

Sin Tax proposal: Turning 'harm into hope' for a healthier Bharat

Imagine this - What if your child's school notebooks could cost less, or health and life insurance premiums became more affordable? Wouldn't that bring relief to every household? Now, here's the catch—what if achieving this required us to pay a little more for harmful products like cigarettes, bidis, and gutka? Isn't that a fair trade for a healthier and more secure future for our families? This is the essence of the recent proposal from the Group of Ministers (GoM), which is reportedly considering introducing a 'sin tax' on demerit goods such as tobacco and aerated drinks. The idea is simple: these products harm public health and burden society, so taxing them more heavily can discourage their consumption while generating additional revenue for crucial sectors like health and education.

Currently, there is no specific 'sin goods' category under the GST structure. The creation of such a category would send a strong message that India prioritizes the well-being of its people over the profits of industries that thrive on unhealthy habits. Tobacco alone kills over 13 lakh Indians annually, yet it remains surprisingly affordable due to inadequate taxation. The ruling government and the Union Finance Ministry deserve recognition for considering this long-overdue measure. By ensuring harmful products bear their fair share of taxes, they are paving the way for much-needed reforms.

For instance, the GoM is reportedly proposing changes that could make school essentials like notebooks cheaper, and plans to lower GST on health and life insurance premiums. These steps reflect a balanced approach—offering relief to common people while funding these initiatives through increased taxes on demerit goods. But this is easier said than done. The tobacco industry, notorious for its deep pockets and aggressive lobbying, will resist tooth and nail. They may claim that higher taxes lead to illegal trade or harm farmers, but countless studies show otherwise. Taxing tobacco products effectively reduces their affordability, curbs consumption, and leads to better public health outcomes.

It is critical that these addictive and killer products be made increasingly unaffordable through regular and consistent taxation hikes, ensuring that taxes keep pace with inflation. Globally, over 40 countries levy taxes on tobacco that constitute more than 75% of its retail price, yet in India, the burden is far lower. The WHO and other health organizations have long recommended significant tax increases on tobacco to counter its devastating impact. It's worth noting that every ₹100 earned in tobacco tax imposes a societal cost of ₹816 in health and productivity losses. This is also a chance to address inequities within the existing tax structure. For instance, bidis are taxed at far lower

rates than cigarettes, even though they are equally harmful. Ensuring that all tobacco products face higher taxes can create a level playing field and maximize public health benefits. If the GST Council adopts the GoM's recommendations during its December 21 meeting, it will mark a turning point for India. The revenue from sin taxes can be funneled into health and education programs, easing the financial strain on families and creating a healthier, more productive society. Ultimately, the question is simple: Do we want our children to have a better future? If yes, then it's time to let harmful products like tobacco pay the price for the harm they cause. Let's hope the GST

Council seizes this opportunity to prioritize the nation's well-being over vested interests. A well-structured 'sin goods' category could serve as a cornerstone of India's fiscal policy, ensuring sustainable revenues while curbing harmful consumption. By acting decisively, the government can silence the tobacco industry's lobbying and prove that it values the lives and well-being of its citizens above all else. This is not just a policy adjustment; it's a bold step toward a healthier, more educated, and prosperous India. India stands at a crossroads. Let us seize this moment to make history—not just for revenue charts but for the lives of 1.4 billion people who deserve a healthier future.

Dharavi slum redevelopment: Bombay HC upholds tender awarded to Adani Group

Citing weak grounds for a challenge, the Bombay High Court on Friday dismissed a petition against the Maharashtra government's decision on the Dharavi slum redevelopment project in Mumbai and upheld the tender awarded to Adani Properties Private Limited. A division bench of Chief Justice D.K. Upadhyaya and Justice Amit Borkar dismissed

a petition filed by UAE-based Seclink Technologies Corporation, saying: "The grounds raised in the petition lack force and effort. The challenge to the government's action of cancelling the earlier tender and issuing a fresh tender award fails." The Adani Group had emerged as the highest bidder for the 259-hectare Dharavi Redevelopment Project and bagged it with its Rs 5,069-crore offer in

the 2022 tender process. In the first tender issued in 2018, the petitioner company had emerged as the highest bidder with its Rs 7,200-crore offer. The Eknath Shinde government had cancelled the 2018 tender and issued a fresh one in 2022 with additional conditions. The state government decided to include 45 acres of railway land in the project for slum rehabilitation, an element not included in the original proposal. Advocate General

