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UNIQUE GIFT OF KRIYAYOGA ASHRAM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO GIVE IMPETUS TO WORLD BUILDING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

## Amid farm stir, Cabinet nod to record increase in sugarcane support price

**NEW DELHI:** Union Cabinet Wednesday approved a record hike of Rs 25 per quintal in Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) for sugarcane, the price that mills have to pay, for the 2024-25 sugar season. I&B minister Anurag Thakur said the FRP for the next season has been fixed at Rs 340 per quintal compared to Rs 315 a quintal for the current season. The announcement of the revised price for sugarcane came much ahead of the usual schedule of June-August every year, at a time when farm unions are agitating on Delhi borders, demanding legal guarantee on MSP for 22 crops. Officials said it is the maximum ever hike in FRP in absolute terms. The decision is set to go down well with farmers from Western UP, coming as it does days after govt conferred Bharat Ratna on Chaudhary Charan Singh besides Karnataka and Maharashtra, three



**Govt eases FDI norms in space, allows 100% foreign investment for making sat components**

**NEW DELHI:** In order to attract overseas players in the Indian space industry, the PM Narendra Union Cabinet on Wednesday night approved the amendment in foreign direct investment (FDI) policy in the space sector, allowing 100% overseas investment in making components for satellites. The space sector has been "liberalised for

major sugarcane producing states. Thakur said the FRP

for their sugarcane across the world. The revised FRP will be applicable from Oct 1. "At 107% higher than A2+FL cost of sugarcane, the new FRP will ensure prosperity of sugarcane farmers... This decision of central govt is going to benefit more than 5 crore sugarcane farmers (including family members) and lakhs of other persons involved in sugar sector. It reconfirms fulfilment of 'Modi ki Guarantee' to double farmers' income," an official statement said. With the approval, mills will pay FRP of sugarcane Rs 340 per quintal at recovery of 10.25%. With each increase of recovery by 0.1%, farmers will get additional price of Rs 3.32 while the same will be deducted on reduction of recovery by 0.1%. Thakur said before 2014, farmers had to face problems for fertilizer, price for sugarcane and timely payments.

FDI in prescribed sub-sectors/activities", an official statement said, adding that "the policy reform will enhance ease of doing business in the country, leading to greater FDI inflows and thereby contributing to growth of investment, income and employment". The reform has been carried out to realise the vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat.

hike for the next season is 8% and farmers get the maximum price

## Centre ticks off Punjab for letting goons in farmers' guise fan unrest

**NEW DELHI:** Centre on Tuesday wrote to Punjab government expressing concern over the "deteriorating" law and order situation in the state and suggesting that the latter had freely allowed miscreants in the guise of farmers' protests, to indulge in stone-pelting and in mobilising heavy machinery on the interstate borders "with an intent of spreading unrest and disorder in the neighbouring states".

The home ministry advisory requested Punjab govt "to take



immediate review and stringent action to curb all such disrupting activities in the guise of farmers' protests". Contesting the Union home ministry's assessment on the "marked deterioration in the law and order machinery in Punjab", the state govt on Wednesday said the

build-up of farmers and heavy vehicles at Shambhu and Dhabi-Gujran barriers was due to restrictions placed on their entry into Delhi, the intended venue of their protests. In a response sent to MHA, state chief secretary Anurag Verma said Punjab has maintained

peace even as tear gas, rubber bullets, physical force and drones deployed by Haryana Police had injured 160 people so far. "There is a need to show more empathy towards the farmers," Verma said and added that the protests must be handled more sensitively, with Punjab being a border state. Stating that 2,000 Punjab Police personnel were engaged in ensuring calm, he said the situation was being watched and further measures would be taken as required.

## Andhra Pradesh has most number of 'Lakshpati Didis', Bihar and Bengal come next

**NEW DELHI:** With the number of 'Lakshpati Didis' - women Self-Help Group members earning a minimum annual income of Rs 1 lakh - crossing 1 crore, data available with the ministry of rural development show that Andhra Pradesh leads

with over 13.65 lakh such women, followed by Bihar (1.16 lakh) and West Bengal (10.11 lakh). Among states and UTs with the least number of 'Lakshpati Didis' - Lakshadweep has none so far followed by Andaman & Nicobar Islands at 242 and Goa

with 206. The 'Lakshpati Didi' scheme was rolled out after Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech last year said that it was his dream to make 2 crore 'Lakshpati Didis' in the country's villages. In the budget speech, the govt

enhanced the target to 3 crore. The target is a 3-year timeline under the scheme that is being executed under Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana- National Rural Livelihood Mission. It involves assisting women with training, enterprise financing.

