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**PARTS OF DELHI STILL FLOODED DESPITE RECEDING WATER LEVEL**

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**EXPENSES ON IPOs BE GIVEN INPUT CREDIT IN GST, ASSOCHAM SAYS AHEAD OF GST COUNCIL MEET**

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**'MI 7' ACTRESS HAYLEY ATWELL BREAKS SILENCE ON ROMANCE RUMOURS WITH TOM CRUISE**

## Delhi flood row: ITO, Rajghat flooded, Yamuna waters reach close to SC; 3 boys drown

## Modi becomes first Indian PM to receive France's highest award

**NEW DELHI:** The raging Yamuna showed signs of calming on Friday but the breach in a drain regulator led to water-logging in some parts of Delhi such as the ITO, with flood water reaching close to the Supreme Court complex, causing hardship for the people.



Water also entered the Mahatma Gandhi memorial at Rajghat due to backflow from a drain in the area.

Three boys drowned while bathing in the floodwaters in northwest Delhi's Mukundpur Chowk area. These were the first deaths reported in the city since the Yamuna water crossed the danger mark last Monday.

While Delhi Fire Services Director Atul Garg claimed the deaths occurred in a ditch at a metro construction site, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) issued a clarification, saying, "No such incident has been reported from our sites." "DMRC's sites are properly barricaded

and entry is strictly regulated only for authorised personnel," it said.

After breaching the 45-year-old record three days ago, water levels in the Yamuna in Delhi came down to 208.02 metres at 10 pm on Friday. However, that did not stop the floodwaters from reaching central Delhi, the nerve centre of the national capital.

As the Yamuna water level reduced, the Okhla water treatment plant, which was shut on Thursday, was opened. In the evening, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said the Wazirabad and Chandrawal water treatment plants will resume functioning if the Yamuna level goes down to 207.7 metres on Saturday.

The Irrigation and Flood Control Department's regulator installed near the Indraprastha bus stand and the WHO Building was being repaired with sandbags, braces and boulders. Kejriwal and Lieutenant Governor Vinay Kumar Saxena took stock of the repair works.

Following the breach, water started to flow into the city through the drain, inundating the Ring Road, Indraprastha Metro Station, IP Depot, ITO and Vikas Marg, reaching the entrance of the Supreme Court in central Delhi.

Vikas Marg, one of the important stretches connecting east and Central Delhi, was closed for traffic as vehicular movement went haywire and commuters got stuck for hours in traffic jams.

Delhi Cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj alleged there was a delay in the deployment of the NDRF for repairing the regulator even as the L-G asked him not to indulge in a blame game.

Interrupting Saxena during his media address, Bhardwaj said he reached out to the officers last night, asking them to deploy NDRF teams to make the repairs but "there was no response".

"This is the time for teamwork, not blaming each other. I could say a lot of things too, but it's not necessary at the moment," the L-G said.



**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred with the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, France's highest award, by French President Emmanuel Macron. He is the first Indian Prime Minister to receive the honour. The award ceremony took place at the Elysee Palace in Paris on Thursday night.

"Thank President @EmmanuelMacron and Mrs. Macron for hosting me at the Elysee Palace this evening," Modi tweeted after his meeting with the French President.

The Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour is the highest French honour in military or civilian orders. In the past, the Grand Cross of the Legion of

Honor has been received by select prominent leaders and eminent personalities from across the world.

These include late South African President Nelson Mandela, King Charles III, former Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel, former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and many others.

## Delhi's Schools, Colleges to Remain Shut till July 16, WEH advisory for Government employees

## LVM3-M4 rocket carrying Chandrayaan-3 lifts off from Sriharikota



FW DESK  
New Delhi

In view of the flood situation in the national capital, the Delhi government has decided to close private and government schools and colleges till Sunday, July 16, 2023.

The Yamuna flowed at 208.53 metres at 10 am on Thursday, breaking the 45-year-old record. "We had a DDMA meeting. Several important decisions were taken. Schools, colleges and universities will remain closed till Sunday," Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal told to media. "A meeting of DDMA was held, and it was chaired by Lt Governor (V.K. Saxena) and several decisions were taken." "During the meeting it was decided that schools, colleges and universities will remain closed till Sunday," the AAP leader said.

"All government offices, except those providing essential services, will have work from home. Advisory is being issued for private offices too to work from home," he said. Water services in some parts of the national capital will be affected as three water treatment plans have been shut down. Kejriwal said adding that attempts will be made to normalise water supply as soon as the waterlogging clears. The state government on Thursday also banned the entry of heavy goods vehicles, barring those carrying essentials, in Delhi from four borders including Singhu as a precautionary measure.

Several key areas in Delhi, including the Secretariat housing the chief minister's office, were flooded on Thursday, impairing normal life and traffic movement as authorities scrambled to lead rescue and relief efforts.

**SRIHARIKOTA:** The Indian Space Research Organisation launched its third lunar mission--Chandrayaan 3 on-board the heavy-lift LVM3-M4 rocket here on Friday.

At the end of the 25.30 hour countdown, the LVM3-M4 rocket, the largest and heaviest in its class and dubbed as 'Fat Boy' lifted off majestically at a prefixed time at 2.35 pm from the second launch pad, discharging thick plumes of smoke. Thousands of spectators who had converged to witness the historic launch cheered the rocket as it made its ascent into the skies.

With the Chandrayaan-3 mission, scientists are aiming at mastering soft-landing on the lunar surface, a challenging technical aspect which is planned for late August. A successful mission would make India only the fourth country to achieve the rare feat after the United States, China and the former Soviet Union.

Chandrayaan 3 follows the Chandrayaan 2 mission which did not achieve the desired soft landing on the surface of the moon in 2019, disappointing the scientists.

According to ISRO officials, around 16 minutes after lift-off, the propulsion module will separate from the rocket



and would orbit the earth for about 5-6 times in an elliptical cycle with 170 km closest and 36,500 km farthest from earth moving towards the lunar orbit.

The propulsion module along with the lander, after gaining speed would proceed for an over a month long journey towards reaching

the orbit of the moon until it goes 100 km above the lunar surface.

After reaching the desired altitude, the lander module would begin its descent for a soft landing on the south pole region of the moon and this action is expected to take place on August 23 or 24, scientists at ISRO said.

## India's G20 export potential worth over \$1 trillion : Study

**MUMBAI:** India has untapped export potential worth USD 1.01 trillion in the high income G20 countries for about 42 products, as per a research study by MVRDC World Trade Center Mumbai.

The data suggests that India meets hardly 1.4% of G20 import demand, which leaves huge scope to cater to this market.

The study has identified 42 products, ranging from agro commodities, chemicals, textiles to pharmaceuticals and industrial machineries, where India has comparative advantage to export to the G20 market (minus India).

These 42 products include meat, marine products, organic and inorganic chemicals, pharmaceutical products, iron & steel, aluminum, textile, synthetic fibre, gems & jewellery and industrial machineries.

According to the report, G20 is one of the most integrated trade bloc as 80% of its imports are sourced from among the member countries.

Yet, large countries such as India have not explored the full benefit of trade integration with G20 bloc.

India supplies hardly 1.4% of the import demand of G20 countries (minus India), which



leaves huge scope to cater to this market. The annual import demand of G20 countries (minus India) is USD 16.5 trillion and it represents 74% of world imports.

The study underscores the untapped export potential of India to the G20 market. Even though G20 countries represent 75% of global trade, they contribute hardly 56% to India's foreign trade, the study highlights.

In his foreword message to the study, Piyush Goyal, Union Minister for Commerce & Industry, Government of India remarked, "The study provides insightful recommendations to strengthen Indian exports to G20 countries by leveraging the existing Free Trade Agreements and capitalizing on the global network of World Trade Centers (WTCs) in G20 countries. The findings of this comprehensive study will pave the way forward for strengthening India's trade

relations with G20 countries in the identified product categories where India has untapped export potential in the G20 market."

Dr. Vijay Kalantri, Chairman, MVRDC WTC Mumbai remarked, "We need to create awareness and build capability of local MSMEs to foray into the G20 market in the sectors identified in this study. WTC Mumbai is committed to organize online trade fairs, exchange trade delegations and conduct buyer-seller meetings to strengthen our trade linkage with G20 countries. WTC Mumbai can leverage the global network of WTCs to enable local MSMEs to reach out to the target market and potential clients in the G20 countries."

Rupa Naik, Executive Director, MVRDC WTC Mumbai pointed out, "WTC Mumbai has always believed in the adage of 'Promoting Prosperity Through Trade' as trade fosters global peace and stability, which is the foundation for economic development. G20 countries can join hands to create an open trade environment to raise standard of living and end poverty, which is the first goal of the UN Sustainable Development Agenda.

## PSB Privatisation unlikely before 2024 general election

**NEW DELHI:** No Public Sector Banks (PSB) are expected to undergo privatisation before the 2024 general election. According to a top government official, "Nothing will happen before the 2024 general elections. We don't have legislation yet for it; without that, privatisation is not possible." India currently has 12 PSBs, including Central Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Bank of India, State Bank of India, Canara Bank, Indian Bank, Bank of Maharashtra, Indian Overseas Bank, Punjab & Sind Bank, Union Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, and UCO Bank. Bank privatisation has been on the anvil for successive governments, but the plan hasn't progressed due to stiff opposition from trade unions. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, while presenting Budget 2021-22, had announced the privatisation of PSB as part of the disinvestment drive to accumulate Rs 1.75 lakh crore.

## Lord Swraj Paul donates GBP 500,000 to London maternity unit

**LONDON:** Leading NRI industrialist Lord Swraj Paul has donated GBP 500,000 towards the refurbishment of the maternity unit of a north-west London hospital, marking the 75th anniversary of the state-funded National Health Service (NHS).

The 92-year-old House of Lords peer delivered the cheque earlier this month as a significant contribution towards a fundraising campaign for the improvement of the Northwick Park Hospital's maternity unit. He said the donation was in memory of his late wife who died aged 86 last year.

"The maternity unit donation is made in honour of my dear late wife, Lady Aruna, who gave me my four darling children," said Lord Paul. Pippa Nightingale, chief executive of London North West University Healthcare NHS Trust (LNWH), expressed gratitude for Lord Paul's contribution, emphasising the significance of creating a safe and comfort-



able environment for expectant mothers. LNWH, established in 2014, provides hospital and community services to Harrow, Brent, and Ealing. They offer acute hospital services at Northwick Park Hospital, St Mark's Hospital, Ealing Hospital, and Central Middlesex Hospital.

LNWH is recognised for its exceptional stroke service and is home to St Mark's Hospital, a renowned specialist centre for colorectal disease. The trust actively engages in research, with thousands of patients participating in clinical trials, and plays a crucial role in training healthcare professionals. In December 2017, LNWH was designated a 'university teaching hospital' in recognition of its contributions to medical education and research.

## Opposition Meet in Bengaluru on 17-18 July

KAVITA SHARMA  
New Delhi

In order to unite opposition parties from different backgrounds, Opposition parties will now meet in Bengaluru on 17-18 July after Patna. Former Congress President Sonia Gandhi will be a part of the second meeting of the opposition parties. She will also attend the dinner hosted by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramiah on July 17. Congress President Mallikarjuna Kharge has already sent invitation to the 24 likeminded parties including Aam Aadmi Party. This will be the meeting after the NCP split.

After the huge success of the first meeting of the opposition parties in Patna on June 23, where opposition parties met to plan a strategy for the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections, this will be the second meeting in Bengaluru. According to the sources Sonia Gandhi was requested to attend this meeting as the United Progressive Alliance Chairperson (UPA) and also because it is being held in

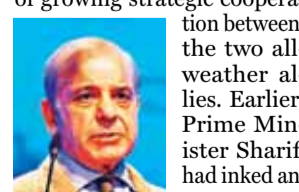
## Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif launches USD 3.5 bn Chinese-designed nuclear energy project



**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday launched the 1200-megawatt nuclear power plant being built with China's assistance in Punjab province which is seen as a sign of growing strategic cooperation between the two all-weather allies. Earlier, Prime Minister Sharif had inked an agreement

with China worth a whopping USD 3.5 billion under which Beijing would build the Chashma-V nuclear plant at Chashma in the Mianwali district of Punjab.

He had termed the nuclear power plant agreement signing as a token of increasing economic cooperation between Pakistan and China and vowed to complete the project without any delay.



between the two all-weather allies. Earlier, Prime Minister Sharif had inked an agreement

# Parts of Delhi still flooded despite receding water level

**DELHI:** Despite the receding water level of the Yamuna river after reaching a historic high, several areas in Delhi remained flooded on Friday.

In the wake of the overflowing water, the Delhi government had closed schools, colleges, crematoriums and water treatment plants in the affected areas. As of 6 a.m. on Friday morning, the water level of the river stood at 208.46 meters, slightly lower than the previous night's measurement of 208.66 meters.

The Central Water Commission has forecasted a further decrease in the water levels, estimating it to reach 208.30 meters by 1 p.m. in the afternoon. However, the floodwaters from the Yamuna have affected certain parts of the national capital and on Friday it also reached the ITO, resulting in a significant traffic jam.



of approximately 30 minutes due to the congestion caused by the flooding. "Traffic movement is affected on Vikas Marg towards ITO due to overflow of flood water. Commuters are advised to avoid this stretch and take route of NH 24 via Akshardham-Nizamuddin-ITO," the Delhi Traffic Police said in a tweet on Friday morning.

"Traffic movement is closed on Bhairon Road due to overflow of

drain water near Railway Under Bridge. Commuters are advised to avoid the stretch," it added. Apart from the Supreme Court vicinity, various other areas including the Outer Ring Road near the Red Fort, Vishwakarma Colony, Yamuna Bazar, ISBT bus terminus, Kashmere Gate, Shankaracharya Road, Majnu Ka Tila, Batla House, Kirari, and Kingsway Camp were also impacted by the flooding.

# 'PADMA' Scheme, being introduced to boost MSME in Haryana

SATISH HANDA

Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala also holding their portfolio of industries development and commerce department in the state while talking to media persons at Chandigarh said that 'Padma' Scheme (Program to Accelerate Development for MSME Advancement) will attract investors attention and their Interest In Haryana State. adding that this will give impetus to the sources of employment as well as holistic development of the state. He gave this information while interacting with the media after presiding over the review meeting of 'Padma' in which Minister of State for Industries and Commerce, Anoop Dhanak was also present on the occasion.

Chautala suggested to HSIIDC and other related officers that for the 'PADMA' cluster land area earlier set up in minimum 100 acres has been modified to 25



acres as originally envisaged so that more and more investors can apply for it. He further informed after the meeting that a venture capital fund would also be set up by the Haryana government under 'Padma' scheme so that more and more youths could become entrepreneurs under One Block-One Product scheme which was introduced in the state. He said that the state government has

planned a venture capital fund of Rs. 200 crores up to Rs. 5 crores in the present budget to encourage youth entrepreneurs to set up startups. Chautala said, in the recently presented budget also Rs 1,000 Crore has been proposed for 'Padma' in the next five years, through which new innovative incentives like designing, branding, marketing and export promotion scheme will be introduced.

