

REGION

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DJB FUND CRUNCH ROW: MINISTER ATISHI ALLEGES FINANCE SECRETARY CAUSING DELAY BY PERSISTENTLY RAISING NEW QUERIES

BANKING & FINANCE

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INDIAN ECONOMY TO GROW AT 7.5-8 PER CENT IN FY24: FICCI

POTPOURRI

8



"DON'T LET YOUR PHYSICAL LIMITATION DEMOTIVATE YOU," KOLHAPUR'S GOLD MEDALLIST SWAROOP UNHALKAR'S ADVICE TO FELLOW PARA ATHLETES

SC upholds abrogation of Article 370, calls for polls by September next year

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Monday upheld the government's decision to abrogate Article 370, which bestowed special status on the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, and said steps should be taken to conduct elections in the assembly by September 30 next year.



and Kashmir does not have internal sovereignty different from other states of the country, he said.

"... all provisions of the Indian Constitution can be applied to J-K," the CJI said.

"We hold the exercise of presidential power to issue constitutional order abrogating Article

370 of Constitution as valid," the CJI said.

Jammu and Kashmir became an integral part of India and this is evident from Articles 1 and 370, he said while pronouncing the judgment.

"The Constituent Assembly of J&K was never intended to be permanent body," the CJI stated.

Article 370, which was abrogated on August 5, 2019, was an interim arrangement due to war conditions in the erstwhile state, Justice Chandrachud said.

The princely state had become an integral part of India and this is evident from Articles 1 and 370, the CJI said.

The apex court reserved its verdict in the matter on September 5 after a 16-day hearing on a batch of petitions challenging the abrogation of the provisions of Article 370.

Abrogation of Article 370: Congress says debate closed, SC verdict bound on everyone

WANTS IMMEDIATE STATEHOOD RESTORATION, ELECTIONS IN JK

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress today said that the debate over the abrogation of Article 370 was closed after the Supreme Court today held that the article was abrogated in accordance with the constitution.

The Congress pointed out that the party was neither a petitioner nor a stakeholder in any of the petitions, which had challenged the abrogation of the Article 370, hence there was no question of it seeking any review of the judgement. The party made it categorically clear, "since accession, Jammu & Kashmir was -- and is -- an integral part of India. The people of Jammu and Kashmir are Indian citizens. We reiterate our resolve to work for the security, peace, development and progress of Jammu & Kashmir", the party added.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here today, P Chidambaram



and Dr Abhishek Manu Singhvi, both MPs Senior Spokespersons, said "the Supreme Court has held that the Article 370 was abrogated in accordance with the Constitution that is the law of the country. And all of us are bound by the law of the country. We can have opinions, but that is a law".

Dr Singhvi said, according to the Constitution, the Supreme Court's is the final word and hence the debate over the abrogation of the article is closed. He pointed out, the Congress was neither a party nor a stakeholder

in any of these petitions challenging the abrogation. "Hence the decision is final and the Congress neither has any agenda nor has the party ever said that it will seek the review of the decision", he clarified.

P Chidambaram said, while the judgement of the apex court has decided many issues, it has left open some issues that are also vitally important. "Prima facie, we respectfully disagree with the judgement on the manner in which Article 370 was abrogated. We reiterate the CWC resolution dated 06-08-2019".

Senior MPs are vocal in their demand to return to the old building as there is many fault in the new parliament building



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

The main reception gate of the new parliament building is on the just opposite side of the Rail Bhawan, some parts as before. But the mushroom-shaped reception room is not there any more, old one has been demolished. Now, in the general reception at that place is look like railway counter type. Security fence in two consecutive phases are there to enter the building. The first is a body search through a metal detector door frame, then face reading sliding door. Just Walk in, when entering the main building through the Shradul Gate, there is also a Face reading metal detector door frame. The way to go up to the second floor in the elevator to the visitors gallery.

There is also a body search through sliding doors with metal and hand detectors. As such, six times checking whereas there were three times in the old building. Even so, the security system of the parliament was so secure. In the name of new artificial intelligence (AI) systems, the number of Security Staff has decreased. 70 percent posts of Parliament Security Service which was earlier called "Watch and Ward", are vacant. The post of Joint Secretary is vacant, as he is the head of the Parliament Security Service (PSS). The 'AI' system has not started working. Senior MPs and experts are asking question again, "Why so hurry to start the session in the new parliament building without making complete?"

From Security to Convenience, Canteen to Parliamentary Political Party's office, Atrium to notice office to the meeting room to the central hall, there are many differences between the old and the new parliament building. BJP Govt. has built the Triangular new parliament building opposite the 101-year-old round house with 144 pillars 27 feet high. The old one's cost Rs 83 lakh to build whereas the new one is 971 crores. The winter session is going on there. On Wednesday, the black 13 December, two people entered the Lok Sabha by showing their thumbs to the new high tech security system and practically 'rubbed Govt.'s nose'!

LS Speaker bans visitor's pass, calls meeting of all party floor leaders



NEW DELHI: Following the massive security lapse in Lok Sabha on Wednesday, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has banned the visitor's pass and also called for an all party floor leaders meeting later in the day.

The decision was taken after a massive security breach in Lok Sabha on Wednesday afternoon, when two persons jumped from the visitor's gallery in the House causing a commotion.

The two persons also sprayed some gas. The Lok Sabha Speaker has also demanded for a detailed report on how this security breach took place on the 22nd anniversary of the 2001 Parliament attack.

Meanwhile, Delhi Police Commissioner Sanjay Arora, Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla have also reached the Parliament to access the situation.

One of the persons wearing a blue jacket was seen climbing on the tables as he ran inside the House spraying yellow gas spreading fear on the anniversary of the 2001 Parliament attack. All the galleries of the Lok Sabha had two security officials present during the proceedings. According to Delhi Police sources, both the persons who created a massive lapse from the visitor's gallery of Lok Sabha causing a massive security scare in the House have been identified as Sagar Sharma and Manoranjan.

Parliament security breach: Delhi Police register FIR under UAPA

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police have taken legal action against the individuals implicated in the breach of Parliament security, invoking UAPA and various sections of the IPC, including charges of trespassing and criminal conspiracy.

Sources indicate that the case, registered at the Parliament Street police station, involves sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 452 (trespassing), 153 (provocation with intent to cause a riot), 186 (obstructing public servants in the discharge of public functions), and 353 (assault or criminal force to deter public servants from duty) of the IPC, along with sections 16 and 18 of UAPA.

The investigation is now being handed over to the Special Cell. Among the four arrested are Manoranjan D. from Mysuru, Sagar Sharma from Luc-



know, Neelam from Haryana's Jind, and Amol Shinde from Maharashtra's Latur. The police are interrogating Vikram, also known as Vicky Sharma, and his wife, apprehended from sector 7 in Gurugram.

A search is underway to locate the sixth accused, Lalit Jha from Bihar, who is currently evading security agencies. As per initial probe, it was also revealed that

Manoranjan and Sharma had visitors' passes for 45 minutes but they stayed in the visitors' gallery for close to two hours.

The two had entered the Lok Sabha Hall from the visitors' gallery. Manoranjan, an Engineering student from Karnataka and Sharma, got his visitor's pass issued on the recommendation of Karnataka's Mysuru BJP MP, Pratap Simha.

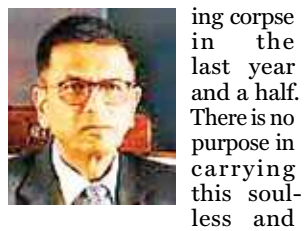
Chief Justice of India seeks reports over woman judge alleges sexual harassment by senior, says wants to die in 'dignified way'

FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

A woman judicial officer posted in Uttar Pradesh's Banda district has written a letter to Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud accusing a district judge of sexual harassment and seeking his permission to end her life in a "dignified way", prompting the CJI to call for a report from the Allahabad High Court administration on the status of inquiry.

The woman judicial officer, in her two-page letter, sought the CJI's permission to end her life following the abuse and harassment she had faced in her career during her posting in Barabanki.

"I have no will to live anymore. I have been rendered to a walk-



ing corpse in the last year and a half. There is no purpose in carrying this soulless body around anymore. There is no purpose left in my life. Kindly permit me to end my life in a dignified way," the letter, which went viral on social media, said. According to apex court sources, the Supreme Court's secretary general, under orders from the CJI, has asked the registrar general of the Allahabad high court about the status of the proceedings before the internal complaints committee (ICC) that is dealing with the complaint of the judicial officer.

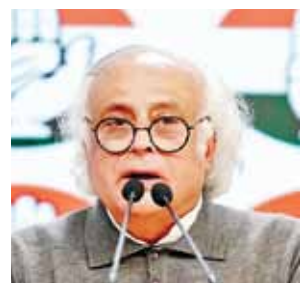
Dec 13 security lapse in Parliament: Cong firm on Home Minister's statement in both houses

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress today expressed its firm resolve seeking a statement of the union Home Minister Amit Shah in both the houses of the parliament over the serious security lapse that took place in the Lok Sabha on December 13. It said, without his statement it did not see any possibility of the two houses functioning.

The party also accused Amit Shah of contempt of parliament by speaking at a television channel on the subject when the house was in session.

Addressing a press conference here today, AICC general secretary in charge of the Communications Department, Jairam Ramesh pointed out, while the government was trying to brush aside the incident on the first day as a small and minor one, later it invoked the stringent UAPA charges against the ac-



cusced. Without going into the merits whether UAPA should have been invoked or not, he observed, the very fact that such a stringent act has been invoked makes it incumbent upon the Home Minister to make a statement in both the houses of the parliament as the matter is very serious.

Jairam Ramesh said, this is the collective stand of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) partners that the Home Minister should come to both the houses of the parlia-

ment make a statement and take questions on the issue.

The Congress general secretary pointed out, only yesterday the Home Minister gave a detailed interview to a television channel. He said, if he can speak at length on television on the matter, why he cannot speak in the parliament when the house is in session. He observed that this is the contempt of the parliament and the parliamentary traditions that the minister spoke on such a pressing issue when the house is very much in session.

Taking a dig at the Home Minister, Ramesh said, otherwise, the Home Minister can mostly be seen in the house but this time he probably did not find any excuse to blame Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru for the incident. Taunting the Home Minister for trying to blame everything on Nehru, he remarked, he was sure if Mr Shah could establish a link between Nehru and

those involved in the incident, he would be definitely making a statement in the parliament.

The Congress general secretary reiterated that his party as well as the INDIA partners did not have any intention to wash out the parliament. He said their demand was simple that the Home Minister should come to both houses of the parliament, make a statement and take questions as to how this security breach of such magnitude could take place. He said the Home Minister must also speak about the role of the BJP MP from Mysuru as to why he facilitated the entry of the accused into the parliament. Expressing hope that the Home Minister will make a statement on Monday, when the house meets next, he pointed out, these are practically the last four working days of the current Lok Sabha as the next session will be quite a brief one ahead of the General Elections.

Delhi airport likely to install full body scanners by May 2024: BCAS

FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Full body scanners are expected to be installed at the Delhi airport by May 2024, a senior official said on Friday.

Besides, Computed Tomography X-ray (CTX) machines whereby passengers will not be required to remove electronic items from their hand baggage during the security check are also anticipated to be installed by May next year. The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) Director General Zulfikar Hasan on Friday said the deadline for installing the full body scanners and CTX machines at certain airports is being extended. The deadline for installing the full body scanners at airports with more than 10 million annual passenger traffic is December 31. The last date for installation of



CTX machines at airports with more than 5 million passengers is also the same. At a briefing in the national capital, Hasan said there have been some provisioning issues and BCAS is in discussions with airport operators on the installation of the scanners. "We expect the full body scanners and X-ray machines to come

in May...", he said and added that both are expected to be installed at the Delhi airport by May next year.

The Delhi airport is the country's largest airport and passenger traffic is expected to cross 70 million in the current fiscal ending March 2024.

Once CTX (Computer To-

mography X-ray) scanners are in place, passengers will not have to remove their electronic gadgets from baggage during security checks at airports.

BCAS will be deploying the full body scanners in a phased manner. Last year, BCAS recommended installation of scanners based on computer tomography technology at airports whereby passengers will not be required to take out electronic devices from their hand baggage before going through the scanner.

At present, passengers have to remove and keep electronic items in a separate tray during security check at airports.

The scanners used at airports provide a two-dimensional view of the objects inside hand baggage. Installation of such scanners is also expected to help in speeding up the security check-in process at airports.

Delhi government "Mohalla bus service" likely to launch soon

FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The Delhi government's 'mohalla' bus service could be rolled out in January next year with the delivery of the first lot of buses after necessary approvals, Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot said on Thursday.

The 'mohalla' bus service, announced in the 2023-24 Delhi budget, aims to deploy shorter nine-metre electric buses to boost last-mile connectivity in crowded areas and those with narrow roads.

These buses have been specially designed to cater to such areas. "The delivery of the nine-metre buses is likely to start from next month and we are waiting



for that. Except for one company that had supplied such buses to the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, no company has such buses ready.

"Before they are supplied, a prototype is made and the certifying agencies assess its roadworthiness. After the roadworthiness

is certified, they (buses) are given to the Transport Department and it carries out an inspection. Then the trial happens," Gahlot said at a press conference. "We held a meeting with the OEM and we are confident of getting the first lot of buses by January. Once we

get them, we will flag them off and dedicate them to the people of Delhi," he added. According to officials, certain areas like outer Delhi, Sangam Vihar, Deoli, Chhatarpur, Vasant Kunj, Dwarka, Rohini and Najafgarh have been identified for deployment of these buses as they do not have proper connectivity to bus stops and metro stations.

The Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal-led government plans to procure more than 2,000 feeder buses to operate on routes that cannot be accessed by 12-metre buses. A technical committee was constituted by the transport minister in May to decide routes and operational characteristics of the new bus service.

DJB fund crunch row: Minister Atishi alleges finance secretary causing delay by persistently raising new queries

FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Despite adherence to the prescribed payment schedule and timely submission of utilisation certificates, the finance secretary has persistently raised new queries, impeding the release of much-needed funds for the Delhi Jal Board, Water Minister Atishi has said.

Atishi said this in an affidavit filed in the Delhi High Court on Monday in response to a personal affidavit filed by Finance Secretary Ashish Chandra Verma in connection with a case related to the delay in release of funds for the DJB by the officer.

While the first instalment of grant-in-aid/loan was released in May, the second instalment of Rs 2,031 crore was due in



October, the minister said. "Despite adherence to the prescribed payment schedule and timely submission of utilisation certificates and requisite details by the DJB on September 12, the Principal Secretary (Finance), Finance and Planning Department, has persistently

raised new and varied queries, impeding the release of the much-needed funds," she said. "I have repeatedly asked for the officers responsible for the alleged mismanagement to be identified and for recommendations for disciplinary action, to no avail. Neither have names

been forwarded, nor has any action been initiated," she added.

In his affidavit submitted on December 9, Finance Secretary Verma had said that the proposals forwarded by the DJB for release of grant-in-aid "lack mandatory information and documents".

"From time to time, instructions are issued to the administrative department with regard to the procedure to be followed for release of GIA/Loan. However, it has been observed that in spite of repeated instructions, the proposals forwarded for release of GIA lack the mandatory information/documents, as a result the proposals are delayed," he said.

"Our department has repeatedly informed, both verbally, and in writing, regarding the se-

rious issues related to utilisation of the huge loan and grant being given to DJB in each financial year," he added.

Verma said the DJB has "not been preparing any annual action plan" and has been creating "committed liabilities to be paid by the Government of NCT of Delhi" without seeking its approval.

He further charged that "huge government funds are being spent by the DJB" for repair and maintenance.

