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PUNJAB CM MANN FLAYS SAD FOR PUNJAB BACHAO YATRA, IT IS SAD THAT RUINED PUNJAB



Unpacking a vision for development

ABDUL WASEY
Editor

Ahead of the upcoming general elections, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented a budget aimed at bolstering infrastructure and improving social welfare, signifying the government's intent to enhance the quality of life across India. This budget, potentially Sitharaman's last before the polls, lays out an ambitious vision for a "developed India" by 2047, featuring increased infrastructure spending and new initiatives like a home ownership scheme, free rooftop solar electricity, and expanded medical coverage for government employees. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is approaching the elections with confidence, buoyed by a strong parliamentary majority and a series of "golden moments" that Sitharaman predicts will lead to unprecedented development over the next five years. The finance minister's optimism, rooted in economic growth and a tax windfall, allows for increased public spending while aiming to reduce the budget deficit to 5.1 percent of GDP, showcasing a commitment to fiscal prudence alongside developmental aspirations. However, the true measure of success for this budget will lie in its implementation and the real-world impact of its provisions. While infrastructure development and welfare initiatives are crucial, addressing broader challenges such as employment, education, and environmental sustainability will be essential for realizing the envisioned path to development. As India aims to cement its status as a global economic leader, the strategies and decisions outlined in this budget represent not just financial planning but a blueprint for the nation's future, underscoring the government's hope for a renewed mandate to continue its developmental agenda. The journey to 2047 is ambitious, and achieving a developed India will require strategic planning, fiscal discipline, and a dedication to inclusive growth.

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY

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FICCI PRESIDENT HAILS INTERIM BUDGET 2024-25 AS A STRATEGIC PATH TO 'VIKSIT BHARAT'



POTPOURRI

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CONTROVERSIAL ACTRESS-MODEL POONAM PANDEY SUCCUMBS TO CANCER

Budget Lays Blueprint for Future MSME Support Programmes: FISME

NEW DELHI: While retaining the allocation for the Ministry of MSME at the level of last year, Nirmala Sitharaman's Interim Budget succinctly posited the future direction of MSME support. Elaborating on the Strategy for 'Amrit Kaal', the Finance Minister alluded to future policies to ensure timely and adequate finances and "preparing the financial sector in terms of size, capacity, skills and regulatory framework". She also underscored the MSMEs' needs of Technology, Training and 'orienting regulatory environment to facilitate growth'. Welcoming the Interim Budget, President of Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) Prashant Patel said, "Acknowledging the critical needs of MSMEs with regard to access to finance, technology and enabling regulatory environment, the Budget notes that the Government intends to come out with a clear set of policies for promotion and regulation to help MSMEs in key areas". In the pre-budget submission to the Government, FISME had



highlighted that the prevailing financial architecture was not being able to serve green field manufacturing projects and fast-growing MSMEs and needed revamp. FISME had also highlighted the need for massive technology up-gradation in MSME clusters. The FM noted in the Budget speech that it was an important policy priority for the Government to ensure

timely and adequate finances and that to meet the investment needs, the Government would prepare the financial sector in terms of size, capacity, skills and regulatory framework. She also mentioned the need for 'relevant technologies and appropriate training for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) to grow and also compete globally. Orienting

the regulatory environment to facilitate their growth will be an important element of this policy mix. "The Government intends to provide for the technology up-gradation needs of MSMEs and dovetail it with emerging requirements of resource efficiency and green energy," adds FISME. After having shared the findings of the seminar 'Reducing

“The Government intends to provide for the technology up-gradation needs of MSMEs and dovetail it with emerging requirements of resource efficiency and green energy”

Cost of Litigation for MSMEs', FISME in the pre-budget paper had suggested a set of measures to make the process of arbitration effective and affordable. New initiatives are expected. FISME welcomed enhancing allocation for infrastructure by 11% boosting the total infrastructure to 3.4% of GDP. FISME feels that continued focus on housing in the Budget, with 2 crore more houses to be built next year, and new scheme for middle class living on rent to 'build or buy' new houses, would generate huge business opportunities for MSMEs.

Nothing for Punjab in the budget, Union Govt has only cheated Punjab for the last 10 years-FM



CHANDIGARH: Responding to the Central Government's Interim Budget 2024-25, senior leader of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Finance Minister of Punjab Government, Harpal Singh Cheema said that there is nothing for Punjab in the budget. Punjab is not going to get any benefits from it. Injustice to Punjab is pretty evident in the budget. In a statement issued from the party headquarters Chandigarh on Thursday, Finance Minister Cheema said that the Modi government at the Center had only cheated Punjab during the 10 years and only took decisions that disappointed and harmed Punjab. The Union Budget of the last ten years of the BJP government shows that the BJP always discriminated against Punjab and tried to deprive Punjab of any economic benefits.

"Empty vessels, trying to make fool! Modi government's interim budget" criticises by Opposition



The opposition termed the whole matter as a 'drama' of the finance minister

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

Modi government's interim budget is 'absurd'. Budget to fool people. The opposition criticized in this language on the interim budget before the Lok Sabha elections. They complained that there is no word how to reduce unemployment in the budget. Even, there is no exemption for the middle class. The opposition termed the whole issue as a 'drama' of the finance minister. Trinamool's leaders said, "Budget is meaningless. Juggling of words, cheap tricks of language. The common man has no relief, no gain." They also complained, "Depriva-

tion of Bengal continues. Not a single word on Price-rise, this is hypocritical budget. The finance minister is scripting an unrealistic drama outside of just approving the three-month budget". Congress leader at Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury has given a punch in the tune of Trinamool. In his words, "Is this the budget for the employment of the unemployed? Or trying to win people's hearts by misrepresenting it in the year of Lok Sabha polls"? In the words of Sachin Pilot, another Congress leader of the party, "Hearing the budget speech of the finance minister, it seemed like she was campaigning for votes". The Finance Minister's confident announcement, «The full budget in July will present the economic figures for the entire year». Nirmala has repeatedly explained in her speech that her government is returning, so she is not in favor of quick surprises. Akali Dal MP Harsimrat Kaur says, "This budget is empty. It is an expression of the arrogance of the government to return to power from now on".

Punjab Bachao Yatra: Sukhbir Badal calls for reopening of the international border for trade

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Attari (Amritsar)

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal today started the party's Punjab Bachao Yatra from near the zero line here and gave a clarion call for re-opening of the international border with Pakistan to facilitate trade between the two countries besides demanding enhancement in compensation to farmers tilling land beyond the barbed wire fence in Indian territory. Earlier the SAD president and the senior party leadership offered prayers at Akal Takhat (Highest Sikh temporal seat) to seek divine blessings for the



success of the party's Punjab Bachao Yatra. The Yatra formally started from Attari with Sukhbir Singh Badal leading a cavalcade of a hundred of vehicles including tractors, cars and motorcycles to the tunes of "Utho ve Sher Punjabio Punjab Bacha lo". Party senior leaders Gulzar Singh Ranike, Bikram Singh Majithia and Anil Joshi accompanied the SAD president at the head of the cavalcade

along with hundreds of youth on foot. All along the way from Attari to Raja Sansi big crowd of tractors joined the Yatra along with a deluge of youth. The SAD president held a detailed discussion with border farmers near the zero point during the course of which farmers disclosed that thousands of people had lost their livelihood due to the closure of the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Wagah. They also related that they had not received compensation of Rs 12,000 per acre per annum for land across the barbed wire fence since the last two years. The farmers called for moving the fence close to the zero line, saying restrictions on caring for their produce was causing losses to them. The farmers also demanded that compensation for border farmers be raised to Rs 35,000 per acre for all 21,600 acres of land situated beyond the barbed fence. The farmers also complained that a Government hospital initiated by former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal here had not seen the light of day till yet. Asserting that the SAD was one with the farmers Badal said "we will leave no stone unturned to ensure an increase in compensation received due to losses suffered in tilling land across the border".

Case should be registered against culprits including CM in case of police attack on Sultanpur Lodhi Gurdwara: SGPC

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

In the special meeting of members of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) held today, a resolution was passed in the case of police entering Gurdwara Sri Akal Bunga Sahib Sultanpur Lodhi with shoes, firing, throwing tear gas shells and violation of Maryada (conduct), and it was said that

a case should be registered under Section 295A IPC against all the accused persons including Chief Minister (CM) of Punjab Bhagwant Mann and the CM should immediately resign from his post as he is guilty of religious conduct. In this meeting held at Teja Singh Samundari Hall located in the SGPC complex, several SGPC members in their addresses strongly condemned the police attack on Gurdwara Akal Bunga Sahib of Sultanpur Lodhi and asked for a strict action into this incident on the basis of the report of sub-committee formed on the orders of Sri Akal Takht Sahib besides approving this report also.



Health experts hail plan to set up more medical colleges, boost vaccination for girls



FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Healthcare experts on Thursday gave a thumbs up to the Centre's plan to set up more medical colleges by utilising the existing hospital infrastructure, with some saying the move demonstrates a "holistic commitment" to health. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while presenting the interim Union Budget for 2024-2025 on Thursday, among

other announcements, also said the government will encourage vaccination for girls in the 9-14 year age group for the prevention of cervical cancer. Serum Institute of India (SII) CEO Adar Poonawalla hailed the government's announcement. "I applaud the announcement to vaccinate girls aged 9-14 against cervical cancer. Let's pledge to prevent HPV (Human Papillomavirus) and ensure easy access to vaccination. Extending health cover for ASHA

and anganwadi workers, setting up more medical colleges and streamlining maternal and child healthcare schemes demonstrate a holistic commitment to health," he wrote in a post on X. Other medical experts said creation of more medical colleges in the country is "crucial". Sitharaman in her address said several youths are ambitious to get qualified as doctors and they aim to serve the people through improved healthcare services. "Our government plans to set up more medical colleges by utilising the existing hospital infrastructure under various departments. A committee for this purpose will be set up to examine the issues and make relevant recommendations," she said. She further announced the extension of healthcare cover under Ayushman Bharat insurance scheme to all ASHA and anganwadi workers and helpers.

Sarna stresses urgent need to resume trade with Pakistan to boost Punjab's economy

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Akali chief, Paramjit Singh Sarna, underscored the critical importance of reopening the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Attari, established in 2012, to reignite business routes and boost Punjab's beleaguered economy. Expressing the urgency, the Panthak leader highlighted the economic challenges faced by local businesses in Punjab since 2019, emphasizing that trade has been in suspension since the Pulwama attack. Welcoming Shiromani Akali Dal president Sukhbir Singh Badal's push for resuming bilateral commerce through Punjab's rail and road routes, Sarna stated, "There's a pressing need to restart trade." India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, he noted, annually engaged in over Rs 8,000 crore worth of business since



2012, following the inauguration of the ICP's modern port. Observing Amritsar's strategic location with three international gateways - road, rail, and air connectivity - the Delhi Akali chief emphasized the immense potential for trade through roads connecting Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and extending to Central Asian countries. Recalling the ICP's primary aim to connect India not

only to its western neighbours but also to high trading zones like Iran, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and beyond, Sarna said, "If all these links - air, road, and rail - are explored, it could trigger and rejuvenate the economy, not only for Punjab but for the entire country." He advocated for not only the reopening of the Attari-Wagah border but also urged for bilateral trade through the Hussainiwala border, located 11 km from Ferozepur. "Throwing open both borders would be a significant stride towards fostering economic growth and collaboration between India and Pakistan," Sarna said.

PM Modi to lay foundation for NLC India's 2,400 MW Odisha power project

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday will be laying the foundation stone for the first phase of the 3,200 MW pit head green field thermal power project in Odisha being built by the integrated lignite/coal mining and power generation company NLC India Ltd, said a top company official. He also said the company plans a capital expenditure of about Rs 40,000 crore next fiscal and the lignite to methanol project is expected to be operational in 2027-28 and would produce 1,200 tonnes per day. Speaking to reporters, Prasanna Kumar Motupalli, Chairman and Managing Director (CMD) said the first phase will be 2,400 MW (3x800 MW) for which PM Modi will be laying the foundation stone. The second phase - 800 MW - plant will come up later. The power project will be at Jharsuguda District in Odisha



based on Ultra Super Critical Technology. Motupalli said the first phase will go on stream in 2028-29. According to Motupalli, the total outlay for both the phases will be over Rs 35,000 crore and for the first phase it will be about Rs 27,200 crore. As regards the funding, he said it will be a mix of debt, internal accruals and amount raised from asset monetization. NLC India will be raising about Rs 5,000 crore by transferring about 1.4 GW of renewable power capacity to its renewable energy subsidiary.

Punjab CM Mann flays SAD for Punjab Bachao Yatra, It is SAD that ruined Punjab

FW DESK

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Thursday handed over 518 more job letters for the government jobs to the youth in the department of Education, Higher Education, Finance, GAD, Cooperation, Power and others.

Addressing the gathering during a function to handover the appointment letters to the youth, the Chief Minister said that the state government fills all the posts as soon as they are vacant in the department. He said that a foolproof mechanism has been adopted for the entire recruitment process due to which not even a single appointment out of these more than 40,000 have been challenged so far in any court. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that it is a proud moment for the government of Punjab that these youth have



been given government jobs completely on the basis of merit.

Taking a jibe over the Punjab Bachao yatra of Akali Dal, the Chief Minister dared the Akali leaders to explain that after looting the state for 15 years, from whom they are trying to save the state from. He said that

Akalis have plundered the state mercilessly besides bruising the psyche of Punjabis emotionally and patronising several mafias in the state. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that people are well aware of the dubious character of the Akalis and Badal family due to which their theatricals

won't work now.

The Chief Minister said that he had vehemently raised voice against the illegal travel agents during his stint as MP adding that ever since assuming charge his government has adopted a zero tolerance policy against illegal travel agents who dupe the people and carry on human trafficking. He said that apart from taking exemplary action against such travel agents the state government has also started a major awareness drive to make the people aware about these dubious travel agents. Bhagwant Singh Mann also said that necessary amendments have also been made in the Immigration Act to ensure severest of severe action against such travel agents.

Punjab Chief Minister also exhorted the youth of the state to exercise restraint and not get swayed away by the mislead-

ing propaganda by the divisive forces. He said that these anti-Punjab want to derail the development and progress of the state due to which they are spreading venom in the state. However, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the wise youth of the state will not prey to such an agenda and they will give a befitting answer to them.

CM said that the sole aim of giving jobs is to ensure that the youth of the state become an active partner in the social economic growth of the state and don't fall in clutches of the illegal travel agents. He said that this venue has witnessed a number of such events in which youth have got jobs in various government departments. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this reflects the commitment of the state government to ensure the well being of youth and opening new avenues of employment for them.

Are people in Amritsar ready for the 'outsider' BJP's candidate Again?



JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

With the upcoming 2024-Lok Sabha polls drawing nearer, the Bharatiya Janata Party candidates are flexing muscles for the party tickets. The party has not opened its cards so far as it is weighing many options as the local mood is that the party candidate must be a local face. The party has faced defeats thrice in the last parliamentary polls and is considering all possibilities while there is a general talk of some 'outsider' or paratrooper testing the polls waters, though there are a number of local party candidates' names doing the rounds too.

The general perception in Amritsar parliamentary constituency is that people want a local face. The outsider including the former late Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had faced defeat in Lok Sabha polls and present Union Minister Hardeep Puri was another popular face who had witnessed elections debacle in 2019.

The perception is that the party must bank upon the local face as had been the practice with the Congress or other opposition parties. People want a candidate who is accessible to the public and approachable as the outsider hardly un-

derstand and know the local issues. "We have seen many outsiders who were unsuccessful in the past. We want the person who is deep rooted locally and can find solutions to peoples' woes", said a local activist.

Amritsar constituency was once represented by Navjot Singh Sidhu in Lok Sabha from 2004 to 2014 when he was in BJP and his candidature was changed and Jaitley unsuccessfully contested the seat. If we take a peep into history, the Amritsar constituency has been won by the Congress largely.

