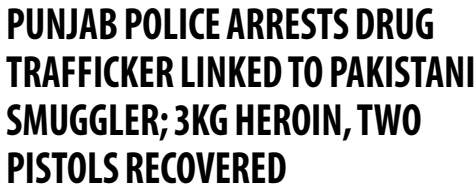


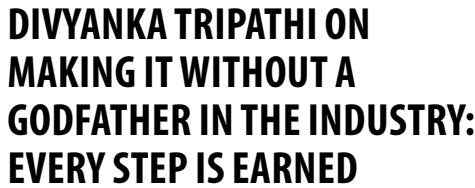
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They further stated that “it is clear that Byju, Divya, and Anita deliberately hid the assets of BYJU’s Alpha and repeatedly were deceptive about the location of the money in order to steal funds rightfully owed to the Lenders”.

Punjab Govt’s Peace & Progress are Non-negotiable: Aman Arora

CHANDIGARH: Punjab Government’s fight against gangsterism achieved a major breakthrough with the arrest of notorious terrorist Happy Passia, who had been orchestrating attacks on the state’s peace from the United States. Passia, known for his involvement in multiple grenade blasts in Punjab, had evaded authorities under previous regimes. However, under the leadership of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government, his movements were closely monitored by Punjab Police and intelligence agencies, culminating in his arrest abroad.

Lauding the Punjab Police and intelligence agencies for this major breakthrough, AAP Punjab President Aman Arora stated, “This is a moment of pride and relief for Punjab. A notorious terrorist who was op-



erating from overseas, spreading fear and chaos, has been apprehended due to the dedicated efforts of our law enforcement and intelligence teams. This arrest is a testament to the Punjab government’s unwavering commitment to maintaining peace and security in the state.”

Aman Arora strongly criticized opposition leaders, particularly Congress Leader of

Opposition (LoP) Partap Bajwa, for undermining the credibility of Punjab Police. He said, “Leaders like Bajwa, who claim Punjab Police is inefficient or suggest its disbandment, owe an explanation to the people of Punjab. It was this very Punjab Police, with its intelligence capabilities and co-ordination with international agencies, that managed to track and capture a terrorist sitting across seven seas.”

Highlighting the achievements of Punjab Police in combating terrorism, Arora reminded the public of their pivotal role during Punjab’s dark days of militancy. “The Punjab Police has proven time

and again its mettle in safeguarding the state. Their success in tracking Passia is yet another feather in their cap and a strong message to those who wish to disrupt Punjab’s harmony,” he added. Arora also pointed out that extremist elements who seek to malign Punjab’s image will face the same fate as Passia. “No matter where they are hiding, anyone attempting to disturb Punjab’s peace will be tracked down and brought to justice. This is AAP’s Punjab, and we will not tolerate any attempt to jeopardize the unity and progress of our state,” he affirmed. Aman Arora added that Punjab’s peace and progress are non-negotiable. He assured the public that under the AAP government, any individual or group attempting to harm the state’s harmony will be dealt with swiftly and decisively.

Hooda lashed out at BJP government, blaming has ruined Haryana state



Former Chief Minister Bhupendra Singh Hooda addressing media persons at Hansi said that Haryana has been lagging behind in every respect under BJP rule since past over 10 years rule. Criticizing Prime Minister Modi for praising ruling Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini at Yamunanagar on Tuesday, Hooda said that unemployment and inflation are at peak in Haryana, whereas farmers are not getting MSP of their crops. He also expressed deep corner over the ruling government responsible for worsening law and order situation in the state. Hooda said, during the inauguration of Hisar airport on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had falsely praised CM Nayab Saini, he should have said that Haryana has gone from being the most prosperous and developed state of the country to the abyss in every respect under the present BJP rule. Former Haryana CM Hooda said this while talking to journalists at Hansi after expressing condolences on the death of the daughter of former member of Haryana Backward Classes Commission Teluram Jangra. Former CM Hooda said that Prime Minister Modi said during the rally stage in Hisar that CM Nayab Saini’s government has given employment to 25 lakh youth, whereas the truth is that the Saini government has been able to provide employment to very few people so far. Instead of falsely praising CM Saini, PM Modi should have told the farmers in Haryana state to get the minimum support price of their crops as assured.

Centre Government must take an immediate decision on Bhai Rajoana & other Bandi Singhs: Dhami

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

A meeting of the Executive Committee (EC) of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), chaired by Harjinder Singh Dhami, was held today.

During the meeting, the policy of delay being adopted by the Centre government in the matter of Balwant Singh Rajoana and other Sikh political prisoners (Bandi Singhs) was strongly condemned and termed as alleged discriminatory behaviour towards the Sikh minority. A special resolution was passed demanding that the Supreme Court should direct the Centre government to make an immediate decision on the commutation of Rajoana’s death sentence so that justice can be delivered to him, as he has been on death row since 2007.

Talking to the media after



the meeting, Dhami stated that Rajoana has conveyed his message that the SGPC should withdraw its petition concerning him and ask the Centre government to take a swift decision, as he no longer sees any difference between life and death. Dhami said the SGPC respects Rajoana’s sentiments, and his steadfastness and high spirit during long imprisonment is a source of inspiration for the Sikh community. He further added that the government should not backtrack on its decisions and

must fully implement the notification issued during the 550th birth anniversary of Sri Guru Nanak Dev in 2019. Moreover, the Supreme Court’s direction to the Centre government to make a decision in Rajoana’s case should not be ignored.

He appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene in the matter and take a large-hearted decision in case of Rajoana in line with Sikh sentiments. The SGPC President emphasized that the Sikh community is seeking justice for

Punjab Police arrests drug trafficker linked to Pakistani smuggler; 3kg heroin, two pistols recovered

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

In a major crackdown against cross-border drug smuggling amidst the ongoing anti-drug campaign ‘Yudh Nashian Virudh’, Punjab Police’s Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) arrested a key drug trafficker linked to a Pakistan-based smuggler after recovering 3.105 kg heroin and two .32 bore country-made pistols along with 37 cartridges and two magazines from his possession, said Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav here on Wednesday.

The arrested accused has been identified as Jobanjit Singh alias Joban, a resident of village Kotli Sur Singh in Tarn Taran. The accused has a criminal history.

DGP Punjab Gaurav Yadav said that preliminary investigations have revealed



that the accused had been receiving heroin consignments via drones from a Pakistan-based smugglers from past few months. The DGP said that further investigations are ongoing to establish the backward and forward linkages to dismantle the entire network and more arrests are likely in coming days.

Sharing operation details, Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) ANTF Nilabh Kishore said that police teams

of ANTF Border Range Amritsar had received a reliable input that accused Jobanjit alias Joban is notorious drug smuggler and has recently retrieved a drug and weapon consignment from across the

border. Acting Swiftly, Police teams led by Superintendent of Police (SP) Border Range Gurpreet Singh launched an intel-based operation and apprehended accused Jobanjit Singh from his house located in village Kotli Sur Singh, he added.

A case FIR No. 99 dated 15.04.2025 has been registered under sections 21-C, 23 and 25 of the NDPS Act and section 25 of the Arms Act at Police Station ANTF in SAS Nagar.

Instead of interfering in internal Sikh matters, Harjot Singh Bains should support in resolving Sikh issues: Jathedar



JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

The officiating Jathedar of Akal Takht Sahib and Jathedar of Takht Sri Kesgarh Sahib, Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaji, has advised Punjab Cabinet Minister Harjot Singh Bains to support the resolution of long-pending Sikh issues instead of interfering in internal Sikh affairs.

In a statement issued here today, Jathedar Gargaji expressed that he is pleased Harjot Singh Bains considers himself a part of the Panth, but the statement he made in the state assembly pertains to an internal Sikh matter, which will be decided by the Khalsa Panth itself, not the Punjab State Legislative Assembly.

He said that the SGPC President has already sought suggestions from the Sikh community and organizations regarding the rules pertaining to the Jathedars. If Harjot Singh Bains considers himself a part of the Panth, he should understand the appropriate forum for raising Panthic issues and share any suggestions through the proper channels.

Jathedar Gargaji mentioned that he respectfully requested Bains to ensure the construction of the road connecting the two Takhts — from Garhshankar to Sri Anandpur Sahib. He noted that Sikh body Kar Sewa Qila Anandgarh Sahib, with the support of the Sangat, is constructing about 10 kilometres of this road by themselves, which is actually the responsibility of the government as it collects taxes from the people.

Jathedar told Harjot Singh Bains that there are some important issues he should raise in the legislative assembly: Propose a resolution to form a special investigation team to probe fake police encounters of Sikh youth and police excesses, and to ensure punishment for those responsible, including former DGP Sumedh Saini and other guilty officers. Assist in the release of Bandi Singhs (Sikh prisoners) who have been imprisoned for over three decades, far beyond their sentences — a clear violation of human rights. Make efforts to commute the death sentence of Zinda Shaheed Bhai Balwant Singh Rajoana. Pass a condemnation resolution in the Punjab Assembly for the massacre of thousands of Sikh youth.

Pass a condemnation resolution regarding the court proven murder of Shaheed Bhai Jaswant Singh Khalra by police and support the film Punjab ’95 based on his life.

Condemn the 1984 military attack on Sri Darbar Sahib and Sri Akal Takht Sahib with a resolution in the assembly.

Sukhbir Badal elected SAD President



Delegates authorise the President to constitute the new Working Committee

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

Former Deputy chief minister Sukhbir Singh Badal was today unanimously elected President of the Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal) at the delegates session of the party at the Teja Singh Samundri Hall here today.

Sukhbir Badal’s name was proposed by senior leader Balwinder Singh Bhundar and was seconded by Paramjit Singh Sarna. The delegates did not propose any other candidate following which Party Chief Election Officer Gulzar Singh Raneka proclaimed Badal as the new President of the party amidst thunderous slogans of “Bole so Nihal, Sat Sri Akal”. The delegates also authorised the President to constitute the party’s new Working Committee.

Addressing the delegates after his election as President, Badal said “I give you my solemn commitment that I will never compromise on any issue which concerns the prestige of the Khalsa Panth, Punjab and the SAD”. Issuing an impassioned appeal for a broader Panthic unity, he called upon all those who may have gone away from SAD out of any grievance to rejoin the Panthic mainstream under the Akali banner, rising above their differences. “We owe this to Khalsa Panth and Punjab.”

Badal also spoke on how the last six months had wit-

nessed a conspiracy to finish the SAD as well as its leadership. He said this conspiracy first started when the SAD left the NDA to express its solidarity with the farmers who were agitating against the three farm bills. “This conspiracy was accelerated during the last six months. It is unfortunate that when we left the NDA, the Center decided to bring its stooges to the fore. The managements of Sri Hazur Sahib and Patna Sahib Boards were expanded to take them under government control. The centre also took over the DSGMC by inducting its leaders into the BJP besides breaking a new Gurdwara Committee for Haryana”.

Badal said it was most unfortunate that even the decisions of the “quom” were manipulated by such forces and “even our respected Jathedar Sahiban who should have acted as custodian of Panthic interests chose to play into the hands of these forces. “I congratulate the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee for vacating the ‘kabja’ of anti Sikh forces over our Takhts”.

Giving a clarion call to the delegates to prepare for bringing the SAD back to power in 2027, Badal said “once our workers decide to bring the SAD to power it will come about. I on my part assure you that the next SAD government will preside over the eradication of the gangster culture and drug mafia which is being patronised by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government”.

Electricity bills of consumers to be linked with Aadhaar, says Anil Vij



GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

Haryana Energy Minister Anil Vij said the bills of electricity consumers of the state will be linked with the Aadhaar card. Along with this, he directed the officials to correct the wrong bills of consumers within a month.

Anil Vij gave this information in a meeting with the officials of the Energy Department here today. The Energy Minister directed the officials to set up electricity courts in circle offices every week on Tuesday from 11 am to 1 pm to listen to the problems of consumers in which the issues related to wrong bills, readings, faulty meters etc. will be resolved. Good facilities should be provided to consumers in electricity offices.

Vij directed that good facilities should be provided to consumers in electricity offices. Benches, drinking water and sheds should be arranged in view of the heat. He said people should be made more aware to pay electricity bills. He instructed officials that a cell should be created in the Energy Department to monitor court stay cases.

Electrical equipment should be available in sufficient quantity at sub-division level.

He instructed officials that electrical equipment like transformers, wires, conductors, poles etc. should be available in sufficient quantity at all sub-divisions. Along with this, arrangements for vehicles and safety kits of employees should also be available. He said transformers should be repaired in 1 hour in urban areas and in 2 hours in rural areas.

Opposition Leaders being targeted by gangsters as they are exposing failures of Bhagwant Mann government: SAD

Bikram Singh Majithia exposes loot story of Police on attack on Petrol Pump of his close aide SGPC member Jodh Singh Samra where firing incident has left 1 dead, 2 seriously injured

JAGMOHAN SINGH Amritsar

Shiromani Akali Dal leader Bikram Singh Majithia on April 14, alleged Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was targeting opposition leaders instead of controlling the law and order situation and that the latest attack on the petrol pump of Shiromani Committee member Jodh Singh Samra proved that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) wanted to eliminate opposition leaders.

Addressing a press conference here, senior SAD leader Bikram Singh Majithia said gangsters were openly attack-



ing opposition leaders. He said the attack at the petrol pump at village Kaler Mangat in Majithia Assembly segment took place because it was owned by SGPC member Jodh Singh Samra, who was his close aide and Incharge of Akali Dal of Ajnala segment. He said that prime motive of this attack was to target Jodh Singh Samra as he was supposed to visit pump.

Exposing the theory of the police that this was a case of loot, Majithia said the attack took place after the pump was shut down late at night. He said the attackers parked their

bike at the road and started firing. He said one person was shot dead and two others were seriously injured and attackers didn’t loot even a single rupee from the pump. He said this was also a reality that this revenue of this pump was much less than two other pumps located at some distance from it.

Lashing out at the complete failure of the Intelligence and registration of case against Leader of Opposition (LoP) Partap Singh Bajwa, the SAD leader said he had predicted in mid January that attempts were being made to disturb peace and communal harmony in the State and any prominent hindu leader or businessman could be the next target of attackers. He said two months after this an attack took place at the residence of former Minister Manoranjan Kalia.

