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ROAD SHOW IN AMRITSAR BY CHIEF MINISTER BHAGWANT MANN IN FAVOR OF AAP CANDIDATE

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INDIAN ONLINE CONSUMER SPENDING PREDICTED TO REACH USD 300 BN BY 2031

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PADMA SHRI RECIPIENT PRAN SABHARWAL A HOUSEHOLD NAME IN PUNJAB THEATRE

Amritpal Singh's family meets him at Dibrugarh Central Jail

GUWAHATI: Family members of President 'Waris Punjab De' Amritpal Singh met him in Assam's Dibrugarh jail on Thursday, officials said.

This came the day after his lawyer announced that Amritpal Singh would contest the Lok Sabha polls from the Khadoor Sahib constituency in Punjab.

According to officials, Amritpal Singh's father Tarsem Singh, uncle Sukhchain Singh, wife Kirandeep Kaur, and other family members arrived in Dibrugarh early in the morning, and some of them went to meet him at the Central Jail later in the day.

The jail officials mentioned that the visitors of Amritpal Singh underwent a comprehensive security check at the gate, and they were allowed to meet him after the necessary



paperwork.

Amritpal Singh's family travelled with Amarjit Singh, the father of one of Singh's close aides, Papal Preet Singh.

Rajdev Singh Khalsa, Amritpal Singh's lawyer, met him on Wednesday in the Dibrugarh



jail and asked him to contest the Lok Sabha polls. "I met Amritpal Singh and during our meeting, I asked him to fight Lok Sabha elections from Khadoor Sahib. He agreed to this proposal and intends to fight the elections as an

independent candidate." Amritpal Singh, the chief of the 'Waris Punjab De' outfit, was arrested in April last year and he, along with nine of his associates, is currently lodged in Dibrugarh jail under the stringent NSA.

Amritpal Singh to contest LS polls from Khadoor Sahiab as a independent candidate

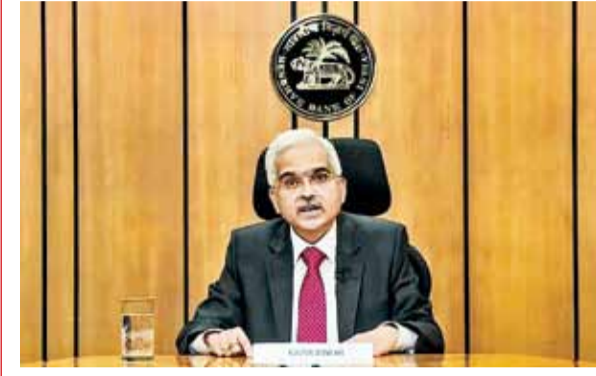
JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Balwinder Kaur mother of Waris Punjab De (outfit) Head, Amritpal Singh here today confirmed that her son would contest Parliament elections from the Khadoor Sahib Constituency.

Talking to the media here today, Kaur said that her son has agreed to contest election as an independent candidate from the Khadoor Sahib Lok Sabha seat.

However, Amritpal Singh presently lodged in Dibrugarh jail in Assam under the (NSA) National Security Act, after his arrest by the Punjab police last year. Earlier, Amritpal's counsel Rajdev Singh Khalsa had said that he would contest as an Independent from the Khadoor Sahib seat but family members were reluctant to confirm it.

India needs 8-10% growth for a decade to reap demographic dividend: RBI



NEW DELHI: India's economy must grow at a pace of 8-10 per cent per annum over the next ten years to fully capitalise on its favorable demographic dividend, according to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

Conditions are ripe for India to extend its recent run of real GDP growth exceeding 8 per cent during 2021-24, the RBI noted.

An SBI report projects India's GDP growth for the current fiscal year to approach 8 per cent. However, the RBI cautions that India's development strategy must laser-focus on maximising the contribution of its young, expanding labor force to drive produc-

tivity gains. Leveraging this demographic bonus is critical for India to escape the middle-income trap.

With the working-age population projected to swell by 9.7 million annually through 2031 and 4.2 million per year in the subsequent decade, enhancing labor quality will be paramount, the bulletin stated. Although labor quality growth has been sluggish historically, there are signs of improvement since 2017-18.

RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patra highlighted India's «striking» demographic contrast with an aging world, underpinning the country's multi-decade growth runway.

However, the RBI warned that extreme weather events, geopolitical tensions rolling oil markets, and food price uncertainties pose risks to the disinflation process. Securing enduring price stability remains crucial for sustained high growth.

Cong-INDI alliance's 'hidden agenda' is to snatch rights of SC, ST, OBC and give to Muslims : JP Nadda



NEW DELHI: Launching a scathing attack against the Congress and INDIA bloc, BJP National President J. P. Nadda on Friday said the opposition's "hidden agenda" is to "snatch" the rights of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST) and other backward classes and give them to Muslims. Appeasement politics of the opposition is evident in the Congress Manifesto, the BJP president said. He added, "BJP does not want Muslims to be neglected, but they should not take undue advantage at the expense of other communities."

"The Congress says that Muslims have the first right to the country's resources, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi says that they belong to the poor," he added. "In December 2006, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's remark on Muslims having the first right to the country's resources was not inadvertent. It was an intentional statement as during a press conference in April 2009, while replying to a question in Mumbai, Manmohan Singh once again justified and reiterated his statement and said that minorities, especially Muslims, should be given priority, and they should have first right to the country's resources," he said.

PM Modi takes opposition to cleaners on EVMs, once again

NEWDELHI: Calling it a "historic day", Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday lauded the Supreme Court's decision to dismiss a batch of petitions seeking mandatory cross-verification of the votes cast in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) with Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) slips.

The SC decision came just as PM Modi was addressing a series of election rallies in Bihar and West Bengal.

Urging the opposition INDIA bloc leaders to offer an apology for doubting the integrity of the country's electoral process, PM Modi said they committed the sin of "creating distrust" against EVMs.

"Today, the Supreme Court has delivered a massive blow to those who plan to loot the ballot boxes... Their dreams have been shattered. The Supreme Court has made it clear today that the era of ballot paper will not return now," said PM Modi.

"Today, when the entire world praises India's democracy, its electoral process, and the use of technology in the poll process, these people, for their personal interests, raise questions about the EVMs with malice. They have constantly tried to undermine democracy. But, the Supreme Court has delivered a tight slap to them today. Every leader in the INDIA alliance should apologise to the people of the country," he added.

This is not the first time that PM Modi has slammed the opposition parties for questioning the EVMs.



Soon after winning the public mandate for the second consecutive time in 2019, PM Modi highlighted the role of EVMs, saying that everyone now talks about the percentage increase in voting instead of discussing incidents of booth capturing and looting that were normal in the past. "I want to tell the nation that for the first time in 1977, the discussion on EVMs had started. At that time, we were nowhere in politics. It was first used in 1982. We were not there even in 1988. The dignitaries at that time from this very House had approved it lawfully."

"They had framed the law. Moreover, under the leadership of the Congress in 1992, all the rules related to the EVMs were made. Like they kept saying - 'we did this, we did that'; this too was done by you. Now you have lost. That's why you are crying." Prime Minister Modi said in his reply to the motion of thanks on the President's address in the Rajya Sabha on June 26, 2019. PM Modi also mentioned

that the opposition parties have time and again tried to derail the election process and create disbelief in the minds of the voters.

"In 2017, there was a huge uproar regarding EVMs. Then, the Election Commission stepped forward and challenged the protesters to come forward and prove the EVMs wrong. But not a single party crying over the EVMs went to the Election Commission. The NCP and the CPI went to the Election Commission but they didn't question the EVMs. They just tried to know how the EVMs were operated. At least the NCP and the CPI went to the Election Commission. Others who doubted didn't go to the Election Commission even after its invitation," he said.

While the opposition continues to make a hue and cry about the EVMs, especially after not tasting success in elections time and again, PM Modi has gone ahead and proudly told everyone about the significant role the EVMs play during elections in the world's largest democracy.

Mann chewed out every opponent, said I'll keep fighting for the rights of the people

TARN TARAN: Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, on Friday, campaigned for Khadoor Sahib MP candidate Laljit Singh Bhullar in Patti, Tarn Taran and lambasted all opposition leaders from Narendra Modi to Badal, from Captain to Jakkhar.

Addressing a huge public gathering in Patti, CM said that for the very first time the people of Punjab have their own government in the state. Earlier there was only 'raje and rajwade'. Mann was referring to Captain as Raja and Badals as Rajwade and said that they looted Punjab,



amassed wealth and property and now they call the common people 'malang' and 'material'. He said that they built their

dynasties while looting Punjab and its people, that is why the people of Punjab have thrown them out of power, now they are begging people for a chance.

He said that in 2024 Punjab will become a hero, will set an example because all 13 candidates of the AAP will win and represent the state in the parliament. He said that traditional parties ruined our childhood, they ruined our youth and they ruined the lives of elderly people. They are even ready to ruin the future of our children and our next generations.

Punjab Congress chief challenges BJP to nominate state prez Jakkhar to contest polls

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Pradesh Congress Committee President Amarinder Singh Raja Warring on Friday challenged the BJP to nominate its state unit chief Sunil Jakkhar to contest from any constituency and he would contest against him.

"I am confident the people will not give the BJP a single seat in Punjab. I extend an invitation to the BJP to nominate its leader, Sunil Jakkhar, to contest from any constituency in Punjab. Should he choose to do so, I will contest against him and secure a resounding victory," he told the media here.

Commenting on the INDIA bloc, Warring said, "Punjab's distinct identity necessitated the avoidance of an alliance with AAP and this has been duly acknowledged. The unique challenges faced by Punjab preclude the possibility of any collaboration with AAP under any circumstance. Punjab Congress leaders and candidates will not share platforms with AAP counterparts. Despite AAP's claims of a 13-0 victory, reality will unveil a starkly different narrative." He said the BJP and AAP in Punjab have made claims, but the time has come for a reality check. "Only the Congress party can effectively address the concerns of the people, a fact recognised by the electorates."

Encounter breaks out between terrorists and security forces in Jammu and Kashmir's Sopore

FW DESK

An encounter erupted between terrorists and security forces in North Kashmir's Sopore district on Thursday, as reported by officials. The exchange of fire occurred in the Check Mohalla Nowpora area, where two to three terrorists are believed to be holed out.

During the crossfire, a civilian sustained injuries and has been admitted to a local hospital for treatment. Security forces are currently engaged in rescuing other civilians from the area. The encounter was a result of a joint operation launched by the Indian Army and Jammu and Kashmir Police based on spe-



cific intelligence input regarding the presence of terrorists in the Nowpora area of the town.

The incident follows a targeted attack earlier this week in Rajouri district, where a 40-year-old man, identified as Mohammad Raziq, was

shot dead outside a mosque in his village, Kunda Top, under the Thanamandi police station area. Raziq, who was immediately taken to the hospital, succumbed to his injuries. His brother serves in the Territorial Army.

India grants over 1 Lakh Patents in 2023-24

NEW DELHI: India granted a record 1.03 lakh (103,000) patents in the financial year 2023-24, the Controller General of Patents, Designs and Trademarks, Unnat Pandit, announced on Thursday.

Pandit assured that there will be no delay in clearing patent applications going forward as the Intellectual Property (IP) Office prioritises timely clearance.

Speaking at an Assocham event, Pandit revealed that 40 per cent of patent applications were disposed of within 30 months of requesting examination. "We are going to have no delay in the IP office. IP should be granted and under Chapter 8 of the Act it should also be utilised by the applicant, that will generate the economic value of IP," he stated, reported in media Pandit emphasised the need for India to strengthen its IP position as patent filings

continue to rise. In 2023-24, India received 90,300 patent applications, indicating robust research activity and confidence in commercialising innovations in the Indian economy. The Commerce and Industry Ministry had earlier highlighted that one technology seeks IP protection in India every 6 minutes.

In 2023, an all-time high of 90,300 patent applications were filed, and over 1 lakh patents were granted between March 15, 2023 and March 14, 2024, with 250 patents being issued every working day.

The government has also notified the Patent Rules 2024, introducing provisions to simplify the patent application and management process.

A unique 'Certificate of Inventorship' has been introduced to acknowledge inventors' contributions to patented inventions.

India Plans Export Infrastructure upgrade to achieve USD 1 Tn target by 2030

NEW DELHI: India is embarking on a major initiative to upgrade its export infrastructure in order to achieve an ambitious target of USD 1 trillion in merchandise exports by 2030.

The commerce ministry, in collaboration with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), has kickstarted an exercise to identify and estimate the investments required across various modes of transportation, reported FE.

The key areas targeted for infrastructure augmentation include railways, roads, ports, and airports to facilitate the seamless movement of goods meant for exports. According to Santosh Sarangi, Director General of Foreign Trade, India needs to create additional capacity to handle 2,000 million tonnes of goods at ports, 338 million tonnes through railways, and



5 million tonnes via airports by 2030.

"These are big challenges but not insurmountable," Sarangi stated, underscoring the government's commitment to overcoming logistical hurdles.

Anant Swarup, Additional Secretary, department of commerce, highlighted that

when goods exports reach USD 1 trillion, imports are expected to be around USD 1.5 trillion.

Thus, the country must develop the capacity to handle the movement of USD 2.5 trillion worth of goods. The ongoing study will also identify the sectors and clusters from where the

additional USD 560 billion in exports, over and above the current levels, will originate in the next six years.

In the last financial year, India's merchandise exports stood at USD 437.06 billion, while imports were at USD 677.24 billion.

Swarup emphasised the importance of pinpointing the clusters, ports, and airports that will drive the USD 1 trillion in exports and USD 1.5 trillion in imports.

"Unless we know about these, we would not be able to do a baseline study to identify the gaps which exist and then enhance our infrastructure capabilities," he said.

Furthermore, the government is focused on enhancing India's integration into global supply chains, as 70 per cent of global trade currently happens through these chains.

Calcutta HC admits plea seeking action against Mamata Banerjee for 'anti-judiciary' remarks

KOLKATA: The Calcutta High Court on Thursday admitted a petition filed by CPI-M Rajya Sabha MP and senior advocate Bikas Ranjan Bhattacharya seeking action against West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee for her alleged anti-judiciary remarks made in the past two days.

However, the division bench of Chief Justice T.S. Sivagnanam maintained that although the plea has been admitted, whether the court will take any action in the matter will be decided by a separate bench. As the administrative head of the high court, the Chief Justice will decide which bench will hear the matter.

The Chief Minister's comments against a section of the judiciary came after the Calcutta High Court on Monday cancelled 25,753 appointments in teaching and non-teaching posts made by the West Bengal School Service Commission (WBSSC) in 2016. On Thursday morning, after Bhattacharya



sought the attention of the division bench, the latter asked him to file an affidavit in the matter in the second half. Accordingly, Bhattacharya filed the affidavit, arguing that the court needs to caution the Chief Minister so that she refrains from making 'anti-judiciary' comments.

Bhattacharya also pointed out the instances when the Chief Minister attacked a section of the judiciary and the courts. "The Chief Minister is claiming that the courts have been sold out and the judges are having political outlooks. The judges operate according to their jurisprudence. Comments like courts have been sold out are simply unacceptable. It is an attack on the dignity of the judiciary," Bhattacharya argued.

Road show in Amritsar by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann in favor of AAP candidate

Jagmohan Singh
Amritsar

During the ongoing election campaigning in Amritsar, on Thursday evening, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann did a road show in Amritsar in favour of AAP candidate for the Amritsar parliament constituency Kuldeep Dhaliwal and appealed to the people to make Dhaliwal win. He said that Amritsar is the city of Gurus. Therefore, when the results of the Lok Sabha elections will come on June 4, the first trend of Aam Aadmi Party's victory should come from here.