"Splitting/duplication of works is happening as a norm under one pretext or other. Draft CAG Audit report indicates huge instances of misappropriation for which no action has been taken by DJB," he said.

The court will hear the matter next on December 19.

Delhi colder than 'Queen of Hills' Shimla, Dharamsala



NEW DELHI: The national capital Delhi was on Friday colder by at least two notches than the 'Queen of Hills' Shimla and Dharamsala, both the preferred hill destinations in Himachal Pradesh.

Likewise, many places in the plains of north India were colder than the hilly tourist destinations, the Met Office in Shimla said.

Delhi recorded a minimum temperature at 4.9 degrees Celsius, while Shimla -- located around 7,000 feet above sea level -- saw a low of 6.8 degrees, a rise of 1.8 degrees from Thursday; Dharamsala 8.2 degrees Celsius; and Dalhousie 6.8 degrees. Punjab's Amritsar and Ludhiana and Haryana's Hisar and Karnal recorded a low of 8 degrees, 11.8, 6.2 and 7.4 degrees Celsius, respectively. Chandigarh, the joint capital

of Punjab and Haryana, saw a low of 9.1 degrees. An official at Shimla's Meteorological Office told to media that Shimla and Dharamsala saw high night temperatures compared to the plains. "This is a natural phenomenon and occurs mainly due to settling of the inversion layer on mountain tops," he said. Generally, the air becomes cooler as elevation increases. The day temperature in most of the plains is abnormally high compared to Shimla. The warm air lifted from the plains overland the existing cold air in the mountains.

He said since Shimla and Dharamsala were near the plains, the impact of the inversion layer was more there. At 3.5 degrees below the freezing point, Sumdoh in Lahaul-Spiti district was the coldest in Himachal Pradesh.

ED searches over a dozen locations in Parabolic Drugs money laundering case



NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday is carrying out searches at over a dozen locations in Punjab and Delhi in connection with Rs 1,626 crore Parabolic Drugs money laundering case.

According to ED sources, the searches began on Friday morning in connection to the case involving Pranav Gupta and Vineet Gupta's company aParabolic Drugs Pharma Ltd. Senior officials have however, remained tightlipped on the issue.

The Guptas were also the co-founders at the Ashoka University and had last year stepped down.

The ED case is based on a CBI FIR against the Chandigarh-based Parabolic Drugs for allegedly defrauding a consortium led by the Central Bank of India (CBI) of Rs 1,626.74 crore.

Delhi government releases Rs 535 crore to jal board amid tussle over funds

FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Amid a tussle over release of funds, the Delhi government's finance department has released Rs 535 crore to the Delhi Jal Board for nearly 70 projects of the agency, officials said on Thursday.

Delhi Water Minister Atishi last month claimed that the national capital was staring at a «man-made water crisis» due to the stoppage of funds to the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) by the finance department and demanded Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena's immediate intervention.

"«The file for release of funds came on December 7 and the funds were sanctioned on December 9. These are from the second instalment of funds that are supposed to be released to the DJB," said a government official.

Earlier this month, DJB vice-chairman Somnath Bharti had said all maintenance and developmental works have «come to a standstill» due to the delay in disbursement of funds from the finance secretary.

"«We have to release a total of Rs 2,200 crore to the Delhi Jal Board and out of that Rs 535 crore has been released. The finance department had informed the Delhi High Court about the release of funds on December 11," he added.

The government official said that there are about 70 projects for which these funds have been released.

"«These 70 projects have been geotagged and all their details were furnished to us. These include providing the DJB tankers for water supply and laying of sewer lines. All these projects have a budget of five crore or above," he added.

Parliament security breach: Accused worked in IT cell for BJP MP, seize his office-Karnataka Congress

MYSURU: The Karnataka Congress has alleged that the arrested individual in the Parliament security breach case had previously worked in the IT cell for BJP MP Pratap Simha. The Congress has also demanded the seizure of the BJP MP's office.

Congress spokesperson M Laxman stated on Thursday that Manoranjan, who jumped into the main hall from the visitors' gallery was very close to BJP Mysuru-Kodagu MP Pratap Simha and had held meetings with him in Mysuru, Madikeri and New Delhi.

"We don't know when these meetings occurred. His office should be seized. This is an issue concerning national secu-



urity. If they request documents and proofs, we are ready to provide them. Our statements are based on evidence. What we are asserting is very close

to the truth," Laxman said.

Meanwhile, BJP MPs, ministers, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have not

reacted to the Parliament security breach incident.

Pratap Simha has also remained silent and even 24 hours after the incident he has not tweeted or given a statement on the accused in the security breach having got their pass for the visitors' gallery from him.

"Why is MP Pratap Simha silent on the issue? He usually reacts to small incidents before the media, and in this case, his silence is causing suspicion. If a Muslim had been involved or if the pass was issued by a Congress party leader, the entire country would be up in arms. How did they manage to breach four layers of security? This seems to be a premeditated act," Laxman said.

1103 criminals arrested in 653 FIRs in raids by 1309 teams comprising of 7049 policemen under 'Operation Aakraman' in Haryana

SATISH HANDA

According to Shatrughit Kapoor, Director General Police Haryana, under 'Operation Aakraman' campaign launched in the state against hard core criminals, drug and liquor smugglers and anti-social elements in the state as many as 1309 police teams comprising of 7049 policemen have been successful in arresting 1103 persons against whom 653 cases have been registered against under various

sections of IPC including NDPS, Excise and Arms Act. DGP Kapoor said that the campaign against such anti-social elements would continue till the state becomes completely crime free. He said that as many as five similar campaigns have been conducted in Haryana state in past years also and this was the sixth campaign launched in the state led

by SPs and DSPs in each team that provided satisfactory result.

While talking to media persons DGP Kapoor disclosed that during recent raids police was able to seize 57 arms, 62 cartridges, and two magazines, 4 kg 528 gm ganja, 31.99 gm heroine, over 22 kg doda post, 1415 kg opium, over 53 gm smack, 1.38 gm charas, 2030 intoxicated tablets, capsules and injections, a stolen motorcycle and Rs 65,200 currency notes from arrested accused.

Bhajan Lal Sharma to take oath as Raj CM on his birthday

NEW DELHI: Bhajan Lal Sharma, a first-time MLA, will be sworn in as the Rajasthan Chief Minister on Friday, which is also his birthday.

He will take oath along with two Deputy Chief Ministers -- Diya Kumari and Premchand Bairwa. Governor Kalraj Mishra will administer the oath of office and secrecy to all three at around 12.15 p.m.

The rest of the ministers will be appointed after getting a green signal from the party's central leadership. December 15 is also the birthday of Sharma. His family celebrated his birthday at the guest house of Chambal Power House, his temporary base.

Nominated Deputy CM Premchand Bairwa visited Moti Durgah Ganesh Temple before the oath-taking ceremony. The swearing-in ceremony



will be held outside Albert Hall (Ram Niwas Bagh) grand.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and party chief J.P. Nadda will participate in the ceremony.

Along with this, 16 Union Ministers and 17 CMs and Deputy CMs will also participate in the ceremony.

Jan Aushadhi Kendras scheme to help patients in Haryana became sick

SATISH HANDA

Medicines for the treatment of gastric disorders, Blood Pressure, diabetes, cardiovascular ailments and pain management with sales rising about 170 since past sometime were started sold through Jan Aushadhi Kendra all over in Haryana state as a result citizens saved about Rs 20,000 crore in past nine years. The Jan Aushadhi Kendras selling generic drugs at affordable prices have seen their sales rise more than 170 times in last nine years, but the government has no intention of making them available online in the near future. There were three stores opened inside the hospitals in three districts and 86 stores in private sector, of these as many as 58 stores have been closed down in the absence of proper infrastructure



CEO of the Pharmaceuticals and Medical Devices Bureau of India Dhadhich said that generic medicines to treat such medical disorders gasketric issues, diabetes, cardiovascular ailments and pain have seen the highest sale at these Jan Aushadhi Kendras under the Pradhan Mantri Bharatiya Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana scheme. The drugs sold at these Kendras are 50% to 90% cheaper

in prices than their branded counterparts available at the medical stores. He said, there are plans to increase the number of drugs and surgical equipments available at these Kendras in the near future and currently the country has 9484 Jan Aushadhi Kendras and there is a proposal to increased to 10,000 with the product basket of about 1800 drugs and 285 surgical items.

52 vehicles involved in illegal mining seized in 11 Haryana districts

SATISH HANDA

Teams of the State Enforcement Bureau Chandigarh along with police during raids in 11 districts seized as many as 52 vehicles involved in illegal mining, most of these were caught during night in a campaign to stop illegal mining in Haryana. The teams conducted raids in 11 districts in which checked 358 vehicles, of these a total number of 52 vehicles were seized which were being used in illegal mining activities. Haryana Home Minister Anil Vij said that in view of increasing cases of illegal mining in the state causing heavy financial loss to government a strict campaign has been launched across the state.

According to information, recently formed Haryana State Enforcement Bureau collecting intelligence on illegal mining operations across the state by



a total of 51 teams including 480 police personnel of all ranks had conducted the raids from 11 pm on Monday night till Tuesday morning by setting up 30 posts and 66 mobile parties in eleven districts in the state at Panchkula, Ambala, Yamunanagar, Karnal, Panipat, Sonapat, Faridabad and Palwal for sand mining and Nuh, Bhiwani and Charkhi Dadri for stone mining. The Home Minister Anil Vij has issued instructions to the Haryana State Enforcement Bureau to intensify the campaign against illegal mining and illicit liquor in the state with more vigor and effectiveness.

Congress demands joint committee of Parliament to probe LS security breach

NEW DELHI: Senior Congress leader Manish Tewari on Thursday demanded a joint committee of Parliament consisting of members with experience in policing, security and Law to investigate the December 13 security breach, and also cited the January 6, 2021 Capitol Hill security breach which was independently probed by a Select Committee of the US Congress.

In a post on X, Tewari said, "A Joint Committee of Parliament consisting of Members who have prior experience in policing, security and Law must be set up to Concurrently investigate the occurrences of December 13, 2023."

Tewari, a Lok Sabha MP from Punjab's Anandpur Sahib and a former Union minister said, "While a simultaneous Police Investigation can play itself out and a parallel security audit by concerned agencies can unfold this Supreme Temple of Indian Democracy can not allow an incident like what happened on December 13, 2023 to repeat itself.

Reminding of the December 13, 2001 Parliament attack by



terrorists, he said, "While December 13, 2001 and December 13, 2023 are not comparable but what could have happened in both cases has portentous consequences. That a security breach occurred again and the perpetrators could make it to the floor of the Lok Sabha should make all members pause and reflect on what could have happened....."

"Just as a Select Committee of the US Congress independently investigated the January 6, 2021 Capitol Hill security breach similarly the Parliament of India must enquire into the entire incident independently and make appropriate recommendations to ensure that security and safety of Members and the Staff of Parliament is maintained at the

highest level possible," he said. "Both houses must rise above partisan divides and not allow the implications of what could have happened yesterday be lost in a he said - she said finger pointing," Tewari added. His remarks came a day after two people jumped from visitors gallery in the Lok Sabha during the Zero Hour proceedings. The two also sprayed yellow colour smoke in the House before they were overpowered and caught by the MPs and handed over to security officials.

The Union Ministry of Home Affairs on Wednesday also ordered an inquiry of the Parliament security breach under Director General CRPF Anish Dayal Singh with members from other security agencies and experts.

In a series of posts, the MHA said, "On request from Lok Sabha Secretariat, MHA has ordered an Enquiry of parliament security breach incident. An Enquiry Committee has been set up under Anish Dayal Singh, DG, CRPF, with members from other security agencies and experts."

15 days ultimatum to Haryana government by doctors for complete shutdown of health services



SATISH HANDA

After two hours pen down strike by the doctors in few government hospitals, Dr Rajesh Khyalia president of Haryana Civil Medical Services Association (HCMSA) has given ultimatum to the state government in support of their nearly half dozen demands for observing a complete shutdown of all health services including OPD and emergency services for an indefinite period in all hospitals in the state with effect from December 29, 2023 onwards if their long pending demands are not fulfilled prior to this date. According to Association members, the government doctors across the state would be forced to do a complete shutdown of outpatient depart-

ments and emergency services from December 27 if the state government did not consider their demands.

The demands include bond amount for postgraduate courses be withdrawn, fulfill the shortage of specialist doctors in government hospitals, and stopping direct recruitments of senior medical officers, Assured Career Profession (ACP) benefits to the doctors not given in Haryana state on completion of four, nine, thirteen and twenty years to be offered by the government in centre and Bihar state, to fulfill shortage of doctors and the medicines in government hospitals, over burden of work to the doctors when many times they are compelled to give double duty during a day.

Live-In Relationship is a disease for the society need a law against it: Chaudhary Dharmbir MP

SATISH HANDA

Controversy has started over fast increasing cases of male and a females living together for a long time without getting married in live in relationship. However, according to few people this is a personal matter of their fundamental rights living both together as per their desire, while majority of others feel the same linked to the deterioration of the social as well as the moral values of culture in the country. Such type of relationships without marriage are called live-in relationships and as such there is no law made in the country to ban these relationships so far. The incidents of such type of relationship among married and unmarried couples has witnessed fast rise in the country since past some time.

Recently, a BJP Member Parliament from Bhiwani-Mahendragarh in Haryana state, Chaudhary Dharmbir Singh raised a question over it in the Lok Sabha and demanded the strict law against live-in relationships in the country causing break in the relation-



ship of several married couples and should be treated as illegal and the violators should be severely punished as per law. The present scenario reveals that there have been many such observations of the Supreme Court and the High Court, in which live-in relationships were not considered wrong.

BJP MP Dharmbir Singh, in the Lok Sabha described live-in relationships as extremely dangerous for the Indian society. He said that the area represented by him in the Lok Sabha is a pure Jat-Ahriwal belt where honor killings of turban are common not only in this area, but also in the entire Haryana state where couples doing love affairs or live

in relationship most of the times had to face adverse decisions of the society in the form of death. He said, love marriages should be allowed only with the consent of the parents. Khap Panchayats have become aware and strongly opposed such evil practices of love marriage and live-in relationships in order to save Indian culture in the society. MP Dharmbir said that the whole world admires our culture and unity in diversity and there has been a tradition of arranged marriages in Indian society for centuries, even today a large section of people (identified over 85%) in the country prefer marriages arranged by their parents or common family members.

Prez Murmu, PM Modi, Kharge, Sonia pay tributes to 2001 Parliament attack victims

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and CPP chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday paid tributes to the security personnel who died during the 2001 Parliament attack.

The Prime Minister, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar, Lok Sabha chairman Om Birla, Kharge, Sonia Gandhi, Leader of Congress in the Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien paid floral tributes in the Parliament premises to the fallen security personnel.

President Droupadi Murmu in a post on X, said, "On this day, 22 years ago, the nefarious plan of terrorists to eliminate the top line of political leader-



ship of the country and damage our Temple of Democracy was foiled by the brave security personnel, including the nine who laid down their lives for the motherland. The nation will forever remain in their debt. Their sacrifice will not be allowed to go in vain as we reiterate today our pledge to wipe out terrorism - a threat to

humankind everywhere - in all its forms and manifestations." PM Modi in a post on X said, "Today, we remember



and pay heartfelt tributes to the brave security personnel martyred in the Parliament attack in 2001. Their courage and sacrifice in the face of danger will forever be etched in our nation's memory."

