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**INDIAN LAWYER GETS PRESTIGIOUS "FREEDOM OF THE CITY OF LONDON" AWARD**

## 'Pran Pratishtha' done, 500-year-old dream realised

**AYODHYA:** Carrying a silver 'chhatra' placed on a red cloth amidst playing of 'Mangal Dhvani', Prime Minister Narendra Modi climbed up the stairs of the newly constructed Ram temple and performed 'Sankalp' within the 84 seconds 'abhijit muhurat' as part of the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of Lord Ram Lalla.



He then went into the 'Garbh Griha' amid chanting of mantras to complete the remaining rituals.

The majestic five ft tall statue of five-year-old Ram Lalla was finally unveiled to the world.

RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat, Governor Anandiben Patel and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath were also present in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple.

The ceremony was completed amid blowing of conch shells and a helicopter showered flower petals on the temple.

The Pran Pratishtha of the Ram temple was completed and a dream of 500 years finally realised.

### Ram temple extends 'darshan' timings to deal with rush

**AYODHYA:** In view of the huge number of devotees visiting the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the temple administration has taken a decision to extend the time for 'darshan'. Now devotees can have darshan of Ram Lalla till 10 p.m. instead of 7 p.m.

In the morning shift, darshan will remain open from 7 a.m. to 11.30 a.m. According to official sources, about five lakh devotees are camping in Ayodhya for darshan at the temple and a regular stream of devotees is coming in.

The Ayodhya district administration has appealed to the devotees to come to



Ayodhya after 10-15 days and have darshan of Ram Lalla. It is noteworthy that more than eight thousand policemen are monitoring the system.

Director General of Police (Law and Order) Prashant Kumar and Principal Secretary (Home) Sanjay Prasad are also camping in Ayodhya to monitor the situation.

### Prime Minister greets every citizen on Republic Day



**NEW DELHI:** The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has greeted every citizen on the special occasion of the 75th Republic Day.

## Direct Tax Revenue Grew 161 pc in 10 yrs; Hit 6.1% of GDP in FY23: CBDT

**NEW DELHI:** The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) announced on Tuesday that direct tax revenue has achieved a milestone by reaching 6.1 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in FY23, propelled by robust growth and an expanding taxpayer base.

The direct tax-to-GDP ratio, which stood at 5.62 per cent in FY14, has steadily increased, reaching 6.1 per cent in FY23. This marks the highest ratio since the financial year 2000-01, as per readily available data.

CBDT disclosed in a statement that the net direct tax receipt of the Centre, adjusted for tax refunds, has surged approximately 161 per cent from FY14 to Rs 16.63 trillion in FY23.



Both corporate and personal income tax payers have contributed almost equally to this significant increase.

CBDT data revealed that five out of the six years leading up to FY23, direct taxes surpassed indirect taxes in contributing to the Centre's exchequer. Tax deducted at source (TDS)

emerged as the predominant mode of tax collection in FY23, standing at Rs 8.17 trillion out of the total gross direct tax receipts of Rs 19.72 trillion. The number of income tax returns filed in FY23 reached 77.8 million, more than double the 38 million returns filed in FY14, as reported by the tax authority.

## India's Economy Grows Rapidly in January

### HSBC FLASH PMI HITS FOUR MONTH HIGH

**NEW DELHI:** India's economy demonstrated robust growth in January, with the HSBC Flash PMI reaching a four-month high.

Private sector business activity expanded significantly, as reflected in the HSBC flash India Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), which surged to 61 from 58.5 in December.

This marks the highest level since September and places India among the fastest-growing major economies.

"Service providers noted a stronger increase in activity than manufacturers, but growth accelerated in both cases," HSBC said in the survey, released on Wednesday.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had revised its growth forecast to 7 per cent for the fiscal year in December, citing higher-than-anticipated growth in the initial quarters.

"The economy grew at a faster pace in January, led by stronger manufacturing output, as well as more robust business services activity," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

"New orders rose at a faster pace than a month ago, and within that, international orders were stronger than before. Input prices rose quickly, but output prices were raised to a smaller extent," he added.

The HSBC Flash India Manufacturing PMI rose to 56.9 in January from 54.9 in December, and the Services PMI Business Activity Index



increased to 61.2 from 59. Factors contributing to this growth, as per the survey participants, include favourable economic conditions, strong demand, and continuous improvements in new business inflows.

"Indeed, aggregate sales increased at a sharp pace in January, and one that was the fastest in six months. Both manufacturing firms and their services counter-parts recorded quicker rates of expansion in new orders," the survey said.

The most recent flash PMI figures, derived from a survey of 400 manufacturers and 400 service providers, come after data revealed a strong 7.6 per cent expansion in the Indian economy during the second quarter.

This growth was bolstered by heightened government expenditures and impressive performances in manufacturing, mining, and construction.

Despite high inflation, a moderation in exports, and a fall in core sector growth, the flash PMI numbers indicate sustained economic expansion. Retail inflation rose to 5.69 per cent in December, exceeding the RBI's target but remaining within the central bank's tolerance range.

## Government cuts outlay for equity in energy transition projects of big 3 oil firms by Rs 15000 crore

**NEW DELHI:** The government has slashed by half to Rs 15,000 crore, the allocation for equity infusion in the energy transition projects of Indian Oil Corporation, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd, the Finance Ministry has said.

The Finance Ministry announced the decision to reduce the equity support and defer filling strategic oil reserves in a post on X. In the Union Budget for 2023-24, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had announced an equity infusion of Rs 30,000 crore to support the energy transition plans of the three oil marketing companies. She had also proposed an outlay of Rs 5,000 crore for buying crude oil to fill strategic underground coastal storages at Mangaluru in Karnataka and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh to provide a cushion against disruption in crude supply. This plan has also been deferred in view of emerging trends in the oil markets, the Finance Ministry said.



## Comfort of India-France friendship will illuminate path forward: President Murmu

**NEW DELHI:** The President of India, Droupadi Murmu received His Excellency Emmanuel Macron, the President of the French Republic at Rashtrapati Bhavan today (January 26, 2024). The President also hosted a banquet in his honour.

Welcoming President Macron at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President said that the leaders of two countries being guests of honour in each other's successive National Day parade and celebrations, is a historic moment, and a symbol of the depth of our friendship and the strength

of our partnership.

The President said that while the shared values of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity and Justice connect our two great Republics, the bonds between our people are even deeper. She added that people have inspired each other with our thoughts and ideals, and we have enriched each other through philosophy, literature, art, scriptures, languages, and more.

The President recalled that she had seen for herself, the influence of French culture in the vibrant heritage of Pu-

**“**People have inspired each other with our thoughts and ideals, and we have enriched each other through philosophy, literature, art, scriptures, languages, and more”

ducherry, and the deep links with the Indian diaspora of France. She said Puducherry is indeed, a living bridge between France and India.

The President expressed satisfaction that both sides have outlined an ambitious vision of our partnership for India's Amrit Kaal, and added that this visit has strengthened our resolve to realise this vision.

The President was confident that the comfort of the India-France friendship and the strength of our partnership will illuminate the path forward.



## Bengal Guv promises to intervene after police deny permission to Rahul's Nyay Yatra event



**NEW DELHI:** West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose on Friday promised to intervene in the matter of denial of police permission for Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's proposed public meeting in Siliguri in Darjeeling district on Sunday as a part of the party's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra.

"The matter is being looked into by the administration. If the administration fails to act,

I will personally look into the matter," the Governor told mediapersons, hours after it surfaced that the police have denied permission for the proposed public meeting.

As per the plans of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPC), a meeting was scheduled in Siliguri on Sunday, followed by Rahul Gandhi addressing a gathering.

However, according to state

Congress leaders, the Siliguri Metropolitan Police have denied permission for the public meeting at the last moment citing certain examination to be held in Siliguri on that day.

The Congress leadership has now decided to go ahead with the proposed rally and cancel the meeting. Meanwhile, state Congress chief and five-time MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has launched a scathing attack against the state administration over the denial of permission.

"The Nyay Yatra faced a lot of resistance in Manipur from the BJP-led government there. But it was unexpected that we would receive similar non-cooperation from the administration in West Bengal as well. It is most unfortunate that police permission has been denied for our proposed meeting on Sunday," Chowdhury said.

The Congress leadership also alleged that the party is facing administrative hurdles in conducting the Nyay Yatra in West Bengal ever since it entered the state through Boxirhat in Cooch Behar district on Thursday morning.

## Bhopal woman files for divorce as husband takes her to Ayodhya, not Goa, for honeymoon

**BHOPAL:** With the 'pran-pratishtha' ceremony in Ayodhya was conducted on January 22, and entry opened for general public from the next day, a large number of devotees from across the country have been visiting the Ram temple - but one woman in Madhya Pradesh has taken umbrage at her husband's plans to follow suit.

The woman, who was taken to Ayodhya by her husband, filed a divorce case upon returning to home in Bhopal, on the grounds that he took her to Ayodhya after promising a trip to Goa for their honeymoon.

The couple got married in August last year. Shail Awasthi, an advocate at a family court in Bhopal, said the couple left for Ayodhya a couple of days before the January 22 ceremony, but the woman was not kept in the loop.

"This was the main crux of her petition. She was angry over being taken to Ayodhya instead of Goa. I am counselling the couple currently," he added.

In her divorce petition, the woman said her husband



works in the IT sector and gets a good salary. She is also employed and earns well, so going abroad for a honeymoon would not have been difficult for them, the petition states.

Despite no financial constraints, the woman's husband refused to take her abroad and insisted on visiting a place in India itself.

He later booked flights to Ayodhya and Varanasi, allegedly without telling her and informed her of the changed travel plans only a day before the trip, saying that they were going to Ayodhya as his mother wanted to visit the city before the Ram Mandir consecration ceremony.

The woman has alleged that her husband took more care of his family members than her. Once they returned from the trip, she filed for divorce, Awasthi added

## Delhi HC refuses stay on defamation proceedings against BJP leader Sirsa

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi High Court has refused to stay criminal proceedings against BJP leader Manjinder Singh Sirsa in a defamation case filed by the former president of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, Manjit Singh G.K.

Justice Swarna Kanta Sharma upheld the trial court's order that maintained the summons issued to Sirsa by an ACMM court. The court noted that, at this stage, it found no reasons to stay the proceedings in the defamation case.

It said that the trial court had examined the issue of FIR registration and simultaneous proceedings for defamation related to a letter dated April 4, 2016.

"...this Court finds that the learned ASJ has examined in detail, the issue of registration of FIR in relation to letter dated 04.04.2016 and



**“**The trial court had examined the issue of FIR registration and simultaneous proceedings for defamation related to a letter dated April 4, 2016”

simultaneous proceedings in the present complaint case for commission of offence of defamation," the court said. The court clarified that its

observations were prima facie and should not be construed as an opinion on the merits of the case.

In the case, Singh alleged that Sirsa and other accused individuals defamed him regularly through social media posts, videos, and press conferences. The court stated that the offence of defamation in this case was not a one-time event in 2020, and there was no infirmity with the trial court's observations.

"...at this stage, this Court does not find any reasons to stay the proceedings in the present complaint case," the court said.



# Delhi Police make history with all women band, marching contingent

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi Police showcased its all-women band for the first time at the Republic Day parade, led by the talented Band Master, Sub Inspector Ruyangunuo Kense. Comprising four women sub-inspectors and 81 women constables, the Delhi Police Brass and Pipe Band marked a significant milestone in the force's tradition.



The melodious tunes of the 'Delhi Police Song' echoed through the air as the all-women band proudly displayed their musical prowess, capturing the audience's attention and applause. Adding to the grandeur of the parade, the Delhi Police marching contingent, a 15-time winner of the best marching contingent title, made history with the inclusion of an all-women contingent.

Leading the way was Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police Shweta K. Sugathan, IPS, bringing forth a sense of pride and achievement. The contingent, adorned in distinctive Red Safas, featured smartly-attired women representing the Delhi Police force. Among them were one Additional DCP, three women Sub

# SP-Congress talks on seat sharing in UP on 'smooth track'

**NEW DELHI:** Even as crisis grips INDIA bloc in West Bengal and Punjab, there is some respite for the beleaguered opposition in Uttar Pradesh.

The seat-sharing talks between the Samajwadi Party and the Congress seem to be on track. The SP leaders hope that things will fall in place in the state soon and the seat-sharing will reach its conclusion soon. "We hope of finalising the seat adjustment in a week or so. We do not have any problem and the BJP will be wiped out in Uttar Pradesh," said SP spokesperson Rajendra Chaudhary.



A senior Samajwadi Party leader, however, hinted that the Congress wanted the seat sharing on the basis of the outcome of the 2009 Lok Sabha elections. He said the Congress initially gave a list of 40-45 seats and this was not acceptable. The SP leader said the political scenario has changed

in the state after 2014. He said the SP was the only political force giving a fight to the BJP in Uttar Pradesh. He added, the Congress may contest 10 to 12 seats in Uttar Pradesh. Congress leaders, meanwhile, said that they would gladly accept whatever the party high command decided. While SP is hopeful of smooth-sailing regarding

seat-sharing in UP, all is not hunky dory in the INDIA alliance. On Wednesday, West Bengal chief minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee announced that her party will contest the Lok Sabha elections in all constituencies as there was a major setback in the seat-sharing talks with the INDIA bloc ally Congress in her state.

# Eleven arrested for waving saffron flag in UP mosque

**AGRA:** Eleven people were arrested for allegedly waving saffron flag in a mosque in Billochpura under Tajganj police station of Agra in Uttar Pradesh.



The arrests were made on Tuesday after a complaint was lodged by Zahiruddin, the Mutawalli (caretaker of mosque) on Monday at the Tajganj police station, said Jasveer Singh in charge of Tajganj police. Locals said that a procession was being taken out on Monday in the area to celebrate the Pran Pratishtha ceremony in Ayodhya. A few youths climbed on the projection of the mosque building and waved saffron flags in their hands. "A case was registered on

Monday afternoon under sections 147 and 148 (related to rioting), 452 (trespass) and 505 (2) (statements conducing public mischief) of the Indian Penal Code against a crowd of 1,000 to 1,500 unidentified people," said Jasveer Singh. "Eleven people, all from the Tajganj area, have been arrested and produced before a magistrate on Tuesday. Due action is to be undertaken in this regard," said Singh.

# More than 490 cases registered, 683 arrested during Operation Aakraman-7 in Haryana: DGP



SATISH HANDA

DGP Haryana Shatruijit Kapoor while addressing media persons said that more than 490 cases were registered under various laws including the Indian Penal Code, Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, Excise Act and Arms Act in which 683 anti-social elements involved in illegal activities were arrested by the police. He said, more than 490 cases were registered, and 683 individuals were apprehended on January 14 by the Haryana Police during a comprehensive anti-crime offensive, Operation Aakraman-7. He said 1,355 police teams comprising 6,582 officials fanned out across the state, targeting criminal elements, drug smugglers, and miscreants. The objective was to remove covert illegal operations and restore public safety. Kapoor said that the police were gathering accurate information on criminal activities, including smuggling of illegal weapons, narcotics, and illicit liquor. Under the leadership of district police chiefs and deputy commissioners of police, the cops initiated raids on criminals on January 14 morning which continued till late evening. During this period, 22 FIRs were registered, and seven arrests were made by the police teams under the Arms Act. Nine pistols, two revolvers, nine country-made pistols, five country-made pistols, and 31 cartridges were recovered. Also, about three kg of ganja, about 18 grams of heroin, 20 grams of smack, 705 grams of charas, 600 banned narcotic pills/capsules/injections were also recovered.

