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

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY

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



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

asserting that the tableau of the state included his pictures or that of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, which 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 led the people of the state by in the tableau.

Punjab CM sets wheel in motion for



VISAKHAPATNAM: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh 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; setting up a big pharmaceutical city 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 re-

nominated 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

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

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, Goy-

al 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

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 govern-

ment that, too, on false ground.

He added that Jakhar mis-



on in accordance with law.

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 "SEBI should take its inves- party organisations such as Court on Wednesday refused tigation to its logical conclu- the Organized Crime and of experts to conduct an in- The facts of this case do not ect (OCCRP) and Hindenburg vestigation into the Adani- warrant a transfer of inves- Research cannot be regarded tigation from SEBI, "held a as "conclusive proof".

Transporters call off strike after assurance from Govt

NEW DELHI: Countrywide 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 before implementing it.

After the assurance that provisions will be discussed

before implementation, be implemented. AIMTC appealed to the driv-

ers 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 Transporters and truck driv-

years that could be termed political justice for the people

of the country.

110 districts.

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

The 'Nyay Yatra' will spend

a maximum eleven days in Ut-

President Droupadi Murmu has given her assent to the Indian Justice Code, Indian Civil Defence Code and Indian Evidence Act and it can be notified before January 26. The fine in 'hit-and-run' cases. Home Ministry says that with this chans ers have been opposing this will be established through provision and they have de- which any victim can get manded that it should not justice within 3 years.

PM Modi urges people not to visit Ayodhya on January 22



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 vears 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 not like to cause any problems to Lord Ram. You all can come starting January 23 till eternity... Ram

As bhakts, we would

Mandir is now there forever and ever" history of the country. On this day in 1943, Netaji Subhash

Chandra Bose hoisted the flag

in Andaman and proclaimed the Independence of India." He further said that if any country wants to reach new

levels of development, it has to preserve its heritage. Prime Minister Modi said

that today's India is an "amalgam of the old and the new". "We are moving ahead in the digital age and are also

preserving our heritage. Development must come with preservation of heritage and carry forward Viksit Bharat, ' he pointed out. The Prime Minister added

that the completion of the Ram temple is a moment that the world was waiting and the excitement is palpable on the

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

Security forces execute anti-terror operation in Kulgam



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 Hadi-

gam 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

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 dis-Congress president Mal-

likarjun 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



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

government. Later briefing reporters, AICC general secretary in charge of Communication

as a milestone. "Politics of ar-

rogance and lies comes with

an expiry date", he remarked

while referring to the BJP

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

tar 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

ing of the P&H High Court with a view to ascertain the

Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat

evaluated the material placed port 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/

of the apex court who are compilation of statistics conversant with the function- submitted by Rohit Kapoor relating to his performance as arguing counsel. The enfitness and suitability of the quiries made by us with reliable sources to ascertain We have scrutinised and suitability of the candidate reveal that Shri Rohit Kapoor on record, including the re- 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

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 Harvana have conveyed their concurrence to the above recommendation, " said the statement uploaded on the website of the apex court.

Supreme Court Collegium recommends appointment of advocate as Punjab & Haryana High Court judge CHANDIGARH: The Su- ferred with a view to seek preme Court Collegium, a report from the Chief headed by Chief Justice of Justice of the P&H High

& Haryana High Court.

poor as judge of the Punjab of the candidate.

India D.Y. Chandrachud, has Court in consultation with recommended the appoint- members of the High Court ment of advocate Rohit Ka- Collegium on the suitability Thereafter, the Chief Jus-

The Collegium of the P&H tice of the High Court, by a High Court had recommend- letter dated November 28, ed his name on April 21, 2023. 2023 forwarded the minutes In light of the inputs pro- of the Collegium regarding vided by the government, suitability of the candidate. the consideration of the The SC Collegium said that recommendation was de- it has consulted other judges



REGION

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 Martyrs from Punjab don't need govt will be named Sri Guru Amardas Ji : CM

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

used only upto 34% but now it will be run to 75-80% thereby augmenting the power generation in the state. He said that with this 33% (1 out of 3 PPA with private thermals) PPAs have been terminated. Bhagwant Singh Mann quipped that on January 1, 2018 units of Bathinda and Ropar thermal power plants were closed

permanently but today on 1st

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 Pachhwara 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.

NOC from BJP- Bhagwant Mann

Jan, the pro-people government 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 tableaus 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, cui-

sines, 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 discre-

However, the Chief Minister unequivocally said that the state will not send its tableaus 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

Amritsar

In a big blow to trans-border narcotic smuggling networks 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.

The arrested smuggler has been identified as Simranjit Singh alias Simar Maan, a resident of Village Gaggarmal in Amritsar. Apart from seizing a consignment of Ice Drugs, Police teams have also recovered a highly sophisticated .30-bore Chinese Pistol along with five live cartridges from his possession.

DGP Gaurav Yadav said that preliminary investigations have revealed that the arrested accused was directly in touch with Pakistan-based smugglers Pathan and Amer, who were supplying him with



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

He said that Police teams had managed to arrest the

accused Simar

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 ar-

rested 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 Kamaljeet Aulakh carried out Drugs is 50 Grams.





Farmers and supporters representing various unions shout slogans as they attend a Mahapanchayat at the grain market in Jandiala Guru (Amritsar) on Tuesday. The farmers have blown the trumpet of the Delhi Front once

First disease control centre for 4 state in Ambala



Ambala

Union Health Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviva laid the foundation stone of a branch of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) to be constructed in a four acre area at Naggal 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 Vij 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

being provided free of cost. The NCDC branch being inaugurated here will further help patients suffering from diseases in the area, he said.

Vij 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. Vij said that earlier, oatients 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. Vij said that the construction will start soon and land for the same has already been handed over for this project. and the building Ayushman Bharat, services are 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.

In a statement issued here today, official stated that on receiving specific information the Customs staff of SGRDJI that during rummaging of the tion is under process.



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

the classroom of the school.

mothers of the victim girls.

ing his suspension period.

Meanwhile, Director Punjab

Schools Education (primary)

School Head.

age of vic-

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 investiga-

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



The Enforcement Directorate recovered illegal foreignmade 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 at 20 locations in Haryana including Yamuna Nagar,

Sonipat, 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

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 prem-

Amolak Singh SHO of Police station Majihta confirming about the registration of FIR against accused said that teacher Rakesh Kumar posted in the Government Primary school at village 'Rakh Bhangwa' falling in the Majitha Assembly constituency was booked under section 354 and 354 (A) of IPC and Protection of children from of Sexual offence (POCSO) act 10 & 12 sexually abusing the minor

SATISH HANDA girls. The Responding to the demands of

traders and industry organisatims mentions in the state, the Haryana government taking decision to tioned in the establish branches of the GST FIR was just Tribunal in Gurugram and years Hisar as such Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar girls in the launched One Time Settlement-2023 scheme, which presence of was a long-standing demand their mothers stated of traders and the business community in the state to teacher often forced them to settle pending tax payments touch his private parts while pertaining to pre-GST time, placing the notebook on his he said that the scheme will lap and it was his routine in be operational from January 1 to March 30. While introducing the scheme in Gurugram SHO said that various police teams have been dispatched a couple of days ago, the CM to nab the accused who went also announced to open a GST absconding immediately after training institute at Gurugram and said that the government the matter was reported to the plans to establish branches of SHO said that FIR was the GST Tribunal in Gurugram and Hisar. Deputy Chief Minlodged on the complaints of ister Dushyant Chautala who

today issued his suspension oraddressed the gathering. ders and told him to report to Under the One Time Settlethe Tarn Taran District Educament scheme, the tax amount tion office (Elementary) durwill be divided into four categories, starting with an un-

holds the portfolio of excise

and taxation department also



SETTLEMENT SCHEME

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

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 and penalties on seven types of 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

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 honourary secretary. The Council members also retained Rajmohinder Singh Majitha as Chancellor, Lakhbir Singh Lodhinangal as Rector while former Majitha MLA Swinder Singh Kathunangal remained as Vice

The 11-member executive body retained most of the old faces. Jatinder Singh Brar was elected as additional honourary 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 Majitha and seconded by RMS Chhina, the house broke into slogans of `Boleso-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 receives 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 chal-

India is one of the largest

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 6073 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 indus-



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

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

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

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

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 said "The selection of the idol for the Prana Pratishtapana 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 Pratishtha' (consecration) ceremony to be

held on January 22. Karnataka BJP unit has kicked off celebrations that the idol of Ram Lalla skilfully crafted by renowned Mysuru sculptor Arun Yogiraj to be consecrated in the sanctum sanctorum of Ram

temple in ayodhya. Former Karanataka 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 hails from a lineage of five generations of renowned sculptors

in Mysore. Yogiraj started his

sculpting career at a young ag 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.

producers and consumers of **Amit Shah likely to**



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 forward areas and a security

YS Sharmila sister of Andhra Pradesh CM Jaganmohan Reddy joins Congress

mense pleasure that the YSR

Telangana Party has merged

with the Congress. She said,

her father late YS Rajasekhar

Reddy not only served the Con-

gress party his entire life, but

also gave his life serving the

Sharmila said, she had decided

to join the Congress as it was the

only true and largest secular party

Congress party.

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 Rajasekhar 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- in the country. She said, it always

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

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 aver-

age capacity of 10 tons per day.

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 sub-

stitution of "Other Pile Fabrics

of Man-made Fibres" (where

China also holds 75% market

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.

BJP to flag off New Year with 'Lok Sabha Yojana' brainstorming across country



parliamentary polls. The BJP High Command has written a letter to all the state in-charges of the party, state presidents and general secretaries of the party organisation across states.

