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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

PIB,MAR6,2023

Government to significantly ramp up focus on quality; reasonably strict but practical quality standards to be brought in on many more products to strengthen manufacturing competitiveness and to protect consumers : Shri Piyush Goyal

Focus on domestic quality will stop the influx of low quality products into the country: Shri Piyush Goyal

Minister asks manufacturers, FMCG providers and the consumers to work collectively to revive Indian domestic manufacturing at scale, with high quality at competitive prices

FMCG sector to be a major driver of economic growth in India: Shri Piyush Goyal

Sustainability will drive demand in the time to come : Shri Piyush Goyal

Shri Goyal asks consumers to foster respect for domestic products and Indian producers

Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution and Textiles, Shri Piyush Goyal said that the government, over the next two or three years, hoped to significantly ramp up focus on quality by bringing in reasonably strict and compulsary but practical quality standards on many more products so that Indian manufacturing is able to withstand irrational competition, increase the scale of production and become more competitive. He was addressing the inaugural session of Massmerize 2023 in New Delhi today. The Minister said that as long as we do not recognize the importance of quality in our country, we will not be able to stop this influx of low quality products. 'Towards that end we in the government are working to introduce quality standards in a much bigger way. We have now almost four times the number of quality control orders implemented in the last few years than what we had 10 years ago.

Shri Goyal asked manufacturers, FMCG providers and the consumers to work collectively to revive Indian domestic manufacturing at scale, with high quality and at competitive prices, so that India once again provides a large amount of jobs, work opportunities, business opportunities, and meets the aspirations of 1.4 billion people. The Minister opined that the FMCG sector will truly be a driver of economic growth and that moving forward, India will be an important consumer market. He called for the creation and strengthening of a virtuous circle with massive amounts of investment and focus both on the public sector and the private sector to create the necessary building blocks or infrastructure to help the Indian economy grow rapidly. He called for renewed investments in infrastructure, in manufacturing, in innovation, in R&D and in quality.

Shri Goyal observed that developed economies had become developed by ensuring significant internationalization of their economies, by engaging with the world in a bigger way, by focusing on scale, so that they can be more competitive, by building their domestic logistics ecosystem, where infrastructure investments play an important role, by focusing their energies on providing what the consumer really wished for, good high quality products at competitive prices and in the current context, sustainable goods. Shri Goyal underscored that sustainability would drive demand in the days ahead. He noted that the government had been focusing relentlessly on sustainability accross sectors

The Minister noted that the consumer industry in India, FMCGs and other such products have been victims of indiscriminate low quality imports, because of which India has suffered and Indians have suffered. He said that though India had liberalized it's economy and a number of foreign companies and foreign suppliers did come into the country with some of them manufacturing in India, most of them had imported goods into India. Shri Goyal said that it should have been a period where quality Indian manufacturing at scale had to be strengthened. 'I think we lost out by allowing a lot of indiscriminate, low quality, low cost goods coming into the country' he lamented.

Shri Goyal pointed out that India's imports from a certain geography had widened the trade deficit enormously and contributed to weakening domestic manufacturing. He observed that this dependence on imports created a set of business persons who met the consumer demand, but through pricing, which was often just meant to undercut all domestic manufacturing, sometimes predatory, thus harming Indian manufacturing. 'The Government over the last few years, focused its energies on bringing back the building blocks to get manufacturing into India again and it's going to be a long haul', he added. The Minister said that efforts, coupled with significant investments earmarked in the budget in the last three or four years will be able to make Indian manufacturing much much more competitive

The Minister referred to Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) and said that it would help our small retail survive the onslaught of large tech based e-commerce companies. 'Our effort will be to encourage more and more startups and small companies even at the local level, small retail the mom and pop stores integrated into the e- commerce ecosystem. And just like UPI was able to democratize payment systems we do hope that ONDC will democratize the e-commerce ecosystem and take its benefits to the people at large', Shri Goyal said.

Shri Goyal said that in India's journey of growth, the retail sector and the FMCG sector, will have a huge role to play. He stressed that going forward consumption will increase significantly and added that consumption will be driven by demand for good quality products made in a sustainable way, delivered smartly. He expressed confidence that Indian industry will absorb the standards of quality that the consumer really deserves and desires.

He stressed on the importance of buying products which ultimately provided jobs, which will not strengthen countries which are inimical to India's interests, but will strengthen India's economy, will have more people become consumers and will help boost the virtuous cycle that of investments in India, money spent in India, leading to jobs in India, incomes for the people of India, who then become consumers. 'It is this virtuous cycle is what will make India a developed country, a prosperous country, a country where 1.4 billion people lead prosperous lives' he added.

He also asked consumers to foster respect for domestic products and Indian producers. He asked organizations like FICCI to take this message of respect for Indian products, respect for Indian ecosystem, respect for the opportunities that consumers can provide for young Indian talent to provide goods and services in India to all parts of the country.

PIB,MAR7,2023

Union Minister Dr Mansukh Mandaviya launched NaMo Free Dialysis Centre and 100th Janaushadhi Kendra, NaMo Day Care Center and NaMo Mobile Healthcare Units on 5th Jan Aushadhi Diwas at Bangluru

Dr Mandaviya urges youth to become 'Jan Aushadhi Mitra' for publicising benefits of Jan Aushadhi Kendras

Jan Aushadhi Diwas celebrated across the country to generate awareness about the usages of generic medicines

Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers and Health & Family Welfare Dr Mansukh Mandaviya today launched NaMo Free Dialysis Centre and 100th Janaushadhi Kendra at Bengaluru South in the presence of Chief Minister of Karnataka Shri Basavaraj Bommai on occasion of 5th Jan Aushadhi Diwas. The Minister was also inaugurated NaMo Day Care Center and Flagged off 4 NaMo Mobile Healthcare Units.

While addressing the gathering, Dr Mansukh Mandaviya said that the first priority of the government is to provide cheap and better quality medicines to all citizens. Keeping this in mind, Jan Aushadhi Kendras have been opened across the country. At these kendras, every citizen, whether poor or rich, can buy medicines at very cheap prices. The Minister further said that disease affects both rich and the poor equally, but the rich man can buy medicines at any cost but the poor man is unable to get treatment many times due to lack of medicine, but our government is providing low cost and better quality medicines to everyone through these centers.

Highlighting the slogan of Jan Aushadhi Diwas 'Sasti bhi, Achhi bhi', the Minister also said that the quality and affordable medicines are available on Jan Aushadhi Kendras. NGOs and many others joined the journey of Jan Aushadhi and today more than 9000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras are in existence. Union Minister urged the youth to become 'Jan Aushadhi Mitra' to publicise the benefits of Jan Aushadhi Kendras for betterment of the people. Dr Mandaviya informed that opening a Jan Aushadhi Kendra is very easy and anyone who opens Jan Aushadhi Kendra gets 20% commission.

Union Minister also narrated last year's incident when PM was interacting with the beneficiaries of Jan Aushadhi Pariyojna, a woman beneficiary shared her experience that she belongs to a poor family, she has two sons and her husband is earning15-20 thousand rupees monthly. She said that she has been suffering from two-three diseases and around Rs 5,000 used to get spent on her medicines only. When she came to know about Jan Aushadhi Kendras and started availing the benefits, she started getting the medicines at Rs 1100. She found that the quality and effect of this medicine from Jan Aushadhi Kendra was same and she could save around Rs.4000 in this way.

Department of Pharmaceuticals is celebrating the Jan Aushadhi Diwas on 7th March 2023. Events have been planned in different cities starting from 1st of March, 2023 to 7th March, 2023 to create awareness about the Jan Aushadhi Scheme. Seminars, participation of children, women and NGO's, Heritage walks and Health camps and many other activities engaging PMBJKs owners, Beneficiaries, State/UT officials, Public Representatives, Doctors, Health Workers, Nurses, Pharmacists, Jan Aushadhi Mitra's organised at different locations across the country covering all State/UTs. This campaign generated awareness about the usages of generic medicines and benefits of Jan Aushadhi Pariyojana and its salient features and achievements.With an objective of making quality generic medicines available at affordable prices to all, Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) was launched by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals & Fertilizers, Government of India in November, 2008. As on 31st January, 2023, the numbers of stores have increased to 9082. Under the PMBJP,743 districts out of 764 districts of the country have been covered.

This scheme ensures easy reach of affordable medicine to the people in every nook and corner of the country. The Government has set a target to increase the number of Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Kendras (PMBJKs) to 10,000 by the end of December,2023. Product basket of PMBJP comprises 1,759 drugs and 280 surgical instruments. Further, new medicines and nutraceuticals products like protein powder, malt-based food supplements, protein bar, immunity bar, sanitizer, masks, glucometer, oximeter, etc. have been also launched.

PIB,MAR9,2023

Ministry of Panchayati Raj to hold Consultation Meeting with States tomorrow on online audit and release procedure under 15th Finance Commission to Panchayati Raj Institutions

Ministry of Panchayati Raj is convening a Consultation meeting with States on online audit and release procedure under 15th Finance Commission to Panchayati Raj Institutions, in New Delhi tomorrow. The

meeting would be chaired by Shri Sunil Kumar, Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in presence of Dr. Chandra Shekhar Kumar, Additional Secretary and Shri Alok Prem Nagar, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Senior Officers from State Panchayati Raj Department will participate in the meeting along with representatives from Directorate of Local Fund and Audit.

Ministry of Panchayati Raj releases the Fifteenth Finance Commission (XV FC) Grants to the States in terms of Ministry of Finance (MOF) Operational Guidelines. XV FC has prescribed that only those States/RLBs having both provisional / audited accounts online in the public domain will receive grants from FY 2021-22. As per XV FC recommendations, for 2021-22 and 2022-23, States should ensure that at least 25% of RLBs have bot provisional accounts for the previous year and audited accounts for the year before the previous year available online in public domain in order to be eligible for the full grants. For 2023-24 onwards, States will receive the total grants due to only those RLBs having both provisional accounts for the previous year and audited accounts for the year before the previous available online in public domain.

XV FC has also stipulated that the constitution of due State Finance Commission (SFC) as necessary condition for release of grants to local bodies from 2024-25. All States which have not constituted due SFC must constitute SFCs, act upon their recommendations and lay the ATR before legislature on or before March, 2024. After March, 2024, no grants will be released to a State that has not complied with the constitutional provision of SFC.

In this direction, it has been observed that several States are yet to make significant progress. This one day Consultation Meeting is being organized by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj to discuss the issues arising out of these two vital recommendations and to ascertain the strategy and preparedness of States in this regard. In this meeting, States would be sharing their strategy and preparedness in respect of above recommendations.

Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh says, Industry should be ready to take up the responsibility of being equal stakeholder in StartUps, right from the moment the project is conceived:

Highly skilled manpower produced from CSIR-IICT is a boon for pharma and biotech industry of Hyderabad and India:

The Minister launches the "One Week One Lab" event at CSIR-IICT (Indian Institute of Chemical Technology) in Hyderabad

Dr Jitendra Singh informs that CSIR-IICT developed several technologies for life saving generic drugs like AZT required in management of AIDS and process for the prostaglandin-based drug, misoprostol, which is used to prevent gastric ulcers, treat miscarriage, induce labor and induce abortion

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; Minister of State (Independent Charge) Earth Sciences; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh said in Hyderabad that the Industry should be ready to take up the responsibility of being equal stakeholder in Start-Ups, right from the moment the project is conceived. This, he said, is essential not only for sustaining the Start-Ups in the long run by linking them with livelihood, but also for bringing about value addition to the Indian Industry as per the contemporary global benchmarks.

