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## Khalistani extremist threatens to disrupt DGPs' meet

Modi, Amit Shah to participate in BBSR event

**MALINI SAHU** ■ BHUBANESWAR

Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, a designated terrorist and head of the banned Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) outfit, has reportedly issued threats to disrupt the upcoming three-day Directors General of Police-Inspectors General of Police (DGP-IGP) conference in Bhubaneswar, which begins on Friday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval are

among the key figures to participate in this high-profile event.

In a video message, Pannun called on his supporters to "disguise and take cover in temples or hotels in Bhubaneswar" to disrupt the conference. He also appealed to Maoists and Kashmiri militants to join his disruptive plans.

Pannun, who is listed as a terrorist under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), challenged PM Modi to visit the Ram Mandir in Bhubaneswar. He alleged that the conference is not a regular meeting but a gathering to plan operations against pro-



Khalistani Sikhs, Kashmiri militants and Maoists.

Twin City Police Commissioner Suresh Dev Datta Singh addressed the media regarding the threats.

"We have deployed a robust security apparatus, including Odisha Police, Bhubaneswar Commissionerate police,

anti-terror agencies and other security forces. The three-day event will primarily focus on law and order across the country," he said.

Responding to Pannun's threats, Singh assured, "Over 70 platoons of security forces have been mobilised. While anti-India terrorist groups remain a challenge, our efforts to neutralise them are ongoing to ensure national safety. Preventive measures are in place, and we are maintaining a strict vigil to ensure the conference proceeds smoothly."

Ahead of PM Modi's arrival on Friday, security has been significantly tightened.

The conference venue and its surrounding areas have been declared no-fly and no-drone zones.

The pan-India DGP-IGP conference, running from November 30 to December 1, will see the participation of senior officers from the Intelligence Bureau, States' DGPs, the CRPF Director General and chiefs of organisations like the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), NSG and Special Protection Group (SPG).

The event will primarily address critical issues such as internal security, Left-Wing Extremism and counter-terrorism strategies.

## In Puri Navy to put up grand show on Dec 4

**PNS** ■ PURI

The Indian Navy is all set to put up a grand show demonstrating its formidable maritime might, capabilities and operational strength on the sea along the Blue Flag Beach of Puri on the occasion of Navy Day on December 4.

The day commemorates the Indian Navy's triumph in the 1971 Indo-Pak war, showcases its multifaceted competencies, enhances maritime awareness



among citizens and honours India's rich seafaring heritage.

This year's Navy Day theme is 'Operational Demonstration' or 'Op Demo' and symbolises the connection between the Indian Navy and the maritime legacy of Odisha. On the occasion, at least 24 warships and 40

aircrafts will demonstrate the Navy's maritime capabilities through water and aerial manoeuvres.

This would be the first-ever Navy Day celebrations. The event is expected to be held between 4 pm and 6:30 pm and culminate with a spectacular laser show.

The Indian Navy is working closely with the Odisha Government and the local authorities to ensure the smooth execution of the event.

## In Kendrapada Woman stripped, molested by fellow villager

**Prime accused at large**

**RAJESH BEHERA** ■ KENDRAPADA

In an inhuman incident that occurred under the Jamboo marine police station, a woman was allegedly stripped, molested and assaulted on a road.

Further, she was confined to a room and a stray dog was released inside, where the dog bit to the victim. The accused allegedly made an attempt to rape the victim's minor daughter too.

According to SI of Police of Jamboo Marine PS Nikunja Kishore Pradhan, the incident occurred at Batighar village under Mahakalapada block. The victim's hubby works at Paradip for which the victim woman is staying with her minor daughter, who is study-

ing in class 10th in the village. Taking advantage of the absence of the victim's husband, a fellow villager, Ashoka Baidya, allegedly used to torture the woman and her daughter in regular intervals. He used to harass them sexually also.

The victim woman lodged an FIR alleging that on November 20 at about 11 am, Baidya, her wife Jinu Baidya and a family member Parbati Baidya allegedly created a reign of terror at her house.

The accused allegedly misbehaved with the victim and also abused her with filthy language. When she protested, the accused dragged her out of the house by her hair. They thrashed and stripped her on the village road. The trio later assaulted the victim severely with an iron pipe.

As if this was not enough to

satiating their anger, they confined the victim to a room and released a stray dog inside where the victim faced dog attack and got injured. She was later rescued and admitted at the Paradip hospital in critical condition. According to the victim's FIR, principal accused Ashoka Baidya also unsuccessfully attempted to rape her minor daughter.

According to SDPO of Kendrapada Debendra Mallick, the police registered two cases and arrested two women, Jinu Baidya, wife of Ashoka and her relative, Parbati Baidya.

The duo arrested woman were produced before the SDJM court where they were remanded in jail custody. The prime accused, Ashoka, however, was yet to be arrested as he is absconding. Raid is on to nab him, informed police.

## In Assembly Opposition criticises govt over rising crimes

Law Minister claims zero-tolerance for criminals

**PNS** ■ BHUBANESWAR

Opposition BJD and Congress strongly criticised the BJP government in the State Assembly on Thursday, alleging a steep increase in crime over the past six months.

During a debate on an adjournment motion, they accused Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi's administration of failing to maintain law

and order, citing a rise in crimes against women and minors, including rape, child marriage, newborn trafficking and road accidents.

BJD MLA Arun Sahoo blamed the administration over "insensitive" ministerial statements, leniency toward offenders and lack of decisive action. He accused ruling party members of interfering in police matters, demoralising law enforcement.

Sahoo claimed that over 1,200 rapes and 556 murders have been reported in the past six months. Bhubaneswar led

in theft cases while Sambalpur had the highest number of dacoity cases. Incidents of child trafficking were noted in Balangir, Rayagada and Bhubaneswar.

He also pointed to alleged police inaction in two prominent cases -- an assault involving the Governor's son and the reported torture of an Army personnel and his girlfriend at the Bharatpur police station. Congress Legislature Party Leader Ramchandra Kadam highlighted the rising crimes against women, including rape and gang-rape.

Congress MLA Sofia Firdos suggested enacting legislation akin to West Bengal's "Aparajita Act" and addressing police staff shortages to combat crime effectively.

Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan, speaking on behalf of Chief Minister, refuted the Opposition's claims and emphasised the administration's zero-tolerance approach to crimes, particularly against women.

He accused the previous BJD government of shielding criminals and contrasted their record with the current

government's focus on investigation, prosecution and conviction. Harichandan highlighted several initiatives, including plans to establish a National Forensic University and create four fast-track courts staffed by women to address crimes against women. He reassured the Assembly that strict action would be taken against offenders, irrespective of their political connections or status. The minister also noted a decline in crime rates over the past five months with a significant reduction in human trafficking cases.

DADLS-58



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# In Mayurbhanj Man held for staging own murder to claim insurance

**PNS ■ BARIPADA**  
A finance executive staged his own kidnapping and murder in a desperate attempt to claim insurance money. The matter came to the fore after the Mayurbhanj police arrested him after three months of hide-and-seek.  
On August 8, a blood-stained motorbike and a bag were discovered near a pond in the Khasia forest under Rairuan police station of Mayurbhanj.  
The missing person was identified as Hemant Patra from Jamudagaon under Harichandanpur PS in Keonjhar district.  
Patra's wife and mother-in-law lodged a police complaint alleging him being kidnapped



and murdered. However, police investigations failed to yield any concrete findings of his murder.  
A significant breakthrough came when police traced his

movements and detained him during a visit to his home to collect his certificates. During interrogation, Patra confessed to fabricating his own abduction and murder.  
Patra admitted that mounting financial pressures, particularly difficulty in managing his equated monthly installments (EMI), prompted him to devise the elaborate hoax to secure an insurance payout.  
Karanja SDPO Subrat Kumar said, "He was under financial burden. He was paying a lot of EMIs. So, he planned everything from placing the blood-stained bike to fleeing to Secunderabad. We are not sure if his wife and other family members are also involved in this."

# Missing Bhadrak girl found dead in Cuttack

**Kin allege murder by BF's family**  
**PNS ■ BHADRAK**  
The body of a minor girl could not be cremated even 16 hours after her death at Sorishadiha village under the Dhamnagar police station in Bhadrak district as the family members alleged that she was murdered by the family members of her lover.  
The deceased was identified as Lilirani Sutar (16).  
As per the allegation by Lilirani's family members, she was in love with one Goutam Behera of the same village. Subsequently, Lilirani eloped with Goutam some eight months back. As the family members of Goutam feigned their ignorance about the matter, Lilirani's family members lodged a missing complaint at the Dhamnagar police station.  
However, the family members of Goutam informed the family members of Lilirani over phone some four days back that their daughter was in Cuttack in critical condition. However, to their utter shock, the family members found her dead when they visited Cuttack.  
Though Lilirani's body has been lying near the door of Goutam since Wednesday evening, the family members of the deceased are refusing to take the body for cremation. They are alleging that Goutam's family members have murdered Lilirani.  
Tension prevailed in the area following the incident. Upon being informed, the Dhamnagar police reached the spot and started an investigation into the incident.

# Ambulance mishap in Jajpur West Bengal youth killed; 3 women injured



**PNS ■ JAJPUR**  
A 24-year-old youth from West Bengal was killed and three women, including a 74-year-old patient, sustained serious injuries when an ambulance they were travelling in from their village in Paschim Medinipur district to a private hospital in Bhubaneswar collided with a truck at Neulapur Chhack on National Highway-16 under the Dharmasala police station in Jajpur district in wee hours on Thursday. The deceased was identified as Sheik Samsad Azad of Paschim Medinipur district.  
The ambulance was carrying the woman patient Aroti Bibi, her two daughters Manowara Begum (54) and Sanwara Dey (52) and the deceased Sheik Samsad Azad, son of Manowara Begum for admission of Aroti Bibi in a hospital in Bhubaneswar when the driver lost control over the wheel and the vehicle crashed against a roadside stationary truck. The driver of the ambulance fled from the spot after the accident.

# In Bhadrak Tension after teacher misbehaves with girl

**PNS ■ BHADRAK**  
Tension prevailed after a science teacher at the Barapur Nodal High School in Basudevpur block in Bhadrak district allegedly misbehaved with a girl student on Wednesday.  
The teacher was accused of misconduct with a minor girl student leading to outrage in the locality. The allegations sparked protest from parents of the student as well as local residents on the school premises.  
Sources said parents of several students gheraoed the

school and detained the teacher inside the campus, demanding an explanation.  
Soon, police arrived at the scene and took stock of the situation even as the agitated parents demanded immediate action against the accused.  
"My daughter narrated the ordeal and described that the teacher used to regularly misbehave with her. However, today his intensity crossed all limits," stated the mother of the victim. She further alleged that the accused teacher also behaved inappropriately with several other students.  
In his statement, the ac-

# BU Economics Dept holds career counselling



**PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR**  
The PG Department of Economics of Berhampur University organised a Career Counselling Workshop on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship for students of the department here on Friday. Eminent resource persons, educationists and alumni members of the university such as Dr Bibhudatta Achary, Prof J Satpathy, Research Director, NSI of Colombia and Kali Prasad Ravi, Soft Skills trainer delivered career counselling talks on diverse areas of skill development.  
1st and 2nd technical sessions were delivered by Dr Bibhudatta Achary, Joint Director, Madhusudan Das Regional Academy of Financial Management (MDRAF), State Civil Service Training Centre, Bhubaneswar.  
During the afternoon session, Prof J Satpathy, Research Director, Neurointegral Scientific Institute of Colombia, Bogota, Republic of Colombia, discussed on the theme

# In Bargarh Large elephant herd wrecks havoc



**PNS ■ BARGARH**  
Reports said the large herd had likely migrated from the Jhohja hills of adjoining Chhattisgarh in search of food. Notably, this is not the first such instance of jumbos invading the area. Padmapur has a history of elephants migrating close to human settlements and farms. The alarming situation comes just a day after State Forests and Environment Minister Ganesh Ram Singh Khuntia informed the State Legislative Assembly that human-elephant conflicts in the State has escalated to an all-time high.

