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**SHAHID KAPOOR GIVES A PEEK INTO HIS 'HAPPY MORNING' AMIDST NATURE**

# Tarunpreet Singh Sond instructs to create a more conducive environment for industries in Punjab

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab's Minister for Investment Promotion, Industries and Commerce, Tarunpreet Singh Sond, has issued instructions to senior officials of the department to create a more conducive, transparent, and hassle-free environment for industries in the state. During a review meeting held at the Udyog Bhawan with senior officials of Investment Promotion, Industries and Commerce, Invest Punjab and related corporations/boards, Sond emphasized that taking Punjab to the forefront in the industrial sector, as per the directions of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, is one of his key objectives. To achieve this goal, he urged all officials to cooperate with dedication and integrity.

While addressing the officials, Sond stressed the need to further intensify efforts to ensure that government schemes, policies, and programs related to



industries reach small and medium enterprises. He pointed out that many central and state schemes remain underutilized because industrialists are often unaware of them. He suggested that online information on these schemes should be made available so that industrialists can access it with just one click. He also emphasized the need for steps to improve easy access to Invest Punjab's website for internet users so that when

global industrialists search for the best investment destinations, Punjab's name appears at the top.

The Minister also directed that better coordination between corporations/boards related to the Department of Industries and various other departments is essential to enhance their performance. He stated that the government under Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann is working tire-

lessly to promote the growth of new and established industries in Punjab, and this can only be achieved if the bureaucracy contributes meaningfully. He added that a favorable industrial environment will develop in the state if administrative bottlenecks are minimized.

Sond motivated the officials to work with dedication to make Punjab the best industrial state, thereby strengthening the state's economy. Expressing satisfaction, he noted that significant investment is flowing into Punjab due to the efforts of Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann, and this momentum will be further accelerated.

During the meeting, Tejveer Singh, Additional Chief Secretary of the Department of Industries, briefed the Minister about the department, Invest Punjab, and the performance, policies, and other issues of the related boards and corporations.

# Jaishankar meets President Dissanayake, assures support in Lanka's economic rebuilding



**COLOMBO:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Friday and discussed "ways to deepen ongoing cooperation and strengthen India-Sri Lanka ties," and assured India's continued support to the island nation's economic rebuilding.

Jaishankar arrived here in the morning on a day-long visit, less than a fortnight after President Dissanayake was sworn in. "Honoured to call on President @anuradisanaayake today in Colombo. Conveyed

warm greetings of President Droupadi Murmu and PM @narendramodi." Jaishankar posted on X. "Appreciate his warm sentiments and guidance for the India-Sri Lanka relations. Discussed ways to deepen ongoing cooperation and strengthen India-Sri Lanka ties for the benefit of people of two countries and the region," he said further in the post.

Jaishankar is the first foreign dignitary to visit Sri Lanka since the National People's Power (NPP) government led by Dissanayake came to power on

September 23. He was received at the airport by Sri Lankan Foreign Secretary Aruni Wijewardena and the Indian High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Santosh Jha. Earlier, Jaishankar met his Sri Lankan counterpart Vijitha Herath. "Concluded wide-ranging and detailed talks with FM Vijitha Herath today in Colombo. Congratulated him once again on his new responsibilities," Jaishankar posted on his X handle.

"Reviewed various dimensions of India-Sri Lanka partnership. Assured him of India's continued support to Sri Lanka's economic rebuilding. Our Neighbourhood First Policy and Sagar outlook will always guide the advancement of India-Sri Lanka ties," he added. "Minister of Foreign Affairs Vijitha Herath welcomed visiting Indian External Affairs Minister @DrSJaishankar at @MFA\_SriLanka this afternoon and discussed a range of matters of mutual interest," Sri Lanka's Foreign Ministry posted on its official X handle.

# Gold, silver witness festive surge



**NEW DELHI:** Gold and Silver prices rebounded on Thursday due to fresh demand from stockists and retail consumers for the ongoing festive season.

The precious metal rose Rs 200 to revisit the all-time high level of Rs 78,300 per 10 gm, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

It had closed at Rs 78,100 per 10 gm on Tuesday.

Silver also jumped by Rs 665 to Rs 93,165 per kg from Rs 92,500 per kg in the previous close. Additionally, gold of 99.5 per cent purity climbed by Rs 200 to reclaim its all-time high of Rs 77,900 per 10 gm. The metal had finished at Rs 77,700 per 10 gm on Tuesday. Traders said the sentiment turned better on rising demand at the beginning of Navratri, an auspicious week in Hindu mythology for purchasing new things particularly precious metals.

# Farmer blocks rail tracks in Amritsar



**JAGMOHAN SINGH**  
Amritsar

On October 3, A large group of protesting farmers in Amritsar have blocked the Rail Track of Amritsar to Delhi over their demands that include justice to the victims of Lakhimpur Kheri. Farmer blocked the rail track while squatting at Devidaspura village near the Manawala railway station falling in the Amritsar district, the main railway track from Amritsar to Delhi. Meanwhile all the incoming and outgoing trains from Amritsar to Delhi and Delhi to Amritsar have been diverted. Kissan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) convener Sarwan Singh Pandher said that a large group of farmers blocked rail tracks across the state for two hours (12.30 pm to 2.30 pm) today due to their various pending demands. Pandher alleged that both the state and the Central governments had deliberately adopted an indifferent approach towards the farmers as not paying any heed to their long pending demands. He said that the farmers were demanding immediate release of pending arrears worth nearly Rs.28 crore of sugarcane growers, guarantee on minimum support price, justice to the victims of Lakhimpur Kheri, and enhancing prices of sugarcane crop and others. But unfortunately Governments didn't bother towards the demands of farmers.

# No response from govt, Wangchuk to go on indefinite fast from Saturday

**NEW DELHI:** Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk said he and other protesters from Ladakh would sit on an indefinite fast from Saturday since they have not received any response from the government over their demand of meeting the President, Prime Minister or the Union Home Minister.

Wangchuk was leading the 'Delhi Chalo Padyatra', which began from Leh a month ago. The 'padyatra' was organised by the Leh Apex Body, which along with the Kargil Democratic Alliance, has been spearheading an agitation for the last four years for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

At a press conference here, the climate activist said they had written to the office of the President, Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister, seeking an appointment and were assured that they would be informed about the meeting by Friday 5 pm.

"We have not received any



response from the government. So we will sit on an indefinite fast from tomorrow," Wangchuk said. Ladakh MP Mohamad Haneefa and other members of the Leh Apex Body and Kargil Democratic Alliance, including Sajjad Kargili, Asgar Karbalai, Tseering Punchok, and Ashraf Ali Barcha, were present on the dais.

"Officials of the Home Min-

istry assured us, they asked us to go to Rajghat and break our fast that we had started while in detention. They assured us that they would give us time to meet the leadership. But they have not said anything, so we have no option but to go on a fast," Wangchuk said.

He said they have requested the authorities to provide them space at Jantar Mantar for hold-

ing the fast, but they have not received any confirmation yet and appealed to all political parties and organisations to provide them with a venue for the protest.

"I would appeal to any organisation or party, political or non-political, social or religious organisation... we will hold our fast at any appropriate site. It will be peaceful... we will follow the path of 'satyagrah' shown by Mahatma Gandhi," Wangchuk said.

"We hope we get Jantar Mantar, but if we do not get permission, we will sit wherever we are offered a place," he said.

The climate activist said locals in Ladakh can best protect the ecology of Ladakh, but they have no role in decision-making.

"We are under a kind of permanent governor's rule where people's representatives are not there to make decisions. This should not happen. There is no mechanism for people to participate in the decision-making process," he said.

# Amazon Company to remove Gutka Sahib, Sikh religious scriptures from website; send an explanation: SGPC



**AMRITSAR:** Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee President Advocate Harjinder Singh Dhami has taken strict notice of the online selling of Gutka Sahib and Gurbani Sainchi (scriptures) by the e-commerce website Amazon and has asked to stop the sale of Sikh religious scriptures immediately. The SGPC President said that the online sale of Sikh scriptures and sacred Gutka Sahib (handheld scripture of Sikh prayers) by Amazon and other e-commerce websites cannot be tolerated at all, as the respect of the holy scriptures cannot be maintained at their stocking stores. When it reaches from one place to another through the parcel or courier, it is natural that its respect and due reverence hurt as the Sikh Maryada (conduct) is not followed. He said that there is immense devotion and respect for Gurbani (holy writings of Gurus) in the minds of the Sikh community and devotees and there is resentment in the Sikhs with the sale of Gutka Sahib on-

line by Amazon and some other e-commerce websites. Advocate Dhami asked Amazon and other such companies to immediately remove sacred Gutka Sahib of Gurbani from its website.

He appealed to the publishers to refrain from selling Gutka Sahib and holy Sainchi (scripture) online keeping in mind the respect of Gurbani. The SGPC President said that this is a very serious matter, which will be discussed in the upcoming meeting of the SGPC's Dharam Prachar Committee (panel on Sikh religious preaching). He said that a legal notice was sent to the Amazon company when such cases came to light in the past, after which the online sale of Gutka Sahib was stopped for some time. He said now the Sikh community members have brought to notice such practice has resumed. In this regard, a letter is being written to Amazon asking them to immediately remove Gurbani's Gutka Sahib from its website and send its explanation to the SGPC.

# President Murmu urges tribal community to prioritise education of children

**JAIPUR:** President Droupadi Murmu on Friday said that the people of the tribal community should educate their children and give them opportunities to move forward in life and spread their wings in multiple spheres.

"The government stands with the tribal society," she said while speaking at the Aadi Gaurav Samman ceremony at Mangarh Dham in Rajasthan's Banswara.

"Had I not got a hostel facility, my studies could have stopped.



People of the tribal community should educate their children and give them opportunities

to move forward and take steps forward," the President added. President Murmu has been

on a two-day visit to Rajasthan from Thursday.

Earlier on Friday, she participated in a programme organised by Brahmakumaris in Abu Road, Sirohi. Speaking there, she said that spirituality is the way to improve the mind through pure deeds. Later, she attended the Adi Gaurav Samman ceremony in Mangarh Dham, Banswara. President Murmu in her address congratulated the women who were felicitated during the programme.

# 30 lakh defence pensioners linked to SPARSH portal: Rajnath Singh

**NEW DELHI:** Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday said that of 32 lakh defence pensioners, 30 lakh have been successfully linked to the SPARSH portal- System for Pension Administration (RAKSHA).

Addressing the annual day celebrations of Defence Accounts Department (DAD), he said despite numerous challenges, the department has been successful in the implementation of this web-based system, which processes pension claims and credits the pension directly into bank accounts of defence pensioners without any external intermediary.

The Defence Minister hailed the efforts of DAD towards modernisation and strengthening of the country's defence ecosystem through optimum utilisation of resources, efficiency and transparency in accounting and adoption of



latest technologies.

Touching upon the progress achieved in the defence sector in the last few years, the Minister said there was a time when acquisitions were mainly dependent on imports, and the positive impact of defence expenditure on the economy was very limited.

"Due to Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's efforts to attain self-reliance, India is today seen as a defence exporter," he said.

The country's defence production surged to Rs 1.27 lakh crore in FY 23-24, as exports soared from Rs 1,000 crore to Rs 21,000 crore, spanning

across over 90 nations, giving a push to the 'Make in India' programme.

Defence export is projected to grow at an 18 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from FY24-FY30.

About Rs 6 lakh crore worth of defence equipment has been procured from Indian companies in the past decade, doubling the country's defence production.

The Defence Minister urged DAD to prepare a roadmap to make the department a 'Centre of Excellence' in the field of defence finance and economics, exploring new frontiers in defence accounting & financial management.

"There are over 50 lakh personnel associated with the Ministry, and the budget is larger than the GDP of many small countries. DAD is a link which connects all the units of the Armed Forces and civilian organisations," he said.