The party high command has also given instructions to discuss in detail the social and political issues affecting the party organisation, organisational preparations and party activities, publicity campaigns



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

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 Yo7, 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 incharge 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

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 Kar-

nataka police department has initiated investigations against Ram Mandir activists involved in alleged property destruction and other offences during Ram Mandir movment 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 Punjab Tableau Row: A Political Agenda or Vendetta?

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

assessment meeting in Jammu.

NEW DELHI: Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Thursday urged the Centre to collect Rs 408 crore from Andhra Pradesh for its using 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.

PM Vishwakarma Yojana scheme launched in J&K



NEW DELHI: Jammu and Kashmir Administration on nition of artisans and crafts of Tuesday launched PM Vishwakarma Yojana (PMVY) at Industrial Training Institute as well basic training of five to (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 credit based soft loans and

The scheme aims for recogpeople through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card 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

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.

immense contribution of the

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

always a shield against external or internal attacks on

JAG MOHAN

THAKEN

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

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 state by rejecting these ideas.

Slamming the BJP led Union



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 tableaus 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 first three rounds of meeting highlighting the heritage of of the expert committee comthe great Guru Sahiban, the Sahibzadas and countless heroes and martyrs of freedom struggle like Shaheed-E-Azam choreography, etc. Sardar Bhagat Singh, Sardar Kartar Singh Sarabha, Sardar Udham Singh, Lala Lajpat Rai?

held accountable." He further adds, "I strongly urge Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi to intervene against the national freedom struggle. discrimination against proud, "This is not for the first time patriotic and valorous Punjab

Anyone responsible for this

injustice to the land of martyrs

deserves to be identified and

clusion of the state from R-Day

dent Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, while questioning the decision of non-inclusion of Punjab Tableaus, tweeted on December 29, "It is highly improbable that Punjab's Tableau has been denied for the 26th January parade. All Tableaus are inspected by a central team & released only if nothing is objectionable. The central govt could have suggested changes if any but outrightly rejecting our Tableau proves that they discriminate against Punjab. This is not in the spirit of CO-OPERATIVE FEDERALISM."

Why the tableaus not considered?

The Ministry of Defence on Sunday, December 31, clarified that the tableau proposal of Punjab was considered in the prising eminent persons in the field of art, culture, painting, sculpture, music, architecture,

After the third round of meeting, the tableau of Punjab could not be taken forward by the committee for further consideration for not aligning to the broader themes of this year's tableau. Explaining further an official with the Defence Ministry said, "As states have to be treated equally, it

display their tableaus as per a formula. Hence, the criticism by these states (Punjab and

West Bengal) is baseless." To give further chance to the rejected category states, the MoD official divulged, "Moreover, the states and UTs not being selected for the Republic Day Parade are being invited to showcase their tableaux in Bharat Parv at Red Fort, New Delhi, during January 23-31."

Strongly criticizing the suggestion of MoD to the states that they can showcase their tableaux in Bharat Parv at Red Fort, New Delhi, during January 23-31, 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 do not need NoC from BJP.

In a statement, 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 tableaus in the Republic Day parade. Mann said that this cannot be tolerated as it is is essential that states should the grave insult of these great be given the opportunity to patriots and national leaders.

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 pr dians. The Republic Day parade should not be politicized in the name of tableaus. Martyrs do not belong to any party or religion, rather they have given martyrdom for the country. Through tableaus, developments in various fields, progressive works or schemes initiated by the govern-

ment 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 Mann should also have raised this issue with the Government of India instead of

holding a hasty press conference

regarding the tableau."

Analysing 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.

regarding self employment marketing support for expanas well as equip them with sion of their business will also industry-relevant skills. 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 situathe peacetime movement of military assets for exercises and the relocation of units from one station to another.

Another order had been for



chanical 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 tions. Additionally, it facilitates 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

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 de-

fence 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.



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

n 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.

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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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> **EDITOR* ABDUL WASEY** (*RESPONSIBLE FOR SELECTION OF NEWS UNDER THE PRB ACT)

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



The dispute on debt burden

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 developspending 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 fastestrowing 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 governments 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 posibility 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 MNREGA 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



ne recent decision by the Maldives to revoke an agreement with India for joint hydrographic surveys in Maldivian waters has caused considerable dismal 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 ment with India Male 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

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 intelligencesurveillance-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 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 eyond 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, 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



BOOKS: REVIEW

Decoding Pranab: A daughter's chronicles of political legend

ranab, 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-

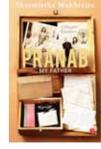
significant national events and the inner workings of Indian politics, the book's soul lies in its personal anecdotes and reflections. It's as much about the man behind the public persona as it is about the author's journey as his daughter.

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

sive diaries, providing insights into
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



Father: A Daughter Remembers By Sharmistha Mukherjee Rupa; 368 pages; Rs

Pranab, My

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.

Mumbai 'City of Dreams' & 'City That Never Sleeps' highlighted textiles industry

DOMINICK RODRIGUES

Piyush Goyal, Union Minister of Textiles, Commerce and Industry, has urged the textiles industry to highlight the challenges facing them, which he would "seriously" address in helping the industry to grow and become a top global performer.

The Minister was speaking at the annual export award function of the Synthetic & Rayon Textiles Export Promotions Council (SRTEPC) - now called MATEXIL - held in Mumbai recently.

Going down memory lane in history where he described Mumbai - the economic hub of India -- as "The City That Never Sleeps" and the "City of Dreams," Goyal said the city's rise to fame came off its aspirations for transformation and achieving audacious goals in which the textile industry played a great part in rising from a "fledgeling"

sector to "nationally exporting to 150 countries today."

spirit of the textile sector is constantly witnessed right from the times of COVID-19 to ongoing international conflicts including the present attacks by "Houthis" on the high seas," he said while noting that nevertheless, India continues to grow +enroute to becoming the largest global economy by 2047.+

While Matexil's enthusiastic growth witnessed successful forays into the interna- and other related factors."

tional sector, there is a need to give value to the domestic The +Never Say Die+ manufacturing chain without which this industry would +suffer+ massively, he said while pointing out that a

> "Unless we support our local manufacturing, the long run will witness India suffering. India's future lies in attracting a greater degree of investments, innovations

"Northern neighbor had been

+dumping+ their goods at

+abysmally" low prices into

The Minister often had his audience in splits of laughter with his witty comments, including one directed at himself. "I don't shop for clothes as my wife does this for me. However, since there's no model to check my size then at shopping, so please don't mind if my clothes don't fit exactly," he replied tongue-in-cheek

Goyal said while calling for increased +certified+ training of the workforce, and also a dedicated "Task Force" for the commerce and textiles

even as the crowd roared

approvingly.

Highlighting the Government's assistance to them, he urged the textile sector to "tell us what you require. There is no limit and the Government of India will invest, but don't look for +crutches+," he said while urging them to come up with ideas that he could support as the concerned Minister. "No target is impossible

as there is a path to success. There is no impediment that cannot be overcome," he emphasized, adding "We need to think about Innovation -Individually and Collectively.

Earlier, Bhadresh Dodhia, chairman, SRTEPC, outlined the "BharatTex" event that would be held in Delhi and draw global participants. Describing 2023 as a

+good+ year for the textiles

sector, he said the sector was expecting the same this year - despite cargo shipping being attacked in transit through the Red Sea. "The present transit time for

our cargo shipping has risen to between two to three weeks, while freight rates have shot by 200 percent to 500 percent and exporters a taking a hit in business," he said, adding We are adopting a +wait and watch+ attitude as this is causing a great disruption for the textile community.'

Tata Passenger Electric Mobility launches its first Pure EV architecture – 'acti.ev

Reveals Punch.ev - the first product to be launched on this Electric First Architecture

ARUN KUMAR RAO Bengaluru

Tata Passenger Electric Mobility (TPEM), the pioneer of the EV evolution in India, today introduced its first advanced Pure EV architecture - acti. ev (pronounced as active). acti.ev stands for (Advanced Connected Tech-Intelligent Electric Vehicle) and will underpin future products from the TPEM portfolio, according company press statement here. Punch.ev will be the first product based on this Pure Electric Architecture, which will spawn a variety of products with multiple body styles and sizes. Starting today, customers can book their Punch. ev by visiting their nearest Tata



Motors showrooms authorized for EV sales or Tata.ev stores by making a payment of just Rs 21,000. Bookings can also be made online..

Commenting on this aspirational introduction, Anand Kulkarni, Chief Products Officer, Head of HV Programs and Customer Service, Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd., said, "As leaders of the EV evolution in India, we are proud to enter 2024 with a groundbreaking development in the form of acti.ev – a madein-India advanced Pure EV architecture that promises to be a trendsetter in the country's

ticulously designed to enable class leading efficiencies, maximizing space, battery capacity and enhancing the overall driving experience. acti.ev is a global ready, future-facing pure electric architecture that enables the implementation of software oriented features, ensuring that our vehicles are not only technologically advanced but also future-proof."

He further said, "With this, we are doubly excited to announce the unveil of the first product made on this advanced. multi-layered architecture – the Punch.ev. The Punch.ev is our introduction to the next generation of EVs from TPEM. As has been the case with our current portfolio of EV products, we are confident that future products made on the acti.ev architecture will continue to spark delight in our ever growing community."

Retailer Associations and VMentor.ai Join **Hands for Retail Education in India**



MUMBAI: Retailers Association of India (RAI), the unified voice representing Indian retailers, and VMentor.ai, a leading technology-driven mentoring company, have unveiled a ground-breaking collaboration with the aim of transforming retail education in India.