# B'pur Rotary 'Youth Activities '24' ends

**Army Public School declared champion**  
**PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR**  
The Rotary Club of Brahmampur concluded its Youth Activities 2024 with a grand valedictory ceremony at on November 24 here.  
Chief guest, ADG W Dhawantri distributed the prizes to the winners of various events.  
Rotary Youth Activities 2024 kicked off on October 20 with 30 schools participating



in 36 events, with around 1,500 students competing.  
Army Public School, Gopalpur, was declared the champion, while St. Vincent Convent was the runner-up, and KC Public School secured the third position.  
The winners received cer-

tificates and prizes during the ceremony. The events were held at various venues, including the Khallikote College Stadium, Sail Lifestar Spa, and the RCS Hall. The competitions included chess, badminton, handball, kho-kho, basketball, athletics, swimming, extempore and youth merit award.  
President Rtn CA R Laxmi Tarun and honorary secretary Rtn KVG Ravi Kumar led the activities. The club's director, Youth Activities, Rtn Lalit Mangaraj, and chairman Rtn Miten Bhuyan, also played a key role in organizing the events.  
The valedictory ceremony was attended by several dignitaries, including past president Satyakam Patro, president elect Venkat Anand, Madhismta Sahu, treasurer Rtn V Satyanarayana, joint secretary Tangudu Rahul and other Rotary Club members.

# Vajpayee bust to be unveiled at B'pur

**PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR**  
A bronze statue of former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee will be installed in Brahmampur. MLA K Anil Kumar laid the foundation stone for the project at the Ramalingam Park here.  
The height of the statue would be 17 feet, with base of 6.5 feet.  
Several BJP leaders, including former Deputy Speaker Rama Chandra Panda and

BeMC Mayer Sanghamitra Dalai, attended the function.  
Anil Kumar said around Rs 20 lakh would be needed for the statue, and it would be spent from his Local Area Development (LAD) Fund.  
"We are targeting to unveil the statue on December 25, the birth anniversary of the former Prime Minister," he said, adding that a local sculptor has been entrusted to make the statue on a war footing.

# Stolen newborn rescued

**PNS ■ SAMBALPUR**  
Police on Thursday rescued a newborn baby boy who had been stolen from the VIMSAR, Burla, a couple of days ago.  
Police traced the newborn to a couple at Rengali in Sambalpur district. Police also took into custody the couple from whom the infant was recovered and began interrogating them to ascertain

the nature and purpose of their act.  
The baby's recovery followed a couple from Chhattisgarh making a complaint about their newborn son going missing from the VIMSAR on November 26 and alleging theft of the baby. The mother of the newborn had raised an alarm after her baby, born a day before, went missing from the hospital premises.

# In Keonjhar Patient carried beneath goods train to hosp

**Due to absence of motorable road**  
**PNS ■ KEONJHAR**  
A patient, who was in urgent need of medical assistance, was put on a stretcher and carried beneath a goods train to reach an ambulance waiting for him in Keonjhar district.  
The incident occurred in Lahanda Mundasahi under Joda block in the district, where the person became seriously ill requiring immedi-



ate treatment. Family members of the patient, identified as Govinda Munda, called the emergency helpline number 108, following which an ambulance arrived near the location. However, it had to

stop at Lahanda owing to the absence of a motorable road. The ambulance staffs proceeded to attend to the patient on foot. The patient was then taken from his residence to the ambulance on a stretcher, covering a distance of about 1 km.  
The only mud road leading to the village further passed through an active train line where a halted goods train was 'blocking' the path.  
Since the condition of the patient was serious, the ambulance staffs decided to continue carrying him on the stretcher while passing beneath the goods train.  
The incident soon caught the attention of social media after video clippings of the incident went viral.

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# J and K, internal security, pro-Khalistan elements to figure at DGP, IGP's conference

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Issues related to internal security, Jammu and Kashmir, pro-Khalistan elements and cyber crimes are likely to be discussed at the three-day conference of top police officers in the country beginning Friday in Bhubaneswar, officials said. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah and National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval among others will attend the Directors General of Police (DGP) and Inspectors General of Police (IGP) conference where Maoist menace, challenges posed by AI tools and threats emanating from drones are also expected to be discussed. About 250 officers of DGP and IGP ranks will physically attend the conference while more than 200 others will

participate in it virtually. Many officers have been tasked with delivering presentations on specific subjects such as counter-terrorism, online fraud, cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, activities of pro-Khalistani groups and left wing extremism (LWE) among others, an official said. There will be detailed deliberations on how to face all these emerging internal security challenges. While the home minister will inaugurate the conference, the prime minister will be present on the remaining two days and deliver the concluding address on Sunday. The conference also provides an opportunity to identify tangible action points and monitor their progress, which is also presented before the prime minister every year. The conference is the culmination of extensive delibera-



tions involving police and intelligence officers from district, state and national levels on identified themes, the official said. Best practices from states and Union territories under each of the themes will be presented at the conference so that the states can learn from each other. Since 2014, the prime minister has taken a keen interest

in the DGP conference. Free flowing thematic discussions over breakfast, lunch and dinner have also been planned in this year's conference. This will provide an opportunity to the senior police officials to share their views and recommendations with the prime minister on key policing and internal security issues affecting the country. Till 2013, the annual meet was

held in New Delhi. The following year, after the Modi government came to power, it was decided to hold the event, organised by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB), outside the national capital. Accordingly, the conference was organised at Guwahati in 2014, Dhordo in Rann of Kutch in 2015, National Police Academy, Hyderabad in 2016;

BSF Academy, Tekanpur in 2017; Kevadiya in 2018; IISER, Pune in 2019; Police Headquarters, Lucknow in 2021; National Agricultural Science Complex in Pusa, Delhi in 2023 and Jaipur in 2024. Continuing with this tradition, the conference is being organised in Bhubaneswar this time. Number of business sessions and topics has increased significantly, with a focus on improving policing in the service of the people. Before 2014, the deliberations largely focused on national security matters. Since 2014, these conferences have a twin focus on national security as well as core policing issues, including prevention and detection of crime, community policing, law and order and improving the police's image, among others, another official said. Earlier, the conference was

Delhi-centric with officers coming together only for the meet. Residing on the same premises over two to three days has served to build a heightened sense of unity among officers of all cadres and organisations since 2014, the official added. Direct interaction of the police's top brass with the head of government has resulted in a convergence of views on crucial challenges faced by the country and the emergence of doable recommendations, the official further said. In the past few years, the topics have been selected after detailed discussions with the highest echelons of the police service. Once selected, several interactions on presentations are held before committees of DGPs to encourage participation and incorporate ideas from the field and from younger officers.

As a result, all presentations are now broad-based, content-intensive and carry a set of cogent and actionable recommendations. Since 2015, detailed follow-up of recommendations of past conferences has become the norm and is the topic of the first business session which is attended by the prime minister and the home minister, the official said. Recommendations are tracked closely by the conference secretariat, led by the IB with the help of nodal officers in the states. Decisions made in the past few conferences brought in significant policy changes, leading to improvement of policing, including setting higher standards for effective policing in rural and urban areas and improved methods of modern policing based on smart parameters, the official added.

## LS extends tenure for Waqf Bill Joint Committee amid Opp walkout

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Thursday adopted a resolution to extend the tenure of the Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill till the last day of the Budget session of Parliament next year. Committee Chairman and BJP leader Jagdambika Pal moved the resolution in the Lok Sabha, which approved it with a voice vote. The parliamentary panel's meetings have become a virtual battleground between the opposition and the ruling party members, who have been vociferously debating the changes to the Waqf Bill proposed by the Government. On Wednesday, the opposition members of the committee staged a walkout and slammed Pal for asserting that the panel's draft report was ready. Pal and the BJP members of the committee then reached out to opposition members and indicated their willingness to press for an extension



of the committee's deadline of November 29 to submit its report to the Lok Sabha. The Lok Sabha had constituted the committee on August 8 and asked to submit its report on the last day of the first week of the Winter session, which is on Friday. Following the last meeting of the committee on November 21, Pal had said its draft report is ready. He indicated that the committee's consultation with stakeholders is over and its members will now discuss the report and suggest changes, if any, before it is adopted. The opposition

members took strong exception to this stand in Wednesday's meeting and soon stormed out. They claimed that Birla had assured them that its tenure would be extended. Opposition parties have stridently criticised the amendments proposed by the bill in the existing Waqf Act, alleging they violate the religious rights of Muslims. The ruling BJP has asserted that the amendments will bring transparency in the functioning of the waqf boards and make them accountable.

## LeT member extradited from Rwanda in CBI, NIA, Interpol op

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rwanda extradited to India on Thursday a member of Pakistan-based terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) facing an Interpol Red Notice in an operation coordinated by the NIA and the CBI. Salman Rehman Khan, a member of the internationally proscribed terrorist organisation, had assisted in providing arms, ammunition and explosives to further terrorist activities in Bengaluru, officials said. "The Global Operations Centre of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has closely coordinated with the NIA and Interpol National Central Bureau - Kigali for the return to India from Rwanda of Salman Rehman Khan, wanted by the NIA for terror-related offences," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) had lodged a case in 2023 related to criminal conspiracy to spread terror in Bengaluru, they said. An FIR was also registered at Hebbal Police Station, Bengaluru.



Khan, who was previously imprisoned in a POCSO case (2018-2022), had allegedly facilitated the collection and distribution of explosives for other terror accused after being radicalised and recruited during his incarceration by T Naseer, a life convict in a terror case, according to the NIA probe. Naseer had allegedly orchestrated the radicalisation and subsequent criminal activities to further LeT operations in the coun-

try besides plotting his escape en route to the court from the prison, the agency said. When the terror module was busted, Khan escaped from the country, it said. NIA chargesheeted him in stringent anti-terror law and Indian Penal Code and court declared him a fugitive," it said. "The CBI on request of the NIA had got a Red Notice issued against the subject from Interpol on August 2, 2024. It was circulated to all

law enforcement agencies globally for tracking of the wanted criminal," the CBI statement said. Based on the Red Notice, he was apprehended by authorities in Kigali, Rwanda. The information was passed on to the CBI which is the designated agency for coordination of Interpol affairs in India and the NIA. After legal proceedings, he was extradited to India. "He was returned to India on

28.11.2024 by a security team from NIA," the CBI statement said. The return of Khan comes soon after similar operations in coordination with Interpol wherein two accused -- one wanted by the CBI and another by the Kerala Police -- were brought back from Saudi Arabia. Barkat Ali Khan, who had an Interpol Red Notice, was wanted in a 2012 case of rioting and use of explosive substances. He was brought back from Saudi Arabia on November 14. Raihan Arabikkalalarikkal, who also had an Interpol Red Notice against him and was wanted by police in Pattambi, Kerala for committing rape and sexual offences against a minor, was brought from Saudi Arabia on November 10. "The CBI, as National Central Bureau for Interpol in India, coordinates closely with all Law Enforcement Agencies in India for cooperation over Interpol channels. Since 2021, as many as 100 wanted criminals, including 26 this year, have been returned to India through coordination via Interpol channels," the statement said.

