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IOC announces probe after bribery scandal

J GOPIKRISHNAN ■ NEW DELHI

After 'The Pioneer' exposed US firms paid penalty of more than 300 per cent for bribery abroad including HAL, Indian Oil Corporation and Railways, the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) in a regulatory filing declared probe. Albemarle Corporation, a global specialty chemicals supplier that develops and sells catalysts used in the operation of oil refineries was caught by US Department of Justice for bribing officials in IOC and refineries Indonesia and Vietnam. Albemarle Corporation paid approximately USD 1.14 million in commission to India intermediary company relating to Indian Oil Corporation business and obtained approximately USD 11.14 million in profits on that business between approximately 2009 and 2011, according to a US Department of Justice order dated September 28, 2023. Albemarle was caught for bribery by the US authorities in 2017 and then settled the case in September 2023 by paying a hefty fine of more than USD 198 million to avoid prosecution. In a filing to National and Bombay Stock Exchanges dated December 20, the IOC said it is "neither party to nor is there any allegation against the company in relation to the proceedings" in the US authorities. "However, the company has initiated an internal fact-finding review concerning the incident, which allegedly occurred in



2009 to thoroughly understand the facts surrounding these allegations and to determine the appropriate steps to be taken," IOC said. The state-owned firm said it has "always upheld and is steadfastly committed to maintaining the highest standards of governance, transparency and regulatory compliance across all jurisdictions of its operations". "We assure our stakeholders, partners and employees that we are a law-abiding company, fully compliant with all laws," India's largest oil firm said in the filing. "The Pioneer on December 16 reported that the US Department of Justice's order dated September 28, 2023 says Albemarle Corporation bagged big contracts in Indian Oil Corporation and companies in Indonesia and Vietnam by corrupt practices and bribing of more than 63.5 million dollars. Albemarle is

and then settled the case in September 2023 by paying a hefty fine of more than 198 Million Dollars to avoid prosecution. The 46-page Order imposing fine on Albemarle says the US company also engaged in corrupt practices with an Indian private refinery. However the name of the private refinery is not mentioned in the Order. The Pioneer also reported that another US firm Moog Inc was caught by US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for bribing in HAL and Indian Railways in 2020. As per the eight page order dated October 11 2024, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000 Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and Railways and paid penalty of 1.68 Million Dollars to US Treasury to avoid prosecution. IT giant Oracle also paid penalty of 23 Million Dollars in September 2022 when caught for bribery of 6.8

Million Dollars in Indian Railways, UAE and Turkey to bag contract. The SEC order detailing bribery in HAL says in November 2021, Moog bagged \$ 1,399,328 valued contract for parts and services related to the April 2021 contract tender. Investigation found that 2.5% commission was received as a bribe by "a HAL official". As per the eight page order, Moog Inc paid more than 5,00,000 Dollars as bribe for getting contracts in HAL and Railways. The September 27, 2022 dated Order of Securities and Exchange Commission says that the IT giant Oracle Corporation was engaged in corrupt practices and bribery in India, UAE and Turkey. "In 2019, Oracle India sales employees also used an excessive discount scheme in connection with a transportation company, a majority of which was owned by the Indian Ministry of Railways... One of the sales employees involved in the transaction maintained a spreadsheet that indicated \$67,000 was the "buffer" available to potentially make payments to a specific Indian SOE (State Owned Entity) official. "A total of approximately \$330,000 was funneled to an entity with a reputation for paying SOE officials and another \$62,000 was paid to an entity controlled by the sales employees," states the 10-page order of Securities and Exchange Commission imposing hefty fine of Rs.23 Million Dollars on Oracle, caught for bribery amount of 6.8 Million Dollars.



Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

AAP opens registration for women, seniors aid

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Stepping up the election fever and in a bid to retain its core voter groups ahead of the high-octane Delhi assembly elections, AAP Convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Sunday announced that the registration for the Mukhya Mantri Mahila Samman Yojana, which will provide monthly assistance of Rs 1,000 to women in the city, and 'Sanjeevani Yojana', which will provide seniors over 60 access to free medical treatment at both private and government hospitals, will begin from Monday. In its 2024-25 budget, the Delhi government had announced this scheme to provide Rs 1,000 per month to all women aged above 18. However, Kejriwal recently announced that the amount would be raised to Rs 2,100 if his party returns to power in the assembly elections, slated for February next year. Further, countering the narrative around not implementing Center's 'Ayushman Bharat Yojana' in Delhi, the ruling party announced 'Sanjeevani Yojana' as a healthcare

initiative aimed at providing comprehensive medical care to senior citizens. The program will offer free medical treatment at both government and private hospitals to all Delhi residents aged 60 years and above who possess a Delhi voter ID. With no income-based restrictions, the scheme is designed to benefit over 25 lakh senior citizens. Addressing a press conference, the former Chief Minister stated, "Ever since we have announced this scheme we are getting numerous phone calls regarding the commencement of registration process for this scheme. Today, I am announcing that registration will begin from tomorrow itself." "You don't need to stand in any queues or waste your time. We will come to your doorstep. Across every area of Delhi, AAP has created thousands of teams. These teams will come to your home and will do registration of all the women of the house and give them a registration card (Kejriwal Kavach Card). For your convenience we are sending our teams door to door," he added.

Over 100 students from UP stranded in jungle in dark

PTI ■ BHARAICH (UP)

Over 100 students and school staff accompanying them were left stranded for hours in the evening in the dense Katarniaghat forests in Uttar Pradesh while returning from an educational tour, officials said on Sunday. The children, aged 14-18, were forced to endure harsh cold during their stay under the open sky without food, water or appropriate clothing for the chilly temperatures after school authorities defied warnings by locals to halt their journey at a safe place, they said. There were 155 people in total, 130 of them children, they added. According to the district administration, the group first attempted to cross the Rupaidiha border to Nepal but was stopped because of border regulations. After being denied entry into Nepal, the managers redirected the buses towards the Katarniaghat Wildlife Sanctuary, known for its dense forests and dangerous wildlife, including leopards, tigers, and elephants. The buses traversed five forest checkpoints before reaching Amba village, deep inside the sanctuary.

A RIDE TO MAHAKUMBH



Sadhus of 'Panch Dashnam Avahan Akhara' take part in a religious procession called 'Peshwai', to reach the Mahakumbh ahead of Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj



Delhi's Republic Day tableau rejected, AAP slams exclusion

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

In a surprise move, the proposal for Delhi's tableau for the Republic Day parade has been rejected by the expert committee. The committee, which is responsible for selecting the tableaux for the parade, found Delhi's proposal lacking in theme, concept, design, and visual impact. According to sources, the expert committee had shortlisted 15 States and Union Territories for the parade, but Delhi's proposal failed to impress the committee. The other two union territories, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep, also failed to make the cut. On the other hand, Punjab and West Bengal, which were absent from last year's parade, have made a comeback this year. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had made a big issue out of Punjab and Delhi's

exclusion from the parade last year, and it remains to be seen how the party will react to Delhi's exclusion this year. The Republic Day parade, which is held every year on January 26, is a showcase of India's cultural diversity and military might. The parade features tableaux from various states and union territories, which depict their unique culture, history, and achievements. This year, 15 states and union territories will participate in the parade, including Bihar, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Goa, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. The expert committee, which is headed by a senior defense ministry official, had evaluated the proposals from various states and union territories based on their theme, concept, design, and visual impact.

Raje's carcade crashes in Rajasthan's Pali

PNS ■ JAIPUR

Three policemen sustained minor injuries when a vehicle of former chief minister Vasundhara Raje's carcade overturned in an attempt to avoid hitting a motorcycle in Rajasthan's Pali district on Sunday, police said. The accident occurred while Raje was on her way to meet former minister Otaram Dewasi to express her



condolence over his mother's death. "Seven policemen were travelling in the car. Some of them have sustained minor injuries," Pali SP Chuna Ram Jat said. Raje left for Mundara village of Pali district by road. A police car which was escorting her between Bali and Kot Baliyan overturned while trying to save a bike rider. A BJP leader said that his car was behind the car which overturned thrice. He said he immediately got down and helped in sending the injured policemen to a hospital.