# 28 Naxalites killed in encounter in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region

**NEW DELHI:** In one of the biggest operations against Maoists in Chhattisgarh, security personnel killed 28 Naxalites in a fierce encounter in the Bastar region on Friday, a senior police official said.

The gunfight broke out around 1 pm in the forest between Thulthuli and Nendur villages in Abhujmaad on the Narayanpur-Dantewada inter-district border, when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxal operation, Inspector General of Police (Bastar Range) Sundarraj P told PTI over the phone. Personnel belonging to the state police's District Reserve Guard (DRG) and Special Task Force (STF) were involved in the operation, he said. Sundarraj said 28 Naxalites were gunned down in the encounter.

Along with the 28 bodies, a



cache of weapons, including an AK-47 rifle and one SLR (self-loading rifle), were recovered from the encounter spot, he said.

Earlier, Dantewada Superintendent of Police Gaurav Rai had said around 30 Naxalites were killed in the gun battle. Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai hailed the security forces for their operation and said the 'double engine' government (BJP government in the state and at the Centre) is determined to eliminate the menace.

In a post on X, CM Sai said, "There is news of 28 Naxalites gunned down in an encounter with security forces in the border area of Narayanpur-Dantewada districts. The great success achieved by the soldiers is commendable. I salute their courage and valour." "Our fight to eliminate Naxalism will end only after reaching its conclusion. Our double engine government is determined for this. Eliminating Naxalism from the state is our aim," he added.

**Supreme Court Upholds GST Input Tax Credit Claims for Rental Properties in Landmark Ruling**

**NEW DELHI :** In a significant decision that could reshape the landscape of Goods and Services Tax (GST) claims, the Supreme Court of India has upheld the constitutional validity of Section 17(5)(d) of the Central Goods and Services Tax (CGST) Act while providing crucial clarification on input tax credit (ITC) claims related to immovable property.

The verdict, delivered on Thursday, in the case of M/s. Safari Retreats Private Limited (Diary No. 37367/2019), addresses a long-standing ambiguity in the interpretation of GST laws regarding the eligibility of ITC claims on the construction of buildings used for renting purposes.

While the court rejected the constitutional challenge to Section 17(5)(d), it interpreted the provision in a manner that prevents undue restriction on ITC claims when the immovable property is integral to the provision of taxable services. This interpretation aligns with the broader objective of the GST regime to avoid tax cascading.

In a key aspect of the ruling, the Supreme Court clarified that the renting of a building could qualify as a «plant» exception under Section 17(5)(d) of the CGST Act.

This interpretation provides significant relief to businesses involved in leasing immovable property, as it allows them to claim ITC on GST paid for building construction when the property is essential to their taxable activity.

The court's decision to accept the assessee's claim to ITC in this case sets a precedent for similar scenarios where constructed property is fundamental to the provision of taxable services.

However, it's important to note that the eligibility for such claims will be determined on a case-by-case basis, with tax authorities required to assess each situation individually.

Legal experts and tax professionals are eagerly awaiting the full text of the judgment, which has not yet been released. The detailed reasoning of the court is expected to provide further guidance on the application of this ruling in various business contexts.







# Supreme Court bans caste-based discrimination in prisons

Quashes jail manual rules of 10 states

**NEW DELHI:** In a landmark verdict, the Supreme Court on Thursday banned caste-based discrimination like division of manual labour, segregation of barracks and bias against prisoners of de-notified tribes and habitual offenders by holding as “unconstitutional” the jail manual rules of 10 states for fostering such biases.

Observing that “right to live with dignity extends even to the incarcerated”, a bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said, “Criminal laws of the colonial era continue to impact the postcolonial world.” It asked the Centre and the



states to amend their prison manuals and laws within three months, and file compliance reports before it.

It dealt with certain discriminatory provisions of jail manuals of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Kerala, Maharashtra Karnataka

and Himachal Pradesh and set them aside.

It said Article 17 enunciates that everyone is born equal.

“There cannot be any stigma attached to the existence, touch or presence of any person. By way of Article 17, our Constitution strengthens the equality of status of every citi-

zen...,” it said.

Referring to an instance, it said convicts from communities lower in the caste hierarchy were expected to continue with their customary occupations in jail and the caste hierarchy outside the prison was replicated within the prison.

“Rules that discriminate among individual prisoners on the basis of their caste specifically or indirectly by referring to proxies of caste identity are violative of Article 14 on account of invalid classification and subversion of substantive equality,” it held.

For instance, rules assigning sweeping work which stipulate that “sweepers shall be chosen from the “Mehtar or Hari caste”, also is part of discrimination, it said.

# Cabinet approves classical language status for Marathi, Bengali, 3 other languages



at a meeting of the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. “This is a historical decision and this goes very well with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the NDA

historical and cultural milestone, the government said.

The Government of India decided to create a new category of languages as “classical languages” on October 12, 2004 declaring Tamil as classical language and thereafter Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Odia languages were given the classical language status.

A government statement said that a proposal from the Maharashtra government in 2013 was received in the ministry requesting classical language status to Marathi, which was forwarded to the Linguistics Experts Committee (LEC). The LEC recommended Marathi for classical language.

The assembly elections are due later this year in Maharashtra and this was a major poll issue in the state.

# Valmiki community votes for 1st time in Assembly elections of J&K



**NEW DELHI:** Expressing their joy at this historic moment, the Valmiki community members said they had been granted voting rights after waiting for decades. It is a momentous day to be voting for the first time in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections.

They also voiced hopes for a brighter future for their community, saying, “We want the government to do more for the upliftment of our society. We believe that after this change, better opportunities will open up for our people.”

Laal Chand, an 85-year-old first-time voter of the community, said, “I am very happy, but also concerned about the future of my children, who are educated but still unemployed. I cast my vote with the hope of a better future for them.”

Ekta, a young woman from the Valmiki community, expressed her gratitude, “Every government seeks votes, but as we didn’t have voting rights, how could we participate? I am thankful to the Modi government for abrogating Article 370, which opened up many opportunities for us. After this change, I was able to enrol in an LLB programme. I urge people to elect a government that understands and works for their future, not one that promotes terrorism and creates hurdles.”

Another member of the community, a 45-year-old man, remarked, “I am very happy to

have finally cast my vote. Our country is one of the largest democracies, but due to Articles 370 and 35A, we were deprived of our rights. After their abrogation, we not only gained voting rights but also domicile status. I hope the Valmiki community will now receive land allotments, job opportunities, loans, and avenues for businesses.”

He further added, “I dream of a healthy and peaceful life for our community. After seven decades, I voted, and I trust that our voice will not go unheard as we have faith in the Modi government, which cares for every section of society.”

Granting the right to the Valmiki community to be able to vote in the Assembly elections marks a significant political and social shift in the union territory, and is a step towards empowering communities that have long been marginalised.

Meanwhile, as the final phase of polling is underway, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called upon the people, especially first-time voters and women in the Union Territory, to come out and vote in large numbers.

Polling for the third and final phase of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly elections began at 7 a.m. across 40 constituencies, with 24 in the Jammu division and the rest in the Kashmir Valley. Voting will continue until 6 p.m. and the votes will be counted on October 8.

# PM Modi extends greetings on the auspicious occasion of Navratri



**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Thursday, extended wishes on the auspicious occasion of Navratri, a nine-day festival dedicated to Goddess Durga.

“I wish all my countrymen a very Happy Navratri. May this holy festival dedicated to Shakti Vandana prove to be auspicious for everyone. Jai Mata Di!”, PM Modi wrote on his X handle.

He also wished for blessings for all, saying, “On the first day of Navratri, I pray to Ma Shailputri with folded hands! May everyone be blessed by her grace. This prayer to the Goddess is for all of you...”

Home Minister Amit Shah prayed for the happiness and peace of the entire world. In his post on X, he wrote, “Heartiest greetings to all countrymen on the sacred festival of Navratri. Navratri is a great festival of worship of Shakti, accumulation of spiritual energy and worship of nine forms of Mother Ambe, the mother of the universe. I pray to Mother Durga for the welfare, happiness and peace of the entire world.”

As the 9-day Shardiya Navratri festival began, devotees thronged to various temples across the country to seek blessings of Goddess Durga

A large number of devotees had darshan at Mata Vaishno Devi temple in Jammu and Kashmir on the first day of Shardiya Navratri. The temple is one of the holiest sites for Hindu pilgrims, dedicated to ‘Vaishno Devi’, one of the forms of Goddess Durga.

# Maintain balance between personal ambitions and social sensitivity: Prez Murmu to students

**JAIPUR:** President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said education was the best mode of empowerment, and advised students to maintain a balance between their personal ambitions and social sensitivity.

She said that one’s welfare is easily achieved by doing good to others.

Addressing the 32nd convocation programme of Mohanlal Sukhadia University at Udaipur, she said, “Education is the biggest mode of empowerment. This institute has been scripting stories of empowerment as there is a big list of students coming out from this university who have extended their contribution in diverse areas by making a mark. One amongst these students is Punjab Governor Gulabchand Kataria.”

The President urged students to extend their cooperation to realise the dream of a developed India by 2047. “We have set



a goal of ‘Developed India by 2047’ and this goal will be attained by your dedicated efforts. I am confident that you will extend your cooperation in this regard,” she added.

“The great personalities of Mewar and Udaipur have played an important role in the freedom struggle and nation-building. This region has been witness to the struggle for national identity for centuries. This

region of Rana Sanga, Maharana Pratap, and the great saint poetess of the Bhakti period Mirabai can be called the region of the confluence of power and devotion,” she said.

The President further said that this institute is educating over one lakh students out of which many students are tribals. “The tribal community has enhanced the country’s pride,” she said and asked

# Distasteful and disgraceful: HM Amit Shah slams Kharge over remarks on PM

**NEW DELHI:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday criticised Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge over his remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi saying it was “distasteful and disgraceful”.

Taking this to social media X, HM Shah stated, “Yesterday, the Congress President Shri Mallikarjun Kharge Ji has outperformed himself, his leaders and his party in being absolutely distasteful and disgraceful in his speech.”

“In a bitter display of spite, he unnecessarily dragged PM Modi into his personal health matters by saying that



he would die only after removing PM Modi from power. It just shows how much hate and fear these Congress people have of PM Modi, that they are thinking of him constantly,” said HM Shah.

HM Shah further stated, “As for the health of Kharge, PM Modi prays, I pray and we all pray that he lives a long, healthy life. May he continue to live for many years and may

he live to see the creation of a Viksit Bharat by 2047.”

Earlier on Sunday, during a poll rally in J&K’s Kathua district, the Congress President nearly fainted while addressing the crowd. As he gathered strength, he commented that he wouldn’t die before seeing PM Modi being ousted from power.

“We will fight to restore statehood. I am 83 years old. I am not going to die so early. I will stay alive until Prime Minister Narendra Modi is removed from power. I wanted to talk. But due to dizziness, I have sat down. Please excuse me,” Kharge remarked resuming his speech.

# Challenges surrounded for new police commissioner of twin cities



ARABINDA MOHAPATRA  
Bhubaneswar

Senior IPS officer Suresh Dev Dutta Singh, known for his efficiency, has taken charge as the new police Commissioner of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, the move being hailed by the residents of the twin cities.

The 1998 batch IPS officer was earlier posted as ADG (Operations) and tasked with the challenging job of curbing Maoist menace. Born in Uttar Pradesh Singh is the winner of President’s police medal for his distinguished service. Always willing to help people he has told the people of twin cities that they can approach him freely.

Singh replaces Sanjeeb Panda who had to quit under controversial circumstances following allegations of an Army captain and his fiancée being physically abused and humiliated in a city police station. A graduate of Allahabad University Singh is known for his no-nonsense approach which he would have to continue with in dealing with the varied challenges that his new job entails.

One of his biggest challenges will be schooling his own force and instilling in them a sense of discipline, the lack of which has left to multiple problems in the past. There have also been allegations of corruption against the force, a disease which plagues the men in khaki in many parts of the state.