## Over a third of children under five enrolled in anganwadis are stunted: Government data



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Painting a worrying picture, the latest government data shows that over a third of children under five enrolled in anganwadis— childcare centers—are stunted, a condition that signals long-term nutritional deficiencies and developmental setbacks. The findings, shared by Union Women and Child Development Minister of State Savitri Thakur in response to a Rajya Sabha query, paint an alarming status of children's health across the country. As of the latest figures, 7.54 crore children under five years old are enrolled in anganwadis and registered on the Poshan Tracker, a digital platform launched by the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) to monitor nutritional outcomes and ensure effective delivery of services. Out of these children, 7.31 crore were assessed for growth parameters, revealing that 38.9 per cent are stunted, 17 per cent are underweight, and 5.2 per cent are wasted. Stunting, wasting, and being underweight are all forms of malnutrition, which indicate serious deficiencies in a child's nutrition, leading to long-term health and developmental issues. The statistics are equally concerning for a broader age group of children aged 0-6 years. With a projected population of

16.1 crore children in this category in 2021, around 8.82 crore are enrolled in anganwadis. Growth measurements taken for 8.55 crore children in this group show that 37 per cent are stunted and 17% are underweight. The findings indicate the enduring problem of child malnutrition in India, which is primarily linked to an imbalance in energy and nutrient intake. Malnutrition can lead to developmental delays, weakened immune systems, and increased vulnerability to diseases, thereby impeding a child's overall well-being and future potential. The Poshan Tracker plays a crucial role in tracking and improving these outcomes, aiming to ensure that children receive the necessary nutritional support to thrive. However, the high incidence of stunting, underweight, and wasting among India's young children indicates that significant efforts are still needed to address the root causes of malnutrition, which include poverty, lack of access to nutritious food, and insufficient healthcare resource. A child is considered stunted if their height is below the recommended level for their age. A child is considered wasted if their weight is below the recommended level for their height while a child is considered underweight if their weight is below the recommended level for their age.

## Survey of Ajmer Sharif: CPI(M) seeks SC's intervention

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The CPI(M) on Thursday sought Supreme Court's immediate intervention on a local court in Ajmer's decision to entertain a petition seeking a survey of the Ajmer Sharif shrine. Terming the local court's decision as unwarranted and without legal standing, the CPI(M) polit bureau said that the decision goes against the provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which decrees that no legal dispute can be raised on a religious place that existed prior to August 15, 1947. A local court in Ajmer on Wednesday directed that notices be issued to the dar-gah committee, the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs



and the Archaeological Survey of India in a civil suit claiming there was a Shiva temple in the shrine of Sufi saint Moinuddin Chishti. The suit, filed in September, sought directions to start worship at the site. "The decision of a civil court in Ajmer, Rajasthan, to entertain a petition seeking a survey of the Ajmer Sharif dargah to ascertain if there was a temple beneath it is unwarranted and has no legal standing. It goes against the provisions of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which decrees that no legal dispute can be raised on a religious place that existed prior to August 15, 1947. "The violation of this Act has already resulted in the flawed decision with regard to the

survey of the masjid in Sambhal that has led to violence and the death of five persons," said CPI(M) in a statement. The notice came days after four people were killed in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal in violence following a local court ordering a survey of a Mughal-era shrine, which petitioners said was built after destroying an old temple. The Left party also said that the Supreme Court must immediately intervene to put an end to such legal proceedings, in line with the Places of Worship Act, which the apex court itself had upheld in its 2019 Ayodhya judgment. The Places of Worship Act states that the religious character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, must be maintained.

## More than 1.12 crore public grievances redressed in past five years using Govt portal: Jitendra Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

More than 1.12 crore public grievances were redressed in the last five years, Union Minister Jitendra Singh said on Thursday. These complaints were raised on the Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) portal -- pgportal.Gov.In. "A total of 1,12,30,957 grievances were redressed from 2020-2024 and an annual all-time high of 23,24,323 grievances have been redressed on CPGRAMS portal from January-October, 2024," he said in a written reply in the Rajya Sabha. The average resolution time has come down from 28 days in 2019 to 13 days in 2024, Singh said. The government has adopted the 10-step reforms of CPGRAMS to make grievance redressal timely, meaningful and accessible and mapped



103,183 grievance officers on the CPGRAMS portal. "This helped bring down the pendency in the Government of India to its lowest level of 54,339 public grievances as on 31 October 2024," the minister said. The government also issued comprehensive guidelines for effective redressal of public grievances on August 23, 2024. These guidelines envisage integration of various public grievance platforms, creation of dedicated grievance cells in ministries/departments, appointment of experienced

and competent nodal officers, emphasis on root cause analysis of grievances and action on feedback, strengthening escalation processes by appointing appellate authorities, grievance closure guidelines with further reduction in the upper limit of resolution time from 30 days to 21 days, he said. To enhance the outreach of CPGRAMS for rural and underprivileged population, the government has collaborated with common service centres to make it easier for citizens to file grievances, Singh said.

## India-Russia Working Group on Military Cooperation holds fourth meet in Moscow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Russia reviewed the entire gamut of their defence ties in the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Military Cooperation under the India - Russia Inter Governmental Commission on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC) in Moscow, defence ministry said here on Thursday. Giving details, officials said the meeting marked a significant milestone in advancing the long standing Strategic Partnership between the two countries. The meeting was co-chaired by Lieutenant General JP Mathew, Chief of Integrated Defence Staff representing India and Lieutenant General Dylevsky Igor Nikolaevich, Deputy Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the General Staff of the Russian Federation Armed Forces.



The Working Group emphasised the importance of continued knowledge-sharing and collaboration in areas of strategic interest. It also agreed upon expanding joint exercises to further solidifying the operational synergy between the two forces. Both nations have conducted numerous joint exercises across land, air and sea domains. Exercises such as INDRA, AVIA INDRA and INDRA NAVY, have served as vital platforms for sharing best practices, refining joint

operational tactics drills and procedures, and deepening mutual understanding. The Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership was signed in 2000, which was elevated to the level of Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership in 2010. The Working Group, a crucial forum for India-Russia defence cooperation, provides a platform to assess existing military engagements and identified new areas for collaboration to address evolving security challenges.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## One nation, one subscription

While heralded as a potential game-changer for academia, the ONOS has ignited intense debate among scholars and researchers

In the series of 'one nation' comes yet another addition and this time it is about subscription of academic journals. The Indian government's recent approval of the 'One Nation, One Subscription' (ONOS) scheme has sparked considerable debate within academic and research communities. Touted as a transformative step for Indian academia, the scheme seeks to centralise access to academic journals and publications for higher education and research institutions across the country. While the initiative promises benefits such as cost efficiency and wider access to resources, concerns about its implementation, implications for academic freedom and necessity remain significant. Under the ONOS scheme, managed by the Information and Library Network (INFLIB-NET), over 6,300 institutions will have access to 13,000 e-journals from 30 major international publishers through a unified digital portal. With a budget allocation of Rs 6,000 crore for its first three years, the government aims to empower approximately 1.8 crore students, researchers and faculty members. This move could enhance India's standing in the global research ecosystem, reducing resource disparities across institutions. The ONOS scheme could democratise access to academic knowledge.

Smaller institutions, often constrained by limited budgets, could benefit immensely from comprehensive access to high-quality publications. Students and researchers in remote or underfunded regions may now have the same access as those in premier institutions, fostering equity in education and research. Centralising subscriptions could also significantly reduce costs. A unified portal ensures that these resources are optimised, potentially freeing budgets for other academic priorities. This could encourage more efficient and effective research practices. Despite its potential benefits, the ONOS scheme has raised several concerns. One major issue is the lack of clarity on how journals will be selected. Academic needs are diverse, varying by discipline, institution and research focus. Centralising the decision-making process risks overlooking specific requirements, leading to an inadequate or unbalanced collection of resources. Critics argue that the government could limit access to publications or perspectives it disagrees with, thereby influencing academic discourse. Another critique is that the scheme might disrupt established systems that currently work well. Many institutions already have mechanisms to access journals through collaborations, institutional networks like the Developing Library Network (DELNET), and platforms like JSTOR. Moreover, the scheme's centralised approach risks reducing the autonomy of academic institutions. Faculty members, who currently play a significant role in determining which journals their institutions need, might find themselves sidelined. This loss of autonomy could hinder academic innovation and responsiveness to emerging research trends. It would be hasty to implement the scheme which has advantages for sure, but the concerns of academicians must be addressed.

### PICTALK



Visitors at the Istanbul stall on the last day of the India International Trade Fair, in New Delhi

# Countering China's African influence

### Prime Minister Modi's visit to Nigeria highlights India's bid to rejuvenate ties with the African nation and counter China's growing influence through partnerships



PARUL CHANDRA

A little over two months after China's assiduous wooing of Nigeria, India sought to do the same during PM Narendra Modi's recent visit to the African nation. The prime ministerial visit, coming after a gap of 17 years, should inject fresh momentum into bilateral ties. It should also, hopefully, help a bit in countering Beijing's growing influence in Nigeria, a country with whom India has enjoyed close and robust ties for decades but now finds itself in competition with China.

While India and Nigeria have 'a strategic partnership', the African nation and China elevated their ties to 'a comprehensive strategic partnership' this year. The courting of Nigeria as well as dozens of other African countries was done bilaterally as well collectively at the ninth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) Summit in early September in Beijing. These summits have been held regularly since the first one in 2006, with one even being held virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic. India, however, has floundered in not being able to organise an African summit since the last one in 2015, ostensibly due to the pandemic and geopolitical tensions, but amounts to a lack of strategic foresight. China is making deeper inroads into the African continent for both strategic as well as economic reasons. Strategically, it can project itself as a geopolitical force countering arch foe US. Moreover, strengthening its foothold in the world's second most populous continent comes with the lucrative advantage of having access to the huge market as well as the rich mineral resources there. For many cash-strapped African nations, China has been a pivotal lender of loans for much-needed infrastructure construction, but it comes with the perils of running up huge debts.

Africa is a vital part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with 53 nations having signed onto the endeavour that India views with deep suspicion given Beijing's hegemonic intentions. Under the BRI, China is assist-



ing Nigeria in its connectivity efforts by building railway lines and a deep sea port in Lagos.

China is also Nigeria's biggest bilateral lender and the two sides decided to forge close economic ties when Chinese President Xi Jinping and Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu met in Beijing ahead of the FOCAC Summit. It's in the backdrop of all this that PM Modi's recent visit to Nigeria assumes even greater significance. While he made it clear that India gives "high priority" to its strategic partnership with Nigeria, the visit yielded only three pacts - on survey cooperation, cooperation in customs matters and culture exchange programmes.

