

Across State

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Ajit Pawar presents interim budget



Mumbai

In the interim budget 2024-'25, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister and Finance Minister Ajit Pawar announced schemes aimed at benefitting the poor and women, while refraining from tax hikes that could dampen the sentiment in the election year.

The budget has an outlay of Rs 6,00,522 crore, an estimated revenue deficit of Rs 9,734 crore and fiscal deficit of Rs 99,288 crore. The budget outlay was 9.7 per cent higher than the budget estimate for the year 2023-'24.

Taking a cue from the vote-on-account approved in the Parliament and Prime Minister's categorisation of four key castes for him, Pawar proposed an expenditure of the first four months of the financial year 2024-25 that also focused on youth, women, poor and farmers ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. Among the programmes that saw an increase in outlay was the district annual plan, which saw a 20 per cent increase to Rs 18,165 crore. For job creation, the finance minister announced that 25,000 industrial units will be set up that will help create 50,000 new jobs.

"It is proposed to create 25,000 industrial units under Chief Minister's Employment Generation Program, of which 30 per cent will be women entrepreneurs. This program will

generate around 50,000 new jobs," Pawar announced.

The budget announced a major thrust on Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Mofat Veej Yojana to provide subsidy of upto Rs 78,000 per household, resulting in consumers getting free electricity upto 300 units. "A new scheme named 'Magel tyala Solar Krishipump' will be launched for the farmers, under which 8.50 lakh solar agricultural pumps will be installed," Pawar announced, adding 37,000 anganwadis will be provided with solar sets.

"The state's policy is to achieve sustainable, environment-friendly and inclusive development. We are effectively implementing the developmental policies to increase the size of the state's economy to one trillion dollars as per the report of the Maharashtra Economic Advisory Council, in accordance with the resolution of the honourable Prime Minister to make India a developed nation by 2047," he said in his budget speech.

Terming it an eyewash, the Opposition parties said that the state is walking on the path of bankruptcy. "The state is walking towards bankruptcy and this budget has fooled farmers, unemployed youth and the middle class," said Vijay Wadettiwar, leader of opposition in the legislative assembly.

Under the Maharashtra Irrigation Reform Program, 155 projects over 25 years old and 75 incomplete irrigation projects will be completed in the next three years. An amount of Rs 2,000 crore will be provided to remove the backlog of irrigation in Vidarbha region.

Pawar also announced Chief Minister Women Empowerment Mission, under which at least one lakh women in each district will get benefit directly from various government schemes. "A scheme is proposed to provide pink rickshaws to 5,000 women in 10 major cities," he said.

With focus on poor and backward classes, Pawar announced an increase in Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Anudan Yojana' and 'Shravanbal Rajya Nivrutivetan Yojana' from Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 under the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan. 'Annabhau Sathe Research and Training Institute' (ARTI) will be established for the Matang community.

The share capital of 'Sant Rohidas Charmoudyog & Charmakar Mahamandal', Mahatma Phule Magasvarg Vikas Mahamandal' and 'Sahitya Ratna Lokshahir Annabhau Sathe Vikas Mahamandal' has been increased. A Leather Park at Deonar, Leather Industry Training Centre at Kolhapur and a Centre of Excellence will be established in each revenue division through 'Sant Rohidas Charmoudyog & Charmakar Vikas Mahamandal'. A leather industry training centre will be set up at Govandi through the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC).

In a bid to reach out to youth and sports personalities, Pawar has proposed a slew of initiatives and also increased the prize amounts for the latter. The government has approved the World Bank assisted 'Development of Applied Knowledge and Skills for Human Development' (DAKSH) project, costing Rs 2,307 crore for implementation of vocational education, innovation and skill enhancement schemes as well as strengthening of quality infrastructure and operational systems.

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Maharashtra sees rise in fiscal and revenue deficits

Mumbai

In what could worry Maharashtra's finances, the revenue and fiscal deficits for the year 2023-24 jumped significantly. While the revenue deficit as per revised estimates for 2023-24 rose to Rs 19,531.64 crore over the budget estimate of Rs 16,122.41 crore, the fiscal deficit crossed the Rs one lakh crore mark for the first time at Rs 1.11 lakh crore in the ongoing fiscal. As per budget estimates the fiscal deficit was projected at Rs 95,500 crore.

Maharashtra's Deputy Chief Minister and finance minister Ajit Pawar on Tuesday presented an interim budget for the fiscal 2024-25 which has estimated a revenue deficit of Rs 9,733.76 crore and the fiscal deficit for the year 2024-25 is estimated at Rs 99,288 crore.

The numbers from the ongoing fiscal have sent worrying signals with the increased revenue deficit of Rs 19,531.64 crore for 2023-24 despite the government approving supplementary demands worth Rs one lakh crore. Supplementary demand

is an expenditure in addition to that approved in the budget.

Former Finance minister and opposition NCP (SP) MLA Jayant Patil pointed out that the government needed to handle



its finances carefully as the increased revenue deficit could be a worrying sign. "The government must explain as to what works were completed in the additional Rs one lakh crore which they sought in supplementary demands," Patil said.

"The government has been successful

in keeping the state's fiscal and revenue deficits within the limits set by the Fiscal Responsibility and Financial Management Act," Ajit Pawar said in his budget speech.

While an outlay of Rs.6,00,522 crore was proposed for total expenditure in 2024-25, the revenue receipts were proposed as Rs 4,98,758 crore and the revenue expenditure as Rs 5,08,492 crore. The ever rising administrative expenditure — mainly on salary, pension and interest payment — was a matter of serious concern for the government.

The state government's outgo towards salary was projected at Rs 1,59,034 crore (budget estimate) against Rs 1,42,718 crore (revised estimate for 2023-24) which is 31.89 per cent of revenue receipts.

The budget estimate of pension was Rs 74,011 crore against a revised estimate of Rs 60,446 crore, which is 14.84 per cent of revenue receipts. The budget estimate of interest payments was Rs 56,727 crore against a revised estimate of Rs 48,578 crore, which is 11.37 per cent of revenue

receipts.

The government will now have to shell out more as it has permitted an old pension scheme option for government employees hired through advertisements issued before November 2005.

The government's public debt is estimated at Rs 7,82,991 crore (budget estimate) for 2024-25 against Rs 7,11,278 crore (revised estimate for 2023-24).

The state received Rs 8,618 crore as the Goods and Services Tax compensation during this financial year. Rs 7,057.73 crore was sanctioned in interest free loans for 50 years under the 'Scheme for Special Assistance for Capital Investment'. An outlay of Rs 18,165 crore was proposed under the scheme expenditure for District Annual Plan for 2024-25. This outlay was 20 per cent more than the previous year. An outlay of Rs.1.92 lakh crore was proposed under the scheme expenditure in the Annual Plan 2024-25. It includes an outlay of Rs 15, 893 crore for Scheduled Castes Sub Plan and Rs 15,360 crore for Tribal Development Sub Plan.

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Maharashtra: Corporation to aid unorganised workers, OBC and enhancing aide minority students announced

Mumbai

With a focus on social engineering the Maharashtra government in the budget announced creating over a dozen memorials, developing monuments and pilgrimage places as well as a provision of over Rs 500 crore to develop and set up an economic development corporation for the Bara Balutedar (Other Backward Class-OBCs identified by their profession). It also announced setting up an organisation for the welfare of the state's unorganised workers.

The Bara Balutedar (OBCs identified by their profession) was a hereditary system of twelve trades or professions in villages of Maharashtra.

The government also announced the formation of Annabhau Sathe Research and Training Institute (ARTI) for the Matang community (Schedule caste) on the lines of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Research and



Training Institute (BARTI). An outlay of Rs 18,816 crore has been proposed as scheme expenditure for the Social Justice and Special Assistance Department for 2024-25.

"Unorganised Workers Welfare Corporation has been established to provide various welfare schemes for auto rickshaw, taxi, passenger and commercial vehicle drivers, cleaners,

cabmen, Vidi workers, porters, domestic women workers, fishermen, door-to-door newspaper distributors as well as workers in animal husbandry, power looms, handlooms, health sectors etc," Finance Minister Ajit Pawar announced while presenting the budget.

"Another corporation, Sant Gadge Baba Bara Balutedar Economic Backward Development

Corporation, will be established for the overall development of the Bara Balutedar community," Pawar added.

Thirty two Shivakalin forts will be renovated and conserved to promote tourism in the Konkan region.

To bring minority students into mainstream education, the government has decided to increase the subsidy of the Dr. Zakir Hussain Madrasa Modernization Scheme from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 10 lakh.

To implement the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam educational loan and micro credit scheme, the government approved increasing a guarantee amount to Maulana Azad Economic Development Corporation from Rs 30 crore to Rs 500 crore.

The government made an outlay of Rs 5,180 crore as proposed scheme expenditure for the Other Backward Class Bahun Welfare

Department and the Minority Development Department for the year 2024-25.

Special Development Authorities will be set up for the development of pilgrimage sites and local areas of Aundha Nagnath — one among the country's 12 Jyotirlingas that is located in Hingoli district, Shri Kshetra Mahurgad in Nanded district and Ekvira Devi Temple in Pune district.

Rs 37.28 crore has been approved for the development of Malojiraje Bhosle's Gadhi and Hazrat Chand Shah Valibaba Dargah premises in Indapur city.

The government also announced increasing the subsidy given to Marathi Mandals promoting Marathi language outside Maharashtra. "Adequate funds will be made available for the conservation of buildings, structures and monuments of Marathi Mandals," Pawar said.

Maharashtra interim budget lacks planning, says Opp; CM says it is in line with PM's concept of developed India

Mumbai

As the Maharashtra government presented the interim budget for fiscal 2024-'25 with an estimated revenue deficit of Rs 9,734 crore and fiscal deficit of Rs 99,288 crore, the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) comprising Shiv Sena UBT, Sharad Pawar-led NCP and Congress criticised it as one that "lacked planning" and was done to please people, keeping the elections in mind.

Leader of Opposition in the state legislative council, Ambadas Danve, said that no relief has been provided to the common people, farmers and workers.

"Around 75 per cent of the previous budget announcements have been again read out this time. People of the state did not get a single drop of Panchamrita (last year's budget) announced by the government. Only announcements have been made and the budget is not in the interest of farmers and workers," Danve said.

Criticising the budget, state Congress president Nana Patole said, "The Mahayuti government has failed on all fronts and to cover up this failure and corruption, announcements have been made to please every section of the society, keeping the elections in sight. Due

to inflation, unemployment and communal strife, people are deeply dissatisfied with this triple engine government. In the Lok Sabha elections, people are going to 'reckon' this grand alliance."

Patole said that the government made big announcements about how much rupees have been allocated to which department, but looking at the experience so far, none of these will benefit the common people.

"Farmers are in great trouble today but the government is not helping them. Even the aid announced in the past has not yet been received. The youth of the state are on the streets, jobs are not being provided. Scams are happening in competitive exams but the government has not paid attention to the demands of the youth. The finance minister made some announcements about women empowerment but everyone knows how safe women are in the state. Thousands of women and girls are missing, crime against women is on the rise....," Patole said.

The government tables the supplementary demands in every session but does not tell what happens to those demands in future.

Memorials to be developed:

1. Rs.66.11 crore approved to develop Shri Sant Jagnade Maharaj memorial at Sudumbare, Taluka Maval, Pune district Pune.
2. Memorial to Sane Guruji at his birth place in Jalgaon district
3. Rs 102.48 crore approved as first phase to develop precinct of Shri Shivram Hari Rajguru's birthplace in Rajgurunagar.
4. Land to be made available at the base of Pratapgad fort to create a memorial for Jiva Mahala — Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's colleague.
5. Lahuji Vastad Salve memorial at Sangamwadi, Pune.
6. Rs.29.73 crore approved to develop memorial for 'Rajmata Saibai' at the base of Rajgad fort.
7. Rs.37.28 crore approved to develop gadhi to Malojiraje Bhosle.
8. Sant Gorobakaka Maharaj memorial at Dharashiv district.
9. Mahatma Phule Wada and Kranti Jyoti Savitribai Phule memorials in Pune.
10. Rs 270 crore to develop Swarajrakshak Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj monument.
11. Rs 20 crore proposed to organise various programmes on the occasion of the birth tricentenary of Ahilya Devi Holkar. An outlay of Rs 53 crore was proposed for the preservation and conservation scheme of 'Punyashlok Ahilya Devi Holkar' temples and step wells.
12. Rs 81.86 crore for the development of Kshetra Saptashrunji Gad in Kalwan taluka

Development on fast track: PM Modi unveils Rs 41K crore rail, road projects

New Delhi

In a major step towards providing world-class amenities at railway stations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday laid the foundation stone for redevelopment of 553 stations under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

Exuding confidence of retaining power for the third term, PM Modi said the mega drive launched today was a symbol of the new work culture in the country. "The scale and speed with which new projects have begun have left everyone baffled. We dream big and work tirelessly to realise these," the PM said.

The 553 railway stations, spread across 27 states and union territories, will be upgraded at a cost of over Rs 19,000 crore. The stations are designed to act as city centres having food courts, children's play areas and other mall-like facilities.

The PM also laid the foundation stone and inaugurated 1,500 road overbridges and underpasses spread across 24 states and union territories. The total cost of these projects is around Rs 21,520 crore. PM Modi, who kicked off these projects virtually, also inaugurated Gomti Nagar station in Uttar Pradesh, which was upgraded at a cost of



Rs 385 crore. This centrally air-conditioned station has modern amenities like an air concourse, food courts and a two-level parking lot.

"Today, the foundation stones for more than 2,000 railway projects have been laid. The third term of this government is going to start in June," the PM asserted.

People had seen a new India being built in the last 10 years, he said, underlining the transformation of the Railways, including the launch of Vande Bharat trains. He said facilities

that used to appear a distant dream to Indians had now become a reality.

In a swipe at previous governments, PM Modi said the government headed by him put a brake on the loot of public money. Stating that the Railway Budget increased from Rs 45,000 crore 10 years ago to Rs 2.5 lakh crore today, the PM said the increase in the allocation to the Railways would not have an impact on the ground if revenue leaks and scams were not plugged.

Marriage Proposal "Not Reaching Desired End" Not Cheating: Supreme Court

New Delhi

The Supreme Court recently dismissed a cheating case against a man who did not go through with a wedding after talks with the woman's family.

"There can be multiple reasons for initiating a marriage proposal and then the proposal not reaching the desired end," Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Prasanna B Varale said while cancelling a case against Raju Krishna Shedbalkar.

Raju Krishna Shedbalkar had approached the Supreme Court against a 2021 Karnataka High Court order that held him guilty of cheating under Section 417, which entails a jail term of up to one year or fine, or both.

