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BJP MLA PROPOSES RENAMING DELHI'S NAJAFGARH TO NAHARGARH

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KANGANA RANAUT, JAVED AKHTAR SETTLE DEFAMATION CASE; ACTOR APOLOGISES FOR INCONVENIENCE TO LYRICIST

CAG Report on Delhi's Health Services Tabled in Assembly

NEWDELHI: The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report on health services in the national Capital, during the erstwhile AAP government's regime, was tabled in the Delhi Assembly on Friday.

The Central government auditor's report on the health department's expenses under the AAP dispensation, is one of the dozens of reports that the BJP government has vowed to present in the House, to expose corruption under the previous regime. In the CAG report tabled on Friday, the Mohalla Clinics, one of the flagship projects of the Kejriwal administration as well as government hospitals came under scathing criticism for the gross irregularities, inefficiencies, price escalation and under-utilisation of funds.

A couple of BJP legislators, speaking on the CAG report in the Assembly, tore into the former AAP government and accused it of promoting corruption and malpractices in health departments. BJP MLA Harish Khurana slammed the AAP



government over cost escalation and overpricing of several projects, due to delays.

He said that the CAG report clearly shows the array of irregularities that took place under the AAP government. "In 11 years of their rule, they built just three hospitals and also incurred huge losses to the exchequer. In 11 years of their governance, only 3 hospitals were either built or extended. Indira Gandhi hospital suffered 5 years' delay, leading to escalation in cost by Rs 314 crore. Similarly, Burari hospital saw cost escalation by about

Rs 41 crore," Khurana said. "In total, an additional expense of Rs 382 crore was made on construction of three hospitals," he pointed out.

"The funds provided by the Centre to the state government in fighting the Covid pandemic were also mismanaged. They were blaming the Centre over shortage of funds but the facts reveal that state government was responsible for bungling up," said Khurana, son of former Delhi CM Madan Lal Khurana. The CAG report highlights the 'dire conditions' of Mohalla

The funds provided by the Centre to the state government in fighting the Covid pandemic were also mismanaged. They were blaming the Centre over shortage of funds but the facts reveal that state government was responsible for bungling up"

Clinics, the much-touted dispensaries started under the stewardship of former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal. Earlier in the day, AAP leaders protested outside the Assembly against the suspension of 21 lawmakers, this week. Ex-Chief Minister Atishi, now Leader of Opposition, also wrote to Speaker Vijender Gupta to flag the 'severe blow to democratic values'.

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

danger. But I believe this modern version of great power competition is an opportunity for Europe and India to reimagine their partnership," she said.

"In many ways, the EU and India are uniquely placed to respond to this challenge together," she added. Von der Leyen said it is time to take the EU-India strategic partnership to next level. "This is not a time to place limits on our cooperation. Or to get stuck looking for agreement on every issue of regional or global concern," she said.

"It is time to be pragmatic and ambitious. And to realign our priorities for today's realities," she said. The European Com-

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.

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.

Swamy and senior counsel RS Cheema, representing the Gandhis, both sought more time to file their submissions.

The counsel argued that there should not be any stay on the investigation in the case, while Cheema, along with advocate Tarannum Cheema, countered that this case stems from a private complaint, and there was no official probe to begin with.

Subramanian Swamy had accused Sonia and Rahul Gandhi, along with other Congress leaders, of conspiring to cheat and misappropriate funds.

Delhi CM Gupta Reverses AAP Govt's Stand, Agrees to Sign MoU with Centre for Health Centres

NEW DELHI: Rekha Gupta government in Delhi is preparing to sign an MoU with the Centre for implementation of the PM-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM), a major reversal of the previous AAP government's decision to oppose the scheme, an official indicated on Friday.

A big signal of Chief Minister Gupta overturning the previous AAP government's decision came on Friday with the Delhi government withdrawing a petition from the Supreme Court wherein it had opposed a Delhi High Court direction to enter into an agreement with the Centre for the ABHIM scheme.

A Bench of Justices B.R. Gavai and P.K. Mishra on Friday permitted the withdrawal of



the petition when Delhi government's counsel Advocate Jyoti Mendiratta said, "We are going ahead with the implementation of the scheme".

The High Court's direction to the Delhi government in January came on a 2017 Public Interest Litigation (PIL) which claimed that non-implementation of ABHIM scheme in Delhi

was not justified at a time when it was benefiting residents of 33 states and UTs.

The High Court had directed the AAP government to implement the ABHIM scheme on pilot basis and scale it up later.

The Rekha Gupta government's decision to work in close cooperation with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's govern-

ment is in sync with the ruling BJP's election promise to improve health services in the city.

An indication of the Chief Minister's priority for improving health services came in her first Cabinet meeting when she unveiled a blueprint to activate 1,139 urban public health centres or Ayushman Arogya Mandirs (U-AAMs) under the ABHIM scheme with an investment of Rs 2,406 crore from the Centre.