# Two earthquakes hit Jammu and Kashmir's Doda region



FW DESK

Jammu and Kashmir experienced two medium-intensity earthquakes on Monday morning, with no reports of casualties or property damage. The National Center for Seismology (NCS) provided details of the seismic activity.

The first earthquake, measuring 4.9 on the Richter scale, occurred at 5.38 AM. Its epicenter was located in the Doda region of Jammu and Kashmir, at a depth of 10 kilometers. Shortly after, at 5.43 AM, a second earthquake measuring 3.6 on the Richter scale occurred in the same Doda region, at a depth of eight kilometers.

The region of Kashmir is known to be seismically active, making it highly vulnerable to earthquakes. In the past, devastating earthquakes have caused significant damage in this area.

In 2005, a 7.6 magnitude earthquake resulted in the loss of over 80,000 lives on both sides of the Line of Control (LOC), the de facto border between Indian-administered and Pakistani-administered regions of Kashmir. However, the recent earthquakes have not caused any significant harm, providing relief to the residents of Jammu and Kashmir.

# Flawed plan: Manipur Police ask farmers to contact SP before field visits



ARIBAM BISHWAJIT

In what can only be described as a poorly executed plan to provide security arrangements to farmers, the Manipur Police have issued a directive, urging farmers not to venture out to their agricultural fields without notifying the respective Superintendent of Police (SP) in their districts. The announcement was made by Inspector General of Police I K Muivah during a press conference at the Manipur Police Headquarters.

Muivah said: "At this point, farmers should not venture out to the field all by themselves without informing police. Because that will be very hazardous and risky. And we would appeal to the public that they should meet with SP and inform them about their requirements and the SP will accordingly make security arrangements and that the farming activities be done in coordination like that with the security forces."

During the press conference, media personnel inquired about the provision of a dedicated phone number for farmers to contact the SP more easily. However, to the disappointment of many, Muivah could not provide such a number, making it appear that the government has not prepared well enough to address the situation.

# Ambala police arrested 2 smuggling 1 kg opium

SATISH HANDA

CIA Staff Ambala police led by Inspector Harjinder Singh on a clue arrested a youth identified as Subhash a resident Fateh Nagla in Badaun district of Uttar Pradesh on Sunday while standing under suspicious condition at T Pont near village Mehmoopur under Saha police station in Ambala district and during checking police recovered from him 1 kg opium. During preliminary investigation the youth disclosed that he was to deliver consignment of opium to Abhimanyu alias Bunty a drug supplier of village Toba. During raid, police also arrested Abhimanyu alias Bunty and a case under NDPS Act was registered at Saha police station and a case was registered under NDPS Act. Both were produced in the court on Monday and remanded to police custody.

# Controversy by Congress leaders over measurement of female chest during recruitment

SATISH HANDA

Controversy has started during recent case of recruitments for the post of forest rangers in which the criteria of measuring chest size of women applicant for the post of forest ranger and deputy ranger in Haryana by Staff Selection Commission (HSSSC) which has been strongly condemned not only by female applicants but also by the leaders of political parties in opposition in the state Congresses. The former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda said that not only in Haryana, but every woman in the country has objection over such a decision demanding that the ruling BJP-JJP government should withdraw this objectionable and a 'Tughlaqi' decree immediately and take back the decision not only in present case of recruitments in forest department but also in case of female police recruitments.

According to a government spokesperson, the recruitments are being done on the basis of Haryana Forest Service Group C rules 1998, wherein the physical standards for height and chest for both male and female candidates have been prescribed and even in the previous cases also all such recruitments have been done on basis of such prescribed standards during recruitments from time to time. Hooda claimed that the ruling government has carried out this controversial decision through the HSSSC and it seems as if insulting women has become the policy of the present BJP-JJP government in the state. Another senior Congress leader Randeep Surjewala termed the rule to measure women's chests for recruitment is merely an 'Tughlaqi' decree, saying that due notice has been issued that the unexpanded chest of the candidates should be 74 cm and the expanded chest as 79 cm.

# Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah Present his 14th budget gives Rs 52,000 crore 'High Five' for poll Bhagyas, Tight Fist for Rest

Liquor prices set to Increase; Education Spend down

ARUN KUMAR RAO  
Bengaluru

Karnataka Congress in the run up to the Lok Sabha election, due in less than a year, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Presented his 14th budget overall and first for the current Congress dispensation that will please a broad swathe of people, Siddaramaiah banks on booze to fund guarantee schemes as Perhaps the only segment that has reason to be unhappy is buyers of alcoholic beverages, prices of which will rise by 10% to 20%. The hike will make Karnataka the most expensive state for spirits in India.

Siddaramaiah who is also the finance minister, said in his budget speech that Karnataka had always tried to balance development and social justice.. He slammed the opposition BJP for describing the Congress' five



guarantees as freebies, and said his party was forced to declining real incomes that common people are suffering. "Though the major share of GST collected comes from the bottom 60% people of society, most profits of the economic system go to the top 10% people of society. Therefore, pro-people governments should follow the policies that redistribute the resources among the poor," He added.

Siddaramaiah also said, The guarantees would put Rs 48,000 to Rs 60,000 a year into the pockets of each of 1.3 crore fami-

lies and will cost government Rs 52,000 crore. Presenting budget Siddaramaiah particularly named delivery workers in e-commerce and announced insurance cover of Rs 4 lakh for gig workers, perhaps a first for any state. He said, "In order to provide social security to the gig workers in the unorganised sector, ie, employed as full-time or part-time deliver personnel in e-commerce companies like Swiggy, Zomato, Amazon etc insurance facility of total Rs 4 lakh will be provided."

Some of the highlight of the budget is Additional excise duty

on Indian made Liquor to go up 20% across all 18 price slabs and 10% on beer; effective from August 1. Government to hike guidance value for immovable properties across the state this year and levy of lifetime tax on certain categories of vehicles. CM reiterates plans to replace the existing National Education Policy (NEP) with new one. To help the semiconductor industry Karnataka government to develop a 100-acre technology innovation park at kadugodi in bengaluru.

Siddaramaiah said, Poll promises are not a burden on government. While it has forced us to present a deficit budget, it is the financial indiscipline by the BJP that has hurt us the most and during his marathon budget speech he slams previous BJP govt and Centre 33 times. We will also launch 76 new schemes. State budget size up from Rs 2.6 lakh crore in 2022-2023 to Rs 3.27 lakh crore in 2023-2024, a Rs 67,027 crore increase.

# Why Haryana Govt adamant on imposing Chest conditions on women foresters?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN

The recent recruitment process for the posts of Forest Ranger, Deputy Ranger and Forester by the Haryana Government has become an issue of controversy. In this, the condition of chest measurement prescribed for females is being demanded to be repealed by the opposition saying that it is insulting and insensitive to women, while the government has made it a prestige issue. Accusations and counter-accusations are being made from both the sides, no one is paying any attention towards the solution. After all, why is the government adamant on making it a point of ego?

According to the condition set by the government, the minimum chest requirement for women for the above posts - 74 cm without expansion and 79 cm with expansion, has been made necessary. The opposition alleges that when the Haryana government does not impose any chest condition for the recruitment of women even in the police force, then why this condition in the lesser hard jobs in the Forest Department? The government is pleading its own arguments.

Randeep Singh Surjewala, a national congress leader and Member of Parliament, condemns the step of the government stating this a shameful, humiliating, insensitive and cultureless order to "measure breasts" of daughters of Haryana for the post of Forest Ranger and Deputy Ranger. He asks that when there is no such condition in Haryana Police and Central Police forces for women candidates, then why such a cruel, childish and stupid condition to insult the daughters of Haryana?



Stating this a Tughlaqi order, Surjewala demanded to withdraw this order and apologize to the daughters.

Former Chief Minister, Bhupinder Singh Hooda stated in a tweet, "The decision to measure the chest of women candidates in the recruitment for the post of Forest Ranger and Deputy Ranger is an insult not only to Haryana but to every woman in the country. Government should withdraw this objectionable decision."

Hooda further tweets, "Recruitments have been taking place earlier also. But till date such objectionable parameters have never been adopted even in police recruitment."

On the other hand, justifying the decision of Haryana Government, a government spokesperson on 8 July said, "Haryana Government is undertaking the process of recruitment to the posts of Rangers and foresters in the State through the Haryana Staff Selection Commission and this recruitment is being done on the basis of Haryana Forest Service (Executive) Group C rules, 1998, wherein the physical standards for height and chest for both males and females have been prescribed." Giving support to the government step, spokesperson added that in the past also, all such recruitments have been done on the basis of these physical standards. Consequently to these rules 22 female Forest Guards and 4 female foresters have been recruited from time to time using these physical measurements.

# Ruling government should compensate those suffered losses due to recent floods at Ambala : Hooda

SATISH HANDA  
Ambala

Former Chief Minister and leader of opposition in Haryana Vidhan Sabha Bhupinder Singh Hooda visited all flood affected areas in twin city Ambala City as well as nearly a dozen severely flood affected villages in the districts, caused suffering and losses to the people including traders, industry owners, farmers and residents in affected areas. Talking to media persons Hooda said that the situation could have been avoided in case timely cleaning of drains would have been done prior to rainy season and the present disaster resulted due to utter neglect by the ruling state government. Hooda said, government should take action to rescue flood affected people with the assistance of police, army and air force and also provide necessary compensation to the affected people including people in trade & industry, farmers suffered crop losses and whose properties were damaged through Flood Control Board.



situation in 1995-96 when then ruling state government had witnessed flood situation in the state and then government ruling in Haryana state had given suitable compensation to the flood affected victims. Hooda said that during his visit to affected rural areas, he has observed farmers have suffered huge crop loss since water was seen standing in their agricultural field up to five to six feet height, as a result their standing crops have been completely damaged. He said, at the same time people in trade and indus-

try are worst affected, besides he observed large number of properties have been damaged and their owners should be suitably compensated with financial help. Hooda made an appeal to Congress workers in flood affected areas in Ambala and surrounding districts to extend full help to flood affected people as well as to the ruling government. Among those accompanied former chief minister were Varun Choudhary MLA Mullana, Jasbir Mallour former MLA, Karan Dalal and Jai Parkash JP both former Union Ministers.

# Ambala scientific industry & country's biggest wholesale cloth market suffer loss worth over Rs 350 crore

SATISH HANDA  
Ambala

After three days of continuous rain and flood situation, twin city Ambala, famous for the scientific instruments industry at Ambala Cantt as well as country's biggest wholesale cloth market in Ambala city has suffered a loss worth over Rs 350 crore. The 'Science City' Ambala Cantt having more than 1000 industrial units located in industrial area as well as in thickly populated areas providing employment to nearly 20000 persons in which according to Saurabh Nagpal Vice President of Ambala Science Equipment Manufacturers Association loss worth over Rs 300 crore has been estimated so far due to water entered inside the factories between 6 to 10 feet height in as many as 106 MSME units not only damaging the machinery but also raw and finished good stocks. Information reveals that the exact value of loss due to water will be estimated later on since there are still units flooded with water.



Similarly, wholesale cloth market at Ambala known as the biggest market in the country having hundreds of shops in three different complexes in Ambala City has been adversely affected when water entered

into shops as well as godown situated in basements are still filled up with water in spite of all efforts by the government and large number of cloth packings as well as readymade garments are seen still flowing in

water all around in the area. According to the wholesale Cloth Market Association president loss between Rs 100 to 150 crore has been estimated so far, but exact loss due to flood water will be calculated later on when the situation will be normal.

Ambala City once famous for manufacturing Mixi-juicers and its spares was earlier known as 'Mixi Town' having between 400-500 manufacturing units. but now left with only 40-50 units. Ambala is also amounts for cultivation of flowers in about 40-50 acres area, too, has suffered loss to the crop due to standing three to four feet water in fields. Nearly 30 families involved in this crop as well as other green vegetables crops were seen in the state of severe shock and told that they worked hard for months and now water still standing in their agriculture fields three to four feet level has completely destroyed the crop. They expressed worry over the unfortunate happening and how to provide both end meals to their families since they were dependent on this crop.

NATION

**BJP national leadership keen for AIADMK alliance in 2024 LS polls**



**NEW DELHI:** Even as the Tamil Nadu BJP state president and former IPS officer, K. Annamalai has time and again been making unruly comments against the AIADMK and its leaders, the central leadership of the BJP is keen that the party is in its fold.

The invitation extended to AIADMK general secretary and former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, Edappadi K. Palaniswami (EPS) to attend the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) meeting on July 18 at New Delhi is a clear indicator to this.

There were reports of the BJP trying to go it alone in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections from Tamil Nadu. However, sources in the BJP told to media that the national leadership had conducted a detailed survey on the prospects of the party and found that without the AIADMK it would not stand a chance to win any seat on its own.

It may be noted that for the past five decades, politics in Tamil Nadu revolved around the Dravidian majors, and the Congress, which had once ruled Tamil Nadu, is relegated to political oblivion without the support of a Dravidian major. If the Congress which had once ruled Tamil Nadu is relegated to a minor party status, then the BJP, which had never got proper recognition in the state, will not be able to do anything without the support of a Dravidian major. R. Kalayanasundaram, political analyst and retired Professor of Political science from Madurai while speaking to media, "The BJP state president was doing political suicide by speaking out against AIADMK as any political student can understand that the only solution to reap benefit in Tamil Nadu is to piggy ride one of the Dravidian majors. Fortunately for the BJP, it already has an alliance with the AIADMK, but the unnecessary uttering of its state president was creating problems for its fortunes in the state. The national leadership of the party will be willing to accept the formula of seat sharing pushed forward by the AIADMK and the saffron party will have to be satisfied with the seats the AIADMK offers it."

**India-France interests in Indo-Pacific region vast & deep, says PM Modi**

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarked on a trip to France on Thursday, he said interests between the two nations in the Indo-Pacific region were vast and deep.

He made the remarks to French newspaper Les Echos ahead of his trip, which will also take him to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

"Our (India AND France) interests in the Indo-Pacific region are vast, and our engagement is deep. I have described our vision for this region in one word, 'SAGAR', which stands for Security and Growth for All in the Region," Modi told the newspaper. "While peace is necessary for the future we seek to build, it is far from assured. India has always stood for peaceful resolution of differences through dialogue and diplomacy, and for respecting sovereignty of all nations, international law and the rules-based international order."

On 25 years of strategic partnership between India and France, Modi told Les Echos that "I feel we are now at a turning point. If we look at the post-pandemic global order and the shape that it is taking, I think the positive experience of our strategic partnership is an important step ahead."

