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TRADE UNIONS STRONGLY CONDEMN THE BRUTAL KILLING OF YOUNG FARMER AND INJURIES TO DOZENS

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SONU SOOD IMPRESSED WITH HIS CCL TEAM PACERS PERFORMANCE AHEAD OF TOURNAMENT

'Scared' of AAP-Congress tie-up, BJP trying to get Arvind Kejriwal arrested: Saurabh Bharadwaj

NEW DELHI: AAP on Friday alleged that the BJP-led Centre was scared of the party's alliance with the Congress for the Lok Sabha polls and was using the CBI to get Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal arrested.

There was no immediate reaction from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) or the BJP to the allegation.

Addressing a press conference here, Delhi cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj said as soon as reports of the finalisation of seat-sharing talks between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) started coming in, the ED sent a seventh summons to Kejriwal in the excise policy-linked money-laundering case.

"We have learnt from reliable sources that the CBI is planning to arrest Kejriwal. The CBI will also serve a notice to Kejriwal either this afternoon or by evening," he alleged.



In the next two to three days, Kejriwal will be arrested, he claimed.

"We are getting messages that if the AAP-Congress alliance happens, Arvind Kejriwal will be arrested. The BJP is scared of the AAP-Congress al-

liance. You can arrest Kejriwal if you want but the alliance will proceed," he said.

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak said people will take to the streets if Kejriwal is arrested.

"There will be a tsunami (of

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We are getting messages that if the AAP-Congress alliance happens, Arvind Kejriwal will be arrested. The BJP is scared of the AAP-Congress alliance. You can arrest Kejriwal if you want but the alliance will proceed”

people). Their (BJP) political calculations will go wrong. We are not scared of being arrested. We are forging this alliance for the country," he added.

Indian Economy Projected to grow at 6.5% in FY 2024-25 : Ind-Ra Reports

NEW DELHI: The Indian economy is anticipated to witness a growth rate of 6.5 per cent during the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024-25, as forecasted by India Ratings and Research (Ind-Ra) on Thursday.

The agency's estimation, while 50 basis points (bps) lower than the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) projection of 7 per cent, aligns with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) forecast of 6.5 per cent.

Notably, the current fiscal year is expected to close with a growth rate of 7.3 per cent.

Ind-Ra attributes the ongoing economic recovery to various factors, including sustained government capital expenditure (capex), robust corporate performance, reduced corporate and banking-sector debt burdens, stable global commodity prices, and the anticipation of a new private capex cycle.

Highlighting the prospect of private investments accelerating, Ind-Ra suggests that a



potential return of the present government to power could further bolster this trend.

Sunil Kumar Sinha, Principal Economist at Ind-Ra, emphasised during a press conference that lead indicators indicate a resurgence in private corporate sector confidence towards investments.

While acknowledging that the realisation of these intentions on the ground might take time, Sinha noted a discernible shift in corporate approaches towards financing projects.

The agency disclosed that in 2022-23, a substantial Rs 3.53-lakh crore was raised to fund 982 large projects exceeding Rs 1,000 crore each, reflecting a notable increase from the Rs 1.98-lakh crore raised for 791 such projects in the preceding fiscal year.

Despite being in the early stages, the private capex cycle is gaining momentum, buoyed by companies' growing confidence amidst perceptions of reduced external shocks.

Sinha emphasised the rise

in demand, foreseeing a surge in capacity utilisation in the private sector, particularly in segments like cement and steel, where utilisation levels have already surpassed 80-85 per cent.

However, the agency sounded a note of caution regarding consumption demand, highlighting its skewed nature favouring higher-income households.

Sinha warned that failure to pass on increased input costs to output prices could potentially erode corporate margins and hinder value addition.

While the outlook for the Indian economy appears optimistic with the projected growth and the anticipated uptick in private investments, challenges such as uneven consumption patterns and managing input costs persist, necessitating prudent economic policies and strategies to sustain the momentum of recovery.

AAP strongly condemned the incident of Sikh IPS officer being called Khalistani in Bengal

BJP INSULTED SIKH RELIGION Chandigarh

Aam Aadmi Party has strongly condemned the incident of BJP leaders calling a Sardar IPS officer on duty in Sandeshkhali, West Bengal 'Khalistani' and termed it an insult to Sikhism.

Addressing a press conference at the Chandigarh party headquarters on Wednesday, Aam Aadmi Party Punjab chief spokesperson Malvinder Singh Kang attacked the BJP and said that this incident shows the poor mentality of the BJP towards the minorities of the country. Not only in Bengal, BJP leaders from Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh also used abusive language against Sikhs many times and discriminated against them on religious grounds.

Giving an example, Kang said



that during the Rajasthan Assembly elections, BJP leader Sandeep Dohre used insulting words about Gurdwara Sahibs and mosques in front of UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He said that after the BJP government came to power again, all the Gurdwara Sahibs and mosques will be demolished.

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar particularly detained Sikhs during the farmers' movement and insult-

ed them. This incident in West Bengal is the latest example of BJP's poor thinking towards Sikhs. These incidents prove that the Bharatiya Janata Party is an anti-Sikh and anti-minority party.

Kang questioned the BJP's central leadership for its silence on these incidents and said that the BJP should learn to respect Sikhs and other minority people. He said that BJP has had problems with Sikhs since the beginning because the ancestors of BJP had supported the British during the freedom struggle, while the Sikhs made sacrifices to liberate the country from the clutches of the British.

'Delhi Chalo' Farmers agitation: 40 layers barricades from Ambala to Delhi

SATISH HANDA Ambala

Farmer leaders of Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) and KMM today morning, while talking to the media persons here, stated that they should be allowed to march to Delhi. At Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border, there was a crowd of approximately 10,000 protesting farmers along with nearly 1200 tractor and trolleys parked on the national highway. The protesting farmers had also specially modified and fortified tractor trolleys, two pochain machines and JCBs to attack and damage the police barricades. There were also arming youths covered faces with sticks, stones and iron shields to attack police and indulge in heavy stone pelting.

The leaders of Kisan Unions SKM/NP and KKM were advised that section 144 CrPC has been



imposed in Ambala district as such a crowd having miscreants indulged in anti-social activities and disturbing law and order in the guise of farmers are liable for strict action against them, as such protestors can not be allowed to enter Ambala. Police advised to restrain their crowd and do not approach barricades put up by the Haryana Police at Ghaggar river bridge. Police strictly dealt with the protesters' attempted stone

throwing on police force using water cannons and rubber bullets. According to information, Haryana police made necessary arrangements to maintain peace in the state having 40 layer barricade at Ambala, Kurukshetra, Karnal, Panipat and Sonapat on the GT Road on way to Delhi, having nearly 7000 police force from more than 30 companies to avoid undesired incidents. There is tight security arrangement with

13 layer barraging near Karan Lake Karnal since protestors had announced to start a march to Delhi from Ambala at 11 AM. However, no incident was reported at Markanda river Shahabad in Kurukshetra district having 16 layer barricades, Tatiana and Sangatpura border in Kaithal district and Data Singhwala border in Jind district because of tight security arrangements by the Haryana police.

Between Shambhu border to Delhi, Haryana police has deployed 700 police men at Ambala 8 layer barricade, 500 policemen at Kurukshetra 8 layer barricade, 700 police men at Karnal 13 layer barricade, 950 police men at Panipat 4 layer barricade and 4100 police men at Sonapat 7 layer barricade. Information also reveals that nearly 1500 police men from Haryana and Delhi have been deployed at the Tikri-Jharoda border in Haryana.

Former LS Speaker Manohar Joshi passes away in Mumbai



MUMBAI: Former Lok Sabha Speaker and ex-Chief Minister of Maharashtra Manohar G. Joshi passed away here at the age of 86, early on Friday morning. In a brief statement by his relatives, it is said: "Our family is deeply saddened to inform you that Mr. Manohar Joshi passed away today morning at 3 a.m. following prolonged age-related health issues." The senior Shiv Sena leader's body would be kept at his Matunga home for people to pay their last respects from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Joshi's last rites would be performed at around 3 p.m. at the Shivaji Park crematorium, said the family.

Amarinder Singh bats for BJP's alliance with SAD



NEWDELH: Two-time Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh that he is in favour of an alliance of his party with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), once a long-time partner of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Amarinder Singh claimed in an interview with a news channel that even Punjab BJP President Sunil Jakhar is in favour of the alliance. "I have discussed this issue with the Prime Minister". Regarding distribution of seats between both the parties, he said the matter would be discussed by the high command. "If the BJP and the Akali Dal come together, no one can defeat us," he said.

On the demands of the protesting farmers, including the legal provision of the minimum support price (MSP) for crops, Amarinder Singh said he would discuss them and other issues related to the state with the Prime Minister.

Amarinder Singh's assertion came days after the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) announced

the termination of its alliance with the SAD in Punjab. In the last Assembly polls held in 2022, the number SAD legislators in the 117-member House was reduced to three, down from its tally of 15 seats in 2017, its lowest-ever number. Amarinder Singh and Jakhar, both former Congress leaders, are prominent rebels. Snapping over two-decade long ties, the Akali Dal pulled out of the National Democratic Alliance in September 2020 after sharp differences emerged over the now-repealed three controversial farm laws. The Akali Dal was one of the oldest allies of the BJP. It was among the first to support the 13-day Atal Bihari Vajpayee government, the shortest Prime Minister's stint in India's history, in 1996.

To rebuild the beleaguered Akali Dal and prevent further exodus of leaders, SAD chief Sukhbir Badal, who was known as the 'Super Chief Minister' when the party was at the helm, is on his toes.

SKM to hold tractor march on Feb 26, 'mahapanchayat' in Delhi on March 14

CHANDIGARH: After discussing the situation at the interstate borders between Punjab and Haryana where thousands of farmers have been camping for over a week, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), an umbrella organisation of the farmers' organisations, on Thursday announced a series of protests, including a 'mahapanchayat' in Delhi on March 14.

It demanded registration of a murder case against Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Home Minister Anil Vij over the death of a man during the farmers' agitation a day earlier and a compensation of Rs 1 crore for the deceased.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) leader Rakesh Tikait told the media after the coordination committee meeting of the SKM said on Friday a 'black



day' for non-implementation of their demands, comprising the law guaranteeing the minimum support price (MSP) of crops, would be observed across the country.

"We demand registration of a murder case under Section 320 (of the IPC) against the Haryana CM and the Home Minister and the death of a protestor would be judicially probed," he said. Accompanying farmer lead-

ers from across the country, Tikait said on February 26 a tractor march would be carried out across the country on one side of national highways. "One side of all the highways will be allowed for the commuters to use. We will ply tractors only on the one side."

On March 14, a 'mahapanchayat' would be held in Delhi for the next course of action.

Delhi HC dismisses TMC leader Mahua Moitra's plea alleging media leakage from ED

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Friday dismissed Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Mahua Moitra's plea against the alleged leakage of "confidential" information from the ED to the media in relation to a probe against her under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA).

"Dismissed," said Justice Subramonium Prasad while pronouncing the verdict. Moitra had sought a direction to restrain the Enforcement Directorate (ED) from "leaking any information, including any confidential, sensitive, unverified/unconfirmed information, to the print/electronic media in relation to the ongoing investigation".

She had also sought a direction to restrain several media organisations from "leaking, publishing/broadcasting of



any information related to the ongoing investigation/proceedings in relation to the investigation being carried out by Respondent No.1 (ED) ... under which a FEMA summons has been issued to the petitioner".

A detailed copy of the court's decision is awaited.

The senior counsel appearing in the court on behalf of the former MP earlier claimed that Moitra was being "hounded" and information on

the issuance of the summons to her by the federal agency was published by the media even before she received it.

The ED had issued the summons to Moitra in a case lodged under the FEMA.

Transactions linked to a non-resident external (NRE) account are under the agency's scanner in the case, apart from a few other foreign remittances and transfer of funds, sources said.

In her petition, Moitra had said the "leakages" to the media of confidential information regarding the investigation was causing a grave and prejudicial impact on her right to a free-and-fair investigation.

Congress accuses BJP of extorting money from private companies using ED, CBI, IT

KAVITA SHARMA New Delhi

The Congress party accused the Bharatiya Janata Party government at the centre of intimidating and arm twisting the private companies to force them to donate funds to the party, while referring to a massive donation by 30 companies to the tune of Rs 335 crore to the party (the BJP) after these were subjected to investigations by the ED, the CBI

and the IT. "It is a clear case of 'hafta wasool' (extortion)", party general secretary in charge communications Jairam Ramesh told a press conference here today, while remarking, "these are the ED and CBI bonds, not electoral bonds which also have been held unconstitutional by the Supreme Court".

Party general secretary in charge organization KC Venugopal has written a letter to the Union Finance Minister Nirmala



Sitharaman seeking a probe into "the allegations of quid-pro-quo between BJP and donors of the

BJP which have been raided by various investigative agencies".

Giving details, Ramesh disclosed that between 2018 to 2022, thirty private companies were subjected to investigations by the Enforcement Directorate, the Income Tax department and the Central Bureau of Investigation. He said, during this period the same companies paid Rs 335 crore to the BJP as donation. He revealed, of these 22 companies had never ever paid any dona-

tion to the BJP prior to 2018. Ramesh questioned the government whether it would come up with a "White Paper" on BJP's finances, not just the sources, but how it coerced corporate firms to donate, by misusing investigative agencies against them?

"If you have nothing to hide, then are you willing to present a point-by-point rebuttal on the 'Chronology' of events which led to the filling of BJP's treasury?", he asked, adding, "if you are un-

willing to come up with a factual explanation, then are you willing to present yourself for a Supreme Court monitored investigation in these dubious deals to loot donation for the BJP?" Ramesh said, these were all the symptoms of frustration and desperation as the BJP has realized that it was losing the ground and government and was nowhere near the majority mark, notwithstanding its claims of winning 370 seats of its own.

Trade Unions strongly condemn the brutal killing of young farmer and injuries to dozens

Declares to observe 23rd February as Black day all over India
FW DESK

The platform of Central Trade Unions express strong condemnation of the unprecedented force and oppression on the farmers at Khanauri and Shambhu borders by the Haryana police and Central forces today. One young life is lost, Shubhkar Singh son of Charanjit Singh of Ballo village died of severe head injury and dozens of farmers have sustained injuries at Khanauri and Shambhu border. There have been use of cane charge, plastic bullets and tear gas shells on the farmers whose fault is that they wanted to reach the capital city of the country to demand from the government to fulfill the promises given to farmers at the time of taking back three farm laws based on which they lifted protest from Delhi borders.

While congratulating the workers and farmers for successful action on 16th February a joint call given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) and the platform of Central Trade Unions, independent Federations/Associations for a nationwide mass mobilisation alongwith



Industrial/Sectoral Strike and Grameen Bharat Bandh, and that this success of the movement has made the rulers in the centre nervous. The ruling regime in the centre and their party ruling in states are conspiring to use all means to crush any opposition and are inclined to use all kinds of unlawful actions. We call upon the unions

of all sectors organised and unorganized to observe 23rd February as Black day and organise nationwide protests, wear black badges, have lunch hour protests, protest dharnas, processions, torchlight/candle light protests in whatever form they can express their anguish on the ruthless approach of Central Government towards workers and farmers of the

country. In the meanwhile we reiterate to continue the workers-farmers unity developed in course of time and would go in solidarity action with any future call by the SKM to fight back this anti-worker, anti-farmer, and anti-national government which is promoting corporate communal nexus.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha Condoles the Death of Shubhkar Singh

NEW DELHI: Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) deeply condoles the death of young farmer Shubhkar Singh aged 23 years, son of Charanjit Singh, Ballo village, Bathinda district. He was shot dead by the Poice today at the Khannori border of Punjab while protesting against the anti-farmer policies of the Modi Government. SKM shares the inconsolable grief of the family of the martyred farmer. SKM appeals organisations of all sections of the people across the country including farmers and workers to pay tribute to the young farmer martyr. SKM pledges not allow the supreme sacrifice to go in vain and take decisive action to achieve the just and fare demands of the farmers are achieved through massive and determined struggles.