A day to remember for Indian womens' cricket

PTI ■ KUALA LUMPUR/ VADODARA

Opener G Trisha made a doughty fifty before the left-arm troika of Ayushi Shukla, Sonam Yadav and Parunika Sisodia spun web around Bangladesh batters as India scored a 41-run win to emerge champions in the inaugural Women's T20 U19 Asia Cup here on Sunday. Back home in Vadodara in Gujarat, stylish opener Smriti Mandhana extended her purple patch with a classy 91 off 102 balls, propelling India to 314/9 in the first Women's ODI against the West Indies, here Sunday. On a spongy pitch, Trisha's 52 off 47 balls (5x4, 2x6) guided India to 117 for seven, but Indian spinners cut through the Bangladesh line-up to bundle them out for 76 in 18.3 overs. The biggest partnership in Indian innings, was between Trisha and her skipper Nikki Prasad - a 41-run alliance for the fourth wicket. India batters struggled against pacer Farjana Easmin, who took four wickets. Despite that, India were restricted to a below-par total, and Bangladesh seemed well on track for a win once they reached 44 for two in the seventh over. However, Ayushi (3/17), Sonam (2/13) and Parunika (2/12) took over from that point as Bangladesh lost remaining eight wickets for a mere 32 runs. Brief scores were shared as India's 117/7 in 20 overs (G Trisha 52; Farjana Easmin 4/32) while Bangladesh's 76 all out in 18.3 overs (Juairiya Ferdous 22; Ayushi Shukla

3/17, Sonam Yadav 2/13, Parunika Sisodia 2/12). Mandhana, who recorded a 50-plus score for the fifth time in as many innings, got the bulk of the runs in her 110-run stand alongside debutant Pratika Rawal (40 off 69). The launch pad was provided by Mandhana from the middle-order to go big and that is what the likes of Harmanpreet Kaur (34 off 23), Harleen Deol (44 off 50), Richa Ghosh (26 off 12) and Jemimah Rodrigues (31 off 19) did to take India past 300. After dropping hard-hitting Shafali Verma, India have tried multiple batters to open alongside Mandhana and on Sunday it was the turn of Delhi cricketer Pratika, who batted at a strike rate of 57.97. The 24-year-old was also dropped at mid-off when she was batting on three in the 10th over. Her four boundaries came on the leg-side as she employed the sweep multiple times. Mandhana, at the other end, entertained the crowd with her trademark shots including a cover drive and pull. India changed gears after the arrival of fit-again skipper Harmanpreet who struck at close to 150 to give the innings a timely move on. The momentum was carried by Richa and Rodrigues who has been in top form of late. For the West Indies, the pick of the bowlers was left-arm spinner Zaida James who took five wickets for 45 runs in eight overs. India could have got a lot more in the death overs but the last three overs only yielded 20 runs with James picking three wickets in the final over.

Loan scam kingpin Bilal Lone caught in Delhi, targeted CRPF officers

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

For years, 33 year old Bilal Ahmad Lone spun a web of deception, targeting those who dedicate their lives to the nation's security-paramilitary officers stationed in the sensitive regions of Jammu & Kashmir. Armed with false promises of easy bank loans, Lone convinced these men to trust him, only to betray them with forged documents and fake deals. However, his endeavor came to an end when Delhi Police's Crime Branch, in a carefully orchestrated operation, tracked him down in the bustling streets of Jama Masjid on Saturday. The police recovered seven Debit Cards of ICICI Bank

issued in name of Central Reserves Police Force (CRPF) Personals from his possession, along with a Lenovo laptop used to create fake documents, Realme phone used for communication, forged stamps, including those purported to be from the J&K Bank and other official agencies and cheque books belonging to different banks. A 'Detention Order' was also issued against him by the District Magistrate of Anantnag in Jammu & Kashmir in an order dated December 13 and the same has also been approved by Government of Jammu & Kashmir (Home Department), Civil



Secretariat, Jammu/Srinagar on December 17. Lone, hailing from Kupwara, Jammu & Kashmir, through his schemes defrauded many officers, exploiting them to obtain loans in their names before disappearing with the money. He presented himself as a loan facilitator and preyed on paramilitary personnel who either were looking to buy vehicles or secure personal loans. His fraudulent activities spanned several years, with 14 cases of cheating registered against him in various police stations across Jammu & Kashmir. The Crime Branch received intelligence from the Anantnag police in Jammu & Kashmir about Lone's possible whereabouts in Delhi. "On the

basis of technical surveillance and two days hard ground work by the team, the location of above criminal was found to be in the area of Jama Masjid, Delhi. Accordingly, on December 21, the above team laid a trap at and around Jama Masjid Area and launched an operation to trace him out," Deputy Commissioner of Police (Crime) Vikram Singh said. After an intensive manhunt, the team finally succeeded to locate him and apprehended near Jama Masjid. "Initially, he resisted and tried to create a scene but he was explained about the operation and detention order issued against him by the District Magistrate, Anantnag, Jammu & Kashmir.

State women to get Rs 2500 of Mainiya Samman Yojana soon

A grand ceremony is proposed to be organized at the Army Ground located in Namkum on December 28



PNS : RANCHI

Good news for the women of Jharkhand, the process of getting an amount of Rs 2500 under the Mainiya Samman Yojana is going to start. According to the information, a grand ceremony is proposed to be organized at the Army Ground located at Kutiyati Chowk in Namkum on December 28, for which the department has started preparing. About five lakh women are expected to attend this program. According to the information, women from far-flung districts like Sahibganj, Dumka of Santhal Pargana division will also come to attend this program. Proper arrangements are also being made for their stay. In this program, Chief Minister Hemant Soren will give an installment of Rs 2500 Mainiya Samman amount to the accounts of 55

lakh women of the state. This scheme helps to make women self-reliant and empower them economically. This will improve the social status of women in rural areas. The rural economy will also be strengthened by the money coming into the hands of women. Riding on poll promises of giving Rs 2500 in the account of women, Hemant Soren led JMM/Congress alliance government came in power. However, the immediate task at hand for Hemant and his cabinet will be to roll out the revised monthly stipend of Rs 2,500 to nearly 50 lakh women beneficiaries of the state under the ongoing Mukhyamantri Maiya Samman Yojana — a poll assurance the govt made soon after BJP said it would also a similar scheme titled, 'Go go Didi Yojana'. decision has already been

approved by the cabinet before the model code of conduct kicked in. The revised monthly stipend will be disbursed from next month onwards," JMM general secretary-cum-national spokesperson Supriyo Bhattacharya said. To meet financial requirement, the State government has even demanded Rs 1.36 lakh crore dues from Centre. The Jharkhand government has reportedly initiated legal proceedings to recover the Rs 1.36 lakh crore in coal royalties from the Centre.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren today reiterated that the demands for Central dues raised by the State government were genuine and that the government would definitely reclaim its money, as it is the right of every resident of Jharkhand.

In response to allegations by BJP State president Babul Marandi, who claimed that the JMM was making baseless and misleading allegations about Rs 1.36 lakh crore in arrears from the Central government, Soren asserted that the demand was not baseless. Marandi had stated that if the JMM had any concrete evidence regarding the figure of Rs 1.36 lakh crore in Central dues, they should present it to the public with complete documents and facts. Notably, the Central government has clarified in the Lok Sabha that there are no dues owed to Jharkhand, particularly regarding the demand for Rs 1.36 lakh crore in royalty.

The JMM had also made this a major issue during the Assembly elections. Large hoardings were put up across the state, demanding the Rs 1.36 lakh crore from the Centre.

Apart from meeting the financial requirement, the promise of expediting JPC and JSSC recruitment faces another challenge — that of harmonising it with another key poll promise, which is the implementation of a domicile policy based on 1932 records. The issue of domicile has gained new urgency with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) alleging that the tribal character of the State was being altered by the influx of foreigners. Changes in domicile law will require the approval of the Centre too, and the JMM has accused the BJP of stalling them. Mr. Soren will have to work with the Centre on this as well as on many other governance issues in the State. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has promised to support the State's aspirations but the BJP's political calculations may hinder Mr. Soren's agenda.

