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PUNJAB POLICE SEIZE 2 KG ICE DRUG, ONE CHINESE PISTOL DROPPED VIA DRONE FROM AMRITSAR; ONE HELD



CORPORATES & INDUSTRY

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MUMBAI 'CITY OF DREAMS' & 'CITY THAT NEVER SLEEPS' HIGHLIGHTED TEXTILES INDUSTRY



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RAM TEMPLE'S 100 DOORS WILL BE LIKE STEEL, THIS KIND OF WOOD WILL BE BROUGHT TO AYODHYA AFTER SELECTING IT FROM HYDERABAD FORESTS



Jakhar 'lying' on Punjab tableau for Republic Day parade: Punjab CM



CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday criticised State BJP President Sunil Jakhar for 'putting foot in his mouth' by speaking a 'naked lie' on the issue of rejection of tableau for Republic Day by the BJP-led Union government.

In a statement here, the Chief Minister said while the state government had always said that the Modi government had rejected the tableau of the state because of its 'anti-Punjab' syndrome, but Jakhar was trying to be 'more loyal than the king' by justifying the move of the Union government that, too, on false ground.

He added that Jakhar misled the people of the state by

asserting that the tableau of the state included his pictures or that of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, which was a lie.

Mann said now that the Ministry of Defence had clarified that there were no pictures of him or of Kejriwal in the tableau, adding that the lie of the State BJP President had been exposed.

The Chief Minister added that the tableau designed by the state was aimed at showcasing its rich cultural heritage along with tradition of sacrifice and martyrdom during the Republic Day Parade.

Criticising the Central government for rejecting the tableau, Mann said the BJP government is playing such dirty tactics to humiliate Punjab, adding that martyrdom and sacrifices are part of the glorious heritage of the state, which was to be highlighted in the tableau.

Punjab CM sets wheel in motion for setting up a big pharmaceutical city



VISAKHAPATNAM: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Friday extended Red carpet welcome to the pharmaceutical companies for making huge investments in the state.

Punjab Chief Minister, who visited the Jawahar Lal Nehru Pharma city, said that there is a huge potential of pharmaceutical sector in the state. He said that the companies should come forward for making big investments in the state to

propel its economic growth on one hand and to expand their business on the other. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that it will help in emerging the state as a front runner in the pharmaceutical sector.

CM also had detailed deliberations with the officers of the pharma city for setting up same venture in the state. He said that such pharmaceutical city can prove to be a boon for the state and can generate a lot of employment opportunities for the youth. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state government will leave no stone unturned for exploring the feasibility of setting up this city in the state.

Punjab Chief Minister also undertook a tour of the pharmaceutical city and minutely observed functioning of the pharma companies by visiting their units. He said that the state government is committed for ensuring holistic development of the state and prosperity of its people. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that such projects are the need of the hour for carving out a rangla and vibrant Punjab.

AAP picks Swati Maliwal for RS; renominates Sanjay Singh, ND Gupta



FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Swati Maliwal resigned as the chief of the Delhi Commission for Women after she was nominated for the January 19 Rajya Sabha elections by the Aam Aadmi Party on Friday.

The Aam Aadmi Party renominated Sanjay Singh and ND Gupta for a second term in the Upper House of Parliament, party sources said on Friday.

The party's political affairs committee (PAC) announced the nominations.

"DCW chairperson Swati Maliwal has been nominated for the first time. The PAC has decided to continue with Sanjay Singh and ND Gupta for their respective second term as Rajya Sabha members," news agency

quoted sources as saying.

Sushil Kumar Gupta, whose tenure will end this month as a member of the Rajya Sabha, has conveyed his aspiration to fully immerse himself in the electoral politics of Haryana where the AAP wants to fight elections later this year, the above-mentioned source said. A court in Delhi has allowed Sanjay Singh, arrested in the excise policy money laundering case, to sign forms and documents for his Rajya Sabha renomination.

Special Judge MK Nagpal passed the order on an application filed by the politician, who submitted that his present term as a member of the Rajya Sabha is expiring on January 27 and the Returning Officer has issued a notice on January 2 for conduct of the election and nominations for the same are to be submitted by January 9.

The application sought a direction to the Tihar Jail Superintendent to allow Singh to sign the documents.

Optimistic for India to be \$5 Tn Economy in next 2 to 2.5 years: Piyush Goyal

New Delhi: India is poised to achieve a USD 4 trillion economy before the upcoming general elections and be USD 5 trillion economy in next 2 to 2.5 years, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal announced on Wednesday. Speaking at the inauguration of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Utsav, Goyal expressed optimism that India would have the third largest GDP in the world latest by 2027, as per every street estimate. Goyal's ambitious economic vision aligns with Bibek Debroy, Chairman of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister.

In an opinion piece for the Economic Times on December 31, Debroy affirmed the certainty of India reaching the USD 4 trillion mark in 2024.

As general elections in India approach, scheduled for around April-May 2024, the nation is on a trajectory toward significant economic milestones.

SC refuses to form SIT to probe Adani-Hindenburg controversy



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to form any SIT or group of experts to conduct an investigation into the Adani-Hindenburg controversy.

bench presided over by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud.

Taking note of the submission made by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that 22 out of 24 investigations relating to the allegations against Adani group of companies have already been finalised, the bench, also comprising Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, asked the market regulator to complete the pending two investigations "expeditiously within a period of three months". The top court said that reports prepared by third party organisations such as the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) and Hindenburg Research cannot be regarded as "conclusive proof".

Transporters call off strike after assurance from Govt

NEW DELHI: Country-wide protests by transporters against the increase in quantum of punishment in hit-and-run cases under the new criminal code ended on Tuesday night after the Centre's assurance that it will have a discussion with them before implementing the provisions.



Representatives of All India Motor Transport Congress (AIMTC) met Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla on Tuesday. During the meeting Bhalla told them that provisions under the new law has not been notified yet. He also assured them that the ministry will have a discussion with AIMTC before implementing it.

After the assurance that provisions will be discussed

before implementation, AIMTC appealed to the drivers to end the strike.

According to AIMTC Chairman Malkit Singh Bal, Section 106 (2) of the new law has a provision of up to 10 years' imprisonment and fine in 'hit-and-run' cases. Transporters and truck drivers have been opposing this provision and they have demanded that it should not

be implemented.

President Droupadi Murmu has given her assent to the Indian Justice Code, Indian Civil Defence Code and Indian Evidence Code and it can be notified before January 26. The Home Ministry says that with this change, a system will be established through which any victim can get justice within 3 years.

PM Modi urges people not to visit Ayodhya on January 22



AYODHYA: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged the public not to visit Ayodhya on January 22 for inauguration of the Ram Temple.

"As bhakts, we would not like to cause any problems to Lord Ram. You all can come starting January 23 till eternity... Ram Mandir is now there forever and ever," Prime Minister Modi said on Saturday.

He also asked everyone to light a diya in their house on January 22. The Prime Minister said that Ram Lalla has got a new permanent home in the form of the Ram temple in Ayodhya after "spending years in a tent".

He said that houses have been constructed for both Ram Lalla and four crore poor people of the country.

Prime Minister Modi also said that the government is taking steps to improve connectivity to Ayodhya from several places in the country.

He made the remarks after inaugurating the Ayodhya Dham railway station and Maharishi Valmiki International Airport. The Prime Minister also flagged off eight new train routes on the day.

Addressing a public event in Ayodhya, Prime Minister Modi said, "December 30 has been a very historical date in the

As bhakts, we would not like to cause any problems to Lord Ram. You all can come starting January 23 till eternity... Ram Mandir is now there forever and ever"

Security forces execute anti-terror operation in Kulgam



FW DESK

Security forces are engaged in an anti-terror operation in Kulgam district of Jammu and Kashmir as they pursue two to three terrorists reportedly holed up in the Hadigam area of the district. The encounter started on Wednesday evening during a search operation conducted by the Jammu and Kashmir Police, Indian Army, and CRPF.

