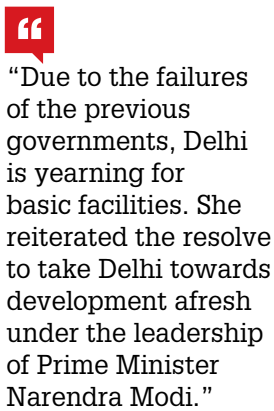


8



Pakistan Gears up to Legalise Cryptocurrency Trading

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.



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."

Chairing her first Cabinet meeting on February 20, CM Gupta approved a 100-day plan, decided to clean the Yamuna and develop the riverfront, gave a nod to table

Chief Minister Gupta, the lone woman head of government 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 AAP government.

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

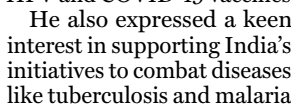
The amount which stated to have been discovered by the Delhi fire department officials is not known yet.

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 Collegium 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 fire there.

“Pakistan is done sitting on the sidelines. We want to attract 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 Chainalysis. In Pakistan, at least 15 to 20 million Pakistanis are currently engaged

Her remarks sparked protests 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 Kolkata where you can create a ruckus, throw stones, and just run away."

He emphasised the crucial



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

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

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

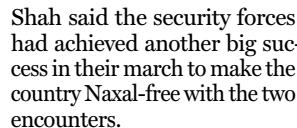
improving monitoring systems. The initiative aims to minimise supply disruptions and enhance efficiency as the demand for water surges during summer. In the first review meeting held on Thursday, officials were directed to take immediate steps to prevent leakages, address sewer blockages and optimise water distribution systems. The minister emphasised the need for strict vigilance to curb unauthorised water connections and wastage, ensuring that residents receive an uninterrupted supply.

"Farmers across the country are being killed, their rights are being stripped away, and yet, by spreading division and hatred

"The government has broken trust and demonstrated dishonesty by detaining peaceful protesters," he said, describing the situation as a betrayal of the people's faith in the system.

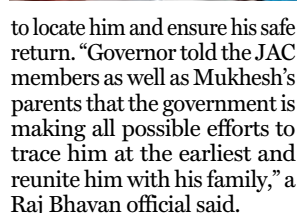
"Mann claims to stand with the farmers, but his actions suggest otherwise. If he truly supports them, he should allow the detained farmers to travel to Delhi. They shouldn't be stopped," Aujla said, demanding that the detained leaders be allowed to protest peacefully in Delhi at Jantar Mantar, where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

Union Home Minister Amit



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 Gangoalpur police station area in Bijapur.

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



safety of her son.

A police officer said that state police personnel, along with Assam Rifles and other Central force personnel, continued their search operations jointly and separately in Imphal West Imphal East, Churachandpur Bishnupur, and Kangpokpi districts to rescue Mukhesh, a resident of Keishampat Le-

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.

Saurabh Bhardwaj is new Chief of Delhi unit , replaces Gopal Rai; Manish Sisodia moved to Punjab

NEW DELHI: Aam Aadmi 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 Kejriwal-led 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



given charge of Chhattisgarh while Mehraj Malik 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 falling.

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

the party's state convenors and office-bearers to implement AAP suprema's views and goals in the state. He will also keep watch on the Punjab government's poll promises and their implementation. Lately, the Bhagwant Mann government has been under fire for not fulfilling AAP's poll promises.

Sisodia's Punjab shift is also seen as a move to establish strong communication

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 2027.

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.

BJP assumed power in Delhi's air pollution, says Manjinder Singh Sirsa

NEW DELHI: Delhi Food and 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 well 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



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.

Sirsa particularly addressed 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 – a fire was set outside Bindra Park in Rajouri Garden, and similar incidents have been occurring."

Startups will get loans up to 10 crores without guarantee, notification also issued Govt



SATISH HANDA
New Delhi

To promote startups in the country for industrial growth, the government 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 government has notified the scheme. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) said in a statement that loans sanctioned 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. For this scheme, the Government of India will establish a trust or fund which will work to give guarantee for the loan managed by the board of National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company.

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 authority.

Multiple complaints have suggested that the project was executed in a shoddy manner, with several cameras found to be non-functional at the time of hand over, Verma said. A political



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 CCTV cameras across Delhi's 70 assembly constituencies.