# Nitish can form new government in Bihar on Sunday, may change sides and go with BJP again: Sources

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA New Delhi

A big news is now coming amidst the strained relations between JDU and RJD in Bihar for the last few days. According to information received from sources, Nitish Kumar can form a new government on Sunday. If sources are to be believed, CM Nitish Kumar may change sides and join with BJP again. And only after this will he stake claim to form a new government. According to the information received, Nitish Kumar has canceled all his previously scheduled programs on Sunday.



Nitish Kumar and Narendra Modi.

According to sources, JDU breaks the tie-up with RJD, then HAM will join with BJP and the son of Jiten Ram Majhi may take over as Deputy CM. The empty chair next to Nitish at High tea program at Raj Bha-

van on the occasion of Republic Day, told the whole political story, a big 'game' can happen in Bihar any time. During this program, CM Nitish Kumar and Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav were seen keeping distance from each other. This was the reason why senior Janata Dal United (JDU) leader KC Tyagi had given a clarification

# SGPGIMS director among Padma awardees from UP

**LUCKNOW:** RK Dhiman, Director, Sanjay Gandhi Post Graduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS), Lucknow, is among the prominent persons awarded Padma Shri along with 11 others from Uttar Pradesh.

"I am very happy to know that my work is getting recognised. My work in eradication of Hepatitis C in 22 districts of Punjab, Covid management in Lucknow and starting organ donation campaign by setting up SOTTO has been recognised by the government. This award will inspire me to work harder," said Dhiman. Babu Ram Yadav, brass Marori craftsperson from Moradabad, said, "My art has won me a great recognition. I am happy about the award." He has over six decades of



experience in creating intricate brass artifacts using traditional crafting techniques. Ram Chet Chaudhary, 79, is a Gorakhpur-based retired agricultural scientist who has

Development Foundation, an NGO in Gorakhpur. He is known for his work in 'Kala Namak' rice promotion. Born on November 8, 1944, he taught in various agricultural universities in India and went on to study in Germany. His works on agriculture have been published across the world and form part of the curriculum in many Indian agriculture universities. It was on the suggestion of Chaudhary that permission was given to cultivate "black salt rice" in Uttar Pradesh. Seeing its yield and utility, governor Anandiben Patel not only appreciated his idea but also honoured him at Raj Bhawan. "He has served in Pantnagar, Pusa, World Bank, IRRI and the UN," says the bio data in his twitter handle.

# No significant change in minimum temperature likely over north India: IMD

**NEW DELHI:** Jet stream winds, of the order of 130-160 knots at 12.6 km above mean sea level, are still prevailing over the plains of North India, enhancing cold wave/cold day conditions which are likely to continue for next 3-4 days, the India Meteorological Department (IMD).



People sitting on the ground in a cold environment.

"The winds are leading to subsidence of cold air and enhancing cold wave/cold day conditions over North India. Similar intensity of Jet Stream is likely to continue during next 3-4 days," it said. The IMD, in its bulletin said that dense to very dense fog and cold day to severe cold day conditions are likely to continue to prevail over North India during the next two days and decrease in intensity thereafter. "Dense to very dense fog conditions are very likely to prevail for a few hours in night/morning over some parts of Punjab, Haryana, and Chandigarh during Saturday night and January 22 morning and dense fog in isolated pockets for subsequent three days.

"Cold day to severe cold day conditions are very likely to continue in some parts of Punjab, and Haryana on Saturday and Sunday and cold day conditions in isolated pockets on January 22 while similar conditions are also very likely to continue in isolated pockets of north Madhya Pradesh, and north Rajasthan on Saturday and Sunday and cold day conditions in isolated pockets on January 23," it said. The IMD said that fall in minimum temperatures by 2-3 degree Celsius is very likely

over many parts of central India during the next 2 days and no significant change thereafter. "No significant change in minimum temperatures is very likely over many parts of northwest India during the next two days and fall by 2-3 degree Celsius thereafter. No significant change in minimum temperatures likely over rest parts of north India during the next 5 days," it said. The IMD said that minimum temperatures are in the range of 6-10 degree Celsius over most parts of Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, Jharkhand, sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, and Madhya Pradesh. "These are below normal by 2-4 degree Celsius in isolated pockets of north Madhya Pradesh, southeast Uttar Pradesh, east Rajasthan, Bihar, and Gangetic West Bengal. Today, the lowest minimum temperature of 3.1 degree Celsius reported at Nowgong (east Madhya Pradesh)," it said.

# Double arm transplant cost 90 lakh to a cab driver's son, Milaap raises fund

FW CORRESPONDENT New Delhi

In yet another success story, a fundraiser has helped a Delhi cab driver fund for his son's treatment, who met with a life-altering train accident in 2019. The family had initiated a fundraiser to garner support for the boy's medical needs and over the last 4 years an overwhelming generosity from 4700 donors contributed to raise over Rs 90 lakhs. The significant contribution facilitated a successful prosthetic leg surgery, and in a groundbreaking development, a recent transformative double arm transplant. This inspiring journey is a testament to the power of community and goodwill that crowdfunding can have on individuals facing challenging medical circumstances. In 2019, Devansh, then a class 9 student, lost three of his limbs after a near-fatal train accident. The boy fell down and got stuck to the track at a railway crossing on his way back from school, and was run over by a railway



People in medical attire.

engine. Soon after the accident, his right leg and both the arms had to be amputated. As the effects of sedatives faded away, Devansh was confronted with the harsh reality of his condition, leaving him speechless for days. Vinit and Priyanka, Devansh's parents, were shattered by the sight of their sons' predicament. Shortly thereafter, Devansh received a prosthetic leg to enable his mobility after the amputation. At that point, the doctors suggested he undergoes an arm transplant only once

he turns 18 years of age. After a prolonged wait for a suitable donor and adequate funds for the surgery, Devansh successfully underwent a double arm transplant at the start of this month. He is now on the path to recovery—gratitude owed to the generous donors who played a crucial role. The funds not only covered the surgical expenses but also supported him through years of medication, nutrition, and prosthetics since the unfortunate incident. Devansh's mother expressed heartfelt gratitude to everyone who played a vital role in her son's journey. "After years of anticipation following the tragic train accident, my son has successfully undergone the transplant at the beginning of this new year. I am deeply thankful to Milaap and all the donors who provided financial support to make the surgery possible for my son and our family. I would also like to appeal to people to continue helping each other, ensuring that nobody is left in pain."

# Haryana to build Science City on 50 acres: Khattar

SATISH HANDA

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar said that there is a committed effort to enhance education in science and technology in the state of Haryana. He said, government will establish a Science City on 50 acres in either Faridabad or Gurugram district to promote new scientific research and innovations. Khattar as the Chief Guest during the closing ceremony of the 9th India International Science Festival held at THSTI Biotech Institute, Faridabad. He said that today Haryana has got the opportunity to host this 9th Science Festival congratulating on the successful organization highlighted the participation of students, teachers, researchers, scientists, entrepreneurs, educators, startups, and international representatives in the Science Festival. He commended all participants for their contributions. CM stated that the Science Festival showcases India's



Manohar Lal Khattar speaking at a podium.

achievements in the fields of science and technology, fostering knowledge exchange and dialogue between various stakeholders engaged in the same field. Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of making India a glorious, prosperous, powerful, self-reliant, and developed nation by the year 2047. He acknowledged the valuable contributions of Indian scientists throughout history since ancient which produced stalwarts like Homi Jehangir Bhabha, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Srinivasa Ramanujan, Shanti Swarup

Bhatnagar, and others in the country. He expressed pride in India's achievements, such as the successful development of two COVID-19 vaccines and their distribution to other countries. Khattar highlighted India's progress in space exploration, including the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the southern pole of the moon and the establishment of the Aditya L-1 mission for solar study. He commended the visionary Vikram Sarabhai, Chairman of the Indian National Committee for Space Research, for conceptualizing the use of satellite technology for communication and weather forecasting. He also mentioned the initiation of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment in India. He encouraged the youth to engage in research and innovation, stating that in today's new India, opportunities are opening up in the fields of research and innovation in science, technology, and entrepreneurship.

The festival included workshops, symposiums, science competitions, technology shows, exhibitions, and more, spanning 17 subjects over three days. India has been a pioneer in the fields of science and technology since ancient times, and the Chief Minister expressed optimism about the ongoing wave of startup programmes in science in contemporary India. Khattar further stated that in order to promote science education among the students of the state, the Department of Science and Technology also gives scholarships to students studying science subjects from class XI to Ph.D level. CM disclosed that six separate government universities have been established in the state for science and technology education and research. Additionally, other universities also provide education in science. On this occasion, the Minister of Higher Education, Mool Chand Sharma, addressed the gathering.

# Delhi HC imposes penalty on husband for false rape allegations, cautions against frivolous complaints

**NEW DELHI:** The Delhi High Court has imposed a penalty of Rs 25,000 on a husband who sought the registration of a purportedly false rape case against his wife's cousin, cautioning against frivolous complaints that could potentially harm innocent individuals.



The entrance of the Delhi High Court.

The husband alleged that the cousin had raped his wife, who vehemently denied the accusations. Justice Anoop Kumar Mendiratta stated that prima facie, the husband initiated the proceedings with ulterior motives, aiming to gain an advantage in ongoing matrimonial proceedings against his wife. The court stressed that the criminal justice system should not be burdened by baseless complaints and that the provi-

the wife refuted these claims, stating that no such incident had occurred and accused her husband of physical harassment and dowry demands. She also mentioned pending proceedings related to domestic violence, maintenance, and divorce. The court, while dismissing the plea, noted that the wife had denied any grievance, and the police's Action Taken Report supported her position. It stressed the importance of the magistrate's judicial scrutiny in such cases, ensuring complaints are not filed with malicious intent. The court urged a careful examination of the credibility of the complaint, pointing out the necessity of specific details to avoid perverted litigation.



# Split in INDIA Bloc in Punjab & West Bengal will help in LS Election to get anti-incumbency votes against Trinamool, AAP

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA  
New Delhi

INDIA bloc do not see the split in Punjab and Bengal as a flux to the bloc. As they claim it will only help block the BJP from garnering all the votes cast against the TMC and AAP in the two States. Neither the Congress nor the Left leadership sees the TMC going alone in the ensuing election, as a negative development. "A Left voter will not vote for the TMC, but in a bid to vote against them, if there is no viable option available, they could vote for the BJP. With the Congress and Left together, we provide them with a strong alternative. We will be able to block the anti-TMC votes going to the BJP", a senior Congress leader from the State said. Though Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said at a press conference in Assam that the Congress has not given up on the talks, a middle way will be found and the INDIA bloc will fight together in the State as Rahul Gandhi also said to media that discussion



with Trinamool leaders are going with Congress leaders. After the formation of the INDIA bloc, Seven months past, but it is facing its grimdest crisis, reeling under the twin pat from the Trinamool Congress and Aam Aadmi Party's declarations that they will not have any truck with the Congress in Bengal and Punjab respectively. However, INDIA leaders are not exactly despondent with the prospect

of splits in the two States as it may help in blunting the anti-incumbency sentiments faced by both ruling parties in the States. Split in Bengal was expected, the breakdown of the bloc in Bengal was anticipated, with the Congress's local unit, headed by the party's Lok Sabha leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, relentlessly attacking the Trinamool Congress, especially CM Mamata

Banerjee, and the deflexure of its Delhi leadership. The Trinamool Congress offered two seats in Bengal was based on the Congress's performance in the last two Lok Sabha elections where the party gathered less than 4% of the total vote share across the State, except in the two constituencies where they won. "We could have perhaps conceded one or two more seats had they shown us the same grace in As-

sam and Meghalaya," one MP & leader of Trinamool Congress said. But the Congress leadership in Delhi continued to drag its feet. At the same time, the TMC sources added that they would continue with the courtesies expected from INDIA allies.

A senior TMC leader said, "On December 19, at INDIA Alliance meeting in Delhi, we told them that we can offer only two seats in Bengal. We gave them 12-days time to get back to us by December 31. It has been more than a month since. In fact, for the last two-weeks there has been no conversation at all. In the meantime, Mr. Chowdhury carried on making nasty statements about our leadership to which none of our top leaders replied".

Though in Punjab, both two are not ruling out some sort of electoral understanding. "On select seats, where the BJP or Akalis are strong, we can have an understanding to support each other. But there is no need for a pan-Punjab seat division," a top-ranking AAP leader explained.

## Northeast witnessing peace, progress due to PM Modi's effort: Amit Shah



Home Minister Amit Shah said that northeast is witnessing peace and progress as a result of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's efforts. Shah said that the Congress had a policy to divert attention from problems and enjoy power, which led to the deaths of thousands of people in the region, especially in Bodoland. "The Bodo movement was in full swing when I was appointed Home Minister. I made effort to comprehend the issues and concerns of one of the largest communities in the northeast," Shah said during the 13th Triennial Conference of All Bathou Mahasabha in Assam's Dhekiajuli. Shah said that Prime Minister Modi followed a new policy on the issue and that is why Bodoland is now free from bomb blasts, firing, and violence. "For the last three years, there was not a single incident of violence in Bodoland and the region has been progressing well on the path of development," Shah said.

## Tension deepens between Nitish, Tejashwi amid new govt rumours



**PATNA:** Tensions between Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav have deepened which was visible during the Republic Day function at Gandhi Maidan. The two leaders were sitting some distance away from each other while the chair of Deputy Chief Minister was placed at least five feet away from the Chief Minister. They even did not interact with each other during the function. Generally, both the leaders sit together during the official functions and frequently interact with each other. Tejashwi also did not attend the High-Tea party at Raj Bhawan and changed his programme at the last minute while the Chief Minister along with Building Construction Minister Ashok Choudhary and Finance Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary attended the function. At the Raj Bhawan, a chair was placed for the Deputy Chief Minister next to the Chief Minister but Ashok Chaudhary removed the name plate and sat next to the Chief Minister during the function. Bihar Chief Minister is likely to form the new government next week with support of BJP by ditching his alliance partners RJD and others of Mahagathbandhan once again.

## NIA arrests minor in Jammu and Kashmir's Dhangri terrorist attack case



TEHELKA WEB DESK

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested a juvenile in connection with the terrorist attack that took place in Dhangri village of Rajouri district, Jammu and Kashmir, on January 1, 2023, resulting in the tragic loss of five lives.

The case, initially registered as FIR no. 01/2023 at PS Rajouri, had witnessed the killing of civilians and serious injuries to several others. The NIA took charge of the investigation on January 13, re-registering the case and intensifying efforts to identify and apprehend those responsible. Subsequent investigations revealed that the arrested juvenile, along with previously detained individuals Nisar Ahmed and Mushtaq Hussain, played a role in harboring the terrorists involved in the heinous attack.

