

REGION

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L-G SAXENA CHAIRS MEETING ON REGULARISATION OF UNAUTHORISED COLONIES IN DELHI



Delhi government calls for CBI probe into supply of 'sub-standard' drugs to hospitals

FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The Delhi government's Directorate of Vigilance wrote to the home ministry, requesting it to assign the probe into the supply of "sub-standard" drugs to state-run hospitals to the CBI. Sources in the AAP dispensation said the Delhi government will recommend to Lt Governor V K Saxena, the suspension of the health secretary pending inquiry in the case. Earlier, Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj had demanded action against the health secretary in connection with the matter. Saxena last week recommended a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry into the alleged supply of drugs that "failed quality standard tests" and had the "potential of endangering lives" to hospitals run by the city government. "I am further directed to state that any action for supplying such kind of 'Not of Standard Quality' drugs should not be confined to the Central Procurement Agency (CPA) and there is a need to investigate the entire



supply chain -- the role of the suppliers who procured from manufacturers and provided access to the end users, that is, hospitals (patients). "Besides, there is a need to lift the corporate veil to understand the gravity and motives of supplying 'Not of Standard Quality' drugs," read the communication of the Directorate of Vigilance to the Union ministry. The drugs that were found to be of "sub-standard quality" included critical life-saving antibiotics used for the treatment of lung and urinary tract infections -- Cephalosporin -- according to officials. They also included a steroid -- Dexamethasone -- for curing life-threatening inflammation in the lungs and joints and swelling in the body, anti-epilepsy and anti-anxiety psychiatric drug Levetiracetam and anti-hypertension drug Amlodipin, the officials said. "In this context, it is not out of place to mention that the matter of 'Mohalla Clinics' was already entrusted to the CBI and a Preliminary Enquiry (PE) was also registered... It needs to be investigated whether the same drugs which have been procured by the Central Procurement Agency (CPA) are also being distributed to the patients through the 'Mohalla Clinics' or

BANKING & FINANCE

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RBI RED FLAGS GLOBAL SLOWDOWN AND GEOPOLITICAL STRIFE FOR INDIA'S ECONOMY



Delhi airport faces aviation investigation amid dense fog challenges

NEW DELHI: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has launched an investigation into recent delays and diversions at Delhi Airport as the capital city grapples with thick fog affecting airline operations. The inquiry aims to determine the causes behind these disruptions, said the sources. Amidst the foggy conditions, airlines are under scrutiny to ascertain whether they deployed appropriately equipped planes and adequately trained crews for low-visibility situations. "Data is being verified from airlines and air traffic control (ATC) to check if the flights were diverted due to captains not being trained for low-visibility operations," said the sources. Delhi Airport currently has only one CAT III-equipped runway designed for operations in low visibility. The second runway, 28/10, is undergoing re-carpeting, affecting its usability. Once the re-carpeting process is completed, the DGCA will inspect the runway for recertification as a CAT III B-compliant runway. Between December 25, 12 a.m., and December 28, 6 a.m., a

POTPOURRI

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MUMBAI CHRISTMAS WITNESSES TRADITIONAL & MODERN CELEBRATIONS



Centre rejected Delhi, Punjab tableaux for Republic Day parade to exact revenge on AAP: Saurabh Bharadwaj



Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Friday said the BJP-led central government had rejected the tableaux of Delhi and Punjab for the Republic Day parade to "exact revenge on the AAP", which is in power in the capital and the border state. Addressing a press conference, Bharadwaj said the Centre had rejected Delhi's tableaux for three years now. The last time Delhi's tableau featured in the Republic Day parade was in 2021. It showcased the Shahjahanabad redevelopment project, according to officials. Bharadwaj said Delhi's tableau this year would have showcased schools in the city and the Mohalla Clinic model. "The tableau of Delhi, which is the capital of the country, was rejected by the Centre. Its tableau was rejected for the 2022 parade and then for the 2023 parade and now it has been rejected again for the 2024 parade," the minister said. The theme of the Republic Day parade was 'Nari Shakti' in 2023 and it is 'Viksit Bharat' for the 2024 parade, he said. "No one can say it's a design competition. The Centre had given us some suggestions and we had incorporated them (into our tableau proposal) and if it would have given us more suggestions, we would have included them too. Our tableau would have showcased schools and the Mohalla Clinic model," he added. Bharadwaj said it's not a coincidence that Punjab's tableau proposal was also rejected. "The Centre is doing this to exact revenge on the AAP," he alleged. On Wednesday, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had attacked the Centre over the non-inclusion of his state's tableau in the parade and accused it of discrimination.

Piyush Goyal asks Paper Industry to focus on Recycled Material, Help Ecology

NEW DELHI: The paper industry will continue to prosper as the country grows economically, stated Union Minister of Commerce & Industry, Piyush Goyal on Thursday. Highlighting the critical role of sustainability, Goyal encouraged the industry to concentrate on manufacturing paper from recycled materials and uphold ecological balance through the adoption of responsible practices. Speaking at the 62nd Annual General Meeting of the Federation of Paper Traders Associations in India (FPTA) in New Delhi, Goyal highlighted the recyclable and sustainable nature of paper, emphasising its crucial role in the circular economy. Recognising the paper industry's significance, Goyal emphasised its integral role as a carrier of knowledge, history, and literature, asserting its continued importance in the digital era for communication, branding, packaging, and more.

capital, called it a golden day for the people of Assam. Tagging a post on the pact by Shah, Modi said, "Today marks a significant milestone in Assam's journey towards peace and development. This agreement paves the way for lasting progress in Assam." "I commend the efforts of all involved in this landmark achievement. Together, we move towards a future of unity, growth, and prosperity for all," Modi said in his post on X. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was formed in 1979 with the demand for a "sovereign Assam". Since then, it has been involved in subversive activities that led to the central government declaring it a banned outfit in 1990. The Arabinda Rajkhowa-led faction joined peace talks with the government on September 3, 2011, after an agreement for Suspension of Operations was signed between the ULFA and the central and the state governments.

Kerala Governor, CM come face to face at swearing-in ceremony but no interaction



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: The 'cold war' between Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan continues unabated as the two came face to face on Friday but did not wish, or even look at, each other. Vijayan came to the Raj Bhavan to attend the swearing-in of two new ministers, replacing two who had resigned according to the agreement in the ruling Left coalition. The CM and Governor were seated side by side but virtually ignored each other. Soon after the national anthem was played, signifying the end of the function, Vijayan did not stay for the customary tea party, held whenever there is a function at the Governor's official residence, nor took his leave, but just walked out of the hall and drove back to his residence.

Peace pact with ULFA paves way for lasting progress in Assam: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed the peace pact signed by the central and Assam governments with ULFA, saying the agreement paves the way for lasting progress in the state. The ULFA's pro-talks faction on Friday signed a peace accord with the central and the Assam governments, agreeing to shun violence, surrender all arms, disband the organisation and join the democratic process. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who was present along with Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma at the signing of the accord in the national



capital, called it a golden day for the people of Assam. Tagging a post on the pact by Shah, Modi said, "Today marks a significant milestone in Assam's journey towards peace and development. This agreement paves the way for lasting progress in Assam." "I commend the efforts of all involved in this landmark achievement. Together, we move towards a future of unity, growth, and prosperity for all," Modi said in his post on X. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was formed in 1979 with the demand for a "sovereign Assam". Since then, it has been involved in subversive activities that led to the central government declaring it a banned outfit in 1990. The Arabinda Rajkhowa-led faction joined peace talks with the government on September 3, 2011, after an agreement for Suspension of Operations was signed between the ULFA and the central and the state governments.

Ayodhya airport to be named after Maharishi Valmiki now

AYODHYA: The airport in Ayodhya, which will be inaugurated on Saturday, has been renamed "Maharishi Valmiki International Airport Ayodhya Dham". The airport is being named after the legendary poet Valmiki, who is celebrated as the author of the epic Ramayana. The airport was earlier called the "Maryada Purshottam Shri Ram Ayodhya International Airport". The newly-constructed airport will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi



on December 30, days before the consecration ceremony of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The grand consecration ceremony will be held on January 22, 2024. On the day it is inaugurated, the first flights will be operated by IndiGo and Air India Express. The two airlines have already announced flights from Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmed-

abad to Ayodhya, commencing in January 2024. The cost of the first phase of construction for the airport is estimated to be nearly Rs 1,450 crore. The new terminal building, spanning 6,500 square metre, is designed to accommodate 600 peak-hour passengers, with an annual handling capacity of 10 lakh passengers.

Siddaramaiah's remark on Rahul as PM face likely to trigger infighting in K'taka Cong

BENGALURU: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's statement that Rahul Gandhi is leading the country and will become the Prime Minister after the Lok Sabha elections next year is likely to trigger internal fight in state Congress, sources said on Thursday. Siddaramaiah made the statement on Thursday while addressing the 139th Foundation Day of the party at the Bharat Jodo auditorium in Bengaluru. Sources said the remarks might trigger a rift between AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge and Siddaramaiah. It may be noted that Kharge's name was proposed as the PM face by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during the INDIA bloc meeting held in the national capital recently. Siddaramaiah had distanced himself from giving his opinion on the proposal to make Kharge the PM face. "Mamta Banerjee had suggested his (Kharge's) name... It is to be seen whom the INDIA bloc makes its PM face," Siddaramaiah had stated. Commenting on the Con-



gress President's name being proposed as the PM face, Karnataka minister Priyank Kharge, the son of Mallikarjun Kharge, questioned why discussions always revolve around community and whether efficiency in Dalits is not considered. He made this statement in response to queries as to if the name of a senior Dalit leader like Kharge had been put up to give an advantage to the INDIA bloc in the forthcoming Lok Sabha elections. Priyank Kharge maintained that every time there are discussions about a Chief Ministerial or Prime Ministerial candidate, they tend to focus on communities. "Won't you see efficiency in these communities that you are mentioning? Will they only get elected in the name of the communities they belong to," he asked. Sources said that questions are already being raised over Siddaramaiah not supporting the proposal of Kharge's candidature for the PM post whole-heartedly.

Govt hikes interest rates on Sukanya Samridhi scheme, 3-yr term deposit by up to 20 bps

FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The government on Friday raised the interest rates on Sukanya Samridhi scheme by 20 basis points and three-year term deposit scheme by 10 basis points for the January-March quarter, while retaining the rates for all other small savings schemes. According to a finance ministry circular, the deposit under Sukanya Samridhi scheme would attract an interest rate of 8.2 per cent from the existing 8 per cent, while the 3-year term deposit would become 7.1 per cent from the current 7 per cent. However, the interest rates for popular PPF and savings deposits have been retained at 7.1 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively. The rates were the same during the December quarter. The interest rate on the Kisan Vikas Patra is 7.5 per cent and the investments will mature in 115 months. The interest rate on the National Savings Certificate (NSC)

remained unchanged at 7.7 per cent for January 1 to March 31, 2024, period. There is no increase in interest rate for the Monthly Income Scheme, and this will earn 7.4 per cent for the investors. The government notifies the interest rate on small savings schemes, majorly operated by post offices, every quarter. The Reserve Bank since May 2022 has raised the benchmark lending rate by 2.5 per cent to 6.5 per cent, prompting banks to raise interest rates on deposits as well. However, the RBI has maintained the status quo on policy rate in the last five consecutive Monetary Policy Committee meetings since February this year.



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Defence Secretary Inaugurates New Design and Test Facility at HAL for Aero Engine Research & Development

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

The Defence Secretary, Giridhar Aramane inaugurated a new design and test facility at HAL's Aero Engine Research and Development Centre (AERDC) in Bengaluru. Hailing the important work being done by HAL, Aramane said, "HAL has received applause at the highest levels and the government trusts your capability to deliver and make the country self-reliant. Manufacturing sector is the future of our country and in the coming decades, HAL should focus on mastering technologies for all types of aircraft. Think ahead as the entire paradigm of warfare is changing." Thrusting on the role of unmanned aircraft in the future warfare, he encouraged HAL to collaborate with other private companies to develop new platforms. "HAL is the largest DPSU in India and I want it to become the top ten companies in the world," he added. He had a look at the manufacturing range of various engines and test beds. He also paid a visit to HAL's Aerospace Division.



He added. C.B. Ananthkrishnan, CMD (Addl. Charge), HAL said, "The development of this facility marks a key milestone in HAL's growth trajectory. It is a testimony of HAL's commitment towards achieving Atmanirbalbharat in aero-engine design and development." The new facility spanning over 10,000 sq. meters has been established under the modernisation plan. The AERDC is currently involved in the design and development of several new engines including two strategic engines -- Hindustan Turbo Fan Engine (HTFE) of 25 kN thrust for powering trainers, UAV's, twin engine small fighter aircraft or regional jets and Hindustan Turbo Shaft Engine (HTSE) of 1200 kN thrust for powering light and medium weight helicopters (3.5 to 6.5 tonnes in single/ twin engine configuration). The new state-of-the-art facility houses special machines, advanced setups leveraging on computational tools, in-house fabrication facility and two test beds for testing HTFE-25 and one testbed each for testing HTSE-1200 and upcoming JV engine for IMRH to be co-

developed by Safran, France and HAL. In addition, the newly developed facility has setups for testing Air producer of Jaguar, Gas Turbine Starter Unit (GTSU) -110 M2 and 127E of LCA, Auxiliary Power Units of IMRH and AMCA, Gas Turbine Electrical Generator (GTEG) -60 for An-32 aircraft. Setups to carry out various critical tests for engine components and LRUs have also been established within the new facility. The Centre, established in the 1960s, holds the unique distinction of being the only design house that has developed test beds for engines of both Western and Russian origin. The Centre has successfully developed & certified PTAE-7 engine, the first indigenous turbojet engine of India powering Lakshya (Unmanned Aircraft), Gas Turbine Electrical Generator GTEG-60 for starting An-32 aircraft, Air starter ATS 37 & Air producer for starting Adour-Mk 804E/811 on Jaguar aircraft and Shakti engine for powering ALH to support Ad804/811 engine of Jaguar aircraft.

L-G Saxena chairs meeting on regularisation of unauthorised colonies in Delhi



NEW DELHI: Days after the Parliament passed the NCTD Laws (Special Provisions) Act, 2023, Delhi Lieutenant Governor V.K. Saxena chaired a meeting with the Chief Secretary, Principal Secretary (PWD), Vice-Chairman of DDA, MCD Commissioner, and other senior officials to take stock of the progress and status of works related to regularisation of unauthorised colonies and rehabilitation of the slum dwellers under the PM-UDAY and PMAY (Urban) schemes, respectively.

Officials said that Saxena expressed surprise and concern at the fact that this Act in different versions had been in operation since December 2006, and yet the matter remained hanging, notwithstanding the constraints caused by the pandemic. Saxena also directed the officials to come up with a concrete time-bound plan of action for registration, verification and subsequent regularisation of the unauthorised colonies and stressed that the process of doing the same needed to be made simple and hassle-free.

Chaos in MCD house as BJP protests alleged 'substandard' drug supply to Delhi govt hospitals

FW CORRESPONDENT New Delhi

Chaos ensued during Thursday's MCD House meeting as BJP councillors raised a fervent protest, demanding the arrest of Delhi Health Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj over alleged "substandard" drug supplies to city government hospitals. The session, marked by disruptions from BJP and Congress councillors seeking answers on various issues, including delayed salaries for municipal employees, pensions, and house taxes, was swiftly adjourned within minutes, as reported by a news agency.

