influenced by various factors beyond our control. What is within our control is the efforts that we can take to achieve Viksit Bharat," he said.

"The outcomes will be subject to global factors, but what the Government of India has been trying to do in the last ten years and will continue to do in the next ten years also is to put in place the building blocks that will take us to Viksit Bharat," he said. Nageswaran also emphasised the need for a changed approach to partnerships among countries in the new global environment.

"At no other time since World War II, do countries need to



lean on each other as much as now. We need to be agnostic and open-minded. We cannot therefore choose but rather be opportunistic in forming partnerships because the world is now in a phase of churn," he pointed out.

"It does not mean that we shift convictions and focus of convenience but it is about being creative in our partnerships and identifying areas where there is commonality, putting aside

our areas of differences for consideration at a later date," Nageswaran said.

Saki Zamzaka from South Africa's Gauteng Growth and Development Agency highlighted potential collaboration in areas with India, particularly in mineral resources and skill development in manufacturing pharmaceuticals and medical equipment. "As we build our mineral beneficiation, which is where part of the opportunity is, as there are minerals which will be necessary for India's growth that we can export," he said.

Zamzaka also noted that Indian companies in South Africa could contribute to organic growth by aiding in skill development.

"India being an economy as big and as influential as it is, will be critical in working with South Africa not against anyone but in broader interests," he added.

Fight Against Obesity: PM Modi Invites 10 Prominent Personalities to Spread Awareness

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday invited ten prominent personalities to join the national movement against obesity and promote awareness about healthy food consumption, aligning with his Fit India initiative.

Among those nominated were Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, businessman Anand Mahindra, actor-turned-politician Dinesh Lal Yadav aka Nirahua, Olympic medalists Manu Bhaker and Mirabai Chanu, actors Mohanlal and R. Madhavan, singer Shreya Ghoshal, Rajya Sabha MP and philanthropist Sudha Murthy, and Infosys co-founder Nandan Nilekani.

PM Modi urged these personalities to further nominate ten individuals each, amplifying the movement's reach and impact. Taking to X, the Prime Minister stated, "As mentioned in yesterday's Mann Ki Baat, I would like to nominate the following people to help strengthen the fight against obesity and spread awareness on reducing edible oil consumption in food. I also request them to nominate ten people each so that our movement gets bigger! Collectively, let us make India fitter and healthier."

In his monthly radio program, 'Mann Ki Baat' on Sunday, PM Modi lauded India's rapid progress toward becoming



ing a global sporting powerhouse and stressed the importance of leading a healthy life.

During the address, he also highlighted a growing health concern — obesity. Referring to discussions at the National Games' opening ceremony in Dehradun, he emphasised the urgent need to address India's rising obesity crisis.

Citing World Health Organization data, he warned that one in every eight people in India is affected by obesity, with cases having doubled in recent years. More alarmingly, childhood obesity has increased fourfold.

He pointed out that excessive weight is linked to numerous health complications, including heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension. However, he reassured that small yet meaningful lifestyle changes could help tackle the issue.

To further this initiative, he invited Olympic gold medalist Neeraj Chopra, boxer Nikhat Zareen, and renowned cardiologist Dr Devi Shetty to share their insights on combating obesity in the radio programme.

Committed to 100 Pc Railways Electrification, Boost Renewable Energy Usage, says Ashwini Vaishnaw

NEW DELHI: The government aims to achieve 'Net Zero' carbon emissions for Indian Railways, with 100 per cent electrification slated for completion in the 2025-26 financial year, Union Minister for Railways and Electronics and IT, Ashwini Vaishnaw, has said.

The next objective is to maximise renewable energy procurement. Till date, Indian Railways has tied up 4,260 MW (installed) of solar and 3,427 MW (installed) of wind energy for its energy requirements, the minister said while addressing investors and entrepreneurs at the 'Global Investors Summit 2025' in Madhya Pradesh via video conferencing.

With this vision, Indian Railways has already tied up



1,500 MW of renewable energy. Further strengthening this commitment, a significant 170 MW Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) was signed with the Madhya Pradesh government.

This milestone marks the procurement of India's cheapest solar power at Rs 2.15/kWh

and the minister reaffirmed enthusiasm for exploring wind and nuclear energy procurement.

The Madhya Pradesh government, through Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Power Limited (RUMSL), is supplying solar power to Indian Railways from its largest solar park.

Vaishnaw lauded state Chief

Minister Mohan Yadav for his active role in advancing railway development in the state. He reiterated the Indian government's strong commitment to a sustainable and green future for the country's transportation network.

"Indian Railways is committed to achieving net-zero emissions and shifting from road to rail transport to promote environmental sustainability, reduce oil imports, and lower overall logistics costs," said the Union Minister.

"As part of this vision, it is meeting its energy requirements through non-fossil sources such as solar, wind, and nuclear power. The collaboration with RUMSL is a significant step in this direction," he added.

Congress Leader Sajjan Kumar gets life imprisonment in 1984 Sikh massacre case

NEW DELHI: A trial court on Tuesday sentenced former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar to life imprisonment in a case of murder during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

This case is related to the killing of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh in the Saraswati Vihar area on November 1, 1984, during the riots.

The sentencing came amid heated protests by the members of the Sikh community earlier in the day, demanding a death penalty for the former Congress MP.

Describing the 1984 riots, which broke out after the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards on



October 31, 1984, as one of the "darkest and most shameful" chapters in India's history, the protesters demanded justice and urged the court to sentence Sajjan Kumar to death.

The Rouse Avenue Court, which had reserved its verdict on January 31, after hearing additional submissions advanced by Public Prosecutor Manish Rawat, had, on February 12, convicted Sajjan Kumar

in connection with the killing. His advocate Anil Sharma had submitted that Sajjan Kumar's name was not there from the very beginning, and there was a delay of 16 years in naming him as an accused by the witness. It was also submitted that a case in which Sajjan Kumar was convicted by the Delhi High Court is pending an appeal before the Supreme Court.

PM Modi releases 19th instalment of PM-KISAN, over 9.8 crore farmers get money in accounts

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday transferred the 19th tranche of PM Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) into accounts of crores of farmers, from Bihar's Bhagalpur district. An amount of Rs 22,000 crore was transferred into the accounts of over 9.8 crore farmers including 2.41 crore female farmers through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

The fresh instalment of PM-KISAN to farmers reinforces the Centre's commitment to rural development and agricultural prosperity.

The previous 18th instalment of PM-KISAN was disbursed by the Prime Minister from Maharashtra's Washim in October 2024. This event was also intended to benefit over 9.4 crore farmers across the country receiving direct financial benefits, amounting to more than Rs 20,000 crore.

Since the inception of the flagship program in February 2025, the Modi government has disbursed over Rs 3.46 lakh crore in 18 instalments.

Earlier in the day, PM Modi also took to social media on X and reiterated the government's commitment towards their welfare.

EPFO interest rate will continue to be 8.25 pc for FY2024-25

NEW DELHI: February 28 (ANI): The Central Board of Trustees of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has recommended continuing with the interest rate of 8.25 per cent on Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) deposits for the financial year 2024-25.

The decision was taken during the 237th meeting of the Central Board of Trustees (CBT), EPF, chaired by Union Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya in New Delhi on Friday.

According to an official statement, the interest rate will be officially notified by the government, after which EPFO will credit the amount to the subscribers' accounts.

Ministry said "CBT recommended 8.25 per cent annual rate of interest to be credited on EPF accumulations in members' accounts for the financial year 2024-25. The interest rate would be officially notified by the Government of India, following which EPFO would credit the rate of interest into the subscribers' accounts."

The government also highlighted that EPF continues to offer high and stable returns compared to many other fixed-income instruments. The interest earned on EPF deposits is also tax-free up to a specified limit, making it a preferred long-term investment option for salaried employees.

Apart from the interest rate announcement, the CBT approved key modifications in the Employees' Deposit Linked Insurance (EDLI) scheme to improve financial security for the families of EPF members.



One of the major changes is the introduction of a minimum

insurance benefit for employees who pass away within one

year of service.

Additionally, the Board decided to provide insurance coverage for members who die after a period of non-contribution, as earlier such cases were denied benefits.

Another significant change is the consideration of service continuity. Previously, even a one- or two-day gap between jobs, such as weekends or holidays, resulted in the denial of minimum EDLI benefits ranging from Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 7 lakh, as it broke the condition of continuous service for

one year. This issue has now been addressed, ensuring that employees and their families do not lose out on financial security due to technical gaps.

The Labour Ministry stated that these changes would lead to higher benefits in more than 20,000 cases of in-service deaths annually, strengthening the social security net for workers. The government reaffirmed its commitment to enhancing financial stability for EPF members and their families, ensuring better protection in times of need.

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE BELIEVES MODI'S VISIT WILL BOOST MOMENTUM IN INDIA-U.S. ECONOMIC TIES



India and the US: A \$500bn trade vision



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's brief and official working visit to the United States last week was significant in many ways, reiterating the strong bonds between the two nations and igniting a new momentum in the economic relationship. The visit was replete with productive outcomes for industry of both sides, with major announcements across trade, defence, technology and energy.

From the perspective of Indian industry, the initiatives announced are likely to help India itself integrate more deeply into global supply chains, boost its technology and innovation attainments, and drive its participation in the defence industrial sector.

First, it is a pivotal decision that there was an initiation of the first phase of a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) to reduce trade barriers and streamline regulatory processes. Such an agreement would encourage United States companies to invest in India which would include the purposes of plugging India into their supply chains. The \$500 billion trade target by 2030 is ambitious but possible, potentially with sectoral sub-targets and easier cross-border procedures.

Several measures have already been taken to address tariffs on both sides. The mention of exporting industrial goods from the U.S. to India and labour-intensive products from India to the U.S. as well as agricultural products highlights that exports from both sides would be encouraged. This is supported by the intention to encourage greenfield investments, including by Indian companies in the U.S.

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) had endorsed this target in its report in 2020, and believes that sectors such as IT, pharma, garments and textiles, among several others, would gain from the joint commitment to Mission 500.

While the U.S. market is already relatively open to Indian exports, a well-struc-

tured BTA would be mutually beneficial, particularly if it facilitates greater U.S. investment and technology transfers to India.

A technology, defence and energy focus

Second, the U.S.-India Transforming the Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology (TRUST) underscores the deepening strategic and technological partnership between the two nations and opens further avenues for private sector cooperation with their governments and academia. With a range of sectors identified such as defence, artificial intelligence (AI), semiconductors, quantum computing, biotechnology, energy, and space, TRUST will help foster closer innovation and technology partnerships with U.S. tech giants. Additionally, the INDUS Innovation initiative aims to accelerate research and development in cutting-edge sectors.

India is emerging as a key player in the AI economy and the U.S.-India Roadmap on AI Infrastructure is expected to attract investments in data centres, comput-

ing power and AI models. This initiative could enhance funding opportunities for Indian startups in AI and encourage significant investments in areas such as fintech, healthcare, agritech and other developmental solutions, not just for India but also for the Global South.

Third, defence sector initiatives reinforce the India-U.S. strategic partnership through expanded technology transfers, joint production, and industrial collaboration. The launch of a 10-year Framework for the U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership this year signifies a transformative shift in bilateral defence ties. Agreements were reached for the co-production of various systems which can promote indigenous manufacturing, skill development, and economic growth. With a potential for offset clauses, Indian industry can gain hugely from the defence agreements announced during the visit.

