

REGION **2**

DHALIWAL CONDEMNS MISTREATMENT OF 104 INDIANS DEPORTED FROM US



Punjab Police to investigate illegal human trafficking

CHANDIGARH: To combat and investigate the illegal human trafficking and illegal migration arising from the deportation of Indians domiciled in Punjab from the US, Punjab Police on Friday constituted a four-member fact-finding committee.

Announcing this, Director General of Police (DGP) Gaurav Yadav said the four-member SIT has been constituted under the chairmanship of Additional Director General of Police (NRI Affairs) Praveen Sinha.

The members of the SIT include ADGP (Internal Security) Shive Kumar Verma, IGP (Provisioning) S. Boopathi and DIG (Border Range) Range Satinder Singh. The SIT will focus on identifying the individuals involved in these illegal activities and ensuring they are held accountable for their actions, besides identifying the people involved in the illegal activities.

DGP Yadav said the SIT has been directed to take appropriate action as per law and facts and take action against any person found involved in committing illegalities and indulging in illegal migration and



human trafficking. He said the SIT has been empowered to co-opt any other police officer in the inquiry and investigation.

They will maintain coordination with the Senior Superintendents of Police and Commissioners of Police concerned, who have been directed to provide all required assistance and infrastructural facilities to it, he added. He said this collaborative effort is aimed at ensuring a comprehensive and effective investigation into illegal migration.

The SIT is tasked with conducting an inquiry to uncover the facts, identify those responsible, and recommend measures to combat illegal

migration. A US military aircraft carrying the first batch of 104 illegal Indian immigrants, with the highest number of 33 each from Haryana and Gujarat, reached Amritsar in Punjab on February 5.

A total of 30 deportees were residents of Punjab. The US military C-17 aircraft landed at Sri Guru Ram Dass Jee International Airport amid tight security. Three each are from Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, while two are from Chandigarh. The deportees include 25 women and 12 minors, with the youngest passenger being just four years old. Forty-eight people are below the age of 25.

CORPORATES & INDUSTRY **5**



LIC REPORTS OVER 16 PC JUMP IN CONSOLIDATED NET PROFIT IN Q3, AUM UP 10.29 PER CENT

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday raised the country's real GDP growth forecast to real GDP growth for 2025-26 to 6.7 per cent, as it expects a robust rabi crop output and an expected recovery in industrial activity to support economic growth going ahead.

It also expects CPI inflation to moderate to 4.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of the current financial year and decline further to 4.2 per cent in 2025-26.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said that "looking ahead, healthy rabi prospects and an expected recovery in industrial activity should support economic growth in 2025-26".

"Among the key drivers on the demand side, household consumption is expected to remain robust aided by the tax relief in the Union Budget 2025-26," Malhotra noted. "Fixed investment is expected to recover, supported by higher capacity utilisation levels, healthy balance sheets of financial institutions and corporates, and Government's continued emphasis on capital expenditure," Malhotra said in his address after the monetary policy committee (MPC) meeting.

At the same time, he mentioned the risk to growth posed by

POTPOURRI **8**



GRAMMY AWARD 2025: INDIAN-AMERICAN MUSICIAN & ENTREPRENEUR CHANDRIKA TANDON BAGS BEST NEW AGE ALBUM AWARD

Travel agent booked on the complaint of US deportee

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

The Amritsar Rural police has booked the travel agent Satnam Singh for allegedly committing fraud with Daler Singh one of the 104 deportees who was recently deported from the US. Travel agent has been identified as Satnam Singh booked under section 420 IPC and other relevant sections, said police. Confirming the registration of FIR against travel agent, Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Charnjeet Singh said the FIR was lodged on the complaint of Daler Singh.

SSP further said that complainant Daler Singh had paid white money to Travel agent Satnam Singh through bank transfer. "Daler Singh son of Gurmjeet Singh resident of Saleempura village falls under the jurisdiction of police station Rajasansi, he himself on his return from US lodged police complaint along with legitimate proofs and same were verified thoroughly which were found genuine and action was initiated by the police by lodging the FIR against the accused Satnam Singh," said SSP. SSP said that Daler paid white money since he wanted to move US legally as per the proper procedure with complete travel documentation and genuine visa. Adding further SSP said that Daler Singh in his complaint stated his tale of woe as how he was inhumanly tortured during journey to the US. But agent forced him to travel to Nigeria, Brazil, Mexico and many other countries to reach the US where Daler was arrested while crossing the border. SSP said that Daler has paid Total Rs. 60 Lakh to agent in installments. SSP said that so far only one complaint has been received and no one other besides Daler came forward with complaint. Daler had to suffer severe hardships as underwent precarious circumstances in the Panama Jungles to reach the US where he was arrested on January 15. Daler said that he didn't know how he was mesmerized by the travel agent Satnam Singh who convinced him to pay Rs. 60 lakh for a valid visa and job grantee in the US but it all was proved fraud.

RBI raises real GDP growth forecast to 6.7 pc for 2025-26



global uncertainties and climate change. "Taking all these factors into consideration, real GDP growth for 2025-26 is projected at 6.7 per cent with Q1 at 6.7 per cent; Q2 at 7.0 per cent; and Q3 and Q4 at 6.5 per cent each. The risks are evenly balanced," said the RBI Governor. The RBI had in December revised its GDP growth forecast to 6.6 per cent from 7.2 per cent earlier.

He pointed out that the global economy is growing below the historical average even though high frequency indicators suggest resilience amidst continued expansion in world trade. The world economic landscape remains challenging with slower pace of disinflation, lingering geopolitical tensions and policy

uncertainties, he added.

Malhotra also said that the strong US dollar continues to strain emerging market currencies and enhance volatility in financial markets. In this context he mentioned that the RBI was keeping a close watch on the depreciation of the rupee and taking all steps to stabilised the Indian currency. "On the domestic front, as per the First Advance Estimates, real gross domestic product (GDP) is estimated to grow at 6.4 per cent (y-o-y) in 2024-25 supported by a recovery in private consumption. On the supply side, growth is supported by the services sector and a recovery in agriculture sector, while tepid industrial growth is a drag," he said.

Number of Indian prisoners in foreign jails at present is 10,152: Govt tells Parliament



NEW DELHI: As per the information available with the Ministry of External Affairs, the number of Indian prisoners, including undertrials, in foreign jails at present is 10,152, the government informed Parliament on Friday.

Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh in a written response to a query in the Lok Sabha shared country-wise data on such prisoners.

The data shared under the head 'total number of Indians under trail and convicted in foreign jails at present' included for 86 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Nepal, Pakistan, the US, Sri Lanka, Spain, Russia, Israel, China, Bangladesh and Argentina. As per the data shared in his response, 2,633 Indian prisoners are in jails in Saudi Arabia and 2,518 such prisoners are in jails in the UAE.

According to the data, 1,317 Indian prisoners are in jails in Nepal, while the corresponding numbers in Pakistan and Sri Lanka stand at 266 and 98 respectively.

"As per the information available with the Ministry, the number of Indian prisoners, including undertrials, in foreign prisons at present is 10,152," Singh said.

The government was asked whether it has come to its notice that a large number of Indians, especially people from Kerala, are boarded in jails in Qatar after the FIFA World Cup.

"As per the information available with the Ministry, the number of Indian prisoners, including undertrials, in Qatari jails is 611. However, due to strong privacy laws, Government of Qatar does not share information on prisoners unless the person concerned consents to the disclosure of such information. Therefore, state-wise data of Indian prisoners is not available," Singh said.

"Moreover, the government has not noticed any abnormal increase in number of Indian prisoners in Qatari jails after the World Cup," he said.

In his response, the Union minister underlined that the government attaches "high priority to the safety, security and well-being of Indians in foreign countries, including those in the foreign jails".

Laying major thrust on enhancing the share of recruitment of youth from Punjab in Indian Armed Forces: CM Mann

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Tuesday said that the state government is laying major thrust for enhancing the share of recruitment of youth from the state in the Indian Armed forces.

Interacting with a delegation led by Air Marshal Hardeep Bains AVSM VSM, the Commandant of National Defence College, the Chief Minister said that Punjab has a glorious history of serving the country in Indian Armed forces. He said that though this trend has now dipped, the state government is making concerted efforts for giving fillip to the recruitment of youth in Armed forces by encouraging them. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that already the Mai Bhago Armed Forces Preparatory Institute and Maharaja Ranjit Singh Armed



Forces Preparatory Institute set up by the state government and C-Pyte centres are doing a commendable job in this direction.

Punjab Chief Minister said that besides being the nation's food bowl, Punjab also has a distinction of being the sword arm of the country and its people are well known

all over the world for their courage, resilience and spirit of enterprise. He said that every inch of this sacred land has the footprint of great Gurus, saints, seers and martyrs, who have shown us the way to oppose tyranny, injustice and oppression. Bhagwant Mann also said that the state has 532 kilometre of border with

Pakistan due to which support of Armed forces is pivotal.

Chief Minister of Punjab said that Recognising the immense contribution of jawans of Armed forces, Paramilitary forces, Police and even Agnivirs in safeguarding unity and integrity of the country, the state government gives financial assistance worth Rs 1 crore to the family in case the jawans attain martyrdom in line of duty. He said that this is in consonance with the commitment of the state government to ensure the well being of the soldiers (from Armed forces, paramilitary and Police) and their families. Bhagwant Singh Mann hoped that this humble initiative by the state will go a long way in helping the aggrieved family on one hand and securing their future on the other.

'PM Modi's US visit valuable opportunity to engage Trump administration on all areas of mutual interest'

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be among the first few world leaders to visit the United States following the start of US President Donald Trump's second term in office a few weeks ago, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced on Friday.

The visit, which will take place on February 12 and 13 at the invitation of the President of the United States of America, will be PM Modi's first to the



US since the inauguration of Trump's second term.

"The fact that the Prime Minister has been invited to visit the US within barely three weeks of the new administration taking office shows the importance of the India-US partnership and reflects the bipartisan support this partnership enjoys in the United States," Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri told reporters in New Delhi on Friday.

The visit, the top Diplomat stressed, would be a valuable opportunity to engage the new

administration on all areas of mutual interest.

Prime Minister Modi will hold a bilateral meeting with President Trump, in both restricted and delegation-level formats. "Senior US administration figures are also expected to call on PM Modi during the visit while he will also have the opportunity to interact with the business leaders and members of the Indian community," added the Foreign Secretary.

Cabinet Approves ₹8,800 Cr Outlay to Extend Skill India Programme Till 2026

NEW DELHI: The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on Friday approved the continuation and restructuring of the Central Sector Scheme 'Skill India Programme' till 2026 with an overlay outlay of Rs 8,800 crore from the period 2022-23 to 2025-26.

This approval underscores the government's commitment to building a skilled, future-ready workforce by integrating demand-driven, technology-enabled, and industry-aligned training across the country, according to a statement issued after the meeting.

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 (PMKVY 4.0), the Pradhan Mantri National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (PM-NAPS), and the Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) Scheme - the three key components, are now combined under the composite Central Sector Scheme of 'Skill India Programme'. These initiatives aim to provide structured skill development, on-the-job training, and community-based learning, ensuring that both urban and rural populations, including marginalised communities, have access to high-quality vocational education. Under



the three flagship schemes of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, there are more than 2.27 crore beneficiaries till date.

PMKVY 4.0 scheme provides NSQF-aligned skill development training through Short-Term Training including Special Projects and reskilling and upskilling through Recognition of Prior Learning with its target beneficiary being 15-59 years of age, the statement said.

To keep pace with evolving industry demands and the advent of new-age technology, 400+ new courses on AI, 5G technology, Cybersecurity, Green Hydrogen, and Drone Technology, have been introduced, focusing on emerging technologies and future skills.

The blended and flexible learning model now incorporates

digital delivery, making training more flexible and scalable. To provide targeted, industry-relevant skills, enabling learners to upskill, reskill, and enhance employability in high-demand job roles, the programme introduces micro-credential and National Occupational Standards (NoS)-based courses ranging from 7.5 to 30 hours. To strengthen quality training and assessments, a national pool of one lakh assessors and trainers is being developed, ensuring standardisation and expertise across training centres. Industry partnerships ensure access to employment opportunities through Recruit Train Deploy training. Additionally, the scheme places a strong emphasis on international mobility, ensuring Indian workers are equipped with globally recognised skills.

1984 Anti-Sikh riots: Delhi court defers pronouncing judgement in murder case against Sajjan Kumar

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court on Friday deferred, till February 12, the pronouncement of its judgement in a murder case against former Congress MP Sajjan Kumar during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.

The case is related to the killing of a father-son duo in the Saraswati Vihar area on November 1, 1984. Special judge Kaveri Baweja, who was slated to pronounce the decision on Friday, deferred the pronouncement till February 12. Earlier on January 31, the Rouse Avenue Court reserved its verdict after hearing additional submissions advanced by Public Prosecutor Manish Rawat. This case is related to the killings of Jaswant Singh and his son Tarundeep Singh in the Saraswati Vihar area



during the riots. On the other hand, advocate Anil Sharma had submitted that Sajjan Kumar's name was not there from the very beginning and there was a delay of 16 years in naming him as an accused by the witness. It was also submitted that a case in which Sajjan Kumar was

convicted by the Delhi High Court is pending appeal before the Supreme Court. Additional Public Prosecutor Rawat, in rebuttal, had submitted that the accused was not known to the victim. When she became aware of who Sajjan Kumar was, she named him in her statement. Earlier, senior advocate H.S.

Phoolka, appearing for the riot victims, had argued that the police investigations were manipulated in the Sikh riots cases. Police investigation was tardy and to save the accused, he said. It was also argued that during riots, the situation was extraordinary and therefore, these cases have to be dealt with in this context. During the arguments, Phoolka referred to the judgement of the Delhi High Court and submitted that it was not an isolated case, it was a part of a bigger massacre. It was further argued that as per official figures, 2,700 Sikhs were killed in Delhi in 1984. Senior advocate Phoolka had referred to the Delhi High Court judgement in the 1984 anti-Sikh riot case of Delhi Cantt wherein the court called the riots a "crime against humanity".

Dhaliwal condemns mistreatment of 104 Indians deported from US

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

Cabinet Minister Punjab Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal has condemned the mistreatment of 104 Indians deported from America, citing gross human rights violations. The youths were allegedly handcuffed and chained during their 17-18 hour flight from America to Amritsar on a military cargo plane.



Dhaliwal urged the Modi government to seek assistance from Indian embassies in America for the deportation of Indians living illegally in the US. He emphasized that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Jaisankar should communicate to the US government that deported Indians should be handed over to Indian embassies for safe return.

The Cabinet Minister also questioned the choice of Amritsar airport for deportation, labeling it as politically motivated. He appreciated the district administration's efforts in providing hospitality to the deported Indians, ensuring their safe return home.

Dhaliwal appealed to the BJP government to take responsibility for protecting the interests of Indian youths and engage with the US government to prevent such incidents in the future.

Dhaliwal emphasized that PM Modi, who had supported

US President Donald Trump during his election campaign, should now use his friendship to resolve the issue. He questioned the usefulness of this friendship if it cannot help Indian citizens in need.

The Cabinet Minister noted that these youths had traveled to America for livelihood, investing significant amounts of money, and their expulsion is a serious concern. While acknowledging that individuals involved in criminal activities can be deported, Dhaliwal stressed that this is a bilateral issue requiring central government intervention, particularly from PM Modi.

Dhaliwal appealed to PM Modi to engage with President Trump to prevent further deportations and address the crisis faced by Indian youths in the US.

Punjab exceeds national average with 11.87% GST growth rate



RAJU WILLIAM
Chandigarh

Punjab has achieved an impressive 11.87 percent growth in net Goods and Services Tax (GST) collection up to January this fiscal year compared to 2023-24.

This growth rate surpasses the national average of 10 percent. Additionally, Punjab has witnessed a net growth of 15.33 percent in excise and a total of 11.67

percent in taxes from net GST, Excise, VAT, CST, and PSDT in the current fiscal year.