Ashutosh Kumbhakoni had recommended that the state government issue a new tender to reflect the changes and incorporate factors like the costs of acquiring this land. The state government had opposed the petitioner's claim and maintained that the revised tender conditions were not arbitrary but were important for ensuring that the development was financially viable. Referring to the changed economic

landscape between 2019 and 2022, the state government justified its decision to cancel the 2018 tender and issue a fresh one in 2022. Seclink Technologies Corporation first challenged the cancellation of the 2018 tender and subsequently the 2022 tender award to the Adani Group. The state government had submitted before the High Court that the tender process was transparent. Dharavi, one of the world's largest slums, is

spread over 2.8 sq km of prime land near the B and r a - K u r l a . Established in 1884 during the British colonial era, it initially housed expelled factories and residents from Mumbai's city centre. Its informal leather and pottery industries are estimated to employ over 100,000 people. The Dharavi redevelopment plan seeks to replace the existing informal settlements with modern housing, infrastructure, and commercial spaces.

Pranav Adani unveils Adani Group's Rs 27,900 crore investment plan for Bihar, to create 53,500 jobs

Pranav Adani, Managing Director, Agro, Oil and Gas and Director of Adani Enterprises, on Friday unveiled a massive Rs 27,900 crore investment plan for Bihar, with the potential of creating as many as 53,500 jobs in the state. Addressing the 'Bihar Business Connect' summit here, Pranav Adani said that "there can be no better validation" of the Adani Group's belief in the leadership of state Chief Minister Nitish Kumar "than the humble fact that we are the largest private investor in Bihar." Providing a snapshot of the Adani Group's current and future investment roadmap for Bihar, Pranav Adani said, "In three sectors, logistics, gas distribution and agri-logistics, we have already invested around Rs 850 crore and have also created around 25,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities." Pranav Adani said that the Adani Group was now going to invest another Rs 2,300 crore in these sectors. This investment will not only massively increase the Group's warehousing and handling capacity and expand its presence in the EV, CGD (city gas distribution) and CBG (compressed biogas) space but will also generate an additional 27,000 direct and indirect local job opportunities. Pranav Adani further stated that the Adani Group was working closely with the state government to potentially invest another Rs 1,000 crore in developing strategic infrastructure in the state, like Gati Shakti Railway Terminals, ICDs (Inland Container Depots) and Industrial Warehousing Parks. The Adani Group also plans to invest Rs 2,100 crore to manufacture and install over 28 lakh smart meters to automate power-consumption-monitoring in five cities - Siwan, Gopalganj, Vaishali, Saran and Samastipur - and this will generate at least 4,000 local jobs in this technology segment, Pranav Adani noted.

DoJ case against Adani 'flimsy, baseless': Mahesh Jethmalani on US Attorney's resignation

The US Department of Justice's (DoJ) indictment of Adani Group officials in an alleged bribery case is "extremely flimsy", senior advocate Mahesh Jethmalani said on Friday, as Breon Peace, the US Attorney behind the case, announced his resignation. According to reports, Brooklyn US Attorney Peace, who presented charges against Adani Group officials, has announced to step down on January 10 - just days away from Donald Trump's inauguration as the next US President on January 20. Peace, who was appointed by outgoing US President Joe Biden in 2021, will be replaced by First Assistant US Attorney Carolyn

Pokorny. "The Adani case in US court was already a very diluted case. There was no evidence or basis to the indictment. The uproar by the Opposition over the issue in the Indian Parliament is baseless," Jethmalani was quoted as saying in media reports. Peace's resignation was on expected lines as he was likely to be asked by the next US administration under Trump to step down. Last week, Adani stocks gained following the news of FBI Director Chris Wray resigning from office early next year after the US President-elect replaced him with Kash Patel. Despite the earlier hedge funds allegations,



the Adani Group made a roaring comeback on the stock market and the US Justice Department indictment will fizzle away soon, according to

industry experts. In November, the DoJ indicted Adani Group officials on allegations ranging from securities fraud to wire fraud. The Adani Group vehemently rejected the allegations as "malicious, mischievous and manipulative selections of publicly available information" to arrive at "pre-determined conclusions for personal profiteering with wanton disregard for facts and the law". The indictment by the US DoJ is nothing but a "wasted expense and once Trump assumes office, such wasteful exercises involving the government offices with overseas businesses will probably fade away," ace global investor Mark Mobius recently told IANS.