PM Modi gifts development projects to the People of Haryana worth Rs 10,000 crore

GULSHAN KUMAR Chandigarh

On the occasion of the birth anniversary of the Architect of the Constitution, Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated a host of development projects to the people of Haryana. He laid the foundation stone for the third unit of 800 MW at Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram Thermal Power Plant in Yamunanagar worth Rs 8,469 crore. Additionally, he laid the foundation stone for a GOBARDhan Plant in Yamunanagar worth Rs 90 crore and inaugurated the Rewari Bypass built at a cost of Rs 1069 crore.

Union Minister for Housing, Urban Affairs and Power Manohar Lal, Union Minister of State for Statistics and Programme Implementation Rao Inderjit Singh, Union Minis-



ter of State for Cooperation Krishan Pal, Haryana Cabinet Ministers, Anil Vij, Krishan Lal Panwar and Shyam Singh Rana were also present on this occasion.

The Ministry of Power, Government of India, has granted approval to Haryana Power Generation Corporation Limited (HPGCL) to set up the third unit of 800 MW at Deenbandhu Chhotu Ram Thermal Power Plant in Yamunanagar. This project is an expansion of the existing

plant that currently operates 2x300 MW units. A total of 233 acres of land will be used for constructing the new unit. The project is targeted to be completed within 52 months, and commercial operations are expected to begin within 48 months, by

March 2029. With this new unit, Haryana’s in-house power generation capacity will increase to 3,382 MW.

The Rewari Bypass project has been developed under the Bharatmala scheme on Hybrid Annuity Mode at a cost of Rs 1,069 crore. This four-lane bypass has been constructed around Rewari city to reduce traffic congestion. The total length of the bypass is 14.4 km. It begins at the NH-352 junction and connects to NH-11 towards Narnaul. This project

is a significant step towards resolving traffic issues in Rewari city and enhancing connectivity to Narnaul. It will facilitate smoother and more timely travel for both passengers and freight. The bypass, along with ring roads and other infrastructure development, will improve the efficiency of both existing and proposed corridors, easing traffic flow and reducing travel time. One of the major benefits of the Rewari Bypass is the reduction of travel time between Delhi and Narnaul by nearly one hour. This will not only benefit commuters but also expedite goods transportation. A GOBARDhan plant will be set up in Mukarampur, Yamunanagar, by the Municipal Corporation Yamunanagar Jagadhri in collaboration with BPCL worth Rs 90 crore. The plant will have an annual production capacity of 2,600 metric tons of compressed biogas.

More than 35 buffaloes of cattle keepers from Punjab suddenly died in Karnal

SATISH HANDA Karnal

Panic spread in the area near Yamuna river in Karnal due to the continuous death of more than 35 buffaloes belonging to cattle farmers from Punjab suddenly died causing a stir. Police reached the spot near Nagla Chowk on Meerut Road in Karnal and started investigating the case. The cattle keepers of Punjab were taking them towards Yamuna, river near the area said that as soon as the buffaloes drank water at the spot, they started running here and there uncontrollably and in a short while they started dying by falling at different places when some buffaloes were found lying in the fields and some on the roadside. Cattle keepers were seen searching for them all over in the area.

These cattle keepers, facing losses of lakhs, have accused the nearby factory involved in



releasing most poisonous water containing chemicals in open. On getting information about the incident, a team of veterinarians and police reached the spot. Veterinarians have taken possession of the carcass of a buffalo and sent it for post-mortem, so that the real cause of death can be revealed. Meanwhile, the police is investigating the matter. Information revealed that large number of sheep had died earlier also : Animal keepers Saraydin, Alamdin, Ashu and other animal keepers said

that as soon as the condition of the buffaloes deteriorated, they could not understand anything.

Later, people nearby told that at the same place about few months ago on 26 December 2024, 21 sheep had also died after drinking water containing chemicals. At that time, the factory owner had pacified the matter by giving compensation to the owners. This time when the deaths of buffaloes started, the factory owner immediately locked the factory and fled from the spot.



After 40 Years, First Indian Astronaut to Travel into Space in May: Jitendra Singh

NEW DELHI: India will send an astronaut to space next month, a feat to be repeated 40 years after Rakesh Sharma's iconic 1984 flight aboard a Soviet Soyuz spacecraft, Union Minister of State for Science and Technology Jitendra Singh said on Friday.

Union Minister Jitendra Singh said Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla of the Indian Air Force is all prepared to fly to the International Space Station (ISS) next month as part of Axiom Space's Ax-4 mission.

"India is ready for its next space milestone," said Singh, underscoring the significance of the upcoming human spaceflight and a series of critical ISRO missions. He said the mission will mark the visit of the first Indian to the ISS and make Shukla the first Indian to travel into space in over four decades after Rakesh Sharma.

The Minister made the announcement after a high-level meeting held to review major future plans of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO)



in the coming months.

Singh said that the collaboration with international partners and the strategic momentum of projects like Gaganyaan reflect India's commitment to becoming a global leader in space technology.

The Minister emphasised that these efforts are not only scientific in nature but also aligned with the vision of a developed and self-reliant India.

ISRO Chairman Dr V. Narayanan said Shukla is fully



spaceflight operations, launch protocols, microgravity adaptation, and emergency preparedness — all essential for India's crewed space ambitions.

What sets Shukla's mission apart is its strategic importance. Unlike the symbolic undertones of India's first human spaceflight, this time the focus is on operational readiness and global integration. His participation underscores India's growing engagement with public-private international partnerships in space and its resolve to emerge as a serious contender in human space exploration.

Congress welcomes SC interim relief on Waqf Amendment Act

KAVITA SHARMA
New Delhi

The Congress today welcomed the Supreme Court interim relief on the recently passed Waqf Act. The party said the Act was not aimed at improving but "infiltrating" and "controlling" the institutions.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC office here today, Chairman of the Law, Human Rights and RTI Department in the AICC and MP Dr Abhishek Manu Singhvi and senior party leader and MP Imran Pratapgarhi said, "we are extremely grateful to the Supreme Court for having spent considerable time and passed an interim order which will of course be subject to further hearing".

Dr Singhvi tore into the government's claims of reform, saying, "it is retaliation in the guise of the reform. It is retaliation meticulously scripted, strategically timed and constitutionally questionable".

The Waqf Amendment Act, the senior Supreme Court lawyer said, is not an exercise in efficiency as it pretends to be. "It is



an exercise in eraser behind the bland language of governance lies, the bold ambition of control where religious autonomy is being reduced to state administered protocol and community rights are being redrawn with bureaucratic pens", he added, while remarking, "let us be clear this is not about improving institutions, this is about infiltrating them, controlling them and closing them".

Observing that it should not be treated as a particular community specific issue, the senior Congress MP maintained that the party was not defending just one community. "We are here to defend a constitutional principle. The constitutional principle is that the rights like: Article 26 cannot be sacrificed at the altar of majoritarian convenience", he clarified.

Today, it is the Waqf; tomorrow it could be your shrine, your institution, your faith and even your voice", he warned, adding, "the Act is not just legally flawed, it is morally vacuous, it is morally vacant, it takes the soul of religious freedom".

Dr Singhvi asserted that the "Waqf Amendment Act is not an amendment, it is an assault on autonomy, on identity, on constitutional values. You cannot amputate Article 26 and call it administrative efficiency".

He observed that "a board with a token Muslim presence is not representation- it is appropriation". He said, this is not just about Muslims. "It is about the message that minority institutions are fair game for state takeover".

Putting up a strong case against the Waqf Amendment Act, the eminent lawyer warned, "today it is the Waqf, tomorrow it could be your shrine, your institution and even your voice".

The constitution, he said, "is not a buffet where you pick the rights you like and ignore the ones you don't".

ED files charges in court against Sonia, Rahul in National Herald case



NEW DELHI: Taking a big step against political heavyweights, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) filed a prosecution complaint in a Special Delhi court against Congress MPs Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi in the alleged National Herald or Associated Journals Limited (AJL) money laundering case, a lawyer said on Tuesday.

The Special Court has fixed April 25 for hearing arguments on taking cognisance of the prosecution complaint. Others named in the chargesheet include Congress Overseas Chief Sam Pitroda, Suman Dubey, and others. The fresh trouble for Congress-controlled AJL comes close to the ED serving notices to registrars of property in Delhi, Mumbai and Lucknow to take possession of attached properties worth Rs 661 crore.

These properties were attached after the investigation revealed signification generation, possession and use of proceeds of crime to the tune of Rs 988 crore. In Delhi, notices were pasted on the wall of AJL property-5 (A), Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg in Central Delhi, which is home to media houses and newspaper offices. The notices were served on Friday in compliance with Section 8 of PMLA, 2002 and Rule 5(1) of the Prevention of Money Laundering (Taking Possession of Attached or Frozen Properties Confirmed by the Adjudicating Authority) Rules, 2013.

In Mumbai, a notice was also served on Jindal South West Projects Limited, which is occupying the 7th, 8th, and 9th floors at Herald House, Bandra (East). Jindal South West Projects was directed to transfer the rent/lease amount every month in favour of the Director, Directorate of Enforcement. In Lucknow, notices were pasted on property number 1, Bisheshwar Nath Road. Earlier, the ED conducted searches and seizures at multiple locations, uncovering incriminating documents linked to the alleged money laundering activities. Investigation revealed that Young Indian, a private company beneficially owned by Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, acquired AJL properties worth Rs 2, 000 crore for a mere Rs 50 lakh, significantly undervaluing its worth.

CJI Sanjiv Khanna recommends appointment of Justice BR Gavai as next CJI



MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA
New Delhi

The Chief Justice has recommended to the Ministry of Law that Justice B.R. Gavai to be appointed as the new Chief Justice of India (CJI). Justice B.R. Gavai is set to become the 52nd CJI of India and is expected to take the oath of office on May 14, with President Droupadi Murmu administering the oath. Current Chief Justice Sanjeev Khanna made this recommendation on Wednesday for Justice B.R. Gavai, a senior judge of the Supreme Court, succeeded him. Born on November 24, 1960, in Amravati, Justice Gavai was admitted to the bar on March 16, 1985. Chief Justice Sanjeev Khanna assumed his position in November 2024.

Road to Congress' success goes through Gujarat says Rahul Gandhi

KAVITA SHARMA
Gujarat

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi has said that the road to Congress' success goes through Gujarat. He also said that the entire country knows that only the Congress can defeat the RSS and the BJP.

Addressing a District Workers' Convention in Modasa Gujarat, Rahul Gandhi said the party needs to engage and involve the new generation and those leaders who are connected with the masses. At the same time, those who are aligned with the BJP need to be sidelined decently, he added.

The senior Congress leader said it was not only a political fight, but also an ideological



battle which was going on in the country. He said there were only two ideological parties in the country: Congress and the BJP-RSS. "The entire country knows only the Congress can defeat the BJP," he remarked,

while adding, "road to Congress' success lies through Gujarat." Gandhi said the Congress must return to its original foundation. "Our party started from Gujarat," he pointed out, while referring to two great

PM Modi pays tributes to Jallianwala Bagh massacre martyrs

NEWDELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tributes to the lives lost in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre as India commemorates the 106th anniversary of the dark day on Sunday.



The massacre occurred on April 13, 1919, when Colonel Reginald Dyer ordered British Indian Army troops to open fire on a peaceful gathering of thousands at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar. Taking to X, PM

Modi posted, "We pay homage to the martyrs of Jallianwala Bagh. The coming generations will always remember their indomitable spirit. It was indeed a dark chapter in our nation's history.

BJP holds key meet in Delhi at PM Modi's residence, discuss organisation reshuffle



NEW DELHI: The top BJP leadership held an important meeting on Wednesday in Delhi regarding the party's organisational elections, in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The meeting, held at the Prime Minister's residence, was attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and BJP's National General Secretary (Organisation), B.L. Santhosh. The organisational reshuffle is expected to have a significant impact on the BJP's electoral strategy ahead of upcoming polls. Discussions also focused around the upcoming election for the BJP President.

According to party sources, the announcement regarding the election could be made within a week. In addition to deliberating on the national

leadership, the meeting also focused on organisational changes at the state level. Sources said that the names of new state BJP presidents for states like Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh were discussed.

The election for the BJP President was to be completed by February 2025, but was delayed due to state elections, including Haryana, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Delhi. The party may announce around half a dozen state unit presidents in the next two to three days. "The election process for choosing the BJP President could begin any time after April 20," the party sources said. The election for the BJP President was supposed to take place in January. However, with April halfway through, it remains pending.

Rising of Dalits: Why Irritates Upper Strata?



JAG MOHAN THAKERN

The persistence of caste stigma against Dalits in India is a complex issue rooted in historical, social, economic, and political factors established through a very long journey categorised by the upper caste strata by some selfish groups to give self a rise and higher status with the ill intention to suppress the innocent people categorised as the Shudras by the so-called self-proclaimed custodians of the religion.

The caste system was weaved by these cunning groups in ancient Indian society, grouping these innocent people in the self-created untouchable category keeping them at the bottom and tied to occupations deemed impure. Despite legal abolition, these hierarchical notions linger in cultural practices and mindsets, reinforced over centuries.

Indian Constitution under the chapter 'Fundamental Rights' has guaranteed the citizens of India some fundamental rights which cannot be violated or snatched except directed by the law of the land and are enforceable in a court of law. However, this does not mean that they are absolute or immune from Constitutional amendment.

These rights also have been aimed at overturning the inequalities of pre-independence social practices. Specifically, they have also been used to abolish untouchability and hence prohibit discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

But, did we succeed in abolishing the stigma of untouch-

ability and discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth? The answer is- only up to some extent.

Let us quote some instances, where the caste stigma still hinders the fundamental rights of the lower strata.

In village Mauli, under Panchkula district of Haryana, hundreds of policemen were deployed at a 'Baraat' (wedding procession) in the first week of this April, though it was neither due to the presence of any protected VIP person in the event nor the groom was any gangster or most wanted person. The groom was just a member of Dalit caste and he came to Mauli with his Baraat to marry a Dalit girl of this village.

Now the questions pop up in mind – "Why so much police force had to cover the wedding procession? Who asked for the police? What was the bone of contention?"

Media Reports state that the family of the groom had to involve the police after some upper caste villagers having a strong majority in the village tried to stop the procession of the groom for being a Dalit.

