

REGION

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DELHI CM SLAMS CAA IMPLEMENTATION, ACCUSES BJP GOVERNMENT OF NEGLECTING INDIAN CITIZENS



Moti Nagar flyover can ease the travel time from half hour to 3 min: Kejriwal

YOGESH KANT
New Delhi

Commuting between West-South Delhi-Gurgaon to and fro, which was earlier troublesome for every commuter plying on this stretch, is now set to get a smoother and easier journey, with the opening of much awaited half flyover in Moti Nagar, Ring Road.

Addressing the gathering on the occasion, Kejriwal said, "Earlier, it used to take half an hour to travel half a kilometre. It gets irritating and tiring to get stuck in traffic. With the construction of the new flyover, this will be covered within 3 minutes. Moti Nagar flyover is just a small component, the bigger and primary component is the Club Road flyover, which will be ready by July of this year." "It took 18 months to build the Moti Nagar flyover, and the Club Road flyover will be completed in about 21 months," he added. "After independence, in the last 75 years, 63 flyovers had



been constructed in Delhi. Since the people of Delhi entrusted us with responsibility, in the last 10 years, we have built 31 flyovers. Today, we are inaugurating the 31st flyover. We have demonstrated 50% of the work done in the past 75 years in Delhi, in just 10 years. It only requires clear intentions.

Part of the 1.68-km Punjabi Bagh-Rajouri Garden corridor redevelopment plan, the 495-m half flyover will provide connectivity from Punjabi Bagh towards Azadpur, Britannia Chowk, Dhaura Kuan, Rohtak Road, and Gurgaon. Meanwhile, PWD Minister Atishi

said, "Everyone is well aware that earlier, one had to spend more than half an hour to cross this stretch of the Ring Road. Today, with the inauguration of this Moti Nagar flyover, people get great relief from traffic congestion."

"As this flyover will eliminate traffic congestion, the speed of the vehicles will increase on this stretch, and it will help the people of Delhi save more than 6 lakh litres of fuel every year. This will also save travel time; 9000 man-hours will also be saved, and people will be able to spend that time with their family or on their work."

BANKING & FINANCE

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RBI & COMMERCE MINISTRY DISCUSS LIBERALISATION OF FEMA FOR E-COMMERCE EXPORTS



NEW DELHI: Corporate donations worth thousands of crores to political parties through now-scrapped electoral bonds may have hit the headlines, but there were also 132 bonds of just Rs 1,000 each bought by individuals as well as corporates, including Behemoth ITC Ltd.

Together, these bonds were worth Rs 1.32 lakh, accounting for a minuscule 0.0001 per cent of the total value of 18,871 bonds worth Rs 12,155 crore, details of which have been made public by the Election Commission of India.

On the other hand, as many as 11,671 bonds of the highest Rs 1 crore denomination were purchased in nearly a four-year period beginning April 12, 2019, and they accounted for a whopping 96 per cent of the overall value of all such bonds bought for making donations to various political parties.

While mostly corporates,



including established names and little-known ones, went for the top-denomination bonds, there were also several individuals who bought multiple such bonds.

These also included big industrialists such as Lakshmi Niwas Mittal, Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Rahul Bhatia, as also common-sounding

POTPOURRI

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FROM REITA FARIA TO MANUSHI CHHILLAR, INDIANS WHO'VE BEEN CROWNED MISS WORLD



Five public sector banks to reduce govt stake to meet Sebi norms

NEW DELHI: Five public sector lenders, including Bank of Maharashtra, IOB and UCO Bank are planning to reduce government stake to less than 75 per cent to comply with Sebi's minimum public shareholding (MPS) norms, Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi has said.

Of 12 public sector banks (PSBs), four were complying with MPS norms as on March 31, 2023. "As part of an ongoing effort, three more PSBs have complied with minimum 25 per cent public float during the current financial year. Remaining five PSBs have laid out action plans to meet MPS requirement," he said.

Currently, government holding in Delhi-based Punjab & Sind Bank is 98.25 per cent. It is followed by Chennai-based Indian Overseas Bank at 96.38 per cent, UCO Bank 95.39 per cent, Central Bank of India 93.08 per cent, Bank of Maharashtra at 86.46 per cent. As per the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), all listed companies must maintain an MPS of 25 per cent.

However, the regulator had given special forbearance to state-owned banks. They have time till August 2024 to meet the requirement of 25 per cent MPS. Joshi said banks have various options to bring down the stake, including follow on public offering or Qualified Institutional Placement.

Depending on market condition, each of these banks will take a call in the best interest of shareholders, he added. Without giving a timeline, he said, efforts were on to meet the requirement.

Joshi said the finance ministry has directed all state-owned banks to review their gold loan portfolio as instances of non-compliance with regulatory norms have been noticed by the government.

Maharashtra cabinet approves land acquisition for Maharashtra Bhavan in Kashmir



FW DESK

The Maharashtra cabinet has given the green light for acquiring 2.5 acres of land at Srinagar in Jammu & Kashmir, to construct a Maharashtra Bhavan. This decision, made during the previous budget session of the Maharashtra Assembly, aims to establish a guest house catering specifically to tourists from Maharashtra visiting the scenic region of Kashmir.

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, also holding the Finance Ministry portfolio, had earlier announced plans to build Maharashtra Bhavans in Srinagar and Ayodhya. This move, integrated into the state budget, will provide comfortable and safe accommodations for tourists and devotees at reasonable rates.

"It has been decided to construct Maharashtra Bhavan at Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, and Sri Ram Janmabhoomi, Ayodhya to provide better and safer facilities to the tourists and devotees of the State at reasonable rates. In both these places, the respective State Governments have provided land at prime locations for which a provision of Rs. 77 crores is proposed," Pawar said.

Delhi HC restrains Ashneer Grover from making defamatory statements against BharatPe



NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Friday issued an order restraining BharatPe's former MD Ashneer Grover from making defamatory and derogatory statements against the fintech company, its office bearers, or officials.

In November last year, the court had imposed a fine of Rs 2 lakh on Grover.

On Friday, Justice Pratibha M. Singh directed Grover to remove his tweets, including one calling the SBI chairperson "petty", within 48 hours.

The court also mandated the Economic Times to take down an article published recently, which was based on letters written by Grover to the RBI chairman.

BharatPe had approached the high court months after Ashneer Grover and his wife, Madhuri Jain Grover, were dismissed from the company over allegations of misappropriation of funds. In its suit, running into 2, 800 pages, BharatPe has claimed damages worth Rs 88.67 crore from Grover, his wife, and his brother for alleged cheating and misappropriation of funds.

The suit sought the court's direction to prohibit them from making defamatory statements on any platform.

PFBR proves India's capabilities in advanced nuclear sciences, engineering

NEW DELHI: It is heartening that Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently visited Kalpakam to witness the start of fuel loading in the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR). Commencement of fuel loading is a major milestone for PFBR, indicating that all major sodium and water loops are functional, and that all static and dynamic equipment are in healthy state.

PFBR, built by Bhartiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI), is currently in the final stage of commissioning. PFBR marks the commencement of the second of the three-stage commercial nuclear



power production, planned by Homi Jahagir Bhabha way back in 1950.

This is an occasion for the entire Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) fraternity -- and for that matter for every Indian -- to be proud of the combined achievement of the BHAVINI

and Indira Gandhi Centre for Atomic Research (IGCAR) teams.

In October 2004, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had marked the occasion by starting concreting of PFBR Raft.

This highly complex reactor is now nearing completion.

Visits of Prime Ministers, President (Abdul Kalam), several Union Ministers, Director Generals of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (Mohamed ElBaradei and Yukiya Amano), Deputy Director Generals of IAEA, several other international dignitaries

and ambassadors, Parliamentary committees, many Padma Awardee Scientists and others to PFBR in the past, is a testimony to the importance of PFBR in the global scenario.

The fast breeder reactor technology has the potential to generate more nuclear fuel (plutonium) than it consumes. This is achieved by using fast neutrons to convert fertile material (depleted uranium) into fissile material. The PFBR contributes to India's efforts to achieve energy security by efficiently utilising its indigenous uranium and abundant resources of thorium.

Sukhbir Singh Sandhu & Gyanesh Kumar take charge as Election Commissioners



NEW DELHI: Newly appointed Election Commissioners Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu took charge of the office on Friday at the ECI headquarters here.

CEC Rajiv Kumar welcomed the two newly-appointed Election Commissioners and emphasized the significance of their joining at the historic point when the Election Commission of India (ECI) is all set to conduct the Lok Sabha elections in the world's largest democracy.

He said that their team is set for action-packed weeks ahead. Earlier, a notification

for the appointment of the two Election Commissioners was issued by the Central government on Thursday evening. Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led three-member committee on Thursday picked bureaucrats Gyanesh Kumar and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu as election commissioners.

The decision comes days after the resignation of Election Commissioner Arun Goel. The selection panel includes the Prime Minister, the leader of the Opposition, and a designated Union Cabinet minister. Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury was in the three-member panel in capacity as the opposition member. Besides the Prime Minister and the Congress leader, Union Home Minister Amit Shah attended the meeting.

Supreme Court fixes March 19 for hearing Sanjay Singh's bail plea



NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday fixed March 19 for hearing the bail plea of AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh in the money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam.

A bench, headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna, was apprised by the counsel for the Enforcement Directorate (ED) that the reply to the AAP leader's plea would be filed during the day.

At this, the bench, also comprising Justice Dipankar Datta,

said that it would hear next week the special leave petition filed by Sanjay Singh against the February 7 decision of the Delhi High Court rejecting his bail, along with another petition filed by him challenging his arrest and subsequent remand in the money laundering case. Sanjay Singh had moved the Delhi High Court seeking bail on January 4 after Special Judge M.K. Nagpal of Rouse Avenue Court on December 22 dismissed his plea.

The second complaint pertains to "Kejriwal not abiding by the summons number 4 to 8", a source said. The AAP convener had earlier requested the financial probe agency for a date after March 12 for questioning on the excise policy matter. His response had come after the ED issued summons to him for the eighth time on February 27 and asked him to appear before it on March 4.



Delhi CM Kejriwal moves Delhi sessions court against magisterial court issuing summons over ED's complaints

NEW DELHI: Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on March 14 moved the sessions court here challenging two summons issued to him by a magisterial court on ED's complaint in the alleged liquor policy scam case.

The ED had made the complaint that CM Kejriwal has not complied with the agency's summons in connection with a money laundering case related to the now-scrapped policy.

Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (ACMM) Divya Malhotra of Rouse Avenue Court had, on March 7, issued second summons to CM Kejriwal on ED's complaint.

ACMM Malhotra had 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.

CM Kejriwal's application is likely to come before Special Judge Rakesh Syal of Rouse Avenue Court later in the day.

The ACMM on February 17 granted a day's exemption from physical appearance to the CM in connection with the first complaint filed by the ED over the same issue.

The second complaint pertains to "Kejriwal not abiding by the summons number 4 to 8", a source said.

The AAP convener had earlier requested the financial probe agency for a date after March 12 for questioning on the excise policy matter. His response had come after the ED issued summons to him for the eighth time on February 27 and asked him to appear before it on March 4.

Electoral Bond Scam is largest extortion racket in the world operated by Modi says Rahul Gandhi

KAIVITA SHARMA
Thane (Maharashtra)

Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi today alleged that the Electoral Bond Scam was the biggest extortion racket in the world operated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Narendra Modi ran the world's largest Extortion Racket in the name of electoral bonds", he remarked.

Addressing a press conference in Thane, Gandhi said, the Electoral Bond was Modi's brainchild and he had claimed to cleanse the system of political financing in the country, but actually he turned it into the biggest corruption scam in the world and a means of extorting money from the business and

corporate houses. Equating it with anti-national activity, he said, there cannot be a greater anti-national activity than this. The former Congress president also warned the investigating agencies like the Enforcement Directorate and CBI that the BJP government will certainly change and stringent action will be taken against all those who resort to extortion on behalf of the BJP. "Action will be so strong and stringent that nobody will ever dare to do it again", he promised. Describing the ED as an "extortion directorate", Gandhi said, the ED and the CBI do not investigate but extort money from the corporate and business houses for the BJP. He pointed out, ED/CBI raids



are immediately followed by hefty donations to the BJP. He said, there were several companies, which had never before donated to BJP but were made to donate after the ED and CBI intimidation. Asserting that it was being done so blatantly, Gandhi said, donations were made to the BJP

immediately after getting big contracts. He pointed out, unlike the BJP, the opposition parties did not have any control over the ED, the CBI or in awarding the highways and defence contracts. The senior Congress leader said that the country's institutions like the Election Commission, the ED and the CBI were no longer working for the nation, but for the BJP as these were directly controlled by the BJP. He made it clear, once the BJP government is gone, strict action will be taken. He said, it was the same money that the BJP used to destabilise the opposition governments with. "In Maharashtra the NCP and the Shiv Sena were broken with the same money", he pointed out.

SC refuses to stay fresh appointments to ECI, next hearing on March 21

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday refused to stay the fresh appointments to the Election Commission of India, made under the legislation which excludes the Chief Justice of India from the process of appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and the other Election Commissioners.

"Normally, we don't stay a legislation by an interim order," observed a Bench, headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna, as it heard a bunch of applications seeking to restrain the Centre from filling the vacancies in the poll panel in accordance with the Chief Election Commissioner and the other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Condition of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

The Act provides that the CEC and the ECs will be appointed by the President on the recommendation of a Selection Committee



consisting of the PM, the Leader of the Opposition (or the largest opposition party) in the Lok Sabha, and a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the PM.

During the hearing, senior advocate Vikas Singh, appearing for a PIL litigant, claimed that the scheduled meeting of the PM-led selection committee was advanced to Thursday after the apex court on Wednesday agreed to urgently list the matter for hearing on Friday.

He urged the top court to decide the validity of the legislation introduced by the Parliament before the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls. Without passing

any interim direction, the bench, also comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Augustine George Masih, said: "Mr Vikas Singh, let the application come up on record. We will examine it." Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, the second highest law officer of the Centre, said that the interlocutory application seeking to restrain fresh appointments to the ECI has not been served to them.

Ultimately, the apex court posted the matter for hearing on March 21. The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to urgently list on March 15 the pleas seeking directions to appoint the member of the poll body as per the March 2023 Constitution Bench judgment of the apex court requiring the appointment to be done by the President on the advice of a panel comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition, and the CJ.

Delhi CM slams CAA implementation, accuses BJP government of neglecting Indian citizens

NEW DELHI: Just two days after the notification of the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday criticised implementation of the legislation, accusing the BJP-led Central government of prioritising the interests of foreigners over those of Indian citizens.

In a Press conference, Kejriwal questioned the rationale behind the CAA, which promises Indian citizenship to minorities from neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

He expressed concerns over the potential influx of minorities into India as a result of this policy.

"What is this CAA?" questioned Kejriwal, highlighting the BJP government's stance



on granting citizenship to minorities from specified countries.

He warned of the implications of this move, suggesting that it could lead to a significant increase in the population of minorities within India.

"It means that a large number of minorities will be brought to our country," said

Kejriwal, indicating potential challenges in terms of employment and housing for both the newcomers and existing Indian citizens.

Kejriwal went on to criticise the BJP's failure to address unemployment and homelessness among Indian citizens while allegedly prioritising the interests of foreigners, particularly

from Pakistan.

"BJP struggles to create employment opportunities for Indian youth, it seems eager to offer jobs to young individuals from Pakistan," remarked Kejriwal, expressing concern over the apparent disparity in the government's approach towards its citizens and foreign nationals.

He also accused the BJP of attempting to settle individuals from Pakistan in India at the expense of native citizens' rights and opportunities.

Kejriwal concluded by expressing apprehension over the allocation of government funds, suggesting that resources intended for the development of Indian families and the nation would instead be utilised for accommodating Pakistani nationals.

HC imposes ₹50,000 fine on Delhi govt for challenging order granting maternity benefits to contractual employee

FW CORRESPONDENT
New Delhi

The Delhi High Court imposed a fine of Rs 50,000 on the Delhi government after dismissing its appeal against a single judge bench order granting maternity benefits to a woman contractual employee at State Consumer Dispute Redressal Commission.