During verification, a BEL officer provided a detailed complaint supporting the allegations. The complaint further alleged that in addition to waiving the penalties, additional orders

for 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 Enforcement Directorate (ED) against political leaders in 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.

"In 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 Sanjay Singh in a statement accused the BJP-led central government of again preparing a false case against Jain.

"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 prosecute Jain in a disproportionate assets case.

The ED had arrested Jain in a money-laundering case linked to alleged hawala transactions in May 2022. He was granted bail in October 2024.

Delhi court junks Engineer Rashid's bail plea in terror-funding case

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 dismissed."

Rashid has been lodged in the Tihar jail since 2019 after he was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act in the 2017 terror-funding case.

The trial court had on September 10 granted interim bail to Sheikh Abdul Rashid, popular as Engineer Rashid, to enable him to campaign for the assembly election in Jammu and Kashmir.

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 opposing the plea.

Elections to the 90-member J-K Assembly were held in three phases from September 18 to October 1.

The results were declared on October 8 in which the National Conference-Congress alliance attained a clear majority with 48 seats. The Delhi High Court is also likely to consider on March 25 Rashid's plea to attend the ongoing Parliament session. Rashid has challenged a March 10 order of the trial court, refusing him custody parole or interim bail to attend Lok Sabha proceedings till April 4.

In the reply filed to the appeal on March 17, the NIA said Rashid couldn't be allowed to use his status as an MP to "get away from rigours of imprisonment".

The NIA argued that Rashid could neither be granted interim bail nor allowed custody parole as he had no enforceable right to attend the Parliament

Sirsa called on Atishi to take 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 & 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 influential" person who might sway witnesses back home, the NIA said, "Under Section 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 session on custody parole, akin to a previous two-day reprieve granted to him.

Custody parole entails a prisoner being escorted by armed police personnel to the place of visit.

The Baramulla MP, who defeated Omar Abdullah in the 2024 Lok Sabha election, is facing trial in a terror funding case with allegations that he funded separatists and terror groups in Jammu and 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 UAPA.

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-cum-rehabilitation 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 Shatruej Kapur, Director General Prisons Mohammad Akil and ADGP O.P. Singh.

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 developmental stage of life.

Congress is now a ruined garden, and no one can predict which tree will fall next; Anil Vij

SATISH HANDA

This time, the opposition has come completely unprepared during ongoing budget session; they have no issues and are merely acting as readers.

Congress is now a ruined garden, and no one can predict which 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-year-old, 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."



Protesting farmers removed from Shambhu border, bulldozers run on the temporary structures built by farmers



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 Dallelwal, 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.

Chintels Paradiso: 6 towers declared unsafe and to be demolished

SATISH HANDA
Gurugram

Multi-storey residential complex 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 and the developer has been given permission to demolish these six towers (D, E, F, G, H and J) immediately to avoid any mishap. As regards the remaining three towers (A, B and C) also declared unsafe to reside in February this year, and will be demolished once these are vacated by the occupants. The Gurugram district administration on Thursday said that it has invoked the Disaster Management Act, 2005 and have issued directions to flat owners to vacate such three towers in the Chintels Paradiso residential society within 15 days. The administration has taken action on the report submitted by the Central Building Research Institute (CBRI), which had earlier had specified Towers A, B and C structurally unsafe. The order issued by Gurugram deputy commissioner, Ajay Kumar said: It has become essential that Towers A, B and C of Chintels Paradiso Group Housing Society, Sector 109, Gurugram need immediate evacuation in order to avoid any damage to life and property of the residents.



The district administration directed the residents living in Towers A, B & C of Chintels Paradiso to vacate their respective premises and hand over the vacant possession of the same to M/s Chintels India Pvt Ltd within 15 days from the order. Information reveals that Chintels Paradiso has nine towers, out of which six towers were declared unsafe and the developer has been given permission to demolish the six towers (D, E, F, G, H and J), whereas the remaining three towers A, B and C has also declared unsafe in February this year and will be demolished once these are vacated. After the order issued by the deputy commissioner, the district town planner (enforcement) Gurugram has been appointed as the nodal officer and duty magistrate to implement the directions immediately with the help of the police force, and if anyone is found guilty

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 provisions

According to information, Chief General Manager (Engineering), 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 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



SATISH HANDA
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 Goyal, when started checking

at various locations in the town including areas around City Court, Ifico 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 were also caught. However, the

police teams released all 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

NEW DELHI: Union Home 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 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 sacrifices made by police personnel

and also took the opportunity 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 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 North-east 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, particularly during religious festivals.