He said that Kuldeep Dhaliwal did a lot of work while being the Panchayati Raj Minister in the Punjab Government. He got more than 10 thousand acres of



PHOTO: PRABHJOT GILL

Panchayati land released from the big influential people of Punjab, from which Punjab got benefits of thousands of crores.

During the speech, Mann attacked the BJP and said that according to the report of the first phase of elections, BJP is getting only 25 to 30 seats. That is why their slogan of crossing

400 has vanished now. Now they are afraid of defeat.

Mann said that this election is not just about victory and defeat. This is an election to save the Constitution and democracy of India. BJP is trying to destroy India's democracy and constitution and if they win this time, they will impose dictatorship

like Russian President Vladimir Putin in India. They will change the Indian constitution and make such a law that only Modi will remain in power in some form or the other in the country. That is why it is very important to defeat the BJP this time.

Mann condemned Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Mangalsutra and communal statements and said that it is a matter of great shame for the country that after ruling for 10 years, Prime Minister Modi is asking for votes in the name of Mangalsutra.

He alleged that the BJP does politics of hatred and polarisation. It wants to get votes by making people fight in the name of caste and religion. On the other hand, we are asking

for votes from the people on the basis of our work. We are asking for votes in the name of government schools, hospitals, employment, electricity, water and other civic amenities.

Mann said that the people of Punjab will never let the politics of hatred win. This time people will reject the BJP's politics of hatred through their votes and will make their candidates lose their deposit in all 13 seats.

During the road show, AAP candidate from Amritsar Kuldeep Dhaliwal assured Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann of victory and said that the people of Amritsar will not let you down. The people here will make the Aam Aadmi Party win by a huge margin and will help AAP win Punjab by 13-0.

SRK vs Hooda: SRK group in Congress gets severe shock in Haryana, since 7 out of 8 declared contestants in Haryana from Hooda lobby

PARVESH HANDA

It is an open fact that Congress in Haryana state has been divided in two groups: Bhupinder Singh Hooda camp and another Kumari Selja, Randeep Surjewala and Kiran Choudhury usually known as SRK camp. The differences between both groups are to the extent that the members of each group are not visible in Congress gatherings organized by the rival groups. Needless to say that differences in both groups may prove very harmful for the party and in spite of all efforts Congress high command has not been successful to unite both groups and with the passage of time the rift between the members of Hooda and SRK groups is continuously widening.

The Congress high command's delay in releasing the



Lok Sabha candidates list for Haryana has not only made aspirants restless, but also enhanced the rivalry between factions which were busy projecting their candidates in present Lok Sabha polls. However, out of eight names declared by the Congress high command so far to contest polls in 10 Lok Sabha seats on 25th May include seven contestants from Hooda group

namely Deepender Hooda from Rohtak, Varun Choudhary from Ambala, Jai Parkash alias JP from Hisar, Rao Daan Singh from Bhiwani - Mahendergarh, Divyanshu Budhiraja from Karnal, Mahinder Pratap Singh from Faridabad and Satpal Brahmchari from Sonapat which according to the sources has highly disturbed the rival SRK group.

Punjab and Haryana High Court Asserts Supremacy Over Model Code of Conduct



TARUN BHAJNI
Chandigarh

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has asserted its authority over the Model Code of Conduct, stating that no election-related guidelines can hinder the execution of its orders. In a recent ruling, Justice Rajbir Sehrawat emphasized that directives from the Election Commission or any other authority cannot impede the High Court's decisions. The court's firm stance came in response to a contempt petition regarding the appointment of a constable in Haryana, where the state cited the Model Code of Conduct during elections as a reason for non-compliance. Justice Sehrawat clarified that such excuses are unwarranted, reaffirming that the court's orders must be executed without delay, regardless of electoral constraints. The ruling serves as a reminder to Punjab, Haryana, and Chandigarh that adherence to High Court directives is obligatory, overriding any electoral considerations unless specifically stayed by a higher court.

Bahujan Samaj Party's Political Revival in Haryana: A Strategic Resurgence?

In the political history of Haryana, only one BSP MP has been elected so far

TARUN BHAJNI
Chandigarh

Over the past four decades, the magic of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has not been effective in Haryana's Lok Sabha elections. In each election, the BSP has alternated between forming alliances and contesting independently on all seats. This time, the BSP is contesting independently on all 10 seats and has announced its candidates for 8 seats so far. Despite once reaching a vote share of up to 15 percent, the party has struggled to sustain its influence, facing setbacks as traditional Dalit vote banks shifted and key leaders departed.

However, recent steps indicate a resurgence effort by the



party. Prior to the elections, the party appointed youth leader Rajbir Sorkhi as president to strengthen its position. Campaigns have been launched to bolster the party's old voter base at the booth level in rural areas. Candidates have been announced in districts like Rohtak, Faridabad, Sonapat, Hisar, Karnal, Bhiwani, Ambala, and Gurugram. The party

claims to announce candidates for the remaining two seats in the coming days.

The party achieved its highest vote share in 2009, fielding ten candidates and securing over 15 percent of the votes. Although none of its candidates won, the party established a strong presence. However, its political ground has been slipping since then, failing to reach

over 5 percent vote share in the subsequent two Lok Sabha elections. In the 2019 elections, BSP received a mere 3.6 percent of the votes. In Haryana's political history, BSP has only once elected a Member of Parliament. In 1998, BSP contested in alliance with INLD. Its former leader Aman Nagar won the Ambala Lok Sabha seat by defeating the BJP candidate with 2864 votes. Aman remains the first and last BSP MP from the state, with no BSP candidate winning since then.

Speaking to *The Financial World*, BSP's state president Rajbir Sorkhi emphasized the party's ground-level work. Over the past few months, the party has been strengthening its cadre at the booth level in rural areas. The party's central leadership remains in constant touch with us. Undoubtedly, this time the party's results are going to be miraculous.

Congress was running corruption industry in Haryana, which was closed down by BJP claims Khattar



PARVESH HANDA

During 'Vijay Sankalp Rally' held at Barwala in Hisar district recently, while addressing a large gathering the former Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar accused former Congress government in Haryana state allegedly running a corruption industry in the state during 10 years rule, which was closed down by the ruling BJP government when came to power in the state in 2014 and provided all basic amenities to the residents of the state.

Khattar said that availability of power supply round the clock in urban as well as rural areas in the state under the management of state minister Ranjit Singh Chautala and availability of LPG for cooking in every kitchen, regular supply of drinking water and provision of all basic amenities to the people all over in the state have changed the system providing neat and clean administration in past nine and half years BJP rule in the state.

Punjab Government Allocates 40 Crores for Mukh Mantri Tirth Yatra Scheme



TARUN BHAJNI
Chandigarh

The Punjab and Haryana High Court received an affidavit from the Punjab government, revealing a budget allocation of 40 crores for the ongoing financial year towards the Mukh Mantri Tirth Yatra Scheme. Implemented since November 27, 2023, the scheme has already benefited 34,850 pilgrims by April 12, 2024. This disclosure came in response to a PIL filed by Parvinder Singh Kittna, challenging the scheme's viability, citing it as a misuse of taxpayers' money.

The state justified the initiative, stating it addresses the religious sentiments of residents, backed by representations from MLAs. Furthermore, an MoU with IRCTC has facilitated travel arrangements, with AC trains and buses deployed at negotiated rates. Addressing concerns regarding discrimination, the state differentiated the scheme from the discontinued Haji Subsidy Scheme, asserting its inclusive nature. Additionally, the government clarified that there are currently no plans to include aeroplane or charter plane travel in the scheme.

Contempt plea to be filed in High Court to punish top officials for violating 'Surakshit School Vahan Policy'

SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

A contempt petition has been filed against top officials of Haryana government for allegedly disobeying the Court's order on implementation of policy for the safety of school children known as 'Surkashit School Vahan Policy' after the Mehendarghar school bus accident in Haryana on April 11 in a dreadful accident in which six students died and

20 sustained injuries when the school bus driver, who was allegedly drunk, rammed the bus into a tree. However, police have already arrested the Chairman, Principal, driver found under the influence of liquor at the time of mishap and two others.

The plea filed by Bal Kranti Trust stated that the Principal Secretary to the Government of Haryana, the Transport Commissioner and other top officials are responsible for flouting



the safety measures which were formulated in policy after the High Court's direction, thus alleged contempt of court since The High Court in 2017, had directed the transport department of the state as well as the Commission for the Protection

of child rights to monitor the implementation of the policy by all the schools, added the petitioner, which was implemented on 23rd January 2023 and 20 January 2017. In another PIL, Joint Transport Commissioner (Road Safety), Haryana filed a status report that the Surakshit School Vahan Policy 2014 is being properly implemented and the school buses as well as other vehicles are subjected to regular checking by the officials.

CBI arrested Inspector along with 2 accepting Rs 5 lakh bribe from Chandigarh jeweller

SATISH HANDA/GULSHAN KUMAR
Yamunanagar

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Tuesday arrested a Haryana Police inspector and two conduits for accepting Rs 5 lakh bribe from a Chandigarh-based jeweller for not naming him in an FIR, having threatened false implication in a case. Ganga Ram Poonia SP Yamunanagar told media persons that Inspector Balwant Singh posted in Yamunanagar police's cyber cell, along with the two other accused Harpal Singh and Janinder Singh, both natives of Haryana were produced before a special CBI court on Wednesday and sent to judicial custody after he was suspended from the service. They were arrested following a complaint by Sukhjit Singh, a resident of Modern Housing Complex, Manimajra, who alleged that the cop threatened him and demanded an illegal gratification of Rs 40 lakh for not framing him in a case under investigation. After negotiations, the deal was settled at Rs 5 lakh.

Sukhjit had approached the CBI on April 10, submitting that he ran a silver jewellery shop in Sector 23-C, Chandigarh. On March 29, inspector Balwant Singh visited his shop and enquired about one Vikramjeet Singh, proprietor of RV Silver, Mohali. Sukhjit said when he responded that he knew Vikramjeet through his tenant and also had business



transactions with him, the inspector told him that they had detained Vikramjeet and one Anchal Mittal, who disclosed that Rs 40 lakh belonging to Vikramjeet were with him. Denying this, Sukhjit showed the inspector some documents, proving that it was in fact Vikramjeet who owed him Rs 26 lakh in payments. The inspector then took him out of the shop and threatened that he was the investigating officer of the case and will implicate him in the FIR, threatening him that he will face trouble even if he gets relief from court, the inspector demanded a bribe of Rs 40 lakh which was finalized at Rs 5 lakh

Sukhjit alleged that the cop took him to the parking lot, where he introduced a woman as Anchal Mittal who was sitting in a Haryana Police vehicle. The cop said the woman will give a statement as told, before leaving. As per the complainant, the cop called him twice on March 31 and April 2, threatening to name him in the

case if he failed to arrange Rs 40 lakh by April 10, which was reduced to Rs 5 lakh. However, Sukhjit filed a complaint with the CBI that laid a trap. The subsequent calls exchanged between the complainant and the cyber crime cell were recorded, wherein the former requested him to reduce the bribe to Rs 5 lakh that the cop told him to route through hawala. On Sukhjit's denial, the cop told him that he will send some men to his shop after 11 am on Monday to collect the bribe. As Harpal Singh and Janinder Singh arrived at the jewellery shop to accept the money at the inspector's behest, CBI sleuths swooped in and caught them red-handed.

CBI team arrested Cyber Crime Cell Inspector Balwant Singh on Tuesday and also conducted searches at residential and office premises of all accused, leading to recovery of incriminating documents. The accused were produced before a special CBI court on Wednesday and sent to judicial remand.

Sirsa LS seat to witness tough fight between Shelja and Tanwar

PARVESH HANDA
Sirsa

Although Congress has yet to officially announce the name of its Lok Sabha candidate for Sirsa Lok Sabha constituency, but Union Minister as well as Congress state president won Lok Sabha polls from Ambala constituency twice and has already started her poll campaign at Sirsa from Monday. However, there was a possibility that Shelja will contest the present Lok Sabha polls from Sirsa constituency, where she had won Lok Sabha polls twice in the past and had her own residential house. Information also reveals that Shelja wanted to contest Vidhan Sabha polls from Uklana in Hisar district likely to be held in month October this year, but she was asked to contest present Lok Sabha polls from Sirsa by their Congress High Command as such she is now focusing at Sirsa Lok Sabha seat to give a tough fight to BJP contestant Dr Ashok Tanwar a former district president.

Dr Ashok Tanwar, BJP candidate from Sirsa Lok Sabha constituency, reflects on his political journey from Congress and TMC to Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and now Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP). While talking to Tanwar, he highlighted his nearly 15 years service to Sirsa focusing on infrastructure improvements and agricultural development plans. Tanwar told of his future initiatives, including



expanding food processing units to boost local farmers' prosperity. When questioned, after Congress and TMC, you quitted AAP and now what motivated you to join the BJP and contest from the Sirsa Lok Sabha constituency.

« I have served Sirsa continuously for 15 years. During this time, I spent five years as Member of Parliament. I could not win in the next two polls but I worked for the people even at that time. My connection with every individual here motivates me to serve the nation. While other parties are plagued by nepotism and the influence of money, the BJP respects even a commoner. I left the Congress in 2019 due to its takeover by blackmailers. Presently, Prime Minister Modi and the BJP are leading with vision and mission and fulfilling promises, that inspired me to join the BJP», said Tanwar when questioned what are the key issues Sirsa is facing and how do you plan to address these if elected, Tanwar said that connectivity was a major issue in Sirsa. The connectivity infrastructure here was inadequate and after becoming an MP, he

spearheaded the construction of a highway from Dabwali to Hisar, alongside improvements in railway connectivity and the establishment of a nuclear plant, apart from schools, hospitals and other facilities were upgraded.

Tanwar said that Sirsa stands out as a leading agricultural based district not only in Haryana but also in the country, and the current focus is on establishing food processing units which will enhance the prosperity and capability of local farmers. He said, « I stand against those who exploit people, disrespect women or engage in corruption. The joining of Meenu Beniwal, who holds significant influence in the Ellenabad constituency, will undoubtedly benefit the party. Their support carries weight and we anticipate a significant advantage in the elections. Tanwar continued that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has done more for farmers than any other leader under various schemes such as crop insurance, farmers have received compensation and funds directly into their accounts.

BJP sure to be reduced to half in the North and completely washed in South in coming elections

SATISH HANDA

Former chief minister and leader of opposition in Haryana Bhupinder Singh Hooda while talking to media persons said that the present political scenario of the government in centre as well as in Haryana after coming Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha polls have been changed since BJP's slogan '400 Paar' have been completely collapsed and according to the political survey by the experts the graph of the Congress likely to witness heavy growth in Haryana state as well as in the country identifying the strength of BJP sure to be reduced by 50% in North, whereas likely to be completely clean bowled in South.

Hooda said the Congress has a list of strong contenders and the party will announce candidates for nine parliamentary seats it is contesting in Haryana very shortly. While talking to media persons Hooda

claimed the BJP did not have enough candidates of its own for the 10 parliamentary seats in Haryana and people crossing over from the opposition parties were being handed over tickets to contest polls. He said the Congress will announce the names of winning candidates for nine parliamentary seats it is contesting in Haryana, however the Kurukshetra seat is being fought by the Aam Aadmi Party which is a constituent of the opposition INDIA bloc.