"The appeal being misconceived is, along with all pending applications, dismissed, with Rs 50,000 costs (to be paid to the respondent within four weeks from today," the division bench of the high court stated in its judgement on March 12, last year.

The court noted that it was 'surprised' that a government that publicised schemes promoting the interest of women filed such a 'misconceived appeal'.

"We are surprised that the Government of NCT of Delhi, which is giving great publicity to the steps being taken to promote the interest of women in Delhi and has under its recently announced scheme Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojna promised to pay all adult women in the city except those who are taxpayers/government employees or are drawing pension, a monthly sum of Rs 1,000 in the future has chosen to file such a misconceived appeal to assail an order which grants the benefits under the Act to a young woman, who has with utmost dedication served in the Delhi State Consumer Forum over 5 years," division bench added in its judgement.

The court refused to interfere with the order of a single judge, stating on Tuesday, "We find no reason to interfere with



the impugned order insofar as it directs the appellants to pay to the respondent salary and other monetary benefits for 26 weeks for which period she had sought maternity benefits."

The division bench, comprising Justices Rekha Palli and Shalinder Kaur, dismissed the appeal. "We find no merit in the appellant's plea that the respondent was not entitled to receive any benefits under the Act for the period beyond March 31, 2018, the date when the term of her contractual engagement was expiring," the bench ruled.

The AAP government moved the high court challenging the single bench order of October 6, 2023, granting her maternity and medical benefits for 26 weeks on account of her pregnancy, as per the provisions of the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961.

The high court found the appeal 'wholly misconceived', citing apex court rulings that held that even women working on a contractual basis are entitled to benefits under the Act even if they exceed the duration of their contractual engagement.

The bench noted that the respondent woman was appointed as a stenographer on a contractual basis with the Delhi State Consumers'

Forum on February 7, 2013, for one year. After rendering contractual services over five years without any break on February 28, 2018, she applied for a grant of maternity leave of 180 days from March 1, 2018.

The commission, however, did not accede to her request, informing her that since her contractual engagement was set to expire on March 31, 2018, no maternity leaves would be granted to her. The woman approached the high court in 2019 not only praying for the grant of maternity benefits during her maternity leave but also that she be allowed to continue in the post of stenographer on a contractual basis like she had worked uninterruptedly for over five years since 2013.

Her petition was partly allowed by the single judge. The counsel for the Delhi government submitted that the term of the contractual engagement of the respondent was expiring on March 31, 2018, and, therefore, the appellant could not be saddled with the liability to pay wages for the entire period (till August 31, 2018) of the purported maternity leave availed by her. He also contended that the respondent could, at best, be paid wages till March 31, 2018, and not for any period thereafter.

We felt neglected in alliance with BJP, in Haryana: Dushyant Chautala



SATISH HANDA
Hisar

Addressing Nav-sankalp Rally in Hisar on the birthday of Dr Ajay Singh Chautala National President of Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), a day after the coalition in alliance with the ruling BJP in the state ended, the JJP leader a former deputy Chief Minister in Haryana state Dushyant Chautala said that the party was preparing to contest 2024 LS elections on two seats, accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party of neglecting the alliance Jannayak Janta Party the step to break alliance was taken, the former Haryana Deputy Chief Minister Dushyant Chautala said in a public rally at Hisar on Wednesday. Chautala said that JJP was a part of the government in the state for four and a half years and took sincere interest in the development of Haryana. In five years, just one meeting of the NDA was held in which he along with Ajay Singh Chautala participated, however, what decision did the BJP make in the end? He said that JJP was prepared to contest the 2024 Lok Sabha elections on just two seats. "We followed the ethics of our alliance and started preparing to contest on two seats," Dushyant Chautala lamented.

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Hearing in 2018 defamation case against Rahul Gandhi postponed due to lawyers' strike



NEW DELHI: The hearing in a 2018 defamation case against Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in which he was accused of making objectionable remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah who was then the BJP president, was postponed on Wednesday, due to a strike by the lawyers in an MP-MLA court here. The case was scheduled to be heard on Wednesday but due to the lawyers' strike, the counsel for the complainant, Santosh Pandey, said.

A complaint was filed in the MP-MLA court by BJP leader Vijay Mishra in August 2018 against Rahul Gandhi, alleging he made defamatory remarks against HM Shah. The Congress MP had appeared in the Special MP-MLA court on February 20, and was granted bail. In the next hearing on March 2, his lawyer Kashi Prasad Shukla sought more time, saying that Rahul Gandhi was busy in the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra. According to the complainant, Rahul Gandhi had made the alleged remarks at a press conference in Bengaluru in May 2018. Home Minister Amit Shah was then BJP President when Rahul Gandhi made the remarks.

After Rathee's brutal murder, now Abhay Chautala seeks Z plus security

Files a petition in the High Court

TARUN BHAJNI
Chandigarh

INLD Ellenabad MLA Abhay Chautala has filed a petition in the Punjab and Haryana High Court requesting security cover of either Z plus or Z category for himself and his family members due to threats received. Chautala, through his counsel Sandeep Goyat, has outlined instances where unknown individuals have threatened him via WhatsApp calls and messages, indicating a serious concern for his safety.

The petition highlights an



incident on July 17, 2023, during which threatening calls and messages were directed towards Chautala's Personal Assistant (PA). Despite filing a complaint and the registration of a First Information Report (FIR) with the police, no arrests have been made, and the perpetrator remains unidentified. Additionally, it is mentioned that the police provided temporary security cover for only two days following the incident, which was then abruptly withdrawn without explanation or completion of the investigation.

Mamata Banerjee cancels anti-CAA rally in Siliguri

KOLKATA: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has decided to return to Kolkata and cancel the proposed anti-CAA rally in Siliguri. Besides attending an administrative review meeting, the Chief Minister was also supposed to lead a mega rally at Siliguri on Wednesday to protest against the Central government's decision to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). However, on Wednesday it was announced that the Chief Minister will only attend the administrative programs and then return to Kolkata without participating in the anti-CAA rally. The rally was called off.



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Hooda demands President's rule imposed in Haryana: BJP has no right to remain in power

SATISH HANDA

Scenario reveals that a failed coalition government was ruling in the state in past years, which had completely disillusioned the people, as such government had to change the chief minister just before the elections, Former Chief Minister Haryana and leader of opposition in Vidhan Sabha Bhupinder Singh Hooda said while interacting media persons. He claimed the BJP-JJP alliance government in the state had accepted defeat even prior to the elections by breaking the alliance and changing the chief minister at the time Lok Sabha elections were going to be held in the state. Hooda said, it is clear from this deci-



sion that a failed coalition government was running in Haryana which had completely disillusioned the people, therefore, the government had to change the chief minister just before the elections. Hooda further added that ruling BJP in alliance with the JJP, by doing this trying to divert attention from the failures of nine-and-a-half years rule in the state has no moral right to remain in power and Assembly elections should be conducted immediately by imposing President's rule in the state.

Rajasthan Granted Rs 114.80 Cr for MSMEs under RAMP Programme

JAIPUR: Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma announced on Thursday that the central government has sanctioned Rs 114.80 crore for Rajasthan under the Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) programme.

This funding injection aims to invigorate the state's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector and bolster its capacity, catering to the financial requirements of MSMEs. Sharma emphasised that these funds will contribute to the state's vision of achieving the goal of Developed India-Developed Rajasthan.

Initiated by the Centre for



the MSME sector since 2022, the RAMP programme entails a strategic investment plan submitted by the state to the central government. Industry and Commerce Minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore highlighted that

this financial infusion aligns with the objectives of various state and central government schemes for MSMEs, ultimately fostering a conducive environment for industrial investment in Rajasthan.

Dwarka Expressway, PM Narendra Modi inaugurates country's first elevated highway

YOGESH KANT
New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated the much awaited Haryana section of the landmark Dwarka Expressway, which will improve traffic flow and ease congestion between Delhi and Gurugram on NH-48 and later it will connect to UER 2, which is under construction.

Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar and Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, were also present at the event. The PM also inspected the 4-level Interchange of the Haryana Section of the Dwarka Expressway.

The total length of Dwarka Expressway is 29 km, out of which 18.9 km falls in Haryana, while the remaining 10.1 km is in Delhi. The 19 km long Haryana section of the 8 lane Dwarka Expressway has been built at a cost of around Rs. 4,100 crore and includes two packages of 10.2 km long Delhi-Haryana Border to Basai Rail-over-Bridge (ROB) and 8.7 km long Basai ROB to Kherki Daula. It will also provide direct connectivity to the IGI Airport in Delhi and Gurugram Bypass.

Other major projects inaugurated by the Prime Minister include the 9.6 km long six lane Urban Extension Road-II (UER-II)-Package 3 from Nangloi - Najafgarh Road to Sector 24 Dwarka section in Delhi; three packages of Lucknow

Ring Road developed at cost of about Rs. 4,600 crores in Uttar Pradesh; Anandapuram - Pendurthi - Anakapalli section of NH16 developed at a cost of about Rs. 2,950 crores in the state of Andhra Pradesh; Kiratpur to Nerchowk section of NH-21 (2 packages) worth around Rs. 3,400 crores in Himachal Pradesh; Dobaspet - Heskote section (two packages) worth Rs. 2,750 crores in Karnataka, along with 42 other projects worth Rs. 20,500 crores in different states across the country.

Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister noted the change from the culture of holding programmes in Delhi to holding big programmes in other parts of the country. He said that today the nation has taken another big and important step towards modern connectivity. Expressing happiness on dedicating the Haryana section of the landmark Dwarka Expressway, PM Modi said that this will change the travel experience between Delhi and Haryana forever and "will shift gear not just in the vehicles but also in the lives of the people of the region".

Emphasizing the change of speed in implementation of projects, the Prime Minister said that in less than three months of 2024, projects worth more than Rs 10 lakh crore have been either dedicated to the nation or foundation stone has been laid for them. Today's



more than 100 project worth more than Rs one lakh crore include development projects from Karnataka, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh in South, from the North, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana related development works are there, East is represented by projects from Bengal and Bihar whereas, from West, major projects from Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan are there. Today's projects include, said the Prime Minister, an increase of 540 kilometer in Amritsar Bhatinda Jamnagar Corridor and development of Bengaluru Ring Road.

PM Modi emphasised the transformative impact of infrastructure development, highlighting the shift from problems to possibilities. He underscored the significance of converting challenges into opportunities, a hallmark of his governance.

Prime Minister Modi cited the example of the Dwarka Expressway as a testament to his government's commitment to transforming obstacles into

avenues for growth. He reminisced how, in the past, the area where the expressway is now built was considered unsafe, with people avoiding it even after sunset. However, today, it serves as a hub for major corporations, contributing to the rapid development of the National Capital Region (NCR).

The Prime Minister highlighted the strategic importance of the Dwarka Expressway, connecting it to the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi. He emphasized that such infrastructure projects enhance connectivity, leading to accelerated economic activities and improved integration of the NCR.

Further, Prime Minister Modi praised the efforts of the Haryana government, particularly Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, in ensuring the timely completion of infrastructure projects. He commended their dedication to modernizing the state's infrastructure, which is crucial for Viksit Haryana

and Viksit Bharat.

The Prime Minister reiterated his government's holistic vision for infrastructure development in the Delhi-NCR region. He emphasized the timely completion of major projects such as the Dwarka Expressway, Peripheral Expressways, and the Delhi-Meerut Expressway. These projects, along with the expansion of metro lines and the construction of international airports, are aimed at easing traffic congestion and reducing pollution in the region. "The 21st Century India is India of big vision and big goals", the Prime Minister asserted.

Prime Minister Modi emphasized the link between infrastructure development and poverty alleviation, highlighting how improved roads and digital connectivity in rural areas create new opportunities for villagers. He noted the emergence of new possibilities in rural India, driven by digital infrastructure and access to essential services like healthcare and education.

"Initiatives like this have helped in pulling 25 crore Indians out of poverty in the last 10 years and India has become the 5th largest global economy" he further added "This rapid infrastructure construction work in the country will make India the third largest economic power in the world." Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated the government's commitment to accelerating infrastructure development across India. He

emphasized that such initiatives not only strengthen the country's economy but also create numerous employment opportunities, particularly for the youth.

The Prime Minister mentioned many long pending projects completed by the present government such as Eastern Peripheral Expressway (announced in 2008 completed in 2018), Dwarka Expressway too was stuck for the last 20 years. "Today, whatever work our government lays the foundation stone of, it works equally hard to complete it on time. And then we do not see whether there are elections or not", he said. Projects like lakhs of kilometres of optic fibers in the villages, airports in small cities, ruler roads, are completed irrespective of the election time, he said.

The Prime Minister said "earlier there were delays, now there are deliveries. Earlier there was delay, now there is development." He said that focus is on to create a 9 thousand KM high speed corridor out of which 4 thousand KM is already constructed. Metro reached 21 cities as compared to 5 cities in 2014. "This work is done with the vision of development. These things happen when the intentions are right. This pace of development will increase manifold in the next 5 years", the Prime Minister concluded.

Cabinet approves two more metro lines for Delhi at cost of Rs 8,399 cr

NEW DELHI: Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday approved the development of two more Delhi Metro corridors -- Lajpat Nagar to Saket G Block and Inderlok to Indraprastha -- with an investment of Rs 8,399 crore, Information and Broadcasting Minister Anurag Thakur said after the meeting.

The total project cost of these two corridors of Delhi Metro's Phase - IV project is Rs 8,399 crore, which will be sourced from the Central government (Rs 4,309 crore); the government of Delhi; and international funding agencies, the minister said. These two lines will comprise 20,762 kms. The Inderlok-Indraprastha corridor will be an extension of the Green Line and will provide interchange with the Red, Yellow, Airport Line, Magenta, Violet and Blue Lines, while the Lajpat Nagar - Saket G Block corridor will connect the Silver, Magenta, Pink and Violet Lines.

The Lajpat Nagar-Saket G Block corridor will be entirely elevated and will have eight sta-



tions. The Inderlok-Indraprastha corridor will have 11,349 kms of underground lines and 1,028 kms of elevated lines comprising 10 stations.

The Inderlok-Indraprastha Line will provide enhanced connectivity to the Bahadurgarh region of Haryana as commuters from these areas will be able to travel on the Green Line to directly reach Indraprastha as well as various other areas of central and east Delhi.

Eight new interchange stations will come up on these corridors at Inderlok, Nabi Karim, New Delhi, Delhi Gate, Indraprastha, Lajpat Nagar, Chirag Dilli and Saket G Block. These stations will significantly improve the interconnectivity among all the operational lines of the Delhi Metro network.

Congress to contest on 9 Lok Sabha seat-sharing alliance with the DMK in Tamil Nadu



CHENNAI: The Congress on Saturday finalised its seat-sharing alliance with the DMK in Tamil Nadu, with the former contesting on nine seats from the state and one lone seat from the Union Territory of Puducherry. However, the seats which the Congress would contest are still not finalised. The possibility of the party being allocated three new seats is high.

Other than the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) President Selvaperunthagai, AICC General Secretary (Organisation) K.C. Venugopal and senior Congress leader Mukul Wasnik were present

during the discussions held at DMK headquarters, Anna Ariyalayam. DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin was also present in the meeting. Venugopal while speaking to mediapersons said, "The INDIA bloc alliance will win all the seats in Tamil Nadu and Puducherry." "Tamil Nadu will set the agenda and model for the country and divisive forces will fail here," he added.

The DMK has already formed its coalition allocating two seats each to the CPI-M, CPI and VCK as well as one seat each to Indian Union Muslim League and the Kongunadu Makkal Desiya Katchi (KMDDK).

Panel on 'One-nation, One-poll' submits report to President Droupadi Murmu

NEWDELHI: A committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind, submitted its detailed report on 'One-nation, One election' to President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan on Thursday.

The comprehensive report has strongly advocated for holding the national and state polls simultaneously. The report, running into thousands of pages has been prepared after extensive consultations from various stakeholders, former election commissioners and constitutional experts.

The committee to study the possibility of holding simultaneous polls was formed on September 3, 2023. Its members comprised of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, former Chief Minister of Jammu & Kashmir, Ghulam Nabi Azad, senior advocate Harish Salve



and more.