To showcase the BJP-led Delhi government's vision and commitment to improving health services, the Health Department has also been tasked by the CM to set up within 30 days 11 new model U-AAMs - one each in every district - under the supervision of the District Magistrates.

Atishi writes to assembly speaker, calls suspension of AAP MLAs 'blow to democracy'

NEW DELHI: The suspension of 21 AAP MLAs from the Delhi Assembly was an "insult" to people's mandate and a "blow to democracy", Leader of Opposition Atishi said in a letter to Speaker Vijender Gupta on Friday.

Condemning the suspensions, Atishi alleged that opposition voices were being deliberately suppressed. In her letter to the speaker in Hindi, Atishi expressed concern over the events in the Delhi Assembly, where she claimed that opposition MLAs faced discriminatory treatment for their protests. She claimed



AAP legislators were suspended after they raised slogans of "Jai Bhim" during Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena's address, while BJP MLAs who chanted "Modi-Modi" faced no consequences.

The controversy escalated when the suspended AAP MLAs, including Atishi, were barred

from entering the assembly premises to stage a peaceful protest at the Mahatma Gandhi statue on Thursday. The opposition leader argued that such restrictions were unprecedented and violated democratic traditions. "This is the first time in the Delhi Assembly that the elected MLAs were not even allowed to enter the assembly premises," she said, adding that the decision was aimed at "suppressing the opposition and crushing their voice". On Tuesday, 21 AAP MLAs, including Atishi, were suspended for disrupting the LG's inaugu-

ral address by raising slogans against the alleged removal of portraits of B R Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh from Chief Minister Rekha Gupta's office in the assembly. The speaker suspended the MLAs and ordered them to be marshalled out. Atishi urged the speaker to "uphold democratic values" and "ensure fairness" for all legislators. "Hon'ble speaker, you are the guardian of this assembly. It is the duty of the guardian to do equal justice to all the MLAs, whether they are from the ruling party or the opposition," she stated.

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.

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.

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 Singhi, 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.

BJP MLA proposes renaming Delhi's Najafgarh to Nahargarh

NEW DELHI: Less than 20 days into power, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) members have already begun pushing for the renaming of certain areas in Delhi.

On Thursday, BJP MLA Neelam Pahalwan proposed renaming Najafgarh in southwest Delhi as 'Nahargarh', claiming that the Mughals had altered its original name.

Pahalwan, who won the recent Assembly polls from Najafgarh defeating AAP's Tarun Kumar by over 29,000 votes, claimed on the floor of Assembly that the renaming effort has been in the works for a long time.

"Najafgarh faced many challenges under Mughal rule. During the 1857 revolt, Raja Nahar Singh fought and



brought the Najafgarh region into Delhi's territory. Despite several attempts, including efforts by MP Parvesh Verma, we have been trying to change the name of Najafgarh to Nahargarh," Pahalwan said. She added that the people of her constituency hope that the

BJP-majority Assembly will support this renaming effort.

Notably, Najafgarh's current name traces back to Mirza Najaf Khan, a Mughal commander in the 18th century who fortified the region during his tenure under Emperor Shah Alam II.

BJP MLA Anil Sharma said that he will meet Speaker Vijender Gupta in the coming days and propose the change of name of village Mohmmadpur in RK Puram to Madhavpuram. "See the proposal to change the name of Mohammadpur village in the RK Puram Vidhan Sabha constituency had already been passed in the Municipal Corporation. Tomorrow I will be proposing this change in name before the Speaker Sir. It is the demand and wish of the people," Sharma said.

Notably, Deputy Speaker in Delhi Assembly, Mohan Singh Bisht had also declared that he would propose renaming the constituency as either 'Shiv Puri' or 'Shiv Vihar' after winning the high-pitched assembly polls.

Vijender Gupta elected as Delhi Assembly Speaker



NEW DELHI: Vijender Gupta, BJP legislator from Rohini, was elected the Speaker of Delhi Assembly on Monday after his name was proposed by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. Soon after his election, the proceedings of the House were adjourned due to disruptions by the Opposition legislators of the AAP.

During the House proceedings, conducted by pro-tem Speaker Arvinder Singh Lovely, Gupta was elected as the new Speaker with unanimity.

Soon after assuming the new role, Speaker Gupta faced the challenge of slogan shouting by the AAP legislators during the discussion on vote of thanks for the election of new Speaker.

In his opening remark, he condemned the Leader of Opposition Atishi for trying to raise an issue without permission and disturb the proceedings.

"I want to warn the Opposition that they should not try to spread anarchy. They should let the proceedings to continue smoothly," he said, expressing his displeasure over the behaviour of AAP legislators.

Earlier, while greeting Speaker Gupta on his election Atishi said photos of B.R. Ambedkar and Shaheed Bhagat Singh had allegedly been removed from the Chief Minister's Office.

Her remarks, without the permission of the Chair, triggered noisy protests from the Treasury Benches with the Speaker censuring the LoP for speaking out of turn and context. When the AAP legislators continued to disrupt the proceedings, the Speaker adjourned the House proceedings.