The Leader of the Opposition in Haryana asserted that the BJP's '400 paar' claim will remain only a slogan as it will be wiped out in south India while its seats in the northern states would be much reduced. He said that the result of the Lok Sabha elections will also lay the foundation for the formation of Congress government in Haryana because every section is unhappy with the BJP government.

Drug smuggler arrested with 1 kg 18 gm Charas at Ambala

SATISH HANDA
Ambala

CIA Staff Ambala police led by Inspector Balkar Singh on an information started search for a drug smuggler and stopped a suspected persons carrying a bag at Khodha Bus Stand near Shahzadpur and during the search recovered 1 kg and 18 gm Charas from his bag. The youth was identified as Dhyan Singh resident of village Badagadi in Kullu district (H.P.). A case was registered against the arrested youth under NDPS Act.

In another case, Bhatinda police during checking at Damwali border recovered Rs 24 lakh cur-



rency notes from a youth travelling in a car. The youth was identified as Parth Jindal a resident of Mansa in Punjab and during investigation failed to say from where he had brought cash money. The youth was coming from Dabwali. The police seized unidentified money and the amount was deposited in the treasury.

What's wrong if Rahul Gandhi contests from two places, Modi did it too: KC Venugopal

ALAPPUZHA (KERALA): Reacting sharply to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remark that the Congress party's 'Yuvaraj' (Rahul Gandhi) ran away from North India to South India, AICC general secretary (Organisation) K.C. Venugopal on Saturday said they never knew that it was Modi who was selecting candidates for the Congress.

Venugopal, who is fighting it out from the Alappuzha Lok Sabha constituency, was reacting to the interview of PM Modi given to a TV channel wherein he belittled Rahul Gandhi. "Isn't Wayanad in India and didn't Modi contest from two seats in the past? It's surprising that Modi is saying such things and we never knew that it was Modi who was selecting the Congress candidates. Moreover what's



wrong if Rahul contests from two seats," asked Venugopal. Venugopal further pointed out that Modi has become jittery and that's why he is often

Isn't Wayanad in India and didn't Modi contest from two seats in the past? It's surprising that Modi is saying such things and we never knew that it was Modi who was selecting the Congress candidates. Moreover what's wrong if Rahul contests from two seats?"

confidence by repeatedly saying about crossing 400 seats. Everyone knows what the reality is going to be," added Venugopal.

Meanwhile, veteran Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) legislator P.K. Kunhalikutty said there was nothing wrong with Rahul Gandhi contesting from two seats and their party general secretary PMA Salam

said Vijayan was spreading canards that Rahul did not speak about CAA, in fact at Kozhikode addressing a mammoth rally he emphasised about CAA.

"He spoke in English and it was translated into Malayalam too," said Salam. Vijayan since he began his election campaign has attacked Gandhi for not speaking a word on CAA.

PM Modi will free Telangana of corruption: HM Amit Shah



HYDERABAD: Union Home Minister, Amit Shah on April 25 assured the people of Telangana that if Narendra Modi becomes the Prime Minister for a third term, he will free the state of corruption.

Addressing an election rally at Siddipet in Medak Lok Sabha constituency, he urged people to give 12 Lok Sabha seats to the BJP from the state. All 17 Lok Sabha seats in Telangana are going to polls on May 13. "The people of Telangana are with PM Modi. People have decided that the lotus will bloom in every seat," he said. Alleging that the state government had made Telangana the ATM of Delhi in a very short time, he claimed that comprehensive development of the state would be possible if there was a BJP government at the Centre.

HM Shah alleged that the Congress and the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) were hand in glove. "Be it Kaleshwaram or land scam, the Congress has not probed the corruption done by the BRS government," he said.

He also alleged that both Congress and BRS do not celebrate September 17 as Telangana Liberation Day as they are afraid of the MIM.

Farmers 'Rail Roko Protest' continues

PARVESH HANDA

Farmers Rail Roko protest sitting on tracks in Shambhu continue going on, as a result railways had to cancel more than 80 trains and changed routes of many trains on the Ambala-Amritsar railway route. The blockage of rail traffic on these busy routes not only causes heavy inconvenience to the passengers travelling on this route but also huge revenue loss to the railways every day.

The protestors have been demanding the release of three farmers arrested by the Haryana Police during the ongoing stir. Amid protesting farmers continue to squat on tracks at



the Shambhu railway station in Patiala (Punjab) district on the border of Haryana and Punjab although a week has passed as such railways have to refund the amount to passengers already

reserved seats in advance. Besides inconveniencing passengers, the cancellation of trains over the last five days was causing financial losses, the officials said, adding, they have diverted many trains.

The protest has affected the movement of 380 trains in the last three days, causing inconvenience to passengers.

Under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) in Patiala districts Shambhu, the farmers have been protesting. While talking to media persons, the farmers leaders said the protest will continue until the three farmers are released. Both SKM (Non-Political) and the KMM are spearheading the 'Delhi Chalo' march by farmers seeking the government to accept their demands including legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops.

Congress complains to EC against Modi on his controversial speech

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress today sought action against the Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his controversial speech in Rajasthan on Sunday where he named one community and accused it of grabbing country's resources.

A delegation of the party including Dr Abhishek Manu Singhvi and Gurdeep Singh Sappal met the EC at Nirvachan Sadan here today.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Dr Singhvi said four or five elements in the PM's speech were "deeply, deeply objectionable".

"He (the PM) had named a community. He has talked of religion blatantly; he has talked of communal and com-



munity blatantly", he pointed out, adding, the PM has linked it with deprivation of resources for the majority and garnering a monopolisation of resources by that minority. Singhvi said the PM also brought up the Hindu imagery of no less than the 'Mangal sutra' in clear violation of the Section 123; the basic principle of not allowing incitement and inflammation of communal passions.

Forces within & outside the country joined hands to defeat me, PM Modi says in K'taka

BENGALURU: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that "big and powerful people" from within India and outside the country have united to defeat him in the Lok Sabha elections.

Addressing a massive gathering in Karnataka's Chikkaballapur city, PM Modi said that the first phase of voting has uplifted the spirit of the people in the country.

"With the blessings of 'Nari Shakti' and 'Matru Shakti', Modi is successfully facing the challenges and marching ahead. The INDIA bloc does not have a leader for the future, and also does not have a vision for the future as well," PM Modi said. "The highest number of ben-



eficiaries of Modi government's schemes are SC, ST and OBC families. During the tenure of the earlier governments, they lived in filth, did not get electricity and water, and they had

lost hope from the government. Modi has rekindled their hopes on the government. The fact that 25 crore people are being lifted out of poverty in the country substantiates the fact," PM

Modi said. PM Modi, speaking at the rally, also said that those who were earlier called at last are being placed on the frontline today. "A daughter from a tribal family went on to become the first citizen of the country," PM Modi said, adding: "Under the development for all objectives, the NDA government has prioritised the education of Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and youth.

"These sections are beneficiaries of Mudra Scheme which provides loans. It is being planned to increase the loan amount from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh," PM Modi said.

Soldier's brother shot dead by terrorists in J & K's Rajouri



FW DESK

A man, identified as Abdula Razaq, was shot dead by terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district on Monday night. The incident occurred as Razaq was leaving a mosque in his village Kunda Top under the Thanamandi police station area. Razaq's brother serves in the Territorial Army. According to officials, the terrorists fired at Razaq from close range before fleeing the scene.

Has Hooda gripped Congress High Command under his clutches?

JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Ultimately, after a long wait, Congress has declared its Haryana Lok Sabha candidates' names. The list, apparently delayed due to alleged infighting within the party's State unit, seems to bear the upper and sole deciding free hand of former Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda.

If we analyse the congress' list of candidates for Haryana Lok Sabha seats released on Thursday, it seems crystal clear that congress high command has surrendered to former Chief Minister and Leader of Opposition, Bhupinder Singh Hooda. In the name of survey and winnability Hooda has succeeded in sidelining and downsizing his rivals in the party. Out of the ten Lok Sabha seats in Haryana, the Congress on April 25 released its list of candidates for eight out of the nine Lok Sabha seats it is contesting in Haryana. Out of these 8 seats, Hooda camp got 7 and only one seat of Sirsa has gone to another faction. Kurukshetra seat has already been given to INDIA block partner, Aam Aadmi Party. The Congress party has kept on hold the Gurgaon seat, where Hooda is supporting the Actor Raj Babbar, however the former state



minister Captain Ajay Singh Yadav is trying to capture the same. But to negate the claim of Ajay Yadav, Hooda has already barricaded the road for Yadav by inducting another Yadav (Rao Dan Singh), his close associate, from Bhiwani-Mahendragarh Lok Sabha seat. With this step Hooda has succeeded in killing two birds with one stone. Firstly, he has dashed former Chief Minister Chaudhary Bansilal's legacy and given a jolt to his long-time rival - former Minister Kiran Chaudhary by snatching the Lok Sabha ticket of Kiran's daughter Shruti Chaudhary, a granddaughter of late Chaudhary Bansilal and secondly neutralized the claim of Captain Ajay Yadav by already giving share to Yadav community, extending ticket to Rao Dan Singh, a Yadav, as only one seat was to be offered to this community out of 10 LS seats according

to social engineering.

It is also surprising that former union Minister Birender Singh's son, Brijender Singh, a former BJP MP from Hisar, who had just joined congress party by leaving BJP with an assurance of Lok Sabha ticket either from Hisar or Sonapat, has found his name omitted from Congress' list.

Instead, the party has fielded from the Hisar seat three-time former Hisar MP Jai Prakash (JP) considered to be a confidant of Hooda. To cut down the claim of Birender Singh on Sonapat seat, Satpal Brahmachari, a Brahmin, another confidant of Hooda, the party's Haridwar Assembly constituency candidate in 2022, has been named party's candidate for the Sonapat seat. Brahmachari's nomination will not only downsize and close the way of Hooda's long-time competitor Birender Singh,

but also work as a bonanza for Hooda's son Deepender Hooda, as through Satpal Brahmachari, he will polarize Brahmin votes in Rohtak. In the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, Deepender Hooda lost the Rohtak seat to BJP's Arvind Kumar Sharma with a thin margin of 7500 votes.

Varun Choudhary, former State Congress president Phool Chand Mullana's son and Mulana MLA, has been named the candidate for the Ambala seat, reserved for the Scheduled Castes. Mullana had been a close associate of Hooda.

Congress general secretary and former Union Minister Kumari Selja, the remaining lone opponent of Hooda in the party, has been fielded from Sirsa, a Scheduled Caste-reserved seat. However, Selja has been time and again denying to contest Lok Sabha election and instead was willing to go to Haryana assembly as a contender for CM Post. Her supporters are regularly sloganeering in her favour claiming her as 'Bhavi CM', but here also, Hooda, by forcing her to fight Lok Sabha election, has got rid of her over the CM post and remained the sole claimant of Chief Ministership. Hooda has win and win in both ways. If Selja wins Lok Sabha seat,

automatically she will not remain a contender for Chief Ministership and her claim for CM post will be slackened if she loses.

Divyanshu Budhiraja, who has got State Youth Congress president post with the support of Hooda, has been pitted against former CM Manohar Lal Khattar in Karnal. Budhiraja also comes from the Punjabi community. But the political thinkers are surprised as fielding a weak candidate may enhance the winning chances of Khattar.

Two-time Minister and five-time MLA Mahendra Pratap has been given the chance to fight the Faridabad seat with the blessings of Hooda camp.

The most shocked are Birender Singh and Kiran Chaudhary, as they were claiming themselves as high altitude fliers and were very proud of their wings, but it seems that the High Command has chopped off their wings. Now what shall be their reaction will show whether they will jump over the party barricades or silence down after fluttering for a while like a frog.

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

"This Election is a fight for the soul of India" says Priyanka Gandhi

KAVITA SHARMA
Kerala

Warning that the foundation of the nationhood was on the threshold of destruction, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi said that these elections were for the soul of India.

"This country that has made us proud for its foundation of incomparable spirituality, its unbreakable resilience, its unflinching enterprise and its immense ability to embrace diversity and thrive in it, yet, these very foundations of our nationhood stand at the threshold of destruction today", she said while addressing a public rally.

"It is a fight for the soul of this great nation. It is a fight for a democratic India that stood valiantly against tyranny and inequality. It is a fight for the freedom we once took for granted, it is a fight for hope, and it is a fight for all that is right", she added.

Warning against threat to democracy, Priyanka Gandhi said, "force asserts itself over righteousness. Laws are enacted by bypassing the processes of democracy and enforced upon people against their will".

She pointed out how people owing allegiance to the Prime Minister speak haughtily about changing the constitution that was written with the blood of our freedom fighters and martyrs.

They treat the Constitution of India that upholds our rights of liberty, equality, and brotherhood as an instrument of their own greed and ambition, she remarked.

The Congress general sec-



retary pointed out, how the voices of dissent were being silenced, students are arrested for expressing their opinion, activists are raided and jailed, journalists are sacked, beaten, and imprisoned for reporting the truth and much of the media is controlled by collaborators of a government that believes in false propaganda, silence, and oppression.

She referred to the way opposition leaders were imprisoned and expelled from parliament with impunity. "Government agencies that are meant to protect the law are turned into unlawful extortionists and used to silence dissent", she said, while adding, uniformity of culture, religion and language is imposed, and diversity is stamped out for political gain.

The government protects rapists and defends the oppressors and abusers of women, they vilify victims of heinous crimes using the entire strength of their administrations to question the characters of victims of abuse, she alleged, while pointing out how Olympic medalists protest for days on the streets begging to be

heard, while their abuser is defended by the Prime Minister.

Priyanka Gandhi alleged that policies were being framed to benefit Prime Minister's friends. "Public assets that belong to the people of India, assets that were built by the sweat and toil of our people, are handed to the Prime Minister's billionaire friends one after the other with impunity", she said, while pointing out how airports, ports, highways, vast tracts of public land and whole sectors of industry like cement, power and coal are virtually controlled by just a handful of businessmen close to the Prime Minister.

Making a passionate appeal to people of Kerala about importance of these elections, Priyanka Gandhi said, "in this land of Mahatma Gandhi and Narayan Guru, this land of the great people of Kerala celebrates Vishu and Onam, and Eid and Easter, this land of harmony and plurality, of equality and education, I implore you to recognize that this election is not a mere election as it is a fight for the soul of India".

Surat's election exposes flaws in Indian democracy

In a recent and alarming development in Surat, the essence of Indian democracy has been challenged, striking a discordant note that reverberates with concerns about the future of political discourse in the nation. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate in Surat was elected unopposed to the Lok Sabha, an event that casts a long shadow on the democratic process. While the BJP celebrates this as a triumph, it inadvertently spotlights a grim reality: a democracy devoid of opposition is a democracy in decline. This concerning scenario unfolded when allegations surfaced that the nomination papers of the Congress candidate, Nilesh Kumbhani, were compromised with forged signatures. Further complicating matters, Suresh Padsala, the dummy candidate for Congress, faced the rejection of his papers under similar dubious circumstances, culminating in the withdrawal of eight other candidates. This cascade of withdrawals left Mukesh Dalal, the BJP candidate, as the sole contender, leading to his uncontested victory declared on April 22. The absence of a contest in Surat raises significant questions about the integrity of the electoral process and the use of state mechanisms to stifle opposition. Such tactics, marked by manipulation and misinformation, not only undermine the electoral system but also erode the foundational democratic principle of fair and free competition. The BJP's vision of a "Congress-less India" might resonate with its strategy of political dominance, but it harbors an authoritarian undertone that is antithetical to democratic values. Moreover, the broader implications of these events are disconcerting. Earlier this year, a similar incident occurred in the Chandigarh mayoral election, where an election officer tampered with results, a decision later overturned by the Supreme Court. These episodes collectively paint a troubling picture of the current state of Indian politics, where electoral victories are increasingly seen as paramount, irrespective of the means to achieve them.