In 1966 when the state of Punjab was re-organized after carving out Himachal and Haryana, Akali leader Bikram Majithia's grandfather Surjit Singh Majithia won from Congress ticket and became Minister in the Nehru government. The seat was represented by Durga Das Bhatia and then by his younger brother RL Bhatia who represented the seat five times.

It was in 1977 that Janata Party's Baldev Parkash won the seat with Akalis' help. Congress RL Bhatia won the seat in 1980 and repeated the victory in 1984 but he was defeated by Janata Party's Kirpal Singh in 1989. All these top leaders were local voice and Amritsar emerged as prominent voice in the arena of politics.

Punjab police arrest two 'big fish' among five drug smugglers from Amritsar; 3kg heroin, Rs.5.25 lakh drug money recovered



JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

Punjab Police have arrested two absconding brothers—considered as big fish in drug trade—along with their three accomplices after recovering 3Kg heroin and Rs.5.25 lakh drug money from their possession, said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav on Tuesday.

Duo arrested 'drug big fish' have been identified as Manjit Singh alias Manna and Lavjit Singh alias Lav alias Labh, both residents of Guru ki Wadali Chheharta in Amritsar, while, their three accomplices have been identified as Kans Kaur of Chheharta in Amritsar, Harmanjit Singh alias Harman and Manpreet Singh alias Manna, residents of village Dhun Dhahawal in Tarn Taran. Apart from recovering heroin and drug money, Police teams have also impounded their three cars including Toyota Fortuner, Hyundai i20 and Renault Pulse and one Splendour motorcycle, besides, seizing an electronic weighing scale from their possession. DGP Gaurav Yadav in a statement issued said that both Lavjit alias Lav and Manjit alias Manna, who were absconding since 2015, had a dozen of cases registered against them under the NDPS Act.

Union Budget will prove to be a milestone in the development of India with the Vision of Developed India-2047: Vj

AMBALA: Haryana Home Minister Anil Vj said that the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman ji will be a stepping stone in the direction of developed India. This budget focuses on comprehensive development in all categories and sectors with the fundamental principles of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas'. Vj mentioned that the budget pays attention to the Vision of Developed India-2047, with a focus on all stakeholders. He stated that the goal of the Lakhpati Didi Yojana is being increased from 2 crore to 3 crore, as this scheme has brought about a significant change in the lives of 9 crore women.

Similarly, He said that steps are being taken in the direction of preventing cervical cancer, increasing vaccination in this regard, and the government will open new medical colleges. Vj said that in today's budget, the government is working with an approach to development that is all-round, all-pervasive and all-inclusive and in the next five years, two crore new houses will be built in rural areas.

Irregularities in govt hospitals of Haryana, nearly 60 doctors on health dept radar

SATISH HANDA

The state Health Department has initiated investigations into public, patients complaints against medical officers in hospitals in various districts in the state on the charges of misbehaviour with patients, referring them to private hospitals and laboratories, prescribing medicines from outside instead of supplying free of cost in the hospital and demanding money for issuing medico-legal reports (MLRs). Information reveals that nearly 60 doctors working in government hospitals are already facing investigation against them and are on state health department radar. The office of the Director General of Health Services Panchkula has written a letter to all civil surgeons to conduct an inquiry into the complaints and submit a report to the head office within couple of days.



Information reveals, a scam of issuing MLRs by doctor had come to light in 2010, following the expose the Hisar police had instituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) which detected nearly 100 suspected cases which were referred for medical opinion to the PGIMS Rohtak, of these as many as 46 MLRs were suspected, subsequently few medical officers were dismissed from service. Information also

revealed, among those doctors included the names of initially 45 medical officers working in Bhiwani, Charkhi Dabri, Hisar, Kaithal, Panchkula and Sonapat government hospitals facing inquiry for inappropriate behaviour, 12 have reportedly been referring patients to private hospitals. Among them, three doctors from Mahendragarh district, two each from Palwal and Charkhi Dabri, and one each from Fatehabad, Ambala, Gurugram, Hisar and Panipat. Four medical officers, two in Palwal district and one each in Jind district and Hathin Community Health Centre were found allegedly taking money to issue MLRs.

Electricity bills for nearly Rs 269 crore in Haryana pending against govt depts

SATISH HANDA

According to the state electricity department in Haryana, a large number of government departments in the state are defaulters in making payment for their electricity bills and an amount worth over Rs 268 crore is pending against the government departments in the state at present and in-spite of repeated reminders they are not making payment of their electricity bills. According to a spokesperson of the department, there are 12421 government connections in the state who have not deposited



amount of electricity bills since past many years in-spite of repeated reminders, which include large number of electricity bills belonging to municipality offices in the state defaulters for the amount worth Rs 268 crore 54 lakh 63 thousand. He

said that 2008 government power connections failed to deposit the amount of their electricity bills in-spite of repeated reminders have been disconnected in the past and now has been taken to disconnect power connections of all defaulters in the state.

Information as regard defaulters from various districts in the state has been specified as Rs 1457 lakh pending against 598 defaulter electricity connections in Faridabad, Rs 3196 lakh pending against 837 defaulters in Palwal Rs 1389 lakh pending against 628 defaulters in Gurugram-1, Rs 696 lakh pending

against 637 defaulters in Gurugram-2, Rs 6785 lakh pending against 2308 defaulters in Narnaul, Rs 2788 lakh pending against 888 defaulters in Rewari, Rs 6958 lakh pending against 2270 defaulters in Bhiwani, Rs 7460 lakh pending against 854 ain Hisar, 399 lakh pending against 437 defaulters in Fatehabad, Rs 1527 lakh pending against 1173 defaulters in Sirsa, Rs 1201 lakh pending against 7940 defaulters in Jind and Rs 26832 lakh pending against 12421 DHBVM defaulters against those action to disconnect their power connections in under the process.

Punjab's FinMin felicitates young entrepreneur Shrey Jain

KULBIR SINGH KALSJI Chandigarh

Shrey Jain, Founder, Experience Entertainment, has been felicitated by Harpal Singh Cheema, Finance Minister, Punjab with the coveted 'Living Legend & Corporate Excellence Award 2024'. He was given the award in the 'Event Management' category for taking the event management industry in the region to a new level.

After receiving the honour Shrey Jain said, "I give all credit for this recognition to



my team who have displayed ingenuity and creativity to orchestrate some of the tricity's most memorable events that have captivated the masses. We specialise in creating unique event properties that are unconventional and full of innovation."

It is noteworthy that Shrey's dynamic leadership helped Experience Entertainment successfully organise the Bangr Festival - a Music and Lifestyle event recently. The festival was a resounding hit with music lovers as over 2 days a record 15,000 people converged at the extravaganza.

It is to be noted that with Shrey's vision and efforts Experience Entertainment, has created an event property - The Bangr Festival which is now North India's biggest music and lifestyle festival.

Pragmatic and focussed on long term nation building: Jakhar credits pm modi's leadership for choosing prudence over political temptation



Says budget reflects trust of 140-crore Indians in pm's record of development and growth-centric leadership since 2014

KULBIR SINGH KALSJI Chandigarh

Lauding the interim budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as an exercise in fiscal prudence and pragmatism focussed on nation building, the Punjab State BJP President Sunil Jakhar on Thursday said that trust of 140-crore Indians in PM Modi's long-term vision of a resilient India is reflected in the document. "By avoiding the strong political temptation of announcing doles in an election year, the Prime Minister has once again shown the courage of conviction in BJP's unmatched record of inclusive development and growth in the last 10 years. Young India today knows the significance of the country's rise in the last decade which has only happened through the full realisation of our capabilities, Jakhar said adding every Indian today wants development to happen unhindered.

PM's foresight has shown a way forward and Bhagwant Mann dispensation must learn from it and immediately stop splurging public funds on doles. Till December 2023, this state government has already taken over 60,000 Crores of debt in name of so called development on paper. Every day, Rs. 100 Crore is added to Punjab's debt on average, Jakhar said stressing that badlaav has been very painful for Punjab.

Welcoming the leaders into the party, Jakhar said several of more leaders are waiting to join BJP in Punjab as they all are worried at present downlodging of our state under AAP. Incumbent Zila Parishad Vice-chairman Fazilka Kirna Rani, alongwith dozens of former Congress Sarpanches were ushered into the party fold.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented Interim Budget today, her sixth in a row - five annual Budgets and one interim — a feat achieved so far only by former Prime Minister Morarji Desai.

Kurukshetra University scientists research to prepare organic compound to destroy cancer cells in human body

SATISH HANDA

Haryana has sanctioned six research projects with a budget of Rs 1 crore, which include two projects for early detection and treatment of cancer disease. The budget will be further increased so that quality research could be carried out. Under the Research and Development scheme, Rs 20 lakh is sanctioned to the scientists also working as professors of education or research institute in Kurukshetra University for carrying out research in the field of science and technology, said Ashok Khemka, Principal Secretary Science & Technology department. He said that the six research projects sanctioned include one each for treatment of cancer, development of hybrid perovskite based energy harvesters for small area devices, wastewa-



ter remediation, early cancer detection technique, detection of prompne Viral Pathogene Using Next Generation Sequencing Technology and production of bioethanol from Parthenium: Parthenium hysterophorus, which is also known as congress grass and is one of the world's most devastating weeds.

Dr Jitender Bhardwaj, while talking to media persons said that after a research work an organic compound has been prepared which will attack cancer cells being spread in the body and patent in this regard has been obtained to manufacture medicine capable to combat the disease leaving no effect on other cells in the body, since the compound



stops formation of new cells as well as control spreading cancer cells in the body. Scientist Pavan Sharma working on this project since past over a year said that since patent has been sought and ready for the human trial when manufacturing of anti-cancer drug Ampotosis (programmed cell death) will commence soon, which would not only stop formation of new cancer cells but also control growth of existing cancer cells in the body, presently being treated by Kemo-therapy and radio-therapy. He said, during the initial trial good results have been obtained.

North India Lawyers Conference on "Work-Life Balance in the Legal Profession"

KULBIR SINGH KALSJI Chandigarh

The North India Lawyers Conference on "Work-Life Balance in the Legal Profession: A Gendered Perspective", which took place at Chandigarh Judicial Academy, Sector - 43, Chandigarh on 27.01.2024, with Hon'ble Justice Surya Kant, Judge, Supreme Court of India as Chief Guest. The Conference started by the lightning of the lamp.

The event's highlight was the release of the first edition of the magazine "Zubaan" (Dr. Kanu Sharma, editor-in-chief) by Hon'ble Justice Surya Kant. The Conference was conducted by the Punjab and Haryana Federation of Women Lawyers under the



guidance of Ritu Punj (President) and Dr. Kanu Sharma (Secretary). This year's event drew hundreds of participants from across the country. The event featured keynote speakers Justice Manjari Nehru Kaul, Justice Alka Sarin, Justice Daya Chaudhary, Justice Rajesh Bhardwaj, Dr. Ameet Jain, Sheela Anish, Hem-

lata Mahishi, Indrani Patani and Shantha amongst others. Poornima Bhardwaj recited a poem on this occasion.

The event concluded with a cultural program featuring Giddha and Bhagra performed at the Punjab and Haryana High Court organised by the Punjab and Haryana High Court Bar Association.

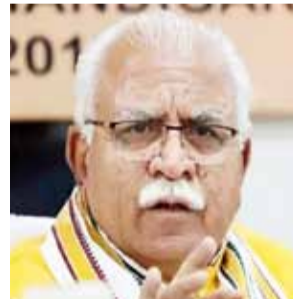
Haryana government to seize properties, up to 10-year jail for fake immigration agents & human trafficking

SATISH HANDA

Registration and Regulation of Travel Agents Bill, 2024 is likely to be passed in upcoming assembly session in Haryana, the Cabinet on Tuesday approved the same to keep a check on unscrupulous cheat agents involved in cheating people into illegal migration. An official spokesperson said that in view of the youths willing to settle abroad being cheated by individuals, particularly from Punjab and Haryana, being deceived by corrupt travel agents involved in fraudulent activities related to immigration, the state government has decided to enact a law.

The spokesperson said as per the Bill, no person can undertake the profession of a travel agent without obtaining a registration certificate under the law, an application must be submitted to the competent authority with the required documents, fees, and within the specified time and the competent authority will issue a registration certificate after verifying the application details. As per the Bill which will be produced in the state assembly, the certificate will not be issued unless the particulars are verified by the police. The validity of a registration certificate will be for three years, renewable as per prescribed procedures. and in case of opening a new office or branch would require obtaining a fresh registration certificate.

The spokesperson said that the competent authority can cancel a registration certificate



for various reasons such as insolvency, criminal activities, violation of terms and the accused will have to suffer jail for a period of 10 years as well as their properties will be seized by the government. He said that an SIT was constituted on the order of Home Minister Anil Vj which trapped hundreds of fake travel agents and immigrarton agents in its net and cases were registered against them as such a large number of such cheats have been pushed behind bars in the past about a year.

Information reveals that before cancellation, a show-cause notice will be issued and the travel agent will be afforded an opportunity to explain. The suspension may occur for a specified period pending cancellation consideration and a cancelled registration would debar the travel agent from the profession for a prescribed period. The spokesperson said that individuals involved in human smuggling or forging documents may face imprisonment up to 10 years and a fine ranging from Rs 2-5 lakhs. Violating the provisions of the proposed Act or using prohibited devices may result in imprisonment up to seven to 10 years and a fine of 2-5 lakh rupees.

Health department tem Ambala busted Gender test racket



SATISH HANDA

Team of Health Department Ambala comprising PNDD Act nodal officer Dr Balwinder Kaur, Dr Hitarth, Dr Vipin Bhandari, Lalit Jindal and Devender Hooda raided a registered ultrasound centre opposite the Ambala Cantonment Sadar Municipal Council during raid busted an alleged pre-natal sex determination racket and arrested a tout tout, Manoj a Class IV employee of the Civil Hospital, Ambala City., whereas his accomplice another tout identified as Kumar an employee of a private hospital, who managed to escape.

Dr Hitarth said, following a tip-off that a Class IV employee of the Civil Hospital, Ambala City and another former Class IV employee of the hospital are involved in running the racket to determine sex of unborn child in pregnant, a decoy was arranged and deal was finalized at Rs 45,000. The sex determination test was conducted at the centre. After getting a signal, a raid was conducted by the health department team at the ultrasound centre.

Manoj was nabbed, whereas his accomplice another tout managed to escape. Efforts are being made to trace absconding tout. Information reveals that his job was terminated due to similar complaints against him in the past also. A complaint has been registered at the police station in this connection.

Governance, Development, Performance is govt's 'GDP' mantra for growth: Sitharaman

NEW DELHI: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said that Governance, Development and Performance is the new 'GDP' formula that the government has adopted to steer the country to a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India).

Addressing a post-budget press conference, the Finance Minister said that the Governance was evident in the way that the government had managed and steered the economy and the Development was reflected in the better standard of living of the people with average income having gone up by 50 per cent.

The Performance of the government could also be seen in the fact that the economy had been growing at over 7



per cent for three consecutive years and inflation in the country had come down. She also highlighted the fact that the government had cleaned up

the banking system which was earlier carrying a huge burden of non-performance assets or bad loans that had led to losses. She pointed out that the

government had succeeded through proper management of its finances to bring down the fiscal deficit to 5.8 per cent of GDP which was even lower than the targeted level of 5.9 per cent for 2023-24. Now with the fiscal deficit target having been fixed at 5.1 per cent the country was well on its way to achieve the glide path of a fiscal deficit at 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26.

She pointed out that the allocation of Rs 11.11 lakh crore for capital expenditure on big infrastructure projects has gone up 11 per cent on a high base and the private sector was also stepping up investment which would lead to an acceleration in the country's economic growth.

She also said that the budget-making process has been made completely transparent as all

the figures pertaining to the economy were being released on a monthly basis.

She also highlighted that Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) had emerged as factor of production that was contributing to the efficiency of the economy and leading to a higher growth. Sitharaman further said that the government would be coming out with a White Paper on the performance of the economy in the last 10 years and its comparison with the country's economic performance with the 10 years before that.

In answer to a question, the Finance Minister said that the rating agencies should take on board that the fiscal consolidation that had been achieved was even better than the prudence level that was targeted.