In this strategic alliance, RAI and VMentor. ai will collaboratively develop and launch specialised short-term courses tailored for the retail industry.

These courses, meticulously designed, target current employees of RAI member organisations, equipping them with cutting-edge knowledge and practical skills essential for thriving in the dynamic retail landscape. The curriculum will

a hybrid model, seamlessly blending in-person instruction with online learning to ensure accessibility for participants.

Participants in these courses will undergo a rigorous training process, concluding with a certification upon successful completion. This certification not

only enhances their professional profiles but also contributes to elevating the standards of retailing in India.

The partnership emphasises continuous improvement and adaptation, with regular assessments and evaluations to ensure the courses remain relevant and impactful.

35% Stainless Steel MSMEs in Gujarat Shut as Chinese Imports Surge



Rajamani Krishnamurti, President of the Indian Stainless Steel Development Association (ISSDA), disclosed this information in an interview with Money Control. He highlighted the severe impact on Gujarat, which represents 80 per cent



Enterprises (MSMEs) in the industry. To navigate the challenging circumstances, many other MSMEs in the region have been forced to reduce their capacities to ensure survival.

The influx of low-cost Chinese imports has exerted significant pressure on the profit margins of domestic stainless steel players.

In response, the industry took collective action by filing a petition last year, urging the government to impose Countervailing Duty (CVD) on Chinese stainless steel products. It's noteworthy that steel imports were previously subject to duty until the 2021 union budget removed such levies. Subsequently, most MSMEs have had to operate on a diminished scale, with some transitioning to trading activities. Krishnamurti emphasised the dire situation by revealing that 20 out of 80 induction furnace companies in Ahmedabad

DPHT rules out more sectors under PLI Scheme

Singh, Secretary of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) stated that the government currently refrains from introducing production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes in new sectors and emphasises the enhancement of existing ones.

While speaking on the sidelines of the 27th World Investment Conference in New Delhi, Singh stated that PLI schemes are active in 14 sectors and the government now focuses on refining existing initiatives, making them



more appealing and industryfriendly.

"The government would prefer to see how these 14 sectors do. The plan is to let them all stabilise and do well and conBut at the moment, there are no plans or consultations for any new PLI schemes," he

Singh highlighted the scheme's notable success in certain sectors, while others are gradually gaining momentum. "Mobile manufacturing

has led to a lot of increase in

exports and sales within the country. PLI schemes for pharmaceutical and food processing sectors are also doing rea-

sonably well," he mentioned. Regarding the adjustments to existing schemes, he stated

Textile and pharma are two such sectors. It is not because they are not attractive at the moment, but because there is a need for some flexibility in timelines, in terms of product lines and things like that."

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, out of the 733 applications selected under various PLI Schemes, 176 PLI beneficiaries are MSMEs in sectors such as bulk drugs, medical devices, pharma, telecom, white goods, food processing, textiles &

Maidaan Bags Fresh Funds From IPV, EvolveX

FW CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi

A social edutainment platform Maidaan raised an undisclosed amount in a Pre-seed Round led by Inflection Point Ventures (IPV) and EvolveX. We Founder Circle also participated in the round. The funds will be utilised primarily for driving product development, innovating on content, games, and tournament formats, the company said in a statement.

Maidaan stands as an innovative peer-to-peer edutain-Through its live, bite-sized Olympiads and tournaments, Maidaan aims to let everyone explore education and a peer group beyond regular school. With a vision to make interaction with peers beyond school affordable and accessible, it aspires to empower over 100 million Indian students from an early age. Maidaan's mission not only broadens horizons but also fosters an environment where learning and growth transcend classroom boundaries, shaping a brighter future for K-12 education in India.

Both founders, raised in Indian Army households, underwent schooling in over 10+ cities across India, instilling in them an early appreciation for diverse exposure. Co-Founder, Judhajit Bal, a



management graduate from MDI, Gurgaon, previously successful with myHQ and with experience from Coca-Cola, shapes Maidaan's vision. Coment platform, redefining Founder, Shashank Awasthi, results in an unpleasant shock, the educational landscape an ISB graduate, brings over a fostering self-doubt and a lifeof tech expertise HSBC, Jivox, and Publicis Sapient, driving Maidaan's product and platform growth.

Rahul Wagh, Managing Director, Inflection Point Ventures, says, "Today when everything is digital, our education still relies on outdated methods and uninspiring textbooks. Maidaan addresses this by integrating learning into interactive games and quizzes, challenging the conventional notion that education is limited to the classroom. By breaking down the boundaries between learning and gaming, With Maidaan, children can seamlessly blend education with play. It shows a bright and promising future not just to kids but to investors as well.

Commenting on Maidaan's potential, Bhawna Bhatnagar, Co-Founder of EvolveX, ex-

pressed, "For most of the students, the first taste of competition beyond school walls occurs at a national level. Being unprepared for this reality hinders progress in a competitive life thereafter. Parents are well aware of this challenge but lack easily accessible means to alleviate this fear. Maidaan seeks to transform this narrative by providing every aspiring individual a stage to discover themselves. At EvolveX, we are committed to supporting Maidaan in this mission through continuous assistance.

mentorship, and guidance." Maidaan>s strengths lie in its gaming-centric approach to skill-building, its unwavering commitment to student engagement, and its focus on fostering peer-to-peer interactions through skill-enhancing gaming experiences.

The pilot version of Maidaan has successfully engaged students from over 100 schools spanning across 25+ cities in alone by 2030.

India. The platform has initiated strategic annual and quarterly collaboration plans with schools, with Pune as its initial focal city for expansion. Judhajit Bal Co-Founder

& CEO, Maidaan, says, "Beyond the top 5% elite in India, millions of students don't get a chance to experience a world beyond the walls of their schools before Class 12, reducing the potential of social mobility. The only way to solve this is to make exposure-beyond-school truly accessible and affordable in a language & format that stu-surpassed its annual loan dents understand and speak distribution targets, demhave IPV & EvolveX onboard

and backing us to solve this. In just 9 months, Maidaan achieved remarkable milestones, growing its user base tenfold to over 2000 users. The platform has secured pivotal strategic collaborations with schools on annual and quarterly levels, all while maintaining exceptional engagement and robust user retention rates on the platform.

In Middle-India households, the age group of 5-15 is projected to exceed 100 million children by 2030, indicating a substantial market. Additionally, the supplemental learning segment, encompassing education beyond schooling, is forecasted to reach a significant USD 5 billion market value in India

UP Govt Infuses Rs 6.55 Lakh Cr in Loans for MSMEs, Catalysing 2.5 Crore Jobs

LUCKNOW: The Uttar Pradesh government has allocated loans amounting to Rs 6,55,684 crore to strengthen the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector within the state, in the past six and a half years.

This strategic initiative has led to the creation of 2.5 crore jobs, providing significant employment opportunities for the youth.

Remarkably, the government has consistently to fostering entrepreneurial

"It is noteworthy that the MSME sector, which was dying of neglect, got a fresh lease of life when various initiatives were launched such as the One District, One Product (ODOP) scheme, Mukhyamantri Gramodyog Rojgar Yojana, Mukhvamantri Yuva Swarojgar Yojana and Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana among others," as per a press release from the Chief Minister's office.

These programs aim to cultivate self-reliance among the state's youth, women, and small businesses, benefitting numerous artisans, craftsmen, and small entrepreneurs. 'The Mukhyamantri

Gramodyog Rojgar Yojana,



Mukhyamantri Yuva Swarojgar Yojana, Vishwakarma Shram Samman Yojana and several other schemes are designed to benefit artisans. craftsmen, small businesses, and small entrepreneurs associated with the MSME sector," as per the release.

This concerted effort not only revitalises the MSME sector but also amplifies employment prospects for the youth, bring in international recognition for their diligence

and craftsmanship. In a bid to facilitate entrepreneurship, the Yogi government has organised annual loan fairs, providing aspiring entrepreneurs with opportunities and essential facilities to establish units.

currently boasts over 90 lakh operational MSME units, as per the release.

In the fiscal year 2022-23,

the government set an annual

loan distribution target of Rs

78,360 crores. Remarkably, it exceeded expectations by distributing

Rs 1,50,032 crores, achieving 191 per cent of the target. Looking ahead to the fi-

nancial year 2023-24, the Yogi government set a target of Rs 1,00,815 crore in loans.

As of December 2023, loans totalling Rs 1,73,336 crores have already been distributed, surpassing the annual target by an impressive 172 per cent, well before the financial year's conclusion.

Zymeworks Announces Additional Leadership Appointments

Vancouver (British Columbia)

Zymeworks Inc., a clinical-stage biotechnology company developing a diverse pipeline of novel, multifunctional biotherapeutics to improve the standard of care for difficult-to-treat diseases, today announced significant addi-

tions to its leadership team. These additions to the Zymeworks' commitment to nurturing and advancing in-

the organization. "At Zymeworks, we recognize that our greatest asset is our people. Elevating talented individuals is a reflection of their strong performance for the company, our confidence in their

ternal talent to key leadership

roles while strengthening the

capabilities and experience of

abilities and the emphasis we place on cultivating leaders from within. As we continue to grow, their expanded roles will play crucial parts in advancing our '5 by 5' development programs into the clinic in 2024 and 2025, planning to develop our AD-VANCE preclinical programs into clinical studies

by 2027 and helping to form the necessary zymeworks collaborations and partnerships for our leadership team highlight emerging product portfolio," said Kenneth Galbraith, Chair

and Chief Executive Officer of

Dr. Jeffrey Smith has been promoted to Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer, where he will play a key role in leading the clinical development of our early-stage programs and overseeing our integrated global early-stage development group.

