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Finance Minister of India hikes capital expenditure, trims deficit for next fiscal; tax rates unchanged

Presenting a vote on account or an interim budget for 2024-25, Sitharaman proposes no changes in income tax rates for individuals and corporates, as well as customs duty

FEBRUARY 1, 2024

NEW DELHI (TIP): Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday hiked capital expenditure by 11 per cent for the next fiscal to sustain world-beating economic growth rate while trimming the deficit in a reform-oriented interim budget that also gave relief to common man from disputed small tax demands of up to Rs 25,000.

Presenting a vote on account or an interim budget for 2024-25, Sitharaman proposed no changes in income tax rates for individuals and corporates, as well as customs duty.

In less than an hour-long budget speech, she presented the Modi government's achievements in the last 10 years that transformed India from being a 'fragile' economy to the world's fastest-growing major economy.



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her address to the Lok Sabha said: "Guided by the principle 'reform, perform, and transform', the government will take up next-generation reforms". Photo / PTI

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GOV. KATHY HOCHUL APPROVES PROPOSAL ALLOWING ASYLUM SEEKERS TO GET TEMPORARY STATE GOVERNMENT JOBS



Gov. Kathy Hochul has approved a proposal allowing asylum seekers to get temporary jobs in state government.

Photo / Facebook

JANUARY 30, 2024

NEW YORK (TIP): Gov. Kathy Hochul has approved a proposal to reform New York's workforce, including allowing asylum seekers to get temporary jobs in state government.

The initiative is open to anyone in New York who has legal work authorization from the federal government, including American citizens, Green Card holders and migrants.

It only applies to temporary positions.

The governor says there are currently 40,000 jobs listed on New York state's migrant work portal.

The governor's action is likely to invite criticism and opposition from Republicans.

US State Department approves sale of 31 armed drones to India



File photo of the MQ-9B Sky Guardian drone

FEBRUARY 1, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. / NEW DELHI (TIP): The US State Department has approved the sale of 31 MQ-9B armed drones to India. These are to be made by General Atomics and are in use across several forces of the world.

The project includes ammunition, surveillance, repairs and spare engines, and will cost an estimated \$3.99 billion (around Rs 32,000 crore). The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) delivered the required certification notifying US Congress of this possible sale on February 1, the DSCA said.

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Jharkhand Governor nominates Champai Soren as Chief Minister

FEBRUARY 01, 2024

RANCHI / NEW DELHI / NEW YORK (TIP): Jharkhand Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan invited Champai Soren to form the government late on February 1.

Mr. Champai was elected as the new leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) Legislature Party following Hemant Soren's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate on January 31 under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) after he met the Governor and submitted his resignation as Chief Minister.

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Jharkhand Governor presents the letter to invite JMM leader Champai Soren to form a government in the State.

Photo / Special Arrangement

United States hikes visa fees for various categories of non-immigrant visas like H-1B, EB-5, popular among Indians



The fee hike, first after 2016, will come into force from April 1.

Photo for representation

FEBRUARY 1, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): The US has announced a steep increase in fees for various categories of non-immigrant visas like the H-1B, L-1 and EB-5, the most popular among Indians.

The fee hike, first after 2016, will come into force from April 1. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

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CHIEF EDITOR:

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CONSULTING EDITOR :

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Blitz India Media Group

ASSISTANT EDITOR:

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GRAPHICS DIRECTOR:

Om Parkash Malik

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CONTRIBUTING**PHOTOGRAPHERS:**

Baldev Singh / BJ Videos

Gunjesh Desai / Masala Junction

Jay Mandal,

Mohammad Jaffer,

SnapsIndia

Mohammad Shahzad,

Zia Khan,

Nisha Rani

Vaaho Photographers,

Vijay Shah - Photo Journalist.

CORRESPONDENTS :**SACRAMENTO:**

Parminder S. Aujla

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Dr. Yashpaul Goyal

DALLAS BUREAU CHIEF & VP

Lovlien Kaurr

972-330-3139

editor@theindianpanorama.news

The Indian Panorama

P.O. Box No. 190067, South

Richmond Hill, NY 11419,

Tel: 646-247-9458

Email:

editor@theindianpanorama.news

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COMMENT

India's Budget 2024: A Balancing Act for Inclusive Growth



BY
INDRAJIT SALUJA

On February 1, India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 in the Parliament. The budget comes at a critical juncture for the nation, grappling with the economic aftermath of the global pandemic and the imperative to foster inclusive growth. Sitharaman's budget attempts to strike a balance between various sectors, addressing the needs of the poor, and outlining a vision for India's future. This analysis delves into the key aspects of the budget, evaluating its strengths and weaknesses.

The budget reflects a delicate balancing act, navigating through economic challenges while aiming for inclusive growth. One notable aspect is the focus on capital expenditure, with a significant allocation to infrastructure development. This includes investments in roads, railways, and urban infrastructure, signaling the government's commitment to boosting economic activity and creating job opportunities.

Additionally, the budget emphasizes the importance of healthcare and education. Increased allocations for the health sector indicate a recognition of the need for a robust healthcare system, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Investments in education, including the proposed National Digital Education Architecture, aim to modernize and enhance the education system, potentially narrowing the digital divide.

The budget puts a strong emphasis on empowering the poor and marginalized sections of society. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment

Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has received increased funding, providing a safety net for rural households and supporting livelihoods. Moreover, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) continues to be a focal point, addressing the housing needs of the economically weaker sections.

The expansion of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) is a notable step, encompassing welfare measures and direct benefit transfers to vulnerable populations. This includes free food grains and cooking gas for identified beneficiaries, showcasing the government's commitment to alleviating immediate hardships faced by the poor.

The budget reflects a vision for a resilient and self-reliant India. The push for digital initiatives, including the proposed National Digital Education Architecture and the expansion of digital payments, aligns with the broader goal of harnessing technology for inclusive development. The focus on research and innovation, especially in the science and technology sector, aims to position India as a global leader in cutting-edge technologies.

The emphasis on sustainable development is evident through allocations for renewable energy projects and the proposed 'Blue Economy' initiative, highlighting the government's commitment to environmental conservation and economic sustainability. Additionally, the push for a 'circular economy' signals a shift towards responsible and sustainable consumption patterns.

The increased focus on capital expenditure for infrastructure development can spur economic growth, create jobs, and enhance connectivity, laying the foundation for long-term prosperity.

The heightened allocations for the health and education sectors indicate a

commitment to building robust systems that are crucial for human capital development, a key driver of economic growth.

The expansion of social welfare schemes like MGNREGA and PMGKY demonstrates the government's dedication to addressing the immediate needs of the poor and vulnerable, providing a safety net during challenging times.

Critics argue that the budget's focus on capital expenditure may exacerbate the fiscal deficit, potentially leading to a strain on government finances. Balancing the need for economic stimulus with fiscal prudence is a challenging task.

The increased spending in certain sectors may fuel inflationary pressures, impacting the purchasing power of citizens, especially those in the lower-income brackets.

While the budget outlines ambitious plans, the successful execution of these initiatives may face challenges, including bureaucratic hurdles, policy implementation bottlenecks, and the need for efficient monitoring mechanisms.

India's budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 reflects a comprehensive attempt to address immediate challenges while laying the groundwork for a sustainable and inclusive future. The emphasis on infrastructure, healthcare, education, and social welfare schemes demonstrates a commitment to uplift the poor and marginalized sections of society. However, the success of these initiatives hinges on effective implementation and management of potential challenges. As India strives to navigate through economic uncertainties and build a resilient future, the budget serves as a roadmap with both promises and challenges.

GUEST COMMENT

Incorrigible Nitish switches allies yet again

True to form, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar has dumped his Mahagathbandhan allies and returned to the NDA's fold. The Janata Dal (United) chief has formed the government with the BJP, the very party he had snapped ties with just a year and a half ago. His latest U-turn has jolted not only the Mahagathbandhan - which includes the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the Congress and the Left Front - but also

INDIA, the Opposition bloc that was formed last year to take on the BJP in the 2024 General Election. Nitish had projected himself as the face of the alliance, but suggestions about naming Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge as INDIA's prime ministerial candidate left him fuming.

It's nothing new for Nitish to switch allies, but he has been doing it with increasing regularity over the past decade. Having once said 'Mitti mein mil jaayenge magar BJP ke saath nahin jaaenge,' Nitish has opportunistically patched up with the saffron party yet again in a bid to survive and thrive. His decision shows that he is anticipating the BJP's victory and INDIA's debacle in the General Election. This is also a

desperate attempt by him to revitalize his party, which had ended up way behind the RJD and the BJP in the 2020 Assembly election. Though the BJP will be calling the shots in the new government in Bihar, it won't be easy for the party to justify taking Nitish back on board after having ruled out his return to the NDA.

Even as Nitish seems to have abandoned his prime ministerial ambitions, INDIA finds itself sinking deeper into the mire. Discord over seat-sharing in West Bengal and Punjab has exposed the alliance's frailties. Nitish's crossover indicates that more Opposition leaders might jump ship as the Lok Sabha elections draw nearer.

(Tribune, India)

Suozzi Says Pilip will make Nassau and Queens Less Safe

PILIP OFFERS UP THE SAME OLD NRA TALKING POINTS AND WILL STAND IN THE WAY OF PREVENTING GUN SAFETY LAWS

GLEN COVE, NY(TIP): Former Congressman Tom Suozzi held a press conference on February 1, highlighting his bipartisan record and platform to prevent crime and gun violence, which was first laid out in his 10-point plan.

While Suozzi is putting forth common sense solutions to address tough problems impacting New York's Third Congressional District, his opponent, Mazi Pilip, is not only hiding from the voters but even worse - she's hiding where she stands on critical issues like gun safety and the need to keep Nassau County and Queens safe.

On the campaign trail, Pilip offers up the same old NRA talking points - proving that she'll stand in the way of preventing gun safety laws. In the few interviews she has granted, Pilip has willfully misled voters about where she stands on an assault weapons ban. She uses deceptive language to fool voters who aren't familiar with the facts.

When she was asked by Newsday if she supported an assault weapons ban, she refused to answer and instead said, "Law-abiding citizens should have a route to have access to guns, but not automatic



Suozzi is getting support of his constituents

assault weapons." She repeated those talk points once again two nights ago on PIX 11.

Here is the trick: the sale and possession of new automatic weapons have been banned since 1986. The ban on semi-automatic weapons expired - which includes weapons of war such as AR-15s.

Pilip's own stated position makes it easier for immigrant gang members to get semi-automatic machine guns, makes it easier for someone to shoot up a school with an AR-15, makes it easier for domestic abusers to get guns, and makes it easier for people with mental illness to get guns.

Suozzi has a strong record of putting forth bipartisan solutions and working with anyone to get things done and make our communities safer.

As Mayor of Glen Cove, he increased the police force and greatly reduced the crime rate to the lowest level of any community of over 25,000 people in New York. As County Executive, he oversaw the 12th largest police department in the country. When he was County Executive, Nassau County had its lowest crime rate in decades and was ranked as the safest community in the entire nation with a population over 500,000.

Suozzi was also able to reduce crime while stabilizing costs by reforming procedures, deploying resources more wisely, and increasing the use of technology. As a Member of Congress, he honored local police officers as "Hometown Heroes" in 2020, 2021, and 2022 - and was inspired to give these awards to voice his support of law enforcement during the wave of "defund the police" support in 2020.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

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INDIAN-ORIGIN TEEN PREETPAUL SINGH ARRESTED FOR DEATH OF COMPATRIOT IN CANADA'S BRAMPTON



Preetpaul Singh has been arrested for the death of Nishan Thind

Photo for representation

JANUARY 30, 2024

TORONTO (TIP): An Indian-origin teenager has been arrested in connection with the death of another Indian-origin youth in a Canadian city and the police are on the lookout for any information or video footage to support the active investigation.

Nishan Thind, 18, of Brampton, a city in the Canadian province of Ontario, was admitted to a local hospital there on December 19 last year. The police were notified that he died after reaching the hospital.

"It was determined he (Thind) had been shot at an unidentified location and time and dropped off at the hospital," police from the Region of Peel said in a statement.

Following Thind's death, detectives from the Peel Regional Police Homicide Bureau on January 9 executed a search warrant at a Brampton residence and subsequently arrested 18-year-old Preetpaul Singh.

"He has been charged with Accessory After the Fact to Commit an Indictable Offence. He was held in custody to appear before the Ontario Court of Justice in Brampton," police added.

The suspected shooter is a 16-year-old male from Brampton and is wanted on a Canada-wide warrant for manslaughter.

Police said, "This remains an active investigation; anyone with information or video footage (dashcam or otherwise) is urged to contact Homicide detectives."

Indian national sentenced for nearly \$2.8mn healthcare fraud in US

Yogesh K Pancholi from Northville was also found guilty of wire fraud conspiracy, engaging in money laundering, aggravated identity theft, and witness tampering

JANUARY 31, 2024

MICHIGAN (TIP): A 43-year-old Indian national in the US state of Michigan has been sentenced to nine years in prison for orchestrating a nearly \$2.8 million healthcare fraud.

Yogesh K Pancholi from Northville was also found guilty of wire fraud conspiracy, engaging in money laundering, aggravated identity theft, and witness tampering.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Pancholi owned and operated Shring Home Care Inc, a home health company based in Livonia, Michigan, a Department of Justice release said.

Despite being excluded from billing Medicare, Pancholi purchased Shring using the names, signatures, and personal identifying information of others to conceal his ownership of the company.

In a two-month period, Pancholi and his co-conspirators billed and were paid nearly \$2.8 million by Medicare for services that were never provided.



Yogesh K Pancholi, a resident of Michigan, owned a healthcare company. He was sentenced to nine years for nearly \$2.8mn healthcare fraud

Photo for representation only

Pancholi then transferred these funds through bank accounts belonging to shell corporations and eventually into his accounts in India.

After being indicted, and on the eve of trial, Pancholi, using a pseudonym, wrote false and malicious emails to various federal government agencies.

In those emails, he alleged a government witness had committed various crimes and should not be allowed to remain in the US in an attempt to keep the witness from

testifying.

In September 2023, a federal jury in the Eastern District of Michigan convicted Pancholi of conspiracy to commit healthcare and wire fraud, two substantive counts of healthcare fraud, two counts of money laundering, two counts of aggravated identity theft, and one count of witness tampering.

Pancholi's case was investigated by the FBI Detroit Field Office and the Department of Health and Human Services Office of the Inspector General (HHS-OIG).

The Justice Department's Criminal Division has been making efforts to combat healthcare fraud through the Health Care Fraud Strike Force Program.

Since March 2007, this programme, currently comprised of nine strike forces operating in 27 federal districts, has charged more than 5,400 defendants who collectively have billed federal healthcare programs and private insurers more than \$27 billion.

(Source: US Department of Justice)

Three Punjabi-origin youths living in Brampton, Calgary to be extradited to US for drug trafficking



Ayush Sharma, 25, and Guramrit Sandhu, 60, both from Brampton, and Subham Kumar, 29, from Calgary have been arrested in Canada and will be extradited for trial in the US for their alleged links with a network trafficking drugs between Mexico and the North American nations.

Photo for representation

FEBRUARY 1, 2024

TORONTO (TIP): Three Indian-origin men have been arrested in Canada and will be extradited for trial in the US for their alleged links with a network trafficking drugs between Mexico and the North American nations.

A joint operation between the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) dubbed "Operation Dead Hand" saw 19 people charged in two US federal indictments for their alleged roles in the organized crime ring.

Ayush Sharma, 25, and Guramrit Sandhu, 60, both from Brampton, and Subham Kumar, 29, from Calgary, were arrested under an international arrest warrant, the RCMP said in a release on Tuesday.

"Drug trafficking is a global problem being driven by sophisticated, organized crime groups who put profits over people's lives. Motivated by greed, these criminals destroy lives, devastate families, and wreak havoc in our community," told US Attorney Martin Estrada for the Central District of California.

Investigators developed information indicating the organized crime group used Canadian "handlers" and "dispatchers" who travelled from Canada to Los Angeles for short amounts of time, a Department of Justice release noted.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

Indian-origin couple convicted in UK of exporting over half ton cocaine to Australia



Arti Dhir and Kavaljitsinh Rajjada, from Hanwell in Ealing have been convicted of exporting more than half a ton of cocaine to Australia

Photo for representation

JANUARY 30, 2024

LONDON (TIP): An Indian-origin couple in the UK, whose extradition was sought by India, has been convicted of exporting more than half a ton of cocaine to Australia after an investigation found that they were behind a front company that had sent the drugs by plane under a cover load of metal toolboxes.

Arti Dhir, 59, and Kavaljitsinh Rajjada, 35, from Hanwell in Ealing were identified by the National Crime Agency (NCA) investigators after Australian Border Force intercepted the cocaine worth 57 million pounds upon its arrival in Sydney in May 2021, the agency said in a statement on Monday.

Dhir and Rajjada denied exporting cocaine to Australia and money laundering. They were convicted of 12 counts of exportation and 18 counts of money laundering by a jury following a trial at Southwark Crown Court on Monday.

They will be sentenced at the same court on Tuesday.

The drugs had been shipped via a commercial flight from the UK and consisted of six metal toolboxes which, when opened, were found to contain 514 kilos of cocaine.

The drugs would have been worth up to 57 million pounds when sold in Australia, where prices are significantly higher than in the UK.

In the UK, a kilo of cocaine at wholesale is priced at around 26,000 pounds per kilo but in Australia, the same amount sells for 110,000 pounds.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

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Indian American jurist Amrith Kaur Aakre to lead EEOC's Chicago district



Amrith Kaur Aakre has become the new director of the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) Chicago District

JANUARY 31, 2024

CHICAGO (TIP): Indian American jurist Amrith Kaur Aakre has become the new director of the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's (EEOC) Chicago District, the federal agency announced, January 31.

Aakre, who most recently served as the legal director for the Sikh Coalition, began her new role on Jan 29, 2024. She took her oath on the Sikh holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib.

"Ms. Aakre has a proven track record of creative problem solving, broad management experience, and a deep commitment to civil rights," said EEOC Chair Charlotte A Burrows. "I am pleased that she will be joining the EEOC's Chicago District."

Aakre said, "I have incredible respect for the EEOC and its mission to advance equal employment opportunities for all, and I'm grateful to be appointed Chicago District Director. I look forward to

working together with the dedicated members of the Chicago District to create impactful change and combat unlawful employment discrimination across our region.

"I am also excited to learn from the various stakeholder groups, civil rights and other professional organizations, and members of employee and employer communities how the Chicago District offices can best serve their needs," she said. "I greatly appreciate the opportunity to continue engaging with civil rights work and am honored to lead the Chicago District moving forward."

Prior to joining the Commission, Aakre led a national civil rights practice focused on high impact, systemic litigation matters in areas such as workplace discrimination, hate crimes, school discrimination, racial profiling, and bias-based policy issues.

Under her leadership, the Sikh Coalition drafted significant amicus

briefs, including one cited by the Supreme Court in its most recent religious accommodation case, *Groff v. DeJoy*.

She also previously served as a prosecutor in the Cook County State's Attorney's Office in Chicago for more than 11 years, during which time she directed efforts to expand access to restorative justice and rehabilitative courts.

Aakre currently serves on the Board of Directors for the ACLU of Illinois and the South Asian Bar Association (SABA) of Chicago, and the leadership committee for the American Bar Association's Religious Liberty Section.

She is the 2022 recipient of SABA North America's Public Interest Achievement Award, 2023 and 2021 recipient of SABA Chicago's Public Interest Lawyer Award, and a 2017 recipient of the Asian American Coalition of Chicago's Community Service award. She also has served as an Emerging Leaders Fellow for the Chicago Council on Global Affairs.

Aakre earned dual bachelor's degrees in applied science and technology engineering and English literature from The George Washington University, and her juris doctor from The University of Illinois at Chicago Law School.

The EEOC's Chicago District is responsible for processing charges of discrimination, administrative enforcement, and the conduct of agency litigation in Illinois, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa and North and South Dakota, with area offices in Milwaukee and Minneapolis.

Photo: Amrith Kaur Aakre (second from left) with Thomas Colclough, director of field management programs, and her parents Rajinder and Navinder Mago at her swearing-in ceremony.

INDIAN-ORIGIN MISSING STUDENT NEEL ACHARYA FOUND DEAD



Neel Acharya, an Indian student at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, who was reported missing on social media by his mother Sunday, January 28, has been confirmed dead.

JANUARY 30, 2024

CHICAGO (TIP): Neel Acharya, an Indian student at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, who was reported missing on social media by his mother Sunday, January 28, has been confirmed dead.

In an email written to the university's computer science department Monday, interim CS head Chris Clifton informed students and faculty of Acharya's death, according to a local newspaper.

"It is with great sadness that I inform you that one of our students, Neel Acharya, has passed away," Clifton wrote. "My condolences go out to his friends, family, and all affected."

Clifton called Acharya a "driven individual and academically talented." Acharya's friend and roommate, Aryan Khanolkar, said he was a "loving, charismatic soul, and will be cherished by all of us."

Acharya, who went to St. Mary's School in Pune, was a double major in computer science and data science in the John Martinson Honors College.

Clifton told the Exponent he received an email from the Office of the Dean of Students confirming Acharya's death.

"A deceased person was found that matched Neel's description and had Neel's ID on (him)," he said.

On Sunday morning, a "college-aged" man was found dead near the Maurice J. Zucrow Laboratories about 10:30 am. According to social media posts by users claiming to be close to Acharya, the student's last known location was pinned in the same area the body was found.

The coroner has not confirmed whether Acharya was the man found near Zucrow that morning, which Robert Wang, a research assistant working at the lab, said had been found by a graduate student.

"It's a shock," Clifton said of Acharya. "A real loss to our community." Earlier, in a desperate plea, Gaury Acharya, Neel's mother, posted about his disappearance on X, "Our son Neel Acharya has been missing since yesterday Jan 28 (12:30 AM EST) He is studying in Purdue University in the US. He was last seen by the Uber driver who dropped him off in Purdue university. (Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)"

Indian-origin student killed by homeless man in Georgia

JANUARY 29, 2024

ATLANTA (TIP): Vivek Saini, a 25-year-old Indian student from Haryana, who had come to the US to do his master's in business administration was killed by a homeless man inside a store in Lithonia, Georgia.

The incident occurred on Jan 16, a local channel reported. Witnesses cited by



Vivek Saini who was doing his master's in business administration was killed by a homeless man inside a store in Lithonia, Georgia.

Photo for representation

the channel said Saini was brutally attacked with a hammer by the homeless man late at night after he asked him to leave the store.

Notably, employees at the food mart including Saini, had been feeding and sheltering the homeless man, identified as Julian Faulkner, for days. "He asked us for chips and coke. We gave him everything including the water," one of the employees at the food mart, told media.

"He asked if I could get a blanket. I said we don't have blankets, so I gave him a jacket. He was walking in and out asking him for cigarettes, water, and everything.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

Two Indian Americans sentenced for conspiring & stealing sensitive government data

JANUARY 30, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): Three former Department of Homeland Security (DHS) employees, including two Indian Americans, have been sentenced for a conspiracy to steal proprietary US government software and sensitive law-enforcement databases for use in a commercial venture.

Sonal Patel, 49, of Sterling, Virginia, was sentenced to two years of probation in a Washington, DC, court on January 26, according to a Justice Department press release. In April 2019, Patel pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit theft of government property theft of government property. Murali Y. Venkata, 58, of Aldie, Virginia, was sentenced to four months in prison.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)



Sonal Patel, 49, of Sterling, Virginia, was sentenced to two years of probation and Murali Y. Venkata, 58, of Aldie, Virginia, was sentenced to four months in prison for a conspiracy to steal proprietary US government software and sensitive law-enforcement databases for use in a commercial venture.

Indian Americans participate enthusiastically in the Indian Consulate Republic Day Celebrations



Consul General of India Mr. Binaya Srikanta Pradhan welcoming guests to the reception



Grammy award winner, Ms. Falu Shah sings a song

JANUARY 27, 2024

NEW YORK CITY (TIP): The 75th Republic Day of India was celebrated in Consulate General of India, New York with a flag hoisting ceremony on Thursday, January 26th 2024.

Consul General Mr. Binaya Srikanta Pradhan unfurled the national flag. Over 150 members of Indian American community and friends of India joined as the national anthem was sung. Consul General then read out the Address of the President of India which she had delivered on the eve of India's Republic Day. A short cultural program of patriotic songs was presented by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, USA. A large number of members of Indian diaspora and friends of India participated in the celebration filling the hall with patriotic fervor. New Jersey State

Senator, Mr. Raj Mukherji graced the occasion with his presence and spoke about the strong US-India partnership. Artists from Bharatiya Vidya bhavan presented Patriotic songs. The event was webcast live through the Consulate's social media platforms.

In the evening, Consul General hosted a reception which was attended by prominent members of the diaspora, elected officials, members of the diplomatic corps, friends from media and people from different walks of life.

Among the esteemed guests were Congressman Michael Lawler, Mayor of Edison Township Mr. Sam Joshi, and senior diplomats and officers from NYC Mayor's office and NY State Governor's office.



A dance performance by Ms. Maheshwari Jagabattula



A View of the gathering

Video messages conveying congratulations on the 75th Republic Day were played from notable figures, including New York State Governor Ms. Kathy Hochul, Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick, etc.

The program included a video showcasing the Consulate's activities across the ten states in the northeast U.S. The event also saw vibrant cultural performances from young but very talented artist, Ms. Maheshwari Jagabattula and a captivating performance from Grammy award winner, Ms. Falu Shah. Guests were then treated to a delightful Indian dinner, featuring a diverse array of regional cuisines from various parts of India. The celebration embodied the spirit of unity, diversity, and shared heritage, marking a memorable Republic Day for all in attendance.

The Indian Community embraces Tom Suozzi, a commonsense candidate for Congress



Tom Suozzi with supporters at Santoor on January 28, 2024

JANUARY 29, 2024

QUEENS, NY (TIP): It was pretty evident from the enthusiasm and energy exhibited at the recent gathering of the Indian Americans in the Santoor Restaurant in Floral Park, Queens, New York, that they are excited to have Tom Suozzi back in the political arena again. "The Indian Community has always admired Mr. Suozzi for standing up for issues that our community has cared for, and this gathering strongly reflects those feelings" Said Mr. Koshy Thomas, one of the leading organizers of the event in Queens. The meeting brought together people from diverse backgrounds who have roots in South Asia.

In his address, Mr. Suozzi thanked the Indian community for their support and said, "The Indian American Community truly understood the importance of voting, particularly in this special

election." Mr. Suozzi assured the audience that he would continue his excellent work of bringing people together to resolve many thorny issues, including the border crisis".

Mr. Suozzi has a reputation as a middle-of-the-road politician who is keenly aware of the issues an average citizen is concerned about, such as rising crime, inflation, the need for better schools for the next generation, and creating jobs for the new graduates. However, these issues often get marginalized by both far-left and far-right policies that are highlighted and garner the most attention. It is time for the nation to return to common sense policies that are beneficial to the majority of voters who are increasingly concerned about their lack of say in addressing these issues.

(Read full story at
www.theindianpanorama.news)



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Reforming UN for a rules-based order

PRIMARY REASON FOR THE ONGOING CRISES IN UKRAINE AND GAZA IS AN INEFFECTIVE SECURITY COUNCIL



BY ASOKE MUKERJI

"The UNSC's decisions since 1946 have been consistently taken in the light of geopolitical priorities of its P5 members and not any commitment to world peace. This was the pattern during the ideological confrontation of the Cold War (1946-1991). After the Cold War, the three NATO members of the P5 (France, the UK and US) acted to make the NATO supplant the UNSC, symbolized by their action in Libya in 2011. The UNSC subsequently proved helpless in preventing NATO's weaponization of globalized economic linkages through unilateral sanctions, which have primarily affected developing countries. The outcome has been the intensification of armed conflicts, impacting not only the integrity of the UNSC but also more than two billion people mainly in the Global South, according to the UN."

The breakdown of the 'rules-based order' is evident from the spread of violent conflicts that are fracturing international relations. At the heart of this order is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which is mandated by the UN Charter with the 'primary responsibility' of maintaining international peace and security. The Charter stipulates that UNSC decisions are binding on all UN member-states. The widening gap between decision-making by the UNSC and the challenges to peace, security and development on the ground is directly responsible for the ongoing crises. The priority for the international community is to eliminate this gap through a review and reform of the rules-based order. This can only be done through the UN General Assembly (UNGA), in which all states, big and small, are represented on an equal basis.

Now, 20 million Afghan women live under 'gender apartheid'. The UNSC was unable to ensure compliance with its decision of 2015, guaranteeing Ukraine's

The need to urgently reform the rules-based order has to be pursued through informal multiple-stakeholder consultations in the lead-up to the UN's Summit of the Future, due in September. Using dialogue and diplomacy to convene a General Conference of the UN in 2025, the objective should be to give the 'primary responsibility' for peace, security and development to the equitable and representative UNGA.



Taken in the light of geopolitical priorities of its P5 members, UNSC's decisions have led to the intensification of armed conflicts, impacting over two billion people, mainly in the Global South.