Jamaat-e-Islami Hind expresses concern over misleading campaign regarding Gyanwapi Masjid

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Vice-President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), Malik Moatasim Khan has expressed concern over the misleading campaign regarding Gyanwapi Masjid.

In a statement to the media, Malik Moatasim Khan said, "We are concerned over certain sectarian and mischievous people orchestrating a misleading campaign regarding the Gyanwapi Masjid. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) report is being misinterpreted and circulated with the express intent of misleading the public, influencing the judiciary, and spoiling the communal harmony in the country by creating a rift between two religious communities. Jamaat-e-Islami Hind believes that the ASI report does not constitute conclusive evidence in this controversial matter."

The JIH Vice President said, "We wish to emphasize the need to abide by the 'Places of Worship Act 1991' in letter and spirit. The Act provides a guarantee for the preservation of the religious character of places of public worship as they existed on August 15, 1947. Staking claim to the places of worship belonging to other religious communities based on 'Aastha' or the alleged presence of another pre-existing religious structure will open a Pandora's box of claims and counter-claims. For example, Buddhists claim more than 84,000 Buddhist viharas, stupas, and statues were demolished by Hindu kings. Jains claim that thousands of Jain mandirs have been converted to Hindu mandirs and almost all the popular Hindu pilgrimage places were once upon a time Jain mandirs."



character of places of public worship as they existed on August 15, 1947. Staking claim to the places of worship belonging to other religious communities based on 'Aastha' or the alleged presence of another pre-existing religious structure will open a Pandora's box of claims and counter-claims. For example, Buddhists claim more than 84,000 Buddhist viharas, stupas, and statues were demolished by Hindu kings. Jains claim that thousands of Jain mandirs have been converted to Hindu mandirs and almost all the popular Hindu pilgrimage places were once upon a time Jain mandirs.

No stone pelting incidents in J&K in 2023: Amit Shah

FW DESK

Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Wednesday that the Narendra Modi government has successfully rebuilt Jammu and Kashmir, putting an end to an era of terrorism and violence while fostering development through extensive infrastructure and welfare initiatives. In a series of posts on X in both English and Hindi, accompanied by the #Pragatish-e-JammuKashmir hashtag, Shah highlighted the transformative efforts of Prime Minister Modi in instilling new hope among the youth of Jammu and Kashmir.

"The Modi government rebuilt Jammu and Kashmir, ending an era of terrorism and violence. The Modi government gave wings to the development of Jammu and Kashmir by rolling out massive infrastructure and welfare schemes, and today it stands as a proud testimony to Bharat's powerful democracy," Shah asserted. He emphasized the rejuvenation of the cultural heritage of



Jammu and Kashmir under the Modi government, stating that the Union Territory's ancient and rich cultural legacy is being revived, contributing to an increase in cultural pride.

Shah alleged that the region had been hindered in its development due to dynastic politics, asserting that the Modi government has strengthened the Panchayati Raj system to provide grassroots-level development, breaking free from dynasty-driven governance.

"Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi ji, Jammu and Kashmir is now heaving a sigh of relief. After abolishing Article 370, the Modi government has secured the dignity of life in the Valley by crushing terrorism with a zero-tolerance policy," Shah stated.

Nitin Gadkari rolls out highway projects worth Rs 2,367 crore in MP

NEW DELHI: Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of nine national highway projects worth Rs 2,367 crore covering a total length of 225 km in Madhya Pradesh's Jabalpur district. He said that the projects that were inaugurated include a 1.5 km long bridge on Jamni river in Tikamgarh-Jhansi road at a cost of Rs 43



crore. "This will make it easier to reach Orchha, the tourist destination of Rajaram's temple," the minister said.

He said that the construction of a road with a 2-lane paved shoulder from Chandi Ghat to Katni Bypass will bring a qualitative change in connectivity to the coal mines of Katni while widening of Bamitha-Khajuraho road will strengthen tourism in Khajuraho.

Budget-2024: The speech is 56 minutes and 10 seconds, the 'real' talk is 6 minutes, the budget is over before 12 o'clock!

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

The speech is 56 minutes and 10 seconds, the 'real' talk is actually 6 minutes, the budget is over before 12 o'clock! At the very end, it's only 6 minutes. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman reserved 360 seconds for the 'real' speech of the budget in her 56 minutes and 10 seconds speech. The rest is a description of what the central government has done in the last ten years, and how successful it has been in some areas. Although the future thoughts of the central government were mixed in the speech, no project name or allocation was heard separately for it. Instead, like Modi, Nirmala's mouth repeatedly used the words «Bikshit Bharat», «Amritkab», «Atmanirhar Bharat».

There is no change in income tax. There is no discussion on the essential goods price-rise. Nirmala said, «There is no change in the tax structure. What was earlier is existing now as it is. The new government



will announce the changes in the general budget in July or August.» Along with that, how much the number of tax payers has increased during the Modi era is also checked.

He has made one or two announcements, but no clear «direction» has been spoken. Talks about advancing women self-help groups, but did not give details about it. Talked about the initiative to give antidote to «cervical cancer» to girls aged 9 to 14 years. But she did not say anything about when it will start.

Talked about plans for tourism but did not mention any financial allocation for it.

However, many say that details cannot be given in the interim budget. That «obligation» was Nirmala's. But whatever the reason, much of Nirmala's budget speech was a travesty. It has also done campaign work before the Lok Sabha elections.

It has been seen in the past few years that Finance Minister Nirmala has reduced the budget speech time. Without reading all, she presented the rest of the documents saying the main points. This is what Nirmala Sitharaman does in the general budget. Thursday was the interim budget ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. She did not take even an hour.

Republic Day Parade 2024: Best marching contingents and tableaux awarded

NEW DELHI: Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt on Tuesday gave away the best marching contingents and tableaux awards for the Republic Day Parade. He announced separate results, one by a panel of judges and the other through an online public vote conducted by MyGov.

Three panels of judges were appointed to assess the performance of Marching Contingents from three Services, Marching Contingents from Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF)/ other auxiliary forces, and tableaux from various States/Union Territories and Ministries/Departments.

Odisha was adjudged the best state/ union territory (UT) tableau by a panel of judges whereas Sikh Regiment Contingent as best marching contingent among the three services, and Delhi Police Women Contingent named best marching contingent among Central Armed Police Forces (other auxiliary forces in both categories), an Ministry of Defence (MoD) official said. The MoD in a statement added that best states/UTs



tableau award was given to Odisha's Woman Empowerment in Viksit Bharat, followed by Gujarat (Dhordo: A Global Icon of Gujarat's Border Tourism) and Tamil Nadu (Kudavolai System in ancient Tamil Nadu -- Mother of Democracy).

Congress seeks donation for Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra generated Rs 20 cr so far



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress today announced that it has included the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in its crowd funding scheme. It got such a tumultuous response that in the first two hours, the party generated Rs 2 crores in first two hours.

Addressing a press conference in New Delhi, Congress treasurer Ajay Maken along with General secretary in charge communications Jairam Ramesh and co-treasurer Vijay Indir Singla said that party was seeking donation corresponding to the number of 6,700 kilometres of the Nyay Yatra that Rahul Gandhi is going through right now.

Nitish Kumar takes oath as Bihar CM for 9th time



PATNA: Janata Dal-United (JD-U) leader Nitish Kumar on Sunday was sworn-in as Chief Minister of Bihar for the ninth time -- hours after he dissolved his Cabinet by walking out of the 'Mahagathbandhan' to once again join hands with the BJP.

Bihar Governor Rajendra Arlekar administered the oath of office to Nitish Kumar during the swearing-in ceremony as the Raj Bhavan here.

Bihar unit BJP chief Samrat Chaudhary, and Vijay Kumar Sinha were named Deputy Chief Ministers.

Soon after these three leaders took oath in Raj Bhavan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated them on 'X'. "I want to congratulate Nitish Kumar for becoming the chief minister, and Samrat Chaudhary and Vijay Sinha for becoming deputy chief ministers of Bihar," PM Modi said.

Will Delhi face Farmers' Gherao again?



JAG MOHAN THAKREN

Riding on the tractor and echoing slogans with firm voice on the roads of nearly all district headquarters of the country, the farmers are again on stir path to pressurize the BJP government for getting their demands fulfilled in consonance with the directions of their top body- Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM).

SKM claimed at the end of Republic Day that Parades were held in 484 districts of 27 states and Union Territories despite inclement weather, especially in North India, tens of thousands of tractors and other vehicles joined millions of farmers in the Parades.

These Parades were part of the second phase of the farmers' struggle in order to press the Union Government to implement its written assurances dated 9th December 2021 and other essential demands of farmers, including legalizing MSP @C2+50% with guaranteed procurement for all crops, comprehensive loan waiver for farmers and farm workers, stopping of the privatization of the electricity sector and installation of pre-paid meters, reducing cost of inputs, ensuring government controlled simple and universal crop insurance, dismissal and prosecution of the alleged main conspirator of the Lakhimpur Kheri massacre of farmers, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra Teni, and other demands.

The first phase of an historic successful stir of the farmers, wherein more than 700 farmers were stated to lose their life, run more than 13 months in 2020-2021, with a massive gherao of Delhi, which forced the central government to bow down and repeal the three agricultural laws.

Even the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi had to apologize, "While apologizing to the nation, I want to say with a



sincere and pure heart that may be something was lacking... that we could not explain the truth to some of our farmer brothers... we have decided to repeal the three farm laws."

What The Next?

The political analysts say that the U-turn, in 2021 by the PM Modi led government, was taken seeing the coming elections in several states, including the agricultural belt of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Now as the clouds of Lok Sabha general elections are hovering over, smelling the essence, the farmers seem to follow the strategy- 'Hitting the hot molds the pot.'

Are the farmers preparing the ground for the second gherao of central capital?

If we analyze the activities of the farmers' unions, the SKM's step-by-step actions indicate so. SKM has already given a call for Grameen Bharat Bandh on 16th February 2024, on which day trade unions have also given a call for Industrial/Sectoral Strike and SKM expects that rural India will come to a stand-still on that day. The SKM divulges that the struggle will be extended in the days to come to all the states and districts up to villages and will be further intensified till all the demands are met by the Modi Government.

Participants of the Parades took a Pledge to intensify the struggle against the pro-corporate, anti-farmer policies of the Modi Government and strengthen the secular and democratic character of the Republic of India, at any cost.

To connect farmers, youth, and workers with its agitational programs, SKM lays emphasis in its every meeting on the issues

related to these categories and flashes that corporatization of agriculture leading to the agrarian crisis has devastated the lives of farmers, workers, and the youth as well. SKM claims, "1,00,474 Indian farmers have committed suicide during the Modi years of 2014-2022. Though 14.64 lakh crore of debt of corporates were written off in the last nine years, not a single rupee of farmers debt has been waived. The withdrawal of subsidies for inputs and the uncontrolled price rise has escalated the cost of production in agriculture and day-to-day expenditure of the farmer households."

SKM reiterates that Narendra Modi is the most anti-farmer Prime Minister, India has ever had, who has betrayed the farmers and youth by violating the election promise of ensuring real MSP, loan waiver and 2 crore jobs every year.

Haryana based SKM leader Inderjeet Singh claimed that the unprecedented success of the tractor parades across the state is indicative of the deepening agrarian crisis because of the pro-corporate policies of state and central governments. He said that a nationwide strike will be observed on February 16 by trade unions supported by Gramin Bharat Bandh to press for the basic issues farmers and workers.

However, Com. Inderjeet Singh, interacting with the author of this analysis, says that after Grameen Bharat Bandh of 16th February, no further program has been chalked out yet, but the release statement of SKM on 26th January clears the mist- 'the struggle will be extended in the days to come to all the states and districts up to villages and will be further intensified till all the demands are met by the

Modi Government

Addressing a Kisan Maha panchayat on 18th January, the four-day national convention of the Bhartiya Kisan Union (BKU), held in Prayag Raj district of Uttar Pradesh, the National Spokesperson Chaudhary Rakesh Tikait indicated the next step, "We will hold tractor parade across the country on 26th January, Bharat Bandh on 16 February and Kisan Maha panchayat in Delhi on 14 March."

This statement of Tikait forecasts BKU's intention to march to Delhi. Will they organize a Maha panchayat only for one day? This seems somewhat suspicious, it may so happen that on the pretext of one day, farmers are going to Delhi again to fight a long battle.

Will the farmers succeed to get the Government bow down again?

Political parties generally want to divide the farmers and ignite their rows at the time of elections to ease up their vote fetching. But the BJP is not depending upon this village disputes angle only, it is trying its all weapons of Sam, Daam, Dand, Bhed (persuade, purchase, punish, and exploit the weakness.)

The Prime Minister is holding Video Conferencing with the farmers. To woo the Punjab farmers, P M Modi interacted with farmers of Gurdaspur on January 8, under Vikashit Bharat Sankalp Yatra program through VC and discussed about the benefits to the farmers through agricultural and other central schemes.

The Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar had also a get-together with the farmers of Haryana during his visits to the state and hosted their stay in Delhi. He tried to talk with them in Haryana dialect to show his proximity to the farmer community. Also, in an issue of mimicry by a member of Rajya Sabha, Dhankhar claimed himself a farmer and tried to divert the mimicry joke as an insult to the farmers and his caste community.

Despite the 2021 massive stir of the farmers, defying all pollsters and predictions, the BJP won an absolute majority in the forthcoming elections in U P, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh during 2022 and 2023.

Here arises the question -- if the farmers were so angry with the BJP, then how BJP got the thundering win?

Some political analysts conclude that the farmers remain farmers only till the agitation is going on, as soon as the stir calm down, they also forget that they are farmers, and they switch over to the factions as per their village feuds and they vote accordingly.

In just held Rajasthan assembly elections in November, 2023, the inference drawn by the analysts gets confirmed, wherein none of the farmer leaders, who had been ardently fighting for the rights and issues of the farmers, could win the elections. Here the farmers' unions will have to think over the issue -- 'Why the support bank of farmers does not convert into the vote bank?' Why they turn into the revengeful groups while voting? Why they forget that they are farmers first?

But this time, despite all odds, the farmers' unions have also tightened their belt to win this final round of wrestling and they have declared, "The Grameen Bandh will be extended to all the villages across the country. Even then, if the Narendra Modi Government does not meet the demands of farmers, the struggle will be intensified further."

However, to get to bow down the firm, strong and adamant BJP government does not seem to be an easy task, but the farmers' unions are also desirous of paying in the same hard coin. The next three months will show -- 'Who will back out or who will bow down'.

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

R. RAMAKUMAR EXPLORES WHY BUDGET LACKS PLAN FOR AGRICULTURAL GROWTH REVIVAL THROUGH POLICY, FISCAL SHIFTS

Budget: Fiscal prudence or growth sacrifice?

In her sixth consecutive Budget speech, India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman delivered what felt like a pre-election, self-praising summary of the economic strides made under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership since 2014. She highlighted overcoming 'enormous challenges' through 'structural reforms, pro-people programmes,' and creating employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, attributing a reinvigorated economy to the broader reach of development benefits, instilling hope and securing a larger mandate in the past elections. Rather than focusing on specific voter demographics with targeted announcements, Sitharaman opted to emphasize the government's dedication to 'an inclusive and sustainable policy approach.' This approach purportedly achieved a 'comprehensive GDP' of governance, development, and performance, underlining a confidence in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government's return to power and casually mentioning plans for a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, based on an anticipated 'resounding' electoral victory.

The Budget plans continue on the path of fiscal consolidation, with a slight improvement in the fiscal deficit as a percentage of GDP and a significant cut in effective capital expenditure. For the fiscal year 2024-25, Sitharaman envisions a tighter fiscal deficit, supported by a projected increase in revenue receipts, despite a more modest rise in capital expenditure than in previous years. While boasting a tripling in capital spending outlays and their impact on growth and employment, the Budget quietly underplays the reduced pace of increase in capital spending next year. However, the Budget's focus on fiscal prudence amidst the slowest growth in private consumption spending since the pandemic raises concerns about potential risks to economic momentum. The overshadowing challenge remains the growing specter of rising inequality, a critical issue that demands urgent attention if the government wishes to truly fulfill its promises of inclusive and sustainable development.