India will have to do some real heavy lifting in the coming years if the 14 areas of bilateral cooperation identified in the joint statement are to come to fruition. Among these are the Bilateral Investment Treaty, the Double Taxation Avoidance Treaty and the Agreement on repurposed Line of Credits. India's outreach to Nigeria at the highest level was required given that Africa's most populous nation enjoys much heft in the region and beyond. It's a founding member of the



AFRICA IS A VITAL PART OF CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI), WITH 53 NATIONS HAVING SIGNED ONTO THE ENDEAVOUR THAT INDIA VIEWS WITH DEEP SUSPICION GIVEN BEIJING'S HEGEMONIC INTENTIONS

African Union (AU), which India helped bring into the G-20's fold last year. Nigeria is now also a BRICS partner state. The country is also a member of OPEC, with President Tinubu also being the current chair of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States). A fresh push to boost bilateral trade and investments by Indian companies in Nigeria is imperative.

There are already over 200 Indian companies in the manufacturing sector with investments worth \$27 billion in Nigeria. While India remains among the top 5 trading partners of Nigeria, bilateral trade unfortunately decreased to \$7.89 billion in 2023-24 from \$14.95 billion in 2021-22. This is attributed to a reduction in Indian oil imports from Nigeria as it chose to import oil from Russia, taking advantage of the cheaper rates being offered due to the conflict with Ukraine.

With the joint statement with Nigeria talking about India's willingness to go in for long-term contracts for crude and LNG purchases, bilateral trade might pick up once again. Significantly, India has also evinced interest in investing in Nigeria's oil and gas sector. Terrorism and piracy also

figured as areas of cooperation in the joint statement. Nigeria for many years has been battling the Islamic radical group Boko Haram, which has also been attacking oil and gas infrastructure in the country. India, interestingly, has offered technical know-how on security for pipelines in Nigeria.

Maritime domain cooperation is also of crucial importance to combat piracy. Nigeria abuts the Gulf of Guinea which passes crucial sea lanes for transporting crude oil. India had deployed at least two warships, INS Sumedha in 2023 and INS Tarkash in 2022, in the piracy-prone Gulf of Guinea. With Chinese vessels on the prowl across the oceans, these deployments were not without strategic significance.

Overall, India needs to move and move fast, delivering on its promises made during PM Modi's visit to Nigeria. It has no time to lose in majorly upscaling its traditional robust ties with African nations, especially with China increasingly grabbing strategic space in the continent. The writer is a senior journalist who writes on foreign affairs. (The writer is a senior journalist who writes on strategic affairs; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SIDHU SPARKS CONTROVERSY

Madam — The former cricketer and commentator Navjot Singh Sidhu, whose wife is suffering from cancer has come out with propaganda on social media that neem leaves, lemon juice, turmeric, and cinnamon helped cure his wife's breast cancer and started advocating it as a simple remedy for those who have been suffering from it. As a celebrity, Sidhu should have advised the people to ensure good health with a periodical medical checkup since the dreaded disease affects lakhs every year in India. His irresponsible statement, while taking into account the false claims that celebrities used to promote wrong products by endorsing commercials for their self-promotion, as well as to claim the fat check, calls for a stringent warning. Sidhu's experience on his wife's issue shouldn't deviate people who are already suffering and availing treatment in their case.

Tall claims in social media need strong rebuttal with penalisation for their unemotional behaviour. In 2019 the BJP leader Pragma Singh Thakur had similarly claimed that Gau Mutra (cow urine) had cured her of cancer, whereas she was operated on for tumour removal in 2008 at JJ Hospital in Mumbai as reported by Dr Rajput. When the flashback runs like this, Sidhu's claim at these advanced medical times has been thoroughly misled while the global research has not yet found anything concrete to counter cancer to date is the reality. Controlling the growth and extending longevity by itself can be considered to be a miracle and we can only seek blessings for the safe health of Sidhu's wife and thousands in the need of this hour.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

### MINORITIES RAISE CONCERNS

Madam — Minorities are making so much noise ever since the NDA came to power for the third time running. They could not digest the defeat of the forces working against the government. Enjoying all benefits as an Indian citizen while still blaming the government is the order of the

## Protecting mental health of Children



Australia will ban children from using social media with a minimum age limit as high as 16 to get kids off their devices and onto the footy fields. The initiative is taken to make kids play in the grounds and experience the loss and victory in the field and have real experiences with real people and teammates

because, as we know that social media is causing social harm to the GenZ at large. After passing with 103 votes in favour to 13 votes against, the bill will move to the Senate, where it is also expected to pass with the majority. This law will help in curbing the social media menace over the children and its threatening impact that may cause stress, impatience among kids, feelings of insecurity, and obesity, as well as mental health disorders.

The authorities have taken welcoming decisions in favour of parents and children against internet safety. An integrated mechanism could only beat the detrimental effects of social media. Although with the advent of AI (artificial intelligence), the spread of misinformation and false news has become the trend. The incidence of deepfakes can mislead the students, kids and children.

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur Nagar

day. Without knowing the ins and outs of the political formula, they pass hate comments against the government. They get solace by abusing the government after losing the elections in Maharashtra. The myth of the model minority is based in stereotypes. It perpetuates a narrative in which they want to get prominence. In reality, the twenty-first century has so far been one of bewildering change accompanied by the destruction of certainties, among them that of the inevitable rise of human rights. It is clear that gains that were once thought permanent can quickly be lost. A real danger of lack of certainty is that the resultant fear leads to a backlash, which is likely to be directed against those seen as a threat or who are easily used as scapegoats.

Jayanthy Subramaniam | Mumbai

### GANGA UNSAFE FOR BATHING

Madam —The water in the holy Ganga is unsuitable for bathing. A few days ago, an exasperated Justice Arun Kumar Tyagi of the National Green Tribunal, while hearing a case related to the tributaries Assi and Varuna, told the Varanasi District

Magistrate to "just put up a sign" and "make it clear the Ganga here isn't for a holy splash." The river flows for about 2500 kilometres from the southern great Himalayas before it empties into the Bay of Bengal. The Namami Gange Programme (NGP), launched in 2014-15 to cleanse the Ganga and its tributaries, was originally scheduled to be completed by March 2021. It has now been extended until March 2026.

The Central Government has released ₹16,012 crore from FY2014-15 until October 2023 under the NGP-I of ₹20,000 crore and NGP-II of ₹22,500 crore. In the 30 years prior to the launch of the NGP, various governments had spent ₹4000 crore to clean the river. Despite spending more than ₹20,000 crore, the water in the Ganga is still not clean enough to take a dip. One is compelled to conclude the NGP is equally polluted with corruption and inefficiency.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## Unpaid care workers: The neglected workforce

These workers, predominantly women, form the invisible backbone of families and communities, shouldering critical responsibilities without recognition or compensation



SHAHNAZ RAFIQUE

Unpaid care workers play a crucial yet often overlooked role in sustaining families and communities. These individuals, typically family members and predominantly women, take on essential caregiving and household tasks without formal salaries or wages. Their contributions range from managing daily domestic duties to supporting vulnerable family members and even volunteering in community-based activities. Despite the significant value they provide, their work remains largely unrecognised, unregulated, and uncompensated, often leaving them economically insecure and lacking social protections.



This group includes several key roles. Household caregivers provide daily care for children, elderly relatives, or family members with disabilities, handling tasks like cooking, cleaning and offering emotional support. Childcare providers, especially in low-income families, often include mothers or grandmothers who look after young children, offering informal education and supervision. In some communities, individuals volunteer for communal care tasks such as organising child care or assisting with health-related services out of a sense of responsibility rather than financial motivation. Family health caregivers manage tasks such as administering medication, assisting with mobility, and caring for chronically ill relatives. In rural areas, unpaid care work often extends to agricultural labor, including farming, collecting water, and gathering firewood, which are essential for household survival but remain uncompensated. The economic contributions of unpaid care work are immense, supporting families and enabling formal economic activities by ensuring the wellbeing of individuals. However, the lack of formal recognition and compensation leaves these workers vulnerable to financial instability and limits access to social protections. A related but distinct category includes 'Anganwadi' workers, who occupy a middle ground between unpaid and paid care work. Employed under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme, they receive a modest honorari-

um rather than a formal wage. This compensation is often irregular, lacks benefits like retirement or health insurance and fails to provide the stability of formal employment. Consequently, while Anganwadi workers are technically paid, their financial insecurity mirrors the challenges faced by unpaid care workers. Despite their critical contributions to the care economy, Anganwadi workers remain undervalued and under-compensated. Many are forced to take on additional jobs to make ends meet. Their situation highlights the broader societal neglect of care work, where contributions—paid or unpaid—are undervalued and often relegated to the margins of economic discourse. Addressing these issues requires recognising care work's essential role in social and economic systems and implementing policies that ensure fair compensation and protection for all care workers.

(The writer is Secretary, Indian Trade Union Congress (INTUC); views are personal)



**FIRST COLUMN**

**TRUMP 2.0: STEEP TARIFFS ON CARDS**

Trump's policies are likely to create ripples across economies, including India



KUMARDEEP BANARJEE

The fireworks have started, even before people across the globe have ushered in Christmas and New Year's festivities. The Trump presidency 2.0 could be a game changer, potentially recalibrating several global geopolitical and economic partnerships. First, the Biden era days of strategic partnership with nations worldwide would be replaced with a more transactional approach which President Trump in his second stint is likely to institutionalise. Even before taking charge, President-elect Donald Trump has vociferously spelt out his tariff-based external affairs policy.

He had during campaigning talked about imposing nearly 60 per cent tariffs on China imports. Recently he has said that one of the first executive orders, he is likely to sign after assuming office on January 20, would be to impose tariffs on Canada, Mexico and China imports. Of course, the caveat is, unless, they stop sending illegal immigrants and ban drugs across to the US. Donald Trump knows his tariff-based foreign policy approach has bipartisan support among Democrats and Republicans. It feeds well into his Made in America, local job creation narrative which catapulted him back to the White House in a non-consecutive term. India is overseeing this space, as it knows very well that even though the first tariff bullets may not be fired at India, eventually many will. Mr Trump has already spoken about India's high tariffs in his election rallies and notwithstanding the amount of good, the Indian IT services sector has done for the US, he needs to send home hard messages. The only saving grace in the upcoming US-India bilateral relationship, under President Trump 2.0 would be the personal equation, the



president-elect has with Prime Minister Modi. Knowing each other for a long period and having observed each other's style of governing, can be an initial advantage but not a long-term solution. Key Indian trade interlocutors are in high demand, especially those who have been in government during Trump's first presidency.

At some point in time, the issue of tariffs would come up in the bilateral conversations, where hard-nosed negotiations may be required. India and US under the Biden administration managed to establish a formal institutional framework for settling trade and tariff issues in the form of a Trade Policy Forum (TPF). The TPF platform provides trade representatives from the US and India to meet regularly to discuss and find solutions to mutual areas of concern. To be sure the TPF mechanism existed even under the Trump administration, but with one meeting and a new Indian government under Prime Minister Modi (with less focus on trade and external affairs policy), it served little purpose. Chances are, given Donald Trump's style of functioning, the TPF may be relegated to the background and several transactional bilateral meetings would be formatted to, minimise the friction in the trade relations.