Photo / Courtesy Global Peace Index

territorial integrity.

The UNSC's decision-making parameters were negotiated between August 1944 and February 1945 among the Council's five 'permanent' members or the P5 (today's Russia, China, France, the UK and the US). A key feature was the requirement for the 'concurrence' (popularly known as the veto) of the P5 to UNSC decisions. Both the composition of the P5 and their veto power were 'parachuted' into the UN Charter as non-negotiable pre-conditions in the invitation extended to countries for participating in the San Francisco conference (April-June 1945) to adopt the Charter.

During the conference, some countries objected to the non-democratic veto provision. Addressing the first session of the UNGA on January 18, 1946, India said it had agreed to the consensus on the Charter on the basis of a compromise. The compromise, contained in Article 109 of the Charter, was to convene a UN General Conference to review the Charter's provisions 10 years after it was adopted. So far, such a General Conference has not taken place.

The UNSC's decisions since 1946 have been consistently taken in the light of geopolitical priorities of its P5 members and not any commitment to world peace. This was the pattern during the ideological confrontation of the Cold War (1946-1991). After the Cold War, the three NATO members of the P5 (France, the UK and US) acted to make the NATO supplant

the UNSC, symbolized by their action in Libya in 2011. The UNSC subsequently proved helpless in preventing NATO's weaponization of globalized economic linkages through unilateral sanctions, which have primarily affected developing countries. The outcome has been the intensification of armed conflicts, impacting not only the integrity of the UNSC but also more than two billion people mainly in the Global South, according to the UN.

The recent track record of the UNSC in failing to uphold a rules-based order illustrates the urgent need for reforming its mandated role. On August 15, 2021, the UNSC was unable to enforce compliance with its own unanimous decision of March 10, 2020, linking US/NATO troop withdrawal with a politically inclusive government in Afghanistan. Today, 20 million Afghan women live under 'gender apartheid'. On February 22, 2022, the UNSC was unable to ensure compliance with its decision of February 17, 2015, guaranteeing Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty in return for the devolution of political power to its restive eastern regions under the Minsk Agreements. The resulting violent conflict between Russia and Ukraine (which is supported externally by NATO) has ruined millions of lives physically and socio-economically. On October 7, 2023, the UNSC was unable to make member-states comply with its numerous resolutions, including No. 2334 of December 23, 2016, on the Israel-Palestine

issue. The conflict has led to the death of thousands of women and children.

In an ideal rules-based order, the UNGA should be responsible under the Charter for maintaining international peace and security. Since 2015, all UN member-states, including the P5, have accepted the interlinkage between peace, security and development. However, the Charter was deliberately drafted to make UNGA decisions recommendatory and non-binding on UN member-states. It prevents the UNGA from considering issues that are on the agenda of the UNSC. Even a UNGA decision to amend the Charter (and reform the UNSC) is hostage to a P5 veto under Article 108 of the Charter. The cart is put before the horse.

The UNGA has tried to overcome these handicaps by prioritizing its work mandating negotiations of treaties to create a rules-based order. Such treaties include the Convention on Genocide (1948); the Convention on outlawing Racial Discrimination (1965); the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966); the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979); the Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Participating states are expected to uphold their treaty obligations to achieve the principles and objectives of the Charter.

A similar approach marks UNGA decisions recommending norms for member-states to use in adopting national legislation. The first such document, adopted unanimously by the UNGA on December 10, 1948, was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

On September 25, 2015, the UNGA adopted Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development with its 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), the first universally applicable normative global policy framework interlinking peace, security, development and environmental protection.

The assertion by world leaders at the UN SDG Summit on September 18-19, 2023, that numerous crises had put the implementation of the SDGs into peril deserves to be taken seriously. The primary reason for these crises is an ineffective UNSC, whose unanimously mandated reform has been assiduously blocked in informal UNGA negotiations by the P5 since 2008.

The need to urgently reform the rules-based order has to be pursued through informal multiple-stakeholder consultations in the lead-up to the UN's Summit of the Future, due in September. Using dialogue and diplomacy to convene a General Conference of the UN in 2025, the objective should be to give the 'primary responsibility' for peace, security and development to the equitable and representative UNGA.

(The author is a former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations)

New fault-lines to the fore in US presidential race

A GREATER CONCERN FOR THE WORLD IS THE IMPACT OF A CHANGING OF THE GUARD ON THE US FOREIGN POLICY



BY LUV PURI

"FOR THE OUTSIDE WORLD, THERE WILL BE TWO MAIN CONSEQUENTIAL AND IMMEDIATE OUTCOMES THAT ARE SHAPED BY ANY CHANGE IN THE US ADMINISTRATION, AS EVIDENCED DURING THE TRUMP YEARS. ONE IS THE IMPACT ON HIGH-SKILLED IMMIGRATION AS US TECH ENTERPRISES DRAW TALENT FROM ACROSS THE WORLD, PARTICULARLY FROM INDIA. AT LEAST 70 PER CENT OF THE H1-B VISAS ARE BAGGED BY INDIANS EVERY YEAR, THE BULK OF THEM BY SOFTWARE ENGINEERS AND, NOW, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PROFESSIONALS. LITTLE DISCUSSED IS THE PERCEIVED SENSE OF INSECURITY AMID HEIGHTENED WHITE NATIONALISM THAT BORDERS ON RACISM, PARTICULARLY FOR THE HIGH-SKILLED PEOPLE FROM ASIAN COUNTRIES. THE TRUMP YEARS DEMONSTRATED THAT SAFETY AS A FACTOR TO MIGRATE OR NOT BECAME IMPORTANT FOR HIGH-SKILLED MIGRANTS, PARTICULARLY FROM NON-EUROPEAN COUNTRIES."

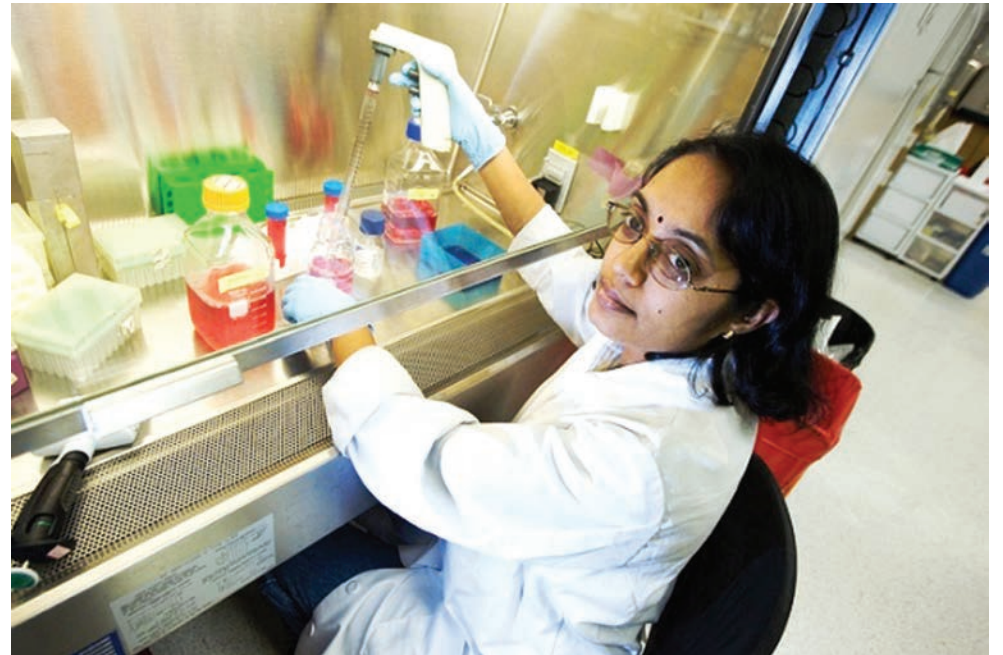
The support for former President Donald Trump in the Iowa caucus and within the Republican Party establishment has created a buzz about a what-if scenario: the return of the Trump era and the concomitant unpredictability in the governance of a country that accounts for a quarter of the global economy.

In the polarized US polity, the congressional districts in some of the swing/battleground states of the 2016 and 2020 elections, such as Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, may decide the 2024 presidential contest. The suburban and rural parts remain conservative and racially homogenized - mostly white. New political, social and economic fault-lines are being drawn within the states, and this may fuel fresh social and ideological tensions, even as Florida has remained a battleground state since the 2000 elections.

For the outside world, there will be two main consequential and immediate outcomes that are shaped by any change in the US administration, as evidenced during the Trump years. One is the impact on high-skilled immigration as US tech enterprises draw talent from across the world, particularly from India. At least 70 per cent of the H1-B visas are bagged by Indians every year, the bulk of them by software engineers and, now, artificial intelligence professionals. Little discussed is the perceived sense of insecurity amid heightened white nationalism that borders on racism, particularly for the high-skilled people from Asian countries. The Trump years demonstrated that safety as a factor to migrate or not became important for high-skilled migrants, particularly from non-European countries.

Even in arguably the most cosmopolitan city in the world like New York, with nearly half of the population being foreign-born, the Police Benevolent Association, NYC's largest police union, reportedly "broke with a longstanding tradition of not endorsing presidential candidates and had thrown its support behind President Trump in the 2020 elections, as many officers viewed him as more of an ally to their pro-police 'Blue Lives Matter' movement than Joe Biden."

A greater concern for the world is the impact of a changing of the guard on the US foreign policy. The US is the pre-eminent power in the international system as its support or withdrawal of support on global issues is consequential. Take, for instance, the challenge of climate change. In the 2017 book, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, Jane Mayer illustrates how Charles and David Koch, the enormously rich proprietors of an oil company based in Kansas, laid the foundations for conservative movements



2024 polls: A change in the US administration will impact high-skilled immigration

that were anti-government and opposed climate change. The funding of various movements, think tanks and newspapers inadvertently created a fertile landscape for Trump to exploit in the 2016 elections. It wasn't a surprise when he decided to formally withdraw from the Paris climate agreement in June 2017.

Also, there are peace and security issues that are shaped by the US directly or indirectly. There are three foreign policy domains that have dominated Biden's presidency - Ukraine, West Asia and China. All three affect every corner of the world, including India, though the US-India bilateral engagement will essentially retain the momentum despite any change. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has given the European Union (EU) a renewed sense of purpose. Russia's perceived threat is now internalized by eastern European Baltic states, such as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which were earlier part of the Soviet Union, and by other eastern European countries like Poland, Romania and Moldova. This has instilled a pan-continental unity that no event has catalyzed since 1993, the year of the EU's foundation. Recent developments have also turned the spotlight within the US on European security. Since the February 2022 invasion, more than \$75 billion in assistance to Ukraine, including humanitarian, financial and military support, has reportedly been given by the US. Trump's current stance on the US financial support to Ukraine is not clear. In fact, during his presidency, he had angered EU allies with his repeated criticism of European countries for not commensurately funding the NATO.

West Asia has witnessed greater instability after the Hamas attacks and the consequent Gaza assault by Israel. Among the 19 September 11 attackers, 15 were from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and they cited the purported partial US role in West Asia, including the Israel-

Palestine conflict, as the reason for carrying out the suicide attacks. The US establishment doesn't want to give fresh ammunition to the violent extremists working against it. This explains repeated words of caution by Biden to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, urging him not to be blinded by rage. In 2017, then President Trump had decided that the US would move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and this was seen as a reckless move as it may directly play into the hands of extremists who slam the US for being pro-Israel. Then, there are other tensions, such as with Iran and its alleged support to proxies like the Houthis in Yemen that are threatening Red Sea's shipping lanes. This requires a calibrated and coordinated approach, with allies anchored in patience and wisdom that was clearly lacking in President Trump.

Finally, another Trump term has the potential to reconfigure the Asia-Pacific security calculus. China's multi-dimensional challenge had been at the heart of President Biden's Asian engagement. Biden continued with Trump's import tariffs on China. It is the US strategy to meet the challenge of China's military projection that may have a greater impact with a change in the US administration. For instance, China has never given up the use of force as an option to bring Taiwan under its control. On the other hand, the US strategic ambivalence over defending the island if it were attacked has been its consistent position. In the recent Taiwanese presidential elections, the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which invokes China's ire for its nationalist stance, retained power. A Trump term may spur Beijing to invade Taiwan and exacerbate China's perennial tensions with Japan, South Korea and even India.

(Luv Puri is a Journalist and Author)

Fear of losing ground drives Nitish

BIHAR CHIEF MINISTER HAS SURVIVED DESPITE BEING AN OVERVALUED POLITICAL ASSET



BY PARSHA
VENKATESHWAR RAO
JR

"NITISH HAS LITERALLY RETURNED TO HIS DEN AND THERE HE HAS TO REMAIN, EVEN AS THE BJP GAINS STRENGTH IN THE STATE AND THINKS OF WAYS AND MEANS TO REPLACE HIM. BUT HE HAS A FIGHTING CHANCE IN BIHAR AND CAN HOPE TO REPEL HIS OPPONENTS FOR THE TIME BEING. INDIA IS ON A WEAK WICKET FOR OTHER REASONS AND THIS DOES NOT HAVE MUCH TO DO WITH NITISH LEAVING IT. NITISH IS NOT A STRONG AND TALL LEADER WHO CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, AND HE KNOWS IT. HE ALSO REMEMBERS THE OUTCOME OF THE 2014 LOK SABHA ELECTIONS IN THE STATE - THE JD(U) FOUGHT AGAINST THE BJP AND WON JUST TWO SEATS, WHILE THE SAFFRON PARTY BAGGED 22."

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar is the proverbial cat with nine lives. He has remained at the helm in state politics for more than 20 years despite his shaky foundations. His party, the Janata Dal (United), is not formidable either in the state or at the national level. But he has tried to stay ahead of his competitors not through numbers but thanks to the fact that the BJP has not been too sure of itself in the state and has been willing to let him have the reins of power. This time, he has dumped the ruling Mahagathbandhan, which includes the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the Congress and Left parties.

When Nitish senses that his plan to grow as a national leader does not seem to be working out, he wants to save his position as CM at whatever cost.

The BJP and the JD(U) had together won 33 of the 40 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar



Back to square one: Nitish has literally returned to his den and there he has to remain.

Credit / PTI

in 2019; the former wants to do an encore in the upcoming General Election. It is for this reason that Nitish has snuggled back into the NDA's fold. But how well is he placed on his home turf? It is the fear of losing ground that has been driving him hither and thither, first into the arms of the RJD and then the BJP.

There is speculation that Nitish's exit from INDIA would weaken Opposition unity so much that there would not be any contest in the parliamentary elections. It is presumed that Nitish was a sort of lynchpin for the bloc and his departure would leave it rudderless. Nitish has for long been an overvalued political asset. He has not stormed the national arena on his own, unlike George Fernandes, his old socialist comrade. Nitish, along with Lalu Yadav, Sharad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan, was a product of Jayaprakash Narayan's protest movement of the early 1970s; they became recognizable faces of a new generation of leaders. But they remained where they were. They did not leverage their success to make an impact on the national stage. A similar thing happened with Jyotiraditya Scindia, Sachin Pilot and Milind Deora in the Congress; Scindia and Deora have since moved on.

However, Lalu Yadav managed to consolidate his party (RJD) in Bihar, while Nitish's JD(U) started lagging behind. And it is with the help of BJP that Nitish managed to stabilize his position in the JD(U) and lead it to victory. The JD(U) base in Bihar is not as wide as that of the RJD. In the 2020 Assembly election, the JD(U) had won only 43 seats, well behind the BJP (74) and the RJD (75).

It is because of his long stay as chief minister that every once in a while, Nitish tries to break out of Bihar and look at the national scene. He thinks that his sobriety gives him an edge over Lalu Yadav's image of a lovable maverick. But sobriety is not gravitas. Nitish has been overestimating his stature as a leader of national importance.

And when he senses that his plan to grow as a national leader does not seem to be working out, he wants to save his position as chief minister at whatever cost. In 2013, he wanted to challenge Narendra Modi but soon realized that he was no match for him because the BJP had a larger footprint across the country and there was the RSS network of volunteers working quietly as foot soldiers of the party. The JD(U) could not match the BJP at the organizational level across the country. So, he went back to the NDA camp. When INDIA was being formed, he again sensed an opportunity and thought that he would be given due regard as the CM of Bihar, an important Hindi-speaking state. He expected to be given precedence over West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee. He wanted to head INDIA, but the honor was denied to him because there was little doubt that the Congress had to be the spearhead, a fact that was realized even by Mamata. When Mamata mischievously proposed that Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge should be declared the prime ministerial candidate of the alliance, a JD(U) leader asked: 'Who is Kharge?' It was implied that being a politician from a non-Hindi-speaking state, Kharge could not stake claim to become a national leader, whereas Nitish was fit to play that role.

NITISH DID NOT WANT TO BE NUMBER TWO IN THE OPPOSITION RANKS. IN THE NDA, HIS POSITION IS NOT IN THE FRONT BUT HE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE CM.

Nitish did not want to be number two in the Opposition ranks. In the NDA, his position is not in the front but he will continue to be the CM.

Notably, Nitish does not have much of a following in neighboring Uttar Pradesh, the hub of the Hindi heartland, and he can hardly hope that JD(U) will make inroads there. Modi made a superb move when he contested from UP in 2019, knowing very well the electoral importance of the state which sends 80 MPs to the Lok Sabha. Nitish and his supporters do not seem to realize that in the Hindi belt, a politician from Bihar does not stand much of a chance outside his state.

Nitish has literally returned to his den and there he has to remain, even as the BJP gains strength in the state and thinks of ways and means to replace him. But he has a fighting chance in Bihar and can hope to repel his opponents for the time being. INDIA is on a weak wicket for other reasons and this does not have much to do with Nitish leaving it. Nitish is not a strong and tall leader who can make a difference, and he knows it. He also remembers the outcome of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections in the state - the JD(U) fought against the BJP and won just two seats, while the saffron party bagged 22.

(The author is a senior journalist)

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THE INDIAN CONSULATE IS AN EXTENSION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, AND OUR JOB IS TO SERVE OUR PEOPLE

Mr. Binaya Kumar Pradhan, Consul General of India at New York in his office.
Photo / Jay Mandal- on assignment

Mr. Binaya Srikanta Pradhan took over as Consul General of India at New York on January 15, 2024. He is a career diplomat of the 2002 batch of the Indian Foreign Service. He speaks English, Russian, Hindi, and Odiya languages. His diplomatic career includes senior roles in Indian Embassies in Moscow, Turkmenistan, and Pakistan from 2004 to 2012. During 2012-14, he managed India's relations with Afghanistan and Iran at the Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi.

From 2014 to 2019, Mr. Pradhan served as the Chief of Staff to the Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Government of India. His international engagements extended to being the Deputy Chief of Mission in the Embassy of India, Moscow, from June 2019 to July 2021.

Prior to his current role as Consul General of India, New York, he held the position of High Commissioner

of India to Tanzania and Permanent Representative to the East African Community (EAC) from August 2021 to January 2024. During this period India- Tanzania relationship was elevated to 'Strategic Partnership' and the first overseas campus of the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras in Zanzibar, Tanzania was set up.

Mr. Pradhan demonstrates a keen interest in economic and energy diplomacy. Beyond his diplomatic pursuits, he finds enjoyment in playing golf. Mr. Pradhan is married to Ms. Monalisa and they are proud parents of two daughters, Dibyanshi and Diya.

Four days after joining the present position, on the 19th January, 2024, in an interview with the Editor of The Indian Panorama Prof. Indrajit S Saluja, Consul General Pradhan spelt out in brief his priorities which included nourishing and strengthening the

already strong bonds between India and the US, and exploring new areas of cooperation and relationship in diverse fields of economy, trade, technology, and culture etc. Mr. Pradhan added that serving the Indian Diaspora remained the primary focused concern of the Consulate. The strengthening of the multi-stake holders relationship will be another priority, he said.

The long interview is being released in two parts. The first one, being presented in this edition, deals with Mr. Pradhan's views on India's foreign policy, situations in India's neighborhood, and India's relations with the neighboring countries.

The second part, dealing with the contribution of the Indian American Diaspora in strengthening India-US relations and in promoting business and cultural relations between the two countries, and the consular services will be published next week. Stay tuned.

HERE ARE EXCERPTS FROM PART ONE OF THE INTERVIEW

TIP: YOU'RE WELCOME HERE TO NEW YORK AND THIS IS OUR FIRST MEETING. AND THIS IS THE TIME TO KNOW YOU, AND WHAT VISION YOU HAVE, WHAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO DO HERE. AS I SAID A LITTLE WHILE AGO, INFORMALLY., THERE IS A VAST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YOUR PAST EXPERIENCE AND THE EXPERIENCE THAT YOU WOULD BE HAVING HERE. SO, YOU MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT OF WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU WANT TO DO HERE, AND HOW YOU WANT TO GO ABOUT THE WHOLE THING? SO, WITH THAT, THE BALL IS IN YOUR COURT.

CG: Thank you, Professor Saluja. It's a real pleasure to meet you and through you to talk to the readers of the Indian panorama. I'm familiar with your publication. I have heard good things, great things about your publication. So, it's a real pleasure and honor to speak to you and to your readers through you. I would say you are right. The landscape is different. I was working in Tanzania, which is a big country in its own right. And you know, the relationship between India and Tanzania is quite spectacular, very good relationship. It's a strategic partnership. We have

a lot of history between our two countries but I entirely agree, coming to this part of the world, it's a very different landscape. And as you mentioned during that informal conversation, it's about 2.5 million Indian diaspora here and it's a diaspora which is very well connected to India, both culturally, economically, and they have been very active. They have been playing a very critical role as a force multiplier to bring our two countries together. So, when I knew that I'm coming to this assignment, I understood the enormity of the task, I understood that it's a very well-developed relationship. And coming here, one is to be better prepared to contribute in this ever-growing relationship between India and the US. As you know, I look after 10 states, I represent India in the Northeastern 10 states. And when I was looking at the profile of these 10 States, when I was looking at the profile of Indian diaspora, profile of the Indian businesses here in these 10 states, the economic linkages between these 10 states with India, I found that it's a very

active, very organic relationship. The India US trade is growing every year in double digits, and this region, these 10 states, are contributing in a larger way into that economic engagement. Even when you look at the profile of the Indian diaspora here, very accomplished people, people who have contributed to economic sphere, cultural sphere, intellectual sphere. Look at any aspect, you find the Indian diaspora has contributed richly in that and the great thing is that they are not limited to the United States alone. Now, they are also, you know, linked very well to India. And they are becoming the robust bridge, I would say, several bridges in different aspects, between our two countries. In this backdrop, when I look at my job, I would say that my job would be to strengthen this existing relationship. When we say that we are also working on KPIs -key performance indicators, and we are generally told that, no, we should work on trade; we should work on tourism, we

CONTD ON PAGE 13

CONTD FROM PAGE 12

Mr. Binaya Kumar Pradhan, Consul General of India at New York in conversation with Prof. Indrajit S Saluja, Editor of The Indian Panorama
Photo / Jay Mandal- on assignment



should work on talent, we should work on technology. So, we call these four T's. I would say they are going to remain pointers for me to strengthen our relationship on the four T's. The good work done by my predecessors, the good work done by the ambassador of India in Washington, DC, my job is to continue that tradition, to strengthen what has been done. So, broadly speaking, to answer your question, I would say, I would continue the good work that has been done, but also to identify areas where we can strengthen our relationship, areas where we can bring the Indian communities closer to what is happening in India, and the Indian, economic and business entities closer to what is happening over here. That will be my broad agenda. But I think, two or three months down the line, if we sit down again, I will have better statistics, better understanding to tell you exactly what I have understood by then. As you know, this is my first week, so, I'm kind of trying to come to grips with the situation.

TIP: IF I'M NOT MISTAKEN, YOU HAVE LEFT A LEGACY IN TANZANIA. PROBABLY, YOU ARE THE ARCHITECT OF A WONDERFUL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TANZANIA AND INDIA, WITH INDIA HAVING GIVEN TANZANIA STRATEGIC PARTNER STATUS. THAT WAS DURING YOUR TIME. WOULD YOU LIKE TO TELL OUR READERS HOW YOU MANAGED THE WHOLE THING?

CG: It's less about me doing that. It's more about the profile of the relationship between India and Tanzania. As you would see, if you if you look at the geography, India and Tanzania are connected by Indian Ocean, and the Indian diaspora is present there for more than 200 years. They used to do trade 2000 years back. There is an archaeological finding on that. But we have a 200-year-old diaspora there, which is primarily from Gujarat and Punjab. So, the Sikh community, which is 150-year-old, went to do the railways projects in Kenya and Tanzania. There were others who went to do business. They did not only contribute to economic building blocks of the country, rather they have contributed in a big way in the entire nation building, whether it comes to institution building, building hospitals, roads, schools. Indian communities contributed in every way. But the other aspect is that Tanzania also welcomed them with open arms. They were always treated as part of Tanzania. So, there is a very nice symbiotic relationship between Indian diaspora and East Africa. And when I went there, I found that the warmth and the depth of relationship is already there. And we are doing

so good in political engagement. Tanzania was the fourth biggest trade partner of India. When it comes to development partnership, we are spending a billion dollar on water projects alone in Tanzania. We are giving the highest number of scholarships to Tanzanian students. So, like I said the necessary condition was already there. And on top of that, we decided to set up the overseas IIT - Indian Institute of Technology outside India, in Tanzania. And if you look at the context, this is the time when the Prime Minister is talking about global south. This is the time when the Prime Minister is leading G-20. And he's bringing the whole agenda of global south to the forefront of G-20. So, what better can be in terms of an example that you take the most premier Indian engineering institute IIT to a country in global south? And if you ask me why Tanzania in entire Africa among the 54 countries, I will say Tanzania is the place which was the gateway for Indians for more than 200 years to reach out to Africa when Indians would go to Africa. They were actually entering Zanzibar and that's the reason why we chose Zanzibar as the place for IIT. I will say, announcing India - Tanzania relationship as strategic partnership was a very natural thing to do at that point of time, and it was fitting into the larger priority of the government and the Prime Minister to develop a closer relationship with global south.

TIP: WILL YOU ALLOW ME TO JUMP FROM TANZANIA TO THE TWO COUNTRIES THAT ARE VERY MUCH IN THE NEWS TODAY AND ABOUT BOTH THE COUNTRIES YOU HAVE HAD PROBABLY A GREAT UNDERSTANDING? ONE IS AFGHANISTAN, AND THE OTHER IS IRAN. WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF YOUR EXPERIENCES AND IMPRESSIONS OF THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS?

CG: Thank you for asking something which is close to my heart, Afghanistan. I haven't served in any of these two countries. But I was looking up to these two countries from the headquarters. And because of that, I have visited both the countries more than 10 times. I have been to Afghanistan, maybe 15 times and Iran, maybe 12 to 14 times and to different cities in both the countries. It's unfortunate that Afghanistan had to go through those difficult years, for no fault of theirs. And we were part of the solution. We were not part of the problem in Afghanistan. And when I was working on Afghanistan desk, our job was to provide the civilian support, to work with the communities there, to work with Afghanistan Government, to deal with the

different ministries, different communities, different societies. And you know, we were doing iconic projects in Afghanistan. We were building their parliamentary building, the Salma dam to provide water to people. I only wish that the country comes back to normalcy. Iran is a very different place. I used to deal with Iran. We have very strong ties with Iran. Our strategic relationship and our energy relationship are very deep and very old. And the cultural relationship is very strong. It's a close partnership that we have.

TIP: ANY COMMENT FROM YOU ABOUT THE RECENT CONFLICT BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND IRAN?

CG: You know, I've served in Pakistan. I spent two and a half years there, and the genesis of the problem between them goes a long, long time back, and, even at that point of time, you would hear about these problems. So, it's just that the magnitude has gone up now, with both countries having kind of resorted to direct action into each other's territory. But let me not make a comment on that. I personally believe that our region deserves peace and deserves peaceful means of solutions for every conflict. Because at the end of the day, we are all part of the developing world. Resorting to armed conflict drains out your precious resources. Things which can be used for development get used into armed conflict or get used into nonproductive things. I'm not being diplomatic here. I genuinely believe that, our region should focus more on development. And countries, the two countries that you mentioned, it would be ideal that they find peaceful means to resolve their differences. But this is not new, by the way. The basic thing is we all yearn for peace and development is possible only when there is peace, and development alone can bring happiness to people because if the development is there, then people have means to sustain themselves. So, India that way is doing the right thing, focusing on peace in the entire world. There may be problems with certain countries of course in the neighborhood, but hopefully, the policy that government of India is pursuing would probably result in lasting peace in at least in our area.

WATCH THE INTERVIEW.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b1vUfJp_MfY&t=256s
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYOEUcsvpY0>

To be continued in Part 2 next week

United States federal agency announces major overhaul of its annual lottery for H-1B visa

H-1B VISA APPLICATION SUBMISSION PROCESS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 TO BEGIN FROM MARCH 6

JANUARY 31, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): The H-1B visa application submission process for the fiscal year 2025 would start from March 6, a US federal agency said on Tuesday, January 30, as it announced a major overhaul of its annual lottery for this specialty occupation visa.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The new system, among other things, includes provision of a beneficiary-centric selection process for registrations by employers. As a result, unlike in the past of multiple applications by an individual that often resulted in abuse of the system, the H-1B visa applications would now be counted and accepted based on individual applicants. Even if one individual files multiple applications for various companies, they would be counted as one application based on their personal credentials like passport numbers.