## Forces standing up to 'bully': Defence secretary on China

**NEW DELHI:** Defence secretary Giridhar Aramane on Wednesday described Beijing as a "bully" against whom Indian forces were standing firm all along the frontier, following China's rebuff once again of India's push to defuse the two major continuing troop face-offs at Depsang and Demchok in eastern Ladakh in the latest round of military talks. Aramane, speaking at the second INDUS-X defence summit with US Indo-Pacific Command chief Admiral John C Aquilino here, also thanked Washington for helping "very quickly" with "intelligence and situational awareness which US equipment and the US government could help us with" after the military confrontation with China erupted in eastern Ladakh in May 2020. It was of great use to us," he said. Latest assessments show the People's Liberation Army (PLA) continues to forward deploy 50,000 to 60,000 troops with heavy weaponry in the western (Ladakh) and central sectors (Uttarakhand, Himachal) of the 3,488km long Line of Actual Control as well as 90,000 soldiers in the eastern one (Sikkim, Arunachal), sources said. India, too, matches them with "mirror military deployments", which found reflection in Aramane's remarks. China declines India request for troop disengagement "India is giving a face-off to our neighbour (China) in almost all the fronts we have with them. Wherever there is a mountain pass, we are stationed there to face any eventuality. Wherever there is a road, we have to be ready there also. So, we are standing against a bully in a very determined fashion," he said. "And we expect our friend US will be there with us in case we need their support. It is a must for us and we have to do it together. We greatly appreciate the support and the resolve from our friends in supporting us during such an event. The strong resolve that we will support each other in the face of a common threat is going to be of critical importance to us," he added.

## UP Congress netas credit Priyanka Gandhi for SP deal

**LUCKNOW:** "Humari party gathbandhan ko poori imandari se amal karegi (Our party will follow the pact in letter and spirit)," Samajwadi Party's national secretary Rajendra Chaudhary said. In return for Khajuraho, Samajwadi Party assured Congress of its "all-out support" in 28 Lok Sabha constituencies of Madhya Pradesh, months after grand old party's then



CM face Kamal Nath left its ally high and dry by refusing to share seats. Congress functionaries said in Lucknow after the allies held a joint presser that they were looking forward to Akhilesh joining

hopeful that SP's national president will participate in the yatra by Feb 24 or 25," said Congress's UP in-charge Avinash Pandey. At the presser, the two parties sought to showcase how accommodating the leadership had been in cementing the alliance. "Our president readily agreed to Congress chief's proposal to leave 17 seats to them.

## Ajit's NCP seeks disqualification of Sharad MLAs, HC issues notice

**MUMBAI:** Bombay HC on Wednesday issued a notice to assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar over two petitions filed by Anil Patil, chief whip of Ajit Pawar-led NCP, challenging his decision not to disqualify Anil Deshmukh, Jitendra Awhad and eight other MLAs from the Sharad Pawar camp. The Ajit Pawar camp has sought orders from HC for the MLAs' disqualification. Justices Girish Kulkarni and Firdosh



Pooniwalla also issued notices to the 10 MLAs after hearing senior counsel Mukul Rohatgi for the Ajit Pawar camp. The matter will be heard next on March 14. Rohatgi said the Speaker erred on

various counts in his order on Feb 15. "The Speaker was wrong in saying there was 'internal strife' within the party. It was a case of external strife," Rohatgi said Narwekar's order was in favour of the Ajit Pawar group as he held it to be the real NCP, but the decree was against it. Justice Kulkarni said there was no interim relief plea, and it will issue a notice and hear the matter in March.

## Eye on China, Army to 'combatise' more formations under Central Command

**NEW DELHI:** Continuing with its re-balancing of forces and firepower to the northern borders with China, the 12-lakh strong Army now plans to "combatise" additional formations under its Lucknow-based Central Command. The Uttar Bharat (UB) Area based in Bareilly, which is



largely a static formation geared for administrative, training and other peace-time purposes, for instance, will be converted into a full-fledged corps, with additional infantry, artillery, aviation, air defence and engineer brigades under

it. "The final approval is yet to come but Army wants UB Area to transform into an operational corps tasked with guarding the middle sector of the 3,488-km long line of actual control (LAC). An Area HQ is neither staffed nor geared for war like a Corps," a source said.

## 4 Indians duped, forced to join Wagner army, say kin

**HYDERABAD:** A 22-year-old youth from Telangana and three others from Karnataka's Kalaburagi - stranded in Russia along the war-torn Ukraine border - have sent an SOS with a plea that they should be immediately rescued from what seems to be a fake army job racket. Mohammed Sufiyan, who hails from Narayanpet district in Telangana, in a video sent to his family was seen pleading. "Please save us. We are victims of a hi-tech fraud," Sufiyan, in army uniform, said that they were being forced to fight in Russia's ongoing war with Ukraine much against their will. He said they were sent to Russia in Dec 2023 by recruiters with a promise that they would be working as army security helpers.

## Indians among youngest to buy Lamborghini: CEO

**NEW DELHI:** It's no secret that Indians are some of the biggest buyers of luxury products across categories today. And, they are also among the youngest in the world when it comes to buying sports cars, such as, Lamborghini. Globetrotting Indians are today buying super cars across countries as many navigate corporations and enterprises from multiple geographies. Stephan Winkelmann, global CEO of the Italian sports carmaker, told that at under 40 years, the bulk of buyers in India are among the youngest compared to developed economies. "Our customers in India, rather in Asia, are getting younger, and are under 40 years. In the US, large



part of our buyers are between 40 and 45 years, while at above 45 years, Europeans are the oldest to purchase our cars." Winkelmann, on a visit to the country where he met partners, group officials and potential customers, said while sales numbers in India are still very low - Lamborghini sold 103 cars in 2023 against 10,000 units globally - the country holds massive potential. "The awareness of the brand is incredible here, which has improved over the past few decades in a way, which was unexpected.

