

REGION **2**

CM KEJRIWAL IS FINE, GETTING INSULIN REGULARLY, SAYS PUNJAB CM AFTER VISITING TIHAR JAIL



SC may consider the question of grant of interim bail to CM Arvind Kejriwal next week

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Friday said that it may consider, on the next date of hearing, the question of grant of interim bail to incarcerated Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy case in view of the ongoing general elections.

Rising for the day and posting the matter for further hearing on Tuesday, a bench, headed by Justice Sanjiv Khanna, told Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju, representing the Enforcement Directorate (ED), to get prepared on the question of interim release of the AAP supremo due to elections.

The bench, also comprising Justice Dipankar Datta, clarified that it was merely informing



both sides to get prepared on the question of interim bail as the final hearing in the case could be prolonged. "If it (conclusion of hearing) is going to take time, it does appear it may take time, we may then consider the question of interim bail because of the elections," the apex court said.

Further, it asked ASG Raju to take instructions if Kejriwal,

because of the position he holds, can be allowed to sign official files in custody. During the hearing, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for Kejriwal, submitted that elections in Delhi are due on May 26 and the AAP leader was arrested on March 21 soon after elections were announced on March 16. In the previous hearing, the top court asked the ED to explain the timing of the arrest of CM Kejriwal after the Model Code of Conduct for the Lok Sabha polls came into force. It had also asked the federal anti-money laundering agency to explain the gap between the date of arrest and the initiation of the investigation.

BANKING & FINANCE **6**

IMF HIGHLIGHTS PUBLIC INVESTMENT AS KEY DRIVER FOR INDIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH



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.

POTPOURRI **8**

'AURON MEIN KAHAN DUM THA' STARRING AJAY DEVGN & TABU SHIFTS RELEASE DATE TO JULY 5



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



MUMBAI: India's forex reserves dropped \$2.42 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.

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.

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, to check if they are carrying money? Why don't they raid 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".

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.

The Prime Minister also accused the Congress of neglecting national interests, claiming that they had given away several uninhabited islands during their tenure.

Attacking Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge over a recent remark pertaining to Lord Ram and Lord Shiva, Modi claimed that the opposition party had declared this election as a fight against Lord Ram.

"The Congress president said his objective was to defeat Lord Ram and that Lord Shiva will defeat Lord Ram. What are they thinking? The Mughals destroyed the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the Somnath Temple with this same mentality," Modi as-

serted. Regarding reservation for Muslims, Modi said that after Independence, it was decided, following careful deliberations, that religion-based quotas would not be granted. "The Congress now wants to snatch such quotas and give them to others," he said.

In another rally in Jamnagar, Gujarat, Modi accused the Congress of attempting to divide society on the basis of caste and appealing its vote bank through various means. "The Congress government in Karnataka issued a 'fatwa' overnight to include Muslims in the Other Backward Classes segment to give them quota benefits," he alleged.

Assam CM best example of BJP's 'washing machine' tactic: Priyanka Gandhi

GUWAHATI: Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra addressed an election rally in Assam's Dhubri on Wednesday where she launched a sharp attack against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, calling him the best example of BJP's 'washing machine' tactic.

Priyanka Gandhi campaigned in the Balijan area under the Dhubri Lok Sabha constituency in support of Congress candidate Rakibul Hussain.

"There were serious allegations against the Chief Minister of Assam before he switched sides to the BJP. However, once he joined the BJP, everything was forgotten. The Assam CM is the best example of BJP's washing machine tactic which began from here. Later, the BJP used the same formula in other places as well," she told the gathering.

According to Priyanka Gandhi, the BJP is using the washing machine strategy to fool the people.

"First, they speak about corruption and later they welcome the corrupt politicians into their party and all the allegations suddenly vanish," she said.

The senior Congress leader also criticised the BJP-led As-



sam government for the "mafia raj" in the state.