Working to make a better future for coming generations: PM Modi



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday 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 media post by Gates on platform X, PM Modi said, "As always, an excellent meeting with Bill

Gates. We spoke about diverse issues including tech, innovation, 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, health-care, agriculture, and digital transformation.

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 self-reliance. 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

reforms and policies, such as 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, he observed.

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

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 minister added.

Srinagar based man arrested for posting extremist content on social media

FW DESK
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 an official statement, a CIK spokesperson said the individual was operating a radical Facebook handle, 'Shaddy Kashmir Dry-fruits', 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

coordinated operation led to his 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 stone-pelting 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 especially in J&K.

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 public 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.

Cancerous River Ghaggar: Who will Emancipate it?



JAG MOHAN THAKREN

Just within a month after BJP's win in Delhi Assembly, how did Haryana CM Saini change his previous standpoint and how the dirt and effluents in the same Yamuna River water have become visible, which previously was being claimed carrying pure and drinkable water?

Chairing 56th Meeting of Haryana State Drought Relief and Flood Control Board in Chandigarh on March 15, CM Saini directed all DCs to ensure that no polluted effluents fall into the Yamuna and said, "We need to find alternate arrangements for the outflow of sewage water". Doesn't It mean that previously the polluted 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 polluted 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 directed the Deputy Commissioners of Panipat, Sonapat, Palwal and Yamunanagar districts to set up Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs) in their districts to prevent polluted water from flowing into the Yamuna. The Chief Minister reiterated Haryana's commitment to clean the Yamuna River permanently. He also directed officials to look into the functioning of 6 STPs in Masani Barrage in Rewari and ensure their maintenance.

During the Delhi assembly elections, River Yamuna became the hot issue to woo the voters. AAP and BJP, both were blaming and slamming each other for the contaminated water flowing through

the river.

Delhi former Chief Minister Kejriwal, as well as the then CM Atishi blamed the BJP led Haryana Government for making the Yamuna River water dirty and contaminated.

Arvind Kejriwal on his X account, on January 30, wrote, "BJP has made Yamuna water poisonous by adulterating it."

He asked the BJP led Haryana Government, "Do you want to kill the people of Delhi by giving them the water which you yourself cannot drink?"

Kejriwal also challenged the BJP leaders to drink the dirty water being supplied to Delhi, "The poisonous water containing 7 PPM ammonia coming from Haryana to Delhi is being sent to the houses of leaders of other parties, they should try drinking this water."

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 above normal in Yamuna waters, 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 Nayab Singh Saini not only refuted the claim of the Aam Adami Party leaders, but also counter alleged by accusing them of failing to make proper arrangements for water distribution, which has forced Delhi residents to consume contaminated water. He alleged that the AAP government in Delhi systematically diverted 28 drains into the Yamuna.

Amid allegations and counter allegations between Haryana and Delhi governments, Haryana CM Saini claimed having a sip of water from the Yamuna River in Delhi's Palla Village.

Later Saini said, "An unfortunate statement by Arvind Kejriwal was given to create



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 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?

Ghaggar is welcomed in 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 the favour by spreading cancer. No one cares for its dirt

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, Haryana 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 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, as reported by Indian Express on March 19. What a big surge

in cancer reported cases during 2024!

Kumari Selja, an MP from Haryana, in her press release dated 17 December ,2024, giving reference of her question 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 response, Health and Family Welfare Minister Prataprao Jadhav stated that under the National Cancer Registry Program of the Indian Council of Medical Research, Haryana

reported 1,486 cancer cases in 2019, 1,536 in 2020, 1,580 in 2021, 1,630 in 2022, and 1,678 in 2023. The minister further said that facilities for cancer patient care are available in government medical colleges in Hisar, Karnal, Nuh, Sonapat, 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 Thakren is a Senior Journalist, Columnist & Political Analyst, views are personal

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

FW DESK
Hyderabad

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



entrepreneurs, small traders, 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-month-long 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 Karnataka government's firm stance against the drug menace.

The arrested duo, identified as Bamba Fanta alias Adonis Jabulile, 31, from Agbovilae, and Abigail Adonis alias Oljo Evans, 30, from Pretoria,



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.