With this, Punjab now figures among the top 3 general category states (GCS) in the country that have exceeded the national growth rate in GST collection, informed Finance and Taxation Minister Harpal Singh Cheema here Monday February 3, 2025.

The net GST collection up to January in the current fiscal

year stood at Rs 19,414.57 crore, compared to Rs 17,354.26 crore collected during the same period in 2023-24, reflecting a growth of Rs 2,060.31 crore. The state registered a 9.73 percent growth in net GST during January 2025, with a collection of Rs 2,008.58 crore against Rs 1,830.52 crore collected in January 2024.

As for the revenue growth from Excise, the FM said the state has collected Rs 8,588.31 crore up to January in the current fiscal year, compared to Rs 7,446.46 crore collected during the same period in 2023-24, showing growth of Rs 1,141.85 crore. The Excise growth rate during January 2025 was 15.91 percent, with a collection of Rs 893.04 crore against Rs 770.45 crore collected in January 2024. The Finance Minister further added that the total collection from net GST, Excise, VAT, CST, and PSDT up to January in the current fiscal year is Rs 34,704.4 crore, with a net growth of Rs 3,625.46 crore when compared to Rs 31,078.94 crore collected during the same period in 2023-24.

Punjab Police introduces improved passport verification system



RAJU WILLIAM
Chandigarh

Punjab Police on Tuesday introduced an improved system for the passport verification which will allow citizens to receive pre-verification SMS and would also be able to submit feedback through Post-verification SMS.

From February 5, 2025, Punjab Police shall send an SMS notification from 'PB-SANJ' to the applicant providing the name of the official conducting the verification and date and time of visit.

This improvement aims to reduce uncertainty and ensure that applicants are well-informed about the verification process, said Gurpreet Kaur Deo, Special Director General of Police (DGP), Community Affairs Division Apart from this, the applicants would be able to send their feedback through post-verification SMS about the quality and behaviour of the officer concerned. For the purpose, they would receive a post-verification SMS from 'PB-SANJ' having a hyperlink to the feedback form. Applicants can share any suggestions, comments, or concerns through the feedback form. This feedback mechanism will help Punjab Police in further improving service standards and address any concerns of the citizens promptly, asserted the Special DGP.

Major administrative reshuffle in Haryana, 12 IAS and 67 HCS officers transferred



GULSHAN KUMAR
Chandigarh

Haryana Government has made a major administrative reshuffle and issued posting and transfer orders of 12 IAS and 67 HCS officers with immediate effect.

Additional Chief Secretary of Health and Family Welfare, Medical Education and Research and AYUSH Departments, Sudhir Rajpal has been given the charge of Additional Chief Secretary of Women and Child Development Department in addition to his present duties.

Commissioner and Secretary of Women and Child Development and Archives Departments, Amneet P. Kumar has been posted as Commissioner and Secretary of Fisheries and Archives Departments.

Excise and Taxation Commissioner, Secretary of Excise and Taxation Department and Managing Director of Haryana Vidyut Prasaran Nigam Ltd, Ashima Brar has been posted as Commissioner and Secretary of Cooperative Department and Managing Director of Haryana Vidyut Prasaran Nigam Ltd.

Haryana Roadways will operate 22 buses daily for Kumbh in Haryana: Anil Vij



SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh/ Ambala

Addressing media persons, Haryana's Energy, Transport and Labor Minister Anil Vij said that The Haryana Transport Department will start bus services from every district of the state for the Kumbh being organized in Prayagraj. He stated that one bus will be operated from each district for Kumbh and this service will run daily from every district. Vij added that the bus service will commence from every district starting today.

In reply to a question regarding the Delhi elections being held today, Vij commented that the results are due on the 8th, the same date when Haryana's election results were announced.

He suggested that Delhi's results would be similar to Haryana's asserting that the Aam Aadmi Party has no voter support and the BJP will form the government with full strength. Vij further accused AAP of being involved in corruption, mentioning that several of its leaders have faced corruption charges and some have even served time in jail. He emphasized that AAP leaders have only secured bail in corruption cases but have not been acquitted. He expressed confidence that Delhi's wise voters will never hand over power to AAP under any circumstances. A couple of days ago, Transport Minister Vij Conducts raid on overloaded vehicles, personally inspects truck and vehicle documents on the Ambala-Narayagarh Road to catch overloaded vehicles. He stopped several trucks, inspected and checked their documents, and trucks and other vehicles found with incomplete or incorrect documents were seized by the police. Vij during the evening, unexpectedly reached Baldev Nagar on Narayagarh Road and started inspecting trucks himself.

US Army Aircraft brings 104 illegal immigrants who were deported by the Trump Government

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

As many as 104 Indian immigrants who were deported from the US, landed at the Shri Guru Ramdas Ji International Airport here on Wednesday at 1.55. p.m.

All were brought there in a US Army chartered AirCraft. However, 30 of the deportees were from Punjab, 33 each from Haryana and Gujarat, three each from Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, and two from Chandigarh.

Comprehensive arrangements were made by the Authorities to send them to



their respective residence in Punjab and neighboring state of Haryana.

All the passengers were being questioned inside the Airport terminal building by the

different Government agencies including Punjab police and various State and Centre intelligence agencies in order to check their past criminal record in any of the police sta-

tions in India.

None of the family members from any of the states were seen at Airport to receive them.

As per sources from Airport out of 104 passengers who were deported from the US there were 13 teenagers, 79 males and 25 females.

Meanwhile, Punjab Cabinet Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal has termed the issue of deporting Indians from America as very serious. As the Minister responsible for the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Dhaliwal emphasized that the Central Government should take this matter seriously.

WORLD CANCER DAY

Health Survey Report: One person dies of cancer in every 2 hours in Haryana

SATISH HANDA
Ambala

The increasing number of cancer patients in Haryana is a matter of concern for the state health department. In every two hours, a cancer patient suffering from this dreaded disease dies, on an average five thousand cancer patients are dying every year in the state. According to former National Vice President of Indian Medical Association Dr D.S. Jaspal, if lifestyle and eating habits are changed then cancer can be prevented to a great extent. One should start treatment immediately as soon as symptoms of disease are detected.

According to a medical survey, cancer is becoming a dreadful problem in Haryana, where in every two hours one person is dying of this disease and on an average every year nearly 5000 cancer patients are dying. Not only this, the graph of new patients is also rapidly increasing every year and if lifestyle and eating habits are changed then cancer can be avoided to a great extent.

Information reveals, during examination out of one lakh suspected persons of age above 30 years, 102 persons were found



having cancer symptoms in the examination in the state, which included more cases of mouth cancer in men and cervical and breast cancer in women. Information also revealed that this disease is spreading rapidly in Faridabad of Yamuna river belt and Sirsa, Fatehabad, Kaithal and Ambala districts of Ghaggar river belt. Water samples taken from various places in Yamuna and Ghaggar rivers by the task force constituted on the orders of National Green Tribunal (NGT) found poison-

ous elements in the river water extremely dangerous for human health. Survey in this regard revealed, due to disorderly lifestyle, environmental problems and lack of awareness, one in five men and one in eight women were detected at risk of cancer. Tobacco consumption due to smoking or taking 'guthka' is found to be the leading cause of cancer, accounting for about 40 percent of cases. If one stays away from tobacco products, it can reduce the risk of several types of cancer. According to Dr. D.S. Jaspal, treatment for first and second stage cancer is possible and can be easily tested. According to Haryana Health Minister Arti Singh Rao, cancer patients are treated free of cost at the Atal Care Centre Ambala Cantt, National Cancer Institute Jhajjar and PGI Rohtak where the medicines are also provided free of cost.

Suspected loud noise heard at outskirts of the city

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

An explosion-like sound was heard outside the Police Post Fatehgarh Churian Road outside the city today in the evening.

Police commissioner Gurpreet Singh Bhullar who reached on the spot to take stock of the situation denying any kind of blast or any kind of grenade attack said that there was nothing such incident occurred but police verifying the facts about the loud noise which was heard by few surrounding people. Bhullar said that this police post was long ago shifted from here to some other place as it was closed.

However, Bhullar said, "Nothing was found at the spot that could indicate an explosion took place". Preliminary investigations suggest that the noise may not have been caused by a grenade blast, but the police are not ruling out the possibility entirely. "The impact is negligible, and first impressions don't indicate a blast," said CP Bhullar. "However, we are investigating the matter from all angles to determine the cause of the noise."

Hospitals will not stop treatment of patients eligible for Ayushman-Chirayu scheme, will continue treatment of the poor: IMA Haryana

SATISH HANDA
Chandigarh

Private hospital operators associated with Indian Medical Association (IMA) Haryana will treat poor people eligible for treatment under Ayushman Bharat-Chirayu Haryana in their hospitals. IMA officials have said that they are satisfied with the decisions of the marathon meeting held in Chandigarh on Monday with the Chief Minister's Chief Principal Secretary Rajesh Khullar. Cooperation is expected from the state government on some points. The government's attitude on these points is positive, after which the doctors have decided to continue treating the poor as decided the treatment will be done in

a private hospital, payment will be made by March 31 this year. According to Dr. Dharendra Soni, general secretary of IMA Haryana, a meeting with the chief principal secretary went on till late on Monday night, the report of which has not been received, due to this, there was confusion among the members of IMA whether they should continue the treatment or stop it.

On Tuesday, the state government released the report of the meeting in which it was said that all the patients who will be treated by private hospitals till March 9, all of them will be paid by March 31 in any case. Dr. Ajay Mahajan demanded interest from the government on the pending payment.

Five ATVM installed at Ambala railway station

Domestic Airport to be operational by February last week

SATISH HANDA
Ambala

The railway administration taking steps to provide convenience to the railway passengers and to reduce the increasing crowd at the railway station. The railway stations in twin city Ambala Cantt and Ambala City are likely to give a new look shortly as told by the DRM Ambala. Now the railway has installed Automatic Ticket Vending Machines (ATVM) at the railway stations of Ambala division to avoid passengers standing in long queues to get tickets. It is being said that five machines have been installed at Ambala railway station so that people traveling by train will now get tickets easily. Giving information, the



senior divisional commercial manager said that the railway has already provided reserved tickets and different facilities to the passengers, but now ATM has been installed at the railway station to get general tickets as well, in which anyone can get a ticket of any station through QR CODE, whose payment will be deducted from his account. If the ticket does not come for

any reason, then his money will be refunded within 24 hours. He told the person who cannot get the ticket, for him a person will be deployed there who will help him. This will also provide employment to that person. This will enable you to easily get tickets to any place in less time through these machines and there is no need to stand in a queue for hours to get tickets.

While talking to media persons, Haryana Transport Minister Anil Vij said the Ambala Cantonment domestic airport is a significant achievement for the region and would be operational by the end February or beginning March this year. He said the airport would enhance connectivity for Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh. Additionally, the airport would support the landing of large aircraft and operate efficiently in all weather conditions. During an inspection of the airport, Vij said almost all preparations for the domestic airport are complete. During the inspection, Vij discussed the progress with the Superintendent Engineer and reviewed the security arrangements.

Vij informed that the security equipment is arriving soon and will be installed at gates and

other designated areas. The minister instructed officials to properly level and clean the premises to enhance the airport's aesthetics. Speaking to the media, Vij emphasised that the domestic airport at Ambala Cantonment would be highly beneficial for the public in the area. Vij highlighted that Ambala is an old railway junction connecting multiple states, and the new airport will further increase its significance and beautify the cantonment. He said he had discussions with the Union Civil Aviation Minister in Delhi, which expedited the airport's development. Initially, central police forces were to be stationed at the airport, but he advocated for Haryana Police instead. "Police personnel have been trained, and robust security measures are in place. The deployment of airport staff will also be voluntary," Vij said.

A family made 4 firms played a 'game' of Rs 54 cr scam

SATISH HANDA
Ambala

A case of GST scam has come to light in Ambala (Haryana) in which a single family formed four firms and committed GST fraud of amount worth Rs 54 crore. These four firms defrauded the government of crores by making purchases and sales only on paper. The GST Department has imposed a fine of Rs 102.85 crore on these firms. Information reveals that a total of 301 firms are under the scanner of the GST department registered at addresses in Ambala in which a single family made a fraud of Rs 54 crore by forming four firms. These include firms from Ambala Cantt and the city as well. Bank accounts of firms have been sealed, as well as the fines imposed on them. According to a spokesperson



of the sales tax department, the bank accounts of the firms have been sealed, in which crores of rupees are lying. These four firms include Satyam Enterprises, Khushi Enterprises, Shiva Traders, MM Traders. These firms were registered at the addresses of Ambala city, whose GST numbers have also been cancelled. In the preliminary investigation of the GST department, Satyam Enterprises director Mahinder Agarwal has given his reply to the department, in which he has admitted that he has taken input tax credit

(ITC) fraudulently. Not only Mahinder but other members of his family are also involved in this game, in whose names firms were formed. A firm was formed in Ambala city in the name of MM Traders, whose director is Satyam Agarwal. After scrutinizing the records, the department recovered Rs 11 crore 67 lakh 14 thousand 566. Similarly, Rs 14 crore 03 lakh 76 thousand 498 was recovered from Khushi Agarwal of Khushi Enterprises. A recovery of Rs 14 crore 63 lakh 54 thousand 914 was made from Satyam Enterprises director Mahindra Agarwal and Rs 14 crore 47 lakh 82 thousand 612 was made from Shiva Trading director Manju Agarwal.

TB Mukt Bharat campaign screens 5.63 cr people, notifies 1.59 lakh new TB patients, says JP Nadda

NEW DELHI: The health ministry's 100-day intensified campaign on tuberculosis Mukt Bharat has screened 5.63 crore vulnerable people and notified 1.59 lakh new TB patients from 347 districts, said Union Health Minister JP Nadda in Parliament on Friday.

The 100-day campaign which started on December 7, 2024, and will continue till March 24, aims to end TB this year — five years ahead of the global target. The campaign aims to target selected 347 high-priority districts across 33 States/UTs. "From the launch of the 100 days intensified TB elimination campaign in 347 districts, 4.94 lakh Ni-kshay shivirs ((screening camps) have been held, 5.63 crore vulnerable individuals have been screened and 1.59 lakh new TB patients have been notified," Nadda said in a written response in Lok Sabha.

He informed that 86, 748 new Ni-kshay Mitras have been registered and 1.12 lakh food baskets have been disbursed to TB patients and their family



members. Nikshay-Mitras can be individuals, NGOs, cooperative societies, faith-based organisations, corporates, political parties, and others. A Mitra can adopt a minimum of one consented TB patient on treatment for a minimum period of six months for any kind of support they want to give to the patient. Further, the Union Health Minister said that 38 of the total campaign districts are tribal, while 27 are mining and 46 are aspirational districts.

"The campaign follows a renewed approach to find missing

TB cases, reduce TB deaths, and prevent new cases," he said.

Nadda added that the government has also organised special outreach camps to screen vulnerable populations and offer X-ray and Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (NAAT) tests, either through mobile medical vans or by mobilising them to the nearest health facility equipped with X-rays. All services related to TB have been decentralised to the level of Ayushman Arogya Mandir to ensure equitable access, Nadda said. Campaign-specific information, education,

and communication materials have been developed and disseminated to educate the public and raise awareness about symptoms, prevention, and the importance of timely treatment for TB in the campaign states and UTs, including Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Madhya Pradesh.

Jan Bhagidari activities are implemented with the involvement of schools, Panchayat raj institutions, self-help groups, Anganwadi, local non-government organisations (NGOs), and civil society organisations, the minister said, adding 22-line departments have been sensitised to actively support the implementation of campaign activities. In addition, the ministry has sensitised MPs, CMs, and state health ministers on the campaign, Nadda stated.

"The 100 Days TB Mukt Bharat Abhiyan in priority districts, is fully aligned to the long-term TB elimination strategies of prevention, early detection, prompt treatment, and reduction of TB-related mortality," Nadda said.