"Look at the Chief Ministers of the Congress-ruled states. Whether it is Revanth Reddy in Andhra Pradesh or Siddaramaiah in Karnataka -- they have been working for the betterment of their states. The Congress CMs have dedicated themselves to the service of the people. But in Assam, a mafia raj is going on. We hear about land mafias, coal mafias, sand mafias, etc., in Assam," she said.

The Congress leader also slammed the Centre on the unemployment issue, saying, "The present unemployment rate is the highest in 45 years. Around 70 crore people in this country

are jobless. Yet, at least 30 lakhs posts are lying vacant in the Central government departments but the BJP has not taken any step to recruit youths in these posts." She also attacked AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal, who is contesting against Rakibul Hussain in Dhubri.

"The BJP has a secret understanding with Ajmal in Assam, just like it has with Asaduddin Owaisi in Telangana," she claimed. Criticising the BJP on the electoral bond issue, Priyanka Gandhi said, "The BJP has become the richest party in the world in just 10 years. The Congress did not earn so much even in 70 years."

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



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.

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



RAE BAREILLY: 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 Bareilly seat in Uttar Pradesh.

Rahul Gandhi's decision to contest from the Rae Bareilly 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 Bareilly can truly be termed a Congress bastion.

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 Bareilly has remained loyal to the Gandhi family in the past decades, the party cadres in the constituency have almost wilted 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 Bareilly 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.

In 1977, Raj Narain of Janata Party defeated Indira Gandhi but Rae Bareilly went back to Indira Gandhi in 1980. In 1996 and 1998, the seat was won by BJP's Ashok Singh

Maneka Gandhi files nomination from Sultanpur



SULTANPUR (UP): BJP candidate and sitting MP Maneka Gandhi filed her nomination papers from the Sultanpur Lok Sabha seat here on Wednesday.

She took out a roadshow to reach the collectorate and then filed her nomination papers

before the District Election Officer.

Nishad Party President and Minister Dr Sanjay Nishad and Apna Dal leader and cabinet minister Ashish Patel accompanied her at the time of the nomination filing.

Talking to reporters after

filing her nomination, Maneka Gandhi said she would do more work in the next five years than she had done in the last five years. She said she wanted to provide more houses to the people under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana here.

Delhi Police lodges FIR over doctored video of Home Minister Amit Shah

NEW DELHI: The Delhi Police on Sunday registered an FIR over a doctored video of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, where his statements indicating a commitment to abolishing reservation quotas for Muslims in Telangana, were changed to make it seem that he was advocating scrapping of all reservations.

"We received a complaint regarding the edited video of the Home Minister. Two complaints were received by police, one from the BJP and another from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA). Following this, the Delhi Police Special Cell Cyber Wing's IFSO unit filed an FIR," a source said.

A case has been registered under Sections 153, 153A, 465, 469, 171G of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and section 66C of the Information Technology (IT) Act and a probe has been initiated, said the sources.

CM Kejriwal is fine, getting insulin regularly, says Punjab CM after visiting Tihar jail



NEW DELHI: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann met his counterpart Arvind Kejriwal in Tihar jail on Tuesday, a prison official said.

He arrived at Tihar at 12.30 p.m. and left the premises around 1.10 p.m.

After meeting the incarcerated Delhi Chief Minister, CM Mann, while talking to

reporters said that CM Kejriwal asked about the latest developments in the health and education spheres in Punjab.

"He also enquired about the board results in Punjab. He has assured Delhiites that he is fine and getting insulin and medical check-ups regularly," said CM Mann.

The Punjab Chief Minister said that CM Kejriwal has urged everyone to go and vote.

The meeting comes a day after Sunita Kejriwal and Delhi Minister Atishi met Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in Tihar jail on Monday, said a prison official.

CM Kejriwal, who was arrested on March 21 by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in the alleged excise scam, is lodged in Tihar's Jail No-2.

