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SAD DELEGATION MEETS GURDWARA ELECTIONS COMMISSIONER REQUESTS TO EXTEND REGISTRATION OF VOTERS TO MARCH 31



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HARYANA IMPROVES SEX RATIO FROM 861 TO 910 IN LAST 10 YEARS: CHIEF MINISTER

Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann Ridicules BJP’s Empty Promises, Calls them ‘Jumlas’

NEW DELHI: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann led a high-energy roadshow in Kas-turba Nagar, it was followed by two Jansabhas (public rallies) in Mehrauli and Chhatarpur Assembly Constituencies, where Mann addressed thousands of enthusiastic supporters.

During the roadshow, Mann was greeted by a sea of AAP supporters, who cheered and chanted slogans as he made his way through the crowded streets of Kasturba Nagar. The Punjab Chief Minister interacted with locals and urged them to vote for AAP candidates.

Addressing the gatherings, Mann expressed his gratitude to the people for their overwhelming support. “I can see the enthusiasm and energy of the people, and I am confident that on February 5, the broom will sweep the elections,” he said. “We have worked tirelessly for the people, and now it’s time for the people to elect their representatives.”

Mann also emphasized the importance of electing representatives who understand the problems of the common people. “We are not here to make false



promises or indulge in petty politics,” he said. “We are committed to working for the people, and we will ensure that their voices are heard.”

The Punjab Chief Minister also highlighted the achievements of the AAP government in Punjab, including providing 50,000 jobs and ensuring that 90% of households receive zero electricity bills. “We have delivered on our promises, and we will continue to work for the people,” he said.

Mann also drew attention to the contrast between the AAP’s commitment to public service

and the opposition’s focus on personal attacks. “The BJP resorts to abuse and slander, targeting Arvind Kejriwal from morning till night,” he said. “This is because they have no constructive work to showcase.”

In contrast, Mann said that the AAP’s focus is on delivering tangible benefits to the people, citing the example of Punjab where the party has provided 50,000 jobs without requiring any recommendations or bribes.

Mann also highlighted the significance of the AAP’s election symbol, the broom. “Our symbol represents cleanliness

and purity, and under Arvind Kejriwal’s leadership, we will bring about a cleanliness drive across the country,” he said. Mann expressed confidence that the people of Delhi would elect AAP representatives who would work tirelessly for their welfare, and urged them to press the ‘jharoo’ button on the EVM to bring about a positive change.

Mann also ridiculed the opposition’s empty promises, citing the example of the BJP’s claim to provide Rs 2, 500 to women. “Did they fulfill their earlier promise of depositing Rs 15 lakh into everyone’s bank account?” he asked. “Their promises are nothing but hollow jumlas, and the people of Delhi will not fall for them.”

Mann criticized BJP for its hypocrisy, saying, “They accused Kejriwal of distributing freebies, but today in their manifesto, they have promised 2500 for women and free gas cylinders among other freebies.” But the people of Delhi know that only Kejriwal fulfill his Guarantees, other parties copied his word ‘guarantee’ and his guarantees but they don’t deliver anything after getting your votes.

Intention is to bring natural gas, aviation fuel under GST says Hardeep Puri

NEW DELHI: Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Puri on Friday said that there is a growing consensus to bring natural gas under the ambit of GST, but stopped short of hinting at a timeline.

“LPG gas is already 100 per cent saturated,” he said, referring to LPG gas connections and the success of PM Ujjwala scheme.

On the matter of GST on LPG, the government maintained that it was under the GST since the beginning. “LPG is under the ambit of GST since the beginning,” Petroleum and Natural Gas Secretary Pankaj Jain said, who was also present during the press conference.

Commercial LPG cylinder attracts 18 per cent GST and domestic attracts 5 per cent. Ujjwala gas currently sells at Rs 503 per unit, and non-Ujjwala at Rs 803 per unit in Delhi.

The minister, responding to a reporter’s question, asserted that aviation turbine fuel will also be taken up for consideration under the GST. “Our sense out of the last



GST meeting was that ATF (aviation turbine fuel) is likely to come on soon under GST but bringing Natural gas is also on the cards,” the minister said.

“There were a large number of states which earlier had reservations like Gujarat, Maharashtra, AP, but they are now more or less seeing the benefits of that. I don’t want to put a timeline, because its not my field. I am the line ministry, and the taxation issue falls under the finance ministry and GST council,” said the minister. “If you ask me, I would say sooner than later (it will happen).”

There have been discussions of bringing petrol and diesel under the GST regime, but several states, from time to

time, have opposed this idea. Petroleum products are currently not part of the GST framework.

Moving on to biofuel blending with petrol, Minister Puri said that 20 per cent blending of ethanol with petrol will be completed next month.

The government has been ambitious of attaining 20 per cent ethanol-blended petrol by 2024-25 financial year and 30 per cent by 2029-30. The government has advanced the target of E20 fuel from 2030 to 2025.

E20 blending in petrol was introduced by the Centre to reduce the country’s oil import cost, energy security, lower carbon emissions and better air quality.

WEF 2025: Ashwini Vaishnaw Highlights Thrust on Manufacturing, Services to Push Growth



DAVOS: Electronics and IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw on Friday highlighted India’s balanced approach to economic development with both manufacturing and services driving the nation’s growth in his speech at the World Economic Forum.

Addressing global leaders and captains of industry here, the minister said: “It cannot be manufacturing or services; it has to be manufacturing and services as both these sectors are integral to India’s economic trajectory.”

He emphasised India’s transformation from focusing solely on import substitution to adopting a “Make in India, Make for the World” approach.

With 99 per cent of mobile phones used domestically now manufactured in India, the growth strategy has shifted towards export-led growth across sectors such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and garments, he said.

Vaishnaw highlighted India’s ascent in the semiconductor and AI sectors, stating that “most semiconductor industry leaders believe today that India will soon join the top three destinations for semiconductors.”

Emphasising why global companies are increasingly gravitating towards India, the Union Minister highlighted the nation’s “unique advantage” rooted in trust, abundant talent, and exceptional design capabilities.

He credited the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for creating an environment of global trust, attracting companies to shift not just supply chains but also value chains to India. “With nearly 2,000 Global Capability Centers (GCCs) working on advanced designs, India is poised to be a major player in global manufacturing,” he remarked.

With artificial intelligence (AI) in the services sector poised to play a prominent role in shaping India’s future, driving innovation and creating opportunities, the Union Minister also highlighted the need for laying special emphasis on training the talent pool in AI. He emphasised India’s potential to become the “use case capital” of the world, creating innovative applications for industries globally. He noted that while AI models are becoming increasingly commoditised, the focus should shift to developing use cases, applications, and solutions that cater to global industries. “Experts believe that India has the potential to lead the world in AI services, just as it has successfully done in the IT services sector,” the minister remarked, underlining India’s capability to shape the future of AI on a global scale.

Congress hits out at the Modi govt over the free fall of the Indian rupee



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress today lashed out at the Modi government over the free fall of rupee against the dollar. The party flagged its grave concern over the rupee dangerously almost touching 87 mark, against the US dollar.

SGPC delegation meets Pakistan High Commissioner

Demand to issue visas to maximum number of pilgrims as per list sent by SGPC

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

A delegation of SGPC today met Pakistan High Commission’s Charge d’ Affaires Saad Ahmad Warraich in Delhi and demanded that the entire list of the Sikh pilgrims sent by the SGPC for visiting Gurdwaras in Pakistan should be given visas and that the Sikh Jatha should be allowed to be sent as per the approved Nanakshahi calendar on the occasion of the martyrdom day of Sri Guru Arjan Dev. The SGPC delegation included its chief secretary and member Kulwant Singh Mann, member Bhaj Rajinder



Singh Mehta, secretary Partap Singh and assistant secretary Jaswinder Singh.

Sharing information in this regard, Kulwant Singh Mann and Bhaj Rajinder Singh Mehta said that in the past, a large number of visas of the Sikh pilgrims from the list sent by the SGPC to Pakistan High Commission were deducted, regarding which a meeting has been held with Pakistan’s officials today. It has been said that the SGPC is a representative organization of Sikhs, which sends Jathas every year to visit various Gurdwaras in Pakistan on the occasion of Khalsa Sajna Diwas (Vaisakhi), martyrdom day of Sri Guru Arjan Dev, barsi (death anniversary) of Maharaja Ranjit

Singh and Parkash Gurburb of Sri Guru Nanak Dev. It is said that for these Jathas, the Punjab state has an approved quota of 1800, 600, 300 and 1800 visas, respectively. However, for the last few years, the entire list of Sikh pilgrims sent by the SGPC is not given visas by the Pakistan High Commission and a large number of names are deducted from the SGPC’s list.

The SGPC officials said that today this matter was raised with the officials of the Pakistan High Commission and it was demanded that visas be issued to the maximum number of pilgrims from the SGPC list keeping in mind the devotion and religious sentiments of the Sikh pilgrims towards the historical Gurdwaras in Pakistan.

Ordinance factory blast: Rajnath Singh condoles death of workers



MUMBAI: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday condoled the death of workers in a blast at the Ordnance Factory at Bhandara, Maharashtra. At least eight people died and seven others were injured in the explosion.

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari in a media event in Nagpur said that eight people died in the explosion.

Expressing grief and praying for the speedy recovery of the injured, Rajnath Singh wrote on X, “Deeply saddened to know about the blast at (at) Ordnance Factory at Bhandara, Maharashtra. My condolences to the bereaved families. Praying for the speedy recovery of the injured.”

The rescue teams were deployed at the site and all efforts were being made to provide assistance to those affected.

The blast occurred in the LTP section of the factory around 10.30 a.m., District Collector Sanjay Kolte had said earlier. The blast led to the roof collapse and trapped over a dozen workers. In the initial efforts, three were rescued alive and one was found dead. An excavator was used to remove the debris, said the senior official.

The blast was of such an intensity that it was heard from 5 km away. A thick smoke was seen from the factory in a video captured from a distance.

In an earlier post on X, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said the SDRF and Nagpur Municipal Corporation team was deployed for the rescue operation. The district administration was also coordinating with multiple teams.

The CM, who is returning from the World Economic Forum summit held at Davos, said in the earlier post on X, “Medical assistance teams are ready too. As per the information received till now, one worker unfortunately lost his life. My condolences to his family. We stand with the family in this tough time. There is a news of incident where 13-14 workers are trapped due roof collapse caused by an explosion at the ordinance factory in Bhandara district. 5 workers have been safely rescued. Bhandara Collector and SP are at the site and ensuring immediate rescue measures and all required support. I pray for speedy recovery of the injured.”

Swati Maliwal Slams ‘Z-Plus’ Security for ‘Goon’ Bibhav , Calls Arvind Kejriwal ‘Ravan’

NEW DELHI: Questioning the ‘Z-plus’ security provided to Bibhav Kumar, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Friday levelled serious allegations against former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, claiming that she believes that he orchestrated the assault on her by his aide last year.

In an exclusive interview with media Maliwal expressed shock and dismay over the protection being afforded to Bibhav Kumar, a man she claims brutally assaulted her in Kejriwal’s official residence. According to Maliwal, Kejriwal’s protection of a “mere goon,” and his repeated pro-



tection of him only point to a deeper conspiracy.

She said, “It has been heard that the same goon, Bibhav Kumar, who mercilessly dragged me and beat me in Arvind Kejriwal’s drawing room, has been given Z-plus security by the Punjab government. After all these months, I believe from my heart that Arvind Kejriwal got me beaten up. If it wasn’t so, why would

Gold hits all-time high of Rs 82,900



NEW DELHI: Gold prices rose Rs 170 to hit a fresh record high of Rs 82,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a positive global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal had closed at Rs 82,730 per 10 grams on Wednesday. In about one year, the precious metal surged Rs 20,180 or 32.17 per cent to Rs 82,900 per 10 grams from Rs 62,720 per 10 grams on February 23, 2024. Extending the gains for the seventh straight session, gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by Rs 170 to hit an all-time high level of Rs 82,500 per 10 grams. The metal had finished at Rs 82,330 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Gold of 99.9 and 99.5 per cent purity grew Rs 2,320 each in the last seven trading sessions. However, silver prices declined Rs 500 to Rs 93,500 per kg from the previous close of Rs 94,000 per kg on Wednesday. Bullion traders attributed the rise in precious metal prices to heightened demand by jewellers and retailers, along with a strong trend in the international markets.

In futures trade on Thursday, gold contracts for February delivery rose Rs 19 or 0.02 per cent to trade at Rs 79,583 per 10 grams on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX).

‘Security withdrawn from Kejriwal after instructions from EC, Delhi Police’: Punjab DGP

NEW DELHI: After Delhi Chief Minister Atishi criticised the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) over the withdrawal of security for Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal, Punjab DGP Gaurav Yadav has said following instructions from the Election Commission of India (EC) and the Delhi Police, they have withdrawn components of the Punjab Police deployed for the security of former Chief Minister.