Earlier, CM Gupta along with her Council of Ministers took oath as members of the Legislative Assembly. The first session

of the House commenced on Monday morning and saw all newly-elected legislators taking oath.

There are 48 BJP legislators and 22 AAP legislators in the 70-member Assembly.

Along with Delhi CM, the BJP ministers namely Parvesh Verma, Ashish Sood, Kapil Mishra, Ravinder Singh Indraj, Pankaj Kumar Singh and Manjinder Singh Sirsa also took the oath.

AAP's MLAs, including Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Atishi, also took oath during the first session of the House.

With her appointment, Rekha Gupta has become the fourth woman Chief Minister of Delhi, following in the footsteps of Sheila Dikshit, Sushma Swaraj, and Atishi.

She is also the fourth BJP leader to hold the top post in the national Capital, succeeding Madan Lal Khurana, Sahib Singh Verma, and Sushma Swaraj.

The first session of the Delhi Assembly is set to last for three days.

The proceedings began with BJP MLA Lovely taking oath as the pro-tem Speaker, a temporary position responsible for conducting House proceedings until a full-time Speaker is elected. Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena administered the oath to Lovely at Raj Niwas.

Haryana Police's 'Cyber Tau' attracted attention of visitors at 'Surajkund Mela', warned public about digital scams



SATISH HANDA Faridabad

'Cyber Tau' remained committed to its mission, urging people to stay cautious and informed to avoid falling victim to online scams.

Haryana Police's 'Cyber Tau' pavilion by Haryana police was able to steal the show at 'Surajkund Mela' has closed down, warning visitors about digital scams. 'Cyber Tau' was grabbing public attention with its traditional look while educating visitors on cyber safety. Having crowds at the Surajkund International Crafts Mela, 'Cyber Tau'—a man with a thick moustache, oversized glasses, traditional white dhoti, and red turban has been attracting significant attention from visitors. 'Cyber Tau' was on a mission—to educate people about the growing menace of cyber crimes fast increasing since past some time. The man behind this persona is Sub-Inspector Virender Singh Balhara, who is dedicated to spreading awareness regarding digital scams in the state.

Balhara was interacting with tourists, holding a poster that reads 'Cyber Tau' and 'Dial 1930', and answering questions about how to stay vigilant, report online fraud and recover lost money. "Cybercriminals lure people mostly with greed or fear, tricking them into financial scams resulting many victims lose their hard-earned money simply because of lacking awareness," he advised to the visitors, explaining that if someone falls victim to cyber fraud, they should immediately call 1930 to register a complaint, ensuring their bank account is frozen to prevent further losses. According to 'Cyber Tau', scammers usually operate in two ways, either by instilling fear or by exploiting greed, besides the latest scams involving fake digital arrests. Victims receive a call claiming that illegal items were found in their courier package or another threatens that they are placed under 'home arrest'. Fraudsters even impersonate police officers, ED or a CBI officer over video calls to make threats for the arrest or face dire consequences. 'Cyber Tau' urged people to stay vigilant and report such incidents immediately to cyber crime cells operating in almost every district across the state.

According to 'Cyber Tau', another common fraud method preys on financial greed. 'Scammers usually promise high returns through fake share market schemes or task-based earnings and offering part time jobs and attraction of gifts, in which many people lose their hard-earned money by falling for these traps,' stressing that awareness is the only way to combat such fraud. 'Cyber Tau' also advised the public to check how many mobile SIM cards are registered in their name using the Sanchar Saathi app or website, telling that fraudsters often misuse SIM cards issued under someone else's identity.

Arvinder Singh Lovely takes oath as pro-tem Speaker of Delhi Assembly



NEW DELHI: BJP MLA Arvinder Singh Lovely took oath as the pro-tem Speaker of the Delhi Assembly on Monday and will chair the proceedings during the first sitting of the legislature.

Delhi Lieutenant Governor V.K. Saxena administered the oath to the Gandhi Nagar MLA at Raj Niwas.

Four-time legislator Arvinder Singh will perform the duties of the Office of the Speaker till the new Speaker is elected.

In a notification published in Delhi Gazette on Saturday, the legislative Assembly secretariat quoted an L-G's order which said, "I hereby appoint Arvinder Singh Lovely, a member of the newly elected Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi to perform the duties of the Office of the Speaker from the commencement of the said meeting and until the new Speaker is elected."

The LG's order added, "I also hereby appoint Arvinder Singh Lovely to be the person before whom Members of the newly elected Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi shall make and subscribe oath or affirmation in accordance with the provisions of section 12 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991."

