

REGION **2**

ELECTION COMMISSION APPOINTS 15 EXPENDITURE OBSERVERS FOR PUNJAB



GST Collections Hit Record High of Rs 2.1 Lakh Crore in April 2024

NEW DELHI: India's Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections soared to an all-time high of Rs 2.1 lakh crore in April 2024, registering a robust 12.4 per cent year-on-year growth, according to data released by the finance ministry.

This remarkable achievement was driven by a strong uptick in domestic transactions, which surged by 13.4 per cent, coupled with an 8.3 per cent increase in imports.

After adjusting for refunds, the net GST revenue for April 2024 stood at an impressive Rs 1.92 lakh crore, reflecting a significant 17.1 per cent growth compared to the corresponding period last year, when the



government had collected Rs 1.87 lakh crore.

The finance ministry's statement highlighted the consistent rise in monthly GST collections over the years. From an average of less than Rs 1

lakh crore per month in 2017-18, the inaugural year of GST implementation, collections rapidly accelerated after the pandemic-hit 2020-21 fiscal year, reaching an average of Rs 1.51 lakh crore in 2022-23.

Notably, the gross collections in April 2024 were 17.81 per cent higher than the mop-up of Rs 1.78 lakh crore in March of the same year.

Breaking down the total collections for April 2024, the central GST component stood at Rs 43,846 crore, while the state GST component amounted to Rs 53,538 crore. The integrated GST mop-up, which includes taxes on imported goods, reached Rs 99,623 crore, with Rs 37,826 crore collected on imported goods alone.

Additionally, GST cess collections for the previous month totalled Rs 13,260 crore, of which Rs 1,008 crore was collected on imported goods.

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY **5**

TRADE & INDUSTRY SUFFERING HEAVY LOSS IN EXPORT BUSINESS DUE TO FARMERS STRIKE



Forex reserves drop \$2.4 billion to \$637.9 billion



MUMBAI: India's forex reserves dropped \$2.412 billion to \$637.922 billion as on April 26, in the third consecutive weekly decline in the reserves, the RBI said on Friday. In the previous week, the overall reserves had declined \$2.28 billion to \$640.33 billion.

POTPOURRI **8**

DILJIT DOSANJH & NEERU BAJWA'S 'JATT & JULIET 3' TO RELEASE WORLDWIDE ON JUNE 28



I have buried Article 370, It is gone now: PM Modi

FW DESK

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday issued a challenge to the Congress, daring them to restore Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, abolish the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and repeal the law banning triple talaq.

"I have buried Article 370. It is gone now. I want to challenge the Congress' royal family and its 'shehzada' (a jibe at the Gandhi family and Rahul Gandhi) that if it is your hidden agenda, then come out in the open and tell people you will restore Article 370," he said.

Speaking at a rally in Junagadh, Gujarat, Prime Minister Modi emphasized that the ongoing Lok Sabha elections were not merely about personal ambitions but about fulfilling his "mission."



"These elections are not for my ambition, as people have fulfilled that ambition in 2014. The 2024 elections are for Modi's mission," he stated.

Accusing the Congress of having a "dangerous mentality," Modi claimed that its manifesto resembled that of the Muslim League.

"For Congress, this election is all about saving its existence, and the party is relying on its 'Mazhabi vote bank' to stay afloat," he asserted.

Referring to the controversy surrounding the Katchatheevu island, Modi criticized the previous Congress government, stating that during their rule, the Union government had no knowledge of the exact number of islands India possessed.

"I then got a satellite survey done and found that we have 1,300 islands. Some of them are as big as Singapore. We will develop some of them for tourism purposes," he announced.

Modi also criticized the Congress for its alleged divisive politics, stating that a Congress leader had recently spoken about separating South India and forming a new nation.

"The Congress will create a dangerous situation for the country if it comes to power. They may give away the Kutch desert claiming no one lives there," he warned.

Vote for INDIA bloc candidates to protect democracy: Tharoor



PANAJI: Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Friday urged the people of Goa to vote for INDIA bloc candidates in the Lok Sabha elections "to protect democracy, diversity, stop corruption and 'washing machine politics'".

"Is it democratic to freeze accounts of opposition parties, BJP has done it to us. Is it democratic to lock up the opposition party leader, who is a chief minister of a state, they did it to Arvind Kejriwal. Is it democratic to selectively raid opponents' helicopters, planes or cars of BJP leaders? This is not the way democracy is supposed to function. The way BJP is functioning people can see how one-sided it is," the Congress leader said while addressing a press conference here.

He also claimed that there is weaponisation of investigating agencies and opposition leaders are "selectively targeted". "BJP washing machine cleans the charges, whoever joins them. The charges against them suddenly disappear," Tharoor said. He further said that the BJP has displayed its "weakness and desperation by locking the leader of a national opposition party in jail". "Why did they do it in the middle of the election," he asked. Tharoor claimed that in this Lok Sabha election, the BJP will get "some big surprises".

CJ Chandrachud calls for international collaboration to combat juvenile cybercrimes



KATHMANDU: Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud said juvenile justice systems must adapt by enhancing international cooperation and sharing best practices to tackle growing transnational digital crimes involving minors, amidst the rapid evolution of technology.

Chandrachud is here on a three-day official visit to Nepal at the invitation of Chief Justice of Nepal Bishwombar Prasad Shrestha.

Addressing a National Symposium on Juvenile Justice, Chief Justice Chandrachud said, "When discussing juvenile justice, we have to recognise the vulnerabilities and unique needs of children embroiled in legal conflicts and ensure that our justice systems respond with empathy, rehabilitation, and opportunities for reintegration into society." It is crucial to grasp the multifaceted nature of juvenile justice and its intersections with various dimensions of the societies, he said.

Chandrachud said with technology evolving rapidly, juveniles are diving into cybercrimes like hacking, cyberbullying, online fraud, and digital

harassment. The anonymity and accessibility of digital platforms lower barriers to entry, luring young individuals into illicit activities.

He cited the "Momo Challenge" as an example. The 'Momo Challenge' was a viral hoax that spread through social media platforms in 2019, targeting children and adolescents. This hoax purported a series of escalating dares, including self-harm or suicide, although it was later debunked.

"Its rapid dissemination highlights the susceptibility of juveniles to online dangers. There is a need for proactive measures to educate and safeguard young individuals in the digital age, emphasising digital literacy, responsible online behaviour, and effective parental guidance as crucial components in mitigating cyber-related risks," Chandrachud said.

The juvenile justice systems, he said, "must thus adapt by enhancing international co-operation mechanisms and sharing best practices to address the transnational nature of digital crimes involving juveniles".

BJP of creating confusion, doubts & sowing the seeds of suspicion about the Sikh principles: SGPC

AMRITSAR: The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) President Harjinder Singh Dhani sharply reacting to the statement of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader Harjit Grewal said that the Sikh body SGPC, being the watchdog of Panth, will always raise its voice on activities against Sikh principles. He said that after the SGPC raised objection to some members of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) joining BJP, Harjit Grewal is making statements under the conspiratorial policy of BJP of creating confusion, doubts and sowing the seeds of suspicion about the Sikh principles, while the Sikh Panth knows how Bharatiya Janata Party is working to eliminate the rights of minorities.

Harjinder Singh Dhani said that BJP, working under the agenda of RSS, wants to directly and indirectly in-



fluence the management of Gurdwaras by interfering in Sikh issues, while people like Harjit Grewal seem in haste to implement BJP's anti-Sikh agenda.

The SGPC President said that the Centre government led by BJP, to which Grewal is calling as a pro-Sikh party, has failed to resolve the pending Sikh issues. He said that whether it is the issue of Sikh prisoners lodged in jails for three decades or the issues of Gurdwaras in the states

outside Punjab, the BJP-led Centre government has never taken the initiative to solve them. Even the BJP government does not consider it appropriate to give time to the SGPC, the representative body of the Sikhs, regarding Sikh issues, he said.

He said that Grewal, who is ignorant of Sikh principles, should not forget that the SGPC and Shiromani Akali Dal are two parts of the same movement, which have always represented Sikh affairs with joint efforts. These Panthic institutions are not the properties of any one but their history has been representative of people's struggle, he said. Advocate Dhani said that from time to time efforts have been made by the governments to weaken these Panthic institutions, to which the community has always given a befitting response. Even at present, these orga-

nizations are the representatives of Sikhs and will continue to challenge every anti-Sikh phenomenon, he said.

On the question raised by Grewal regarding the issue of sacrilege, the SGPC President said that during the Shiromani Akali Dal government, the environment of the state was spoiled by sacrilege of the holy Saroops (scriptures) of Sri Guru Granth Sahib in Punjab by anti-Sikh people. He said that it has become clear from the facts that have come out in the recent past that the incidents of sacrilege are directly committed by people related to Dera Sirsa. He questioned that Grewal should tell about whose government in Haryana is kind to Dera Sirsa head Gurmeet Ram Rahim, who has been named as the main culprit in the tragic cases of sacrilege? Why is he being given repeated and unrestricted paroles?

Turmoil in Panthic Politics as Amritpal Singh Declares Candidacy against SAD

TARUN BHAJINI
Chandigarh

In a surprising turn of events, Amritpal Singh, the leader of "Waris Punjab" Jathebandi, has announced his candidacy as an independent candidate for the Lok Sabha elections from the Khadoor Sahib constituency, leaving the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) entangled in the web of religious politics. The situation has become precarious for the Akali Dal, as it finds itself caught between supporting Amritpal Singh, who carries the legacy of Sikh

domination, and having to campaign against him.

Amritpal Singh's father, Tarsem Singh, expressed his dissatisfaction with the Shiromani Akali Dal's decision to field their own candidate from the Khadoor Sahib constituency. His statement came shortly after a meeting with the wife of Virsa Singh Valtoha, the Shiromani Akali Dal's candidate for the Lok Sabha elections, who sought support for her husband's candidacy.

Tarsem Singh criticized Virsa Singh's decision to stand as a candidate, labeling it a



historical mistake. Meanwhile, the Shiromani Akali Dal (Amritsar), led by Simranjit Singh Mann, has thrown its support behind Amritpal Singh, causing discomfort for the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal).

Simranjit Mann stated that after Amritpal Singh filed his nomination papers for the elections, their party would

withdraw its candidate from the Khadoor Sahib constituency. Khadoor Sahib is often referred to as a "panthic" seat, having come into existence in 2008, encompassing nine assembly segments - Jandiála, Tarn Taran, Khem Karan, Patti, Khadoor Sahib, Baba Bakala, Kapurthala, Sultanpur Lodhi, and Jheera.

Simranjit Singh Mann, known for his staunch panthic stance, also secured victory in the Sangrur Lok Sabha by-election from Malwa, another stronghold of the Shiromani Akali Dal.

Rae Bareli's tryst with another Gandhi, will Rahul do it this time?



RAE BARELI: If there is one Lok Sabha seat in the country that can claim to have the longest association with the Gandhi family, it is the Rae Bareli seat in Uttar Pradesh.

Rahul Gandhi's decision to contest from the Rae Bareli Lok Sabha seat shows that the family still cherishes its ties with this constituency, but it will not be a cakewalk this time.

Situated on the banks of the Sai River, 82 km southeast of Lucknow, Rae Bareli can truly be termed a Congress bastion.

After Independence, barring three occasions, the Congress has been continuously winning the seat. Feroz Gandhi, husband of Indira Gandhi, first won Rae Bareli in 1952 and then in 1957. After he died in 1960, R.P. Singh and Bajinath Kureel won the seat till Indira Gandhi took it over in 1967.

In 1977, Raj Narain of Janata Party defeated Indira Gandhi but Rae Bareli went back to Indira Gandhi in 1980.

In 1996 and 1998, the seat was won by BJP's Ashok Singh

but during this period, no member of the Gandhi family was in active politics.

From 2004 to 2019 Sonia Gandhi retained this seat.

Earlier this year, she opted for Rajya Sabha, apparently due to health reasons, and wrote an emotional note to the people of her constituency, chronicling her family ties with them and promising to maintain the relationship.

While Rae Bareli has remained loyal to the Gandhi family in the past decades, the party cadres in the constituency have almost willed away.

Of the five Assembly seats, four -- Bachhrawan (SC), Harchandpur, Sareni and Unchahar -- are held by the Samajwadi Party while the Sadar seat is held by the BJP. The prolonged absence of the Gandhis from Rae Bareli and the emergence of 'middlemen' who claim to act as a bridge between the people and their leader have driven away most of the local leaders to other parties.

Qaumi Insaaf Morcha : Supreme Court stays High Court's order to remove protesters from road

SC Bench also issued notice to NGO, Chandigarh Administration and Center Govt

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court has stayed the Punjab and Haryana High Court's order to authorities to remove protesters blocking Chandigarh-Mohali road for release of political prisoners.

Acting on a petition filed by the Punjab government, a Bench led by Justice BR Gavai on Friday also issued notice to Arrive Safe Society - an NGO which had gone to the high court, the Centre, the Chandigarh Administration and others.

The protesters have been seeking the release of Sikh prisoners, including Balwant Singh Rajoana, a convict in the former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh's assassination case, and Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, a 1993 Delhi bomb blast convict. On behalf of the Centre, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta supported the Punjab Government's stand.



"We are supporting each other. Federalism is always protected except when it comes to corruption. In COVID times, every State and Centre worked together..." said Mehta after Justice Gavai commented that the Centre and the state were on the same page "for a change." Noting that the Centre and the state had a common objective, Punjab Advocate General Gurminder Singh urged the top court to stay the high court order.

The high court had on April 9 said that despite repeated opportunities given, neither the State of Punjab nor the Union territory of Chandigarh had been able to give any re-

dressal to the commuters of Chandigarh and SAS Nagar Mohali. It had expressed the hope that the Punjab and Chandigarh Administration would wake up from their slumber. "On account of a handful of people sitting and blocking the road, inconvenience is being caused to the commuters and residents of the Tri-city and the misery is continuing," it had said. The high court had cited the Supreme Court's observations in Amit Sahni vs Commissioner of Police and others, 2020 (Shaheen Bagh protests case) in which the top court had said that public places can't be occupied indefinitely.

Furnish data on notices & arrests under GST Act: SC to Govt

NEWDELHI: The Supreme Court has asked the Centre Government to furnish details of issuance of notices and arrests done under the provisions of the Goods and Services Tax, saying it may interpret the law and lay down appropriate guidelines to avoid any harassment of citizens by depriving their liberty. A Special Bench of Justices Sanjeev Khanna, MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi, which is hearing a batch of 281 petitions challenging various provisions of the GST Act, Customs Act and the provisions of PMLA, voiced concern over the ambiguity in section 69 of the GST Act that deals with the powers of arrest. The Bench said it would interpret the law to "strengthen" the liberty, if need be, but not allow citizens to be harassed. "You furnish the data on notices issued and arrests made under the GST Act for alleged defaults of Rs 1 crore to Rs 5 crore respectively for the past three years. There can be harassment



of people and we won't permit that. If we find there is ambiguity in the provision, we will set it right. Second, people can't be sent behind bars in all the cases," the Bench told Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the Centre. The Bench sought the data after senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, appearing for some of the petitioners flagged the alleged misuse of the powers of the authorities under the GST regime, saying it is curtailing the liberty of individuals. The Bench said, "We want all the data. The GST Council will have those data. If the data is available, we want it before us." The ASG told the Bench he would try to answer the court's queries, when the matter will be heard next on May 9.

Election Commission appoints 15 expenditure observers for Punjab

CHANDIGARH: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has appointed 15 expenditure observers for all 13 Lok Sabha constituencies in Punjab, state Chief Electoral Officer Sabin C. said on Thursday.

The observers are entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the expenditure incurred by candidates and political parties during the campaign, ensuring compliance with election expenditure regulations.

Sabin C. said the appointed observers are distinguished Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officers. He said Harshad S.



Vengurlekar has been appointed for Gurdaspur, Bare Ganesh Sudhakar for Amritsar, Anurag Tripathi for Khadoor Sahib, Madhav Deshmukh for Jalandhar (reserved), and Pawan

Kumar Khetan for Hoshiarpur Lok Sabha constituency.