Why was the wedding procession obstructed? The groom's riding on the Ghorra-Buggi (Horse Cart) was the main cause of discord. In India, at some places, the tradition of riding a horse or a horse cart, well-decorated for such special occasions, is considered a symbol of pride and dignity, but the villagers of upper caste strata who objected to the procession were not willing to accept this tradition being practised by a Dalit groom. They consider riding on horse in wedding procession as their monopoly and sole right and using this right



by a person from a lower caste is an insult to them.

Another incident of insulting and obstructing a Dalit to perform some religious rituals that has drawn the attention of even National Media and also became an agenda of speech during All India Congress Committee (AICC) session on April 9, wherein Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and former party president Rahul Gandhi both mentioned the most stigmatic incident of "washing" of a temple after a visit by Tika Ram Jully, the Congress Leader of the Opposition in Rajasthan assembly.

Addressing the congress workers, Gandhi said, "They don't give rights to Dalits to enter temples, and when one goes, they clean the temple. This is not our religion... Our religion respects every individual. This thing – be it against Dalits or backwards – is hidden in the hearts of every BJP worker", Indian Express reports the statement.

Why are the congress leaders alleging of the BJP for the incident? The Indian Express adds that the person, Gyandev Ahuja a former three-time MLA of BJP, who reportedly sprayed the Ganga Jal (Water of pious river Ganga) for purifying the temple after the visit of Dalit congress leader, Tika

Ram Jully, had been associated throughout his political journey with BJP's wings – RSS, Hindu Jagran Manch, Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh and ABVP since his childhood.

What the issue was? Dalit congress leader Tika Ram Jully, on the auspicious occasion of Ram Naumi, 6th April 2025, visited the temple to worship the lord Ram, but as alleged that after the visit of the Dalit leader BJP leader purified the temple by sprinkling Ganga Jal.

Congress@ INCIndia on April 7 reacted sharply against the act of the BJP leader and commented that the anti-Dalit face of BJP has come to the fore once again.

"Leader of Opposition in Rajasthan Assembly, Tika Ram Jully ji, comes from the Dalit community. He went to visit the Ram temple on Ram Navami. After this, former BJP MLA and Narendra Modi's favourite, Gyandev Ahuja washed the Ram temple with Ganga Jal."

INC further tweeted, "Ahuja says that Dalits are impure. Impure people had entered the temple, so we washed the Ram temple with Ganga Jal."

INC alleged, "This is not the first case, BJP and RSS people have been continuously insulting Dalits. What Modi's close aide Gyandev Ahuja has

done is a living proof of BJP's anti-Dalit mentality."

The sufferer, Tika Ram Jully on April 7, explains the incident @TikaRamJullyINC, "The statement of senior BJP leader Shri Gyandev Ahuja is indicative of BJP's mentality towards Dalits. I had raised the voice of Dalits in the assembly and talked about running a campaign against untouchability, but BJP's mentality is that they are talking about washing the temple with Gangajal if I visit the temple because I am a Dalit. This is not only an attack on my personal faith but also a statement promoting the crime of untouchability.

Does BJP hate Dalits so much that it cannot even see us doing puja? Do only BJP leaders have the right over God?"

The Chief Minister and BJP State President should clarify whether they support the statement of washing the temple with Gangajal if Dalits visit the temple? asks Jully.

Month of March also ended with some unfortunate note, when some miscreants allegedly vandalized Veer Tejaji Maharaj's statue at Jaipur, Rajasthan on March 29, which sparked outrage among locals, who took to the streets on Saturday, hampering the vehicular movement on the Tonk Road as a mark of dissent. Tejaji or Veer Tejaji is a Rajasthan folk deity. He is considered to be one of the eleven major incarnations of Shiva and is worshipped as a deity in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana by mostly the farmer community and other backward caste (OBC) people and any perceived disrespect to his legacy is seen as an insult to

cultural sentiments.

These nefarious incidents clearly indicate the growing challenges faced by Dalit and other backward communities in India as social and cultural norms framed by the higher caste strata are often used to remind the Dalits their actual place in social fabric. And they always display a message, through all the platforms by doing some nuisance activities now and then – 'Never Forget That You Are A Dalit', so that the lower strata feeling fear of social and physical harassment can never rise their heads before these so-called dictatorial people or social groups belonging to the upper caste higher strata.

On one hand the so-called 'Hindu Vadi' forces growing abruptly in India claim that they are staunch supporter of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (The world is one family) and on the other hand they even discriminate between Hindu and Hindu on caste and creed basis by insulting the lower strata. Are the lower strata people not the Hindus or are they Hindus only when the trumpet of elections starts sounding?

However, due to education, city-based jobs available to Dalits, Indian Constitution and Dalit movements, like those led by figures such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, have pushed for rights and visibility and have made some positive changes in the lives of Dalits, but the systemic change is slow and dismantling the centuries-old prejudices requires sustained effort across society. (Ground Post)

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

SC sets deadline for President of India to decide on bills

MEENAKSHI BHATTACHARYA

In a pivotal ruling, the Supreme Court determined that the President does not possess the authority of an absolute veto. This landmark decision pertains to legislation approved by state legislatures. The court has set a three-month timeframe for the President to render a decision on the issue. Furthermore, the Supreme Court emphasized that if there is a delay beyond this stipulated period, justifiable reasons must be presented, and the relevant state should be duly notified.

The Supreme Court has established a three-month timeframe for the President to make decisions on bills passed by state legislatures for the first time. This ruling pertains to a case involving the Governor of Tamil Nadu, R.N. Ravi. The court declared the actions of Governor R.N. Ravi as unlawful and erroneous.

The bench stated in its 415-page ruling, "The President is not an exception to this default rule that permeates our entire Constitution. Such unchecked powers cannot reside in any of these constitutional positions." Justice Pardiwala, who authored the decision on behalf of the bench, remarked that any delay by the President in making a decision regarding the reference under Article 201, without justification or necessity, would contravene the fundamental constitutional principle that the exercise of power should not be arbitrary or capricious.

In November 2023, Governor R.N. Ravi submitted ten bills to the President for consideration, despite the fact that the state assembly had already reviewed them. The bench, comprising Justice J.B. Pardiwala and Justice R.



Mahadevan, stated that the governor does not possess the authority to exercise a 'full veto' on any bill, adding, "We see no reason why the same standard should not apply to the president under Article 201."

The Supreme Court elaborated on the characteristics of Article 201 that have historically led to disputes in the relationship between the center and the states. The bench stated that there is no specified timeframe for the President to announce approval or disapproval of a bill after it has been reserved for consideration by the Governor under Article 201. The bench remarked, "There is no obligation on the President to necessarily approve a bill under Article 201. If the governor, exercising discretion, reserves a bill for the president's consideration, it would render the passage of that bill by the state assembly meaningless, especially if the president keeps the bill pending or refuses to grant approval".

The document dated April 4, 2016, outlines the significant developments in the field of research and innovation. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration among various stakeholders to enhance the effectiveness of initiatives aimed at fostering growth and advancement in this sector. The report states, "The integration of diverse perspectives and expertise is crucial for driving innovation forward. It is essential that all parties involved work together to create a conducive environment that supports the exchange of ideas and resources."



RBI’s rate cut: A timely boost for a fragile economy

The Reserve Bank of India’s Monetary Policy Committee has offered a much-needed reprieve with its unanimous decision to cut the repo rate by 25 basis points, bringing it down to 6%. At a time when India’s exporters are grappling with uncertainty stemming from US trade policy shifts, this move signals cautious optimism. President Donald Trump’s aggressive stance on “reciprocal” tariffs, though temporarily paused for 90 days, still looms large. Against this backdrop, the RBI’s shift from a “neutral” to an “accommodative” policy stance is both timely and pragmatic. The immediate impact is evident. Banks have already begun passing on the rate cut to consumers, providing relief to businesses, homeowners, and retail borrowers alike. In doing so, the RBI seeks to maintain liquidity and investment momentum in a global climate shadowed by volatility. However, the decision is not without its sobering signals. The central bank’s downward revision of GDP growth estimates — from 6.7% to 6.5% — reflects deep-rooted concerns over the economy’s resilience amid external shocks. Global trade tensions, particularly the escalating US-China tariff war, evoke historical parallels. The Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930, aimed at protecting American industries, ultimately deepened the Great Depression. Today’s policymakers would do well to remember that economic nationalism, while politically expedient, risks long-term global damage. Sustainable growth demands more than reactionary tariffs; it rests on embracing one’s competitive advantages. For the US, that means strengthening research, education, and innovation — not retreating behind protectionist barriers. India, for its part, must continue diversifying its export markets and fostering a stable, forward-looking economic environment. The RBI’s intervention is a vital step, but broader strategic resilience remains the ultimate safeguard against global instability. At the same time, India must intensify its efforts to boost domestic demand, invest in infrastructure, and support innovation-driven industries. A vibrant internal economy, coupled with strong external trade relationships, will provide the cushion needed to navigate the uncertainties of global markets. Strategic economic management, rather than reactive measures, will determine India’s future trajectory.

LETTERBOX

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DEVAYANI TIRTHALI & PARAG WAKNIS BELIEVE CROSS-DISCIPLINARY LEARNING AS A FOUNDATION FOR INNOVATION

Reimagining higher education



Indian Institutes of Technology are adding or strengthening their humanities and social sciences, offering integrated masters programmes in economics and allied disciplines. Second, creating university clusters by connecting existing institutions — for example, a commerce college can collaborate with an arts and science college to create a cluster university. This requires administrative streamlining and not just academic collaboration. Clustering single stream institutions might be a cost effective and time efficient way of creating large multidisciplinary institutions in the short term. However, according to the 2020-21 All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), a significant proportion of institutions are undergraduate colleges, 35% of these are single stream, and many of these are only B.Ed colleges, making it difficult to find appropriate disciplinary variety nearby that is suitable for clustering.

In addition to repurposing existing IHEs, new multidisciplinary universities will have to be established to reach the goal of having “at least one in or near every district” by 2030. It would be wise to establish a single multidisciplinary campus in a district rather than have one institution with multiple campuses across

districts to maximise educational and research efficiency. Research shows that while public universities have a higher educational efficiency, they have lower research efficiency because they need to manage multiple campuses.

Cross-disciplinary learning and practice

The university of the future cannot be just a collection of multiple departments. It needs a disciplinary faculty that is open to collaboration and facilitate cross-disciplinary research and projects to solve complex problems.

At this stage, faculty and students are expected to bring in their disciplinary knowledge, collaborating and fostering dialogue between the disciplines. This can lead to the creation of cross-disciplinary courses — for example, a course titled ‘Economic changes and class structures as seen in Indian cinema, in collaboration with the economics, sociology, and film studies faculty’.

Incentivising such cross disciplinary courses, projects or centres needs additional funding to sustain it over multiple years. The National Science Foundation’s (NSF) Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship (IGERT) programme in the United States is a good example of substantial investment in having teachers and researchers of the future with a “breadth of skills, strengths, and un-

derstanding to work in an interdisciplinary environment while being well grounded with depth of knowledge in a major field”.

On inter-disciplinary thought

Cross-disciplinary learning and practice expects collaboration between disciplines. On the other hand, interdisciplinary thinking and research requires drawing deeper connections between disciplines and the creation of integrated frameworks. Can cross-disciplinary research and practice really reach this ideal? In the experience of the writers of this article of the Integrated Graduate Research Traineeship (IGERT), this was achieved in some cross-disciplinary combinations such as biotechnology, medicine, chemistry and biology. However, for disciplines such as engineering and architecture, participating students reported challenges in finding publication venues for integrated research, securing and advancing in academic employment, as they did not fit in any particular discipline. Thus, to avoid interdisciplinarity from sliding into traditional practice, there is a need to overhaul funding and the publication ecosystem as well as faculty hiring/promoting practices.

The cost implications of all these changes will be enormous and staggered over several years. This will require reprioritising public spending. The governance and regulatory changes to achieve this also need to be carefully thought out. The fact is that we are trying to create a higher education structure that broadly resembles the American system at its zenith, which has organically grown over a century, in one of the most unregulated and competitive environments.

Devayani Tirthali is an educational researcher and research design consultant. Parag Waknis is a faculty of economics at the Dr. B.K. Ambekar University Delhi. Views are personal.



RENJINI RAJAGOPALAN WONDERS WHY FRAGMENTED WELFARE BOARDS FAIL INFORMAL WORKFORCE

Gig economy spurs social security reforms



nearly 70 years after the 102 Convention, intends to provide a comprehensive framework for social protection. But it has faced significant criticism for its ambiguous definitions, watered down protections, and on-going implementation challenges.

One of the Code’s most prominent features is its insistence on relying on welfare boards for the distribution of social welfare — a process that has long been found falling short of its intended goals. For instance, a recent Right To Information petition showed that Welfare Boards for Building and Other Construction Workers of various States were yet to use 70,744.16 crore worth of cess they had collected from employers for the welfare of workers. In another instance, a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) 2024 report found that 99 local bodies in 10 districts had delayed remittance payments to the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB), amounting to ,Rs 221.8

crore. Even in Kerala, with its strong thrust on worker welfare, only five out of its 16 boards were found to function effectively, with some boards (as per 2016-17 data) not reporting any beneficiaries at all. This has led to repeated calls from activists and advocacy groups for improvements in the management and the functioning of welfare boards.

One of the main arguments in favour of India’s fragmented, welfare-board run social welfare systems is its ability to provide targeted relief to segments of workers in need — for example, beedi and cigarette workers of Karnataka have sought the revival of a defunct welfare fund to deal with their welfare woes. Today it is the gig worker; but new worker categories are bound to emerge with advancements in technology or other forces of disruption.

So, relying on a piecemeal approach — as opposed to a combination of universal social protection and targeted support — can fail

to account for the precarious nature of all informal work. Such an approach could also create artificial distinctions between different types of informal work such as between gig work and domestic work, and in turn impose arbitrary thresholds on who is deserving of social protection, and who is not.

It is also risky to assume that focusing on just one worker segment will automatically solve the challenge of formalising informal labour. Because right now, there is understandably growing excitement about how gig work will employ more people in the future. But banking on it as a solution to formalising informal labour is overly optimistic.

Towards universal social protection systems

As India strives to make its workforce ‘future ready’, it is crucial to create robust social protection systems that can withstand workforce and sectoral changes. Which raises the key question: what is the most realistic way forward? The Code, despite its implementation logjam, looks here to stay. And while it leaves the bulk of the oversight to the Centre, it allows States some flexibility to enact social security measures within its framework.