Kharge also in a post on X said, "We remember the brave personnel who made the supreme sacrifice while the Parliament was attacked on this day in 2001." "We bow to their indomitable courage and are forever indebted to them. Our thoughts remain with their families. India stands united against terrorism," he added. Terrorists of the Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed outfits attacked the Parliament complex on December 13, 2001, killing nine people. All five terrorists were gunned down by the security forces.

Quiz-Master, Trinamool Congress's spokesperson Derek O'Brien suspended from Rajya Sabha for the remaining winter session



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

Quiz Master & Spokesperson of Trinamool Congress, Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien has been suspended from the remaining part of the winter session. This action has been taken against him due to his 'condemnable behaviour' in Rajya Sabha. According to the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, "Derek O'Brien had entered the well of the House and raised slogans there and disrupted the proceedings of the House."

On Wednesday, there was high drama in both houses of parliament on Thursday, December 14, a day after there was a security breach in the Lok Sabha. Opposition parties were asking questions in the House regarding the major lapse in security of the Lok Sabha. Seeing the increasing noise and commotion, the proceedings of the House were adjourned. Other opposition parties including Congress were asking questions as to how there was such a huge negligence in the security of the House. INDIA Alliance demands that Home Minister Amit Shah will answer this question in both the houses.

It is noteworthy that there was a major lapse in the security of Parliament on Wednesday, the black 13 December. In 2001, on the anniversary of the Parliament attack, two people jumped into the floor of the House from the visitor's gallery in the Lok Sabha.

These people carried smoke stick cannister, sprayed yellow gas and raised slogans. Zero hour was going on when this incident happened inside the House. In the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, opposition members demanded a short-term discussion on the security breach the day before. The Chairman of the Rajya Sabha Jagdeep Dhankhar informed the house that he had received 26 notices demanding suspension of business to discuss the security breach but said that he did not find merit in the notices and he rejected all. Both houses were adjourned within an hour of proceedings starting.

When the Rajya Sabha resumed proceedings at noon, a motion was moved by the leader of the house and BJP MP Piyush Goyal against Derek O'Brien. Chairman Dhankhar accused TMC MP O'Brien of "gross misconduct" and "gross defiance of the directions of the chair".

Parliament smoke attack case: Hang my son if he has done any 'injustice', says father of accused Manoranjan Bengaluru - The father of Manoranjan, who was arrested following his smoke canister attack in the Lok Sabha while the proceedings were underway on Wednesday, said that his son should be hanged if he is done any "injustice".

Devaraje Gowda said that he condemned the incident. "If he has done any injustice to the society, he is not my son at all. If he is guilty, let him be hanged. We are not connected to any political party," he said in Mysuru.

"Manoranjan had completed his BE degree and was moving to Bengaluru and New Delhi. Former PM H.D. Deve Gowda had helped my son to get a seat in the engineering college," Devaraje Gowda stated.

Meanwhile, a police team headed by the ACP rank officer has reached the residence of Manoranjan in Vijayanagar locality of Mysuru and is collecting information about him.

Mysuru-Kodagu MP Pratap Simha, from whose office the passes were issued to the accused youth, said that they had sought them to watch the proceedings.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, at the assembly session in Belagavi Suvarna Soudha, condemned the development and termed it is a serious security lapse. The issue resulted in heated arguments between the Congress and the BJP.

Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, IT and BT Minister Priyank Kharge attacked the BJP, asking what would have happened in case the pass would have been issued by the Congress MP?

"Don't the Members of Parliament have responsibility while issuing passes? Would BJP leaders be quiet? They would have branded us with the label of anti-national."

PM Modi, Mallikarjun Kharge greet Sharad Pawar on his 83rd b'day



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Tuesday greeted Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) founder Sharad Pawar on his birthday. PM Modi took to X, and said, "My best wishes to Sharad Pawar Ji on his birthday. May he be blessed with a long and healthy life." Kharge in a post on X in Marathi said, "Happy Birthday to Nationalist Congress Party President, former union minister, Sharad Pawar Ji. I wish him good health and long life." Pawar, 83, has served as a chief minister of Maharashtra and Union minister.

Centre's 'Unrealistic' demands' killing gaming sector: Priyank Kharge

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Karnataka Minister for IT & BT, Priyank Kharge, while flaying the Centre's "Unrealistic demands", sought legitimacy for the gaming industry in the country, saying it could result in a windfall in investments. Kharge comment came after state government passed a bill hiking goods and services tax (GST) on the gaming industry to 28% at the winter session in Belgavi, a move which merely endorsed a levy by the Centre.

Priyank Kharge, Qoting studies on the Indian gaming industry, in a series of comments on X, SAID BETWEEN 2020-2023 (during pandemic), the online gaming sector in India registered a 28% growth. He said the



country has a staggering 42.5 crore gamers. He said, "with a market size of 16,428 crore in 2023, Industry estimates suggest it will reach 33,243 crore in a couple of years. The sector directly and indirectly employs around one lakh individuals, with the prospect of expanding to 2,50,000 job opportunities by 2025", he added.

Lambast the Centre priyank said, "Gaming companies want to be regulated, but the central government is being unrealistic and unreasonable with their demands, which is not only killing employment in

the sector, but is also driving away gamers to Chinese and European gaming sines where they are being duped.

He said, country has as many as 1,400 online gaming start-ups and reports suggest 430 crore downloads of gaming apps were recorded in 2023 alone. "In gaming purchases and deposits contributed Rs 8,370 crore through UPI transactions and the online real money gaming segment enterprise has a valuation of Rs 1,60,000 crore. The estimated corporate tax and TDS contribution to the exchequer by the real money gaming sector between FY24-28 will be Rs 6,500 -6800 cr, with GST contribution to the exchequer between FY24-28 could be around Rs 76,000 cr." He added.

Congress flags allegations against MP CM-designate Mohan Yadav, questions 'Modi's guarantee'

NEW DELHI: A day after the BJP announced Mohan Yadav as the Madhya Pradesh chief minister designate, Congress on Tuesday took a dig at the saffron party, saying there are many serious allegations against him, including large-scale manipulation in the Ujjain masterplan and asked if this was the Prime Minister 'Narendra Modi's guarantee' for the state.

In a post on X, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "Eight days after the election results, the BJP elected the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, a person against whom there are many serious allegations including large-scale manipulation in the Ujjain masterplan."

He said, "Out of the 872 acres of land reserved for Simhastha, the land was alienated by changing the land use. Many of his videos are also viral on social media in which he is seen abusing,



Is this 'Modi's guarantee' for Madhya Pradesh?" Ramesh took a swipe at the Prime Minister over his statement of 'Modi ki Guarantee'. Ramesh also attached a news clipping to back his claims.

The Madhya Pradesh unit of the BJP made Mohan Yadav the next Chief Minister of the state on Monday.

The decision came after the party's legislative meeting in the state capital.

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Bhim Army chief slams Mayawati for practising nepotism



NEW DELHI: Bhim Army chief Chandra Shekhar, who is seen as a potential contender to don the mantle of a Dalit leader, has slammed Mayawati's decision to name Akash Anand as her political heir.

Reminding the BSP chief of her earlier statement of keeping relatives, brothers and sisters away from politics, Chandra Shekhar, in a series of posts on X, said, "Bhim Rao Ambedkar had said, 'Earlier, the king was born from the queen's womb, but now I have made arrangements that the king will no longer be born from the queen's womb, but from the ballot box.'"

Chandra Shekhar stated,

Party chief Mayawati has entrusted upon me the responsibility of carrying forward the ideology of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram, for the development of Dalits"

"Speaking in a public meeting, Mayawati had said that when

Kashi Ram laid the foundation of this party on April 14 1984, he had decided to keep family and relatives away from politics to do something in politics selflessly. I will also keep my family away from politics and now she has forgotten her own commitment to the people." Meanwhile, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) national coordinator Akash Anand has called upon party workers and supporters to gear up to fight for social justice. Party chief Mayawati had named him her political successor at a national level meeting held at the state unit office on Sunday.

"Party chief Mayawati has entrusted upon me the responsibility of carrying forward the ideology of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram, for the development of Dalits - the exploited and deprived society in the country...I will undertake the responsibility with full devotion and honesty," Anand said in a post on social media platform X.

The Bahujan Samaj Party is a mission, and we have to take it to every corner of the country. I express my heartfelt gratitude to all workers and supporters. The support of all young friends is very important in this journey.

MP Raghav Chadha staunchly opposed bill of appointment of Chief Election Commissioner in Rajya Sabha



NEW DELHI: Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha vehemently opposed the controversial bill related to the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners in parliament on Tuesday. The AAP Rajya Sabha MP stated that the BJP wants to control the Election Commission by introducing this bill. If passed, it will bring the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner along with two additional Election Commissioners completely under the control of the central government, enabling them to choose anyone they wish. MP Raghav Chadha emphasized the importance of a non-partisan Election Commission in the country's democracy. The Election Commission determines when and where elections will take place in the country, the maintenance of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), and where they will be deployed. He mentioned that this bill is not only disrespectful to the Supreme Court but also to Lal Krishna Advani, a founding member of the BJP. L.K Advani had advocated for the formation of a 5-member committee in the Chief Election Commissioner's selection committee, comprising the Prime Minister, opposition leader, Law Minister, and leaders from both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. My demand is that the government should withdraw this bill.

AAP's Rajya Sabha MP from Punjab, Raghav Chadha staunchly opposed the highly contentious bill related to the appointment of Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners. The Rajya Sabha MP of the AAP ques-

tioned the BJP, asking if the BJP wants to end non-partisan elections in the country. Does the BJP's government not understand the importance of democracy? Does the BJP not value constitutional institutions? Does the BJP want to make a puppet of every constitutional institution? Does the BJP not respect the decisions of the Supreme Court or understand its importance? These are some questions emerging after reading this bill because this government wants to completely bring the Election Commission of India (ECI) under its control through this bill. They want complete dominance over it. The selection and appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two additional Election Commissioners (ECs) out of the 3 members of the Election Commission will fall into the hands of the government, allowing them to appoint anyone as the Election Commissioner as they desire.

MP Raghav Chadha mentioned, "The Election Commission plays an important role in our country's elections. The Election Commission decides whose vote will count, the date and number of phases for elections. The Election Commission determines the management, control, coordination, and usage of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). This Election Commission is a crucial institution for conducting impartial elections in this country. This bill is going to destroy one of the few remaining independent institutions in India i.e. the Election Commission, and thereby dislodge free and fair elections from India."

J&K L-G rubbishes house arrest claim of Mehbooba Mufti



J&K Lt. Governor Manoj Sinha on Monday rubbished claims of former Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti that she has been put under house arrest. Sinha released a video statement in which he said that nobody has been put under house arrest in J&K.

The Lt Governor called Mehbooba's claim of having been put under house as 'spreading rumour'. Earlier, the PDP had said on its official social media page that Mehbooba Mufti had been put under house arrest on the eve of the historic verdict on Article 370 by the 5-judge constitutional bench of the Supreme Court.

Income Tax Raids trigger political slugfest

ARABIND MOHAPATRA
Bhubaneswar

Seizure of unbelievably huge amounts of cash by the IT officials following raids against the liquor business being run by the family of Congress Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand Dhiraj Sahu has triggered a political earthquake in the state. Though Sahu is an MP from neighbouring Jharkhand the main concentration of his family's liquor business is in Odisha, especially the western part of the state where Mahua-based country liquor is extremely popular.

The IT officials, who began searches on December 6, are said to have recovered around Rs.350 crore in cash, following raids at several locations in Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal. These are states where the Sahu family has been running its liquor business successfully. The raids lasted around six days with the biggest cash recoveries being made from Bolangir, Sambalpur, Sundergarh and

Bhubaneswar in Odisha where the Sahu family dominates the country liquor trade.

This is being described as the biggest cash recovery in the history of the IT department in a single operation. So huge was the recovery that it took nearly 50 bank officials assisted by 40 counting machines to count the seized cash. Sahu family run BDPL group is said to have a virtual monopoly of country liquor manufacturing and marketing business in Odisha with control over 250 country liquor units in the western parts of the state where mahua-based liquor is quite popular.

Sources said that raids against the group began on December 6 on the suspicion of tax evasion but the cash recovery was mind-boggling. Though the IT department is yet to come out with a detailed official statement sources said the raids commenced after suspicion was allegedly aroused by the group's inconsistent and low net profits. Major cash recoveries



were made from Sudapada area of Balangir town. Recoveries were also made from Sambalpur and Sundergarh, among others. Some of the seized currency notes were covered with mildew as they had obviously been stored for a long time. Several bundles of Rs. 500 denomination notes were found torn in the middle and dumped near the boundary wall of Boudh Distillery Private Limited.

The recovery had triggered the political blame game. While the Congress, which has refused



to defend Sahu, wants a fair probe into the issue the BJP alleges that Congress and the Naveen Patnaik-led Biju Janata Dal (BJD) are hands in glove and the seized money would have helped the regional party in the elections.

A senior BJP leader went to the extent of saying that the bulk of the recovered cash was deliberately hidden in a backward district like Bolangir to avoid arousing suspicion. The cash would have been used by the BJD which was planning

early elections in the state. The charge, though, has been trashed by the BJD which describes it as the figment of BJP's imagination.

While the BJD has demanded a thorough probe into the issue the Congress insists that the probe has to be impartial to bring out the whole truth. The party has no faith in agencies like ED, CBI or even the income tax department for they all are run by the state government.

Sources said Sahu family, which has been in liquor business for a long time, owns the BDPL group which consists of four companies including Boudh Distillery Private Limited which is based in western Odisha's Boudh district and Baldeo Sahu Infra Private Limited which is based in Bolangir. The business is said to have been established by late Rai Saheb Baldeo Sahu, father of Dhiraj Sahu. Today the group has country liquor and IMFL shops all over Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal.



BINOY VISWAM EXPLAINS WHY THE GOVT MUST DISCUSS CLEAN AIR FIGHT IN PARLIAMENT'S WINTER SESSION

No more hot air about air pollution



negligence of the government, the programme has ended up being a non-starter. When the G-20 was hosted by India with fanfare, the Modi government boasted that India, the 'Vishwaguru', was ahead in every developmental yardstick. But the reality is evident to all: the pathetic living conditions of our people. The adapted safety standards of the World Health Organization have said that the annual average concentrations of PM2.5 should not exceed and

dioxide emissions from an ever-growing number of vehicles (over 3.38 million private cars in 2021 in Delhi) cannot be ignored. Yet, discussions on air pollution by the government and the political forces behind it always revolve around stubble burning and 'irresponsible' farmers.

This greed of the capital along with its market-controlled path of development at the expense of people, brings to memory what Karl Marx wrote in the first chapter of the Communist Manifesto in 1848. He characterised the bourgeois government as the "executive committee for managing the general affairs of the capitalists". That statement remains true in the era of LPG, i.e., Liberalisation, Privatisation, and Globalisation.

Practices worth examining

The existing and alarming situation of air pollution in the country warrants an urgent proactive plan on the part of the government to protect life expectancy. The government should understand that people and their lives are of paramount importance; not the profits of the government cronies. If the government is serious, it should find the time to discuss in the winter session of Parliament the severe crisis caused by the frightening rate of air pollution. There are various worthy practices worth emulating such as "wind path forests" in different countries and India's own concept of "Social Forestry". This is the time to act, and to give hope to the people. The Prime Minister should convene an all-party meeting urgently to set the ground for India's fight for ensuring safe air and environment.