## Rahul Gandhi spells out five point agenda, 'Paanch Nyay', for justice

KAVITA SHARMA  
Kamrup (Assam)

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has spelled out his five point vision, 'Paanch Nyay' for justice in the country. These include justice for youth, justice for women, justice for farmers, justice for labourers and justice of participation.

Addressing a press conference in the outskirts of Guwahati, Rahul said, he was quite firm in his belief as what was his mission and motto and he will never be intimidated. He also asserted that power needs to be shared equitably. He said, each of the five agendas of justice will be backed up by specific action plan which will be revealed in next few weeks.

Replying to a question on the harassment and impediments faced by the Nyay Yatra during its course in Assam, Gandhi said, he was not feeling disturbed or intimidated rather he was feeling happy, as the yatra had become the main focus in the state. He said, he even waived kisses at the BJP workers who also waived at him.

In fact, Gandhi added, it was not the Chief Minister himself who was doing it as it was being



orchestrated from Delhi. He said, if the Chief Minister says something that is not liked by people in Delhi, anybody can imagine his fate given the cases pending against him (the Chief Minister). "More he does it, better it is for us", he remarked about the intimidating attempts by the Chief Minister.

Gandhi said, the BJP was rattled with the grand success of Bharat Jodo Yatra last year. He pointed out, earlier they were very dismissive about the B.J.Y. But, he added, eventually it touched the crescendo of success. He observed, that is the reason that the BJP is now trying to disrupt the Nyay Yatra in the beginning itself. However, he asserted, he will not be deterred and intimidated. Rahul Gandhi said, during

his conversations with people in Assam, two main things had emerged. One was that the Chief Minister of Assam was one of the most corrupt Chief Ministers in the country and second the state faced the problems of unemployment and price rise, while the farmers and other common people were suffering.

To a question whether the INDIA partners will join the Nyay Yatra in states like West Bengal and Bihar, he said, he and the Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had personally invited all of them.

To a question as to who will be the challenger to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the upcoming General Elections, he said, it will be the ideology of INDIA against the ideology of Modi and the RSS.

## Govt to invest Rs 1.25 lakh crore to build 200 ropeway projects: Gadkari

Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, said on Tuesday that the government has identified more than 200 projects at a cost of Rs 1.25 lakh crore to be taken up in the next five years under the National Ropeways Development Programme, 'Parvatmala Pariyojana'.

Addressing the 'Ropeway: Symposium-Cum-Exhibition' here, the minister said, "Our foremost priority should be to make ropeways economically viable by bringing down the overall project cost and encourage public private partnership to develop the ropeway network in the country."

He said apart from facilitating tourism in the hilly areas, ropeways offer huge potential in urban public transport as well. The focus should be on developing indigenous and cost-efficient solutions without compromising safety.

The highlights of the day were the award of two ropeway projects - Bijli Mahadev Ropeway Project in Himachal Pradesh, and Dhosi Hill Ropeway Project in Haryana. An MoU was also signed at the event by NHLML and IIT Roorkee for creating a centre of excellence for rope-



ways and other innovative alternative mobility systems. Gadkari said the priority is to bring standardisation of existing policies and codes and transform the ropeway industry by encouraging the manufacturing of ropeway components under the 'Make in India' initiative.

The minister said 60 per cent construction support is provided under Hybrid Annuity Mode (HAM) for ropeways as compared to 40 per cent support provided under National Highways to attract more private players for development of ropeways under 'Parvatmala Pariyojana'. The objective of the symposium-cum-exhibition is to enable industry collaborations between various Indian and global manufacturers, technology providers, concessionaires and infrastructure developers.

## Not a interim but a regular ED Chief ahead of 2024 LS Polls?

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA  
New Delhi



In the backdrop of source-based information pouring in about not interim but ED getting a regular incumbent before 2024 Lok Sabha elections are announced, it remains to be seen whether the New Delhi dispensation decides to go with an interim arrangement or comes up with a regular appointment before it seeks mandate for third consecutive term at Centre. In the run-up to 2024 Lok Sabha elections, it appears likely that Directorate of Enforcement may get a regular Director either by getting the interim chief 1993 batch Rahul Navin regularised or by bringing a new regular incumbent.

The last month, name of Rahul Navin was taking rounds as the next regular Director of Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO); another key investigating agency. SFIO is functioning under an ad hoc arrangement (till January 2024) since July 2022 when 1995 batch Keshav Chandra was prematurely repatriated to

his Cadre as Chief Secretary of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. This whisper gives rise to further speculation which appears logical that the ruling dispensation may fill up the vacancy but important seats of power with a regular incumbent.

This is to recall that ahead of S K Mishra's (Retd. IRS) term coming an end in the middle of September last year, two names took rounds prominently as his likely successor -- 1986 IRS Nitin Gupta and 1987 IRS Pravin Kumar who are serving as Chairman and Member CBDT, respectively. Interestingly, the guess work started when Nitin Gupta was, in September 2023, re-engaged as CBDT Chairman on a contract-basis for a remarkably brief period of nine months tenure which will end 30 June 2024, when the new/next government would have taken over the reign at the Centre after 2024 LS Polls.

## Amit Shah likely to pay two-day visit to Bengal by month-end

**NEW DELHI:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to pay a two-day visit to West Bengal by the month-end in the backdrop of the Lok Sabha polls this year.

He is likely to be in the state on January 28 and 29. According to a member of the BJP's state committee, Shah is expected to arrive in Kolkata on January 28 and on the same day he might hold an organizational meeting in the city with state party leaders.

"The minister, in the meeting, is expected to take stock of the party's preparations in the state for the Lok Sabha polls," the committee member said. On January 29, Shah might address a party rally at Meche-



da in East Midnapore district, which is the native district of the Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal assembly, Suwendu Adhikari, said the member.

State BJP sources said that the two Lok Sabha seats in East Midnapore district, Kanthi and Tamluk, from where the sitting MPs are the Leader of the Opposition's father Sirsir Kumar Adhikari and his brother Dibyendu Adhikari, are under special focus of the BJP for the general elections.

## Ramlala's Consecration Fuelling Inclusive Development

SATISH SINGH  
S i n c e ancient times, temples have played an important role in strengthening the economy, because temples have been the centre of economic activities in our country since the beginning. The owners or trusts of many temples used to build

the performance of companies listed in the stock market. Bombay Stock Exchange's (BSE) index, Sensex has touched the level of 73,000 points and National Stock Exchange's (NSE) index, Nifty has also crossed the 21,000 level. In the current scenario, Sensex may cross the level of 80,000 by the end of this year, while Nifty may cross the level of 30,000. The balance sheets of BSE and Nifty listed companies remain strong and are expected to remain strong in the coming years also.

At the same time, selling is going on in the stock markets of almost all developed countries including USA. Due to the Corona pandemic, geopolitical crises like the ongoing war between Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas, etc., the condition of the economy and stock market of developed countries is dismal. There is a slowdown in the global economy and there are chances of recession in some countries, but on the contrary, the Indian economy and stock market are continuously getting brighter.

One of the major reasons for the boom in the stock market is more investment 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, more than Rs.57000 crore have been invested by FIIs in the Indian stock market in



the month of December alone, while the total investment of FIIs this year is Rs.1.62 lakh. The total investment made by foreign investors has reached more than 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.

According to Honourable Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, FDI worth \$919 billion has come to India in the last 23 years, out of which 65 per cent i.e., investment of \$595 billion has come during the tenure of Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. Here, according to the 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 estimates of the National Statistical Office (NSO), the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate in the financial year 2023 will be 7.0 percent, which is 20 bps higher than the estimate of the Reserve Bank of India. There has also been a significant increase in nominal GDP growth per capita. It has increased to Rs.47000 per person in the financial year 2023. At the same time, the service sector is estimated to grow at the rate of 8.4 percent in the financial year 2023, whereas during the financial year 2022, this sector grew at the rate of 8.4 percent. Under the service sector, rapid growth has been recorded in areas like hotel, transport,

communication etc.

Due to the continued rapid recovery in the Indian economy, 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.

Both revenue collection and expenditure have increased, leading to a slight increase in the fiscal deficit. Nevertheless, it is expected that if the revenue collection increases as per the budgetary estimate, then the government will have the scope to spend about Rs.85,939 crore in FY 2023 without changing the figure of revenue deficit, which can be used for developmental works.

At the Vibrant Gujarat Global Summit held in Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat from 10 to 12 January, Honourable Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman said that India will be the world's third largest economy with a GDP of more than \$ 5 trillion by the financial year 2027-28, while the size of the Indian

economy will reach 30 trillion dollars by 2047. Currently, the Indian economy is the fifth largest economy in the world with \$3.4 trillion.

According to the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) data released by NSO, India's industrial production in 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.

Ramlala's reputation in Ayodhya is likely to lead to increase in investment, employment generation, increase in growth rate of various sectors, increase in foreign exchange etc., which is bound to increase the growth rate. Currently, inflation remains stable and is expected to decline in the coming months, exports are increasing, industrial production is increasing, balance sheets and profits of government and private companies are improving, private investment and spending are improving. In such an environment, it is natural for the economy and the stock market to shine.

Satish Singh, is a Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal



## India and Maldives need to navigate diplomatic currents

The India-Maldives relationship has recently faced a series of diplomatic challenges, including tensions over derogatory remarks by Maldivian Ministers, calls for an Indian tourist boycott, and issues surrounding Indian troops in the Maldives. Adding to these complexities is the anticipated docking of the Chinese “research” ship Xiang Yang Hong 03 in Male, a development that has caused concern in New Delhi due to the strategic implications of Chinese naval activity in the Indian Ocean. India’s wariness of Chinese maritime research activities is not new. After raising objections to similar Chinese activities in Sri Lanka, India influenced Colombo to ban foreign research vessels, suspected of dual-purpose data collection, from 2024. The Maldives’ decision to welcome the Chinese vessel, particularly after terminating the India-Maldives hydrography agreement, is seen in India as a diplomatic slight. This is further accentuated by the Maldives’ recent diplomatic gestures, such as engaging with the United States Indo-Pacific Command and prioritizing visits to Türkiye, the UAE, and China. Despite these setbacks, India continues its diplomatic engagement with President Muizzu’s government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s meeting with Muizzu and the formation of a high-level core group for bilateral negotiations demonstrate India’s commitment to maintaining dialogue. India, seeking to expand its global influence, must balance regional aspirations with respect for sovereignty. Conversely, the Maldives, dependent on external support for economic and regional security, faces the challenge of aligning its national interests with the complex geopolitical environment. The Muizzu government’s decision to limit the Xiang Yang Hong 03 to a routine port call may suggest that diplomatic efforts are yielding positive results. For India, adhering to a ‘Neighbourhood First’ policy that respects the priorities of its neighbors is essential, particularly in avoiding any perception of military imposition. Similarly, the Muizzu government must weigh the implications of its foreign policy choices, especially in light of domestic political dynamics.

### LETTERBOX

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“Do not take life too seriously. You will never get out of it alive.”

—ELBERT HUBBARD

## 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

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(\*RESPONSIBLE FOR SELECTION OF NEWS UNDER THE PRB ACT)



HAPPYMON JACOB EXPLORES HOW INDIA’S TWO-FRONT CONTINENTAL AND MARITIME CHALLENGES REMAIN, DESPITE RED SEA

## Decoding message from the Red Sea



The arrival of the Indo-Pacific marked India’s great break out from the unfriendly continental theatre, hemmed in by China and Pakistan and constrained by the vagaries of geopolitics on most of the remaining land borders. But is this ocean of opportunity, quite literally so, steadily becoming yet another theatre of conflict, competition and containment?

The Houthi attacks on MV Chem Pluto, an oil and chemical tanker, on its way to the New Mangalore port from the Al Jubail port in Saudi Arabia, and MV Sai Baba, a Gabon-owned, Indian-flagged crude oil tanker, with predominantly Indian crew forced India’s External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to rush to Tehran to persuade the principal Houthi sponsor to help cease the attacks. India’s military response to the Red sea situation has also been swift: the Indian Navy deployed the guided missile destroyers, INS Mormugao, INS Kochi and INS Kolkata in the broader region.

The Houthi attack on commercial ships in the Red Sea and the fragility of order and stability in the Indo-Pacific, a direct result of Hamas’s attack on Israel on October 7, is also a reminder of the rough weather ahead in the Indo-Pacific in general and India’s maritime space in particular. For India, the Houthi challenge may soon pass, given New Delhi’s ties with Tehran. And yet, beyond the action-reaction mode, there is a larger question we must ponder. Does India have a maritime grand strategy that goes beyond occasional fire-fighting, naval exercises with friendly nations and a snail-pace increase of the budget allocation for the Indian Navy? What indeed is India’s long-term vision for the Indo-Pacific?

New Delhi for sure has made a big, and welcome, shift in its grand strategy — from its continental obsession to maritime theatre. This is India’s opening to the world at a time when its land borders are becoming increasingly tetchy allowing little access for the country to trade with and transit to the rest of the world. But, New Delhi’s maritime turn also presents a major challenge, elements of which are becoming increasingly apparent.



### A different ‘new’ two front situation

India’s new two front challenge is not Pakistan and China posing a nutcracker situation for India, but a combination of its continental and maritime challenges.

Having an aggressive and rising China attempting to contain India on its continental and maritime fronts is a classic two-front situation. While India has been allowing itself to be obsessed with the Line of Control with Pakistan in the west, defending the Line of Actual Control with China in the north, and picking needless quarrels with its neighbours, Beijing was quietly building its empire of influence in the eastern, southern and western oceanic planks. For decades, Beijing (by arming Pakistan) ensured that India is boxed in in South Asia, ignoring the China challenge. By the time New Delhi put its unresolved conflicts with Pakistan in cold storage and shifted gears to the China challenge on the LAC, the game had already gotten bigger.

While the People’s Liberation Army keeps up the pressure on the LAC, the People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has been increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) at an alarming rate. Consider the following. To begin with, take note of the stupendous growth of the Chinese Navy which is perhaps the largest in the world today: according to one account, it has “an overall battle force of over 370 ships and submarines, including more than 140 major surface combatants”. This number is expected to jump to 435 ships by 2030. By way of comparison, the Indian Navy today has 132 warships.

### China’s intentions

Take a look at China’s push for overseas military bases. Beijing today has a military base in Djibouti. Growing Chinese activities in Pakistan’s Gwadar and Sri Lanka’s Hambantota should worry Indian strategists, even if they are not yet military bases. In Myanmar, the Kyaukpyu port which China is constructing will enable PLAN to inch closer to the Indian Navy in the Bay of Bengal — a maritime space India hereto enjoyed unrivalled. Beijing is reportedly expanding an artificial island in Maldives and the China-Maldives strategic partnership is bound to increase due to tensions between Male and New Delhi. One had the visit of the anti-India Maldivian President to China recently. China is also exploring strategic investment options in the Seychelles, and is also building a naval base in Ream, Cambodia. The small Indian Ocean island nation of Comoros is the latest to join China’s fan club in the Indo-Pacific.

The emerging picture is this: from the Horn of Africa (Djibouti) to Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Seychelles, the Maldives in the Indian Ocean to Gwadar in the Arabian Sea, China’s actions will amount to a containment of India in the Indo-Pacific. Read these developments alongside China’s expanding outreach to the global South, its port building efforts around the world, and strengthening of relations with West Asia and Africa. Two things stand out. First, India’s assessment about China’s strategy to contain India in the continental space in South Asia is not a misplaced one, but is definitely an insufficient one. China is parallelly attempting to contain India in the larger maritime theatre as well.