However, maintaining law and order in Bhubaneswar is a bigger challenge as it is a city in transition, moving towards becoming a metropolis. Besides Bhubaneswar has a huge floating population which offers a challenge of a very different kind. The city offers a kind of anonymity to new people which makes commitment of crime easy and its detection difficult.

# Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi extend greetings on Navratri Festival



**NEW DELHI:** Congress supremos Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Rahul Gandhi extended their greetings and best wishes on the commencement of the auspicious occasion of the nine-day Navratri festival on Thursday. General Secretary of All India Congress Committee, Priyanka Gandhi took to X and expressed her wishes to the devotees. “From today’s auspicious day, Shardiya Navratri is starting - the great festival of worship of Shakti Swaroopa Maa Durga. Many congratulations to the devotees of Maa spread across the country and abroad on this series of festivals,” she wrote, as translated from Hindi. Adding to her greetings, she went on: “May the whole country be blessed with wealth and prosperity; people be free from diseases, grief, old age and death. May the loving blessings of Maa be showered on all the children.” She concluded her message with the Sanskrit shloka in praise of the goddess: “Om Jayanti Mangala Kali Bhadrakali Kapalini. Durga Kshama Shiva Dhatri Swaha Swadha Namostu Te.”

Her brother and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi too took to X and wished devotees on the grand occasion. “Best wishes to everyone on the auspicious festival of Navratri. May the blessings of Maa Durga always be upon you and your life be filled with happiness. Jai Mata Di,” he wrote in Hindi. The festival of Shardiya Navratri begins with the worship goddess Shailputri on the first day. Shailputri, the daughter of the mountain king Himavat, is a form of the Hindu mother goddess Mahadevi, representing herself as the pure form of goddess Parvati.

# Two militants killed in gunfight in South Kashmir’s Kulgam



FW DESK

Two unidentified militants have been killed in the ongoing gunfight in Adigam Devsar village in south Kashmir’s Kulgam, reports said. Earlier, four army personnel and a traffic police official suffered injuries during the operation. Quoting a senior police officer, a local news agency reported that two unidentified militants were killed by security forces. The gunfight comes amid the ongoing elections being held after a gap of ten-years in Jammu and Kashmir.

# Prashant Kishor launches Jan Suraa party, sets ‘humanity’ its core ideology

**NEW DELHI:** Political strategist Prashant Kishor launched his new political party, Jan Suraa party, on Wednesday with ‘humanity’ as the ‘main ideology’ and quality education as the ‘supreme goal’.

Addressing a large gathering, he noted that people had been curious about when his ‘Jan Suraa’ campaign would officially form a political party. With the Election Commission’s recognition of Jan Suraa as an official party, he took the opportunity to present his vision for Bihar’s future. Prashant Kishor said, “This party is a collective movement, representing all communities - Dalits, backward classes, Hindus, and Muslims.”

He claimed that the gathering signifies the commitment of people from every background to develop a state that had been neglected by traditional political forces. “People gathered here are focused on restoring the historic pride of Bihar,” he added.

He addressed a key question on the party’s ideology, stating that “humanity” will be the core principle, drawing inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, and B.R. Ambedkar. “Humanity First” is Jan Suraa’s guiding philosophy,” he said. Prashant Kishor also



emphasised that the goal is to see Bihar so developed that people from states like Haryana and Gujarat come to Bihar seeking employment.

He also questioned the current state of Bihar’s leadership, saying, “What is the way forward? Leaders come here and demean each other without any blueprint for Bihar’s development.” He shared his experience of travelling during the Jan Suraa campaign, creating awareness among people to choose leaders who would work for the future of their children.

“Jan Suraa’s top priority will be on quality education for children,” he said. He urged people to think about their children’s future, stating, “How many times have you voted for the education and employment of your

children? Education quality and employment were never prioritised in Bihar because you never voted for these things.”

He alleged that the people, for the greed of 5 kg of cereals, voted for PM Modi. “Loot was done, but cereals were given. The Ayodhya Mandir was built, but no factories or hospitals were built in Bihar,” he said. He said that many people voted for Lalu Yadav, and during his reign, there were no roadways, electricity, or water. The poor and backward communities were promised progress and respect. Did they get it? Yes, but were their basic needs fulfilled,” he said.

He further acknowledged that under Nitish Kumar’s reign, electricity reached every village, though citizens now face issues

with smart meters. He also noted that many people voted for PM Modi, seeing the work he did in Gujarat, where he established factories by leveraging funds from across the world. “Biharis are working in these factories, but what matters is the reason for which you vote,” Prashant Kishor added. Kishor asserted that his focus is not just on rhetoric but on actionable plans: “I am not just speaking about development; I am discussing the strategy as well.” He reminded the audience that when people voted for a temple, it was built. When they voted for electricity, it came. “But none of you voted for the education of your children, and that is why no one provided it to Bihar.”

His key question to the people was: “Do you care about the future of your children or not? According to scholars, only through education, land, and wealth can poverty be eliminated.” He pointed out that Bihar lacks all three: “If you look clearly, Bihar has none of these. In the name of education, children go to school for khichdi (mid-day meals) and then leave. In colleges, degrees are being sold for money. Bihar needs quality education, and Jan Suraa will invest in and prioritise improving education.”





# Look deep into rural recovery & urban woes

India’s remarkable 8.2 per cent GDP growth in 2023-24, while impressive, hides two troubling trends. First, the agriculture sector is faltering, impacted by an unfavorable monsoon. Second, private consumption expenditure—a key driver of growth—expanded by just 4 per cent, less than half the pace of overall economic growth. This consumption slowdown is the weakest since 2002-03, barring the COVID-19 year of 2020-21. Much of this deceleration can be attributed to sluggish rural demand, hit hard by rain deficits. At the same time, economists highlight a “K-shaped” consumption pattern, where demand for higher-end goods outstrips that for everyday items. Hopes for a recovery rest on a normal monsoon and rising rural demand, which would spur consumption across the board, increase industrial capacity, and attract private investment—fueling the much-needed virtuous cycle of growth. Recent signs are encouraging: consumption grew at 7.4 per cent in the first quarter, and rural wage growth turned positive in July. Yet, there is a growing concern that urban demand is waning. S&P Global Ratings noted that high interest rates are curbing urban spending, a concern mirrored in the Reserve Bank of India’s July consumer confidence survey, which showed a decline in urban buyers’ optimism. The Finance Ministry also flagged falling passenger vehicle sales as an indicator of this cooling demand. To counter these headwinds, policymakers must act swiftly. High food inflation and shrinking wallets are squeezing discretionary spending, making this festive season a critical moment for recovery. The government should consider meaningful cuts to fuel taxes, passing the benefit of lower global oil prices to consumers. A significant reduction in fuel costs could reignite demand, supporting both consumption and the broader economy, ensuring that the growth momentum does not stall. It will also ease the financial burden of common people a bit.

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DON'T WORRY ABOUT BEING SUCCESSFUL, BUT WORK TOWARD BEING SIGNIFICANT AND THE SUCCESS WILL NATURALLY FOLLOW.

— OPRAH WINFREY

”

THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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MUKUL SANWAL SAYS DEVELOPING NATIONS MUST UTILIZE U.N. SYSTEM OPPORTUNITIES



The Summit of the Future raises a set of fundamental questions on global governance: should the focus be on great power competition or continuing imbalance in the institutions, agenda setting, and global inequality? The former looks at the means and not the ends with a continuing debate on the meaning of justice. Global goals do not resolve challenges; they support new forms of cooperation. The Summit resulted in a Global Digital Impact initiative and a Declaration on Future Generations, an inspirational call for national action. The concrete impact is an International Scientific Panel and a Global Dialogue on AI. An implementation map and intergovernmental consultations mirror how climate change came onto the global agenda 30 years ago. Climate change is now relegated to scaling up adaptation finance, and GDP will include sustainability. Developed countries continue to have the capacity to shape the global agenda. The Summit did not agree to a clear pathway for Security Council reform and has called for categories of members. Reform of governance of global financial institutions is limited to a pledge to give developing countries a greater say in decision making and review of sovereign debt has been reiterated. Concerns of developing countries have got a short shift. The problem here is one of definitions. Should the G-7, which continues to set the global agenda, be described as a club of victors of the Second World War or a group of former colonial powers? The U.S. established the G-7 in 1973 to set the global agenda in the United Nations as an anti-developing country body. The clash between Western capitalism and Soviet communism provided the former colonies who became the world’s poor

## Bridging global inequality gap



more space and voice. While the world’s political geography was reshaped, the ‘poor’ remained trapped at the bottom of the economic and geopolitical hierarchy. The imbalance in the wider world is reflected in the United Nations. For example, recent figures from the U.N. show that only 17% of the Sustainable Development Goals are on track. Developing countries hold \$29 trillion in public debt, with \$847 billion in net interest payments, and experienced a negative net resource transfer in 2022. In July, the first joint declaration by G-20 finance leaders on international tax cooperation ended with disagreement over whether the U.N. or the OECD is the right forum to advance the agenda. Real change began with the re-emergence of China and India and their BRICS grouping, in 2009, but it still awaits the reversal of colonial imbalances in key areas. In 1950, the U.S. used 40% of the world’s natural resources having hegemonic power to set up multilateralism in a unilateral manner. With the reconstruction of Europe

by 1970, their share had come down to 26%. Multilateralism evolved into treaties, having the authority to impact national policies. The G-7 share decreased to one-fifth in 2010, when Asia used half of global resource use. In a more equal world, the interests of the Global South gained a voice but not the ability to set the agenda. South Africa in 2023 had to file a case to determine obligations under the climate regime and this is a severe indictment of conference diplomacy.

### Foundations of power

The foundations of power will remain with the West for a few decades even as the global trend is in favour of the Global South. In 1800, Asia consumed more energy than the rest of the world. In 1850, it consumed as much energy as the West. In 1950, the West’s consumption was three times the rest of the world. In 2000, the West consumed as much energy as the rest of the world. The imbalance in the sphere of technology and endogenous capacity is even more severe with China and India as outliers becoming global leaders only in certain areas. The trend is towards a more equal world in all its dimensions. In 2000, 4.6 billion people lived in countries whose combined GDP was just 20% of the 755 million people who lived in the G-7. By 2016, the GDP share of 17 developing countries as a percentage

of the G-7 countries tripled to 63%. The Summit accepts this imbalance but focuses on how progress is measured rather than on measures to bridge the gaps. The Summit recognises that GDP focuses on the economic performance of societies but seeks to link it to sustainability. A broader understanding of prosperity considers non-monetary factors such as infrastructure, municipal services, affordable energy, educational opportunities, health care, and access to drinking water that better represent the urban living standards in a country. A focus on comparable levels of well-being is overdue. The big lesson from the Summit is that developing countries have yet to exploit the opportunities presented by the U.N. system. While the international political process is open in procedural terms, it has been informed by consensual science developed by ‘official experts’, and this will be the case for global governance of AI and modification of GDP. Experts frame issues in a manner that determines the “problem” and how it should be “resolved”. As global power shifts back to Asia, both giants are conscious that their ideas are different from the dominant view espoused by the West on how societies work, change, and can be influenced. In a nod to geopolitics, Asia needs to be involved more deeply from the very beginning in expert bodies on AI and GDP to shape global governance by defining global priorities, cooperation, and justice.