“From time to time, we get reports of threats to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and Arvind Kejriwal and we share them with the concerned agencies. Following the directions of the Delhi police and the Election Commission today, we with-



drew the component of the Punjab police in the security of Kejriwal ji,” Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav told the media on Thursday in Patiala.

Earlier on Thursday, CM Atishi also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah of “playing with

the life” of former CM Kejriwal.

Attacking the BJP further, CM Atishi questioned the Election Commission for being a “mute spectator” despite “repeated attacks” on the leader of a national party. “Shameful. On the instructions of Amit Shah ji, @DelhiPolice today forcibly

removed @ArvindKejriwal ji’s Punjab Police security. And on the same day, Kejriwal ji was attacked by BJP goons in Hari Nagar. Does Modi-Shah want to play with Kejriwal’s life? How long will the Election Commission remain a mute spectator? Why is there silence on the repeated attacks on a leader of a national party?” Atishi said in a post on X on Thursday. This comes after the Punjab Police withdrew its security for AAP chief Kejriwal. Atishi’s remarks came after AAP Chief Arvind Kejriwal earlier on Thursday, while taking to social media X, alleged that some people of the opposition candidate entered his public meeting in Hari Nagar and attacked his car.

Punjab Child Rights Commission Takes Serious Note of Stray Dog Bites on Children, Orders Sterilization of Stray Dogs

CHANDIGARH: Taking serious note of the rising incidents of stray dog attacks on children, Kanwardeep Singh, Chairman of the Punjab State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, has directed the Local Government and Rural Development Departments to conduct a census of stray dogs in all cities. He has also urged immediate sterilization to prevent further incidents.

The Chairman has stated that reports of stray dog attacks on children have been brought to the commission’s attention through media sources. Expressing deep concern over these incidents, the commission has taken suo-motu notice of



the matter. The Chairman highlighted that media reports have revealed alarming incidents, including the tragic deaths of two children within a week in Hasanpur village near Ludhiana due to stray dog attacks. Similar incidents have been reported from various parts of Punjab, including Mohali, Zirakpur, Amritsar, Machhiwara Sahib, and Nabha, raising serious

public concern.

The Chairman further informed that he has written to the Administrative Secretaries of the Punjab Local Government Department and the Rural Development & Panchayat Department, urging them to implement the provisions of the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023, as notified by the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Government of India, on March 10, 2023. He emphasized that timely implementation of these rules will help control the stray dog population and prevent further attacks on children.

SAD delegation meets Gurdwara Elections commissioner requests to extend registration of voters to March 31

CHANDIGARH: A Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) delegation led by Working President Balwinder Singh Bhundar, former President Sukhbir Singh Badal and SGPC president Harjinder Singh Dhami today met Gurdwara Elections Chief Commissioner Justice (ret'd) S S Saron and requested him to extend the process for registration of voters for the Shiromani Committee elections to March 31 besides weeding out all bogus votes.

While presenting the memorandum to the chief commissioner, Mr Sukhbir Badal informed Justice Saron that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government had directed booth level officers to register votes en mass from voter lists due to which thousands of non- Sikhs had been given the voting right for the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak (SGPC) elections. He said besides this genuine



votes were being deleted even as bogus votes were being added as part of the conspiracy to take over control of the SGPC by hook or by crook. Mr Badal urged the chief commissioner to issue directions for the review of all voter lists so that bogus votes could be weeded out. He also appealed for extending the time period for making new votes saying a large number of

eligible voters had still been left out from the election process. Mr Badal also gave the example of Himachal Pradesh where the voter list had also not been made till now.

Later while briefing news-men about the memorandum, Dr Daljit Singh Cheema said the SAD stood for registration of genuine voters but it was condemnable that the AAP

government was coming in the way of this exercise. He said the situation was such that thousand of non- Sikhs who had not applied to be registered as voters for the elections had been given this right. He said the delegation had also apprised the chief commissioner about the Sikh rehat maryada under which it was compulsory to suffix Singh or Kaur with Sikh names. "We have submitted voter lists to the Commission in which the names of voters are in contravention to the Sikh rehat maryada.

SAD Working president Balwinder Singh Bhundar said the delegation had also requested the Gurdwara Elections to direct the government to ensure rules governing registration of voters was adhered to strictly. The delegation included Hira Singh Gabhria, Amarjit Singh Chawla and Arshdeep Singh Kler.

SGPC opens Char Sahibzade MRI and CT Scan Center in Mumbai

MRI and CT scan facility will be provided to economically weaker sections for Rs 10: Advocate Dhami

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar



Char Sahibzade MRI and CT Scan Center was inaugurated today at Guru Nanak Khalsa College, Matunga in Mumbai, under the management of Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC).

Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht Sahib Giani Raghbir Singh, SGPC President Advocate Harjinder Singh Dhami, Jathedar of Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib Giani Sultan Singh, Jathedar of Takht Sri Harmandir Ji Patna Sahib Giani Baldev Singh, SGPC member Gurinder Singh Bawa, President of Takht Sri Patna Sahib Management Committee Jag-

jot Singh, OSD of SGPC Satbir Singh Dhami, Jasbir Singh Dham and other personalities were present at the inauguration ceremony.

SGPC President Harjinder Singh Dhami said that the representative body of the Sikh community, the SGPC, is doing great services in public welfare works. Under this, an MRI and CT Scan Center dedicated to the four Sahibzadas of Sri Guru Gobind Singh has been started in Mumbai today. He

said that at this center, MRI, CT Scan, X-ray test services will be provided to the people of economically weaker sections for just Rs 10. Apart from this, medicines will be provided at a rate 25% lower than the market rate from the pharmacy run under the name Guru Nanak Mission 1313 and medical blood tests will also be done at 50% cheaper rates. He said that these services will be provided to the common people at very affordable rates.

11454 samples of milk & milk products collected in 4 northern states, 3107 cases registered against adulterators



SATISH HANDA

People residing in four northern states Punjab, Haryana, Himachal and Chadigarh are fond of milk and milk products, where adulteration in such products has been observed. According to Health & Family Welfare Ministry report, during year 2023-24 a total number of 11,454 sampled of milk and milk products collected in above states 3107 samples which include 1653 cases in Punjab, 935 cases in Haryana, 351 cases in Himachal and 165 cases in Chandigarh were found adulterated witnessing increase of 733 cases in Punjab and 524 cases in Haryana as compared to the previous year. Information revealed that under Food Security Quality Rule 2006, as many as 2866 cases were also registered against firms allegedly involved in wrong branding of food products.

According to a doctor of Gastro-antrolgy Department of PGIMS Chandigarh, use of adulterated milk and its products is very harmful for the health causing medical disorders like kidney and liver problems, apart from the infections including the food poisoning, stomach pain, diarrhoea, intestine infection and typhoid. According to the report, out of 6041 samples of food products collected in Punjab during the year 2023-24, adulteration was not found in 929 samples, whereas civil cases were registered in 1577 and criminal cases in 76 cases.

Similarly, in Haryana out of a total number of 3485 collected samples, 856 samples were found correct, whereas 818 civil and 117 criminal cases were registered against the adulterators. In Himachal, out of a total number of 1617 samples as many as 396 samples were found correct, whereas 346 civil and 8 criminal cases were registered against the samples found adulterated. In the 311 samples collected from Chandigarh, 128 civil and 31 criminal cases were registered against the adulterators.

Two Punjab police officers hospitalized after burn injuries

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

Two Punjab Police officers have been hospitalized after they suffered burn injuries at the time of disposal of seized narcotics consignments.

Confirming the incident here today, Punjab police official Rajiv Pal said two officers who suffered burn injuries were Superintendent of Police Mr. Tarun Rattan and Deputy Superintendent of Police Mr. Sukhamrit Singh both were from Khanna district of Punjab. Adding further, he said that both the officers were here for the disposal of seized drug (narcotic) consignments in the furnace at Khanna Paper Manufacturing unit in Amritsar.

Telling about the incident he said that when they were throwing the drug consignments wrapped in the plastic bags in the furnace, all of sudden embers of fire bounced back and hit on the legs of police officers resulting in burn injuries on their lower legs.

Immediately, both the officers were rushed to a local private hospital where they were declared out of danger. DSP Sukhamrit Singh was discharged after first aid and another officer SP Mr. Tarun Rattan to be discharged tomorrow as per doctors, said.

Cyber Frauds: Haryana DGP directs banks to follow RBI guidelines

RAJU WILLIAM Panchkula

Even as Haryana Police is strengthening the system to control cybercrime, the state's Director General of Police (DGP) Shatruijeet Kapur has urged the banks and fintech companies to chip in for the purpose as fake bank accounts are used by cybercriminals to commit frauds.

Chairing a state level conference here, the DGP gave necessary directions to officials of banks and fintech companies to follow the new Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines, specifically keep an eye on fake bank accounts and take appropriate action.

In this conference, the banking sector and fintech companies were briefed in detail about the new RBI guidelines of November 2024 and January 2025 regarding cybercrime control.

RBI's Regional Director Vivek Srivastava, NPCI, and senior officials from around 50 banks and fintech companies across the country, including Google Pay, Paytm, Amazon Pay, and PhonePe, along with senior police officers attended the conference.

Though some banks are do-



ing a good job in controlling cybercrime, but to control it effectively, all stakeholders need to work together so that the defrauded amount can be frozen as soon as possible, he said.

In September 2023, only 7% of the amount of cyber fraud was held by Haryana Police, which increased to 27% in November 2024. The DGP emphasized the need to increase this percentage rate to 70% through joint efforts, which can be done after all the banks adopt the RBI's Mulehunter Artificial Intelligence software.

With the passage of time, the cases of cyber fraud have also increased. In 2023, cyber fraud of Rs 602 crore was committed in Haryana, while in 2024 this figure increased

to Rs 980 crore. This figure shows that there is an increase in cybercrime cases, which need to be curbed in time.

Since cyber fraud is done through digital means, it is very important to use the digital platform effectively to stop it. Apart from this, he also appealed to inform the helpline number 1930 immediately in case of cyber fraud.

DGP Kapur urged the bank officials to keep an eye on suspicious transactions in bank accounts and take appropriate action if they find any suspicious bank account transactions.

Interestingly, Inspector General of Police (Cyber) Shivas Kaviraj shared that while 72927 bank accounts were opened in December 2023, this number

increased to 128963 in November 2024, which is a serious issue. If every banker works under the new policies of RBI, then cybercrime can be controlled. Bank officials should take immediate action as soon as they receive a complaint of cybercrime.

RBI's Regional Director Vivek Srivastava explained in detail about the new RBI policy, the system and procedure in case of cyber fraud, and asked all banks to follow its guidelines. Along with this, he also cleared the doubts of the representatives from the banks.

In the conference, Parul, an officer from the RBI, shared detailed information about the AI-based Mulehunter software developed to identify fake bank accounts involved in cyber fraud. With this system, fake bank accounts can be identified with 90% accuracy.

Samarjith, a representative of NPCI, also shared information about the technical aspects being taken to control cybercrime through a PowerPoint presentation. During this, the process of searching for an automated response system for money trails on the NCRP portal and points related to stopping the amount defrauded in the banking channel were discussed.

Nayagaon front objects to old ESZ proposal by Punjab forests department

RAJU WILLIAM Chandigarh

Nayagaon Ghar Bachao Manch, a prominent Chandigarh-based public front has strongly objected to the latest move of Punjab's Forest and Wildlife Conservation Department in which an old proposed notification for an eco-sensitive area in the vicinity of Chandigarh has been sent for approval of the state cabinet.

The notification is meant for declaring an Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) up to 3 km. for Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary adjacent to the Nayagaon Municipal Committee, SAS Nagar (Mohali) district Mohali.

The move amounts to defying the Supreme Court orders as well as bypassing the high-level committee constituted by the



Punjab government, comprising three cabinet ministers Lal Chand Kataruchak, Dr Ravjot Singh and Hardeep Singh Mundian, alleged Vineet Joshi, chairman of the manch and senior BJP leader of Punjab.

He demanded that a joint

meeting of ministers and officials of the concerned departments should be convened immediately to take a decision per law on the objections raised before the high-level committee during the public hearing.

Harvinder Kalyan Appointed as Member of AIPOC Standing Committee

GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

Haryana Legislative Assembly Speaker, Harvinder Kalyan, has been nominated as a member of the Standing Committee of All India Presiding Officers' Conference (AIPOC), the highest body of presiding officers in the country. The committee, chaired ex-officio by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, includes Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh Narayan Singh as Vice-Chairman and a Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha as an ex-officio member. Additionally, seven legislative assembly speakers from various states are also part of the committee. The committee's secretary is Lok Sabha Secretary General Utpal Kumar Singh.