"Encounter has started at Hadigam area of Kulgam district. Kulgam Police, Indian Army and CRPF are on the job. Further details shall follow," said Jammu and Kashmir Police in a statement on Wednesday. The operation saw terrorists firing upon the security forces during the initial search, leading to an ongoing encounter. Despite no fresh firing reported, the forces are actively continuing their search efforts at the site. A top security official disclosed that the terrorists took advantage of the cover of darkness to escape the initial operation site after firing on the forces. Following the initial skirmish, additional troops were deployed, and the entire village was cordoned off. The search operation resumed with the first light after being halted overnight. This marks the first anti-terrorist operation in 2024 in the region, with the security forces determined to either apprehend or neutralize the terrorists.

"Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" to cover 15 states involving 100 LS constituencies

CONG ANNOUNCES ROUTE OF BHARAT JODO NYAY YATRA AFTER KHARGE CHAIRS MEETING OF PCC PRESIDENTS, CLP LEADERS

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' being started from Imphal on January 14 by Rahul Gandhi will cover 15 states covering a distance of 6,713 kilometers involving 100 parliamentary constituencies and 110 districts.



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on January 4 chaired a meeting of the PCC presidents, CLP leaders and AICC general secretaries/in-charges of states. The meeting among others was also attended by former president Rahul Gandhi.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Kharge recalled how under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi, the United Progressive Alliance defeated the BJP led National Democratic Alliance 20 years ago, in 2004. He said, at that time every worker across the country had worked hard

to defeat the NDA and now the time has come when the workers need to work with the same zeal and dedication once again. He said, time has come for the same dedication, commitment, zeal and hardwork to ensure the party's victory in 2024 General Elections.

Kharge listed some important steps the party has taken including "Donate for Desh" 'crowd-funding' ahead of the General Elections. Besides, he added, general secretaries' and in-charges' duties have been

finalized while the Manifesto Committee has also been constituted.

Asserting that the NDA existed just in name now, Kharge said, in comparison, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) was emerging stronger with parties having strong grassroots cadres across the country, being part of it.

Taking a dig at the Modi government, Congress President said, it had not done a single thing in the last ten

years that could be termed as a milestone. "Politics of arrogance and lies comes with an expiry date", he remarked while referring to the BJP government.

Later briefing reporters, AICC general secretary in charge of Communication Department, Jairam Ramesh said, that today's meeting had two issues on agenda, which included preparations for the 2024 General Elections and the 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra' to be led by Gandhi from January 14 to March 20 or 21.

Jairam Ramesh said, there was a unanimous view that the momentum generated by the Bharat Jodo Yatra and the transformation it brought to Indian politics, needed to be carried forward. Referring to the theme 'Nyay' of the 'Yatra' he said, it had been drawn from the Constitution, which in the Preamble seeks 'Justice' including social, economic and

political justice for the people of the country.

Jairam Ramesh said, the Yatra will start from Imphal on January 14 and will conclude in Mumbai on March 20 or 21. It will cover a distance of 6,713 kilometers mostly by bus. However, Rahul Gandhi will also walk on some stretches along the Yatra route. In the 15 states it will cover 100 Lok Sabha constituencies and 337 assembly segments involving 110 districts.

The 'Nyay Yatra' will spend a maximum eleven days in Uttar Pradesh where it will travel a distance of 1,074 kilometers covering 20 districts. The 15 states which will be covered by the 'Nyay-Yatra', include Manipur, Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Supreme Court Collegium recommends appointment of advocate as Punjab & Haryana High Court judge

CHANDIGARH: The Supreme Court Collegium, headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, has recommended the appointment of advocate Rohit Kapoor as judge of the Punjab & Haryana High Court.

The Collegium of the P&H High Court had recommended his name on April 21, 2023.

In light of the inputs provided by the government, the consideration of the recommendation was de-

ferred with a view to seek a report from the Chief Justice of the P&H High Court in consultation with members of the High Court Collegium on the suitability of the candidate.

Thereafter, the Chief Justice of the High Court, by a letter dated November 28, 2023 forwarded the minutes of the Collegium regarding suitability of the candidate. The SC Collegium said that it has consulted other judges



of the apex court who are conversant with the functioning of the P&H High Court with a view to ascertain the fitness and suitability of the candidate.

"We have scrutinised and evaluated the material placed on record, including the report of the Chief Justice of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana forwarding the recommendation of the Collegium dated 23 November 2023, based on the response/

compilation of statistics submitted by Rohit Kapoor relating to his performance as arguing counsel. The enquiries made by us with reliable sources to ascertain suitability of the candidate reveal that Shri Rohit Kapoor is a competent advocate suitable for elevation to the High Court," it said.

It added that names of advocates Harmeet Singh Grewal and Deepinder Singh Nalwa - which have been ap-

proved by the Collegium on October 17, 2023 - be given precedence in the matter of appointment, clarifying that the inter se seniority of all the three advocates be fixed as per the existing practice.

"The Chief Minister and the Governor for the States of Punjab and Haryana have conveyed their concurrence to the above recommendation," said the statement uploaded on the website of the apex court.

Punjab disburses Rs 19.83 crore to farmers opting for direct seeding of rice



CHANDIGARH: The Punjab government has transferred Rs 19.83 crore into bank accounts of 17, 007 farmers who opted Direct Seeding Rice (DSR) in the Kharif season, state Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian said on Friday.

He said 19, 114 farmers have registered 172, 049 acres on the DSR portal during 2023-24 and 18, 931 farmers and 133, 745.67 acres under DSR was verified.

Khudian said the government has been encouraging farmers to adopt DSR to save ground water. The government had announced an incentive amount of Rs 1, 500 per acre for the farmers who would sow paddy directly (without transplanting).

Private thermal plant purchased by the Punjab govt will be named Sri Guru Amardas Ji : CM

CHANDIGARH: In a New Year bonanza to the residents of the state, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Monday said that the state has created history by purchasing Goindwal power plant owned by a private company GVK Power at a cost of Rs 1080 crore.

The Chief Minister said that for the first time this reverse trend has started that the government has purchased any private power plant whereas in the past the state governments used to sell their assets to the favorite individuals at 'throw away' prices. He said that the power plant is the cheapest purchase made by any state/private company as other power plants like Korba West, Jhabua Power and Lanco Amarkantak of capacity 600 MW have been purchased at Rs 1804 crore, Rs 1910 crore and Rs 1818 crore respectively. He said that the 540 MW power plant has been purchased at



Rs 2 crore per MW. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this is much less than other power plants whose acquisition has been made at Rs 3 crore per MW. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that will be named as Sri Guru Amardass Thermal Power plant after the third Sikh Guru. The Chief Minister said that the available capacity of power plant was 61% whereas it was

Jan, the pro-people government has purchased a private power plant to augment power supply of the state.

The Chief Minister said that as coal from Pachwara coal mine can be used only for government power plants so with purchase of this power plant this coal can be aptly utilized for producing power to provide it to every sector of the state.

The Chief Minister said that this purchase will help in reduction in overall Tariff by over Rs. 1 per unit adding that it will lead to Savings of Rs. 300- 350 crores on power purchase thereby benefiting the consumers of the state. He said that it will also help in higher (More than Double) power generation due to availability of coal from Pachwara Coal Mine as Plant Load Factor (PLF) is likely to go up to 75 to 80% against average Plant Load Factor (PLF) 34% so far.

Martyrs from Punjab don't need NOC from BJP- Bhagwant Mann

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann categorically said that the state government will not send its tableau in the rejected categories list of the Modi led Union government as the martyrs of the country don't need NoC from BJP.

In a statement issued here today, the Chief Minister said that the great martyrs including Shaheed Bhagat Singh, Shaheed Rajguru, Shaheed Sukhdev, Lala Lajpat Rai, Shaheed Udham Singh, Shaheed Kartar Singh Sarabha, Mai Bhago, Ghadri Baabe and others cannot be kept in rejected category. He said that the union government is trying to belittle their contribution and sacrifice of these heroes by not including their tableaux in the Republic Day parade. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this cannot be tolerated as it is the grave insult of these



great patriots and national leaders. The Chief Minister said that the Union government had in a letter written on December 30 asked the state government as per clause 8 of the MOU signed with the states for Republic Day parade, the State/UT, which will not be selected for Republic Day Parade will be given an opportunity to display the tableau during Bharat Parv to be organized at the Red Fort, New Delhi during January 23 - 31. He said that in this parv stalls of all States & UTs based on their famous food, cuisines, traditions, product, Handicrafts and festivals will be showcased. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that after the 'Bharat Parv' the tableaux of States/UTs may be displayed in the respective State's/UT's Functions as per their discretion.