"So, we look forward to work-



ing on a roadmap for the next 25 years of the strategic partnership, which I think is very important for the relationship. The relationship is in excellent shape. It is strong, trusted and consistent. It has been steady and resilient in the darkest storms. It has been bold and ambitious in looking for opportunities." Highlighting the significance of India in promoting issues of the Global South, the Prime Minister said: "I see India being that strong shoulder that if Global South has to make that high jump, India can be that shoulder to propel it ahead. For the Global South, India can also build its linkages with Global North."

"So, in that sense, this shoulder can become this bridge of sorts. So, I feel that what we need is to strengthen this shoulder, this bridge so that linkages between the North and South can become stronger and the Global South can itself become stronger." On being asked as to why the Indo-US relationship has seen a phenomenal rise in the last few years, Modi said: "It is true that the relationship has been growing positively since the turn of the century. It has accelerated and reached new levels in the past nine years."

"There is widespread support for deepening our ties, from all stakeholders, in both countries -- be it government, parliament, industry, academia and of course the people. The US Congress has consistently extended bipartisan support for elevating our relationship."

He further said that he personally enjoyed an excellent rapport with the US leadership, across different administrations, over the last nine years.

"During my state visit to the US in June, President Joe Biden and I agreed that the partnership between the world's two largest democracies with exceptionally strong people-to-people ties could be the defining partnership of this century."

"This is because this partnership is perfectly placed in terms of interests, vision, commitments and complementarities to address the challenges of our times and contribute in a significant way to shaping the global order," he noted.

Modi's two-day visit to Paris comes at the invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron. The Prime Minister will be the guest of honour at the Bastille Day Parade on Friday, where a tri-services Indian armed forces contingent will be participating. According to the External Affairs Ministry, Modi will also hold formal talks with Macron and meet his French counterpart, as well as the presidents of the Senate and the National Assembly.

He will also separately interact with the Indian diaspora in France, CEOs of Indian and French companies, and prominent personalities.

**GST Council meet: Several Opposition ruled states voice concern over ED sharing info with GSTN**

Union finance ministry brought in an amendment to the provisions of PMLA, as per which GSTN has been included in the list of entities with which ED will share information.

New Delhi : Several opposition ruled states expressed concern over Centre's decision to allow enforcement directorate (ED) to share information with GST Network, with finance minister of AAP-ruled Punjab Harpal Singh Cheema on Tuesday saying it amounts to 'tax terrorism' and scaring small business.

The finance ministry, through a notification, brought in an amendment to the provisions of Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, as per which GSTN, which handles the technology backbone of Goods and Services Tax, has been included in the list of entities with which ED will share information.

At the 50th GST Council meeting on Tuesday, Aam Aadmi Party ruled Delhi and Punjab voiced concerns over the notification and demanded a discussion.

"A lot of finance ministers raised the issue Delhi, Punjab, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, and



Rajasthan have voiced their concern and said that it should be discussed in GST Council," Delhi finance minister Atishi told reporters here.

Punjab FM Cheema said several states have demanded a discussion. "The notification would give power to ED to catch any businessman if he/she does not pay GST. "With such decision, tax terrorism will increase in the country and it is dangerous for small businesses and common man." Atishi further said since GSTN has been brought under PMLA, it would mean that irrespective of whether you are a small or big business, if you are registered under GST, you can be prosecuted by ED

for offences like delay in filing of return.

"We have all seen how ED is being misused to harass and arrest people. Now crores of GST registered businesses and traders will have to save themselves from PMLA prosecution. We are against this notification," Atishi said, adding if anyone is involved in GST evasion, then he/she should be tied under GST laws.

"If a country wants to increase 'ease of doing business' and boost economic growth, we should not scare businesses with ED. A lot of FMs raised the issue. Such a big decision should not have been taken without consulting the GST Council," Atishi said.

**Union Cabinet clears amendment to MMDR Act to allow private entities in lithium mining**



**NEW DELHI:** The Union Cabinet on Wednesday learnt to have cleared the Amendment of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act 1957, which will allow the private sector to bid for mining critical minerals like lithium.

Sources aware of developments said that out of the list of critical minerals, a few of them have been brought under the proposed amendment, which will allow their mining by the private entities. In addition to this, the

proposed amendment will also allow the Central government to auction these minerals while the royalty will go to states. The government is bullish on procuring critical minerals, especially lithium, which is useful for batteries, especially for electric vehicles.

Lithium is the lightest metal and the least dense solid element. The element's high electrochemical potential makes it a valuable component of high energy-density rechargeable lithium-ion batteries.

**Bengaluru set for chip-enabled e-passports by year end**

**PSP 2.0 to have hi-tech document validation process going away with current manual processing by PSK staff. All fresh applicants and those seeking renewal will be eligible for e-passports**

**ARUN KUMAR RAO Bengaluru**

Passport applicants from the Karnataka state, particularly those in Bengaluru there is some good news with the introduction of Passport Seva Programme (PSP) version 2.0 and the launch of the much-anticipated chip enabled e-passport, processing time for this all-important travel



document is expected to be reduced by half by this year end according to sources here.

The Regional Passport Office here is gearing up for PSP 2.0, powered by Tata Consultancy Services, (TCS), the two Passport Seva Kendra (PSK) in the city are also set for major infrastructure and software upgrades, resulting in the ap-

plication process being reduced by half from what now takes about four to five working days.

Expected to be launched by November-December this year sources said the new version of the software will have a hi-tech documents validation process. In May 2010 PSP 1.0 was introduced in Bengaluru and Chandigarh as a pilot project,

before it was made available to the rest of the country by 2012. With PSP 2.0 Silicon city Bengaluru is yet again set to be standard-bearer for an upgraded passport service and an advanced version of the travel document in the country.

Last month, External affairs minister S Jaishankar, had announced the PSP Version 2.0 will help ensure EASE-meaning, enhanced passport services using a digital ecosystem, artificial intelligence-powered service delivery, smoother overseas travel using e-passports and enhanced data security. "PSP 2.0 will revolutionise passport processing, mainly in Bengaluru where we receive nearly 1,700 applications at the Lalbagh Road centre and close to 900 at the Marathahalli facility" according to senior officer here.

**Ten arrested for conspiracy to revive banned Jammu and Kashmir outfit**



**FW DESK**

The Jammu and Kashmir Police on Monday apprehended 10 individuals on charges of conspiring to revive the banned Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) and the Hurriyat, two separatist organizations.

The arrests were made following a case filed under sections 10 and 13 of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, along with section 121A of the Indian Penal Code, at the Kothibagh police station.

According to the police, these individuals, in collaboration with their Pakistan-based handlers, were planning to resurrect the banned organizations. An ongoing investigation has revealed that the arrested individuals were in contact with overseas entities, with some of them being associated with secessionist groups like the Kashmir Global Council, led by Farooq Siddiqui, and Raja Muzaffer of JKLF.

Preliminary findings indicate that a meeting was held under the guise of a manufactured pretext to discuss strategies for the revival of these organizations. It has also come to light that a preliminary meeting was held on June 13, attended by several of the arrested individuals.

**Manipur braces for loss of 1543.23 metric tons of rice, Bishnupur District hit hardest**

**ARIBAM BISHWAJIT Imphal**

The agriculture sector in Manipur is facing a severe blow due to the ongoing violence, which could result in a staggering loss of 1543.23 metric tons of rice next year if the main crop cannot be cultivated.

N Gojendro, the director of the Department of Agriculture, reported that as of June, the violence had already impacted around 5127 hectares of agricultural land in Manipur. He expressed concern, stating, "If we cannot cultivate in these areas, Manipur will face a loss of 15,437.23 metric tonnes of rice next year."

Gojendro explained that Manipur has a total of 195,000 hectares of land dedicated to the cultivation of rice during the Kharif season. However, due to the ongoing conflict, an inquiry was conducted to identify the areas where agricultural activities cannot be carried out. The report revealed that as of June, 5127 hectares of land had been affected. The unrest in Manipur has had a detrimental impact on farming and agricultural activities across various districts of the state. Bishnupur District has been the most severely affected, with 2191 hectares of land impacted, while Jiribam District has experienced the least impact, with only 37 hectares affected, Gojendro said.

The current situation has prevented agricultural activities in sensitive areas, and this will undoubtedly have an adverse effect on rice production. Gojendro emphasized, "If the agricultural activities cannot be carried out in these 5127



hectares of land, we estimate a loss of approximately 1543.23 metric tons of rice next year. In monetary terms, this would amount to a loss of around 39 crores." Given the current situation, the state government has been taking measures to address the situation and provide relief to farmers. Gojendro highlighted the state government's efforts, stating, "Several meetings have already been convened in the department, minor irrigation department, water resource department, and many other departments."

To mitigate the expected loss, the government seems to have initiated the distribution of high-yielding varieties of rice to affected farmers. Gojendro explained, "We have distributed a certain quantity of rice mainly to the affected areas through district agriculture officers. I hope that they have already received it." He further added: "Additionally, the agriculture department has made efforts to ensure timely access to fertilizers for farmers to properly harvest their crops. A substantial quantity of fertilizer has been stored for distribution, with Gojendro himself recently distributing 62,000 bags. District agriculture officers are also distributing fertilizers in their respective districts."

**Kashmir politicians accuse administration of barring them from paying homage to 1931 martyrs**

**FW DESK**

Top politicians from Jammu and Kashmir have accused the administration of barring them from imposing restrictions on Martyr's Day to prevent them from going to Martyrs' Graveyard in the middle of Srinagar.

The day is being observed every year since 1948 in memory of those who revolted against the then Dogra rule on July 13, 1931. "Despite the restrictions placed on JKNC Vice President Omar Abdullah, which denied him security vehicles and ITBP cover, he chose to walk from his home to the Nawai Subh office. His purpose was to address the party workers who had gathered there to pay their heartfelt tributes to the 1931 Martyrs," National Conference, tweeted.

Omar, while tagging the twitter handle of Jammu and Kashmir



police said: "Don't think that refusing to give me my escort vehicles & ITBP cover will stop me. I'll walk to where I have to go to & that's exactly what I'm doing now."

"Now that I've got to the office & will go ahead with my programme you will send everything. The fact is @JmuKnrPolice has stopped a lot of my senior colleagues from coming to the @JKNC office today by adopting the same tactics of stopping them in their homes. Notable amongst those stopped are Abdul Rahim Rather Sb, Ali Mohammad Sagar Sb, Ali Mohd Dar Sb and others, he said in another tweet.

**SGPC expresses strong opposition to Uniform Civil Code**

**JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar**

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has registered opposition on behalf of the Sikh community, declaring the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) proposed by the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Centre government as unnecessary in the country.

After a serious discussion about the UCC in the SGPC's Executive Committee (EC) meeting presided over by SGPC President Harjinder Singh Dhani, it has been decided that there is no need for UCC in the country, while the Constitution recognizes the principle of unity in diversity.

Speaking to the media after the EC meeting, Dhani said that there is an apprehension among the minorities in the



country regarding the Uniform Civil Code that this code will hurt their identity, originality, and principles. On the issue of UCC, the SGPC has constituted a sub-committee of Sikh intellectuals, historians, scholars, and lawyers, which at the preliminary stage considered the UCC as suppression for the existence of minorities, their religious rites, traditions, and culture. This sub-committee includes SGPC general sec-

retary Bhai Gurcharan Singh Grewal, senior Sikh lawyer Puran Singh Hundal, SGPC members Advocate Bhagwant Singh Sialka, Advocate Paramjit Kaur Landran, and Bibi Kiranjot Kaur, Prof Kashmir Singh, Dr Inderjit Singh Go-goani, Dr Paramveer Singh, and Dr Chamkaur Singh. He said that as per the opinion of this sub-committee, the SGPC EC has expressed opposition against the UCC.

**Talking Points Narvijay Yadav**

Neglecting the desilting of rivers, covering the drains, constructions on the river beds, blocking the water passages, ignoring the rainwater harvesting, covering the land with tiles, vanishing forests, and keeping the drainage capacity low are few of the factors responsible for the floods in city areas.

**T**he excessive rains and the resulting tragedies are appalling. Monsoon, cyclonic circulation, and western disturbance prepared such a cocktail that Delhi got heavily waterlogged, boats floated in settlements near Chandigarh. Roads were submerged in water up to the waist and urban people with modern facilities started facing the worst

kind of tragedy. The occupants of the high-rise buildings may have kissed the high-altitude air, but their cars below were submerged in water and they had to wait for rescue boats to get out at a safer place. The rains may have stopped, but the tragedy of floods continues. The condition of the national capital is worst, where Yamuna water has reached ITO and Red Fort.

**Extreme weather conditions are new normal**

Schools, offices, and markets all had to be closed and the people in submerged areas are forced to live without drinking water. Water from heavy rains in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Uttarakhand gets collected in Hathnikund Barrage in Haryana. As soon as the gates of the barrage were opened, this water reached the Yamuna and made Delhi's condition miserable.

It is said that the same condition prevailed in Delhi 45 years ago. The people of Himachal too have never witnessed such horrific rains, in which bridges in Mandi town were washed away and Kullu-Manali roads disappeared from the map. In Manali, a large hotel building was completely razed to the ground. Almost all the villages and cities are in the same condition in the country. The condition of flood and destruction is



being seen everywhere. Nature is showing its fierce form. First at the time of Covid and now on the pretext of rain, nature is giving a message and warning to mankind that change your ways or else the result will be bad. But homo sapiens aren't listening. Men are increasing their population and destroying animals. The children of the new generation will never know that the creatures like frogs and sparrows used to ex-

ist somewhere. Along with the trees, the species of animals are also getting vanished. Creatures are reaching the plate of man. Mountains of concrete are being built everywhere and the real mountains are struggling to survive.

Prof Raghu Murtugudde of IIT Bombay says that the fearful season of 2023 is unique. El Niño has raised temperatures around the world, and wildfires have consumed three

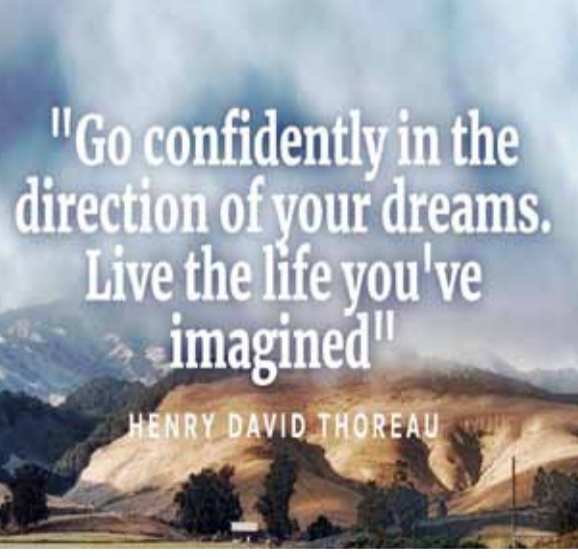
times as many areas, resulting in three times as much carbon dissolved in the atmosphere. Meteorologists say that due to global warming, drastic changes are being seen in the weather and now this is the new normal. An expert from Skymat Weather said that the rapid increase in the temperature over both land and sea surfaces has increased the capacity of the air to hold moisture for longer. If we talk about floods, there is no desilting of rivers, construction of buildings on the river banks is on the rise, rainwater harvesting is ignored, the land is being covered with concrete and tiles, and trees and forests are removed. All these factors are responsible for the floods in the cities.