Rahul exposes glaring irregularities in voters' list in Maharashtra

Questions Election Commission Over 39 Lakh New Voters in 5 Months

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi today exposed the glaring discrepancies and irregularities in Maharashtra voter list and questioned the motive and intentions of the Election Commission of India in not sharing the data with the Congress and other opposition parties.

Addressing a press conference along with other leaders of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi, Ms Supriya Sule of the Nationalist Congress Party (SP) and Sanjay Raut of the Shiv Sena (UBT), Gandhi also questioned the motive of the government in removing the Chief Justice of India from the committee to appoint the Election Commissioners.

Gandhi revealed that more voters were added in Maharashtra in five months than



in the previous five years. He said that in five years, between Vidhan Sabha elections 2019 and Lok Sabha polls 2024, 32 lakh voters were added to the electoral rolls of Maharashtra. However, in a period of five months, between Lok Sabha elections 2024, which INDIA won, and Vidhan Sabha polls 2024, 39 lakh new voters were added in Maharashtra, he added. He asked how it was possible that more voters were added in five months after the Lok Sabha election than in the previous five years. Drawing a comparison, he said Himachal Pradesh has an equivalent number of voters and the

voting population of Himachal Pradesh was added to the voter list of Maharashtra after the Lok Sabha elections.

Pointing to the glaring discrepancy regarding the total number of voters in Maharashtra, he said there were more registered voters in Maharashtra than the entire adult population of the state.

Quoting government figures, he said the adult population of Maharashtra is 9.54 crores. According to the Election Commission, there are 9.7 crore voters in Maharashtra implying there are more voters than there are adult people in Maharashtra, he added.

Prime Minister Modi takes holy dip at Sangam in Maha Kumbh



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi took a holy dip at Sangam on Wednesday after he arrived in Prayagraj as part of his visit to the Maha Kumbh.

After arriving at Prayagraj, PM Modi, who was accompanied by Uttar Pradesh (UP) Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, made his way to Aaral VIP Ghat, where they took a boat ride to reach the Sangam, the confluence of the holy Ganga, Yamuna, and the mythical Saraswati rivers.

Before boarding the boat, the Prime Minister and UP CM Yogi waved to the gathered crowd at Aaral VIP Ghat, acknowledging the enthusiastic supporters who gathered to witness the occasion.

Technological revolution will fuel India's future, says Rahul Gandhi



KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi today spoke with students from Nagaland recently and realized how little we are taught about their culture—that's not education, that's erasure. The Northeast should be far more central to India's vision and development.

The real conversation, though, was about the future. The world is shifting to a new energy system, where electric motors, batteries, and optics will be the most crucial technologies. Yet India remains stuck in outdated economic think-

ing, controlled by monopolies like Reliance and Adani. Our policies still favor fossil fuels, while China and the US race ahead in EVs, AI, and battery tech. This isn't just an economic shift—it's a power shift. Take cars, for example. Traditional engines are centralized power sources, but in EVs, power is decentralized—batteries and motors reshape the entire design. The same is happening across energy and industry. When power is no longer concentrated in a few hands—whether in business or government—it transforms everything: our economy, our politics, even the nature of war.

Rahul calls for self-reliant India, Flags Chinese presence in Indian territory

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi today spelt out the vision for a new self-reliant India with special focus on youth. He called for youth to be at the forefront of mobility revolution, which is being driven by four technologies — electric motors, batteries, optics and application of Artificial Intelligence. He said that India cannot afford that Chinese are at the forefront of this revolution.

He also flagged the presence of Chinese army inside India territory, saying it was cause of concern, although the Prime Minister had denied it. Speaking during the discussion on motion of thanks to the President's address in the Lok Sabha today,



Rahul Gandhi observed that the future of India is to be decided by the youth of this country and so if INDIA bloc had to deliver Presidential Address, it would be addressed to them. We would make our youngsters partners in the mobility revolution. We would say to them that "we believe in you that you can take on

the Chinese". He said, the successive governments had failed the youth, whether it was the UPA government earlier or the NDA government now. "The universal problem we have faced is that we have not been able to tackle the problem of unemployment. Neither the UPA nor the NDA government did it," he remarked.

BJP seeks privilege motion against Rahul Gandhi over China charges in Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Nishikant Dubey has urged Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to initiate a breach of privilege motion against Congress MP and Leader of Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, for his comments in Parliament that Chinese troops were present on Indian soil.

Dubey accused the Congress leader of distorting facts and making baseless claims that "lower the prestige of our Republic". Rahul Gandhi, while responding to the President's address during the Budget Session, launched a direct attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government, accusing it of failing to boost the manufacturing sector under the 'Make in India' initiative. He claimed this failure had led to the presence of Chinese troops on Indian soil, adding: "The reason China is



inside our territory is because 'Make in India' has failed. India is refusing to produce, and I'm worried India is going to give up this revolution to the Chinese again." Rahul Gandhi also raised concerns about unemployment, alleging that India had handed over production jobs to China.

In a letter to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Dubey slammed the Congress MP for making "an attempt to ridicule our country"

and demanding action against the Leader of Opposition, for misleading Parliament. He argued that Rahul Gandhi "shamelessly distorted historical and substantive facts" in his speech. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju strongly refuted Rahul Gandhi's statements, calling them "fake narratives" and accusing him of using "frivolous language" that undermined parliamentary standards.

Why Indian Farmers' Unions criticizing the Central Budget?



JAG MOHAN THAKERN

Praising that the announcements made for the farmers in the Budget 2025-26 tabled in the Parliament on the very first day of February by the Union Minister for Finance, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that this budget will lay the foundation for a new revolution in the agricultural sector and the entire rural economy. PM Modi highlighted that under the PM Dhan-Dhanya Krishi Yojana, irrigation and infrastructure development will take place in 100 districts. He emphasized that increasing the limit of the Kisan Credit Card from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh will provide greater assistance to farmers.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that this program aims to enhance agricultural productivity; adopt crop diversification and sustainable agriculture practices; augment post-harvest storage at the panchayat and block level; improve irrigation facilities and facilitate availability of long-term and short-term credit. This program is likely to help 1.7 crore farmers. Announcing the Mission for Cotton Productivity, Smt. Sitharaman highlighted that the five-year mission will facilitate significant improvements in productivity and sustainability of cotton farming, and promote extra-long staple cotton varieties. She said the mission will benefit lakhs of cotton growing farmers as the best of science & technology support will be provided to farmers.

Here arises the question, if PM Modi's statement — "This budget will lay the foundation for a new revolution in the agricultural sector and the entire rural economy", is the indicative of the farmers' welfare budget, then why the farmers under the banner of Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Majdoor Morcha (KMM) are agitating even

after the budget at Punjab-Haryana border at two places since February 13, 2024 and the farmer leader Dalweal is still continuing his hunger strike started from November 26? Shouldn't they step back after this so much miraculous budget?

What the Farmers' leaders say?

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) leader and National Vice-President of All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), Dr Inderjeet Singh says that the union budget has totally belied the hopes and expectations of farmers as the announcements pertaining to the farm sector are disappointing.

"Farmers were expecting reduction in input cost, debt relief by way of loan waiver, MSP legal guarantee on the basis of C-2+50%, farm implements exempted from GST and withdrawal of National Policy Framework on Agricultural Marketing etc. out of which none has materialized." Dr. Singh adds that there is a decrease in allocations on food security, irrigation, MGNREGA, PM Fasal Bima Yojana etc. Kisan Samman Nidhi amount has also not been enhanced.

Reacting over the enhancement in credit limit, Dr. Inderjeet states that as far as increase in amount of loan on credit card is concerned it is itself and admission of the extent of indebtedness. Apart from this there is no provision for a large number of tenant farmers who cultivate lands on lease and have no supportive mechanisms.

Commenting on 'Mission for Cotton Productivity', announced in the budget, Dr. Inderjeet Singh says, "Purported emphasis on crop diversification by giving emphasis to cotton and pulses is a hoax as area under cotton cultivation is depleting fast due to spurious seeds sold by private companies that is prone to insect infestation. Similarly pulse producing farmers are not being given MSP and they had to make distress sale of



Moong and other pulses."

National spokesperson of Bhartiya Kisan Union, Chaudhary Rakesh Tikait said that there is nothing for villages, poor, farmers, tribals in the budget released by the central government of the country. They are seen in the figures of the government but are miles away from the basic structure.

Tikait states, "The government is forcing the farmers to take loans but not paying the price of crops. When this loan keeps on increasing, the land will be handed over to the corporates. From today's budget, it appears that the farmers of the country who are demanding MSP guarantee law and C2 + 50 formula have got only loans in the budget. This is the budget of corporate capitalists. This budget is just a sham for farmers and laborers. The farmers of the country reject this budget outright. The government has once again betrayed the trust of the farmers."

Basis of criticism by the farmers' unions

All India Kisan Sabha (AIKS), the largest wing of Samyukta Kisan Morcha, gives facts and figures in support of its reactionary criticism of the budget.

AIKS states that the contribution of agriculture and allied sectors to the GDP has increased to 16 per cent of the budget allocation for agriculture and allied activities is lower than the Revised Estimates of 2024-25. While the Revised Estimates of 2024-25 was Rs. 376720.41 crores the 2025-26 allocation is only

Rs. 371687.35 crores. When inflation is accounted for, this is a huge cut in allocation. Real expenditures for agriculture and allied activities have steadily fallen since 2020-21; farmers are clearly not the priority of the BJP-led NDA Government. There is nothing in the budget to ensure legal guarantee of MSP, expand procurement or free farmers from indebtedness. Even the Parliamentary Standing Committee recommendation to ensure remunerative prices has been thrown to the winds.

The increased share of the agriculture sector in employment rising from 44.1 per cent in 2017-18 to 46.1 per cent in 2023-24 indicates a reverse migration from urban areas as there are no employment opportunities. In an extremely insensitive manner, the budget allocation for the MGNREGA has been kept at just Rs.86,000 crores. There is no emphasis for generation of employment in the countryside. The Government is stopping all funds to the National Institute for Rural Development and there is zero allocation in the budget for it; this also is a telling reflection on the BJP-led NDA Government's apathy towards rural development and the rural poor.

Food subsidy is lower than the allocation made in 2024-25. The allocation for distribution of pulses to State/ Union Territories for Welfare Schemes is zero, while the last Budget had allocated Rs.300 crores. The much-hyped exemption of income tax up to Rs.12 lakh is aimed at quick

electoral gains; increasing prices, high levels of indirect taxation, increasing food, health, education, travel expenses will all bring to nought if at all any benefit is accrued through this exemption.

The allocation to the Flagship Program of the Government, the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana for crop insurance has seen a drastic cut from Rs.15,864 crores to Rs.12,242.27 crores. There has been no increase in allocation to the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi and the Scheme has had no adjustment even for inflation since 2019 when it was first initiated.

AIKS adds that the Fertilizer subsidy has been cut from Rs.171298.50 crores to Rs.167887.20 crores, a cut of Rs.3,411.30 crores. The hollow claim of a Six-Year Initiative of Atmanirbharata Mission for Pulses is exposed when the total allocation for the Mission is merely Rs.1000 crores. This claim ironically comes from a Government that just 10 days ago extended duty-free imports of Arhar/Tur and are incentivizing farmers in Mozambique and other countries. In 2024 imports of pulses almost doubled to 60 lakh tons (between January and November). There is also nothing new in the claim that NAFED and NCCF will procure pulses for the next 4 years to ensure price stability; it only exposes the fact that the private sector will not be willing to buy at MSP.

A Dhan Dhyani Krishi Yojana has been announced claiming that it will cover 100 districts with low yields and benefit 1.7 crore farmers but there is no separate allocation for it. It only is a reshaping of existing programs. No allocation has been made for the Price Stabilization Fund for Rubber or for mitigation of the Wild Animal Menace.

Will the government consider the Farmers' concerns?

As the farmers are the backbone of the Indian economy and still, they run into losses

despite their day and night laborious task. Their major and foremost demand is to ensure legal guarantee for their produce, but the central government is adamant even to hear their grievances.

It is pertinent to mention here that even the Indian Vice-President, Jagdeep Dhankhar himself has also expressed his rage over the inaction of the government for neglecting the demands of the farmers.

On December 3, 2024, addressing at the Centenary Foundation Day of Indian Council of Agricultural Research — Central Institute for Research on Cotton Technology (ICAR-CIRCOT), Mumbai, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar supported the MSP demand of the farmers and said, "We are not practical, our policy making is not on the right track. Farmers need a law that guarantees MSP. Look with an open mind, think with an open mind, and evaluate. And it pains me that the well-wishers of the farmers are silent today, they shy away from speaking. No power in the country can stifle the voice of the farmers. A nation will pay a huge price, if it tries the patience of a farmer."

Will the central government heed towards the inner voice of the worthy Vice-President, if the voice of the farmers strikes feebly into the ears of the government.

But the farmers' leaders do not expect much from the government in the present scenario, they think that only the stir path can bow down the adamant government.

AIKS National Vice-President, Dr. Inderjeet Singh warns that there is no other way for the farmers to fight for the reversal of anti-farmer and pro-corporate policies being followed by the Modi government.

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

Mumbai lone Indian city with a potential of 2 Trillion dollars



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Mumbai, which offers significant investment opportunities, is the 'only city in the country with a potential worth 2 trillion dollars,' and Maharashtra should focus on fields like Artificial Intelligence, Biotechnology, and Quantum Computing, according to NITI Aayog's CEO B. V. R. Subrahmanyam.

The NITI Aayog CEO, who met the Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis at his residence, noted that these sectors presented both oppor-

tunities and capacity for growth in the state.

Describing Maharashtra's work in the energy sector as the best in the country and as a model for other states, he emphasized that the state's development plan is ready and needs to be accelerated, with regular reviews of ongoing projects through a +war room. Chief Minister Fadnis said efforts at further accelerating the pace of development in Maharashtra — including several major projects and development works — are underway in the state, even as new investments continued to flow in. The Central Budget witnessed Maharashtra being allocated Rs 11,000 crore for projects like Mumbai Metro, Pune Metro, MUTP and MMR, Fadnis said while stating that Maharashtra will utilize these opportunities effectively while also playing a leading role in India's journey towards development.

Civilian killed in Army firing in Kashmir, one more dies after alleged police torture in Jammu

JAMMU: A civilian was shot dead by the Army in north Kashmir's Baramulla after allegedly failing to stop at a security checkpoint, while another civilian in Jammu's Kathua district reportedly died after alleged torture in police custody.

In the Baramulla incident, the deceased was identified as Waseem Ahmad Mir, a resident of Goripora Bomal in Sopore. The Army stated that a Mobile Vehicle Check Post (MVCP) was set up on February 5 following intelligence inputs about terrorist movement. According to the Army, a speeding truck ignored multiple warnings to stop, prompting troops to pursue it for 23 km before firing at its tyres to bring it to a halt at Sangrama Chowk. The injured driver was taken to Government Medical College, Baramulla, where he was declared dead.

The truck was taken into police custody for further investigation. The J&K police



confirmed that an FIR has been registered, and a post-mortem is underway to determine the cause of death. Authorities urged the public to refrain from spreading misinformation or disrupting public order.

In a separate incident in Kathua's Billawar, 25-year-old Makhan Din was allegedly tortured in police custody before being found dead on February 6. Locals claimed he was detained over suspected links to militants and subjected to beatings and mental harassment. They also alleged that Din had made a video inside a mosque denying any association with militants.

ABDUL WASEY EXPLAINS HOW NEW METHODOLOGIES COMPLICATE INDIA'S POVERTY ESTIMATION



Decoding Budget 2025: From tax breaks to tech advances



The Union Budget for 2025-2026, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, serves as a strategic blueprint to accelerate India's economic growth while ensuring fiscal prudence and inclusivity. The budget, deeply rooted in the vision of "Viksit Bharat" (Developed India), aims to foster development across multiple sectors, from agriculture and MSMEs to infrastructure and technology. By balancing tax reforms, investment in human capital, and sector-specific initiatives, the government seeks to address both immediate economic needs and long-term developmental goals.