CBI celebrates Foundation Day

PNS : RANCHI

Central Bank of India (CBI) Regional Office Ranchi celebrated the 114th Foundation Day of the Bank.

The program was started by Regional Head Sunil Kumar by garlanding the portrait of the founder late Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala. Addressing the guests present on the occasion, Mr. Kumar said that Central Bank of India is the first indigenous bank of the country. The foundation of Central Bank of India was laid by Sir Sorabji Pochkhanawala on 21 December 1911.

Kumar said that at present it has about 5000 branches all over India. "Through these branches, the bank is spreading its services to the remote areas and the poorest population. Various public utility and attractive products of deposit and loan are benefiting the people," he said. While discussing the glorious history of Central Bank, the Regional Chief said that during the British rule, Shri Sorabji had laid the foundation stone of this bank to connect the Indian citizens deprived of banking services with bank-



ing operations and even today the bank is operating about 75 percent of its branches in rural and semi-urban areas.

On the occasion of Foundation Day, the Sukhdev Nagar branch of the local Central Bank of India was inaugurated in a new building by Kumar by cutting the ribbon. In this sequence, while presenting certificates to the branch managers who have shown excellent performance in various banking parameters in the current financial year among the 47 branches under Ranchi region, Shri Kumar called upon all the branches to successfully fulfill

the responsibility of taking the bank towards progress by working in this manner continuously.

On the occasion of Foundation Day, a loan of about 52 crores was sanctioned by the branches under the regional office.

Various types of colorful programs were organized in the program and people celebrated the Foundation Day enthusiastically through songs and music.

The officers and employees of the Regional Office Ranchi played an important role in the successful conduct of the programme.

No shivering cold on Christmas this year

PNS : RANCHI

This time there will be no shivering cold on Christmas in Jharkhand. On this day, the maximum temperature of Ranchi will be around 25 degrees and the minimum temperature will be around 12 degrees Celsius. The reason behind this is Western Disturbance.

The Meteorological Center Ranchi has given clear indications that there will be no change in the minimum temperature in the next four-five days. On Saturday, the mood of the weather of Jharkhand seemed changed. It was cloudy. There was also light drizzle in some parts including East Singhbhum. Due to cloud cover, the minimum temperature increased by 4.7 degrees Celsius. The minimum has gone above 10 degrees in all the districts.

The Meteorological Center has said in the forecast that there will be no change in the minimum temperature in the next four-five days. The temperature of the capital Ranchi has risen in the last 7 days.

This change in temperature has been up to 5 degrees. Where the minimum temperature was 7.9 degrees Celsius on December 16, it became 12.8 degrees Celsius on December 21. Due to the low pressure area formed in the Bay of Bengal, light rain has occurred at some places in the Kolhan division.

The Meteorological Department has said in its forecast that there may be dense fog in some places in the north-eastern, central and southern parts of Jharkhand in the morning. For this, the Meteorological Department has issued a yellow alert.

There may be dense fog in some places in the morning in Deoghar, Dhanbad, Dumka, Giridih, Godda, Jamtara, Pakur Sahibganj, East Singhbhum, West Singhbhum, Saraikela-Kharsawan, Simdega Ranchi, Bokaro, Hazaribagh, Ramgarh, Khunti, Gumla districts. For this, the Meteorological Department has issued a warning.



Overwhelming response to the Second Edition of Jam@Street



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The much-anticipated second edition of Jam@Street was successfully held at the Tata Motors Township (Telco Area) today, attracting over 25,000 enthusiastic participants from across the city. Organized by Tata Steel ULSL in collaboration with Tata Motors and Tata Cummins, the event transformed the stretch from the Labour Bureau

Roundabout to the Dealers Hostel into a vibrant hub of fun, fitness, and celebration. The event was graced by the special presence of Chanakya Chaudhary, Vice President, Corporate Services, Tata Steel; Ritu Raj Sinha, Managing Director, Tata Steel ULSL; Sunil Tiwary, Plant Head, Tata Motors; and Ramphal Nehra, Plant Head, Tata Cummins. Their encouragement and active participation added to the excitement of the day. Also, Anyana Mittal, DC, Jamshedpur along with her wife attended the event and enjoyed and honoured the program. Jam@Street offered a plethora of activities, ensuring something for everyone.

Fitness enthusiasts enjoyed Zumba workouts and badminton sessions, while families indulged in delicious healthy food and live musical performances. Other highlights included basketball and karate demonstrations, adventure sports, painting sessions, temporary tattoo booths, and the ever-energetic Jumba dance sessions.

The event underscored the spirit of community and brought together people from all walks of life, creating a shared space for recreation and bonding. Participation in Jam@Street was free, further emphasizing inclusivity and the organizers' commitment to fostering community spirit.

'Gaatha' annual function cum prize distribution at SCS

PNS : RANCHI

Surendranath Centenary School celebrated its Annual Function cum Prize Distribution, themed 'Gaatha', with great fervor and enthusiasm, marking 36 glorious years of academic excellence. The event was graced by Prof. (Dr.) Gopal Pathak, Director General, Sarala Birla University, as Chief Guest, and Dr. Neelima Pathak, Dean, Faculty of Humanities & Linguistics, as Guest of Honour.

The programme commenced with the lighting of the lamp followed by the Annual Report which was read by the Principal Madam Samita Sinha, highlighting the school's achievements and progress for the session 2023-24.

The thematic show featured a mesmerizing welcome dance and song, followed by a vibrant dance performance 'Mile Sur Mera Tumhara' by students of KG to II. The main attraction of the evening was the colourful dance drama 'Ahilyabai - Itihaas Ke Panno Se', which brought to life the inspiring story of the brave and visionary queen Ahilyabai Holkar, showcasing the talent and creativity of students from Class III to XII.



The 'Music Fiesta' and 'Zorba', a Greek dance form, were notable highlights. The instrumental music performance 'Yaadein' was a treat for the audience.

The prize distribution ceremony recognized students for their academic excellence, co-curricular achievements, and special talents. Notable awardees of session 2023-24 included Anyana Rai, the Science Topper for the 'Ranadeb Chaudhuri Award', Samridhi Kumari, the Commerce Topper for the 'Mira Chaudhuri Award', and Suprita Kumari of class X for the 'Amala Goswami Award'.

The event also witnessed the release of the school magazine 'Expressions'. Leopard

Criminals set fire to three trucks

PNS : RANCHI

In the early hours of Sunday, criminals set fire to 3 coal-laden trucks to spread panic in the Kharali area of the capital. This incident took place near Nirmal Mahato Chowk at around 4 am.

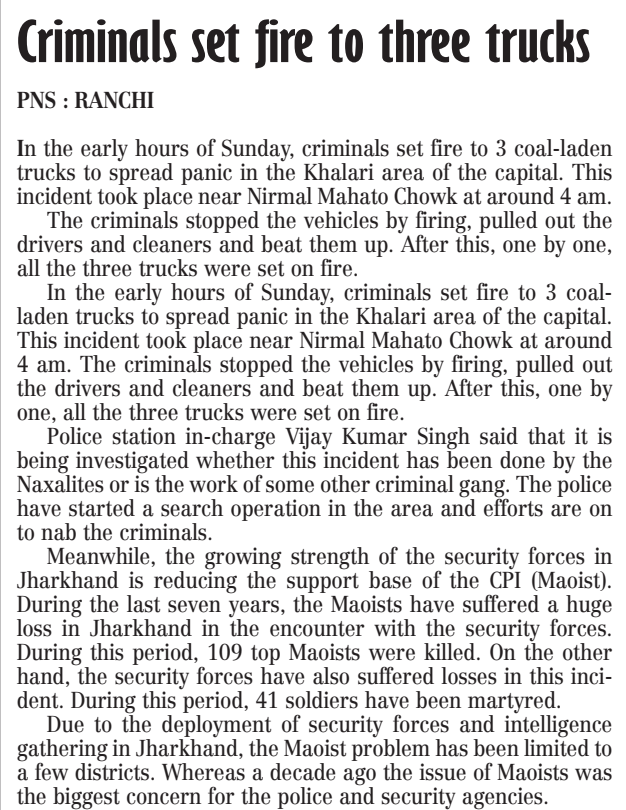
The criminals stopped the vehicles by firing, pulled out the drivers and cleaners and beat them up. After this, one by one, all the three trucks were set on fire.