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There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.

COLIN POWELL

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R. RAMAKUMAR EXPLORES WHY BUDGET LACKS PLAN FOR AGRICULTURAL GROWTH REVIVAL THROUGH POLICY, FISCAL SHIFTS

Agriculture sector remains in distress

The report released by the Finance Ministry and the vote-on-account presented by the Finance Minister are concerned more about portraying a glowing image of the government than about the financing plans for 2024-25. For the same reason, one is constrained to confine the discussion on the Budget to one question: was the distress in agriculture over the past decade alleviated by policy, or has it been exacerbated?

All official data appear to indicate the latter. First, there was a strong downward pull on agricultural prices leading to a squeeze on farmers' incomes. The sectoral deflator in agriculture and allied sectors — estimated as the difference in the growth rates of gross value added in current and constant prices — declined from 9.4 in 2013-14 to 5.0 in 2019-20 and 3.7 in 2023-24.

Second, the stagnation or fall of agricultural prices in the market was not ameliorated by any rise in minimum support prices (MSP). For major foodgrain crops, the MSPs rose by an average of 8-9% per annum between 2003-04 and 2012-13, but only by about 5% between 2013-14 and 2023-24. The refusal to adequately raise MSPs affected the government's ability to intervene effectively in the market to control prices — on the farmers' side as well as on the retail side.

Third, a promise was made that real incomes of farmers would be doubled between 2015 and 2022. But the issue appears to have disappeared from policy and media discourse in recent years. In fact, real incomes of agricultural households from cultivation fell by about 1.4% between 2012-13 and 2018-19. The fall of incomes from cultivation was not only owing to the stagnation or fall of agricultural prices, but also due to a sharp rise in the costs of inputs in agriculture, particularly fertilizers.



Fourth, rural unemployment rose between 2011-12 and 2018-19. For rural men, the rise was from 1.7% to 5.6%. For rural women, the rise was from 1.7% to 3.5%. Rural unemployment rates fell after 2018-19 but their levels remained higher than in 2011-12 in 2022-23: at 2.8% for men and 1.8% for women. More importantly, the fall of rural unemployment was accompanied by a rise in the share of self-employed women among all women workers. And most of this rise in the rural areas was in agriculture. In short, there was a crowding of the agricultural sector by unemployed workers from the non-agricultural sectors at a time when agricultural prices were not rising and agricultural incomes were falling.

Fifth, real wages in rural India have never risen after 2016-17 and have even fallen after 2020-21 — particularly in the context of the crowding of the agricultural labour market. These trends have been true for agricultural wages and non-agricultural wages in the rural areas. All rises in nominal wages were wiped out by inflation.

Finally, public investment in agriculture, in general as well as in specific fields like agricultural research and extension, were stubbornly stagnant, and occasionally even fell, over the past decade. Consequently, capital investment in agricultural and allied sectors did not rise. Most of the long-term bank credit supplied to agriculture was also diverted away as short-term loans to corporates and agri-business firms.

It is thus clear that incomes and profitability in rural India were under severe stress across the two terms of the Union government.

Painting a rosy picture

Yet, the Finance Ministry's report and the Budget speech attempt to paint a totally different picture. They cherry-pick and cite absolute numbers on the increases in agricultural production. But they ignore the fact that the index numbers of production of all principal crops grew by 3.1% annually between 2003-04 and 2010-11, but only by 2.7% annually between 2011-12 and 2022-23. If we consider the index

numbers of yield, the fall was sharper: from 3.3% per year to 1.6% per year. In short, the fortuitous spurt of agricultural growth during the pandemic years was inadequate to reverse the long-term decline of agricultural growth beginning from the early-2010s.

The Budget Estimates for 2024-25 also do not inspire confidence. There is no plan in the Budget to substantively reverse the decline of growth in agriculture — either through welfare measures or through investment measures.

In 2024-25, the most important heads and flagship schemes in agriculture and allied sectors are to face a spending cut. Fertilizer subsidies are to fall from Rs 1.9 lakh crore in 2023-24 to Rs 1.6 lakh crore in 2024-25. Food subsidies are to fall from Rs 2.1 lakh crore in 2023-24 to Rs 2 lakh crore in 2024-25. The allocation for the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana is to decline from Rs 17,000 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 12,000 crore in 2024-25. If Rs 90,000 crore was the spending under MGNREGS in 2022-23, the allocation for 2024-25 is only Rs 86,000 crore. The transfers under the PM-Kisan scheme remain the same as during its inception in 2019, implying a fall in the real value of cash transfers.

There was much mention in the Budget speech on blue revolution in the fisheries sector, but the budgeted allocation for the sector has been increased by only Rs 134 crore. The budgeted allocation for the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying has increased only by Rs 193 crore between 2023-24 and 2024-25.

The revival of agricultural growth from its long-term slump requires imaginative policy shifts and decisive fiscal measures. But the interim Budget provides no indications of such a plan or even intent.

R. Ramakumar teaches at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Views are personal.



VIVEK KATJU EXPLORES WHY THE GOVERNOR OF TAMIL NADU SHOULD REFRAIN FROM PUBLIC OPINION AIRING

What is needed from a Governor is reticence

The Tamil Nadu Governor, R.N. Ravi, has recently been in the news for the wrong reason. Instead of confining himself to his role which requires that Governors steer clear of controversies, especially those unconnected with their constitutional duties, Ravi has waded into the minefield of interpretation of historical events which led to India's Independence. Even a Governor with a background of historical studies should avoid this. But Ravi was a student of physics who joined the Indian Police Service and spent long years in the Intelligence Bureau (IB). He has obviously felt that he had the expertise to publicly express his opinions on an important period of Indian history.

There has been no indication from Ravi that he has made a detailed study of India's national movement which, under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership, aimed at the comprehensive transformation of a feudal, largely obscurantist and hierarchical society along with the achievement of freedom from British colonialism. All the great leaders of the national movement played their part in this noble enterprise. In any event, it is intrinsically wrong for any constitutional authority to play up the role of some and denigrate that of others.

The Governor's view

Ravi has been reported as saying that the Quit India movement made little impact on the British decision to leave India. Instead, it was insecurity felt by the British at Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose forming



the Azad Hind Government and its army (INA) and in 1946 by the Naval Mutiny and the Air Force Rebellion. Apparently, Ravi formed this view from his reading of IB files of the relevant period. He has also cited a conversation between British Prime Minister Clement Attlee and an acting Governor of Bengal in which Attlee said that the impact of 'non-cooperation' was minimal but that the British left because they felt 'insecure' after the 'Naval Revolt and the Air Force Rebellion'.

A clarification

Under criticism for his assertions and views, Ravi clarified that he had the 'highest respect' for Mahatma Gandhi. At the same time, he reiterated his views on the departure of the British from India. There is no doubt that the loyalty of Indian

soldiers in the British Indian armed forces was a principal pillar of their rule in India. If not for the Indian soldiers who served in the armies of the East India Company, the British could not have conquered India. Most historians of the national movement also acknowledge that the INA and the naval mutiny shook British confidence in the loyalty of the Indian members of their army in India. And, obviously, after the Second World War, circumstances created by the national movement, Britain's economic weakening and the international situation simply did not permit them to even think of undertaking armed action to retain their rule in India.

Hence, Ravi was right in praising Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose's great contribution in achieving Independence. This is almost universally acknowledged. Despite the great ideological differences in leaders of the freedom movement none of them ever denigrated Netaji or the INA. Had that been so, would it have been possible for so many of the lawyers among them to come together to defend the three officers — Prem Kumar Sehgal, Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon and Shah Nawaz Khan — at their court martial at the Red Fort in 1945-46? The great lawyer, Bhulabhai Desai, led the defence which included Tej Bahadur Sapru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Kailas Nath Katju. This writer would be forgiven for

making a personal reference. As Katju's grandson and Sapru's great-grandson, he knows full well the enormous admiration that Netaji evoked in them.

It would not be out of place to quote from Katju's unpublished biography of the impact of the INA trial. He writes that because of them "The excitement in the country was intense and indescribable". He goes on to note, "I am firmly of the opinion that just as the murders in Jalianwala Bagh in 1919 laid the foundation stone of our national struggle, similarly the Indian National Army trials were the definite cause of the withdrawal of the British rule in India in August 1947. The British discovered for themselves that it was impossible for them to continue...".

The last word

It is obvious that Ravi feels that Netaji was not given due recognition for his contribution to the country's Independence by the Congress party because of Jawaharlal Nehru and his successors, and that this lapse has now been corrected. It is Ravi's right to feel so. What is not open to him while holding the office of Governor is to make his views public. Governors are also not expected to make comparisons, however indirectly, of the impact of the actions of different leaders of the national movement. What is needed from Governors is reticence. As a former civil servant, Ravi should certainly know this.

Vivek Katju is a retired Indian Foreign Service officer. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

Crafting hope from despair: The art of short storytelling revived

In "This Is Salvaged," Vauhini Vara takes a significant leap from the speculative landscapes of "The Immortal King Rao" to the complex terrains of human emotion and reality. This collection of short stories marks her second major publication, following her debut that clinched a spot as a finalist for the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Unlike her first novel, which sprawled across an imagined world, "This Is Salvaged" plants its roots firmly within the realm of the tangible, yet it explores the depths of the human condition with equal, if not more profound, complexity and sensitivity.

Vara introduces us to a spectrum of characters, each ensnared in their own moment of crisis, carrying burdens of loss, unfulfilled dreams, and the universal quest for connection. These individuals, with their flaws and vulnerabilities

laid bare, navigate the rough seas of their lives, often against the current. Vara's storytelling is imbued with a tender, compassionate gaze that invites the reader to engage with the characters without judgment, urging a shared perspective of empathy and understanding.

The narrative threads woven through the collection suggest that life's transience underscores the importance of meaningful relationships. Without these, individuals risk being adrift in a sea of isolation, underscored by a persistent air of melancholy and an undercurrent of quiet humor that lends a bitter-sweet flavor to the tales. Themes of loneliness, grief, alcoholism, and the struggle against the tide of adversity run deep, painting a poignant picture of human resilience and the pursuit of redemption.

Notably, "This Is Salvaged" is marked by its consistent qual-

ity, a testament to Vara's skilled craftsmanship. The titular story stands out, showcasing a masterful exploration of its protagonist in a format that demands brevity yet delivers depth. The narratives are predominantly voiced by women, each striving to forge meaningful connections amidst the complexities of their lives. These are not idealized heroines but real, imperfect individuals whose courage and determination illuminate their paths, however tumultuous.

Vara's prose is both affecting and evocative, capable of capturing the essence of the human spirit in a single line. Her voice, hailed as original and assured in her debut, resonates with even greater clarity and inventiveness in this collection. It's a voice that cares deeply, not just for the characters it brings to life, but for the broader human experience it seeks to explore.



This Is Salvaged
By Vauhini Vara
Fourth Estate,
208 pages; ₹399

"This Is Salvaged" is a compelling testament to Vara's evolving narrative prowess, her ability to traverse the landscapes of speculative fiction and the intimate terrains of short stories with equal adeptness. Her exploration of the complexities of life and relationships, marked by a blend of melancholy, humor, and resilience, showcases a remarkable depth of insight and empathy.

As readers turn the pages of "This Is Salvaged," they are invited into a world where the pursuit of connection and the struggle against life's relentless currents are portrayed with poignant clarity. Vara's collection is not just a series of stories; it's a mosaic of human experiences, each piece a reflection

on the fragility and the inherent strength within us all. In laying bare the trials and triumphs of her characters, Vara not only confirms her place as a significant voice in contemporary literature but also enriches the reader's understanding of the nuanced spectrum of human emotion.

"This Is Salvaged" is an exquisite collection that solidifies Vauhini Vara's reputation as a masterful storyteller. With its rich tapestry of characters and their life-affirming journeys, the book is a profound exploration of the human condition. Readers will undoubtedly be eagerly awaiting Vara's next literary endeavor, anticipating the further evolution of her distinctive and deeply human voice.

Beyond the thematic richness and the depth of character development, what sets "This Is Salvaged" apart is Vara's meticulous attention to language. Each story is crafted with a linguistic precision that elevates the narrative, transforming ordinary moments into profound insights.

FICCI President hails Interim Budget 2024-25 as a Strategic Path to 'Viksit Bharat'

NEW DELHI: In response to the Interim Union Budget 2024-25 unveiled by the Finance Minister today, Dr Anish Shah, President of FICCI, expressed his views on the budgetary measures, highlighting its strategic alignment with the vision of 'Viksit Bharat.'

"The Interim Budget is a clear and outcome-based continuum towards Viksit Bharat. It brings together growth, climate, and social empowerment, while maintaining a careful balance between current investment rate and fiscal discipline," stated Dr Shah. Dr. Shah underscored the significance of empowering states to adopt reforms for the advancement of 'Viksit Bharat,' capitalising on the momentum generated by the Centre towards 'Amrit Kaal.'



"Focus on Blue Economy, expanding and strengthening the EV ecosystem, domestic tourism, and multi-modal logistics will propel India towards the vision of a developed nation by 2047," added Dr Shah. The FICCI President also applauded the budget's ac-

knowledge of innovation as a catalyst for growth. Notably, the allocation of a substantial corpus of Rs 1 lakh crore for providing a fifty-year interest-free loan to scale up Research and Development (R&D) in sunrise domains was seen as a key driver for future economic development.

ASPHL Rs 920 cr IPO for India's growing hotel room demand

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited announced here recently its IPO of Equity Shares priced at Rs 147 to Rs 155 aggregating to Rs 920 crores.

The Bid/Offer will open on February 5 and close on February 7, 2024.

The Company proposes to utilize the net proceeds from the fresh issue of Equity Shares towards repayment/prepayment in full or part of certain outstanding borrowings availed by the company and balance amount towards general corporate purposes.

Describing the company as +pioneers+ in the boutique hotels segment in India, Ms. Priya Paul, Chairperson and Executive Director, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited, said the emphasis is on highlighting contemporary Indian culture in its numerous hotels and properties alongside growth also in the fast-growing Tier II and Tier III cities.

"We want good food and beverages — which is the cornerstone of our business and gets us about 92% hotel occupancy — besides our acquisition of the



famed +Flury's+ Swiss Bakery (which opened in 1927) whose outlets we are opening in India," she said.

"Our Park Collection comprises boutique properties around India including four contract properties in Goa, while our hotel portfolio is strategically located across metros and emerging cities," she said, adding "We have a robust plan to have 56 hotels by 2026."

Noting that "culinary experiences are the differentiating factors", Ms Paul said "We have popular design, food and nightlife to cater to the new generation of brands and customers who include Gen Z and Millennials in the majority (46%), besides Corporate (43%), Airlines (5-6%) among others.

Vijay Dewan, Managing Director, Apeejay Surrendra Park Hotels Limited, said "We are at the top with 92% hotel occupancy and 25-30% repeat

customers, besides having Rs 524 crores Revenue last year and doing well during Covid-19 scenario." Lamenting the present "acute shortage of room supply" despite 1.78 lakh rooms availability in India, he said the demand for room supply kept growing at 7.5% and the company is focused in meeting it.

"Where F&B is concerned, Indians are eating out like never before and we run 81 award-winning bars and restaurants to cater to this demand," he said, adding "Our Covid pre-mix was very strong due to our F&B (39% in 2023 and 42% this year) with the best track of 'desserts' globally and now part of our robust expansion plan where we have re-engineered our menu towards efficiency."

J M Financial Limited, Axis Capital Limited and ICICI Securities Limited are the Book Running Lead Managers or BRLMs to the issue.

A delicate dance of debt & development



NAMRATA MITTAL
Chief Economist, SBI Mutual Fund

The 2024 Budget is a vote on account Budget, implying limited parliamentary discussion and hence an avoidance to tax modification at large. The primary objective is to seek permission to spend and collect receipts until the new government is formed. The underlying theme was clearly fiscal consolidation with an ability to maintain the infrastructure spends at the existing run rate.