Addressing an exclusive session of Industrialists, Start-Ups and Innovators at the Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) here and earlier during over one-hour one-to-one interaction with representatives of some of the leading Industrialist Houses, Dr Jitendra Singh said, Hyderabad is known to be a destination of Health and Wealth as well as the pharma capital of the region. Therefore, the specialized and skilled manpower developed by the IICT should find a naturally integral place in the pharma and biotech industry of Hyderabad in particular and India in general, he added.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Dr Jitendra Singh said, for the first time after several decades, we have a political leadership and a ruling dispensation which are amenable to abandon the obsolete regulations of the past and to bring in enabling reforms for ease of Start-Ups as well as ease of business. He advised the Industry leaders to set up an institutionalized mechanism and come forth with precise and concrete proposals for doing away with unwarranted regulations and options to avoid procedural delays.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, Hyderabad Pharma City (HPC) under making is the world's largest integrated cluster in Hyderabad for pharmaceutical industries with thrust on R&D and manufacturing. He said, the cluster has been recognized as National Investment and Manufacturing Zone (NIMZ) by Government of India, given its national and international importance. Developed at international standards, Hyderabad Pharma City will harness the true value of symbiotic co-existence across pharmaceutical value chain, the Minister added.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, each of the 37 CSIR (Council of Scientific & Industrial Research) Labs spread across the country is dedicated to a different exclusive area of work and the ongoing "One Week, One Lab" campaign is offering an opportunity to each one of them to showcase the work being done by it so that others can avail of it and stakeholders learn about it. He said, keeping in tune with the transformations, the new tagline for CSIR is - "CSIR-The Innovation Engine of India". With a pool of over 4,500 scientists, CSIR can reorient and revitalize to emerge as Global Centres of Innovations in the Amrit Kaal, the Minister emphasised.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, with the active and constant support of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for all scientific endeavors since May 2014, India is scaling new heights each day in Science, Technology, Innovation (STI) eco-system. He said, out of 130 countries, we were at number 81 in the Global Innovation Index till 2015, but we have jumped to 40th position in 2022. Today India is among the top three countries in the world in terms of PhDs and we are among the top three countries in the world in terms of start-up ecosystem", the Minister reiterated.

Addressing the Heads of academic and research institutes, Leaders from various industries (pharma, biotech, agro, power), Scientists, Staff, Students and general public, Dr Jitendra Singh said, we are celebrating International Women's day tomorrow and "I am very happy to see that now woman Director General, Dr. Kalaiselvi heading the CSIR for which we waited for 8 decades".

Talking about CSIR-IICT, Dr Jitendra Singh said, the institute is almost 80 years of its formation, vigorously pursued basic as well as translational research, and is working towards sustainable development goals. He added that CSIR-IICT excelled in both basic and applied research areas of chemistry & chemical technologies. He also informed that the institute houses state-of-art pilot plant facilities to undertake industrial projects in a "concept to commercialization" mode.

Dr Jitendra Singh pointed out that the recent launch of the Hydrazine Hydrate plant by GACL by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi is based on the novel technology developed at CSIR-IICT. He said, the Anaerobic Gas Lift Reactor (AGR) Technology-based plant set up at Bowenpally market yard was mentioned by Prime Minister in his popular monthly radio program "Maan Ki Baat".

Dr Jitendra Singh pointed out that CSIR-IICT developed several technologies for life saving generic drugs like the development of indigenous technology for AZT required in management of AIDS that brought down the cost of the drug in the world market.Anti-viral drugs and vaccine adjuvant for Caixin developed by the institute played a pivotal role in limiting the spread of COVID-19 virus. CSIR-IICT partnered with the industry during the pandemic to deliver solutions to common people at the shortest time, the Minister informed.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, the institute's Flouro & Agro Chemicals Department is the first of its kind in a national laboratory that was set up to address the Montreal Protocol resolutions in 1990, when CSIR-IICT was assigned the responsibility to develop indigenous and internationally competent technologies for hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) which are considered as well recommended substitutes for ozone depleting chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

STATESMAN,MAR10,2023

Business could become a harmonising force in Asia

It is driven by a combination of increased distrust in government and media, a lack of shared identity, sense of systemic unfairness, economic pessimism, and societal fears all contributing towards a more polarised society.

Warren Fernandez

Agrowing sense of distrust, and with it polarisation, has been sweeping across our region, and the world.It feeds on itself. It is driven by a combination of increased distrust in government and media, a lack of shared identity, sense of systemic unfairness, economic pessimism, and societal fears all contributing towards a more polarised society.

And once divided, a polarised community makes fostering trust all the more difficult.These are the headline findings of the 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer for the Asia Pacific region, published today by Edelman, a global communications advisory firm, which has been studying the issue of societal trust for over two decades.

Understanding the social and political forces fueling these divisions is all the more critical given the backdrop against which they are playing out — looming inflation, a lingering war in Ukraine, and rising Sino-United States tensions, the effects of all of which are being felt around our region.These could also have electoral implications, as countries such as Thailand, Japan, Singapore, and Indonesia, move into higher political gear, with major elections on the cards.Our latest report shows that overall trust in major institutions across the world is not only deteriorating but deepening at a societal level. In fact, 42 per cent of this year's respondents in Asia Pacific say their country is more divided today than in the past.

In South Korea, 63 per cent of people say their country is more divided today than in the past, amid widening political and economic divides. In Japan, there is serious concern that the present divisions will be too difficult to overcome.Across Asia, six in ten people say the lack of civility and mutual respect in their country is the worst they have experienced, and 61 per cent say the social fabric that used to hold the country together is now too weak to do so.The fact that these regional figures are similar to the global average offers scarce comfort, given that harmony, civility and mutual respect have traditionally been seen as defining features of Asian societies.The biggest measured contributors to polarisation are distrust in government and lack of a shared identity, followed by a feeling that the system is unfair. Other significant drivers include economic pessimism, societal fears, and distrust in the media.

Asked whether they think they will be better off in five years, the average across Asia was 44 per cent, down significantly from 57 per cent in 2019. Since last year, economic optimism fell by 20 percentage points in Malaysia, 11 points in Australia and South Korea, and by 8 and 7 points in Indonesia and Singapore respectively.

Strikingly, Japan sat at the very bottom of this optimism scale, with just 9 per cent of those polled expressing hope for their future economic prospects, in a country buffeted by a drawn-out Covid exit strategy, lingering inflation, and anxieties about its rapidly ageing population.This gloom is widely shared. In our global survey, 24 out of 28 countries recorded all-time lows in terms of economic optimism, with the global average down by 10 percentage points from last year.Significantly, our study also found a relationship between income and trust, in what might be called a "massclass trust divide." This reflects how those who are better-off in a society are generally more trusting of its institutions.Globally, there is a 15-percentage point gap between high- and lowincome groups in their average trust of the four core institutions.

Turning to Asia, Thailand – whose election in May is widely expected to be a re-run of rivalries between royalist and populist groups – has the widest income-based divide of all countries in the survey, with a 37-point difference between high and low-income trust levels.The gaps in China and Japan stand at 19 points, while Singapore has an 18-point divide.Most troubling of all is that this lack of trust appears to be getting personal. When we asked people how they would feel or act toward someone who had different views from theirs on an issue they cared strongly about, just 31 per cent of Asian respondents say they would help them in a time of need. Only 21 per cent are willing to have such a person as a coworker, and just 19 per cent would live in the same neighbourhood.

These are troubling signs of distrust feeding into social divisions and giving rise to a deep polarisation of societies.The only small mercy for Asia seems to be that things appear to be worse elsewhere. Thankfully, Asia's sense of division is 11 percentage points less than the global average.

Even so, the findings also show that South Korea and Japan are in danger of joining the ranks of the world's most polarized nations, countries that include the U.S., South Africa, Colombia, and Argentina.Clearly, there is work to be done by all stakeholders in our societies.Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, the former British Labour Party Foreign Secretary David Miliband lamented that too many government leaders have "given up being in the solutions business". Instead, politics has supplanted sound policy making, with key decisions being shaped more by electoral and news cycles.

In his argument, Miliband cited the recent book, the Revenge of Power: How Autocrats are Reinventing politics for the 21st Century, by the Venezuelan thinker Moises Naim. In it, Naim warns that authoritarian leaders are exploiting "the 3Ps – populism, polarisation and post-truths" – to sway voters to win, and consolidate, power.Leaders and voters alike, he noted, will have to stay alert to the threats posed to democratic systems, in both developing and developed countries, as recent events in the U.S. and Brazil have shown.

But it is not only governments that will have to work hard at bridging the trust gap and averting a distrust spiral. Business, especially, has a key role to play. Edelman's study found that business is the most trusted institution in Asia Pacific, with an average score of 65 per cent, ahead of nongovernment organisations (62%), government (60%) and the media (55%).Significantly, 79 per cent of Asian employees trust their employers, the most trusted institution overall, 19 points more than government. "My CEO" enjoys 69 per cent trust among Asian employees.Besides, both consumers and employees are demanding more of businesses – buying brands that match their values and wanting to work for companies that have a positive societal impact.

Those polled say business leaders are obligated to ensure workers are paid fairly, and they expect CEOs to take a public stand when it comes to employee treatment. They also believe business should do more to address issues such as climate change and economic inequalities in society.

Encouragingly, clear majorities in Singapore (55%), China (60%), Malaysia (61%), Indonesia (64%), India (65%) and Thailand (69%) think there is room for business leaders to make an impact on societal issues without becoming political. In contrast, only about a third think this way in more polarised countries like Japan (30%) and South Korea (35%).The consensus across the board, however, is that business is seen as being more ethical and competent than other institutions, and most effective in addressing societal issues when working in partnership with government, rather than trying to do it on its own.But if there's a guiding principle that runs through our findings – it's that business has an opportunity, and perhaps even a responsibility, to become a unifying force that helps restore harmony in Asia.Given the growing and deep divides within and between countries, people everywhere expect – and need – more of business and its leaders in 2023.

TELEGRAPH,MAR10,2023

Multipronged crisis

Partisan institutions foster insularity

Anup Sinha

It is commonplace to view the ingredients of successful economic development to include competitive markets, an enabling State, and a political democracy based on universal franchise. The quality of these ingredients varies from one society to another, leading to outcomes that are widely different. Much is known about the quality of markets and how they influence economic development. The State, on the other hand, is a complex creature with many branches and departments. Relatively less is known about how the quality of a State impacts the process of economic development. Similarly, political democracy only ensures that people choose their legislators. Here the quality of electoral supervision and management by a neutral institution like the Election Commission plays an important role in determining fair outcomes in voting. However, the voters have little direct control over the laws enacted, the quality of the executive branch, and the judiciary. The laws

enacted include political rights granted by the State and civil liberties for citizens. The quality of the executive branch depends on transparency in its actions and how fair the law enforcement agencies are in their investigations. The judiciary is the ultimate institution that citizens can fall back on against injustice. The courts of law have to be deemed unbiased, independent of the executive branch. In any society, the quality of these institutions is, to a large extent, determined by the values and beliefs shared by citizens and the faith they have in the system of governance. If the law enforcement agencies are deemed to be biased in favour of a political party, or the judges appear to be influenced by the executive branch, the citizen's faith in justice will be eroded. Not only that, some powerful people might even game the system by nudging a court's decision to go in a particular direction.

In the determination of values and beliefs that influence governance outcomes, two sets of institutions play critical roles in shaping them. They are primary schools on one end of the spectrum of educational institutions, and universities on the other end. Basic values are formed in the early stages of education and socialisation of a child. This is distinct from the useful skills the child will be expected to acquire over the years spent in school. The infant learns about sharing, about not hurting others, being fair, treating others equally, being polite, gender equality, and civic responsibilities. These have to be explicitly inculcated and reinforced. It is the ability to deliver these, along with the routine writing and reading skills, that makes primary education of a school system socially useful. The values learnt often persist over a lifetime. It is the material on which the future generation's worldview and culture are built.