"Time and again, this court has reiterated that in order to make out an offence under cheating the intention to cheat or deceive should be right from the beginning. By no stretch of imagination, this is even reflected from the complaint made by the informant," the Supreme Court said.

A case was registered against Raju Krishna Shedbalkar, his brothers,

sister and mother based on a complaint filed by a woman who alleged that he had cheated her by not marrying her.

The woman alleged that her family had found Mr Shedbalkar suitable for her, and both had started talking to each other.

She said her father had also paid ₹ 75,000 to book a wedding venue, but she learnt that Mr Shedbalkar had married someone else.

The Karnataka High Court had dismissed the case against all the accused, except Mr Shedbalkar. The High Court noted since he had "induced the woman's father to book a marriage hall, there is prima facie material which makes out a case".

Overturning that decision, the Supreme Court said there was no evidence to prove that the man had any intention to cheat the woman. "It is possible theoretically yet in order to prove an offence of cheating in such cases prosecution must have reliable and trustworthy evidence in order to first prosecute such a case. There is no such evidence before the prosecution and therefore no offence under Section 417 is also made out," the judges said.

Haven't Resigned: Himachal Chief Minister Dismisses Rumours Amid Congress Crisis

New Delhi

The Congress faces a crisis in Himachal Pradesh after yesterday's shock Rajya Sabha election loss. Six MLAs cross-voted, and three independents who offered their support, sided with the BJP, leaving doubts over the majority status of its government.

On Wednesday afternoon, under-fire Chief Minister Sukhvinder Sukhu rubbished talk of his resignation. "Neither (has) anyone asked for my resignation nor have I presented my resignation to anyone. We will prove our majority. We will win..." he said, accusing the BJP of "spreading rumours" to break the party before the budget is tabled.

"They want to create a break in the party. They want Congress

MLAs to leave and join them. But Congress is united..." he declared, claiming also that some of his lawmakers who had cross-voted had already reached out, and were trying to return to the fold.

The defiant note comes amid buzz the BJP will force the Congress into a floor test to prove its majority in the 68-member House, in which the majority mark is set at 35.

The Congress had 40 MLAs before the cross-voting. However, if it has lost the six cross-voters, its count slips to 34 - one seat below majority. The BJP had 25 but could now have as many as 34 too, including the independents, making for a dramatic hung House.

Alarmed at the potential loss of another state government, the Congress has rushed three



'observers' - Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, ex-Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda, and state-in-charge Rajeev Shukla - to defuse the situation.

Senior leader Jairam Ramesh called the cross-voting "unfortunate"; the six who did so have been served disqualification

notices. The priority, though, is to "save the Congress government", he said, claiming another chapter in 'Operation Lotus' - the term used by the opposition when accusing the BJP of conspiring to oust elected governments.

However, there seemed to be subtext in Mr Ramesh's message to the media that suggested Chief Minister Sukhu might be removed if he doesn't quit. "We will have to take some difficult decisions and we will not stop short of that," Jairam Ramesh said.

Meanwhile, the BJP's Jairam Thakur - who has been leading his party's charge since the Rajya Sabha poll reversal - demanded Mr Sukhu resign "if he has even a little bit of morality left". The Congress "does not have a majority", he said. He also claimed "there can

be many others" after saying nine 'opposition' MLAs "are with us".

The numbers game in Himachal Pradesh was further muddled this morning after the Assembly Speaker expelled 15 BJP MLAs for sloganeering and alleged misconduct. This means the effective strength of the House falls to 53 and the effective majority to 27 - which the Congress can clear. But if the 15 were only suspended, the Congress would then fail, as the House strength remains 68.

If the Congress does lose Himachal, it will underline the size of the challenge facing it and the INDIA bloc - formed last year to defeat Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his BJP, and led by the party - before a general election due in just a few weeks.

Union ministers Nirmala Sitharaman, Jaishankar to contest Lok Sabha polls, says Pralhad Joshi



Hubballi (Karnataka)

Union Minister Pralhad Joshi has said Union Ministers Nirmala Sitharaman and S Jaishankar will contest the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

However, it has not been decided yet as to where they will contest from, he added.

“It is appearing in the media. More or less it is final that they (Nirmala Sitharaman and Jaishankar) will contest the Lok Sabha elections. It has not been decided yet from where

they will fight, whether it is in Karnataka or some other state,” Joshi, who holds the Coal and Mines portfolio, told reporters here on Monday.

To a question whether it will be Bengaluru, Joshi said, “How can I answer when nothing has been finalised?”

Union Finance Minister Sitharaman and External Affairs Minister Jaishankar are Rajya Sabha members from Karnataka and Gujarat respectively.

Food subsidy: India to press WTO for permanent solution

New Delhi

Meeting against the backdrop of the farmers’ agitation, India will insist at the WTO Ministerial, which opened in Abu Dhabi on Monday, that the “peace clause” or concessions on farm subsidies must be made permanent from its present interim status.

India has already won an endorsement from a meeting of 47 countries under the G-33 banner on Sunday. In a statement, the G-33 expressed serious concern over the lack of progress in agriculture trade negotiations, especially on the public stock holding (PSH) programme under which governments procure foodgrains from farmers at MSP and distribute it to the poor or under PDS. This protects both the producers and the consumers.

Under PSH, the food subsidy bill should not be more than 10 per cent of the value of production with the price prevailing between 1986 and 1988. India wants to amend the Agreement of Agriculture (AoA) to allow PSH programmes to cost more than the WTO limits.



This group of 47 least-developed countries, including India, also called on the WTO Ministerial to safeguard the right of developing countries to use the Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) to guard against sudden surges in imports or a crash in prices.

Besides the farmers’ agitation where one of the demands is for India’s withdrawal from WTO if the peace clause is sought to be terminated, the WTO Ministerial is taking place under the most severe global food price crises since the one in 2007-08. Besides, the International Grain Council has said wheat stocks in 2023-24 are at the lowest in

a decade.

If farm subsidy or the peace clause is made permanent, countries will be able to conceive food security schemes of any amount. A decade back, efforts quarterbacked by India, ensured that the WTO General Council (GC) extended the peace clause in perpetuity, pending a permanent solution. The 10th Nairobi Ministerial approved the GC decision to extend the interim peace clause. But neither the Nairobi Ministerial nor the two that followed could not arrive at a decision because of opposition from the US and the Cairns Group comprising net foodgrain exporters.

Come forward with new vision, fulfil world’s needs: PM Modi to textile industry

New Delhi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday inaugurated Bharat Tex 2024, a global textile event being held at Bharat Mandapam and Yasho Bhoomi in New Delhi.

With over 3,000 exhibitors from nearly 100 countries and 40,000 visitors, the event serves as a significant platform connecting tradition with technology and sustainability with scale.

Addressing the gathering, the Prime Minister emphasised the multi-dimensional nature of Bharat Tex, connecting India’s rich textile history with modern talent and technology. He hailed the event as a manifestation of ‘Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat’, showcasing diverse textile traditions from across the country.

Modi urged the industry to come forward with a new vision, diversify markets, and fulfil the world’s needs, emphasising the government’s role as a catalyst for realising these dreams.

The Prime Minister acknowledged the critical role of stakeholders in the textile value chain, especially weavers at

the ground level, in the ‘Viksit Bharat’ initiative. He outlined the four pillars of ‘Viksit Bharat’—poor, youth, farmers and women—and stressed the event’s growing significance in this context.

In addressing employment and rural participation, the Prime Minister noted that seven out of 10 apparel makers are women, and steps taken in the last decade have strengthened khadi’s role in development and job creation.

Highlighting the government’s efforts, the Prime Minister detailed the focus on tradition, technology, talent and training in the textiles sector. He introduced the concept of Five Fs—Farm to Fiber, Fiber to Factory, Factory to Fashion, Fashion to Foreign—aimed at streamlining the entire value chain.

He discussed initiatives to support the MSME sector, including a revised definition to ensure continued benefits post-growth. He also touched upon direct sales, exhibitions and online portals bridging the gap between artisans and the market.



'Action will be taken': Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav as 5 party MLAs meet CM Yogi after casting Rajya Sabha vote

Lucknow

Five Samajwadi Party MLAs met Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after casting their vote for the Rajya Sabha election, there was speculation of them having cross-voted in favour of the BJP.

In response to this development, Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav said that disciplinary action would be taken against the MLAs if they had cross voted.

Samajwadi Party MLAs: Abhay Singh, Rakesh Singh, Rakesh Pandey, Vinod Chaturvedi, and Manoj Pandey met CM Yogi Adityanath in the Assembly Secretariat after they cast their votes.

"Not everybody has the guts to stand against the government. Pressure is put on everybody, is there anyone who doesn't know that BJP would go to any extent to win. BJP was dishonest during the Chandigarh elections also... When it comes to UP, BJP did everything to get votes and those who left, might not have had the guts to stand against the govt. Action will be taken because our party leaders want such people to be kept away from the party..." said Samajwadi Party

chief Akhilesh Yadav.

Meanwhile, Apna Dal (K) leader Pallavi Patel claimed that she had cast her vote for Samajwadi Party candidate Ram Lal Suman in the name of the PDA.

Regarding the reported spat with the SP chief over the phone, Pallavi Patel said, "Now is not the time to talk about this, now we should talk about PDA (Backward, Dalit and Minority)." Reportedly, there was a heated argument over the phone between Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav and Apna Dal (K) Chief Pallavi Patel regarding Rajya Sabha voting on Tuesday.

Earlier, in a blow to the Samajwadi Party, MLA and leader Manoj Kumar Pandey resigned from the post of Samajwadi Party Chief Whip.

Manoj Pandey met Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath in his chamber in the Legislative Assembly. Transport Minister Daya Shankar Singh was also present during the meeting.

"I have requested the party chief to accept my resignation from the post of Chief Whip," said SP MLA Manoj Kumar Pandey when he was going to meet Uttar Pradesh Transport



Minister Dayashankar Singh.

After he met with the SP MLA, the UP Transport Minister Dayashankar Singh said that the SP MLA was a supporter of Sanatan Dharma.

"Many public representatives are joining the BJP due to being influenced by PM Modi's policies and the development that is happening in the country. Manoj Pandey ji has always been a supporter of Sanatan Dharma, he has been giving equal statements on this issue inside and outside the House. That's why he was unhappy there and when the proposal came for the darshan of Ram ji, he wanted everyone to go for darshan," Dayashankar Singh said Earlier, another Samajwadi Party MLA Rakesh Pratap Singh indicated he would vote against the party saying that he is not

angry with his party but will listen to the voice of his inner soul before casting his vote.

"I'm not angry with anyone, I will vote according to the voice of inner soul..." said Samajwadi Party MLA Rakesh Pratap Singh.

In Uttar Pradesh, the BJP has put up eight Rajya Sabha candidates and the Samajwadi Party 3 for the 10 seats at stake. As per the numbers in the Legislative Assembly, the BJP is guaranteed to win 7 seats while the SP should win 3 seats. However, there are reports that several MLAs could cross-vote.

On Monday, some legislators of the SP went missing from a dinner hosted by SP Chief Akhilesh Yadav. Reports suggest that at least 8 MLAs were missing from the dinner.

The BJP, however, was confident in getting the numbers to win all the eight seats where they have put up candidates.

UP Deputy CM Brajesh Pathak said, "MLAs support and blessings are with BJP's candidates. The results will be in favour of BJP...all candidates of BJP will win" The seven candidates fielded by the BJP are former Union Minister RPN Singh, former MP Chaudhary

Tejveer Singh, general secretary of the party's Uttar Pradesh unit Amarpal Maurya, former state minister Sangeeta Balwant (Bind), party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi, former MLA Sadhna Singh and former Agra mayor Naveen Jain.

But with the BJP fielding Sanjay Seth as its eighth candidate, a keen contest is on the cards in one of the seats.

The SP has fielded actor MP Jaya Bachchan, retired IAS officer Alok Ranjan, and Ramji Lal Suman.

To get elected to the Rajya Sabha from UP, a candidate needs nearly 37 first preference votes. Voting for the 10 Rajya Sabha seats will be held on Tuesday and the results will be announced the same day.

The term for Rajya Sabha MPs is six years, and elections are held after every two years for 33 per cent of the seats. Currently, the Rajya Sabha has a strength of 245 members.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls in the country, the outcome of the polls to the Rajya Sabha is likely to have an impact in the politically crucial state.

Centre extends ban on J&K's Jamaat-e-Islami by 5 years



New Delhi

The government has declared the Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu Kashmir as an unlawful association for a further period of five years under Section 3(1) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967.

Home Minister Amit Shah in a post on X wrote, "Pursuing

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji's policy of zero tolerance against terrorism and separatism, the government has extended the ban on Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu Kashmir for five years. The organisation is found continuing its activities against the security, integrity and sovereignty of the nation."

"The outfit was first declared an 'Unlawful Association' on February 28, 2019. Anyone threatening the security of the nation will face ruthless measures," he added. The last ban on the Jamaat-e-Islami Jammu Kashmir was imposed on February 28, 2019.

Rahul Gandhi should reconsider contesting from Wayanad: Brinda Karat

New Delhi

Senior CPM leader and former Rajya Sabha MP Brinda Karat on Tuesday said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi should reconsider contesting from Wayanad and should find an alternative seat against the BJP.

"CPI has declared its candidate for the seat in Wayanad, Comrade Annie Raja, who has played a key role in 'Mahila andolan'. Now she will be the candidate from the side of the whole Left Democratic Front. Rahul Gandhi and Congress need to think, they say that their fight is against BJP," Karat said.

She asked the Congress, "In Kerala, if you come and fight



against Left, what message are you giving? So they need to think about their seat once again."

The LDF is exerting pressure on Rahul to vacate Wayanad for CPI.

Rajya Sabha polls witness cross-voting: Big upset for Congress in Himachal Pradesh, wins 3 seats in Karnataka; BJP bags one extra in UP

Bengaluru/

The Congress on Tuesday suffered a major upset in Himachal Pradesh at the hands of the BJP in the Rajya Sabha elections which were marred by cross-voting in all the three states though it won three seats in Karnataka while the saffron party pocketed an extra seat in Uttar Pradesh.

Polling was held for 10 seats in Uttar Pradesh, four in Karnataka and one seat in Himachal Pradesh. On February 20, 41 candidates including BJP chief JP Nadda, former Congress president Sonia Gandhi and Union ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw and L Murugan were elected unopposed to the Upper House.

Himachal Pradesh saw cross-voting that led to the victory of BJP candidate Harsh Mahajan over Congress's Abhishek Manu Singhvi. Mahajan was declared winner by draw of lots after both the candidates were tied, securing 34 votes each.