Kalyan's appointment fills the vacancy created by the resignation of Sikkim Legislative Assembly Speaker, Arun Kumar Upreti. He has been nominated to the committee starting January 17, 2024, as per a notification from the Lok

Sabha Secretariat.

Notably, Kalyan, who assumed office as Haryana Legislative Assembly Speaker on October 25, 2024, has been appointed to this prestigious committee within just three months of assuming office. He expressed his gratitude to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for the opportunity and pledged to fulfill the responsibilities expected of him as a member of the Standing Committee.

The Standing Committee is responsible for setting the dates, venue, and agenda for the annual conference of Presiding Officers. It also oversees the implementation of resolutions passed by AIPOC and addresses national and international constitutional and parliamentary matters.

Prostitution racket in hotel exposed: 4 Thai, one Nigerian woman & a hotel operator were arrested

Hisar leads in crime in Haryana

SATISH HANDA Hisar

A prostitution racket running in a hotel in Haryana's prominent Hisar district has been exposed. Prostitution was being conducted in The Redwood Hotel near a cinema in the Red Square Market in the town. The police have arrested the hotel operator Rajkumar and sent him to jail. Four Thai and one Nigerian women are also said to be involved in this sex racket. In this case, the prime accused hotel operator Rajkumar was arrested and produced before the court and after his police remand was sent to jail by the police. Police investigation revealed that the accused had met a woman in Delhi. After this, the accused made contacts there and brought four Thai and one Nigerian women to his hotel in Hisar. With their help, the accused started the business of prostitution in his hotel.

On January 10, the police received information regarding sex trade going on in the hotel, after which the police formed a team and raided the hotel. The police sent a fake customer to the hotel by giving him Rs 1000. When the bogus customer asked to provide a girl, the hotel staff agreed. The hotel was raided by a police team on the signal of the bogus customer. The operator and manager Rajkumar of Tibba Danasher was arrested by the police waiting outside the hotel.



During a raid in the hotel, boys and girls were found in objectionable condition during a search operation in the rooms. After which the police registered a case against Rajkumar. The police presented the accused in the court on Wednesday and sent him to jail.

According to police record, Hisar a prominent town of Haryana state is leading in large number of criminal cases, which include 209 cases of rape registered in Hisar division during previous year 2024. Police records revealed that Hisar police division registered 24 cases of dowry murder and 612 cases of domestic violence against women registered during the year 2024. Whereas, 260 out of 264 registered cases of molestation against women and 329 out of 350 registered cases of kidnapping were settled by the police. According to a police spokesperson reveals, in Hisar division, action has been taken in all 18 cases by registering cases against the complaints received from people belonging to scheduled caste and tribe. He said that Hisar police has registered eight cases of dowry deaths during the past year which included three cases registered in Hansi, five cases registered in Jind, five cases registered in Sirsa and four cases registered in Fatehabad.

R-Day parade to showcase valour & discipline of armed forces

NEW DELHI: The Republic Day parade will be a powerful showcase of the strength, valour and discipline of armed forces, an army official said on Thursday.

He noted that in preparation for the parade, a full dress rehearsal was organised at Kartavya Path.

“The 76th Republic Day Parade on 26 January will be a grand celebration of India’s rich heritage and its progress as a nation,” the official said.

He pointed out that the Army’s Bhisma Tank-T90, SARATH Infantry Carrying Vehicle BMP-II, NAMIS (Nag Missile System), CHETAK (All Terrain Vehicle), BRAHMOS, AGNIBAAAN and PINAKA missile system will be displayed at Kartavya Path on Republic Day. “The army will also showcase its KAPIDHWAJ (Specialist Mobility Vehicle), BAJRANG



(Light Specialist Vehicle), AIRAWAT (Vehicle Mounted Infantry Mortar System), NANDIGHOSH (Quick Reaction Force Vehicle (Heavy), TRIPURANTAK (Quick Reaction Force Vehicle (Medium), SANJAY (Battlefield Surveillance System (High Altitude Areas), SANJAY (Battlefield Surveillance System (Desert), LAGHU ANTARAL SETU

PRANALI 10M (Short Span Bridging System 10M) and Akash Weapon System,” the official said.

The official added that the Brigade of the Guards, Mechanised Infantry Regiment, Punjab Regiment, Rajput Regiment, JAT Regiment Contingent, Garhwal Rifles Regiment Contingent, Sikh Light Infantry and Bihar Regiment will also participate in the marching and band contingents of the Army during the parade.

He said that before the parade, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will lead the nation in paying tribute to the martyrs by laying a wreath at the National War Memorial.

“The parade will begin at 10:30 AM with the ‘National Salute’ and will continue for 90 minutes, reflecting the journey of India’s heritage and growth,” the official said.

He said that during the parade the army will display New Generation Equipment in Mechanised Column.

“Six marching contingents from the Army, 08 Mechanised Columns and Mounted Cavalry will participate,” he said.

He further added that there will be tableaux of Department of Military Affairs (DMA) and Veterans.

Union Govt to Step Up Procurement of Pulses from Farmers in Rabi Marketing Season



NEW DELHI: The Centre has prepared plans to go for increased buying of pulses in the current Rabi season to ensure that farmers get remunerative prices for their crops and step up cultivation of pulses to reduce dependence on imports.

A senior official confirmed that directions have been issued to Central nodal agencies National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited (NAFED) and National Cooperative Consumers’ Federation of India Limited (NCCF) to step up buying of Tur, Urad and Masur pulses during the Rabi marketing season through

the Price Support Scheme (PSS) and Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF).

The two agencies have pre-registered around 21 lakh farmers from large pulse producing states such as Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Karnataka on their portal for purchase of their crops.

Union Minister of Agriculture, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, had earlier assured the states that the Centre is committed to procure 100 per cent of Tur, Urad and Masur produced by farmers at the Minimum Support Price (MSP) to ensure crop diversification and achieve self-sufficiency in the production of pulses.

Chauhan said the e-Samridhi portal has been launched through NAFED and NCCF for registration of farmers and

the government is committed to procure these pulses at MSP from farmers registered on the portal.

He urged the state governments to encourage more and more farmers to register on this portal so that they can avail the facility of assured procurement.

During the 2023-24 Rabi season the Centre had procured 6.41 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of pulses at an MSP value of Rs 4,820 crore, which benefited 2.75 lakh farmers, according to official figures.

The procurement to support the farmers included 2.49 LMT of Masoor, 43,000 MT of Chana and 3.48 LMT of Moong.

Similarly, 12.19 LMT of oilseeds of Rs 6,900 crore of MSP value were procured from 5.29 lakh farmers.

During the start of the Kharif season, market prices of soybean were ruling much below the MSP, leading to great hardship to farmers.

Mamata Banerjee unhappy on RG Kar verdict, says ‘death penalty’ was sought



KOLKATA: As a special court in Kolkata on January 20 sentenced Sanjay Roy, convicted in the case of ghastly rape and murder of a junior women doctor of the state-run R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital within the hospital premises in August last year to life imprisonment, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee expressed her displeasure and dissatisfaction over the quantum of sentence. “We demanded ‘death penalty’ for the convict. I don’t know how... had the case been in our hands (state police or Kolkata Police), and not the ‘death penalty’, the Chief Minister refused to make any direct comment. “I do not want to say anything on these lines. All I can say is that recently in the three cases of similar rape and murder which were handled by the state police, the ‘death penalty’ was pronounced within a much shorter period, “the Chief Ministers said. BJP’s IT Cell chief and the party’s central observer for West Bengal Amit Malviya issued a statement that the verdict by the special court must be appealed and the Chief Minister should stop shielding the criminals. “Agencies also need to investigate the role of the then Kolkata Commissioner and the Chief Minister in the destruction of evidence. Justice must not only be done but must also be seen to be done, “Malviya’s statement read. Senior advocate of Calcutta High Court and CPI-M Rajya Sabha member, Bikas Ranjan Bhattacharya, however, said that in his opinion, life imprisonment for Roy is quite a strong punishment.

Congress leaders prepared to sacrifice lives for people, equality & democracy: Priyanka Gandhi

BELAGAVI: Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi on Tuesday claimed that her party leader is prepared to sacrifice lives for people, equality and democracy.

“We are ready to sacrifice our lives for the people, equality, and democracy. Our heritage is one

of sacrifice. We have never written apology letters from prison,” said Priyanka Gandhi while addressing the ‘Jai Babu, Jai Bhim, Jai Samvidhan’ convention in Belagavi on Tuesday, commemorating the centenary of Mahatma Gandhi taking over as the President of Congress.

She appealed to the public, “Do not allow anyone to cast aspersions on the Constitution. Take a pledge not to tolerate any insult to Ambedkar or the Constitution. Protect it with the same dedication as you derive protection from it.

Union Govt hikes MSP of raw Jute

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said that the Centre has taken a significant step to benefit farmers in the jute-producing sector, including in West Bengal, by approving a hike in the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of raw jute for the 2025-26 marketing season.

Taking to X, PM Modi said, “Our government has taken a big step in the interest of jute-producing farmer brothers and sisters across the country. An increase in the MSP of raw jute has been approved for the year 2025-26. This will benefit lakhs of farmers associated with this sector in many states of the country, including West Bengal.”

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by PM Modi, has fixed the MSP of raw jute (TD-3 grade) at Rs 5,650 per quintal for the 2025-26 season, ensuring a 66.8 per cent return over the all-India weighted average cost of production.

This represents an increase



of Rs 315 per quintal over the MSP for the 2024-25 marketing season. The increase aligns with the government’s principle of fixing MSP at least 1.5 times the weighted average cost of production, as announced in the 2018-19 Union Budget.

The MSP of raw jute has witnessed a significant rise under the current government, from Rs 2,400 per quintal in 2014-15 to Rs 5,650 per quintal for 2025-26, marking a 2.35 times increase of Rs 3,250 per quintal.

The livelihood of 40 lakh farm families is directly or indirectly dependent on the jute industry, with about 4 lakh workers employed directly in jute mills and trade. Last year, jute was procured from 1.7 lakh farmers, with 82 per cent of jute farmers based in West Bengal and the remaining from Assam and Bihar, contributing 9 per cent each to national production.

The Jute Corporation of India (JCI) will continue as the nodal agency for Price Support Operations, with the Central Government fully reimbursing any losses incurred during these

“Our government has taken a big step in the interest of jute-producing farmer brothers and sisters across the country. An increase in the MSP of raw jute has been approved for the year 2025-26”

operations, the statement noted. The official statement highlighted the difference in payments made to jute farmers over the years. Between 2014-15 and 2024-25, the amount stood at Rs 1,300 crore, compared to Rs 441 crore during the period of 2004-05 to 2013-14.

Defaming Punjab: Is it a scripted conspiracy?



JAG MOHAN THAKUR Interacting with a batch of participants from Indian Institute of Democratic Leadership (IIDL) at Vice-President’s enclave on Wednesday, the Vice-President, Shri Jagdeep Thakur stressed on the significance of expression and dialogue, stating, “We take pride, we are mother of democracy. We are all this democracy, but are we justifying that claim? If I look around... I’m a worried man. The political climate in the country is alarmingly worrisome. Political parties have no meaningful dialogue amongst themselves. They do not deliberate on issues of Nationalism, Security or Development. You will find a confrontational stance solidifying. Disturbance has been weaponized as a political strategy, and look at the kind of language used from all quarters—right, left and centre that not only belittles the Indian mind, but tarnishes the fair name of our civilization.”

“I am concerned as Vice-President of the country that the expression and dialogue, these twins, fundamental to blossoming of any democratic value, are fast receding in background. People are judgmental. They have a view. I am alone right, all others are wrong, without listening to the other point of view”, he added.

It shows that in the present scenario how pained the soul of the worthy Vice-President is!

We can’t say why the Vice-President has reacted so, but the statement of BJP leader Parvesh Verma style persons surely might have stained some effect on this version.

What Parvesh Verma Said ?

In an update on January 22, Wednesday, The Tribune, an English Daily quoted that

Verma had said in Delhi on Tuesday, “Thousands of vehicles with Punjab registration plates are roaming around here (Delhi). Who are in those vehicles? Preparations for celebrating January 26 (Republic Day) are going on here (in Delhi). What something big are they going to do here that could put our security system at risk.”

This reportedly quoted version of Parvesh Verma has boiled the political atmosphere and the political leaders have slammed Verma with red mouth.

In a release of Aam Adami Party, on January 21, responding to the statement of Verma, Punjab Chief Minister, Bhagwant Mann, quoted stating on his X account, “Delhi is the capital of India, and people from every state live here. Vehicles from every state move freely across the country, and there is no restriction on their movement. BJP’s statement questioning the presence of Punjab-registered vehicles in Delhi is not only appalling but also deeply insulting to Punjabis. They are insinuating that Punjabis are a threat to national security simply because of their state of origin. This is unacceptable and an insult to the patriotism of every Punjab.”

