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KEJRIWAL EXTENDED ZERO ELECTRICITY BILLS AND SUBSIDIES TO LAWYERS, FARMERS & VICTIMS OF 1984 RIOTS TILL 2024-25

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RBI TO ROLL OUT INTEROPERABLE PAYMENT SYSTEM FOR FASTER FUND SETTLEMENTS

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NEETU CHANDRA SAYS HER PORTRAYAL OF UMRAO JAAN WILL BE 'A TRIBUTE TO ACTRESS REKHA

LG orders termination of two non-official members of DUSIB govt hits back

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena has ordered the termination of two non-official members of DUSIB who were serving as expert members without any requisite qualification in urban planning, Raj Niwas officials said on Thursday.

Saxena issued the directions in the exercise of his powers under section 4(2) of the DUSIB Act, 2010, they added. However, the Delhi government later issued a statement saying the appointment of Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB) members lies in the domain of the elected government and not the LG.

Raj Niwas officials earlier said that of the two officers whose services were ordered to be terminated, one has been serving as an expert member of



DUSIB for nine years while the other was appointed as a non-official member on March 9, 2022. Both were drawing hefty remunerations in contravention of the law, they added. Saxena also sought a panel of fresh names for expert members who fulfil the requisite qualifications within a week, an official said.

One of the members was initially engaged at a salary of Rs 70,000 per month which was increased to Rs 80,500 and

further to Rs 98,520.

«This was in contravention of section 52(2)(a) of the DUSIB Act as the members were appointed at consolidated remuneration and there was no provision of increment as applicable in the case of a government employee,» a Raj Niwas official said.

The other member was also engaged in the consolidated remuneration of Rs 98,250, besides Rs 25,000 as transport

allowance and Rs 1,500 per month as telephone allowance.

The LG has also directed the administrative department to frame rules regarding the service conditions of board members of the DUSIB.

Responding to the development, the AAP government said, «The Delhi LG wakes up every day with a new idea on how to stop the works of Delhi government. Why does he hate the people of Delhi so much? Appointment of DUSIB members lies in the domain of the elected government, and not the LG.»

«If he had any questions regarding them, he could have discussed it with the chief minister. But he did not do it. At a time when the LG should be stopping the illegal demolition of slums in Delhi by DDA, he is busy removing DUSIB members who are opposing this inhumane action,» it added.

Delhi Govt presents budget with ₹76000 crore outlays

Main focus on women's welfare, education, health, and infrastructure

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The Delhi government presented a Rs 76,000-crore budget for FY25, which it claimed to be inspired by the vision of «Ram Rajya», and announced a monthly payment of Rs 1,000 to all women under a scheme that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal termed the world's biggest step towards women empowerment.

Presenting the 2024-25 budget in the Delhi Assembly ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, state finance minister Atishi also announced the implementation of Business Blasters scheme in universities and industrial training institutes (ITIs). The scheme is already being implemented in government schools.

Addressing a press conference, Kejriwal said that the budget takes care of every sector, asserting that the AAP government is inspired by the vision of «Ram Rajya».

However, the overall budget for the financial year 2024-25 has witnessed a 3.7 per cent reduction compared to Rs 78,800 crore allotted in the preceding fiscal.

The allocation for health and education sectors also reduced in the latest budget.

The government allocated Rs 16,396 crore for education, slightly down from the previous fiscal's allocation of Rs 16,575 crore. Similarly, the health sector's outlay of Rs 8,685 crore is less than



Rs 9,742 earmarked in the previous budget.

«We do not get a single penny out of the central pool of taxes. Earlier, we would get Rs 325 crore. but even that has stopped now. This is like strangulating the hen that lays golden eggs,» Kejriwal said.

While presenting her maiden budget, Atishi announced the «Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana» under which all women aged 18 and above will get Rs 1,000 every month. The government has set aside Rs 2,000 for the implementation of the scheme.

«The Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana is perhaps the world's biggest programme of women empowerment. It will incur a huge amount. We will implement the scheme after the Lok Sabha polls,» Kejriwal told the press conference after the budget announcement.

There are around 67 lakh women voters in Delhi, the chief minister said, adding that the scheme excludes the income tax payers and those who avail benefits of other gov-

ernment schemes. According to him, the scheme will benefit around 45 to 50 lakh women.

While presenting the budget in the assembly, the finance minister said that any woman who is eligible will have to fill a form and give a self-declaration that she is not a part of any government scheme. She is also not a government employee and is not an income tax payer.

«On the basis of self-declaration, those women will start getting the benefits of this scheme. Along with the form, every woman will have to provide her Aadhaar card and bank account information. For the financial year 2024-25, I propose Rs 2,000 crore for «Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana,» Atishi said. The government allocated Rs 8,423 crore for the civic bodies, which is more than Rs 8,241 crore budgeted in 2023-24. An allocation of Rs 16,396 crore has been made for the education sector. Atishi said the priority of the state government is to focus on providing quality education to the residents of the city.

Cong misled nation on Article 370, says PM Modi



FW DESK
Srinagar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his visit to Srinagar on Thursday, accused the Congress of misleading the nation on the now-abrogated Article 370.

Addressing a public rally in Srinagar, the PM asserted that Jammu and Kashmir is experiencing new heights of development as it breathes freely.

Referring to J&K as the «head of India,» the Prime Minister emphasized that the path to development in the region will emerge from tourism opportunities and the empowerment of farmers. He highlighted the significance of a developed Jammu and Kashmir for a developed India.

As part of his visit, PM Modi unveiled development projects worth over Rs 6,400 crore, focusing on the tourism sector under the «Swadesh Darshan» and «PRASHAD» schemes. The projects also include initiatives for the integrated development of the Hazratbal shrine in Srinagar.

'Be careful': EC advises Rahul Gandhi on remarks against PM Modi



NEW DELHI: The Election Commission of India on Wednesday advised Congress MP Rahul Gandhi to be careful and cautious while making remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The advisory came after considering some of the Congress leader's remarks against PM Modi, and the poll panel also considered an order of the Delhi High Court and Rahul Gandhi's reply.

The Election Commission said that the advisory comes after considering all facts in the matter related to the remarks against the Prime Minister.

The Delhi High Court, on December 21, said that Rahul Gandhi's speech on November 22 against PM Modi was «not in good taste», and had directed the Election Commission to decide the matter within 8 weeks.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission, had last week, put star campaigners and candidates on notice in case of violations that followed the previously-known methodologies during elections to avoid the model code of conduct (MCC).

Congress fields Rahul Gandhi from Wayanad; Baghel, Tharoor & Venugopal also in first list

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress on Friday released its first list of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls, naming 39 nominees from nine states, including senior party leader Rahul Gandhi, who will contest from Kerala's Wayanad again.

The party has named six candidates from Chhattisgarh, including former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel from Rajnandgaon, and Tamrhwaj Sahu from Mahasamund, seven from Karnataka, including sitting MP D.K. Suresh - the brother of Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar - from Bangalore Rural, and 16



from Kerala, including Rahul Gandhi and Shashi Tharoor from Thiruvananthapuram. Congress General Secretary (Organisation), K.C. Venugopal, who is currently a Rajya Sabha member, will return to the LS poll fray from Kerala's Alappuzha - the only seat that the Congress-led UDF had lost in Kerala in 2019.

The list, announced by Venugopal at the party office here, also includes two candidates

from Meghalaya, including sitting Shillong MP Vincent Pala, as well as for the sole seats in Nagaland, Sikkim, and Lakshadweep, four from Telangana, and one from Tripura.

There are 15 candidates from the general category, while 24 are from Schedule Castes, Schedule Tribes, Other Backward Class, and minorities. Twelve of the candidates are under 50 years of age, eight are aged between 50 and 60, and 12 are aged between 71 and 76.

The candidates were named a day after the meeting of the party's Central Election Committee held here on Thursday evening.

President Murmu & PM Modi extend wishes on Int'l Women's Day

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday extended their greetings on the occasion of International Women's Day.

International Women's Day is celebrated worldwide every year on March 8, to highlight women's accomplishments, rights, equity, empowerment, and other issues.

«My greetings to all on Women's Day! It is an occasion to celebrate Nari Shakti. A so-



ciety's progress is measured by the progress made by its

women,» the President wrote in a post on X.

«India's daughters have been excelling in all walks of life, from sports to science, and making the nation proud. Let us work together to remove the remaining hurdles from the path of young women, and give them wings, for they will shape tomorrow's India,» she added.

The theme of Women's Day 2024 is «Invest in women: Accelerate Progress».

«Greetings on International Women's Day! We salute the strength, courage, and resilience of our Nari Shakti and laud their accomplishments across various fields,» PM Modi wrote on X.

«Our government is committed to empowering women through initiatives in education, entrepreneurship, agriculture, technology and more. This is also reflected in our accomplishments in the last decade,» he added.

AAP launches LS election campaign in Delhi, releases slogan

NEW DELHI: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann on Friday launched the Lok Sabha election campaign from the party headquarters here.

During the launch event, CM Kejriwal also released the party's election slogans: «Sansad mein bhi Kejriwal, tabhi Dilli hogi khush haal.»

The AAP has decided to collaborate with its INDIA bloc partner Congress for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, and have a seat-sharing arrangement in Delhi, Gujarat, and Haryana. However, in Punjab, both parties have opted to contest the Lok Sabha polls independently.

In Delhi, the AAP will con-



test four out of the seven Lok Sabha seats, leaving the remaining three for the Congress.

Similarly, in Gujarat and Haryana, the AAP has been allocated two constituencies -- Bharuch and Jamnagar in Gujarat, and Kurukshehra in Haryana -- as part of the seat-sharing agreement with Congress. Additionally, the AAP has announced its candidates for the Guwahati, Dibrugarh, and Sonitpur Lok Sabha constituencies in Assam separately.

Electoral bonds case: Plea in Supreme Court seeks contempt action against SBI



NEW DELHI: A contempt petition has been filed against SBI for wilful disobedience of the Supreme Court order mandating the leading public sector bank to disclose the details of encashed Electoral Bonds to the Election Commission by March 6.

The contempt plea moved by the petitioner Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) said the SBI application seeking extension of time, until June 30, is mala fide and demonstrates a wilful and deliberate disobedience and defiance of the judgement passed by the Constitution Bench.

In its application filed two days before the expiry of the deadline set out by the apex court, the SBI said that «decoding» of the Electoral Bonds and

for the petitioner Association for Democratic Reforms, requested a bench headed by CJI D.Y. Chandrachud to list the contempt plea along with the SBI application seeking extension of time, which is tentatively coming up for hearing on March 11.

At this, CJI Chandrachud said: «The moment formalities are done, ask your junior to send an email to the registry. I will pass orders on the email.»

On February 15, a 5-judge Constitution Bench struck down the Electoral Bonds Scheme, 2018 as unconstitutional and ordered the SBI to forthwith stop their issuance.

It had asked the SBI to submit details (like date of purchase, the name of the purchaser and the denomination) of the Electoral Bonds purchased since April 2019 to the Election Commission by March 6 for publication on the official website of the poll body.

«SBI must disclose details of each Electoral Bond encashed by political parties which shall include the date of encashment and the denomination of the Electoral Bond»

the matching of the donor to the donations is a complex and time-consuming exercise and the timeline of three weeks would not be sufficient for the entire exercise to be completed.

On Thursday, advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing

RBI & Bank Indonesia Set Framework for INR & IDR Use in Cross-Border Deals



MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Bank Indonesia (BI) inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), aimed at establishing a framework to enhance the usage of local currencies, namely the Indian Rupee (INR) and the Indonesian Rupiah (IDR), for cross-border transactions, on Thursday.

The MoU signing ceremony saw the participation of RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das and Bank Indonesia Governor Perry Warjiyo. This MoU marks a significant milestone in fostering cooperation between India and Indonesia in facilitating cross-border transactions in their respective local currencies (INR and IDR). The framework set forth by the MoU encompasses all current account transactions, permissible capital account transactions, and any

other economic and financial transactions mutually agreed upon by both nations.

One of the primary objectives of this framework is to facilitate exporters and importers to invoice and settle transactions in their domestic currencies. This initiative is expected to pave the way for the development of a robust INR-IDR foreign exchange market.

«Use of local currencies would optimise costs and settlement time for transactions,» the RBI said in a statement.

Moreover, it is anticipated that leveraging local currencies in bilateral transactions will not only promote trade between India and Indonesia but also foster deeper financial integration, strengthening the longstanding historical, cultural, and economic ties between the two nations.

Focusing on safety and security of all Indians in Israel: MEA

NEW DELHI: India on Friday said it is focusing on ensuring the safety and security of all its citizens in Israel following the death of an Indian in that country in a missile attack reportedly launched by Hezbollah.

«We have over 18,000 caregivers and other professionals in Israel. Their safety and security is of prime concern to us,» External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at his weekly media briefing. Pat Nibin Maxwell, hailing from Kerala, was killed in the missile attack that hit an orchard at Galilee in northern Israel on March 4.

The missile was reportedly fired from Lebanon by Hezbollah militant outfit in support of Hamas.

After the death of Maxwell, the Indian embassy in Israel issued an advisory urging Indians, especially those working in or visiting border areas



in north and south Israel, to relocate to safer areas.

Jaiswal said the Indian embassy in Israel is doing its best to ensure the safety of all Indians in that country.

«They've opened a helpline. We have issued an advisory for their safety and security,» he added.

Referring to the advisory, Jaiswal called on Indians in

Israel to exercise caution.

«A helpline is there, if anybody needs help, they can contact the embassy,» he said.

Asked about Israel looking at recruiting Indians to replace Palestinian workers following the Israel-Hamas conflict, Jaiswal said the government-to-government agreement for movement of people is still in the works.

Kejriwal extended zero electricity bills and subsidies to lawyers, farmers & victims of 1984 riots till 2024-25

OUR CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader and Delhi Power Minister Atishi announced that the Delhi government under the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal has extended the scheme for zero electricity bills and subsidies to lawyers, farmers and victims of 1983 riots till 2024-25.

"I am extremely glad to announce that in today's cabinet meeting, it has been decided that free electricity bills and subsidies will continue in 2024-2025 as well for the people of Delhi," said AAP leader and minister Atishi while addressing the media on Thursday.

Taking a jibe at the opposition, Delhi minister Atishi said, "As you know there is no policy of Arvind Kejriwal's government which the opposition does not try to stop. Year after year, whenever AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal tries to do something for the people of Delhi or take



any decision in the interest of Delhites, our opposition tries to stop his work."

"Last year too, when the time for electricity subsidy came, so many attempts were made by the opposition to stop the subsidy. There came a time when we announced that 'zero bill' would end. This year too, there have been constant attempts in the past month to stop the Delhites from receiving zero bills and ways to stop the subsidy of the Kejriwal government," she said.

Atishi further said, "But as you all know once Kejriwal ji makes a promise to the people of Delhi, he fulfils his promise. Providing 24-hour free electricity in Delhi is a promise of the Arvind Kejriwal government, which we have been fulfilling for nine consecutive years. The electricity bill of 22 lakh families in Delhi is zero."

"Today the cabinet has decided that electricity will remain free in 2024-25 also. Electricity will be free up to 200 units, half the bill will

have to be paid up to 400 units. The scheme for farmers and lawyers will also continue. The scheme for zero electricity bills and subsidies will continue to be received by lawyers, farmers and victims of the 1983 riots till 2024-25. This benefit of the policy will continue till 31 March 2025," said the Delhi minister.

Earlier on March 4, Delhi Finance Minister Atishi presented the state budget with total outlays of Rs 76,000 crore for the Financial Year 2024-25 with a focus on the "Ram Rajya" theme and said that the Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi government have been trying day and night for nine years to materialise this dream of Ram Rajya.

The Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi government on Monday in its Budget announced another populist measure to transfer Rs 1,000 per month to every woman above 18 years of age under 'Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana' for the financial year 2024-25

Delhi court issues summons to CM Kejriwal over ED's 2nd complaint



NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Thursday issued fresh summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on ED's complaint.

This is ED's second complaint over non-compliance with the agency's summons issued to him in connection with a money laundering case related to the now-scrapped excise policy case.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) Divya Malhotra of Rouse Avenue Court put up the matter for hearing on March 16, when she is set to hear the ED's first complaint over the same matter as well.

The ACMM on February 17 granted a day's exemption from physical appearance to CM Kejriwal in connection with the first complaint filed

“ If a high-ranking public functionary like him disobeyed the law, it would set a wrong example for the common man **”**

by the ED over the same issue. The fresh complaint pertains to "Kejriwal not abiding by the summons number 4 to 8", a source said.

The AAP convenor had requested the financial probe agency for a date after March 17 for questioning on the excise policy matter.

His response came after the ED issued summons to CM Kejriwal for the eighth time on February 27 and asked him to

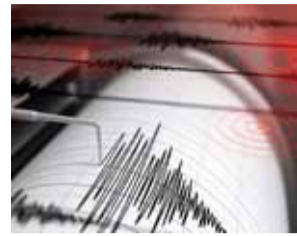
appear before it on March 4. ACMM Malhotra had taken cognisance of the first complaint on February 7. "The judge had then said, "... summons are being issued to him to appear on February 17".

The ED, on January 31, issued summons to CM Kejriwal for the fifth time, and he was told to appear before it on February 2. The financial probe agency's complaint alleged that the CM intentionally did not want to obey the summons and kept on giving "lame excuses".

"If a high-ranking public functionary like him disobeyed the law, it would set a wrong example for the common man," the agency had said.

The ED had issued summons for the fourth time to CM Kejriwal on January 13, asking him to appear before it on January 18. On February 2, AAP said that CM Kejriwal did not appear before the ED for questioning, and also targeted the Central government. "Delhi CM and AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal will not appear before ED today either. The party calls the summons 'unlawful'. We will comply with the lawful summons," AAP had said.

Earthquake of 3.6 magnitude hits Jammu and Kashmir's Doda



FW DESK

Jammu and Kashmir experienced an earthquake measuring 3.6 on the Richter Scale on Monday night, according to the National Center for Seismology (NCS). The seismic activity occurred at 9:17 pm (IST) with the epicenter located in Doda.

The NCS reported, "Earthquake of Magnitude: 3.6, Occurred on 04-03-2024, 21:17:27 IST, Lat: 33.04 & Long: 75.83, Depth: 10 Km, Location: Doda, Jammu and Kashmir."

There have been no reported injuries thus far due to the tremors. The quake marks the latest in a series of seismic events in the region. Last month, Ladakh experienced a magnitude 5.2 earthquake near Kargil on February 19.

People have already tested the Congress, why would they test them again? Says Anil Vaj



SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Haryana's Home and Health Minister Anil Vaj said, the Sanatan is what was yesterday, is today, and will be tomorrow. He further said, the INDI leaders have been running a campaign against the Sanatan; some speak against it from one platform, while others from another. He was reacting to the statement of DMK MP A. Raja that he would not accept the slogans of Jai Shri Ram and Bharat Mata. Vaj said, "When Rahul Gandhi speaks about Lord Rama, some DMK MP speaks about Mother India. But the Sanatan is not weakened by the words of such people; it does not matter whether they believe it or not, and the world has been accepting it for thousands of years. They (INDI) are attacking the in various ways." Reacting to the statement of former Chief Minister Bhupinder Hooda regarding the compensation amount to farmers, Home Minister Anil Vaj said that the government provides compensation to every farmer who suffers losses.

Scrap 5 per cent customs duty on newsprint, Indian Newspaper Society urges Centre

NEW DELHI: The Indian Newspaper Society (INS) acknowledges the prevailing situation of price and availability of Newsprint due to the combination of various factors such as global geopolitical uncertainties, logistical intricacies, depreciation of the Indian rupee, and the prevailing customs duty on Newsprint. This has created a formidable burden on the publishers in the country.

The escalations in conflicts, in the Midwest countries, as well as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, have significantly impacted the global supply chain, and thus affecting the availability of Newsprint. Coupled with the Red Sea issue, where cargo ships are being continuously targeted, has further exacerbated



the situation, leading to disruptions in the transportation of essential commodities, including Newsprint. Resultantly, the Newsprint suppliers are cancelling the earlier confirmed orders of the publishers.

Further, many Newsprint

mills, across the world as well as in India, have either suspended their operations or ceased Newsprint production entirely, causing concerns about the continuity of supply of Newsprint across the country.

Compounding these chal-

lenges is the declining value of the Indian rupee, which adds pressure on import-dependent industries like the print media sector. The fluctuating currency exchange rates contribute to the rising costs of importing Newsprint, thereby straining the financial viability of newspapers and publications.

It is pertinent to mention here that survival of print media industry is crucial for the largest democracy of the world, as we not only serve as a vital medium for disseminating knowledge and information at low and affordable costs to the common public but also contribute significantly to the Government's communication efforts, informing citizens about policies and social welfare programs.

CNG price reduced by Rs 2.50 per kg in Delhi-NCR

NEW DELHI: CNG supplier Indraprastha Gas Limited (IGL) announced a reduction in the selling price of the gas in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR) on Wednesday. The retail consumer price of the gas has been reduced by Rs 2.50 per kg.

After the reduction, the revised selling price of CNG in Delhi will be Rs 74.09 per kg. The new price has been brought into effect from midnight of March 7. Earlier on Tuesday, Mahanagar Gas Ltd (MGL) announced a reduction in CNG prices by Rs 2.50 per kg for Mumbai and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region.

The downward revision came into effect from midnight of



March 5/6, and now the new price of CNG in Mumbai and the Mumbai Metropolitan Region is Rs 73.40 per kg. The reduction in CNG price would help to increase the consumption of natural gas in the transporta-

tion segment while delivering unmatched convenience, safety, reliability, and environmental friendliness to consumers, and taking a step towards making India cleaner and greener, the company said.

Rathee murder case being handed over to CBI

efforts going on for the arrest of another 2 killers

SATISH HANDA
Gurugram

Haryana INLD chief Nafe Singh Rathee murder case is being handed over to the CBI for investigation as desired by Haryana chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar and Home Minister Anil Vaj and sprinkled bullets at his car while standing near the railway gate on the recommendation of Haryana DGP Shatrughan Kapoor. Rathee was

shot dead at Bahadurgarh by four persons in a car on 25th February and later police during investigation had recovered 21 used bullets from the site of incident. Police registered a case on February 26 under sections 147, 148, 149, 307, 302A, 120B of IPC and section 25/27-54-59 of Arms Act. The family of the deceased leader also expressed danger to their lives. There is yet a mystery why and by whose direction INLD leader was killed. In a joint operation by Jhajjar and Delhi Police Special Cell as well as Haryana STF two



shooters Sachin alias Saurav (27) and Ashish (24) both residents of Nangloi in Delhi has already been arrested from a hotel in Goa and search by the police for the remaining two shooters is going on.

Seed of hatred was sown by Congress, says Home Minister Vaj

Dividing people in the name of religion, imposing Emergency & orchestrating the genocide of Sikhs

PARVESH HANDA
Chandigarh

Haryana's Home and Health Minister, Anil Vaj today strongly criticized the controversial statement made by former Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said that "Remember Lalu Prasad Yadav ji, you had stopped



the rath of Lal Krishna Advani ji who was protesting for Ram Janmabhoomi, today Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji constructed Ram temple, compare and tell who is the real Hindu". He gave a sharp reaction to Lalu Prasad Yadav's

controversial statement that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not a Hindu and posted it on X.

While interacting with the media persons, Vaj said that "Lalu Prasad Yadav, remember, when Advani ji were protesting for the Ram Janmabhoomi on 25 October 1990, you arrested Lal Krishna Advani Ji. On one hand, you, and on the other hand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, despite all the obstacles, got the construction of the Ram Temple done. Compare and tell who the real Hindu is. You should be ashamed," he added.

Gangster gets custody parole to marry his 'Lady Don' girl friend

PARVESH HANDA

Additional Session Judge Deepak Wasan Additional Session Judge of the Dwarka court granted six hours custody parole to notorious gangster Sandeep alias gangster Kala Jatheri on March 12, followed by the 'Grih Pravesh' ceremony at his native village Jatheri in district Sonapat in Haryana on March 13 for his marriage ceremony with his girl friend Anuradha, also known as 'Lady Don' and 'Revolver Rani' in the crime world. The court directed police to take him from Tihar jail from 10 AM till 4 PM for celebrating his marriage on parole on humanitarian grounds under tight police security. According to information, Kala Jatheri is currently in custody for multiple serious offences.



lack adequate care. However, the court accepted the plea and allowed custody parole to the gangster Kala Jatheri for six hours to attend both occasions.

Information reveals, Sandeep alias Kala Jatheri was involved in criminal activities and having more than 30 criminal cases registered against him by the different police stations which included cases of murder, ransom demand, extortion, kidnapping, and attempt to murder in Delhi, Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan and include allegations of running an organised crime syndicate in which the stringent MCOCA was invoked. Kala Jatheri was arrested by Delhi police at Saharanpur in U.P on 30th July 2021 and presently locked in Tihar jail,



Delhi. In case of Anuradha, she was married to Deepak Minz and both were running share trading business at Sikar in Rajasthan, got invested amount worth lakhs of rupees by the investors and they lost huge amount in business and were burdened under heavy debts worth crores of rupees, when Anuradha left her husband and adopted the profession of a criminal to earn money and was known as 'Lady Don' and 'Revolver Girl' and came in contact with Sandeep alias Kala Jatheri.

Interstate car lifters gang busted with recovery of six vehicles



SATISH HANDA
Kurukshetra

The CIA-2 staff of the Haryana Police busted an interstate gang of lifting luxury cars with the arrest of three persons identified as Deepak Khanna a resident of Uttam Nagar Delhi, Bhupinder Singh a resident of Moti Nagar Delhi and Gurmeet Singh a resident of Kishor Nagar Ludhiana in Punjab with the recovery of six stolen vehicles from them which included two Fortuners, two Innovas, a Scorpio, and an I-20 car. Inspector Mohan Lal said that the recovered vehicles had been stolen from different locations including at Kurukshetra, Karnal, Panipat, Yamunanagar and Chandigarh. He said, the prime accused Deepak Khanna had a criminal record with over 60 theft cases registered against him across Delhi, Haryana, Chandigarh and Punjab. He said that Deepak Khanna had shifted his focus to stealing

luxury cars in collaboration with Bhupinder and all arrested were remanded to police custody by the court for 10 days.

Inspector Mohan Lal said that Deepak Khanna was expert in advanced techniques of luxury vehicles, including scanning methods to ignite the car engines and also having a master key for Toyota vehicles, facilitating the illegal sale of stolen vehicles to Gurmeet, selling the stolen cars at discounted prices to the clients from other states or sold by financial institutions mostly registered in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. He said that a case was registered on the complaint of Aman Khurana a resident of Guro Nanak Colony whose Scorpio car parked outside the house of his friend during night was stolen at Pehowa and a case was registered with the Sadar police station which was handed over to the CIA Staff-2 for investigation.

Kejriwal has ED Phobia, ED is calling him and he is singing different melody: Anil Vaj

PARVESH HANDA
New Delhi

Haryana Home & Health Minister Anil Vaj while interacting with the media persons said that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has developed ED Phobia.

Mocking Kejriwal's statement that the BJP is intimidating people through the ED, Vaj said that when Kejriwal was not in power, he used to tweet himself that should immediately go to the ED, Income Tax, or CBI notice. Now that the ED is calling him, he's singing a different tune. If he has not done anything wrong, then what is he afraid of, and why does not he go to the ED? The Home Minister said that the police and ED can arrest forcefully, but their people have not been getting bail from the court for years, and what is the answer to this?

Contradicting the statements made by former Bihar Chief Minister Lalu Prasad Yadav against the Prime Minister, Anil Vaj said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is paying attention to every class and every sector. If there is any issue anywhere in the country, the Prime Minister immedi-



ately takes notice of it, whether it's the case of violence in West Bengal or even when he visited West Bengal. He criticized Mamata Banerjee by saying that there is no mercy in Mamata. If she had any mercy, she would have stood with the women after such a big incident and taken action, not tried to save the accused by going to the Supreme Court. Vaj said that Prime Minister has raised the issue, and he is the Prime Minister for all.

The Election Commission has warned Rahul Gandhi against using wrong words against Prime Minister Narendra Modi in public statements, to which Home Minister Anil Vaj said that Rahul Gandhi has lost his senses. Therefore, the right words that he should use do not come to his mind.

That's why he uses wrong words. Therefore, the Election Commission has issued a warning to Rahul Gandhi.

Commenting on a viral video where Congress leader Deepender Hooda is seen threatening an officer, Anil Vaj said that this is their style of their working, this is their political way. He said that by using such words without knowing the truth, it can be inferred how they would work if they ever came to power. Only by pressuring officers would they have got all the wrong works done.

Vaj redressing to the grievances of people of the state arrived at his residence in Ambala as regard various cases of rape being reported in the state when victim women made a complaint that no action been taken by the police, Home Minister Vaj instructed the SPs of the respective districts to take strict action against accused in such cases.

Anil Vaj expressed deep sorrow over the demise of former Deputy Speaker of the Haryana Vidhan Sabha Master Fakirchand Agrawal, paid his respects at the cremation ground in Ambala city and offered his condolences to the bereaved family.

Election Commission holds security review ahead of announcing LS poll dates

NEW DELHI: The Election Commission on Friday held meetings with top Home Ministry and Railway officials on the deployment and movement of security personnel across the country ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, sources said.

The EC top brass is also learnt to have discussed with home ministry officials the possibility of holding assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir alongside state assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

While the Supreme Court had in December last directed the EC to hold assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir by September 30, there was no official word on whether assembly polls in J-K can be held with Lok Sabha polls expected to take



place in April-May.

The terms of the state assemblies of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim end on different dates in June and state elections there will be held alongside Lok Sabha polls.

Whenever assembly elections are held in J-K, they will be the first since Article 370 of the Constitution was abrogated

and Jammu and Kashmir was divided into two Union territories in 2019.

The electoral exercise in Jammu and Kashmir is usually spread over a month.

Following the delimitation, the number of assembly seats has gone up from 83 to 90, excluding the seats allocated to Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

In December last, the Su-

preme Court had directed the poll panel to hold assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir by September 30.

During the meetings, the poll panel is learnt to have underlined the need for timely movement of central forces being deployed for election duty.

The Commission is also learnt to have stressed the need for good coaches in trains which will be used for the movement of security personnel. It also pressed for food on board such trains.

The poll panel was represented by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar and fellow Election Commissioner Arun Goel, and other senior officials.

During the deliberations, the EC insisted on meeting the deadline of early next week for 'advanced induction' of security personnel.

Final Call for Section 43B(h) Income Tax Act to be taken In Union Budget 2024-25

NEW DELHI: The Indian government is mulling over the deferment of a newly proposed law aimed at facilitating prompt payments to micro and small enterprises (MSEs).

The implementation of the plan, originally scheduled to take effect from April 1, has currently been halted. A final call is expected to be made during the regular budget session in July, as disclosed by media. The objective of the law was to provide much-needed support to small businesses grappling with financial challenges, ensuring a steady cash flow.