The result made it clear that six Congress MLAs and the three Independents voted in favour of

the BJP. At present, the Congress has 40 MLAs, BJP 25 while three are independents in the 68-member Himachal Pradesh assembly.

Singhvi said the BJP's move to field a candidate against a party



which has 40 members compared to its 25 was a clear message that the saffron party wants to win by hook or by crook and more by crook.

There was high drama in Uttar Pradesh where amid concerns over cross-voting, SP chief whip Manoj Pandey quit while polling was under way. As many as eight SP MLAs also did not attend a meeting called by Akhilesh Yadav on Monday.

SP candidate and retired IAS

officer Alok Ranjan lost to BJP's Sanjay Seth, an industrialist.

The other seven BJP candidates who won are former Union minister RPN Singh, former MP Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, general secretary of the party's Uttar Pradesh unit Amarpal Maurya, former state minister Sangeeta Balwant (Bind), party spokesperson Sudhanshu Trivedi, former MLA Sadhna Singh, and former Agra mayor Naveen Jain. SP's actor-MP Jaya Bachchan won another term while Dalit leader Ramji Lal Suman bagged the second seat for the party.

In Karnataka, five candidates were in the fray for the four seats, including D Kupendra Reddy JD(S). Those elected are Ajay Maken, GC Chandrasekhar and Syed Naseer Hussain (all Congress) and Narayansa K Bhandage of the BJP.

The election was marred by cross-voting as BJP MLA S T Somashekar voted for Maken, while another party legislator A Shivaram Hebbar abstained from voting.

ED can summon anyone, they must respond: SC

New Delhi

Stating that persons summoned under PMLA were required to respond to repeated notices issued by the Enforcement Directorate, the Supreme Court on Tuesday directed five district collectors of Tamil Nadu to appear before the probe agency in connection with a money laundering probe pertaining to alleged illegal sand mining.

Terming the plea of Tamil Nadu and its officials as "strange, unusual and thoroughly misconceived,

a Bench led by Justice Bela M Trivedi stayed the Madras High Court order granting relief to the district collectors, saying it might lead to stalling the ED probe into the money laundering aspect in connection with the FIRs. "The ED can summon any person it seems necessary to produce evidence or give attendance during proceedings under the Act ... The ones issued summons are required to respect and respond," the Bench noted.

Being test & fighter pilot selection criteria for Gaganyaan mission

New Delhi

As part of the process to select astronauts for the first Indian human mission into space, the Indian Air Force (IAF) had set parameters that included the need to be a qualified test and fighter pilot besides a series of other requirements.

All four IAF pilots selected for the space mission are qualified test and fighter jets

Aircraft developed by India has been flown during test flights. Also, test pilots are tasked with evaluating all upgrades like the engines, avionics and master flight computers on board existing fleets.

Being a test pilot is not an automatic elevation in the IAF. A pilot, after completing certain number of flying hours, takes an exam, undergoes a viva voce and is judged on his flying skills. The pilot then undergoes a six-month specialised training before being inducted as test pilot.

For space missions, fighter jet pilots are given preference as they have flown speeds

close to 2 Mach and their bodies have been evaluated against 'G-force' – the gravitational pull experienced by pilots when accelerating quickly in mid-flight.

On questions being raised over there being no woman pilot in the mission, IAF officials said though women were there in the fighter jet stream, none had so far met the criteria to take the test pilot exam, which is the minimum requirement. They could have been considered had there been women test pilots, they added.



pilots. They have undergone pre-space training for months. All four pilots have flown fighter jets of Russian parentage during their service in the IAF.

The previous IAF foray in space on board Soviet Soyuz T-11 in 1984 had selected two pilots — Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma and Air Commodore Ravish Malhotra — both test pilots and both fighter pilots.

Sources explain that being a test pilot is needed as all experimental flights are first flown by test pilots who are trained to evaluate new technologies. The Light Combat

Justice AM Khanwilkar is Lokpal chairperson

New Delhi

Close to two years after Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose retired as the chairperson of the anti-corruption ombudsman, Lokpal, former Supreme Court judge AM Khanwilkar was on Tuesday appointed as his successor. After Justice Ghose completed his term on May 27, 2022, Justice Pradip Kumar Mohanty, a judicial member of the Lokpal, has been functioning as its acting chairperson.

President Droupadi Murmu was pleased to appoint Justice Ajay Manikrao Khanwilkar as the chairperson of the Lokpal, the Rashtrapati Bhavan announced. Justice Khanwilkar retired from the Supreme Court in July 2022.

Former Himachal Pradesh High Court Chief Justice Lingappa Narayana Swamy, former Allahabad High Court Chief Justice Sanjay Yadav and former Karnataka High Court



Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi have been appointed as judicial members of the Lokpal, a Rashtrapati Bhavan communiqué stated. Justice Awasthi is currently the Chairman of the Law Commission of India.

Former Chief Election Commissioner Sushil Chandra, former Gujarat Chief Secretary Pankaj Kumar, and Madhya Pradesh Cadre IAS and former

Women and Child Development Secretary Ajay Tirkey will be non-judicial members. The appointments will take effect from the dates they assume charge of their respective office. The chairperson and members of the Lokpal are appointed by the President after obtaining the recommendations of a Selection Committee with the Prime Minister as its Chairperson. Apart from that, the Lokpal can have eight members — four each judicial and non-judicial.

Enacted in 2013, the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act received Presidential assent on January 1, 2014, and came into force on January 16, 2014. However, it had taken more than five years to appoint Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose — a retired judge of the Supreme Court — as the first Chairperson of Lokpal in March 2019.

PM Modi inaugurates projects, lays foundation stone for new ISRO launch complex in Tamil Nadu



Thoothukudi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday inaugurated projects and laid the foundation stones for new initiatives, totally worth over Rs 17,000 crore and castigated the UPA regime for not 'bothering' about Tamil Nadu's progress.

Laying the foundation stones and inaugurating projects, Modi said the state is writing a "new chapter of progress", and due to the Centre's efforts, modern connectivity in Tamil Nadu is "on a new high".

In a veiled reference to the ruling DMK, he alleged that though newspapers and TV channels wanted to highlight the Centre's such efforts "the regime here won't allow them to do so".

"But we won't desist from development work," Modi asserted.

Flagging off India's first indigenous green hydrogen waterway vessel in Tamil Nadu's Thoothukudi, he said increasing connectivity due to the consistent efforts of the Central government has enhanced 'ease of living' in Tamil Nadu. The new projects are an important part of the roadmap for a developed India.

"Whatever I am saying belongs neither to any political

ideology nor to my own ideology, it only belongs to development."

Apparently targeting the DMK-Congress and pointing to a slew of development projects launched, he said: "I need to tell a truth to people of Tamil Nadu and the rest of the nation. Truth is bitter but it needs to be told...all these projects I have brought, they were demands of locals for decades." In an indirect reference to the DMK, he said the Tamil Nadu's ruling party shared power at the Centre during the UPA regime.

However, they were not "bothered about your progress".

All development initiatives had been delivered by the "sevak", he said in a reference to himself.

The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone for a new launch complex of ISRO at Kulasekarapattinam near here, which is worth about Rs 986 crore and the facility is set to accommodate 24 launches per year.

The new complex includes 35 facilities, and features mobile launch structure (MLS) with checkout computers marking a significant stride in enhancing space exploration capabilities.

PM Modi reveals names of Gaganyaan astronauts



New Delhi

Making a historic announcement on Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi revealed the names of four astronauts who are currently undergoing training for India's first-ever human space flight mission — Gaganyaan.

Addressing a gathering at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) at Thiruvananthapuram, the PM introduced to the nation the astronauts: Group Captains Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Angad Pratap, Ajit Krishnan, and Wing Commander Shubhanshu Shukla. They are all IAF fighter pilots.

Bestowing them with the prestigious 'astronaut wings,' Modi hailed the astronauts as "four forces" representing the aspirations of India's 140 crore population.

He emphasised the significance of the mission, noting that after four decades, an Indian was poised to venture into space. "This time around, the countdown, the timing, and

even the rocket would be ours," he declared. Lauding the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), the PM said the space agency was playing a key role in sowing the seeds of scientific temperament among young generations.

The PM said because of the ISRO's success in carrying out difficult missions, many children now wanted to become scientists when they grow up. "The countdown of the rocket inspires lakhs of children in India, and those making paper planes today dream of becoming scientists," Modi said.

India's space economy will grow five-fold and touch US \$44 billion in next 10 years, said Modi, adding that India was becoming a global commercial hub for space sector.

Comparing India's achievements in the space sector in the past 10 years with the decade before 2014, the PM said 400 satellites were launched by ISRO since 2014 compared to

only 33 in the previous decade.

The number of space startups shot up to more than 200 from two or three in the decade before 2014, Modi said, underscoring how the space sector had grown in the country since he took over as the PM.

At the VSSC, the PM virtually inaugurated the PSLV Integration Facility at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, and Semi Cryogenics Integrated Engine and Stage Test Facility at ISRO Propulsion Complex at Mahendragiri. He also inaugurated the Trisonic Wind Tunnel at VSSC. The estimated total cost of the projects is Rs 1,800 crore.

The PSLV integration facility will help in boosting the frequency of PSLV launches from six to 15 per year. This facility can also cater to the launches of SSLV and other small launch vehicles designed by private space companies.

Group Capt Prasanth b Nair

Born in Thiruvazhiyad, Kerala, on August 26, 1976. Alumnus of NDA and United States Staff College
Commissioned on December 19, 1998, in the fighter stream
Recipient of 'sword of honour' at Air Force Academy
Category-A flying instructor and a test pilot with over 3,000 hours of flying experience
Has flown Sukhoi-30 MKI, MiG-21, MiG-29, Hawk, Dornier, An-32. Commanded a Sukhoi-30 MKI squadron

Group Capt Ajit Krishnan

Belonging to Chennai, Tamil

Nadu, he's an alumnus of NDA and DSSC, Wellington; a recipient of President's Gold Medal and 'sword of honour' at Air Force Academy
Commissioned on June 21, 2003, in the fighter stream
Flying Instructor and a test pilot with over 2,900 hours of flying experience
Has flown Sukhoi-30 MKI, MiG-21, Mig-29, Jaguar, Dornier, An-32
Group Capt Angad Pratap

Native of Prayagraj, UP

Alumnus of NDA and commissioned on December 18, 2004, in the fighter stream

Flying instructor and a test pilot with over 2,000 hours of flying experience

Has flown a variety of planes — Sukhoi-30 MKI, MiG-21, MiG-29, Jaguar, Hawk, Dornier, An-32

Wg Cdr Shubhanshu Shukla

Born in Lucknow, UP, on October 10, 1985, he's an alumnus of NDA; commissioned on June 17, 2006, in the fighter stream
'Fighter combat leader' and a test pilot with approximately 2,000 hours of flying experience
Has flown Sukhoi-30 MKI, MiG-21, MiG-29, Jaguar, Hawk, Dornier, An-32

Israel ready to pause war if hostage deal reached: Joe Biden

Jerusalem

Israel would be willing to pause its war on Hamas in Gaza during the upcoming Muslim fasting month of Ramadan if a deal is reached to release some of the hostages held by militants, US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

There was no immediate Israeli reaction to Biden's comments on an emerging framework deal, brokered by the US, Egypt and Qatar, under which Hamas would free some of the dozens of hostages it holds in exchange for the release of Palestinian prisoners and a six-week halt in fighting.

During the temporary pause, negotiations would continue over the release of the remaining hostages and additional Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. A Hamas official played down any sense of progress, saying the group wouldn't soften its demands.

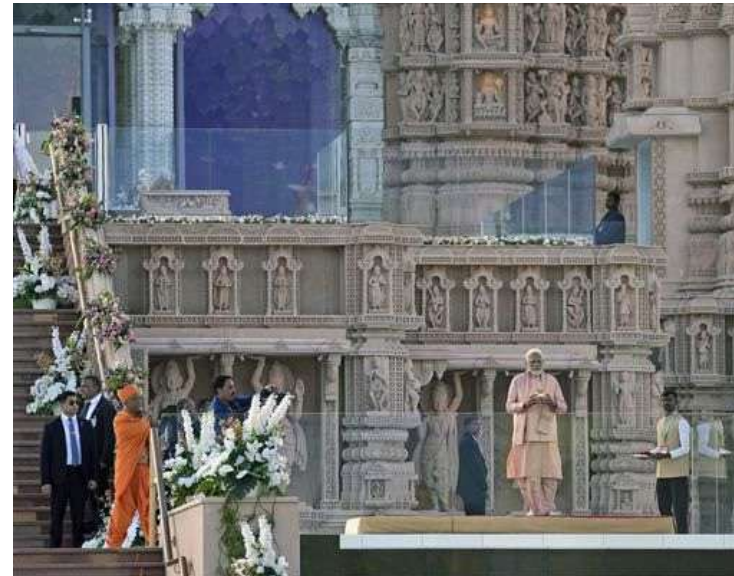


The start of Ramadan, which falls around March 10, is seen as an unofficial deadline for a ceasefire deal. The month is a time of heightened religious observance and dawn-to-dusk fasting for hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world. Israeli-Palestinian tensions have flared in the past during the holy month. Biden said on Monday that he hoped a ceasefire deal

could take effect by next week.

"Ramadan's coming up and there has been an agreement by the Israelis that they would not engage in activities during Ramadan as well, in order to give us time to get all hostages out," Biden said. At the same time, Biden did not call for an end to the war, which was triggered by the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7.

Abu Dhabi's first temple to open for public on March 1



Abu Dhabi

The first Hindu stone temple in Abu Dhabi, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier this month, will be opened to the public from March 1, according to the temple authorities.

The temple has been built by the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan

Sanstha Swaminarayan Sanstha on a 27-acre site in Abu Mureikhah, near Al Rahba off the Dubai-Abu Dhabi Sheikh Zayed Highway, at a cost of around Rs 700 crore. The grand temple was inaugurated by PM Modi on February 14 during a ceremony attended by over 5,000 invitees.

Angry farmers lay siege to EU headquarters



Brussels

Concrete barriers and barbed wire surrounded the European Union's headquarters on Monday as farmers, angry at red tape and competition from cheap imports, drove their tractors into Brussels in a fresh show of force as the bloc's agriculture ministers met.

The police carrying riot gear patrolled near barricades set up at the main entry points to the European Council building,

where the 27-nation bloc's agriculture ministers were gathering. Scores of tractors adorned with flags and banners were ranked in lines, snarling city traffic. Some lamented what they see as the slow death of working the land. "Agriculture: As a child you dream of it, as an adult you die of it," said one. At the start of the month, a similar demonstration turned violent near a summit of EU leaders.