CM Mann further questioned the BJP’s priorities saying, “Home Minister Amit Shah cannot secure the country’s borders nor prevent illegal infiltrations of thousands of Bangladeshis and Rohingyas. Yet, he and his party leaders label Punjabis traveling to Delhi as a security threat. This reflects their dangerous mindset and complete disregard for Punjab’s immense contributions to the nation’s security and progress. BJP owes an apology to the Punjabi community for this baseless and shameful allegation.”

Aman Arora, Punjab AAP President reminding the BJP of Punjab’s legacy of sacrifice



and patriotism added, “It was Punjabis who made over 80% of the sacrifices for India’s freedom. It was Punjabis who stood at the forefront to protect the country, then and now. The Gurus of Punjab gave their lives for the nation’s unity and humanity. Even today, whenever danger looms over India’s borders, it is the Punjabi soldiers who stand tall and defend the country with their lives. For BJP leaders to question the loyalty of Punjabis is an insult to this legacy.”

AAP leader Sanjay Singh @ SanjayAzadSIn reacted to BJP leader Parvesh Verma’s ‘vehicles from Punjab entering Delhi’ remark.

“This statement is a huge disrespect to Punjabis. Delhi is the capital of the country... vehicles of every state are here. I think Amit Shah should seek apology from the Sikh community for this statement. People will teach them a lesson in the (Delhi) election by the power of their vote.”

Why Punjab is toed upon every time?

This is not the first time that such a derogatory statement against Punjabis has been issued by someone. During the 13-month long farmers’ agitation in 2020-21, some people, having a grudge against the farmers’ movement, even tagged the farmers as terrorists and Khalistanis. Why did the farmers stop entering Delhi? Why were they barricaded with nails? Not only that time, even today,

the Punjab farmers, agitating at Khanauri and Sambhu borders, are being barred by carrying on their ‘Delhi Chalo’ march? What threat does the BJP-led central government and its double engine Haryana government inhale from the Punjab farmers march to Delhi? Why are Punjab farmers not allowed to enter their own country’s capital to press upon their demands? Are the countrymen not even entitled to visit their capital? Why is the central government treating Punjab farmers as if they are not our natives, as alleged by the farmer leader, Sarvan Singh Pandher. UNI reporting on January 18, quoted Pandher, “Union government should not treat farmers as citizens of an enemy country.”

Pandher cited the news of ceasefire between Israel and Hamas as good news for human rights activists across the world and hoped that the Narendra Modi government will allow farmers to go to New Delhi and protest peacefully, which is their democratic right.

Not only on farmers’ issues, Punjab is targeted on other platforms also. As alleged by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Punjab, Himachal Pradesh Congress MLA Chandrashekhar Thakur has accused Punjab of being responsible for the drug problem in Himachal.

In a slamming statement, issued by AAP on January 22, the party has strongly condemned the statement of the Himachal leader stat-

ing it as irresponsible and baseless remarks.

The release quotes that in his controversial statement, Thakur claimed that drugs like “Chitta” are being supplied to Himachal from Punjab, alleging that Punjab has been actively working to destabilize Himachal’s youth. Thakur also made unfounded remarks about Punjab’s efforts to curb drug abuse and questioned the state’s initiatives like the establishment of a military academy.

Responding sharply to these allegations, Punjab AAP leader Neel Garg stated, “The statement by the Himachal Congress MLA is completely baseless, devoid of facts, and a deliberate attempt to malign Punjab’s reputation. It is ironic that the Congress, whose leadership has repeatedly failed to control the drug menace in its own state, is now pointing fingers at Punjab.”

Garg further exposed, “Himachal is home to illegal drug manufacturing hubs that have been repeatedly flagged by law enforcement agencies. Instead of addressing these hotspots and strengthening local policing, Congress leaders are busy playing the blame game.”

“Punjab’s youth have already suffered due to the drug menace, and it is shameful for Congress to further malign a state that has been battling this issue on multiple fronts,” Garg said.

Now the question arises -- Isn’t some foul smell being fuelled in the air with the intention of defaming Punjab on every nook and corner? Is there someone scripting this conspiracy to defame Punjab, the country’s food court, with some hidden agenda or motive? Everyone will have to think over this to counter negative agenda and stabilise harmony in the society.

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

Supreme Court grants ‘last chance’ to Centre to decide Balwant Singh Rajoana’s mercy plea

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on January 20 granted a “last chance” to the Union government to decide the mercy petition filed by Balwant Singh Rajoana, a death row convict in the 1995 assassination case of former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh and others.

A Special Bench headed by Justice B.R. Gavai agreed to defer the hearing till March 18 after Solicitor General (SG) Tushar Mehta, the second-highest law officer of the Centre, submitted that Rajoana’s mercy petition is under consideration of the Union Home Ministry and the matter would require more time, considering its “sensitive” nature.

“We are granting you time by way of a last chance. Either you take a decision or otherwise, we will hear it on merits,” added the Bench, also comprising Justices P.K. Mishra and K.V. Viswanathan, as it adjourned the hearing till March 18.

The apex court was hearing a writ petition filed by Rajoana challenging an over



12-year-long delay in deciding the mercy petition seeking commutation of his death penalty. In an earlier hearing, the Justice Gavai-led Special Bench had granted the Union government four weeks more to decide Balwant Singh Rajoana’s mercy petition. It had agreed to defer till January 20 the hearing after SG Mehta submitted that more inputs from agencies were needed, considering the “sensitivities” involved in the matter.

In an order dictated in open court on November 18, the top court had requested President Droupadi Murmu to consider within two weeks the mercy petition filed on behalf of Balwant Singh Rajoana.

President Murmu, PM Modi wish Meghalaya, Tripura, and Manipur on Statehood Day

NEW DELHI: President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday extended her greetings to the people of Meghalaya, Tripura, and Manipur on the occasion of their Statehood Day, wishing them a “peaceful and prosperous future.”

The three states attained full statehood on January 21, 1972, under the North Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act, 1971. In a message shared on X, President Murmu wrote, “Greetings to the residents of Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur on Statehood Day! The enterprising people of these states have made remarkable contributions to the development of the country. I convey my best wishes to the residents of these states for a peaceful and prosperous future. May their diverse culture, vibrant traditions and rich biodiversity continue to flourish!”

Prime Minister Narendra



Modi also took to social media to extend his wishes to the people of the three states, highlighting their contributions and potential for growth. In his messages, he wished for the continued progress and development of Meghalaya, Tripura, and Manipur. For Manipur, the Prime Minister wrote, “Greetings to the people of Manipur on their Statehood Day. We are incredibly proud of the role played by

the people of Manipur towards India’s development. My best wishes for the progress of Manipur.” Sharing his sentiments for Meghalaya, he posted, “On Meghalaya’s Statehood Day, I convey my best wishes to the people of the state. Meghalaya is admired for its natural beauty and the industrious nature of the people. Praying for the continuous development of the state in the times to come.”

Fire breaks out at Maha Kumbh Mela venue after ‘gas cylinder explosion’

A fire broke out at the Maha Kumbh Mela venue in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, reportedly following the explosion of two gas cylinders inside a tent. The fire quickly spread to several nearby tents, burning them to the ground. Thankfully, no injuries have been reported.

According to police, the fire started in Sector 19 of the Maha Kumbh site, where the cylinders exploded. Fire trucks, which were already stationed at the venue as part of safety measures for the large-scale event, rushed to the scene and managed to control the blaze.

As a precautionary measure, people living in surrounding tents were promptly evacuated to ensure their safety. The incident, though alarming, did not result in any casualties, thanks to the swift response from the authorities.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has sent senior officials to the site to assess the situation.



Meanwhile, the official X handle of the Maha Kumbh Mela expressed concern, stating, “Very sad. The fire incident at Maha Kumbh has shocked everyone. The administration is ensuring immediate relief and rescue operations. We pray to Maa Ganga for everyone’s safety.”

The incident has raised concerns but has been managed efficiently, with the fire under control and safety measures being promptly enacted. The situ-

ation continues to be monitored by local authorities to ensure the safety of all participants and attendees at the massive religious gathering.

Meanwhile, drones were used to assess the fire situation at the Maha Kumbh Mela venue. They provided real-time aerial views, helping authorities monitor the spread of the blaze and coordinate the firefighting efforts effectively, ensuring swift response and better management of the crisis.



Infra push alone won't sustain India's recovery

The Centre's reliance on public capital expenditure (capex) to drive post-pandemic economic recovery has been pivotal. Investments in infrastructure have bolstered demand for key sectors like cement and steel while generating jobs and creating a multiplier effect. However, in Budget 2024-25, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's announcement of Rs 11.11 lakh crore in capex, amounting to 3.4 per cent of GDP, faces hurdles. Spending curbs during the election-affected first quarter make this ambitious goal harder to achieve. While the government's push for infrastructure continues, private sector participation remains lukewarm. Data reveals a sequential decline in private investment plans in two out of three quarters this fiscal year. Despite a recovery in Q2, investment intentions weakened again in Q3. Projects Today reports a 1.4 per cent drop in domestic investments from Q2 and a 22 per cent decline in the value of new projects year-on-year, according to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. The private sector's hesitation stems from several factors: weak corporate earnings, global uncertainties, rising costs, and tepid demand in urban markets. These challenges undermine the risk appetite needed for factory expansions and new projects. A sustainable recovery demands that private capital take the lead. Public capex alone cannot sustain economic momentum while balancing fiscal consolidation and funding welfare programs. Mere exhortations and incentives targeting import substitution will not suffice. Policymakers must focus on fostering an environment conducive to private investments by boosting incomes, stimulating consumption, and expediting macro- and micro-level reforms. The absence of a promised economic policy framework for next-generation reforms is a glaring gap. India's growth story depends on synchronised public and private efforts. Creating viable demand, ensuring policy clarity, and easing project realisation must remain priorities for long-term economic stability and progress. Right approach can not only put India's economy back on track but also take it forward.

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SANJEEV JOSHIPURA & KAPIL SHARMA ON WHY US AND INDIA MUST WORK ON REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION



The United States-India relationship has evolved into an increasingly vital strategic partnership ever since the Clinton administration laid the foundation for a new direction in the 1990s. Today, broad bipartisan consensus supports building upon these ties even further, driven by converging interests in economic growth, regional security, and democratic values. As global dynamics shift, the importance of this relationship for the Trump administration becomes even more pronounced. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) agreement presents a tremendous opportunity for President Donald Trump to solidify this multilateral partnership while advancing both the strategic interests of the U.S. and India. By leading the effort to secure cooperation among the participating nations, the U.S. can help create a robust economic corridor to ensure free and open trade routes, with enhanced energy security and technological innovation, which, in turn, will also benefit American companies.

More conceptual now

Announced in 2023, IMEC represents an ambitious vision to forge an integrated network spanning three vital regions through advanced physical and digital infrastructure. The corridor must develop efficient transportation routes, including railways, shipping networks, and maritime connections, while also establishing cross-border electricity and hydrogen pipelines and digital communication cables. The end goals should be to enhance trade connectivity and reduce transportation costs, while diversifying global supply chains and promoting deeper economic integration among participating countries (India, the U.S., the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Italy, France, Germany, and the European Commission).



At the moment, it is reasonable to suggest that IMEC is more conceptual than concrete. Meeting its lofty goals requires extensive planning and cooperation. The Trump administration's leadership on this matter could enhance his legacy on the international stage. By supporting IMEC, the U.S. and India can establish a compelling alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), creating a more balanced global economic architecture that aligns with western democratic values and market principles.

IMEC was never destined to be a straightforward endeavour. Each participating nation faces a complex calculus of investment, political will and economic strategy. The corridor demands substantial infrastructure investments that directly compete with other national priorities. Moreover, private sector engagement introduces another layer of complexity. Corporate investors require clear pathways to return on investment; and without active engagement from the private sector, it is unlikely that the project could succeed.

Several countries, such as Greece and Italy, have shown substantial initiative on IMEC. France has distinguished itself by appointing a special envoy in Gérard Mestrallet, who is not a traditional diplomat. France's President

Emmanuel Macron has chosen a proven business leader from France to head this geopolitical and economic initiative, as he recognises its economic potential for France. The UAE and Saudi Arabia appreciate the role IMEC can play in advancing relationships with the West, and have spearheaded efforts for its implementation. Without regular, strategic engagement, there is a significant risk of creating an uneven economic landscape that could breed tension and political friction among participating nations. The corridor offers transformative economic opportunities not just for coastal regions and primary ports but also for inland areas that could become crucial nodes in this expansive trade network. Even within the region, we have already seen countries such as Iraq and Türkiye initiate trade agreements to compliment IMEC.