In the early hours of Sunday, criminals set fire to 3 coal-laden trucks to spread panic in the Kharali area of the capital. This incident took place near Nirmal Mahato Chowk at around 4 am. The criminals stopped the vehicles by firing, pulled out the drivers and cleaners and beat them up. After this, one by one, all the three trucks were set on fire.

Police station in-charge Vijay Kumar Singh said that it is being investigated whether this incident has been done by the Naxalites or is the work of some other criminal gang. The police have started a search operation in the area and efforts are on to nab the criminals.

Meanwhile, the growing strength of the security forces in Jharkhand is reducing the support base of the CPI (Maoist). During the last seven years, the Maoists have suffered a huge loss in Jharkhand in the encounter with the security forces. During this period, 109 top Maoists were killed. On the other hand, the security forces have also suffered losses in this incident. During this period, 41 soldiers have been martyred.

Due to the deployment of security forces and intelligence gathering in Jharkhand, the Maoist problem has been limited to a few districts. Whereas a decade ago the issue of Maoists was the biggest concern for the police and security agencies.



AFFIDAVIT



I, Shashi Kumar Mehta, Father Pyarchand Mehta, Resident village - Kalimanda Domchanch, post - Domchanch Bazar, Police Station - Domchanch, District - Koderma, State - Jharkhand. That my daughter's name in her Aadhar card is Aska Kumari and my daughter's name is mentioned as Anishka Mehta in the admission register of Manjula Sharma Memorial Academy Domchanch. That my daughter's name is Aska Kumari alias Anishka Mehta and my daughter is known and identified by both the names. That my name is mentioned as Shashi Mehta in my daughter's Aadhar card and my name is mentioned as Shashi Kumar Mehta in my daughter's school. That I am known and recognised by both the names Shashi Kumar Mehta alias Shashi Mehta and both the names refer to the same person, who is myself. Vide Affidavit No.06, dated-19.11.2024

AFFIDAVIT



I, Shashi Kumar Mehta, Father Pyarchand Mehta, Resident village - Kalimanda Domchanch, post - Domchanch Bazar, Police Station - Domchanch, District - Koderma, State - Jharkhand. That my daughter's name in her Aadhar card is Annu Kumari and in the admission register of Manjula Sharma Memorial Academy Domchanch my daughter's name is Anushka Mehta. That my daughter's name is Annu Kumari alias Anushka Mehta and my daughter is known and recognised by both the names. That my name is mentioned as Shashi Mehta in my daughter's Aadhar card and my name is mentioned as Shashi Kumar Mehta in my daughter's school. That I am known and recognised by both the names Shashi Kumar Mehta alias Shashi Mehta and both the names refer to the same person, who is myself. Vide Affidavit No.07, dated-19.11.2024.

J'khand amongst top 5 states at Eco Creativity & Innovation Hackathon

PNS : RANCHI

Jharkhand's commitment towards environmental protection has once again received national recognition. Jharkhand has been included amongst the top five states of the country in the National Eco-Creativity and Innovation Hackathon organised at NDMC Convention Centre, New Delhi.

It was organized by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India in collaboration with Amazon Future Engineers and P Jam Foundation. More than 4 lakh student from across the country participated in this Eco-Creativity and Innovation Hackathon and presented more than 1.9 lakh innovative ideas, highlighting solutions for environmental sustainability, conservation and climate action.

Misleading advertisements: CCPA imposes ₹ 2 lakh penalty on Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) has imposed a penalty of Rs 2 lakh for misleading advertisements on Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study. The decision was taken to protect and promote the rights of consumers as a class and ensure that no false or misleading advertisement is made of any goods or services which contravenes the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019.

In view of the violation of the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, the CCPA, headed by Chief Commissioner, Nidhi Khare, and Commissioner Anupam Mishra has issued an Order against Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study for misleading advertisement regarding UPSC Civil Service Exam 2023.

Coaching Institutes and

online edtech platforms use pictures and names of successful candidates to influence prospective aspirants (consumers), without disclosing the courses opted by such candidates or the fees paid by them & length of the course so attended.

The institute's ads claimed "13 students in the top 100", "28 students in the top 200", and 39 students in the top 300" in the UPSC CSE 2023, and prominently displayed successful candidates' names and photos, an official statement said.

The CCPA found that Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study Institute concealed important information about the courses taken by students it claimed had cleared the prestigious Indian Civil Services Exam (CSE) in its advertisements. Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study prominently displayed suc-



Successful candidate's names & pictures and simultaneously advertised various types of courses provided by them on its official website. However, the information with respect to the course opted by the said successful candidates in UPSC Civil Service exam 2023 was not disclosed in the above-mentioned advertisement. The institute used terms like "Shubhra Ranjan IAS" and "Students of Shubhra Ranjan

IAS" in its advertisements and letterheads, creating a deceptive impression that Shubhra Ranjan is/was an IAS officer, it added.

"Institute used terms such as "Shubhra Ranjan IAS" and "Students of Shubhra Ranjan IAS" in its advertisements and letterheads, creating a deceptive impression that Mrs. Shubhra Ranjan is/was an IAS officer. This constitutes a misrepresentation and unfair trade practice under Consumer Protection Act 2019, thereby misleading the public and potential students into believing that the services or guidance provided by them are directly associated with the credibility of an IAS officer. The Institute submitted that it was a clerical mistake, which is not tenable as the term Shubhra Ranjan IAS or @shubhraranjanias has been frequently used on its letterheads and in its advertise-

ments. Institute utilized deceptive practices to create a perception of exceptional quality and success. An advertisement should be truthful & honest representation of facts by making disclosures in such a manner that they are clear, prominent and extremely hard to miss for viewers to notice," the CCPA said.

The consumer regulator said the advertisements violated provisions of the Consumer Protection Act of 2019 related to misleading advertisements by "deliberately concealing important information".

The lack of proper disclosure about successful students' course details deprived consumers of making an informed choice while selecting coaching institutes, the CCPA said, asking Shubhra Ranjan IAS Study to discontinue the misleading ads.

On November 22, CCPA

imposed a Rs 7 lakh penalty on Vajirao & Reddy Institute for misleading advertisements regarding the results of the UPSC CSE 2022. Vajirao & Reddy Institute in its advertisement claimed "617 selections out of 933 in UPSC CSE 2022" and "We are ranked at 1st position among the list of top UPSC Coaching Institutes in India". CCPA has so far issued 45 notices to various coaching institutes for misleading ads and imposed a penalty of Rs 63.60 lakh on 20 coaching institutes, directing them to discontinue the misleading advertisements.

The Department of Consumer Affairs, through the National Consumer Helpline, has successfully intervened at a pre-litigation stage to ensure justice for students and aspirants who enrolled for the UPSC Civil Services, IIT and other entrance examinations.

Dhankhar calls for accountability of lawmakers

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of Parliament witnessing poor productivity due to disruptions, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Sunday called for accountability of lawmakers and said people would force them to think why they were sent to Parliament. He also said that for any democracy to succeed, expression and dialogue must go hand in hand with great responsibility on both sides.

Dhankhar is the Rajya Sabha's ex-officio chairman.

Calling for accountability among parliamentarians, he said, "... Make no mistake, I am referring to parliamentarians. People have learned to take disorder as order. There is no sense of revulsion." Hopefully, people will write and their thoughts will move, the vice-president said, according to an official statement. "People will force you



to think, why did you go there (Parliament)?" he said. Addressing awardees of the Chaudhary Charan Singh Awards - 2024, the vice-president said agriculture was the spine of rural development. "Unless agriculture develops, the rural landscape cannot be changed. And unless the rural landscape changes, we cannot aspire to have a developed nation," he said.

For India to be a developed nation by 2047, people's income must increase eight-fold that, he said, was a "daunting challenge".