Nevertheless, concerns raised by MSEs and traders regarding operational difficulties and the lack of clarity necessitated a reassessment. The proposed amendment, under Section 43B of the Income Tax Act, empha-



sises deduction based on actual payment rather than accrual basis, in adherence to the time constraints outlined in Section 15 of the MSME Act. These time limits stipulate a payment window of 45 days for contractual agreements and 15 days for non-contractual transactions, slated to come into effect from April 1, 2024.

While the provision aims to bolster financial liquidity for MSEs, stakeholders like the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT) have expressed reservations.

CAIT General Secretary Praveen Khandelwal highlighted the need for clarity on the law's applicability to traders and related provisions.

Uddhav Thackeray makes Lok Sabha 'offer' to Nitin Gadkari; BJP hits back



MUMBAI: Needing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Shiv Sena (UBT) President and ex-Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray made the fresh offer of a Lok Sabha seat to Union minister Nitin Gadkari, leading to a war-of-words between the two rival parties.

At a couple of public meetings, Thackeray pointed out that a senior leader like Gadkari, a two-time MP from Nagpur, did not figure in BJP's first list of candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

"Don't bend before Delhi... You just leave the BJP and come to the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA). Show them your worth. We shall all ensure that you get elected to the Parliament," Thackeray said. On several occasions, Thackeray has pointed out how the BJP ignored Gadkari in the first list, but included an ex-Congressman and a tainted leader like Kripashankar Singh for the Jaunpur seat in Uttar Pradesh. "I have worked closely with Gadkari. It was he who completed Balasah Thackeray's dream project, the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, in a record time more than 20 years ago. He is a senior and loyal BJP leader, yet his name did not figure in the first list. I have known him much before Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah," said Thackeray. Earlier on several occasions, state Congress President Nana Patole and Nationalist Congress Party (SP) leader Supriya Sule had called upon Gadkari to consider options, when he was reportedly slighted by the BJP, while another Shiv Sena (UBT) leader, Kishore Tiwari, had described him as a 'PM material'.

Lok Sabha Elections: BJP eyes pacts with ex-NDA allies



NEW DELHI: BJP-Led NDA has lost steam with top partners exiting, PM Narendra Modi-led BJP dispensation is silently working to revive the old front.

After ensuring the return of Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) to the NDA in January and Jayant Chaudhary-led Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) this week, the BJP top brass is working to strike pacts with the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) in Odisha and the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) in Punjab.

All three are erstwhile NDA allies. Efforts are on for each one's return to the fold or at least reach an understanding with the BJP.

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu arrived in Delhi on Thursday and is expected to hold parleys with Union Home Minister Amit Shah later tonight. Andhra Pradesh has 25 LS and 175 Assembly seats. Pawan Kalyan of the Jana Sena has already joined the TDP and has been rooting for a TDP-BJP pact. In Odisha, sources in the BJP and BJD said the LS seat-sharing pact had nearly been finalised, with an announcement likely on March 12 when Shah would visit the state. Extensive deliberations on the BJP-BJD tie-up were held at the residence of Patnaik in Bhubaneswar on Wednesday.

Mahila Congress to organize 'Mahilla Nyay Yatra' in all districts

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

In order to highlight the plight of the rape victims and their families, the All India Mahila Congress (AIMC) will organise 'Mahilla Nyay Yatra' across the country to mark the International Women's Day that falls on March 8.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters, the president of the AIMC Alka Lamba also appealed to the President Draupadi Murmu and the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to invite the rape victims and personally assure them of speedy justice.

Alka Lamba disclosed that after taking over the reins of the Mahila Congress on January 10 this year, she has travelled across 20 states and met the rape victims.



She alleged that most of the cases were reported from the BJP ruled states like Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand just to name a few. She alleged that while the accused were being patronised and protected by the ruling party, the victims were subjected to unlimited atrocities. She pointed out, that in Kanpur in BJP ruled Uttar Pradesh two

Former Union Minister Srikant Jena returns to Congress

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

In a major boost to the Congress party in Odisha, former union minister Srikant Jena today joined the party in presence of the AICC in-charge for Odisha Ajoy Kumar.

Welcoming him back into the party fold, Dr Ajoy Kumar said, all the misunderstandings had been removed. He said Jena's absence was felt very much in the Congress party, as his return will boost the party's prospects in the State ahead of the General Elections. He disclosed that Jena had met the Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and the general secretary in-charge Organisation KC Venugopal before finally deciding to rejoin the party.

Thanking the party leadership for inducting him back in



the Congress, Srikant Jena said, he had always been a Congressman right from his student days. He said, all the misgivings and misunderstandings had been removed and he was feeling happy to return to the Congress party. The former union minister expressed confidence that the Congress party will emerge stronger in Odisha despite the "unholy" alliance of the ruling Biju Janata Dal and the Bharatiya Janata Party. He observed that while their formal alliance was likely to take place soon, there was already an unwritten alliance between the two.

India's Pushback at WTO MC13 Leaves Farmers, Fisherman & MSMEs Better Off

NEW DELHI: The Ministerial Conference (MC13), under the aegis of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which brought together nearly 4,000 ministers, senior trade officials and other delegates from the WTO's 164 members, concluded in Abh Dhabi with a mixed bag of results.

India had taken a firm stance at MC13, particularly concerning two key issues: Protecting the Livelihoods of Farmers and



Fishermen and inclusion of new issues like e-commerce.

India's pushback on protecting the livelihoods of farmers and fishermen was against proposals from developed nations to reduce domestic support for farmers. India argued for fairer treatment, highlighting the large subsidies already enjoyed by farmers in developed countries.

Additionally, India has advocated for allowing subsidies for fishermen operating within Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) to ensure their livelihoods.

SC upholds Kashmiri professor' right to protest repeal of Article 370

FW DESK

Striking a blow for citizens' freedom of expression, the Supreme Court Thursday overturned a criminal case against Professor Javed Ahmad Hajam. The professor, hailing from Baramulla in Kashmir and working in Maharashtra, faced legal action for terming the day of the withdrawal of Article 370's as a "black day" for Jammu and Kashmir in his WhatsApp status messages.



The Bench, comprising Justices Abhay S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan, asserted that labeling August 5 as a black day for J&K was an expression of the petitioner's individual perspective.

"It does not reflect any intention to do something which is prohibited under Section 153A. At best, it is a protest, which is a part of his freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a)," the Bench said. The Supreme Court criticized the Bombay High Court's decision not to quash the FIR, contending that it overestimated the potential for stirring emotions among citizens. Instead, the Court highlighted the sig-

nificance of democratic values prevailing over fear of dissent. In a related development, the Court defended Professor Hajam's right to extend goodwill to Pakistan on its Independence Day, asserting that such gestures promote international harmony without necessarily inciting hatred. The Bench ruled that motives cannot be attributed based solely on an individual's religious affiliation.

Why the congress horses have no fear of whip?



JAG MOHAN THAKEN
In the recent Rajya Sabha elections held in Himachal Pradesh, Congress has to face a shameful defeat despite having majority in the assembly. In a shocking result to the congress, its candidate Abhishek Manu Singhvi lost his battle to BJP's Harsh Mahajan on February 27, despite Congress is in power in the state with 40 MLAs in the 68-member Assembly and also having a support of three independent MLAs.

BJP, which had just 25 MLAs, managed to secure 9 additional votes by luring three Independents and six Congress MLAs for cross-voting for the BJP.

It was not the first time that the congress has to face defeat due to jumping over the stable wall by its horses.

In June 2022, Kartikeya Sharma managed a sensational victory as an independent candidate in the Rajya Sabha elections in Haryana by defeating Congress' heavyweight candidate, Ajay Maken, despite the congress having a required strength in the assembly. The Congress had a total 31 MLAs in Haryana Assembly but since Kuldeep Bishnoi, reportedly regularly being humiliated by the party and especially by Former CM Hooda, didn't vote for the party candidate. Maken got only 30 votes out of which one vote was declared invalid as another anti-Hooda legislator adopted such a path that

the vote got rejected without anyone having even an inkling of the same.

In June 2016 also, INLD & Congress supported candidate for Rajya Sabha, R K Anand, despite having a sufficient vote back, lost to BJP-backed independent candidate Subhash Chandra after 14 Congress votes were declared invalid.

Now the question arises - 'Why every time congress gets a jolt despite having sufficient number?'

When horses jump out of a stable by crossing over the wall, the main reason is the stable master, being weak and helpless, loses control over his horses, other supporting reasons are - instead of the dry grass being fed in the stable, there is some alluring soft green grass outside, repeated mental and physical torture of the horses in the stable or some vicious dacoit breaking into the stable.

In Just occurred Himachal episode, six congress MLAs, under the vicious plan of some hidden hands, (however, Yeh Public Hai, Sab Janti Hai), who were using these MLAs as scapegoats for their own elevation, revolted against the party - which afforded them to become MLAs, for the allotment of getting some cream. They have no fear of the party whip as they know the High Command is not so strong and it can't take any stern action. "Lethargic policy and passive ride, spare the rod and spoil the child."

In July 2020, Rajasthan Deputy Chief Minister, Sachin Pilot along with 18 MLAs had



revolted against Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot. The plan reportedly was getting oxygen from BJP to topple the Gehlot government. 'Addressing a program in Dholpur, Mr Gehlot had said his government could be saved because of the support of three BJP leaders -- former chief minister Vasundhara Raje, former assembly speaker Kailash Meghwal and MLA Shobharani Kushwah.'

Gehlot had also alleged the involvement of money in this scandal. The revelations of Gehlot in the Sachin Pilot episode outrightly prove the involvement of all the above stated factors causing instigation to the Rajasthan MLAs under the leadership of Pilot. Sensing the weak and indecisive High Command, under the temptation of green grass outside (Money and Honey -- lucrative and creamy post in the new to be formed government), allured by some vicious dacoits, the humiliated Pilot segment jumped over the wall of stable without any hesitation.

What the defectors get?

The major factor of revolt comes out as the over expectations of the disgruntled, whether it is Himachal Pradesh or Rajasthan or Punjab or Haryana. What did they get? History speaks so.

Ashok Tanwar, a former president of Haryana Pradesh Congress, has again proved the proverb- 'A rolling stone gathers no moss'. He left congress (2019) seeing that he has no chances of getting enthroned on the CM chair in the congress till Bhupinder Singh Hooda, his main contender, is in congress, established his own outfit, joined TMC(2021), worked for Aam Adami Party (2022-24), smelling the alliance of AAP and Congress party in Haryana and seeing again being dropped in the dust bin in the Hooda dominated alliance, Tanwar joined BJP(2024) just to have a claim for a Lok Sabha ticket. His dream of CM chair has again dashed to ground.

In Rajasthan, Sachin Pilot, a first choice of Rahul Gandhi, who became the rebellious leader in congress to gain CM post, not only lost his Rajasthan

Pradesh Congress President chair, but also had to lose his Deputy CM post.

In Punjab, two times chief minister under congress umbrella, Captain Amarinder Singh, feeling humiliated in the party left the congress and floated his own outfit -- Punjab Lok Congress (PLC) in 2021 and fought assembly election in February 2022 from Patiala as an alliance partner of BJP, but lost. Not only he, the captain of PLC, but all his candidates lost the ground fight. Captain's alliance partner BJP also dashed to ground and could win only 2 seats out of 117 assembly seats.

Smelling a murky future of his PLC, Captain Amarinder Singh dipped into the BJP's Ocean to get some reputable position, but he is now rusting like Advani ji.

And now in Himachal Pradesh, where the state Congress President Pratibha Singh, who, just after the results of the election were declared, was the first to stake claim for the CM post. But before the high command, she could not succeed at that time and sensing the ignorance by the Chief Minister, Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, now she is showing her teeth to bite Sukhu's CM chair. She is telling BJP's work better than Congress'.

The incidents of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana have shown that the desire for the post of Chief Minister had been the main reason for rebellion in these provinces and Lalappa (bluffing) policy of the High Command is responsible for this.

Alleging BJP for the recent Himachal Pradesh incidence,

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra tweeted in Hindi on February 28, 2024, 'But BJP wants to crush this right of the people of Himachal by misusing the money power, power of agencies and power of the Centre,' also shows that money power and outsider crushing agencies are involved in the horse trading.

But Congress' own minister Vikramaditya Singh expresses the counterview and refutes the Priyanka Gandhi's statement blaming BJP for horse-trading. "Blaming the Opposition party (BJP) for everything is not the solution. We should first look into our house. The Opposition party will always take the benefit of the crisis inside the house of its rival. It is our collective responsibility to put our house in order."

Will Priyanka Gandhi still go on blaming BJP for failure of her own party to control its horses? Congress should digest the reality that the wolf enters the sheep pen only when it feels that the fence is weak and the keeper of the sheep flock is sleeping. So, despite all this, will the Congress High Command continue to sleep till its whole pen empties and carry-on alleging others?

Politics is the game of poly tricks; 'Where no one is Near and no one is Far, everything is fair in Love & War'. Never forget, only the 'win' is the main target. By hook or crook, the egret will catch the snook.

Jag Mohan Thaken is a Journalist, Columnist & Political Analyst, views are personal.

Bomb goes off at tech corridor eatery Bengaluru, 9 injured



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Bomb goes off at a tech corridor and nine people were injured, three of them seriously. A timer operated bomb planted at a popular Rameshwaram Café exploded on Friday afternoon. Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah it "A Low intensity blast caused by an improvised explosive device (IED). As latest information Late night cops detained a man for question. Siddaramaiah said, "Preliminary prob says it is a low-intensity blast... we will not spare anyone. After Mangalore blast, this is 2nd such incident, I urge the opposition to not politicize the issue".

The IED placed allegedly by an undefined man who was ordered rava idly in a and in a 7 minutes visit, exploded at café in Brookfield, ITP road, when eatery was teeming with about 250 customers, mostly employees of software companies and financial services firms. According to information that suspect in mask gets down from bus at a stop in front of café and deposits bag

allegedly containing bomb in hand-wash enclosure leaves café after eating rava idly and Bomb goes off.

Deputy CM DK Shivakumar said the Central Crime Branch has formed eight teams to arrest the suspect "The suspect has been identified. His facial features have been captured by CCTV cameras and the same are being matched using AI facial recognition technique to track him" He added.

Meantime Karnataka state BJP Unit president BY Vijayendra said "Government should order probe and spare not efforts in apprehending the perpetrators. We urge the police to eradicate such elements from the core without yielding to any political pressures". Senior police officer described it as an act of terror and said they are trying to identify the module. Cops probing the blast are deploying AI powered facial recognition tech to identify the suspect. On likely reasons behind targeting Rameshwaram Café, an investigating police officer said the famed outlet has enough trappings to generate maximum Publicity.



WTO misses a big opportunity as trade talks stall

The recent conclusion of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi left much to be desired, ending with a whimper rather than a bang. With global trade at a critical juncture, facing the combined challenges of geopolitical tensions, disrupted supply chains, and a trend towards protectionism, the WTO had a prime opportunity to assert its relevance and steer the international community towards greater cooperation and open trade. Instead, what transpired was a series of discussions that barely scratched the surface of the deep-seated issues threatening global commerce. The MC13's inability to make substantial headway on key issues, including critical matters like agricultural subsidies and the digital economy, underscores a worrying trend of stagnation within the organization. Despite Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's optimistic note on agriculture talks, the reality is that progress is glacial, and the WTO seems increasingly out of step with the contemporary trading landscape. The extension of e-commerce customs duty exemptions, while a contentious topic for countries like India, indicates a reluctance to confront challenging but necessary debates on how to adapt to the digital age. Furthermore, the continued impasse on revitalizing the WTO's dispute resolution body speaks volumes about the organization's current state of paralysis. The body's incapacitation is a significant blow to the enforcement of trade rules, leaving members without a critical mechanism for resolving disputes. India's strategic maneuvering to protect its interests, particularly in blocking an investment facilitation pact pushed by China, showcases the kind of assertive diplomacy necessary in today's complex trade environment. However, these individual victories cannot mask the broader issues at play. As we look ahead, the WTO must confront the reality that its relevance is hanging by a thread. In an era marked by division and uncertainty, the organization must find a way to reinvigorate its mission and deliver tangible results.

