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**SAURABH BHARDWAJ IS** NEW CHIEF OF DELHI UNIT, **REPLACES GOPAL RAI; MANISH** SISODIA MOVED TO PUNJAB

BANKING & FINANCE



**INDIAN ECONOMY REMAINS RESILIENT AMID RISING GLOBAL CHALLENGES: RBI** 



**HOCKEY OLYMPIANS** MANDEEP SINGH AND **UDITA DUHAN TIE THE KNOT** 

### Starting from 'level zero' to rebuild city infra: Delhi CM Rekha Gupta

NEW DELHI: Marking her first month in office, Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on March 20 hit out at the previous AAP government for ru-ining the city's basic facilities and infrastructure, promising to offer relief despite being forced to start from 'level zero' to rebuild a Viksit Delhi.

A message posted on the so-cial media handle of the Chief Minister's Office read: "Due to the failures of the previous governments, Delhi is yearning for basic facilities. She reiterated the resolve to take Delhi towards development afresh under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra

Rekha Gupta also said the Delhi government has to start from level zero to rebuild the basic infrastructure in the city. which is struggling to get rid of mountains of garbage.

She lamented the poor performance of previous governments for leaving Delhi in a state where questions are being raised about sanitation and cleanliness, and it has become among the most polluted cities in the world.

Manipur burned under

Congress rule, but they

ignored it says Nirmala

**NEW DELHI:** Responding to

a discussion on Manipur in the

Rajya Sabha on Tuesday, Union

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman accused the Congress of

She alleged that when both

the Centre and Manipur were

under Congress rule, hundreds

were killed, but no Union Minis-

ter visited the state to assess the

situation and cool things down.

gress governed Manipur from

2002 to 2017 and led the central

government until 2014. "During that time, Manipur experienced

628 shutdowns and blockades, causing a loss of Rs 2, 828 crore

to the state treasury, "she said.

2011, under Congress rule, Ma-

nipur faced a 120-day economic

blockade that led to severe

shortages of essential commodi-

ties. "Petrol prices soared to Rs

200 per litre, and cooking gas

reached Rs 2,000 per cylinder

Contrasting this with the BJP

government, Sitharaman said

that when the recent unrest

began, Union Home Minister

Amit Shah personally visited

Manipur, spending four days

meeting with affected com-

groups during the most tense

engine government, ministers

have been consistently present

Her remarks sparked pro-

tests from opposition members,

including Trinamool Congress

(TMC) MP Sushmita Dev. In a

heated exchange, Sitharaman

criticised the TMC members,

saying, "This is the Rajya

Sabha, not the streets of Kol-

then, "she added

period, "she said.

pur for 23 days.

on the ground."

She also mentioned that in

Sitharaman said that Con-

during its tenure.

Sitharaman

"The Yamuna is crying for cleaning and mountains of garbage have not been adressed, "she said.

Suggesting a joint effort to rebuild and improve infrastructure in the national capital, she said that collective participation and public cooperation were important for achieving the objective of Viksit Delhi.

In her inimical poetic style, CM Gupta recited a couplet: "There will be no delay in decision-making due to lack of intent and nobody will benefit if all start focusing on their personal interests.

In her first month in office, the CM has visited hospitals to improve health facilities. initiated steps for redeveloping the reclaimed Bhalswa landfill site by building a

bamboo forest, pressed for

desilting three major south

Delhi drains falling into the Yamuna to check waterlogging, and called for improving facilities at Asha Kiran shelter home. Chairing her first Cabinet meeting on February 20, CM Gupta approved a 100-day

plan, decided to clean the

Yamuna and develop the riv-

"Due to the failures of the previous governments, Delhi is yearning for basic facilities. She reiterated the resolve to take Delhi towards development afresh under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi."

pending CAG reports in the Assembly and gave approval for the introduction of Centralgovernment funded Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) that offers a health cover to each family.

Chief Minister Gupta, the lone woman head of govern-ment in 16 BJP-ruled states, claimed that Arvind Kejriwal will have to face scrutiny for "every penny" misappropriated by his government as the Cabinet paved the way for exposing corruption in the previous erfront, gave a nod to table AAP government.

### **Supreme Court Collegium starts initial inquiry against** Delhi HC judge embroiled in cash recovery row



NEW DELHI: Taking swift Justice Varma to the Allahabad measures, the Supreme Court Collegium on Friday commenced an initial inquiry against Delhi High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma from whose official residence a large stash of cash was allegedly discovered during a fire incident, aside from reportedly calling for his transfer to the Allahabad High Court.

The initial inquiry, which is not an in-house inquiry as envisaged in Supreme Court judgments, would entail seeking of a primary report on the incident from the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court.

Acting swiftly, the Collegium headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna held an urgent meeting where it stated to have initiated the process to transfer High Court which is his parent

high court. It has been said the commencement of an initial inquiry was just one of the steps and the Collegium might take further action in this regard.

The controversy surrounding the alleged discovery of cash from Justice Varma's official residence in the National Capital and subsequent deliberations of the Collegium were first reported by The Times of India.

Justice Varma's proposed transfer could come into effect after the Centre accepts the Collegium's recommendation, which is yet to be sent officially.

The amount which stated to have been discovered by the Delhi fire department officials is not known yet.

According to information on the Delhi High Court website, Justice Varma enrolled as an advocate on August 8, 1992. He was appointed as an additional judge of the Allahabad High Court on October 13, 2014.

He took oath as a permanent judge of the Allahabad High Court on February 1, 2016, before being appointed as a judge of the Delhi High Court on October 11, 2021.

He is currently heading a Division Bench, dealing with cases of sales tax, GST, company appeals and other appeals of the original side. In a related development, Justice Varma, the second senior-most judge of the Delhi High Court, did not hold the court on Friday-a development shared to advocates by his court master.

Delhi High Court Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya expressed pain and shock over the incident when a senior advocate mentioned the issue before the Bench. The apex court Colle-

gium is said to have swung into action after it was intimated by certain government officials about the alleged discovery of huge cash from Justice Varma's residence following a major

#### Pakistan Gears up to Legalise Crypto**currency** Trading



ISLAMABAD: Bilal Bin Sagib, who has been appointed as the Chief Advisor to the Finance Minister to streamline and strategise digital asset management, has said that Pakistan will no longer sit on the sidelines and let the opportunity to attract global investment through cryptocurrency trading slide away. "Pakistan is done sitting on

the sidelines. We want to at-

tract international investment because Pakistan is a low-cost, high-growth market with 60 per cent of the population under 30. We have a Web3 native workforce ready to build", said Saqib as Pakistan seriously considers legalising cryptocurrency trading to attract global investment. "Pakistan stands ninth globally in terms of crypto adoption, according to blockchain analysis firm Chainalaysis. In Pakistan, at least 15 to 20 million Pakistanis are currently engaged in crypto trading despite the absence of a formal regulatory framework," Saqib, who is also the CEO of Pakistan Crypto Currency Council (PCCC), added. Saqib said that the global political developments have also played an important part in the realization to legal-

"Donald Trump is making crypto a national priority, and every country, including Pakistan, will have to follow suit," he said. Cryptocurrency trading has been banned in Pakistan for some time, with authorities cautioning risks regarding use of virtual currencies. In 2018, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) even sent out a notification, warning all those using virtual currencies/coins/tokens for the purpose of transferring

ise crypto trading in Pakistan.

### **Delhi Water Minister Parvesh Verma holds** meeting with DJB to prevent leakages, optimise water distribution system



 $\textbf{NEW DELHI:} \ In \ order \ to \ tackle$ water shortage during the peak summer months, Delhi Water Minister Parvesh Verma has efficiency as the demand for launched a new initiative under the Summer Action Plan

As part of the initiative, the minister will hold weekly review meetings with Delhi Jal Board (DJB) officials to ensure efficient water distribution across the city.

According to an official statement from the Delhi Water Ministry, these meetings will focus on streamlining water distribution, curbing illegal connections and

improving monitoring systems. The initiative aims to minimise supply disruptions and enhance water surges during summer. In the first re on Thursday, officials were directed to take immediate steps to prevent leakages, address sewer blockages and optimise water distribution systems. The minister emphasised the need for strict vigilance to curb unau-

thorised water connections and wastage, ensuring that residents

receive an uninterrupted supply.

#### **Adani Group likely** to buy Emaar India

value outside Pakistan.



#### **NEW DELHI:** Under its plan to expand its realty business, billionaire Gautam Adani's group is likely to acquire real estate company Emaar India for an enterprise value of around USD 1.4-1.5 billion, sources privy to the deliberations said on Thursday.

After entering the Indian real estate market in 2005 in partnership with India's MGF Development, Dubai-based Emaar Properties had invested Rs 8,500 crore through the joint venture firm Emaar MGF

### Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to Collaborate with India on advance Biotech & Vaccine Innovation

**NEW DELHI:** In a major boost to technology-driven collaboration, Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates met with Union Minister Jitendra Singh during his visit to India. The two leaders engaged in

comprehensive discussions on expanding private sector and startup participation in India's growing innovation landscape and biomanufacturing sector. The meeting, attended by

delegations from both sides, covered advancements in gene therapy, vaccine innovation, biotechnology manufactur- lution, facilitated by initia- global health breakthroughs. ing, and the rapidly evolving tives such as the Biotechnology

Jitendra Singh highlighted that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India has witnessed remarkable growth in biotech innovations, supported by policies like Bio E3—biotechnology for economy, employment, and

He emphasised the crucial

role of private players and acknowledging India's restartups in India's bio-revo-Council (BIRAC)

Bill Gates lauded India's biotech achievements, particularly in vaccine development, citing its contributions to the HPV and COVID-19 vaccines.

He also expressed a keen interest in supporting India's initiatives to combat diseases like tuberculosis and malaria,

search potential in delivering A key highlight of the discus-

biotechnology startup ecosystem, which now boasts over 10,000 startups. Jitendra Singh noted that

70 per cent of these focus on medical and health biotech. while others contribute to agriculture, environmental sustainability, and industrial

#### He reiterated the government's commitment to scaling up innovations through increased funding and policy reforms for faster commercialisation.

Additionally, Gates and Jitendra Singh explored investment opportunities through Gift City, a financial hub facilitating global investments.

Gates indicated that while the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation primarily operates in philanthropy, new financial structures could enable direct investments in promising Indian biotech startups.

As India accelerates its biochnology advancements. Ji tendra Singh reaffirmed the government's dedication to fostering public-private partnerships to ensure the sector's continued growth.

With increased R&D investments and global collaborations, India is on track to becoming a leading hub for biotechnology innovation.

### Congress leaders condemn detention of farmers in Punjab, stress right to protest



**NEW DELHI:** With the Punjab munities. "He moved from Police clearing out protesting one camp to another, engaging with people from various farmers from their sites near the Shambhu Border with Haryana and detaining their She further noted that Minleaders, Congress leaders voiced ister of State for Home Affairs strong criticism of the state's Nityanand Rai stayed in Mani-Bhagwant Mann government, accusing it of deceiving the Training guns on the oppofarmers, and emphasising that if farmers wish to hold an agisition, Sitharaman remarked, "During Congress rule, no Union tation, they should be allowed Minister visited Manipur during to do so without interference. violence. But under our double-Congress leader Imran

Masood voiced his dismay at the situation, calling attention to the alarming crisis facing India's farming community. He pointed out the tragic

reality that more than 2, 600 farmers had taken their own lives in recent years, yet their detained without cause. struggles remain largely ignored by the authorities. "Farmers across the country

the government seeks to distract from these critical issues, " he added. He highlighted the case of Maharashtra's farmers, where even the most decorated farmers had fallen victim to despair, culminating in suicides.

"We cannot keep turning a blind eye to this crisis, "Masood said, warning that the government's tactics are endangering the country's future. Punjab leader Sukhjinder Singh Randhawa condemned the actions of the authorities, calling the detentions a clear betrayal of

sising that after holding talks with the farmers, they were

"This is an outright deception, Randhawa remarked, empha-"The government has broken

trust and demonstrated dis-

honesty by detaining peaceful

protesters, "he said, describing

the situation as a betrayal of

Congress spokesperson Gurjeet Singh Aujla joined in the chorus of criticism, denouncing the detentions as undemocratic. How can you arrest people after inviting them to a meeting? This is not how negotiations work, "he added. He continued to stress that even in times of conflict, countries come together for dialogue, but here, arrests followed peaceful talks, which he labelled as unacceptable. Aujla further claimed that

the situation in Punjab had deteriorated under the combined mismanagement of the BJP and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). "In just three years, the atmosphere in Punjab has turned toxic - bulldozers are running, extortion is rampant, and the state is crumbling. For years, we've warned the government in Parliament and the Vidhan Sabha that Punjab's condition was worsening, but they ignored us. Now, the damage is evident." Aujla also questioned Punjab Chief Minister Mann's sincerity.

"Mann claims to stand with the farmers, but his actions suggest otherwise. If he truly supports them, he should allow the detained farmers to travel to Delhi. They shouldn't be stopped, "Aujla said, demanding that the detained leaders be allowed to protest peacefully in Delhi at Jantar Mantar, where the people's faith in the system. their voices could be heard.

### Thirty Naxals, policeman killed as Chhattisgarh sees twin encounters

NEW DELHI: In a fresh offensive against Naxals, the security forces killed at least 30 members of the banned CPI (Maoist) in two separate encounters in Chhattisgarh's Bastar region on Thursday, officials said.

While 26 Naxalites were killed in Bijapur district, four Maoists were gunned down in Kanker by a joint team of the BSF and District Reserve Guard (DRG) personnel of the state police. A policeman was also killed in the encounter in Bijapur, the officials said. Union Home Minister Amit

Shah said the security forces had achieved another big success in their march to make the country Naxal-free with the two encounters. The Modi government is mov-

ing forward with a ruthless ap-

Raj Bhavan official said.

proach against Naxalites and is adopting a zero tolerance policy against Naxalites who are not surrendering despite all facilities being offered to them, ranging from surrender to inclusion. The country is going to be Naxal-free by March 31 next year," Shah wrote on X in Hindi. An official said a gunfight broke out around 7 am in a forest along the border of Bijapur and Dantewada districts when a joint team of security personnel was out on an anti-Naxalite operation in the Gangaloor police station

area in Bijapur.

### Govt taking all steps to trace missing meitei youth in manipur: Governor

IMPHAL: Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla on Friday said that the government is making all possible efforts to trace missing youth Luwangth-em Mukhesh and reunite him with his family. Massive searches by the Ma-

nipur police and other security forces continued for the sixth day on Friday to locate 20-yearold Meitei youth Mukhesh, who went missing on March 16.

Members of the Joint Action Committee (JAC), who are agitating since the youth was missing and demanding his rescue, along with his parents, met the Governor at Raj Bhavan on Friday evening.

The JAC members and Mukhesh's parents urged the Governor to take urgent steps



police personnel, along with Assam Rifles and other Central force personnel, continued trace him at the earliest and their search operations jointly reunite him with his family," a and separately in Imphal West, Imphal East, Churachandpur, Mukhesh's mother also ear-Bishnupur, and Kangpokpi lier made a fervent appeal to districts to rescue Mukhesh, a resident of Keishampat Lethe authorities to ensure the

Tracker dogs were also deployed to locate the missing vouth while CCTV footage shows his vehicle was last

seen in Bishnupur district near

West district.

lmajam Leikal area of Imphal

Chinikon, close to the Kukidominated Kangpokpi district. Mukhesh was reported missing after driving a car towards the tribal-dominated district Churachandpur on March 16 afternoon. Mukhesh's family members registered a missing

person report at the Imphal

Police Station.

According to official reports, more than 30 youths belonging to the Meitei community have reportedly gone missing since the ethnic violence broke out in the state 22 months ago.

kata where you can create a are being killed, their rights are ruckus, throw stones, and just being stripped away, and yet, by spreading division and hatred, run away.'

# Saurabh Bhardwaj is new Chief of Delhi unit, replaces Gopal Rai; Manish Sisodia moved to Punjab BJP assumed power in Delhi's air pollution, says Manjinder Singh Sirsa Sirsa called on Atishi to take

Party (AAP) effected a major overhaul in the party's organisational structure on Friday, replacing incumbent Delhi unit chief Gopal Rai with Saurabh Bharadwaj and moving the former to Gujarat.

The big shake-up and restructuring of the party's state chiefs and in-charges come in the wake of AAP's debacle in Delhi Assembly polls. The decision to reallocate the party's top leaders to states like Punjab, Gujarat and Chhattisgarh was taken at the Political Affairs Committee (PAC), the highest decision-making body of the Arvind Kejriwalled party.

