

REGION2

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PUNJAB CM ASKED THE OFFICERS TO ORGANISE SPECIAL KISAN MILNI AT PAU ON APRIL 12



TRADE BODY SEEKS INTERIM TEXTILE EXPORTS PROTECTION SCHEME AS US PAUSES TARIFFS



GIPPY GREWAL'S FILM 'AKAAL' PREMIERE SHOW CREATES A LOT OF EXCITEMENT

Punjab Govt directs to procurement agencies to ensure timely payments of farmers

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Government led by the Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has made arrangements for procurement of 130 LMT wheat to ensure that every wheat grain brought by the farmers in the mandis is procured at the Minimum Support Price. Disclosing this at Anaj Bhawan while reviewing the Wheat procurement, the Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Minister Lal Chand Kataruchak further said that in order to facilitate the procurement process, 1, 864 regular purchase centers have been allotted among procurement agencies. Additionally, to prevent any glut-like situation in the mandis, 520 additional purchase centers have been notified to ensure seamless procurement operations. All procurement agencies



have made comprehensive arrangements for storage space, gunny bales, stock articles, and Cash Credit Limit (CCL) to support uninterrupted procurement. The State has witnessed arrivals of wheat in 11 districts of the State till

now and a total of 9, 601.5 MT of wheat has arrived in the mandis, out of which 3, 278.75 MT has been procured by government agencies and 927.5 MT by private traders. The agencies have also ensured the timely lifting of procured

wheat and prompt payment to the farmers. The Food and Supplies Minister directed all agencies to ensure smooth and efficient procurement of wheat across all mandis. He reaffirmed the commitment of the State Government to purchase every single grain produced with the sweat and toil of the farmers. The Minister also directed that all field officers be directed to complete 100% e-Kyc of NFSA beneficiaries by 30.04.2025 positively. Among those present on the occasion included the Principal Secretary Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Rahul Tewari, Secretary cum Director Varinder Kumar Sharma, Additional Secretary Kamal Kumar Garg, AMD Pungrain Rakesh Popli and Additional Director Dr. Anjum Bhaskar.

India & Slovakia Sign Key MoUs to Boost MSME & Diplomatic Cooperation

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu has arrived in Bratislava for the final portion of her State Visit to Portugal and the Slovak Republic, marking the first visit by an Indian President to Slovakia in 29 years. The President's delegation includes Minister of State Nimuben Bambhaniya and Members of Parliament Dhaval Patel and Sandhya Ray. President Murmu's official engagements began at the Presidential Palace, where Slovak President Peter Pellegrini welcomed her with a traditional Slovak ceremony featuring bread and salt presented by individuals in folk attire, followed by a formal Guard of Honour. During subsequent bilateral discussions, President Murmu held both one-on-one meetings and delegation-level talks with President Pellegrini, covering



various aspects of bilateral relations and shared global and regional interests. She acknowledged President Pellegrini's personal commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and noted the growing popularity of Indian culture in Slovakia. The Indian President highlighted significant opportunities for collaboration in India's ex-

panding media, entertainment, and creative economy sectors. She specifically suggested promoting Slovakia as a filming destination and potential partner for joint film productions. President Murmu extended an invitation for Slovakia to participate in the upcoming WAVE Summit scheduled in Mumbai from May 1-4, 2025. The bilateral discussions culminated in the exchange of two Memoranda of Understanding: one establishing cooperation between the National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) and the Slovak Business Agency in the field of MSMEs, and another formalising diplomatic training cooperation between the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (SISFS) and Slovakia's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.

Gold skyrockets Rs 6,250 to breach Rs 96,000 level as US-China trade war intensifies



NEW DELHI: Gold prices surged by Rs 6,250 to hit a record high of Rs 96,450 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday due to heavy demand from local jewellers and retailers, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Analysts said the precious metal hitting lifetime high levels in the international markets on strong safe-haven demand amid escalating US-China trade tensions boosted the domestic prices. On Wednesday, the yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 90,200 per 10 grams. Rebounding after four days of sharp fall, gold of 99.5 per cent purity surged by Rs 6,250 to touch an all-time high of Rs 96,000 per 10 grams against the previous close of Rs 89,750 per 10 grams. Silver prices also registered a steep rise of Rs 2,300 to Rs 95,500 per kg, largely in tandem with global trends. The white metal had closed at Rs 93,200 per kg in the previous market close.

Big breakthrough under 'Yuddh Nashe Viruddh'



JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Punjab Police's Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) apprehended a key drug trafficker and recovered 18.2 kg heroin from his possession, said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav here on Friday. The arrested drug smuggler has been identified as Hira Singh alias Hira, a resident of Village Khaira in Amritsar. Apart from recovering big haul of heroin, police teams have also impounded his HF Deluxe motorcycle (PB 02 BW 7803), which he was riding. DGP said that preliminary investigations have revealed that accused Hira Singh and his associate identified Kulwinder Singh alias Kinda of village Dauke in Amritsar, were in touch with Pakistan-based drug trafficker identified as Billa. The latter has been using drones to drop the large consignments of heroin from across the border for the past one year, he said.

Big bonanza for SC community; CM takes historical step in appointment of law officers

CHANDIGARH: The Punjab Cabinet led by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann has decided to promulgate an Ordinance to provide adequate representation to members of SC community for contractual engagement as law officers in the state. A decision to this effect was taken the Council of Ministers in a meeting held here under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister here at his official residence today. Disclosing this here today a spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office said that Cabinet gave nod to promulgate an ordinance to amend Punjab Law Officers Engagement Act 2017. This step is aimed to relax income criteria



for contractual engagement of Law officers belonging to SC Community in the state. The purpose of relaxation in income criteria is to provide adequate representation to members of SC community for contractual engagement as law officers in

AG Office, Punjab. In another significant decision, the Cabinet has also accorded its approval to One Time Relaxation (OTR) policy regarding Non Construction fee and outstanding allotment amount for allottees of Improvement Trusts of the state. This decision will give a major relief to the allottees as the penal interest will be waived off. To maintain geographical and administrative contiguity, efficiency, cost optimisation and legislative synergy, the Cabinet also gave green signal for reorganisation and rationalisation of the existing blocks in the state. The realignment of blocks is necessitated in order to en-

sure better administration of these blocks in the larger public interest. Pertinently, there are 154 blocks in the state currently and due to some ambiguities, several problems were being faced to run administration smoothly in these blocks. In another significant decision, the Cabinet also gave consent to enhance retirement age of Doctors and Professors serving in Medical Colleges under Medical education and research department from existing 62 years to 65 years. This will help in imparting quality education in the Medical Colleges continuously thereby immensely benefitting the students in these colleges.

Kerala HC Sentences Ambulance Driver to Life Term for Raping Covid Patient

A Kerala court on Friday sentenced an ambulance driver to life imprisonment for raping a 19-year-old woman while she was being transported to a Covid care centre in September 2020.

V. Noufal, the ambulance driver, was transporting the patient from a medical centre to a Covid care centre opened by the state government. Instead of taking her to the Centre, he took her to another place and sexually assaulted her.



After the incident, Noufal apologised to her, which she had recorded on her mobile phone. R. Binu, the Kerala Police official who headed the probe, said it was a difficult case as the state was under lockdown. "We found it hard to get evi-

dence, and it was after a team work we were able to get all the evidence and filed the charge sheet," said Binu. The police managed to get evidence from 55 people. It was the Pathanamthitta District and Sessions Judge N. Hari Kumar who pronounced the sentence against Noufal. The victim had reported the incident to the healthcare workers in the centre, where she was put up as she was Covid-positive. Soon, the police took her state-

ment, and Noufal was arrested. Noufal has been found guilty of multiple charges, including rape and others. The Court also found him guilty under Sections of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, which deals with sexual offences against SC/ST women and prescribed enhanced punishment when such offences are committed by a person not belonging to a Scheduled Caste or Tribe.

NIA set to grill 26/11 Mumbai attack accused Rana as Delhi court grants 18-day custody

NEW DELHI: Mumbai attack mastermind Tahawwur Husain Rana will be questioned in detail by the National Investigation Agency to unravel the conspiracy behind the deadly 26/11 terror strike and his role as a planner of the attacks after a court here granted the agency his 18-day custody early on Friday.



The anti-terror agency had produced Rana before the NIA Special Court at Patiala House after formally placing him under arrest on his arrival here on Thursday evening, following his extradition from the US. Special National Investigation Agency (NIA) judge Chand-er Jit Singh sent Rana to 18-day custody while the NIA sought 20-day custody. Rana was brought to the Patiala House Court in a cavalcade, including a jail van, an armoured SWAT vehicle and an ambulance, late Thursday night. Senior advocate Dayan Krishnan and Special Public Prosecutor Narender Mann represented the NIA. Before the proceedings, the judge asked Rana if he had a lawyer. After Rana said he did not have a lawyer, the judge informed him that a counsel was being provided to him

from the Delhi Legal Services Authority. After that, advocate Piyush Sachdeva was appointed to represent him. The 64-year-old Pakistani-origin Canadian businessman, a close associate of 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks main conspirator David Coleman Headley alias Daoud Gilani, a US citizen, was brought to India after the US Supreme Court on April 4 dismissed his review plea against his extradition. The agency told the court that Rana's interrogation was necessary to unearth the larger conspiracy behind the 2008 attacks. It also told the court that it had to look into his role as a planner of the attacks. Before Rana was brought to the Patiala House Court, Delhi Police removed mediapersons and members of the public from

the court's order. The NIA said that as part of the criminal conspiracy, accused no. 1, Headley, had discussed the entire operation with Rana before his visit to India. Anticipating potential challenges, Headley sent an email to Rana detailing his belongings and assets, the NIA told the court, adding that Headley also informed Rana about the involvement of Pakistani nationals Ilyas Kashmiri and Abdur Rehman, who are also accused in the case, in the plot. The NIA had secured Rana's extradition from the US following years of sustained efforts, and after the terror mastermind's last-ditch efforts to get a stay on his extradition from the US failed. The extradition finally came through after Rana's various litigations and appeals, including an emergency application before the US Supreme Court, were rejected. With the coordinated efforts of India's Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Home Affairs, along with the relevant authorities in the United States, the surrender warrant for the wanted terrorist was eventually secured and the extradition was carried out, the statement said.

INDIA bloc seeks amendment to Data Protection Act

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) called for the repeal of Section 44(3) of the Digital Data Protection Act (DDPA), arguing that the law, as it stands, undermines the Right to Information Act (RTI Act) and defeats the purpose of the Right to Information. Addressing a joint press conference here today, senior INDIA bloc leaders including Gaurav Gogoi from Congress, Priyanka Chaturvedi from the Shiv Sena, John Brittas from the CPI-M, MM Abdullah from DMK and Javed Ali from the Samajwadi Party disclosed that before the Digital Data Protection Act was enacted, it had been thoroughly discussed in the Joint Parliamentary Committee. However, Gogoi added, as is usual with this government, when the final Bill was brought in the Parliament it had been amended and was different from what the JPC had proposed. He said, the Bill was passed at a time when the opposition had brought in a vote of no confidence against the government that time in 2023 over its failure to control the situation in Manipur. Gogoi said, the Act in its current form has serious im-



plications for the Right to Information and the freedom of expression. "As we have understood it clearly, the recent amendments have a draconian impact on the rights of citizens and the freedom of the press," he said. "The DDPA has devastated another Act passed by the Parliament which is the Right to Information Act," he remarked. Explaining the matter, he said, there is a particular Section 8(1) in the Right to Information Act, which says if somebody seeks some information, which has no public interest in it, that information can be withheld. But, in case the information is relevant in the public interest, it cannot be withheld even if it means giving some personal information about someone, he added. The senior Congress leader disclosed that in the DDPA there is a section, 44(3), which undermines Section 8(1) of the RTI

Act, which says that notwithstanding anything contained in this Act, there shall be no obligation to give any citizen information which relates to personal information. "Very surreptitiously, maliciously and mischievously, the Right of Citizens to Information has been snatched by the recent Digital Data Protection Act," he observed, while seeking repeal of Section 44(3) of DDPA. The INDIA leaders disclosed that they have prepared a petition for the Minister for Electronics and Information Technology with signatures by about 120-130 leaders, demanding repeal of the Section 44(3) of the DDPA. They said, by repealing Section 44(3) of the Digital Data Protection Act, there will be no change in its fundamental purpose, while the "soul of the RTI Act will be protected."

'Only in exceptional cases': SC on when courts should call in the CBI for a probe

NEWDELHI: The Supreme Court has reiterated the view that a CBI investigation should not be directed by courts in a routine manner or just because some allegations have been made against the local police, but only in exceptional cases. A Bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and K. Vinod Chandran gave the guideline while hearing a special leave petition filed by an accused against an order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court transferring investigation from the Haryana Police to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) at the instance of the complainant.

The main ground taken by the complainant before the high court was that the police officials were acquainted with the appellant-accused, and those officers may also be involved in the present case. The complainant, a pharmaceuticals businessman, alleged that the accused-appellant impersonated an Inspector General of the Intelligence Bureau (IB) and threatened him to transfer Rs 1.49 crore into his account, apart from coercing him to do business with the accused's associates and friends. "What is difficult for us to comprehend is that when the present FIR itself was filed on 22.10.2022 and the investigation itself was in its initial stage, then what was the burning hurry for the complainant to approach the High Court under Section 482 CrPC as early as January 2023 seeking an investigation by CBI instead of local police," the Justice Dhulia-led Bench said. "The complainant had admitted that he knew the appellant since 2019 as they were doing business together, and even if we assume that the appellant was impersonating himself as an IPS officer, it is difficult to believe that the complainant was not able to find out the truth till October 2022," it added. The apex court said that the Punjab & Haryana High Court ought to have been slow in interfering with the investigation, as this was not a case which should have been handed over to the CBI at the initial stage itself.

Punjab CM asked the officers to organise special Kisan Milni at PAU on April 12

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann asked the officers to organize a special Kisan Milni at Punjab Agriculture University, Ludhiana on April 12 to sensitize the farmers regarding cultivation of paddy. Chairing a meeting here at his official residence, the Chief Minister said that the special Kisan Milni will focus on making the farmers aware about cultivation of paddy before the starting of paddy season. He said that during the Milni the farmers will be apprised about the innovative and less water guzzling techniques of paddy transplant. Likewise, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that focus will be on motivating the farmers to use only the high yielding varieties of paddy approved by the PAU. The Chief Minister said that the farmers will also be informed that in order to avoid complications to the farmers in selling their paddy harvest



due to high moisture content in October, the state government has decided to advance the paddy cultivation season from June 1. He said that zone wise cultivation of the paddy crop will be ensured in the state for which necessary planning and arrangements are already being made by the

Punjab government. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state will be divided into zones to implement this sowing mechanism in an effective manner. The Chief Minister said that the dates of paddy cultivation in a phased manner will be announced soon so that farmers can take benefit from it.

Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state government will rope in renowned agriculture experts to benefit the farmers during this Milni. Meanwhile, he reiterated that the state government is duty bound to check the sale of spurious seeds and no one involved in this heinous crime will be spared.

SGPC thank officials of Pak High Commission for granting 1942 visas to pilgrims

**JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar**

To attend the congregation on the occasion of Khalsa Sajna Diwas (Vaisakhi), 1942 Sikh pilgrims have been granted visas to visit Gurdwaras in Pakistan, as part of the jatha (religious group) being sent by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). This jatha will depart from the SGPC office on April 10.

Providing further details, SGPC Secretary Partap Singh stated that the passports of 1942 devotees were sent to the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi, which has now issued the required visas. He said that, as like previous years, a Sikh jatha will visit Pakistan on the occasion of Khalsa Sajna Diwas (Vaisakhi). The Jatha will depart on April 10 from the SGPC office and after attending the main congregation at Gurdwara Sri Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal, Pakistan, it will



visit other prominent Gurdwaras. The jatha will return to India on April 19. Partap Singh further mentioned that pilgrims whose visas have been approved can collect their passports from the SGPC office during office hours on April 9. Meanwhile, SGPC OSD Satbir Singh Dhami expressed gratitude on behalf of the SGPC to the officials of the Pakistan High Commission for granting visas to all submitted names. He highlighted that in the past, many devotees were denied vi-

sas, which hurt their religious sentiments. He extended thanks not only to the officials of the Pakistan High Commission but also to the governments of both India and Pakistan for their cooperation in granting visas to all the devotees. However, in the recent past, a delegation led by SGPC Chief Secretary Kulwant Singh Mannan had met officials at the Pakistan High Commission in Delhi, requesting to grant visas for all applicants from the SGPC sent list.

Attempt of fraud in the name of Hisar's business woman and MLA Savitri Jindal



**SATISH HANDA
Hisar**

Fraud attempt by cyber criminals was made by creating a fake ID in the name of prominent steel business woman Savitri Jindal of Hisar in Haryana also holding the chair of MLA's office to dupe people through these IDs. The MLA's office has lodged a complaint with the Cyber Thana. The police have registered a case of fraud against unknown persons and started an investigation. Cyber criminals were luring people to invest. Information reveals, Cyber criminals tried to cheat people by creating two fake IDs on the Internet in the name of the city's prominent business entrepreneur and City's MLA Savitri Jindal putting the posts on the Internet in the name of her Jindal Group, in which it was written that if you invest 50 thousand rupees in the company, you will get 2.50 lakh rupees in three days. Information also reveals that there are five thousand friends on this ID.

The other ID was also in the name of the MLA. A complaint in this regard has been lodged with the Cyber Police Station Hisar by Lalit Sharma of the MLA office while he was searching on the Internet in the name of Savitri Jindal, during this, an ID appeared in the name of Savitri Jindal on which there was her photo and the name having five thousand friends visible on this ID. On the basis of the complaint, the police have registered a case of fraud against unknown persons and started investigation.

The cyber criminals had created a fake ID and posted a post on it, in which it is written that we are investing on the CSR of Jindal Steel Power, Mining, Oil and Gas and Infrastructure Project, through which you will be able to earn money in three days with the MLA's photo is on this fake ID, stating that the minimum investment is fifty thousand and after three days Rs 2.5 lakh will be paid, luring people that this is going to be a life changing and profitable business for you along with steel, power, mining, oil, gas and infrastructure. Another fake ID was also created on the internet in the name of Savitri Jindal along with her photo also on this ID with the intention of not only cheating people as well as tarnishing the image of the MLA and a prominent business lady in the state.

Punjab Police Sub Inspector Shot dead in Tarn Taran district



**JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar**

A Punjab Police Sub-Inspector Charanjit Singh was shot dead on Tuesday in the presence of his colleagues. Confirming the incident police said that dead person was Police Sub Inspector Mr. Chranjit Singh who was shot dead when he was pacifying the two groups during clash in Kot Mohammad Khan village, falling under the jurisdiction of Sub-Division Khadoor Sahib of border district Tarn Taran. Police said that there was a call in the police control room about a violent altercation in the Kot Mohammad Khan village. Victim Sub-Inspector Singh along with other police officials were immediately dispatched to the spot to take stock of the situation. On reaching the spot, a gun fire hit the Singh and immediately shifted to hospital where he was declared brought dead. Police said that in this regard FIR has been registered at Police Station Goindwal and around twenty people have been rounded up in this regard and investigation was underway. However, SSP Tarn Taran Mr. Abhimanu Rana talking media said that last night a telephonic call was received in the police control room about serious clash between the two groups. A police team was sent on the spot where police party was attacked wherein Sub inspector Mr. Charanjit Singh was shot dead and head constable Mr. Harvinder Singh injured after a brick hit his arm .

Akal Takhat summons former Jathedar of Patna Sahib

**JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar**

In the five Sikh high priests meeting led by Jathedar Akal Takht here today directed THE former Jathedar of Harmandhar Sahib of Takht Patna Sahib to appear at Akal Takht before the five Sikh high priests.

Talking to media persons, Jathedar Akal Takhat Gyani Kuldeep Singh informed that Takhat Patna Sahib former Jathedar Gyani Iqbal Singh has been directed to appear before



the five Sikh high priests as serious complaints of religious

misconduct were being received against him. Jathedar Kuldeep

Singh also clarified that unless he appeared at Akal Takhat to give clarification and clear his position would not attend any religious congregation or any religious program or function.

Jathedar said that earlier in the past Gyani Iqbal Singh was slapped Tankah (religious punishment) from Akal Takhat and the same he underwent and thereafter he was allowed to take part in Sikh religious activities but now he has again begun to commit religious misconducts.

Punjab CM lays foundation stone of expansion project of Milkfed ₹135 cr

Farmers to get benefit worth rs 370 crore, youth to get 1200 new jobs

**JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar**

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Wednesday gave a bonanza worth Rs 135 crore to Majha region by laying the foundation stone of a project aimed at enhancing capacity of sterilized flavored milk and new fermented products dairy (Lassi, Curd and Flavored Milk) at the local milk plant.

Addressing the gathering, the Chief Minister said that such functions were never witnessed during the previous regimes as those who were at helms of affairs at that time were bothered about their family only. However, he said that now these functions are a regular feature as the state government is working tirelessly for the well being of the people. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that now spectacular progress and development is seen in every sector for which the state government is making concerted efforts.

The Chief Minister said that



Verka is now being launched on e-commerce platforms so that the mouth watering and quality products are available across the globe online. He said that the state government will rope in the ace players from the state to be the brand ambassadors of the Verka so that it can spread its wings across the globe. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that Punjab has pioneered White revolution in the country by producing quality milk, curd, lassi and others adding that this is the real development of the state.

Meanwhile, the Chief Minister said that this project will not only boost Milkfed's production capabilities but will also contribute to the growth of the

dairy industry in the region and provide remunerative prices to the dairy farmers associated with Milk Union Amritsar. He said that the state government has drafted new employee service rules, marking a significant milestone for Milkfed employees. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that these rules will provide salaries to regular employees at par with government employees and introduce performance-based incentives, promoting a culture of excellence and motivation.

The Chief Minister said that this will also open the gates for fresh recruitment of 1200 employees. He said that it is also a matter of immense pride and satisfaction that Milkfed is launching exciting new prod-

ucts, including Rabri and Kaju Badam milk. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that these additions will cater to diverse consumer preferences, further establishing Milkfed's position as a leading dairy brand.

The Chief Minister said that a new mascot of Milkfed- 'Veera' has also been launched which will serve as a brand ambassador, giving a voice to the values and message Verka wants to convey to its customers. He said that Milkfed, was established in 1973 to promote dairy farming in Punjab and its primary objective was to provide a remunerative market to milk producers, offer technical support to enhance milk procurement and ensure effective marketing of dairy products. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that at present Milkfed Punjab is the seventh largest milk cooperative of India with business turnover of more than Rs.6000 Crore.

The Chief Minister said that the Punjab government has provided Rs. 100 Crore as budgetary support for paying higher procurement prices to help the dairy farmers.

**JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar**

The Padyatra begun by the Governor, Punjab, Gulab Chand Kataria as part of the Yudh Nasheyana Viruddh campaign of Punjab Government, from the sacred land of Dera Baba Nanak today entered its 5th day. Soliciting the support of common people for elimination of drugs from Punjab, the Governor said that Punjab is renowned as the land of Guru Sahiban, Saints, Seers, Warriors, Prophets, Players and Patriots and this identity of the state must be kept intact at all costs.

In an official release today, lauding the Punjabi people, Kataria said that these brave people have steadfastly confronted each and every danger faced by the country whether it is the external aggression, need of foodgrains or any other issue. Punjab was in the forefront in the freedom movement too and accounted for the maximum number of sacrifices made for the sake of freedom of the Nation.

However, during the past few years, the menace of drugs has spread its tentacles which can only be eradicated with the active cooperation of the masses as the Governor or the Punjab Government can't do anything.

He emphasized upon the people to be ever vigilant about their environment and near & dear ones and ensure that the children make a connect with the sports along with the education so as to make Rangla Punjab.

Divulging more, the Governor said that the Universities as well as the colleges should concentrate on preparing world level sports grounds in order to encourage the children to take up sports. Also, it is important that the parents inculcate the values of dignity of labour and enterprise in their children with a view to wean them away from going astray and helping them stand on their feet in life later on. He further added that drugs problem is plaguing the entire country and not Punjab alone.

Today's padyatra also saw participation by International Hockey player Tejbir Singh Hundal and Jugraj Singh. Among others present on the occasion included MP Rajya Sabha Vikramjit Singh Sawhney, Avinash Rai Khanna, Vice Chancellor Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar Dr. Karamjit Singh, Lakshmi Kanta Chawla, Police Commissioner Gurpreet Singh Bhullar, Deputy Commissioner Sakshi Sawhney, Vice President World Punjabi Organization Karan Galhotra who also took part in the padyatra.

Ministry of External Affairs does not have accurate data of illegal travel agents says Kumari Selja

Government has notified a total of 3,281 illegal agents on the e-Migrate portal

**PARVESH HANDA
Chandigarh**

Kumari Selja said the Illegal travel agents' offices are open in every street of every city, and the youth are falling victim to fraud: The unemployed youth are being subjected to physical, mental, and financial exploitation in the country.

The General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee, former Union Minister, and Member of Parliament from Sirsa, Kumari Selja, expressed her surprise over the response given by the Ministry of External Affairs to certain questions, stating that there is a rampant presence of illegal travel agents in every city, yet the Ministry claims that as of February 2025, a total of 3,281 illegal agents, including those in Haryana, have been notified on the e-Migrate portal. On the other hand, the youth, who are desperately searching for employment and dreaming of



going abroad, are falling victim to these illegal agents. The youth are spending 50-50 lakh (5 to 5 million) and heading abroad via the "Donkey Route" in search of jobs, only to be deported like criminals with handcuffs. This is the most shameful situation for the country. The government should collect accurate data on this issue and take strict action against illegal agents.

In a statement released to the media MP Kumari Selja said that she had sought information from the Ministry of External Affairs about the exact number of such illegal travel agents in India who send youth abroad with false promises of jobs. Kumari Selja said that some travel

agents deceive youth with false promises of jobs abroad, causing them significant financial and emotional harm. Many youths go abroad for jobs, only to face bad conditions and exploitation there. The Ministry's response indicates that the e-Migrate portal, social media handles, and other promotional methods issue advice about the dangers of fake job rackets and how to prevent them. As of February 2025, a total of 3,281 illegal agents have been notified on the e-Migrate portal, including those in Haryana. The Ministry has conducted awareness campaigns on safe and legal migration through workshops, training sessions, informational meetings, media groups, police officers, law enforcement agencies, local administrations, aspiring recruitment agents, entrepreneurs, and the general public across the country, including Haryana.

She said the Ministry regularly coordinates with state governments, including Haryana, on issues related to illegal agencies and the enforcement of migration regulations. The

foreign contact program is organized from time to time with the cooperation of state governments. The Ministry regularly conducts outreach programs to educate various stakeholders about the benefits of safe and legal migration and suggests ways to prevent illegal migration through fake/unregistered recruitment agencies. In addition to sharing regular information about unregistered recruitment agencies, regular meetings are held with the state-level nodal officers. The Ministry also organizes regular workshops and training sessions.

Kumari Selja said that the Ministry's response is surprising, and it can be said that the Ministry does not have accurate data on illegal travel agents. In India, in 2020, there were more than 250,000 small-sized travel agents. The Indian travel agent market size in 2020 was approximately 38 billion USD, which is estimated to exceed 67 billion USD by 2027. Instead of a decrease, the number of illegal travel agents has increased since 2020.

BJP is not enemy of Muslims; Waqf Amendment Act 2025 is in the interest of community: Zakir Husain

**SATISH HANDA
Ambala**

Haryana Waqf Board Administrator Zakir Hussain while discussing with media in detail the benefits and concerns of the Amendment Bill 2024 at Waqf Board office said how this bill is in the interest of Muslims and will help increase the income of the Waqf Board. He also refuted the allegations that this bill is a step towards closing down the Waqf Board by the ruling government as claimed by a handful of people for their self-vested interests. After the Amendment Bill 2024 was passed by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, he said that this bill is in the interest of Muslims and will benefit them as well as will increase the income of the Waqf Board and money will be spent on mosques, graveyards and dargahs for the benefit of Muslims community and will also spend in a better way on the education of Muslim children, therefore this bill is going to be beneficial for the entire community. He said that if BJP was the enemy of Muslims, the



Waqf Board would have been closed, but this did not happen.

Haryana Waqf Board Administrator Zakir Husain said that in the cases being heard under this Act, earlier there was a provision that cases were heard in the Waqf Tribunal and people went to the High Court or Supreme Court for revision. There was a provision for appeal in this, but in the case that has come through revision, people can go to the High Court, and such things have happened in Haryana before as well having a thousand cases pending here. The High Court, Supreme Court and Waqf Tribunal are also involved in these cases. When asked what will be the advantages and disadvantages



of the new Waqf Bill, Zakir Husain said the Amendment Bill has been passed by the Central Government in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha and in the coming times, the lands owned by Haryana Waqf Board will benefit a lot from this, besides there will be transparency in the work of the Waqf Board and the income of the Waqf Board will be better managed in the accounts. There is no such problem in the Haryana Waqf Board. We are already working on the amendments that have been passed. Complaints have come from other places.