Second, Beijing’s attempt is to influence, among others, those spaces and countries that India has historically engaged with. While the IOR was India’s traditional sphere of influence until the Chinese came in with goodies, the far-off regions such as Africa had historical, cultural and political links with India. In that sense, it appears to be a zero sum game — China’s gain is India’s loss.

### Utilising global attention

So what should India do? To begin with, India should use the growing global attention on the Indo-Pacific which is easily the most consequential geopolitical construct of our times. The good news is that the Indian Ocean is too important for the rest of the world to let China take over. If China poses a challenge to India’s regional security and interests in the broader IOR, it also poses a challenge to the commercial and security interests of the United States and its allies.

Every major country is today interested in the Indo-Pacific and its future trajectory as is India, which provides an opportunity for New Delhi to make coalitions with like-minded countries especially at a time Beijing has little great power backing in the maritime theatre. Second, India cannot balance against the growing Chinese power in the Indian Ocean all by itself. India occupies a pivotal location in the Indo-Pacific moment just as it is the heart of the Chinese attempts to create an empire of influence. Creating, and enhancing, partnerships with like-minded countries is perhaps an important way forward.

Even more importantly, perhaps, New Delhi must invest in a cohesive and well thought-out Indo-Pacific strategy that goes beyond noble intentions and nobler declarations. While Quad and Malabar are useful initiatives, they are at best a modest response to a grand futuristic challenge that is unfolding quickly. For sure, New Delhi already has several pieces of what could constitute the elements of a maritime grand strategy, but they need to be put together in a purposeful and cohesive manner. The Red Sea situation will fade away eventually, but India’s new two-front situation will become more and more apparent in the years to come. In that sense, New Delhi’s decision not to join the U.S.-led ‘Operation Prosperity Guardian’ may have been the right choice for now, but in the longer run, its ability to meet the China challenge without being part of collective efforts would be limited.

Happymon Jacob teaches at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and is the founder of the Council for Strategic and Defense Research. Views are personal.



MADHAV CHAVAN DELVES INTO WHY MOTIVATED USERS LEARN TECHNOLOGY WITHOUT CONSTRAINTS

## Better use of technology needs free access



Data from the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 report, that was released recently, confirms that the story of widening access to smartphones across the country continues. The results show that 92% of the 14-18 year olds who were surveyed reported knowing how to use a smartphone. What does this access mean in terms of education or learning?

First, although over 90% of boys and girls reported knowing how to use a smartphone, almost half of them, or 44% of the boys, owned their own smartphone. Among girls, only 20% owned one. The difference in ownership of devices, gender-based or otherwise, can limit what these devices can be used for and can affect some abilities but not others. For example, the ability to browse for information is equal among either boys or girls, regardless of whether they own the device or simply have access to one at home. Finding a YouTube video, which also falls under the category of browsing, is equally easy among boys who own or do not own their phones. But the skill of finding a video and sharing it depends on ownership of the device.

The examples above describe tasks that the youth who were surveyed did on a smartphone (their own, a household member’s, or a neighbour’s) in the presence of the ASER survey team. Other examples of how phone ownership makes a difference are visible in the youths’ self-reported use of smartphones. For example, over 90% of those surveyed reported having used social media in the week prior to the survey, but the proportion of those who were familiar with safety features (such as changing a password or blocking a profile) was largely dependent on ownership.



In short, these results suggest that while access to a common smartphone can be described as basic or superficial, owning a smart device is necessary for deeper access to information and services. Smartphone skills, like all other skills, need motivation combined with the opportunity to learn. Entertainment is a great motivator. Products such as WhatsApp and YouTube have clearly motivated and helped youngsters to learn to use the new technology without a gender bias. However, in cases of certain online services and commercial activities, girls seem to show less participation than boys. This may have less to do with barriers of technology and more to do with social obstacles. Where there are no social barriers such as using the devices for school-related work, ownership of devices and gender make only a small difference: nearly 70% of youth, boys and girls, both report having used phones for studies at least once in the reference week. ASER 2023 cannot say if this has

made an impact on the learning of school subjects.

Once technology, any technology, is in the hands of motivated users without constraints, they learn to use it. Motivation to use and learn new technology came during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without being taught, huge populations adopted the new technology and its applications that were useful and user-friendly. But, even before the big push of the pandemic, we saw an example on a fairly large scale of how children pick up skills without being taught.

### An earlier experiment

In 2017, in an early Pratham experiment with integrating digital technology into education, small groups of 11- to 14 year olds were each given a tablet to share. Their mothers were given responsibility for its safe-keeping, with the assurance that there would be no penalty for loss or damage. Nearly 3,000 tablets were distributed in about 400 villages in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan. Each tablet had a password to ensure that no external content was imported. Within two weeks we discovered that passwords in half the tablets spread over villages in all three States had been changed, and the children were having a laugh at the expense of the Pratham staff. In those days it was unlikely that the children had prior exposure to devices such as tablets and smartphones in the villages. But obviously some people knew how, and the knowhow spread like wildfire, motivated by the opportunity to play mischief. Needless

to say, we removed passwords in all the tablets, and the groups of children were made responsible for protection of the content. Not surprisingly, this worked very well although mistakes were made every now and then. In the above experiment, supported by the Sarva Mangal Family Trust and Google.org, ownership of the tablet was with the children by rotation and they were free to play with the device. Almost similar to the ‘Hole in the Wall’ project of Professor Sugata Mitra, children learned on their own and from each other. Pratham staff helped but did not teach. It is not clear if this impacted ‘progress’ in school subjects but boys and girls became much more comfortable with using technology.

There were different phases of this experiment including one where children started filming, editing, sharing and uploading their own videos on given themes or topics. In one phase almost half of the 4,394 group leaders were girls (49%). In other words, girls use the devices equally well as boys when they are given equal and unfettered access to the devices. In contrast, when their access is constrained, their learning also is likely to be affected negatively. The ASER 2023 reports a lower ability of girls to perform tasks such as accessing services, or making payments, or being safe on the Internet. This is strongly related to constraints in using the devices due to absence of ownership.

Free bicycles gave a boost to the enrolment of girls in secondary schools. Perhaps, free smartphones with Internet access are round the corner?

Madhav Chavan is a co-founder of Pratham. Views are personal.



### BOOKS: REVIEW

## A new book that brings the echoes of partition to life

In the literary world, where the confluence of memory, history, and imagination often creates masterpiece, Geet Chaturvedi’s “Simsim” stands out as a poignant exploration of these themes. Translated by Anita Gopalan and longlisted for the JCB Prize for Literature 2023, “Simsim” is a novel that delves deep into the human psyche, narrating stories of loss, love, and longing.

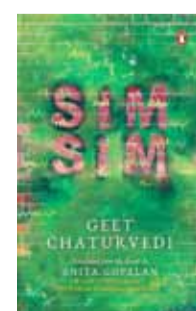
The novel primarily revolves around two characters: Basar Mal Jetharam Purswani, an elderly library owner in a state of decline, and an unnamed student who

frequently passes by the library. Basar Mal, battling the challenges of damp, dust, and the looming threat of land mafia, clings to the fading memories of his beloved and homeland. His wife, in her yearning for a child, adopts a doll, dedicating her life to its care. The student, meanwhile, fantasizes about a young girl he sees in the library and constructs an imaginary life with her, escaping the reality of familial disputes over his career.

Chaturvedi’s narrative is a tapestry woven with threads of poetry, magical realism, and philosophical musings. The au-

thor captures the essence of space and time, transporting readers to Basar Mal’s childhood in Sindh, the horrors of Partition, and the struggle of adapting to a new land. This journey is not narrated but rather felt through the subtlety of everyday prose and interactions.

One of the novel’s most striking features is its ability to blur the lines between reality and memory. Chaturvedi constructs his characters through mundane interactions, making the ordinary extraordinary. Basar Mal’s library becomes more than a repository of books; it transforms into a sanctuary for displaced Sindhis,



Simsim  
By Geet  
Chaturvedi,  
Translated by  
Anita Gopalan  
Penguin;  
256 pages;  
Rs499

a memory palace echoing with shared losses and unspoken horrors.

The translation by Anita Gopalan is commendable for its fluidity and fidelity to the original text. Gopalan succeeds in maintaining the author’s intent, making the prose revelatory and prophetic, yet mellifluous. The translation mirrors the sensory triggers of Basar Mal’s memories, leaving a lasting impression on the reader.

“Simsim” is also a commentary on the politics of language and gender. Through the voice of a book within the story, Chaturvedi delves into why book burnings have persisted throughout history, adding a layer of meta-commentary on the power of words and stories.

“Simsim” is a remarkable work that resonates with the reader long after the last page is turned. Chaturvedi, with the aid of Gopalan’s skillful translation, presents a narrative that is both deeply personal and universally relatable. The novel is a testament to the enduring power of memory and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of loss and displacement. It is a must-read for those who appreciate literature that not only tells a story but also evokes emotion and thought.



# Stainless Steel Industry Stands firm and urges the Ministry of Commerce for Non-Extension

FW DESK  
Jaipur

The All India Steel Bottles Association applauds the Indian government's commendable step in introducing Quality Control Orders (QCO) for stainless steel vacuum-insulated water bottles and portable stainless steel water bottles. As the industry faces challenges, this move aligns with 'Make in India,' 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat,' and broader goals for a 'Swasth Bharat' and sustainable environment. This initiative has the potential to generate approximately 25,000 new jobs, predominantly in the MSME sector, which also boasts a substantial women employment base. The industry's commitment to quality and adherence to BIS standards has positioned India competitively on the global stage, with hopes of increased export volumes shortly.

The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has played a crucial role in setting stringent quality standards across various industries, witnessing significant benefits in sectors like Toys, ACs, Helmets, Footwear, and 387 others. This has not only guaranteed product reliability but has also spurred innovation in vital sectors crucial for India's technological advancement.

The All India Steel Bottles Association, representing the voice of the industry, underlines the critical need for the non-



extension of the QCO implementation date. As of the current date, numerous manufacturing units have obtained the necessary licenses, with others actively in the application process. However, the import lobby has requested a six-month extension on the BIS implementation, raising concerns among domestic manufacturers. This potential delay could lead to inefficiencies, jeopardizing investments and creating market imbalances with low-quality imports. The livelihoods of over 30% of the workforce, predominantly women, stand at risk due to the surge in imports, impacting their employment opportunities.

Bharat Agarwal, Director of Crown Craft, a leading player in the industry and a representative of the association, emphasized the industry's gratitude, stating, "We need to thank the government for bringing in the QCO, which, when implemented, will give a lifeline to our industry

and offer Indian consumers better quality products. It's a very positive move. Indian companies are still far from reaching that scale." Anticipating the positive impact of BIS implementation, Pedia expressed confidence, "As soon as BIS is implemented, we are sure more factories in India will reach at least 100 within 1-2 years. Existing manufacturers will expand capacities to not only achieve large-scale production but also become quality producers for India and the world."

Vikas Jain, Director of Nanobot Housewares Solutions, expressed confidence in the burgeoning growth of the industry, stating, "Presently, the installed capacity in India stands

at an amount exceeding Rs 800 crores, with further expansion initiatives projected to elevate it to approximately Rs 1000 crores by 15th January 2024. Ancillary units have also made substantial investments to bolster their capacities, with a collective commitment of approximately Rs 1000 crores. In the preceding year, the tentative import value was recorded at Rs 600 crores, while the domestic production amounted to around 130 crores, culminating in an approximate Indian consumption of Rs 730 crores. As the industry witnesses this significant growth, the association echoes the collective sentiment of industry leaders, urging stakeholders to support the timely implementation of BIS QCO for stainless steel water bottles.

Rakesh Jain, Director of Atlas Metal Processors Pvt Ltd, added his perspective, stating, "The BIS QCO is a crucial step towards establishing industry-wide standards. This initiative not only ensures the production of high-quality stainless steel bottles but also promotes fair competition among manufacturers, ultimately benefiting the end consumer."

The industry calls upon stakeholders, policymakers, and influencers to support the timely implementation of BIS QCO, ensuring a thriving and competitive environment, especially for the MSME sector.

## Ola's mobility business in India logs Rs 250cr profit in FY23

Ride-hailing company Ola's mobility business in India reported a profit of Rs 250 crore in FY23 against a loss of Rs 66 crore in FY22. Bhavish Aggarwal-run company's revenue grew 58 per cent to Rs 2,135 crore in FY23 from Rs 1,350 crore in FY22.

"In FY23, we challenged ourselves - to not just grow and scale, but to do this profitably. While our revenue continued to grow at a strong clip of 58 per cent, we became EBITDA positive in the India mobility business. One of the few consumer internet businesses in India to be profitable at this level," Aggarwal said.

The company launched Prime+ to offer customers premium services with better partners, superior in-ride experience, faster allocation and no cancellations.

Over 16,000 partners have been on-boarded across 7 cities and 1.9 million rides have availed Prime+ service so far, according to the company.

"We are continuously building on this service and will make it available to many more consumers in the near future," the company said.

In September 2023, Ola launched its e-bike service in Bengaluru. "Our service offered the most affordable electric two-wheeler rides in India, priced 30 per cent lower than those of our competitors. This pioneering move led



to a substantial 40 per cent market expansion in the category within three months," said Ola's new CEO, Hemant Bakshi.

"To date, we have accomplished more than 1.75 million rides. In addition, we have also set up 200 charging stations in Bengaluru to service our fleet," he said.

In FY23, the company integrated Artificial Intelligence (AI) into its care operations, aiming to elevate the overall customer and partner support experience.

"The results were remarkable, with a noteworthy 69 per cent improvement in resolution turnaround time. This underscores our commitment to leveraging cutting-edge technology for the benefit of our valued users and partners," said Aggarwal.

Ola also has 6 million monthly active users in its financial services platform.

"We provide services ranging from payments, lending, asset financing and insurance. We will continue to build on our current base with a clear focus on our own customers - partners and riders," it said.

## Air India operates first Airbus A350 from Bengaluru to Mumbai

ARUN KUMAR RAO  
Bengaluru

Air India, Private carrier operated its first Airbus A350 aircraft, the first such plane from the country from kempegowda International Airport (KIAL), Bengaluru to Mumbai. According to an official statement, Air India launched the maiden scheduled commercial flight with Ima's first aircraft in the new bold Air India livery—from KIA at 7.05 am Monday. The A350, which has capacity of 316 passengers, saw 297 board the flight to Mumbai. Initially the Airbus plane will be deployed on domestic routes for crew familiarisation and regulatory compliance purposes. The Aircraft will be later deployed for long haul flights to destinations across continents, strengthening the airline's wide-body fleet, comprising its own and recently leased aircraft. The press statement said, The a350-900 aircraft will have a three-class cabin configuration of 316 seats, including 28 private business suites with full-flat beds, 24 premium economy seats with extra legroom and other amenities, and 264 spacious economy seats. All seats on Aircraft feature the latest generation in-flight entertainment system and HD screens. Fitted with Rolls Royce engines, these aircraft are 20 per cent more fuel efficient than other similar planes, reducing fuel emissions and ensuring sustainable operation.