India Post Payments Bank opens 2.68 crore accounts in 2024, 59 pc belong to women

India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) opened 2.68 crore accounts in 2024 (till November), with 1.56 crore or 59 per cent being owned by women and 77 per cent accounts being opened in rural parts of the country, the government said on Friday. While 1.04 crore customers availed mobile banking services, 69 lakh utilised VDC (virtual debit card) services and around 2,600 crore were disbursed through AePS (Aadhaar Enabled Payment System) in the January-November period. About 3.62 crore IPPB customers received direct benefit transfer (DBT) benefits aggregating Rs 34,950 crore while 4.40 lakh digital life certificates were issued to pensioners in the January-November period, according to the Ministry of Communications. Nearly 58 per cent of total DBT beneficiaries are women, and the bank is proactively working



towards women empowerment, aligning with the government's directions. Parcel monitoring application (PMA) revolutionised real-time delivery information sharing from 4.33 lakh articles in May 2019 to 5.35 crore articles in October 2024. As of October, 400,00 KYC verifications were

successfully completed. According to the ministry, radio frequency identification (RFID) gates have been installed at 42 major mail exchange hubs to ensure real-time tracking across networks. "The establishment of 233 nodal delivery centres has enhanced the speed and efficiency of parcel delivery, covering over 1600 PIN codes and handling 30 per cent of total parcels delivered across India," it informed. Aadhaar centres were extended to defence personnel including the highest centre at Siachen, with 110 operational centres in Army Postal Service locations.

More than 1,000 Dak Ghar Niryat Kendra (DNKs) have been opened to facilitate commercial export through postal channels across the country. The Department of Posts acceded to the Postal Payment Service Multilateral Agreement (PPSMA) for electronic postal payment service exchange between the signatory parties. Meanwhile, 25,133 individuals were engaged in the first tranche of the Rozgar Mela on October 29. The construction of 56 new postal buildings and renovation of 95 improved service delivery, according to the ministry.

Check It Daily Horoscopes

Your day today

By Dr C.V.B. Subrahmanyam

-  **Aries:** New contacts at the professional front would bring lucrative opportunities. A very demanding approach can create tensions in your love life.
-  **Taurus:** A favourable time to start new projects and a happy day of wooing and courtship. Guard against being overly dominating when putting across your views at home.
-  **Gemini:** Cultivate a harmonious nature to kill your hatred because it is more powerful than love and deadly affects your body. Romantic influence is strong.
-  **Cancer:** The romantic life is becoming interesting. You are observing your love life, as it is blowing hot and cold. Act immediately as tomorrow may be very late.
-  **Leo:** You desperately need some activity to keep fit. Festive atmosphere all round keeps everyone in high spirits. On your part develop a harmonious relationship with all and win your opponents by love.
-  **Virgo:** Visit those who are less fortunate than yourself and help them with their personal problems. Loved ones will be hard to get along with. Group events will be far too expensive for you to organize.



-  **Libra:** Romantically a glittering bait awaits you to be trapped. Your affairs seem to go well on the surface. There are people in the background who don't wish you well in love. Stomach issues may rise.
-  **Scorpio:** Some of you will need to keep your temper under control, even under grave provocation. Your childish approach can thwart your romantic aspirations.
-  **Sagittarius:** You will have to do something different to make your lover enjoy your company. Your efforts at work get recognized, so cash in on this development.
-  **Capricorn:** Good earning will make you splurge on the romantic front. Speculative activities should be avoided. Those burdened with work will have to do something about the resulting fatigue.
-  **Aquarius:** Think wisely before loaning money to a friend as early return is not foreseen. Help and assistance will be forthcoming from close ones in getting a matrimonial alliance for the eligible.
-  **Pisces:** Monetary gains will keep you in a buoyant mood. This is the day when you can find everything topsy-turvy on the professional front. Those in private companies can face a salary cut.

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EDITOR : VINOD KUMAR,

E-Mail: vkvinod756@gmail.com

Bureau Chief : Komal

Adv. Manager : Hemanshu Magotra, 7006118131

E-Mail: trulytimes47@rediffmail.com,

trulytimes47@gmail.com

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