*The author is a senior journalist and columnist, views are personal.*

## Extensions of ED, CBI heads bad for agency autonomy

In a verdict that questions the underpinnings of institutional autonomy in India, the Supreme Court recently validated 2021 legislative changes that authorize successive term extensions for heads of investigative agencies. While the Court's move to invalidate two one-year extensions to the Enforcement Director, S.K. Mishra, is worthy of applause, the broader fallout of the judgment appears to sanction a governmental erosion of these agencies' self-reliance. The Court has mandated that Mishra vacate his role by July 31. A central consequence of this latest judgment is its affirmation of amendments enabling yearly extensions for CBI and ED Directors until a five-year tenure is reached. This mechanism effectively converts an initial two-year appointment into a potential five-year stint, courtesy of up to three annual extensions. Several voices, including those contesting Mishra's extension and the Court's appointed amicus curiae, have highlighted the jeopardy to institutional independence posed by such incremental extensions. They warn of a potential incentive-based approach that might compel Directors to conform to government mandates. Unfortunately, the Court dismissed these legitimate apprehensions, providing minimal explanation. It sidestepped claims that the 2021 alterations contravene previous rulings that stipulated fixed tenures for CBI and ED leaders, with the objective of shielding them from undue influence. The Court's unexpected determination that these amendments do not breach fundamental rights is baffling. The prospect of government dominance over the investigative directions chosen by Directors fundamentally violates citizens' entitlements to equitable treatment and impartial investigation. The Court's sanction of a tenure-extension mechanism, potentially tailored to compromise the independence of investigative agencies, is deeply concerning, especially amidst the current backdrop of suspicions regarding the misuse of these agencies against political rivals. Such a trend spells ill for our nation's commitment to the rule of law. It accentuates the pressing necessity to reassert and protect the tenets of autonomy and independence that are the foundations of these vital investigative institutions.

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**SONALDE DESAI** EXPLAINS HOW INDIA'S DEMOGRAPHIC JOURNEY HAS REVOLUTIONISED WOMEN'S LIFE STAGES

## The change in women's lives



The passage of World Population Day (July 11) is also a time to look at how India's demographic journey has changed the lives of its citizens, particularly its women. India's population grew from about 340 million at Independence to 1.4 billion. This growth was fuelled by the gift of life that receding starvation, improved public health, and medical miracles brought to India. In 1941, male life expectancy was about 56 years; only 50% of boys survived to age 28. Today, life expectancy for men is 69 years, and nearly 50% live to see the ripe old age of 75. This rapid decline in mortality took parents by surprise, who no longer needed to have four children to ensure that at least two would survive, causing population growth until fertility decline caught up with the mortality decline, and the Total Fertility Rate fell from 5.7 in 1950 to 2.1 in 2019.

These statistics mask the tectonic shift in the lives of people as they learn to adjust to a longer lifespan and fewer children. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the lives of Indian women. Women's childhood, adulthood, and old age have been transformed over the course of demographic transition, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively.

As families began having fewer children, ensuring at least one son became more difficult. With four children, the chance of not having a son was barely 6%, but with two children, it grew to 25%. Social norms and patrilineal kinship patterns combined with lack of financial security reinforce a preference for sons. The India Human Development Survey (IHDS) found that 85% of women respondents expected to rely on their sons for old age support, while only 11% expected support from their daughters. Hence, parents who want to ensure that they have at least one son among their one or two child family, resorted to sex-selective abortion, and, in some cases, the neglect of sick daughters. Consequently, the number of

girls per 100 boys, ages under five dropped from 96 to 91 between 1950 and 2019.

With a fertility decline, active mothering occupies a smaller proportion of women's lives, creating space for education and employment. Good data on this only goes back 30 years, but my research with Sojin Yu, based on the National Family Health Survey, finds that the number of years women spend caring for children under five declined from 14 years in 1992-93 to eight in 2018-20; the years spent caring for children ages six to 15 dropped from 20 to 14 years. These changes are only partly accompanied by changes in the life course of women. While women's educational attainment increased, with over 70% of girls enrolling in secondary education, early marriage and childbearing remain the predominant forces defining women's lives. As a recent article by Park, Hathi, Broussard, and Spears documents, the average age at first birth has hardly budged about 20 for women born in the 1940s and still remains well below 22 years for those born in the 1980s.

Early motherhood, perhaps, explains why lower fertility does not translate into higher labour force participation for women.

Women need to establish secure connections to the labour market and gain work experience if they are to get skilled jobs. By the time peak childcare demands end, they have missed the window for occupations that require specific skills; only unskilled work is open to them.

Demographic shifts also affect women's lives at older ages. With rising life expectancy, the proportion of the female population aged 65 and above increased from 5% to 11% between 1950 and 2022, and is projected to reach 21% by 2050. While the proportion of older men will also increase, aging for women has unique implications. Women generally marry men who are older and are more likely to outlive their husbands. The 2011 Census shows that while only 18% of men above age 65 are widowed, about 55% of the women are widowed. For widowed women, the lack of access to savings and property results in dependence on children, mainly sons, bringing the vicious cycle of son preference to full circle.

**Harnessing gender dividend**  
Changing patriarchal norms may take a

long time. Meanwhile, enhancing women's access to employment and assets will reduce their reliance on sons and could break the vicious cycle of gendered disadvantage, stretching from childhood to old age. However, unlike East Asian nations where demographic transformation has led to delayed and often foregone marriage and childbearing, early marriage and childbearing remain central to Indian women's lives. Hence, any efforts at improving women's labour force participation must be accompanied by access to safe and affordable childcare.

A World Bank evaluation based on a randomised controlled trial in Madhya Pradesh found that the expansion of Anganwadis to include a crèche led to an increase in the work participation of mothers. Arguably, the most striking example of the importance of childcare is documented in a study based in urban China by Du and Dong; it found that as state support for childcare declined, employment rates for mothers fell from 88% to 66%.

What are the practical strategies for enhancing childcare access? One relatively low-hanging fruit would be to make staffing crèche an acceptable form of work under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). At present, NREGS is being used to build physical infrastructure but there is no reason it cannot be used to develop social infrastructure where NREGS workers can help staff crèches. The burgeoning self-help group movement can be harnessed to set up neighbourhood child-care centres in urban and rural areas. Obtaining the much hoped for demographic dividend cannot be done without fully harnessing the gender dividend. Improving access to childcare is an important component of achieving this.

*Sonalde Desai is Professor and Centre Director, National Data Innovation Centre at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), and Distinguished University Professor, University of Maryland, U.S. Views are personal.*



**TRILOCHAN SASTRY** EXPLAINS HOW INDIA'S POTENTIAL WILL FLOURISH ONCE CITIZENS REJECT POLITICAL CRIMINALITY

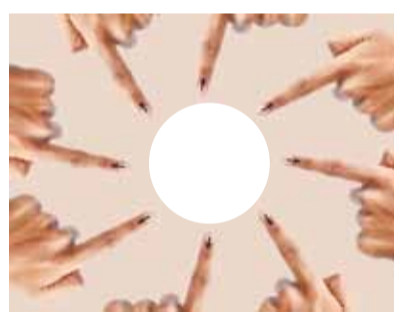
## Citizen action needed for cleaner politics

What does a comprehensive look at the background of all the 4,001 sitting Members of the Legislative Assemblies across India tell us about the state of Indian politics? Can India's aspirations to be a globally respected economic and cultural power be fulfilled with the kind of politics it has?

All candidates now follow stipulations following a Supreme Court of India judgment, filing self-sworn affidavits which record the details of criminal cases they have, if any. Of the 4,001 sitting MLAs, 1,777 of them, or 44%, have a criminal case. The current Lok Sabha also has 43% Members of Parliament (MP) with criminal cases. In 2004, the percentage was around 22%, and has now doubled. Many people feel that the cases are either trivial ones or politically motivated. The point that these are not frivolous first information reports needs to be emphasised. These are cases registered after a due process of investigation, filing of charge sheets, a preliminary hearing of the case and being formally charged in a court of law. Even if we say that the cases are foisted by rival political parties, it shows that political parties are selectively using the law and the system needs to change. The law and order system was put in place by political parties and they need to change it. However, facts show that most cases were filed when the party to which the MLA or MPs belonged to was in power. So, the cases are not all politically motivated.

### The data is an eye-opener

If we dig deeper and look at serious criminal cases — which on conviction would lead to a jail sentence of five years or more — there are 1,136 or 28% of such MLAs today. There are 47 MLAs with murder cases, 181 with attempt to murder cases, another 114 with cases related



to crimes against women, and 14 with rape cases. States/Union Territories with the highest number of serious criminal cases are Delhi 53%, Bihar 59%, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Telangana 39% each, and Uttar Pradesh 38%. No political party is free of this malaise. If one focuses only on those parties with at least 40 such MLAs, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leads with 479 MLAs with criminal cases, and 337 with serious criminal cases. The next largest party, the Indian National Congress (INC), has 334 MLAs with criminal cases, and 194 with serious criminal cases.

The other parties including the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), Trinamool Congress, Aam Aadmi Party, YSR Congress, Samajwadi Party, Bharat Rashtra Samithi (formerly the Telangana Rashtra Samithi), Rashtriya Janata Dal, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Biju Janata Dal have a lower number of such MLAs but with a higher percentage of offences — between 42% to 76% for criminal cases, and 32% to 43% for serious criminal cases. The other parties such as the Nationalist Congress Party, Shiv Sena, Janata Dal (United) or JD(U), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam have far fewer seats, and

so the number of their MLAs with criminal cases is also much lower.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha, the BJP had 116 MPs with a criminal record, the INC 29, DMK 10, Trinamool Congress 9, and JD(U) 13. When it came to serious criminal cases, the BJP has 87 MPs, INC 19, DMK 6, Trinamool Congress 4, and JD(U) 8. Even Union Ministers are tainted. In the case of their first swearing in during 2019, there were 22 Ministers out of 56 with criminal cases and a total of 61 cases against these 22 Ministers, all from the ruling party. The chances of those with a criminal record winning was over 15%. In comparison, it was 4.7% for those with a clean record. This shows that people with a criminal record are more likely to get elected. No other country has so many people with known criminal records in its Parliament or State Assemblies.

### Net worth and election spend

Gender representation is low with only 9% of elected women MLAs. Most MLAs are college graduates or more (66%). The average assets of MLAs was 13.63 crore, and of those with a criminal case, at 16.36 crore. Winning depends on the wealth of a candidate, with 30% of those with assets of 5 crore or more being elected, while only 8% of those with assets of 2 crore or less were elected.

In contrast, 75% of Indian citizens reported wealth of 8 lakh or less, and a total of 98% reported wealth of 80 lakh or less.

The spend on elections now is at an all-time high. Clothes, mobiles, cooking equipment, liquor and cash are distributed to entice voters, thus violating the law. Estimates show that the expenditure in the Lok Sabha elections is more than that in the United States presidential elections. It is well known that candidates spend crores of rupees and violate the spending limit

of 40 lakh for MLAs and 70 lakh for MPs (enhanced to 90 lakh in 2022), which is the limit the Election Commission of India (ECI) has set in consultation with political parties. Public money is spent to promise freebies such as free water, electricity, travel, and food to name a few. The number of MLAs and MPs with criminal records has risen only because their party leaders continue to distribute more tickets to such candidates. In the so-called advanced countries, there is no such system of distributing tickets. Candidates are selected either by a first-round primary, as in the U.S., or by a more open and democratic process, as in many European countries.

In summary, India has a system where there are a very significant number of elected representatives with a serious criminal record. Such people are more likely to win than others. Electoral laws are flouted while spending money. So far, the ECI has taken very little action on this. Political leaders continue to distribute tickets to such people. Winning is the means by which to recover the money spent and accumulate it for the next election. Media management, especially through social media, passes off as good governance.

We will see more of this in the next Lok Sabha election in 2024. Every party fears that it will lose if it undertakes reforms. Media management can impact public perception for some time. Eventually, more and more Indians will get to know the truth. Perhaps that is the moment when change will happen. That is when the potential of the country will be realised. Citizen action can speed up this process.

*Trilochan Sastry is Professor, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore and Founder Chairman, Association for Democratic Reforms. Views are personal.*

### BOOKS: REVIEW

## Historical romance gets a fresh twist in Rimli's debut novel

Rimli Sengupta's maiden novel is an enthralling battle between the author's academic inclinations as a historian and her personal journey to delve into her family history, consequently shaping her individual identity. The narrative spirals into an intriguing amalgamation of reality and fantasy, setting itself apart as a unique, genre-defying work that boldly celebrates its internal conflict.

The tale is an echo of timeless narratives: childhood sweethearts Ramesh ('Shishu') and Noni, torn apart by his involvement in Bengal's armed independence movement and her forced marriage at 16. Shishu bears witness to a politically turbulent epoch spanning eighty years, endures severe physical torture in two notorious jails, and grapples with ideological dilemmas. Despite this, his sanity remains intact, nur-

tered by his dedication to writing poetry for his lost love.

Conversely, Noni endures the harsh realities of life as a refugee in Calcutta post-Partition, and succeeds in raising a thriving and prosperous family of over fifty members. The asymmetrical record of this unique love story endures in Shishu's poetry journal, as retold by Noni's granddaughter.

The challenge lies in the fact that this narrative, intricately constructed in an earnest, realist style, is rooted in truth. Sengupta reinterprets history "from below", leveraging family relics such as a notebook, a mirror, and a photograph to craft an alternative historical perspective on India's freedom movement, particularly the roles of East Bengali ('Bangal') and Dalit individuals.

Sengupta, as a novelist, crafts vividly detailed fictional scenes that encapsulate meetings, separations,

**Noni endures the harsh realities of life as a refugee in Calcutta post-Partition, and succeeds in raising a thriving and prosperous family of over fifty members**

and journeys. However, the sudden introduction of the autobiographical "I" in the memoirist sections is jarring. Towards the conclusion of the book, Sengupta engages in an imaginary debate with "ghost Shishu" about the difficulty of revealing the inherited fissure of their people. Oddly, Noni is not extended the same courtesy of imagined dialogues with her granddaughter, instead



*A Lost People's Archive*  
By Rimli Sengupta  
Aleph  
242 pages; Rs 699

remaining a catalyst, yet enigma in the narrative.

The way in which the author - a historiographer, a granddaughter, and a self-proclaimed "voluntary exile from engineering academia" - responds to the delayed impact of historical reality is by intertwining the written text with its genres. This leaves the reader in a state of deliberate disorientation, unable to distinguish between metaphorical and literal truths.