Notably, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has time and again underlined the need for

clubbing the national and state elections together to save huge expenses and also utilise the time for bettering governance.

'One-nation, One-election' was also one of the major planks of the BJP in the 2019 Parliamentary elections.

There is no possibility of increasing the production of paddy and wheat



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

The production of Paddy or Wheat which producers are Punjab, Haryana and Bengal, is unlikely to increase their productions significantly. Therefore, the Modi government directed the states to emphasize to increase the collection of food grains as an alternative to meet the supply of food grains. Cereals i.e., Millet, Bajra, Ragi and Jawar. The central government has now named it 'Sri-Anna', Cultivation of which requires less water. This time, the center has taken the target of collecting 6 lakh tons of grains from the whole country. However, the Center has received reports from the states that the production of Millet or Ragi, other than Jawar, will not be as expected among pulses.

Last year (2022-23 crop year), Jawar production was 3.8 million tonnes, according to government data. This time it can be 4 million tons. But the production of Millet or Ragi is not increasing much. According to the information of the ministry, 11.4 million tons of millet was produced last time. This time 9.5 million tons. Similarly, Ragi may decrease from 1.6 to 1.3 million tonnes.

According to official sources, last time 135 million tons of Rice was produced in the entire country. Centre's estimate, this time it will be 123 million tonnes. Wheat may increase slightly from 110 million tons last time to 112 million tons.

PM Modi inaugurates 15 airport projects worth Rs 9,800 crore

**Emphasises on infrastructural growth*

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 10 inaugurated and laid the foundation stone for a series of ambitious airport projects across India, with a combined value exceeding Rs 9, 800 crore.

In a landmark event, the Prime Minister marked the inauguration of 12 new Terminal Buildings in key locations including Pune, Kolhapur, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Delhi, Lucknow, Aligarh, Azamgarh, Chitrakoot, Moradabad, Shrawasti, and Adampur Airports.

Additionally, he laid the foundation stone for three new Terminal



Buildings at Kadapa, Hubballi, and Belagavi Airports.

Highlighting the remarkable pace of development, PM Modi underscored that the Gwalior terminal was completed in just 16 months, showcasing the government's commitment to efficient project execution.

"This initiative will make air travel easier and accessible for the common citizens of the country,"

he asserted, countering allegations of electioneering tactics. Addressing concerns about project completion, the Prime Minister said: "The record of the government in completing announced projects on time repudiates the allegation of these projects being election gimmicks." He reiterated his dedication to creating a developed India, saying: "People are seeing that Modi is made of different material. I am working relentlessly to create a Viksit Bharat." PM Modi underscored the holistic approach to infrastructure development, noting that alongside airport projects, investments were also being made in highways, railways, education, water, and the environment.

CEC Rajiv Kumar visits Jammu & Kashmir to assess preparations for Lok Sabha polls



FW DESK

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar arrived in Jammu and Kashmir for a three-day visit to assess the preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, expected to be held in April-May. The Election Commission team, comprising Kumar and nine other officials, arrived in Srinagar on Monday. While no formal engagements were scheduled for the day, detailed meetings with civil administration and police officials are set to take place on Tuesday as part of the review process. During their visit, the Election Commission officials are also slated to meet with representatives of political parties. Similar interactions are scheduled for Jammu on Wednesday, with a potential engagement with the media.

There has been a rising demand from political circles in Jammu and Kashmir for the Election Commission to conduct Assembly polls simultaneously with the Lok Sabha elections or immediately thereafter. Former chief ministers Farooq Abdullah and Ghulam Nabi Azad have vociferously advocated for this in the past two weeks. In preparation for the polls, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Secretary Atal Dooloo convened a meeting with civil and police administration on Saturday to apprise them of the necessary measures for the smooth conduct of the Lok Sabha elections in the Union Territory.

Kharge questions Modi's silence over BJP voices to change constitution...

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge today questioned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's silence over the demands made by certain BJP leaders, no less than an MP, to change the constitution of the country.

He accused the BJP and the RSS of being against the social justice guaranteed by the constitution and the word "secularism" in it. He pointed out, it was not for the first time such voices have been raised as it is for a long time that senior BJP and RSS leaders have been suggesting to change the constitution.

He warned that any attempt to change the constitution will have dangerous repercussions and disastrous consequences.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here today along with the party general secretaries Jairam Ramesh and Mukul Wasnik, the Congress president referred to one of the senior BJP MPs seeking two-third majority in the parliament to change the constitution. He observed that there was an agenda behind the BJP seeking to win 400 plus seats, which in any case it will never win, to change the constitution.

Dismissing the clarification of the BJP distancing itself from the Karnataka MP's statement, Kharge said, it was typical of the Prime Minister to make others speak for himself. He asked why he is not taking any action against such people and why he is not throwing them out of the party.

He referred to the RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's ear-



They talk of merit suggesting to do away with the reservations and sometimes they talk of changing the constitution"

lier statement where he had opposed reservations. He said, sometimes they talk of merit suggesting to do away with the reservations and sometimes they talk of changing the constitution. He alleged that the BJP, the RSS and Bhagwat in particular were against reservations.

The Congress President said that the BJP and their associates neither had any role in the freedom struggle of the country, nor in the drafting of the constitution. He said, the RSS was even against the national flag and the Ashok Chakra and they have always preferred the saffron flag over the national tricolor.

He said, while Prime Minister Modi swears by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar and bows before him, he does not follow his principles. He observed, if he really believed in what Dr Ambedkar taught and

preached he would not be tolerating the voices against the constitution being raised by his party leaders.

He said the BJP has already weakened the autonomous constitutional bodies like the CAG as the party government no longer acknowledged and accepted the CAG reports.

In the same context, he disclosed that according to various CAG reports, the BJP governments at the centre and states had committed scams worth Rs 8.5 lakh crore. He said, the BJP government was hiding it and had it been about others, it would have created hell.

The Congress president reiterated his party's demand for the 100 percent count of the VVPAT slips. He wondered why the Election Commission avoided answers on this issue.

On the SBI seeking four and a half months for revealing the names of those who purchased electoral bonds, he said, the Modi government was only trying to hide its black deeds.

On SBI saying that it will furnish the details of only the donors and not about those who received the donations, he said, it will not serve any purpose. He asked the Prime Minister, while he keeps on talking about corruption and transparency, why he was not prepared to disclose the names of those people who bought the electoral bonds.

Kharge also took a jibe at the Prime Minister for speaking in different languages like Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. "Beware, if you press the wrong button everything will go haywire", he cautioned the Prime Minister with a pinch of sarcasm....

CBI busting multi-state networks involved in human trafficking of Indians youths to Russia

Over 17 visa consultancy agencies on CBI radar

PARVESH HANDA

After conducting searches, the CBI has started busting multi-state networks including immigration and travel agents, allegedly involved in human trafficking of Indian youths keen to settle abroad assuring them attractive jobs.

Information reveals that multiple teams of the CBI conducted searches at around 15 places in seven cities across the country including Delhi, Mumbai, Thiruvananthapuram, Ambala, Chandigarh, Madurai, and Chennai. During searches, the CBI has recovered a large number of incriminating documents and records. CBI spokesperson said that searches are still going on and certain suspects have also been detained for questioning at various locations. He disclosed that around 35 instances of victims sent abroad have been established.

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Mamata Banerjee fell probably because of a 'push' from behind: SSKM Director

KOLKATA: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee might have been pushed from behind at her residence on Thursday evening, following which she fell and sustained injuries on her forehead, the Director of S.S.K.M. Medical College and Hospital, Manimoy Bandyopadhyay, said on Thursday night.

Almost an hour after the Chief Minister was released from the hospital and taken back to her residence in Kalighat, Manimoy Bandyopadhyay made this explosive statement while speaking to mediapersons.

"The Chief Minister was brought to the hospital at around 7.30 p.m. She fell down probably because of a push from behind. She received a deep injury on her forehead. There was profuse bleeding from that wound," the S.S.K.M. Director said.



He also said that the Chief Minister was treated by specialists from the neurosurgery, general medicine, and cardiology departments.

"A number of medical examinations like electrocardiogram and CT scan were conducted. The hospital authorities advised her to

stay back. But she insisted on returning home," Manimoy Bandyopadhyay said. The Chief Minister will be brought to the hospital again on Friday for further medical checkup. She has been kept under medical observation at her residence.

As per the information shared by the Trinamool earlier, the Chief Minister had tripped while taking a walk at her residence on Thursday evening. The social media cell of the Trinamool had also released a photograph in which the Chief Minister could be seen bleeding from her forehead.

The Chief Minister was brought to the hospital at around 7.30 p.m. She fell down probably because of a push from behind. She received a deep injury on her forehead. There was profuse bleeding from that wound"

Trinamool drops seven sitting MPs, including Mimi and Nusrat Jahan



KOLKATA: As many as seven sitting Lok Sabha members were dropped by the Trinamool Congress as it released its list of candidates from West Bengal for the forthcoming polls on Sunday.

These include Sisir Adhikari from the Kanthi constituency and Dibyendu Adhikari from the Tamluk constituency, as they are the father and younger brother, respectively, of the current Leader of the Opposition Suwendu Adhikari.

The other five dropped MPs are Arjun Singh from Barrackpore in North 24 Parganas, Nusrat Jahan from Basirhat in the same district, Afrin Ali aka Aparupa Poddar from Arambagh in Hooghly district, Mimi Chakraborty from Jadavpur in the South 24 Parganas district, and Chowdhury Mohan Jatua from Mathurapur, also in the same district. Arjun Singh had been elected on a BJP ticket from Barrackpore in 2019 after quitting the Trinamool before the Lok Sabha polls. However, he joined the ruling party again in 2022. The Trinamool has fielded state Irrigation Minister Partha Bhowmik from Barrackpore this time.

Actress-turned-politician Mimi Chakraborty announced recently that she wants to quit politics to concentrate on her acting career. Jatua, a former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer had been ailing for quite some time and his movement is restricted.

Although there were speculations that two more sitting MPs, namely Saugata Roy from Dum Dum in North Parganas and Sudip Bandyopadhyay from Kolkata (North) in Kolkata might be replaced this time, they were re-nominated.

Pakistani Hindu refugees in Delhi celebrate notification of CAA rules

NEWDELHI: Holi came early for Pakistani Hindu refugees living in a cramped settlement near Majnu Ka Tila in Delhi, as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) rules were notified on Monday. Since Tuesday morning, the people living in the refugee camp were seen distributing sweets and playing with colours.

Dharamveer Solanki, regarded as a leader by the Pakistani Hindu community in Delhi, shared his elation with IANS, and said that the refugees would now obtain Indian citizenship after waiting for over a decade.

"This moment is like a second birth, not only for me and my family but for my entire community and for those who were living here without any authority for decades," said Kamal.

Another refugee, Brij Lal, likened the occasion to Holi and Diwali, two of the most celebrated festivals in Hindu culture.



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"This moment is like a second birth, not only for me and my family but for my entire community and for those who were living here without any authority for decades," said Kamal.

Another refugee, Brij Lal, likened the occasion to Holi and Diwali, two of the most celebrated festivals in Hindu culture.

Lal attributed this milestone

to Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, describing him as no less than an "avatar (incarnation)" for their community.

The implementation of the CAA has been a subject of heated debate since its inception. However, for refugees like Solanki, Kamal, and Lal, it represents a long-awaited opportunity for a better life in their adopted homeland.

The Union Home Ministry on Monday notified the rules

for the CAA, paving the way for granting of citizenship to non-Muslims -- mainly Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists and Parsis -- facing persecution in neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, who had migrated to India before December 31, 2014.

"Immigrants qualifying for citizenship under CAA will have to submit applications in an online mode, for which a web portal has been created," an MHA spokesperson said.

The CAA was an integral part of the BJP's 2019 Lok Sabha poll manifesto and was enacted by the Parliament in December 2019 amid large-scale demonstrations from the Muslim community, backed by Opposition parties.

Monday's announcement came on the back of Union Home Minister, Amit Shah's assertions that the CAA would be implemented before the Lok Sabha elections, slated for April/May.

NIA raids at 30 places in various northern states at terrorist-gangster nexus

PARVESH HANDA

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Tuesday carried out raids at 30 locations across the states Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chandigarh UT in connection with the searches in terrorist-gangster nexus cases across Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chandigarh states which continued since morning till late night. Multiple NIA teams conducted a massive operation in coordination with the concerned state police forces at the premises of suspects involved in the cases based on the inputs following interrogation of the accused. According to information, on January 6 this year, the NIA had also conducted major action towards demolishing the terrorist-gangster-drug smuggler nexus in the country along with attachment of four properties including three immovable.

Muslim organizations condemn implementation of CAA before Lok Sabha Elections

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Muslims organizations issued a statement to express our unified stance against discriminatory legislation that undermines the fundamental principles of equality and justice. We vehemently condemn the enforcement of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019 just before the announcement of general elections.

The act introduces provisions that sabotage the principles of equality and secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Article 14 of the Indian constitution embodies the general principles of equality before the law and prohibits unreasonable discrimination between persons based on religion.

The insertion of Clause (b) in Section 2 of the Citizenship Act, 1955, establishes biased treatment - by mentioning individuals belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, or Christian communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, or



Pakistan, who entered the Indian territory before December 31, 2014; shall not be treated as an illegal migrant.

The act sheepishly avoids mentioning Muslims infringing the fundamental right to equality and secularism guaranteed by the Indian constitution by selectively granting citizenship based on religious affiliation; thus undermining the principle of equal treatment under the law. This discriminatory legislation threatens the social fabric of the country eroding the foundational principles of inclusivity and diversity.

The approval of the Citizen Amendment Bill by the Indian Parliament created a nationwide uproar and protests from Muslims and other sections of society, who felt an immediate responsibility to protect the Constitution of India.



India-EFTA deal charts new course in global trade

India's recent signing of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries - Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland - marks a significant pivot in its trade policy direction. This long-awaited pact, initiated in 2008 but stalled until now, opens a new chapter in India's economic diplomacy, promising enhanced market access for Indian services and professionals in Europe. The agreement, which aims to facilitate \$100 billion in foreign direct investment and create a million jobs in India over the next 15 years, is a testament to the country's renewed focus on leveraging trade for economic growth. Beyond the economic metrics, the deal is poised to bring tangible benefits to Indian consumers, including access to cheaper wines and chocolates, and to producers through more affordable machinery. The nuanced approach of linking tariff cuts to investment inflows underscores a strategic patience, with the full fruits of this agreement expected to be assessed two decades hence. The swift conclusion of the EFTA deal is particularly commendable. It not only reflects India's agility in trade negotiations but also its evolving stance on international trade agreements. This shift is evident when juxtaposed with India's recent trade history, including its exit from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and its cautious engagement with other potential trade partners. Moreover, the EFTA agreement's symbolic value cannot be overstated. It signals India's departure from its previously protectionist trade policies at a time when global trends are veering towards protectionism. The inclusion of non-trade issues such as labor rights, environmental concerns, and gender equality in the agreement aligns India with global best practices and addresses potential concerns of key allies like the European Union. In essence, the TEPA with EFTA countries is more than just a trade deal; it's a strategic maneuver that positions India as a proactive, open, and responsible player on the global economic stage.

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The ultimate goal of farming is not the growing of crops, but the cultivation and perfection of human beings.

MASANORU FUKUOKA

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URMILA CHOWDHURY BELIEVES ENGAGEMENT IS CRUCIAL FOR LEARNING, OFTEN LACKING IN INDIAN CLASSROOMS

Higher engagement, better learning



The Annual Status of Education Report 2023 states that more than 86.8 per cent individuals in the age group of 14-18 are enrolled in educational institutions, but one-fourth of them cannot read a Class 2-level text fluently in their regional languages.

A learning deficit

India has been struggling with a learning deficit for years now. And though there is more awareness about this thanks to Pratham's annual surveys, little seems to have changed on the ground. Attendance in public schools tends to be low, so despite children being enrolled in school, many of them don't learn much. This is largely because schools are unable to engage children. Therefore, children and parents see little value in school. Across classrooms, government school teachers attribute poor student learning outcomes to poor student attendance. When students don't show up, teachers lose their motivation and do little to increase the level of engagement with learners, which could in turn motivate students to show up. It's a chicken and egg situation.