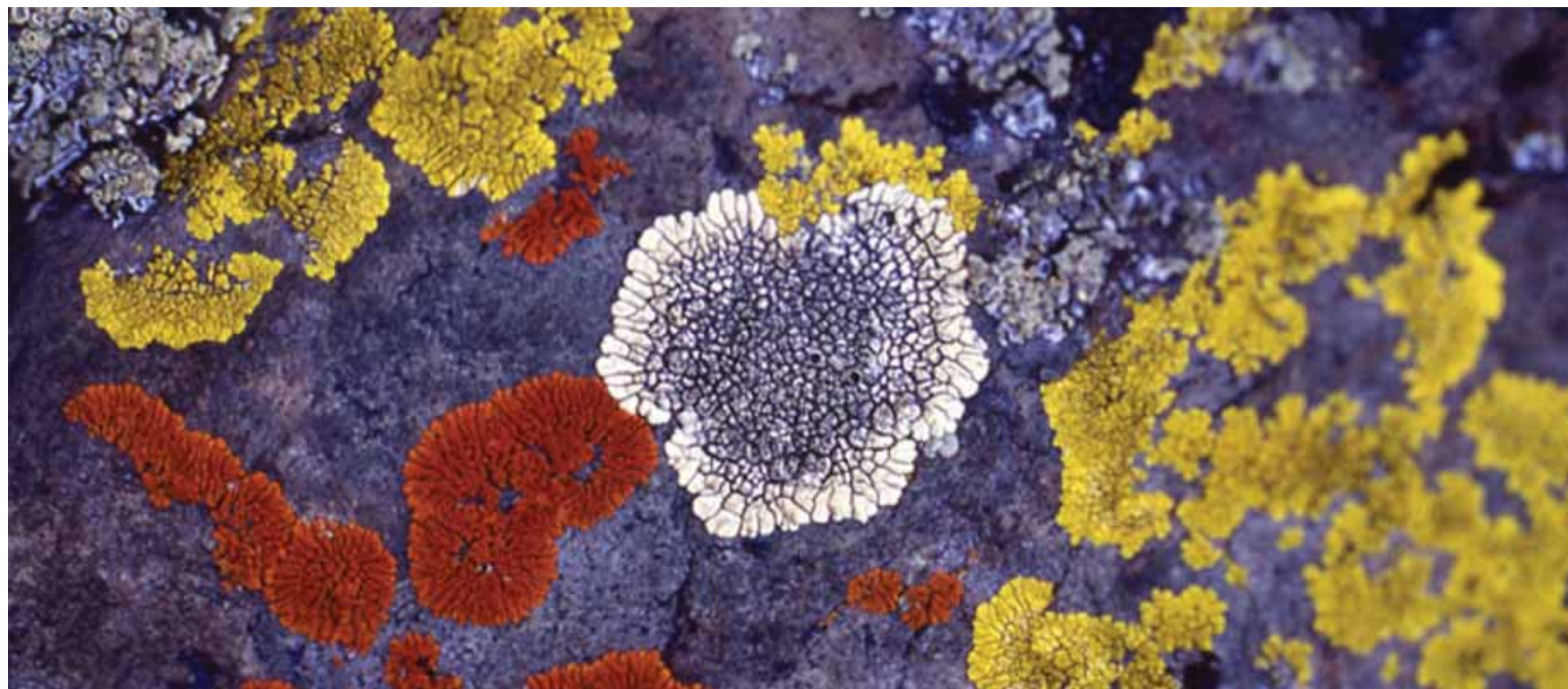
It may be worth noting that India has a trade surplus with the US, a point Mr Trump will keep in mind to extract his side of the deal. Meanwhile, the expected tightening of the trade environment between the US and China would have a significant impact on the global economy. China would have to find newer markets to push some of the goods, which could be too expensive to export to the US. India and its neighbouring nations would have to brace up. Prices of items in the US, most of which are imported from China could add an extra burden on household budgets, which in turn could push rate hikes.

These global headwinds will shape, the narratives for a long time to come. It could have an inflationary impact on global oil prices and growth of the several global economies. India's Reserve Bank has already cautioned that the slowdown in the global economy, protectionism, and tariffs are three key factors that will shape India's economy next year. It would be another tightrope with clever hands of the juggler on rope which can carry India for the next few years.

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

# Climate change and Lichens: The tiny titans of nature

Lichens, the silent guardians of our ecosystem, are under threat from climate change and need to be saved, write BKP SINHA and ARVIND KUMAR JHA



Vibrant patches of colour adorning some tree trunks and rocks may draw your attention as you move in the forest. Although they appear as mere stains or growths; they are intricate organisms called lichens, a product of a mutualistic alliance between fungus and algae. Making it a unique creation of nature, the fungus absorbs water and nutrients from the air while an organic compound is generated by the photosynthetic partner. Thus while fungi build a house; its algal partner supplies food as the breadwinner. Similarly, if fungi did not provide a secure structure, the algae would die homeless in harsh places.

The absence of cuticles and roots and their direct reliance on the atmosphere for nutrients, however, makes lichens highly vulnerable to pollutants. Found in a variety of shapes and colours, ranging from delicate leafy structures to crusty patches, they thrive in diverse habitats, from rocky mountainsides to rain forests and deserts. They can grow on soil, humus, stones, rocks, bricks, plaster, leaves, tree trunks, decaying wood and even on glass. Overtly so simple and insignificant in the face of the dominant bias of human beings that often considers a forest just as an assemblage of trees and vegetation mix, lichens play an extremely vital role in ecosystems. Lichens are known to play a crucial role in soil formation, breaking down rocks through biogeochemical and biochemical weathering and creating nutrient-rich soil paving the way for other plants to grow. They produce unique compounds with potential medicinal properties, such as antibiotics and antifungals. They are used in medicine, food, fodder, perfume, spices, and dyes. Researchers are exploring these compounds to develop new drugs and sustainable materials. By understanding the adaptations and biochemical properties of lichens, one can unlock new possibilities and contribute to a more sustainable future. Lichens can survive at extreme temperatures and altitudes in which no creatures can survive. One can see more lichen on



**LICHENS ARE KNOWN TO PLAY A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SOIL FORMATION, BREAKING DOWN ROCKS THROUGH BIOGEOCHEMICAL AND BIOCHEMICAL WEATHERING AND CREATING NUTRIENT-RICH SOIL PAVING THE WAY FOR OTHER PLANTS TO GROW**

the edge of the forest than deep in the forest. They will be lesser near the towns as the air quality deteriorates. Many lichens are incredibly sensitive to air pollution, particularly due to sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, as also to the level of heavy metal pollution. All lichens, however, are not equally sensitive to air pollutants. Different lichen species exhibit different sensitivity to specific air pollutants. Consequently, lichens are well-suited as biological indicators for monitoring environmental quality.

More than seventeen thousand species of lichens are reported to cover around seven per cent of the world's surface. India, a land of diverse landscapes and climatic conditions, is home to rich biodiversity and harbours about 3,000 fascinating species of lichens. Some European countries like Germany, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia; considering lichen's response to pollution; have positioned them as bio-monitors and bio-indicators and included them in their air-pollution-related policy documents. Much of India's lichen diversity, however, remains relatively unexplored as regards their ecological significance and potential applications. Yet another crucial issue in the Indian context is the undervaluation of lichens in India.

When the diversion of forest land for rainforest purposes is proposed, the net present value (NPV) of the forest is calculated and the amount is recovered from the project proponents. Calculation of NPV does not consider the aspect of the immense value that lichens have from ecological as well as economic points of view. This is evident from the fact that the per hectare NPV of forests of Eco-class-I and Eco-class-II categories that have

forests of types Tropical Wet Evergreen / Semi-Evergreen / Moist-Deciduous / Littoral and Swamp have been assigned the same value. It is essential that realistic values are assigned to the forests of different types and the monetised value of lichens and their services are duly incorporated therein. Climate change has serious implications for the lichens. Higher temperatures can disrupt the delicate balance between the fungal and algal partners. Extreme heat can lead to desiccation and reduced growth rates. Altered rainfall patterns can affect the availability of water, which is crucial for lichen growth and reproduction. Further, climate change can exacerbate air pollution, harming lichens.

A rise in pollution load in the air breaks the lichen cell resulting in bleaching of the organism, and the same is followed by its demise. Again, acid rain, caused by releasing sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides, can damage lichen tissues. Climate change-induced alterations in habitats may result in the loss of suitable environments for their growth while fragmentation of habitats can critically limit dispersal and gene flow. The importance of exploring the roles of different organisms involved in the complex eco-processes in the context of global changes cannot be overestimated.

In this context, lichen is increasingly being recognised globally as a bio-indicator of 'Global Change Drivers' that are seen as interconnected stressors like climate change, pollution, land use change, and loss of biodiversity contributing to large-scale environmental impacts. The mapping of epiphytic lichen diversity to assess ecological changes has emerged as a popular bio-moni-

toring approach in Europe and a European standard has been adopted under the Committee European d Normalisation (CEN) framework. It aims to provide Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) to ensure reliability, consistency and objectivity while simultaneously improving data quality and comparability across space and time.

Needless to say, it is high time that India, possessing almost eighteen per cent of the world's lichen species and being globally the third-highest air-polluted country only after Bangla Desh and Pakistan, prioritises her efforts in this direction. Detailed exploration and study of lichens can also yield many more useful species for an unexpectedly wide variety of ecological as well as human needs and pursuits including their widespread use as bio-prospecting agents.

An extremely valuable natural resource the lichens are, they are reportedly in a losing evolutionary race against climate change. A 2022 study reveals that it could need more than one million years to adjust to the ecological crisis created due to just one degree Celsius of warming.

With the unabated pace of global warming, lichens, considered one of the most unique and hardy species and a bio-monitoring tool, are facing the danger of getting obliterated from the face of our planet. Well, the next time you encounter a tree or rock adorned with colourful lichens, take a moment to appreciate these remarkable organisms. Let us work towards their conservation as their beauty and ecological significance make them an integral part of our natural world.

*(The writers are Former PCCFs of UP and Maharashtra; views are personal)*

# Educate. Advocate. Act Now: Confronting antimicrobial resistance

Awareness is crucial to stop misuse of antibiotics to stop antimicrobial resistance and its harmful side-effects

As we observe 'World Antimicrobial Awareness Week (WAAW) 2024' under the theme 'Educate. Advocate. Act Now', we are reminded of both the remarkable achievements of antimicrobial medicine and the escalating threat posed by antimicrobial resistance (AMR). This year's theme serves as a clarion call for individuals, healthcare providers and policymakers to unite in protecting these life-saving drugs. Through education, advocacy and immediate action, we can address the growing crisis and secure a healthier future for all.

**Life Before Antibiotics: A Fragile Existence**  
For much of human history,



SANGEETA SHARMA

infections posed a dire threat to survival. Minor injuries, routine childbirth, or surgical procedures often led to fatal outcomes due to the lack of effective treatments. Ancient civilisations turned to natural remedies such as herbs, honey and garlic, but these measures were often inadequate. The concept of microbes and the role of hygiene were poorly understood, enabling infectious

diseases to spread rapidly with devastating results.

**The Antibiotic Revolution: A New Era of Medicine**  
The discovery of penicillin by Alexander Fleming in 1928 marked a turning point in medical history. By the 1940s, penicillin was widely used to treat infections during World War II, saving countless lives. This success ushered in the "golden age" of antibiotics, spanning the 1940s to the 1960s, with groundbreaking drugs like streptomycin and tetracycline offering solutions to diseases once thought incurable.

These "miracle drugs" revolutionised healthcare, enabling complex surgeries, cancer therapies, and organ transplants that depended

on effective infection control. Antibiotics became synonymous with progress and hope, reshaping our approach to health and longevity.