Dhankhar also laid stress on the need for strengthening the village economy. "The greatest market we have is agricultural produce, yet farming communities are hardly involved with it. The farming sector must be prioritised by governments for it

to become an engine of economic development," he added. The Chaudhary Charan Singh Awards - 2024 were presented for contributions to agriculture, rural development and journalism. A statement by the Kisan Trust said the awards were presented on Saturday and the event was attended by Union ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and Jayant Chaudhary. Inaugurating the event on Saturday, Pradhan lauded Charan Singh's legacy that, he said, continued to inspire those working tirelessly for the uplift of India's farmers and rural communities.

Union minister Chaudhary said the current policies of the Narendra Modi government reflected the vision of Charan Singh. His vision on procurement prices, debt relief for farmers, land reforms and the uplift of landless people is still relevant, he said, according to the Kisan Trust.

Will SC conduct further inquiry, asks Surjewala after Pegasus spyware case verdict in US

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress general secretary Randeep Surjewala on Sunday claimed that the Pegasus spyware case verdict in the US proved how 300 WhatsApp numbers of Indians were targeted and asked if the Supreme Court would now conduct a further inquiry in view of the judgment.

Surjewala shared a media report which said that, for the first time, a court in the US had held Israel's NSO Group liable for its intrusive spyware Pegasus. "The Pegasus spyware case verdict proves how 300 WhatsApp numbers of Indians were targeted in the illegal spyware racket," Surjewala said in a social media post.

He said it was time for the Narendra Modi government to answer who the 300 names targeted were. "Who are the two Union ministers? Who are



the three opposition leaders? Who is the constitutional authority? Who are the journalists? Who are the business persons? What information was retrieved by the BJP government and agencies? How was it used - misused and to what consequence?" the Congress leader asked.

He also questioned if appropriate criminal cases would now be lodged against the political executive or officers in the present government and the company owning NSO. "Will the Supreme Court

take note of the judgment of the US court in Meta v/s NSO? Will the Supreme Court proceed to make public the report of the Committee of Technical Experts on Pegasus Spyware, submitted to it in 2021-22?" Surjewala said.

Questioning if the Supreme Court would now conduct a further inquiry in view of the judgment affirming the targeting of 1,400 WhatsApp numbers, including 300 from India, he asked, "Will the Supreme Court now ask Meta to submit to itself the 300 names to meet the ends of justice in the Pegasus case?"

"Shouldn't Facebook (now Meta) now have responsibility to release the names of 300 Indians targeted by Pegasus, considering WhatsApp and Facebook have the biggest subscriber base in India and they have 'duty of care and disclosure' to its clients in India?" the Congress leader asked.

Communal Muslim alliance behind Rahul, Priyanka's win in Wayanad, says CPI(M) leader

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

CPI (M) Politburo member A Vijayaraghavan's recent controversial remarks regarding the Lok Sabha victories of Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra from the Wayanad constituency have drawn sharp criticism from Congress and Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) leaders on Sunday.

Congress leaders accused the senior CPI (M) leader of making the comments to "please" the Sangh Parivar, while their United Democratic Front (UDF) ally, the IUML, alleged that he was attempting to provoke majority communalism in society.

During a party event in Wayanad on Saturday, Vijayaraghavan reportedly claimed that Rahul Gandhi secured victory in the high-range segment twice with the support of communal forces and that extremist elements were present at Priyanka Gandhi's campaign rallies.

AICC General Secretary K C Venugopal strongly criticised Vijayaraghavan, accusing him of using "communal" language that even the Sangh Parivar might hesitate to employ against Rahul Gandhi. Venugopal also questioned whether the CPI (M)



shared the same opinion. "How can someone holding the position of a Politburo member of the CPI (M) speak in such a communal manner?" Venugopal asked. "This is part of a deal to please the BJP.

This is not just a CPI (M) statement—it is a BJP quotation aimed at crucifying Rahul Gandhi," he alleged.

Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan echoed similar sentiments, charging the CPI (M) with pushing the same communal agenda propagated by the Sangh Parivar. "Post-Parliamentary elections, the CPI (M) is engaged in majority appeasement. This is an effort to gain favour with the Sangh Parivar and escape scrutiny from

Gurugram Police cyber crime team arrests Malaysian national for fraud of Rs 2.81 crore

STAFF REPORTER ■ GURUGRAM

A cyber crime team of the Gurugram police has arrested a Malaysian national for allegedly duping a man of Rs 2.81 crore in the name of investing stock market, police said.

Police said on Sunday that they received a complaint regarding cheating of about Rs 2.81 crore for investing in the stock market. On the complaint, a case was registered under the relevant sections in Police Station Cyber West, Gurugram.

During the investigation, a cyber crime police team led by Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (cybercrime) nabbed the accused from Tamil Nadu on Friday.

The accused was identified as Mohammad Jameel bin Mohammad Iqbal a resident of Malaysia.

"During the probe, the investigation team found that the mother of the accused is from Tamil Nadu and he is also married in Tamil Nadu, due to which he knew the Tamil language.

The above accused had come to India with another Malaysian partner, and he had taken the Indian SIM card used in committing the fraud from another accused, Devkaran.

Some other SIM cards pro-



vided by the accused have also been used in the fraud cases," Priyanshu Diwan, ACP (cybercrime), said.

Police then circulated a lookout notice against the accused, and the accused had come to Tamil Nadu to attend a wedding ceremony, after which the accused was arrested by Gurugram Police. 04 accused have already been arrested in this case, he said.

The investigation team has recovered a Malaysia passport, an international driving license, a Malaysia identity card, a health card, a debit card, a Malaysia driving license, a mobile phone, a SIM card, a ring and foreign and Indian currency

NDA to contest 2025 Bihar Assembly polls under leadership of Nitish, Modi: Deputy CM



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and BJP leader Samrat Choudhary said on Sunday said NDA will contest the assembly polls in Bihar next year under the leadership of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"There is no confusion," he said during a Press conference at the BJP headquarters in the national Capital when asked to comment on speculation that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) could do a rethink on projecting Kumar as its leader in the polls.

He was responding to Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent interview to a news channel in which he was

asked if the NDA could go to the polls in Bihar without declaring a chief ministerial candidate, like it recently did with great success in Maharashtra.

Shah, a former BJP president who is still regarded as the party's principal strategist, had replied after a pause, "We will sit together and decide. We will let you know after we have made a decision." The cryptic response had led to furious speculation that the BJP could insist on not projecting Kumar in the 2025 polls.

Dismissing the speculation, Choudhary said, "The NDA is working under the leadership of Nitish Kumar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bihar and we will continue to contest elections under the leadership of both leaders."

Modi Government's 'calibrated erosion' of EC's integrity: Kharge on election rule

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday hit out at the government for tweaking an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents, alleging it is part of the Modi government's "systematic conspiracy" to destroy the institutional integrity of the Election Commission.

Kharge also said the Modi government's "calibrated erosion" of the ECI's integrity is a frontal attack on the Constitution and democracy. The government has tweaked

an election rule to prevent public inspection of certain electronic documents such as CCTV camera and webcasting footage as well as video recordings of candidates to prevent their misuse. Based on the recommendation of the Election Commission of India (ECI), the Union law ministry on Friday amended Rule 93(2)(a) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961, to restrict the type of "papers" or documents open to public inspection.

While Congress general secretary-in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh indi-



cated the grand old party would legally challenge the amendment, Lok Sabha MP and Congress general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal said the poll panel had chosen opacity and a pro-government attitude in its dealings thus far.

Reacting to the development, Kharge said Modi government's audacious amendment in the Conduct of Election Rules is another assault in its systematic conspiracy to destroy the institutional integrity of the Election Commission of India. "Earlier, they had removed the Chief Justice of

India from the Selection panel which appoints Election Commissioners, and now they have resorted to stonewall electoral information, even after a High Court order," he said in a statement.

Everytime the Congress party wrote to the ECI, regarding specific poll irregularities such as voter deletions and lack of transparency in EVMs, the ECI has responded in a condescending tone and chosen not to even acknowledge certain serious complaints, Kharge said. "This again proves that the ECI, even though it is a quasi-judicial

body, is not behaving independently," he said.