LETTERBOX

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Agriculture is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals, and happiness.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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INDIRA HIRWAY EXPLAINS HOW INDIA'S MOVE MAY INADVERTENTLY EXPAND EXPLOITATION AMONG DOMESTIC WORKERS.

More women in job market



There is growing demand from social scientists, governments and international organisations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, that women's participation in the economy/labour market should increase to promote economic growth of India. It is believed that when women's participation rate, which is one of the lowest in Asia, increases, it will bring prosperity to the Indian economy.

Key factor of patriarchy

Why is women's participation in the labour market in India so low?

Though there are various explanations such as low human capital, and even discrimination against women, the root cause is patriarchy, which is a social system marked by the supremacy of the father/man in the family, community and society. As Marina Watanabe says, patriarchy is "a social structural phenomenon in which males have the privilege of dominance over females". This supremacy is manifested: in values, attitudes, and customs in the society; in ownership of assets, incomes and wealth; and in institutes and organisations that govern our society and economy. With economic growth and increasing education, the strength of patriarchy has perhaps declined in some ways. However, the overall culture of male dominance over women has not changed much in our traditional society.

Under patriarchy, men are considered to be the breadwinners and women are expected to be the homemakers. That is, women are responsible for household upkeep, and for providing care to the child and those who are old, sick and the disabled in the family. Even when there is hired help, it is the woman who is responsible for household upkeep and care.

Though performed with love, this work of women is inferior work for several reasons. This work is unpaid and invisible as time use data are not available on a regular basis

in India, and, therefore, not covered under national policies. It is repetitive (performed every day) and boring. There is no upward mobility, and, therefore, a dead-end job. There is no retirement and no pension. This implies that a significant part of the total labour force available to the economy is locked up in low productivity and inferior kind of work, which is performed mainly by women. Women perform this work not necessarily by free choice or by any particular efficiency in this work but because it is largely imposed on women as a social construct. As this work is outside the purview of economic policies, the drudgery of work, the time stress, technology and low productivity of this type of work and working conditions of workers are outside the purview of policy making. This is unjust, unfair, and unacceptable.

As a result, many women do not enter the labour market due to their high domestic responsibilities. When the others enter the labour market, they enter with domestic responsibilities on their shoulders, implying that there is no level playing field for them from the beginning. Again, they usually have lower human capital (thanks to social norms); restricted mobility due to their domestic responsibilities.

Therefore, their choice is gendered in the labour market. They tend to prefer work that is close to home, part time or flexible work,

and which has a safe work environment. Consequently, they overcrowd in stereotyped low productivity jobs and lag behind men in all average labour market outcomes such as participation, wages, and diversification of work. This is clearly not the optimum use of women labour power in the economy. Therefore, women's participation in the labour market must be raised.

Greater participation, but also exploitation

As women with higher education and professional qualifications in India tend to participate more in the labour market, it is argued by experts that greater women's education will raise their participation rate in the labour market.

However, this is only half truth, as this increase in participation is backed by an army of domestic workers, who are known to be highly exploited in the Indian economy.

Women's participation in the labour market can increase at all levels mainly by reducing their burden of unpaid domestic work and care by reducing the drudgery/strain of work or improving productivity of women's work (for example, providing fuel-efficient stoves in cooking in place of primitive stoves that use fuel wood); by providing infrastructural support to reduce the burden of their work (for example, water

supply at the doorstep); by shifting a part of unpaid work to the mainstream economy (for example, child care, disabled care, care of the old can be provided by the government, the market or by civil society organisations to the mainstream economy).

The burden of unpaid domestic work on women can also be reduced by redistributing this work to other household members, mainly men. These steps will release women from the burden of unpaid work to a significant extent and give them free time to acquire higher education and new skills, or to participate in productive work in the labour market.

Address the issue of subordination

If we want not only women's participation but also gender equality in the labour market, households will have to provide equal opportunities to men and women within the household, i.e., by sharing the "inferior work", or unpaid domestic work and care by men and women. However, irrespective of sharing, what is critical is removing the subordination of women in the household by sharing the responsibility of unpaid household work by men and women.

On hired domestic workers, there is an International Labour Organization Convention that provides minimum basic rights to domestic workers in the world. These include a weekly day off, limited hours of work, overtime compensation, minimum wages and minimum social security. It is unfortunate that India has not even ratified this Convention. If India raises the participation rate of (well-educated) women in the labour market along with a rapid increase in the size of domestic workers, the gains in terms of economic growth will be lost as it will create a huge army of highly exploited domestic workers also.

Indira Hirway is Professor of Economics, Centre for Development Alternatives, Ahmedabad. Views are personal.

RITWIK SHARMA EXPLORES WHY POLITICAL EVENTS CAST DOUBT ON INDIA'S ANTI-DEFECTION LAW'S EFFECTIVENESS.



The long road to reforming political party system

With the general election 2024 inching closer, the spate of political defections across the country is no cause for surprise. In Bihar, MLAs from the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal have moved to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) while the elections to the Rajya Sabha that were held recently saw cross-voting in favour of the BJP in Himachal Pradesh. The MLAs concerned have now been disqualified under the anti-defection law. In the Andhra Pradesh Assembly too there have been disqualifications under this law.

However, an adjudicatory development from more than a fortnight ago makes one doubt the perceived need and utility of India's anti-defection law. On February 15, 2024, the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Speaker delivered his verdict on the split in 2023 within the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). No MLA from either faction of the NCP was disqualified, and the Ajit Pawar faction was recognised as being the "real" NCP. Unsurprisingly, the order appears to be similar to the Speaker's decision in the split in the Shiv Sena where neither faction was disqualified, and one of the competing factions (in that case, the Eknath Shinde faction) was recognised as the real Shiv Sena.

Transgressions that pass muster

While official copies of both these decisions are unavailable, the reasoning that went into the decision can be discerned from the livestreaming of the Assembly proceedings. Relying on the test of legislative majority, the Speaker noted that the Ajit Pawar-led faction of the NCP had the support of 41 out of 53 NCP MLAs, making it the real NCP. More intriguing was the Speaker's observations on the applicability of the anti-defection law to these proceedings.



What transpired between June 30 and July 2, 2023, when the NCP split vertically, is termed as an expression of "intra-party dissent". In uncritical terms, the Speaker has said that such intra-party dissent cannot be subject to the punitive provisions of the Tenth Schedule, and the dissenting MLAs cannot be disqualified from the Assembly. However, the soundness of this observation can be questioned on the ground that if any dissenting group within a political party wishes to distance itself from such a party, it must ideally merge with another party so as to be able to claim protection under the Tenth Schedule. Under the anti-defection law, a faction that splits from its original party cannot claim exemption from disqualification on its own, given that the "split" exception was deleted from the Tenth Schedule in 2003.

The only exemption available now to legislators moving in groups is that of mergers, which mandatorily require a minimum of two-third members to separate from their political party and merge with another. As is well-known, in both the Shiv Sena and NCP splits, the split-

ting factions (led by Eknath Shinde and Ajit Pawar, respectively), did not opt to either merge with an existing political party or establish an altogether new party. Instead, each of the two factions claimed to be the original political party themselves, and formed an alternate government with other political parties. In neither of these cases was there a merger within the strict terms of the Tenth Schedule.

It would have been interesting to see the Speaker contend with this issue in both these cases purely in terms of the language of the law. Instead, the Speaker made a rather worrying observation to the effect that it is in the very nature of politics for leaders to forge new alliances, undo old relations, and make or break into new forms, and that such political movements cannot qualify as defections under the Tenth Schedule. Why have the anti-defection law in the Constitution when even the most manifest transgressions of the law are allowed to pass muster with the adjudicating authority?

The Speaker's concern for preservation of inner-party dissent is laudable, especially when he says that the Tenth Schedule cannot be used to silence party members. The Speaker had to go by the legislative strength of each faction to determine the real NCP, because reliable information to that end could not be sourced from the party's constitution, leadership and organisational structure.

The issue of inner-party democracy. Undeniably, this highlights the need for better thought-out reform of the political party system — one which accounts for adequate democracy within parties. Defections are often engineered on the premise of an absence of inner-party democracy in the original political party of a turncoat legislator. To systematically remedy this concern,

it is time to first conduct a thorough study of how robust democratic structures and processes are within parties, and, second, usher in statutory regulation that compels political parties to ensure greater inner democracy. The 255th Report of the Law Commission of India proposed amendments to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 which could mandate that besides having a constitution, political parties elect an executive committee (for the party), select candidates who are to contest elections to Parliament or State Assemblies, and conduct regular elections within the party at every level. The Law Commission also proposed granting the Election Commission of India the powers to impose monetary penalties or withdraw the registration of a political party in case it failed to comply.

The Law Commission's recommendations have yet to see the light of day. Evidently, in the absence of more robust means to ensure inner-party democracy, the Tenth Schedule had to be circuitously put into disuse in the Shiv Sena and NCP verdicts — both instances where the anti-defection law could well be applied! The Maharashtra Legislative Assembly Speaker is now presiding over a committee which will review the anti-defection law. Given his recent encounters with this law in two high-profile matters, there could not be a better opportunity than now for India to get an anti-defection law best suited to its felt needs and realities.

Ritwik Sharma is a Senior Resident Fellow at the Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy and leads Charhka, Vidhi's dedicated constitutional law team. Vidhi recently published a report titled 'Anatomy of India's Anti-Defection Law: Identifying Problems, Suggesting Solutions'. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

New book acts as divine mirror that reflects Theyyam's spiritual tapestry

In the verdant landscape of Malabar, where history and modernity intertwine amidst the tropical jungles and ancient tharavads, lies a spiritual practice that has captivated the hearts of many — Theyyam. This ancient form of devotional art, a vibrant blend of dance, music, and ritual, serves as a bridge between the divine and the earthly. It's within this enchanting world that Pepita Seth's "In God's Mirror: The Theyyams of Malabar" emerges as a monumental work, exploring the depths of this tradition with the keen eye of a scholar and the heart of an enthusiast.

Pepita Seth, a British writer who has made India her home since the 1970s, delves into the heart of Kerala to uncover the mysteries of Theyyam. Unlike typical coffee table books, "In God's Mirror" transcends the genre, offering readers not just visual splendour but a pro-

found insight into the rituals and beliefs of Theyyam practitioners. Seth's narrative is imbued with a sense of wonder and an insatiable curiosity, making the book a treasure trove of knowledge and beauty.

Through her lens, we see the vivid colours, the dramatic makeup, and the intricate costumes that define Theyyam. But more importantly, Seth introduces us to the human element of this tradition — the devotees and performers who breathe life into the gods they embody. Her encounters and conversations reveal a world where the divine and human meet, sharing stories of hope, faith, and communal identity.

Seth's journey through Malabar, spanning the districts of Kozhikode, Kannur, and Kasargod, uncovers the diverse manifestations of Theyyam, from the well-known deities like Chamundi

and Bhagavathi to lesser-known spirits that occupy the Hindu pantheon. Her detailed exploration of the caste dynamics within Theyyam provides a nuanced understanding of how this art form challenges and transcends societal hierarchies, allowing for moments of egalitarianism in a deeply stratified society.

"In God's Mirror" is not just a book; it's an invitation to explore the rich tapestry of Theyyam, a practice that has, for centuries, captivated the imagination of those fortunate enough to witness its magic. Seth's meticulous research and beautiful photography make this work an indispensable guide for anyone interested in the cultural heritage of Kerala. Whether one is drawn to Theyyam for its religious significance, artistic expression, or anthropological value, Seth's book offers a com-



In God's Mirror: The Theyyams of Malabar
Hardcover
By Pepita Seth;
Scala Arts Publishers
336 pages;
Rs7,500

prehensive and engaging overview of this captivating tradition.

The book also touches on the broader cultural significance of Theyyam in the context of South Indian traditions, drawing parallels with practices like Bhootha Kola in neighboring Karnataka. This comparison highlights the fluid nature of cultural traditions, which transcend geographical and linguistic boundaries to influence and be influenced by neighboring practices.

"In God's Mirror" stands as a testament to the enduring allure of Theyyam and its significance in the cultural landscape of Kerala. Seth's work is a masterful blend of visual storytelling and academic

research, making it a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the complex interplay of tradition, religion, and society in India. It's a rare gem that educates, enlightens, and inspires, urging readers to look beyond the surface and see the divine reflection in the mirror of Theyyam.

Seth's exploration of Theyyam also delves into the personal stories of the performers, offering a glimpse into the lives of those who dedicate themselves to this spiritual art form. Through her intimate portraits, readers are introduced to the dedication, physical rigor, and spiritual discipline required to embody the divine. These narratives serve to humanize the practice, showing that beyond the elaborate costumes and dramatic performances, Theyyam is deeply rooted in the personal faith and communal identity of its practitioners. Seth's ability to capture the essence of these personal journeys adds a profound depth to the book, making it not just a visual feast but a heartfelt exploration of human devotion.

Corporate India Forecasts 4.3% Inflation, Indicates Moderation in Cost Pressures: Survey

NEW DELHI: Corporate India's inflation expectations appear to be stabilising around 4.3 per cent, according to the latest findings from the Business Inflation Expectations Survey (BIES) conducted by the Indian Institute of Management-Ahmedabad (IIM-A).

The survey, released on Tuesday, revealed a decline in inflation expectations to 4.37 per cent in January, indicating a 21 basis point drop from December 2023.

The one-year-ahead outlook for inflation among India Inc has also decreased, dropping to 4.3 per cent from 4.58 per cent in December 2023, as reported by the survey.

Professor Abhimanyu Das, who oversees the survey, highlighted



that the average inflation expectation for the past six months stands at approximately 4.3 per cent, with many firms anticipating a moderation in cost pressures.

Primarily consisting of manu-

facturing firms, respondents to the BIES contribute to the insights provided by the survey, which is now in its 81st iteration and based on responses predominantly collected in the latter half of February.

Inflation expectations hold significant importance for policymakers, as they play a crucial role in ensuring price stability.

The Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) emphasised on February 8 the necessity for monetary policy to remain "actively disinflationary" to anchor inflation expectations effectively.

According to the IIM-A survey, the proportion of businesses reporting a 6 per cent or more increase in costs in January slightly decreased to 31 per cent from 33 per cent in December.

Additionally, 25 per cent of firms experienced cost increases ranging from 3.1 to 6.0 per cent, down from 29 per cent in December.

Registration of Informal Micro Enterprises Crosses 1.5 Cr at Udyam Assist Platform

NEW DELHI: In a significant milestone for the MSME sector, the Udyam Assist Platform has exceeded 1.5 crore registrations in just over 14 months since its launch by the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises.

Launched on January 11, 2023, with the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) as the implementing agency, this platform simplifies registration for Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs) by issuing the Udyam Assist Certificate.

What sets the Udyam Assist Platform apart is its inclusive approach, allowing IMEs without a GSTN to register seamlessly. This accessibility has contributed to its rapid adoption by micro-enterprises across the country.



Further amplifying its impact, the Government of India, through Gazette Notification S.O. 1296(E) dated March 20, 2023, equated the Udyam Assist Certificate with the Udyam Registration Certificate for availing Priority Sector Lending (PSL) benefits.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) reinforced this by cat-

egorising IMEs holding the Udyam Assist Certificate as Micro Enterprises under the MSME category for PSL classification, as per its circular dated May 9, 2023.

The Udyam Assist Platform stands as a testament to the government's commitment to empowering micro enterprises and fostering economic growth.