One of the standout features of this budget is the comprehensive tax reform aimed at enhancing the spending power of India's burgeoning middle class. Personal income tax exemptions have been raised significantly, with individuals earning up to Rs 1.2 million annually now exempt from paying income tax. For those in higher income brackets, reduced rates have been introduced, simplifying the tax structure and providing relief to millions. This move, expected to cost the exchequer approximately Rs 1 trillion in revenue, is designed to stimulate consumer spending, uplift household sentiments, and invigorate private sector investments. The government's rationale appears to hinge on the belief that increased disposable income will lead to a surge in consumption, thereby driving economic growth.

However, while these tax cuts are poised to boost consumption, they also present potential challenges. The revenue shortfall from these tax reforms must be compensated through other avenues, such as enhanced GST collections, increased corporate taxes, or improved compliance measures. The success of this strategy will depend on the government's ability to broaden the tax base and improve tax administration, ensuring that the fiscal deficit remains under control.

Agriculture, the backbone of India's economy, receives significant attention in this budget. The introduction of the Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana aims to develop 100 agricultural districts, benefiting an estimated 1.7 crore farmers. This initiative focuses on

spurring agricultural growth and building rural prosperity through targeted development and propagation of high-yield, pest-resistant, and climate-resilient seeds. Additionally, the establishment of a Makhana Board in Bihar seeks to enhance the production, processing, and marketing of this unique crop, providing a boost to the local economy.

Furthermore, the National Mission on High Yielding Seeds and the Mission for Cotton Productivity are set to transform the agricultural landscape by improving productivity and sustainability. Enhanced credit through Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) will facilitate short-term loans for 7.7 crore farmers, fishermen, and dairy farmers, with an increased loan limit of Rs 5 lakh. The budget also emphasizes "Aatmanirbharta" (self-reliance) in pulses, with a six-year mission focusing on the development and commercial availability of climate-resilient seeds, enhancing protein content, and improving post-harvest storage and management.

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector, a critical driver of employment and economic growth, has been given a substantial boost. The budget revises the classification criteria for MSMEs, effectively expanding the scope of enterprises eligible for benefits. Customized credit cards with a Rs 5 lakh limit will be issued to micro enterprises registered on the Udyam portal, with 10 lakh such cards expected in the first year. Additionally, a new scheme targeting five lakh first-time entrepreneurs, including women and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, will provide term loans of up to Rs 2 crore over the next five years. Labor-intensive sectors

such as footwear, leather, toys, and food processing are also set to benefit from focused product schemes and support measures. For instance, the footwear and leather sectors are expected to generate employment for 22 lakh people, achieve a turnover of Rs 4 lakh crore, and boost exports by over Rs 1.1 lakh crore. These measures align with the broader "Make in India" initiative, aimed at fostering a vibrant and dynamic MSME sector, enhancing the ease and cost of doing business, and promoting clean tech manufacturing for climate-friendly development.

Infrastructure development remains a cornerstone of this budget, reflecting the government's commitment to building robust economic foundations. The Urban Challenge Fund allocates Rs 1 lakh crore to implement proposals for "Cities as Growth Hubs," "Creative Redevelopment of Cities," and "Water & Sanitation" projects. The Jal Jeevan Mission, extended until 2028 with an enhanced total outlay, aims to achieve 100% coverage of potable water supply across the country.

The Asset Monetization Plan 2025-30 seeks to reinvest Rs 10 lakh crore from existing assets into new projects, signaling a strategic approach to resource utilization. This plan is complemented by power sector reforms, which incentivize distribution reforms and the augmentation of intra-state transmission. States will receive additional borrowing of 0.5% of their Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), contingent on the implementation of these reforms. Furthermore, the SWAMIH Fund-2, with a corpus of Rs 15,000 crore, aims to expedite the completion of one lakh dwelling units through blended finance.

Education and healthcare, critical pillars of human capital development, receive significant allocations in this budget. The establishment of 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs in government schools over the next five years aims to foster innovation and creativity among students. Broadband connectivity will be provided to all government secondary schools and primary health centers in rural areas, bridging the digital divide and enhancing access to quality education and healthcare services.

The budget also proposes the expansion of medical education with 10,000 additional seats, aiming to add 75,000 seats over the next five years. Daycare cancer centers will be established in all district hospitals, improving access to specialized healthcare services. The Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence for education, with a total outlay of Rs 500 crore, underscores the government's commitment to leveraging technology for educational advancement. On the fiscal front, the government targets a reduction in the fiscal deficit to 4.4% of GDP, down from 4.8% in the previous year. This objective is to be achieved through gross borrowings of Rs 14.82 trillion. While the budget reflects a commitment to fiscal consolidation, it also underscores the importance of sustained public investment to drive economic growth. The delicate balance between fiscal prudence and growth-oriented spending will be crucial in navigating the complexities of the current economic landscape.

However, the budget's success hinges on effective implementation and the ability to navigate potential challenges. The ambitious tax cuts, while poised to boost consumption, may strain fiscal resources if not accompanied by commensurate revenue generation from other avenues. Additionally, the global economic environment, characterized by uncertainties and potential commodity price shocks, could impact the budget's projections.

To sum it up, the Union Budget for 2025-2026 presents a balanced and comprehensive approach to addressing India's economic challenges and opportunities. By focusing on inclusivity, infrastructure development, and fiscal discipline, the government aims to create a conducive environment for sustainable growth and development. The effectiveness of these measures will depend on robust implementation, proactive governance, and the government's agility in responding to evolving economic dynamics. As India continues its journey towards becoming a "Viksit Bharat," this budget lays the foundation for a resilient and prosperous future.

Abdul Wasey, Editor-in-chief, The Financial World. Views are personal.

M. SURESH BABU EXPLAINS HOW THE BUDGET AIMS TO BOOST GROWTH BY STIMULATING INDUSTRIAL DEMAND



Reviving demand for industrial growth



Assuming a conservative GDP growth rate of 10.1% for FY26, the Budget accords priority for fiscal consolidation. The 'cautious' GDP forecast appears to be realistic for tax revenue projections, given the uncertainties in the global economy and growth slowdown in the domestic economy.

Importantly, even with these moderate growth expectations, the government has shown resolution in lowering the fiscal deficit. There are two implications of this. First, there exists a possibility of pegging the fiscal deficit to below 4% in the medium term; and second, there is no room for concerns on liquidity in the financial system as an expanded borrowing programme would have caused disturbances in the market.

Given this fiscal path, the gross borrowings would be Rs 14.8 trillion against Rs 14 trillion in FY25. As the liquidity is under pressure currently, a higher level of borrowing could have caused disruptions in the market impacting investments. Given this macro fiscal stance, the Budget attempts to revive growth by stimulating aggregate demand in the economy, with a crucial role assigned to the industrial sector.

There are three aspects to note about the industrial sector. First, industrial growth, especially that of manufacturing, exhibits frequent fluctuations with sectoral and spatial growth differences often dampening employment creation and GDP growth. Second, despite numerous incentives, export growth has been sluggish, with low

productivity growth, competitiveness, and research and development activity. Third, private investments are not keeping pace with governments efforts to encourage them through incentives and concessions.

Boosting industrial growth

Two broad sets of measures can be deciphered to boost industrial growth: (a) economy-wide measures to tackle supply bottlenecks and bolster demand and (b) sector-specific policies to enhance output and exports. In the first set, there has been a continued focus on capital expenditure (capex), which is targeted to be Rs 11.2 lakh crore, higher than the revised numbers for FY25. The focus remains on roads, railways, and defence, which is expected to generate multiplier effects in the economy. Further, to step up investments, various measures have been announced across ministries focusing on fostering public-private partnership deals along with States. There is also an emphasis

on investment in urban infrastructure with funding supported by issuance of bonds.

In terms of stimulating demand, the government has attempted to tackle consumption through changes in income tax rates and has given major concessions for individuals. Complementing this is the focus on social welfare and development through programmes such as PM KISAN, MGN-REGA, and PM Awas Yojana. A combination of tax relief and welfare provisioning along with continued capex is expected to generate higher demand and fuel industrial growth.

Regarding targeted measures for the manufacturing sector, the emphasis has been on three areas: employment and skills, MSMEs, and export promotion. The focus on manufacturing of electronics, toys, and footwear is important, as these are one of the biggest export baskets of China to the U.S. With the U.S. imposing more tariffs on China, it is prudent to focus on domestic production. The emphasis on leather products and production of toys by developing clusters and a manufacturing ecosystem is expected to generate employment in the industrial sector. Four initiatives have been announced for export promotion: an export promotion mission to be driven jointly by the Ministries of Commerce, MSME, and Finance; the BharatTradeNet a digital public infrastructure; a national framework to be formulated as guidance to States for promoting Global Capability Centres in emerging Tier 2 cities; and warehousing facility for air cargo to facilitate the upgradation of infra-

structure. For MSMEs, the loan limit under the Modified Interest Subvention Scheme will be increased from Rs 3 lakh to Rs 5 lakh. Further, a new scheme will be launched for five lakh women entrepreneurs from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Two aspects of the strategy to push industrial growth need careful examination. First, the emphasis on exports might not deliver in an era of global uncertainties and tariff wars. The old mantra of 'export-led growth' needs re-examination. Second, earlier models of skilling have not delivered enough. Given the rapid technological changes and changing needs of industry, a new template needs to be evolved. The PLI scheme also requires stocktaking.

Two challenges

The Economic Survey and the Budget say 'get out of the way', 'trust people', and speak of the need of having a 'light touch regulatory framework based on principles and trust'. The intent is to unleash productivity and employment in the manufacturing sector. However, this throws open two challenges: for the government to implement promises and for corporates to utilise the space left by the government getting out. Getting out then has to be in phases, recalibrating the nudges provided through incentives. This requires corporates to assume a larger role by stepping up investments, for which the economy has been waiting.

M. Suresh Babu, Director, Madras Institute of Development Studies. Views are personal.

LETTERBOX

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BOOKS: REVIEW

Book chronicles dark legacy of Velupillai Prabhakaran

In *The Rout of Prabhakaran*, M.R. Narayan Swamy delivers a comprehensive and deeply researched chronicle of the rise and fall of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and its enigmatic leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran. This book is not just a recounting of events but an exploration of how an individual's initial dreams for justice and freedom can devolve into a violent obsession that ultimately leads to self-destruction and the devastation of the very people he claimed to protect.

Swamy, an experienced journalist who closely followed the LTTE's trajectory, meticulously unpacks the life of Prabhakaran—from a young man with legitimate grievances to a militant leader who embraced violence as the ultimate solution. The book poses a critical question: How does a freedom fighter transform into a ruthless killer, whose actions not only targeted enemies but also obliterated allies and innocent civilians? Prabhakaran was both the back-

bone and the Achilles' heel of the LTTE. Under his command, the LTTE became one of the most formidable guerrilla forces in modern history. Swamy highlights the LTTE's military prowess, its pioneering use of suicide bombers, and its role in high-profile assassinations, including that of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. Yet, this same uncompromising reliance on violence and elimination of dissent ultimately isolated the LTTE from potential political allies and support from the international community.

The book delves into Prabhakaran's paradoxical nature. While he fought for Tamil rights, he was also responsible for the deaths of countless Tamils. Swamy details Prabhakaran's systematic eradication of rival Tamil groups and leaders, including Sri Sabaratnam, Mahattaya, and the revered Amirthalingam. These assassinations, intended to consolidate power, revealed Prabhakaran's growing paranoia and intolerance for differing perspectives within the Tamil movement. Swamy's narrative

underscores how Prabhakaran's narrow vision—shaped by his limited understanding of geopolitics and lack of broader political engagement—contributed to his strategic blunders, most notably the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, which alienated India, a crucial potential ally.

One of Swamy's most compelling insights is how the LTTE's overwhelming focus on military operations, at the expense of political engagement and humanitarian work, led to its downfall. Unlike other revolutionary leaders who transitioned from armed struggle to political leadership—such as Yoweri Museveni in Uganda or the leaders of the Chinese and Vietnamese communist movements—Prabhakaran never embraced the political dimension necessary for sustainable change. This failure to adapt sealed the LTTE's fate.

Swamy also addresses the peace process in Sri Lanka, noting the irony that the LTTE entered negotiations in 2002 at the height of its power, not out of desperation. However,



The Rout of Prabhakaran
By M.R. Narayan Swamy
Konark Publishers
432 pages; Rs 895.

Prabhakaran's inflexibility and the loss of his close confidant Anton Balasingham, who often tempered his militant tendencies, led to a series of miscalculations. The decision to boycott the 2005 Sri Lankan elections, which facilitated Mahinda Rajapaksa's rise to power, was a critical error. Rajapaksa's government took an uncompromising stance against the LTTE, culminating in the military onslaught of 2009 that annihilated the organization and its leadership, including Prabhakaran and his family.

Swamy does not shy away from the brutal end of the LTTE. The book recounts the tragic and gruesome deaths of Prabhakaran, his wife, and their children, including the execution of his 12-year-old son, Balachandran—a stark reminder of the brutalities committed by both sides in the conflict. However, Swa-

my focuses primarily on the LTTE's internal dynamics and Prabhakaran's decisions, offering less exploration of the Sri Lankan state's war crimes and the broader political failures that perpetuated the civil war.

The Rout of Prabhakaran is not just a biography of a militant leader; it is a cautionary tale about the dangers of absolutism, the limits of violence as a political tool, and the tragic consequences of failing to adapt revolutionary ideals to changing political realities. Swamy's detailed account, drawn from years of reporting and personal interactions with key players, offers invaluable insights into one of the most protracted and bloody conflicts in South Asia.

While the book may leave readers wanting a deeper exploration of the broader Sri Lankan political context and the state's role in perpetuating the conflict, it remains an essential read for anyone interested in understanding the complexities of insurgent movements, leadership dynamics in guerrilla warfare, and the human cost of ideological extremism. Swamy's work stands as a critical contribution to the history of the Sri Lankan civil war and the enigmatic figure of Prabhakaran, whose legacy remains both influential and deeply controversial.

STAY POSITIVE.
STAY FIGHTING.
STAY BRAVE.
STAY AMBITIOUS.
STAY FOCUSED.
STAY STRONG.

THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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LIC Reports Over 16 Pc Jump in Consolidated Net Profit In Q3, AUM Up 10.29 Per Cent

NEW DELHI: The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) on Friday reported over 16 per cent rise in its consolidated net profit to Rs 11,008 crore in the third quarter ended December 2024 (Q3 FY25), from the net profit of Rs 9,468.99 crore in the year-ago quarter.

The profit after tax (PAT) for the nine months ended December 31 was Rs. 29,138 crore compared to Rs 26,913 crore for the nine months ended December 31, 2023, registering a growth of 8.27 per cent, the nation's largest insurer said in its stock exchange filing.

In the nine months of FY25, total premium income increased by 5.51 per cent to Rs 3,40,563 crore, and assets under management (AUM) went up by 10.29 per cent to Rs 54,77,651 crore.

Individual business non-par APE (annualised premium equivalent) increased by



106.52 per cent to Rs 6,813 crore while non-par APE share within individual business was up 27.68 per cent for 9M FY25 as compared to 14.04 per cent for 9M FY24.

New business premium income (individual) increased by 9.73 per cent to Rs 42,441 crore in the nine months of FY25.

LIC continues to be the market leader in Indian life insurance business with an

the non-par share within the individual business increased to 27.68 per cent, on an APE basis, as compared to 14.04 per cent for the same period last year.

Further, the value of the new business (VNB) margin has also improved to 17.1 per cent for the nine-month period ended December 31, 2024, as compared to 16.6 per cent for the same period last year, he added.

The value of new business (VNB) for the nine-month period ended December 31, 2024, was Rs 6,477 crore as compared to Rs 5,938 crore for the nine-month period ended December 31, 2023, registering a growth of 9.08 per cent.

Mohanty further stated that till date, more than 1.25 lakh women have been registered in the Bima Sakhi Yojana and more than 70,000 have been appointed as Bima Sakhis.