Fourth, energy cooperation was another critical area of discussion, with a focus on establishing long-term strategic linkages as India seeks to diversify its energy sources. The leaders underscored the importance of increasing hydrocarbon production to enhance global energy stability and affordability. India's Union Budget 2025-26 commits to collaborating with the private sector on the development of small modular reactors (SMRs), wherein U.S. companies will play a vital role in advancing this capability. Given India's ambitious net-zero targets, the U.S., with

its vast natural gas reserves, can serve as a reliable energy supplier, strengthening India's energy security.

Fifth, the two countries have pledged to further the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) through joint infrastructure projects. With both countries entering into plurilateral arrangements in these regions, infrastructure creation could be fast-tracked, with possible spin-offs for the participation of Indian industry in railways, roadways, smart cities and industrial zones. The mention of undersea cables connecting India and the U.S. would give impetus to India's digital economy and services exports as well.

Links in higher education

Sixth, on education, the leaders decided to boost higher education institutional cooperation, which includes setting up of campuses by leading U.S. educational institutions in India. This would bring comfort to Indian students. Legal mobility is expected to be streamlined as well.

Indian industry is committed to working with both governments to maintain this momentum, advocating pro-business policies and ensuring industry feedback in implementation. With collaborative spirit and sustained reform, the benefits of this visit can be fully realised, positioning India's economy on a high-growth trajectory. In sum, Mr. Modi's U.S. visit, viewed through industry's business lens, is more than a diplomatic success. It is a blueprint for India to leverage global partnerships in becoming an economic powerhouse, innovating and prospering in tandem with its strategic ally.

Chandrajit Banerjee is Director General, Confederation of Indian Industry. Views are personal. Views are personal.

AVINASH GODBOLE EXPLAINS WHY INDIA-CHINA PROGRESS POST-GALWAN DEMANDS CAUTIOUS DIPLOMACY



Diplomacy or Compromise? The Future of India-China Relations

India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri was in China in January 2025, during which India and China made several announcements on the future of their bilateral relations. He met Wang Yi, who is China's Foreign Minister, the Director of the Office of Central Commission of Foreign Affairs and also a politburo member of the party, and also Liu Jianchao, Minister of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party.

The Indian statement after this meeting indicated that the process of restoration of several aspects of bilateral relations including media and think tank exchanges, the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, and bilateral flights is on the cards for the summer of 2025.

India and China have attempted to move forward after more than four years of tense and stalemate-based relations since the clashes in Galwan in June 2020. Stalemates cannot be permanent. Both sides have made their points and moved to the détente. One can argue that there are several reasons for the timing of this bilateral agreement, the main being the election of Donald Trump, who is a known disruptor and unpredictable in his ways of doing business. The other is about economic concerns in China and in India in recent times.

India and China have been bracing for the Trump impact especially when by the middle of October last year his election was already beginning to look more likely to happen. This possibility may have pushed the October 2024 de-escalation agreement between India and China, and Mr. Trump's gigantic electoral victory in November 2024



may have pushed the January 2025 agreement between India and China. There is a historic logic to this as well. China agreed to normalising relations with India, after the 1962 war, only in the backdrop of the backlash in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Again, China may have agreed to normalise its relations with India given that it had to brace for the Trump impact. Thus, there is both internal and external logic around the restoration of normalcy.

However, since we do not know whether patrolling rights have been/are fully restored or whether demobilisation is in its advanced stages, such an absence of communication on the part of the government raises doubts and questions needlessly.

At the LAC

The Government of India has maintained absolute silence on the status of de-escalation, demilitarisation and demobilisation of the fairly large number of troops. Troops were mobilised and

deployed on the border, first during the tensions of May-June 2020, and then in even larger numbers in the aftermath of the June 15, 2020 clashes. These troops were on active duty or in newly created barracks close to the six points of tension along the border including in Galwan, Depsang Bulge, Charding Nala, Gogra Post and Hot Springs and on the north bank of the Pangong lake.

There is also no clarity whether the large number of People's Liberation Army troops on the Chinese side, before and after the clashes, have retreated to their bases. Confirmation of this would mean that the actual restoration of normalcy on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) has been achieved. India has also made it clear in the aftermath of 2020 that it was China that had violated the several agreements and protocols the two sides had signed. One is not sure about whether these have been rectified in a verifiable way. This in turn can only be established when patrolling rights have not only been agreed to but also exercised.

The briefing in October 2024, by the Foreign Secretary, prior to the 16th BRICS summit in Kazan in this respect, was already guarded. It only alluded to an agreement that would lead to the "process of engagement and resolution of issues that emerged in 2020". A follow-up briefing on this issue would have been useful and necessary to make it clear that India had not given up on its position on the bilateral relations. India's principled stand in dealing with

China in the aftermath of the 2020 crisis has been that the stability on the border and the restoration of the status quo ante are the preconditions to progress in other aspects of bilateral relations. However, it was China that reiterated that India should move on from the clashes and not let the border standoff be a hindrance to the development of overall bilateral relations in the economic, political and social sectors.

The need for clarity

India's silence on the progress on the status of restoration of status quo ante makes it appear as though the Chinese position of "moving on" is succeeding and that India is abandoning its position of stability and restoration before there is progress on other aspects. It was always known that the process of restoring normalcy would be long drawn and fraught with challenges. In addition, the worldviews of India and China will remain divergent as their ideas about the world order are not going to converge anytime soon. India-China relations have seen several cyclical ups and downs in the Xi Jinping era. Therefore, abundant caution would be the best way forward. The Indian government's lack of clarity does not boost one's confidence.

Avinash Godbole is professor and Associate Academic Dean at Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities (JSLH), O.P. Jindal Global University. Views are personal.

RBI's currency swap set to ease liquidity crisis

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) decision to inject \$10 billion into the country's financial system via a dollar/rupee swap auction is a crucial move to address liquidity concerns among domestic lenders. This initiative comes amid foreign capital outflows from Indian stock markets, as global investors chase better returns in the United States, driven by corporate tax cuts and trade policies. The rupee's depreciation against the U.S. dollar has further exacerbated liquidity constraints, making RBI's intervention necessary. This marks the second rupee infusion in less than a month. Unlike the first \$5 billion swap on January 31, 2025, which had a six-month tenure, the latest auction has a three-year duration. Combined, these measures will inject approximately Rs 1.3 trillion into the banking system, providing much-needed stability to India's financial sector. Currency swaps are a standard tool used by central banks to counter liquidity shortages, stabilize local currencies, and manage inflationary pressures. However, given India's current economic landscape, the latest swap seems more of a defensive response than a proactive strategy. Since October 2024, the rupee has depreciated by 3.3 per cent, breaching the Rs 85 per dollar mark, and foreign investors have pulled out \$31 billion from Indian equities. Additionally, the RBI has already sold \$111.2 billion—roughly 18 per cent of its foreign reserves—since December 2024 to support the rupee. With an estimated Rs 1.7 trillion liquidity shortfall, economists suggest that an additional \$5 billion infusion may be required. While these interventions provide short-term relief, Indian banks must utilize this liquidity boost to sustain credit flow, investment, and employment, ensuring that India's economic growth trajectory remains on track despite global headwinds. If leveraged effectively, this move could help push India's GDP growth beyond 6.4 per cent, strengthening economic resilience in uncertain times.

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BOOKS: REVIEW

'Island' explores the thin line between study & exploitation

Sujit Saraf's *Island* is a masterfully woven tale of cultural collision, moral ambiguity, and unintended consequences. Set in the Andaman Islands, the novel follows the journey of Nirmal Chandra Mattoo, a once-prominent anthropologist turned disgraced souvenir shop owner, as he embarks on a perilous mission that echoes real-life incidents. Blending dark humor, suspense, and social critique, *Island* offers an incisive exploration of colonial legacies, ethical dilemmas in anthropology, and the consequences of well-intentioned interference.

The novel's central theme is reminiscent of the Prime Directive from *Star Trek*, which warns against interfering with the natural progression of civilizations. Mattoo, the novel's protagonist, would likely agree with this philosophy—at least in theory. His story unfolds as an introspective journey into the complexities of cultural preservation and human

adventure, but also a moral exploration of how societies interact. Mattoo, once a respected figure in the Anthropological Survey of India, has fallen from grace after a disastrous expedition to establish contact with the Sentinelese tribe, one of the most isolated indigenous groups in the world. Now, he lingers in obscurity, selling fake tribal artifacts in Port Blair, nursing the remnants of his once-ambitious career. His only solace is his unfinished grammar of the Jarawa language, a project that hints at his lingering passion for anthropology, despite his disillusionment.

When an opportunity arises to join a covert expedition to North Sentinel Island, Mattoo is at first reluctant. The mission, which involves smuggling an American missionary onto the island, is risky, unethical, and possibly catastrophic. However, Mattoo is coerced into participating by a shady businessman who controls

his supply of souvenirs. What follows is a tense, gripping narrative that highlights the clash between scientific detachment, religious zeal, and indigenous autonomy. One of the novel's strengths is its deeply researched anthropological and historical context. The Andaman Islands, with their rich indigenous cultures and fraught colonial history, serve as more than just a setting—they become a character in themselves. Saraf seamlessly integrates historical and cultural insights into the novel, offering readers a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between anthropologists, governments, and indigenous tribes.

The novel draws inspiration from real events, particularly the 2018 death of American missionary John Chau, who was killed by the Sentinelese while attempting to convert them. This parallel adds an urgent contemporary relevance to the book, forcing readers to confront uncomfort-



Island
By Sujit Saraf
Speaking Tiger,
256 pages; Rs 499

able questions about cultural imperialism, moral righteousness, and the consequences of external intervention. Saraf's writing style is both sharp and evocative. His prose is crisp yet deliberate, allowing the story to unfold at a measured pace, balancing tension, dark humor, and philosophical depth. Mattoo's voice is world-weary and sardonic, making him a compelling and relatable protagonist. One of the novel's most striking aspects is its satirical take on contemporary India. Saraf skewers political grandstanding through characters who proclaim the Prime Minister's love for the Andamans while simultaneously pushing aggressive development policies. The dialogue is biting and humorous, with one politician lamenting, "Why is Andaman

not Hawaii?"—a line that encapsulates the disconnect between nationalist ambitions and ground realities.

As the novel builds toward its climax, Saraf skillfully maintains suspense and intrigue. The final act is both thrilling and darkly comedic, reinforcing the tragic irony of well-meaning but misguided interventions.

Beyond its gripping plot, *Island* serves as a commentary on the ethical dilemmas of anthropology and development. Mattoo's idol, Verrier Elwin, once lamented that by merely observing indigenous tribes, he may have inadvertently contributed to their decline. This sentiment haunts the novel, forcing readers to ask: At what point does curiosity become exploitation? Can cultural preservation coexist with modernization? Who truly benefits from these so-called 'missions' to 'help' indigenous people?

Saraf does not provide easy answers, making *Island* a thought-provoking read. The novel critiques both scientific objectivity and missionary zeal, showing that even the best intentions can have disastrous consequences.

India Begins Exporting Apple Components to China, Vietnam

NEW DELHI: India has taken a significant step in the global electronics supply chain by exporting electronic components to China and Vietnam for the first time.

This milestone marks a role reversal, as India has traditionally been a net importer of such components.

The exports, meant for manufacturing Apple products like MacBooks, AirPods, Apple Watch, Apple Pencil, and iPhones, underscore Apple's efforts to diversify its supply chain beyond China.

Several Apple suppliers in India, including Motherhood Group, Jabil, Aegus, and Tata Electronics, are manufacturing mechanical components, such as enclosures, for all Apple products except iPads.