In response to the tumult, Mayor Shelly Oberoi took decisive action, suspending opposition leader Raja Iqbal and BJP councillors Ravi Negi, ko jail bhejo" (Send Saurabh Bharadwaj to jail), "House tax mafi yojna laao" (Bring house tax waiver scheme), and "kya hua tera wada, pelhi tareekh ko salary kaha that" (What happened to your promise? Where is the salary on the first of the month?). Despite the tumult, Mayor Oberoi managed to pass 18 proposals, postpone three, and refer back two during the course of the meeting.



Officials said that the L-G also warned that no dereliction or corruption in this regard will be tolerated. With regard to the rehabilitation of the slums, the L-G directed the DDA to immediately identify alternate sites within a radius of 5 km where in situ rehabilitation was not possible as per law and slum dwellers be rehabilitated to a dignified life in flats or houses that have already been constructed under various schemes.

Delhi Customs nab Bangladeshi duo with gold valued Rs 1.5 cr



NEW DELHI: Delhi Customs officials have arrested two Bangladeshi nationals and recovered over two kgs of gold valued at Rs 1.5 crore at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport, an official said. According to the officials, on the basis of profiling, the Customs have seized 2,724 grams of gold valued at Rs 1.5 Crore brought by two Bangladeshi nationals. "They had arrived from Abu Dhabi and were intercepted by the officials. On checking, gold bars and jewellery weighing over two kgs were recovered," said the official. "The passengers have been arrested under Customs Act, 1962. Further investigation is underway," the official added.

Two separate earthquakes jolt Leh, Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar

FW DESK

Two mild earthquakes struck Leh district in Ladakh and Kishtwar district in Jammu and Kashmir in the early hours of Tuesday. Officials reported no immediate damage from the tremors. The National Centre of Seismology recorded the first quake, measuring 4.5 on the Richter scale, hitting Leh at 4:33 am, with its epicenter five kilometers below the earth's surface.

Flight, train operations hit as dense fog blankets Delhi, AQI remains 'severe'

NEW DELHI: Delhi woke up to a blanket of dense fog on Wednesday, significantly reducing the visibility across the city to less than 50m affecting flights, rail and road traffic. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) classifies fog intensity into four types — shallow, moderate, dense and very dense fog. The visibility ranges from 999m to 500m, 499m to 200m, 199m to 50m and < 50m, respectively. As the day unfolds, the fog is forecasted to gradually dissipate, revealing a clearer atmosphere by the afternoon. The dense fog has led to increased caution in railway operations, affecting the departure and arrival times of trains. Flight schedules are also being affected, with many flights experiencing delays and some possibly facing cancellations. As of 8 a.m., more than 40 flights have been delayed due to the ongoing dense fog. This includes disruptions in eight international departures, four international arrivals, 22 domestic departures and five domestic arrivals. Delhi airport has also issued an advisory, which reads: "While landing and takeoffs continue at Delhi Airport, flights that are not CAT III compliant may get affected. Passengers are requested to contact the airline concerned for updated flight information. Any inconvenience caused is deeply regretted."

Protecting Sunehri Masjid is the responsibility of NDMC says JIH Vice President MM Khan

KAVITA SHARMA New Delhi

The Vice President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, Malik Mohtashim Khan has voiced concern over reports that the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) is considering demolishing the Sunehri Masjid due to traffic problems. Opposing the proposed demolition, the JIH Vice President, in a statement to the media, said, "We are extremely concerned and disturbed at the arbitrary public notice served by the Chief Architect, NDMC, which says that NDMC is considering the "Removal of Sunehri Masjid (Grade-III Heritage building)" after receiving an official request from Delhi Traffic Police for providing better traffic management in the vicinity of the roundabout of Sunehri Bagh. The NDMC is poised to demolish the Sunehri Masjid under the Unified Building Bye Laws- 2016. We take strong objection to and oppose the demolition of such a magnificent Heritage Building. Protecting Sunehri Masjid is the responsibility of the NDMC, which is under the control of both the Central Government and the Government of Delhi. We endorse the letter to NDMC by a group of prominent architects of Delhi who pointed out that "The Sunehri Bagh masjid is not merely a structure of bricks and mortar; it stands as a testament to our historical legacy and architectural grandeur. Its demolition would result in an irrevocable loss to the cultural fabric". We also concur with the opinion of these experts that "There are numerous examples globally where modern urban planning has successfully integrated with historical preservation, ensuring development and conservation go hand in hand."



Mr Khan pointed out, "Rather than seeking public opinion on the traffic problems posed by the mosque, the NDMC should take expert opinion and check the feasibility of alternative solutions like constructing a roundabout around the mosque, an underground tunnel or an overhead flyover. Every day there are traffic snarls due to some or the other religious, cultural, educational, political, and business events in the capital. Does it mean that we put an end to all these activities? No country in the world erases its heritage to make way for the irresponsible growth in vehicular traffic. Jamaat-e-Islami Hind believes that the Sunehri Masjid is owned by the Delhi Waqf Board and NDMC's claim over its land that is pending in the court, is erroneous. Jamaat would like to remind the Government of India that freedom fighter and Member of Parliament, Maulana Hasrat Mohani (who coined the slogan Inquilab Zindabad) stayed at Sunehri Masjid while attending Parliament sessions. Media reports suggest that after the NDMC public notice seeking feedback from the public, the majority of people have opposed the demolition of the mosque. Selectively erasing history is both vengeful and disappointing and must be avoided by our government if it believes in justice and fair play."

Fake call centre racket busted with 36 arrests including 11 females

SATISH HANDA Faridabad

The cases of on-line fraud are fast increasing day by day in Haryana. The team of Crime Branch DLF Faridabad exposed a fake call center running in Spring Field on Friday late night and arrested 36 youths including 11 females from the spot, and also recovered Laptops and notes prepared for talking to foreigners from the arrested accused. The kingpin of the operation, also the call centre owner is yet to be arrested. Sube Singh of police said, the cops raided the premises on the second floor of Veer Plaza complex at around 3.30 pm and found that an illegal call centre was reportedly extorting money from the bank's customers without having licence or any document issued by the Department of Telecommunication, reportedly been operational for over two months. The accused arrested at the spot were residents of Delhi, Faridabad and the northeastern states.



More than 14.29 lakh families in Haryana above poverty line, 4.50 % decline: Khattar

SATISH HANDA Chandigarh

Haryana's poverty rate was 11.88 percent in 2015-16, which came down to 7.07 percent in 2019-21, which is a decrease of more than four and half percent. Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said that when we took over the reins of the government in 2014, the poverty rate of Haryana in 2015-16 was estimated at 11.88 percent. But as a result of the positive efforts of our government, this rate came down to 7.07 percent in 2019-21, which is a drastic decrease. Thus, 14,29,341 families have come above the poverty line in Haryana. The Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said. CM said that the economic limit of poverty line across the country is Rs 1 lakh 20 thousand, whereas in Haryana we have increased this limit to Rs 1 lakh 80 thousand, so that more and more people get various benefits including ration card, Ayushman Bharat Scheme. Information reveals that in past nine years Haryana state government increased BPL limit from Rs 1.20 to Rs 1.80 lakh so that they may get benefits of different government schemes enabling them to get ration cards and free medical aid under Ayushman Bharat Yozna, which have now been further increased to Rs 3 lakh. Under the Ayushman Bharat scheme the eligible families may get free medical aid in 715 hospitals in the state which include 539 private hospitals and 176 government hospitals thus over one crore families in the state are getting benefits in this scheme. CM Khattar said that when BJP government came to power in Haryana state in 2014 the poverty rate in the state was 11.88% which due to government efforts reduced to 7.07 % in 2019-21 witnessed decline by nearly 4.5%. He said, there is also improvement in collection of taxes and Haryana state ranks first position in collection of GST able, to get Rs 34186 per capita, which was identified as Rs 19,652 crore in October 2022 which was increased to Rs 23,841 crore in October 2023 thus witnessing nearly 21% increase. Khattar said that the unemployment rate in Haryana state has dropped to 5.2% as against the National level of 6.6%. He said efforts are being made by the government to further reduce unemployment in the state. He disclosed that according to PLFS report unemployment in neighbouring states has been recorded as 8% in Punjab state, 14.5% in Himachal Pradesh and 12% in Delhi state, as such the unemployment situation in Haryana state is not bad as compared to other adjoining state as being constantly claimed by Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda that according to Niti Aayog Haryana facing 9% unemployment.



Sikh Gurus taught Indians to live for glory of their land: PM Modi on 'Veer Bal Diwas'

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said that Sikh Gurus have taught Indians to live for the glory of their land, and served as an inspiration to make the country better and developed. Speaking at a 'Veer Bal Diwas' event here to commemorate the martyrdom of the two sons of Guru Gobind Singh, PM Modi highlighted that their sacrifices are not only being remembered in India but also globally. The Prime Minister said, "Today the country is remembering the immortal sacrifice of the brave Sahibzadas and taking inspiration from them. In the golden age of independence, a new chapter has started in the form of Veer Bal Diwas."



He said that last year, for the first time, the country celebrated December 26 as 'Veer Bal Diwas'. "Then everyone in the entire country listened to the heroic stories of Sahibzadas with great emotion. Veer Bal Diwas symbolizes the resolve to do anything to protect Indianness. This day reminds us that age does not matter at the height of bravery," he said. He said that now 'Veer Bal Diwas' is being celebrated at the international level also. "Programmes related to Veer Bal Diwas are also being organised in Britain, Australia, New Zealand, UAE and Greece. The whole world will know more about the brave Sahibzadas of India and will learn from their great deeds," he said. He also said, "The courage and ideals of Guru Gobind Singhji and his four Sahibzadas continue to inspire and energise the hearts of the people of India. "So, the Veer Bal Diwas is the nation's tribute to the unmatched bravery of those true heroes and the great mothers who gave birth to them." He also said, "Unless we respect our heritage, the world will also not appreciate our heritage. Today when we are proud of our heritage, the world's perspective has also changed." He said that he was happy that India is coming out of the slavery mentality, and "today's India has full faith in its people, its capabilities and its inspiration". "The sacrifice of Sahibzadas is a matter of national inspiration for today's India. In today's India, the sacrifice of Lord Birsa Munda and the sacrifice of Guru Govind Singhji inspire the entire nation," he said. "We have to live for the honor and glory of this soil, we have to live to make the country better. As children of this great nation, we have to live, unite, struggle and emerge victorious to make the country developed," PM Modi said. He also pointed out that today, India is one of the countries in the world which has the youngest population. "India was not so young even at the time of its freedom struggle. When that youth power brought independence to the country, it is beyond imagination to what heights today's youth power can take India to," he said. He also said that the coming 25 years will bring huge opportunities for the youth of India. "The youth of India may be born in any region or society... their dreams are limitless. To fulfill these dreams, the government has a clear road map, clear vision, clear policy and there is no flaw in its intentions," he said. "Being the world's third largest economy means better healthcare, better education, more avenues and more employment opportunities. It also means quality of life and quality of products! How will the developed India of 2047 be? To draw this picture of Bharat on that big canvas, our youth has to take the lead," the Prime Minister emphasised. He also said that today the whole world is considering 'Bharat Bhoomi' as the land of opportunities. "Today India is at that stage where India is playing a big role in solving major global challenges," the PM said.

Residents drinking 'slow poison' in water containing high fluoride content in 17 Haryana districts

SATISH HANDA Mahendergarh

Residents of 17 out of the total number of 22 districts in Haryana state are compelled to drink slow poisons in under ground water having high concentration of fluoride in drinking water, as per NGT report. The information was also sought by the RTI activists and the report also revealed that in 230 districts of 25 states in the country the water contains very harmful arsenic contents in 230 districts across 25 states, and are compelled to drink water containing poisonous concentration of fluoride contents in drinking water in 469 districts in 27 states, which is unfit for human consumption causing several ailments. According to information, the permissible limit of fluoride in water is 1 mg/litre, while the fluoride in these districts is 3.8 mg/litre, not only fluoride but TDS and chloride level is also much higher. On the basis of information from few adversely affected districts in the state include Jind district apart from the Mahendergarh district having 17 villages with high concentration of fluoride. In Rewari district, there are 16 such villages. According to a report by water management in the state, Gurugram has 9 such villages, Sirsa has 4, Kaithal 4, Panipat and Sonapat 1 village each. In sPalwal, there are eight villages with a high fluoride level. Among other affected districts in Haryana state include Ambala, Bhiwani, Faridabad, Fatehabad, Jhajjar, Karnal, Panipat, Sonapat, Rohtak, Sirsa, Yamunanagar, Panchkula and Kaithal district where the quantity of Arsenic in ground water has been identified ranging between 0.01 to 0.05 mgm per liter water. Whereas the quantity of Fluoride has been observed as around 1.5 mg each liter water.

Over 3000 doctors go on strike in Haryana

SATISH HANDA

More than 3000 doctors working in government hospitals of Haryana have gone on strike today in support of their long pending demands. During this period only emergency services will be available while OPD in hospitals will remain closed and doctors will not examine patients. However, along with emergency, trauma center and post-mortem house will also remain functional. Haryana Civil Medical Services Association (HCMSA) has warned that if their demands are not met, they will go on complete strike from December 29 as already declared. According to information, doctors have been protesting for long pending demands including a separate cadre for specialist doctors, increasing the rule of filling two bonds of Rs 1 crore each doing PG while in service to Rs 50 lakh, selection of senior medical officers through promotion instead of direct recruitment. However, government hospitals in twin city Ambala a home town of Home & Health Minister provided normal services to the patients. The doctors hworking in government hospitals in the state have warned that if their demands are not met, they will go on an indefinite strike from December 29 and If the health services are affected during strike period, the government will be responsible for it. In view of the doctors' strike, the Director General of the Health Department has canceled the leaves of all government doctors and said if any doctor does not come for duty then he will be considered on strike. Under the leadership of District Head of Haryana Civil Medical Association, Dr. Vipin Gondwal all the doctors gathered outside the Civil Surgeon offices and expressed concern over government taking no action on their demands.



Ram Vilas Vedanti asks Yogi to bring Advani to Ayodhya for Jan 22 event

NEW DELHI: Former BJP MP Ram Vilas Vedanti, who was accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case in 1992, has urged BJP veteran and former Deputy Prime Minister L. K. Advani to attend the consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on January 22.



Vedanti said the Yogi government must make arrangements for Advani's visit, so that he could witness the grand temple and idol of Shri Ram at the sanctum sanctorum. The Temple Trust has already sent an invite to Advani, however, there were doubts over him attending the event because of his ill health. Advani became one of the torchbearers of the final phase of the temple movement when he started his Rath Yatra from Somnath to mobilise support

for Ram Temple in September 1990.

"Advani had made a huge contribution to awakening Hindutva in the Ram Mandir movement through his Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust has invited him for the consecration ceremony.

being seated there," Vedanti said.

"Atal, Advani and Joshi have contributed a lot for BJP to reach where it is now. Advani's contribution to the Ram Jannabhoomi movement is huge. He should witness Ram Lalla enthroned in his temple. This is not just the desire of the

country but of Hindus across the globe," he said.

Vedanti was one of the 32 accused in Babri Masjid demolition, including Advani, Murl Manohar Joshi, Uma Bharti and Kalyan Singh and was acquitted by the CBI court in September 2020.

He won from Machhlishahr parliamentary seat in 1996 and Pratapgarh in 1998.

Vedanti was the working president of Ram Jannabhoomi Nyas which the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had set up for the construction of Ram Temple during the temple movement.

After the SC verdict in 2019, the Centre set up Shri Ram Jannabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust to oversee the construction work, with Nriyaya Gopal Das as its chairman and Champat Rai its secretary.

Rahul Gandhi to start "Bharat Nyay Yatra" on Jan 14 from East to West...