Binoy Viswam, a Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament, is a member of the CPI National Secretariat. He has been nominated as Secretary of the CPI's State Committee. Views are personal.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his colleagues in the Bharatiya Janata Party must have forgotten what they have said about the menace of air pollution in their manifesto for the 2014 elections. To brush up their memory, here is a quote from page 36 of the said manifesto: "The present generation has to make this world a better place to live. A better place not only for us, but for our future generations as well. We have to nurture the environment, institutions, people, resources and amenities... We will take Climate Change mitigation initiatives with all seriousness and work with the global community and institutions in this regard. We will: (do) Ecological Audit of projects and pollution indexing of cities and townships will be done on a scientific basis. Pollution control mechanisms will be set up on priority basis".

After ruling for five years, in the election in 2019, the BJP proclaimed its pollution control commitment in the following words, in Point 21 of the 2019 manifesto: "We have evolved technologically better strategies and devices to map the level of pollution in cities and rivers and have taken effective steps to reduce the level of pollution in major cities, including the national capital. We will convene the National Clean Air Plan into a Mission and we will focus on 102 most polluted cities in the country. Through concerted action, we will reduce the level of pollution in each of the mission cities by at least 35% over the next years." Living in Delhi and breathing its polluted air, they should have understood by now that the promises still remain the same — as only promises.

In the million-plus (population) cities where the National Clean Air Programme is supposed to have done miracles, people still experience tortured breathing in the aftermath of profit-motivated growth for which the BJP is full of self-praise. When

IQAir released the World Air Quality Report 2022, 39 Indian cities were named in the list of the 50 most polluted cities in the world. The report said that air pollution is the second biggest risk factor for disease in India. In 2019, a Lancet study found that nearly 1.6 million deaths in India could be attributed to air pollution, comprising 18% of the total deaths in the country.

Disease burden

India's air pollution is solely responsible for the highest number of respiratory diseases such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) (50% of all cases in the world are in India), asthma (13% of global burden is in India) and rising cases of cancer and stroke throughout the country.

The result is that people in these cities have a reduced life expectancy, of nine years, at the present stage. Even the World Economic Forum reports that the cost India pays in terms of air pollution is Rs 7.91 lakh crore annually.

While the National Clean Air Programme that BJP promised in its manifesto was officially launched in 2019, comprising 131 most polluted cities, due to the utter

5 ug/m3. As India is nowhere near the safety zone, the people are helpless victims of the pollution crisis.

Lured by power and guided by corporate greed, the party in power has never cared to revisit the promises made to the people. Let the country have a look at the amendments made by the Modi government in the forest and environment-related legislations. They were all meant for the destruction of forests and environment; not for their protection. The Great Nicobar Development Plan is an assault on the richness of the biodiverse abundance of the islands, with a disastrous impact on the air, water and environment conditions of India as a whole. The Central Vista project of the BJP government, which has been boasted about a lot, has caused unimaginable damage to the air of the capital. The Rs 20,000-crore project has resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of trees in Lutyens' Delhi.

To ensure the Central Vista Project, the government blatantly disregarded building laws in the country and found shelter in the outdated Government Buildings Act of 1899! Pollution from the indiscriminate demolitions (recently, 80,000 tonnes of debris were heaped in Noida) and carbon



NISSIM MANNATHUKKAREN SAYS WESTERN COMPLICITY IN PALESTINIAN PLIGHT STEMS FROM COLONIAL, IMPERIAL ROOTS

The hypocrisy of Western democracy



With a staggering 17,000 Gazans already killed since October 7, Palestine is seeing one of its greatest tragedies. The West has shockingly enabled this in various ways: it has supported Israel's "right to defend" by reducing Palestine to Hamas; conflated critiques of Zionism and the Israeli state with anti-Semitism; weaponised the Holocaust; and attempted to erase history (the White House described Hamas' attack as "unprovoked").

Western societies that profess democracy have also scotched their own people's freedom of expression — not with official diktats but by demonising and targeting citizens speaking in support of Palestine. Western universities have become the major ground for this. In Ivy League institutions such as Harvard and Columbia, the private details of students who signed pro-Palestine letters have been made public. Prominent Jewish donors (and supporters of the Israeli state) have withdrawn funding from universities including Harvard and Pennsylvania alleging inaction against anti-Semitism and anti-Israel speeches on campuses (note: 45% of Harvard's revenue of \$5.8 billion in 2022 came from philanthropy). University administrations in North America put out official statements condemning only Hamas. And scholars working on Palestinian freedom have faced various unwritten codes of harassment.

The media has been key in framing the Palestine-Israel conflict for Western citizens for 75 years. The fundamental problem here, with a few honourable exceptions,

as anti-Semitic. Some actors, artist agents, and magazine editors have had to face professional consequences.

The most egregious actions have taken place in Europe, the supposed bastion of free speech. Countries including the U.K., France, Germany, and Italy emphatically declared their support for Israel and imposed various kinds of bans (some of them blanket) on pro-Palestinian protests. Austria, for instance, banned a pro-Palestinian demonstration citing the inclusion of the phrase "from the River to the Sea" in invitations, as a justification. Ironically, this is the same "free" Europe where blasphemy laws are abolished (Denmark, Sweden) and caricatures of religion are allowed (France) and have led to burnings of the Koran and cartoons on Prophet Muhammad.

There is no denying that there are inflammatory positions, fake news articles, and also celebration of brutality on both sides of the divide, all of which are not conducive to reasoned debates. If incidents of racism towards Palestinians/Arabs have increased, so has anti-Semitism.

But the root cause of Western complicity in Palestinian oppression lies in colonialism and imperialism, which is masked by the façade of liberal democracy. Democracy has seemingly thrived in the West, which has perpetuated colonialism and imperialism elsewhere. But even those democratic freedoms at home seem under threat now.

An exposé

The way out of the complicity in Israel's colonisation of Palestine can only be through

an exposé of the hypocrisies of Western democracy. This has been undertaken by those on the margins of this democracy. For instance, the Canadian government-appointed National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was forced to acknowledge that the Canadian state has perpetrated genocide against the Indigenous people. There is resistance to the war in Palestine, not just by Arabs and Palestinians but also by Jewish dissenters. The horrors unfolding in Gaza are also changing opinions. Mainstream Western media has given more space to Palestinian stories this time, even if they are not enough. In recent U.S. opinion polls, almost 70% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning voters under 35 years disapproved of President Joe Biden's support to Israel.

As the Israeli carnage in Gaza resumes, the West has to listen to people such as Israel-born Omer Bartov, one of the world's foremost Holocaust scholars, who, while rightly expressing empathy with the Jewish victims of Hamas' heinous war crimes, warned of genocide and asked leaders and scholars "to publicly warn against the rage and vengeance-filled [Israeli] rhetoric that dehumanises the population of Gaza..."

As another Holocaust scholar Raz Segal asserted, "No justice is possible... without a truthful reckoning of how we got here." The West must acknowledge its own monstrous role in getting Palestine to this precipice.

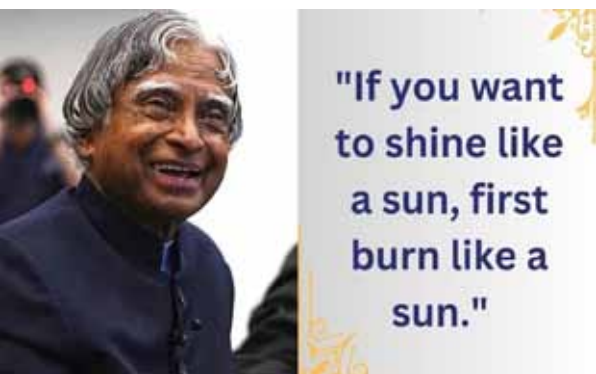
Nissim Mannathukkaren is Professor, Dalhousie University, Canada, and posts @nmannathukkaren. Views are personal.

Holding rates amid inflation is MPC's balancing act

The recent decision by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to hold the benchmark interest rates steady at 6.5% for the fifth consecutive bi-monthly meeting, despite raising the forecast for full-year GDP growth and acknowledging potential food price shocks, raises questions about the risks of lagging in anchoring inflation expectations. The MPC's move comes amid signs of inflation quickening in November-December, driven by uncertainties in food prices and an unfavourable base effect, potentially derailing the disinflation process. With the likelihood of price gains accelerating in the coming months, coupled with the volatility in oil prices and global financial markets, the risks to price stability remain significant. The RBI's 'Households' Inflation Expectations Survey' from November starkly reflects this, with households anticipating higher inflation rates in the near and medium-term future. The central bank's messaging, however, shows a dissonance. On one hand, the MPC has upgraded its real GDP growth projection for the fiscal year ending in March 2024 to 7%, from 6.5% in October. This optimistic outlook is attributed to robust investment, manufacturing strength, construction buoyancy, and a gradual rural recovery potentially boosting household consumption. On the other hand, the MPC's caution on inflation and the cumulative 250 basis point increase in the benchmark rate since May 2022 suggest a more guarded stance. This paradox is further compounded by the RBI's 'Consumer Confidence Survey', indicating that consumers maintain negative sentiments on both current and future price conditions. High inflation is evidently hampering discretionary spending, as Deputy Governor Michael D. Patra highlighted. This situation underscores a broader challenge: achieving a delicate balance between fostering economic growth and ensuring price stability. As the MPC navigates these complex economic dynamics, its primary task remains clear. Ensuring price stability is crucial; without it, the benefits of GDP growth and employment could be undermined by diminishing purchasing power.

LETTERBOX

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BOOKS: REVIEW

New book helps in navigating the complexities of modern life



SATISH SINGH

In the realm of self-help literature, Mandeep S.

Jalota's debut book, "Reset Your Mind, Body, and Spirit," stands as a compelling testament to the resilience of the human spirit. Jalota, who serves as the Joint Commissioner, GST, in Mumbai, brings a deeply personal touch to his writing, drawing from his own battle with depression. This authenticity lends the book a powerful credibility, making it not just a guide but a companion for those seeking solace in turbulent times.

At the heart of Jalota's message is the belief that our mental anguish — be it anxiety, sadness, or depression — is often rooted in our patterns of thought. He contends that obsessing over past negatives, fretting about

the future, and falling into the trap of constant comparison are key contributors to a disturbed mental state. His insights here are particularly striking, resonating with a contemporary audience that is often caught in these exact mental loops.

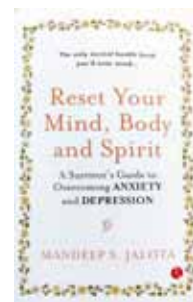
"Reset Your Mind, Body, and Spirit" goes beyond mere diagnosis, offering actionable advice on maintaining mental, physical, and emotional wellness. Jalota emphasizes the insidious nature of stress, which, borne out of daily uncertainties, can spiral into depression if left unchecked. His perspective on the mind's power to create personal hells or heavens is thought-provoking, highlighting the significant role our mental state plays in our overall well-being.

One of the book's strengths is its holistic approach. Jalota doesn't just focus on the mind; he stresses the importance of a healthy body in fostering a healthy mind. Disciplined living — en-

Jalota emphasizes the insidious nature of stress, which, borne out of daily uncertainties, can spiral into depression if left unchecked

compassing nutritious eating, adequate sleep, and regular exercise — is championed as a bulwark against stress and disease. The author's practical tips here are grounded in simplicity, steering clear of overcomplication.

Jalota's exploration of happiness is another highlight. He delves into the subjective nature of happiness and how our internal dialogues and worries about past and future events can influence our mental health. His argument that a self-motivated person, armed with a clear vision and



"Reset Your Mind, Body, and Spirit" By Mandeep S. Jalota Rupa Publication Rs 395

positivity, is better positioned to achieve their goals is particularly motivating.

The book also addresses the impact of mental health on physical wellness. Jalota makes a compelling case that mental disturbances can manifest as physical ailments and that positive thinking, coupled with a disciplined lifestyle, can act as a preventive measure. This mind-body connection is a recurring theme, underscoring the book's holistic ethos.

For parents, "Reset Your Mind, Body, and Spirit" offers sage advice on child-rearing. Jalota underscores the importance of instilling positive values in children to ensure their future well-being and mental health. This focus on early intervention is a vital inclusion, broadening the book's

appeal and relevance.

A significant portion of the book is devoted to navigating life's later stages. Jalota's perspective on old age is refreshingly optimistic. He argues that the elderly, often unburdened by the attachments and worries that define younger years, are in a unique position to live life fully for themselves. His encouragement to embrace every moment with positivity is both uplifting and grounding.

The book's relevance in today's stress-filled, materialistically driven world cannot be overstated. Jalota's emphasis on living a balanced life, amidst constant challenges, is a timely reminder of the need for personal well-being in the face of relentless societal pressures.

In conclusion, "Reset Your Mind, Body, and Spirit" is more than just a self-help book; it is a guide to living a fulfilling life. Mandeep S. Jalota's personal journey, combined with his insightful observations and practical advice, makes this book a valuable resource for anyone looking to navigate the complexities of modern life. It's a book that doesn't just aim to reset your state of being; it aims to transform it.

Repos Energy and Cummins India Limited Collaborate to Redefine Fuel Management, Unveil DATUM

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

In a ground-breaking collaboration, Repos Energy, a pioneer in the Doorstep Fuel Delivery industry, and Cummins India Limited, a leading power solutions technology provider, have partnered to revolutionise fuel management in India with DATUM X (Data Automated Teller Ultimate Machine). As a part of this collaboration, Cummins India Limited will market and distribute Repos Energy's DATUM X range of products through its vast distribution network across the country. The association was announced at "CII EXCON 2023" held at the Bengaluru International Exhibition Centre.

Founded by Aditi Bhosale Walunj and Chetan Walunj, and co-founded by Aparajit Subramanian, Repos Energy is on a mission to make all forms of energy available at the doorsteps of end consumers by bridging the gap between supply and

demand using tech-enabled innovations. DATUM X, Repos Energy's patented technology invention, offers an unmatched suite of features catering to the evolving needs of businesses reliant on diesel applications. With a relentless focus on enhancing operational efficiency and safety, Repos' DATUM X introduces a transformative approach to fuel procurement. It is an intelligent diesel storage and management machine for DG Set Consumers, offering Fuel Level Tracking, Digital Dashboards, and Safe Fuel Storage at their site.

Currently, customers face multiple challenges while managing their fuel operations including cumbersome procurement processes, fuel pilferage and adulteration, high dead-mileage operations, and unbalanced diesel inventory. Managing fuel requirements for multiple sites through conventional and manual processes locks working capital, contributing to a higher Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) and



lower profitability. DATUM addresses these customer challenges by offering a solution that enhances the visibility into the downstream diesel value chain, driving cost and operational efficiency for its users.

Aditi Bhosale Walunj, Founder, Repos Energy, highlighted the partnership's potential to catalyse a fuel distribution transformation, stating, "We are excited to collaborate with Cummins India Limited to offer the DATUM range of products to consumers across the country. This tech-enabled tool will en-

able end consumers to avail fuel delivery at their desired location with just a click on their phone. It will not only improve easy fuel accessibility for consumers but also help in structuring and organising the fuel delivery industry."

Chetan Walunj, Founder, Repos Energy, added "With Cummins India Limited onboard, our intent to take this solution across industries and geographies is only bolstered. We are thrilled to partner with the team, and we are confident that this will be a huge step forward towards

achieving our mission to make energy available at the doorsteps of end consumers by bridging the gap between supply and demand using tech-enabled innovations."

DATUM leverages sensors and digital technologies to provide real-time updates on fuel inventory and consumption across multiple installations. The safe and certified smart fuel storage solution enables remote monitoring of fuel levels, sends alerts when fuel level is low and facilitates 24x7 doorstep delivery of diesel thereby enhancing the efficiency of operations while reducing its carbon footprint. The entire process from fuel ordering to payment and invoicing is digital. The customer benefits from reduced fuel procurement costs, improved management of diesel inventory, higher asset utilisation and assurance of quality and quantity of fuel consumed. This has shown a direct reduction of up to 10% in fuel costs, coupled with a significant improvement in operational uptime.

