Standard Glass Lining debut with premium of nearly 26 per cent

New Delhi: Shares of Standard Glass Lining Technology Ltd listed with a premium of nearly 26 per cent against the issue price of Rs 140 on Monday.The stock made its market debut at Rs 176, rallying 25.71 per cent from the issue price on the BSE. Later, it surged 29.78 per cent to Rs 181.70. At the NSE, it listed at Rs 172, up 22.85 per cent.The company's market valuation stood at Rs 3,541.97 crore.The initial share sale of Standard Glass Lining Technology Ltd received a huge 182.57 times subscription on the final day of bidding on Wednesday.The Rs 410.05-crore Initial Public Offering (IPO) had a price band of Rs 133-140 per share.The public issue is a combination of fresh issuance of equity shares worth Rs 210 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 1.43 crore shares by promoters and other selling shareholders, according to the Red Herring Prospectus (RHP).Proceeds from the fresh issue to the extent of Rs 130 crore will be used by the company for debt repayment and Rs 30 crore for investment in wholly owned subsidiary S2 Engineering Industry.Funds worth Rs 20 crore will also be utilised by the company towards inorganic growth through strategic investments or acquisitions, Rs 10 crore for the purchase of machinery and equipment and a portion will also be used for general corporate purposes.Standard Glass Lining Technology offers comprehensive solutions that encompass design, engineering, manufacturing, assembly, installation, and commissioning and establishing standard operating procedures for pharmaceutical and chemical manufacturers on a turnkey basis.Its pharma clients include Aurobindo Pharma, Cadila Pharmaceutical, Granules India Ltd, Macleods Pharmaceuticals, Piramal Pharma, and Suven Pharmaceuticals.

Justice Sujoy Paul appointed as Chief Justice of Telangana HC

Hyderabad: President Droupadi Murmu has appointed Justice Sujoy Paul as the Chief Justice of Telangana High Court.Justice Paul is currently a judge of the High Court. He will succeed Justice Alok Aradha, who has been transferred as Chief Justice of Bombay High Court.The Ministry of Law and Justice of the Government of India has issued orders to this effect. Justice Paul is the seniormost judge of the Telangana High Court.He is likely to take oath as the new Chief Justice in a couple of days.

Born on June 21, 1964, Justice Paul did B Com, MA and LLB. He enrolled in the Madhya Pradesh Bar Council in 1990. He had a school education in Pandit L S Jha Model Higher Secondary School and Graduation, Post Graduation and LLB from Rani Durgavati University, Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh.Enrolled as an Advocate in 1990 in the Bar Council of Madhya Pradesh, he actively practiced in Civil, Constitutional, Industrial, and Service and other branches of Law and appeared before various Courts.Justice Paul was elevated as a judge of the High Court Madhya Pradesh at Jabalpur on May 27, 2011, and permanent judge on April 14, 2014.In February last year, Justice Paul had requested the Supreme Court's collegium to transfer him from the Madhya Pradesh High Court to some other High Court as his son was practising in the same court.Following his request, the Supreme Court's collegium transferred him to Telangana High Court. He took oath as a Judge of Telangana on March 26, 2024. Justice Alok Aradhe was appointed as the Chief Justice of Telangana High Court on July 19, 2023, and he took oath on July 23, 2023. He had earlier served as acting Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court.

Godrej Properties unveils 1st housing project in Hyderabad

New Delhi: Real estate company Godrej Properties Ltd is expecting around Rs 1,300 crore revenue from its first housing project in Hyderabad.In a regulatory filing on Monday, the company announced the launch of 'Godrej Madison Avenue', its first premium residential project in Hyderabad.The project, spread over 3 acres of land at Kokapet in Hyderabad, will have around 12 lakh square feet of saleable area with an estimated booking value of about Rs 1,300 crore, the company said.Gaurav Pandey, MD & CEO, of Godrej Properties, said, "We are excited to launch our first project in Hyderabad, representing a significant step in our growth journey. Kokapet's strategic location and infrastructure advantages make it an ideal destination for premium residential developments." Godrej Properties is one of the leading real estate developers in the country.The company has a strong presence in Mumbai Metropolitan Region (MMR), Delhi-NCR (National Capital Region), Bengaluru and Pune housing markets. It has now entered Hyderabad city. Godrej Properties also has residential plotted development projects in tier II and III cities.

How govt wants to produce 80 million skilled Indian grads for global workforce by 2035

In a major effort towards enhancing the employability of India's youth, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has unveiled a set of guidelines for embedding skill-based courses and micro-credentials into the higher education framework. Aimed at bridging the glaring gap between academic instruction and industry requirements, these changes have the potential to redefine the role of Indian universities in producing a future-ready workforce, especially amid the on-going massive technology shifts and changes.While India's huge youth population presents immense opportunities for taking the country's economy to its next orbit of growth, the nation grapples with a mismatch between the skills imparted by traditional educational institutions, and those demanded by several sections of industry. This disconnect continues to contribute to a paradox: while employers cite skill shortages, a significant proportion of graduates remain underemployed.

Why a skill-based education

It is here, the UGC's guidelines propose an essential shift in pedagogical priorities, with a clear focus on fostering practical competencies. "These guidelines aim to equip students with industry-relevant skills, enabling them to achieve academic excellence while preparing them for the demands of a globally competitive knowledge economy," remarked UGC Chairman M. Jagadesh Kumar."This initiative reflects our commitment to creating a vibrant, adaptable education system that prepares India's youth for emerging opportunities," the UGC Chairman added while unveiling the guidelines a few weeks back. The draft guidelines are open for public feedback to strengthen its implementation.Key features of the guidelinesThe UGC guidelines present a robust strategy to integrate vocational skills into higher education. They recommend:Skill-based programs across academic levels: Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as Universities and colleges will offer skill-oriented programs, including certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas, and degree coursesMicro-credentials for flexibility:Short, modular courses focused on niche skills will allow students to acquire targeted expertise and stack credits toward broader qualifications.Industry collaboration: To ensure alignment with job market needs, the guidelines emphasize partnerships between HEIs and industries, fostering internships, apprenticeships, and co-designed curricula.Credit-based flexibility: Students can accumulate and transfer academic credits, facilitating lifelong learning and diverse educational pathwaysThese initiatives support the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020's vision of a multidisciplinary, skill-focused higher education ecosystem. The UGC's initiative can benefit a substantial number of students over the next decade.