SEBI Cracks Down on Firms Diverting Funds for Personal Use

MUMBAI: The Securities and 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.



However, these funds are then diverted for personal use such as buying property.

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 avoid SEBI scrutiny.

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

asked to return Rs 49.82 crore 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 industry 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.

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

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 for the gold ore concentrate processing industry.

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 stability.

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 domestic 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, ensuring a level playing field.

SEBI Partners with DigiLocker to Reduce Unclaimed Assets, Enhance Investor Protection



NEW DELHI: The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) on Wednesday partnered with DigiLocker to help investors track their securities holdings and reduce unclaimed financial assets.

This initiative, outlined in the SEBI's circular titled "Harnessing DigiLocker as a Digital Public Infrastructure for Reducing Unclaimed Assets in the Indian Securities Market," aims to enhance investor protection and streamline access to financial holdings.

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 investors to manage their securities information. According to the government, a key feature of this initiative is the nomination facility. Investors can appoint data access nominees within DigiLocker, allowing them read-only access to the account in case of the investor's demise.

"This ensures that legal heirs can easily locate and claim financial assets without unnecessary delays," the government said.

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

NEW DELHI: India is keen 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 Minister Eduardo Martinez Diaz said: "Closer bilateral and multilateral relations between the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) countries, like Cuba and India would improve



relations amongst countries in the Global South."

He said that India could be a partner for the LAC region in agriculture, food security, transportation, ICT, and renewable energy sectors. He also highlighted Cuba's role as a founding member of the International Solar Alliance and underscored the importance of renewable energy cooperation between the two sides.

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 added.

DDA and CESL join hands to establish EV Charging

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 (EV) charging and battery swapping stations across DDA sports complexes in the city.

CESL is a subsidiary of Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), under the Ministry of Power. The agreement was signed in the presence of Vijay Kumar Singh, DDA Vice-Chairman, Vishal Kapoor, MD



and CEO - CESL, Chittaranjan Dash, Principal Commissioner, DDA, and Rajneesh Rana, Head-Convergence. This collaboration marks a significant step toward enhancing the capital city's EV infrastructure and supporting India's transition to clean mobility. As part of the

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

span across North Delhi, West 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 Point 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 Build-Own-Operate-Maintain (BOOM) model, ensuring sustainable and long-term EV infrastructure expansion.

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



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

Bringing an insider or an outsider as the 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 succession 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 declined to about just over seven in 2001 (*The Economist* dated October 23, 2003).

Both these aspects get attention whenever there is an exit of a CEO in a prominent company. In August 2024, Mark Schneider (58 at that time) stepped down as the CEO of Nestle SA after serving for almost eight years. He joined Nestle SA in 2017. The company was struggling to grow sales, attract customers to the company's branded products amid high rate of inflation. Replacement came in the form of Laurent Freixe (62 at the time of appointment), the company's Executive Vice President and CEO for the Latin American region. It was badly needed as Nestle's share had fallen 8.0 per cent in

2024 in contrast to Unilever that had gained 29 per cent during the same period. Exit had a healthcare connection too as Mark Schneider had served a prominent healthcare 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 almost four decades. Freixe had joined 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 newly designated CEO in the same company attracted eyeballs in February 2025 when Unilever replaced CEO Hein Schumacher by appointing CEO Fernando Fernandez as the CEO. Schumacher was on the job for about 18 months as he joined Unilever in July 2023. He was an external candidate who was taken as the CEO. Fernandez is an insider as he is with the company for more than three decades as he joined Unilever in 1988. The new CEO is expected to deal with challenges such as supply chain resilience, inflationary trends, energy crisis, declining profit margins, consumer shift towards cheaper options, among others.

Tenure of a CEO is important to ensure the continuity

in any business. At the same time when strategic shakeup is desired then an outsider is preferred. In pharmaceutical sector, this aspect is crucial 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 family-owned 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 August 2001. It was in January 2020 when he took over as the CEO of the company. In Cipla that is 3rd largest company in terms of market capitalization among listed



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 years. In that background, he could bring a different perspective with no past baggage.

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 acceptance of leadership.

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, and erstwhile Ranbaxy Laboratories Limited in leadership roles. He is holding an M.B.B.S. degree. Dr. Gupta was appointed as the CEO of the company with effect from September 22, 2023. However, he has assumed the role of the CEO just about 18 months ago but has been backed by promoters.