MSME Sector Struggles To Regain Pre-Pandemic Momentum

NEW DELHI: The share of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021-22 was 29 per cent, reflecting a decline from the sector's pre-pandemic highs, attributed to the lingering impact of COVID-19.

Data presented in Parliament on Monday revealed that the contribution of MSMEs to India's gross value added, a measure of the country's total output, reached 31 per cent in 2018-19 but subsequently witnessed a decline during the pandemic years.

While India's overall exports witnessed a 44 per cent increase from USD 313 billion in FY20 to USD 450 billion in FY23, the contribution of MSMEs to this growth remained subdued.

Despite achieving a sub-

stantial USD 200 billion in exports in FY23, MSMEs' share in India's total exports fell to a concerning five-year low of 44 per cent.

Meanwhile, the closure of over 13,000 MSMEs in FY23, representing the highest number in the past four years, contradicts the government's targets for the sector's contribution to GDP and exports.

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari announced in 2020 the government's aim to substantially enhance the MSME sector's contribution to the GDP, targeting an increase from 30



per cent to 50 per cent, and to its export share, aiming for a rise from 49 per cent to 60 per cent, within a five-year timeframe.

Over 123 million individuals have found employment in the sector since 2020-21, with Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana leading the way in terms of job creation.

BEL receives orders worth Rs 4878 crores

ARUNKUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has received an order of Rs. 4,522 Crore from Indian Army for the supply of Fuses for various calibres. This contract has been signed on December 15, 2023, by Maj Gen Gurpreet Singh Choudhry, SM, VSM [JS (Army & TA)/DMA] & Bhanu Prakash Srivastava, CMD, BEL, in the presence of Vice Admiral Atul Anand, AVSM, VSM, Additional Secretary (DMA). Indigenisation of critical technologies was the key requirement of the tender, press statement from BEL said.

This project will have



the participation of Indian Electronics and associated MSMEs, including MSMEs which are sub-vendors of BEL. The equipment manufactured by BEL are part of the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' programme.

The company has also received additional orders worth Rs. 356 Crores since the last disclosure on 6th December 2023 and the

said orders pertain to other products like EW (Electronic Warfare) Testers, Medical Systems (Exports), Consumables and Batteries for Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), Night Vision Devices Spares and Services.

With the above, BEL has cumulatively received orders worth Rs. 2,3176 Crores (excl. taxes) in the current financial year 2023-24.

Scania Unveils Cutting-Edge G 500 Super Truck at EXCON 2023

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Scania Commercial Vehicles Pvt. Ltd. Unveiled G500 8x4 Super Heavy Tipper, a ground-breaking addition to its fleet of mining tipplers at EXCON 2023 in Bengaluru, this powerful and eco-friendly truck sets a new standard for the mining and transport sector. Engineered to meet the toughest emission standards globally, the G500 Super boasts a low-emission, biodiesel/FAME-compatible engine in the 500-horsepower range, making it the epitome of fuel efficiency. Demonstrating its global efficacy, achieving a notable 8% fuel savings, Scania's Super engine takes the lead in



addressing the industry's dual challenge of emission reduction and profitability. Scania Super is also a proud winner of the prestigious Green Truck Award for the year 2022.

The G500 Super powered by XT promises a SUPER Horsepower with the highest torque offering on the market, a highly efficient New G33 Heavy-duty Gearbox, a robust 395L steel Fuel tank with Fuel optimization unit, a New chassis composition generation, 40% Stronger

power train, robustness specifically developed for Mining, and higher safety margins on critical components. With superior drive-ability and outstanding technical hardness, the G500 Super ensures it conquers the operational challenges of the next decade.

Johan P Schlyter, Managing Director of Scania Commercial Vehicles India., expressed his excitement about the G500 Super, stating, "This launch signifies a new era in Mining, combining cutting-edge technology, unmatched performance, and eco-friendly design. The G 500 Super is not just a vehicle; it's a revolution, redefining standards and setting new benchmarks in the industry."

MSME Registrations At Udyam Portal Cross 3 Crore Mark

NEWDELHI: Total 3,16,05,581 MSMEs have been registered since 1 July, 2020 to 4 December, 2023 as per Udyam Registration Portal, informed MoS for MSME, Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha on Monday. This total number includes informal micro enterprises registered on Udyam Assist Platform.

From this the total number of women owned MSMEs registered during that period across India was 1,17,36,406, said the MoS.

Further in the reply, he gave a brief information about the steps taken by the ministry in ensuring growth of the MSME sector and the expenditure incurred. For non-tax benefits the government extended it for 3 years in case of an upward change in status of MSMEs w.e.f. 18 October, 2022. The Ministry also launched the Udyam Assist Platform on 11 January, 2023 to bring Informal Micro Enterprises under the formal ambit for availing the benefits under Priority Sector Lending, he said.

ONDC Collaborates With MSME Mart, 2 Lakh MSMEs Onboarded: MoS Som Parkash

NEW DELHI: The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), has partnered with the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises to onboard MSMEs onto the network via existing seller applications, said Minister of State, Ministry of Commerce, Som Parkash.

MSME-Mart, managed by the MSME ministry through the National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC), serves as a Business-to-Business (B2B) platform facilitating market access for MSMEs.

ONDC is also working to integrate MSME-Mart, which has more than 2 lakh MSMEs, he added.

It accomplishes this by offering a digital showcase for MSMEs to present their products and services, facilitating seamless connections between buyers and suppliers.



In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, Parkash stated that ONDC is currently collaborating proactively with industry associations such as the National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI) and the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI), to bring restaurants onto the network using different food aggregators.

Currently, over 59,000

food and beverage (F&B) sellers are present on ONDC and overall, more than 2.3 Lakh sellers and service providers including small, medium and large enterprises, as reported by FE.

Parkash noted that ONDC has implemented several measures to enhance awareness, adoption, and training for small businesses aiming to leverage ONDC's benefits.

MSME Share Accounts for 45% In India's Total Exports: MoS Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma

NEW DELHI: Products related to the MSME sector has a total contribution of 45.56 per cent in all India exports as of September in the current financial year, informed the MoS MSME Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma in a written reply to the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

Importantly, India's overall exports (merchandise and services combined) in April-September 2023 exhibited a negative growth of 2.97 per cent over April-September 2022.

During the six-month period last year the exports amounted to USD 387.8 billion vis-a-vis USD 376.29 billion till September in the current fiscal, data from the commerce ministry showed.

The share of export of MSME-specified products in all India exports has also been declining year-on-year



even as the country's overall exports including merchandise and services grew by an estimated 13.84 per cent in FY23.

From 49.77 per cent in FY20, the share of MSME-related products dropped to 49.35 per cent in FY21 and 45.03 per cent in FY22. It further declined to 43.59 per cent in FY23 while the value of MSME exports had increased to USD 190 billion in FY22 from USD 143.9 billion in FY21 and USD 54.8 billion in FY20.

Young Employees Account For 47.76% Of New Registration Under ESI Scheme In Oct

NEW DELHI: The provisional payroll data of Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) revealed on Friday that 17.28 lakh new employees have been added in the month of October, 2023. During the same month around 23,468 new establishments have been registered and brought under the social security umbrella of the Employees' State Insurance Corporation, thus ensuring more coverage.

According to the data presented by the Ministry of Labour & Employment, more jobs have been generated for the youth.

As out of the total 17.28 lakh employees added during the month of October 2023, 8.25 lakh employees up to the age group of 25 years constitute the majority of new registrations which is 47.76 per cent of the total employees. Gender-wise analysis of payroll data indicates that net enrollment of female members has been 3.31 lakh in October, 2023. The data shows that a total of 51 transgender employees have also got registered under ESI Scheme in the month of October, 2023.

Over 29 Cr Workers Secure eShram Cards Through Portal Registration

NEWDELHI: The Ministry of Labour and Employment has issued eShram cards to over 29.20 crore unorganised workers registered on the eShram portal, informed Union MoS Labour and Employment, Rameshwar Telu, in a written reply in the Lok Sabha on Monday.

He highlighted the registration numbers and widespread participation in the initiative, as of December 4, 2023.

The portal allows workers to register across 400 occu-



pations in 30 broad sectors, creating a comprehensive

national database. Launched on August 26,

2021, the primary objective of the eShram portal is to establish a database for unorganised workers, facilitating the delivery of Social Security and welfare schemes to this vital workforce.

Key features include Aadhaar-seeded registration, capturing family details of migrant workers, and sharing construction workers' data with states/UTs for Building and other Construction Workers (BoCW) board registration.

Govt Pushes Industrial Policy After Elections to Take Fresh Look

NEW DELHI: The central government has put the proposed industrial policy on the back burner and decided to work on changes possibly after the general elections of 2024, reported Mint. This will make the wait for India's new industrial policy a bit longer than anticipated, sources told Mint.

Government plans to take a fresh perspective at a range of matters such as global supply chain shifts, greater urgency on the green agenda, and geopolitical developments, two

people aware of the matter told Mint. In 2022, the Union Commerce Ministry had circulated the draft of Industrial Policy 2022 - Make in India for the world, aimed to replace the 1991 policy. The proposed document aimed to address challenges faced by the industry through policy measures to foster and create an innovative and competitive ecosystem.

"As far as the proposed new industrial policy goes, it is currently on the back burner," an official told Mint.

Agri Product Value Addition Set to Propel Economy and Job Growth

Value addition to agricultural products and the incorporation of local cuisine in ready-to-eat forms could significantly broaden the product's reach, Sanjay Kumar, Chairman, Agricultural Scientists Recruitment Board said on Speaking at the 37th Foundation Day of the ICAR-Indian Institute of Soybean Research, Kumar highlighted the significance of innovation and modernization in agriculture for fostering economic growth and generating job opportunities.

The ready-to-eat packaged



food sector is experiencing an annual growth rate of 8 per cent, with expectations of even higher expansion in the future, attributed to the growing inclination of consumers toward healthier options in the packaged food segment, he said.

Veson Nautical extends data analytics and collaboration capabilities with acquisition of Shipfix

Veson Nautical will strengthen its unique data position, AI expertise, and ability to optimize workflow across the value chain, while integrating internal and external communication tools to the IMOS Platform, which furthers its vision to be the standard platform that propels maritime commerce

BOSTON: Veson Nautical (Veson), the global leader of maritime freight management solutions, today announced its acquisition of Shipfix, the collaborative data platform for the maritime and trade sectors driven by advanced AI-enabled tools. As Veson's second acquisition this year, Shipfix will further Veson's pursuit to deliver quality, contextual data to the industry. Veson will continue to offer Shipfix's suite of maritime solutions and bring the full Shipfix team onboard.

Shipfix was founded in 2018 to solve the email overload challenge encountered by chartering desks. By developing innovative products and groundbreaking AI-enabled tools, Shipfix provides a unique data platform allowing trade professionals to make smarter decisions and ultimately trade smarter and faster. Their product suite has expanded beyond front-line trading and chartering into operations teams and physical trading. Shipfix supports dry and tanker clients alongside other customers interested in freight market insights.

Shared clients will see the combined impact of Veson Nautical and Shipfix as Shipfix's pre-shipment data and insight capabilities are combined with Veson's existing end-to-end workflows to produce an unmatched freight trading and operations solution for the market. In addition, the data intelligence offerings from both Veson Nautical and Shipfix will become stronger through the consolidation, rationalization, and standardization of critical industry reference data.

John Veson, Co-founder and CEO at Veson Nautical, said: "A massive amount of data goes into pre-shipment decision-making. We're fortunate to have a growing integrated dataset that helps clients leverage



contextual data across vessel specifications, ownership structures, commodities, trade flows, and tonnage flows, all in one place. I am thrilled to officially welcome Shipfix's expert team to Veson as we add their market-validated and accepted chartering and operations platform to our suite of solutions."

Antoine Grisy, Co-founder and Co-CEO at Shipfix said: "Together with Veson Nautical, we will deliver the ultimate integrated workflow and data experience shipping and trading companies have demanded for over a decade. We are very excited to start executing on the synergies between the companies. Our combined expertise will allow us to build a set of trading and operating insights that meet the increasingly sophisticated requirements of freight market participants."

Serge Alleyne, Co-founder and Co-CEO at Shipfix, said: "When Antoine and I founded Shipfix five years ago, our vision was to emerge as the ultimate solution for the maritime and trade community, commencing with an AI-powered collaboration platform and a suite of data insights products. Today, as Shipfix joins forces with Veson Nautical, it presents a unique opportunity for us to truly become the premier maritime platform, integrating best-in-class maritime expertise, data insights, and communication workflows from pre to post-fixture. This union aims to maximise our clients' efficiency and operations in ways never seen before. It's the perfect match for us, leveraging extraordinary data and workflow synergies to accelerate our growth and consistently deliver maximum value for the entire shipping industry."

About Veson Nautical - Veson Nautical delivers maritime

freight management solutions that propel the global shipping economy. Trusted by buyers and sellers of bulk marine freight in every region of the world, Veson solutions are responsible for managing \$109 billion in freight traded and moving 4.4 billion tons in annual trade each year.

With a suite of offerings in marine freight trading and operations, vessel documentation, and data and analytics, Veson's products are widely recognized for their strong utility, sustained innovation, and measurable business impact.

Veson is a champion of progress that actively supports its clients, partners, and broader community in navigating change while shaping the best practice workflows and standards of tomorrow's connected maritime shipping ecosystem. Veson.com

About Shipfix - Shipfix is a collaborative workflow and data platform for the maritime and trade sectors, driven by ground-breaking AI-enabled tools. Shipfix went live in 2018 and has over a thousand users globally across more than 70 global clients. The platform streamlines maritime workflows using market and operational intelligence with a focus on ship-owners, commodity traders, industrials, freight forwarders and shipbrokers. The company has 4 offices globally in Paris, London, Singapore and Tbilisi (Georgia).

With Shipfix, maritime and trade professionals make better-informed decisions and move faster. Users are enabled to find their market edge in highly volatile markets by turning their communications data into a competitive advantage. Shipfix is pioneering data transformation across the industry by enabling a subtle mix of artificial and human intelligence.

Indian Economy to Grow at 7.5-8% in FY24: FICCI

NEW DELHI: The Indian economy is expected to grow by 7.5 per cent to 8 per cent in the current fiscal year Anish Shah, President, the Federation Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), said on Monday. During an interview with PTI, Shah said that due to strong growth momentum, positive sentiments, and increase in private investments, the economy will grow by 8 per cent in the next fiscal year (2024-25) as well. The FICCI President cautioned that geopolitical factors could be a concern for India's growth prospects. "We have seen great growth numbers so far at 7.8 per cent, 7.6 per cent. I expect that to continue because we have got



strong momentum. We are seeing multiple companies investing, adding capacities, something that Mahindra group has done as well," he said. Notably, the Indian economy logged a growth rate of 7.8 per cent in the first quarter of FY24, and 7.6 per cent in the quarter ended September 2023.

The growth rate for the first half of the current fiscal year came out to be 7.7 per cent. Regarding the economy's pressure points, Shah said the main pressure points remained outside India. "We are seeing stress with regard to Israel and Gaza, added to

what is happening in Ukraine. Our hope is that it does not expand or accelerate any further from there," he stated. Shah stated that the government needs to maintain the growth momentum to deal with the issues arising globally. Expressing his views about the RBI's decision to keep interest rates unchanged for the fifth consecutive time, he said, "One needs to give lot of credit to RBI for being pro-active, because they have acted early. That has helped. More important factor is to have inflation under control, than to reduce rates. It has worked so far. I would rely on the experts of the RBI to manage the economy which they have done very well so far."