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Senior Congress leader and former president Rahul Gandhi will embark on 6,200 km Bharat Nyay Yatra from Manipur on January 14. It will cover 85 districts in 14 states and conclude in Mumbai on March 20.

Disclosing this here today, AICC general secretary in charge of organization KC Venugopal and General Secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said, the yatra will be flagged off by the Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge from Imphal on January 14.

The Nayay Yatra will be for securing economic, social and political justice for the people of the country.

Venugopal said, following the unanimous resolution of the Congress Working Committee on December 21 that Mr Gandhi should do the second phase of the Yatra from

East to West, it was decided that he (Gandhi) should do the second phase of the yatra from Imphal to Mumbai.

Replying to a question about choosing Manipur as the starting point, he said, the state was an important part of the country and also the party wanted to begin the process of healing the wounds of people of Manipur.

He said, while in the first phase, Gandhi covered about 4,500 kms from Kanyakumari to Kashmir covering 12 states, this time he will cover 6,200 kms covering 14 states. This time the mode of the 'yatra' will be a bus with off and on walking stretches.

The states to be covered in the yatra include Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Ramesh said, while during the Bharat Jodo Yatra, Gandhi

While in the first phase, Gandhi covered about 4,500 kms from Kanyakumari to Kashmir covering 12 states, this time he will cover 6,200 kms covering 14 states. This time the mode of the 'yatra' will be a bus with off and on walking stretches"

raised the issues of economic disparities, polarization and dictatorship, the Nyay Yatra will focus on social, economic and political justice for the people of the country.

He said, after spreading the message of unity, love and harmony through Bharat Jodo Yatra, Gandhi will seek justice for the people of the country.

Replying to a question whether the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) parties will also participate in the yatra, Venugopal said, the final details were being worked out.

Ramesh pointed out, during the Bharat Jodo Yatra leaders of various political parties had also participated in that yatra.

Terrorists using Chinese weapons, devices to attack security forces in J&K



FW DESK

Terrorists are using Chinese-manufactured weapons and communication equipment in attacks against security forces in Jammu and Kashmir, intelligence reports have revealed. As per sources within the Army, there's a growing reliance on China-made weaponry and devices by outfits like JeM and Lashkar-e-Toiba in their operations against the military, reports in the media said.

The reports suggest Chinese-supplied drones, grenades, and other armaments provided to the Pakistan army are being diverted to terrorist groups, leading to their deployment in recent attacks. Instances of terrorists using sniper guns equipped with Chinese technology have been identified during infiltration attempts from Pakistan into Indian territories. Moreover, the evidence points to the utilization of Chinese-made body cameras for capturing footage during attacks, which has raised concerns about the authenticity of images released by these groups. Intelligence sources have highlighted that encrypted communication devices employed by these terrorist outfits also trace back to Chinese origins.

Former RAW Chief Dulat advocates dialogue with Pakistan to tackle terrorism in J&K



FW DESK

AS Dulat, former chief of India's RAW, on Wednesday emphasized the necessity of initiating a dialogue with Pakistan to address the issue of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

Speaking at a media interaction organized by the NGO Sarhad, Dulat highlighted the positive outcomes witnessed during former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's tenure through dialogue. He recalled the significant ceasefire on the border in 2003 as a result of such efforts.

Dulat mentioned experts' observations about Nawaz Sharif's potential return to power in Pakistan and his purported interest in restoring peaceful relations with India. He stressed the importance of political developments in India, Pakistan, and the United States in revitalizing Indo-Pak relations, citing Sharif's purported eagerness for dialogue with India.

Priyanka Gandhi named in ED charge sheet in PMLA case

NEW DELHI: Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra has been named in a charge sheet filed by the Enforcement Directorate, pertaining to the purported acquisition and disposal of a five-acre plot in Haryana. Notably, her husband, businessman Robert Vadra, is also mentioned; however, both have yet to be formally designated as "accused".



A charge sheet has been lodged against C.C. Thampi, a non-resident Indian (NRI) businessman, and Sumit Chadha, a British citizen of Indian descent.

According to the ED charge sheet, throughout the investigation, it was discovered that C.C. Thampi acquired around 486 acres of land between 2005 and 2008 in the village of Amipur, District Faridabad in Haryana, through the services of H.L. Pahwa, a real estate agent based in Delhi-NCR.

Notably, Robert Vadra also procured three parcels of land totaling 334 kanals (40.08 acres) in Amipur from Pahwa during 2005-2006, subsequently selling the same land back to H.L. Pahwa in December 2010.

Moreover, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra acquired agricultural land measuring 40 kanals (5 acres) in the village of Amipur

from Pahwa in April 2006. She later sold the same land to Pahwa in February 2010.

"Pahwa was receiving cash out of the books for the purpose of acquisition of land. It was also noticed that Robert Vadra did not pay the entire sale consideration to Sh. Pahwa. The investigation in this regard is still ongoing. The copy of the ledger accounts in the books of H.L. Pahwa reflecting the above mentioned transactions were taken on record vide letter dated November 17.11.2023," read the ED charge sheet.

"During the course of investigation in this case, it is found that a long and thick relationship exists between C.C. Thampi and Robert Vadra. Not only a personal/cordial bond but common and similar business interests are also found between them. The details of the evidence showing their association are given hereunder in subsequent paras," it read.

As per charge sheet, the statements of Thampi were recorded under Section 50 of PMLA on various dates.

"In his statement recorded on 19.06.2019, Sh. CCT stated that he knew Robert Vadra for the last more than 10 years and he (Robert Vadra) was initially introduced to him (Thampi) by Madhavan, P.A. to Sonia Gandhi. He met Robert Vadra many times during the latter's visit to UAE," it added.

Foundation day: Congress's main objective is public welfare: Kharge

NEW DELHI: Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday hoisted the party flag at the party headquarters on its 139 foundation day, and said the objective of the Indian National Congress is public welfare.

The foundation day celebration saw the presence of Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi, General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Member of Parliament Rajeev Shukla, General Secretary K.C. Venugopal and other members. "The objective of the Indian National Congress is public welfare and there is progress for the people of India. We believe in an India based on parliamentary democracy in which there is equality, opportunities for all without any discrimination and political, economic and social rights enshrined



in the Constitution are followed," Kharge wrote on X. "We are proud that for the last 139 years we have been struggling with full honesty to build such an India. My heartiest greetings to every Indian on the occasion of Congress Foundation Day. Jai Hind, Jai Congress," he further said in the tweet. Extending

greetings to party members, Rahul Gandhi also took to X and wrote: "Truth and non-violence are the foundation of whose pillars are love, brotherhood, respect and equality and patriotism is the roof. I am proud that I am a part of such an organisation, proud that I am a part of the Congress.

Hearty greetings to all the leaders, officials, supporters and my dear Babbar Sher and Sherni workers on the Congress Foundation Day."

"During the independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi had started 'Tilak Swaraj Fund' to conduct the activities of the Indian National Congress. Its objective was to raise money for the non-cooperation movement so that 'Swaraj' could be established," Priyanka Gandhi said in a tweet.

"Today, after almost a 100 years, Congress has started the 'Donate for Desh' campaign so that democracy can be saved, a strong opposition can be formed against the dictatorial government working for a few billionaires and the Constitution can be saved," she said.

Multi-party alliance in Kashmir mulling review petition on Art 370

FW DESK

The multi-party coalition People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration (PAGD) has declared its intention to explore the possibility of lodging a review petition in the Supreme Court, the PAGD spokesman MY Tarigami said. The move is in response to the recent verdict that upheld the Central government's decision to revoke Article 370 provisions.

Tarigami addressed the media in Jammu, expressing discontent with the Supreme Court's ruling, stating, "What the government of



India did on August 5 (2019) is not an ordinary mistake; it was an assault on our basic constitutional rights, rights of people of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh," Tarigami while revealing the ongoing discussions

among stakeholders and petitioners to seek justice and reconsider the apex court's decision.

The Supreme Court's five-judge constitution bench, on December 11, upheld the Cen-

tral government's decision to annul Article 370 through a presidential order issued in August 2019. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) was among the parties challenging these decisions and expressed dismay at the apex court's verdict. Tarigami, representing the Gupkar Alliance—a multi-party front advocating for Article 370 restoration—highlighted the available option to file a review petition. "Why would we construe that doors will not open for us? Some retired justices, who are colleagues, also feel that there is room for a review petition before the apex court," he added.

KRV activists vandalise properties over non-kannada boards in Bengaluru

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Pro-Kannada organisation, "Karnataka Rakshana Vedike" (KRV) activists vandalised several properties and ransacked multiple commercial buildings in different parts of the Bengaluru city during what outfit had claimed was an "awareness procession" about the mandate for business establishment to prominently use Kannada in their name boards. The incidents were reported between 11am and 3pm according to KRV, its activists pulled down



several non-kannada name boards. At least three malls decided to shut down for the day following the incidents.

Bengaluru City police com-

missioner told to media that they have taken more than 1,000 activists, including several women into preventive custody. Meanwhile Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah said, "I have been informed about the incident. Those who have taken law into their hands will be booked. The authorities will look into it". Deputy CM DK Shiva Kumar said, "we are not against the KRV Protest but we will not allow activist to damage public properties and action will be taken against those damage public properties" he added.

Puri Parikrama project likely to be inaugurated next month



ARABIND MOHAPATRA
Puri (Odisha)

The pet project of chief minister Naveen Patnaik— Shree Mandira Parikrama Project (SMPP), a massive periphery redevelopment of the famous Jagannath Temple in Puri—is almost complete and likely to be inaugurated next month. It seems to be competing with the preparations for the grand opening of the Ram Temple at Ayodhya in January 2024. Ceremonies in Puri are being planned on a similar scale. According to one source the Lokarpan Yajna for the project is scheduled to be performed from January 15th to 17th, 2024, with Vedic recitations at the four gates of the temple. Rigveda for the eastern gate, Yajurveda for the southern, Samaveda for the western, and Atharvaveda for the northern gate have been finalized. Uniform painting is underway for prominent structures along the three-kilometer-long Grand Road connecting the Jagannath Temple and Mausima Temple. Vibrant lighting will adorn all temples and subsidiary shrines. Sources said that the Puri Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) and Puri district administration are leaving no stone unturned to make the inauguration ceremony of the much-awaited Srimandir Parikrama (Heritage Corridor) Project a grand success. About 30 teams comprising servants and SJTA officials have left for various parts of the country to distribute invitation cards. Among others the invitation cards will be handed over to religious heads of various shrines across the country.

Despite India's Vice-President being a farmer

WHY THE FARMERS ARE TO ADOPT STIR PATH?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN



December 27, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the late Justice Konda Madhava Reddy, former Chief Justice of Andhra Pradesh and Bombay High Courts and former Governor of Maharashtra, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar claiming himself a farmer, said, "As a Kisan Putra myself, I am inspired by Justice Reddy's efforts to alleviate rural struggles through his judgements. He gave a voice to those who were believed to be voiceless, he helped those who are the providers of Bharat i.e the Kisans of our Bharat."

that I get to honour another Kisan: a man who truly dedicated his life to the service of Bharat. I deem it a matter of pride, privilege, and pleasure for having been called upon to release the postal cover."

He further said, "I resonate with Justice Reddy on a personal level not only because of his association with the judiciary but also as someone who did not forget his roots. A son of the soil, Justice Reddy remained a cultivator in his native village, Dharmasagar, until the end."

On another occasion, while interacting with the invitee Haryana farmers in his office on October 13, he expressed his gratitude that on his election as Vice-President the Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced him in the Rajya Sabha as 'Kisan Putra'.

Expressing delight at the visit of the farmers in the Parliament House, he remarked, "Today is a special day as the parliamentarians from around the world & from the G-20 nations are in our country. Your visit to the



Parliament coincides with this momentous day. This Parliament stands as the largest Panchayat in the country, and today, the rightful individuals have gathered here. Discussions regarding farmers & farming should take centre stage in this forum."

Here question arises – when the Vice-President, himself a farmer, is so much anxious about the welfare of the farmers, then why the farmers are to adopt the stir path across the country?

Why they have to agitate for MSP? Why they have to demand prosecution of Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay

Mishra Teni, allegedly the main conspirator behind the Lakhimpur Kheri massacre of farmers?

It is pertinent to mention that All-India General Body meeting of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) has called for intensifying struggle of farmers and farmworkers in 2024 to achieve the main demands MSP@C2+50% for all crops and procurement, freedom from debt-trap through loan waiver, halting privatisation of electricity, dismissal and prosecution of Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra Teni (allegedly the

main conspirator behind the Lakhimpur Kheri massacre of farmers) etc.

As per statement of SKM, shared by All India Kisan Sabha Vice-President, Inderjeet Singh, SKM State Units in 20 states shall conduct massive Jana Jagran Campaign from 10th to 20th January 2024 across India through door-to-door visits and distribution of leaflets. The aim of this mass campaign is to expose the pro-corporate economic policies of the BJP led Modi Government, detrimental to the interest of farmers, workers, and people at large, causing large scale unemployment, uncontrolled price rise, poverty, indebtedness and unbridled rural to urban migration. The Campaign is against the Modi Governments' narrative of corporate raj-based development dependent on GDP rate and India become three trillion-dollar economy that hides the decline in the per capita income, growing income inequality and denial of minimum support price to farmers

and minimum wage to workers. The farmer and worker activists will visit households, distribute leaflets, and ensure massive participation of the people in the forthcoming joint and coordinated struggle actions against corporate exploitation under the patronage of RSS-BJP rule. State level coordination committees will meet immediately to prepare for the campaign to target to cover at least 40% of the 30.40 crores households.

Divulging further, the release states that SKM shall hold Tractor Parade on 26th January, Republic Day of 2024 at district level in all the States and Union Territories. It is expected that the parade shall be held in at least 500 districts. SKM appeals to farmers to join the official Republic Day Parade in great numbers and after the conclusion of the formal Parade, the Tractor Parade will be held. The farmers participating in the Tractor Parade will fly-high the National Flag along with the flags of the constituent organisations. Farmers will take

pledge to protect the principles of Democracy, Federalism, Secularism and Socialism enshrined in the Constitution of India. Along with tractors, other vehicles and motor bikes also will join the parade.

SKM has called on the farmers across India to make the Jana Jagran Campaign and Tractor Parade successful to mark the determination to defeat the corporate communal nexus that exploits and divides people through communal and casteist polarisation. The struggle will be intensified till all the demands are met by the Union Government.

A farmer leader from Haryana, Dr. Balbir Singh raises a question, "Why the farmer community Vice-President can't see the atrocities with the international wrestlers, who are also the daughters of the farmers."

Jag Mohan Thaken is a Haryana based retired Senior Bank Manager, views are personal

Decoding India's stance on IMF's economic outlook

India's Finance Ministry recently issued a statement clarifying its position in response to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) recent Article IV consultations with India. These consultations, a routine exercise conducted by the IMF with member nations, involve comprehensive discussions on economic and financial developments and result in a detailed report reviewed by the IMF's executive board. The Ministry's statement, following four days after the IMF released its India consultation details, aimed to address "certain presumptions" made by the IMF. Particularly, it focused on the IMF's view that adverse shocks could potentially escalate India's general government debt to over 100% of GDP by 2027-28. The Ministry emphasised that this projection was based on a 'worst-case scenario' and not an inevitable outcome. It also highlighted that other countries, like the U.S., the U.K., and China, have been projected by the IMF to face much steeper debt scenarios in their respective 'worst-case' assessments. The statement draws attention to India's resilience in the face of global economic shocks, such as the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. It also clarifies that the Ministry's intent was not to rebut the IMF but to prevent misinterpretations of its observations. It is noteworthy that the IMF's view of India's fiscal position has evolved positively over the past year. In 2022, concerns were raised about India's fiscal space; however, recent assessments suggest moderate sovereign stress risks. This shift in perception is largely attributed to the Indian government's success in meeting fiscal deficit targets, with central government debt around 57% of GDP last year. The Ministry's reaction to the IMF report may have inadvertently drawn more attention to the concerning aspects of the report. However, India's focus must remain on reducing debt and adhering to fiscal deficit targets. The commitment to reduce the deficit to 4.5% of GDP by 2025-26 from an estimated 5.9% this year is crucial.