"The Modi government's calibrated erosion of ECI's integrity is a frontal attack on the Constitution and Democracy and we will take every step to safeguard them," Kharge said.

According to Rule 93, all "papers" related to elections shall be open to public inspection. The amendment inserts "as specified in these rules" after "papers". Law ministry and ECI officials separately explained that a court case was the "trigger" behind the amendment.

While documents such as

nomination forms, appointment of election agents, results and election count statements are mentioned in the Conduct of Election Rules, electronic documents such as CCTV camera footage, webcasting footage and video recording of candidates during the Model Code of Conduct period are not covered.

"CCTV coverage, webcasting of polling stations are not carried out under Conduct of Election Rules but are the result of steps taken by the ECI to ensure a level playing field," a former ECI official explained.



FIRST COLUMN

MAKE A DIRECT CONNECT WITH GOD

Our approach to the Divine has been shackled by rituals, often muddling the true essence of spiritual connection



RAVI VALLURI

As a monolithic organisation, railway bureaucracy was once fossilised and adopted an ostrich-like approach while dealing with its internal and external customers and also with rivals till it adopted technology in attracting passenger and freight segments.

This cardinal principle of competitive advantage and adaptability also applies in our relationship with religion, spirituality and almighty God. Humans have been prisoners to an outdated pedagogy while approaching God. The transaction between the Divine and the bhakta has been constrained as the transmission of knowledge and blessings have been clogged in drain pipes, as the seeker and the devout feels impotent and weak.

Can we recall two path-breaking movies from a few years back, OMG - Oh My God! and PK, wherein the relationship of humans and God was explored?

In OMG a petty trader, Kanji challenges the orthodoxy of the religious establishment by suing the Creator for the ruin of his business, much to the chagrin of the priestly and spiritual class. Similarly, PK - an alien who is marooned on planet Earth, as his spaceship leaves without him - questions various religious and spiritual institutions with his childlike curiosity, only to attract disapprobation.

If it was Lord Krishna's flute and discus in the case of Kanji, it became the symbolic wrong number in the case of PK to dispute the indurate thought processes of a shambolic order. A distraught PK was unable to connect with the Divine forms of various religious denominations and all his trials ended in a sandbox of wrong numbers. So, what is the right number? It is a Wi-Fi to God.



Let us for a split second assume that human beings and all the other manifestations of this grand design are like computers, smartphones or other electronic devices. Almighty God can be likened to the World Wide Web possessing the repository of knowledge, of course with the faculty of creation and destruction.

In the wired world all gizmos are connected to the internet through a Wi-Fi. Aberrations or disruptions in the communication do take place, when the battery power is low, or due to software glitches (this can be attributed to low prana levels). The intermediaries, in the form of the priestly class, astutely blame these muddles faced by the gizmos, either in the hands of God or lack of tapas by the seeker. For centuries across the world, as humans evolved from the inception as mere nature worshippers, to established religions, the febrile human mind has always been inquisitive about the acceptable and bizarre theories of existence. Almighty God in all his manifestations and myriad forms is approachable to bestow benedictions. However, tragically it is the gizmo (humans) and the channel (Wi-Fi) that have transfigured and remodeled since perhaps, the Big Bang!

The Wi-Fi is symbolic of a direct connection with the Divine. A true bhakta does he require an emergency quota to board the heavenly train. There is no need to perform rituals, consult tarot card readers, visit places of worship out of fear, beseeching for mercy or boons. A chip is embedded in the DNA to ensure the divine communion which needs to be activated. The regular practice of yogic postures is essentially Hatha Yoga and a tonic for the physical body. The meditation that humans practice is to fortify and safeguard the comfort of our minds, but it is our true inner self, which pines for nourishment. The ordinary mortal today too can be in this state of spiritual reverie through the power of breath. This brings us closest to our inner self. This is the unalloyed Wi-Fi to connect with the Divine.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Slowdown in growth: Is it a temporary blip?



UTTAM GUPTA

This temporary slowdown, attributed to reduced government spending, raises broader concerns about the structural challenges underpinning India's growth story



The GDP (gross domestic product) growth during the second quarter of the current financial year (FY) ending September 30, 2024, decelerated to 5.4 per cent down from 8.1 per cent achieved during the corresponding period of FY 2023-24. It was the lowest in seven quarters and well below the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) forecast of 7 per cent. It was even lower than the 6.7 per cent recorded during the first quarter of the current FY ending June 30, 2024.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman observed that deceleration was not a "systemic slowdown"; that it was a temporary blip caused by a reduction in government expenditure (courtesy, elections ended in the June quarter when many projects came to a standstill due to the model code of conduct). She exuded confidence that expansion during the third quarter would make up for the lost momentum. The Ministry of Finance (MoF) expects full-year GDP growth to be 6.5 - 7 per cent. Coming on top of growth of 8 per cent plus achieved during the previous three consecutive years, 6.5 - 7 per cent during the current FY is indeed impressive. Even at this lower level, the Indian economy continues to be the fastest-growing in the world. Then, why should it worry us?

Nearly 70 per cent of India's GDP is driven by domestic consumption; the remaining 30 per cent is driven by investment and export. Domestic consumption includes government consumption and private consumption. Likewise, investment consists of capital spent by the government and private investment. During the last five years, the Central Government has done the heavy lifting especially when it comes to investment. An idea of this can be gauged from its budget outlay 2020-21: Rs 30.42 lakh crore; 2021-22: Rs 34.83 lakh crore; 2022-23: Rs 39.45 lakh crore; 2023-24: Rs 45.03 lakh crore; 2024-25: Rs 48.20 lakh crore.

The Centre's capital spend during these years was 2020-21: Rs 4.39 lakh crore; 2021-22: Rs 5.54 lakh crore; 2022-23: Rs 7.50 lakh crore; 2023-24: Rs 10.01 lakh crore; 2024-25: Rs 11.11 lakh crore. The Central government has also been helping the states



UNION FINANCE MINISTER NIRMALA SITHARAMAN OBSERVED THAT DECELERATION WAS NOT A "SYSTEMIC SLOWDOWN"; THAT IT WAS A TEMPORARY BLIP CAUSED BY A REDUCTION IN GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE

to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans.

During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For the current FY, the transfers are kept at Rs 150,000 crore. It has also given incentives to promote investment in the private sector. The mother of all incentives was a reduction in the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises and 22 per cent for existing enterprises. In this year's budget, the corporate tax rate on foreign firms was reduced from 40 per cent to 35 per cent.

The Centre has also done its bit to give a boost to private consumption. In the budget for 2024-25, Sitharaman has given relief in personal income tax (PIT) of around Rs 17,500/- annually by changing the tax slabs under the New Income Tax regime and increasing in standard deduction by Rs 25,000/-. Less tax means higher disposable income in the hands of the people hence the scope for more spending. But, initiatives by the government alone can't ensure high growth on a sustainable basis. To achieve high sustainable growth, it is necessary to give a boost to private consumption. The dip to 5.4 per cent during the second quarter of the current FY when the decline in urban demand took a toll even as heavy lifting by the Centre was not available (due to elections) should serve as a warning signal. This brings us to a systemic problem that has hampered growth for decades.

This has to do with inequalities in the distribution of income and wealth. According to an Oxfam report, 'Inequality Kills', the collective wealth of India's 100 richest people in 2021 hit a record high of US\$ 775 billion or over 25 per cent of India's GDP. In conversation with ET Now at the recently held

Times Network India Economic Conclave, Arvind Panagariya, Chairman, of the 16th Finance Commission said: "The inequality in the sense of the top 1 per cent as a proportion of the bottom 5 percent, yes, that inequality has gone up". Thomas Piketty, a professor at the Paris School of Economics (he is known for his groundbreaking research on economic inequality, wealth distribution, and the dynamics of capitalism) says "the share of India's top 10 percent population is currently at 55-60 per cent". According to him, this should be 30-40 per cent. Whichever source one looks at, we can't wish away the fact that India is home to glaring inequalities in income distribution.