Mukul Sanwal served as policy adviser to the Executive Director of UNEP and later to the Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC and was closely associated with Inter-Agency Relations in the Chief Executives Board of the United Nations. Views are personal



TAKAYUKI HAGIWARA ON HOW WASTE CAUSES ECONOMIC LOSS, HITS SUSTAINABLE AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS



Food loss and waste represent one of the most pressing challenges to sustainable global food systems. According to the estimates of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 13% of food produced globally is lost before it reaches the retail stage, while an additional 19% is wasted at the retail, food service, and household levels. This results in 32% of global food production being discarded. In a world where more than 700 million people suffer from hunger, this scale of waste is unacceptable. In India, the situation is concerning. As per the 2022 study of NABARD Consultancy Services (NABCONS), there are significant production losses across all food categories: fruits (8.1%); vegetables (7.27%), and plantation crops (7.18%) suffer the highest percentage of food losses. Food loss as a percentage of production by category in India is as follows: livestock produce 1.29%; cereals 4.44%; oilseeds 5.66%; eggs 6.03%; pulses 6.36%; plantation crops 7.18%; vegetables 7.27% and fruits 8/1% (Source: NABCONS (2022)). Food loss in India not only undermines national food security but also translates into substantial economic loss. The total monetary value of food lost is close to Rs 1.52 lakh crore (\$18.41 billion), which is about 3.7% of the gross value added to the agricultural sector in the country. These estimates are likely conservative since they do not account for the deterioration in food quality, and other studies suggest even higher proportions of food loss. On the International Day for Food Loss and Waste 2024 — it is observed on September 29 — the FAO calls for increased financing to strengthen efforts to reduce food loss and



waste to build sustainable food systems and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Wasted food equals wasted resources The consequences of food loss go beyond food itself. Wasted food means wasted resources as land, water, energy, and labour. Agriculture consumes nearly 70% of the world’s freshwater, and when food is lost, so are critical water resources. Similarly, energy inputs are required at every stage of the food supply chain, from mechanised farming to transport, processing and storage, and every instance of food wastage squanders this energy. Food systems contribute approximately 26% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Food loss alone accounts for 6% of global emissions. When food waste decomposes in landfills, it produces methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide. Reducing food loss and waste is thus not only a matter of food security but a critical measure in combating climate change.

### Reducing food loss to mitigate climate change

As concerns over climate change intensify, the need to curb food loss and waste becomes more urgent. Achieving UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets 12.3.1 (halving food loss) and 12.3.2 (halving food waste) is now a global imperative. The Government of India has taken commendable steps to improve logistics and cold chain infrastructure in recent years through various initiatives under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sam-pada Yojana (PMKSY) which provides subsidies for the transportation/storage of eligible crops. Under the PMKSY, the government is providing financial incentives to various stakeholders such as the private sector, self help groups, farmer producer organisations, local bodies, and cooperatives to build modern cold chains and warehouses. Furthermore, the government’s Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure scheme promotes cold chain facilities without any break from the farm gate to the consumer. The Rural Godown Scheme specifically focuses on improvement in storage infrastructure in rural and remote areas to reduce storage losses. However, more needs to be done to promote efficient storage, grading and transport of agricultural produce. Public-private partnerships, fostering start-ups and innovative financing solutions are crucial in scaling interventions and ensuring sustainable outcomes. Identifying and addressing key stages of the food supply chain where losses are acute are most important. The FAO is currently preparing a project to be funded by the Green

Climate Fund (GCF) to target reduction in food loss and retail waste in India together with the Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI). As part of the project, the FAO in collaboration with the National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management (NIFTEM), is undertaking a study to enhance India’s agrifood resilience by addressing the climate impact of food loss and retail waste in post-harvest operations. The focus is on identifying points of loss within the food supply chain, quantifying the losses, and evaluating the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions resulting from food loss. The study will provide a range of tailored solutions for different commodities and help design targeted interventions under the GCF project by the public and private sectors, which will not only make processing value chains more efficient but also lead to a significant reduction in GHG emissions. A critical issue Reducing food loss and waste is vital to building sustainable food systems and addressing climate change. The environmental impacts of food loss and waste, particularly in terms of GHG emissions and resource depletion, make it a critical issue for governments, businesses and individuals alike. By reducing food loss and waste, we can make significant strides toward India’s climate goals, enhance food security, and improve the lives of millions of people worldwide. Takayuki Hagiwara is the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) Representative in India, and part of Team UN in India. Views are personal.



### BOOKS: REVIEW

## New book delves into women’s struggles and aspirations

“Fly into the Sky” takes its evocative title from the saintly Muktabai’s abhang, a Marathi devotional hymn that speaks of miracles, where an ant flies into the sky and a barren woman gives birth to a son. This metaphor beautifully captures the essence of the novel, which tells the story of three girls navigating their lives in early 20th-century Maharashtra, amidst societal change, personal struggles, and cultural expectations. The story revolves around three sisters—Surekha, Malati, and Kamala—growing up in Ratnagiri at the dawn of a new century. Each sister embodies a different trajectory within a patriarchal society. Surekha, the eldest at 15, is thrust into marriage with Vilas Rao, a man significantly older than her and already married, thereby sealing her fate as the second wife in a rigid social structure.

Meanwhile, the younger sisters, Malati and Kamala, are given the rare opportunity to “fly into the sky,” defying the norms by pursuing an education and shaping their own futures. They grow up at a time when figures like Gandhi, Maharishi Karve, Annie Besant, and Mohan Malaviya are championing women’s education and public participation in the national movement, providing the socio-political backdrop for their personal journeys. The novel begins with striking authenticity and tenderness, depicting the lives of women constrained by traditional roles yet yearning for change. The character of Aye, the sisters’ mother, embodies this paradox, believing herself to be the legitimate “ardhangini” (half of her husband) while simultaneously sacrificing her life for the conception of a male heir. The other women, such as the isolated Maa Saheb, who

is dismissed due to her “divine madness,” also reflect the varied roles and fates of women in a patriarchal world. The cruel realities of Surekha’s marriage, particularly her nuptial submission, are depicted with a raw honesty that pierces the heart. The two younger sisters, Malati and Kamala, present a counterpoint to Surekha’s life. Their path, as they journey from a boarding school to Elphinstone College in Bombay, represents the burgeoning possibilities for women at the time. They not only choose their own life partners but also become involved in the freedom movement, which adds a layer of historical significance to their individual stories. This slow-burn romance and political awakening are handled with sensitivity, allowing the reader to become invested in their futures. However, halfway through the novel, the narrative falters. What



Swallowing the Sun By Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri Aleph; 424 pages; Rs 899.

begins as a nuanced portrayal of three distinct female experiences suddenly narrows its focus. The other characters are pushed to the periphery, and the story shifts almost entirely to Malati and her romantic entanglement with Guru, overshadowing the other threads. Significant events, such as Malati’s brother’s marriage—a child whose conception resulted in Aye’s death—are mentioned in passing, diluting their impact. The plot begins to meander, and the author, once skillfully weaving together personal and political narratives, starts to slip into didacticism. The insertion of contemporary vocabulary like “PDA” and “B-team” into a pre-Independence setting jars the reader out of the historical con-

text and disrupts the otherwise immersive experience. One of the novel’s most remarkable achievements, however, is its transcreation of Marathi poems. The use of Marathi, seamlessly accompanied by English translations, elevates the prose and adds an authentic cultural flavor to the narrative. These poetic interludes not only enhance the story but also emphasize the delicate balance between tradition and modernity, a theme that runs through the novel. As the novel draws to a close, the reader is left pondering the larger message. Malati and Kamala, encouraged to “fly into the sky” and “swallow the sun,” mirror their mother Aye’s relentless pursuit of a son, despite the personal cost. Is the novel suggesting that the aspirations of these modern women are, in the end, not so different from those of their mother’s generation? Even Baba, the stoic patriarch who defends his family only to be killed by dacoits, seems to echo this theme of striving for a seemingly unattainable goal—flying into the sky, like the ant in Muktabai’s abhang.





# Surge in Electric Vehicle Registrations Drives Need for Enhanced Charging Infrastructure

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian government is actively working to address the growing demand for electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, as public charging stations (PCS) experience a significant surge in power consumption.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI) is in advanced discussions with the Ministry of Power to develop strategies that will help optimise the charging process for EVs, particularly in large urban centres where electric vehicle adoption is rapidly increasing. Kamran Rizvi, Secretary of MHI, highlighted the issue during an interview with Businessline.

He noted that in major cities like Delhi, Bengaluru, and Mumbai, where EVs are most concentrated, the increased demand for electricity has added 3 per cent to overall power



consumption, especially during peak load periods.

To alleviate the strain on the grid during peak hours, Rizvi explained, “We are in touch with the Ministry of Power on how to shift charging of these vehicles to the daytime instead of nighttime.”

Rizvi further clarified that not all vehicle segments can transition to daytime charging,

However, the ministry is focusing on electric two-wheelers and four-wheelers as the starting point. Discussions are underway to determine how best to implement these changes in collaboration with the Ministry of Power.

Addressing concerns about whether battery swapping stations, particularly those for two-wheelers and three-wheelers,

were contributing to the increased power demand, Rizvi downplayed their impact, noting that swapping infrastructure accounts for only a small percentage of the overall EV energy consumption.

The rapid rise in electricity demand from public charging stations is underscored by recent data from the Central Electricity Authority (CEA).

During the April-June quarter of FY25, PCS consumed 176.87 million units (MU) of energy, a 108 per cent year-on-year increase from 84.95 MU in Q1 FY24. This surge is directly linked to India’s exponential growth in EV adoption.

The country witnessed a 23 per cent annual increase in EV registrations in September 2024, totalling 1.59 lakh units, compared to 1.29 lakh units in September 2023.

# HAL Delivers First AL-31FP Aero Engine to IAF, Marking a New Era of Atmanirbharta



**ARUN KUMAR RAO**  
*Bengaluru*

In a landmark achievement for India’s aerospace and defence sector, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) handed over the first AL-31FP Aero Engine to the Indian Air Force (IAF) at its Koraput facility yesterday. The event, held in the presence of Sanjeev Kumar, Secretary (Defence Production), and Dr. D K Sunil, CMD of HAL, marked the

beginning of a crucial project under which HAL will manufacture 240 such engines for the Sukhoi-30MKI fleet. According to press statement released here.

The ceremony saw Saket Chaturvedi, CEO of MiG Complex, presenting the engine to Air Vice Marshal K Harisankar, who received it on behalf of the IAF. The official documentation for the handover was presented by R B Nagaraja, ADG AQA (Koraput). The contract

for manufacturing these 240 engines, signed just two weeks prior on September 9, 2024, is scheduled for completion over the next eight years.

In his address, Sanjeev Kumar praised HAL for its swift action and impressive delivery within two weeks of the contract’s signing. “This key milestone reflects HAL’s aero engine manufacturing competency and its dedication to supporting the Su-30MKI fleet. The Koraput Division has mastered cutting-edge technologies in engine manufacturing, setting it on par with global OEMs. I am confident that the division will not only serve the IAF but also grow as a global supplier,” he said.

He encouraged HAL employees to focus on self-reliance and adopt innovative Quality 4.0 processes. His message resonated with India’s mission for self-reliance, or “Atmanirbhar Bharat,” in defence manufacturing.

## Merger won’t affect Vistara services : Air India



**NEW DELHI:** Air India on Wednesday said flights operated with Vistara aircraft would have numbers starting with the prefix ‘AI2’ after the merger next month while Vistara’s planes, crew and service would continue to operate as before. The Tata Group-owned full service carrier also emphasised that the Vistara experience would remain post merger. The merger of Vistara — a joint venture between Tata and Singapore Airlines — with Air India is scheduled for November 12. This will mark a major consolidation in the Indian aviation space. There are concerns in certain quarters on whether Vistara passengers will continue to get the same services like now, as Air India, which is in the transformation phase, has been facing certain service issues in recent times.

# Garuda Construction & Engineering Limited has Rs 264 crore IPO

**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
*Mumbai*

Garuda Construction & Engineering Limited is coming out with its Initial Public Offering (IPO), priced at between Rs 92 and Rs 95 per Equity Share – aggregating totally Rs 264 crores -- opening on October 8, 2024 and closing on October 10, 2024.

Pravin Agarwal, Managing Director, GCEL, said here recently that the net proceeds from the fresh issuance will be utilized through Rs 100 crore going towards working capital requirements, and the balance for general corporate purposes including unidentified inorganic acquisitions.