## 60% of IAS officers on panel for secretaries to get at least 5-year stint

**NEW DELHI:** Around 60% of IAS officers empanelled as secretaries and equivalent on Tuesday will have at least five years' tenure, reflecting govt's focus on providing long tenure to high-ranking officials. While defence and home secretaries get two years fixed tenures, others often complained of deci-

sion making and policy implementation getting affected. As a result, the Modi administration has been posting officials in key ministries for four-five years. A close look at the latest empanelled officers from 1993 batch as secretaries and equivalent show that 12 out of 20 officers will have

more than five years tenure. Even five out of 20 IAS officers from 1992 batch who were empanelled as secretaries or equivalent last June will have five more years in service. Sources said a major bureaucratic reshuffle at top level is likely in June-July after the new govt assumes office.



## Indian Navy swiftly responds to distress call from Iranian fishing vessel



**NEW DELHI:** Amid a series of attacks on cargo vessels, the Indian Navy once again swung into action after Iranian Fishing Vessel FV Al Arifi made a distress call. Responding to the distress call from the fishing vessel, the Indian Naval ship INS Shivalik Mission, deployed in the Gulf of Aden, rendered medical assistance including critical medical supplies to the 18 Pakistani crew onboard. "INS Shivalik is deployed in the region in consonance with the Indian Navy's mandate of Maritime Security Operations under the broader

ambit of the Prime Minister's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)," Indian Navy posted on X, formerly Twitter. This is not the first time the Indian Navy has come to the aid of distressed vessels. Earlier this month, an Indian Naval ship mission deployed in the North Arabian Sea for maritime security operations provided damage control assistance to the Iranian Fishing Vessel (FV) Ameen, with six Iranian crew onboard, operating East of Duqm. Medical aid was also extended to three injured crew members. The FV sus-

tained extensive damage, including a hull breach leading to water ingress. Earlier in January, Indian warship INS Sumitra rescued hijacked Iranian-flagged fishing vessel Al Naeemi with 19-member Pakistani crew off the east coast of Somalia. In the same month, the fire-fighting team of INS Visakhapatnam successfully controlled a fire onboard the merchant vessel Marlin Luanda. The Indian Navy's prompt response and collaboration with the merchant vessel's crew ensured the fire was brought under control.

## ML Public School's 11th anniversary celebration was celebrated with pomp and show amid colorful programs

**Meja/Sirsa:** The 11th anniversary celebration of the famous school Meja Public School located in Chowki Bagaha of the area was concluded amidst colorful programs. The chief guest in the program was Gopiganj Bhadohi Municipality Chairman Jitendra Gupta and the special guest was Lala Laxmi Narayan Degree College Sirsa Principal Mahendra Jaiswal and fire in-charge Siya Sharan Singh. During this, Bhojpuri singers Rajesh Pardeshi, Usha Ujjwal and Sanjay Sharma not only enthralled with their melodious singing but also added charm to the programme. Which was greatly appreciated by the people present. The program was started by outpost in-charge Sirsa Kuldeep Sharma by garlanding the statue of Mother Saraswati and lighting the lamp. It is worth noting that during the annual function, colorful cultural programs were presented admirably by the school boys and girls, while Bhojpuri Sur Sangram's famous singers Rajesh Pardeshi Sanjay Sharma and Usha Ujjwal enthralled the entire program with their singing. Spread which was praised by the people present there. Thereafter, while address-



ing the program as the chief guest, Municipality Chairman Jitendra Gupta said that the school is a temple of knowledge and the children are the learners of that temple. Today's children are the future of tomorrow's country. Organizing such programs not only helps in their physical but also mental development. He believes that along with education, it is necessary to have knowledge. He praised the organizer of the program and school chairman Durga Prasad

Gupta from the stage and expressed his gratitude for inviting him for the program. In the same sequence, Principal Mahendra Jaiswal and fire in-charge Siya Sharan, who came as special guests, also expressed their views.

School manager Ved Prakash Gupta and Principal Satish Upadhyay thanked the guests who came for the program. The program was presided over by school director Babita Gupta and school chairman Durga

Prasad Gupta. On this occasion, school teachers Abhiranjan Gupta, Meva Lal Yadav, Vipin Shukla, Bijendra Kumar, Madan Kumar, Gaurav Pandey, Divyanshu Gupta, Vijay Kumar Kamlesh Sharma, Manoj Kumar Vishwakarma, Navdeep Yadav, Rishu Sharma, Kuldeep Sharma, Meenakshi Yadav, Savita Shukla. Apart from Reena Yadav, Pooja Tripathi, Vipul Kumar and Avinash Kumar, hundreds of parents and local people were prominently present.