US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) also



The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

For representation

announced a set of new rules which are aimed at strengthening the integrity of and reducing the potential for fraud in the H-1B registration process. This includes reducing the potential for gaming the registration system and ensuring each beneficiary would have the same chance of being selected, regardless of the number of

registrations submitted on their behalf, the federal agency said.

"We're always looking for ways to bolster integrity and curtail the potential for fraud while improving and streamlining our application processes," said USCIS Director Ur M Jaddou.

"The improvements in these areas should make H-1B selections more equitable for petitioners and beneficiaries and will allow for the H-1B process to be fully electronic from registration, if applicable, until final decision and transmission of approved petitions to the Department of State," he said.

USCIS said the initial registration period for the fiscal 2025 H-1B cap will open at noon Eastern on March 6, and run through March 22. During this period, prospective petitioners and their representatives, if applicable, must use a USCIS online account to register each beneficiary electronically for the selection process and pay the associated registration fee for each beneficiary.

Starting February 28, companies would be allowed to open their account which can be used to start and complete the registration process.

Canada Investigates India influencing Canadian Elections; The United States Needs to do the same

JANUARY 30, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C. (TIP): On Wednesday, January 24th, 2024, Canada's Foreign Interference Commission released the following statement, opening up inquiries concerning ways the Indian Government may have been tampering with Canadian elections:

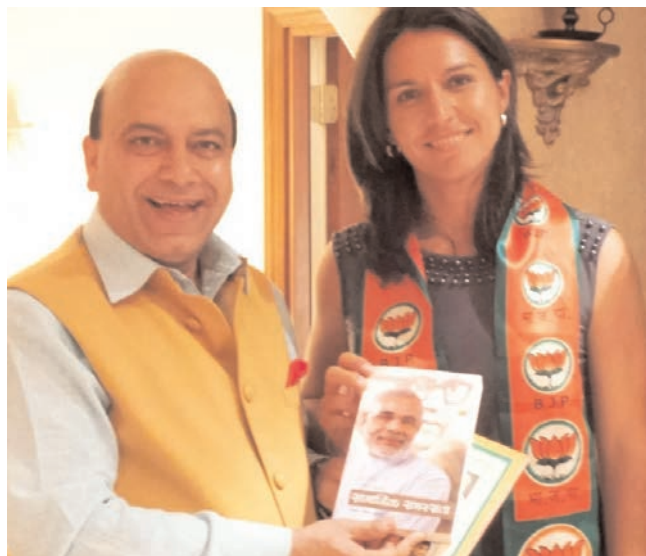
"Pursuant to its Terms of Reference, the Foreign Interference Commission has requested that the Government of Canada's collection and production of document relating to paragraphs clause (a)(i)(A) and (a)(i)(B) of its Terms of Reference include information and documents relating to alleged interference by India related to the 2019 and 2021 elections."

The FIC was formed in September 2023, and had announced at the time it would be investigating election interference from China and Russia, as well as any other "foreign actors" who may have interfered with elections. India has now been publicly implicated as one of those foreign actors.

This comes on the heels of Canadian officials accusing the Indian Government of orchestrating the assassination of Canadian Citizen Harpreet Singh Nijjar, a strong critic of the Indian Government who was killed in front of his Gurdwara in British Columbia last June. Clearly Canada's government believes India has the ability to send covert operatives into foreign countries to illegally enforce their will on the world stage. They have also made it clear they will have zero tolerance for any kind of transnational repression like this within their borders.

We believe the same thing is occurring within the United States, and we call on our government officials to apply the same diligence our Canadian neighbors are doing to protect the rights of their citizens.

United States officials have already implicated Indian national Nikhil Gupta as a go-between, hired by the Indian Government to coordinate the assassination of Nijjar; as well as a New York lawyer, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun, the head of 'Sikhs for Justice in the US. Thankfully, the plot to kill Pannun was thwarted by undercover officers. According to an October 19th article in the Sacramento Bee, many United States citizens who have been criticizing the Indian Government have had their lives threatened, and have been warned by the FBI that they are being watched by operatives of the Indian



Former United States Presidential Candidate Tulsi Gabbard, draped in BJP scarf with BJP leader Vijay Jolly, at a fundraiser in Atlanta GA, in August, 2014

government on American soil.

Such operatives have also been extending their influence on US elections. For example, in 2010 and 2012, California Congressman Ami Bera's father, Babula Bera, illegally siphoned funds into his son's campaign, which contributed to Ami Bera winning an extremely close election in 2013. According to Fox 40 News, "The elder Bera was convicted of paying friends and strangers to make contributions to his son's congressional campaign - more than 130 contributions to the tune of \$260,000." While Congressman Bera claimed to have no knowledge of his father's actions, he never took responsibility for the fact that since more than ten percent of his campaign funds had been obtained by illegal means, he should have ceded his seat in congress.

The entire ordeal has been highly suspicious, especially since further investigation revealed that Babula Bera had been involved in an ongoing illegal "shell game" fundraising scheme, which including partnering with supporters of Louisiana Congressional candidate Ravi Sangisetty. Families of both candidates have strong ties to India's ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

In 2020, Presidential Candidate Tulsi Gabbard, a practicing Hindu, was photographed wearing a BJP scarf, draped over her by a supporter. The image later drew much scrutiny but she responded to concerned members of the public by stating "Sometimes, as we're standing ... people come up and they want to take a picture. Somebody put something around my neck and snapped a picture without my knowing what it was...That's the reality of ...what happened in the picture...Any implication or accusation or efforts to elicit some kind of suspicion about me or my motives can only be attributed to religious bigotry because I'm a practicing Hindu." Such claims seem hollow in light of her documented attendance at multiple Overseas Friends of the BJP fundraising events. Further, she eventually dropped out of the election after credible evidence emerged that she was in fact a member of the RSS, the Hindu Nationalist organization behind India's BJP. The BJP's illegal involvement in her campaign is further backed by statements from Vijay Chauthaiwale, the head of the BJP's foreign policy department.

In September, 2020, while Gabbard was running for President, Chauthaiwale bragged to Indian press about what he had accomplished through the Overseas Friends of the BJP in the United States, and then added instructions he gave its members on the need to be covert with respect to their relationship to the BJP. "The OFBJP-USA members can participate in the US election campaign and support any candidate or a party in their personal capacity but they have been instructed not to use BJP or OFBJP name during the campaign," he said.

These are just some instances of ties between BJP money and American politicians. Many more exist. Many American agencies have uncovered and made public election tampering by Russia and China. Given that we now know a plethora of Indian government operatives have entrenched themselves on American soil with the specific intent of exerting Indian power and influence on American citizens, we strongly urge our leaders to follow the example of our Canadian neighbors, and investigate India's interference in American elections. This degree of transnational repression should not be tolerated by any democracy, Organization of Minorities of India, said in a statement sent to The Indian Panorama.

The Federation of Indian Associations, Chicago hosts USA's Largest Republic Day Celebrations

JANUARY 29, 2024

CHICAGO, IL (TIP): The Federation of Indian Associations, Chicago (FIA), elevated the celebration of India's Republic Day to new heights on January 28th, at the prestigious Matrix Club in Chicago. This momentous occasion, dedicated to honoring the adoption of the Constitution of India, transcended expectations through a symphony of grand celebrations, patriotic fervor, and a vibrant tapestry showcasing the rich cultural diversity of the nation. The 2024 Republic Day festivities orchestrated by FIA were a testament to the organization's unwavering commitment to excellence, featuring a diverse array of events, impactful community service initiatives, and a spectacular grand show that unequivocally underscored India's profound unity in diversity. A noteworthy highlight of the evening was a breathtaking performance by acclaimed artists from India, led by the talented Shahid Rafi, the son of the legendary Padmashree Mohammad Rafi, revered as the Greatest Voice in Indian Cinema. The evening not only celebrated the heritage of the Indian Republic but also served as a beacon of cultural brilliance and artistic prowess.

The inaugural moments of the event unfolded in the timeless Indian tradition, symbolizing the illumination of knowledge and wisdom through the ceremonial lighting of the lamp. Standing as custodians of this symbolic act were luminaries of FIA: Founder and Chairman Sunil Shah, President Vinita Gulabani, President Pratibha Jairath, and esteemed past presidents, each contributing to the collective radiance. In keeping with FIA's commitment to inclusivity, the stage beckoned all Advisory Board members, Directors, and Members, to partake in this auspicious initiation.



India's Consul General for Midwest, Somnath Ghosh addresses. Founder Chairman Sunil Shah, President Vinita Gulabani and President for 2024 Pratibha Jairath look on.

The grandeur of the main event was ushered in by the dynamic presence of FIA's General Secretary, Nilabh Dubey, seizing the stage to a resounding applause that echoed through the venue. Nilabh Dubey, set the tone by introducing the evening's main MCs by his eloquent articulation that offered a glimpse into the diverse talents that define FIA, specifically that highlighted the professional achievements of the evening's MCs. The spotlight of the evening shifted seamlessly to the captivating presence of the main MCs, Anu Malhotra and Suchitra Kukreja, who effortlessly took command of the stage, igniting the atmosphere with great excitement.

Inviting Founder Chairman Sunil Shah to share his insights, Sunil Shah, in his smooth style, painted a vivid picture of FIA's pivotal role in uniting the diaspora in and around Chicago land over the past several years, including

expanding into neighboring states. Sunil Shah eloquently articulated the organization's vision and mission, setting the stage for a night of celebration and reflection.

Past President Vinita Gulabani, gracing the stage, highlighted the remarkable achievements of 2023, emphasizing the phenomenal growth from 58 to over 160 members—a testament to a staggering 300 percent increase in funding, event sizes, and the number of events hosted. Current President Pratibha Jairath, invited to the stage by Anu Malhotra, expressed gratitude to the Executive members and outlined her ambitious plan for 2024. In a groundbreaking move, she introduced an additional event focusing on Animal Medical Welfare and Care, reiterating FIA's commitment to diverse and impactful community engagement.

The stage then welcomed the esteemed Chief Guest for the evening, Consulate

General Somnath Ghosh, who spoke passionately about the relevance of India's Republic Day to the Indian Diaspora, conveying key messages from the President of India to the captivated audience.

In a poignant moment, FIA's Advisory Board members, instrumental in the organization's decade-long growth, took center stage. Syed Hussaini, Manish Gandhi, Asha Oroskar, Pinky Thakkar, Lakhvir Sahota, Dr. Anuja Gupta, Dr. Bhupinder Beri, Dr. Suresh Reddy, Nimish Jani, Shrujal Patel, Sushma Bhanot, Shital Daftari, and Jasbir Suga shared their perspectives on FIA's contributions to the community, underscoring the collective impact made month after month.

The culmination of this segment gave way to an exhilarating and patriotic performance, as children from the Atharv Dance Academy, unleashing a foot-stomping patriotic dance that echoed the spirit of the evening.

The festivities included bestowal of awards and honors upon exceptional individuals who have left an indelible mark on the community across diverse fields. Founder Chairman Sunil Shah, President Vinita Gulabani, President Pratibha Jairath, and Consulate General Somnath Ghosh, graced the occasion to present these accolades. The luminaries acknowledged for their unwavering generosity in both time and funding, breathing vitality into numerous remarkable FIA and community initiatives, were Sudhir and Archana Agarwal, Pinky & Dinesh Thakkar, Chintan & Digna Patel, Chirag Patel, Sunny Patel, Arjun Patel, Manish & Shailja Gandhi, Suketu Amin, Kunal Sarangi (ex-MLA), Naresh Shah, Dr. Bhupinder Beri, and Jayanti Oza. The dynamic duo MCs, Anu Malhotra and Suchitra Kukreja, brought their collective expertise to the forefront, turning the award ceremony into a flawless celebration of community service and contribution.

Jaspreet Kharbanda, the CFO of Dabur USA, took us on a heartfelt journey to India, not just through geography but through the senses, creating an immersive experience. In a gesture that transcended the ordinary, he generously treated all attendees to the rich flavors of Badshah masala chai/tea and the delightful burst of aromatic richness of Pani Puri. Truly Jaspreet's thoughtful gesture reinforced the simple act of breaking bread together.

In a commitment to fostering community development, the FIA proudly extends its support through a commendable scholarship program presented annually on India's Republic Day. This initiative, grounded in both financial need and academic excellence, attracted an impressive pool of more than 35 applications this year.



At the celebration of India's Republic Day; Sunil Shah [Founder President and Chairman], Pratibha Jairath [President], Vinita Gulabani [Past President], Executive Board, Directors and Advisory Board

SC agrees to consider AAP petition over Chandigarh mayoral polls

The Supreme Court on Friday, Feb 2, agreed to consider an AAP councillor's request seeking urgent hearing of his plea challenging a Punjab and Haryana High Court order that refused to grant any interim relief to the party seeking fresh mayoral polls in Chandigarh.

The matter was mentioned before a bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud by senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for councillor Kuldeep Kumar, a candidate for the mayor's post.

Abhishek Singhvi submitted that the returning officer was caught on video smudging the ballots.

"We will list it... we will look at it," the bench, also comprising Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, said.

The BJP swept the Chandigarh mayoral polls, retaining all three posts, a setback to the Congress-AAP alliance that alleged tampering with ballot papers by the presiding officer.

On Wednesday, January 31, division bench of Justices Sudhir Singh and Harsh Bunger of the high court denied interim relief the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which alleged that ballot papers had been tampered with and sought fresh polls under the supervision of a retired judge of the court.

The high court issued notices to the Chandigarh administration, the municipal corporation, presiding officer Anil Masih and newly-elected mayor Manoj Sonkar, among others, asking them to file their replies within three weeks.

Hindus pray in Gyanvapi cellar, 30 years after Mulayam Yadav sealed it

VARANASI (TIP)

Members of a Hindu priests' family started praying at a cellar in the basement of Varanasi's Gyanvapi mosque after a district court February 1 ordered the administration to unseal the premises, 30 years after it was sealed on the orders of former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav, shortly after the Babri Masjid demolition.

"Hindu side allowed to offer prayers... district administration will have to make arrangements in seven days. Everyone will have the right to pray there," Vishnu Shankar Jain, lawyer for the Hindu side, told the media.

The area near the mosque, located right next to Kashi Vishwanath temple, witnessed frenetic activity late last night as Hindu devotees started reaching the mosque to pray in the cellar, named 'Vyas ka tehkana'. Members of a Hindu outfit, Rashtriya Hindu Dal, were seen pasting the 'mandir' (temple) word on a sign near the mosque. The puja started around 3 am. Heavy force has been deployed to prevent any untoward incident.

The mosque has four cellars in its basement. One of them was in the possession of a family of priests that used to live there. Somnath Vyas, a member of Vyas family, offered prayers in the cellar before it was sealed in 1993, according to the petition by Shailendra Pathak, the petitioner and a member of the family. He had argued in court that as hereditary priests, they should be allowed to enter the structure and worship there. The court yesterday asked the district administration to ensure that prayers can be held inside the cellar within a week.

The mosque committee has said they would be challenging the court's order in Allahabad High Court. "This is happening to get political advantage. The same approach is being adopted, which was done in the Babri Masjid case," their counsel Merajuddin Siddiqui said.

The order is being seen as a major development in the Gyanvapi case, in which Hindu petitioners have sought



permission to pray in the mosque complex. The Archaeological Survey of India, which conducted a survey of the premises, has shared its report with the petitioners and the mosque committee. The report concluded that a large Hindu temple existed on the site before the mosque was built. Four Hindu women have now moved the Supreme Court, seeking the excavation and scientific survey of a section that had been sealed by a court order.

Leader of the Opposition Akhilesh Yadav has stressed that due process must be followed while implementing the court order. "The Varanasi Court fixed a 7-day period for it. What we are seeing now is a concerted effort to go beyond the due process and prevent any legal recourse that can be taken," he said.

The BJP has refrained from commenting on yesterday's development, saying the matter is subjudice. Hindu outfits such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad have welcomed the ruling. "Today, a court in Kashi has given a very important decision, filling the hearts of every Hindu with joy," VHP working president Alok Kumar said.

Parliament did 'half-hearted' job in amending AMU Act: SC

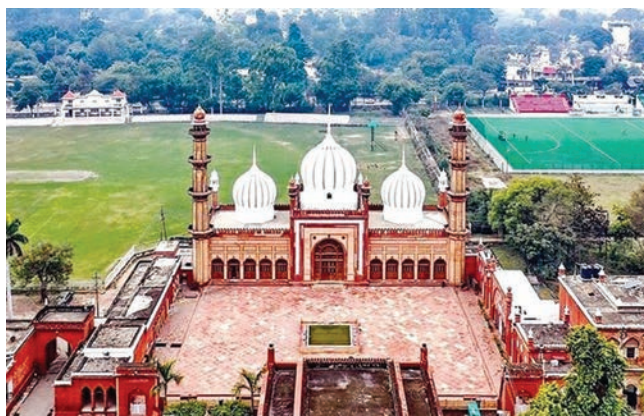
NEW DELHI (TIP)

The Parliament did a "half-hearted" job in amending the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) Act in 1981, the Supreme Court remarked on Thursday, February 1, pointing out though the amendments sought to include the Muslim voice in the administration of the institution, it fell short of conferring the "complete minority character" on AMU.

As the seven-judge bench led by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud reserved its judgment in the case relating to minority status of AMU, the court observed that the amendments made in 1981 changed the definition of the term "university" under the AMU Act to state that it was established by Muslims and made some other changes.

"So, it was really placating those sentiments. But when it actually came to the brass tacks, they did not go back to the position prior to 1951. And what they actually did was that it brought the Muslim voice into the AMU administration as we see it. But it still stopped short," commented the bench, which also comprised justices Sanjiv Khanna, Surya Kant, JB Pardiwala, Dipankar Datta, Manoj Misra and Satish Chandra Sharma.

The court added that the 1981 amendments did not restore the position that existed prior to 1951. After the Constitution was enforced, the original AMU Act of 1920 was modified to remove provision for compulsory



religious education; to provide for the University to be open to students of all caste, creed, sex, etc; remove the requirement of all the members of the Court (administrative body of the University) to be Muslims.

"In other words, 1981 amendment does a half-hearted job. We can understand if the 1981 amendments said, 'Okay, we are going back to the position in 1920', conferring a complete minority character. But they changed some definitions... Even the parliament, which had the power to do it, stopped short of taking us back to the 1920 Act. They made a few concessions, but they never took it back to 1920," it observed.

Following wide-ranging arguments spanning eight day-long hearings, the Constitution bench on Thursday

reserved its judgment in the matter. If declared a minority institution, AMU need not reserve seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS).

On Thursday, Feb 1, senior counsel Rajeev Dhavan, Kapil Sibal, Salman Khurshid and advocate MR Shamshad made submissions on behalf of AMU and other petitioners that have pressed for a reconsideration of the Supreme Court's five-judge bench judgment in the Azeez Basha case in 1967.

The 1967 judgment declared that AMU was not a minority institution and could not enjoy protection for minorities to administer educational institutions under Article 30(1) of the Constitution. In 1981, Parliament passed amendments to the AMU Act to change the definition of "university" in its endeavour to grant minority status to AMU.

The Allahabad high court, however, junked these amendments in 2006, leading to AMU and the then United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government to challenge it before the Supreme Court. But in 2016, in a reversal of the previous stand, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government sought to withdraw the Centre's appeal, maintaining that AMU is not a minority institution and that the Basha judgment was correct. The Centre also said that it does not support the 1981 amendments in the AMU Act. *Source: HT*



Kejriwal skips 5th summons in excise policy case

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal skipped the Enforcement Directorate's summons for the fifth time in connection with the money-laundering probe related to irregularities in the Delhi excise policy case.

The fresh summons to the Delhi CM followed the fourth summons, which he had skipped on January 18.

While skipping the fifth summons, the party called it "unlawful".

"Delhi CM and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal will not appear before the ED today as well. We will comply with the lawful summons. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aim is to arrest Arvind Kejriwal and topple the Delhi government. We will not allow this to happen," the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) said.

Kejriwal earlier has skipped four previous summonses issued by the ED on January 18, January 3, November 2, and December 22, calling them "illegal and politically motivated".

The ED wants to record Kejriwal's statement in the case on issues like the formulation of policy, meetings held before it was finalised, and allegations of bribery.

While skipping the fourth summons issued by the ED, Kejriwal had termed it "illegal," saying he was ready to cooperate, but the agency intended to arrest him and stop him from campaigning.

Source: ANI

No Supreme Court reprieve for Hemant Soren on his arrest by ED

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The Supreme Court on Friday, February 2, refused to entertain a plea filed by Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) chief Hemant Soren, challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on money laundering allegations minutes after he resigned as chief minister of the state on January 31.

Asking Soren to rather approach the high court concerned, the top court also declined to set down a deadline for the Jharkhand high court to hear and decide his petition that seeks his arrest be declared unconstitutional.

"Why haven't you gone to the high court? Why have you come here directly? If we permit in one case for somebody to come here directly, we will have to permit everyone. After all, a high court is also a constitutional court," a bench, led by justice Sanjiv Khanna asked the lawyers representing Soren. Senior counsel Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Manu Singhvi, appearing for the JMM leader, pressed that the facts of the matter required the top court to step in.

"We are dealing with a chief minister who has been arrested in such a manner. Please, see the evidence. This is not fair," submitted Sibal, adding it was an appropriate case for the Supreme Court to exercise its discretion.

But the bench, which also comprised justices MM Sundresh and Bela M Trivedi, replied that all courts are open to everybody and that the high court is equally competent to grant the relief Soren wanted.

"There is an earlier order of this court by a bench of which my sister (justice Trivedi) was a part, asking you to go to the high court. Move the high court... From your amendment application, it appears that he has been arrested... Move the high court because the issue is different now. You came here challenging the summons (by ED) but now you are challenging your arrest," it said.

Responding, Sibal tried to distinguish between the two cases.

"In the other case, constitutionality of the PMLA provision was challenged. Here, it is not. Look at the order of arrest in this case. Such an order cannot be passed by any reasonable person," he argued.

But the bench remained indisposed.

"The fact of the matter is that the high court is also a constitutional court. Please, go to the high court. We will



have to follow it consistently. I have been following it consistently and my brother and sister have been following it consistently," it emphasised.

At this point, Singhvi came in to persuade the bench that the Supreme Court has concurrent jurisdiction in these cases and that there was no legal necessity for his client to move the high court at first instance if the apex court deemed it a suitable case to exercise its discretion.

"Further, this case has laid down the law that there is a difference between power to arrest and necessity to do so. There has to be some concrete reasons to make arrest," added the senior counsel.

The bench, however, said that Soren must approach the high court first. "We are not inclined to entertain this petition under Article 32 (writ jurisdiction of the Supreme Court) and leave it open to the petitioner to move the high court under Article 226 (writ jurisdiction of a high court. We have been informed that the petitioner has already preferred a writ petition before the Jharkhand high court where it is still pending," the court recorded in its order.

The order further noted that an older petition by Soren was disposed off by the top court while granting him the same liberty of moving the high court.

"It will also be open to him to ask the high court for expeditious listing and disposal of the case," recorded the bench.

Source: HT

Centre approves Bilateral Investment Treaty between India-UAE

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, Feb 1, approved the signing and ratification of the Bilateral Investment Treaty between India and UAE.

The government said that the treaty is expected to improve investor confidence and increase foreign investments and Overseas Direct Investment (ODI) opportunities. "The approval is expected to increase investments in India and is likely to help in realizing the goal of Atmanirbhar Bharat by encouraging domestic manufacturing, reducing import dependence, increasing exports etc," an official statement by the Cabinet said. The approval for the signing and ratification of the ambitious investment treaty comes ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's likely visit to the UAE this month.

Other announcements

In the meeting, the Union Cabinet also extended the



Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) till 2025-26.

The fund, worth Rs 15,000 crore, was approved by the government in June 2020.

According to an official statement, the Cabinet approved the "continuation of Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) to be

implemented under Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF) with an outlay of ₹29,610.25 crore for another three years up to 2025-26."

The scheme will incentivise investments for dairy processing and product diversification, meat processing and product diversification, animal feed plant, breed multiplication farm, animal waste to wealth management (Agri-waste management) and veterinary vaccine and drug production facilities, according to PTI.

Besides this, the Cabinet also extended the scheme of sugar subsidy for Antyodaya Anna Yojna (AAY) families distributed through the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) for two more years.

It also approved the determination of the marketing margin for supply of Domestic gas to Fertiliser (Urea) between May 2009 and November 2015 and the continuation of the scheme for Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies for the export of garments and made ups.

India in history this Week

FEBRUARY 2 TO FEBRUARY 8

02 FEBRUARY

1814 Calcutta (now Kolkata) Museum established.



1915 Khushwant Singh, a well-known writer, poet and columnist of the country, was born.



1952 India wins the first Test cricket in Madras.

03 FEBRUARY

1934 The process of sending Parcel by airplanes for the first time began. It was started by the company which is today known as Lufthansa.

1963 Former Reserve Bank Governor Raghuram Rajan was born.



1916 Banaras Hindu University started.

1988 The first nuclear submarine (INS Chakra) joined the Indian Army.

2008 There are indications that the stolen Nobel Prize of poet Guru Ravindra Nath Tagore was in Bangladesh.

04 FEBRUARY

1628 Shah Jahan was declared Emperor of Agra.

1881 The first issue of the daily newspaper 'Kesari' appeared in the editing of Lokmanya Tilak.

1938 Birju Maharaj, the famous Kathak artist of the country, was born.



1974 Physicist Satendra Nath Bose, who discovered God Particle, died.



05 FEBRUARY



1630 The seventh Sikh Guru Har Rai was born in Kiratpur, Punjab.

1916 Popular Hindi poet Janki Vallabh Shastri was born.

2007 Sunita Williams of Indian origin set a new record of the most spacewalking time by a female.



1916 Famous poet Janaki Vallabh Shastri was born.

1915 Wireless message sent for the first time by a moving train was received to the railway station.

06 FEBRUARY

2002 India sneaks into the border, shoots down Pakistan spy plane.

1999 The country's first Pace Maker Bank was established in 1999 in Kolkata.

2009 On February 6, 2009, India provided financial assistance of Rs 9.45 crore for the construction of three large dams along its border with Nepal.

07 FEBRUARY



1931 Freedom fighter and lawyer Motilal Nehru died.

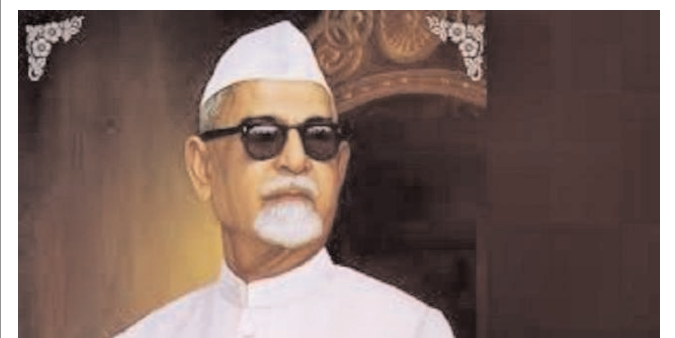
2000 The first meeting of the joint opposition between India and the United States began in Washington on February 7, 2000.

2009 Maharashtra Governor SC Jamir conferred the 12th and the first woman President of Independent India, Pratibha Patil, with the title of D.Litt.

2010 The 19th International Book Fair held at Pragati Maidan in Delhi ended on 7 February 2010. Let us tell you that this fair lasted for 9 days, in which about 2 thousand publishers took part.

1898 Ramabai Ambedkar, wife of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, was born in 1898.

08 FEBRUARY



1897 Zakir Hussain, the third President of the country, was born.

1941 Ghazal singer Jagjit Singh was born.



1943 Freedom fighter Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose left for Japan via a ferry from Kell, Germany.

1986 Prepaid taxi service was started for the first time at Delhi Airport.

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Rs 6.21 lakh cr set aside for defence budget for 2024-25; capital outlay pegged at Rs 1.72 lakh cr

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The defence budget was on Thursday, February 1, increased to Rs 6.21 lakh crore for 2024-25 in a modest hike of 4.72 per cent from last year's allocation of Rs 5.25 lakh crore amid India's continuing border row with China in eastern Ladakh as well as concerns over evolving security situation in the strategic waterways.

In the interim Union budget, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also announced plans to roll out an ambitious scheme for "deep-tech" technologies in the military domain.

A total of Rs 1.72 lakh crore was set aside to the military for capital expenditure that largely includes purchasing new weapons, aircraft, warships and other military hardware.

For 2023-24, the budgetary allocation for capital outlay was Rs 1.62 lakh crore while the revised estimates put the amount at Rs 1.57 lakh crore.