The party has announced new party chiefs in two states

and in-charges in four states. Gopal Rai will be the party's in-charge for Gujarat while Durgesh Pathak will serve in the capacity of co-convenor. Sandeep Pathak has been

Startups will get loans

up to 10 crores without

**guarantee**, notification

To promote startups in the coun-

try for industrial growth, the gov-

ernment has approved a Credit

Guarantee Scheme (CGSS), under

which, startup companies will be

able to get loans up to Rs 10 crore

without any guarantee. The govern-

ment has notified the scheme. The

Department for Promotion of In-

dustry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)

said in a statement that loans sanc-

tioned on or after October 6 will be

eligible for this scheme. Under this

scheme, loans will be provided for

a fixed period to meet the financial

needs of startups. According to

DPIIT spokesperson loans will be

given only to those startups which

fall under the definition of startup

as per the notification of DPIIT or

any changes made in it from time to

time. This step of the government

will help the startup companies of

the country in raising capital. This

credit facility will not be covered

under any other guarantee scheme.

fund which will work to give guar-

antee for the loan managed by the

board of National Credit Guarantee

Trustee Company.

also issued Govt

SATISH HANDA

New Delhi



while Mehraj Mallik has been made Jammu and Kashmir chief. Among the most noticeable changes is former Delhi Deputy CM Manish Sisodia being moved to Punjab, to strengthen the party's base and keep its only citadel from

Manish Sisodia, being the closest aide of Arvind Kejriwal is likely to work closely with

channels between the party's Punjab unit and the central leadership in Delhi.

After losing the Delhi battleground, the AAP is eyeing its electoral chances in Gujarat and Goa, the two states where it managed to secure moderate vote percentage earlier.

In Gujarat, AAP won five seats in the last Assembly elections. Gopal Rai and Durgesh Pathak will reassess the ground connect in the state and prepare the party for the next Assembly elections in

In Goa, AAP has two legislators. Here also, AAP has maintained a vote share of above 5 per cent and will look to consolidate the public support further.

Sandeep Pathak, being shifted from Gujarat to Chhattisgarh assumes importance as he was instrumental in cultivating and drawing people's support for AAP in the 2022 polls.

trash inside parks and setting

it on fire. I have shared a video

of this incident. This is being

done with the sole intention

of making the air polluted and defaming the BJP, "Sirsa added.

AAP leader Atishi, urging her

to allow the BJP to carry out

its work without obstruction.

"Atishi Ji, you should accept the

truth. Arvind Kejriwal Ji, you

must accept the truth. Allow

the BJP to work for the people

of Delhi. You should not create

barriers. Atishi Ji, I'm sharing

this video for your information

Park in Rajouri Garden, and

similar incidents have been oc-

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court

on Friday dismissed the bail

application of Lok Sabha MP

from Jammu and Kashmir's

Baramulla, Engineer Rashid,

in a terror-funding case. Additional sessions judge Chander Jit Singh said, "The bail plea

Rashid has been lodged in

the Tihar jail since 2019 after

he was arrested by the Nation-

al Investigation Agency (NIA)

under the Unlawful Activities

(Prevention) Act in the 2017

The trial court had on Sep-

tember 10 granted interim

to enable him to campaign

The judge also previously

extended Rashid's interim bail

till October 28 on the ground

of his father's health, after the

NIA said it had verified the

documents and it was not op-

Elections to the 90-member

-K Assembly were held in

Court is also likely to consider

attend the ongoing Parliament

session. Rashid has challenged

a March 10 order of the trial

court, refusing him custody

parole or interim bail to at-

tend Lok Sabha proceedings

In the reply filed to the ap-

peal on March 17, the NIA said

Rashid couldn't be allowed to

use his status as an MP to "get

away from rigours of impris-

The NIA argued that Rashid

could neither be granted in-

terim bail nor allowed custody

parole as he had no enforceable

right to attend the Parliament

till April 4.

onment".

posing the plea.

terror-funding case.

dismissed.

Delhi court junks Engineer

Rashid's bail plea in

terror-funding case

a fire was set outside Bindra

Sirsa particularly addressed

Environment Minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa on Friday accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of intentionally worsening Delhi's air pollution to harm the image of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

He claimed that since the BJP assumed power in Delhi, significant progress has been made in reducing pollution levels.

In a video message posted on X Sirsa remarked, "Since BJP took charge in Delhi, we have been consistently working to reduce pollution, and we have been successful. Air quality is improving every year, with many days being cleaner. We have broken records over the last three years, something that is clearly not sitting wel with the Aam Aadmi Party."

He further accused the AAP of resorting to extreme tactics to disrupt the city's air quality.

"It saddens me to say this, but the AAP has sunk so low that they are now gathering

action against the culprits within her party and corporation. "If you are truly impartial, I

urge you to file a case against your own party workers and your corporation, so that it is clear who is behind these actions that aim to worsen Delhi's air quality," he said.

Expressing his condemnation, Sirsa concluded, "I strongly condemn those responsible for this act. The people of Delhi can see how AAP is trying to create more hardships in their lives by polluting the air and causing harm to their health. This is the mentality of the Aam Aadmi Party." In the video shared by the Minister, trash can be seen burning in a park and he named the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) for this. Sirsa wrote, "Shocking & amp; Shameful! Last night, MCD deliberately set a fire in Rajouri Garden... a reckless act under the AAP-led MCD just when Delhi's AQI had improved in recent weeks.

session while in lawful custody.

Calling Rashid a "highly in-

fluential" person who might

sway witnesses back home,

the NIA said, "Under Section

to a previous two-day reprieve

defeated Omar Abdullah in

the 2024 Lok Sabha election,

is facing trial in a terror fund-

ing case with allegations that

granted to him.

the place of visit.

he Baramulla

### Udta Haryana: 2405 NDPS cases registered with 3562 arrests; property worth Rs. 9.59 crore seized



SATISH HANDA

The Chief Secretary said that Haryana has 105 de-addiction centres, 21 counseling-cumrehabilitation centres, and 12 psychiatric nursing homes, all of which are regularly checked for compliance with operational norms. During the 7th SLC NCORD meeting, the Health Department was directed to establish de-addiction treatment facilities in every district hospital. The Education Department and all Deputy Commissioners have been instructed to implement the 'Nav Chetna Modules' to sensitize high school and college students about the dangers of drug abuse. Additionally, 971 investigating officers have been trained in NDPS case investigations. The meeting was also attended by Haryana Home Secretary Anurag Rastogi, Director General Police Shatrujeet Kapur, Director General Prisons Mohammad Akil and ADGP

Drug addiction has affected not only our country but also every country of the World. Youth is considered the productive and creative age of human life. It is also a vital age for the development of any country. Today, there is no part of the world that is free from the curse of drug trafficking and drug obsession has engulfed the whole world because people as well as youths in large numbers are addicted to drugs. Use of alcohol and levels of drug abuse have increased extremely in Haryana since the 1990s, and drug abuse among adolescents is due to the venerable age and important

#### Congress is now a ruined garden, and no one can predict which tree will fall next; Anil Vij session on custody parole, akin

**SATISH HANDA** 

Custody parole entails a This time, the opposition has prisoner being escorted by armed police personnel to

> as readers. Congress is now a ruined

Kashmir. According to the NIA's FIR, Rashid's name cropped up during the interrogation of businessman and co-accused Zahoor Watali.

After being chargesheeted in October 2019, a special NIA court framed charges against Rashid and others in March 2022 under Sections 120B (criminal conspiracy), 121 (waging war against the government), and 124A (sedition) of the IPC and for offences relating to terrorist acts and terror funding under the

# developmental stage of life.

#### 43D(5) of the UAPA, the accused cannot be granted bail if there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusations against him are prima facie true.' Rashid's counsel urged the high court to permit him to attend the ongoing Parliament

come completely unprepared during ongoing budget session; they have no issues and are

garden, and no one can predict which

he funded separatists and terror groups in Jammu and tree will fall next. Vij said the

opposition has no idea what they are asking and what they should be asking. The 2008 recruitment issue will keep coming up because it concerns the future of youth. Hooda Sahib questions my age in the Assembly daily, so I thought I should finally respond today that I have more courage than a 45-yearold, so my age is 45. New Delhi: Haryana's Energy, Transport & Labour Minister Anil Vij took a dig at the opposition and said that "Congress is now a ruined garden, and no one can predict which tree will fall next.

### Delhi ACB books ex-minister Satyendar Jain in CCTV project corruption case

The Delhi Government's Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) has registered a case against former PWD minister and senior AAP leader Satyendar Jain over alleged corruption in a Rs 571 crore CCTV project, an official

said on Wednesday. According to the ACB, Jain allegedly accepted a bribe of Rs 7 crore to waive the liquidated damages penalty of Rs 16 crore imposed on Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

The project, which was executed when he was a PWD minister in the previous Arvind Kejriwal government, was related to the installation of 1.4 lakh CCTV cameras across all 70 Assembly constituencies.

"Jain is accused of arbitrarily waiving liquidated damages worth Rs 16 crore imposed on BEL for delays in installing CCTV cameras across Delhi.

The waiver was allegedly granted after receiving a Rs 7-crore bribe," Joint Commissioner of Police (ACB) Madhur Verma said in a statement.

The FIR was registered on Tuesday after obtaining prior sanction under Section 17A of the Prevention of Corruption Act from the competent au- CCTV cameras across Delhi's 70 thority.

of India will establish a trust or suggested that the project was executed in a shoddy manner, with several cameras found to be non-functional at the time of leged that in addition to waiving Enforcement Directorate (ED) hand over, Verma said. A politithe penalties, additional orders against political leaders in the bail in October 2024.



AAP supremo's views and goals

in the state. He will also keep

watch on the Punjab govern-

ment's poll promises and their

implementation. Lately, the

Bhagwant Mann government

has been under fire for not

fulfilling AAP's poll promises.

also seen as a move to estab-

lish strong communication

Sisodia's Punjab shift is

cal tussle erupted following the FIR against the former PWD minister, with both the ruling BJP and the opposition AAP targeting each other.

Although there was no immediate response from Jain, his Aam Aadmi Party called it a case of "political witch-hunt". On his part, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva accused Jain of accepting a bribe of Rs 7 crore.

According to the statement issued by the ACB, the case is based on a news report which claimed that a bribe of Rs 7 crore was arranged for Jain, who was the nodal officer for the CCTV project, in exchange for waiving penalties imposed on BEL and its contractors. The penalties were initially levied in August 2019 by the then AAP government due to significant delays in the installation of 1.4 lakh

assembly constituencies. During verification, a officer provided a detailed complaint supporting the allegations. The complaint further alfor 1.4 lakh more CCTV cameras were awarded to BEL. Verma said. The bribe was allegedly routed through contractors who received the additional camera installation orders. Payments were reportedly made by inflating vendor order values, he said.

The ACB is in the process of scrutinising relevant documents from the Public Works Department (PWD) and BEL. A case has been registered under sections 7 (offence related to public servant being bribed) and 13(1) (a) (criminal misconduct by a public servant) of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, read with Section 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code, he added.

A comprehensive investigation has been launched to determine the full extent of the conspiracy and the involvement of PWD officials and BEL executives, the statement said.

Meanwhile, former Delhi chief minister and senior AAP leader Atishi slammed the BJP, accusing the saffron party of framing Jain in a false case. In a post on X, she said, "When investigating agencies leave their work and start political witch-hunting on the orders of the boss..." She also shared a document highlighting a reply by the BJP-led Centre in Parliament, which claimed that out of the 193 cases filed by the

past 10 years, only two resulted in convictions.

In a video post on X, Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva alleged that the previous government led by Kejriwal covered up the corruption case for years.

"În 2017-18, the Kejriwal government awarded a contract of Rs 571 crore to Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) for installing CCTV cameras in Delhi. Due to delays, a penalty of Rs 16 crore was imposed in 2019 but Satyendar Jain waived it after taking Rs 7 crore bribe. The ACB completed its investigation in 2023 but the FIR was delayed due to AAP's cover-up act," Sachdeva claimed.

Another senior AAP leader bail to Sheikh Abdul Rashid, Sanjay Singh in a statement popular as Engineer Rashid, accused the BJP-led central government of again preparfor the assembly election in ing a false case against Jain. Jammu and Kashmir.

The Modi government is always trying to harass the Aam Aadmi Party, this is another attempt in the same sequence," Singh alleged. The fresh case has added to Jain's legal troubles.

On March 2, the CBI informed a special court that it had secured approval from the Delhi lieutenant governor to three phases from September prosecute Jain in a dispropor- 18 to October 1.

The ED had arrested Jain in a money-laundering case linked to alleged hawala transactions in May 2022. He was granted

on October 8 in which the National Conference-Congress alliance attained a clear majority with 48 seats. The Delhi High on March 25 Rashid's plea to

# **Chintels Paradiso: 6 towers declared**



Shambhu border, bulldozers run on the

Protesting farmers removed from

SATISH HANDA Ambala

The 7th round of talks took place between farmer leaders and the central government on Wednesday in which Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan was also present on behalf of the government delegation. Farmer leaders were returning after talking to the minister and other members of delegation, when the Punjab Police took them into custody which includes several other farmer leaders including Sarwan Singh Pandher, Abhimanyu Kohad, Jagjit Singh Dallewal, Sukhwinder Kaur, Kaka Singh Kotra and Manjit Rai. Meanwhile, internet service has been shut down in the areas around Shambhu and Khanauri border with immediate effect along with the deployment of heavy police force, Punjab Police used bulldozers to remove the temporary shelters built by farmers on the Punjab-Haryana Shambhu border near Ambala where the farmers were

sitting on a dharna in support of

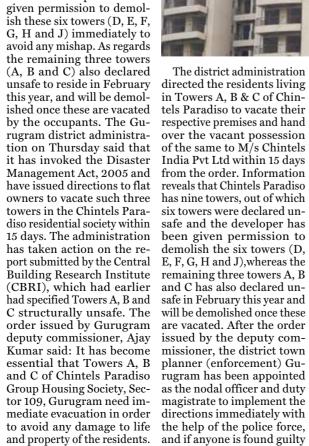
their demands since last many months causing not only lot of inconvenience to the passengers travelling on this busy highway but also suffering loss worth hundreds crores to those involved in trade and industry in Punjab as well as Haryana

and the government. Many farmer leaders returning after talks with the central government delegation were detained by the Punjab Police, the internet services was shut shut down in the areas around Shambhu and Khanauri border, the protesting farmers were removed from the border by huge police forces deployed by the government, which immediately started demolishing the tents set up by the protesting farmers at Shambhu border using bulldozers. The protesting farmers were also forcibly removed from the border. Punjab Police took the detained farmers to Bahadurgarh Commando Police Training Center. Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher

and others were also detained.



plex in the town 'Chintels Paradiso' Group Housing Society in Sector 109 Gurugram has nine towers, out of which six towers have already been declared unsafe



of disobeying the orders, the action will be taken under Section 223 of the Indian Justice Code 2023 and Section 51 to 60 of the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and

other applicable legal provi-According to information, Chief General Manager (En-

gineering), NBCC, in a letter submitted on January 22, 2025, highlighted the urgent need for demolition due to repeated structural failures, had written that due to the **SATISH HANDA** deteriorating condition of the buildings, several balconies of towers collapsed on August 9, 2024, and on September 9, 2024, four more balconies of the same tower are likely to collapse may cause tragic accident, stating could have occurred, since there is a school adjacent to the project as such there is an urgent need for immediate demolition to prevent harm to nearby residential as well as commercial structures.

### **Booming sex trade: Young couples involved in** prostitution were caught during police raid



Gurugram

Police during a campaign on complaints regarding increasing cases of prostitution at many places in the town, detained 35 females including teen girls and mid-age women involved in prostitution. The campaign was conducted under the leadership of Deputy Commissioner of Police West Karan

at various locations in the town including areas around City Court, Iffco Chowk, Sector-29, Sikanderpur and MG Road. Police warned the women seen standing or moving under suspicious manners and let them go after warning. Team of Sector 51 Mahila Police station led by DCP West conducted a special checking on MG Road, when women engaged in prostitution and men standing there Goyal, when started checking were also caught. However, the

women after warning them not to participate in such activities in future.

According to the information, on Tuesday night, a special campaign was conducted by the police teams of Manager Mahila Police Station Sector-51 and Mahila Police Station West, under the leadership of Gurugram Deputy Commissioner of Police West and started interrogating youths, men and women standing on MG Road under suspicious manners searching companion for prostitution. However, the police officer warned these females not to do this again and then released them. It is worth mentioning that due to the men and women involved in prostitution standing at these places, the people working nearby and the pedestrians passing

by have to face trouble.

### Modi govt defeated terror in J&K, brought all-round transformation, says Amit Shah in Rajya Sabha

Minister Amit Shah on Friday reiterated Modi government's zero tolerance policy towards terrorism and lambasted previous dispensations for being 'soft on terror'.

Amit Shah, while replying to the debate on the working of Ministry of Home Affairs in the House, listed out some path-breaking decisions of Modi government including abrogation of Article 370 and how it brought lasting peace in the valley. Home Minister, speaking in Rajya Sabha, said that after the removal of Article 370, the involvement of locals with terrorists has completed ended, marking the restoration of peace in the entire region.

He further said that the glorification of terrorists, which was often seen during UPA rule, has come to an end during the



NDA's decade-long rule. He also and also took the opportunity noted a 70 percent reduction in deaths due to terror-related incidents. Comparing figures, he said that between 2004 and 2014, the region saw 7,217 terror incidents, whereas between 2014 and 2024, this number dropped to 2,242.

The Home Minister expressed deep respect for the sac-

to highlight their achievements in strengthening the nation's security and governance.