## 'It's being addressed': US diplomat Richard on action against Pannun

**NEW DELHI:** The US deputy secretary of state, Richard Verma, has assured that the United States will take action against India-designated terrorist Gurbatwant Singh Pannun and his associates if they cross the line. In an interview with ANI on Tuesday, Verma said, "I'm not going to get into specific cases, but I just go back to what I said about operating within the law. When people cross that line, they will be held accountable." Verma also said, "When people say things, and we each have different rules when it comes to free speech. We have to assess where the line crosses into conduct, but we won't tolerate any violence or any kind of harassment directed at officials, and we will crack



down on it where the law allows us to do it, and we have done it, and we will continue to do it." Regarding the alleged involvement of India in the attempted assassination of Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, the US deputy secretary of state said, "Look, we raised the concerns with the Indian government at the most senior levels. They took it seriously. They've launched an investiga-

tion, and we look forward to continuing to hear back from the Indian authorities about what they've found, but it's a very important issue, and it's being addressed." Gurbatwant Singh Pannun, an India-designated terrorist holding American and Canadian citizenship, has been charged with murder-for-hire. The US Justice Department revealed that an Indian national, Nikhil Gupta, has been charged for attempted 'murder-for-hire' of Pannun. The US government is waiting for the committee of inquiry set up by India to provide updates on the investigation. Verma said, "Well, as I understand, there is a committee of inquiry that's looking into this and investigating.

## 'All is well that ends well': Akhilesh Yadav

**NEW DELHI:** The Samajwadi Party and the Congress on Wednesday sealed a seat-sharing deal in Uttar Pradesh for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections ending days of suspense and bickering between the two allies of INDIA bloc.

The Congress UP in-charge Avinash Pande, while announcing the details of seat sharing, said Priyanka Gandhi played a crucial role in reaching an agreement. As per the deal, Samajwadi Party and other INDIA allies in



UP will contest on 63 seats while the Congress will get 17 seats. "I am delighted to tell you that it has been decided that in Uttar Pradesh the Congress will contest on 17 seats and the remaining 63 seats will have candidates of INDIA bloc - SP and other parties," Avinash Pande said.

Samajwadi Party state president Naresh Uttam Patel said, "Akhilesh Yadav and Mallikarjun Kharge ji have done something that people of India needed and wanted for a long time." "The time when the seats will be distributed: SP Akhilesh Yada Earlier today, confirming the alliance with

Congress, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav said, "All is well that ends well." This marked the end of bitterness between the two parties which had resulted in Akhilesh Yadav not joining Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in the state. The SP chief had insisted that he will join the yatra only after seat-sharing deal is finalised with the Congress. With Rahul still in the state with his yatra, it is likely that Akhilesh will eventually join Rahul Gandhi.

## A great giant of an intellectual, says CJI

**NEW DELHI:** Legal luminaries led by CJI D Y Chandrachud paid rich tributes to eminent jurist Fali S Nariman and recalled his immense contribution to the judicial system. Before initiating court proceedings, the CJI said, "We mourn the sad demise and passing away of Fali Nariman. He was a great giant of an intellectual. It's very sad." In a condolence message, former CJI N V Ramana said Nariman would be remembered as an "ethical giant" for generations to come. "Never known for mincing words, Fali S Nariman has been a conscience keeper for judicial institutions. Through his arguments in courtrooms, widely read newspaper columns, public lectures, parliamentary interventions and televised interviews, he has educated generations



of legal professionals and general public alike," he said. Solicitor general Tushar Mehta said it was a loss not only to the legal fraternity but the country had lost "the epitome of what righteousness stood for." "A doyen, paragon and a legend in his own lifetime has left us, leaving jurisprudence enriched by his immense contribution. I have always learnt something new by merely appearing even against him.

Sharing home-made buttermilk brought by

me from my home in Supreme Court corridors while he regaled all of us with anecdotes in Gujarati is a cherished memory. There cannot be and will not be another Fali Nariman" he added. Senior advocate Kapil Sibal said, "A great son of India passes away. Not just one of the greatest lawyers of our country but one of the finest human beings who stood like a colossus above all. The corridors of the court will never be the same without him.

● "On March 1, there would be a meeting of all incumbent as well as former MLAs and ministers from the community. to take a public stand in favour"

**CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR:** Reservation activist Manoj Jarange on Wednesday said either the 'sage soyare' (blood relation) law be passed in two days or else the Maratha community would launch a statewide 'Adarsh' rasta roko agitation from Saturday. He also threatened a massive road-block as a show of strength across the state and Mumbai on March 3. He said community members would go on a hunger strike from Thursday next week if the demands were not met by then. On March 1, there would be a meeting of all incumbent as well as former MLAs and ministers from the



community. They would be told to take a public stand in favour of Maratha reservation. All statements were made during Jarange's public meeting, which lasted two hours on Thursday at Antarwali Sarati village in Jalna. The activist, who has been on a hunger strike since Feb 10, stressed on ensuring a 'peaceful' agitation. He came down heavily on chief minister Eknath Shinde, deputy minister Devendra Fadnavis and cabinet minister Chhagan Bhujbal. Jarange said the reservation given by state govt through the special session was of the kind that had

already been rejected by courts." "The state must either pass a law recognising 'sage soyare' or pass a govt resolution that Marathas and Kunbis are one," he said. He warned the state govt that roads in every possible village, taluka, town, district and city as well as state and national highways would be blocked every day from 10.30 am to 1 pm and 4 pm to 7 pm from Saturday. He said HSC and SSC students heading to and returning from exam centres would not be troubled. He told his supporters to help the examinees reach their centres in time.