**AMR: A Global Crisis in the Making**  
While antimicrobials transformed healthcare, their misuse and overuse have driven the global crisis of antimicrobial resistance. Mismanagement of these drugs has undermined their effectiveness, allowing resistant strains of bacteria to flourish.

**Misuse and Overuse :** Antibiotics are frequently prescribed for conditions like viral infections (e.g., the common cold), where they have no effect. In agriculture, antimicrobials are



used excessively, often to promote animal growth rather than treat illness. This practice creates resistant bacteria that can transfer to humans through the food chain.

**Underuse :** Failing to complete prescribed antibiotic courses, skipping doses, or using leftover medications allows bacteria to survive and develop resistance.

Examples such as Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) highlight the danger of resistance. Once easily treatable, infections like MRSA now require last-resort drugs, which are often more toxic, expensive, and less effective.

**The Innovation Gap:** Despite the urgent need for new treatments, the development of antibiotics has stagnated. No new classes of antibiotics have been discovered in recent decades, leaving humanity vulnerable to resistant pathogens. Developing antibiotics is an expensive and time-consuming process and limited financial incentives deter pharmaceutical companies from pursuing research in

this field. As a result, existing drugs are our most critical line of defense, underscoring the need to use them responsibly.

**Educate:** Public education is a powerful tool in combating AMR. Raising awareness about the proper use of antibiotics is crucial to reducing unnecessary prescriptions. Antibiotics are effective only against bacterial infections, not viruses. Simple practices, such as completing prescribed courses and avoiding sharing or stockpiling antibiotics, can significantly reduce resistance. Community outreach programs and health campaigns are essential in promoting a deeper understanding of AMR and fostering respon-

sible antimicrobial use.

**Advocate:** Governments, healthcare organisations, and advocacy groups play a pivotal role in addressing AMR. Policies that regulate antimicrobial use in agriculture, improve prescribing practices, and promote the use of diagnostics can help mitigate resistance. Antimicrobial Stewardship Programmes in hospitals encourage responsible antibiotic use, ensuring patients receive appropriate treatment while minimising unnecessary exposure.

*(The writer is Neuropsychopharmacology Institute of Human Behaviour & Allied Sciences & President, DSPRUD; views are personal)*







# NSE, Meghalaya Government ink pact for youth in BFSI sector

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The National Stock Exchange (NSE) on Thursday said it has collaborated with the Meghalaya government for a skill building program for the youth of the state in the BFSI sector. This project will enhance employability and self-employment opportunities in the Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI) sector, NSE said in a statement. As part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), the exchange with the support of the Meghalaya Government will implement the program to increase awareness, build skills and competencies in the BFSI across the state. "As India cements its position amongst the world's largest economies and continues its remarkable growth story, the



Northeast region stands poised to play a transformative role in this journey. Meghalaya is committed to being at the forefront of this transformation.

transformation. "Our collaboration with the NSE through their Student Skilling Program marks a significant step in empowering Meghalaya's youth in the BFSI sectors. By equipping our youth with financial knowledge and skills, we are investing in both their future and Meghalaya's prosperity," Conrad Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, said. This program aims to empower the youth of Meghalaya with essential skills and knowledge in the BFSI sector, bridging the skill gap and enhancing their employment opportunities for the future. "With financial literacy at the heart of NSE's mission, we aim to transform young people from job seekers into job creators," Ashishkumar Chauhan, MD and CEO at NSE, said.

# Government collects ₹ 1.44 lakh crore in toll tax since 2000

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The government has collected Rs 1.44 lakh crore as toll tax at fee plazas presently operational under Public Private Partnerships (PPP) model on National Highways since December 2000, Parliament was informed on Thursday. In a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha, road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari said all user fee plazas on National Highways are established as per the provision of National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008 and the respective Concession Agreement. "Amount of 1.44 lakh crore rupees have been collected as

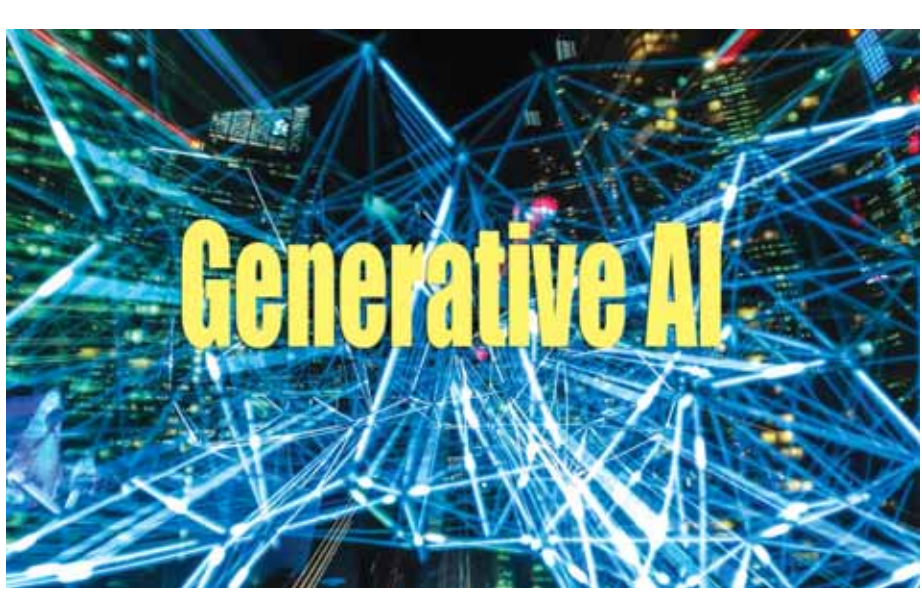
user fee at fee plazas presently operational under Public Private Partnerships (PPP) model on National Highways since December, 2000," he said. Replying to a separate question, Gadkari said the government has initiated the implementation of barrier-free tolling using available technology based electronic toll collection (ETC) system as an added facility along with FASTag. The minister said presently, Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) based tolling system is not operational anywhere on National Highways. However, he added that amendment to the NH Fee Rules, 2008 (dated Sep 9, 2024) has been made to enable GNSS-based tolling system through On-Board Unit (OBU) and users of vehicles not fitted with a valid, functional Global Navigation Satellite System On-Board Unit shall have to pay a fee equivalent to two times of the user fee applicable for that category of vehicle at that fee plaza in case the GNSS based tolling is made operational. In the GNSS-based user fee collection system, toll charges shall be levied based on the actual distance travelled by a vehicle, on a National Highway or expressway in term of NH Fee Rules, 2008 and amendment thereof. Whereas, at present, the user fee is collected at the fee plaza depending on project influence length of respective fee plaza.

# Generative AI will enhance effectiveness of tax functions: Report

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Most of the CFOs as well as finance and tax leaders in India believe generative AI (GenAI) will significantly enhance the effectiveness of their tax functions, said a study on Thursday. Globally, 87 per cent of leaders echo this sentiment, underscoring GenAI's potential to revolutionize tax functions worldwide, said a EY Tax and Finance Operations (TFO) Survey 2024. Based on insights from 1,600 leaders across 32 countries and 18 industries, including 70 CFOs and tax leaders of leading Indian corporates, the global survey highlighted key challenges in the tax and finance domain. It said, "94 per cent of CFOs and finance and tax leaders in India believe generative AI (GenAI) will significantly

enhance the effectiveness of their tax functions a remarkable increase from just 19 per cent in 2023, highlighting a growing recognition of GenAI's potential in the tax landscape." The survey 2024 also showed that Indian tax leaders have already begun to make strides in their GenAI journey, with 14 per cent actively developing strategies, launching pilot projects, and exploring early-stage Gen AI applications. Another 47 per cent are in the exploratory phase, investigating and experimenting with GenAI's potential to enhance their operations, surpassing the global average of 40 per cent. Rahul Patni, Digital Tax Leader, EY India, said that GenAI is clearly emerging as an effective tool for tax professionals to transform their workspaces and



professional lives. Areas of application can range from AI assisted document reviews to data cleansing and drafting business deliverables for day-to-day matters. This will allow them to work more effectively, focus on strategic priorities, and make better decisions," Patni said. The survey further said 44

per cent of respondents in India (and 45 per cent globally) spend their time on routine tasks like data collection and tax return preparation, which Indian tax leaders believe should take not more than 20-25 per cent of their time, allowing for a greater focus on strategic initiatives. Jitesh Bansal, National Leader, Tax and Finance Operate, EY India, said that as regulatory and reporting burdens grow, tax and finance functions face increasing strain. "Tax teams in companies will need to step out of their comfort zones and start addressing newer problems around tax function strategy, processes, data quality, audit readiness and so on," Bansal said. In the context of shift in ways of working, the survey highlighted a trend of tax skills being complemented very well by data and technology skills.

# Air India sees growth from domestic, short international flights in 2025



**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Air India will see most of the air traffic growth coming from domestic and short-haul international flights as most of the aircraft that are coming in are narrow-body ones. "We are also taking the aircraft for the refit programme. So, the number of wide-body aircraft available will shrink a little bit," he added. As part of Tata Group consolidating its airline business, Air India has merged Vistara with itself and AIX Connect has been integrated with Air India Express. The CEO and MD of Air India noted that there is a delay in getting all the 50 white tail aircraft, which were earlier expected to join the fleet by December this year. Out of the total 50 white tail Boeing 737 MAX aircraft, at least 35 have joined the fleet. These planes are being operated by Air India Express. "50 white tail aircraft, all of them were to come by December this year. They will stretch up to June next year and that in itself has a little bit of impact," Wilson said while responding to a query about delays due to issues at Boeing, including the recent strike. "It is not clear how long the impact will be. Six months is reasonable for some aircraft," he said. Generally, white tail planes are those that were originally manufactured for a particular airline and later taken by another airline.

# Rupee falls nine paise against US dollar

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

The rupee depreciated 9 paise to close at 84.49 (provisional) against US dollar on Thursday, weighed down by a negative trend in domestic equities and broad strength of the American currency in the overseas markets. Forex traders said a mixed-to-weak tone in crude oil prices cushioned the downside. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 84.45 and touched the lowest level of 84.50 against the greenback during intra-day. The unit ended the session at 84.49 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a fall of 9 paise over its previous close. The rupee hit its lowest-ever closing level of 84.50 on November 21. On Wednesday, the rupee depreciated by 11 paise to close at 84.40 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a negative bias on strength in the US dollar and month-end dollar demand from importers.



However, overall weakness in crude oil prices and fresh FII inflows may support the rupee at lower levels. "US markets will remain closed today to observe the Thanksgiving Holiday. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 84.35 to Rs 84.70," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan. According to traders, the latest Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) minutes

revealed a significant shift in the Federal Reserve's outlook. The Fed is likely to put downward pressure on short-term interest rates, reducing the appeal of dollar-denominated assets and contributing to the decline in the Dollar Index. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.25 per cent at 106.34. Brent crude, the global oil

# Sensex tumbles nearly 1,200 points to slip below 80k

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty surrendered early gains to plunge nearly 1.50 per cent on Thursday, weighed down by intense selling in market heavyweights Infosys, RIL and HDFC Bank amid a mixed trend in global equities. The BSE benchmark Sensex slumped 1,190.34 points or 1.48 per cent to settle at 79,043.74. During the day, it tanked 1,315.16 points or 1.63 per cent to 78,918.92. The NSE Nifty tumbled 360.75 points or 1.49 per cent to 23,914.15. "Domestic markets took a breather after a strong start to the week. The overnight sell-off in the US market, driven by renewed uncertainty about the rate cut trajectory and rising geopolitical tension, led to a correction in heavyweight IT and consumer discretionary stocks," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said. From the 30-share Sensex pack, Mahindra & Mahindra,



Infosys, HCL Technologies, Adani Ports, Bajaj Finance, Tech Mahindra, Titan, Tata Consultancy Services, Reliance Industries and Power Grid were among the laggards. On the other hand, State Bank of India was the only gainer. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo settled in the green, while Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading higher. The US markets ended lower on Wednesday. The decline in tech companies dragged major American indices lower. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 7.78 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.49 per cent to USD 73.18 a barrel.