At the other end of the spectrum of learning are institutions like colleges and universities that provide useful research on human behaviour, aesthetics, history, the physical world, science and technology. This output has two components: the basic foundations of knowledge that are available to all as public goods and the addition of technology, which can be used privately to produce other goods and services for profit. The latter has immediate economic benefits in terms of output, income, and employment. The former is useful as a stock of

permanent learning, which can be useful for future research that can produce benefits for citizens. It is clear that for higher education, the bigger and deeper the stock of knowledge a society can produce the better it is for humanity. The more the diversity, the richer is the stock. Hence, higher education needs freedom as an essential ingredient in its recipe for knowledge creation. Any attempt to stifle this freedom would result in long-term damage to the nation's ability to improve the well-being of its citizens.

Another institution is vital for enabling economic development and an open society: an independent media. Newspapers, radio, television, internet news and social media provide information about the world which shapes and influences people's views and perceptions. The information could be about local or global events. Typically, purveyors of news also provide some analysis by and opinions of experienced people and scholars. This is done through powerful visuals and real-time commentary. The viewer has alternative sources to choose from. It is important that the information comes as raw as possible, free from the lens of political ideology or through the sieve of misinformation and falsehood. If this does not occur, people could form warped opinions and often find it impossible to separate fake news from what is the reality. In most societies, media platforms are owned by large business houses that have their own agenda in terms of what they are willing to peddle as news. Some news may be suppressed completely, some tweaked to give it a different perspective, while others may be presented as being entirely opposed to the truth. Business houses have their own dynamics with political parties and governments. On paper, the media remain an important instrument for a vibrant democracy. But in today's world featuring multiple sources of instant information, the media remain feeble in the hands of the powers that be. Hence, more often than not, what citizens believe is the product of media propaganda. This contributes to the blurring of the distinction between truth and falsehood.

In India, all the institutions mentioned above have been deteriorating sharply in the twenty-first century. Electoral politics along with respect for the Election Commission have eroded. The judiciary has been associated with many controversies and has had its rulings criticised in sensitive cases. Law enforcement

agencies appear to have lost their independence from political control. Institutions of higher education are becoming increasingly restricted in terms of what they can talk about, write, or do research on. Debate and dissent are both strongly discouraged. Non-compliance draws unpleasant consequences. As far as primary schools are concerned, even the elementary skills of reading and writing are inadequately taught with alarming results in terms of learning. Nobody knows what kind of values are being imparted or the nature of the civic consciousness developed. The media have become unabashedly partisan in supporting the government and the political party in power. Propaganda, inaccurate news, and distorted views are purveyed in strident tones. Falsehoods are repeated with astonishing regularity.

Lack of trust in critically important institutions makes the average citizen compelled to fend for himself/herself. The citizen defines the life he/she can lead, focussed entirely on a culture of 'I-me-myself'. As a result of which one is no longer concerned with other people and their well-being. One is worried about one's self-identity and suspicious about other people. One learns to exclude and one learns to hate. One loses the ability to speak; one can only echo. The rule of law that any modern society feels comfortable with is under duress to give way to the dominance of social norms, that too largely antiquated ones. On top of that, one should not forget to add the misery brought about through high inflation, unemployment, and deep uncertainty over livelihoods and incomes. In such a milieu, even a 6% economic growth may not be something that will help India improve the quality of development.

TELEGRAPH,MAR10,2023

Unbroken spell

STATE OF PLAY | The fabled event manager is at work, once again

Sankarshan Thakur

There are two G20 tableaux rolling along if you'd care to look carefully. There's the one that, as the group's name suggests, involves the affairs of 20 nations that together account for 80% of the global GDP and 99% of global trade in addition to representing two-thirds of this planet's human population. There's the other one, rippling vibrantly and barely bothering to conceal its interloper aspect, which doesn't bother addressing itself to 19 of those involved nations and is dedicated to the purposes of the remaining one: Narendra Modi's India.

The first G20, as is becoming increasingly evident, is a bit knocked up and dishevelled at the moment; it's riven by the bloody gnashing over Ukraine, its visage is so splintered it does not even pretend to be a group. Nobody was surprised that the recent summit of G20 foreign ministers did not even become the stage for a ceremonial photograph of the gathered eminences.

The second G20 is chiming along sweetly to the clockwork choreography of our fabled event manager. By the time its elaborate and pervasive rites are done, in excess of 200 events would have been staged in more than 50 cities and towns across India's geography, all of them propitiating Narendra Modi as vishwaguru, all of it at public expense — a lavish vaudeville that would get seamlessly dovetailed into the campaign for 2024.

Hand it to Modi for thinking ahead, and thinking with precision. His G20, what was always going to be a G20 tailored to his ends, was wired to become part of the armoury for 2024. India was to have assumed the rotating presidency of G20 towards the end of 2020, but India pleaded at the Argentina summit in 2018 that it be slotted to take the presidency in the 75th year of its Independence, which would be 2022. But thereafter came another request for another postponement, that time with a claim to take over on the eve of 2023. No reasons proffered this time, but the reason should have been plain enough — Modi would seek a third term in 2024, and what better way to arrive into the year than at the head of the G20 table? So in between India's originally planned turn at the presidency, the G20 summit travelled to Italy and then to Indonesia. And voila! Modi got

handed the baton just on the final lap to the next general election.But let's call India's current presidency of G20 just what it is, let's annotate this vishwaguru burlesque wearing the Modi logo with plain fact: the G20 presidency is not something Modi has been bestowed with for his grandiose international helmsmanship as is being made out by his ecosystem — party, government and votaries all included — but something that rolls around the list of member nations by clerical custom.

Modi is the master of populist subterfuge; we often behave like a slavish confederacy of dunces. He has amplified a routine turn at a multilateral table into a thing of rare recognition and reward and we have allowed ourselves to turn even headier in Modi worship. The official theme of India's presidency year is: 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. The way we are meant to read it is: 'One Earth, One Family, One Future, One Leader — Vishwaguru Modiji'. Onward to 2024 on a new global high! Who cares that the G20 is a torn and tattered entity in India's presidency year? What matters is who chairs those tatters. Internationally, G20 lies torpedoed by differences; domestically, it has been turned into a cracker of a campaign slogan for Modi and we are in the throes of celebration.

For a fair and regrettable length of time now, it has not been about what Modi does or does not do, it has been about what we do or do not do in response. It is hard to imagine a leader or a dispensation that would have been forgiven the hardship, even atrocity, wreaked by the demonetisation guillotine dropped on the citizenry. We rewarded that wanton act, not once but multiple times; we seemed to care not a whit what dubious claims had been trotted out to justify the decision, we seemed to care not a whit what it reduced this entire nation to.

We applauded the abrogation of Article 370 and reduction of the status of what used to be the state of Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019. We continue to swing and swagger over what was done without caring to examine what has followed in the wake of that decision. Did it — like it was also claimed after demonetisation — stamp out extremism and secessionist militancy? Was it able to throttle the inflow of menace from the

western side of the fence Jammu and Kashmir sits along? Examine just one simple question: who has the Kashmir Valley become a safer place for?

We banged our utensils and shut off our lights and in all the clamour and the darkness we buried the untold misery and tragedy that were brought upon ourselves through two rounds of the coronavirus affliction. We lent our ears to being told how many vials of vaccines we sent abroad, we turned amnesiac on the derelictions that left us gasping for oxygen.

We bought into the cult's 'red-eye' and '56 inch' braggadocio without caring to examine just what a sham it continues to be. We have suffered aggression and numbing losses of personnel and territory. The prime minister is on record telling the nation nobody came in. The prime minister is not on record telling China off for its ingress and offences. His government is yet to counter the Chinese claim, made by their ambassador who sits within stone's throw from the prime minister's residence, that the Galwan Valley is Chinese territory, period. His foreign minister is suitably informed of the line on China which suggests neither red-eye nor 56 inches; China is a bigger economy, he says; India can't pick a fight with it. Translation: we can't do much about what the Chinese are doing along our borders. It is probably fair to recall here the events of 1971 around the creation of Bangladesh. It is probably fair to recall the size of the Indian economy at that time and how paltry it was in comparison to the Americans who were threatening to send the Seventh Fleet up the Bay of Bengal so Indira Gandhi would back off.It will not do for us to mesmerise ourselves into believing whatever we are began in 2014, that nothing happened before that. Or, if it will do, we shall only travel further down this perilous road of grand delusions such as our phantasmagoric imagination of G20 2023 is.

PIB,MAR11,2023

MeitY organized Chintan Shivir on the theme 'Digital India Techade – Strategy and Implementation'

Deliberations held on six thematic areas namely 'Transforming the lives of common citizens', 'Alignment of ongoing initiatives for next 5 years', 'Addressing emerging challenges', 'New digital subjects to be included in college curriculum', 'Regulatory support for growth of Startup and manufacturing ecosystem', and, 'Securing computers in government offices from Cyber vulnerability'

More than 200 Officials from MeitY and Its organisations participated

Officers from Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology & different organizations took part in a day-long Chintan Shivir at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan in New Delhi today. The conext setting of the programme was done by Shri Alkesh Kumar Sharma, Secretary, MeitY and the event was addressed by Hon'ble Minister of Electronics and IT, Communications and Railways, Shri Ashwini Vaishnaw. Senior Officers from the Ministry and Head of organizations also participated in the Shivir.

More than 200 officers participated from Ministry, its organizations and field offices in the Shivir. It broadly discussed six topics threadbare. These were: (1). How MeitY can contribute in transforming lives of all strata of society, especially deprived section? (2). How ongoing programmes, schemes & projects should be aligned to needs in coming days? (3). What steps could be taken to address challenges like addiction of online games, financial losses due to crypto currency, fake news in social media, access of unethical content to children? (4). Which new subjects should be included in college curriculum? (5) Constraints/barriers in regulations that are limiting growth of Startup & manufacturing ecosystem and (6) Steps to be taken for securing computers in Govt. offices from Cyber vulnerability.

The suggestions given by participants were appreciated by the Minister and motivated the officers to think out of box and ahead for time for usage of technology to ease the living of common man of the country. He emphasized that schemes and projects should be reviewed for their higher effectiveness and relevance with the goals of the ministry.

PIB,MAR11,2023

Dr Jitendra assesses progress on Mega Projects under execution of NHPC, NHIDCL and GREF in Doda

 All HEPs and NH Projects will change the economic activity the region.

Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology and Earth Sciences; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh, today chaired a review meeting to assess the pace of development works on mega projects under execution of NHIDCL, NHPC and GREF here in the conference hall of DC office complex Doda.

At the outset, District Development Commissioner Doda, Vishesh Mahajan welcomed the dignitaries and a presentation on the achievements and progress recorded by BRO (GREF) and NHIDCL in creating and augmenting road infrastructure in the district Doda and district Kishtwar was made by the concerned. NHPC authorities also gave detailed and project wise information to the Hon'ble Minister. It was informed that hydroelectric project (HEP) Keru shall be ready for commissioning by 2024, while HEP Kwar and HEP Pakal Dal shall be ready by 2026 and 2027 respectively.

Under NHIDCL, Sudhmahadev Dranga Tunnel, Goha- Khalleni road, Khaleni- Khanbal road, Khaleni Tunnel, Sangpura- Vailo tunnel were discussed and informed that work is in progress and all the projects shall come up in prescribed time.

Dr Singh while addressing the demand of local representatives regarding allocation of employment in the mega projects for the local unemployed youth, has directed DC Kishtwar Dr Devansh Yadav to ensure that all get their due share in employment in all the government projects under NHPC and NHIDCL.The Minister reiterated that it is the endeavour of the present Government led by Honb'le Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi to trickle down the benefits of all the centrally sponsored schemes to the deserved lot and to the last person in the queue.Dr Singh has asked the executing agencies including administration to double their efforts, make use of the latest technology, and work in coordination to reach out to the expectations of the public and the government in bringing up the prestigious developmental projects for improving the quality of life in every part of the UT especially in the rural districts like Doda, Kishtwar and Ramban.