These components are then exported to assembly plants in China and Vietnam to be



integrated into final products.

Apple's decision to expand domestic procurement beyond iPhone manufacturing is expected to boost India's electronics industry. Industry experts view this move as a crucial step towards creating a robust component ecosystem in India.

Historically, India has imported most of its electronic components from China and Vietnam, but with this shift, the

country is positioning itself as a key player in global electronics manufacturing.

Industry analysts predict that India's component exports could reach USD 35-40 billion by 2030. To further accelerate this growth, the Indian government is set to introduce a production-linked incentive (PLI) scheme exceeding USD 3 billion for component manufacturing.

Mechanics, which are essential structural components

that house motherboards and processors in electronic products, require sophisticated engineering and high-precision machinery.

The involvement of top-tier Indian manufacturers and global suppliers setting up local operations reflects Apple's confidence in India's manufacturing capabilities.

Among Apple's suppliers, Jabil has started producing mechanics for AirPods from its Pune facility, while Aegus in Hubballi, Karnataka, has begun manufacturing components for MacBooks.

Tata Electronics, Apple's first Indian supplier for mechanics, has expanded its production capacity to include exports to China. The latest addition to Apple's supply chain is Motherhood Group, which is now manufacturing enclosures for iPhones.

India Poised to Become World's Leading Investment Destination: Piyush Goyal



MUMBAI: With a robust and resilient economy, a large and dynamic consumer market, and a government committed to fostering business-friendly policies, India is poised to become one of the world's leading investment destinations, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Thursday.

Inaugurated the 'Bharat Calling Conference 2025' organised by IMC Chamber of Commerce and Industry here, the minister said that India stands at the forefront of global economic growth, offering unparalleled opportunities for investment across diverse sectors.

Dwelling on the theme 'Path to Viksit Bharat 2047: Pioneering Prosperity for All', he said there are huge opportunities unfurling in a country of 1.4 billion people, many of whom are aspirational and young. There is a deep commitment towards manufacturing, skill development, and innovation, as advocated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself, which truly makes India the world's emerging investment destination.

Goyal highlighted that various strategic initiatives of the

government, including Make in India, Digital India, Startup India, Swachh Bharat and Atmanirbhar Bharat, have collectively prepared the mindset of the nation to be resilient, self-sufficient and become a bigger player in global trade, even as the country's economy is transformed in the Amrit Kaal of the coming two decades leading up to 2047.

"We are collectively committed to bringing about a prosperous and developed India," he remarked.

Goyal further said that India cannot become a developed nation if it does not open up its businesses for international trade. In this context, he named five key enablers for bringing about Viksit Bharat@2047, namely quality management and handholding of small business, sustainability, inclusive growth, skill development, and competitiveness and efficiency.

He said that India is at the crux of a quality revolution. Lamenting that quality had been the biggest casualty in the country in the past, he urged that it is time for businesses to adopt modern quality standards and ensure that the country's ecosystem is trained

towards good quality and follows good manufacturing practices. There are around 700 quality control orders in the country, he informed.

Business chambers like IMC would do a great service to the nation by spreading the message of quality control, he added.

Goyal further said that adopting and handholding small businesses by the big players of a business for quality control and upgrading their manufacturing practices is also very important.

About sustainability, he said that it is another important aspect of trade and commerce. Indian ethos traditionally reflects consciousness for sustainability for thousands of years. It is important to recognise sustainability as a challenge in present times, which along with energy efficiency should be a focus area for businesses. He further said development cannot happen if there is no inclusive growth in the country, for which targeted interventions like ease of living initiatives for various communities and infrastructure development across the country have been taken up by the government.

The minister urged that businesses will also have to cater to the agenda of inclusive development through better CSR initiatives. Goyal stated that skill-building initiatives for the people will add more jobs and make our economy stronger. In this context, he stated that two more skill development centres are coming up in north Mumbai, after the launch of the first state-of-the-art skill centre in Mumbai's Kandivali area last year.

Production of Key Minerals Records Robust Rise in April-January '24-25



NEW DELHI: The production of some key minerals in the country has continued to witness strong growth during the 10-month period from April to January of FY 2024-25, after reaching record production levels in FY 2023-24, according to an official statement issued on Thursday. The production of iron ore, which accounts for 70 per cent of the total mineral production in India by value and had touched 274 million metric tonnes (MMT) in FY 2023-24, has shown a further increase during the current financial year. As per provisional data, production of iron ore has increased from 228 MMT in FY 2023-24 (April-January) to 236 MMT in FY 2024-25 (April-January), showing a healthy 3.5 per cent growth, the statement said.

The production of manganese ore has shot up by 11.1 per cent to 3.0 MMT in FY 2024-25 (April-January) from 2.7 MMT during the corresponding period of the previous year while the production of chromite has risen by 8.7 per cent to 2.5 MMT from 2.3 MMT during this period.

Additionally, the production of bauxite has also risen by 5.6 per cent to 20.6 MMT in FY 2024-25 (April-January) from 19.5 MMT in the same period of the previous year. In the non-ferrous metal sector, primary aluminium production in FY 2024-25 (April-January) posted a growth of 1.2 per cent over the corresponding period last year, increasing to 35.10 lakh tons (LT) in FY 2024-25 (April-January) from 34.67 LT in the same period of FY 2023-24.

Wipro commits \$200 million to VC arm Wipro Ventures



BENGALURU: IT major Wipro on Wednesday announced to commit \$200 million to its venture arm, Wipro Ventures, in its latest round of funding. This is the fourth round of funding raised by Wipro Ventures since its inception 10 years ago, and is aimed at accelerating the company's investments in early- to mid-stage startups.

"Wipro Ventures is strategically positioned to participate in and contribute to technological innovation across startup hubs globally," said Srinu Pallia, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Wipro Limited. "We envision a collaborative ecosystem where these emerging technologies can be deployed globally, drive progress, and create sustainable value for all stakeholders involved," he added. Wipro Ventures was founded in 2015 to identify and invest in high-potential early-stage startups that are at the forefront of technological innovation and that allow Wipro to deliver differentiated value to clients. The Wipro Ventures team connects Wipro and its clients to a global ecosystem of startups working on disruptive technologies, enabling Wipro's clients to access latest innovations, while providing startups with access to a global network of enterprise customers.

Corporate India Eyes 7-8 pc Revenue Growth in Q4FY25 on Rising Rural Demand: ICRA

NEW DELHI: Corporate India is projected to achieve 7-8 per cent year-over-year revenue growth in Q4FY25, driven by strengthening rural demand and increased government expenditure, according to a recent ICRA report.

The operating profit margins are expected to stabilise between 18.2-18.4 per cent, bolstered by improved consumer sentiment and rising demand.

Following the Reserve Bank of India's 25 basis points reduction in repo rate, companies are anticipated to benefit from lower borrowing costs, with the interest coverage ratio



potentially expanding to 4.6-4.7 times from 4.5 times in the previous quarter.

ICRA's Senior Vice President and Co-Group Head of Corporate Ratings, Kinjal Shah, expressed optimism about rural demand prospects for the first half of calendar year 2025. This positive outlook is attributed to strong kharif crop yields and favour-

able conditions for the ongoing rabi season.

Urban demand, which has remained subdued, is expected to recover due to income tax relief measures announced in the Union Budget 2025, monetary easing policies, and anticipated moderation in food inflation.

The report highlighted several key factors requiring close monitoring, including global economic and political developments, currency exchange fluctuations, the impact of new U.S. presidential policies, government spending patterns, and domestic urban demand revival.

HAL and BEML join forces for Leadership and Technical Training

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

In a significant move aimed at bolstering skill development and professional excellence, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and BEML Limited have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate on leadership and technical training programs. The agreement was formalized today in the presence of senior management from both organizations. Dr. Srikantha Sharma, Executive Director, HAL Management Academy (HMA), and Ms. Monideepa Roy, Head (Talent Management), BEML, signed the MoU, witnessed by Shri A B Pradhan, Director (HR), HAL, Shri



Debi Prasad Satpathy, Director (HR), BEML, and Shri M G Balasubrahmanya, Executive Director (HR), HAL. The event was attended by senior officials, underscoring the strategic significance of this collaboration. Under this partnership, HMA will design and deliver a comprehensive range of training programs, middle and senior management training, special-

ized workshops, and certification programs. Key focus areas will include Six Sigma, Quality, Reliability, Data Analytics, and Industry 4.0, ensuring that professionals remain at the forefront of technological advancements. Beyond structured training, the MoU will facilitate industrial visits, knowledge-sharing sessions, joint conferences, internships, and project-based learning opportunities, providing BEML

professionals with hands-on experience and exposure to cutting-edge industry practices. Speaking at the event, Shri A B Pradhan emphasized the critical role of continuous learning and capability building in the defence and heavy engineering sectors. Shri Debi Prasad Satpathy echoed these sentiments, highlighting how the partnership will enhance technical expertise and managerial leadership within BEML.

This collaboration marks a significant step toward strengthening industry-academia ties, fortifying India's defence manufacturing ecosystem, and equipping professionals with advanced skills and knowledge to drive innovation and excellence in the sector.

Indian Pharma Sector Sees Growth at 8% CAGR, Export Rates Spike by 9% in 2024: Report

NEW DELHI: The Indian pharma sector has grown at 8 per cent CAGR and has also seen a 9 per cent increase in export rates in 2024, according to a report.

The report by McKinsey & Company showed that the pharma sector in the country is witnessing rapid production growth. Expanding its capabilities in APIs and biotechnology, it has grown at 8 per cent CAGR, twice the global average. The country also emerged as the world's largest supplier of generic medicines, with a 9 per cent pharma export growth rate, nearly double the global average, the report said.

Currently, India meets 20



per cent of global demand. This includes over 40 per cent of generic medicines being supplied to the US, and 25 per cent to the UK. The country also supplies over 60 per cent of the world's vaccines and 70 per cent of global antiretroviral drugs for HIV treatment.

Further the report showed that India is also marching ahead in terms of emerging modalities like mRNA, cell and gene therapies, and an-

tibodies. These are witnessing a growth at 13-14 per cent CAGR, surpassing conventional drug growth. Notably, the pharma sector in India has seen an increase in the number of US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) registered generic manufacturing sites. In 2024, India had a network of 752 FDA-approved, 2,050 WHO GMP-certified, and 286 EDQM-approved plants. There has been a sharp improvement in compliance outcomes over the last several years. The incidences of 'official action indicated' (OAI) after USFDA inspections dropped by 50 per cent between 2013-14 and 2023-24.

Patent Cliff: Opportunity for Indian Pharmaceutical Companies



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

Until 2028, spending on innovator drugs is likely to face a reduction of about US \$146 Billion due to patent expiry. This will apply to 'small molecule' as well as 'biologics', and their respective reduction in spending is likely to be \$106 Bn and \$40 Bn as Losses of Exclusivity (LOE) has direct impact on brand spending as generic players. Patent cliff has implications for large cap companies as these companies will continue to face patent cliffs. For example, Merck had full year worldwide sales of \$64.2 Billion for 2024 which was an increase of 7 per cent from Full Year sales of 2023. KEYTRUDA sales touched \$29.5 Billion with a growth rate of 18.0 per cent. Sales from KEYTRUDA alone were 45.95 per cent of total sales of the company, and growth rate was also higher as compared to company's overall sales growth. KEYTRUDA faces a key patent expiry in 2028. Because of this reason, Rob Davis - the company's CEO stated that acquisitions valued up to \$15 billion would be in Merck's range. Hence, patent cliffs as well as gaps in the pipeline of global pharma MNCs in the latter half of this

Table 1: Impact of Brand Losses of Exclusivity from 2019-2028 in Ten Developed Countries
Amount in US \$ Billion

Year	Biologics	Small Molecules	Total
2019	3.4	12.2	15.6
2020	5.9	11.0	16.9
2021	3.0	7.4	10.4
2022	0.6	10.0	10.6
2023	8.6	18.7	27.3
2024	12.2	19.0	31.2
2025	14.1	21.6	35.7
2026	16.1	32.1	48.2
2027	7.5	25.7	33.2
2028	9.3	34.6	43.9

Source: Compiled from Annual Report 2023-24 of Alkem Laboratories (p.48), and Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Limited (p.67).

decade will compel these companies to look for M&A opportunities to achieve their growth plans.