When asked how many Waqf properties and tenants are there in Haryana? Zakir Husain said that there are 12, 336 property

gazettes notified in Haryana at present, whereas the tenants are concerned, there are 25, 782 tenants from whom the Board earns annual income worth about Rs 27 crore. When raised a question how many illegal occupations are there, he answered he has just given details about illegal occupation and on asking if government departments taken over the markets also, Zakir Husain said there is nothing pending in this regard, however some properties are with the government department where Income is also coming and Waqf Board do not have any problem in this regard, and It is not that the Waqf Board has claimed the government property. When questioned, which district has the maximum Waqf Board properties, he replied that the maximum number of properties include Gurugram, Rohtak, Rewari, Karnal and Ambala districts.

When questioned, in the Act earlier the government used to appoint members, but now the government will also appoint the chairman.



Only focus on ‘Parivar Ka Saath, Parivar Ka Vikas’: PM Modi’s Swipe at Opposition in Varanasi

VARANASI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday took a sharp swipe at the Opposition for carrying forward the legacy of dynastic politics, accusing them of prioritising the interests of their own families over the welfare of the people and compared it to that of the BJP, which he stated, focuses on inclusive development.

Addressing a massive public gathering in his parliamentary constituency of Varanasi, PM Modi laid the foundation stone and inaugurated developmental projects worth Rs 3,880 crore. In a direct dig at rival political parties, PM Modi said that some political parties are more focused on “seizing power” for their families rather than working for the public. “We are taking forward the idea of ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas’.



However, there are some whose only focus is to conspire to grab power, their only resolve is ‘Parivar ka Saath, Parivar ka Vikas’,” he said. PM Modi’s reference to ‘Parivarvad in politics’ came while he was addressing the

gathering after inaugurating and laying the foundation stone of 44 development projects, during 50th visit to his Parliamentary constituency. Highlighting the success of the Ayushman Bharat scheme, PM Modi said the programme not only ensures free medical treatment for senior citizens but also restores their dignity and peace of mind. He shared his personal experience of distributing Ayushman Vaya Vandana Cards to elderly citizens, stating, “Just a short while ago, I had the opportunity to hand over Ayushman Vaya Vandana Cards

to several elderly citizens here. The expression of satisfaction on their faces was, for me, the greatest success of this scheme.”

Reflecting on the region’s transformation over the past decade, the Prime Minister recalled the state of healthcare facilities before 2014. “The condition of medical facilities in Purvanchal before the last decade is also well known. Today, the situation is different. My Kashi is becoming a health capital,” he said. “The big hospitals of Delhi and Mumbai have now come close to your homes. This is true development — when

facilities come to people,” PM Modi added.

He noted that in the past ten years, the government has not only increased the number of hospitals but has also ensured that patients are treated with dignity.

“The Ayushman Bharat scheme is no less than a boon for the poor brothers and sisters. This scheme provides not just medical treatment but also trust.”

“When you gave us your blessings for the third time, we tried to return the favour through our service. It was my guarantee that the elderly would receive free treatment. The Ayushman Vaya Vandana Yojana is a result of that promise,” he said.

The Prime Minister also underscored the impact of the ongoing development initiatives in Varanasi, stating that the 44 projects unveiled will significantly improve the quality of life in the region by modernising services and infrastructure across both urban and rural areas.

Caste census will change development paradigm in country: Rahul Gandhi

KAVITA SHARMA
Patna

Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi today said that the ‘caste census’ will change the paradigm of development in the country and help in breaking the monopoly of a select few over everything. He maintained that the ‘caste census’ is like the social X-Ray that will reveal everything that ails the system.

Addressing the ‘Samvidhan Surakhsha Sammelan’ in Patna, the senior Congress leader said that the Constitution of the Country is not just a 75-year-old document, it carries thousands-year-old idea of India.

He said, it carries the ideas of great men of truth. He pointed out, when Mahatma Gandhi wrote his autobiography, he did not write, ‘My Experiments with Life’, but he wrote, ‘My Experiments with Truth’. He said, Savarkar’s ideas cannot be part of the Constitution as he could not stand for truth.

At the same time, he remarked, it is not easy to speak truth in India right now and



the upper caste, the system will be against you”.

Gandhi narrated the story of a cobbler from Sultanpur in Uttar Pradesh, Chet Ram, who was working for forty years in his shop but was not able to get a bank loan to expand his business. He disclosed that when he arranged a machine for him, Chet Ram opened another shop, suggesting that there were talented people but were not getting proper support and opportunities to grow.

Stating that people like RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat were against the caste census, Gandhi said, the twenty-first century is the age of data and in Telangana, the government has complete caste data in its hands with which it can change the whole politics of the state. “What truly belongs to you, we can rightfully give you through caste census”, he told people, while asserting that, leave aside RSS and the BJP, no power on earth can stop the caste census.

many senior political leaders had preferred not to speak the truth.

Reaffirming his commitment to carry out the ‘caste census’ in the country, Rahul Gandhi said, it will change the paradigm of development. Quoting the example of Telangana, where the Congress government has already carried out a caste census, he said, it had revealed sensational details.

He disclosed that the Telangana caste census revealed that none of those who had taken bank loans was an OBC, EBC, Dalit or Adivasi. He revealed that none of the owners or CEOs of top corporate houses was an OBC, EBC, Dalit, Ati-Dalit, Adivasi. “There is zero percent representation”, he said, while remarking, “if you are not from

LPG price hiked by Rs 50 per cylinder



NEW DELHI: The price of LPG cylinders has been increased by Rs 50 per 14.2 kg cylinder for both subsidised and non-subsidised consumers with effect from April 8, Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri announced on Monday. The price increase applies to both Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) beneficiaries as well as other consumers. “For PMUY beneficiaries, the price will rise from Rs 500 to Rs 550 per cylinder. For other consumers, it will increase from Rs 803 to Rs 853,” the minister said. He added that the revision is subject to the periodic review that takes place every two to three weeks. On April 1, in a relief to people in the new financial year, oil marketing companies had reduced the price of commercial LPG cylinders. The price of a 19-kg commercial LPG cylinder was cut by Rs 41. In the national capital, Delhi, the revised retail selling price now stands at Rs 1,762 per cylinder.

India imports about 60 per cent of the domestic LPG consumed. Price of LPG in the country is linked to its price in the international market.

Pleas Challenging Validity of Waqf Act Mentioned Before CJI for Urgent Listing

NEW DELHI: The pleas in the Supreme Court challenging the recent amendments introduced to the Waqf Act were mentioned on Monday before Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna for urgent listing. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal urged CJI Khanna to give an urgent hearing on the petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025. In response, the CJI, who is the master of the roster, asked the senior counsel if he had moved an email containing the mentioning letter. When informed that the same had already been done, CJI Khanna said, “I will get the letter and do the needful this afternoon.” Several petitions have been filed before the apex court challenging the amendments immediately after the Parliament passed the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2025, on Friday.

Congress blasts BJP over weak-kneed foreign policy, sinking economy, adopts “Nyay Path”

KAVITA SHARMA
Ahmedabad

The Congress today blasted the BJP government for its overall failure on economy, foreign affairs and betrayal with the farmers.

On the concluding day of the AICC session here today, the party adopted the ‘Nyay Path’ resolution outlining its stance on agriculture, foreign policy, economy, social justice, national harmony, gender equality among other things.

Accusing the BJP of “weak-kneed and failed foreign policy”, the resolution said successive Congress Governments enhanced India’s global stature and demonstrated leadership on the world stage through a



principled and visionary foreign policy. “Our governments’ foreign policy was always centred around protection of India’s interests, global balance of power, finding solutions through mutual harmony and dialogue, international cooperation and peaceful resolution of disputes”, it said, while regretting, sadly, the current regime has com-

promised India’s foreign policy at the altar of “individual branding” and serving “vested interests”.

It said, the Congress Party believes that India’s foreign policy can’t be an instrument of divisive politics for the domestic political agenda, as is being done by the BJP government.

It said that China has illegally

occupied thousands of square kilometres of Indian territory in Eastern Ladakh, yet the current BJP Government, founded upon the rhetoric of showing “lal aankh” (“red eyes”), has utterly failed to restore the status quo ante, as it existed prior to April 2020. It referred to the proposed construction of the world’s largest dam by China on the Brahmaputra River, saying, it is an alarming development, particularly for Assam and other Northeastern States.

The resolution expressed serious concern over the rise of radical elements in neighbouring Bangladesh saying, it has already created an unsafe environment for religious minorities, including Hindus, Buddhists and Christians.

The New ‘Avatar’ of Narendra Modi 3.0 × N&2 Having Nitish and Naidu as Vanguard

GOPAL MISRA
Consulting Editor-FW

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is no exception that he has quietly been repositioning his political position with his graduation from the BJP’s most admired and powerful leader to lead a coalition under the banner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) having stalwarts like Nitish Kumar and Chandra Babu Naidu with their unquestioned moorings of India’s secular politics.

In this context, it is natural to ask how Modi, who had been much maligned for his ‘Hindutva’ agenda, could emerge as an unquestioned leader representing the country’s secular political space, especially being endorsed by Nitish and Naidu. History, however, is full of such contradictions. During the Mughals, Aurangzeb, known for his secular approach a veena player and who used to offer tribute his Hindu grandmother by giving offerings to the Hindu priest during the Shraadhha or the remembrance period every year, had taken refuge under the umbrella of Islamic radicals after killing his brothers and putting his father, Shahjahan in prison.

It is also quite intriguing that how Modi, who was accused and had faced media trials for years for his alleged role in the Gujarat riots has finally evolved a constituency among Muslims, especially in Western UP, Jharkhand and even in Madhya Pradesh. He may not be having the similar following among them like Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar and Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP, who had been nursing their Muslim constituency by promoting some aggressive people among them; who often used to claim themselves as their saviors from the various aggressive so-called Hindu outfits.

Interestingly, during the last two decades, a strong group of highly educated Muslim youths, mostly the recipients of scholarships and study grants under various government schemes, including a large number of women, has had a significant presence. The policy of Dr. Manmohan Singh to introduce a number of schemes for Muslim youths, including the girls, seeking higher education, which fortunately was continued during the Modi regime, appears to be quietly blossoming in the country’s fragile social and religious horizon.

Modi’s Drive to Win Muslims

Modi’s historic speech at the centenary celebrations of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) on December 22, 2020 in considered a milestone in the country’s politics, when he declared that “nobody can be discriminated against for adhering to a particular religion or faith. He was quite vocal that there could be ideological differences, but the nation is first. His address had become more significant, especially when a section of the BJP had been demanding that the name of the university should be changed to ensure it does not harbor Muslim radicals. During the pre-partition years, the AMU students, mostly hailing from the families of the rich landlords had spear-headed the movement for Pakistan. For Modi’s historic speech, the AMU vice-chancellor, Professor Tariq Mansoor, is being praised and credited for inviting him to this auspicious occasion. Mansoor had asked that the centenary celebrations should be kept above politics. In fact, the founder of AMU, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan had always been for a strong Hindu-Muslim unity. Later, the British had succeeded in turning this institution into a hub for



the supporters of the Muslim dreamland, Pakistan.

With this seedling of a secular approach, Modi has also ensured closer ties with a large number of Muslim countries in various parts of the world during the past five years. His consistent political drive finally evolved him as an acceptable political icon even among the new generation Muslims. He is now rightly being credited for re-scripting a new alignment in the country’s social and political environment accompanied by an aggressive dose of nationalism. Earlier, the BJP under him had overwhelmed Sonia’s Indian National Congress (INC). He is now going to challenge the country’s disparate opposition with his new secular credentials.

The history is full of instances that the rulers re-anoint themselves with new narratives according to the obtaining situations; and democratic regimes are not exceptions. It may be recalled that country’s first prime minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, often accused by Indian leftists, especially the Communist Party of India (CPI), as a representative of the Indian bourgeoisie, had announced his socialist policies at the Congress session held on January 10, 1955 at Avadi. Similarly, his daughter, Indira Gandhi, had trounced the party’s old guards by nationalization of banks professing her commitment to the country’s poor.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Modi has resorted to reinvent an image of a secular leader more acceptable to the country.

Modi off the Hook of RSS

With his new incarnation as the NDA leader, it will be difficult for his political mentors in the RSS to evict him from the office after attaining 75 years. He will be 75 in September 2025, but this discipline may not be applicable to him. The BJP leaders. L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi were superannuated under this formula, but they were not leading a political alliance. With Modi leading the NDA, a coalition, he has to serve the country to fulfil the wishes of his alliance partner leaders, Nitish Kumar and Chandra Babu Naidu. Therefore, according to his admirers, he cannot be asked to quit either by the BJP or the RSS. It may be recalled that initially, Modi was unanimously elected the leader of the NDA; later his name was endorsed by the BJP Parliamentary Party.

It is interesting that by ensuring his smooth transition from the BJP’s leadership to become the new unquestioned leader of the coalition, he is no longer under the existing discipline protocols only applicable to the BJP. It, perhaps, could have been invoked if the BJP had repeated its successes in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha elections getting absolute ma-

jority in the House in the 2024 polls also. The party could have sought his replacement, but it is now a political outfit badly trounced in the election held about 10 months ago. It is further weakened, perhaps crippled politically, by the presence of the 101 Lok Sabha members of the party facing prosecution for committing murders and rapes before different courts in the country.

The NDA, however, was revitalized almost at a lightning speed after BJP’s poor show in the 2024 elections. The BJP lost 62 seats, bringing its total down to 240, below the 272 required for a majority in the Lok Sabha. It was for the first time since 2014 that the BJP could not win a clear majority on its own. Interestingly, for this debacle, Modi’s unanimous election to lead the NDA escaped the wrath of the party and the RSS, the mentors of the BJP leadership.

Modi’s New Avatar

It took almost six months, if not more, for those harboring anti-Modi ideas, in the ruling BJP as well as in the opposition benches, that Modi in his new ‘avatar’ or incarnation as the NDA leader has a much larger constituency of supporters across the country than he had been enjoying as the BJP leader. Also, Modi is not leading a minority government of the BJP and being supported by a few political groups or parties for remaining in the power, but he is heading a powerful alliance under the banner of the NDA having a 292-strong presence in the Lok Sabha. With this formidable support, Modi has returned to lead the country for a third term. His political clout has further been augmented in the political arena with the crucial support Nitish and Naidu; thus, his new tenure is being aptly called Modi-3.0xN2.