Delhi records 7.6 degrees, AQI 'poor' at several stations



NEW DELHI: The national capital on Friday recorded a minimum temperature of 7.6 degrees Celsius, four notches below the seasonal average, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said. Until Thursday, the minimum temperature was hovering around 12 degrees, and the maximum temperature was recorded at around 25 to 27 degrees. The IMD's Friday forecast showed that the maximum temperature was likely to hover around 27 degrees,

with the minimum at around 8 degrees again. The weather department said that there will be 'mainly clear sky' throughout the day. Air quality at 9 a.m. at several stations across the city was in the 'poor' and 'moderate' categories, unlike last week when the AQI was 'very poor' and 'poor'. In the Anand Vihar area, at 9 a.m., PM2.5 levels were recorded to be in the 'poor' category, at 300 and PM10 reached 260, according to the Central Pollution Control

Board (CPCB). The Air Quality Index (AQI) between zero and 50 is considered 'good'; 51 and 100 'satisfactory'; 101 and 200 'moderate'; 201 and 300 'poor'; 301 and 400 'very poor'; and 401 and 500 'severe'. The Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport (T3) recorded PM2.5 levels at 137, which is counted as 'moderate' and PM10 at 122. Dwarka Sector 8 witnessed PM2.5 levels at 180, falling under the 'moderate' category.

Rs 6.70 lakh robbed from Axis Bank ATM at Karnal near police station



SATISH HANDA
Karnal

Four youths having covered their faces with masks robbed Rs 6.70 lakh from Axis Bank ATM installed on the Mall Road Karnal situated at a distance of hardly 50 meter from the police station and a case was registered with the police on the complaint of bank manager Arun Goel. According to CCTV footage, four youths entered the ATM booth at around 4 AM on Sunday morning, cut down two ATMs with a gas cutter and managed to flee within five minutes with an amount worth Rs 6.70 lakh. Large number of VIPs including Deputy Commissioner and SP reside on the Mall Road near the ATM. The accused left the place when the iren started and before theft had damaged the CCTV camera filled inside the ATM booth.

INS President condemns physical aggression on journalists



FW DESK
New Delhi

On behalf of The Indian Newspaper Society, Rakesh Sharma, President, INS, condemns any form of physical aggression towards journalists/news reporters by political party workers. The Society is deeply concerned about the recent incident involving a Correspondent in Rae Bareilly during the Nyay Jodo Yatra. It is essential for all political party leaders to refrain from making any derogatory remarks that may incite violence against journalists/news reporters. Press freedom is a fundamental element woven into the tapestry of this democratic nation, and it is imperative for all political parties to safeguard the same in the interest of our nation's democratic values. The INS stands in solidarity with them and reiterate our commitment to defending their right.

No-trust vote against Khattar govt in assembly collapsed

SATISH HANDA

The no-confidence motion brought by the Congress, the main opposition group in the Haryana assembly was defeated on Thursday after the Congress MLAs walked out of the House following a four-hour long debate. The leader of opposition in the state assembly while talking to media persons said that BJP members had started personal attacks on their party members in the house which compelled the Congress MLAs to walk out of the House following a four-hour long debate. The motion was expected to fall as the ruling BJP-JJP alliance has 51 MLAs and support of at least six Independents and one HLP MLA in the 90-member House.

However, since the Congress legislators decided to walk out of the House before the speaker could put the question and invite MLAs who were in favour or against the motion, the no-trust vote became an insignificant formality. Congress. Former Haryana CM Bhupinder Singh Hooda said that since the CM did not respond to the issues raised by the MLAs of his party during the



debate there was no point carrying on. According to information, this was the second no-trust vote brought by the Congress since March 2021 when the BJP-JJP alliance government had easily avoided the 2021 no-confidence motion getting the votes of 55 MLAs out of 87 present and voting.

At the start of the two-hour debate on the motion, Congress MLAs Bharat Bhushan Batra, Varun Chaudhary, Shamsher Singh Gogi, and Geeta Bhukkal spoke about various issues including the ongoing farmers protest and sought a solution to the issues raised by them, Unlawful Activities Prevention Act against Maman Khan MLA from Nuh, about the appointment of an outsider as Haryana Public Service Commission chairperson, the 75% reservation in private jobs

for locals from Haryana law which was quashed by the high court in November 2023, issue of crime rate against women was highest in Haryana with increasing kidnapping and abduction cases in Haryana, the crime rate against children and senior citizens was third highest in Haryana.

The only INLD MLA, Abhay Singh Chautala questioned the need of bringing a no-confidence motion as the BJP-JJP alliance government has already lost the confidence of the people in the state long back because of ruling government as many as 750 farmers had lost their lives in the farmers' agitation and now the similar situation is emerging again. In his response, Khattar said that such incidents take place in every government, but such malafide acts are much below that the previous government rule in the state. CM Khattar said that Congress has a long history of scams in the country as well as in the state when ruling in Haryana including the AJL land probe, industrial plots allotment and said that those who live in the glass houses should not throw stones at others.

'Beti Bachao Abhiyan' gave life to 52 thousand girls. Shockingly 5 districts in Haryana have less than 900 females per 1000 males

SATISH HANDA

Shockingly, the five districts in Haryana state have less than 900 females per 1,000 males at birth, which include Rohtak at 883, Mahendgarh at 887, Sonapat at 894, Charkhi Dadri and Rewari at 897 each in the year 2023 despite the state sex ratio at birth (SRB) has been identified as 916 at present, said Additional Chief Secretary (health) G Anupama while addressing a state-level stakeholder meeting on 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBBP) programme on Saturday. She said that more than 52,000 girls have been saved since the rollout



of Mahendgarh, Sonapat, Charkhi Dadri and Rewari which need immediate attention by the government. She said that more than 52,000 girls have been saved since the BBBBP programme was launched in Haryana on January 22, 2015,

(MTP) Act, regular sensitisation of police, prosecution and health department on PC-PNDT, MTP Acts, curbing online and over the counter sale of MTP kits are important to curb death of newborns prior to the birth.

Woman & her daughter-in-law arrested in honey-trap of a contractor

SATISH HANDA
Yamunanagar

A case of honey-trap of a contractor of old vegetable market at Yamunanagar was registered at Sector 17 police station, who made a complaint against two women Kusum Lata and her young daughter-in-law Savita alias Shaveta both residents of village Dheen in Ambala district, both arrested by the police allegedly black-mailing and threatening him demanding Rs 5 lakh from him, who had paid them Rs 2 lakh as settled and now demanding another Rs 1 lakh. On

the complaint of a contractor, police arrested both women red-handed while accepting the money and registered the case. Both were produced in the court on 21st February and remanded to police custody.

Vishwajit Singh SHO told media persons that the contractor had offered a job to Savita alias Shaveta on 16th November 2023 and started attracting him and both developed love affairs with him, both had sex relations with each other a couple of times in a hotel till 29th November under a planned conspiracy by the daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law.

Venture capital fund to boost startups to offer employment, rather seeking job: Dushyant Chautala

SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Deputy Chief Minister also holding the charge of industries and commerce minister Dushyant Chautala said that youngsters having ideas for startups which require funds to set up industry will be benefited under venture capital fund scheme introduced by Haryana state who will start offering employment to others, rather seeking employment for them. He said, the banks gen-



erally hesitate in funding giving loans for new ventures. Chautala said that the Haryana government has taken an initiative to support young entrepreneurs and boost startups by facilitating assistance to help them convert new business ideas into reality. Industries and commerce minister said that Rs 200 crore corpus announced

by chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar in the 2023-24 budget estimates for setting up a venture capital fund in association with banks and financial institutions to provide financial support through loans and equity to startup entrepreneurs, especially women or come from families with an annual income of up to Rs 1.80 lakh or belong to the scheduled castes or backward classes, will produce young entrepreneurs which evaluates and invests in businesses.

High Court says 'Can't use modified tractor-trolleys, JCBs on highways'

HC also said what Punjab government was doing so far?
SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

In a writ moved in Punjab and Haryana High Court by Randeep Tanwar a resident of Kurukshetra that as a result of neglect by the governments huge number of the protesting farmers from Punjab have gathered at Shambhu and Khanori borders along with modified tractors on way to Delhi, trying to damage barricades installed by Haryana government to maintain law and order in the area. The applicant said that as a result of state government negligence, the public in general are incurring heavy loss due to blockage of traffic on roads, unable to travel in journeys and not only this trade and industry in Haryana state have been much affected, incurring heavy losses.



The Punjab and Haryana High Court on February 20 censured the protesting farmers camping at the Shambhu border with hundreds of tractors and ordered that tractor trolleys can't be used on highways. "According to the Motor Vehicle Act, you can't use tractor trolleys on the highway. You are travelling from Amritsar to Delhi on trolleys," the bench comprising acting chief

justice GS Sandhwalia and justice Lapita Banerji said, "everyone knows about rights but there are constitutional duties as well. The bench also questioned the Punjab government for permitting such a large number of farmers towards capital Delhi, disturb peace and damaged to the people and strongly grilled Punjab government unable to perform their duties to control

farmers how permission was granted by the government to hold such protest by large number of farmers in the state, permitted them to gather at Punjab-Haryana borders. The bench also raised a question over the government doing so far, merely playing politics. «Its wrong to say Punjab allowed gathering of farmers at borders, farmers were going to Delhi to hold a protest but because of restrictions and use of force by Haryana, they have remained at the border points.» According to the Punjab government, protesting farmers have been camping at Shambhu and Khanauri points on Punjab's border with Haryana after their 'Delhi Chalo' march to press the Centre for various demands, including a legal guarantee for MSP for crops, were stopped by security forces which led to clashes last week.

Anti-Hindu policy, says BJP on K'taka govt's move to utilise 10% of temple revenue

BENGALURU: Karnataka BJP President B.Y. Vijayendra has criticised the Congress government's move to utilise 10 per cent of revenues of the temples with more than Rs one crore income. "The Congress government which is adopting a series of 'anti-Hindu' position in the state has set its evil eye on the temples to fill its empty coffers. The ruling Congress has tabled the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments (Amendment) Bill, 2024, and got the consent of the House," Vijayendra said on Wednesday.



"As per the bill, in future, the Karnataka government will take away 10 per cent of the revenues of the temples which have more than Rs one crore revenues. This is nothing but being in a state of utter poverty. The money given by the devotees to the temples by their devoutness should be used to renovate temples and towards creating facilities for the devotees. If it is utilised for other purposes, it amounts to committing an atrocity and fraud on the Trust of the God by the devotees," the State BJP President added.

"The question of crores of devotees is why not the government is always eyeing on the revenues of Hindu temples but not on the sacred places of other religions? Instead of taking share in the money of the devotees let the government place collection boxes in temples and plead them to help out to run the state.

Five held for reckless driving, bursting colour bombs on Delhi roads



NEW DELHI: Delhi Police have apprehended five men for reckless behaviour after bursting colour bombs and driving erratically on the Vikaspuri flyover even as Section 144 CrPC remains in effect in the national capital in view of the farmers protest. The five were a part of a group of men in around 20-25 cars who created nuisance on the Delhi roads recently, said officials. The accused were identified as Subeer Singh (42), Naam Singh (41), Gurmeet Singh (29), Harmeet Singh (32), and Manmeet Singh (36), all residents of Tilak Nagar. Police said that they have also seized five vehicles. Deputy Commissioner of Police (west) Vichitra Veer said that it was reported that "some miscreants in around 20-25 cars were creating nuisance on Vikaspuri flyover going to-

wards Peeragarhi by bursting colour bombs and driving in zig-zag manner, especially at the time when Section 144 CrPC is in force in Delhi, local police and traffic police decided to take strict action against such activity. "Immediately, a case under sections 279 (rash driving) and 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) was registered and investigation was taken up," said the DCP. During the probe, the police team was specifically tasked to identify the offending vehicles available in the video footage provided by a complainant in his complaint. "With the help of details provided by traffic and CCTV footage, the team identified and apprehended five persons from Tilak Nagar along with five vehicles," the DCP added.

Talks Fail; Protesting Farmers Firm on 'Delhi Chalo' March

CHHAVI BHATIA
New Delhi

The standoff between protesting farmers and the government continues as farmers rejected the Centre's proposal to buy five crops at MSP over five years, deeming it inadequate. Following this, the farmers remain steadfast in their resolve, with the 'Delhi Chalo' march scheduled for February 21.

After extensive discussions within their organisations, farmer leaders rejected the government's offer, terming it as unsatisfactory. "After the discussion of both forums, it has been decided that if you analyse, there is nothing in the government's proposal... This is not in favor of farmers. We reject it," asserted farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal.

The rejection followed a high-level meeting chaired



by Union Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, and Minister of State for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai, on Sunday. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also participated in the discussions.

The government put forth a five-year plan to purchase pulses, maize, and cotton crops from farmers at the MSP.

"Cooperative societies like the NCCF and Nafed will con-

tract with farmers who grow tur dal, urad dal, masoor dal, or maize to buy their crop at MSP for the next five years," said Union Food and Public Distribution Minister Piyush Goyal post-meeting.

However, despite the government's assurances, the breakdown in talks may lead to a potential confrontation between the farmers and the police at Shambhu border. Since February 13, farmers

have been camping at the Shambhu border near Ambala, facing resistance from Haryana Police, which has employed tear gas shells and moderate force to deter their movement.

Additionally, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, though not actively participating in the on-ground protest currently, also denounced the government's proposal, accusing it of attempting to divert and dilute the farmers' demands. "The ministers are not ready to clarify whether the MSP they proposed is based on A2+FL+50% or C2+50%. There is no transparency in the discussion, though discussions have taken place four times. This is against the democratic culture established by SKM during the 2020-21 historic Farmers' Struggle at Delhi Borders," the release from Samyukta Kisan Morcha stated.

Farmers reject Centre's proposal on MSP on 5 crops

NEW DELHI: In a setback, farm union leaders on Monday rejected the Centre's proposal of buying pulses, maize and cotton at minimum support price (MSP) by government agencies for five years, saying it was not in farmers' interest.

The announcement was made by farmer leaders Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal at the Punjab-Haryana's Shambhu border in Patiala district after holding a meeting. A panel of three Union ministers Piyush Goyal, Arjun Munda and Nityanand Rai — on Sunday gave a proposal to the farmers during the fourth round of talks in Chandigarh.

Soon after the fourth round of talks concluded on Monday night, farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said, "We will

discuss proposals given by the Centre with fellow farmers, take the opinions of experts."

The crops which the Centre has proposed to buy on assured MSP include three pulses — arhar, tur and urad, besides cotton and maize. It is proposed that the central agencies such as the NCCF, NAFED and the Cotton Corporation of India will sign a contract for five years to buy the crops from the farmers. The farmer leaders have been asked by the three-member Union ministers comprising Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal and Nityanand Rai to discuss their proposal and give their consent before arriving at the final plan from the Central government.