## Ex-Congress strategist helped stitch up Ashok Chavan's exit plan

A week ago, former CM Ashok Chavan joined BJP in the presence of deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis, his archival of several years. It was found that Chavan had been planning to join BJP for a long time, and his plan was given the final shape at a meeting with Fadnavis at the residence of political activist Ashish Kulkarni. Kulkarni, once a trusted aide of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, had ditched Sena, along with Narayan Rane, for Congress. For a brief period, he worked in AICC as a strategist for Digvijaya Singh. During Chavan's tenure as CM, Kulkarni pulled out all the stops to take over Mhada, but when that didn't work out, he left Congress and joined hands with Fadnavis for better political prospects.



## Congress-SP finalise UP seat-sharing pact

**NEW DELHI:** In a crucial breakthrough for the opposition bloc INDIA (Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance), the Congress and the Samajwadi Party on Wednesday finally announced seat-sharing pact for Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh. The negotiations, which had started almost a month back, had hit a dead end as both sides were not ready to compromise on the number of seats. According to reports, Samajwadi Party had initially offered 11 seats to the Congress, which was rejected by the grand old party. Akhilesh later raised the offering to 17 seats. However, the Congress wanted three more. Also, the two parties had differences over some specific seats which both the parties wanted. Akhilesh Yadav, who had hardened his stand vis-à-vis the Congress in the last two days and had refused to join Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, softened his stand today



and signalled that the alliance was on the right track. He also said there was no conflict with the grand old party over seat sharing. So, what changed in 24 hours. According to Congress, it was party general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra who played a crucial role in breaking the deadlock. While announcing the seat-sharing details, Congress UP incharge Avinash Pande made a special mention of Priyanka's role in reaching a consensus. Congress sources said Priyanka Gandhi spoke with Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav over phone on Wednesday to iron out differences between the two parties. The phone call helped not

just seal the deal but also ensured that Congress got a fair deal in the form of some important seats that it wanted, the sources added. The last time the two parties contested together in Uttar Pradesh was in 2017 when Akhilesh and Rahul had campaigned together for the assembly elections. However, the alliance failed to woo voters and BJP Avinash Pande made a huge victory. The two parties later parted ways and in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections Samajwadi Party joined hands with Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party. The BSP alliance also did not work for the SP as it could win only 5 Lok Sabha seats, while the BSP bagged 10.

## Farmers suspend Delhi push after one dies in border clash

**PATIALA/BATHINDA:** A 22-year-old Punjab farmer lost his life to a "suspected bullet wound" during clashes on Wednesday with Haryana police at the heavily-barricaded Khanauri border. At least 15 protesters suffered serious injuries as farm unions attempted to resume their "Delhi chalo" march by pushing past roadblocks to press for a new law guaranteeing MSP for 23 crops and loan waivers, among other demands. In response to the death of Shubkaran Singh from Balloh village of Bathinda



district, Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, the unions leading the march, announced a two-day

suspension of the protest. Meanwhile, Centre invited the farmers for a fifth round of talks to discuss all demands, including MSP.

## Priest held for 'molesting' Swedish tourist

**BHUBANESWAR:** A 24-year-old priest of Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, was arrested Wednesday for allegedly sexually harassing a 28-year-old Swedish tourist outside the shrine earlier in the week. The

accused, Kundan Mahapatra, was booked under IPC sections 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) and 354-A (sexual harassment and punishment for sexual harassment near the temple. He was sent to

judicial custody after his bail plea was rejected. Police sources claimed Mahapatra is a habitual offender, who was arrested on July 9, 2023, for allegedly molesting and extorting money from a domestic tourist near the temple.

## CAPSULES

### HC removes magistrate accused of molesting rape survivor in his chamber

**AGARTALA:** Tripura high court has taken action against Bishwatosh Dhar, first-class judicial magistrate of Kamalpur in Dhalai district, following allegations of molesting a rape survivor in his chambers last week. State law department officials confirmed Wednesday that HC has "closed" magistrate Dhar and instructed him not to leave station without permission. In legal terms, "closing" refers to placing an official in a different location without any assignment. In this case, Dhar has been attached to HC. The accusation stems from a 23-year-old rape survivor who reported that Dhar touched her inappropriately when she visited his chambers to record her statement under Section 164 of CrPC. She alleged that the molestation happened after she was raped by a 26-year-old man in her home on Feb 13. The women had recounted to police that Dhar warned her that the case would go against her if she did not comply. She managed to escape from the chambers within a few minutes without making any statement. Her husband lodged a complaint with Kamalpur Bar Association's secretary, alleging that Dhar molested his wife and justified his actions by claiming that judges have to behave in such a manner while recording statements in rape cases. "Hearing this, she started to cry. The judge told her to leave and sit outside. If a judge has such character, how will people get justice?" he asked. Kamalpur police station registered a case on Feb 16 based on the allegations. The woman also submitted an affidavit detailing her ordeal to the additional district and sessions judge.