# India actively engaged with 30 nations for mutual recognition agreements: CBIC Chairman

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs chairman Sanjay Kumar Agarwal on Thursday said India is actively pursuing negotiation for signing of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) with customs authorities of about 30 countries. Mutual recognition agreements help ease overseas trade by avoiding dual certifications. It thus reduces compliance cost, simplifying requirements by adhering to only one regulation and enhancing trade opportunities. India is proactively engaging with its trading partners to broaden and deepen the Authorised Economic



Operator (AEO) program. India has successfully signed MRAs with several key trading partners including the US, South Korea, UAE, Taiwan, Australia and Malaysia, he said. "Negotiations are ongoing with over 30 countries with promising progress and discussions with Japan and South Africa," he said while

commitment to digital and sustainable trade facilitation, as evidenced by improved performance in the United Nations Economic and Social Commission Asia Pacific's Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. India has also shown improvement in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index, he said. In the era of an increasingly connected world, he said, the coming together of global fraternity is extremely crucial to foster trust, cooperation and Innovation. The AEO programme is central to this vision symbolising partnership between customs and businesses, he said, adding, it is built on mutual respect and a common goal of secure and efficient trade.

# Finmin to review efficacy of windfall tax on crude oil, fuel exports

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

The Finance Ministry would review the efficacy of windfall tax on the export of petrol, diesel and Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) as global crude oil prices have stabilised, sources said. Phenomenal profits made by some oil refiners on exporting fuel at the expense of domestic supplies had prompted the government to introduce an export tax on petrol, diesel and ATF in July 2022. The finance ministry is going to review the windfall tax and tax being mobilised out of this, sources said. The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has already written to the Finance Ministry in this regard,

sources said. The government in September slashed the windfall tax on domestically produced crude oil to 'nil' per tonne. The tax is levied in the form of Special Additional Excise Duty (SAED) and is notified fortnightly based on average oil prices in two weeks. The last such revision took place effective August 31 when the windfall tax on crude petroleum was set at Rs 1,850 per tonne. The SAED on the export of diesel, petrol and jet fuel or ATF, has been retained at 'nil' with effect from September 18. India first imposed windfall profit taxes on July 1, 2022, joining a host of nations that tax supernormal profits of energy companies.

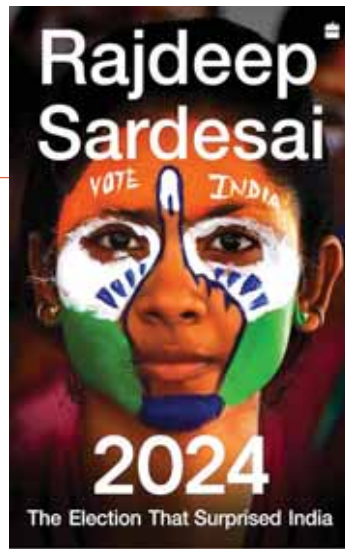
### IN BRIEF

**NEW DELHI:** The Goa Pavilion is adjudged as the Gold Medal award for excellence in "Swachh Pavilion" displayed at the 43rd India International Trade Fair, 2024, which concluded at the iconic Pragati Maidan in New Delhi.

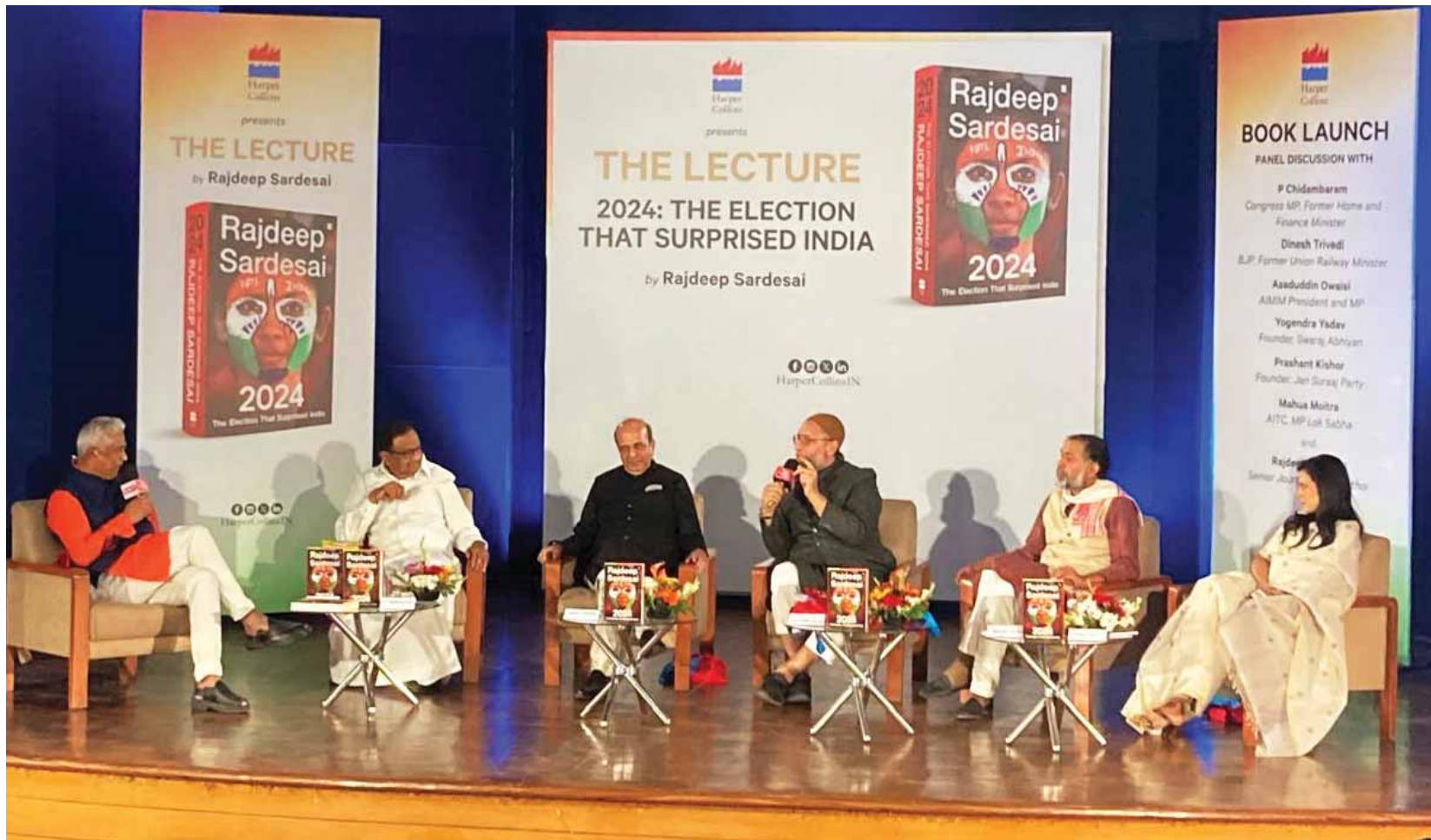


### GNU OBSERVES CONSTITUTION DAY

**AMRITSAR:** Celebrating Constitution Day, the Department of Laws of Guru Nanak Dev University organized a Free Legal Aid Camp and a Guest Lecture titled "Constitutional Right to Justice in India: The Role and Impact of Lok Adalats." This event also marked the inauguration of the first issue of the department's new student magazine, a platform designed to reflect the creativity and voices of law students.



**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
**Book:** 2024: The Election That Surprised India  
**by** Rajdeep Sardesai  
**Publisher:** HarperCollins  
**Price:** ₹799



# BOOK LAUNCH SPARKS INSIGHTFUL DEBATE

2024: *The Election That Surprised India*, the latest book by **RAJDEEP SARDESAI**, captures the myriad nuances of the recently held general elections, presenting an unflinching narrative of power, ambition, and the changing aspirations of the electorate, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

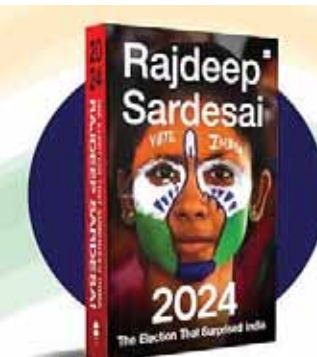
Veteran journalist Rajdeep Sardesai launched his latest book, *2024: The Election That Surprised India*, on Constitution Day at a packed auditorium in Teen Murti Bhavan. Non-fiction books dealing with politics and politicians generally evoke significant interest, especially when penned by a journalist with extensive experience in covering politics and elections. Sardesai's latest work was eagerly anticipated, and the wait proved worthwhile. The book offers a compelling exploration of one of India's most dramatic and unpredictable general elections, held just a few months ago.

This is Sardesai's third book on elections, following his analyses of the 2014 and 2019 general elections. In this new volume, he delves into the missteps of pollsters and pundits, who failed to predict the outcome accurately, and critiques the mainstream media for its perceived one-sided narratives. Sardesai examines why the BJP's "Char Sau Paar" campaign slogan, intended to project overwhelming confidence, failed to resonate with voters as expected. He also sheds light on Rahul Gandhi's Congress, which mounted a surprising comeback after years of setbacks. The narrative explores the operational strategies of the Modi-Shah political team, the role of enforcement agencies during the elections, and the controversies surrounding the fairness of the electoral process. Sardesai highlights the fierce battles in state elections and provides nuanced insights into who truly emerged victorious—and who faltered—in India's increasingly polarised political landscape.

In his characteristic unsparing and incisive style, Sardesai charts the dramatic changes in Indian politics over the last five years, offering readers an insider's perspective on the personalities, strategies, and events that defined the 2024 elections. Building on his bestselling accounts of the 2014 and 2019 elections, this book is a must-read for anyone seeking to understand the shifting sands of power and politics in India. One may agree or disagree with his interpretation and insights, especially since he is not the same as he once was, but the book is a good read and definitely has a shelf life.