Bharti Airtel reports 121 pc net profit growth in Q3, revenue jumps 19 pc



MUMBAI: Telecom major Bharti Airtel on Thursday reported a significant rise in its net profit for the third quarter (Q3 FY25) at Rs 14,781 crore, driven primarily by exceptional items from the consolidation of Indus Towers.

However, after adjusting for exceptional items, the company's profit after tax (PAT) stood at Rs 5,514 crore with a 121 per cent increase compared to Rs 2,442 crore in the year-ago period (Q3 FY24). The company's revenue from op-

erations grew by 19 per cent year-on-year (YoY) to Rs 45,129 crore due to strong performance in India and steady growth in Africa.

"We delivered another consistent quarter as Indus Towers consolidation was effective in Q3," said Gopal Vittal, Vice Chairman and MD. He added that the company's balance sheet remains solid, supported by robust cash generation, prudent capital allocation and continued deleveraging.

"At the same time, we believe the industry further tariff repair to ensure sustained investments and long-term value creation," Vittal added. Airtel's EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortisation)

increased by 24 per cent YoY to Rs 24,480 crore, partly reflecting the impact of Indus Towers' consolidation for 43 days during the quarter. The company also reported steady growth in its average revenue per user (ARPU), which rose to Rs 245 from Rs 208 in the same quarter last year.

Airtel strengthened its leadership in the postpaid segment by adding 0.6 million new customers in Q3, taking its total postpaid user base to 25.3 million. Airtel Business continued its strong performance as the revenue increased by 8.7 per cent year-on-year (YoY). Meanwhile, its home broadband segment maintained its growth momentum by reporting a 19 per cent increase in revenue. Net customer additions in this segment reached a record high of 674,000, driven by demand for fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) and fixed wireless access (FWA) services.

Salesforce collaborates with Tata Play for its DTH, OTT Platforms



DOMINICK RODRIGUES
Mumbai

Salesforce announced a strategic collaboration with Tata Play to accelerate relevant and customized experiences to its Pan-India user base.

Tata Play is India's leading direct-to-home and content distribution company.

Arundhati Bhattacharya, chairperson and CEO, Salesforce India, said that the company helps its customers deliver seamless, unified and personalized interactions across multiple touchpoints, creating a harmonious omnichannel experience.

"Salesforce continues to lead AI innovation, introducing solutions like 'Agentforce,' an advanced layer on the Salesforce Platform that enables companies to deploy AI-driven agents capable of autonomously executing tasks across business functions," she said.

"Our partnership with Tata Play marks a significant step in leveraging the transformative power of Generative AI and data-driven insights to deliver hyper-personalized, meaningful interactions," She said, adding "Together, we aim to set up new benchmarks in customer engagement and help Tata Play accelerate its digital transformation journey, creating lasting value for its subscribers across the nation."

Harit Nagpal, CEO & managing director, Tata Play Ltd, said that the company is accelerating its digital transformation journey by implementing Salesforce Data Cloud, Marketing and Personalisation, and Tableau - reinforcing its commitment to becoming a data-driven, customer-centric organization.

"By leveraging Salesforce's AI-powered solutions, Tata Play will unify customer data across its DTH and OTT platforms - including subscriptions, interactions and viewership patterns - creating a comprehensive single view of its customers to enhance targeting, optimize campaigns and deliver seamless, personalized experiences across platforms."

Tata Power posts 10 pc jumps in Q3 net profit at Rs 1,188 crore



MUMBAI: Tata Power on Tuesday reported a robust 10 per cent increase in net profit to Rs 1,188 crore for the Oct-Dec quarter of the current financial year compared to the corresponding figure of Rs 1,076 crore in the same period of 2023-24.

The Tata Group company said the strong performance was due to better realisation in the core business segments comprising power generation, transmission, distribution and renewables. The consolidated revenue of the power major during the third quarter rose 3 per cent to Rs 15,793 crore from Rs 15,294 crore during the same period last year, according to the company statement. The company's earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortisation (EBITDA) increased by 7 per cent to Rs 3,481 crore from Rs 3,250 crore in the year-ago period.

Tata Power said its renewable business in Q3FY25 recorded a 59 per cent jump to Rs 214 crore and by 41 per cent to Rs 787 crore over nine months of the current financial year. The clean and green portfolio now stands at around 6.7 GW installed and a pipeline of 10 GW, which will take the total portfolio to over 16.7 GW.

Aero India 2025: Showcasing India's Aviation and Defense Excellence

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

Aero India 2025, scheduled to take place from February 10-14 at the Air Force Station Yelahanka, Bengaluru, will witness an impressive display of indigenous defense and aerospace capabilities. This premier aviation event will bring together leading defense public sector undertakings (DPSUs) and global aerospace giants, highlighting innovations, collaborations, and advancements that reinforce India's self-reliance in defense and aerospace.

HAL's Showcase: 'Innovate. Collaborate. Lead' Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) will exhibit its cutting-edge technologies under the theme 'Innovate. Collaborate. Lead.' The indigenously designed and developed Light Utility Helicopter (LUH) will take center stage. HAL's Research & Development



divisions will showcase various innovative avionics, mechanical systems, engines, and aerospace technologies for both manned and unmanned aircraft.

HAL's indoor pavilion (Hall-E) will feature: LUH, Hindustan Turbo Trainer (HTT)-40 Simulator, Scaled models of LCA Mk1A fighter, LCA Mk1 Trainer, Hindustan Jet Trainer (HJT)-36, HTT-40, LCH, and ALH Mk IV, Scaled models of Hindustan 228 and its amphibian variant

The outdoor display near HAL's stall will include static displays of LCA Mk 1A, HJT 36, HTT-40, LCA Mk 1 Trainer, Hindustan 228, Do-228, and LUH. The flying display will feature unique formations of LCA Mk 1A, HJT 36, HTT-40, and LUH.

At the India Pavilion, the central theme 'Flight of Self-Reliance' will be highlighted with: A full-scale engineering demonstrator of the Combat Air Teaming System (CATS)

Warrior Advanced Light Helicopter Next Generation (ALH NG) and Rotary Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (RUAV). A 1:1 model of the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) New technology and future marquee product sections.

HAL will also display state-of-the-art avionics and flight control systems, including: Mission Management System, Digital Map Generator, Data Lite-Communication System, IFF & CIT, Advanced electro-mechanical systems such as Active Side Stick Control, Static models of HTSE-1200 and GTEG-60 engines, showcasing technological innovations, Aerospace models of Cryogenic Engine CE-20, GSLV Mk III, and Chandrayaan-3

HAL will engage with defense delegations, OEMs, and customers, signing agreements and contracts for various projects.

EB5 Capital Secures \$100 Million Credit Facility

FW DESK
Washington

EB5 Capital, a leading Regional Center operator in the EB-5 industry, announced today that it has secured a \$100 million credit facility with EagleBank, one of the largest community banks in the Washington, DC area. This new credit facility, which doubles the firm's previous \$50 million credit line with EagleBank, will significantly



enhance EB5 Capital's ability to remove syndication risk for its sponsors and provide the necessary capital to support future growth.

"This credit facility marks a monumental step forward for EB5 Capital," said Daniel Schiff, Chief Investment Officer & Managing Partner at EB5 Capital. "It represents our vision of building a company that not only provides valuable investment opportunities but also structures deals in ways that benefit our investors and partners."

The expanded credit facility strengthens EB5 Capital's ability to confidently support its sponsors, ensuring access

to the necessary funds to close deals and continue the momentum of its portfolio, which now includes over 40 U.S.-based commercial real estate projects. This increased capacity will provide EB5 Capital with greater flexibility in deal structuring, enabling the company to continue attracting high-quality investors and advancing transformative real estate developments that generate jobs and drive economic growth nationwide.

Union Budget 2025: Impact on Pharmaceutical Sector



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

Economic Survey 2024-25 while observing the performance of pharmaceutical sector in India, highlighted that the total output of the pharmaceuticals, medicinal and botanical products industry in FY23, at constant prices, reached Rs 4.56 lakh crore. The total annual turnover of pharmaceuticals in FY24 stood at Rs 4.17 lakh crore, growing at an average rate of 10.1 per cent in the last five years. Further, during FY24, exports accounted for 50 per cent of the total turnover, with its value at Rs 2.19 lakh crore. During FY24 itself, the total import of pharmaceuticals was about Rs 58,440.4 crore. Economic Survey also noted that industrial R&D is low and is also sectorally concentrated. Drugs and pharmaceuticals led the way, followed by other sectors such as information technology, transportation, defence, and biotechnology.

To promote pharmaceutical sector, various government initiatives include Production Linked Incentive Scheme that aims to reduce import dependence in critical Key Starting Materials (KSMs), Drug Intermediates and Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), setting up of Bulk Drug Parks, scheme to support MSMEs in pharmaceutical

sector to improve their quality, Jan Aushadhi Scheme to provide affordable medicines, etc.

These facts set the tone for the Union Budget. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her speech while presenting Union Budget 2025 used the word, 'medicines' 11 times, 'drugs' 7 times, and 'pharmaceutical' twice. But emphasis remained on making import of certain drugs cheaper, and these drugs are going to benefit patients. It is crucial in case of cancer patients as the National Cancer Registry Programme has projected the rise of cancer cases and there are going to be 800,000 new diagnoses annually. In that background only, experts had advocated for building capacity through a hub-and-spoke model for cancer care. Key beneficiaries in the process are pharmaceutical MNCs too as these drugs are imported and used by these companies in their Patient Assistance Programmes (PAPs).

The Department of Pharmaceuticals has been allocated Rs 5,268.72 Crore. Allocation to the DoP has been increased by almost 28.82 per cent as FY25 BE (Budgetary Estimates) put the allocation at Rs 4,090 Crore. Two major initiatives namely the Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks and Production-linked Incentives Schemes received Rs 1,460 Crore and Rs 2,444.90 Crore respectively. Allocation was higher in comparison to pre-

Table 1 - 37 Medicines and related 13 Patient Assistance Program (PAP) added in the list of items exempt from Basic Customs Duty (BCD)

Name of the Company	Name of Patient Assistance Program (PAP)	Number of Drugs
MSD Pharmaceuticals	PAP 1.0	2
Pfizer Products India Private Limited	LorbriquaCare, DacoCare, and HemaCare	3
Novartis Healthcare Private Limited	UMAANG	2
AstraZeneca Pharma India Limited	AstraZeneca Pharma PAP	5
Johnson & Johnson Private Limited	Johnson and Johnson PAP	7
Merck Specialties Private Limited	Rainbow PAP, My Bavencio Assist Program and My Tepmetko Patient Access Program	3
Takeda Biopharmaceuticals India Private Limited	Takeda PAP	5
GSK Pharmaceuticals Limited		1
Roche Products India Private Limited	The Blue Tree	8
Bristol-Myers Squibb India Private Limited	Bristol-Myers Patient Assistance Program	1

vious year when both these initiatives received Rs 1,000 Crore and Rs 2,143 Crore.

It is the Department of Pharmaceuticals under which Central Sector Schemes/Projects such as NIPERS, Jan Aushadhi Scheme, and Consumer Awareness Publicity and Price Monitoring is dealt. For the development of Pharmaceutical Industry, there are seven initiatives for which Notes for Demands for Grants, 2025-26 listed requirements, and these initiatives are - Pharmaceutical Promotion & Development Scheme (PPDS), Assistance to Pharmaceutical Industry for Common Facilities (API-CF)/Cluster Development, Pharmaceutical Technology Upgradation Assistance Scheme (PTUAS), Promotion of Bulk Drug Parks, Promotion of Medical Device Parks, Human Resource Development in Medical Device Sector, and Assistance to Medical Device Clusters for Common Facilities (AMD-CF).



Production Linked Incentive Schemes comprised three schemes for which requirement was given. Three Schemes are - Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Promotion of Domestic Manufacturing of Critical Key Starting Materials (KSMs)/Drug Intermediates and APIs in India, PLI Scheme for Domestic Manufacturing of Medical Devices, and PLI Scheme for Pharmaceuticals.

National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) related establishment expenditure is also part of the budget of the Department of Pharmaceuticals. Promotion of Research and Innovation in Pharma MedTech (PRIP) has resource requirements. As Medical Devices Sector is a promising area so to strengthen Medical Device Industry, there are schemes like Medical Device Clinical Studies Support Scheme, Medical Device Promotion Scheme, Capacity Building and Skill Development for Medical Devices, and Marginal Investment Scheme for reducing Import Dependence. In Medical Device Industry,

there are certain specialized inputs/components in manufacturing of Medical Devices which are not produced by the general industry. Hence, medical device manufacturers need to import these inputs/components. Through Marginal Investment Scheme for reducing Import Dependence, grants are offered to incentivize the manufacturing of essential or key components or upstream materials or accessories or closely related products which are used in manufacturing of medical devices. In this way, this Scheme is expected to lower import dependence.

Under the DoP, Assistance to Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) primarily includes provision under loan kept for six PSUs namely Indian Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Limited (IDPL), Hindustan Antibiotics Limited (HAL), Bengal Chemicals and Pharmaceuticals Limited (BCPL), Bengal Immunity Limited, Rajasthan Drugs and Pharmaceuticals Limited (RDPL), and Smith Stanistreet Pharmaceuticals Limited. For Karnataka Antibiotics and Pharmaceuticals Limited (KAPL), Internal and Extra Budgetary Resources (IEBR) have been mentioned and not under budgetary support.

Key proposals on pharmaceutical sector primarily focused on providing relief to patients, particularly those suffering from cancer, rare diseases and other severe chronic diseases. 36 lifesaving drugs and medicines were added to the list of medicines fully exempted from Basic Customs Duty (BCD). 6 lifesaving medicines were added to the list attracting concessional customs duty of 5%. Besides this, full exemption and concessional duty will also be applied on the bulk drugs/active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) used in manufacturing above products.

Customs Duty Rate Changes have been affected to reduce 'input costs', deepen 'value addition', promote 'export competitiveness', correct 'inverted duty structure', and boost 'domestic manufacturing', etc.

Specified drugs and medicines under Patient Assistance Programme (PAP) run by pharmaceutical companies are fully exempt from BCD but with a condition that medicines are provided free of cost to patients. 37 more medicines have been added along with 13 new patient assistance programmes. PAPs play an important role as these programmes are expected to simplify the lives of patients suffering from cancer, hemophilia, rare disease etc. Access to effective, and quality healthcare demands a combination of products, services, systems and resources. PAPs recognize a variety of support needs such as diagnostic support services, disease information, funding support and zero interest EMI, PAP vial support, doorstep delivery, 24x7 helpline, reminders & counseling, and value-added services - physiotherapy, nutritional

& psychological support. A pharmaceutical company's support network is expected to include Primary Support Vendors, Team, and Field coordinators pan-India with presence in different parts of the county.

Rise in allocation for healthcare including Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHM) and the National Digital Health Mission will benefit pharmaceutical sector. Non-inclusion of the demand for return of weighted deduction for R&D expenses is on expected line as even the Economic Survey acknowledged the concentration of R&D in select sectors, and it specifically cited Drugs and Pharmaceuticals.

Five crucial health pillars namely preventive care, early detection, low-cost treatment, accessibility, and health tech as outlined by the Union Budget 2025-26 have implications for healthcare sector but have relevance for pharmaceutical sector too. 'Heal in India' too has incremental gains to offer for the pharmaceutical sector.

Dr. Anil Kumar Angrish - Associate Professor (Finance and Accounting), Department of Pharmaceutical Management, NIPER S.A.S. Nagar (Mohali), **DISCLAIMER:** Views are personal and do not represent the views of the Institute.

RBI Cuts Repo Rate by 25 Basis Points to 6.25 Per Cent to Spur Growth

MUMBAI: The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Friday cut the repo rate by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent.

RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said the MPC has also unanimously decided to continue with a neutral stance and will focus on inflation while supporting growth. This would provide flexibility to respond to the macroeconomic environment, he added.

He said that inflation has declined and is expected to further moderate and gradually align with the RBI's target.

Malhotra said the RBI was committed to providing sufficient liquidity in the economy and would take steps to ensure durable liquidity to meet the requirement of the system.