## Government to farmers: Solution only through talks, maintain peace

**NEW DELHI:** As the agitation by farmers entered an intense phase along the Punjab-Haryana border, the Centre on Wednesday invited their leaders for a fifth round of talks to discuss all their demands, including the ones on minimum support price (MSP), and appealed to them to maintain peace. "We are ready to discuss all the issues, be it MSP or crop diversification. We can find a solution only through dialogue. I have invited them for the discussion and appealed to them to maintain peace and



find a solution that is good for everyone," said agriculture minister Arjun Munda. Though govt side, during the fourth round of talks, offered to have a five-year contract with farmers to procure maize, cotton and pulses (tur, masoor and urad) at MSP, unions

rejected it saying it's an attempt by the Centre to dilute their key demand of legal guarantee to procure all crops at MSP. Seeking to remain engaged with protesting farmers to find a solution to the current crisis, Munda, however, emphasised

that the govt side was keen to discuss all issues including those related to MSP, crop diversification, stubble burning issue (no penalty for biomass burning) and FIR registered against agitating farmers. BJP too, on Wednesday, advocated for a solution through discussions. "We appeal that solution should come out peacefully... Our govt has done so much work for farmers. Farmers' progress is our priority and will continue to remain so," said senior BJP leader Ravi Shankar Prasad.

## Bhishma Pitamah' of Indian judiciary Fali S Nariman dies

**NEW DELHI:** Some soldiers sleep with their boots on. Fali S Nariman, you would think, slept with his robes on. The indefatigable jurist, who passed away on Wednesday at 95, was prepping for a submission to be argued before a Constitution bench in what turned out to be the last day of an extraordinary life. Born in Rangoon in 1929, he landed in Delhi as a refugee in 1942. He started practising law in Mumbai in 1950. The remarkable



thing is how his evolution as a jurist over 70 years mirrors India's jurisprudential journey. Most of the cases that built its social, political and legal landscape had a Nariman

imprint. Referred to as 'Bhishma Pitamah' of Indian judiciary, he was conscience keeper and guiding light for legal fraternity. Widely considered as one of India's finest

lawyers, Nariman not only guided fellow professionals and judges but for decades was the go-to legal expert. Presidents first approached when they sought an opinion on a tricky issue. Nariman's principles defined his legal journey. Govt and CJs offered Fali S Nariman preferences lawyers dream of. He was offered judgeship, first for Bombay high court and later for Supreme Court. He graciously refused both times.

## 4 minors molest & assault Manipur woman in Bengaluru

**BENGALURU:** A 25-year-old woman from Manipur was molested and assaulted by four minors near regional passport office in Bengaluru's Koramangala on Saturday. The boys also attacked her male friend, but passersby helped the duo catch one of them and hand him over to police, who later nabbed the other three attackers, too. All four boys are aged between 16 and 17 years, a police officer said, adding that since they were minors, "we have recorded their statements and sent them home". Further action would be taken based on the investigation, he said. A case has been registered under IPC sections 354 A (sexual harassment) and 323 (voluntarily causing hurt). Leina (name changed), who works in a hotel in the city, told police



that the incident took place they were returning home after disposing of waste around 1.30am. As the boys loitering in front of a building molested her, she pushed them away and shouted at them. The boys then punched Leina in the face repeatedly and kicked her, and she began bleeding from the nose and mouth. Her friend was also assaulted when he tried to save her, Leina told police. The boys picked up a wooden log and tried to hit Leina, but her

friend shielded her and took the blows. By this time, some passersby had stopped and questioned the boys, who then fled. While people were trying to help Leina and her friend, the boys returned to the spot with logs, but ran away when they saw more people had gathered there. They were chased by some people, and one of them was caught. A man took Leina, her friend and the boy to a police station in his car, helped her file a complaint and then took the duo to a hospital.

## Farmer's protest: Haryana government extends internet suspension in seven districts

**CHANDIGARH:** Amid a standoff with the farmers, the Haryana government on Wednesday extended the ban on mobile internet and bulk SMS services in seven districts till February 23. Earlier, the government extended the suspension till February 19. According to a notification issued by the Haryana administration, bulk SMS and all dongle services provided on mobile networks, except voice calls, will remain suspended in the jurisdiction of districts Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad and Sirsa. "In order to stop the spread of misinformation and rumours through various social



media platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook Twitter, etc. on mobile phones and SMS, for facilitation and mobilization of mobs of agitators and demonstrators who can cause serious loss of life and damage to public and private properties by indulging in arson or vandalism and other types of violent activities," the order said. The state administration also mentioned that the

order is extended to prevent any disturbance of peace and public order in seven districts and shall be in force up to February 23. "This order is being passed ex-parte in view of the emergent situation, as explained in earlier paragraphs. Any person found guilty of violation of aforesaid order will be liable for legal action under relevant provisions," it

added. Meanwhile, at least 12 police personnel have been seriously injured following a clash between protesting farmers and Haryana police amid the "Delhi Chalo" march at the Data Singh-Khanauri border, an official said on Wednesday. Taking to their social media handle, Haryana police in a video message said on X, "The protesters surrounded the police personnel from all sides at the Data Singh-Khanauri border and burned stubble with chilli powder in it. The protesters also attacked the policemen using sticks and pelted stones. About 12 police personnel have been seriously injured."