Rahul chides Modi on US tariffs, says only Congress can defeat RSS-BJP

KAVITA SHARMA
Ahmedabad

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi on April 9 chided Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump on Indian imports. “Where is Modi hiding?” he asked, while recalling how Modi used to boast about his friendship with Trump.

Addressing the AICC Session here today, Gandhi in his characteristic style ripped apart the BJP-RSS’ polarising agenda, alleging that all the BJP workers were full of hatred. He quoted the recent incident in Rajasthan involving the CLP leader Tika Ram July’s visit to a temple, which was later washed by one of the BJP leaders, because July belongs to the Dalit community.

Gandhi also said that the Waqf Bill passed recently by the BJP government in the parliament was an attack on the freedom of religion. He also quoted the RSS mouth-piece Organiser, saying their next target was the Christians’ lands across the country. “The Waqf Bill is anti-constitution and against the freedom of religion”, he remarked, while warning that even the Sikhs were in line to be targeted by the BJP.

The Congress leader main-



tained that it was the battle of ideologies between the BJP-RSS on the one side and the Congress on the other side. He said, only the Congress can defeat the BJP-RSS and no other party can do it. Because, he explained, the Congress has an ideology, which is enshrined in the constitution of the country.

He accused the BJP government of attacking the constitution and the constitutional institutions every day. He said, since the BJP cannot do it openly, they were doing it with a hidden agenda.

The Congress leader pointed out that the RSS did not accept the constitution and the day it was adopted it held a protest in Ramliha Maidan in Delhi where the RSS activists burnt the copies of the constitution. Gandhi reiterated and reaffirmed his party’s commitment to carry out the caste census in the country. He quoted the example of Telangana, where the party government has carried out a caste census.

JIH calls the Waqf Amendment Act a Dark Chapter for Minority Rights in India

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Syed Sadatullah Husaini, President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), has strongly condemned the passage of the Waqf Amendment Act 2025 in Parliament, calling it a dark chapter for minority rights in the country. He was addressing a monthly press conference held at the Jamaat’s headquarters.

The JIH President said: “The passage of this Act is highly condemnable and marks a dark chapter for minority rights in our nation. It is a direct assault on religious freedom and constitutional rights in the country. The Act introduces sweeping changes to the Waqf Act 1995, drastically increasing government interference in managing Waqf properties. The Act violates Articles 14, 25, 26, and 29 of the Constitution and paves the way for unjust state interference in the religious affairs of the Muslim community. We express deep concern over the misleading arguments presented by treasury members during the parliamentary debate. Waqf Boards are not equivalent to the Charity Commissioner, as falsely claimed in the Lok Sabha. Several states have exclusive legislations for Hindu and Sikh endowments, ensuring that regulatory and



supervisory authorities belong exclusively to the respective religious communities. The government has repeatedly cited mismanagement, legal disputes, and misappropriation of Waqf properties as reasons for this amendment. However, the Act contains no concrete measures to address these issues. Instead, adding non-Muslim members and shifting control to government-designated officers will do nothing to solve the problem. In fact, undue political and bureaucratic interference has historically been the primary source of corruption and mismanagement in Waqf affairs. Jamaat believes that provisions such as altering ‘Waqf by User’ and imposing restrictive conditions on new Waqfs is a deliberate attempt to weaken Muslim institutions.”

Pointing out how narrowly the Waqf Bill was passed in Parliament Syed Sadatullah Husaini said, “The partisan nature of the Act can be seen by the fact that it could garner only 288 votes in favour in the Lok Sabha while 232 MPs

voted against it. In the Rajya Sabha, it received 128 Ayes and 95 Noes. One should also note that the ruling party with the largest number of lawmakers has zero Muslim MPs in the Lok Sabha and did not have a single elected Muslim MP to speak in favour of the Act in the waqf debate. This shows how little support this Act has received from the Muslim community in the country. We thank all parliamentarians and political parties which opposed the Act. We hope they will continue to extend their full support to the nationwide protests against the Act and pursue all legal, constitutional, and democratic means to overturn this unjust and unconstitutional law. As for the political parties that claim to uphold secularism yet support this unconstitutional law, we feel that their hypocrisy is the worst example of political opportunism and deception. They are bound to pay a heavy price for this short-term political expediency and may not taste power again in their respective constituencies.”



India needs to supercharge its EV dreams

India’s move to exempt import duties on 35 capital goods for electric vehicle (EV) battery manufacturing and 28 items for mobile phone batteries marks a strategic step toward bolstering domestic manufacturing and clean technology. Proposed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Union Budget 2025-26 and formalised through the Finance Bill 2025, this signals a crucial policy shift at a pivotal time. The global EV landscape is evolving rapidly. In March, Chinese EV giant BYD unveiled its “Super E-platform,” promising 500 kilometres of range with just five minutes of charging — a breakthrough that could significantly reduce range anxiety and hasten EV adoption worldwide. Batteries, comprising nearly 40 per cent of an EV’s cost, remain the single biggest hurdle to affordability, especially in emerging markets like India. At present, China dominates global battery manufacturing, producing over 70 per cent of EV batteries. India, where EVs made up only 2 per cent of passenger car sales in 2024, must urgently address technological and manufacturing gaps. Encouragingly, electric two-wheelers (e2w) have gained traction, with 1.14 million units sold last year, accounting for 60 per cent of total EV sales. While India’s tariff relaxations partly aim to enhance trade ties with the United States, the broader objective should be to decarbonise its transport sector and reduce dependence on oil imports. To succeed, India must integrate deeply into the global EV battery value chain, spanning mining, refining, manufacturing, and assembly. This would lower costs, enable technology transfer, and position India as a credible alternative to China for supply chain diversification. Sustained investment in R&D, favourable trade policies, and strategic partnerships will be critical. The race for leadership in the EV sector has begun — and India must accelerate to stay in contention. This is the only way forward.

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Success

Success is not a luck,
It's a game of patience and
hardwork.

THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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NITIN DESAI BELIEVES CORPORATIONS MUST BALANCE PROFIT, PEOPLE, AND PLANET TOGETHER

Corporates look beyond profits



commands the attention of not only the environmental and engineering departments but also the marketing department, the finance department, and, certainly, the CEO.

Many years ago, this writer met an Indian CEO who said that his company had recently become ISO 14000 compliant (which was a demanding international standard for environmental management). When asked why, because nothing in Indian legislation at that time required compliance with ISO 14000, his answer was very simple: ‘If I want to be a global player in my business, I have to be there with the other global players in terms of standards. I also have to be compliant with these standards because that is what my clients abroad increasingly demand.’

The view of what constitutes social responsibility must also vary. One CEO might think that if the company is making a profit, it is socially responsible because many thousands of people work for the company and benefit from its success. Another CEO might have another view: “Oh yes, profit is important, but I must also make sure that my corporation is able to do something concrete for the community whose resources it uses. I need to put something back into the community.” A third CEO may reason, “My corporation cannot survive if there is continuous strife in my country, so I have a certain responsibility to see how I can contribute to the resolution of that strife.” What is interesting is that very few are ready to say that they are not socially responsible. The challenge is to make sure that there is a certain commonality to what people mean by social and environmental responsibility.

Commitment from the top

The most obvious corporate support for sustainable development is the conviction that being socially and environmentally responsible does not necessarily mean that you have to sacrifice the bottom line. Such people believe that win/win solutions are available, particularly on the environmental side. A greater commitment to sustainability can come from a CEO with a long-term vision for sustainability; things that are not a part of the normal calculation of shareholder value but are likely to become part of shareholder value 10 years from now. Both these approaches are consistent with a focus on shareholder value.

A more challenging goal is when CEOs accept that a significant part of the problems of society arises from environmental and social stresses. And if companies must be ready to sacrifice some profit in order to be able to address that environmental and social stress, they can make a great contribution. But the benefit of this accrues to society at large, including rival companies. Therefore, these steps will not be taken without a broad consensus that the steps are necessary and binding on all. This third type of corporate approach to sustainability requires a broad-based consensus where all players (businesses, governments, and civil society) recognise sustainability as a shared responsibility. Platforms such as the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) play a crucial role in fostering such partnerships, enabling collective action toward sustainable development.

Will this come on time? CEOs and managers are not a breed apart. They are a part of society. This will happen when sustainable development is a widely accepted consensus for development policy and actions.

Nitin Desai is Chairman, The Energy and Resources Institute. Views are personal.

A microcosm of society

It is possible that even in these cases, the investing company may focus so much on economics that it may not sufficiently value the environmental benefits. It is of course true that corporations realise that their success depends on what happens in the marketplace and on much else as well. It depends on the morale, the commitment, and the loyalty of the workforce. It also depends on the loyalty of the customer base and the public reputation it commands. All of this contributes to the long-term success of a corporation. Corporate leaders should recognise this and become far more sensitive to the concerns of these other groups.

Companies must pursue not just the bottom line and shareholder satisfaction. They must also worry about: employees, the opinions of clients, and the impact on the societies of which it is a part. Corporations today cannot command respect even among their own employees if they do not have a reputation for being environmentally and socially responsible. A large corporation is a microcosm of society.

If environmental awareness and a sense of social responsibility are growing in society, these things will be reflected in the workforce. Shareholder value is important. But in the longer run, they also have to worry about the workforce and the needs of society.

With the growing global involvement of companies, corporate managers are part of a community of corporate managers around the world. The powerful factor here is a sense that “this is how my peers expect me to behave — this is now the standard of behaviour”. Today, the admired person is the manager who is able to combine shareholder value with environmental and social responsibility successfully.

Part of corporate policy

Most corporations today show environmental consciousness because of the need to meet regulatory standards. But what has happened in the minority of corporations is that instead of being limited to the environmental department doing audits of waste and so on, the broader issue has entered the boardroom, and is being written into corporate policy. It



SWATI MEENA NAIK ADVISES THAT INVESTING IN WASH YIELDS HEALTH, EQUITY, SUSTAINABILITY, AND DIGNITY

Sanitation and water remain twin pillars of health



On this World Health Day (April 7), as nations reflected on the foundations of human well-being, India stood tall with a transformative lesson: health and sanitation are not separate pursuits, but are two sides of a coin. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has undertaken a sanitation and water revolution that has not only changed the way we live but also how we thrive.

The story of modern India cannot be told without acknowledging the contribution of the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) Grameen and the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM). These programmes are not just about toilets and tap water alone. They represent a shift in the soul of the nation. These rural missions symbolise dignity, equity, and, above all, health.

When the Prime Minister launched SBM from the ramparts of the Red Fort in 2014, he ignited a movement that has touched every Indian household, making it a people’s movement — a Jan Andolan that was anchored in behavioural change and inter-generational equity. By 2019, India had declared itself Open Defecation Free (ODF) and taken significant steps towards achieving SDG 6.2 (it focuses on achieving access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all by 2030) and also ending open defecation, 11 years ahead of time.

The SBM has been a powerful public health intervention. A World Health Organization (WHO) report estimated from 2014 to 2019, through the sanitation mission, over three lakh diarrhoeal deaths were averted. The Gates Foundation reported in 2017 that there were 58% higher cases of wasting among children in non ODF areas. A UNICEF study (2017) found that 93% of women felt safer after getting a toilet at home and ODF families saved Rs 50,000 annually in health-care costs, ensuring higher

savings. The SBM has improved environmental outcomes. Groundwater contamination in ODF villages is 12.7 times less likely, ensuring long-term health resilience in rural communities. A (2024) Nature study estimated that 60,000 to 70,000 child deaths are prevented every year due to improved sanitation access. These outcomes are not incidental, they are the result of sustained political commitment, inter-ministerial coordination, and community ownership.

In 2019, the Jal Jeevan Mission was launched to ensure every rural household receives clean drinking water through a tap connection. This is more than infrastructure. It is an investment in human potential with far-reaching socio-economic impact. Research by Nobel Laureate Dr. Michael Kremer has shown that nearly 30% infant deaths can be reduced if safe water is made available to families for drinking and 1.36 lakh child deaths (under five years) can be prevented with universal tap coverage. WHO estimates suggest that the JJM could avert four lakh diarrhoeal deaths with safe drinking water supply at home. And,

5.5 crore hours are saved every day, mostly by women, who had earlier spent time fetching water. State Bank of India research finds that the availability of water within premises led to increased participation by women in agriculture and allied activities.

The Sujal and Swachh Gaon campaign, launched to integrate water, sanitation, and hygiene at the village level, has further galvanised communities. Thousands of villages have already been declared Swachh Sujal, which is an important marker of holistic public health transformation. Improved water and sanitation systems are also leading to reduced out-of-pocket expenditure for rural households, reinforcing the preventive health-care model.

On the ground

Sanitation and water are the first line of defence in public health. They are the invisible shield that protects communities from disease, women from indignity, and children from lost opportunity. A healthy nation is a productive nation. A clean nation is a resilient one.

Today, more than 80% of India’s rural households have tap water connections. Over 96% villages have been declared as ODF Plus, more than 5.07 lakh villages have solid waste management systems, and 5.23 lakh villages have liquid waste management systems in place.

Women are not just beneficiaries, they are also water testers, sanitation entrepreneurs, and local leaders. Over 2.48 million women have been trained to test water quality, and women-led Self-Help Groups are managing sanitation assets, recycling centres, and even sanitary napkin production. This is the vision of a Viksit Bharat where no child misses school because of a lack of water, no woman walks miles with a pot on her head, and no family loses a loved one to preventable illness.

The journey to health is the journey to dignity. A toilet brings privacy. Clean water brings opportunity. Waste management protects the environment. Each link in the sanitation chain connects directly to a healthier, safer society. The lessons we have learnt highlight the importance of inter-ministerial collaboration which is non-negotiable.

It is about convergence

Since, health is not the concern of one Ministry alone, it is the outcome of converged action across water, sanitation, nutrition, education, and rural development. We must recognise that India’s model is not insular, it is global. Our innovations, community-led models, and use of technology whether through real-time dashboards, Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (or GOBARdhan) biogas plants, or plastic waste management units are blueprints for the world, especially the Global South. Lastly, we must continue to work through a mutual understanding that every rupee invested in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) yields manifold returns in health, productivity, gender equity, and environmental sustainability.

India is committed towards progressing forward on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and this World Health Day, we need to acknowledge and remember that good health begins not in hospitals, but in homes with access to clean water, safe sanitation, and a shared resolve. As we move forward, India remains committed to sharing its journey, collaborating globally, and co-creating a cleaner, healthier, and more resilient world.