The jailed Delhi CM has provided a list of six individuals with whom he wants to meet in prison.

The ED has termed CM Kejriwal the "kingpin" and the key conspirator of the alleged excise scam in collusion with other ministers of the Delhi government, AAP leaders, and other persons.

Delhi HC disposes of PIL on deepfake videos, asks poll panel to take action



NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Thursday disposed of a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking measures to curb the spread of deepfake videos during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections, asking the Election Commission of India to address the issue.

The PIL, filed by Lawyers Voice, raised concerns about the potential impact of deepfake content on the electoral process and sought intervention from the court.

A division bench of Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet P.S. Arora said that the court could not issue directives in the middle of an election, and instead, directed the petitioner to submit a detailed representation to the Election Commission of India (ECI).

Stressing the urgency of the matter, it directed the poll panel to expedite the review of the representation and take appropriate action by May 6.

Senior advocate Jayant Mehta, representing the petitioner, said that there is a need for stringent measures to address the menace of deepfake videos, citing their potential to spread misinformation rapidly. However, the court refrained from issuing immediate orders, stressing its trust in the ECI to address the issue effectively.

The PIL had sought specific directions from the ECI to formulate guidelines for verifying video messages, prohibiting the use of deepfake technologies in electoral communications, and collecting data on their usage during the election period.

Moreover, the petitioner urged social media platforms such as Google, Meta, and X to take down and block deepfake content related to political leaders until the declaration of election results. The instances of deepfake videos cited in the PIL included misleading clips featuring Bollywood actors Ranveer Singh and Aamir Khan, as well as political figures like Rahul Gandhi and Amit Shah.

Yogi govt to spend Rs 4,000 crore on animal protection



LUCKNOW: The Uttar Pradesh government will spend nearly Rs 4,000 crore on the protection, treatment, and service of animals, including cows, a government spokesman said here on Wednesday.

The state Department of Animal Husbandry, dairy, and Fisheries has prepared an annual plan in this regard while a budget of Rs 3, 907.1 crore has also been proposed for it, "he said.

This includes complete details of the expenditure incurred in cow protection, veterinary education and other areas, including veterinary hospitals, polyclinics and service centres.

According to the annual plan, a total amount of Rs 1,140 crore will be spent on cow conservation of which Rs 140 crore will be used to establish cow protection centres, while the remaining Rs 1, 000 crore will be given as a grant for the maintenance of stray cows.

In addition to this, there is a plan to spend Rs 470.30 crore on veterinary, polyclinics, and service centres. This includes Rs 55 crore for establishing veterinary hospitals, Rs 6 crore for veterinary polyclinics, Rs 4.5 crore for veterinary service centres, and Rs 71 crore to meet various expenses in veterinary hospitals, service centres, research, and diagnostic services (revenue head).

Furthermore, Rs 36.52 crore will be spent on mobile veterinary services, Rs 186.72 crore on the National Animal Health and Disease Control Programme, and Rs 22.50 crore on vaccination.

Nothing suspicious found so far, says Minister Atishi on bomb threat emails to Delhi schools

NEW DELHI: Following the bomb threat through email at several schools across the city on Wednesday, Delhi Education Minister Atishi said that so far nothing suspicious has been found in any of the schools.

"Some schools have received bomb threats today morning. Students have been evacuated and those premises are being searched by Delhi Police. So far nothing has been found in any of the schools" the Minister said on X. "We are in constant touch with the Police and the schools. Would request parents and citizens not to panic. School authorities will be in touch with parents wherever needed," the post said.

Multiple schools in the national capital, including DPS



Dwarka, BGS International School, Sanskriti School, Indian School, St Thomas School and Amity School in Pushp Vihar, faced a chilling bomb threat via email.

Following the bomb threat, several schools informed parents that the school would be closed on Wednesday, while others sent children home after receiving the email.

A senior police official said that in the preliminary inquiry, it appears that numerous emails have been sent since Tuesday following a similar pattern.