The pace of fiscal consolidation took everyone by surprise. Despite FY24 being a pre-election year, and despite FY24 nominal GDP growth coming in lower than budgeted (10.5% y-o-y vs. 8.9%), the government plans to end the year with lower than budgeted fiscal deficit (RE at 5.8% vs. BE of 5.9% of GDP) and consolidate it to 5.1% of GDP in FY25. It lends credibility to their FY26 fiscal deficit target of 4.5%.

Nominal growth is projected at 11%, which looks slightly optimistic but overall receipts are projected to grow by a reasonable 11.8% versus RE of 12.2% for FY24.

The Central government's total expenditure, budgeted to grow at 6.1% versus a likely 7.1% in FY24, is lower than India's nominal growth. In fact, adjusting the interest outgo, fiscal impulse reduces further. Optically, capital expenditure via budgetary support appears to be improving from Rs 9.5 trillion in FY24 RE to Rs 11.1 trillion in FY25 (capex to GDP at 3.4% is the highest since FY05). However, if one were to look at key infrastructure-oriented sectors (roads, railways, water, defence, and metros), most of them show a low single digit growth in the FY25 capex spend. It appears that a large part of capex is directed towards loan and equity infusion (BSNL being one case).

With the lone exception of rural housing (FY25 budgeted spend at Rs 545 billion versus Rs 320 billion in FY24), allocation for most of the key rural schemes is largely flat in FY25. There is a hope to reduce subsidy outgo too, which, in the end, would be contingent on the evolution of commodity prices through FY25.

As the 14% SGST revenue growth guarantee ends and FY25 entails no maturity of GST loan, the Centre has decided to utilise a part of GST cess collection (Rs 1.23 trillion) to pay for some regular G-secs maturing in FY25, thereby helping reduce the gross G-sec supply in FY25.

Gross borrowing is markedly lower in FY25 at Rs 14.1 trillion versus Rs 15.4 trillion in FY24. As per our calculation, the actual net market borrowing in FY25 falls to Rs 10.5 trillion versus Rs 11 trillion in FY24.

We compare the colour of Centrally sponsored schemes of the government during its first and second term. While the government's first term focussed on Swachh Bharat, crop insurance, rural roads and housing, allocation towards MGNREGA, Awas Yojana, and the National Rural Drinking Water Mission was scaled up substantially in the second term. PM Kisan was introduced just ahead of the second term. Ayushman Bharat (public health insurance), Anganwadi 2 and few of the new agri-oriented schemes were also introduced in the second term. Rural electricity, and women are likely to be the focus areas in the coming years.

BEL signs contract with Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs



ARUN KUMAR RAO

Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has signed Contract with Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC), Ministry of Finance, Govt of India on 30th January 2024 for implementation and management of IT infrastructure, according to BEL press statement. The value of the contract, won through open bidding, is Rs. 665.84 crores plus taxes. The scope of the project is to supply, install and maintain IT and networking infra, field IT support and centralised management and monitoring. Maintenance support will be provided for 5 years inclusive of implementation period. This is one of the biggest Civilian Projects acquired on competitive basis by BEL during the current financial year. With this BEL has received cumulative orders of Rs. 28494 Cr in the current financial year.

MSMEs Seek Exclusive Work Orders Amid Rail Bogie Upgrade Proposal



TIRUCHIRAPPALLI: Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), eyeing opportunities in railways sector for diversification, are optimistic about the recently tabled interim Union budget in Parliament.

The proposal to upgrade 40,000 normal rail bogies to Vande Bharat standards has sparked hope among local MSMEs, reported TOI.

They are urging authorities to allocate a portion of the work orders for this conversion exclusively to the MSME sector, utilising the Golden Rock railway workshop in Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu.

N Kanagasabapathy, Chairman of Trichy Trade Centre, emphasised the need for orders to encourage more MSMEs to venture into producing components for rail bogies. "As we have expertise in engineering and fabrication besides welding technologies, upgrading rail bogies will be a boon for MSMEs in Trichy," he said.

Trade bodies in the region are seeking financial assistance to upgrade machinery in production units, aiming to support MSMEs in manufacturing rail bogie components. Entrepreneurs, looking to stay resilient and

broaden their focus in the defence and railway sectors, have expressed the importance of a rehabilitation package from the Union government to facilitate loan repayment.

The MSMEs stress the necessity of a common assembly line infrastructure for overhauling bogies in Trichy.

The Trichy District Tiny and Small Scale Industries Association (TIDITSSIA) echoed similar sentiments, emphasising that fund allocation for railway infrastructure would not only spur industrial growth but also generate employment

Hazer Achieves First Hydrogen and Graphite at Commercial Demonstration Plant

FW DESK
Perth (Australia)

Hazer Group Ltd, a leading clean-technology developer, is pleased to announce the start-up of its Commercial Demonstration Plant ("CDP") and first production of hydrogen and graphite. The Company introduced feed gas to the reactor at Hazer process conditions today and subsequently achieved first hydrogen and Hazer-produced graphite at the facility.

The Company expects to ramp up operations through the 1st half of CY2024, safely executing the performance testing program to deliver data that demonstrates its commercial readiness. The performance testing program will focus on demonstrating continuous operation at a commercial scale and be leveraged into Hazer's global commercial project portfolio. Hazer will provide updates as key results become available.

Hazer's CEO and MD Glenn Corrie said: "This is a landmark achievement for Hazer, as we realise the successful start-up of our CDP and the production of low-cost, low-emissions hydrogen and graphitic carbon utilising our world-first pyrolysis technology. As the team strives towards extended continuous operation of the plant in 2024 we are excited to build



on this momentum for the next scale-up of the technology with our global partners in key markets, including North America, Europe and Asia.

CDP Site, Perth, Australia

"The CDP is the culmination of over 10 years of leading-edge research, development and engineering innovation, and is a testament to the Hazer team's dedication, courage and resilience in reaching this milestone. I would like to acknowledge our shareholders, partners and other key stakeholders that supported our journey towards becoming a leading commercial clean-technology company."

"This is an important juncture for Hazer commercialisation strategy. Our pipeline of opportunities is growing and with our CDP proving our technology can operate at commercial scale, I'm confident that 2024 will open-up further demand for our disruptive technology that can provide clean hydrogen to accelerate global decarbonisation."

Indel Money Limited announces Public Issue of up to Rs.200 crores of Secured, Redeemable Non-Convertible Debentures



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Indel Money Limited, one of the fastest growing NBFC in the gold loan sector, announced the 4th public issue of Secured NCDs of face value of Rs.1,000 each. The Issue opens on Tuesday, January 30, 2024 and closes on Monday, February 12, 2024 (with an option of early closure in case of early over-subscription). Doubling of investment in 72 months - Option VIII Coupon yielding up to 12.25% per annum Secured NCDs with tenure ranging from 366 days to 72 months, Minimum application size 10 NCDs (Rs.10,000) across all Options of NCDs.

Addressing press conference Umesh Mohanan, Executive Whole Time Director, Indel Money Limited said, "Our business strategy is designed to capitalize on our competitive strengths to enhance our position in the Gold Loan industry and to expand our presence. The first half of FY24 saw the company demonstrating a stellar performance with its profitability surging by a record

568.86% buoyed by a strong AUM growth, heightened demand for gold loans, expansion into newer territories and operational efficiencies despite a challenging business environment. We aim to continue to grow our loan portfolio by expanding our branch network by opening new branches. Increased revenue, profitability and visibility are the factors that drive the branch network. With this issue, we aim to expand our sources of funds."

The issue includes a Base Issue Size for an amount of up to Rs.100 crores with an option to retain over-subscription up to Rs.100 crores aggregating up to Rs.200 crores. The Lead Manager to the Issue is Vivro Financial Services Private Limited. The funds raised through this issue will be used for the purpose of onward lending, financing and for repayment/prepayment of principal and interest on borrowings of the Company. Indel Money Limited had a total outstanding AUM (excluding off-balance sheet assets) amounting to Rs.81,740.86 lakhs as on September 30, 2023 as compared to Rs.64,768.53 lakhs as on March 31, 2023.

Realme launches the newest addition to its Number Series with realme 12 Pro Series 5G with the best in class periscope telephoto

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bangalore

Realme, the Smartphone Service Provider, today announced at the press conference launch of the realme 12 Pro Series 5G, the newest addition to its premium Number Series. The realme 12 Pro Series 5G introduces two standout smart phones: the realme 12 Pro+ 5G and the realme 12 Pro 5G. The two new additions are positioned as the Next-gen Imaging smart phones, marking an important milestone that is aligned with realme's revamped 'Make it real' brand spirit, and boasts a refreshed brand identity that resonates with young users.

The realme 12 Pro+ 5G introduces next-generation imaging technology and features cutting-edge periscope telephoto technology to enable



full-focal-length, lossless zoom capabilities, and a proprietary MasterShot Algorithm developed in collaboration with Qualcomm. realme 12 Pro+ 5G is the latest premium Smartphone from realme, designed to elevate photography and videography to new heights for young users. realme Design Studio also collaborated with renowned international luxury watch design master Olivier Savé to bring a luxury watch-inspired design that comes to

life in the new realme 12 Pro Series 5G.

Commenting on the launch, Saurabh Arora, Mobile, Compute and XR, Business Development, Qualcomm India Pvt. Ltd. said, "The realme 12 Pro Series 5G powered by the Snapdragon 7s Gen 2 underscores our commitment to working with our partners to provide premium experiences across the spectrum of user experiences. Whether your interests lie in photography, gaming, music or just upping your productivity, these devices are designed to meet every need with best-in-class features and performance. With its integrated AI Engine, our Snapdragon platforms have you covered with more intuitive experiences and performance while you enjoy improved 5G and Wi-Fi speeds."

BEL registers a growth of 49% in PAT during 3rd Quarter of FY 2023-24

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Navratna Defence PSU Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) has achieved a Turnover of Rs. 4120.10 Cr, registering a growth of 1.83% during 3rd Quarter of FY 2023-24 over the Turnover of Rs. 4046.11 Cr recorded in the corresponding period of the previous year. Press statement from BEL said here.

Profit before Tax (PBT) during 3rd Quarter of FY 2023-24 stood at Rs. 1172.26 Cr, with a growth of 46.45% over the Profit before Tax (PBT) of Rs. 800.43 Cr recorded in

the corresponding period of the previous year.

Profit after Tax (PAT) during 3rd Quarter of FY 2023-24 stood at Rs. 893.30 Cr, with a growth of 49.19% over the Profit After Tax (PAT) of Rs. 598.77 Cr recorded in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Statement also said that, Up to 3rd Quarter of FY 2023-24, BEL achieved a Turnover of Rs. 11484.92 Cr as against Rs. 11005.89 Cr recorded in the corresponding period of the previous year. Profit Before Tax (PBT) has increased to Rs. 2948.95 Cr from Rs. 2203.39

Cr recorded in the corresponding period of the previous year. The Profit After Tax (PAT) has increased to Rs. 2236.48 Cr from Rs. 1641.31 Cr recorded in the corresponding period of the previous year.

The Board of Directors in their meeting held on 29th January 2024 declared Interim Dividend of Rs. 0.70 paise per equity share (on face value of Rs 1/- each). The said dividend will be payable to the eligible shareholders holding shares as on the record date, i.e. 10th February 2024. The order book position of the company as on 1st January, 2024, stood at Rs. 76217 Cr.

Floship Honored With Deloitte Rising Star Award



FW DESK
Hong Kong

Floship, a leading global circular supply chain solution provider for e-commerce brands, is thrilled to announce that it has been recognized as a Deloitte Rising Star Company awardee at the prestigious Hong Kong's Technology & Rising Star (HKTRF) program. The award was presented to Floship at an exclusive ceremony held last night, marking a significant milestone for the company.

The Deloitte HKTRF program, a sub-program of Deloitte China Technology Fast, serves as a platform for fast-growing and innovative local enterprises to showcase their market eminence, network with successful peers, and garner wider recognition while enhancing their talent brand across the Asia Pacific region. This accolade underscores Floship's commitment to innovation and rapid growth in the technology and business sectors. Expressing his elation, Floship CEO Joshua Tsui stated, "Receiving the Deloitte Rising Star Award is a tremendous honor for Floship. It is a testament to the dedication and hard work of our team, as well as the trust and support of our valued clients and partners. This recognition reinforces our position as a leader in the industry and motivates us to continue pushing boundaries and achieving greater success."

Solenis focus on India's water, recycling, hygiene solutions



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

"India is the focus of Solenis' Pan-Asia strategy in big global trends highlighting Water Scarcity and Reuse, Hygiene, Packaging for liquid products," according to John E. Panichella, CEO, Solenis, USA.

"India is well-placed for Solenis to serve all these segments, while also driving the country's economic growth and helping double our business," said Panichella, who is currently in India to highlight business synergies, global investments by Solenis in Polyamine (APAC)/PVAM (US) capacities, besides catering to various markets and their new vision for the Group.

Early 2023 witnessed Solenis - a global producer of specialty chemicals for water-intensive industries - acquire Diversey (a company operating in cleaning, hygiene products and technologies) for \$4.6 billion.

Panichella said that organic growth alongside a series of mergers and acquisitions - including Diversey Holdings in July 2023 and the BASF paper and water chemicals business in 2019 -- witnessed Solenis achieving global leadership in specialty chemicals for water-intensive industries.

"India is one of the few big economies having a stable government, doing business in the ethical way, spoken English, and having the right environment with ease of doing business," he said while noting that the biggest area of development need in the Indian segment is "sustainability and water" alongside focus on hospitals, hospitality and

needs of the healthcare sector.

While there was much awareness about the dangers of 'single-use plastics,' Solenis is highlighting its 'packaging' through use of +fibre-based+ (recyclable) materials and custom-developed coatings for food-grade materials, besides also floor cleaners for the sensitive electronics industry.

He said Solenis is constantly investing in R&D in its products with 25%-30% sales presently coming off products developed barely five years ago. Brijesh Rathore, Vice-President - South Asia and Global Strategic Accounts (APAC) at Diversey—a Solenis company, said that from the hygienic perspective, India is witnessing massive awareness in this regard and Solenis has related flagship plans for helping communities here in sales and earning livelihood.

Around 20,000 people were deployed in India after related certified training through Solenis' "Knowledge Center", though 350,000 more were needed, he said, adding that India has a strong share in the hospitality sector and Solenis is focusing on elevating its hygiene standards, cleaner air, besides reducing +absenteeism+ in schools.

"We have created many formulations customized for Indian conditions and habits, besides deployment of 50-55 scientists here and investment being in planning stage. Our building service contracts are doing well and our segmentation strategy is viewing: hospitality, power plants and for resourcing it with our own industry-aligned expertise including in water-treatment solutions," he added.

Govt Allocates ₹75,000 Cr for State Growth Initiatives



NEW DELHI: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, during her interim budget speech, emphasised the imperative need for growth and development-enabling reforms in states to realise the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' or Developed India. To facilitate these crucial reforms, the government has proposed a provision of Rs 75,000 crore as a fifty-year interest-free loan for State

Governments. This financial support aims to encourage and bolster milestone-linked reforms across various states. In the context of tax reforms, Sitharaman highlighted the government's steadfast focus over the last five years on enhancing taxpayer services. A significant transformation was achieved by replacing the age-old jurisdiction-based assessment system with the

introduction of Faceless Assessment and Appeal. This strategic move not only increased efficiency but also brought greater transparency and accountability to the tax assessment process. The introduction of updated income tax returns, a new Form 26AS, and the prefilling of tax returns have played a pivotal role in simplifying the filing process for taxpayers. As a result, the average processing time for tax returns has seen a remarkable reduction, dropping from 93 days in the fiscal year 2013-14 to an impressive ten days in the current year. This streamlined approach not only eases the burden on taxpayers but also ensures faster processing of refunds, marking a significant improvement in the overall tax administration system.