Interacting with the media after the meeting, Punjab Chief

Minister Bhagwant Mann said if the MSP is given for this crop then Punjab can lead the country in production of pulses. He added it will be a second green revolution in the country though Punjab had suffered due to the Green Revolution by loss of its only natural resources in terms of over exploitation of fertile soil and water. The Chief Minister also said that farmers of the state can adopt cotton and maize only if they get the MSP of these crops.

He said the assured marketing of these crops can encourage the farmers for crop diversification — a major push to the crop diversification in the country.

He added the country today imports pulses from other countries whereas if farmers get remunerative prices then they can produce these pulses here.

Former J&K Governor Satya Pal Malik's premises raided by CBI



FW DESK

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) raided the premises of former Jammu and Kashmir governor Satya Pal Malik and 29 other locations on Thursday in connection with alleged corruption in the Kiru Hydropower Project, reports said.

Around 100 CBI officers were involved in the searches, which took place in multiple cities. The case involves allegations of bribery and irregularities in awarding a Rs 2,200 crore contract for the project's civil works. Malik, who governed Jammu and Kashmir from 2018 to 2019, has previously claimed he was offered a Rs 300 crore bribe to approve files related to the project. The CBI has also booked former officials of the Chenab Valley Power Projects (P) Ltd and the company awarded the contract, Patel Engineering Ltd. This is the latest development in an ongoing investigation into the project. The CBI had previously conducted searches in January as part of the case.

Sonia Gandhi elected as RS MP for first time from Raj; 2 BJP candidates elected unanimously



JAIPUR: Congress leader Sonia Gandhi was elected as Rajya Sabha MP for the first time in Rajasthan and two candidates from the BJP, Chhuni Lal Garasiya and Madan Rathore were elected unanimously from the state, confirmed Election Commission officials on Tuesday.

Mahavir Prasad Sharma, Principal Secretary of Rajasthan Legislative Assembly and Returning Officer of Rajya Sabha, declared that all three candidates from Rajasthan had been elected unopposed in the Rajya Sabha biennial elections. After the deadline for withdrawal of nominations passed, the election officer announced the victory of all three candidates. After the announcement, Chhuni Lal Garasiya and Madan Rathore received their certificates while Sonia Gandhi's agent received the certificate on her behalf. As of now, out of 10 Rajya Sabha seats in the state, six seats are with the Congress and four are with the BJP.

Union ministers, farmers hold fourth round of talks brought no result

SATISH HANDA

A panel of Union ministers held a fourth round of talks with the farmer leaders at Chandigarh on Sunday over their demands, including various demands a legal guarantee of support price for 23 crops (MSP), implementation of Swaminathan Commission, waiving of farmers loans, Rs 10000 pension to the farmers every month, compensation to the farmers injured at Lakhimpur Kheri, punishment to the accused involved in Lakhimpur Kheri incident, roll back all cases against the farmers and suitable compensation to the family of farmers died during protests with job to a member of the family. However, issues regarding MSP applicable for 23 crops and waiving of loans against farmers remained unsolved.

Agriculture and Farmer Welfare Minister Arjun Munda, Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal and Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai reached the Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26, Chandigarh for the talks. Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also joined the meeting, which began around 8:30 pm and continued late into the night. The Union ministers and farmer leaders had met earlier also on February 8, 12 and 15 but the talks remained inconclusive. Meanwhile, the protesting farmers from Punjab have been camping at Shambhu and Khanaur points on the state's border in Haryana since February 13 when their 'Delhi Chalo' march agitation by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) an Kisan Mazdoor Morcha to press their demands was inter-



vened by Haryana police and attack on each other by protestors and police continued for three days. According to information, there were no attacks on each other between protestors and the police on Sunday. However, large number of tractor trolleys were seen parked at the border.

Besides a legal guarantee of MSP, the farmers are demanding the implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pension for farmers and farm labourers, farm debt waiver, no hike in electricity tariff, withdrawal of police cases and «justice» for the victims of the 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri violence, reinstatement of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013, and compensation to the families of the farmers who died during a previous agitation in 2020-21 were widely discussed during Sunday meeting between Union ministers and the farmer leaders. Ahead of the fourth round of talks, the SKM leader Balbir Singh Rajewal announced that it will stage protests outside the residences of BJP leaders in Punjab including MPs, MLAs and district presidents for three days from Tuesday to Thursday to press the Centre into accepting

their demands. Interacting with reporters, Rajewal said it has also been decided that they would protest at all toll barriers in the state and make them free for all commuters from February 20 to 22.

Balkaran Singh Brar, Boota Singh and a few other farmer leaders said that they will not accept anything less than the C-2 plus 50 percent formula for MSP as recommended in the Swaminathan Commission report. Earlier, farmer leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal said the central government should not dilly-dally and accept farmers' demands before the Model Code of Conduct for the Lok Sabha elections comes into force. «We want to tell the government that it should avoid the policy of dilly-dallying.» Protesting leaders told reporters at the Shambhu border point. If the government thinks it will continue to hold meetings till the Model Code of Conduct is imposed and then say it cannot do anything as the code is in force and in such case the farmers are not going to return, they said, «The government should find a solution to our demands before the Model Code of Conduct comes into force.»

Vaishnav's election exposes BJD's hypocrisy

ARABINDA MOHAPATRA
Bhubaneswar

The election of railway minister Ashwini Vaishnav to the Rajya Sabha from Odisha with the support of Naveen Patnaik-led Biju Janata Dal has blown BJD's claim of maintaining equidistance from BJP and Congress to smithereens. This was the second time that Vaishnav, a bureaucrat-turned politician who embraced the BJP apparently impressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, got elected to the parliament's Upper House from Odisha with BJD's backing.

His election this time, however, is more significant because it comes just ahead of the general elections which the BJP and BJD will be contesting as the main rivals in Odisha. Lok Sabha and assembly elections were held in Odisha simultane-



ously in 2019 and they will be held together again this time. For a ruling party to support the candidature of a person belonging to its rival party just ahead of general elections is not only surprising but can also be extremely risky. That, too, in a situation where it had the strength to win all the three Rajya Sabha seats at stake in the state.

But the chief minister chose to sacrifice the third seat and gifted it to his main rival. The ruling BJD sought to justify its support for Vaishnav saying he would work for the development of railways and IT sector in Odisha. But this hardly fooled anyone.

It is now an open secret that even though BJD and BJP happen to be rivals in the state the

chief minister enjoys the best of relations with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and most of the senior central BJP leaders. While the Prime Minister scrupulously avoids targeting him even in his election rallies Patnaik has ensured his party's support for the BJP-led NDA inside the parliament on the most crucial issues. His support is vital for the NDA which lacks a majority in the Rajya Sabha. This has been going on right since 2014 when Modi became Prime Minister for the first time. Patnaik's BJD backed the controversial Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2015 helping the NDA get it passed in the Rajya Sabha. Similarly, Patnaik was among the first chief ministers to welcome demonetisation — a move slammed by the Congress and several other parties.

Congress retorts to Modi's claim of 400 plus seats, Ab ki baar-satta se bahar: Kharge

Farmers being blocked as they are enemy army says Rahul Gandhi

KAVITA SHARMA
Amethi

Taking a dig at Prime Minister Narendra Modi's claims of BJP and its allies getting 400 plus seats in the coming General Elections, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge today said that they will be thrown out of power and will not get even 100 seats. "Ab ki baar, satta se bahar", Kharge said in retort to Modi's claim of "ab ki baar, 400 paar".

Addressing a largely attended public rally on the thirty-seventh day of the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra here today, Kharge lashed out at the Prime Minister for be-



ing vindictively discriminatory towards Amethi and Raebareilly, just because people here elected the Congress leaders like Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi.

Speaking on the occasion, senior Congress leader and former president Rahul Gandhi lashed out at the BJP government for the way it was treating the farmers who were demanding legal guarantee for MSP. "The way they are being stopped by cre-

ating concrete walls looks like they are dealing with an enemy army", he observed, while pointing out, the BJP government can waive off Rs 15 lakh crore loans of a few billionaires but cannot give legal guarantee on MSP to farmers. "While Modi guarantees lies, we guarantee legal status for MSP", he remarked.

Kharge warned that Modi was turning into a dictator saying, if he was not stopped

this time, there will not be any elections again and there will be no more democracy and no more constitution. He said, if there is no constitution, there will be no privileges people are enjoying right now.

Taking a dig at Prime Minister Modi for claiming that he (Kharge) had said that the BJP will get 400 seats in the parliament, the Congress president said, he had actually said that while they (the BJP) were claiming to win 400 seats, they will not even win 100 seats. He alleged that as is a routine in the parliament that whenever he speaks, his mike is switched off and the ruling party members disrupt his speech, same thing happened that day also and the BJP was now distorting his speech.

Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India : A Boon or Bane?

JAY DEVKAR
The Uniform Civil Code (UCC) stands as a pillar of contention and debate in India, reflecting the intricate tapestry of its social, cultural, and legal fabric. At its core, the UCC proposes a unified legal framework governing personal matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption, irrespective of an individual's religious affiliation or community. While advocates champion its potential to foster equality, secularism, and social justice, opponents raise valid concerns about its impact on religious freedom, cultural diversity, and minority rights. In this article, we delve into the merits and pitfalls of the Uniform Civil Code in India to discern whether it serves as a boon or bane for the nation.

Boon
1. Promotion of Gender Equality: Advocates argue that the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code would be a significant stride towards gender equality. Presently, India's diverse personal laws often result in discriminatory practices against women. A uniform legal framework would ensure equitable rights and opportunities for women across all communities, thereby em-

powering them and fostering gender justice.

2. Secularism and National Integration: The secular ethos enshrined in India's Constitution mandates the separation of religion from state affairs. However, the existence of disparate personal laws based on religious affiliations challenges this principle. Implementing a Uniform Civil Code would reaffirm India's commitment to secularism by treating all citizens equally under the law, thus fostering national integration and social cohesion.

3. Simplification of Legal System: India's legal system is currently fragmented, with different personal laws applying to various religious communities. This fragmentation often leads to legal complexities and inconsistencies, hindering access to justice for many citizens. A Uniform Civil Code would streamline the legal system, simplifying procedures and ensuring uniformity and consistency in the application of laws across the country.

Bane

1. Threat to Minority Rights: Opponents of the Uniform Civil Code express concerns about its potential threat to minority rights and cultural identities. India boasts a diverse mosaic of religious and cultural traditions, each with its unique customs and practices.



Imposing a uniform legal code could undermine the autonomy of minority communities and erode their distinct cultural identities.

2. Resistance from Religious Institutions: Religious institutions wield significant influence in shaping personal laws and customs within their respective communities. The implementation of a Uniform Civil Code would challenge the authority and autonomy of these institutions, likely leading to resistance and opposition from religious leaders and organizations. Any attempt to impose a common civil code without adequate consultation and consensus-building could lead to social unrest and discord.

3. Complexities of Implementation: The practical implementation of a Uniform Civil Code poses numerous chal-

enges, given the diverse nature of Indian society. Customary practices and traditions vary widely across different regions and communities, making it challenging to reconcile conflicting laws and norms. Moreover, any attempt to impose a uniform legal code without addressing these complexities could exacerbate existing social tensions and divisions.

In North India, particularly within Hindu marriage customs, variations abound, illustrating the complexity of implementing a Uniform Civil Code. For instance, in North Indian Hindu families, a boy cannot marry his maternal uncle's daughter due to established traditions. However, in regions like Maharashtra and some Southern states, such marriages are permissible. This disparity underscores the challenge of enforcing a Uniform Civil

Code amidst the diverse customs and traditions prevalent across India.

Conclusion

The debate surrounding the Uniform Civil Code in India encapsulates the nation's intricate socio-cultural dynamics and underscores the need for a nuanced approach. While proponents advocate for its potential to advance equality, secularism, and social justice, opponents caution against its potential infringement on minority rights and cultural diversity. As India continues its journey towards progress and modernization, striking a delicate balance between uniformity and diversity will be imperative in ensuring that the Uniform Civil Code serves the interests of all citizens while respecting the country's rich tapestry of cultures and traditions. Ultimately, the path forward on this issue must be guided by dialogue, consensus-building, and a steadfast commitment to upholding the principles of justice, equality, and inclusivity enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

Jay Devkar is a practicing Attorney & Advocate at Supreme Court of India and High Courts of various Jurisdictions, Tribunals and Commissions.

Manipur Lawyers condemn RAF's excessive force inside Cheirap Court, demand inquiry within a week



ARIBAM BISHWAJIT

Manipur lawyer fraternity staged a sit-in protest at Cheirap Court, expressing their strong condemnation against the excessive use of force by the Rapid Action Force (RAF) while attempting to control protesters, particularly women. The sit-in was jointly organized by the All Manipur Bar Association, High Court Bar Association, Bishnupur District Bar Association, and Thoubal District Bar Association in front of Cheirap Court.

Addressing the media on the sidelines of the protest, the President of the All Manipur Bar Association, Puyam Tom-

cha, highlighted the incident that occurred yesterday at the Cheirap Court Complex, situated in the heart of Imphal City.

"As an attempt to control the protesters, the Rapid Action Force resorted to excessive force against the public, including media personnel and advocates," stated Puyam Tomcha, President of the All Manipur Bar Association, addressing the media during the protest at Cheirap Court. "The Cheirap Court holds a significant historical legacy, predating Manipur's integration into the Indian union. It is revered by the legal fraternity as a sacred place. The use of

such excessive force within its premises is utterly condemnable and unacceptable. Those responsible must be held accountable," he continued, urging both society and security forces to uphold the sanctity of the court.

He further stated that the protesters had gathered in connection with the cases related to the arrest of six individuals for an alleged arms and ammunition looting incident. The number of protesters was significantly low, making it unnecessary to resort to excessive force for control.

Therefore, he called for an inquiry to be conducted within seven days, headed by a retired Chief Justice of the High Court of Manipur. It should be noted that yesterday, six persons arrested in connection with the arms and ammunition looting from the 5th IRB Post in Chingarel Teipur were produced before Cheirap Court and given judicial custody remand until March 5. In the meantime, protesters demanded their release unconditionally, asserting their unarmed civilian status. In an attempt to disperse the protesters, the RAF fired tear gas shells, further escalating the tension.



Hope and hurdles chase India's trade trajectory

In a recent development that brings a glimmer of hope to India's trading scenario, the country's goods exports witnessed a modest rise for the second consecutive month. With a 3.1% increase following a modest 1% uptick in December, January's performance marks a rare moment of growth in the fiscal year 2023-24. However, despite these signs of resilience, the broader picture remains tinged with concern. The total value of merchandise exports this year has seen a decline of 4.9%, totaling about \$354 billion. This downturn underscores the challenges facing India's export sector amidst fluctuating global demand and geopolitical tensions. A silver lining in this scenario is the significant narrowing of the goods trade deficit, hitting a nine-month low of \$17.5 billion. This improvement, however, reveals underlying economic strains, as it partly stems from reduced imports of crucial goods, hinting at a weakening in investment and consumer demand within the country. The government remains optimistic, projecting that India's export performance could match or nearly reach the previous year's record of \$776 billion, despite facing global economic headwinds. Yet, achieving last year's goods export tally of \$451 billion appears daunting in the face of cooling commodity prices and uncertain global demand. As we look ahead, the export landscape is fraught with uncertainty. Mixed signals from major economies like the U.S. and Germany, coupled with the U.K.'s fluctuating retail sales, present a complex picture. Furthermore, the ongoing geopolitical strife and the resultant operational challenges in shipping through the Red Sea could necessitate the adoption of longer, more costly routes, potentially exacerbating the situation by increasing prices and dampening demand for Indian exports. While India's export sector has shown some signs of recovery, it navigates through turbulent waters marked by geopolitical conflicts, economic fluctuations, and global market dynamics. The path ahead demands strategic adaptation and resilience to sustain growth and navigate the uncertainties of global trade.