However, the Chief Minister unequivocally said that the state will not send its tableaux as per it as the martyrs of the country don't need NOC of BJP adding that Punjab knows how to respect the patriots and martyrs. He said that these are the heroes of the country and the entire country is indebted to them for their supreme sacrifices made for the nation. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state government don't need support of the union government to showcase their heroes rather it is capable enough to pay tributes to them.

Punjab Police seize 2 kg ice drug, one Chinese pistol dropped via drone from Amritsar; one held

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

In a big blow to trans-border narcotic smuggling networks amidst the ongoing war against drugs Punjab Police have busted a cross-border drug and arms smuggling racket being operated by Pakistan-based smugglers with the arrest of a key person after recovering 2 Kg Ice Drug (Methamphetamine), said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav here on Thursday.



Ice drugs and weapons from across the border using a drone.

The arrested accused further used to supply the Ice drugs across the state, he said, while adding that investigations are ongoing to establish backward and forward linkages. Sharing more details, Commissioner of Police (CP) Amritsar Gurpreet Singh Bhullar following reliable inputs about the attempt to influx of large quantity of Ice drug and weapon consignment by Pak-based smugglers in the state, Police teams from CIA Staff-1 under supervision of DCP Harpreet Mandher, ADCP CITY-3 Abhimanyu Rana and ACP West Kamaljeet Aulakh carried out

an extensive operation at in Chheharta area here.

He said that Police teams had managed to arrest the accused Simar Maan, when he was waiting for someone to deliver this

consignment. CP Bhullar said that further investigations are being conducted to unearth the whole network of drug suppliers, dealers and their buyers. Efforts are being made to ascertain the total amount of narcotics procured by the arrested accused so far, he added.

A case FIR no. 2 dated 3.1.2024 has been registered under sections 21 and 22 of the NDPS Act and section 25 of the Arms Act at Police Station Chheharta in Amritsar Commissionerate. It is pertinent to mention here that the commercial quantity of Heroin is 250 Grams, whereas, the commercial quantity of Ice Drugs is 50 Grams.



Farmers and supporters representing various unions shout slogans as they attend a Mahapanchayat at the grain market in Jandiatala Guru (Amritsar) on Tuesday. The farmers have blown the trumpet of the Delhi Front once again by announcing a joint march to Delhi on February 13 by both the forums in the mass rally of Jandiatala Guru Dana Mandi.

First disease control centre for 4 state in Ambala



SATISH HANDA Ambala

Union Health Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya laid the foundation stone of a branch of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to be constructed in a four acre area at Nagal in Ambala to be built at the cost of Rs 14 crore. The NCDC branch first in the area will carry advanced tests of the patients of four states: Haryana, Punjab, Himachal and Chandigarh. Haryana Home and Health Minister Anil Viji and Rajya Sabha MP Kartikeya Sharma were present on the occasion. In his address, Mandaviya said, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, healthcare facilities are being strengthened all over in the country, where Ayushman Bharat, services are being provided free of cost. The NCDC branch being inaugurated here will further help patients suffering from diseases in the area, he said. Viji said, a state-of-the-art lab equipped with hi-tech instruments will be set up here. Samples will initially be sent to the NCDC at Delhi, but soon the facility to test for diseases and viruses will be undertaken in this lab. Viji said that earlier, patients suffering from serious diseases had to go to AIMS New Delhi for the treatment, but now these are available within the state and there are 150 medical colleges set up within the state. Viji said that the construction will start soon and land for the same has already been handed over for this project, and the building would have three floors

Unclaimed Gold worth RS 93,71,875 seized at Airport

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

Customs department officials Posted at Shri Guru Ramdas international Airport have seized 1499.50 grams gold having market worth Rs. 93,71,875.



International Airport, Amritsar rummaged the Indigo flight No. 6E1428 arrived from Sharjah. Official further stated that during rummaging of the

aircraft two gold bars having gross weight 1508 grams found to be wrapped inside tissue and wrapped with black adhesive tape. The net weight of total gold recovered is 1499.50 grams (1000 grams + 499.50 grams). The market value of the said gold is Rs. 93,71,875/-. The unclaimed gold is seized under section 110 of Custom Act, 1962. Further investigation is under process.

ED raids premises of ex-Haryana MLA Dilbag Singh, recovers Rs 5 cr cash

GULSHAN KUMAR Yamuna Nagar

Former MLA Dilbag Singh from Yamuna Nagar and shares a close friendship with INLD leader Abhay Singh Chautala. In the 2019 Assembly polls in Haryana, Dilbag Singh was ranked among the state's wealthiest candidates.



The Enforcement Directorate raided the premises linked to former Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) legislator Dilbag Singh and associates in connection with an illegal

mining case. The Enforcement Directorate recovered illegal foreign-made arms, 300 bullets, more than 100 liquor bottles & Rs 5 crore cash, 4/5 kg bullion and other materials. Along with that, several properties belonging to ex-INLD legislator Dilbag Singh & his associate's premises, in India & abroad were recovered, informed the Enforcement Directorate. The searches were conducted in 20 locations in Haryana including Yamuna Nagar, Sonapat, Mohali, Faridabad, Chandigarh and Karnal. Notably, Dilbag Singh is former Yamuna Nagar legislator and shares a close friendship with INLD leader Abhay Singh Chautala. Four years ago, Dilbag Singh daughter wedded Chautala's son, Arjun Chautala. In the 2019 Assembly polls in Haryana, Dilbag Singh was ranked among the state's wealthiest candidates. Singh declared assets amounting to Rs 34 crore. More details awaited.

Teacher of Government primary school booked for molestation of minor girl students



JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

Police have booked a teacher of Government Primary School for molestation of three minor girls inside the school premises.

girls. The age of victims mentioned in the FIR was just ten years old. Victim girls in the presence of their mothers stated in the FIR that the accused teacher often forced them to touch his private parts while placing the notebook on his lap and it was his routine in the classroom of the school.

SHO said that various police teams have been dispatched to nab the accused who went absconding immediately after the matter was reported to the School Head. SHO said that FIR was lodged on the complaints of mothers of the victim girls.

Meanwhile, Director Punjab Schools Education (primary) today issued his suspension orders and told him to report to the Tarn Taran District Education office (Elementary) during his suspension period.

One-time settlement scheme pre-GST tax dues launched in Haryana

SATISH HANDA

Responding to the demands of traders and industry organisations in the state, the Haryana government taking decision to establish branches of the GST Tribunal in Gurugram and Hisar as such Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar launched One Time Settlement-2023 scheme, which was a long-standing demand of traders and the business community in the state to settle pending tax payments pertaining to pre-GST time, he said that the scheme will be operational from January 1 to March 30. While introducing the scheme in Gurugram a couple of days ago, the CM also announced to open a GST training institute at Gurugram and said that the government plans to establish branches of the GST Tribunal in Gurugram and Hisar. Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala who holds the portfolio of excise and taxation department also addressed the gathering. Under the One Time Settlement scheme, the tax amount will be divided into four categories, starting with an un-



disputed fee category for cases without dispute. Taxpayers will pay 100% of the amount in this category, with no penalties or interest, an official spokesperson of the department said. Whereas, In case of disputed taxes under Rs 50 lakh, taxpayers will have to pay 30% of the outstanding amount and if the disputed tax amount is above Rs 50 lakh, they will have to pay 50%. In the third category, undisputed taxes will be assessed by the department where no appeal was made. The taxpayers will pay 40% if the amount is below Rs50 lakh and 60% if it is above Rs 50 lakh. In this category there will be relief for taxpayers from

penalties and interest. However, in the fourth category to include outstanding amounts due to differences in tax rates. Here, the government has discounted the amount, requiring taxpayers to pay only 0% of the total. While offering tax relief, the scheme also providing easy instalment options to taxpayers on a condition that the taxpayers with outstanding amounts below Rs 10 lakh must have to pay the entire sum in one lump sum before March 30. In case the outstanding amount is between Rs 10 lakh and R 25 lakh, the amount can be paid in two instalments and in case the outstanding amount of tax

is more than Rs 25 lakh the payment can be spread across three instalments such as 40% in the first 90 days, 30% in the next 90 days, and 30% in the final 90 days. According to information the scheme addresses outstanding tax issues pertaining to the excise and taxation department until June 30, 2017, specifically resolves concerns related to seven VAT-related acts.