Students learn when there is motivation to do so and that happens when classrooms are meaningful and psychologically safe spaces. However, in classrooms across India, the teacher focuses only on the few students who sit in the front rows. The teacher writes questions and often even the answers on the blackboard. The students spend most of their learning hours copying off the board while the teacher leaves the room to do "more important" work. The teacher asks questions, but only a few children generally answer. Otherwise, the class answers in a chorus. The children repeat after the teacher in unison. The teacher asks if everyone has understood and receives an enthusiastic



'yes' in response. But this does not give a sense of how much the students have really learned. This looks and sounds like active learning, but is not, because the children are not cognitively or emotionally engaged. India has a long tradition of rote learning. Many have progressed in life learning this way, but this kind of learning does not serve all students. In any case, with the world changing so fast, children need different skills.

A two-way communication

Now imagine a classroom where the teacher calls upon every child randomly. Every child is alert, curious, and attentive. The students are allowed to discuss and solve problems with their peers and learn from one another. Every child gets to touch, feel, and use the learning material — whether a maths manipulative, a book, or a science kit. The teacher stays in the classroom while the children work and gives them feedback in real time. The children cognitively engage with the topic. There is a happy buzz of students taking ownership for their own learning. This is student engagement and this is what makes the classroom a meaningful space for every learner.

Unless the teacher participates, student engagement cannot happen. Classroom learning opportunities must be made available to everyone, irrespective of gender, caste, religion, special needs, or disability. When teachers actively engage students in a lesson, learning outcomes improve. This seems like a simple premise. Why then is it so difficult to implement in the classroom? The many problems that plague the education system, including inadequate teacher allocation, poor systemic governance, outdated teaching practices, lack of teacher support and coaching, all contribute to making this hard to implement at scale.

There are many teachers who teach with passion and dedication, despite the challenges. However, even when we have dedicated teachers teaching and good student attendance, children still do not always learn. A part of the problem is that many of these teachers were themselves not taught in an engaging way. So, very few of them worry about whether they are engaging the learner as they don't see it as their responsibility. Teaching is largely seen as a one-way communication with the teacher getting no feedback from the

student during the lesson. The teacher does not know what is going on in the learner's mind and therefore cannot customise their teaching to suit the learner's needs.

Teaching the teacher

Teachers have not seen how practices such as questioning are practiced. This is because teacher education and training in India tends to be theoretical. It is conducted in seminar-style and tends to be a one-way communication. There is little opportunity for practice provided to the participants. We must see teachers as learners too and provide them with an engaging learning environment with 70 per cent practice and 30 per cent theory so that training serves a two-fold purpose: teachers get trained, but also experience learner engagement for themselves.

Additionally, there is no one in school to support teachers. All of us need coaching and hand-holding to support us in adopting new behaviour. Even though teaching is a vital job, teachers do not get help.

Student engagement is the key to driving better learning, but this is missing from many classrooms. Structured lessons, high quality teacher-student relationships, and student autonomy, i.e. allowing students choices in the classroom result in higher engagement and better learning outcomes. Simple changes in classroom techniques can positively impact the learning environment. In India, we have spent a few years discussing the Right to Education but this is a good time to shift the focus to the Right to Learning. Else, reading every ASER report will only lead to more disappointment.

Urmila Chowdhury has 35 years of experience as an educationist and currently serves as the Education Director at Peepul, an education non-profit. Views are personal.



KALEESWARAM RAJ EXPLAINS WHY SUCH ACTS VIOLATE OATH, DEFY INDIAN PRECEDENTS, AND JUDICIAL NORMS.

It's time to prohibit judges from joining politics



Justice Abhijit Gangopadhyay recently resigned as a judge of the Calcutta High Court and joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). He said that he was approached by the BJP, and he also approached the BJP, during his tenure as judge. He declared that henceforth, he will be a "party soldier".

While he was judge, Gangopadhyay was often in the news for the wrong reasons. He allegedly gave an interview to a TV channel criticising the West Bengal government and speaking about the school job-for-bribe case. He created controversy by defying an order of a division bench. Sometimes he had run-ins with lawyers and even fellow judges. While dealing with one of the cases pertaining to Gangopadhyay's conduct, a bench of Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice P.S. Narasimha rightly said that judges have no business giving TV interviews on pending matters. The Chief Minister criticised Gangopadhyay after his resignation saying his judgments will always remain questionable.

Former Union Minister Arun Jaitley had once advocated a cooling off period for judges saying "pre-retirement judgments are influenced by a desire for a post-retirement job". When confronted with this suggestion, Gangopadhyay retorted that there is no rule to this effect. He added that he "never gave any political judgment which was politically biased".

No legal bar

A member of the Constituent Assembly, K.T. Shah, had suggested that judges of constitutional courts should be legally barred from occupying executive posts. But the Constituent Assembly did not find



favour with this. Implementing external rules to control the judicial behaviour of judges would be antithetical to the idea of judicial independence. This is why India has not legislated over the judicial conduct of judges of constitutional courts.

Acceptance of judgeship is often an act of sacrifice for lawyers as it involves loss of freedom. Restraint becomes the norm, which also reduces the space for personal aspirations. Yet, a judge of the constitutional court gets powers and privileges which others do not enjoy. According to Article 217 read with Article 124(4) of the Constitution, the only way to remove a judge is the almost unworkable method of impeachment by Parliament. Article 215 declares the High Court to be a court of record with contempt power which the judges could invoke. The jurist Alan Dershowitz was

right when he said that "judges are the weakest link in our system of justice, and they are also the most protected".

Judicial conduct

Paragraph VIII of the Third Schedule of the Constitution demands a judge-designate to swear inter alia that he will perform his duties without fear or favour, affection or ill-will. The Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct (2002) gained international acceptance as indicated by the Judicial Integrity Group. The declaration enlists certain judicial values including independence, impartiality, integrity, propriety, equality, competence and diligence. It emphasises the need to eradicate bias or prejudice in the decision-making process. It asks judges to ensure that their conduct "both in and out of (the) court maintains and enhances the confidence of the public, the legal profession, and litigants in the impartiality of the judge and of the judiciary". Clause 2.4 of the declaration is against the judge making comments "that might reasonably be expected to affect the outcome of (a case)". It says that the "judge shall disqualify himself or herself from participating in any proceedings in which the judge is unable to decide the matter impartially". The Code also says, "A judge shall conduct himself or herself in a way that is consistent with the dignity of the judicial office".

The U.S. judge, Simon Rifkind, remarked that the courtroom, sooner or later, becomes the image of the judge and that

it will rise or fall to the level of the presiding judge. The Supreme Court in C. Ravichandran Iyer v. Justice A.M. Bhat-tacharjee (1995) said, "To keep the stream of justice clean and pure, the Judge must be endowed with sterling character, impeccable integrity and upright behaviour". In All India Judges' Association v. Union of India (1991), the court spoke of "society's expectation from judicial officers".

There have been similar instances in the past. In 1967, Chief Justice Koka Subba Rao resigned to contest the presidential elections, and in 1983, the Supreme Court judge Baharul Islam resigned to get elected as a member of the Rajya Sabha. But past aberrations do not justify present wrongs. They are no longer good precedents or practices given the globally accepted principles of the Bangalore Declaration, which were made later.

An opportunity

The present episode, therefore, gives an opportunity to the Chief Justice of India and the Supreme Court to investigate the matter more seriously and evolve methods to avert such judicial aberrations. It could lead to one of the most awaited steps towards reforming the judiciary. The top court must expressly prohibit judges of constitutional courts from taking the political plunge even after they resign. Such acts should be interpreted as a breach of the oath read in the light of Indian precedents and the accepted norms on judicial conduct. There is a need for a judge-made law on the topic since Parliament will hardly act on this issue.

Kaleeswaram Raj is a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

Gulbadan's memoirs: A look at Mughal empire's forgotten voice

Ruby Lal's "Vagabond Princess: The Great Adventures of Gulbadan" offers a riveting departure from the conventional narratives surrounding the role of women in the Mughal empire. Through the life of Gulbadan Banu Begum, Babur's daughter, Lal not only challenges clichéd perceptions but also introduces readers to the first and only female historian of the Mughal era. This book review delves into Lal's exploration of Gulbadan's life, her historical contributions, and the broader implications for understanding Mughal women's roles in history.

Gulbadan Banu Begum, affectionately known as 'Rosebody', emerges from the pages of history as an extraordinary figure whose memoir, 'Ahval-i Humayun Badshah' or 'Humayun Nama,' offers invaluable insights into the lives of

three Mughal emperors: her father Babur, her brother Humayun, and her nephew Akbar. Unlike other historical accounts of the time, Gulbadan's narrative focuses on the intricacies of daily life within the royal palace, providing a unique perspective on the empire's formative years.

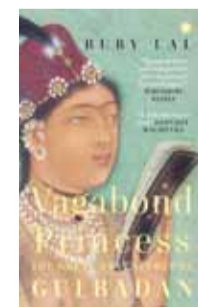
Lal's portrayal of Gulbadan's life is vivid and engaging. From her early years, embroiled in the politics and wars of her time, to her adventurous travels across seas laden with gold and diamonds, Gulbadan's story is one of resilience and audacity. Her close relationship with her father and her significant role in familial and political affairs underscore the respect and agency afforded to royal women, contrary to the popular belief of their seclusion.

The book also sheds light on the broader social dynamics within

the Mughal empire, including the homosocial arrangements that defined interactions within the royal court. Lal illustrates how these arrangements facilitated a supportive environment among women, enabling them to play crucial roles during conflicts and in the governance of the empire.

One of the most captivating aspects of Gulbadan's life was her pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, a journey that Lal describes with a rich tapestry of details that bring the ancient cities to life. This pilgrimage, undertaken with a retinue of women, highlights the adventurous spirit of Mughal women and their independence in undertaking significant journeys for spiritual fulfillment.

Lal's meticulous research and narrative skill reconstruct the missing parts of Gulbadan's biography, offering readers a comprehensive



Vagabond Princess: The Great Adventures of Gulbadan
By Ruby Lal
Juggernaut;
280 pages; Rs 699.

look into her life and times. The book goes beyond a simple biographical account, presenting a nuanced exploration of gender, power, and memory in the Mughal empire. It challenges the erasure of women's voices from history and celebrates the contributions of a woman who lived boldly in a world dominated by men.

"Vagabond Princess" is not just a story about a Mughal princess; it's a testament to the complex lives of women who navigated the intricacies of a vast empire. Lal's work is a significant contribution to the field of history, providing a fresh perspective on the Mughal era through the lens of a woman whose voice has long been overlooked. It

invites readers to reconsider the narratives surrounding women's roles in history, making it a compelling read for anyone interested in the Mughal empire, women's history, or the power of storytelling in preserving the past.

Ruby Lal's narrative is imbued with a sense of rediscovery and reclamation, as she meticulously pieces together the life of Gulbadan from various historical texts, paintings, and memoirs. This process of reclamation is not just about Gulbadan but serves as a symbolic restoration of the voices of countless women whose stories have been overshadowed or omitted from the historical record. Through "Vagabond Princess," Lal not only enriches our understanding of the Mughal era but also contributes to the ongoing effort to bring women's histories to the forefront. The book, therefore, is not just a historical account; it is a powerful act of reclamation and remembrance, urging readers to acknowledge and celebrate the complex lives and legacies of women throughout history.

BEL receives orders worth Rs.1,940.35 Cr

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Navaratna DPSU Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) today entered into a contract valued at Rs.847.70 Cr plus taxes with Larsen & Toubro Limited (L&T) for the supply of 14 cutting-edge Communication and Electronic Warfare (EW) sensors and systems. These state-of-the-art systems, manufactured domestically by BEL, will be installed on three Cadet Training Ships for the Indian Navy. Press statement issued here said.

This collaboration between BEL and L&T exemplifies the strong partnership between the two companies and underscores the broader co-operation within the Indian Industry. The successful execution of this contract will involve the participation



of numerous Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and represents a significant stride towards achieving the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Additionally, BEL has secured other orders valued at

Rs.1,092.65 Cr following the last disclosure on February 13, 2024. These orders encompass the supply of LRU's for T-70 & T-90 Tanks, Communication Systems for the Indian Navy, as well as other Spares and Services. With

these recent developments, BEL has now accumulated orders totalling Rs.32,716.33 Cr in the current financial year, highlighting the company's continued growth and success in the Defence sector.

NITI Aayog Unveils 'Vocal for Local' Initiative to Uplift Grassroots Entrepreneurship

NEW DELHI: In a bid to bolster local economies and nurture grassroots entrepreneurship, NITI Aayog has rolled out the 'Vocal for Local' initiative as part of its Aspirational Blocks Programme on Wednesday.

The 'Vocal for Local' initiative signifies a pivotal step towards economic empowerment and self-sufficiency at the grassroots level. BVR Subrahmanyam, CEO of Niti Aayog underscored the importance of collaboration with entities like Government e-Marketplace (GeM) and Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) to bolster micro-enterprises within Aspirational Blocks.

Central to this initiative is the unveiling of the 'Aakanksha' logo by Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member of NITI Aayog, in



conjunction with B.V.R. Subrahmanyam.

'Aakanksha' serves as a collective platform for indigenous products sourced from 500 Aspirational Blocks, fostering a sense of self-reliance and sustainable growth among local communities.

Subrahmanyam envisioned 'Aakanksha' as a versatile brand capable of tapping into international markets.

To provide a conducive environment for these local products, a dedicated window under the 'Aakanksha' brand has been

established on the GeM portal. Partnerships with GeM and ONDC will extend support in various aspects including e-commerce onboarding, skill enhancement, and financial literacy.

The event saw active participation from all 329 Districts and Block Level Officials under the Aspirational Blocks Programme, who joined virtually to mark the occasion.

This holistic approach aims to fortify the 'Vocal for Local' initiative, ensuring its sustainability and impact.

Through collaborative efforts, NITI Aayog remains steadfast in its commitment to unlock the potential of every Aspirational Block, driving inclusive growth and prosperity for all stakeholders.

FISME Nominated to Steering Committee as DPIIT Gears Up for Industrial Park Rating 3.0



NEW DELHI: The Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) has been nominated to be part of the steering committee providing guidance on the framework for the Industrial Park Rating System (IPRS) 3.0.

IPRS 3.0 is an ambitious initiative by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) aimed at enhancing India's industrial infrastructure competitiveness.

Recognising the pivotal role of a robust industrial ecosystem, DPIIT has constituted a multi-stakeholder 'Steering Committee' comprising experts from government ministries, departments, agencies, former bureaucrats, advisors, think tanks, and industry associations like FISME. This panel will steer the development of IPRS 3.0, building on insights from global best practices, major DPIIT programs, and learnings from previous IPRS iterations.

The rating system facilitates both qualitative and quantitative assessments of industrial parks, focusing on four key pillars: internal infrastructure, external infrastructure, business support services, and environment and safety management.

Through standardised ratings, this system empowers investors to make informed decisions and pinpoint the most suitable industrial parks for their investments. Expanding upon previous versions, DPIIT aims to broaden the reach and improve the quality of the Industrial Park Rating System (IPRS) with the introduction of 'IPRS 3.0'. Originally piloted in 2018 with support from the ADB, the IPRS initiative evaluated 177 out of 202 nominated parks across 21 States/UTs.

Building upon this foundation, DPIIT launched IPRS 2.0 in alignment with the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan', assessing 449 parks across 31 States/UTs based on input from developers (60 per cent weightage) and tenants (40 per cent).

Ace Turtle partners Shoppers Stop for 'Dockers' expansion in India



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Ace Turtle and Shoppers Stop jointly announced recently the launch of 'Dockers' - a leading global khaki brand - in India. Ace Turtle is a leading technology-native retail company, while Shoppers Stop is India's leading premium omni-channel fashion and beauty destination. Kavindra Mishra, Customer Care Associate, Executive Director and CEO, Shoppers Stop Ltd., said the Dockers collection will be featured across 15 Shoppers Stop stores, marking a significant milestone for both brands. "Dockers bring a timeless blend of quality and style that matches the evolving preference of the modern Indian customer," he said, adding "The Dockers collection will resonate strongly with those who appreciate timeless classics with a modern twist."