LETTERBOX

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“Once in you life you need a doctor, a lawyer, a policeman and a preacher, but every day, three times a day, you need a farmer.”

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P.P. BALAN PONDERES WHY EDUCATING OFFICIALS, PUBLIC ON SELF-SUFFICIENT PANCHAYATS' IMPORTANCE IS CRUCIAL

The self-governing panchayats



Three decades have passed since the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments Acts came into effect, which envisaged that local bodies in India would function as institutions of local self-government. As a follow up, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was constituted in 2004 to strengthen rural local governments.

When it comes to analysing the status of devolution, it is evident that some States have forged ahead while many lag behind. The commitment of State governments towards decentralisation has been vital in making panchayati raj institutions an effective local governance mechanism at the grass-roots level.

The constitutional amendment has set forth specific details on fiscal devolution which includes the generation of own revenues. Emanating from the Central Act, various States Panchayati Raj Acts have made provisions for taxation and collection. Based on the provisions of these Acts, panchayats have made efforts to generate their own resources to the maximum extent. Participatory planning and budgeting were the end result of such interventions by the Ministry.

That "Panchayats earn only 1% of the revenue through taxes", with the rest being raised as grants from the State and Centre was highlighted in a 'Datapoint' (Opinion page, The Hindu, February 5, 2024). It specifically points out that 80% of the revenue is from the Centre and 15% from the States. This is an eye-opener for the proponents of decentralisation as the net result is that the revenue raised by panchayats is meagre even after 30 years of devolution initiatives.

Avenues for own source of revenue

The report of the expert committee constituted by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on own source of revenue (OSR) of rural local bodies elaborates on the details of State Acts that have incorporated tax and non-tax revenue that can be collected and utilised by panchayats. Property tax, cess on land revenue,

surcharge on additional stamp duty, tolls, tax on profession, advertisement, user charges for water and sanitation and lighting are the major OSRs where panchayats can earn maximum income. Panchayats are expected to establish a conducive environment for taxation by implementing appropriate financial regulations. This includes making decisions regarding the tax and non-tax bases, determining their rates, establishing provisions for periodic revisions, defining exemption areas, and enacting effective tax management and enforcement laws for collection.

The huge potential for non-tax revenue includes fees, rent, and income from investment sales and hires charges and receipts. There are also innovative projects that can generate OSR. This covers income from rural business hubs, innovative commercial ventures, renewable energy projects, carbon credits. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds and donations.

The role of gram sabhas

Gram sabhas have a significant role in fostering self-sufficiency and sustainable development at the grass-roots level by leveraging local resources for revenue generation. They

can be engaged in planning, decision-making, and implementation of revenue-generating initiatives that range from agriculture and tourism to small-scale industries. They have the authority to impose taxes, fees, and levies, directing the funds towards local development projects, public services, and social welfare programmes. Through transparent financial management and inclusive participation, gram sabhas ensure accountability and foster community trust, ultimately empowering villages to become economically independent and resilient. Thus, gram sabhas need to promote entrepreneurship, and foster partnerships with external stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of revenue generation efforts.

In several States, gram panchayats lack the authority to collect taxes, while in numerous others, intermediate and district panchayats are not delegated the responsibility of tax collection. When gram panchayats collect 89% of own taxes, the intermediate panchayats collect 7% and the district panchayats a nominal amount of 5%. There is a need to demarcate OSR for the entire three-tier panchayats to ensure equitable sharing.

There are several factors behind the general aversion towards generating own income.

With the increase in the allocation of Central Finance Commission (CFC) grants, panchayats are evincing less interest in the collection of OSR. The allocation for rural local bodies from the 10th and 11th CFC was Rs 4,380 crore and Rs 8,000 crore, respectively. But in the 14th and 15th CFCs there was a huge increase by way of allocating Rs 2,00,202 and Rs 2,80,733 crore, respectively. The tax collected in 2018-19 was Rs 3,12,075 lakh which diminished in 2021-2022 to Rs 2,71,386 lakh. The non-tax collected for the same period was Rs 2,33,863 lakh and Rs 2,09,864 lakh. At one time, panchayats were in competition to raise OSR for their commitment to fulfil basic needs. This has now given place to dependency on grants allocated through central and State finance commissions. Some States have the policy of incentivisation by providing matching grants but which were sparingly implemented. Panchayats also have no need of penalising defaulters as they believe that OSR has not been regarded as an income that is linked with panchayat finance.

Overcoming the dependency syndrome

Despite every enabling factor to raise revenue, panchayats confront several impediments in resource mobilisation: the 'freebie culture' rampant in society is the cause for the antipathy in paying taxes. Elected representatives feel that imposing taxes would alter their popularity adversely. Here, the answer is clear. There is a need to educate elected representatives and the public on the significance of raising revenue to develop panchayats as self-governing institutions. Ultimately, the dependency syndrome for grants has to be minimised and in due course, panchayats will be able to survive on their own resources. Panchayats can only achieve such a state of affairs when there are dedicated efforts in all tiers of governance, which includes even the State and central level.

P.P. Balan is Senior Consultant, Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Views are personal.



TALMIZ AHMAD EXPLORES HOW BIDEN, NETANYAHU'S POLITICAL BATTLE COSTS PALESTINIAN LIVES

In Gaza, peace prospects remain distant

As the conflict in Gaza neared its fifth month, the wanton death and destruction wreaked upon its Palestinian residents spurred major peace initiatives that brought together intelligence officials from the U.S. and Israel engaging with counterparts from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, and the Prime Minister of Qatar. To push the process forward, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also embarked on his fifth visit to the region mainly to convey to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the need to accept a ceasefire and allow increased humanitarian assistance to reach the beleaguered people in Gaza.

Peace negotiations

A peace plan emerged in Paris at the end of January following talks among the intelligence chiefs and the Qatari Prime Minister. It called for a two-month cease fire when the remaining hostages held by Hamas would be released in return for a several Palestinian prisoners in Israeli custody. Hamas fine-tuned this proposal by calling for a 135-day truce when the release of hostages would take place in three stages, along with an increased flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza. This would be followed by a full cease fire and the withdrawal of all Israeli troops from Gaza.

Mr. Blinken carried this proposal to Mr. Netanyahu on February 7. Within a day, Mr. Netanyahu rejected it, terming the terms set by Hamas "delusional". Mr. Blinken later said he had told Mr. Netanyahu that "the daily toll...on innocent civilians remains too high" and had insisted that delivery of life-saving assistance should not be blocked. President Joe Biden said from Washington that Israel's



military campaign had been "over the top" and called for a sovereign Palestinian state.

Mr. Netanyahu paid no heed to U.S. advice: he insisted that his war aim remained "total victory" — the total destruction of Hamas and the re-occupation of Gaza by Israeli armed forces till all hostile elements had been flushed out. He assured his American interlocutors that "we are nearly there with total victory".

However, it appears that the peace negotiators have still not given up: as Mr. Blinken left for home, he said the Hamas proposal "creates space" for an agreement to be reached, even as a Hamas team reached Cairo a day after Mr. Blinken's departure to discuss arrangements relating to prisoner exchanges and movement of humanitarian assistance. These expectations are perhaps unrealistic: on February 12, Israeli special forces rescued two hostages in Gaza, convincing Mr. Netanyahu that the remaining hostages could be freed through military force.

Mr. Netanyahu is regarded as Israel's most wily, self-centred and ruthless politician,

with the capacity to turn even the most adverse circumstances to his advantage. In December 2022, he formed a government with hard right-wing elements. He included in his cabinet Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir who represent groups that exhibit the most visceral animosity for Arabs and reject any possibility of compromise with the Palestinians. Given his dependence on right-wing support, Mr. Netanyahu has consistently rejected the 'two-state solution'.

The Gaza war is perhaps Mr. Netanyahu's greatest challenge in his long career. He is viewed by most Israelis as responsible for the failures that facilitated Hamas' brutal attacks on October 7 last year. While the hard right in his Cabinet rejects any accommodation with Hamas, his war cabinet includes opposition moderates such as former army chiefs Benny Gantz and Gadi Eisenkot who have gained considerable political standing during the ongoing conflict. More seriously for Mr. Netanyahu, if his government were to fall, he faces the prospect of immediate arrest and court proceedings for corruption and abuse of office.

Thus, his hardline posture in response to peace initiatives is possibly influenced by concerns relating to his personal rather than national interests. A major source of his complacency is his shrewd assessment of the limits of the pressure that the U.S. can bring to bear upon him. In the forthcoming presidential elections, Mr. Biden faces a formidable

challenge from the resurgent Donald Trump. Again, given the total backing for Israel that animates most Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate, Mr. Biden has no capacity to make unacceptable demands of the Israeli Prime Minister. Hence, Mr. Netanyahu has disdainfully shrugged off all the advice addressed to him by the U.S. President and his Secretary of State. Israeli reports suggest that Mr. Netanyahu would like to prolong the Gaza conflict until Mr. Trump, his close friend and benefactor, is elected to the White House.

The Saudi Arabia card

The one card that the U.S. is hoping to use to push Mr. Netanyahu towards a cease fire is the prospect of normalisation of ties with Saudi Arabia once a sovereign Palestinian state is conceded. But Mr. Netanyahu believes he can get around this with a United Nations Security Council resolution recognising a Palestinian state; this would trigger normalisation of ties with Saudi Arabia without Israel having to actually give formal shape to the resolution. This may be misplaced optimism: the kingdom has recently reiterated that normalisation of ties with Israel would follow the setting up of a sovereign Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Meanwhile, as Mr. Biden and Mr. Netanyahu struggle for their survival on the chess board of domestic politics, scores of Palestinians are dying daily under the lethal barrage of Israeli firepower.

Talmiz Ahmad is a former diplomat. Views are personal.

BOOKS: REVIEW

The haunting legacy: New book converges history and fiction

Benjamin Labatut's "The Maniac" opens with a harrowing scene that sets the tone for a novel that defies conventional storytelling. On a fateful day in 1933, physicist Paul Ehrenfest commits an act of violence that is as shocking as it is true, anchoring the narrative in a historical moment fraught with upheaval. Labatut uses this incident not merely for its dramatic effect but to delve into the profound transformations occurring in the realms of science and mathematics during the period, challenging the very foundations of reason and certainty.

The novel, however, is not a biography of Ehrenfest but rather uses his story as a prologue to explore the life and impact of John von Neumann, a figure whose intellect and contributions have shaped the modern world in ways that are both extraordinary and terrifying. Von

Neumann's work laid the groundwork for quantum mechanics, game theory, nuclear weaponry, and artificial intelligence, intertwining with the most pressing issues of our time: nuclear proliferation, environmental crisis, and the rise of machines that might one day surpass human intelligence.

Labatut's portrayal of von Neumann is not that of a detached genius but as a man driven by a "monomania" that has far-reaching consequences for humanity. Through the lens of von Neumann's life, Labatut engages with the dualities of progress and destruction, rationality and madness, exploring the moral ambiguities inherent in the pursuit of knowledge. This exploration is enriched by the author's narrative approach, which blurs the lines between fact and fiction, creating a space where the imagined and the real coexist to reveal

deeper truths.

"The Maniac" is a testament to Labatut's mastery of "realistic magic," a term that aptly describes his ability to render the lives of real people and historical events with a sense of wonder and significance. His writing moves with a compelling pace, drawing readers into a world where scientific discoveries are not just milestones of human achievement but also markers of the personal costs and ethical dilemmas faced by those who push the boundaries of knowledge.

Labatut's work stands out for its willingness to confront the "unpopular" aspects of science—the human costs and moral questions that often go unexamined in more celebratory accounts. Through the figure of von Neumann and the diverse cast of characters that surround him, the novel presents a multifaceted view of scientific endeavor, one that ac-



The Maniac
By Benjamin Labatut
Pushkin Press
368 pages; Rs 699

knowledges the complexities and contradictions of its protagonists.

As the narrative unfolds, Labatut navigates the terrain of reason and irrationality, order and chaos, with a philosophical depth that challenges readers to reconsider the implications of humanity's quest for knowledge. The chilling inevitability of confronting our own limitations and the potential for self-destruction inherent in our advancements are themes that resonate throughout the book.

The culmination of these reflections is strikingly illustrated in the match between Lee Sedol and the AI AlphaGo, serving as a metaphor for the broader questions the novel raises about the future of human-

ity in an age of machines. Labatut suggests that the creations of minds like von Neumann's may ultimately reveal more about our humanity—its strengths, its flaws, and its capacity for both creation and destruction—than we might have anticipated.

"The Maniac" is more than just a novel; it is an intellectual journey that invites readers to ponder the complex interplay between human ambition, ethical responsibility, and the relentless pursuit of knowledge. Labatut's ability to weave together history, biography, and philosophical inquiry into a narrative that is both engaging and enlightening is a remarkable achievement. The book leaves us not only with a sense of awe at the wonders of scientific discovery but also with a sobering reminder of the moral and existential questions that accompany our technological advancements. In the end, "The Maniac" is a profound meditation on what it means to be human in a world increasingly shaped by our own creations, challenging us to confront the consequences of our intellectual pursuits with both courage and caution.

Dozee unveils fall prevention alert feature for Enhanced Patient Safety

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Dozee, India's first AI-based contactless remote patient monitoring (RPM) & early warning system (EWS), today announced the launch of its innovative "Fall Prevention Alert (FPA)" feature aimed at revolutionizing patient safety in hospitals. The unveiling took place at 11th International Health Dialogue in Bengaluru, where healthcare professionals and experts gathered to discuss advancements in healthcare.

As per World Health Organization (WHO), patient falls are the most frequent adverse event in hospitals. The state that falls are the second leading cause of deaths due to unintentional injuries, and represent one of the most prevalent patient safety incidents in healthcare facilities worldwide. As a result, fall prevention needs to be the foremost parameter for improving patient safety. According to a recent study falls occur at a mean rate of 6.6 per 1000 occupied bed days (OBDs) in the United



States alone, with up to 30% resulting in physical injury, including fractures.

According to recent research in India, the impact of falls is particularly significant, with an estimated 1.5-2 million older adults experiencing fall-related injuries annually, and 1 million succumbing to fall-related fatalities. Beyond the human toll, falls also impose substantial financial burdens, including increased patient care expenses and liability costs.

The Fall Prevention Alert (FPA) feature by Dozee revolutionizes patient safety with its

real-time monitoring capabilities and proactive alerts. Leveraging advanced technology, including the Dozee Sensor Sheet's bed exit logging, FPA offers customizable alerts for high-risk patients, ensuring prompt intervention. With audio and visual cues, nurses are instantly notified when patients attempt to leave their beds, enabling timely assistance and reducing the risk of falls. Org-level configurations further streamline workflow, making FPA a comprehensive solution to enhance patient safety in healthcare settings.

Dr. Sandeep Reddy, Consultant, MS Ramaiah Hospital said during launch announcement "As clinicians, we've witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of falls on patients' health and well-being within hospital settings. The Fall Prevention Alert feature by Dozee offers a critical layer of protection, enabling healthcare teams to proactively monitor and intervene when patients are at risk of falls. This technology not only enhances patient safety but also streamlines our clinical workflow, allowing us to deliver more effective and responsive care".