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The story of family farming underscores a legacy of sustainability.

AMANDA ZALUCKY

THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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TIKENDER SINGH PANWAR ON HOW STATE SCHEME HAS BECOME A TOOLKIT FOR HEALTH PRIVATIZATION

The Swachh Bharat Mission's reality

India was ranked right at the bottom of 180 countries in the Environment Performance Index (EPI) in 2022. The EPI ranks countries on climate change performance, environmental health, and ecosystem vitality. It measures 40 performance indicators across 11 issue categories, such as air quality, and drinking water and sanitation. The government responded to the rank saying the methodology is faulty and does not quantify the Indian scenario objectively.

For 10 years, the Modi government has embarked on much-hyped campaigns of development. These included the Swachh Bharat Mission, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, and the National Clean Air Programme.

Is the EPI linked to these missions? It should be, because these missions aim to enable better living standards. The SBM is meant to address the issue of WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Health). Likewise, the SCM is supposed to deliver on the clean energy requirements of towns. However, what we have seen is an increase in the vulnerability of the population owing to air and water pollution, among others.

The Swachh Bharat Mission

So, what went wrong? Let us take the example of the SBM and SBM 2.0, which was launched in 2021 and which aims to make all cities free of garbage. Sanitation and waste management in India are associated with the wide prevalence of caste. Historically, the subjugated castes have been forced to carry out sanitation work. The SBM tried to create a narrative that sanitation is everyone's job. Instead, it has ended up continuing the same old caste practices.

The SBM is a politically successful project; no Opposition party or community has raised objections to it. While the entire



project is governed and monitored by state agencies, the design makes it clear that large capital-intensive technologies are promoted.

The Union government claims that India is open defecation-free, but the reality is different. A Comptroller and Auditor General report in 2020 raised many questions about the government's claims over the success of the SBM on this front. It indicated the poor quality of construction of toilets under this scheme. A few urbanisation studies pointed out that in some metros, communities in slums still do not have access to public toilets. Even in rural India, toilet construction has not been linked to waste treatment. In peri-urban areas, the faecal sludge generated is tossed into the environment. Septic tanks are cleaned by manual scavengers and the sludge is thrown into various water systems.

One thing the government intended to do via SBM was to reduce the involvement of people in waste management by replacing them with large, capital-intensive

technologies. However, these installations have refused to live up to their promoters' promises, leaving town after town screaming for resources to fix them and, importantly, respond to the health crises emerging from badly managed waste (if at all) as well as the rates and forms of urbanisation local governments believed these technologies would support. In this scenario, the governments outsourced most of the work to private players, who employed the same subjugated communities to handle waste.

Take, for example, solid and liquid waste management in cities. In most towns, the Union government is employing technological solutions in handling solid waste. Some of these solutions are in the form of waste-to-energy plants and biological methanation. But there are barely any success stories in either case.

City governments are being asked to buy more machines including road sweeping machines that cost no less than Rs 1 crore, more vehicles to transport the waste from one corner to another with geo-tagging,

and so on. Funds are made available to the city governments for such plans. However, all this work is being handed over to large contractors entering the city domains for making sanitation a profit entity. Most of the workers employed by these contractors are Dalits. Hence, a scheme fully owned by the state has become a toolkit for the privatisation of public health services and continues caste discrimination.

On March 30, 2024, in the Himachal Pradesh High Court, the Urban Development Department said that there are just five sanitation inspectors in the Shimla Municipal Corporation, which comprises 34 wards. Instead of recruiting more such inspectors, this cadre is being declared dead after they retire. In a State where there are more than 50 municipal bodies, there are only 20 sanitation inspectors, which means that there are some municipalities that have no sanitation inspectors.

There are similar problems with other programmes too. Such failures have been dragging down India's EPI performance.

Development model

The EPI may be quite comprehensive. However, one of its features of mapping exposes the unsustainability of our development processes. This means that our development models must be altered. The EPI must also be seen in the background of a recent judgment where the Supreme Court observed the links between climate change and basic human rights. Climate scientists have said that the reasons for the current problems are anthropogenic and systemic in nature.

We will have to link policies to human rights in order to tackle these issues.

Tikender Singh Panwar is a former directly elected Deputy Mayor of Shimla and an urban practitioner. Views are personal.



MEGHNA SHARMA SAYS CONGRESS, CPI(M) MANIFESTOS OFFER HOPEFUL SHIFT IN DISABILITY RIGHTS DIALOGUE

A glimmer of hope in political arena for disability rights

The release of manifestos during election season rarely occasions a discussion on the rights of persons with disabilities. However, the promise of the Congress and CPI(M) to include disability as a specific ground for discrimination under Article 15 (and Article 16) of the Constitution has sparked optimism within the disability rights movement. Currently, the provision prohibits discrimination on grounds of "religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them" and does not expressly include disability.

A constitutional amendment of Article 15 to address this glaring omission has been a long-standing demand of the disability rights movement. In 2019, this demand was reaffirmed by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in its concluding observations while reviewing India's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). To this date, no steps have been taken in this direction.

Ever since the Constituent Assembly debates, the discourse on disability rights within the constitutional scheme has continued to overlook the concerns of the disability rights movement. However, the disability rights movement in India and across the globe has made significant strides since then. The adoption of the UNCRPD in 2006 marked a significant step, recognising that persons with disabilities are entitled to enjoy their rights "on an equal basis with others". India ratified the Convention in 2007 and enacted the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act in 2016. While no amendment was made to Article 15 in response to the ratification, Section 3 of the Act provided that no person with disabilities shall be discriminated against on grounds of disability. However, the law only extends a



restricted notion of equality to persons with disabilities. This provision also says that if the act or omission is a proportionate way of achieving a 'legitimate aim', the same shall not violate the provisions of this law. As the phrase 'legitimate aim' is not defined, it leaves wide scope for legislative, administrative, and private action to be classified as a "legitimate aim".

There can be an argument that the current gap can also be rectified by amending the above Act. However, even after such an amendment, the right against discrimination guaranteed to persons with disability would remain a statutory right as opposed to a constitutional right. Considering the higher normative value of a constitutional right, the amendment would not only signify a deeper commitment but would also provide a stronger remedy in the form of a fundamental right against discriminatory acts and omissions.

The Constitution of India holds deep philosophical importance in our country's social, political, and legal structure, marking

a departure from colonial rule to adopting a democratic order based on principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. It restructured the relationship between individuals and the state by guaranteeing everyone fundamental rights against the state, and the relationship among individuals by guaranteeing equality and the right against non-discrimination. Article 15 prohibits discrimination based on certain grounds. Through these grounds, it identifies the social hierarchies amongst its citizens and how politics of exclusion can be remedied. The inclusion of disability under Article 15 will undo this historical injustice.

In 2018, the Supreme Court in Navtej Singh Johar vs Union of India extended the protection of Article 15 on grounds of sexual orientation after recognising the same as 'analogous' to the other grounds mentioned under Article 15. This decision opened the possibility that the judiciary may extend the same protection on grounds of disability by treating it as analogous grounds. While treat-

ing disability as an analogous ground may extend the protection of Article 15 to persons with disabilities, it cannot be considered an alternative to a constitutional amendment that specifically includes disability as a ground under Article 15.

The analogous grounds approach poses a burden on the litigator to have the same recognised through the process of constitutional litigation and ignores the systemic marginalisation faced by persons with disabilities. It should be the responsibility of the government and not that of the judiciary to recognise this omission. The possibility of political will he promises made in manifestos of the Congress and the CPI(M) have signalled an era where there is a clear political will to act on the demands of the disability rights movement. Disability rights organisations in India deserve due credit for their consistent and aggressive advocacy behind this demand.

In February 2024, the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) and the National Disability Network (NDN) launched a first-of-its-kind initiative by releasing a manifesto for and by persons with disabilities, which urged the political parties to prioritise and address the issues of the disabled community.

It is only hoped that other parties follow the example. Electoral promises are rarely followed in India's electoral democracy. But despite that, these promises give hope that the movement will no longer face political apathy with regard to this demand and that India is ready to shift the Overton window on this topic.

Meghna Sharma is an Assistant Professor at the School of Law, RV University, Bengaluru. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

Green horizons: Capitalism's role in a climate-conscious future

In his thought-provoking work "Climate Capitalism," Akshat Rathi navigates the complex interplay between economic growth and environmental stewardship, offering a nuanced perspective on how the reigning economic system can pivot towards sustainability without stalling progress. His exploration into harnessing capitalism to address the urgent issue of climate change presents a hopeful yet critical analysis of our current trajectory and the innovative shifts needed to sustain both our planet and our economies.

The book begins by outlining a grim picture of modern economic practices where the quest for cheaper goods and incessant growth has led to rampant exploitation of natural resources and a disturbing rise in greenhouse gas emissions. Rathi paints a vivid

picture of a world teetering on the brink of irreversible climate damage, driven by unchecked capitalism that prioritizes profit over planet. This sets the stage for the book's central argument: the need to radically transform capitalism into a force for environmental good without dismantling it entirely.

Rathi's narrative is not just a critique but a proactive response to the climate crisis. He dives into how emerging technologies like renewable energy, green cement, electric vehicles, and carbon capture are creating new avenues for investment and regulation that could marry economic incentives with environmental outcomes. These technologies, Rathi argues, represent the seeds of a new form of capitalism—one that could potentially reverse the damage while promoting economic inclusivity.

The heart of Rathi's argument lies in the detailed case studies spanning several continents. From China's leadership in electric vehicles to India's ambitious solar energy initiatives, and from America's efforts to rehabilitate its oil industry to Denmark's push for wind energy, Rathi showcases how nations are pioneering the path to a greener capitalism. He suggests that with just 2% of global GDP, the carbon dioxide problem could significantly be addressed if political will, technological advancement, and financial capital align correctly.

However, the journey Rathi describes is fraught with challenges. The political landscape is often hostile to drastic changes, and the vested interests in fossil fuels are robust and influential. Moreover, the disruption caused by transitioning to new technologies can



Climate Capitalism
By Akshat Rathi;
John Murray/
Hachette;
272 pages; Rs 699

be both economically and socially turbulent. Despite these obstacles, Rathi remains cautiously optimistic, citing instances where economic growth and carbon reduction have occurred simultaneously, such as in the UK from 1990 to 2017.

"Climate Capitalism" does not shy away from the economic complexities involved in transforming the global economy. Rathi discusses the need for significant policy shifts that encourage climate-friendly investments and the creation of market opportunities in the green sector. His discussion extends to the role of private capital and the potential for climate finance to accelerate change, inspired by international agreements like the

Paris Accord.

The book concludes on a hopeful note, suggesting that the cost of saving the world may indeed be lower than the cost of destroying it. Rathi's faith in the capacity of capitalism to evolve and adapt offers a fresh perspective on an often polarized debate. He argues that the very agents of capitalism, once seen as the perpetrators of environmental decay, are now waking up to the dual realities of the costs of inaction and the profits of proactive engagement.

"Climate Capitalism" is an essential read for anyone interested in understanding how economic mechanisms can be recalibrated to foster environmental sustainability. It is a compelling call to action for policymakers, business leaders, and citizens to rethink how capitalism functions and to work together towards a sustainable and economically viable future. Through detailed analysis and engaging prose, Rathi not only critiques the status quo but also illuminates a path forward that is both hopeful and grounded in practical reality.

Indian online Consumer Spending predicted to reach \$300 bn by 2031

NEW DELHI: India's online consumer expenditure is forecasted to more than double from USD 140 billion to USD 300 billion by 2030, according to a report titled "What If... We Win?" by venture capital firm Elevation Capital.

This surge in consumer spending is projected against the backdrop of a thriving Indian start-up ecosystem and a promising economic outlook, with the country's GDP per capita expected to soar to USD 5,200 by 2031. The report highlights that India's top 2 per cent, or roughly 5 million households, will witness a significant increase in their pool of discretionary expenditures,



rising from the current USD 40 billion to USD 100 billion over the coming decade.

Elevation Capital has identified several key categories that are poised to create winners in the consumer tech and brand space, including pet care, lei-

sure travel, personal care, quick service restaurants (QSRs), apparel, and durables.

The report also sheds light on the booming trend of new consumer brands fuelled by the rise of direct-to-consumer (D2C) strategies. The combined

revenue of new-age consumer brands tracked by Elevation has already crossed the USD 5 billion mark.

This growth is being driven by deepening e-commerce penetration, lowering cost barriers, and internet access preceding discretionary income – factors that are now converging to make brand-building both lucrative and exciting for entrepreneurs.

Elevation Capital anticipates that new-age brands in discretionary categories will contribute USD 50 billion in public market capitalisation by 2030, further underscoring the potential of India's consumer market.

Nearly 50% of Women Entrepreneurs Struggle for Credit in Indian MSME Sector: Report

NEW DELHI: A new report has shed light on the significant hurdles faced by nearly 50% (47 percent) of women entrepreneurs in India's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) when attempting to access financial credit.

The report, titled the 'Bharat Women Aspiration Index Report' by UK-based financial platform Tide, conducted a comprehensive survey of over 1,200 current and aspiring women business owners aged 18-55 from tier II and III cities.

The survey found an alarming 95% women lacked awareness about government financial schemes and programs aimed at supporting their enterprises. This knowledge gap has driven many to resort to informal, potentially precarious credit channels.

Highlighting another major barrier, the report revealed that while 63 per cent of respondents had access to business mentorship, a staggering 90 per cent cited relatives or close friends and family as their primary "peer" network. This underscores the dearth of formal programs facilitating networking and upskilling for women entrepreneurs.



"Access to funding, mentors and digital business tools are inextricably linked for women entrepreneurs, especially those from smaller cities and towns," said Gurdhpal Singh, CEO of Tide India. "The prevalence of informal lending points to gaps in financial literacy that may not serve their best interests," he added.

Echoing the results of the report, Secretary General of Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) Anil Bhardwaj said that the ground realities were greatly at odds against women entrepreneurs in India.

"The biggest hurdle is lack of ownership of collateral assets without which raising loans is almost impossible. In a patriarchal society most assets are in

the name of men of the family and there is resistance for ceding ownership for raising loans for women-owned enterprise. Secondly, the absence of insolvency for individuals and widespread criminal clauses in Indian regulations also scare women of spectre of imprisonment," Bhardwaj added.

Despite the challenges, Tide remains optimistic about the future role of women-led MSMEs in catalysing economic growth, job creation and innovation through resilient, family-centric entrepreneurial ecosystems.

"Targeted initiatives are key to eliminating barriers and supporting the success of women in business globally," added Oliver Prill, Tide's Global Chief Executive.

Emmforce Autotech IPO oversubscribed 20.21 times on 1st day of bidding



NEW DELHI: The initial public offering (IPO) of Emmforce Autotech, a niche automotive drivetrain parts manufacturer, witnessed an overwhelming response on the first day of bidding on Tuesday. The company's maiden public issue was oversubscribed a staggering 20.21 times. All categories of investors participated actively in the issue on Tuesday, with bids received for 7.94 crore equity shares against the IPO size of 39.33 lakh shares, as per subscription data available with the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE). Retail investors led the charge by subscribing 29.34 times the allotted quota. Non-institutional investors, comprising high net-worth individuals, also showed significant interest, bidding 23.37 times the reserved portion.