The defence ministry said, "the announcement regarding a rupees one lakh crore corpus for deep-tech for long term loan to tech-savvy youth/companies and the tax advantage to the start-ups will give further impetus to innovation in the defence sector." The allocation for capital expenditure for 2024-25 in the defence budget is 20.33 per cent higher than the actual expenditure of 2022-23 and 9.40 per cent more than the revised estimate of 2023-24.

"In the current geopolitical scenario and with the twin objective of promoting self-reliance and exports, the defence budget has touched Rs 6,21,540 crore in the financial year 2024-25," the defence ministry said.

"This comes out to be 13.04 per cent of the total Union budget," it added.

The total revenue expenditure has been pegged at Rs 4,39,300 crore that included Rs 1,41,205 crore for defence pensions, Rs 2,82,772 crore for defence services and Rs 15,322 crore for the Ministry of Defence (Civil).

A total of Rs 6,500 crore has been earmarked to strengthen border infrastructure while Rs 7,651 crore was set aside for the Indian Coast Guard.

The allocation to the DRDO has been pegged at Rs 23,855 crore.

On the overall outlay, the ministry said the allocation is in line with the Long Term Integrated Perspective Plan (LTIPP) of the three services that aims to fill the critical capability gaps by implementing some big ticket acquisitions.

The enhanced budgetary allocation will facilitate in equipping the Armed Forces with state-of-the-art niche technology lethal weapons, fighter aircraft, ships, platforms, unmanned aerial vehicles and



	2022-23 Actuals	2023-24 Budget Estimates	2023-24 Revised Estimates	2024-25 Budget Estimates
Revenue Receipts	2383206	2632281	2699713	3001275
Capital Receipts	1809951	1870816	1790773	1764494
Total Receipts	4193157	4503097	4490486	4765768
Revenue Account	3453132	3502136	3540239	3654657
Capital Account	740025	1000961	950246	1111111
Total Expenditure	4193157	4503097	4490486	4765768
Revenue Deficit	1069926	869855	840527	653383
Fiscal Deficit	1737755	1786816	1734773	1685494
Primary Deficit	809238	706845	679346	495054

drones, it said.

It said the planned modernisation of the existing Su-30 fighter fleet along with additional procurement of aircraft, acquisition of advanced engines for existing MiG-29 jets, acquisition of transport aircraft C-295 and missile systems will be funded out of the budget.

Apart from this, to take the initiative of 'Make in India' further, the Light Combat Aircraft MK "I IOC/FOC configuration will be additionally funded to ensure state-of-the-art technology in domestic production.

The Indian Navy's major projects such as acquisition of deck-based fighter aircraft, submarines, next generation survey vessels will all materialise through this allocation, the ministry said.

Dr Laxman Kumar Behera, Associate Professor at Special Centre for National Security Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University described the overall allocation under the defence budget as modest which is reflective of the government's priorities for the military.

"The allocations did not show any lack of commitment to the armed forces," he told PTI.

Dr Behera also described as a "healthy sign" the increase of Rs 10,000 crore in the outlay under capital expenditure.

In the capital outlay for defence services, Rs 40,777 crore has been set aside for aircraft and aero engines while an amount of Rs 62,343 crore was allocated for "other equipment".

An outlay of Rs 23,800 crore has been made for naval fleet and Rs 6,830 crore for naval dockyard projects.

The allocation on account of defence pensions is Rs 1,41,205 crore which is 2.17 per cent higher than the outlay made during 2023-24.

In the budget for 2023-24, the capital outlay for the Indian Air Force was the highest at Rs 57,137.09 crore that included Rs 15,721 crore for procurement of aircraft and aero engines and Rs 36,223.13 crore for other equipment.

The revenue expenditure for the Army has been pegged at Rs 1,92,680 crore for 2024-25 while the Navy and the Indian Air Force have been allocated Rs 32,778 crore and Rs 46,223 crore respectively.

On the allocation for infrastructure projects, the ministry said the projects such as development of Nyoma air field in Ladakh at an altitude of 13,700 feet, 4.1 km strategically important Shinku La tunnel in Himachal Pradesh, Nechipu tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh and many other projects will be funded out of this allocation.

Source: PTI

AT 56 MINUTES, SITHARAMAN'S SHORTEST BUDGET SPEECH EVER

NEW DELHI (TIP): Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday, Feb 1, presented her sixth consecutive budget with a speech lasting 56 minutes, her shortest-ever.

Sitharaman, who holds the distinction of delivering the longest budget speech at 2.40 hours in 2020, was cheered at regular intervals by the treasury benches -- her remarks on the presentation of the full budget by "our government" in July receiving the loudest applause.

Opposition members listened to Sitharaman's budget speech with rapt attention, barring some voices of disapproval to the minister's reference to her government returning to power after the Lok Sabha elections.

Earlier, BJP members raised slogans of Bharat Mata ki Jai, Jai Shri Ram, Jai Siya Ram as Prime Minister Narendra Modi entered the Lok Sabha chamber and took his seat a few minutes before 11 am. At 56 minutes, it was Sitharaman's shortest budget speech. She also holds the distinction of delivering the longest budget speech at two hours and forty minutes in 2020.

In 2019, as India's first full-time woman finance minister, Sitharaman's budget speech had lasted for two hours and 17 minutes. In 2021, her speech lasted for one hour and 50 minutes, followed by 92 minutes in 2022 and 87 minutes in 2023.

Sitharaman's budget speech found no mention of Tamil poets and thinkers unlike previous occasions, but she referred to Prime Minister Modi at least eight times and quoted from his speeches.

The public galleries saw thin attendance with a few Rajya Sabha members occupying seats in Gallery 2, while relatives of Finance Minister Sitharaman -- Krishnamurthy Lakshminarayan and Vidya Lakshminarayan -- and her daughter Vangmayi Parakala were seated in the first row of Gallery 3. Sitharaman, who was dressed in a turquoise-coloured embroidered Kantha silk saree, Ministers of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and Bhagwat Karad, and top officers from the Finance Ministry called on President Droupadi Murmu before presenting the Budget.

The President gave Sitharaman a spoonful of curd and sugar and extended her best wishes for the presentation of the Union Budget.

Agriculture ministry gets Rs 1.27 lakh cr

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The government has allocated Rs 1.27 lakh crore budget for the Ministry of Agriculture for 2024-25, marginally higher than the current fiscal.

According to the budget document, the agriculture ministry has been allocated Rs 1,27,469.88 crore for 2024-25 financial year, of which the Department of Agriculture will get Rs 1,17,528.79 crore while the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE) Rs 9,941.09 crore.

As per the revised estimates of the current fiscal, the department of agriculture has been allocated Rs 1,16,788.96 crore while the DARE Rs 9,876.60 crore.

The allocation for flagship PM-KISAN scheme under the department of agriculture remains unchanged for next fiscal at Rs 60,000 crore. Under this scheme, the government provides Rs 6,000 per year to farmers in three equal instalments.

According to the budget papers, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution has been allocated Rs 2.13 lakh crore for the next fiscal year, lower than the 2023-24 allocation.

Under this ministry, the allocation for the department of consumer affairs has been earmarked at Rs 303.62 crore for 2024-25 from Rs 309.26 crore in the current year.

The Department of Food and Public Distribution has been earmarked Rs 2,13,019.75 crore as against Rs 2,21,924.64 crore in the current 2023-24 fiscal. This department has been tasked to provide free foodgrains to over 80 crore people through ration shops.

The Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers has been allocated Rs 1.68 lakh crore for 2024-25 fiscal.

Under this ministry, the allocation for the



department of fertilisers has been reduced to Rs 1,64,150.81 crore for the upcoming financial year from Rs 1,88,947.29 crore in the current fiscal.

The department of chemicals and petrochemicals has been earmarked Rs 139.05 crore next fiscal as against Rs 572.63 crore in the current financial year.

However, the allocation for the department of pharmaceuticals has been enhanced to Rs 4,089.95 crore from Rs 2,697.95 crore in the current fiscal.

The Ministry of Cooperation, headed by Home Minister Amit Shah, has been allocated Rs 1,183.39 crore for 2024-25 from Rs 747.84 crore in FY24.

As per the document, the Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has been earmarked Rs 7,105.74 crore for the next fiscal.

Out of this, the department of fisheries' allocation has been increased to Rs 2,584.50 crore in the next fiscal from Rs 1,701 crore in the current 2023-24 fiscal. The department of animal husbandry and dairying has been allocated Rs 4,521.24 crore in 2024-25 from Rs 3,913.93 crore in the current fiscal. The allocation for the Ministry of Food Processing Industries has been slightly raised to Rs 3,290 crore next fiscal from Rs 2,911.95 crore in the current fiscal.

Big boost for auto sector PLI as FY25 allocation hiked to Rs 3,500 crore

NEW DELHI (TIP)

The government on Thursday, Feb 1, announced an over seven-fold increase in allocation for the automotive industry's production-linked incentive scheme for 2024-25 to Rs 3,500 crore, the interim budget documents showed.

According to the Expenditure Budget, a sum of Rs 3,500 crore has been earmarked towards the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for automobiles and auto components in the financial year beginning March, up from a revised estimate of Rs 483.77 crore in the current fiscal.

Additionally, the budget for the PLI scheme for advanced chemistry cell and battery storage has been hiked from Rs 12 crore to Rs 250 crore in 2024-25.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries recently extended the tenure of the PLI scheme for automobile and auto components by one year, with incentives now applicable for five consecutive financial years starting 2023-24.

The Union Cabinet had approved the PLI-Auto scheme on September 15, 2021 with a budgetary outlay of Rs 25,938 crore for a period of 5 years (FY2022-23 to FY2026-27).

The PLI-Auto scheme aims to boost manufacturing of Advanced Automotive



Technology (AAT) products, help facilitate and promote deep localization for AAT products and enable creation of domestic as well as global supply chain.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM FINANCE MINISTER NIRMALA SITHARAMAN'S BUDGET SPEECH

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday, Feb 1, presented her sixth Budget in a row, equalling the record of former Prime Minister Morarji Desai.

Following are the highlights of Interim Budget 2024-25.

- No change in direct, indirect tax rates
- Withdraws income tax demands up to Rs 25,000 till 2009-10; Demands up to Rs 10,000 from 2010-11 to 2014-15 also withdrawn
- Move to benefit about a crore taxpayers
- A scheme to help middle class living in rented houses to buy or build their own houses
- Tax benefits to startups and investments made by sovereign wealth or pension funds extended by 1 year till March 31, 2025
- Capital expenditure hiked 11 pc to Rs 11.11 lakh cr
- Fiscal deficit for 2024-25 projected at 5.1 pc, lower than 5.8 pc this fiscal
- Govt to borrow Rs 14.13 lakh crore in next fiscal, lower than Rs 15.43 lakh crore in 2023-24
- Nominal GDP for next fiscal (2024-25) projected at 10.5 pc
- Mop-up from Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) disinvestment pegged at Rs 50,000 crore for next fiscal, up from Rs 30,000 crore in 2023-24
- Gross tax revenue target for 2024-25 hiked 11.46 pc to Rs 38.31 lakh crore, from Rs 34.37 lakh crore this fiscal
- Direct tax collection target set at Rs 21.99 lakh crore; indirect tax at Rs 16.22 lakh crore
- Next five years of unprecedented development to help realise goal of developed India by 2047

Fiscal Deficit



The budgeted fiscal deficit, which is the difference between the government expenditure and income, for the current fiscal ending March 2024 is 5.9 per cent, against 6.4 per cent in the last fiscal. The number for 2024-25 would be in focus as it is widely expected that the government would open its purse strings in an election year. The budgeted fiscal deficit of 5.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) for the current fiscal is likely to be achieved, but it is nearly twice the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act (FRBMA) fiscal deficit to the GDP target of 3 per cent for the central government. Correspondingly, the debt-GDP ratio at 54 per cent is also well above the target of 40 per cent.

Disinvestment/Privatisation



In current fiscal year the budgeted disinvestment target is likely to be missed, like the past five years. It is expected the government would set a realistic target of sub-Rs 50,000 crore for next fiscal.

Capital Expenditure



The government's planned capital expenditure for this fiscal year is budgeted at Rs 10 lakh crore, higher than Rs 7.3 lakh crore in the last fiscal. The government has been pushing infrastructure creation and also incentivising states to step up capex.

Tax Revenue



The Budget had pegged direct and indirect tax mop-up at Rs 18.23 lakh crore and Rs 15.29 lakh crore for current fiscal, taking the gross tax collection to Rs 33.61 lakh crore. The government's tax revenues are expected to overshoot the budget estimates on buoyant collections in GST; and income and corporate tax.

Borrowing



The government's gross borrowing budget was at Rs 15.43 lakh crore in the current financial year ending March 31. The government borrows from the market to fund its fiscal deficit.

School education gets record allocation of over Rs 73,000 crore

NEW DELHI (TIP)

In the highest-ever allocation for the Department of School Education and Literacy, the government has allotted more than Rs 73,000 crore for school education in the interim Budget for 2024-25 announced on Thursday.

The allocation has increased to Rs 73,008.10 crore from Revised Estimates (RE) of Rs 72,473.80 crore in the previous fiscal. The government had allocated Rs 68,804.85 crore to the department last year.

The budget for PM SHRI, a Ministry of Education (MoE) scheme which seeks to upgrade existing government schools to model schools, has risen from Rs 2,800 crore in 2023-24 (RE) to Rs 6,050 crore in 2024-25 -- an increase of Rs 3,250 crore.

"The government is committed to empower Amrit Peedhi, the Yuva. Our prosperity depends on adequately equipping and empowering the youth. The National Education Policy 2020 is ushering in transformational reforms. PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) are delivering quality teaching, and nurturing holistic and well-rounded individuals," Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said



while presenting the interim Budget in the Lok Sabha. The outlay for all important schemes, such as the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, Kendriya Vidyalayas and Navodaya Vidyalayas has seen an increase this year. According to the MoE, this is the highest-ever budget outlay for school education.

"The Budget allocation for the FY 2024-25 of Rs 73,498 crore is the highest-ever for the Department of School Education and Literacy," the MoE said in a statement.

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY ALLOCATED RS 14,225 CRORE IN INTERIM BUDGET

NEW DELHI (TIP): The Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry has been allocated Rs 14,225.47 crore in the interim Budget for 2024-25, an increase of 28.4 per cent over Rs 11,078.33 crore in the Budget (revised estimates) for 2023-24.

The Department of Social Justice and Empowerment has been allocated Rs 13,000 crore in 2024-25 while the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities got Rs 1,225.27 crore in the interim Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Thursday, Feb 1.

In 2023-24, the revised estimate of the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment was Rs 9,853.32 crore and the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities was Rs 1,225.01 crore.

Under the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, the National Program for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities received an allocation of Rs 615 crore. Under the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment, the umbrella scheme for development of scheduled castes was allocated Rs 9,559.98 crore while the umbrella programme for development of other vulnerable groups was allocated Rs 2,150 crore.

The National Commission for Scheduled Castes, National Commission for Backward Classes and National Commission for Safai Karamcharis have been allocated a total of Rs 7,175 crore.

Govt allocates Rs 1,300 cr to procure e-buses, Rs 24,931 cr for metro projects

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Prioritising the urban public transport, the government proposed to allocate Rs 1,300 crore to procure electric buses and Rs 24,931 crore in the interim Budget to fund various metro projects in the country.

There is a 7.57 per cent increase in funds for the mass rapid transit system and metro projects in comparison to the last year's allocation of Rs 23,175 crore.

In the interim Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Rs 26,170 crore has been set aside for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) - an increase of 4.3 per cent.

The Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi), a micro-credit scheme that provides collateral-free working capital loans of up to Rs 50,000 to street vendors, has been allocated Rs 326 crore against Rs 468 crore in the last Union Budget.

The Smart Cities Mission received Rs 2,400 crore in the interim Budget while it had been allocated Rs 8,000 crore in the 2023-24 General Budget. The period of the mission is scheduled to end in June this year.

The Swachh Bharat Mission, another flagship programme of the Modi government, has been given Rs 5,000 crore.

The government has proposed to allocate Rs 1,300 crore to procure electric buses under the PM-eBus Sewa scheme. Under the scheme, 10,000 electric buses will be provided to 169 cities under the public-private partnership model.

Last month, Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri had said the government has floated tenders for procuring e-buses under the scheme. The scheme, which will continue till 2037, will have an outlay of Rs 57,613 crore, of which Rs 20,000 crore will be provided by the Centre and the rest will be



borne by the states.

While presenting the interim Budget, Sitharaman said that rapid urbanisation is taking place in the country, asserting that metro rail and NaMo Bharat trains can be catalysts for the required urban transformation.

She said expansion of these systems will be supported in large cities focusing on transit-oriented development.

In October last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the country's first Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS). It was named NaMo Bharat train.

"We have a fast-expanding middle class and rapid urbanisation is taking place," Sitharaman said.

According to the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, one crore passengers ride metro systems per day in the country.

AYUSH MINISTRY GETS RS 3,712 CR

NEW DELHI (TIP): The interim Budget allocation for the Ayush Ministry has been increased to Rs 3,712.49 crore for 2024-25 from Rs 3,000 crore (revised estimates) in 2023-24, recording a rise of 23.74 per cent.

The National Medicinal Plants Board has been allocated Rs 14.63 crore while the Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy (PCIM&H) allocated Rs 20.80 crore.

The autonomous bodies have been allocated Rs 1,848.40 crore, of which Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences has been given Rs 413.54 crore, Central Council for Research in Homeopathy Rs 144 crore, Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine Rs 228.05 crore and the All India Institute of Ayurveda has got Rs 227.20 crore.

The National Medicinal Plants Board undertakes promotional and contractual farming schemes with a view to encourage in-situ conservation and ex-situ cultivation of medicinal plants for providing raw materials of assured quality for manufacturing of ASU&H medicines.

At the initiative of National Medicinal Plants Board, 32 State Medicinal Plants Boards in 27 states and five Union territories have been constituted for providing impetus to cultivation of high priority medicinal plants for domestic consumption as well as export.

The Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy is a subordinate office under the Ministry of Ayush. It is an appellate authority for drug testing of all Ayush drugs in India. Further, it sets standard for all Ayush drugs which is published in the form of Pharmacopeias.

Hospitality cos cheer focus on island tourism even as some 'disappointed' with no infra tag

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Hospitality industry cheered Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's focus on promoting island tourism in the interim budget, saying it reflects a strategic vision for the long-term growth of the travel and tourism sector, even as some players expressed disappointment over the sector not getting infrastructure status.

"Overall, a good nation-first budget. However, the hospitality industry is disappointed that infra status for the industry did not come through. A missed opportunity for an industry that can significantly grow contribution to the GDP and employment as well as the much needed foreign exchange for the country," said Sanjay Sethi, CEO and Managing Director, Chalet Hotels Limited.

"We are optimistic about additional futuristic support from the government in granting infrastructure status to hospitality and tourism, which will help us achieve a long-awaited status. We foresee that this will have a multiplier impact and drive significant investment from the private sector," said K B Kachru, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor, Radisson Hotel Group, South Asia.

Rajesh Magow, Co-founder & Group CEO, MakeMyTrip, said the commitment to bolster domestic tourism through initiatives spanning rail and air travel, coupled with the ongoing emphasis on tourism-led destinations, particularly in the realm of island tourism and spiritual tourism, reflects a strategic vision for the long-term growth of the travel and tourism sector.

Pradeep Shetty, President, The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India, said the enhanced focus of the government for promotion of MICE, religious tourism, iconic tourism centres and domestic tourism will lay the



foundation of tourism development in the Amrit Kaal and equip the sector to achieve the ambitious target of welcoming 100 million tourists by 2047.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said projects for port connectivity, tourism infrastructure and amenities will be taken up "on our islands, including Lakshadweep" to address the "emerging fervour" for domestic tourism in the country. While presenting the interim Union Budget, she also said "our economic strength has made the country an attractive destination for business and conference tourism". The mention of Lakshadweep by the finance minister is significant because Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited the island on January 4. He had tried snorkelling and said Lakshadweep has to be on the list of visit for those who wish to embrace the adventurer in them.

A row erupted on social media when a minister and some other leaders in the Maldives used derogatory remarks against Prime Minister Modi after he posted a video of him on a pristine beach in Lakshadweep.

"NOTHING FOR POOR, WOMEN AND YOUTH": OPPOSITION ON INTERIM BUDGET

NEW DELHI (TIP): Leaders of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) on Thursday said that there is "nothing" in the Union Interim Budget for the poor, women, and youth, while calling it a new "jumla."

Delhi Minister Atishi told ANI, "The budget proves that this is a 'jumla' government. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said in 2014 that he would provide 2 crore jobs every year, but not even one crore people got jobs. Today they have given a new 'jumla' that they will give 55 lakh jobs..."

"No step has been taken to reduce the inflation..." she alleged.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi told ANI that the budget has "poured cold water" on the expectations of the general public.

"There is a huge difference between saying and doing, this is what we have been seeing for the last 10 years... There is nothing in it for the poor, women and youth. This budget has poured cold water on the expectations of the general public" she said.

AAP MP Sushil Kumar Rinku told ANI, "The youth, Dalit and the people of the backward class had hopes that the budget will talk about them...BJP will have to face great loss in the 2024 elections due to this budget..."

Former Janata Dal (United) president Rajiv Ranjan (Lalan) said, "This is an interim budget, and it reflects on the work done by the government in various sectors in the last five years. It also talks about their goals for the years ahead..."

Meanwhile, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman pegged the fiscal deficit target for 2024-25 at 5.1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP).

In 2023-24, the government pegged the fiscal deficit target for 2023-24 at 5.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP). Today, Sitharaman said that the fiscal deficit of 2023-24 was downwardly revised to 5.8 per cent.

The difference between total revenue and total expenditure of the government is termed as fiscal deficit. It is an indication of the total borrowings that may be needed by the government.

The government intends to bring the fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent of GDP by the financial year 2025-26.

The government proposed to increase capital expenditure outlay by 11.1 per cent to Rs 11.11 lakh crore in 2024-25.

A capital expenditure, or capex, is used to set up long-term physical or fixed assets. The Indian economy is projected to grow close to 7 per cent in the financial year 2024-25 which starts this April, said the Ministry of Finance in a review report.

India's economy grew 7.2 per cent in 2022-23 and 8.7 per cent in 2021-22. The Indian economy is expected to grow 7.3 per cent in the current financial year 2023-24, remaining the fastest-growing major economy.

Interim budget firmly conveys govt's commitment to fiscal consolidation goals: Moody's

NEW DELHI (TIP)

Moody's Investors Service on Thursday, Feb 1, said the interim budget for 2024-25 firmly conveys the government's commitment to its fiscal consolidation goals, set against a backdrop of healthy economic growth.

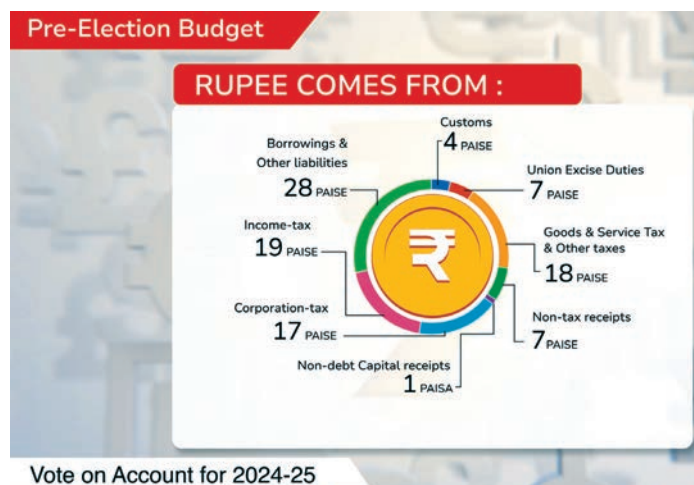
Moody's Investors Service Senior Vice President Christian de Guzman said the government demonstrated fiscal restraint in not resorting to large handouts or increasing discretionary spending ahead of this year's elections.

"The government anticipates that reduced spending as a percentage of GDP will largely drive the reduction in the fiscal deficit, despite ongoing increases in planned infrastructure spending," Guzman said. Given the challenging global environment and the potential for climate-related shocks, emerging spending needs not currently included in the budget could restrict the government's ability to meet its deficit target, he added. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a Rs 11.11 lakh crore spending on infrastructure and vowed to continue reforms as she resisted resorting to populist measures in Modi government's last Budget before general elections, instead choosing to stay on the path of cutting deficit while bolstering measures for focus groups.

Fiscal deficit in next financial year is estimated at 5.1 per cent of GDP, lower than 5.8 per cent in current fiscal.

Budget focuses on making India USD 5 trn economy, developed nation: Assocham

The interim budget focuses on the government's objective of making India a USD 5 trillion economy and a developed nation by 2047, Assocham President Ajay Singh



said.

"It is an India-first budget. A confident budget of a confident government that focuses on the objective of ensuring that India becomes a 5 trillion-dollar economy by 2025 and a developed nation by 2047," Singh told PTI in a post-budget interaction.

Speaking further, he said the government has focused on infrastructure, startups, and rail corridors in the Budget. The Finance Minister also announced a Rs 1 lakh crore fund for research and development and the startup sector which is a very significant move.

There is no question that the Budget will have a significant impact on the common man, Singh, who is also the CMD of airline company SpiceJet, said.

CARDIOTHORACIC SURGEON-TURNED -PIONEER-COMEDIAN CATERS TO HEALTHY LIVING



Surgeon-Comedian Bassem Youssef

Photo / Courtesy bassemyousef.xyz

BY MABEL PAIS

Pioneering Egyptian comedian Bassem Youssef, is set to perform his English-language solo show, 'The Middle Beast,' at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) on Friday, February 16th, at 7:00

p.m. & 9:30 p.m.

You're guaranteed to laugh all night long!

Dubbed the Jon Stewart of the Arab World, cardiac surgeon Bassem Youssef hosted the popular TV show Al Bernameg - the first political satire show in the Middle East. Originally a 5-minute presentation on YouTube, Al Bernameg became the first online-to-TV conversion in the Middle East and the most-watched performance across the region, with 30 million viewers every week and over a million subscribers to its YouTube channel.

In recognition of his success, Youssef was named among Time Magazine's most influential list for 2013 - under the "Pioneers" category, was awarded the International Press Freedom Award by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), and was chosen by Foreign Policy magazine as one of the global thinkers during the same year.

Youssef currently performs his one-person show, THE MIDDLE BEAST, around the globe. The first title in Bassem's children's book series, 'The Magical Reality of Nadia,' was published by Scholastic on February 2nd,

2021, and is currently being developed as an animated series. Bassem can be seen in MO (Netflix), RAMY (Hulu), LIONESS (Paramount+) and UPLOAD (Amazon). Learn more at bassemyousef.xyz.

TICKETS

To see Bassem Youssef perform, visit njpac.org or the NJPAC Box Office or call 888. GO.NJPAC (888.466.5722).

THE NEW JERSEY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER (NJPAC)

Follow NJPAC Online:

Website: njpac.org

Twitter: @NJPAC

Instagram: @NJPAC

Hashtag: #NJPAC

Facebook: facebook.com/NJPAC

YouTube: NJPACtv

FOLLOW NJPAC'S STANDING IN SOLIDARITY SERIES ONLINE:

Website: njpac.org/takeastand

Hashtag: #NJPACTakeAStand

Youtube: Standing in Solidarity playlist

FAMILIES CELEBRATE LUNAR NEW YEAR MARKING REUNION AND REBIRTH



Lunar Year at BCM

Photo / Courtesy brooklynkids.org

BY MABEL PAIS

The Brooklyn Children's Museum (BCM) invites families to celebrate the Year of the Dragon on Sunday, February 11. The museum is located at 145 Brooklyn Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11213. The event takes place from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Visitors will learn about the traditions of Lunar New Year through live music, dance performances, and kung fu workshops with the New York Chinese Cultural Center; storytelling with authors Michele Wong McSween and Yobe Qiu, calligraphy workshops with artist Nelson Leung, and a lion dance parade led by the Chinatown Community Young Lions.

"We look forward to our Lunar New Year celebration every year, as do our visitors," says BCM President and CEO Atiba T. Edwards. "Lunar New Year is a time of joy and renewal, celebrated by diverse communities across Asia and by millions of Asian Americans here in our city. This year New York declared that

Lunar New Year will become an official public school holiday, and we invite families and caregivers to bring their children to the Museum to experience the vibrant traditions of this holiday through incredible live performances and hands-on activities. The Year of the Dragon and the dragon are the embodiment of progress and success, which feels very fitting for the future we all want to create and be part of creating."

THIS YEAR'S FESTIVAL FEATURES PROGRAMS THAT INCLUDE:

INTRO TO KUNG FU

Get an up-close demonstration of kung fu, presented by martial artists from the New York Chinese Cultural Center. Following the presentation visitors are invited to take part in a hands-on workshop that introduces kung fu and teaches basic stances, strikes, and other techniques.

THE STORY OF LUNAR NEW YEAR

Join the New York Chinese Cultural Center in BCM's auditorium to discover the traditions of Lunar New Year. This 30-minute program features a variety of performances including a youth choir, Chinese folk music, and classical dance pieces.