While addressing, Dushyant Chautala said the Haryana government has implemented this scheme for the welfare of traders and industrialists. He said, a new bill has been passed in the recent past assembly session for this purpose enabling traders to receive exemptions in outstanding tax cases for the period till June 30, 2017. He said the implementation of the scheme, granting one-time exemption to traders in cases where consent of outstanding tax amounts are promptly given. He said, the state government has initiated various important schemes to provide relief to people in trade and industry offering this relief to waive the amount of interest and penalties on seven types of outstanding taxes.

Satyajit Singh Majithia unanimously re-elected President of historic Khalsa College Management

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

The historic Khalsa College Governing Council (KCGC) general house today re-elected incumbent Satyajit Singh Majithia as President while Rajinder Mohan Singh Chhina was re-elected as honorary secretary. The Council members also retained Rajmohinder Singh Majithia as Chancellor, Lakhbir Singh Lodhinangal as Rector while former Majithia MLA Swinder Singh Kathunangal remained as Vice President.

The 11-member executive body retained most of the old faces. Jatinder Singh Brar was elected as additional honorary secretary, Gunbir Singh, Joint Secretary (Finance), Ajmer Singh Heir, Joint Secretary (Legal and Properties), Paramjit Singh Bal, Joint Secretary (Buildings), Lakhwinder Singh, Joint Secretary (Religious Affairs), Rajbir Singh, Joint Secretary (Farms), Santokh Singh Sethi, Joint Secretary (Public

Schools-CBSE), Dr.Kartar Singh Gill, Joint Secretary (Agriculture College), Gurpreet Singh Gill, Joint Secretary (Aided Schools).

As soon as the name of Satyajit Singh Majithia was proposed by Rajmohinder Singh Majithia and seconded by RMS Chhina, the house broke into slogans of 'Bole-so-Nihal' and he was elected President by the voice vote. He later selected his executive members who were approved by the general house.

Majithia is President of 'influential management' since 2004 had to his management's credit the opening of new professional colleges and widespread development of infrastructure. He thanked the House for reposing their faith in him as President once again. He said his team of dedicated members had been working tirelessly for the progress and development of the educational institutions catering to the education needs of the society.

Indian Textile Industry eyeing \$350 billion trade by 2030

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

The Indian textile industry has set a goal of earning a whopping \$ 350 billion by 2030 and the tenacious efforts of this sector's participants in making this goal a reality has resulted in them winning related awards, said Dhiraj Raichand Shah, former chairman and Convenor, Export Award Committee, SRTEPC, recently.

As many as 65 awardees receive trophies of gold, silver and bronze, besides certificates of Merit, at a function held in Mumbai recently. The event witnessed the Chief Guest -- Union Minister of Textiles, Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal assuring the textile industry of obtaining investment from the Central Government, while also helping the sector to cope with the numerous associated challenges.

India is one of the largest producers and consumers of

textiles and apparel in the world, accounting for 4% of the global trade in this sector. The focus is now on attracting investment into quality textile processing to enable India to leverage its strengths in the textile industry such as: abundant raw material availability, and also overcome its weaknesses like: low quality, high costs and environmental pollution. The textile sector ranks among the top job generators in India by providing employment to over 4.5 crore people, even as it focuses on making its presence felt in the global market through significant exports, he said.

India imported 1300 tons per day of knitted fabric worth Rs 607.3 crores in 2022-23 from various countries comprising mainly China, besides Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia and Bangladesh, while efforts are on towards identifying import/substitution opportunities in this regard, according to industry sources.



The reasons for India's such imports include: the country's increasing domestic market for textiles and apparel that require variety of fabrics; its strong export-oriented textile industry that supplies garments and other products to global markets including the U.S. and the EU -- which emphasize preference for high quality and compliance standards.

A market review noted that China is "controlling" over 90% of the market share in quantity related to synthetic fabric

products category. The price/kg of such fabric yarn imports is much lower than Indian prices. For import substitution of such products, the Indian sector would require about 53 manufacturing setups with average capacity of 10 tons per day.

China also holds 75% market share in global exports of knitted or crocheted fabrics, and India would require 3 manufacturing setups with average capacity of 10 tons per day. For import substitution of "Other Pile Fabrics of Man-made Fibres" (where

again China holds 75% market share), India would need atleast 6 manufacturing setups with capacity of 10 tons per day.

India faces a gap in domestic production due to lack of adequate and modern technology, infrastructure and skills in the textile processing sector, besides this sector being also largely fragmented, unorganized and inefficient -- resulting in high costs, low quality and environmental pollution.

India needs to invest in improving quality and competitiveness of its textile processing sector to reduce its dependence on imports, while simultaneously increasing its value addition and profitability in the textile value chain.

India also needs to upgrade its technology and machinery, develop related infrastructure and logistics, enhance skill and innovation, and ensure environmental and social sustainability of the textile processing sector, the sources added.

The idol of Lord Rama, carved by Arun Yogiraj from Mysore will be installed in Ayodhya

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

The Ram Lalla idol carved by distinguished sculptor Arun Yogiraj from Mysore, Karnataka, has been selected by the temple trust in Ayodhya. Confirming the same Union minister Pralhad Joshi posted in a social media post on X, said "The selection of the idol for the Prana Pratishthapana of Lord Rama in Ayodhya has been finalized. The idol of Lord Rama, carved by renowned sculptor of our country Yogiraj Arun, will be installed in Ayodhya." Union minister Joshi said the idol carved by Yogiraj will adore the grand Ram temple days after the idol was finalised for "Pran Pratishth" (consecration) ceremony to be held on January 22.

Karnataka BJP unit has kicked off celebrations that the idol of Ram Lalla skillfully crafted by renowned Mysuru sculptor Arun Yogiraj to be consecrated in the sanctum sanctorum of Ram



temple in Ayodhya. Former Karnataka CM posted in X, "The idol of Lord Rama sculpted by the sculptor Arun Yogiraj of Mysuru has been selected for installation in the magnificent Sri Rama Mandir of Ayodhya, which has doubled the pride and happiness of the entire Rama devotees of the Karnataka state. Heartfelt congratulations to 'Shilpi @yogiraj_arun'. Sculptor Arun Yogiraj hailed from a lineage of five generations of renowned sculptors in Mysore. Yogiraj started his

sculpting career at a young age and was highly influenced by his father, Yogiraj, and grandfather, Basavanna Shilpi, who enjoyed the patronage of the King of Mysore. After pursuing an MBA and working in the corporate sector, Yogiraj started pursuing sculpting full time from 2008. Besides Ram Lalla idol, Yogiraj has carved an array of impressive sculptures, including a 30-feet statue of Subhash Chandra Bose displayed behind the Amar Jawan Jyoti near India Gate in Delhi.

Amit Shah likely to visit J&K on Jan 9



FW DESK

Union Home Minister Amit Shah is likely to visit Jammu and Kashmir on January 9 to assess the security situation in the region following the recent Poonch attack. The attack resulted in the loss of four soldiers, with two others sustaining injuries after heavily armed terrorists ambushed two Army vehicles. Shah's visit comes in the wake of escalating tensions in Jammu and Kashmir, particularly after the deaths of three civilians in Poonch subsequent to the attack. His agenda includes a thorough review of the anti-terror operations in the frontier areas and a security assessment meeting in Jammu.