Poses dilemma for the founder on involving outsider as the CEO or on retaining the role for himself/herself. This was shared by Bill Gates in March 2025 itself when he told in a conversation with Microsoft's Vice Chair and President, Brad Smith about the 'emotional weight' of handing over the reins after stepping down as the CEO in 2000. On stepping down by Bill Gates, Steve Ballmer succeeded him. Steve 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 outsider is likely to carry intense emotional weight as almost all pharmaceutical companies are majority 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 get to know that there is limit for them in organizational ladder. Hence, it literally freezes their career path. Therefore, companies attempt to strike

the balance between benefits and costs attached to the tenure of a CEO. In this regard, 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-year term in May 2012. Shanghvi re-designated 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 amid Rising Global Challenges: RBI

MUMBAI: Amidst growing 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 high-frequency 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.

Recent developments across different sectors reaffirm the assessment of a sequential pick-up 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 momentum, 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 depreciation, the bulletin added.

RBI Governor Calls for Stronger Grievance 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 two levels of grievance redress,

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 know-your-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 oversight and bias mitigation.

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



MUMBAI: Equity benchmark 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 investors' sentiments.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex declined 252.8 points to 76,095.26 in early trade. The NSE Nifty dropped 57.85 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 barrel. On Thursday, the BSE benchmark jumped 899.01 points or 1.19 per cent to settle at 76,348.06, regaining the 76,000 level. The Nifty surged 283.05 points or 1.24 per cent to reclaim the 23,000-mark to settle at 23,190.65.

India's forex reserves see sharpest rise in 2 years



NEW DELHI: After the \$10 billion forex swap undertaken by the central bank on February 28, 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 million to \$18.21 billion. India's reserve position with the IMF was down by \$69 million at \$4.148 billion in the week, the RBI data showed.

India's Bioeconomy sees 16-fold rise to reach \$165.7 Billion in 10 Years: Union Minister

NEW DELHI: India's bioeconomy has witnessed 16-fold rise in the last 10 years — from \$10 billion in 2014 to an impressive \$165.7 billion in 2024, the government said on Friday.

This exponential growth is a 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 capital.

"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," Dr Singh stated, quoting the 'IBER 2025' report.

As per the report, the sector is contributing 4.25 per cent



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

The minister also unveiled BioSaarthi, a pioneering global mentorship initiative aimed at nurturing biotech startups.

Designed as a six-month cohort, BioSaarthi will facili-

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

The minister emphasised that this initiative will strengthen India's biotech ecosystem by fostering innovation, enhancing industry-academia collaboration, and positioning Indian

startups for global success.

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 10,075 now.

Public Sector Emerges as Key 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 banks.

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 investment banking growth in FY26 and beyond.

India's equity markets have continued to witness strong investor participation. In 2024, 92 IPOs collectively raised over Rs 1.62 lakh crore, while Rs 1.36 lakh crore was mobilised through qualified institutional placements (QIPs), according



to the report.

Additionally, the sustained 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 investors (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.

The anticipated repo rate cut, relaxation of risk weights on NBFC loans, and liquidity measures will provide a boost to the financial sector.

Higher return on gold investment instead of equity



SATISH SINGH
According to a recent survey conducted by the Indian Gold Policy Centre at IIM Ahmedabad, gold has consistently provided higher returns to investors than equity in every period over the last 20 years despite rising prices. Not only this, gold has reduced the risk for investors when investing in both equities and gold. This can be understood with an example. For example, if an investor's portfolio consists of 80 per cent equity and 20 per cent gold, then gold has helped offset the loss in equity.

Investing in gold for 1 year has yielded a return of 34.1 per cent; for 3 years, 16.8 per cent; for 5 years, 14.8 per cent; for 10 years, 12.5 per cent; for 15 years, 11.5 per cent; and for 20 years, 12.9 per cent. Whereas investment in equity for 1 year has yielded a return of 2.6 per cent, for 3 years, 11.6 per cent; for 5 years, 14.6 per cent; for 10 years, 9.9 per cent; for 15 years, 11.5 per cent; and for 20 years, 12.3 per cent.

Thus, gold has yielded a maximum return of 34.1 per cent, while equity has yielded a maximum return of 14.6 per cent; in other periods, gold has also provided higher returns than equity. These figures indicate that investing in gold in current times is more profitable than investing in equities.