NCRB Report: Haryana witnessed over 60% rise in rape cases in past 8 years



SATISH HANDA New Delhi

Rape is the fourth most common crime against women in India. According to the National Crime Report Bureau (NCRB) report, rape cases has started witnessing increase after year 2021 which revealed, 31,677 rape cases were registered in the country, or an average of 86 cases daily. According to NCRB record, 28,046 rape cases were recorded during the previous year 2020 and out of the total 31,677 rape cases registered in 2021 nearly 89% of the rapes were committed by persons known to the victims among them the share of the minor victims below age 18 was nearly 10%. It was also found that consensual sex was committed in most of the cases on the false promise of marriage. According to NCRB 2021 statistics, Rajasthan reported the highest number of rapes among Indian states, followed by Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Among metropolitan cities, the national capital of Delhi continued to have the highest incidence of rape cases as 1,226 in 2021, followed by Jaipur, whereas Kolkata had the least number of registered rape cases among metropolitan cities.

Eight female members of Kadiyan gang arrested

PARVESH HANDA Gurugram

Crime Branch of Sector 43 Gurugram police station arrested eight women belonging to the Kadiyan gang of Madhya Pradesh for allegedly stealing a lady's purse from the Sector 14 market here, the police registered a case against arrested females at Sector 12 police station on victim's complaint on Saturday. Madhya Pradesh's Kadiyan gang is known for its involve-



ment in thefts across several metro cities used to indulge in criminal activities in crowded markets, according to the preliminary police investigation. The victim woman had filed a complaint stating that her purse, which contained money and important documents was stolen during shopping at the

Sector 14 market.

The arrested women were identified as Radhika Bhaneriya, Jyoti, Gayatri Bai, Sunita Bai, Ramkali, Juli Bhaneriya, Jivika and Gauri Sisodia, all residents of Rajgarh district in Madhya Pradesh. Investigation revealed that among women burglars Ramkali was involved in a case registered against her in Madhya Pradesh, whereas Juli Bhaneriya was having a theft case registered against her in Delhi.

Delhi Assembly Discusses CAG Report on AAP's Excise Policy

NEW DELHI: A discussion on the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) damning report on the previous AAP government's excise policy began on Thursday in Delhi Assembly, with BJP MLAs hitting out at favouritism in the issue of liquor licences, opening of vends in residential areas and absence of lab test of liquor before sale in the city.

The third sitting of the House, whose session began on February 25, started with only Amanatullah Khan of the AAP representing the Opposition in the House, while the other 21 legislators staged a protest outside the premises of the Assembly due to a suspension slapped on them by Speaker Vijender Gupta till Monday.

Before the discussion on the excise policy, Malviya Nagar MLA Satish Upadhyay raised



the issue of desecration of a statue of Shaheed Bhagat Singh in a park in the south Delhi colony.

"The AAP Malviya Nagar MLA did not attend to the broken arm and leg of the statue over the past three years," he said, adding that he has now covered the statue and directed officials to repair the statue or install a new statue within a

month. He said the AAP leader's respect for Shaheed Bhagat Singh is unreal. "If they were committed to respecting the national hero, they should have repaired the statue and walked the talk," he said.

The poor state of the statue in Malviya Nagar park exposes the "double standards" of the

AAP, which raised slogans in the House but "failed" to give due respect to the statue, said Upadhyay, adding that a similar statue in Mehrauli had also been damaged.

Later, taking part in Special Mention (Rule 280), Upadhyay raised the issue of the absence of quality check of liquor at the time of issuing licences to vendors, as exposed by the CAG report on the now-scrapped excise policy of the previous AAP government.

"The CAG report said the liquor licence did not fulfil the obligation of getting liquor samples tests. Such a policy of the AAP encouraged the sale of illicit liquor in the city," he said.

He said the government lost an additional Rs 941 crore due to the exemptions that had to be given to the zonal licensees.

Eight including 6 females arrested running a fake call centre since past 11 months



SATISH HANDA Gurugram

The Cyber Crime team from Gurugram during night in a raid exposed an illegal call center operating in Badarpur area adjoining Faridabad where fraud was being committed through this call center in the name of providing loans and innocent people were being cheated by trapping them in their net. During raid eight accused including six women employees were arrested from the spot identified as Raju Mandal a resident of Gajraula Kalan in Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit district currently living in Vishwakarma Colony in Delhi, Rohit Kumar a resident of Delhi's Mittal Colony and Rosy a resident of Yakubpur village in Uttar Pradesh, Gyanati a resident of Auraiya district presently living in Badarpur. Police recovered 25 mobile phones and an Airtel WiFi dongle from the possession of arrested accused who were produced in the court on Friday, from where they were sent to Bhondsi jail in judicial custody. Assistant Commissioner of

Cyber Crime police Gurugram Priyanshu Diwan succeeded in exposing more than 50 fake call centers in the past some-time said that on February 4 this month, a complaint was received at the Cyber Crime Police Station, Manesar. The complainant was duped of about Rs 18,000 in the name of file charges, DD and other charges by calling from different numbers posing as a representative of Axis Bank. He said, since then an investigation was going on. Information was received that the accused had committed the crime while sitting in Badarpur area of Delhi. Based on the information, a team was formed under the leadership of the in-charge of Cyber Crime Police Station Manesar and a raid was conducted, when eight accused were caught from the spot itself. The accused used to commit fraud by calling people and getting money transferred in the form of various charges in the name of getting a loan. Information revealed that the accused used to get salary and commission from the defrauded amount in return for this work.