'I want to pay tribute to all the police personnel who have sacrificed their lives for the safety and security of the people. Thanks to their immense sacrifice, India is now poised to play an important rifices made by police personnel role in global affairs, a posi-

tion we've been working toward for over 76 years. My heartfelt gratitude goes to the families of these brave officers for their unwavering service, "he said.

Highlighting the legacy issues faced by the country before PM Modi's tenure, Shah pointed out that problems such as terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, Left Wing Extremism, and Northeast insurgencies had hindered India's progress. "These issues were holding back India's potential for peace and development. But under PM Modi, we have eradicated these obstacles. Shah asserted. Speaking on

Jammu and Kashmir, Shah emphasised the drastic shift in approach since the Modi government took power. He recalled the time when terrorist attacks on civilians

were a daily occurrence, particu-

larly during religious festivals.

reaffirmed his commitment to shaping a better future for the next generations after his meeting with Microsoft co-founder and philanthropist Bill Gates. Responding to the social me-

dia post by Gates on platform

X, PM Modi said, "As always,

an excellent meeting with Bill

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister

Narendra Modi on Wednesday

tion, and sustainability towards making a better future for the coming generations. Gates is on his third visit to

India in three years, engaging in high-level discussions about artificial intelligence, healthcare, agriculture, and digital

Gates. We spoke about diverse

issues including tech, innova-

His meeting with PM Modi was focused on India's development vision, particularly the 'Viksit Bharat 2047' goal -- an initiative aimed at making India a developed nation by its centenary year of Independence.

The discussions between Modi and Gates emphasised how AI and digital infrastructure can revolutionise healthcare, education, and agriculture.

"I had a great discussion with @narendramodi about India's development, the path to Viksit Bharat 2047, and exciting advancements in health, agriculture, AI, and other sectors that are creating impact today, Gates posted on X.

The India AI Mission and the Gates Foundation are expected to collaborate on several initiatives, leveraging technology to improve public services and create sustainable

#### Working to make a better future for coming generations: PM Modi **Public Money, Public Trust:** Strengthening Accountability & Transparency in Internal Framework says Chief Vigilance Officer, SEBI



**FW DESK** New Delhi

In her special address at the ASSOCHAM virtual session on Risk Management and Internal Control, Yatri Dave Vitekar, IRPS Chief Vigilance Officer Securities and Exchange Board of India said In a regulatory landscape where public trust is paramount, anyone handling oublic money has an inherent duty to act as a public servant, ensuring transparency, accountability, and ethical governance. The increasing volume of complaints—both public and private—highlights the urgent need for robust preventive mechanisms. Establishing strong systems for oversight and compliance is not just a regulatory mandate but a commitment to fostering a corruption-free environment where financial integrity and public confidence remain uncompromised. Adhering to SEBI regulations not only mitigates financial and compliance risks but also strengthens corporate governance, fostering long-term sustainability

and market integrity. There is a need to set up internal control systems to avoid corruption and malpractices. In today's evolving financial landscape, regulatory compliance is not just a requirement but a cornerstone of trust and stability. SEBI's stringent framework ensures transparency, accountability, and investor protection, compelling businesses to adopt robust risk management and internal control measures. Recognizing potential risks that may impact operations, financial reporting, and compliance is the way put it.

#### RG Kar Rape & Murder case: CBI summons security personnel deployed on tragic night

KOLKATA: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) officials have now summoned security personnel who were on duty when the R.G. Kar rape and murder tragedy took place. Sources said the eight security

personnel had been asked to be present at CBI's Central Government Office (CGO) complex at Salt Lake in Kolkata, this weekend. The summons to the eight security persons follows similar summons to seven nursing staff on duty on the night of the tragedy at the ward where the body of the victim, a junior woman doctor was recovered in the morning of August 9, 2024.

Four of the seven nursing staff, who were summoned, appeared at the central agency office on Thursday and faced marathon questioning for several hours. However, the CBI officials are tight-lipped on what revelations were made during the interrogation.

### Proud moment for India as coal production crosses 1 billion tonnes in 2024-25 says PM Modi

**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday hailed the country's historic achievement of a record-breaking 1 billion tonnes of coal production in the financial year 2024-25. calling it a "proud moment for India" and recognising the relentless dedication and hard work of those associated with the sector.

'Crossing the monumental milestone of 1 billion tonnes of coal production is a remarkable achievement, highlighting our commitment to energy security, economic growth and selfreliance. This feat also reflects the dedication and hard work of all those associated with the sector," PM Modi said.

The Prime Minister was reacting to Union Minister for Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy's announcement in a post on X that India has crossed a monumental 1 billion tonnes of coal production.

Reddy said that the remark-



able achievement in coal production comes 11 days ahead of last fiscal year's coal production of 997.83 million tonnes (MT), underscoring India's significant progress in ensuring its energy demands and driving industrial, agricultural, and overall economic growth, the minister said.

From April to December 2024, India's coal imports declined by 8.4 per cent, resulting in forex savings of around \$5.43 billion (Rs 42, 315.7 crore) as compared to the same period of last year.

The record-breaking production reflects the success of the Government's strategic development. By embracing

amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act and the opening of the coal sector to private players through the commercial auctioning of coal blocks. These initiatives have led to a marked increase in the availability of domestic coal, progressively substituting imports and significantly contributing to foreign exchange savings, the minister pointed out.

This milestone aligns with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and highlights the Ministry of Coal's ongoing efforts to foster self-reliance in the energy sector while ensuring sustainable development,

This achievement is not just about coal production; it is a crucial step towards ensuring long-term energy security and propelling India's overall

he observed.

advanced mining techniques, optimising logistics, and promoting sustainable practices, the coal sector is playing a central role in strengthening India's energy infrastructure and bolstering economic resilience, Reddy said.

The coal sector's success is attributed to the tireless efforts of coal Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs), private players, and the dedicated workforce of around 5 lakh mine workers across more than 350 coal mines. These coal miners, who have defied numerous challenges with unmatched dedication, have played a pivotal role in achieving this historic milestone. India relies on coal for approximately 55 per cent of its energy mix, and around 74 per cent of the country's electricity is generated by coal-based power plants. This underscores the critical importance of coal in powering India's economy and sustaining energy security, the

#### Srinagar based man arrested for posting extremist content on social media coordinated operation led to his

Srinagar

The Counter Intelligence Kashmir (CIK) has arrested a Srinagar resident for allegedly posting extremist content on social media, officials said on March 18.

In a official statement, a CIK spokesperson said the individual was operating a radical Facebook handle, 'Shaddy Kashmir Dryfruits', which was being used to spread extremist propaganda with the intent of disturbing peace. "Upon receiving input about the online activity, a swift investigation was launched, social media handle was resolved leading to the identification of the suspect as Showkat Ahmad Dar, son of Ghulam Ahmad Dar, a resident of Doodh Mohalla, Shalimar,

Srinagar," the statement read. According to the CIK, Dar was actively engaged in sharing content that glorified terrorism and its commanders while inciting anti-national sentiments among youth. Security forces faced challenges in tracking him due to his frequent movement, but a

arrest along with his electronic devices. A preliminary inspection of his digital records revealed access to the radical Facebook account, as well as incriminating material, including a video of slain terrorist commander Zakir Musa and other extremist propaganda. The CIK further stated that Dar had a history of radical activities. "He was previously arrested in 2019 by Harwan Police Station of Srinagar for involvement in stonepelting incidents. Additionally, in 2022, he was detained by Cyber Police Station Srinagar for engaging in the online dissemination of radical content," the statement added. The agency also highlighted ongoing efforts by intelligence units and social media companies to monitor and curb radical propaganda in Jammu and Kashmir. "On the request of intelligence agencies in Jammu and Kashmir, all the social media service providers have established special units to monitor the radical propaganda

### **Cancerous River Ghaggar: Who will Emancipate it?**



win in Delhi Assembly, how did

same Yamuna River water ing it." have become visible, which previously was being claimed Haryana Government, "Do carrying pure and drinkable

and Flood Control Board in Chandigarh on March 15, CM Saini directed all DCs to enpolluted effluents and sewage water were falling into the river without any hindrance and no need ever felt to find

the alternate arrangements? Issuing strict instructions, the Chief Minister ordered that no sewage water or pol- above normal in Yamuna waluted drain should fall into the Yamuna River as it was our collective responsibility to clean the Yamuna. He said we need to find alternate arrangements for the outflow of sewage water and especially Navab Singh Saini not only directed the Deputy Commissioners of Panipat, Sonipat, Adami Party leaders, but also Palwal and Yamunanagar districts to set up Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) in their arrangements for water disdistricts to prevent polluted tribution, which has forced water from flowing into the Delhi residents to consume Yamuna. The Chief Minister contaminated water. He alreiterated Harvana's commitment to clean the Yamuna ment in Delhi systematically River permanently. He also diverted 28 drains into the directed officials to look into Yamuna. the functioning of 6 STPs in Masani Barrage in Rewari

During the Delhi assemthe voters. AAP and BJP, both were blaming and slamming each other for the contaminated water flowing through Kejriwal was given to create cer. No one cares for its dirt on March 19. What a big surge Medical Research, Haryana

Delhi former Chief Minister Kejriwal, as well as the then ust within CM Atishi blamed the BJP month led Haryana Government for water dirty and contaminated. Arvind Kejriwal on his

Haryana CM Saini change his X account, on January 30, previous standpoint and how wrote, "BJP has made Yamuna the dirt and effluents in the water poisonous by adulterat-He asked the BJP led

you want to kill the people of Delhi by giving them the Chairing 56th Meeting of water which you yourself can-Haryana State Drought Relief not drink?" Kejriwal also challenged the BJP leaders to drink the

sure that no polluted effluents Delhi, "The poisonous water fall into the Yamuna and said, containing 7 PPM ammonia "We need to find alternate coming from Harvana to Delhi arrangements for the outflow is being sent to the houses of sewage water". Doesn't of leaders of other parties, It mean that previously the they should try drinking this The then Chief Minister of

Delhi, Atishi @AtishiAAP, while referring her letter Jan 28 to Election Commission stated on her X, "Ammonia levels continue to be 6 times ters, at the point it is entering Delhi from Haryana. Such levels are extremely toxic for the human body.

And on the other corner Haryana Chief Minister refuted the claim of the Aam counter alleged by accusing them of failing to make proper leged that the AAP govern-

Amid allegations and counter allegations between Haryand ensure their maintenance. ana and Delhi governments, Haryana CM Saini claimed bly elections, River Yamuna having a sip of water from became the hot issue to woo the Yamuna River in Delhi's Palla Village

Later Saini said, "An unfortunate statement by Arvind the favour by spreading can- as reported by Indian Express



fear in the minds of people for his political benefits. Today, I have come here to the banks of River Yamuna and took a sip of water from Yamuna. He (Kejriwal) said that the dirty water being supplied to BJP Govt of Haryana has poisoned the Yamuna River. He spoke about mass genocide. The water resource authority took samples from here and no poison was found in the water. Arvind Kejriwal has lied all his life...", reports Economic Times web portal on January 29.

What a sudden shift! Now the CM Saini is clearly seeing the dirt and polluted effluents flowing abundantly in the Haryana territory in the same river water which was very clear and fit to drink one month before, and now alarming the officers to ready up the river clean.

Here arises the question--If Haryana CM Saini is so anxious about the dirt and effluents flowing in the river waters, then why is he not even talking about the Ghaggar River, which is so badly poured with polluted effluents and sewage waste that it is being named as cancerous river in the public?

Haryana at its entry point, the Panchkula city, which showers the welcome flowers by pouring its untreated sewage waste through nallahs at different places and let it speed up its crawling further to get blessings in the form of industrial effluents and sewage dirt in the journey ahead to return

and grime. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), stating the history of River Ghaggar, states, "The Ghaggar is an intermittent river in India, flowing during the monsoon season. It originates in the Shivalik Hills of Himachal Pradesh and flows through Punjab, Harvana and Rajasthan.

In Haryana, it flows through south-west of Sirsa and by-the-side of Talwara Jheel in Rajasthan. This seasonal river feeds two irrigation canals that extend into Rajasthan.

The wide river-bed (paleo-channel) of the Ghaggar suggests that the river once flowed full of water, through the entire region, in the presently dried channel of the Hakra River.'

Hinting about the quality of water flowing in Ghaggar, CPCB further adds that in addition, the industrial and domestic wastewater discharges from the towns located along Ghaggar or its tributaries deteriorate the water quality of the river.

Will someone heed?

Haryana's Health Minister, Arti Singh Rao, on March Ghaggar is welcomed in 18, 2025, while giving data of cancer patients in the state assembly, said that health institutions in Haryana and joint capital Chandigarh reported 30475 new cancer patients in the year 2024. However, there are only 915 beds for cancer patients in 38 special wards in various government health institutes, said the Minister,

tion asked in Lok Sabha, claims that the Government admitted in the Lok Sabha that people living around the Ghaggar River are at a higher risk of Cancer as the water of the Ghaggar River is neither fit for drinking nor bathing. She adds the Risk of Cancer is continuously increasing due to the polluted water of the river and the adequate arrangements have not been made for Cancer patients by

the state Government. Divulging details, Kumari Selja revealed, "The People living near the Ghaggar River, which flows through several districts of Haryana, face a high risk of cancer. The river's water has become so polluted that it is neither fit for drinking nor bathing. Polluted water is contributing to cancer, with the number of cancer patients increasing every year. However, there are no adequate treatment facilities for these patients, forcing them to travel to Delhi, Chandigarh, or other states for treatment.

Sirsa MP Kumari Selja had asked the Union Health and Family Welfare Minister in the Lok Sabha about the number of cancer patients in Haryana, the details of special cancer wards set up in various districts for treating these patients, and the extent to which polluted water from the Ghaggar River is responsible for spreading cancer. Kumari Selja also inquired about whether the government has any plans to clean this river and if the central government provides any special assistance to cancer patients from Below Poverty

Line (BPL) families. In re-

sponse, Health and Family

Welfare Minister Prataprao

Jadhav stated that under the

National Cancer Registry Pro-

gram of the Indian Council of

Kumari Selja, an MP from in 2021, 1,630 in 2022, and Haryana, in her press release 1,678 in 2023. The minister dated 17 December ,2024, further said that facilities for able in government medical colleges in Hisar, Karnal, Nuh, Sonipat, and Rohtak, along with comprehensive facilities at the National Cancer Institute in Bhadsa.

> The response also revealed that studies indicate a higher risk of cancer among people living near the Ghaggar River. The river's water contains lead, iron, and aluminium in amounts far exceeding permissible limits, which contributes to the spread of cancer. In Haryana, the water of this river is unsuitable for drinking and bathing. Under the National River Conservation Plan, 28 sewage treatment plants (STPs) with a total capacity of 291.7 MLD have been set up in Punjab for treating wastewater discharged into the Ghaggar River's catchment area, while Haryana has created a sewage treatment capacity of 588 MLD.

> Central health minister Prataprao Jadhav confirms that the studies indicate a higher risk of cancer among people living near the Ghaggar River. The river's water contains lead, iron, and aluminium in amounts far exceeding permissible limits, which contributes to the spread of cancer. In Haryana, the water of this river is unsuitable for drinking and bathing

Will the Haryana CM heed towards the facts stated by the union health minister and divert his action plan to keep clean the Ghaggar also with the same concern as is being shown towards Yamuna River or will keep mum? Will he let the cancerous Ghaggar to flow as it is running and ruining the lives of the inhabitants?

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

### **Telangana IT Minister Inaugurates** Viyona Fintech's GraamPay, **Empowering Rural India**

Hyderabad

especially in J&K.

D. Sridhar Babu, Telangana's Minister for Information Technology, Electronics & Communications, Industries & Commerce, and Legislative Affairs, inaugurated GraamPay at Viyona Fintech's headquarters. The new platform aims to improve digital financial access for rural communities by providing secure and efficient

digital payment solutions. GraamPay connects rural users with secure digital payment options, helping local businesses integrate into the digital economy. With over 65% of India's population residing in rural areas, access to financial services remains a challenge. GraamPay seeks to address this by enabling fast, reliable, and secure transactions that comply with banking standards. The platform empowers rural



and farmers by reducing cash dependency and enhancing financial security.

During the launch, IT Minister D. Sridhar Babu emphasized the importance of technology in expanding financial access. 'GraamPay is an important initiative that aligns with India's vision for digital and financial inclusion. It ensures financial access is a right for all, not just a privilege," he stated. GraamPay operates through a Village-Level Entrepreneur (VLE) model. where trained individuals assist their communities by promoting digital payments and onboarding rural merchants.

### Mangaluru city police arrest two South Africans, ₹75 cr worth of MDMA seized

ARUN KUMAR RAO Bengaluru

In a dramatic turn of events, the Mangaluru City Police successfully dismantled a major drug smuggling operation, culminating in the arrest of two South African women in Bengaluru. The six-monthlong investigation, marked by relentless surveillance and intelligence gathering, led to the seizure of nearly 38kg of MDMA worth a staggering Rs 75 crore. The operation not only exposed an elaborate drug trafficking network but also underscored the Karna-

against the drug menace. The arrested duo, identified as Bamba Fanta alias Adonis Jabulile, 31, from Agbovillae, and Abigail Adonis alias Olijo Evans, 30, from Pretoria,

taka government's firm stance



had been operating from New Delhi. While Fanta arrived in India in 2020 on a business visa and ran a food cart, Adonis entered the country in 2016 on a medical visa and was engaged in the garment business. However, beneath these seemingly legitimate occupations, the two women were running a highly sophisticated drug supply network.