Mudit Dandwate, CEO & Co-Founder, Dozee, added, "The Fall Prevention Alert feature is another milestone in our ongoing efforts to enhance patient safety. With real-time monitoring and proactive alerts, healthcare professionals can now intervene promptly, mitigating the risk of falls and improving patient outcomes. We are committed to leveraging technology to address pressing healthcare challenges and improve patient outcomes.

The Fall Prevention Alert feature is set to transform patient safety quotients in hospitals and healthcare facilities worldwide.

Dozee enables healthcare workers to remotely monitor patients' vital parameters such as heart rate, respiration rate, blood pressure, SPO2 levels, temperature, and ECG. Dozee's Early Warning System (EWS) tracks the trends of vital parameters and provides alerts to healthcare providers for early detection of patients' clinical deterioration, enabling timely medical intervention. Dozee uses AI-based Ballistocardiography (BCG) for contactless vitals monitoring. Dozee's technology is patented and made in India. Dozee's innovative technology significantly impacts patient safety, clinical outcome, and operational efficiency. Research done by independent consulting firm Sattva shows that for every ~100 Dozee connected beds, it can save ~144 lives and ~80% of the time taken for vitals by nurses and reduce ICU ALOS by ~1.3 days.

Karnal rice exporters expecting handsome orders in Gulf Food Festival, Dubai

SATISH HANDA

Haryana farmers producing rice eye rich returns during the coming Gulf Food Festival to start from 19th February 2024 at Dubai. In which nearly 50 countries are participating. Basmati rice produced at Tarawadi in Karnal district, Kurukshetra, Yamunanagar and Kaithal districts in Haryana state is the first choice in export markets. According to information, nearly 60 to 65% Basmati rice exported to 160 countries across the world including USA, Europe, Italy, Spain, Thailand, Sri Lanka, China, Africa, Nepal and Khadi countries supplied from Karnal district in the state. Exporters from Haryana state are expecting good orders from countries like Iraq, Iran, United Arab, Amirat and Yaman in the coming Gulf Food Festival.

Following a rise in demand, basmati rice export surged to 4.24 lakh MT in April this year, up from 3.19 lakh MT the previous year. Basmati growers and traders are likely to reap a rich harvest over the coming Kharif marketing season as the prices of all aromatic long grained varieties of rice has witnessed



an increase in domestic and international market. Haryana farmers and traders are likely to reap a rich harvest over the coming Kharif marketing season. According to reports from rice exporters following a demand in the international market, the prices of Basmati rice have reached to over Rs 90,776 per metric tonne (MT) from Rs 83,068 of the last year. Following a jump in the rice export from the country, the price of basmati rice in the domestic market has reached above Rs 80 to Rs 120 a kg against Rs 70 to Rs 100 of the last year.

Information by the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) revealed that in April,

2023-24 India exported 4.24 lakh MT basmati rice against 3.19 lakh MT of the previous year. The rise in export has helped exporters to earn handsome profits as prices in the international market have also witnessed an increase of around Rs 7,000 per MT. They are predicting that the prices may rise further following the increasing demand of Indian rice in the international market. There is also a surge in the export and prices of the parmal or non-basmati rice in the country. It exported a total of 14.2 lakh MT non-basmati rice in 2023 as against 13.52 lakh MT last year. The prices of the non-basmati rice also reached an all-time high of Rs 30,576 per MT last year from Rs 29,265 per MT last year.

Birla Group sets target to launch new decorative paints business



SATISH HANDA
Panipat

ness to over 6,000 towns by the end of 2025, launched under the group's flagship business Grasm Industries, have initially commenced operations of three plants—in Haryana's Panipat, Ludhiana in Punjab, and Cheyyar in Tamil Nadu. Kumar Manglam said, Grasm Industries has plans to establish a total of six manufacturing plants across India by 2025 and has so far invested Rs 5,000 crore. The rest of the investments will be made in three more plants that will come up in Chamarajanagar in Karnataka, Mahad in Maharashtra, and Kharagpur in West Bengal, which will commence production in 2025, he added that with the six plants the company will have a total capacity of 1,332 million litres per annum. Birla said that no paint company globally has ever launched in one shot—factories, operations, products, and services at the scale they are about to undertake.

In a media question about the rates of the per litre decorative paints, Birla said that the products are likely to be launched in March this year and the prices will be fixed at the time of launch only. However, he said that rest assured that the distemper rates will move towards economy and economy rates of the paint will move towards high quality products.

Sadhav Shipping Limited announces IPO aggregating Rs 38.18 crore

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Sadhav Shipping Limited (SSL) is coming out with its Initial Public Offering (IPO) of 40,18,800 equity shares priced at Rs 95 and aggregating to Rs 38.18-crore. The IPO opens for public subscription on February 23, 2024 and closes on February 27, 2024.

For the financial year ended March 31, 2023, the company clocked a Profit After Tax (PAT) of Rs 7.75-crore on a revenue of Rs 77.81-crore. The same period witnessed revenue of Rs 69.55-crore, while upto September 2023 saw the company earning a PAT of Rs 4.07 crore on a revenue of Rs 33.69 crore for FY 24. Describing India's economy as growing robustly, the company Chairman and Managing Director Capt. Kamal Kant Choudhury said, "Sadhav Shipping is well-positioned to capitalize on the bright growth prospects of the Maritime industry." The company presently owns and operates 24 vessels of which 19 are owned and the others being rented. Sadhav Shipping is a key player in varied segments of the maritime domain in India, and is a ship owner, ship manager and operator in verticals of Offshore Logistics, Port Services and Oil Spill Response. In Offshore Logistics, Sadhav Shipping supports the



exploration and production of oil and gas in offshore fields of ONGC Ltd with specialised marine assets meant for offshore operations.

Its service bouquet to ports includes pilot boats, high-speed security boats, survey boats and work boats. With an increase in traffic in all major ports of the country, demand for ancillary services which the company provides has also correspondingly increased. Where the third vertical of Oil Spill Response is concerned, Sadhav Shipping provides Tier-1 Oil Spill Response facility for ports and is presently offering its services on long-term retainer contracts to Kandla, Vadinar, Mumbai, JNPT, Mangalore & Paradip Port. The company intends to utilise the proceeds of the issue to purchase additional vessels to cater to its business requirements, besides also on modifying existing vessels and boats.

The company recently bagged a contract from ONGC to operate one fast crew boat and has contracted with a notable owner for purchase of a suitable boat.

IFFCO retains top position again in World Cooperative Monitor Report 2023

KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Chandigarh

The Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) has been ranked again as Number 1 Cooperative among top 300 cooperatives in the world, sustaining its position from last year. The ranking is based on the ratio of turnover over gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. It signifies that IFFCO is contributing significantly to the GDP and economic growth of the nation. It relates the turnover of the enterprise to the wealth of the country according to the 2023 edition of the 12th Annual World Cooperative Monitor (WCM) report published by International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). IFFCO has also stepped up to 72nd Position in overall Turnover ranking from 97th position in last financial year. IFFCO along with its 35,500-member cooperative

societies, 25,000 PACS and 52,400 PMKSK centres progressing towards 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Atmanirbhar Krishi' is a testimony of prosperity through cooperatives.

IFFCO has maintained its No. 1 rank from past several years which is a testament to IFFCO and its management's unwavering faith in the cooperative principles. This can also be seen as an indicator of strong cooperative movement in the country which has gained impetus since the formation of dedicated Union Cooperation Ministry under the able leadership of Shri Amit Shah, Hon'ble Minister of Home Affairs and Cooperation, Government of India. Initiatives taken by the ministry has created a conducive environment that has enabled flourishing of Cooperative movement in India.

Taking inspiration from Hon'ble PM's vision of "Sah-



kar Se Samridhhi" and with years of hard work, research and experimentation on various crops, IFFCO developed World's First Nano Urea and Nano DAP for farmers.

IFFCO is procuring 2,500 Agri-Drones along with Accessories and Spares for spraying IFFCO Nano Fertilizers as well as Bio-fertilizers, Bio-stimulants like Sagarika and Argi-chemicals etc. IFFCO will train more than 5000 rural entrepreneurs and will distribute 2500 Agri Drones. IFFCO is also engaged in identifying suitable Village Level Entrepreneurs, who will be trained to operate these Drones as "Certified Pilots".

These drones will be deployed as per the location and schedule of training of these rural entrepreneurs.

Commenting on retaining the top position in consecutive years, Dr. Uday Shankar Awasthi, Managing Director, IFFCO said, "It is a proud moment for us at IFFCO and the Indian Cooperative Movement as well. At IFFCO, we are always committed towards the mission of increasing farmers' income ensuring wholesome growth of farmers across the nation, and strengthening the cooperative movement. We believe in innovation as it is the key to success that is why we introducing Nanotechnology based solutions for agriculture especially alternative fertilizers, beginning with IFFCO Nano Urea Liquid which has been received very well by the Indian farmers. Later, IFFCO launched IFFCO Nano DAP which was recently mentioned

in Annual Budget of Government of India. I congratulate each and every one at IFFCO and entire cooperative fraternity of the country for this momentous achievement."

IFFCO being featured in the report is a testament of Indian Cooperatives' zeal towards realizing the mission of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and 'Atmanirbhar Krishi' while promoting the 'Make in India' project. Driven by the Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Sahkar Se Samridhhi', IFFCO continues to drive towards innovation with successful launch of Nanotechnology based IFFCO Nano Urea Liquid and Nano DAP Liquid which has the potential to revolutionize the way agriculture is being practised. Support from the Union Ministry of Cooperation led by Honourable Home Minister Shri Amit Shah has given an impetus to these efforts.

Scandron Receives India's First Logistics Drone Type-Certification from the DGCA

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Scandron Pvt. Ltd. becomes the first company in India to receive a DGCA Type Certification for a Logistics Drones, the "CargoMax 500HE". This historic milestone achievement, demonstrates Scandron's commitment to technological innovation with drones and their commitment to ensure compliance with all regulatory requirements to ensure safe drone operations. With this certification, Scandron is uniquely positioned to revolutionize logistics and supply chain management, enabling efficient and timely delivery for companies that are adopting drones in their supply chain.

The launch of a DGCA Type Approved Logistics Drone facilitates critical medical deliveries to remote regions, streamlines e-commerce logistics, and enhances mid and last-mile delivery. Scandron recently entered



into a strategic partnership with CriticaLog India to offer comprehensive B2B and hub-to-hub drone delivery solutions across 160 Indian cities. Receiving DGCA Type Certification for the CargoMax 500HE Logistics drone enables Scandron and CriticaLog to operationalize their partnership and introduce innovative drone based logistics solutions to the market. This partnership leverages Scandron's CargoMax series of logistics drones, manufactured in its Bengaluru facility, and CriticaLog's expertise in logistics to enhance delivery services in various sectors, including healthcare, e-commerce, and NFO.

Walmart acquires US TV maker Vizio for nearly \$2.3 bn to boost ad biz

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Retail giant Walmart on Tuesday said it is acquiring US-based TV maker Vizio in a deal valued at nearly \$2.3 billion, in a bid to boost its ad business. The acquisition of Vizio and its SmartCast Operating System (OS) would enable Walmart to serve its customers in new ways, including innovative television and in-home entertainment and media experiences. Vizio has more than 500 direct advertiser partnerships which "now accounts for a majority of the company's gross profit."

Vizio's smart TV OS called SmartCast is used by more than 18 million active accounts. "We believe Vizio's customer-centric operating system provides great viewing experiences at attractive price points. We also believe it enables a profitable advertising business that is rapidly scaling," said Seth Dallaire, executive vice president and chief revenue officer, Walmart US.

Kuhl Fans highlights power savings for market

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Kent Healthcare Products highlighted here recently a Made in India for Global Market product "Kuhl Fans", that incorporates BLDC technology with 65% power savings alongside elegance and style.

Varun Gupta, Joint Managing Director, Kent RO Systems, noted that the new BLDC fans aligned on the brand's philosophy focusing on energy, environment and technology, while achieving energy savings of 65% through barely 28 watts power consumption – unlike typical induction fans consuming 80 watts power. By expanding its portfolio along with strategic expansion including through the Mumbai launch, Kuhl aims to solidify its standing as a premier provider of energy-



efficient and innovative ceiling fan solutions in the market, he said.

Kuhl introduced an innovative Next-Gen Desert Cooler fan based on BLDC technology called Kuhl Exzel, which disperses ultrasonic water mist in the air to cool room temperature by 5 degrees. Kuhl Fans also launched another innovative device called the 'Kuhl Voice Controller' – a first-of-its-kind voice-based controller for fans – that can also operate any brand of AC or TV in the room.

World's Largest Hedge Fund highlights Challenges & Opportunities for Investors

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

"PM Narendra Modi's leadership highlights India's potential and challenges prevalent in public markets including taxation, regulatory hurdles, and the specter of capital controls can often impede foreign investment flows," according to Raymond T Dalio, Founder, CIO Mentor, and Member of the Bridgewater Board, Bridgewater Associates, LP.

However, to unlock growth potential, comprehensive development initiatives are necessary to streamline regula-

tions, enhance efficiency, and foster a conducive investment environment, he said while addressing the "ET Now Global Business Summit 2024" organized in New Delhi recently.

Speaking on "Principles for Dealing with the Changing World Order," Dalio highlighted how investors face a multitude of challenges and opportunities in today's dynamic global environment and suggested ways to navigate through this changing world order.

Dalio, ranked the world's 79th wealthiest person by Bloomberg in 2020, said "We delve into the statistical



projections of growth rates, highlighting the rise of the middle class, increased capital formation, and opportunities for educational advancement." "These are the key factors

that influence today's economic progress. Notably, India has emerged as a standout performer on the world stage due to its significant developmental strides in recent years."

However, he warned of potential challenges. "In the United States, the weakening of its currency status could trigger a ripple effect, which can lead to currency depreciation in other nations. High levels of debt pose a significant risk, urging investors to exercise caution, especially when dealing with bonds and heavily indebted assets," he added.

Advocating diversification across various locations

to mitigate risks, while also avoiding over-concentration in any single country or currency, he said "There are three critical factors to consider when evaluating investment prospects: a country's ability to generate more income than expenditure, its internal competitiveness, and coherence amid external conflicts."

Noting how development initiatives are needed to streamline regulations and enhance promising benefits for all stakeholders, he highlighted how climate change affects economics, while human inventiveness drives technological advancements.

CEAT Indian Supercross Racing League: Bangalore to Witness High-Octane Action and Championship Showdown



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bangalore

The CEAT Indian Supercross Racing League (ISRL) is gearing up for its grand finale, marking the culmination of a historic inaugural season that has captivated motorsports enthusiasts across the nation. Announcing during the press conference held here Veer Patel, and Ashwin Lokhande, Co-founders & Directors "CEAT Indian Supercross Racing League (ISRL)" said, The third and final round is set to take place in the vibrant city of Bangalore on the 25th of February, promising a thrilling spectacle that will conclude the first-ever franchise-based Supercross league in the world. The race will be held at the Open Grounds, Survey No. 95-110, Behind Floating Walls, opposite Dash Square, Airport Road, Chikkajala. After the adrenaline-fueled races in Pune and Ahmedabad, where the Shree Shiv Chhatrapati Sports Complex and EKA Arena witnessed high-octane action, the CEAT ISRL has left an indelible mark on the motorsports landscape in India. The inaugural season has not only showcased the skill and prowess of the riders but has also established India as a global hub for Supercross.