The author begins with a proposition, "If you quit trusting me, I'll understand." As readers, we find ourselves deeply appreciative of her understanding, as we navigate the labyrinth of her truth and fiction, history and personal narrative,

vividly unfolded in this book.

Sengupta's writing style is as layered as her narrative. The prose is articulate, often lyrical, punctuated by vivid imagery and metaphors. This sophisticated use of language not only enriches the plot but also adds depth to the characters, making them resonate with readers on an emotional level. The potent backdrop of socio-political upheaval against which the story unfolds is meticulously detailed, enabling the reader to experience the raw intensity of the times.

One of the most compelling aspects of the book is the author's ability to seamlessly blend personal and public history. Through her skillful storytelling, Sengupta transforms an intimate tale of love and loss into a profound exploration of historical events, underscoring their lasting impact on individuals and communities. The narrative becomes a mirror reflecting the societal fractures and ideological clashes of the era. It raises pertinent questions about personal identity, cultural memory, and the complexities of recording history, engaging the reader in a thoughtful introspection.

# Tesla car for Rs 20 lakh in India still a distant dream: experts

As reports surfaced on Tesla considering a cheaper Model 3 in India around Rs 20 lakh as it mulls bringing its supply chain ecosystem to the country in the near future, industry experts on Thursday said achieving this price range appears to be a distant dream.

If all goes well, Tesla can reportedly produce 5 lakh electric vehicles annually that starts from Rs 20 lakh, as the Elon Musk-run company plans to set up its auto parts and electronics chain in India, along with seeking incentives and tax benefits.

According to experts, Tesla prices are nearly the same across the globe and currently, the base variant of the Tesla Model 3, which is the cheapest Tesla model available, is priced at \$40,240 (approximately Rs 33 lakh). Importing this model into India will incur a cost ranging between Rs 60-66 lakh. India imposes a 100 per cent import tax on electric vehicles (EVs) priced above \$40,000.

"However, this import duty can be eliminated by setting up local production. Despite this,



the possibility of acquiring a \$40,240 (or around Rs 33 lakh) car for \$24,366 (Rs 20 lakh) still seems like a distant dream," senior analyst Soumen Mandal from Counterpoint Research told IANS. This cost reduction could be achieved if Tesla models manufactured in India have fewer features compared to the ones available in the US.

"For example, certain hardware required for Full Self-Driving (FSD) could be eliminated and, instead, Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS) Level 2 could be included,"

Mandal added. The battery pack, imported from China, could have a capacity lower than 50kW and the electric motors could be of lower power.

Additionally, the in-vehicle electronics could be reduced and a smaller center display used, according to the analyst.

There are initial talks between the Indian government and Tesla and may take some time before a Tesla facility arrives in the country. Tesla is also conducting meetings with industry executives in India, according to The Economic Times.

There are also reports that Tesla is working on a 'next gen' EV platform that will support compact cars. "The production cost of this platform is expected to be reduced by approximately 50 per cent compared to the present platform, enabling Tesla to enter the sub-\$25,000 EV segment. We expect that India will become a manufacturing hub for these compact models, with prices starting from Rs 20 lakh," Mandal noted.

The recent challenges in China have provided an impetus for Tesla to potentially explore, and establish a manufacturing base in India. "The possibility of a Tesla in India at potentially around Rs 20 lakh depends on an array of variables, including potentially attractive policy incentives, and Tesla's ability to accomplish efficiencies in supply chain and costs to effectively leverage local manufacturing. All said, pricing decisions will be driven by Tesla's business strategy," said Prabhuram who heads the Industry Intelligence Group (IIG) at CyberMedia Research (CMR).

## Wipro Announces Financial Results for the Quarter ended June 30, 2023, Delivers Net Income growth of 12% YoY

**Total Bookings of \$3.7 billion for the Quarter**  
**Large deal Bookings growth of 9% YoY.**  
**Highest in last 8 quarters**  
**Operating Cash Flows at 130% of Net income**

ARUN KUMAR RAO  
Bengaluru

Wipro Limited, a leading technology services and consulting, Company, announced financial results under International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) for the quarter ended June 30, 2023.

Wipro's performance continues to lag its peers. Its revenue declined 2.8% sequentially in constant currency in the June quarter compared to the March quarter. Wipro had forecast its revenue to grow between -3% to -1% in the June quarter. In dollar terms, its revenue in constant currency rose 1.1% year on year to \$2.7 billion.

Addressing press conference announcing financial results,



Wipro CEO Thierry Delaporte said, in almost every industry, business have been reducing discretionary spends in response to the weaker macro environment. "That's had an impact on our revenues as well", he added.

Delaporte said, "Wipro's first quarter results come with a strong backbone of large deal bookings, robust client additions, and resilient margins,". He also stated that "Despite a gradual reduction in clients' trust with strong delivery, innovation, and expanded services that strengthen our long-term businesses, and help capture market share. The launch of Wipro ai360 and USD 1 billion investment

solidifies Wipro's position as leading transformation partner that delivers the result and innovation our clients need to future-proof their business." Jatin Dalal, CFO, said, "Our ongoing focus on operational improvement has ensured that margin remains steady even in a softening revenue environment. Our operating margin for the first quarter was 16% and expansion of 112 basis point YoY. We generated strong operating cash flows at 130% of our net income for the quarter. EPS for the quarter grew by 11.5% YoY."

Wipro's operating margin was nearly flat at 16% in the June quarter compared to 16.3% in the March quarter.

## Twitter sues top law firm that received \$90 mn in Musk deal



Twitter has sued a law firm that represented the micro-blogging platform as Elon Musk tried to back out of his deal to buy the platform for \$44 billion. Twitter's previous management hired the corporate law firm after Musk tried to terminate his agreement to acquire the company last year. Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, a top mergers and acquisitions firm, received a \$90 million fee from Twitter, which according to the social network was "unjust enrichment", reports The New York Times. Twitter now wants the fee to be returned. The lawsuit has been filed in San Francisco Superior Court by X Corp, Twitter's parent company. The lawsuit said Wachtell Lipton took "funds from the company cash register while the keys were being handed over" to Musk, who owns X Corp. According to documents submitted with the lawsuit, Twitter's board and executives approved the \$90 million payment because the law firm had succeeded in making Musk abide by his agreement to buy the company.

## Cotton yarn industry likely to grow 5-7 pc in FY24: Report



**NEW DELHI:** India's cotton yarn industry is expected to witness a year-on-year growth of 5-7 per cent in its sale volume in FY24, according to a report by CareEdge Ratings released Thursday.

Indian cotton yarn exports has hit a decade-low level of 664,000 tonnes in FY23, compared to the highest exports of 1,389,000 tonnes in FY22. CareEdge Ratings in its report said that the demand for cotton yarn in FY22 was strong, driven by downstream demand for home-textile products and the advantage of lower domestic cotton prices compared to international prices.

"Furthermore, America's ban on cotton products from China's Xinjiang region redirected some of the demand from China to other countries, including India. This increased demand also led to an elevated cotton yarn spread of around Rs 125 per kg in FY22, which was 25-30 per cent higher than the historical average," it said in a report.

In FY23, the cotton yarn exports faced challenges due to the disparity between domestic and international cotton prices.

"The global demand slowdown resulting from high inflation and recessionary pressures in developed economies, such

as the USA and the European Union, further impacted the industry. Retailers with excess inventories deferred new orders for home textiles and ready-made garments (RMG), negatively impacting the demand for cotton yarn," the ratings agency said.

One of the major reasons for the expected high growth in FY24 is the shift in demand from competing nations, which can create opportunities for Indian exporters. Additionally, the gradual relaxation of China's zero Covid policy is anticipated to improve demand from China.

However, analysts have warned that average sales realisation of cotton yarn is expected to fall by 12-17 per cent followed by a decline in cotton prices.

The report highlighted that the slowdown in demand is expected to continue in H1FY24 amidst macro-economic headwinds while demand is expected to improve in H2FY24, thereby limiting growth in FY24.

India's spinning industry is expected to register a revenue decline of around 8-10 per cent, while the operating margin is expected to expand by 100-150 bps aided by higher capacity utilization, softening of cotton prices coupled with the benefit of lower freight and power cost.

## Go First flies into financial turbulence, its future hangs in a balance

**NEW DELHI:** Amid a legal battle and insolvency crisis, cash-strapped Go First is now at a turning point wherein the new management led by the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)-appointed-IRP (interim resolution professional) submitted a resolution plan on June 28 and for the first time, aviation watchdog Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) earlier this week had conducted an audit that can change the destiny of the low-cost airline.

A DGCA official said that the special audit was focused on safety-related aspects, compliance with requirements for holding an Air Operator Certificate, and the physical verification of arrangements made for the resumption of flight operations. Indian low-cost carrier Go First, previously known as Go Air, temporarily ceased its operations on May 3, 2023.

The airline attributed its financial woes to alleged problems



with engine supply from Pratt & Whitney, its manufacturer. Following the three-day operational halt, the airline faced a series of challenges, including aircraft lessors seeking to reclaim their planes. However, the NCLT granted Go First immunity from repossession.

The sudden suspension of operations by Go First caught the industry off guard, as there were no visible signs of financial stress. The airline continued to fulfill its obligations by paying lessors and meeting all its EMI payments on time.

The DGCA has confirmed that it has received a resolution plan from Go First. However, the regulatory body will only

grant the necessary approvals after assessing the revival of operations and facilities at the airline's bases in New Delhi and Mumbai.

In a positive development, Go First recently received in-principle approval for Rs 425 crore in funding to facilitate the restart of its operations. The airline aims to resume operations with a fleet of 23 to 25 aircraft. But it seems that the troubles continue for Go First as on July 7, following the Delhi High Court's decision to permit aircraft lessors to conduct inspections and maintenance on aircraft leased to Go First Airlines, the airline's IRP has filed an appeal challenging the order.

Senior Advocate Sandeep Sethi on Friday requested an urgent listing of the matter before a division bench of the High Court comprising Chief Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Sanjeev Narula. The court has said that it will consider the case on Monday (July 10).

## Hyundai Exter is here to take you places experience outdoors like never before

KULBIR SINGH KALSI  
Gurugram

Hyundai Motor India Limited (HMIL), India's first smart mobility solutions provider and largest exporter since inception, today announced the launch of its sporty Entry SUV - Hyundai EXTER. Designed to redefine benchmark in its \*segment. Hyundai EXTER has been developed to reflect the tenets of unique exteriors, spacious interiors, advanced safety & technology and exceptional performance. Hyundai EXTER personifies the qualities of India's Gen MZ customers who are fueled by the adrenaline of wanderlust and exploration.

Speaking at the launch of Hyundai EXTER, Mr. Unsoo Kim, MD & CEO, Hyundai Motor India Ltd., said, "Hyundai Motor India has always created new benchmarks in the industry with its revolutionary products &



technologies. Yet again, with EXTER we are proud to introduce an SUV that embodies Hyundai's commitment to innovative design, intelligent technology and exceptional performance. With its modern and confident exterior, cutting-edge technology and unparalleled safety features, Hyundai EXTER is poised to redefine this fast growing segment\*. We are confident that Hyundai EXTER will exceed the expectations of our customers and reaffirm Hyundai's position as India's leading smart mobility solutions provider."

## Global public cloud revenue crosses \$500 bn, Microsoft leads

Led by Microsoft, global revenue for the public cloud services market reached \$545.8 billion last year, an increase of 22.9 per cent over 2021, according to a new report.

Top 5 public cloud service providers - Microsoft, Amazon Web Services, Salesforce, Google, and Oracle - captured more than 41 per cent of the worldwide total and growing 27.3 per cent year over year, according to the latest IDC data.

With offerings in all four deployment categories, Microsoft remained in the top position in



the overall public cloud services market with 16.8 per cent share, followed by Amazon Web Services with 13.5 per cent share.

Software as a Service - applications (SaaS-applications) continued to be the largest source of public cloud services revenue, accounting for more than 45 per cent of the total

in 2022. Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) was the second largest revenue category with 21.2 per cent of the total while Platform as a Service (PaaS) and Software as a Service - System Infrastructure Software (SaaS - SIS) delivered 17 per cent and 16.7 per cent of overall revenue, respectively.

"The assessment and use of AI, triggered by generative AI, is starting to dominate the planning and long term investment agendas of businesses and cloud providers will play a significant role in

the evaluation and adoption of AI enablement services," said Rick Villars, group vice president, Worldwide Research at IDC.

Meanwhile, the revenue for foundational cloud services that support digital-first strategies saw revenue growth of 28.8 per cent. "SaaS - Applications remain the largest segment of the more than \$547 billion cloud software market forecast by the end of 2023," said Frank Della Rosa, research vice president, SaaS, Business Platforms, and Industry Cloud at IDC.

## Agra footwear manufacturers threaten to shutdown units over compulsory ISI mark



**AGRA:** The footwear manufacturers in Agra have threatened to shut down the units over the government's decision to enforce ISI standardisation in the footwear production process.

The move, which requires ISI marks on all footwear priced above Rs 150, has sparked concerns among small businesses in the cottage footwear manufacturing sector.

Upendra Singh Lovely, chairman of Agra Shoe Manufacturers Association highlighted that the expense of acquiring the ISI mark for each new footwear design can range from Rs 5,000 to Rs 10,000, depending on the size of the business. Given that small businesses often operate on narrow profit margins, this additional cost becomes a major financial challenge.

Pointing out another concern, he said, "ISI mark will lead to the standardisation of footwear, which could stifle innovation. The ISI mark is awarded to products that meet certain standards of quality and safety. This means that all footwear that bears the ISI

mark will be of a similar standard. This could make it difficult for small businesses to differentiate their products from those of their competitors."

According to Somdatt Pippal, chairman of Kendriya Bhim Yuva Vyapar Mandal, the most affordable footwear in Agra is typically priced around Rs 150 and experiences high demand, and since this type of footwear is primarily produced by multi-generational family-run cottage units; the production process lacks significant standardisation.

"Imposing standardisation requirements on these units, would force them out of business as compliance with the standards would be challenging while maintaining their competitive price advantage," he said.

He highlighted that the cost of obtaining the ISI certification process is prohibitive for cottage units. Additionally, the requirement for footwear to be manufactured in a factory setting poses challenges for these smaller workshops that do not meet ISI's manufacturing standards.

## MBD Group Celebrates 78th Founder's Day

ANNOUNCES A MULTITUDE OF IMPACTFUL CSR INITIATIVES, UNVEILS 'LOVE TO LEARN' CAMPAIGN WITH THE AIM TO IGNITE PASSION FOR EDUCATION IN EVERY STUDENT

KULBIR SINGH KALSI  
Chandigarh

MBD Group, an embodiment of excellence, reliability and expertise across various sectors including Education, EdTech, Skill Development, Capacity Building, Exports, Hospitality, Food & Beverage, Malls, Realty, Design & Construction, Residences and Commercial spaces operating in India and abroad commemorated its 78th Founder's Day with indomitable spirit and zeal. This momentous occasion honoured the outstanding legacy of their visionary founder, Shri Ashok Kumar Malhotra. This event served as a heartfelt tribute to his remarkable contributions, untiring commitment and transformative ideas towards empowering people. Employees from diverse verticals were honoured for their invaluable contributions, and their unwavering dedication was acknowledged as the backbone of MBD's success. Furthermore, as a testament to their commitment to employee

growth, MBD Group extends support to selected individuals by providing scholarships to fund their education. This longstanding tradition is upheld every year, reflecting MBD Group's steadfast dedication to the professional and personal development of its employees.