Similarly, Shilpi Sinha has been appointed for Anandpur Sahib, Pankaj Kumar and Chetan D. Kalamkar

for Ludhiana, and Akhilesh Kumar Yadava and Nandini R. Nair for the Bathinda constituency.

Anand Kumar for Fatehgarh Sahib, Manish Kumar for Faridkot, Nagendra Yadav for Ferozepur, Amit Sanjay Gaurav for Sangrur, and Meetu Agarwal for Patiala have also been appointed.

Each observer will play a crucial role in ensuring the fairness and transparency of the electoral process in their respective constituencies, he added.

Punjab will go to the polls for all 13 parliamentary seats on June 1.

Ambala police seized 1 kg opium from a truck



PARVESH HANDA
Ambala

CIA-1 staff of Ambala police led by Inspector Harbhajan Singh on a secret information conducted raid at a canter standing near Chacha Bhatija Dhaba on Do-Sarka (Barara) on Ambala- Jagadhari Road and during search recovered 1 kg opium from a youth sitting on the driver seat in the canter, identified as Rajbir Singh a resident of Khawaja Peer Colony Sirhind in Fatehgarh district of Punjab. Police team impounded the truck bearing registration no. PB11DC-4076. A case under NDPS Act was registered at Mullana police station in Ambala district.

SP Ambala Jashandeep Singh Randhawa while talking to media persons said that this is the second case of recovery of drugs in the district in the past couple of days. Earlier, police had recovered 1 kg 18 gm Charas from a youth from Himachal Pradesh near Shahzadpur subdivision in the district and campaign against drug smuggling will continue in Ambala district.

Haryana Govt action likely against 9 projects at Ambala



SATISH HANDA
Ambala

Eight important projects started years ago in twin city Ambala on which amount worth crores of rupees has already been spent by the government have been left incomplete, hanging on fire due to alleged fraud in which the officers of the PWD (B&R) released payments to the contractors and suppliers on the basis of fake bills without work done or receipt of the material, as a result people in the area are deprived of the benefits expected from these projects. Information reveals that in spite of the fact, excess payments released to the contractors and the suppliers by the department could not be recovered by the department in spite of all efforts and the case was under trial in Punjab and Haryana High Court, presently in the arbitration.

Additional Chief Secretary Anurag Rastogi visited Ambala on Tuesday to inspect all such incomplete projects and few other projects in which the work is going on too slow, and after having a meeting with the PWD (B&R) officers indicated stern action against officers of the department responsible for the embezzlements. Information also reveals that action was taken against a few technical officers of PWD (B&R) Ambala supervising these contracts and allegedly involved in embezzlement in the past and few of them were also suspended by the head office.

Punjab police seizes 4kg ICE drug, 1kg heroin from Amritsar; one held

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

In an intelligence-led operation against trans-border narcotic smuggling networks, Counter Intelligence (CI) Amritsar has arrested one person after recovering 4 Kg ICE drug (Crystal Methamphetamine) and 1 Kg heroin from his possession, said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav here on Friday.

The arrested accused has been identified as Avtar Singh, a resident of village Kakkar in district Amritsar.

In a statement issued here today, DGP Gaurav Yadav said



that following reliable inputs that accused Avtar Singh has retrieved a consignment of narcotic drugs from village Bhindi Saidan in Ajnala of Amritsar district and intends to deliver this consignment near Hargobind Avenue at

Sher Shah Suri Road in Chhaharta, Police teams from CI Amritsar led by DSP CI Balbir Singh swiftly conducted the raid at the designated location. Police teams have apprehended the accused person and recovered 4 Kg ICE drug and 1 Kg heroin from his possession, he added.

The DGP said that during the investigation, it was found that the accused Avtar was directly in touch with a Pakistan-based drug smuggler. Probe has also revealed that the Pakistan-based drug smuggler has used drones to deliver this drug consignment from across the border, he added.

IMT to be developed in Ambala after Congress comes to power: Hooda



PARVESH HANDA
Ambala

Former Haryana chief minister and leader of opposition in Haryana Vidhan Sabha Bhupinder Singh Hooda on the occasion of filing the nomination papers by Varun Mullana former Barara MLA for Lok Sabha seat alongwith HPCC president Ch. Uday Bhan addressed a large gathering in Ambala City, said that the present Lok Sabha polls are not only polls but also a fight to save democracy in the country, for which different political parties in the country have also constituted I.N.D.I.A to fight against the ruling BJP government jointly by '36 Biradaris' to bring Congress in power not only in Haryana state but all over in the country.

Hooda said, when Congress comes to power after the present polls, assures to provide government jobs to about 30 lakh youths in the country and two lakh youths in Haryana state and will also benefit farmers not only with the minimum support prices of their crops, but also waive of their loans with immediate effect, will also implement old pension scheme as desired by old-age persons, Hooda said that Congress after coming to power in Haryana state

assures free supply of 300 units electricity every month on every power connection, assures to supply LPG cylinder at the rate Rs 500 each to the consumers, 50% reservation in jobs for the females and promises to provide Rs 1 lakh financial assistance to women in the state every month as indicated in their poll manifesto released by Congress.

HPCC president Ch. Uday Bhan while addressing the gathering said that the poll manifesto released by Congress high command is likely to wipe out ruling Bhartiya Janta Party in every state across the country and going to fulfill the dreams by Gandhi Ji, Nehru Ji and Baba Saheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar, since 25 guarantees as specified by Congress in their poll manifesto is going to bring justice to everyone. Meanwhile, candidate for Ambala Lok Sabha seat Varun Mullana, accompanied by hundreds of his supporters started shouting slogans - 'Haath Badle-ga Halaat' and 'Laden-ge Jiten-ge', and while addressing said that Congress has assured five justices and 25 guarantees to the voters and whatever have committed will fulfill the same, whereas on the other hand BJP makes tall claims but never fulfills the same.

After quitting Congress, ex-Punjab MLA Dalvir Singh Goldy joins AAP

CHANDIGARH: A day after quitting the Congress, former legislator Dalvir Singh Goldy, who unsuccessfully contested against Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann in the 2022 Assembly polls, joined the AAP on Wednesday.

Goldy, who resigned from the Congress after he expressed his "displeasure" over the denial of a party ticket from the Sangrur Lok Sabha seat, joined the AAP in the presence of CM Mann here. Welcoming Goldy into the party fold, CM Mann, who won the Dhuri seat with a margin of 58,206 votes in 2002, called him his "younger brother" and a "hardworking youth".

"I have always believed that youngsters should be allowed

Central agencies started campaign against SAD immediately after it quit the NDA govt : Badal

FW DESK
Bathinda

The SAD president, who was addressing a huge gathering here in favour of the party's candidate Harsimrat Kaur Badal, said those who had attacked the SAD virulently for the acts of sacrilege eight years back, including self-styled panthic leader Baljit Singh Daduwal, had now joined the BJP. "This proves there was a sinister agenda to defame the SAD and weaken it".

Sukhbir Badal said the SAD was known for selfless service. "Leaders like Sardar Parkash Singh Badal have been jailed for as long as sixteen years in far off places like Tamil Nadu, Coimbatore and Panchmari. Badal Sahab even did not avail bail to attend his daughter's wedding".

Badal also took on the BJP for taking over Sikh religious bodies. He said the BJP government in Maharashtra had tinkered with the Sri Hazoor Sahib gurdwara managing board and nominated 12 members to the Board to take it in its control. He said members of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee had been co-opted into the BJP even as the SGPC had



been broken to create a separate Gurdwara committee for Haryana. He said Sikh bodies under the control of BJP like the Delhi Committee led by Manjinder Singh Sirsa were now even denying 'langar' to those who were holding 'dharnas' against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The SAD president also asserted that the central government had virtually taken over the AAP government in Punjab. He said chief minister Bhagwant Mann was already functioning as a B team of the BJP and was ready to become the BJP's chief minister in Punjab in case the party formed the government at the centre.

Sukhbir Badal also appealed to the voters to support the SAD. He assured the

people that the party would continue to live by its principles come what may. "We earlier left the BJP because the party was not doing justice with the farming community. Even now we chose not to align with the BJP because it was not doing justice to the Sikh Panth and Punjab".

In an emotional pitch to the electorate, the SAD president also asked the audience not to vote for the Congress. "Elections in Punjab are occurring on June 1, the same day Indira Gandhi attacked Sri Darbar Sahib with tanks and mortars. No Punjabi can forget the carnage which occurred at Sri Darbar Sahib or the subsequent genocide of Sikhs".

Badal also spoke about how Mansa, which was one of the most backward areas in the State, had developed manifold during previous SAD tenures. "Look around you. Every infrastructure project be it roads, irrigation channels or Mandis - has come about during the tenure of S Parkash Singh Badal". Senior leader and party secretary general Balwinder Singh Bhundar, EX MLA Dilraj Singh Bhundur and Istri Akali dal President Bibi Hargobind Kaur also addressed the gathering.

Senior journalist Sarbjit Pandher passes away at 58



CHANDIGARH: Senior journalist and former president of the Chandigarh Press Club Sarbjit Pandher passed away at his residence in Mohali on Sunday morning. He bravely fought a deadly cancer for almost eight months before breathing his last. He was 58 years old.

He is survived by his father Sardar Gurdev Singh Pandher and two daughters.

Apart from being a journalist par excellence he was a renowned photographer as well. Born in 1964 in Ludhiana, Sarbjit Singh Pandher did his schooling from Sacred Heart School. He studied for a brief while at Government college, Ludhiana and went on to do Masters in journalism from PAU, Ludhiana.

He joined PTI and The Tribune as a stringer and covered militancy in Punjab while stationed at Gurdaspur.

Later he joined The Hindu at Chandigarh covering Punjab. He wrote extensively on issues concerning Punjab's economy, farmers' issues opposing WTO policies. He was invited by the US government to study farm issues.

After taking voluntary retirement from The Hindu he joined as Editor in Chief of Daily Post. He took a break from journalism and took to photography. His passion for photography took him to a host of places in India and abroad. He held several solo exhibitions and was awarded by various bodies for his stunning pictures. Apart from being a remarkable journalist he stood up like a true leader for the community of journalists. He started as union leader in PTI and remained very active in Press Club where he was elected President and secretary general twice.

He was always among the first to reach any place whenever a journalist needed help or assistance.

He will be widely missed by his family and friends.



to come forward in politics and be the harbingers of change. But Goldy was ignored in the Congress. I am inducting him in the party as my younger brother," the Chief Minister said.

AAP has fielded Cabinet Minister Gurmeet Singh Meht Hayer from the Sangrur parliamentary seat, while the Congress candidate is Sukhpal Khaira, a legislator and AAP rebel.

Nearly 80% school vehicles violating fitness measures on roads

PARVESH HANDA
Chandigarh

As per STA data between January 2023 to March 2024, there have been 1,008 challans issued to autos apart from 81 autos were impounded for violations of the Safe Transportation Policy by the UT transport department which issued an advisory to schools in the wake of the recent Mahendergarh school bus accident at Kanina, which claimed the life of six students and injured about 20 others in this mishap. It has come to light that the autos are the biggest rule breakers as compared to buses and maxi-cabs. Schoolchildren on their way to school or returning home are seen in crowded auto-rickshaws, which are not allowed to carry over four kids as per the High Court guidelines. As per the Road Safety in Chandigarh 2022 report, five fatalities and 13 minor



injuries were reported in autos, whereas in the case of buses, one fatality and one case with minor injury were reported throughout the year. In a meeting held recently by the UT education department and traffic police with all school principals of the city, the specifications of both buses and autos were discussed, according to which 17th school autos must carry a contract carriage permit issued by the STA. As per the Punjab and Haryana high

court's order 17th January, 2020, school autos are not allowed to carry more than four children in case the age of children is below 12 years. Autos must also be fitted with horizontal grills, bars, gates on both sides for the safety of children.

In the meeting held by the school management and the parents, whether the buses are owned by the school or by independent contractors, schools must check the quality of the buses and

the manpower handling the buses. All schools having a parking area inside the boundary wall shall ensure that children are dropped inside the school. School management shall control and man the traffic through their own manpower and shall also appoint one of its faculty as transport manager. President of the Chandigarh Parents Association Nitin Goyal said, the schools charge inflated transport fees from parents and why is this fee collected, if schools will make excuses that they don't own the buses, and if any discrepancies come up the schools should also be penalised if any of their buses are found lacking security measures. After the UT state transport authority issued an advisory to schools in the wake of the Mahendergarh school bus accident, which claimed the life of six innocent students, it has come to light that the autos are the biggest rule

breakers as compared to buses and maxi-cabs.

On a public litigation writ moved in Punjab and Haryana High Court by Ravinder Kataria a resident of Ludhiana after the mishap at Kanina in Mohindergarh district on 11th April, in which six school children had lost lives and the driver of the bus was found under the influence of liquor, a notice has been issued for hearing in the case in the court of Bench of Chief Justice G.S. Sanghwalia and Justice Lapita Banerjee in which it was made clear that the vehicle causing the accident was not having fitness measures required by the school bus while carrying the children to the school. However, the school director, female principal and the driver of the bus who was under the influence of liquor at the time of mishap were arrested by the police.

Revenue loss over Rs 42 cr due to farmers protest at Shambhu Toll Plaza

PARVESH HANDA
Ambala

In past 13 days, revenue loss worth over Rs 42 crore has been estimated at the Shambhu Toll Plaza near Haryana-Punjab border on Amritsar-Delhi highway, from where nearly 40,000 vehicles pass daily with the revenue collection towards toll tax worth Rs 55 to 60 lakh every day. Apart from this, the drivers of the automobiles travelling on

this route are facing severe harassment since the farmers protest has been going on since the past about 80 days and the vehicle owners have to divert journeys via passing through the lengthy alternate routes covering extra distance wasting time as well as money in travelling.

Information reveals that in the past about 13 days more than 900 trains have been cancelled, as well as more than 1700



trains have been adversely affected causing much inconvenience to travelling passengers in this period. Information also reveals that 32 Haryana Roadways buses from Ambala depot travelling everyday on Punjab routes have been discontinued since past about 80 days, besides a few buses are travelling towards Punjab via different link routes, and in spite of the bus services have been discontinued Haryana state

government has to bear amount worth Rs 1 lakh daily to the Punjab government daily towards passenger tax, thus incurring heavy financial loss.

As a result of direct connectivity between Haryana and Punjab, the trade and industry of both states have been adversely affected due to the farmers' protest. Business in Asia's biggest wholesale cloth market, Ambala City has also been adversely affected due to the farmers'

protest for a long time causing a 40 to 50% drop in the sale even during the present marriage season. Information also reveals that large number of oil filling stations as well as roadside 'dhaba' located on the highway on the both sides of Shambhu Toll Plaza and the Haryana-Punjab border have been worst affected due to slump in their sale due to limited number of vehicles plying in the area since past about over 80 days.

Congress chief writes to PM Modi, says our votebank is every Indian

NEW DELHI: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in reply to the PM's letter to Phase 3 candidates, saying that their 'guarantees are simple and votebank is every Indian.

Posting his letter on X, Kharge said, "...In your letter, you claim that reservation will be taken away from SC, ST and OBC and given to 'our (Congress's) votebank. Our votebank is every Indian - the poor, the marginalised, the women, the aspirational youth, the labour class, the Dalits and the Adivasis."

Kharge said that voters are intelligent enough to read and understand by themselves what the Congress has written in its manifesto and what guarantees they have promised. "Our guarantees are so simple and clear, that we don't have to explain it



to them," he said.

The Congress chief said, "We have heard you and the Home Minister say that Congress is practising appeasement politics. The only appeasement policy that we have seen in the last 10 years is the appeasement of Chinese by you and your ministers. Even today, you refuse to call

China as 'Ghospaithiye', instead on June 19, 2020, you said Na Koi Ghusa Hai, Na Hi Koi Ghus Aaya hai, insulting the supreme sacrifice of 20 Indian soldiers in Galwan. Your public 'Clean Chit' to China, has weakened India's case and made it more belligerent. Even as tensions escalate due to repeated Chinese

transgressions and construction of military infrastructure near LAC in Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh and Uttarakhand, the imports of Chinese goods to India has (sic) increased by 54.76% in the past 5 years alone and has crossed 101 billion dollar in 2023-24."