Telangana CM urges Centre to collect Rs 408 crore from AP for state

NEW DELHI: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Thursday urged the Centre to collect Rs 408 crore from Andhra Pradesh for its using Telangana properties even after bifurcation of the state and pay the sum to Telangana.

Making the request during a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi, he said that he wanted the money to be collected from Andhra Pradesh for using the buildings like Raj Bhavan, High Court, Lokayukta and State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) in Hyderabad. In his first meeting with Amit Shah after assuming office, Revanth Reddy requested him to allocate 29 additional IPS officers to Telangana in view of creation of new districts and supervision of various departments.

YS Sharmila sister of Andhra Pradesh CM Jaganmohan Reddy joins Congress

SAYS SHE WILL WORK TO FULFIL HER FATHER'S DREAM TO SEE RAHUL AS PM

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi



YS Sharmila, the sister of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jaganmohan Reddy and daughter of former Chief Minister YS Rajasekhara Reddy today joined the Congress after merging her party YSR Telangana Party into the Congress.

She was inducted into the party by the Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge in presence of former party president Rahul Gandhi and other senior leaders including general secretary organisation KC Venugopal.

Speaking on the occasion, Sharmila said, it gave her im-

mense pleasure that the YSR Telangana Party has merged with the Congress. She said, her father late YS Rajasekhara Reddy not only served the Congress party his entire life, but also gave his life serving the Congress party.

Sharmila said, she had decided to join the Congress as it was the only true and largest secular party in the country. She said, it always

upheld the culture of India serving all sections and uniting people of India.

Sharmila said, she was deeply pained and anguished over what happened in Manipur. She said this can always happen if a party like Congress is not in power.

Sharmila disclosed that it was her father's dream to see Rahul Gandhi as the Prime Minister of India and she was glad that she was going to be a part of making that happen. She said, whatever role the Congress party will give her, she will perform it with loyalty, integrity and diligence. Welcoming her into the party, the Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said, "We welcome Y. S. Sharmila in the Congress party. The strong emotional bond which the Congress party enjoys with the people of Andhra Pradesh shall be strengthened further."

PM Vishwakarma Yojana scheme launched in J&K



NEW DELHI: Jammu and Kashmir Administration on Tuesday launched PM Vishwakarma Yojana (PMVY) at Industrial Training Institute (ITI) in Shopian district.

An official statement said that the scheme will be a significant step towards empowering the craftsman community of Jammu and Kashmir as it will enhance their competence and empower them regarding self employment as well as equip them with industry-relevant skills.

The scheme aims for recognition of artisans and crafts of people through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card as well as basic training of five to seven days and advanced training of 15 days or more, with a stipend of Rs 500 per day.

The scheme will also provide modern toolkit of Rs 15000 free of cost to trained Vishwakarmas besides linkage with credit based soft loans and marketing support for expansion of their business will also be provided under the Yojana.

Defence Ministry Inks Rs 802 Cr Procurement Order for Indigenous BOMs & MMMEs

NEW DELHI: To give boost to domestic indigenous manufacturing and encouraging private sector participation, Ministry of Defence signed two contracts worth Rs. 802 crore for the procurement of military equipment on Thursday.

According to the reports, 697 Bogie Open Military (BOM) Wagons would be procured valuing Rs 473 crores. The BOMs - designed by the Research Design and Standard Organisation (RDSO), serve as specialised rail vehicles for the Indian Army's mobilisation. These units will be manufactured by Jupiter Wagons Limited.

This Critical Rolling Stock, represented by BOM wagons, ensures the swift and simultaneous induction of army units and equipment into operational areas during conflict situations. Additionally, it facilitates the peacetime movement of military assets for exercises and the relocation of units from one station to another.

Another order had been for



procurement of 56 units Mechanical Minefield Marking Equipment (MMME) Mark II valuing Rs 329 crores to be manufactured BEML Ltd. Marking all minefields is a compulsory obligation under the amended Protocol-II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, to which India is a signatory. In adherence to this protocol, the MMME has been developed to fulfil this crucial requirement.

The MMME is specifically designed to operate efficiently across varied terrains, carrying a complete load of stores. Its primary function is to conduct the marking of minefields with minimal time

and manpower requirements. The BOM Wagons and MMME will be manufactured using equipment and sub-systems from indigenous sources and underscores the effort to encourage private sector participation in defence production.

These wagons play a crucial role in transporting various military assets, including light vehicles, artillery guns, BMPs (infantry fighting vehicles), and engineering equipment.

The incorporation of such advanced systems not only streamlines the process of minefield marking during military operations but also significantly reduces the time and manpower involved.

Punjab Tableau Row: A Political Agenda or Vendetta?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Punjab has always served as a shield against external or internal attacks on India. To forget the sacrifice of the heroes here is to forget Indian history. Here, while the youth had kissed the noose with a smile, the Gurus, who had always given the message of humanity, not only got their heads chopped off but had also gotten their innocent children stuck in the wall so that the religion and honour of the country could be kept intact. Even today the words of the Gurus provide coolness to the mind and give the message of peace and brotherhood. In such a situation, if the Government of India does not see any merit in the tableaux of Punjab for the Republic Day and these tableaux are not even considered worthy of display, then it is not only surprising but also saddening and forces one to think that after all, "Why don't we see the qualities worthy of display in our sacrifices and culture?" Is this being done due to some special agenda or political discrimination as alleged by Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Singh Mann? Definitely the question will arise.

Punjab government had submitted three ideas viz. Punjab-history of sacrifice and martyrdom, Mai Bhago-the First Lady warrior of Sikhism (women empowerment) and Rich heritage of Punjab. CM Mann said that these ideas were duly submitted on time with the Union government for their approval, but the union government had ignored the immense contribution of the state by rejecting these ideas.

Slamming the BJP led Union government for rejecting the tableau of state for the Republic Day parade, the Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, on December 27, alleged that the 'power mad' centre government is demeaning and humiliating the enormous sacrifices made by Punjabis in the national freedom struggle.

"This is not for the first time



but last year also the BJP led Union government had done the same mischief and by rejecting the tableau this year too, centre has rubbed salt into wounds of the state" said the Chief Minister in an official release on December 27.

Mann alleged that for the last two years, the Modi government has deliberately kept Punjab out of this mega national event. This year also more than 90% states that have been selected for tableaux are being ruled by the BJP, which indicates the ongoing saffronisation of Republic Day and Independence Day by the Modi government.

Criticizing the action of the central government, Shiromani Akali Dal President and former Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab, Sukhbir Singh Badal, in a tweet on December 28, states, "How can any national event be deemed complete without highlighting the heritage of the great Guru Sahiban, the Sahibzadas and countless heroes and martyrs of freedom struggle like Shaheed-E-Azam Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sardar Kartar Singh Sarabha, Sardar Udham Singh, Lala Lajpat Rai? Anyone responsible for this injustice to the land of martyrs deserves to be identified and held accountable."

He further adds, "I strongly urge Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi to intervene against discrimination against proud, patriotic and valorous Punjab



various platforms and media sources (such as social media etc). The saffron party is also paying special attention to the time regarding various preparations for the 2024 general election.

As the election dates have not been announced yet, the party has postponed the date of counting of votes from January 10 on the basis of the calendar of dates of Lok Sabha elections held in 2019.

BJP has asked all the state in-charges, state presidents and general secretaries of the party to hold Lok Sabha Yojana Baithak before January

7, and has also directed them to send the details of these meetings to party's national president J.P. Nadda.

In the guidelines sent by the party's national general secretary and headquarters in-charge Arun Singh on behalf of Nadda to all the states for the Lok Sabha Yojana Baithak, it has been said that "a meeting should be organised for detailed discussion regarding the preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in the presence of a national party official before January 7. The expected party representatives in larger states may be between 40-50 and in small states their strength should be 20-30."

"All discussions held in the Lok Sabha Yojana Baithak will have to be documented and sent to the BJP National President for approval."

Arrest of Kar Sevaks based on Court orders: CM Siddaramaiah



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

As the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya approaches, the Karnataka police department has initiated investigations against Ram Mandir activists involved in alleged property destruction and other offences during Ram Mandir movement in 1992, a special team has been formed to probe cases, and arrests are being made. In Hubballi, Srikanth Poojari was arrested in connection with the alleged torching of shop owned by minority community member on Dec 5, 1992. Poojari is the third accused in the case, and efforts are underway to apprehend eight other suspects.