RBI Aims to Strengthen Digital Infrastructure with Cloud Storage Services

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is working on setting up a cloud facility for India's financial sector to enhance its security, integrity and privacy. The service, which will be developed by a subsidiary of the central bank, will directly compete with similar services offered by American companies like Amazon, Google and Microsoft. The central bank is taking the similar approach as it has done with setting up 'digital public infrastructure' (DPI). There the underlying technology is built by the government, and is later outsourced to the private sector for developing various applications. The biometric identity programme Aadhaar and United Payments Interface (UPI) are key examples of DPI. "Banks and financial entities are maintaining an ever-in-



creasing volume of data. Many of them are utilising various public and private cloud facilities for this purpose. The Reserve Bank is working on establishing a cloud facility for the financial sector in India. The proposed facility would enhance the security, integrity and privacy of financial sector data," RBI said in its statement on developmental and regulatory policies.

The facility will be set up and initially operated by the Indian Financial Technology & Allied Services (IFTAS), a wholly-owned subsidiary of RBI. Eventually, the cloud facility will be transferred to a separate entity owned by the financial sector participants, the central bank said. The service is intended to be rolled out in a calibrated fashion in the medium term. While details about the cloud service, especially around its adoption, are yet to be released, the fintech industry is looking forward to whether the central bank would require companies to switch to its cloud offering. The regulator already has an exhaustive set of norms of localisation of data, and many in the industry believe that the cloud service could take those norms a step further.

Over 51 Cr PM Jan Dhan Accounts Opened, 4.30 Cr Remain Dormant: Union MoS Finance



NEW DELHI: The Ministry of Finance stated that over 51.04 crore Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) accounts have been opened as of 29 November, 2023, holding a total deposit balance of Rs 2,08,855 crore, as informed by Union Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Kisanrao Karad in a written reply in Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. The Minister also stated that as on 22 November, 2023, a total of 4.30 crore PMJDY accounts are dormant, i.e., having zero balance, since the scheme provides an inbuilt feature of non-requirement of maintaining any minimum balance in PMJDY accounts. The Minister further stated that there is no inbuilt provision of micro-investments, such as flexi-recurring deposits, in PMJDY scheme. However, PMJDY account holders can avail benefit of micro-investments such as flexi-recurring deposits etc. as per the terms and conditions of their respective banks. Launched in 2014 as the National Mission for Financial Inclusion, the scheme aims to ensure comprehensive financial inclusion in the country by providing universal access to banking facilities and basic bank accounts to every unbanked adult.

Gurugram, Noida Operating In First-World Economy: Raghuram Rajan



NEW DELHI: Different parts of India are operating at various levels of world economies, such as people in Noida and Gurugram are operating in first-world economy level, said former RBI Governor Raghuram Rajan.

Rajan who is the Katherine Dusk Miller Distinguished Service Professor of Finance at Chicago Booth, said that while the Indian economy is largely playing catch-up, many parts of the economy are operating at "first-world" levels, but many are worse even than third-world. Speaking at YouTuber Akash Banerjee's The Deshbhakt channel podcast, he said, "Parts of the Indian economy are first world, further adding, "People in Noida or Gurgaon are essentially operating in a first-world economy." He said that parts of India are worse than third-world or sub-Saharan Africa. Considering our growth, he said India will become a USD 10,000 per capita economy by 2047, which is still USD 3,000 behind China. "Our current per capita is around USD 2,500. India cannot become a developed country by 2047 at the current growth rate.

World Economy's Disintegration Into Regional Power Blocs Will Wipe Out Open Trade Gains: IMF

NEW DELHI: The global economy is on the edge of a second cold war that could "annihilate" progress made since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Gita Gopinath, IMF's first deputy managing director has warned. The increasing fragmentation of the world economy into regional power blocs - centred around the US and China - risked smearing out trillions of dollars in global output, she said on Monday. "If we descend into cold war two, knowing the costs, we



may not see mutually assured economic destruction. But we could see an annihilation of the gains from open trade," said the senior official. Warning that the world was at a "turning point" as tensions mounted between the planet's most powerful nations, Gopinath urged governments to pull back from the brink and work together on shared economic priorities where possible. Her intervention comes amid a slowdown in international trade since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 inflamed pre-existing tensions between the US and European nations in the west and China and Russia in the east. "While there are no signs of broad-based retreat from globalisation, fault lines are

emerging as geo-economic fragmentation is increasingly a reality. If fragmentation deepens, we could find ourselves in a new cold war," she said. Setting out the potential damage from a collapse in trade between the two blocs - divided along the lines of the UN vote on the 2022 Ukraine resolution - Gopinath said the world economy could expect to see losses worth about 2.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), or about USD 2.5tn (£2tn) if trade was eliminated entirely.

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Former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan warns states opting for old pension scheme

NEW DELHI: Former Governor of the Reserve Bank of India Raghuram Rajan Tuesday warned states that opting for the old pension scheme over the new would ultimately cripple their finances. Rajan was speaking at the Delhi launch of the book Breaking the Mould: Reimagining India's Economic Future, co-authored by him and economist Rohit Lamba. The former central bank chief also spoke about the larger trend of political parties competing with each other to offer non-targeted cash transfers and other financial incentives to woo voters. "Direct benefit transfers, when targeted, can help those at the very bottom," Rajan said, in response to a question from the moderator about states increasingly opting for cash transfers. "They can help feed children, and send them to school."

pays the retiree their pension using its own funds - that is, the retiree does not contribute anything towards their pension during the course of their service. Further, the government itself needs to make the payments only once the employee retires. Under the NPS, government employees contribute 10 per cent of their basic salary (including dearness allowance), and the government contributes 14 per cent towards their pension, throughout the course of the employee's service. The accumulated funds are then used to pay for the pension. Reversion to OPS 'major step backwards', says RBI - Economists are of the view that the OPS may save the government and the employees money right now, since they don't have to make regular contributions to the pension fund, but it imposes a debilitating future cost to government finances when they have to make the pension payments. The Reserve Bank of India, in particular, has been a vocal opponent of the OPS. "The return to the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) by a few States and reports of some other States moving in the same direction would exert a huge burden on State finances and restrict their capacity to undertake growth enhancing capital expenditures," the central bank had said in a report in January. The RBI further said that a reversion to OPS by the states would be "a major step backwards", "compromising the interest of future generations". During the book discussion, Rajan, who was governor of the RBI from September 2013 to September 2016, also spoke about how states announced farm-loan waivers without thinking through the financial implications. "They would do it before elections, but afterwards would ask me: 'Sir, kaise karein' (Sir, how can we do it)," Rajan recounted. Notably, in the run-up to the Chhattisgarh elections this year, outgoing Congress chief minister Bhupesh Baghel had announced his government would waive farm loans if voted back to power.

Retail Inflation Reaches a Three-Month Peak, Surging to 5.55% in November

NEW DELHI: India's Consumer Price Index (CPI)-based inflation rose to 5.55 per cent in November from 4.87 per cent in October, denoting a three-month high, as per a data released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on Tuesday. This is due to a spike in prices of onion led a rather broad-based rise in food inflation. However, the latest print being at the lower end of the forecasts by analysts and the continued moderation of core inflation to a 44-month low of 4.1 per cent, would offer comfort to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The government has recently taken a host of steps to boost supply of food items, including wheat, sugar



and onion. The central bank in the December monetary policy statement unveiled last week had anticipated "an increase in prices of key vegetables which may push CPI inflation higher in the near-term." Separate data released on Tuesday showed factory output, measured by the Index of Industrial Production (IIP), rose to a 16-month high of 11.7 per cent in October from 6.2 per cent in September, aided by a

favourable base, and a rise in manufacturing output amidst festive demand. Inflation in onions was at a 38-month high of 86.46 per cent in November, which pushed vegetables inflation to 17.7 per cent during the month from 2.70 per cent in October. The massive increase in onion prices are a consequence of fresh kharif harvest arriving late in the market. However, the prices of onions are likely to cool off towards December end partly aided by ban on the exports of the staple vegetable imposed last week, easing inflationary pressures. As on Tuesday, retail prices of onion were down 6 per cent on month.

Google's Digital Push to Empower India's MSMEs



NEW DELHI: Google plans to make a calculated investment in digital payments with the aim to strengthen the dynamic Indian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) market, said Sanjay Gupta, country head and Vice President of Google India, in an exclusive interview with Mint. Google plans to expand its impact beyond payments, aiming to unlock India's MSME potential through financial inclusion and digital empowerment, noted Gupta, while speaking to Mint. Recognizing the limited access to credit hindering MSME growth, Gupta said, "India still suffers deeply from lack of access to credit. We haven't built a great MSME part in this country. MSMEs only contribute 28 to 29% of GDP, whereas in the US and China, it goes to 55 to 60% because there is not enough capital (in India) which is easily accessible." He added, "If we can enable credit to be made affordable to every Indian in a simple and easy manner, it will be a game changer," reported Mint.

Google Cloud's support for the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) aims to foster a thriving digital commerce ecosystem, further boosting MSME activity, Gupta told Mint. Beyond just payments, Gupta stated, Google envisions smartphones as gateways to citizen services, leveraging AI to personalize and simplify access in local languages, overcoming the barrier of an English-dominated internet. While the COVID-19 pandemic ravaged many industries, Google took a step to support the struggling media landscape. Recognizing the vital role of media in informing and engaging communities, Google implemented initiatives to help small and large publishers weather the storm. One of the key initiatives involved opening up the Discover platform, a prime space for brand visibility, to a wider range of media publishers. This provided small businesses with a valuable opportunity to showcase their brands to a vast audience, fostering brand awareness and growth. Google offered access to cutting-edge technology and tools to help publishers optimize their content, improve user engagement, and generate revenue. By opening up the Discover platform and investing in digital transformation initiatives, Google played a crucial role in helping small businesses and publishers not just survive but thrive during the pandemic.

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Sensex down more than 200 points as IT heavyweights lag



MUMBAI: BSE Sensex is down 249 points on Wednesday morning trade as IT stocks face selling pressure. BSE Sensex is trading at 69,301 points with Infosys, TCS down more than 2 per cent. Vaishali Parekh, Vice President - Technical Research, Prabhudas Lilladher, said Nifty has been roped in with a tight resistance near 21,000 zone and has witnessed some profit booking during the intraday session to dip towards 2,0850 zone to end in the red near the 20,900 levels. With near-term support positioned near 20,850 zone, we can expect some consolidation and would need a decisive breach above 21,000 levels to carry on with the uptrend and expect for next higher targets of 21,800-21,900 levels in the coming days with major support lying near 20,550 zone of the rising trendline zone. The support for the day is seen at 20800 while the resistance is seen at 21,050. V.K. Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services said the

short-term undercurrent of the market is bullish despite the high valuations. The growth momentum in the economy, the sustained buying by DIIs and retail investors, reversal of the FPI strategy from selling to buying and favourable global cues will keep the market resilient. From the global perspective, tonight's Fed message is important in setting the global market trend. Markets will wait for the Fed chief's message before taking a decisive turn. Even though India's CPI inflation has come higher at 5.55 per cent in November compared to 4.87 per cent in October, this print is lower than the market expectation of 6 per cent. IIP growth of 11.7 per cent in October indicates continuation of the growth momentum in the economy. Steadily declining Brent crude (now below \$74) is strengthening India's macros. Leading banks, capital goods, cement, oil marketing companies and the leading airline company are on strong wicket, he said.

India's retail inflation rises to 5.55% in November

India's retail inflation increased to 5.55 per cent in November after having slowed to a four-month low of 4.87 per cent in October, with higher food prices pushing up the cost of living and stretching household budgets. The increase in the inflation level above the RBI's 4 per cent target means that the central bank is not likely to go in for a rate cut to spur economic growth. Food inflation, which accounts for nearly half of the overall consumer price basket, rose by 8.7 per cent during November compared to 6.61 per cent in October as the prices of vegetables such as onion, fruit, and pulses went up sharply during the month, data released by the Ministry of Statistics on Tuesday showed. The prices of pulses, which are the main source of proteins in the country's diet, shot



up by a whopping 20.2 per cent during the month while vegetable prices increased by as much as 17.7 per cent and fruits turned costlier by 10.9 per cent. Cereal prices too rose by double digit figures while spices turned costlier by 21.55 per cent. However, there was some consolation in fuel prices showing a marginal dip compared to the same month last year as the government reduced the price of LPG and kept petrol and diesel prices on hold during the month.

INTERNATIONAL

India Will Retaliate Against EU's Carbon Tax If Required: Piyush Goyal

NEW DELHI: India is ready to address the issue concerning the European Union's (EU) plan to impose a carbon tax on certain imported goods.

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal said that "I will retaliate" if required.

The CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) or carbon tax (a kind of import duty) will come into effect from January 1, 2026.

However, from October 1 this year, domestic companies from seven carbon-intensive sectors, including steel, cement, fertiliser, aluminium and hydrocarbon products, will have to share data with regard to carbon emissions with the EU.

"Bharat will address the



problem of CBAM with confidence, and we will find solutions. We will see how we can convert CBAM to our advantage if it comes in. Of course, I will retaliate. You need not worry about it," he said at an industry chamber event.

CBAM will translate into a

20-35 per cent tax on select imports into the EU, starting January 1, 2026, as per a report of the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI). India's 26.6 per cent of exports of iron ore pellets, iron, steel, and aluminium products go to the EU.

These products would be hit by CBAM. India exported these goods worth USD 7.4 billion in 2023 to the EU.

He also said that India retaliated against the US after it imposed additional customs duties on certain steel and aluminium products.

To resolve the issues, India and the US ended all the bilateral disputes that they had in the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The minister also asked the industry to help promote the electric vehicle mission of the country to promote sustainable growth.

There is a need to quickly replace the existing public buses and trucks in the country with electric vehicles, besides two and four-wheeler vehicles in a mission mode, he added.

NY court rejects Trump's challenge of gag order in civil fraud trial

NEW YORK: A court in New York has rejected former US President Donald Trump's challenge of the gag order in his civil fraud trial, that bars him and the attorneys from speaking publicly about the case's presiding Judge Arthur Engoron's court staff.

In its rejection on Thursday, the appeals court said Trump did not use the proper legal vehicle to challenge the gag order and sanctions, reports CNN.

The appellate court in another order on Thursday also rejected a request by the former President to allow his legal team to seek a review of the gag order by the Court of Appeals, New York's highest court.

Trial testimony ended on Wednesday after 11 weeks in court.

The parties are scheduled to file supplemental briefs in the case on January 5, 2024 and return for oral arguments



January 11 before Judge Engoron renders a final verdict. The civil fraud case strikes at the heart of the Trump Organization, the former President's real estate empire.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, who brought the lawsuit, is suing the former President for \$250 million and seeking to bar him from

doing business in the state. James, a Democrat, has alleged that the Trump Organization deceived lenders, insurers and tax authorities by inflating the value of his properties using misleading appraisals.

Trump was expected to testify on Monday, but he did not appear.

India Seeks Review of WTO Panel's Decision against Tariffs on ICT Goods



NEW DELHI: India on Thursday placed an appeal for a review challenging a decision by the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) dispute settlement body that had ruled against New Delhi's imposition of tariffs on mobile phones and electronic components, among other ICT goods, reported by media.

The European Union (EU) brought the case and a WTO panel in April stating that India had violated global trading rules.

In response, India has sought a review by the Appellate Body and said in its appeal, "Of the errors of law and legal interpretation by the panel in its report and requests finding by the Appellate Body".

Similarly in May, India had appeal a ruling that had favoured Japan but the WTO gave three months, till September 19, to India and the EU to settle the dispute.