Raj Kamal Jha wins Banaras Lit Fest Award for fiction

FW DESK New Delhi

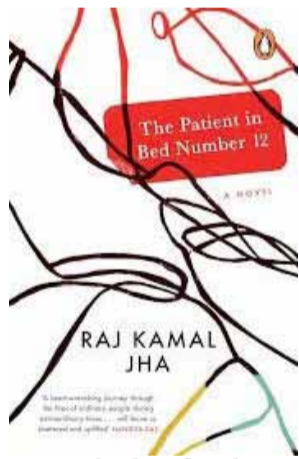
Acclaimed author and Indian Express Chief Editor Raj Kamal Jha has been awarded the prestigious Banaras Lit Fest Award in the Ruskin Bond Fiction Book Award Category for his novel *The Patient in Bed Number 12* (Penguin India). The announcement was made at the Curtain Raiser event of the Banaras Lit Fest in Delhi.

Jha's novel is a powerful exploration of contemporary India, weaving together the stories of restless, ambitious youth navigating personal and societal burdens. Often referred to as India's "novelist of the newsroom," Jha delves into



themes of mistrust, ambition, and the lingering shadows of history. His storytelling style, known for its poetic intensity and deep social observations, has once again earned him literary recognition.

The Banaras Lit Fest Book Awards 2025 celebrate excellence in poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and translation, recognizing authors whose works challenge conventions, inspire thought, and enrich India's literary heritage. This year's



winning books reflect diverse themes of identity, history, language, and modern-day challenges, further reinforcing

the festival's reputation as one of the most prestigious literary honors in India.

Alongside the book awards, the Bhartendu Harishchandra Lifetime Achievement Award will be conferred upon eminent Hindi writer Kashinath Singh, acknowledging his immense contribution to Hindi literature. The Banaras Lit Fest Awards 2025 will be formally presented during the Banaras Lit Fest, set to take place from March 7 to 9, 2025, at Hotel Taj, Banaras. The festival will bring together renowned authors, scholars, and literary enthusiasts from across the country, fostering intellectual discussions and literary appreciation.

AAP and former CM Atishi are now extinguished lamps

Former PM Rajiv Gandhi legitimized the 1984 massacre by saying, 'When a big tree falls, the earth shakes': Anil Vij

PARVESH HANDA New Delhi

Haryana's Energy, Transport and Labour Minister Anil Vij said that «the people of the state have made up their minds that since the BJP is in power both at the Center and in the state, they will also ensure its victory in municipal elections so that development can continue unhindered.» He further added that «In the municipal elections, all national parties, including Congress, and regional parties have abandoned the field and fled.» He was responding to media questions regarding Congress not fielding candidates in most places during the municipal elections in the state. He said that «Intimidated by the popularity of the Bharatiya Janata Party,



these parties could not even field candidates under their election symbols.»

Vij said the oil in the Aam Aadmi Party's lamp has run out, and now it has been extinguished. Responding to a question about the removal of pictures of Shaheed Bhagat Singh and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar from the Chief Minister's Office in Delhi, he launched a verbal attack on the Aam Aadmi Party, saying, «Aam Aadmi Party and former Chief Minister Atishi are now extinguished lamps. They are now desperately trying to raise irrelevant issues just to stay politically relevant.» He sarcas-

tically remarked, «But now the oil in Aam Aadmi Party's lamp has run out, and it has been extinguished.»

When asked about Congress leader Sajjan Kumar being sentenced to life imprisonment, Vij said that «The 1984 riots led to a massacre of our Sikh brothers, and unfortunately, the then-Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi legitimized this massacre by stating, «When a big tree falls, the earth shakes.» Because of this, action against the culprits was delayed for so many years, despite the devastation they caused.»

Vij further stated that «Since the Bharatiya Janata Party came to power, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has worked towards ensuring justice. Now, after years, Sajjan Kumar has been sentenced to life imprisonment. I believe that the punishment for such a massacre should be nothing less than the death penalty, but since it is the court's decision, I cannot comment on it, he added.»