India's Milk Production Poised to Reach 300 MT by 2030: NITI Aayog



NEWDELHI: According to a NITI Aayog report, the country's milk production is projected to reach an impressive 300 million tonnes by 2030, up from 231 million tonnes in the financial year 2023, registering a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6 per cent over the past decade. The Indian dairy market, currently valued at a staggering Rs 13 lakh crore (approximately USD 160 billion), is expected to more than double to Rs 31 lakh crore (around USD 380 billion) by 2027, growing at a CAGR of 15 per cent over the past 15 years. While the unorganised sector has traditionally dominated the Indian dairy industry, holding a 60 per cent share in the liquid milk market, the organised sector is rapidly gaining ground. Its share has increased from 32 per cent to 40 per cent in the last three years and is projected to reach 54 per cent by 2026, aided by capital investments from cooperatives and private players.

HP powers INDO-MIM to mass produce metal 3DP parts in India



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

The World's leading Metal Injection Molding (MIM) company, Indo-MIM, unveiled a groundbreaking advancement in technology and marked the operationalization of two of HP's cutting-edge metal jet binder 3D printers, a momentous occasion that would revolutionize the production landscape. With HP's Enhanced Digital Printing (EDP) technology integrated seamlessly into their operations, Indo-MIM first company to pioneer large-scale production of 3D printed high-precision metal parts in India. It was a leap forward for industries spanning automotive, aerospace, defence, consumer electronics, and medical equipment. These machines installed at the Bengaluru facility of Indo-MIM catering to both domestic and international markets with unmatched quality and speed. Collaboration between Indo-MIM and HP. Together, they had unlocked a new chapter in the story of manufacturing, where imagination knew no limits, and the future was forged with every layer of metal.

Will make India our global export hub: Hyundai Motor chief

NEW DELHI: The chief of Hyundai Motor Group recently visited India and laid out a vision to bolster its operations there to utilise the country as a key export hub for the South Korean automaker, the group said on Thursday.

Over the past year, Hyundai Motor Group has announced new investment plans in India totalling approximately 5 trillion won (\$3.75 billion), reflecting the group's intent to better target one of the fastest growing major automotive markets in the world.

Euisun Chung, Hyundai Motor Group's executive chair, visited the group's Indian headquarters in Gurugram, Haryana on Tuesday and discussed medium- to long-term strategies for the Indian market with employees.

He also held a town hall with some 400 employees and shared his future visions. It marked the first time for Chung to hold a town hall with employ-



ees overseas, reports Yonhap news agency.

At the meeting, Chung shared his vision to nurture India as the group's global export hub as Hyundai expands its business to Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

He also highlighted customer trust, employees' dedication, and technological expertise as key growth factors in India, while expressing pride in the

group consistently achieving the second position in the Indian market share.

Regarding Hyundai's electric vehicle (EV) business direction, Chung said Hyundai will "play an active role in electrification through specialised EV development for the Indian market" and envisioned the group leading India's clean mobility sector by the time EV adoption becomes mainstream by 2030.

Silicon Motion Announces Chief Financial Officer Transition

TAIPEI (TAIWAN AND MILPITAS): Silicon Motion Technology Corporation announced that Jason Tsai, currently VP of IR and Finance at Silicon Motion, has been appointed Interim Chief Financial Officer of the Company effective as of April 25, 2024. Jason Tsai succeeds Riyadh Lai who will be stepping down as Chief Financial Officer, effective as of April 25, 2024.

Riyadh Lai will be staying on with the Company where he will continue to support the Company's various strategic and investment initiatives to deliver

value to our stockholders. Wallace Kou, Chief Executive Officer of Silicon Motion, said, "We are thankful for Riyadh and his many contributions to Silicon



Motion as its Chief Financial Officer for more than 17 years. Riyadh is an experienced leader, with deep familiarity with the

Company and the industry, and I am confident he will continue to provide the Company with valuable services." Kou continued, "Jason, as our VP of IR and Finance, has made significant contributions to the strong operation of our finance team and financial results of the Company over the last few months. Jason, who had previously been with the Company for more than 10 years, and recently rejoined, has had an accomplished finance career and held senior leadership roles in the hardware, semiconductor and software industries.

India emerging as a major manufacturing & export hub with launching of new schemes



SATISH HANDA
New Delhi

According to the Union Minister Ashwani Vaishnav, with the introduction of new schemes and preparing a framework in about a dozen different industrial sectors in the field of transport, power supply, logistic, digital connectivity and few other fields the country enabling to enhance exports upto the

value of one lakh crore dollars by the year 2030 in the international market as such the country may become a hub for the manufacturing as well as exports in future. Under this framework . According to the Union Industry Ministry in the country, under this policy a framework has been prepared to make available incentives to the industry entrepreneurs in the field of manufacturing auto

components, automobiles, capital goods, chemical, electronics system design and manufacturing (ESDM), medical devices and leather footwear.

According to information, the manufacturing sectors included in this regard as stated above our country is yet dependent on exports from other countries. Information reveals that more than 60% of medical devices are being imported and there is immediate focus to become self-sufficient in these products. Similar is the situation in case of chemicals, semiconductors units, quality footwears and in case of many other products likely to get a boost after having special focus in these sectors.

According to information, India is now the third largest exporter, especially in manufacture of mobile phones and therewith 99 per cent of electronic devices used in India are being made locally.

Patent Expiry and Innovator Pharmaceutical Companies: Mechanisms applied to preserve market dominance



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH
OMKAR VIVEK PARAB

Patent expiry refers to the end of the period of exclusivity granted to the patent holder for a specific invention or product. When a patent expires, it means that the protection and legal rights associated with the patent no longer apply, allowing others to use, manufacture, and sell the invention without infringing on the patent holder's rights. The term 'patent cliff' refers to a significant drop in revenue experienced by a pharmaceutical company when one or more of its key patents expire. Patent expiry has implications for innovator companies, generic companies, investors and consumers. In pharmaceutical sector, implications include 'increased competition' due to arrival of generic rivals, 'consumer savings' as generic drugs are typically less expensive, 'decline in sales' for innovator companies due to generic competition, and 'opportunities for generic manufacturers' as generic manufacturers get a chance to enter the market. Previous studies such as Simon von der Schans et al. (2020), Gerard T. Vondeling et al. (2018), Gregory H. Jones et al. (2016), among others have assessed impact of patent expiry on drug prices. Ernst R. Berndt et al. (2007) observed the impact of introducing authorized gener-

ics in the market in order to counteract the generic competition. Gregory H. Jones et al. (2016) also discussed the strategies that the innovator pharmaceutical companies have applied to delay or prevent the availability of generic drugs, thereby increasing the price paid by patients, governments, and insurance companies.

To understand the strategies adopted by innovator companies for lowering the impact on sales, we observed the facts regarding top pharmaceutical companies with 30 top-selling drugs which lost their patent during 2010-2020. Innovator companies' contention is that they get less 'exclusivity time', i.e., the average time in years from brand launch to patent expiry. Innovator companies deploy strategies such as evergreening, introduction of generic, product hopping, patent thickets strategies, and also, Pay-for-delay.

Data about 30 top-selling drugs which lost their patent during 2010-2020 shows that the most widely used technique by innovator pharmaceutical companies to fend off the competitors was Lawsuit against Abbreviated New Drug Application (ANDA) Para IV Certificate. The U.S. Food Drug Administration (USFDA) bestows an ANDA to a generic drug under Paragraph I, II, III and IV Certification. In case of Para IV Certification, generic drug manufacturer challenges the validity, enforceability, or infringement of the relevant patents listed for the reference brand name drug. Through filing a Para IV Certification, the generic

drug manufacturer states that the listed patents are either invalid or unenforceable or that their generic medication does not infringe any of the listed reference drug's patents. In 23 out of 30 cases, lawsuits filed by innovator pharmaceutical companies constituted as the most widely used defensive strategy, followed by other strategies, i.e., Line Extension (8 out of 30 cases), authorized generic (6 out of 30), licensing (5 out of 30), Patent thicket or evergreening (4 out of 30), and collaboration (2 out of 30). As companies followed more than one strategy at the same time, so the number adds up to more than 30. For example, for the drug named Bevacizumab, Roche, a prominent Switzerland-based Company, has a brand - Avastin which used to fetch \$7073 million in 2019. The brand lost about 29 per cent of sales with sales of \$4992 million in 2020 due to patent expiry. As a defensive strategy, it filed a lawsuit against Amgen for not exchanging the information that was stated as necessary by Roche so as to mount a patent infringement attack on Amgen's biosimilar. Through lawsuit, Amgen was asked to provide the required data for evaluation, and potentially delay the biosimilar's launch. Roche also launched an FDA-approved combination drug containing Bevacizumab, Carboplatin, and Paclitaxel. In addition to this, Roche had applied for a patent with new indications covering more variants of cancer. Many generic versions were launched by companies like Bevacirel by



Reliance Lifesciences, Cizumab by Hetero, Zylbev by Zydus, and Abevmy by Mylan.

In case of the drug, 'Trastuzumab', Roche launched the drug under the brand name - Herceptin which had the sales of \$6039 million in 2019, the period prior to patent expiry. Sales from the brand declined to \$3732 million in 2020, i.e., the period after the patent expiry. A decline of about 38 per cent was observed in the sales from the brand due to patent expiry. In this case too, Roche filed a lawsuit against Samsung Bioepis, Amgen and Celltrion, and the company was successful in winning the patent infringement cases in two out of three cases. Roche had challenged Pfizer also for infringing its patent and submitting the application for drug approval to the USFDA and European Medicines Agency (EMA). On patent expiry, generic versions were launched such as Canmab by Biocon, Hertraz by Mylan, Vitro by Zydus, and Neuzumab by Lupin.

Line Extension is another

mechanism applied by innovator pharmaceutical companies, e.g., for the drug named - Telmisartan, innovator company - Boehringer Ingelheim launched the drug under the brand name - Micardis. Prior to loss of patent, the company had the sales of \$980.18 million from this brand. Sales declined to \$861.26 million after it became off-patent in 2015, with a decline of about 12 per cent. Boehringer Ingelheim had gone for a brand extension to launch Micardis Plus, Micardis HCT, and Co-Micardis (a combination therapy) in order to sustain and retain the share of Micardis in the market. Many Indian pharmaceutical companies got ANDA approvals in 2014 and launched their brands such as Telma by Glenmark, Telista by Lupin, Tetan by Alembic, and Teli by Zydus.

Innovator pharmaceutical companies launch 'authorized generic' to preserve market dominance. For example, for the drug - Insulin Lispro, Eli Lilly launched the drug under their brand name - Humalog.

As defensive strategy, Eli Lilly introduced an authorized generic version of Humalog in the US in November 2019. Eli Lilly identified the focal point that patients had years of experience and comfort managing their disease on their current regimen and were resistant to change. The company's messaging focused on the potential negative impact on adherence that their patients could face upon the change in the treatment regimen. In another case, for the drug - Valsartan, Novartis launched the drug under their brand name - Diovan. As defensive strategy, Novartis introduced an authorized generic version of the drug to tackle the competition. Regarding generic version, Lupin got ANDA approval in 2015 and launched it under brand name Eglucen.

Innovator pharmaceutical companies also resort to licensing mechanism, e.g., for the drug - Insulin Glargine, French multinational - Sanofi had launched Lantus which had a sales of \$7063 million in 2015, i.e., period prior to patent expiry. Sales declined to \$6581 million in 2016 with a decline of 6.82 per cent. Sanofi sued the US-based Eli Lilly claiming infringement of original patents. Later on, both companies agreed to terminate the action under the terms of the settlement through which Eli Lilly agreed to pay royalty to Sanofi on the grant of the license. Many generic versions were launched by Indian companies such as Basalog by Biocon, Glaritus by Wockhardt, Basugine by

Lupin, and Basaglar by Cipla. In a similar case, for the drug named 'Celecoxib', Pfizer had launched the drug under the brand name, 'Celebrex'. Celebrex had the sales of \$2699 million in 2014, i.e., period prior to patent expiry. Sales declined to \$830 million in 2015 with a decline of about 69 per cent. Companies such as Teva, Lupin, Apotex, Mylan, and Watson, were sued by Pfizer on account of patent infringement. Later on, both sides agreed to a settlement and license was granted to market the drug beginning in December 2014. Generic versions were launched by Indian companies like Celib by Torrent, Celcox by Cipla, Sionara by Alembic, Coxib by Micro Labs, and Zyclrel by Zydus.

Patent thicket or evergreening has also been applied by many pharmaceutical companies to preserve market dominance. For the drug named - Imatinib besylate, Novartis launched a drug under brand name - Gleevec (also sold under the brand name - Glivec). Novartis earned \$4.6 bn and \$4.7 bn in 2013 and 2014 from sales of Gleevec. The basic compound patent expired on July 4, 2015. Sales from the brand in the year 2016 went down to \$323 mn from \$4746 mn in 2015. Novartis had applied for a further patent extension in the US based on a secondary patent that extended its market exclusivity in the US from July 2015 to November 2019. The decline in sales was mainly because of markets other than the US which set a very high bar for approval of such second-

ary patents. Indian pharmaceutical companies launched generic versions such as Imalek by Sun Pharma, Levin by Dr. Reddy's Labs, Veenat by Natco Pharma, and Imat by Zydus.

Innovator pharmaceutical companies also opt for 'Collaborations', e.g., drug - Clopidogrel was launched under the brand name - Plavix which lost the exclusivity in the US in May 2012. Sales from the brand in the year 2012 stood at \$2066 million. In 2013, sales declined to \$1857 million. Sanofi had granted rights to Bristol-Myers Squibb to co-promote and co-market the drug worldwide. Upon patent expiry, Bristol Myers Squibb had returned Sanofi its rights in all markets except the US. Indian pharmaceutical companies launched generic versions such as Plagril by Dr. Reddy's Labs, Clopilet by Sun Pharma, Deplatt by Torrent Pharma and Clopiflo by Cadila.

'Pay for Delay' agreements between big pharma and generic companies have also come under scanner in different countries to keep low-cost medications out of the market for specified terms in return for compensation.

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Disclaimer: Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.

RBI flags adverse weather, geopolitical tensions as Inflation Risks

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has warned that adverse weather conditions and extended geopolitical conflicts leading to volatile crude oil prices may pose a threat to inflation in the near term. In its monthly bulletin, the RBI stated that consumer price index (CPI) inflation moderated to 4.9 per cent in March after averaging 5.1 per cent in the preceding two months. However, food inflation remains elevated, posing a risk to the disinflation trajectory. The central bank highlighted that careful monitoring during the summer is warranted as overlapping food price shocks play



The article prepared by RBI Deputy Governor Michael Patra and other officials noted that extreme weather events, as warned by the World Meteorological Organisation, could impact inflation alongside prolonged geopolitical tensions affecting crude oil prices.

On the economic front, the RBI expressed optimism about India's growth prospects, stating that conditions are shaping up for an extension of the trend upshift that took the average real GDP growth above 8 per cent during 2021-24. However, it emphasised the need for sustaining high growth rates to reap the demographic dividend and achieve developmental aspirations over the next three decades.

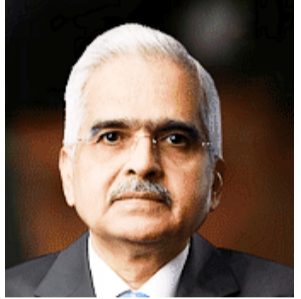
New FEMA regulations pave way for Indian Company Listings on Global Stock Exchanges



NEW DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has unveiled new regulations under the Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), facilitating the listing of Indian companies on international stock exchanges. These regulations are seen as a significant step in enabling companies to utilise foreign exchange more effectively and expand their global presence.