Amazon Partners with Indian Govt to Boost District-Level Exports

NEW DELHI: Amazon Global Selling, the e-commerce giant's export platform for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), is teaming up with the Ministry of Commerce and Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) to enhance sales from districts with promising export potential.

Bhupen Wakankar, Director of Global Trade, Amazon India, emphasised the significance of forming partnerships across various levels over the past two years, reported businessline.

He stated, "What we have done over the last two years is specifically start forming partnerships at all levels."

The collaboration extends to both central and state governments, trade bodies, export promotion councils, and industry organisations like CII, FICCI & FISME.

Additionally, Amazon is working with logistics, service providers, banks, and venture



capitalists for funding support. Recently, Amazon India inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the commerce ministry to intensify involvement in the top 75 districts, contributing to 80 per cent of its exports.

Engagement with DGFT, which boasts local export promotion council tie-ups and on-the-ground presence, is a pivotal aspect of their strategy. The aim is to raise aware-

ness and educate on e-commerce exports, focusing on district-level outreach. With over 1.25 lakh exporters on its platform, Amazon Global Selling has achieved over USD 8 billion in revenue since its 2015 launch and is on track to meet its USD 20 billion target by 2025.

Exporters benefit from access to over 200 countries through Amazon's 18 international websites.

Hyundai, Kia to recall 1.7 lakh EVs over charging software issue



NEW DELHI: Hyundai Motor and Kia will voluntarily recall nearly 170,000 electric vehicles (EV) to address a software error in the charging system, the government said on Thursday.

The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport said 12 car models totaling 232,000 units from Hyundai Motor, Kia, Stellantis Korea and Tesla Korea are subject to recall due to manufacturing defects. Of those, 169,932 Hyundai Motor and Kia units were found to have software errors in the integrated charging control unit. Models affected are Hyundai's Ioniq 5, Ioniq 6, Genesis GV60, GV70 and GV80 EVs, totaling 113,916 units, and 56,016 units of Kia's EV6, reports Yonhap news agency.

The ministry said that the error could prevent the vehicles in question from conducting low-voltage charging, leading to the possibility of the vehicles stopping while driving.

Hengst Filtration Unveils State-of-the-Art Facility in Bengaluru

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Hengst Filtration, Germany's leading filtration company, has unveiled its cutting-edge facility in Yelahanka, Bengaluru. This strategic move aims to address the surging demand for filtration systems in automotive, hydraulics, healthcare, and industrial sectors within the country. With an initial investment of 2 million Euros (INR 17 Crores) allocated towards machinery, IT infrastructure, and warehousing, Hengst Filtration is laying the groundwork for its operations in India. Recognizing India's pivotal role as both a key market and a potential export destination, the company is poised to seize the abundant opportunities present.

Speaking on the sidelines of the inaugural event, Christopher Heine, Group CEO, Hengst Filtration, said, "India represents a significant growth opportunity for Hengst Filtration. The country's expanding economy, coupled with its growing demand for filtration systems across industries, makes it an ideal fit for our expansion plans. We are confident that our innovative solutions that bundle filtrations for industry and the environment will be well received by our Indian customers." He added



Sandip Mehta, MD, Hengst India said, "We are excited about our latest and most significant expansion into this pivotal market, poised to contribute to reducing emissions in the production environment and enhancing air quality for the people of India."

Our substantial investments, totalling around 2 million Euros, underscore our unwavering dedication to India's progress. From automotive to medical technology, our mission is unequivocal: to mitigate emissions, safeguard machinery, and elevate air quality. Each of our products acts as a catalyst for positive change, fostering a cleaner, greener planet. With our diverse portfolio deeply intertwined with India's thriving sectors, we're fully dedicated to nurturing its trajectory of growth. The inauguration of our new facility at Yelahanka symbolizes our steadfast commitment to establishing a robust foothold in the Indian market," he added.

Caution and Survival Lessons for family-owned Pharmaceutical Companies in India



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

Aphorism 'Third Generation Curse' has been interchangeably used for 'three-generation rule', and 'three-generation myth'. This suggests that most family-businesses don't survive beyond three generations. It also asserts that family fortunes dissipate over generations, and the cause of failure lies with their heirs. In different countries, there are different versions of aphorism, e.g., 'Pai rico, filho pobre, neto pobre' in Portuguese which means 'Rich dad, noble son, poor grandson', 'Rich father; noble son; poor grandson' in Brazil, or 'the first generation builds, the second strengthens, and the third spends it all' in France, or 'shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves in three generations' in the USA. 'Wealth does not last beyond three generations' in China, etc.

A study attributed to the wealth consultancy firm - The Williams Group - found that nine (09) in ten (10) families tend to lose their fortune by the third generation, and 7 in 10 by the 2nd generation. The study involved 3,250 families over a 20-year period.

There are many reasons behind the failure of businesses in next generation, e.g., 'trust and communication breakdown', making it 'obligatory for next generation to join the business against their interest', joining the existing family business as a 'fallback option', 'lack of training or exposure', 'lack of work for each and every family-member in the family-business', 'family disagreements', 'extravagance', 'no succession planning', among others.

Many pharmaceutical companies have shown the way to beat three-generation curse. Merck is the oldest family-controlled pharmaceutical

chemical company in the world, and remains family-owned for 13 generations at present. Friedrich Jacob Merck founded the company at Darmstadt, Germany in 1668. In India, one of the oldest pharma companies is Dabur, an Ayurvedic medicine company, started by Dr. S. K. Burman in 1884. This is being spearheaded by the fifth generation represented by Dr. Anand Burman as the Chairman and Amit Burman as Vice-Chairman. Certain other companies dealing in ayurveda products have existence from pre-1947 era such as Shree Baidyanath Ayurved Bhawan (1917), Himalaya Drug Company (1930), Charak Pharma (1947). But the credit for being the first company to produce Drugs and Pharmaceutical products goes to Bengal Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Works Limited (later on, renamed as Bengal Chemicals & Pharmaceuticals Limited) which was established in 1901 by Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy. BCPL was nationalized in December, 1980. In 2017, it turned profitable after 64 years. So, the history of drugs & pharmaceutical companies other than ayurvedic medicine companies is less than 125 years old. There are less than 15 such pharmaceutical companies which were set up in pre-1947 era and are still in existence. The list comprises mainly Alembic (1907), Raptakos, Brett & Co. (1930), CIPLA (1935), East India Pharmaceuticals Works (1936), FDC (1936), Albert David (1938), Dey's Medical Stores (1941), Unichem Labs (1944), VHB Life Sciences (1946), and Indoco Remedies (1947).

I, myself, with my co-authors - Dr. Vikas Daryal and Vikas Aggarwal in a study titled - Ownership, Control, Management and Succession in Family Businesses: A Study on Pharmaceutical Companies

in India (2022) based on top 100 pharmaceutical companies in India, observed that 20% of these pharmaceutical companies were being run by first-generation entrepreneurs, 51% pharma companies were being headed by second-generation entrepreneurs, and 25% pharma companies were being run by the third-generation entrepreneurs. Fourth-generation entrepreneurs ran only 3% pharmaceutical companies, and only one company was being run by fifth-generation entrepreneurs! This cannot be attributed to just third-generation curse at present as the history of such pharmaceutical companies in India is less than 125 years old as described in preceding paragraph.

Prominent pharmaceutical companies with 2nd generation participation includes Sun Pharma, Mankind, Alkem, Lupin, INTAS Pharma, Dr. Reddy's Labs, Glenmark, Aristo Pharma, IPCA Labs, Cadila Pharma, Ajanta Pharma, Blue Cross, Medley Pharma, Corona Remedies, Fourt's India, Samarth Pharma, Serum Institute of India, Biological E, Natco Pharma, among others. These companies are going to pass on the business to next generation.



Group (with a prominent group company - Zydus Lifesciences), Micro Labs, Alembic, FDC, Himalaya Wellness Company (formerly Himalaya Drug Company), Indoco, Bharat Serum, Wallace, Raptakos, Brett & Co., Wockhardt, Albert David, Tablets India, RPG Life Sciences, East India Pharma, Jagson Pal, ENTOD, Charak Pharma, among others. Successful transition of this set of companies will prove the 'third-generation myth' wrong.

In India, pharmaceutical sector has witnessed 'Third Generation Curse' on multiple occasions. One prominent case is of erstwhile Ranbaxy which was acquired by Bhai Mohan Singh from two cousins - Ranjit Singh and Gurbax Singh (Ranbaxy got name from these two names) in 1952. Dr. Parvinder Singh took over the company from his father - Bhai Mohan Singh, and ran it till his death in 1999. But in the third generation - Malvinder Singh and Shivinder Singh, it literally resulted into squandering of a business empire. In June 2008, promoters sold their residual stake of 34.8% to Daiichi Sankyo, a prominent Japanese pharmaceutical company.

In last few months, news on potential stake sale by promoters of CIPLA was a surprise in the background that the business is headed by the second-

generation representative and Non-Executive Chairman, Dr. Yusuf Khwaja Hamied. CIPLA has operations in more than 80 countries, and is quite successful as it is ranked third largest in pharmaceutical sector in India. In 2022-23, the company had revenue of Rs. 22,753 Crore. But Samina Vaziralli (Hamied), third-generation entrepreneur, and niece of Dr. Y.K. Hamied, stepped down from the position of Executive Vice-Chairperson of the company in January 2024. Her younger brother, Kamil Hamied was groomed by the family head as the successor but he had resigned in June 2015 to achieve his personal growth objectives. Parting remarks of Samina Hamied were pertinent when she stated that "a decade ago, they believed that Cipla needed an engaged and active promoter from the next generation to steer and strengthen the company as we built a world-class leadership team, forayed into new geographies and incubated new businesses....". In a way, it echoed the feeling that it would lead to separation of 'operational management' of the business from 'family owners' but news on potential stake sale by promoters who own 33.47 per cent in the company led to strengthening the belief in 'three-generation curse'.

Even promoters remain fearful of this aphorism. Ajay Sharma as the Director of Shree Baidyanath Ayurved Bhawan shared in one of his addresses that being a third-generation family member in the family-business; he had a lot of burden on his shoulders. He drew an analogy to the trinity of Hinduism; Brahma - the creator, Vishnu - the preserver and Mahesh - the destroyer. With this in mind, he posed a question to himself - hey am I Mahesh? Have I been born to 'destroy what my grand-father created

and my father preserved'? With failure rate during third-generation in his mind, he went on to study 250-odd family businesses. He shared the lessons in the book - How to Thrive in a Family Business: Business Lessons from my Baidyanath Journey. To put it in context, Pt. Ramnarayan Sharma started the manufacturing of Ayurvedic medicines at Baidyanath Dham (in Bihar) in the year 1917. Now, with an existence of more than 107 years, fourth generation entrepreneurs are managing the family business.

Frank Stangenberg - Haverkamp, 11th generation representative and the then Chairman of E. Merck KG, the parent company of Merck, in one of his interview (May 23, 2017 in the Korea Herald) shared important lessons in this context when he stated that they (as a family) 'think in generations, and not in quarters'. He attributed the success of oldest pharmaceutical company to 'unique governance structure' of the company which kept the company under the control (70.3 per cent stake with 153 family members) of the family but separated its 'management from the ownership'. Irrespective of the gender, family members inherit the stake from parents. Family members keep the stake in the form of investment. CEO and CFO are not family members. It is also emphasized to family members that they have not worked for it so they should not forget that. Therefore, they are not entitled to anything, they have just inherited it. And if they want more, they have to work for it.

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

Sats opens its largest innovative food solutions facility in Bengaluru

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

To serve the demand for both domestic and international markets, SATS Food Solutions India (SFSI), a wholly owned subsidiary of SATS Ltd. (SATS), has opened its largest international food solutions facility in Bengaluru, complementing its existing large-scale food facilities in Singapore, China, Japan and Thailand. Situated in close proximity to the Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru (KIAB), the facility covers an area of 221,000 sq. ft. and has the capacity to supply up to 40,000 kg of ready-to-eat food products per day to institutional catering, private labelling, and



commercial clients, including large-scale food retailers, restaurants, cloud kitchens, cafes, and lounges in India, and international markets.

The SATS India Food Solutions (SFSI) facility, funded with an investment of S\$61 million, is a frozen food manufacturing facility that incorporates culinary expertise, smart technology to produce tasty, nutritious food products according to the highest food safety standards.

Coromandel International gives 200 drones for womens SHGs



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Coromandel International, India's leading agri-solutions provider, announced its support to the Prime Minister's "Namo Drone Didi" Scheme by providing 200 drones to women from Self-Help Groups in modernizing farming.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in an event organized recently by the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers across 11 locations in the country, had virtually handed over 1,000 drones - including 200 drones supplied by Coromandel International. The Government, through this scheme,

aims to help 15,000 women-led SHGs with agricultural drones for crop monitoring, spraying fertilisers and crop protection chemicals.

Besides supplying the drones, Coromandel International also trained the local woman pilots to operate these drones in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka.

Arun Alagappan, Executive Vice-Chairman, Coromandel International Limited, said that these drones encompass a wide range of cutting edge solutions to meet farmers' needs including: anti-collision sensors, RTL feature for safe landing and high-quality nozzles covering upto 30 acres of spraying per day.

RBI & Commerce Ministry Discuss Liberalisation of FEMA for E-commerce Exports

NEW DELHI: Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Santosh Kumar Sarangi, revealed that the Commerce Ministry is engaged in discussions with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regarding the liberalisation of Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA) guidelines to facilitate e-commerce exports.

Speaking at the 1st Asia Pacific e-commerce policy summit organised by economic think tank ICRIER on Thursday, Sarangi highlighted recent meetings with the RBI officials, expressing optimism about forthcoming liberalisation in RBI guidelines within the next two to three months.

He stated, "A few days back we had a meeting with the entire team of RBI officials who deal with this. There is a lot of liberalisation which is coming in the RBI guidelines and we should be seeing the results in next two to three months with



regard to e-commerce (export) policies."

Sarangi underscored the significance of extending the time frame for realising payments in Business to Business (B2B) shipments, indicating the Commerce Department's efforts to collaborate with the RBI to liberalise guidelines for e-commerce exports.

Further elucidating on

the current process, Sarangi explained the necessity of Electronic Bank Realisation Certificates (e-BRCs) generated against shipping bills for export realisation.

He mentioned ongoing efforts by the DGFT's team to work with the RBI to facilitate self-declaration based e-BRCs, enhancing ease of doing business for e-commerce players,

particularly those dealing with numerous consignments of smaller values.

Presently, e-BRCs are uploaded on the DGFT system by banks upon the realisation of export payments. Sarangi emphasised the vital role of e-BRCs as proof of payment realisation for firms applying for benefits under Foreign Trade policy.

Sarangi also revealed collaborative efforts between the Commerce Department, the Department of Revenue, and the Department of Post to expedite e-commerce exports.

Key focus areas include designated zones ensuring accountability and responsibility, expediting clearance of consignments, and ensuring adequate warehousing facilities to meet consumer demand in real-time. Overall, concerted efforts involving various stakeholders aim to enhance policies impacting e-commerce.

Markets fall after a day's breather on weak global market trends, foreign fund outflows



MUMBAI: Equity benchmark indices declined nearly 1 per cent on Friday after a day's breather amid weak global market trends and foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 453.85 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at 72,643.43 after a weak beginning. During the day, the benchmark tanked 612.46 points or 0.83 per cent to 72,484.82. The NSE Nifty dropped 123.30 points or 0.56

per cent to 22,023.35. From the Sensex basket, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Motors, NTPC, HCL Technologies, Larsen & Toubro, Infosys, Tech Mahindra and State Bank of India were the major laggards.

Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv, Tata Consultancy Services and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower,

while Shanghai ended in the green. European markets were trading with marginal gains. The US markets ended in the negative territory on Thursday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,356.29 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge slipped 0.51 per cent while the smallcap index went up by 0.25 per cent. "Cautiousness towards mid & smallcaps continued to drag market sentiment, dampening the broader market. However, the moderation in global commodity prices and the upward revision of India's GDP for FY25 are poised to highlight robust domestic demand, potentially supporting a rebound once the broader market attains stability," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

Two bank employees held in third case of cyber fraud in Gurugram



PARVESH HANDA

The Gurugram police's Cyber Crime Cell arrested two private YES bank employees of Rohimi branch allegedly providing bank account details for Rs 1.32 crore cyber fraud. This is the third case of cyber fraud by the bank employees reported in the past few days in which Gurugram cyber crime cell succeeded in arresting bank employees allegedly involved in on-line frauds, said Priyanshu Diwan ACP. While talking to media persons disclosed that police has arrested three accused in this cyber fraud have been identified as Deepak a resident of Bawana and Dharmender resident of Bharatpur in Rajasthan both were arrested on Monday night at Rohini in Delhi and were employees of Rohini branch of YES Bank and according to a complaint at the Cyber Crime Police Station East on March 3 alleged duped of amount worth Rs 1.32 crore on the pretext cheated of investing in the stock market. Earlier, Gurugram cyber crime cell had also three officers including the bank manager Kotak Mahindra Bank at Gurugram and three officers of YES Bank in past few days.

Sidhant Jain DCP said, during the probe, Cyber Crime Police Station SHO Inspector Devender arrested the suspects from Delhi's Rohini on Monday along with the arrest of one of their associates identified as Prakash in whose account Rs 10,000 was transferred from the cheated amount. DCP said that during four days police remand police trying to find out how many accounts fraud amount was made, accounts were opened by the accused and how many accounts were sold to the cyber criminals enabling them to arrest. During interrogation, the accused admitted that they kept in touch with cyber criminals and provided bank accounts to be used in committing cyber frauds and in return they received Rs 1.60 lakh. According to information, out of Rs 1.32 crore, Rs 10 lakh was also transferred by cyber criminals in a bank account in the name of Prakash provided by the arrested bank employees and further investigation is going on

How to close Paytm Payments Bank FASTag?

NEW DELHI: As per the guidelines issued by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) regarding restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank, users of Paytm FASTag will not be able to top up or add to their balance after midnight on Friday.

However, they can continue to use their current balance for toll payments even after March 15.

Those who wish to close the Paytm Payments Bank FASTag can do it via the Paytm App.

People can first open the Paytm App and search for 'Manage FASTag' in the search menu.

The Manage FASTag section will list all the vehicles linked to Paytm Payments Bank FASTag. After that, people will be required to choose the 'Close FASTag option' on the top right section of the page then select the vehicle for which they want to close the FASTag.

On clicking Proceed a confir-



mation message will appear on the screen. The FASTag will be closed within 5-7 working days.

As per the company, the applicable security deposit and minimum balance maintained for PPBL FASTag will be refunded to the Paytm Payments Bank Wallet post-closure.

On Friday, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) granted approval to One97 Communications Limited (OCL), the parent company of Paytm, to participate in Unified Payments Interface (UPI) as a third-party application provider under multi-bank model.

India's Investment surge propels Economic Growth to Mid-2000s Levels

NEW DELHI: Economists at Morgan Stanley have identified investment as a significant catalyst behind India's burgeoning economy, drawing parallels to the robust expansion witnessed in the mid-2000s.

This resurgence in investment, particularly from private enterprises, alongside expanding exports and a more stable economic environment, signals promising prospects for India's economic trajectory.

According to Morgan Stanley economists, India's investment as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) is on a steady upward trajectory, poised to reach 36 per cent by 2027 from a recent low of 28 per cent in 2021. This surge mirrors the period between



2003-2007 when investment ratios soared to 39 per cent.

The economists project a prolonged growth cycle, indicating ample room for expansion in the current economic landscape. India, acclaimed as the world's fastest-growing major economy, recorded a remarkable growth rate of 8.4 per cent in the last quarter of the previous year.

However, a nuanced analysis reveals a deceleration in growth when accounting

for one-off factors, prompting considerations regarding the sustainability of India's growth trajectory. Echoing sentiments from Morgan Stanley, economists at Societe Generale highlight investment's pivotal role in propelling India's economic engine.

They note early indications of a resurgence in private capital expenditure, indicative of a broader-based investment surge. India's top economic adviser also underscores sustained signs of capital formation, projecting economic expansion exceeding 7 per cent in the upcoming fiscal year, commencing in April.

65 pc SHG members turn into Lakhpati Didis as incomes triple: SBI report



NEWDELHI: The Women's Self-Help Group (SHG) schemes are turning out to be a huge success in the rural areas resulting in a tripling of incomes with 65 per cent SHG members turning into Lakhpati Didis nationwide, according to an SBI report released on Tuesday.

The report sees Lakhpati Didis emerging as a game changer by 2026-27 across most states & UTs.

Credit linkage, digital access and targeted policy measures, coupled with an unwavering sense of entrepreneurial spirit have ensured female SHG members accounts witnessing income tripling during FY19-FY24 (credits in accounts), with urban female members showing 4.6X increase while age group <27 years harnessing income increase of 4.7 times, a testimony to young nation theory...Most of the Female SHG members belong to the age of 35 to 50 years with median age of 43 years.

Income has increased for SHG Members across the board... relative income analy-

sis suggests around 65 per cent of rural SHG members have moved upwards in terms of relative income in FY24 when compared to FY19.

All the regions, except metros have witnessed maximum increase in income of female SHG members belonging to 28 to 42 years in FY24 when compared to FY19.... For metro regions, maximum increase is in age group <27 years.

While Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are leaders in SHGs, other states like Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Kerala, Punjab, Gujarat have also significantly increased female SHG incomes in recent times...Further, Female SHG members of Haryana, MP, West Bengal, and Jharkhand are expected to cross annual income of Rs 1 lakhs in 1 year...SHG members of UP, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan may take 2 more years in earning annual income of Rs 1 lakhs...by FY27, India will have millions of Lakhpati Didis in almost every state.

SEBI signals stricter Disclosure Norms for SMEs amid Manipulation Concerns

NEW DELHI: Madhabi Puri Buch, Chairperson, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), announced that SEBI is intensifying efforts to enforce more stringent disclosure standards for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) entering the market.

This initiative aims to address issues of manipulation observed at both the Initial Public Offering (IPO) stage and during price fluctuations, as per media reports. Buch emphasised the vulnerability of SMEs due to their smaller issue sizes and free floats, making them susceptible

to manipulation at both the IPO and trading levels.

She stated, "It is relatively easy to manipulate both at the IPO level and at the trading level. I think as a first step we are clear that some more disclosures are needed in terms of the risk factors."

Feedback received by SEBI indicated that some SMEs were taking advantage of the relatively lenient oversight, prompting the implementation of surveillance measures applicable to the SME board. SEBI possesses the technological capability to monitor price movements and



subscription data, identifying evidence of manipulation and discerning certain patterns.

However, Buch noted that constructing a comprehensive case and initiating action would

require time. Malpractices have been observed not only during IPO subscriptions but also at the listing stage.

Buch expressed gratitude for the market's feedback, which has guided SEBI in identifying and addressing such cases effectively. She mentioned, "Fortunately, the market has given us feedback and advised us on, what we can do in order to identify such cases and to deal with them." Collaboration with industry stakeholders is crucial to mitigating risks inherent in this sector.

Despite numerous SME IPOs

being oversubscribed significantly in recent years, with listing gains far surpassing their issue prices, Buch refrained from providing a timeline for the implementation of disclosures, citing the early stages of the process. Any necessary actions will be taken against culpable parties based on the findings of ongoing investigations.

SEBI continues to collaborate with advisors to comprehend the dimensions and analyse the data, ensuring effective measures are implemented to safeguard market integrity and investor interests.

Glittering Gold May Spoil the Wedding Ceremony Budget



SATISH SINGH

Due to increase in the price of gold in the international market, there has been a significant increase in the price of gold in India also.

On March 5, the price of 24 carat gold crossed the level of Rs.66,000 per 10 grams, which is the highest price of gold till date. Further, the price of 10 grams of 24 carat gold was Rs 66,051 on 10th March 2024. The price of gold continues to rise in the international market. On March 5, the price of 1 ounce gold increased to \$ 2,126. Not only this, but the price of gold also increased by 2.5 per cent in 2 months of 2024. Due to the high price of gold, during 14 to 18 February, Sovereign Gold equivalent to the price of 12.8 tonnes of gold was purchased, because by investing in it, investors got more profit than gold. The price of gold per 10 grams was Rs.62,600 on February 28, Rs.63,900 on February 29, Rs.64,250 on March 1, Rs.65,200 on March 4 and Rs.66,100 on March 5. Even on March 10, the price of gold remained at Rs 66,021.

According to some of the world's leading rating agencies that estimate the price of gold, such as ABV AMRO, the price of gold may be \$ 2,000 per ounce in 2024, whereas,

according to DBS, the price of gold in 2024 may be \$ 2,050 per ounce, while According to TD Securities, the price of gold may be \$ 2,133 per ounce in 2024, while according to Citi Group, the price of gold in 2024 may be \$ 2175 per ounce and according to UBS, the price of gold in 2024 may be \$ 2,250 per ounce.

Indications show that the Federal Reserve Bank of USA may cut interest rates in May. This may lead to reduce loan and deposit rates and people will invest in gold in the hope of higher returns, which will increase the demand for gold and increase its price. There is also Akshaya Tritiya in May, in which gold is purchased in large quantities, as doing so is considered auspicious.

Lok Sabha elections in India are going to be held in the months of May and June and there is a strong possibility of Modi government coming back to power. Political stability strengthens the economy. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figures have also been better than expected. The GDP growth rate in the third quarter of the current financial year was 8.4 per cent, which is better than everyone's forecasts. India's GDP, in amount, reached Rs.41.74 lakh crore in the third quarter, increasing India's chances of becoming the world's fourth largest economy. Even in the second quarter, the GDP growth rate was 7.6 per cent.



The retail inflation rate declined to 5.10 per cent in January 2024, which was 5.72 per cent in the month of December. There will be further reduction in inflation. Having better condition of the economy, the employment situation in the country will be better and in the state of self-reliance, people may be motivated to invest in gold in the hope of higher returns.

Investors benefit from the increase in the price of gold, but difficulties increase for those who need to buy it. Nowadays it is the wedding season, and this is the need of the people in India, because in the social fabric of India, gold ornaments are given to girls in marriage. Now even men are given gold ornaments.

Since 2024 is a leap year, this year is considered auspicious for marriage. Many marriages took place on 29 February. However, the months of April, May, August, November, and December are also considered

auspicious for marriage. According to Mithila Panchang, there are a total of 32 auspicious days times for marriage in 2024.

In India, there has been a close relationship between marriage and gold jewellery since time immemorial. Marriage here is considered incomplete without gold jewellery. There is a tradition of giving jewellery to both the bride and groom during marriage. In marriage, many types of jewellery are given to the bride, while in India there is a tradition of giving gold chain, ring, bracelet etc. to the groom.

Gold is exchanged during the 16 rites of Hindu religion i.e. from birth to death. At the time of birth of a child, he or she is made to wear a gold pendant with a black thread around his waist. Even at the time of Yajnopavit Sanskar, gold ornaments are worn on the child. When bride enters the house for the first time, the mother-in-law gifts gold jewellery to

her daughter-in-law. Not only this, even at the time of death, gold is donated to a Brahmin.

For Indian women, gold is not just a jewel, but a symbol of their well-being, self-respect, and pride. Therefore, they buy gold but never sell it. Cases of selling gold jewellery are seen only in situations of crisis.

In marriage, rich and poor all give gold ornaments to their daughter as per their capacity, but now it has become a problem for the poor to give gold ornaments to their daughter in marriage, because in the last 17 years, the price of gold per 10 grams has increased. There has been a significant increase in price. The price of gold per 10 grams was Rs.10,000 on 5 May 2006, which increased to Rs.50,000 on 22 July 2020 and crossed the level of Rs.62,000 on 20 March 2023 and crossed the level of Rs.66,000 on 5 March 2024.

According to the National Statistical Office (NSO), the per capita annual income in India was Rs.33,717 in the financial year 2006-07, while the per capita annual income in the financial year 2022-23 was Rs.98,118. If we convert this annual income into per month, then the average monthly income of an Indian in the financial year 2006-07 was Rs.2,810, which will increase to Rs.8,177 per person in the financial year 2022-23. However, these figures can be considered merely an indication, as it is a figure

calculated by dividing the total income of the country by the total population.

According to an estimate, in the year 2006, an average of Rs.5 lakh to Rs.10 lakh was being spent on a wedding, of which the share of expenditure on jewellery was usually 20 to 30 per cent. Today this expenditure has increased to Rs.10 lakh to 20 lakh, but the share of expenditure on jewellery is decreasing. Due to the unprecedented increase in the price of gold in the last 17 years, the wedding budget of the lower and middle class has increased significantly, but the income has not increased comparatively as expected. However, this comparison is meaningless because the exact data of everyone's income is not available.

In such a situation, the marriage will take place during the auspicious time of marriage this year, but not everyone will be able to give jewellery to their daughters and sons-in-law as per their wish, because the Federal Reserve Bank is expected to cut policy rates in the coming months, and loan and deposit interest rates will be reduced. The price of gold may increase further in the coming months due to the possibility of continued global geopolitical crisis, disruption of supply chains globally, etc.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal

Uttar Pradesh Government offers relief to MSMEs



Rolls back of Conversion Charges for Industrial Activity

LUCKNOW: In a significant move aimed at aiding Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) unit operators, the state government of Uttar Pradesh has announced the rollback of

conversion charges imposed for industrial activities on agricultural land.

Responding to appeals from industrial bodies, the MSME department affirmed the continuity of provisions outlined in the 2017-18 policy.

With over 90 lakh MSMEs operating in the state, this decision is poised to benefit numerous unit operators who have sought permission from the 29 housing development authorities for land use conversion.

On average, one-third of the land's value is typically paid as conversion charges to the housing department.

SIDBI's CMD Ramann presents 2 valuable books to Sitharaman

FW DESK New Delhi

Union Minister of Finance, Nirmala Sitharaman, heralded for her unwavering commitment to fostering economic growth and stability, was presented with two insightful books by, Sivasubramanian Ramann, Chairman and Managing Director, SIDBI which showcased pioneering work undertaken by SIDBI.

The first book, titled Prabhaav is an Impact Study of Fund of Funds, reveals the transformative effects of fund allocation



strategies under the Start Up Fund of Funds scheme of the Govt. Through meticulous research and analysis reveals how the scheme has resulted in all-round outcomes due to the catalytic effect of the INR 10,000 crore commitment to about 100 AIFs wherein more than 5 times that amount was collected from the market.

INTERNATIONAL

PM Narendra Modi to visit Bhutan next week

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has accepted an invitation extended by his Bhutan counterpart Dashi Tshering Tobgay, on behalf of the king Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, to visit the Himalayan kingdom next week.

The two prime ministers met in the national capital on Thursday, sharing warm hugs and handshakes, and discussed a range of issues to strengthen relations between the two neighbouring nations. "On behalf of His Majesty the King of Bhutan, PM Tshering Tobgay extended invitation to Prime Minister Modi to visit Bhutan next week. Prime Minister accepted the invitation," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a release on Friday.

Both leaders reviewed the progress in various areas of



bilateral partnership, including infrastructure development, connectivity, energy, hydropower cooperation, people-to-people exchanges, and development cooperation, the MEA statement said.

Further, they reaffirmed their commitment to further bolster the "special and unique" friendship between the two countries.

PM Tobgay conveyed his

deep appreciation for India's role as a reliable, trusted, and valued partner in his nation's developmental priorities.

After meeting PM Modi, PM Tobgay wrote in a post on X handle: "Wonderful to meet my friend, Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi. I thanked him for his steadfast support to Bhutan, and we discussed a range of issues to strengthen relations between Bhutan and

India. Prime Minister Modi Ji also agreed to visit Bhutan soon... next week, in fact!"