TRADITIONAL LION DANCE

Gather in the BCM lobby to participate in a traditional lion dance to bring luck in the new year. Performers from the Chinatown Community Young Lions will lead this parade with full-scale, authentic lion dance costumes!

STORYTELLING WITH AUTHOR YOBE QIU

Meet author Yobe Qiu and participate in an interactive reading of Yobe's book, 'Our Lunar New Year.' This program includes an introduction to Lunar New Year traditions and customs, followed by a 30-minute fan painting and lantern-making workshop.

STORYTELLING WITH AUTHOR MICHELE WONG MCSWEEN

Hear stories read aloud by children's book author Michele Wong McSween! This program will include a mini mandarin lesson and an interactive reading of Michele's book 'Gordon & Li Li: Celebrate Chinese New Year.'

CALLIGRAPHY WORKSHOP

BCM invites visitors to its ColorLab Art Studio to learn about and create your own Chinese calligraphy using brush and ink. Artist Nelson Leung will share his work, guide the project, and explain the significance of Chinese calligraphy.

SCALES OF A DRAGON

What's your wish for the New Year? Contribute to a community art project by

writing your hopes and goals down on a paper 'scale,' then adding it to BCM's Big Dragon along the ColorLab Art Studio wall.

Note: All programs are subject to change.

TICKETS

To purchase tickets, visit brooklynkids.org/programs/lunar-new-year.

LUNAR NEW YEAR

Lunar New Year is a holiday that celebrates the beginning of the New Year on the traditional Chinese calendar. While based on the Chinese calendar, Lunar New Year is also celebrated in Korea, Singapore, Mongolia, Tibet, Vietnam, and in Asian communities worldwide.

The Chinese calendar is on a 12-year cycle, with each year linked to one of a dozen animals - the rat, ox, tiger, rabbit, dragon, snake, horse, goat, monkey, rooster, dog and pig. Vietnam is the only country that celebrates the year of the cat. This year, BCM is excited to celebrate the Year of the Dragon.

Lunar New Year is seen as a time of reunion and rebirth, marking the end of winter and the start of spring. Homes are thoroughly cleaned to sweep away old ill fortune to make room for coming good luck, and fireworks are set off to ward off evil monsters and bad luck. Celebrants decorate their homes and wear outfits using the colors red and gold, which symbolize good fortune.

BROOKLYN CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

For more information, visit brooklynkids.org.

(Mabel Pais writes on Social Issues, Spirituality, The Arts and Entertainment, Education, Cuisine, Health & Wellness, and Business)

POETRY, A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL CHANGE?

BY MABEL PAIS

The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation (Dodge Foundation), the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) and Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka on January 24, 2024 announced plans for the 2024 Dodge Poetry initiative - a new collaboration that celebrates poetry as a catalyst for communities to advance social change.

Guest speakers featured John Schreiber, CEO of NJPAC; Tanuja Dehne, President and CEO of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation; Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka; Ysabel Gonzalez, Poetry Creative Officer at the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

The event featured special poetry performances by Poet and Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka, who recited his poem, 'Digging Max,' paying homage to his late father Amiri Baraka, a legendary poet and playwright who worked with Max Roach. Then, a surprise poetry performance by the legendary 'The Last Poets,' ABIODUN OYEWOLE, BABA DON and FELIPE LUCIANO, who continue the legacy of 'The Last Poets' who originally formed in 1968 in Harlem, New York.

The event also included an exceptional performance by Poet and Pulitzer Prize Winner TYEHIMBA JESS, a champion for Black voices in the literary arts. He is the Board President of Cave Canem, an organization committed to cultivating Black poets' artistic and professional growth. Tyehimba Jess performed his poem, 'A Black Man's Prayer,' a profound poem about peace.

Watch a surprise poetry performance by the legendary 'The Last Poets,' Umar Bin Hassan, Abiodun Oyewole, and Baba Don, who continue the legacy of 'The Last Poets' and who originally formed in 1968 in Harlem, New York - youtu.be/B3DY7CIAbQA

For the first time, Dodge Poetry will expand beyond its biennial poetry festival (which has been headquartered at NJPAC since 2010) to include poetry programs in Newark throughout the year including NJPAC's Horizon Sounds of The City.

These Dodge Poetry events will have three goals to: 1) mobilize communities and fuel movements for social change; 2) amplify poet activists who challenge and reframe existing narratives and norms; and 3) create spaces for empathy, healing, and repair for individuals who have experienced systemic racism.

Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka shared, "Because poetry impacts hearts so directly, it has great power to transform communities, and give rise to social change, hope, and healing. This year-round poetry program about to ripple through Newark will realize one of my greatest wishes for the city, and I thank the Dodge Foundation and NJPAC for making this happen."

Building on 40 years of poetry

programming, the new collaboration between NJPAC and Dodge Foundation will extend the footprint of Dodge Poetry across the entire city of Newark. The events are designed to engage and activate residents, especially young people and community partners, and to highlight the intersection of poetry and social justice.

The first initiative of this project happened on Friday, January 26th with 'Max Roach's Freedom Now Suite' performance in NJPAC's Prudential Hall at 8PM, a celebration of the centennial of Max Roach - drummer, bebop pioneer, and civil rights activist - who explored social justice issues and racial inequality through the lens of jazz and poetry.

Performers included Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka, who presented his poems

and special programs designed to build a community of poets and citizens mobilizing for racial and social justice, repair, and healing.

"The Dodge Foundation has a long legacy of creating opportunities for people to explore and engage with poetry. Now, the reimagined Dodge Poetry will expand our ability to reach new places and people, and focus our programming on artists and activists who interrogate and address issues of social justice," says Tanuja Dehne, President and CEO of the Dodge Foundation. "By holding these events and the festival across Newark, we will honor the city's legacy and further amplify the voices and narratives of those who have been at the forefront of activism for racial justice."

"Ours is a city of the arts, a center of

radical queer organizing, racial justice organizing, and art activism; Naomi Extra, a poet, writer, cartoonist, and scholar with a PhD in American Studies from Rutgers Newark; Willie Perdomo, a two-time New York Foundation of the Arts Poetry Fellow and former NY state Poet Laureate; and Vincent Toro, an award-winning Puerto Rican poet, playwright, stage performer, author of two poetry collections, and full time professor at Rider University.

More information about Dodge Poetry, upcoming shows, and events can be found at njpac.org/dodgepoetry. The Dodge Poetry Festival does have an open submission process, and applications will be accepted for performance consideration beginning in mid-February.

MAYOR BARAKA

Ras J. Baraka is the 40th Mayor of the City of Newark.

A native of Newark, whose family has lived in the City for more than 80 years, Mayor Baraka's progressive approach to governing has won him accolades from grassroots organizations to the White House.

Learn more at rasbaraka.com; #Believeinnewark; facebook.com/RasJBaraka

THE LAST POETS

The Last Poets was formed in 1968 in Harlem, New York. Before RAP knew its name, there was a group of ambitious young men who reflected the harsh spirit of their times and whose work remains prophetic and inspirational today. 'The Last Poets' started in the late sixties, speaking out as few other musical groups had, or have since, about racism, poverty, and other African American and societal concerns. Learn more at thelastpoets.com.

TYEHIMBA JESS

Tyehimba Jess is a Pulitzer Prize winner and is a champion for Black voices in the literary arts and is the Board President of Cave Canem, an organization committed to cultivating the artistic and professional growth of Black poets. Learn more at tyehimbajess.net.

THE GERALDINE R. DODGE FOUNDATION

Established in 1974, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation envisions a just and equitable New Jersey where people of all races and communities have equitable access to opportunities to thrive. Learn more at grdodge.org.

THE NEW JERSEY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER (NJPAC)

Learn more at www.njpac.org.

(Mabel Pais writes on Social Issues, Spirituality, The Arts and Entertainment, Education, Cuisine, Health & Wellness, and Business



(left to right): The Dodge Foundation, New Jersey Performing Arts Center, Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka announced major expansion of Dodge Poetry program that will take place throughout 2024 in Newark, New Jersey, L to R John Schreiber, CEO of NJPAC; Newark Mayor Ras J. Baraka; Dave Rodriguez, NJPAC's Executive Producer; Last Poets, Umar Bin Hassan, Abiodun Oyewole, and Baba Don, Ysabel Gonzalez, Poetry Creative Officer at the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation; Tanuja Dehne, President and CEO of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation; and Poet and Pulitzer Prize Winner Tyehimba Jess.

Photo / Courtesy NJPAC

by his father, Amiri Baraka (a long-time Max Roach collaborator) as well as his own writing; drummer Nasheet Waits (of Max's percussion ensemble M'Boom); vocalist Cassandra Wilson; poets 'The Last Poets,' Sonia Sanchez and Saul Williams; saxophonist Ravi Coltrane; pianist Nduduzo Makhathini; and bassist Eric Revis. Advisory Committee member and past Festival Poet, Vincent Toro, opened the event.

Dodge Poetry will culminate with the 20th celebration of the Dodge Poetry Festival, an event that has to-date engaged more than 150,000 people including 45,000 high school students, on Oct 17-19, 2024. The Festival will be hosted by the Dodge Foundation at NJPAC, which has welcomed poets and artists from across the United States to Newark every other year since 2010, and it will feature performances, readings,

creativity where there are so many stories that need to be heard. Through this initiative, we look forward to sharing the aspirations and realities of all Newarkers" said John Schreiber, President and CEO of NJPAC. "All of us at the Arts Center are excited that the Dodge Foundation is collaborating with us on creating authentic, community-centric programs that spotlight poetry as a means to advocate for social justice and artistic expression."

To help shape and guide the events and strategy over the year, Dodge Poetry has convened an Advisory Committee of award-winning poets and activists: Sean Battle, CEO and Founder of EvoluCulture Ventures, a Newark-based integrated arts organization that holds space for artists and art lovers; Tamiko Beyer, a social justice communications writer and strategist with roots in

BEAT THE WINTER BLUES WITH FUNTAINMENT

BY MABEL PAIS

The Morristown Performing Arts Center (MPAC) this winter in February continues to offer a great lineup from comics to classic sounds to eye-popping, finger-popping shows.

TICKETED MPAC EVENTS:

Forever Motown

Friday, February 2 at 8 pm

All of your favorite Motown hits on one stage in one night! Featuring G.C. Cameron, former lead singer of The Spinners, Glenn Leonard, former lead singer of 'The Temptations' and Traci Robinson, former lead singer of 'The Marvelettes.'

TRACY MORGAN

Saturday, February 3 at 8 pm

Tracy Morgan is one of the most well-respected comedians in his field, known for his award-winning role on '30 Rock,' as well as 'Saturday Night Live.' Morgan presents a night of unfiltered comedy as only he can deliver!

Mature Audiences only. LIMITED TICKETS

GET THE LED OUT

Friday, February 9 at 8 pm

From the bombastic and epic, to the folky and mystical, 'Get the Led Out' recreates the music of legendary supergroup Led Zeppelin with attention to detail and nuance that captures the essence of the band's hallowed discography.

ANTHONY RODIA: TOTALLY RELATABLE TOUR

Saturday, February 10 at 8 pm

Anthony Rodia's comedy is refreshingly genuine, quick witted and totally relatable! A first-generation Italian American from Westchester, Rodia has quickly

gained a rabid following with over 900,000 social media followers and over 22 million views of his YouTube videos. Rodia's comedy pulls from his razor-sharp observations on marriage, parenthood, road rage, and everything else worthy of a social media rant.

LIMITED TICKETS



The Gazillion Bubble Show

Credit / mayoarts.org

DIONNE WARWICK

Friday, February 16 at 8 pm

Six-time Grammy Award-winning music legend Dionne Warwick has more than 75 hit songs and has sold over 100 million records. Warwick's hits include 'Don't Make Me Over,' 'Walk on By,' 'Say a Little Prayer,' 'A House is Not a Home,' 'Alfie,' 'Heartbreaker' and 'Déjà Vu,' among countless others.

LIMITED TICKETS

DENA BLIZZARD'S 'I LOVE YOU,' 'GET AWAY FROM ME'

Thursday, February 22 at 7:30 pm

Dena Blizzard's new show is a three-generation multi-media comedy show about finding the funny in life's transitions, with Dena's son, Dean, live on stage,

and her mom, Diana, via Zoom. Whether it's becoming a widow at 75, empty nesting and divorcing at 50, or trying to act like a grown-up at 23....there's plenty to laugh (or cry) about. 'I Love You,' 'Get Away from Me' is perfect for anyone starting over, going through some stuff or just wants everyone to GET AWAY FROM HER!

THE SIMON & GARFUNKEL STORY

Friday, February 23 at 8 pm

The Simon & Garfunkel Story is the critically acclaimed concert-style theatre show that tells the story of two young boys from Queens who went on to become the world's most successful music duo. Using video projection and a full band, The Simon & Garfunkel Story is a moving and powerful event featuring all your favorite hits such as 'Mrs. Robinson,' 'Bridge Over Troubled Water,' 'Homeward Bound,' 'The Boxer' and many more.

LIMITED TICKETS

THE GAZILLION BUBBLE SHOW

Sunday, February 25 at 11 am, 2 pm and 5 pm

Prepare to be amazed by the world-famous Gazillion Bubble Show! This mind-blowing show combines the beauty of bubble artistry, the wonders of soapy science, and interactive fun for the whole family. With mesmerizing bubble magic, immersive lights and lasers and high-energy music, it's a spellbinding experience for all ages. Debuting for the first time at MPAC, the show promises unimaginable fun for the whole family. Featuring the incredible award-winning artist Deni Yang, this unique blend of art, science, and entertainment has become an international phenomenon with a worldwide following. Don't miss the spectacular celebration of bubbles, science, and family fun at the Gazillion Bubble Show!

LIMITED TICKETS to 2 pm show

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

BY MABEL PAIS



'Art in the Atrium' exhibit
Photo / Courtesy mayoarts.org

Honoring Black History Month, Art in the Atrium, Inc. (ATA), a non-profit volunteer arts organization founded in Morris County that champions Black art excellence, returns with its third major exhibition at the Mayo Performing Arts Center's (MPAC) Art Upstairs and Starlight Galleries.

In its continued partnership with MPAC, ATA presents 'Traditions and Transitions: Historical to Contemporary Perspectives in Black Art.' The exhibit which opened on January 17 runs until March 3.

'Traditions and Transitions : Historical to Contemporary Perspectives in Black Art' is an exhibit of art that reflects a traditional approach in genre and subject matter and also art that steps beyond prescribed media and representational styles of expression. A range which involves still life, portrait, landscape, and fiber art, as well as the optical art, abstract expressionistic and non-objective styles, among others.

The exhibit features approximately 50 selected works of art by over 30 artists. The artists range from emerging new artists to well established and known artists.

"Art in the Atrium brings to MPAC a refreshing exhibit of artists both locally and nationally known," says curator Nette Forne Thomas, the exhibit's curator. "The art in the exhibit, 'Traditions and Transitions' ranges from broad and diverse styles showcasing expressions from the learned academic approach to the more experimentally creative. This array of art provides a rewarding and eclectic experience in keeping with ATA functioning as a motivating source

for artists and art patrons."

HOURS OPEN

Artwork displayed at MPAC is available for purchase. The galleries are open prior to MPAC events, Tuesdays from 12 pm to 2 pm, and by appointment. Private group tours are also available. To make an appointment, call 973-539-0345, ext. 6587.

ART IN THE ATRIUM

Art in the Atrium, Inc. (ATA) is a Black-led, non-profit, culture-keeping institution founded in Morristown, New Jersey in 1991, that is committed to the celebration and advancement of Black culture. ATA supports and invests in black fine art by established and emerging artists by giving them visibility and a creative space to breathe.

Since its founding, in addition to its exhibits, ATA has provided unique arts education programming that includes The ATA STEAM Academy and a scholarship program for promising BIPOC arts students majoring in fine art. For more information on the Art in the Atrium, visit artintheatrium.org, follow ATA on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter @artintheatrium, or email hello@artintheatrium.org.

THE MAYO ARTS PERFORMING CENTER (MPAC)

Learn more at mayoarts.org.

(Mabel Pais writes on The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, Spirituality, Education, Cuisine, Health & Wellness, and Business)

Sikh History This Week

FEBRUARY 2 TO FEBRUARY 8

2nd February



1534 Bibi Bhani Ji, was born at Basarkae.



1807 Maharaja Ranjit Singh attacked Kasur, as Qutbuddin had sided against him in the battle of Bhasin. Qutbuddin was caught while fleeing. However, he was pardoned with a jagir at Mamdot. Kasur was annexed to Lahore Darbar. Pasrur town was also annexed.

1958 Sikhs held a Protest March in Delhi against numerous acts of the sacrilege of their Gurdwaras by the Hindus.

3rd February



1816 Baba Ram Singh Namdhari was born.

BABA RAM SINGH was born in village Rayia, Ludhiana, to father Jassa Singh and mother Sedha Kaur. Since early childhood, Ram Singh was inclined to reciting God's name (Vaaheguru's Naam simran). For a while, he served in the forces of Lahore darbar. However in 1841 he left active service and joined the company of Baba Balak Singh, whose preachings had enlightened thousands. Upon receiving Naam Updaesh, Ram Singh settled in Bhaenni village and engaged in extensive preaching of Sikh faith. On the Baisakhi day

of 1857, Baba Ram Singh administered Pahul to teh Sikhs in his village and created 22 centres in different parts of the country. He started the Kuka branch. Kuka Sikhs wear white attire and a malla made from white wool. Their practices include, giving Vaaheguru Gurmantar in individual's ear; amrit is not partaken together, rather given to individuals in isolation; practice of Hawaan ceremony; rather than the traditional Parikarma around Guru Granth Sahib during marriage ceremony, they recite lawan in presence of fire (Agni Haum). During religious ceremonies, they yell, shout, and dance out of love. The Punjabi term for their yelling and shouting is Kukeh. Hence they are popularly known as Kukas.

4th February

1764 Khalsa fought against Ruhaliya forces in which Ruhalaee lost and left the battle grounds.

1853 John Lawrence was appointed the Chief Commissioner of Punjab.



1975 As a result of representation made by The Sikh Dharma Brotherhood (USA), the Labor department of US Government exempted the Sikh workers employed in workshops from wearing safety helmet which are required to be worn by all the labourers in carpentry trade and construction (an OSHA program Directive of 1972). The exemption to Sikh employees was granted under the provisions of the United States Constitution relating to free exercise of religion.

5th February

1762 Ahmad Shah invaded for the 6th time. This invasion was primarily against the Sikhs. The Sikhs had besieged Jandiala. Ahmad Shah reached Jandiala by forced marches. In the meantime Sikhs had moved to Malerkotla. Ahmad Shah surprised the Sikhs at Kup Raheera near Malaerkotla (now in Sangrur district) and the two armies met in a straight fight. Sikhs were encumbered with families and camp followers and lost more than 30,000 Sikh – mostly old men, women, and children, out of a total of 50,000. However, the main body of the Sikhs fighting force remained intact. However, the hand written copy of the Holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib had to be lodged near here in the house of a muslim, who kept the holy scripture respectfully for about two centuries. It is said to have been taken to Pakistan by that family at the time of India's Partition in 1947. This battle is known as the "Wada Ghallughar." Ahmad Shah reached Amritsar and destroyed Hari Mandir and the holy tank. Ahmad Shah stayed the entire year 1762 in Panjab to subdue and crush the Sikhs, but he totally failed in the objective. Despite the heavy loss of life and the Holy Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikhs fought several subsequent wars with Ahmed Shah Abdali and eventually convince him to leave Punjab. Soon they recuperated and established their own kingdom, the Khalsa rule in Punjab. With the establishment of the Sikh rule, the Western borders of India were sealed forever to the Mughal invaders.

1921 The famous Sikh shrine, Punja Sahib was



brought under management control of Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC)

6th February

1921 SGPC asks government to safeguard Sikh institution of Nankana Sahib.



1926 Kahan Singh Nahba's monumental work, "Mahan Kosh", Encyclopedia of Sikh Religion was published.

7th February



1955 Master Tara Singh was elected President of SGPC for the third time.

Master Tara Singh was born on 24 June, 1885, in Haryal in Rawalpindi district of North Western Province of undivided India. His mother, Moolan Devi, was a pious lady and his father, Bakshi Gopi Chand, was a patwari of the village and was a well known and respected person. Tara Singh's original name was Nanak Chand. In 1902 Nanak Chand embraced Sikhism and came to be called Tara Singh.

8th February

1780 Sikhs fought Timur near Multan during his 2nd invasion but lost Multan city and the fort.

1961 Fateh Singh and Nehru held talks on Punjabi Suba. Talks followed on March 1 and May 12. As expected, these talks failed to materialize anything and a "failed talks" was announced.



Shilpa Shetty honoured with Champions of Change Award 2023

It's a moment of pride for actor Shilpa Shetty Kundra, as she was honoured with the Champions of Change Award in Maharashtra. Taking to Instagram, Shilpa shared the exciting news with her fans and posed with her award.

Shilpa received the special award from Justice KG Balakrishnan and Justice Gyan Sudha Misra. Sharing the photo, she wrote, "Immensely grateful and honoured to be awarded the 'Champions of Change 2023' award by Hon'ble Justice KG Balakrishnan and Hon'ble Justice Gyan Sudha Misra ji in Maharashtra. As a #ProudIndian, I take immense pride in my work and feel humbled that I can play catalyst in a small, positive way through entertainment or awareness for one's health and wellness." As soon as the picture was uploaded, fans and industry members congratulated the actor. Champions of Change is an Indian award for promoting Gandhian values, community service and social development. It was founded in 2011.

Source: ANI

Bhansali's Heeramandi starring Manisha, Sonakshi, Aditi will take you back to another era

First look of Sanjay Leela Bhansali's highly-anticipated Netflix series, Heeramandi: The Diamond Bazaar, is out. Heeramandi features Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Richa Chadha and others in pivotal roles. On Thursday, the cast and makers dropped Heeramandi's first look, and it is as grand, enticing and dramatic, as is expected from Sanjay Leela Bhansali, known for films such as Devdas, Bajirao Mastani and many others.

With Heeramandi, Sanjay Leela Bhansali brings his majestic signature flair to stories of love and betrayal in the lives of courtesans in pre-independence India. The series explores the cultural reality of Heeramandi, a dazzling district, through the stories of courtesans and their patrons set against the tumultuous backdrop of the Indian freedom struggle of the 1940s.

The series stars Manisha Koirala, Sonakshi Sinha, Aditi Rao Hydari, Richa Chadha, Sharmin Segal, and Sanjeeda Sheikh in the lead roles. The official streaming date of the show is still awaited. However, the series is expected to drop on Netflix in 2024. Sharing the first look on Instagram, Netflix India wrote in the caption, "Here's your first look at legendary Indian creator Sanjay Leela Bhansali's first series EVER: Heeramandi: The



Diamond Bazaar!"

The makers in a recent statement described the show as 'a mix of love, betrayal, succession, and politics in the kothas (house of courtesans)'. They said, "Heeramandi promises Sanjay Leela Bhansali's signature style of larger-than-life stories, intricate and soulful characters, and rippling dynamics of a world rife with conflict during a defining time period for India. Like all of the auteur's creations, Heeramandi will have unique compositions and music that linger

with the audience, just like his stories."

In a statement last year, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, who has created the series, told ANI, "Heeramandi is an important milestone in my journey as a filmmaker. This is an epic, first-of-its-kind series based on the courtesans of Lahore. It is an ambitious, grand and all-encompassing series; therefore I am nervous yet excited about making it. I am looking forward to my partnership with Netflix and bringing Heeramandi to audiences all over the world."

Source: HT

Bhakshak trailer: Bhumi Pednekar's investigative journalist goes all out to expose crimes at girls' shelter



The trailer for Bhumi Pednekar's next film, Bhakshak (literally translating to predator) was released on January 31. In the film, Bhumi will be essaying the role of an investigative journalist, who is out to expose those involved in a case of sexual assault of girls at a shelter home. Bhakshak is directed Pulkit.

The trailer for Bhakshak introduces the dark side of a girl's shelter home, run by Aditya Srivastava, aka Bansi Sahu. Bhumi takes up the case to expose the truth, going against everyone's advice. The film is inspired by true events.

Bhakshak also stars Sanjay Mishra, Sai Tamhankar and Surya Sharma. It is backed by Gauri Khan and Gaurav Verma under the banner of Red Chillies Entertainment. Sharing the trailer, Shah Rukh Khan wrote on Instagram, "A story of resilience that needs to be told. Bhakshak, a film inspired by true events, releasing on 9th February, only on Netflix."

Talking about the film, Bhumi recently told news agency ANI about her experience of stepping into the shoes of a journalist. She said,

"Journalism is a difficult career...it needs a lot of courage to ask the right questions, especially to the people who are in power. To ask questions fearlessly definitely needs a lot of courage... I salute the journalists out there for doing their job with integrity and fearlessness. I have learned a lot by working on this film. I feel honoured."

"Working on Bhakshak was quite challenging as it is based on a sensitive and hard-hitting topic. The film asks questions at a core level that is bound to shake one's conscience. I hope the film sparks conversations that lead to meaningful change. The film sheds light on the crimes against the children," she also added.

'Bhakshak,' is inspired by the events of the Muzaffarpur Women's Shelter Case of 2020. Aditya Srivastava portrays Bansi Sahu, a character inspired from Brajesh Thakur, the mastermind of the real-life case.

The case first came into light when the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) presented a report to the Bihar government on May 26, 2018, bringing to attention the alleged sexual abuse of minor girls in the shelter home for the first time.



Nia Long to play Michael Jackson's mom in his biopic

Actress Nia Long has been roped in to essay a crucial role in late pop singer Michael Jackson's biopic. Nia will essay the role of Michael Jackson's mother, Katherine Jackson, in director Antoine Fuqua's upcoming biographical drama.

On having Nia on board, Fuqua said, "Nia has delivered iconic performances throughout her career. I've been a fan for a long time because her characters stay with you. I'm excited to now work alongside her as she pours all of that into Katherine Jackson: a woman who was the glue, the rock, and the heart of the Jackson family during its best and its most turbulent times."

Michael is currently in production and slated to hit theatres on April 18, 2025.

Source: ANI

Sophie Turner makes her relationship with beau Peregrine Pearson Insta-official



The well-recognized 'Queen of the North' Sophie Turner of Game of Thrones fame is making the most of the chilly winter. On January 29, the 27-year-old actress pinged with a new update surrounding her new rumored romance.

Taking to Instagram, she shared a few pictures of the recently undertaken ski trip. In this thread of six snaps, her potential boyfriend aka the British aristocrat Peregrine Pearson is also featured alongside the actor's friends.

This new update has emerged amidst Turner's divorce with Joe Jonas, also a member of the pop band Jonas Brothers. Sophie has been linked to the fourth Viscount Cowdray heir since the latter half of October 2023.

The first pic in the Sophie Turner ski trip Instagram thread post captioned "Jagerbomb anyone?" drives the attention to a group of four people. Although the quartet is fully covered in heavy winter gear as they take a ride on the ski ride, Sophie tagged her pals as well as her rumored beau. She's seen sitting right beside Pearson, while her friends Amadea Kimmins and Rupert Gorst take the other side.

Other photos in the carousel post also reveal them landing at the snowcapped mountain's top. Yet another snap lends us a blurred insight into the friend circle having a jolly time and dancing at what possibly appears to be an intimate pub. Visuals of a ski chalet and other solo Sophie pics also made it to the post. The location of the vacation spot wasn't revealed.

The Emmy-nominated actor Sophie Turner has recently been in the news after she parted ways with Jonas in September following their four years of marriage. The two share two daughters and have since then been to court regarding their heated custody issues. Sophie had even filed a case against Joe for allegedly not letting their daughters return to England earlier. An Instagram post even addresses Sophie Turner and Joe Jonas's decision to split.

Milly Alcock soars into James Gunn's DCU as the new Supergirl

Milly Alcock, known for her role as Rhaenyra Targaryen in HBO's Game of Thrones prequel series House of the Dragon, has been cast as Kara Zor-El, Superman's cousin, in the upcoming film Supergirl: Woman of Tomorrow. The announcement was made by DC Studios Co-CEO James Gunn on Instagram, where he confirmed the news. Gunn is also reported to be writing and directing Superman: Legacy.

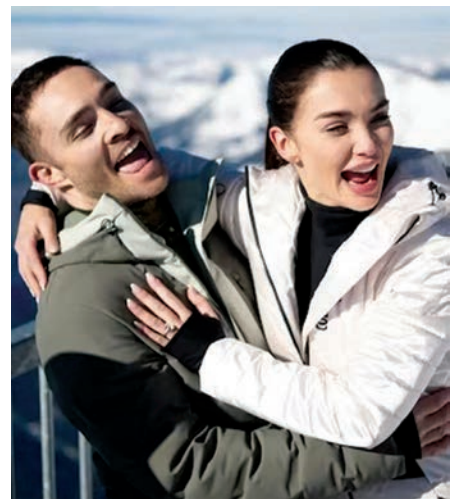
Alcock, a native of Sydney, is a proud graduate of Newtown High School of the Performing Arts. Opting to follow her passion for acting, she made the decision to leave high school during her final year to fully pursue a career in acting.