Consistent with the survey, 56 per cent of people who invest in gold have an annual income between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 10 lakh. Meanwhile, the price of gold has doubled from 2022 to March 2025, but there has been no increase in the savings of people of this income group. As a result, due to a lack of sufficient savings, these individuals are currently unable to purchase gold.

The price of 10 grams of 24-carat gold crossed the 91,000 level in the bullion market on March 18, 2025, and it is likely to surpass the Rs 1 lakh mark this year. Obviously, due to the increase in gold prices, the general public is unable to afford gold. Not only this but due to the fear of overspending, they are also avoiding buying gold jewellery for their wedding.

The jewellery industry is concerned about the current situation because the increased prices have significantly reduced demand for jewellery. Therefore, to address the current crisis and enable the common man to purchase gold, gold jewellery manufacturers are emphasising the sale of 14-carat gold. Advertising and other promotional methods are also being employed in this matter. Along with this, efforts are also being made to hallmark 9-carat gold so that the common man can maintain the joy of the wedding by purchasing low-carat gold according to his income.

According to a report by the World Gold Council



(WGC), India's demand for 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 18, 2025.

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, the possibility of a trade war

starting at the global level, the 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

Index (CPI) has dropped to a 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.

SIDBI honored by TiE Mumbai for Shaping India's Venture Capital Ecosystem

TANVIR KAUR
New Delhi

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 12, 2025.

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



conferred upon Manoj Mittal, CMD, SIDBI.

It was received on behalf of SIDBI by S.P. Singh, CGM, SIDBI, 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-

ture Capital (VC) ecosystem 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-building initiatives.

India to remain fastest growing economy in next 2 years at 6.4 to 6.6 pc growth: OECD

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-



nom 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 Mathias Cormann said.

"Increasing trade restrictions

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.

Jaishankar meets Commonwealth Secretary General-elect, discusses India’s expectations

NEW DELHI: External Affairs 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 Thursday, 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



said, “A comprehensive discussion on bilateral cooperation with FM Bolivia Celinda Sosa Lunda this afternoon. The recent opening of our new Embassy in La Paz reflects our resolve to

deepen the India-Bolivia partnership. Today’s signing of an agreement on Quick Impact Projects is another step forward in that direction.”

Meanwhile, Jaishankar ex-

tended India’s full backing to Brazil’s presidency for a successful and outcome-oriented COP30.

This development comes as Jaishankar met with Andre Aranha Correa do Lago, President of COP30 Amazonia 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 outcome-oriented COP30,” Jaishankar posted.

Jaishankar’s assurance underscores 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 Nations.

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



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 low-income 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 statement.

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 Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Wednesday condemned Israel’s latest military strikes on Hamas targets in Gaza, calling them an act of “cold-blooded murder.”

Israel launched heavy air-strikes on multiple locations 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 between Israel and Hamas.

According to medical officials 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 City.

Expressing her outrage on X, Priyanka posted, “The cold-blooded 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 inability to face their own truth.”

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 Benjamin Netanyahu’s office on Tuesday stated, “Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz have instructed the IDF to take strong action against the Hamas terrorist organisation 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 hostages held by Hamas.

“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 leadership,” it said.

US rejects French politician’s call to return Statue of Liberty, calls him ‘low-level’



WASHINGTON: The United States has firmly rejected a suggestion by French politician Raphaël Glucksmann that the Statue of Liberty should be returned to France, dismissing his remarks as unwarranted and politically motivated.

Glucksmann, a centre-left politician, recently stated that France should take back the iconic statue, arguing that the US no longer upholds the values that inspired France to gift the monument. His remarks were seen as a direct criticism of US President Donald Trump’s policies, particularly regarding scientific freedom and international relations.

“Give us back the Statue of Liberty... We’re going to tell the Americans, who have chosen to side with the tyrants and fired researchers for demanding scientific freedom -- ‘Give us back the Statue of Liberty,’” Glucksmann said.

“We gave it to you as a gift, but apparently, you despise it. So it will be just fine here at home.”

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 three-year-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 Russia’s requirements for a Trump-



proposed 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

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 reaching an agreement is futile,” he said.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Antonio Costa jointly called for “a comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine,” expressing hope that the phone call marks progress in this direction and reaffirming their steadfast support for Ukraine.