He also said that the RBI was keeping a close watch on the rupee and was taking all steps to keep the Indian currency stable. Growth in the Indian economy is also expected to pick up growth momentum and rural



demand has already revived, he said.

However, there are uncertainties in global trade and climate change also poses a risk to growth, the RBI Governor said.

Malhotra also said that the MPC felt that excessive volatility in global financial markets and global trade policies calls for the MPC to remain watchful.

The RBI's monetary policy announcement comes close on

ministry official and has already announced the injection of Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the banking system as the liquidity situation had become tight in the financial sector.

The government has reduced its net market borrowings estimate for the 2025-26 financial year to Rs 11.54 lakh crore which will leave more money in the banking system for giving out loans to corporates for investment and spur demand through consumer spending to accelerate growth.

According to senior officials, both the fiscal measures announced in the budget and the RBI's monetary policy will be aligned to accelerate growth along with price stability.

The Budget has rolled out significant income tax cuts for the middle class as 1 crore individuals earning up to Rs 12.75 lakh a year will not pay any tax and will have more money in their hands to spend on goods and services. This will add to aggregate demand in the economy, giving a fillip to growth.

Sensex, Nifty End Lower As Investors Assess RBI MPC Decision



MUMBAI: The Indian stock market on Friday closed in the red as investors continue to assess the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s Monetary Policy Committee decision to cut the repo rate by 25 basis points (bps).

However, the central bank maintained its policy stance, keeping a neutral approach. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to reduce the repo rate from 6.5 per cent to 6.25 per cent. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra stated that the committee remains focused on keeping inflation in check while also supporting economic growth. Following the announcement, the BSE Sensex hit a high of 78,357 but

later tumbled nearly 900 points to touch a low of 77,476 during intra-day trading.

The index eventually settled at 77,860, down by 198 points. This marked the third consecutive day of losses for the Sensex, but it still ended the week 354 points higher. The NSE Nifty index fluctuated between 23,694 and 23,443, before closing at 23,560 with a decline of 43 points. "The Nifty remained volatile as the RBI Governor announced the monetary policy. However, the volatility did not push the index below the 21 EMA on the daily timeframe, signifying a positive short-term trend," Rupak De, Senior Technical Analyst at LKP Securities, said.

He further added that the trend is likely to remain positive as long as the index stays above 23,450. Among the top gainers on the Sensex, ITC surged 4.5 per cent, while Bharti Airtel jumped 3.5 per cent after reporting a five-fold increase in its Q3 profit. Other stocks that performed well included Zomato, Mahindra & Mahindra, Ultra-Tech Cement, IndusInd Bank, Tech Mahindra, and NTPC.

On the losing side, ITC and SBI slipped over 2 per cent each after announcing their Q3 results. Other major laggards included Reliance Industries, TCS, ICICI Bank, and Power Grid. Sector-wise, Nifty FMCG and PSU Bank indices declined around 1.5 per cent, while the Oil & Gas index was down nearly 1 per cent. In contrast, the Nifty Metal index gained over 2 per cent in the intra-day trading session. In the broader market, the MidCap index managed to close with slight gains, while the SmallCap index saw mild losses. Meanwhile, India VIX, the volatility index, dropped 4 per cent. Out of 4,057 stocks traded on the BSE, 2,433 ended in the red, while 1,478 registered gains.

Exchange rate policy consistent; not targeting specific rupee level: RBI Governor



NEW DELHI: Reserve Bank Governor Sanjay Malhotra on Friday said the exchange rate policy has remained consistent over the years and the central bank does not target any 'specific level or band' of the rupee, which slipped to an all-time low of \$7.59 to a US dollar.

On Thursday, the rupee plunged 16 paise to close at a record low of \$7.59 against the American currency. "I would like to mention here that the Reserve Bank's exchange rate policy has remained consistent over the years. Our stated objective is to maintain orderliness and stability, without compromising market efficiency," he said while unveiling the outcome of the Monetary Policy Committee meeting. Accordingly, he said, "our interventions in the forex market focus on smoothening excessive and disruptive volatility rather than targeting any specific exchange rate level or band. The exchange rate of the Indian rupee is determined by market forces." The rupee has declined about 2 per cent so far this year. It depreciated by 3.2 per cent against the dollar since November 6, 2024, the day US presidential election results were announced, largely mirroring the 2.4 per cent appreciation in the dollar index during the same period.

The forex reserve has seen a decline of USD 45 billion in the last 3 months partly due to RBI's intervention in the forex market. The forex kitty stood at USD 675.65 billion as on November 8, 2024. As on January 31 this year, India's foreign exchange reserves stood at USD 630.6 billion, up from USD 629.55 billion in the preceding week, providing an import cover of over 10 months. With receding expectations on the size and pace of rate cuts in the US, the US dollar has strengthened and bond yields have hardened, he said, adding, Emerging Market Economies (EMEs) have witnessed large capital outflows, leading to sharp depreciation of their currencies and tightening of financial conditions.

Bold Budget to provide consumption impetus to economy, unleashing of entrepreneurial spirit: ASSOCHAM



FW DESK
New Delhi

Describing it as a "bold" Budget to boost consumption particularly from the vibrant middle-class families, ASSOCHAM said, "Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has lived up to wider expectations by giving significant relief to individual taxpayers, maintaining the fiscal deficit of 4.4 per cent of GDP".

In his reaction to the Union Budget for 2025-26, ASSOCHAM President Sanjay Nayar said, "The finance minister has placed her confidence in the middle class for leading the consumption-led growth". At the same time, there is a clear focus on unleashing the potential of the MSMEs, Startups and exports. He said pick up in consumption demand would, in turn, encourage investment as well in the medium term while several employment-oriented sectors such as tourism, textile, handicrafts, footwear and toys have been given an immediate impetus for take-off. "Priorities to agriculture, rural demand, agro and food processing, warehousing and marine products would infuse a greater vibrancy in the country's rural landscape," he said. Nayar said, leaving annual income of individuals up to Rs 12 lakh a year tax-free and rationalising TDS/TCS thresholds and slabs would not only provide ease of living for common citizens but also provide an ease of doing business for small and micro entrepreneurs. "As was indicated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, his government has foregone a revenue of Rs 1 lakh crore, on account of direct tax exemptions and reliefs, mainly to the middle class. This is quite a bold approach and should pay off to the economic growth." Government's trust in taxpayers is seen enhanced as the focus of the Budget proposals and the forthcoming new Income Tax Bill is on voluntary tax compliance with ease of procedures. The finance minister has also addressed the issue of customs duty inversion by rationalising the rates. She has also placed priorities on Make in India by value-added manufacturing in sectors such as electronics by lowering customs on essential raw material and critical minerals. Continued priorities to climate change and transition to clean energy, as reflected in the Budget proposals, place India in the global leadership role in environment protection even as there are counter moves back towards fossil fuels by some large economies of the world. Startups have been given several easy dispensations which include enhancement of credit guarantee cover from Rs 10 crore to Rs 20 crore. For MSMEs, the credit guarantee cover has been raised to Rs 10 crore from Rs 5 crore.

Budget 2025-26: Here're tax slab rate changes, rebate

RAJU WILLIAM
New Delhi

Union Budget 2025-26 has reposed faith in the country's Middle class and continued the trend of giving relief in tax burden to the common tax-payer.

During the budget presentation in the Parliament, Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Nirmala Sitharaman proposed an across-the-board change in tax slabs and rates to benefit all tax-payers.

Giving the good news to taxpayers, the Finance Minister stated, "There will be no income tax payable upto income of Rs. 12 lakh (i.e. average income of Rs.1 lakh per month other than special rate income such as capital gains) under the new regime.

This limit will be Rs.12.75 lakh for salaried tax payers, due to standard deduction of Rs. 75,000." Tax rebate is being provided in addition to the benefit due to slab rate reduction in such a manner that there is no tax payable by them, she added.

Sitharaman stated that, "The new structure will substantially reduce the taxes of the middle class and leave more money in their hands,



Income	Tax on Slabs and rates		Benefit of Rate /Slab	Rebate benefit Full upto Rs 12 lacs	Total Benefit	Tax after rebate Benefit
	Present	Proposed				
8 lac	30,000	20,000	10,000	20,000	30,000	0
9 lac	40,000	30,000	10,000	30,000	40,000	0
10 lac	50,000	40,000	10,000	40,000	50,000	0
11 lac	65,000	50,000	15,000	50,000	65,000	0
12 lac	80,000	60,000	20,000	60,000	80,000	0
16 lac	1,70,000	1,20,000	50,000	0	50,000	1,20,000
20 lac	2,90,000	2,00,000	90,000	0	90,000	2,00,000
24 lac	4,10,000	3,00,000	1,10,000	0	1,10,000	3,00,000
50 lac	11,90,000	10,80,000	1,10,000	0	1,10,000	10,80,000

boosting household consumption, savings and investment". In the new tax regime, the

FM proposed to revise tax rate structure as follows:

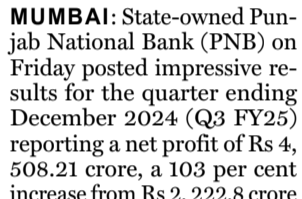
₹0-4 lakh	Nil
₹4-8 lakh	5%
₹8-12 lakh	10%
₹12-16 lakh	15%
₹16-20 lakh	20%
₹20-24 lakh	25%
Above ₹24 lakh	30%

The total tax benefit of slab rate changes and rebate at different income levels can be illustrated in the table below:

Underlining taxation reforms as a key to realize the vision of Viksit Bharat, the FM stated that the new income-tax bill will carry forward the spirit of 'Nyaya'. The new regime will be simple to understand for taxpayers and tax administration, leading to tax certainty and reduced litigation.

Reforms are a means to achieve good governance for the people and economy. Providing good governance primarily involves being responsive. The tax proposals detail just how the Government under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken steps to understand and address the needs voiced by our citizens, asserted Sitharaman.

PNB reports strong Q3 FY25 results, net profit doubles



MUMBAI: State-owned Punjab National Bank (PNB) on Friday posted impressive results for the quarter ending December 2024 (Q3 FY25) reporting a net profit of Rs 4,508.21 crore, a 103 per cent increase from Rs 2,222.8 crore in the same quarter last year.

On a sequential basis, profit grew by around 5 per cent from Rs 4,303 crore in the September quarter (Q2 FY25).

The net interest income (NII) rose by 7.2 per cent year-on-year (YoY) at Rs 11,033 crore, compared to Rs 10,293 crore in Q3 FY24, according to its stock exchange filing.

PNB's total income jumped 16 per cent to Rs 34,751.7 crore from Rs 29,961.65 crore in the previous year. Quarter-on-quarter (QoQ), it saw a marginal increase of 1 per cent from Rs 34,447.10 crore in Q2FY25.

The gross non-performing assets (Gross NPA) reduced to Rs 45,413.98 crore from Rs 60,371.38 crore a year ago and Rs 47,582.25 crore in the previous quarter. The Gross NPA ratio declined to 4.09 per cent from 6.24 per cent

in Q3FY24 and 4.48 per cent in the previous quarter.

However, the net NPA of the public bank fell to Rs 4,437.43 crore from Rs 4,674.24 crore in Q2 FY25 - significantly lower than a year ago. The net NPA ratio of the bank dropped to 0.41 per cent from 0.66 per cent QoQ and 0.96 per cent YoY.

Punjab National Bank's operating profit stood at Rs 6,620 crore in Q3 which was a 4.6 per cent growth YoY.

The credit-deposit ratio of the bank improved to 69.95 per cent from 69.24 per cent YoY and 69.91 per cent in Q2FY25. The bank reported a provision write-back of Rs 285 crore, compared to a provision of Rs 288 crore in Q2 FY25. Provisions against NPAs rose to Rs 317 crore in the third quarter from Rs 199 crore in the previous quarter.

Strategic reforms to spur GDP growth in 2025-26, says PHDCCI



RAJU WILLIAM
New Delhi

The focus on Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) in infrastructure, along with 50-year interest-free loans for state projects, is expected to create a multiplier effect not only boosting India's GDP but also strengthening the states' economy, observed Hemant Jain, President, PHDCCI while articulating his views on Union Budget 2025-26.

He noted that with a historic high of Rs. 50.65 lakh crore, the Union Budget 2025-26 prioritized agriculture, the middle class citizenry, manufacturing, MSMEs, women empowerment, and job creation.

"PHDCCI projects that its strategic focus will contribute over 1% (100 bps) to India's GDP growth in 2025-26, creating lakhs of new employment opportunities in the country. This budget is in line with PHDCCI's expectations, the budget has surpassed the Rs. 50 lakh crore mark for the first time," he highlighted.

The increased budget allocation is set to foster substantial growth across various sectors. A significant reform in in-

come tax, including the exemption for incomes up to Rs. 12 lakh and a 30% tax rate on incomes above Rs. 24 lakh, will stimulate consumption demand and expand industrial production.

The rise in disposable incomes will drive consumer spending, subsequently encouraging businesses to scale operations, increase investments, and expand production.

The Dhan Dhanya Krishi Yojna, benefiting 1.7 crore farmers in 100 districts, will significantly boost rural development, agricultural productivity, and farm incomes.

Moreover, the mission for self-reliance in pulses is set to reduce food inflation and curb dependence on imports, while a dedicated Makhana Board in Bihar will enhance processing and value addition, further benefiting farmers.

The transformative initiatives would empower the MSMEs and bolster the Make in India manufacturing mission. Enhanced focus on MSMEs will generate employment, accelerate economic growth, and strengthen India's journey towards Viksit Bharat, concluded Jain.

Taxation Reforms a Key Feature of the Budget: Finance Secretary

Featured in Part A of the Budget for first time

TANVIR KAUR
New Delhi

Taxation reforms is a key feature of this budget, as it has an impact on what the rest of the economy does and for the first time is included in Part-A of the budget. Budget making is actually balancing different imperatives and never an exercise in segments. We had a 20-25 percent growth in personal income tax over the last three years. We don't really gain loading taxes very much on the same taxpayers. We need to create a wider avenue for income generation and an environment of voluntary compliance. A high level of taxation is counterproductive, and we have taken the bold step of not increasing taxes. Our direction is clear, expand the tax base, expand the economy and the taxes will also flow." Said Tuhin Kanta Pandey, Finance Secretary and Secretary, Department of Revenue, Ministry of Finance at ASSOCHAM Post Budget Conference.

"The Bharat Trade Net announced in the budget will connect all stakeholders and streamline the customs process and has the potential to be much more than UPI. It's no longer a question of following standards; our concept of GST has no parallel in the world and we must take pride in what we all have achieved" he added.

Addressing the conference, Ravi Agrawal, Chairman, Central Board of Direct Taxes, (CBDT), Ministry of Finance, in



his address said, "The customs duty rate rationalization has been conducted in respect of 8,500 tariff lines out of 12,500 tariff lines pertaining to industrial goods. Agriculture goods and textiles have not been touched due to their highly sensitive nature. These rates have remained unchanged for almost two decades and there is a perception that India has very high rates. Rates have been now rationalised to 20% which were between 70 to 20% and those which were above 70% have been brought down to 70%. Equivalent amount of EIDC has been imposed to keep the effective duty incidents at the same rate or slightly lower rate. So, that shock is absorbed gradually."

Delivering the welcome address focused on 'Analysis of Tax-Related Proposals,' Mr Manish Singhal, Secretary General, ASSOCHAM, lauded the government for aligning Union Budget 2025

with public expectations while ensuring fiscal prudence. The introduction of significant tax relief for the middle class is expected to stimulate economic growth by enhancing savings and consumption. Additionally, he emphasized the government's commitment to fostering a business-friendly environment through ease-of-doing-business initiatives and financial deregulation, which will support sustained business expansion.

Sandeep Chaufla, Chair of the National Council on Direct Taxes ASSOCHAM, articulated the need for India to achieve an 8% annual GDP growth rate to fulfill its Vision 2047 aspirations. He commended the tax reforms introduced for the middle class, recognising their vital role in nation-building. The rationalization of tax slabs and increased rebates are expected to stimulate consumption and encourage investment.