**A LIVELY LAUNCH EVENT**  
 The book launch was more than a literary occasion; it featured a panel discussion moderated by Sardesai himself, with luminaries from various political parties in attendance. The event, held in a packed auditorium, was marked by engaging debates that delved into the key questions surrounding the electoral verdict that stunned the nation. The distinguished panel included prominent political figures such as P. Chidambaram, senior Congress leader; Mahua Moitra, the fiery Trinamool Congress MP; Dinesh Trivedi, former Railway Minister; and Asaduddin

Owaisi, leader of the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM). True to expectations, the discussion was animated and insightful. Adding a unique twist, the panellists took playful potshots at Sardesai himself, "roasting" him in a rare and humorous turn of events. Sardesai, clad in an orange kurta (perhaps making a statement), took the jabs in stride with a smile and humour. On a more serious note, the discussion was refreshingly candid. P. Chidambaram painted a picture of optimism for the Congress, emphasising the growing disillusionment with the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He highlighted issues such as unemployment, inflation, and the perceived erosion of democratic



**RAJDEEP SARDESAI**  
**ANSWERS THE BIGGEST QUESTIONS ABOUT INDIA'S MOST BRUISING AND POLARIZED POLITICAL ELECTION.**

institutions, arguing that these factors could shift voter sentiment. Chidambaram asserted that the Congress was ready to lead the country back to a path of inclusive growth and social justice. On the other hand, Mahua Moitra critiqued the centralisation of power under the BJP and the stifling of dissent. She warned that India's diversity was under threat due to rising authoritarianism and religious polarisation. Moitra argued that regional parties like the TMC were better equipped to challenge the BJP's

dominance because they understood the electorate's pulse more effectively than the Delhi-centric political establishment. Asaduddin Owaisi was humorous yet thought-provoking, raising concerns about the marginalisation of Muslims and other minority communities under the current regime. He criticised the BJP's focus on religious polarisation, warning that it was detrimental to India's secular fabric. Owaisi also called for greater unity among Muslim voters and reiterated his party's commitment to representing marginalised voices while building alliances with like-minded regional players. Yogendra Yadav, a psephologist-turned-politician, countered Dinesh Trivedi's assertion that there were no minorities in India and that "all are Indians." Yadav argued that while leveraging community votes was not new, the BJP had spearheaded campaigns that effectively rendered Muslims second-class citizens. Throughout the discussion, Sardesai kept the conversation dynamic, challenging panellists with incisive questions that encouraged them to think beyond the obvious. The debate was intense, often bordering on contentious, as the political heavyweights offered divergent perspectives on the state of the nation. From discussions on the BJP's electoral strategies to the role of opposition unity, caste politics, and the influence of social media, the conversation reflected the multifaceted nature of Indian politics. The panellists, despite their differing ideological positions, agreed on one point: the 2024 elections marked a watershed moment in Indian politics and that the rightward shift in Indian politics is real and here to stay. While this shift might not be irreversible, it is the reality of the day, nevertheless!

## November Reads!

By Rupa Publications



**The Wife and the Dancing Girl**  
 By ANUJA CHANDRAMOULI  
 (PRICE: ₹395, PAGES: 272)

In *The Wife and the Dancing Girl*, Anuja Chandramouli weaves a tale of searing passion and heartbreak inspired by Silapathikaram, the timeless Tamil classic by Ilango Adigal. This story explores the intricate love triangle between Kannagi, the devoted wife, Madhavi, the enchanting dancing girl, and the man they both loved fiercely. Through moments of breathtaking passion and harrowing despair, Kannagi and Madhavi navigate the depths of love and loss, armed with fragile hope and the bitter truth that exquisite pleasure often comes at the cost of endless pain. Chandramouli's retelling is both tender and tragic, delivering a romance that transcends time and leaves an indelible mark.

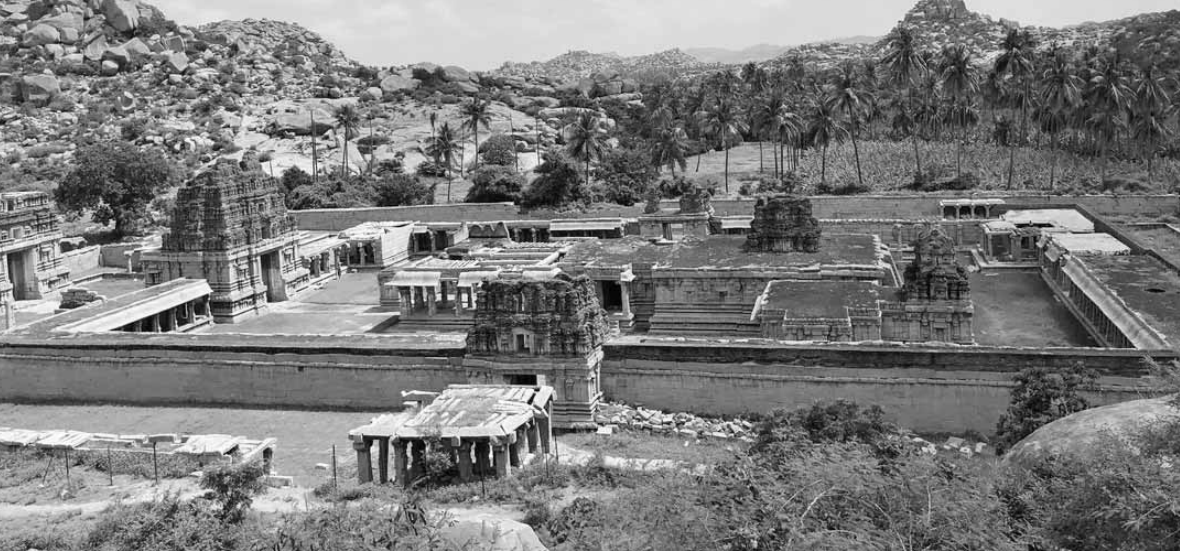
**Unpolitically Correct: The Politics and Economics of Governance**  
 By SATYA MOHANTY  
 (Price: ₹595, Pages: 232)

In *Unpolitically Correct*, Satya Mohanty, a former senior bureaucrat, delivers a provocative critique of India's governance and economic policies. With growing inequality and 1% of the population holding a disproportionate share of wealth, the book questions whether this disparity is inevitable or the result of a pro-rich policy bias. Challenging conventional beliefs, Mohanty examines issues like inequality, health, education, employment, and privatisation from a refreshingly radical perspective. He deconstructs the narratives of governments, media, and academia, exposing myths about wealth creators and economic progress. The book warns of the dangers posed by fiscal stress, economic slowdowns, and unchecked privatisation without ensuring efficiency and equity. Offering a bold and insightful perspective,

We've all heard the adage: never judge a book by its cover. While this is sound advice, there are exceptions. *One Foot in the Ruin and Other Poems* by Janhwi Sharma is one such exception where the cover perfectly mirrors the book's essence. The image—a lone wayfarer treading an uneven, weathered path amidst ruins, with distant figures barely visible—evokes a sense of solitude and introspection. Towering hills frame the background, while trees and bushes border the ruins in the foreground. Rendered in shades of black, white, and grey, the photograph conjures an atmosphere steeped in history, timelessness, and philosophy. It invites the reader to reflect: What is life if not a journey, and what are we if not wayfarers navigating an unpredictable path? This evocative cover sets the tone for the meditative and poignant journey that unfolds within the book. The title poem, "One Foot in the Ruin," found on page 166, epitomises this theme. Accompanied by a photograph of an abandoned street in Hampi, the poem reads:  
*One foot in the ruins...  
 I walk on the weather-beaten path  
 setting one foot in the ruin  
 I may wander  
 wander aimlessly  
 carelessly ceaselessly  
 but never to get lost  
 but maybe at times to  
 find new paths, new goals  
 embark on a new journey  
 or simply to return home.*  
 Traditionally, ruins evoke somberness, loss, and mystery. Sharma, however, takes a refreshingly different approach. He portrays the ruins not as dead relics but as sites of exploration, learning, and renewal. The poet walks through them not to lose himself but to discover new meanings, new paths, and, ultimately, a way home. In these lines, Sharma shares a hopeful philosophy: life, no matter how unpredictable or transient, holds potential for growth and return. This hopeful outlook resonates in another short poem, "Silent Spaces," on page 41, paired with a photograph of the Red Fort's barracks in Delhi:  
*Silent spaces  
 haunting...  
 filtering rays of hope  
 for the ruin.*  
 Here, Sharma's ruins filter light,

# Whispers of Ruins

JANHWIJ SHARMA'S *One Foot in the Ruin and Other Poems* is a captivating blend of evocative photography and reflective poetry that explores the intersection of history, memory, and the human spirit, writes **SWATI PAL**



**ABOUT THE BOOK**  
**Book:** 'One foot in the ruin and other poems' - The poem book by Janhwi Sharma, Dev  
**Publisher:** Dev  
**Price:** ₹2,495 **Pages:** 218

offering glimpses of hope rather than despair. Similarly, in "Is There a Way" (p. 77), paired with a photograph from Fatehpur Sikri, the poet muses on the stories ruins whisper:  
*Is there a way to hear the ruins  
 still telling tales of its  
 proud past with all  
 moments it lived  
 cherished and felt...  
 Time feels alive  
 within these ruins...  
 all that will one day remain  
 will be the ruins' whispering tales*

to those who could hear. Sharma's ability to hear and convey this "whispering tales" makes this collection profound. Of the book's five sections—North, West, Central, South, and East—each rooted in different regions of India, the Central section lingers in memory. For example, the poem "Excavated" (p. 159), paired with a photograph of Sarnath, explores time and its interplay with history:  
*Unearthed remains brought to fore  
 testaments of the era silent long back...  
 Time unwinds and time unwraps  
 bringing ruins to another life  
 time now stands still...*  
 Similarly, "In His Shelter" (p. 162), set against an image of a shrine in Hampi, reflects on the timeless pursuit of divine shelter:  
*In perpetual obeisance  
 prostrations before the divine  
 seeking His shelter and blessings  
 humbly forever...*  
 Sharma's poems often delve beneath the surface of ruins to unearth

enduring values, faith, and hope. This sentiment finds expression in "Stones Speak" (p. 120), inspired by the Ellora Caves:  
*Hewn out of rock/sculpted over  
 time/lasting forever.  
 Stones speak/louder than words/echoing  
 memories/with ceaseless gaze.*  
 The poet also captures spiritual and surreal elements, as in "The Other World" (p. 203), paired with an evocative photograph from Assam:  
*Passage for the ultimate departure  
 there is deathly silence around...  
 one never dies as they say  
 no need to ever mourn those who  
 leave...*  
 Balanced against these profound reflections are moments of lightheartedness, as in "Craftsman's Prank" (p. 112), inspired by a seemingly purposeless carved handle on a wall at Adalaj Vav, Gujarat:  
*Why is it there/I ponder  
 what purpose does it serve/makes me  
 think harder...  
 Surely he is having a good laugh/even  
 in his grave.*  
 This blend of spirituality, history, and human touch showcases Sharma's ability to see both the solemn and the whimsical in his subjects. Whether contemplating eternity or musing on a craftsman's playful detail, his poems bridge past and present, light and shadow, permanence and impermanence. The book's concluding poem, "Through the Ruin" (p. 32), paired with a photograph from Sarai Amanat Khan in Amritsar, encapsulates the collection's overarching message:  
*Through the ruin...  
 And I walk alone/framed through the  
 ruin  
 ravaged by time...  
 And I walk ahead/through the voids of  
 the ruin  
 reaching the destination/where my  
 future will be.*  
 As we reflect on the book's title and its solemn promise, we find that *One Foot in the Ruin* does not burden readers with heaviness. Instead, it uplifts, offering hope and perspective. Sharma's work reminds us that ruins, like life, hold stories worth hearing and lessons worth cherishing. Both the poetry and photographs take readers on an evocative journey across India, making this book a treasure worth exploring.