Nokia & STL partner to develop connectivity solutions for govts, enterprises



NEW DELHI: Nokia on Monday partnered with optical and digital solutions company STL to develop and deliver cutting-edge enterprise connectivity solutions for governments and enterprises in manufacturing, healthcare, retail, banking, critical infrastructure and rural broadband projects.

The companies will explore 5G use cases for enterprises and compelling solutions for data centres.

The partnership will also focus on government-driven connectivity projects, by capitalising on Nokia's B2B technology portfolio and STL's system integration capabilities.

"STL's extensive experience in connectivity solutions, coupled with Nokia's technological strength in 5G and IoT, creates a synergy that has the potential to redefine enterprise connectivity and transform industries," said Praveen Cherian, CEO of Global Services Business at STL.

The combined solutions will strengthen enterprise networks, providing high-speed, high availability, low-latency connections for applications such as 5G, IoT, augmented reality, data centre interconnect, supply chain efficiency, real-time data analytics, and Gen AI use cases.

"This partnership with STL is aligned with our commitment to accelerate digital transformation across industries and governments," said Vinish Bawa, Head of Enterprise and Webscale business in India at Nokia.

The collaboration will also accelerate the Industry 4.0 revolution and its transformative potential for enterprises, said the companies.

IIFL Finance launches "Ladies First" Gold Loan Mela



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

IIFL Finance has - in a unique industry-first initiative - launched a "Ladies First" Gold Loan Mela campaign for women customers recently. This initiative will offer an assured gift and zero processing fee to all new women customers, who are taking gold loan from IIFL Finance branches across India between March 5 and March 12, 2024. IIFL will also offer bumper prizes including gold coins to winners, Saurabh Kumar, Head of Gold Loan Business, IIFL Finance, said this initiative was launched for women borrowers in the week of International Women's Day to celebrate and encourage women entrepreneurs. IIFL, which is one of India's largest non-banking finance companies, is India's second largest gold loan company in terms of loan assets. Over 25% of IIFL Finance's 85 lakh borrowers are women and their number is growing as women choose entrepreneurship amid a growing economy, Kumar said, adding that this campaign has been planned spanning a period before and after the International Women's Day celebrations on March 8.

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia Inaugurates India's First Green Hydrogen Plant in Jindal Steel

NEW DELHI: In a significant step towards sustainable industrial growth, Union Minister for Steel and Civil Aviation Jyotiraditya M. Scindia, virtually inaugurated India's inaugural Green Hydrogen Plant in the Stainless Steel Sector on Monday.

The plant, situated at Jindal Stainless Limited in Hisar, marks a pivotal moment in India's commitment to environmental stewardship and technological innovation.

The world's first off-grid Green Hydrogen plant for the stainless steel industry, coupled with its state-of-the-art rooftop and floating solar facilities, showcases India's technological prowess and commitment to environmental conservation.

With a targeted reduction of



2,700 Metric Tonnes of carbon emissions annually and 54,000 tons of CO2 emissions over the next two decades, the project exemplifies India's determination to create a cleaner, more sustainable future.

The Minister hailed India's strides in the steel sector, transitioning from a net importer to a net exporter, and aspiring to become the world's largest producer of crude steel.

He highlighted the government's proactive stance on green policies, Minister Scindia announced the establishment of task forces and implementation of the Steel Scrap Recycling Policy to enhance sustainability in the steel industry.

He urged stakeholders to collaborate in building a globally competitive and sustainable steel industry.

The inauguration ceremony, attended by dignitaries including Secretary, Ministry of Steel Nagendra Nath Sinha, Managing Director of Jindal Stainless Limited, Abhyuday Jindal, and Founder of Hygenco Amit Bansal, underscored India's determination to lead the global charge towards a greener future.

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Savaari collaborates with "MakeMyTrip" to Transform Online Travel Experiences

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Savaari Car Rentals, a front-runner in the Indian car rental domain, has just announced a successful financial year and has set its goals right for the FY 2024-25. The company credits its impressive growth to several key factors: high ROI from marketing activities coupled with industry-best acquisition costs, high-quality service resulting in over 60% repeat business, and cost-effective operations ensuring each transaction contributes positively

to the margin. Since its inception in 2006, Savaari has tirelessly expanded its reach to over 2000 cities across India, with plans to double this figure in the coming year. Additionally, the company has reported a remarkable 50% growth in FY2024.

Gaurav Aggarwal, Founder and CEO, Savaari Car

Rentals, addressing media said, "We are at the forefront of revolutionizing the over \$3 billion intercity market, which remains largely unorganized. Our approach focuses on leveraging advanced technology and enhancing our understanding of consumer behaviours. This initiative aligns seamlessly with India's digitization efforts,

the government's initiative to promote domestic tourism, and the increasing trend among travellers to use online platforms for booking inter-city cab services", he added.

Savaari's collaboration with MakeMyTrip is a significant development that has the potential to reshape the travel industry landscape. This strategic partnership combines Savaari's expertise in providing reliable and convenient car rental services with MakeMyTrip's extensive reach and influence in the online travel marketplace.

Roche launches Vabysmo bispecific antibody for the eye to treat vision loss

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bangalore

Roche Pharma India marked its foray into the Ophthalmology space by launching Vabysmo® (faricimab) for the treatment of neovascular or "wet" age-related macular degeneration (nAMD) and diabetic macular edema (DME). Neovascular AMD and DME are two leading causes of



vision loss worldwide.

Vabysmo® is the first and only dual-pathway-inhibitor that

uniquely targets and inhibits two disease pathways linked to a number of visions threatening retinal conditions. It neutralises both angiopoietin-2 (Ang-2) and vascular endothelial growth factor-A (VEGF-A) which are key proteins involved in the development and progression of retinal conditions, contributing to vision loss by destabilising blood vessels in the eye.

Private Equity and Indian Pharmaceutical Industry-A Review



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

India's Pharmaceutical Industry (PI) is the third largest in volume terms and the 13th largest in value terms in the world. Pharmaceutical sector in India is dominated by family-owned enterprises. During Covid-19, two companies - Serum Institute of India (SII) which is world's largest vaccine manufacturer by number of doses produced/sold globally and Bharat Biotech proved the strength of family-owned enterprises by supplying Covishield and Covaxin and both these organizations are closely-held companies. Serum Institute of India Private Limited, founded in 1966 by Dr. Cyrus S. Poonawalla, is wholly-owned by Poonawalla family and Bharat Biotech International Limited, incorporated in 1996 is owned by promoter family comprising Dr. Krishna Ella and his wife to the extent of about 86% (March, 2023) whereas rest is held by private equity investors.

In recent past, Private Equity has gained momentum in pharmaceutical sector in India. Private Equity funds fall under Category II - Alternate Investment Funds (AIFs). AIFs are established or incorporated in India and are privately pooled investment vehicles collecting funds from sophisticated investors, whether Indian or foreign. These funds are subject to the SEBI (Alternate Investment Funds) Regulations, 2012. Prominent names among global PE firms include Blackstone, KKR & Co., Carlyle Group, Thoma Bravo, TPG, Advent

International, among others. Clout of these firms can be observed from the fact that Assets under Management (AUM) of Blackstone reached US \$1 trillion in 2023 thereby becoming the first PE manager to pass this milestone.

Involvement of PE firms with Indian pharmaceutical companies provides interesting insights. For example, PE firm Chryscapital took 11% stake for about Rs. 850 Mn in Mankind Pharma in 2007 (the company was incorporated in 1991), thereby valuing the company at Rs. 7.7 Bn, and sold this stake in 2015 to the US-based Capital International Group for a 14X return. Just after three years, Chryscapital again bought a stake of 10% at two times of 2015 valuation. In May 2023, at the time of Initial Public Offering (IPO) by Mankind Pharma, Chryscapital sold 2.5% holding while retaining 7.5%. Capital International Group also sold part of the stake at the time of IPO while retaining 6%.

Another interesting instance is of Actis Capital, a prominent PE firm's involvement with Ahmedabad-based Paras Pharma, a family-owned pharmaceutical company in India. Paros Pharma (founded by Girish Patel, Devendra Patel and their family) owned brands like Dermicool (talcum powder), Moov (pain-relief gel), D'Cold (for cold and cough relief), Krack (skincare cream), etc. Initially, Actis acquired 23 per cent stake for \$43 million in the year 2006. By March 2008, through a deal with younger sibling, Actis stake became almost 60 per cent. Then Girish Patel, the promoter, had 30 per cent stake and rest 10 per cent was held by other investors including PE firm - Sequoia



Capital. With 60 per cent stake by the PE firm, it was decided by majority shareholders to bring in an outside professional as the CEO. In December 2010, Reckitt Benckiser decided to acquire Paros Pharma for Rs. 3,260 by buying the stake from Actis, Girish Patel and family, and other investors. Actis Capital is said to have made more than 3X of amount invested.

In November 2013, KKR & Co had agreed to invest about \$200 million in Gland Pharma, a company established in 1978 by P.V.N. Raju, to acquire a minority stake. This marked the largest PE investment in an Indian pharma company, and Evolve India Life Sciences Fund had sold the stake to KKR & Co. By July 2016, KKR & Co. had 36 per cent stake in Gland Pharma. In 2016 only, Shanghai Fosun Pharmaceutical (Group) Co. Ltd. acquired 86% stake of the company for \$1.3 Bn including KKR's 36% stake that was valued at \$540 million. Founder was retained as the board member and his son was retained as the Managing Director by new owners holding majority stake.

In recent years, Private Equity players have become quite active in pharmaceutical sector in India. In July 2020, US-based PE giant KKR agreed to acquire 54% stake (including open offer

of 26%) in Mumbai-based JB Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals for Rs. 3,100 Crore. J.B. Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals was established in 1976 by three brothers - Jyotindra Bhagwanlal (J. B.) Mody, D.B. Mody and S.B. Mody. Further, the company was primarily owned and controlled by Mody family till stake sale. During this period, in October 2020, Ajay Piramal Group company - Piramal Pharma Limited announced completion of 20% Strategic Growth Investment by Carlyle for Rs. 3,523.40 Crore. These deals became largest PE deals in the Indian pharmaceutical sector. In the last week of February 2024, KKR & Co. was contemplating stake sale in J.B. Pharma as per media reports, and firm was valued at \$3 bn with a 65% rise in share price during last 12 months.

In December 2022, Advent International signed an agreement to buy a majority stake (50.1% for Rs. 6,313.08 Cr.) in Suvon Pharmaceuticals from the Jasti family. At that time itself, the PE firm had conveyed the intention to explore the merger of its portfolio company - Cohance Lifesciences with Suvon Pharma so as to build a leading Contract Development and Manufacturing Organization (CDMO) along with two other growth vectors namely Specialty

Chemicals and Merchant API. MD of Suvon Pharma - Venkateswarlu Jasti, was retained to provide consultancy services as the 'Chief Advisor' on the deal completion. In February, 2024 the merger of Suvon Pharma and Cohance Pharma was announced, and in the merged entity, Advent entities were to own 66.7% stake and balance with public shareholders.

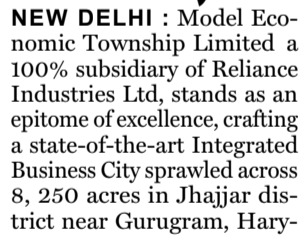
In last nine months, news regarding stake sale by promoters of CIPLA Limited, gained a lot of attention even though the transaction has not materialized. Hamied family as promoter holds 33.47 per cent stake in CIPLA, a company founded in 1935 by Dr. Khwaja Abdul Hamied, and now, ranked third in revenue terms. Currently, the company is headed by Dr. Yusuf Khwaja Hamied, 2nd generation entrepreneur. As per news reports, PE firm Blackstone was looking to acquire entire stake of promoters. Torrent Pharma, 8th largest pharma company was also contemplating to acquire controlling stake as successful merger could have created 2nd largest pharma company in revenue terms. At the same time, another PE firm - Bain Capital was said to be in talks with Dr. Reddy's Labs, to acquire controlling stake in CIPLA as this could have culminated into formation of a 2nd largest Indian origin company in terms of domestic revenue. Size of the transaction was prohibitively high as promoters' stake alone was valued close to \$4.0 Bn. Due to the size of the deal, there was less competition, and PE firms had deeper pockets to make the deal happen.

A common theme emerged out of these transactions that meant change of family-owned, traditional management style

to PE owned and professionally managed firm. Deal size in PE-backed transactions carried out in India has also gone up over a period. PE firms have invested in well-established companies with a good track record. Many Pharma MNCs globally have also undergone similar transition. In 1980s, many PE firms came into existence such as Bain Capital (1984), Blackstone Group (1985), Carlyle Group (1987) in the USA, and BC Partners (1986) in Europe, to name a few and brought significant changes in different industries. Now, PE firms are making serious inroads in Indian pharmaceutical industry. Entry of PE firms has helped existing promoters of family-owned pharmaceutical companies to grow at higher pace, and also helped them to unlock the wealth through IPO or exit through stake sale. In many pharmaceutical companies, promoters, or members of promoter family served in advisory capacity even after losing majority control to ensure smooth transition. PE firms have shown the capability to improve overall performance of certain firms due to their professional teams with entrepreneurial desire and got exit at attractive valuation. This trend of PE involvement with Indian pharmaceutical companies is likely to be positive for professional managers. It is also likely to ignite the debate on profits before patients and employees.

Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish, Associate Professor, Department of Pharmaceutical Management at NIPER, SAS Nagar (Mohali), Punjab. Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.

Model Economic Township Limited a subsidiary of Reliance Industries



NEW DELHI: Model Economic Township Limited a 100% subsidiary of Reliance Industries Ltd, stands as an epitome of excellence, crafting a state-of-the-art Integrated Business City sprawled across 8, 250 acres in Jhajjar district near Gurugram, Haryana. This visionary endeavour has attracted more than 480 national and international corporations, solidifying its status as a premier business hub.

Backed by top-notch plug-and-play infrastructure, MET City boasts a strategic location with unrivalled connectivity to the Delhi National Capital Region. The completed trunk infrastructure includes a 220 kV substation, cutting-edge water treatment facilities, an extensive water distribution network, well-planned road networks, and meticulous landscaping. This unwavering commitment to quality has propelled MET City into one of India's largest Indian Green Building Council Platinum Rated Greenfield Smart Cities.

SV. Goyal, CEO & WTD of MET City said "With its Plug-and-play infrastructure, IGBC Platinum rated certification and companies hailing from 9 different countries, MET City has emerged as a premier business destination of India attracting investments from diverse sectors. It is a pioneering project in sustainable development with over Rs. 8, 000 Crore investment already committed. Presently, MET City holds licenses for over 2200 acres' land, and the project has already provided employment to more than 40, 000 individuals. Recently we welcomed Saab from Sweden marking a significant milestone in our journey of inviting key global companies to MET city.

Saab as India's first 100% FDI approved defence manufacturer will not only strengthen our resolve for delivering best-in-class infrastructure but will also establish MET City as a preferred location for doing business for global companies."

The project has emerged as a key driver of economic growth in the state and the region. It currently provides direct employment to over 40, 000 individuals across 49 operational companies and more than 130 companies under construction and counting. It will become one of the largest projects for employment generation in India. The consistent growth in employment figures reflects the city's dynamic role in shaping the economic landscape of the region.

Reliance MET City hosts companies from 9 different countries in various sectors. As one of the rapidly expanding business hubs in North India, it stands out as a preferred destination for industries across sectors like defence, engineering, electronics, auto components, medical devices FMCG, footwear, plastics, consumer products, and many others.

It stands as the sole Japan Industrial Township in Haryana, accommodating 6 Japanese companies from electronics to auto-components to medical devices. The project also has 6 companies from South Korea and multiple companies from Europe.