She gained recognition as part of the cast of the 2019 Australian drama series Upright, where she portrayed the character of Meg alongside Tim Minchin. Alcock's most recent performance was on the London's West End stage, where she took on the role of Abigail Williams in the National Theatre's production of The Crucible.



Amy Jackson engaged to Gossip Girl star Ed Westwick

Actor Amy Jackson is now engaged. She took to social media and shared the good news. She dropped a couple of romantic pictures with her beau Ed Westwick. In the images, Ed Westwick can be seen proposing to Amy in Switzerland on a bridge.



The first picture showed Ed on his knees as Amy clasped her mouth. "Hell, YES," Amy captioned the post, adding a ring emoji.

The post is flooded with heartfelt wishes from fans, friends and members of the film industry. Back in 2022, Amy made her relationship with Ed Westwick Instagram official. Ed is also an actor. He is best known for his role in Gossip Girl.

Amy earlier dated George Panayiotou for quite some time. The two got engaged in 2019 and welcomed their son in September of the same year. Reportedly, the couple parted ways in 2021.

Source: ANI

EU AGREES TO \$54 BN ASSISTANCE FOR UKRAINE

BRUSSELS (TIP): The leaders of the 27 European Union (EU) countries sealed a deal on February 1 to provide Ukraine with a new 50-billion-euro (USD 54 billion) support package despite Hungary's weeks of threats to veto the move.

European Council President Charles Michel announced the agreement about only an hour into the leaders' summit in Brussels. "We have a deal," Michel said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter.

He said the agreement "locks in steadfast, long-term, predictable funding for Ukraine," and demonstrated that the "EU is taking leadership and responsibility in support for Ukraine; we know what is at stake."

It was not immediately clear if any concessions were made to secure Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's approval. He raised staunch objections to the financial aid package in December and in the days leading up to Thursday's summit in Brussels.

On their way into their meeting, several fellow leaders had lashed out at Orban, accusing him of blackmail and playing political games that undermined support for Ukraine and the country's war-ravaged economy.

Almost two years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the war has ground to a halt and Ukraine's economy desperately needs propping up. But political infighting in the EU and in the United States has held up a long-term source of funding. Concern has mounted that public support to keep pouring money into Ukraine has started to wane, even though a Russian victory could threaten security across Europe. "There is no problem with the so-called Ukraine fatigue issue. We have Orban fatigue now in Brussels," Polish PM Donald Tusk told reporters Thursday. — AP

ISRAEL POUNDS GAZA AS HAMAS STUDIES CEASEFIRE PLAN

GAZA (TIP) : Israeli forces pounded areas in northern and southern Gaza on January 31 after Hamas said it had received and was studying a new proposal for a ceasefire and release of hostages held in the Palestinian enclave. The proposal, presented to the Palestinian militant group by mediators after talks with Israel, appeared to be the most serious peace initiative for months in the Israel-Hamas war. Gaza health authorities said 26,900 Palestinians had been killed, including 150 over the past 24 hours.

Relations between Tehran and Washington are also tense after the deaths of three US soldiers in a drone strike in Jordan that US officials blame on Iran-backed militants. (Agencies)

North Korea tests more cruise missiles as leader Kim Jong Un calls for war readiness

SEOUL (TIP): South Korea's military said it detected North Korea firing multiple cruise missiles into waters off its western coast on February 2, adding to a provocative run of weapons testing in the face of deepening tensions with the United States, South Korea and Japan. The launches came hours after state media reported that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un reiterated his focus on strengthening his naval forces as he inspected the construction of new warships at a western shipyard, calling such projects crucial to the country's war preparations.

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the US and South Korean militaries were analysing the launches, which were the North's fourth round of cruise missile tests in 2024. There was no immediate information on the exact number of missiles fired or how far they flew.

Kim's visit to the shipyard in Nampho followed a series of weapons demonstrations in January that furthered increased tensions with rivals, including tests of new cruise missiles designed to be launched from submarines.

Kim in recent months has been



emphasising his goal of building a nuclear-armed navy to counter what he portrays as growing external threats posed by the United States, South Korea and Japan, which have stepped up their military cooperation to cope with Kim's nuclear weapons and missile programme.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency did not specify when Kim visited Nampho. It paraphrased Kim as saying that the strengthening of his naval force "presents itself as the most important issue in reliably defending the maritime sovereignty of the country and stepping up the war preparations". (AP)

Explosion strikes near vessel in the Red Sea off Yemen as Houthi rebel attacks continue

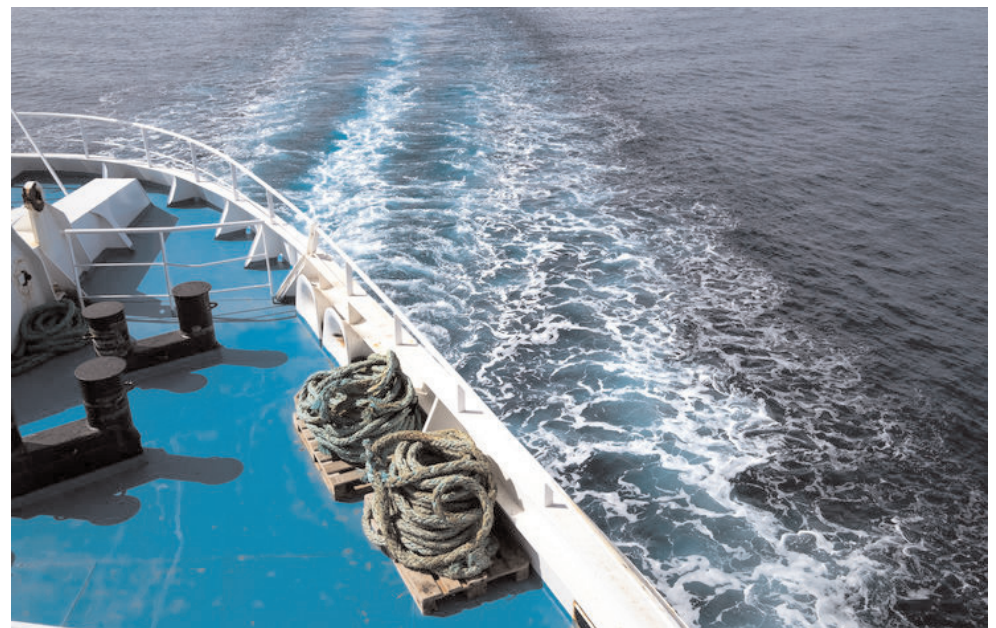
JERUSALEM (TIP): Yemen's Houthi rebels fired two ballistic missiles on February 1 at a Liberian-flagged container ship in the Red Sea, a US defense official said, the latest attack by the rebels as America launches airstrikes targeting them.

The attack happened west of Hodeida, a port city in Yemen long held by the rebels, said the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, a British military group overseeing Mideast waterways. It said the crew and the vessel were safe and the blast came far off the vessel's starboard side.

The US defence official identified the targeted container ship as the Koi. Its management could not be immediately reached for comment. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

<

The Houthis did not immediately claim responsibility for the assault. The private security firm Ambrey reported Wednesday night that a ship was targeted with a missile southwest of



Aden, Yemen, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The Houthis claimed that attack also targeted the Koi, though American officials had no immediate information on any attack Wednesday night.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a

key route for global trade between Asia, the Mideast and Europe.

The Houthis hit a commercial vessel with a missile on January 26, sparking a fire that burned for hours.

Late Wednesday, American F/A-18 fighter jets struck and destroyed 10 Houthi drones that were prepared to launch, as well as a ground control station used by the rebels, the US military said. The US also intercepted a ballistic missile and other drones already in the air during the day. (AP)

Russian opposition figure Kara-Murza moved to another prison, placed in solitary confinement again

TALLINN (TIP): Lawyers for prominent Russian opposition figure Vladimir Kara-Murza Jr., who is serving a 25-year sentence for treason, said on January 30 that he has been transferred to another prison in Siberia and placed in solitary confinement again, for at least four months, over an alleged minor infraction.

The move comes amid unrelenting pressure on Russian dissidents at home and abroad that has intensified significantly since President Vladimir Putin sent troops into Ukraine almost two years ago.

Kara-Murza, 42, was held in a prison in the Omsk region, but his supporters said on Monday he apparently was no longer there.

Kara-Murza lawyer Maria Eismont told Russia's independent Novaya Gazeta newspaper on Tuesday that she had received a letter from him in which he said he was transferred to another penal colony in the city of Omsk and placed in a restricted housing unit for at least four months.

In the letter, a copy of which his other lawyer Vadim Prokhorov posted on Facebook, Kara-Murza said that prison officials on Friday accused him of disobeying a command he said wasn't even given to him.

"So now I'm in the IK-7 (penal colony),



also in Omsk," the politician said in the letter. "It is a special regime colony, there is a special restricted housing unit facility for repeat violators' like me. I'm in solitary confinement, of course," he wrote, adding that he was "fine," had enough food and it was warm in the facility.

Kara-Murza was arrested in 2022 and later sentenced to 25 years on charges

stemming from a speech that year to the Arizona House of Representatives in which he denounced Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Moves to neutralise opposition and stifle criticism intensified after the start of the war in Ukraine, including passage of a law criminalising reports seen as defaming the Russian military. (PTI)

China's Xi Jinping ready to 'break new ground' for France after Emmanuel Macron inks big defence deals with India

BEIJING (TIP): Chinese President Xi Jinping has offered to "break new ground" to give a fillip to the China-France ties, days after French President Emmanuel Macron's high-profile visit to India during which the two countries unveiled an ambitious defence roadmap besides intensifying cooperation in the strategic Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific region.

Macron's visit to India also coincided with the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and France.

In his message on the occasion, Xi said, "As today's world is once again at a critical crossroads, China and France should jointly open up a path of peace, security, prosperity and progress for human development."

Xi said China attaches great importance to the development of bilateral ties and he stands ready to work with Macron to take the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations as an "opportunity to uphold fundamental principles, break new ground, build on past achievements, open up a new



future, and make China-France comprehensive strategic partnership more solid and dynamic," the official media reported.

China has offered to step up French imports to the country, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

"We will continue to unleash consumer and investment market demand, continue to expand the import of high-quality products and services from France," he said and hoped that France, too, would provide Chinese companies with a fair, just and predictable business environment.

China is prioritising ties with France as Macron is pushing Europe to become a third bloc, a balancing force between the US and China.

Hailing China-France ties, Chinese official media has called for stepping up cooperation in high-tech areas.

"Scientific and technological cooperation between France and China has been a cornerstone of their relationship. From aerospace and the nuclear industry to renewable energy, the two countries have made significant strides in joint research and development", state-run China Daily said in its editorial. (PTI)

19 KILLED AFTER BUS, TRAILER COLLIDE IN MEXICO

MEXICO CITY (TIP): At least 19 people were killed after a double-decker passenger bus collided with a trailer on the Mazatlan-Culiacan Highway in northern Mexico, Sinaloa state Attorney General Sara Bruna Quinonez Estrada confirmed.

In a message posted on social media platform X, the head of the Sinaloa State Attorney General's Office said on January 30: "So far, according to the expert work that is still being carried out in that area, 19 lifeless bodies have been registered" at the site of the accident in the municipality of Elota.

"We still do not have the total number of people who were travelling; we are in the process of comparing it with the (bus) company's list," she added as quoted by Xinhua news agency report.

The bus burst into flames following the impact and bodies were burnt beyond recognition, so it will take time "to verify the identification" of the fatal victims, she said.

In a later statement, Sinaloa's government said the bus was travelling between Guadalajara and Los Mochis when the accident occurred at 5:15 a.m. local time on Tuesday.

The trailer overturned on the road when the bus drove into it, leading both vehicles to catch fire.

The cause of the accident has not been verified, according to local media. (IANS)

HONG KONG BEGINS WORK ON NATIONAL SECURITY LAW TO CURB DISSENT

HONG KONG (TIP): Hong Kong began public consultation on a local National Security Law on January 30, more than three years after Beijing imposed a similar law that has all but wiped out dissent in the semi-autonomous city.

The new law could expand the government's ability to prosecute residents for offenses like collaborating with foreign forces to influence legislation or "publish misleading statements", and to close down civil society organisations.

Some of its provisions threaten criminal prosecutions for acts committed anywhere in the world.

Hong Kong's mini-constitution, the Basic Law, calls for the city to enact a national security law, but it's been delayed for decades because of widespread public opposition based on fears it would erode civil liberties. In 2003, an attempt to pass a version of the law sparked street protests that drew half a million people, and the legislation was shelved. (PTI)

HASINA'S DAUGHTER TAKES CHARGE AS WHO REGIONAL HEAD

DHAKA (TIP): Saima Wazed, the daughter of Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina, on February 1 assumed charge as Regional Director for the World Health Organization South-East Asia Region. Wazed is the first from Bangladesh and the second woman to hold this office.

She was nominated by members of the WHO South-East Asia at the Regional Committee session on November 1 in New Delhi and appointed by the WHO Executive Board on January 23 in Geneva. (TNS)

GENERAL ELECTIONS IN PAKISTAN WILL BE HELD ON FEBRUARY 8: CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER, INTERIOR MINISTER

ISLAMABAD (TIP): Despite increasing poll-related violence and security challenges, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sikanadar Sultan Raja and Pakistan's acting interior minister Gohar Ejaz on February 1 dispelled all doubts about holding the general elections on the already announced date of February 8.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had summoned a meeting on Thursday to discuss the worsening law and order situation in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. It was attended by the Interior Minister, Secretary of Interior, Chief Secretaries, Inspector Generals of Police from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, along with representatives from intelligence agencies, according to a statement by the ECP.

"The Feb 8 election will be held on time. Despite security challenges, the ECP is fully prepared," the CEC said addressing the meeting, adding that those trying to create disturbance would be tackled with the help of law enforcing agencies, including the army. "In this regard, no leniency will be shown to anyone," he said.

Raja expressed concern at the fragile law and order in the two provinces, especially at the attacks on the office of the ECP and political parties, but he announced the electoral process would not be affected by these attacks.

Ejaz, the acting interior minister, while briefly talking to the media after the security meeting, said that after the recent spate of terrorist attacks in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, "There should not be any doubt about elections. No matter what happens." "The government will ensure that the elections are held on February 8," he said in response to a question regarding rumours about a possible delay in the elections in some regions due to security reasons. (PTI)

Now, Imran, wife jailed for 14 years in graft case

ISLAMABAD (TIP): Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were sentenced on Wednesday to 14 years of rigorous imprisonment each in a corruption case, a day after the beleaguered leader was given a 10-year jail term for leaking state secrets.

The verdict by an accountability court, which comes eight days before the February 8 general elections, has added to the legal woes of the 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician's bid to return to power.

HC reserves verdict in marriage case
The Islamabad High Court reserved its verdict on a petition seeking dismissal of a case challenging the "un-Islamic" marriage of Imran to Bushra Bibi, his third wife.

Bibi's ex-husband had filed the case, seeking action against Imran as Bibi had been reportedly on iddat period.

Rejection of nomination papers Challenged

Imran has filed a plea in the Supreme Court challenging the rejection of his nomination papers for two National Assembly seats in Punjab province for the February 8 polls.

Earlier this month, the Lahore High Court had turned down his plea, upholding the decisions of the returning officer.

Khan is already serving a three-year jail term after being convicted of corruption in a separate Toshakhana



case on August 5 last year. Khan's party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) faced numerous troubles before the election starting with the denial of its election symbol, the cricket bat, to the rejection of nomination papers of Khan, former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and several other party leaders.

In the Toshakhana corruption case, he was accused of retaining expensive state gifts they received during his tenure as Pakistan's premier from 2018-2022.

Khan and his wife were also barred

from holding any public office for 10 years and slapped with a fine of Rs 787 million each. Bushra Bibi, 49, did not appear before the court on Wednesday.

At the outset of the hearing, Judge Bashir asked Khan if he recorded his statement. To this, the former premier said that he would submit his statement once his lawyers came.

"I have been deceived as I was only called to mark my attendance for the hearing," Khan said. Following the verdict, Bushra Bibi arrived at the Adiala jail and surrendered before the authorities. (PTI)

Six Sri Lankan fishermen abducted by suspected Somali pirates rescued: Navy

COLOMBO (TIP): All six Sri Lankan fishermen who were abducted by suspected Somali pirates last week have been rescued, a media report on January 30 quoted the navy spokesperson as saying.

Online portal newsfirst.lk reported that the rescued fishermen, who were aboard the vessel named 'Lorenzo Putha 4', are being escorted to the capital of Seychelles.

The security forces of Seychelles carried out a rescue operation following the intervention made by the Sri Lanka Navy, it said, adding that three members of the armed group had surrendered to the Seychelles Security Forces.

The multi-day fishing trawler Lorenzo Putha-4 set sail from Dikowita fishing harbour in Sri Lanka on January 12, marking its maiden voyage.

The crew comprised six fishermen from Marawila, Chilaw, and three of them are from the same family, the report said.

Sri Lanka Navy spokesman Gayan Wickremasuriya on Sunday said the UN's central maritime command was alerted by Sri Lanka on Saturday on the six fishermen and their trawler being captured by the Somali pirates 840 nautical miles southeast of Mogadishu.

He said India has pledged to assist Sri Lanka in the rescue of the fishermen. However, the online portal report made no mention of any Indian assistance in the rescue operation.

The abduction came days after Colombo announced it would join a US-led operation to protect merchant vessels sailing in the Red Sea against attacks by Yemen-based Houthi rebels. (PTI)

Maldives Opposition readies impeachment motion against pro-China President Muizzu

MALE (TIP): The main opposition MDP, which holds a majority in the Maldivian Parliament, is planning to submit a motion to impeach President Mohamed Muizzu even as three members of his cabinet were denied approval during a parliamentary vote on January 31, according to media reports here.

The development comes a day after clashes broke out in Parliament on Sunday between pro-government MPs and opposition lawmakers over differences over the approval of four members of the pro-China President's cabinet.

Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in the presidential runoff held in September last year. "The MDP, in partnership with the Democrats, have gathered enough signatures for an impeachment motion. However, they have yet to submit it," Sun.com reported, quoting a lawmaker from the MDP.

The decision to submit an impeachment motion was taken unanimously in the parliamentary group meeting of the MDP held on Monday, The Edition.mv reported.

"The Constitution, along with the Parliament's standing orders, dictates that the president can be impeached with 56 votes," the Sun.com added.

The Parliament had recently amended its standing orders to make it easier to submit an impeachment motion.

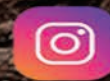
The Maldivian Parliament has a total of 80 members. The Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has 45, followed by its ally The Democrats (DEM) with 13 members.

Of the ruling coalition of PPM-PNC, the Progressive Party of the Maldives has 2 while the People's National Congress has 13 members. There are three independents while the Jumhooree Party and the Maldives Development Alliance (MDA) have two each. (PTI)

ANNOUNCING THE FILM

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How to apply lipstick like a makeup pro

Finding the perfect lipstick that suits you is a task, no doubt. But, what's even more of a hassle is finding the right one and not knowing how to apply lipstick perfectly. While one might think that the whole application process is easy and breezy, it takes more than a steady hand to make the most out of your lip makeup products. Follow along to find out how to put on lipstick like a pro.

Prep Your Lips

This first step how to apply lipstick perfectly is crucial if you want your lips to look smooth and soft when the lip colour is applied. Always exfoliate your pout with a gentle scrub (you can even use coffee grounds or sugar) — this prevents it from looking flakey, patchy, or uneven and textured. Soon after washing it off and patting your lips dry, make sure you top it off with a hydrating and nourishing lip balm. This also increases the longevity of your lipstick, lip gloss or liquid lip, especially if you're using a matte lipstick.

Prepare The Base

The next step in how to apply lipstick is that you need a clean and clear canvas in order for you to paint away, right? So, go ahead and set that base. If you've got discoloured dark lips or dual-toned lips, make sure you add a concealer or foundation to even it out and lighten your lips a little. This way you'll get the true colour of your lipstick and won't be left surprised when the bullet doesn't match the colour on your lips.

Line Away

It's always a good idea to line your lips before going in with lipstick. Apply a lip liner on the entire base of your lips, instead of just a line around it. This step of how to apply lipstick properly helps increase the longevity of your lipstick set colour and helps guide you when you top it off with your actual lipstick.

Go With The Flow

Always go with the natural shape of your lips. When overdrawing them, make sure the line is slightly higher than your natural lip line. Remember to just overdraw your cupid's bow and the more plumper parts of your



bottom lip. Lighter hues will make your lips appear bigger. If you want your pout to appear smaller, then use a darker colour when lining your lips and make sure you match the line of your natural lips to the liner.

Precise Application

If you're looking for a more precise approach (or you have a shaky hand) feel free to use a lip brush to apply your lip product. This is especially important for lipsticks that are being shared by a couple of people, as it prevents cross-contamination of bacteria. This is another tip on how to apply lipstick perfectly.

Conceal Away

Made A Mistake? No problem. Simply use a brush and a concealer to erase those errors.

Always Blot

Whether you apply a liquid lipstick or a bullet one, always remember to blot to set your colour. You can do this by keeping a tissue between your lips while you purse them. This also removes any excess product on your lips and prevents it from bleeding or spilling outside the natural lip line.



Women tend to gain weight in high demand jobs

Women who face heavy psychological pressures at work are more likely to gain weight, a study claims.

The study, published in the journal *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, included data from over 3,872 participants in Sweden.

"We were able to see that high job demands played a part in women's weight gain, while for men there was no association between high demands and weight gain," said Sofia Klingberg, a researcher at University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

The participants in the study were investigated on three occasions over a 20-year period with respect to such variables as body weight and demands and control at work. They were followed either from age 30 to 50 or from 40 to 60.

To estimate the level of job demands, the respondents were asked about their work pace, psychological pressures, whether there was enough time for their duties and how often the demands made were contradictory.

The questions about control at work covered such matters as how often they learned something new; whether the job called for imagination or advanced skills; and whether the respondent was personally able to choose what to do and how to do it.

The results show that the respondents with a low degree of control in their work more frequently gained considerable weight, defined as a weight gain of 10 percent or more, in the course of the study. This applied to women and men alike.

FOOD CORNER

Egg Curry

Ingredients

6 hard-boiled eggs, 5 tbsp. cooking oil (vegetable, canola, or sunflower), 2 medium-sized onion (cut into quarters), 3 medium-sized tomatoes (cut into quarters), 2 green chilies, 2 tsp. garlic paste, 2 tsp. ginger paste, 2 tsp. coriander powder, 1 tsp. cumin powder, 1 tsp. garam masala powder, 1/2 tsp. turmeric powder, 1/2 tsp. red chili powder, Salt to taste, Optional: 2 potatoes cut into 1-inch cubes.

To Garnish: Chopped fresh coriander leaves.

To Garnish: 2 green chilies, slit lengthwise

Method

- Heat 2 tbsp. of the cooking oil in a deep pan and when hot, add the onions.
- Fry till slightly golden. Turn off the fire. Use a slotted spoon to remove the onions from the pan and put them in a food processor.

- Grind the onions, tomatoes, and green chilies into a smooth paste.
- Try not to add water while grinding, if possible.
- Heat the remaining oil in the same pan and add the paste you just made.
- Fry for 2 to 3 minutes.
- Add the ginger and garlic pastes, all the dry spices (coriander powder, cumin powder, garam masala powder, turmeric powder, and red chili powder) then mix and fry till the oil begins to separate from the masala (onion-tomato-spice mix).
- Add 2 cups of warm water to this masala and bring to a boil on a medium flame.
- If adding potatoes to the curry, add them now and cook till half done. Half slit the boiled eggs vertically and add them gently to the gravy. Simmer the flame and cook for 10 minutes or till the gravy has thickened or reduced to about 3/4 of the original quantity (before you added the water). If you have added potatoes they should ideally be cooked by now. Turn off the fire and garnish with chopped coriander leaves.



New AI-based test to detect ovarian cancer early with 93% accuracy

Scientists have combined machine learning with information on blood metabolites to develop a new test able to detect ovarian cancer with 93 per cent accuracy. For over three decades, a highly accurate early diagnostic test for ovarian cancer has eluded physicians.

Ovarian cancer is often referred to as the silent killer because the disease is typically asymptomatic when it first arises — and is usually not detected until later stages of development, when it is difficult to treat. According to John McDonald, Professor in the School of Biological Sciences at Georgia Institute of Technology, US, the new test's accuracy is better in detecting ovarian cancer than existing tests for women clinically classified as normal, with a particular improvement in detecting early-stage ovarian disease in that cohort.

The new test, published in the online issue of the medical journal *Gynecologic Oncology*, uses a patient's individual metabolic profile to assign a more accurate probability of the presence or absence of the disease. "This personalised, probabilistic approach to cancer diagnostics is more clinically informative and accurate than traditional binary (yes/no) tests," McDonald said.

"It represents a promising new



direction in the early detection of ovarian cancer, and perhaps other cancers as well." McDonald said that while the average five-year survival rate for late-stage ovarian cancer patients, even after treatment, is around 31 per cent — but that if ovarian cancer is detected and treated early, the average five-year survival rate is more than 90 per cent. "Clearly, there is a tremendous need for an accurate early diagnostic test for this insidious disease," McDonald said.

And although development of an early detection test for ovarian cancer has been vigorously pursued for more than three decades, the development of early, accurate diagnostic tests has proven elusive.

Because cancer begins on the molecular level, McDonald said,

there are multiple possible pathways capable of leading to even the same cancer type.

"Because of this high-level molecular heterogeneity among patients, the identification of a single universal diagnostic biomarker of ovarian cancer has not been possible. "For this reason, we opted to use a branch of artificial intelligence — machine learning — to develop an alternative probabilistic approach to the challenge of ovarian cancer diagnostics." The researchers developed their integrative approach by combining metabolomic profiles and machine learning-based classifiers to establish a diagnostic test with 93 per cent accuracy when tested on 564 women from Georgia, North Carolina, Philadelphia, and western Canada. *Source: IANS*

Sepsis, tropical fever most common causes for community-acquired acute kidney injury in India

Sepsis and tropical fever were found to be the most common causes of community acquired-acute kidney injury (CA-AKI) in India, whereby kidneys fail to filter waste from the blood, according to a new research published in *The Lancet Regional Health-Southeast Asia* journal.

While sepsis refers to the presence of pus-forming bacteria or their toxins in the blood or tissues, tropical fever is the infection characterised by fever and unique to or prevalent in tropical or subtropical regions.

Conducted across nine tertiary care centres in India, the study also found that the most common comorbidities in these CA-AKI patients included hypertension and diabetes.

The team of scientists, including those from Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical



Sciences, Uttar Pradesh, and Madras Medical College, Tamil Nadu, observed that presenting CA-AKI patients to tertiary care units was associated with high mortality.

They also found that a significant number of these patients progressed to developing chronic kidney disease (CKD).

The findings underscored the high mortality risk among patients

from most deprived socio-economic groups, the researchers said, urging for immediate attention for targeted interventions. Previous evidence has found CA-AKI to be common in India and other low and middle-income countries (LMICs).

For the study, the team included 3,711 CA-AKI patients older than 12 years and admitted to either the inpatient or emergency departments of the participating hospitals. They defined CA-AKI as "AKI occurring outside the hospital setting - typically in the community or home setting". AKI recently replaced the term "acute renal failure".

The researchers constructed the participants' clinical, demographic, and socioeconomic profiles, along with collecting data regarding their risk factors and causes, comorbidities, complications and patient outcomes. *Source: PTI*



80% of glaucoma cases go undetected in India, say experts

A whopping 80 per cent cases of glaucoma -- the third most common cause of blindness -- goes undetected in India, said experts here on Wednesday. Glaucoma is a disease that affects the optic nerve. January is national glaucoma awareness month, a time to spread awareness about the disease.

Glaucoma is also known as the "sneak thief of sight", because there are no early symptoms. It is also the leading cause of irreversible blindness, affecting more than 80 million people worldwide.

"Glaucoma is a group of eye conditions that damage the optic nerve, leading to progressive vision loss. It typically presents with no symptoms in its early stages, making regular eye examinations crucial for early detection," Ikeda Lal, Senior Cornea, Cataract and Refractive Surgery Specialist, at Delhi Eye Centre and Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, New Delhi told IANS.

Lal explained that as the condition progresses, one may experience blurred vision, difficulty adjusting to low light, reduced peripheral (side) vision, and seeing halos around lights. Few patients may even experience eye pain and headache.

"If you notice any of these symptoms, it's important to see an eye doctor for a comprehensive eye exam," the doctor said.

Approximately, 11.2 million people aged 40 years and older have glaucoma in India but only 20 per cent of them know they have it. It is because the disease initially has no symptoms.

Although glaucoma primarily affects the middle-aged and the elderly, it can affect people of all ages, according to experts.

"Vision loss in glaucoma is caused by damage to the optic nerve which is responsible for carrying images from the eye to the brain. Vision loss or impairment may be associated with reduced quality of life and decreased ability to perform activities of daily living, including loss of independence, restricted mobility, depression, and anxiety," Rohit Saxena, R P Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, AIIMS, New Delhi, told IANS.