This, in turn, has to do with the manner in which fruits of development are shared amongst the people. Unambiguously, the sharing is unequal. According to an analysis of the financials of India's largest companies - those comprising the BSE 500 index - over five years, the profits of corporations included in this index more than doubled from Rs 480,000 crore during 2017-18 Rs 1000,000 crore during 2021-22, whereas their revenue growth was only 47 per cent.

This means that payments to factors of production other than the owners of capital such as to employees/workers, etc., have been kept under a tight leash, resulting in a disproportionate boost to profits. A big slice of these profits has gone to the pockets of the shareholders of these firms.

Thus, the aggregate dividend paid by them increased from Rs 176,000 crore during 2017-18 to Rs 302,000 crore during 2021-22, which is an increase of 72 per cent. In those five years, cumulatively, they paid 34 per cent of aggregate net profit as dividends. This is an unusually high payout ratio - even higher than 30 per cent paid by the

world's largest companies in America's S&P 500. Whether profits to the firms or high dividends to shareholders, it has been paid for or come at the cost of millions of others. Rs 1,000,000 crore profits of firms in the BSE 500 index during FY 2021-22 came at the cost of undermining the purchasing power of millions of consumers.

Likewise, the mammoth dividend fills the coffers of a few - the money that merely adds to their idle cash balances or is spent on a few luxury items - denying millions of workers decent income. The tendency to appropriate a disproportionate share of the proceeds of wealth generation by a few persons at the top can be seen even amongst the owners of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) who ape large enterprises when it comes to making payments to their workers.

The SMEs being employment intensive, a general belief is that giving a boost to them would help in creating more jobs hence, lead to a more equitable income distribution. But, their owners' paying less to workers militates against this objective.

Even the millions of small and marginal farmers who by nature of their occupation play the role of owner as well as worker don't get to earn a good income as a handful of traders buy their crops at throwaway prices even as the minimum support price (MSP) notified by the government remains mostly on paper. When, the enterprise-owning class no matter which occupation it is in and the scale of its operation is intrinsically prone to sharing less with those who are at the receiving end, inequalities are inevitable. In such a scenario, how can we expect a big push to the demand needed for sustained growth?

(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)

The allure and impact of Reels: A double-edged sword

In an age where digital connectivity reigns supreme, short-form content like reels has taken centre stage, captivating millions with its addictive allure

In today's digital era, people from all walks of life are increasingly drawn to the virtual world, spending countless hours glued to their screens rather than engaging in real-world activities. Social media platforms, online gaming, and streaming services have created an engaging yet addictive digital ecosystem. Among these, reels have emerged as a dominant form of entertainment, captivating users with short, visually stimulating content that ranges from dance challenges and comedy skits to educational snippets and senseless videos. While initially sought as a break from daily routines, reels often trap users in an endless cycle of mindless scrolling that detracts from productivity and long-term goals.



GURDEEP KAUR

Reels are crafted with algorithms and driven by artificial intelligence to provide instant gratification. However, this seemingly harmless indulgence is contributing to a concerning decline in social and emotional wellbeing. The short bursts of content, typically lasting a few seconds to a minute, are often paired with catchy music, effects, and filters to maximise engagement. These features captivate both creators and viewers, fostering an obsession that has surpassed earlier trends like the selfie craze.

The statistics are staggering. In 2023, India had approximately 24 crore Instagram users, accounting for nearly 17 per cent of its population - the highest globally. Children as young as five years old are consuming reels, while parents take pride in showcasing their kids' talents online. Although reels highlight creativity and talent, they come with significant risks. Overexposure to adult themes, unsolicited criticism, and the pressure to perform for likes and shares can severely impact a child's self-esteem and emotional health. For parents, the drive

for online validation often overshadows the responsibility to provide age-appropriate environments for their children. The dopamine rush triggered by watching reels creates a cycle of instant gratification, making it difficult for users to focus on meaningful achievements that require sustained effort. The infinite scroll feature exacerbates this issue, leading to binge-watching that consumes valuable time and energy. For youth, who are particularly vulnerable, this translates to lost opportunities for personal growth, skill development, and building genuine relationships.

Reels and Social Dynamics
The cultural impact of reels extends beyond individual habits, influencing societal

norms and behaviors. Content creators often sensationalise material to attract more viewers, blurring the lines between private and public domains. This trend has led to the normalisation of inappropriate content, including vulgarity, obscenity, and indecent practices, which are being readily adopted by impressionable audiences.

The effects are troubling. Incidents of cyberbullying, harassment, and social media-



driven disputes are on the rise. The dopamine-induced focus on short-term gratification undermines hard work and perseverance, fostering a culture of mediocrity. Youth, in particular, are losing precious productive years to the reel marathon, trading real-life interactions for virtual validation.

Physical and Cognitive Consequences
The overconsumption of reels is not only detrimental to mental health but also poses physical and cognitive risks. Prolonged screen time leads to issues such as poor concentration, memory deficits, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic or professional performance. Lifestyle disorders like obesity, diabetes, and hypertension are becoming

more prevalent, exacerbated by sedentary habits encouraged by excessive reel consumption. **Breaking the Cycle**
Addressing the negative impact of reels requires a collective effort. At an individual level, self-discipline is crucial. Setting clear limits on screen time and prioritising meaningful activities can help break the cycle. Families play a pivotal role, as parents must lead by example, fostering environments that encourage "family time" and shared activities. Introducing hobbies and alternative forms of entertainment can also reduce reliance on digital distractions. From a societal perspective, stringent regulations are necessary to monitor and control the type of content being created and shared. Governments

and tech companies should collaborate to design features that promote responsible platform usage.

The Way Forward
They must be used responsibly to avoid their harmful consequences. Striking a balance between virtual and real-world experiences is essential for leading a fulfilling life. Individuals need meaningful relationships, emotional support, and real-life achievements to thrive. By fostering awareness and adopting healthier digital habits, we can harness the benefits of technology without compromising our wellbeing. (The writer has an experience of 17 years of teaching the under graduate students of Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce; views are personal)



Mindful snacking can keep you satisfied, nourish your body, and help you avoid unhealthy choices if you embrace nutritious options like pecans to indulge wisely and guilt-free, writes **KAVITA DEVGAN**

SMART SNACKING FOR THE CHILLS

Winter is here, and so is the temptation to indulge in comforting treats! With the chilly weather encouraging cosy evenings and festive gatherings, snacking often takes center stage. But mindless munching, especially on unhealthy snacks, can derail your health and lead to unwanted weight gain. Instead of avoiding snacks altogether, the key is to snack smart and make choices that nourish your body while satisfying your cravings.

WHY SMART SNACKING MATTERS

Snacking isn't inherently bad—it's what and how you snack that matters. Smart snacking can fill nutritional gaps, keep hunger in check, and even prevent overeating during main meals. On the other hand, poor choices, like fried or sugary snacks, can add empty calories, lead to guilt, and make staying healthy during the season difficult.

SMART SNACKING RULES

PLAN YOUR SNACKS: Snacks aren't extras—they should be part of your daily meal plan. Choose nutrient-rich options that complement your meals. A great addition to your winter snack list is American pecans. Packed with over 19 vitamins and minerals, they're now easily available in India and are a nutritious, satisfying option.

MIND PORTION SIZES:

Snacking isn't feasting. A proper snack should be small but fulfilling. For instance, 30 grams of pecans (about 19 halves) offer 200 calories, 3 grams of protein, and fibre to keep you satiated.

SATISFY YOUR CRAVINGS THOUGHTFULLY: Identify what you're craving—crunchy, salty, or



SNACKING IN STYLE DURING FESTIVITIES

- Roasted pecans can be your go-to snack for cosy evenings. They're also perfect for hosting guests during winter celebrations.
- Looking for gifting ideas? Ditch traditional sweets and consider gifting American pecans. They're healthy, innovative, and sure to be appreciated by health-conscious friends and family.

SIMPLE WAYS TO ROAST PECANS

BASIC ROAST

- Spread pecans evenly on a baking sheet.
- Bake at 180°C for 7–10 minutes, stirring occasionally for even roasting.