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THE FINANCIAL WORLD

RNI NO. DELENG/2011/38860
PRINTED & PUBLISHED BY SWINDER BAJWA
ON BEHALF OF FW MEDIA
PRINTED AT JAGJIT PUBLISHING CO. PVT LTD
D-12, INDUSTRIAL AREA, PHASE-1, MOHALI,
PUNJAB 160059
PRINTER & PUBLISHER SWINDER BAJWA
OWNER: FW MEDIA
PUBLISHED AT: BUILDING NO-23, NEHRU PLACE
NEW DELHI 110019; PHONE: 9888040061
EDITOR* ABDUL WASEY
(*RESPONSIBLE FOR SELECTION OF NEWS UNDER THE PRB ACT)



ARUN MAIRA EXPLAINS HOW INDIA'S GROWTH IS HINDERED BY SKILL-JOB-INCOME MISMATCH

Inclusive growth: A new economic approach

In their book, *Breaking the Mould: Reimagining India's Economic Future*, Raghuram Rajan and Rohit Lamba recommend that India give up its policies to build its manufacturing sector and jump straight to export more high-end services. This is surprising because this is what India has been trying to do in the last 30 years, with very poor outcomes. Insufficient jobs and incomes are the Achilles heel of India's economy.

The signs are visible outside economists' datasets, in the social and political arenas. Farmers are demanding better prices and informal sector workers and contract workers, fair wages and social security. The economy cannot be in good shape when 60% of Indians, cutting across castes and religions, are classified as "economically weaker sections" entitled to job reservations.

A growth-affecting mismatch

The obstacle tripping India's growth is the mismatch between skills, jobs, and incomes. Twenty years ago when, supposedly, "India was Shining", economists thought India had leapfrogged manufacturing in the development ladder, in which, traditionally, masses first transition from agriculture to manufacturing and then to services. China lifted its masses from poverty by moving them up the ladder into a large manufacturing sector, becoming the factory of the world. Now, China is producing world-beating technology champions.

India invested in world-class institutions of science and engineering 70 years ago. The Indian Institutes of Technology enabled India's software industry to become a globally competitive force. They also produced CEOs for U.S. multinational companies. India's space programme is delivering results at a fraction of the Na-



tional Aeronautics and Space Administration's costs. However, India's pattern of growth, with investments in high-end skills, has not generated enough decent jobs for India's masses.

Delivering the 2010 Lionel Robbins Memorial Lectures, British economist Adair Turner pointed out that too much reality was being left out of economists' models for them to explain the world. With a twist of Keynes' statement that "practical men...are usually the slaves of some defunct economist", he warned that the "great danger lies (now) with reasonably intellectual men and women employed in the policy-making departments of central banks and governments who tend to gravitate to simplified versions of the dominant beliefs of economists who are still very much alive."

The realities are being missed

Economic theories developed by analysing numbers miss realities. Most economists do not understand the process of "learning" (which is the essence of "development") whereby citizens learn new skills

and increase their incomes, and nations acquire capabilities they did not have before. An agricultural worker is willing to apply his intelligence and labour to a new job; but cannot take much time off from working and earning to learn new skills. Therefore, his next job, though different in content, must be close enough to his capabilities for him to take the leap from one to the other and then continue to increase his skills on the job. If the next job is near his present habitation, he will save living costs too. Therefore, "adjacencies" in work and location in rural areas are the best steps for climbing the skill-income ladder. They also create dense webs of economic activity.

Manufacturing is performed not only in large, capital-intensive smart-phone factories, and value-adding services not only in large software factories. Manufacturing and value-added services can be carried out in rural areas and around farms, in small, labour-intensive, and low-capital, enterprises, for processing agricultural produce and transporting and selling it in nearby markets. Such enterprises add value to agricultural commodities locally, without requiring their transportation to more distant, large-scale processing centres.

Targets of trillions of dollars of GDP will not be achieved if economic growth does not become inclusive and sustainable very soon. The pattern of economic growth must be changed. More Indians must be employed so that they can earn and learn and, by earning more, increase the market for more producers. India cannot afford to

neglect its small-scale and informal manufacturing sector any longer. While India has abundant resources of willing human beings, large, capital-intensive, factories require more land and financial capital to operate on scale — resources which are relatively scarce in India.

Make more for India, in India

Investing in education and skills for "high end" manufacturing and services will not benefit the masses if they cannot be employed. Richness of economic activity within local webs will create more sustainable growth than policies to participate in long, international supply chains when barriers are rising. The Indian state has limited financial capacity. It cannot afford to misspend it, by reducing taxes and duties and giving incentives to investors, with the expectation that benefits will gush down to the masses. More imports will not increase the well-being of Indian citizens if they do not have more incomes to buy. Foreign direct investment will not boost growth if it does not increase employment soon.

The mould in which economics was cast in the later part of the 20th century must be broken. Policymakers must reimagine the path for India's growth. They must get down to the basics of inclusive economic growth. There are no shortcuts.

The global economy is not growing like it was when China became the factory for the world. Producers everywhere are looking for new markets. India, with its unmet needs is very attractive for them. India's policies must take advantage of this opportunity and make more for India in India, thus growing both jobs and incomes for India's masses.

Arun Maira is former Member, Planning Commission and Chairman, Boston Consulting Group India. Views are personal.



BRINDA KARAT ON WHY G20 SUPPORTS 'WOMEN-LED DEVELOPMENT,' YET DATA SHOWS PAY DISPARITY.

The gender gap in corporate-driven development

The G20 Summit in Delhi adopted a Declaration which resolved to set up a "working group on the empowerment of women." Given the continuing discrimination against women and girls, this is welcome. But by and large, "working groups" formed in the past have not been implemented. For example, the Sustainable Development Goals have specific targets to address gender gaps. However, as the Declaration itself admits, "At the midway point to 2030, the global progress on SDGs is off-track with only 12% of the targets on track."

The Gender Equality section says, "We encourage women-led development and remain committed to enhancing women's full, equal, effective, and meaningful participation as decision makers for addressing global challenges inclusively and in contributing as active participants in all spheres of society, across all sectors and at all levels of the economy..." The phrase 'women-led development' is striking and is the contribution of the Government of India. But there is no explanation of what this actually means.

This is not an issue of semantics. When phrases like 'women-led development' are used, leaders need to describe the parameters of such a development process, which are different from 'non women-led' development models. The truth is that the development models adopted by countries describing themselves as democracies (mainly developed countries in the West) have led to obscene inequalities between countries, between the rich and the poor within countries, and between men and women. The core of this model remains



the discredited 'trickle down theory' in which big business continues to enjoy state subsidies through tax concessions, bank loan write-offs, subsidies in land availability, and cross-country concessions for the free movement of finance capital on the premise that all this will lead to more investment, creation of employment, and so on. The 'no governance is good governance' model has removed government regulation, dismantled and sold off public assets, and privatised strategic industries. All this has been done in the name of reforms. The G20 Declaration reiterates this commitment. It says, "We recognise the critical role of private enterprise in accelerating growth and driving sustainable economic transformations." If the macro model of development remains the same, where does women-led development fit in?

On March 7, the bulletin of the Press Information Bureau listed government schemes meant to benefit women under the headline 'From Women Devel-

opment to Women-led Development.' Just as reform is the cover for aggressive profit maximising models of capitalism, women-led development schemes conceal the reality of decreasing government investment in projects and schemes meant for women's development. The Gender Budget was started in 2005-2006. What was meant to be a tool to plug the gaps through prioritised investment has been reduced to an accounting exercise. It has two parts. Part A includes schemes which are 100% for women and Part B includes all government schemes where at least one-third of the expenditure is supposedly for women. Women-led development should mean a substantial increase in the total amount of the Gender Budget. It should also reflect in a much bigger component in the expenditure in Part A rather than Part B. However, on both counts, the opposite trend dominates. The total Gender Budget for 2023-2024 was reduced from 5.2% of the total expenditure the previous year to 5%. On average, there has been no substantial increase in the Gender Budget since its inception, which has remained between 4% and 6%. What is of greater concern is that, in 2023-24, the year that the phrase 'women-led development' was used, the expenditure in Part A was at its lowest at around 39% of the total, while Part B made up 61% of expenditure of the Gender Budget. In other words, wholly women-specific schemes are just about 40% of an already inadequate budgetary allocation.

Economic independence

A critical area recognised as being a pre-

requisite for women's development is her economic independence. However, the share of women in regular waged work fell in India, according to an analysis of the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), from 21.9% in 2018-2019 to 15.9% in 2022-2023. Over 95% of women are in the unorganised sector with no job or income security. Most women are employed in flagship schemes of the Central government. Almost one crore women work in Anganwadis, as ASHA workers, as mid-day meal scheme workers, as facilitators, and so on. However, they are the most exploited, they are paid 'allowances' which are below even minimum wages, and not recognised as government employees. According to the PLFS survey, the share of women engaged in agriculture has increased to 64.3% in 2022-23 from 55.3% in 2018-19. This is mainly unpaid work on family farms. The budgetary allocations for paid work mandated by law in rural work projects through MGNREGA has been drastically cut down by the Central government. This mostly has a negative impact on women who constitute between 50% to 80% of workers in several States.

The reality is that women, particularly Dalits and Adivasis, are bearing the brunt of the economic policies of the Central regime of handing over the national resource to the richest 1% who now control over 40% of the country's wealth. This is corporate-led development, certainly not women-led.

Brinda Karat is a member of the CPI(M) Polit Bureau. Views are personal.

BOOKS: REVIEW

Modern satire meets classic narrative in Biles' new book

Adam Biles' "Beasts of England" ventures into the daunting terrain of creating a sequel to George Orwell's classic, "Animal Farm." With a blend of wit and satire reminiscent of Orwell himself, Biles navigates this challenge with a sense of humor that is often missing in contemporary literature. Orwell's legacy, often shrouded in the gloom of political disillusionment, is a tapestry of satire and humor, something Biles seems to understand deeply. Christopher Hitchens' observation of Orwell's widespread misquotation highlights this irony, and Biles appears to embrace it.

"Beasts of England" revisits the thematic landscape of "Animal Farm" - power and its corrupting influence. The familiar villains, pigs, and dogs, return to symbolize the perpetuation of corruption. However, Biles diverges from Orwell's path by removing humans from the equation, offering a fresh perspective

on the spread of corruption within the animal kingdom.

The novel, while entertaining, occasionally falters under its own ambition. An example is a scene where animals are coerced into misnaming fruits, which seems a tad heavy-handed in its portrayal of modern totalitarianism, especially in the social media era. Biles' attempt to parallel Orwell's themes with current societal mechanisms sometimes feels more like an addendum than an integral part of the narrative.

Biles pushes the envelope with anthropomorphism, assigning human attributes to animals beyond speech - they write, sing, and engage in distinctly human activities. This creative choice, while intriguing, risks alienating the reader as the animals become uncomfortably human-like. The introduction of Jumbo, a pig embodying excessive human vices, exemplifies this over-indulgence.

Despite these criticisms, Biles'

An example is a scene where animals are coerced into misnaming fruits, which seems a tad heavy-handed in its portrayal of modern totalitarianism, especially in the social media era

novel is a timely commentary on the absurdities and sinister undertones of political leadership, especially evident during the COVID-19 crisis. "Beasts of England" succeeds in doing what Orwell did best - using satire to reflect on our societal follies and making us laugh in the process. For readers seeking a humorous yet thought-provoking read, Biles' venture into Orwellian territory is a welcome addition to



Beasts of England
Adam Biles
Picador India;
288 pages;
Rs599

satirical literature.

Continuing the review of "Beasts of England" by Adam Biles, one can't help but admire the audacity with which Biles handles the Orwellian legacy. The novel doesn't just pay homage to Orwell; it seeks to extend his narrative into the contemporary world, albeit with mixed success. Biles' approach is bold, as he takes familiar characters and situations and places them in a context that is distinctly modern. This interplay between the classic and the contemporary is one of the novel's strengths, providing a bridge between Orwell's time and ours.

However, Biles' narrative sometimes struggles under the weight of its ambition. The task of contemporaryizing a classic without losing its essence is enormous, and at times, the novel veers towards be-

ing a parody rather than a sequel. While Orwell's "Animal Farm" was a product of its time, rooted in the specific political and social contexts of the mid-20th century, "Beasts of England" attempts to straddle different eras. This endeavor, while commendable, occasionally leaves the novel feeling disjointed, as it tries to resonate with both past and present audiences.

Moreover, the novel raises questions about the effectiveness of satire in today's world. In an age where reality often surpasses fiction in its absurdity, "Beasts of England" endeavors to capture this essence. Yet, one wonders if the subtleties of satire are enough to encapsulate the complexities of contemporary politics and society. Biles attempts to navigate these challenges with humor and wit, but the novel sometimes falls short in delivering a cohesive commentary on our current predicament.

In conclusion, "Beasts of England" is a brave and humorous attempt to carry forward Orwell's legacy into the 21st century. While it succeeds in invoking laughter and reflection, it also reminds us of the challenges inherent in reviving classics for a modern audience.

Panipat textile industry turning from local to global under 'Make in India' program

SATISH HANDA
Panipat

Textile and blanket industry of Panipat sees nearly 20% growth in export of textile products and blankets manufactured in Panipat as compared to previous years, while talking to The Financial World the president of Panipat Industrial Association Premam Singh Sachdeva said that there are more than 125 units manufacturing blankets in the town, especially manufacturing both Mink and Flamo blankets having much demand not only in domestic market as well as in other countries due to better in quality as well as prices competitive as comparing to the blankets manufactured in China. He said, blanket industry in the town doing annual business worth Rs 6000 crore in international markets, supplying goods in United States, United Kingdom, Australia and many other countries due to better in quality as well as



price, selling Mink blankets at the price 3 dollar each kg as compared to Chinese manufacturers selling these blankets at the price Rs 3.5 dollar each kg, as such foreign buyers prefer to buy blankets manufactured in India better in quality and cheaper in price, which witnessed over 20 growth in export sale this year.

The president of Chamber of Commerce & Industry Vinod Dhamija said that the manufacturers in China suffering huge loss in business after spread of Carona epidemic

outbreak started from and large number of foreign buyers shifted their procurements from Indian manufacturers after this. Dhamija said that foreign buyers now prefer to import textile products and blankets from Panipat manufacturers due to better in quality as well as cheaper in price, since Indian manufacturers are using cotton and wool in Mink and Flamo blankets, whereas manufacturers in China are mixing polyester in the raw material to earn more profit, resulting drop in quality as such

many buyers have switched over their procurement from Panipat manufacturers. Sources reveal that textile goods and blanket manufacturers in China are facing severe slump in their sale since past couple of years and large number of manufacturing units have become sick or closed down due to increase in production cost and drop in quality of their products. Dhamija said nearly 1250 ton thread is being consumed by the Panipat textile goods manufacturers daily and the consumption of thread as well as wool is fast increasing day by day.

According to information, in recent past sometime nearly 95 manufacturers from India had visited exhibition and business fair in China, among those there were 20 manufacturers from Panipat industry textile manufacturing handloom, blankets and carpets which proved very beneficial for Indian manufacturers visited the exhibition.