Prudent Budget with bold ambition to make India Viksit Bharat; focus on capex stands out: ASSOCHAM

FW DESK
New Delhi

Describing the interim Union Budget for 2024-25 as inclusive and catalyst for investment, ASSOCHAM today said assertion by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to present a roadmap for making India 'Viksit Bharat' shows determination on the part of the government to take the country into the big league of the developed countries. "It is an India first budget. A confident budget of a confident government that focuses on the objective of ensuring that India becomes a 5 trillion-dollar economy by 2025 and a developed nation by 2047. I commend the FM for her unwavering commitment to *sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas*. I commend especially the increase in infrastructure spending that will have a multiplier effect on our economy. I commend the evident railway corridors, and the one lakh crore fund for research and development and the startup sector. The emphasis on clean energy, technology and digital infrastructure will make India a world leader. This is India's moment, and this budget is part of a continuous process of making policy that will provide massive opportunities for India and Indians", said Ajay Singh, President, ASSOCHAM.

"Given the fact that it is an interim Budget ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, leaving tax rates unchanged is quite understandable, but the intentions are quite clear in terms of focus on youth, women, skill development. Statement on dealing with the challenge of population growth is quite brave and is in alignment with the national objective of making India a developed nation, ASSOCHAM Secretary General Deepak Sood said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's determination to make India a developed nation is quite evident in the Budget. The ASSOCHAM further said resilience of the Indian economy in the face of severe global headwinds is reflected in the fact that the government has not only managed to slightly lower the fiscal deficit at 5.8 per cent of the GDP for the current fiscal from 5.9 per cent in the Budget for 2023-24, it has been pegged much lower at 5.1 per cent of GDP for FY25. "This comes on the back of prudent expenditure management as also buoyancy in tax receipts leveraging the inherent strength of the economy". "Quality of expenditure



stands out as a unique feature of the Budget. Capital expenditure of Rs 11.11 lakh crore provided for FY '25 with an increase of nearly 17 per cent over the revised estimates of the previous fiscal, is a testimony of the government's determination to invest heavily in infrastructure build-up. Such an approach is paying dividends for sustaining economic growth," said ASSOCHAM. The Budget focuses on promotion of renewable energy with incentives to rope in entrepreneurship in EV infrastructure. This would go a long way in making India a leader in clean energy, fuelling the economic growth. The MSME sector has been well identified as an engine of growth and employment generation with promises of helping hand in the Budget. Withdrawal of personal tax demands up to Rs 25,000 for certain periods is surely a confidence building measure for the common people; it should even be extended to MSMEs as well, the ASSOCHAM said.

Prudent as expected with promise of bigger things



NIRMAL JAIN
Founder, IIFL Group

Days before she was to deliver the Interim Budget for 2024, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman dropped some hints on what to expect from her speech. She said that the government would orient its policies towards improving the lot of four main interest groups: women, the youth, farmers and the poor.

In her Budget speech on February 1, Sitharaman reiterated this stance, and went a step further. The Narendra Modi government, she said, was committed to inclusive growth and that it had a detailed roadmap ready for a developed India by 2047. This was a pre-election Vote-on-Account and not a full Budget, so the Finance Minister had limited legroom, and yet she managed to move the needle enough to keep the interests of large swathes of the country's population in mind. While for the poor, there was the promise of 2-crore more houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, on top of 3 crore that have already been built, for the middle classes, there was a commitment that the government will ensure affordable housing for all. If done right, this should give a massive boost to the country's real estate sector. The Modi government's core philosophy over the last decade has been to push capital expenditure, especially in the infrastructure sector. In fact, the government's capex has nearly trebled in the last four years. The government stuck to the theme as it raised the capex outlay for the coming financial year to 11.11 lakh crore, an increase of 11%. Capex on infrastructure has a multiplier effect and the real impact of this push should be visible in the coming years on old economy and construction sectors that power it.

The Modi government needs to be commended for the fact that despite significant economic upheavals since the pandemic, it has managed to steer a tight ship, remain fiscally prudent and keep fiscal deficit in check in the face of stiff crude oil prices. While the fiscal deficit for the current financial year at 5.8% is an improvement over the initial estimate of 5.9%, the figure for the coming financial year is projected at a more challenging 5.1%. This would bring India closer to achieving the fiscal deficit target of 4.5% by 2025-26. The government has also reduced its market borrowing plan for 2024-25. It has pegged its gross and net market borrowing at Rs.14.13 lakh crore and Rs. 11.75 lakh crore respectively. This is significantly lower than most estimates on the street. Simply put, the government wants to cut back on market borrowings and is looking at the private sector to partner it in funding the country's massive infrastructure development push. The government can pat itself on the back as the revenue deficit as a factor of fiscal deficit has been coming down over the years, indicating that it is borrowing money to create productive assets rather than merely to fund consumption expenditure. To power the animal spirits of India's young tech entrepreneurs, the government promised to set up a 1 lakh crore fund for research and development in the tech space. This can mark the start of the much-needed shift in India's image as just a provider IT engineers to an innovation hub. India is on the verge of something transformational. While the country may have missed the bus in the first couple of decades of this century, and may have been left behind by its neighbour China, India's time may finally have come. It is already the fastest growing major economy in the world, by a mile. The government is now looking to take it further and make India a developed economy by 2047. The Modi government has taken the right step in that direction.

India Rupee Feel Pressure as US Federal Likely to Hold Interest Rates



MUMBAI: The Indian rupee is anticipated to experience a slight decline following stronger-than-expected employment figures in United States. In the view Federal Reserve is unlikely to cut interest rate in March. Non-deliverable forwards suggest that the rupee will commence trading at approximately 83.12-83.14 against the dollar, compared to the previous session's 83.1050. Despite a narrow intraday range of 2 to 6 paise over the last four sessions, forex traders remain cautious about any substantial movement. A forex trader at a bank noted, "The rupee is back to the mode in which nothing will happen," predicting that the decline at the opening "will not amount to much, and at maximum, we could see a move to 83.18." The likelihood of a March rate cut by the Federal Reserve dropped to 44 per cent as U.S. job openings unexpectedly increased in December.

Union Budget: No Changes to Tax Rates, But Benefits Extended for Startups & IFSC Units

NEW DELHI: During the Union Budget presentation, Finance Minister Sitharaman has declared that, in accordance with convention, there would be no changes to tax rates for direct and indirect taxes, including import duties. This move aims to provide stability and predictability in the taxation landscape, offering businesses and individuals a sense of continuity. "As for tax proposals, in keeping with the convention, I pro-

pose to retain the existing tax rates for both direct and indirect taxes, as well as import duties," stated Finance Minister Sitharaman. However, the Finance Minister highlighted that certain tax benefits for start-ups and exemptions on investments made by sovereign wealth or pension funds, along with tax exemptions for specific income of some International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) units, are set to expire on March 31, 2024.

GST collections rise to second highest-ever at Rs 1.72 lakh crore in January



THE HIGHEST-EVER MONTHLY GST COLLECTION WAS RECORDED IN APRIL 2023 AT RS 1.87 LAKH CRORE.

NEW DELHI: Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections rose to Rs 1.72 lakh crore in January (for sales in December), up 10.4 per cent from the year-ago period, data released by the Finance Ministry on Wednesday showed. This is the second highest level of GST collections after the July 2017 rollout of the indirect tax regime and marks the third instance of collections over the Rs 1.7 lakh crore

mark in this financial year. The highest-ever monthly GST collection was recorded in April 2023 at Rs 1.87 lakh crore. "The gross GST revenue collected in the month of January, 2024 is Rs 1,72,129 crore, which shows a 10.4% Year-o-Year (Y-oY) growth over the revenue of Rs 155,922 crore collected in January 2023 (till

05:00 PM on 31.01.2023)," the ministry said in a statement. "Notably, this is the second highest monthly collection ever and marks the third month in this financial year with a collection of Rs 1.70 lakh crore or more," it said. With the latest print, GST revenue collections have averaged at Rs 1.67 lakh crore per month during April-January 2023-24, up 11.6 per cent from the monthly average of Rs 1.50 lakh crore seen during April-January 2022-23. The government has settled Rs 43,552 crore to Central GST (CGST) and Rs 37,257 crore to State GST (SGST) from the Integrated GST (IGST) collection.

India's April-Dec fiscal deficit at 55% of full year target



NEW DELHI: India's fiscal deficit for the 9-month period of April-December 2023 is at Rs 9.82 lakh crore, which works out to 55 per cent of the target for the full financial year ending on March 31, 2024, according to data released by the country's Controller General of Accounts on Wednesday.

With the fiscal deficit well under control, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will have more headroom for carrying out the government's investment plans to push up the economic growth rate and make adequate allocations for social welfare schemes to benefit the poor. For the entire financial year 2023-24, the fiscal deficit of the government has been fixed at a target of Rs 17.86 lakh crore or 5.9 per cent of the gross domestic

product (GDP). The data also shows that the country's April-December 2023 capex or investment in infrastructure projects is at Rs 6.74 lakh crore, 67.3 per cent of FY24 target which is well on course. The figures released on Wednesday show that the macro-economic fundamentals of the economy are strong as the fiscal deficit is well under control and the government will not have to take recourse to excessive borrowing for meeting its capital expenditure.

Well-crafted Interim Budget



SATISH SINGH
Before the interim budget, the central government had presented the report "The Indian Economy: A Review" in lieu of the Economic Survey, in which the economic and social health of the country as well as the interim budget were also outlined. It has been clearly stated in this report that in the next 3 years i.e., in 2027, the Indian economy will become a 5 trillion-dollar economy leaving Germany and Japan behind and by 2030 it will become a 7 trillion-dollar economy. It is noteworthy that provisions have been made in the interim budget under this strategy. As per this report, India's GDP growth rate may exceed 7 percent for the fourth consecutive year in the financial year 2024-25, whereas currently the growth rate of the world's major economies is around 3 percent. However, the inflation rate in India is expected to be 5.5 percent during the financial year 2023-24, which is high, but it cannot be considered a dangerous level. In other words, we may consider it as a moderate level. On the social front, the cost of KYC was around Rs.1000/- before 2014, which has come down to Rs.5 due to the rapid development in digital public infrastructure. In the year 2021, 78.6 percent women had their own bank account, whereas in the financial year 2015-16 this percentage was only 53. The participation of women in the

total labour force of the country has increased to 37 percent, which was only 23.3 percent in the financial year 2017-18. The gross enrolment ratio of girls in higher education has increased to 27.9 percent in the financial year 2020-21, which was only 6.7 percent in 2000-01. Thus, in 20 years the overall proportion of girls in higher education has increased by 4 times. The enrolment ratio of girls in secondary education has increased to 58.2 percent in the financial year 2020-21, which was only 24.5 percent in the financial year 2004-05. Thus, the data of "The Indian Economy: A Review" report shows that, our country is doing well in the economy as well as on social front & it is happening only due to inclusive growth of the country. On February 1, 2024, Union Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman presented the interim budget for the financial year 2024-25, which has been called a reflection of the youth aspirations of Young India and includes the 4 pillars of India-empowering the poor, youth, women, and farmers. In this connection, special attention has been paid to those measures which help them to grow significantly. Along with this, provisions related to ensuring inclusive growth, delivery of government facilities to the last person, consolidation of infrastructure and proper exploitation of existing capacities have also been made in this interim budget. To reinforce the infrastructure, there is a need to boost sectors like railways, roads, solar energy etc. It is noteworthy that



in the last 5 years, the budgetary provisions to bolster this sector have been increased by more than 2.5 times. Under this, 40 thousand bogies of railways will be upgraded and connected to Vande Bharat. To make the roadways efficient and reliable, work is also being done at a rapid pace on PM Gati-Shakti scheme, so that the road network across the country can be laid as soon as possible and people can reach their destination in a short period. According to the announcements of the interim budget, Energy and Cement Corridor, Port Connectivity Corridor, Hard Density Corridor etc., will be developed as soon as possible. To implement these works, capital expenditure has been increased by 11.1 percent, taking it to Rs.11.1 lakh crore. Before this, in the financial year 2024, this amount was Rs.10 lakh crore. It is proposed to spend Rs.44.90 lakh crore in the interim budget, whereas last year Rs.45 lakh crore was spent on this item. Skills of 1.4 crore youth have been developed in the current financial year. 7 new IITs and 7 new IIIMs, 3 thousand IITs, 390 universities etc. have also been

opened. Taking lessons from the Corona pandemic, hospitals are also being constructed continuously. In the budget speech, the Union Finance Minister said that in the last 10 years, 30 crore Mudra scheme loans have been given to women entrepreneurs. 11.8 crore farmers have got the benefit of PM Samman Nidhi scheme and 25 crore people have been successful in coming out of the poverty line. All this has been possible because of people's access to banks. Today, with the help of Pradhan Mantri Mudra Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Scheme, people are becoming self-reliant and with the help of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) scheme the amount of PM Samman Nidhi is becoming possible to be credited to the accounts of the beneficiaries with few minutes. A fund of Rs 1 lakh crore will be created to develop research and innovation, so that the poor, youth, farmers, and women can become self-reliant with the help of technology and banks. Tax exemptions given to start-ups will be expanded, which is sure to benefit the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector. There are more than 6

crore MSME units in the country, which employ more than 12 crore people and this sector contributes about 35 percent to the country's GDP. Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Scheme, 2 crores more houses will be built in rural areas in the next 5 years. The government will also bring a housing scheme for the people living in huts, so that all the poor can get permanent houses. The government has also set a target of making 3 crore women Lakhpati Didi, so that women can become self-reliant. Work will be done to strengthen the dairy sector to increase milk production and new schemes like bio-manufacturing and bio-foundry will be started to promote green growth. Fish production in the country has doubled. Nevertheless, the government is continuously working to increase fishery production, as this sector has immense potential for employment generation. The government is also working on measures to increase the income of farmers. For this, special emphasis is being laid on research, so that agricultural production can be increased with the help of technology. It can be said that with the help of various measures that empower the 4 pillars of India - poor, youth, women and farmers and provisions that ensure inclusive development, our country will be able to become a 5 trillion-dollar economy by 2027 and become a developed country by 2047.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal

SEBI/ISF highlights Brokers Industry working

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

The Brokers Industry Standards Forum (ISF) and its Composition, Working and Vision was highlighted by the SEBI chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch here recently.

Describing India as having some of the 'Best Practices' globally, she said these called for: vision, experience, development, performance, ethic, knowledge, potential and competence. "Best Practices is not a +magic Wand+, but all these factors put together, where our job is to fuel the economy," she reiterated.

Noting that the Brokers ISF was set up on September 5 by SEBI as a pilot project, she said it is anchored by three broker associations including: Association of National Exchange Members of India (ANMI), Bombay Stock Exchange Brokers Forum (BBF) and Commodity Participants Association of India (CPAI). The Brokers ISF comprised also the stock exchanges (BSE, MCX, MSE, NCDEX, NSE), Clearing Corporations (ICCL, MCXCCL, NCCL, NCL), and Depositories (CDSL, NSDL), besides also Bank-based and non-bank-based Qualified Stock Brokers (QSBs), Domestic and Foreign custodians, and Domestic and Foreign High frequency Trading (HFT) firms.

The ISF had held 18 meetings since September 2023 and its work had been formally acknowledged through SEBI circulars including one of November 13, 2023 -- highlighting an MITC focusing on the critical aspects of the broker-client relationship. Buch said upstreaming of client funds to the Clearing Corporations through a revised framework ensured "100%" end-of-day funds credit balances for clients with minimal friction in client servicing, faster and efficient turnaround time for clients' funds payout. A SEBI circular of January 12, 2024 highlighted a framework issued with Brokers ISF for Trading Members to provide facility of voluntary freezing/blocking online access of the trading account to their clients in case of any suspicious activities (e.g. hacking). Other SEBI circulars highlighted: Ease in Compliance reporting where redundant reports and dependence on broker uploads were done away in MII systems that took data directly from original sources like bank/clearing corporations. Replying to questions, Buch said that about some industry 'players' (who will try to circumvent the law), the industry had made a representation to SEBI who would analyze it in a 'balanced' way to ensure a



'win-win' solution. Investors should also have a chance to "plan/close" their business efforts in case of a holiday being declared in that period, she said, adding "There is no misinterpretation or ambiguity in SEBI's decisions as we are ready to give clarity where required." About broken/technical glitches occurring and taking time even upto 15 minutes that affected the industry players, Buch said that SEBI has issued a framework in this regard. "Technology is not infallible and large technology companies are also coming down. It's better to have account with two brokers if your business is affected by even 15-minute glitches," she said, adding "Everything is system-driven and a certain amount of time is needed for maintenance of the system -- just like +changing tyres by going to the pit-stop+." About instances of companies without identifiable promoters+, she said the ISF -- in consultation with SEBI -- publishes 'legally binding' industry standards where broker participants have to conform to them.