A sensible starting point might be to treat the Code’s mandates as the bare minimum, and use these as a foundation to build stronger, more inclusive, accessible and ultimately, universal social protection systems that leave no worker behind.

Renjini Rajagopalan is a lawyer and Research Lead at the Centre for Gender Analysis, Just Jobs Network. Views are personal.



BOOKS: REVIEW

New novel delves into stages of betrayal and redemption

In *The Comeback*, Annie Zaidi crafts a compelling, elegantly spare novel about ambition, friendship, and self-realisation, using the world of theatre and film as both a setting and metaphor. Much like Anne Enright’s *Acress* (2020), Zaidi’s novel draws on the performing arts to explore deeply human conflicts. However, while Enright focused on a mother-daughter bond, Zaidi delves into the fraught dynamics between two friends whose lives take diverging paths. At the heart of *The Comeback* is John K., formerly Jaun Kazim, an actor who has anglicised his name in a pragmatic bid for greater acceptance in Mumbai’s competitive entertainment industry. After years of playing minor roles and enduring endless auditions, John finally catches a break when a film producer, impressed by his audiobook narration, casts him as the lead in a major adaptation. Yet, just as

professional success beckons, John’s personal life unravels in unexpected ways. John’s early passion for acting was nurtured in Baansa, a small town in north India, under the mentorship of his friend Asghar. “His was the hand that had picked up a rock and polished it into a gemstone,” John acknowledges with rare humility. But the bond between the two is tested when John, in an ill-considered interview, reveals youthful indiscretions that cost Asghar his stable bank job. Asghar, betrayed and humiliated, retreats to his hometown with his family, cutting off all ties with John. Zaidi captures this central rupture with precision and emotional resonance. The novel’s strength lies in its economy—there is no melodrama, just a slow, simmering tension as the two men drift further apart. John, meanwhile, becomes increasingly consumed by a blend

of guilt and self-interest, even as he signs contracts and basks in the limelight. *The Comeback* avoids becoming merely a backstage drama about the fickle nature of fame. Zaidi expands the narrative to explore John’s complex relationships with his ex-wife, his family, and his former theatre colleagues. Through these interactions, she sketches a larger canvas of human frailty and aspiration, while offering sharp insights into the nature of performance—both on stage and in life. The novel also engages lightly but tellingly with the role of social media, showing how John tries to manipulate Instagram as a tool for both reinvention and redemption. When John learns that Asghar is staging a return to theatre, he is seized by jealousy and a desperate need to insert himself into the production. This marks a turning point: his obsession forces him to confront not only Asghar’s changed circumstances but also



The Comeback
By Annie Zaidi;
Aleph;
192pages; Rs 599.

his own sense of self. Zaidi’s portrayal of John’s emotional landscape is deft and layered; he is neither villain nor hero, but a deeply flawed individual grappling with the consequences of his actions. A brief but effective narrative shift allows readers to glimpse Asghar’s perspective, offering much-needed depth to the story. This choice enriches the novel, underlining that both men are trapped in their own versions of ambition, regret, and pride. Zaidi’s prose is clear, unshowy, and often wry. There are moments of broad irony—particularly in her depictions of the way Eastern and Western dramatic traditions are co-opted by urban elites—but these are never heavy-handed. Instead, they serve to highlight the novel’s central concern: the

complicated business of living an authentic life in a world obsessed with appearances. Comparisons can be drawn to other recent fiction exploring personal guilt in a rapidly changing India, such as Prayaag Akbar’s *Mother India* (2024). However, Zaidi’s approach is quieter, more introspective. The questions she poses—about loyalty, ambition, and what we owe to those who helped shape us—linger well after the final page. “What’s your soul worth?” asks a poster in Asghar’s theatre production. In *The Comeback*, Zaidi suggests that the answer is neither simple nor absolute. Redemption, she hints, requires not grand gestures but honest self-examination—and even then, it may remain incomplete. At just over 200 pages, *The Comeback* is a slim novel, but one that offers a rich, satisfying reading experience. Zaidi’s keen psychological insight and understated style ensure that this story of ambition, betrayal, and uneasy reconciliation leaves a lasting impression. It is a quietly powerful book about the costs of success and the elusive possibility of forgiveness.



India’s Sugar Production Touches 254.97 Lakh Tons in Current Season

NEW DELHI: Sugar production in the current sugar season touched 254.97 lakh tons, as on April 15, with 38 factories operating across the country, according to a statement issued by the Indian Sugar and Bio-energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) on Thursday.

Around 35 lakh tons of sugar is expected to be diverted towards ethanol production this year, compared to last year’s diversion of 21.5 lakh tons, the statement said.

As many as 22 factories are still operational during the current season in Uttar Pradesh, out of which 16 factories are operating in western UP.

Owing to the improved yield of plant cane, cane availability has improved in UP, and these factories are expected to remain in operation up to late April 2025 or May 1st week. Moreover, sugar recovery has also shown improvement in the second half of the season,



resulting in better output of sugar, the statement said.

In Maharashtra, one sugar mill in Pune district is expected to remain in operation up to the 2nd week of May this year.

At the same time, some factories in south Karnataka are expected to restart operations during the special season from June/July to September 2025.

Historically, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu collectively contribute around 4-5 lakh tons

of sugar in the special season.

ISMA is also optimistic on the outlook for the 2025–26 sugar season due to better crop prospects in the southern and northern states.

The crop outlook has improved in the south, due to a favourable southwest monsoon in 2024, and sugarcane planting for the 2025–26 season has shown notable improvement in key producing states like Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Consequently, the crushing season is anticipated to begin as per schedule in October 2025, ensuring adequate supply.

Both cane and sugar yields are also expected to go up in the north. In Uttar Pradesh and other northern regions, ongoing varietal replacement initiatives are delivering encouraging outcomes. These advancements are expected to enhance both cane yield and sugar recovery rates, thereby strengthening overall production performance in the upcoming season.

Seasonal forecasts from both the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) and Skymet project a normal southwest monsoon for 2025. This reinforces confidence in a favourable agro-climatic environment, supporting a healthy sugarcane crop and robust production potential for the 2025–26 season, the ISMA statement added

MSME Ministry Holds PM Vishwakarma–National SC-ST Hub Conclave in Odisha



NEW DELHI: On Wednesday, the Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) organised the ‘PM Vishwakarma–National SC-ST Hub Conclave.’

The event aimed to promote and empower MSMEs in the state and foster synergy among stakeholders.

The conclave, held at Maharaaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University in Baripada, Mayurbhanj, Odisha, was co-chaired by Union MSME Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi and Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi. Other dignitaries included Gokulananda Mallick, Minister of State (Independent Charge), MSME,

Fisheries & Animal Resources Development, Govt. of Odisha; Hemant Sharma, Additional Chief Secretary, Industries & MSME Department, Govt. of Odisha; and several MPs and MLAs from the region. The event commenced with the inauguration of an exhibition, followed by experience-sharing sessions from beneficiaries of the PM Vishwakarma, Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), and National SC-ST Hub initiatives.

E-certificates and credit cheques were distributed to beneficiaries, recognising their achievements and encouraging further growth. In his address, Minister Manjhi emphasised

the significant role of the MSME sector in job creation and improving livelihoods.

He highlighted the importance of the PM Vishwakarma and National SC-ST Hub schemes, along with contributions from the Coir Board and Khadi, in empowering individuals. He expressed confidence in India’s trajectory towards becoming the world’s third-largest economy by 2027-28.

Chief Minister Majhi acknowledged the positive impact of the PM Vishwakarma and National SC-ST Hub schemes on the state’s populace, noting the special focus given to Odisha by the Ministry of MSME.

Launched on September 17, 2023, the PM Vishwakarma Scheme supports traditional artisans and craftspeople with skill development, financial aid, and toolkits. The National SC-ST Hub, initiated in October 2016, empowers SC/ST entrepreneurs through capacity building, market linkages, and access to technology and credit.

US Tariff Exemption Makes Indian Electronics 20% Cheaper than Chinese: ICEA



NEW DELHI: Indian exports of smartphones, laptops and other electronics to the United States are expected to become 20 per cent cheaper compared to those from China following the Trump administration’s decision to remove tariffs on a range of consumer electronics, according to the India Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA).

The exemption, announced over the weekend, covers smartphones, tablets, laptops, flat-panel monitors and certain semiconductor components that were previously subject to reciprocal tariffs imposed on countries including China, India, and Vietnam. Industry experts view this development as a significant boost for India’s growing electronics manufacturing sector.

“China still has 20 percent tariffs on iPhones, laptops, tablets, and watches. Only reciprocal tariffs have been removed for China. India has zero tariff on iPhones and all smartphones, laptops and tablets exported to the US,” explained Pankaj Mohindroo, Chairman, ICEA.

He added that Vietnam enjoys similar advantages, with both countries now holding a 20 per cent tariff advantage over China on these products.

The ICEA, which represents major companies like Apple, Foxconn, and Dixon, expressed relief after weeks of concern over potential export disruptions. “Now there will be no extraordinary disruption,” Mohindroo stated.

“The incredible shock of the last few weeks is in itself a tectonic event and the realignments are bound to happen without too much blood spilt in our category,” he mentioned.

India has emerged as a key manufacturing hub for Apple, with iPhone exports reaching approximately Rs 1.5 lakh crore in 2024-25, according to Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw.

Total mobile phone exports from India exceeded Rs 2 lakh crore this year, representing a 55 per cent increase from the previous fiscal year.

Ashok Chandak, President, India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA), described the tariff exemption as a significant but potentially short-term reprieve for global tech manufacturers.

Airtel Partners with Blinkit to Deliver SIM Cards to Customers’ Doorsteps in Just 10 Minutes in Bengaluru



ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

In a game-changing move that redefines customer convenience, Bharti Airtel has partnered with Blinkit, the leading quick commerce platform, to deliver SIM cards to customers’ homes in Bengaluru within just 10 minutes. This first-of-its-kind initiative by a telecom provider in India reflects Airtel’s ongoing commitment to innovation and customer-centricity.

Through this unique collaboration, customers in Bengaluru can now receive their new Airtel SIM cards at their doorstep with lightning speed—paying just a nominal convenience fee of ₹49. Once the SIM is delivered, users can activate it easily via a secure Aadhaar-based self-KYC process, right from the comfort of their homes. The service supports both prepaid and postpaid plans and also allows users to port their existing numbers to the Airtel network using the Mobile Number Portability (MNP) option.

Wipro ends FY25 on a Profitable Note despite Revenue Headwinds: Q4 Net Jumps 26%

ARUN KUMAR RAO
Bengaluru

In a quarter marked by cautious client spending and global tech uncertainty, Wipro has managed to end FY25 on a high note—delivering a stellar 26% year-on-year rise in net profit for the January–March quarter. The Bengaluru-headquartered IT major reported a consolidated net profit of ₹3,570 crore, significantly higher than analyst estimates of ₹3,290 crore, and up from ₹2,835 crore in Q4 FY24.

While revenue growth remained modest—up 1.33% YoY to ₹22,504 crore—the sharp jump in profitability underscores Wipro’s strategic focus on operational efficiency and margin protection amid tough macro-economic conditions.



Flat Topline, Strong Bottom-line Revenue from operations for the quarter edged up marginally from ₹22,208 crore a year ago. However, a deeper look reveals that Wipro’s core IT services business continues to face pressure. IT services revenue fell 1.2% sequentially and 2.3% YoY to \$2,596.5 million. In constant

currency terms, the segment saw a 0.8% QoQ and 1.2% YoY decline.

Despite the tepid topline, Wipro’s operating margin in the IT services segment improved 110 basis points YoY to 17.5%, holding steady sequentially. This signals the company’s growing discipline around cost control and strategic execution.

Mega Deals Reflect Strong Client Confidence

Perhaps the most encouraging sign for investors and analysts is the company’s surge in large deal bookings. Wipro reported a massive 48.5% YoY jump in large deal signings, amounting to \$1.76 billion. Total bookings for the quarter stood at \$3.96 billion, up 13.4% sequentially in constant currency terms.

Wipro CEO Srinii Pallia attributed the performance to a combination of strong execution, client-centric innovation, and deepening customer relationships. “We closed FY25 with two mega deal wins and growth in our top accounts. Client satisfaction scores improved, reflecting strong execution and engagement,” he said.

Economic Uncertainty Push Govt Bond Prices Hit 3-Year High



NEW DELHI: Indian government bond prices climbed to their highest levels in over three years on April 15, with short-term bonds leading the gains after the Reserve Bank of India announced a new liquidity injection.

Market participants now anticipate continued durable liquidity injections throughout the year, following the central bank’s latest move and guidance on banking system liquidity. The Reserve Bank of India plans to purchase bonds worth Rs 40,000 crore and will also conduct a 43-day repo operation for Rs 1.50 trillion on Thursday. This follows the central bank’s second consecutive repo rate reduction last week, accompanied by a shift to an accommodative monetary policy stance. RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra stated last week that the central bank aims to maintain sufficient surplus in the banking system to ensure effective policy transmission, targeting a level of ap-

proximately 1 percent of deposits. This translates to a range of Rs 2.20 trillion to Rs 2.50 trillion, while the daily average banking system liquidity surplus has remained around Rs 1.70 trillion for the current month. With the central bank in the midst of its rate-easing cycle, market participants believe comfortable liquidity conditions are essential for quicker and more effective monetary policy transmission to support economic growth.

The yield on the 10-year benchmark bond declined by 3 basis points to 6.41 percent, while three-year and five-year bond yields fell more substantially by 5-6 basis points to 6.12 percent and 6.17 percent respectively. A. Prasanna, Head of Research, ICICI Securities Primary Dealership, commented, “The indicative commitment may still require (net) durable liquidity injection of around Rs 3 trillion. Out of this, we expect around 90 percent to be via OMO purchases and balance via fix swaps.”

Panopto appoints Stephen Laster as Chief Executive Officer

Veteran tech executive to lead Panopto’s next chapter of innovation and global expansion

FW DESK
New Delhi



Panopto, the leading AI-powered video learning platform, today announced the appointment of Stephen Laster as Chief Executive Officer. A proven technology and product leader, Laster brings more than two decades of executive experience driving digital transformation and innovation across education and

enterprise software.