As an alternative to China's BRI

IMEC promises substantial economic advantages for India by dramatically reducing trade costs and transforming maritime logistics. This strategic network reduces vulnerability to potential disruptions such as those that might occur in the Suez Canal, but also creates compelling opportunities for increased foreign direct investment. By positioning itself as an alternative to the BRI, the corridor allows India to strengthen diplomatic ties with West Asian and European countries.

Better for the environment

There are implications to this deal that could impact the earth's climate health. India has emerged as a significant player in green hydrogen development, positioning itself as a potential global leader in this emerging clean

energy technology. The country has launched ambitious initiatives to develop green hydrogen as a strategic component of its energy transition and decarbonisation efforts.

India is collaborating with international partners such as Germany and Japan, and developing infrastructure for green hydrogen production, storage, and transportation. This will help reduce carbon emissions, decrease dependence on fossil fuel imports and create new job opportunities in emerging green technology sectors.

The Trump administration's role in facilitating the Abraham Accords proved instrumental in creating the diplomatic conditions that made IMEC possible. Former U.S. President Joe Biden has been a strong proponent of IMEC. Looking ahead, questions remain about IMEC's future under potential new U.S. leadership. One intriguing factor is Mr. Trump's warm personal relationship with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This rapport could prove significant to ongoing relations. Now that there is a peace agreement between Israel and Hamas, both leaders could facilitate the much needed (and required) meeting of IMEC participants to discuss the next steps.

This endeavour transcends traditional infrastructure development; it represents a fundamental reimagining of regional economic cooperation that requires unprecedented levels of coordination among diverse stakeholders. The U.S. and India, as key architects of the corridor, must work closely to shepherd this project to completion, recognising both its economic significance and environmental implications for all participating countries.

Sanjeev Joshipura is Executive Director of Indiaspora. Kapil Sharma is Principal at Kapstone Strategies and Non-Resident Fellow, Atlantic Council. Views are personal.



KUMAR RITWIK EXPLAINS HOW ACADEMIC EXPERTISE CAN ENHANCE INDIA'S JUDICIARY'S OUTPUT QUALITY



A critical aspect of a judicial system is the effective and timely delivery of justice. This can be achieved in the Indian judicial system only if the significant crisis of backlogs and vacancies is addressed urgently by both the judiciary and the government. Data as of January 1, 2025, show that 371 posts of the 1,122 posts sanctioned across the High Courts of the country remain vacant. The Allahabad High Court functions at only 50% of its total sanctioned strength. Naturally, this has a direct impact on the already alarming levels of backlog. As millions of people have to wait for a long time for justice, their faith in the judicial system is eroding. Although this has been a perennial issue, there are now about 60 lakh cases pending across all the High Courts, an astonishing number. To solve this, we need both immediate remedial steps and reformative measures.

While it is true that the pace of Collegium recommendations and the resulting appointments has picked up in the last couple of years, it has unfortunately not been able to match the number of retirements and ever-increasing number of filings. In turn, this has put enormous strain on the system, compelling judges to take on a higher caseload than feasible. This is likely to adversely impact both the time given to as well as the depth of engagement with a particular case. Therefore, a well-staffed judiciary functioning at near-total sanctioned strength is the need of the hour.

A game changer

In that context, Article 124(3)(c) and Article 217(2)(c), now repealed, of the Constitution become increasingly significant.



These provisions allow for the appointment of individuals who, in the opinion of the President (read Collegium), are 'distinguished jurists', as judges of the Supreme Court and the High Courts. Unfortunately, Article 124(3)(c) remains unutilised and Article 217(2)(c) has been repealed without any stated reason. In other words, no jurist has been found to be distinguished enough to be appointed to these posts till date. Although it is a routine practice in jurisdictions across the globe to appoint jurists as judges, appointments to the High Courts and the Supreme Court in India have always been either from the Bar (practising advocates) or the judicial services.

At a time when the issue of vacancies and backlogs is stifling the system, introducing and invoking the provision to appoint 'distinguished jurists' to High Courts of the country can turn out to be a game changer. In fact, a similar idea was floated by Shri Shibban Lal Saxena but negated by the Constituent Assembly on June 7, 1949, without any meaningful deliberation.

Involving the world of academia directly into the mainstream Indian judicial system can bring both immense benefits and challenges. A vast pool of specialised knowledge, research-based critical thinking, and expertise can provide unique insights and add a hitherto missing dimension to the judiciary's understanding of complex socioeconomic and socio-legal cases. At the same time, the lack of courtroom experience, procedural knowledge, understanding of limits to exercising judicial power, and a certain degree of resistance among the status quoists within the institution are challenges that will need to be overcome as well.

An important message

A number of countries (such as the United States, Poland, Myanmar, Kenya, Thailand, Spain and Italy) that allow jurists or professors of law to be appointed to posts equivalent to that of a judge in the High Courts and/or the Supreme Court of India have vastly benefited from this practice. In India, where academia has expressed its legitimate concerns and grievances of not having been adequately nurtured or supported, re-introducing Article 217(2)(c) and appointing jurists or academics as judges of the High Courts would send across an important message. At the same time, with adequate training of procedural know-how and courtroom experience, the presence of our sharpest academic minds on the Bench would en-

sure that the judicial discourse is enriched and that judicial decision-making is further strengthened.

Granting an opportunity to distinguished academics to effectively engage with the complex problems of the contemporary legal world would lend a fresh perspective to the cause of justice. Such appointees would naturally serve as a bridge between academia and practice. This would lead to a synergistic interaction of legal research with the more nuanced and practical aspects of delivering justice.

Therefore, the need of the hour is to tide over the current crisis of increasing backlogs, and bridge the widening gap between the actual strength and the sanctioned strength of courts. First, the government must comply with the Collegium's recommendations within a strict time frame. Second, deploying innovating solutions, such as re-introducing and invoking Article 217(2)(c) to appoint distinguished jurists to High Courts, would help fill existing vacancies. Tapping into the academic world as a valuable resource sector would help ensure that the Indian judicial system remains dynamic, robust, and diverse, grounded in practical realities as well as an in-depth understanding of its underlying constitutional principles. By drawing upon the expertise of our sharpest academic minds, India will be able to address the existing concerns and enhance the quality of the judiciary's output. Such a step could prove to be transformative for the Indian judiciary in the years to come.

Kumar Ritwik is a Delhi-based Advocate, currently serving as a Law Clerk in the Supreme Court of India. Views are personal.

BOOKS: REVIEW

Memoir revisits 2002; recounts personal pain, collective memory

Zara Chowdhary's memoir, *The Lucky Ones*, is a poignant and courageous exploration of survival, memory, and healing. At the tender age of 16, Chowdhary witnessed the devastating communal riots that engulfed Gujarat in 2002. The violence, sparked by a fire on a train in Godhra that killed over 50 Hindu kar sevaks, unleashed unprecedented turmoil, leaving over 2,000 Muslims dead (a figure contested by the government) and tens of thousands displaced. In this deeply personal narrative, Chowdhary revisits the tragedy, recounting its profound impact on her family and her identity as a Muslim in India. Unlike investigative accounts such as Revati Laul's *The Anatomy of Hate* or Manoj Mitta's *The Fiction of Fact-Finding*, which delve

into the systemic and socio-political dimensions of the riots, *The Lucky Ones* offers an intimate lens. Chowdhary's voice is unflinching yet devoid of sentimentality, weaving her personal trauma with the larger sociopolitical fabric of India. She recalls the harrowing initial days of curfews, fear, and violence, juxtaposing them with her mundane adolescent concerns, like the postponement of her school-leaving exams. Yet, this microcosmic perspective expands to examine the subcontinent's brutal history, including the rise of right-wing ideologies and their implications for democracy. Central to her narrative is the horrifying account of Bilkis Bano, a survivor of gang rape during the riots, and the Gulbarg Society massacre that claimed the life of Congress leader Ehsan Jafri. Chowdhary ensures these

atrocities are not forgotten, meticulously documenting the desecration of religious sites, the destruction of homes, and the human cost of hatred. Amidst this chaos, Chowdhary's family, residing in Jasmine Apartments in Ahmedabad, finds an unexpected ally in their elderly neighbour, Mrs. Pant. This act of solidarity underscores the enduring potential for humanity even in times of division. The memoir also reveals cracks within her family—strained relationships and unresolved tensions that mirror the fractured society outside their home. Chowdhary's ability to connect personal grief with collective trauma is one of the book's greatest strengths. She writes about Ahmedabad's history of communal strife, contextualising the 2002 riots within a broader narrative of recurring violence. Yet,



The Lucky Ones
By Zara Chowdhary;
Context/Westland Books;
324 pages; Rs 699.

she also celebrates moments of harmony, such as the family's peaceful years in Baroda. These reflections lend the memoir a balance that avoids reducing Gujarat's history to a single, tragic event. One of the most evocative sections of the book is Chowdhary's reflection on her love for Sanskrit. Her three-year study of the language, typically associated with upper-caste Hindus, offers a unique perspective. She describes Sanskrit as both structured and fluid, a language that carries the weight of millennia. This academic passion becomes a metaphor for her ability to find beauty and meaning even amidst loss. Another poignant thread in the memoir is how trauma

reshapes identity. Chowdhary delves into the feeling of "unbelonging" within her own country, a sentiment amplified by the targeted violence against Muslims. Yet, instead of being consumed by despair, she channels this pain into resilience and inquiry. Her reflections transcend the personal, addressing universal questions about the fragility of coexistence and the strength required to rebuild fractured lives. Ultimately, *The Lucky Ones* is a story of survival told without bitterness but with a profound sense of purpose. Chowdhary's narrative is a call to remember, not just to recount horrors but to understand their origins and consequences. By documenting her journey and connecting it to broader historical and political currents, she offers a deeply human perspective on one of India's darkest chapters. This memoir is not just a recounting of the past but a reflection on the future, urging society to learn, heal, and ensure such tragedies are never repeated.



Centre issues notice to Apple, Ola, Uber over software performance, differential pricing

NEW DELHI: The Consumer Protection Authority (CPA) has issued notices to tech giant Apple Inc and cab aggregators Ola and Uber following consumer complaints about software performance and pricing disparities, Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi said on Thursday.

Apple has been asked to respond to technical issues reported by iPhone users after a recent software update.

“The department, after examining consumer grievances, has issued a notice to Apple through the CCPA, seeking a response on the matter,” Joshi said in a social media post.

A survey by LocalCircles revealed that 60 per cent of iPhone users experienced service problems, with call failures being the most significant issue.



Nearly 90 per cent of surveyed iPhone users attributed their difficulties directly to an iOS update, with no blame placed on WiFi or mobile networks.

Apple has been releasing updates, including iOS 18.0.1 in October to address screen and camera freezing issues, and the latest 18.2.1 update

used, Department of Consumer Affairs through the CCPA has issued notices to major cab aggregators #Ola and #Uber, seeking their responses,” Joshi said in a social media post.

Joshi had earlier termed this practice a “prima facie unfair trade practice” and a “blatant disregard” for consumer rights.

The minister stressed the government’s “zero tolerance for consumer exploitation” and directed the CCPA to conduct a thorough investigation into the allegations.

Comments from Apple, Ola, and Uber could not be received at the time of filing this report. The companies have not yet responded to the notices issued by the CCPA.

The notices mark a significant step in protecting consumer interests in the rapidly evolving tech market.

WEF Davos Summit: Maharashtra Govt Signs MoU with RIL for Rs 3.05 Lakh Cr Investment

MUMBAI: The Maharashtra government and Reliance Industries on Wednesday at the slide lines of the World Economic Forum summit at Davos signed a MoU with an investment of Rs 3,05,000 crore with over 3,00,000 employment opportunities across diverse sectors, including new energy, retail, hospitality, and high-tech manufacturing.

With this, is the state government has so far inked 32 MoUs with investment proposals worth Rs 9,30,457 crore.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis in his post on X said, “Massive step for Maharashtra! MoU worth Rs 3,05,000 crore with Reliance Industries, will create about 3,00,000 job opportunities. Thank you so much, Shri Anant Ambani and Reliance Industries!” He further added that it will boost Maharashtra’s growth.



The chief minister’s office said, “Anant Ambani lauds PM Shri Narendra Modi for his transformative efforts in building a Viksit Bharat, with RIL committed to contributing to a New India. He also thanks CM Shri Devendra Fadnavis for his leadership in positioning Maharashtra as the gateway to India’s \$5 trillion economy and, soon to be first trillion-dollar economy.”

Earlier, JSW signed a MoU with an investment of Rs 3 lakh crore for Maharashtra’s Green Transformation and Tata Group will also make an investment of Rs 30,000 crore in multiple sectors.