The meeting was attended by DDC Chairman Doda Dhananter Singh Kotwal, DDC Vice Chairperson Sangeeta Rani Bhagat, DC Doda Vishesh Mahajan, DC Kishtwar Dr Devansh Yadav, SSP Doda Abdul Qayoom, ADDC Doda Pran Singh, ADC Doda Dr R K Bharti, Executive Director NHIDCL Sandeep Sudhera, GM NHIDCL NS Gill, OC GREF 118 Kishtwar Col YK Gautam, SM (HR) Dulhasti Power Station Ashok Kumar Bhanwal, SM (IT) Dulhasti Power Station Sachin Vishwakarma, Group General Manager M.K Kashyap HOP Dulhasti Power Station, SM (Env) Ratle HEP Shashi Paul Singh, DGM (HR) Ratle HEP Aswani Kumar Sahi, GM (Electrical) Ratle HEP Vinod Kumar Sharma, formal legislatures, and other concerned officers.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

PIB,MAR6,2023

Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh says, all portals like Pension Disbursing Bank portals, ANUBHAV, CPENGRAMS, CGHS will be integrated in a single portal in the form of the newly created "Integrated Pensioners' Portal" to ensure "Ease of Living for the elder citizens"."

Addressing the Bankers Awareness Workshop in Bhopal, Dr Jitendra Singh said, in tune with Vision of Prime Minister for an "Integrated Approach to bring Ease of Living", the move will mitigate the problems faced by the pensioners

Says, all 18 Pension disbursing banks will be integrated in Integrated Pensioners' Portal

Pension Department has undertaken a Nation-wide Digital Life Certificate through Face Authentication campaign in the November, 22 which has resulted into 30 lakhs pensioners submitting their life certificate digitally: Dr Jitendra SinghUnion Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; Minister of State (Independent Charge) Earth Sciences; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh today informed that the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare has decided that all the pension portals like Pension Disbursing Bank portals, ANUBHAV, CPENGRAMS, CGHS etc. will be integrated in a single portal in the form of the newly created "Integrated Pensioners' Portal" (https://ipension.nic.in) to ensure "Ease of Living for the elder citizens".

Addressing the Bankers Awareness Workshop in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, Dr Jitendra Singh said, in tune with Vision of Prime Minister for an "Integrated Approach to bring Ease of Living", the move will mitigate the problems faced by the pensioners with the banks like Change of bank, Submission of life certificate, Submission of death certificate of pensioners, Pension slip and retrieval of pension slip, Income tax deduction data/form 16, Pension receipt information, the websites of Pension Disbursing Banks will also be integrated with the Integrated Pensioners Portal.

The Minister also pointed out that the task of Integration of Pension Seva Portal of SBI and Canara Bank with Bhavishya portal have been completed. With this integration, the pensioners can now get their pension slip, status of

submission of Life Certificate and Form-16 through the Integrated Pensioners' Portal. He also informed that all 18 Pension disbursing banks will be integrated in Integrated Pensioners' Portal.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, DoPPW will take care of not only serving/retiring employees but also work for the Ease of Living of our pensioners and Digital Life Certificate is another step towards this direction. He pointed out that in November 2014, an Aadhar based scheme for online submission of digital life certificate, "Jeevan Pramaan" was launched by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure transparency and "Ease of Living" for pensioners while submitting their life certificate.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, initially submission of DLCs using biometric devices was commenced and later, the Department engaged with MeitY to develop the milestone Face-Authentication Technology-based system based on UIDAI Aadhaar software through which it became possible to give DLC from any Android based smart phone. This breakthrough technology has reduced the dependence of pensioners on external bio-metric devices and has made the process more accessible and affordable to masses by leveraging biometric systems available on smartphones, he added.

The Minister informed that the Pension Department has undertaken a Nation-wide Digital Life Certificate through Face Authentication campaign in the November, 22 which has resulted into 30 lakhs pensioners submitting their life certificate digitally.

Secretary, Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare, Shri V.Srinivas said in his address that DoPPW has commenced a series of awareness programs for Bankers with a view to provide information about the latest pension rules/procedures reforms and welfare initiatives to Bank's field functionaries, handling pensions. He said, in line with the Government's objective of transparency, digitization and service delivery, the Bhavishya platform has ensured End-to-End digitization of the Pension processing and payment. From the retiree filing his/her papers online till issue of the PPO in electronic format going into the Digilocker, this platform has showcased the intention of complete transparency and efficiency of the Government. The 'Bhavishya' platform, an integrated online pension processing system was made mandatory for all central government departments w.e.f. 01.01.2017.

This system is at present being successfully implemented in the main Secretariat of 97 Ministries/ Departments including 818 Attached Offices, 7,941 DDOs on board. As on date, more than 1,89,494 cases have been processed i.e. PPOs issued which includes more than 1,23,249 e-PPOs.PPO in Digilocker and eliminates delays in forwarding PPO to new Pensioners, as well as the necessity of handing over a physical copy. Considering that a very large number of retirees are from CAPFs who serve in far flung areas of the country, such software is a boon both in terms of Ease of processing as well as speed and accuracy in pension processing.

It may be recalled that the Department of Pension & Pensioners' Welfare has bagged the 3rd Rank for BHAVISHYA (An online tracking system for pension sanction and payment developed by DOPPW) as per the NeSDA Assessment 2021 among all the Central Government e-Governance Service Delivery Portals. The ranking is based on Accessibility, Content Availability, Ease of Use, Information Security & Privacy, End Service Delivery, Integrated Service Delivery, Status & Request Tracking. It's very creditable to be able to achieve rank 3 on the basis of these parameters.

This Awareness programs also provide a platform for strategizing and conceiving new initiatives for the benefit of Pensioners. This facilitated introduction of the path for integration of Bhavishya Portal with the pension paying portals of the Banks. So far State Bank of India and Canara Bank has integrated their portals with Bhavishya - IPP and process is on with Punjab National Bank.

The workshops held were an excellent two-way learning process and will go very far in reducing Pensioners' Bank related grievances since the Pension dealing Bank officials were made aware of all the measures/OMs taken/issued by DoPPW for Ease of Living of Pensioners. Such Awareness Programs also convey a strong message of the seriousness of this Department to focus on hitherto neglected expectations of the Pensioners from Banks.

PIB,MAR7,2023

Shri Bhupender Yadav says more than 9,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras have been opened across the country to make health facilities accessible to all

Union Minister for Labour and Employment and Environment ,Forest and Climate Change Shri Bhupender Yadav addressed the Jan Aushdhi Diwas2023 program organized in Dwarka, Delhi today. He said under the leadership of the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, more than 9,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras have been opened across the country

by the central government to make health facilities accessible to all people.

Shri Yadav said medicines are available at these centers at low prices, due to which the public is getting relief from the burden of expensive medicines. He said along with this, keeping in view the convenience of women, the availability of sanitary pads at cheap rates is also being ensured by the government at these Jan Aushadhi Kendras.Shri Yadav said the Modi government is working on a target of increasing the number of Jan Aushadhi Kendras to 10,000 in the country by the end of the year.

PIB,MAR9,2023

Dr Jitendra Singh announces an exclusive women's portal for research grants and funds.The portal will become functional with effect from 1st of April.Special Call inviting proposals from Women Scientists will open the same day

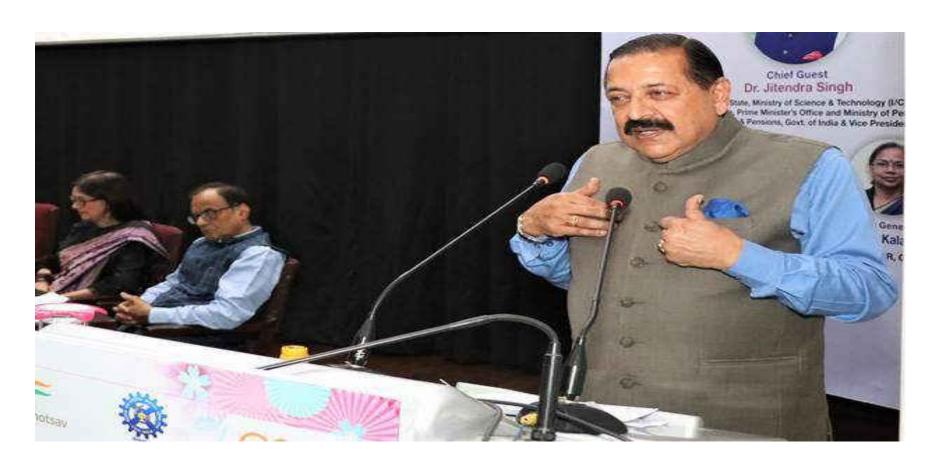CSIR to provide exclusive Research Grants for Women Scientists: Dr. Jitendra Singh

Dr. Jitendra Singh says PM Modi considers women-led development a central dimension of India's progress

"As we move towards Amrit Kal, this is another visionary step towards the Prime Minister Modi's efforts to put Nari Shakti at the forefront of India's development journey"

Dr. Jitendra Singh addresses the International Women's Day celebration of CSIR

To mark the International Women's Day, Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; Minister of State (Independent Charge) Earth Sciences; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh today announced an exclusive women's portal for research grants and funds. The portal will become functional with effect from 1st of April.The Minister was addressing the International Women's Day celebration programme organized by the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) here. He informed that the Council CSIR has decided to start exclusive Research Grants for Women Scientists under CSIR-ASPIRE and an exclusive portal in this regard will be available from April 1, 2023. The Special Call inviting proposals from Women Scientists will open the same day.

Pertinent to mention that the proposal for inviting research grant proposals from Women Scientists under Extramural Research Scheme, was approved during the 200th meeting of the Governing Body of CSIR on 17th December, 2022 under the chairmanship of Dr Jitendra Singh.

Only women scientists across the country will be eligible to apply for research grants to carry out R&D in major disciplines of science and engineering viz Life Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Physical Sciences, Engineering Sciences and inter/trans disciplinary sciences.The funds will be provided for staff (JRF/SRF/RA), contingency and minor equipment. The total budget of a research proposal including research fellow's stipend should generally not exceed the limit of 25-30 lacs.Dr. Jitendra Singh said, this initiative is aligned to the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's initiative to empower women and promote 'Nari Shakti' in the country."As we move towards Amrit Kal, this is another visionary step towards the Prime Minister Modi's efforts to put Nari Shakti at the forefront of India's development journey," he said.

CSIR has been taking several initiatives towards Women empowerment, including 15% discount on CSIR technologies for women entrepreneurs offered by CSIR- Central Leather Research Institute and a slew of training programmes across the whole spectrum of CSIR domain. In August last year, for the first time in the history of CSIR, senior electrochemical scientist Ms. Nallathamby Kalaiselvi became the first woman Director General to head the premier scientific R&D body that constitutes 38 research institutes across the country.Dr. Jitendra Singh said, Prime Minister Modi considers women-led development a central dimension of India's progress and necessary for strengthening India.

"In the last nine years, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government has launched numerous welfare schemes that have aimed to empower women and make them lead India's development journey. His efforts are enabling women to overcome social barriers and fulfil their aspirations," he said.Dr. Jitendra Singh said 68% of 2 crore PM Awas-Gramin beneficiaries are women and over 23 crore MUDRA loans have been granted to Women beneficiaries. For the first time, sex ratio in India has improved to 1,020 women per 1,000 men, according to the NFHS-5 survey, he said.

"PM Modi has made unshackling women and freeing them from the drudgery of everyday life a key objective of policy making. Every flagship welfare scheme launched by the Modi government has improved the lives of women across the country," he said.

Dr. Jitendra Singh said, in the last 9 years, there has been a massive increase in Women Police Personnel. In 2018, PM Modi announced a landmark decision to allow Permanent Commission for Women in the Armed Forces. There are more than 10,000 Women Officers serving in the Armed Forces, the majority in the Medical Services.