RBI emphasises Price Stability amid India's strong growth momentum

NEW DELHI: India's robust economic growth is providing the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) with the policy space to unwaveringly focus on price stability, which will help lay the foundation for a period of high growth, according to RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das. In the minutes of the April monetary policy meeting released on Friday, Das stated, «The strong growth momentum, together with our GDP projections for 2024-25, give us the policy space to unwaveringly focus on price stability.» He highlighted, «Price stability is our mandated goal, and it sets strong foundations for a period of high growth.» Das added, «Accordingly, I vote to keep the policy repo rate unchanged and continue



with the focus on withdrawal of accommodation.» The majority of the RBI's rate-setting panel, the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), expressed caution about upside risks to inflation, particularly emanating from uncertainties in food prices, during the policy review. On April 5, the MPC kept the policy repo rate, the rate at which the central bank lends to banks, unchanged at 6.5 per cent for the seventh consecutive time and continued its withdrawal of accommodation stance.

Intellectual Property addresses all components of Viksit Bharat, Says Himani Pande

FW DESK New Delhi «Viksit Bharat 2047 is about empowering people, a thriving economy, a prosperous India and a sustainable India. IP addresses all components of Viksit Bharat and Atmanirbhar Bharat. However, technology does not address every problem that we face today. We have to also think of the social impact our work has and not just focus on the economics, said Himani Pande Additional Secretary - Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry



of Commerce and Industry, Govt. of India at ASSOCHAM's 2nd IP Leadership Summit and Awards.

The introduction of biometrics in the PDS system has reduced pilferage through ghost beneficiaries and made ration accessible across the country. It does not however solve all problems making it important to build in civic attention into innovations and IP. Just two percent of IP Grants are commercialised, and we are in the process of framing the IP financing framework to increase that number not just for the economics but also for the societal benefits.» said Himani Pande Additional Secretary, DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Govt. of India.

Robust GST Collection & Low Inflation Underline India's Economy Resilient Despite Global Risks: Report



NEW DELHI: India's economic performance remains robust, underpinned by resilient growth, stable prices, and steady external sector performance, according to the latest monthly economic report released by the finance ministry on Thursday. Despite ongoing geopolitical tensions, particularly in West Asia, the report notes softened risk perceptions, offering potential growth opportunities. The global economic landscape is witnessing a gradual resurgence, characterised by diminishing recession fears and a rebound in growth across major economies. However, regional growth disparities persist. India's economic strength

persists amidst global uncertainties, driven by factors such as robust domestic demand, strong investment, and sustained manufacturing momentum, as highlighted in the ministry's report. «India stands out amidst global challenges, showcasing strong economic performance across sectors and reaffirming its pivotal role in supporting global growth,» the report states, emphasising India's position as the world's fastest-growing major economy. The report also delves into specific aspects of India's economic landscape. It notes the positive outlook for agricultural productivity, buoyed by the forecast of above-normal rainfall during the upcoming

monsoon season. This is expected to alleviate inflationary pressures, particularly in food prices. Additionally, the report highlights a downward trend in retail inflation, reaching 5.4 per cent in FY24, the lowest level since the onset of the pandemic. March witnessed remarkable performance across various economic sectors in India. Record-breaking stock market performance, robust goods and services tax (GST) collections, and substantial growth in manufacturing and services sectors reflect a buoyant domestic economic environment. In terms of the external sector, the report acknowledges the challenges posed by slowing global trade but expresses optimism regarding India's trade deficit, which is expected to narrow in the coming years. This optimism is attributed to the extension of production-linked incentive schemes to additional sectors. Moreover, recent trade agreements, such as the India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), signal India's commitment to expanding its global trade footprint.

Govt Considers Further Liberalising FDI Norms in Banking, Insurance & Defence



NEW DELHI: The Indian government is exploring the possibility of further liberalising foreign direct investment (FDI) norms in crucial sectors such as banking, insurance, and defence. This move comes after the recent relaxation of FDI rules for the space and satellite industries. According to officials, while the bulk of FDI reforms have already been implemented, discussions are ongoing to assess if the conditions for these key sectors can be further eased. However, any changes to the existing norms will be undertaken after the conclusion of the ongoing elections on June 1. «Some areas in finance and insurance, even in defence, could still be looked at in terms of further reduction. Brainstorming is going on, but it has not reached anywhere,» said an official familiar with the deliberations. A final decision will be taken after consultations among officials and stakeholders. The government's stance is that India should further relax FDI rules, as the country's current policy is more liberal than that of some other nations, officials noted. «We are more liberal than most of the ASEAN countries, which are generally considered very open,» the official added. Currently, India allows 74 per cent FDI in private sector banking, with up to 49 per cent permitted through the automatic route and government approval needed beyond that. In public sector banking, the FDI cap is fixed at 20 per cent through the government route. For the insurance sector, India permits 49 per cent FDI in insurance companies through the automatic route and 100 per cent in insurance intermediaries, subject to certain conditions. In the defence industry, FDI can go up to 100 per cent in the manufacture of small arms and ammunition under the Arms Act, with up to 74 per cent permitted through the automatic route, subject to conditions.

Robust demand driving India's Business activity to 14-year high: HSBC report

NEW DELHI: India's business activity expanded at the fastest pace in nearly 14 years this month, driven by robust demand, according to an HSBC survey released on Tuesday. The survey also showed easing input inflation and positive job growth, suggesting that India is well-positioned to remain the fastest-growing major economy this year. HSBC's flash India Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global, rose to 62.2 this month from March's final reading of 61.8. The reading has consistently been above the 50-mark separating expansion from contraction since August 2021. The strong expansion was led by the services sector activity, with the index rising



to a three-month high of 61.7 from March's 61.2, thanks to accelerating new business – a key gauge for demand. The manufacturing PMI, on the other hand, remained strong at 59.1, similar to March's level. Both output and new orders for goods continued to grow at a robust pace, albeit slightly slower than the previous month. Overall international demand was solid, and the composite sub-index rose to the

highest since it was added to the survey in September 2014. The strong sales improved the business outlook for the coming 12 months from a four-month low in March. Efforts to meet rising demand supported job growth, which was the most pronounced in manufacturing, where it increased at the fastest pace in one-and-a-half years. However, employment generation among services firms was slower than in March. Meanwhile, input costs cooled for both goods producers and their services counterparts, but demand strength enabled passing on expenses to customers. A stronger increase in output costs among manufacturing firms contrasted with a slower rise in the services industry.

Economy Weakening by Freebies

SATISH SINGH Former Governor of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Shri D Subbarao has advised the government to avoid the policy of freebies, because nowadays political parties motivate voters to vote in their favour by luring them with free electricity, free drinking water, monthly allowance to the unemployed, free distribution of laptops, smartphones, bicycles etc., to win elections and after coming to power, they empty the government treasury to fulfil the promises, due to which the financial discipline of the state and central government is negatively affected and due to spending money on freebies, developmental work gets affected i.e. the government is not able to make arrangements for roads, schools, hospitals, electricity, water etc., owing to which economic activities slow down and a decline is recorded in the growth rate. In pursuit of freebies, state governments violate the limits of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBM), which is detrimental to the financial health of the state. Under the FRBM Act, it is ensured that revenue deficit, fiscal deficit, and total outstanding liabilities do not exceed prescribed limits. If it is necessary to do so, it should be done only in case of disaster or exigency. Mr. Subbarao says that due to freebies, some state governments are violating the FRBM limit, due to which the state governments are getting trapped in the quagmire of debt. Therefore, state governments and the central government should maintain financial discipline. According to Mr.

Subbarao, the Modi government should build a consensus among political parties on the issue of stopping freebies and should not hesitate to present a «white paper» on the issue if needed. There should be a deep and meaningful debate on this issue among all political parties and a concrete policy to stop freebies should be made and implemented as soon as possible. The public should also be made aware of the costs and benefits of free gifts. It should be the responsibility of the government to educate people about this. Also, in a poor country like India, it is also the responsibility of the government to provide every kind of security cover to the most vulnerable section and ensure that the poor or underprivileged people can become economically self-reliant without freebies. Honourable Finance Minister Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman had recently presented to the public through a White Paper in the Lok Sabha the failures of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government during its 10-year tenure and the achievements of the Modi government during its 10-year tenure, so that the general public can decide which government has made earnest efforts for the betterment of the general public, society and country during its tenure. A «white paper» is usually used by the government to present its policy priorities before introducing legislation and to gather public opinion on controversial policy issues. The government assesses the possible effects or consequences of policy decisions taken in accordance with the opinion and makes policy or law accordingly. It is noteworthy that even before Mr. Subbarao, the Supreme Court had advised the



government to stop freebies in the matter. Last month, the Supreme Court had asked the central government whether it was economically viable to promise freebies during election campaigns and implement them after coming to power. Some time ago, the Election Commission had also raised questions on the increasing tendency of political parties to promise to give freebies and then spend on freebies after coming to power. Freebies weaken the basic structure of the economy and force the government to divert development priorities from its expenditure priorities. The sources of revenue of states are limited. Therefore, the state budget gets derailed due to freebies and the government has to take loans to complete the developmental works. Today many state governments are in debt beyond the prescribed limit. Punjab has taken a loan of 53.3 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), which is the highest among all the borrowing states. According to the Central Bank, no state should have a debt of more than 30 per cent of its GSDP. Apart from Punjab, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Goa, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Rajasthan, and West Bengal also have debt much higher than

development in the neglected area. For example, to promote renewable energy, subsidies are being given to install solar panels on roofs of houses or at other places. A rule should also be made as to what percentage of the budget should be spent on public welfare works and it should also be ensured whether the public has benefited from the public welfare schemes on which money has been spent? If any public welfare scheme has not provided any benefit to the public or there has been no improvement in their standard of living, then there is no justification in continuing such schemes. The public also needs to introspect whether they are benefiting from the freebies or not, if not, then they should not fall prey to such populist promises that the government will provide basic facilities like roads, electricity, water, schools, hospitals etc. available to the public. A laptop, smartphone or bicycle does not have a long lifespan, but implementing developmental works will benefit all sections of the society. Apart from freebies, the government should also avoid giving benefits of schemes to corporates which are being misused on a large scale. For example, tax and interest rate concessions are often given to big corporates to accelerate development or to encourage a particular sector, but many corporates misuse such benefits, which are difficult to curb. This means that whatever the government spends, it should have a contribution in strengthening the economy while ensuring the development of the country and society. Satish Singh, Ahmedabad based Senior Columnist, Views are personal

ICICI Bank maps 17k credit cards to wrong users

MUMBAI: ICICI Bank on Thursday said nearly 17,000 credit cards issued recently have been erroneously mapped to the wrong users in digital channels. The second largest private sector lender, however, said



that no instances of any misuse have been reported because of the error, and also promised to compensate users for any financial loss.

«It has come to our notice that about 17,000 new credit cards, which were issued in the past few days were erroneously mapped in our digital channels to the wrong users,» a bank spokesperson said.

ED attaches properties valued over Rs 55 cr in VMC Systems bank fraud case

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) in Hyderabad has provisionally attached movable and immovable properties to the tune of Rs 55.73 crore in a bank fraud case connected to VMC Systems Limited under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The financial probe agency had initiated an investigation based on an FIR registered by the CBI in Bengaluru under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) against VMC Systems Limited, its directors, and others for defrauding the Punjab National Bank (PNB) and others to the tune of Rs 539.67 crore. «The probe revealed that in 2009, VMC Systems approached the PNB and the State Bank of India (SBI) for part financing its working capital requirements. Thereafter, between 2009 and 2012, VMC Systems availed credit facilities from a consortium of banks consisting of Corporation Bank, Andhra Bank, PNB, and Karur Vysya Bank with SBI as the lead bank, to the tune of Rs 1673.52 crore (principal amount),» the ED said in a statement issued on Tuesday. The PNB account of VMC slipped into NPA on December 31, 2013, followed by the remaining bank accounts. In total, the loss to all the banks as on March 31, 2018, was pegged



at Rs 1,745.45 crore. «The investigation unveiled falsification of accounts and diversion of credit facilities to multiple entities ultimately linked to VMC Systems, leading to the generation of proceeds of crime. The directors of these entities, during the investigation, confirmed the fraudulent nature of these transactions,» it said. Additionally, funds were channelled through entities beneficially owned and controlled by individuals associated with VMC Systems and its promoters. «After its bank accounts turned into non-performing assets, VMC Systems continued its illegal activities by transferring funds, both through its own accounts and those of its associates, to entities under the control of Himabindu and V. Satish Kumar,» the agency said. These entities, having dummy directors who were either relatives or long-term acquaintances, served as conduits for the movement of the crime proceeds. «Upon receiving these funds,

they engaged in a series of sham transactions among themselves, aiming to obfuscate the origin and nature of the funds. Further investigation revealed that Satish Kumar and V. Madhavi (Himabindu's sister), among others, were indicted for wire fraud, tax evasion, and money laundering conspiracy by a district court in Seattle, the US, based on a suit filed by Kyko Global Inc, USA,» it said. The Court awarded Kyko \$133,000,000 due to Prithvi Information Solutions Ltd's fraudulent conduct and illegal racketeering activity. «Subsequently, a settlement agreement was reached between Kyko Global and Satish Kumar and Madhavi, transferring assets in the subsidiaries of Prithvi Information Solutions in the US and the stake in a beneficially owned company in India, Bastusilpi Construction Pvt. Ltd., to Kyko Global,» the ED said. The assets attached by the ED include residential property of Satish Kumar at Jubilee Hills in Hyderabad; agricultural land situated in Anajpur Village acquired in the name of Rajesh Kothea, an associate of Satish Kumar; a tea estate spread over 580.77 acres of land in Cacher district, Assam, valued at Rs 11.73 crore in the name of Emmen Infra Properties (India) Pvt. Ltd.; and receivables of VMC Systems from the BSNL to the tune of Rs. 37.03 crore.

India and South Korea gear up for fresh CEPA talks to tackle Trade Imbalance

NEW DELHI: India and South Korea are preparing for a fresh round of negotiations in May-June to upgrade their Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). This move comes after the conclusion of the 10th round of negotiations earlier this year.

The primary objective for India in these talks is to address the significant trade imbalance that currently favours South Korea, reported Mint. In the calendar year 2023, India's exports to South Korea stood at USD 6.286 billion,



a decrease of 16.61 per cent annually, while imports from the Southeast Asian nation were USD 21.361 billion, an increase of 3.19 per cent an-

nually, according to data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industries.

To rectify this trade deficit, India is seeking greater

market access for its commodities like rice, steel, and shrimp, as well as improved opportunities in sectors such as healthcare and information technology (IT).

Authorities familiar with the matter have confirmed that the Indian government has raised concerns about the growing trade imbalance between the two countries.

They expressed optimism that the upcoming CEPA negotiations will address and resolve some of these issues, paving the way for a more balanced trade relationship.

TikTok faces nationwide ban in US as Biden prepares to sign 'historic' bill

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden is set to sign a historic bill regarding a huge foreign aid package on Wednesday, that will also ban TikTok in the country if its China-based owner ByteDance doesn't sell its stake within a year.