Qualcomm unveils new chip for more realistic mixed reality experiences

Qualcomm unveils new chip for more realistic mixed reality experiencesChip-maker Qualcomm has announced a new Snapdragon chipset to create more realistic, detailed experiences in mixed reality (MR) and virtual reality (VR) with higher GPU frequency.

The Snapdragon XR2+ Gen 2 Platform is a single chip architecture that unlocks 4.3K spatial computing at 90 frames per second for better visual clarity across work and play. Samsung and Google will provide new extended reality (XR) experiences by utilising Snapdragon XR2+ Gen 2, according to the company "Snapdragon XR2+ Gen 2 unlocks 4.3K resolution which will take XR productivity and entertainment to the next level by bringing spectacularly clear visuals to use cases such as roomscale screens, life-size overlays and

virtual desktops," said Hugo Swart,

vice president and general manager

of XR, Qualcomm Technologies.

Samsung Biologics selects Rapid Micro Biosystems' Growth Direct® platform to automate critical microbiology quality control testing

Companies share commitment to innovating quality control processes to meet biomanufacturing challenges such as scale, data integrity and accelerating time to market

FW DESK Lowell, Mass

Rapid Micro Biosystems, Inc. ,an innovative life sciences technology company providing mission critical automation solutions to facilitate the efficient manufacturing and fast, safe release of healthcare products, today announced that Samsung Biologics (KRX: 207940.KS) has selected the Growth Direct® platform to automate its microbial quality control processes to deliver increased efficiency, more robust data integrity and scalable quality control opera-



"Samsung Biologics is a leading global contract development and manufacturing organization (CDMO) and has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to automation and quality management in biopharmaceutical manufacturing," said Robert Spignesi, President and CEO of Rapid Micro Biosystems. "The Growth Direct" improves operational efficiency and data integrity in the quality control microbiology lab, and we are proud to partner with Samsung

Global pharmaceutical manufacturers rely on the Growth Direct platform to meet both

today's microbiological quality control standards and tomorrow's challenges. It is the only fully automated, non-destructive growth-based platform for microbiology quality control testing that offers faster time to results, improved data integrity, and enhanced accuracy, with

greater sample capacity. Rapid Micro Biosystems is an innovative life sciences technology company providing mission critical automation solutions to facilitate the efficient manufacturing and fast, safe release of healthcare products such as biologics, vaccines, cell and gene therapies, and sterile injectables. The Company's flagship Growth Direct system automates and modernizes the antiquated, manual microbial quality control "MQC") testing workflows used in the largest and most complex pharmaceutical manufacturing

operations across the globe.





People wait for fuel at a gas station in Amritsar on Tuesday. A nationwide strike called by transport associations has caused disruption in fuel supply. The strike was called to protest against stringent jail and penalty regulations for hit-and-run cases. PHOTO: PRABHIOT GILL

Indian Economy Growth Projected 6.2 per cent For 2024: UNWESP



NEWDELHI: According to the United Nations World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP) 2024 report, India is forecasted to achieve a growth rate of 6.2 per cent in 2024, slightly below the 6.3 per cent estimate for 2023.

The report, launched on January 4, emphasizes India's robust domestic demand and

impressive growth in the manufacturing and services sectors.

Despite concerns about erratic rainfall impacting agricultural output, the Indian economy is expected to remain strong, with a projected GDP increase of 6.6 per cent in 2025.

The UN report outlined potential risks, including global conflicts, sluggish international factors and India's vulnerability trade, and climate disasters.

to climate change. The country's largely farm-based economy could face disruptions due to climate-related shocks, affecting food and fuel prices. Consumer price inflation is expected to decelerate, but the risk of a surge remains, influenced by commodity prices and climate events. In the labor market, improvements were noted in India, with increased labor force participation and declining youth unemployment rates.

The Reserve Bank of India has cautiously managed financial market openings, implementing risk manage-ment systems. On a global scale, the UN projects a slowdown in economic growth from an estimated 2.7 per cent in 2023 to 2.4 per cent in 2024. While 2023 exceeded expectations, persistent challenges include high-interest rates, escalating

Former Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Arvind Panagariya Appointed Chief of 16th Finance Commission

NEW DELHI: The Central government named Arvind Panagariya, former Niti Aayog vice-chairman, as the head of the 16th Finance Commission, on December 31.

Having served in the role of Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman from January 2015 to August 2017, Panagariya, a distinguished economist, presently imparts his expertise in economics at Columbia University.

In August 2017, Panagariya's unexpected departure from Niti Aayog prompted speculations about his relationship with the Centre. Prime Minister Naren-

dra Modi, however, lauded Panagariya's contributions, recognising his instrumental role in shaping the new body that succeeded the Planning

Expressing gratitude, PM Modi stated, "I want to especially thank Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Arvind Panagariya, who is showing how work is

has done good work and the country will always remember him and his contribution," during an address at a CEOs' function organised by Niti

Panagariya has been a vocal supporter of the Modi government's significant reforms, emphasising the necessity for labor reforms and reduced protectionism to unlock India's potential for growth.

Earlier this year, Panagariya projected that India

I want to especially thank Niti Aayog Vice-Chairman Arvind Panagariya, who is showing how work is done in mission mode. He has done good work and the country will always remember him and his contribution"

could secure the position of the world's third-largest economy by 2026. Citing an annual average growth rate of 10.22 per cent in current dollars over the past two decades, he predicted India's GDP to reach USD 5 trillion in 2026 and USD 5.5 trillion in 2027, potentially outpacing existing forecasts for the nation's economic

record high in 2023

Wall Street hits



NEW YORK: Wall Street hit record high after record high in 2023, a year investors had feared would be a washout as elevated interest rates threatened to grind the economy to a halt, media reports said.

However, a resilient job market, robust consumer spending and easing inflation kept investor confidence high — helping propel all three indexes to double-digit gains.

S&P 500, the broadest measure of the US stock market closed 0.28 per cent lower on Friday, leaving it just under 30 points away from a recordhigh close, it gained 24 per cent this year, ending 2023 with a bang. It also notched its ninth-straight weekly gain the longest streak since January 2004. This year has been much kinder to the market than last: The benchmark index fell by about 20 per cent

in 2022, CNN reported. Dow Jones Industrial Aver-

age reached multiple record highs in December, including notching records in each of the past five trading sessions. It was down 0.05 per cent Friday, closing at 37, 689. In 2023, the Dow gained 14 per cent. The tech-heavy Nasdaq in-

dex was the year's biggest star, however. Although it was down 0.56 per cent Friday, closing at around 4769, it rose by 43 per cent in 2023 — its best performance since 2020. It remains about 1,000 points below the all-time high it reached in November 2021, demonstrating what a horrendous year tech had in 2022 - and how much room it still has left to recover, CNN reported. It's been a strong year for supersized tech and AI stocks. Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet, Amazon, Nvidia, Meta Platforms and Tesla, known collectively as the 'Magnificent 7, 'dominated the S&P 500 and soared well over 100% in 2023,

48.80 Lakh Apply for PM Vishwakarma scheme; 1.32 lakh successful applicants



wakarma Scheme has achieved remarkable success, boasting a total of 48.80 lakh enrolments and registering over 1.32 lakh successful applications, as of December 30, 2023, according to a MSME Ministry release, on Wednesday.

Under this initiative, registered applicants undergo a five-day 'Basic Training.' Following successful training, those who opt for credit support can benefit from collateral-free credit.

Launched on September 17, 2023, the Scheme focuses on enhancing the quality and reach of products and services offered by artisans and crafts-

The ultimate aim is to integrate 'Vishwakarmas' into both domestic and global value

The scheme has a broader hensive end-to-end support tion of ticket sizes and purto Vishwakarmas, enabling artisans and craftspeople to ascend the value chain in their

respective trades. As a fully funded Central Sector Scheme by the Government of India, it carries an initial outlay of Rs. 13,000 crore for the period 2023-24 to 2027-28.

NEDFi Channels Rs 547 Cr For 5,338 Projects In Northeast Region: DoNER NEW DELHI: The North

Eastern Development Finance Corporation Limited (NEDFi) has allocated more than Rs 547 crores for the Northeast region between January 1 and November 30, according to a report from the Union Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

NEDFi plays a crucial role in facilitating the establishment of new projects in the industrial and service sectors within the region. "The Corporation assisted

around 5,338 projects, with total sanctions and disbursements of Rs 766.47 crores and Rs 547.11 crores respectively, in diverse sectors such as education and training food processing, handlooms and

MUMBAI: Despite a promis-

ing start to the festive season,

most sectors, excluding jewel-

lerv and travel, seem to have

hit the snooze button, as per

a report released by HDFC

nis including the normal

chase frequencies, weak foot-

falls (on a per sq ft basis), and

a trend towards downtrading.

(especially for apparel and

footwear) has ranged from

-5 per cent to 2 per cent.

With a few exceptions, SSSG

Both retail and distribution

with elevated inventory levels.

Several factors contribute to



Consumer discretionary categories barring

jewellery, travel staring at moderating growth

between January 1 to November 30, 2023," the ministry announced in a communique.