Contractor honey trapped in the net by Facebook female friend demanded Rs 20 lakh ransom

SATISH HANDA Panipat

The police arrested the accused girl who kidnapped a youth contractor from Uttarakhand by trapping him in friendship on Facebook. The accused girl along with her friends kidnapped the contractor and his driver and demanded 20 lakh rupees as ransom. The girl who called the young man to Panipat was trapped in the net by befriending him on Facebook and got him kidnapped and arrested and sent to jail. However, the gang leader and the accused girl's friend are still absconding. The police produced the accused girl in the court and sent her to jail. The Facebook girl friend after luring a contractor from Dehradun in Uttarakhand into the trap of friendship calling him



to Panipat and getting him kidnapped by her accomplices. The accused girl's friend is still out of police custody and the police team is raiding his hideouts. However, the police have arrested four Shivansh, Ranaak, Rohit and Mohit all residents of Balla village of Karnal and sent them to jail. The girl originally hailing from Jhajjar befriended Dehradun based contractor Manish on Facebook and trapped him in her net and called him to a hotel in Siwah, Panipat last Tues-

day. As soon as he reached there, she got him and his driver kidnapped by her friends. They demanded a ransom of Rs. 20 lakh from the family of the contractor. The girl who kidnapped the contractor was sent to jail, whereas the gang leader and the accused girl's friend are still absconding. The police produced the accused girl in the court and sent her to jail after luring a contractor from Uttarakhand into the trap of friendship on Facebook and calling him to Panipat and getting him kidnapped by her accomplices. The accused girl's accomplices are still out of police custody.

The police have not been able to catch the gang leader and the

accused girl's friend so far and are conducting raids at his hideouts. However, the police have arrested Shivansh, Ranaak, Rohit and Mohit all residents of Balla village of Karnal and sent them to jail. The girl from Jhajjar befriended Dehradun based contractor Manish on Facebook and trapped him in her net and called him to a hotel in Siwah at Panipat last Tuesday. As soon as he reached there, she got him and his driver kidnapped by her friends and demanded a ransom of Rs. 20 lakh from the family of the contractor. The police arrested the accused girl who kidnapped the contractor Maneesh, called the young man to Panipat by trapping him in the friendship on Facebook for ransom and was sent to jail, whereas the gang leader and the accused girl's friend are still absconding.

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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I, SWINDER BAJWA, hereby declare that the particular given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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(Publisher)

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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 Zamkaka 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.

Zamkaka 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 Chenu, 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.



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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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.

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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, making the book not just an 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 initiatives, including induction 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 towards 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 varia-



tions 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, includ-

ing 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 Hyundai 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.

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 in-

tense 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 Marseille 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

taken against networks suspected of entrapping individuals in false blasphemy cases," the report maintained. It emphasised on the urgent need for procedural changes to discriminatory laws that "affect religious minorities disproportionately".

Members of HRCP's working group recommended the introduction of a constitutional amendment that gives rights to religious minorities and allows them to hold the office of President and Prime Minister.

The issue of forced kidnappings, conversions and marriages of women and girls from the minority community, especially the Hindu community, has been specifically mentioned in the HRCP report. The large-scale forced conversions continue to escalate without any action on ground by the relevant authorities and the provincial government.

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 India 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.



An artist dressed in the guise of Lord Shiva along with Hindu devotees take part in a religious procession on the occasion of Maha Shivratri festival, in Amritsar on Wednesday, February 26, 2025. PHOTO-PRABHJOT GILL

Kangana Ranaut, Javed Akhtar settle defamation case; actor apologises for inconvenience to lyricist



MUMBAI: Actor Kangana Ranaut on Friday resolved the over four-year-long defamation case filed against her by veteran lyricist Javed Akhtar through mediation, with the BJP MP apologising for the "inconvenience" caused to the screenwriter.

The duo appeared before a special court here on Friday and informed it of their decision to withdraw the complaints they had filed against each other. After the court appearance, the actor also posted a photo on her social media platform along with Akhtar, stating that they have resolved the legal matter.

The actor said she made the statement against Akhtar due to misunderstanding, and apologised for the inconvenience caused to him due to it.

Akhtar had filed a complaint against Ranaut in 2020, alleging that she had defamed and damaged his 'immaculate reputation'

by dragging his name into actor Sushant Singh Rajput's death in an interview with a news channel in July that year.

Ranaut had later filed a cross complaint against Akhtar, alleging criminal intimidation and insult to modesty.

She had claimed that during her meeting with Akhtar at his residence in 2016, he criminally intimidated her, demanding that she apologise to a co-star.

Ranaut's lawyer Rizwan Siddiquee and Akhtar's advocate Jay Kumar Bhardwaj said the matter was settled through an hour-long mediation before a special magistrate court in Bandra.

Ranaut stated before the mediator that she made the statement due to misunderstanding and she has decided to withdraw it, Bhardwaj told PTI.

Ranaut has apologised to Akhtar for inconvenience caused to him due to her state-

ment, he said, adding that she has undertaken not to make such a statement in future.

Siddiquee said, "We were looking for mediation for a long time. We had exchanged drafts also. Finally we have resolved the case." "There were no issues, only the wordings were to be decided, which was done today. We prepared the draft, signed it and both the cases were withdrawn today," he added.

The case was initially heard by a magistrate court in Andheri. In 2024, after she was elected as a Member of Parliament (MP) from the Mandi Lok Sabha constituency in Himachal Pradesh, the matter was transferred to a special magistrate court designated for matters involving MPs and MLAs.