Rishi Sunak: Parliament must not bend to intimidation



London

British PM Rishi Sunak said on Sunday that a decision by the House of Commons speaker to break with procedure due to threats facing some lawmakers over their views on the Gaza conflict sent a dangerous signal that

intimidation works.

Parliament descended into chaos on Wednesday night as tensions flared over a vote on whether to call for a ceasefire in Gaza and the exact language to use. The speaker of the lower house, Lindsay Hoyle, said he broke with

usual procedure for the vote because of what he described as "absolutely frightening" threats against lawmakers.

"In parliament this week, a dangerous signal was sent that intimidation works," Sunak said in a post on X. "It is toxic for our society and our politics and is an affront to the liberties and values we hold dear here in Britain. Our democracy cannot and must not bend to the threat of violence and intimidation or fall into polarised camps who hate each other."

On Saturday, Sunak's Conservatives suspended one of their lawmakers Lee Anderson after he refused to apologise for saying the London mayor was under the control of Islamists.

Close ties with Russia

DURING his recent visit to Germany, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar again justified India's close ties with Russia. Much to the consternation of the West, New Delhi has refused to scale down its engagement with Moscow. Jaishankar observed that in the history of post-Independence India, Russia/USSR had never hurt its interests. The ties among various powers have seen ups and downs over the decades, but India's relationship with Russia has remained stable and friendly.

Two factors — military hardware and energy supplies — are cited to explain India's reluctance to criticise Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. These certainly have had a critical bearing on the country's perspective, even as the track record of enduring bilateral ties is often disregarded. For 67 years, Russia/USSR has backed India with its veto

in the UN Security Council to prevent a discussion on the 'India-Pakistan question' regarding Kashmir. The



dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971 happened partly due to India's Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union and Moscow's threat to attack China if it tried to

intervene.

Two years of the Ukraine war have seen India lending Russia diplomatic support. The New Delhi Declaration, framed during the India-hosted G20 Summit, was one such example. The West was satisfied that its stand was incorporated, while Russia was happy at not being named in the text. This ability to balance the aspirations of both sides makes India an ideal candidate to mediate in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. But as Jaishankar said, India will not take the initiative in this regard. For now, India will be content to expand its unique relationship with Russia into newer domains, while being confident that there would be no rancour or backstabbing.

// satyasya paramarṇ nidhānam //

We would like to hear from you. Please share your comments on editor.acrossstate@gmail.com

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking.

-Steve Jobs

Beyond cereals

Keep pace with demand for milk, fruits & veggies

THE Household Consumption Expenditure Survey, conducted by the National Sample Survey Office from August 2022 to July 2023, shows that the per capita monthly household expenditure in the country

in rural areas is growing at a faster rate than in urban ones — the gap, which was 84 per cent in 2011-12, has come down to 71 per cent. According to NITI Aayog CEO BVR Subrahmanyam, the data indicates that India's

as a share of the average MPCE (monthly per capita consumption expenditure) has gone down from 10.7 per cent in 2011-12 to less than 5 per cent. The trend is similar in urban areas — people are having more milk, fruits

this month, the Finance Minister noted that despite being the largest producer of milk in the world, India continued to grapple with low productivity of milch animals. The great legacy of the 'Father of the White Revolution', Verghese Kurien, should serve as an inspiration for the stakeholders to arrest the slide.

The horticulture sector needs a Kurien as well to help farmers become self-sufficient and resilient to price volatility, which often makes them suffer losses and dump their produce on the roads. Encouraging cultivators to grow fruits and vegetables in accordance with the increasing demand can also give a fillip to the crop diversification programme.



has more than doubled in a decade. It is heartening that consumption in both rural and urban areas in 2022-23 was about 2.5 times what it was in 2011-12. Another key takeaway is that consumption

poverty level has fallen below 5 per cent amid the rising prosperity of its citizens.

As per the survey, there has been a significant drop in the consumption of cereals. In rural areas, their intake

and vegetables. Thus, it is imperative to bolster the dairy sector, which needs to keep pace with the ever-rising domestic demand. In her Interim Budget speech earlier

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Custodial rape

Distressing NCRB data calls for urgent reforms

THE National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, which states that 275 cases of custodial rape were reported between 2017 and 2022, represents a systemic failure and societal apathy. The perpetrators of this heinous crime against women prisoners are found not only in law enforcement agencies but also in jails, remand homes and hospitals. Especially vulnerable to sexual violence are victims of trafficking or



domestic abuse. These incidents, in which officials entrusted with upholding the law and ensuring the safety of undertrials or convicts commit excesses, demand urgent intervention and comprehensive reforms.

Addressing these concerns is the recent call to action from the Calcutta High Court, which was informed about the rising number of pregnancies among female

prisoners in West Bengal. That there are 196 babies in various prisons of the state sums up the distressing state of affairs. The amicus curiae urged the court to bar the entry of male employees of correctional homes into the enclosures of women inmates to curb abuse and exploitation.

The social stigma attached to unwed mothers, the abhorrent practice of victim-blaming and the impunity enjoyed by

law enforcers impede the survivors' efforts to pursue justice. Officials' interaction with women undertrials and convicts is often marked by a gross lack of compassion. An empathetic and supportive environment can be created by conducting a sensitisation and awareness campaign, along with a robust

legal mechanism to hold erring officials accountable. Action must be taken to safeguard the rights and dignity of women in custody. In this pursuit of justice and accountability, collaboration between government agencies, civil society organisations and the judiciary is of paramount importance.

KEY constituents of the Opposition bloc INDIA are finally getting down to brass tacks ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. The Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) are on course to seal a seat-sharing pact in Delhi. Of the seven parliamentary seats in the Capital, AAP is expected to contest four, leaving the rest for the Congress. With AAP's senior leaders in the crosshairs of Central probe agencies, the party is banking on the Congress' support to upstage the BJP. Though AAP had swept both the 2015 and 2020 Assembly elections, it was the BJP that had won all seven seats in Delhi in the 2014 and 2019 Lok Sabha polls. AAP is hoping for a turnaround this time, even as the Congress is looking to revive its fortunes after successive poll debacles in the Capital.

The AAP-Congress candidate's victory in the Chandigarh mayoral poll following the Supreme Court's intervention seems to have galvanised both parties into resolving or setting aside their differences. Their seat-sharing arrangement in Gujarat, Haryana and Chandigarh is also being regarded

as a done deal; however, a consensus has remained elusive in Punjab.

In Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party has tied up with the Congress. The former will contest 63 seats and the latter 17. This is the first major accord between INDIA members. The two parties have reportedly finalised an agreement in Madhya Pradesh too, something which had not happened in last year's Assembly elections. Opposition parties have begun to realise that they cannot challenge the dominant BJP on their

The 'day after' plan

Gaza needs a long-term solution

IN a brief message to the media on Friday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu finally responded to the worldwide opposition to Tel Aviv's unending assault on Gaza by laying out his post-war diplomatic vision. The plan envisages Israel controlling Gaza security indefinitely, while its handpicked 'contractors' would run



the administration. It does not mention the Palestinian Authority, has vague references to a deradicalisation plan and hints at the involvement of some Arab countries. Gaza would be watched from land, air and sea as Israel maintains surveillance over the area west of Jordan.

For a leader whose reputation for keeping Israel safe is in tatters and whose military operation is yet to achieve even half its aim despite causing the death of

around 30,000 Palestinians, Netanyahu is catering to his mass base. The root cause of the recurring violence is the heavy-handedness of Israeli security forces and illegal settlers, besides the PM's adamant rejection of the two-state solution. By effectively proposing that Gaza become a Union Territory of Israel, run by collaborators, and watched over by its army, Netanyahu is sowing the seeds of another conflict.

The plan also ignores the human and moral aspects of post-war Gaza. There is no word on what the 20 lakh Gazans will do. Who will replace the expelled UN relief organisations? Even the US has expressed opposition to the plan.

Without addressing the basic trigger for the unrest — the demand for a Palestinian state — Israel's plan to install a puppet leadership with the army calling the shots will breed more explosive discontent. A perpetually perilous security situation could well lead to Israel's exclusion from the India-Middle East-Europe corridor, thus hurting Tel Aviv's economic interests as well.

INDIA regrouping

Bloc members teaming up to take on BJP

to the NDA fold and the defection of veteran party leaders like Ashok Chavan have apparently prompted the Congress to be more accommodative of its allies. This



own in the majority of the states across the country, even though the Trinamool Congress has decided to go solo in West Bengal. Bihar CM Nitish Kumar's return

bodes well for an alliance that is struggling to find its feet.

Ukraine war, two years

India has exhibited deft diplomacy

WITH the fall of the fortified Ukrainian city of Avdiivka, the third year of the Russia-Ukraine war is likely to be fiercer than the first two. Russia still needs to invest considerable military brawn to take four to five similarly fortified cities. The West is unlikely to meekly accept the inevitability of the Russian advance and may inject more viciousness into the battle. This is President Vladimir Putin's moment after the death of Alexei Navalny, the last flicker of dissent in Russia, and the resilience shown by the Russian economy despite Western sanctions. Yet, there is no diminishing Western appetite to arm Ukraine, and the conflict is set to endure.

As the war drags on, there are increasing suggestions from the West



for India to act as a mediator. As Foreign Minister S Jaishankar said, India will be happy to mediate but won't take any initiative on its own. Very early on in the conflict, India

had seen through the moral posturing that masked the West's strategic designs against Russia. New Delhi has asserted from the very beginning that war could not be a solution;

priority should instead be given to dialogue and diplomacy. In essence, rather than see one side suffer a defeat, India will be happy with a solution that addresses Ukrainian insecurities, Russian expectations and European anxieties.

However, contrary to the Western perception, India has been proactively neutral instead of being a fence-sitter. It has robustly shepherded its national interests, especially in oil, defence and fertilisers. New Delhi mediated successfully in the imbroglio over the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. India has also been keen that the conflict remains confined to the European theatre so that it doesn't spill over to the Indian Ocean or derail its Act East policy, especially with regard to China.

US help along LAC

Major step towards strengthening bilateral ties

IN the first-ever acknowledgement of American assistance amid the prolonged standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane said the US provided critical intelligence and situational awareness information that helped India effectively

US to keep ties with India on an even keel. But it is also India's rising economic and strategic heft that enables closer association with the US. Last week, Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande visited the US and held discussions with his American counterpart Gen Randy George on bilateral issues and ways to enhance mutual commitment towards global peace and security. Earlier this week, US Ambassador Eric Garcetti called on the two allies to explore co-development of military hardware.

For India-US ties to grow stronger, it is necessary to remove the suspicion that either side is inching closer to China behind the other's back. It is a sign of maturity in the India-US relations that though Washington has started a series of high-level engagements with Beijing, New Delhi has not expressed its resentment. This is because there has been no slacking of American help on the LAC, and talks on co-production of defence items have made steady progress. While irritants such as the Gurpatwant Singh Pannun case will remain, the wide array of collaborations has led the two sides to realise the importance of sticking together.



counter Chinese 'bullying'. Aramane said India expected its friend to be at hand whenever it needs support in the future. This appreciation of cutting-edge American help exemplifies how the India-US relationship, redefined by the emergence of Chinese regional hegemony, has evolved over the past 25 years.

The lure of the market — defence, digital and manufacturing — prompts the

Death of a farmer

Vital for both sides to find a middle ground

THE irony was not lost on anyone. Around one lakh people, mostly dairy farmers and cattle rearers, gathered at the Narendra Modi stadium in Ahmedabad on Thursday for the golden jubilee celebration of the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation, even as thousands of protesting farmers camped at Khanauri and Shambhu on the Punjab-Haryana border during a

Amul's success story demonstrated the benefits of taking every farmer along. The PM rightly said that a sapling planted 50 years ago by the farmers of Gujarat had become a giant tree with branches all over the world. A similar outreach is required to win over aggrieved farmers who have been braving tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons. There has been no breakthrough despite four rounds of talks between farmer leaders and Union ministers. The battlelines hardened after farmers' representatives rejected the Centre's proposal to purchase pulses (tur, urad and masoor), maize and cotton crops at the MSP for a five-year period.



pause in their 'Dilli Chalo' march. In a tragic turn of events, a young farmer, Shubhkaran Singh, died in a clash between security personnel and protesters at Khanauri on Wednesday. His death is a wake-up call for the farmer leaders and the Union Government to intensify efforts to break the deadlock over legal guarantee for procurement at the minimum support price (MSP).

It is back to the drawing board for the government, which has invited farmers for the fifth round of talks to discuss the MSP demand, crop diversification and other issues. Both the authorities and the protesters must exercise restraint so as to create an atmosphere conducive to holding a constructive dialogue. It is imperative to find a middle ground at the earliest opportunity for the sake of peace as well as normalcy. With the future of farmers and farming at stake, let Shubhkaran's death not go in vain.

Vijay Shekhar resigns as Paytm Bank chairman



New Delhi

Vijay Shekhar Sharma has stepped down as part-time non-executive chairman of Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) and the board of the bank has been reconstituted, a filing said on Monday, adding PPBL will soon commence the process of appointing a new Chairman.

The Reserve Bank has barred PPBL from accepting deposits and credits from any customer post-March 15 for persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns in the bank.

PPBL has reconstituted its Board of Directors with the

Board reconstituted

Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) has reconstituted its Board of Directors with the appointment of independent directors, Paytm said in its regulatory filing on Monday. "PPBL's future business would be led by the reconstituted board," the fintech company said.

Adani opens 2 units to manufacture ammo, missiles

New Delhi

Adani Defence and Aerospace today announced the inauguration of two separate facilities to manufacture ammunition and missiles at Kanpur.

Spread over 500 acres, these facilities were inaugurated

UP CM Yogi Adityanath. Army Chief General Manoj Pande was present at the event. An Adani spokesperson said the facility in Kanpur is set to become one

of the largest integrated ammunition manufacturing complexes. It will produce high-quality small, medium and large calibre ammunition for armed forces, and police.



SEBI using AI for investigations, says official

New Delhi

SEBI is using Artificial Intelligence (AI) for investigations, its Whole Time Member Kamlesh Chandra Varshney said on Saturday and emphasised that entities should keep track of technological developments.

Against the backdrop of instances of manipulations in the stock market, he said the message is that abiding with the law will be more beneficial and

violations will cause problems.

In response to a question by



PTI on whether SEBI is using AI, Varshney said, "we are using AI for investigations... and also using for a lot of things".