The ministry further mentioned that to foster the development of the Micro and Small Enterprises (MSE) sector, NEDFi has undertaken handicrafts, healthcare, hotels initiatives to identify and nur- small enterprises sector. More-

This has led to an early com-

mencement of End of Season

Sales (EoSS) by 2-3 weeks and

higher discount levels in the

system. Consequently, mar-

gins are likely to be weak, the

'Our interaction with key

report said.

channels continue to grapple stakeholders/companies sug-

ture potential first generation local entrepreneurs. It aims to provide financing

on favourable terms to assist them in establishing viable industrial projects. NEDFi has extended credit

schemes at concessional interest rates within the micro and

response in the festive season

was healthy, demand took a

beating from mid-November

onwards in apparel, innerwear,

and footwear. Sales densities

were weak, with SSSG ranging

from -5 per cent to +2 per cent

In terms of sub-categories,

Indian ethnic wear perfor-

mance was good courtesy the

festive/wedding season; how-

ever, menswear and women's

western wear, winter wear and

innerwear continue to strug-

Given the gold price tailwind

(up 13 per cent YoY till Decem-

gle, it added.

to promote and develop the microfinance sectors in the region, it said.

over, it has initiated activities

"NEDFi in collaboration with the DoNER Ministry has set up the North East Venture Fund (NEVF), a dedicated venture capital fund, to encourage start-up ventures in the region," stated the min-

"The fund's capital commitment amounts to Rs 100 crores, with contributions from DoNER at Rs 45.00 crores, NEDFi at Rs 30.00 crores, and the Small Industries Development Bank of India at Rs 25.00 crores," it specified.

"The fund generated a lot of enthusiasm among the startups from the region," the ministry further stated.

companies continue to do well

in terms of growth. However,

ticket sizes have inched down

for the industry. Grammage

(per store basis) continues to

teens to mid-20 per cent, the

Most discretionary catego-

ries, excluding jewellery and

travel, are staring at moderat-

ing growth, negative-to-flat

SSSGs, and potential contrac-

"Hence, we suspect the

earnings downgrade cycle to

continue, "the report said.

tion in margins.

be in the high-

MUDRA Loans hit Rs 3-lakh cr mark in Q3 **FY24, Records 16% YoY Growth**



bursed under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY) have reached an unprecedented Rs 3-lakh crore in December 2023, reflecting a remarkable 16 per cent yearon-year growth.

week before the end of the third quarter of the current

Government data highlights the crucial role played by women applicants in driving decline. Most companies have the growth of Mudra loans, been aggressive in expanding with approximately 70 per cent by the third week of December, YoY; hence growth rates are of the loans sanctioned for zomen entreprepeurs

Notably, 25 per cent of these

A recent report from SBI Research underscores positive trends in the disbursal of Tarun and Kishor category loans, featuring higher loan limits to address the 'missing middle problem' in enterprise growth.



The loans sanctioned now stand at Rs 2,99,457 crore a

financial year on December 22, 2023 against Rs 2.58-lakh crore in the same period in previous fiscal," a senior official of Mudra told businessline. Provisional figures indicate that this figure surpassed Rs 3-lakh crore by December 29,

loans have been allocated to first-time petty entrepreneurs.

Razorpay and Groww Opt for India **Base: Tech Startups' Strategic Shift NEW DELHI**: Numerous

Indian startups are contemplating a return to their home country after initially venturing into various overseas locations. In September 2022, PhonePe, a fintech firm owned by Walmart, set the precedent by relocating its base from Singapore to India.

Razorpay and Groww are among the startups considering bringing their parent entities back to India. Razorpay, valued at USD 7.5 billion, initially moved its operations to the US to secure funding from Y Combinator.

The company has initiated a complex process to repatriate its parent entity to India, a move endorsed by the management and board.

this shift may pave the way for a potential IPO listing, Meesho although discussions on a reverse flip involve a potential tax payment of USD 250-300 million in the US.

Rahul Kothari, Razorpay's Chief Business Officer, stated in September that there were no immediate plans for a re-

Shashank Kumar, Razorpay's founder, expressed

optimism about India's burgeoning fintech landscape, highlighting the need to simplify processes for businesses, especially as digital commerce

Reports since May suggest that Groww, a full-stack financial services platform, is also contemplating relocating its domicile from the US to India.

Pine Labs, a payments firm valued at \$5 billion, is also returning to India. Pine Labs CEO Amrish Rau emphasised that the decision should consider whether the technology Successful completion of is built for global or domestic

> platform, and Udaan, a B2B ecommerce firm, are reportedly planning to shift their holding companies back to India.

Udaan has decided to pursue a public listing in the next year or so. These strategic shifts underscore a focus on India's evolving fintech landscape and global market positioning.

Gold still Glittering

gested that although the initial ber 20, 2023), most jewellery



hе investment option in India. In times of crisis, its demand increases further, because in- other safe investment options. vesting in gold is always gives In the last 10 years, gold has good returns to the investors. given a return of 105 percent, Due to inflation being under control, expectation of USA's Federal Reserve Bank cutting global market. interest rates in 2024, reduction in the price of crude oil in the international market and to strengthen & shine, investors are likely to invest in gold in 2024 & the number of investors will also increase significantly.

been

At present, the challenge before developed and other countries is to increase the pace 2023 its price became Rs.62,193, of development. For this, the Federal Reserve Bank & Reserve Bank of India can cut the interest rate in the upcoming monetary reviews. Generally, the central banks of all the countries of the world follow the footsteps of the Federal Reserve Bank. Hence, it is believed that when the Federal Bank cuts the interest rates, the of gold will cross the level of central banks of other countries will also cut the interest rates, per ounce in the international which will reduce the interest market will reach \$ 2400. rates of both loans and depos- Looking at the 50-year his-

its. When deposit interest rates come down, people will invest in gold for better returns.

Today investors are getting good returns in gold. For example, investors investing in safest and most profitable gold in the year 2023 have got a return of 16.4 percent, which is much better than banks or while the price of gold has increased by 63 percent in the

In June 2008, the price of 10 grams of gold was Rs.11,901, while in June 2014, the price of the Indian economy continuing 10 grams of gold was Rs.25,924, whereas in June 2017, the price of 10 grams of gold was Rs.29,499. There was an unprecedented increase in the price of gold in August 2020 and it reached the level of Rs.56,499 and in October whereas on December 29, 2023, the price of gold was Rs.63,332 per 10 grams, whereas, in the international market, the price

of gold per ounce was \$2050. Owing to the continuous increase in the number of people investing in gold, it is being speculated that by the end of 2024, the price of 10 grams Rs.70,000 and the price of gold



tory of gold price fluctuations, it shows that major fluctuations in the price of gold continue for about 5 to 6 years. In such a situation, there are speculations that the price of gold will remain at a high level for the coming few years.

According to BOFA Global Research, central banks around the world have purchased significant amounts of gold in 2022 and 2023. For the first time in 2022, central banks bought more than 1000 tonnes of gold. Even in 2023, central banks have purchased more than 1000 tons of gold, which is 2.5 times more than 2021 and 4 times more than 2020. At present, gold accounts for 20 percent of the reserves of world. The Reserve Bank of India purchased 9 tonnes of

gold in September 2023, while

the People's Bank of China pur-

September to December 2023. Since the start of 2023, China's central bank has increased its gold holdings by 181 tonnes to 2,192 tonnes. Based on the analysis of historical data, it is believed that even in 2024, all the central banks of the world will buy gold to expand the scope of their deposit base.

Due to the Corona pandemic, global uncertainty, and the ongoing slowdown in the economy globally, the pace of improvement in the economies of all developed countries including USA is slow. At the same time, due to the ongoing war between Hamas and Israel, tension remains in the Middle East and the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has also all the central banks of the not stopped, due to which the supply chain of many products is disrupted. As a result, people are investing in gold. chased 78 tonnes of gold during in this matter, as here people of India.

invest in gold even in recession and when the economy is rosy, because investing in gold has been prevalent in India since time immemorial.

The wedding season has started in India from December and despite the skyrocketing gold price, people are buying gold as per their financial capacity or condition. The most important thing is that gold has always been popular in India, since women in India are crazy about gold and this craze has been there since time immemorial. In ancient times, along with women, men also used to wear gold ornaments. Gold is so deeply embedded in the lifestyle, civilization, and culture of Indians that their life is incomplete without it. For Indian women, gold is not just a jewel, but a symbol of their wellbeing, self-respect, and pride. Gold transactions are done in 16 Sanskars of Hindu religion i.e., from birth to death.

Not only this, in Hindu religion there is also a tradition of offering gold to the gods and goddesses or making the gods and goddesses wear gold crowns. Because of this, many tons of gold are deposited in the temples of India. The World Gold Council (WGC) had released a report in the year 2020, according to which more than 4 thousand tonnes of gold However, India is an exception is deposited in the major temples

Since India is unable to meet the domestic demand for gold on its own, India has to depend on other countries to meet its domestic needs. For this, India imported maximum gold from China in 2022, while from Switzerland in 2021. However, due to global uncertainty, gold imports in India decreased by 24.15 percent to \$ 35 billion in the financial year 2022-23, but this is only a provisional state. If the situation changes, India

will start importing gold again. Switzerland accounts for 22.6 percent of global gold imports and is the world's largest importer by value, while China is in second place with 17.6 percent of imports. However, China produces 10.6 percent of the total gold production in the world. Today the highest gold in the world is in USA with 8133.47 tonnes, second place is Germany with 3359.09 tonnes of gold.

At present, due to almost controlled inflation, low interest rates on deposits in banking and other financial sectors, geopolitical crisis, fear of global recession, etc., people's trust in other means of investment has reduced. People feel that by investing in gold they can keep their money safe and get good returns.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal

India's FY24 Economic Growth Expected to Surpass 6.5%: Finance Ministry

NEW DELHI: The Finance Ministry, in its half-yearly economic review report released, anticipates that India's economy will comfortably exceed the government's growth projection of 6.5 per cent for the fiscal year 2023-24 (FY24).

According to the report, the momentum gained by the Indian economy in the second quarter of FY24 is expected to endure through the subsequent December quarter, with sustained growth in consumption demand.