BEL receives orders worth Rs.678 Cr, including for NextGen Dial 112 project for UP Govt



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has signed a contract for a value of Rs.445 Crore with the Uttar Pradesh Government for next generation UP Dial 112 project company Press statement said. BEL will be providing comprehensive and state-of-the-art hardware, AI based software tools and Cyber Security solutions for the Dial 112 project, which is spread across the entire state of Uttar Pradesh. BEL is happy to be associated with the

UP Government for this project, which is one of Asia's biggest emergency response systems. BEL will be utilizing the ecosystem of domestic suppliers, including MSMEs for execution of this project, statement said. The company has also received other orders worth Rs.233 Crore and these pertain to Communication Display Units, Thermal Imaging cameras and other miscellaneous spares and services. With this, BEL has cumulatively received orders worth Rs.26,613 Crore in the current financial year, 2023-24. NexGen UP Dial 112 is one of

the pioneering Emergency Response Systems in India, among the largest such systems in Asia. The vision of NexGen UP Dial 112 is "to provide prompt integrated emergency response for public safety and security to all persons, anytime, anywhere in Uttar Pradesh". The programme will serve a population base of more than 25 crores. BEL will provide technology upgradation with 5 years' support for NexGen UP Dial 112, which will be able to handle calls landing through multiple channels like PSTN, mobile, SMS, emails, social media channels, web portal and mobile app. It will provide better services using updated solutions and technologies. The upgraded system can receive approximately 1,50,000 calls per day. As part of this project, BEL will provide AI based and cloud-ready software applications for the Contact Center, Multimedia Services, Computer Aided Dispatch, Map Services, location-based tracking, Business Intelligence, etc. BEL will also provide IT, Networking and Cyber Security Hardware and solutions.

India to Commence Trade Negotiations with Russia Led EEU FTA in January; S Jaishankar



NEW DELHI: India is poised to commence trade negotiations with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) bloc in January for a potential free trade deal, announced External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday.

Following extensive discussions with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov as part of the annual India-Russia bilateral engagements, Jaishankar emphasised the significant focus on trade, investments, and logistics during their talks. The EEU comprises five post-Soviet states—Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia—forming an integrated single market since its inception in 2015.

With a current population of 183 million people and a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) exceeding USD 2.4 trillion, an agreement with this bloc would grant Indian goods access to the lucrative Central Asian consumer market.

Additionally, it would solidify the expansion of Indian products in Russia, particularly in the wake of Western brands and goods facing challenges after Russia's actions in Ukraine last year. The ministerial meeting also delved into discussions on mutual investments, emphasising the necessity to progress on a bilateral investment treaty, as highlighted by Jaishankar. He underscored that both nations explored "long-term arrangements" to ensure the continuous flow of fertilisers and coking coal.

746 PLI applications approved till November spread over 150 Districts: DPIIT



NEW DELHI: Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has approved 746 PLI applications till November 2023 and has established PLI (Production Linked Incentive) units in more than 150 districts across 24 states, the Commerce Ministry said on Tuesday.

According to the 2023 Year End Review For DPIIT over Rs 95,000 crore of investment reported till September 2023, which has led to production/sales of Rs 7.80 lakh crore and employment generation (direct & indirect) of over 6.4 lakh. Export have been boosted by Rs 3.20 lakh crore. Incentives worth around Rs 2,900 crore have been disbursed in FY 2022-23. There has been a value addition of 20 per cent in mobile manufacturing within a period of 3 years. Of the USD 101 billion total electronics production in FY 2022-23, smartphones constitute USD 44 billion, including USD 11.1 billion as exports, it said.

Make in India 2.0 to focus on Drones, Toys, EVs

NEW DELHI: Sectors like drones, toys, robotics, electric vehicle (EV) components and electronics are set to receive major boost in the second phase of 'Make-in-India' initiative, the Ministry of Commerce Industry said on Tuesday.

The government has decided to focus on these sectors due to their potential for exports and jobs generation.

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) is working closely with 24 sub-sectors to boost manufacturing in the country, it said.

According to the ministry, the sectors have been "chosen keeping in mind the Indian industries' strengths and competitive edge, need for import substitution, potential for export



and increased employability". The sectors include furniture, air-conditioners, leather and footwear, ready-to-eat, fisheries, agri-produce, auto components, aluminium, agrochemicals, steel, textiles, EV components and integrated circuits, ethanol,

ceramics, set top boxes, televisions, close circuit cameras, medical devices, sporting goods and gym equipment.

"Efforts are on to boost the growth of the sub-sectors in a holistic and coordinated manner," the ministry said.

E-retailers on ONDC required to deduct 1% TDS on Gross Sale

NEW DELHI: The Income Tax department has provided clarity on the TDS liability for e-retailers engaged in transactions through the government's Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), on Thursday.

According to the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) released by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), a 1 per cent Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) is mandated to be deducted from the gross sale amount. This includes convenience, packaging, and shipping fees charged by e-commerce platforms facilitating orders on ONDC. ONDC,



initiated by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), prompted the CBDT to address representations seeking clarification on TDS compliance responsibilities under Income Tax laws.

In compliance with the law, each e-commerce operator is obligated to deduct TDS at a rate of 1 per cent from the sales

amount of goods/services conducted through its platform. The CBDT has explicitly stated that in scenarios involving multiple E-Commerce Operators (ECOs) in a single transaction via the ECO platform, TDS compliance rests with the supplier, who ultimately disburses payment.

The CBDT has clarified that in a situation where multiple e-commerce operators (ECOs) are involved in a single transaction through the ECO platform, the TDS compliance is to be done by the supplier side, who finally releases the payment to the supplier.

DGFT E-Commerce Exports Handbook for MSMEs Launched

NEW DELHI: Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Commerce & Industry, launched the comprehensive "E-Commerce Exports Handbook for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)" prepared by the Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), on Thursday.

This handbook, aligned with the goals of Foreign Trade Policy 2023, is poised to become a definitive guide for MSMEs seeking to leverage e-commerce platforms for expanding their exports, stated the Union Minister.

Emphasising its role as a one-stop repository, the hand-



book offers detailed insights into strategies for promoting exports through e-commerce, providing MSMEs with the tools to venture effectively into global markets.

Goyal highlighted the global demand for India's traditional products, such as 'Shree Anna'

(millets), particularly in regions with a significant Indian diaspora. Through e-commerce, he added, the goal is to bridge the gap, connecting Indian MSMEs, craftsmen, farmers, and food processors with global markets.

Furthermore, the Union Minister announced the extension of the Scheme for Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) benefits to courier and postal exports.

He stressed the ongoing efforts to establish the necessary IT framework and other enablers to facilitate this extension. This move is expected to facilitate the MSME sectors to capitalise on government schemes, fostering e-commerce exports and contributing to the overall export growth target of achieving USD 1 trillion merchandise exports by 2030.

On the way of Self-Reliance

SATISH SINGH

To make the youth self-reliant and strengthen the country's economy, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi had launched "Start Up India" scheme on 16 January 2016, which can be considered a successful initiative started by the government today. India is progressing rapidly with the help of "Start Up India" Scheme. Only 111 unicorn startups had employed 4,42,714 people by July 2023, which is 12,765 more than the 4,29,949 employees recorded in September 2022. The Unicorn startups are those whose value is more than 1 billion US dollars. From this figure, the increasing importance of startups in India can be estimated.



As per a report by NASSCOM and Zinnov, Indian startups had raised Rs.1.79 lakh crore in 2021. According to this report, India has become the country with the fourth highest number of startups in the world, while USA, China and Britain are at the first, second and third places respectively. The data clearly shows that the country's startup ecosystem is growing rapidly, and this is also increasing the country's reputation as a hub of innovation and technologies.

When an innovative product or service of a company solves the problem of a customer in his own home, then it is called a startup. It can be started by one person, or many people can do it together. A startup started with new ideas, innovative solutions and technology quickly makes its place in the market due to its uniqueness and amazing commitment. To run the startup, the promoters can invest themselves or can invest capital in the business by taking a loan from a bank or financial institution. There is more risk in startup, but when the business runs, it gives significant returns to the promoter and provides employment to

many others.

To promote startups, the government has started Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups. To provide loans to startups, financial institutions must comply with the conditions of the DIPP. Only financial institutions approved by DIPP can provide loans to startups. Financial assistance to startups is given in the form of working capital, debentures, term loans etc. Member lending institutions of DIPP can provide loan amount up to Rs.5 crore to startups without third party guarantee or collateral security.

If a startup wants to take a loan of Rs.1.5 crore under this scheme, then 75 percent of its financial assistance is given by the institute and the remaining 25 percent amount must be arranged by the entrepreneur himself or herself. At the same time, the financial institution gives up to 85 percent of the loan to entrepreneurs seeking a loan of less than Rs.5 lakh and the entrepreneur must arrange 15 percent of the amount himself or herself.

The government has also launched Atal Innovation Mission, Startup India Seed Fund Scheme etc. to promote

innovation in startups. With this, the e-Biz portal, developed by Infosys, is serving as a communication hub for all business investors and entrepreneurs, helping startups to grow. However, to ensure the growth of startups, there is also a need to create a conducive environment in India, simplify regulatory requirements, provide appropriate facilities, etc.

Young population equipped with technology, large number of middle class who have less capital but are equipped with innovative ideas, favourable regulatory scenario etc. have important contributions for the sharp increase in the number of startups in the country. Due to the increasing number of startups, the contribution of startups to India's gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to increase by 5 to 10 percent by 2030.

The biggest obstacle in the development of startups is investment, but this obstacle is gradually being eliminated with the support of the government. Government banks and other financial institutions are not averse to funding startups. Domestic and foreign multinational companies are also investing in Indian startups. With the strengthening of the Indian startup ecosystem, investor participation can increase to 46 percent by 2030. At the same time, by 2027, the number of Indian high-net-worth individuals (HNIs) may increase to 1.7 million at a compound annual growth rate of 16 percent.

Indian startups are expanding not only within the country

but also globally. The growth of startups in India has ushered in a new era of economic progress and innovation. With the help of startups in India, people's income and employment generation are increasing and people are becoming self-reliant.

It is believed that the startup will manufacture goods in the country, which will reduce their prices. Importing goods from abroad increases their price, because the expense incurred in bringing the products from abroad is also added to the price of the products. If any item is manufactured in the country, then the needs of the people of the country will be fulfilled, at the same time foreign exchange will come to the country through export, rise in income, profit in domestic trade, increase in government treasury, upsurge in growth rate, strength in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), growth in employment rate etc. may be possible.

In view of the steady improvement in the Indian economy, it is expected to reach the level of Rs. 3 trillion to Rs. 5 trillion by the year 2025. At the same time, in the recent report of HSBC, the Indian economy has been estimated to reach the level of Rs.7 trillion in 5 to 10 years, because the phase of rapid improvement in the economy continues. In this way, with the help of startups, the possibility of the country's economy becoming even more rosy has increased.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal

Jagdeep Singh, Who Earns Elon Musk Like Salary of Rs 17,500 Crore

FW DESK
New Delhi

Another Indian-origin CEO Jagdeep Singh is in discussion these days and because of the discussion his hefty salary. Actually, the company has given him a package of 17 thousand 500 crores.

Jagdeep Singh is the CEO of QuantumScape Corp. Many talented people of Indian origin are CEOs of foreign companies like Parag Aggarwal and Iena Nair were in news due to their stunning pay packages. Parag Aggarwal was in a lot of discussion recently after becoming the CEO of Twitter. After Parag, now another Indian origin is in the headlines, whose name is Jagdeep Singh. The reason for Jagdeep Singh being in the discussion is his package. Actually, he has been given such a package by the company, about which the knowledgeable people are surprised. The special thing is that this package gives competition to Elon Musk, one of the richest people in the world. In such a situation, we know who Jagdeep Singh is, which company he is the CEO of and what his company does. Also, you will know the answer to this important question that how much is their package. So know some special things related to Jagdeep Singh...

Who is Jagdeep Singh?

Jagdeep Singh is an Indian-origin CEO who is the CEO of American startup company QuantumScape Corp. Now the company has announced to give them a fat package, after which they remain in the media headlines. This company has gone



public only a year ago and now after this the package of Jagdeep Singh has been approved in the annual meeting of shareholders. According to Jagdeep's LinkedIn profile found on the Internet, he is the founder and CEO of QuantumScape Corp.

According to this social profile, before this he was the founder and CEO of Infinera from 2001 to 2009. After this he started QuantumScape Corp in 2010. Prior to 2001, Jagdeep was the founder and CEO of several companies, including Lightera Networks, AirSoft etc. He has studied Stanford University (Computer Science), University of California (MBA), University of Maryland College (Computer Science).

What does the company do?

First of all, let us tell you that the venture fund of Volkswagen and Bill Gates has invested in this company. The company is currently valued at \$50 billion. The company is currently working on the next-generation technology, which will accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles across the world. The company is working on providing a safer and cheaper alternative to lithium-ion batteries to EV makers.

QuantumScape: Solving New Age Problems A little glimpse of the company's plans to solve the very time-consuming bat-

tery problem. Vehicles will need new types of batteries to replace regular gas batteries on the roads of the world. And this is where QuantumScape has developed a new technology that makes vehicles affordable and durable in a short period of time. Batteries charge faster with better capacity and run cooler. The company pioneered the replacement of lithium-ion battery liquids with metal strips, making batteries safer and less prone to combustion. Jagdeep is leading the EV revolution through his innovative acumen and his company's collective efforts, thereby making the world a better place to live.

What is QuantumScape?

Headquartered in San Jose, California, the company is currently worth \$50 billion and is funded by Bill Gates and Volkswagen. With 400 employees, the company is working on next-generation technologies that will accelerate the adoption of electric vehicles around the world.

Jagdeep was the CEO of Infinera from 2001 to 2009, before founding Lightera Networks and AirSoft. He studied computer science at Stanford University and the University of Maryland and earned an MBA from the University of California.

How much is the package?

Jagdeep has been given a pay package of \$ 2.3 billion i.e. Rs 17500 crore from the company. Jagdeep gets stock options in this package. These packages are different from the normal salary packages and this package depends on the company performance, shares etc.

RBI Red Flags Global Slowdown and Geopolitical Strife for India's Economy

NEW DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Thursday that various factors such as slowdown in world trade, tighter monetary conditions, increasing fragmentation and geopolitical pose risks to the Indian economy.

In its biannual 'Financial Stability Report', the RBI noted that the impact of El Niño conditions could present a challenge to agricultural output and food prices.

Meanwhile, Union Commerce and Industries Minister Piyush Goyal said the Red Sea crisis has hit India's exports of rice, while the impact on other sectors would be known once



the monthly trade data is made available.

Geopolitical strife in the Middle East have escalated to tensions in the Red Sea region. Indian shipments to the Middle

East, US and Europe have been affected.

"Red Sea disruption is a matter of fact," Goyal told reporters at an event. "One industry that we know that

has been affected is rice. But we will know all the details once we have the data for the current month," he added.

Global headwinds pose the main risks to the outlook for the Indian economy, although macroeconomic stability is anchored by moderating inflation, ongoing fiscal consolidation and a modest current account deficit (CAD), the RBI said.

It also noted that the Indian banks are well capitalised and capable of absorbing macroeconomic shocks, that net non-performing assets (NPA) ratio of banks declined to a multi-year low of 0.8 per cent at the end of September 2023.

Central Bank of India & Kisetsu Saison Finance to Co-lend MSME Loans

NEW DELHI: Central Bank of India on December 27 signed a strategic co-lending partnership with Kisetsu Saison Finance, India for MSME Loans.