RBI to roll out Interoperable Payment System for faster fund settlements

MUMBAI: Expected to launch in the current calendar year, an interoperable payment system for internet banking will be introduced by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), as Governor Shaktikanta Das revealed on Monday.

The interoperable system aims to facilitate swifter fund settlements for merchants and further advance online transactions.

During the 'Digital Payments Awareness Week' festivities in Mumbai, Das revealed that the RBI has sanctioned the implementation of this interoperable system to NPCI Bharat BillPay Ltd (NBBL),



a subsidiary of the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI).

The envisioned system will enable customers to conduct net banking payments to busi-

nesses seamlessly, irrespective of whether their banks and the merchants' payment aggregators are integrated.

Currently, online merchant payment transactions rely on

non-interoperable payment aggregators, mandating individual bank integrations with diverse online merchant platforms.

"Due to the absence of a payment system and a set of rules for these transactions, there are delays in actual receipt of payments by merchants and settlement risks," stated Das, terming it a bottleneck in the digital payment system.

Asserting the RBI's commitment to India's digital payment journey, Das highlighted the regulatory resolve to address these challenges and facilitate smoother digital transactions.

India's forex reserves shoots up by \$6.55 billion

MUMBAI: India's foreign exchange reserves shot up by \$6.55 billion to \$625.63 billion for the week ending March 1, according to the latest data released by the RBI on Friday.

The country's foreign exchange reserves had increased by \$2.98 billion to \$619.07 billion in the preceding week ending February 23.

Rising foreign exchange reserves are a positive for the economy, as they reflect an ample supply of dollars that help strengthen the rupee. An increase in foreign exchange reserves helps the RBI stabilise the rupee when it turns volatile. The RBI intervenes in the



spot and forward currency markets by releasing more dollars to prevent the rupee from going into a free fall when it comes under pressure.

On the other hand, a sharp decline in the country's forex kitty leaves the RBI less headroom to intervene in the market to prop up the rupee.

Moody's Revises India's Growth forecast upward to 6.8% for FY2024 on Strong Economic Data



NEW DELHI: Global rating agency Moody's has revised India's growth forecast for the fiscal year 2024 to 6.8 per cent, up from the earlier estimate of 6.1 per cent, citing 'stronger-than-expected' economic data from 2023 and diminishing global economic challenges.

In the fourth quarter of the calendar year 2023, India's real GDP surged by 8.4 per cent year-over-year, resulting in a full-year growth of 7.7 per cent in 2023.

Moody's Investors Service attributed this robust growth to significant contributions from government capital spending and vigorous manufacturing activity.

With the waning of global economic headwinds, Moody's predicts that the Indian economy should comfortably achieve a real GDP growth rate of 6 to 7 per cent.

This positive outlook is underpinned by the continuation of government capital spending and sustained momentum in manufacturing.

Moody's also highlighted the evolving geopolitical landscape, which is expected to influence international trade flows, capital movements, migration trends, and the operations of international organisations in the years ahead.

Additionally, it noted the interconnectedness of industrial and trade policies with foreign policy in several countries.

The upward revision in India's growth forecast reflects the resilience and strength of the Indian economy amidst global challenges, positioning it for robust expansion in the fiscal year 2024.

RBI Governor clarifies stand on Fintech Sector assuring support for growth



MUMBAI: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das addressed concerns surrounding the scrutiny of fintech companies, emphasising the central bank's support for the sector's growth in a recent statement reported by media.

Contrary to speculation, Governor Das affirmed that the RBI is not opposed to fintech innovations.

Rather, recent regulatory actions are aimed at ensuring compliance within the sector, without targeting any specific fintech entity.

The clarification comes amidst the backdrop of the recent Paytm case, where RBI imposed restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank due to compliance issues and supervisory concerns.

Governor Das reassured stakeholders that the measures taken were necessary for maintaining regulatory standards and fostering a healthy financial ecosystem.

Highlighting the timeline provided to Paytm Payments Bank until March 15 to address compliance issues, Governor Das emphasised the importance of adhering to regulatory directives.

Since the initial restrictions were imposed, approximately 15-20 per cent of Paytm Payments Bank's customers have transitioned to other banking alternatives, indicating a shift in consumer behaviour.

India's Foreign Direct Investment Slumps 21 per cent in 2023

NEW DELHI: Foreign direct equity (FDE) inflows into India contracted by 21 per cent year-on-year to USD 41.31 billion in 2023, according to data released by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

The sustained contraction in FDI inflows to India reflects various factors contributing to the cautious investor sentiment. High inflation rates and a slowdown in developed countries have significantly impacted investor confidence, leading to a decline in overseas investments flowing into the country.

While the Indian government has not officially commented on the reasons behind the FDI dip, industry analysts suggest that addressing policy uncertainties and streamlining regulations could be crucial in attracting renewed investor interest.

"India remains a promising market with a large and growing consumer base," said an industry expert. "However, it is essential



to create a stable and predictable policy environment to ensure continued foreign investment and support economic growth," he added.

The decline in FDI comes despite India's recent efforts to improve its ease of doing business ranking and attract foreign capital. The government has implemented various initiatives, including addressing regulatory bottlenecks, streamlining bureaucratic procedures, and offering incentives to encourage foreign investment inflows.

The coming months will be crucial in observing how the Indian government responds to this downward trend and whether it can implement effective measures to reverse the decline in FDI inflows.

India opens doors to Foreign Investment in Space Sector with new norms

NEW DELHI: The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) has announced significant changes in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) regulations within the space sector following a decision by the Union cabinet on February 21.

As part of a concerted effort to attract foreign players and private companies, the government has now permitted 100



per cent overseas investment in the production of satellite components.

However, the investee entity will be subject to sectoral guide-

lines set forth by the Department of Space.

The satellite sub-sector has been categorized into three distinct activities, each with defined limits for foreign investment, according to an official statement.

Previously, FDI in the space sector was restricted to 100

per cent for satellite establishment and operations exclusively through government routes.

Under the revised policy, the government has now sanctioned up to 74 per cent FDI under the automatic route for satellite manufacturing and operation, satellite data products, as well as ground and user segments. Beyond this threshold, government approval will be mandatory for FDI in these areas.

India's GST Revenue Surges in February 2024 Signalling Strong Economic Growth

NEW DELHI: In February 2024, India's Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue soared to Rs 1.68 lakh crore, marking a robust 12.5 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2023.

Experts hail this surge as a testament to the resilience of the Indian economy and its thriving consumption narrative.

Abhishek Jain, Partner and National Head of Indirect Tax at KPMG in India, lauded the substantial growth, emphasising the 13.9 per cent increase in GST collections from domestic transactions as a significant



contributor to the overall positive trend. He noted that this growth, coupled with an 8.4 per cent GDP increase in Q3, underscores the strength of India's economic landscape.

According to data released by the Ministry of Finance, the growth in GST revenue was

propelled by a 13.9 per cent rise in domestic transactions and an 8.5 per cent increase in imports of goods.

The net GST revenue, after refunds, reached Rs 1.51 lakh crore, reflecting a notable 13.6 per cent growth from the previous year. For the fiscal year 2023-24, the total gross GST collection stands at Rs 18.40 lakh crore, marking an 11.7 per cent increase from the previous fiscal year. The average monthly gross collection for FY 2023-24 exceeds Rs 1.5 lakh crore, indicating a consistent upward trajectory.

Gunjan Prabhakaran, Partner & Leader of Indirect Tax at BDO India, highlighted the sustained year-on-year growth in GST collections, despite a minor month-on-month decrease.

He attributed this increase to the expansion of economic activities, particularly evident in major states like Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Gujarat.

Saurabh Agarwal, Tax Partner at EY, emphasised the broadening economic growth across smaller Indian states and union territories, showcasing a more inclusive development narrative.

Bank manager among three held online fraud

SATISH HANDA Gurugram

In the second case of on-line bank fraud by the employees of bank in a couple of days in Gurugram district, the Gurugram Cyber police arrested three employees of Yes Bank including a manager of the bank's Delhi branch allegedly cheated over Rs 9.5 lakh. The suspects used to open accounts fraudulently and sell them to the fraudsters after taking money. The police has started investigation in the case after obtained a four-day police remand from the court. The suspects have been identified as Mohammad Mukim, Anikesh

and Rohsan Kumar all originally hailing from Bihar and presently staying in Delhi. Mukim was the branch manager of Lajpat Nagar, Delhi branch, of Yes Bank, while Anikesh and Rohsan were working as sales officers at the same bank.

Addressing media persons Assistant Commissioner Police Priyanshu Dewan said a Gurugram resident had filed a complaint last year that he had received a call on April 10, in which the caller mentioned that they were calling from Fedex and a parcel of his had been confiscated at the Customs as it had illegal items. The caller said the call would be transferred to Mumbai Police to report the issue. On the



pretext of removing his name from the case, the suspects duped him of Rs 9.21,500 and transferred the amount in four accounts. An FIR was registered by the cyber crime police station. While following the investigation, a team led by SHO Jasvir arrested the suspects from Delhi on Saturday night.

Investigation revealed that the

suspects working with Yes Bank used to open accounts in Yes Bank by fraudulently preparing fake documents and as many as 12 fake bank accounts were opened by them. On 26th February this year Gurugram cyber crime cell had arrested three senior executives of Kotak Mahindra Bank M.G. Road allegedly involved on-line frauds through a middleman, a resident of Nuh in Mewat district, opening fake accounts. On the pretext of opening a bank account, Rs 2 lakh was received from another suspect Suhail Akram and distributed among themselves. Of the defrauded amount, Rs 1,52,000 was transferred to the bank ac-

count provided by the suspects, said ACP Dewan. He said that further investigation in this case is underway to find how many other accounts have been opened by the suspects and how much money has been taken per account and who else is involved in the gang. Dewan said that Rs 1.5 lakh was transferred in the account of Ranjan resident of Muzaffar Nagar in U.P. by Rohsan working in Yes Bank branch at Chattarpur and was arrested by the police and on his information Anikesh working as Deputy Sales Manager in the same bank branch and Mukim also working as manager in Lajpat Nagar Branch New Delhi.

Trade secret is intrinsic to every aspect of life & its protection under law is vital for economy: Arjun Ram Meghwal



NEW DELHI: "Trade secret is part of everything we do, and history is replete with examples where trade secret has made the difference in war, trade and international relations. In today's highly technological world, trade secret plays an important role in driving competitive advantage, innovation, economic growth, business continuity, legal compliance, international trade and relations. We have now entered Industry 4.0 where AI, AR/VR, robotics, IoT, block chain technology among others are the mainstay. We cannot escape the era of technology and we must protect our trade secret to forge ahead," said Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Law and Justice (Independent Charge); MoS, Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Ministry of Culture, Government of India at ASSOCHAM's International Conference on Protection of Trade Secrets & Economic Espionage.

Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi Hon'ble Chairperson, Law Commission of India & Former Chief Justice of the High Court of Karnataka said, "As India continues to chart its course towards becoming a global economic powerhouse, the protection of intellectual property rights stands as a cornerstone of its journey. In a world driven by innovation and knowledge-based economies, safeguarding these intangible assets is paramount to fostering a conducive environment for economic growth, technological advancement and sustainable development. Enacting legislation on trade secrets would enable India to establish a forward looking legal framework aligned with global standards while catering to its

evolving business landscape."

Justice Prathiba M. Singh Hon'ble Judge, High Court of Delhi, said "The concept of Intellectual Property has roots in rewarding creativity and innovation in varied fields like art, technology and product design. As we progress with newer forms of protection, we have expanded from brands, trademarks to copyrights, patents, designs and even community rights. We generate humongous amount of data on a daily basis, do we need to protect this data and do we have a regime to do so. We are currently reliant on organic copyright, IP and contractual law. Courts are facing challenges from the lack of a definite definition of trade secrets, confidential information, lack of specific remedies and digitisation. We need trade secrecy law that is balanced, enforced uniformly and without ambiguity and vagueness. The purpose of economic growth is certainty and that comes only when there is law."

Addressing the gathering at the conference, Ajay Singh President, ASSOCHAM; & Chairman and Managing Director, SpiceJet, said, "This is the first initiative of this kind undertaken and marks the culmination of several discussions and deliberations with the law commission. The need for a specific law on the protection of trade secrets has been felt for some time now. The WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) of which we are a signatory allows specific legislations to prevent unauthorised disclosure and use of trade secrets and we look forward to establishing our own law."

Need to Change Business Pattern

years and now after 11 years, the average Monthly Per Capita Expenditure (MPCE) survey results have been released for the year 2022-23.

In the last 11 years, the MPCE in rural areas was Rs.1,430, which increased to Rs.3,773 in the year 2022-23, while during the year 2011-12, the MPCE in urban areas was Rs.2,630, which increased to Rs.6,459 in the year 2022-23. The data shows that in rural areas, there has been an increase of monthly expenditure two and a half times in 11 years, while in urban areas also the MPCE has increased by almost two and a half times.

If we talk about state-wise rural and urban MPCE, Sikkim is at the top in the country. The MPCE in rural areas here is Rs.7,731, while in urban areas it is Rs.12,105. In Tamil Nadu, the MPCE in rural areas is Rs.5,310 and in urban areas it is Rs.7,630, whereas in Karnataka, the MPCE in rural areas is Rs.4,397 and in urban areas it is Rs.7,666.

Gujarat's MPCE in rural area is Rs.3,798 and urban area is Rs.6,621, Rajasthan's MPCE in rural area is Rs.4,263 and urban area is Rs.5,913, Madhya Pradesh's MPCE is Rs.3,113 in rural area and Rs.4,987 in urban area, West Bengal's MPCE in the rural area is Rs.3,239 and in the urban area it is Rs.5,267, while the MPCE in the rural area of Chhattisgarh is



Rs.2,466 and in the urban area, the MPCE is Rs.4,483.

HCES also shows that in rural areas, there has been an increase in the per month expenditure on transport, durable goods, dry fruits, processed foods, entertainment, pan, tobacco, intoxicants, toilet related items etc. Whereas in urban areas, there has been an increase in the monthly expenditure on transport, durable goods, dry fruits, processed foods, pan, tobacco, intoxicants etc.

Analysis of data also shows that since the year 2011-12, the expenditure on food items is decreasing and people have started spending more on other things. For example, in the year 2011-12, in rural areas, 53 per cent was being spent on food items, while 47 per cent was being spent on other items. This picture changed completely in the year 2022-23 and expenditure on food items declined to 46 per cent, while expenditure

on other articles increased to 54 per cent. At the same time, in the urban areas of the country, during the year 2011-12, 43 per cent was being spent on food items, while 57 per cent was being spent on other things, while in the year 2022-23, 39 per cent was being spent on food items in the urban areas of the country, while 61 per cent spent on other objects.

The analysis also shows that in rural areas there has been a decline in expenditure on grains, pulses, spices, vegetables, oil, and education, while in cities there has been a decline in expenditure on grains, pulses, vegetables, oil, entertainment, and education. Additionally, this survey also shows that due to decline in expenditure on food items and increase in expenditure on other things, the government machinery has to prepare the new series of Consumer Price Index (CPI). This will also help in calculating inflation in easier way.

As the pace of development is increasing in the country, the difference in expenditure between rural and urban India is also decreasing. Besides, there is a difference in the monthly expenditure patterns of people. In the last 11 years, MPCE has increased by two and a half times. Now people have started spending more on luxuries items instead of food items. Like the urban people, now people in the villages have also started eating processed foods like Maggi, pasta, frozen chicken, mutton etc.

However, a major reason for this change is also the introduction of e-commerce companies. Now even in villages, people can get anything delivered at home through e-commerce companies. The lifestyle of the village people is also changing with the help of TV and cinema. Both things are easily available in villages today and villagers are not averse to spending them.