Adani Energy Solutions Wins Its Largest-Ever Rs 25,000 Cr Bhadla-Fatehpur HVDC Project



AHMEDABAD: Adani Energy Solutions Ltd (AESL) on Tuesday said it has won a Rs 25,000 crore Bhadla (Rajasthan)-Fatehpur (Uttar Pradesh) high voltage direct current (HVDC) order, its largest-ever order win to date.

his prestigious win takes AESL’s under-execution order book to Rs 54,761 crore and transmission network to 25,778 circuit kilometres (ckm) and 84,186 megavolt-amperes (MVA) transformation capacity.

“By enabling efficient evacuation of renewable energy from some of the most inhospitable regions of the country and connecting them to the national grid, AESL is playing its role in India’s decarbonisation journey,” said Kandarp Patel, CEO, AESL.

“We will be deploying the latest technology and practices to deliver the project in time and with minimal environmental impact,” Patel added.

AESL, India’s largest private transmission and distribution company and part of the globally diversified Adani portfolio, won the project under the tariff-based competitive bidding (TBCB) mechanism and REC Power Development & Consultancy Ltd (RECPDCL) was the bid process coordinator.

The project SPV was formally transferred to AESL on January 20, 2025.

Called “Transmission system for evacuation of power from REZ in Rajasthan (20 GW) under Phase-III Part I”, the project includes the establishment of a 6,000 MW HVDC system between Bhadla to Fatehpur (2,400 ckm) along with 7,500 MVA transmission capacity.

According to the company, the project will help evacuate 6 GW of renewable energy from various REZs in Rajasthan beyond Bhadla-III to the demand centres in North India and the national grid. AESL will deliver the project in 4.5 years.

AESL is the only player in the private sector to own an HVDC asset, which is preferred for long-distance power transmission.

Deriv recognised as “Most Innovative Broker - MEA 2025”



FW DESK
Dubai (UAE)

Deriv has proudly been named the “Most Innovative Broker - MEA 2025” at this year’s Dubai iFXEXPO. This prestigious award highlights the company’s commitment to groundbreaking innovation, building trust, and providing exceptional service to both clients and partners. With 25 years of industry leadership, Deriv has made trading more accessible worldwide by offering a wide array of platforms, products, and advanced solutions.

Deriv’s focus on innovation has driven the integration of AI across its operations, enhancing efficiency and user experiences. To streamline workflows and empower its teams, Deriv has embraced low-code platforms. These tools have reduced development times, enabling quicker iterations and improvements across projects like website updates and user onboarding. By addressing the challenges of traditional code-heavy systems, this strategy has fuelled innovation across the organisation.

This accolade coincides with a transformative phase in Deriv’s journey as it pivots towards becoming an AI-first company. “In 2025, our focus will be on integrating AI into the DNA of every department and empowering our teams to build their capabilities,” said Rakshit Choudhary, Co-CEO of Deriv. “We plan to use AI to automate tasks, leverage data analysis, streamline processes, and scale smarter.”

Deriv’s vision for artificial intelligence spans multiple facets of its operations, including predictive support to address client queries, enhanced compliance protocols, and optimised recruitment processes. Beyond its internal advancements, Deriv plans to use AI to innovate and deploy new product offerings.

AI to Help SEBI Process 1,000 IPOs in Next 2 Years: Madhabi Puri Buch



MUMBAI: With the possibility of handling up to 1,000 initial public offerings (IPOs) in the next two years, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is adopting artificial intelligence (AI) to make the process of reviewing IPO documents in a faster and more efficient way, its Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the Association of Investment Bankers of India’s (AIBI) annual convention here, Buch said SEBI is working on a standardised IPO template to simplify the filing process for companies and their merchant bankers.

The new template would follow a “fill-in-the-blanks” format. Any information that doesn’t fit the standard format will be flagged separately for closer review, she told the gathering.

This system aims to divide

IPO documents into two parts: standard information and exceptional details.

By focusing attention on sections that deviate from the template, SEBI hopes to make it easier for its officers to identify and address irregularities. The initiative is expected to save time for both companies and regulators. “With the possibility of handling up to 1,000

IPOs in the next two years, this step will significantly reduce the workload for everyone involved,” Buch noted.

The AI tools will help in three key ways — document review, online search and content check.

SEBI’s exception reporting mechanism will further improve efficiency. By separating standard and non-standard

sections, officers can prioritise their scrutiny where it is most needed, streamlining the review process.

“This approach will not only save time but also enhance the overall efficiency of IPO document preparation and review,” Buch added.

Mahavir Lunawat, Chairman, AIBI, said that the initiatives launched at this year’s convention mark a significant step toward building a robust and future-ready merchant banking ecosystem.

“New initiatives aim to address critical gaps, such as the growing need for skilled professionals and the need for standardising practices. These efforts underscore AIBI’s commitment to fostering innovation, transparency, and cross-border collaboration to support the nation’s ambitious economic growth agenda,” Lunawat added.

Big blow to factories manufacturing single-use plastic in Haryana, will have to pay heavy fine

SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Companies manufacturing single-use plastic in Haryana may face a major setback in case of violation of rules. Haryana state government has strictly warned that those factories violating directions may be closed and the shopkeepers’ licenses can be cancelled. According to a government spokesperson, single-use plastic is strictly banned in Haryana, despite this it is being used indiscriminately and now onward those violating directions will have to suffer heavy fines, to stop this, the state government has shown strictness. He warned that street vendors and shopkeepers will have to pay Rs 10 thousand and a fine of Rs 5,000 per tonne will be imposed for the first time violation by the industries as well as suppliers.

Commissioner and Secretary of Urban Local Bodies Department Vikas Gupta has issued orders in this regard. Not only this, CEOs of Zila Parishads, Social Education and Panchayat Officers and XENs, SDOs and JEs of Panchayati Raj Department have also been given the authority to



take action against the accused. Taking a tough stand on this the state government has now made preparations to levy heavy fines on the producers and manufacturers of single use plastic as well as municipal corporations, councils, municipalities and panchayats by fixing accountability. While local bodies may have to pay up to Rs 1000 crore annually as environmental compensation according to the population, factories making single-use plastic will have to pay a fine of up to Rs 500 crore. Gram Panchayats will also have to pay up to Rs 50,000 as environmental compensation. According to orders, every local body will be responsible for developing or setting up infrastructure for

segregation, collection, storage, transportation, processing and disposal of plastic either by itself or through an agency. Hefty fines will also be levied on those found burning plastic waste in the open.

Secretary of Urban Local Bodies Department Vikas Gupta said, factories were directed not to manufacture carry bags made of unused or recycled plastic with a thickness of less than 75 microns till September 30, 2021 and 120 microns after December 31, 2022. Non-woven plastic carry bags shall not be less than 60 grams per square metre, but orders are being violated and now strict action will be taken on violation of orders.

Maha Kumbh a Blessing for MSMEs : Sectors like transport, FMCG & hotels to get boost says ASSOCHAM



NEW DELHI: Maha Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj, billed as world’s largest congregations, would be one of the major drivers of consumption demand especially in sectors of specific interest to micro, small and medium enterprises, apex chamber ASSOCHAM has said.

The six-week Mela expected to be visited by 400 million devotees is already witnessing a critical impact not only on economy of Uttar Pradesh but also across different states.

“While clear data is expected to be shared by state and central organizations at the conclusion of the grand spectacle, a visible impact is seen in sectors including transportation - road, rail and air, hotels, restaurants, roadside eateries, construction and maintenance of civic infrastructure amongst others in terms of brisk demand,” ASSOCHAM Secretary General Manish Singhal said.

He said such gatherings create catalysts also in sectors like Fast Moving Consumer Goods, footwear, winter wear, automobile and telecom. Increased transactions take place across different financial products particularly payment gateways, micro finance in a spiraling way. For instance, devotees may be extended micro finance while eateries would be able to circulate funding fast creating a unique economic opportunity.

Lakhs of additional man hours will be utilised amongst cab drivers, hotel staff, construction and maintenance workers, utility and security services, the ASSOCHAM Secretary General said. “We thank and compliment Prime Minister Narendra Modi and UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for providing inspirational leadership and support for organising such a grand event, leveraging technologies and organizational skills”. It would go down as a case study of its kind.

Union Minister lauds PHDCCI for its ideas to improve MSMEs lending

RAJU WILLIAM
New Delhi

Union Minister of State (MoS) Finance Pankaj Chaudhary has appreciated PHDCCI suggestions like collateral free loan to MSME up to 5 crore, help desk for people seeking loans and taxing registered MSMEs at a flat 25% rate.

The Minister was addressing the Conference on MSME Financing: A Key Driver for Viksit Bharat 2047 & PHDCCI’s 1st MSME Banking & NBFC Excellence Sammaan – 2025 held at PHD House, New Delhi held Monday, January 20, 2025.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has prioritized infrastructure development, increasing spending from Rs 5 lakh crore to Rs 11.11 lakh crore, he said emphasizing the need for growth in every sector of the economy, aligning with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 of the PM.

Under the Mudra Yojana, more than 31 lakh loans have been disbursed, with over 60% of the beneficiaries being women. Furthermore, 55 crore Jan Dhan accounts have been opened, of which 55% belong to women, he added.

He congratulated the PHDCCI on completing 120 years and acknowledged its role in providing a shared platform to strengthen the backbone of our economy, which are MSMEs.

To make industries more efficient, the government has abolished 1,500 unnecessary laws and initiated steps to promote MSMEs. Over the last 10 years, there has been a notice-



able change in the government’s approach toward industries; the cost and time for businesses have reduced significantly.

Concluding his address the Minister emphasized that achieving the goal of making India a developed nation by 2047 will require a significant contribution from the MSME sector.

On the occasion, Dr. Ishita Ganguli Tripathy, Additional Development Commissioner, Ministry of MSME, Government of India informed that 5.86 crore enterprises have registered on the Udyam portal till now which drives employment of 24.8 crore persons.

The formalised identity enables enterprise to avail the benefits focusing is on upward mobility. In 2022, a notification was brought out which entailed that previous category and benefits could continue after 3 years. More than 5 lakh enterprises have availed this and grown.

She informed that under the Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSEs, women-owned enterprises have seen a 90% increase in credit guarantees. From 2000 to December 31, 2024, approximately 1.01 crore guarantees have been approved. Under

the Self-Reliant India Fund, equity funding support has been provided to MSMEs. A total of 59 Daughter Funds have been empanelled; 533 MSMEs have been assisted; approximately Rs 9,999 crore have been invested in MSMEs. The average investment has been around Rs 19 crore.

Shachindra Nath, Chair, BFSI Committee, PHDCCI & Founder and Managing Director, UGRO Capital discussed that unsecured loans are critical for MSMEs in India, as many of these businesses, particularly first-generation enterprises, lack access to adequate collateral.

Dr. Ranjeet Mehta, CEO & Secretary General, PHDCCI deliberated that there were three critical challenges for MSMEs - financing, market access, and access to technology. However, when the financial challenge is resolved to a great extent, the others can be easily sorted out. Another Key issue he addressed was the scheme of collateral free loan to MSME up to 5 crore but in practical most of banks ask for collateral security for giving loan, here PHDCCI suggest if there can be a help desk for people seeking loans it can be sorted out.



RBI steps to boost liquidity in banking system are smart, pragmatic : SBI

MUMBAI: More changes in the RBI Liquidity Management Framework are likely after the daily dynamic VRR has been taken as the first step to manage liquidity in the banking system, according to an SBI research report.

“Such changes and frontloading next round of moves are smart and pragmatic by the RBI...A delicate mix of temporary and permanent liquidity injection and withdrawal remains a work in progress,” the report states.

As a corollary to intervention in the forex markets juxtaposed with volatile movements in government cash balances, liquidity has been shrinking in the banking system and alarmingly blowing past the comfort zone

This persistent liquidity conundrum, along with the anticipation of a rally in DXY has prompted the regulator to revert to daily dynamic VRR (variable



rate repo) to effectively manage the liquidity along the revised LMF (Liquidity Management Framework) in place from February 2020.

Given that such daily VRR transactions are akin to transient liquidity injections, repo transactions should ideally compensate for changes in government cash balances, but this is somehow also substituting for permanent durable liquidity shortfall arising out of currency

leakage and liquidity impact of RBI forex intervention, the report observes.

“To negate this, in a smart move RBI has started to sell in Spot and NDF forwards and then doing short-term buy-sell swaps to replace the maturing forward sale position and also to counter the durable liquidity drain from spot intervention. We also think RBI may announce longer term (2-3 years) buy sell swaps to

shore up reserves and release liquidity,” according to the SBI report.

In principle, liquidity management per se still has some operational challenges like improving the market micro-structure, a proper indicator of liquidity tightness in the system and most importantly maintaining a delicate balance between an effective mix of durable and transient liquidity injection or withdrawal, the report points out.