Ikodoo Launches Next Innovation in Audio Technology: Ikodoo Buds X ANC

FW DESK
New Delhi

Following the launch of a highly successful range of audio devices and mobile accessories IKODOO, the revolutionary technology brand, proudly unveils its latest innovation in wireless audio technology – the IKODOO Buds X ANC. These cutting-edge earbuds are engineered to provide users with the ultimate audio experience, combining seamless connectivity, intuitive controls, and premium sound quality. IKODOO Buds X ANC seamlessly integrates with Siri and OK Google, offering touch control compatibility for effortless navigation throughout your day. The unique slide-to-open design, combined with LED light indication, ensures an intuitive and user-friendly experience, complemented by the touch of sophistication provided by Premium Tag1. These earbuds effortlessly sync with all Bluetooth-enabled devices, including phones, watches, laptops, TVs, and PCs.

RBI bulletin forecasts promising Economic Prospects for India in 2024

NEW DELHI: In its February bulletin, titled 'State of the Economy', the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) presents a comforting portrayal of stabilising inflation and optimistic economic prospects for India in the year 2024.

According to the RBI bulletin, while there may be a slight decline in inflation expectations, the possibility of renewed pressures from specific sectors still remains. The bulletin highlights that retail inflation in January registered a three-month low of 5.1 per cent, indicating positive trends in the overall inflation landscape.

The RBI's assessment suggests that the Indian economy is sustaining its momentum,



bolstered by promising high-frequency indicators.

The bulletin expresses confidence in corporate expansion strategies, driven by anticipated increases in demand.

"Core inflation is currently

internal simulations suggesting a promising trajectory for India's debt-to-GDP ratio.

The RBI outlines strategies for fiscal consolidation, advocating for a concentration on developmental expenditure.

This includes investments in health, education, digitalization, and climate risk mitigation, aimed at fostering sustainable growth.

"We find that directing government expenditure towards the aforementioned segments could substantially reduce the debt-GDP ratio of the general government to 73.4 per cent of GDP by 2030-31," the bulletin stated, highlighting the potential for significant positive impact.

at its lowest level since October 2019," the bulletin noted, suggesting a favourable outlook for input costs and manufacturing firm selling prices.

Furthermore, the bulletin delves into fiscal matters, with

Crisil's FCI alludes to Liquidity Strain in January

NEW DELHI: In January, India experienced a notable surge in the deficit of its domestic systemic liquidity compared to December, prompting the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to infuse a significant sum of Rs 2.07 lakh crore to address the shortfall.

CRISIL's Financial Conditions Index (FCI) underscores a tightening of India's overall financial conditions during January in contrast to December. The FCI dipped from 0.7 to 0.5, indicating a palpable shift in the economic landscape, as reported by BL.

"Liquidity plunged into deeper deficit, exerting upward pressure on short-term rates. Financial conditions were also affected by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) transitioning into net sellers," Crisil remarked in



a report. Despite the tightening liquidity, the transmission of interest rate hikes witnessed improvement across lending and deposit rates in January. However, the cumulative increase in these rates remains below the RBI's 250 basis point hikes since May 2022.

Interestingly, the rise in lending and deposit rates has had minimal impact on overall bank credit growth thus far, the report added. The incomplete transmission of monetary policy compelled the RBI to maintain unchanged interest rates and persist with its withdrawal of

accommodation stance.

Crisil anticipates proactive measures from the central bank in liquidity management and regulation to curb excessive credit growth, foreseeing a potential moderation in gross domestic product (GDP) growth by the next fiscal year. The outlook suggests the RBI might consider rate cuts starting from June 2024. The deepening deficit in domestic systemic liquidity, which nearly doubled in January compared to December, prompted the RBI to infuse Rs 2.07 lakh crore (1.0 per cent of NDTL) through the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF).

This contrasts with the infusion of Rs 1.14 lakh crore (0.5 per cent of NDTL) in December. The deficit in liquidity has persisted since September, with the gap widening steadily.

India will be 3rd Largest Economy Sooner than expected: Amitabh Kant



NEW DELHI: G20 Sherpa Amitabh Kant emphasised India's projected ascent to becoming the third largest economy by 2027 while highlighting the current recessionary trends in Japan, the United Kingdom, and Germany, suggesting that India's economic progression could accelerate accordingly.

He stated, "India will be the third largest economy by 2027. And now that Japan, the United Kingdom and Germany are all in the recession phase, we should be able to do it much quicker and much faster." The statement was made at an event organised by the All India Management Association, as reported by BS. Kant stressed the necessity for India to maintain an annual growth rate of 9-10 per cent over the next three decades to achieve its ambitious goal of becoming a USD 35 trillion economy by 2047. With India currently ranking as the fifth largest economy, Kant underlined the importance of ambition in propelling rapid growth. "And it is important to be ambitious to make India grow at rapid rates and be USD 35 trillion economy by 2047," Kant further added.

Reflecting on India's economic journey, Kant noted significant strides made since facing balance sheet challenges.

He contrasted India's innovation landscape with that of the West, emphasising the power of India's digital public infrastructure in fostering innovation.

Kant underscored India's future growth pillars, which include sustainable urbanisation, enhanced agricultural productivity, and increased exports.

IREDA inks pact with PNB for financing green energy projects



NEW DELHI: Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Ltd. (IREDA) and Punjab National Bank (PNB) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on February 19 aimed at advancing renewable energy initiatives across the nation. The agreement paves the way for joint efforts in co-lending and loan syndication for a diverse spectrum of renewable energy projects. It covers joint lending, loan syndication and underwriting, management of Trust and Retention Account (TRA) for IREDA borrowers, and working towards competitive terms of sanction, including pricing on IREDA borrowings.

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal Advocates Deepening Economic Ties with Europe

NEW DELHI: Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal emphasised the need for European nations to bolster their economic engagement with India during the India-Europe Partnership for Better Sustainable Future Conclave, hosted by the Confederation of Indian Industry.

Goyal articulated that such collaboration would not only reduce production costs but also enhance supply-chain reliability while providing access to India's burgeoning market.

Goyal's remarks come amid New Delhi's active negotiations with the United Kingdom, the European Union, and the European Free Trade Association for separate free trade agreements (FTAs). Addressing concerns raised by other speakers regarding FTAs, bilateral investment treaties (BITs), or agreements on geographical indicators (GIs), Goyal assured fair, equitable, and balanced negotia-



tions, prioritising India's broader interests in the long term. As negotiations for FTAs with the UK and the EFTA progress, with political approval pending, India is currently engaged in the seventh round of talks with the EU in New Delhi.

Additionally, a high-level delegation led by the commerce secretary is in London to advance discussions on the UK deal. Asserting India's negotiation stance from a position

of strength, Goyal stressed the mutual benefits for the developed world in aligning with the world's fastest-growing major economy. He underscored India's commitment to sustainable development and environmental protection, cautioning against the inclusion of non-trade issues in trade talks.

Goyal, slated to represent India at the 13th Ministerial (MC13) of the World Trade Organisation in Abu Dhabi,

reiterated India's responsible stance on global efforts towards a better future. With a demographic dividend and a youthful population, India is poised to offer political stability and decisive leadership, encapsulating a three-dimensional vision: democracy, demography, and demand.

Germany highlighted its collaboration with India to tackle climate change and achieve sustainable growth. Tobias Lindner, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, Germany, emphasised the potential of ongoing negotiations for an EU-India FTA to bolster trade and economic integration.

According to data from the Confederation of Indian Industry, Europe stands as India's second-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade exceeding USD 185 billion in 2022-23, including exports worth USD 96.90 billion.

Projected long term economic growth hinges on a healthy capital market: Tuhin Kanta

**FW DESK
Mumbai**

"For Indian economy to move forward, it will require a very large number of stocks, very large number of well-managed companies are expected to come in the market-raising resources, because that's how, you know, the capital investments will take place. It is very important for well-managed companies to get listed to achieve accelerated growth. Most of the projections are that the economy will continue to grow over a long period of time, and this will mean that it will require both the capital markets and the National markets also, doing all that they can do

in order to achieve this growth," said Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Secretary, Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), Ministry of Finance, Government of India at the 15th Capital Market Summit organised by ASSOCHAM.

"India is the fastest growing economy in the World. Our capital markets are also performing well. We exceeded the \$4trillion market cap for NSE. And the number of Demat accounts have grown up to more than 14 crores. It is important to actually become prosperous, not only in our immediate future but in the long-term we invest in the market infrastructure, and provide opportunities for



all citizens in our region to reach their potential. We're continuing to improve social structure and improving skills, education, health, and other social needs for our growing economy. The retail participation from urban and rural India in capital markets has been growing strongly with

more and more SIP accounts as well as direct investments clearly indicating the growth of the economy." He added.

Sharing his views at the summit Ananth Narayan Gopalakrishnan, Whole Time Member, Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) said, "The capital market too comes with inherent risks and individuals must exercise due diligence before making investments. Phones have become a convenient tool in the investment process and individual investors rely heavily on it. There is a need for enhancing investor's awareness on the risk posed by technology. Today cybersecurity and threats to tech resilience have emerged as the

biggest threat in the capital markets and it is giving sleepless nights to the stakeholders."

Kamlesh Chandra Varshney, Whole Time Member, Securities & Exchange Board of India, speaking at the summit said, "We can see that the growth in the Capital Market has been phenomenal. We have already talked about total number of Demat accounts, and the growth is 40% in last 10 months. Similarly, you Demat accounts has seen growth of 20% in last 1 year. Now, this is something which is very heartening. And not only the amount, the number that we are talking about, if we go deep down into from which cities these numbers are coming, in last few years,

that is more heartening because it is coming from tier to tier 3 cities. Now, when we say that it is important because when we see Viksit Bharat in 1947, it is not only the GDP, the per capita income that is important, it is also important that each and every Indians are part of that growth is growing. Each and every Indian is enjoying the fruit of development. So, to that extent, when we see last few years, it is the small investors from tier 2 tier 3 cities are joining Capital Market and enjoying the growth that we are seeing in Capital Market. That is something very, very important for development of India and for development of Capital Market."

Hackers place order of over Rs 97k from victim's Swiggy account, two held



NEW DELHI: Two men were arrested for allegedly duping people by hacking food and grocery delivery app Swiggy account, a Delhi Police official said on Monday.

The accused were identified as Aniket Kalra (25), and Himanshu Kumar (23), both residents of Gurugram, Haryana.

According to police, the duo was using 'Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to hack Swiggy accounts of the victims.

The official said that after hacking the account, the accused used to place orders from the victims account and then used to sell the grocery products at a lower price.

Their arrest came after a woman complainant, a resident of Sultanpur was cheated of Rs 97,197 by some unknown persons from her Lazy Pay account linked with Swiggy account.

During the investigation, technical analysis of call details and money transaction was made and it was found that complainant received a call in late night hours from an Automated Telephony Interactive Voice Response (IVR) System and she was told in Pre-Recorded Voice Responses that somebody is trying to access her Swiggy account.

Thereafter, her Swiggy account was hacked and online orders of Rs 97,197 were placed using her Lazy Pay account linked with Swiggy.

"Further, CDR analysis of the calling number revealed that the mobile number from which the complainant received the call is an application based generated number connected with IVR System. Simultaneously, details from Swiggy were

obtained and it came to notice that the alleged orders were delivered in Gurugram," said the Deputy Commissioner of Police (south) Ankit Chauhan.

The mobile number used for delivering the products was found registered on fake ownership. "The team worked on all the available aspects of the case. The efforts of the team bore fruits when during IMEI search, the location of suspect was zeroed in Sector 7, Gurugram, Haryana," said the DCP.

Raids were conducted and Aniket and Himanshu were apprehended.

On interrogation, Aniket disclosed that he used to work as a delivery boy in Zomato and Swiggy.

"Thereafter, he started buying grocery items from online selling platform at lower price through offers and then used to sell them in the market, thus saving 5 per cent-10 per cent on every order. Further, he along with co-accused Ansh, a resident of Punjab met on telegram and they both started duping people through IVR Calling system," said the DCP. Ansh has the data of people who have linked their credit card/debit card/internet banking with their Swiggy account. "Ansh used to target victims by hacking their Swiggy account through pre-recorded voice responses and thereby accessing confidential data of victims. Then Aniket used to link a phone number registered on fake ownership with the Swiggy account of the victim and then used to place orders of Grocery items for as much amount as available in the account of the victim," said the DCP.

Electoral bond-why the Supreme Court of India considering it unconstitutional?

**MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi**

CJI had commented that this scheme should not become a legalization of bribery and vendetta between the centers of power and the people well-wishers of that power.

What has the Supreme Court said in its Decision?

The State Bank should stop selling electoral bonds. This electoral bond scheme is closed now. State Bank will have to disclose its complete information for the year 2019 on its website. It is the voter's right to know where the money in electoral bonds came from and who invested it. Not giving this information is also a violation of information rights.

What are the challenges in EBS?

Electoral bonds are donations made to political parties that keep the identity of donors and recipients anonymous. They may compromise the right to know, which is part of the right to freedom of expression under Article 19 of the Constitution. Anonymity can be compromised due to government access to donor data. This means that the government in power can take advantage of this information which can disrupt free and fair elections. The danger of crony capitalism and use of black money: Crony capitalism is an economic system that leads

to close, mutually beneficial relationships between businessmen and government officials. There are many loopholes regarding transparency and donation limits for corporate entities. According to the Companies Act 2013, a company can make political contributions only if its average net profit for the last three financial years is 7.5%, but this section has been removed, thereby increasing the scope for black money contribution to political funding through shell companies, anxiety has increased.

Last year, several petitions were filed in the Supreme Court, challenging the validity of the Electoral Bond Scheme. A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud heard the Centre's stand and the four petitioners who challenged it. Now the court has given its decision on this. The Supreme Court has completely banned the electoral bond scheme, considering it unconstitutional. Also, State Bank has been asked to make its complete information public within three weeks. In this regard, an affidavit was submitted by the Center on 29 October 2023. Attorney General R Venkataramani told the apex court that citizens do not have a general right to know the sources of electoral bonds.

It is going to be around 5 years since the electoral bonds were issued. Even now people

have very few information about it. The biggest question is that who are those people who are giving their money to electoral parties through electoral bonds. In fact, electoral bonds were issued as an alternative to cash donations to political parties in such a way that it would increase transparency in political funding.

Earlier, this could have kept secret the money that was coming to political parties through electoral bonds, how much money was being deposited and for which party, it was not being disclosed. When RTI was filed on this, it was said that this information cannot be made public to the citizens. Many political parties were also raising questions on its entire process. He was also emphasizing on increasing its transparency.

How are these Bond issued and is there any fixed time for this?

After its launch in the year 2018, it is issued almost twice every year. The 11th electoral bonds were issued in the beginning of October. While initially there was a few response towards its but this year it got a good buyer till before the elections.

How much money has been raised so far through electoral bonds?

Rs 5851 crore has been issued so far through electoral bonds. Electoral bonds worth Rs 822

electoral bonds and are eligible to do so. The electoral bond system was introduced through a Finance Bill in the year 2017. It was implemented in the year 2018. They serve as a means for individuals and institutions to donate to registered political parties while maintaining the anonymity of the donor.

The only objection was that the information about who was depositing money through electoral bonds, how much money was being deposited and for which party, it was not being disclosed. When RTI was filed on this, it was said that this information cannot be made public to the citizens. Many political parties were also raising questions on its entire process. He was also emphasizing on increasing its transparency.

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crore were sold in the month of May last year. From January to May 2019, bonds worth Rs 4794 were sold through various branches of State Bank of India. Whereas earlier in 2018, a bond worth Rs 1000 was sold.

Why was electoral bond created?

Electoral bond has been created by the Central Government to keep the details of donations of political parties in elections. It was said from the Center that this is for transparency of donations. Every penny given to every political party under electoral bonds will be accounted for by the bank.