ASSOCHAM is expecting the beginning of a rate cut cycle by RBI's Monetary Policy Committee tomorrow in a move to boost consumer demand and bring down interest costs for businesses.

"We share widespread expectations of a 25-basis point cut in the policy REPO rate to 6.25 percent", ASSOCHAM Secretary General Manish Singhal said.

Expecting a demand-led economic recovery in the short to medium term, he said, "With the finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman giving a liberal income tax relief to the middle class, the next booster is expected from the RBI. We are confident the MPC will deliver it".

The ASSOCHAM said while food inflation is moderating, there are bright prospects for the Rabi crop. Going forward by March - April, food prices should be further corrected giving elbow room for a reversal in the rate cut cycle.

"The growth impetus is also required in the face of global headwinds in the form of tariff war amongst the top economies of the world. Exporters need to be given a strong support in a challenging environment".

ASSOCHAM expects rate cut, demand push from RBI



FW DESK
New Delhi

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India to co-chair AI summit, major announcements expected during PM Modi's visit to France

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will co-chair the AI Summit in Paris on Monday. Notably, France had invited India to co-lead this meeting. Earlier summits were held in London and Seoul.

United states and China will be represented by US Vice President and Chinese Vice Prime Minister in the meet along with industry big names, start-ups and major stakeholders in a week long meet.

This is Prime Minister Modi's sixth official visit to France. Apart from co-chairing the AI meet, PM Modi will also attend VVIP dinner hosted by French government on February 12.

"Artificial Intelligence foundation is also expected to be launched during the summit, French president has called it 'action summit.' Focus of summit will be on AI governance



and make it inclusive, political message behind this meeting is that all countries should get involved in AI revolution that is challenging. Action summit will showcase convergence between France and India and create a bridge, innovation will be our new mantra," said diplomatic sources. After co-chairing AI summit, Prime Minister Modi

will also meet CEO's of top French companies in Paris at CEO forum, France is eleventh largest foreign investor in India. More than 800 French companies are operating in India.

The diplomatic sources said the way French companies has complied with 'Make in India' and did transfer of technology like no one else, there is no com-

petition. "Trust is built, our relationship is not just strategic but it is universal," the source added.

Prime Minister Modi will also hold bilateral discussion with French President Macron in French city of Marseille. It is learnt from diplomatic sources that talks on aerospace, engines, submarines and nuclear reactors are progressing successfully.

According to sources, some tangible bilateral agreements and announcements will be made during the visit. India France bilateral roadmap may also be unveiled.

Apart from technology, innovation, cyber, space, security, sovereignty, bilateral meet will also focus on people to people contact. France has an ambitious plan to attract more Indian students to the country. Global issues will also come up during the meet.

Four Killed as US Military Plane Crashes in Philippines



US citizens. The twin-engine turboprop aircraft was contracted by the Defence Department to conduct intelligence,

fence Secretary Pete Hegseth held his first call with his counterpart from the Philippines, Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro, Jr. According to a readout of the call, the two discussed the importance of deterrence in the South China Sea and enhancing the capabilities of the Philippine military.

"The aircraft was providing intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance support at the request of our Philippine allies," the Indo-Pacific Command said in a statement about the crash on Mindanao island. "The incident occurred during a routine mission in support of US-Philippine security cooperation activities." The US military said one service member and three defence contractors were killed in the incident. They were not immediately identified pending notification of their families.

"We can confirm no survivors of the crash," the statement said.

MANILA: A small plane contracted by the US Defence Department crashed in the southern Philippines on Thursday, killing all four people on board, including one US service member, the US Indo-Pacific Command said.

The crash occurred in Maguindanao del Sur in the southern Philippines. Images from the crash site, confirmed by a US Defence official, show the wreckage of a Beechcraft King Air 350 in a rice field. The official said the service member killed in the crash was a US Marine. It is unclear if the three Defence contractors were also

surveillance, and reconnaissance at the request of the Philippines, Indo-Pacific Command said. The crash occurred during a "routine mission," and the cause of the crash is under investigation. The aircraft is registered to Metrea Special Aerospace ISR, Inc., according to publicly available data.

Metrea's website shows a Beechcraft King Air 350 — the type of aircraft that crashed — and advertises "integrated, turnkey Airborne Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (AISR) solutions to our defence partners". The crash comes one day after new De-

Australian PM has announced a billion-dollar funding deal to cut waiting time



CANBERRA: Australia's Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has announced a billion-dollar funding deal to cut waiting times at the country's public hospitals.

Albanese and Minister for Health Mark Butler on Wednesday said that the federal government has reached a deal with all eight states and territories to increase funding for the public healthcare system in 2025-26.

Under the deal, the federal government will boost its contribution to funding for public hospitals and health services by 1.7 billion Australian dollars (1.06 billion US dollars) to 33.91 billion AUD (21.19 billion USD), an increase of 12 per cent.

"This decision today will help save lives and lead to better outcomes for our nation's hospitals," Albanese told reporters in Canberra.

He said in a joint statement with Butler that the funding would help cut waiting lists, reduce wait times in emergency departments and address delays in transferring patients from ambulances to hospital beds.

Of the new additional funding, more than 1.2 billion AUD (749.9 million USD) will go towards hospitals in the states of New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, which account for over 75 per cent of the national population, Xinhua news agency reported.

Public healthcare funding deals between the federal and state and territory governments are usually five-year deals, with the current deal set to expire at the end of the current financial year on June 30.

Butler said that the government would not have time to renew the deal before the general election, which must be held by May, so instead opted for the one-year rollover agreement.

Describing Australia as the greatest country in the world, Albanese had used his New Year's message to declare that the country can become stronger in 2025.

Albanese will face a general election in 2025 where his Labour Party aims to win a second term in power.

The election must be held by May.

In his own New Year's message, Peter Dutton, leader of the opposition coalition, said that 2025 was an opportunity for Australia to get 'back on track'.

Shutting USAID weakens US, helps adversaries: Democrats



NEW YORK: Democrats have vowed to fight the shuttering of USAID, asserting it weakens the US and helps its adversaries.

They took aim at President Donald Trump's adviser Elon Musk, the head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), who announced the decision on Monday, questioning his authority.

"We are not going to let this injustice happen", Senator Brian Schatz said on Monday in Washington with demonstrators holding up signs denouncing the closure of USAID.

"We are going to fight in every way we can, in the courts in public opinion, with the bully pulpit in the halls of Congress", he said.

As China increases its aid and lending programmes around the world for its strategic interests, USAID is an important pillar of Washington's efforts to counter it.

Senator Chris Van Hollen said Musk's effort to shut down USAID is "an absolute gift to our adversaries, to Russia, to China, to Iran and others because aid is an essential instrument of US foreign policy and US national security policy".

He quoted an X post by former Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev calling Musk closing down USAID a "smart move".

About Musk's connections to China, he cited former DOGE co-head Vivek Ramaswamy's allegations that the Tesla boss was a China "puppet" who would respond to President Xi Jinping's requests.

Los Angeles Wildfires Cost upto \$164 Billion in Property & Capital Losses: Report

LOS ANGELES: The two largest wildfires that recently ravaged Los Angeles County may have caused total property and capital losses of as much as 164 billion US dollars, according to a new report.

The report published on Tuesday by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) suggests total property and capital losses caused by the Palisades and Eaton fires could range between 95 billion dollars and 164 billion dollars, with insured losses estimated at 75 billion dollars. The report, authored by UCLA Anderson Forecast economists Zhiyun Li and William Yu, predicts a 0.48-percent loss in county-level GDP for 2025, amounting to approximately 4.6 billion dollars, and a total wage loss of 297 million dollars for local businesses and employees in the affected areas, reports Xinhua news agency.

"Without substantial and effective wildfire mitigation efforts



and investments, Californians will face increasingly higher insurance premiums and growing health risks from wildfire-related pollution," said the report, adding that Los Angeles housing markets, "in particular for rental units, will become increasingly unaffordable."

UCLA Anderson Forecast is one of the most widely watched and often-cited economic outlooks for California and the

region, according to UCLA Anderson School of Management's website.

Last month, Los Angeles County, the most populated county in the United States, experienced the most catastrophic wildfires in its history. The two deadly major wildfires killed at least 28 people and destroyed over 16,000 structures. The Palisades and Eaton fires scorched over 23,700 acres (95.9 square

km) and 14,000 acres (56.7 square km), respectively. Additionally, the devastating wildfires that began sweeping through Southern California on January 7 have left the region's education system reeling, with over a dozen schools severely damaged or destroyed. As school officials begin the daunting task of rebuilding, they face an estimated cost of hundreds of millions of US dollars, with recovery expected to take years.

At least 12 schools in Los Angeles County have suffered significant damage, with five campuses destroyed, according to CalMatters, a nonprofit news organisation focusing on local agendas in California. Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest school system, lost two elementary schools in Pacific Palisades, while Palisades Charter High School was heavily damaged. In Pasadena and Altadena, three additional elementary schools were destroyed.

US tariff move sparks criticism, concern in Germany

BERLIN: US President Donald Trump's tariff move against Canada, Mexico and China has sparked criticism and concern in Germany.

On Saturday, Trump ordered to impose a 25 per cent tariff on imports from Mexico and Canada, and a 10 per cent tariff on Chinese goods. He also signalled that the first priority should be the bloc's persistent trade surplus with the US.

While reaffirming Germany's commitment to economic ties with the US, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz emphasised that the first priority should be "not to divide up the world with many tariff barriers."

"Tariffs have never been a good idea to resolve trade policy conflicts," Chairman of the German Christian Democratic Union Friedrich Merz said, warning of backlash in the



US as rising import costs would fuel inflation and hit American consumers directly, reports Xinhua news agency.

Dirk Jandura, president of the Federation of German Wholesale, Foreign Trade and Services (BGA), described the tariffs as "a clear warning to the EU and Ursula von der Leyen," stressing that neither Germany nor the EU should remain passive.

Trump's move would come at a high cost for Americans, Jandura said, adding, "The losers are always end consumers, who will feel the price increase at the checkout."

European Commission calls for faster progress in water protection, flood management

BRUSSELS: The European Commission called for faster progress across the European Union (EU) to protect waters and better manage flood risks.

According to the latest report on the state of water in the EU, only 39.5 per cent of EU surface water bodies have good ecological status while only 26.8 per cent of waters are achieving good chemical status, Xinhua news agency reported. "This is mainly due to widespread contamination by mercury and other toxic pollutants," said the Commission, adding that water scarcity and drought are also growing concerns across most of the EU waters. Therefore, it recommended that states should increase compliance with EU water laws to adhere to pollution limits, improve waste-



water discharge, and ensure sufficient funding to enable effective implementation of water management measures. They should also address persistent environmental challenges, such as chemical pollution, and promote water reuse, the Commission said.

Member states need to invest in flood prevention, which must be based on ecosystem restoration, nature-based solutions, and early warning systems, it added, citing several massive floods affecting many EU coun-

tries, including Slovenia, Spain, Germany, Austria, Poland, Romania, and France over the past two years.

The Commission also recommended that member states should enhance measures to protect marine biodiversity and reduce nutrient, chemical, and underwater noise pollution. They should share input and help design the future European Water Resilience Strategy, it said, adding that a consultation event on the matter will take place on March 6.

Though much needs to be done, the commission also noted significant progress over the past few years. According to the report, marine macro litter on the EU coastline went down by 29 per cent from 2020 to 2021 compared to the 2015-2016 period.



Dhaka lodges protest with Delhi over Hasina's activities in exile

NEW DELHI: Bangladesh on Thursday lodged a protest with India's acting envoy saying that "false and fabricated comments" by deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina are a "hostile act" against Dhaka,

a day after she delivered a virtual address to her supporters from exile in India.

The foreign ministry here asked India "to immediately take appropriate measures, in the spirit of mutual respect

and understanding," an official statement read. India later voiced anguish over destruction of the historic residence and said the "act of vandalism" should be strongly condemned.

A MESSAGE FOR INDIA!

US Fortifies Influence in Americas, Panama Yields

GOPAL MISRA

With the recent visit of the US Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, to countries such as Panama, in Central America, triggers the fight for supremacy between Washington and Beijing in the region.

Meanwhile, during a brief encounter between Rubio and India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, India appears to have been frankly told that New Delhi's soft peddling with China is not acceptable to the Trump Administration.

In spite of the much trumpeted rhetoric in the Indian media about how India is fortifying her resources to pick up the gauntlet against China, it is being observed in Washington that New Delhi is reluctant to take any substantial measures even in discontinuing heavy imports of consumer goods needs from China. Even the cottage industries, which were giving employment to millions of Indians and catering to the daily needs, in India, these industries have been allowed to

close down during the past 10 years. It has enabled the Chinese to penetrate the Indian markets of consumer goods without any hassle. Earlier, the policy of prohibiting the big industry to manufacture the goods earmarked for the small and medium enterprises has also been done away by the present government. Maybe, it was done on the advice of Beijing.

With the action-packed policies, now being vigorously pursued in foreign as well as in domestic affairs by Washington for reining in China, Rubio has ensured that China concedes American interest in the region.

The message is clear that the 200-year old Monroe doctrine will remain the keystone of US policy in the Americas.

In 1823, President James Monroe had spent out that the European powers would not be allowed to interfere in the western hemisphere. The US would be reciprocating by not interfering in the affairs of Europe. Washington now has decided to use it against the Chinese penetration in the region.

The issue is whether the



Monroe doctrine could be evoked to prevent the growing financial and strategic presence of Beijing in the region. The Monroe doctrine has never been validated by any international forum. It may be recalled that during the 1962 standoff between the then US President John F. Kennedy, and the strongman of the then USSR, Nikita Khrushchev, the US had finally succeeded in preventing the USSR from deploying missiles loaded with nuclear weapons in Cuba. With the retreat of the USSR, on this issue, the American opposition of setting up missiles with nuclear weapons was validated by invoking the Monroe doctrine.

It appears that the Trump Administration has already decided to invoke this American assertion in the Western hemisphere. It however, is to be ascertained yet whether China would concede to Washington on this issue.

Panama Retreats

A few days before the visit of the top American diplomat to his country, the Panamanian President Jose Raul Mulino, who was keen to assert his country's sovereignty, had refused to concede any American role in the management of the Panama Canal. It was being stated that the American company which had constructed the canal has already

been allowed to obtain the profits and also the capital invested in the Panama Canal, a 82-kilometre waterway connecting the Atlantic Ocean to Pacific Ocean. It was built by the US in 1914, and Panama got its full control in 1999.

According to the Panamanian authorities, the US has no locus-standi in the management and functioning of the Canal. Apart from allowing Chinese to manage the canal, they have also signed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with

Beijing. However, with the high-profile visit, they have also decided to discontinue this agreement with Beijing.

It is natural for Washington to be happy with the recently held negotiations with Panama.

Rubio's Initiative

In an interview Rubio's policy regarding the ongoing Panama Canal Negotiations in Focus, just on the eve of his visit to Central America; US has demanded that they must reduce Chinese Influence Over Canal or US Will Act. During a January 30 in-

terview with Megyn Kelly of The Megyn Kelly Show, he also stated that "One of the main investments the Chinese have is in these two port facilities on both sides of the canal. And all kinds of other infrastructure, cranes and the like," Rubio said, "all this is not acceptable to us".

He further stated that while the company engaged in these activities is from Hong Kong, it still comes under the control of the Chinese regime. He also shared his national security concerns with President Jose Mulino and Foreign Minister Javier Martinez-Acha in a Panama City meeting on Feb. 2.

Rubio told them that President Donald Trump has determined that "the current penetration of China in the region is not acceptable. Within the next three months, India too would be told to take effective steps against the Dragon.

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

Mexico hits back at US after Trump's decision to impose tariffs

MEXICO CITY: In response to former US President Donald Trump's imposition of a 25 per cent tariff on Mexican imports, Mexico's President Claudia Sheinbaum has announced counter-tariffs on American goods, further escalating trade tensions between the two nations.