The investigation revealed a shocking detail: between them, the women had taken 59 flights between Bengaluru and New Delhi in just six months an extraordinary frequency that raised suspicion.



### Economy thrives despite market turbulence

ndia's economic landscape presents a striking contrast between the real economy and financial markets, offering both concern and reassurance. February's retail inflation dropped to a seven-month low of 3.61 per cent, a welcome relief from October's peak of 10.87 per cent food inflation. The moderation in food prices, which declined to a two-year low of 3.75 per cent, is a significant boost for consumers and policymakers alike. This trend bodes well for the government's ambitious 6.5 per cent GDP growth target for the 2025 financial year, driven by stable consumption patterns. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) decision to cut the reporate by 25 basis points to 6.25 per cent in February, its first in five years, underscores efforts to bolster capital inflows and sustain economic activity. However, the domestic financial system remains strained by a liquidity crunch, exacerbated by foreign investor outflows amid global uncertainties and a weakening rupee. The RBI has responded with dollar/rupee swap auctions to inject over Rs 2 trillion into the banking system, aiming to mitigate long-term liquidity concerns. Despite these financial market jitters, the real economy signals resilience. January's industrial production surged to an eight-month high of 5 per cent, buoyed by growth in primary, intermediate, and infrastructure-related sectors. This uptick reflects underlying economic strength, even as financial market volatility unnerves investors. The latter is evident in mutual fund (MF) trends, where February saw a 27 per cent dip in equity MF inflows, marking the fourth consecutive month of declining stock returns. Retail investors, many of whom embraced equities post-COVID-19, are pulling back, with fresh Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) plummeting to their lowest in the fiscal year. While financial market fluctuations may be temporary, the resilience of the real economy offers a reassuring counterbalance. Policymakers must continue to nurture this growth while addressing financial sector vulnerabilities

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to ensure sustained economic momentum.



### THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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AASHEERWAD DWIVEDI SAYS BSNL'S REVIVAL HIGHLIGHTS CONSULTANCY FIRMS' PUBLIC SECTOR INFLUENCE

### BSNL, BCG, and bureaucracy



n May 2024, a report that the American consultancy group, Boston Consulting Group (BCG), was to be involved in the revival strategy of state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) and that BSNL was to pay BCG Rs 132 crore for the consultancy drew much attention. BCG has reportedly recommended reducing the workforce among other major steps. While this became a much-talked about news item. this is not a one-off event. In recent years, the public sector's reliance on the services of external consultancy firms has increased exponentially - and not just in India but also worldwide. While the overall spending of the government is not available for India, there is some data available for other countries. For instance, France spent over €1 billion on intellectual services provided by consultancies in 2021, while the Australian government spent A\$21 billion on external labour hire in 2021-22.

The case of BSNL has once again drawn attention to the contentious issue of the growing influence of consultancy firms within the public sector. It raises important questions about the efficacy and the implications of outsourcing strategic decision-making in the public sector. Given the increased involvement of external consultancies, there is a need that this is scrutinised.

The central critique by most people is rooted in their lack of "skin in the game". Consultancy firms are given projects and contracts to provide strategic advice but bear no responsibility for the outcomes of their recommendations. Like in this case, for example, if BSNL's fortunes fail to improve despite the implementation of BCG's strategies, the consultancy faces no consequences. This lack of accountability creates a troubling misalignment of incentives. The consultants are rewarded handsomely regardless of the



results, while BSNL — and by extension, the Indian taxpayer — will bear the full brunt of any failure.

Moreover, such an arrangement undermines the very purpose of hiring external expertise: to deliver tangible improvements and long-term viability. Also, if you are pay ing someone to solve your problems without any major accountability, there will always e some problems left to be solved.

In addition, the over-reliance on consultancies erodes the capacity of the state to innovate and manage its enterprises effectively. Over time, this dependence on external expertise creates a vicious cycle. Instead of building internal capabilities, they become perpetually reliant on external advice — and this does not come cheap.

#### Impact on state capacity, conflict of

This kind of dependency has much broader implications for the state capacity. The skills and the knowledge learned by the consultancies on these projects are not transferred to the public officials. In effect, this sets up a negative feedback loop, where public sector employees lose skills and institutional knowledge, meaning, the next project or piece of work will still need external inputs.

The proliferation of consultancy contracts reflects a deeper crisis of confidence in the public sector's ability to govern itself as well, by implicitly undermining their own legitimacy. This outsourcing of expertise not only weakens public institutions but also creates an unaccountable parallel bureaucracy of consultants who wield significant influence over public policy and resource allocation without subject to the same democratic oversight or accountability as public officials or political leaders.

Consultancy firms often serve multiple clients across industries, including competitors and regulators, which can create conflicts of interest. Their advice may be influenced by these overlapping relationships, raising questions about the impartiality and the integrity of their recommendations. The conflict of interest has recently been much debated in most countries leading to major consultancy firms considering breaking their various functions.

An additional problem is that the objectives of public sector enterprises are often very different from those of the private sector. Consultancy firms often approach problems from a profit-maximisation perspective, emphasising cost-cutting, efficiency, and market competitiveness. While these strategies might yield short-term gains, they may not align with the broader public service mandate of organisations. For instance, BSNL as a public sector enterprise, has historically played a vital role in India's telecommunications landscape, particularly in bridging the digital divide and bringing telecommunication services to rural and underserved areas. The aggressive cost-cutting measures might

compromise the quality of service in rural areas, where BSNL's presence is crucial in providing affordable telecommunications access. Overall, a purely market-driven strategy could divert the public enterprise's focus from its social responsibilities, which will essentially undermine its role as a public goods provider.

#### What will work better

A better alternative, as Mariana Mazzucato and Rosie Collington, the authors of the book, The Big Con: How the Consulting Industry Weakens our Businesses, Infantilizes our Governments and Warps our Economies, suggest would be to invest in strengthening the internal capabilities of the public sector institutions. This could involve recruiting and training top talent, fostering a culture of innovation, and empowering employees to take ownership of the company's strategic direction. They write, "Because knowledge is not cultivated within state workforces and institutions, a dependency on the 'expertise' of consultancies spirals." By building internal expertise, these organisations could develop strategies that are not only effective but also aligned with their long-term goals and public service mandate. This will help them reclaim their strategic autonomy as well — which gets compromised with too much reliance on outside the system.

The case of BSNL and BCG serves as a microcosm of the broader debate about the role of consultancy firms in public sector governance, state capacity and accountability. There is a need for governments across the world to rethink this model of governance.

Aasheerwad Dwivedi is Assistant Professor  $(Economics), Faculty \ of Management \ Studies,$ University of Delhi. Views are personal.



DR. SOHAM D. BHADURI EXPLAINS HOW RAPID UHC ROLLOUT FAVOURS PRIVATE SECTOR, NEGLECTS PRIMARY CARE

### Ayushman Bharat's missed opportunity



little over six years ago, what has been proclaimed as the world's largest health assurance scheme, namely, the Centre's Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), was rolled out in the face of hitherto scarce evidence of publicly funded health insurance (PFHI) affording significant levels of financial risk protection, particularly to the marginalised. Another point of contention was that the scheme would gobble up already scarce resources meant for primary health care and channel them to feed commercial interests. Ever since then, two conspicuous features have characterised AB-PMJAY's trajectory: first, the poor, yet lately improving, utilisation of central budgetary allocations to the scheme; and second, a spirited scramble on the part of government and quasi-government structures to demonstrate evidence of financial risk protection in favour of AB-PMJAY. As the Economic Survey 2024-25 celebrates the achievements of AB-PMJAY and the Unio Budget 2024-25 has notched up its allocation for the scheme, a quick status appraisal

The Economic Survey 2024-25, among other government reports, states that AB-PMJAY has resulted in over Rs 1.25 lakh crore worth of savings in out-of-pocket (OOP) expenses. Studies on which such observations are premised infer that PFHI coverage has resulted in increased health-care utilisation and reduced catastrophic health expenditure (CHE) and OOP expenses on inpatient care. However, the findings below the surface are not as encouraging, particularly in the current context of budgetary allocation patterns. Persistent criticism of PFHI in India has been that it does not cover outpatient care, which accounts for the largest share of OOP expenses. Predictably, while schemes such as



PFHI have reduced the financial burden of inpatient care, the concomitantly increased utilisation of outpatient care ensures that the scheme has had little impact on overall financial risk protection. CHE levels among insured households continue to be high, with no significant reductions in outpatient OOP expenses.

to financial risk protection while primary health-care provision is related with improving health outcomes. However, such distinctions are largely artificial, and while inpatient care has an acute role in distress financing, evidence shows that outpatient care costs also contribute majorly to financial hardships. Savings accrued from improved primary health care and social investments far outweigh those from hospitalisation insurance, particularly in the developing country context, and any assessments of financial risk protection must be holistic. While AB-PMJAY can be seemingly promising in terms of reducing inpatient costs among its beneficiaries, the bigger question of primary care stares at us as the National Health Mission (NHM) allocations continue to stagnate, even as health and wellness centres get ennobled under the rechristened title, 'Ayushman Arogya Mandirs".

#### Insidious challenges

Developing countries looking to provide universal health insurance typically encounter some burning questions, foremost among them being raising awareness, enrolling beneficiaries, and collecting premiums, which can be expensive exercises. Non-contributory entitlement-based programmes such as AB-PMJAY can seem to circumvent such questions, but only until they start providing coverage that is anywhere close to being universal. Where total OOP expenses amount to lakhs of crores, it is obvious how far a few thousand crores of public investment in AB-PMJAY can go. The measly share of PFHI in India's total health spending is a telling fact. However, blanket prescriptions to increase spending are of no use. Increased spending demands commensurately robust instituhealth care, and this remains one of the major short- and medium-term challenges before PFHI even today. And once the utilisation of PFHI schemes enters an upward slope, its budgetary demands will grow rapidly and exponentially. A parallel strengthening of primary care institutions is very unlikely. if at all feasible, and can induce wasteful and sticky structural imbalances in health care.

The far better performance of other government health insurance schemes such as Employees State Insurance (ESI) and the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS) at providing financial protection, which cover outpatient care, testify how Ayushman Bharat has a long way to go as far as delivering on its primary care promises is concerned. Nearly two-thirds of outpatient

care is catered to by the private sector. Rapid rollout of universal health coverage (UHC) often entails contracting out services to the private sector through public private partnerships, as in the case of AB-PMJAY. The fact that such widespread partnerships in outpatient care remain improbable in the face of stagnant budgetary allocations to primary care paints a bleak future for UHC, where the gap between hospitalisation and primary care keeps widening increasingly. And the fact that increased AB-PMJAY allocations are likely to come at the expense of primary care is keenly dismaying.

#### A ray of hope

Some current statistics on India's health spending patterns are indeed promising. The share of government health expenditure in total health expenditure has increased, and the share of OOP expenditure has seen a declining trend. Recent national surveys also indicate an sing share of the public sector health-care provision. Such developments clearly paint the imperative of investing in public health care, albeit addressing existing socio-economic and class disparities in health-care access. Evidence shows that health insurance, although at times seemingly the most feasible option, is no elixir for developing countries. The fact that when it comes to financial risk protection in health, some States with low PFHI coverage but higher per capita government health expenditure outperform their counterparts with higher PFHI coverage but lower per capita government expenditure is a felicitous example.

Dr. Soham D. Bhaduri is a public health specialist, independent researcher, and former editor of The Indian Practitioner. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

### The war economy: How Israel profits from occupation

ntony Loewenstein's The Palestine Laboratory is a and deeply unsettling examination of Israel's defense and surveillance industry and its global reach. The book exposes how Israel has turned its occupation of Palestine into a commercial enterprise by exporting military technology, surveillance tools, and expertise to various nations worldwide. From apartheid South Africa to contemporary India and Myanmar's military junta, Israel has built an extensive network of clients eager to acquire its battle-tested security apparatus. Loewenstein's argument is simple yet profound: Israel's control over Palestinian territories serves as a testing ground for weapons and technologies that are later marketed globally.

One of the most chilling insights in the book is Loewenstein's discussion of a 2020 app developed by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF), which allows commanders to order drone strikes with the ease of purchasing

an item online. The dehumanization of Palestinians, reduced to mere targets in a digital system, is emblematic of what Loewenstein describes as the inevitable consequence of prolonged occupation. The monetization of occupation has been turbocharged post-9/11, with Israel positioning itself as a leader in counterterrorism strategies and high-tech surveillance.

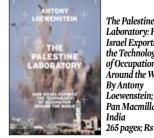
The privatization of occupation is another major theme in The Palestine Laboratory. Israeli companies, often staffed by former intelligence officers, have created a booming industry in surveillance and cyber warfare. One such company, NSO Group, developed the Pegasus spyware, which has been used by various governments to target journalists, dissidents, and activists. Similarly, AnyVision, an Israeli startup, employs facial recognition technology to monitor Palestinians at West Bank checkpoints while simultaneously expanding its services to over 40

countries. Loewenstein reveals that

these companies operate under the implicit approval of the Israeli state, demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between government policy and private enterprise.

Loewenstein explores how Israel, despite its branding as a democratic nation, has historically had no qualms about dealing with repressive regimes. From the military dictatorship in Argentina to Iran's monarchy before the 1979 revolution, Israel's weapons and intelligence-sharing agreements have been dictated more by financial gain than ethical considerations. The book traces how, over the years, Israel has solidified its role as a major arms xporter, providing weaponry and intelligence tools to governments that engage in widespread human rights abuses.

In contemporary times, India has become one of Israel's largest defense clients, purchasing drones, surveillance equipment, and advanced weaponry. Loewenstein suggests that Israel's security



Laboratory: How Israel Exports the Technology of Occupation Åround the World By Antony Pan Macmillan

industry is a model that many nations seek to emulate—an apparatus that allows for control over populations, mass surveillance, and suppression of dissent under

the guise of counterterrorism. Written before the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, The Palestine Laboratory nonetheless predicts some of the worst-case scenarios currently unfolding. Loewenstein warns that Israel's technology-driven occupation could lead to mass expulsion or ethnic cleansing under the pretext of national security. With Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's administration openly considering population transfers from Gaza, Loewenstein's arguments

appear prophetic. Raja Shehadeh's What Does Israel Fear from Palestine?, a short but piercing commentary,

complements Loewenstein's work by arguing that Israel's ultimate fear is the mere existence of Palestine. Shehadeh points out that while Israel continues to expand its military dominance, its legitimacy as a state committed to democratic values is eroding.

Beyond its geopolitical ramifications, The Palestine Laboratory highlights the human cost of Israel's militarization and surveillance strategies. Loewenstein delves into the psychological impact of constant surveillance on Palestinian communities, where drones and biometric monitoring create an environment of perpetual fear. He argues that this system of control not only strips Palestinians of their fundamental rights but also serves as a blueprint for other governments looking to suppress dissent within their own populations. The parallels between Israel's security practices and the increasing surveillance measures in Western democracies reveal how occupation-tested technology is shaping global governance in troubling ways. Additionally, the book raises

important ethical concerns about the complicity of Western nations in Israel's arms trade.

#### SEBI Cracks Down on Firms Diverting Funds for Personal Use asked to return Rs 49.82 crore

Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has cracked down on multiple companies for misappropriation of funds raised through rights issues in the stock markets, after receiving complaints from whistleblowers.

SEBI is reported to have initiated investigations against these companies for the alleged illegal diversion of funds by promoters to their relatives or front companies for personal use rather than the declared purpose for which the money was raised.

The capital markets watchdog is currently looking into four or five such entities and has discerned a pattern in the misuse of such funds. The issue is, therefore, also being taken up on a broader level, according to a report in media.

Most of the cases relate to small and dormant companies which float a rights issue, in which shares are offered to existing shareholders at a discount to raise funds for further investment to expand the business.

**SEBI Partners with** 

DigiLocker to Reduce

Investor Protection

**Unclaimed Assets, Enhance** 

**NEW DELHI:** The Securities

and Exchange Board of India

(SEBI) on Wednesday part-

nered with DigiLocker to help

investors track their securities

holdings and reduce unclaimed

SEBI's circular titled "Harness-

ing DigiLocker as a Digital Pub-

lic Infrastructure for Reducing

Unclaimed Assets in the Indian

Securities Market," aims to en-

hance investor protection and

streamline access to financial

By integrating DigiLocker

with the securities market, the

SEBI is ensuring that investors

can store and retrieve details

of their demat accounts and mutual fund holdings securely.