Laster joins Panopto from D2L, where he most recently served as President. His career spans senior leadership roles at McGraw-Hill Education, Ellucian, Harvard Business School, and Babson College where he has led large-scale teams,

developed category-defining products, and built platforms that have redefined how millions of learners and professionals experience education. At Panopto, Laster will lead the company’s next chapter as it scales its platform and continues to enable AI-powered video across learning, training, and communication environments around the world.

“Panopto is uniquely positioned at the intersection of video, knowledge management, and education,” said Laster. “I am thrilled to join a company with such a strong foundation, an exceptional

team, and a powerful mission. As video becomes increasingly critical to how organizations learn and operate, Panopto is poised to play an even greater role in enabling success for its customers.”

Panopto’s enterprise-grade, open platform is trusted by leading global institutions and organizations – including Duke University, Kimberly-Clark, Harvard University, HubSpot, Nikon, Oxford University, Qualcomm, and Stanford University – to harness video at scale for skill building, training, onboarding, compliance, and knowledge sharing.

Factoring Inflation in Medicine Prices: Need for a Sectoral Index in India



DR. ANIL KUMAR ANGRISH

Through Order dated March 27, 2025, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) fixed the ceiling prices exclusive of Goods and Services Tax applicable, in respect of the Scheduled Formulations. Manufacturers of scheduled formulations have been allowed an increase of (+) 1.740228%. The ceiling prices have been made applicable with effect from April 1, 2025. The NPPA listed 748 medicines, along with their dosage form and strength, and Units (tablet, capsule, vial, dose in mL, GM, Metered dose, etc. as applicable). Where strength varies, the ceiling price is to be revised in same ratio, e.g., NPPA highlighted that the ceiling prices fixed for Paclitaxel Injection 30 mg/ 5 mL and 100mg/16.7 ml at S. No. 554 are also applicable to any other strengths (300mg/50mL, 260mg/41.7mL, 200mg/33.4mL etc.) of the Paclitaxel with same ratio, i.e., 6mg/mL.

Further, all manufacturers of scheduled formulations, selling branded or generic or both the versions of scheduled formulations at price higher than the ceiling price (plus GST) so fixed and notified have to revise the prices of all such formulations downward. All the existing manufacturers of these scheduled formulations

having Maximum Retail Price (MRP) lower than the ceiling price notified may revise the existing MRP of their formulations, based on WPI announced for the year 2024 over 2023. Underlying reason behind the revision in the prices of scheduled formulations on yearly basis in India is to reimburse manufacturers for the increase in input costs due to inflation.

Revision in the prices of scheduled formulations is allowed as per the paragraph 16 (2) of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013. Scheduled formulation means any formulation which is included in the First Schedule of DPCO, 2013. National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) that is published by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare as updated and revised from time to time is included in the First Schedule of the DPCO, 2013.

Revision in the prices is based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data which is provided by the Office of the Economic Advisor, Department of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Paragraph 16 of the DPCO provides for revision of the ceiling prices of scheduled formulations as per the annual WPI for preceding calendar year on or before April 1 of every year. In 2025, the Order came on March 27, 2025. There is always a time lag between the revision in the ceiling prices and the

Table 1: Price revision in Scheduled Formulations (2020-21 to 2025-26)	
Year	Price Increase allowed in Scheduled Formulations (In %)
2020-21	4.26
2021-22	1.88
2022-23	10.70
2023-24	12.12
2024-25	0.005551
2025-26	1.74

Source: Compiled from NPPA notifications for respective years

availability of these scheduled formulations with the revised prices in the market place. Existing stock levels also play an important part in the supply chain.

For 2023-24, prices of essential medicines had seen the highest annual increase. For two years in a row, i.e., for 2022-23, and 2023-24, the increase was more than 10 per cent. In 2024-25, the increase was negligible. Pharmaceutical companies asked for one-time exemption on negligible increase by citing administrative burden through printing new prices. Manufacturers of scheduled formulations also cite increase in the cost of inputs while asking for higher increase as in non-scheduled formulations, increase is allowed up to 10 per cent. Pharmaceutical industry also faces increase in cost of inputs like any other industry. If increase is inadequate then it has implications for the quality of pharmaceutical products in addition to availability of essen-



tial medicines. The Regulatory body has to ensure availability, accessibility, and affordability of medicines.

For 2025-26, the price revision will lead to increase of 1.74 per cent in the prices of scheduled formulations. But question is: Is 1.74 per cent increase representative increase given the fact that WPI does not give weightage to only pharmaceutical products. In July 2024, the Office of Economic Advisor in the DPIIT had suggested the shift towards a Producer Price Index (PPI) instead of the existing WPI. The idea was that the PPI will act as an indicator to measure the average change in the prices which producers receive for their products manufactured or services rendered. Prices captured are those that reflect prices at their factory gate or at the site of service providers. Essentially, elements such as taxes, trade margins, transportation cost, etc. gets excluded. But this will not be essentially

capturing the essence of pharmaceutical sector.

January 2025 data on WPI shows that respective weightage of three major groups: Primary Articles with 22.62 per cent weightage, Fuel & Power with 13.15 per cent weightage, and Manufactured Products with 64.23 per cent weightage. Within Manufactured Products, manufacturing of Chemicals and Chemical Products and Manufacturing of Pharmaceuticals, Medicinal Chemical and Botanical Products are considered and these two sub-sectors have relevance for pharmaceutical sector. Out of 100, Manufacturing of Chemicals and Chemical Products have weightage of 6.47 per cent, and Manufacturing of Pharmaceuticals, Medicinal Chemical and Botanical Products have 1.99 per cent weightage.

This reflects the limitation of WPI in pharmaceutical sector. Sectoral indices can serve important purposes, e.g., the National Housing Bank

(NHB) came up with the NHB RESIDEX in July 2007. It was India’s first Official Housing Price Index. The scope of the index has been widened under NHB RESIDEX brand. Now, it includes Housing Price Indices (HPI), Land Price Indices (LPI), and Building Materials Price Indices (BMPI), and also Housing Rental Index (HRI).

Sectoral Index for capturing inflation regarding pharmaceutical products is a complex issue. The very first transaction is between the manufacturer and the wholesaler. This has the variation in pharmaceutical sector as a manufacturer may have a captive plant of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) or APIs may be procured from outside including imports. Alternatively, in case of contract manufacturing, it is between manufacturer and marketer. This price is relevant for Producer Price Index. Next in the chain falls Wholesale Acquisition Cost (WAC). The WAC considers manufacturer’s list price for formulations to wholesalers. At this stage, there is role of rebates or incentives offered. Next transaction is between the wholesaler and the retailer. Final stage is when a patient/end consumer is purchasing the pharmaceutical product from the retailer.

DPCO, 2013 recognizes manufacturer (any person who manufactures or imports or markets drugs for distribution or sale in the country), wholesaler (a dealer or his

agent or a stockiest engaged in the sale of drugs to a retailer, hospital, dispensary, medical, educational or research institution or any other agency), retailer (a dealer carrying on the retail business of sale of drugs to customers).

The Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013 refers to “maximum retail price” which means the ceiling price or the retail price plus local taxes and duties as applicable, at which the drug shall be sold to the ultimate consumer and where such price is mentioned on the pack. The DPCO, 2013 provides for calculation of ceiling price of a scheduled formulation by considering “Average Price to Retailer” and provides a margin to retailer. Percentage margin to retailer is 16 per cent. “Price to Retailer” is referred as the price of a drug at which it is sold to a retailer which includes duties and does not include local taxes.

Sectoral price index will be helpful in fixation of ceiling price of a drug under certain circumstances (Para 19 of the DPCO, 2013) when it is considered necessary to do in public interest, and an increase or decrease is to be allowed in the ceiling price or the retail price. Such an increase of decrease is allowed irrespective of annual wholesale price index for that year. This essentially reflects shortcoming of capturing inflation in existing framework. Prices of non-scheduled for-

mulations are also monitored. Para 20 of the DPCO, 2013 deals with ensuring that no manufacturer increases the MRP of a drug more than ten per cent of MRP during preceding twelve months. Appropriate sectoral price index that captures sectoral inflation can provide a sound basis for allowing the increase. Fixation of retail price of a new drug which is not available in domestic market requires application of principles of “Pharmacoeconomics” through involvement of the Standing Committee of Experts.

To conclude, sectoral index in pharmaceutical sector can be a better measure to factor inflation for pharmaceutical products rather than Wholesale Price Index which is being applied presently. Through sectoral index, inflation pertaining to pharmaceutical sector-specific variables can be captured appropriately rather than including the weightage of those items which are not directly relevant to pharmaceutical sector but included in WPI. The scope can be widened over a period to make Pharma Sector-specific Index more comprehensive.

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No plan to Levy GST on UPI Transactions over Rs 2,000, says Finance Ministry

NEW DELHI: The Finance Ministry on Friday made it clear that the government is not considering any proposal to levy Goods and Services Tax (GST) on UPI transactions over Rs 2,000.

“The claims that the Government is considering levying Goods and Services Tax (GST) on UPI transactions over Rs 2,000 are completely false, misleading, and without any basis. Currently, there is no such proposal before the Government,” the Finance Ministry said.

GST is levied on charges, such as the Merchant Discount Rate (MDR), relating to payments made using certain instruments. Effective January 2020, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has removed the MDR on Person-to-Merchant (P2M) UPI transactions through the Gazette Notification dated December 30, 2019. Since currently no MDR is charged on



UPI transactions, there is consequently no GST applicable to these transactions, the Ministry said. The government remains committed to promoting digital payments via UPI. To support and sustain the growth of UPI, an Incentive Scheme has been operational from FY 2021-22. This scheme specifically targets

low-value UPI (P2M) transactions, benefiting small merchants by alleviating transaction costs and promoting wider participation and innovation in digital payments, the official statement explained.

The statement pointed out that the total incentive payouts under this scheme over the years

reflect the government's sustained commitment to promoting UPI-based digital payments. Allocation under the scheme over the years includes Rs 1,389 crore for FY2021-22, Rs 2,210 crore for FY2022-23, and Rs 3,631 crore for FY2023-24. These measures have significantly contributed to India's robust digital payments ecosystem. According to the ACI Worldwide Report 2024, India accounted for 49 per cent of global real-time transactions in 2023, reaffirming its position as a global leader in digital payments innovation. UPI transaction values have seen an exponential increase, growing from Rs 21.3 lakh crore in FY 2019-20 to Rs 260.56 lakh crore by March 2025. Specifically, P2M transactions have reached Rs 59.3 lakh crore, reflecting growing merchant adoption and consumer confidence in digital payment methods, the statement added.

IDFC FIRST Bank's Board Okays Rs 7,500 Cr Fundraising from Warburg, ADIA

MUMBAI: The board of IDFC FIRST Bank on Thursday approved raising up to Rs 7,500 crore from Warburg Pincus and Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) amid global uncertainties.

The board approved a preferential issue of equity capital (CCPS) amounting to approximately Rs 4,876 crore to Current Sea Investments, an affiliate company of global growth investor Warburg Pincus and approximately Rs 2,624 crore to Platinum Invictus Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) managed by its Private Equities Department.

The proposed issues are subject to shareholder and regulatory approvals. The rationale behind this fundraising is that the bank plans to scale up its optimal profitability and aims to grow the overall loan book at 20 per cent for the next few



years, the bank said in an investor presentation.

Over the last six years, IDFC FIRST Bank has undergone a successful transformation from its legacy as an infrastructure-focused DFI to becoming a modern, technology-driven, universal bank.

During this time, deposits grew 6x, loans and advances doubled, and CASA ratio has significantly improved from 8.7 per cent to 47.7 per cent. PAT rose from a loss of Rs 1,944 crore in FY19 to a profit of Rs 2,957 crore in FY24.

“However, profitability dipped in 9M FY25 due to in-

dustrial challenges in microfinance, which the bank has navigated well. With this fund raise, the overall capital adequacy will increase from 16.1 per cent to 18.9 per cent,” said the bank in a regulatory filing.

“The Bank has firmly moved into profits and is now at a pivotal stage, where our income growth is expected to consistently exceed OPEX growth, leading to improved operating leverage. We expect many businesses which are in the investment stage to turn profitable with scale,” said V Vaidyanathan, Managing Director and CEO, IDFC FIRST Bank.

“It is great to have Warburg Pincus back and to welcome a wholly owned subsidiary of ADIA as our shareholder. We thank them both for believing in us and our future growth plans and for investing in us even under volatile global situations,” he added.

India's Economic Fundamentals are Strong, Growth to Continue: Industry Leaders



NEW DELHI: India's economic growth story is expected to strengthen further, backed by strong fundamentals, robust policymaking, and a skilled talent pool, top industry leaders said.

Speaking to national media on the sideline of 120th anniversary celebrations of the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) here, they expressed optimism about the country's economic trajectory in the third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

JK Tyre & Industries Limited Chairman and Managing Director Raghupati Singhania said: “So far, so good — and I'm sure it will continue to grow because our fundamentals are good and sound.” “The government is keen and working earnestly on building strong bilateral ties and exploring opportunities for further collaboration globally,” Singhania told to media.

Echoing the sentiment, PHDCCI President Hemant Jain highlighted that India is in a “sweet spot” on the global map.

“Inflation is under control, the market is looking good, and we have one of the most stable governments in the region. India is now the centre of attention globally,” Jain added that strong ties between global leaders, including PM Modi and the US leadership, would ensure further progress in trade relations. He expressed confidence that India would continue to benefit from global shifts in trade patterns.

Jain noted that India already has the skills and knowledge base to become a global leader in AI. “It's about directing our talent towards building platforms and assuming leadership over time,” he said. Khaitan & Co Founder and Managing Partner, Suman Jyoti Khaitan, also stressed that India's growth will continue due to sound basics and strong policy support.

“India has substantial infrastructure improvements, focused policymaking, and entrepreneurial talent. We are in a good position to benefit from changes in the global economy,” He also welcomed the government's focus on skill development and the rollout of internship programmes.

UP Govt signs MoU with NSE to boost MSME Funding



LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Wednesday, creating a pathway for the state's 96 lakh micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to access capital-raising opportunities. Under this agreement, these enterprises can now secure funding by launching Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) through the NSE Emerge platform. An official spokesperson confirmed that the state government remains dedicated to strengthening these enterprises both financially and technically. “As part of the MSME Policy 2022, financial assistance of up to Rs 5 lakh is being offered to support MSMEs in getting listed on the stock exchange,” the spokesperson explained. This partnership represents a crucial development in the state's ongoing efforts to empower its MSME sector by facilitating capital access and expanding market presence.