He was speaking on the sidelines of the 13th international convention of the Association of National Exchanges Members of India (ANEMI) in the national capital. As long as the market is transparent and no manipulation is happening, that is fine with the regulator, he noted. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has been taking action against violators as well as measures to enhance transparency and curb misdoings.

Will take up EU's carbon tax issue strongly: Goyal

New Delhi

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said India would take up the carbon tax issue "very" strongly with the European Union (EU) and address it with the 27-nation bloc.

Non-tariff barriers and unilateral measures like carbon taxation are issues of concern for India, but the



country will be a responder in a free and fair manner within the rules of international trade.

"Where we have to take countermeasures, we will take countermeasures; where we have to take it up legally, we will do that," Goyal said.

RBI allows banks to issue PPIs for public transport

Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday permitted banks and non-banking institutions to issue pre-paid instruments for making payments across various public transport systems.

With the introduction of these instruments, commuters will have more options to pay for tickets besides cash mode. The instruments will provide convenience, speed, affordability and safety of digital modes of payment to commuters for transit services, RBI said in a notification. Public transport systems across the country cater



to a multitude of commuters on a daily basis, it added.

Welcoming the decision, fintech MobiKwik's Co-Founder

and CEO Bipin Preet Singh said, "this marks a pivotal moment in our journey towards modernising transit systems".

Job on inflation front not over: RBI Governor

Mumbai

The Reserve Bank of India's job to bring down inflation is not over, and any premature move on the policy front could undermine the success achieved so far on the price situation, according to RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das.

According to the minutes of the February Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting released by the central bank on Thursday, Das had said "as markets are front-running central banks in anticipation of policy pivots, any premature move may undermine the success achieved so far".



Indian Oil launches premium fuel

Hardeep Singh Puri, Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas and Housing and Urban Affairs, virtually launched 'STORM', a customised fuel specially curated by Indian Oil for FIM Asia Road Racing Championship 2024 season.

PFC, Italian agency join hands

PFC, a Maharatna company, is partnering with SACE, an export credit agency of Italy, for an ECA-backed financing facility. This proposed partnership will position PFC as the first government-owned entity in India to partner with SACE under this programme.

PFC, Goa Govt sign agreement

Power Finance Corporation (PFC), has signed an MoU with the Government of Goa. The collaboration marks a historic milestone in green financing, as PFC through this initiative catalyses energy transition through emerging technologies.

WIPPA celebrates foundation day

Wind Independent Power Producers Association (WIPPA) celebrated its 11th Foundation Day Conference in New Delhi recently. WIPPA continues to play a pivotal role in fostering collaboration between all stakeholders to fortify India's wind sector.

100 BlazoX for World Wide Movers

Mahindra's truck and bus division has handed over 100 BlazoX trucks to Inderpreet Anand, MD, World Wide Movers Pvt Ltd. The delivery marks a significant milestone in Mahindra's ongoing efforts to enhance logistics operations across the country.

Amazon to help women-led firms

Amazon India has signed a memorandum of understanding with 'Global Alliance for Mass Entrepreneurship', to promote digital growth of women entrepreneurs in Tier-2, Tier-3 cities. Amazon India aims to support approximately 25,000 women entrepreneurs.

HDFC transforms Haryana schools

HDFC Bank, through its flagship CSR programme Parivartan, has partnered with Seva Sahyog Foundation & Connected Technologies to launch 'E-Shiksha', an innovative program aimed at converting 50 government schools in Haryana into 'smart schools'.

Cantabil Retail opens new stores

Cantabil Retail India Ltd, a premier apparel manufacturer and retailer, has launched two new retail outlets in Sangrur, Punjab, offering a comprehensive selection of formal wear, casuals, and ultra-casual clothing for men, women, and children.

IFFCO tops cooperative rankings

Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative Limited (IFFCO) has been ranked again as No. 1 cooperative among top 300 cooperatives in the world. The International Cooperative Alliance's rankings are based on the ratio of turnover over GDP per capita.

Western Digital's guide for creators

Western Digital has released a guide to help content creators in India choose the right tech tools for their content creation needs. The guide suggests using SSDs for quicker access to large files and faster performance, especially for video editing.

WTO meet: India seeks permanent solution to food security; to protect fishermen, farmers interest

New Delhi

India will strongly oppose a China-led proposal for an investment facilitation pact besides pressing for finding a permanent solution to public stock holding of grains for food security and protection of the interests of fishermen at the WTO ministerial meeting beginning Tuesday.

The Indian delegation is led by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal. The four-day 13th ministerial conference (MC13) will start on February 26 in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Trade ministers of 164 member countries of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are meeting against the backdrop of the uncertain global economic situation due to the Red Sea crisis, the Ukraine-Russia war and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

The key issue of India's interests at the meeting relates to finding a permanent solution for its minimum support price (MSP) issue for food security, agricultural reforms, fisheries subsidies, e-commerce moratorium on import duties, dispute settlement, and WTO reforms.

Food security issues

The public stock-holding (PSH) programme is a policy tool under which the government procures crops like rice and wheat from farmers at MSP, and stores and distributes foodgrains to the poor.

India stresses the need for PSH for its large, vulnerable population and wants a permanent solution from the MC13. Food procurement, stockholding, and distribution are crucial to India's food security strategy.

MSP is normally higher than the prevailing market rates and sells these at a low price to ensure food security for over 800 million beneficiaries. However, the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture limits the ability of a government to purchase food at MSP.

Under global trade norms, a WTO member country's food subsidy bill should not breach the limit of 10 per cent of the value of production based on the reference price of 1986-88.

As part of the solution, India has asked for measures like amendments in the formula to calculate the food subsidy cap. Developed nations are of the view that such programmes distort global trade prices of food grains.

Joint Support Initiatives (JSIs) or plurilateral agreements

India opposes this move being pushed for certain nations. For example, India is strongly opposing efforts of a group of countries led by China to push a proposal on investment facilitation for development agreement at the WTO.

The country has maintained that this agenda falls outside the mandate of the global trade body.

According to experts, the attempt of the group to integrate the proposal into the WTO has systemic concerns for the organisation and it would impact developing nations in pursuing their interest in future.

Agricultural reforms

India's stance is to protect farmer livelihoods and ensure equitable market access. However, developed

nations are pushing to reduce domestic support and increase market openness irrespective of the fact that they themselves provide large subsidies to their rich farmers.

WTO reforms

India advocates for inclusive reforms that consider developing countries' interests, against the backdrop of developed nations' proposals for flexible negotiation processes, dropping of decision-making by consensus and the integration of non-trade issues into WTO without consensus.

India supports efforts to improve the working of the WTO but its key pillars like special and differential treatment for less developed and developing nations, equal voice and dispute settlement mechanism should be retained while undertaking reforms, an official said.

India also seeks a revamp of the Appellate Body to ensure fairness, facing off against the USA's reluctance to do so and EU's proposal for alternate mechanisms.

The US, a frequent participant in WTO disputes, has been obstructing the process due to dissatisfaction with inefficiencies and perceived overreaches by the WTO's judiciary.

Fisheries subsidies

The members have already reached the first part of the agreement in 2022 under which subsidies will be prohibited for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

Now they are negotiating to curb subsidies that contribute to overfishing and overcapacity with a view to promoting sustainable fishing.

India champions a balanced approach on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, an expert said.

India, being a low fisheries subsidizer, emphasizes that advanced fishing nations that have historically provided substantial subsidies and contributed to fish stock depletion should bear more responsibility based on the 'polluter pay principle'.

"Our top priority will be to protect the interest of poor fishermen. About 90 lakh people are dependent on the sector in India," the official said.

India has proposed that developing countries be allowed to give subsidies to their poor fishermen to catch fish till exclusive economic zones (EEZs) or up to 200 nautical miles from the shore; while rich countries engaged in fishing beyond this zone should stop providing any kind of subsidies for the next 25 years.

Extension of customs duties moratorium on e-commerce trade

The ongoing moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions, in place since 1998, is a contentious issue facing the WTO and a key focus point for India at the upcoming MC13.

India, alongside several other developing nations, has historically called for the termination of the moratorium and has specific demands at MC13 to achieve this goal. Developed nations, however, are pushing for the permanent adoption of a duty-free flow of digital transmission.



Household Consumption Survey: A worrying concentration of income that doesn't help industrial growth

New Delhi

The most striking feature of the latest monthly per capita expenditure estimates is how low the purchasing power of most Indians remains, regardless of where India stands in the ranking of countries by aggregate GDP.

Nearly four-fifths of Indians in rural areas consume less than Rs 4,500 worth of goods and services per month, that is, less than Rs 54,000 per year. The consumption of their urban counterparts is less than Rs 7,700 per month or Rs 92,400 per year. In other words, the family of a housemaid in a middle-class residential colony in a city like Delhi, who is paid Rs 15,000-Rs20,000 per month,

and whose husband also has at least a comparable income, belongs to the top 25 percent or so consumers of the land.

Some might cheer such elevation of household help to the nation's income elite as a sign of the nation's progressive march towards equality. Such people probably also believe in elimination of poverty by statistics. The more realistic approach, which thinks it prudent to give free food to 80 crore or 56 percent of the population, as the present government has, would acknowledge the magnitude of distress in the country, and focus on what it takes to accelerate the pace of growth and to broaden the base of the growth that takes

place.

It would strike most well-off Indians as outlandish that their household help belongs to the top 25 percent consuming layer of society. How do we arrive at this conclusion? It is derived from the table, from the figures for the fractile class 70-80 percent. What is meant by a fractile and a fractile class?

Let us take the fraction 80 percent (for the sake of those who have forgotten their elementary arithmetic, let us note that percent denotes a fraction whose denominator is 100). The 80th percentile of the distribution of monthly per capita expenditure is the level of expenditure that would be just above the

expenditure levels of 80 percent of the population.

The table does not tell us what the expenditure level is for the 80th percentile. It gives the average for the percentile class comprising 70th-80th percentiles. The maid family's per capita monthly expenditure falls within the expenditure for this percentile class. Which is why it is safe to conclude that this expenditure level belongs to the uppermost 25 percent of the Indian population.

It can be observed that the average monthly expenditure keeps climbing by about Rs 1,000 for successive percentile classes till we come to the 80-90 percent class, when it rises by Rs 2,000. For the next percentile class, 90-95 percent, the jump is some Rs 3,000. The gap rises to Rs 8,000 between the 90-95% class and the 95-100% class.

The average for the most well-off 5 percent in urban areas still falls short of Rs 21,000, lower than the price tag of a single paithani saree. Which suggests

that even within this five percent of the population, there is great income disparity. But then, even one percent of India's population is 14 million. A consuming class of 2 percent of the population would be roughly as large as Belgium and the Netherlands put together.

But Indians cannot afford to be happy with the statistical reduction in poverty and marginal declines in the share of food in overall consumption. Growth of the demand for what the industry produces depends on growing purchasing power in the hands of the masses.

For such a mass market to develop and drive the profitable growth of industry, we need a growth strategy that focuses on broadening the base of growth, with special focus on education, so that India's youth become employable and generate income at a high level of productivity.

The current growth strategy produces concentration of income, as the table shows. India needs to shift gears.

India's April-January steel imports at six-year high as China shipments surge

New Delhi

India's steel imports touched a six-year high in the first 10 months of the fiscal year to March, led by Chinese shipments, and India was a net importer of finished steel, according to provisional government data seen by Reuters on Tuesday.

The demand for steel was strong in India, the world's second-biggest crude steel producer, as the country remained a bright spot globally with robust demand from its construction and automotive sectors.

Steel consumption in India jumped 14.5% to a six-year high of 112.5 million metric tons during the period, reflecting buoyant demand for the alloy in one of the world's fastest-growing economies.

India's steel demand is

likely to stay strong as the government expects economic growth will outpace the global economy in the next fiscal year.

India imported 6.7 million metric tons of finished steel between April and January, up 35% from a year earlier, the data showed.

India's steel mills have called for government interventions and safeguard measures against surging imports. However, the federal Ministry of Steel has resisted calls for curbs, citing strong local demand.

China was the top exporter of finished steel to India between April and January, shipping 2.18 million metric tons of the alloy, up 80% from the same period a year earlier to hit a six-year high.

Takeda To Manufacture 50% Of Its Dengue Vaccines In India

Japanese drugmaker Takeda Pharmaceutical Co. announced a strategic partnership with Indian vaccine and biologics company Biological E. Ltd. to manufacture its dengue vaccine, TAK-003. The Indian partner is expected to "scale up its production capacity to potentially reach 50 million doses annually," the company said in a Feb. 27 release.

This is further expected to accelerate Takeda's efforts to manufacture 100 million doses annually within the decade, indicating that 50% of its planned manufacturing would be from the facility based out of Hyderabad, India. This announcement comes after the recent recommendations made by the World Health Organisation's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunisation, which recommended Takeda's dengue vaccine. It is in line with the WHO's disease-specific target of achieving a case-fatality rate of zero for dengue by 2030. "Takeda's long-term goal for our dengue programme has been to make TAK-003 broadly available to those at risk who may benefit from immunisation,"



Gary Dubin, president of the Global Vaccine Business Unit at Takeda, said. "Together, Takeda and Biological E. will help combat dengue on a global scale by significantly increasing manufacturing capacity for multi-dose vials of TAK-003 to drive sustainable access to the vaccine in more endemic countries."

Phase-3 trials indicated that the vaccine showed continued protection against dengue fever through four and a half years (54 months) after vaccination. A study quoted in the release indicated that 1.3 billion people live in dengue-endemic areas in India and Southeast Asia. The

vaccine is currently approved in more than 30 countries, including the European Union, the United Kingdom, Brazil, Argentina, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. In an exclusive conversation with NDTV Profit, the management said that they are engaged in a dialogue with Indian authorities to allow the launch of the vaccine in India and may start clinical trials soon. No definitive information on launch timelines and pricing was divulged for the Indian market. The vaccine is suitable for both children and adults, the management said.

Overcoming inconsistencies in comprehensive mobility plans of Indian cities

In 2021, India recorded an urbanisation rate of 1.34 percent, marking a year-on-year increase of 1.5 percent. The country's urban population, currently pegged at 475 million, is projected to witness an additional influx of 416 million by 2050. Its 475 cities with 0.1 million-plus population contribute nearly 63 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which is projected to rise to 75 percent by 2030.

The efficient functioning of these urban areas is thus paramount for India's sustained economic growth. The projected urban growth necessitates accommodating the anticipated surge in population, managing industrial and commercial development, and recognising the evolving role of cities as service hubs for their rural surroundings. Equipping cities with the most optimal, cost-efficient, and effective mass rapid transport systems is imperative.