Clearing the allegations puts forward by EU, India said in its appeal, "The products which, as the EU alleges, should be given tariff-free treatment were never covered under the ITA and hence were not negotiated."

To make its appeal stronger, India argued that the concessions under the ITA were available to all WTO members, and not only to the ITA participants.

"In particular, the panel erred because the order of analysis conducted is correct," India said in the appeal.

India has requested the Appellate Body to reverse, modify, or declare moot and of no legal effect, the findings, conclusions, rulings, and recommendations of the panel.

Norway, Switzerland attempt to Finalise Trade Deal with India before Elections of 2024



NEW DELHI: Norway and Switzerland have expressed optimism about settling an agreement on a trade pact with India as their respective Trade Ministers concluded their visit to Delhi this week, reported India Today. The trade pact would be with four European countries that make up the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) outside the European Union (EU): Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

Negotiations for a trade deal began 15 years ago, and the attempt is to sign an agreement before the General Elections due in India in May 2024, reported India Today.

In an exclusive interview with India Today TV, Norwegian Trade Minister Jan Christian Vestre and Swiss State Secretary for Economic Affairs Helene Budliger Artieda spoke about their vision to enter into a trade pact with India.

When asked about the timeline, Jan Christian Vestre, Norwegian Trade Minister told India Today, "Let's see. Let's find out. But we are progressing. And we have, you know, put our best experts on this journey on the Indian side, the minister himself, Goyal, is very personally engaged in those topics. He is extremely knowledgeable."

"He's representing India in a great way. We are here. We brought our colleagues. As well. So I think, in respect of the negotiations, it's a bit too early to say it, but it's a good progress. And that makes us happy, of course," added Vestre.

Talking about the benefits, Helene Budliger Artieda, Swiss State Secretary for Economic Affairs, said, "India is going currently very strong so that's maybe also what pushed us. We really feel great ambition and great hunger by Swiss companies to strengthen their presence in India."

Biden touts 'unshakeable support' for Israel

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden has touted his "unshakeable support for the safety of the Jewish people and the security of Israel and its right to exist" as the Jewish nation and Hamas continue their war in Gaza.

He made the remarks on Monday night at a reception hosted by him and First Lady Jill Biden to celebrate the fifth night of the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, CNN reported.

President Biden was joined by Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff and a group of White House officials that descended from Holocaust survivors who lit the White House menorah.

The event featured some 800 guests, including Holocaust survivors, lawmakers and various Jewish leaders, according to the White House.

In his address, the President said: "We'll continue to provide military assistance to Israel until they get rid of Hamas, but we have to be careful — they have to be careful."

"The whole world's public opinion can shift overnight, we can't let that happen."

The President also hailed



the work his administration has done to secure the release of hostages still held in Gaza and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the region.

"We're working relentlessly for the safe return of the hostages. I personally spent countless hours -- and I mean it, probably up to 20 hours with the Qataris and Egyptians, the Israelis -- to secure the freedom of hostages, to get the trucks in, to get the humanitarian aid flowing, to convince them to open the gate, to have (Egyptian President Abdel Fattah) El-Sisi make sure he opened the gate into Egypt."

"And there's a whole range of things going on now that are

really very, very difficult. We've gotten more than 100 hostages out and we're not going to stop till we get every one of them home," CNN quoted President Biden as saying.

According to the White House, there are still seven American men and one woman unaccounted for since the Israel-Hamas war began. Four Americans -- a four-year-old girl and three women -- have been released so far. Israeli officials have said that about 137 people remain captive in Gaza, including foreign nationals.

During the humanitarian pause from November 24-30, 86 Israeli and 24 foreign hostages were released.

Israel Minister calls on war cabinet not to allow Palestinian workers to return

Israel National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, who is known for his extreme far-right views, called on war cabinet not to let Palestinian workers back into the country.

The Israel war cabinet has been deliberating upon the prospects of whether to allow Palestinians from the West Bank area into the country for work. Ben Gvir in a social media post on Saturday night said, "Letting in workers from the Palestinian Authority who are drenched in incitement to Israel right now is a continuation of the concept and the understanding that we did not understand anything from October 7."



Hezbollah militant killed in Israeli attacks on Lebanon's southern border



BEIRUT: A Hezbollah militant was killed in Israeli attacks on border areas in southern Lebanon, a Lebanese military source said.

The source, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said on Saturday that the Hezbollah militant died from Israeli airstrikes on the village of Aita

al-Shaab, Xinhua news agency reported.

Israeli warplanes and drones carried out six airstrikes targeting houses and forests in the border areas, destroying six houses and damaging another 15, according to the source.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Resistance, the military wing of

Hezbollah, said its fighters carried out 10 attacks on 10 Israeli sites, killing one and injuring another.

Later on Saturday, Israeli media reported that three soldiers were wounded on the country's border with Lebanon and were transported by helicopter to Rambam hospital in Haifa, a northern Israeli port city.

The Lebanon-Israel border has witnessed increased tension since October 8, after Lebanese armed group Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets toward Shebaa Farms in support of the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, prompting the Israeli forces to respond by firing heavy artillery toward southeastern Lebanon.

COP28 Agreement Implores Countries to Triple Global Installed Capacity of Renewable Energy

NEW DELHI: One of the most important and expected outcome of the COP28 climate meeting is tripling of renewable energy which contributes to additional emission reductions between now and 2030.

It calls upon countries to contribute to tripling of global installed capacity of renewable energy, and doubling of annual improvements in energy efficiency.

Together, these two measures have the potential to avoid emissions of about 7 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent between now and 2030, more than all the net result of all the other climate actions being currently taken.

The 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference or Conference of the Parties of the UNFCCC, more com-



monly known as COP28, was the 28 United Nations Climate Change conference, held from 30 November until 12 December at Expo City in Dubai.

The COP28 climate meeting delivered some important outcomes - a first-time acknowledgement of the need to move away from fossil fuels, a first promise to reduce methane emissions, operationalisation and capitalisation of the loss and damage fund, and an agreement on a framework for the global goal on adaptation.

Bryan Adams recalls 'meeting' Princess Diana



LOS ANGELES: Singer-songwriter Bryan Adams recently opened up on the beginning of his close friendship with Princess Diana. The singer, 64, showered the late princess with praise and kind words "straight from the heart", report People magazine. He spoke in a new interview with The Sunday Times and recollected his friendship with the late princess. "We had a lot of really, really good conversations, I have to tell you. In fact it's strange and surreal to think about," he told the outlet. "I really, really liked Diana, she was an amazing woman and a super-great inspiration. Meeting her was truly one of the greatest things that ever happened to me." As per People, he said he was introduced to the princess on an aeroplane after he co-wrote and released the song called 'Diana', which many believed was inspired by the princess' 1981 marriage to Prince Charles. "I said, 'I used your name on a song once,' and Diana said, 'Yes, I know, very funny. Actually I'd like to hear it again,'" he recalled. "So I sent a copy to Kensington Palace, got an invitation to tea back and that's how we became friends." Their friendship grew over time, he said. "When I first went round to [Kensington Palace] she wasn't, like, 'I really need to talk to somebody,' and you don't bulldoze into someone's life wanting to know everything in the first 10 minutes," he continued. "It was, 'Let's have a cup of tea.' But later, the more friendly we got the more I learnt what was really going on." Adams said the lyrics to "Diana" were "laddish humour," and noted that the original inspiration behind the song was from "that guy who (had) broken into the Queen's bedroom and sat on her bed smoking." However, he noted that he "retired (the song) after Diana died out of respect to her and her boys".

Indian origin Canadian sentenced to 15 yrs in jail for drug smuggling, flees to India

SURREY: A Canada-wide arrest warrant has been issued against a 60-year-old Indian truck driver in British Columbia province who fled to India after he was sentenced to 15 years in prison for drug trafficking.

Raj Kumar Mehmi from Surrey was sentenced in November for smuggling 80 kg of cocaine into British Columbia, through the Canada-US Pacific Highway border crossing.

An Interpol Red Notice is being sought as a request to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally arrest Mehmi, pending extradition, surrender, or similar legal action, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said on Wednesday.

Mehmi was initially arrested on November 6, 2017 by the British Columbia RCMP after the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) discovered 80 sealed bricks of cocaine hidden inside a semi-trailer truck being driven, and owned by Mehmi.

At the time of this seizure, the bulk street value of the



cocaine was estimated at \$3.2 million.

Under the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (CDSA), Mehmi was charged with Importation of a Controlled Substance, Section 6 (1) CDSA, and Possession for the Purpose of Trafficking, Section 5 (2) CDSA.

On September 6, 2022, a Supreme Court Judge found Mehmi guilty on both charges, and a sentencing hearing was scheduled for January 9, 2023.

On October 11, 2022, Mehmi fled to India after boarding a flight from Vancouver, and arriving in New Delhi the following day, the

RCMP said. Since Mehmi failed to appear for his sentencing hearing, an application to sentence him in absentia was filed, and subsequently granted on September 15, 2023.

On November 16, 2023, the Surrey Provincial Court of British Columbia sentenced Mehmi (in absentia) for importing drugs and six years for possession of drugs.

Police said Mehmi's Canadian passport was seized and turned over to Passport Canada at the time of his arrest. However, due to the length of time between his arrest and conviction, he was able to legally obtain another passport through Passport Canada, which he ultimately used to flee, the CTV News reported, citing an RCMP spokesperson.

Describing Mehmi as approximately 6 feet tall and weighing 200 pounds, police have urged people not to approach him and contact their local police agency.

Cong gives adjournment notices in LS on census exercise, 8 ex-navy men in Qatar jail

NEW DELHI: Congress MPs Manickam Tagore and Manish Tewari on Wednesday gave adjournment notices to discuss the delay in census exercise and the issue of eight former Indian Navy personnel on death row in Qatar.

In his notice in the Lok Sabha, Tagore, who is the MP from Tamil Nadu's Virudhu Nagar, said, "I hereby give notice of my intention to ask for leave to move a motion for the adjournment of the business of the House for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent importance, namely -- to discuss about the abnormal intentional delay of the Central government for mitigating census exercise and to direct the government to initiate steps for the census process immediately without further delay."

Tagore said that was a matter of utmost importance that directly impacted the nation's governance and the well-being of its citizens. "The Census 2021 was initially postponed due to the severe COVID outbreaks in 2019 and later it has been subject to abnormal and intentional delays. The Central government, citing various



reasons such as the availability of population projections based on Census 2011 data and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, has continuously deferred the commencement of field activities for Census.

"In March 2022, certain amendments to Census Rules were notified, allowing citizens to self-enumerate themselves in the Census and the National Population Register (NPR). Despite this, the actual initiation of the census has been further delayed. The Office of the Registrar General of India announced in January this year that the freezing of administrative boundaries had been extended to July 1, 2023, pushing the commencement of the census well into 2024. But due to impending general elections in 2024, the process

would not be initiated in 2024 also.

"This intentional delay in conducting the census is becoming a significant hurdle in understanding the actual needs of our people. It has resulted in the failure of implementing various schemes and plans designed to cater to the specific requirements of our diverse population. As responsible citizens, we cannot overlook the adverse effects this delay may have on policy making, resource allocation, and the overall development of our nation," the Congress MP said.

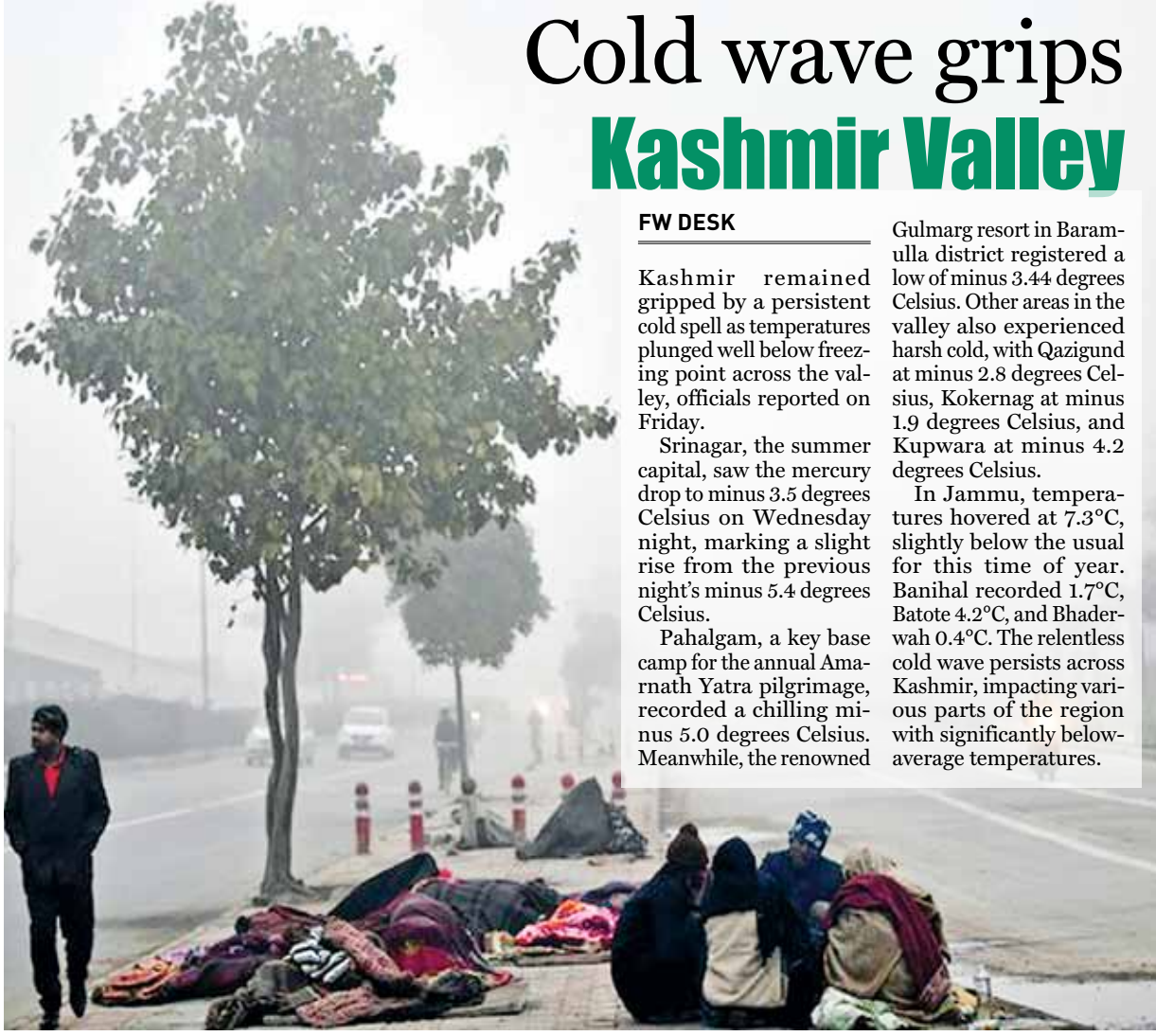
"Therefore, I urge this august House to have a discussion regarding the urgent need for conducting the census immediately. The timely completion of the census is crucial

for accurate data collection, which in turn is essential for effective governance and the successful implementation of government programs.

Tewari gave the adjournment notice to have a discussion regarding the retired-Indian Navy personnel imprisoned in Qatar.

"I hereby give notice of my intention to ask for leave to move a motion for the adjournment of the business of the house for the purpose of discussing a definite matter of urgent importance, namely -- That this House do suspend Zero Hour, Question Hour, and other Businesses of the Day to have a discussion regarding the retired-Indian Navy personnel imprisoned in Qatar. Captain Navtej Singh Gill, Captain Birendra Kumar Verma, Captain Saurabh Vasisht, Commander Amit Nagpal, Commander Purnendu Tiwari, Commander Sugunakar Pakala, Commander Sanjeev Gupta, and Sailor Ragesh, were sentenced by the Qatari court on October 26, 2023."