Who can buy and at what price can they buy this Electoral Bond?

Anyone can buy it, any citizen, company or organization of India can buy these bonds as donations for election. These bonds can be of one thousand, ten thousand, one lakh and up to one crore rupees. If any citizen of the country wants to donate to any political party, they will have to buy electoral bonds from SBI. They will be able to buy bonds and give them to any party.

Are there any benefits to the buyer of electoral bonds?

By purchasing electoral bonds and giving them to any party, the 'bond buyer' will not get any benefit. Nor is there any return on this money. This amount is like donations

INTERNATIONAL

US makes first lunar landing in over 50 years

US company Intuitive Machines' first lunar lander has touched down on the moon, marking the first American spacecraft to land on the lunar surface in more than 50 years.



The spacecraft was launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket on Thursday last week from NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida. The mission, code-named IM-1, marks Intuitive Machines' first robotic flight to the moon's surface, Xinhua news agency reported.

weather interactions with the lunar surface.

It will also demonstrate precision landing technologies and communication and navigation node capabilities, according to NASA.

NASA is working with several US companies to deliver science and technology to the lunar surface through the Commercial Lunar Payload Services initiative.

The last US moon landing mission was made in December 1972, when Apollo 17 touched down on the lunar surface for the final mission of the Apollo Program.

India-Sri Lanka forge ahead with Economic & Trade cooperation agreement talks



NEW DELHI: India and Sri Lanka are poised to advance discussions on the Economic and Trade Cooperation Agreement (ETCA), with upcoming bilateral talks set for later this month and in March.

This development marks significant progress for both nations, as previous attempts to finalise the pact faced obstacles, including opposition from certain worker unions and nationalist politicians in Sri Lanka.

The ETCA negotiations, which were initiated during the Maithripala Sirisena-Ranil Wickremesinghe administration, saw 11 rounds of discussions between 2016 and 2019 but failed to reach fruition due to protests in Sri Lanka.

However, under President Wickremesinghe's leadership,

discussions resumed last year, signalling a renewed commitment to bolstering economic ties between the two countries.

President Wickremesinghe, who took office amidst economic turmoil in Sri Lanka, has stressed the importance of trade agreements in facilitating the nation's recovery.

Notably, Sri Lanka recently signed a free trade pact with Thailand, underscoring its efforts to enhance economic partnerships.

With India and China being key partners, President Wickremesinghe aims to upgrade agreements with these nations to aid in Sri Lanka's economic revitalisation.

The recent progress in ETCA negotiations includes the 13th round of discussions held in New Delhi, focusing on

various aspects such as goods trade, service trade, and customs procedures.

Both sides are exploring mechanisms to safeguard local labour and are considering linking service trade to investments, official sources told Hindu.

While the agreement does not foresee free movement of individual professionals, officials are optimistic about reaching a consensus.

The next round of discussions is scheduled for March 2024, as indicated by a recent official press release.

India and Sri Lanka initially signed a free trade agreement in 1998 but have since endeavoured to upgrade it without success.

Previous attempts, such as the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) discussions with former President Mahinda Rajapaksa's government, did not materialise.

As both India and Sri Lanka gear up for upcoming elections, there is a shared eagerness to finalise the ETCA before the political landscape potentially shifts. Officials from both countries are committed to navigating the remaining challenges and cementing a mutually beneficial agreement.

IDF closing in on Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar in Gaza



The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is closing in on Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar, widely believed to be the mastermind behind October 7 massacre in southern Israel, leading to the death of 1,200 people and kidnapping of 250 people.

Sources in Israel defense ministry told IANS that they have inputs of Sinwar and that he was on the run with his family in the tunnel network of Hamas and is surrounded by hostages from Israel. Sinwar has made the hostages surround him to prevent any attack from the Israel army.

On Sunday night, Israel defense minister Yoav Gallant said that Hamas leadership is looking for a replacement to Sinwar and that the external leadership of Hamas are clueless on the whereabouts of Sinwar and Mohammed Deif, the military commander of Hamas who pulled the strings of the October 7 massacre.

Israel's army has also recently released photographs of Sinwar along with his family in one of the tunnel networks of the terror group.

Hebrew media have reported that either Sinwar is captured by the IDF or the military is closing on him.

A retired Major General of Mossad also told IANS that the IDF was closing in on Yahya Sinwar. It may be recalled that a few days before the spokesperson of IDF, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari announced that IDF would catch Sinwar dead or alive, Yoav Gallant had publicly called for the assassination of Sinwar.

Malaysia: Redefining Cancer Treatment Standards

KUALA LUMPUR (MALAYSIA): As the world marks Cancer Awareness Month, Malaysia has made significant strides in the field of cancer treatment, earning recognition as a premier destination for individuals seeking advanced care. With its state-of-the-art medical facilities, renowned healthcare professionals, and commitment to innovative care, Malaysia has emerged as a beacon of hope for patients battling cancer.

In recent years, Malaysia has experienced a significant increase in medical tourism, particularly in the field of cancer treatment. According to the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC), the country welcomed over 1.3 million medical tourists in 2023, with a substantial number seeking cancer-related care. This surge underscores Malaysia's growing reputation as a leading destination for individuals seeking effective and affordable cancer treatment options.

Malaysia has garnered international recognition for its excellence in cancer care and treatment. The country's healthcare system boasts advanced medical infrastructure, including internationally accredited hospitals and specialised cancer centres equipped with cutting-edge technology. These facilities offer a comprehensive range of cancer treatments, including chemotherapy, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, and surgical interventions, tailored to meet the unique needs of each patient. At the heart of Malaysia's appeal is the expertise of its healthcare professionals. Oncologists, surgeons, nurses, and support staff undergo rigorous training and accreditation, ensuring that patients receive top-notch treatment and personalised care throughout their cancer journey. This dedication to excellence has earned Malaysia recognition as a hub for advanced cancer treatment in the region. Cost-effectiveness is another compelling factor driving individuals to choose Malaysia for cancer treatment. The relatively lower cost of medical procedures, combined with competitive pricing for accommodation and transportation, makes Malaysia an attractive option for patients seeking high-quality care without financial burden.

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

Train services suspended between Tokyo-Yokohama due to concrete on tracks



TOKYO: Train services on Japan's JR Yokosuka line between Tokyo and Yokohama stations were suspended on Thursday due to concrete on tracks in a tunnel. Multiple pieces of concrete have fallen onto the tracks in the tunnel between Tokyo and Shinagawa stations, leading to suspension of train operations since morning, said East Japan Railway Company, or JR East, Xinhua news agency reported. The closed section was extended from Tokyo to Yokohama stations due to restoration work. JR East's Narita Express trains, which connect Narita Airport in Chiba Prefecture and the greater Tokyo area, have consequently been suspended from the first departure on all routes, but are expected to resume in the afternoon.

Trump launches sneaker line after court fined him \$355 mn penalty in civil fraud case

Former US President Donald Trump has launched a sneaker line, a day after a New York judge fined him and his companies nearly \$355 million in the civil fraud case.

The former president unveiled "Trump Sneakers" at Sneaker Con in Philadelphia. He placed a pair of gold sneakers, which a new website priced at \$399 and named the "NEVER SURRENDER HIGH-TOP SNEAKER", on the podium as he spoke, media reports said. "This is something I've been



talked about for 12 years, 13 years, and I think it's going to be a big success," said Trump, the frontrunner in GOP nominations in a potential rematch between him and President Joe Biden for 2024 presidential elections.

By Saturday night, the \$399 sneakers were listed as sold out on the website. There had been 1,000 pairs of the sneakers available for purchase, according to the site. The former president is also selling two versions of sneakers that have "T" and "45" on the sides for \$199, according to the website. Cologne and perfume are for sale at \$99 each.

XPENG announces dealer partnerships in UAE, Egypt, Azerbaijan, Jordan & Lebanon

GUANGZHOU [CHINA]: XPENG Motors a leading Chinese smart electric vehicle ("Smart EV") company, today announces its latest long-term strategic partnership with UAE dealership group Ali&Sons.

As part of XPENG's international expansion plans, a growing list of new partners from XPENG's strategic markets have joined XPENG in bringing the brand's latest smart EVs



to local consumers, including: Egypt, RAYA Azerbaijan, SR Group Jordan, T Gargour and

Fils Lebanon, Gargour Asia SAL XPENG global market dealer strategy focuses on establishing partnerships with local dealers to create a first-class distribution, sales, and service network in various regions. The partnerships will enable XPENG to bring its latest smart EVs to local consumers with branded showrooms, after-sales support, and comprehensive guidance through each stage of the buying process.

XPENG will offer the G6 SUV and G9 SUV models in UAE from Q3 2024. Developed for global markets, both the G6 and the G9 are underpinned by XPENG's evolutionary Smart Electric Platform Architecture (SEPA) 2.0 platform, which sets the foundation for future production models while reducing development and manufacturing costs.

India Shouldn't sacrifice export orientation for Import Substitution: Arvind Panagariya

NEWDELHI: India needs to uphold its external export-oriented approach and stay receptive to global markets to accelerate growth and ascend to a higher growth trajectory, according to Arvind Panagariya, Chairman of the 16th Finance Commission.



This comes at a time when the country has intensified its attention on import substitution through programs such as Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Production Linked Incentives (PLI) in recent years, to stimulate economic growth and foster employment. Stepping out of this current phase of import substitution presents a challenge for a nation like India, stated Panagariya, in an exclusive discussion with Rahul Ahluwalia, Director, Foundation for Economic Development (FED), a think tank. Panagariya underscored the enduring support for industrial policy and import substitution within India's intellectual circles, lamenting the scarcity of advocates for an outward export-oriented strategy.

"I fear that, in our case, exiting this new phase of import substitution will be a challenge," he added. Reflecting on his examination of successful high-growth

countries like Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, China, and India, Panagariya emphasised the correlation between openness to global markets and rapid economic growth. He cautioned against the allure of import-substituting industrial policy, drawing parallels with South Korea's experience where growth faltered following attempts to curtail imports through industrial targeting, ultimately leading to a swift abandonment of such policies by 1979.

Panagariya stressed the imperative for countries with low per-capita incomes, such as India, to prioritise exports. Highlighting the vast scope of the global export market, valued at USD 32 trillion in 2022—nearly ten times India's GDP—Panagariya outlined the transformative potential of capturing a share of this market.

23 lakh Indian diaspora are reinforcing Indo-Canadian relations: Jitendra Singh

NEW DELHI: Twenty-three lakh Indian diaspora are reinforcing New Delhi-Ottawa relations and contributing to the development of both nations, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh said as he met a high-level delegation on Wednesday.

Singh told Scott Moe, Premier of Saskatchewan province who was leading the delegation, that the presence of the Indian diaspora in the Canadian Parliament and the cabinet is a testimony of longstanding relations between the two countries.

Acknowledging the positive contributions made by the Indian community, the minister said they act as a bridge between the two nations as Canada is one of the most favoured destinations

for Indian students for higher education.

Singh also mentioned PM Narendra Modi's invitation to India's diaspora to do research in India's premier institutions and contribute to its progress under the VAIBHAV fellowship programme.

Cooperation and collaboration in areas like Electric Vehicles, Cyber Physical System, Quantum Technologies, Future Manufacturing, Green Hydrogen Fuel, Deep Ocean Mining etc were also discussed, a Ministry of Science & technology release stated.

He told the delegation that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India established the 'Anusandhan' National Research Foundation. The foundation prioritises



research in areas of technology and science to foster and revitalise the innovation ecosystem with around 60-70 per cent participation of the private sector.

He also emphasised that the government is keen on opening arms to welcome non-governmental organisations to contribute to technology development and support them.

The meeting comes as India is keen to develop research col-

laborations with Canadian R&D institutions and technology collaborations with Canadian industries.

Speaking of Canada and India relations, Moe said it has made great strides in recent years and has become truly multidimensional, spurred by a significant convergence of interests, mutual goodwill, and exchanges.

He said the relationship

NEW GOVERNMENT IN PAKISTAN

Zardari-Shahbaz Alliance Paves the Way for Huge Investment from Gulf



GOPAL MISRA

With the announcement of a new coalition government under the banner of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM-2), the decks are being cleared for huge Arab investments in Pakistan as well as in the region, including India. The Sovereign Wealth Fund Institute has estimated that the Gulf SWFs have deep pockets; collectively, they manage around 3.7 trillion USD. The region's seven largest funds have combined assets of about 40 per cent of global SWF assets.

India is already receiving investments from the region, but the bounties of the treasure chest will accrue on a much larger scale, if the twins, India and Pakistan, the countries created in 1947, improve their ties. It is hoped that with PDM-2 forming the government, the two estranged neighbours might normalize their relationship. The outcome of the February 8 polls, perhaps, might finally seal the political fate of Nawaz Sharif, a three-time

prime minister, but new history is being created in Pakistan. In spite of the suggestions of some powerful political groups favouring a martial law, army Chief General Asim Munir, has refused to intervene and offered his support to the new civilian regime.

With the failure of Nawaz Sharif's party, Pakistan Muslim League-Noon (PML-N) to muster majority in the National Assembly, his political fate has been sealed, but it has brought two crafty and cunning leaders, Shehbaz Sharif, his younger brother and Asif Ali Zardari under one umbrella. Shehbaz now will be PM for the second time. He had headed the PDM-1 government till the polls were announced last year.

Zardari, a successful businessman, is known for political acumen in negotiating for power whether it is army or any political outfit. His father-in-law, Z.A. Bhutto, was deposed during his tenure as PM by the then army chief, General Zia-ul-Huq, who later got him hanged through a farce judicial process. Bhutto's daughter, Benazir, who had married Zardari, also a former PM, was assassinated by killers sent by the then military



dictator, Musharraf in 2007. Yet, Zardari, did not hesitate to carve out a political career for his son, Bilawal, in the country's murky political environment with the GHQ.

It goes to the credit of Zardari and Shahbaz that they have finally sealed an alliance preventing the return of Imran Khan and his supporters to power. The stunning success of independent candidates having allegiance to Khan's Pakistan-Tehreek-Insaf (PTI) in the polls has been historic. They have won despite being denied the political symbol of their party. The Khan supporters have also trounced Nawaz Sharif in one of the constituencies he had contested. The PTI supporters have also been elected as independents in large numbers in the provin-

cial assemblies of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). The political and financial significance of this alliance is manifold. In political terms, the PML-N and Pakistan People Party (PPP) offers political stability and since they have tacit support of the GHQ, the new government may go ahead with substantial changes in its foreign policy towards India as being desired by the Arab investors.

It is hoped that with the advent of the new regime, the major financial players in the petro-rich Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and UAE, will be keen to invest in the business and industry for lucrative returns. India has already emerged as a favourable destination for investment. They are also keen to invest in Pakistan.

A Paradigm Change

The Arab countries have recently been stressing upon two issues; that they were in no mood to squander their petro-dollars in the unnecessary avoidable conflicts in the region, and they do not want to give any charity to Pakistan in the name of Islam or funding the terror outfits. Instead, they advocate spiritual Islam, which advocates other faiths. Further, their refusal to support HAMAS against Israel reaffirms their new policy.

During the eighties, the Arab countries were pursuing the US-led western policies of preventing the growing influence of the USSR (now Russian Federation) in South Asia. However, with the sudden exit of the US-led NATO forces from Kabul, the direct presence of the erstwhile colonial powers in the region finally ended. Also, the futility of the ongoing Ukraine-Russian War accompanied by HAMAS attack on Israel has also brought paradigm changes in the policies of the Arab world towards the Indian sub-continent. They find India a lucrative destination for investments, but they are also keen to stabilize Pakistan economically

by offering investment on an unprecedented scale.