Participation by both entities in this co-lending arrangement will result in greater expansion of the portfolio by Central Bank of India and Kisetsu Saison Finance, India, said the bank in its regulatory filing. Co-lending or co-origination is a set-up where banks and non-banks enter into an arrangement for the joint contribution of credit for priority sector lending.

Under this arrangement, both banks and NBFCs share the risk in a ratio of 80:20 (80 per cent of the loan with



the bank and a minimum of 20 per cent with the non-banks). Bengaluru-based M/s. Kisetsu Saison Finance is an NBFC with AUM (Assets under management) of the Company as of September 30, 2023, was more than Rs

8200 crore. "The Co-Lending arrangement is expected to benefit both the entities to offer convenient experience and customer delight to their customers as well as to expand their reach across India," said the Central Bank of India.

Undisclosed global client terminates \$1.5bn AI deal with Infosys



NEW DELHI: IT major Infosys on December 23 announced that a global client has decided to terminate the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for a \$1.5 billion deal focused on artificial intelligence (AI) solutions.

The 15-year deal was signed in September with the undisclosed global client.

No reason was given for the termination of the deal. The agreement in September was subject to the parties entering a Master Agreement.

Both the parties will not be pursuing the Master Agreement now.

"This is in continuation to the disclosure made by Infosys vide letter dated September 14, 2023, titled 'Company update' with respect to a Memorandum of Understanding with a global company which was subject to parties entering into a Master Agreement," Infosys said in an exchange filing.

"The global company has now elected to terminate the Memorandum of Understanding and the parties will not be pursuing the Master Agreement," the company added. Infosys was to provide enhanced digital experiences to the global client, leveraging its platforms and AI solutions.

The technology solutions provider recently signed a \$1.64 billion deal with London-based Liberty Global for a five-year period.

Infosys, which will declare its December quarter earnings on January 11, won deals worth \$7.7 billion in the September quarter.

Indian, Hong Kong customs unearth trade-based money laundering case

NEW DELHI: The Indian Customs and Hong Kong Customs have unearthed a major case of Trade-Based Money Laundering (TBML) involving Hong Kong-based exporters and Indian importers located in Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in an exemplary case of bilateral cooperation and exchange of information. This crackdown showcases investigation and enforcement actions taken by both administrations under their respective laws to expose an international cartel.

The collaborative bust comes close on the heels of recently concluded Global Conference of Cooperation in Enforcement Matters (GCCCEM) organised by Indian Customs and Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI), with the theme of 'It takes a network to fight a network'.

DRI had unearthed a case of Trade-Based Money Laundering from a SEZ, wherein cheap synthetic diamonds were being imported into India in the guise of natural diamonds, to remit foreign currency out of India. Investigations revealed that cheap synthetic diamonds were being mis-declared as natural diamonds and overvalued more than 100 times and being imported from firms based in Hong Kong to SEZ in India.

During the investigation, it was also observed that some real diamonds were imported but replaced with synthetic diamonds and smuggled outside the SEZ.

SBI Chairman applauds India's Economic Resilience and Banking Sector Performance

NEW DELHI: The Indian economy demonstrated resilience in the face of global uncertainties, enabling the domestic banking sector to achieve robust performance in both FY2023 and the initial half of the current financial year, stated Dinesh Khara, Chairman, State Bank of India (SBI).

Addressing the audience at SBI's banking and economics conclave, Khara emphasised the continued robustness of



the Indian economy in the face of global turmoil, achieving a growth rate of 7.7 per cent

in the first half of FY24, the highest amongst major world economies

Khara highlighted the significance of 'Brand India' and proposed that, given the increasing presence of Indians or individuals of Indian origin in leadership roles globally, it is an opportune time to solidify the concept.

Expressing his observations over the past year, Khara noted the strengthening trajectory of the economy and the remark-

able resilience displayed by the banking sector.

He pointed out that banks not only delivered a robust performance in FY23 but also continued the trend into the first half of FY24, reinforcing capital and other key ratios.

The sector is prepared to achieve a scale conducive to funding numerous large-value projects, capital expenditure, and facilitating the transition towards green energy and mobility, Khara added.

India to retain fastest growing position in 2024: ASSOCHAM

NEW DELHI: India will likely retain the coveted position of growing at the fastest pace amongst the major economies in 2024 on the back of strong consumer demand leading to pick up in investment across several sectors in construction, hospitality, infrastructure including railways and aviation, said ASSOCHAM.

"India's macro picture looks quite convincing with the overall economy following a trend growth of seven per cent with critical building blocks combining to give it brighter prospects," ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood said.

According to ASSOCHAM, India Inc led by financials, construction, hotels, aviation, automobile and other manufacturing areas like electronics are on a strong pitch to further improve performance in the new year. The trajectory is being helped by the low crude oil prices, keeping inflation in



check with a big positive on raw material cost.

"Sectors like construction have several related industries which too have gained momentum. These include steel, cement, mining, electricity generation and consumer durables," the chamber said.

The macros including government balance sheet reflected in strong tax collections, record foreign exchange reserves, stability in INR against major currencies and signs of revival in

merchandise exports are expected to further improve.

Direct tax mop up between April-October, 2023 witnessed 23.9 per cent annualised growth with income tax and corporate collections rising by 31.1 per cent and 17.4 per cent, respectively. Total tax collections including indirect taxes, went up by 14 per cent in this period. The country's foreign exchange reserves of over USD 615 billion give a great cushion to the economy.

Special court convicts Karnataka Minister in Cheque Bounce Case

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

A special court has convicted Karnataka Minister for School Education and Literacy/Madhu Bangarappa over a cheque bounce case. The Minister has been ordered to pay a fine of Rs 6,96,70,000 failing which he will be required to undergo simple imprisonment for six months. Madhu Bangarappa as the director of the M/S Akash Audio-Video Pvt Ltd was the second accused in the complaint while Akash Audio-Video was the main accused. The special court for cases filed against sitting and former MPs/MLAs in Karnataka was hearing the case. Bangarappa had earlier deposited Rs50 lakh in court and on Dec 26, 2023, the day before the verdict, filed an undertaking that he would pay the remaining amount by January 30, 2024.



India's Economic Reforms Set Stage For 'Self-Sustaining' Expansion: Franklin Templeton Report

NEW DELHI: India is poised to undergo a period of 'self-sustaining' expansion, driven by reforms that have established a cycle of growth, as per a report by the global investment firm, Franklin Templeton.

The report anticipates the possibility of achieving an annual nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of up to 10 per cent in the approaching decade.

Highlighting the potential impact of recent government-led reforms, the financial firm, in its report, asserted that the reforms undertaken by the government possess the capacity to elevate India to a status akin to that of the United States and China by the year 2035.

The report projects India's potential membership in the prestigious USD 10 trillion GDP club. Franklin Templeton identifies three key drivers of growth in India, emphasising (i) broad-based infrastructure and manufacturing investment, (ii) a persistent shift from unorganised to organised economic activities, and (iii) enhanced political and economic stability. "Broad-based infrastructure and manufacturing investment



has joined consumption as growth drivers," said Franklin Templeton. Services exports are expanding and deepening, incorporating global capability centres focused on accounting, marketing, and human resources, the report added.

A sustained transition from unorganised to organised economic activities is underway, driven by prior reforms that integrate more labour into the organised economy, diminishing the allure of cash-based transactions, as highlighted by the report. "There is more political and economic stability with low inflation and a sustained reduction in the current account and fiscal deficit. The government has recognised its role in kick-starting a new industrialisation process to leverage opportunities from Make In India, the diversification of global supply chains and the green transition," stated the report.

Former ICICI Bank MD Chanda Kochhar, 10 others booked for 'cheating' tomato paste company

NEW DELHI: Former ICICI Bank Managing Director and CEO Chanda Kochhar is yet again at the centre of a legal storm with a new case being registered against her in the national capital, accusing Kochhar and ten others of cheating a tomato paste company, leading to a staggering loss of Rs 27 crores.

The case, dating back to 2009, recently came to the limelight after the Patiala House Court on December 9 ordered the Delhi Police to initiate an investigation. Subsequently, the Economic Offence Wing of the Delhi Police registered an FIR on December 20, citing allegations of cheating and criminal conspiracy.

Those named in the FIR include Chanda Kochhar, Sandeep Bakshi (CEO & MD ICICI Bank), Vijay Zagade (ex-manager ICICI Bank), unnamed officials of ICICI Bank's Global Trade Services unit in Mumbai, Atul Kumar Goel (MD & CEO Punjab National Bank), K.K. Bordia (ex-GM Oriental Bank of Commerce), Akhila Sinha (AGM PNB & the then Branch Head of OBC), Manoj Saxena (AGM PNB & the Branch Head of OBC), and K.K. Bhatia (ex-Chief Manager at OBC).

According to the FIR, lodged by Shammi Ahluwalia, Director of P & R Overseas Pvt Limited (Tomato Magic), the accused allegedly conspired to present a 'Letter of Credit' (LoC) from a Foreign Bank as a genuine document. The LoC, crucial for an export order of tomato paste, was purportedly issued by the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) but was later revealed to be from a local Russian bank named RBS Alliance, known for its dubious reputation.

The FIR stated: "ICICI Bank fraudulently authenticated the



LoC as issued by Royal Bank of Scotland, knowing fully well that the LoC (L/C) was from a local Russian Bank: RBS Alliance. The said LoC was amended thrice, but on all these occasions, ICICI repeatedly committed fraud."

"ICICI Bank which in this case is the Advising Bank and its officers were to enquire whether the L/C being issued was authentic and issued by a bonafide banking entity. As will be stated later, the L/C was a complete fraud and forged but was verified to be authentic and legal by ICICI Bank in league and in conspiracy with the L/C issuing bank," the FIR read.

The FIR stated that the complainant company received the L/C purportedly issued by Royal Bank of Scotland, a well-known 'A' class International Bank of repute.

"It was categorically stated in the said Credit that the same is subject to terms and conditions as contained in Uniform Customs and Practise for Documentary Credits... the L/C was received through ICICI Bank, Mumbai, being the Advising Bank, hired by the actual L/C issuing Bank, RBS Alliance, Moscow, which did not enjoy good reputation in honouring its documentary credits," the FIR read.

The complainant company, Tomato Magic, a pan-India supplier of tomato paste, had received an export order from a Russian buyer for 1000 metric tonnes of Chinese tomato paste.

The order, initially valued at \$10 lakh, increased to \$18.48 lakh (approximately Rs 8.68 crore) for an additional supply of Iranian-origin tomato paste.

To mitigate payment risks, the order was contingent on a 100 per cent irrevocable LoC issued by an 'A' class bank, with ICICI Bank acting as the advising bank. The subsequent wrongful authentication of the LoC by ICICI Bank allegedly led to a series of events resulting in a loss of Rs 27.66 crores for Tomato Magic, the complainant said.

The FIR further noted that in May 2011, ICICI Bank, in response to the complainant's concerns, provided "frivolous" and "untrue" answers, attempting to evade responsibility. Surprisingly, Oriental Bank of Commerce (now Punjab National Bank) did not challenge ICICI Bank's stance, leading to a consent to the correctness of the information.

The complainant alleged that the company had been cheated at the hands of the all accused, who hatched a criminal conspiracy with prior meeting of mind having a common intention to commit fraud, criminal breach of trust and cheating to the tune of \$1000, 000 in the forged and fraud Letter of Credit allegedly issued by RBS Alliance and not by Royal Bank of Scotland and thereafter used the said forged and fabricated documents as genuine one.

"The erring Accused No1 ICICI Bank violated RBI Guidelines to protect a Fraudster Bank. Based on two items that the Complainant handpicked up from the internet points to the fact that RBS Alliance, the L/C issuing bank, was a fraudster. Pertinent to mention that, ICICI bank, being the Advising Bank in India, had a collaborative relationship with RBS Alliance to swindle Indian businesses," the FIR said.

Boom in the Stock Market Even in New Year

SATISH SINGH

On December 28, the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) index reached an all-time high of 72,484, while the National Stock Exchange (NSE) or Nifty also reached an all-time high of 21,801 on the same day. However, on the same day BSE closed at 72,410 and Nifty at 21,778. Shares of 22 out of 30 companies of BSE saw a rise, out of which the biggest rise was seen in the shares of banking and energy sectors. Earlier on December 27, BSE had closed at 72,119, while Nifty had closed at 21,675.

At present, a period of selling is going on in the stock markets of almost all developed countries including USA. The condition of the stock market in developed countries is bad due to Corona Pandemic, geopolitical crisis, ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine etc. There is still a slowdown in the global economy and there are chances of recession in some countries, but on the contrary, the Indian stock market is continuously becoming brighter.

In recent times, there has been pressure on the price of crude oil in the international market. The price of crude oil has seen a decline of up to 2 percent in one day. Also, the price of Brent crude oil has gone below \$ 80 per barrel. Not only this, the price of WTI has also gone below \$75 per barrel, which is lower than the earlier price. One reason for the boom in the stock market is more invest-



ment in the Indian market by foreign institutional investors (FIIs). In view of the political stability in the country, the ever-strengthening Indian economy and the continuous decline in US bond yields, FIIs have invested more than Rs.57,000 crore in the Indian stock market in the month of December alone, while the total investment of FPI this year is Rs.1.62 lakh crore. The total investment made by foreign investors has reached around Rs.2 lakh crore.

Apart from equity, FIIs have invested Rs.60,000 crore in debt funds. FIIs have invested the most in the finance sector, but significant amounts have also been invested by them in sectors like capital goods, telecommunications etc. Looking at the current scenario, political stability and economy are likely to remain rosy in the new year 2024, hence, it is believed that a significant amount will be invested in the Indian market by FIIs in 2024 also.

Consistent with data of the Reserve Bank of India, as of December 8, the foreign exchange reserves have increased to the level of \$ 606.85 billion, which was \$ 604.4 billion on December 1.

With this, foreign currency assets have also increased and have increased by \$ 3.08 billion to reach the level of \$ 536.69 billion.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation increased to 5.55 percent due to increase in food prices, which was 4.87 percent in the month of October. Nevertheless, retail inflation is currently below the maximum tolerance limit of 6 per cent set by the Reserve Bank of India for inflation. In the month of September this year, retail inflation was at the level of 5.02 percent, while in the month of August it was at the level of 6.83 percent and in the month of July it was at the highest level of 15 months at 7.44 percent.

As the Indian economy continues its rapid recovery, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is improving steadily. In the second quarter of the financial year 2023-24, GDP grew at the rate of 7.6 percent, while in the first quarter it was 7.8 percent, which was the highest in the last 4 quarters. It is noteworthy that in the second quarter, GDP was estimated to grow at the rate of only 6.5 percent. It is noteworthy that India's GDP

growth rate is better than Russia, USA, China, and United Kingdom, where the GDP growth rate in the second quarter of the financial year 2023-24 has been 5.5 percent, 5.2 percent, 4.9 percent, and 0.6 percent respectively. Due to enhancement in the GDP growth rate in the fourth quarter of the financial year 2022-23, the growth rate of the entire financial year was also improved. Earlier, in the financial year 2022-23, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) had estimated the GDP to be 6.8 percent, which was 7.2 percent.

As said by the Finance Ministry, the share of private consumption in GDP was 61 percent in the second quarter of the financial year 2023-24, which was 59.7 percent in the first quarter. The manufacturing and construction sector has been a major contributor to the GDP growth rate, despite slow global growth, the manufacturing sector grew by 13.9 percent in the second quarter, while the construction sector grew by 13.3 percent. Apart from this, the mining and quarrying sector has also grown at a high rate.