"Now Women are breaking the glass ceiling in every sphere. Only recently, the Indian Air Force posted Group Captain Shaliza Dhami as the first woman officer to command a missile squadron in the Western sector facing Pakistan. Women CRPF combatants have been inducted into the elite anti-Maoist COBRA Unit. Women officers have also started taking command of various Army units. The Navy has also started inducting Women Officers on frontline warships," he said.

INDIAN EXPRESS,MAR10,2023

Travel and tourism is poised for its own Amrit Kaal

With a National Tourism Board, India could become part of the top three travel and tourism economies

Puneet Chhatwal

As one of the fastest-emerging tourist destinations in the world, India's travel and tourism sector will be the key axis of development in the coming years. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reiteration of the importance of tourism in driving growth in the Budget Session is a testimony to the immense possibilities of the sector. Budget 2023, at the beginning of Amrit Kaal or the period of intense robust growth, has outlined the path to developing tourism in mission mode.

India's G20 presidency together with Prime Minister Modi's vision to develop 50 destinations across the country has provided the right fillip to the tourism sector and is certain to dramatically improve India's global ranking on the World Economic Forum's Travel & Tourism Development Index.There is a clear tilt towards collective action by industry stakeholders and the government to shape an ever-brighter future for the sector — that's a pillar of development, accounting for 10 per cent of the total employment directly, and providing 8 per cent of the overall GDP.

The basic premise for the central government's push on tourism is an acknowledgement of the fact that the travel and tourism sector needs multiple means of support to prop it up. The Union budget has listed six themes for the development of the sector — convergence, public-private participation, creativity, innovation, digitisation and development of destinations.The power of collaboration between the government, private sector, and local communities in developing and promoting tourism cannot be emphasised enough. It stimulates creativity, enhances competitiveness and achieves visionary results, which may be difficult if all parties were to operate in isolation.

The Prime Minister gave the examples of Kashi, Kedarnath, the Statue of Unity and Pavagadh, to show how a unified approach put the wind in the sails of these regions. The Kashi Vishwanath Dham temple, for instance, saw footfalls increase from 80 lakh a year on average to seven crore last year. The newly-developed site around the Statue of Unity saw 27 lakh visitors within a year of its completion. This approach is aligned with his call for Aatmanirbhar Bharat and the initiative of Dekho Apna Desh that spurred domestic tourism.Technology and tourism will go hand-in-hand. Travel experiences are becoming more personalised, immersive, and interactive. The last two years have given us a glimpse of how blockbuster digital technologies, AR/VR, and artificial intelligence will revolutionise the travel and tourism industry.AR/VR can help travellers explore destinations before they even arrive, providing virtual tours and simulations of famous landmarks, historical sites, and cultural experiences. AI-powered chatbots and digital assistants can help travellers plan their trips, recommend personalised activities, and offer real-time assistance while travelling.

A coordinated approach boosted by the adoption of technology can also help India beat the bugbear of low-spending foreign tourists. On average, we find, foreign tourists spend 33 per cent less than what they would in the US; when compared to Australia, it is lower by more than 60 per cent.

Unlocking India's immense tourism potential requires a comprehensive strategy that addresses the six key pillars of planning, place, people, policy, process, and promotion. The Budget Session addressed all these "6Ps" effectively by covering destination planning and management, infrastructure development, sustainability and safety, development of human capital, policy and process interventions to align the Centre and states as well as promoting the narrative of Indian tourism.

Constitutionally, too, tourism remains a state subject, and the central tourism department has been batting for it to be moved to the Concurrent List, to allow policy-making both at the central and state levels. Granting tourism infrastructure status will provide further impetus to the growth of the sector. It is understood that the idea of a National Tourism Board is under consideration by the government. Matched with the right policies and initiatives, it's the ideal time now for India to turbo-charge efforts to be among the top three travel and tourism economies globally.

INDIAN EXPRESS,MAR11,2023

P Chidambaram writes: Putting lipstick on the numbers

In my view, neither the y-o-y quarterly estimate nor the sequential quarterly estimate of the growth rate reflects the true state of the economy. Ultimately, it is the "output" of all our endeavours in each quarter that will matter.

P Chidambaram

On the Republican party's campaign during the US presidential election in y2008, the Democratic party's candidate, Mr Barack Obama, said, "you can put lipstick on a pig, but it is still a pig." That crushing put down became instantly famous. According to Wikipedia, the phrase has been in use since at lease the middle of the twentieth century.I was reminded of the phrase when I heard the spin that government officers put on the NSO's estimates on India's national income released on February 28, 2023. Numbers do not lie, interpretations of the numbers lie — as we found in the weeks following the presentation of Budget 2023-24. In her Budget speech, the Hon'ble Finance Minister projected a GDP growth of 7 per cent in 2022-23. Since then, government officers, including the Chief Economic Adviser, have repeated that claim. It may well turn out to be correct, but behind the alluring number of 7 per cent lies the cold fact that, in successive quarters of 2022-23, the output has recorded a declining growth rate. According to the NSO's estimates, the growth rates in the first three quarters, year-on-year, are 13.2, 6.3 and 4.4 per cent.In my view, neither

the y-o-y quarterly estimate nor the sequential quarterly estimate of the growth rate reflects the true state of the economy. Ultimately, it is the "output" of all our endeavours in each quarter that will matter. The NSO has measured the value of the quarterly output in terms of Gross Value Added (GVA) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Please see Table:

Remember, these values are absolute values, not rate of growth over the quarter a year ago or over the previous quarter. If the economy was growing at a brisk pace, there is no reason why the value of the output in a quarter should be less than the value of the output in the previous quarter or the preceding quarters. For example, if the manufacturing sector was in good health, employment was maintained and demand was robust, why should the value of the output of the manufacturing sector decline from Rs 6,39,243 crore in Q1 to Rs 6,29,798 crore in Q2 to Rs 6,14,982 in Q3?

Note also that the value of the output of 'Electricity, Gas and Water' (activities closely associated with 'Manufacturing') has declined in successive quarters.

Numbers Don't Lie

If we look at the economy in terms of Gross Domestic Product, Government Final Consumption Expenditure has not been able to maintain its pace. Gross Fixed Capital Formation has been up and down in the three quarters. Exports and Imports are stagnant. There is hardly any indication of strong growth.Another set of worrying numbers is Private Final Consumption Expenditure. Ordinarily, consumption jumps from Q1 to Q2 to Q3 by about Rs 3,00,000 crore in each quarter. In 2022-23, the increase in private consumption has been barely Rs 1,21,959 in Q2 and Rs 1,68,005 crore in Q3, pointing to lukewarm demand. I believe that the fear of inflation, layoffs and retrenchment has constrained private consumption.It is not difficult to estimate the GDP growth in Q4 which will end on March 31, 2023. If the best estimate of annual growth in 2022-23 is 7 per cent, the 'space' that is available in the fourth quarter is only between 4.1 and 4.4 per cent.The economy is facing strong headwinds: recession, inflation, tight monetary policies, protectionism and high fuel prices in advanced economies; the Ukraine-Russia war; sanctions that disrupt supply chains; domestic inflation; rising interest rates and EMIs; loss of jobs and unemployment; and political uncertainty. No amount of brave talk will hide these realities. The outlook for 2023-24 is not bright.

Nevertheless the chorus continues. It is disappointing that the RBI has joined the cheerleaders. According to the RBI's February bulletin, the Indian economy will "decouple from macroeconomic projections of current vintage and also from the rest of the world" — whatever that purple prose means. Further, according to the RBI, the Budget for 2023-24 is "the instrument of decoupling and raising India's growth prospects." This is from the RBI that finds itself unable to decouple from the U.S. Federal Reserve System (the Fed) on monetary policy!

If you had read my three columns on the Budget (The Indian Express, February 5, 12 and 19, 2023), you will agree with me that the Establishment is putting lipstick on the numbers, but they are still depressing numbers.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

PIB,MAR6,2023

Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh emphasized on technology-driven e-Governance for reaching last mile.

The Minister addresses the Inaugural Session of the 2nd Regional Conference on Good Governance in Bhopal in presence of Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan

Vision India@2047 on Governance is truly e-Vision India@2047 marked by saturation and benchmarking of high-quality e-services in tune with Prime Minister's "Panch Pran" goal for the next 25 years elucidated in the Union Budget: Dr Jitendra Singh

Dr Jitendra Singh says, Digital innovation will play an important part in the next decade for governance to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; Minister of State (Independent Charge) Earth Sciences; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh today emphasized on technology-driven e-Governance for reaching last mile.

Addressing the Inaugural Session of the 2nd Regional Conference on Good Governance in Bhopal, Dr Jitendra Singh said, the Vision India@2047 on Governance is truly e-Vision India@2047 marked by saturation and benchmarking of high-quality e-services in tune with Prime Minister's "Panch Pran" goal for the next 25 years elucidated in the Union Budget.

Dr Jitendra Singh underlined that this conference comes at a crucial time, when India is taking Multi-Sectoral Stand on key issues concerning several Central Ministries as the President of the G20 Working Group Meetings and Sideline Events ahead of the Main Summit. The Minister said, it is also an occasion to showcase India's achievements in many fields apart from its globally recognized Soft Power. He said, India is gearing up fast for achieving the vision of a developed India by 2047 with speed and scale facilitated by digital transformations in e-Governance.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government is taking several strides in the field of IT and new age technologies for better delivery of governance to citizens. He said, Digital innovation will play an important part in the next decade for governance to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, we drew inspiration from the words of Prime Minister who stressed on the role of technology in making governance and justice delivery systems reach the poorest of the poor, the marginalized and women living in the hinterland. He said, the Government of India has preempted the need of Information Technology and inculcated the same in each and every aspect of governance and has committed to augment inclusive growth across different sectors. The vision of Prime Minister of India's Techade can be realized through a vigorous and all-pervasive digital governance push, the Minister added.

Dr Jitendra Singh pointed out that as India celebrates its 75th year of Independence as Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, the Prime Minister has given a clarion call for adoption of Next Generation Reforms by bridging the gap between government and citizens and this vision of Next Generation administrative reforms of the PM has been diligently translated into reality by DARPG. Secretariat Reforms, Swachhta Campaigns, Benchmarking of Governance and Services, Redressal of Public Grievances & Improving Service Delivery, recognizing meritocracy and replication of good governance practices form the core of India's good governance model.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, the Regional Conference on Good Governance Practices is an effort to bring the Government and Citizens closer through various administrative reforms at the Centre, State and District level. It is being factored by use of digital technology pursuing next generation reforms and innovations with policy objective of "Maximum governance, Minimum Government", the Minister added.

Secretary, DARPG, Shri V Srinivas said, the DARPG is pursuing integration of State and District Portals with CPGRAMS through web API's so that grievances can be redressed in a seamless manner. He said, this is in accordance with the Government's policy for One Nation-One Portal and considerable amount of work has been completed in this regard. The CPGRAMS has grown in size and quality, integration with multiple grievance redressal platforms functioning in India can provide timely and quality grievance redressal to citizens. Intelligent Grievance Management Dashboard leveraging AI/ML technology has been developed, and a Data Strategy Unit has been set up for analytical insight enabling strategic decision making and policy reforms. This will enable significant improvements in quality of grievance redressal. Besides, Feedback Call Centre for CPGRAMS has been established to collect feedback directly from the citizens.

Digital Transformation of Institutions is enabled by adoption of office automation - e-Office, delayering, delegation of financial powers, digital central registration units and adoption of desk officer system. Fully Digital Central Secretariat, Digital State Secretariats, Digital District Collectorates represent the Digital Transformation of Institutions. There is a need to constantly upgrade e-Office versions and equip them with data analytics to ensure increased efficiency in decision making.

e-Office was initiated with the objective of improving the Government functioning by inculcating more efficient, effective, transparent and standard office procedures. Thus increasing the accountability and responsibility in the Inter-Government and Intra-Government transactions leading to an efficient Government administration and public delivery system. It is a complete digital work place solution for Government offices and is based on Central Secretariat Manual of e-Office Procedure (CSMeOP), formulated by Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances (DAR&PG). eOffice-eFile application (eFile v7.0) was conceptualized, re-architected, developed and launched by National Informatics Centre (NIC) in June 2020, by adopting the latest tools and technologies.