Market benchmarks surge over 6% in past 4 days; investors' wealth rallies by Rs 25.77 lakh crore

MUMBAI: Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surged more than 6 per cent in the last four trading sessions, as a temporary pause on tariffs by the US, return of foreign investors to the domestic market, and prediction of an above-normal rainfall in the upcoming southwest monsoon season lifted investors' sentiments.

Moreover, retail inflation dipping to a nearly six-year low also raised hopes for a third rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), according to market experts.

In the last four trading days, the BSE benchmark index jumped 4,706.05 points or 6.37 per cent, and the NSE Nifty surged 1,452.5 points or



6.48 per cent.

Accordingly, investors' wealth rallied by Rs 25.77 lakh crore to Rs 4,19,60,046.14 crore (USD 4.90 trillion) in the past four days.

Stock markets are closed on

Friday for 'Good Friday'.

According to Vishnu Kant Upadhyay, AVP, Research & Advisory, Master Capital Services, several factors like foreign fund inflows, temporary pause on tariffs by the US and further

monetary easing by the RBI have converged to drive the recent sharp rally in the Indian markets despite global trade uncertainty.

“In the last three trading sessions, foreign portfolio investors purchased over USD 1 billion worth of Indian equities after a prolonged selling streak. Further, the announcement of a temporary pause on tariffs by the US and potential negotiations with countries also led to the relief rally,” Upadhyay said.

Moreover, the RBI's 25 bps rate cut on April 9, and its shift of stance from “neutral” to “accommodative” added fresh momentum to the equity market, as investors priced in further monetary easing, he noted.

Indian Banks Seek Power to Freeze Fraudulent Accounts without Court Approval

NEW DELHI: Indian banks are pushing for greater authority to freeze accounts suspected of being used in cyber fraud operations without requiring prior approval from courts or law enforcement agencies.

This recommendation comes from a working group established by the Indian Banks' Association, which plans to present this proposal to the Reserve

Bank of India for consideration. Currently, financial institutions face legal constraints under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, which does not grant them independent authority to freeze or block customer accounts without proper authorisation, although they can implement blocks based on internal alert systems.

Fraudsters frequently utilise



mule accounts to channel illegal funds through the banking

system. Despite banks freezing numerous such accounts annually, criminals have found ways to exploit system vulnerabilities to rapidly open new accounts.

The working group's report recommends that banks enhance their identification and monitoring of accounts that show characteristics making them susceptible to misuse as mule accounts.

One needs to be cautious while taking loans from credit cards and loan apps



SATISH SINGH

The number of credit cards issued by January 2025 increased to 10.88 crores from 9.95 crores in January 2024, indicating a significant increase in credit card use. However, with the rise in the number of credit cards, non-performing assets (NPAs) in this segment increased by 28.42% to ₹6,742 crores by December 2024 from ₹5,250 crores in December 2023. The 91-180 days outstanding liability rate also increased to 7.6% by June 2024 from 6.5% in June 2023.

The main reason for the increase in NPA in the credit card segment is not properly checking the credit eligibility of the applicants while issuing credit cards. Nowadays, there is so much pressure on credit card issuing banks to increase their business that they ignore the guidelines for issuing credit cards. They also give credit cards to people who do not have regular income; if they have income, their liabilities are high. Due to this, the percentage of defaults in the credit card segment is constantly increasing.

There are many reasons for the increase in the percentage of NPA in credit cards, including economic growth rate slowing down to 6.4% in FY 2025, decrease in job creation, retrenchment of workers in IT and other sectors, higher interest rates charged by credit cards per year in case of default, most customers unaware of the nuances of credit card repayment cycle,

people getting lured by the offer of attractive discounts on purchase of online and offline products through credit card, etc. For these reasons, borrowers are trapped in the debt trap.

It has been seen many times that people take loans from loan apps to repay credit card debt or other loans, which charge interest rates ranging from 18% to 70% on the outstanding loan amount, due to which they get trapped in the vicious cycle of debt. Generally, most people take loans from loan apps like Hero Fin corp, CreditBee, InCred, IFIL, Tata Capital, Moneyview, MoneyTap, Mpocket, Zest Money, TrueBalance, PaySense, etc. However, one can avoid getting trapped in their trap by understanding the interest rate, charges, and other terms of the loan. To reduce rising defaults and save people from the vicious circle of debt, the Reserve Bank of India has increased the risk weight on consumer loans, credit card receivables and non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) by 25% to 150% in November 2023, so that customers also transact with caution.

36 Chinese apps were banned in India in 2020 and returned in 2025. The government banned these apps for privacy and security reasons. Now, they can be downloaded from the Google Play Store and the Apple App Store. Many such apps have shifted all their operations to India and store data on Indian servers. Many Chinese apps run entirely on the franchise model, whose entire operations are being looked after by Indian companies.

It has also been observed



that when customers cannot pay their credit card dues, the bank gives them a one-time settlement opportunity, and under this, they are given a discount of a certain percentage of the amount when paying the dues. This allows the loan to be repaid in a smaller amount, but the customer's credit score is affected, and the status turns into a settled loan. If your credit report shows a “Write-off” or “Settled” status, most banks consider you a high-risk customer. It reduces the chances of the defaulter getting a loan. Therefore, instead of settling the dues in a one-time settlement, the customer should contact the bank and request that it relax the repayment terms.

Further, after default, the customer's credit score drops significantly. Most banks prefer to lend to a proposed borrower with a CIBIL score above 750. Banks avoid lending to such defaulters if the CIBIL score is 600 or less.

Credit card or loan app defaulters can become eligible for loans despite their settled status, but only with certain conditions. Defaulters have limited loan options. For example, they can take gold loans, loans against property,

etc. They can also take loans with the help of a co-applicant or guarantor, or with the help of someone with a good credit score. In this connection, NBFC or fintech lenders are more lenient but charge higher interest on the loan.

If you have a credit card, you need to be cautious at many levels, such as, keep card information safe, do not share your card number, CVV, PIN or OTP with anyone, use your card only on secure websites, access websites only after looking for HTTPS and padlock icons, check account statements regularly, set transaction alerts via SMS or email for immediate updates, do not use public Wi-Fi for online shopping or banking, do not save card information on websites or browsers unless absolutely necessary and safe, use strong passwords and two-factor authentication, protect your online banking and card-related accounts with unique passwords, report loss or fraud to the bank and cyber police immediately, if your card is lost or stolen, immediately report it to the issuing bank to block it, immediately inform your bank about suspicious transactions, do not click on suspicious links or respond to emails, texts or calls asking

for card details, always check the sender before giving any information. Verify by talking to the customer, Avoid using the card physically, Be cautious while handing over your card at public places like restaurants, theatres etc., Use contactless payments or mobile wallets as far as possible for added security, Set spending limits, Cut off the chip and magnetic stripe of old cards to prevent misuse, Use verified payment gateways, Use only trusted payment portals while shopping online, Avoid entering card details on pop-ups or unfamiliar pages etc.

In the light of the above, it would be appropriate to say that defaults in credit cards and loan apps are increasing due to reasons such as slowdown in the pace of development, lack of employment generation, high interest rates of credit cards and loan apps, ignorance of the credit card repayment cycle, tendency to spend more, high liabilities of credit card holders, falling prey to attractive discounts, adding to online gaming, dugs or watching porn videos online etc. After becoming a defaulter, one should repay the default amount, get a 'No Dues Certificate', and gradually improve their credit score by managing loan accounts.

Although regulatory measures have been implemented in this matter, many challenges remain in the unsecured loan sector, the solution of which does not seem to be emerging shortly, due to which the possibility of improvement in the state is low.

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

TDB to Fund Dvipa Defence to Produce Assault Rifles for Indian Army

NEW DELHI: The Technology Development Board (TDB), operating under the Ministry of Science and Technology, has announced significant financial assistance to Hyderabad-based M/s dvipa Defence India Pvt. Ltd. (formerly M/s dvipa Armour Pvt. Ltd.) to advance the domestic manufacturing of small arms in India.

The funding will support the 'Development and Commercialisation of 7.62 mm x 51 mm Assault Rifles'—a project aimed at producing high-performance rifles that meet the Indian Army's General Staff Qualitative Requirements (GSQR).

This financial backing will facilitate the development, testing, and commercialisation of the UGRAM rifle, while also enabling the establishment of an advanced in-house manufacturing facility equipped with integrated quality assurance and testing infrastructure.

The initiative represents a strategic move toward reducing



India's longstanding dependence on imported small arms.

For many years, India has relied heavily on foreign suppliers for small arms, resulting in substantial foreign exchange expenditure and creating interoperability challenges across various armed forces that complicate both training and logistics operations.

The INSAS rifles, developed through previous collaborative efforts, have increasingly been considered inadequate for contemporary combat scenarios.

Recognising these limita-

tions, the Government initiated a policy change in 2017 to replace aging weaponry with more advanced and reliable rifles chambered for 7.62 mm x 51 mm NATO-standard ammunition. As one of the first companies to receive licensing for small arms and ammunition production, dvipa Defence collaborated with the Armament Research & Development Establishment (ARDE) in Pune, a division of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), to develop UGRAM, a fully indigenous assault rifle.

India's WPI Inflation declines to 2.05 % in March 2025

NEW DELHI: India's annual rate of inflation based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) slowed to 2.05 per cent in March, down from 2.38 per cent in February, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Tuesday.

The positive rate of inflation in March is primarily due to an increase in the prices of manufactured products, the figures showed. The month-over-month change in WPI for March was in the negative zone at (-) 0.19 per cent as compared to the previous month of February, reflecting the declining trend in inflation.



There was a decline in the prices of food as well as fuel and power groups compared to the previous month, which resulted in the overall month-on-month inflation rate turning negative.

Meanwhile, retail inflation has also been on a declining trend. The Reserve Bank's Monetary Policy Committee has re-

duced its inflation forecast for 2025-26 to 4 per cent from 4.2 per cent earlier as the “outlook for food inflation has turned decisively positive,” RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said last week. “Headline inflation moderated during January- February 2025 following a sharp correction in food inflation. The outlook for food inflation has turned decisively positive. The uncertainties regarding rabi crops have abated considerably, and the second advance estimates point to a record wheat production and higher production of key pulses over that last year,” the RBI Governor said.

INTERNATIONAL

Death Toll from US Airstrikes on Yemeni Fuel Port Rises to 38: Houthis

SANAA: The death toll from US overnight airstrikes on the Yemeni fuel port of Ras Isa has increased to 38, with 102 others wounded, Houthi-run al-Masirah TV reported on Friday, citing Houthi-controlled local health authorities.

According to al-Masirah, the casualties include five paramedics who were killed upon arriving at the scene, when the US military launched another wave of airstrikes on the port just minutes after the first on Thursday night.

More than 14 airstrikes on the fuel port were reported during the two waves, igniting massive fires in tanks storing imported fuel. The fires were extinguished within hours, said the report.

The US Central Command said earlier in a statement that it struck and destroyed the Ras Isa port on Thursday to “eliminate this source of fuel for” and “degrade the economic source of power of” the Houthis, Xinhua news agency reported.

In mid-March, US President



Donald Trump ordered “decisive and powerful military action” against the Houthis after the group announced plans to resume attacks on Israeli vessels in the Red Sea, citing Israel’s blockade of humanitarian aid to Gaza as the reason.

Earlier on April 17, Yemen’s Houthi leader Abdulmalik al-Houthi had said his group had launched 26 attacks against Israel and 33 strikes on the US aircraft carrier and warships in the Red Sea since March 15.

In a televised speech aired by

the group’s al-Masirah TV on Thursday, the Houthi leader said the attacks on Israel were carried out using “30 ballistic missiles and drones,” while those targeting the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier and its escorts involved “122 ballistic and cruise missiles, as well as drones”.

However, the Israeli military has reportedly intercepted many of the Houthi projectiles before they reached targets, Xinhua news agency reported.

The US Central Command

dismissed the Houthi claims of daily attacks on the US aircraft carrier as “outlandish” in a post on the social media platform X.

Meanwhile, the Houthi leader noted that the US military had conducted more than 900 airstrikes against his group’s positions across northern Yemen during the past 30 days.

Tensions between the Houthi group and the US military have escalated since Washington resumed airstrikes on Houthi targets in Yemen on March 15 to deter the group from attacking Israel and US warships in the Red Sea.

The Houthis, which control much of northern Yemen, said their attacks aim to press US-backed Israel to stop the offensive against the Gaza Strip and allow humanitarian aid into the Palestinian enclave.

Israel’s Channel 12 News reported last Saturday that a Yemeni drone was intercepted near the Dead Sea within the Jordanian airspace before it could reach Israel.

Finland President dials PM Modi, discusses ongoing collaborations in digitalization, mobility



NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finland President Alexander Stubb reiterated their commitment to further strengthen and deepen the partnership between the two countries, including in the areas of quantum, 5G-6G, AI and cyber-security during their telephonic conversation, on Wednesday.

“Had a fruitful conversation with President Alexander Stubb. Finland is an important partner country in the EU. We are committed to elevating our ties. Exchanged our perspectives on regional and global issues, in-

cluding the situation in Ukraine,” PM Modi posted on X after the phone call.

According to the Prime Minister’s Office, the two leaders reviewed the ongoing collaboration between the two countries including in the areas of digitalization, sustainability and mobility besides also exchanging views on regional and global issues of mutual interest, including the situation in Ukraine.

As the two leaders agreed to remain in touch, Finland’s President expressed his country’s support for closer India-EU relations and conclusion

of a mutually beneficial FTA at the earliest. “Had a good phone conversation today with Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi. We discussed, among other things, bilateral relations, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, and the geopolitical shifts and their implications for the multilateral system. In these turbulent times, the friendship between Finland and India is more important than ever,” Stubb wrote on X.

On Tuesday, PM Modi spoke with Denmark PM Mette Frederiksen, emphasising that both countries continue to work extensively together in several fields, including the Green Strategic Partnership. “Glad to speak with PM Mette Frederiksen today. Reaffirmed our strong support for the India-Denmark Green Strategic Partnership and enhancing cooperation across sectors for the benefit of our people. We also discussed regional and global developments of mutual interest,” PM Modi posted on X after the phone call.