"The emails lack a date line but include 'bcc', indicating they've been sent to multiple recipients. Currently, an investigation is underway," said the official.

According to police, after receiving information from schools regarding the bomb threat, local police teams along with the bomb detection team, bomb disposal squad and officials of Delhi Fire Service (DFS) reached the spot in the morning.

"The schools were evacuated and a search operation is going on. So far nothing suspicious has been found," said the official.

Gang of 5 cyber cheats working on the tips of mastermind in Dubai arrested



PARVESH HANDA
Faridabad

Cyber police station NIT Faridabad arrested five members of a gang allegedly involved in cheating more than 500 persons amount worth crores of rupees on fake share trading AP on the tips of a mastermind residing in Dubai. Police recovered about 400 Sims and Rs 60000 cash from the arrested accused identified as Ankit resident of Udham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand, Shamim resident of Gonda in U.P, Saurabh resident of Bulandshahr in U.P, Roshan resident of Dheerpur in Amroha district in Bihar and Divyanshu resident of Ahmedabad in Gujarat.

ACP Cyber Crime Abhimanyu Goel said that a case was registered against the gang of cheats on 14th March 2024 in NIT police station on the complaint of a retired government officer Chand Singh a resident of Sector 46 Faridabad, who was cheated Rs 53 lakh by making investment in fake share trading business and was assured handsome return on the investment in share trading business and initially invested very small amount on which he earned attractive profits and later he made heavy investment and was cheated.

ACP Goel said that after registering the case police started investigations and in due course of time arrested Ankit from Moradabad, Shamim was arrested from Delhi on the information of Ankit. Meanwhile, within a couple of days Shaurabh and Roshan were arrested from Gurugram and Divyanshu was arrested from his residence in Ahmedabad in Gujarat during a police raid.

881 held in 'Operation Aakraman' in Haryana

SATISH HANDA

In view of Lok Sabha polls, Haryana government has launched 'Operation Aakraman' in state in which 1309 teams comprising of 6161 policemen led by a police officer during raids since early morning till late night on Saturday arrested 881 anti-social elements involved in criminal activities on the information gathered by CID in the state. The police registered 478 cases during the day, talking to the media persons Director General Police (DGP) Haryana Shatruijit Kapoor said that the police department prior to raids had collected all information regarding illegal arms, drug smugglers and other criminal activities by the hard core criminals in the state.

DGP Haryana disclosed that 28 FIRs were registered under the Arms Act during the day in which 32 illegal arms were collected by the police. He said, in the Satnali area under Mohindergarh district the police during raids had seized 392 kg explosive material, 190 detonators and 750 meter wire, and arrested as many as 19 persons



involved in illegal mining in the state. DGP said that during raids police also arrested six drug smugglers from whom recovered 3 kg 'ganja', 1.5 kg opium, 22 kg heroine, and 7.80 gm 'chhitta'.

Meanwhile, in view of Lok Sabha polls the district administration Ambala has declared alert and since after the code of conduct declared by the government in the state during raids recovered 479 complaints on C-Vigil AP as regard violations of code of conduct, besides also seized drugs and illicit liquor at different places of value worth over Rs 50 lakh in the state. According to a spokesperson of district administration, out of 479 complaints received as regard violation of the code of conduct so far, nearly 460 complaints have already been sorted out and action on the remaining 19 complaints are under process.

6 out of 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana to have tough competition between BJP and Congress

SATISH HANDA

Seven out of 10 Lok Sabha seats have been announced by Congress so far in Haryana state: Ambala, Sonapat, Rohtak, Faridabad, Bhiwani, Hisar and Sirsa are likely to have tough competition between the candidates of Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) in the state this times. Congress has yet to announce the names of candidates to contest polls in the remaining two Lok Sabha constituencies so far. Congress has to announce the name of the for important Gurugram seat to contest against BJP's heavyweight candidate Rao Inderjit. There was a proposal by a group of senior Congress leaders to contest Bollywood star Raj Babbar from this seat, whereas at the same time a former minister in Haryana state Capt. Ajay Yadav has expressed keen desire to contest from this seat on behalf of Congress and the final decision have yet to be taken by Congress high command.