Department of Administrative Reforms & Public Grievances (DARPG) had constituted the National e-Governance Service Delivery Assessment (NeSDA) in 2019 as part of its mandate to boost the e-government endeavors and drive digital government excellence. The biennial study assesses States, Union Territories (UTs), and focus Central Ministries on the effectiveness of e-Governance service delivery. NeSDA helps the respective governments improve their delivery of citizen centric services and shares best practices across the country for all States, UTs and Central Ministries to emulate.The Special Campaign 2.0 on Swachata and reducing pendency in Government offices was organized from 2nd -31st October, 2022 in all Central Ministries/Departments and their attached/subordinate offices/ PSUs/ autonomous organizations. DARPG issued the guidelines and coordinated the campaign across the Central Ministries and their offices through real-time monitoring on a dedicated portal www.pgportal.gov.in/scdpm22.

To encourage replication of good governance practices, DARPG is conducting a series of 13 National Good Governance Webinars, one Webinar a month, over the year 2022-23, commencing from on 28th April, 2022.

One of the functions of DARPG is to showcase the select PM award and e- Governance award winning initiatives to present their innovation to all the central ministries, state and union governments and academicians for dissemination of good governance practices with a view to sharing of experience with each other and replication elsewhere.The changes in Government of India towards improved quality of governance have to be reflected in States and Districts. The aim is to provide governance which is transparent and in adherence to established rules and procedures. This alone will make the march to New India successful.

PIB,MAR7,2023

India AI program will be one of the largest publicly assembled datasets in the world: MoS Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar at the Moneycontrol India FinTech Conclave

India AI program along with Fintech ecosystem will catalyse the next generation of the Fintech: MoS Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar

Fintech ecosystem is a shining example of India's entrepreneurship and confidence: MoS Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar

Union Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Electronics & IT Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said today in Mumbai that IndiaAI program to be launched later this month will be one of the largest publicly assembled datasets in the world.

He said the IndiaAI program along with Fintech ecosystem will catalyse the next generation of the Fintech and Internet.Addressing the Moneycontrol India FinTech Conclave in Mumbai, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar spoke about the growth of the Fintech ecosystem in India and its role in India's Techade.He said that the emergence of India's fintech ecosystem has helped resolve the decades' long problem of ensuring government subsidies reach beneficiaries without leakages and intermediation.Terming the Unified Payments Interface as crucial component of the Fintech ecosystem, he said, "India today has amongst the highest fintech adoption rates in the world at 87 per cent as opposed to the world average of 67 per cent."

Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said, "A single dimensional, digital economy that we inherited in 2014 has become a broad-based, high growth, independent, asynchronous components of the digital economy that are all growing rapidly and creating innovation in their wake."He also said that the fintech ecosystem was a shining example of India's entrepreneurship, India's confidence and Young Indians' messaging to the world that we are here to compete and win.Stressing about the government's initiatives in providing an enabling framework, the Minister said "All legislations are based on the idea of not creating road bumps for the innovation ecosystem."Speaking about the launch of the IndiaAI program, he said, "The program will be one of the largest publicly assembled and available data sets in the world. Working with the fintech ecosystem, it will certainly catapult and catalyse the next generation of fintech and other parts of the Internet."

The Minister address was followed by an interactive session with members of the editorial staff of Money Control.

India under PM Narendra Modi has transformed from being IT/ITES Hub to one designing & manufacturing next Gen products and devices: MoS Rajeev Chandrasekhar at The Deep Tech Summit in Bengaluru

Recently announced 300-acre Apple-Foxconn plant in Karnataka to catalyse electronics manufacturing and Deep Tech ecosystem in the state: MoS Rajeev Chandrasekhar

18-20 lakh Kannadiga Youth to be skilled in traditional to Industry relevant Future Ready skills under Govt of India's Skilling Programs over next three years.Union Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Electronics & IT Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar today said that post-Covid as electronics global value chains are being re-shaped, India is becoming more and more relevant not just in terms of designing but also for manufacturing cutting edge technology and next generation products and devices. He was addressing the Deep Tech Summit - Transformation Through Indigenous Innovation, organized by MeitY-NASSCOM Centre of Excellence (CoE) - IoT & AI in Bengaluru today.

He said, "Upto 2014, the IT/ITes sector mostly represented India's digital economy. After Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi government took over, the opportunities in the digital economy space have rapidly expanded and cover areas such as internet consumer tech, AI, data plus economy, electronics, space, automobiles, space. Segments of the economy that were slightly digitised are now racing forward with each building a future on intersection of digitisation and Deep Tech." Under PM Narendra Modi ji's government, Deep Tech, Electronics and Semiconductor sectors and designing and manufacturing of next gen products and devices are going to be significant focus areas for our digital economy, startups and young Indians," he added.

Highlighting the skilling efforts of the Government and the allocation of Rs 8,000 crore for it in the Union Budget, the Minister said, "The talent inputs that are required to be an enabler for the expansion of the digital economy have been put in place. In Karnataka alone, 18- 20 lakh youth will be skilled for both blue-collar as well high tech, industry relevant and future ready jobs over the next three years."

The Minister also added that the Indian digital economy is no longer limited to certain centres of innovation. He said, "Innovation and talent are longer restricted to developed centres like Gurugram or Bengaluru but come from new and smaller cities." Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar also spoke about the new arenas that Karnataka can become a technology hub and referred to the 300-acre plant being put up by one of the Apple Inc suppliers, Foxconn, just outside Bengaluru in that context. He mentioned that it shall open new opportunities for the youth and catalyse the electronics manufacturing and Deep Tech ecosystem.

Prior to the Minister's address, several startups showcased innovations especially in healthcare and spoke highly of the cooperation they were getting from the governments both at the Centre and in Karnataka. Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar appreciated the efforts of MeiTY NASSCOM Centre of Excellence in IoT/AI in Bengaluru for playing a critical role in Catalysing Deep Tech ecosystem in Bengaluru and Karnataka.

The other attendees included Ms Kalavati, SVP, Head of Software-as-a-Service solutions & Software Center of Excellence and Shri Jitendra Chaddah, VP, India Country Head for Global Foundries who termed India's semiconductor policy as "the best policy rolled out by respective nations," and asked Deep Tech Startups to "Stay there - there are going to be lot of opportunities."Recently, the Ministry of Electronics and IT had signed a pact with Siemens Healthineers to develop new, improved and innovative technologies for advancing healthcare and diagnostic access in India.

PIB,MAR10,2023

Vice President emphasises on technology as a game changer for good health and happiness

Growth of health infrastructure touches the lives of fiscally vulnerable, says the Vice President

Vice President addresses the 2nd International Symposium on Health Technology Assessment

"Facilities that had rarely been found within India until a few decades ago are now available in the country at the divisional level and are of the highest quality," this was highlighted by the Vice President of India, Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar during his address at the 2nd International Symposium on Health Technology Assessment (ISHTA), 2023. Describing technology as a game changer for good health and happiness, Shri Dhankhar noted that India has set an example in the world where technology is being used to provide efficient services to the people.

The Vice President lauded ISHTA's objective of ensuring 'Availability, Affordability and Accessibility' of quality healthcare to all. He commended Ayushman Bharat as the 'world's largest, highly transparent and impactful mechanism', which has enabled the creation of health infrastructure and institutions that ease the lives of the 'fiscally vulnerable'. Shri Dhankhar also made note of other initiatives such as Jan Aushadhi Kendras, e-Sanjeevani and Swachh Bharat Mission which have contributed immensely towards securing good health of people at large.

Underlining India's successful handling of the COVID pandemic, Vice President Dhankhar drew attention to India's Vaccine Maitri initiative. This, he said, is in spirit of India's age-old ethos of 'Vasudaiva Kutumbukam', which sees the world as a family. He urged all stakeholders and global leaders to come together with the same belief and conviction to help secure a world order of health and happiness.

ISHTA-2023 was organised by the Department of Health Research, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with World Health Organisation (WHO) and Centre for Global Development. The symposium also hosted a Market Place that showcased the prominent HTA recommendations that have been implemented by the State and the Central Government.

Dr. Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare, Dr. V K Paul, Member (Health), NITI Aayog, Shri Sunil Kumar Gupta, Secretary to Vice-President of India, Dr Rajiv Bahl, Secretary, Department of Health Research and Director General, Indian Council of Medical Research, Dr Roderico Ofrin, World Health Organization Representative to India and representatives from 23 countries were among the dignitaries present at the event.

PIB,MAR10,2023

MoS Rajeev Chandrasekhar holds consultations with stakeholders on the proposed Digital India Bill (DIB);

For the first time, Design, Architecture and Goals of a Bill are being discussed with stakeholders at its pre-introduction stage;

It will catalyse India's ambition of being in the leading pack of nations that would shape future of technologies;

Union Minister of State for Skill Development & Entrepreneurship and Electronics & IT Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar has held consultations with stakeholders on soon-to-be introduced Digital India Bill -- a future ready legislation that aims to catalyse India's ambition of being in the leading pack of nations that would shape the future technologies.

For the first time design, architecture and goals of a Bill are being discussed with stakeholders at its pre-introduction stage. These consultations are part of the Digital India Dialogues, in line with Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's consultative approach to law and policy making.Making a presentation on the objectives and goals of the Bill, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said the proposed Bill aims to help India achieve the goal of becoming a trillion-dollar digital economy and be a significant trusted player in the Global Value Chains for digital products, devices, platforms and solutions.Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that the proposed Digital India Act aims to help develop India as a globally competitive innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem while at the same time protecting the rights of its citizens.

Stating that the tech ecosystem in general and Internet in particular has evolved significantly after Information Technology Act (IT Act) came into being in 2000, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said that the new law has to be evolvable and consistent with changing market trends, disruption in technologies, and keep in mind protection of digital nagriks from user harm.

"Internet that began as a force of good has today become vulnerable to various types of complex user harms like catfishing, cyber stalking, cyber trolling, gaslighting, phishing, revenge porn, cyber-flashing, dark web, women and children, defamation, cyber-bullying, doxing, salami slicing, etc and there is an urgent need for a specialised and dedicated adjudicatory mechanism for online civil and criminal offences," the Minister observed.Reiterating that the DIB is an attempt by the Government to bring in global standard cyber laws, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said, "We want to ensure the Internet is Open, Safe, Trusted & Accountable and accelerate the growth of innovation and technology and create a framework for accelerating digitalisation of Government and to strengthen democracy and governance."

Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar thereafter listed down some of the guiding principles for the proposed legislation, which include managing the complexities of internet and rapid expansion of the types of intermediaries addressing the risks of emerging technologies, protecting citizen rights, managing and setting guardrails for the varied intermediaries on the internet.The Minister also spoke of promoting free market access and fair-trade practices and ease of doing business and ease of compliance for Startups and delivery of public services through online and mobile platforms in a simple, accessible, interoperable and citizen friendly manner in the same thread. Terming the bill as future ready, Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said, "The new law should evolve through rules that can be updated and address the tenets of Digital India and designed on a principles & rule-based approach' to regulation."The proposed law, in addition to many aspects of the digital ecosystem, will deal in detail with the question of user harm on the internet. Shri Rajeev Chandrasekhar said, "The internet can be a responsible space and illegal content certainly does not find any place on the Indian internet."

After the minister's presentation, he had an interactive discussion with the various stakeholders who included industry representatives, lawyers, Intermediaries, consumer groups amongst others and invited their inputs on it.

PIONEER,MAR12,2023

Develop digital literacy skills to make a change

The ability to use technology, communication tools and networks along with proper netiquette is extremely essential

For a person or an organisation accessing their work digitally, it becomes important to find, evaluate and effectively use the pool of online information. Also, one must have the ability and intent to create and share content digitally.