President Trump threatens to strip Harvard University of its tax-exempt status



WASHINGTON: The row between Harvard University and US President Donald Trump escalated further after the elite university refused to accept far-reaching policy changes ordered by the White House, and Trump threatened to strip it of its tax-exempt status.

As it is Harvard University is facing a major financial setback after the Trump administration imposed a freeze on \$2.2 billion in federal funding, following the university’s refusal to comply with a list of sweeping demands related to governance, campus policies, and civil rights enforcement.

Now, Trump has said that Harvard “should lose its Tax Exempt Status and be Taxed as a Political Entity” if the premier college does not agree to his demands to change how it runs itself, which would include a selection of students and authority for professors.

Tax-exempt status is “totally contingent on acting in the PUBLIC INTEREST,” he said in the post on Truth Social.

The demands, originally issued in early April, called for the dismantling of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) offices, cooperation with immigration authorities in screening international students, and sweeping reforms to hiring, admissions, and internal governance. On Friday, the Trump administration escalated the situation by sending a more detailed list of requirements, including an audit of student and faculty political views.

Harvard responded by publishing the letter and rejecting the proposed terms. In a public letter addressed to students and faculty, Harvard President Alan Garber affirmed the university’s refusal to yield to government pressure.

Punjab-born surgeon, 3 family members killed in US plane crash



NEW YORK: A Punjab-born surgeon, her two children and their partners were killed along with her husband, who piloted a small plane that crashed in New York state. Joy Saini’s family confirmed their deaths in a statement to the media on Sunday. National Transportation Safety Board investigator Albert Nixon said on Sunday that the crash happened on Saturday while their Mitsubishi MU2B aircraft was trying to land at the Columbia County Airport, about 200 km from New York City. Speaking at a news conference in Albany, he said that the pilot missed the approach for landing and asked to make another try, but the air traffic controller noticed it was flying at a low altitude and unsuccessfully tried to alert the pilot. The plane, which had taken off from Westchester Airport in a New York City suburb, went down about ten miles from the airport near the border with Massachusetts State. Saini immigrated to the US with her parents and received her medical degree from the University of Pittsburgh where she met her husband, Michael Groff, who was a neurosurgeon.

B'desh Demands US\$ 4.32 Billion, Apology for 1971 Genocide from Pak

DHAKA: Bangladesh on Thursday raised the issue of financial claim to the tune of USD 4.32 billion from Pakistan as a fair share from the assets of undivided Pakistan before 1971 besides also seeking a formal apology for the genocide committed by the Pakistani armed forces during the Liberation War.

The issues were raised during the Foreign Secretary-level Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) held in Dhaka between the two countries after a gap of 15 years. Bangladeshi Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin led the Bangladesh delegation while the Pakistani side was represented by its Foreign Secretary Amna Baloch. During the meeting, Bangladesh also demanded USD 200 million – the foreign aid from countries and agencies to East Pakistan – during the extremely deadly Bhola cyclone.

“We said that as a friendly neighbour of Bangladesh in South Asia, we seek Pakistan’s cooperation in building a strong, welfare-oriented and forward-looking relationship with Pakistan by resolving the existing historical unresolved issues at the earliest and we emphasise on working together towards this end,” Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin told reporters at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after the talks. “These issues must be resolved for having a solid foundation



of our relations,” he added. Interestingly, the local media reported that the Pakistani side refused to comment on the outcomes of the meeting. During her visit, Baloch held separate meetings with Bangladeshi interim government’s Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus and Foreign Affairs Advisor Touhid Hossain, where they discussed issues of mutual interest.

During his meeting with the visiting Pakistani Foreign Secretary, Yunus called for strengthening ties with Pakistan to boost mutual cooperation and explore trade and business potentials. “There are certain hurdles. We have to find ways to overcome those and move forward,” Yunus said after Baloch called on him at the State Guest House Jamuna. Referring to the past, Baloch said Bangladesh and Pakistan must find ways to “harness the potentials between the two countries”. “We have huge intra regional markets on our own rights. We should use it. We can’t miss the bus every time,” Baloch said.

Pakistan’s Punjab celebrates Vaisakhi, Sikh pilgrims mark Khalsa’s founding

LAHORE: The age-old agrarian festival of Vaisakhi, marking the start of the wheat harvest, was celebrated in Pakistan’s Punjab on Sunday. Observed annually on April 13, and sometimes on April 14, the festival remains deeply rooted in cultural fabric of rural Punjab, straddling both sides of the India-Pakistan border.

For farmers, it signifies the end of months of crop-watching and the joyous beginning of the harvest season, a day when hard work yields its long-awaited reward, the News reported.

Before the Partition, Vaisakhi festivals were vibrant festivals steeped in folk tradition and farmers gathering to dholak beats, kick-starting the harvest, with menfolk performing the bhangra in the fields, while the women sang tapay and mahiye.

Now, mechanisation has altered the customs, with combine harvesters and threshers replacing the communal harvest,



and has drained the day of its vibrancy, the News said. Vaisakhi also holds profound religious significance for the Sikh community, commemorating the founding of the Khalsa by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699. Post-Partition, the festival became more closely associated with Sikhism, and it is now marked by a special ceremony held at Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. However,

this year, the central celebration is being held at Gurdwara Janam Asthan in Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak.

Ahead of Vaisakhi, the district administration of Nankana Sahib announced school holidays that all educational institutions in the district will remain closed from April 12 to April 16 as thousands of Sikh pilgrims began arriving from India to take part in the Vaisakhi celebrations,

US-China Trade Tensions Escalate as Tariffs Reach 245% on Chinese Imports

NEW DELHI: China now faces up to 245 per cent tariffs on imports to the US as a result of its retaliatory measures, according to a White House fact sheet.

This significant increase comes after China ordered its airlines not to take any further deliveries of Boeing jets in response to the earlier US decision to impose 145 per cent tariffs on Chinese goods.

Beijing also instructed Chinese carriers to halt any purchases of aircraft-related equipment and parts from US companies. “If the US really wants to resolve the issue through dialogue and negotiation, it should stop exerting extreme pressure, stop threatening and blackmailing, and talk to China on the basis of equality, respect and mutual benefit,”



foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian said. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt stated yesterday that President Trump is open to making a trade deal

with China but believes Beijing should make the first move.

“The ball is in China’s court: China needs to make a deal with us, we don’t have to make a deal with them,” Leavitt told a press briefing, adding that Trump had given her that statement directly in an Oval Office meeting.

“China wants what we have... the American consumer, or to put another way, they need our

money,” Leavitt said. Although Trump has described Chinese President Xi Jinping in admiring terms in the past, neither leader has backed down in the escalating trade war between the world’s two largest economies. “The president, again, has made it quite clear that he’s open to a deal with China. But China needs to make a deal with the United States of America,” Leavitt emphasised.

ATTACKS ON AMERICAN EATING JOINTS IN PAKISTAN

Jihadists’ Violence Upsets Prompt US Assistance in Weeding Out Advanced Weapons from the Region

GOPAL MISRA

During a recent visit to a few American journalists, the public relations outfit of the Pakistani army shared the details about the weapons being recently recovered from the Baluch rebels and the TTP or Tehreek-e- Taliban Pakistan; a few days later, Pakistani foreign minister, was assured by the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio during a telephonic conversation that the US would soon be assisting Pakistani army in resolving this issue. These weapons were left behind in Afghanistan.

According to a 2023 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, when the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in August 2021, over \$7 billion worth of American military equipment was still in the country. It is being estimated that more than a quarter-million rifles were left behind by US forces during their withdrawal from Afghanistan, enough to arm the entire US Marine Corps as well as nearly 18,000 night-vision goggles.

The bigger guns or missiles are being well-protected by

the Taliban government in Kabul, but a large number of light machine guns and assault rifles have been pilfered and being sold in the open market. They include M-4 guns, which are considered more lethal than the AK-47. These guns are equipped with a laser system with a night vision to target the enemy with a rare precision. They could be obtained from the armament bazar at a price of 5000 USD. Similarly, the Americans have also left highly effective Polish and Swedish guns.

Even if the Afghan Taliban are not supplying these weapons to the Baluch and TTP rebels, they are now being used against the Pakistani army.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani army has briefed the Washington Post offering details about the American weapons being used by the rebels. They have also claimed that the Baluch rebels had used the American weapons in the recent hijacking of a train in southwestern Pakistan. It is being further stated that the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) had stormed the ill-fated Jaffar Express train in holding hundreds of passengers hostage. It took 24 hours to rescue them, 33 rebels were killed and 31 others, including a few soldiers, succumbed in the operation.



In its report, Washington Post has stated that the US Army and the Pentagon confirmed that 63 weapons shown to reporters had been provided by the US government to Afghan forces. Meanwhile, a Pakistan Army major, Zaheer Hassan, has claimed that the rebels have successfully paired night vision and thermal equipment with small drones to attack troops with more precision.

The Assurance and the Sabotage

During his telephonic conversation, Marco Rubio is believed to have assured Ishaq Dar, a confidant of the GHQ in Pakistan and presently deputy prime minister holding the foreign portfolio that the US administration would try to end this pilferage. He also had profusely thanked Pakistan for the arrest and transfer to the United States

of ISIS-K operative Mohammad Sharifullah.

They also discussed briefly about Pakistan’s cooperation on law enforcement and addressing illegal immigration, and also issues related to the U.S. reciprocal tariffs on Pakistan and how to make progress toward a fair and balanced trade relationship. Rubio also raised prospects for engagement on critical minerals and expressed interest in expanding commercial opportunities for U.S. companies.

Before this warming up of the relations between the old allies could move forward, the series of attacks on outlets of American fast food restaurant chains from Karachi to Lahore and Rawalpindi hit the headlines. It was being camouflaged as a part of an anti-Israeli campaign.

It may be noted that these attacks were being made in

the well-secured areas of the prominent urban centres in Pakistan and the police did not care to book the miscreants. They had stormed an American fast food restaurant chain in Lahore’s Defence Housing Authority (DHA), American food outlets in Karachi and later now in Rawalpindi just near the headquarters of the Pakistani army.

The video clips on social media have shown a group of people attacking the KFC restaurant in the DHA’s Phase IV but there were no police to stop them. According to some eyewitnesses, when most of the attackers carrying clubs entered the KFC, shattered the glass doors and window panes, the staff and customers ran to save their lives. Interestingly, the Rawalpindi police has claimed that vandals involved in the attack have been traced through the close-circuit television cameras, but no arrests could be made.

Thus, the issue of American weapons is now again being buried under the Jihadists violence.

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

NASA sacks Indian-origin DEI Chief Neela Rajendra following Trump’s executive order

WASHINGTON: Neela Rajendra, the Indian-origin head of NASA’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, has been officially dismissed from her position in compliance with US President Donald Trump’s sweeping executive order aimed at dismantling DEI initiatives across all federal agencies.

Rajendra’s removal comes after weeks of internal efforts at NASA to retain her by rebranding her role. In March, NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) reassigned her as the head of a newly-created department, the “Office of Team Excellence and



Employee Success,” in a move widely seen as an attempt to shield her from the implications of the executive directive. While her title changed, her core responsibilities, overseeing employee support programs and managing affinity groups like the “Black Excellence Strategic Team,” remained largely the same. However, the Trump

administration’s renewed crackdown on DEI programs earlier this month led to her dismissal, despite NASA’s attempts to preserve her position under a new title. An internal email circulated at JPL last week confirmed her departure, stating, “Neela Rajendra is no longer working at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. We are incredibly grateful for the lasting impact she made to our organisation. We wish her the very best.” The message, reportedly sent by JPL Director Laurie Leshin, marked the end of Rajendra’s years-long tenure at the space agency.

Russia lodges protest over Japan’s upcoming military drills

MOSCOW: Russia lodged a strong protest with Japan over Tokyo’s plan to conduct anti-ship missile drills near Russia’s borders, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Russia lodged a protest with the Japanese Embassy in Moscow over Japan’s plans to hold training exercises with the SSM-1 anti-ship missile systems, equipped with the Type-88 missiles on the Hokkaido Island near the Russian border in June, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Thursday in a statement.

It said that Moscow considers such “provocative” military activity near Russia’s borders “a potential threat to its national security,” adding that Tokyo’s actions heighten tensions in Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, Xinhua news agency reported.

“Russia reserves the right



to take all necessary counter-measures” to ensure its security on its Far Eastern borders, the Foreign Ministry warned.

Earlier reports indicated that Japan’s Self-Defense Forces are planning to conduct live-fire training exercises using anti-ship missiles at the Shizunai range in Hokkaido, a region bordering Russia, this summer.

The exercise will utilise Type 88 surface-to-ship missiles.

While Japan previously conducted similar drills beyond the national borders due to the missile’s range – nearly 150 km

or more – which might endanger safety on the sea and in airspace, it has now decided to hold exercises within Japanese territory with specific range restrictions.

The Shizunai range, situated on Hokkaido’s southern coast overlooking the Pacific Ocean, will host the drills.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi has confirmed that preparations for these exercises are underway.

Russian and Chinese warships recently held joint drills in the Sea of Japan, part of a major naval exercise that Russian President Vladimir Putin said was the largest of its kind in three decades. Then last week, a Chinese aircraft carrier sailed between two Japanese islands near Taiwan for the first time.

DIVYANKA TRIPATHI on Making It without a Godfather in the Industry: Every Step is Earned

MUMBAI: Television actress Divyanka Tripathi has opened up about navigating the entertainment industry without a godfather.

Speaking candidly, she emphasized that when success isn't handed to you, every achievement feels more meaningful earned through persistence, self-belief, and hard work. Divyanka told IANS, "When you don't have a godfather in the industry, every step is earned, not handed. You have to prove yourself repeatedly and be your own biggest critique & cheerleader. But the beauty is that it makes you stronger, more grounded, and more grateful. The struggle builds an interesting arc to your character and over time, your work becomes your strongest introduction."

When asked about the relentless energy she brings to improving her craft, Divyanka shared, "Honestly, it comes from a place of pure love for what I do. Acting isn't just a profession for me. It's a passion, almost therapeutic. The desire to grow, to evolve, and to challenge myself keeps me going. I'm also a bit of a perfectionist at heart, so I never feel "done" with learning. There's always a better way to say a line, to feel a scene, to live a character. There's always something new to be explored for every character, and that search gives me boundless



energy."