## JSW Energy posts 24% rise in net profit for Oct-Dec quarter



MUMBAI: Billionaire Sajjan Jindal-led power major JSW Energy on Tuesday reported a 24.36 per cent year-on-year increase in consolidated net profit to Rs 232.24 crore for the October-December quarter of the current financial year on the back of a robust demand for electricity, the company said in an exchange filing.

The company had made a net profit of Rs 186.74 crore in the same quarter last year.

The company's revenue from operations rose 13 per cent to Rs 2,661.41 crore while fuel costs, which includes expenses for coal and is the company's largest cost, fell nearly 20 per cent. Earnings before interest, tax, depreciation, and amortisation (EBITDA) increased 69 per cent to Rs 1,229.43 crore from Rs 727.63 crore a year earlier. The EBITDA margin was 46 per cent compared to 31 per cent during the same quarter last year.

## Teledyne FLIR IIS announces a new modular and compact USB3 machine vision camera series

TELEDYNE FLIR  
Everywhere you look

FW DESK  
Richmond (BritishColumbia)

Teledyne FLIR IIS (formerly Point Grey Research), industry pioneer of the area scan USB concept, is pleased to introduce the new Dragonfly® S USB3 camera series to its machine vision portfolio. The new series is a result of Teledyne's constant commitment to set and enhance vision industry standards for customer success. It addresses the market's essential need for a modular, compact, and lightweight camera for at-scale manufacturing, volume-based applications, and multi-camera systems.

Dragonfly S has a modular design to accelerate the inception stage of imaging application development for a diverse range of industrial and non-industrial segments. "This is a first-of-its-kind practical option for factory automation and embedded vision-based device manufacturers," said Sadiq Panjwani, General Manager at Teledyne FLIR IIS. "The modular concept of the new camera empowers engineers to quickly test, develop, and deliver competitive vision products to market at scale."

The camera series is ideal for embedded or handheld device applications such as biometrics kiosk solutions, ophthalmology, 3D scanning, automated optical inspection, and more. It is available in multiple configurations, from board-level to a fully-enclosed module in a ruggedized aluminum case. The USB connector is offered in a rear or side orientation with screw-in locking mechanism. These modular options provide maximum flexibility and durability, allowing seamless integration in tight spaces. The cased models are Class B EMC safety compliant as mitigating electromagnetic interference is critical for healthcare and residential applications. Additionally, an onboard image buffer ensures that every captured image frame is reliably transferred to the host CPU.

## Rainbow Children's Medicare Launches its 100 beds spoke hospital in Bengaluru

ARUN KUMAR RAO  
Bengaluru

Rainbow Children's Medicare Limited (RCML), popularly known as Rainbow Children's Hospital, India's leading Pediatric multi-specialty hospital chain announces the launch of its new state-of-the-art 100-bed spoke hospital at Sarjapur Road, Bengaluru.

This is Rainbow Children's Hospital's 4<sup>th</sup> Pediatric multi-specialty hospital with integrated prenatal care in Bengaluru. With this development, the company is further strengthening its presence in Bengaluru, reaching cumulative bed strength of 452 beds in Bengaluru.

The hospital on Sarjapur Road which is surrounded by IT Companies is designed to be a significant spoke hospital, playing a crucial role in Rainbow's network in Bengaluru. This hospital is proposed to provide comprehensive Pediatric and obstetric care services, which include 24x7 consultant-led emergency cares in



Pediatric and obstetrics, outpatient services and level 3 Neonatal and Pediatric intensive care services. The hospital will complement the services offered at the Hub hospital at Marathahalli. RCML is enhancing its services to meet its objective of providing quality Pediatric healthcare. With the addition of the hospital at Sarjapur Road, the company has commissioned 295 beds across Hyderabad and Bengaluru, of the 1,000 beds that were envisaged in the business plan and guided during the IPO.

Commenting on the development, Dr. Ramesh

Kancharla, Managing Director, Rainbow Children's Medicare Limited (RCML) said, "With the addition of our 4th hospital, in Bengaluru, Rainbow Children's hospital has strengthened its presence in Bengaluru. In keeping with the brand ethos, the facility has been designed with child centric environment and soothing interiors to make it appealing to children. This hospital will further augment our hub and spoke model to provide wider coverage, better access and offer superior care for children and women in the city." He added.

## Indian Steel Bottle Industry Lauds Govt's Quality Control Measures, Urges Continuance



JAIPUR: The All India Steel Bottles Association commends the Indian government's recent introduction of Quality Control Orders (QCO) for stainless steel vacuum-insulated water bottles and portable stainless steel water bottles.

Aligned with 'Make in India,' 'Aatma Nirbhar Bharat,' and broader goals for a 'Swasth Bharat' and sustainable environment, the move is expected to create around 25,000 new jobs, primarily in the MSME sector.

The import lobby has requested a six-month extension on the BIS implementation, raising concerns among domestic manufacturers.

However, the All India Steel Bottles Association emphasises the critical need for the non-extension of the QCO implementation date.

Currently, manufacturing

units are obtaining licenses, and any delay could lead to inefficiencies, jeopardising investments, and creating market imbalances with low-quality imports.

Over 30 per cent of the workforce, predominantly women, face the risk of unemployment due to the potential surge in imports.

Mr. Bharat Agarwal, Director of Crown Craft, a leading player in the industry, expressed gratitude to the government for the QCO, stating that it will provide a lifeline to the industry and offer Indian consumers better quality products.

He urged against an extension, highlighting the readiness of Indian companies to replace import volumes immediately.

Mr. Vedant Padia, Director of Placero International Pvt.

Ltd, raised concerns about China's influx of low-quality products threatening MSME manufacturers.

Despite challenges, India's MSMEs have shown the capacity to meet domestic requirements.

Mr. Pedia anticipates that BIS implementation will lead to the establishment of more factories in India within 1-2 years, boosting both production scale and quality.

Mr. Vikas Jain, Director of Nanobot Housewares Solutions, expressed confidence in the industry's growth, emphasising the investments made to bolster capacities.

The industry, collectively urging stakeholders to support timely BIS QCO implementation, aims to create a thriving and competitive environment, especially for the MSME sector. Rakesh Jain, Director of Atlas Metal Processors Pvt Ltd, highlighted the importance of the BIS QCO in establishing industry-wide standards, promoting fair competition, and ultimately benefiting consumers.

The industry calls upon stakeholders, policymakers, and influencers to support the timely implementation of BIS QCO, ensuring a thriving and competitive environment, especially for the MSME sector.

## Thomas Cook launched exclusive charter flights to Bhutan ex Bengaluru

ARUN KUMAR RAO  
Bengaluru

Thomas Cook has launched exclusive charter flights to Bhutan ex Bengaluru, expanded its Spiritual Journeys portfolio; Exclusive Karnataka Regional; Festive group departures with the reassurance expert Thomas Cook tour managers, comfort of Indian and vegetarian food on tour.

Romil Pant, Executive Vice President, Business Head - Holidays, Thomas Cook (India) Limited said, during press conference that "We are very bullish on the powerful and strong growth market that Bengaluru and Karnataka represent. We are investing deeply in this high potential market and are expanding our footprint in the region. We have launched a dedicated range of products to cater to the unique preferences of customers from this market and catalyze growth. We expect to see an uptick of 30% from Karnataka in 2024. Unique initiatives that we plan to le-



verage in the region are our exclusive Bhutan charters, our expanded portfolio of Spiritual Tours and Regional Tours to Europe and Asia." He added.

Thomas Cook's spiritual tourism segment is witnessing an exponential growth - over 100% YoY. While Historically India's seniors/Gen S comprised a key segment for spiritual tours, the Company has also Witnessed an uptick

in demand from segments like multigenerational families, honeymooners/couples, Millennial and Gen Z. In commemoration of the inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the Company has introduced its unique product range, Ramayana Trails - guided private tours featuring locales Associated with the life and times of Lord Ram within India and in Sri Lanka.

## India & Dominican Republic to establish joint Economic & Trade Committee

NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet has granted approval for the signing of a protocol to establish a Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) between India and the Dominican Republic.

The committee will be established between India's Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic. India and the Dominican Republic share friendly bilateral relations, with deepening ties across



various domains. Currently lacking a bilateral institutional mechanism for trade and commerce, India imports gold from the Dominican Republic while exporting pharmaceuticals, marine products, motor vehicles, two and three-wheelers, among

other goods.

The creation of JETCO aims to strengthen economic ties between the two nations, providing a pivotal platform for discussions, information exchange, and sharing of knowledge and ideas. This, in turn, will facilitate trade and industry and serve as an effective gateway to the broader Latin American and Caribbean markets. The Joint Committee will serve as a channel for the exchange of information among different authorities, fostering trade

in goods and services and enhancing employment opportunities for professionals in both countries.

The establishment of JETCO is expected to address challenges in the export of Indian products through mutual dialogue, opening avenues for increased exports of pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and engineering goods from India, thereby contributing to greater foreign exchange earnings in line with the vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat.

## Indian Retail Sees 4% Growth in December 2023, Reveals RAI Survey

NEW DELHI: The Indian retail sector has witnessed a 4 per cent increase in December 2023 sales compared to the corresponding period in 2022.

The Retail Business Survey conducted by the Retailers Association of India (RAI) noted that despite starting discounts mid-month and the wedding season, growth had been muted for many retailers in December.

Commenting on the survey's findings, Kumar Rajagopalan, CEO of RAI, observed, "As we analysed the retail sector's performance in December 2023, retailers who sold categories with high value and consumer



financing did see business growth."

The survey noted that consumers are opting for purchases like cars, houses, and high-end electronics on an

EMI basis. However, other discretionary spending experienced a reduction.

The industry's overall growth of 4 per cent was driven by new stores and

trading in new geographies, while like-for-like stores growth was negative at about 5 per cent for most offline retailers.

Across regions, South India led with a 7 per cent growth, followed by North and West India with 3 per cent each, and East India with a 2 per cent growth.

In terms of categories, Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) reported a 9 per cent growth, followed by food & grocery (8 per cent), jewellery (7 per cent), and beauty (6 per cent). Consumer durables and IT products experienced a 2 per cent decline compared to December 2022 sales levels.



# Improved trade balance with better capital flows will be a positive for the rupee

**NEW DELHI:** Even as merchandise exports are expected to remain under pressure due to a slowing global economy, imports are also likely to cool off from here on as crude prices come down amid concerns of a weak global demand along with lower gold imports, says Sujan Hajra, Chief Economist and Executive Director at Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers.



That of imports. The growth in exports was driven by core exports with gold exports too increasing over November 2023. Imports too increased in December 2023 driven by higher non-oil non-gold imports as well as gold, whereas oil imports remained flat, the report said. Services trade surplus improved in December 2023 after dipping in November 2023 driven by a continued contraction in imports. The peak of services exports is behind us

with exports continuing to contract as much of the advanced economies slows down. India's merchandise trade deficit narrowed further to a 5-month low of \$19.8 billion in December 2023 from \$20.6 billion in November 2023. The sequential correction was entirely on account of exports, which posted a faster increase vis-a-vis imports, as per a report by Acuite Ratings and Research. Merchandise exports stood

at \$38.5 billion (13.5 per cent MoM and 1.0 per cent YoY) in December 2023. Core exports rose to a four-month high of \$28.7 billion in December 2023 from \$23.6 billion in November 2023 driven by a prominent increase in engineering goods, chemical products and Agri commodities.

Merchandise imports stood at \$58.3 billion (6.9 per cent MoM and -4.9 per cent YoY) in December 2023. Core imports rose to \$38.0 billion from \$34.6 billion in November 2023, led by sequential increase mainly in electronic goods imports (+\$2.9 billion).

Suman Chowdhury, Chief Economist and Head - Research at Acuite Ratings & Research, said after the record high trade deficit in October 2023, normalisation has continued to transpire over the months of November-December 2023. This has been largely enabled by a moderation in global commodity prices, despite the esca-

lation of geopolitical risks.

"From an outlook perspective, we continue to believe that merchandise trade deficit in H2 FY24 would be wider in comparison to H1 FY24, owing to sluggish growth in global trade volumes, domestic export restrictions on select agricultural commodities and India's strategic advantage of importing relatively cheaper Russian oil dissipating", Chowdhury said.

"However, the recent downside on commodity prices has offered incremental comfort to our past CAD view. As such, we revise our FY24 current account deficit forecast lower to \$47 billion (from \$67 billion earlier), at 1.3 per cent of GDP. Having said so, tensions in the Red Sea region remain a developing story on watch.

"Persistence or escalation of tensions could manifest more materially over the coming months on India's trade performance via increase in shipping costs", Chowdhury added.

# Pre-budget expectations from HR & Staffing industry

ARUN KUMAR RAO  
Bengaluru



Pre-budget expectations from HR & Staffing industry, Puneet Arora, Managing Partner, Biz Staffing Comrade Pvt Ltd, a renowned name in the HR realm, providing a wide range of recruitment and selection services to diverse companies said, We expect measures from the upcoming Budget 2024, mostly about employee welfare and taxation, the employment process, formal job creation opportunities, reducing compliance complexity, roll out of labour codes making them more adaptable to the modern workplace and addressing the skill-gap challenge in the country. The staffing industry plays a critical role in opening up employment opportunities, helping the organisation to build their business, developing a talent pipeline and thus fuelling economic growth. Hence this industry deserves to be given an industry status. The HR landscape has also witnessed profound transformations in recent years from being a standalone function to becoming a strategic business partner. There has been a fundamental shift in repositioning HR

to drive business transformations and it will strengthen its hold in the near future as well.

He also stated that, As skilling in the new and emerging technologies becomes the need of the hour for various industries, we expect the Union Budget 2024 to allocate more funds into a structured and comprehensive skilling programme. With the employment landscape evolving quickly, bringing in fundamental changes to the skilling system are necessary. The financial outlay must increase to stay up with the rate of technological advancement and the people's ability to learn new skills. Simultaneously, encouraging deductions for training courses will promote professional development and lifelong learning,

enhancing individual career growth and overall workforce competitiveness.

In order to provide the same degree of flexibility to the core sectors as is accessible to the services sector, it is imperative that our labour laws be redrafted in line with the changing times. It is also crucial to take proactive measures to encourage women to re-enter or remain in the workforce as this will contribute to a more balanced professional landscape. While the government has been providing impetus towards job creation through several initiatives, it is important that the Union Budget 2024 lays a strong roadmap for economic growth and continues the momentum to create new job opportunities across sectors.

## PNB clocks 3-fold jump in net profit at Rs 2,223 crore for Q3



Punjab National Bank (PNB) on Thursday announced an over three-fold jump in its profit to Rs 2,223 crore for the October-December quarter of the current financial year, compared to the corresponding figure of Rs 629 crore in the same period last year.

The government-owned bank's total income shot up to Rs 29,962 crore during the quarter from Rs 25,722 crore in the same period last year.

PNB's net interest income (NII) went up 12.1 per cent to Rs 10,293 crore from Rs 9,179.4 crore in the year ago period, according to a regulatory filing. The bank's asset quality also improved during the quarter with gross non-performing assets (NPAs) declining to 6.24 per cent of total loans from 9.76 per cent in the same period last year. Net NPAs came down to 0.96 per cent from 3.30 per cent. The provisions for bad loans made by the bank came down to Rs 2,739.1 crore from Rs 4,713.34 crore in the same quarter of the previous year.