The Ashok Kumar Malhotra (AKM) Charitable Trust, the CSR division of MBD Group, also unveiled its "Love to Learn" initiative. Through this initiative the Group aims to revolutionise traditional classrooms by incorporating technology which will open up a world of endless possibilities for learners. This initiative has been implemented in numerous schools located in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. Approximately 25,000 students will benefit from this initiative.

Expressing joy on celebrating the 78th Founder's Day, Satish Bala Malhotra - Chairperson, MBD Group - said, "We MBDians gather each year on Founder's Day to honour the enduring val-



ues and belief system established by Ashok Kumar Malhotra; a profound sense of pride fills my heart with joy that we are upholding the philosophy and values instilled by our Founder. I strongly believe we should give back to society and endeavour constantly to disseminate education."

Monica Malhotra Kandhari - Managing Director, MBD Group - said, "On Founder's Day, I would like to congratulate each one of you for having

successfully launched the 'Love to Learn' initiative. We aim to narrow the educational gap and provide equal opportunities for all the students, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds. Along with upgrading infrastructure we are committed to empowering teachers through capacity building programmes thus ensuring the sustainability of the project."

Sonica Malhotra Kandhari - Joint Managing Director, MBD

Group - said, "Our Founder was always committed to transform education and make a positive impact in society. By upgrading traditional classrooms into digital classrooms, we create engaging and interactive spaces for students to learn and explore. This initiative will be an ongoing effort, running year after year, with the intention of benefitting an increasing number of students pan India."

MBD takes immense pride in its tie-up with the National Independent Schools Alliance (NISA) in a heartfelt mission to transform traditional classrooms into digital classrooms in budget private schools. With this tie-up, MBD is fully committed to strengthening schools nationwide because we believe that giving students the resources they need to thrive in the digital age is essential.

Dr Kulbhusan Sharma - President NISA - said, "MBD's decision to transform classrooms into smart spaces is quite admirable. During a panel discussion where Mrs. Monica Malhotra Kandhari was also

present, I asked if there will ever be a CSR initiative for budget private schools. To my surprise, MBD not only took my question to heart but also took action. Classrooms are now becoming digital and students are being connected to new technologies. It's incredible to witness their genuine care and commitment."

Guided by the core principles of making resources accessible to those who require them, the Group spearheads its CSR initiatives through 'MBD - MY BEST DEEDS'. Furthermore, MBD Group extends its philanthropic efforts through the AKM Charitable Trust. The Trust actively supports projects aimed at empowering girls through education, establishing MBD libraries in various schools, donating books and stationery, and many more.

On the 78th Founder's Day, MBD Group commemorated Ashok Kumar Malhotra's enduring legacy and pioneering spirit, which have become a source of inspiration for generations to come.

# Expenses on IPOs be given input credit in GST, ASSOCHAM says ahead of GST Council meet

**NEW DELHI:** Ahead of the meeting of the GST Council, ASSOCHAM has made a strong case for making GST paid on expenses on the Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) eligible for input tax credit, stating such an option is permissible under the GST Act.



take ITC on goods and services used in or intended to be used in the course or furtherance of business".

"GST paid on expenses towards IPOs are eligible for input tax credit, being expenses used in the course or furtherance of business," the chamber said in a comprehensive note submitted to the GST Council. It said a circular to this effect should be issued.

The apex industry organisation, after wider consultations with the stakeholders, said "The only provision which will be applicable to ITC on goods and services used for IPOs shall be Section 16(1) of the CGST Act, 2017. This section permits companies to

ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood said, "IPOs have played a major role in raising equity capital for the companies, strengthening their balance sheets in the process. We would urge upon the GST Council to encourage companies to tap a vibrant

capital market for expansion of their businesses and de-leverage themselves".

In another recommendation to the council, ASSOCHAM said the Employee Stock Options (ESOPs) are key incentives to promote and retain talents in the corporates, especially amongst the start-ups. Thus, the ESOPs should be kept out of the GST dispensation as these are "in nature of

securities".

The chamber also sought clarification stating that Corporate Guarantees or Director's Personal Guarantees issued for borrowing or letter of comfort for performance for group companies, should not be liable to GST. It said a transaction of corporate guarantee does not benefit the guarantor in any manner, but is only an act of safeguarding the interest of the group as a whole akin to a shareholder function. Hence, deeming such transactions as deemed supply and levying them to GST would result in a scenario where every act between related parties, though without consideration, would be liable to GST.

The other recommendations include rationalisation of levy of GST on intercompany cross charge and rationalising penalty provisions.

# Bandhan Bank Q1 profit slips 19 pc to Rs 721 crore

**KOLKATA:** Post-tax profit of private lender Bandhan Bank dipped 18.7% to Rs 721 crore in the first quarter of the current fiscal as compared to the similar previous corresponding period of Rs 890 crore.

Deposits of the bank at the end of the first quarter stood at Rs 1.08 lakh crore while advances touched Rs 1.03 lakh crore. MD & CEO of Bandhan Bank Chandra Shekhar Ghosh said the first quarter had been stable for the bank. "The bank has also made significant progress in diversifying the asset base. The bank has also made considerable investments in people, technology and infrastructure", Ghosh said.

Net interest margin (NIM) of the bank at the end of the first quarter fell to 7.3 per cent as against eight per cent in the previous similar period. Ghosh said that the bank is keen to reduce its exposure to micro-credit and diversify towards advancing retail loans.



share of retail to total deposits now stands at 71 per cent.

Net interest margin (NIM) of the bank at the end of the first quarter fell to 7.3 per cent as against eight per cent in the previous similar period.

Ghosh said that the bank is keen to reduce its exposure to micro-credit and diversify towards advancing retail loans. The bank's retail loan book grew 87 per cent while the

share of retail to total deposits now stands at 71 per cent.

In the first quarter of the current fiscal, the bank's advances towards micro-credit loans was lower at Rs 51,000 crore from Rs 57,000 crore in the same period of the last financial year.

"In the new areas where the bank is focussing on advancing loans, the margins are lower as compared to MFI loans," Ghosh added.

# Netweb Technologies mobilises Rs 189 cr from anchor investors

**NEW DELHI:** Home-grown server maker Netweb Technologies India on Friday said it has collected Rs 189 crore from anchor investors days ahead of its Initial Public Offering (IPO). The company has allocated 37.8 lakh equity shares to 25 funds at Rs 500 per share, which is also the upper end of the IPO, according to a circular uploaded on BSE website.

Nomura Funds, Goldman Sachs Funds, ICICI Prudential Mutual Fund (MF), HDFC MF, WhiteOak MF and Nippon MF, among others participated in the anchor round.

Out of the total allocation 37.8 lakh equity shares to the anchor investors, 22.27 lakh equity shares were allocated to 9 domestic mutual funds through a total of 19 schemes. The IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 206 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of 85 lakh equity shares by promoters.

# Flipkart makes estimated USD 700 mn cash payout to staff post PhonePe separation

**NEW DELHI:** Walmart-backed Flipkart on Friday began mega cash payout to staff, estimated to be worth USD 700 million, following its separation from fintech firm PhonePe.

The board of directors of Flipkart had announced the complete separation from the PhonePe business by selling off its entire shareholding in December 2022.

Accordingly, the board decided to pay USD 43.67 as compensation for each ESOP (vested options for eligible current and former stakeholders and unvested options only for eligible current stakeholders) as of the record date of December 23, 2022.

# FISME, World Bank jointly conducts workshop on gender dimensions of trade facilitation in India



**NEW DELHI:** The Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) and World Bank jointly organised a workshop on the interlinkages between trade facilitation and gender in cross-border trade on July 12.

The primary aim of the workshop was to discuss the meth-

odological approach for a study on understanding the reasons behind low women participation in the trade sector. It served as a platform for key stakeholders to share their perspectives on women employment in logistics and international trade as well as share knowledge and good practices on the key agenda.

During the course of the workshop, representatives of World Bank made a presentation on the best practices in terms of gender participation in trade, issues and challenges faced by Indian women in trade sector.

During his address, Satya Prasad Sahu, Senior Trade Facilitation Specialist at World Bank highlighted the initiatives being taken by the World Bank to make all its programmes gender inclusive. He also laid stress on the importance of gender inclusive policy making.

Anil Bhardwaj, Secretary General, FISME in his concluding remarks stressed on the importance of women entrepreneurs in the economic growth of the country. Bhardwaj also talked about the need for taking feedback from women entrepreneurs and women-based associations to have a more robust trade policy.

# IT heavyweights power Sensex towards 66k mark



**MUMBAI:** BSE Sensex is up almost 600 points in a ferocious rally to close in on the 66,000 points milestone powered by positive cues from the US market. Sensex was up 586 points at 65,980 points during the Thursday morning trade.

IT stocks powered the Sensex rally with TCS, Infosys, Tech Mahindra up by more than 2 per cent. V.K. Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said the ongoing global rally in stock markets will get a further mild boost from the latest US consumer inflation for June which has come at 3 per cent, better than market expectation of 3.1 per cent. Importantly core inflation has dipped below 5 per cent, he added.

This is clear indication that the disinflation process is on in the US and might persuade the Federal Reserve to pause once again in the July 26 rate decision. This is an important positive global cue, he said.

In India, though the June CPI inflation has increased to 4.81 per cent, this was expected since the prices of vegetables and milk had spiked.

The positive number is the May IIP at 5.2 per cent, which indicates that the growth momentum in the economy is robust.

# Several states protest move to bring GST network within money laundering law's ambit

**NEW DELHI:** Several opposition party-ruled states, namely Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, West Bengal and Delhi are learned to have protested against the provision of bringing the GST network (GSTN) within the ambit of the Provision of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), during the meeting of the GST council, which began earlier on Tuesday.

Delhi minister Atishi, who holds the finance portfolio, told reporters outside Vigyan Bhawan, where the GST council is currently meeting under Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, that finance ministers from many states opposed the Centre's decision to bring GSTN under PMLA provisions, as it will lead to unnecessary harassment of small and medium businesspersons in the hands of Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Even Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema



told reporters during a break in the proceedings, that bringing GST under PMLA's ambit would be a huge threat to small traders and may even lead to tax terrorism.

"On July 7, a notification was issued which brought the GSTN under the PMLA. This means that those businessmen, who due to some difficulties, are unable to file GST, can be prosecuted by the ED under the PMLA," Atishi

told reporters. She said that the issue was also raised by the finance ministers of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan during the meeting.

Atishi said that all these finance ministers, including those from Delhi and Punjab (both ruled by AAP) sought a discussion on this issue but Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman was not ready for it.

# 19 people across the world became billionaires via cryptocurrency

As the world of cryptocurrency tumbles down amid regulatory crackdowns, there are 19 individuals in the world who have achieved the title of a billionaire through cryptocurrency.

One cryptocurrency in particular that has led to investors amassing impressive returns is Bitcoin.

Satoshi Nakamoto, the pseudonym for the creator of Bitcoin, is widely assumed to have the most Bitcoin wealth. Although the creator has not officially revealed the amount of Bitcoin he holds, estimates predict he has a wallet containing around 1.1 million BTC, according to data shared by niche news publisher BanklessTimes.com.

This would translate to a staggering around \$25 billion.



"Following Nakamoto is Changpeng Zhao, commonly known as CZ who is the founder and CEO of Binance, with a total of \$65 billion. Prior to Sam Bankman-Fried's scandal, he took third position with a total of \$24 billion," the report showed.

Looking at the landscape

of BTC investing across countries, the US takes the lead, with 46 million holders. This is significantly more than India in second place with 27 million holders and Pakistan with 26 million. However, the most Bitcoin owned is distributed among just four wallets which hold a collective 663,306 Bit-

coins. Aside from individuals, there are large corporations that have accumulated great volumes of Bitcoin. In fact, a total of 23 publicly traded companies have sizeable investments in BTC, said the report. The company with the largest investment in BTC among these is MicroStrategy Inc. with an astonishing 129,699 BTC, equating to \$3,975 million.

Another high profile example of company ownership of BTC is Tesla, which in 2021, purchased \$1.5 billion worth of Bitcoin. The automotive and clean energy company also began to accept BTC as a form of payment which would've increased their total value invested even higher.

# BMW launches updated SUV X5 at Rs 93.9 lakh



**NEW DELHI:** German luxury carmaker BMW on Friday launched the new version of its popular SUV X5 with prices starting at Rs 93.9 lakh (ex-showroom).

The model is locally produced at the company's Chennai plant and will be available in both petrol and diesel engine options.

The petrol option has a 3-litre engine with a power output of 381 hp and can accelerate from 0-100 kmph in 5.4 seconds. It comes in two variants priced at Rs 93.9 lakh and Rs 1.05 crore, BMW India said in a statement.

# Indian Rupee on the Path of Global Currency



**DR. PS VOHRA**

The Indian Rupee's ambitions to become a recognised international currency are a topic of much debate at the moment. This may appear odd at first because most common Indians do not believe that the Indian Rupee has developed to the point where it can take the place of the dollar as the world's reserve currency. There are also rumours that if the Indian Rupee becomes a recognised worldwide currency, India will economically gain significantly and will be able to advance quickly among wealthy nations in the future.

In reality, the beginning of this matter was initiated in an official discussion last year by the Reserve Bank of India, stating that all countries in the world should have the right to use their preferred currency in international transactions. These rumours then received further traction as India brought up the topic of financial regionalization for political centralization during the BRICS Summit, indicating that the Modi government is potentially

thinking about using the Rupee as a commercial incentive in all of India's international transactions. India supported this idea by promoting mutual cooperation with other small nations, including Sri Lanka, and made the Indian Rupee the base for all exchanges. In this context, the Reserve Bank of India also began offering its citizens a special banking service in which they could conduct international transactions in Indian Rupees rather than having to convert their money into dollars through a special banking account called the Vostro Account.

Is the dollar's dominance over the world about to start to wane? The analysis reveals a number of data that lend credence to the notion that the dollar's global sway is now beginning to wane in a number of international locations. The American dollar accounted for more than 70% of the world's currency reserves in 1999, but by 2022, that percentage had dropped to 59%, according to a new report from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). International diplomacy contributes to this decline, but the United States' economic policies also unfairly impose



its dominance on other nations. The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine under the framework of international diplomacy is an example where Russia and China, together, have strongly positioned the Chinese currency against the American dollar on the international stage. If we discuss some of America's flawed economic policies, after the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Reserve made multiple changes to its interest rate policies in an attempt to control domestic inflation. As a result, the dollar became significantly stronger on the international level, causing major economic setbacks for all major developed countries, including leading economies

like India, as their currencies continually weakened against the dollar on the international stage. For example, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Indian Rupee was around 70 rupees to the dollar in December 2019, but it reached a level of 83 rupees in December 2022. This means that the Indian Rupee weakened against the dollar by about 20% in just three years. As a result, India's imports became increasingly expensive, leading to high inflation in the domestic market. The rising prices of crude oil also played a significant role in all of these factors.