PM Modi said he was "glad to meet" his "friend" on his first overseas visit after assuming office in February 2024, and they had "productive discussions encompassing various aspects of our unique and special partnership".

PM Modi also conveyed his "heartfelt thanks" to the King of Bhutan and Premier Tobgay for inviting him.

The two nations share warm and cordial ties, based on trust, goodwill, and mutual understanding at all levels.

Earlier this week, the Union Cabinet, chaired by PM Modi, gave its approval for the signing of three MOUs between India and Bhutan, covering the supply of petroleum products, energy efficiency, and cooperation in food safety measures.

Florida judge denies Trump's motion to dismiss classified documents case



The US district judge in Florida overseeing the federal criminal case regarding former President Donald Trump's handling of classified documents has rejected one of his two motions to dismiss the case.

Judge Aileen M. Cannon issued the ruling on Thursday shortly after the completion of a daylong hearing on Trump's

requests to dismiss the case, which Trump attended Xinhua news agency reported.

A "motion to dismiss charges" is a legal request

made by a defendant in a criminal case to have the charges against them dismissed. If the motion is granted by the court, the charges are dropped, and the case does not proceed to trial. However, if the motion is denied, the case will continue through the legal process.

Trump's legal team argued that the majority of the charges should be dismissed based on

the Presidential Records Act, a 1978 law which regulates the preservation of information during and after a presidency, contending that the law prevents Trump from being prosecuted.

Trump's lawyers cited other cases where presidents were discovered to have kept classified information and also referenced Special Counsel Robert Hur's choice not to prosecute President Joe Biden for classified material he retained after his vice presidency.

Trump has also asserted that he designated the materials he removed to Mar-a-Lago as personal records while he was still in office, an argument refuted by the office of Special Counsel Jack Smith, who has been investigating Trump.

US House passes TikTok crackdown law



WASHINGTON: The US House of Representatives on Wednesday passed legislation with an overwhelming bipartisan vote that could lead to the banning of the popular social media platform TikTok.

The fate of the app, which is used monthly by 170 million Americans, now rests with the Senate where some lawmakers have vowed to prevent the law's speedy passage. President Joe Biden, who will have the final say, has said he will sign it into law. The legislation passed with 352 affirmative votes to 65 negative and one vote marked as present. It was introduced by the bipartisan duo of Mike Gallagher, a Republican, and Raja Krishnamoorthi, a Democrat, who head the select committee on China as the chair and ranking member, respectively.

"Today we send a clear message that we will not tolerate our adversaries weaponizing our freedoms against us," said Cathy McMorris Rodgers, the Republican chair of the House Commerce Committee who advanced the TikTok bill. The legislation requires TikTok's parent company ByteDance, which is based in China and is alleged to have links to the Chinese government, to divest its stake in the company within 180 days of the enactment of the law.

Failure to meet the deadline would bar TikTok from the app stores of Apple and Google. The app had mounted a vigorous campaign to defeat the legislation through appeals from its users and influencers. Former President Donald Trump, who had met an American investor in TikTok, famously changed his position and came out in opposition to any effort to ban the app arguing it would make Facebook stronger, which he believes is a bigger threat.

Announcement of teaching Punjabi in schools of Pakistan Punjab is commendable: Dhami



JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

The Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) President Harjinder Singh Dhami has welcomed the announcement made by the newly elected Chief Minister (CM) of Punjab in Pakistan, Maryam Nawaz, regarding the teaching of Punjabi in schools of the state.

Dhmi said that Punjabi is the mother tongue of the people of Punjab in India and Pakistan, which is very important to be taught to the new generation. He said that any community cannot succeed after being separated from its mother tongue and also misses the heritage of its ancestors.

U.S.-China Green Institute Celebrates New Milestone in Agricultural Cooperation

FW DESK
New York

The U.S.-China Green Institute (USCGI) announces the signing of a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which formalizes the relationship between the Iowa-based World Food Prize Foundation and the Peoples Republic of China. Signatories to the MOU are the World Food Prize Foundation (WFPF), the China Friendship Foundation for Peace and Development (CFFPD), and the U.S.-China Green Institute. The US and China have cooperated well on agricultural issues for many years but this is the first formal relationship with the World Food Prize which is considered the "Noble Prize of Agriculture."

At a ceremony held on December 5, 2023, former U.S. Ambassador to China and Chairman of the World Food Prize Foundation, Terry Branstad, along with Jonathan Krane, CEO of KraneShares, and Longshe Wang, Secretary General of the China Friendship Foundation for Peace and Development (CFFPD), commemorated the deepening ties and shared commitment to food safety and sustainable agriculture.



The MOU outlines a commitment to establish a collaborative accelerator for sustainable agriculture initiatives, conduct exchange programs for government officials, students, and industry leaders, and revitalize the 2012 U.S.-China Agricultural Summit to enhance cooperation across the agricultural sector.

Ambassador Branstad, in his remarks to the CFFPD, reflected on the longstanding relationship between Iowa and China, and the importance of continued engagement and cooperation in addressing global food security challenges. He noted the unique and personal ties Iowa has with China, including the early visit of President Xi Jinping to the State.

"This agreement is a testament to the enduring partnership and mutual respect between our two nations," stated Ambassador Branstad. "It paves the way for a future where innovation and collaboration in agriculture can flourish, ensuring we can meet the pressing demands of global food security together."

Jonathan Krane, Chair of the USCGI, added, "The signing of this MOU is a commitment to cooperation and a step forward in our mission to foster meaningful dialogue and action on climate change and sustainability. We are excited about the opportunities this will create for the United States and China."

The U.S.-China Green Institute is a prominent non-profit organization dedicated to fostering collaboration between the U.S. and China on climate change and green initiatives. The Institute's mission is to ensure continued constructive engagement between the two superpowers in addressing the climate crisis.

The World Food Prize Foundation (WFPF), established by Nobel laureate Dr. Norman E. Borlaug and led by current president Terry Branstad, is dedicated to championing solutions to global food security challenges.

Palestinian death toll in Gaza exceeds 31,000: Health Ministry



GAZA: The Palestinian death toll in the Gaza Strip from the ongoing Israeli attacks exceeded 31,000, the Hamas-run Health Ministry said in a press statement.

During the past 24 hours, the Israeli army killed 85 Palestinians and wounded 130 others in various areas in the coastal enclave, bringing the total death toll to 31,045 and injuries to 72,654, according to the statement released on Sunday.

The statement noted that

some victims remain under the rubble amid heavy bombardment and a lack of civil defence and ambulance crews, Xinhua news agency reported.

Israel has been launching a large-scale offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip to retaliate against the group's rampage through the southern Israeli border on October 7, 2023, during which about 1,200 people were killed and more than 240 were taken hostage.

Stalemate in West Asia, NATO's Involvement in European War, New Delhi is Worried



GOPAL MISRA
With Sweden finally joining NATO, the prospects of an early peace in Europe appear to have faded for the time being. Even an early ceasefire is being ruled out. It is hoped that due to the mounting pressure of the Russian forces, now occupying about 25 percent of Ukraine, may halt the unnecessary ongoing fratricide. It is also being stated Russia too is keen to end the war. It may not like to convert it into a perennial animosity in the region.

The US voters will be choosing a new president in coming November, whether they decide to renew a next term to the Democratic Party nominee, Joe Biden, or the irrepressible Donald Trump of the Republican Party allowing him to repeat his stormy presence in the Whitehouse. Next nine months are going to be crucial for world peace. Either of them, who will be holding the mighty office of the US presidency for next four years, do not offer any solace to the allies as well as strategic partners, including India. For the democratic world the year 2024 continues to be a mirthless bleak period as well as coming years too is expected to be equally challenging and controversial. With the domestic issue regarding illegal immigrants dominating during the election campaign, few expect any substantial American policy initiative in the challenging contemporary geo-political issues. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, Israel-Hamas conflict, and the security issues of India-Pacific have been relegated to the contemporary political debates in the USA.

President Joe Biden, 81, maybe in his effort to salvage the image of his administration suffering from perennial slow response to the growing Chinese threat, boldly mentions in his final State of the Union Address about US-India cooperation in a world increasingly facing China's expansionist policies. Meanwhile, India quietly deploys her troops

on India-Tibet borders amidst the reports that Dragon might invade Indian territories from the Tibet side. India has not stated anything about the troops movements, but the Chinese foreign ministry has criticized the replacement of Indian forces estimated to be 10,000 on the India-Tibet border. The Chinese spokesman has claimed that the troop movement is not "conducive to easing tensions", but it did not say why it has not reduced its presence on the Ladakh-Tibet border despite agreements and why during the past four a large number of Chinese soldiers are being deployed in the region.

Amidst these developments in the world's most powerful democracy, USA, perhaps, still the only Super Power on the earth, China appears to have been quietly and successfully expanding its influence in the regions of West Asia region, Arabian Sea as well in the Indo-Pacific. With Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, having close ties with Beijing as well as the country's army, now firmly saddled in Pakistan, China has become more assertive in the countries of Arabian Sea and the Gulf. Apart from having close ties with Iran and Pakistan, it has recently inked defence ties with the island nation, Male. The Chinese have succeeded in conspiring against India Male by successfully ousting the erstwhile pro-Indian government. Earlier, Beijing had played Good Samaritan by helping Saudi Arabia to renew its diplomatic ties with Iran. With this new 'avatar' of the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, as the 'peace-keeper' in West Asia, American influence has already started fading. Meanwhile, the US forces have so far failed to tackle the Houthi attacks on cargo ships. These terrorists supporting Hamas in the ongoing conflict with Israel are known to be getting both financial and military support from Iran, a close ally of China.

New Delhi Worried

It is not surprising that this walkover to Dragon in the world politics, especially in India's neighbourhood, has dismayed the mandarins managing India's vital



strategic interests in the South Block, the headquarters of the two key ministries, Defence and External Affairs under the overall umbrella of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The strategic affairs scholars in New Delhi do not expect any spectacular initiative from Washington in the ever-challenging geo-politics, except for some noisy rhetoric in 2024.

The present lame-duck Biden administration, which is known for its perennial non-performance in geo-politics since its inauguration in 2020, is expected to remain non-functional during 2024, perhaps, insulated from the ongoing developments in world politics. It, however, may trumpet its achievement in Europe by enrolling Sweden to NATO, or giving an indirect entry to Ukraine to the defence alliance by signing 10-year agreements for extending military and financial support with other NATO partners to the war-ravaged country, but in reality, it has ceased to be the peace-keeper on the earth.

With little hope of immediate end to the European conflict between Russia and Ukraine, peace continues to be elusive in West Asia. The possibility of any immediate cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas is being ruled out. The delay in initiating the peace process has triggered the apprehension that the US establishment is pursuing a 19th. century British agenda against the Russian empire. It is getting more and more pronounced with each passing day. Interestingly, Beijing is not directly involved in these two conflicts, yet it is quietly pursuing its global agenda worldwide. The conflicts in Europe and West Asia have reinvigorated its impe-

rial agenda, especially when the leadership in Washington fails to pick up the gauntlet, the growing Chinese threat to world peace.

The War Agenda

Eleven years ago, an article published by a Chinese website, Sohu, in 2013, continues to remind India and other countries in South Asia about Dragon's strategic designs in the region. The website, believed to be sponsored by the Communist Party of China (CPC), talks about Beijing's ambitious plans to reconquer lost territories which include Taiwan and India's border state, Arunachal. During the first week of March, the Houthi attack on a cargo ship in West Asia killing crews from the Philippines and Vietnam and the inability of the US-led western powers to restore peace in the region could be attributed to the secret support the terrorists got from China through Iran.

The Chinese foreign office has rejected the allegation that the website has any official support, but it may be noted that Sohu is a Beijing-based online media, search engine, and game service company that has promoted Chinese government propaganda for years. The tech company was chosen as the official sponsor of Internet Content Service for the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games.

Apart from its ambitious plans to subjugate South Asia and the Gulf, Beijing is also directly hitting American interests in Southern and Central America. Much to the annoyance of Washington, China has recently signed long-term oil-purchase deals with Venezuela ignoring American sanctions. It has also rescheduled its loans estimated to be USD

10 billion. In 2023, it had also accorded a warm welcome to the Venezuelan ruler, President Nicolas Maduro during his visit to China.

A number of Indian strategic affairs experts such as Brahma Chellany are convinced that despite Beijing dismissing its war plans revealed in the website, India and Taiwan might face massive Chinese aggression anytime. India might have to face a major aggression from China; perhaps, much bigger than what she had faced during the 1962 and 1967 conflicts.

Chinese Propaganda

With huge investments from the US-led West during the past three decades, China has already become an economic Super Power. In spite of its huge trade ties with the West, it pumps billions of the US dollars in Iran and openly supports Russia in the ongoing European War. With the recent inability, if not its failure, the USA's weakness is being exposed in ending the West Asian conflict; it has also enabled China to emerge as the most influential player of geopolitics in the region.

When Beijing says "Taiwan has always been an inalienable part of China" and calls this "an indisputable legal and historical fact," it promotes a claim that has absolutely no basis in international law or history, but by aggressively stating that claim time and again over the years, it has made many in the world believe that fiction, especially when the dominant Western media outlets are reluctant to challenge the Chinese narrative. Earlier, Biden during his tenure as the Vice-President of the USA had abandoned Tibet and been to the disputed region to meet his then counter-part, Xi Jinping, now president. It will be a matter of little surprise that in the wake of the Chinese invasion, the USA may just be making statements and threatening with its "ineffective" sanctions. Earlier, China's unilateral abolition of the democratic system in Hong Kong was meekly accepted by the West.

The process of abandoning

Taiwan appears to have already begun with the western media, including some international publications now use the phrase "reunify" without quotation marks while referring to Beijing's Taiwan goal. It may be noted that Taiwan, for most of its history, had no relationship with China and has remained fully outside Chinese control for the last 129 years since 1895 when, following defeat in the First Sino-Japanese War, China's Manchu-run Qing government signed the Treaty of Shimonoseki that ceded Taiwan to Japan.

While Taiwan remained under Japanese colonial rule until 1945, Japan officially renounced its sovereignty over it only in the 1951 San Francisco Peace Treaty, but without the transferee being identified. In recent years, between 2017 and 2023, Beijing has renamed a number of places in India's northern state, Arunachal Pradesh, which is almost three times larger than Taiwan. Beijing has already ignored Indian protest, contending that Arunachal Pradesh is its own "territory" and Sincizing names of places there is "China's sovereign right."

The Indian worries about the Chinese agenda have further increased due to the decline of the US interests in geo-politics and its leaders succumbing to Chinese rhetoric. China, under President Xi Jinping has been claiming territories in Asia on the basis of an ingenious principle — "what is ours is ours and what is yours is negotiable."

In fact, as the mythical Middle Kingdom, China claims to be the mother of all civilizations, weaving legend with history to claim a dual historical entitlement — to recover "lost" lands and become a world power second to none. This helps to rationalize its muscular foreign policy, which seeks to make real the legend that drives the CCP's revisionist history — China's centrality in the world.

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

Asif Ali Zardari elected Pakistan 14th President

ISLAMABAD: PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari was elected as the 14th president of Pakistan on Saturday, defeating the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf-backed Sunni Ittehad Council candidate Mahmood Khan Achakzai.

Asif Ali Zardari secured 411 votes while Mahmood Khan Achakzai bagged only 181, Geo News reported.

Asif Ali Zardari, 68, is the husband of slain Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto and father of former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

Asif Ali Zardari, who served as President from 2008 to 2013, was supported by the coalition government led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

The new president would replace Arif Alvi, whose five-year term ended last year. However,



Arif Alvi continued since the new electoral college was not yet formed.

Earlier in the day, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said Asif Ali Zardari, who is a presidential candidate, will once again become president. In a post on X, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said, "Sardar bana that Zardari, phir sadar banega Zardari. Dam mast Qalandar Zardari."

Australian EdTech Trade Mission to India a resounding success: Kennedy

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

The Australian EdTech Trade Mission to India 2024 recently has been a resounding success in creating a unique platform for Australian companies to explore the Indian market and establish connections, an official said.