Source: IANS

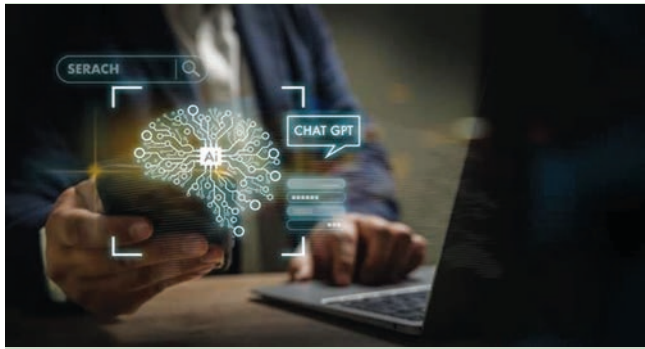
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DR. SATISH AND GITANJLI ANAND



DR. SATISH ANAND
Former Chairman, Board of Trustees, AAPI National
E-Mail: sanandmd@gmail.com

GITANJLI ANAND
Former President, India Association of Long Island (IALI)
E-mail: gitanjlianand@gmail.com



Users can now bring GPTs into any conversation in OpenAI's ChatGPT

OpenAI is promoting GPTs, third-party apps powered by AI models, by enabling its AI chatbot ChatGPT users to invoke them in any chat. ChatGPT users can use GPTs in conversations by typing "@" and selecting one from the list. The GPT chosen will understand the full conversation, and different GPTs can be "tagged in" to meet different needs and use cases. "You can now bring GPTs into any conversation in ChatGPT - simply type @ and select the GPT," OpenAI posted on X on January 30. "This allows you to add relevant GPTs with the full context of the conversation," it added.

It comes weeks after ChatGPT launched the GPT Store, a marketplace for GPTs accessible through the dashboard to make GPTs more discoverable.

To access the GPT Store, users must be subscribed to one of OpenAI's premium ChatGPT plans ChatGPT Plus, ChatGPT Enterprise or the newly-launched ChatGPT Team.

The Sam Altman-run company also announced it will start a revenue-sharing programme with GPT creators in the first quarter of the year.

Since announcing the GPT Builder programme in November, OpenAI said that more than three million GPTs have been created by users. *Source: IANS*

Apple's Vision Pro is new, but big tech's fascination with face computers is not

There is excitement and skepticism surrounding Apple Vision Pro, the tech giant's first new product in over a decade. With the mixed-reality headset going on sale on February 2, Apple will be judged on how developers respond to the \$3,500 device and whether those developers see potential in creating apps for the Vision Pro. The headset is launching at a crucial time when Cupertino is under pressure to look beyond the iPhone and open new avenues of growth. Critics are watching to see how Apple's gamble with immersive experiences pays off.

But more than technology, it is user behaviour that will decide whether Apple's Vision Pro is a success or not. History shows that tech companies have had trouble mainstreaming face computers on the lines of smartphones and PCs. Much of the problem lies in getting average people to get used to a headset that is bulky and looks weird when strapped onto their face.

The criticism is valid and Apple is no exception. The Vision Pro is marketed as a new type of "spatial computer" that is worn on your face. Instead of looking at the screen as you do on your smartphone, the output is beamed directly in front of your eyes using two high-resolution displays not too far from you. A device like the Vision Pro transforms your physical space into a giant screen floating in the air. Additionally, Apple ditches the traditional control mechanisms like a keyboard, mouse, or touchscreen, and instead tracks your eyes and hands for inputs.

The tech industry's fascination with face computers dates back to the 1960s when American computer scientist Ivan Sutherland introduced the first head-mounted display with the help of his student Bob Sproull. That head-mounted virtual reality display system was so



heavy that it had to be suspended from the ceiling. The device was primitive both in terms of graphics and realism, but it laid the foundation for Virtual Reality, VR as it is commonly known, where users interact in a three-dimensional space around them. The development of VR sped up in research labs since then, and the technology began to be heavily marketed through Hollywood movies.

By the 80s and 90s, companies like Sega and Nintendo started to launch dedicated VR gaming systems with a focus on 3D gaming, but none of the devices were able to bring virtual reality into mainstream conversations. The Sega VR, heavily promoted at the Consumer Electronics Show in 1993, had head tracking, stereo sound, and LCD screens in the visor. Sega intended to commercially release the headset at a price point of \$200, but technical difficulties led to the project's cancellation, and the wrap-around glasses remained a prototype and were never released. *Source: The Indian Express*

Twitterrific's team is back with Tapestry, an app for tracking social media, news

The Iconfactory, the maker of a popular third-party Twitter client, Twitterrific, that was among those killed off by Twitter under Elon Musk's management, is hoping to recover from its losses with a new app that combines your social media, news feeds and alerts into one experience. The app, dubbed "Project Tapestry" as it launches on Kickstarter, will support Twitter/X alternatives like Bluesky, Mastodon and Tumblr, and possibly Instagram Threads when its developer API becomes available. However, it won't support X itself due to the company's ban on third-party apps.

A working prototype of Project Tapestry has already been developed and if The Iconfactory is able to raise \$100,000 in funding through Kickstarter it will further develop the app to be launched to the public.

As described, Project Tapestry is meant to organize today's fragmented online media into one interface, by allowing users to follow a variety of sources in one place. For instance, you could track your favorite blogs, news sites, social networks and webcomics, as well as critical updates that used to come via Twitter, like weather alerts or earthquake warnings.

This would involve working with any site that offers an RSS feed, which most blogs and news sites (without a paywall) already do. It would also integrate with the startups that are offering Twitter alternatives, like Bluesky, powered by the new AT Protocol, and Mastodon, which will be powered by another



emerging web standard, ActivityPub.

Other planned sources include Tumblr, Micro.blog, USGS Earthquakes, NOAA Satellite and GO Comics. Facebook and Instagram will not be available, though.

After setup, Tapestry would organize all your updates into one feed, displayed in chronological order. Plus, the app could remove duplicates to cut down on the clutter — like when someone posts a link to multiple social networks at once. In the new app, those mentions could be combined, so you only see the post one time.

Astronomers in Chile to use largest-ever digital camera to study universe

Surrounded by the desert mountains and clear blue sky of northern Chile, astronomers from the Vera C. Rubin Observatory hope to revolutionize the study of the universe by affixing the world's largest-ever digital camera to a telescope.

The size of a small car and weighing 2.8 metric tons, the sophisticated piece of equipment will reveal views of the cosmos as never before, officials from the US-funded project told AFP. Beginning in early 2025, when the \$800 million camera will snap its first photos, the machine will sweep the sky every three days, allowing scientists to reach new heights in their galactic analyses.

Researchers will be able to go from "studying one star and knowing everything in-depth about that one star, to studying thousands of stars at a time," said Bruno Dias, president of the Chilean Society of Astronomy (Sochias). *Source: AFP*

Red Sea disruption hits UK manufacturing at start of 2024: PMI

British manufacturing started 2024 on a weak footing, recording an 18th consecutive month of contraction as orders fell and disruption to Red Sea shipping delayed deliveries, a survey showed on Thursday, February 1.

The S&P Global Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for manufacturing rose to 47.0 in January from 46.2 the month before, a two-month high but below an earlier preliminary estimate of 47.3 which had been the highest since April 2023. Readings below 50 represent a fall in activity.

Manufacturing has been persistently weaker than Britain's service sector, which recorded moderate growth in January according to preliminary PMI data.

"Companies linked lower output to weaker new work inflows, efforts to reduce inventory holdings and disruption caused by supply chain delays," S&P Global said.

Businesses reported that delays to deliveries increased at the fastest pace since November 2022, as ships rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope rather than travel via the Red Sea, where they are at risk of attacks from Iran-backed Houthis.

Deliveries from east Asia were taking at least 12-18 days longer as a result, manufacturers said.

So far economists have forecast relatively little economic impact in Britain from the conflict. The Bank of England, which is monitoring the situation, is due to publish new quarterly inflation forecasts at 1200 GMT along with its latest interest rate decision.

Many economists expect British consumer price inflation – which was 4% in December – to be below the BoE's 2% target by April or May.

However, Thursday's survey showed manufacturers' input costs rose at the fastest pace since March 2023, after the biggest month-on-month jump in the index since September 2022. Output prices rose by the most since September, as manufacturers began to pass on the increased costs to customers.

New orders fell due to weaker demand domestically and from customers in the United States, China, the European Union, Canada and the Middle East.

"There were ... reports of low customer confidence, order cancellations and client destocking all negatively impacting new work inflows," S&P Global said.

India Inc hails Interim Budget but rues absence of big bang announcements

NEW DELHI (TIP)

India Inc welcomed the Interim Budget but regretted the absence of any big bang announcement.

Even though the government failed to present the Medium-term Expenditure Framework Statement, which charts the economic trajectory for the next few years, CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee said a \$7 trillion economy is achievable even before 2030.

FICCI president Anish Shah said the Interim Budget was "a clear and outcome-based continuum towards Viksit Bharat" as it brings together growth, climate and social empowerment while maintaining a careful balance between current investment rate and fiscal discipline.

SBI Chairman Dinesh Khara said the heartening news was that the anticipated tax buoyancy in fiscal 24 excluding the outlier pandemic year was the highest in seven years. The Interim Budget has also laid out reinforced architecture of big possibilities, he said.

Financial analyst Madhavi Arora felt the Interim Budget was short of any big bang announcements, but the policy prerogatives and spirit had not been derailed.

PHF Leasing's CEO Shalya Gupta said it was good to see the government continuing its thrust on the EV sector. "With a robust ecosystem in place, the financing solutions become easier to implement with the risk of default decreasing. We are hoping that in the full Budget to be presented after the elections, the new government will continue with its policy thrust on job creation through opportunities presented by the electric light commercial vehicle segment," he added.

Bourses unimpressed, close lower on Budget day

The Interim Budget failed to galvanise the stock markets which ended lower on Thursday, Feb 1, as many indices ended the session on a weak note.

The BSE Sensex ended 106.81 points lower at 71,645.30



points and the NSE Nifty also moved in tandem, ending at 21,697.45 points.

Notable exceptions to the weak trend were shares of bank and financial services companies, which underwent a hammering in previous trading sessions. Among the stock that fell during the day were those of Grasim, L&T, Ultratech Cement, Dr Reddy's and JSW Steel. Apart from banks, some other Nifty gainers were Maruti Suzuki, Power Grid, Cipla, SBI Life and Eicher Motors.

Stocks of companies related to the railways gave up initial gains and ended lower on Thursday, February 1 after the presentation of the Interim Budget. Shares of IRCON International declined 3.69 per cent, Rail Vikas Nigam went lower by 3.49%, Indian Railway Finance Corporation fell by 2.85% and Jupiter Wagons skidded 1.93% on the BSE.

Oil buoyed higher by US rate cut expectations

Oil prices edged higher on Thursday, Feb 1, boosted by the U.S. Federal Reserve signalling a possible start to interest rate cuts in coming months. Brent crude futures were up 61 cents at \$81.16 a barrel at 11:23 a.m. EST (1623 GMT). U.S. West Texas Intermediate crude futures were up 62 cents to \$76.47.

There was limited immediate price impact after two OPEC+ sources said the group would decide in March whether or not to extend voluntary oil production cuts in place for the first quarter, after a ministerial panel meeting made no changes to the group's output policy.

OPEC+ currently has 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) of voluntary oil production cuts, announced last November.

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell on Wednesday said interest rates had peaked and would move lower in coming months, with inflation continuing to fall and an expectation of sustained economic growth.

Lower interest rates and economic growth help oil demand.

Powell declined to promise that rate cuts would come as early as the Fed's March 19-20 meeting, as investors had hoped.

The U.S. also released on Thursday, Feb 1, data showing worker productivity grew faster than expected in the fourth quarter, keeping unit labour costs contained and giving the Fed another boost in the fight against inflation.

U.S. manufacturing stabilized in January amid a rebound in new orders, but inflation at the factory gate picked up.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) said on Thursday, February 1, that its manufacturing PMI increased to 49.1 last month, while economists polled by Reuters had forecast the



index dipping to 47.0.

"Data from ISM came in stronger than expected, which is good for oil demand and supportive for prices," said Phil Flynn, analyst with Price Futures Group.

In China, the world's second-biggest economy, leaders revealed new support measures to help to reduce fallout from the liquidation of property developer Evergrande (3333.HK), opens new tab.

Analysts at JPMorgan said they expected China to remain the single largest contributor to global oil demand growth in 2024, forecasting that Chinese demand would increase by 530,000 bpd, having jumped by 1.2 million bpd last year.

Source: Reuters



BEJAN DARUWALLA AND CHIRAG DARUWALLA



ARIES : Ganesha says Aries sign people will get the fame and name they deserve this week. You have reached this level only because of your communication skills. So don't let anything fall in your way, keep up your efforts, and don't let your ego get in your way. This will keep people respecting you. You may get into an argument at home this week. So, you have to keep your words and anger under control. Decisions taken with a calm heart are never wrong. On the other hand, the haste and anger done at this time can cause domestic problems for you for a long time. Don't let the troubles of your life become so heavy that they overwhelm you. Remember, this time too shall pass. If misunderstandings have created space between you and a friend, find a solution as soon as possible. Letting things drag on for too long can be bad for your relationship. This week you can expect someone to come into your life who will change a lot your life for good. You may unexpectedly meet someone who can give you some important advice related to your business or personal life.



TAURUS : Ganesha says this week will be very auspicious for the family life of people with the Taurus zodiac sign. You will find him standing by your side in every trouble. Similarly, you should also be ready to help them when needed. Generally, the people of the Taurus zodiac are not afraid of taking risks. Keep going this week as well and you will find that those who were criticizing you are also with you now. Although the environment of your home will be satisfactory, due to work, distance from your family is possible at this time. Despite all this, any worry related to the family itself can be eating you inside. In such a situation, it is important that before taking any decision, you should think deeply about it and only then come to any conclusion. Otherwise, a wrong decision can land you in trouble and regret it for a long time.



GEMINI : Ganesha says to control your speech otherwise, you may have to repent for your harsh words later. This week you will probably be very worried. You will get relief from this stress only along with your family and friends. On the other hand, this will be a very auspicious time to think and make plans for your future. Gemini people who are going through some troubles now is the time to change your strategy to achieve your goals. This step will be auspicious for your future. This week's festivities will serve an important purpose. It may be that an important deal is finalized or one of your projects may reach its final stage.



CANCER : Ganesha says cancer signs people may remain worried about many aspects of their life this week. You may feel that the goal you set for yourself is impossible to

WEEKLY HOROSCOPE - FEB 5 TO FEB 11, 2024

By Chirag Daruwalla - Son of Astrologer Bejan Daruwalla

achieve. But this is not the time to lose courage but to increase our efforts. During this period, your family will be useful to you. They are ready to help you in every possible way, so ask them for advice. Whatever advice the elders of the house give you, they will give you keeping your interests in mind. So, if you are facing any problem in completing any task then you can depend on them. So, if any kind of stress is troubling you then try to control your mind. Along with this, through introspection, you can come out of any worry. On the other hand, your ability to resolve a matter with confidence will help you to face tough situations with calmness. This week it is necessary for the people of the Cancer zodiac to have complete control over their resentment towards others.



LEO : Ganesha says this week has brought some struggles for people of the Leo zodiac sign. But you don't need to panic as this is another step towards your success. Your friends and family members supported you a lot in the past. Now it's your turn to show your gratitude to them and assure them that you too will be there for them in their time of need. Finally, the time has come when you must settle down. Pick the most difficult area of your life-whether it's money, home, or work-and start working on it. Leo people are inflexible about work, but this week you will feel a little more ruthless and ruthless in your struggle to get something.



VIRGO : Ganesha says your family life will be good this week. If small disputes are left, then there will be an atmosphere of happiness and peace in the house. You will seem satisfied with your family life. There will be a feeling of togetherness and love in the family. There will also be harmony in the family towards each other. There is a strong possibility of an increase in ancestral property at this time. Brothers and sisters can get some achievement. If any kind of trouble comes to the family, then the whole family will have to face that challenge together. Everyone will be involved not only in the troubles but also in the happiness of the family.



LIBRA : Ganesha says this week you will have to work hard to get success in your career. This week you will have to move forward with new ideas for success in your job and business. In this matter, advice from senior officials can prove beneficial for you. There are chances of undertaking some journey in connection with work. You are likely to benefit from them. Adopting some new methods in business will be beneficial. This week will be special for your love life. You will enjoy time with your loved partner. At the beginning of this week, you will be looking for a chance to sit with your loved one and express your heart. Family life will be a little better than usual this week.



SCORPIO : Ganesha says this week will bring new responsibilities for the people of the Scorpio zodiac. Everyone may depend on your skill and ability to solve any family problem. This may be new and unknown territory for you, but despite that, you should try your best to solve this problem. Planetary positions indicate some such incidents in which your loved ones will feel better safe and protected

under the umbrella of your loving love. Your efforts will be appreciated. Apart from this, people of the Scorpio zodiac sign may spend a lot of time on phones and social media this week. But keep in mind that in the process of talking to your loved ones, you should not forget your responsibilities. You are also likely to make unexpected financial gains. The reason for this will be the vital energy inside you, which will keep you energized this week.



Sagittarius

SAGITTARIUS : Ganesha says job professionals can get promotions this week, as well as some good news can be received in both job and business. This week your financial side is also going to be very strong. Because there are many chances of profit Your financial condition will be strengthened and your respect will increase in society due to an increase in income and gain of wealth. If you talk about your love life and married life, then this week you will get happiness in both your love life and married life. The loving couple will go a step ahead and give new strength to their relationship. The love between you and your beloved will increase. At the same time, this week there will be peace and harmony in family life. Parents will be happy and their blessings will bring happiness and prosperity in the home.



Capricorn

CAPRICORN : Ganesha says misunderstandings may arise in your life this week, so be careful. Pay attention to your words, so that you do not say anything wrong to your friends. Don't say anything that will hurt them. You will be able to make your relationships stronger by staying calm. Chances are that people around you may remain angry, which can affect your mood as well. But don't worry because this time too will pass. You just focus on your work. You are full of extraordinary ideas but these thoughts will lose their importance if you are not able to express them properly.



Aquarius

AQUARIUS : Ganesha says this week, Aquarius people will have to use their cleverness and intelligence to resolve delicate issues at home and office. Make sure you don't start by observing others arguing. If someone is behaving rudely or rudely with you then talk politely and go away from there, everything will be fine soon. But do not lose hope of achieving your target at any cost. This week you would like to give up your bad habits and adopt good habits. Use this week to know yourself better and set yourself up for success. Higher officials will help you this week.



Pisces

PISCES : Ganesha says Pisces people may feel that time is running out for them, but the truth is that luck is with you this week. It is possible that you may not get any help from your friends and coworkers. But before making any opinion, remember that every coin has two sides. The thing you have been searching for a long time can be found this week. Not only this, if you try you can find everything that you thought was lost for so long. Consider yourself fortunate this week. Your hard work and dedication will be widely acknowledged and appreciated. This will motivate you to continue your work. Generally, you are more dependent on your friends for emotional stability and happiness.

BIRTHDAY HOROSCOPE : FEBRUARY 5 TO FEBRUARY 11 BY VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR BEJAN DARUWALLA



**VEDIC ASTROLOGER NASTUR
BEJAN DARUWALLA**

FEBRUARY 5 : Ganesha says because of the burst of energy and determination that characterizes this day, it is an excellent time to tackle any lingering projects or duties that you have been avoiding undertaking. Even though you have a high level of productivity, you also have a tendency to rush. Always keep in mind that precision is more important than speed. In things that are close to the heart, a simple expression of gratitude can go a long way. Are you single? It's possible that an unexpected encounter will pique your curiosity, but patience is essential. For the sake of your health, you should make getting enough rest and staying hydrated a priority.

FEBRUARY 6 : Ganesha says the day is centered around the concepts of introspection and reflection. This is the ideal opportunity to reevaluate your objectives and the strategies you are employing in order to accomplish them. It's possible that you'll discover that the things you've been working toward are no longer in line with what you truly want. This realization should be embraced; it is never too late to make a course correction. In a social setting, a friend can ask for your guidance or support. While listening with an open heart, it is important to have limits in order to safeguard your energy.

FEBRUARY 7 : Ganesha says in

professional situations, today presents you with the challenge of stepping outside of your comfort zone. Participate actively in meetings, provide unique suggestions, or take the initiative to lead a project. There will be recognition for your initiative. As a result of the possibility of unforeseen expenditures, it is prudent to examine and modify your budget in accordance with the circumstances. In your personal life, you might find that a quarrel puts your patience to the limit. You should approach it with compassion and a willingness to comprehend the viewpoint of the other party.

FEBRUARY 8 : Ganesha says today is a day that is filled with creativity, making it an ideal day for engaging in artistic endeavors or coming up with inventive solutions to problems at work. Not only will your ideas garner good attention, but you should not be afraid to provide them. Whether you are single or in a relationship, you can feel the presence of romance in the air. In order to strengthen your connection, you should organize a memorable evening or a considerate surprise. When it comes to your health, you should think about including mindfulness or meditation into your routine so that you may completely harness this creative force.

FEBRUARY 9 : Ganesha says there is a

possibility that you are feeling a heavy burden of obligation and responsibility today. In spite of the fact that it is essential to fulfill your commitments, you must not allow them to eclipse your desire for personal time. Finding a happy medium is essential. There may be a member of your family or a close friend who needs your care. While providing support helps to enhance your connection, you should be careful not to overextend yourself in the process. In terms of one's finances, today is an excellent day to make preparations for the future, potentially by way of investments or savings plans.

FEBRUARY 10 : Ganesha says it is possible that a course, workshop, or seminar will present itself as a chance for personal or professional development. An opportunity like this could come about. Take full use of this opportunity to broaden your knowledge and abilities. There is also the possibility that your social circle will expand, allowing you to meet individuals who have similar interests or aspirations. Through the course of time, these ties might prove to be beneficial. As far as your health is concerned, engaging in physical activity not only gives you more energy but also helps you to clear your mind.

FEBRUARY 11 : Ganesha says because of today's heightened intuition, you are

able to make better decisions and have more meaningful interactions with other people. You should put your faith in these instincts, particularly in circumstances where rationality alone cannot provide a definitive solution. Collaborating with others is essential in your working life. If you collaborate closely with your coworkers, you will be able to make significant progress on a project that has been stalled. Romance takes a playful turn; whether you are single or attached, inject some fun into your love life by going on an impromptu vacation or making a gesture.

**Nastur Bejan Daruwalla is available for
astrological consultations.**

**He can be reached at
www.bejandaruwalla.com
info@bejandaruwalla.com
+91 9825470377**

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Mauni Amavasya

Mauni Amavasya, also known as Mauna Amavasya, is a significant Hindu observance celebrated on the no moon day (Amavasya) of the Magha month in the Hindu lunar calendar. This day holds great spiritual importance and is observed with various rituals, prayers, and acts of self-discipline.

The date of Mauni Amavasya varies each year as per the Hindu calendar. In 2024, Mauni Amavasya falls on Feb 9-10. The day is particularly auspicious, as it aligns with the cosmic positions that enhance the spiritual energy on Earth.

The term "Mauni" is derived from the word "Mauna," which means silence or observing silence. Therefore, Mauni Amavasya is often associated with the practice of Mauna Vrata, or the vow of silence. Devotees, especially those inclined towards spiritual pursuits, consider observing silence on this day as a means of internal purification and focus on self-realization.

Mauni Amavasya Rituals:

On the day of Mauni Amavasya, worshippers rise early to take a sacred bath in the Ganges at daybreak. If a person is unable to travel to any pilgrimage site on this day, they must add a small amount of Ganga "jal" to their bathwater. It is a common misconception that one must keep quiet while having a bath. On this day, worshippers of Lord Brahma also recite the "Gayatri mantra" and worship him. The bathing procedure is completed, and after that, the devotees sit down to meditate. Concentration and inner serenity can be attained via the practice of meditation.

Any improper behavior must be avoided on the day of Mauni Amavasya. On the day of Mauni Amavasya, some devotees maintain complete "mauna," or stillness. To reach a state of oneness with themselves, they refrain from speaking during the day and solely engage in meditation. This ritual is called "Mauna Vrat." If someone is unable to observe mauna vrat for the entire day, they must remain silent until all of the puja rites have been performed. Thousands of Hindu devotees and "kalpavasis" meditate the remainder of the day on Mauni Amavasya after taking a sacred plunge in Prayag's sangam.

The Hindu holiday known as Mauni Amavasya is also suitable for purging pitru dosh. To obtain the forgiveness and blessings of their "pitrs," or ancestors, people offer "tarpan" to them. People feed the dog, crow, cow, and kusht rogi on this day. Another significant daytime ritual is giving to charity. In the Hindu calendar, the month of "Magha" is significant. People provide food, clothing, and other necessities to the poor and in need on this day. Offering sesame (til) oil to Shani Dev is another tradition.

Significance

The Hindu faith views practicing stillness, or "mauna," as an essential component of spiritual discipline. The word "mauni" is derived from the Hindi word "muni," which refers to a "sanyasi" (saint) who observes quietly. Thus, the term "mauna" accurately denotes achieving oneness with oneself. In the past, prominent Hindu guru Adi Shankaracharya said that one of the three primary characteristics of a saint is "mauna." Ramana Maharshi, a Hindu guru, promoted the use of silence as a spiritual practice in modern times. According to him, silence is more potent than thought or conversation and it helps people connect with themselves.

Mauni Amavasya must be practiced in order to soothe an anxious mind. Hindu devotees attach great importance to the ritual of bathing in the sacred waters. According to Hindu traditions, it is thought that the Ganges River's holy water transforms into nectar on the auspicious day of Mauni Amavasya. As a result, on this day, worshippers from all over the world bathe in the sacred Ganga River. Not only that, but the entire month of "Magha," from Paush Purnima to Magha Purnima, is excellent for the bathing ritual. However, the day of Mauni Amavasya is the most significant.

The Story behind the Mauni Amavasya

The most popular story about Mauni Amavasya is the



IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Mauni Amavasya 2024

Friday, 09 February 2024

Amavasya Tithi Begins - 09 February 2024 at 08:02 am

Amavasya Tithi Ends - 10 February 2024 at 04:28 am

one with Brahmin Devaswami. Once lived a Brahmin named Devaswami, with his wife Dhanvati, his sons and a virtuous daughter in Kanchipuri. All his sons were married and he was left with an unmarried daughter eligible for marriage. He began to search for an eligible groom for his daughter and sent his eldest son with his daughter's kundali to the city to search for a suitable groom. His son showed his sister's horoscope to an expert astrologer who told him that the girl would become a widow after marriage.

When Devaswami heard about his daughter's fate he got worried and asked the astrologer for a remedy. The astrologer suggested requesting a washerwoman Soma in Sinhaladweep to conduct a special "pooja" and that if the lady agreed to perform the "pooja" at his house, then his daughter's horoscope dosha shall be removed. Devswami headed to Soma's house but he had to cross the ocean to reach there. When he got tired, hungry and thirsty, he thought of having some rest under a banyan tree.

On the same tree lived a vulture's family. The

"Everyone thinks how to become a better son or daughter, mother or father, brother or sister, husband or wife, and man or woman. But no one puts actual thoughts on that they are all HUMAN and how to become a better HUMAN. What can we do to learn how to be a better human? "

-- Arish K Sahani

vulture asked Devaswami about his problem and he told them his whole story. Then the vulture assured him that he would help him reach Soma's house and guided him throughout the journey. Devaswami brought Soma to his house and asked her to perform the pooja (worship) with all the rituals.

After the pooja, his daughter Gunvati got married to a suitable groom. Even after all this, her husband died. Then Soma, being a kind-hearted woman donated her good deeds to Gunavati. Her husband got his life back and Soma returned to Sinhaladweep. As she had donated all her virtuous deeds to Gunavati, her husband, her son and her son-in-law died. Soma went through a deeply saddened phase and began to worship Lord Vishnu sitting under a peepal tree at the bank of the river and circumambulated the Peepal tree 108 times. Pleased with her true worship, Lord Vishnu gave back life to her husband, her son and her son-in-law. And ever since the fast of Mauni Amavasya is practised.

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"If Hindus don't maintain Hinduism, who shall save it?"

"If India's own children don't cling to their faith, who shall guard it?"

"Indians alone can save India, and India and Hinduism are one."

CONTD FROM PAGE 1

Finance Minister of India hikes capital expenditure, trims deficit for next fiscal; tax rates unchanged

She hiked capital expenditure to Rs 11.11 lakh crore for 2024-25 while trimming the fiscal deficit for this financial year to 5.8 per cent, from the budgeted 5.9 per cent of GDP, and further lowering it to 5.1 per cent in the next fiscal.

Stating that every challenge of the pre-2014 era was overcome through economic management and governance, she said the government, in its July budget, would present a detailed roadmap to make India a developed country.

"Guided by the principle 'reform, perform, and transform', the government will take up next-generation reforms, and build consensus with the states and stakeholders for effective implementation," Sitharaman said in her speech.