This is not the first time that Indian companies got this opportunity to capitalise. Impact of Brand Losses of Exclusivity decide the size of opportunity, e.g., during 2014-2016, about US \$92 bn worth of patents drugs were expected to go off patent in the USA in comparison to US \$65 bn during 2010-12. Factors which play role include aggressive filings of ANDAs, Para - IV filings (where generic company gets exclusive rights to sell generic version of patented drug for certain period), capitalizing on the patent expiries of blockbuster drugs. Product portfolio of pharmaceutical companies, filings, along with necessary

manufacturing infrastructure are also deciding factors.

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) Limited and Alkem Labs quoted IQVIA Market Prognosis (2023, September), and Global Use of Medicines, 2024: Outlook to 2028, Report by the IQVIA Institute for Human Data Science. DRL also cited two more reports including 2023 Global Life Sciences Outlook by Deloitte, and World Preview 2023 by Evaluate Pharma.

From 2019 to 2024, exclusivity losses were estimated to the tune of \$112.0 Billion comprising Biologics worth \$33.7 Billion and Small Molecules worth \$78.3 Billion. From 2025 to 2028, it is estimated that exclusivity losses are likely to be \$161.0 Billion comprising Biologics worth \$47.0 Billion and Small Mol-



ecules worth \$114.0 Billion.

Losses of exclusivity represent a huge opportunity for Indian pharmaceutical companies. Due to tariffs, Indian pharmaceutical companies are at the receiving end to some extent, but Loss of Exclusivity presents a major growth opportunity for these companies to launch generic versions. It should be seen in the background that Indian companies cater to about 40 per cent of the total demand in the generic drug market of the USA.

The major factor that goes in the favour of Indian pharmaceutical companies is their focus on Research and Development for products in this important market. Their coverage of therapeutic categories such as cardiovascular, anti-cancer, and anti-diabetic, also reflects their breadth of product portfolio. Major

pharmaceutical companies recognize this opportunity and are well placed to take advantage from this. It can be observed from the fact that the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) approved 618 Abbreviated New Drug Applications (ANDAs) during January-September 2023. ANDAs contains data that is submitted to FDA for the review and potential approval of a generic drug. Out of these 618 ANDAs, Indian pharmaceutical companies and their subsidiaries secured 284 ANDA approvals, i.e., 46 per cent of total.

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Limited has established itself in this space since its entry in the US market through acquisition of Caraco in 1997. In FY24, topline growth of the company was led by the US market with 13.4 per cent Year on

Year (Y-o-Y) growth. As on March 31, 2024, the company had 635 cumulative ANDAs filed and 531 cumulative ANDAs approved with rest pending with the US FDA for approval. US business had contributed 32 per cent to the company's consolidate revenues. The company has emerged as the 13th largest generics pharma company in the US and secured the second position by prescriptions in the U.S. dermatology market. Diverse portfolio also favours the company as it has expanded footprint in the Specialty Segment, and now, focuses on dermatology, ophthalmology, and oncology.

By March 31, 2024, Cipla Limited had 298 patents, 277 cumulative ANDAs and NDAs along with 2,204 cumulative DMFs. Besides Indian R&D facilities, the company has R&D facility in New York, USA. ANDAs and NDAs included those with InvaGen Pharmaceuticals Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of the company. Further, portfolio of ANDAs included approved (158), tentatively approved (20), and under approval (77). For FY24, 12 ANDAs were filed and 5 were approved. NDA portfolio included approved (6), tentatively approved (12), and under approval (4).

Lupin Limited had 442 ANDAs and NDAs filed with

the U.S. FDA up to March 2024. The company is also well placed to tap the opportunity arising out of patent cliff given the fact that the company is ranked 3rd in the U.S. (by prescriptions) and 11th largest generics company in the world. Lupin had 12 ANDA and ANDSs (in Canada) filings in FY24 which were lower than previous years' figure, i.e., 28 filings in FY23, and 19 filings in FY22. But ANDA approvals stood at 42 in FY24 as compared to 17 in FY23 and 9 in FY22. Cumulative approvals of ANDAs alone for Lupin stood at 314 out of 431 filings.

As on March 31, 2024, Dr. Reddy's Labs had 325 cumulative ANDAs, and 86 filings were pending approval including 81 ANDAs and 5 NDAs. In FY24, the company filed 17 new ANDAs with the US FDA. It was further highlighted by the company that out of 86 ANDAs, 50 were Para IV applications, and the company believed that 24 out of these had the 'First to File' status. DRL had a revenue of Rs. 245.5 bn from Global Generics in FY24, with a growth rate of 15.0 per cent as compared to FY23. North America Generics (NAG) had an impressive growth of 28.0 per cent in FY24 over FY23 even though the growth was aided by the strengthening of the US currency against

Indian rupee. Global Generics had contributed 88.0 per cent to the company's overall sales in FY24. North America Generics is the largest market for DRL as it contributed about 53.0 per cent (Rs. 129.9 bn or approx. US\$ 1.6 bn) to the company's Global Generics sales, and 47.0 per cent of overall sales.

By FY24, Alkem Labs had 176 ANDAs besides 2 New Drug Applications (NDAs) with the US FDA. It had approvals of 145 ANDAs (including 13 tentative approvals). The Company had 1 manufacturing facility in the US.

Recent news on tariffs for pharmaceuticals from India has implications for competitiveness of Indian pharma companies so patent cliff due to loss of exclusivity in recent years and forecast for next four years is promising for Indian pharmaceutical companies. Given the depth and breadth of portfolio of Indian pharmaceutical companies and their focus on the U.S. market, many Indian pharmaceutical companies are well placed to perform well.

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.

World Bank sees India as Right Place to Invest for Global Firms

GUWAHATI: The World Bank has reaffirmed its positive outlook on India's economic growth, urging global companies to invest in the country.

Speaking at the 'Advantage Assam 2.0 Business Summit' here, World Bank Country Director, Auguste Tano Kouame, dismissed worries over short-term fluctuations, calling India "the shining light in the world." In his address at the session titled "Leveraging MDB (multilateral development bank) Resources to Unlock Opportunities for the Private Sector," Kouame said, "If somebody is worried about recent data, we would like to say that don't worry. India is the shining light in the world. If you are looking to invest, then come and invest here. The Indian growth makes it the place to invest."



He pointed out that variations of one percentage point in economic growth do not alter the World Bank's optimistic outlook towards India. "We are not worried about India's growth at the moment. We are very bullish about India and will remain bullish," Kouame added. India has maintained its status as the fastest-growing large economy. The January 2025 edition of the World Bank's Global Economic Prospects (GEP) report projects India's

economy to grow at a steady rate of 6.7 per cent in both FY26 and FY27, significantly outpacing global and regional peers. At a time when global growth is expected to remain at 2.7 per cent in 2025-26, this robust performance underscores India's resilience and its growing significance in shaping the world's economic trajectory. The GEP report credits this extraordinary momentum to a thriving services sector and

a revitalised manufacturing base, driven by transformative government initiatives. From modernising infrastructure to simplifying taxes, these measures are fuelling domestic growth and positioning India as a cornerstone of global economic stability. With its closest competitor, China, decelerating to 4 per cent growth next year.

Complementing the World Bank report, the latest update from the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) World Economic Outlook (WEO) also reinforces India's strong economic trajectory. The IMF forecasts India's growth to remain at 6.5 per cent for both 2025 and 2026, aligning with earlier projections from October. This consistent growth outlook reflects India's stable economic fundamentals and its ability to maintain momentum despite global uncertainties.

RBI to Inject USD 10 billion Via Forex Swap Amid Banking Liquidity Crunch



NEW DELHI: In a significant move to address the banking system's severe liquidity constraints, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has announced plans to inject USD 10 billion through a foreign exchange swap operation scheduled for February 28.

The central bank disclosed this initiative in a statement released on Friday, marking its second major intervention in recent weeks.

The mechanism involves the RBI purchasing U.S. dollars from commercial banks

in exchange for rupees, with an agreement to reverse the transaction after three years.

This operation effectively introduces rupee liquidity equivalent to the dollar purchases into the banking system, which is currently grappling with a substantial deficit of approximately two trillion rupees, one of the most severe shortfalls witnessed in more than a decade.

This latest intervention follows a similar USD 5 billion six-month foreign exchange swap conducted late last

month. The current liquidity crisis has been partially attributed to the RBI's sustained dollar sales, aimed at protecting the rupee from volatility amid a strengthening U.S. dollar, influenced by President Donald Trump's tariff policies.

The central bank has deployed multiple tools to address this situation, including open market bond purchases and extended-term variable repo auctions.

Despite implementing its first interest rate reduction in nearly five years earlier this month, financial analysts emphasise that additional liquidity measures are essential for these monetary policy adjustments to effectively penetrate the broader economic landscape.

The newly announced forex swap represents the RBI's continued commitment to stabilising the banking sector's liquidity conditions.

Indian Stock Market Opens Sharply Lower Amid Weak Global Cues



MUMBAI: The Indian benchmark indices opened sharply lower on Friday amid weak global cues, as selling was seen in the auto, IT, PSU bank and metal sectors in the early trade.

At around 9.34 am, Sensex was trading 840.82 points or 1.13 per cent down at 73,771.61 while the Nifty declined 254.15 points or 1.13 per cent at 22,290.90.

Nifty Bank was down 439.75 points or 0.90 per cent at 48,304.05. The Nifty Midcap 100 index was trading at 48,142 after declining 994.75 points or 0.12 per cent. Nifty Smallcap 100 index was at 14,836.35 after dropping 320.25 points or 2.11 per cent.

According to experts, the last three sessions have been unremarkable for the benchmark index, as indicated by the small-bodied candlestick formations. The minimal changes in price suggest persistent bearish sentiment, prompting market participants to adopt a cautious approach.

"Moving forward, one must remain vigilant with global developments, which are likely to act as catalysts in setting the initial tone for domestic markets. At the same time, one should refrain from making aggressive bets until momentum returns to the market," said Sameet Chavan, Head Research, Technical and Derivative, Angel One.

Meanwhile, in the Sensex pack, Reliance, ITC, Sun Pharma, ICICI Bank, Hindustan Unilever Limited, Axis Bank and Asian Paints were the top losers.

In the last trading session, Dow Jones declined 0.45 per cent to close at 43,239.50. The S&P 500 declined 1.59 per cent to 5,861.57 and the Nasdaq declined 2.78 per cent to close at 18,544.42.

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

The foreign institutional investors (FIIs) continued their selling on sixth day in a row, as they sold equities worth Rs 556.56 crore on February 27. However, domestic institutional investors (DIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,727.11 crore, on the same day.