Swati Meena Naik is Joint Secretary, National Jal Jeevan Mission. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

New book paints a poignant portrait of rural India, illness

The sheer wordsmithery and depth of knowledge on display in *Breathless* are evident from the very first page. Andrew McDowell crafts a narrative that goes far beyond a mere account of tuberculosis (TB) in India — a subject that already has an expansive body of literature. Instead, *Breathless* offers a deeply immersive exploration of how tuberculosis intersects with caste, poverty, gender, and systemic inequality in rural India. It is a story not just about disease, but about the fabric of rural life itself, stitched together with extraordinary sensitivity and insight.

Set in Ambavathi, a real village in Rajasthan located roughly halfway between Delhi and Mumbai, McDowell draws readers into a landscape where dust permeates both the air and the lives of its people. Much like R.K. Narayan’s fictional Malgudi, Ambavathi serves as a microcosm, revealing larger truths about India’s rural realities. Predominantly inhabited by Dalits and

Adivasis, the village’s social and environmental conditions conspire to exacerbate the spread and impact of tuberculosis. McDowell transforms elements of nature — breath, dust, air, mud, clouds, forests, and even the afterlife — into central thematic chapters, creating what he terms “atmospheric entanglements.” This creative approach elevates the narrative, making it as much about the environment and social structures as about the disease itself.

One of the book’s greatest strengths lies in its profound empathy. McDowell’s writing never feels clinical or voyeuristic. Instead, he invites readers into the intimate spaces of his subjects’ lives, allowing them to experience their struggles and small victories. Whether standing beside Mauz Harijan in a hospital ward, cycling alongside Daulat Singh on a dusty path, or witnessing young Khem Singh Rawat tenderly fanning his ailing father, the reader is drawn into these moments with remarkable immediacy. In the

chapter titled “Dust,” McDowell’s vivid descriptions are so potent that one almost feels the dust clogging one’s own nostrils — a visceral experience that reflects the depth of his narrative craft.

McDowell’s writing is rich with metaphor, yet grounded in acute observation. Dust, for instance, becomes much more than a physical annoyance; it stands as a symbol of systemic neglect and failed development. He writes, “Dust in Kesarlal’s comment signified more than a fine layer of grit on his home’s floor. It was a microecology of mind and matter that indicated the inconvenient ubiquity of failed development projects in the area.” Sentences like these shimmer with insight, demonstrating McDowell’s ability to weave anthropological detail with literary finesse.

Beyond individual lives, *Breathless* also offers a textured portrait of rural society. McDowell examines the intricate power structures forged through caste hierarchies



and gender dynamics, and the economic vulnerabilities created by geographic remoteness. His portrayal of these issues is never heavy-handed. Instead, he presents them through the lived experiences of the villagers, letting the realities speak for themselves. The result is a nuanced understanding of how health outcomes are inseparable from broader socio-political contexts.

The book’s success is equally attributable to its foundation in rigorous research. McDowell draws from anthropology, history, and sociology to contextualize his findings, blending scholarship with storytelling seamlessly. In just over 200 pages, *Breathless* accomplishes what many longer works struggle to achieve — it informs, moves, and provokes reflection, all without losing narrative momentum.

In many ways, *Breathless* challenges readers to rethink their understanding of public health. Tuberculosis is not presented merely as a biomedical problem but as a condition woven into the social and environmental textures of life. McDowell’s narrative makes it clear that addressing TB, or any major health crisis, requires more than medicine; it demands attention to development, equity, and dignity.

Published by Navayana and priced at Rs 599, *Breathless* is not just an important book for those interested in public health, rural development, or anthropology. It is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand the lived realities of rural India beyond statistics and policy documents. Andrew McDowell’s *Breathless* is a deeply human story, beautifully told — a testament to the power of attentive listening and evocative writing.

In the end, *Breathless* leaves readers with more than knowledge; it leaves them with a feeling — the feeling of having walked, breathed, and lived, if only for a while, in Ambavathi.

Trade Body Seeks Interim Textile Exports Protection Scheme as US Pauses Tariffs

NEW DELHI: The Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) on Thursday said that the 90-day relief in US reciprocal tariffs will bring short-term respite to the Indian textile and apparel exporters, who were bracing for higher tariff barriers, urging the government to introduce an interim Textile Exports Protection Scheme.

US President Donald Trump has announced on a 90-day 'pause' on reciprocal tariffs for all but China. During this period, a substantially lower reciprocal tariff of 10 per cent, over and above the existing duties, fees, taxes, exactions or charges applicable, will be in place.

"The temporary relief will bring short-term respite to Indian textile and apparel exporters, who were bracing for higher tariff barriers. However, this



measure is only a stopgap. It is crucial that the government of India intensifies its engagement with US counterparts to arrive at a more sustainable and mutually beneficial solution," CITI Chairman Rakesh Mehra said.

Highlighting the importance of the US market, he said that America is the largest destination for Indian textile and

apparel exports. "While the government is actively pursuing bilateral negotiations for better tariff access, the industry urges the government to consider introducing an interim Textile Exports Protection Scheme," said Mehra. Such a measure would help mitigate the impact of additional tariff costs, particularly given the wafer-thin

margins that textile and apparel exporters operate on, he added.

He further pointed out that the ongoing trade tensions between the US and China present a strategic opportunity for the country. With the US looking to diversify its sourcing away from China, India has the potential to emerge as a reliable alternative.

"However, this will require proactive diplomacy and a concerted effort to secure a more favourable and stable tariff regime," he emphasised.

As per the latest data, India exported textile and apparel products worth \$10.5 billion to the US in 2024, which accounted for about 28.5 per cent of India's total textile and apparel exports.

In the last five years, India has been a relatively preferred partner for the US in this sector.

US based BlackRock Largest Investor in Adani Group's \$750 Million Bond Issue



NEW DELHI: US-based leading asset manager BlackRock is the largest investor in \$750 million private bond issuance by the Indian behemoth Adani Group, informed sources said on Thursday. According to people close to the matter, BlackRock's move marks its first private placement in India's infrastructure sector. BlackRock's involvement also signals that it does not anticipate any significant operational disruptions for the conglomerate stemming from the legal proceedings in the US. BlackRock, which oversees \$12 trillion in assets globally, has apparently taken on one-third of the \$750 million issuance, which carries a tenure of 3-5 years. Apart from BlackRock, five other institutional investors also participated in the Adani Group's latest capital raise. As per sources, the \$750 million bond issue of Renew Exim DMCC, a wholly-owned off-shore entity of the Adani Group promoter family, is to be used to finance the acquisition of ITD Cementation and other growth avenues

India Withdraws Transshipment Facility for B'desh Export Cargo

NEW DELHI: The Indian government has terminated a key transshipment facility that allowed export cargo from Bangladesh to reach third countries via Indian land customs stations and ports. The move was announced through a circular issued by the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) on Tuesday. Originally granted in June 2020, the facility had enabled Bangladesh to send goods, particularly to landlocked countries like Nepal and Bhutan, through Indian routes.



However, it has now been rescinded with immediate effect. Cargo already in transit will be

allowed to exit the country under the old guidelines. The decision comes amid rising global trade tensions, including new U.S. tariffs affecting both India and Bangladesh. Indian exporters, especially in the apparel sector, had previously urged the government to end the facility, citing congestion and rising air freight costs at major ports like Delhi's IGI Airport. Ajay Sahai, Director General of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO), welcomed the move, noting it would free up space for Indian exporters. Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEP) Chairman Sudhir Sekhri said that transshipment from Bangladesh had caused delays and made Indian exports uncompetitive.

Trade analysts caution, however, that the decision could disrupt logistics for Bangladesh and its trade partners. Ajay Srivastava of the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) highlighted concerns over increased transit times and costs.

New Electronics Component PLI to Boost Local Manufacturing, Create Jobs: Industry

NEW DELHI: India's electronics manufacturing sector has received a major boost with the government notifying the much-awaited 'Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme' (ECMS), top industry bodies said on Wednesday.

The scheme marks a turning point for strengthening India's component manufacturing ecosystem and increasing domestic value addition.

With a financial outlay of Rs 22,919 crore over six years, ECMS aims to generate production worth Rs 4.56 lakh crore, attract investments of Rs 59,350 crore and create nearly 91,600



direct jobs. Applications for the scheme will open from May 1 for an initial period of three months and can be reopened based on industry response.

The India Cellular and Elec-

tronics Association (ICEA) Chairman Pankaj Mohindroo said this scheme would not only deepen India's electronics supply chain but also help build strong Indian champions that can compete globally.

"The electronics sector has already made a mark, especially in mobile manufacturing. The ECMS will build on that momentum and help realise the

India Launches 'Skills Accelerator' Initiative in Partnership with World Economic Forum



NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has partnered with the World Economic Forum (WEF) to establish the 'India Skills Accelerator,' a national public-private collaboration platform aimed at addressing India's workforce development challenges.

The initiative was discussed during a high-level roundtable at Kaushal Bhawan in New Delhi.

The Skills Accelerator will focus on three primary objectives: improving awareness about future skills requirements, enhancing collaboration among stakeholders, and upgrading institutional structures to support a more responsive skilling ecosystem.

This comes at a critical time when 65 per cent of organisations cite skill gaps as a major barrier to progress amid rapid technological and economic changes.

The initiative will be led by Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State for Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Education, with Dr. Sukanta

Majumdar, Minister of State for Education and Development of North-Eastern Region, serving as co-chair.

From the private sector, Shobana Kamini, Executive Chairperson, Apollo HealthCo, and Sanjiv Bajaj, Chairman and Managing Director, Bajaj Finserv, will also act as co-chairs.

In his opening remarks, Minister Chaudhary emphasised that India's demographic advantage can only be fully realised if skilling systems remain agile and aligned with global opportunities.

"India today stands at the confluence of three powerful forces - demographic advantage, digital transformation, and a deep developmental commitment," he emphasised.

"With the world's largest youth population and a vibrant skilling ecosystem, we are uniquely positioned to become the Skill Capital of the World," he stated.

Dr. Majumdar highlighted India's opportunity to position itself as a global epicentre of next-generation talent, particularly in fields like artificial

intelligence, cybersecurity, and cloud computing.

He noted that the National Education Policy has already initiated transformative changes by promoting flexibility, vocational pathways, and digital skilling.

Saadia Zahidi, Managing Director, World Economic Forum, expressed support for the initiative, stating, "By strengthening alignment across the skills ecosystem, this initiative will help close critical skills gaps, support the growth of India's digital and innovation-driven economy, and enable more people to thrive in a rapidly evolving world of work."

The roundtable participants emphasised the need for comprehensive analysis of India's skilling ecosystem and identified 10-12 high-impact priorities with measurable outcomes.

They also discussed establishing dedicated working groups to guide implementation and track progress through WEF's Global Learning Network, enabling peer learning and global benchmarking.

The session included participation from senior leadership of the WEF, MSDE, National Council for Vocational Education and Training, Directorate General of Training, National Skill Development Corporation, as well as key representatives from the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission, All India Council for Technical Education, National Council of Educational Research and Training, and the Central Board of Secondary Education.

Govt hikes excise duty on petrol, diesel as oil prices crash in global market



NEW DELHI: The government on Monday announced that it has increased excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 2 each, with effect from Tuesday, but there will be no increase in the retail prices of the two fuels as oil prices have come down in the global market. The lower crude oil prices will reduce the cost of production for oil refining and marketing companies such as Indian Oil and Bharat Petroleum and increase their retail margins. This will enable the government to raise more revenue from an excise duty hike without increasing the burden on consumers.

"The PSU Oil Marketing Companies have informed that there will be no increase in retail prices of petrol and diesel, subsequent to the increase effected in Excise Duty Rates today," the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas posted on X. The excise duty on petrol has been increased to Rs 13 per litre and that on diesel to Rs 10, according to the order. The move aims to mop up more revenue as crude oil prices have fallen to a four-year low in the global market with the benchmark Brent crude falling to \$63 a barrel - the lowest since April 2021 - and the US West Texas Intermediate crude declining to \$59.57. India, the world's 3rd largest importer of crude, stands to gain as oil prices have fallen.

Oil prices extended losses on Monday, falling close to 4 per cent as growing trade tensions between the United States and China triggered fears of a recession that would lead to a decline in the demand for crude, while the OPEC+ oil cartel has decided to increase supply. Brent futures lost \$2.43, or 3.7 per cent, to \$63.15 a barrel and US West Texas Intermediate crude futures were down 3.9 per cent, at \$59.57. Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, on Sunday slashed crude oil prices for Asian buyers in May by up to \$2.3 per barrel. The decline in oil prices augurs well for the Indian economy as the country imports around 85 per cent of its crude requirement, and any decline in oil prices leads to a reduction in the country's import bill.

Swiggy faces tax demands worth over Rs 165 cr, says no major financial impact

NEW DELHI: Online food and grocery delivery platform Swiggy is facing fresh tax troubles after receiving two assessment orders related to the financial year 2021-22.

The total tax demand stands at over Rs 165 crore. In a regulatory filing on Saturday, Swiggy said it received an order from the Office of the Profession Tax Officer in Pune, demanding Rs 7.59 crore. The order alleges that the company failed to properly deduct profession tax from employees' salaries, which is required under the Maharashtra State Tax on Professions, Trades, Callings & Employments Act, 1975. Swiggy,



however, maintained that it has strong grounds to challenge the order and is planning to file a review or appeal. "The Company believes that it has strong arguments against the Order and is taking necessary steps to protect its interest through review/appeal," Swiggy stated in its filing.

FY24 Review: Profitability of select Pharmaceutical Companies in India



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

Indian Pharmaceutical Industry is now recognized 3rd largest in terms of volume globally and 11th largest in terms of value as per recent data of 2023. Growth and profitability of pharmaceutical companies is driven by multiple factors. Multiple studies have shown that factors such as firm size (as measured by total sales), liquidity (current ratio), market power, company efficiency (assets turnover), firm's growth, etc. affect the profitability. Profitability ratios are used by companies to measure their performance. These ratios include Earnings before Interest, Tax, Depreciation and Amortisation (EBITDA) margin, gross margin, net profit margin, Return on Capital Employed and Return on Net Worth. Companies extensively apply profitability ratios for the purpose of determining the compensation of executive directors.

Pharmaceutical companies in India vary in terms of their revenue streams. Geographic reach also varies from company to company, e.g., Sun Pharma holds top position in Indian pharmaceutical market. India formulations sales of the company were at 149 Billion, but it accounted for 31 per cent of the overall revenues of the company. The company was ranked number 1 by prescriptions with 12 different classes of doctors (February 2024 MAT figures). Pharmaceutical companies face differ-

ent challenges in different markets, and these markets differ widely in contribution to profit margins for these companies, e.g., standalone net profit margin of Sun Pharma was 14.4 per cent but consolidated net profit margin stood at 20.1 per cent for FY24. There are significant differences in segment-wise profitability.