According to the report, the system liquidity situation remained tight and turned to injection mode since 16 December 2024, due to many reasons like tax outflows, GST payment, forex market intervention and volatility in capital flows. Further with the implementation of Just in Time (JIT), the system liquidity has been impacted through movements in government cash balances.

Kotak Mahindra Bank Acquires Standard Chartered India’s Personal Loan Biz For Rs 3,330 Cr



MUMBAI: Kotak Mahindra Bank on Thursday said it has completed the acquisition of the personal loan portfolio of Standard Chartered India for Rs 3,330 crore.

The acquisition, which received the necessary regulatory approvals, will help Kotak strengthen its position in the retail credit market, Kotak Mahindra Bank said in an exchange filing. The bank said the high-quality loan portfolio will enhance its presence in the affluent customer segment and further solidify its leadership in

retail lending.

According to the exchange filing, “we refer to our intimations dated October 18, 2024 and November 27, 2024 in relation to the proposed acquisition by the Bank of the Personal Loan book of Standard Chartered Bank, India, as stated therein.”

“In this regard, we now wish to inform you that, after having received the necessary regulatory approvals and upon fulfillment of the relevant conditions precedent, the Bank has, today, i.e., on January 23, 2025, completed the aforesaid acquisition,”

Budget 2025 to Boost Startups & MSMEs with Expanded Financial Support



NEW DELHI: India's upcoming Union Budget for 2025-26 is set to strengthen financial support for startups and small businesses, which form a crucial backbone of the national economy contributing approximately one-third of the country's economic output. According to a recent Mint report, the government plans to tackle key financial challenges faced by these sectors, particularly in areas of working capital accessibility, trade finance, and growth funding under favorable terms. The government's initiative is expected to expand support through existing frameworks overseen by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) and the Ministry of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME).

Indian stock market opens higher, IT sector shows promise post Q3 earnings



MUMBAI: Indian benchmark indices opened higher on Friday, extending gains to day three this week, as Nifty Bank, auto, FMCG and IT sectors led the morning trade.

In early trade, Nifty rose 0.31 per cent to 23, 277, while the 30-stock Sensex advanced 0.31 per cent to 76, 765. Seven out of the 12 sectors on the NSE advanced, with Nifty Metal and Nifty Oil and Gas gaining the most.

India’s Digital Economy to Drive 20 pc Of GDP By 2030: MeitY Report

NEW DELHI: India's digital economy is set to experience exponential growth, projected to contribute nearly one-fifth of the country's national income by 2029-2030, according to a report released by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) on January 22.

The comprehensive study, titled 'Estimation and Measurement of India's Digital Economy', represents the first systematic attempt to quantify the value and employment generated by the nation's digital sector. It forecasts a transformative trajectory that will see the digital economy surpassing both agriculture and manufacturing in less than six years.



As of 2022-23, the digital economy already contributes 11.74 percent of India's national income, translating to Rs 28.94 trillion in Gross Value Added and Rs 31.64 trillion in GDP. The report projects this share to increase to 13.42 percent by 2024-25, with the

largest contribution coming from information and communication services, telecommunications, and electronics manufacturing.

The sector's growth is expected to be driven primarily by digital intermediaries and platforms, with increasing

digital diffusion and broader economic digitalisation.

Currently, big tech players, digital platforms, and intermediaries account for nearly 2 percent of the national Gross Value Added, while industries like banking, financial services, insurance, trade, and education contribute an additional 2 percent.

Employment data reveals that the digital economy employed 14.67 million workers in 2022-23, representing 2.55 percent of India's total workforce.

This stands in stark contrast to agriculture, which remains the largest employer with 263.6 million workers, and manufacturing, which employs 65.6 million workers.

HDFC Bank Clocks 2.2 Pc Net Profit Growth in Q3, Gross NPA Deteriorates

MUMBAI: India's largest private lender HDFC Bank on Wednesday reported a 2.2 per cent rise in its net profit for Q3 this fiscal, as its gross non-performing assets (NPA) ratio rose during the quarter.

For the December quarter, the bank's profit stood at Rs 16,736 crore, compared to Rs 16,373 crore in the same period last year.

Net interest income, or the bank's core income, rose nearly 8 per cent (year-on-year) to Rs 30,650 crore. Core net interest margin stood at 3.43 per cent for the bank and 3.62 per cent on an interest-earning asset basis.

In the September quarter, the respective figures were at 3.46 per cent and 3.65 per cent.

The bank also saw an increase in interest earned, which grew by 7.6 per cent. It earned Rs 76,007 crore in Q3 FY25, up from Rs 70,583 crore in the same quarter last year.

At the same time, HDFC Bank paid Rs 45,354 crore in interest for the quarter, which was a 7.7 per cent rise from Rs 42,111 crore in Q3 FY24.

However, the private sector



bank's asset quality deteriorated, with the gross NPA ratio rising to 1.42 per cent as of December, compared to 1.36 per cent in the previous quarter. The net NPA ratio rose to 0.46 per cent from 0.41 per cent in the prior quarter.

According to the filing, earnings per share for the quarter ended December 31, 2024 was Rs 23.1 and book value per share as of December 31, 2024 was Rs 656.6.

HDFC Bank's operating expenses stood at Rs 17,110 crores, an increase of 7.2 per cent from Rs 15,960 crores in the same period last year.

The company's cost-to-income ratio was 40.6 per cent in Q3. The average deposits also increased in the same quarter by 15.9 per cent at Rs 24,52,800 crore from Rs 21,17,100 crore for the same period last year.

Investments by Indian Firms Surge 39 Pc to Rs 32 Lakh Cr in April-Dec 2024: SBI Report

MUMBAI: Indian companies have announced investments of over Rs 32 lakh crore during the first nine months (April-December) of the current financial year, which represents a 39 per cent jump compared to the corresponding figure of Rs 23 lakh crore for the same period of the previous financial year, according to a State Bank of India (SBI) report.

A strong pipeline of Rs 13.63 lakh crore in work-in-progress capital, as of March 2024, reflects a strong growth momentum in the coming years, the report states.

Government investment reached 4.1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in FY23, the highest since FY12 while private sector investment



as a share of GDP touched 11.9 per cent, which is the highest since FY16. Preliminary FY24 data, expected by the end of February, is likely to show private investment nearing 12.5 per cent of GDP.

Meanwhile, external commercial borrowings (ECBs) remain a key funding source for Indian companies, with outstanding ECBs at \$190.4

billion as of September 2024, a slight increase from the previous quarters.

Non-rupee and non-FDI components account for \$155 billion, offering stability due to lower volatility from hedging. Private companies hold 63 per cent (\$97.58 billion) of these borrowings, with 74 per cent of their exposure hedged.

Private companies held around 63 per cent (\$97.58 billion) of these borrowings, while public sector companies accounted for the remaining 37 per cent (\$55.5 billion).

Private firms demonstrated stronger hedging practices, covering about 74 per cent of their exposure. They brought the overall hedging ratio for non-rupee-non-FDI ECBs to approximately 68 per cent, according to the report. The practice of hedging has been on the rise with two-thirds of the total ECBs being hedged as of September 2024, up from 55 per cent two years ago.

Among the unhedged portion, some are backed by government guarantees, while others benefit from natural hedges, where borrowers earn in foreign currency. As of September 2024, natural hedges accounted for around 1.5 per cent of unhedged ECBs, the report added.

Union Budget 2025: Expectations of Pharmaceutical Industry



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

The phrase, 'Expectations are the root of all heartache', sums up the message regarding expectations from people or situations, and subsequent disappointments when those expectations are not met. With respect to the Union Budget, all industries and stakeholders have expectations from the Union Finance Minister, and the finance minister is expected to satisfy all of them. The finance minister has many constraints, and is expected to consider many competing interests, priorities at a given point of time, resources available to name a few while accommodating different stakeholders. Industries also vary in size, nature, stage of development, support required, and influence. Accordingly, expectations of respective industries get considered, and get accommodated. Pharmaceutical Industry in India is now known as the Pharmacy of the World.

For FY 2023-24, India's pharmaceutical industry was valued at US \$ 50 bn, out of which exports contributed

US \$ 26.5 bn and the domestic consumption contributed US \$ 23.5 bn (PIB Release dated December 17, 2024). Ratio of exports to domestic consumption was 53:47. India's pharmaceutical industry is ranked the world's third largest in volume terms. This reflects the strength of Indian pharmaceutical industry in international markets as net foreign exchange earner, as well as the capacity to serve domestic market and international markets. Product portfolio of pharmaceutical companies has gone beyond generic products or vaccines, and now covers biologics, biosimilars, bulk drugs, Complex Generics, Medical Devices, etc.

Given the diverse nature of pharmaceutical industry, growth of biologics, biosimilars, emergence of medical devices industry, and developments in MedTech, each component of value chain requires attention in the Union Budget for holistic development of the industry, be it R&D, manufacturing, or exports.

Exports form major chunk of revenue for many pharmaceutical companies in India. Pharmaceutical industry from India as a whole, now heavily relies on exports so credit schemes and policies which



support exports, are desirable. Export of medical devices has shown encouraging signs. Export incentives presently range from 0.6% to 0.9% under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RoDTEP) Scheme that became applicable from January 1, 2021. This Scheme had replaced the existing Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS).

Changing nature of pharmaceutical business demands attention in all areas of value chain. Research and Development (R&D) in pharmaceutical sector is crucial, cost-intensive, and time-consuming. At the same time, the risky nature of drug discovery does not go well for each pharma enterprise. Due to this, pharmaceutical enterprises primarily rely on grants and soft loans in addition to their own resources for carrying out the R&D.

Continued focus on R&D is needed to transform India into a value-driven economy as Indian pharma industry is still 14th in terms of value of production.

The size of the Indian pharmaceutical Industry has grown from about \$15.2 billion in 2014 to \$50 Bn in 2024. To maintain existing momentum, appropriate interventions are required from time to time. Like any other year, industry leaders have expressed their expectations from the upcoming Union Budget 2025-26 that is going to be presented on February 1. R&D tax incentive is widely expressed as a major demand since it was reduced to 100%.

In his budget speech in 2016, the then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had announced the reduction of the weighted deduction from 200% in FY 2017-18 to

150% in 2019-20. From the FY 2020-21, weighted deduction on Research and Development (R&D) expenses was reduced to 100%. Pharmaceutical companies kept on demanding R&D tax incentive as these companies have to incur R&D expenses outside their facilities too which include bio-equivalence studies, clinical studies, patent filings, product registration to name a few. Research-linked Incentives (RLI) has remained a consistent demand. Research on Orphan drugs needs encouragement through incentives. From government perspective, underlying rationale appeared that there was demand from corporate sector for reduction of corporate tax rate and at the same time, there were weighted deductions.

A key expectation remains the focus on 'increasing healthcare funding' as 47 per cent contribution to India's pharma industry is from domestic consumption. The government health expenditure's share in India's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased from 1.13% in 2014-15 to 1.84% in 2021-22. Further, the share of Government Expenditure in Total Health Expenditure has increased from 29.0% in

2014-15 to 48.0% in 2021-22 as per the National Health Accounts Estimates for India 2020-21 and 2021-22 which were released on September 25, 2024. A decline in out-of-pocket expenditure out of total health expenditure has been observed from 64.2% in 2013-14 to 39.4% in 2021-22. National Health Policy (2017) had recommended that the government should spend 2.5% of GDP on healthcare by 2025.

Production-linked Incentive (PLI) Schemes, Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks and Medical Devices, Pharmaceutical Technology Upgradation Assistant Scheme (PTUAS), Jan Aushadhi Scheme, Promotion of Research and Innovation in Pharma Med-Tech (PRIP), and the scheme on Human Resource Development in Medical Devices Sector need allocation as higher allocation will help respective players participating in these areas.

With technological advancements, emphasis is on application of Gen AI and other tools by pharmaceutical companies too. Sustainable manufacturing in pharma and integrating sustainability with advanced technologies is the need of the hour. Measures and incentives are needed to

boost investments in AI in general. Pharma-specific areas are likely to be benefited. Top pharma companies globally are extensively applying AI and other such tools in research, clinical trials, and other upstream activities. Globally, countries want to remain competitive in this domain, e.g., The US President Donald Trump on his 2nd day of his Presidency announced 'Stargate Project', a private sector investment of up to \$500 billion to fund infrastructure for artificial intelligence, aiming to outpace rival nations in the business-critical technology.