Past scenario reveals that



during 2019 Lok Sabha polls, BJP was able to win all 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana in which NDA was able to get 38.4% and UPA 28.5% votes. During 2019 Lok Sabha polls BJP was able to get 58.2%, Congress 28.5%, JJP 4.9%, BSP 3.6%, INLD 1.9% and others 2.9% votes in Haryana state. Information reveals that during present Lok Sabha polls Congress is going to contest all heavyweight party leaders to face BJP contestants on all seats, except Karnal seat where the new face of a youth Congress leader

Divyanshu Budhiraja is going to contest against the former Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar. According to information, BJP contestants will fight present Lok Sabha polls in Haryana claiming 'Modi Ki Guarantee' and the developments in the state by Manohar Lal Khattar government. Whereas, Congress claims to fight these Lok Sabha polls on the basis of caste and community policy, as such has offered similar tickets to the communities belonging to Punjabi, Dalit, OBC, Aheer, Brahmin and Jaat.

Delhi Congress leaders Naseeb Singh & Neeraj Basoya quit party, blame AAP alliance

NEW DELHI: In a major setback to the Congress party, two of its leaders and observers for two Lok Sabha seats in Delhi, Neeraj Basoya and Naseeb Singh have resigned from the party.

The two leaders in separate letters addressed to party president Mallikarjun Kharge have majorly blamed the Congress' AAP alliance for their quitting the parties.

Neeraj Basoya, former MLA and party Observer for the West Delhi Parliamentary Seat, has said, "I am addressing the present communication to you, being aggrieved by the alliance of the party with the AAP in Delhi. I have humbly submitted that the said alliance is bringing a great dis-repute and embarrassment to Delhi Congress workers on a daily basis. And I believe, that as a self-respecting party leader, I cannot be associated with the party anymore."

"I hereby tender my resignation from all Party Posts and the primary membership of the Party. I thank Smt Sonia Gandhi Ji for giving a common man like me, all the opportunities in the last 30 years," said Basoya in the letter dated May 1.



Naseeb Singh, former MLA and party observer for North West Delhi has expressed his anguish over the appointment of Davinder Yadav as the Delhi Congress chief.

He said in his letter, "Davinder Yadav has up till now

run a campaign in Punjab solely based on attacking Arvind Kejriwal's false agenda and today, he in Delhi will be mandated to praise and support AAP and its CM Arvind Kejriwal."

The two resignations from the party come close on the heels of veteran Congress leader Arvind Singh Lovely resigning as Delhi unit chief, over strong differences with the Central leadership.

Delhi goes to Lok Sabha polls on May 25

Sanjay Raut MP questions increase in Maha voting percentage after 11 days

MUMBAI: Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut on Thursday questioned the Election Commission of India (ECI) about the increase in the voting percentages of Phase I and Phase 2 Lok Sabha elections, and asked how it suddenly shot up after so many days.

Speaking to the media here, he said that the hourly and daily voting percentages in all the Lok Sabha constituencies that have voted so far, provided on the Maharashtra Chief Electoral Officer and ECI websites were the latest current data. "However, after 11 days from the Phase I (April 19) and a week after the Phase 2 (April 26) polling, the ECI has released the voting percentages which are much higher than the live data given on the polling dates. Where did the extra votes come from?" demanded Raut.

He pointed out that the voting percentages have changed by 7-10 per cent in many constituencies, though in Nagpur it has reportedly reduced by some points, and the low turnout had rattled the Bharatiya Janata Party. Pointing a needle



of suspicion, he said that after the low voter turnout, many people had taken note and expressed concerns over the considerable drop in the voting percentages as compared with the 2019 polling data. The very same people are now surprised that the low percentage has shot up in 11 days and has nearly equalled the 2019 poll tally, raising questions.