Cities and public transport

Enhanced standard of living and the increased affordability of personal modes of transportation across various income strata have contributed to the proliferation of private automobiles. Consequently, this surge in private vehicle ownership has given rise to many transportation challenges—traffic congestion, elevated occurrences of road accidents, suboptimal travel experiences during peak hours, and adverse environmental impacts, to name a few.

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Historically, India has witnessed a discernible lack of emphasis on sustainable transportation, with strategies frequently prioritising private vehicular movement at the expense of efficient mass transportation. This prevailing paradigm led to an undue concentration on private automobile usage, diverting attention from the potential efficacy of a robust public transport system as a viable alternative capable of alleviating transportation externalities.

However, the pivotal turning point came with the introduction of the National Urban Transport Policy (NUTP) in 2006, which, for the first time, attempted to address urban transport issues. It aimed at ensuring safe, affordable, expeditious, comfortable, reliable, and sustainable transportation for the growing urban population to employment, education, recreation, and other essential services. NUTP also catalysed the focused implementation of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), instituted a year earlier, with the primary objective of promoting governance reforms and expediting planned urban development. The mission

strategically focused on enhancing urban infrastructure efficiency, improving service delivery mechanisms, fostering community participation, and reinforcing accountability of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and parastatal agencies to citizens.

Institutionalising CMPs of cities JNNURM's framework involved the formulation of Comprehensive Mobility Plans (CMP) by all the mission cities. CMP was conceptualised as a strategic transportation blueprint aligned with the city's spatial Development Plan (DP) or Master Plan (MP) to define long-term accessibility and mobility patterns for people and goods within the urban agglomeration. They prioritised efficient mobility of individuals and facilitated the optimal utilisation of



existing infrastructure, including public transport, pedestrian, and non-motorised transport (NMT) facilities. CMPs, slated to be developed by 500 cities, encompassed operational efficiency of paratransit and public transport systems, achieving network completion, preserving pedestrian-oriented characteristics of the city, curbing urban sprawl, and mitigating environmental degradation. Such an approach necessitated land use and transport development integration. To aid ULBs in formulating CMPs, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MOHUA) devised a toolkit in 2008, revised in 2014. In 2016, in line with India's climate commitments, it released the Toolkit for Preparation of Low Carbon Mobility Plan.

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Navigating the Landscape of Indian CMPs

While most cities followed the MoHUA guidelines, substantial gaps exist between the planning processes and the substantive content of these plans. Besides deficient stakeholder and community collaborations during the plan preparation

process, they also suffered from a lack of clarity in defining the vision and objectives of the plans. Most CMPs incorporated aspirational terms such as "inclusive," "safe," "reliable," "integrated," "sustainable," and "efficient" and focused on the "Prioritisation of public transit," "Low carbon Mobility," "Reduction of travel demand," "Strengthening of Non-Motorised Transport (NMT) infrastructure," and "Creating reliable multimodal transport systems." However, despite these articulated goals, the plans fail to provide practically implementable strategies for their realisation.

Moreover, the cities failed to establish linkages, strategic alignment and integration of CMPs with other city planning documents, such as the

20-year MPs and DPs. For instance, the Development Plan 2035, prepared by the Surat Development Authority and the Comprehensive Mobility Plan 2046, prepared for the city by CEPT University, are presented as distinct documents, resulting in inconsistencies in their respective proposals. This lack of coordination raises concerns regarding the seamless integration of transportation strategies with broader urban development initiatives.

The sectoral examination of CMPs reveals how all cities have failed to recommend the provision of necessary institutional arrangements and infrastructure for NMT. They also ignore hawkers, who are an integral component of roadside infrastructure.

The cities failed to establish linkages, strategic alignment and integration of CMPs with other city planning documents, such as the 20-year MPs and DPs.

CMPs either inadequately address or altogether omit crucial aspects such as the safety and security of users, universal accessibility, enhancement of the quality of the existing public transport system, integration of public and paratransit systems, improvement of accessibility to public transport systems, promotion

of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in mobility solutions, parking management and the transition towards sustainable fuel sources.

The way forward

CMPs serve as a visionary framework for transport within a city. They delineate potential strategies and projects to transform urban transport infrastructure. However, the comprehensiveness of its coverage across all sectors within the urban transport system is pivotal. It necessitates the development of distinct plans tailored to individual sub-systemic plans, such as NMT, parking management, Transit-Oriented Development, Urban Freight Mobility, etc. These sub-systemic plans are imperative for a nuanced understanding of the specific interventions required to operationalise the proposed strategies effectively.

Furthermore, the successful execution of these plans demands the expertise of ULBs in comprehending existing challenges and translating the proposed strategies into tangible urban projects. Consequently, a critical need arises for capacity-building and training initiatives for municipal officials to equip them with the requisite knowledge and skills to navigate the intricacies of implementing the proposed measures in real-world urban contexts.

The successful execution of these plans demands the expertise of ULBs in comprehending existing challenges and translating the proposed strategies into tangible urban projects.

To enhance the efficacy of the urban planning process, cities must foster more comprehensive engagement with both the community and experts. Such a participatory approach must include focused group discussions conducted at various planning and implementation phases. Furthermore, the ULBs must regularly disseminate pertinent plan information in easily understandable documents and brochures to ensure broad participation and engagement with diverse user groups, fostering a more inclusive and informed interaction with the city's urban transport plan.

CMPs must be intricately aligned with all the other pertinent plans, policies, and strategies to avoid isolated functioning and contribute comprehensively to the overarching vision for the city. Furthermore, it is inevitable to review CMPs at regular and uniform intervals to systematically gauge the city's progress towards the ultimate objectives of sustainable transportation. Lastly, the procedural framework of the CMPs must have legislative and legal support to ensure their effective implementation and foster a sustainable trajectory for urban mobility.

A new frontier: Space warfare



Future war is seen as one with autonomous weapons, robots, and Artificial Intelligence (AI). But another key element that has emerged is the race to dominate space. Satellites in space provide a range of capabilities for combat systems on Earth like GPS guidance for munitions and men, surveillance of adversary movements, command, and control. Destroying or disabling them can have multiplier effects on ground.

On Wednesday, Michael R Turner, the chairman of the United States (US) House Intelligence Committee, remarked that a new Russian development of space technology was emerging as a “serious national security threat.”

On Thursday US National Security Council spokesman John Kirby confirmed that information was shared with the US Intelligence Committee and be made available to other Congressmen. President Joe Biden was briefed about it earlier and he has ordered National Security Advisor, Jake Sullivan, to brief senior legislators.

On the same day, the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, dismissed the warning, terming it a “malicious fabrication” and a trick by the White House to get US lawmakers to approve more money for Ukraine to counter Russia.

While no details have since emerged, there has been speculation that this capability could pose a major threat to US intelligence and communications satellites with a nuclear weapon. Such a weapon, if deployed, could destroy communications, space-based surveillance and military command and control systems of the US. But it

is unlikely that the Russians will put a nuclear warhead in space. Instead, the information could be more about a Russian nuclear-powered device that could blind, jam, or gut the electronic insides of US satellites or issue an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) that could destroy all satellite electronics in a certain range.

Like many major space-faring nations, Russia has experimented with space-based systems to disable satellites. This has ranged from ground-based missiles to knock off satellites in orbit, to nuclear energy and directed energy to disable them. In 2021, Russia launched a missile from Earth to destroy an old satellite of its own. In 2019, India had done the same. A nuclear explosion would indiscriminately destroy all satellites within a certain range and these could be Russian ones too. A nuclear weapon in space would also violate the UN's 1967 Outer Space Treaty through which nations are barred from placing “in orbit around the Earth any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction.”

However, countries have experimented with several ways of disabling adversary satellites. One of them is a co-orbital anti-satellite (ASAT) system which could be anything ranging from a small satellite that is sent proximate to an existing satellite and detonated. Another technique is to use a robotic arm to grab or destabilise the target satellite.

In addition, high-powered lasers and high-powered microwaves can also be used to damage targeted satellites. In 2006, China the US publication Defense News noted that a ground-based laser had been used to “dazzle” and blind

a US optical surveillance satellite several times. The Chinese themselves have acknowledged a successful 2005 experiment to blind a satellite using a ground-based laser gun. Chinese military literature has featured discussions on aeroplane—and satellite-based lasers. Similar discussions are available on micro-wave weapons systems which are being developed for shipborne use, but can also have implications for space.

The Russian development, probably follows the deployment of Starlink satellites by Ukraine to bypass their efforts to disable Ukrainian communications systems. Further, Starlink has provided them the invaluable ability to share information from diverse sources, ranging from commercial satellite imagery and the West's secret intelligence. It is another matter that in 2023, the war settled into a phase of attrition, where Ukraine may have had the algorithmic advantage, but lacked adequate artillery ammunition.

The Starlink system with thousands of satellite offers resilience against traditional anti-satellite weapons like ASAT missiles and directed energy weapons. But a nuclear detonation could disable them by the hundreds if not thousands. But a nuclear detonation in space would not discriminate against friendly or adversary satellites and the Russians risk disabling their own satellites, as well as of countries who are not involved in the war.

The vulnerability from space was the reason why the US established a US Space Force in 2019. The force's creation had to do with the capabilities that China and Russia had already developed in relation to satellite-based US communications such as GPS and

the ability to detect missile launches. These capabilities included techniques of jamming satellites, intercepting their feeds, blinding, shooting them down and disorienting them by shifting their orbits using satellites with robotic arms.

The New York Times has noted that the US has already been at work to counter these threats for some time. Even as news of the alleged Russian space weapon broke, the US had put in orbit a missile tracking system prototype to test a new plan named Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture that aimed at blanketing the Lower Earth Orbit (LEO) with hundreds of smaller, cheaper satellites in constellations similar to Starlink. The system would be able to operate even if dozens of them were destroyed.

According to a report, Russia has extensively jammed signals from GPS satellites in Ukraine to foil drone operations but has not used systems to blind satellites though it possesses such systems. In October 2022, a Russian diplomat warned in a speech at the UN that commercial satellites could become legitimate targets and that this “quasi-civilian infrastructure may become a legitimate target for retaliation.”

The issue of Russian activity is not an abstract one for India which also depends on satellites for communications, surveillance, and navigation. According to reports, the US has instructed its administration to hold negotiations with Russia on the issue and also reached out to India and China to dissuade Moscow from deploying such weapons.

Why city master plans fail to materialise

Ever since the Union Finance Minister (FM), while discussing urban matters during her annual presentation of the National Budget 2022-23 in Parliament, devoted her entire attention to urban planning, a much-neglected subject was drawn centre-stage in urban academic discourse. Till then, city conversations had remained overshadowed by the emphasis on the implementation of the 74th Amendment and its mandated reforms in urban governance, particularly transparency, accountability, local capacity, and the need for mayoral leadership in municipal bodies. The neglect of urban planning meant that cities would grow much like wild weeds, unkempt, and unorganised. Hopefully, in the coming years, the thrust towards city planning sought to be imparted by the FM should initiate a beginning in altering the sorry condition in which urban planning finds itself languishing today.

The neglect of urban planning meant that cities would grow much like wild weeds, unkempt, and unorganised.

In her Budget Speech, the FM believed that by 2047, when India completes 100 years of independence, half of India's population will be urban. Good urban development, therefore, was vital for the national developmental salubrity. Thus, the megacities needed to grow into vibrant hubs of economic progress. Furthermore, Tier 2 and 3 cities needed handholding so that they were in a position to take on a larger role in the future. This could only materialise if there was a radical reimagining of urban planning. To oversee this rebuilding process, a high-level committee was proposed to look into the issues of urban planning and design, building bylaws and teaching curriculum. The FM proposed centres of excellence in the area of urban planning be set up in the country with endowment funds of INR 250 crore each.

Urban planning is placed at the top of the list under the 12th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which lists municipal functions. Moreover, in state municipal statutes, each urban local body is required to prepare a futuristic development plan (DP), also referred to in certain parts of the country as a master plan (MP). These are spatial development blueprints of a city, to be implemented in a 20-year time frame. They generally comprise an existing land use plan (ELU), a proposed land use plan (PLU) based on city data and demographics, development control regulations (DCRs), also termed development control and promotion regulations (DCPRs), which explain the principles, objectives and targets on which the plan is based. It also contains standards for the many amenities or services that a city is required to provide in proportion to its projected population. For example, if the standard is the provision of 10 sq m of



open land for each citizen, then a city with a population of one million people with 100 sq km of area is required to put aside 10 sq km for green, non-buildable space. These standards are not uniform nor nationally mandated, despite the existence of the Government of India's 'Urban and Regional Development Plans Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) Guidelines'. State town planning directorates prescribe standards for state ULBs. Sometimes large cities like Mumbai stipulate their own standards.

Since the predominant characteristic of the city is economic, non-cognisance of such changes in the external world will build up planning deficits in the city, rendering the city unresponsive to emerging needs and heightening inefficiencies.

Towns and cities are dynamic and keep changing in size, shape, and texture over time. They also get majorly impacted by science, technology, technological innovations, digitization, and the way the urban world transacts business. Since the predominant characteristic of the city is economic, non-cognisance of such changes in the external world will build up planning deficits in the city, rendering the city unresponsive to emerging needs and heightening inefficiencies. These changes need to be taken seriously and quickly and should be reflected in the plan. However, while we discuss the preparation of quality master plans and the need to continuously tweak them in the face of changing dynamics, the fact is that on the ground, urban planning is in a sorry state of affairs.

The present state of urban planning is that most cities do not have a DP. NITI Aayog's report 'Reforms in Urban Planning Capacity in India' found that 63 percent of the 7,933 urban local bodies in India did not have DPs and, therefore, had no road map on how to move ahead with the settlement's further challenges of development. Those urban local bodies that have taken the initiative to prepare one have, in general, not been able to prepare

them in time. The ones that somehow got prepared, lacked the quality that one would want in Indian cities. Clearly, there is much that is wrong with urban planning, and it is widely agreed that independent India's urban planning strategies have not moved in sync with the country's socio-economic needs and technological innovations. But a matter of even greater concern is that the prepared ones went largely unimplemented despite the long window of twenty years.

Several factors stand in the way of the preparation and implementation of DPs. The first is that ULBs do not possess internal spatial planning capacity and are required to hire external professional teams to put together a DP and guide them through the entire process. There are very few ULBs in the country, if at all, that can internally take up this challenge. Most ULBs that employ a bidding process to identify professional master planners find it difficult to identify proper agencies to take up this work. Several rounds of bidding are the norm. Furthermore, the job is costly and many ULBs may find it difficult to set aside the resources for preparation.