The US Senate passed the bill 79-18 on Tuesday after the House passed it with an overwhelming majority last weekend. TikTok, which has more than 170 million American users, didn't immediately comment but Michael Beckerman, its head of public policy for the Americas, said that the company plans to challenge



the move in court. "The stage that the bill is signed, we will move to the courts for a legal challenge," he said in a memo to TikTok's US staff. The bill gives TikTok owner ByteDance nine months' time to force a sale, with a 90-day extension. In a White House statement, Biden said that a bipartisan majority in the Senate joined the House to answer "history's

call at this critical inflection point". "I will sign this bill into law and address the American people as soon as it reaches my desk tomorrow so we can begin sending weapons and equipment to Ukraine this week," said the US President.

"The need is urgent: for Ukraine, facing unrelenting bombardment from Russia; for Israel, which just faced unprecedented attacks from Iran; for refugees and those impacted by conflicts and natural disasters around the world, including in Gaza, Sudan, and Haiti; and for our partners seeking security and stability in the Indo-Pacific," he elaborated.

America warns Pakistan, others of 'curbs' over pacts with Iran



WASHINGTON: The United States of America has warned of a "potential risk of sanctions" for anyone considering a business deal with Iran, a day after Pakistan and Iran inked several agreements during Iranian President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi's maiden visit to Islamabad to boost bilateral cooperation. The latest warning comes days after the US imposed sanctions on suppliers to Pakistan's ballistic missile programme, including three companies from China even as the US

Workers at VW's Tennessee plant to unionise after key vote

WASHINGTON: Workers at Volkswagen's Chattanooga plant in the US state of Tennessee have voted overwhelmingly to unionise at the third attempt, the company and the United Auto Workers (UAW) have announced.

The ballot, which ended on Friday, saw 73 per cent of the workers backing the move. The result has yet to be confirmed by the National Labor Relations Board, an agency of the United States federal government.

The UAW, which is seeking to expand its presence in the US automotive sector, sees the outcome as a significant victory.

Two attempts to unionise the plant over recent years failed. But the union has scored major successes recently. In the autumn, it secured better conditions and a pay rise of around 25 per cent at the main US automotive companies, General Motors, Ford and Stellantis (formerly Chrysler), following a lengthy strike. Until now, the union has had little success in the southern states and the plants



of non-US vehicle makers. It has also failed to unionise Tesla workers.

A total of 3, 613 workers, equivalent to 83.5 per cent of the labour force, cast their ballots, with 2, 628 voting to be represented by the UAW.

Germany's powerful IG Metall union said on Saturday that Chattanooga is the VW brand's sole plant without union representation. Daniela Cavallo, head of the VW works council, said the Chattanooga workers had "rewritten US trade union history."

US: 2 killed in block party shooting in Memphis



HOUSTON: Two people were killed at a block party shooting in Memphis, in the southern US state of Tennessee, police said.

Initially, the Memphis Police Department said on social media platform X that there were 16 people shot, two of whom were dead.

"We believe the error occurred with several victims being reported multiple times," the MPD said in a correction post.

One of the wounded "remains in critical condition," the police said in an update. The Memphis Police Department (MPD) said that the shooting happened at an

unpermitted block party of "approximately 200-300 people" at 7:19 p.m. local time on Saturday (0019 GMT Sunday), Xinhua news agency reported.

"Officers located five victims suffering from apparent gunshot wounds on the scene, three of whom were transported to area hospitals in critical condition and two males were pronounced deceased," the MPD said.

MPD interim Chief Cerelyn "C.J." Davis told a press conference Saturday night that there were at least two shooters involved. "We already have received some video footage and are looking for those responsible," she said.

Biden reaffirms support for Israel on eve of Passover

WASHINGTON: US President Joe Biden has reaffirmed his commitment to Israel's security on the eve of the Jewish Passover holiday.

"My commitment to the safety of the Jewish people, the security of Israel, and its right to exist as an independent Jewish state is ironclad," Biden said on Sunday. The Passover holiday, which commemorates the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian slavery, begins on Monday evening. The ongoing Gaza war began after more than 1, 200 people were killed in the massacre carried out by Hamas and other militant Palestinian



groups in Israel on October 7. Numerous people were also taken hostage from Israel to the Gaza Strip. Until a few weeks ago, Israel had assumed that just under 100 of the 130 remaining hostages were still alive. However, it is now feared that significantly more of them may already be dead. "This Passover

falls particularly hard on hostage families trying to honour the spirit of the holiday -- a story centered on freedom -- while their loved ones remain in captivity," Biden said. The US President added that his administration was working "around the clock" to free the hostages as well as "an immediate and prolonged ceasefire" in Gaza that would see the release of hostages and deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinian civilians. "We will continue to work toward a two-state solution that provides equal security, prosperity, and enduring peace for Israelis and Palestinians," Biden said.

Man sets himself on fire in New York outside Trump's criminal trial court

NEW YORK: A man set himself on fire outside Manhattan Criminal Court as jury selection was underway in the criminal trial of former US President Donald Trump, according to media reports and videos posted on social media.

The incident took place on Friday noon. The man was engulfed in flames and was rushed to hospital later, Xinhua news agency reported. The man threw pamphlets



into the air and poured accelerant on himself, according to the reports.

"I have set myself on fire outside the Trump trial," reads the heading of flyers left at the scene, according to a report by New York Post.

The motivation behind the man's action was not clear.

Starting from last Monday, Trump appeared in a criminal court in Manhattan, New York City, in the hush money case, making him the first former US President to stand a criminal trial. The trial is expected to last around six to eight weeks.

The Third Eye : India's foreign policy navigates a new flux in international relations

India's three-fold strategy of handling international relations by opting for bilateral and even multilateral friendships designed to bring in mutual security and economic benefits without prejudice to world peace, asserting the country's position as a major power influencing matters of global security and economic betterment and developing India as a self-reliant nation capable of building its own economic strength as well as defence, has worked to the country's great advantage so far.

However, the current geopolitical developments highlighting the injection of religion in international politics, the advent of a new Cold War between the US and China-Russia axis, and the sudden preoccupation of the Joe Biden administration in the US with 'measures to counter Islamophobia' in the environment resulting from Israel-Hamas conflict, have added to the task of policymakers here in keeping India on top of the issues of foreign relations.

Pushing Indo-US strategic partnership to a new height to lead the democratic world against shared threats of terrorism, 'radicalisation' and dictatorship, and in the Indian context, countering the Sino-Pak axis which represented an alliance of a Marxist state with a fundamentalist regime, have been the two major planks of India's foreign policy. India believed that both the US and this country were on the same side of the fence on global commons.

On both the Ukraine-Russia military confrontation and the Israel-Hamas conflict, India took an independent stand favouring cessation of hostilities and talks for settlement -- in one case on the plea that security concerns of both sides should be understood and in the other, on the acceptance of a two-state solution in Palestine. India's stand was acknowledged as an unbiased policy by the international community and this enhanced the stature of this country as a world power whose voice mattered on



global issues.

The political divide between the US-led West on one side and the China-Russia combine on the other that was still ideological -- though economic rivalry also mattered a great deal -- is getting impacted now by faith-based conflicts that were playing out across the world -- particularly in the Middle East. This was compelling the US to temper its foreign policy with the domestic compulsion of not alienating its Muslim population following the killing of over 30, 000 Palestinians by Israel -- mostly women and children -- in the ongoing conflict. India, on its part, has to watch out for the consequences of the new-found initiative of the White House to roll out steps against 'Islamophobia' and be more assertive about rebutting any attempts by international lobbies to run down this country on matters of internal freedom and treatment of the minorities.

The Islamic radical forces represented by the Taliban-Al Qaeda axis and ISIS attack US interests because of political animosity and go after Shiite Iran, the Alawite regimes of Syria and Iraq and the Iranian proxies like Hezbollah active in the Middle East, on account of religious hatred.

The attack of ISIS on a hugely attended concert on the outskirts of Moscow on March 22 -- barely 20 kilometres from the Kremlin -- as a result of which 143 persons were killed and more than 300 injured, was attributed by the radical Islamic outfit, to the Russian support for the Syrian

President -- who belonged to the Alawite sect of Shiism -- and also to the "atrocities" of Vladimir Putin's Russia on Chechen Muslims who are Sunnis.

ISIS -- and also the Taliban-Al Qaeda combine -- carry the historical legacy of the anti-West Wahhabi 'revolt' of the 19th century and the 'revivalist' memory of animosity towards Shiites. The faith-based motivation of ISIS thus can be said to have led it to target Russia keeping the latter at par with the US-led West -- political opposition in this case also accruing directly from religious antagonism.

In the Middle East, Saudi Arabia is a Sunni extremist state but as a close US ally in the Muslim world, was inclined towards accepting the Abrahamic accord of UAE with Israel.

In the wake of the Israel-Hamas conflict that broke out with the terror attack of Hamas on Israel on October 7 last year, Saudi Arabia -- like India -- emphasised the need for a pause in Israel's military attack on Gaza to minimise civilian casualties there. Iran and its armed proxy, Hezbollah, have sided with the Sunni Hamas because of their political antipathy towards Israel -- the closest friend

of the US in today's geopolitics -- would override everything else.

Israel and Iran happened to be the major contenders for power in the Middle East and the political rivalry between them guided their responses. Iran would also, to a certain degree, share concern on the broader Islamic issue of

Israeli encroachment on Al Aqsa mosque in East Jerusalem -- the third holiest centre for Muslims of the world.

As regards China, the Chinese move of making it up with the Taliban that had reestablished its Emirate at Kabul in 2021 -- again with the help of Pakistan -- in return for the facility granted to China for extending its B&RI to Afghanistan, invited the ire of ISIS which attacked Chinese diplomats in Kabul in December 2022. Of course, ISIS attacks on the Shias in Pakistan and the Hazaras in Afghanistan also continued.

ISIS now leading the Islamic radical forces would not take kindly to Pakistan's effort to draw close to the US.

An interesting fallout of the Israel-Hamas conflict is that the huge military assault of Israel in Gaza in retaliation to the October 7 attack of Hamas, had produced a wide-scale pro-Muslim demonstration in the US and elsewhere.

Hamas had justified its attack on Israel on the grounds that Israel had imposed its authority on Al Aqsa mosque in April 2023 and had continued with the creation of settlements in Gaza and the West Bank.

From India's point of view, as already mentioned, a concern is that the pro-Palestine opinion could encourage anti-India lobbies to raise the issue of protection of Muslim minority in India. Any demonstrations in India in this regard would impact the internal security situation here.

India is rightly pursuing a foreign policy that best suits a multipolar world order and allows for a non-aligned approach that serves the best national interests in the spheres of both security and economic development. Notwithstanding the concerns of the Biden administration over the fallout of the Israel-Hamas conflict, Indo-US friendship has to be pushed deeper for the most important reason that China in strategic alliance with Pakistan, posed a major threat to India's national security.

While India was strengthening its role in Quad led by the US

because there was convergence on threat perception relating to China between the US and India, this country would be justifiably concerned over any attempt by the Biden administration to keep Pakistan on the side of the US at the cost of India's national interests.

There are fresh indications that the US and Saudi Arabia -- two countries that mattered to Pakistan the most -- wanted India to pick up the thread of talks with Pakistan.

India has once again made the point that it would be willing to attack terrorists behind cross-border, on the soil of Pakistan itself, which was a way of reminding Pakistan that it would have to draw down on terrorism before India could respond to the suggestion of Indo-Pak talks.

India can of course handle the narratives of 'majoritarianism', 'illiberalism', and 'safeguarding of minorities' on its own since secularism was built into this country's electoral democracy by way of the universal adult franchise. India is welcoming defence imports from the US, Russia, and France in line with its own sovereign requirements and this should work well since India's handling of international relations rested on the country's assertion as a major power of the world on issues of global peace and economic advancement.

A priority for India's security is to have the capabilities of dealing with both China and Pakistan on the borders, on the sea and in the air. At the same time, India has to continue raising its voice against global threats of terrorism, radicalisation and drug trade from all multinational platforms. In a nutshell, India's handling of international relations has to reckon with a shifting geopolitics where potential friends and adversaries have to be taken stock of, from time to time.

Intelligence agencies have to be specially geared to tracking the operational plans of the two adversaries in our neighbourhood -- China and Pakistan -- of causing internal destabilisation here.

National security is incomplete

without economic security which raises among other things, the question of safeguarding India's strategic establishments against infiltration and sabotage. The vigilance and security set-up of each of these entities should be strengthened under the guidance of the Intelligence Bureau.

India is already working on protecting the country's lifelines against cyber attacks and is on the front line of pressing Artificial Intelligence into use for the cause of national security. Intelligence liaison with established and tested friends must be an important component of our foreign policy.

In informal Indo-US interactions, India should continue to 'educate' the Americans on the threat of 'radicalisation' translating into faith-based terrorism that would pose a danger to the entire democratic world. Keeping up relations with friendly neighbours has acquired a newfound importance in view of the Chinese determined effort to extend the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) to these countries.

Our approach to international relations reflects the political will of India as a major world power, to assert its sovereignty and independence in formulating foreign policy while demonstrating a commitment to global peace and human welfare.

India being sensitive to communal conflicts can counsel the democratic countries on how to quell 'radicalisation' that justified recourse to violence in the name of religion and gave a fillip to proxy wars and cross-border terrorism. The danger of faith-based conflicts may get deeper as Iran had already carried out a military offensive against Israel and Yemen's Houthi movement with its Shiite origins, was coming out in support of Iran.

The recent attacks of ISIS from Moscow to Syria further point to the induction of religion into international politics in no uncertain terms.

The democratic world order led by the US and India must wake up to this new danger and work together to defuse it.

UAE reports illness linked to contaminated water after floods



DUBAI: A small number of people in the United Arab Emirates have shown symptoms associated with contaminated water after heavy rains and floods, the health ministry said.

The statement, carried by the state news agency late on Wednesday, did not say exactly how many people had been affected or what exactly they were treated for. There have been "a very limited number of cases

that showed some symptoms of being affected by the mixed water" and they received hospital treatment, the ministry said.

It did not say what the water had been contaminated with. The UAE was hit by record rains on April 16 that brought parts of the Gulf country to a standstill, heavily flooding some neighbourhoods, including in Dubai and northern cities. Four people died in the floods.

Drops of toilet cleaner mixed in Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi's food : Spokesperson

ISLAMABAD: Jailed former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi was reportedly given at least two to three drops of "toilet cleaner" mixed in an Iftar meal, her spokesperson said on Thursday.

The cleaner was allegedly mixed with her food on Shabe-Barat on February 24.

"We found out that two or three drops of toilet cleaner were added to Bushra Bibi's Iftar meal," the spokesperson of Bushra Bibi, Mashal Yousafzai, was quoted as saying by the Geo news.

She claimed that after consuming the meal, her health deteriorated and it was getting worse every day.

Imran Khan, 71, the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, has many times claimed that Bushra Bibi, 49, was given food mixed with toilet cleaner.

The spokesperson said before her arrest, she did not have any problems, including blood pressure and diabetes.



"Since her arrest, Bushra Bibi's health has deteriorated, something must have happened," she said expressing her apprehension.

Bushra Bibi, convicted in two different cases, is being held at the Bani Gala home since the couple was sentenced in the 'un-Islamic nikah' case in February. The Bani Gala residence has been converted into a sub-jail for the former prime minister's wife.

Yousafzai, also the advisor to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa chief minister, questioned why Bushra's medical tests were not conducted when the court had been directing the authorities for three weeks.

She also wondered who was preventing the authorities from conducting the medical tests.

Padma Shri recipient Pran Sabharwal a household name in Punjab theatre



Pran Sabharwal, the 93-year-old recipient of the Padma Shri, is a veteran Punjabi theatre actor with over 5,000 performances spanning over seven decades and a household name in the state.