A major reason is migration to cities in search of employment. Now, be it city or village, people are living alone in both the places. People do not have enough time to prepare roti, rice, pulses, or vegetables etc. for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Therefore, people are filling their stomachs with frozen or processed foods. However, the changed environment also has disadvantages, for example, surveys have revealed that people in both rural and ur-

ban areas have started spending more on tobacco and other intoxicating substances. This is a matter of concern, because it is not bringing the expected pace of economic activity and the expenditure on health is increasing.

According to HCES, the expenditure on education is also decreasing, which needs to be changed, because such a trend can slow down the development of the country. Due to decrease in expenditure on vegetables and increase in consumption of junk food, expenditure on health items is increasing. This is also blocking the path of development, because only a healthy persons can discharge their responsibilities in a better way.

HCES is an important data for policy making because it shows what people are consuming and how much they are consuming. This also shows how much demand there is for which food product it may have in the future. For example, if the demand for milk, fish, poultry products, fruits etc. is more than that of grains, then according to the changed situation, the government should change its policy and the businessmen should change their business pattern.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal

INTERNATIONAL

Ramesh Singh Arora becomes Pakistan's first Sikh minister in Punjab

LAHORE: Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, an influential minority leader, has been sworn in as a provincial minister, making him the first Sikh to occupy a ministerial position in post-Partition Punjab.

Belonging to the former prime minister Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party, Arora has returned to the Lahore provincial assembly for the third term after winning the February 8 polls.

Arora, 49, was recently elected parhnan (president) of the Pakistan Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee and also as the ambassador to the Kartarpur Corridor. He was



administered the oath along with 17 others on Wednesday. Arora has been allotted the portfolio of minorities of Punjab province in the cabinet of Chief Minister

Maryam Nawaz, incidentally, also the first woman to hold the post in the country. According to sources, Arora has close connections with the military establishment.

"Singh's brother is also looking after the affairs of the Kartarpur Corridor," another member representing the Christian minority community of Punjab, Khalil Tahir Sindhu, told to media on Thursday. Born on October 11, 1974 at Nankana Sahib and hailing from Narowal district, Arora was also the first-ever Sikh member of the Punjab provincial assembly taking oath in 2013. He has done post-graduation in social enterprise and studied at the Government College, Lahore, Punjab University, Lahore, and Harvard Business School in the US.

He also served as a member of the National Commission

for Minorities, chairman of the Standing Committee on Commerce & Investment and remained as Patron-in-chief of the Pakistan Sikh Council.

According to Arora's profile on the official website of the Punjab Provincial Assembly, he is also a renowned human rights activist and a social worker, who played a prominent role in protecting the rights of Sikh community in Pakistan and is credited with the passage of 'The Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act, 2018.' Due to his efforts, Pakistan has become the first country where the Sikh Marriages Registration Act is enforced, it said.

Nikki Haley to suspend race for White House

WASHINGTON: Nikki Haley, the former US Ambassador to the UN, will suspend her campaign for the Republican nomination for President after a severe drubbing in the primaries held in more than 10 states on Tuesday.

Former President Donald Trump will now become the presumptive Republican nominee to take on President Joe Biden, a Democrat, in the November election. He has a lock on the nomination with 955 delegates, which is just a bit shy of the winning threshold of 1,215 delegates (Every state gives the candidates a certain number of delegates who will vote to elect a nominee in the party convention later in the year. Haley has picked up only 88 thus far).

The Indian American Republican is expected to make the announcement later in the day.

Haley ran a gritty campaign, coalescing Republican voters who did not want Trump to be their nominee again. But, in the end, their numbers fell far short of winning her the nomination.

But she did raise substantial sums of money, garnering the support of some of the party's largest donors, such as the immensely resourceful Koch



Network, which in a sign of things to come, withdrew its support to Haley last week. Haley won the primaries in only two states thus far, to Trump's 22.

Calls had been mounting from within the Republican party for her to exit the race and let Trump focus on his contest against Biden.

But Haley stayed in, arguing she was the better candidate than both Trump and Biden, who who are battling voter scepticism on account of their age and, for the former President, a litany of civil and criminal charges, some of which he has lost and could end up in jail some day.

Haley's exit raises questions about her future. Could she join Trump as his running mate? She has said before she is not interested in a position in a Trump administration and that she is not auditioning for a job. But that could change.

She is a woman and as a woman of color, she brings unmatched equity to the ticket.

Donald Trump wins Missouri's Republican presidential caucus



WASHINGTON: Former US President Donald Trump on Saturday won Missouri's Republican presidential caucus, continuing his march toward the GOP nomination.

Trump's victory over former US Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, in the midwestern state was another piece of good news for the former President, who previously won Iowa, New Hampshire, Nevada and South Carolina.

In Michigan, a key swing state, Trump won the Republican primary on Tuesday, garnering more than 68 per cent of the vote, Xinhua news agency reported.

On Saturday, he was awarded more delegates during a Republican convention, cementing his victory in the northern state.

Trump, who has already collected more than 100 delegates in the contests so far, will need to attain at least 1,215 delegates to clinch the Republican presidential nomination.

Super Tuesday, the day in the presidential primary cycle when most states vote, is fast approaching. It's typical for nearly one-third of all delegates to the Republican or Democratic conventions to be distributed on this day. This year's Super Tuesday falls on March 5, when some 15 states and one territory will vote.

Earlier this week, the US Supreme Court decided to take up Trump's assertion of immunity from prosecution in his efforts to challenge the outcome of the 2020 election, as he seeks to postpone legal proceedings while campaigning for a return to the presidency. The US presidential primaries, extending through June, precede the Republican National Convention in July, where the party's presidential nominee is officially selected by delegates, followed by the Democratic National Convention in August.

The 2024 Election Day falls on November 5.

US Vice President Kamala Harris calls for increasing flow of aid to Gaza



WASHINGTON: US Vice President Kamala Harris has urged Israel to "significantly increase the flow of aid" to Gaza by opening new border crossings and not imposing "any unnecessary restrictions".

"What we are seeing every day in Gaza is devastating. We have seen reports of families eating leaves or animal feed, women giving birth to malnourished babies with little or no medical care, and children dying from malnutrition and dehydration," she said on Sunday in Selma, Alabama. "Just a few days ago, we saw hungry, desperate people approach aid trucks, simply trying to secure food for their families after weeks of nearly no aid reaching northern Gaza. And they were met with gunfire and chaos... Our hearts break for the victims of that horrific tragedy and for all the innocent people in Gaza who are suffering from what is clearly a humanitarian catastrophe," Harris added. She further said that the Israeli government must ensure that humanitarian personnel, sites, and convoys are not targeted. "And they must work to restore basic services and promote order in Gaza so more food, water, and fuel can reach those in need."

Sexually transmitted infections surge in Europe: Report

LONDON: Sexually transmitted infections surged across Europe in 2022, with reported cases of gonorrhoea jumping by nearly a half, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said as it released its most recent data on Thursday.

Syphilis cases rose by 34% from the previous year, to more than 35,000, chlamydia cases by 16% to more than 216,000. Gonorrhoea cases jumped by 48% to more than 70,000.

"The numbers paint a stark picture, one that needs our immediate attention and action," said ECDC director Andrea



Ammon in a press conference on the data. Untreated STIs can lead to a range of health problems including chronic pain, infertility and, for syphilis, neurological and cardiovascular complications. Cases of lympho-

granuloma venereum (LGV) and congenital syphilis, when the infection is transmitted from mother to foetus, also increased sharply, ECDC said, although from lower levels.

Rates of STIs have been ris-

ing for years in many countries, including in Europe, although this was stalled by Covid as most governments imposed social isolation measures, people stayed home and reporting rates fell.

A number of reasons were behind the sustained rise, ECDC said, including better surveillance and a rise in home-testing as well as an increase in riskier sexual behaviour. A leap in infections among young heterosexual people in the latest data, and particularly young women, could be due to a change in sexual behaviour post-pandemic, the EU agency said.

Families of Israeli hostages seek ceasefire, details on kidnapped relatives

TEL AVIV: The Hostages and Missing Families forum of Israel has demanded that the ceasefire deal be accelerated and information on their near and dear ones, who were kidnapped on October 7, 2023 by Hamas, be immediately ascertained.

This is following an interview by a senior Hamas official Basem Naim that the hostages are in the captivity of several groups and the Hamas does not have the exact details on those who are alive or dead.

Naim in an interview to a media organisation said that the information on the kidnapped hostages was valuable and that it can't be shared for free. He had also said that the condition of the hostages



could be ascertained only after a ceasefire.

Olive Mosley, a close relative of a hostage while speaking to media said, "The reported statement of this Hamas official is indeed frightening. We are waiting for our dear ones and we don't know whether they will come back alive or

in a coffin."

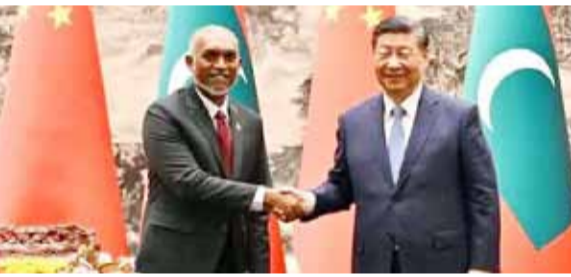
She called upon the Israel government to immediately ascertain the situation in Gaza and the condition of hostages.

At least 134 people are in the custody of Hamas and according to Israeli intelligence agencies 32 of them are dead.

Pak PM Shehbaz Sharif raises Kashmir issue in inaugural speech

In his inaugural address after securing a second term as Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif addressed the National Assembly, emphasizing the need for a resolution to the longstanding issues faced by the people of Kashmir and Palestine. Despite expectations that his elder brother, Nawaz Sharif, would play a key role in government decisions, Shehbaz Sharif wasted no time bringing the Kashmir dispute to the forefront. "Let's all come together and the National Assembly should pass a resolution for the freedom of Kashmiris and Palestinians," he said in his speech on Sunday.

Will obtain non-lethal arms, training from China: Maldives President



MALE: The Maldives will get free "non-lethal" military equipment and training from China's military under a newly inked agreement with Beijing, President Mohamed Muizzu has said, underlining that it would further strengthen the Indian Ocean island nation's independence and autonomy.

Earlier on Monday, the Maldives Ministry of Defence announced that a military assistance agreement has been signed

by Defence Minister Mohamed Ghassan Maumoon and Major General Zhang. This is the first time Maldives has signed a deal with China for military cooperation of this level. Speaking late on Tuesday evening, President Muizzu said China and Maldives had always maintained military cooperation and that the only new development with this agreement is the help Maldives will be receiving to strengthen its military capacity.

Pakistan Doesn't Require Financial Assistance from IMF, China or the Gulf ; if it's Rich Decide to Help!



GOPAL MISRA
Under the invisible umbrella of the uniform, Shahbaz Sharif begins his second innings as the prime minister of Pakistan this week in Islamabad. Sharif of the Pakistan Muslim League-Noon (PML-N) and Bhutto-Zardari's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) have formed a strong coalition. Yet, it is difficult to predict whether the new government would be able to usher in any substantial reforms in the country's sick financial system.

An Islamabad-based think tank and advisory firm, Tabadlab, has issued a stark warning about Pakistan's debt situation, describing it as a "raging fire" that has become unsustainable, as per a Bloomberg report. This assessment is more severe than that of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had previously deemed the country's dues as "borderline" manageable, according to a 68-page report by Tabadlab.

It is being rightly asked whether the rich and powerful Pakistan is within their own country as well as in the developed first world are known for their huge wealth and fairy-tale lifestyle could resolve the country's perennial financial challenges.

With their huge wealth and financial resources, it is being stated that if they decide to bail out their country, Pakistan does not require charity either from China or the financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or even the brother Muslim countries in the Gulf.

The country's ruling elite comprises serving as well as retired defence officers, senior civil servants, judges of high courts and Supreme Court and politicians

representing both the ruling alliances as well as the Opposition. They have introduced such favourable laws related to the country's citizenship to enjoy nationalities in as many as 21 countries; thus enabling them to enjoy the money amassed in Pakistan to be a part of the rich-richer of the first world.

For a Pakistani, if could amass wealth by cheating brother citizens back home, can get citizenship in the countries, including the USA, U.K., France, Italy, Switzerland, Canada, Australia and many other countries.

These 'bold' and 'courageous' having no inhibition in cheating their fellow countrymen, enjoy a lifestyle causing much envy even to the rich elite in the West. Back home, Pakistan is facing an unprecedented financial crisis depending upon IMF loans for meeting its needs to import oil and gas. The ruling elite even having western education does not hesitate in seeking charity from the brother Islamic countries such as Saudi Arabia and UAE.

According to estimates, billions of the US dollars, obtained from various sources, including the Chinese assistance, are being quietly siphoned off to meet the cost of education of the children of the ruling elite and also to known or unknown off-shore accounts.

Exit of US from Kabul

The political crisis in Afghanistan during the past three decades, the USSR's intervention, promoting radical Islam with American and Arab funds and finally joining "the war against terror", has been a financial bonanza for the Pakistani army and its proxies. The situation, however, has undergone paradigm changes following the setting up of the Taliban government. The inflow of dollars has suddenly stopped causing financial hardships to the com-



A Unique Economic Model

Since its inception, the Pakistani ruling elite comprising powerful landlords, top echelon of army and civil services, and its political parties have evolved a unique system of governance under an Islamic ideology. The frequent use of religion and radicalization of masses helped the army to legitimize its rule. Its military dictators from Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haq to Pervez Musharraf have been ruling the country with the tacit approval of Washington.

Wealthy Generals

It is difficult to state or estimate how much wealth is being siphoned off by army generals and politicians from the cash-starved country. The military dictator, Pervez Musharraf, who died in Dubai had amassed more than two billion US dollars and huge properties in Dubai,

Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Noon (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Also, the GHQ promotes and patronizes regional parties in Sindh, Baluchistan such as MQM to serve as its proxies.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Baluchistan was a hotbed of political activity, and many Baloch leaders and student activists were in the thrall of leftwing politics. They took an active role in politics, forming the provincial government in Baluchistan under the platform of the National Awami Party (NAP). Interestingly, the Pakistani army as well as Iranian clergy were opposed to the secular dimension of Baloch politics. They worked together to radicalize society. The extremists, thus became a formidable force, could not be defeated by genuine secular political forces. In recent years, the madararas being funded having links with terrorists have mushroomed in Balochistan.

The non-commissioned officers get high civilian positions, including diplomatic assignments, and also earn huge money by indulging in purchase of arms and ammunition. Apart from the widespread corruption among generals, non-commissioned officers are being given opportunities to earn profits by joining the companies owned by the army such as for manufacturing and selling comflakes, breads, biscuits, cement, and fertilizers. The military also runs airlines, logistics companies, banks, and insurance

Malaysia Makes Historic Debut in World's Best Hospitals 2024 by Newsweek



Solidifying Its Position as a Leading Medical Tourism Hub

KUALA LUMPUR (MALAYSIA): In a monumental achievement for the nation, two Malaysian hospitals have been recognised in the highly respected Newsweek & Statista's World's Best Hospitals 2024 (Malaysia) list are MHTC's members hospitals.

Dr. Mohamed Ali Abu Bakar, Chief Executive Officer of MHTC, expressed immense pride on this achievement, stating, "This recognition serves as a testament to the dedication and expertise of our healthcare professionals, as well as the continuous advancements being made in our healthcare infrastructure and patient care protocols. It significantly strengthens Malaysia's position as a leading destination for medical tourism. International patients can now be confident in choosing Malaysia for high-quality, affordable, and internationally accredited healthcare services delivered with compassion and cultural sensitivity." The inclusion in this prestigious survey goes beyond mere recognition. It presents a strategic opportunity for Malaysia to further solidify its position as a preferred destination for medical tourism. By leveraging this recognition strategically, Malaysia can attract more patients from around the world seeking top-notch medical care along with enriching cultural experiences.