SIDBI signs MoU with Tata Capital Limited to Strengthen financing avenues for MSMEs



TANVIR KAUR
Mumbai

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and Tata Capital Limited (TCL) signed an MoU for "Partnership for financing MSMEs". The focus is on growth and development of MSME Ecosystem by way of providing funding avenues in the field of machinery / equipment financing, working capital/CC/OD/business loans, and loan against property, etc.

Further, risk sharing/ co-lending/ joint financing shall also be explored while extending credit facilities to MSMEs. The MoU was signed by Vivek Kumar Malhotra, Chief General Manager, SIDBI and Vivek Chopra, Chief Operating Officer, Retail Finance, TCL in the presence of senior SIDBI and TCL officials.

India's private sector companies post higher profits, lower debt: RBI

NEW DELHI: The operating profit margin as well as net profit margin of private sector corporates in India improved across major sectors during 2023-24 while their debt burden declined during the year, reflecting the growing financial strength, according to the latest data compiled by the RBI. "The operating profits rose by 15.3 per cent during 2023-24 from 4.2 per cent growth during the previous year, at aggregate level. The operating profit growth of the manufacturing and services sector stood at 13.2 per cent and 15.5 per cent respectively, during



2023-24, from (-) 3.9 per cent and 16.8 per cent growth in 2022-23," according to the RBI report. The profit after tax increased by 16.3 per cent during 2023-24; services sector companies recorded much higher post-tax profit growth of 38.1 per cent when compared to that in the manufacturing sector's 7.6 per cent. Reserve Bank released the

data relating to the financial performance of non-government non-financial (NGNF) public limited companies during 2023-24 based on audited annual accounts of 6,955 companies.

The leverage of these companies, as measured by the debt-to-equity ratio, continued to moderate during 2023-24, according to the report.

The interest coverage ratio (ICR) improved to 4.1 during 2023-24 as growth in gross profit outpaced the growth in interest expenses; ICR of manufacturing companies remained stable at 6.3, while it improved marginally to 3.2

for services companies, the RBI said.

The share of internal sources accounted for over two-thirds of the total funds of the sample set of public limited companies during 2023-24, mainly due to a rise in reserves and surplus, the report further stated.

The gross fixed assets of these public limited companies increased by 10 per cent during 2023-24; manufacturing companies, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, electrical equipment, motor vehicles and other transport vehicles sectors recorded higher growth in fixed assets, according to the RBI.

Govt Plans Minority Stake Sales in State-Run Banks and Financial Firms

NEW DELHI: The Indian government is set to undertake minority stake sales in select state-run banks and financial companies through the offer for sale (OFS) route, according to a notice on the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) website. To facilitate the process, bids have been invited for appointing merchant bankers and legal advisers, with a submission deadline of March 27.



Though the document did not specify the banks involved, reports suggest the government plans to dilute stakes in Central Bank of India, Indian Overseas Bank, UCO Bank, and Punjab and Sind Bank.

The move aims to align with the market regulator's public shareholding norms, which require a 25 per cent public stake in listed companies. However, government-owned firms have been granted an exemption until August 2026. Currently, the government holds significant stakes in these banks—over 93 per cent in Central Bank of India, 96.4 per cent in Indian Overseas Bank, 95.4 per cent in UCO Bank, and 98.3 per cent in Punjab and Sind

Bank. It also owns 80 per cent of Bank of Maharashtra. In the past, public sector banks used Qualified Institutional Placements (QIPs) to raise capital and reduce government ownership. The new OFS plan continues this trend, focusing on minority stake sales rather than full privatisation. This strategic shift comes after the government shelved its broader privatisation plans, halting majority stake sales in at least nine state-owned entities due to ministry opposition.

Need to Save Small Investor's Trust on Banking System



SATISH SINGH

Recently, a cash embezzlement of Rs122/- crore was reported in Mumbai's New India Cooperative Bank, due to which this bank is currently facing a severe liquidity crisis. Thereafter, the Reserve Bank of India immediately banned withdrawals from the bank to handle the situation, due to which customers are facing difficulties in withdrawing their money. In such an environment, there is a state of fear and doubt in the minds of customers regarding safety of their money. A few years ago, owing to the scam in Punjab and Maharashtra Co-operative Bank (PMC), Yes Bank and Lakshmi Vilas Bank, customers also had to face huge difficulties in withdrawing their money.

Incidents of irregularities and bankruptcy in cooperative banks have now become common, which is reducing the trust of small investors in the banking system. Therefore, to keep their trust intact, the central government is considering increasing the existing insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh under the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation Act (DICGC).

At present, the banking industry is facing the problem of scarcity of deposits. In such a situation, if investors lose faith in the banking system, then banks will face more difficulties in raising deposits. It is worth mentioning that only when bank deposits increase

at a cheaper rate, banks will be able to give loans to the needy and businessmen, corporates etc., because investment in business can be done only when there is availability of capital and economic activities can increase when investment increases.

DICGC is an institution owned by the Reserve Bank of India that provides insurance cover on bank deposits. The premium for the insurance cover is paid by the banks to DICGC on behalf of the customer. All commercial banks including branches of foreign banks, local area banks and regional rural banks operating in India are insured by DICGC. In case of registration of banks, DICGC shares the details of insurance with them so that customers can be given proper information about the insurance.

At present, DICGC pays insurance amount of up to Rs 5 lakh to the customers in case of bank collapse or bankruptcy. Customers are paid their deposited money within 90 days of the bank collapsing or closing. The affected bank has to give the details of the account holders to DICGC within 45 days. After that, it returns the money to the account holders in the remaining 45 days.

If a depositor has 10 lakh rupees deposited in a bank and the bank collapses, then the depositor will be paid only the insured amount of 5 lakh rupees and the customer's 5 lakh rupees will be lost. Investors fear such a provision. Therefore, it is believed that if the insurance amount is increased, investors will not



hesitate to deposit money up to the insured amount in banks and this will also increase the credibility of banks.

The formation and functioning of a cooperative bank is based on cooperation. Most countries in the world have cooperative banks, which take deposits and give loans. The main purpose of their establishment is to provide banking facilities in agricultural and rural areas and to realize the concept of financial inclusion. Generally, their branches are limited to one state, but there are also exceptions to this.

There are 4 types of cooperative banks in India, first, primary cooperative credit societies, second, central or district cooperative bank, third, state cooperative bank and fourth, land development bank. Cooperative bank is the apex institution of cooperative credit organization. Just as the central bank situated in the district controls the credit societies, in the same way, the state cooperative bank organizes all the central banks spread across the state. In this way, this bank is the apex institution of agricultural cooperative institutions spread

across the state.

A major reason for irregularities or scams in cooperative banks is believed to be the dual control system of the Reserve Bank and the Registrar of Cooperatives. Cooperative banks are established according to the State Cooperative Societies Act. They are registered with the "Registrar of Cooperative Societies", which are regulated partially by the State Government and the Reserve Bank of India. There is no interference of the Central Government in the functioning of this bank. The task of monitoring such banks is mainly done by the State Government, whose directors are leaders of the ruling party. The role of the Reserve Bank as a regulator in this matter is limited.

So far, the Reserve Bank has taken control of 27 cooperative banks due to scams or irregularities in operations. According to the Reserve Bank of India's report on the trend and progress of banking in India, the number of urban cooperative banks has decreased from 1,926 to 1,472 in the last 2 decades. Thus, from the financial year 2004-05 till now, 156

urban cooperative banks have been merged, out of which 6 urban cooperative banks have been merged in 2023. In the past years, the Reserve Bank of India has given licenses to many urban cooperative banks, which has increased their number. Although they have also been merged later, but their number is less.

A big reason behind the general public keeping money in cooperative banks is that they offer higher interest on bank deposits. Due to this, investors get greedy. New India Cooperative Bank and PMC Bank were also giving higher interest on deposits, which was more than many other cooperative banks. Due to this greed, fake and Ponzi companies are also doing business worth billions of rupees in the country.

However, the Indian banking system is still strong and stable. It would be wrong to consider the entire banking system flawed based on the scam in New India Cooperative Bank or PMC or any other bank. This is also true, but the monitoring system in the country is very weak in the context of cooperative banks, which needs to be strengthened. Also, there is a need to increase the insurance cover to ensure that the account holders' deposits in banks are safe. Therefore, the government and the Reserve Bank of India need to take further action in the matter to give concrete shape to the corrective measures at the earliest.

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

Rupee falls 19 paise to 87.37 against US dollar in early trade

MUMBAI: The rupee declined 19 paise to 87.37 against the US dollar in early trade on Friday, as the strength of the American currency and a negative trend in domestic equities dented investor sentiments.

Forex traders said the ongoing uncertainty surrounding tariff imposition by the US has left financial markets in flux. Moreover, the tariff chaos has injected volatility and uncertainty into the US Dollar Index.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.32, then fell to 87.37 against the American currency, registering a decline of 19 paise over its previous close.

On Thursday, the rupee settled almost flat with a marginal



gain of 1 paise at 87.18 against US dollar.

"The Indian rupee depreciated by 20 paise influenced by rising geopolitical tensions and the looming threat of trade wars," CR Forex Advisors MD Amit Pabari said.

Moreover, the Reserve Bank of India is actively intervening near the 87.40 level to curb excessive depreciation of the rupee, Pabari said, adding that all eyes are on the upcoming economic data releases, including India's GDP figures.

"The USD/INR pair is expected to remain at elevated levels, with strong support at 87.00 and resistance at 87.50-87.60, amidst rising geopolitical tensions," Pabari said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was at 107.35, higher by 0.10 per cent. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, quoted 0.51 per cent lower at USD 73.66 per barrel in futures trade. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex was trading 917.03 points or 1.23 per cent lower at 73,695.40 in morning trade, while Nifty was lower by 272.15 points or 1.21 per cent to 22,272.90.

MSCI Index Rejig to Bring up to \$1 Billion Inflow; Hyundai, Zomato Brace for Volatile Friday

MUMBAI: The MSCI Inc's February index review is set to take effect after market hours on Friday, bringing a net passive inflow of up to \$1 billion into Indian stocks.

This adjustment is expected to cause increased volatility in the stock market, particularly for companies affected by the changes. According to data from IIFL Capital, the estimated inflow from these rejigs ranges between \$850 million and \$1 billion. The key highlight of the review is the inclusion of Hyundai Motor India Limited, which went public in November 2024, is set to receive an inflow of \$257 million, marking the highest weight increase among Indian securities. Now, all eyes will be on Hyun-



dai Motor India, the only Indian large-cap stock added to the MSCI Global Standard Index in the February review. Apart from these changes, the review has led to an increase in the weightage of several Indian stocks, further contributing to the anticipated inflow. Infosys Limited, Adani Enterprises Limited, and Voltas Limited will also see an increase in their weightage. HDFC Bank Limited now holds the highest weightage among Indian stocks in the MSCI index, followed by ICICI Bank Limited, Infosys Limited, and Bharti Airtel Limited.

In the small-cap segment, MSCI has added 19 Indian stocks while removing an equal number. Some of the key additions include Jyoti CNC Automation Limited, Ola Electric Mobility Limited, CarTrade Tech Limited, Afcons Infrastructure Limited, and TBO Tek Limited. Following these changes, India's weightage in the MSCI Global Standard Index will increase from 18.8 per cent to 19 per cent. However, the country has slipped one rank to third place in terms of weightage among emerging markets. Other stocks such as PB Fin-

External Affairs Minister Jaishankar meets European Commission President

EAM lauds her views on re-energizing India's engagement with Europe

NEW DELHI: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday called on the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and lauded her views on reenergizing India's engagement with Europe.