Profitability of any company has relevance for dividend decisions, i.e., dividend payout by the company to its shareholders, or retention for ploughing back the profits. Pharmaceutical companies in India are expected to increase their R&D spending if these companies want to stay ahead in the race as now biologics are taking over. Indian pharmaceutical companies cannot stay on their existing laurels. These companies need to diversify their portfolio. Profitability is necessary for pharmaceutical companies to invest in new product development, in mergers and acquisition deals to become bigger in size, to plough back profits for sustainable growth, to invest in ESG initiatives, to replace old assets, to grow organically, etc.

Domestic pharmaceutical companies must deal with regulatory issues which may arise from time to time. To deal with risks arising from geo-political developments, companies need sufficient profits as observed recently due to potential tariff imposition in the US market. To compete with Pharma MNCs which have deeper pockets, domestic companies need adequate profit. Facts speak in this regard, e.g., Top-ranked

Table 1: Operating Profit and Net Profit Margin of Top 10 listed Pharma Companies in India for FY24

Company	Operating Profit Margin (%)	Net Profit Margin (%)
Sun Pharma		
Standalone	25.5	14.4
Consolidated	25.7	20.1
Divi's Labs		
Standalone	32.76	19.70
Cipla		
Standalone	-	22.58
Consolidated	20.3	16.0
Torrent Pharma		
Standalone	-	16.2
Consolidated	32.0	15.0
Mankind Pharma		
Standalone	-	19.68
Consolidated	24.7	19.0
Dr. Reddy's Labs		
Standalone	-	22.28
Consolidated	24.3	19.9
Lupin		
Standalone	-	16.0
Consolidated	20.0*	10.0
Zydus Lifesciences		
Standalone	-	33.4
Consolidated	27.5*	19.71
Aurobindo Pharma		
Standalone	-	17.85
Consolidated	20.1*	10.9
Abbott India		
Standalone	29.1*	20.5

Source: Based on Annual Reports of respective pharmaceutical companies for the year 2023-24

*EBITDA Margin



consumption valued at US \$23.5 bn and export valued at US \$26.5 bn.

At the same time, it is also important that profits are not exorbitant and hurt the patient and payer.

Multiple studies have touched profitability aspect of pharmaceutical companies and related aspects. Institute for Business in Global Society (2023, July), Harvard Business School shared that Big Pharma can simultaneously earn additional profits and expand access to lifesaving drugs. Ledley Fred D. et al (2020) observed that the median net income from 2000 to 2018 when expressed as a percentage of revenue, was significantly greater for 35 pharma companies compared to 357 non-pharmaceutical companies, i.e., 13.8 per cent vs. 7.7 per cent. The study also found that large pharma companies were more profitable than other large companies, although the difference was smaller when controlling for differences in aspects such as company size, R&D expense, and time trends. Lim, H. and R. Rokhim (2020) examined the factors affecting profitability of 10 pharma companies in Indonesia for 2014-18. Researchers used five independent variables namely

firm size, company efficiency, liquidity, market power and a firm's growth.

A U.S. Government Accountability Office study (2017) found that sales revenue of drug industry (pharma and biotech) increased to \$775 bn in 2015 from \$534 bn in 2006. Further, 67 per cent of drug companies increased their annual profit margins during the same period - with margins up to 20 per cent for some companies in certain years. The study also covered R&D spending and M&A deals.

Profitability of top 25 listed pharmaceutical companies in India (in terms of market capitalization) for FY24 (results of FY25 yet to come) gives a broader overview of profitability in pharmaceutical industry. This list includes domestic pharmaceutical companies as well four foreign pharma companies' subsidiaries which are operating in India such as Abbott, GSK, Pfizer and AstraZeneca. In J. B. Chemicals & Pharma, TAU Investment which is investment arm of KKR, held 53.78 per cent stake (exit process kicked off in late-January 2025).

For FY24, Operating Profit margins of Abbott India, GSK, and Pfizer stood at 29.1 per cent, 24.54 per cent and 26.0

per cent. Their respective net profit margins stood at 20.5 per cent, 20.30 per cent and 25.0 per cent. It was only AstraZeneca that had lower operating profit margin of 15.98 per cent and lower net profit margin of 12.5 per cent. Even then it was in double digits.

Profitability of Indian pharmaceutical companies vary extensively, e.g., Consolidated, and standalone operating profit margins of Sun Pharma were comparable, but net profit margin was much lower at 14.4 per cent for standalone business as compared to consolidated net profit margin of 20.1 per cent. This reflects the differences in the profitability across different markets.

For FY24, Net profit margin of four companies namely Emcure Pharma, Glenmark (consolidated basis), Laurus Labs, and Piramal Pharma stood at 4.64 per cent, 3.41 per cent, 3.20 per cent on standalone basis (and 4.60 per cent on standalone basis), and 0.22 per cent respectively. These margins were very much on the lower side. In other words, five Indian pharmaceutical companies out of 25 in terms of market capitalization reported less than 5.0 per cent net profit margin including net loss reported by Wockhardt.

Divi's Labs, Torrent Pharma, Eris Lifesciences, and Suen Pharma reported more than or equal to 30 per cent operating profit margin for FY24. This was also reflected in their respective Net profit margins of 19.70 per cent, 16.2 per cent on standalone basis (and 15.0 per cent on consolidated basis), 20.16 per cent on standalone basis (and 21.50 per cent on consolidated ba-

sis) and 28.0 per cent. Suen Pharma was the only exceptional player with an Operating Profit margin of 43.0 per cent on standalone basis and 35.23 per cent on consolidated basis. Next player that came close to Suen Pharma was Eris Life with a consolidated operating profit margin of 36.0 per cent and 21.50 per cent net profit margin on consolidated basis for FY24.

32 per cent pharma companies, i.e., 8 out of top 25 pharma companies in terms of market capitalization had an Operating Profit less than 20 per cent for FY24. Just one pharmaceutical company namely Wockhardt, had an Operating Profit below 10.0 per cent. One pharma company out of 25 had an Operating Profit in the range of 10-15 per cent. 6 out of select 25 pharma companies had an Operating Profit in the range of 15-20 per cent, and another 7 pharma companies had an Operating Profit in the range of 20-25 per cent. 6 pharma companies had an Operating Profit in the range of 25-30 per cent and just 4 pharma companies out of 25 had an Operating Profit more than 30 per cent.

5 out of top 25 pharma companies had a Net Profit margin below 5 per cent including net loss for one company and all these companies are domestic companies. Just one company - Ipca Labs had net profit ratio in the range of 5-10 per cent. 6 out of 25 pharma companies had a net profit margin in the range of 10-15 per cent and 5 out of these 6 companies were domestic companies. 8 pharma companies had a net profit margin on standalone basis in the range of 15-20

per cent. Seven (07) pharma companies (2 MNCs and 5 domestic) had a net profit in the range of 20-25 per cent. Two pharma companies which had a net profit margin in the range of 25-30 per cent included one domestic company (Suen Pharma) and one pharma MNC (Pfizer).

For 10 out of 25 pharma companies, either the ROCE or Net Worth had declined in FY24 as compared to FY23 or it had remained static. For Sun Pharma and DRL, it remained static. Decline in ROCE or RoNW was significant for Laurus Labs, Pfizer, and Eris Lifesciences. For 15 out of 25 pharma companies, improvement was visible in ROCE/RoNW. ROCE remained below 5 per cent for three Indian pharmaceutical companies. For 20.0 per cent pharma companies, ROCE or RoNW remained in the range of 5-10 per cent. For 20.0 per cent pharma companies ROCE or RoNW remained between 10-15 per cent. For 3 companies, ROCE remained in the range of 15-20 per cent. For 20.0 per cent companies, ROCE or RoNW remained in the range of 20-25 per cent. The highest ROCE or RoNW was observed in case of GSK (53.40 per cent), followed by Abbott India (34.9 per cent), AstraZeneca (31.1 per cent), and Ajanta Pharma (31.07 per cent).

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MUDRA Scheme Benefitted 52 Cr Entrepreneurs with ₹32.6 Lakh Cr Credit Over 10 Yrs

NEW DELHI: India commemorated a milestone on Tuesday as the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) completed ten years since its inception.

Launched on April 8, 2015, this flagship credit support program was designed to provide institutional financing to non-corporate, non-farm micro and small enterprises that traditionally lacked access to formal credit channels.

Official data reveals the substantial impact of the initiative, with more than 52 crore loans sanctioned totaling Rs 32.61 lakh crore over the decade.

The scheme has demonstrated remarkable growth in average loan size, increasing from Rs 38,000 in FY16 to Rs 1.02 lakh in FY25, indicating strengthening demand for higher-value financing among small enterprises as they expand operations.

The PMMY has contributed significantly to expanding credit flow to the MSME sector.

According to a State Bank of India report, MSME lending surged from Rs 8.51 lakh crore in FY14 to Rs 27.25 lakh crore in



FY24, with projections exceeding Rs 30 lakh crore in FY25.

This represents a notable shift in credit allocation patterns, with MSME financing increasing from 15.8 percent of total bank credit in FY14 to nearly 20 percent in FY24.

Women entrepreneurs have emerged as primary beneficiaries, constituting 68 percent of total Mudra loan recipients.

The decade has witnessed substantial improvements in women's financial inclusion, with the average loan per woman increasing at a 13 percent compound annual growth rate to reach Rs 62,679.

Concurrently, incremental deposits by women grew at 14

percent CAGR to Rs 95,269.

Government data indicates that states with higher proportions of loans to women have experienced greater employment generation in women-led MSMEs.

The initiative has made significant strides in advancing social inclusion within formal financing frameworks.

The SBI report highlights that 50 percent of Mudra accounts are held by entrepreneurs from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, while 11 percent belong to individuals from minority communities, demonstrating improved financial access for traditionally underserved demographic segments.

Analysis of loan category distribution reveals an upward trajectory in business scale among beneficiaries.

Kishor loans (Rs 50,000-Rs 5 lakh) expanded from 5.9 percent of total disbursements in FY16 to 44.7 percent in FY25.

The Tarun category (Rs 5-10 lakh) has also experienced increased demand, prompting the introduction of a new Tarun Plus category for enterprises seeking financing between Rs 10-20 lakh.

Tamil Nadu leads among states in total disbursements at Rs 3.23 lakh crore, closely followed by Uttar Pradesh (Rs 3.14 lakh crore), Karnataka (Rs 3.02 lakh crore), West Bengal (Rs 2.82 lakh crore), and Bihar (Rs 2.81 lakh crore).

Maharashtra reported disbursements of Rs 2.74 lakh crore. Among Union Territories, Jammu and Kashmir topped the list with Rs 45,815.92 crore sanctioned across more than 21 lakh loan accounts.

The PMMY serves micro units engaged in manufacturing, trading, processing, and service sectors.

These enterprises—predominantly operating as sole proprietorships or own-account enterprises—provide employment to approximately 10 crore individuals, establishing them as the second-largest employment generator after agriculture.

The International Monetary Fund has consistently recognised the scheme's contribution to expanding financial access.

In its 2024 report, the IMF reaffirmed that initiatives like PMMY have supported self-employment growth and economic formalisation through improved credit access.

Previous IMF assessments in 2017, 2019, and 2023 also acknowledged the program's role in promoting women-led businesses and enhancing financial inclusion.

The scheme operates through a network of Scheduled Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks, Non-Banking Financial Companies, and Microfinance Institutions, offering collateral-free loans up to Rs 20 lakh under the administration of the Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA).

Bank of India and UCO Bank cut Lending Rates after RBI repo Rate Slash



NEW DELHI: Hours after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) announced a 25 basis points cut in the repo rate, two major public sector banks — Bank of India and UCO Bank on Wednesday reduced their lending rates, bringing relief to both existing and new borrowers.

The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), led by Governor Sanjay Malhotra, reduced the key policy rate to 6 per cent from 6.25 per cent earlier in the day. This marks the second consecutive cut under Malhotra's leadership and is aimed at supporting economic growth amid rising global challenges, including a steep 26 per cent tariff by the US on Indian exports. Reacting swiftly to the RBI's move, Bank of India lowered its Repo Based Lending Rate (RBLR) to 8.85 per cent, down from 9.10 per cent. The new rate came into effect

immediately on April 9. Similarly, UCO Bank also reduced its repo-linked lending rate to 8.8 per cent, with the revised rate effective from Thursday.

Both banks announced the rate cuts through separate regulatory filings, citing the RBI's latest policy decision as the reason for the revision. This move is expected to make loans cheaper, encouraging more borrowing by individuals and businesses.

Other banks are likely to follow suit in the coming days, passing on the benefits of the RBI's rate cut to customers across the country, experts noted. Governor Malhotra, while announcing the decision, also revealed a shift in the policy stance from 'neutral' to 'accommodative,' indicating that the central bank is willing to support growth through easier monetary policy. "Our stance provides policy rate guidance without any direct guidance on liquidity management," he said. The RBI has already infused over \$80 billion into the banking system in the last two months, along with a rate cut in February — the first such move in five years.

RBI releases draft revised Foreign Exchange Rules for Feedback



MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday issued a revised draft of regulations under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999, aimed at simplifying and streamlining export and import procedures to promote ease of doing business. One of the key proposals states that exporters with unrealised export proceeds exceeding Rs 25 crore, pending for over two years from the due date, will only be allowed to carry out further exports if payments are made in full advance or backed by an irrevocable letter of credit. In a significant move concerning precious metal imports, the RBI has proposed that authorised dealers shall not permit any advance remittance for importing gold or silver. This marks a shift in the approach to regulating such high-value transactions.

Securitisation Crosses Rs 50,000 Cr in Q4FY25 despite Sequential Dip: ICRA

NEW DELHI: Securitisation — sale of loans to investors — by lenders, including banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs), crossed Rs 50,000 crore during the fourth quarter ended March 2025 (Q4FY25).

This represents a slight increase from Rs 48,000 crore recorded during the corresponding period of FY24.

On a sequential basis, however, securitisation volumes declined substantially from approximately Rs 69,000 crore each in the second and third quarters of FY25, according to rating agency ICRA. This sequential decline reflected an improvement in liquidity conditions.

Several market participants, particularly private banks that had securitised higher volumes in Q2 and Q3, reduced their activity in the final quarter of the financial year, according to analysts and bankers.

Securitisation involves pooling similar assets, such as mortgages, auto loans, or credit card debt, and then repackaging them into securities like pass through certificates (PTCs). The loans are also sold through direct assignment.

Lenders, especially banks,



typically purchase loan pools to meet priority sector lending requirements.

ICRA data revealed that overall securitisation volumes reached approximately Rs 2.35 trillion for the financial year FY25, up from Rs 1.9 trillion in FY24.