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In the event ULBs succeed in preparing a master plan, they have a document on their hands that presents a financial mountain to climb. Since the plan is a spatial plan, it naturally follows that a lot of land would have to be acquired to provide municipal amenities/services to the citizens. Unfortunately, the acquisition of urban land has been made prohibitively pricey by the Land Acquisition Act and the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013. ULBs need to pay twice the annual reckoner rate/circle rate. Given the scale of acquisition involved in a master plan, no ULB in the country could dream of outright purchase of all these

lands. Using land instruments that allow ULBs to compensate the owner through additional grants of FSI (floor space index), TDR (transfer of development rights) or accommodation reservation (AR) are alternatives that have their own negative fallouts for the city. In many instances, landowners are not willing to accept any of the alternative modes of payment and insist on money, failing which they drag ULBs to court. In such cases, litigation causes interminable delays and areas a prominent impediment in the implementation of DPs.

ULBs themselves are also guilty of neglecting to implement the DP. Lands that are of municipal ownership or government lands require only construction costs to be borne to build a service. However, a DP does not statutorily become a mandatory document for budgetary provision every year. While preparing the annual budget, no specific attempt is made by the ULB administration to take up DP implementation and accordingly provide for DP works in the budget. Services will thus remain unbuilt and unprovided if there is no provision in the annual budget, inevitably leading to a poor quality of life in the city.

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Against this backdrop, while some of the above-cited measures may result in a greater percentage of ULBs getting their DPs made, it is likely to remain on paper due to the overall inability of ULBs to implement the plan. There is no doubt that master plans are central to a city's well-being. However, unless urban planning is heavily incentivised with quality men and money, nothing out of the ordinary is likely to happen.

India's 'onshoring' vision with GIFT City

Proclaimed as the embodiment of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', a hub of ingenuity and innovation, the Gujarat International Finance Tech (GIFT) City in Gandhinagar is India's first greenfield smart city housing the International Financial Services Centre (IFSC). It operates as a multi-service Special Economic Zone (SEZ),[1] providing tax exemptions and simplified regulations. The International Financial Services Centres Authority, established in 2020, acts as a unified regulator overseeing financial products, services, and institutions, including banking entities operating IFSC Banking Units (IBUs).

Aiming to compete with international financial zones like La Defense, France, and Shinjuku, Japan, the GIFT City aspires to integrate India's economy into the global financial system, encourage capital flow, and enhance connectivity with global financial markets in a business-friendly environment.

From offshoring to onshoring

Evoking comparisons to the 2008 Financial Crisis, the Silicon Valley Bank's (SVB) closure and Credit Suisse's collapse in March 2023 caused numerous Indian startups to experience a fund freeze. For years, while "offshoring" was the startup world's catchphrase, with many India-centric ventures establishing global holding structures, these events marked a shift back to "onshoring" as prominent startups sought to return to India. Over US\$200 million of the US\$1 billion held by startups with SVB has now been transferred to banks in GIFT City, a secure space for foreign currency transactions.

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Capitalising on this trend, IFSC Authority published a white paper detailing plans to develop GIFT City as a hub for businesses to "reverse-flip" or shift domicile back to India—suggesting legal (SAFE agreements and offshore exchange listings) and fiscal (tax exemptions and angel tax relief) reforms.

Over 400 entities, primarily from the banking and financial services sector, have opened offices in GIFT City, with over 20,000 employees. However, cultivating a thriving financial ecosystem with a robust market turnover remains a regulatory challenge.

Banking and financial services sector opportunities

Indian and foreign banks can establish IBUs in GIFT IFSC upon obtaining the necessary licenses. Five major global and 14 Indian banks have already set up operational units. As of July 2023, GIFT City's total banking assets reached US\$41.20 billion, accompanied by cumulative transactions worth US\$508 billion.

Under exchange control laws, Indian banks' IBUs are considered offshore branches and can conduct convertible foreign currency transactions. Permissible IBU activities include opening foreign currency accounts for residents in India and abroad, accepting deposits, extending credit by offering loans and trade finances, credit enhancement, insurance services, sourcing foreign currency funds and more. IBUs are also encouraged to establish global or regional treasury units.

Under exchange control laws, Indian banks' IBUs are considered offshore branches and can conduct convertible foreign currency transactions.

Banks are actively attempting to capitalise on the financial inflows from startups by providing customised solutions. For instance, the Bank of Baroda's GIFT City branch offers 'World Startup' services for transaction-based internet banking services in US Dollar, Euro, and British Pound Sterling.



Allowing foreign banks' IBUs to finance acquisitions in GIFT IFSC could present new business prospects and offer Indian companies an additional funding source for domestic takeovers. Acquisition financing[2] by these IBUs will acknowledge offshore derivative instruments (ODIs)[3] as valid contracts.

The value of outstanding ODIs in the domestic economy reached INR 1.49 trillion in December 2023, showing a 63-percent growth in calendar year 2023. The government is considering simplifying the issuance of such ODIs concerning GIFT City banking units, by eliminating double taxation on the income they generate. Moreover, IBUs shall be exempted from taxation for non-resident ODI holders to reduce tax-related complications and income distribution. This proposal aims to motivate foreign banks' IBUs to issue ODIs for their clientele, fostering growth and collaboration within the financial sector.

The dispute resolution lacuna

IBUs find themselves in a unique position, as they must simultaneously navigate the overlapping territorial laws of India and the fictional regulations within an IFSC. One significant challenge they face is the absence of a sophisticated dispute resolution system for IBUs and GIFT city transactions. Potential investors and reverse flippers may apprehend the potential complexities that could arise when dealing with disputes, inevitably leading to cumbersome settlements.

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Although the IFSC Authority oversees all banking activities of IBUs within an IFSC, there is no exclusive court or dispute resolution forum to handle disputes arising from these transactions. Their absence creates challenges, particularly in cases involving multifaceted civil and criminal

IFSC banking units of foreign banks and subsidiary Export-Import Bank of India (EXIM Bank) for trade refinancing, set foundations for arbitration and related services, and recognised ODIs as valid contracts. To further promote GIFT City's growth, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman added that data embassies would be facilitated for countries seeking digital continuity solutions.

The industry expects the 2024-2025 Budget to further liberalise banking services towards capital account convertibility. Taking advantage of the positive fintech environment in GIFT City, the government can conceive several reforms to bolster the banking sector's progress in IFSC. It is vital for IBUs to access a wide array of Electronic Trading Platforms and Voice Brokers, with reasonable registration requirements for platforms servicing IFSC entities. Additionally, allowing IBUs to join platforms regulated by respected international authorities like the Financial Control Authority (FCA UK) and the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) could attract non-resident participants.

The exemption of mergers from the intricate procedures of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) while ensuring a simplified dispute resolution process can "flip" holding companies back into India.

The IFSC Authority's white paper suggested ODIs for entities in GIFT IFSC with Indian subsidiaries to expand offshore merger possibilities. The exemption of mergers from the intricate procedures of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) while ensuring a simplified dispute resolution process can "flip" holding companies back into India.

A well-rounded dispute resolution mechanism would only be complete with specialised commercial courts in GIFT City staffed by judges possessing business acumen. This system would not only support arbitration[4] processes but also enforce awards effectively. In the medium to long term, risk mitigation could be achieved by establishing advanced ruling authorities that address investor and entrepreneur transaction concerns.

Making regulatory changes to ease investment restrictions under the Overseas Investment and Liberalised Remittance Scheme, offering tax-neutral treatment for startups in GIFT IFSC, and ensuring robust intellectual property protection and soft infrastructure can propel GIFT IFSC to a global startup hub exploring the Indian market.

Amidst the fall of banking giants like SVB and Credit Suisse, a need for secure banking emerges. With its digital banking prowess, including the acclaimed unified payments interface (UPI), India can emerge as a cost-effective global financial hub, offering seamless banking experiences in GIFT City.

Consequently, while an IBU might be considered a "foreign branch" from a foreign exchange regulatory standpoint, other aspects like debt recovery could be scrutinised by Indian territorial laws. Awareness concerning this overlapping legal landscape is vital for new IFSC entrants.

Realising the potential ahead of Budget 2024

The 2023-2024 Union Budget introduced acquisition financing by

Pankaj Udhas was reluctant to sing 'Chitthi Aayi Hai' in 'Naam': Mahesh Bhatt



It took some convincing to persuade ghazal maestro Pankaj Udhas to appear on screen in 'Naam' to perform 'Chitthi Aayi Hai', a song that became synonymous with the 1986 film and skyrocketed the singer to fame, recalls filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt.

Udhas, 72, died at a hospital in Mumbai on Monday after prolonged illness.

His name was suggested by screenwriter Salim Khan, Bhatt said, glad he heeded that advice and brought the singer on board for the song, which he described as the "heartbeat" of the film.

In the film, Udhas appears as himself singing 'Chitthi Aayi Hai' during a concert. The lyrics of the song, popular to this day, were written by Anand Bakshi and the music was scored by Laxmikant-Pyarelal.

"Udhas was a singer and he sang to a live audience so he was a little reluctant, unsure whether he would be able to pull it off. We assured him that we wanted him to play himself. We didn't want him to become somebody else. I just told him (think that) you are in one of your shows in Singapore or London and you are singing a song on the stage. The only thing is we will shoot and film it," Bhatt told PTI in an interview.

"I remember I and Saroj Khan ji—she was the choreographer—we would shoot long takes because unlike film actors who are used to shooting in fragments, he (Udhas) was a person who

would come into his own only when he would get large chunks to perform," he added.

Think of 'Naam' and you think of 'Chitthi Aayi Hai', the 'Naam' director said, adding that the heart could not be separated from the heartbeat. "I was just talking with Sanjay Dutt and we both fondly remembered those days of shooting that song, his presence. He (Udhas) would come from the airport straight onto the set and he would shoot non-stop and then rush back to do his shows. I'm very privileged to have been touched by a man like him, his simplicity was so disarming, and his voice had the same largeness of a simple heart," Bhatt said. Bhatt said the song comes at a pivotal point in the narrative in the second half, which was crafted carefully by Salim Khan. "We needed a song, which comes as a catalyst for the character (of Sanjay Dutt), who has fallen into the wrong hands of the underworld, and how he sets himself right and is longing to go back home," Bhatt said.

"In those days, ghazal singers of India had made a name for themselves and they would go overseas and perform. So this (song) worked like magic with people. The song has a timeless quality," he added.

The 75-year-old filmmaker praised Udhas for his dedication and commitment.

According to Bhatt, 'Chitthi Aayi Hai' was hugely popular because it resonated with people

who have been away from home.

"This song triggers that yearning... because there were people going away from homes overseas, to Dubai, or Bangkok, to make a living. Even people who left their villages and came to the city felt they were uprooted from their near and dear ones, so the song touched that pulse.

"It gave voice to that palpable feeling that was crossing the hearts of millions of Indians, who long to come back to their homes," he said. Bhatt believes the song played a pivotal part in the success of the movie 'Naam'.

Captain Marvel actor Kenneth Mitchell passes away

Canadian actor Kenneth Mitchell, best known for his roles in Captain Marvel and Star Trek: Discovery, has died at the age of 49 due to ALS. In an Instagram post, the actor's family said Mitchell died on February 24.

"With heavy hearts we announce the passing of Kenneth Alexander Mitchell, beloved father, husband, brother, uncle, son and dear friend," the family said in its post.

Mitchell's death comes over five years after he revealed his ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) diagnosis. ALS is a fatal disease that leads to progressive degeneration of nerve cells in

Bhumi Pednekar completes 9 years in Bollywood; expresses gratitude



Actor Bhumi Pednekar, who made her Bollywood debut with 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha', is now nine years old in the industry.

On Tuesday, her first film completed nine years ever since it hit the theatres.

Recalling working in the film, Bhumi took to Instagram and dropped the film's most popular and melodious track 'Moh Moh Ke Dhaage'.

'9 years since my life changed. Thank you for all the love,' she captioned the post.

Helmed by Sharat Katariya, 'Dum Laga Ke Haisha' revolves around a school dropout named Prem, essayed by Ayushmann Khurrana, who reluctantly marries the educated but overweight Sandhya (Bhumi). The couple come closer when they take part in a race, which involved Prem carrying Sandhya on his back.



the spinal cord and brain. There is no known cure for it. In an Instagram post in August last year, the actor wrote, "It's been a long 5 years. So much lost, so much gained. Incredibly hard times, mixed with so many more blessings.

"At the heart of it all are friends and family, caregivers and doctors coming to the aid of my family over and over and over again. Giving a plethora of support and love and care and encouragement. There is so much beauty in that. This disease is absolutely horrific... yet despite all the suffering, there is so much to be grateful for." Mitchell is

survived by his wife, Susan May Pratt and two children.

'Kashi of the Himalayas' 2nd at Chitra Bharati Film Festival

'Kashi of the Himalayas', a documentary film by Shimla-based director Aman Sharma, has won the first runners-up prize in the 'Best Documentary Film' category in the Fifth Chitra Bharati Film Festival 2024 held at Indradhanush Auditorium in Panchkula, Haryana.

The director was presented a memento and Rs 50,000. The documentary has been written by Deeksha Katoch and edited by

Alkesh Sonaji. Aman said the festival was a medium to bring together talented artistes and producers of Indian cinema and honour their outstanding contributions. "The documentary depicts the divine celebrations before Mahashivratri and devotion of people who believe in Lord Bhootnath, Madho Rai and the local deities of Mandi district," he added.



The documentary 'Next Stop Folk Music', co-directed by Ashwani Ranjan, Abhay Dubey, Kajal Kapoor and Anubhuti Mehta, was awarded the Best Documentary Award in the Professional Campus category. All four are the students of Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at the Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamsala.

A total of 139 films helmed by Indian and foreign directors were screened in the three-day film festival. About 20 films from the state were sent to the festival. Three were shortlisted and screened during the festival that concluded on February 25.

The film festival was inaugurated by Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, while renowned film directors Vivek Agnihotri of "Kashmir Files" fame and Sudipto Sen of "The Kerala Story" fame were among those present.

Randeep Hooda visits 'Kalapani' on Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's death anniversary

Actor Randeep Hooda, who is gearing up for his directorial debut 'Sawatanrya Veer Savarkar', shared pictures from his visit to 'Kalapani' or the cellular jail in the Andaman

The actor wrote, "Today is the death anniversary of Sawatanrya Veer Savarkar. A man whose towering intellect and fierce courage scared the British so much that they locked him in this 7 by 11-foot jail in Kalapani for two life times (50 years)."

On Monday, the actor shared pictures from his visit on his X.