The European Commission President is on a two-day bilateral visit to India, accompanied by members of European College of Commissioners.

"Pleased to call on @EU_Commission President @vonderleyen today in Delhi. Appreciate her thoughts on reenergizing India's engagement with Europe. The wide-ranging participation of Indian Ministers and EU College of Commissioners during this visit stands testimony to the importance we place on deeper India-EU ties," Jaishankar said in a post on X.



Ursula von der Leyen, who is on a two-day official visit to India, will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday and discuss how to take strategic partnership to the next level.

She arrived in the national capital earlier in the day.

"Touchdown in Delhi with my team of Commissioners. In an era of conflicts and intense competition, you need trusted friends. For Europe, India is such a friend and a strategic ally. I'll discuss with @narendramodi how to take our strategic partnership to the next level," Ursula von der Leyen said in a post on X.

The European Commission President was accorded a warm and special welcome and was received by Minister of State for Health and Family

Welfare Anupriya Patel.

This is President Ursula von der Leyen's third visit to India. She previously visited India for a bilateral official visit in April 2022 and to attend the G20 Leaders' Summit in September 2023. PM Modi and President Ursula von der Leyen have also met regularly on the sidelines of multilateral meetings.

The EU has recently articulated its Indo-Pacific strategy, indicating interest in deeper collaborations. Discussions may include formalizing agreements to bolster coordination between naval forces operating in the region.

The visit will focus on intensifying and diversifying India-EU engagement across various sectors, including trade, investments, resilient supply chains, digital technologies, semiconductors, green hydrogen, clean energy, sustainable urbanization, water management, defence, and space.

Trump proposal to relocate Gaza's Palestinian population to neighboring countries

NEW DELHI: Citing examples from various conflict zones in Ukraine and Syria, Reuven Azar, the Ambassador of Israel to India, has backed US President Donald Trump's proposal to relocate Gaza's Palestinian population to neighboring countries.

"There is an anomaly when it comes to Gaza. When you look at conflicts in the region and outside, you can see very clearly. For example, when the Russia-Ukraine war started, five million Ukrainians left Ukraine. When there was a civil war in Syria, eight million Syrians left Syria. So in any conflict zone, people are being allowed to go to refuge, to go to a quiet place until things are over, until the war is over, until things get through a construct and then they come back. The only place in the world in which it is not allowed apparently is the Gaza Strip," Azar told IANS in an exclusive interview on Wednesday.

Much before his re-election Trump had pledged to bring



peace to West Asia and expressed solidarity with Israel on the "heinous" October 7, 2023 attack. Earlier this month, the US President had proposed a plan to resolve the decades-long West Asia crisis, suggesting the US taking over the Gaza Strip which, he said, has been "a symbol of death and destruction for so many decades".

Azar, a seasoned Israeli diplomat, stated that Trump was saying something that is "very natural" as Gazans can be temporarily relocated to a safe haven until things get better.

"This is not something that is going to happen by force. It will

be based on a voluntary basis. So, if there are countries that are ready to accept Palestinians, that want to take refugees, then we can do it," he told IANS. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was the first foreign leader received by the US President after returning to the White House, last month.

"We are optimistic because we saw what the first Trump administration did to the region. We reached the Abraham Accords and Israel got very important achievements from that administration that have to do with the American recognition of Jerusalem, our capital, the moving of the American Embassy to Jerusalem, the recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights and many other things. So, we have a hope that with this Trump administration, we can achieve more," he said.

Explosions near Russian Consulate in France have signs of terrorist attack: Moscow



MOSCOW/MARSEILLE: The Russian Foreign Ministry on Monday stated that explosions on the territory of the Russian Consulate General in France's Marseilles resemble a terrorist attack. "The explosions on the territory of the Russian Consulate General in Marseilles have all the hallmarks of a terrorist attack. We demand that the country accrediting them take comprehensive and prompt measures to investigate, as well as steps to strengthen the security of Russian foreign missions," Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova told state-owned Tass news agency.

Reports in French and Russian media indicated that the explosion occurred near the Russian consulate in Marseilles at around 8 AM Monday, though no casualties have been reported. Prompting a swift response from emergency services, about 30 fire and rescue personnel were deployed to the scene, reported Tass, citing French news channel BFM TV.

It was reported that unidentified individuals threw two incendiary devices into the consulate's garden. A stolen car was also discovered near the site of the explosion, raising further security concerns.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has demanded that French authorities take immediate and comprehensive measures to investigate the matter and bolster security around Russian diplomatic missions in the country.

The explosion comes amid heightened tensions between Russia and the West, particularly following the European Union's recent announcement of its 16th package of sanctions against Moscow. The incident also coincides with commemorations marking three years since the start of the Ukraine-Russia war. Last week, Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) claimed that Ukrainian authorities were allegedly planning attacks against Russian diplomatic missions in Europe, including in Germany, the Baltic States, and Scandinavia. The agency suggested that Slovakia and Hungary could also be targeted as part of an effort to discredit EU nations that have adopted a distinct stance on the Ukraine conflict.

Iran Condemns New Israeli Attacks in Syria



TEHRAN: Iran on Thursday strongly condemned Israeli airstrikes in southern Syria and near Damascus, calling for international action to halt Israeli aggression.

Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei, in a statement released by the ministry, denounced the strikes carried out by Israeli warplanes on Tuesday night, targeting multiple locations. "We warn against the continuation of Israel's expansionist and aggressive actions in Syrian territory," Baghaei said, urging the international community and Muslim states to take "decisive and immediate actions" to condemn and stop Israel's "lawbreaking." He cited Israel's "frequent violations" of the 1974 Disengagement Agreement between Israel and Syria, stating that the strikes were a "flagrant violation of the principles of the United Nations Charter as well as international law."

"Israel's occupation of parts of Syria's soil and frequent violations of the Arab state's sovereignty and territorial integrity amount to committing the crime of aggression," Baghaei said, calling on the UN Security Council to intervene. Xinhua news agency reported. The Israeli strikes followed remarks by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who called for a demilitarized southern Syria.

Abduction, Conversion and Forced Marriage of Hindu, Christian Girls Continues Unabated in Pakistan: Report

ISLAMABAD: The latest report of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has slammed the Pakistan government for failing to ensure security and freedom to its minorities, highlighting the constant and consistent increase in cases of killings and imprisonment on charges of blasphemy.

The report titled 'Under Siege: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2023/24' cited that, as of October 2024, over 750 individuals were imprisoned on blasphemy charges while at least four killings were recorded based on faith-based issues. At least three cases of killings were also reported, targeting specifically the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan. The HRCP report detailed the increasing mob violence against religious minorities, citing incidents, including mob attacks on places of worship, homes, arbitrary



detentions and desecration of minorities' graves. The report also gives alarming details on increasing cases of forced kidnappings, marriages and conversions of Hindu and Christian women and girls. The report details attacks against the Christian community in Jaranwala and Sargodha and the spread of disinformation before and during the incident through social media that triggered the mob to attack the churches and homes of Christians.

"Despite investigations by a special branch in Punjab, no effective measures have been

Trump plans \$5 million immigration Gold Cards that companies can buy for talented employees

NEW YORK: US President Donald Trump has announced plans for an immigration Gold Card that companies can buy for \$5 million for highly talented employees to deal with the uncertainties of work visas and green cards.

The Gold Card programme he announced on Tuesday, though, is primarily meant for the rich who can buy it for themselves.

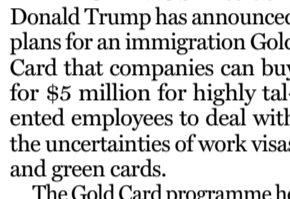
"Apple and all these companies will be able to buy a card for the people, who are Number 1 in their class at top schools and whom they want to employ," he said in Washington.

Under the current system of employment visas, he said people may graduate from top institutions like the Wharton School of Finance, his alma mater, or Harvard or Stanford "and nobody knows if you can even go to work for a company".

The Gold Card "is going to give you green card privileges plus it's going to be a route to citizenship," he said. It could deal with the uncertainty of H-1B work visas for professionals that are allocated through a lottery that top talent may miss out on, and the wait of decades for green cards that people from India have to endure.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said the Gold Card would replace the current programme known as EB-5 which gives immigration privileges to people who invest between \$800,000 and \$1.05 million to create jobs depending on the areas they go to.

The Gold Visas will primarily



be for "people with money and people that create jobs", President Trump said.

Lutnick added, "We're going to make sure they're wonderful world-class global citizens."

President Trump said it could become a moneymaker for the US government, helping reduce the deficit. "A million cards would be worth \$5 trillion -- five trillion and if you sell ten million of the cards, that's a total of \$50 trillion," he said.

"Well we have \$35 trillion in debt, that'd be nice," President Trump said that the Gold Visa programme could be unveiled in two weeks.

He said the programme was legal and would not require Congressional approval since it would be like allocating green cards.

However, Congress has set national limits for green cards and the Gold Card programme may be constrained by them.

Trump may also want to remove some programmes like the green card lottery which allows visas through a lottery to citizens of some countries that have not used their green card quotas.

"Why do we give out lotteries of green cards," Lutnick asked.

"We shouldn't give them away," President Trump said.

It's in Russia's benefit to end war in Ukraine, says Trump after meeting Macron

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump said it is to Russia's "benefit" to make a deal and end the war against Ukraine and he thinks President Vladimir Putin does want to make a deal.

Addressing a joint news conference with him, France's Emmanuel Macron stressed the importance of security guarantees in any negotiated agreement to end the war.

The two leaders met at the White House on the third anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Earlier in the day, the United States broke with its European allies to vote



against a resolution at the UN General Assembly condemning Russia as the aggressor.

"It's very much to Russia's benefit to make a deal, and I feel that we'll do that," President Trump said at the joint news conference, responding to a question about whether he trusted President Vladimir Putin. There is tremendous distrust on both sides.

President Trump said one of the first phone calls he had after starting his second term was to President Putin, who he believed, is ready to make a deal. He repeated that it is to the "benefit of Russia to make a deal and (for President Putin) to go on with leading Russia in a very positive way".

The American president also said he is looking forward to

signing a deal with Ukraine that will give the US rights to rare earth minerals in return for the billions of dollars in security assistance it has received to defend itself from Russia.

President Macron, who came to Washington DC after two rounds of meetings with European allies who are preparing to deal with a situation in which the US is unlikely to accord them unqualified support in this matter as before, repeatedly stressed the need for "checked and verified" security guarantees in any peace agreement reached with Russia.

INDIA MISSES TRILLION DOLLAR BUSINESS

US Announces a New Chip, but China May be Ahead



GOPAL MISRA

India has missed being a destination for the new generation computer chips, though may be having an initial edge over in the development of softwares even with a few countries in Europe and in some sectors with the US and China. With the US already announcing a new Chip driven by the particles akin to Boson-Higgs or the divine particle, perhaps, a few weeks before the Chinese announcement in this regard. It, according to the industries sources, could be imminent.

India already has missed the opportunity to be on the front row of this sensitive field. It may be recalled that the divine particle was first discovered by an Indian scientist, Satyendra Nath Bose. Later, this theory was validated by others.

Instead, India appears to be struggling for setting up production of semiconductor chips, already dated in this highly competitive field.

In other words, India is going to be dumped with redundant technologies, especially in the computer hardware.