DigiLocker, which already

provides access to bank account

statements, insurance policies,

and National Pension System

(NPS) details, will now serve as

a centralised platform for inves-

tors to manage their securities

information. According to the

government, a key feature of

this initiative is the nomination

data access nominees within

DigiLocker, allowing them read-

only access to the account in

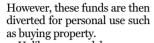
case of the investor's demise.

nancial assets without unnec-

This initiative, outlined in the

financial assets.

holdings



Unlike pump and dump cases, fund diversion from rights issues does not have an immediate impact on the stock market. Hence, such misuse of funds is more difficult to detect and whistleblower complaints are the main source of information in unearthing the cases.

In an interim order passed on December 5, 2024, SEBI observed that Mishtann Foods

Ltd. misused proceeds from its rights issue, transferring funds to promoters and group entities instead of their stated purpose. The company withdrew an initial Rs 150 crore rights issue and later issued smaller rights issues under Rs 50 crore, seemingly to

The markets regulator has barred the company from raising public funds and prohibited the promoters from trading or accessing the capital markets. Mishtann Foods was also

avoid SEBI scrutiny.

misappropriated from its rights issue and Rs 47.10 crore diverted through fictitious transactions. To improve governance, SEBI has mandated the formation of a new audit committee to ensure strict compliance with regulations. Additionally, BSE has been directed not to approve any further rights issues by the company. These directives will remain in force until further orders. In another order passed on December 11, 2024, SEBI released an order against Debock Industries Ltd. The company was found to have engaged in financial misconduct, including manipulating its financial statements, submitting false bank statements, and siphoning off rights issue proceeds.

The company allegedly used fictitious preferential issues to migrate to the Main Board of the stock exchange. As a result, SEBI imposed strict restrictions, preventing the accused from dealing in securities or accessing the capital markets.

### MSMEs to Drive IT Sector towards \$450 Billion **Services Export Target: Piyush Goyal**



**NEW DELHI:** Led by MSMEs, the IT sector can achieve an ambitious \$450 billion services export target in the next financial year, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, has emphasised.

Goyal underscored the critical role of the IT and IT-enabled services (ITES) sector in India's economic growth.

The minister noted that the services sector exports reached approximately \$340 billion last year, with IT and ITES contributing nearly \$200 billion. This year, services exports are expected to reach between \$380 billion and \$385 billion, further solidifying India's global presence.

Speaking at the 'Global

Confluence 2025' organised by Nasscom here, the minister highlighted the importance of innovation and adaptability in maintaining India's competitive edge.

The minister also reaffirmed confidence in India's IT sector and MSMEs as key drivers of the country's economic transforma-

tion in the Amrit Kaal, working collectively towards a developed and prosperous Viksit Bharat.

He praised Nasscom for fostering a culture of continuous learning, stating that the IT sector has consistently remained ahead of the curve by embracing new technologies such as quantum computing, artificial intelligence, and machine learning.

The minister also stressed the

need to attract global capability centres (GCCs) to India, leveraging the country's vast talent pool. Encouraging businesses to operate from India rather than relocating talent abroad, he said this would enhance foreign exchange earnings and fuel domestic economic growth.

Discussing India's expanding middle class and rising consumption levels, Goyal outlined the cascading benefits of IT-led growth, including increased demand for commercial real estate, housing and infrastructure.

### **PHDCCI Seeks Zero** Duty on Import of Gold Ore Concentrate to Boost Local **Industry**



NEW DELHI: The PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) has urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to grant permanent zero-rated import duty on gold ore concentrate, aligning it with copper ore concentrate as this would help boost India's gold ore concentrate processing in-dustry and create more jobs in the country.

India's gold ore concentrate processing industry, which commenced in 2021, has the potential to significantly boost the nation's economy by reducing gold bullion imports, generating high-value employment, and advancing self-reliance under the Make in India vision, the chamber stated in a letter to the Finance Minister.

in import duty structures between Gold Ore Concentrate and Copper Ore Concentrate (HSN-26030000). This imbalance is severely impacting the growth, competitiveness, and sustainability of this nascent industry," the letter states.

for the gold ore concentrate processing industry.

suring a level playing field.

### **India Eyes \$100 Bn Trade with Latin American & Caribbean Countries**

to double its trade with Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries to \$100 billion and the path is very clear, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said here on Wednesday.

Addressing the 10th CII India-LAC Conclave with the theme of Advancing Economic Alliances for Collaborative Growth, Barthwal said: "Trade will be the engine of growth for both regions and that there is a need to address core trade issues such as tariffs, non-tariffs and regulatory barriers between the two sides for bolstering bilateral trade and investments.

In his address at the conclave, Cuba's Deputy Prime Diaz said: "Closer bilateral and Cuba and India would improve between the two sides.



relations amongst countries in the Global South.'

He said that India could be partner for the LAC region in agriculture, food security, transportation, ICT, and renewable energy sectors. He Minister Eduardo Martinez also highlighted Cuba's role as a founding member of the Inmultilateral relations between ternational Solar Alliance and the Latin American and Ca- underscored the importance of ribbean (LAC) countries, like renewable energy cooperation

Minister of State for External Affairs Pabitra Margherita said: "India's growing diplomatic footprint in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries is a clear indication of New Delhi's commitment to strengthening bilateral and regional ties."

The minister emphasised the seven pillars of cooperation including capacity building, agriculture and food security,

renewable energy and climate change, innovation, technology and trade, cricket and culture, ocean economy and maritime security, and medicine & healthcare, as equally important for India-LAC relations. The seven pillars were propounded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 2nd India-CARICOM summit.

The minister stressed the need for India and LAC to continue to work on supply chain diversification. He added that India is committed to partnering with LAC in the areas of providing affordable and quality healthcare and sharing Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) products such as the Unified Payments Interface (UPI). There is a need for more interactions, fast-tracking of processes and addressing current bottlenecks for bolstering India-LAC bilateral trade, he

### **Ather Energy and Salesforce Join Hands to Revolutionize Customer** and Dealer Experience



**ARUN KUMAR RAO** Bangalore

In a landmark partnership, Ather Energy, one of India's leading electric two-wheeler (E2W) manufacturers, has joined hands with Salesforce. the world's #1 AI-powered CRM, to transform dealership operations and enhance customer experiences. This collaboration introduces a first-ofits-kind Dealer Management System (DMS) designed to unify Ather's Lead Management System (LMS), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), and dealer operations on a single, scalable platform.

With a rapidly expanding network of 350 dealers across India and ambitious growth plans on the horizon, Ather Energy is committed agile business operations. The newly developed 'Ather Dealer Central,' powered by Salesforce, is a next-generation with real-time insights, AIcustomer satisfaction and business growth. The solution will be avail-

able on a mobile app, allowing Ather's dealer partners to manage operations on the go, enhance customer interactions, and drive efficiency in the expanding EV market. By leveraging Salesforce's industry-leading capabilities, Ather Energy aims to set a new benchmark for dealership management and customer engagement in India. Ravneet S. Phokela, Chief

Business Officer at Ather Energy, highlighted the significance of this collaboration: "At Ather, our approach to the dealer management system was to develop a solution that is agile, scalable, and truly customer-centric. With 'Ather Dealer Central,' we are reimagining how EV dealerintelligent platform seamlessly connects every aspect of the dealer ecosystem, providing unprecedented insights, modealer partners. It represents driven decision-making, and a strategic asset that will shape mobile accessibility—ensuring the future of EV retail and customer engagement in India."

"At this juncture, we bring to your kind notice a crucial issue regarding the disparity

It claims that the existing 2.5 per cent import duty on gold ore concentrate versus zero duty on copper ore concentrate poses a significant cost disadvantage

Additionally, the exemption on the import duty for gold ore concentrate is temporary, expiring on March 31, 2026, adding further uncertainty for the industry's future, the letter said.

The PHDCCI has requested Finance Minister Sitharaman to remove the conditionality and expiry date (March 31, 2026) from the exemption to ensure long-term policy

It further states that the problem is compounded by the reduction in the import duty on finished gold from 15 per cent to 6 per cent in the Union Budget 2024-25, making direct imports of finished gold more attractive than estic refining, hindering the growth of India's refining infrastructure.

The business chamber has said that aligning the duty structure between gold ore processors and finished gold importers would create a fair competitive environment, en-

### DDA and CESL join hands to establish EV Charging span across North Delhi, West

**TANVIR KAUR** New Delhi

Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Lieutenant Governor of Delhi, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) and Convergence Energy Services Limited (CESL) have signed an agreement to develop electric vehicle ping stations across DDA sports complexes in the city.

"This ensures that legal heirs can easily locate and claim fiessary delays," the government Chairman, Vishal Kapoor, MD clean mobility. As part of the



and CEO - CESL, Chittaranjan Dash, Principal Commission-CESL is a subsidiary of Ener, DDA, and Rajneesh Rana, ergy Efficiency Services Limited Head-Convergence. This col-(EESL), under the Ministry of laboration marks a significant Power. The agreement was step toward enhancing the capisigned in the presence of Vi- tal city's EV infrastructure and jay Kumar Singh, DDA Vice- supporting India's transition to

agreement, DDA will provide adequate vacant land at identified locations within its sports complexes. CESL will utilise these sites to establish and operate public charging infrastructure.

The identified locations for the installation of EV charging and battery swapping stations

Delhi, South Delhi and East Delhi, enabling wider access to efficient charging facilities for EV users in the city. Under CESL's business model, tailored to evolving market conditions for the development of EV charging and battery swapping stations, it will procure services from Charge Operators (CPOs) for the supply, installation, testing, commissioning, operation, and maintenance of EV charging and battery swapping stations. These facilities will be deployed on a DMS that empowers dealers bility, and efficiency to our Build-Own-Operate-Maintain (BOOM) model, ensuring sustainable and long-term EV in-

### Insider or an Outsider as a CEO: Insights on Pharmaceutical Industry in India

KUMAR **ANGRISH** ringing an insider or an outsider as the CEO along with CEO tenure has relevance for a firm's performance and growth. This relationship has been explored by many authors across various economies. Preference for insider over an outsider in CEO suc- most four decades. Freixe had cession is appreciated in majority of the cases. Regarding tenure, the average tenure of CEOs in big companies used to be nine years in 1980 which

dated October 23, 2003). Both these aspects get attention whenever there is an exit of a CEO in a prominent company. In August 2024, the CEO. Schumacher was on Mark Schneider (58 at that the job for about 18 months time) stepped down as the as he joined Unilever in July CEO of Nestle SA after serv- 2023. He was an external caning for almost eight years. He didate who was taken as the joined Nestle SA in 2017. The CEO. Fernandez is an insider company was struggling to as he is with the company for grow sales, attract custom- more than three decades as he ers to the company's branded joined Unilever in 1988. The products amid high rate of inflation. Replacement came with challenges such as supply in the form of Laurent Freixe chain resilience, inflationary (62 at the time of appoint- trends, energy crisis, declin- August 2001. It was in Janument), the company's Execuing profit margins, consumer ary 2020 when he took over tive Vice President and CEO shift towards cheaper options, for the Latin American region. among others. It was badly needed as Nestle's

too as Mark Schneider had company - Fresenius prior to joining Nestle. Further, he was the first external hire in the company for the job of the CEO in a century. In contrast to that, Laurent Freixe came as an internal hire as he was working with company for aljoined the company in 1986 and had served for almost 16 years on the Executive Board.

Most recently, the exit of existing CEO and experience of declined to about just over newly designated CEO in the seven in 2001 (The Economist same company attracted eyeballs in February 2025 when Unilever replaced CEO Hein Schumacher by appointing CFO Fernando Fernandez as new CEO is expected to deal

2024 in contrast to Unilever in any business. At the same that had gained 29 per cent time when strategic shakeup during the same period. Exit is desired then an outsider is had a healthcare connection preferred. In pharmaceutical sector, this aspect is crucial served a prominent healthcare as certain functions such as R&D do not produce result in a short span of time. In that background, tenure of a CEO must not be too short as the change of a CEO may disturb the continuity of the R&D plan. At the same time, when results are not evident for long period then the need arises for inducting an outsider. In India, pharmaceutical

sector is dominated by familyowned businesses. As a result, the role of a CEO is assumed by a family member belonging to the promoter family. That ensures that an insider is joining as the CEO and a longer tenure is granted to a CEO. In those pharmaceutical companies in which a professional CEO is hired even then a longer tenure is guaranteed as the family remains among dominant promoters.

In Divi's Laboratories which is second largest company in terms of market capitalization in pharmaceutical sector, Dr. Kiran Divi is on Board and is the CEO of the company. He is with the company since as the CEO of the company. In Cipla that is 3rd largest Tenure of a CEO is impor- company in terms of market years. In that background, he



pharmaceutical companies, Umang Vohra is Managing Director and Global CEO of Cipla since September 2016. He is an insider for Cipla as he joined the company in October 2015 as its Global Chief Financial Officer. After that, he served as Cipla's Global Chief Operating Officer from January 2016 to August 2016. In his earlier role, he had served Dr. Reddy's Laboratories as Head of the North America business. Both companies are leading pharma companies. Erez Israeli is the CEO

of Dr. Reddy's Laboratories (DRL) and assumed the role of the CEO in July 2019. He is in his sixth year as the CEO of DRL. In April 2018, he joined as Chief Operating Officer. Erez Israeli had extensive experience in pharmaceutical sector. He had worked with Teva Pharmaceuticals for 23

Vinita Gupta is the CEO of Lupin Limited. She is the eldest daughter of Dr. Desh Bandhu Gupta, the founder of Lupin Limited. She joined Lupin way back in 1992. She was appointed as the CEO of the company, effective September 1, 2013. Hence, she is serving the organization from more than 23 years which is a long tenure as she has been a Director on the Board of the company since June 27, 2001. From May 28, 2020, she has been re-appointed as the CEO for a period of five years until May 27, 2025. In that way, there was smooth transition, no cultural shock, or quick

In Alkem Labs, Dr. Vikas Gupta is the CEO. Prior to this role, he had worked with prominent pharmaceutical companies such as Cipla, Glenmark Pharmaceuticals, share had fallen 8.0 per cent in tant to ensure the continuity capitalization among listed could bring a different per- and erstwhile Ranbaxy Labo-

acceptance of leadership.

ship roles. He is holding an on involving outsider as the and costs attached to the ten-However, he has assumed the backed by promoters.

aging Director & CEO of Ipca Labs. Initially, he joined as the Business Development Man-16, 2003. Subsequently, he was promoted as Vice President - Generics Business of the company with effect from November 1, 2004. He became the President - Generics Busi-2006. He was appointed as the Executive Director of the Company on November 11, 2008. From April 1, 2023, he was designated as Managing Director for a period of five (05) years till November 10, 2028. His tenure with the company in the capacity of the CEO is almost two years but his total experience is more than 20 years and belongs to the founder's family. His diverse experience, and family background positions him as an ideal candidate.

Satyanarayana Chava is the Labs. He started this comcompany formed by him also companies attempt to strike

M.B.B.S. degree. Dr. Gupta CEO or on retaining the role ure of a CEO. In this regard, was appointed as the CEO for himself/herself. This was of the company with effect shared by Bill Gates in March from September 22, 2023. 2025 itself when he told in a conversation with Microsoft's role of the CEO just about Vice Chair and President, 18 months ago but has been Brad Smith about the 'emotional weight' of handing over Pranay Godha is the Man- the reins after stepping down as the CEO in 2000. On stepping down by Bill Gates, Steve Ballmer succeeded him. Steve ager of the company on August Ballmer announced his retirement in the year 2013 then the search for the next CEO had sparked intense speculation. So, for pharmaceutical companies in India, the handing over the reins of the company to an ness of the Company in May outsider is likely to carry intense emotional weight as almost all pharmaceutical companies are majorly family-owned. Longer tenure of CEOs

has its own pros and cons. Member of a family-owned company who has long innings in that company, is in a better position to build relational assets. But in a dynamic environment, if that member is not able to reinvent, or lacks capability to adjust during disruptions then it can sow the seeds of failure. Talented personnel in family-owned pharmaceutical companies founder and CEO of Laurus get to know that there is limit for them in organizational ladpany in 2005. Long stay of der. Hence, it literally freezes the Founder as the CEO of a their career path. Therefore,

the most relevant example is of Dilip Shanghvi who brought Israel Makov (73 at the time of appointment) as Executive Chairman of the Board for a three-vear term in May 2012. Shanghvi redesignated himself as Managing Director. Israel Makov had extensive experience as he was the former President and CEO of Teva Pharmaceutical Industries, a prominent Israeli pharma company. It was a surprise move at that time as majority stake of the company was owned by Dilip Shangvi and his family. Even then he brought an outsider on such an important position. Over and above this, the person was a foreigner. Dilip Shanghvi had earlier inducted Kal Sundaram, former MD of GlaxoSmithKline Pharma in the board as he foresaw the need to hire professional managers at the senior level in Sun Pharma. This example offers lessons for promoter-led and family-owned pharmaceutical companies in India.

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.

### Indian Economy Remains Resilient RBI Governor Calls for Stronger Grievance amid Rising Global Challenges: RBI

global economic uncertainty, the Indian economy continues to demonstrate resilience as is evident in the robust performance of the agriculture sector and improving consumption, according to the RBI's latest monthly bulletin.

The resilience of the global economy is being tested by escalating trade tensions and a heightened wave of uncertainty around the scope, timing, and intensity of tariffs. While engendering heightened volatility in global financial markets, these have also caused apprehensions about the slowdown in global growth, the bulletin states.