The purchase of gold by all the major nations on the international market is currently considered as a basis

for reducing the pressure the dollar exerts on the world economy. China alone purchased 58 metric tonnes of gold in the first three months of 2023, which is why gold accumulation in China is at an all-time high right now. Russia, on the other hand, is the world's second-largest producer of gold and has purchased 32 metric tonnes of it in the past quarter despite being involved in a conflict with Ukraine. Continual large-scale gold purchases are also being made by nations like Singapore, Turkey, and Kazakhstan. Statistics are also telling that after the year 2010, today the accumulation of gold in the whole world is at its maximum level. During that time, the maximum purchase of gold had suddenly increased in the world due to the negative impact of the American recession of 2007. The reason was that due to the American recession, the unavailability of the American dollar or the lack of foreign exchange reserves, countries did not have to see the inability to pay for their imports and gold could be used as a substitute for the dollar. Perhaps this thinking is once again making

its place, these days, on the global stage as the dollar has artificially become very strong due to the interest policies of the American Fed. This has greatly affected the currencies of all countries, due to which all countries may use gold as a substitute for payment instead of dollars in future. Although India has not shown such a rush in buying gold and has bought only 10 metric tonnes of gold per quarter on an average, but today India has 8 percent gold in its total foreign exchange reserves.

The topic of India being the third-largest economic superpower in the globe in the coming years was prominently mentioned in Prime Minister Modi's speech to the joint session of the American Congress a few days ago. India's GDP is projected to be worth approximately \$6 trillion by 2028, according to the IMF's most recent report. In the midst of all of this, it's crucial to recognise that India has significant trade deficit issues in foreign exchange even though its economy is currently growing extremely quickly. The primary obstacle here is paying for imports in American dollars, which is exceedingly

expensive when compared to the Indian rupee. Due to this aspect, during the war between Russia and Ukraine in the past, when India bought crude oil from Russia instead of buying it from Gulf countries and made an agreement to do mutual exchange with Russia in rupees, then it used rupee as international currency. India had a diplomatic success towards setting up. However, it cannot be taken as a complete success as of now because Russia wants to recover the benefits of paying in dollars by selling more crude oil to India. Therefore, only the time to come will tell whether payment of excess purchase of crude oil will give benefit in rupees or not. But if India's agreements with some industrialised nations are for the payment of foreign exchange in rupees, then it will undoubtedly be a tremendous success for India's economic development and have a wide range of positive consequences on the Indian economy and society in the future.

*Dr. P.S. Vohra, Academician, Financial Thinker & Newspaper Columnist, Views are personal*

# INTERNATIONAL

## Indian students pursuing Masters in France to get 5-yr work visa: PM Modi

Indian students pursuing a Master's degree in France will now be given a five-year long-term post-study visa, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced.

Modi, who is on an official visit to France at the invitation of President Emmanuel Macron, made the announcement during his address to the Indian community at LA Seine Musicale in Paris on Thursday. "The last time I came to France, it was decided that Indian students studying in France would be given a two-year post-study work visa. Now, it has been decided that Indian students pursuing Masters in France will be given a long-term post-study visa of five years," he said.

During his address, the Prime Minister also highlighted the contribution of the Indian community in France, who form a strong foundation of the India-France partnership.

Approximately 65,000 immigrants from India currently reside in France.

Around 2.7 million students



enroll for French higher education, 14 per cent of whom are foreign students, according to a French embassy data.

France is especially popular for its management programmes with over 70 per cent of Indian students enrolled in them.

According to the latest official data collected post-Covid, there were around 6,000 Indian students in France in the 2021-2022 academic year.

France plans to invite 20,000 Indian students in the country by the year 2025, Foreign Minister Catherine

Colonna said last year.

While calling the plan "very ambitious", Colonna said: "We want 20,000 Indian students in France by 2025. We're starting from something close to 5,000. It is very ambitious but, between India and France, the sky's the limit."

## Five Mexicans and Nepali pilot killed in helicopter crash near Mt Everest in Nepal

**KATHMANDU:** All six people, including five members of a Mexican family, were killed in a fiery crash of a private commercial helicopter near Mount Everest in eastern Nepal on Tuesday, a senior airport official said.

The Manang Air NA-MV chopper took off from Surke Airport in Solukhumbu district at 10:04 am for Kathmandu and suddenly lost contact at an altitude above 12,000 feet at 10:13 am, said Gyanendra Bhul, Manager at Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA).

The helicopter crashed in the Lamjura area of Likhupike Rural Municipality in the remote mountainous Solukhumbu district. TIA spokesperson Tkeknath Sitaula said all six bodies were found at the crash site during a search operation. They were returning to Kathmandu from Surke after enjoying a mountain flight. The flight was conducted from Lukla, the gateway to Mount Everest, Sitaula said.

All six people aboard the chopper have died in the ac-



cident, The Kathmandu Post newspaper quoted operation and safety manager of Manang Air Raju Neupane as saying. Six people including Captain Chet Bahadur Gurung and five Mexican nationals were aboard the aircraft, the official said. Police have established the identities of the deceased, District police chief Dipak Shrestha said, adding the accident is believed to have been caused due to bad weather. All five foreign passengers are members of a Mexican family. They have been identified as

Sifuentes G. Fernando (95) and Sifuentes Rincon Ismail (98), both males, along with three females - Sifuentes Gongalez Abril (72), Gongalez Olacio Luz (65) and Sifuentes G. Maria Jese (52), MyRepublica news portal reported.

Earlier, a senior official at TIA said locals informed him that the helicopter crashed with a loud explosion and they saw fire at the crash site. "The locals discovered the crashed helicopter at Chihandanda," said rural municipality deputy chair Nwang Lhakpa.

## 'Serious breakthrough' needed to end conflict in Yemen: UN envoy



UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, has called on the warring parties in Yemen to make efforts for a "serious breakthrough" in the ongoing talks to end the conflict in the country.

Yemen has been locked in a military conflict since the Houthi militia took control of several northern cities and ousted the Yemeni government from the capital Sanaa in 2014, Xinhua news agency reported.

On April 2, 2022, the Yemeni government and the Houthi militia agreed upon a two-month truce brokered by the United Nations, which was later renewed twice through October 2. However, Yemen's warring sides have failed to reach an agreement on further extension.

Despite the expiration of the truce, Yemen and its people continue to feel the benefits from the longest period of relative calm since the beginning of the conflict, Grundberg told a Security Council meeting on Monday.

The period of relative calm has opened the door for serious discussions with Yemeni actors on the way forward toward ending the conflict, he said, noting that to sustainably end the war, the ongoing talks "have to reach a serious breakthrough". The situation on the ground in Yemen remains fragile and challenging, said Grundberg, stressing that "we cannot afford to seek a seasonal peace".

The parties in Yemen need to immediately stop military provocations and prepare for and agree to a sustainable nationwide ceasefire, he said. They also need to immediately de-escalate economically and address near- and longer-term economic priorities, Grundberg added.

He also urged the parties to make progress on agreeing to a clear path to restarting an intra-Yemeni political process under UN auspices. He underlined that only Yemenis can debate and decide on the weighty and fundamental questions of sovereignty, national and local governance, revenue management and security arrangements. "The UN-mediated process will be led and owned by Yemenis, and will involve and reflect the priorities of a plurality of Yemenis, including women and men from across Yemen's governorates," the envoy said.

## New Zealand food prices up 12.5% annually: Statistics

New Zealand's annual food prices were 12.5 percent higher in June 2023 than in June 2022, the national statistics department said on Thursday.

Stats NZ said last month the annual increase was due to rises across all the broad food categories measured, with grocery food prices increasing 12.8 per cent, fruit and vegetable prices up 22 per cent, meat, poultry, and fish prices increasing 11 per cent, and non-alcoholic beverage prices up 9.7 per cent, reports Xinhua news agency.



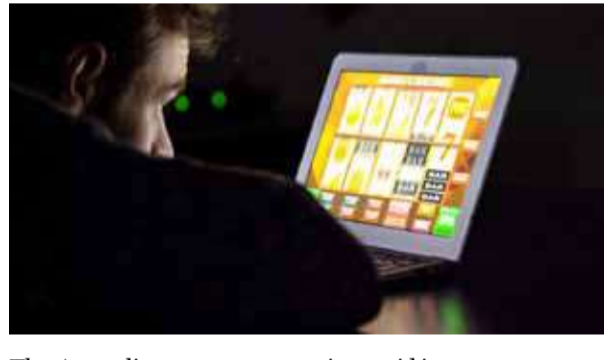
"Increasing prices for fresh eggs, six-pack yogurt, and cheddar cheese were the largest drivers within grocery food," Stats NZ's consumer prices manager James Mitchell said.

The second largest contributor to the annual movement was fruit and vegetables.

The increase in this group was driven by tomatoes, kumara, and potatoes.

Monthly food prices rose 1.6 per cent in June 2023 compared with May 2023, statistics show.

## Australia to set up voluntary scheme to stop gambling addiction



The Australian government on Monday announced that it will set up a voluntary betting exclusion scheme in August in a bid to stop gambling addiction.

In a statement, the government said that BetStop will allow Australians to exclude themselves from all 150 licensed online gambling companies for a period from three months to permanently, reports Xinhua news agency.

Those companies will not be allowed to open accounts in the name of, accept wagers from or send marketing materials to anyone who is on the register.

It will be rolled out from August 21, as will new rules requiring online gambling companies to verify a customer's identity before they can place a bet.

"The launch of Australia's first National Self-Exclusion Register, BetStop, is a game changer, and will make it easy for vulnerable consumers to self-exclude from online wagering services," Michelle Rowland, the Minister for Communica-

tions, said in a statement.

"BetStop is the last of 10 measures to be implemented under the National Consumer Protection Framework for online wagering, to empower Australians through stronger consumer protections."

Australians are among the biggest gamblers in the world. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Australians lost A\$25 billion (\$16 billion) in gambling in 2018-2019, more per capita than any other country.

A separate survey published by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) in March found that 73 per cent of Australians gambled at least once in the last 12 months, almost half of whom were considered at risk of gambling harm.

Monday's announcement comes after a government-led parliamentary inquiry in June recommended a blanket ban on gambling advertising in Australia within three years, warning children and young people are being "manipulated" to gamble online.

## Over 30,000 food items subject to price hikes in Japan

A new survey released on Wednesday revealed that over 30,000 food and beverage items were subject to price increases in Japan this year as businesses continue to pass on their higher raw material costs to consumers.

The survey by credit research company Teikoku Databank showed that 195 food and beverage makers have announced plans to raise prices for 30,009 items this year as of Wednesday, up from 29,106 items as of the end of June, reports Xinhua news agency.

Prices for about 20,000 items

had already been raised in the first six months of this year, with price hikes for some 10,000 items being planned in the second half, including 3,716 items in October, when the number may swell to around 8,000 to hit a peak of this year, according to the survey.

The company said that consumers are facing "an unprecedented rush of price hikes" in 2023, noting that prices for around 35,000 food and beverage items may rise, up by more than 10,000 from the previous year.



## NATO summit ends amid division, opposition



The NATO summit wrapped up here in the Lithuanian capital amid divisions among members and opposition from the international community. During the summit concluding,

NATO adopted its "most comprehensive defence plans since the end of the Cold War" and endorsed a new defence production action plan. Under the new plans, NATO aims to have 300,000 troops fully ready for action, Xinhua news agency reported. NATO allies have also made an "enduring commitment" to invest at least two per cent of their GDP annually in defence, according to a state-

ment published at the summit. Only 11 of the alliance's 31 members have reached or exceeded this target after "nine consecutive years of increased defence spending" since 2014, documents released at the summit showed.

NATO leaders also pledged to provide more long-term support to Ukraine and held the inaugural meeting of the new NATO-Ukraine Council with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. However, they failed to set a timetable for Ukraine's membership in the alliance, which Zelensky has called "unprecedented and absurd".

## BRINGING CHEER TO THE SIKH COMMUNITY IN THE UK, A NEW GURDWARA HAS OPENED ITS DOORS FOR UP TO 900 WORSHIPPERS IN LEICESTER.

## New Gurdwara in Leicester opens its doors for worshippers

The 4.2 million-pound Gurdwara Sahib, which was originally located on Meynell Road, is now built on a 2.8 acre site in Hamilton, Leicester, to make room for the increasing number of worshippers.

According to the Leicester Mercury, the construction was carried out by the trustees of the Ramgarhia Board Leicester who borrowed 2.1 million pounds to part-fund the new building.

It committed 800,000 pounds of its own money, and the rest was donated by members of the Sikh community.

The gurdwara has classrooms for children to learn Punjabi, two main prayer halls, a library and a langar dining hall, which can accommodate up to 600 people.

The car parking, which is currently under construction, will have up to 150 car park spaces, coach parking and cycle racks.

"The old Gurdwara was a



heavy vehicle garage that had bought the land for the new site back in 2013," president of the gurdwara, Inderjit Singh Panesar, told the Leicester Mercury. The prayer halls have seats as well as lifts to support elderly worshippers. The new Gurdwara also houses a creche for new mothers.

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## Biden on Europe visit amid questions over NATO unity, munition to Ukraine

US President Joe Biden on Sunday embarked on Europe visit which is expected to be dominated by the US approval of munitions to Ukraine and bolstering North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) alliance.

During his five day trip from July 9-13, Biden will visit the UK, Lithuania and Finland to bolster NATO, White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre had said in a statement.

In the first leg of his visit, Biden will have a stopover in London on Sunday night. The US President on Monday has scheduled engagements with King Charles III and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to further strengthen close relationship between the two nations. On July 11-12, the US President will visit Vilnius, Lithuania to attend the 74th NATO meeting during which leaders are set to discuss the war in Ukraine and bolstering the military alliance.



Despite use of bombs being banned across the world by 123 countries, Biden had announced that it will send cluster munitions to Kiev, saying "he took a difficult decision to act as the Ukraine

are running out of ammunition", sky news reported.

He will conclude his tour with visit to Helsinki, Finland for US-Nordic leaders summit on July 13 and fly back to the US the same day.

## Canada's employment increased in June



Canada's employment increased by 60,000, or 0.3 per cent, in June, driven by gains in full-time work, the national statistical institute said.

Statistics Canada said on Friday that the employment gains in June were concentrated among young men aged 15 to 24 and men aged 25 to 54, reports Xinhua news agency.

Employment among women of all age groups was little changed in June, the national statistical institute said.