The half-yearly economic review for 2023-24 highlights a significant real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 7.7 per cent in the first half of FY24, following a 7.6 per cent expansion in the second quarter (Q2). As per the report, strong do-

mestic consumption and investment are cited as the driving forces behind this growth, with Private Final Consumption Expenditure (PFCE) experiencing a 4.5 per cent increase, contributing 60.4 per cent to GDP-its highest in H1 since FY12.

The better-than-expected growth in Q2 of FY24 and the emergence of India as the fastest-growing major economy in H1 of FY24 have improved the growth prospects and prompted various domestic and international agencies to upgrade GDP growth projections for FY24,» the report noted.



The Finance Ministry report also expresses optimism about India>s external sector, citing the relatively stable Indian rupee and adequate foreign exchange reserves. On the inflation front, the

ing it to stable core inflation and ongoing deflation in fuel inflation. Despite temporary disruptions from food prices, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)

report notes a declining trend

in headline inflation, attribut-

projects an average inflation rate of 5.4 per cent for FY24. On indirect taxes, the report underscores the momentum in economic activity through GST collections. The gross GST collection for November 2023, at

Rs 1.68 lakh crore, is 12 per cent

higher on a YoY basis. The report concludes with information on merchandise exports, which contracted by 8.8 per cent in H1 of FY24, leading to a reduction in India>s overall trade deficit to USD 39.9 billion compared to USD 75.3 billion in H1 of

UN Chief condemns 'epic human suffering' in Gaza amid Israeli offensive



condemned the epic human suffering and collective punishment of Palestinian civilians, media reports said

Reports said that he and other world leaders have repeatedly called for a ceasefire while Israel has vowed to push on until Hamas is defeated, a position backed by its powerful ally the United States.

"Far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has called for the return of Jewish settlers to Gaza after fighting, saying its Palestinian population should be encouraged to emigrate, media reports said.

"If we act in a strategically correct way and encourage emigration, if there are 100, 000 or 200, 000 Arabs in Gaza and not two million, the whole discourse of the day after will be completely different, "Smotrich told Israeli army radio.

Media reports said that there was no suggestion that the minister's proposals had the support of the government as a whole but Hamas swiftly condemned his comments as a call to expel two million Palestinians and a

Gaza war can spill into a regional conflict : UN Chief

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has reiterated his concerns that the war in Gaza can spill over into a regional conflict media reports said.

"There is a continued risk of wider regional conflagration, the longer the conflict in Gaza continues, given the risk of escalation and miscalculation by multiple actors," media reports quoting Guterres as saying in a statement.

He said that the burgeoning violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank by Israeli forces and Israeli settlers is extremely alarming.

"As is fighting between Hezbollah and Israel across the south Lebanon border, attacks from Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis attacking shipping in

He has again appealed to all members of the international community to do everything in their power to use their influence on the relevant parties to prevent an escalation of the situation in the region.

Unless India hits where it hurts Canada, Trudeau not likely to relent OTTAWA: Though India-Canada relations have seen

many lows- such as Ottawa's sanctions on New Delhi after the 1974 and 1998 nuclear tests and the bombing of Air India Kanishka in June 1985 -- over the years, they have touched a new low in the wake of the killing of Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside a Surrey Gurdwara in June

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau dropped a bombshell on September 18 when he alleged in the House of Commons that the agents of the Indian government were behind the killing of Nijjar.

As he made these allegations, Canada suspended the on-going trade talks on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, expelled Indian diplomat Pavan Kumar Rai and asked India to cooper-



ate in the Nijjar investigation. India denied the allegations and hit back by expelling 41 diplomats and stopping visa services in Canada.

Trudeau has upped the ante since then, making periodic statements on India's alleged role in the Nijjar killing even as New Delhi has repeatedly said that it has not been given any credible evidence by Ottawa.

The Canadian Prime Minis-

ter has used the indictment of Indian national Nikhil Gupta in an alleged plot to kill Khalistani leader Gurpatwant Singh Pannun to support his allegation.

The latest twist in this entire episode -- that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is about to arrest two persons in connection with the Nijjar killing -- is an ominous sign that India-Canada relations are not going to improve anytime soon.

reveal after their arrest and how much more it will harm the bilateral relationship will be known only in the weeks

Apart from the argument in some Indo-Canadian quarters here that Canada and the US are weaponising the Khalistan issue because of India's Ukraine policy and its strategic autonomy, Trudeau's somewhat personal grudge against New Delhi about what happened during his 2018 and September visits to India may be playing into this diplomatic

But despite this crisis, Canada is getting what it wants from India -- thousands and thousands of new immigrants and students. For Ottawa. trade with India is not a big

New Indian immigrants and

Whatever these two persons students bring in billions of dollars into Canada. Indian students keep hundreds and hundreds of private colleges running and provide low-wage labour for Walmart, Tim Hortons, Amazon, and security companies. The majority of frontline workers at these companies in Canada today

> If Indian students were to stop coming here, hundreds $\,$ of private colleges will shut and Walmart, Tim Hortons and Amazon will struggle to find low-wage workers. Not surprisingly, Canadian

are Indian students.

study visas for Indian students are being issued faster now despite the expulsion of 41 Canadian diplomats.

Unless India hits where it matters by putting in place new measures, Ottawa won't relent and rein in anti-Indian

Omicron BA.5 more deadlier Covid variants, flu: US-CDC

Patients hospitalised with Omicron BA.5 are more likely to die than those with other Covid-19 variants or with flu, according to a new study led by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The study, published in the Open Forum Infectious Diseases, looked at the proportion of hospitalised Covid-19 and influenza patients admitted to a US intensive care unit (ICU) in 2021 and 2022. The findings showed that

the percentage of hospitalised Covid-19 patients admitted to the ICU was similar to seasonal influenza but hospitalised Covid-19 patients during the Omicron BA.5 period continued to experience more in-hospital death than adults hospitalised with influenza.

The association with increased



among adults aged 18-49 years; there was no significant difference in deaths between patients with Covid-19 and influenza among older ages. "The epidemiology of Covid-19 continues to evolve. Our data suggest that from the Delta-predominant period to the Omicron BA.5redominant period, the severity of patients hospitalised with Corid-19 generally decreased, " said Noah Kojima, from the CDC's Influenza Division in Georgia. The study included 5, 777 and 2, 363 eligible adults hospitalised for Covid and flu, respectively.

Japan earthquake toll increases to 92 as aftershocks hinder rescue



The death toll from the a series of powerful earthquakes that struck the central Japanese prefecture of Ishikawa earlier this week, increased to 92 on Wednesday, with continued aftershocks and severe weather conditions hindering rescue

The worst-hit city of Wajima in Ishikawa has confirmed a total of 92 deaths, Xinhua news agency quoted Japan's Kyodo News as saying citing local authorities.

In a series of aftershocks experienced by the region, one with a magnitude of 5.6 on Wednesday morning and one with a magnitude of 4.6 on Tuesday evening struck off the Noto Peninsula, both at shallow depths and measuring upper 5 on Japan's seismic intensity scale which peaks at 7, according to the Japan

Meteorological Agency (JMA). The full extent of the quake remains unknown as rubble and severed roads still prevent search and rescue operations on Wednesday, two days after the 7.6-magnitude quake on Monday caused extensive in Wajima.

government, more than 100 people in a state of isolation due to cut-off roads in at least three municipalities, including

the severely hit city of Nanao.

The National Institute for Land and Infrastructure Management announced on Tuesday that they detected a significant uplift in the ground surface, reaching approximately four meters in the city of

The JMA issued warnings of potential mudslides for Ishikawa prefecture with intermittent rain expected through Thursday in the disaster-hit areas, including some cut-off

A heavy rain alert has been issued for the most-devastated

İshikawa prefectural authorities have asked the central government to send Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel for disaster relief, and the forces were set to use taken shelter, according to lohelicopters to deliver supplies. to cut-off areas, according to local media reports.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a press confer-Majima. government had decided to double the number of SDF

region from 1,000 at present.

A day after a tragic collision between a Japan Airlines plane and a Japan Coast Guard aircraft carrying relief goods at Tokyo's Haneda airport, Kishida said the accident has no impact on disaster relief work and transportation of relief supplies to the areas has been progressing steadily. A series of strong earth-

the Noto region of Ishikawa prefecture. The JMA has officially named it the 2024 Noto Pen-

quakes, with a major one of

7.6 magnitude, on Monday

struck at a shallow depth in

insula Earthquake. Centered around 30 km east-northeast of Wajima, the devastating quake registered a maximum intensity of 7, which would make it impossible for people to stand.

The earthquake, categorised as a seismic swarm, had a length of up to 150 km in the epicentre area, leading to unprecedented scale and shaking intensity, said a JMA expert, noting that such a temblor was last recorded in 2018 in

In the aftermath of the quake, nearly 34,000 households, as of Wednesday morning, still suffered power outages in Ishikawa prefecture, where over 33,000 people have

Reports of damages and several cases of people being buried or trapped under collapsed homes in the structural damage and fires ence on Wednesday that the quake-hit areas kept coming in, according to municipal authorities.

Canadian MP Iqwinder Singh Gaheer meets UK MP Dhesi in Slough



LONDON: The Sikh Member of Parliament from Britain, Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, hosted a meeting with Canadian counterpart Iqwinder Singh Gaheer during the latter's visit to the United Kingdom.The meeting took place in Slough, where both MPs engaged in discussions covering a wide array of political and global Sikh matters.

In a statement, Tan Dhesi hailed Iqwinder Singh Gaheer as a promising and dynamic individual, possessing immense potential to contribute significantly to the welfare of the Sikh community in Canada. "It was an enriching discussion revolving around various facets of international politics, recent global Sikh concerns, and the exploration of opportunities to fortify the bilateral relationship between our nations, "stated Dhesi.