Exports are also showing a faster pace than before and due to these the foreign exchange reserves are also increasing. In the first quarter, exports grew at the rate of 21.4 percent, while in the second quarter it increased at the rate of 21.4 percent.

As per Index of Industrial Production (IIP) data, released by the National Statistical Office (NSO), India's industrial production in the month of October stood at 11.7 percent, which is the highest in the last 16 months. It was

5.8 percent in the month of September and 3.3 percent in the month of September 2022. The biggest factor in the increase in the Industrial Production Index is the electricity sector, which grew at the rate of 20.4 percent in the month of October, whereas in October 2022 it grew at the rate of 1.2 percent.

At present, India's growth rate is continuously increasing because inflation is under control, exports are mounting, foreign exchange reserves are increasing, FIIs are continuously investing in the Indian market, industrial production is growing. The price of crude oil is decreasing in the international market, the balance sheets and profits of government and private companies are also improving, private investment and expenditure are going up etc. In such an environment, it is natural for the stock market to shine. Such a situation is also favorable for the economy because fluctuations in share prices not only cause loss to investors, but it also has a negative impact on the country's growth rate, employment, and economic activities. However, currently there is a favorable investment environment in the stock market, which all domestic and foreign investors should take advantage of. More investment will further boost the Indian economy.

Satish Singh,
Ahmedabad based Senior
Columnist, Views are
personal

INTERNATIONAL

UN chief appoints Sigrid Kaag as senior humanitarian coordinator for Gaza

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has appointed Sigrid Kaag of the Netherlands as the senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator for Gaza. Kaag will facilitate, coordinate, monitor and verify aid consignments to the embattled enclave, in line with a recent UN Security Council resolution. She will also establish a UN mechanism to accelerate humanitarian relief shipments through states that are not party to the conflict, Xinhua news agency reported. Kaag is expected to take up the assignment on January 8. According to a press note issued on Tuesday by the UN chief's office, Kaag has a wealth of experience in political, humanitarian and



development affairs, as well as in diplomacy. Most recently, she served as the first deputy prime minister and first female finance minister in the Dutch Government since January 2022, and was minister for trade and development cooperation from October 2017 to May 2021, and minister for foreign affairs until that September. Kaag has held a wide range of senior positions in the UN

system, including serving as special coordinator for Lebanon from 2015 to 2017, and as the special coordinator of the Joint Mission of the Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the UN Mission in Syria from 2013 to 2015. On Friday, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2070, which, among other points, demands immediate, safe and unhindered delivery of humanitarian assistance at scale directly to Palestinian civilians throughout the Gaza Strip. The resolution requests the UN secretary-general to appoint a senior humanitarian and reconstruction coordinator and calls for the "expedient" establishment of the UN mechanism to ramp up aid distribution.

Israel hits air defence base in Syria



Israel has carried out an aerial strike targeting a main Syrian air defence base in the southern Syria, media reports said. Media reports citing a Syrian military source said that the state media had earlier said missile strikes coming from the direction of the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights had targeted several sites it did not identify. "Our air defences confronted the (Israeli) aggressors' missiles and downed some of them with only material losses," a Syrian military source said. Reports said that a Syrian army source was quoted on state media as saying Israel staged another round of strikes after midnight near the capital but gave no details.

Pakistan court dismisses petition against former PMs, including Nawaz Sharif, in Toshakhana case

LAHORE: A court in Pakistan on Friday dismissed a petition seeking disclosure of Toshakhana gifts (received from heads of the states) against all former premiers, including Nawaz Sharif and former lawmakers and not just Imran Khan. Petitioner Tanveer Sarwar had requested the Lahore High Court's (LHC) Justice Raheel Kamran to issue directives for the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to "allow criminal complaints against all former premiers and lawmakers," who are contesting the February 8, 2024 polls but did not show details of Toshakhana gifts they received in their assets submitted to the ECP in their nomination papers. Sarwar said the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) founder Imran Khan was



handed down three-year imprisonment in the Toshakhana case for "non-disclosure of the details of state gifts in his assets." On the contrary, former prime minister such as Nawaz Sharif, Yousaf Raza Gillani and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, and former president Asif Zardari did not disclose the details of their Toshakhana gifts but "they are contesting upcoming polls," he claimed. "The ECP is prejudiced only against Imran Khan but is not taking any action against the above-mentioned persons," the petitioner said and requested the court to stop the ECP from "selective

prosecution." After hearing the arguments of the petitioner, the judge dismissed the petition as being not maintainable. Despite the question of 10-year disqualification or lifetime ban on Nawaz Sharif handed down by the apex court in 2017 in corruption cases, his nomination papers on both Lahore and Manshra national assembly seats have been accepted. Speculations are rife that Sharif is going to become the prime minister for the fourth time on the blessing of military establishment, which is accused of indulging in massive pre-poll rigging to stop Imran Khan's PTI from returning to power. The powerful army has ruled over Pakistan for most of the period during its 75-plus years of existence.

Hamis denies 'rejecting Egyptian ceasefire deal'

Hamis denied that it had rejected an Egyptian proposal to end the conflict in Gaza and exchange prisoners with Israel as reported by some media outlets. Ezat al-Rashq, a member of Hamas' Political Bureau, said in a statement on Monday that the group "confirmed that there are no negotiations except with a comprehensive cessation of the Israeli aggression", Xinhua news agency reported. Rashq added Hamas' leadership "is vigorously seeking to halt the aggression and killing against our people entirely, not temporarily." "Our people want the aggression to stop, not temporary truces or partial calm followed by continued aggression," he said. On Monday, a media outlet, citing two Egyptian security



sources, reported that "Hamis and the allied Islamic Jihad have rejected an Egyptian pro-

posal that they relinquish power in the Gaza Strip in return for a permanent ceasefire."

China successfully launches test satellite for internet technologies



BEIJING: China today successfully launched a test satellite for satellite internet technologies. The satellite was launched by a Long March-2C carrier rocket from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. It successfully entered its preset orbit, the report said. It was the 505th flight mission of the Long March carrier rocket series.

Ukrainian, Russian troops suffer from 'exceptional levels of rat infestation'



Both Ukrainian and Russian troops are suffering from "exceptional levels of rat and mice infestation" in some sectors of the frontline, according to UK intelligence. The Ministry of Defence said that rodent populations have risen due to milder temperatures in recent months and plenty of food, The Guardian reported. It said: "This year's mild autumn, along with ample food

This year's mild autumn, along with ample food from fields left fallow due to the fighting, have likely contributed to the increase in the rodent population" area during the second world war. Unverified reports also suggest Russian units starting to suffer from increased sickness cases which the troops attribute to the pest problem", UK intelligence said, The Guardian reported. Ukraine said that its forces have shot down three Russian Su-34 fighter-bomber aircraft on the southern front, hailing it as a success in the 22-month-old war. The Russian military made no mention of the incident. But Russian bloggers acknowledged the loss, and analysts suggested US-supplied Patriot missiles had probably been used.

US Congress faces uphill task to clear backlog of legislations in 2024

WASHINGTON: The US Congress braces itself for a stormy start in the new year of 2024 when a handful of political fights kicked down the road last year come to a head next month and lawmakers will have little time to settle them to keep the government open, analysts said. Congress is set to resume its session to discuss and resolve issues carried over from 2023 such as the most critical appropriation bills to keep the government open through the year and its shaping up to be a tumultuous January, media reports said. A spate of crucial bills such as FISA and funding for various agencies will see frayed tempers between the democrats and republicans on spending cuts taking on a number of polarized political fights that have been deferred or delayed into the new year with little time to reach a resolution, reports said. What adds to the pressure of the Congressmen and sena-

Physically, mentally tortured in prison, Ex-Pak FM tells to court



RAWALPINDI: The former Foreign Minister of Pakistan and PTI Vice Chairman Shah Mahmood Qureshi on Thursday told a court in Rawalpindi that he was physically and mentally tortured in prison, media report said. "I was physically and mentally tortured in prison last night after I was illegally abducted outside from a prison," Qureshi said while recording his statement during a hearing at the Rawalpindi Judicial Complex. The reports said that the court has reserved its verdict. Reportedly, Qureshi was released from Adiala Jail on Wednesday after the Supreme Court had approved his post-arrest bail in the cipher case. However, the PTI leader, who tried to talk to the Punjab Police on multiple occasions, was pushed and whisked away from the prison. "The PTI leader was arrested in a case related to May 9 violence. Qureshi was initially moved to the Cantt police station by the police, who maltreated him," media reports from Pakistan said. It said that on Thursday, Qureshi was brought to the court of Duty Magistrate Syed Jahangir Ali in an armoured police van. A video shared by the PTI on social media showed policemen escorting a hand-cuffed Qureshi. Speaking to media persons ahead of the hearing, the PTI leader's daughter Meher Bano Qureshi expressed displeasure at the security arrangement made outside the court. "It seems as if they are presenting a terrorist," she said. "No one is allowed to enter the Judicial Complex," Meher Bano pointed out, adding that the police's behaviour was disappointing.

Israel Police arrest man for desecrating Muslim cemetery



Israel Police have arrested one person suspected for desecrating a Muslim cemetery. The incident occurred in an Israeli Muslim cemetery in annexed east Jerusalem's Old City. Jerusalem police said that the 35-year-old is "unbalanced", and added that he was arrested after they were alerted that a man had "broken the law and disrupted public order by hanging the head of a donkey" at the cemetery. Police said that the man, when arrested, was with an axe and his accomplice was also taken into custody. Social media is flooded with the photographs of the head of a donkey hanging from a fence of the cemetery. Meanwhile, the Muslim Waqf Islamic affairs council stated: "A Jewish extremist slit the throat of a donkey today at the Golden Gate cemetery before hanging it over the Muslim graves," and added that it was "a serious desecration of one of the main historic Muslim cemeteries in Jerusalem".

Qatar Court Reduces Sentence of Ex-Indian Navy Men on Death Row

NEW DELHI: A Qatar court on Thursday reduced the sentences of 8 former Navy officers convicted in the Dahra Global case, the Ministry of External Affairs confirmed on Thursday, December 28. The verdict reduces the death penalty of former Navy officers to jail term. The MEA added that the Indian government will continue to extend all consular and legal assistance to the Indian citizens and also continue to take up the matter with the Qatari authorities. "We have noted the verdict today of the Court of Appeal of Qatar in the Dahra Global case, in which the sentences have been reduced...The detailed judgment is awaited...Our Ambassador to Qatar and other officials were present in the Court of Appeal today, along with the family members. We have stood by them since the beginning of the matter and we will continue to extend all consular and legal assistance. We will also continue to take up the matter with the Qatari authorities," the MEA statement said on the verdict in the Dahra Global case in Qatar. The 8 former Navy officers, who were working for Doha-based Dahra Global were arrested in August 2022. The Qatari authorities didn't reveal the charges against the Indian citizens, but sources alleged the former Navy officials were spying for Israel. The authorities filed a chargesheet against the accused in March 2023 and a court sentenced them to death on 26 October 2023.



India's Ministry of External Affairs, which was following the matter expressed shock over the ruling and began some intense diplomatic deliberations with the Qatari authorities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also met Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani on the sidelines of the COP28 summit in Dubai and discussed the well-being of the Indian community. Last week, during a press conference MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi, outlined India's approach to the case and said that the government is focusing on bringing our people back. "We have said this is an important issue that we are following, and [looking at] how we can get our people back to India at the earliest. That is what is driving us," he said. The 8 former Navy officials are identified as Captain Navtej Singh Gill, Captain Birendra Kumar Verma, Captain Saunabh Vasishth, Commander Amit Nagpal, Commander Purnendu Tiwari, Commander Sugunakar Pakala, Commander Sanjeev Gupta and Sailor Rajesh.

British Sikh medic Amritpal Singh Hungin knighted in King Charles' New Year Honours

LONDON: A British Sikh senior medical professional with over 30 years of general practice (GP) experience has been knighted by King Charles III in the 2024 New Year Honours list. Dr Amritpal Singh Hungin, Emeritus Professor of General Practice at Newcastle University, receives a Knighthood for services to medicine on a list including nearly 30 Indian-origin healthcare professionals, philanthropists and community activists honoured for their selfless service to society. The list was released here on Friday night. Professor Pali Hungin, as he is known, was the founding Dean of Medicine at Durham University and a former president of the British Medical Association (BMA). "The New Year's Honours List recognises the exceptional achievements of people across the country and those who have shown the highest commitment to selflessness and compassion," said British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. "To all honourees, you are the pride of this country and an inspiration to us all," he said. The list, released annually by the government's Cabinet Office in the name of the British monarch, includes Commanders of the Order of the British Empire (CBEs) for Staffordshire GP Dr Chandra Mohan Kanneganti for services to General Practice and Senior Clinical Fellow of Imperial College London Dr Mala Rao for services to public health, the National Health Service (NHS), and to equality and diversity. Also receiving the prestigious CBE honour is Bidesh Sarkar, Chief Financial Officer at the Department for Business and Trade, for public service. "This year's New Year Honours List celebrates the most selfless, compassionate people in the UK. I send them all my warmest congratulations for what they have achieved," said UK Deputy Prime Minister and Cabinet Office minister Oliver Dowden.



"This year's New Year Honours List celebrates the most selfless, compassionate people in the UK. I send them all my warmest congratulations for what they have achieved," said UK Deputy Prime Minister and Cabinet Office minister Oliver Dowden

the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan UK, for services to Indian culture. Other Indian-origin recipients of MBEs include: Tajinder Kaur Banwait for services to business and to the beauty industry; Dr Manav Bhavsar for services to healthcare, particularly during Covid-19; Nilesh Basker Dosa for services to social equality; Dr Dinendra Singh Gill for services to pre-hospital and trauma care in Wales; Dr Gian Parkash Gopal for services to the Hindu community and to multi-faith Cohesion in Oxfordshire; Jasdeep Hari Bhajan Singh Khalsa for charitable services to the Sikh community; Dr Meenakshi Nagpal for services to the NHS; and Satish Manilal Parmar for public service, among others. Healthcare and charity work also dominate among the Indian-origin Medallists of the Order of the British Empire (MBEs) such as Chandra Shekhar Biyani for services to medical education and Harbaksh Singh Grewal for services to charity. Among the other high honours for 2024, Hollywood filmmaker Ridley Scott is made a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire for his services to the UK film industry and Welsh singer Shirley Bassey - made a Dame by the late Queen Elizabeth II - becomes the 64th living member of the Order of the Companion of Honour in recognition of her services to music. "This is in recognition of Dame Shirley's remarkable career which has seen her sell more than 135 million records," the Cabinet Office said. "Individuals have been recognised for being dedicated community champions, role models in sport, pioneers in the arts, passionate health workers, and supporters of young people. The Prime Minister is committed to ensuring that honours are awarded to people across the whole of the UK, so that the honours system captures and celebrates the fantastic contribution of people throughout the country," it added. Of the total, 66 per cent of the recipients are people who have undertaken outstanding work in their communities either in a voluntary or paid capacity and 48 per cent are women.



Rahul Gandhi posted multiple pictures on X (formerly Twitter) of his visit to the Virendra Akhara in Chharravillage (Haryana), wrestling session with Olympic medalist Bajrang Punia



POTPOURRI

Mumbai
CHRISTMAS
witnesses traditional & modern celebrations



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Modern times continue to evolve globally but old traditions continue to remain steadfast as this year's Christmas celebrations witnessed in Mumbai.

Christmas had its own unique touches in different parts of the city with age-old traditional nativity "Stars" and Cribbs being highlighted in various areas, besides the numerous churches which observed the celebrations through prayer services including midnight mass on Christmas eve.