He said in his letter, "I saw the letter written by you to all the NDA candidates about what they need to communicate to the voters. From the tone and content of the letter it seems that there is a lot of desperation and worry in you which is leading you to use language that does not suit the office of the Prime Minister. The letter makes it look like the lies in your speeches are not having the effect you intended and now you want your candidates to amplify your lies. Repeating a lie a thousand times will not make it the truth."

BELAGAVI: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday slammed the Congress, saying that its move to field Rahul Gandhi from the Raebareli Lok Sabha seat will not be successful as the party leader will lose by a huge margin.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi successfully launched Chandrayaan in the very first attempt. On the other hand, Sonia Gandhi has tried to launch Rahul 'baba' 20 times and failed each time. He ran away from Amethi and today, for the 21st time, his candidature has been announced from Raibareli. I can assure you that he is going to lose by a huge margin against BJP's Dinesh Pratap Singh. " Amit Shah said while addressing a rally at Chikodi in Karnataka's Belagavi district.

Earlier on Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi too



had taken a dig at Congress' decision, stating that the party's 'Shehzada' (prince) will be defeated from Wayanad and that, soon after the elections at Wayanad gets over, he will go in search of a second seat. His followers were claiming that

he will fight from Amethi. But, it seems that he is scared of Amethi too. So now the 'prince' is trying to find an escape route from Raebareli, " PM Modi said while addressing a rally at Burdwan in West Bengal.

Meanwhile, Shah accused the Congress of promoting 'parivarvaad' (nepotism), saying the BJP remains focused on protecting the country's 'parampara' (heritage).

"Congress has always insulted the culture and heritage of the country while PM Modi has protected it. You got him elected for the second time and he built the Ram Mandir which Congress could not do in 70 years," Amit Shah said during the rally in support of BJP candidate Anna Saheb Jolle.

He also criticised the Congress leaders, including AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi, for not attending the Ram Mandir's inauguration in Ayodhya in January.

He also listed the Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor project and upliftment of the Somnath Mandir, Kedarnath Dham, and Badri Dham as some other achievements of the Modi government besides the abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir.

Jammu-Srinagar National Highway closed due to landslides amid heavy rainfall



FW DESK

Continuous rainfall in Ramban has triggered landslides along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway, leading to its closure. The heavy downpour caused cracks in the mountains at various points along the highway, including Mehad, Kishtwadi Pathar, and Gangru Ramsu areas, necessitating a complete shutdown of the highway.

The landslides have resulted in the blocking of the highway, with large rocks falling from the mountains making the situation more challenging. Authorities have been working since 5 am to clear the debris and stones to reopen the highway for traffic.

In light of the adverse weather conditions forecasted by the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) Srinagar Station from April 26 to April 30, residents living near the River Jhelum, its tributaries, and Nallahs have been advised to avoid these water bodies until the weather improves.

The Jammu and Kashmir State Disaster Management Authority (JKDMA) has issued an avalanche warning, prompting the closure of all schools in Srinagar on Monday as a precautionary measure. However, teaching and non-teaching staff have been instructed to report for duty to oversee the situation and safeguard the institutional assets of their respective schools.

Priyanka accuses Modi of misleading people by exploiting religious sentiments

KAVITA SHARMA
Fatehpur Sikri

Priyanka Gandhi accused the Prime Minister Narendra Modi of misleading people by exploiting their religious sentiments at the time of elections.

Addressing a public meeting during a roadshow Gandhi cautioned people against such a leader who only lied to people all these years.

She pointed out, he didn't give anything to the poor but only to a handful of billionaire friends. She said, he gave them everything from ports to airports and infrastructure projects.

Besides, Priyanka Gandhi added, he bought two aero-



planes for himself for Rs 16,000 crores but did not spare Rs 15,000 crores to provide debt relief to the farmers.

The Congress General Secretary said, while Modi's billionaire friends were prospering, poor people and farmers

were suffering. She said, Modi did not do anything to ameliorate the plight of common and ordinary people.

She asked, why was Modi not providing jobs to youth when 30 lakh vacancies were lying in various government

departments. She said, by bringing Agnipath scheme Modi had blocked the chances of youth to serve the country.

Taking a dig at Modi's foreign trips she said, where he can be seen in Russia or taking swings with Chinese President, he never bothered to meet the common people of the country.

Priyanka Gandhi observed that too much power turns people too arrogant. She said, same thing had happened to Modi. He was having too much power and the people around him were too scared to speak truth. She said, Modi remains disconnected from the masses and does not know anything about their problems.

Modi wants to subvert constitution, says Rahul

KAVITA SHARMA
Patan

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi today alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi wanted to finish the reservations by changing the constitution. He pointed out, the BJP leaders were openly saying that once they form the government they will be changing the constitution.

Addressing a public rally in Gujarat, RG said, these elections were going to decide whether the democracy and constitution were going to survive in India or not. He pointed out, everything the people of this country have got its foundation in the constitution.

But, he added, the Congress along with the INDIA bloc would protect the constitution and democracy at all costs.

He alleged that Modi wanted to finish the reservation, by schemes like Agnipath and privatisation, as he wanted to give all the benefit to a select few billionaires to whom he was handing over all the national assets and wealth.

Asserting that Prime Minister's policies were aimed at benefiting only the rich and super rich, he said, the situation in the country right now was such that 22 people owned as much wealth as 70 crore Indians. Besides, he added, just one percent of the population was controlling forty percent of the country's wealth.

He said, unemployment and rising prices were the main issues and still these were not being discussed and debated anywhere as Modi had completely taken control of the media.

Referring to the discrimination with people on the basis of their caste, Gandhi pointed out,



how the President of India, Ms Droupadi Murmu, who is the head of the state was not allowed to attend the Ram Mandir and the new parliament building inaugurations as she belonged to an Adivasi community. He asked people whether they could see any poor, any dalit, any farmer, any backward or any Adivasi at the Ram Mandir inauguration as there was none.

Gandhi alleged that not only had Modi handed over the country's wealth and assets to his billionaire friends, he had also waived off their Rs 16 lakh crores loan, which was enough to waive off farmers' debt for 25 years or run the MGNREGA scheme for 24 years. He reiterated the Congress' promise of creating crores of millionaires. He said, while Modi had created a select few super billionaires, the Congress party will create crores of 'lakhpaties' (millionaires) by distributing the country's wealth among them.

He said, first the Congress par-

ty's government will carry out the caste census and financial survey to find out who was controlling how much wealth and resources. He said, this will be the basis for further development and progress in the country.

He announced Rs one lakh every year for one woman of every poor family in the country. He said, every month one woman in every poor family will receive Rs 8500 directly in her bank account.

To address the issue of unemployment, he said, the Congress government has guaranteed 'pehli naukri pakki' (first job guaranteed). He said, the Congress government will bring in a law, Right to Apprenticeship. Under this law every fresh graduate and diploma holder will have the right to one year apprenticeship with a guaranteed income of Rs one lakh. Besides, the Congress government, he added, will waive off the debt of farmers and provide legal guarantee for the MSP of their crops.

HD Revanna and his son Karnataka MP Prajwal Revanna booked for sexual harassment case

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru/Hassan

A 47-year-old woman hailing from Holenarsipura town has filed a police complaint against former minister and local MLA HD Revanna, and his son Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, alleging sexual harassment toward herself and her daughter. This comes in the wake of reports indicating Prajwal's departure from the country, purportedly to Frankfurt, Germany. Promptly, the Hassan district police transferred the case to the Special Investigation Team (SIT), established by the government to investigate the scandalous videos



allegedly implicating Prajwal. Early last week, sleaze videos allegedly involving Prajwal went viral on social media. Pen drives containing the Video were mysteriously distributed in Hassan city.

Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the Karnataka Police has summoned sitting MP and NDA Lok Sabha candidate from Karnataka's Hassan constituency Prajwal Revanna and his father Janata Dal (Secular)

MLA HD Revanna for questioning in connection with the obscene videos case. The summons against the father-son duo come a day after the JD(S) suspended Prajwal Revanna after the Congress formed the SIT to probe allegations of sexual abuse against him.

Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, grand son of ex-PM HD Deve Gowda and embroiled in alleged sex video case, is likely to return to India from Germany later this week to face probe launched by the SIT set up by Cong govt. CM Siddaramaiah wrote to PM Modi asking his to take necessary steps through MEA so that Prajwal can return to India to join the probe.

Why BJP Can't Afford to Neglect Brij Bhushan ?



JAG MOHAN THAKEN

Despite the criticism from all corners, ultimately BJP has given ticket to Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son for the current Lok Sabha election. Singh's son Karan Sharan Singh has been nominated as a BJP candidate in his father's Kaiser Ganj seat in Uttar Pradesh, a seat Brij Bhushan has previously won six times. Brij Bhushan Singh is accused of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour during his tenure as the President of Wrestling Federation of India. Seven female wrestlers, including one minor, had filed complaints with the police accusing Mr Singh of molesting and groping them at training camps and tournaments, but Mr Singh had denied all the allegations, accusing the wrestlers of being "politically motivated."

Top Indian wrestlers, including Bajrang Punia, Sakshi Malik, and Vinesh Phogat, among others protested at the Jantar Mantar in the national capital demanding action against Brij Bhushan, who they had accused of sexually

harassing women grapplers. The wrestlers got support from all strata including farmers' unions.

But now it seems that BJP has kept its deaf ear towards all the public voices and messaged that it is not caring for any resentment, but why?

Renowned Indian wrestlers, Sakshi Malik and Bajrang Punia, have slammed the ruling government party.

Talking to the Indian Express, Bajrang said, "I don't know why the government is so scared of Brij Bhushan. His son getting the ticket also shows the 'Parivarvad' in the BJP. The BJP criticises other parties saying 'Parivarvad' exists, but they are no different."

Expressing her anguish over extending Lok Sabha ticket to the son of Brij Bhushan's son, Sakshi Malik, the Indian woman Olympian medallist, writes on her twitter (X) account in Hindi, "The daughters of the country lost, Brij Bhushan won. We all put our careers at stake, slept on the streets for many days in sun and rain. Till date Brij Bhushan has not been arrested. We were not demanding anything; we were only demanding justice. Leave the arrest, today by giving ticket to his son you have broken the morale of crores of



daughters of the country. If the ticket goes to only one family, is the country's government so weak in front of one man?"

Congress in its tweet on X in Hindi quotes Priyanka Gandhi's speech in a rally in Banaskantha, Gujarat on May 4, Wherein Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi questions the favouring of Brij Bhushan by giving LS ticket to his son, "Today, wherever women are being tortured in the country, the BJP government has supported the criminals. BJP government and Modi ji did not provide any help in Unnao case, Hathras case, women wrestlers case. BJP gave ticket in Uttar Pradesh to the son of the person who tortured women wrestlers. Rajput women were insulted in Gujarat. Did PM Modi take action against that candidate?"

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has also made a scathing attack on BJP on the issue of son of BJP MP Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, who is facing allegations of sexual abuse of Indian women wrestlers, getting a Lok Sabha ticket and former Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda's grandson HD Revanna sexually abusing hundreds of women.

On Friday, May 3, AAP Punjab's senior leader and spokesperson Neel Garg said that BJP is not just a threat to the Constitution of the country. It is also a threat to the women of the country. BJP is no longer Bharatiya Janata Party, it has now become the Balakari Janata Party, alleges Neel Garg in a party press release.

He said that on one hand BJP gives the slogan of Beti Bachao - Beti Padhao and on

the other hand it encourages people who sexually exploit women by giving them Lok Sabha tickets.

He said that women wrestlers in Delhi protested against Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh for months but BJP did not take any action against him. Neither any BJP leader, nor any minister, nor the Prime Minister spoke a word against Brij Bhushan Singh. Now on the contrary, his son has been given a Lok Sabha ticket.

He said that giving a Lok Sabha ticket to Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh's son is not just an insult to the women wrestlers of the country, it is an insult to all the women of India. He said that the people of the country are watching these misdeeds of BJP. In this election, the people of the country, especially women, will exact the price of these insults and abuse from the BJP.

Is BJP scared of Brij Bhushan Singh?

Renowned Wrestler Bajrang Punia raises the question, "I don't know why the government is so scared of Brij Bhushan?"

It is pertinent to mention here that Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, a six-time MP, having a strong hold in Rajput community, has been victorious

not only in his present Kaiserganj seat (in 2009, 2014, and 2019) but also in neighbouring constituencies including Gonda (in 1991 and 1999) and Balrampur (in 2004). He has a significant influence over half a dozen Lok Sabha seats in central UP due to his ownership of over 50 educational institutions in the region.

News 18 on MAY 04, 2024 states Mr Singh as irreplaceable, "Observers say Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh is perhaps an irreplaceable or important factor in Uttar Pradesh's politics. While UP's strongmen politicians are gradually either fading away or being cut down to size by the government, Brij Bhushan seems to be an exception, with influence over the five Lok Sabha constituencies of Kaiserganj, Gonda, Balrampur, Shravasti, Ayodhya, and Bahraichthrough the 54 educational institutions he owns or is associated with."

Business Line in its report dated April 18, 2024 had reported that a Rajput agitation is disturbing the BJP's calculations in the seats where the party had expected to sweep in alliance with the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD).

According to Business Line, the Rajputs believe they have

been short-changed by the BJP's central leadership who they believe is "gunning for Yogi Adityanath". Other factors such as Union Minister Purushottam Rupala's comments that the Rajputs compromised with the British and denial of a ticket to General VK Singh from neighbouring Ghaziabad, have also fuelled the anger. The community has taken to organising large gatherings.

By giving ticket to Brijbhushan Sharan Singh's son Karan Singh, BJP has given the message that it has no qualms against those who play with the honor of the country's sisters and daughters. Because their aim is only to cross 400. It doesn't matter to him whether it is Ujjwal Revanna or Brij Bhushan Singh.

Indicating towards the injustice with women wrestlers, a Delhi based senior journalist, says, "But the question is that the election chariot of the so-called RLD chief (without naming Jayant Chaudhary), who does politics of Jat community and farmers, will go to Kaiserganj to campaign for the son of Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh and make him win the election? Because RLD has been claiming that it is contesting elections on

80 out of 80 seats with BJP. So Kesarjanj also comes in 80? Will RLD's claim of 80 be fruitful? Have politicians become so selfish and blind that they cannot even demand justice for women wrestlers?"

Malik further adds, "I am asking this question as a journalist, son of a farmer and a citizen of Western UP. Along with me, society and farmers should also ask this question? Do you know that you only take votes and donations in the name of society and caste, you have no accountability towards the society? Whether anyone asks or not, I will ask the question?"

AAP Punjab's senior leader and spokesperson Neel Garg says that the people of the country are watching these misdeeds of BJP. In this election, the people of the country, especially women, will exact the price of these insults and abuse from the BJP.

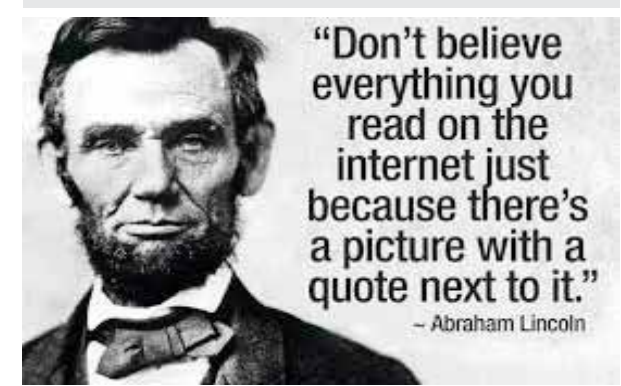
Can BJP dare to ignore or neglect Brij Bhushan? No is the straight answer in the present scenario, when BJP seems to be facing hardship to repeat its third term.