Describing the company as being into ‘niche+’ projects. Agarwal highlighted one such project –the ‘iconic’ Delhi Po-



lice Headquarters – being constructed within five years, while being situated in a Hi-Security Zone barely 500 metres from the Indian Parliament.

“We are concentrating on niche projects across India without a topline being our focus, and are also into backward integration also through operations and maintenance services, mechanical, electrical and plumbing services and finishing works as part of our construction services,” he said, adding that the company is maintaining the ‘Delhi Police Headquarters’ building for the period of 13 years.

# BEL and ISRO’s SAC Sign MoU to Boost Indigenous Production of Space-Grade Technology

**ARUN KUMAR RAO**  
*Bengaluru*

In a significant move towards strengthening India’s self-reliance in space and defence technology, Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), a Navratna Defence PSU, has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Space Applications Centre (SAC) of ISRO, Ahmedabad. The MoU aims to indigenise and develop infrastructure for the production of space-grade Travelling Wave Tube Amplifiers (TWTAs) within India. The collaboration will not only advance domestic capabilities but also contribute to significant foreign exchange savings.

The agreement was formalised at SAC Ahmedabad, with Mr. Nilesh M Desai, Di-



rector of SAC, and Mrs. Niti Pandit, General Manager (Strategic Planning), BEL Corporate Office, signing the MoU in the presence of senior officials from both organisations.

TWTAs, a complex and cutting-edge technology, involve the controlled interaction of microwaves with electron beams under ultrahigh vacuum conditions. These devices are essential components of

satellite communication and navigation payloads, microwave remote sensing radar, scientific missions, and inter-spacecraft communication systems. BEL has already established a state-of-the-art facility for the fabrication and manufacturing of TWTAs, enabling the company to play a crucial role in the country’s space technology ecosystem.

The TWTAs, developed by SAC and manufactured by BEL, will be deployed in a variety of satellite payloads, including those used for communication, navigation, and microwave remote sensing. This collaboration is a critical step in boosting India’s indigenisation efforts in the space sector, aligning with the government’s vision of reducing dependence on foreign technology.

# Anil-led group forays into Bhutan, to set up 1,270 MW green projects

**NEW DELHI:** Anil Ambani-led Reliance Group on Wednesday announced its foray into Bhutan and said it would set up 1,270 megawatt solar and hydroelectric projects in the Himalayan Kingdom.

“We have entered into a strategic partnership agreement with Druk Holding and Investments Ltd (DHI), the commercial and investment arm of the Royal Government of Bhutan, to undertake various initiatives aimed at bolstering investment in the renewable and green energy landscape of Bhutan,” the group said in a statement.

The partnership between Reliance Group and Druk Holding will focus on green energy generation, specifically solar and hydropower initiatives, while also exploring innovative sus-



tainable technologies.

The Indian group has set up a new company, Reliance Enterprises, for investments in Bhutan’s renewable and green energy sector. Reliance Enterprises will be jointly promoted by Mumbai-listed Reliance Infrastructure Ltd and Reliance Power Ltd.

It will set up a 500 MW solar plant in two phases of 250 MW each over the next two years.

Reliance Power and Druk

Holding will also jointly develop the 770 MW Chamkharchhu-1 hydro project. The project has been classified as a run-of-the-river project and under a concession model in accordance with Bhutan government policy.

“Reliance Group will collaborate with government-owned companies in Bhutan to implement infrastructure projects that support Bhutan’s net-zero goals,” the statement read.

# Dividend Policy dynamics of Pharmaceutical Companies in India



**DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH**

**DIKSHA SINGH**

Dividend payment by pharmaceutical companies like companies from other sectors, gets influenced by multiple factors. These factors include use of retained earnings for Capital Expenditure requirements, use of funds for acquisitions, investment in new businesses as part of strategic plans, debt payment obligations, debt equity ratio, liquidity position of the company, operating cash flow, past dividend patterns, reserves and surpluses of the company, return on invested capital, working capital requirements, macro-economic conditions in an economy, statutory requirements, competitive conditions, among others. Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is well known for its track record of generous dividend payouts. It is also worthwhile to note that promoter holding in TCS is more than 70 per cent, 71.77 per cent in June 2024 quarter to be precise. Higher promoter holding results into higher dividend payment to promoters.

Cash balance as a Liquidity Measure, Total Debt as a Leverage Measure, and ‘Profit after Tax’, ‘Capital Expenditure’, ‘Retained Earnings’, ‘Earnings per Share’, ‘Dividend per Share’ and ‘Dividend Payout Ratio’ have been found as key determinants of the dividend policy of pharmaceutical companies in India. For this write-up, emphasis is on impact of promoter holding, dividend distribution tax (DDT), type of capital expenditure in pharmaceutical sector on dividend payout ratio.

Pharmaceutical companies have to incur capital expenditure on multiple activities, e.g., in 2023-23, Sun Pharma acquired the remaining shares of Taro, a company in which Sun Pharma already had a controlling stake. In 2021-22, Sun Pharma acquired Uractiv Port-



folio from Fiterman Pharma in Romania Pipeline projects in 2021-22. In the same year, it launched Brillo, a first-in-class oral lipid-lowering drug in India. In 2020-21, Sun Pharma entered into a licensing agreement with Eli Lilly to expand access to Baricitinib, in helping alleviate the burden of Covid-19 in India.

In last four years, promoter holding in Sun Pharma has remained constant whereas dividend payout ratio has fluctuated. In FY2019-20, DPR was 37 per cent which went up to 54 per cent in FY20-21. It must be seen in the background that Dividend Distribution Tax (DDT) was abolished in February 2020. In Divi’s Labs, promoter holding has not changed significantly in last five years, but dividend payout ratio has shown immediate decline in 2020-21 and 2021-22 but again started showing upward trend. From 2019 to 2022, Divi’s Labs completed the brownfield DC and DCV SEZ units and de-bottlenecking programs became operational, besides modernization of waste water treatment plants at manufacturing site.

For Cipla, promoter holding got reduced in last five years from 36.68 per cent in 2019-20 to 33.46 per cent in 2023-24. Pattern is similar to Divi’s Labs as DPR went down to 17 per cent in 2020-21 from 21 per cent in 2019-20 and further declined to 16 per cent in FY22. In 2022-23, Cipla acquired 21.05 per cent stake in Achira Labs for the access of ‘Point of Care’ diagnostic medical testing. In FY21-22, the company had signed a non-exclusive licensing agreement with MSD for manufacturing and distribution of Molnupiravir. In FY21, the company

announced acquisition of the prescription drug ZEMDRI from Achaogen Inc besides acquiring novel anti-infective Elores from Venus Remedies, and acquisition of brand name and trademark rights for Vysof of the anti-diabetic drug.

In Dr. Reddy’s Labs, there is marginal change in promoter holding in last five years but DPR declined significantly from 21 per cent in FY20 to 12 per cent in FY24. After abolition of DDT, DPR remained stable in FY21 and went up to 23 per cent in FY22 but declined thereafter. Capital expenditure activities included opening up of a new 70,000 sq ft facility in Hyderabad to focus on development and manufacturing of proteins used in drugs in 2023-24, launch of Sorafenib tablets in 2022-23, and acquisition of portfolio of branded and generic hospital injectable products from Eton Pharma, based in Illinois in the same year. Substantial capital expenditure is expected to affect the dividend paying capacity. In contrast to this, in FY22, the company had entered into a voluntary licensing agreement with Eli Lilly to manufacture and commercialize Baricitinib in India, launch of Sputnik V in Indian market, collaboration with ICICI Lombard pilot launch of first-of-its-kind integrated and cashless digital health solution in India, and launch of Minoxidil topical solution for the treatment of female pattern hair loss.

In Torrent Pharma, decline in DPR was observed in FY21 to 47 per cent from 53 per cent in FY20. In FY22, significant rise was observed in DPR whereas there was decline in DPR in FY23, and FY24. In FY23, Torrent Pharma ac-

Table 1: Promoter Holding in Top pharma companies in India and Dividend Payout Ratio (DPR)

Sun Pharma					
FY	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Promoter Holding (%)	54.69	54.48	54.48	54.48	54.48
DPR (%)	37	54	66	30	31
Divi's Labs					
Promoter Holding (%)	51.97	51.95	51.94	51.94	51.92
DPR (%)	31	21	18	43	50
Cipla					
Promoter Holding (%)	36.68	36.73	33.63	33.55	33.46
DPR (%)	21	17	16	24	25
Dr. Reddy's Labs					
Promoter Holding (%)	26.75	26.74	26.72	26.69	26.65
DPR (%)	21	21	23	15	12
Torrent Pharma					
Promoter Holding (%)	71.25	71.25	71.25	71.25	71.25
DPR (%)	53	47	104	30	29
Zydus Lifesciences					
Promoter Holding (%)	74.88	74.88	74.88	74.98	74.98
DPR (%)	25	24	30	40	8
Abbott India					
Promoter Holding (%)	74.99	74.99	74.99	74.99	74.99
DPR (%)	90	85	73	73	73
Alkem Labs					
Promoter Holding (%)	65.88	60.16	57.13	57.16	56.74
DPR (%)	26.5	22.6	25.0	48.5	56.74
Aurobindo Pharma					
Promoter Holding (%)	52.01	51.94	51.83	51.84	51.84
DPR (%)	6.2	4.4	10.0	23.0	8.3

quired 100% stake in Curatio Health Care, a leading player in the cosmetic-dermatology segment with a portfolio of over 50 brands marketed in India. In FY22, the company introduced new products, particularly in the space of NNDS, Fixed Dosage Combinations (FDC), and line extensions, thereby leveraging ensuing patent expiry in the chronic space.

In Zydus Lifesciences, there was marginal decline in DPR in FY21 to 24 per cent from 25 per cent in FY20. In FY22 and FY23, DPR increased to 30 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. Decline in DPR was observed in FY24 as the company acquired UK-based LiqMeds Group for Rs. 690 crore. In FY23. The company launched 32 products in the US generics market, and the company was the first player to launch the generic version of Topiramate Extended-Release capsules. In FY22, the company extended the Joint Venture – Bayer Zydus Pharma Private Limited with Bayer by

three years. In FY21, it signed a non-exclusive licensing agreement with Gilead Sciences Inc., to manufacture and market Remdesivir.

In Abbott India, promoter holding has remained constant at 74.99 per cent in last five years. In FY21, there was marginal decline in DPR to 85 per cent from 90 per cent in FY20. Further, in FY22, DPR declined to 73 per cent and then it remained at same level of 73 per cent. In FY24, the company launched the XIENCE Sierra Everolimus Eluting Coronary Stent System in India. In FY23 too, the company launched New PediaSure with Nutri-Pull System to help support catch up growth and overall, health in children. In FY22 too, the company launched Amplazter Piccolo Occluder in India. In FY21, the company announced a collaboration with 1mg to make FreeStyle Libre Pro available online.

In Alkem Labs too, decline in DPR was observed in FY21 to 22.6 per cent from 26.5 per cent in FY20. In FY22, DPR

increased to 25 per cent and then further increased to 48.5 per cent in FY23. Decline in DPR was observed in FY24. In FY23, the company launched the world’s 1st biosimilar for Cetuximab, which is used for treatment of head and neck cancer, and also launched a unique patented technology for the treatment of Diabetic Foot Ulcer. In FY22 too, the company launched inhalation device Innohaler for COPD patients, Ibuprofen and Famotidine Tablets in US market.

In Aurobindo Pharma too, decline in DPR was observed in FY21 to 4.4 per cent from 6.2 per cent in FY20. In FY22 and FY23, DPR went up and declined in FY24 to 8.3 per cent. In FY21, the company acquired the business and certain assets of Veritaz Healthcare.