## Living in tent as kid, cricketer Yashvi Jaiswal buys Rs 5.4 crore Mumbai flat

**MUMBAI:** Yashvi Jaiswal, Indian cricket's young sensation, has purchased an apartment in X BKC for Rs 5.4 crore. According to registration document accessed by Lias Foras, the 1,100-square-foot flat in wing 3 of the Bandra (East) building was registered on Jan 7. The deal works to Rs 48,499 a sq ft. As a kid growing up in Mumbai, he lived in a tent at Azad Maidan - after his parents left for his village in UP's Badohi - to pursue his cricketing dream before he was picked up by his childhood coach. At one point, he helped a hawk sell pani puri at Azad Maidan. Last Sunday, the left-handed opener hit a double century, which included a record 12 sixes, to star in India's 434-run rout of England in third Test at Rajkot.



## Editorial

### Alexei Navalny's last walk and the haunting legacy of Russia's Arctic Circle Prison

"Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma," said Winston Churchill famously. And so are its prisons. The vast Siberian tundra that forms large parts of Russia allows for this macabre and unearthly narrative for the rest of the world. There has been global bedlam, since Alexei Navalny, Vladimir Putin's fiercest critic and opponent dropped dead while walking in the Russian prison, also known as the 'Arctic Circle Prison', where he was imprisoned since December 2023, sentenced to 19 years under a "special regime". Western leaders have since pointed fingers at Putin, accusing him of being directly responsible for Navalny's death, while Russia has claimed that Navalny died under natural circumstances. In a statement, the federal penitentiary service for the region where Navalny was incarcerated said, "He felt unwell after a walk immediately after which he lost consciousness." The "Arctic Circle Prison", or the "Polar Wolf" was officially named FKU IK-3 and is a men's maximum security corrective colony located in the town of Kharp located in the Priuralsky district in the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug. It has an occupancy limit of 1,085 people. Russia has an extensive and chimerical history of prisons since Stalin's infamous Gulag (also slang for political prisons), and Kharp was indeed a town built by the convicts of the Gulag during the Stalin era. Located about 60 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle, IK-3 was founded as part of the GULAG system of forced labour camps. The colony was founded on 21 August, 1961, on the former camp unit of the 501st Gulag construction site. It was initially known as YATs 34/3. In 1964, the first residential building for convicts, a medical unit, a boiler room, a bathhouse, a laundry, a dormitory for the colony settlement section and a central checkpoint were constructed. Convicts worked in quarries, loading sand and gravel for the railways, between 1966 and 1970, with the first batch of especially dangerous repeat offenders brought to the colony in 1967. In 1971, warehouses, an icehouse and garages for the institution's equipment were built. Since 1985, the IK 3 has been actively developing, with convicts employed in manufacturing at minimum wage. In 1999, the prison colony even opened their first temple, the Temple of St Sergius of Radonezh, built by the inmates. Today, some 3,000 kilometres away from Moscow, IK 3 houses some 1,050 of Russia's most dreaded and feared criminals. It is a known fact that the prison holds serial killers, rapists, convicted paedophiles, repeat offenders and others convicted of the most serious of crimes against humanity and serving sentences of 20 years or more. In cases like Navalny's the government sends convicts who can be considered political prisoners there too. Apart from Navalny, another high-profile inmate was Platon Lebedev, who was convicted of tax evasion and other charges during the dismantling of the Yukos oil giant in the mid-2000s. Unlike Navalny though, Lebedev walked out alive after a few years in the Polar Wolf. Lucky man! All you need to do is look at a map, to see that it is the northernmost prison in the world close to the Arctic Circle, no doubt one of the harshest as well. For most of the year there are no flights to the region and accessing by railway is tough. Sitting in a tropical country, scenes from the movie Dr Zhivago come to mind when one imagines the terrain and its ingress. Even Russia's Federal Penitentiary Service's postal service is not operational at IK-3. The normal Russian postal service is the only mode of communication with the prison. The prison system's cell phone service Zonatelekom was also shut down recently by the time Navalny arrived.