As of the 2021-2022 academic year, approximately 43.3 million students are enrolled in higher education institutions across India. Projections indicate that by the financial year 2035, student enrolment in higher education is expected to rise to about 92 million.Assuming a linear growth trajectory, the student strength would likely increase by 48.7 million over the next 13 years, averaging around 3.75 million additional students per year. Over a 10-year period, this suggests an increase of about 37.5 million students. Thus the UGC's initiative over the next decade is estimated to be approximately 80.8 million.Of relevance in this context is a recent joint initiative by the All India Council for Technical education (AICTE), the Association of Indian Universities, the Confederation of Indian Industry, and an online assessment organizations, Wheebox, along with state governments and private organizations, to bring out an India Skills Report 2025.The report notes that countries across the Gulf, Southeast Asia, Africa, Australia, and Europe face acute shortages of skilled professionals in high-demand sectors like tech-nology, healthcare, finance, and green energy. India's vast and evolving talent pool in fields like IT, engineer-ing, healthcare, and emerging domains like AI and digi-tal commerce, provides a timely and strategic solution to these challenges.After surveying over 600,000 students, the report points to an employability level of students from different disciplines.Maharashtra, Delhi, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and UP students were found to have the highest employability index from the employability test done by Wheebox.A quick background: The Economic Survey by the government in 2023-24 had noted that only 51.25% of India's graduates are employable, with significant challenges in vocational training and skilling."With one of the youngest populations, a median age of 28, India can harness its demographic dividend by nurturing a workforce that is equipped with employable skills and prepared for the needs of the industry. Elevated levels and superior standards of skills help countries adeptly navigate the challenges and opportunities present in both domestic and international job markets," the Survey had stated then.It is amid this background that the UGC has released the draft guidelines on infusing skill courses in degree programs, calling for feedback.A call for refinementWhile the guidelines mark a significant milestone, their successful implementation hinges on addressing longstanding systemic challenges:Bridging the industry-academia gap: Collaboration with industry leaders must go beyond nominal partnerships. Employers often seek real-time applied skills rather than theoretical knowledge. Structured apprenticeships, live projects, and exposure to emerging technologies must form the backbone of these courses.

Faculty development: The quality of skill-based education depends on the educators delivering it. Faculty training programs, including industry immersion initiatives, are crucial to equipping teachers with the expertise to impart practical skills.Infrastructural investment: Skill-based education requires modern infrastructure, including well-equipped labs, workshops, and access to cutting-edge technology. Many HEIs, especially in rural and semi-urban areas, lack these facilities.Dynamic curriculum design: Curricula must be continually updated to reflect the rapidly changing demands of industries such as IT, renewable energy, and healthcare. Establishing advisory boards with representatives from high-growth sectors could help maintain relevance.Focus on soft skills: Communication, teamwork, and critical thinking are often cited as critical gaps in the Indian workforce. Embedding these competencies into the curriculum can enhance the overall employability of graduates.Critical sectors for skill development

The success of India's skilling initiatives also depends on identifying and prioritizing sectors poised for exponential growth. Over the next decade, the following industries are likely to demand a skilled workforce:Information technology and digital transformation: Roles in artificial intelligence, data science, cloud computing, and cybersecurity will continue to dominate the job market.Renewable energy: As India transitions toward green energy, the solar and wind power sectors will require skilled engineers, technicians, and project managers.Advanced manufacturing: With the rise of automation and Industry 4.0, proficiency in robotics, machine learning, and advanced manufacturing technologies will be crucial.Healthcare: An aging population and the rise of medical technology demand skilled professionals in healthcare management, diagnostics, and telemedicine.Digital marketing and e-commerce: The proliferation of digital platforms necessitates expertise in online marketing, user experience design, and analytics.Industry leaders have echoed similar sentiments. An IT sector executive remarked, "While degrees provide foundational knowledge, it is practical skills and adaptability that determine employability. These guidelines are a step in the right direction."By addressing many of the existing systemic weaknesses, fostering collaboration with industry, and focusing on sectors with high growth potential, India can empower its youth to thrive in an increasingly competitive global economy. With sustained effort, this UGC initiative has the potential to not only elevate the nation's skills index but also drive economic progress for decades to come.

The right to food and the struggle with the PDS

In 2023, there was a report discussing the right to food in the context of Jharkhand. Similarly, a few days ago, there was another report that was in the context of Odisha. These reports highlighted something alarming — that a substantial number of households have been removed from the rolls of the Public Distribution System (PDS). This disturbing situation is not limited to Jharkhand and Odisha. Bihar, another State in the east-central region, has its own PDS tragedy.

The example of the Musahar communityBihar was blighted by a supply crisis, when rations were needed the most, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, there are communities which continue to be in want of a stable supply of ration. This is more notable among extremely marginalised communities such as the Musahars. This is a community that has been pushed beyond the edge of destitution by the socio-politics of caste. Its struggle with the PDS emerges as a significant symptom of the same.

A number of Musahar households in Patna district do not have an active ration card. Even if they do have one, there is another problem — the card does not have the names of all the family members.

There are also several people who have lost access to their monthly supply of ration ever since biometric verification was made mandatory at fair price shops (FPS). In such cases, the individuals concerned are forced to get a new ration card as after verification it emerges that their names have been struck off the PDS rolls. The ruling dispensation and its over the top marketing of 'smart cities' clearly posits before us the disconnect between the government and the people most in need of state welfare.Problems with the PDS are not limited to enrolment and access. There is also the flow of corruption through the veins of the system. Households enrolled with the PDS have reported that FPS dealers have been releasing only four kilograms of food grain/person when a below poverty line (BPL) household which has a Priority Household (PHH) ration card is entitled to five kilograms a person. The four kilograms of grain being issued is rice, which is the lowest quality of 'Usna' rice. No amount of wheat is issued.Documentation that has no legal basis

Punjab to take the tourism sector to a new zenith: Chief Minister

Chandigarh (JAG MOHAN THAKEN), January 15: While dedicating the first of its kind boutique and heritage hotel Ran Baas-Palace constructed at Quilla Mubarak in Patiala, the royal city to the people, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Singh Mann on Wednesday said that the state government intends to take the tourism sector to a new zenith.The Chief Minister said that this aesthetically designed hotel has been built on PPP mode and will set a new benchmark in comfort, hospitality and elegance. He envisioned that magnificent hotel will be a favourite place for destination weddings and others.

CM Mann said that this Hotel will give a big boost to the tourism sector in the state in general and the royal city of Patiala in particular. The Chief Minister expressed hope that the tourists will have a comfortable stay in the Hotel and they will enjoy the warm hospitality of the state during their visit.He said that this hotel will give further impetus to tourism in the royal city by providing a comprehensive and holistic wedding destination, in addition to its current status as a hub for religious tourism. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that besides grandeur this hotel is a reflection of the glorious cultural heritage of the state.The Chief Minister expressed the state government's unwavering commitment to making Punjab a leading tourist destination in the country through such projects. He said that day one after assuming charge of office it is his dream to showcase hidden aspects of vibrant and blessed Punjab to people across the globe.Bhagwant Singh Mann said that from day one his government is working tirelessly to enhance the income of the state exchequer adding that this is a step in this direction only.

The Chief Minister said that geographically Punjab is blessed land adding that the state government intends to take the tourism sector to a new zenith.He said that areas around Chohal Dam, Ranjit Sagar Dam, Shahpur Kandi Dam and Kandi areas of the state are being developed as ideal tourist destinations for attracting the tourists from across the globe. Mann said that there is a huge potential for developing these areas as a tourist destination for which all out efforts are being made.