Meanwhile, the unemployment rate rose to 5.4 per cent in June, the highest level in over a year, as more people searched for work.

The unemployment rate rose 0.2 percentage points following a similar increase in May.

There were 1.1 million people unemployed in June, an increase of 54,000, or 4.9 per cent, in the month.

Average hourly wages rose 4.2 per cent on a year-over-year basis in June, following an increase of 5.1 per cent in May, Statistics Canada said.



# actress Hayley Atwell breaks silence on romance rumours with Tom Cruise

Los Angeles: British-American actress Hayley Atwell has spoken up on rumours of romance with Tom Cruise. The actress,

41, and her 61-year-old in 'Mission: Impossible - Dead Reckoning Part One' co-star have been plagued by speculation

they have extended their chemistry beyond the silver screen. At the time of filming the latest installment of the film

franchise, romance rumours began to swirl but it seems there wasn't any truth to them, reports Mirror.co.uk.

Hayley has poured cold water on the rumours by describing Tom as like an 'uncle' to her. The British star also said that she would turn to him for advice during filming. She said that she thought the rumours were "weird" and that she was upset when they began.

Speaking to The Independent she said: "I would be like, 'Ooh, there's some weird rumours, and it feels base, it feels a little dirty, it feels grubby, it's not what I'm about'. Why are things being assumed or projected onto me about my relationship with my work colleague and boss? It's upsetting."

She further mentioned, quoted by Mirror.co.uk: "When I've talked to him about it, he'd be like: 'You know exactly who you are. You know what you're about. And that is the only thing that matters. It doesn't matter what people think of you, if you are in integrity with yourself, if you know what your value system is.'"

## Huma Qureshi, Sharib Hashmi go out lunching with Mumbai's dabbawalas



MUMBAI: As the Tarla Dalal biopic 'Tarla' started streaming on Zee5, Huma Qureshi, who plays the lead role, and Sharib Hashmi, her on-screen husband, stepped out in style to promote the film with dabbawalas.

carried a big tiffin in her hand. Sharib opted for a green shirt and enjoyed posing and interacting with the dabbawalas. The two then settled down for lunch with the dabbawalas. 'Tarla' is a captivating biopic that chronicles the extraordinary life of home cook-turned-popular TV show host and cookbook author Tarla Dalal, who rises from humble beginnings to attain national renown.

The film chronicles Tarla's unwavering determination and ambition, as she rises to the top of the culinary world, leaving a flavourful legacy for generations to come.

## Priyanka Chopra Jonas has showered her birthday love for laureate

Actress Priyanka Chopra Jonas has showered her birthday love on the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Pakistani global education activist and Hollywood producer Malala Yousafzai on her 26th birthday. Taking to Instagram Stories, Priyanka shared a throwback smiling picture with Malala, and wrote, "Happy birthday @malala! May you be blessed with the best, always!", with a pink heart emoji.

Malala replied to PeeCee's post with a blush face emoji. She added: "Sometimes we just go along with certain behaviours because everyone else is doing it. But here's the thing, just because everyone does it, doesn't make it right."

# ALIA BHATT

## penned a heartfelt note for Neetu Kapoor on her 65th birthday



MUMBAI: Bollywood star Alia Bhatt penned a heartfelt note for her mother-in-law and veteran actress Neetu Kapoor, who is celebrated her 65th birthday, July 8.

In an Instagram post, Alia shared a monochrome photo of Neetu, and wrote in the caption -- "Happy birthday queen @ you make everything wonderful!!! Love you oh so much!" -- with a yellow heart emoji.

Neetu, who is currently in Italy, shared a lovestruck family portrait with son Ranbir Kapoor, daughter Riddhima Kapoor Sahni, son-in-law Bharat Sahni, and her granddaughter Samara. Alia and her daughter Raha, however, were not present at the birthday celebration.

The Bollywood actress famous for her role in 'Amar Akbar Anthony', and last seen in 'Jug Jugg Jeeyo', wrote in the

caption, "Beautiful cherished day. Missed @aliaabhatt #raha (my loves) @riddhimakapoorsofficial @brat.man @samarasahni."

Alia dropped a red heart emoji on Neetu's post and said, "Love youuuuuuuuu."

Riddhima also shared the same family photo and wrote, "Happy B'day Ma. We adore you #backboneofthefamily (major missing @aliaabhatt and my baby Raha) #portofino." Kareena Kapoor Khan, who is on a summer vacation with her family in Italy, commented on sister Riddhima's post, and said, "Surprise best best", with a rainbow and red heart emoji.

Bharat, also penned a birthday note for his mother-in-law and said, "Happy happy birthday. Mom. Love you so much".

Meanwhile, Alia is busy promoting her Hollywood debut film 'Heart of Stone'. She will appear alongside Gal Gadot and Jamie Dornan in the spy film. She also has Karan Johar's romantic comedy 'Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani', co-starring Ranveer Singh, which is set to release on July 28.

# POTPOURRI

## Jackie Shroff shares montage of unseen pics as 'Tridev' turns 34



MUMBAI: Actor Jackie Shroff stirred up the nostalgia among his fans and followers, as he celebrated the 34th anniversary of the iconic Bollywood film 'Tridev' on Friday, by sharing a heartfelt reel on Instagram.

Jackie goes down the memory lane, and shares unseen pictures from the sets alongside Madhuri Dixit, Sunny Deol and other cast from the team. The actor captioned the post as, "34 years of Tridev", expressing his sentiment and appreciation for the movie that left an indelible mark on his career. The reel has garnered 76.3K views. It got comments such as, "My all-time favorite movie!", "Dada, you looked incredible then, and you look incredible now", and "Ek number". It also evoked memories of the popular song 'Gali Gali Mein Firta Hai', which became an instant hit then, and is still loved by fans today.

'Tridev' is a 1989 action thriller film directed by Rajiv Rai, starring Sunny Deol, Naseeruddin Shah, Jackie Shroff, Madhuri Dixit, Sangeeta Bihrani, Sonam, Anupam Kher and Amrith Puri. On the work front, the actor has Tamil movie 'Jailer' alongside Rajinikanth, Malayalam project 'Chila Nerangalil Chilar', and Hindi movie 'Baap' in the pipeline.

## Varun and Janhvi's upcoming film 'Bawaal' shows an important time: Nitesh



Varun Dhawan and Janhvi Kapoor's upcoming film 'Bawaal' shows an important time from the pages of history - World War 2, which acclaimed director Nitesh Tiwari says was the toughest. He revealed why it was the toughest scene to shoot from the film, which is all set to release on July 21 on Prime Video. "The bigger challenge was to come up with a story like this and to write a screenplay on that. Shooting difficulties were the moments, recreating portions of history we not only had to be factually correct but also particular about every detail possible. This took a lot of time with my production design team and costume team," Nitesh said. "The challenging part was the Omaha beach the war scene. That was toughest part of the shoot", he added.

## Hrithik remembers grandfather Roshan: Immensely proud to be part of his extraordinary lineage



MUMBAI: Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan on Friday paid homage to his grandfather Roshan on his 106th birth anniversary, saying that his work as a music director laid the foundation of his family's journey in cinema. The 49-year-old actor shared an old photograph of his grandfather on Instagram with Roshan's iconic song 'Oh Re Taal Mile Nadi Ke Jal Mein' from Sanjeev Kumar's 1968 movie 'Anokhi Raat' playing in the background.

# Aditya Roy Kapur on social Media: It is importance of kindness in a relationship

Actor Aditya Roy Kapur, who has added fuel to his dating rumours with Ananya Panday with their pictures from vacation doing the rounds on social media, has talked about the importance of kindness in a relationship.

Aditya is featured in dating app Bumble's new global campaign, titled Kindness is Sexy.

He emphasised on the importance of being empathetic and kind. "I think the heart of everything is being good to people around you and being good to people you are in a romantic relationship with".

Speaking on the importance of kindness in relationships, he



shared, "I think kindness can never go out of style. It's one of the intrinsic things about being able to survive in society - the ability to get along with other people, be it in a romantic relationship or friendship or any other, and at its core, you need

to be kind to everyone, especially in romantic relationships."

He added: "Sometimes we just go along with certain behaviours because everyone else is doing it. But here's the thing, just because everyone does it, doesn't make it right."

## Suhaib Ilyasi's new serial Crime Alert will be aired every Sunday at 1:30 pm on Dangal TV channel: Gulshan Kumar

FW DESK New Delhi

Producer-director and anchor Suhaib Ilyasi of the country's famous and popular serial India's Most Wanted's new serial Crime Alert will be aired every Sunday at 1:30 pm on Dangal TV channel. Giving this information, Suhaib Ilyasi's associate Gulshan Kumar told that the crime alert serial is based on the brave police officers who caught criminals risking their lives. Took bullets in the encounter with the criminals. And caught the dreaded criminals and put them behind bars.

Gulshan Kumar told that the police officers played an important role in getting the



criminals by solving the complex knots of crime with their courage, enthusiasm, duty, and understanding. The purpose of crime alert serial is also to make the public aware of crime. In this, by showing cybercrime, fraud, forgery, love affair, and other incidents of crime through theatrical adaptation, the public is warned so that they do not get trapped in the clutches of criminals.

Significantly, the serial India's Most Wanted aired earlier by Suhaib Ilyasi was about those wanted criminals who were far away from the grip of the police and whom the police failed to catch. In the serial India's Most Wanted, such in-depth information about the wanted criminal was given that the country it used to be difficult for the wanted criminal to hide throughout. After the telecast about the wanted criminal in the serial India's Most Wanted, on the information of the public, that wanted criminal was caught by the police. Through India's Most Wanted serial, many dangerous wanted criminals were brought behind the bars of the jail.

## Hugh Jackman to sport Wolverine's classic yellow-and-blue costume in 'Deadpool 3'

Hugh Jackman writes 'Variety', promised fans that his return as Wolverine in the upcoming 'Deadpool 3' would not screw with 'Logan', the 2017 'X-Men' tentpole that brought an end to the superhero's movie arc by killing him off.

It appears Jackman was telling the truth, as a first look at 'Deadpool 3' shared on Jackman and co-star Ryan Reynolds' Instagram finds Wolverine sporting his classic yellow-and-blue costume from the comic books, 'Variety' adds. This appears not to be the iteration of Wolverine



that Jackman previously played, as the superhero has never worn this costume on the big screen before.

'Deadpool 3' is currently in production. The film is being

helmed by Shawn Levy, who last directed Reynolds in 'Free Guy' and the Netflix tentpole 'The Adam Project'.

Not much is known about the film's plot, but it clearly involves the multiverse as Deadpool joins the Marvel Cinematic Universe for the first time after a string of solo movies produced under Fox, 'Variety' notes. Joining Jackman and Reynolds in 'Deadpool 3' are returning players like Morena Baccarin and Brianna Hildebrand, plus newcomers Emma Corrin and Matthew Macfadyen.

# Enhance Your Google Ranking with an Optimized Google Business Page



strong online presence is vital for businesses in today's digital era. To improve your visibility and Google ranking, one of the most effective strategies is creating and optimizing your Google Business Page. A well-optimized Google Business Page plays a crucial role in local search engine optimization (SEO) by providing essential information to potential customers. In this article, we will explore the various ways in which an optimized Google Business Page can help boost your ranking on Google and attract more customers to your business.



Once verified, you can proceed with optimizing your page.

**Complete Your Business Profile:** To maximize your visibility, it is essential to provide accurate and comprehensive information about your business. Fill out all the required fields on your Google Business Page, including your business name, address, phone number, website, hours of operation, and a concise description. This information helps Google understand your business and display it correctly in search results.

**Select Relevant Categories:** Choosing relevant categories for your business is crucial for improving your ranking. Be specific and select the most accurate categories that describe your products or services. This enables Google

to connect your business with relevant search queries and display it to potential customers actively seeking what you offer.

**Incorporate High-Quality Photos:** Visual content holds significant power in attracting customers. Enhance your Google Business Page by adding high-quality photos of your business, products, or services. Ensure that your images are clear, well-lit, and properly formatted. High-quality visuals not only make your page more appealing but also increase engagement and help potential customers develop trust in your business.

**Encourage Customer Reviews:** Positive customer reviews serve as a strong indicator of credibility and quality. Actively encourage your

customers to leave reviews on your Google Business Page. Respond to these reviews promptly and professionally, regardless of whether they are positive or negative. Engaging with customer feedback demonstrates your commitment to customer satisfaction and improves your overall reputation.

**Maintain Consistent NAP Information:** NAP stands for Name, Address, and Phone Number. Consistency in this information across your Google Business Page, website, and other online directories is crucial. Google places value on accuracy and consistency, so it is important to ensure that your NAP information is up-to-date and identical across all platforms. Inaccurate or inconsistent NAP details can have a negative impact on your ranking.

**Utilize Relevant Keywords:** Incorporate relevant keywords into your business description, posts, and other content on your Google Business Page. Conduct thorough keyword research to identify the phrases and terms that potential customers are likely to use when searching for businesses like yours. By optimizing your page with these keywords, you increase the

chances of ranking higher in relevant search results.

**Regularly Publish Updates and Posts:** Google Business Pages allow you to publish posts and updates to keep your audience informed and engaged. Consistently share relevant content, such as news, promotions, events, or blog posts. This activity signals to Google that your business is active and relevant, thereby improving your chances of ranking higher in search results.

**Conclusion:** A well-optimized Google Business Page serves as a powerful tool for improving your Google ranking and attracting more customers to your business. By claiming and verifying your page, providing accurate information, adding high-quality visuals, encouraging customer reviews, maintaining consistent NAP details, utilizing relevant keywords, and regularly publishing updates, you can significantly enhance your online visibility and increase your chances of ranking higher in Google search results. Dedicate time and effort to optimize your Google Business Page, and enjoy the benefits of improved visibility and increased customer engagement.

## Hustle to Survive: Ultimate Fitness Battle Unleashed by MultiFit and Fitrr

FW DESK

MultiFit and Fitrr, two prominent leaders in the fitness industry, have come together to present an extraordinary event: The Hustle to Survive Fitness Survival Challenge. This highly anticipated collaboration is set to captivate fitness enthusiasts on July 15th, 2023, at MultiFit Baner in Pune. With a lineup of exceptional competitors and a quest for victory, this event promises to redefine the boundaries of human potential.



Starting at 11 AM, the Hustle to Survive Fitness Survival Challenge will immerse participants in a thrilling journey of physical endurance and mental fortitude. The challenge consists of five intense rounds meticulously designed to test participants' mettle and determination. From electrifying 1v1 matchups in the Survival

Round to synchronized team challenges in later rounds, every stage demands unwavering strength, coordination, and resilience.

In the Survival Round, 100 participants will showcase their physical prowess through demanding exercises such as pause push-ups, cone races, tug of war, and rope climbing. Only the top 50 contenders will advance, while the remaining 50 will have a chance at redemption in the gripping Lucky Loser Round #1.