Dr Monica Kennedy, Senior Trade and Investment Commissioner at Austrade, noted that the engagement and partnerships formed during this mission are testament to the synergies between the Australian and Indian EdTech sectors.

The Edtech Trade Mission 2024 has laid a solid foundation for future collaboration between Australian and Indian EdTech innovators, she said, adding that the Australian EdTech firms are well-positioned to meet the increasing demands in India for innova-



tive educational solutions. "Austrade remains committed to supporting Australian companies in navigating the Indian market and seizing the opportunities for growth and collaboration that lie ahead," she said.

The Mission's highlight was its participation in the India Digital Summit 2024 (IDS) in Mumbai on February 27-28, which offered Australian delegates invaluable networking opportunities.

From Reita Faria to Manushi Chhillar, Indians who've been crowned Miss World

NEW DELHI: Over the decades, six Indian divas who have won the coveted title have gone on to carve out notable paths in different fields such as cinema, modelling and even healthcare, and have also become advocates for women empowerment.

From the first Indian Miss World, Reita Faria, to Aishwarya Rai, who won the title 28 years later, to Priyanka Chopra Jonas and most recently, Manushi Chhillar, each winner has transcended the realm of beauty pageants and become icons of grace, talent and social impact.

Reita Faria Powell: The first Indian woman to win the title in 1966, Faria, who is from Mumbai and now lives in Dublin, pursued a career in medicine and went on to become a successful doctor.

In the 1966 pageant, which was held at the Lyceum Ballroom in London, she won the sub-titles 'Best in Swimsuit' and 'Best in Evening Wear' dressed in a saree. She later ventured into public health and has been involved in initiatives promoting healthcare and education in India. Faria lives with her husband, endocrinologist David Powell. The couple have two daughters.

Aishwarya Rai Bachchan: Crowned Miss World in 1994 (in the same year when Sushmita Sen became Miss Universe), Aishwarya has established herself as one of the most successful actresses in the Indian film industry, besides being



the face of L'Oreal and a regular on the Cannes red carpet. In 2022, she experienced a rebirth of sorts with Mani Rathnam's two-part Tamil historical drama, 'Ponniyin Selvan'. She is a recipient of the Padma Shri and has also been awarded the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French President. Aishwarya is married to actor Abhishek Bachchan, which makes her the daughter-in-law of Amitabh Bachchan, and has a daughter named Aaradhya.

Diana Hayden: Winner of Miss World 1997, Diana comes from Hyderabad, studied acting at the Royal

Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA), and has had a diverse career spanning modelling, acting, and presenting television shows. She was the wild card entry in the second season of the reality show 'Bigg Boss'. She is the author of 'The Beautiful Truth', an encyclopaedia on grooming and personality development.

Married to American businessman, Diana had a baby girl in 2016 at the rather late age of 43 from an egg she had got frozen eight years before the birth of the child.

Yukta Mookhey: After winning the Miss World title in 1999, Yukta

ventured into acting in Bollywood films, but she hasn't made much of a headway. She has worked in not-so-popular movies such as 'Pyasa', 'Katputli', 'Memsahab: Lost In A Mirage', and was most recently in the 2019 film 'Good Newwz' with Karishma Kapoor, Akshay Kumar and Kiara Advani.

Priyanka Chopra: Winner of Miss World 2000, Priyanka became one of the highest paid Bollywood actresses and went on to win two National Film Awards. She is also a recipient of the Padma Shri.

She has starred in a number of Bollywood film, her most notable appearance being in 'Don 2' with Shah Rukh Khan, sung with American rapper Pitbull, became sought-after in Hollywood with her appearance in the FBI drama series, 'Quantico', and is now in the news because of her human rights advocacy, counting among her friends people like Malala Yousofzai and feminist writer Gloria Steinem. She is married to American pop star Nick Jonas and the couple have a baby girl named Malti Marie.

Manushi Chhillar: Crowned Miss World 17 years after Priyanka, Manushi from Haryana was pursuing her MBBS degree (her parents are doctors) when life took a dramatic turn for her. Abandoning her dream to become a doctor, Manushi prepared herself for Bollywood and made her debut alongside Akshay Kumar in 'Samrat Prithviraj'.

Singer Diljit chills with residents of Kinnaur, practises pahadi jhumar dance steps

MUMBAI: Singer and actor Diljit Dosaanjh, who is all geared up for the release of two of his Hindi films 'Crew', and 'Amar Singh Chamkila', recently visited Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, and danced with the locals on the folk song.

The 'Patiala Peg' fame singer took to his Instagram account and shared a string of pictures and videos with the locals, who are wearing traditional Kinnauri topi. Diljit is donning a black sweater and matching joggers. The look was rounded off with an orange pagri and black boots. The photos show him joining hands in gratitude in front of the people. A video features the 'Gabru Nu' singer dancing with the locals on a mountainous road, and he is seen saying 'happy Mahashivratri' to everyone. "I did a different dance form today.. pahadi jhumar. I don't know



the lyrics.. but I did the dance," Diljit said. The post is captioned: "LOVE", followed by a red heart emoji. The fans took to the comment section and wrote: "Hope you loved the hospitality of Kinnauris". One user said: "So you're enjoying one of the best cultures in India". Another commented: "Bro its Kinnauri dance love you". A fan said: "Kinnouri vibes". Meanwhile, Diljit will be seen as the titular character in the upcoming biopic 'Amar Singh Chamkila', directed by Imtiaz Ali.

After Armaan Malik, Ed Sheeran does SRK's iconic pose with the man himself

MUMBAI: British singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran, who is set to perform in Mumbai on March 16, struck the iconic Shah Rukh Khan pose yet again and this time, he was joined by the Bollywood megastar himself.

Earlier, he shook a leg with his friend Armaan Malik.

Both SRK and Ed Sheeran took to their respective Instagram accounts and shared a video post, with the caption reading: "This is the Shape Of Us spreading love".

In the video, SRK was seen in a loose shirt with a paper-cutting print which he paired with ripped jeans and sneakers. Ed Sheeran wore black pants and a marble print sweatshirt which he paired with his Jordans.

They played the song 'Deewangi Deewangi' from the SRK-starrer 'Om Shanti Om'.

As soon as the two shared the post on the photo-sharing app,



their fans flooded the comments section awestruck by their camaraderie. SRK's friend and Director-choreographer Farah Khan, who directed 'Om Shanti Om', wrote in the comments, "If this was the last thing I directed I'll die happy (sic)".

Incidentally, Farah Khan's picture from Ed Sheeran's last outing in India, back in 2017 went viral leaving netizens amused as the 'Main Hoon Na' director was seen in high spirits along with her 'Happy New Year' actor, Abhishek Bachchan.

'Pehle stomach burn, ab abs ka turn', Sara Ali Khan drops workout video

MUMBAI: Actress Sara Ali Khan, who recently sustained a burn injury on her belly, has shared a workout video in which she could be seen doing abs burnout exercises. Sara, who is currently gearing up for the release of her two films -- 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' and 'Murder Mubarak' -- had suffered a minor burn injury on March 6 when she accidentally spilled hot coffee on her belly while she was busy with promotional activities.

The actress, known for her work in 'Kedarnath', took to Instagram on Wednesday where she shared a Reel video. The snippet shows Sara in light blue shorts and a matching



sports top, working out hard in the gym, flaunting her toned abs. "Pehle stomach burn... Ab abs ka turn... You gotta work so you can earn... the sarso ka saag for which you

yearn...," Sara captioned the post. The video has already garnered 1.3 million views, with fans showering a love on Sara. Directed by Kannan Iyer, 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' also features Sachin Khedekar, Abhay Verma, Sparsh Shrivastav, Alex O'Neil, and Anand Tiwari in key roles, with Emraan Hashmi making a special appearance. Produced by Karan Johar, Apoorva Mehta, and Somen Mishra, 'Ae Watan Mere Watan' is set to premiere on Prime Video on March 21. On the other hand, 'Murder Mubarak' also stars Vijay Varma, Karisma Kapoor, Pan-kaj Tripathi, Dimple Kapadia, and Sanjay Kapoor.

Daler Mehndi's son Gurdeep gets ready to walk on his father's lyrical path

MUMBAI: Gurdeep Mehndi, the son of Punjabi music legend Daler Mehndi, is set to take a flight into the mainstream music space.

The young singer said that he is eager to start creating his own music as he embarks on a new journey. Gurdeep is known for his ability to deliver electrifying live performances and enthrall audiences. The singer has been signed by music label Saregama India Ltd. as part of their artiste management roster, and is set to release his originals in May 2024.

Talking about the same, Gurdeep shared: "This marks a pivotal moment in my career.



I'm eager to start creating my own music with a label that's not only revered for its historical significance but also for its reliability and credibility in the music industry. This collabora-

tion opens up new avenues for growth and creativity, and I am looking forward to what we will achieve together."

Speaking on the announcement Siddharth Anand Kumar,

Senior VP of Films & Events at Saregama shared: "We are thrilled to welcome Gurdeep to the Saregama family. Our extensive network in the music industry and expertise in artist management will most definitely help us in charting out a new growth trajectory for him. We are committed to not only investing in content for such artists who have great potential across various genres and languages, but also have dedicated teams to build their brand, grow business potential through brand endorsements, more live shows and tours. We look forward to Gurdeep's pioneering journey with us."

Czech beauty Krystyna Pyszkova crowned 71st Miss World

MUMBAI: Krystyna Pyszkova of the Czech Republic was crowned the 71st Miss World at a glittering ceremony co-hosted by filmmaker and celebrity talk show host Karan Johar in Mumbai on last Saturday night.

Krystyna was crowned by Miss World 2023, Karolina Bielawska of Poland. The beauty pageant returned to India after 28 years. It was last held in Bengaluru in 1996.

The Czech beauty edged out Yasmina Zaytoun of Lebanon, Ache Abrahams of Trinidad and Tobago, and Lesego Chombo of Botswana to win the title. Miss India (and Mumbai girl) Sini Shetty could make it only to the Top 8.

Shetty's answer to the competition question in the Top 8 stage did not impress the judges and resulted her in being ousted from the competition.

She was asked how social media can be instrumental in the empowerment of women.

Sini said social media had the power to change the world and that it had led to an increasing participation of women across different fields. She added that



social media can make the world march towards progress.

As many as 40 contestants from around the world were chosen for the grand finale out of the 112 who participated in the event.

The grand finale turned out to be a star-studded event as it saw Bollywood actresses Kriti Sanon, Pooja Hegde (both served on the panel of judges), Manushi Chhillar (the last Indian woman to be crowned Miss World in 2017) and Sonakshi Sinha (who spoke at the event) as well as Hindi pop stars Shaan and Neha and Tony

Kakkar (who put up electrifying performances), reality TV specialists Shiv Thakare and Mannara Chopra, and even Test cricketer-turned-Rajya Sabha MP Harbhajan Singh.

The leading ladies of the upcoming Sanjay Leela Bhansali web series 'Bazaar': The Diamond Hezar' -- Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Richa Chadha, Sanjeeda Shaikh and Sharmin Segal -- also made an appearance on a deferred live broadcast. The first track of the series, 'Sakal Ban', released on Saturday was also played at the venue.

Hockey India unveils ground-breaking program to cultivate next generation of drag-flickers & goalkeepers

*FORMER NATIONAL STARS WILL LEAD THE INITIATIVE TO IDENTIFY & TRAIN YOUNG TALENT ACROSS INDIA

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Hockey India, the apex body for the sport in the country, has announced a ground-breaking initiative aimed at investing in the future of Indian hockey through specialized coaching targeting young drag-flickers and goalkeepers across the nation.

This strategic decision follows a pivotal meeting convened to discuss the crucial aspects of Goalkeeping & Drag Flicking Coaching at the grassroots level. The meeting saw the participation of eminent former India goalkeepers including Adrian D'Souza, Bharat Chetri, Yogita Bali, Helen Mary, Dipika Murty, Akash Chikte, PT Rao, along with illustrious former India drag-flickers Rupinder Pal Singh, Jugraj Singh, VR Raghunath, and Gurjinder Singh.

The esteemed officials of Hockey India, including President Dr Dilip Tirkey, Secretary General Shri Bhola Nath Singh, Treasurer Mr Sekar Manoharan, and High-Performance Director Mr Herman Kruijs, also lent their invaluable insights to the deliberations, joining the meeting virtually.

The newly unveiled initiative places a paramount emphasis on nurturing talent at the grassroots level, with a focused approach towards identifying and honing gifted players in the pivotal positions of drag-flickers and goalkeepers.



By fostering a nurturing environment from an early age, Hockey India aims to fortify the talent pipeline for the nation's prestigious hockey teams.

Key highlights of the program include

Formation of Talent Pool: Hockey India will assemble a dedicated pool of former goalkeepers and drag-flickers. These seasoned athletes will be deployed to premier national

academies across India to conduct intensive 3-day training sessions.

"Identification and Specialized Training:" Following the training sessions, the former players will meticulously identify young talents exhibiting exceptional promise. These identified athletes will receive specialized attention and training from Hockey India, tailored to enhance their skills and nurture their potential.

Support and Compensation: Recognizing the invaluable contribution of the former players, Hockey India will provide compensation for their time and efforts. Additionally, the organization will

extend support to cover any incidental expenses, including accommodation and travel arrangements.

Speaking on the initiative, Rupinder Pal Singh said, "This initiative is truly remarkable, providing young talents with invaluable learning opportunities as they glean insights and refine their skills under our guidance. Moreover, it presents a wonderful chance for us to pass down the wisdom accumulated through years of experience, nurturing the next generation of hockey stars and fostering a culture of mentorship and growth."

Also, Helen Mary comment-

ed, "This initiative marks a significant step forward in goalkeeper development and for nurturing future drag-flickers. It's particularly beneficial for aspiring grassroots goalkeepers and players of all genders. The pathway from sub-juniors to juniors and ultimately the national team is now clearer, sparking excitement among coaches to witness the progress of all age groups. This promises to be a promising journey ahead."

Meanwhile, Bharat Chetri also expressed his thoughts on the brilliant move by Hockey India and said, "As a former India goalkeeper, I applaud Hockey India for spearheading this transformative initiative. Investing in grassroots development is pivotal for the long-term success of Indian hockey. By focusing on crucial positions like goalkeeping from the grassroots level, Hockey India is laying a sturdy foundation for our national teams. This program not only nurtures talent but also instills a sense of pride and passion for the sport among youngsters, ensuring a steady supply of skilled players for years to come. I believe this initiative will be instrumental in shaping the future of Indian hockey and elevating our teams to greater heights on the global stage."

LFW x FDCI: Sara Ali Khan to walk the ramp for designer Varun Chakkilam

MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Sara Ali Khan will be seen strutting the ramp and flaunting designer Varun Chakkilam's latest collection Lenora as the showstopper.

Sara will be walking on March 16 for the designer's collection, presenting an opulent ode to the splendour of light, marrying classic contours with botanical embellishments and sumptuous fabrics. The colour palette for the show will range from greys, burnt coppers and earthy russet browns. The silhouettes will feature fusion of antiquated artistry such as aari and luminous glass beadwork with contemporary forms.

Mrunal Thakur to speak at UN panel on human cost of conflict-related sexual violence

MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Mrunal Thakur, who is known for her roles in Sita Ramam, Hi Nanna, Dhamaka and others, is set to participate in a panel discussion titled Human Cost of Conflict Related Sexual Violence.

The panel is set to be hosted at the UN Headquarters in New York on Thursday, and the actress will attend the event virtually owing to her work commitments.

Mrunal's work in Love Sonia brought her a lot of acclaim, as the film sheds light on the grim reality of human trafficking. The panel aims to explore the global context and impact of sexual violence in conflict zones, including human trafficking. Mrunal's presence adds significant weight to the discussion, given her portrayal of the harrowing experiences faced by victims of trafficking in Love Sonia.

Expressing her anticipation



for the event, Mrunal said in a statement, "Being a part of this panel discussion is a profound honour for me. Love Sonia was not just a film; it was a journey into the darkest corners of humanity, shedding light on the unimaginable suffering endured by victims of human trafficking. Through my role, I had an opportunity to delve deep into the complexities of this issue, and it has since become a cause that is close to my heart."