If the current establishment in New Delhi had cared to

make India a part of the select countries to lead technologies in this sensitive field, she, perhaps, did have missed the opportunity to join the exclusive club of the technology-rich countries. It, thus, has missed an expected trillion-dollar business, and perhaps soon will be competing with countries like Pakistan and a few countries in Africa.

Just a decade before, India was one of the leaders in the high-tech field of software development. She was also keen to become a hub of the state-of-the-art technology in the field of computer hardware. However, with recent breakthroughs in computer chip technology in the US, India's bid to become self-sufficient in the field of computer hardware has received a setback. Also, in recent years, India is being overtaken in software development by China, and also perhaps, by South Korea. It may be noted that India had already emerged as a formidable force in the development of software technologies before 2014, more specifically before the reign of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Only Blame Game: It may be denied by the present ruling elite for its inability to prepare the country for her to qualify to join and gradu-



ate in higher sciences and technologies. However, even within the BJP, a few may agree to condone Modi for this pathetic situation. He cannot deny that during the past 10 years, he has successfully diverted the country's goal from achieving a scientific outlook to become a nation of pilgrims or devouts in quest of better life after death.

Unaware of Bitter Truths: It is also possible that the present rulers may not be aware of the bitter truths of history that Babur had defeated much larger forces of the Lodhis in the battle of Panipat on 21 April 1526. He was able to trounce the Delhi sultanate forces with his soldiers equipped with guns and artillery laden with gunpowder. Interestingly, Babur had obtained gunpowder from China.

In other words, even today rulers in New Delhi are unable to comprehend that by conceding Chinese supremacy even in the fields of computers and softwares, India's defences are being compromised.

It may be recalled that the Chinese tech-giant, Huawei, had reportedly assisted Pakistan with its software for updating the firepower of the Pakistan Air Force. It is being suspected, but never confirmed, that the Chinese software was used in hitting the Indian fighter plane, MIG-19 Bison on 27 February 2019 during Modi's much-trumpeted surgical operation against the hide-outs of the Islamic terrorists in the Pak-occupied Jammu and Kashmir, thus causing embarrassment to India.

Before 2014, more specifically before the arrival of Modi in India's political scene, the

Indian technology in these crucial fields, specially in the computer software and space technologies had an edge over with her northern neighbour China, according to a senior BJP leader, who had held key portfolios in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government.

Asked how many marks he would like to give, he beamed that "the marks are given only when something is written in the answer sheet, but it could not be applied in the case of the present government". He, however, refused to elaborate further.

New Chip: The recent announcement of Microsoft to introduce the Majorana chip, which is expected to revolutionize the present computing system, has brought paradigm changes in the present computer operating system.

It is stated that it is a breakthrough not only in terms of technology, but also redefines the traditional approach towards the matter whether it is solid, liquid or plasma. It is to be defined for common people what sort of semiconductor platform it would be offering.

It is also stated that Majorana is a particle akin to anti-matter, but more details are being awaited. For most of us, it could be resembling the Higgs-Boson particle dis-

covered in 2012. In fact, it was visualized by Bose, later it was validated at CERN, and those associated with the experiment were awarded nobel prize.

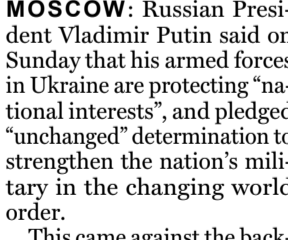
China Smiles: There was no immediate reaction from Beijing to the announcement of Microsoft's top executive, Satya Nadella, but insiders believe that a Chinese version of this chip could be announced soon.

The scholars, who have keenly observed these developments in New Delhi, believe that with the invention of the new chip, Indians have to invest in Windows 12. The present hardware is likely to become redundant. Asked how India should face the new challenge, the experts observed that it is the result of self-aggrandizing based on false beliefs.

Unless corrective steps were not resorted to for improving our perspective and national goals, India's prospects in this lucrative business are doomed, they stated.

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

Putin lauds Russian soldiers in Ukraine for defending 'national interest'



MOSCOW: Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Sunday that his armed forces in Ukraine are protecting "national interests", and pledged "unchanged" determination to strengthen the nation's military in the changing world order.

This came against the backdrop of the third anniversary of Russia's war against Ukraine, which is on February 24.

"Today, at the risk of their lives and with courage, they (soldiers) are resolutely defending their homeland, national interests and Russia's future," Putin said in a video released by the Kremlin on Russia's Defenders of the Fatherland Day.

"We will continue to improve the combat capabilities of the army and navy, their combat readiness as an essential component of Russia's security and guarantee of its present and future sovereignty," he said, according to a report in the nation's leading daily, The Moscow Times.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Presidential Aide Yuri Ushakov this week held talks in Riyadh with a United States delegation represented by Secretary of State

Marco Rubio, National Security Adviser Michael Waltz, and US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff in a bid to improve their ties and negotiate talks to resolve Russia-Ukraine conflict.

A press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Russia stated that both sides exchanged views on the situation surrounding Ukraine and reiterated their mutual commitment to settle the conflict.

According to the release, the Russian side emphasised the importance of eliminating the root causes of the conflict, creating proper conditions for achieving lasting and enduring peace, and ensuring the security and legitimate interests of all countries in the region.

An agreement was reached to continue joint work in this area through special envoys to be appointed in the near future.

Bhumi Pednekar talks about essaying myriad of colourful characters in her cinematic journey

MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Bhumi Pednekar, who is receiving a lot of positive response for 'Mere Husband Ki Biwi', recently completed 10 years in the film industry as an actor. Following her milestone, the actress spoke about portraying an array of characters in her journey, and how it has shaped her career.



From her memorable debut in 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha' to her recent roles, Bhumi has emerged as one of the most versatile and celebrated actors of her generation.

Reflecting on her journey, Bhumi shared, "My journey began with 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha', and every day since has been a reminder of how far I've come. These 10 years have taught me resilience, passion,

and the power of believing in oneself".

She further mentioned, "I've had the privilege of playing some truly diverse characters, an overweight bride in my debut, a queer character in 'Badhaai Do', a journalist

fighting for justice in 'Bhaskak', an octogenarian who defied age norms in 'Saand Ki Aankh', a woman confronting colour biases in 'Bala', and someone embracing her agency in 'Thank You For Coming'. The actress has essayed a

variety of roles across different genres, and her career has been defined by her ability to embrace powerful, socially relevant narratives while delivering exceptional performances. Her fearless approach to portraying complex and unconventional characters has resonated deeply with audiences, making her one of Bollywood's most respected actresses.

As Bhumi celebrates this important achievement, she reflects on the lessons learned and the opportunities that continue to shape her career. The actress is said to have multiple exciting projects in the pipeline, as she remains committed to taking on roles that challenge the status quo and offer fresh perspectives on contemporary issues.

Kashmir Valley sees fresh snow, rain, more wet weather ahead



GULMARG: Higher reaches of Kashmir received fresh snowfall on Tuesday, while the plains, including Srinagar, were lashed by rain, bringing much-needed relief to residents after a dry winter, officials said.

Popular tourist destination Gulmarg and surrounding areas saw fresh snow, along with other high-altitude regions in the valley. The rainfall led to a significant drop in daytime temperatures across the plains.

The Meteorological Department (MeT) has issued

weather alerts for the coming days. A yellow alert is in place for February 26 across Jammu and Kashmir, while an orange alert has been issued for February 27. On February 28, Jammu remains under an orange alert, with a yellow alert for Kashmir. The advisory warns of isolated heavy snowfall and rainfall, which may impact surface transportation.

Director MeT Dr. Mukhtar Ahmad said the wet weather is expected to continue until February 28, with light to moderate rain and snow across most areas. The heaviest snowfall is likely between February 27 and 28. Light rain and snow may continue on March 1 and 2 due to an active Western Disturbance.

Authorities have warned of possible disruptions in air and surface transport, including key routes like the Srinagar-Jammu National Highway, Mughal Road, and passes such as Sadhna, Razdhan, and Zojila. Tourists, transporters, and travelers have been advised to plan accordingly.

Farmers have been urged to suspend irrigation and fieldwork, while departments responsible for snow clearance and emergency services have been directed to stay on alert. The public can contact the District Emergency Operation Centre in Srinagar for assistance.

Kashmir has faced an 80% precipitation deficit this winter, but the ongoing wet spell has raised hopes of reducing the shortfall.

Even after 58 years of Haryana coming into existence, we are deprived of our new capital and separate High Court. At present, the Haryana State Government plans to build a new Haryana Vidhan Sabha building near the Panchkula border in Chandigarh. The construction of a big new Haryana Vidhan Sabha building in Chandigarh for the increased seats of the new Vidhan Sabha in 2029 shows that the current Haryana Government and the Opposition have no interest in building a new capital and a separate High Court in the middle of the state. Their thinking is that if a new capital is built after

'Swabhiman Andolan' leaders demand for Haryana's Capital in the middle of state

Next rally on May 11 in Mahendergarh, 100 rally will held in the state says Randeep Lohchab
FW DESK
Chandigarh

Meham 23 February 2025
Even after 58 years of Haryana coming into existence, we are deprived of our new capital and separate High Court. At present, the Haryana State Government plans to build a new Haryana Vidhan Sabha building near the Panchkula border in Chandigarh. The construction of a big new Haryana Vidhan Sabha building in Chandigarh for the increased seats of the new Vidhan Sabha in 2029 shows that the current Haryana Government and the Opposition have no interest in building a new capital and a separate High Court in the middle of the state. Their thinking is that if a new capital is built after



Hindu devotees stand in a queue as they wait to offer prayers on the occasion of 'Maha Shivaratri' festival at Shivalva Bhaiyan temple, in Amritsar on Wednesday, February 26, 2025. PHOTO-PRABHJOT GILL



some time, it should be built in Panchkula only. The head offices of many departments are being built in Panchkula for the last two decades. The indication is clear that if the new Vidhan Sabha building is built in Chandigarh, then in future the capital of the state will never be built in the middle of Haryana. This will be a never-healing wound for the people of the state and future generations. Chandigarh is located in a remote corner of Haryana, where one has to travel 800 kilometers to come and go from South West Haryana. Neither our language nor our culture is found in Chandigarh. No one knows or identifies themselves here, there is great difficulty in living, eating and staying here, the people of Haryana are ridiculed in the High Court and government offices here,

we have no respect here, because of which our self respect is dying. In the current situation, the need of the hour is that the new Vidhansabha building should not be built in Chandigarh but in the middle of Haryana, beyond Delhi, at equal distance from North-South, between Hisar-Meham, Jind-Bhiwani, after conducting a survey, it should be built at a suitable place, a separate High Court of Haryana should be built here, a modern, well equipped, world class and beautiful city should be established at this place. In the interest of the state, public interest, bright future of the future generations, facilities, equal development, employment for youth, dignity and self-respect of the citizens, in accordance with public sentiments, Nyay Paksh is running "Swabhiman Andolan" on this issue.

Shah Rukh Khan starrer 'Dil To Pagal Hai' re-release to draw the curtains on month of romance



MUMBAI: The Shah Rukh Khan-starrer 'Dil To Pagal Hai' is gearing up for its re-release to lower the curtains on the month of romance.

The film, which also starred Madhuri Dixit and Karisma Kapoor, is set to arrive in cinemas on February 28. 'Dil To Pagal Hai' was directed by legendary filmmaker Yash Chopra, and bagged three National Awards. At the 45th National Film Awards, the film won 3 awards, including Best Popular Film. Karisma Kapoor's performance as Nisha won her the National Film Award for Best Supporting Actress.