In his complaint, Akhtar claimed that Ranaut dragged his name during an interview while referring to a 'coterie' existing in Bollywood, following the alleged suicide by actor Sushant Singh Rajput.

Ranaut posted a photo with Akhtar on Instagram and said the cinema veteran was "kind and gracious" during the mediation process.

"Today, Javedji and I have resolved our legal matter (defamation case) through mediation. In the mediation Javedji has been very kind and gracious, he also agreed to write songs for my next directorial," the BJP MP wrote in the caption.

Preity Zinta Slams Kerala Congress for 'Fake News and Vile Gossip', Clarifies on Bank Loan



NEW DELHI: Bollywood actor Preity Zinta on Tuesday called out the Congress party's Kerala unit, accusing it of promoting fake news and using her name and fame to further its political agenda.

Her stern criticism of the Kerala Congress followed reports of a bank loan, linked to her, from the beleaguered New India Cooperative Bank, that collapsed recently. Kerala Congress took to X and claimed that the actress gave her social media accounts to the BJP and got Rs 18 crore bank loans written by the ruling dispensation, hinting that this was done without following recovery procedures.

"The bank collapsed last week. Depositors are on the streets for their money," Kerala Congress further said in a post. Preity Zinta rubbished the charge and accused the Congress' state unit of promoting fake news. "No one wrote off anything or any loan for me," she wrote on X. On charges of handing over her social media accounts to the BJP, she said that the party should have some shame for promoting fake news.

The actress also sought to clarify the bank loan, stating that the loan was fully paid back, 10 years ago. "Hope this clarifies and helps so there are no misunderstandings in the future," she further wrote. The name of the actress started doing the rounds when the alleged corruption in the New India Cooperative Bank came to the fore. The bank collapsed recently, prompting the RBI to impose severe restrictions on the bank.

The RBI had imposed severe restrictions on the New India Cooperative Bank citing irregularities, prohibiting it from issuing new loans or renewing existing ones. It was also barred from accepting new investments or deposits and selling its assets. According to some reports, around 80 staff members of the bank were forced to resign in 2019, following which they moved to the Central Bank, requesting a forensic audit and also the dissolution of the board of directors.

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 'Bhaktshak', 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.

Recently, Bhumi held a special cake-cutting ceremony in Mumbai to mark 10 years of her journey. The event was attended by the media and her fans, on the auspicious day of Maha Shivratri. The actress was dressed in black pants and a stylish long-sleeve shirt.

Swiggy Instamart Partners with Gurugram Police to Raise Awareness on Cyber Fraud

TANVIR KAUR Gurugram

In a bid to combat cyber fraud, Swiggy Instamart, India's pioneering on-demand convenience platform, has partnered with the Gurugram Police to raise awareness about online scams. As more Indians turn to the internet for everyday activities, from ordering groceries to financial transactions, scammers are finding new ways to exploit users. Awareness is the first line of defence against such threats.

To help, the Gurugram Police and Swiggy Instamart have created pamphlets on five major types of cyber fraud—fake customer care scams, impersonation fraud, job scams, investment fraud, and UPI/QR code scams. These will be included with thousands of Swiggy Instamart orders in Gurugram.

Sairam Krishnamurthy, SVP and COO, Swiggy Instamart commented, "The rise of online services has made life more convenient for everyone, but this convenience should not come at a cost. The internet should be a safe space for all, and awareness is key to ensuring that. As



a trusted platform for millions, we provide convenience to our users, but we want to do more to ensure no one falls victim to online threats. We're committed to leveraging our network to raise awareness about cyber safety, so users can continue enjoying the benefits of the internet without any risks."

Vikas Arora IPS Commissioner of Police - Gurugram, added, "Cyber fraud is an evolving threat, and raising awareness is crucial in preventing people from falling victim. Simple steps like verifying information and being cautious while making online transactions can make a big difference. We appreciate that a household name like Swiggy Instamart,

which is used by millions of Indians daily, is partnering with us to spread awareness and ensure more people have access to essential cyber safety information."

Priyanshu Dewan ACP Cyber Crime of Gurugram stated, "Today, the internet is used by everyone, from young adults to first-time users among the older generation. While it has brought great benefits, it has also created opportunities for scammers to exploit unsuspecting users. This is why education is key. We are pleased that a prominent brand like Swiggy is leveraging its vast reach to raise awareness, demonstrating its commitment to ensuring consumers have a safe and secure online experience."

Galaxy Surfactants bags Gold Innovation Award at HPCI India for Ground-breaking Hair Care Innovation

TANVIR KAUR Mumbai

Galaxy Surfactants Ltd., a global leader in the home care, personal care, beauty, and wellness industry, has been honoured with the prestigious HPCI Innovation Award for its ingredient, Galseer Flexcon. This recognition underscores Galaxy's commitment to innovation, sustainability, and performance-driven solutions in the personal care industry.