In 7 pharmaceutical companies including Lupin, out of top 10 listed pharmaceutical companies, DPR declined immediately after roll back of Dividend Distribution Tax as shareholders would be taxed on dividends received as income. Thus, promoters who were the major shareholders in the firms were affected as the rate of DDT was lower as compared to tax on dividend income. Except for Alkem Labs and Cipla, there was no substantial change in promoter holding. In FY24, for 5 out of top 10 companies namely Sun Pharma, DRL, Torrent, Zydus Lifesciences, and Abbott India, DPR has declined as compared to FY20. In contrast to this, DPR for Divi’s, Cipla, Alkem, Aurobindo and Lupin, has gone up in FY24 as compared to FY20. Impact of Capex on DPR was visible as funds got deployed in acquisitions, expansion of facilities, acquisition of brands, among others.

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

# ixigo Launches ‘Price Lock’ for Flights: Lock Fare Now, Book Later

**NEW DELHI:** ixigo, India’s leading OTA for the next billion users, has introduced its innovative “Price Lock” feature for flights, allowing travellers to lock airfares for up to 2 days and book later, once their travel plans are confirmed. Currently available for domestic flights, this feature offers users added flexibility and protection from fluctuating airfares, making travel planning more convenient and stress-free. With Price Lock, booking flights becomes easier and more secure, giving travellers peace of mind while finalising their trips.

The Price Lock feature, starting at just Rs 99 per passenger, allows travellers to lock in airfares and pay later, offering protection against sudden price increases and avoids buyer’s remorse in case fares drop. If fares rise, the feature provides price protection of up to Rs 4,000 per passenger. If prices drop, travellers benefit by paying the new lower fare. This ensures that they either pay the locked-in price or a reduced price, but



never more, providing reassurance when booking flights. Price Lock is currently available on domestic flight bookings, across all the ixigo Group apps.

Commenting on this, Rajnish Kumar, Group Co-CEO, ixigo, said, “We are thrilled to launch the Price Lock feature, designed to give travellers the freedom to plan their trips without the stress of dealing with sudden fare hikes. This feature offers both flexibility and peace of mind, ensuring users can secure the best fares without the pressure to book immediately. Our goal is to make flight travel more flexible, hassle-free, and budget-friendly for all, enhancing the overall travel experience.”

# FISME, NPC Facilitate B2B Partnerships for Indian and Taiwanese SMEs

**NEW DELHI:** In a significant move to promote technological advancement and sustainability among Indian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the Federation of Indian Micro and Small & Medium Enterprises (FISME) and IFICI Ltd., under the Ministry of Finance, have established the ‘Centre of Excellence for Aspiring SMEs’.

The visit, organised under the Asian Productivity Organisation (APO) framework and in collaboration with the India National Productivity Council (NPC) and Taiwan’s China Productivity Centre (CPC), aims to strengthen bilateral cooperation on smart green technologies.

The delegation of Taiwanese experts from various sectors like fertiliser, solar energy, trade promotion, electronics and construction, specialising in cutting-edge environmental technologies, presented their innovations at a meeting held on October 1, 2024, at the NPC office in New Delhi.

This initiative, aimed at assisting fast-growing Indian SMEs in acquiring advanced technologies and forming joint ventures (JVs) both domestically and internationally, marks a strategic step in India’s MSME modernisation drive. The Centre is expected to focus on creating partnerships with key East and Southeast Asian countries, including Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan.

The discussion centred around areas critical to Indian industry, including wastewater treatment for Common Effluent Treatment Plants (CETPs), e-waste recycling, solar waste management, and circular biotech solutions for the pharmaceutical and agricultural sectors.

Notably, Taiwanese expertise in wastewater management could prove transformative for India’s efforts to achieve Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) and Zero Waste Disposal (ZWD) standards in CETPs, ensuring sustainable water use and improved industrial efficiency.







INTERNATIONAL

India, US ink pact on critical minerals: Commerce Minister Goyal

**WASHINGTON:** Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal has announced that India and the US have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on critical minerals that will pave the way for cooperation between the Indian Ministry of Mines with its US counterpart to secure the supply chains in these materials that are critical to the production of clean energy technologies and equipment.

The MoU will also pave the way for the two countries to launch joint projects in a third country and seek investments from other countries, the Commerce Minister said at a news conference to review his meetings with US officials.

The MoU was signed on Thursday at the sixth India-US commercial dialogue that was hosted by the US and chaired by Commerce Minister Goyal and his US counterpart Gina Raimondo.

"We executed the MOU on critical minerals to keep the supply chains open and for greater engagement between the Ministry of Mines in India and the US government," the Commerce



Minister told reporters at the news conference. These critical minerals include lithium, cobalt, nickel, manganese, graphite, rare earth elements, and copper, which are critical to the production of clean energy technologies.

India is the only developing economy in an elite group of countries called the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP) that includes the US, the UK, Australia, Canada, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Norway, Sweden and the European Union, which

recently launched a financial vehicle to rally and mobilize public and private sector for funding in this sector.

The MSP was launched in June 2022 with the unstated goal of securing this supply chain of these minerals from China. India joined the group exactly a year later during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit in June 2023.

The MoU opens yet another area of bilateral cooperation between the two countries that have already an exhaustive list

of corporations, ranging from climate to emerging technologies, trade, strategic, education, health and space.

The Commerce Minister also met with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai for the Trade Policy Forum meeting, and he co-chaired the India-US CEO Forum with Raimondo on Wednesday.

"All these institutions are now regularly interacting with each other," Commerce Minister Goyal told reporters. "There was a time that these were sporadic interactions. Many years would go by without any meetings. Now they are very outcome-oriented, with a focused agenda, and the periodicity has been made very regular."

He recounted recent visits by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. He misspoke, however, about Ajit Doval, the National Security Advisor, saying he came with the Prime Minister. He did not. Commerce Minister Goyal corrected himself at prompting by Vinay Kwatra, Ambassador to the US, that it was the US NSA Jake Sullivan, who visited India.

Global Trade Faces Uncertainty as West Asia Conflict Intensifies



**NEW DELHI :** The ongoing escalation of conflict in West Asia is expected to have far-reaching consequences on global trade and logistics, according to industry experts and exporters.

The intensifying tensions are likely to exacerbate already high logistics costs and adversely affect trade in key sectors such as oil, electronics, and agriculture, reported BS.

Exporters have expressed concerns that insurance costs for shipments to countries directly involved in the conflict may rise, potentially straining the working capital of Indian exporters.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), a prominent think tank, has reported that

the conflict is already impacting India's trade relations with countries like Israel, Jordan, and Lebanon.

The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) has highlighted the potential for significant disruptions to world trade and the global economy.

FIEO Director General Ajay Sahai noted that Iran's crucial role in the oil market means any escalation could lead to supply disruptions and higher prices, with oil prices already having increased by USD 4 per barrel.

This development could have far-reaching effects on global economies, particularly those dependent on oil imports.

Sahai further warned that increased tensions could desta-

bilise the Middle East, affecting vital trade routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, through which a substantial portion of the world's oil transits.

Such disruptions could result in higher shipping costs and delays, impacting global supply chains across various industries, from electronics to agriculture.

The potential imposition of sanctions or trade restrictions by Western nations could further complicate global trade dynamics, adding to market volatility.

S C Ralhan, Chairman, Hand Tool Association, expressed apprehension that orders to affected countries would likely be put on hold, making trade in the region increasingly risky and challenging.

Data from the first seven months of 2024 reveals significant challenges in India's trade with countries directly impacted by the conflict.

Exports to Israel declined sharply by 63.5 per cent, while Jordan experienced a 38.5 per cent decrease due to spill over effects. Lebanon also saw a 6.8 per cent reduction in trade with India.

Lloyd Austin reaffirms US support to Israel, warns Iran of 'serious consequences'



**WASHINGTON:** US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin reiterated America's strong support for Israel's right to defend itself against Hezbollah and prevent attacks similar to those on October 7.

In a phone conversation with Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant, Austin emphasised the need for a diplomatic resolution to protect civilians on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border.

In a post on X, Austin stated, "I made it clear that the United States supports Israel's right to defend itself," adding that both sides agreed on the importance of "dismantling attack infrastructure along the border to ensure that Lebanese Hezbollah cannot conduct October 7-style attacks on Israel's northern communities."

The US Defence Secretary also stressed that a diplomatic resolution is necessary to ensure the safe return of civilians to their homes.

Further warning Iran of "serious consequences," Austin said that he "made clear that the United States is well-positioned to defend US personnel, partners, and allies in the face of threats from Iran and Iran-backed terrorist organisations and determined to prevent any actor from exploiting tensions or expanding the conflict."

"I reiterated the serious consequences for Iran in the event Iran chooses to launch a direct military attack against Israel," he added, reinforcing the US's commitment to support Israel in case of any expansion of the conflict.

Earlier on Monday, US State Department Spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters that Israel had informed the US it was carrying out "limited operations focused on Hezbollah infrastructure near the border".

The Washington Post, citing US security officials, reported that Israel had informed the White House of plans for an imminent, limited ground campaign in Lebanon.

Additionally, US President Joe Biden also said on Sunday that he would speak with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as tensions in the Middle East increase following Israel's assassination of Hezbollah Chief Hassan Nasrallah.

He added, "We really have to avoid" all-out war in the Middle East, saying, "We've already taken precautions relative to our embassies and personnel who want to leave, but we're not there yet. But we're working like hell with the French and many others."

'Gravely concerned' over Israeli strikes in Beirut: UN chief



**UNITED NATIONS:** United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has said that he was "gravely concerned" over the rising violence in the Middle East, urging all sides to halt the cycle of violence immediately.

Sharing a post on X, Guterres said, "I'm gravely concerned by the dramatic escalation of events in Beirut in the last 24 hours. This cycle of violence must stop now. All sides must step back from the brink."

He added, "The people of Lebanon, the people of Israel, as well as the wider region, cannot afford an all-out war."

Meanwhile, Unicef has sounded the alarm over the strikes in Beirut, condemning the recent escalation that has claimed thousands of lives.

Sharing a post on X, Unicef said, "Tragedy upon tragedy in Lebanon. The recent escalation has killed and injured thousands and instilled an unimaginable fear in people. The children of Lebanon need an immediate de-escalation."

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) also eliminated senior Hezbollah intelligence array terrorist Hassan Khalil Yassin in a precision strike in the Dahieh district in Beirut on Saturday, the military reported, according to a report by Jerusalem Post.

Singapore's private economy expands for 19 consecutive months

**SINGAPORE:** The seasonally adjusted S&P Global Singapore Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) was 56.6 in September, marking a continued improvement in private business conditions for 19 straight months, the S&P Global said Thursday. It added that the growth rate eased to a three-month low but remained marked, Xinhua news agency reported.

The accumulation rate was the most pronounced in eight months, partly due to supply constraints. Inventory levels



also declined amid a worsening of supply delays. Input prices

continued climbing last month as firms reported higher raw materials, transport, and labour costs, but at a moderate pace from August.

Though easing from an over three-year peak in August, the confidence levels among Singaporean private sector firms remained above the long-run average and reflected hopes for better business activities.

A PMI reading of 50 and above indicates expansion, while a reading below 50 indicates contraction.

Marked by congeniality, Walz-Vance debate a polar opposite of acrimonious Harris-Trump encounter

**NEW YORK:** The optics of the almost congenial vice presidential debate between Democrat Tim Walz and Republican J. D. Vance were the stark opposite of the acrimonious presidential faceoff between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump.

Expected fireworks at the vice presidential debate on Tuesday night ended up a damp squib as the two rivals avoided personal attacks and even expressed mild agreement on some issues.

The 20-year age difference between Vance at 40 and Walz at 60, is a reversal from the presidential, where Trump is 78 to Harris, 59. Harris and Trump hovered over the debate like ethereal presences whose performances in office the debaters had to defend – on immigration, inflation, foreign policy, and energy.

Walz, the balding avuncular former teacher and football coach, who proclaimed his middle-class background, was more tense, speaking with his hands and making dramatic facial expressions. Vance, the bearded 40-year-old, suave self-made millionaire venture capitalist, stressed the depths of abject poverty he grew up in with a mother who was a drug addict and a grandmother who couldn't afford to heat their home in winter.