During their meeting in Berlin 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

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 possible ceasefire in Ukraine.

“It has been a week since the ceasefire proposal. And, what do we see? The most powerful attack of APU drones on Russian territory in history. And



then another attack. But, we are not losing hope. We are clinging to everything. But both the US and Russian presidents need to talk to each other,” Russian Presidential aide Yuri Ushakov

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 ceasefire following the talks in Saudi Arabia on March 11. On March

13, Witkoff held talks with Putin 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

GOPAL MISRA

First it was the army spokesman at Rawalpindi announcing a new war strategy, two days later, the Pak army chief Asim Munir told the National Assembly, the internal threat is grave and supported by foreign forces.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani media has unleashed a massive blame game against India for supporting the Baloch rebels.

In this backdrop, it is quite surprising why during the 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 in the US. Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented Tulsi Gabbard a bottle of the Holy water from the Kumbh, recently concluded in Prayag, where the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Yamuna takes place.

During her visit, a security conference representing 20 countries also took place in New Delhi. There, however, was no mention of the up-rising against the Pakistani army’s repression and exploitation of the people of two border provinces of Pakistan, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or KPK. who are on a warpath.

With the accusations against India, the ongoing rebellion may be spreading to

Sindh and the Punjab bordering India. A worst scenario of the period 1970-71, when the majority Muslims of Pakistan’s eastern wing struggled to become Bangladesh, perhaps, awaits us.

There is a growing apprehension among the scholars of foreign and strategic affairs in New Delhi that in a bid to seek the support of the US-led West and China, Islamabad might embark upon a war against India. Its groundwork is being done thoroughly.

There are whispers in the South Block, which houses 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 have told Tulsi as well as at the conference held under the banner of Raisina Dialogue that the ongoing struggle for freedom in the two provinces are actually caused by the non-representative nature of the hybrid regime under the strict control of the uniform in Pakistan.

The Baloch are not only being exploited by Pakistan, but its army is engaged in doing illicit mining of rare minerals in their province. Even the poor Baloch fishermen are being deprived by the Chinese trawlers catching fishes. On the other hand, the people of KPK refuse to accept the Durand Line, which divides the people of the province.

It is quite intriguing that



despite the obvious threats from Islamabad, the issue was neither taken up with Tulsi Gabbard nor before the two-day security conference held 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.

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 security is to be ascertained

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, Gwadar, 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 information between India and the US much more ex-

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.

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

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.

In a conversation with US-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.

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 meeting in Kazan, last October.

“We appreciate Prime Minister 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 levels, and achieved a series of positive results,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said during a regular media briefing in Beijing.



The spokesperson highlighted 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 developing countries, the 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 that China always believes that the 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.

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 Minister Rustem Umerov wrote on 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-



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 Chief of the general staff of

the Ukrainian armed forces.

More than three years into the full-scale war, Ukraine is slowly withdrawing on multiple fronts amid a critical manpower shortage. Kyiv is trying to modernise the army in an attempt to solve long-standing issues, such as command culture and resource management.

Drawing on the experience of NATO partners, Ukraine is currently trying to implement a corps system instead of a brigade one, in an effort to improve cohesion.

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.

NASA 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 Boeing Starliner extended her time in space, leading to prolonged uncertainty and isolation. Upon return, astronauts like Williams undergo a reconditioning period to readjust to Earth's gravity, relearning basic motor skills and regaining physical strength. The ability to walk, fundamental to human life, must be relearned after months in microgravity. Williams' experience resonates deeply with me, reminding me of my struggle during the second wave of COVID-19 in May 2021, caused by the deadly Delta variant. I had expected a brief hospitalization, believing I would recover within a week. However, my condition deteriorated rapidly. My lungs were damaged by 92 percent, and I found myself battling for survival in a COVID ICU for three weeks. In total, I spent one and a half months in the hospital, cut off from the outside world. Days and nights blurred to-

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 slow and arduous. After two and a half months, I retook my first few steps. The moment was overwhelming like a child learning to walk for the first time. Every small milestone in my recovery filled me with immense gratitude. It made me realize how much we take fundamental freedoms, like movement, fresh air, and human touch, for granted. Loss of freedom: Experiences of confinement, whether in space or due to illness, offer a unique perspective on the lives of animals in captivity. Unlike astronauts or patients who anticipate a return to freedom, many animals in zoos, temples, and private collections endure lifelong captivity. Research indicates that a significant percentage of zoo animals exhibit signs of mental distress, a condition known as 'zoochosis.' Symptoms include repetitive behaviors, anxiety, and depression stemming from restricted environments that lack the stimulation of their natural habitats.