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

Services need to balance growth with sustainability

A recent report by Goldman Sachs, entitled 'India's rise as the emerging services factory of the world,' offers an in-depth analysis of India's burgeoning role in the global services market. Over the past 18 years, following pivotal economic reforms initiated in 1991, India's services sector has not only expanded dramatically but also diversified, encompassing areas from professional consulting to financial services. The report highlights that while global services exports tripled over the last 18 years, India's exports grew at double that rate, reaching nearly \$340 billion last year. Remarkably, India's growth in this sector has been the third fastest globally since 2005, trailing only behind Singapore and Ireland. The country's global services market share surged from under 2% in 2005 to 4.6% in 2023, while its goods exports share saw a more modest increase from 1% to 1.8%. This expansion has provided a crucial buffer for India's external account balances, helping mitigate impacts from vulnerabilities such as high oil import costs. Looking forward, Goldman Sachs projects that services exports could rise to \$800 billion by 2030, slightly under the government's ambitious \$1 trillion target for combined services and merchandise exports. This growth trajectory suggests a significant boost to sectors such as high-end discretionary consumption and real estate. Despite these optimistic projections, the immediate outlook remains cautious. The dominant IT services sector has recently experienced workforce reductions and moderate growth projections, with major players like Infosys forecasting only a 1% to 3% increase in revenue. To maintain its upward trajectory, India must adopt a balanced approach that not only pushes for greater global market access but also fosters innovation in emerging areas like artificial intelligence and blockchain. A regulatory environment that supports rather than stifles innovation will be essential for nurturing new enterprises and ensuring the long-term vitality of India's services sector.

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DIPA SINHA SAYS ADDRESSING INEQUALITY INVOLVES QUESTIONING GROWTH'S NATURE AND ENSURING JOB CREATION

Inequality can't be ignored



The Congress party's election manifesto, the Nyay Patra, has triggered a debate on inequality, concentration of wealth and the measures to address these. The Prime Minister, with his misleading comments on what the Congress manifesto contains, has also managed to provoke a discussion on wealth redistribution. There is ample evidence to show that inequality in India has been rising. The World Inequality database found that in 2022-23, 22.6% of the national income went to the top 1%, the highest ever since 1922. Wealth inequality is even more stark with the top 1% population having 40.1% share in wealth. It is clear that inequality can no longer be ignored and justified as a collateral to growth. The cost of such unequal growth must be interrogated.

The unfairness of some people and a few corporates doing so well while most of the population continues to struggle for decent employment opportunities is becoming more and more obvious. The logic of trickle down and of supporting 'wealth creators' so that more jobs are created and prosperity spreads has failed time and time again not just in India but across the world also. The futility of continuing to depend only on economic growth even at the cost of increasing inequality, for improving the lives of people, is a core political economy question facing countries today. That it is finally becoming an election issue in India must therefore be welcomed, irrespective of what the election outcome in 2024 will be.

The public discussion, especially on social media platforms, has so far mostly been confined to direct redistribution measures of the 'Tax the rich, subsidise the poor' nature. These are very relevant in the Indian context. After all, India not only has a low tax-GDP ratio compared to other middle-income countries (India's tax-GDP ratio is 17% compared to 25% in Brazil) but also a regressive taxation structure, where indirect

taxes contribute to almost two-thirds of all tax revenue collection. Furthermore, even direct taxes are not very progressive. For example, the effective tax rate (tax to profit ratio) according to the Receipt Budget 2023-24 was 19.14% for companies that had more than Rs 500 crore profit before taxes compared to an effective tax rate of 24.82% for companies in the group of 0-Rs 1 crore profit.

Welfare spending is low

On the other hand, spending on welfare and the social sector is very low compared to other countries. Public spending on health for instance is still around 1.3% of GDP whereas the National Health Policy (NHP) targets achieving 2.5% of GDP by 2025. Despite COVID-19, we have not seen any such massive increases in health expenditures, and going by the current trend, we will not achieve this target. A number of other major budgetary allocations of the Union Government such as for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), education, budget for children, show a decline as a proportion of the total ex-

penditure or of GDP. Hence, improving revenue mobilisation in a progressive manner while also increasing spending on areas that directly affect lives of the poor is very much a relevant issue and needs to be paid attention to.

However, addressing inequality is also about questioning the nature of growth itself. In a situation where the major source of livelihood for people is through employment, how far can growth that does not generate jobs contribute to development? The kind of growth we have experienced recently has been one that has been accompanied by joblessness as witnessed by a declining employment elasticity of output. Further, there is a rise in profit shares and stagnant real wages. The discussion, therefore, has to be on generating employment — not distress self-employment but decent jobs with adequate remuneration. For this, we have to focus attention on more equitable growth where the purchasing power of people also increases. Governments can play a role in this by spending on programmes such as the NREGA and the Public Distribution System. Cash transfer schemes such as the Mahalakshmi scheme

proposed in the Congress manifesto can also contribute to this.

Job creation

At the same time, governments can also contribute to directly creating jobs by filling up all existing vacancies and expanding much needed public services in health, education, nutrition and social security. The quality of jobs, such as of anganwadi workers, accredited social health activists and other frontline workers, also need to be improved with adequate wages and improved work conditions. These direct job creation efforts will not only create employment opportunities for many, especially women, but also contribute to improving human development outcomes and reduce the burden of unpaid care work on women and free them up for other employment. Further, they can also address the inequality in opportunities and the intergenerational inequality that gets perpetuated due to the unequal access to services such as pre-school education and nutrition during childhood.

An employment-centered growth pattern will be one where government policy focuses on supporting small and medium enterprises that are more labour-intensive in nature, promoting skill training and overall human capital (health and education) along with enabling women to participate in the labour market through measures such as maternity entitlements, childcare, transportation, safe and affordable accommodation and so on. It is only when we address the employment issue that we can address inequality in earnest. On the other hand, as long as growth is of the nature where profits for few is the priority, the employment issue is also likely to remain unaddressed.

Dipa Sinha is a development economist. Views are personal.



K.R. SHYAM SUNDAR EXPLAINS HOW TRADE UNIONS CAN PLAY KEY ROLE IN PRODUCING LABOUR STATISTICS

An urgent need for the use of labour statistics

The reform of labour institutions is always in the air as objective (variables) and subjective (orientation of agencies involved) factors keep changing. In the case of the industrial relations system and labour market (IRS-LM), variables such as product market, technology, trade and investment, and labour institutions such as trade unions, collective bargaining and strikes keep changing. There are two aspects of reforms — substantive issues and procedural aspects.

Social dialogue is an important procedural institutional process to debate and arrive at consensual conclusions which could be used for legal and other policy-oriented actions. In the post-reform period, the government uses social dialogue agency, viz., the Indian Labour Conference (ILC), to push the reforms agenda. Evidence-based reform arguments enrich social dialogue — something which has not happened thus far. Social partners have been advocating their "class-based opinions" unbacked by credible data or experience. The ILC has degenerated into a "talking shop".

Labour statistics, unlike economic and industrial data, are not rigorous. For example, the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) and the National Sample Survey Office produce excellent statistics but have limited information relating to the IRS-LM. The Labour Bureau provides statistics on a range of industrial relations (strikes and trade unions) and labour statistics (contract labour, absenteeism, labour turnover, labour inspections). It mostly provides administrative data, viz., those generated as a part of implementing labour laws. The statistics on work stoppages are collected voluntarily. The composition and the scope of data published by the Labour Bureau has remained virtually the same over the decades.



Reform arguments

Let us look at three reform arguments put forth relentlessly by employers and neoliberal academics. Employers have criticised the labour inspection system as a case of "Inspector-Raj" and called for its reforms. This criticism stems probably from their "limited experience". They have complained that State governments hardly sanction applications for retrenchment or the closure of establishments. They also demand a curb on the right to strike and prefer non-union workplaces. Some academics and global agencies such as the World Bank/International Monetary Fund which have "priors" similar to the reform opinions of employers have published studies "consistently" supporting the benevolent impact of reforms and refuting their obverse. For example, a study by Besley and Burgess (B&B) on the impact of labour regulation in 2004 has been widely used by employers and others to push hire and fire reforms, among others. This is despite glaring weaknesses in the studies using B&B methodology, original or revised. The government has fallen for these "strong prior-based evidence" hook, line and sinker and sought to introduce labour law reforms.

To counter the reform arguments mentioned above, trade unions should have collected the relevant information/statistics on inspection (such as the number of sanctioned and actually employed inspectors, the universe of inspection and actual inspection, the frequency of inspections) and studied them to make informed arguments to support labour inspection — even strengthening them. It is then that social partners and the government would have realised the poor quality of data on inspections. They would realise that labour inspectors are much fewer in number than the inspection universe. Research has shown that there is no all-India data on labour inspections.

Closure reform

Again, on firing/closure reform, trade unions have not collected data on the retrenchment/closure applications under Chapter V-B submitted to the labour department, permissions granted/refused by the labour department. These are not published in most States except in Maharashtra for a limited period. The denial of permissions was surely prevalent during the command economy, but is this prevalent in the post-reform period? My study on retrenchments/closures under Chapter V-B in 2001-05 showed that Maharashtra was more liberal in granting permissions for retrenchments/closures (Impact of Labour Regulations... in Maharashtra, Bookwell, 2008).

On strikes

The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 Code on Industrial Relations (CIR) has made legal

strikes well-nigh impossible. Illegal strikes carry a heavy penalty. Trade unions could have used the data on strikes and lockouts published by the Labour Bureau which would show that lockouts are more frequent and account for more workdays lost than strikes during the post-reform period. This evidence would have challenged the need for introducing harsher clauses on strikes in the CIR.

Trade unions are well placed to "produce" statistics on several aspects of the IRS-LM at the establishment level. Employers' organisations such as NASSCOM generate statistics on the IT industry which is used indiscriminately.

India has ratified the Labour Statistics Convention (No.160), 1985 and Labour Inspection Convention (081), 1947. India must generate statistics that are valid, comprehensive and reliable on IRS-LM. Trade unions must know by now that reforms are contested not only by street struggles but also primarily in the realm of ideas where objective data and rich empirical studies are used.

In essence, trade unions should produce labour statistics, do research on IRS-LM, build an active and productive interface with academics and use academic studies to make "evidence-based arguments" in the ILC. Imagine a massive strike demanding good labour statistics! The larger society and the government are bound to stand up and seek reform labour statistics. For once, strikes would enjoy public legitimacy.

Trade unions must resolve to carry out these measures. If nothing, statistical agencies such as the Labour Bureau will be reformed as a result of these pursuits.

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BOOKS: REVIEW

Narrative resilience: New book explores identity, expression

Salman Rushdie's latest memoir, "Knife," emerges not just as a chronicle of survival but as a profound testament to the power of free expression, woven through the fabric of a life lived under the shadow of a death sentence. Rushdie, whose literary career has been punctuated by both acclaim and controversy, uses his narrative prowess to recount a chilling encounter that could have ended his life but instead reinforced his commitment to storytelling.

The memoir pivots around a terrifying 27 seconds — a brief yet profound moment when Rushdie was attacked by a knife-wielding assailant. He delves into the physical and psychological aftermath of the attack, intertwining his personal recovery with broader reflections on freedom, faith, and the human condition. This is not just a recounting of events; it's a vibrant, deeply medi-

tative exploration of the existential battles fought in those moments and their ripple effects across his subsequent life.

Rushdie frames his narrative within two critical time spans. The first being the 33.5 years since the issuance of the fatwa by Ayatollah Khomeini, calling for his death following the publication of "The Satanic Verses." The second, those pivotal seconds of the attack itself. These periods bookend a life of intellectual exploration, personal transformation, and an unyielding commitment to the liberal humanist values that Rushdie cherishes.

Central to the memoir is a candid reflection on his life post-fatwa — from his secretive existence under the alias 'Joseph Anton' to his more public life in New York City, where he believed he had escaped the shadows of his past. Yet, the attack proved otherwise, and Rushdie

confronts this reality with both resilience and vulnerability. His narrative is punctuated with philosophical inquiries, engaging directly and sometimes imaginatively with his would-be assassin, identified only as A., to delve into the motivations and misconceptions that drive such extremism.

"Knife" is also a love letter — to life, to the act of creation, and to Eliza, his fifth wife, whose presence imbues the narrative with a poignant sense of finality and fulfillment in his personal life. This relationship offers a stark contrast to the violence he endured, highlighting the redemptive power of love and art.

What makes "Knife" compelling is not just Rushdie's recounting of his ordeal but his reflections on the concept of freedom itself, a theme that has defined much of his work and life. In today's fractured world, where the principle of free speech



Knife
By Salman Rushdie
Hamish Hamilton,
224 pages; Rs 699.

is often contested terrain, Rushdie's insights are both timely and timeless. He navigates the complexities of this debate with the nuance of someone who has paid a personal price for his outspokenness, challenging the reader to reconsider their own stances on these fundamental issues.

Ultimately, "Knife" is more than a memoir. It is a challenge — a challenge to confront the perils that threaten free expression and to reaffirm our commitment to the liberal values that underpin a free society. Rushdie does not just survive; he thrives, using his pen to fight back against the forces that sought to silence him. In "Knife," he not only tells his story but also reclaims it, ensuring that his voice, despite all

attempts to the contrary, remains louder and clearer than ever.

In "Knife," Rushdie's narrative extends beyond the personal to engage with the global implications of his experiences. He weaves in a critical analysis of the shifting landscapes of political and cultural ideologies that have impacted the discourse on freedom and expression worldwide. This global perspective is integral to understanding the broader significance of his personal story within the context of ongoing debates over censorship, artistic freedom, and the limits of speech in a polarized world. His observations are sharp and unyielding, reflecting a deep understanding of the intricate dynamics that govern societal norms and how these can both restrict and enable creative expression.

Moreover, Rushdie's writing reflects a relentless pursuit of truth through art, using his personal ordeal as a lens to scrutinize the very nature of narrative and identity in the modern age. He challenges the reader to consider how stories are told and who gets to tell them, pushing against the boundaries of conventional narrative forms.

Trade & industry suffering heavy loss in export business due to farmers strike

SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Over 3000 export containers are lying dumped at the dry port, Ludhiana due to farmers protests sitting on 'dharna' at the Shambhu railway station on Haryana-Punjab border since past over 12 days, not only causing lot of inconvenience to the passengers travelling in the trains as well as heavy loss to trade and industry in Punjab state. Information reveals, over 3000 containers of goods to be exported to different countries against export orders, which also include perishable goods are presently lying for the shipment from sea ports at Ludhiana dry port, likely to incur heavy loss to the manufacturers as well as exporters in Punjab state.



According to the Custom Commissioner Ludhiana, he has already taken up matter with the Ministry of Railways to change the route of goods trains from Punjab since the exporters are suffering heavy loss due to the farmers repeated protests since past two and half months, which have already resulted heavy loss to the exporters in the state failed to execute export orders of huge

value. According to the industry entrepreneurs and the exports the tariff on each container for dispatch to sea ports via road transport causes not only much delay but also putting additional financial burden on them towards freight up to Rs 10000 each container. They said, as a result of repeated protests by the farmers in Punjab, it has become a challenge for trade and industry in the state losing heavy export orders.

The industry owners and the exporters in Punjab have made an appeal to the government to settle farmers' demands in order to save the industry.

FSSAI to inspect all manufacturers in its crackdown on 'spurious' spices

HYDERABAD: The food safety regulator on Thursday said it had ordered testing and inspections at all companies making spice mixes, widening an investigation into the sector as global regulators look into suspected contamination in two popular local brands.

Hong Kong last month suspended sales of three spice blends made by India's MDH and an Everest spice mix for fish curry. Singapore ordered a recall of the same Everest mix as well, flagging high levels of ethylene oxide, which is unfit for human consumption and a cancer risk with long exposure.

MDH and Everest products are hugely popular in India and also sold in Europe, Asia and North America, and the companies have said they are safe. Still, U.S. and Australian food authorities said they are gathering more information on the matter, and India had already ordered testing of the two brands' products.

The Indian regulator has now ordered officials to con-



duct "extensive inspections, sampling and testing at all the manufacturing units", for powdered spices, with a focus on those making curry powders and mixed spice blends for local and foreign sales.

"Each of the product sampled will be analysed for the compliance with quality and safety parameters," the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India said in a statement.

The agency added checks would also be made for any presence of ethylene oxide,

whose use is banned in India, and "appropriate actions will be initiated as fit" after testing was completed.

India is the world's biggest exporter, producer and consumer of spices, and its domestic market for the products was valued at \$10.44 billion in 2022, according to Zion Market Research.