INTERNATIONAL

ICJ rules that it will hear part of Ukraine-Russia genocide case

UN's top court will not address aspects of case accusing Russia of violating Genocide Convention by falsely alleging genocide.

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ruled that parts of Ukraine's case against Russia arguing that Moscow baselessly accused Kyiv of genocide to justify the 2022 invasion can move forward.

However, the ICJ ruled on Friday that it will not address whether Russia violated the 1948 Genocide Convention by using what Ukraine says were trumped-up genocide charges as a pretext for the war, even if the invasion may have violated international law broadly.

Instead, the case will proceed to assess whether Ukraine committed genocide in the eastern parts of the country, as Russia claims — a matter where judges ruled that they have jurisdiction.



When Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion on February 24, 2022, part of his argument was that pro-Russian people in eastern Ukraine had been "subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kyiv regime".

Ukraine filed a suit at the ICJ, "emphatically denying" this and arguing that Russia's

use of "genocide" as a pretext for invasion went against the Genocide Convention.

"In the present case, even if the Russian Federation had, in bad faith, alleged that Ukraine committed genocide and taken certain measures against it under such a pretext, which the respondent [Ukraine] contends, this would not in itself constitute

a violation of obligations" under the genocide convention, the ICJ said in the ruling read out by its president, Joan Donoghue on Friday.

The ICJ, known as the World Court, said it did not have jurisdiction to rule on whether Russia's invasion violated the Genocide Convention, or on whether Moscow's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk, two breakaway republics in eastern Ukraine, amounted to a breach of the convention.

But the judges said they would allow Ukraine's request for the court to rule that there was no "credible evidence that Ukraine is committing genocide in violation of the Genocide Convention" in eastern Ukraine.

Kyiv is seeking a declaration from the ICJ that it did not commit genocide. A final, legally binding decision is likely still years away.

Trump's dominance over GOP could alienate swath of voters including some Republican conservatives

NEW YORK: The GOP has come under fire from a section of the US media which says that if the Republicans continue to back a beleaguered former President Donald Trump, who is facing numerous court cases on election subversion and tax fraud, then they only end up alienating a wide swath of voters including many conservatives.

"Some people want a principled conservative, others want that too, but revenge isn't more important. Revenge doesn't go well in the end."

"I can pretty much guarantee that if Republicans obtusely tie their horse to the former president, they can count on ostracizing a wide swath of American voters, including many conservatives," a columnist in USA today commented based on what she claimed was the general feeling of the American voters.

As someone who works in the world of words, I understand that their meaning - and use - can change over time. Yet, something I greatly resent is how the Republican Party has conflated Trump with conserva-



tism, she wrote in the publication, considered to be a great influencer and public opinion maker in the USA.

It certainly doesn't, and I can pretty much guarantee that if Republicans obtusely tie their horse to the former president, they can count on ostracizing a wide swath of American voters, including many conservatives, including many conservatives, Ingrid Jacques, the op-ed writer, said.

"It seems like that's what they plan to do. The Democrats want just that, they want Trump against Biden, so that the latter can win easily, they don't want Nikki Haley, who would beat Biden easily with swing voters on her side," other media reports said.

Trump loyalist Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene put it

this way last week after the New Hampshire primary: "This is a true change for the Republican Party. It says that not only do we support President Trump. We support his policies. And any Republican that isn't willing to adapt to these policies, we're completely eradicating from the party."

Prepare to eradicate a lot of people? - People Republicans will need come November, if winning is the actual goal, the reports commented on Green's extreme observation saying, Don't give up: Trump wins New Hampshire, but if Haley drops out, Democrats will get their wish. Don't do it.

Trumpism has taken over the GOP: Conservatism has generally been promoted with its ideals, never a particular politician or personality. Conservatism means a belief in free markets, individual liberty and limited government, the columnist wrote saying, there used to be widespread consensus inside the GOP about that, too. Now, the Republican Party has made Trump fealty a litmus test for the ideology.

Russia has no intention to deploy nuclear weapons in other nations: Deputy Foreign Minister



Russia is not planning to deploy nuclear weapons in other countries, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said.

Ryabkov affirmed Moscow's commitment to refrain from deploying nuclear weapons in countries beyond the existing stations in Belarus. This statement came on Thursday during a press conference held after the inaugural BRICS Sherpas and Sous-Sherpas meeting, Xinhua news agency reported.

He said Moscow deployed tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus to counter "the increasingly aggressive and threatening activities of the North Atlantic Alliance," as a responsible approach to this matter.

Israel-Hamas war: Hamas leaders in Cairo for peace talks



A delegation of senior leaders of Hamas, led by its political head Ismael Haniyeh, has reached the Egyptian capital of Cairo for peace talks to end the ongoing war with Israel in Gaza strip.

The delegation, also comprising senior leaders Moosa Abu Marzook and Khalil al Hayya, reached Cairo on Thursday and held meetings with the Egyptian officials led by its intelligence chief, Major General Abbas Kamel.

The discussions, according to sources in Egypt, are centered around the peace talks that have been underway at Paris during last week in which Qatar, Egypt, the US and Israeli officials had participated.

According to the Paris discussions, a broader framework for release of hostages in the custody of Hamas has been agreed under which 35 hostages would be released in the first step that include old, sick and women

Jamaat-e-Islami Hind appreciates South Africa's role in dragging Israel to the ICJ

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi



The President of Jamaat-e-Islami Hind (JIH), Syed Sadatullah Husaini has lauded South Africa for dragging Israel to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and urged the Government of India and Muslim countries to press Israel for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

In a statement to the media after the ICJ ruled Israel must respect its obligation to refrain from acts of genocide in its war against Gaza, Syed Sadatullah Husaini said, "Jamaat-e-Islami Hind appreciates the bold and timely move by South Africa to drag Israel to the United Nation's highest judicial body. In keeping with its glorious legacy of fighting colonialism, occupation, and apartheid, South Africa took up cudgels on behalf of Palestine and pleaded before the ICJ that Israel was responsible for serious breaches of humanitarian law and was committing acts of genocide in Gaza. South Africa stands vindicated as the ICJ has said in no uncertain terms that Gaza must be protected "from acts of genocide and related prohibited acts identified in Article III, and the right of

South Africa to seek Israel's compliance with the latter's obligations under the Convention."

The JIH President said, "We welcome certain observations by the ICJ especially those mentioned in Paras 54, 78, and 79, although we are disappointed that the ICJ did not explicitly call for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The positive aspect of the ICJ ruling is that it specifically accomplishes the goal of preventing genocide and serves as a moral and legal condemnation of Israel for its airstrikes on healthcare facilities, and densely populated civilian areas. The fact that a 15-2 majority within the ICJ favored most of the provisional measures shows a broad consensus over Israel agreeing to refrain from genocidal warfare. JIH urges the Government of India, the international community along with Muslim countries to press Israel for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The indictment of Israel in ICJ should be extended to achieving peace and a cessation of hostilities in the Gaza Strip."

Echoes of Arab-Israel Conflict: A Forgotten Lesson



DR. MAQSOOD UL HASAN QASMI

The conflicts, riots, clashes, and wars between Arabs and Jews, or Arabs and Israel have been going for decades. 'Nakaba' (Catastrophe), 'Naksa' (Setback), and 'Intifada' (Uprising) are well-known terms in Arabic literature, expressing the pain of Palestinians and other Arabs. The major wars or conflicts that caused massive human loss and destruction include the wars of 1929, 1948, 1956, 1967 (Six Day War), The 'First Intifada' (1987-1993), and the 'Second Intifada' (2000-2005).

What is noticeable is that each time, the number of casualties and amount of destruction on the Palestinian side has been higher than on the Israeli side. As per statistics (Wikipedia), in the 1948 war, more than 6000 Israeli Jews, including 4000 soldiers and 2000 civilians, were killed, while the Israeli army killed more than 10,000 Arab soldiers including other civilians. In 1956 war, 3000 Arabs lost their lives, while the number of losses on



the Israeli side was extremely low. In 1967, Israel lost 796 lives, while Arabs lost 19,000 people. In First Intifada, Israel lost 100 civilians and 60 soldiers, while Arabs lost 1097. In Second Intifada, the total number of casualties on the Israeli side was 1062, while the number of Palestinians killed was between 2739 and 3168.

It was only during the week of riots from August 23 to 29 in 1929 when the number of casualties on the side of Jews was remarkably higher than Arabs. In this first-ever clash between Arabs and Jews, Arabs killed more than 133 Jews and injured 339. Later, 'Hagana' (the old name of the

missile defense system, through which it has been able to flatten Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon. Israel would have faced greater challenges in dealing with groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Ansarullah and other Arab militias.

It is a historically proven fact that nations or peoples who are advanced in science and technology have been, and will continue to be, the ones who rule the world, dictating and shaping the global order.

It is the bitter reality that the Arab and other Muslim worlds have failed to realize. They have not learnt any lesson from their plight. Despite being rich in resources and wealth, they are far behind in science and technology. They lack medical colleges and Universities dedicated to modern education. Their focus only remains on religious debates, while clerics and rulers are engaged in infighting and sectarian violence, labeling each other as 'Kafir' (non-believers) while still dreaming of global domination.

(Writer is a prominent Islamic scholar, he has PhD. on Palestine issue)

India to Get Drones, Despite the Dark Shadow of the 'Khalistani Issue'



GOPAL MISRA

With the Biden administration notifying the US Congress to firm up a USD three billion for the supply of 31 MQ-9B Predator long endurance drones to the Indian armed forces. With this move, the Congress has to decide within the next 30 days, whether to reaffirm the order or cancel it.

The initiative of the US administration is being well taken in India, with the spokesman of the Indian foreign office, Randhir Jaiswal, expressing optimism that "India is respectful to US systems of decision making". He further stated, "This particular matter relates to the US side. They have their internal processes in place and we are respectful of that. That is where I would like to leave my comment."

The Indian comment has come in the wake of the media reports claiming that Washington has blocked the drone sale to India until New Delhi carries out a thorough probe into an Indian link to the failed plot to kill Sikh separatist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Pannun has dual citizenship of Canada and the US. It is being stated that his campaign for a separate Sikh state, Khalistan, is being funded by a Canada-based separatist group asking for an independent Sikh state to be carved out from India.

Pannun had received media attention on November 29, 2023, when a US District Court of New York indicted an Indian citizen, Nikhil Gupta, for conspiring to murder Pannun. Earlier, the assassination of Hardeep Singh



Nijjar, a Sikh separatist, at a Gurdwara in June the same year had caused estranged diplomatic ties between India and Canada. Canada has also claimed that Nijjar was killed at the direction of Indian authorities.

Pannun Issue Sidelined

During the past one week, a number of social media platforms and television channels and newspapers were abuzz with the possibility of adversely affecting the growing Indo-U.S. camaraderie in contemporary geo-politics. In spite of India being cool towards the US suggestion to join NATO, the two countries have been keen to cooperate militarily in the Indo-Pacific as well as to collaborate on global governance issues like climate change and emerging technologies. India has been denying that she was pursuing collaborating with the US to counter China's assertive rise in the geo-politics, but China is reportedly unhappy and is trying to bring Iran and Pakistan to its fold. Meanwhile, India and US had just concluded fifth two+two dialogue among their key officials of the defence and foreign ministries. It is expected that the next dialogue might be held later this year for fine tuning the next Quadrilateral Dialogue.

Apart from revealing maturity and seriousness among them towards global issues, it appears that despite intense lobbying by Pakistan and China in the USA and Canada, in the support of the Khalistanis, both sides have consciously embarked upon their strategic stakes in the current world politics, especially when the war between Russia and Ukraine us

continuing and the Israeli-Hamas conflict appears to be continuing in West Asia. In this context, it is not surprising that the Pannun case has lost its relevance.

The comprehensiveness of the India-U.S. partnership across multiple agencies, and the necessary political support accorded to this relationship across the party lines has given a boost to their ties.

However, the Pannun case might usher in closer intelligence cooperation accompanied by setting up a mechanism for Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism and the Homeland Security Dialogue, that can bring together agencies on both sides concerned with tackling internal and external security threats.

The Economic Issues

In its eagerness to create a challenge to the USSR, the USA has been stressing upon closer economic ties with China. It has expanded over the past three decades with a substantial growth in both imports and exports. The total trade amount rose from only two billion USD in 1979 to over 457 billion in 2011. Although total trade increased over time, U.S. imports from

situation, especially in those industries that mainly employ low-skilled workers.

The current unemployment situation in the US is being debated, but the policy makers and economists could not find any clear solution to resolve the problem. The unemployment rate has remained relatively high over the past few years and differed across industries. For the manufacturing sector, the rate has stayed relatively high at about 10% on average (2001 - 2011). Therefore, if the trade imbalance of the U.S. with China contributes to U.S. manufacturing sector job losses, it would have significant policy implications and help the U.S. government provide necessary protection to its workers.

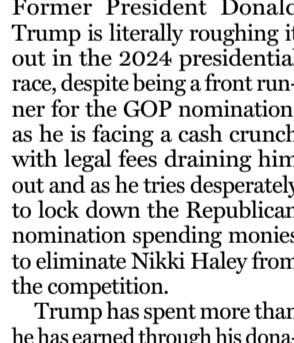
There is yet another aspect of the growing unemployment that a large number of young men and women depend upon unemployment allowances. In any big American town, one may find young men and women addicted to drugs or indulging in small crimes.

On the other hand, China has emerged as a counterweight to new inventions and its younger generation is full of hope and promises a long jump into the field of science and technology.

It is just not the case of a separatist movement once supported by western media and their deep state, they have to team up with Indian talent for saving their young generation too. It means much more cooperation with India in the key field of science and technologies.

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

Trump runs low on cash for campaign as legal fees drain him, Biden flush with funds



Former President Donald Trump is literally roughing it out in the 2024 presidential race, despite being a front runner for the GOP nomination, as he is facing a cash crunch with legal fees draining him out and as he tries desperately to lock down the Republican nomination spending monies to eliminate Nikki Haley from the competition.

Trump has spent more than he has earned through his donations or self-financing schemes. As a potential 2024 Trump-Biden general election rematch looms large, President Joe Biden appears money-flush.

Trump's campaign and super PAC both spent more than they raised in their most recent finance reports, while Biden built up more reserves, media reports claimed.

Campaign finance records filed Wednesday show the main super PAC supporting Trump's campaign, MAGA Inc., spent more than it raised in the last six months of 2023 - primarily by transferring back \$30 million to Save America, the main vehicle for paying the former president's prodigious legal fees.

Similarly, Trump's official campaign blew through more cash than it took in over the last three months of the year, NBC reported after perusing the campaign records of both candidates.

That suggests that Trump's recent threats to blackball Republican donors who don't give money to him are about more than just loyalty: He also needs the money, media reports said.

President Biden's campaign in comparison ended the year with \$46 million in cash, far more than the \$33 million Trump's campaign held before the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary. Flash to the Future, the main super PAC

backing Biden, held a little bit more in the bank than MAGA Inc., \$24 million to \$23.3 million, at the end of the year.

Democrats claimed on Wednesday night that Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris are stockpiling money for campaign purposes, rather than legal fights like Trump, and are in an advantageous position.

"While Donald Trump lights money on fire paying the tab on his various expenses, Team Biden-Harris, powered by grassroots donors, is hard at work talking to the voters who will decide this election and building the campaign infrastructure to win in November," Biden's campaign spokesman TJ Ducklo said in a statement.

Though Trump's legal troubles make him a martyr before his republican supporters, he is also down in cash for the campaigns paying his legal fees through his various outfits. Trump is rallying GOP voters to his cause without a shred of evidence accusing Biden of using the Justice Department to target him and hamstringing his campaign.