The reverberations of a tumultuous external environment, however, are being reflected in sustained foreign portfolio outflows. India's macroeconomic strength to face these challenges is bolstered by a decline in headline CPI inflation to a seven-month low of 3.6 per cent in February 2025 on account of a further correction in food prices, the report points out. The bulletin highlights that



India's macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong, and economic growth is poised to sustain momentum driven by robust domestic demand, steady investment activity, and ongoing government spending on infrastructure development.

Private consumption expenditure is on an upward trajectory, signalling strong consumer confidence and sustained demand. Government spending has picked up significantly in recent months, providing a further fillip to growth. Key sectors, including construction, financial

services, and trade, continue to thrive as pillars of economic resilience, the report observes.

It states that various highfrequency indicators of economic activity point towards a sustained momentum in growth during Q4 as well. The first revised estimates of GDP for 2023-24 placed the real GDP growth at 9.2 per cent

- the highest in over a decade if we exclude the post-Covid rebound — demonstrating that in an uncertain world, India's growth story remains a beacon of stability and progress. tion, the bulletin added.

Recent developments across different sectors reaffirm the assessment of a sequential pickup in growth momentum. The Kharif season 2024-25 has seen an upward revision in production estimates for foodgrains and oilseeds and rabi foodgrains registered a growth of 2.8 per cent mainly on account of above-normal rainfall supported by comfortable reservoir levels.

Despite a mild loss in mo-

mentum, the Indian manufacturing sector saw a rise in purchasing activity and employment in February 2025. The services sector recorded a strong expansion in new businesses and employment, according to the bulletin. Notwithstanding the innate strength built on strong macroeconomic fundamentals and prudent policy, the reverberations of a tumultuous external environment are also reflected in various segments of the economy. Sustained foreign portfolio outflows exerted significant pressures on domestic equity markets in February and engendered currency deprecia-

# **Redress Systems in Banks and NBFCs**

**NEW DELHI:** Reserve Bank of India Governor Sanjay Malhotra has issued a strong appeal to banks and non-banking financial companies to address the alarming increase in customer complaints, emphasising that quality service is essential for survival in today's competitive environment.

Speaking at the annual conference of RBI Ombudsmen on Monday, Malhotra highlighted concerning statistics showing that complaints under the RBI's Integrated Ombudsman Scheme grew at a compound average rate of nearly 50 percent annually over the past two years, reaching 934,000 in 2023-24. The number of complaints processed by the RBI Ombudsman increased by 25 percent, from approximately 235,000 in 2022-23 to almost 294,000 in 2023-24.

Malhotra expressed particular concern that nearly 57 percent of maintainable complaints last year required mediation or formal intervention by RBI Ombudsmen, calling this 'a highly unsatisfactory situation' demanding urgent attention.



He noted that in FY24, the 95 scheduled commercial banks alone received over 10 million customer complaints, a figure that could grow substantially with an expanding customer base and product range if corrective action is not taken. The Governor strongly urged senior executives, including managing directors and CEOs, to dedicate time weekly, if not daily, to grievance redress, stating that 'all great CEOs find time to do it.' He emphasized that the goal should not merely be resolving complaints but ensuring similar issues do not recur. Malhotra called on regulated entities to review their grievance redress systems, suggesting that large institutions should have at least

with unresolved issues escalating from lower to higher levels. He recommended that the highest level should be at a senior rank to ensure proper examination of complaints. The Governor identified several areas requiring improvement, including knowyour-customer norms, digital fraud prevention, addressing mis-selling practices, and reforming aggressive recovery methods. On KYC specifically, he urged banks to ensure customers are not repeatedly asked to provide the same documents, pointing out that most banks and NBFCs have not enabled the Central KYC Records Registry in their branches, causing unnecessary

inconvenience to customers. Looking to the future, Malhotra highlighted artificial intelligence's potential to revolutionize grievance redress by creating seamless, efficient, and data-driven systems. However, he cautioned about associated challenges including data privacy concerns, algorithmic bias, and the complexity of AI-driven models, stressing the need for human two levels of grievance redress, oversight and bias mitigation.

#### Markets bounce back after falling in opening trade on fresh foreign fund inflows



mark indices Sensex and Nifty opened on a negative note on Friday but soon recovered the lost ground and were trading with gains as fresh foreign fund inflows supported inestors' sentiments.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 252.8 points to 76,095,26 in early trade. The NSE Nifty dropped 7.85 points to 23,132.80.

However, later both the benchmark indices recovered all the early lost ground and were trading higher. The BSE benchmark gauge traded 205.09 points higher at 76,550.97, and the Nifty quoted 70.05 points up at 23.262.55

From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finance, Nestle, Kotak Mahindra Bank, NTPC, Maruti, Power Grid, Adani Ports, Tata Motors, Reliance Industries and Bajaj Finserv were among the gainers.

However, Infosys, Titan, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank, Tech Mahindra, Asian Paints and Zomato were

among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo were quoting in the positive territory while Shanghai and Hong Kong traded lower.

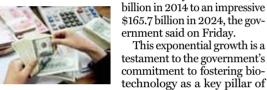
US markets ended marginally lower on Thursday.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,239.14 crore

on Thursday, according to exchange data. "The rally in the market this week which saw the Nifty rise by 3.5 per cent has come at a time when trade tensions are escalating and more is expected when the reciprocal tariffs kick in on April 2. The main driver of the rally is the buying by FIIs in the cash market in two days,' said VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services. Global oil benchmark brent crude climbed 0.43 per cent to USD 72.31 a barreĺ. On Thursday, the BSE benchmark jumped 899.01 points or 1.19 per cent ing the 76,000 level. The Nifty

surged 283.05 points or 1.24

## NEW DELHI: India's bioecon-



"In just 10 years, India's bioeconomy has expanded from a modest \$10 billion to \$165.7 billion, far surpassing our initial target of \$150 billion by 2025."

'IBER 2025' report.

The minister also unveiled BioSaarthi, a pioneering global mentorship initiative aimed

Designed as a six-month is contributing 4.25 per cent cohort, BioSaarthi will facili-

Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan

to the overall GDP. The sector tate structured mentor-mentee engagements, offering personalised guidance to emerging entrepreneurs in the biotech

The minister emphasised that

The initiative would engage

overseas experts, particularly from Indian diaspora as international mentors who would volunteer to give back to the society.

The minister also highlighted the recently approved BIO-E3 Policy —Biotechnology for Economy, Employment, and Environment — which aims to accelerate research, innovation, and entrepreneurship in the sector.

Dr Singh also announced that Assam has become the first state to adopt the BioE3 framework, marking a significant step toward pan-India implementation. India's biotech startup ecosystem has grown from just 50 startups a decade ago to over

since inception of the scheme. The government initiated the National Mission for Financial Inclusion (NMFI), namely the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) in August 2014 to provide universal banking serbased on the guiding principles of banking the unbanked, secur-

#### **Growth Driver for Investment Banks in India: Report MUMBAI**: Public sector is

playing a crucial role in driving growth for investment banks in India, supported by the government's divestment plans and strong domestic inflows, a new report said on Thursday.

The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has set a divestment target of Rs 47,000 crore for FY26, presenting significant opportunities for investment

In recent years, IPOs of major PSUs such as LIC, IREDA, and ONGC, along with offers for sale (OFS) in companies like IRCTC, HAL, and Coal India, have kept the market active, said the report by Emkay Investment Banking.

Upcoming IPOs and fundraising activities from Bharat Coking Coal, CMPDI, MNGL, IREDA, and several banks are expected to further fuel invest-

ment banking growth in FY26

and beyond. India's equity markets have continued to witness strong invices for every unbanked adult vestor participation. In 2024, Rs 1.62 lakh crore, while Rs cut, relaxation of risk weights 1.36 lakh crore was mobilised on NBFC loans, and liquidity through qualified institutional measures will provide a boost



inflow from systematic investment plans (SIPs) has provided steady support to the market, the report said. For the past 11 months, SIP

inflows have consistently exceeded Rs 20,000 crore, reaching over Rs 25,000 crore in the last five months — a strong indicator of investor confidence. Domestic institutional inves-

tors (DIIs) have played a vital role in supporting market stability. In FY25, DIIs invested over Rs 5.7 lakh crore, contributing to market liquidity and investor sentiment.

Meanwhile, key policy decisions by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are expected to further enhance market liquidity and credit growth.

#### per cent to reclaim the 23,000mark to settle at 23,190.65. placements (QIPs), according to the financial sector. SIDBI honored by TiE Mumbai for Shaping

**India's Venture Capital Ecosystem** 

New Delhi

12, 2025.

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has been applauded by The Indus Entrepreneurs (TiE) Mumbai for its outstanding contributions in nurturing and supporting the venture capital and startup ecosystem in the country. The recognition was conferred at TiEcon Mumbai 2025, India's premier entrepreneurial leadership summit, held on March

The award, which highlights SIDBI's pivotal role in fostering India's startup ecosystem and driving innovation, was



conferred upon Manoj Mittal, ture Capital (VC) ecosystem CMD, SIDBI.

It was received on behalf of SIDBI by S.P. Singh, CGM, SID-BI, from the esteemed hands of Narayana Murthy, co-founder of Infosys.

Since its inception in 1990, SIDBI has been at the forefront of developing the Ven-

in India, playing a crucial role in promoting innovation-led enterprises. Over the past three decades, SIDBI has consistently nurtured this segment through sustained funding from its own balance sheet, as well as pioneering ecosystem-

## India to remain fastest growing economy in

**NEW DELHI:** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) expects India to remain the fastest-growing major economy over the next two years with the country's GDP growth rate projected at 6.4 per cent for financial year 2025 and at 6.6 per cent in 2026.

The OECD report projects China's growth rate at 4.8 per cent in 2025 and at 4.4 per cent in 2026. The OECD's projections are more or less in line with the RBI's forecast of India's growth prospects. In its outlook released in February, the central bank's monetary policy committee kept the growth forecast at 6.7 per cent for FY26. The Eco-



ias Cormann said.

"Increasing trade restrictions

# building initiatives.

# next 2 years at 6.4 to 6.6 pc growth: OECD

nomic Survey pegged growth between 6.3 per cent and 6.8 per cent for FY26.

"The global economy has shown some real resilience, with growth remaining steady and inflation moving downwards. However, some signs of weakness have emerged, driven by heightened policy uncertainty, OECD Secretary-General Math-

#### will contribute to higher costs both for production and consumption. It remains essential to ensure a well-functioning, rules-based international trading system and to keep markets open, "he added. The OECD report expects

global GDP growth to moderate from 3.2 per cent in 2024 to 3.1 per cent in 2025 and 3.0 per cent in 2026, with higher trade barriers in several G20 economies and increased policy uncertainty weighing on investment and household spending. Annual real GDP growth in the United States is projected to slow from its very strong recent pace, to 2.2 per cent in 2025 and 1.6 per cent in 2026.

### see sharpest rise in 2 years **NEW DELHI:** After the \$10 billion forex swap undertaken by the central bank on February 28,

India's forex reserves

when it bought dollars against rupee to inject liquidity in the system, the country's foreign exchange reserves saw a huge \$15.267 billion spike during the week ended March 7. The sharp rise during the

week was the sharpest jump in over two years. The forex reserves had increased to an all-time high of \$704.885 billion in September last year 2024. Foreign currency assets, a

major component of the reserves, increased by \$13.993 billion to \$557.282 billion. Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves.

The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by \$212 milion to \$18.21 billion. India's reserve position with the IMF BY) stood at 50.30 crore till Up India Scheme and other minister. was down by \$69 million at March 7, Minister of State for financial inclusion schemes \$4.148 billion in the week, the Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, have also witnessed remark-

SINGH

returns to investors than eq-

last 20 years despite rising

offset the loss in equity.

Investing in gold for 1 year

cent; for 3 years, 16.8 per cent;

10 years, 12.5 per cent; for 15

years, 11.5 per cent; and for 20

10 years, 9.9 per cent; for 15

cent, while equity has yielded

figures indicate that invest-

20 years, 12.3 per cent.

#### India's Bioeconomy sees 16-fold rise to reach \$165.7 Billion in 10 Years: Union Minister Public Sector Emerges as Key startups for global success.

omy has witnessed 16-fold rise in the last 10 years — from \$10 billion in 2014 to an impressive \$165.7 billion in 2024, the gov-

testament to the government's commitment to fostering biotechnology as a key pillar of India's future economic growth, said Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh at the BIRAC Foundation Day ceremony in the national

Dr Singh stated, quoting the

As per the report, the sector

NEW DELHI: A total of 55.02

crore Jan-Dhan accounts have

been opened till March 7, out

of which, 36.63 crore accounts

are in rural and semi-urban

areas, the government said on

under the Pradhan Mantri

Also, cumulative enrollment tion in Rajya Sabha.

said in a written reply to a ques- able progress.

has shown a CAGR of 17.9 per cent over the past four years, showcasing India's potential as a global biotech powerhouse.

at nurturing biotech startups.

sector.

this initiative will strengthen

India's biotech ecosystem by fostering innovation, enhancing industry-academia collaboration, and positioning Indian

55.02 crore Jan-Dhan accounts opened; 36.63 crore in rural, semi-urban areas: Centre The Atal Pension Yojana saw enrollments reaching 7.49 crore till the reported period. Under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana (PMMY), as of

> The Stand Up India Scheme amounting to Rs 60, 504 crore

crore loans amounting to Rs

33.19 lakh crore have been

he scheme, according to the

(till March 7) being sanctioned

February 28, as many as 52.07 sanctioned since inception of ing the unsecured, funding the (SUPI) saw 2.67 lakh loans unfunded and serving unserved and underserved areas

# Higher return on gold investment instead of equity

The jewellery industry is

ing in gold in current times is his income more profitable than investing the World Gold Council the possibility of a trade war

Consistent with the survey, 56 per cent of people who invest in gold have an annual income between Rs 2 lakh ccord - and Rs 10 lakh. Meanwhile, ing to a the price of gold has doubled recent from 2022 to March 2025, but survey conducted by the In- there has been no increase in dian Gold Policy Centre at the savings of people of this IIM Ahmedabad, gold has income group. As a result, due consistently provided higher to a lack of sufficient savings, these individuals are currently uity in every period over the unable to purchase gold.

The price of 10 grams of prices. Not only this, gold has 24-carat gold crossed the reduced the risk for inves- 91,000 level in the bullion tors when investing in both market on March 18, 2025, equities and gold. This can be and it is likely to surpass the understood with an example. Rs 1 lakh mark this year. Obvi-For example, if an investor's ously, due to the increase in portfolio consists of 80 per gold prices, the general public cent equity and 20 per cent is unable to afford gold. Not gold, then gold has helped only this but due to the fear of overspending, they are also avoiding buying gold jewellery has yielded a return of 34.1 per for their wedding.

for 5 years, 14.8 per cent; for concerned about the current situation because the increased prices have sigyears, 12.9 per cent. Whereas nificantly reduced demand investment in equity for 1 year for jewellery. Therefore, to has yielded a return of 2.6 per address the current crisis and cent, for 3 years, 11.6 per cent; enable the common man to for 5 years, 14.6 per cent; for purchase gold, gold jewellery manufacturers are emphasisyears, 11.5 per cent; and for ing the sale of 14-carat gold. Advertising and other pro-Thus, gold has yielded a motional methods are also maximum return of 34.1 per being employed in this matter. Along with this, efforts are a maximum return of 14.6 also being made to hallmark per cent; in other periods, 9-carat gold so that the comgold has also provided higher mon man can maintain the joy returns than equity. These of the wedding by purchasing

low-carat gold according to According to a report by

(WGC), India's demand for starting at the global level, the gold reached its highest point in 2024. However, investors

who initially purchased gold to earn a profit are now taking advantage of this situation by selling gold coins and jewellery. According to the World Gold Council, 34.8 tonnes of gold were sold for cash in the March quarter of 2023, while 38.3 tonnes of gold were sold in March 2024. Along with an estimate, more than 40 tonnes of gold are likely to be sold in the last quarter of the current financial year.

After 78 years of independence, the price of gold has skyrocketed. When India became independent, the cost of 10 grams of gold was Rs 88.62. In 1964, its price fell further to Rs 63.25. In this way, the price of gold has increased from a few rupees to a level of 91,000 rupees as of March

There are many reasons

for the increase in the price

of gold, the most prominent

of which are the economic

policies being adopted by US

President Mr Donald Trump,

chance of a recession on in the US, speculation of the US Federal Reserve cutting policy interest rates, the softening of the US dollar, a 5 per cent fall in the US dollar index, subsequently, it reaching its lowest level in last 4 months, weakness in the rupee against the dollar, the persistence of uncertainty at the global level, continuous purchase of gold by central banks, etc. It is worth mentioning that in 2025, the Reserve Bank of India also purchased 3 tonnes of gold, resulting in an increase in gold reserves to 879 tonnes.