How the GOI should have ensured its decision fair and free from biasedness?

Commenting over the issue, a senior Punjab journalist, Jai Singh Chhibber says, "The celebration of 26 January (Republic Day) is a matter of pride for Indians. The Republic Day parade should not be politicized in the name of tableaux. Martyrs do not belong to any party or religion, rather they have given martyrdom for the country. Through tableaux, developments in various fields, progressive works or schemes initiated by the government and where India or the state stands in the modern arena are expressed. Indians are proud of their martyrs. It was because of the martyrs that the country became independent, and the Constitution came into force on 26 January, due to which this day is a day of great pride for Indians. To ascertain that no controversy regarding the tableau arises at any point, the Government of India should have issued guidelines in advance or the states' Rotation should be done so that all the states get a chance to participate in the parade. Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann should also have raised this issue with the Government of India instead of holding a hasty press conference regarding the tableau."

Analyzing both ends—MoD decision and criticism by all major political parties of Punjab—Congress, Aam Adami Party and Shiromani Akali Dal, one cannot ascertain up to the mark that the decision is biased, or vendetta based, but it does not sound fully transparent and beyond doubt even, as it has failed to satisfy the questions being raised in the public mind. To prove unbiasedness and fairness, every decision of the authority should be as transparent as crystal water. While deciding an issue, the authority should always keep in mind the dictum laid down by Lord Hewart, the then Lord Chief Justice of England, "Justice must not only be done but must also be seen to be done."

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

Let's decode apex court's decision on the Adani case

In its pivotal decision, the Supreme Court of India delegated the responsibility of investigating the Adani group to SEBI, the nation's market regulator. Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, leading the bench, stressed the regulator's comprehensive inquiry and the Court's role in avoiding interference in specialized regulatory functions. Yet, the ruling leaves key compliance issues related to the Adani group unresolved, particularly in areas highlighted by the Expert Committee's report. The Court also dismissed petitions challenging amendments to financial regulations, citing no legal or constitutional breaches. Investors continue to express concerns about SEBI's handling of allegations from Hindenburg Research. The Court acknowledged SEBI's progress, noting 22 out of 24 investigations were completed, but details on these findings or pending investigations remain scant. This decision, while respecting SEBI's regulatory autonomy, raises questions about judicial oversight in cases of corporate malfeasance and market manipulation. This approach, perhaps indicative of judicial hesitancy, might not completely address public concerns about prompt and effective enforcement, especially considering past instances where SEBI's response has been lacking. The Supreme Court's stance underscores the importance of not just administering justice but also ensuring its visibility to maintain public trust in judicial and regulatory systems. Furthermore, the Court's ruling could have significant implications for corporate governance and investor confidence in India's financial markets. It also highlights the delicate balance between judicial intervention and respecting the domain of specialized regulatory bodies. This balance is crucial in a rapidly evolving market landscape, where regulatory agility and judicial wisdom both play a vital role in maintaining market integrity and investor trust. The ruling, therefore, is not just a reflection of a legal stance but also a commentary on the evolving dynamics of corporate regulation and governance in India. The verdict will hopefully add confidence to the Indian businesses and markets.

LETTERBOX

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"A business absolutely devoted to service will have one worry about profits. They will be embarrassingly large."
Henry Ford

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M. SURESH BABU EXPLAINS WHY FISCAL CORRECTION IS CRUCIAL IN ELECTION YEAR TO AVERT WORST OUTCOMES

The dispute on debt burden



Two recent observations by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) sparked reactions from the Indian Government. First, the IMF has raised concerns about the long-term sustainability of India's debts. Second, it reclassified India's exchange rate regime, terming it a "stabilised arrangement" instead of "floating". These emerged from the annual Article IV consultation report, which is part of the Fund's surveillance function under the Articles of Agreement with member countries. The report also acknowledged India's effective inflation management and projected a balanced outlook for India's economic growth. While the remark on the exchange rate can be viewed as comments on 'excessive management', as the rupee moved in a narrow band due to Central Bank interventions, the concerns on debt sustainability can be construed as a call for more prudent management of debt in the medium term.

The IMF, in the report, states that India's general government debt, including the Centre and States, could be 100% of GDP under adverse circumstances by fiscal 2028. According to them, "Long-term risks are high because considerable investment is required to reach India's climate change mitigation targets and improve resilience to climate stresses and natural disasters. This suggests that new and preferably concessional sources of financing are needed, as well as greater private sector investment and carbon pricing or equivalent mechanism." The Finance Ministry refutes IMF projections as this is "a worst-case scenario and is not fait accompli".

Worrying global trends

There are no two arguments on the fact that government borrowings can play a vital role in accelerating development, as governments can use it to finance their expenditures and invest in people to pave the way for a better future. However, the weight of debt can act as a drag on development due to limited access to financing, rising borrowing costs, currency devaluations and sluggish growth. As noted by the United Nations, "Countries are facing the

impossible choice of servicing their debt or serving their people." According to the UN in 2022, 3.3 billion people live in countries that spend more on interest payments than on education or health.

Global public debt has increased more than fourfold since 2000, outpacing global GDP, which tripled over the same period. In 2022, global public debt reached a record USD 92 trillion. Developing countries accounted for almost 30% of the total, of which roughly 70% is attributable to China, India and Brazil. Public debt has increased faster in developing countries compared to developed countries over the last decade. The rise of debt in developing countries is due to growing development financing needs — exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost-of-living crisis, and climate change. As a result, the number of countries facing high levels of debt increased from 22 in 2011 to 59 in 2022.

Further, the burden of debt is asymmetric between developed and developing countries as the latter — even without considering the costs of exchange rate fluctuations — have to pay higher interest rates than the former. It has been well documented that countries in Africa borrow on average at rates that are four times higher than those of the United States and even eight times higher than those of Germany. This higher borrowing costs undermines debt sustainability of develop-

ing countries, as the number of countries where interest spending represents 10% or more of public revenues increased from 29 in 2010 to 55 in 2020. IMF's worst-case scenario projections for India need to be viewed in this context of persistent debt conundrum in developing countries.

The challenge for India

Apart from managing public debt deftly to ensure that it does not breach sustainable levels, India faces challenges in enhancing its credit ratings. As elucidated by S&P Global Ratings, "Credit ratings are forward-looking opinions about the ability and willingness of debt issuers, like corporations or governments, to meet their financial obligations on time and in full. They provide a common and transparent global language for investors and other market participants, corporations and governments, and are one of many inputs they can consider as part of their decision-making processes". Elevated debt levels and substantial costs associated with servicing debt impact credit rating.

Even with the tag of being the fastest-growing major economy and being called a 'bright spot' in the global economy, sovereign investment ratings for India have remained the same for a long time. Both Fitch Ratings and S&P Global Ratings have kept India's credit rating unchanged at 'BBB- with stable outlook'. It should be noted that BBB- is the lowest investment grade rating and India has been on that scale since August 2006. Though one could raise methodological issues and biases on the rating process, rating agencies believe that India's stronger fundamentals are undermined by the government's weak fiscal performance and burdensome debt stock. Further, India's low per capita income is a major factor that pulls down score in the sovereign rating.

The central government's debt was Rs 155.6 trillion, or 57.1% of GDP, at the end of March 2023 and the debt of State govern-

ments was about 28% of GDP. As stated by the Finance Ministry, India's public debt-to-GDP ratio has barely increased from 81% in 2005-06 to 84% in 2021-22, and is back to 81% in 2022-23. This, however, is way higher than the levels specified by the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBMA). The 2018 amendment to the Union government's FRBMA specified debt-GDP targets for the Centre, States and their combined accounts at 40%, 20% and 60%, respectively. Part of the present high levels of debt-GDP ratio can be attributed to the disruptions due to the pandemic, which resulted in a major deterioration in the debt-GDP ratios across the board.