Trump that way is banking on the allegations he faces as a key part of his strategy to defeat Biden in November. They have also proved to be an aid in fundraising and in dispatching Republican opponents. The day Trump's mug shot was released

in August, following his arrest in the Georgia election interference case, he raised \$4.2 million online, according to a fundraising report filed Wednesday by WinRed, the GOP's main online fundraising platform. It was the most Trump raised online in a single day last year.

Trump hopes his legal woes will energize the GOP faithful for the general election and help him to persuade persuadable voters to oust Biden. Trump continues to be a master of small-dollar fundraising. While 18 per cent of Biden's fourth-quarter haul came from donors who have given the maximum amount to his campaign, only 6 per cent of Trump's cash came from donors who have given the \$6, 600 limit, reports said.

That means Trump is well-positioned to go back to the well for more contributions from donors who can still legally give. Spokespeople for Trump and MAGA Inc. did not respond to requests for comment on their campaign finance filings Wednesday night.

Both Trump and Biden have enlarged their operations during the last quarter of the year as they transitioned from the start-up size of nascent campaigns into more robust general election machines. Trump had 78 people on payroll and Biden had 74 people, according to their campaign disclosures.



Controversial actress-model Poonam Pandey succumbs to cancer

MUMBAI: The controversial model-cum-actress Poonam Pandey succumbed to cancer at 32, her media team said here on Friday. "This morning is a tough one for us. Deeply saddened to inform you that we have lost our beloved Poonam to cervical cancer. "Every living form that ever came in contact with her was met with pure love and kind-

ness. "In this time of grief, we would request for privacy, while we remember her fondly for all that we shared," said a statement today. No details of Pandey's passing, where and when, or whether any of her family members were present, are provided in the message. She was seen in Bigg Boss

(2011), and then made her Bollywood debut in 2013 with the film "Nasha", "GST - Galti Sirf Tumhari" (2017), and a few other films and television serials. In 2011, she grabbed headlines by promising to strip for the Indian cricket team if it bagged the Cricket World Cup that year, and similar such daredevilry on various occasions.

80% of the Glaucoma cases go undetected in India, a leading cause of blindness: Experts



YOGESH KANT New Delhi

The third leading cause of blindness in India, eye disease named glaucoma, 80 per cent of cases related to it go undiagnosed, says expert while spreading awareness related to the illness on Wednesday. January is National Glaucoma Awareness Month, a time to spread awareness about a disease. Glaucoma is a disease that affects the optic nerve, glaucoma is the third most common cause of blindness in the country. Approximately, 11.2 million people aged 40 years and older have glaucoma in India but only 20% of them know they have it. The numbers can be more, as experts say 80% of cases go undetected. Glaucoma is known as the "sneak thief of sight," because there are no early symptoms. It is also the leading cause of irreversible blindness, affecting more than 80 million people worldwide. Dr Ikeda Lal, Senior Cornea, Cataract and Refractory Surgery Specialist, at Delhi Eye Centre and Sir Ganga Ram Hospital New Delhi said "Glaucoma is a group of eye conditions that damage the optic nerve, leading to progressive vision loss. Often referred to as the «silent thief of sight»,

they seek medical help. Although glaucoma primarily affect the middle-aged and the elderly, however it can affect people of all ages, according to experts . Vision loss in glaucoma is caused by damage to the optic nerve which is responsible for carrying images from the eye to the brain. Vision loss or impairment may be associated with reduced quality of life and decreased ability to perform activities of daily living, including loss of independence, restricted mobility, depression, and anxiety.» She further added that glaucoma becomes more common with advancing age. Family history and genetics play a role, with individuals having relatives affected by glaucoma being at a higher risk. Other factors contributing to glaucoma include elevated eye pressure, certain medical conditions like diabetes, hypertension and prolonged use of steroids, especially without regular monitoring. Dr. Ikeda Lal further said that "While there is no absolute cure for glaucoma, early detection, and treatment is of great importance. This can help in preventing further vision loss. Treatment options may include eye drops to lower intraocular pressure, oral medications, laser therapy, or in severe cases, surgery. With early detection and adherence to treatment, sight can be saved from glaucoma and these patients can have a very good vision for their entire life. Therefore, there is no need to be scared of this disease. Adults older than 40 years, especially those with a family history of glaucoma, must get a comprehensive eye exam every year, including an examination of the retina and the optic nerve. If and when it is identified, people will need long-term monitoring and management.

Few patients may even experience eye pain and headache. If you notice any of these symptoms, it's important to see an eye doctor for a comprehensive eye exam"

Glaucoma typically presents with no symptoms in its early stages, making regular eye examinations crucial for early detection. However, as the condition progresses, you may experience blurred vision, difficulty adjusting to low light, reduced peripheral (side) vision, and seeing halos around lights. Few patients may even experience eye pain and headache. If you notice any of these symptoms, it's important to see an eye doctor for a comprehensive eye exam" Dr. Rohit Saxena Professor, Dr. R P Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS, New Delhi said «Majority of the patients with glaucoma are not aware about their disease as initially it has no symptoms. Only when they start losing vision in advanced cases do

Inspired by PM's call, Rakul & Jacky change wedding venue from abroad to India

MUMBAI: Bollywood actor-producer Jacky Bhagnani and actress Rakul Preet Singh, who are set to tie the nuptial knot, changed their wedding venue to India influenced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for families to host their wedding festivities within India. The two will tie the knot in an intimate two-day celebration, set to conclude on February 21 in Goa. The couple, originally planned a destination wedding overseas, made a last-minute decision to align with Prime Minister Modi's call. A source close to the soon-to-be-married couple revealed, "Rakul and Jacky



December, urging rich and influential families to choose India as the venue for their big life events, Rakul and Jacky reconsidered their original plans and relocated the wedding to India." The source further mentioned, "Their decision, made in mid-December, necessitated a complete reset, involving the destination, and accommodations. Despite the considerable changes, the couple embraced the overhaul, driven by their love for the country and desire to contribute to its growing economy." Hosting the wedding in India aligns with economic goals, providing a boost to the local wedding industry.

People Matter in business success: CMA



CHANDIGARH: People are the key to success of any business, said Prof. Charanjit Singh, past president of Chandigarh Management Association (CMA) on January 31. Addressing members of CMA, Charanjit Singh, who is a faculty in the School of Media and Communication at Shoolini University, spoke about the changing media scenario and how organizations can take advantage of the emerging technology to effectively communicate their products/services. He traced the evolution of media from the past where print, radio and tv coverage mattered the most, and the current emergency of mushrooming social media platforms that have empowered corporate and individual professionals to own up their own channels to communicate with targeted audience. Knowing the people whom you want to be your customers or users is the first fundamental aspect to succeed in any business, and the second being, to be relevant to the people's needs, aspirations and pain points. Communication in the digital space is restricted today with numerous algorithmic gatekeepers who are sifting the useful content from the trash, he informed. Therefore to stay connected to the audience is possible only if one is sharing more relevant, meaningful, and useful content that can help create a brand identity for an individual or a corporate, he emphasized. Charanjit Singh has four decades of experience of working with media, government, corporate, professionals, and NGO and is currently teaches at Shoolini University, said CMA President Sukhwinder Singh.

Parineeti gives a glimpse of practice session for her first live performance

NEW DELHI: Bollywood actress Parineeti Chopra, who recently announced her musical journey, has given a glimpse from her singing practice session as she gears up for her maiden live performance. Parineeti on Sunday took to Instagram, where she shared a video montage featuring her with headphones and a mic. In several moments, she's even pictured singing. The clip has the tune of 'Sanson Ki Mala', by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, playing in the backdrop. For the caption, the actress

wrote: "From my soul to stage very soon." On January 25, Parineeti announced her foray into the world of music, for which the actress said she feels lucky and blessed to start a new chapter and "embark on this musical journey." She even shared a video of her singing 'Maana Ke Ham', which she originally sang in the 2017 romantic movie 'Meri Pyaari Bindu', starring her alongside Ayushmann Khurrana.



Talking about her acting career, Parineeti, who made

her debut in 2011 with the film 'Ladies Vs Ricky Bahl',

was last seen on screen in 'Mission Raniganj' opposite Akshay Kumar. Her next is with Diljit Dosanjh and the title of the film is 'Chamkila'. The film is based in Punjab, where Diljit, plays Amar Singh Chamkila and Parineeti essays his partner Amarjot Kaur, who were shot dead, along with two members of their band in 1988 in an assassination which remains unsolved.

Fans throng Bobby Deol's Mumbai home to wish him a Happy 55th Birthday



MUMBAI: Bobby Deol, fondly known as Lord Bobby, celebrated his 55th birthday in grand style as fans and the media congregated outside his Mumbai home for a joyous celebration. The ardent fans of the star, who made news with his chilling performance in 'Animal', turned the vicinity of home into a carnival spot, overflowing with dancing, singing and plastering the neighbourhood with congratulatory posters. Some of them even adorned Bobby with garlands to express their love for him. Dressed in a dapper jet-blue co-ord suit, Bobby Deol exuded charm on his special day. Sporting a stylish hat, the actor embraced the

festivities, capturing the attention and admiration of onlookers. The birthday festivities reached their crescendo when Bobby cut a magnificent five-tier white cake, a delightful gift from his devoted fans. The actor then graciously posed for selfies with the ecstatic crowd. Some fans even adorned him with garlands, adding an extra layer of joy and warmth to the celebration. After his menacing portrayal of his character Abrar Haque in 'Animal', Bobby is now set for Telugu star Nandamuri Balakrishna's 109th movie, tentatively titled NBK109, and the Tamil fantasy action film 'Kanguva' headlined by Suriya.

Fatima Sana Shaikh returns to Punjab for her next film

CHANDIGARH: Actress Fatima Sana Shaikh, who was recently seen in the theatrical film 'Sam Bahadur', has returned to Punjab for the shoot of her upcoming film 'Ul Jalool Ishq'. The actress shot for her debut vehicle 'Dangal' in the state in which she essayed the role of Indian wrestler Geeta Phogat, who clinched gold for the nation at the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Getting to shoot at the locations in the villages of Gujjarwal, Narangwal, Kila Raipur, Dango, and Leel in Punjab and Haryana during the making of 'Dangal', Fatima is immersed in a wave



of nostalgia. 'Ul Jalool Ishq' also stars Nas-eeruddin Shah, Vijay Varma and Sharib Hashmi. Fatima's last release, 'Sam Bahadur', saw her receiving love and adoration for her portrayal of the former Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi.

Fatima completed seven years in the industry last month with 'Dangal'. The film wasn't just a cinematic treat but it was a cultural phenomenon, with Fatima's portrayal of the real-life wrestling champion earning her accolades and adoration in equal measure. Reflecting on her journey, Fatima had said, "It's been 7 years since 'Dangal', a film that marked my debut in cinema and gave me happy tears, joy, and timeless memories. From 'Dangal' to 'Dhak Dhak' my film career has been a roller coaster ride of emotions with happiness, tears, joys and sorrows."

Juhi Chawla reveals how Ajay Devgn, Aamir Khan played pranks on sets of 'Ishq'

MUMBAI: Actress Juhi Chawla took a stroll down the memory lane, as she reminisced about the days of shooting for the romantic action comedy 'Ishq' (1997), sharing how her co-stars Ajay Devgn and Aamir Khan used to play pranks on the sets of the movie. Directed by Indra Kumar, 'Ishq' stars Juhi, Kajol, Ajay and Aamir in lead roles. Juhi, who appeared on the celebrity dance reality show 'Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa', recalled about the shooting of 'Ishq', saying, "While shooting for 'Ishq', Ajay and Aamir, despite their straight face and innocent appearances, would continuously play pranks. There was a new assistant director, and whenever he came to give the clap for a shot, Ajay and Aamir would poke him and the clipboard would shake."



Costume Party' challenge, where the contestants had to deliver dramatic performances wearing a unique costume. Known for his soulful voice and dynamic performances, Sreerama Chandra, along with choreographer Sonali Kar, presented their interpretation of the popular song 'Neend Churayee Meri' from 'Ishq', infusing it with their distinctive style and energy. Impressed with the performance, Juhi, on whom the song was pictured, said: "Very nice. I must say both of you look very interesting. The costumes are very good. Sreeram, you were dancing with a lot of enthusiasm. I enjoyed it very much." "Sonali, since you wore heels while performing, I remember a flashback from the 90s when Sridevi used to dance on screen in high heels. We all used to follow her, so we had to wear those stiletto-toe heels and dance like her, which I found very difficult. Still, dancing in heels brings a certain grace," she added.

"As a result, the assistant director would often get scolded by our director, Indra Kumar. Sometimes they would even erase the markings for the shot. Each time, the assistant director would be scolded by our director, unaware that it was actually Aamir and Ajay who were behind the mischief," Juhi said. The special episode titled 'Jashn Juhi Ka' is an ode to Juhi Chawla's career in Indian cinema. It featured dance performances by the contestants on some of her most iconic songs from the 90s. Adding a unique twist to the celebrations, the judges - Farah Khan, Arshad Warsi, and Malaika Arora - challenged the contestants with a thrilling 'Grand

Munawar Faruqui thanks 'Bade bhai' Salman Khan for guidance on 'Bigg Boss 17'



MUMBAI: Comedian-musician Munawar Faruqui, who won the reality television show 'Bigg Boss 17', shared his first social media post after winning the title and spending over 100 days inside the 'Bigg Boss' house. On Monday, Munawar took to his Instagram and shared a picture of him holding the trophy with the show host Salman Khan. The comedian expressed his gratitude towards the Bollywood superstar for his guidance throughout the latest season. He thanked his fans for their support. He wrote in the caption: "Bohot Bohot Shukriya Janta. Aapke pyaar aur support ke liye Aakhir kar Trophy Dongri aa hi gayi. Special thanks to Bade Bhai @beingsalmankhan Sir for all your guidance." Munawar, who had a bumpy ride during the show, defeated

actor Abhishek Kumar to win the finale. Munawar celebrated his birthday with the finale of the show and took home a cash prize of Rs 50 lakh. He was among the finalists alongside Ankita Lokhande, Mannara Chopra and Abhishek. While the comedian aimed to make the audience smile with his one-liners and shayaris, his time on the show often saw him getting emotional and teary-eyed. Munawar's journey on the show also involved controversies, including accusations of two-timing with Nazila Sitaishi and previous marriage proposals before entering the 'Bigg Boss' house. With this, the comedian is now proud winner of two reality shows in the same format, the Kangana Ranaut-hosted streaming reality show 'Lock Upp' and the Salman Khan hosted 'Bigg Boss 17'.

30 lakh in India suffer from cancer, 11 lakh new cases: experts

KULBIR SINGH KALSI Chandigarh "30 lakh people in India suffer from cancer, of which 11 lakh are new cases. Cancer claims 5 lakh lives every year in India. Breast & cervical cancer are the most common cancers in females, whereas lung & liver are most common cancers in males in India." Addressing a press conference here Thursday, Dr. Jatin Sarin director medical oncology at Ivy Hospital Mohali said that few decades back, breast cancer was seen only after fifty years of age and the number of young women suffering from this disease were lesser

with almost 65-70% patients were above 50 years and only 30 to 35% women were below fifty years of age. However presently, breast cancer is more common in the younger age group and 50% of all cases are in the 25 to 50 years age group. More than 70% of the cases present in advanced stage accounting for poor survival and high mortality, Dt Jatin maintained. Dr Vijay Bansal, senior surgical oncologist shared that India continues to report the highest prevalence of oral cancers globally with 75,000 to 80,000 new cases of such cancers reported every year. Chewing tobacco

and gutkha contribute to 90 percent of oral cancer cases in the country. Dr Minakshi Mittal, senior radiation oncologist, said that the number of new cases of cancer is expected to rise by about 70 percent over the next two decades. Dr Priyanshu Chaudhary, medical oncologist stated: "One third of the cancers prevented by lifestyle modification. Breast self-examination and mammography is a noble technique to deduct breast cancer cases at an early stage and simple investigations like chest X-ray & PSA can help in picking up lung cancer & prostate cancer in early stages."