The Chief Minister said that the state government has land even in other states like Goa, Jaipur (Rajasthan), McLeod Ganj (Himachal Pradesh) and others which will be developed in coming days.He said that earlier the previous state governments used to sell the prime properties of the state to their close friends but now a reverse trend is being witnessed as the state government is developing these sites.Citing an example, Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the state has created history by purchasing Goindwal power plant owned by a private company GVK Power adding that for the first time this reverse trend has started that the government has not purchased any private power plant whereas in the past the state governments used to sell their assets to the favourite individuals at 'throw away' prices.The Chief Minister said that this is the first heritage hotel of the state adding that more such projects will be developed in the state by optimally utilizing the historic buildings of the state.CM Mann said that the state government will

construct a heritage street at the native village of Shaheed-e-Aazam Bhagat Singh to showcase the glorious contribution of Punjab and Punjabis in the national freedom struggle. He said that this 850-metre-long heritage street will be constructed from the existing Museum to the ancestral house of Shaheed

Bhagat Singh at Khatkar Kalan. Bhagwant Singh Mann said that this street will showcase the glorious contribution of the state in the national freedom struggle thereby inspiring the youth to work zealously for the country.The Chief Minister expressed hope that this prestigious project will drive tourism,

create opportunities for local businesses and showcasing Patiala's rich cultural identity and heritage to attract global travellers, contributing to the region's economic growth.Bhagwant Singh Mann said that the hotel has been restored as Punjab's first luxury palace hotel, seamlessly blending heritage with contemporary luxury.

MG Windsor, India's latest buzz in EVs, crowned Green Car of the Year at ICOTY 2025

Hyderabad:JSW MG Motor India is proud to announce that the MG Windsor, India's first Intelligent CUV, has been awarded the prestigious Green Car Award at the Indian Car of the Year (ICOTY) Awards 2025, held at Aerocity, New Delhi, on January 10, 2025.

The ICOTY Award, considered India's most prestigious automotive accolade and often referred to as the 'Oscar' of the Indian automotive industry, is presented to the best new car by a panel of expert automotive journalists. The rigorous evaluation process considers factors such as price, fuel efficiency, styling, comfort, safety, performance, practicality, technical innovation, value for money, and suitability for Indian driving conditions.Speaking on the milestone, Rajeev Chaba, CEO Emeritus, JSW MG Motor India, shared, "The MG Windsor is the right product at the right time with the right pricing and packaging. It is certainly a disruptor in the segment, redefining consumer perceptions about EVs. The strong sales momentum since its launch, highlights the evolving preference of consumers. The MG Windsor ticks all the boxes of their consideration sets, especially the value for

money it delivers. The MG Windsor is all the more special to us because it has been successful in debunking myths around higher acquisition cost of EVs through path breaking initiatives such as Battery-As-A-Service and lifetime battery warranty. The interplay of all these factors has helped MG Windsor to emerge as the Green Car of the Year at the coveted ICOTY 2025. I would like to thank all our customers for their unwavering support, the esteemed jury at ICOTY and everyone at JSW MG Motor India who have worked relentlessly to make this achievement possible."A key factor contributing to MG Windsor's success is its availability through the unique Battery as a Service (BaaS) program. This innovative ownership model offers customers the flexibility to own an EV without the substantial upfront cost of the battery. Instead, they can opt for a pay-as-you-go approach, paying only for battery usage, similar to refuelling a conventional vehicle. Flexible options and rental packages are also available, allowing customers to choose the best fit for their needs. The option to purchase the ve-

hicle at the full ex-showroom price, including the battery, remains available.This win follows JSW MG Motor India's success at the ICOTY Awards last year, where the MG Comet EV – The Smart Electric Vehicle –

received the runner-up award in the same category in 2024.JSW MG Motor India has also achieved a significant production milestone, manufacturing 10,000 units of the MG Windsor in just three months.

Maha Kumbh Mela's journey (1954-2025): A look at its evolution, unique features, logistics and tragedies

"A Maha Yagya of Unity," proclaimed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on December 13, 2024, while describing the upcoming Maha Kumbh Mela scheduled to be held in Prayagraj from January 13 to February 26, 2025. With millions of devotees set to participate in what is the world's largest religious congregation, Mr. Modi inaugurated 167 projects worth ?5,500 crore in Prayagraj, ranging from a multilingual Sah'AI'yak' Chatbot to streamline communication for devotees in 11 Indian languages to revamping holy places, like Shringverpur Dham, across the city.The Maha Kumbh will kick off on January 13 with a visual display of 2,000 illuminated drones over Sangam Nose, depicting iconic events such as the mythical Samudra Manthan and emergence of the Amrit Kalash. A similar drone show will also mark the close of the event on February 26.Here's a look at the origins, evolution, unique features and logistical challenges surrounding the Kumbh Mela.Origins

The origin of the Kumbh Mela is attributed to eighth-century Hindu philosopher Adi Shankaracharya, who promoted regular gatherings of spiritual leaders and ascetics, and also instituted the monastery system and the 13 akharas (warrior-saint sects). Kumbh Melas are held every three years with a 12-year cycle for the Maha Kumbh – commencing along the riverbanks in Haridwar, then Ujjain, Nashik and culminating with the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj. The Ardh Kumbh at the six-year mark is celebrated in Haridwar and Prayagraj. The dates of the event are decided based on the movements of the moon, sun and Jupiter as recorded in the Hindu calendar.According to Hindu legend, when Lord Vishnu, in the guise of Mohini, carried the pot of amrit (nectar) during the Samudra Manthan (churning of the ocean), a scuffle ensued leading to four drops falling at Prayagraj, Haridwar, Nashik and Ujjain – creating four Tirthas (holy sites). Devotees believe that a dip in the rivers flowing through these Tirthas (Ujjain - Kshipra, Nashik - Godavari, Haridwar - Ganga and Sangam at Prayagraj - the confluence point of rivers Ganga, Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati) will lead to salvation.

Akharas and the Shahi SnanSince the eighth century, a large gathering of sadhus (monks) from various akharas have been seen at Prayagraj to perform the Shahi Snan (holy dip) at a stipulated time on auspicious days. Led by the Naga Sadhus – ascetics who smear ashes over their naked bodies and sport weapons like tridents, swords, and lances, as well as conches and drums – the sadhus from various akharas hold traditional processions to the river for bathing. The 13 recognised akharas partaking in the Shahi Snan include the Shaivite akharas— Nirvani, Atal, Niranjani, Anand, Juna, Awahan and Agni; the Vairagi akharas — Nirmohi, Digambar Ani and Nirvani Ani, the two Udasin Akharas (Naya and Bada) and the Nirmala Akhara.In 2019, a 14th sect, the Kinnar Akhara — a group of 15-20 transgender saints with Mahamandaleshwars (chief monks) from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Maharashtra and others were included in the Shahi Snan order. The group, which was first recognised by the Juna Akhara, took part in the Shahi Snan and will henceforth be part of Kumbh festivities.