Adding to this are the emerging worrying signs on the fiscal front. Despite handsome growth in tax collections, there is the possibility of a fiscal slippage in FY24, according to a report by India Ratings and Research (IR&R). IR&R attributes this to higher expenditure on employment guarantee schemes and subsidies. They state that budgeted fertilizer subsidy of Rs 44,000 crore was almost over by end-October 2023 and the Union government has now increased fertilizer subsidy to Rs 57,360 crore. Similarly, due to sustained demand for employment under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), a sum of Rs 79,770 crore has already been spent till December 19, 2023, as against the budgeted Rs 60,000 crore and an additional sum of Rs 14,520 crore has been allocated through the first supplementary demand for grants. Increased subsidies do not come as a surprise as the country is heading for general elections next year, but the MGNREGA outlay increase raises questions about employment growth and livelihoods in rural areas. Though the IMF's debt projections could be viewed as worst-case scenarios of the medium term, the short-term challenge of sticking to the fiscal correction path in an election year might go a long way towards avoiding worst-case scenarios.

M. Suresh Babu is Professor of Economics at IIT Madras. The views expressed are personal. Views are personal.



ABHIJIT SINGH ON HOW MALDIVES' PACT DECISION REFLECTS ITS STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT SHIFT TOWARDS CHINA

How the 'India out' initiative could reshape Maldives

The recent decision by the Maldives to revoke an agreement with India for joint hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters has caused considerable dismay in Indian media and strategic circles. Inked during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the islands in 2019, the pact was seen as a symbol of India-Maldives defence ties.

The move by Male, in mid-December 2023, came a few weeks after the archipelagic state formally asked New Delhi to withdraw its Indian military presence from its shores. As if to emphasise its reservations about defence engagement with India, Male also skipped the latest meeting of the Colombo Security Conclave, also in December.

That trust between India and the Maldives is at a low ebb is manifestly evident. Since the election of Mohamed Muizzu as Maldivian President in November 2023, there has been a deliberate, if predictable, attempt by Male to create a distance with New Delhi. The Maldives would like the world to believe that terminating the hydrography pact is a way of asserting its autonomy and agency. It is not. Far from balancing ties with India, Male has thrown in its political lot with China. The Muizzu administration's refusal to renew the hydrography pact seems less to do with the President's sensitivities about sovereignty than with his special relationship with Beijing. Getting Indian hydrographic ships out of Maldivian waters appears intended to aid China's marine surveys of the surrounding seas.

The dual nature of hydrography

It is worth noting that hydrographic data inherently has a dual nature in that the information collected from the seas can be used for civilian and military purposes. Marine scientists maintain that the data that helps



advance non-military objectives, such as ensuring navigational safety, marine scientific research, and environmental monitoring, can also be used to facilitate military aims such as surveillance of a nation's vital coastal installations and war-fighting assets.

Even so, China is unique in using its marine and seabed surveys to advance a largely strategic agenda. The country has an expansive oceanographic research programme, in which "scientific research vessels", in particular the Shi Yan class of oceanographic survey vessels and the Yuan Wang series of intelligence-surveillance-reconnaissance ships are regularly deployed in the Indian Ocean. Their presence goes largely unnoticed, eclipsed by China's growing naval footprint. For China, however, marine surveys and reconnaissance are critical enablers of the People's Liberation Army Navy's maritime strategy in the far seas. It is no happenstance that Chinese authorities approached Sri Lanka and the Maldives many times last year to allow the docking of marine research ships.

On China's surveys

Indian observers point out that China's

ocean surveys play an important part in enhancing China's antisubmarine warfare capabilities. The mapping of the ocean's temperature profile and the study of other oceanic phenomena such as currents and eddies, they contend, is meant to improve sonar performance and detection of enemy submarines. Studying the marine environment also aids in the development of systems that help Chinese submarines elude detection and fine-tune tactics for littoral combat.

However, China's oceanographic surveys in the waters of friendly South Asian states are potentially hampered by the presence of Indian hydrographic ships in the area. The Indian Navy has the capability to track foreign ships' subsurface sensor activity. Chinese hydrographers suspect the Navy's operations in the waters of Indian Ocean island states could interfere with China's own marine survey efforts.

Meanwhile, speculation abounds in New Delhi of a Chinese plan to develop a naval base in the Maldives. In 2018, China planned an ocean observatory in Makunudhoo Atoll, north of Male — not far from India's Lakshadweep Islands. Maldivian opposition leaders had then expressed reservations about the observatory's potential military applications, including a provision for a submarine base. There is no evidence yet that China has revived that proposal, but recent developments suggest that the possibility cannot be discounted.

Male's concerns

For its part, the Maldives has apprehensions about India's hydrographic activity being a form of intelligence collection. Its concerns are not entirely unfounded — not because Indian activity in Maldivian waters is suspect, but because the laws and legal framework governing hydrography are not different

from the norms governing military surveys. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) does not explicitly authorise a coastal state to regulate hydrographic surveys or military surveys conducted beyond its territorial sea; a littoral state may only regulate marine scientific research in its exclusive economic zone (EEZs). By implication, foreign maritime agencies conducting hydrographic surveys are free to map the seas outside a coastal state's territorial waters. It is this prospect that Male finds problematic.

The discrepancy, though glaring outwardly, is better understood if one considers that the aim of hydrography is not to collect data about topography and geophysical processes for the sake of knowledge. Instead, it caters to a specific demand, which can come either from marine ecologists, scientists, and the maritime industry, or military strategists and national security planners. That does not alter the reality that many navies, in particular India's, have an exemplary track record of hydrographic surveys in their neighbourhoods. The Indian Navy has rendered hydrographic assistance to Mauritius since the 1990s, charting the vast Mauritian EEZs and helping build capacity, even assisting with the setting up of a hydrographic unit for skill development among Mauritian hydrographers.

The best bet for the Maldives to enhance maritime awareness and security remains a partnership with India. The Muizzu administration must recognise that it is not India but China that seeks to weaponise ocean surveys. The eagerness for a strategic concert with Beijing, driven plainly by political compulsions, could entail adverse consequences for Male.

Abhijit Singh is Head of the Maritime Policy Initiative at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi

BOOKS: REVIEW

Decoding Pranab: A daughter's chronicles of political legend

"Pranab, My Father: A Daughter Remembers" by Sharmistha Mukherjee is not just another political biography; it's a heartfelt memoir that weaves the personal and the political into a rich tapestry. The author, daughter of the late President Pranab Mukherjee, navigates the complex intersections of being a daughter and a witness to a life steeped in India's post-independence political history.

Sharmistha's narrative transcends the typical confines of political memoirs, offering a unique dual perspective. While it delves into Pranab Mukherjee's exten-

sive diaries, providing insights into significant national events and the inner workings of Indian politics, the book's soul lies in its personal anecdotes and reflections. It's as much about the man behind the public persona as it is about the author's journey as his daughter.

A striking example of this blend is the story of the 'Basanter Kokil' (springtime Koel), symbolizing the transient nature of political friendships. This anecdote not only reflects the fickleness of relationships in the political sphere but also serves as a life lesson for young Sharmistha, shaping her understanding of the realities of

It's as much about the man behind the public persona as it is about the author's journey as his daughter

a political family.

The book also sheds light on the personal relationships that Pranab Mukherjee nurtured, notably with Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh. The emotional depth of these ties is poignantly illustrated at Geeta Mukherjee's funeral, attended



Pranab, My Father: A Daughter Remembers
By Sharmistha Mukherjee
Rupa,
368 pages; Rs 595

by Sheikh Hasina, where shared grief transcends mere political alliances.

Sharmistha Mukherjee skillfully intertwines her father's public life with private moments, offering a comprehensive view of his personality. From his famous temper to his attempts at shielding his daughter from the impermanence of political privileges, these insights add layers to our understanding of the late

President. "Pranab, My Father" is more than a historical account; it's a daughter's homage to her father. It's about the human side of a political titan and the intricate dynamics of a family living in the public eye. The book's structure, balancing the personal with the political, makes it a compelling read not just for those interested in Indian politics, but for anyone who appreciates the complexities of life in the public sphere.