His performance was different too, from the scorch-earth rhetoric of Trump and a contrast to his pugilistic persona



on the campaign trail. Vance put on a measured and often genial performance, saying at one point, "If Tim Walz is the next vice president, he'll have my prayers, he'll have my best wishes, and he'll have my help whenever he wants it".

Walz said, "I've enjoyed tonight's debate, and I think there was a lot of commonality here." "Me too, man," Vance responded. The congeniality was perhaps a disappointment to the extremes of both parties who wanted them to go for the jugular. They seem to agree on some aspects of the housing crisis, on childcare and on reducing gun violence, but not on the solutions.

On the extremely divisive issue of legal abortions, Vance tried to put on a compassionate face, without ceding ground on his opposition to it but accepting his state's referendum backing it. But there were tense moments, too. At one point the moderators cut off the microphone as they squabbled on the immigration issue. "The audience can't hear you because your mics are cut," Margaret Brennan, a moderator, remarked with amusement.

Biden says he'll speak with Netanyahu, vows all-out war in the Middle East must be avoided

**WASHINGTON:** US President Joe Biden has said that he would speak with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as tensions in the Middle East increase following Israel's assassination of Hezbollah Chief Hassan Nasrallah.

"Yes, I will be talking to him," Biden said on Sunday as he headed for the White House from Dover Air Force Base.

He added "we really have to avoid" all-out war in the Middle East, saying, "We've already taken precautions relative to our embassies and personnel who want to leave, but we're not there yet. But we're working like hell with the French and many others."

The US backed Israel's operation, saying that Hassan Nasrallah's death "is a measure of justice for his many victims".

In a statement, Biden had said, "Hassan Nasrallah and

the terrorist group he led, Hezbollah, were responsible for killing hundreds of Americans over a four-decade reign of terror. His death from an Israeli airstrike is a measure of justice for his many victims, including thousands of Americans, Israelis, and Lebanese civilians."

The statement further said, "The strike that killed Nasrallah took place in the broader context of the conflict that began with Hamas's massacre on October 7, 2023. Nasrallah, the next day, made the fateful decision to join hands with Hamas and open what he called a "northern front" against Israel."

Following Nasrallah's death, Netanyahu had issued a warning to Iran's Ayatollah regime and asserted that those who target Israel will face consequences and that no location in Iran or the Middle East is



beyond Israel's reach.

He called Nasrallah as "main engine of Iran's axis of evil" and added, "Nasrallah was not just another terrorist, he was the terrorist. He was the axis of the axis, the main engine of Iran's axis of evil. He and his people were the architects of the plan to destroy Israel. He was not only operated by Iran, he also frequently operated Iran."

The US President's statements come as Israeli air-

strikes across Lebanon killed dozens of people on Sunday.

The Iran-backed Hezbollah sustained a string of deadly blows to its command structure, including the killing of its overall leader, Hassan Nasrallah, as part of a wave of increasingly brazen Israeli strikes meant to undercut the group's capacity to attack its territory.

Before Nasrallah's killing, Netanyahu brushed off a ceasefire proposal brokered by the US and France that called for a 21-day pause in fighting across the Israel-Lebanon border, infuriating American officials who had been led to believe he was on board.

Israel informed the US that it was launching its major operation in Beirut only after it was underway -- again, to the frustration of some American officials.

WITH EACH SUCCESS OF ISRAEL

Prospects of Kamala Harris Improve in the US Presidential Race

**GOPAL MISRA**

The recent elimination of the Hezbollah chief Nasrallah in Beirut appears to have paved the way for the Democratic Party nominee, Kamala Harris, a woman of Indian-African bloodline, to make history.

She is expected to be the first woman with a rare feline aggressive posture to become the American President, when next month the polls for POTUS, as of now the most powerful political office on the earth, take place. With the election campaign reaching to its peak, she appears to have successfully engaged her Republican Party nominee Donald Trump, perhaps, a trusted tomatcat in the Battle for the political supremacy.

It all began last month, when Kamala Harris, calling herself a childless cat, supported abortion as a woman's right, has not only received attention from the American tomatcats, but from many across the continents. India is no exception.

In recent weeks, the popularity gap between Kamala

Harris and Donald Trump was decreasing, but her decision to support the woman's right regarding abortion could have been supported by the conservative voters, but her support to Israel has improved her chances to be elected to the coveted office.

The opposition to abortion has been rooted in the American psychological mindset since the colonial era. The British wanted to increase their population to assert their presence in the New World. However, the non-white immigration has redefined the American dream. Kamala being an inheritor of the Indian genius from her mother appears to be the new standard bearers of the cherished American dream. She represents those who despite being a victim of both racial and gender biases could rescript the US as a land of the people having the merit overcoming the racial and gender biases.

Few in the US are aware of the fact that Indian women have been enjoying democratic rights since 1947, when the British finally left the Indian shores. On the other hand, the American women got their voting rights on August 26, 1920.,



while it became an independent country on July four, 1776. It took 244 years for the American women to be inducted in the system of governance as a voter. The American's inability to elect even a brilliant woman like Hillary Clinton to become president speaks volumes of the American mindset.

The decision of the Biden administration to support Israel has had an impact on the geopolitics, but it might also usher in Kamala Harris, Vice President, to become the President. It is going to be a watershed not only in US politics, but also hit the traditional mindset of the discriminating women rooted or embedded

in all the faiths having the Abrahamian roots. In a few Islamic countries, women have the voting rights, but the value of their ballot is less than that of men. Pakistan and Bangladesh could be exceptions, where the brilliant women Muslim leaders took them to the path of political stability and prosperity, but they were either assassinated or toppled with the help of the Muslim clergy.

It cannot be denied that Kamala Harris has embarked upon a mission like Don Quixote, the outbursts of the American oligarchy even against allowing women to go for abortion.

However, it is difficult to predict the impact of her endorsement of abortion on the election prospects.

In a display of innocent humor, an Indian diplomat has jokingly remarked that Kamala's commitment to a woman's right to go for abortion, perhaps, could have been more forceful, if she could consult India's most cherished tomatcat i.e. PM Narendra Modi.

Since Modi didn't meet Trump, the American tomatcat, in Indian politics, the feline presence has always been influencing politics as much prior to independence as in later years. For Indians, even those converted to any Abrahamian faith believe in the theory of karma, and respect for the daughters. Their beauty has to be admired and respected.

In the Indian politics, Kamala's relentless pursuit for changing the mindset of the Americans, is indeed a formidable task. It is yet to be known how the Americans will react to her observation as a childless cat, but in India the abusive language against the then PM Indira Gandhi, used by none other but the

President Richard Nixon is well archived in her elephantine memory.

He and his security advisor, Henry Kissinger, called her a bitch. It may be a little embarrassing for a country famous for Hollywood and fashion shows to admire the beauty God has given to mankind, not to commit the sin of procreation, but to lead a meaningful life on the earth. The pregnancy heralds the arrival of spring in life, but the American mindset has to be emancipated.

Kamala Harris, who shares Indian genes being daughter of a highly accomplished woman, should have also supported the right of an American woman to choose a partner for giving birth to a child only from an accomplished person. It is hoped that the childless cat would dare to induct reforms if she is allowed to occupy the Whitehouse.

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

MEA hails nation's humanitarian efforts in first 100 days of PM Modi 3.0 govt

**NEW DELHI:** The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, has highlighted the contribution of India's efforts in supporting different countries in times of crisis through its Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations during the first 100 days of Prime Minister Narendra Modi 3.0 government.

Sharing a post on Sunday on X, Jaiswal said, "India - Vishwabandhu, a friend to the world. Extending a helping hand during humanitarian situations. Take a look at India's Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Operations in the first 100 days of the Government."

Sharing a video, Jaiswal elaborated on India's HADR operations during the first 100 days of the government.

He added, "Kuwait (provided support during the fire incident in June); Papua New Guinea (assistance of supplies in June); Haiti (medical supplies in July); El Salvador (relief materials in August); Syria (anti-cancer drugs in August); Ukraine (four BHISHM cubes in August); Chad (essential life-saving drugs, antibiotics and general medicines in September); Lao PDR (emergency



flood relief assistance as part of Operation Sadbhav in September); Malawi (consignment of rice in September); Myanmar (relief material and ration as part of Operation Sadbhav in September); Namibia (consignment of maize and rice in September); Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (sleeping bags and hygiene products in September); Vietnam (relief goods as part of Operation Sadbhav in September); Zambia (shipment of maize in September); and Zimbabwe (consignment of rice in September).

Notably, India has been among the first responders in providing HADR to impacted countries. Operation Sadbhav is part of India's broader effort to contribute to HADR within the ASEAN region, in line with its longstanding 'Act East Policy'.



## Shahid Kapoor gives a peek into his ‘happy morning’ amidst nature

**MUMBAI:** Bollywood star Shahid Kapoor, who seems to be on a vacation, has given a glimpse into his “happy morning”.

Shahid took to Instagram stories, where he shared a picture of himself dressed in a gray T-shirt paired with gray sweatpants and a black half jacket. He completed his look with sunglasses and posed standing near some green plants. The actor is seen looking into the camera and smiling as he struck a pose for the camera. He wrote: “Happy morning.”

The actor, who did not reveal the destination, on Wednesday had shared a string of pictures and videos from the flight,

where he was seen gorging on paneer kathi roll, which he said was “har vegetarian ka go to !!”

He had then shared a video of himself chomping on the roll and said: “Kha daala.” Shahid also shared a video of himself making faces at the camera, which he captioned: “I don’t react to turbulence.” Recently, Shahid was seen performing at the 24th edition of IIFA. He event spoke about if he would ever work in south Indian cinema.

He said, “I’m game for it but I have a fear of what if the audience down south is not happy with my usage of the language pertaining to correct

enunciation of the dialogues. I don’t want to leave any loose ends, Hindi, I have (a good command on)”.

When asked which particular cinema from south, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam or Kannada he likes in particular, the actor said: “It’s the same for me because I don’t know any of them. So whichever filmmaker from south can trust me, explain to me properly and deal with all my questions, I’m ready to do it.

Shahid will be next seen in ‘Deva’ in which he has been paired opposite Pooja Hegde. The film, directed by Rosshan Andrews, will see Shahid in the role of a cop.



Hindu devotees offer prayers to an idol of goddess Sheeta Mata on the first day of Navratri celebrations at Mata Longa Wali Devi temple in Amritsar on Thursday. Navaratri lasts for nine days, with three days each devoted to the worship of the goddess of valor Durga, the goddess of wealth Lakshmi, and the goddess of knowledge Saraswati.

PHOTO-PRABHJOT GILL

## Mithun Chakraborty to be honoured with Dadasaheb Phalke Award



**NEW DELHI:** This year’s Dadasaheb Phalke award will be given to legendary actor Mithun Chakraborty. Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav announced this on Monday in a post on X.

“From the streets of Kolkata to Cinematic Heights; Mithun Da’s remarkable cinematic journey inspires generations! Honoured to announce that the Dadasaheb Phalke Selection Jury has decided to award legendary actor, Sh. Mithun Chakraborty Ji for his iconic contribution to Indian Cinema,” Minister Vaishnav announced. The Minister said the award will be presented to the veteran actor at the 70th National Film Awards ceremony on October 8. The actor made his acting debut with the art house drama Mrigayaa (1976) by Mrinal Sen for which he won his first National Film Award for Best Actor. The film was a major box office success in the country and outside also, particularly in the then Soviet Union. The actor embarked on his acting journey with Mrigayaa and became a rage after his 1982 film Disco Dancer was released. The film did phenomenal business across Asia, the (then) Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Turkey, and Africa.

## Utkarsh SFB Brand Ambassadors Mary Kom & Sunil Chhetri



**DOMINICK RODRIGUES**  
*Mumbai*

Utkarsh Small Finance Bank announced the “on-boarding” of legendary Indian boxer Mary Kom and well-known Indian footballer Sunil Chhetri as its ‘Brand Ambassadors.’