## India's Banking System Faces Historic Liquidity Deficit: RBI Data

**NEW DELHI :** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has reported that India's banking system is facing an unprecedented liquidity deficit, reaching a record high. This situation has been aggravated by outflows for tax payments and restrained government spending.



As of January 23, the liquidity deficit surged to Rs 3.34 trillion (\$40.18 billion), nearly tripling from the beginning of the month, as reported by the RBI.

In response to the liquidity crunch, Indian lenders have urged the RBI to alleviate li-

quidity conditions, given that overnight cash rates persistently remain above the policy rate.

On Wednesday, the call rate stood at 6.85 per cent, and the Treasury Bills Repurchase (TREPS) rate was at 6.78 per cent, both significantly exceeding the repo rate of 6.50 per cent.

While the central bank has

undertaken shorter-term repo auctions to infuse cash into the banking system, it has refrained from injecting longer-term funds at this point.

Earlier this month, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das expressed caution, stating that it would be premature to discuss a monetary policy pivot while inflation continues to be elevated.

As the liquidity deficit presents a growing challenge, market participants keenly await further actions or statements from the central bank to address the pressing issue in India's banking system.

## Chinese syndicates to keep hurting India via loan app scams, says Cyber expert

**NEW DELHI:** Chinese criminal syndicates and gangs operating digital loan shark scams are expected to further dent the Indian economy in 2024, warns cybersecurity law expert Pavan Duggal.



The surge in illegal activities, through Chinese loan apps, has raised concerns about the exploitation of unemployed youth and financially-stressed individuals in India.

Investigations reveal that the masterminds behind these operations are predominantly based in China, leveraging local recruits in neighbouring countries to conduct their transnational criminal activities. The illicit operations include data collection and financial disruptions targeting the Indian economy.

Pavan Duggal, Chairman of the International Commission on Cyber Security Law, said that Chinese loan apps are significantly impacting the Indian economy as part of a broader approach. "China aims to target the Indian economy due to their past relationship with the nation. As a result, China is actively working to destabilise the Indian economy and gather as much data as possible through these loan apps."

Duggal also pointed out that these apps offer instant loans with high-interest rates, leading people into financial distress. While many Chinese apps fall under the IT Act of 2000, they do not comply with Indian law, causing significant

but not comprehensively. And thirdly, the existing laws are inadequate in effectively responding to cybercrimes, posing significant challenges in combating them. "The Government needs to bring stringent laws to deal with the people in our country who cahoot with Chinese loan app fraudsters," Duggal added.

Last year, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) had frozen Rs 106 crore, lying in merchant IDs, and bank accounts. In the Chinese loan app case.

It had initiated an investigation on the basis of the FIRs registered by Cyber Crime Police Station, Bengaluru under various sections of Karnataka Money Lenders Act, Information Technology Act, the Karnataka Prohibition of Charging Exorbitant Interest Act, and various sections of Indian Penal Code against numerous entities in connection with their involvement in extortion and harassment of the public who had availed small amounts of loans through the mobile apps being run by those Chinese national controlled entities.

The investigation by ED revealed the modus operandi of these entities wherein these entities were incorporated by appointing dummy directors on behalf of Chinese nationals, obtained KYC documents of company staff and appointed them as Directors of such entities and even opened bank accounts in their name, without their knowledge or prior consent.

## India's Forex Reserves Reached USD 618 Billion : RBI



**NEW DELHI :** India's foreign exchange reserves marked an increase of USD 1.634 billion, reaching USD 618.9 billion for the week ended January 12, as reported by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). In contrast, the preceding week witnessed a decline, with overall reserves falling sharply by USD 5.89 billion to USD 617.3 billion.

Despite reaching an all-time high of USD 645 billion in October 2021, India's forex reserves faced challenges as the central bank utilised them to safeguard the rupee amid global pressures. The latest data reveals a positive shift, with foreign currency assets, a crucial component, rising by USD 1.859 billion to USD 548.508 billion. Expressed in dollar terms, these assets consider the impact of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound, and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

However, gold reserves experienced a decline of USD 242 million, totalling USD 47,247 billion during the reported week, according to the RBI. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) witnessed an increase of USD 12 million, reaching USD 18.31 billion, as per the reports.

## IDFC First Bank registers 18% increase in Q3 net profit at Rs 716 cr

IDFC First Bank on Saturday reported an 18 per cent increase in net profit to Rs 716 crore for the October-December quarter of the current financial year.

The bank had posted a net profit of Rs 605 crore in the same quarter of the previous year. The bank's Net Interest Income (NII) grew 30 per cent year-on-year from Rs 3,285 crore in Q3-FY23 to Rs. 4,287 crore in Q3- FY24. The net interest margin was 6.42 per cent during the quarter up from 6.13 per cent in the year ago period. The bank registered an improvement in its asset quality with gross non-performing assets (NPAs) declining to 2.04 per cent of total loans, down from 3.96 per cent in the same quarter last year. The net NPA for the quarter



was 0.68 per cent, improving from 1.74 per cent compared to the same period of the previous year. The bank's CASA deposits grew by 28.6 per cent year-on-year from Rs 66,498 crores as of December 31, 2022, to Rs 85,492 crores as of December 31, 2023. CASA Ratio stood at 46.8 per cent as of December 31, 2023.

"We are happy to share that our deposits continue to grow strongly at 43 per cent

year-on-year, and our CASA ratio continues to be strong at 46.8 per cent. Our asset quality continues to improve," IDFC First Bank CEO V Vaidyanathan said.

He said that in the Retail, Rural & SME business, which is a significant part of our business, the Gross NPA and Net NPA continues to remain low and are at 1.45 per cent and 0.50 per cent respectively as of December 31, 2023.

## Jaishankar proved to Russia that our economy is far ahead of theirs



**DR P S VOHRA**  
India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar's visit to Russia, in the last week of December, could be noteworthy in the context of strengthening India-Russia ties. During his journey, Jaishankar emphasized with clarity that India has significantly surpassed Russia in terms of economic growth. However, the 90s were crucial for both countries. India initiated economic reforms and in the same period the Soviet Union was disintegrated and since then the reins of Russia are in the hands of Putin. Economic indicators for both countries in the '90s were substantial, with India's GDP at \$270 billion and Russia's at \$518 billion. However, today, India's GDP stands more than 60% higher than Russia's, with \$3.7 trillion compared to Russia's \$2.3 trillion in 2022. This gap is expected to widen further in the future. Despite the latest figures for 2023 being unavailable, it's evident that Russia, recovering from economic challenges due to the conflict with Ukraine, contrasts with India's robust economic development, registering a growth rate of 6-7%

acknowledged by global economic institutions.

Certainly, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar has not attempted to convey through these figures that Russia is significantly lagging behind India. However, it is emphasized with great importance that India has witnessed a commendable progress in the past 30 years and is poised to emerge as a major economic power in the coming times. The continuous improvement in economic policies has been a key factor in India's economic progress from the 1990s until now. On the other hand, Russia's ambitions in international politics have been a major hindrance to its economic development compared to India. If we compare the economic progress of both countries, it can be observed that until around 2008, Russia's economic progress was considerably higher than India's. The global recession in 2009 had an adverse impact on Russia, leading to an economic downturn in 2010. However, in the subsequent two to three years, Russia could rapidly maintain its development rate. The year 2014 marked a new phase for both countries. While India, under a strong democratic government, rapidly initiated various economic reforms, Russia faced severe economic setbacks due to its interventionist and dogmatic international poli-



tics. The term "iridentism" in English refers to a situation where a country, based on its glorious history, takes great pride and strives to regain its past glory and status, seeking to reclaim all other territories and nations that were once part of its undivided sovereignty. Fueled by this mindset, Russia separated Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, leading to stringent economic sanctions. Subsequently, the impact of the Ukraine conflict, coupled with the ongoing global pandemic, has contributed to a continuous divergence between the economies of Russia and India over the past two years.

The ideology of irredentism or international expansionism began in Italy at the end of the 18th century. During that time, Italy envisioned reclaiming various European countries, including Switzerland, as part of its territory.

Germany's Hitler also had similar ideology during the last century, and in recent

years, examples of this mindset have been observed with Somalia, Ethiopia, and Argentina's Falkland Islands. This ideology has placed these countries in significant economic crises. Speaking of the neighboring country Pakistan, it has been troubled to some extent by a similar ideology, considering Kashmir as part of its territory based on religion and language. This has led to sheltering extremists under a systematic plan, causing huge economic setbacks compared to India. However, by the 1980s, Pakistan's GDP was 65% higher than India's, but today it heavily relies on economic assistance from the IMF and World Bank for domestic economic stability. Similarly, Russia is continuously falling behind due to its political ambitions.

During his stay in Russia, S Jaishankar not only met President Putin but also engaged in extensive discussions with the Prime Minister and For-

eign Minister. It's well known that India and Russia share a longstanding friendship, often considered as Russia being India's all-time favorite friend. However, since the beginning of the globalization era, India's inclination towards the United States and Russia's alignment with China has steadily increased, resulting in strong need for deepening India's friendship with Russia. Despite the annual India-Russia Friendship Summit being consistently postponed in the last two years, Prime Minister Modi again deferred it. In December 2021, President Putin visited India for the annual Friendship Summit.

In October 2023, Putin notably did not attend the G-20 Summit held in Delhi. It's crucial to mention that Russia has been at war with Ukraine for the past two years, leading India to initiate purchasing crude oil in Indian Rupees from Russia, as severe international sanctions are imposed on Russia due to the conflict. Observably, Russian companies are struggling to utilize the Indian currency for oil payments, putting pressure on India to trade crude oil in Chinese Yuan as an alternative to support Russia's economy.

Dr P S Vohra is a Writer, columnist and financial thinker. View are personal

## Nifty registers sharp recovery after Tuesday's sharp fall

**MUMBAI:** From early morning low of 21,137, Nifty registered a sharp recovery of more than 340 points and finally ended the day with gains of 215 points to close at 21,465.



Though NSE Cash market volumes were lower as compared to Tuesday, it remained higher as compared to recent averages, said Nandish Shah, Deputy Vice President, Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

After Tuesday's sharp fall, Nifty Midcap 100 and Smallcap 100 Indices recouped some of the losses, gaining by 1.80 per cent and 1.70 per cent, respec-

tively. Advancing shares outnumbered the declining shares as advance decline ratio stood at 1.83 on BSE. All the sectoral Indices ended in the green except Nifty Private Banks. Among them, Nifty Media, Nifty Metal and Nifty Oil/Gas rose the most, Shah said.

Meanwhile, China's central bank announced that the re-

serve requirement ratio for commercial banks will be reduced by 50 basis points from February 5 to boost the economic growth.

The move is expected to inject 1 trillion yuan (\$140 billion) worth of liquidity into the market. Metal stocks gained as uptick in Chinese economy can provide strong boost to demand for metals with China being the largest consumer of commodities globally, he said.

Near term resistance for Nifty is seen in the zone of 21,700-21,750, which should be utilized to lighten trading long commitments, he said.

## Further selling by FPIs, more corrections in broader market likely

**NEW DELHI :** The important takeaway from January 23 sharp market correction is not the 1.54 per cent cut in Nifty but the crash in Nifty mid-cap and Nifty small-cap indices by 3.15 per cent and 2.87 per cent respectively, says V.K. Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services.



The valuations in the broader market had become excessive and unsustainable as pointed out many times recently, he said.

The trigger for the correction came mainly from the sustained selling by FPIs who have sold equity worth Rs 27,830 crore during the last five days, he added.

also contributed to the selling in the market. There is news that SEBI is tightening the ultimate beneficiary norms for FPIs starting February 1st. This might have triggered some FPI selling. Also, there is a rumour floating around that the finance minister may tweak the LTCG tax taking away the advantages investors are enjoying now, he added.

Further selling by FPIs and more corrections in the broader market are likely. Investors may wait for the market to

stabilise. Safety now is in fairly priced large caps, he said.

Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities said India's direct tax-to-GDP ratio hit a 15-year high of 6.11 per cent in 2022-23, hovering near its peak of 6.3 per cent reached in 2007-08, according to data released by the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT). In 2022-23, direct taxes made up 54.62 per cent of the government's total tax revenue, up from 52.27 per cent in 2021-22 and 46.84 per cent in 2020-21.

After a gap-up opening of 145 points on the back of positive global cues, Nifty could not hold on to the gains and turned south. Nifty nosedived by more than 1.5 per cent to close at 21,238.



## INTERNATIONAL

## Trump testifies in E. Jean Carroll defamation case



Former US President Donald Trump has testified for less than five minutes in E. Jean Carroll defamation trial in a New York court, local media reported. Trump, the front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, who testified briefly was cut off by Judge Lewis Kaplan. Trump said Carroll's accusations were false though he was not allowed to testify that he didn't assault Carroll. The jury in the current trial has been shown threats of murder and rape that Carroll has received since 2019 when she went public with her story through emails, texts and tweets, reported CBS News on Thursday. Carroll, an American writer and former magazine columnist, accused Trump of raping her in the mid-1990s at a department store dressing room in Manhattan, New York City, and of later defaming her by denying her claims. The trial is tasked to determine if Trump owns any more for defaming Carroll as another trial found him liable for sexual abuse and defamation with 5 million US dollars in damages awarded to Carroll in May 2023.

## Gaza death toll exceeds 25,000 amid unabated fighting

GAZA: Amid the unabated fighting between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the death toll in the besieged enclave exceeded 25,000, the Palestinian Health Ministry said on Sunday.

At least 178 Palestinians were killed and 293 others wounded in the last 24 hours, the ministry said in a statement, Xinhua news agency reported.

Since the Israel-Hamas conflict broke out on October 7, 2023, a total of 25,105 people have died while 62, 681 sustained wounds, the ministry said.

## 'Will you marry me?' Trump supporter asks Nikki Haley

NEW YORK: A marriage proposal was thrown at Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley by rival Donald Trump's supporter as she addressed a rally in the US state of Hampshire.

"Will you marry me?" the supporter asked, interrupting the 52-year-old's speech midway, drawing laughter from her as well as the crowd at the Artisan Hotel in Salem.

The two-time former South Carolina governor has been married to William Michael Haley since 1996 and the couple has two children, daughter Rena and son Nalin.

Responding swiftly to her suitor, Haley in turn asked: "Are you gonna vote for me?" to which the man replied that he was voting for Trump. "Oh, get out of here!" Haley



said in a light-hearted repartee that was shared on X by conservative political commentator, Benny Johnson.

The post garnered some hilarious reactions from the netizens where one user referred to former GOP rival and fellow Indian American Vivek Ramaswamy.

"She doesn't even try to convince him to vote for her, Vivek would have been like 'let's talk'. 'Too funny! Nobody wants Nikki. We want Trump!' another user wrote.

Despite a strong performance in the New Hampshire primary and support from Republican Governor Chris

“Are you gonna vote for me?” to which the man replied that he was voting for Trump, “Oh, get out of here!”

Sununu and 2022 GOP Senate candidate Don Bolduc, Haley lost to Trump.