Elephants, Astronauts and Freedom Struggle



The ethical implications 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 beings. 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-

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.*

Hockey Olympians Mandeep Singh and Udita Duhan tie the knot

KAVITA SHARMA

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 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 national hockey team. 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 championships. Olympian Mandeep Singh is currently posted as DSP

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 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 told IANS. A day before, the Bombay High Court allowed an application filed by the estranged couple seeking waiver of the 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

Rs 18 crore in the IPL 2025 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 statutory cooling-off period of at 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. The 28-year-old dancer, Dhanashree is known for her

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 #backtitaagain." In the clip, the actress can be seen sitting with her back to the camera, performing arm and back exercises with focus and precision. Mrunal also added the song 'Ek Daffa' (Chinnamma) by Arjun Kanungo to the video. Yesterday, the 'Sita Ramam' actress posted a series of stunning pictures of herself 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 romantic role.

Aamir Khan Makes First Public Appearance with Girlfriend Gauri In Front of Media Cameras



MUMBAI: Bollywood superstar 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 be from the Khar area of Mumbai. The couple were casually 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 shell-shocked 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 Bollywood 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 Shikhar, 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 Sre (badminton) and Preeti Pal (athletics) joined Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union minister of Youth Affairs and Sports, Dr. Virendra Kumar, 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 Jhaharia, in a unique torch rally to formally flag off the Khelo India Para Games 2025. Dr Mansukh Mandaviya said he was excited to see the response to every Khelo India



event that has now become the "umbrella" for all athletes aspiring to win laurels for the country. "I am immensely proud and elated by the contributions made by Khelo India to Indian sports. Be it Khelo India Youth Games, Khelo India School 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 Paris Paralympics 2024, where we won a total of 29 medals

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 the best opportunity and they are paving the pathway to success. This is exactly what our Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi had envisaged". Dr. Kumar too lauded the Khelo 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".

Special Olympics Bharat, Indian Contingent returns with 33 Medals at World Winter Games 2025

KAVITA SHARMA New Delhi

Special Olympics Bharat, on Monday, organized a welcome ceremony for the Indian athletes who returned from Turin, Italy after a historic 2025 Special Olympics World 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 dignitaries were accompanied on the stage by Special Olympics Bharat athlete Bharti, who won two gold medals in the tournament. 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 six sporting disciplines: alpine skiing, snowboarding, floorball, snowshoeing, short track speed skating and cross country skiing. Recognizing the achievements of the athletes, the



Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports has announced increase in cash prizes for the medal winners, with the gold medalists in the tournament receive a cash prize of Rs. 20 lakhs, and the silver and bronze medalists being awarded Rs. 14 lakhs and Rs. 8 lakhs, respectively. Applauding this achievement of the athletes, Minister of State, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Smt. 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 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 the entire country proud."

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 pool of INR 12 crore, the highest ever in the history of the Hockey India Annual Awards. Among the evening's top honours, Savita and Harmanpreet Singh were recognised as the



Hockey India Balbir Singh Sr. Award for Player of the Year 2024 winners in the Women's and Men's categories, respectively. The awards ceremony began by honouring the biggest highlight of 2024—India's

bronze medal win at the Paris 2024 Olympics. The members of the Indian Men's Hockey Team were felicitated with a scarf and a cash award of INR 15 lakh each, while alternate players received INR 5 lakh each, and

support staff were awarded INR 7.5 lakh each in recognition of their contributions. In the second category, eight states were honoured for their 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 achievements.

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

A mission for Clean & Cruelty free city: A Model Animal Welfare Organisation

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 the efforts made for better care of stray animals in city to manage them in scientific manner by following the aims

and objectives of the kindness and compassion -"Ahimsa" under provision of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960(An Act of Parliyamnt).

The event was graced by esteemed guests, including Maneka Sanjay Gandhi, renowned animal rights activist 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. The Blue Cross of India has been at the forefront of animal welfare in the country, pioneering initiatives like the Animal

Birth Control (ABC) program, which was the first of its kind in the world. The organization 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.