SPICED ROAST

- Toss pecans with a mix of olive oil, paprika, and a pinch of salt.
- Roast at 180°C for 10 minutes for a flavourful twist.

This winter, embrace mindful snacking by making smart choices like pecans.

— The author is a nutritionist and has taken inputs from American Pecan



sweet—and choose a healthier alternative. If you love crunchy snacks, roasted pecans are an excellent choice. They retain their nutritional profile and are rich in antioxidants, even after roasting.

SNACK TO CURB HUNGER, NOT BOREDOM: Snack mindfully when you're hungry, not out of habit or boredom. Avoid overindulging and balance high-calorie snacks with



lighter choices during other meals. A handful of pecans paired with fresh fruits can be a delicious and balanced winter snack.

BE PREPARED: Keep healthy snacks handy—store nuts in your bag, desk drawer, or even your car. Pecans are a fantastic non-perishable option for when hunger strikes unexpectedly. This way, you'll avoid grabbing unhealthy, convenient options.



HOLISTIC APPROACH TO COMBAT DISEASES



By **DR SHIFALIKA GOENKA**

Chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, heart attacks, strokes, and obesity are rapidly rising in India. The good news is that more than half of these conditions are preventable through actions taken through multi-sectoral policy action, simplified generic drug policies, community action, and empowered individuals. The most potent ammunition to protect from chronic diseases is a healthy lifestyle. A healthy lifestyle consists of a diet rich in locally available and inexpensive fruits and vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts, and seeds, with extreme moderation in salt and sugar, refined foods, and sugar-sweetened beverages. Additional steps include avoiding tobacco and alcohol. Exercise produces endorphins and is addictive. Leisure and physical activity should be part of everyone's life. All these require an empowered community, an enlightened individual, and an energetic polity.



ASPECTS OF THE ECOSYSTEMS THAT NEED TO BE PART OF THE GRID

Social norms and policies must achieve the following for a health-promoting eco-system.

Healthy Eating: Healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables in their raw forms (and cooked), cheap, nuts, seeds, pulses, whole grains, and healthy oils must be made safer, cheaper, and more readily available, accessible, and affordable across access points such as public transport, at the workplace, and in educational institutes.

Controlling portion sizes is critical. Large portions of unhealthy foods and beverages, especially at discounts, have been proven to push people to eat more. Large servings, large plates, supersized meals, and bottomless drinks must be de-incentivised, and smaller portions must be incentivised. Children must be protected from unhealthy foods and beverage advertising onslaught. Also, targeting children by extolling children to persuade them into unhealthy behaviours, food, and beverages should not be allowed.

Eliminating trans fats and tobacco and decreasing artificial sugar and refined foods are universal goals from a scientific perspective.

The unorganised sector dominates the Indian food market and is price-sensitive. Lower taxes on healthy oils, higher taxes on unhealthy oils, and cheaper fresh fruits and vegetables will boost healthy food production and consumption.

Health Promoting Town Planning Critical to Healthier Communities

Scientific research shows that providing wide sidewalks, large parks, and green forests within a 0.5 km radius of every household improves health in many ways, including preventing more than 50 chronic diseases and improving mental health for the residents and families staying in the vicinity. Trees also act as natural filters, reducing air pollution and creating a healthier environment.

A study published in JACC Advances has shown that living in high-traffic, congested localities alongside highways increases the local population's blood pressure and chronic diseases. High air pollution is a public health crisis. Preventing air pollution should be a top priority across all ministries, as well as housing and development. High air pollution can shorten life-spans by 1.7 years and increase chronic diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, lung diseases, and asthma, among those exposed to high levels of air pollution.

The holistic way to address the challenge of chronic diseases is to create a grid environment conducive to healthy eating and healthy living through multiple sectors. This leads to a healthy country, systems, societies, and happy people.

— The author is the Deputy Director & Head, Health Promotion, Physical Activity & Obesity Prevention, Centre for Chronic Disease Control (CCDC)



SOLUTION TO POLLUTION

By **ARUN DUGGAL**

DELHI STRUGGLES TO MEET EV TARGETS

Delhi once again finds itself developed in a thick blanket of smog with AQI touching an AQI of 349 or 'very poor' category and hapless Delhiites are turning to humorous memes for solace. One popular tweet went like this: "Time to give Delhi new names: Pollutys Delhi, Haze Khas, Dhua Kuan and Chandni Choke." Apart from the stress busting mirth, citizens of the Capital are hostage to an annualised feature when air pollution swerves between 'very poor to severe' levels as the winter sets in, leading to permanent health issues. Delhi has the unfortunate distinction of being the world's worst polluted capital city. The air is unbreathable, thanks to fully dispersed harmful pollutants – around 40% which comes from vehicular emissions. One survey pegs the financial losses to the Delhi NCR at a very conservative Rs 100 crore/day due to poor air quality.

BEEN THERE, DONE THAT

To be fair, the state government has tried its best. In 2001, it moved public transport to CNG as fuel, levied charges on commercial ICE vehicles, banned 10-year-old diesel and 15-year-old petrol vehicles and introduced the odd-even car numbers initiative. The Delhi EV Policy was framed to encourage greater use of public transport and a viable supply-chain ecosystem through a combination of fiscal and non-fiscal incentives. Initiatives like "Switch Delhi," unveiled in early 2021 to create mass awareness and the ongoing 'Red Light On, Gaadi Off' campaign are well intended. Yet, Delhiites continue to bear the brunt of pollution emanating from within and from nearby states.

Despite a target of 25% EVs in new vehicle registrations by 2023-24, Delhi could manage around 12% in the fiscal. While higher than other states, it's a poor record given the pollution levels. Even after compulsory scrapping of old diesel and petrol vehicles in 2021, the city still has 472 vehicles per 1,000 people. Between 2012-2024, the share of personal vehicles registered was around 92%, but EV 4-wheelers, with just 3% share, have struggled to take off. Regulatory action and financial incentives are inducing some growth in commercial EV segments, but this has to be accompanied by a parallel or superlative growth in personal EVs, to address the pollution crisis.

LOOK EAST, LOOK WEST

New Delhi can take a few cues from Norway and Nepal – countries that have notched up amazing results in pollution reduction and long-term environmental benefits with their commitments to EV adoption. Norway, a country with a population of 5.5 million and an oil and gas producer, has achieved a 35% reduction in CO2 emissions since 2012, improving both air quality and public health. Oslo has the highest per capita number of EVs in the world due to a strict adoption target, generous tax rebates and strategic incentivisation of EV users. With EVs accounting for over 90% of its new car registrations, the world will have to scale up the EV adoption roughly as fast as Norway, if it must meet any net zero targets. Closer home, EVs account for 50% of Nepal's overall vehicle sales (as of FY24) thanks to sustained incentives and low taxes amid a nationwide urgency to cut down energy imports. With nearly all its energy coming from renewable river-fed

hydroelectricity, Nepal is focusing on infrastructure development to support EV ownership.

REAL SOLUTION TO POLLUTION KEPT AT BAY

With the fast-growing economy creating higher disposable income for its huge middle-class, each passing year, the desire for personal mobility will always be on the rise. One perpetual casualty will be air quality. A Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) study in Delhi, Kanpur, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai, and Mumbai categorically concludes that the transport sector will continue to emit most of the Nox, and around 50% of PM2.5 emissions in these cities, if we keep away from greener transportation. Studies show that subsidies are not a magic bullet unless the switch to EV is made too good to ignore for a customer. Starting with attractive subsidies, customers can be lured by parking benefits, besides manufacturer-offered incentives for upgrades. Most importantly, a modern EV policy with a strong commitment to achieving targets from all authorities would comfort buyers in areas like charging infrastructure. Since many are not fully aware of the need to switch to EVs, regular campaigns must be undertaken. Big cities may pollute more, but smaller and emerging ones are not far behind; every year new towns in Tier 2 and Tier 3 India are making to the WHO's most-polluted cities list. Unless there's collective will to fast-track EV adoption, Delhi's air pollution will always get tossed around in inter-state bickering and internal political rivalries with fewer solutions.

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