With 36 per cent of the estimated vote counted, the former president registered 53.6 per cent support against Haley's 45.3 per cent in the critical early state contest on Tuesday.

However, the lone woman candidate in the presidential bid vowed to continue the fight against Trump, saying the race is "far from over".

## Nepal's top leadership wishes India on Republic Day



KATHMANDU: Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" on Friday wished his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi on the occasion of India's 75th Republic Day, expressing confidence that the bilateral relationship would continue to grow further.

Prachanda posted on X, "On the occasion of 75th Republic Day of India, I extend my best wishes to PM Shri @narendramodi ji, the government

and friendly people of India for good health, peace and prosperity. I am confident that the ties of friendship between our countries will continue to grow further." The Indian Embassy in Kathmandu also organised a special programme to mark the Republic Day.

On the occasion of the 75th Republic Day of India, I extend my best wishes to PM Shri @narendramodi ji, the government, and the friendly people of

India for good health, peace, and prosperity. I am confident that the ties of friendship between our countries will continue to grow further," Prime Minister Dahal stated on his official social media account. Joining the chorus of well-wishers, Foreign Minister NP Saud took to X to extend greetings to Dr S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India. "While India celebrates this special day, I convey my best wishes for its continued progress and prosperity as well as the further strengthening of Nepal-India friendship," he expressed.

Former Prime Minister and Chairman of CPN (UML) KP Sharma Oli conveyed his wishes in Hindi, reaching out to all Indians on the occasion of the Republic Day. "समस्त भारतवासियों को 75वें गणतंत्र दिवस की हार्दिक शुभकामनाएँ। #HappyRepublicDay2024," Oli shared on his social media platform.

## Canada to probe India's alleged interference in Federal elections

OTTAWA: Months after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused India of having a role in killing of pro-Khalestan leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a designated terrorist in New Delhi, Ottawa has now announced to investigate alleged meddling by India in country's Federal elections in 2019 and 2021.

The Foreign Interference Commission, which was set up last year by the Trudeau government to investigate interference by foreign governments in the last two federal elections in Canada, on Tuesday said that it will also



investigate India's alleged interference in the elections. The commission in a statement has asked the Canadian government to give it all information and documents related to said accusation.

Earlier, the main target of the commission's work was alleged interference by China and Russia. Now, India has also been included in its investigation after India-Canada relations nosedived in the wake of Trudeau's allegations against New Delhi in Nijjar's killing. The commission, scheduled to begin its hearings next Monday, will examine all the information about foreign interference in the two elections and make recommendations to stop it.

It will submit its interim report by May 3 and final report by December 31.

## Exploring pathways to ceasefire in Gaza



DR. MAQSOOD UL HASAN QASMI  
It has been almost four months since Israel's war on Gaza following Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. According to reports from Gaza's health officials, over 25,000 people, including children and women, have lost their precious lives. Additionally, nearly 7,000 bodies remain buried under the rubble, and more than 65,000 individuals have sustained serious injuries.

Despite the IDF's devastating onslaught which has flattened more than 85% of Gaza, the objective of destroying Hamas, removing it from political power in Gaza and releasing Israeli hostages captured by Hamas during the October 7 attack have not been successfully achieved. Observers note that it appears Israel's primary objective is to eliminate innocent Palestinian people in Gaza.

In spite of the worldwide protests against the war, a UN resolution calling for a ceasefire, and Israel facing genocide charges in the In-



ternational Court of Justice, as well as attacks (in protest against Israel's war on Gaza) by the Houthi rebels on ships in the Red Sea heading to Israel, ranging from Hezbollah's attacks to Iran's threats, nothing has served as a deterrent for Israel to declare a ceasefire. Within Israel, there is a rift among members of the Israeli government, and relatives of the hostage are demanding a ceasefire for the release of their loved ones.

However, Prime Minister Netanyahu is adamant about continuing this war until Israel achieves its goals. There are reports suggesting a feeling within the US administration that Prime Minister Netanyahu is pro-

longing this war for his own interests.

Considering the economic and defensive conditions in the Arab world, Mr. Netanyahu appears very confident that the Arab nations would not dare go to war against Israel, even if Israel were to eliminate all the people of Gaza from the world map. The assassination of Hamas' deputy commander Saleh Al-Aroui, Hezbollah senior leader waseem al-Tawil within the depths of Lebanon territories, and the successive killings of many senior Iranian leaders in Syria through Israeli airstrikes serve as evidence that fiery speeches and empty rhetoric alone cannot win a war. The world is observing

that there is still no alternative to Israel's air power with respect to Iran or Hezbollah. To the extent that Hezbollah Chief Mr. Hasan Nasrallah reportedly avoids appearing publicly and resides in a bunker due the fear of Israeli airstrikes.

## Only U.S:

Going through the history of the Israel-Palestine-Arab wars and conflicts, one thing can be pointed out: only the U.S. President is in a position to compel Israel to declare a ceasefire. As Nathan Tharall mentions in his book "The Only Language They Understand," force, including but not limited to violence, is the weapon that can yield the results. In 1956, U.S. President Eisenhower called Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and conveyed that if Israel did not unconditionally withdraw from Sinai (Egyptian Territory), it would lose all aid from the U.S. and U.S. would not oppose Israel's expulsion from U.N. This method proved effective, Israel rapidly announced its withdrawal from Egyptian territory.

(Writer is prominent Islamic scholar, he has PhD. On Palestinian issue)

## India's French Connection: Le président français Emmanuel Macron's Présence on the Republic Day, Romance des liens indo-français



GOPAL MISRA  
French President Emmanuel Macron's presence on the Republic Day, January 26, when India celebrates 75th year of her democratic constitutional regime, has become much more than reinventing old ties between a pre-dominant European power and the Asian giant preparing for a geo-political role.

It is just not a romance or Romance des liens indo-français, but the crucial role French have been playing in the key political and strategic developments since 19th century in India.

If the French generals had modernised Maharaja Ranjit Singh's army, Macron's presence on the Republic Day this year would be the sixth time that a French leader has been the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations reaffirming their strategic ties.

Macron's decision to attend the celebrations has gained more importance in the contemporary political fluid situation; it cannot be called just a diplomatic gesture, especially in the wake of the last minute refusal of the US President Joe Biden, to be the chief guest at the Republic Day. Also, it would be for the second time that a French leader to grace the occasion under the tenure of PM Narendra Modi. In 2016, Francois Hollande had attended the Republic Day parade. Earlier, in 2023, France had hosted Modi as the chief guest for Bastille Day, the second time for an Indian prime minister to attend



he high-profile event. These highest level exchanges, which had begun during the regime of PM Indira Gandhi with the presence of the then French president Jacques Chirac as the chief guest in 1976 at the Republic Day parade, has evolved in much closer ties between the two countries.

## Setback to QUAD

The four countries, Australia, India, Japan, Singapore, and the United States had conducted joint naval exercises known as Malabar Exercise in the Bay of Bengal in 2007. It was just a maritime exercise for keeping the sea-lanes free for the flow of traffic in the Indian Ocean; yet it had annoyed China. However, later, the Americans wanted to convert into a defence alliance, but due to the Indian reluctance, the Quadrilateral alliance remained informal. The US was forced to sign defence arrangements with its allies separately.

In the wake of Biden's refusal to join the republic day celebrations, India has been forced to postpone of the much-awaited QUAD summit in New Delhi, earlier scheduled during the January 26 celebrations. It

may also signal that with the recent improvement in relations between Washington and Beijing, White House may not be attaching much importance to QUAD at least for the time being. However, according to the Indian foreign office, India and France would be celebrating the 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership reaffirming their closer ties.

## Fauj-i-Khas or "special brigade"

The strategic ties between India and France go back to the reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. British called his special force raised with the French assistance, Fauj-i-Khas or "special brigade" or a French Legion. The French had played crucial role during 1822 and 1849, when they served under the benevolent king. Earlier, especially after 1801, Maharaja Ranjit Singh had unified the various Sikh principalities to create the kingdom of Punjab. He had successfully created a state that he wanted to be modern and which gradually expanded at the expense of Afghanistan in the north-west and in the east, preventing the expansion of the East

India Company. The reign of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1801-1839), is still remembered for his secular administration and preference to merit in the government appointments.

In a bid to augment his defence forces, Ranjit Singh had inducted "Napoleonic" officers for the creation of the Fauj-i-Khas. They were trained by French Generals Jean-François Allard, Jean-Baptiste Ventura and Claude Auguste Court, who had reorganized the cavalry, infantry and artillery respectively comprising young chivalrous young soldiers into a formidable force. Another French General Paolo Di was engaged for reorganizing the army on modern lines. Later, King Louis-Philippe of France had appointed General Allard as "agent of France in Lahore"; it, perhaps, was beginning of diplomatic ties between India and France.

These generals were quite knowledgeable. They used to take deep interest in various faiths, local cultures, including Indo-Greek, Persian and Islamic traditions. They also financed a number of archaeological excavations or had a large number of paintings (pictures or miniatures) made by local artists. The force they created was a professional war machine on secular lines comprising Sikh, Hindu or Muslim soldiers from all the neighbouring ethnic groups (Gurkhas, Afghans, Kashmiris, etc.).

## The Strategic Ties

The year 2023 marks 25 years of the Indo-French Strategic Partnership. Launched by France and India on 26

January 1998 on the occasion of President Chirac's visit to India, it embodies the will of both nations to develop their respective strategic independence by drawing on concrete bilateral cooperation in order to maintain peace and global security.

France and India are engaged in constant, detailed dialogue at all levels. India has already obtained 36 Rafale fighter, six Scorpene-class submarines are being built in Mumbai, encouragement for developing partnerships between industrial firms and the joint development and launch of satellites. They are also engaged in the construction of the Jaitapur EPR nuclear power project.

The French and Indian armies frequently conduct joint exercises (e.g. Shakti, Varuna, Pegase, Garuda), demonstrating the efforts underway with a view to closer integration and interoperability wherever possible. Dialogue is also ongoing in the areas of space and cyberspace, as well as the fight against terrorism.

This partnership demonstrates the long-standing trust and solidarity between France and India over the past 25 years, including in difficult times. France was the first major Western country to build a long-term strategic partnership with India that was suited to a multi-polar context.

Gopal Misra has been associated with national and international media. His books on journalism and geo-politics have been well-appreciated. Views are personal.

## Indian-origin ex-lawyer gets jail for misappropriating nearly \$358k in Singapore



SINGAPORE: An Indian-origin former lawyer has been sentenced to three years and 11 months in jail in Singapore for misappropriating nearly S\$480, 000 (approx US\$358k) of clients' money.

Guardaib Singh Pala Singh, 70, who used to be a lawyer at Guardaib Cheong & Partners (GCP), continued to act as an advocate and solicitor even after he was struck off the rolls in 2018.

He pleaded guilty last year to two counts of criminal breach of trust involving nearly S\$459, 000 and an offence under the Legal Profession Act, The Straits Times reported on Thursday.

A third criminal breach of trust charge involving another S\$21, 000 was considered during sentencing. Singh's bail was set at S\$100, 000 on Thursday and he is expected to surrender himself at the State Courts on February 15 to begin serving his sentence.

The Straits Times earlier reported that a man named Zulkifli Osman engaged GCP's services for the sale of his late father's flat in December 2010, which was sold in 2011 and the firm received sale proceeds of more than S\$356, 000.

Between Zulkifli and Singh it was agreed that out of that sum, the former's brother was

to receive S\$138, 876.50.

Following this, Zulkifli deposited S\$138, 876 into GCP's client account to be held in escrow as his brother's share of the sales proceeds on December 15, 2011.

However, between December 20, 2011, and May 3, 2012, Singh misappropriated Zulkifli's funds in GCP's client account by issuing cheques to pay for other matters such as the firm's office expenses.

Zulkifli made three requests to Singh between August 2012 and July 2014 to withdraw a portion of the money, unaware that it had been fully expended.

Singh then disbursed a total of S\$10, 156 to Zulkifli by using money in the GCP client account that belonged to the firm's other clients.

In June 2015, Zulkifli asked Singh to withdraw the remaining S\$128, 720 from the funds but the offender failed to disburse any money to him.

After being struck off the company rolls in 2018, Singh agreed to represent a man in divorce proceedings.

The man, unaware that Singh had been struck off the rolls, paid him S\$1, 750 between September 7 and 27, 2019.

In 2020, the man asked Singh for a full refund as he no longer wanted his services, following which the offender returned S\$1, 000 to him.

## Taiwan's Largest Government Energy Storage System Supplied by Fluence in Partnership with TECO Starts Operation

TAIPEI (TAIWAN): Energy, Inc. a leading global provider of energy storage products, services, and optimization software for renewables and storage, announced that the 60 MW / 80 MWh Longtan battery-based energy storage system for Taiwan Power Company (Taipower) has started operation. Located at the Taoyuan Longtan ultra-high voltage substation, the energy storage system was supplied by Fluence in partnership with TECO Electric & Machinery Co. (TECO).

The Longtan energy storage system is currently Taipower's largest storage project in Taiwan, with an installed capacity equivalent to the average daily electricity consumption of nearly 8,000 households. The project accounts for 37.5 percent of Taipower's storage capacity and serves as a significant milestone for Taiwan's net-zero transformation. "Fluence has more than 15 years of experience in designing, engineering, and delivering large-scale energy storage systems globally. We are very honored to deepen and expand our long-term partnership with TECO through our cross-regional team and technology collaboration," said Jan Teichmann, SVP & President APAC at Fluence.

"Leveraging the global experience and advanced technology of the Fluence team, combined with TECO's expertise in large-scale energy storage system construction, we have jointly delivered Taiwan's largest government energy storage project with proven technology and superior services that exceeded Taipower's technical requirements. It further demonstrates our long-term commitment to Taiwan's energy transition."



# Indian lawyer gets prestigious “Freedom of the City of London” award

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA  
New Delhi

An Indian born prolific lawyer Ajit Mishra has been conferred with “Freedom of the City of London Award” at Guildhall today for his outstanding contribution in legal and public life. Ajit Mishra is Founder and Chair of UK India legal partnership. He is a dual qualified lawyer and corporate partner at Knights. With more than two decades of professional experience of leading M&A and commercial in transactions between India and UK. Mishra has been partner and head of India desk at some of the best domestic and international law firms. He has acted



for international companies investing into Indian market and is also Chair of India chapter for Centre of Commercial Law Studies (Queens Mary

College University of London). UKILP, a dynamic networking platform, is rapidly gaining prominence as a leading hub for senior lawyers fostering connections between the legal communities of India and the UK. Established with the primary goal of enhancing understanding and collaboration within the common law system, this platform stands out for its inclusive ethos, actively dedicated to promoting the rights of women and young lawyers in the legal sector. As one of the fastest-growing network in its category, UKILP serves as a vital bridge, facilitating meaningful full interactions and knowledge exchange among legal professionals.

Ajit's nomination for the «Freedom of the City» Award came from Chris Hayward, the esteemed City of London Corporation's policy Chairman and Shriyan Joshi, Deputy chair of the Civil affairs Committee. The Award given by the City of London Corporation, dates back to the 13th century and is bestowed upon individuals who make an outstanding contribution to London and public life. Expressing his gratitude, Ajit Mishra stated that I am humbled to receive the «Freedom of the City of London» award, I started my legal career from the City of London and it's a proud moment to be recognised by the city.