Industry leaders have voiced the concern from the point of view of end-users/patients, e.g., Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw stated that cancer-related drugs are expensive so any drug used for a chronic therapy with a monthly cost of treatment exceeding Rs. 5,000 should be exempted from tax altogether. Chronic patients have to buy medications by paying a tax of 12 per cent which is quite high as medicines for such patients are necessity, and not luxury. In a similar manner, import duties need to be reduced on input materials, consumables, and highly sophisticated &

costly instruments which are required to develop precision medicines used in cancer treatment. This will reduce out-of-pocket cost of patients. In July 2024 when the Finance Minister in her 7th consecutive Budget speech brought down the customs duty on X-ray tubes used in medical X-ray machines, and allowed duty-free import of three medicines, Trastuzumab, Deruxtecan, Osimertinib, and Durvalumab from existing 10 per cent customs duty, then the move was widely appreciated.

The Union Budget determines the roadmap for different sectors for a short period of one year but it has the potential to halt or ensure continuity in the journey towards becoming a developed nation, or Viksit Bharat. Pharma and Meditech sectors collectively need adequate attention in budget as in first four months of FY 2024-25, it became the 4th largest merchandise export item for the Indian economy.

Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish-
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DISCLAIMER: Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.

Haryana Improves sex ratio from 861 to 910 in last 10 years: Chief Minister

Government committed to providing educational opportunities & ensuring rights for girls

GULSHAN KUMAR
Chandigarh

Haryana Chief Minister, Nayab Singh Saini, said that under the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign, the state government has made continuous efforts over the past 10 years to eliminate gender discrimination, provide girls with proper educational opportunities, fulfill their aspirations, and ensure their rights. He highlighted that the nationwide Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign, launched on January 22 in 2015 from the historic land of Panipat under the leadership of Prime Minister Sh Narendra Modi,



has played a significant role in combating this social evil. Through unprecedented im-

provements in the state's sex ratio over the last decade, the sex ratio has risen from 861 in

2014 to 910 today. The state government is making sustained and serious efforts to completely eradicate this social evil. Chief Minister Haryana was interacting with media persons on Wednesday.

In response to a question, Chief Minister explained that the state government is diligently working to further improve the sex ratio. Officials have been instructed to work with full commitment to completely eradicate this social evil at its root. In addition, during a recent review meeting of the Women and Child Development Department, it was decided to appoint women Sarpanches as ambassadors in their respective villages. This initiative aims to strengthen efforts for improving the sex ratio and promoting further progress.



Punjab police personnel take selfies during a full dress rehearsal for the upcoming Republic Day parade at the Guru Nanak Stadium, in Amritsar on Friday, January 24, 2025.

Ayurveda's new hope for Alzheimer's treatment



RAJU WILLIAM
New Delhi

A new study that provides a multipronged approach to treatment of several neurodegenerative diseases, offers hope for Alzheimer's disease, Dementia, and related diseases. Prof. Anirban Bhunia and his team at the Bose Institute in Kolkata, an autonomous institute of Department of Science and Technology, Government of India (GoI) repurpose a drug called Lasunadya Ghrita (LG) from Ayurveda, the ancient traditional Indian medicine, which has previously shown efficacy in treating depression-related mental illnesses. They utilize chemically synthesized peptides to combat amyloid beta aggregation. Amyloid proteins and peptides play a pivotal role in various neurodegenerative diseases including Alzheimer's disease (AD). This research offers hope to individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease and highlights the potential of Ayurveda, or ancient Indian traditional medicine, as a viable solution to complex neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer's.

her defiance against the ruthless Sultan Alauddin Khilji, and her unyielding courage. Released in 2018, "Padmaavat" also stars Aditi Rao Hydari, Jim Sarbh, Raza Murad, and Anupriya Goenka. The film revolves around Queen Padmavati, who is happily married to a Rajput ruler until a ruthless sultan, Alauddin Khali, declares war on their kingdom due to his obsession with her beauty. Despite not being released in some states of India, it became the third highest-grossing Indian film of 2018. Ahead of the release, the film was subjected to many controversies.

Ranveer, Deepika and Shahid-starrer 'Padmaavat' to re-released

MUMBAI: As Ranveer Singh, Deepika Padukone and Shahid Kapoor's magnum opus "Padmaavat", directed by Sanjay Leela Bhansali, is all set to turn seven, the makers will be re-releasing the movie on January 24 to mark the milestone. Bhansali Productions took to Instagram, where they shared the film's poster and made the announcement. "Witness the epic tale on the big screen again. #Padmaavat in cinemas on 24th January. @ranveersingh @deepikapadukone @shahidkapoor @jimsarbhforreal @aditiraohydari #SanjayLeelaBhansali @



ajit_andhare @bhansaliproductions @Viacom18Studios @iseriesofficial #Padmaavat #7YearsOfPadmaavat," read the caption. The blockbuster historical drama, based on the poem Padmavat by Malik Muhammad Jayasi, tells the tale of Rani Padmavati's legendary beauty,

Talking Points

Narvijay Yadav



AI promises a brighter future for ordinary Indians. In the next five years, it will transition from a futuristic concept to an integral part of everyday life in India.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the global landscape, and India is no exception. Over the next five years, AI is poised to influence almost every facet of life for ordinary Indians, revolutionizing sectors such as education, employment, finance, health, communication, and mobility. This technological evolution promises to bridge gaps, create opportunities, and redefine how people interact with the world. **Affordable Healthcare:** AI will bridge the gap between India's growing healthcare demands and limited resources. Telemedicine powered by AI will enable remote consultations, offering medical advice to patients in the country's remotest corners. AI-driven diagnostic tools will provide accurate results in record time, reducing dependency on specialized labs. Predictive analytics will play a crucial role in preventive healthcare, identifying risks based on patient data and enabling early interventions. AI-powered wearables will monitor vital signs in real-time, empowering individuals to take charge of their health. **Revolutionizing Finance:** Advanced AI algorithms will enhance fraud detection, reducing financial crimes. Chatbots and virtual assistants will streamline customer service, enabling faster resolution of queries. Personal-

ized financial planning tools will help individuals manage their money better, and AI-driven investment platforms will make wealth-building strategies available to the average Indian, democratizing financial growth. **Super Communication:** AI will revolutionize communication, especially across linguistic and geographical divides. AI-based real-time translation tools will allow seamless conversations in multiple regional languages, fostering greater collaboration and unity in a diverse nation. Advancements in Natural Language Processing will make digital interactions more intuitive, enabling even those unfamiliar with technology to use it effectively. Virtual assistants like Siri and Alexa will evolve into more culturally aware entities catering to local needs and preferences. **Innovative Travel:** India's transportation sector is poised for an AI-led transformation. While autonomous vehicles are still nascent, they may become more prevalent in controlled environments like factories or campuses. AI-powered traffic management systems will reduce congestion in urban areas, making commutes faster and more efficient. Ride-sharing platforms will leverage AI to optimize routes and reduce costs, benefiting consumers. AI-driven predictive maintenance

AI's Next Move in India



nance systems for roads and vehicles will improve transportation infrastructure and safety in rural areas. **Personalized Learning:** AI in education will make learning more personalized and accessible. AI-driven platforms like adaptive learning apps can tailor lessons to each student's pace and style, ensuring no one is left behind. Virtual tutors powered by AI will provide 24/7 support, breaking the limitations of traditional classroom-based teaching. AI-powered tools can translate content into regional languages, bringing quality education to millions who previously lacked access. **Skill Transformation:** Integrating AI into industries will reshape the job market. While automation may replace repetitive tasks, it will simultaneously create demand for new skills and job roles. Fields like data analysis, AI development, robotics, and ethical AI governance will flourish, requiring workers to upskill and adapt. Freelancing and gig-based opportunities

driven by AI platforms will rise, allowing individuals to work remotely for global companies and increasing income avenues for Indians. **The Bigger Picture:** AI will enhance governance and social welfare beyond these sectors. AI-powered tools can analyze vast datasets to identify patterns and make policy recommendations, improving resource allocation and tackling issues like poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, AI's role in addressing climate challenges, such as optimizing renewable energy usage and predicting natural disasters, will have a significant indirect impact on ordinary Indians' lives. While the potential benefits of AI are immense, challenges such as data privacy, algorithmic bias, and the digital divide need to be addressed. Ensuring ethical AI deployment and investing in digital literacy will be crucial for inclusive growth. *The author is a senior journalist and columnist. Views are personal. Twitter @narvijayyadav*

The Commons at Bella Vista Launches "Give a Little, Change a Lot" Donation Drive



KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Panchkula

The Commons at Bella Vista, a vibrant hub for food, community engagement, and children's activities, is proud to announce the launch of its second annual donation drive, "Give a Little, Change a Lot," in partnership with two of tricity's leading NGOs, Pukaar and Yuva Stambh. Set in the buzzing heart of the Commons' amphitheatre, this initiative reflects its ongoing commitment to fostering unity and goodwill within the Tricity community. The focus this year remains on collecting essential items, including clothes, books, and toys for children. Collection boxes will be placed at the amphitheatre to encourage contributions, symbolizing the collective power of a community coming together to create positive change. Once filled, the items will be distributed to Pukaar and Yuva Stambh, two NGOs renowned for their impactful work in the local community. "We at The Commons at Bella Vista firmly believe in the power of community," shared Executive Director Ms. Nanki Aurora Singh. "As we say, 'Give a Little, Change a Lot,' even the smallest acts of generosity can have a profound impact on someone's life."

POTPOURRI



Devastating destruction—UNITED SIKHS volunteers are tirelessly working on the ground to bring relief to those affected in the fires around Los Angeles. Over 40,000 acres burned, at least 25 lives tragically lost, and more than 150,000 people forced to leave their homes.

Kangana Ranaut and Diljit Dosanjh's fates are intertwined through their films



MUMBAI: Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut and Punjabi sensation Diljit Dosanjh's fates are intertwined through their films "Emergency" and "Panjab 95" due to the chatter around both the movies. On Tuesday morning, Diljit took to Instagram, where he posted a note apologising that his film "Panjab 95", has once again faced a hiccup in its release in India. "We are very sorry and it pains us to inform you that the movie Panjab 95 will not release on 7th Feb due to circumstances beyond our control," he wrote. The movie, which is based on the life of prominent Sikh human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalsa, was proposed to be named as Ghalughara initially, which means massacre, but after the objection of the Censor Board the movie title was renamed to Panjab 95 with 120 scene cuts. Sikh religious body, Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), intervened, and the Censor Board relented with the cuts but asked the title to still be

changed. According to reports, the film's trailer was launched on YouTube the same year but was removed a day later. In Kangana's case with "Emergency", the film has been halted in Patiala, Amritsar and Bathinda amid fear of protests. Protests took place across Punjab as different leaders of Sikh organizations including The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) asked for ban on "Emergency" as they claim the film "tarnishes the image of Sikhs and distorts history". A tweet by SGPC also stated that it demands a ban on the film in Punjab, which is scheduled to release on January 17, 2025. The film is touted to be controversial due to its subject matter, which revisits the tumultuous period of the 1975 Emergency declared by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The film delves deep into the historical and political upheaval of the time, shedding light on a chapter that continues to evoke polarising reactions across the nation.

Haryana's tableau to showcase divine view of prosperity, heritage, and development

Tableau designed on the theme 'Samridh Haryana- Virasat Aur Vikas'

GULSHAN KUMAR
Chandigarh



This year's Republic Day celebrations will feature Haryana's tableau on New Delhi's Kartavya Path, showcasing a divine depiction of the state's prosperity, heritage, and development. The tableau will highlight Haryana's rich cultural heritage through the portrayal of the divine message of the Bhagavad Gita, delivered by Lord Shri Krishna to Arjuna in Kurukshetra. Additionally, it will offer a glimpse of a modern Haryana, a sports powerhouse, reflecting the state's continuous development in technology and innovation, alongside the stellar achievements of its athletes. This information was shared by K.M. Pandurang, Director General of the Department of Information, Public Relations, Languages and Culture Haryana, while presenting Haryana's tableau to the media at the Rashtriya Rangshala Camp in New Delhi today. He explained that the front part of the tableau portrays Lord Krishna delivering the message of Bhagavad Gita to Arjuna before the Mahabharata war at the sacred Jyotisar Tirtha in Kurukshetra. This divine message, imparted by Lord

Krishna to humanity through Arjuna, stands as a testament to Haryana's enduring contribution to India's spiritual and cultural heritage. The middle section of the tableau features a craft cart inspired by the Surajkund Mela, showcasing Haryana's rich art and handicrafts. Behind the craft cart, a 'Haryanvi Tau' is depicted working on a laptop, symbolizing how Haryana's farmers are utilizing information technology to enhance their daily lives and farming practices. Through digital platforms like 'Meri Fasal-Mera Byora,' they access government schemes and check crop prices online. Nearby, two schoolgirls in uniform represent Haryana's commitment to women empowerment and gender equality, reflecting the impact of programs like Beti Bachao-Beti Padhao. Pandurang said that the rear section of the tableau depicts a blend of skyscrapers, modernization, and urbanization in Gurugram. This part highlights how Haryana has emerged as a leading state in technology, innovation, and technical advancements.

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