The covid-19 pandemic has taught the people of India, especially the elderly how to adapt to new technologies to facilitate their tasks. It has also provided them with an effective means against loneliness and social isolation caused by confinement. Today everyone is surrounded by the digital world in some way or other be it paying online bills, booking movie tickets, shopping, ordering food from their favourite restaurants, or even signing contracts in just one click but at the same time it becomes important to talk about the highly rated term Digital Literacy for individuals who are still disconnected or are very little related to the digital world.

At its core, digital literacy is the ability to use digital technology to access, understand and use information effectively and efficiently. According to the American Library Association, digital literacy is defined as the ability to use information and communication to find, evaluate, create and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills. Professionals such as an educator, architects, doctors, warehouse operators, contractors managing construction sites and many more require digital communication at some point in time for searching or extracting information from across varied digital channels. Moreover, the biggest advantage of digital content being accessible on personal devices often makes an individual retain the information for a long time and enhances the knowledge. The best part about going digital is that a user does not require the mandatory skills of coding to be successful but what forms the utmost importance is digital literacy.

It becomes necessary for an individual, especially the nation builders of the future- the children, to develop digital literacy skills for these skills are going to help them in creating their future as many businesses today are setting up their own online applications which require submission of resumes through email. To develop digital literacy skills, a child should start using technology in everyday life for simple tasks such as reading a blog and articles, writing an email and sending it to its near and dear ones or joining an online community that

will help in connecting with others and many more.Parents too can help develop digital literacy skills at home by monitoring the use of technology in terms of time being spent online, websites being accessed, and interactions done by them over social media. When such skills are inculcated at an appropriate age will the child know the limitations of technology and understand the dangers and precautions that the use of this digital technology requires. Though the biggest disadvantage associated with the use of technology is that it will make a person addicted, socially isolated, obese or even anxious at the same time improve academic performance, and creativity due to interaction with different people, enhanced communication skills followed by multitasking and many more outweigh the risks.

Today digital consumption has become a part of our daily lives. As we look to the future, it's clear that digital literacy will continue to play increasingly important roles in everyone's life. Proper knowledge and effective usage of online practices will help in increasing safety. Digital literacy is the building block of the digital India vision.. In a world where AI is deployed at scale, understanding how to adopt AI systems and knowing where to apply Machine Learning capabilities will be a major component of digital literacy.

MINT,MAR12,2023

GPT-4 launch: All we know so far about next-gen launguage model

Aman Gupta

GPT 4, the next-generation language model from OpenAI, could reportedly be launched next week with the ability to respond to user queries in the form of AI-generated videos or images

OpenAI could release the next generation of large language model (LLM), GPT-4 as early as next week. OpenAI is also the maker of popular language models ChatGPT and DallE. While ChatGPT has been restricted to answering user's questions with text, the next generation of language model from the Microsoft-backed

startup could have the ability to generate AI-powered videos and other types of content.In a conversation with German news website Heise, Microsoft Germany's Chief Technology Officer (CTO) Andreas Braun said, "We will introduce GPT-4 next week … we will have multimodal models that will offer completely different possibilities — for example videos."A multimodal language model can source information from a number of sources meaning that the latest developments based on GPT-4 could have the ability to reply to user's queries in the form of images, music and video.

What do we know so far about GPT-4?

Apart from GPT-4's multimodal abilities, it could also be successful in solving ChatGPT's problem of responding slowly to user-generated queries. The next-generation language model is expected to give out answers much more quickly and in a more human-like manner.

Reportedly, OpenAI could also be working on a mobile app powered by GPT-4. Notably, ChatGPT is a web-based language model and does not have a mobile app yet.While both Microsoft and OpenAI are tight-lipped about integrating GPT-4 into Bing search (possibly due to the recent controversies surrounding the search assistant), it is highly likely that GPT-4 will be used in Bing chat.While ChatGPT is built on top of GPT-3.5, Microsoft's Bing search uses GPT-3 and GPT-3.5 along with proprietary tech called Prometheus to churn out answers quickly while making use of real-time information. ChatGPT is a chatbot that answers questions in a human-like making use of its artificial neural networks. The viral chatbot was released by San Francisco-based OpenAI in November 2022 and has since taken the world by storm. It recently crossed the landmark of 100 million active monthly users just 2 months after its launch, while it took popular social media apps Tik Tok and Instagram close to 9 months and 2½ years respectively to cross the prestigious figure.

Climate change, glacier topography & morphology control glacial retreat

Change in debris cover plays a critical role in the glacier surface lowering, shrinkage, retreat, and mass balance, according to a recent study. Therefore, these factors need to be accounted for in future studies for a complete understanding of the observed glacier changes and responses.

Despite the importance of the Himalayan glaciation, the knowledge of the glacial dynamics and the factors that influence these dynamics is scanty. Recent studies of Himalayan glaciers indicate wide variability in retreat rate and mass balance in different sectors of the mountain range, primarily linked to the topography and climate of the region. However, variable retreat rates of glaciers and inadequate supporting field data (e.g., mass balance, ice thickness, velocity, etc.) of the Himalayan glaciers make it challenging to develop a coherent picture of climate change impact.One of the significant characteristics of the Himalayan glaciers is that the glaciers are mainly debris-covered and have been receding since the end of the Little Ice Age. The supraglacial debris on the surface of glaciers is commonly found to have significant control over the rate of loss of mass of ice due to sun, wind, or rain (ablation). It has been observed that the thickness of supraglacial debris significantly alters the glacier response to climate forcing.

A team of scientists from Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology (WIHG), Dehradun, Uttarakhand, India (An autonomous institute under DST, India), quantitatively evaluated the influence of the debris cover on the loss

of ice mass in summer (summer ablation) and on terminus recession of glaciers.Dr. Manish Mehta and his team studied two glaciers with different characteristics --- the Pensilungpa Glacier (PG) in Suru River and the Durung-Drung Glacier (DDG) in Doda River basins of Zanskar in the Leh district of Ladakh for a comparative study of glacier fluctuations between 1971 and 2019. While a thick debris cover characterizes the PG, the DDG has a thin debris cover, and their comparative analysis helped them trace the influence of various factors on the mass balance process.

They found that the glacier retreat rate is controlled by climate change and the topographic setting and morphology of the glacier. Their comparative study published in the journal Sustainability also confirms the possible influence of factors such as snout geometry, glacier size, elevation range, slope, aspect, debris cover, as well as the presence of supra and proglacial lakes other than the climate in the heterogeneous glacial dynamics and underlined the need to include these in glacial studies.

PIB,MAR9,2023

Stage-I of GRAP revoked as overall AQI of Delhi improves significantly

Air Quality Index of Delhi likely to remain in 'Moderate' category in the coming days

Delhi's average Air Quality Index (AQI) clocked 119 at 4pm today, as per the AQI Bulletin provided by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). In view of the significant improvement in the overall AQI of Delhi and also considering the meteorological/ weather forecasts by IITM/ IMD, the Sub-Committee for invoking actions under Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) of the Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR & Adjoining Areas (CAQM) met today to review the current air quality scenario. While comprehensively reviewing the overall air quality parameters of Delhi-NCR and other aspects, the Sub-Committee noted that

forecasts by IMD/ IITM do not indicate any unusual deterioration of air quality in the region with the overall AQI of Delhi to likely remain in 'Moderate' category in the coming days. Therefore, it was considered by the Sub-Committee to revoke the orders under Stage-I of GRAP with immediate effect in the entire NCR.

The overall AQI of Delhi has significantly improved from the level of 213 (lower-end of 'Poor' category) observed on 08.03.2023 to 119 ('Moderate' category) recorded today and has generally remained in the 'Moderate' category so far during March, 2023 except on 02.03.2023 and 08.03.2023.Based on earlier decisions of the Sub-Committee for invoking actions under GRAP, different stages of GRAP have been invoked and further revoked from time to time based on the air quality scenario along with weather/ meteorological forecasts provided by IITM/ IMD. Preventive/ restrictive actions under Stage-I of GRAP have been in force since October 5, 2022.

Now, as the weather/ meteorological forecasts by IMD/ IITM indicating continuous improvement in overall air quality of Delhi in the coming days with highly favourable conditions for dispersion of pollutants because of good wind velocity and high ventilation index, the Sub-Committee, accordingly has decided to revoke the order, issued vide dated 05th October, 2022 for implementation of actions under Stage-I of GRAP in the entire NCR.All the agencies concerned of the State Governments / GNCTD in the NCR, in an effort to sustain the better AQI levels as being experienced currently and that the air quality does not slip to the "Poor" category, however need to ensure that all statutory directions, advisories, orders etc. issued by the Commission are followed strictly and implemented in letter and spirit, including the rules / regulations / guidelines issued by Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) and CPCB and related instructions/ guidelines issued by the respective State Governments / GNCTD and Pollution Control Boards / DPCC, for the following major contributing sectors:

Dust mitigation measures from construction and demolition activities

Control of dust / air pollution from roads, pathways / right of way and open areas

Emissions from industrial operations

Emissions from vehicular segment

Open biomass burning

Miscellaneous dispersed sources and household pollution

In this context, all the agencies concerned are also required to take note of various actions and targeted timelines as envisaged in the comprehensive policy issued by the Commission to curb air pollution in the NCR and take appropriate actions accordingly in the field.

PIB,MAR10,2023

PM inaugurates 3rd Session of National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Felicitates awardees of the Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar

"After the earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria, the world has recognised and appreciated the role of India's disaster management efforts""The way India has expanded the technology and human resources related to disaster management has served the country well"

"We have to develop models of housing or town planning at the local level. We need to encourage use of advanced technology in these sectors.""Recognition and Reform are the two main components for strengthening disaster management""You will get success only by following the mantra of Local Resilience by Local participation""Knowledge on aspects like age of the houses, drainage, resilience of our electricity and water infrastructure will help in taking proactive steps""Explore the use of AI, 5G and Internet of Things (IoT) to make the ambulance network future ready"

"Tradition and technology are our strength, and with this strength, we can prepare the best model related to disaster resilience not only for India but for the entire world"The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi today inaugurated the 3rd Session of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (NPDRR) in New Delhi. The main theme of the 3rd session of this platform is "Building Local Resilience in a Changing Climate".

During the event, the Prime Minister felicitated awardees of the Subhash Chandra Bose Aapda Prabandhan Puraskar. The winners of the 2023 Puraskar are Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) and the Lunglei Fire Station, Mizoram. The Prime Minister also inaugurated the exhibition for showcasing innovative ideas, initiatives, tools and technologies in the field of Disaster Risk Reduction. The Home Minister, Shri Amit Shah, Minister of State Shri Nityanand Rai were among those present on the occasion.

Speaking on the occasion, the Prime Minister noted the global appreciation for the work of the Indian rescue team in Türkiye and Syria recently which has made every Indian proud. The Prime Minister said that the way India has expanded the technology and human resources related to disaster management has served the country well. He said that these awards have been instituted in order to strengthen and promote the disaster management system and also infuse healthy competition. The Prime Minister lauded both awardees.

The Prime Minister said that the theme of event "Building Local Resilience in a Changing Climate" is familiar for Indian tradition as this element is clearly visible in the wells, architecture, and old cities. He said, In India, the system, solutions and strategy of disaster management has always been local. He gave an example of Bhunga houses of Kutch which survived the earthquake to a large extent. The Prime Minister stressed the need to evolve local models of housing and town planning as per new technologies. "Enriching local technology and material with the new technology is the need of the hour. When we link the examples of local resilience with future technology, only then we will be able to do better in the direction of disaster resilience". He added.