Welcoming both sportspersons, Parveen Kumar Gupta, Chairman, Utkarsh SFB, said at a press conference here recently that Mary Kom and Sunil Chhetri have overcome significant challenges to achieve global recognition – mirroring Utkarsh SFB’s mission of uplifting underserved segments by providing accessible financial services.

Govind Singh, MD & CEO, Utkarsh SFB, said Mary Kom and Sunil Chhetri are synonymous with resilience, discipline and commitment – qualities that resonate with Utkarsh

SFB’s core values of financial inclusion, empowerment and trustworthiness.

Trail-blazing Boxer Mary Kom, while lauding Utkarsh SFB’s commitment to driving financial inclusion within underprivileged communities, expressed pride in being part of the Bank’s journey in inspiring people to achieve their aspirations – regardless of challenges.

India’s top-scoring Footballer Sunil Chhetri highlighted the opportunity in this association with Utkarsh SFB’s vision and mission for driving financial freedom and empowering people to achieve their dreams, where persistence and proper support are key factors for success. Utkarsh Small Finance Bank also launched its Supercard and WhatsApp Banking Service during the press conference.

## Punjab Vidhan Sabha Speaker Honours Young Boxing Champion Gurseerat

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab Vidhan Sabha Speaker Kulraj Singh Sandhwan felicitated 14-year-old Gurseerat Kaur, a student of Mount Carmel School, Sector 47, Chandigarh, for her exceptional achievement in the Asian School Boxing Championship. Held at Abu Dhabi, UAE, from August 28 to September 10, 2024, Gurseerat clinched the Gold Medal, showcasing her remarkable boxing skills.

This victory comes on the heels of her impressive performance in the ASBC Asian Junior & Schoolboys & Schoolgirls Boxing Championship trials held in Rohtak, Haryana, from August 8-11, where she secured the first position.



Speaker S. Sandhwan praised Gurseerat’s determination and hard work, urging her to continue making

India proud. He emphasized the importance of encouraging young talent in sports, citing the need for determination

## Alia Bhatt, Sharvari-starrer ‘Alpha’ to release on Christmas 2025

**MUMBAI:** The makers of the upcoming spy film “Alpha” starring Alia Bhatt and Sharvari have finally revealed the release date. The movie will hit the screens on Christmas – December 25, 2025.

The banner Yash Raj Films took to Instagram, where they made the announcement along with a poster carrying the release date.

The poster was captioned: “On Christmas 2025, #ALPHA will rise! Get ready for an action-packed holiday... 25th Dec, 2025. @aliaabhatt | @sharvari | @shivrawail | #YRFSpyniverse”

In the film, directed by Shiv Rawail, Alia and Sharvari both play super agents.

In September it was report-



ed that the two actresses were prepping hard for their next physically challenging schedule of “Alpha” in Mumbai.

A source had back then

said: “The most dangerous, physically taxing schedule of Alpha awaits for Alia and Sharvari.”

The source shared that a

heavily secured set has been put up for the schedule, which will take place for 15 days.

“A heavily guarded set has been put up in Mumbai and the two will need to be in the best physical fitness to be able to pull off the massive stunts that have been planned for the two.”

According to the source Alia and Sharvari will be seen doing a lot of action in the film.

“Alia has put in months of training for this demanding film. A video that was uploaded by her trainer a few days back showed how she is getting stronger by the day for Alpha. The reason why Alia is pushing her body so much now is because of this schedule,” the source said.

## Micromastery & Soft Skills: The Futuresmart Employment Path for India’s Graduates

**SOURAV ROY**

**I**ndia produces approximately 5 million graduates annually, contributing to a vast youth population of 238 million, projected to grow to 365 million by 2030. While the country has a plentiful workforce, it faces challenges in effectively educating and employing this youth. As of 2020, only 36% of India’s population was formally employed, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). This low employment rate, coupled with a population growth rate of 1.1%, intensifies competition for jobs, especially among young graduates.

The disparity between job availability and population size poses a significant issue. According to World Bank data from 2020, there were only 34 jobs for every 100 people in India, with many roles existing in the informal sector. This imbalance leaves many young graduates struggling to secure employment.

India’s corporate sector prioritizes English-speaking employees. Despite having 22 officially recognized languages, business communication at the corporate level predominantly occurs in English. Unfortunately, only 20% of the youth can effectively communicate in English, putting the majority at a disadvantage. A British Council report from 2020 noted that India had 125 million English speakers, constituting just 10% of the total population.

This language barrier often



undermines the confidence of rural candidates, hindering their attempts to pursue higher-level positions and better opportunities.

The education system’s hard focus on technical disciplines fails to cultivate essential soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and leadership, which are highly valued by employers and critical for career advancement.

Many brilliant graduates from top engineering colleges and business schools, despite holding near-perfect CGPAs, find themselves rejected or unplaced in campus interviews due to a lack of these crucial skills.

Employers today look beyond grades, recognizing that numerous Indian students possess similar degrees and technical competencies. The differentiators in hiring are often communication skills, cultural fit, and practical knowledge gained through additional training, such as micromastery courses.

Companies increasingly seek candidates who can navigate interpersonal relationships, collaborate effectively in teams, and communicate clearly in business settings.

This is where micromastery comes into play, alongside essential soft skills training. Micromastery refers to breaking down skills into manageable segments, allowing individuals to master specific competencies quickly.

In a country like India, where 5 million graduates enter the job market annually, micromastery provides a pragmatic solution to bridging the skills gap. It is not meant to replace the traditional 3-4 year graduation model but rather to enhance it by allowing students to acquire targeted skills quickly and effectively.

This combination of micromastery and soft skills training equips young professionals with a well-rounded skill set, making them more adaptable and competitive in the workforce.

For instance, MBA graduates who undertake micromastery courses in Google AdWords, Google Analytics, Salesforce, and HubSpot are better positioned for roles in digital marketing and sales.

Armed with practical skills, these graduates demonstrate immediate value to employers, distinguishing themselves from peers who rely solely

on traditional degrees. Additionally, courses focusing on crisis communication, client negotiation, and team collaboration enhance their soft skills, making them even more attractive to employers.

Moreover, proficiency in data visualization tools like Power BI and Tableau, along with advanced Excel skills, not only equips candidates with technical expertise but also enhances their ability to communicate insights effectively.

A candidate skilled in budget management and PNL reporting who articulates these concepts clearly during interviews is far more likely to secure a role in a leading organization compared to one lacking these competencies.

Furthermore, micromastery in functional business English allows rural graduates to stand shoulder to shoulder with their urban counterparts, alleviating their fears of inadequacy in English communication and boosting their confidence.

India is projected to become the world’s second-largest economy by 2031, according to insights from the Reserve Bank of India.

This rapid growth is expected to create a surge in demand for Indian graduates by major organizations across Europe, America, and beyond.

As the geopolitical landscape evolves, these companies will increasingly seek talent equipped with not just technical expertise, but also strong communication skills and proficiency in various micromastery skills and certifications to successfully navigate the Indian market.

The dual emphasis on mi-

cro-mastery and soft skills equips graduates to tackle the complex demands of today’s job market, providing them with a competitive edge that traditional educational paths often overlook.

By focusing on these areas, India can harness its demographic dividend, fostering job generation and reducing unemployment for its vast population of freshers.

Micromastery is rapidly positioning itself as a transformative force for global economies, particularly in India.

As a testament to its growing significance, this innovative approach will be a focal point of discussion at the prestigious Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Asia Pacific Higher Education Summit in Macau this November. Notably, QS announces the esteemed World University Rankings every year. It has done so since 2004.

Countries across Asia are increasingly recognizing the potential of micromastery, with Singapore setting a remarkable precedent.

Influential universities, educators, and policymakers worldwide are now actively exploring how to integrate micromastery into existing educational frameworks.

For India, this represents a pivotal opportunity to revitalize its education system, significantly boost employability, and effectively bridge the critical divide between academia and industry.

*Sourav Roy is Director, University Readiness Academy at Chitkara University.*

## Sunny Deol wishes JP Dutta on 75th b’d day: Time to take legacy forward with ‘Border 2’

**MUMBAI:** As filmmaker J.P. Dutta turned 75 on Thursday, Bollywood star Sunny Deol wished the director, saying that the two have given “Hindustan its biggest war film” with “Border” and that it is time to take the legacy forward with “Border 2”.

Sunny took to Instagram, where he shared a string of pictures from the 1997 film. The photographs featured Sunny alongside Dutta.

For the caption, he wrote: “Happy 75th Birthday JP, it’s good to look back and be back! We gave Hindustan its biggest war film with Border, and now it’s time to take the legacy for-



ward with #Border2! Lots of Love. God Bless! #JPDutta.”

Set during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, “Border” is based on the events of the Battle of Longewala. It also stars Suniel Shetty, Jackie

## My divorce was amicable, Samantha tells Telangana minister



**HYDERABAD:** Clarifying that her divorce was with mutual consent and amicable, actor Samantha Ruth Prabhu on Wednesday lashed out at Telangana minister Konda Surekha for linking Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) working president K. T. Rama Rao with her divorce from actor Naga Chaitanya.

The actress took to microblogging site X to react strongly to the minister’s comments and urged her not to trivialise her journey and be responsible and respectful of individuals’ privacy.

In her statement posted on social media, Samantha highlighted her journey and fight in the glamorous industry. “To be a woman, To come out and work, To survive in a glamorous industry where women are more often than not treated as props, To fall in love & to fall out of love, To still stand up and fight...,” reads her post.

“It takes a lot of courage and strength, Konda Surekha Garu, I am proud of what this journey turned me into – please don’t trivialise it. I hope you realise that your words carry significant weight as a minister. I implore you to be responsible and respectful of individual’s privacy,” she wrote.

“My divorce is a personal matter, and I request that you refrain from speculating about it. Our choice to keep things private doesn’t invite misrepresentation. To clarify: my divorce was mutual consent and amicable, with no political conspiracy involved. Could you please keep me out of political battles? I have always remained non-political and wish to continue doing so,” the actress added.

Meanwhile, Naga Chaitanya’s stepmother Amala Akkineni has lashed out at Konda Surekha for her comments.

## SJOBA TSD Rally 2024 concludes: Subir Roy and Nirav Mehta win Pro and Overall categories

**KULBIR SINGH KALSI**  
*Chandigarh*

The 37th Edition of the SJOBA TSD Rally 2024, hosted by the St. John’s Old Boys Association (SJOBA), concluded with a prize distribution ceremony at the Lalit Hotel, IT Park Chandigarh. Winners received cash prizes and awards, while all other participants were honored with certificates. Harpal Singh Malvai, President of SJOBA; Danish Singh Mangat, Secretary and Competitors Relations Officer and others were present at the prize distribution ceremony.

This year, 46 enthusiastic participants from across India, including teams from Kolkata, Mumbai, Shillong, and Uttarakhnad, competed in this thrilling three-day motorsport extravaganza.

In a display of skill and tenacity, the dynamic duo of



Subir Roy and Nirav Mehta soared to victory, claiming the top spot in the Overall Pro category. Following closely behind, Vikas Malik and Dinky Varghese secured the first runner-up position, while Dr. Vanishree Pathak and Kasshish Gagan Mehta proudly took third place. Notably, the champions of the Pro category mirrored these achievements in the overall standings, reinforcing their dominance across both competitions.

In the Amateur Category,

Chandra Singh and Venu Rameshkumar claimed first place, while Naman Goyal, Anirudh Goyal, and Sukriti Chotani secured second, and Debashish Dutta RVD, Mrityunjoy Majumder took home third. The Novice category saw Anil Bakshi, Sunita Bakshi and Ameya Bakshi take the spotlight, winning first place with a fantastic performance. They were followed by Vidyanand Kumar, Rajesh Karan Deo, Anuyog Verma, and Irvindeep Singh Khanna, who captured the second and third spots.