From the ninth to the eighteenth centuries, it was the akharas which organised the month-long Kumbh festivities and the order for the Shahi Snan was a friction point. Several violent clashes occured between akharas over this hierarchy, even resulting in fatalities. While the order is still decided by the akharas, it has been institutionalised by authorities. During the Shahi Snan, the Mahamandaleshwars (chief monks) of the akharas, seated on guilded chariots, palanquins, elephants, and/or horses lead the Shahi Snan into the icy waters in the early hours on special days like Makar Sankranti, Paush Purnima, Mauni Amavasya, Vasant Panchami, Maghi Purnima and Mahashivratri. General devotees participate in the holy dip on any of the auspicious days during the month-long Kumbh festival.

Kumbh Mela and the BritishWith the arrival of the British on Indian shores, control over and logistics pertaining to the event transferred to the colonial administration. The first reference to the Kumbh Mela by the British was in an 1868 report which said a 'Coomb Mela' was to be held in Allahabad in 1870, for which logistic support and sanitation facilities were sought. as well as arrangements to house the pilgrims attending it. During the British Raj, the festival saw a large gathering of citizens from all walks of life apart from the sadhus, and it was used to galvanise support for the freedom movement. According to the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT), even Mahatma Gandhi participated in the Maha Kumbh mela in 1918 and interacted with other attendees. With the imposition of pilgrim tax, rapid expansion of railway infrastructure, institutionalisation of the Shahi snan, preparation of housing, sanitation, and food facilities for the pilgrims and policing, the British Raj controlled the Maha Kumbh Mela's functioning, thus limiting clashes between the akharas.

Organisation of Kumbh Mela (1954-2025)The first Maha Kumbh Mela organised by Indian authorities after Independence was in January 1954. Despite prior planning, the Army and Public Works Department faced the hurdle of constructing and maintaining five new pontoon bridges over the constantly changing course of the Ganga. In 1966, over seven lakh pilgrims took the holy dip on Magha Purnima – the fifth important bathing day, reported The Hindu.

1977 marked the completion of 12 Kumbh Mela cycles –i.e. 144 years, and was also unique as the flow of the river Ganga in two streams had created two 'sangams' (confluences). While Emergency was imposed across India by the Indira Gandhi government, preparations for the Kumbh Mela were continued at a large scale, according to reports by The Hindu. Fourteen bridges on the two streams of Ganga were erected, while 2,000 country boats facilitated travel from the river banks to the narrow bathing strips at the Sangam. Armed with 8,000 policemen, Army jawans, and Home Guards, the government kept strict control on traffic to avoid any stampede, as one crore people gathered in Prayagraj for a holy dip on January 19, creating a world record for the largest crowd gathering.In 1989, the Kumbh area was expanded to 3,000 acres, with more pontoon bridges fabricated by the Army over the Ganga. Special bathing strips on the river

(similar to those in 1977) were not feasible that year as the space between the two streams of the river was insufficient, but crowds continued to swell as 1.5 crore devotees visited Prayagraj for a holy dip, entering the Kumbh officially as the world's largest gathering of people in the Guinness World Book of Records.

The millennium's first Maha Kumbh Mela, held in 2001 from January 9 to February 20, saw proceedings being telecast live, with the U.P. government commissioning Aastha Television Channel and providing studio facilities, transportation, hospitality, communication and other assistance, The Hindu reported. The government's media channel Doordarshan also broadcast the major events, i.e. all the Shahi Snans. India's remote sensing satellite (IRS-ID) captured the landscape of the Kumbh area, including the confluence of the two rivers Ganga and Yamuna.Swipe across the images to view other photographs

As popularity, scale, and area increased, so did security arrangements. Apart from security personnel, the government deployed naval diggers, mine-sweepers, and sniffer dog squads. Two Air Force helicopters were tasked with air surveillance while intelligence agencies kept an eye on activity by militants and Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). In 2013, a record three crore pilgrims descended on the Sangam on the biggest bathing day, Mauni Amavasya, as the government arranged 22 ghats spread across 14 sectors and spanning 18,000 feet of the Ganga's river banks.

Political links and features of the KumbhWith total control over communication during the 1977 emergency, radio and television sets blared the Prime Minister's 20-point programme and Sanjay Gandhi's five-point programme during the mela, informing the citizens of its benefits and speedy implementation. Gandhi addressed a special conference of the Bharat Sadhu Samaj on January 22, urging them to remove superstitions among people to aid the country's progress. Receiving more than the sadhus' blessings, the conference passed a resolution favouring the government's programme targeted to alleviate poverty by providing basic amenities like food, clothing, education, and shelter.In 1989, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) also capitalised on the increase in the number of visitors, unveiling the blueprint of the proposed Ram Mandir in

Ayodhya at its annual religious conference – the Dharam Sansad. The conference also vowed to collect bricks from each village for the Ram temple. Acclaimed director Michelangelo Antonioni too released a short documentary on the 1977 Kumbh Mela, as global attention for the festival increased.

The scope and scale of the mela continued to grow, but some logistical marvels emerged. A 2001 report by The Hindu stated that an estimated 4,000-6,000 pilgrims lost their relatives everyday in the Kumbh crowds, but due to efforts of the volunteers operating the 'Bhoole- Bhatke Shibir' (missing persons information centres), over 99% of these individuals (mostly women) were reunited with their families.With all major international media channels covering the event, the VHP unveiled the proposed Ram Mandir's thermacol model at its Dharam Sansad, declaring that the construction of the temple would begin by April 2002. That year, Congress chief Sonia Gandhi too took a symbolic 'Ardha snan' (partial dip) at the Sangam, insisting it was a religious and not a political visit.Inclusivity entered the Kumbh Mela in 2013 as 100 women who were former manual scavengers took a dip in the Sangam and later shared a meal with 150 priests from the akharas on February 8. The event was organised by social service organisation Sulabh International along with the head seers of Anand, Juna and Niranjani Akharas, The Hindu reported.Politics once again reared its head at the Maha Kumbh in 2013 as the Lok Sabha election was a mere year away. Putting a spotlight on Gujarat CM Narendra Modi, the VHP backed his candidacy as BJP's Prime Minister pick, pressuring the party's ideological parent Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh to make its choice. However, ground reportage by The Hindu found that the Kumbh attendees – Naga Sadhus, kalpavasis, and regular attendees, remained clueless as to who Mr. Modi was. Moreover, even those politically inclined refused to discuss politics, maintaining that the Kumbh was sacred.In 2019, several new features were introduced in the Ardh Kumbh at Prayagraj including the inclusion of the Kinnar Akhara in the Shahi Snan. Apart from this, the 10,000 sanitation workers who worked in keeping Kumbh premises clean were felicitated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a public event. Symbolically, Mr. Modi also washed the feet of five of them, stressing the role in his government's 'Swachh Bharat' programme.

The Trump card, global politics and outcomes for India

Who is Donald Trump? Dissecting the psychology of the next U.S. President is a popular pastime. His bold, disinhibited speaking style, his outspokenness, his focus on deal-making, his real estate background that defines his coercive leadership and politics, cast him very differently from his predecessors. He is a polarising figure, wading constantly into controversy, stubbornly resilient, a master of populist rhetoric, presenting himself as the voice of the "common people" arraigned against an out-of-touch political establishment.