Randeep also penned a lengthy note in his tweet and shared that during the recce of his film he couldn't stay

locked for even 20 minutes in the jail.

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and Nicobar Islands, on the death anniversary of politician and activist Vinayak Damodar Savarkar.

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Well done!: Karisma Kapoor turns speaker at Harvard Business School

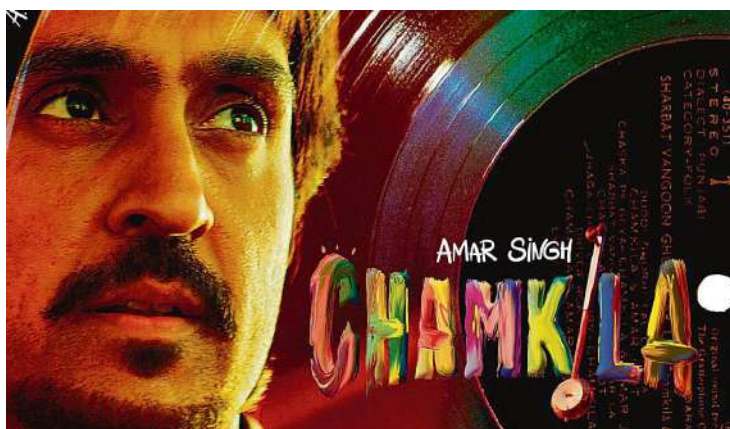
Karisma Kapoor was one of the speakers at the India Conference at Harvard Business School in Boston, Massachusetts. On Monday, Karisma took to Instagram and expressed her happiness on receiving an

opportunity to share her views at a session titled Soft Power of Bollywood at the renowned institute.

Interestingly, Karisma's sister and actor Kareena Kapoor marked a special "virtual" appearance at Karisma's session. "It was an absolute pleasure and honour to be a speaker at the India Conference at Harvard. Shout out to @kareenakapoorkhan for joining us for an impromptu but insightful chat. Thank you to @sunnysandhu24 and team #HarvardIndiaConference for being so wonderful. This was truly special," she wrote. She also shared a string of images from her session at Harvard.



Diljit Dosanjh, Parineeti Chopra's Amar Singh Chamkila' to be out in April



The release date of Diljit Dosanjh and Parineeti Chopra-starrer Amar Singh Chamkila has been locked.

The film directed by Imtiaz Ali, will be out on Netflix on April 12.

Sharing the film's promo, team of Netflix on Instagram wrote, "Netflix_in's profile picture netflix_in Maahaul bann jaata tha jab vo chedta tha saaz, kuch aisa hi tha Chamkila ka Andaaz @imtiazaofficial's #AmarSinghChamkila arriving on 12 April, only on Netflix!"

The film marks Diljit and director Imtiaz Ali's first on-

screen collaboration.

Amar Singh Chamkila presents the true story of Punjab's original rockstar of the masses, Amar Singh Chamkila, who emerged from the shadows of poverty and rose to the heights of popularity in the 80s due to the sheer power of his music, angering many along the way, which finally led to his assassination at the young age of 27.

The highest-selling artiste of his time, Chamkila is still regarded as one of the best live-stage performers that Punjab has ever produced.

Earlier, talking about the film,

director Imtiaz Ali said, "Making Amar Singh Chamkila about the life of the iconic music star of the masses has been a unique journey for me. I could not have asked for better actors than the immensely talented Diljit Dosanjh and Parineeti Chopra to play in this film, especially since it involves some live singing. The film follows the crazed popularity of Chamkila's daring songs, which society could neither ignore nor swallow. Having Netflix as a partner, I am humbled to take our story to millions of viewers not only in India but around the globe." Diljit said, "Playing Amar Singh Chamkila has been one of the most challenging experiences of my life, and I am thrilled to be returning to Netflix with yet another exciting story. It has been a pleasure to work with Parineeti and the entire team that has worked extremely hard to bring this beautiful story to life. To be able to sing to Rahman sir's exemplary music was a meditative experience and I hope I have been able to do justice to his vision."

'Looking forward to getting back on my feet', says India pacer Mohammed Shami after undergoing ankle surgery; set to miss IPL

Senior India pacer Mohammed Shami has undergone a successful surgery on his left achilles tendon, which rules him out of next month's Indian Premier League and possibly the T20 World Cup in June.

The 33-year-old, who last played for India in the ODI World Cup final against Australia on November 19, went under the knife in London on Monday.

Shami, who is eager to "get back on my feet soon" stares at a recovery time of a minimum of three months. He will thus miss the IPL slated to be played from March 22 to May 26, as reported by PTI last week.

Shami is also a doubtful starter for the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean and USA.

"Just had a successful heel operation on my achilles tendon! Recovery is going to take some time, but looking forward to getting back on my feet," Shami tweeted, along with several pictures of him in the hospital, on X on Monday.

Shami, who was one of the architects of India's stupendous ODI World Cup campaign with 24 wickets, had played through pain as he had problems with his landing but didn't let it affect his performance.

He had flown to London in January to take special



ankle injections. However, the medication didn't work and the fast bowler had to opt for surgery.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also wished Shami a speedy recovery following his surgery.

Modi posted on X, "Wishing you a speedy recovery and good health, @MdShami11! I'm confident you'll overcome this injury with the courage that is so integral to you."

The absence of Shami is a major blow for Gujarat Titans, who have also traded all-rounder Hardik Pandya to Mumbai Indians in an all-cash deal. Shami was the side's highest wicket-taker during their runner-up

finish in IPL last year.

Shami, who was recently conferred with the Arjuna Award, has 229 Test, 195 ODI and 24 T20 wickets in his decade-long career.

The development raises a question mark about the injury rehabilitation management programme planned by the National Cricket Academy (NCA) for Shami.

It is also highly unlikely that the pacer would be able to make a comeback before India's Test matches at home against Bangladesh and New Zealand (October November). His target could be the marquee away series against Australia.

Wanted: Guys hungry for success, Rohit makes it clear



India skipper Rohit Sharma today had a stern message for aspirants wanting to make the national Test team without putting in the hard yards, saying opportunities will only be given to those who show "hunger for success" in the "toughest" format.

India sealed a 17th straight Test series win at home after beating England by five wickets in the fourth Test here today.

New entrants like Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Akash Deep played decisive roles in the team's overall success, leaving Rohit pleased and also quite clear about the kind of talent he wants in the side.

"We will give opportunities to only those who are hungry," Rohit declared, making it clear that the team management is not

willing to entertain players who do not display a burning desire to perform. "Agar hunger nahi hai to unko khila ke koi matlab nahi hai (There's point in playing those who don't have the hunger)," he said.

His comments came close on the heels of a BCCI diktat asking players like Ishan Kishan and Shreyas Iyer to turn up for the Ranji Trophy matches, a missive that was ignored by the duo.

Rohit also rued the lack of adequate recognition for a Test series win at home and the critics' tendency to go after the team with all their might in the event of a defeat. "Home and away, you can differentiate between the two but if you win at home, not a lot is spoken about, it's like 'oh no, India are supposed to win at home'," Rohit said.

Bring a law to free sports from politicians, bureaucrats: Pullela Gopichand

Legendary shuttler Pullela Gopichand was on Sunday extremely critical of politicians and bureaucrats running sports administration in the country, saying that the government should bring a law to ensure only professionals and people who understand sports are at the helm of affairs.

Speaking during the 'News9 Global Summit' here, the former All England champion, who runs a badminton academy in Hyderabad

producing top players said, "One legislation, I would really love to see is the



government telling that we (sportspersons) are not under bureaucrats, sports administration is not under politicians. But sports is

managed by professionals and people who know stuff and who are sportspersons.

"That, from a legislation point I would really want to see," said Gopichand, who is also currently the chief national badminton coach.

He also called upon the government and other stakeholders to streamline the processes where an athlete could just concentrate on his training and performance without having to bother about other issues.

Deepika bags double gold in India's big haul

Baghdad

Former world No. 1 archer Deepika Kumari returned to winning ways 14 months after embracing motherhood as she bagged two gold medals in India's rich haul of 14 medals at the Asia Cup Leg 1 here today. India's archers dominated the field on the final day, winning all seven finals. India ended with 10 gold, three silver and one bronze medals.

Deepika defeated Simranjeet Kaur 6-2 to pocket the recurve women's title.

She helped the women's team overcome Uzbekistan 5-4 (24*-24) in a tight shoot-off finish en route her second gold.



The recurve men's and mixed teams beat Bangladesh in one-sided finals for two more gold medals. Dhiraj Bommadevara clinched the men's title, defeating Tarudeep Rai 7-3.

Prathamesh Jawkar claimed the compound individual title, pipping teammate Kushal Dalal 146-144.

Parneet Kaur prevailed over Fatemeh Hemmati of Iran 138-135 to secure the compound women's title.

India win Ranchi Test; secure 17th straight Test series win at home

India's home supremacy weathered the 'Bazball' storm as Rohit Sharma's men secured a hard-fought five-wicket win over England in the fourth and penultimate Test for a 17th consecutive series triumph in their own backyard here on Monday, handing a harsh reality check to the visitors' unidimensional approach.

Overnight 40/0 in a chase of 192 here, India romped home after surviving a few hiccups with the opening duo of skipper Rohit Sharma (55 off 81 balls) and Yashasvi Jaiswal (37 off 44 balls) providing the perfect platform for others to build with their 84-run stand on day four of the match.

There were some jitters after the two departed in close succession followed by Rajat Patidar and Ravindra Jadeja's dismissal but Shubman Gill (52 not out) and Dhruv Jurel (39 not out) guided the side past the finishing line with an unbeaten 72-run partnership.

Left-arm spinner Tom Hartley (1/64) took the prized scalp of Rohit, while Shoaib Bashir was the most successful English bowler, scalping 3/79 in the second innings for a match haul of eight wickets.

India lead 3-1 in the series with the last game scheduled in Dharamsala from March 7. The team's last home series loss was a 1-2 defeat to an Alastair Cook-led England in 2012-13. Since then, India have won 39 out of 50 Tests at home.

"It's been a very hard-fought series, so to come on the right side of it feels very good," said Rohit in the post-match presentation.

The host team's victory marked a stunning downfall for 'Bazball', which has been a much-hyped winning mantra for England since 2022 and is now facing all-round criticism for being too rigid and lacking in depth.



Conceptualised after the appointment of Brendon McCullum as coach and Ben Stokes as captain, England's plan to attack irrespective of circumstances found its match in the unflappable approach of the Indians.

While the visitors remained stubborn barring the conservative hundred by veteran Joe Root here, the Indians adapted and refused to be bogged down by setbacks.

The result, England would be going back with their first series defeat under Stokes and McCullum. It is also the first time they have lost three back-to-back Tests.

"The only thing I can say is we left nothing on the field, we've fought hard and I'm happy with that," said Stokes.

England's opening win in Hyderabad was expected to unsettle the home side which was already without superstar Virat Kohli, out due to personal reasons, and the injured KL Rahul.

On the contrary, the team was galvanised by the arrival of rookies, who grabbed their opportunities with both hands.

Whether it was batter Sarfaraz Khan in Rajkot or wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel and pacer Akash Deep here, the team gained from the infusion of fresh energy.

Jurel was a key factor in ensuring series-deciding win with his gritty 90-run knock in the first innings and the solid cameo in the second essay -- both efforts coming in high-pressure situations.

On Monday, Rohit and Jaiswal started positively. After seeing through veteran pacer James Anderson's opening over, Rohit brought out his swat flick to dispatch the 41-year-old for a maximum over wide long-on.

Bashir operated from the other end as runs came thick and fast for India, be it in singles or in boundaries.

The sense of desperation was palpable as Anderson was seen sprinting down to the fine leg boundary and even threw his body but could not stop a boundary off Jaiswal's bat.

The duo swept and reverse swept to tackle the low bounce from the spinners with Rohit playing the lead role in the

partnership. He also got past 9,000 runs in first-class cricket.

With nothing going their way, Stokes brought in Joe Root to unsettle the rhythm and the part-timer did just that by exploiting the rough against the Indian left-hander.

Jaiswal failed to control his inside-out shot and Anderson pulled off an absolute stunner with a forward diving catch at backward point.

Stokes was quick to take Root out of the attack and operated with his two spin twins in Bashir and Hartley, who did a decent job in stopping the run flow.

Gill looked under pressure to rotate the strike, which affected a well-set Rohit at the other end as boundaries dried up, pushing India on the back-foot.

Hartley was finally rewarded for his miserly spell with the prized scalp of the Indian captain.

Rohit came down the track only to be beaten by the flight and spin from Hartley and Ben Foakes did the needful behind the stumps. Though Rohit was way out of the crease, he was adjudged caught behind after getting a faint tickle on the way to the wicketkeeper.

Bashir sent back Jadeja and Sarfaraz off successive deliveries right after the lunch break. The Indian chase began to unravel with those dismissals but Gill and Jurel teamed up to steady the ship.

Against the run of play, Jurel produced a lovely cover drive off Bashir, who went too wide and full, to get the team's first boundary in 31 overs. There was a sigh of relief and the Indian victory did not seem remote anymore.

The target soon came down to less than 50 and Gill, too, joined in the party smashing Bashir for back-to-back sixes.

Para World C'ships: Triple treat for para shuttlers

India's Suhas Yathiraj, Pramod Bhagat and Krishna Nagar capped their impressive runs by securing gold medals at the Para Badminton World Championships here today.

World No. 3 Yathiraj, a Paralympics silver medallist, outwitted Indonesia's Fredy Setiawan 21-18 21-18 in the men's singles SL4 final for his maiden world title.

"Gold it is, happy and proud to be world champion," the 40-year-old Yathiraj, who hails from Karnataka and is an IAS officer of the 2007 batch of Uttar Pradesh cadre, posted online.

Tokyo Paralympics gold medallist Bhagat, who won one gold and two bronze medals at the Para Asian Games, edged out England's Daniel Bethell 14-

21 21-15 21-14 in the men's singles SL3 final. b" "This win holds a very special place in my heart for various reasons," said the Bihar-born shuttler. "I have managed to equal my idol Lin Dan's record of five World Championships gold medals in singles and to win three consecutive titles," he added.

Apart from the gold, the 35-year-old also won bronze medals in the men's doubles and mixed doubles. The three medals took his tally to 14.

In the men's singles SH6 category, Krishna, a Paralympics gold medal winner, prevailed 22-20 22-20 over China's Lin Naili.

In women's singles SU5, Manisha Ramadass signed off with a silver medal after losing 16-21 16-21 to China's Yang Qiu Xia.



अक्रॉस स्टेट एंटरटेनमेंट प्रस्तुत

निर्माते
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