The listed hospitals, Glenaeles Kuala Lumpur and Sunway Medical Centre are esteemed members of the Malaysia Healthcare Travel Council (MHTC), demonstrating the hospitals firm commitment to elevating the quality of healthcare and attracting international patients by providing exceptional care and world-class facilities to patients from around the world. Over 80,000 medical professionals, including doctors, hospital managers, and healthcare experts from 30 countries, participated in the survey. The rigorous evaluation process involved recommendations based on expertise, experience, peer recognition, patient outcomes, hygiene, patient safety, and advanced medical technology. This inclusion in the World's Best Hospitals Survey underscores the exceptional standards of Ma-

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



Hindu devotees arrive to offer prayers on the occasion of 'Maha Shivratri' festival at Shivala Bhaiyaan temple in Amritsar on Friday.

PHOTO-PRAHJOT GILL

Holi in Mathura to be grander, bigger this year



LUCKNOW: A grand 'Rangotsav' will mark Holi this year in the Braj region in Uttar Pradesh. The Uttar Pradesh Braj Teerth Vikas Parishad (UPBTP) and culture department have started preparations for the event in Mathura.

According to the minister of culture and tourism, Jaiveer Singh: "Holi in Mathura and Vrindavan is a lively celebration, deeply woven into the

fabric of the region's cultural and religious history. Rooted in the tales of Lord Krishna's early life spent in Vrindavan, the festivities here are a kaleidoscope of unique rituals and joyous gatherings that attract people from around the globe."

He said that the state government has established basic facilities in Mathura, Vrindavan and Barsana to attract domestic and international

tourists. The aim is to draw maximum tourists from across the world to watch Holi celebrations in Mathura-Vrindavan and Barsana. The festival spans 40 days, but the true enthusiasm builds up a week before Holi. The festivities begin with Barsana's Laddu Holi and Lathmar Holi where women beat men with sticks.

The minister said that the Holi of Braj had special significance as it was associated with Lord Krishna. The Braj region, including Mathura, Vrindavan, Govardhan, Gokul, Nandgaon and Barsana, was known for its unique Holi celebrations which would be showcased by the department to attract tourism.

He said a large number of foreign tourists visit the region to witness colourful Holi celebrations. "We will make sure that they get a once-in-a-lifetime experience which will make them want to come back year after year," he added.

Sara Ali Khan-starrer 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' recalls freedom fighter Usha Mehta



MUMBAI: Karan Johar has unveiled the teaser of the Sara Ali Khan-starrer 'Ae Watan Mere Watan', which pays homage to freedom fighter Usha Mehta, who at the age of 22 used an underground radio to broadcast news exposing the British Raj during the 1942 Quit India Movement. The teaser, which is a minute and 32 seconds long, begins with KJo standing in a museum and looking at old pictures, including a board with 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' written on it. He then takes a look at a vintage radio receiver. The video shows the director-producer saying, "1942. The Britishers were crushing the Quit India Movement. But then came Usha. At the age of 22, she was the ray of hope in our struggle for freedom." We then get a glimpse of Sara dressed in a plain white khadi saree and sporting a red bindi.

Goa delegates on a five-day visit to Odisha to study sports ecosystem

KAVITA SHARMA
Bhubaneswar

The Sports and Youth Services Department, Government of Odisha, hosted a delegation from the Directorate of Sports and Youth Affairs, Goa. The purpose of the visit was to conduct a comprehensive study of the sports ecosystem of Odisha and the unique High performance Model established at the Kalinga Stadium.



Led by Swetika Sachan, IAS, Secretary (Sports & Industries), Government of Goa, the delegation included Dr. Geeta S Nagvenkar, GCS, Executive Director of the Sports Authority of Goa, Santosh Bhingvada, Assistant Engineer, Public Works Department, Goa and other officials.

The delegation visited key sports facilities at the Kalinga Stadium, including Indoor Athletics Centre, Sports Science Centre, Aquatics Centre, Tennis Centre, Gymnastics Centre, Hockey High Performance Centre, and the AIFF FIFA Talent Academy.

They aimed to understand the entire process of establishing High Performance Centers,

corporate partnership procedures, sports infrastructure development, and management. Additionally, they delved into the intricacies of hosting international sporting events.

Expressing his warm welcome to the delegates, CEO, Hockey Promotion Council of Odisha, Deepankar Mohapatra, stated, "We are delighted to host the representatives of the Directorate of Sports And Youth Affairs, Goa, for an in-depth study of Odisha's sports ecosystem. I extend my congratulations to Goa for successfully hosting the National Games last year and it is encouraging to see their commitment to furthering their sports

initiatives. This collaboration is a significant step towards advancing India's position as a sporting nation, and we are honored to have facilitated this exchange to assist them in understanding the Odisha sports model."

Throughout their visit, the delegation engaged with coaches and senior officials of the Odisha sports department, for an in-depth understanding of the state's sports landscape. The delegation expressed their delight to be at the Kalinga Stadium and commended the emphasis given to developing world class infrastructure and the development and promotion of sports.

Govt of India initiative for promotion of Regional Languages

NEW DELHI: Microbiologists Society India (MBSI) has become a Member of the International Union of Microbiological Societies. It definitely is a big feather in the MBSI cap. We are making our best efforts to spread the subject to the remotest corners in the country and initiate activities all over the world. Proud of MBSI and it's a

reason to celebrate. Government of India initiative for promotion of Regional Languages MBSI has organised many talks in Marathi, Gujarati, Tamil, Kannada, Nagamese, Ladakhi, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam, Telugu, Kulvi, Dogri on Bioscience and Biomedical Topics. We plan to have more in diverse languages of India soon. Please volun-



teer from all corners of India

and educate the masses in the subject. MBSI is becoming International. We are going to organise a Photo microscopic competition in which all countries will participate actively. We gave the MBSI Scientific Calendars to many people and they appreciated the efforts of creating a digital Calendar.

Importance of International Women's Day

MAHIE JK

International Women's Day is celebrated on 8th March every year. In 1975 United Nations announced its global celebration. The origin of this day is the struggle of women for their rights, freedom and gender equality. The first celebration of Women's Day took place on February 28, 1909. The Socialist Party of America designated this day in honour of "the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York, where women protested against working conditions."

15,000 women protested for shorter hours of work, voting rights. This day is celebrated as a national holiday across the globe. The day is celebrated by giving gifts, flowers to women.

This day was made to honour women and to praise women in every field. Women's are the most powerful creation of God. The most fearless ones and the Achievers.

They are Multi Tasker. Along



with household chores they look after the children, and office work. Women can do anything, both office and household work which men can't manage.

In 2001, the international-womensday.com platform was launched to reignite attention for the day, celebrate women's achievements and continue to call for gender parity.

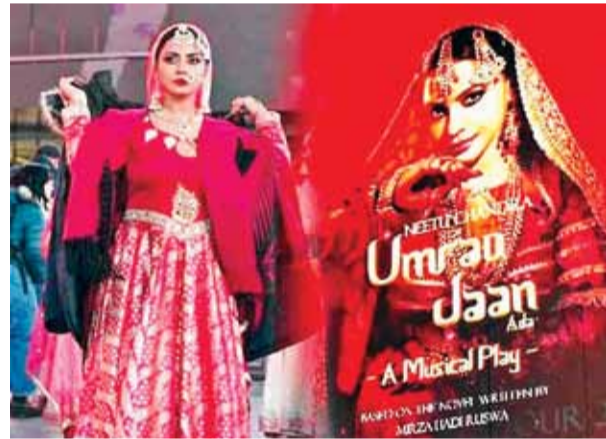
In 2011, sitting US President Barack Obama called for March to be known as Women's History Month. He said: "History shows that when women and girls have access to opportunity, societies are more just, economies are more likely to

prosper, and governments are more likely to serve the needs of all their people."

Nowadays Women are excelling in every field whether it is sports, education, art, science and are making the country proud.

Purple, green and white are the colors of International Women's Day. Purple signifies justice and dignity, and being loyal to the cause. Green symbolizes hope. White represents purity, albeit a controversial concept. The colors originated from the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) in the UK in 1908.

Neetu Chandra says her portrayal of Umrao Jaan will be 'a tribute to actress Rekha'



MUMBAI: Neetu Chandra is set to play the Lucknow courtesan Umrao Jaan in the play 'Umrao Jaan Ada: The Westend Musical' and she says it is a tribute to screen legend Rekha.

In the videos from the set where Neetu is spotted rehearsing with the director wearing a white and golden kurta paired with golden leggings. Her look is completed with a transparent dupatta.

Calling it a big opportunity for her, Chandra said: "We start the rehearsals in the morning at 10 a.m. and end at 10 p.m. It has music by Salim-Sulaiman. It is a big opportunity for me, because we will perform three live shows in America."

Chandra is best known for her work in the Tamil supernatural thriller 'Yavarum

Nalam' as well as the Maithili movie 'Mithila Makhaan',

Lauding the writing of the play, which will be staged at multiple locations in the United States, Chandra said: "This platform is very different. We will portray the characters in a very different manner. Our writer Varun Gautam has written the play beautifully." The 1981 period drama 'Umrao Jaan', starring Rekha in the titular role as well as Farooq Sheikh playing her star-crossed lover, was helmed by Muzaffar Ali. The film is best known for Khayyam's music and Shahryar's lyrics brought to life by the mellifluous renditions by Asha Bhosle. On Mirza Hadi Ruswa's 1905 Urdu novel 'Umrao Jaan Ada', the film narrates the story of a Lucknow tawaif and her rise to fame.



DILJIT TO KAREENA, 'Tera ni main lover'

THE FILM ALSO STARS TABU, KRITI SANON AND KAPIL SHARMA

MUMBAI: Actor Diljit Dosanjh has confessed his love for Bollywood diva Kareena Kapoor Khan, going by his latest post on social media.

Diljit, who will be seen sharing screen space with Kareena in 'Crew', took to Instagram, where he dropped a few stills from the upcoming film.

In the pictures, Diljit looks dapper in a brown embroidered shirt paired with light brown pants. He is seen embracing Kareena, who looks every inch gorgeous in an all red backless outfit. The still is from the upcoming song titled 'Naina' from the film, which is directed by Rajesh Krishnan.

The film also stars Tabu, Kriti Sanon and Kapil Sharma.

The motley of pictures has the song 'Lover', which was dropped two years ago by Diljit, playing in the background.

The singer captioned the post: "Tera ni main lover." 'Crew', which will release on March 29, revolves around three women, who hustle to move on with life. But as they try to make their way forward, their destinies lead them to some unexpected and unwarranted situations.

Pankaj Udhas was greater than just 'Chitthi Aayi...'

MUMBAI: It is sad how ill-informed our media is! The coverage of the passing away of legendary ghazal singer, Pankaj Udhas, demonstrates this lack of information and research. The credit for Pankaj's fame is attributed mainly to one film song, 'Chitthi aayee hai...' from 'Naam'. The film was released in 1986 by which time Pankaj had become a hugely popular ghazal singer, second only to the veteran



Jagjit Singh. But then, Jagjit Singh had a head start. By 1986, Pankaj had quite a

few silver, gold and platinum discs to his credit. These discs were awarded by the music companies on an album achieving a certain milestone in sales. Ghazals were initially a choice of certain discerning music lovers. But Pankaj had a varied repertoire and his numbers such as 'Chungroo toot gaye', 'Sharab cheez hi aisi hai', 'Chandi jaisa rang' and 'Niklo na benaqab' carried a definite appeal for the masses.

Deliverance from the Past Sins



VIJAY SINGAL

has been declared that even the most sinful of all the sinners can cross over the ocean of misery by the boat of knowledge. In other words, anyone can escape from the worldly sufferings by acquiring spiritual wisdom. It has been stated that nothing in this world is as purifying as the spiritual wisdom. As a blazing fire reduces the firewood to ashes, so does the fire of wisdom burn the stack of karmas. To put it in simple words, wisdom neutralises all actions, in this very lifetime.

It has further been asserted that the actions do not bind the one who has renounced all his works by yoga, who has removed all his doubts by wisdom; and who is settled in the self. Renunciation of works here refers not to giving up the actions, but giving up the sense of doership. When one dedicates all his works to the Supreme i. e. he works not for any selfish purpose, but for the welfare of all; he realises the knowledge of the self.

The load of the reactions of the unfructified evil deeds can also be lightened by sincere devotion to God. It has been stated in shlokas 9.30 and 9.31 that even the most sinful of all sinners can become a dharmatman

ego, there is no sinner as well. To put it slightly differently, all impurities relate not to the consciousness but to the physical nature. When one realises that as the unchanging soul, he is different from the ever-changing world, there is no question of any impurity remaining in him. All of one's past karmas are, thus, cleansed.

What is important is not the quantity of the accumulation of the past karmas, but the firm resolve to get over them. When one gives up the evil deeds and strongly decides not to incur any sin in future, no new karmas are being generated. In the absence of any new karma, the spiritual wisdom paves the way for the past karmas to be washed away.

The spiritual wisdom surely has the power to purify the heart, sharpen the intellect; and liberate the soul. But how can the spiritual wisdom be gained? Sri Krishna has stated that the one who is perfected in yoga (is in unity with the God), he himself experiences the spiritual wisdom, in due course of time. To conclude, one can overcome past karmas - by giving up the sense of doership, by sincere devotion; and thus attaining true knowledge. All of one's past karmas are then washed away. Even the man of biggest crimes can attain liberation.



(a soul of righteousness) and thus obtain everlasting peace, by single-minded devotion to the Divine. In other words, even worst of the evil-doers can become a sincere devotee. And it has also been emphasised by Sri Krishna that His devotee (a devotee of the Divine) never perishes. It has been re-iterated in shloka 5.17 that sins of those whose mind, intellect and faith are in the Supreme Self; and who take refuge in Him, are washed away by wisdom. They reach a state from where there is no return.

As is evident from the above shlokas, unattached work and sincere devotion leads to spiritual wisdom, and such wisdom results in annihilation of sins. It needs to be clarified here that spiritual wisdom does not mean theoretical information on the

Nobody else is able to do portray women on screen like Bhansali : Sonakshi Sinha

MUMBAI: Bollywood Actress Sonakshi Sinha has heaped praise on filmmaker Sanjay Leela Bhansali and said that the way he portrays women on screen, nobody else is able to do that.

Sonakshi will be featuring in Bhansali's upcoming series 'Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar', which also stars Manisha Koirala, Aditi Rao Hydari, Sharmin Segal, Richa Chadha, and Sanjeeda Sheikh.

The actress was joined by Tanya Bami, series head, Netflix India, on a panel about championing women's stories in the age of streaming organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), reports variety.com.

Bami called the series as "India's gift to the world."



To which, Sonakshi added: "Sanjay sir and I have been trying to collaborate for many years now and I'm so glad it happened on 'Heeramandi', the way he portrays women on screen, nobody else is able to do that." "Heeramandi" tells the stories of six women, Sonakshi said about the series, which is set in the midst of multiple power struggles in Heeramandi, Lahore and more generally in undivided, pre-independence India, where anti-colonial freedom move-

ments were emerging.

To be a part of something like this, it's been tremendous, to say the least," said the actress, adding that the majority of the team were women.

She added: "Girls were running that world."

The actress made her Bollywood debut in 2010 with the Salman Khan-starrer 'Dabangg'. She made her series debut with 'Dahaad' in 2023.

"It's the best time to be a female actor in the (Indian) industry, there's so many more openings. Now, with the advent of OTT (streaming) doing the kind of work that they've been doing, putting out content where even more roles are being written for strong female characters- I'm so happy to be a part of that," she said.