Galseer Flexcon is designed to meet the growing demand for eco-friendly and multifunctional hair conditioning products. With a high natural index of over 90%, UV protection, and effective frizz control, this breakthrough ingredient empowers manufacturers to develop next-generation hair



care solutions that are gentle on both hair and the environment.

The HPCI Innovation Award is a testament to Galaxy Surfactants' relentless pursuit of excellence and its dedication to shaping the future of sustainable personal care. Through continuous

research and development, the company strives to create high-performance ingredients that meet the evolving demands of consumers and industry stakeholders alike.

"Winning the HPCI Innovation Award for Galseer Flexcon is a proud moment for

all of us at Galaxy Surfactants. This product is the need of the hour as sustainability becomes a defining factor in consumer choices. Today's end users are more informed and conscious about the environmental impact of the products they use, and it is imperative for the industry to address these concerns with innovative solutions. Galseer® Flexcon aligns with the growing demand for eco-conscious and responsible hair care products. At Galaxy, innovation and sustainability go hand in hand, and this recognition further strengthens our commitment to shaping a greener future for personal care with focus on our specialty chemicals portfolio," said Rajib Bhattacharjee, Vice President - Value Acceleration, Galaxy Surfactants.

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.

Kriti Sanon Misses 'Crazy Crack Time' With Shahid Kapoor

MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Kriti Sanon says she was in 'no network' zone and hence she could not wish actor Shahid Kapoor. She added that she misses their "crazy crack time together".

Kriti took to her Instagram, where she shared moments from their "Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya" promotions and then penned a birthday note for Shahid, who turned 44 on February 25.

She wrote: "Sorry was in no network.. hence a delayed insta wish.. For my fav @shahidkapoor!! Happiest Birthday Shahid! Miss our Crazy Crack time together!! Hahahaha.. Have the best year ahead SK!"

Kriti and Shahid worked together in the film "Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya", which was released in 2024. The science fiction romantic comedy



film is directed by Amit Joshi and Aradhana Sah, in their directorial debuts.

The film followed the story of a robotics engineer who falls in love with an intelligent female robot mistaking her for a real woman in Los Angeles. Though he gets heartbroken and returns to India, he later decides to marry her.

Up next, Kriti Sanon will be seen sharing the screen with Dhanush in Anand L Rai's directorial "Teri Ishk Mein". Penned by Himanshu Sharma in collaboration with Neeraj Yadav, the movie has been produced by Anand L Rai, Himanshu Sharma, Bhushan Kumar, and Krishan Kumar. "Teri Ishk Mein" is likely

to be released in theatres on November 28, in both Hindi and Tamil.

Meanwhile, Shahid will next be seen in "Ashwatthama: The Saga Continues", directed by Sachin B. Ravi. Besides this, Shahid has Vishal Bhardwaj's "Arjun Ustara" with Triptii Dimri in the lineup.

Last month, Shahid shared with IANS an update about his upcoming film "Arjun Ustara" and said that the film, at heart, is a love story, but it's full of action and gangsters. He also revealed that the film has a "stellar cast". "It's got me, it's got Triptii, it's got Nana sir, it's got Randeep Hooda, it's got Vikrant Massey, who's in a special appearance. And I have thoroughly enjoyed the work of all these people. And I'm very excited to collaborate and work with all of them."

'The Eye' starring Shruti Haasan to open 5th Wench Film Festival

MUMBAI: The British psychological thriller 'The Eye', which stars Shruti Haasan, is set to have its India premiere as the opening feature of the 5th Wench Film Festival, founded by Sapna Bhavnani.

The film festival is dedicated to horror, sci-fi, and fantasy films, and will be held from February 27 to March 2, 2025.

The film marks Shruti's international debut as a leading lady, and is directed by Daphne Schmon. 'The Eye' tells the haunting story of Diana (played by Shruti Haasan), who journeys to the remote island where her husband Felix (Mark Rowley) drowned, seeking closure by scattering his ashes.

However, her grief soon turns to intrigue when she learns of the mysterious 'Evil Eye' ritual, an ancient practice that might bring Felix back but



demand a dark and unsettling sacrifice. The film has been shot in Athens and Corfu.

Talking about the film's Indian premiere, Shruti Haasan shared, "Psychological thrillers have always been a genre that fascinates me. To be part of a story that dives deep into human emotions, grief, and the supernatural is incredibly exciting. Besides the fact that the film has a riveting storyline and top-notch pro-

duction quality, what makes this project even more special is that it was created under an all-women-led production house, which aligns with my passion for supporting women in the film industry."

"Furthermore, this film champions a sustainable way of filmmaking, something that the world desperately needs. If we want to continue telling our stories, we must be able to tell them in a manner that is conscious of our impact", she added.

Director Daphne Schmon said, "'The Eye' is both a love letter to Corfu, the island where my family is from, and an exploration of the dark psychological impulses surrounding grief. The story demanded an actor who could embody its emotional depth and complexity, and Shruti Haasan was the perfect fit.