Settled in Patiala town, Sabharwal's artistic journey prospered with the inspiration of Hindi cinema doyen Prithviraj Kapoor.

With no formal training in acting, Sabharwal carved his niche in theatre and radio.

In a recent interview, Sabharwal recalled his encounter with his role model Prithviraj

Kapoor in 1952, and how his advice to pursue acting in Punjab became a turning point in his lustrous career.

For Sabharwal and his wife Sunita, who is six years younger than him, life starts and ends on the stage.

They have been actively involved in promoting and teaching drama and promoting the Punjabi language through theatre, radio and films, both in India and abroad. The couple has been running National Theatre Artists Society (NTAS) since 1952 and is presently imparting training to budding

artists free of cost to keep the theatre alive. Sabharwal now rues the theatre has just become confined to competitions in educational institutes with limited audiences.

"None of the institutes is making any effort to keep the theatre, an art form, alive. Even the government is not promoting it," he is often quoted as saying.

He feels proud to share the Padma Shri with Nirmal Rishi, 80, with whom he had worked in the play "Paisa Bolta Hai". Born in Jalandhar on December 9, 1930, Sabharwal

retired from the state-run Punjab State Electricity Board and shifted his base to Patiala in 1988.

"I have dedicated my life to theatre and will continue to do so till my last breath. Nurturing young talent is our passing," he believes.

His journey to theatre began in childhood when he used to perform in Ramlilas. "I still remember when my father, and elder brother, who lived in Lahore, used to ask me to act in the Ramlila," he said.

For him, theatre is a medium which helps the artiste convey a message strongly to the audience.

He's one of the founder faculty members of the Department of Speech, Drama, and Music at Punjabi University in Patiala.

He gives credit to his better half for his passion. "If Sunita wasn't in my life, I wouldn't have survived theatre for so long. She's the one who looked after all theatre activities when I was busy with my office commitments," he revealed. She also wrote and directed "Bal Ramayana" in 1980.

Currently, the couple has been staging monthly theatre episodes at the Baradari Gardens in Patiala.



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann with his wife Gurbpreet Kaur and family members pays obeisance at Sri Harmandir Sahib (Golden Temple), in Amritsar on Friday. PHOTO-PRABHJOT GILL

Madhuri, Karisma recreate 'Dance of Envy'; Suniel Shetty calls them 'greatest dancing stars'

MUMBAI: Actresses Madhuri Dixit Nene and Karisma Kapoor will set the stage on fire as they will be seen recreating the magic of the 'Dance of Envy' from the iconic 1997 film 'Dil Toh Pagal Hai'.

Karisma will be a guest on the upcoming episode of the reality show 'Dance Deewane'. She will be joining Suniel Shetty, with whom she worked in 'Rakshak' and her 'Dil To Pagal Hai' co-star Madhuri Dixit Nene.

A promo shared by the



channel on Instagram showcased the two actresses recreating the iconic face-off

dance, which is called the Dance of Envy. The two nailed it to the T as they took over the stage on the show.

Suniel Shetty gave them a standing ovation and praised the two by saying: "Tab bhi aap logo ke liye dil paagal tha aur aaj bhi dil paagal hai. The greatest dancing stars of our industry and country."

The song is from Yash Chopra's 1997 blockbuster. In the film, both actors were cast opposite Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan.

Karisma Kapoor stuns fans in breezy co-ord set: 'Summer lovin', she declares



Karisma Kapoor won the hearts of her fans worldwide by dropping some mesmerising pictures of herself in a breezy summer attire. The 'Dil To Pagal Hai' actress took to her Instagram and shared a string of pictures donning a pastel green floral co-ord set.

The set comprises a long kurta-style top paired with matching trousers. She opted for a no-makeup look and tied her hair in a ponytail. Karisma rounded off the look with silver hoop earrings, juttis and sunglasses. For the caption, the 'Bivi No 1' actress wrote: "Summer lovin." Fans showered love in the comments section, with one expressing, "awssmmmm", while another conveyed, "love from Pakistan". A user also wrote: "Luv from Kashmir".

Meanwhile, she was recently seen in the mystery thriller film 'Murder Mubarak' alongside Sara Ali Khan, Pankaj Tripathi, Vijay Varma, Dimple Kapadia, and Sanjay Kapoor.

Rihanna regrets showing off too much skin in her past fashion appearances



LOS ANGELES: Singer-songwriter Rihanna has reflected on some of her past fashion choices, expressing regret over certain aspects.

The multi-hyphenate spoke about her favourite looks and her least favourites.

in my life. I had my n***** out, I had my p***** out," she said.

"But now those are the things that as a mom, an evolved young lady -- emphasis on young -- things that I just feel like I would never do, I'm like, 'Oh my god, I really did that? Nips out?'"

According to 'People', some of the Grammy winner's most notable looks were skin-baring moments, including the famed custom Adam Selman design -- which was an unforgettable fishnet dress, gloves, and headscarf that was hand-embellished with over 216,000 Swarovski crystals.

Another notable NSFW fashion moment was her 2014 Met Gala afterparty gown, a Stella McCartney design that showed a lot of abs with a daringly low back.

In conversation with the outlet, Rihanna also said that the backless gown remains one of her favourite looks, highlighting that two of her top fashion moments are from the 2014 Met Gala.

The 'Umbrella' singer further expressed her fondness for her Stella McCartney white cropped top paired with a skirt worn at the Gala itself.



Onus lies on news consumers to separate fact from fiction says Shriya Pilgaonkar

MUMBAI: Actress Shriya Pilgaonkar, who is set to return with her role of journalist Radha Bhargava in Season 2 of the streaming series 'The Broken News', has said that amidst the alarming rise in the usage of deepfake and Artificial Intelligence (AI), the onus also lies on people who consume news.

The actress said that the series stresses the fact that news consumption cannot be a one-way traffic. The ones who are consuming the news also have to be aware of AI and should verify news from their end as well.

The actress told to media "This season explores different themes in the world of news reporting that are so relevant. One of them is fake news and how easy it is for sensationalised stories

to spread faster than actual truth and facts. Given the recent alarming incidents of the Deepfakes, it raises concerns about misinformation and trust in the media."

"Today, we can't afford to blindly believe everything we read on social media without fact-checking from multiple sources because of how common fake news has become. Our series addresses the fact that the onus also lies on people consuming news to make sure that they discern fact from fiction."

He also spoke about her character Radha, saying that in the second season of the show, Radha will be seen avenging the false accusations against her.

She told media "The character arc of Radha takes an unpredictable turn as she is

determined to avenge the false accusations and her being unfairly maligned by the press, particularly Dipankar played by Jaideep Alhawat. As an actor, the process of exploring this inner conflict was both intense and exhilarating. I enjoy playing characters that are on the edge and creating that dynamic with an actor like Jaideep was extremely fulfilling."

"I love a good challenge and the experience of shooting for Season 2 has been super thrilling and a challenge because of the many layers and complexities that unfold in my character. I loved every bit of the process and also learnt a whole lot about the world of news reporting", she added. 'The Broken News 2' drops on ZEE5 on May 3.

Emraan Hashmi shooting for 'Ground Zero' in Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla



FW DESK

Actor Emraan Hashmi is currently busy shooting for his upcoming film 'Ground Zero' in Jammu and Kashmir. Directed by Tejas Vijay Deoskar, known for Marathi films such as 'Ajinky' and 'Bucket List', the movie features Emraan in the role of an Indian army officer.

Several videos and images from the set location have circulated online, showing a crowd of fans in Baramulla getting excited to see Emraan. In the images, Emraan can be seen donning an Indian army uniform.

'Ground Zero' is backed by Excel Entertainment, the production banner of actor-filmmaker Farhan Akhtar and Ritesh Sidhwani. The film also stars Sai Tamhankar and Mukesh Tiwari, among others.

In 2022, there were reports of Emraan being injured in a stone-pelting incident in Pahalgam, Kashmir, which went viral on social media. However, Emraan refuted the rumors on his social media page, saying, "The people of Jammu and Kashmir have been very warm and welcoming. It has been an absolute joy shooting in Srinagar and Pahalgam. The news of me being injured in a stone-pelting incident is inaccurate."

Apart from 'Ground Zero', Emraan is also set to make his Telugu film debut with 'They Call Him OG', which also stars Priyanka Arul Mohan, Arjun Das, and Prakash Raj.

'They Call Him OG' is scheduled to release in September this year. Additionally, Emraan recently made a special guest appearance in the historical thriller drama film 'Ae Watan Mere Watan'.

Sonali Bendre says she almost 'packed bags and left' films before 'Humma Humma' became a hit

MUMBAI: Bollywood Actor Sonali Bendre says she had decided to pack her bags and leave the film industry if she was unable to do a good performance in the song 'Humma Humma' from Mani Ratnam's 1995 movie 'Bombay'.

Bendre, who was barely five films old in the industry, said she was often "slammed" by choreographers for her moves until she got a breakthrough for her stint as the female dancer in the superhit track 'Humma Humma' alongside Prabhu Deva's brother Raju Sundaram.

According to the actor, it was a common perception at the time that one couldn't become a heroine if they didn't know how to dance. The 49-year-old said she wanted to give dancing a shot as the song was choreographed by the legendary Prabhu Deva.

"I'm not a trained dancer. When I got into movies, I really got slammed by dance directors for my dancing. 'Badi heroine banne chahi hai, dancing nahi aata'. So, if you couldn't dance, you couldn't be a heroine. I was going through all of that so whatever time I would get before and after the shoot, I started to train in 'Bollywood dancing', as it's called.

"This was more like, 'Let's do this'. This is with Prabhu Deva because if I can do it, I have a right to be here and if I can't do it, pack your bags and leave. At that point of time, it was like, '(At least) My team would earn their per-day (money)'," Bendre

told in an interview here.

The actor, who later went on to feature in '90s hits such as "Diljale", "Major Saab", "Sarfarosh", "Zakham" and "Hum Saath Saath Hain", said Prabhu Deva's father and choreographer master Muger Sundar was so impressed by her skills that he gave her a reward of Rs 100.

"The best part was I was dancing with Prabhu Deva's brother Raju and Sundar master ji, their father was (also) on the set. Mani Ratnam sir always did huge long shots, so we did everything in one go. After we did one of the things (shots), Sundar master ji took out 100 bucks and gave it to me and said, 'You did so well'. I was like, 'I don't need a certificate from anybody else, I'm here'."

Bendre said she was not even part of the main cast of 'Bombay', which was led by Arvind Swamy and Manisha Koirala, and yet "Humma Humma" is remembered as her song.

Aamir Khan makes debut on 'The Great Indian Kapil' show, opens up about skipping award ceremonies



MUMBAI: Bollywood actor Aamir Khan, known for his selective public appearances, finally made his debut on 'The Great Indian Kapil' show.

The much-awaited teaser of this upcoming episode, featuring Khan, has been circulating on social media platforms, generating significant buzz among fans.

In the teaser, Kapil Sharma, the charismatic host, engages in his trademark banter with Khan, drawing out candid responses from the actor.

The 'Dangal' actor has shed light on his choice to skip film award ceremonies, emphasising the value of time.

When questioned by Archana Puran Singh about his absence from award shows, Khan replied with characteristic wit, stating, "Time is precious, use it wisely."

The episode promises more laughter-inducing moments as Khan reveals amusing anecdotes about his family life, including his children's not greenlighting his choices. He humorously recounts how his attire for the show had been chosen by his children the night before, showcasing a glimpse into his off-screen persona.

Election 2024 : New Players, Shifting Alliances & Voter Aspirations Reshape Political Landscape

ADITI CHAHAR

The year 2024 marked a pivotal moment in India's political history as the nation witnessed one of its most consequential elections. Against a backdrop of evolving socio-economic challenges, shifting demographics, and heightened political consciousness, the 2024 Indian elections unfolded as a spectacle of democratic fervor. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the election dynamics, exploring the emergence of new political players, the realignment of alliances, and the diverse aspirations of the Indian electorate.

Emergence of New Political Players: One of the defining features of the 2024 elections was the rise of new political players on the national stage. Regional parties, rooted in local issues and identities, gained significant traction, challenging the dominance of traditional political heavyweights. These parties capitalized on grassroots support and leveraged social media and other platforms to amplify their message. The emergence of these new players added a layer of complexity to the political landscape, introducing fresh perspectives and diversifying the electoral discourse.

Shifting Alliances and Coalition Politics: The 2024 elections also witnessed a re-



shuffling of political alliances, as parties sought to forge strategic partnerships to maximize their electoral prospects. Traditional alliances were tested, and unexpected coalitions emerged as parties sought to expand their voter base and secure a path to power. The fluid nature of coalition politics added an element of uncertainty to the electoral calculus, as parties engaged in intense negotiations and back-room maneuvering to cobble together winning combinations.

Key Issues and Voter Aspirations: Against the backdrop of economic uncertainty, social inequality, environmental degradation, and national security concerns, voters entered the polling booths with a diverse set of aspirations and priorities. Economic development, job creation, healthcare, education, and infrastructure were among the top issues driving voter sentiment. Additionally, issues such as social justice, gen-

der equality, and environmental sustainability resonated strongly with segments of the electorate, reflecting the evolving priorities of Indian society.

Campaign Strategies and Mobilization Efforts: The campaign season leading up to the elections was marked by frenetic activity as political parties pulled out all the stops to woo voters. Candidates crisscrossed the country, holding rallies, roadshows, and town hall meetings to connect with voters. Social media emerged as a potent tool for political communication, with parties leveraging digital platforms to reach millions of voters and disseminate their message. Ground-level mobilization efforts, including door-to-door canvassing, grassroots outreach programs, and targeted messaging, played a crucial role in shaping voter perceptions and turnout.

The Role of Technology and Media: Technology played an

unprecedented role in shaping the narrative of the 2024 elections. Social media platforms became battlegrounds for political discourse, with parties engaging in aggressive campaigning, disinformation campaigns, and online mobilization efforts. Data analytics and targeted advertising allowed parties to micro-target specific demographics and tailor their messaging accordingly. Additionally, the role of traditional media outlets, including television, newspapers, and radio, remained influential in shaping public opinion and framing the electoral narrative.

Challenges and Controversies: Despite the democratic fervor surrounding the elections, they were not without challenges and controversies. Allegations of electoral malpractice, voter suppression, and manipulation of social media platforms marred the electoral process. Instances of hate speech, communal polarization, and identity politics further heightened tensions, raising concerns about the integrity of the electoral process and the health of Indian democracy. Additionally, logistical challenges, including voter registration issues, polling irregularities, and security concerns, posed logistical hurdles for election authorities.

The Aftermath and Govern-

ance Challenges

As the dust settled and the results were announced, India woke up to a new political reality. The elections had ushered in a new era of coalition politics, with parties scrambling to negotiate power-sharing arrangements and stake their claim to government formation. The task of governance fell squarely on the shoulders of the newly elected leadership, who faced the formidable challenge of addressing the myriad socio-economic issues facing the nation. Balancing competing interests, delivering on campaign promises, and navigating the complexities of coalition politics would require skillful leadership, effective governance, and a commitment to inclusive development.

The 2024 Indian elections were a watershed moment in the country's democratic journey, characterized by the emergence of new political players, shifting alliances, and diverse voter aspirations. Against a backdrop of socio-economic challenges and heightened political consciousness, the elections underscored the vibrancy and dynamism of Indian democracy. As India charted its course forward, the onus fell on its elected leaders to translate electoral mandates into meaningful governance, driving progress, and prosperity for all segments of society.