It's 'America first'What is Mr. Trump's approach to the "rules-based international order"? We know from his first Presidency, that he expounds an "America First" doctrine. He debunks multilateralism in global politics, and he trashes international agreements that he believes do not favour the United States. He prefers bilateral agreements over multilateral ones: witness his approach to the Paris Climate Agreement (from which he withdrew and is likely to withdraw again) and to trade agreements such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He is dismissive of international institutions like the United Nations and regional bodies such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, saying that these disproportionately benefit other nations at the expense of the U.S. To the delight of his acolytes, he places American sovereignty over global governance.In the Trumpian worldview, strategy revolves around the bully pulpit, strong personal branding, a willingness to take risks, unconventional deal-making, winner-take-all in place of win-win. Practical outcomes rather than theoretical constructs are emphasised.

Donald Trump's transactionalism is legend. His MAGA ("Make America Great Again") policy will have implications influencing global geopolitics. This will entail a rise of protectionism in global trade (free trade is an anachronism in this scheme of things), escalating tariffs and trade wars and increased economic uncertainty. Intensified competition with China where Beijing is clearly framed as an economic and ideological adversary will affect global stability, particularly in the Indo-Pacific.Mr. Trump's scepticism about global institutions will inspire adventurism in global politics and nationalisms that override international law. Polarisation in global politics will be increasingly in evidence, and debates on free trade, immigration and globalisation will become increasingly fractious. Climate policy and action will be downgraded. Instability in global markets will affect nations, whether developed or developing, across the board. The world is in for 'interesting' and tumultuous times.

American isolationism under MAGA (since Mr. Trump has clearly signalled opposition to U.S. direct involvement in external conflict), can encourage powers such as China and Russia already united in their opposition to the U.S.'s power and influence, to expand their global footprint, using both economic and military means. MAGA could be synonymous with disruption beyond American shores and power realignments.

Ties with India, the line for New DelhiThe strategic outlook for India-U.S. relations under a second Trump Presidency is mixed. Relations between the two countries have witnessed a steady evolution and multi-faceted growth over the last two decades across partisan divides. That trend is expected to continue especially since Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Mr. Trump have a warm friendship. India has stressed constructive engagement with the U.S. as a key strategic partner. India's growing geopolitical clout and a mutual interest with the U.S. in countering China (particularly because of the over-assertive Chinese military posture and transgressions across the Line of Actual Control) provide a strong impetus for a growing strategic partnership. India-U.S. defence cooperation will continue to strengthen together with partnerships in critical technologies (provided the new administration does not use export controls as pressure points) and business. Trade frictions could, however, be a complicating factor.The countering of Chinese influence in the region by the incoming U.S. administration suggests that groupings such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad or the U.S., Australia, India, and Japan), where India is an important constituent, will be strengthened. The maintenance of the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific requires the continued involvement of the U.S., even though India is cautious about an over-reliance on America and seeks to ensure its very own strategic autonomy. India's Indo-Pacific vision stresses regional cooperation, multilateralism and multipolarity.India would do well to continue to emphasise its own strategic priorities, as shaped by history, geopolitics, national security, its economic interests and civilisational identity. Its border security, a strong defence posture, military modernisation, intensified counterterrorism efforts through strengthened intelligence, anti-radicalisation, and a continued focus on fighting cross-border terrorism, remain of central concern.

The compulsion of economic growth is central to its strategic outlook. India's energy security, diversification of energy sources, building renewable energy and the maintenance of stable relationships with key energy suppliers are vital. Peace and stability in South Asia are important, as also vigilance about containing and neutralising destabilising influences in the region, particularly from China and Pakistan. Security of the Indo-Pacific as a key maritime and economic passageway is a strategic priority. India's partnerships with Japan, Australia, with the European Union and with The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, apart from the U.S. are essential to the balancing of China's rise, to ensure India's access to key technologies, to defence preparedness, and for its trade and economic development.Key for its strategic future are its digital transformation, space exploration, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity for its digital infrastructure and building resilience against cyber threats from hostile nations and non-state actors. India's priorities should incorporate a deployment of soft power in an emphasis on democratic and constitutional values, pluralism, humanitarian engagement and diaspora outreach. The relationship with Russia must continue to be in focus because of the complex and diversified nature of India's strategic partnership with that country, and because of the counterweight it provides to the growing Sino-Russian alignment in Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific.On Trump againThe reality of the second Trump Presidency, and Mr. Trump's victory in the elections, indicate that established patterns of history and geopolitics that served as guides to the future may no longer apply as the positioning system for a global order that will instead be disruptive, polarised and unstable. Global politics, all said, may never be the same. As the American analyst, Ian Bremmer, recently noted, a G-Zero world has arrived, and the law of the jungle may provide the new global playbook.

The promised land record

Ever since the Congress government came to power in Telangana, it has taken a series of measures to streamline the land ownership process, rectify deficiencies in the previous system that had caused sleepless nights for farmers, and improve revenue administration.Farmers began to struggle when, in 2020, the Telangana Assembly enacted the Telangana Rights in Land and Pattadar Passbooks Act, popularly known as the Record of Rights Act. The previous Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) government had also introduced the Dharani portal, a land record management portal, billed as one-stop solution for land-related issues. However, the portal was rife with errors. There was often a mismatch between the physical records and the digitised records, and 18.36 lakh acres of land were pushed into the prohibited list even though farmers had been tilling them for decades. The portal was operated by a foreign company.To make matters worse, the new law left no scope for grievance redress at the local level. The power of redress was mostly vested with the District Collector or Chief Commissioner of Land Administration. The BRS government also did not prepare rules for effective implementation of the Act.Then the BRS government also scrapped the village revenue officers and village revenue assistants system, arguing that it was a residue of the feudal system and that the officers and assistants were fudging revenue records. Village revenue assistants had been helping revenue officials in villages with the collection of village revenues, such as agriculture tax and irrigation tax. The village revenue officers and village revenue assistants of 10,950 revenue villages across the State were removed overnight and accommodated in other departments. This hit revenue services at the grassroots level. This forced farmers to approach courts at different levels and as a consequence, the judiciary was faced with a pile of cases.The government also faced allegations that BRS leaders were taking advantage of the loopholes in the Dharani portal to usurp lands from farmers at throwaway prices.In short, land management became a messy affair.Immediately after it came to power, the Congress government constituted a committee headed by senior party leader M. Kodanda Reddy to study the lapses in revenue administration and recommend measures to strengthen the system. The committee comprising experts recommended repeal of the Records of Rights Act and suggested that the Dharani portal be replaced with a new farmer-friendly portal, Bhumata.Last December, the Assembly enacted the Telangana Bhu Bharati (Record of Rights) Act, 2024, with a provision to issue Bhudhaar cards, on the lines of Aadhaar cards, to all land owners for issuing title deeds and reducing disputes at the village level. "The lack of unique identification number for land parcels is leading to boundary disputes and is also a hurdle in maintaining accurate revenue records. There is a need to create unique land parcel identification numbers for each parcel," the Act said. Last week, the Governor gave assent to the Act. It is hoped that this new law will reduce property-related disputes in rural areas and bring financial stability to citizens by enabling them to use their property as a financial asset for taking loans.More importantly, the law provides for a redress mechanism. It also provides for expeditious adjudication of lands entered in the prohibited list and aims at creating a user-friendly and hassle-free online portal for record of land rights. Revenue Minister Ponguleti Srinivas Reddy has assured the people that the rules for the new Record of Rights Act are being prepared .