Mumbai's far-off suburban area of Mira Road-Bhayandar was one such place, that shone with glittering decorated stars, even as traditional celebrants came from far-off villages like Uttan, Gorai and others in bullock carts and horse-carriages.

"We observe also the feast of St. Jerome during this period and come in our own rustic transport comprising our own horses and bullocks from our farms," said Moses Mendonsa and Adrian Pinto, who came with a 40-strong contingent of men, women and children dressed in their colourful, festive best — including wearing the traditional nine-yard sari called "Lugra" — for the picnic-like celebrations.

"After church prayers, we cook or bring our food and stay overnight here before returning home," Mendonsa said even as the womenfolk chose a lakeside corner to spread out and enjoy their meals. "We East Indian Christian community have been observing this festive tradition for over the decades, but we sometimes get pulled up unnecessarily by some NGOs who don't like us using this type of traditional animal transport," they said while pointing out that these animals are their own home-farm bred and treated like family members, including their two horses "Bansi" and "Tyson." Meanwhile, street vendors made booming business as the suburban roads witnessed crowds of people seeking to pick up festive bargains. A welcome departure from the normal in Mumbai was less fireworks in celebrating Christmas as witnessed in earlier years. However, the chill in the air had people coming out in their winter clothes, despite the moderate climate warmth.

Kamiya Jani's Puri temple visit has political overtones

ARABIND MOHAPATRA

The recent visit of social media influencer and YouTuber Kamiya Jani to the Puri Jagannath temple has snowballed into a controversy with BJP leaders in Odisha questioning how could someone who has been promoting beef gain entry into the 12th century shrine which is the sanctum of pious Hindus. Some BJP leaders even called for her arrest even though Jani has since clarified that she neither eats beef nor promotes its consumption.

State BJP leaders have also been targeting bureaucrat-turned-politician VK Pandian, chairperson 5T and Ama Odisha Nabin Odisha who was private secretary to chief minister Naveen Patnaik before he recently took voluntary retirement from IAS. Since he accompanied Jani he is being accused of having facilitated her entry into the shrine.

In a video on her YouTube channel, Jani was seen interacting with VK Pandian with the discussion focussing on the significance of 'Mahaprasad', (the cooked food offering made to the lord) and the ongoing heritage corridor project around the shrine. However, the BJP not only objected to Jani's presence, citing the alleged use of a video camera which is prohibited by



the Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) it also accused her of hurting the sentiments of the Hindus. The BJP has even threatened to move court for arrest.

As the controversy assumed serious dimensions Jani, who is also a food blogger, addressed the issue on her Instagram asserting that her mission was to promote Indian culture and heritage globally. The Shree Jagannath Temple Administration (SJTA) also dismissed the allegations of a camera being taken inside the temple as baseless. The ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) criticized the BJP for trying to make a mountain out of a molehill and clarified that Jani consumed 'Mahaprasad' at Radha Ballav 'Mutt' (monastery) and not within the temple premises.

Jani, who claims to promote

Indian culture, is known for her interviews with various celebrities and politicians. In a statement she pleaded complete innocence saying "Not that anyone has reached out to me, but just here to clarify that I don't and have never eaten Beef. Jai Jagannath."

Jani, the founder of Curly Tales and a food blogger, has also said that she is a Hindu and does not eat or promote beef. In a video message she said, "My aim behind visiting the Shree Jagannath Temple in Puri was to seek the blessing of the deity and inform people about the infrastructure development of the shrine. Unfortunately, my visit has become controversial".

Noting that the temple authorities have rules, Jani said, "I want to clarify that I haven't broken any rule. I am a practicing Hindu. I have neither

consumed beef nor promoted it." As a food blogger she has been informing people about local cuisines of various places.

However, the BJP continues to project her as a "beef eater" and a promoter of beef consumption. The saffron party has raised questions as to how she was allowed entry into the 12th century shrine. It also demanded action against Jani and 5T (transformation initiative) chairman VK Pandian for allegedly facilitating her visit to the temple.

Many feel that the real target of BJP's attack is Pandian who is considered to be the man wielding real power behind chief minister Naveen Patnaik. Now that he has made a formal entry into politics he is likely to not only devise BJD's electoral strategy but also implement it. The BJP being the main opposition party is wary of Pandian and wants to corner him. Congress, too, has been targeting the former bureaucrat on the issue but he is yet to make a statement clarifying his position.

It may be mentioned that Pandian is the main who monitors the Shree Mandir Parikrama heritage project on a day to day basis. The BJD is keen to dedicate the project to the people of the country with great fanfare to tap into

the sentiments of the Hindus. This is being seen as a clever move by the political party.

Senior BJD leaders have jumped to the defence of Pandian and questioned the BJP for objecting to the visit of Jani to the Jagannath temple while the BJP government at the Centre was making documentaries by engaging the YouTuber and blogger. "BJP government appointed Kamiya Jani to make films on Hindu heritage and temples. She has gone to Chardham and Ayodhya to see Ram Lalla. And all of you love her for that," said a senior party leader.

The issue has definitely assumed political overtones in an election year. Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee president Sarat Pattnayak demanded an apology from Patnaik if Jani's visit to the temple took place on his instructions and with his permission. Shree Jagannath Sankruti Surakha Abhijan, a local outfit, also staged a demonstration in Bhubaneswar, demanding action against Jani and Pandian.

However, interestingly while Jani has issued clarification twice on the issue so far, Pandian has studiously avoided commenting on it. "Jai Jagannath" was his reported reply when asked about it.

Aamir Khan's sea-facing building to be redeveloped by MCL Group



MUMBAI: Man Infraconstruction Ltd will redevelop a building partly owned by Bollywood mega-star Aamir Khan in the posh Pali Hill area of Bandra west, a statement said here on Friday.

The sea-facing building with Aamir Khan and other owners stands on a plot of around 37,000 square feet and the redevelopment is likely to start in mid-2024.

The property is Virgo CHS Ltd. comprising two wings — Bella Vista and Marine — with 24 flats in which 9 are owned by Khan.

The building will have ultra-luxury flats with a sale component of around 50,000 square feet targeting an expected revenue of around Rs 500 crore, and MCL will redevelop it through an associate company.

After redevelopment, each of the existing owners shall be eligible for bigger flats, with around 55-60 per cent extra area compared with the existing area. The flats in the revamped building, each with sea-view and four and five BHKs, are likely to cost in the range of Rs. 125-K psf, as per current market indications in the Pali Hill neighbourhood.

The picturesque Pali Hill is considered the abode of stars and other celebs, and marks the start of the 'glamour crescent' that extends from Bandra west to Oshiwara on the west coast of Mumbai. Bandra, Khar, Santacruz, Vile Parle Juhu, Versova and beyond to the north and the surroundings is home to many glamour personalities from films, television and the entertainment industry, besides big business persons, honchos of Indian and foreign companies, politicians and others.

A few prominent denizens of the area include Shah Rukh Khan, Salman Khan, Sanjay Dutt, Saira Banu, Rekha, Amitabh Bachchan, Shabana Azmi-Javed Akhtar, Anil Kapoor and clan, Rani Mukherjee, Farah Khan, Vivek Oberoi, top film producers-directors, music directors, et al, besides, their offices also located in the region.

I wasn't the first choice for 'Aradhana': Sharmila Tagore

MUMBAI: Veteran actress Sharmila Tagore has disclosed that she was not the initial choice for the role of 'Vandana' in the 1969 movie 'Aradhana', and how she fought to prove why she was perfect for the character.

The 1969 romantic drama 'Aradhana' is directed by Shakti Samanta, and stars Sharmila and Rajesh Khanna in lead roles. Sharmila's portrayal as Vandana in the movie stands as one of her iconic performances.

The surprising details emerged on the 'Koffee with Karan' couch as she disclosed not being the first choice for the role.

Sharmila said: "I chose Aradhana, rather fought for Aradhana. Shakti (Samanta) Ji said, 'We are thinking of somebody else.'"

"Your image was scarred, asked host and filmmaker Karan Johar. The 79-year-old actress re-



"No, he didn't say that. He was very fond of me. But he felt that I was too young. Oh, and I won't be able to do it. But Sachin will make the screenplay writer as a friend.

plied: "No, he didn't say that. He was very fond of me. But he felt that I was too young. Oh, and I won't be able to do it. But Sachin will make the

screenplay writer as a friend. He kind of said, 'Yes, I think we can do it.' So there was much debate. And in any case, they were making a big film with Shammi ji. Right. And with Shammi Ji, they were having problems with dates. So this happened very quickly."

KJo added: "What a blockbuster. Oh my God. What a blockbuster." "It ran for 50 weeks," said Sharmila.

Quality in Education comes from village

DR. SRIDHAR KUNDU

Quality education at school level is important for adding productivity to nation's human capital and thus, contributing to its social and economic progress. Odisha is one among the front runner states in India for provisioning of quality in school education. The NITI Aayog Report 2019 rightly ranks Odisha 7th among 20 selected major states in India School Education Quality Index. In this index ranking, Odisha has left behind many leading states such as, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Telangana, Punjab and few other. Thanks to the government schools for preserving the quality in education for decades.

For their quality services, the government schools have established and restored faith among the people. The Annual Statistics on Education Report (ASER) 2022 says that about 93 percent of school going children in the age group of 6-14 are getting the education services provided by the government. However, in the neighbouring state Andhra Pradesh, this ratio is 70 percent, in Kerala 64 percent, Punjab 58 percent and in Hararyana, the ratio is 51 percent according to the ASER report.

It is important to note that the dependence on government school education is not for income or affordability factor. Odisha today, is one among the progressive states. The annual average growth of per capita income in the state during 2011-12 and 2021-22 stands at 5.4 per cent compared to the national average growth rate of 3.8 per cent. In 2021-22, the per capita income of the state stands at Rs.91,645 compared to the national per capita income of Rs.91,481. The state has surpassed the per capita income of the states such as West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, and a few others.

The strength of quality dates back to 1950s when a very few schools in rural hinterlands were the only hope for millions waited for receiving education. These schools have been



contributing the mass skilled labour force for today's economic progress. The quality is the outcome of discipline and culture inherent in rural society. Kabata Bandha high school situated in the village Kabata Bandha in the district of Jajpur in Odisha is one among those few. It was set up in 1967 with a limited human resource and physical infrastructure facilities. With its quality services, it has made a significant contribution in transforming the life of the people in the village and its neighbouring areas. Various learnings provided by the schools have now seen to be covered in India's public policy.

A. Role in Rural Transformation

During 1960s, above 60 percent of the population in India were living below the poverty line and the poverty situation in rural sector was above 70 percent. Odisha was among the poorest states among all with the poverty ratio higher than the national average. With this macro statistics, it is not surprising to say that above half of the population in the village Kabata Bandha were poor and half-nourished.

In the last couple of decades, a major economic transformation happened in the village and its neighbouring areas and, the credit goes to Kabata Bandha high school. The village has successfully defeated the disease of poverty. Today, it stands as one of largest per capita income among all the villages in the state.

The transformation is the result of spread of education. Above 80 percent of the villagers are educated at elementary level. Education has helped spreading awareness about the functioning of various government schemes

run by the state and union government.

People in the village are immensely helped by the PMAWas Yojana. Above 90 percent of the Kuchha houses have been rebuilt to Pucca houses. Electrification has reached almost every house. There is a significant progress in supply of tapped drinking water to every kitchen, an effort made under Jal Jeevan Mission.

The village has not faced the challenge of unemployment as majority of the households live on small scale businesses. At least a single person in a household is a part of skilled labour force and contributes to the overall household income. MGNREGA has also helped somewhat in the time of severity in unemployment situation.

B. Role in Public Policy

Since 1960s, the school has endured many policies which created many disciplined, cultured and productive labour force. These practices are progressive and at present, many of those are used as prescriptions in few public policies in India.

One of the important practices followed in the school was 'Education for All' without having any discrimination on the ground of social and economic condition of the family. Even with limited infrastructure and human resources, no one in the village has been denied in accessing education. Equal opportunity to all and focus to create meritorious students with additional efforts from the teachers has produced results in creating the mass skilled human capital for the nation.

Second, compulsory attendance in various cultural

programs such as, celebration of Ganesh Puja, Saraswati Puja, Republic Day, Independence Day, Teacher's Day and Children's Day, Annual Sports Day and many other, forms integral part of the education policy. Few other activities such as, funds collection from the students for these celebration and support from the richer students, teachers to the poorer ones in this collection are added flavour to the policies. Though these are not written policies but are working underline for the smooth functioning of the education system. These unwritten policies are meant to create cohesiveness and strengthening the participatory learning which is a significant section in the New Education Policy.

Third and important point is Swachhata or practice of cleanliness in the school, is found in the government's present policy on "Swachh Bharat Mission". The school uses the traditional ways of checking the finger and toes' nails by a monitor in every morning prayer class. In few occasions, a group of students along with the teachers used to go round the village to collect garbage and create awareness of practicing cleanliness.

These are examples of some of the contributions from one village school set up during the post-independent India. There are quite a few old schools during this period who not only created a skilled labour force for the country but helped in preserving the rich culture and societal values. Today Odisha has successfully defeated the challenge of poverty and malnutrition and become a well-known face in the global world because of the rich contributions of these old and unfortunately, less acknowledged heritages. Remembering Kabata Bandha high school on the auspicious occasion of its Golden Jubilee celebration is a proud moment indeed.

Dr. Sridhar Kundu,
Economist Consultant at
World Bank

Africa beat India by an innings and 32 runs in the first Test

SUNIL THAPLIYAL
New Delhi

The visiting Indian team suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of South Africa by an innings and 35 runs. The Indian cricket fans, who had expected a first Test series win on African soil in 33 years, were shocked. They had expected the Rohit Sharma-led Team India to start the series with a win, but that expectation was dashed as the team failed miserably and lost the match that began on 26 December after three days. The Indian batting line-up, which looked strong on paper, failed against the African bowlers, especially the front row. Be it Rohit Sharma, Jaiswal or Shubham Gill, they failed to give the team a solid start and crashed out early. India were 24 for 3 on the first day of the first season and later, at the end of the first day, India could only score 208 after losing eight wickets. Only KL Rahul could stand up to the African pace battery and



scored a century to help India score 245 before going all out.

Kasigo Rabada picked up five wickets and Nandre Burger dismissed three Indian batsmen to keep the visitors below 250 runs. Later, the Indian bowlers looked clueless on the African pitch; the only exception was Jasprit Bumrah, who did some impressive bowling. Dean Elgar, playing his last series before retirement, scored a magnificent 185 runs and his counterpart Marco Jansen ended up scoring a whopping 84 runs, helping South Africa

to 408 runs against India and a lead of 163 runs.

In the second innings, India's top order again failed miserably and the middle order looked helpless. Only Virat Kohli managed to score 76 runs and Gill somehow managed to score only 26 runs. While other batsmen failed to make any impact on the field, India suffered a heavy defeat of an innings and 32 runs. India's top order batsmen, especially Rohit and Jaiswal, failed to impress in both innings, while in the middle order only Virat

and KL Rahul performed as expected.

On the other hand, Shardul Thakur and R. Ashwin failed to impress with either their batting or bowling. While the absence of Muhammadham Shami was clearly visible, Prashidh Krishna, the debutant in the Indian team, could not contain his nerves and was very expensive with his bowling.

It was clear to see that the Indian team was still waiting for a better replacement for Cheteswar Pujara and Ajinkya Rhane, who had proved themselves time and again in Test cricket, while Gill and Jaiswal still had miles to go to fill their boots. Still, this defeat is not the end of the world; the Indian team still has a chance to level the series in the next match, as it has done before, and bounce back against the opponents. The fans will be hoping that the team performs better in the next game and gives their supporters a reason to cheer.