Beyond MDH and Everest, other major manufacturers include Madhusudan Masala, NHC Foods and consumer giants Tata Consumer Products

and ITC. None of the companies responded to a request for comment. The Spices Board says India exported spice products worth \$4 billion in 2022-23. — Reuters

Fortified rice, Dairy items too under lens
After starting a probe into alleged violation of norms in branded spices, food regulator FSSAI plans to launch surveillance on other food items like fortified rice, dairy products and spices sold in the domestic market.

According to sources, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is planning surveillance on food items like fruit and vegetables, salmonella in fish products; spice and culinary herbs; fortified rice; and milk and milk products.

FSSAI is already taking samples of spices in powder form of all brands, including MDH and Everest, from across the country in view of quality concerns flagged by Singapore and Hong Kong.

500 Micro & Small Enterprises apply for Green Investment Incentives



NEW DELHI: At least 500 micro and small enterprises (MSEs) have applied for incentives under two key government schemes aimed at encouraging green investments and the circular economy.

This strong response came within just three months of the launch of the Green Investment and Financing for Transformation (GIFT) and Scheme for Promotion and Investment in Circular Economy (SPICE) initiatives in December 2023, reported ET. According to officials, these enterprises are gearing up to embrace eco-friendly technologies and cater to the growing consumer preference for environmentally conscious products. As a testament to the schemes' early success, a staggering Rs 380 crore in loans has already been disbursed to MSEs under these programs.

The GIFT scheme offers a 2 per cent annual interest subvention for five years on loans up to Rs 2 crore to MSEs adopting environment-friendly technologies. On the other hand, SPICE provides capital subsidies to MSEs for brownfield projects, incentivising them to expand or upgrade their existing circular economy projects. Recognising the cash crunch often faced by MSEs, the government is actively demonstrating the tangible benefits of adopting greener and more efficient technologies.

Officials are categorising MSEs into those willing to adopt sustainable practices and those reluctant, with a focused approach to showcasing the long-term savings and advantages, such as reduced energy consumption, to the latter group.

With a combined outlay of Rs 950.5 crore, SPICE will run from FY24 to FY27, while GIFT has an outlay of Rs 478 crore until FY26. These schemes are expected to play a crucial role in facilitating the transition of MSEs towards a more sustainable and circular economic model, aligning with global climate regulations and consumer demands.

Over 40,000 MSMEs Cancel Registrations, Challenge 45 Days Payment Rule in SC

NEW DELHI: More than 40,000 Indian small businesses, including 12,000 from Gujarat alone, have taken the drastic step of cancelling their registrations, as highlighted in a CNBC Awaaz report.

These businesses have approached the Supreme Court with an appeal to overturn the mandated rule that requires payments owed to them to be cleared within a strict 45-day period.

Thousands of small businesses allege that the influx of new orders from larger customers has dwindled considerably since the regulation came into effect on April 1.

Jayendra Tanna, President, Federation of All India Vypar Mandal, highlighted the unintended consequence of the rule, stating that business has started flowing from registered entities to unregistered ones, as the latter al-

lows buyers to circumvent the payment deadline.

The furore among small businesses has reached a crescendo, with traders' organisations across the country preparing to move the Court.

Meghraj Dodwani, head of the Ahmedabad Vypari Mahasangh, echoed the sentiment, asserting, "Our small MSMEs have cancelled their registration. If we have to go to the Gujarat High Court in the future, we will go."

As the matter escalates to the Supreme Court, all eyes will be on the judicial outcome that could potentially reshape the landscape for small businesses in India.

Raymond posts 18 per cent jump in Q4 net profit at Rs 229 crore

NEW DELHI: Gautam Hari Singhania-led Raymond on Friday reported an 18 per cent rise in its January-March quarter profit on the back of a strong performance in its real-estate and apparel segments.

The company said its consolidated profit rose to Rs 229 crore in the quarter, up from Rs 194 crore in the same period last year. Its revenue rose 23 per cent to Rs 409 crore during the quarter. The company's



real estate segment attracted strong booking during the quarter after the launch of a premium project in Mumbai's posh Bandra locality.

The three verticals of the company -- lifestyle, real estate and engineering -- would be its future growth engines, Chairman and Managing Director Gautam Singhania said. Branded textile segment sales maintained its topline of Rs 920 crore in the quarter despite muted customer demand and challenging market conditions. In the apparel segment, it saw growth across all brands and formats.

REC posts 34 pc jump in Q4 net profit at Rs 4,016 crore

Leading government-owned financial company REC on Tuesday reported a 34 per cent increase in net profit at Rs 4,016 crore for the January-March quarter of 2023-24 compared to the corresponding figure of Rs 3,001 crore for the same period in the previous year.

Revenue from operations of the company went up 25 per cent to Rs 12,613 crores during the quarter from Rs 10,113 crores in the same period of the previous year. The net interest income of



NBFC increased by 29 per cent to 4,407 crore. REC has declared a final dividend of Rs 5 per equity share and the total dividend for FY 2023-24 now works out to Rs 16 per equity share.

India's first indigenous bomber UAV unveiled

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Flying Wedge Defence and Aerospace Technologies, an esteemed Indian defence aerospace firm, celebrated a significant achievement by introducing the FWD-200B. This groundbreaking unveiling in Bengaluru marked the debut of India's premier indigenous bomber unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

The FWD-200B stands as a testament to indigenous innovation, being a medium-altitude, long-endurance (MALE) unmanned combat aerial vehicle conceived and crafted entirely within India. Boasting a payload capacity of 100 kg, it possesses the versatility to accommodate optical surveillance payloads alongside precision air strike weapons, as affirmed by the company.

During the unveiling ceremony in Bengaluru, Suhaz Tejaskanda, the founder of Flying Wedge Defence, addressed the Media said, emphasizing the significance of the FWD-200B in realizing



India's longstanding aspiration for indigenous combat UAV production. Tejaskanda highlighted the years of unsuccessful attempts by agencies like the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and stressed the importance of this achievement.

The firm elucidated that a pivotal aspect of the FWD-200B is the substantial cost reduction it offers. While an imported US Predator drone commands a staggering price of Rs 250 crore, the Indian-manufactured FWD-200B will be available for just Rs 25 crore—a mere tenth of the cost, they added.

Founder Tejaskanda emphasized that this milestone underscores the company's dedication to self-reliance and elevates India's status as a pioneer in cost-effective defense solutions.

Pharma 2.0: Indian Pharmaceutical Companies strive to Create & Enhance Strength in Biopharmaceuticals



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH



RAMYA KORADA

Indian Pharmaceutical Industry (IPI) has made a name for itself and is now ranked 3rd globally in terms of volume. Presently, Indian Pharmaceutical Industry is producing more than 60,000 generic drugs across 60 therapeutic categories. The strength of the industry is reflected in terms of exports too as in 2023-24, India's drugs and pharmaceutical exports have touched US\$ 27.9 billion with 9.67 per cent year-on-year growth. Now, the time has come that with existing strengths, it is able to create and enhance strength in biopharmaceuticals, represented by Pharma 2.0. On April 25, 2024, Dilip Shanghvi (Sun Pharma) and Hari Bhartia (Jubilant group), prominent pharma industry leaders from India while addressing at 18th Annual BioPharma & Healthcare Summit meeting of the USA-India Chamber of Commerce (USAIC) in Boston echoed this – "In small molecules (chemistry-based drugs), we have capacities but in large molecules (biotech drugs), we are still building".

The use of herbs or plants for treating diseases dates back to ancient times. Earlier medications included natural sources like plants, herbs, animals, or minerals. Later on, the use of active chemicals extracted from plants became prevalent, e.g., morphine extracted from opium in 1804 by Friedrich Wilhelm Serturmer became the first pharmaceutical medicine. After that, synthetic drugs came into ex-

istence, e.g., the first synthetic drug – Chloral Hydrate came up in 1869. In contrast to this, a biopharmaceutical (biological medicine or biologic) is a therapeutic product that is extracted or semi-synthesized from biological sources such as humans, animals, or microorganisms and are made from carbohydrates, nucleic acids, living cells, proteins, or tissues produced by biotechnology methods and other cutting-edge technologies. The first Biologic/Biopharmaceutical 'Humanized Insulin' was introduced in 1982 that formed the beginning of Biopharmaceuticals/Biologics. By 2016, out of the top 10 global best-selling drugs were biologics. Besides biologics, there are biosimilar products as recognized by regulatory bodies, e.g., by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration which considers it as a biologic product that is highly similar to and has no clinically meaningful differences from an existing FDA-approved reference product (biologic). When the patent on the original product expires, biosimilars, which are officially approved variations of the original 'innovator' product, can be produced. The first Biosimilar approved in India dates back to the year 2000 for Hepatitis B. Another related term is – Biobetters which is a distinct category of biopharmaceuticals that undergo structural or functional modifications to enhance their clinical performance compared to approved reference products.

The global biopharmaceutical market that accounted for nearly one-third of the pharmaceutical market was valued at US\$ 443 billion in FY 2022, and was growing at a CAGR of 12% over a 5-year period. India has been predicted to be one of the world's fastest-growing bio-hubs' owing to its growing

biosimilar industry. As per the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), there were over 98 approved biosimilars till September 2019. Biopharmaceutical market in India is forecasted to reach US \$12 billion by 2025. There is a huge potential for the biosimilars as 70 biological drugs are losing exclusivity in the USA and 5 key European geographies over 2022-25.

Indian pharmaceutical companies have initiated moves to create and sustain strength in biopharmaceuticals. Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Limited, which holds numero uno position in Indian pharmaceutical industry, started its journey towards biopharmaceuticals when it formed a joint venture with MSD in 2011 to develop, manufacture and commercialize new combinations and formulations of innovative, branded generics in the emerging markets. In 2014, the company obtained the licence of Ilumya, a biologic drug, from a subsidiary of Merck & Co. In 2016, the company announced new exclusive collaboration with the International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) to develop novel dengue vaccine thereby marking its potential entry into vaccine segment. In 2016 itself, Sun Pharma entered into a licensing agreement with Almirall on the development and commercialization of Ilumya in Europe, and in 2017, it entered into a strategic long-term manufacturing agreement for Ilumya with Samsung Biologics in Korea. In 2018, the company announced the U.S. FDA approval and Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), Australia of Ilumya for psoriasis. The company reported strong sales of US \$315 million from the product globally in 2022. Sun Pharma tapped the biologics



segment in different countries through licensing with different companies.

Dr. Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) entered into a technical collaboration agreement with Viral Therapeutics Inc. of USA in 1997, to initiate the Bio-technology division to produce diagnostic and therapeutic recombinant proteins. In 1998, it created a Molecular Biology Group to develop four new biotech products. The Biotechnology division was established by the company with a goal of providing Indian consumers with generic versions of imported therapeutic recombinant proteins at affordable prices. Reddy US Therapeutics Inc. commenced its operations in the year 2000 for discovering novel therapeutics. In 2001, the company launched its first biologic product – Grastim. In the same year, a subsidiary, Zenous Biotech Private Limited was formed that is involved in building a technology platform for monoclonal antibodies. In 2007, the company made a mark in biosimilars by launching the world's first biosimilar 'Rituximab' in India under the brand name - Reditux. In subsequent years, the company entered into different partnerships or collaborations for different biosimilars with companies such as Merck Serono, TR Pharm, and Amgen in 2012, 2016 and 2016 respectively. In 2020, DRL has got into

an agreement with the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to collaborate on clinical trials, and distribution of Sputnik V vaccine in India. As of 2023, the company had 12 Biologics in its pipeline.

Torrent Pharmaceuticals has earned an epithet – The Company with the Most First Launches. Torrent tapped biopharmaceutical sector indirectly in 1992 when it had an agreement to manufacture Insulin for the Denmark-based Novo Nordisk. In 2014, the company made entry into biosimilars with launch of 'Darbator', the biosimilar for Darbepoetin alpha. In 2014 itself, it entered into an exclusive agreement with Reliance Life Sciences (RLS) for marketing biosimilars in India where RLS was to develop and supply these products and Torrent Pharma had to market these biosimilars in India.

Cipla had its first collaborative biopharmaceutical development program in 2003 with Avesthagen regarding the biologics. Joint Venture – 'Avesta Biotherapeutics and Research Limited' was formed in 2007 between Cipla's fully-owned subsidiary Meditab Specialties and Avesthagen. In 2009, Cipla entered into a strategic alliance with an advanced clinical stage biotech company - Stempetia Research. Cipla's first biosimilar 'Etacept' was launched in

2013 through partnership with a Chinese company - Shanghai CP Guojian Pharmaceutical. In 2014, it launched its second biosimilar in collaboration with Hetero. In 2014 itself, the company bought remaining 75 per cent of Mabpharm Pvt. Ltd thereby making it a fully-owned subsidiary, and it was named – Cipla BioTec, with focus on research, development, manufacturing and marketing of biosimilars. In 2016, a limited approval for Stempetia was given by the Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) making it the 5th off-the-shelf stem cell product to be approved in the world and the first such approval in India. In 2014, company's entry into vaccine segment came up in the form of an agreement with Serum Institute of India (SII) where Cipla was responsible for seeking European Medicines Agency approval for the paediatric vaccines produced by the SII and market the products in Europe.

Alkem Laboratories initiated its journey towards biopharmaceuticals in 2011 with acquisition of Enzene Biosciences Limited that had focus on producing biosimilars, novel biologics, synthetic peptides and phytopharmaceuticals. The first biosimilar, 'Teriparatide' from Alkem got market approval in 2021 in India. Alkem also entered into an agreement with Theramex to commercialize biosimilar in Europe, UK, Australia, and Switzerland. Aurobindo Pharma another leading company that is in existence since 1986 started its journey towards the vaccines segment with a JV with Tergene Biotech in 2015. In 2015 itself, Tergene Biotech became subsidiary of Aurobindo Pharma. In 2016, the company added two new segments namely Biosimilars and Vaccines. In 2017, it acquired 4 biosimilars from

the Swiss TL Biopharma. In 2020, biosimilar business was transferred to 'CuraTeQ Biologics', a subsidiary of Aurobindo. By FY22, it had 14 biosimilars in its portfolio. Vaccine business is with a subsidiary company - Auro Vaccines.

Zydus Lifesciences (formerly Cadila Healthcare), 4th largest pharma company in India, entered in biopharmaceutical space through joint venture with Korean Green Cross Corporation in 1998. To launch a range of vaccines in India, it entered into a technical-cum-marketing tie-up with 'Berne Institute', the Swiss Serum and Vaccine Institute. At present, Zydus has a dedicated Vaccine Technology Centre with two R&D centers, located in Italy and Ahmedabad. In 2021, the company received Emergency Use Authorization (EMA) for its World's First Covid-19 DNA vaccine 'ZyCoV-D'. By FY22, the company had 30 biologics in portfolio including 8 Novel biologics and 22 biosimilars.

Lupin Limited entered into the field of biopharmaceuticals in 2008 on establishing a biotech facility at Pune, and a Biotechnology Research Group was established to develop and commercialize biosimilars and novel biologics. Presently, Lupin has a total of three centres in Pune namely Lupin Research Park (LRP), Lupin Biotech, and Lupin Bioresearch Centre.

Biocon has transformed itself from an enzyme manufacturing company to a leading biopharmaceutical company. In 2006, it inaugurated India's largest integrated biotechnology hub 'Biocon Park'. Biocon Biologics, a subsidiary of Biocon is dedicated to biosimilars, and has three manufacturing facilities and two R&D sites. Other notable companies which have presence in biopharmaceutical

space include Gland Pharma, IPCA Labs, Laurus Labs, and Glenmark. Glenmark that is in existence since 1977 established its first R&D Centre for NBE Research in Switzerland to focus on the development of novel biologics. In 2011, it out-licensed its 1st novel biologic product. Ichnos Sciences Inc, a spun off entity of Glenmark had 7 biologic molecules in pipeline by 2023.