"This is the digital era in a digital India... Does it take them 11 days to give the voting percentages? We can understand a difference of half or one per cent in the final calculations, but such a huge gap of 7 or 10 per cent or more is difficult to digest," said Raut.

Congress made the poor became poorer during rule, whereas Modi brought them out from poverty line: Nayab Saini

PARVESH HANDA
Ambala

Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Saini and former Home Minister Anil Vij, Union Minister Gajinder Shekhawat were seen together first time on the stage at Ambala during launch of poll campaign in favour of Banto Kataria as a BJP candidate for Ambala Lok Sabha seat on Wednesday which was arranged by Anil Vij who made an appeal to support Banto Kataria. However, while addressing a large gathering Vij expressed deep concern over few BJP political leaders tried to create a rift between him and the party. Banto Kataria also filed nomination papers after the Vijay Sankalp Rally in which Gian Chand Gupta Vidhan Sabha president, Kanwar Pal Gurjar Union Minister, Union Minister Gajinder Shekhawat, State Minister Aseem Goel, former MLA Rajbir Barara, former minister Santosh Sarwan, BJP district president Mandeep Rana were present. However, Anil Vij was not present at the time of filing nomination papers.

Haryana Chief Minister and State President Nayab Saini while addressing a gathering took the Congress to task and said that Congress has always used the poor for power. Congress was neither concerned about the poor while in power, nor is it now. He said, Congress has only worked to make the poor poorer. He said that Indira Gandhi promised to remove poverty in 1970, Rahul also lied about re-



moving poverty last time in Rajasthan and today again he is lying about removing poverty. During the 55-60 years of rule Congress never cared about the poor, he said that Congress always used the poor for power. Saini said that Modi is concerned about the welfare of the poor, hence Modi ji is working to bring smile on the faces of the poor. In the last 10 years, 25 crore people have been strengthened and brought out of the poverty line.

Remembering the achievements of Prime Minister Modi Nayab Saini said that he came to Haryana twice recently and gave two big gifts to the state: AIMS and Dwarka Express, besides so much work has been done in the last 10 years that if we start counting it will reduce the time, besides the important achievements include removal of Article 370, Ram Lala was installed in a grand and divine temple in Ayodhya. Aiming at the Congress, CM Saini said that the Congress manifesto is a bundle of lies. "Congress is currently upset after seeing the development done by

the Modi government. The people of the country and the state neither have faith in the Congress nor in the manifesto of the Congress," Saini said that BJP's resolution letter is the guarantee of Modi ji. He said that on May 25, the public will press the lotus button while voting on the guarantee of Janardan Modi. Mr. He said that Modi has guaranteed to provide continuous ration to 80 crore people by 2029. Zero electricity bill through Surya Yojana, right to free treatment of Rs 5 lakh in Ayushman Card Scheme and now the elderly have been linked with Ayushman Card.

Saini said that Congress never worried about the farmers has only misled the farmers, whereas Modi government is a government in the interest of farmers, created the Prime Minister Crop Insurance Scheme to provide Rs 1100 crore in case of crop failure, earlier during the time of Congress, farmers used to get cheques of Rs 2 each and Rs 10 each towards crop compensation, whereas the BJP government has given Rs 12500 crore through crop insurance scheme.

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

Rahul Gandhi will lose by a big margin in Raebareli : Amit Shah

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 'Ghuspaithiye', instead on June 19, 2020, you said Na Koi Ghussa Hai, Na Hi Koi Ghussa 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 Balatkari 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.

K.R. Shyam Sundar is Adjunct Professor, Management Development Institute, Gurgaon. Views are personal.

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 within 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-

cal 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, Suhars 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 Bharti (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.

Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish,
Associate Professor
(Finance and Accounting),
Department of Pharmaceutical
Management, NIPER, S.A.S.
Nagar (Mohali), Punjab
Ramya Korada,
MBA (Pharm.), Department of
Pharmaceutical Management,
NIPER, SAS Nagar
(Mohali), Punjab
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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.

Fertilizer Subsidy Exceeds Estimates by Over Rs 6,500 Cr

NEW DELHI: The fertilizer subsidy provided by the Indian government in the 2023-24 fiscal year has exceeded revised estimates by more than Rs 6,500 crore, according to the latest government data.

However, this overspending is unlikely to impact the revised estimate of the fiscal deficit.

One key reason for the increased subsidy is the rise in input costs and operational expenses, mainly due to higher natural gas prices. Data analysed shows that the subsidy



for urea rose to over Rs 1.30 lakh crore, exceeding the revised estimate of Rs 1.29 lakh crore but still lower than the budget estimate of over Rs 1.35 lakh crore. Under the nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) scheme, expenditure climbed to over

Rs 65,000 crore, surpassing the revised estimate of over Rs 60,000 crore and the budget estimate of Rs 44,000 crore.

Last June, the government extended the urea subsidy scheme until March 31, 2025, with a total estimated outlay of over Rs 3.68 lakh crore for the period between 2022-23 and 2024-25.

The actual expenditure may vary based on the prices of natu-

ral gas and other inputs used for urea production. The government provides urea to farmers at a maximum retail price of Rs 242 per 45 kg bag, while the cost can sometimes exceed Rs 3,000 per bag. The difference is given as a subsidy to urea manufacturers and importers.

The nutrient-based subsidy policy, implemented in 2010 and extended until 2025-26, provides a fixed rate of subsidy per kg for nutrients like nitrogen, phosphate, potash, and sulfur.

Reality of becoming the Third Global Economy

DR P S VOHRA
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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

OKX VENTURES | Stanford Future of Digital Currency Initiative

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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



Palastine 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."

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

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).

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.



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

'Auron Mein Kahan Dum Tha' starring Ajay Devgn & Tabu shifts release date to July 5



MUMBAI: Auron Mein Kahan Dum Tha' starring Ajay Devgn and Tabu will now release on July 5.

The film directed by Neeraj Pandey of 'A Wednesday' and 'Special 26' fame also stars Jimmy Shergill, Saiee

Manjrekar, and Shantanu Maheshwari. It is a musical romantic drama spanning 23 years between 2000 and 2023.

The film has seen quite a few changes with regard to its release date.

In December last year, Ajay had taken to X to reveal that the film will hit the screens on April 26, 2024.

However, the release date was again shifted to Eid al-Adha in June, around the same time as the Kangana Ranaut-starrer 'Emergency' and the 'Chandu Champion' starring Kartik Aaryan.

The film, presented by NH Studios, is produced by Friday Filmworks, Shital Bhatia, Narendra Hirawat, and Kumar Mangat Pathak (Panorama Studios) in association with Mangal Murti Films.

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 people, 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 adaab, 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's', which also features Agastya Nanda.

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

"Wanted to tap into scientific temperament to create an institution different from others"

FW CORRESPONDENT New Delhi

As India progresses towards its \$5 trillion economy dream, it is imperative that each participant equally contributes, and the benefits of economic growth reach all. To ensure the country's progress is inclusive and no one is left behind, 50% of the population, which is women, have to be empowered, ensuring their financial and digital inclusion so they become equal contributors and help realize this dream.

Taking steps in this direction is Dr. Kalpana Sankar, Chairperson and Managing Trustee of Hand in Hand India, who, in an interaction with *The Financial World*, shares how under her leadership, the organization has provided financial inclusion to 4.15 million households by creating 112,335 women enterprises and impacted the lives of 1.5 million women in Tamil Nadu, for a better future.