The price of gold is also rising due to increased geopolitical tensions in certain parts of the world. The demand for gold has increased recently due to increased investment in Gold ETFs. Meanwhile, due to the decline in the stock market over the past few months, investors are turning to gold. Apart from these, the fear of inflation remains prevalent in the country and abroad. However, due to the decrease in food prices in India, the retail inflation rate based on the Consumer Price

7-month low of 3.61 per cent in February; however, this cannot be considered permanent. There is a possibility of a price increase for vegetables again in the summer.

India is unable to supply the domestic demand for gold, as the required amount of gold is not produced here. Therefore, in this case, our country is entirely dependent on exports.

In the 11 months of 2024, India imported a total of US\$47 billion worth of gold, the highest level ever recorded, while in 2023, the country imported a total of US\$42.6 billion worth of gold. Notably, China is the world's largest gold buyer. It purchased 224.88 metric tons of gold in 2023, while Turkey was in second place, buying 130.64 metric tons of gold.

Due to the current global uncertainties, geo-political tensions in some parts of the world, current policies of US President Trump, the current stance of the US Federal Reserve, the possibility of a recession in the US, a fall in the dollar index, continuous weakening of rupee against the dollar, recent fall in the stock market, inflation remaining at high level etc., there is a rising trend in the price of gold, which is not beneficial for the common man. Still, such a situation is helpful for high-income investors.

Satish Singh, Ahmedabad Based Senior Columnist, views are personal.

Minister S Jaishankar welcomed Commonwealth Secretary General-elect and former Ghanaian Foreign Minister Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey, and shared India's expectation that the Commonwealth should be more reflective of its members' views

In a post on X, he said, "Pleased to welcome Commonwealth Secretary General-Elect and former FM Shirley Ayorkor Botchwey this evening. Shared India's approach to the Commonwealth, voicing the expectation that it would become more purposeful, contemporary, efficient, transparent and reflective of its members' views.

Earlier on Thuirsday, Jaishankar held talks with Bolivia's Foreign Minister Celinda Sosa Lunda. Following this, Jaishankar stated that the two countries signed Quick Impact Projects to strengthen their partnership. In a post on X, Jaishankar

US rejects French politician's

Liberty, calls him 'low-level'

WASHINGTON: The United

States has firmly rejected a

suggestion by French politician

Raphael Glucksmann that the

Statue of Liberty should be

returned to France, dismissing

his remarks as unwarranted

Glucksmann, a centre-left

politician, recently stated that

France should take back the

iconic statue, arguing that the

US no longer upholds the val-

ues that inspired France to gift

the monument. His remarks

were seen as a direct criti-

cism of US President Donald

Trump's policies, particularly

regarding scientific freedom

and international relations.

Liberty... We're going to tell

the Americans, who have cho-

sen to side with the tyrants and

fired researchers for demand-

us back the Statue of Liberty,

"We gave it to you as a gift,

' Glucksmann said.

at home.

"Give us back the Statue of

and politically motivated.

call to return Statue of



nership. Today's signing of an agreement on Quick Impact Projects is another step forward in that direction.

Brazil's presidency for a successful and outcome-oriented

This development comes as Jaishankar met with Andre Aranha Correa do Lago, President of COP30Amazonia and former Ambassador of Brazil to India.

"Glad to meet Andre Aranha Correa do Lago, President of UN Climate Change COP30 Amazonia and former Ambassador of Brazil to India. Extended India's full support to Brazil's presidency for a successful and outcomeoriented COP30," Jaishankar posted Jaishankar's assurance un-

derscores India's commitment to strengthening bilateral ties with Brazil, particularly in the realm of climate action. The two nations have a history of cooperation on global issues, having worked together in forums like the G20, BRICS, and the United

### Trump signs executive order to begin dismantling Education Department

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump signed an executive order to formally begin the process of dismantling the Education Department, saying that his administration is returning education back to the states.

Beyond the "core necessities, my administration will take all lawful steps to shut down the department, "Trump said in a speech at the White House on Thursday. "We're going to shut it down and shut it down as quickly as possible, "Trump said. Noting that the Education Department is "doing us no good" -- citing low proficiency in reading and math among students in US elementary, middle and high schools -- Trump said his administration is returning education to the states, Xinhua news agency reported.

The US president noted that the department's functions such as Pell Grants, Title I, and funding resources for children with

European Commission Presi-

dent Ursula von der Leyen and

European Council President

Antonio Costa jointly called for

"a comprehensive, just and last-

ing peace for Ukraine, "express-

statement.

disabilities and special needs, will be "fully preserved" and be "redistributed to various other agencies and departments.'

Pell Grants are a form of federal financial aid that helps lowincome undergraduate students pay for college. Title I provides federal funding to school districts and schools that serve a high percentage of students from low-income families, focusing on improving educational opportunities for disadvantaged students. "The Trump administration is denying the next generation the resources they need to succeed in order to pay for tax breaks for billionaires. It

is a betrayal to students, parents, and educators, "Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus Chair Rep. Grace Meng and Education Task Force Chair Rep. Mark Takano said in a joint statement. "This is an unlawful decision and Congress must not cede its authority in the face of this order, "according to the

The establishment and dismantling of federal agencies generally require Congressional approval through legislation. If Trump wants to shut down the Education Department, it must go through the legislative process in Congress. It is still unclear how he will proceed with this executive order.

Trump has long criticised the Education Department, arguing that despite significant federal investment in education, the quality of education has not met expectations, citing deficiencies in American students' skills in reading, math, and other areas.

#### **Cold-blooded murder:** Priyanka Gandhi on Israeli attacks on **Hamas targets**



NEW DELHI: Congress MP

Israel launched heavy airstrikes on multiple locations tween Israel and Hamas.

cials in Gaza, over 350 people were killed and more than 150 others injured in strikes in northern Gaza, Deir al-Balah, Khan Younis, Rafah, and Gaza

Expressing her outrage on X, Priyanka posted, "The coldblooded murder of over 400 innocent civilians, including 130 children, by the Israeli government shows that humanity means nothing to them. Their actions reflect an inherent weakness and inabil-

She further criticised the response of Western nations, stating, "Whether Western powers choose to recognise this or to acknowledge their collusion in the genocide of the Palestinian people or not, all citizens of the world who have a conscience (including

many Israelis), see it." "The more criminally the Israeli government acts, the more they reveal themselves for the cowards they truly are. On the other hand, the bravery of the Palestinian people prevails. They have endured unimaginable suffering, yet their spirit remains resilient

and unwavering, "she added. Israel defended its military action, attributing the offensive to Hamas's refusal to release hostages and its rejection of ceasefire proposals from US Presidential Envoy Steve Witkoff and other mediators.

Israeli Prime Minister Benamin Netanyahu's Tuesday stated, "Prime Minis-

in the Gaza Strip. The statement further noted that Israel was intensifying its military campaign to achieve its war objectives, which include securing the release of

"Israel will, from now on, act against Hamas with increasing military strength. The operational plan was presented by the IDF over the weekend and approved by the political

### China 'appreciates' PM Modi's 'positive remarks', says willing to work with India

BEIJING: China on Monday said that it "appreciates" Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent "positive remarks" on China-India relations as both sides earnestly implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries in Kazan, last year.

based podcaster Lex Fridman, which was released on Sunday, PM Modi laid stress on efforts that are being made to ensure that differences between both countries do not escalate into conflicts and dialogue remaining key to diplomatic approach.

"We appreciate Prime Minlevels, and achieved a series



lighted the historical exchanges between India and China for more than 2,000 years, citing that friendly exchanges and mutual learning have been the mainstream, making important contributions to world civilization and human progress. "As the two largest devel-

oping countries, the current common task of the two sides is to strive to achieve the development and revitalization of their respective countries. They should understand, support and achieve each other. This is in line with the fundamental interests of more than 2.8 billion people in the two countries, in line with the common expectations of regional countries, in line with the historical trend of the Global South's outstanding growth, and conducive to world peace, stability, development and prosperity, "she added.

Beijing also asserted taht two should be partners that contribute to each other's success and a cooperative pas de deux of the dragon and the elephant is the only right choice for both sides

"China is willing to work with India to thoroughly implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, take this year's 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and India as an opportunity to promote exchanges and cooperation at all levels in all fields, and push forward the development of China-India relations along a healthy and stable track, "stated Mao Ning.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday condemned Israel's latest military strikes on Hamas targets in Gaza, calling them an act of "cold-blooded

across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, marking its first major offensive since the ceasefire that began on January 19. The renewed assault followed the collapse of negotiations be-According to medical offi-

ity to face their own truth.'

ter Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz have instructed the IDF to take strong action against the Hamas terrorist organisation

hostages held by Hamas.

leadership, "it said.

In a conversation with US-

PM Modi emphasised that cooperation between India and China is essential for global stability and prosperity, advocating for healthy competition rather than conflict. "Dialogue is the key to building a stable and cooperative relationship that benefits both nations", he said.

Appreciating Prime Minister Modi's remarks, China's Foreign Ministry said on Monday that Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi had provided strategic guidance for improving and developing China-India relations during their successful

ister Modi's recent positive remarks on China-India relations. Last October, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi met successfully in Kazan and provided strategic guidance for improving and developing China-India relations. Recently, the two sides have earnestly implemented the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, strengthened exchanges and practical cooperation at all of positive results, "Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said during a regular media briefing in Beijing.

### Ukrainian President Zelensky appoints new Army Chief of Staff

KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has appointed Major General Andrii Hnatov as the Chief of the general staff of the Ukrainian armed forces to replace Lieutenant General Anatolii Barhylevych.

The decrees to dismiss Barhylevych and appoint Hnatov, published on the presidential website, did not specify the reasons for the replacement.

Ukrainian Defence Minis-Facebook that the reshuffle in the armed forces aims to enhance their combat effectiveness, Xinhua news agency reported.

'We are systematically transforming the Armed Forces of Ukraine to enhance their combat effectiveness, Umerov said in a Facebook post, applauding a promotion that he said came at his recommendation.

Umerov noted that Hnatov has more than 27 years of military experience, hav-



ter Rustem Umerov wrote on ing previously commanded a marine brigade, the troops of Operational Command East, and the Joint Forces of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.

According to a statement by the Ukrainian Defence Ministry, Barhylevych has been appointed chief inspector of the Ministry with the mission to ensure compliance with military standards and strengthen discipline within the armed forces.

Barhylevych started in February 2024 to served as the

slowly withdrawing on multiple fronts amid a critical manpower shortage. Kyiv is trying to modernise the army in an attempt to solve longstanding issues, such as command culture and resource management. Drawing on the experience

the Ukrainian armed forces.

More than three years into

the full-scale war, Ukraine is

of NATO partners, Ukraine is currently trying to implement a corps system instead of a brigade one, in an effort to Chief of the general staff of improve cohesion.



in La Paz reflects our resolve to

deepen the India-Bolivia part-

Mixed reactions from European countries to Trump-Putin call on Ukraine

BRUSELS: European countries have had mixed reactions to a phone conversation held between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, during which initial steps toward peace in Ukraine were discussed In its readout of the call, the

White House said on Wednesday that the two leaders agreed on the need to end the threeyear-old Russia-Ukraine conflict with a lasting peace, on starting the process "with an energy and infrastructure ceasefire, "and on soon launching technical negotiations on a maritime ceasefire in the Black Sea, as well as a full ceasefire and a permanent peace deal, Xinhua news agency reported. The focal points of the Kremlin readout include Rus-

sia's requirements for a Trumpproposed 30-day ceasefire. Putin emphasised that a complete end to foreign military aid and intelligence sharing for Ukraine is key to preventing conflict escalation and reaching a political and diplomatic settlement.

Hours after the Trump-Putin reaching an agreement is futile,

phone call, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that his country supports any proposals leading to a lasting and just peace, but his country's direct involvement in peace negotiations is needed. "Without Ukraine's involvement, I believe

ing hope that the phone call marks progress in this direction and reaffirming their steadfast support for Ukraine. During their meeting in Ber-

lin on Tuesday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron welcomed the Trump-Putin phone call as an important step, while reaffirming support for Ukraine's full involvement in peace talks, saying no decisions about Ukraine's future should be made "over the heads" of the Ukrainian people.

#### Putin aide says Russia has not lost hope for ceasefire in Ukraine 13, Witkoff held talks with Putin

MOSCOW: Hours before the much-anticipated phone call between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin, the latter's top aide on Tuesday stated that Moscow has not lost hope of a ing scientific freedom -- 'Give possible ceasefire in Ukraine.

"It has been a week since the but apparently, you despise do we see? The most powerful it. So it will be just fine here attack of APU drones on Rusto talk to each other, "Russian fire following the talks in Saudi



then another attack. But, we are not losing hope. We are clinging ceasefire proposal. And, what to everything. But both the US and Russian presidents need

told Kommersant about the expectations from the upcoming telephonic conversation between the two Presidents.

The top official also stressed that both leaders did not engage in any kind of conversation after the visit of Trump's Special Envoy Steve Witkoff to Moscow.

Ukraine accepted the US proposal for a 30-day ceasesian territory in history. And Presidential aide Yuri Ushakov Arabia on March 11. On March

in Moscow to learn about his position. Putin said that Russia agrees to the suspension of hostilities, but it is necessary to agree on a lot of nuances. Trump is confident that Moscow will agree to a 30-day truce.

Russia on Monday had confirmed that a phone call between US President Trump and his Russian counterpart Putin will take place on Tuesday.

#### **WAR CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON**

### Pak's Civil War Endangers Peace in the Region



Asim Munir told the National is grave and supported by foreign forces.

media has unleashed a massive blame game against India for is being done thoroughly. supporting the Baloch rebels. In this backdrop, it is quite 60-hour visit of the Director of the US intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, to New Delhi, India

didn't raise the growing threat

to peace in the region. Instead, according to media reports, the Indian defence minister, Rajnath Singh raised the issue of the activities of the separatist, Khalistanis Tulsi Gabbard a bottle of the takes place.

conference representing 20 countries also took place in New Delhi. There, however, ing exploited by Pakistan, but was no mention of the uprising against the Pakistani illicit mining of rare minerals army's repression and exploitation of the people of two poor Baloch fishermen are border provinces of Pakistan, being deprived by the Chinese Balochistan and Khyber Pak- trawlers catching fishes. On htunkhwa or KPK. who are the other hand, the people on a warpath.

against India, the ongoing the people of the province. rebellion may be spreading to

Sindh and the Punjab bordering India. A worst scenario of the period 1970-71, when the the army majority Muslims of Pakispokesman stan's eastern wing struggled at Rawalpindi an- to become Bangladesh, pernouncing a new haps, awaits us.

There is a growing appredays later, the Pak army chief hension among the scholars of foreign and strategic affairs Assembly, the internal threat in New Delhi that in a bid to seek the support of the US-led West and China, Islamabad Meanwhile, the Pakistani might embark upon a war against India. Its groundwork

surprising why during the three key ministries, the defence, external affairs and the office of the prime minister that the issues related to the immediate threats to peace were deliberately kept on the back burner, but never explained.

#### **Opportunity Missed**

It is quite intriguing that the Indian authorities could in the US. Prime Minister have told Tulsi as well as at Narendra Modi presented the conference held under the banner of Raisina Dialogue Holy water from the Kumbh, that the ongoing struggle for recently concluded in Prayag, freedom in the two provinces where the confluence of the are actually caused by the rivers Ganga and Yamuna non-representative nature of the hybrid regime under the During her visit, a security strict control of the uniform

The Baloch are not only beits army is engaged in doing in their province. Even the of KPK refuse to accept the With the accusations Durand Line, which divides

There are whispers in the South Block, which houses despite the obvious threats from Islamabad, the issue was

> on March 17-18. Could it be the Ambani factor? It, however, cannot be denied that in recent years, the Mukesh Ambani factor is being increasingly felt in the key areas of the country's foreign policy. Even the Russian foreign minister Lavrov in an earlier conference has told the organizers to get "your questions verified by Washington" before asking him.

neither taken up with Tulsi

Gabbard nor before the two-

day security conference held

Tulsi's presence, however, in the Indian capital could not have been better timed. She was in India during the meeting of the high-profile experts of security and strategic affairs held under the Rasina Security dialogue, a joint venture of Ambani's think tank, Observer Research Foundation (ORF) and India's Ministry of External Affairs.

The Spinoffs

The impact of the two-day session of the 10th. edition of the Raisina Dialogue for information between India It is quite intriguing that security is to be ascertained and the US much more ex-

yet. The conference was focused on the theme of the kalachakra i.e. focusing on people, peace and planet. The security issues related to India's neighbourhood did not receive the attention in the high-profile conference. It, however, could not be denied that Tulsi's brief presence might have boosted the confidence of the participants, especially in the context of India's role in the region.

It was expected that her presence might set in motion the resumption of India's more substantial contribution to the region's political stability, but not by ignoring the current threats.

China's economic stakes are also quite high in the region. Its connivance with the Pakistani army in conducting excessive mining, fishing and fortifying their port, Gwador, is also one of the factors that has triggered rebellion in the mineral-rich province of Baluchistan.

The unspoken agenda of the visit of Tulsi Gabbard could be a part of the exchange of haustive than being shared during the erstwhile regime of President Joe Biden.

The history might soon be repeating in Pakistan with its further fragmentation, but would be being accompanied by graver threats to India.