Sachin Joglekar, group co-head of structured finance ratings at ICRA, attributed part of the fourth quarter performance to sluggishness in loan disbursements among NBFCs in micro-finance and other unsecured asset classes.

Private sector banks continued to sell portions of their credit portfolio through securitisation to lower their credit-deposit ratios.

The country's largest private sector bank, HDFC Bank, was less active in selling loans during the fourth quarter. According to a filing with the BSE, the bank securitised Rs 10,700 crore of loans in Q4 and Rs 57,000 crore in FY25.

Bank of Baroda passes on RBI rate cut to retail and MSME customers

MUMBAI: The government-owned Bank of Baroda on Thursday announced the immediate transmission of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) policy rate cut to its customers.

The public sector lender said it has "reduced its external benchmark-linked lending rates for loans catering to Retail and MSME segments, ensuring that customers benefit quickly from the RBI's monetary policy move."

Additionally, the Bank's overnight marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (MCLR) stands at 8.15 per cent, and its one-year MCLR is 9 per cent, which the bank said is among the most competitive in the industry. This move is aimed at providing credit at affordable rates to individuals and businesses, supporting broader economic growth and financial inclusion, the Bank said.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Wednesday announced a 25 basis point cut in the policy rate from 6.25 per cent to 6 per cent and a change in monetary policy stance from neutral to accommodative to accelerate economic growth.

The RBI Governor said the decision to cut the repo rate



has been taken unanimously by the monetary policy committee, keeping in mind the macroeconomic and financial conditions and outlook.

A lower policy rate is aimed at bringing down interest rates on bank loans, which makes borrowing easier for consumers as well as businesses, resulting in higher consumption and investments in the economy, leading to higher growth. However, the effectiveness of this rate cut will largely hinge on how quickly and efficiently commercial banks pass on the benefits to borrowers.

With the RBI's 50 basis points cumulative reduction in policy rates since February

this year, transmission of the rate cut by banks is expected in the coming quarters, according to an SBI report.

The report points out that following RBI's 25 basis point cut in repo rate in February, public sector banks reduced deposit rates by 6 basis points, and foreign banks reduced 15 basis points, while private banks increased the rate by 2 basis points. The analysis of the weighted average lending rate (WALR) on fresh loans versus the repo rate reveals that WALR for public sector banks and scheduled commercial banks SCBs closely follow the adjustments in the policy rate, implying an effective and timely transmission mechanism.

RBI to issue new guidelines for gold loans

MUMBAI: RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra announced on Wednesday that it has been decided to issue comprehensive regulations on prudential norms and conduct-related aspects for gold loans following concerns raised over the issue.

The review of guidelines for lending against the collateral of gold jewellery and ornaments are extended by regulated entities (REs) for both consumption and income-generation purposes.

"Prudential and conduct-related regulations for such loans have been issued from time to time, and they vary for different categories of REs. With a view to harmonizing such regulations across REs while keeping in view their risk-taking capabilities and also to address a few concerns that have been observed, it has been decided to issue comprehensive regulations on prudential norms and conduct-related aspects for such loans," Malhotra said.

The draft guidelines in this regard are being issued for public comment.

Shares of Muthoot Finance, IIFL Finance, Manappuram Finance, Cholamandalam Investment and Fin Co fell up to 7 per cent on Wednesday after the announcement.



The RBI had observed a sharp surge in gold loans across the country, reflecting an increasing dependence on gold as collateral to meet financial needs. According to an RBI report, gold loans saw significant growth in the period ending September 2024 compared to the same period a year earlier.

However, the central bank also raised concerns over irregular practices observed among certain supervised entities (SEs) involved in gold lending. To address these issues, the RBI issued comprehensive guidelines on September 30, 2024, directing SEs to review their policies, processes, and practices.

The report identified several gaps, including deficiencies in outsourcing practices, discrepancies in gold valuation, inadequate due diligence, and insufficient monitoring of the end use of loan funds. These measures aim to ensure that the rapid growth in gold loan portfolios remains sustainable and free from malpractice.

Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs) continue to dominate the gold loan segment, holding a substantial 59.9 per cent share of total gold loans disbursed by both banks and NBFCs as of March 2024. This underscores their critical role in catering to borrowers who rely on gold jewellery and ornaments for securing loans.

Indian stock market & Economy will remain strong even after tariffs



SATISH SINGH

The stock markets of the affected countries registered a significant decline on April 7 due to the imposition of a base-line tariff of 10% from April 5 on countries doing business with the USA, including India, by US President Donald Trump. However, the impact of the decline in the Indian stock market was comparatively less, and the Sensex and Nifty registered a drop of only around 4%. In comparison, the maximum decrease of 15.24% was recorded in the Hong Kong stock market, 10.74% in the Taiwan stock market and 8.49% in the Japanese stock market. At the same time, the US stock market registered a decline of 5.75%.

The US has imposed more tariffs on Asian countries than on European countries. This is 104% in China, 49% in Cambodia, 46% in Vietnam, 37% in Bangladesh, 36% in Thailand, 32% in Taiwan and Indonesia, 29% in Pakistan, 26% in India, 24% in Japan & 20% in the European Union. Therefore, the stock markets here have significantly declined in Asian Countries. However, there are many domestic reasons for the decline as well. For example, the Sensex has declined in India for 6 months. Nifty has also been declining continuously for the last few days after 1996, i.e. after 29 years. The tariff imposed by the US has negatively impacted diamond products exported from India,

because India exports more than 1/3rd of its diamond products to the US.

Amid these turbulences, the Reserve Bank of India announced the results of the monetary review on April 9. It reduced the GDP growth forecast from 6.7% to 6.5% and the inflation forecast from 4.2% to 4% during the financial year 2026. As the reduction in the GDP estimate is nominal, it can be presumed that the US imposing tariffs on India will have minimal impact on the Indian economy. It is worth noting that the National Statistical Office (NSO) has projected the GDP growth rate to be 6.4 percent in its first advance estimate for the financial year 2024-25, which is lower than the last three financial years. During the previous financial year, the GDP growth rate was 8.2 percent.

Despite the estimate of a decline in GDP, our economy is much better than the global level. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the global GDP growth rate was 3.2% in 2024. It can be 3.3% in 2025, whereas, according to the IMF, the global economy can grow at a rate of 3.1% in 2024 and 3.2% in 2025. The Indian economy is better than that of the world's most powerful country, the USA, and it is expected to remain strong in the coming years. The growth rate in the USA is estimated to be 2.7% during the financial year 2024 and 2.0% in the financial year 2025.

The level of inflation is still a matter of concern in many



countries worldwide. Still, due to the decrease in the prices of food items in India, the retail inflation rate based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) came down to 3.61% in February 2025, which was at 4.31% in January. Currently, inflation is at its lowest in the last 6 months. It was at 5.22% in December, while in January 2024, it was at 5.1%.

A total of 30 companies are listed in the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) index Sensex, and 50 companies are listed in the NSE or Nifty. In the stock market, Indian, foreign institutional investors, individual foreign investors, etc., invest in listed companies. Both indices are very sensitive. When the shares of a particular company among the listed companies are continuously sold, the investors' trust in that company decreases, and the price of the shares of that company decreases, resulting in investors suffering losses.

There are many reasons for the fluctuations in the price of shares. For example, poor financial performance or the

company getting involved in some controversy, political instability, government policies, weakening of the rupee against the dollar, global uncertainty, trade war, geopolitical crisis, Federal Reserve's stance, etc. Apart from these, overvaluation of shares and psychological reasons are also the reasons for the stock market crash.

However, the US imposition of tariffs has raised the possibility of recession in most countries except India because tariffs will reduce imports of the affected countries, foreign exchange inflows will reduce, unemployment will increase, etc. Since the economy of many countries is already in a bad condition, the pace of development there may slow down even more, and recession may get a chance to spread.

India exports many products like textiles, pharmaceuticals, IT services, steel, etc., to the US. Therefore, imposing a tariff will increase the cost of these goods in the US market, reducing their demand

and causing losses to Indian exporters. Also, this can lead to a decrease in employment in India, an increase in trade deficit, a reduction of foreign exchange reserves, a decrease in company revenue, a decrease in economic activities, a decrease in the pace of development, etc. Due to the fall in the level of exports, the rupee may also weaken, imports may become expensive, and inflation pressure may increase.

However, if such a situation persists for a long time, India can look for alternative markets like the European Union, ASEAN and the Middle East to compensate for the loss. Even during the Corona period, India quickly became self-sufficient regarding masks and vaccines. Also, in retaliation, tariffs can be imposed on agricultural products, medical equipment, etc., imported from the US, which can compensate for the loss to some extent.

The government's focus in the budget has been on accelerating development. There has been some decline in the GDP growth rate, but there are chances of it picking up due to the repo rate reduction and inflation reduction over the last six months. The Indian economy remains strong, and tariffs cannot weaken it. Therefore, there is less scope for selling in the Indian stock market, and investors can get attractive investment returns. Therefore, investors do not need to panic; they need to avoid unnecessary selling.

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

MSMEs show optimism in Sales, Jobs, Green Investments and resilience on Profitability: SIDBI

TANVIR KAUR

New Delhi

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has released the second edition of its MSME Outlook Survey (MOS) for the quarter January–March 2025. Designed to bridge the critical data gap in the sector, the survey offers valuable insights through two key indices—the MSME Business Conditions Index (M-BCI) and the MSME Business Expectations Index (M-BEI). These indices help policymakers and stakeholders track the evolving business environment and expectations of the MSME sector. This pan-India survey has been undertaken with a well-distributed sample size of about 1200 MSMEs across regions and industries.



The survey findings reflect a broadly optimistic sentiment among MSMEs, underpinned by improved business conditions and forward-looking growth plans. The Composite M-BCI for Q4 FY25 stands at 60.82, marking an improvement from the previous quarter's 58.30. This increase indicates a sustained healthy business environment across the manufacturing, services, and trading sectors, with sector-specific M-BCIs also showing upward movement. Looking ahead, expectations remain positive with M-BEIs for

the next four quarters holding firm above 54. While the overall optimism has slightly moderated compared to the previous round—attributed to ongoing global economic uncertainties and rising tariff barriers—the sector continues to exhibit confidence in future performance.

MSMEs remain buoyant on sales growth, driven by stronger order books, increased production, and higher selling prices. A significant majority anticipates maintaining or improving profitability in Q4 FY25, despite moderate increases in input and salary costs. The outlook for profitability over the next year also remains upbeat, with MSMEs banking on higher production volumes and improved price realizations to support stable or better margins.

National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development Signs MoU with New Development Bank

TANVIR KAUR

New Delhi

The National Bank for Financing Infrastructure and Development (NaBFID), one of India's premier Development Financial Institution (DFI), has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the New Development Bank (NDB) to establish a strategic framework for cooperation in areas of mutual interest, which includes creating a deep and sustainable infrastructure financing market and developing a supportive ecosystem around it. The New Development Bank (NDB) is a multilateral development bank



established by Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) with the purpose of mobilising resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in emerging markets and developing countries (EMDCs).

This collaboration will help bridge the infrastructure financing gap and explore long-term collaboration opportunities, including the exchange of technical expertise.

NaBFID aims to work with NDB on clean energy and transportation projects, such as renewable energy initiatives, sustainable water and sewage management, among others. The MoU also lays the foundation for both organizations to participate in infrastructure projects through thematic-level collaborations within their respective mandates.

Gippy Grewal’s film ‘Akaal’ premiere show creates a lot of excitement

KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Chandigarh

The premiere of the famous singer, actor, producer, and director Gippy Grewal’s film “Akaal” created a lot of excitement. The special feature of this show was that throughout the show, the audience, impressed by the good scenes and appropriate dialogues, kept shouting ‘Bole-so-Nihal’. etc. ‘Akaal’ has been written and directed by Gippy Grewal himself, which will be seen by cinema lovers on April 10. Talking to reporters after the premiere show, Gippy Grewal, Gurpreet Ghuggi and actress Nimrat Khaira seemed to be in a frenzy. Gippy Grewal said that the perception of the film industry is that there is a trend in Punjabi cinema to make comedy films, while breaking that perception, the film ‘Akaal’ is a healthy step in a unique direction and towards showing the bravery of the Sikh community to our new generation. Gurpreet Ghuggi said that films of different genres have broken



the stereotype. Actress Nimrat Khaira said that she is very excited to play a unique character in this film. Whenever Gippy Grewal’s sons Shinda Grewal and Ekam Grewal came on screen in the film, the audience kept applauding their acting with enthusiasm. On this occasion, the main actors of the film, Gippy Grewal, Gurpreet Ghuggi, Nimrat Khai-

ra, Singer and actor Happy Raitkoti, Malkit Rouni, Kulwinder Billa, Navneet Singh (Mumbai) Prince Kamaljit, Bunty Bains, Karan Gilotra, Harkirat Pal Singh (Canada), Gagan Kokri, Gatka expert and his unparalleled performances Gurpreet Singh Khalsa, Narinder Neena, Sukhbir Pal Kaur, director Simran Hundal, actors Lakhwinder Lakha, Anureet Pal Kaur, Gur-

baz Singh, Simarjit, Abhay Antri as well as Jagtar Jagga, Jagga Bains, Kulbir Singh Kalsi, Rangdev, Manmohar Sidhu, Gunveer Sidhu, Raghubir Boli, Gopi, Peter Virdi, Harinder Bhullar, singer Kiran Kaur, Raja Raj Singh, Satbir Kaur Khalsa, Simran Kaur Khalsa and many Nihang organizations also attended the event and enjoyed the film.

Punjabi Cinema to Shine on the Global Stage through PIFFLA Hollywood

*Heritage and creativity of Punjabi cinema to be celebrated at the Punjabi International Film Festival Los Angeles
**Initiative led by acclaimed actor Girija Shankar, known for his iconic role as Dhritrashtra in the 1980s epic Mahabharat

KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Chandigarh

Punjabi cinema is set to receive global recognition through a powerful cultural initiative—PIFFLA Hollywood (Punjabi International Film Festival Los Angeles). This annual festival aims to spotlight the rich heritage of Punjabi cinema, music, and arts at the heart of Hollywood. Veteran actor and cultural ambassador Girija Shankar, who brought the character of Dhritrashtra to life in B.R. Chopra’s legendary television series Mahabharat, is leading this global movement. Addressing the media at the Chandigarh Press Club on Monday, Girija Shankar shared that PIFFLA Hollywood will be an annual celebration of Punjabi



culture, designed to bridge the gap between South Asian storytelling and Western audiences. “PIFFLA Hollywood will not only showcase the creative brilliance of the Punjabi and North Indian communities but also offer international artists a chance to collaborate with Hollywood,” Shankar said. The festival will feature feature films, documentaries, and short films, awarding excellence in categories such as Best Film, Director, Actor, Music Director, and Singer. Through this festival, Girija Shankar aims to inspire young filmmakers and storytellers to create content with international appeal—positioning Punjabi cinema not just as regional en-

tertainment, but as a global cinematic force. Speaking about his journey, Girija Shankar shared: “After years of theater in Patiala, I moved to Mumbai and had the opportunity to work with some of the finest directors and writers in the industry. I acted in the renowned TV serial Bunyaad, directed by Ramesh Sippy, and then in Mahabharat—one of the greatest television series of all time—directed by B.R. Chopra, where I portrayed the blind king Dhritrashtra. I also worked in the popular series Alf Laila by Ramanand Sagar, and in numerous films with legends like Mahesh Bhatt, Ram Gopal Varma, and many more.” “While living abroad, I realized the immense potential for Punjabi cinema, music, and folk art to be appreciated globally—in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and beyond. That is why I founded the Punjabi International Film Festival in Los Angeles. The time has come to take our stories to the world through the platform of PIFFLA Hollywood.”