UGC rules on faculty, V-C appointments: Can subjective criteria be quantified?

The recent draft University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations on appointment and promotion of faculty and staff including vice-chancellors stress flexible criteria. The UGC Chairman M Jagadeesh Kumar has stated that the 2025 regulations aim to transform how faculty members are recruited and promoted in Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) by introducing changes that enhance flexibility, inclusivity and excellence in faculty recruitment and career progression.For example, individuals can qualify for faculty positions based on their performance in a subject of their choice in UGC-NET, even if their undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are in different disciplines.

Mr. Kumar notes that many Indian higher education institutes find it difficult to produce graduates endowed with the skills and competencies needed in today's workforce. They must have greater freedom to select and promote faculty members who have potential to adopt new pedagogical approaches, blend technology, introduce experimental learning conditions and transform the education system.According to R. Srinivasan, academician and member of the Tamil Nadu Planning Commission, the new set of regulations replaces objective criteria of publications and qualifications with liberal rules that can lead to subjective evaluation of credentials and suitability for academic positions. Integrity, transparency and credibility of the subjective evaluation process should be ensured. This however does not justify the older rules, he added.He said the University exam system is not credible so that degree does not signal the knowledge of the degree holder. The research publications are dubious, both in English and in the vernacular. The recruitment process is also corrupt. Giving more scope for subjective assessment in recruitment process is flawed.When a candidate completes UG and PG in a discipline and then qualifies for NET, still we need an elaborate selection process. Now allowing just a pass in NET without aligning with the subjects in UG and PG, will only give greater scope for subjectivity in the selection process. The NET is not a good system of assessment of knowledge and expertise in a discipline. This can be partially addressed if we insist on acquiring UG and PG degrees in related disciplines. Now that is lost.Academician Parimal Maya Sudhakar says the proposal to broaden the criteria for selection of faculty members and Vice Chancellors is a welcome move. However, the UGC should clarify how the new criteria would be quantified. Otherwise, selection process can become arbitrary and subjective. Also, students who are pursuing Ph.D/ post Doctoral and advanced research should not get discouraged due to the new guidelines.According to him, a major drawback in the previous framework was rigidity in terms of research papers publications in specified journal (Scopus Index). For some academic disciplines like in the field of humanities and new emerging disciplines, it was quite problematic. Hopefully, the new criteria will balance it well, he said.Shraddha Kumbhojkar, professor and head of the department of history at Savitribai Phule Pune university, observes that it is anomalous that a candidate can, without a Master's degree in a subject, pass the National Eligibility Test for lecturership in any subject. The UGC-

CARE Cell and the elaborate system of checking predatory practices in academic publishing, becomes redundant by this clause.On the proposal to appoint teachers on contract basis against vacancies, she says this is a first. It secures the fair payment of contractual teachers but also gives legitimacy to the process of Contractualization thereby harming long-term pedagogical interests such as research

mentoring.On the bracket of distinguished persons with proven administrative capabilities being considered for appointment as VCs, she believes this might encourage non-academic people to hold key positions which require a deep understanding of the academic community.Ms. Kumbhojkar says the clause about alternative qualifications can be used to favour people- just a graduate with some experience can be appointed as a

lecturer.Regarding the clause on alternative qualifying criteria that includes teaching in Indian languages, she points out regional language publications are not digitally accessible as much as the English ones.

"Citation Index increases when your published work is quoted in a digitised/digital academic publication. Regional language academic publications are usually print only," she says.

Rekindle the animal spirits

Last year, when India's GDP growth came in at 8.2% in 2023-24, some analysts were overly optimistic about India's medium-term growth prospects. And on Tuesday, after the first advance estimates for 2024-25 growth put the number at 6.4%, some analysts have been overly pessimistic about them. A careful reading of last year's numbers — Gross Value Added (GVA) growth was a percentage point lower and higher GDP growth numbers were basically a reflection of the rollback in subsidies — should have warned against excessive optimism. Tuesday's estimate puts GVA growth also at 6.4% in this fiscal year. Simply put, the slowdown vis-a-vis last year is relatively lower if one uses GVA as the benchmark.Still, it's hard to deny that the economy has begun to lose momentum. A disaggregated reading shows that the slowdown is being driven by investment rather than consumption and non-farm non-government sectors of the Indian economy. In other words, what the Indian economy is lacking is the proverbial catalyst of animal spirits to kickstart the private investment part of the growth reaction.

What explains this? Private investment is based on an expectation that existing capacity will not be adequate to cater to future demand. Low private investment means a bearish view of demand. Once again, this should not be surprising. (Food driven) head-

line inflation staying above RBI's target notwithstanding, core inflation — the non-food non-fuel and hence seasonally immune part of the CPI basket — has been trending towards its lowest ever levels throughout this fiscal year. This means that current demand in the economy is pretty much in line with capacity.What will it take to rekindle the animal spirits?We should remember that the

IMF's potential growth estimate — the rate at which an economy can grow without triggering inflation — for India is 6.3%, which is pretty much what the GDP growth is. It is also useful to remember that a lot of the investment growth post-pandemic came from the rise in government capex which is likely to lose momentum going forward given the imperative of fiscal consolidation.

Why is deciphering the Indus script important? | Explained

On January 5, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin announced a $1-million prize for experts or organisations in the event of their success in deciphering the scripts of the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC). He made the announcement at the inauguration of an international conference to mark the centenary of the IVC discovery, which was disclosed through an article published in September 1924 by the then Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) John Marshall. That the Chief Minister of a southern State in the country had made such an announcement was due to the possible Dravidian connection with the IVC. Notwithstanding the political dimension of the Dravidian concept, historians, archaeologists and linguistic scholars have been debating over the Dravidian hypothesis ever since the publication of Marshall's article.

How do scholars define the Indus Valley Civilisation (IVC)?

The IVC, also called the Harappan Civilisation, spanned 2,000 sites across 1.5 million sq. km. in the territories of modern-day India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan during the Bronze Age (3000-1500 BCE). It had a wider geographical area than the combined areas of its contemporary civilisations — Egyptian and Mesopotamian. Talking of the IVC's importance, Pakistan's veteran archaeologist Ahmad Hasan Dani, in the December 1973 issue of UNESCO Courier, observed that the Valley lies across "ancient migration routes from central and western Asia to India." The IVC introduced urban life for the first time in the valley when similar civilisations had developed on the banks of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates valleys.

Why is deciphering the Indus script important?

Other scripts encountered in the contemporary Mesapotomian and Egyptian civilisations had been deciphered in a more satisfying manner, But, the non-decipherment of the Indus script prevents scholars from providing a complete picture of Harappan culture, which is why scholars tend to call it a "mystery script."

What is the Dravidian hypothesis?