In a bid to justify its ignominious exit a Whitehouse document of 2023 camouflages the Biden Administration's disgraceful action as an effort for peace! However, this disgraceful action emboldened the then Pakistan army chief General Qamar Jawed Bajwa to have truce with India on the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. Bajwa was opposed by the then PM, Imran Khan.

The collapse of alliance between the army and Khan has enabled Asif Ali Zardari, former president of Pakistan and co-chairman of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to occupy the centre-stage of Pakistani politics. It goes to the credit of Shahbaz Sharif that he successfully reinvented ties between the GHQ and Sharif family. Both Sharif and Zardari have not only ousted Imran Khan from power. He is now languishing in jail. In spite of his supporters being re-elected as independents, his future will depend upon the performance of the PDM-2 government.

The number of SWFs around the world has grown steadily over the past two decades, from 62 funds in 2000 to 176 in 2023. During

that time, SWF assets have ballooned from one trillion USD to 11.36 trillion USD. For resource-rich countries such as Gulf oil and natural gas producers, SWFs have emerged as promising tools to save for future generations, mitigate the effects of outsized economic shocks. These funds could be deployed as reserve investment and strategic development funds to spend on human, natural, social, and physical capital.

The Gulf is currently home to about 20 SWFs, with at least one such fund originating from each of the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The primary source of their funding is surplus revenues generated from the export of commodities, namely oil and gas. Second, they operate under the guidance and oversight of the government or ruling family. The South Asian region, thus becomes a natural destination for their investments.



Aada Khan decodes Deepika's fashion mantra

MUMBAI: Actress Aada Khan, known for her work in 'Naagin' shared that she loves the way Bollywood diva Deepika Padukone dresses up, adding that she oozes confidence no matter what she wears.

Decoding her fashion mantra, Aada said: "I see fashion as a means of expressing myself. It's a subtle way of expressing my personality, creativity, and mood. It should be appropriate for the situation, allow me to try new things, and enable me to pull them off without feeling uncomfortable."

"Although I don't have anyone in particular to look up to in terms of fashion, I do think highly of Deepika Padukone. She expresses confidence in whatever she wears," she shared.

The 'Behenein' fame actress also expressed that being a celebrity does come with its baggage, as they need to look

good at all times. "Being in the spotlight does come with a certain amount of pressure. But I've learned to accept it with grace, realising that being well-groomed is more than simply appearance-- it's also about expressing confidence and genuineness," she said.

Aada loves to keep up with trends, and said: "I really like keeping up with current fashions, but instead of just following what's in style, I always make sure that the trends suit my comfort level and personal taste. In addition, I personalise everything I wear in order to combine trends with originality."

She revealed her go-to clothes are "oversized t-shirts paired with leggings or cozy jeans." On the professional front, she was last seen in 'Wagle Ki Duniya-Nayi Peedhi Naye Kissey'.

POTPOURRI

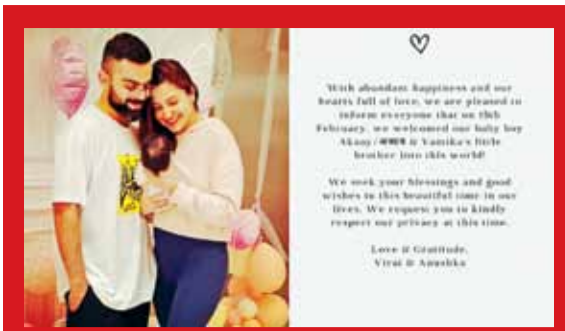
SHIVANGI VERMA to make her OTT debut with musical love story



MUMBAI: 'Choti Sarrdaarni' fame actress Shivangi Verma is all set to make her OTT debut with a musical love story, saying it will take the audience on an emotional ride.

Shivangi, who will play a prominent role in the yet-to-be-titled show, said: "There are so many goosebump moments which will take the audience on an emotional trip. I am also an emotional person and that is why I connect with the story." The 'Bhuti' actress added: "I couldn't be happier. I think every actor

gets what they deserve in some way or other, and it's such a great feeling. I chose this web show because of Nivedita Basu (Senior VP at Atrangi Group), as she has always been on my mind and I always wanted to work with her. And of course, I loved the musical love story." The project revolves around couples and their love affairs and heartbreaks. Shivangi added: "I don't know if it's a happy or a sad ending, but tears will definitely roll down your eyes. And there won't be a single scene where you can blink your eyes."



Anushka-Virat blessed with a boy; name him 'Akaay'

MUMBAI: Star couple Anushka Sharma and Virat Kohli have announced the arrival of their second child -- a boy -- and revealed that they have named their bundle of joy 'Akaay'. Taking to Instagram to make the announcement, the couple wrote: "With abundant happiness and our hearts all of love, we are pleased to inform everyone that on 15th February, we welcomed our little boy Akaay & Vamika's little brother into this world! "We seek your blessings and good wishes in this beautiful time in our lives. We request you to kindly respect our privacy at this time. Love & Gratitude. Virat & Anushka."

The couple had been very secretive about Anushka's second pregnancy. However, a video had been doing the rounds, which had raised speculation. In the clip, the actress could be seen walking with a baby bump in a black dress with her cricketer husband. Anushka and Virat, who are fondly called as 'Virushka' by the fans, got married in December 2017 in a hush-hush ceremony in Italy.

Sanya Malhotra mourns the loss of Suhani Bhatnagar

MUMBAI: Actress Sanya Malhotra on February 18 condoled the death of Suhani Bhatnagar, who essayed the role of young Babita Phogat in the 2016 Aamir Khan-starrer biographical sports drama 'Dangal'.

Sanya expressed disbelief at Suhani's demise and extended her condolences to the entire family.

'Dangal' narrates the story of the Haryana sisters Geeta and Babita Phogat, who became India's first women wrestlers to appear in international competitions and won medals.

Sanya, who started her acting career with Nitesh Tiwari's directorial 'Dangal', portrayed the adult version of Babita Kumari.

The actress posted on her Instagram Stories: "I can't believe it's real. There was no one quite like our Suhani. She was so special, so talented, and way too young



to have left us so soon. Rest in peace Chotu My deepest condolences to Pooja, Puneet and the entire family."

'Dangal' featured Aamir Khan as their father, Mahavir Singh Phogat, who was driven by his dream to

make his daughters world-class wrestlers. Sanya played Babita, Fatima Sana Shaikh essayed

Ameen Sayani, the voice of radio's golden era, passes away at age 91



NEW DELHI: The voice that remained the sound of radio for decades together has fallen silent. Ameen Sayani has passed away at 91.

His son, Rajil Sayani, has confirmed the demise of the iconic figure last night at a hospital.

The cause of his death is said to be heart failure.

Sachin Tendulkar shares video of his Kashmir visit



FW DESK

Cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar has shared the breathtaking scenery of Kashmir in an Instagram video from his first-ever visit to Kashmir.

Accompanied by his wife Anjali and daughter Sara, Tendulkar expressed his admiration for Kashmir, referring to it as the "closest to heaven on earth."

During their trip, the Ten-

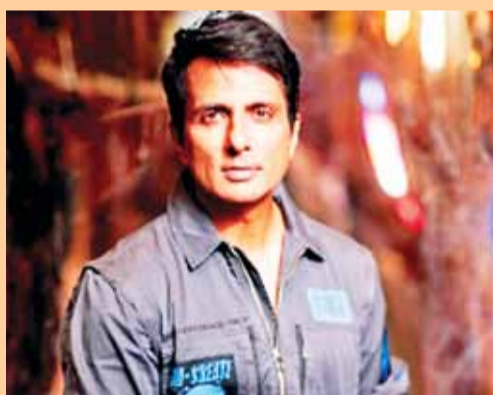
dulkar family made an unexpected stop at a bat manufacturing unit in Charsoo, situated on the Srinagar-Jammu highway. Owner Mohammad Shaheen Paray of MJ Sports revealed the pleasant surprise of Tendulkar and his family visiting their facility. Tendulkar took the opportunity to inspect the quality of bats made from Kashmir willow, expressing satisfaction with the craftsmanship.

Sonu Sood impressed with his CCL team pacers performance ahead of tournament

MUMBAI: Actor Sonu Sood, who is gearing up for the upcoming edition of the 'Celebrity Cricket League' (CCL), is pretty happy with the way his team Punjab de Sher has performed during the practise sessions. Sonu, who serves as the skipper for Punjab de Sher, is specifically impressed with the performance of his pacers during the practice.

The 'Celebrity Cricket League' features notable figures such as Salman Khan, Sohail Khan, Sonu Sood, Riteish Deshmukh, Mohanlal, Bobby Deol and Manoj Tiwari.

Talking about what lies ahead in the tournament for his team, the 'Yuva' actor said in a statement: "CCL



He further mentioned that before the start of the upcoming season their practice games showed their progress.

He said: "I'm happy with how our fast bowlers performed during the

is an opportunity for us to venture into sports and bring out the best of ourselves in sports by taking a break from on-screen and getting on-field. This season, the stakes are even higher as our matches will be broadcasting live on JioCinema, reaching a vast audience across the platform."

practice matches, proving we have a strong team and a long run ahead. We will surely give a tough time to the opponents in this season. This season, I surely believe we can win! With our hard work and solid performance, Punjab de Sher is ready to compete and make a statement in the tournament."

Huma Qureshi aims to spread joy & laughter with her new comedy show

MUMBAI: Actress Huma Qureshi is all set to assume the role of a comedy champion in 'Madness Machayenge-India Ko Hasayenge', and has shared the insights into the upcoming show. Huma will offer a great blend of humour, support, and engagement in various segments, coupled with her witty observations and hilarious anecdotes.

"Comedy serves as a universal stress buster and our aim is simple: to spread joy and laughter one joke at a time," 'Gangs of Wasseypur' fame actress said.

"In today's fast-paced world, we believe everyone deserves a break filled with laughter, and 'Madness Machayenge' is here to deliver just that," she shared.

She said that she is thrilled to be a part of this project as the comedy champion wherein she will challenge the comedians with tasks across different segments that will range from fun and simple to unusual situations, testing their mettle. Redefining the genre by breaking the conventional norms of comedy, the show will deliver varied styles of comedy with an impressive line-up of seasoned comedians.



'Dangal' director Nitesh Tiwari 'shocked' by Suhani's death: 'Such a happy soul'



MUMBAI: 'Dangal' director Nitesh Tiwari has expressed shock at the sudden demise of Suhani Bhatnagar, who essayed the role of young Babita Phogat in the Aamir Khan-starrer film. He said that the news is heartbreaking, adding that "she was such a happy soul".

Suhani, who passed away at the age of 19, succumbed to her untimely death at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, on Saturday morning after an adverse reaction to

medication that had been prescribed to her for the accumulation of fluids in her body.

Expressing shock over the loss of the young actress, who appeared in ad commercials before choosing to focus on studies, Tiwari said: "Suhani's passing away is absolutely shocking and heartbreaking. She was such a happy soul, so full of life. My deepest condolences to her family."

Suhani's final rites will take place in Faridabad's Ajrona crematorium.

Anurag Singh Thakur inaugurates Khelo India University Games in Guwahati

PM MODI ADDRESSES KHELO INDIA UNIVERSITY GAMES BEING HELD IN NORTHEAST STATES VIA A VIDEO MESSAGE

KAVITA SHARMA Guwahati

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, today addressed Khelo India University Games being held across the seven states in the Northeast via a video message. PM Modi noted the mascot of the Khelo India University Games, i.e. Ashtalakshmi in the shape of a butterfly. PM who often calls the Northeast states Ashtalakshmi said "making a butterfly the mascot in these games also symbolizes how the aspirations of the North East are getting new wings."

Conveying his best wishes to athletes the Prime Minister complimented them for creating a grand image of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' in Guwahati. "Play wholeheartedly, play fearlessly, win for yourself and your team, and even if you lose, do not fret. Every setback is an opportunity to learn", the Prime Minister said. Reflecting on the nationwide sports initiatives, Prime Minister Modi mentioned, along with the current Khelo India University Games in the Northeast, Khelo India Winter Games in Ladakh, Khelo



India Youth Games in Tamil Nadu, Beach Games in Diu and remarked, "I am pleased to witness sports events being organized across every corner of India, from the North to the South and from the West to the East." He applauded the efforts of various state governments, including the Assam government, for their contributions to promoting sports and providing opportunities for youth to showcase their talents.

Addressing the changing societal perceptions towards sports, Prime Minister Modi emphasized the shift in parental attitudes, noting, previously, parents hesitated to involve their children in sports activities, fearing it would distract from academics. He highlighted the

evolving mindset where parents now take pride in their children's achievements in sports, be it at the state, national, or international level.

Prime Minister Modi stressed the importance of celebrating and honouring athletes' achievements, stating, "Just as academic achievements are celebrated, we must develop a tradition of honouring those who excel in sports." He emphasized the need to learn from the Northeast region's rich sports culture, where sports are celebrated fervently, inspiring athletes across disciplines from football to athletics, badminton to boxing, weightlifting to chess. Prime Minister Modi expressed confidence that athletes participating in the Khelo India University Games

About Khelo India University Games

The Khelo India University Games is a multi-discipline sports event aimed at promoting sports and fitness among university students in India. Ideated by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, it provides a platform for young athletes to showcase their talent and compete at the national level. The Khelo India University Games - Ashtalakshmi 2023 will feature an array of sporting disciplines including Athletics, Rugby, Basketball, Volleyball, Swimming, Badminton, Hockey, Fencing, Kabaddi, Football, Tennis, Mallakhamb, Judo, Table Tennis, Boxing, Shooting, Weightlifting, Archery, Wrestling, and Yogasana, the event embodies the essence of unity in diversity.

would not only gain valuable experiences but also contribute to the advancement of sports culture throughout India.

The Prime Minister highlighted the evolving ecosystem of opportunities for the youth, stating, "Whether it's Khelo India, Tops, or other initiatives, a new ecosystem of possibilities is being created for our young generation." He emphasized the government's efforts to create a conducive environment for athletes, from training facilities to scholarships, and a record budget allocation of over 3500 crore rupees for sports this year.

Prime Minister Modi proudly shared India's success in sporting events globally, affirming, He celebrated India's ability to compete on the international stage, citing remarkable achievements in various tournaments, including the World University Games where Indian athletes secured unprecedented success, winning a total of 26 medals in 2023 from just 4 in 2019. He also mentioned record medal haul in the Asian Games. "This is not just numbers of medals, these are proofs of what our athletes can achieve if they are helped with a scientific approach", he added.

Reflecting on the values instilled through sports, Prime

Minister Modi emphasized, "Success in sports requires more than just talent; it demands temperament, leadership, teamwork, and resilience." He encouraged the youth to embrace sports not only for physical fitness but also for developing essential life skills, stating, "Those who play, also flourish."

Prime Minister Modi urged the athletes to explore the beauty of the North East region beyond the sports arena. He encouraged them to embark on post-event adventures, capture memories, and share their experiences on social media using the hashtag #NorthEastMemories. Additionally, he suggested learning a few local phrases to engage with the communities they visit, enhancing their cultural experience. PM Modi asked them to experiment with Bhashini App too. On the occasion Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports Shri Anurag Singh Thakur said that after the huge success of the Khelo India University Games held last year in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh and the first Khelo India Winter Games in Ladakh, it's now our turn to shine with this year's University Games here in Guwahati.