The revenue receipts for the current fiscal at Rs 30.03 lakh crore are expected to be higher than the Budget Estimate, reflecting strong growth momentum and formalization in the economy.

"We continue on the path of fiscal consolidation, as announced in my Budget Speech for 2021-22, to reduce fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26," Sitharaman said.

US State Department approves sale of 31 armed drones to India

These will be through the Foreign Military Sale to the Government of India.

As per the US process, the Congress

will recommend the sale to US President for final ratification.

India had requested to buy thirty-one MQ-9B Sky Guardian aircraft. The payload sought by India are a mix and match of offensive equipment and surveillance. The long-range UAV can stay up in the air for 36 hours while tracking any threat.

The DSCA said it has delivered the certification that includes 170 of the AGM-114R hellfire missiles; sixteen M36E9 hellfire captive air training missiles; 310 laser small diameter bombs; and eight laser guided test vehicles with live fuses.

For surveillance India has sought 161 embedded global positioning and inertial navigation systems; 35 rio grande communications intelligence sensor suites.

India is also looking getting spare engines; hellfire missile launchers; cryptographic appliques and other identification friend or foe (IFF) equipment

Active Electronically Scanned Array (AESA) surveillance radars will be on board.

The General Atomics will also work on repair; consumables, accessories, and repair and return support; secure communications, precision navigation, and cryptographic equipment.

"This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States by helping to strengthen the US-Indian strategic relationship and to improve the security of a major defense partner," the DSCA said.

India is seen as important force for political stability, peace, and economic progress in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia region.

The proposed sale will improve India's capability to meet current and future

threats by enabling unmanned surveillance and reconnaissance patrols in sea lanes of operation.

An offset agreement will be defined in negotiations between the purchaser and the contractor. Implementation of this proposed sale will not require the assignment of any additional US Government or contractor representatives to India. (With input from agencies)

Jharkhand Governor nominates Champai Soren as Chief Minister

Earlier in the evening, Mr. Champai, accompanied by Congress leader Alamgir Alam, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MLA Satyanand Bhokta, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) MLA Vinod Singh and Congress MLA Pradeep Yadav went to Raj Bhavan and staked their claim to form the government.

After meeting the Governor, Mr. Champai said, "We have staked claim to form the government. I urged the Governor to allow us to form the government. The Governor said that he will soon inform us."

While a delay on the part of Mr. Radhakrishnan in calling Mr. Champai to form the government sparked criticism from the ruling camp, the Governor gave his nod late in the day. Till 5 p.m., the MLAs were hoping that the Governor would invite them to form the government, Mr. Champai said.

Meanwhile, a special PMLA court on February 1 sent Mr. Hemant Soren to judicial custody for a day. He was taken to Hotwar Central Jail in Ranchi after the court reserved its order for Friday.

The ED had sought 10 days' remand for the former CM. The 48-year-old executive president of the JMM will spend the night in the upper division cell of B-block in Central Jail.

Mr. Hemant Soren, meanwhile, urged the Supreme Court to hear his plea against the arrest. Appearing before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, senior advocates Kapil Sibal and A.M. Singhvi said such arrests of sitting Chief Ministers "affect the polity of the country". Chief Justice Chandrachud agreed to consider listing the case before an appropriate Bench on February 2.

Ruling coalition MLAs had been housed at the Ranchi Circuit House since February 1 morning, waiting for the Governor's call. The JMM released a video 'roll call' on social media in which all the MLAs counted themselves - 43 in total - to prove that they have the required count to form the government in the 81-member Jharkhand Assembly. The JMM-led alliance claimed to have the support of 47 MLAs. It said only 43 of them were present at the 'roll call' as the rest of the MLAs were unwell.

Soon after this development, one bus which was parked inside the circuit house took 38 MLAs, along with their luggage, to Ranchi airport where two chartered flights were waiting. However, the MLAs had to return to the Circuit House as the flights couldn't take off due to poor visibility caused by fog.

"We have never seen such a situation where the Governor is so adamant and not inviting the party with majority to form the government. We are sensing that something may happen with our legislators so we are taking them to a safer place. We will not allow democracy to be sold off," Jharkhand Congress chief Rajesh Thakur had said earlier at the airport.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge shared a video on X (formerly Twitter) of the 'roll call' of Congress and JMM MLAs. "In the House of 81 MLAs, only 41 form a majority. Despite having the support of 48 MLAs, not inviting Champai Soren ji to form the government is clearly contempt of the Constitution and denial of public mandate. Nails are being hammered in the coffin of Indian democracy by 'His Excellencies'," Mr. Kharge had said.

BJP MP Nishikant Dubey took a jibe at the parading of the MLAs and said, "Split in Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, National President Shibu Soren ji, MLAs Sita Soren ji and Basant Soren ji were not seen in today's parade." (With input from PTI)

United States hikes visa fees for various categories of non-immigrant visas like H-1B, EB-5, popular among Indians

Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The EB-5 programme, launched by the US government in 1990, enables high-net-worth foreign investors to obtain a US visa for themselves and their families by investing a minimum of USD 5,00,000 in a US business that helps create 10 jobs for American workers.

To come into force from April 1, the new H-1B application visa fee, which is form I-129, has been increased from USD 460 to USD 780. The H-1B registration will increase from USD 10 to USD 215, but from next year.

The fee for L-1 visas has been increased from USD 460 to USD 1,385, and that of EB-5 visas, popularly known as investors visas, has jumped from USD 3,675 to USD 11,160, according to a federal notification issued on Wednesday.

The L-1 visa is a non-immigrant visa category in the US that is designed for intracompany transferees. It allows multinational companies to transfer certain employees from their foreign offices to work in the US temporarily.

The fee adjustments, as well as changes to the forms and fee structures used by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), will result in net costs, benefits, and transfer payments, the Department of Homeland Security said in its federal notification.

For the 10-year period of analysis of the rule (FY 2024 through FY 2033), the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates the annualized net costs to the public will be USD 157,005,952, discounted at three and seven per cent.

Get to the Point





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Varanasi: India's spiritual epicenter

One of the oldest cities in India, Varanasi is a prime sacred center in the country for the followers of many religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. Kashi and Banaras are other names by which the dazzling city of Varanasi is known. It is believed that the city was created by Lord Shiva himself and so the people living here are reckoned to be the greatest admirers of him.

Varanasi is one of those places that find mentions in the Hindu epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The culture, traditions, and beliefs of Varanasi are also closely related with the River Ganges which flows through the city. For years, the sacred city has been one of the popular places in India to achieve salvation through various spiritual practices.

Varanasi is a perfect blend of history, spirituality, culture and traditions and has therefore become one of the destinations in India that you must visit in your lifetime. The festivities of Diwali and Chhat Puja in Varanasi take place in such a fascinating manner that you definitely do not want to miss.

The city remains packed with people, locals as well as tourists, throughout the year and is one of the most-visited tourist destinations in India. The city has many Ghats or river banks with steps leading to the water, which hold religious values, and hence are always dotted with devotees. At the Ghats you can see people offering homage to their forefathers, devotees taking a holy dip in the river and kids diving around in the water.

The Temples of Varanasi

The holy city of Varanasi is famed for its Hindu temples, being a popular pilgrimage site. With an abundance of it, you can find temples on almost every street.

The most famous among them is the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. It is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas among the country and is dedicated to the Hindu God, Shiva who is worshiped in the form of Vishwanath, the ruler of the universe. The temple is even mentioned in the Vedas and Puranas.

The is Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple is another popular temple at Varanasi but this one is dedicated to the Hindu God Hanuman, a disciple of Lord Rama. Sankat Mochan translates to reliever of troubles. The temple was founded by Tulsidas, a Hindu poet and philosopher most commonly known for his Ramcharitmanas, and is located on the banks of the river Assi.

The Tulsi Manas Temple in the city is dedicated to Lord Rama and built in honor of the Hindu poet and philosopher, Tulsidas. The temple is a marble structure with verses of Tulsidas Ramcharitmanas written on its walls. The stories from the epic are also depicted throughout the temple through an ensemble of pictures, paintings and sculptures.

Dedicated to the Goddess Durga is the Durga Temple at Varanasi. The exquisite architecture of the temples exterior is made of multiple layers of sikhara whereas the red color of the structure is to match the Goddess idol inside the



temple. The idol, according to the locals, existed by itself and the temple was later made around it.

Varanasi and its Gangetic Ghats

The Ghats or the stepped banks of the river at Varanasi are equally important to the city as its temples. The ghats along the holy river of Ganges are a site for various Hindu rites and rituals, each with its own significance.

One of the things that you must experience at the ghats is the Ganga Aarti that takes place every evening and is truly a captivating sight. The Ganga Aarti takes place at the Dashashwamedh Ghat near the Kashi Vishwanath Temple. The worship of the Ganges river with chants, prayers and the beautiful multi-tiered lamps create a wonderfully spiritual atmosphere that will be hard to forget.

Another ghat where you can witness the ganga aarti is at the Assi Ghat. Here, the worship of the River Ganges happens early in the morning and is called the Subah-e-Banaras. Apart from the aarti, visitors get to witness vedic chants, morning performances of classical music, and yoga. Since the aarti at the Assi Ghat takes place early in the morning, there are fewer crowds as compared to the Ganga Aarti at Dashashwamedh Ghat but it is equally mesmerizing and the perfect way to start the day.

The Manikarnika Ghat at Varanasi is another ghat that holds significance in the life of devotees of Hinduism. The ghat is a cremation ground and is a prominent one among all the ghats of the city. It is believed that the bodies that are



cremated here attain salvation as Lord Shiva himself guides their souls to the other side and leads them to salvation by speaking the Taraka Mantra to them. Visiting Manikarnika ghat is sure to evoke some emotions and remind you of the vanity of this journey called life.

Historic Sites of Varanasi

As established, Varanasi is a major site for Shiva devotees and people in search of salvation. Besides the temples, the city also has numerous historic sites and museums that display the rich culture and heritage of Varanasi and India.

A site with equal importance in history and religion lays Sarnath. It is a revered site for the followers of Buddhism due to it being the place where Lord Buddha gave his first sermon after attaining enlightenment. The Deer Park at Sarnath where the sermon was held is a popular tourist spot today. Along with being a

pilgrimage site, Sarnath is also known for its historic importance due to the presence of The Ashoka Pillar and the Dhamek Stupa which were built centuries ago.

Sarnath is also significant for followers of Jainism too for its Digambar Jain Temple also called the Shreyansnath Jain Temple, built in honor of the 11th Jain Tirthankara Shreyansnath. Tirthankara in Jainism are spiritual leaders who have attained complete enlightenment through a life of asceticism and are highly revered among the devotees.

Located within the campus of the Banaras Hindu University is the Bharat Kala Bhavan Museum and houses various archaeological artifacts. It also houses a collection of beautiful miniature paintings of the Mughal era. The museum also show India's fine arts through its display of decorative art, sculptures, and textiles.



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Take care when choosing a tax return professional: IRS

FEBRUARY 1, 2024

WASHINGTON, D.C.

(TIP): The Internal Revenue Service, on February 1, reminded taxpayers that carefully choosing a tax professional to prepare a tax return is vital to ensuring that their personal and financial information is safe and secure and treated with care.

Most tax return preparers provide honest, high-quality service. But some may cause harm through fraud, identity theft and other scams.

It is important for taxpayers to understand who they're choosing and what important questions to ask when hiring an individual or firm to prepare their tax return. Another reason to choose a tax preparer carefully is because taxpayers are ultimately legally responsible for all the information on their income tax return, regardless of who prepares it.

The IRS has put together a Directory of Federal Tax Return Preparers with Credentials and Select Qualifications to help individuals find a tax pro that meets high standards. There is also a special page on IRS.gov for Choosing a Tax Professional that can help guide taxpayers in making a good choice, including selecting someone affiliated with a recognized national tax association. There are different kinds of tax professionals, and a taxpayer's needs will help determine which kind of preparer is best for them.

RED FLAGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

There are warning signs that can help steer taxpayers away from unscrupulous



tax return preparers. For instance, not signing a tax return is a red flag that a paid preparer is likely not to be trusted. They may be looking to make a quick profit by promising a big refund or charging fees based on the size of the refund.

These unscrupulous "ghost" preparers often print the return and have the taxpayer sign and mail it to the IRS. For electronically filed returns, a ghost preparer will prepare the tax return but refuse to digitally sign it as the paid preparer. Taxpayers should avoid this type of unethical preparer.

In addition, taxpayers should always choose a tax professional with a valid Preparer Tax Identification Number. By law, anyone who is paid to prepare or assist in preparing federal tax returns must have a valid PTIN. Paid preparers must sign and include their PTIN on any tax return they prepare.

OTHER TIPS

Here are a few other tips to consider when choosing a tax return preparer:

Look for a preparer who's available year-round. If questions come up about a tax return, taxpayers may need to contact the preparer after the filing season is over.

Review the preparer's history. Check the Better Business Bureau website for information about the preparer. Look for disciplinary actions and the license status for credentialed preparers.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

Renowned Financier Ronak M. Jani Joins University of California Merced, External Advisory Board

JANUARY 30, 2024

MERCED, CA (TIP): The University of California Merced (UC Merced) is thrilled to announce the appointment of Mr. Ronak M. Jani of The Jani Group of Companies to its External Advisory Board. Mr. Jani brings a wealth of experience and expertise in the finance industry to this esteemed university, which provides strategic guidance and counsel to the university leadership.

The UC Merced School of Engineering External Advisory Board (EAB) meets regularly with the Dean of Engineering for the purposes of:

"Assisting the School of Engineering in developing strategic relationships with the engineering and business communities across the state and beyond.

"Improving the school's responsiveness to the needs of the engineering profession and those organizations employing the school's graduates.

"Identifying and helping implement development programs necessary to ensure that the school can meet its academic and professional goals into the foreseeable future.

Mr. Jani is a highly respected leader with over two decades of experience in the finance industry. He currently serves as the Managing Director of The Jani Group of Companies, proudly expanding the foundation of his multi-generational family's business. A compendium of international financial services and venture firms headquartered in New York, while providing worldwide financial



Ronak M. Jani joins The University of California, Merced

solutions.

Mr. Jani received his Bachelor of Business Administration in Public Accounting and an MBA in Financial Management from the Lubin School of Business - Pace University, New York. He is a Certified Commercial Investment Manager from the illustrious CCIM Institute, Chicago, and Certified by the Wharton School of Business - University of Pennsylvania in the Fundamentals of Quantitative Modeling.

His portfolio of work includes over USD\$750+ Million worth of commercial development transactions throughout the US, and Banking Instrument transactions well over USD\$1+ Billion globally. Throughout his career, Mr. Jani has demonstrated a strong commitment to innovation and entrepreneurship.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

The Federation of Indian Associations, Chicago hosts USA's Largest Republic Day Celebrations

CONTD FROM PAGE 15

Rigorous evaluation led to the shortlisting of 17 exceptional candidates, and we are thrilled to announce that, on this occasion, 6 remarkable individuals were honored with scholarships. The entire process was led by Vinita Gulabani and Kamlesh Kapoor from FIA. Consulate General Somnath Ghosh, Swapnil Shah, Sahaj Shah, Asha Oroskar, Lakhvir Sahota, Kamlesh Kapoor, graciously presided over the awards ceremony. Vice President of FIA and pro-MC Richa Chand, with an eloquent and inspirational delivery, announced the recipients of the scholarships, highlighting their remarkable achievements. Richa Chand infused the moment with a sense of pride and uplifting experience for the exceptional accomplishments of the scholarship winners. These scholarships, a testament to the collaborative spirit of various businesses and the visionary leadership within the FIA, symbolize our unwavering dedication to nurturing



Consul General Somnath Ghosh, Sunil Shah [Founder President and Chairman], Pratibha Jairath [President], Vinita Gulabani [Past President] with Sponsors

talent and empowering the aspirations of the deserving students in Chicago land.

Chandini Duvvuri, Vice President of FIA, eloquently conveyed the Vote of Thanks, embodying gratitude and appreciation on behalf of the entire organization. In her heartfelt expression of thanks, Chandini extended sincere appreciation to Founder Chairman Sunil Shah, acknowledging the enduring legacy he has crafted and commending

current and past presidents for consistently elevating the standards of FIA events to unprecedented heights. She expressed deep gratitude to Consulate General Somnath Ghosh, Linda Davenport, Court Judge, and other esteemed dignitaries whose presence added prestige to the occasion. Chandini offered a profound thank you to the altruistic individuals whose generous contributions made the event and

scholarships possible. Recognizing the dedication and unwavering commitment of FIA Advisory Board members and Directors, she emphasized their pivotal role in shaping the organization's collaborative spirit and serving as a continual source of inspiration.

President Vinita Gulabani set the stage ablaze, ushering in the main cultural show with a magnetic presence that commanded attention. Her introduction of renowned artists from India and across the globe heightened anticipation, reaching a crescendo when the iconic Shaid Rafi was warmly welcomed on stage, earning a resounding standing ovation. Shahid Rafi, with grace and nostalgia, guided the audience through the corridors of memory, offering poignant insights into Mohammad Rafi's personal life and his role as a father.

The cultural extravaganza unfolded with a cascade of melodies that transported the audience through a time capsule of Bollywood's golden era.

(Read full story at www.theindianpanorama.news)

History This Week

FEBRUARY 02 - FEBRUARY 08

FEBRUARY 2

February 2, 1848 - The war between the U.S. and Mexico ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In exchange for \$15 million, the U.S. acquired the areas encompassing parts or all of present day California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, and Texas. The treaty was ratified on March 10, 1848.



February 2, 1990 - In South Africa, the 30-year-old ban on the African National Congress was lifted by President F.W. de Klerk, who also promised to free Nelson Mandela and remove restrictions on political opposition groups.



Birthday - Irish novelist and poet James Joyce (1882-1941) was born in Dublin, Ireland. His works include; Dubliners, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Ulysses, and Finegan's Wake.

FEBRUARY 3



February 3, 1865 - A four-hour peace conference occurred between President Abraham Lincoln and Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens at Hampton Roads, Virginia. The meeting was unsuccessful as President Lincoln insisted there could be no armistice until the Confederates acknowledged Federal authority. The Confederates wanted an armistice first. Thus the Civil War continued.

February 3, 1870 - The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was

ratified, guaranteeing the right of citizens to vote, regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

February 3, 1913 - The 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, granting Congress the authority to collect income taxes.

February 3, 1943 - An extraordinary act of heroism occurred in the icy waters off Greenland after the U.S. Army transport ship Dorchester was hit by a German torpedo and began to sink rapidly. When it became apparent there were not enough life jackets, four U.S. Army chaplains on board removed theirs, handed them to frightened young soldiers, and chose to go down with the ship while praying.



Birthday - The first female physician in the U.S., Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910) was born near Bristol, England. As a girl, her family moved to New York State. She was awarded her MD by the Medical Institute of Geneva, New York, in 1849. She then established a hospital in New York City run by an all-female staff. She was also active in training women to be nurses for service in the American Civil War.

Birthday - American artist and illustrator Norman Rockwell (1894-1978) was born in New York City. Best known for depicting ordinary scenes from small town American life for the covers of Saturday Evening Post magazine.

FEBRUARY 4



February 4, 1861 - Apache Chief Cochise was arrested in Arizona by the U.S. Army for raiding a ranch. Cochise then escaped and declared war, beginning the period known as the Apache Wars, which lasted 25 years.

February 4, 1985 - Twenty countries in the United Nations signed a document entitled "Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment."

Birthday - Thaddeus Kosciuszko (1746-1817) was born in Poland. He served in the American Revolution, building the first fortifications at West Point. He then returned to Poland and fought against a Russian invasion.

Birthday - Aviation pioneer Charles Lindbergh (1902-1974) was born in Detroit, Michigan. He made the first non-

stop solo flight from New York to Paris, May 20-21, 1927.

FEBRUARY 5

February 5, 1917 - The new constitution of Mexico, allowing for sweeping social changes, was adopted.

FEBRUARY 6

February 6, 1788 - Massachusetts became the sixth state to ratify the new U.S. Constitution, by a vote of 187 to 168.

February 6, 1933 - The 20th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was adopted. It set the date for the Presidential Inauguration as January 20th, instead of the old date of March 4th. It also sets January 3rd as the official opening date of Congress.



February 6, 1952 - King George VI of England died. Upon his death, his daughter Princess Elizabeth became Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Her actual coronation took place on June 2, 1953.

Birthday - Aaron Burr (1756-1836) was born in Newark, New Jersey. In 1804, Vice President Burr challenged Alexander Hamilton to a duel over Hamilton's negative remarks and mortally wounded him. Burr was later tried for treason over allegations he was planning to invade Mexico as part of a scheme to establish his own empire in the Southwest, but was acquitted.

Birthday - Legendary baseball player George Herman "Babe" Ruth (1895-1948) was born in Baltimore, Maryland. Ruth held or shared 60 Major League records, including pitching 29 consecutive scoreless innings and hitting 714 home runs.

Birthday - Ronald Reagan, (1911-2004) the 40th U.S. President, was born in Tampico, Illinois. Reagan spent 30 years as an entertainer in radio, film, and television before becoming governor of California in 1966. Elected to the White House in 1980, he survived an assassination attempt and became the most popular president since Franklin Roosevelt.

FEBRUARY 7

February 7, 1795 - The 11th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified, limiting the powers of the Federal Judiciary over the states by prohibiting Federal lawsuits against individual states.



Birthday - Thomas More (1478-1535) was born in London, England. He was a lawyer, scholar, and held the title Lord Chancellor of England. As a devout Catholic, he refused to acknowledge the divorce of King Henry VIII from Queen Catherine, thereby refusing to acknowledge the King's religious supremacy. He was charged with treason, found guilty and beheaded in 1535, with his head then displayed from Tower Bridge. Four hundred years later, in 1935, he was canonized by Pope Pius XI.

Birthday - British novelist Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was born in Portsmouth, England. He examined social inequalities through his works including; David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, and Nicholas Nickleby. In 1843, he wrote A Christmas Carol in just a few weeks, an enormously popular work even today.

Birthday - American social critic and novelist Sinclair Lewis (1885-1951) was born in Sauk Center, Minnesota. He received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930. His works include; Main Street, Babbit, and It Can't Happen Here.

FEBRUARY 8



February 8, 1587 - Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, was beheaded at Fotheringhay, England, after 19 years as a prisoner of Queen Elizabeth I. She became entangled in the complex political events surrounding the Protestant Reformation in England and was charged with complicity in a plot to assassinate Elizabeth.

February 8, 1910 - The Boy Scouts of America was founded by William Boyce in Washington, D.C., modeled after the British Boy Scouts.

Birthday - Union Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman (1820-1891) was born in Lancaster, Ohio.

Man United teenager Kobbie Mainoo scores late goal to clinch 4-3 win over Wolves

On the transfer deadline day, Manchester United relied on some homegrown talent for a dramatic victory. Kobbie Mainoo, an 18-year-old midfielder, scored in the seventh minute of stoppage time to seal United's 4-3 win over Wolverhampton on Thursday, Feb 1, at Molineux.

"It is a dream come true. It is a tough place to come. We had to get the win. I have still not come down from it. I still feel like I am dreaming to be honest," Mainoo said. "To start playing in the Premier League for my boyhood club has been amazing. Now it's about trying to win more games."

How United manager Erik ten Hag needed Mainoo's moment of inspiration after his team had led 2-0 and then 3-1 before Wolves' Pedro Neto evened the game in the 95th.

Mainoo was born in Stockport and rose through United's academy before breaking into the first team.

"He is a big talent," United captain Bruno Fernandes said. "I have seen him play for the under-18s and I said a couple of years ago the name of Kobbie without knowing if he would come and play for the first team."

Marcus Rashford had fired United into the lead after five minutes with a curling shot from outside the box.

It was the perfect response from the forward after reportedly visiting a Belfast nightclub last week and later reporting ill.

Ten Hag started Rashford and appeared to get a reaction with his well-taken finish.

Rasmus Hojlund doubled the visitors' lead in the 22nd by converting Luke Shaw's cross at the near post.

Wolves got back into the game through Pablo Sarabia's penalty in the 71st, but Scott McTominay restored United's two-goal advantage with a header just two minutes after coming on as a substitute.

Max Kilman gave Wolves hope with a goal in the 85th and Neto equalized when he cut inside and fired low into the corner to leave goalkeeper Andre Onana standing. Ten Hag held his head after seeing his team blow its advantage, but he led the celebrations on the sideline when Mainoo struck for his first Premier League goal.

India opt to bat against England; Rajat Patidar and Shoaib Bashir handed debuts

VISAKHAPATNAM (TIP)

India skipper Rohit Sharma won the toss and elected to bat against England in the second Test here on Friday, Feb 2.

Rajat Patidar makes his Test debut with the hosts also bringing in spinner Kuldeep Yadav and pacer Mukesh Kumar for KL Rahul, Ravindra Jadeja and Mohammed Siraj.

England have also handed a maiden Test cap to Shoaib Bashir, who replaces injured Jack Leach while veteran pacer James Anderson comes in place of Mark Wood.

India were 103/2 at lunch on day 1 of the Test as Yashasvi Jaiswal cruises past half-century.

India trail the five-match series 0-1.

An under-pressure and under-resourced India will need to think out of the box to counter England's fearless bunch of Bazballers in the second Test.

India are seldom stretched at home but following a dramatic loss in Hyderabad, they have plenty to ponder and the absence of injured Ravindra Jadeja and KL Rahul has made their task tougher.

Three years ago, the mighty hosts found themselves in a similar situation having lost the opening Test to England at Chennai but bounced back to win the series.

However, the Joe Root-led side was a different breed then and this time



Yashasvi Jaiswal scores a feisty fifty in the opening session on Day 1 of the second Test against England. (Reuters)

India plan to fight back against a team that has redefined the way Test cricket is played and defied all probability to win the series opener after conceding a 190-run lead on a turning track.

Wicketkeeper Srikar Bharat, however, was confident India could level the series. "Credit where it's due, they deserved to win (in Hyderabad)," the stumper said today. "But we have bounced back previously as well so yeah, looking forward to this next challenge."

England batters, led by Ollie Pope,

swept and reverse swept their way to success in the first Test, taking Rohit Sharma and his bunch by surprise, while making the most potent spin trio in the world look ordinary.

"The combination that Ben (Duckett) and Zak (Crawley) have had for us at the top since they've become a partnership has been incredible. The way in which they set the tone for everybody else but also they way they put the bowlers under a serious amount of pressure with a new ball," England captain Ben Stokes said.

2025 FORMULA 1 SEASON

Lewis Hamilton to leave Mercedes and join Ferrari

Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton on Thursday, Feb 1, activated a release option in the Mercedes contract he signed in August in a bid to join Ferrari from the start of the 2025 Formula 1 season. The bombshell announcement was confirmed by Mercedes on social media before Ferrari released a one-line statement, saying that he is joining them on a "multi-year" deal. Hamilton will replace Carlos Sainz at Ferrari.

"Scuderia Ferrari is pleased to announce that Lewis Hamilton will be joining the team in 2025, on a multi-year contract," Ferrari said.

Charles Leclerc, who signed his fresh contract with Ferrari last week, will now be Hamilton's new teammate starting next season.

"I have had an amazing 11 years with this team and I'm so proud of what we have achieved together. Mercedes has been part of my life since I was 13 years old," said Hamilton in the Mercedes statement. "It's a place where I have grown up, so making the decision to



leave was one of the hardest decisions I have ever had to make. But the time is right for me to take this step and I'm excited to be taking on a new challenge."

Hamilton is the most successful driver in F1 history with a tally of 103 wins and 104 pole positions. The legendary Michael Schumacher is the only other driver with seven world titles. However, the 39-year-old, who joined Mercedes in 2013 from McLaren and won six world titles with the team, has not won a race since December 2021.

Hamilton added that he wanted to finish his time at Mercedes on a high and stands "100% committed to delivering the best performance I can this season and making my last year with the Silver Arrows, one to remember".

The Briton will replace Spanish driver Sainz at Ferrari, who released a statement about his future moments after Hamilton's news. It read: "Following today's news, Scuderia Ferrari and myself will part ways at the end of 2024."

Meanwhile, Mercedes will begin their search for a partner to Britain's George Russell. Sainz could be a possibility, although he has also been linked to Audi.



An Eye Institute in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh combatting avoidable blindness in children.

"On behalf of all my colleagues of the Wilmer Eye Institute in Baltimore, MD. I send my best wishes and congratulations to our friends in Goutami on this extremely important occasion. This beautifully facility will match the wonderful world class work of your doctors, nurses, and staff in preserving and restoring the vision of so many patients. We in the United States are inspired by your dedication and admire your tireless efforts to serve so many who need your skills and compassion. Best wishes, Peter"

Peter J McDonnell, MD Director Wilmer Eye Institute, Johns Hopkins



New Goutami Institute building to be constructed 2024

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In 2018 Prasanth, Sushanth and Nisanth were diagnosed and treated for Prematurity Retinopathy. An illness in premature babies which can cause blindness.

Luckily through GEMROP an initiative funded by EFA to screen premature babies throughout hospitals in India, the triplets were able to receive an expensive surgery free of charge. The boys are now the age of 4 with perfect vision.