Rejecting allegations from the White House that her administration has ties to criminal organisations, Sheinbaum shifted the blame onto the US, accusing American arms dealers of supplying weapons to illicit groups.

"If any alliances exist, they are in the United States' weapons industry, which sells high-powered firearms to these criminal groups, as the US Department of Justice itself confirmed in January this year," she asserted.

Sheinbaum firmly stated that Mexico would not accept any form of foreign interference. "We outright reject the White House's baseless claims that the Mexican government is aligned with criminal organisations, as well as any attempt to intervene in our country's affairs," she declared.

Stressing the importance of diplomacy, Sheinbaum em-



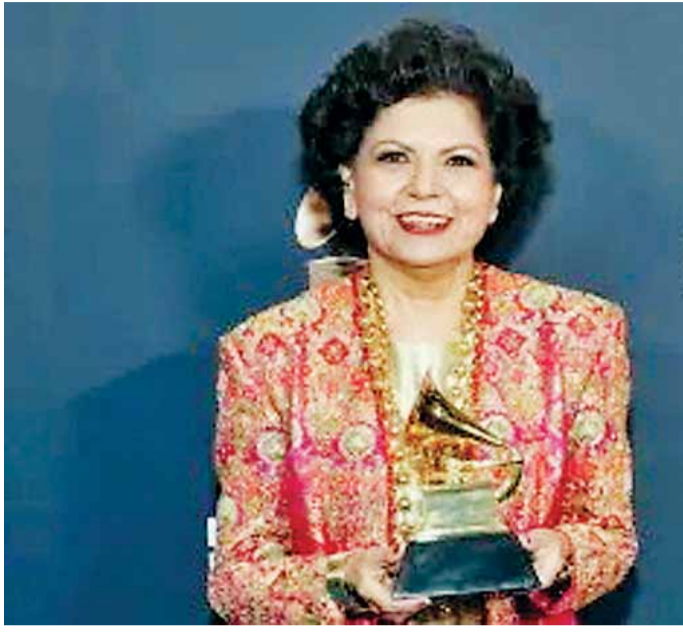
phasised Mexico's preference for cooperation over conflict.

"We advocate for collaboration between neighbouring nations. Our efforts must be based on shared responsibility, mutual trust, and respect for sovereignty, which is non-negotiable. Coordination, yes; subordination, no," she posted on X. Responding to Trump's accusations that Mexico has failed to control fentanyl trafficking and illegal migration, Sheinbaum highlighted her government's extensive anti-drug efforts.

She reported that in just four months, Mexican authorities had seized over 40 tons of illicit drugs, including 20 million doses of fentanyl, and arrested more than 10,000 individuals associated with drug cartels.

Sheinbaum slammed US authorities for their inadequate response to the fentanyl crisis, arguing that the epidemic is largely a domestic issue.

Grammy Award 2025: Indian-American Musician & Entrepreneur Chandrika Tandon bags best new age album award



NEWDELHI: Indian-American vocalist and entrepreneur Chandrika Tandon has won the Grammy award for the album Triveni in the Best New Age, Ambient or Chant Album category. The 67th edition of the biggest musical awards night, organised by the Recording Academy, was held on Sunday at the Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles. Tandon, also a global business leader and the older sister of former CEO of PepsiCo Indra Nooyi, won the award along with her collaborators South African flautist Wouter Kellerman and Japanese cellist Eru Matsumoto.

“It feels amazing,” said the musician, who grew up in Chennai, in a backstage interview with the Recording Academy after winning the Grammy. Other nominees in the Best New Age, Ambient or Chant Album category were: Break of Dawn — Ricky Kej, Opus — Ryuichi Sakamoto, Chapter II: How Dark It Is Before Dawn — Anoushka Shankar, and Warriors Of Light — Radhika Vekaria. “We had such wonderful nominees in the category. The fact that we won this is really an extra special moment for us. There were fabulous musicians who were nominated with us,” she added.

Diljit Dosanjh treats this disease with a simple trick



MUMBAI: Punjabi superstar Diljit Dosanjh, whose Dil-Luminati Tour has been a massive rage across the globe, is sharing tips on how to combat tension in routine life. The video shows Diljit treating the tension of different people with one slogan, “Tension mitra nun hai nahi”. He wrote in the caption, “Tension, ye Bimari Kis Kis Ko Hai? (Tension - Who all have this disease?)”. One of the instances in the video also shows Diljit poking fun at the government advisories on his shows when

international music artists don't get issued any such advisory. Diljit appeared to me making a backhanded comment on the recently concluded Coldplay shows in India. Earlier, the actor-singer had shared the first look from his upcoming movie 'Punjab '95'. He took to his Instagram, and shared an array of pictures in which he can be seen in his character from the film. He wrote in the caption, “I Challenge the Darkness. Punjab '95”. The film is based on the life of human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khaira. He was the director of a bank in the city of Amritsar in Punjab during the militancy period in Punjab. Following Operation Blue Star, the assassination of Indira Gandhi, and the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots, the police were empowered to detain suspects for any reason, ostensibly as suspected terrorists.

Haryana govt making dedicated efforts to prevent cancer: Arti Singh Rao



GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

Haryana Health Minister Kumari Arti Singh Rao said that considering the rising number of cancer cases in Haryana, the state government is making dedicated efforts to prevent cancer. A strong and comprehensive approach is being adopted to ensure better treatment and healthcare facilities, even for patients in remote areas.

Health Minister, Kumari Arti Singh Rao made people aware about the disease on World Cancer Day. A state-level seminar was organised in Panchkula today on World Cancer Day.

The Health Minister mentioned the state government's initiative for cancer patients including free travel in roadways and pension benefits. In 2024-25, 9,408 passes have been issued to cancer patients for free travel, and 3,428 patients are receiving a monthly pension. Various awareness rallies, seminars, and health camps were held across the state to educate people about cancer prevention, she added.

The minister further pointed out few steps to reduce the risk of cancer such as, tobacco and alcohol consumption are among the main causes of cancer, and avoiding them can help prevent the disease. She advised people to eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains while avoiding processed and red meat. Regular physical activity and yoga should be included in daily routines, as exercise plays a key role in reducing cancer risk. Speaking at the seminar, Additional Chief Secretary, Health Department, Sh. Sudhir Rajpal, said that the Atal Cancer Hospital in Ambala Cantt is providing top-class treatment not only to Haryana's residents but also to patients from neighbouring states.

Session on Business beyond Borders – London Calling Amritsar



FW DESK Amritsar

Punjab State Chapter of PHDCCI, in association with London & Partners International organized an Interactive Session on Business Beyond Borders – London Calling Amritsar Hotel Courtyard by Marriott, Amritsar. The session aimed to equip industrialists with valuable insights and resources necessary for successfully entering and navigating the UK market. Ashok Sethi, Steering Committee Member, Amritsar Zone, PHDCCI and Director, Punjab Rice Millers & Exporters Association welcomed the delegates and speakers. He emphasized the long-standing historical connection between Amritsar and London, highlighting the potential for fostering stronger trade relations in the future. Abhilasha Malik, Vice President – North India, London & Partners, presented an insightful

overview of the services and offerings available through London & Partners International. She highlighted some of the key growth sectors in London, showing

causing the immense potential for Indian businesses to tap into this thriving market. Hemin Bharucha, Chief Representative, Mayor of London and Regional Director, India & Middle East, London & Partners, engaged in a fireside chat where he addressed critical questions about trade and investment sentiment between London and India. He elaborated on how trade dynamics have evolved in recent years and shared projections for future growth. Bharucha also discussed the upcoming London Tech Week, emphasizing the event as a prime opportunity for Indian tech companies to expand their global footprint. The session was moderated by Vishal Mehra, Member, PHDCCI and Director, Sewa Ram Overseas Group who shared his own experiences with trade in London, providing valuable insights into overcoming challenges and capitalizing on opportunities in international markets.

Robot Mummy: Can Robots Be Part of Our Family? Exploring the Future of Kinship and AI



DR. R B CHAUDHARY

As the world grapples with demographic challenges such as aging populations, declining fertility rates, and shrinking birth rates, artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly being considered as a potential solution. But can a robot truly be a part of our family? Researchers at Umeå University in Sweden are exploring this question through a project called AI and Kinship. Led by Dr. Berit Åström, the project analyzes how AI is depicted in speculative fiction, such as science fiction stories and films, as a way to understand how we might imagine AI as part of our families. The project is not just about robots and AI, but about how we define family and relationships. Close relationships are the

fabric of our society, regulating everything from caring responsibilities to life-changing decisions. As AI becomes more integrated into our daily lives, including healthcare and social care, the boundaries between human and non-human are becoming increasingly blurred. This raises important questions about the potential roles that AI can play in our families and communities. The AI and Kinship project is using kinship studies to analyze stories about androids and AI in speculative fiction. By examining these narratives, the researchers aim to gain insight into how cultures make sense of the challenges posed by demographic changes and how AI can be imagined as part of the solution. One area of particular interest is the potential of AI in caregiving and family relationships. As the population ages, there is a growing need for caregivers and support systems. AI-powered robots and virtual assistants could potentially fill this gap, providing companionship, emotional support, and practical care.

However, this raises important questions about the nature of family and kinship. Can a robot truly be a part of our family, or is it simply a tool to support our relationships? As AI becomes more integrated into our daily lives, it's essential to consider how we want to relate to these technologies. Can a robot be a mother, a sibling, or a child? The AI and Kinship project is helping us explore these questions and imagine a future where AI is part of our families. The project's goal is to help us think critically about the roles we want AI to play in our society. By exploring how AI is imagined in speculative fiction, we can gain insights into how cultures make sense of current challenges and imagine possible alternatives. As Dr. Åström explains, “The analysis can help us understand how we make sense of contemporary challenges in terms of kinship and care practices, and what possible options we can imagine AI posing in the future.” (Author is a Senior Journalist, specialized in Science writing and communication; Editor-in-Chief, Pashu Mitra (Hindi-English Bimonthly) and Former Editor and Chief/Assistant Secretary, Animal Welfare Board of India, Government of India)

Fresh snowfall in Kashmir valley



GULMARG: Several higher-altitude areas in Kashmir, including popular tourist destinations Gulmarg and Pahalgam, received a fresh spell of light snowfall overnight. Srinagar and other parts of the valley experienced light rain during the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, while some areas in the Jammu region also recorded light showers. According to the Meteorological Department, Gulmarg in north Kashmir's Baramulla district received 5.1 cm of snowfall, while Pahalgam recorded 2.8 cm and Kupwara 2.5 cm. Higher reaches, including the Pir Panjal range in south Kashmir, also witnessed light snowfall. The MeT department has predicted generally cloudy weather with a possibility of isolated light rain

or snowfall over the next 24 hours. Light snowfall and rain are expected at some places from the evening of February 3, with chances of light to moderate precipitation across Jammu and Kashmir on February 4. Another spell of rain or snow is likely in the early hours of February 5. Meanwhile, night temperatures remained above normal in most areas, except for Gulmarg, where temperatures dipped. Srinagar recorded a minimum temperature of 2.5°C, rising from 0.8°C the previous night and exceeding the normal average by 3.1°C. Gulmarg saw a slight decrease in temperature, recording -7.6°C compared to -7.4°C the previous night. Pahalgam's temperature dropped to -2.6°C from -0.4°C, while Kokernag recorded -0.8°C.

Talking Points Narvijay Yadav



Can you imagine how emails, AI, social media, smartphones, and digital activities impact the earth? Adopting responsible digital habits is essential to mitigating its environmental impact as technology advances.

Every email sent, every AI query processed, and even browsing through photos on a smartphone consumes energy. These everyday digital activities contribute to carbon emissions, accelerating global warming. With data centers expanding rapidly to meet growing digital demands, the environmental footprint of our digital lifestyles is becoming a serious concern. Emails seem harmless, but their ecological impact is more significant than most people realize. A single email generates approximately four grams of carbon dioxide due to the energy required to process, store, and transmit data. This might seem small, but when billions of emails are exchanged daily, the cumulative impact is alarming. When an email is sent, it travels through multiple servers before reaching the recipient, consuming power at every stage. The problem is particularly severe with unnecessary emails like spam, promotional content, and automated notifications that flood inboxes everywhere. It is estimated that over 300 billion emails are sent globally daily, and a significant portion are redundant. Moreover, the 'reply all' option in emails is another major culprit. When multiple recipients receive and respond to an email thread, the data

Emails, AI, Smartphones Harm Environment



load escalates, leading to higher energy consumption. If people were to delete old and unneeded emails regularly, the collective reduction in carbon emissions would be substantial. The impact of smartphone usage on the environment extends beyond daily energy consumption. Every digital action, from sending a message to scrolling through images, requires energy, as data is continuously retrieved from cloud storage and transmitted between servers. Phone production contributes significantly to environmental degradation. Extracting rare earth metals used in components involves destructive mining that harms the earth and depletes natural resources. Streaming services, cloud backups, and automatic updates also contribute to carbon emissions. Even browsing images or watching videos uses power on the device and servers. Energy consumption can be reduced by reducing cloud storage reliance, disabling auto-backups, and minimizing background apps. AI, the latest tech revolution, is among the most energy-intensive digital systems. Large AI models that power virtual assistants like ChatGPT, Google Assistant, and Siri require vast amounts of computational power. Training these AI models

Surajkund mela to be held from Feb 7 to 23, tickets can be booked online: Kala Ramchandran



GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

Haryana Tourism Corporation's Principal Secretary Kala Ramchandran said the 38th International Surajkund Crafts Fair will be organized in a grand manner. All the preparations are in full swing for this fair, which will be organized from February 7 to February 23. Kala Ramchandran today held a meeting with the administrative officers regarding the preparations of the 38th Surajkund International Crafts Fair. Deputy Commissioner Vikram Singh was also present on the occasion. The Principal Secretary said the Surajkund Fair has been digitized. For the first time, the booking of stalls has been done online. While maintaining complete transparency, the crafts fair of Surajkund is getting ready to welcome the general public through a digital platform. Information about every aspect of the fair will be available on surajkundmela.co.in. This time, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh are the theme states and BIMSTEC-Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand are the partners while North East Handloom and Handicraft Association is the cultural partner for the fair. The Delhi Metro will be the ticketing partner. Artists, weavers, craftsmen from theme states, BIMSTEC countries as well as other countries will participate in the fair, while the common people will be able to enjoy the traditional dishes of many states of the country.

Alchemist Hospital Panchkula Organizes Screening Camp & Awareness Talk on World Cancer Day



FW DESK Panchkula

On the occasion of World Cancer Day, Alchemist Hospital Panchkula organized a cancer screening camp and an awareness talk aimed at educating the public about cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment. The event featured expert insights from Dr. Mukesh Bansal, Consultant Medical Oncologist, and Dr. Munish Mahajan, Consultant Surgical Oncologist. During the camp, the hospital's specialized cancer team provided free medical and surgical consultations. A key highlight of the event was the free mammography screening and 50% discount on PSA test. This initiative was part of the hospital's ongoing commitment to spreading cancer awareness and ensuring early diagnosis, which can significantly improve treatment outcomes. During the awareness session, Dr. Mukesh Bansal emphasized the importance of regular check-ups and lifestyle modifications. He stated, “Early detection is crucial in the fight against cancer. Regular screenings, a healthy diet, and avoiding tobacco can significantly reduce the risk of various types of cancer.” Dr. Munish Mahajan highlighted the role of advanced surgical interventions and



timely medical care. He said, “With advancements in medical science, many types of cancer can be cured if detected in the early stages. Our goal is to educate people on recognizing early symptoms and seeking medical consultation without delay.” The event witnessed a large turnout, reflecting the growing awareness of cancer and the need for proactive health measures. Attendees appreciated the hospital's initiative in making quality healthcare accessible and sharing valuable information on cancer prevention. Alchemist Hospital Panchkula remains committed to continuing such efforts in the future, empowering communities with knowledge and healthcare support. The hospital urges everyone to prioritize regular health check-ups and spread awareness about the importance of early cancer detection.