The Indus script carries proto-Dravidian references — this is the position of scholars including Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Father Heras, Yri Valentinovich Knorozov, Walter Fairservis, Iravatham Mahadevan, Kamil Zvelebil, Krishnamurti and Asko Parpola — which can be found in the latest study on Indus signs and graffiti marks of Tamil Nadu.

The IVC "is non-Aryan and pre-Aryan," argued Mahadevan in his article published in The Hindu on May 3, 2009. Attributing "solid archaeological and linguistic evidence," the scholar, who passed away in 2018, emphasised that "the Indus script is a writing system encoding the language of the region (most probably Dravidian)". Ruling out Aryan authorship of the civilisation, he hastened to add that this did not automatically make it Dravidian. Yet, "there is substantial linguistic evidence favouring the Dravidian theory: the survival of Brahui, a Dravidian language in the Indus region; the presence of Dravidian loanwords in the Rigveda; the substratum influence of Dravidian on the

Prakrit dialects; and computer analysis of the Indus texts revealing that the language had only suffixes (like Dravidian), and no prefixes (as in Indo-Aryan) or infixes (as in Munda)," Mahadevan wrote. As the Dravidian models of decipherment had still little in common except certain basic features, "it is obvious that much more work remains to be done before a generally acceptable solution emerges," according to him.

What does the latest work have to offer?

Commissioned by the Tamil Nadu government's State Department of Archaeology (TNSDA), the study, which is morphological in nature, reveals that nearly 90% of the graffiti marks found during excavations at archaeological sites in the State have parallels to those found in the Indus Valley Civilisation. "...the exact shapes and their variants found both independently and in composite forms vividly indicate that they were not accidental. It is believed that the Indus script or signs would have not disappeared without any trace[s], rather they would have transformed or evolved into different forms," concludes K. Rajan, formerly professor with Pondicherry University and academic-research advisor to the TNSDA, and R. Sivanantham, joint director in the department, who carried out the study.Defining the terms "graffiti" and "script," the duo, in a monograph, explain that all the recognisable scratches engraved on the ceramics in south India and, to some extent, on Indus ceramics are identified as graffiti. The ones engraved on seals and other metal objects of the IVC are designated as script. Even though both were written by the same people, they were differentiated and documented as script and graffiti. "However, the extensive comparative study of graffiti marks and Indus scripts evidently suggests that both are undeciphered signs," the two scholars observe.

Which project has preceded the work?

The findings of a two-year-long project of the TNSDA, called 'Documentation and Digitisation of Graffiti and Tamili (Tamil-Brahmi) Inscribed Potsherds of Tamil Nadu', have formed the basis of the monograph.Aimed at documenting, compiling and analysing the graffiti bearing potsherds and Tamili inscribed potsherds unearthed in archaeological excavations of the State, the project, launched during 2022-23, seeks to compare those graffiti marks with the Indus script to explore whether any cultural relationship existed between the two.The datasets from the project suggested that 15,184 graffiti-bearing potsherds were reported from 140 sites in the State and nearly 14,165 sherds were documented. Of them, nearly 2,107 signs had been morphologically categorised within a group of 42 base signs, 544 variants and 1,521 composites. Any additional strokes added to the base signs were considered variants of the base signs while a group of signs containing more than one base sign was regarded as a composite sign. "Several signs encountered in Tamil Nadu had exact parallels in the Indus scripts. Likewise, some signs had near parallels. These signs probably evolved from the base

signs. Out of 42 base signs and their variants, nearly 60% of them found their parallels in the Indus script," the document explains.

How has the question of cultural contact between the IVC and south India been explored by the work?

The monograph talks of a "possibility of cultural exchanges." Even though the occurrences of identical graffiti marks in south India suggest a kind of cultural contact, one needs more material evidence and tangible data to support or strengthen the view.The recent chronometric dates indicate that when the Indus Valley experienced the Copper Age, south India experienced the Iron Age. "In this sense, the Iron Age of South [sic] India and the Copper Age of Indus are contemporary." If that is so, there is a "possibility of cultural exchanges either through direct or intermediate zones," the authors of the monograph point out.

The document goes on to state that the occurrence of a large number of carnelian and agate beads and high-tin bronze objects, particularly from Iron Age graves, give a clue about the contact, as carnelian, agate, copper and tin have to come from the north or elsewhere. Besides semiprecious stones and copper, a few more cultural items are required to prove the existence of contact "convincingly," the authors state, calling for future explorations, excavations, scientific investigations and historical linguistic analysis.

Indian firms planning to outpace global adoption in key technologies: WEF

New Delhi: Indian employers are planning to outpace global adoption in key technologies, with 35 per cent expecting semiconductors and computing technologies and 21 per cent expecting quantum and encryption to transform operations, according to the 'Future of Jobs Report 2025' published by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The report, released ahead of the WEF's annual meeting in Davos from January 20-25, observes that 35 per cent employers in India think that adopting semiconductors and computing technologies (compared to 20 per cent globally) will transform their operations while 21 per cent employers think that adopting quantum and encryption technologies (compared to 12 per cent globally) will also transform their operations."The country's projected fastest-growing job roles, including big data specialists, AI and machine learning specialists, and security management specialists, align closely with global trends," the report stated.

Companies operating in India are also expected to harness diverse talent pools (67 per cent, compared to 47 per cent globally) and adopt skills-based hiring by removing degree requirements (30 per cent, compared to 19 per cent globally).

"Demand for AI skills has accelerated globally, with India and the US leading in enrolment numbers. However, the drivers of demand differ. In the US, demand is primarily driven by individual users, whereas in India, corporate sponsorship plays a significant role in boosting GenAI training uptake," the report noted.

The report also highlights increased digital access, geopolitical tensions, and climate-mitigation efforts are the primary trends expected to shape the future of jobs in India by 2030. The report brings together perspectives of over 1,000 companies, collectively employing more than 14 million workers globally, to project emerging and declining roles, skill shifts, and the workforce practices businesses are developing to manage the evolving labour market.The report also highlighted countries with a demographic dividend, such as India and Sub-Saharan African nations, will supply nearly two-thirds of new workforce entrants in the coming years as demographic shifts caused by an ageing population in high-income countries and a growing working age population in low-income countries have a direct impact on global labour supply — currently balanced between lower-income countries (49 per cent) and higher-income nations (51 per cent).

Rollout of Data Rules set for mid-2025: IT Minister

The government is aiming to notify and begin implementing the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025 — currently in a draft state — by the middle of this year, Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology Ashwini Vaishnaw said."The consultations so far have been extensive, and people are by and large okay with the provisions," Mr. Vaishnaw said in an exclusive interview with The Hindu on Wednesday. "I don't see too many amendments coming in the final notification beyond some tweaks."

While large firms are prepared to comply quickly with most of the Rules, Mr. Vaishnaw said that a maximum of two years is being allowed as a transition period to the new regime. This will allow certain categories of data fiduciaries some more time to prepare for the full implementation of the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, which the Rules seek to operationalise. The government is currently accepting stakeholder comments on the draft until February 18."The law has been drafted in a way to ensure the functioning and autonomy of the Personal Data Protection Board of India," Mr. Vaishnaw said, adding that the implementation of the DPDP Act would be digital in nature. The same approach has been followed in at least one other institution: the Grievance Appellate Committee, which deals with social media complaints under the IT Rules, 2021.