He said that he has been constantly raising this matter since August 2022 both inside and outside the House but there has been no response from the government for 14 months.



Cold wave grips Kashmir Valley

FW DESK

Kashmir remained gripped by a persistent cold spell as temperatures plunged well below freezing point across the valley, officials reported on Friday.

Srinagar, the summer capital, saw the mercury drop to minus 3.5 degrees Celsius on Wednesday night, marking a slight rise from the previous night's minus 5.4 degrees Celsius.

Pahalgam, a key base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra pilgrimage, recorded a chilling minus 5.0 degrees Celsius. Meanwhile, the renowned

Gulmarg resort in Baramulla district registered a low of minus 3.44 degrees Celsius. Other areas in the valley also experienced harsh cold, with Qazigund at minus 2.8 degrees Celsius, Kokernag at minus 1.9 degrees Celsius, and Kupwara at minus 4.2 degrees Celsius.

In Jammu, temperatures hovered at 7.3°C, slightly below the usual for this time of year. Banihal recorded 1.7°C, Batote 4.2°C, and Bhaderwah 0.4°C. The relentless cold wave persists across Kashmir, impacting various parts of the region with significantly below-average temperatures.

Shreyas Talpade suffers heart attack, undergoes angioplasty



MUMBAI: Actor Shreyas Talpade, who is known for 'Iqbal', 'Golmaal' franchise and 'Poster Boys', suffered a heart attack. The actor was shooting for a film and after completing the shoot collapsed due to a heart attack on Thursday evening. As per media reports, he was rushed to the hospital and underwent angioplasty at the city's Bellevue Hospital in Andheri West.

The angioplasty was conducted at around 10 p.m. and currently the actor is doing fine now. The actor shot through the day, and was absolutely fine. He even joked around with the crew on the set, and shot sequences that had a bit of action. However, once he went home, he told his wife that he was feeling uneasy. He was then rushed to the hospital but he collapsed on the way. Once he reached the hospital, the medical professionals conducted the angioplasty and is now stable.

Seema Singal's love for sports brings her to the Sponsorship of Pro-Tennis league

KAVITA SHARMA

Harven Realtors LLC provides high quality real estate buying, selling, leasing and property management services in Dubai. Ms Seema Singal is the founder chairman of the company, she is an entrepreneur and a business woman in the field of real estate with more than 25 years of experience. She has also acquired the title of Master Spiritual healer in 2010 and still practices spiritual healing and has a huge member following. Seema Singal is recently in Delhi as her company Harven Realtors LLC is the title sponsor of fifth Edition of Pro-Tennis league held in New Delhi. In an Exclusive conversation with The Financial World digital, Seema Singal spoke up about the PTL league, Her Company Harven Realtors LLC and her love for sports.

Reporter-Why are you sponsoring this PTL league?
Seema- see from the very beginning I have been health freak person and getting associated with something that is promot-



ing a sport in our country is a privilege. So we as Harven are very proud to say that we are associated with PTL and we are going to take this relationship forward in the coming years.

Reporter-How you are going to promote lawn tennis in India... Any Plans?

Seema- Definitely we have our plans and are working on it. We are planning to take this league to UAE very soon...so we are working on our proposal.. how we are going to promote this entire sport...and how we can promote as Harven with the PTL so that all the sport and the sportsmen people get their due

respect and the opportunities to be shining in India and overall world scenario as well. So we working on it.

Reporter- How frequently Tennis leagues are you planning to hold in India.?

Seema- that is something we still need to discuss with the directors and everybody but definitely you will see more of PTL and the sport coming up.

Reporter- Harven is in real-estate so why is it not in India, Why only in Dubai?

Seema- so we already are real estate people in delhi, we have a background of generations of real-estate building in India. And

"Don't let your physical limitation demotivate you," Kolhapur's gold medallist Swaroop Unhalkar's advice to fellow para athletes

Swaroop Unhalkar won the Gold medal in 10m Air Rifle Standing SH1; He draws inspiration from India's icons Abhinav Bindra and Gagan Narang

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

After 8 series and 22 shots, Maharashtra para-shooter Swaroop Unhalkar found himself trailing by one point in the Final of Men's 10m Air Rifle Standing SH1 at the inaugural Khelo India Para Games against Haryana's Deepak Saini on Wednesday. While Swaroop had a total score of 222.8 with two shots left, his opponent Deepak was ahead with 223.8 points and was on the cusp of winning the Gold medal. But giving up is not in Swaroop's nature.

Born with severe polio leading to disability in both legs, Swaroop has been a fighter ever since he was born. Between the age of 2 months and 10 years, he had to undergo multiple opera-

tions because of his severe condition. "I never let my condition deter me from achieving my dreams," Swaroop says at the Karni Singh Shooting Range during a training session of the Khelo India Para Games 2023.

Growing up in the city of Kolhapur in Maharashtra, Swaroop became passionate about sports after he saw his uncle playing football. "I was always interested in sports while growing up. I would often visit the stadium to see my uncle compete. Looking at him, I also developed a desire to play but was unable to do so due to my physical condition. At the time, I was not aware about para-sports."

A chance meeting with Mr. Anil Pawar in 2008, who was the head of the District Paralympic Association at the time led Swaroop on a new path.

"I would go to attend my classes in Polytechnic in a Government institution in Kolhapur and over there I introduced myself to Mr. Anil. He became a close friend and gave me knowledge about para-sports and thus my journey began. I finally had



a chance to fulfill my dream of playing sports," he recalls.

The next step for Swaroop was to determine the sport he wanted to pursue. He tried his hands across almost everything - Shotgun, Discus Throw, Javelin Throw, Athletics, Powerlifting, and Archery, before finally deciding on Shooting as his career option.

"While shooting since 2008 from the age of 21, I started competing across tournaments in 2012 after I was inspired by Abhinav Bindra Sir and Gagan

Narang Sir, who both won medals at the London Olympics," he says. But another factor that attracted him towards shooting was the fact that the sport would allow him to see instantaneous results.

"I could see my score on the screen as soon as I took a shot. The fact I was seeing results simultaneously allowed me to recognise my skills," he says.

But getting a chance to compete in a sport was just the start of Swaroop's journey. He had to figure out means to finance the sport. The equipment needed itself was too expensive for his family to provide, with his parents running a small shop selling pooja items. The early passing away of his father, made things more difficult.

"Because we were a family of limited means, I decided to hide my participation in shooting from my parents and family for a long time. After I played in a few competitions, they found out seeing my name being printed in newspapers. I received immense support from them once they did," he says.

Bhagavad Gita: Eternal Journey of the Embodied Soul

VIJAY SINGAL

The embodied soul (jeevatma - the self) is on a continued journey towards perfection. Sri Krishna has described, in the very beginning of his dialogue with Arjuna (Chapter 2 of the Bhagavad Gita) the characteristics and movements of the jeevatma. It has been stated that jeevatma dwells in the body of everyone. Though the physical bodies in which the jeevatma resides are perishable, but the jeevatma himself is imperishable. He is immeasurable and immutable. The jeevatma is never born nor he ever dies. He does not come into being at any particular time nor he ever ceases to be; because he is eternal, unborn, ever-existing and primeval. He is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. He rather moves to another body. Sri Krishna has also described the manner of the journey of the jeevatma. It has been stated that just as an embodied soul passes through childhood, youth and old-age; in the same manner, he obtains another body after death. And just as a person discards old garments and puts on fresh ones; similarly the embodied soul gives up worn-out body and passes into new one.

The journey of the embodied soul has further been explained in shlokas from 15.7 to 15.11. In these shlokas Sri Krishna has elaborated upon the genesis, attributes and transformations of the embodied soul. It has been stated that an eternal fragment of the Supreme Lord (Ishvara) having become an individual soul in the world of beings, attracts towards himself, from the material nature, five senses and also the mind. The expression 'an eternal fragment of the Supreme Lord' does not imply that Ishvara is capable of being partitioned into fragments. The individual self is an integral and inseparable part of the Supreme Self (the consciousness nature of Ishvara). Though



inseparable part of the whole, the jeevatma becomes jeev (a living being) after he acquires the senses and the mind i. e. he enters into a mind-body complex. In other words, instead of being a mind-body complex having a soul, the jeev is a soul having a mind-body complex. This soul keeps on moving from one body to another. The relationship of jeevatma, jeev and Parmatma has often been explained through the analogy of the space within an earthen pot and the universal space outside.

The soul being of the consciousness nature cannot directly see, hear, touch, taste or smell. But when he resides in a particular body, he enjoys the objects of the senses and, thus, experiences the pleasures and pains of the body, through the mind and the senses. These senses and the mind accompany the embodied soul in its perpetual voyage through the cosmic existence. Sri Krishna has stated that when the jeevatma leaves a body and enters a new one, he carries the mind and the senses with him, in the same manner as the air carries aromas from one place to another. The symbolism of the air carrying the fragrance (and not the flowers themselves) explains the process of the transmigration of the soul. Fragrance does not remain in the air for ever. Similarly, any set of the senses and the mind is not an ever-lasting associate of the embodied soul. When the jeevatma departs from one body (at the time of death), he discards the gross body and carries samskaras (the latent mental impressions generated

through the varied experiences of the body) and enters the other body along with these samskaras. While the soul gets a new body in every birth, the mental impressions continue travelling with him from innumerable past lives.

Though pervading whole of the body and experiencing its pleasures and pains, jeevatma is not easy to be perceived. Not everyone can realise the presence of the indwelling divinity. That is why it has been stated in these shlokas that the ignorant cannot see the jeevatma while residing in the body, while experiencing the objects of the senses; or while departing from the body. But those who possess the eye of wisdom, can see it all. In other words, the enlightened beings perceive the self at every stage.

It has further been declared that the yogis who strive with full faith and firm resolve see the soul existing in their own selves - in their own mind and in their own intelligence. They recognise the self as their own being. But those whose hearts are not pure, cannot see the indwelling soul, even if they try to see him.

To conclude, the pilgrimage of the embodied soul continues, till he reaches the goal of freedom from the cycle of birth, death and re-birth. Therefore, even while fulfilling his worldly duties in all possible ways, one must always remain aware that in essence he is an eternal fragment of the Supreme Lord. Right knowledge, sincere devotion and unattached action paves the way of unity of the individual self with the Supreme Self.

Dead' man who became a Khelo India Para Games powerlifting champion

29-YEAR-OLD GADADHAR SAHU OF ODISHA BAGGED A GOLD IN THE 58KG CATEGORY

KAVITA SHARMA
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In 2009, Gadadhar Sahu's life changed forever. He was travelling from Odisha to meet his brother in Surat, Gujarat when he met with a mishap while deboarding the train. His injuries were so grievous that he was declared dead by the first responders. It was only when he was being moved to the morgue that the medical team realised he was still alive and needed his legs to be amputated. Sahu was only studying in 7th standard when this accident happened.

Fourteen years since the fateful day, 29-year-old Gadadhar Sahu has emerged from adversity to bag a gold medal for Odisha in powerlifting following an impressive 140kg lift in the 58kg category.

Sahu who had already seen fair share of struggle - due to poverty, refused to give up easy. In the aftermath of the tragic accident, most doors of a conventional life were closed for Sahu. To make a living, he helped his brother run a fast-food kiosk in his hometown Narendrapur, a small village located in the Ganjam District of Odisha. It was only after pursuing



bodybuilding as a hobby, did he find solace and a new identity.

His first triumph was a gold medal in wheelchair category of the Mr Odisha Junior Bodybuilding Competition in 2016. But the financial burden of the required supplements and nutrition proved too much, and he was eventually enticed by the discipline of para powerlifting. "I was inspired by para-athletes when I read about them in the newspaper, I knew it would not be easy as a para-athlete, but I had the belief and motivation to do it. Because I had the background in bodybuilding it was a natural fit for me, and I have been focused ever since," he said.

On his preparation leading up to his gold medal at the Khelo India Para Games, the most significant triumph of his journey, Sahu said, "I have been training very hard to be the best version of myself. I have been training for two hours in the day and two hours in the evening every day, while helping my brother in his business as well."

New artificial intelligence model could help prevent sight loss in humans

FW CORRESPONDENT
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Team of Researchers have created a new artificial intelligence (AI) model capable of predicting long-term visual impairment risk in patients dealing with high myopia, which ranks among the top three causes of irreversible blindness in various parts of the world.

The experts at Tokyo Medical and Dental University (TMDU) have created a special AI that can predict the risk of long-term vision loss. This kind of AI, called machine learning, helps computers learn from information to become better at tasks.



The team at the Tokyo Medical and Dental University (TMDU) said its machine-learning model works well for predicting—and visualising—the risk of visual impairment over the long term.

Machine learning is a type of AI focused on building computer systems that learn from data, enabling software to improve its performance over time.

People with extreme short-

sightedness (called high myopia) can clearly see objects that are near to them but cannot focus on objects at a distance.

Contacts, glasses, or surgery can be used to correct their vision, but having high myopia can lead to a condition called pathologic myopia, a leading cause of blindness.

"We know that machine-learning algorithms work well on tasks such as identifying changes and complications in myopia but in this study, we wanted to investigate something different, namely how good these algorithms are at long-term predictions," said Yining Wang, lead author of the study.

Harven Pro Tennis League: Gurgaon Sapphires win season 5 of the league; becomes first team to win two PTL titles

Defending Champions Gurgaon Sapphires beat Ichiban Samurai 81-56 in the final to win the fifth season of the Harven Pro Tennis League (PTL) for consecutive titles

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Gurgaon Sapphires became the first team in the history of the Harven Pro Tennis League (PTL) to win back-to-back titles when they beat Ichiban Samurai in the final at the DLTA Complex in New Delhi. It took their tally to two titles as they

triumphed 81-56 in the final played under the lights at the RK Khanna Stadium. With the win, Ichiban Samurai suffered their first defeat of the season and disappointingly for them, it came in the title clash.

Gurgaon Sapphires had entered the final after a thumping 81-64 win over Sankara Stag Babolat Yoddhas while Ichiban Samurai narrowly edged Paramount Proec Tigers 81-75.

Gurgaon Sapphires maintained that powerful run into the final as well despite losing the first match of the tie. Sahaja Yamalapalli gave the Ichiban Samurai a winning start (14-6



over former National champion Sharmada Balu. Next Gen men's player Rushil Khosla kept that momentum with a 11-9 win over Maan Keshwarwani. From then on it was one way traffic in the

direction of the Gurgaon Sapphires.

First, Next Gen women's singles player Ruma Gaikawari trounced Gauri Mangaonkar 15-5 to bring the match to even

footing at 30-30. Then the pairing of Balu and Suresh Krishna had the better of Yamalapalli and Dilip Mohanty (12-8) in the women's pro and Masters mixed doubles match. In the men's singles match that followed, Rithvik Choudhary gave his team a further six point margin to enjoy with a 18-12 win. This 10-point margin grew bigger with Balu and Gaikawari resoundingly beating Yamalapalli and Mangaonkar 15-5.

With Gurgaon Sapphires leading by a staggering 20 points, they knew even a slight advantage in the seventh match would be enough.



traditional Kashmiri attire, he emphasized the inviting nature of the locals and invited others to experience the valley's charm beyond film sets.

In a video message, the actor urged visitors to consider

Kashmir for vacations, not just for filming purposes. He highlighted the warm welcome received and advised against littering, stressing the importance of preserving the valley's pristine beauty.