The film is known for its soulful music, mesmerizing dance sequences, and unforgettable dialogues, and remains a cult favorite among fans of Bollywood romance. The film follows the love lives of the members of a musical troupe, in which two dancers (Madhuri Dixit and Karisma Kapoor) get entangled in a love triangle with their choreographer (played by SRK). The soundtrack was composed by Uttam Singh, and the lyrics were penned by Anand Bakshi.

The film was the second of Yash Chopra's 4 consecutive films to star Shah Rukh Khan as the male lead. The other two were Veer-Zara and his last directorial 'Jab Tak Hai Jaan'. 'Dil To Pagal Hai' was the third film to feature SRK opposite Madhuri Dixit, after 'Anjaam' and 'Koyla'.

Sridevi was initially offered to play the role of Pooja, but she declined as she did not find her role as substantial as that in 'Lamhe', and the role eventually went to Madhuri.

Samprabhav 2025: NIPER Mohali Hosts Pioneering Pharmaceutical Symposium

FW DESK

The Department of Pharmaceutical Management at NIPER S.A.S. Nagar (Mohali) successfully hosted "Samprabhav 2025" on February 22nd and 23rd, 2025. This two-day national symposium convened industry leaders, academicians, and aspiring pharmaceutical professionals to discuss the latest trends and innovations in the sector.

The event was graced by esteemed dignitaries, including Chief Guest Subba Rao Chaganti, Honorary Chairperson Vinay Kumar Lohariwala, Guest of Honour Sanjay Sharma, and Distinguished Speaker Supreet Singh. In his inaugural address, Subba Rao Chaganti emphasized the critical role of early-phase marketing and digital transformation in shaping the pharmaceutical industry's future.



Vinay Kumar Lohariwala provided a visionary outlook on leadership and talent development, highlighting the need for agile business models.

The symposium featured insightful sessions led by eminent speakers. Tavinder Jit Singh Vasudeva, founder of Micro Labs shared various innovative marketing strategies while Harit Mohan delved into market research and technological advancements, while Dr. Ankit Jain, Ph.D., discussed DNA sequencing, pharmacogenomics, and the role of gut microbiota in disease understanding.

Prof. Anand Sharma as the



Head of the Department, and Dr. Anil K Angrish, Associate Professor from the Department facilitated the speakers.

A significant highlight was the focus on biosimilars and medical devices. Gopal Rao provided a comprehensive overview of biosimilar development and

commercialization, and Ajay Kumar Shukla discussed emerging trends in medical devices, including 3D printing and telemedicine. The symposium also addressed innovation and intellectual property. Komal Sharma Talwar emphasized AI-driven innovation and patent

analysis, while Satish Kumar Arora inspired attendees with insights into angel investment and entrepreneurial ventures. With discussions on talent development and strategic consulting, Virendra Kumar highlighted essential skills for competitive intelligence, and Suresh Pemmaraju shared strategies for market entry and corporate growth.

The event concluded with Guest of Honour and Distinguished Speaker sessions. The Guest of Honour Sanjay Sharma offered insights into global business strategies, shedding light on the evolving competitive landscape of the pharma sector. Distinguished Speaker Supreet Singh shared transformative perspectives on entrepreneurship and emerging healthcare business models, focusing on bridging the gap between academia and industry.

38th Edition of the SJOBA Rally 2025 kicks-off, competing in North India's longest running rally

Flag-off preceded by Super Special Stage showcasing drivers' skills with their machines
KULBIR SINGH KALSII
Chandigarh

The highly anticipated motorsports event, the 38th edition of the SJOBA Rally 2025, being organised by the St. John's Old Boys Association (SJOBA) - the alumni association of St. John's High School, Chandigarh, officially kicked-off with the rally being flagged-off by Chandigarh's Mayor Harpreet Kaur Babla at the Sector 34 Exhibition Ground, Chandigarh. This three-day adrenaline-fueled rally will conclude on March 2, 2025, with a prize distribution ceremony at the CGA Golf Range, Chandigarh.

Sharing further insights, Harpal Singh Malvai, President of SJOBA said, "To make the start exciting we introduced specially designed short tracks and gave members of the public an opportunity to get a close view of the powerful machines in full action on these tracks. This drew large crowds."

Meanwhile, the event kicked off with the scrutiny of vehicles, with 30 four-wheelers and 60 two-wheelers, along with their drivers and riders. The participants will be competing in four challenging sections each day. The total prize money for the 2025 edition of the rally is approximately Rs. 6 lakhs, along with trophies and additional awards for participants and winners.



Danish Singh Mangat, Secretary of SJOBA and Competitors Relations Officer (CRO), added that there are women also taking part and that 3 riders are participating in the women category with their two-wheelers. "A diverse group of professionals and emerging rally enthusiasts from Chandigarh, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi NCR, Rajasthan and other various parts of India have come to participate in the rally," said Mangat.

SPS Ghai, Clerk of Course (COC) of SJOBA, while talking about the rally's route said: "We have outlined a challenging route that will be covered over the course of three days by rally drivers and riders. The participants will mainly pass through Punjab's Ropar, Garhshankar, Mansowal, and Hoshiarpur districts. The rally will also hit a part of Himachal Pradesh. This year's route offers variation and there is a good degree of difficulty that participants will have to overcome. The route features unmetalled surfaces, axle-breaking riverbeds - both dry and wet, fast tarmac with winding hairpins and an exhilarating hilly terrain in both Punjab and Himachal Pradesh."

Nagendra Singh, Deputy Clerk of Course (DCOC) of SJOBA, added, "In the 'Challenge Rally' (Extreme), Jeeps, Cars, and Bikes are participating. Participants in this category are required to navigate through some of the most challenging terrains, covering an average distance of 200 km per day." It is noteworthy that the rally is being held under an official affiliation of the Federation of Motor Sports Clubs of India (FMSCI). Comprehensive safety measures have been put in place for the participants with ambulances stationed at key points along the rally route. Additionally, First Intervention Vehicles (FIVs) manned by SJOBA marshals are positioned at each competitive stage to ensure a rapid response in need of emergencies.

Participants will be competing in four challenging sections each day. The total prize money for the 2025 edition of the rally is approximately Rs. 6 lakhs, along with trophies and additional awards for participants and winners.

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Social Media Playing a Crucial Role in Bringing Music to Millions says Sukhwinder Singh



KULBIR SINGH KALSII
Chandigarh

Renowned singer and composer Sukhwinder Singh, known for lending his powerful voice to Bollywood hits like 'Jai Ho', 'Chak De', 'Chaiyya Chaiyya', 'Haule Haule', 'Banjara', 'Saki Saki', and 'Ramta Jogi', continues to receive widespread appreciation for his music. The veteran singer, who has been an integral part of the music industry for nearly three decades, once again finds himself in the limelight with his latest song, "Nagini", featuring lyrics penned by the acclaimed lyricist Babu Singh Maan.

Singh, who brought international recognition to Indian music with his Oscar-winning song 'Jai Ho', believes that Nagini will captivate audiences, especially the youth. The song's lyrics—

Selected Assistant Professors in Punjab continue to protest

FW DESK

Members of the '1158 Assistant Professors and Librarians Front, Punjab' staged a protest march in SAS Nagar (Mohali) today, demanding the completion of the recruitment process for 1158 posts of assistant professors and librarians in government colleges. Carrying placards demanding that the government complete the entire recruitment process, the selected Assistant Professors staged a protest asserting that



their primary demand was the appointment of the remaining candidates to government colleges to ensure that all the 1158 posts were filled.

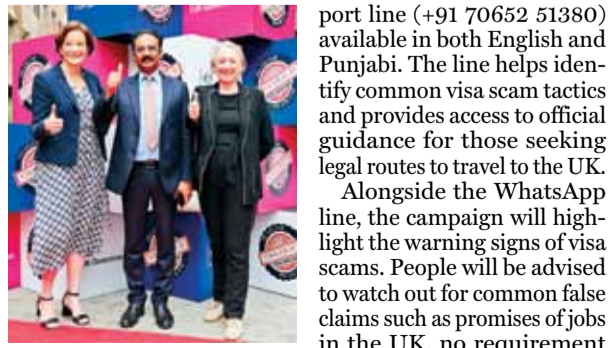
Gurlal Mann, himself a selected candidate for Assistant Professor-Punjabi and who is spearheading the stir said that the protest will continue

until all the selected candidates are appointed and the recruitment process is completed. He alleged that despite a favourable ruling from Punjab and Haryana High Court allowing the 1,158 recruitments to proceed, the government had delayed the appointments for a long. The protesters argued that the issue is about recruitment and the survival of government colleges, which have not had regular professor appointments for 25 years.

UK Launches VISA Fraud Awareness Campaign 'VISA FRAUD TON BACHO'

PRABHJOT GILL
Jalandhar

The UK has launched the 'Visa Fraud Ton Bacho' campaign to help protect Indian citizens from the physical, financial, and emotional risks of visa fraud and irregular migration. The campaign was launched at Lovely Professional University (LPU) in the presence of Founder Chancellor of LPU and Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha), Dr. Ashok Kumar Mittal, Ms. Christina Scott, British Deputy High Commissioner to India, Ms. Caroline Rowett, Deputy High Commissioner, Chandigarh, Col. Dr. Rashmi Mittal, Pro-Chancellor of LPU, Dr. Jaspal



Singh Sandhu, Vice-Chancellor of LPU, Mr. Ben Punglesy, First Secretary of Justice and Home Affairs, and Amandeep Grewal, Deputy Head of Mission at Chandigarh.

The campaign includes a dedicated WhatsApp sup-

port line (+91 70652 51380) available in both English and Punjabi. The line helps identify common visa scam tactics and provides access to official guidance for those seeking legal routes to travel to the UK.

Alongside the WhatsApp line, the campaign will highlight the warning signs of visa scams. People will be advised to watch out for common false claims such as promises of jobs in the UK, no requirement for English-language tests (IELTS), and inflated fees.

Visa fraud leads to unacceptable and unnecessary levels of debt and puts individuals at risk of physical harm and exploitation. Anyone found committing visa fraud could

face a 10-year ban on travel to the UK. Under the Mobility and Migration Partnership Agreement, the UK and India are committed to addressing irregular migration. The campaign represents a further element of joint efforts to step up the fight against irregular migration and visa fraud.

Christina Scott, British Deputy High Commissioner to India, stated: "The opportunity to visit, study, and work in the UK has never been greater, and Indian nationals continue to receive the largest share of UK visit and work visas. However, the dreams of many young people are being exploited, with too many falling victim to visa fraud."

Eco Bikers Club, Mohali Organizes 'February Love Month Ride'

Kulbir Singh Kalsi
SAS Nagar (Mohali)

Eco Bikers Club, Mohali organized the 'February Love Month Ride' under the campaign for 'Drug-Free Punjab'. The theme of this special ride was "Spread Love, Shed Stress." Sharing details about the event, Mohit Rajal, Adventure Ride Coordinator of the club, informed that the ride started from Ram Bhan, Kharar, passing through Kurali, Siswan, Barotiwala, Hariapur, and concluded at Arki, Himachal Pradesh. Riders from all age groups actively



participated in this event with enthusiasm.

Promoting Love, Unity, and Positive Energy in Society - Club mentor and advisor Neelam Tangri stated that the primary objective of the Eco

Bikers Club is to spread love, unity, and positive energy in society. Through such rides, the club provides a platform for youth to engage in constructive activities and contribute to social causes.