On electronics manufacturing, Mr. Vaishnaw said, "We are working on a programme for promoting and incentivising component manufacturing in our country", adding to existing schemes for IT hardware and semiconductors. Indigenous components are key to reducing import dependence in India's growing electronics manufacturing sector."The product validation centre of Applied Materials is now functional in Bengaluru; there is one more centre which is likely to open up very soon in Karnataka, which will be much more expanded, which is focusing on designing equipment in India," Mr. Vaishnaw said. "There has also been progress in the manufacturing of servers and laptops; we are soon opening a laptop production facility in Chennai."While global IT firms saw India as a way to save costs in the past, they are now seeing the country as a leading source of talent and demand, Mr. Vaishnaw said.What can we expect in the coming months with the DPDP rules? The consultation period is currently slated to end in February. Will you be moving for an immediate notification and then the implementation timeline starts, or do you foresee another round of consultations with another draft? The consultations so far have been very extensive and the feedback that we are getting is that people are by and large okay with the provisions, because most of the provisions have been made in consultation with all these stakeholders. So I don't see too many amendments coming in the final notification — some tweaks here and there might happen, but not more than that. Parallelly, we have also worked on the entire digital implementation framework, so the Data Protection Board of India's portal is ready, the workflows, how they will happen in a totally digital way...right now we are getting that tested for robustness, service and

security. We would like to notify it as soon as we can, and of course we'll give a good transition period to the industry to move to a new regime. So I think we should see the implementation of this Act starting somewhere in the middle of this year.

You mentioned a two year implementation timeline. Can you talk us through the justification for this? There will be different transition periods for different types of data fiduciaries. Different parts of the industry are at different levels of preparedness. Most of the large organizations are already prepared, but some people want some time for getting the consent manager framework in place. Some people want to understand the age verification process in a greater detail, so those are the items on which people are seeking some more time.Otherwise, on reasonable safeguards for preventing breaches, to do all those things, most of the industry is prepared already, so we'll take a nuanced approach once we get the formal suggestions or recommendations from the industry, then we'll move to the final round. 24 months is the outer limit.

The rules outline standards that government organizations must adhere to. So in the event that they are in breach of these standards, will they also be liable to the same penalties and consequences?

In this country, we have a system where the law stands the same for everybody. The law is supreme. Since 2023, there has been a concern that the institutional design of the Data Protection Board of India, and how it should be an independent body as opposed to under administrative control of the IT Ministry.The law has been drafted in a way to ensure the functioning and autonomy of the board. What will be a big challenge — because this is a totally new evolving field — getting the right people who understand law, digital technology, financial implications, societal implications, all those things.One thing we are doing is creating a reasonably high level of awareness programs across the industry, across government organisations, across common citizens, so that people know what their rights are, people know what their obligations are. In my opinion, obligations are as important as rights, sometimes more important, because once you fulfill your duty, then the other person's rights are automatically enforced. We are also trying to engage people who are already highly knowledgeable about these topics in greater detail so that they understand the nuances of the law. In this consultation process, the Ministry has stated not just in this rules, but also in the draft version of the preceding act that inputs from stakeholders will be held in a fiduciary capacity. Why is this particular route of consultations being used? The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, for instance, has two rounds of consultations where everyone's responses are published and there is an opportunity for stakeholders to address each other's point of view. You cannot compare TRAI's consultation process with a lawmaking consultation. Lawmaking is a sovereign act enabled by the Constitution. Laws are made in a very structured manner. TRAI consultations are regulations for the industry. I don't think there's any comparison.

The Rules leave the door open to restricting data transfers of Indians to foreign governments. Do you share the concern that this may conflict with U.S. law that requires American firms to provide foreign nationals' data, or is that the intention in the first place?

The laws passed by the Parliament of India will be applicable to every entity, from every geography. They will have to implement and follow the law passed by the Parliament of India. As and when they are providing any service or doing any economic activity in the country, the laws of the Parliament of India have to be followed by everybody who's doing business in the country. Recently, Meta announced that they are moving away from professional fact checkers to community-led fact checking. The IT Rules had provisions on fact checking bodies for general news and news on the government. This whole point proves that the stand that we had taken was the right one, that the owner or the generator of the information, or the person who is well-placed to fact check in a particular sector on a particular subject is the right person to do so. For example, for everything related to the central government, the facts have to be checked by the central government; for things related to, let's say, State governments, the State government should be doing the fact checking. For things related to a particular private industry, that industry is the right one to do so.

This stand is now being legally challenged, so how are you going to proceed?

Let the courts decide. This is a very logical way to proceed, and there is no bias in this entire thought process. On January 6, the subcommittee on AI Governance under the IndiaAI Mission's Advisory Group led by the Principal Scientific Advisor put out a draft report saying that we need a "whole of government approach" for creating a framework for Artificial Intelligence.The subject of AI has three major dimensions. The first dimension is the power that it brings for solving our very complex problems, which we must harness. Second, the potential harms it can cause; we must protect our society from those harms. And third, there is a large technology component of it which will create new opportunities for our companies, our youths and startups, that we should not block. So that's why our Principal Scientific Advisor has taken this initiative under the

honourable Prime Minister's guidance, to create a holistic plan for the country. This complements the IndiaAI Mission, and one of the seven pillars of the mission is to create a good regulatory framework which develops trust, balances innovation and regulation, and creates opportunities for the youth. Once we get inputs from the industry, we'll publish the final policy. This is a common thread — balancing innovation and regulation — that you have cited in your approach to data protection, AI and other issues. But do you think that innovation and strict rules are necessarily in conflict when it comes to issues like this?No, they're not. The reason I say this is because some geographies have actually put so much emphasis on the regulation part that the innovation potential there has reduced; and there are some geographies which do not want any regulation, they simply want 100% innovation. That is the context. We are actually trying to place ourselves somewhere between the two. We want a balance of both. And I think the world is noticing; in informal meetings, people are saying that this is the right template which the world should follow. There is an impact [of big tech and social media] on institutions which have been built over centuries, and most societies are today worried that the institutions are weakened because of the misinformation and the fake news. So everywhere the society is looking for the right balance between absolute free speech and the right mix of regulation.The Rules do not outright ban social media for children, like some countries are doing, but require authentication of parental consent. Here again, we have taken a very nuanced approach and our approach is that these are things which must evolve, and the society must create a consensus around these subjects. So that's why in the Parliament also, we have very clearly stated that we would like to create a consensus around these matters. Society and the law have to walk in tandem. There are also larger policy shifts that are underway over the last two–three years, and the Digital India Act has been one of them. Are we still moving in the direction of overhauling the IT Act and replacing it with a DIA? We have to overhaul the entire digital framework. We began with the two horizontal laws, the Telecommunication Act, 2023 and the DPDP Act, 2023, which cut across all the sectors and have an impact on all sectors. There will be certain verticals which