All about Akshay Kumar’s niece Simar Bhatia who is set to make her Bollywood debut soon



MUMBAI: Simar Bhatia is a name that has been making a lot of noise in the media lately. Niece of Bollywood hunk Akshay Kumar, Simar is all set to make her Bollywood debut soon with “Ikki”. Speaking about her highly-awaited debut in the B-town, Simar said, “I’ve always believed in stars aligning, and this feels like one of those rare, magical moments. I’m grateful, excited, and of course, a little nervous. Right now, I’m just soaking it all in—learning, growing, and trying to enjoy every little moment... even the wonderfully awkward ones!” Akshay Kumar also expressed pride, support, and excitement for Simar’s entry in Bollywood. Earlier, he had penned a heartwarming message for Simar on social media, reminiscing his initial days in films, and expressing confidence in Simar’s capabilities. Akshay’s Instagram note went like this, “I remember the first time I saw my photo on the cover of the newspaper. I thought that’s the ultimate happiness. But today I know the happiness of seeing your child’s photo here beats everything. I wish my mom was here today and she would have said ‘Simar puttara Tu tah Kamaal hai’. Bless you my baby @simarbhatia18, the sky is yours.”

Sonu Sood Breaks Silence on his Wife’s Accident Injury, Makes this urgent appeal

MUMBAI: Actor Sonu Sood has broken his silence regarding his wife’s recent injury in a car accident, urging everyone to prioritize safety on the roads. In a heartfelt video shared on social media, the actor made an urgent appeal, stressing the importance of wearing seat belts at all times, even for passengers in the rear seat. On Monday, the Simmb actor took to his Instagram handle and posted a video where he urged everyone to take road safety seriously, reminding people



that seat belts are crucial for the safety of all passengers, regardless of where they are seated in the vehicle. Sonu



captioned the video, “Seat belt nahin..To aapka parivaar nahin !!! Wear seat belts even if you are sitting in the rear seat.”

In the clip, the ‘Fateh’ actor could be heard saying, “This is a very important message. Last week, there was a major accident in Nagpur in which my wife and her sister were inside the car, and the condition of the car was seen by the whole world. You know, if someone saved them, it was the seat belt, especially for those sitting in the back seat who often don’t wear it. That day, Sunita was sitting in the car, and my wife Sonali told her to wear the seat belt.



Sikh pilgrims shout slogans before leaving for Pakistan to celebrate ‘Vaisakhi’, a spring harvest festival, in Amritsar on Thursday, April 10, 2025. PHOTO-PRABHJOT GILL

Startup Ecosystem of Punjab

SATISH KUMAR ARORA

Punjab, known for its fertile lands and rich industrial heritage, played a pivotal role in India’s Green Revolution during the 1970s and 1980s. Cities like Ludhiana and Jalandhar thrived with booming textiles, sports goods, and auto parts industries, driving Punjab’s economic growth through the 1990s. However, as the new millennium approached, financial challenges and limited career opportunities led many young professionals to seek opportunities abroad, triggering a significant talent drain. Yet, this shift also created an inflection point. The need for economic renewal prompted Punjab to reinvent itself, focusing on industrial modernization, entrepreneurship, and innovation to reclaim its competitive edge. Over the last two decades, Punjab has undergone a remarkable industrial transformation fueled by strategic government interventions, infrastructure advancements, and industry-friendly reforms. The expansion of industrial parks, improved logistics, and a focus on emerging sectors have diversified the state’s economy. Manufacturing, agribusiness, food processing, and IT services have seen steady growth, while Punjab has also positioned itself as a leader in electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing, pharmaceutical production, and precision engineering. Cities like Mohali and Amritsar have emerged as technology and startup hubs, while Ludhiana remains the backbone of India’s textile and auto component industry. Additionally, government-backed clusters and industrial zones have streamlined production, making Punjab a preferred destination for manufacturing and exports. As industries evolved, the demand for a highly skilled workforce became evident, necessitating a transformation in Punjab’s education system. Recognizing this need, Punjab saw its higher education landscape evolve, initially led by fewer than ten prominent government institutions that laid a strong foundation for technical and management education. While these insti-



tutions provided academic excellence, the rapid shifts in global industries highlighted the need for more specialized hubs that could equip students with contemporary skills and foster entrepreneurial thinking. To bridge this gap in advanced technical knowledge, the early 2000s witnessed an influx of private and specialized institutions, positioning Punjab as a key player in higher education. Over a dozen institutions emerged, focusing on pharmaceutical and biotech education, world-class management studies, and industry-driven technical programs. Presence of nine Government Universities, fifteen Private Universities and five Institutes of National Importance in the State of Punjab expanded access to engineering, management, and entrepreneurship education while fostering innovation. This transformation helped Punjab retain and nurture talent, shaping a new era of academic and professional growth. Today, these institutions are at the heart of Punjab’s entrepreneurial transformation. With over 50 incubators and accelerators offering mentorship, funding, and cutting-edge resources, students are now prepared to enter the workforce not just as job seekers, but as job creators. Boot camps, hackathons, and industry collaborations ensure that students gain real-world experience, driving innovation across emerging sectors such as IT, agritech, deep-tech, and advanced manufacturing. A key initiative that has fueled this entrepreneurial revolution is Startup Punjab, launched by the Government of Punjab to foster a thriving startup ecosystem. Through partnerships with academic institutions and industry leaders, Startup Punjab has established over 30 incubators and accelerators, offering startups access to mentorship, seed funding,

and state-of-the-art technology. The initiative has provided over Rs 4.7 crore in seed grants to more than 150 startups, covering diverse sectors including IT, agritech, ITes, and food processing. Through more than 300 outreach events and with the support of 100+ mentors, Startup Punjab has sensitized over 20,000 students and entrepreneurs, nurturing a culture of enterprise and innovation. With streamlined processes, such as single-window clearances and tax incentives, the initiative ensures startups can grow seamlessly. Its focus on connecting entrepreneurs with venture capital and state-backed funding further strengthens Punjab’s position as a global hub for innovation. Invest Punjab, the Punjab Bureau of Investment Promotion, stands as a model for attracting and facilitating investments with its seamless, investor-centric approach. Backed by the Punjab Bureau of Investment Promotion (PBIP) Act, the Bureau serves as a “one-stop office” for investors, ensuring time-bound approvals, transparent governance, and efficient decision-making. With the Invest Punjab Business First Portal (IPBF), a robust Single Window System offering 100+ services, the state fosters an inclusive ecosystem for large enterprises, MSMEs, and startups. The government’s commitment to ease of doing business is evident through reduced compliance burdens, technology-driven approvals, and district-level facilitation, with Deputy Commissioners acting as CEOs of Invest Punjab at the local level. By working closely with Invest India, industry bodies, and global stakeholders, Invest Punjab continues to drive sector-specific reforms and attract marquee investors like Tata Steel, JSW Steel, and Cargill India. As Punjab positions itself as



North India’s most preferred investment destination, its emphasis on manufacturing excellence, export potential, and high-trust governance ensures long-term economic growth and job creation. At the forefront of Punjab’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, TIE Chandigarh stands as a driving force for emerging and growing startups. As a dynamic chapter of TIE Global, a non-profit organization with 60 chapters across 12 countries, it fosters entrepreneurship by connecting a diverse mix of entrepreneurs, industry leaders, and investors. TIE Chandigarh ensures that startups in the region gain access to global networks, strategic mentorship, and crucial funding opportunities, helping them scale successfully. With over 450 members, TIE Chandigarh runs several impactful programs that accelerate startup growth at every stage. TIE Investor Connect links startups with venture capitalists, angel investors, and industry leaders, facilitating essential funding for expansion. TIE Young Entrepreneurs (TYE) nurtures the entrepreneurial mindset of high school students, equipping them with real-world startup experiences. The TIE University Challenge offers university-based startups the opportunity to compete for funding, with expert mentorship to guide them through the process. TIE Women is dedicated to empowering women entrepreneurs, offering them structured guidance, investment opportunities, and access to international networks. Through Masterclass & Mentorship Programs, TIE provides invaluable insights from industry veterans, helping startups refine their strategies and overcome challenges. Recently, TIE Chandigarh, in collaboration with Chandigarh Angel Network, made a significant move by investing Rs 5 crore during its flagship event

TIECon, further emphasizing its commitment to supporting promising startups. With over 300 startups benefiting from its initiatives, TIE Chandigarh has played a critical role in shaping Punjab’s entrepreneurial landscape. By leveraging its international network, it has propelled Punjab-based startups beyond borders, unlocking global partnerships, investment opportunities, and market access. Punjab’s startup revolution is being led from the front by TIE Chandigarh, in collaboration with Startup Punjab and Invest Punjab, which is creating a dynamic and globally connected entrepreneurial ecosystem. As a key catalyst, TIE Chandigarh has been pivotal in empowering startups through mentorship, funding access, and global networking opportunities. With over 2,000 registered startups spanning diverse industries, Punjab’s entrepreneurial landscape is witnessing unprecedented growth, driven by investors’ confidence, government-backed initiatives, and strong industry-academia partnerships. The state’s rapid ascent in innovation and entrepreneurship is reflected in its top ranking in the India Innovation Index 2023. Punjab has attracted over Rs 1,000 crore in venture capital in the past five years, reinforcing its emergence as a preferred hub for technology-driven enterprises and high-growth startups. As TIE Chandigarh continues to lead this transformation, Punjab’s startup ecosystem is poised to make a profound impact on India’s economy while establishing itself as a formidable player in the global entrepreneurial landscape.

Satish Kumar Arora- President, TIE Chandigarh Chapter, Co-Founder, AppSmartz and GameSee

Physician-modified fenestrated EVAR for complex aortic aneurysm performed

KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Chandigarh

A 73-year-old female patient has undergone successful physician-modified fenestrated EVAR for complex aortic aneurysm at Ojas Hospital, Panchkula recently. Talking to media here on Monday, Dr. Ankur Aggarwal senior consultant vascular surgery said that the patient was suffering from a life-threatening aortic aneurysm. This complex, minimally invasive procedure marks a major advancement in vascular care and is in fact among only five such cases ever performed in the tricity region, he informed. Dr. Ankur further informed that the patient had a 6-cm wide aortic aneurysm, a dangerous condition involving the ballooning of the main artery that carries blood from the heart to the rest of the body. Left untreated, such aneurysms carry a risk of rupture, with a mortality rate of 80–90%, he pointed out.



Open surgery—previously the only treatment option—\ is extremely risky for elderly patients, often requiring 7–8 hours of surgery and involving bypasses to both kidneys and intestinal arteries, said Dr Ankur. To avoid these complications, we opted for a cutting-edge technique known as physician-modified fenestrated EVAR, he informed. “This advanced procedure allows us to custom-modify the stent on the operating table by creating tiny fenestrations (holes) to preserve blood flow

to vital arteries branching from the diseased aorta,” explained Dr. Aggarwal. “Once the stent is placed inside the body, four additional stents are inserted through these fenestrations to maintain continuous blood supply to the kidneys and intestines.” The entire surgery was completed via a small 3 cm incision in the right groin , a stark contrast to the large incisions required in traditional surgery and the patient was discharged in stable condition just two days later.

Dy Commissioners to Hold Weekly Review Meetings on Samadhan Shivirs Every Friday: Chief Secretary

GULSHAN KUMAR
Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Secretary Anurag Rastogi april 9, issued directives to all Deputy Commissioners (DCs) to hold review meetings every Friday to review the status of grievances registered during Samadhan Shivirs (Complaint Redressal Camps). These camps, aimed at addressing public grievances, are being organized across the state every Monday and Thursday from 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM. To ensure accountability, an officer of Administrative Secretary rank will monitor these district-level reviews from the Chief Minister’s Dashboard Hall. The instructions were given during a video conference meeting where the Chief Secretary reviewed the functioning of grievance redressal camps and the ongoing procurement of Rabi crops. Rastogi urged the Deputy Commissioners to ensure that complaints received at the Samadhan Shivirs are resolved promptly and to the satisfaction of citizens. “Regular monitoring and swift action are key to improving transparency and responsiveness in handling grievances



across Haryana,” he emphasized. The Friday review meetings should also be attended by key district officials, including the Superintendent of Police, Additional Deputy Commissioner, Municipal Commissioner, Sub-Divisional Officer (Civil) (Headquarters), SDO (Civil), Deputy Superintendent of Police, and heads of relevant departments, ensuring a coordinated approach to problem-solving. The Chief Secretary also instructed the National Informatics Centre (NIC) to develop a portal for DCs to submit monthly reports on their mandatory night halts in villages, a practice aimed at fostering closer engagement with villagers. Dr. Priyanka Soni, Special Secretary, Monitoring and Co-

ordination, said out of over 1 lakh grievances received until yesterday, an impressive 81% have been resolved. Districts such as Ambala and Rewari lead with a 92% resolution rate, followed closely by Fatehabad, Palwal, and Rohtak, each at 88%. On the procurement front, the Chief Secretary underscored the importance of a hassle-free procurement process for Rabi crops. “Farmers should face no inconvenience, and any negligence in this regard will not be tolerated,” he said, directing officials to strengthen oversight in mandis, provide comprehensive support to farmers and ensure smooth and timely lifting of crops from mandis. Rastogi also called for efforts to educate farmers on maintaining wheat within permissible moisture limits to ensure quality and smooth procurement. Additional Chief Secretary, Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Anand Mohan Sharan, shared that 2,47,000 Metric Tonnes (MT) of wheat has been procured in mandis till yesterday, a significant increase from the 1,86,000 MT recorded during the same period last year.