To face this threat, the Indian establishment, however, has to be unshackled from the non-state players of Indian industries. In this backdrop, it is not surprising that there is little preparation in the present bureaucratic-driven approach for seriously preparing for tackling the threats looming on her horizon.

Modi's experiment to replace his party's seasoned leaders by assigning the steering of his government to a selected group of loyal bureaucrats, many of them occupying cabinet positions, has not only reduced his credibility, but also hurt the country's vital interests. It has already weakened his

government politically. They have already caused national shame, when the handcuffed enchained Indians were recently brought to India. It is being repeatedly justified by the Indian foreign office and a section of Indian media known to be close to the Modi government. It is not known who advised Modi to guide Tulsi to achieve salvation through the holy Ganges water obtained from the Prayag.

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

Gopal Misra has been

### **Talking Points**

### **Narvijay Yadav**

Biodiversity is essential for the survival of our planet, yet humans confine animals and deny them freedom. All creatures deserve the right to live freely, urging us to rethink our ethical responsibilities.

ASA astronaut Sunita Williams returned to Earth after an unexpected nine-month mission aboard the International Space Station (ISS). Initially scheduled for a brief stay, technical issues with the slow and arduous. After two Boeing Starliner extended and a half months, I retook her time in space, leading to my first few steps. The moisolation. Upon return, astronauts like Williams undergo first time. Every small milea reconditioning period to readjust to Earth's gravity, relearning basic motor skills and regaining physi-take fundamental freedoms, cal strength. The ability to walk, fundamental to human life, must be relearned after months in microgravity.

resonates deeply with me, offer a unique perspective on reminding me of my struggle during the second wave of ity. Unlike astronauts or pa-COVID-19 in May 2021, tients who anticipate a return caused by the deadly Delta to freedom, many animals in variant. I had expected a zoos, temples, and private brief hospitalization, believ- collections endure lifelong ing I would recover within a captivity. Research indicates week. However, my condi- that a significant percentage tion deteriorated rapidly. My of zoo animals exhibit signs lungs were damaged by 92 percent, and I found myself tion known as 'zoochosis.' battling for survival in a CO- Symptoms include repeti-VID ICU for three weeks. In tive behaviors, anxiety, and total, I spent one and a half depression stemming from months in the hospital, cut restricted environments that off from the outside world. lack the stimulation of their Days and nights blurred to- natural habitats.

gether as I lay in isolation, longing to see the sky, hear familiar voices, and experience the simple joy of moving freely.

Just as Sunita Williams had to regain her ability to walk, my journey to recovery was prolonged uncertainty and ment was overwhelming like a child learning to walk for the stone in my recovery filled me with immense gratitude. It like movement, fresh air, and human touch, for granted.

Loss of freedom: Experiences of confinement, wheth-Williams' experience er in space or due to illness, the lives of animals in captivof mental distress, a condi-

# and Freedom Struggle



of keeping animals in captivity are complex. While some argue that zoos play a role in conservation and education, the adverse effects on animal well-being cannot be ignored. Captive animals often face limited space, unnatural social structures, and inadequate mental stimulation, leading to both physical and psychological health issues. Humans, who have fought for their freedom throughout history, must extend the same empathy to other sentient

Reflecting on these parallels prompts critical questions about our responsibilities toward other species. Do humans possess the moral right to confine animals for entertainment or education, especially when such con-

The ethical implications finement leads to suffering? Compassion, empathy, and freedom are central to this discourse. Moreover, our planet's ecosystem's health is intricately linked to its diverse species' well-being.

> The decline of pollinators like bees, the endangerment of elephants, and deforestation all have cascading effects on environmental stability. Whether in space, a hospital room, or a cage, the longing for freedom is universal. These reflections challenge us to reevaluate our ethical considerations, striving for a world where freedom and well-being are universal rights, extending beyond humanity to all creatures that

share our planet. The author is a senior journalist and columnist, views are personal.

### Elephants, Astronauts Hockey Olympians Mandeep Singh and Udita Duhan tie the knot

Indian men's hockey team player Mandeep Singh and women's team player Udita Kaur Duhan tied the knot on Friday at Gurdwara Singh Sabha in Model Town, Jalandhar, and was attended by the entire men and women teams of Indian hockey.

Olympian Mandeep Singh, who hails from Hockey Mecca national hockey team. Mithapur in Jalandhar, has

married Indian women's hockey team defender Udita Kaur, who hails from Hisar in Haryana.

Born on 25 January 1995 in Mithapur village of Jalandhar, Mandeep Singh started playing field hockey as a youngster at Surjit Hockey Academy in Jalandhar. Now Mandeep Singh is a part of the Indian men's

Who have performed in

World Cup 2014 & 2018, Asian Games 2018, Commonwealth Games 2018, Asia Cup 2013, Hockey World League Tier 4

Final 2014 & 2017, Hockey World League Tier 3 2013 & 2017 and Champions Trophy 2016 & 2018. Mandeep Singh has won many other major champi-

onships. Olympian Mandeep

in Punjab Police.

Born on 14 January 1998 in Nangal village of Hisar, Udita Kaur Duhan has brought laurels to India in international matches with the Haryana hockey team

She is a defender of the Indian women's hockey team. Before hockey, Udita also played handball. Her sports career started with handball.



### Mumbai court grants mutual consent divorce to Yuzvendra Chahal, Dhanashree Verma



MUMBAI: A family court in Rs 18 crore in the IPL 2025 Mumbai's Bandra on Thursday allowed a mutual consent divorce plea filed by cricketer Yuzvendra Chahal and choreographer Dhanashree Verma.

Dhanashree and Chahal got engaged in 2020 and married in December of the same year in a private ceremony in Gurugram. "Divorce has been granted. The marriage has been dissolved. They are no longer husband and wife. The petition for divorce by mutual consent has been accepted, ' Yuzvendra Chahal's lawyer

A day before, the Bombay cooling-off period in their ongoing mutual consent divorce proceedings.

A bench of Justice Madhav Jamdar of the Bombay HC directed the family court to decide the divorce petition on Thursday itself considering Chahal's participation in the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL).

The leg-spinner was picked by Punjab Kings (PBKS) for Dhanashree is known for her the T20 format.

auction.

The Justice Jamdar-led Bench took note of the fact that the parties had been living apart for over two and a half years and had duly complied with the consent terms regarding the payment of alimony arrived at during the mediation process.

Under Hindu law, if the husband and wife have been living separately for one year or more, they may apply to obtain a decree of divorce by mutual consent. However, under Section 13B(2) of the Hindu Marriage Act, a statu-High Court allowed an ap- tory cooling-off period of at during tough times." plication filed by the estranged least six months from the date of presentation of the divorce petition is provided, to explore possibilities of settlement and reunion between the couple. The Supreme Court, in a

landmark verdict in 2017, held that the 6-month cooling-off period is not mandatory, and the court may waive the condition if it is satisfied that there exists no possibility of parties resuming cohabitation.

fusion dance performances that blend traditional Indian dance forms with contemporary styles.

Recently, Chahal was spotted amongst the spectators sitting next to social media star RJ Mahvash during the Champions Trophy Final. However, this was not the first time the two have been linked together. Last year, in December, a

picture of RJ Mahvash with the cricketer from a Christmas celebration went viral. The social media star then took to Instagram to set the record straight. In a note, she wrote: "Some

articles and speculations have been circulating around the Internet. It's literally funny to see how baseless these rumours are. If you get seen with a person of the opposite gender, does that mean you are dating them? I'm sorry, what year is this? And how many people are you all dating then?" "I have been patient for 2-3 days now, but I won't let any PR teams drag my name into this to cover up other people's images. Let people live in peace with their friends and family

has been nothing short of remarkable. With 205 wickets to his name, he is the leading wicket-taker in IPL history, having surpassed Dwayne Bravo's record of 183 wickets during the 2023 season. His career average of 22.44 and an economy rate of 7.8 underline his ability to combine wicket-taking prowess with The 28-year-old dancer, miserly spells, a rare feat in

#### **Mrunal Thakur shares** the food that fuels her workout motivation



MUMBAI: Actress Mrunal Thakur has shared the secret behind her workout motivation, and it's not what you might expect.

The actress revealed that simple food plays a key role in fueling her fitness routine. In her latest Instagram post, the 'Jersey' actress revealed that Indian breakfast Poha keeps her energized and ready to take on her workouts. Sharing her video of working out in the gym, Mrunal wrote, "I workout because I really love POHA #backatitagain."

In the clip, the actress can be een sitting with her back to the camera, performing arm and back exercises with focus and precision. Mrunal also added the song 'Ek Dafaa' (Chinnamma) by Arjun Kanungo to

Yesterday, the 'Sita Ra-Chahal's IPL journey, mam' actress posted a series in a lavender-hued chikankari lehenga, paired with sparkling diamond accents. She kept her look simple and chic, opting for minimal makeup to highlight her natural beauty. In the caption, she wrote, "Classic charm with a desi twist." On the professional front, Mrunal Thakur is currently shooting for her next project, "Dacoit," where she will star opposite Adivi Sesh in a

# Front of Media Cameras

**Aamir Khan Makes** 

First Public Appearance

with Girlfriend Gauri In

perstar Aamir Khan, who recently celebrated his birthday in Mumbai, made his official appearance in front of the curious media cameras with his new partner Gauri Spratt.

The superstar, who opened the Rs 100 crore club in Bollywood with his movie 'Ghajini', was seen sitting in his car along with Gauri, the visuals seem to Mumbai.

The couple were casu ally dressed as they sat in their Toyota Vellfire, and zoomed off in the lanes of Mumbai. Gauri is the third woman in Aamir's life. The actor was earlier married to Kiran Rao and prior to that, Reena Dutta.

Aamir left the entire Mumbai media shellshocked when he introduced his lady love Gauri to them ahead of his 60th birthday at a five star property in the Bandra area of Mumbai. This comes after the superstar and the 'Laapataa Ladies' director Kiran Rao announced their divorce in 2021 after 16 years of marriage.

Interestingly, the Bol lywood superstar met Kiran on the sets of the Oscar nominated film 'Lagaan', which was bankrolled by him with his first wife, Reena serving as the executive producer on the film.

The superstar was married to both Kiran and Reena for 16 years each before they called it quits. The actor shares two children with Reena, Junaid and Ira Khan. Junaid made his debut last year with his streaming movie 'Maharaj', and was recently seen in 'Loveyapa'. Ira tied the nuptial knot last year in January with Nupur Shikhare, a fitness expert.

With Kiran, the actor shares a son, Azad, which they continue to co-parent after their divorce. The actor was also rumoured to be dating actress Fatima Sana Shaikh with whom he worked in 'Dangal' However, he never confirmed or spoke about it like how he officially introduced Gauri to the media.

### Khelo India Para Games 2025 opens up with grand opening ceremony KAVITA SHARMA

New Delhi

Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports and Labour & Employment, Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya declared the 2nd Khelo India Para Games 2025 open at KD Jadhav Indoor Hall, Indira Gandhi Stadium complex in New Delhi today. More than 1300 para athletes will take part in six sports disciplines in this eight-day long championship.

Six Paralympians – Simran Sharma (athletics), Praveen Kumar (badminton), Nitesh Kumar (badminton), Nitya Union Minister of Social Justice & Empowerment Kento Jini, Sports and Youth Affairs Minister of Arunachal Pradesh and President of the Paralympic Committee of India and former Paralympian i Devendra Jhajharia, in a unique torch rally to formally flag off the Khelo India Para Games 2025.

Dr Mansukh Mandaviva said he was excited to see the Paris Paralympics 2024, where response to every Khelo India we won a total of 29 medals



Games, Khelo India Winter Games or Khelo India Para Games, our athletes are making the country proud through their talent everywhere," said Dr Mandaviya Dr Mandaviya further said,

When one is determined, is heading in the right direction, and is working hard, the result is always positive. The success at

proved that our athletes have the potential to make the country proud on the global stage. Through Khelo India Para Games, our athletes are getting Prime Minister Narendra Modi had envisaged". Dr. Kumar too lauded the Khe-

lo India initiative and mentioned, "Khelo India Para Games 2025 is a world-class platform for Indian athletes to compete among each other and portray their talent publicly. At the same time, it also provides a chance to the para athletes to not just prove themselves but also inspire others through their challenging journey".

### Hockey India 7th Annual Awards 2024: Savita & Harmanpreet named Players of the Year

1975 World Cup heroes honoured with Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award

**KAVITA SHARMA** New Delhi

The Hockey India 7th Annual Awards 2024 brought together the Indian hockey fraternity in New Delhi on March 15, as the National Federation celebrated the country's finest hockey stars, officials, and legends who have made immense contributions to the sport, bringing pride to the nation year after year.

This year's awards held special significance as the apex body celebrated 100 years of Indian

hockey while also marking the golden jubilee of India's historic 1975 World Cup victory. To commemorate this milestone, Hockey India felicitated the members of the victorious 1975 World Cup squad, with the Hockey India Major Dhyan Chand Lifetime Achievement Award along with a cash prize of INR 50 lakh.

The unforgettable evening, which saw some of the biggest names in Indian hockey come together, featured a record prize Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr. pool of INR 12 crore, the highest ever in the history of the Hockey India Annual Awards.

Among the evening's top hon-



Award for Player of the Year 2024 winners in the Women's the Indian Men's Hockey Team and Men's categories, respectively. The awards ceremony a cash award of INR 15 lakh

bronze medal win at the Paris 2024 Olympics. The members of were felicitated with a scarf and 7.5 lakh each in recognition of their contributions. In the second category, eight states were honoured for their

support staff were awarded INR

pivotal role in promoting hockey and their outstanding performances at the 14th Hockey India National Championships 2024. Hockey Haryana, Hockey Jharkhand, Hockey Association of Odisha, Hockey Madhya Pradesh, Hockey Maharashtra Uttar Pradesh Hockey, and Hockey Punjab each won medals across various categories of the tournament and were awarded a cheque of INR 10 lakh each in recognition of their

#### ours, Savita and Harmanpreet began by honouring the big-each, while alternate players Singh were recognised as the gest highlight of 2024—India's received INR 5 lakh each, and

'Blue Cross of India' Celebrates 60 Years with Release of "Memories and Milestones"

A mission for Clean & Cruelity free city: A Model Animal Welfare Orgnisation

DR R B CHAUDHARY

The Blue Cross of India marked a significant milestone 15th March ,2025 Saturday evening with the release of "Memories and Milestones," a book documenting its 60-year journey. The book, authored by historian V. Sriram and Lashman, was released by Justice P.N. Prakash, Former Judge of Madras High Court. This



program was held to recall and objectives of the kindness the efforts made for better and compassion -"Ahimsa" under provision of Prevention of care of stray animals in city to manage them in scientific Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960( manner by following the aims An Act of Parliyament).

and environmentalist, and A.L. Somayaji, Former Advocate General, Government of Tamil Nadu. Dr. Chinny Krishna, Co-founder of Blue Cross and Praani Mitra awardee, shared his insights on the organization's remarkable journey.

esteemed guests, including

Maneka Sanjay Gandhi, re-

The Blue Cross of India has been at the forefront of animal welfare in the country, pioneering initiatives like the Animal

The event was graced by Birth Control (ABC) program, which was the first of its kind in the world. The organization nowned animal rights activist has also been recognized for its transparency, receiving the Platinum Level certification from GuideStar India in 2013. Dr. Krishna acknowledged the challenges of running an organization for 60 years, particularly in the animal welfare field. He expressed his gratitude to Maneka Sanjay Gandhi for her unwavering support and legislative efforts in promoting animal welfare.

#### **Special Olympics Bharat, Indian** Contingent returns with 33 Medals at World Winter Games 2025 **KAVITA SHARMA**

New Delhi

Monday, organized a welcome ceremony for the Indian athletes who returned from Turin, Italy after a historic 2025 Special Olympics World Ministry of Youth Affairs Winter Games campaign. The ceremony, held at the Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium, was graced with the presence of the Hon'ble Minister of State, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Smt. Raksha Khadse and President of Special Olympics Bharat, Dr. Mallika Nadda. The digthe stage by Special Olympics Bharat athlete Bharti, who

Special Olympics Bharat, on

The Indian contingent, comprising 30 athletes and 19 support staff members, returned home with an inspiring collection of 33 medals, including 8 gold, 18 silver, and 7 bronze medals, won across pine skiing, snowboarding, floorball, snowshoeing, short track speed skating and cross country skiing.

Recognizing the achieve-



and Sports has announced increase in cash prizes for the medal winners, with the gold medallists in the tournament receive a cash prize of Rs. 20 lakhs, and the silver and bronze medallists being awarded Rs. 14 lakhs and Rs. 8 lakhs, respectively. Applauding this achieve-

nitaries were accompanied on ment of the athletes, Minister of State, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Smt. won two gold medals in the Raksha Khadse said, "We are extremely proud of the athletes, who showed exceptional performance in Turin. This is a testament to their and resilience and the hard work they put in to achieve the results they got. I would also like to applaud Special six sporting disciplines: al- Olympics Bharat for the steps taken by them to provide opportunities to individuals with intellectual disabilities so they can showcase their potential on the global stage and make ments of the athletes, the the entire country proud."