## Supriya Pathak says Hansa is the most gratifying role of her life



MUMBAI: Actress Supriya Pathak, who is gearing up for the release of comedy-drama, 'Kichdi 2: Mission Paanthukistan', has called her character, Hansa, the most gratifying role of her life.

'Kichdi 2: Mission Paanthukistan', which is the follow-up to 'Kichdi: The Movie' also stars Rajeev Mehta, Anang Desai, Vandana Pathak, Jambhans Majethia, Kirti Kulhari, Anant Vidhaat Sharma, Reyansh Vir Chaddha and Flora Saini with cameos by Farah Khan and Pratik Gandhi.

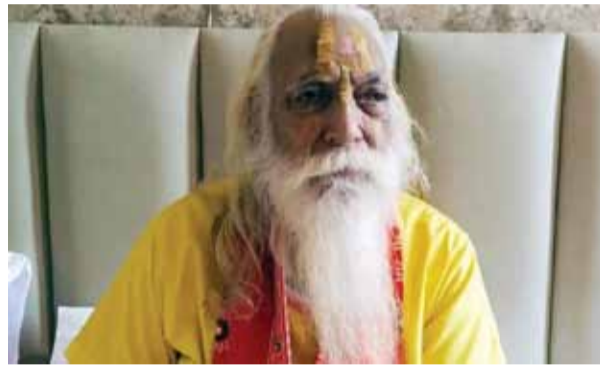
Elaborating on the same, Supriya Pathak said: "Bringing Hansa back in 'Kichdi 2: Mission Paanthukistan' has been an absolute delight. The laughter, camaraderie, and the sheer absurdity of the character never fail to bring a smile to my face." She further mentioned: "Hansa as a character has resonated so well across all age groups and it has been the most gratifying role of my life. This new installment guarantees another laughter-filled roller-coaster ride."

## Lord Ram belongs to all Indians Satyendra Das Ayodhya head priest

AYODHYA: Acharya Satyendra Das, the chief priest of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple, has reacted sharply after several opposition party leaders refused to attend the 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony in Ayodhya on Monday, saying that Lord Ram does not belong to any one political party but is a symbol of collective consciousness and unites millions of Indians living in the country and elsewhere.

Acharya Satyendra Das has been living in Ayodhya since his early childhood and has been worshipping in the same temple since the last 32 years, much before the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. He is still the chief priest of the newly-constructed Ram temple. Acharya Satyendra Das in an exclusive conversation with media spoke on several issues, including worship at the Ayodhya temple.

Reacting to the several opposition party leaders raising questions about the 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony, Acharya Satyendra Das said: "There is an atmosphere of fervour in the entire country regarding the Pran Pratishtha ceremony of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya, but some political party leaders are raising questions about the timing of this auspicious and momentous occasion. I



want to tell the critics of this grand inauguration event that Shri Ram does not belong to any one person. He belongs to every Indian. Shri Ram does not belong to any one political party. "Therefore, if there is faith in God, then one has faith in God. This is beyond politics and only those who have faith and reverence in Him will worship Him. Please be kind to Shri Ram, everyone should visit Him to get his blessings and accept Him as God and you will be benefitted by it... if you don't do so then no problem, so let those who believe in Shri Ram work in their own way."

"Somewhere in between, Congress leaders started asking, why was there a need for a new statue of Prabhu Shri Ram? Shiv Sena also makes a different kind of rhetorical

statement," said Satyendra Das, adding "Shiv Sena supported the decision of building a new statue of Shri Ram. However, Congress has never been cooperative... rather it was anti-Ram."

"But Shiv Sena remained with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement since the time when party founder Bal Thackeray was alive. They had great faith and belief in Shri Ram and even when the disputed structure collapsed during the time of Kar Seva, Shiv Sena activists and workers were present there. Shiv Sena should follow the same ideology which Bal Thackeray was known for and carry on his ideology. Shiv Sena should continue to believe in God and continue to respect God. Uddhav Thackeray should also follow the same path as his late father."

# The flip-flop show of Indian football



SUNIL THAPLIYAL  
New Delhi

Indian football has once again failed to shine on the big stage, be it the Asian Games or the recent AFC Cup. The team has failed to assert itself among the leading Asian football nations. The Indian team was brutally beaten down by its opponents in the tournament and the Indian team could not score a single goal, not even a

whiff of a goal. Poor tactics and game planning, errors in defence, late substitutions and lack of coordination between players cost the Indian team a humiliating defeat against their opponents. Apart from the first half against Australia, this was an absolute nightmare for the Indian football team that recently hosted the AFC Cup. The team failed to qualify for the knockout round after losing all three matches against Australia,

Uzbekistan and Syria. Not only did the team lose all three games, but they also failed to score even a single goal and conceded six.

Despite a world-class infrastructure and good despite a good coaching staff, the Indian team has failed to showcase Indian football on the big stage. After this poor performance in two high-profile competitions, be it the Asian Games or the AFC Cup, the responsibility for what went

wrong in the team and team management needs to be addressed. There should be an honest investigation and no one should be the scapegoat to take responsibility. The enquiry should focus on why Indian football keeps failing. The question needs to be asked as to why Indian football is not getting better results despite having better facilities. Undoubtedly, the Indian Super League has helped India get better players, financial security and presentation to match international standards. Also, football gets a huge fan following and support from the fans, but the team has not lived up to the expectations of the people. Despite all the money that goes into football, we are being beaten by countries with less than 1 per cent of our population.

The poor performance of the Indian football team has shattered the dream of Indian fans who wanted to see the Indian team qualify for the 2026 World Cup. The fans can support the team to hell, but it is the responsibility of the team's coach and more importantly the AIFF to ensure that football, domestic tournaments or events like the AFC, Asian Games or international friendlies are prioritised.

## YouTube removes over 1,000 videos of celebrity AI scam ads



SAN FRANCISCO: Google-owned YouTube has deleted more than 1,000 deepfake scam ad videos of celebrities from its platform. YouTube said it is "investing heavily" to stop AI celebrity scam ads.

After a 404 Media probe into such fake celebrity ads, YouTube deleted more than 1,000 videos tied to an advertising ring that used AI to make celebrities like Taylor Swift, Steve Harvey, and Joe Rogan promote Medicare scams.

Such videos had nearly 200 million views, with both users and celebrities regularly complaining about them, said the report.

## A village that worships Ravana, now welcomes Lord Ram

MAHIE

Mythology has always played a crucial role in India's culture and tradition since centuries. We all have witnessed many mythological stories from our ancestors. Mahabharata and Ramayana are one among the most famous stories we all have heard. Here's a concealed story of a village named Bisrakh located in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

Bisrakh Village is believed to be the birthplace of Ravana, the demon king. According to the villagers the name of the village is derived from the name of Ravana's father Vishrava, who was a saint and a devotee of Lord Shiva. Ravana was a son of Vishrava and Kaikeyi. The villagers believe that Ravana had spent his childhood in this village and later went to Lanka.

As we all know that Ravana was the most powerful and intelligent saint, also a great devotee of Lord Shiva. He is worshipped in this village. The people of this village do not celebrate Diwali and Dusshera. For them the nine days of Navratri is a period of mourning in the village. The locals pray for the peace of Ravana's soul and perform yagnas. It is also believed that celebrating Diwali or Rameleela



will invite the wrath of Ravana. According to the villagers anyone who tries to celebrate Rameleela or Diwali in this village had to bear the consequences. They believe that celebrating Rameleela would invite wrath of Ravana and a bigger calamity can take place.

There is also a temple of Shiva Lingam in Bisrakh village, which is believed to be built by Ravana's father Vishrava. As a child, Ravana along with his father used to offer prayers in this temple. For them Ravana is their protector and guarding deity, and protects them from any calamity. The villagers worship both Lord Rama and Ravana, but Ravana is more

closer to them. Recently, when new Lord Ram's idol was installed in Ayodhya, on 22 January and the entire country celebrated this event as a festival. The villagers of Bisrakh also made a change, and brought an Idol of Lord Ram. Along with Ram, idols of Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman, were also installed at Shiva temple in the village. The consecration ceremony was held by 11 priests, following a procession across the village. The Villagers who have never celebrated Dussehra festival earlier, are planning to bring an Idol of Ram from this year. So from now onwards both Ram and Ravana will be worshipped in Bisrakh.

## Yami Gautam, Priya Mani learned a lot from each other while working together

MUMBAI: Yami Gautam will be seen sharing screen space with actress Priya Mani in 'Article 370'. The actress said that the two learned a lot from each other while working in the upcoming film.

Yami said: "Playing the role of an intelligence officer in Article 370 was truly challenging, it pushed me to explore new facets of my acting abilities. The film has many intense action sequences which demanded



physical and mental preparation, making it a thrilling yet demanding experience."

"Being part of this genre-defining project allowed me to contribute to telling a first-of-its-kind story, shedding light on

the historical events surrounding the subject and its intricate complexities. Working with Priya Mani in the film was great experience. We both have different working styles and there is a lot that we both learned from each other while filming for this film."

The upcoming action political drama showcase how Yami who plays an intelligence officer along with Priya Mani who essays the role of a PMO bureaucrat. Priya Mani added: "Article

370 is beautifully nuanced film and it was not just about portraying a character; it was about playing a strong, resilient female figure. My character has many layers and it gave me an opportunity to showcase strength and determination of women in position of power."

Priya Mani said that the film is an eye-opening exploration of an untold story, revealing the remarkable journey of individuals who played crucial roles in

shaping our nation's history.

"I absolutely loved working with Yami on this film, she is an easy going person and I hope the audience will enjoy watching us together on the big screen in this action packed political drama."

The film is directed by National Award-winner Aditya Suhas Jambhale. Produced by Jyoti Deshpande, Aditya Dhar and Lokesh Dhar, the film is slated to release in cinemas worldwide on February 23, 2024.

## Unlocking Success in Uncertain Times: Class of 2024, Let Your Soft Skills Shine!

SOURAV ROY  
The year 2024 has proven to be a formidable challenge for placements at some of India's premier engineering colleges and elite business schools. The global economic slowdown, overhiring in the aftermath of the post-pandemic job boom, and a significant reduction in campus hiring have collectively left the class of 2024 in a state of uncertainty, with hearts pounding and butterflies fluttering in their stomachs. Despite India's impressive economic growth figures, there's an imminent job crisis at the grassroots level.



macroeconomic conditions. Investors, even in buoyant markets, have become apprehensive, leading to a tightfisted approach. Ironically, amid these challenges, India continues to surge forward as one of the world's fastest-growing economies. However, the paradox lies in the lack of employment opportunities, particularly for the youth in urban India where most development is concentrated.

According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, the country's unemployment rate reached its highest point in the last two years, peaking at 10.5% in October 2023 from 7.5% in September 2023. It's evident that India's economic expansion is failing to create sufficient employment opportunities for a significant portion of its population. Major IT firms such as

Infosys and Wipro have already announced a pause in campus recruitments and hiring of fresh college graduates last year, a trend expected to persist this year. This unfortunate reality translates into heartbreak for millions of freshly graduated engineering students, as many other corporate firms follow suit with similar halts in campus hiring for freshers.

Adding to the chaos, Mercer Mettl's India's Graduate Skill Index 2023 report suggests that only 45% of Indian graduates who apply for jobs are employable according to the latest industry demands and standards. This means tens of millions of Indian graduates are automatically excluded or disqualified from the scarce pool of jobs available in urban India.

So, why is India's seemingly fairy-tale growth story, with its vast number of skilled

graduates, coupled with the specter of layoffs and recruitment freezes, not adding up? Beyond major macroeconomic factors such as recessionary fears, a weak pipeline of deals, and global economic slowdown, there's a fundamental issue: the wide gap between acquired knowledge in classrooms and the skills required in various industries and corporate sectors.

The memory-based education system in India, heavily emphasizing theoretical and rote learning, is producing academic champions but failing to create realistic plug-and-play heroes capable of meeting employer expectations and swiftly adapting to rapidly changing economic scenarios. This stark mismatch between academic institutions' output and the job sector's requirements is evident.

Graduate engineers and MBAs with near-perfect scores often shy away from personal interviews and become nervous at the mere mention of a recruiter contacting them. The lack of communication and interpersonal skills, along with the absence of emotional intelligence and the inability to create friendly interactions without ulterior motives, renders many self-centered, high-ranking academic toppers unfit for selection in large organizations seeking a decent 'company culture' fit rather than just

high technical skills.

The logic is clear – beyond a certain basic level, advanced skills can be imparted to any trained mind. However, people skills such as cooperation, collaboration, teamwork, active listening, and empathy are more reflective of a person's conduct and longevity at work. In times like these, when recruiters are becoming tougher to please and layoffs are becoming a trend, it's imperative for the class of 2024 to judiciously blend their hard and soft skills.

At the university where I teach, we're addressing this challenge with our 20,000 students. Engineers, architects, MBAs, pharmacists, computer scientists, and Artificial Intelligence graduates are all being trained to strike a meaningful human chord with everyone by honing their people skills. The goal is not only to create a workforce that is 'Work Ready World Ready' but also to cultivate a new breed of humane professionals perfectly aligned with the industry and its testing times.

As one of the engineering freshers who secured a high-paying job remarked, "I enrolled for an A-grade engineering course, but it was the inner engineering that came along with it which made me win."

Sourav Roy is a Professor of Practice at Chitkara University

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA  
New Delhi

Special Sweet for Ram Mandir anointment ceremony: All over the country celebrate the inauguration of Ram Mandir Gifts are reaching from different parts of the country for Ramlala. This time special sweets are sent from Kolkata for God Ram and his anointment ceremony. 18 inch long Ram shaped Patisapata made of pitha, kheer from milk and coconut filling. The blade of



the bow is made of colored kheer of milk, gold & silver eatable foil just as the bow and blade of Rama in the idol

are made of gold and silver. Just like that, Conch sweets are made with molasses and coconut.

## High Commission of Canada organized a commemorative event entitled 'Inspire Inclusion'

KULBIR SINGH KALSI  
Delhi

To mark India's National Girl Child Day and to amplify the voices of young women and girls, the High Commission of Canada organized a commemorative event entitled "Inspire Inclusion." This event featured an inspiring panel discussion, showcasing the stories of young women change-makers from India who have made significant strides in advancing education, health, fitness and women's empowerment. As part of the event, a recreational 10K Women's Run was announced in collaboration with Pro Fit Sports and AIPL Gurugram. The High Commission recognized and honoured panelists Tanya Agarwal, Ansuviya,



Anusha Attree, and Aditi Arora for their outstanding contributions to gender equality,

women's health, women's fitness, and the promotion of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). During the event, the panelists highlighted the pivotal role of youth in advancing inclusion and gender equality through community leadership, education, skill development, and capacity building. They took the initia-

tive to pledge their commitment to the theme, marking National Girl Child Day and reinforcing their dedication to making progress in these critical areas. Additionally, the event inspired participants to actively commit to the empowerment of women and girls. Deputy High Commissioner Stewart Wheeler presided over the event and announced that the Run will be held on February 18, 2024 - in the lead-up to International Women's Day - in Sector 62, Gurugram. The event will promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, building a more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous global community.