To conclude, Sun Pharma and Glenmark launched their first biopharmaceuticals through in-licensing route. Cipla, Torrent, and Lupin did it through partnerships DRL, Biocon, Alkem, and Zydus launched biopharmaceuticals on their own. Biocon, Glenmark, Lupin, Alkem, Aurobindo, and Ipca Labs have set up their dedicated biologic R&D Centers. Companies such as DRL, Biocon, Cipla, Glenmark, Lupin, Alkem, Aurobindo, Zydus Life Sciences, Laurus Labs, and Gland Pharma have set up dedicated biopharmaceutical manufacturing facilities. DRL, Cipla, Biocon, Glenmark, Lupin, Alkem, Aurobindo Pharma, Zydus Life Sciences, and Laurus Labs have set up their subsidiaries to focus on biopharmaceuticals. Majority of these companies have invested in infrastructure, manpower, and drug development in biopharmaceuticals.

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FinMin Mulls Requiring Nodal Officers at Banks

FINTECHS FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT LIAISON

NEW DELHI: The Finance Ministry is considering a proposal to require banks and fintech companies to appoint designated nodal officers or key contact points to liaise with law enforcement agencies (LEAs).

This issue was discussed at a workshop organised jointly by the Department of Financial Services and the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre on Tuesday in New Delhi.

The half-day interactive workshop brought together LEAs, startups, fintech firms and other ecosystem partners to foster collaboration in addressing challenges like cyber-security, financial fraud prevention, regulatory compliance and promoting innovation.

Discussions covered topics such as frauds perpetrated through mule accounts, fintech merchant abuse and potentially developing an indigenous anti-money laundering system tailored to the Indian context.



Key points raised included the role of technology in increasing financial inclusion, strategies to control money mules, real-time data monitoring, geotagging transactions, maintaining registries of suspicious banking correspondents and fraudsters, auditing digital KYC, and streamlining account freezing processes.

Enhancing data privacy, modernising digital infrastructure and emerging cybercrime trends were also deliberated.

State police departments from Gujarat, Haryana and Uttarakhand shared best practices on curbing cybercrime

alongside the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre. Fintech associations presented operational challenges faced by their member companies.

Addressing the workshop, Department of Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi highlighted fintechs' contributions to economic growth while emphasising the need for greater public-private collaboration to fully harness the sector's potential, reported BL.

He noted fintechs tend to draw more regulatory and law enforcement attention as their businesses scale over time.

IMF Highlights Public Investment as Key Driver for India's Economic Growth

NEW DELHI: In its latest Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and Pacific, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has emphasised the crucial role played by public investment in driving India's economic growth, making it the world's fastest-growing major economy.

The IMF report highlights that while headline inflation in several Asian and Pacific economies may witness further reductions due to lower energy prices, India's disinflation process could be slower due to persistent food price pressures, especially for rice.

Reflecting the positive economic trajectory, the IMF had earlier this month raised India's growth forecast for the financial year 2024-25 to 6.8 per cent, up from the previous estimate of 6.5 per cent.

The growth forecast for 2025-26 remains unchanged at 6.5 per cent. The IMF attributed this upward revision to the resilience of domestic demand, propelled by factors such as public investment.

The report commends India



and the Philippines for being sources of repeated positive growth surprises, underpinned by robust domestic demand.

This highlights the importance of nurturing domestic economic drivers, including public investment, to sustain growth momentum.

While acknowledging the potential risks posed by global conflicts and trade frictions, the IMF emphasises the urgency of fiscal consolidation in Asia to address the burden of

higher debt levels and rebuild fiscal space.

This underscores the need for a balanced approach, where public investment continues to drive growth while maintaining fiscal prudence.

Overall, the IMF's remarks underscore the pivotal role of public investment in fuelling India's economic growth, while also highlighting the need for targeted measures to address inflationary pressures and maintain fiscal sustainability.

RBI directs lenders to rectify unfair interest charging practices



NEW DELHI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has instructed regulated lending entities to review and rectify certain practices regarding the charging of interest rates that have been deemed unfair to borrowers.

This directive comes after the central bank's inspections in March 2023 revealed instances where some lenders resorted to non-standard and opaque methods when applying interest charges.

In a statement released on Monday, the RBI outlined several problematic practices identified during the inspections. These include lenders charging interest from the date of loan sanction or agreement execution rather than disbursement, as well as levying inter-

est charges on loans disbursed via cheque from the issue date rather than when the physical check was received by the borrower days later.

The regulator also noted cases where despite only a portion of the month seeing the loan outstanding, certain lenders charged interest for the full month. Additionally, there were instances of lenders collecting installments in advance but still calculating interest on the full original loan amount.

While the 2003 Fair Practices Code guidelines allow pricing freedom for lenders, the RBI stated that the revealed practices violate the spirit of fairness and transparency expected when dealing with customers.

Kotak Mahindra Bank Joint MD KVS Manian quits

MUMBAI: Kotak Mahindra Bank on Tuesday announced that its joint managing director KVS Manian, a veteran at the private sector lender, has stepped down with immediate effect. Manian, who had been with the lender for nearly three decades, was elevated in a management rejig in January. The surprising news of the departure comes days after the RBI put severe business restrictions on the lender, including stopping it from selling new credit cards for shortcomings in its tech architecture.

UPI transaction count witnesses slight drop to 1,330 cr in April

NEW DELHI: The number of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) transactions fell by 1 per cent (month-on-month) to 1,330 crore in April, down from 1,344 crore seen in March.

However, on a year-on-year basis, the transaction count increased by 50 per cent. According to data from the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), the transaction volume in April was Rs 19.64 lakh crore, down from Rs 19.78 lakh crore in March. However, it soared 40 per cent year-on-year.

In February, transaction

count and volume were seen at 1,210 crore and Rs 18.28 lakh crore, respectively, while in January, it was 1,220 crore and Rs 18.41 lakh crore, respectively.

In 2023, the number of UPI transactions increased by almost 60 per cent (year-on-year) to a record 11,768 crore, while the total value of UPI transactions grew by over 40 per cent (year-on-year) to Rs 182.84 lakh crore.

Meanwhile, the Indian payment infrastructure has

expanded to other countries such as Nepal, France, New Zealand, and more. The NPCI and the government have taken steps to increase UPI usage, with the NPCI actively introducing new features and services to improve its adoption.



NABARD-RBIH tie-up for revolutionizing digital agri-lending

DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) – in a landmark partnership aimed at revolutionizing digital agri-lending – will integrate its e-KCC loan origination system portal with the Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit (PTPFC) of Reserve Bank Innovation Hub (RBIH).

The partnership agreement was signed here recently by Shaji K.V., Chairman, NABARD and Rajesh Bansal, CEO, RBIH.

NABARD, India's apex development bank, developed the Loan origination system portal to facilitate digital Kisan Credit Card (KCC) loan processing for cooperative banks and Regional



Rural Banks (RRBs). Through the integration with PTPFC, about 351 district and state cooperative banks and 43 RRBs will gain access to a range of services including digital state land records, satellite data, KYC credit history and transliteration for more effective credit underwriting.

The collaboration between NABARD and RBIH, a wholly-

owned subsidiary of the RBI, will streamline the lending process and reduce the turnaround time for loans from three to four weeks to just five minutes for India's 120 million farmers.

"The digitalisation of agricultural lending will ensure instant doorstep delivery of credit to farmers while improving the efficiency of banks, advancing

NABARD's mission of fostering rural prosperity," said the NABARD Chairman Shaji K.V.

"This partnership is not just about technology integration, but also about reimagining rural finance and empowering our Indians with quicker, more reliable access to credit. It signifies our commitment to using innovation to deliver frictionless finance for a billion Indians," said RBIH's CEO Rajesh Bansal.

The paper-based loan process takes up substantial amounts of a farmer's time, especially to acquire land records, that they could spend on income-generating activities. The PTPFC has seen the participation of over 10 states in making digital land records available to facilitate the seamless flow of credible information for lenders.

Multi-Sector NPA Concerns Mount for Central Bank of India Including MSMEs in Q4 FY24

NEW DELHI: In a concerning development, Central Bank of India, a prominent public sector lender, has reported fresh slippages from various sectors, including Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), retail, corporate, and agriculture, during the fourth quarter of the financial year 2023-24.

According to MV Rao, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Central Bank of India, the bank has witnessed slippages amounting to Rs 1,175 crore in the



reporting quarter, a significant increase from the Rs 643 crore recorded in the previous quarter.

A loan is classified as a Non-Performing Asset (NPA) when the borrower fails to repay

the interest or principal for a period of 90 days or more, requiring banks to set aside provisions to cover such loans.

The slippage ratio, which measures the proportion of loans turning into NPAs, stood

at 0.57 per cent as of March 2024, a slight improvement from 0.70 per cent a year ago.

However, the bank has set a guidance of maintaining a slippage ratio below 0.50 per cent on a quarterly basis for the current financial year, as per its investor presentation.

Despite the fresh slippages, Central Bank of India's gross non-performing asset (NPA) ratio remained unchanged at 4.50 per cent from the previous quarter, but showed a substantial decline from 8.44 per cent a year ago.

Reality of becoming the Third Global Economy

DR P S VOHRA
N

early everywhere, there is talk about how India's economy is growing quickly to become the third largest in the world. Is this a set narrative to attract global economic progress? What are the supporting economic data and facts? Is this an election ploy?

It is significant that India's economy currently stands as the fifth largest in the world, a testament to its economic success. In 2022, India overtook England in terms of GDP size, marking a significant economic milestone as it rose to the fifth rank. This progress of India has been great in the last decade. In 2014, India used to be at the tenth position. At that time, India's GDP was equal to 1.86 trillion US dollars and ahead of India, Italy was 2.14 trillion dollars, Brazil 2.21 trillion dollars, England 2.79 trillion dollars, France 2.81 trillion dollars, Germany 3.7 trillion dollars, Japan 5.21 trillion dollars, China 9.57 trillion dollars and America was at the forefront at 17.55 trillion dollars. At present, India's GDP is around four trillion dollars, although there has been no official announcement of this GDP, but the figures are predicting that after the results of the last quarter of the financial year 2023-24, India's GDP will come to this level. This confirms that India's GDP has increased more than two times



in the last decade. This in itself is very surprising because during this period the whole world has seen a period of economic recession for almost two years due to the Corona epidemic and the Indian economy also endured a negative growth rate of about 25 percent for the first time since independence.

For the first time, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) acknowledged that India will rank third in terms of GDP. Considering India's consistent annual economic growth rates of 6 to 7 percent, the IMF estimated that by the year 2027, India's GDP would surpass the \$5 trillion mark. Currently trailing behind Germany and Japan with levels around \$4.95 trillion and \$5.08 trillion respectively, India will then overtake them, becoming the world's third-largest economy. Additionally, by 2027, China will remain in second place with \$25.72 trillion, and the United States will maintain its top position with \$31.09 trillion. This means even after becoming the third-largest economy, China will still be economically more than five times larger than India, and the

United States will be more than six times larger economically.

According to the facts from several research bulletins following the IMF's previous estimate, by the year 2026, there will be a \$500 billion increase in India's healthcare, auto, and retail sectors. While dreaming of becoming the third-largest economy, it is crucial to understand the reality that India still lags far behind in per capita income. Even after surpassing England to become the fifth-largest economy, there is a clear gap of 20 times in per capita income between the two countries. Moreover, in the past decade, India has only climbed six positions in the global ranking based on per capita income. Currently, out of 189 countries, India ranks 141st in terms of per capita income, while it was at 147th position in 2013-14. In the past decade, per capita income in India has increased from \$1,438 to \$2,389. It is evident that in the past decade, the increase in per capita income has been just over half of the GDP growth, despite GDP more than doubling.

Achieving the milestone of becoming the third-largest

economy based on GDP seems possible, but along with that, it has become extremely necessary to aim for rapid growth in employment through economic policies. According to a recent report by the International Labour Organization, a part of the United Nations, the unemployment rate in India has been steadily increasing. In 2012, there were approximately 100 million unemployed individuals in India, while by 2022, this number had risen to 229 million. As a result, the unemployment rate increased from 2.18% to 4% over the past decade. In India, only about 20 to 21% of employment falls under regular employment, the remaining are in the categories of irregular employment and self-dependent. The per capita income of people in the irregular and self-dependent categories is very low.

In the context of India's economic development, a bitter truth is that India's agricultural sector has fallen far behind. Increasing its contribution to GDP has now become extremely necessary; otherwise, achieving an increase in per capita income won't be easy.

One of the reasons behind this is the dependency of 50% of the population on agriculture for their livelihood. Additionally, it is crucial to bring the manufacturing sector, which is a significant source of employment, into the mainstream rapidly. It is also worth noting that for the past three decades, the backbone of India's economic development has been the service sector. It has shouldered this responsibility quite effectively. However, today, the rapid economic disparity in India, which symbolizes the gap between poverty and prosperity, is largely due to the service sector. Although the service sector contributes more than 50% to GDP, its share in employment is only between 30 to 35%. Furthermore, it is essential to understand that within the service sector, there are several other sectors whose progress depends on a strong dollar and, consequently, leads to economic growth in the service sector annually. However, this does not contribute to an increase in per capita income. Therefore, alongside increasing GDP, rapid improvement in employment opportunities should also be a major goal. Otherwise, even after becoming the third-largest economy, India will continue to be recognized as a poor country, which would be a bitter truth.

Dr P S Vohra is Writer, columnist and financial thinker. View are personal

OKX Ventures Collaborates with Stanford's Future of Digital Currency

Initiative to Promote Blockchain Innovation and Sustainability

SINGAPORE: OKX Ventures the investment arm of leading crypto exchange and Web3 technology company OKX, today announced a research and education collaboration with Stanford's Future of Digital Currency Initiative (FDCI), aiming to promote blockchain innovation and sustainability.

As part of the Stanford School of Engineering's Department of Computer Science, FDCI is an industrial affiliates program led by a team of experts in computer science, economics, law and business, with the objective of driving innovation, collaboration and the future of digital currencies through education, research, and industry engagement.

Through this collaboration, OKX Ventures aims to advance the frontiers of knowledge, tackle industry challenges, and unlock new opportunities for innovation through a series of initiatives in research, knowledge-sharing, technical collaboration, and community activities engaging students, institutions, regulators and more. Partner of OKX Ventures Jeff Ren will also



join the FDCI's Advisory Board to provide support with his veteran industry expertise.

Partner of OKX Ventures Jeff Ren said: "We are thrilled to announce our collaboration with Stanford's Future of Digital Currency Initiative, an institution known for its groundbreaking research and innovation in digital currencies. This collaboration reflects our mission to foster sustainability and drive positive change within the blockchain ecosystem. By combining our industry leadership and resources with Stanford's academic expertise and research capabilities, we aim to unlock new opportunities and accelerate the development of innovative solutions shaping the future of digital currencies."

FDCI Faculty Director Professor David Mazieres said: "We are thrilled to have OKX Ventures become a member of FDCI and to have Jeff Ren join our Advisory Board. We look forward to working with them as we continue our work to make digital currencies accessible, inclusive and to promote fair standards."

To advance digital currency technologies and shape a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient digital economy, OKX Ventures will also work with its partners to expand participation from wider academia, industry, and other communities to create a more positive impact on the digital currency ecosystem.

OKX Ventures has recently supported OKX Web3 in launching an educational campaign across the United States to foster the next generation of tech innovators. Teaming up with ecosystem collaborators to bring blockchain technology into classrooms, this initiative focuses on fostering a sustainable and inclusive future by empowering students with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly digitized world.

OKX Ventures is the investment arm of the second-largest crypto exchange by trading volume and Web3 technology company OKX, focusing on exploring the best blockchain projects on a global scale and supporting cutting-edge blockchain technology innovation.

INTERNATIONAL

Canadian Police release photos of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar's killers

OTTAWA: Canadian authorities, who arrested three Indian nationals in connection with the killing of Khalistan separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada, said their investigation has not concluded and "others" played a role in the homicide. Karan Brar, 22, Kamalpreet Singh, 22, and Karanpreet Singh, 28, all Indian nationals, residing in Edmonton have been charged with first-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder. The three are believed by investigators to be members of an alleged hit squad tasked by the government of India with the killing of Nijjar, 45, outside a gurdwara in Surrey, British Columbia, on June 18, 2023. He was a Canadian citizen.