The Prime Minister underlined that the lifestyle of yesteryears was very comfortable and it was experience that taught us how to deal with natural calamities of drought, flood and incessant rain. He pointed out that it was natural for previous governments to place disaster relief with the agricultural department. He recalled that when natural calamities like earthquakes struck, it was dealt at the local level with the help of local resources. However, the Prime Minister said, it is a small world that we live in today where learning from experiences and experiments of one another has become a norm. On the other hand, he also noted that the outbreak of natural calamities have also increased in number. Drawing the analogy to the single physician in a village who would treat everyone, the Prime Minister shed light on the fact that we have specialist doctors for every ailment in today's day and age. Similarly, the Prime Minister stressed the need to develop a dynamic system to deal with natural calamities. He highlighted that by studying natural calamities of the past century, an accurate assumption can be made while also stressing on revising these methods in due time, be it material or system.

"Recognition and Reform are the two main components for strengthening disaster management", the Prime Minister underlined. He explained that recognition will help in identifying the possible threats posed by natural calamities and when it will strike in the future, while reform is a system where the threats of a possible natural calamity is minimized. He suggested improving the system by making it more capable in a time bound manner and emphasized the approach of long term thinking instead of short-cut. He recalled the hundreds of fatalities caused due to cyclones hitting West Bengal and Odisha in the previous years, but with the changes in time and strategies, India is now capable of dealing with cyclones where damage to life and property is minimized. "We cannot stop natural calamities but we can definitely minimize its effects by putting better strategies and systems in place", the Prime Minister remarked as he emphasized on adopting a proactive approach rather than a reactive one.

The Prime Minister talked about the poor state of disaster management in the years after Independence. He informed that even after five decades, there was no law regarding disaster management. Gujarat was the first such state that came out with the state disaster management act in 2001. The then Central Government enacted Disaster Management Act on the basis of this act. After that, the National Disaster Management Authority came into existence. The Prime Minister emphasized the need to strengthen disaster management governance in the local bodies. "We will have to institutionalize planning and review local planning. Underlining the need for overhaul of the complete system, the Prime Minister called to work on two levels. First, disaster management experts will have to focus more on public participation. He stressed a continuous process of making people aware about the dangers of earthquakes, cyclones, fire and other calamities. It is important to impart awareness about proper process, drill and rules in this regard. "You will get success only by following

the mantra of Local Resilience by Local participation", he said while asking the stakeholders to use train 'Yuvak Mandals' and 'Sakhi Mandals' at village and neighborhood levels. He asked to further strengthen the mechanisms of Apada Mitr, NSS-NCC, Army veterans and need to ensure equipment in the community centers for the first response as timely start of the rescue work can save many lives. On the second level, the Prime Minister asked for a real time registration and monitoring system using technology. He said, "Knowledge on aspects like age of the houses, drainage, resilience of our electricity and water infrastructure will help in taking proactive steps." The Prime Minister talked about the discussion on the hospital fires during his recent review meeting on the heatwave and how regular review of fire preparedness of the hospital can save lives. The Prime Minister noted the increase in fire incidents in dense urban areas such as a hospital, factory, hotel or multi-storey residential building in the past few years especially with the increasing heat. He highlighted the challenges of having to work very systematically in densely populated areas where reaching by a vehicle is a difficult task and insisted on finding a solution for this. The Prime Minister stressed on constantly increasing the skill set of our firefighters in order to extinguish the fire in high rise buildings while also making sure that there are enough resources to extinguish the industrial fires that start.

The Prime Minister focussed on the need for continuous modernization of local skills and equipment. He asked to explore the possibility of providing equipment that changes forest fuel into biofuel to women of self help groups to increase their income and reduce fire incidence. He also talked about creating a force of specialists for industries and hospitals where chances of gas leaks are high. Similarly, highlighting the need to make Ambulance networks future ready, the Prime Minister asked to explore the use of AI, 5G and Internet of Things (IoT) in this regard. He also asked the stakeholders to look into the use of drones, gadgets for alerting, and personal gadgets that can help in locating people buried under debris. He requested the experts

to study the work of global social bodies that are creating new systems and technologies and adopt best practices. Concluding the address, the Prime Minister underlined that India reacts quickly to the disasters coming around the world and also responds and takes initiative for resilient infrastructure. He informed that more than 100 countries of the world have joined the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure formed under India's leadership.The Prime Minister expressed confidence that today's discussions will lead to lots of suggestions and solutions and thereby lead to emergence of actionable points for the future. "Tradition and technology are our strength, and with this strength, we can prepare the best model related to disaster resilience not only for India but for the entire world" the Prime Minister concluded. NPDRR is a multi-stakeholder platform constituted by the Government of India to facilitate dialogue, sharing experiences, views, ideas, action-oriented research & explore opportunities in the area of Disaster Risk Reduction.

PIB,MAR11,2023

24 by7 Control room for Real-time Monitoring of fire set up to contain 48 Forest Fire spots in Goa

Inquiry ordered to ascertain reasons for Fire at each location

No major losses to floral and faunal diversity reported as yet

Sporadic fires have been reported and detected in various areas of Goa including forests, private areas, communidade lands, plantations, revenue lands, etc. since 05th March, 2023. The Forest Department Goa in close co-ordination and in tandem with the District Collector (North), the District Collector (South), SP (North), SP (South) and other line departments like Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services, has been addressing the local occurrences of fires on topmost priority and mobilising men and material to ensure that the fire spots are contained and loss to life and property, including natural resources is kept at nought/bare

minimum. All concerned officials have been placed on high alert, the situation is being reviewed from close quarters and necessary instructions are being issued from time to time to all responsible officers.The following steps have been taken by the Department to address the forest fire situation till now:

24x7 Control room for Real-time Monitoring of fire: A 24x7 Control Room has been established for real-time monitoring of the alerts generated by FSI. Exact geo-coordinates and maps of fire locations are shared to the field functionaries on real-time basis to immediately attend to the fires. Forest Area divided into sectors DCF / ACF level officers made as incharge for monitoring the fire situation: The impacted areas have been divided into sectors and duties have been assigned to DCF and ACF level officers to immediately attend to the fires, for intensive management of forest fires in close coordination with line departments. More than 750 people are on the field to attend to the fire incidences on war-footing.

Unauthorised entries banned, Strict Enforcement of Forest and Wildlife laws to prevent entry: To check and prevent unauthorised entries into the forest areas, specific directions have been also given to the DCFs to ensure and strictly enforce the forest laws, as applicable and that matter be flagged to Police Department for investigation at their levels as well.Co-ordination with Line Departments: Joint teams, in co-ordination with District Collector (North)/(South), Police Department, District Disaster Management Authority, Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services, local community, including PRI are deployed on field for immediate management of the fire incidences on war-footing. Collectors requested to activate Disaster Management Machinery: Communications have also been made with DC (North/South) and SP (North/South) including the Director (Fire and Emergency Services) to activate the Disaster Management machinery at their respective jurisdiction and issue instructions to the responsible officials for prevention and control of fire.Public Outreach through print, electronic and social media platforms: To generate awareness on Forest Fires amongst the public

at large, preventive and control measures in the form of Dos and Don'ts are being disseminated.Inquiry ordered to ascertain reasons / causes for Fire at each location: All the concerned DCFs have been directed to conduct detailed enquiry into each of the fire incidences which have occurred since 05.03.2023. Forest Fire Prevention Measures intensified: The field executives and the teams are attending to the fire by cutting off the fuel to fire through creation of fire-lines and fire breaks, beating of bushes, counter firing, clearing the leaf litter.As a precautionary measure to check reoccurrence of fires, all the sites where fire has been doused are being monitored regularly to control it immediately.

Aerial support from Indian Air Force and Indian Navy for forest fire management: Two helicopters of Indian Air Force and Indian Navy are continuously carrying out regular aerial recce of the forest areas to ascertain the extent of fire across the state. Drones are also being used for assessment of the extent of active fire areas. Further, in the case of inaccessible areas, the Indian Navy/IAF have also extended aerial support in dousing the fire through helibuckets. As per the reports received from the field, since 05.3.2023 and till 1000 hours of 10.3.2023, 48 fire-spots have been detected and attended to by the field executives in close co-ordination with line departments and local public, including PRIs.

As on 10.3.2023 till 10 am, 7 number of fires are reported to be active. More than 500 number of staff and others, including manpower from other Departments, Fire and Emergency services and PRIs are deployed and 41 number of fires have already been doused.

S. No.

Status of land

No. of fire incidences doused

No. of active fire incidences

1.

Private area

5

2.

Private forest

2

3.

Communidade

1

4.

Government forest

31

7

5.

GFDC

3

Total

41

7

Some points that have been observed over the past few days are delineated below:

Long dry-spell (almost no rains since mid-October, 2022), coupled with unprecedented high summer temperature with low humidity has resulted in a conducive atmosphere for fire, which has been aggravated by high winds observed in the past couple of weeks, particularly after sundown.

The fires are mostly reported from the deciduous patches across the State. The nature of fire seen and observed is surface fire. Surface fires burn loose and dried leaf litter, dried herbaceous vegetation, shrubs, small trees, and saplings that are at or near the surface of the ground, mostly by flaming combustion. The expansion and spread of the surface fire are dictated by the load of surface fuel an area harbours; at places dead trees/fallen logs have added onto the intensity of the fire. Due to the burning debris, smoke and fumes is being continuously been observed and covered a large area. The local populace, depending upon herding of cattle, are known to practise slash and burn technique in grazing lands and grasslands that are accessed by them for their cattle herds. Large swathes of grassy plateaus are observed to have been burned maybe primarily for promoting new grasses.

Similarly, as a cost-cutting measure in cultural and tending activities of the cashew plantation, slash and burn technique is also observed to be followed by the cashew plantation owners and workers, mostly to reduce the

ECONOMIC TIMES,MAR12,2023

Climate has a gender bias?

SECTIONSClimate has a gender bias?

Krisztina Tora

As we look back on global progress on climate action in 2022, one thing is clear: the 27th United Nations Climate Change Conference was a disappointment on many fronts, not least when it comes to the voice of women in the climate debate. This glaring failure was reflected in the lack of women delegates at decision-making levels: only one-third of all delegates were women, while less than 10 women were pictured among the 110 leaders who posed for the official 'family photo'....

The consistent lack of investment in women has environmental and social consequences. Today, 80% of people displaced by climate change are women. For solutions to the climate crisis to be viable, they must be designed by women, for women.

For instance, off-grid renewable energy and clean-cooking solutions directly benefit women and women entrepreneurs, as well as the environment. Another example is the investment in female farmers, who represent 43% of the agricultural labour force in low- and middle-income countries. Such an investment could improve agricultural yields by 30%....

Evidence also shows that in forestry, agriculture, water and many other sectors, projects are more likely to succeed when a gender-sensitive approach is adopted. In other words, systematic gender-sensitive approaches improve social and environmental outcomes and benefit society as a whole.

CURRENT EVENTS

PIB,MAR6,2023

PM responds to the upcoming launch of Bharat Gaurav Train to North East on 21st March 2023

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has expressed his happiness on upcoming launch of Bharat Gaurav Train to North East on 21st March 2023. Shri Modi has said that this would be an interesting and memorable journey, an exciting opportunity to discover the Northeast.

Indian Railways has decided to operate "North East Discovery: Beyond Guwahati", specially designed tour to cover the North eastern states of India by Bharat Gaurav Deluxe AC Tourist train. The train tour will start from Delhi Safdarjung railway station on March 21, 2023 and will cover Guwahati, Sivasagar, Jorhat & Kaziranga in Assam, Unakoti, Agartala & Udaipur in Tripura, Dimapur & Kohima in Nagaland and Shillong & Cherapunji in Meghalaya in 15 days tour.

Responding to the tweet thread by Union Minister for Culture, Tourism and Development of North Eastern Region, Shri G Kishan Reddy about aforesaid upcoming launch of Bharat Gaurav Train, the Prime Minister tweeted;"This would be an interesting and memorable journey, an exciting opportunity to discover the Northeast."