1. Can you share with us the journey of transitioning from a nuclear scientist to a champion of social development?

I am a scientist with a doctorate in Nuclear Physics. I took up my first job at Cancer Institute, Chennai. As much as I wanted to work with people who were ailing, I knew that I was not cut out for a job in radiation therapy. This journey bolstered my commitment to serve others and fuelled my



determination to create positive change. I joined the Women's Development Corporation of Tamil Nadu Government and worked on the initial proposal for the TNWorld Bank Poverty Eradication Project. Later I was given an opportunity to work with Hand in Hand at the grassroots level. It gave me a lens to the other side of poverty and there has been no looking back.

Q. What inspired this shift in focus, and how has your approach influenced your approach to addressing social issues?

My interactions with the poor while heading Red Cross in Coimbatore and through my extensive experience working with the Government of Tamil Nadu exposed me to a different reality about poverty in India. This gave me the grounding to do social work. I also knew I had to tap into my scientific temper to create an institution that was different from oth-

ers. My specialisation was in gender and microfinance, and I knew this would be the fulcrum that would bring communities out of poverty. These aspects make my work and approach different.

Q. Hand in Hand India has achieved remarkable success in empowering rural women and creating job opportunities. What innovative models or strategies have been instrumental in achieving these outcomes, and how do you envision scaling these efforts for even greater impact?

We established our job creation and entrepreneurship model way back in 2004. We had our focus on forming self-help groups, encouraging savings, small scale entrepreneurship and then access to credit. Aside from financial literacy training, we include digital and financial literacy as a separate module. We conduct awareness camps on social security schemes and connect women to suitable Govern-

ment schemes. We understand that the women need to grow from micro to macro entrepreneurs or as the Government of India now calls it, Lakhpathi Entrepreneurs - so to do this we have business development training with courses developed by IIT Madras. We encourage market linkages through mobile applications and social media for more reach for these entrepreneurs. To take these models to the next level, we have federated women in self-help groups to cluster level networks where they are bringing about change at the community level.

Q. What advice would you give to individuals and organizations striving to make a positive difference in society, especially in rural areas?

My advice to other organisations and individuals striving to make a difference is to always think long-term and make a long-term plan. When we work with communities and people, we need to keep their requirements in mind - a participatory approach is needed as they are the champions for the initiatives once we exit. Always do small pilots, learn from them and then scale. Invest in good resources and have clarity in project implementation with good monitoring systems in place. Finally, never give up. Like in any business, this sector will also have its challenges. We have to learn to take them in our stride and keep moving forward.

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 Khandala. 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 Film Atankatha'.

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.

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 Ad-

itya'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 cinematic 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'.

Akshay Oberoi comes aboard Varun Dhawan-Jahnvi Kapoor's 'Sunny Sanskari ki Tulsi Kumari'



MUMBAI: Varun Dhawan and Jahnvi Kapoor's upcoming movie 'Sunny Sanskari ki Tulsi Kumari' has added 'Fighter' actor Akshay Oberoi to the cast.

Also starring Sanya Malhotra and Rohit Saraf, the romantic-comedy is written and directed by filmmaker Shashank Khaitan of 'Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania' and 'Badrinath Ki Dulhania' fame.

Oberoi, who currently features in season two of the acclaimed series 'The Broken News', said "Sunny Sanskari ki Tulsi Kumari" presents a fantastic opportunity for him as an actor.

"Working with such talented co-stars like Varun, Janhvi and Sanya is incredibly exciting. I'm eager for audiences to enjoy the blend of humour and romance we're bringing to the screen. This film is set to be a memorable one," the actor said in a statement.

Backed by Karan Johar's Dharma Production, 'Sunny Sanskari ki Tulsi Kumari' will be released in theatres on April 25, 2025.

The movie will reunite Dhawan and Kapoor, who most recently worked together for Nitesh Tiwari's relationship drama 'Bawaal'.