"The investigation does not end here. We are aware that there are others out there that played a role in this homicide and we remain dedicated to identifying and arresting each

one of them," Superintendent Mandeep Mooker, Officer in Charge of the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT) said. The three men were arrested

for the murder of Nijjar Friday morning by IHIT investigators, with the assistance of members from the British Columbia and Alberta Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and the Edmonton Police Service. Royal Canadian Mounted Police Assistant Commissioner David Teboul said they are not able to make any comments about the nature of the evidence collected by police nor "can we speak about the motive" behind Nijjar's murder. "However, understanding this situation has attracted considerable and very broad public interest, I will say this matter is still very much under active investigation. I will underscore that today's announcements are not a complete account of

the investigative work currently underway. "There are separate and distinct investigations ongoing into these matters, certainly not limited to the involvement of the people arrested today, and these efforts include investigating connections to the Government of India." The ties between India and Canada came under severe strain following Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's allegations in September last year of the "potential" involvement of Indian agents in the killing of Nijjar. India has dismissed Trudeau's charges as "absurd" and "motivated." Teboul said that three people have been arrested and charged in the killing of Sikh activist Nijjar.

India asks Indian student in US to obey local laws

WASHINGTON: India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Wednesday urged Indian students enrolled in US colleges and universities to abide by local laws and regulations with regard to the ongoing protests that have swept across American institutions for higher education against Israel's ongoing war in Gaza. There have been no reports yet of the involvement of Indian students in these protests and the ministry has also said no student or their family has contacted Indian missions for help. "We expect all our citizens at home and abroad to respect local laws and regulations," MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at a news briefing in New Delhi in response to a question about protests at Columbia University. "So far no Indian students or their families have contacted us for any assistance in regard to disciplinary action which has been taken for their participation in the protest," he added.



Hundreds of thousands of Indian students are enrolled in US colleges and universities in graduate and undergraduate courses. Many of them desire to work after college and settle down here. They are unlikely to participate in protests or take part in an action that pits them against the law, which could jeopardize their future. Protests have spread across US colleges and universities against Israel's ongoing war in Gaza, with students demanding an end to US support for Israel and, as in the case of Columbia University, cutting with businesses and other entities with investments in Israel. These protests have turned violent in many instances with students taking over parts of the university building as they did in Columbia. Police have arrested scores of students and are breaking up their encampments, as their tents pitched around the campuses are being called.

UN chief Guterres appeals for international pressure to stop Israel incursion into Rafah



UNITED NATIONS: As Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stood firmly by his determination to send troops into Rafah, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed for international pressure to stop the attack on the area where more than 1.2 million Palestinians are sheltering from Israeli invasion that has rolled across most of Gaza. "I appeal for all those with influence over Israel to do everything in their power to prevent it," he said on Tuesday. "A military assault on Rafah would be an unbearable escalation, killing thousands more civilians and forcing hundreds of thousands to flee" the area where "more than 1.2 million people are now seeking shelter in Rafah governorate, most of them fleeing the Israeli bombardment that has reportedly killed over 34,000 people", he said at a news conference.

King Charles III returns to public duties after cancer treatment

LONDON: King Charles III is set to return to public duties after the positive effect of his cancer treatment. King Charles has been receiving care as an outpatient since early February, and sources have said that despite the welcome news the king still has cancer and will continue to be treated for the undisclosed form of the disease. Charles and Queen Consort Camilla will visit a cancer treatment centre on Tuesday to meet medical specialists and patients. The event aims to raise awareness of the importance of early diagnosis and to highlight innovative research, supported by Cancer Research UK, taking place at the hospital. King Charles's diary of events will not be a full summer programme, and attendance will be announced nearer the time and "subject to doctors' advice," with "adaptations made where necessary to minimise risk" to his recovery.



India and Croatia Discuss Bilateral Relations in 11th Foreign Office Consultations

NEW DELHI: India and Croatia held their 11th round of Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) in New Delhi on Tuesday, engaging in comprehensive discussions on strengthening bilateral relations across various domains. The Indian delegation was led by Pavan Kapoor, Secretary (West), Ministry of External Affairs, while the Croatian side was headed by Petar Mihatov, Director General for Political Affairs, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs.



During the consultations, the two sides conducted an extensive review of existing bilateral ties, exploring avenues to deepen cooperation in areas such as trade and economic relations, defence and maritime

affairs, science and technology, innovation, research and development, tourism, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. Both nations underscored the importance of fostering cultural and interpersonal connections

between their citizens. Furthermore, the two sides exchanged views on international cooperation, including collaboration within the United Nations and other multilateral platforms. They noted with satisfaction the growing cooperation aimed at further strengthening India-EU bilateral relations and emphasized the need for an early conclusion of a comprehensive, balanced, and mutually beneficial India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Australian government failing to prepare for climate security risks

CANBERRA: The Australian government is failing to properly plan for security risks from climate change, former military and intelligence leaders have warned. In a report published on Thursday, the Australian Security Leaders Climate Group (ASLCG) said the federal government has fundamentally failed to accept the size and immediacy of climate risk, Xinhua news agency reported.



The ASLCG was formed in 2021 by a group of former senior military and security

officials, including former Australian Defense Force chief Chris Barrie, who said they were concerned that the

security implications of climate change were not being addressed by the government. In Wednesday's report, they

said that the 2024 National Defense Strategy released in April fails to recognise that the rapid acceleration of climate change requires a fundamental recalibration of security and defense thinking. The report said that the government's commitment of up to 18 billion Australian dollars (11.7 billion US dollars) to upgrade military bases in northern Australia will place many critical bases in areas that are projected to become near-unlivable if global warming reaches 2.7 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels.

Bangladesh agrees to join non-UN international force in Haiti

UNITED NATIONS: Bangladesh has agreed to join an international force that will operate independently of the UN to help restore order in Haiti, which has spiraled into gang-fuelled chaos, according to a UN Spokesperson.



Bangladesh is one of the six countries that have written to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres that they will contribute personnel to the Multinational Security Support Mission in Haiti (MSSM), Spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Monday. Invoking the UN Charter provisions for maintaining peace, the Security Council authorised the creation of the MSSM mission to help ameliorate the situation in Haiti by helping its national politi-

cal force. Having been burnt by its earlier forays into the Caribbean nation, the UN is taking a hands-off approach this time, authorising a force that will operate independently and not as a UN peacekeeping mission. The other countries in the Kenya-led force are the Bahamas, Barbados, Benin, Chad, and Jamaica. Bangladesh is taking a bold step in joining the mission after the catastrophic end to

the previous UN mission with military peacekeepers ended in 2017 amid accusations that Nepali troops introduced a strain of cholera from South Asia that, according to the World Health Organisation, killed 9,792 Haitians and sickened more than 810,000. The mission, known as MINUSTAH from its French initials, was ineffective in bringing peace to the country contributing to its demise. A smaller mission without the military component that followed ended in 2019. Armed gangs run several parts of the country, including the capital Port-au-Prince, and several thousands have perished in the violence that has destabilised the country.

NAWAZ'S KHUL JA SIMSIM

A Magical Code, but Army is Asked to Unshackle Civilian Government

GOPAL MISRA
Former Pakistani Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif is quietly

working to pave the route for unprecedented investments in his perennially financially deficit country. He, however, has been told to allow adequate political and administrative space to the present hybrid regime being led by his younger brother, Shahbaz Sharif. His recent three-day visit to China reminds us of his previous three tenures, when he had successfully lured huge investments in different sectors. However, his removal by the army and its secret police, Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) ushered in political instability as well as economic disaster to the country.

It is also being asked whether the present coalition government of the country's two major political parties, Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Noon (PML-N) under Shahbaz Sharif is being allowed to have independent policy in key economic areas to attract investments. There is a general impression that like the government of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), it is functioning under the close supervision of the uniform.

In a bid to re-establish some facade of a civilian supremacy, Nawaz Sharif appears to have decided to play a more meaningful role in the country's affairs, but without any confrontation with the GHQ. The stakes of the Sharif family are quite high, apart from Shahbaz Sharif, his daughter, Maryam, leads Punjab as its chief minister.

As an astute politician, Nawaz Sharif's visit to Beijing might lead not only to provide some relief to the country's

economy, but also improve its position in the geo-politics. The timing of his visit comes just after the much discussed high-level visits of the Saudi Arabian delegation and Iranian President, Ebrahim Raees to Islamabad.

Sharif's visit to Beijing has been camouflaged that he was going for medical treatment. However, few believed it. It is quite known that during 2019-2023, he was in self-exile in London under the pretext of his treatment, but he was waiting for an opportune time to return to the country's political arena. Also, China could hardly be a destination for medical treatment. The Chinese doctors are not known as top class physicians or surgeons. In the modern medical world. They do not enjoy even the reputation being enjoyed by their counterparts in India. A common Pakistani considers India as a better destination for medical treatment than any other country in the world, including China.

Reassuring Beijing

Nawaz Sharif's China visit has finally received attention, especially amidst the reports that he is poised to become PML-N president during the second week of May. Thus, Nawaz Sharif's visit, to Beijing, could usher in greater role for him in the key sectors like strategic affairs and finance.

The diplomatic circles in New Delhi and Islamabad, are abuzz with a number of issues, which might have been discussed during the visit. They might have included setting up an industrial complex for producing cheaper Chinese goods in Pakistan for exports to the neighboring countries. It might include supplies to India, where despite repeated anti-China rhetoric in media as well as at the government level, India has imported goods worth USD 117 billion in 2023, according to a UN report.



Awaiting GHQ Response

It is being stated that the Chinese might condone failure of the Pakistani army in protecting its nationals, but the response of the army chief Asim Munir is not known whether he would allow the speedy implementation of CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor), which was nearly shelved during the Imran Khan's regime. It was then headed by an army officer reported to be close to the then army chief, Qanar Javed Bajwa. It is estimated that China has already sunk more than 60 billion USD in the project and there is little hope of recovering the huge loans extended to Pakistan. The donors like IMF and other international financial institutions have ensured that the financial assistance being extended to Pakistan should not be used for paying debts to China. They have also obtained details about the exorbitant interest rates being charged by China.

It, however, is said that Nawaz Sharif may succeed in pacifying the Dragon provided he succeeds in getting full support of the GHQ. At present, Beijing neither trusts the army nor the present hybrid regime for further investments. It has rescheduled the repayment for the time being.

There are causes for the current trust-deficit between Islamabad and Beijing. Apart from siphoning off the Chinese

money given to Pakistan by generals and bureaucrats for obtaining properties in London, Dubai and other destinations in the US, Australia and Canada, it's security establishment has also failed to provide a foolproof security system to its engineers and other staff members. They are being regularly targeted by various radical Islamic groups.

It is also reported that the Chinese ambassador to Pakistan had summoned PM Shahbaz Sharif to the embassy premises and scolded senior police and security officers for their failure in protecting Chinese personnel.

It is widely believed that Nawaz Sharif would succeed in pacifying the Chinese, but for this GHQ has to allow adequate freedom to the civilian leaders. They have to be allowed to implement the agreements with other countries. Reinventing anti-India Rhetoric The army and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) may continue to focus on the anti-Indian sentiments for bridging the trust deficit with China, but Nawaz Sharif may refuse to subscribe to it. It will not be surprising, if he visits New Delhi at the inauguration of the third term of Narendra Modi in June, if he finally trounces his political rivals. He has already refused the Army's advice to return to London for enjoy a peaceful retired life.

It is being closely watched whether

Sharif's views regarding closer ties with India are finally acceptable to the GHQ, or it still believes in promoting the anti-India sentiments that had brought China and Pakistan closer during sixties. There is little possibility of repeating a Kargil conflict against India under the present regime. A few within the Pakistani establishment, who reportedly have been toyed with the idea of conducting a HAMAS type aggression against India or a repeat of the terrorists' attack on Mumbai, are being forced to postpone their plan for the time being at least, but they continue to be a formidable group within army establishment against normalization of ties with India. It may be recalled that during the sixties, the then Pakistani leader, Z.A. Butto, a political proxy of the then army dictator, Ayub Khan, had brought the ISI, Chinese intelligence and the CIA together for creating unrest in India's north-east region. The activity center was the American consulate in Dacca, the then capital of East Pakistan. Interestingly, the British intelligence MI-6 refused to work against India.

Their nexus against India has recently been exposed in a book, Milari, written by a former chief minister of Mizoram, Zoramthanga. Zoramthanga, who himself was an insurgent leader, had joined democratic politics after the Mizoram Accord. His book offers graphic details about the nexus among the three agencies helping the militants under the umbrella of Mizo National Front (MNF). They used to provide travel funds and weapons to them. The Pakistani army had setup camps on Mizoram-East Pakistan border; however, the situation had undergone paradigm changes following the end of Pakistani rule in its eastern wing, now Bangladesh.

The CIA, however, continued to support the MNF and it's leader Lal Denga through its proxies in Church and media.

The army under its present chief, Asim Munir, is keen to repeat the anti-India conspiracies, it, perhaps, prevents him to allow free hand to the civilian leaders in international and strategic affairs.

Nawaz Sharif's Agenda

It is being widely discussed across Pakistan, whether he would become a real power center in Pakistan's unpredictable political environment. If he succeeds in opening the route for the much-awaited huge financial investments, he could pave the way for ensuring political and economic freedoms for the hybrid government led by Shahbaz.

With Asim Munir controlling all the branches of the government, legislature, executive and judiciary, it is difficult to predict whether Nawaz Sharif would succeed in getting the much needed political accommodation from the GHQ. It is believed that Nawaz Sharif's decision to visit Beijing could have been prompted by the appointment of Mohsin Naqvi as the Home Minister. Naqvi, known for his proximity with the GHQ, was appointed as the caretaker chief minister of Punjab during polls and is being allowed to continue as the chief of the Pakistan Cricket Board even after becoming the Home Minister. His appointment has invited reactions within PML-N that the GHQ is controlling the civilian government, which has little say in the policies, but the reaction is being restrained by Nawaz Sharif.

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

Further protests at UK factories over military arms sent to Israel



LONDON: More protests have been held outside factories across the UK by campaigners against military arms being sent to Israel. Organisers said more than 1,000 workers and trade unionists demonstrated outside BAE Systems sites, as well as the London offices of the Business and Trade department. They said the aim was to show solidarity with Palestinian workers. The Workers for a Free Palestine group said it was escalating its tactics by targeting BAE Systems and the government department on the same day. Members of the group protested outside factories in Glasgow, South Wales and Lancashire.

Tania, a trade unionist and organiser for Workers for a Free

Palestine taking part in the London protest - who did not want to give her full name, said: "Our movement forced the issue of an arms embargo onto the table and polling shows the majority of the British public want to see arms sales to Israel banned, yet the government and also the Labour Party continue to ignore the will of the people." "The government has sought to play down the scale of its arms supplies to Israel, but the reality is UK arms and military support play a vital role in the Israeli war machine, and evidence that three British aid workers were killed by a drone partly produced in the UK shows the extent of British complicity in Israel's genocide."

Govt Mulls Delaying Cross-Border Insolvency Plans over Enforcement Concerns

NEW DELHI: The government is reconsidering its plans to implement a cross-border insolvency regime in India due to potential challenges around enforcement, according to multiple official sources.



"It is likely that the government may not introduce the cross-border insolvency norms anytime soon," according to a senior government official. A key reason, as stated by sources, is the realisation that many countries with significant investment ties to India have not adopted the relevant United Nations convention on a cross-border insolvency. Reciprocity between nations is crucial for effective implementa-

tion of such a regime. However, with major economies like China, Russia, and several European nations not being parties to the UN Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency, Indian lenders may face difficulties accessing overseas assets of stressed companies in those jurisdictions. Leading insolvency expert Sumant Batra emphasises the need for a cross-border insolvency law to complement the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).



Actors Diljit Dosanjh and Neeru Bajwa's upcoming film 'Jatt & Juliet 3' is set to hit the big screen worldwide on June 28.

Diljit took to X and Instagram to make the announcement, sharing two posters from the Punjabi film directed by Jagdeep Sidhu.

He captioned it: "Fateh and Pooja are back. Jatt & Juliet 3 releasing worldwide June 28." 'Jatt & Juliet', a romantic comedy directed by Anurag Singh, was first released in 2012. A year later, the second instalment was released. Even though Diljit and Neeru's characters were reprised, the story was not directly linked to the previous film.