The memoir also takes a deep dive into the political landscape of India, as seen through the eyes of Pranab Mukherjee. His insights into pivotal moments in Indian politics, from emergency to economic reforms, are not just historical records but reflect his own interpretations and decisions during those times.



Sikh Devotees listen to the early Morning Prayer on the first day of New Year to pay obeisance at Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), the holiest of Sikh shrines, in Amritsar on Monday. Thousands of Sikh devotees stand in a queue to pay obeisance. PHOTO: PRABHJOT SINGH GILL

Ram temple's 100 doors will be like steel, this kind of wood will be brought to Ayodhya after selecting it from Hyderabad forests

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA New Delhi

The consecration of Lord Ram will take place in the Ram temple on 22 January. Preparations for this are going on in full swing...



from them was selected to be used for the inner complex of the temple. There is very little chance of termites infesting teak wood and it is not affected by weather.

The Ayodhya Temple Trust, in collaboration with Larsen & Toubro and Tata Consultancy Services...

18 doors are plated with gold.

There are symbols of elephants, peacocks and various deities on the doors. There is a carving of a peacock on the door of the sanctum sanctorum.

whose height is 8 feet and width is 12 feet. The firm has made a variety of doors, including those with domes.

Rakul Preet Singh, Jacky Bhagnani to get married next month in Goa



MUMBAI: Actress Rakul Preet Singh and actor-producer Jacky Bhagnani are set to tie the knot in February.

The couple made it official on Instagram back in October 2021. Earlier this year, Jacky Bhagnani shared a reel featuring the moments he and Rakul have spent together...

Jacky also penned a special note for his girlfriend, as he wrote: "On your special day, I want to express my admiration for the one who always leaves me in awe."

He further mentioned: "You're more than just my companion; you're my confidant, my partner-in-crime, and the one who fills my life with love and laughter."

'Keep myself out of arguments', Kareena shares her New Year Mantra



MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Kareena Kapoor Khan, who is on her annual vacation to snow-capped Switzerland with her family and friends...

The 'Jab We Met' actress is on a vacation with her husband and actor Saif Ali Khan, her kids Taimur and Jeh, and close friend Natasha Poonawalla.

On Saturday, she took to Instagram Stories, and revealed her New Year mantra. "I'm at the stage of my life where I keep myself out of arguments."

Janhvi Kapoor opens up on rumoured beau Shikhar Pahariya



MUMBAI: Actress Janhvi Kapoor, who is set to appear on the upcoming episode of the streaming chat show 'Koffee With Karan'...

Janhvi Kapoor and Shikhar Pahariya have been papped together at numerous occasions and also engage on social media with their comments.

Talking about it, Karan Johar asked: "You have had an interesting path of love, you were dating Shikhar, and then you dated someone else and now you are dating Shikhar again."

"I won't say that but I will say this, he is not just for me, but for her (Khushi), for dad and everyone in our family, he has been there from the start as a friend."

"He was just there in a very selfless dignified way and in a way that I have not seen many men capable of being there for another human being."

Water, bodies freeze in Kashmir as temperature plunges further

FW DESK

A chilling cold wave has tightened its grip on Kashmir, plunging temperatures well below freezing across the region.

Residents residing in houseboats navigated the challenge of breaking through the ice to reach the banks.

The extreme cold has taken its toll on the region, freezing water supply pipes in multiple areas, disrupting daily life.

Other areas such as Qazigund, Kokernag, and Kupwara also experienced plunging temperatures...



Adding to the woes, Kashmir has faced a prolonged dry spell with a staggering 79% rainfall deficit in December.

Forecasters predict no respite for the next six days, painting a harsh picture for residents as they brace for an even more frigid start to 2024.

Ananya Panday, Aditya Roy Kapur's picture of ice skating in UK goes viral



MUMBAI: Rumoured Bollywood couple Ananya Panday and Aditya Roy Kapur, who were earlier spotted leaving Mumbai together for New Year celebrations...

A picture from their outing has gone viral on social media. In the picture, Ananya can be seen wearing a black trench coat over a pair of wide-legged pants...

The two are currently back in Mumbai after the New Year celebrations. Earlier, both Aditya and Ananya were asked about their relationship on the streaming chat show 'Koffee With Karan'...

Aamir Khan's daughter Ira Khan marries Nupur Shikhare



MUMBAI: Superstar Aamir Khan and film producer Reena Dutta's daughter Ira Khan on Wednesday tied the knot with her long-time partner Nupur Shikhare.

Ira, who is the founder and CEO of a mental health support organisation, registered her marriage with Nupur, a celebrity fitness trainer, at a five star hotel in suburban Bandra.

The marriage was attended by their close family members, including Aamir, his ex-wives Reena Dutta and Kiran Rao, among others. The ceremony was followed by a reception at the same hotel.

The wedding venue was seen packed with guests. Ira Khan and Nupur Shikhare are now married.

The security of Ram temple will be impenetrable, it will be monitored with 110 CCTV cameras

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA New Delhi

The grand Ram temple in Ayodhya is almost ready. Ramlala is ready to sit in the Ram temple. The temple is going to be inaugurated on 22 January.

CCTV cameras installed in the Red Zone and Yellow Zone adjacent to the Ram Janmabhoomi complex will be monitored. This master plan has been made for the security of Ram Janmabhoomi complex before the consecration of Ram Lalla.

Ramesh Inder Singh's book 'Dukhant Punjab Da' released

KULBIR SINGH KALSI Chandigarh

Punjab former Chief Secretary Ramesh Inder Singh's book 'Dukhant Punjab Da', was released here on Wednesday. The book which is an eye-opening account of before and after Blue Star...



Particularly devastating events blur neutrality, divide people, and often ignore the facts. "Operation Blue Star and the events that followed were disastrous events of this nature, which led India to go to war among itself."

Ramesh Inder Singh explains that in June 1984, the Indian Army marched towards Amritsar - Operation Blue Star was underway. Some saw it as an attack on the holy site of Sri Harmandir Sahib, while others saw it as a military operation to liberate the holy site from gun-toting terrorists.

"A few months later, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated. Street mass-

cries took place in Delhi and elsewhere, in which more than 3,000 innocent Sikhs were killed. It was genocide while others consider it a spontaneous reaction to the assassination of their beloved leader.

According to Ramesh Inder Singh I was an eyewitness, and sometimes a role player, although this is inconsequential at this moment in history.

It would not be fair to history to leave things unsaid. Therefore, I feel the need for an objective and factual description of events and incidents.

Terrorism has been decisively eliminated in Punjab.

Katrina Kaif, Vicky Kaushal spend 'teen khoobsurat din' full of 'pyaar, aaram, sunsets'

MUMBAI: Actress Katrina Kaif on Wednesday shared glimpses of her "teen khoobsurat din" with husband and actor Vicky Kaushal from their New Year getaway to Rajasthan.



On December 31, Katrina and Vicky were seen walking hand in hand at the airport, as they were flying for new year's eve. Taking to Instagram, the 'Race' actress shared her holiday album wherein she can be seen playfully basking in the winter sun.

Katrina is wearing a checkered print dress with bell sleeves. She is sporting a no-makeup look, and her hair is kept open.

Another picture shows Katrina sitting on the lap of Vicky, and the 'URI' actor is looking at his ladylove. He is wearing a pine green coloured sweater, black cap and sunglasses.

Another photo features the lovebirds sitting in the midst of a desert and romantically gaz-

ing at the mesmerising sunset. The post was captioned as: "Teen khoobsurat din... pyaar, aaram, sunsets aur thand! New Year mana liya... now it's time for 'Merry Christmas'!"

It was liked by Alia Bhatt and Ananya Panday. Meanwhile, on the work front, Vicky was last seen in 'Dunki'. The comedy drama stars Shah Rukh Khan in the lead. He next has 'Mere Mehboob Mere Sanam', and 'Chhava' in the pipeline.

Katrina was last seen as Zoya in Salman Khan-starrer 'Tiger 3'. She next has 'Merry Christmas' in her kitty. The romantic thriller film is directed by Sri-ram Raghavan, and stars Vijay Sethupathi, alongside Katrina.