On being asked about how she lifts her spirits on days that don't feel quite right, the 'Yeh Hai Mohabbatein' actress revealed that she turns to the soothing world of art and nature.

"On such days, I find a lot of peace in creating art or spending

time with my plants. There's something incredibly grounding about watching something grow, whether it's a canvas filling up with color or a new leaf sprouting. It's my way of reconnecting with the present moment. I also enjoy reading. Books have a way of transporting you to a different world,

offering comfort or perspective when you need it the most."

While Divyanka has earned widespread love and recognition for her work on screen, the actress recently shared a thoughtful revelation about what path she might have taken if not acting. The actress mentioned, "Yes, I've thought about it quite often. If not acting, I see myself in a role that involves serving the nation or the people directly, maybe in the Army, forest services, or even Indian public services. There's always been a strong sense of duty within me, a desire to contribute meaningfully to society. I think that drive to serve would've shaped my path, no matter the profession."

Divyanka Tripathi also shared that the love she receives humbles her and is something she never takes for granted. What's helped her stay connected with people over the years, she believes, is her authenticity — remaining the same person whether she's in the spotlight or away from it.

The 'Banoo Main Teri Dulhann' actress also attributed her lasting impression to a few simple but powerful values: staying grounded, respecting others, and allowing her work to speak for itself. Tripathi feels that consistency in character and being genuine create a meaningful impact on people.

A battle against the Empire unfolds! Kesari Chapter 2 trailer out



KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Mohali

The team behind the highly anticipated Bollywood film Kesari Chapter 2 recently held an emotional press conference in Amritsar, marking a pivotal moment in the promotion of the film. Before addressing the media, lead actors Akshay Kumar, R. Madhavan, and Ananya Panday visited the revered Sri Darbar Sahib, offering their respects in a solemn moment of reflection. Following this, the entire star cast made their way to the historic Jallianwala Bagh, where they paid homage to the martyrs who lost their lives during the infamous massacre.

The press conference witnessed the presence of media teams from across Punjab, with journalists from Amritsar, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Mohali, and Chandigarh gathering to cover this poignant event.

Oscar-winner AR Rahman talks about the potential misuse of AI in music

MUMBAI: Oscar-winner AR Rahman says there are both good and bad aspects to the use of artificial intelligence in music, but there will be chaos if it is not controlled. The musician is not averse to new technology in music and, in fact, used an AI software to recreate the voices of late singers Bamba Bakya and Shahul Hameed for a track, Thimiri Yezhuda from Rajinikanth-starrer Lal Salaam. But he did that with proper permission from the family of the musicians.

Rahman acknowledged that the use of AI in music had 'gone wild'. "I don't know what's going to happen. Some of the songs are so filthy, yet they come out with the voices of popular singers. It needs to be controlled because if it's not, there'll be chaos," the musician said.

The music maestro, who has two Oscars, a Golden Globe and Grammy to his credit, said it was important to have rules for ethical use of the AI technology. "There are both good and bad aspects, and the good things should be used to empower people who never had the chance to put their vision into action. But overusing it in a bad way is bad for us. It's like mix-



ing poison with oxygen and breathing it in. There should be rules, like certain things you can't do. Like, how they talk about ethics or behaviour in a society, this is also behaviour in the software and digital world," he added.

Rahman is currently working on his much-anticipated The Wonderment Tour, to be held on May 3 at the DY Patil Stadium. The concert was conceptualised by the composer himself in collaboration with Percept Live and co-produced by Percept Live, Fair Game and Jo Entertainment.

The global premiere of 'The Wonderment Tour' is said to be a grand concert under the aegis of the WAVES summit taking place from May 1 to 4.

Tickets are now available on Zomato app.

The 58-year-old musician has a slew of projects in the pipeline, including the romantic film, Tere Ishq Mein, with his frequent collaborator, filmmaker Aanand L Rai, Mani Ratnam's Thug Life, Rajkumar Santoshi's Lahore 1947, Meena Kumari biopic, and the Hansal Mehta-directed Gandhi series.

He is also reuniting with Imtiaz for his next after Chamkila. "The more you see people loving Vida Karo and Mirza, it forces us to look back and get that beautiful aura of that era in your way. So that's a good thing to see," he added.

Rahman is also excited about the upcoming Hansal Mehta series on Gandhi, which is headlined by Pratik Gandhi. "The Gandhi series is unexpectedly beautiful; I never expected that to be such a beautiful experience. Working with Hansal Mehta and Sameer Nair was fascinating. Even Gandhi ji's life... I feel that's like a textbook, and it's a fantastic textbook for the previous or the future generations to see the father of the nation," he said. Meanwhile, Rahman attended the MAMI Film Festival 2025, in Mumbai, on Tuesday.



A Sikh priest carries the Guru Granth Sahib (Sikh holy Book) during a religious procession on the eve of the birth anniversary of the 9th Sikh Guru, Guru Teg Bahadur ji at Sri Harmandir Sahib on Thursday, April 17, 2025. PHOTO-PRABHJOT GILL

CISF DG Rajwinder Singh Bhatti pays obeisance at Sri Harmandar Sahib

SGPC hands over memorandum regarding Kirpan restriction on Sikh Employees at airports

JAGMOHAN SINGH
Amritsar

The Director General of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF), Rajwinder Singh Bhatti, paid obeisance at Harmandar Sahib. Later he was honoured at Sri Darbar Sahib Information Center by SGPC Secretary Partap Singh.

On this occasion, a letter written by SGPC President Harjinder Singh Dhama was handed over to CISF DG Rajwinder Singh Bhatti by Secretary Partap Singh. The letter urged resolution of the ongoing issues faced by Amritdhari Sikh employees at the Indian airports regarding the wearing of the Kirpan.

The letter stated that the recent directive issued by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security,



which restricts Sikh employees from wearing the Kirpan while on duty at airports, is an excess to Sikhs. This discrimination within our own country is a serious attack on the religious freedom of Sikh citizens. The Indian government should never forget the immense sacrifices made by Sikhs for the nation's independence. It is painful that Sikhs, who laid down their lives for the country, are being subjected

to such injustice in their own homeland. The government should refrain from actions that hurt the religious sentiments of the Sikh community.

The DG of CISF was urged to coordinate with the concerned ministry to find a permanent resolution to this issue. Present on the occasion were assistant manager Gurtinderpal Singh, information officer Jatinderpal Singh and Sandeep Singh, among others.

Aamir Khan introduces his girlfriend Gauri Spratt to Chinese media & actors Shen Teng, Ma Li

MUMBAI: Bollywood superstar Aamir Khan made headlines as he stepped out for the first time in a public event with his girlfriend, Gauri Spratt.

The couple's appearance sparked buzz across social media, marking a rare and notable moment in Khan's otherwise private personal life. On April 12, Aamir made a rare public appearance at the Macau International Comedy Festival in China, and this time, he wasn't alone. Accompanying him was his girlfriend, Gauri Spratt, whom he had introduced to the Indian media on his 60th birthday last month.

The couple looked stunning in traditional Indian outfits as they attended the event together. Aamir opted for a classic black kurta-pyjama ensemble, paired



with a heavy, decorative shawl, while Gauri looked elegant in a simple yet sophisticated floral white saree, perfectly complementing her partner.

During the event, the 'PK' actor kept his girlfriend, Gauri, close by his side, and the two were not hesitant to strike a pose for the Chinese paparazzi. They

were also joined by renowned Chinese actors Shen Teng and Ma Li, with Aamir seen introducing Gauri to them and other attendees. The most memorable moment of the evening came when Aamir and Gauri, alongside Shen Teng and Ma Li, playfully formed heart shapes with their hands while posing for the

Preity Zinta says Always own who you are and be proud of your roots



MUMBAI: Actress Preity Zinta has urged to "be who you are" as she showcased traditional Phulkari Indian wear with simple needlework from Punjab.

Preity took to Instagram, where she shared a motley of images, flaunting the salwar kameez she wore at an Indian Premier League (IPL) match. The actress' white-hued outfit had multicolored floral embroideries made with intricate needlework. To complete her look, she went for soft beach waves, natural makeup, and glossy lips. She added a black bindi to elevate her look. For the caption, she wrote, "When in Punjab, dress in a Phulkari! Always own who you are and be proud of your roots, that's why I am flaunting the traditional Phulkari with simple yet exquisite needlework from Punjab." On April 11, she shared some fun behind-the-scenes moments from her "fastest shoot of her career." She shared on Instagram, "The fastest shoot I ever did, thanks to the incredible team around me. Flashback Friday."

On April 10, Preity heaped praise on Punjab Kings' Priyansh Arya and said that she witnessed an explosive game of cricket, the roar of a legend, and the birth of a bright star. The actress said she is proud of him and added, "You are a shining example of how actions speak louder than words. Keep smiling and shining, and thank you for entertaining not just me but everyone that showed up to see the game... Here's to many more memorable moments on and off the field. Ting !"

Talking Points Narvijay Yadav



Unplanned flight delays and cancellations spark chaos at airports nationwide. Furious passengers clog gates, venting at staff, as systems buckle under storms, exposing the fragile dance of aviation's limits.

The dust storm hit like a rogue wave, swallowing IGI Airport Delhi in a haze of chaos this weekend. At Gate 30, departure area, Terminal 3, Mona, a ground duty manager of a premier airline, braced herself as the wind howled outside, rattling the glass walls. Screens flickered, announcing delays for 250 flights, and the lounge swelled with stranded passengers. Suitcases toppled, coffee cups spilled, and voices rose in a crescendo of frustration. "This is unacceptable!" a man in a suit bellowed, jabbing a finger at Mona. Her earpiece crackled with updates: cancellations, rerouting, zero visibility. The storm didn't care about her title or the airline's five-star rating.

Mona, 32, had seen delays before, but this was a beast

unleashed. Her navy blazer felt like armor, yet it couldn't shield her from the onslaught. A woman clutching a toddler screamed about a missed wedding; an elderly couple fretted over a hospital appointment. "Why no warning?" a tech bro demanded, as if Mona had personally summoned the storm. Her team of four scurried, distributing water bottles and apologies, but the crowd's patience was thinner than the airport's Wi-Fi. Mona's phone buzzed, her boss demanding updates while she dodged a thrown boarding pass.

Breathe, Mona. You've got this, she whispered, but her pulse disagreed. The truth stung: she was powerless. Aviation wasn't a vending machine spitting flawless luxury for a premium ticket. It was a juggernaut of tech, manpower, and nature's whims. Friday's

Anger Won't Clear Airport Storms



storm had grounded planes, scrambled radars, and choked runways with debris. Airline's heavy investments in fleets, infrastructure, AI scheduling, and trained crews meant nothing when bad weather blinded pilots. Mona's job was to manage the fallout, not the weather. Yet passengers saw her as the villain, not the victim of a system stretched to breaking. "Fix this now!" a voice roared, and her smile wavered. If only I could control the clouds, she thought bitterly.

Gate 30 was a warzone of crumpled coffee mugs and frayed tempers by midnight. Mona's voice hoarse, she announced a flight rescheduling,

only to face a chorus of groans. A young man filmed her shouting. "This'll go viral." Her stomach knotted; would this cost her job? She pictured her widowed mother, dependent on her salary, and steeled herself. "Sir, I'm doing my best," she said, dodging his phone. Hours blurred; her heels ached, but she kept moving - rebook passengers, calming her team, ignoring the lump in her throat. At 3 am, a caretaker offered her chai. "You're tougher than this storm," he said. Mona smiled, her first real one in hours.

By Saturday, the haze lifted, but the lesson lingered. Passengers weren't wired to expect service; they paid for

it. But rage at ground staff, like Mona, was like cursing a doctor for a heart attack. Airlines weren't gods but complex machines, fallible under nature's fists. Mona's stress wasn't just hers; it was the system's, stretched thin by expectations of perfection. Mona clocked out at dawn, the airport quieter but her mind loud. Storms pass, she thought, stepping into sunlight. So will this. Gate 30 would hum again, and she'd be ready, blazer on, heart steady.

Points to Ponder:

Chaos exposes cracks in any system, and aviation is no exception. Passengers should channel frustration into calm questions to help find solutions, while airlines must prioritize proactive updates and crisis training to ease tensions. Staff like Mona need mental health support to endure high-pressure roles, and regulators should fund resilient tech to minimize disruptions. Empathy, preparation, and shared responsibility can turn tempests into moments of collective strength. Together, we soar through storms!

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

Dhanda Nyoliwala's 'Jeelo Jeelo' Turns Hate into Harmony — A Celebration of Growth, Gratitude, and Moving On

KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Chandigarh



D h a n d a Nyoliwala returns with "Jeelo Jeelo", a track that addresses his critics not with anger, but

with confidence and positivity. Instead of engaging in typical diss battles, he chooses to rise above, showcasing growth and maturity.

The song kicks off with confidence, as Dhanda makes it clear he's past the negativity. While some may have expected a fiery response to critics, he takes a different route — calm, collected, and full of self-assurance. He gives a heartfelt shoutout to a former classmate who's now an SHO. Instead of throwing shade, he chooses to uplift — showing how much he values progress, not just his own, but others too.

With slick production, effortless flow, and sharp lyricism, Dhanda proves that evolution can be just as impactful as confrontation.

Grand Opening of G World School - A New Era in Education Begins



KULBIR SINGH KALSI
Mohali

G World School proudly opened its doors on April 16, marking a significant milestone in the field of education. With an aim to become one of the premier institutes for learning, the grand opening was a vibrant and joyous occasion, filled with energy, enthusiasm, and hope for the future. The campus buzzed with excitement as children participated in a variety of fun-filled activities, exploring their new surroundings and enjoying the thoughtfully designed campus that promises to foster creativity, curiosity, and holistic development.

Chairperson Mrs. Navdeep Kaur addressed the gathering with heartfelt gratitude, thank-

ing the parents for placing their trust in the school and choosing Gworld as the foundation of their child's educational journey. She emphasized that Gworld School is envisioned as a futuristic institution — equipped with modern learning tools and progressive methodologies — yet firmly rooted in the rich cultural heritage and timeless values of Punjab. "We are building a place where innovation meets tradition. Our mission is to shape future leaders who are not only smart and skilled but also ethical and grounded," said Mrs. Navdeep.

With a perfect blend of academic excellence, cultural grounding, and forward-thinking, Gworld School is set to redefine the standards of quality education in the region.