The interaction between the two distinguished parliamentarians centered on fostering deeper understanding and cooperation on issues pertinent to the Sikh community, as well as broader global politiaimed at identifying pathways to enhance collaboration and solidarity between Canada and the United Kingdom while addressing shared concerns and interests of the Sikh diaspora worldwide.

for democracy, secularism and

evolution of a plural society.

Canadian study permit applications processed for Indians down over 40% since July 2023: Report



NEW DELHI: The Indian demand for Canadian education declined significantly with the number of study permit appli-cations processed going down by more than 40 per cent since July 2023, according to a newlyreleased data. The Canadian government processed almost 146,000 new study permit applications for Indian nationals from July to October 2022.

But across the same period in 2023, it processed fewer than 87,000, representing a yearover-year decrease of 41 per cent, data released by Apply-Board, an online platform for international student recruitment, said.

This means that almost 60,000 fewer student visas were processed for Indian students from July to October 2023 than over the same period in 2022.

From January to June 2023, the Canadian government processed 25 per cent more study permit applications from Indian dents than it did over the same period in 2022. The sharp drop comes even as the Canadian government announced last month that it will more than double the cost-of-living financial requirement for incoming international students beginning January 1, 2024.

So going forth, a single applicant will need to show they have 20,635 Canadian dollars (\$15, 181) in addition to their first year of tuition and travel costs. Negative sentiment on social media

While it remains to be seen how the announcement will

impact international students in terms of numbers, the reason for the drop in later part of 2023 was attributed to a growing number of Indian students taking on to social media to speak about the hardships they faced in Canada, specifically calling out the high cost of living and lack of opportunity promised. The ApplyBoard found that

between April and August of 2023, the number of articles written about housing in Canada increased fivefold versus the same period last year. Additionally, the percentage of content flagged as negative rose from 12 to 30 per cent, with Indian students' financial hardships and unemployment challenges a consistent theme. In September last year, students from Punjab actively took to 'X' to speak about skyrocketing house rents in the country, which was forcing many of them to stay in cramped basement setups, compromising their safety.

Indian-American medical biller

arrested for stealing over \$1 mn

Humanitarian aid delivery blocked in Gaza: UN



The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that for the past three days, the world body and other partners have been unable to deliver urgently needed life-saving humanitarian aid north of Wadi Gaza - the coastal wetland located along the central part of the besieged enclave. Around half of the Hamas-

controlled enclave lies north of Wadi Gaza. In its latest situation update, the OCHA said the delivery of the humanitarian assistance was not possible 'due to access delays and denials, as well as active conflict". According to the UN body, the aid included medicines that would have provided vital support to more than 100,000 people for 30 days, as well as eight trucks of food for people who currently face catastrophic and life-threatening food

"Humanitarian organisations are calling for urgent, safe, sustained and unhindered humanitarian access to areas north of Wadi Gaza, which has been severed from the south OCHA said in its update.

insecurity.

On Wednesday, the World Health Organization (WHO) had said that in the past three days, 13 trucks carrying crucial medical supplies for surgeries and anaesthesia were delivered to Gaza via the Rafah crossing.

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Indo-US Ties Cooling Off!

Dumb-wits in White House Trigger off Deep State against India, New Delhi Hits Back geo-politics, because India is



mirthless 2024 dawns with both

whether the deep state has sabo-

taged the common agenda of

cooperation. The visit of Biden in New Delhi on the eve of G-20 session in September 2023 further warmed their ties. The two the recent campaign against countries have been engaged for re-orienting their ties following the visit of Indian PM Narsimha Rao is being continued to be Rao to Washington in 1994. Both sides may not admit but just, before the year ended to become a history, the year-long intense the Industrial Policy Resoluefforts making their ties impact- tion, considered 'holy cow' by ing the geo-politics appear to be in the process to be buried in the process to be buried in economic reforms simultanethe archives.

The scholars and experts in the India-US close ties. strategic and foreign affair in New Delhi, naturally, are pertrend in the warmth of India-US



suddenly plummet that too on some frivolous issues like Indian conspiracy to eliminate a supporter of Khalistan in USA.

India's Matured Diplomacy Compared to Indian diplosides examining and exploring mats, most of the officials serving in the office of the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken are considered dumb wits. In spite Biden's long innings in various capacities in directing and monitoring foreign affairs, India deliberating accusing India of violating human rights. remembered as the 'shrewd Chankaya', who could rescue Indian economy by changing ously laying the foundation for

Rao continues to influence the generation next in South Block plexed by this sudden down- to be vigilant and be ready to respond to a challenging situarelations; they are at wits end tion. The five-day visit of India's ated policy of luring American of American presence in the

External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishanakar, to Moscow signing number of strategic agreements is just an example that India adheres to agreements, but they should really be delivered. The delay on the part of the US authorities not supplying drones as scheduled or engines for India's own aircraft Tejas must have alarmed New Delhi. Also, perhaps, the strengthening

to Jammu and Kashmir could also have necessitated keeping India's old ally adequately informed.

of the Chinese troops on 3000 kilometre on the India –Tibet border accompanied by a new wave of terrorists from Pakistan

Also, much to the surprise of Washington, the Modi Government's overtures towards Moscow are being appreciated in the country transcending political spectrum. Earlier, Indian been slow. It had taken more than decade for India to seek American support; on the other hand, China had already initi-

capital and technology during Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping's 1979 visit to America. The comments in Indian

media and news papers in the West, including American, that the recent India-Russia agreements only reveal either their ignorance or partisan approach towards global power play. They have to explain how India's cooperation in sensitive field of defence production, expansion of nuclear power houses and other areas with Russia hurts the US interests. The Indo-US defence cooperation is still at nascent stage, and it needs much more effort for augmenting their ties.

China Revises its Strategy In recent years, the world has been witnessing two trends in the international diplomacy; the Chinese wolf warrior diplomacy and pedestrian tit for tat approach. It, however, appears that these approaches have become redundant with the dawn of 2024; the world powers have to reinvent their ties; the proxy war between the US-led West against Russia using as their Ukraine has failed. Similarly, the American rhetoric describing India as its close ally, while its deep state, CIA, quietly supporting the Khalistani separatists, is bound responses to a situation have to hurt their ties despite having

a friendly set up in New Delhi. It is for Washington to un-

derstand that Indians do not

want any further weakening

The other players in the world politics, Russia and China do not subscribe to human rights and democracy. Among the western leaders President D. Roosevelt was ipposed to the partition of India; he had advised British statesman, Winston Churchill not to divide India during the high-level talks at Potsdam; however, most of the successive administrations in Washington had little concern towards India's sensitivities. Much before the fall of Dacca and President Richard Nixon's visit to Beijing, America had sent its Seventh fleet armed with nuclear missiles to the Indian Ocean in favour of the Pakistani army committing genocide against Bengali Muslims in 1971. Also, CIA operatives were active in India's north east supporting Mizo insurgency and hobnobbing with the Chinese, during the past three decades. Washington has to realize that Indians have elephantine memory; they neither forget their supporters nor ignore those who had worked against democracy and her national interests. Gopal Misra has been

associated with national and international media. His books on journalism and geo-politics have been well-appreciated. Views are personal. **NEW YORK:** A 61-year-old Indian-origin medical biller has been arrested for allegedly stealing more than \$1 million intended for surgeons who provided care to injured workers in New York. Amrish Patel and his two

companies -- Medlink Services and Medlink Partners -- were charged on Wednesday with 27 felony counts for the thefts they allegedly committed from January 2012 through January 2019. Patel, who was arraigned before the Honorable Holly

Trexler in Albany City Court, provided billing services to a Brooklyn-based orthopedic surgery practice, according to the Office of the New York State Attorney General. He allegedly submitted falsified claim forms to the New York State Insurance

Fund (NYSIF) to steal at least \$1.1 million in workers' compensation reimbursements for himself. "Doctors and health care professionals provide crucial care to our communities,

and they rely on accurate and ethical billing to sustain these services and ensure our wellbeing, "said New York Attorney General Letitia James. "When money is illegally diverted away from doctors

and providers, all New York-



change for these transac-

my office will continue to monthly service fees use every measure to hold accountable those who seek to cheat New Yorkers for personal gain." As outlined in the 27-count complaint, Patel abused his position as a medical billing agent over

meant for surgeons. Starting in 2011, Patel and his companies were responsible for submitting billing for surgeries related to workrelated injuries under the New York State Workers'

the course of nearly seven

years by diverting payments

Compensation Law. Under the law, authorised providers are reimbursed for their treatment of injured workers by the insurance carrier for the employer.

Under the terms of their client agreement, Patel submitted bills for surgical procedures to NYSIF, the workers' ers suffer as a result. Fraud compensation carrier in this of any kind will never go instance, and then the payments would subsequently be unchecked in our state, and

tions, Patel and his companies were paid

However, he allegedly submitted falsified claim forms to NYSIF and requested that the payments be sent to his companies instead of the doctors. In total, Patel allegedly

stole at least \$1.1 million in payments originally intended for three doctors for services provided between January 1, 2012 and January 4, 2019.

The felony counts against him and his companies included, one count of Insurance Fraud in the First Degree; one count of Grand Larceny in the First Degree; one count of Grand Larceny in the Second Degree; one count of Grand Larceny in the Third Degree; one count of Scheme to Defraud in the First Degree; 11 counts of Falsifying Business Records in the First Degree, and 11 counts of Workers

Compensation Fraud. Patel was released with electronic monitoring and a \$100,000 bond.