Diljit's latest offering, 'Amar Singh Chamkila', which was released on a streaming portal, received high praise.

The film, directed by Imtiaz Ali, was based on the eponymous singer, considered controversial over the themes he made his songs on.

Diljit Dosanjh & Neeru Bajwa's 'Jatt & Juliet 3' to release worldwide on June 28

Spy universe film starring Alia Bhatt, Sharvari to have 7 big action sequences

MUMBAI: The upcoming spy universe film, starring Alia Bhatt and Sharvari in lead roles, will feature seven big action sequences.

The yet-to-be-titled film is directed by Shiv Rawail, who made his debut with the streaming series 'The Railway Men'. The film's producer, Aditya Chopra, is sparing no effort to make the first female-led spy universe film into an action spectacle.

The film also stars Bobby Deol as the antagonist.

Created by producer Aditya Chopra, the spy universe commenced with the 'Tiger' franchise, featuring Salman Khan and Katrina Kaif.

It commenced with 'Ek Tha Tiger', followed by 'Tiger Zinda Hai'.

The success of these two films solidified Aditya's belief to introduce two more larger-



than-life agents: Kabir, portrayed by Hrithik Roshan in 'War', and 'Pathaan', portrayed by Bollywood megastar Shah Rukh Khan.

'Pathaan' witnessed the crossover of characters from this ambitious spy universe, showcasing the union of SRK and Salman Khan in an action sequence that celebrated the superstardom of these cin-

ematic icons.

In 'Tiger 3', Pathaan and Tiger reunite once more, with Kabir from the 'War' franchise also making an appearance towards the end credits, indicating that all actors from the spy universe could now be seen across different timelines.

The next film from the spy universe will be 'Pathaan 2', followed by 'Tiger vs Pathaan'.

Preity Zinta is 'on top of the world' as she drops BTS video of her fashion shoot



Actress Preity Zinta has shared behind-the-scenes (BTS) glimpses from her recent fashion shoot and said she is "on top of the world". Preity, who is currently busy with the ongoing season of the Indian Premier League (IPL) with regards to her team 'Punjab Kings', took to Instagram and shared a Reel video. In the video, she is seen posing on the terrace of a high-rise building for a fashion photoshoot. Wearing a backless halter neck purple and orange colourblock long gown, the 'Kal Ho Naa Ho' fame actress exudes elegance.

'Madly obsessed' Ananya Panday drops picture of her 'baby jaan' Riot



MUMBAI: Actress Ananya Panday on Wednesday introduced the world to her new furry friend -- her pet dog 'Riot', calling it the 'cutest little boy'.

The 'Gehraiyaan' actress took to Instagram and shared a series of pictures of the dog, leaving the fans in awe of its cuteness. The first snap shows Ananya holding the little dog in her arms, while she smiles for the lens. There are some pictures of the dog playing with the toys in Ananya's house. The last picture features the dog sleeping next to Ananya, under a blanket.

The post was captioned: "Guys, say hello to my baby jaan - 'RIOT'... he is the cutest little boy in the whole wide world and I'm madly obsessed.

PS. This is gonna become a RIOT fan page."

Ananya's bestie Shanaya Kapoor commented: "I'm a Massi". Malaika Arora wrote: "adorable". Maheep Kapoor said: "too cute".

Meanwhile, she was last seen in the movie 'Kho Gaye Hum Kahan', directed by Arjun Varain Singh, written by Arjun, Zoya Akhtar, Reema Kagti and produced by Ritesh Sidhwani, Akhtar, Kagti, and Farhan Akhtar under the banners of Excel Entertainment and Tiger Baby Films.

It also stars Siddhant Chaturvedi and Adarsh Gourav.

Ananya next has 'Call Me Bae', 'Control', and 'The Untold Story of C Sankaran Nair' in the pipeline.

Aamir Khan understood the power of 'Namaste' during 'Dangal' shoot



MUMBAI: Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan, who was last seen in 'Laal Singh Chaddha', shared that he understood the power of 'Namaste' while shooting for his 2016 blockbuster 'Dangal' in Punjab.

Aamir recently appeared on the streaming comedy show 'The Great Indian Kapil Show' and spoke with Kapil about various topics, including his last two films, 'Laal Singh Chaddha' and 'Thugs of Hindostan', which didn't perform well at the box office.

During the conversation, he also reflected on being raised in a Muslim family and how he learned about the cultural significance of 'Namaste'. Recalling a memorable experience, he first mentioned shooting for 'Rang de Basanti' in Punjab.

The actor said in Hindi, "The power and the Punjabi culture, is full of love. So, when we went for the shoot of 'Dangal', it was a small village we were shooting in. We shot for more than two months in that location and that house."

"You won't believe it, but when I used to arrive there around 5 or 6 in the morning, as my car entered, people would stand outside their homes just to welcome me with folded hands and 'Sat Sri Akaal'. They used to just wait to welcome me. They never disturbed me, never stopped my car, nothing. After my pack-up, when I would return, they would again be standing outside their homes and would greet me 'Good Night', " he said.

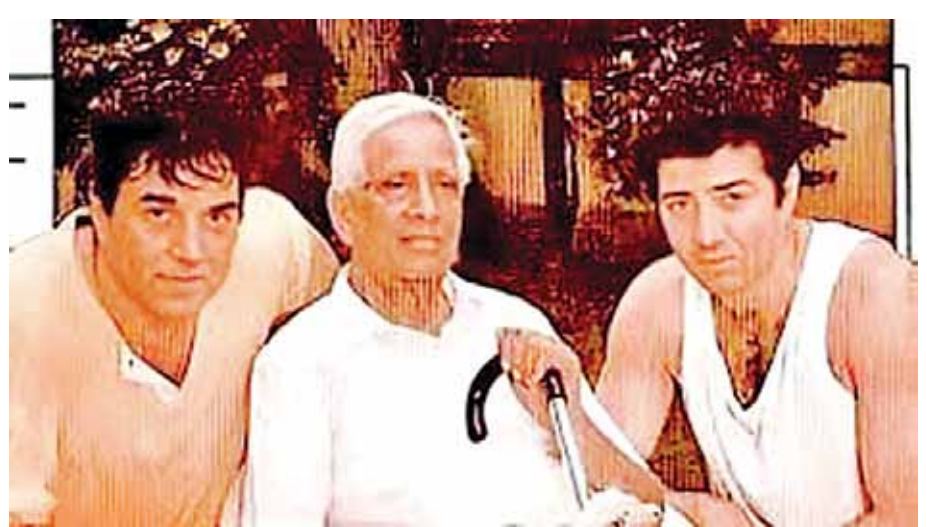
Aamir said: "I belong to a Muslim family, I am not used to folding my hands in 'namaste'. I'm used to raising my hand (gesturing aadaab, the way Muslims greet each other) and bowing my head. After spending those two and a half months in Punjab, I understood the power of 'namaste'. It's such a wonderful emotion. People in Punjab have so much respect for everyone and do not discriminate based on stature."

"The Great Indian Kapil Show" streams on Netflix.

Grandad Dharmendra wishes he had spent more time with his parents

Veteran star Dharmendra took a trip down memory lane as he talked about his parents and expressed regret over not spending more time with them. Dharmendra took to Twitter and shared an old picture featuring himself, his father, Kewal Kishan Singh Deol, and his elder actor-filmmaker son, Sunny Deol.

In the image, Dharmendra and Sunny are seated on either side of his father, who is pictured sitting on a chair holding a walking stick. Accompanying the image, Dharmendra wrote: "kaash! MAA BAAP ko aur waqt diya hota! (I wish I had spent more time with my parents!)" The actor also shared a picture on Instagram with the caption: "Friends, with your good wishes and his blessings, I got busy with my kheeti baadi. Love you all..... This cute tractor.....A lovely gift from a loving fan and friend



from Rajkot This year you will see me in IKKEES (21) A BEAUTIFUL FILM by SRIRAM RAGHAVAN."

Fondly known as the "He-Man" of Bollywood, Dharmendra has worked in over

300 films in a career spanning over six decades. His latest on-screen appearance was in the Shahid Kapoor and Kriti Sanon-starrer 'Teri Baaton Mein Aisa Uljha Jiya'.

The actor will next be seen in Sriram Raghavan's film titled 'Ikki', which also features Agastya Nanda.

Reportedly, the film is based on the life of the youngest Param Vir Chakra recipient, Arun Khetarpal.

Priya Dutt, cancer survivors & docs take part in walkathon on cancer awareness

113 years old veteran marathon runner Fauja Singh also takes part

KULBIR SINGH KALSI Chandigarh

As many as 300 people including cancer survivors and doctors from Ivy Hospital, Mohali participated in a cancer awareness walkathon at Mohali on Sunday.

The walkathon was jointly flagged-off from Ivy Hospital by Priya Dutt ex MP and chairperson cum trustee of Nargis Dutt Foundation and 113 years old veteran marathon runner Fauja Singh.

Speaking during the occasion, Priya Dutt stressed upon the need to focus on the awareness of cancer. Early detection and timely treatment can



defeat cancer. However delay in detecting the disease and treatment can be fatal.

We need to spread word in society that cancer is not a stigma or an end of life. It needs to be detected at an early stage and to check its growth before it's too late for the medical treatment to intervene.

She further said that Priya Dutt said that since Nargis Dutt

Foundation formation in 1981 by her father late Sunil Dutt after the death of Nargis Dutt with cancer, it has worked towards raising awareness about cancer as well as helping patients to fight the cancer.

Despite a lot of challenges, our journey to help and support cancer patients is on with full efforts and dedication, she maintained.

Dr Vijay Bansal, director surgical oncology at Ivy Hospital Mohali said that 30 lakh people in India suffer from cancer, of which 11 lakh are new cases. Awareness is the solution to curb myths. Out of 100 people 98 must be unaware of the truth about cancer. People are not even aware of how the condition develops and then how to cure it, he asserted.

Among others Deepa Shergill from JEETO Foundation, Dr Meenakshi Mittal director radiation, Dr Meenakshi Sharma, consultant radio oncology, Tripal Singh eminent Yoga influencer, Cap Jagdev Singh president Mohali senior citizen association, Aulakh director CGC Landra and Sukhdev Singh councilor from sector 70 Mohali were also present during the occasion.

When writer & realist actor Balraj Sahni raced against a train for a film scene

MUMBAI: More than three decades before Aamir Khan's train stunt in "Ghulam" (1998), this actor, renowned for his natural performances, had already done such a hazardous exploit, not just a daredevil challenge on the screen, but to inject reality into the scene and save the filmmaker the "bother of back projection".

Balraj Sahni also involved Meena Kumari in his risky ruse in "Pinjre ke Panchhi" (1966), which -- in another strange resemblance with Aamir's film -- was shot at Khandaal. The scene had her walking on the rail tracks in a bid to commit suicide, even as he ran after her and managed to pull her aside from the rushing train at the last minute.

The filmmaker only wanted shots of him running after her and pulling her away; those of the were to be juxtapositioned. Sahni, however, knew that a train would pass the spot soon, and if they moved fast, the whole scene could be filmed there only. He asked the director, who, in turn, asked the actress, and she gamely agreed.



With all arrangements in place, he started chasing Meena Kumari amid shrill whistles from the approaching train's driver, who "must have been horrified to see us right in the middle of the track". The train must have been only a few yards away when Sahni dragged Meena Kumari away, he recalled in his autobiography "Meri Filmki Atamkatha".

The shot came out perfect, but Sahni, who was above 50 then, only later realised how he had imperilled both of them.

Going to her hotel room to apologise, he found her sitting with her head in her hands and she asked him if he was tired of life. He acknowledged his recklessness but also questioned why she went along. "You were so very keen on taking that shot at one go! How could I then stop you?" was her disarming response with a rare smile.

This aim of realism marked the film career of Balraj Sahni, born on this day (May 1) in Rawalpindi in 1913. He

may not have been Hindi cinema's first 'natural' actor -- that honour was for near-contemporary Motilal -- but was matched by few when it came to researching his roles, which spanned from a dispossessed peasant to a rich landlord, among others.

He nearly missed his iconic role in "Do Bigha Zameen" (1953), when a bemused Bimal Roy nearly sent him off after Sahni landed at his office in a London-made suit. But he convinced the exacting filmmaker and prepared for the role of a farmer-turned-menial labourer by living -- and working along as Deen Bandhu -- with the rickshaw pullers of Calcutta to familiarise himself with their language, mannerisms and habits. Before this, Sahni, jailed in a political case, notched up an unparalleled record by being allowed to leave the prison in the day, under guard, to shoot for a film -- where he played the role of a jailor! This was K. Asif's "Hulchul" (1951), starring Dilip Kumar and Nargis.

IAS Harshita Sharma- An Inspiration for Young Aspirants



KAVITA SHARMA Noida

"I am very relaxed, feeling immensely relieved" says IAS, Harshita Sharma who cracked the UPSC 2023 and secured 214 rank. My dream has come true, I have fulfilled the dream of my parents, adds harshita who has been preparing for UPSC since five years. Her optional subject was Zoology. She hails from the Economically weaker background and it was her third attempt for the UPSC. She is from Rajpura, district Patiala in Punjab. After completing her schooling in Rajpura, Harshita moved to Delhi for further studies and completed her graduation and post graduation from Delhi University. She got selected in Jamia Millia's Residential Coaching Academy (RCA) also but opted for self study to save time. She feels Civil services is one of the prestigious post and her passion to work for the society led her to prepare for this exam.

It is often said for a girl from a middle class family it is very difficult to convince her parents to support her in fulfilling her dreams, but harshita is lucky that her parents supported her in it. She is an example of hard-work and determination. Civil Services Examination is considered as one of the toughest and challenging Exam of India. Every year thousands aspire

to become IAS officers, but only a few succeed. Numerous students opt for various types of coaching for preparation but many of them do self study, Harshita started preparing for the exam by herself, after post-graduation and had to face various financial as well as societal challenges. Her motto is to believe in yourself and not get influenced by others.

In an Exclusive Interview with 'The Financial World', Harshita shared her experiences. She feels that Civil Services is not a difficult Exam but it needs ones determination and focus. It is lengthy process indeed so the student should have enough patience to deal with it. Giving credit to her parents she said "My parents have sacrificed for me and my brother, but I am happy that they believed in me and because of them, I am able to achieve my goal, fulfil my Dream" She is happy that being a woman she has fulfilled the dream of her father, made him proud. Recollecting the memories, how her father was worried about her marriage, harshita got emotional but she never lost hope. Self belief is crucial, she says.

Her hobbies are Painting, watching movies and reading books. She is a motivation for many civil service aspirants. Her message to young girls is Be Financially Independent. Hard work always pays.

Space Tourism Takes Off: The New Frontier of Adventure and Exploration

ADITI CHAHAR

Space tourism is the practice of traveling into space for recreational, leisure, or adventure purposes. It is a subset of the commercial space industry and aims to provide non-professionals (such as astronauts or scientists) with the opportunity to experience space travel. As the technology continues to develop and the cost decreases, space tourism is becoming more accessible to private individuals.

There are several types of space tourism:

1. Suborbital Space Tourism
2. In suborbital flights, tourists travel to the edge of space (above the Kármán line, which is about 100 kilometers or 62 miles above the Earth) but do not orbit the planet. These flights typically last a few minutes and allow passengers to experience weightlessness and see the curvature of the Earth. Companies like Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic offer these types of flights.
3. Orbital Space Tourism: In orbital flights, tourists travel into orbit around the Earth. These trips can last several days or even weeks and usually involve staying on a space station, such as the



International Space Station (ISS). These trips are currently more expensive and less frequent than suborbital flights due to the higher complexity and risk.

4. Lunar Tourism: This is a type of space tourism that involves traveling to the Moon. Although still in the early stages, several companies have announced plans to offer commercial lunar flights in the future.

5. Deep Space Tourism: This is a more ambitious form of space tourism that would involve traveling beyond the Moon to other celestial bodies, such as Mars or asteroids. This type of space tourism is still largely in the conceptual and planning phases, but some companies and organizations are exploring the possibility.

As space tourism technology and infrastructure continue to improve, the industry is likely to expand and offer a variety of experiences for different budgets and interests.