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.

'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, has shared her 2024 mantra, and it is all things funny.

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. Kareena, who is an avid social media user, is updating her fans about her holiday by sharing pictures from her year-end

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. Even if you tell me 1+1=5, you're absolutely correct, enjoy, " she wrote in the post. The '3 Idiots' fame actress captioned the post as: "2024

Janhvi Kapoor opens up on rumoured beau



Kapoor, who is set to appear on the upcoming episode of the streaming chat show 'Koffee With Karan' along with her sister Khushi Kapoor, has opened up about her rumoured boyfriend Shikhar

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

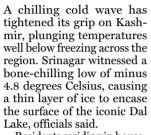
Talking about it, Karan Johar asked: "You have had an interesting path of love, you were dating Shikhar, and then you dated someone else and now you are dating Shikhar again. True or False?"

"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. Not in a way that made me feel like he is expecting anything or he is a pushover or any of those

"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, "Janhvi

Water, bodies freeze in Kashmir as temperature plunges further

FW DESK



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. Pahalgam, a crucial base camp for the annual Amarnath Yatra, recorded a low of minus 6.2 degrees Celsius, while Gulmarg's famed skiing resort registered a freezing minus 4 degrees Celsius.

Other areas such as Qazi-

filmmaker, and mentor Prof P S Nirola has been released. This book is

a step-by-step guide for a new producer and a great help for existing

filmmakers. It explains what should be a producer's qualities and how

Aamir Khan's daughter

Ira Khan marries

Nupur Shikhare

MUMBAI: Superstar Aamir khare are now married. A

her marriage with Nupur, a traditional lehenga.

five star hotel in suburban married in the same clothes

video of the couple register-

ing their marriage has sur-

faced online and is now going

viral. In the video, Nupur was

seen seated on the stage in

a pair of white colour shorts

with a black vest while Ira

was decked up in a beautiful

Nupur was seen getting

as that he sported at the bara-

at. The groom ditched the

traditional baraat to jog to his

wedding. He was seen wear-

ing a pair of gym clothes for

the run and participated in

the baraat dance outside the

wedding in the same clothes.

A video from inside the wed-

ding shows he opted to sign

the marriage papers in the

Khan and film producer Ree-

na Dutta's daughter Ira Khan

on Wednesday tied the knot

with her long-time partner

Ira, who is the founder and

CEO of a mental health sup-

port organisation, registered

celebrity fitness trainer, at a

The marriage was at-

tended by their close family

members, including Aamir,

his ex-wives Reena Dutta

and Kiran Rao, among oth-

ers. The ceremony was fol-

lowed by a reception at the

The wedding venue was

Ira Khan and Nupur Shi- same outfit.

seen packed with guests.

Nupur Shikhare.

Bandra.

same hotel



cury dropping well below zero. Adding to the woes, Kashmir has faced a prolonged dry spell with a staggering 79% rainfall deficit in December. The absence of snowfall in most parts, both in the plains and upper reaches, exacerbates the situation. Clear skies have

in temperatures, intensifying the ongoing 'Chilla-i-Kalan, the 40-day harshest winter period, causing water bodies, including the Dal Lake, and supply lines to freeze.

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



ng ice skating in the UK in a recent picture.

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 and a sweater. Aditya, sported a pair of denims, a black puffer jacket and a grey beanie. He can be seen holding Ananya from behind to help her with the balance on the ice.

The two are currently back Karan Johar.

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, were seen enjoy-

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' by the show host,

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 go-ing on in full swing, Skilled artisans from different parts of the country are engaged to make the temple grand. A wood company from Hyderabad is working rapidly to provide 100 doors for the temple. Chaudhary Sarath Babu, managing partner of Anuradha Timbers International, has been traveling between Ayodhya and Hyderabad since the month of June to ensure timely delivery.

In the doors being prepared for the Ram temple, they are using teak wood which is known to last for 3,000 years. Undoubtedly, they are using the finest wood for such orders. After getting the contract, they found high quality trees from Balharshah forest in Maharashtra, whose average age is 100 years and there was no visible defect in them.

While selecting the trees, it was ensured that there were no cracks, knots or any kind of moisture in the wood of those trees. These trees then again went through a hard process of selection and only 20 percent of the wood collected

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, had asked the companies three years ago to make a wooden model of the temple. A wooden model was placed on the Darshan Marg to give a glimpse of how the new temple would look.

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. It is a foldable door.

whose height is 8 feet and width is 12 feet. The firm has made a variety of doors, including those with domes. All the doors inside the temple are plated with gold, including 18 doors on the ground floor. The doors are designed in Nagari style. Kumaraswami, an experienced wood carver from Anuradha Timbers International Company. Kanyakumari, is working with Ramesh and the team. He has designed hard-designed doors for many famous temples in India, including the Yadadri Temple on the outskirts of Hyderabad. The doors were designed in Nagari style by Sompura, the chief architect of the temple. Kumaraswamy's team has replicated the design of the tee by hand.

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



MUMBAI: Actress Rakul Preet Singh and actor-producer Jackky Bhagnani are set to tie the knot in February. The couple will get married in Goa in an intimate ceremony.

The couple made it official

on Instagram back in October 2021. Earlier this year, Jackky Bhagnani shared a reel featuring the moments he and Rakul have spent together so far, wishing the actress on her birthday. The reel features glimpses of their vacation diaries, dinner dates, red carpet walks as well as on stage performances.

Jackky 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. With you, every day feels like an incredible journey, and there's never a dull moment."

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. On your big day, I wish you everything you have ever dreamt of, and more.

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 throws serious light on the past and present history of Punjab. On this occasion, senior journalist Baljit Balli and the author were also engaged in a discussion about the book. Harish Jain, Publisher Unistar Books was also present during the occasion.

Ramesh Inder Singh was the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar during Operation Blue Star and he has described the situation as he saw it with his own eyes in this book. Ramesh Inder Singh was later promoted and retired from the post of Chief Secretary.

Ramesh Inder Singh said, "Starting from the year 1978, Punjab went through a volcanic less violence. These few years were to determine the direction of our history. After the country's independence, perhaps no other domestic crisis would have had such a deep impact,"

"But 40 years after the Blue Star incident, we still hear conflicting stories about what happened and how. This book 'Dukhant Punjab Da' is an eve-witness account of this historical accident and those years. The book gives a detailed description of the past events which shows the situation of insurgency from its beginning to its end,

He further said that even in the best of times, people's perception of an event or situation

varies. Particularly devastating cres took place in Delhi and

events blur neutrality, divide people, and often ignore the 'Operation Blue Star and

the events that followed were disastrous events of this nature, which led India to go to war among itself. The country lost a Prime Minister, a Chief Minister, a former Army Chief, thousands of innocent However, others hold him recivilians and some innocent people. However, nearly four decades of turmoil, suffering decades later, we still hear and destruction in Punjab," different stories about what happened, why it happened, and how it happened. Facts are eternal, but whose facts are they? It's one person's truth versus another person's, your interpretation versus their interpretation," Ramesh Inder

Singh maintained. 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 massa-

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. For some, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale was a martyr, as the Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht Sahib publicly stated in 2003. sponsible for more than two

According to Ramesh Inc Singh I was an eyewitness, and sometimes a role player, although this is inconsequential at this moment in history. What I saw or did-or what I failed to do—needs to be told. My conscience, more than anything else, prompts me to state my interpretation of the facts and events during the decade and a half surrounding Operation Blue Star

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. I try to do just that in the pages of this book

Terrorism has been decisively eliminated in Punjab.

However, the deep, underlying ethno-socio-religious fault lines that have caused turmoil in the state still persist. History has a strange habit of repeating itself and we must be careful, only those civilizations move forward that learn from their

This is the first time to publish the present work under the RTI system after my retirement as Chief Secretary of Punjab and later as Chief Information Commissioner of Punjab, having held government roles, he said. I do not regret this long gap as the passage of years has helped clarify the issues and cool down the anger.

Much has been said and written about Operation Blue Star and the turmoil in Punjab in these twenty-nine vears. Several history books and documentaries and some eyewitness accounts—mostly hearsay—have been published. However, given the sensitivity of the topic and security has been said and may not be

However, to the best of my knowledge, I have said and written it honestly. I hope, as the frenzy subsides over time, people inside and outside the government will be more receptive to this work. My words may seem bad to some people; however, the intention is not to hurt anvone's sentiments or instigate divisiveness

said for some time.

But starting a dialogue, opening the way for introspection and most importantly moving towards healing and ending a painful past can be achieved with reconciliation, justice and transparency, asserted Ramesh Inder Singh.

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. On this day, Ramlala's life will be consecrated in the temple with full rituals. The special thing is that before the consecration of Ram Lalla, hi-tech security arrangements are being made in the temple. The temple of Lord Ramlala has been equipped with CCTV

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. Rs 38 crore was approved by the government



to purchase security equipment. Let us tell you that in the first phase, the city of Ramlala will be protected, it will also be equipped with machinery and equipment and a third eye along with the security forces will monitor the city of Ramlala.

According to the members of Ram Mandir Trust, Ramlala will be equipped with heavy

security equipment by 25th December. Along with this, security equipment procured by the Uttar Pradesh government including scanner prescription machine will also be installed in the campus by December 20. By December 30, the work of security, lighting and passenger transportation facilities will be completed in the Ram Janmabhoomi complex.

Katrina Kaif, Vicky Kaushal spend 'teen khoobsurat din' full of 'pyaar, araam, 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. One 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, araam, sunsets aur thand! New Year mana liya... now it's time for #MerryChristmas !!!" 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 'Chhaava' in the pipeline.

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