From tear gas to iron spikes, the government has left no stone unturned to stop the farmers' march on the Punjab-Haryana border. Thousands of farmers have been blocked on the Punjab side with an overwhelming police presence on the Haryana side. Local police and paramilitary battalions have been deployed in heavy numbers. But what led to such a confrontation? We have to rewind to 2022, when the Modi government rescinded the three farm laws and asked the farmers to go back home as there will be a government committee formed to look into the minimum support price (MSP). Since January 2022, the government hasn't given any clear answers to the questions of MSP, debt waiver, electricity bills, etc. As 2024 began, a splinter group of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (non-political) declared their intention to revive the demand for MSP and were willing to do a tractor-cade to Delhi on 13 February to reassert themselves and pressure the government to make MSP the legal right of farmers. Now even before we begin to analyse this demand let's understand what MSP is and how it came to be. In the 1960s, India's war with China and constant droughts devastated the Indian food distribution sys-



tem. India was forced to import wheat from the US to feed its own people. But as a condition of receiving food aid, India had to agree to structural adjustment and subscribe to an industrial agricultural model. The Green Revolution experiment began in Punjab. Before interventions, Punjab was a fertile area, growing cotton, and indigenous varieties of legumes, oilseeds and millet. "High-yielding" rice varieties introduced during the Green Revolution were non-native and didn't suit Punjabi farmers' palate or markets, seeing as rice was not part of their diet. The Indian government pushed farmers to grow these hybrid seeds but found that there were no buyers for their rice paddy. To address the market problem in Punjab, the Indian govern-

ment introduced the MSP. Inspired by the US price support system, the MSP system assured a minimum price floor for Green Revolution crops — mainly rice paddy and wheat. This price floor was originally calculated based on the costs of chemical inputs, seeds, and fuel, and was revised each year to assure farmers that they would earn a profit. However, many local traders, who had no use for the rice as it had no part in the local food economy, refused to guarantee MSP. In response, the government's Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) introduced regulated market yards for buying rice and wheat, mainly in the regions where the Green Revolution was first introduced — Punjab and Haryana. The APMC served as a safeguard

for farmers, protecting them from exploitation by traders and corporations, and ensuring that farmers had a market where they would receive government-regulated prices for their produce. The farmers started to visit these APMC market yards to sell their paddy and the markets started to flourish. The grain purchased at the APMC also landed up in the PDS system and our strategic grain reserves. For a while, the APMC system stabilised prices for farmers. Market yard taxes were used to improve village roads and other infrastructure. However, while the MSP was established to guarantee farmers a minimum price, over time it became the maximum price a farmer could hope for. To keep food inflation in check, the government didn't increase MSP to account for inflation. The cost of chemical inputs needed for the Green Revolution seeds became more costly and degraded soils, creating the need for more chemicals just to get the same yield. If at first, a field required one kg bag of urea, after two decades of chemical farming that same field needs two or three bags of urea to get the same yield. The cost of water, farmers' labour and soil degradation were not considered in the MSP costs. MSP became an approxima-

tion of the cost of production each season by the CACP. The CACP each year declares the MSP for 23 crops, although the government directly procures two or three crops at best. 'MSP as a legal right' Now if we see the main demand of the farmers groups' - make MSP a legal right. What does it even mean? In simple terms, farmers are proposing that the government declare prices for various agri-commodities each season and make purchases below them illegal. Seeing the dismal state of agriculture and their shrinking pockets, where a farmer makes 1/10th of daily wage labourers yearly earnings, farmers wanted a guaranteed income built-in with the value of their agri-produce. Their logic is simple, if the daily wage labourer has a minimum wage for his work, the farmers should also be empowered by including the minimum living wage in the price of the produce. **Challenges** On the face of it, the farmers' demand is only fair. Why shouldn't one get the fair for his labour? The Modi government has also realised this need, and hence aggressively campaigned for a doubling farmers' income programme and yet failed to see results in the past decade.

## Uniform Civil Code: Assam going Uttarakhand way?

The Uniform Civil Code has been a legally contentious issue. Despite being envisioned in the Directive Principles of the State Policy as a non-justiciable right under Article 44, as rightly observed by the Supreme Court it is regrettably lied as a 'dead letter'. However, this explains the situation till the Modi government came into power. UCC envisages a uniform set of laws intended to encompass customary laws across various religious communities, regulating civil matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession, maintenance etc. It is known that the UCC has been occupying centre stage since the Shah Bano Case (Mohd. Ahmed Khan Vs. Shah Bano Begum, 1985), in which the Supreme Court had adjudicated in favour of Shah Bano. Shah Bano, 62, wife of Mohammad

Ahmad Khan filed a petition at a local court in Indore, against her husband under section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, asking him for a maintenance amount for herself and her children. Husband gave an irrevocable talaq (divorce) to her which was his prerogative under Muslim Personal Law and took up the defence that since Shah Bano had ceased to be his wife and therefore, he was under no obligation to provide maintenance for her as except prescribed under the Muslim Personal Law, which was in total Rs 5,400. The issue was finally taken up by the Supreme Court and it decided it, in favour of Shah Bano using the secular Criminal Procedure Code regardless of religion. It was seen as an attack on Muslim Personal Law by radical

Islamists and a section of the political class that believed in the appeasement of radical Muslims by catapulting their radicalism at the cost of progressive ideas and the constitutional mandate in favour of equality before the law and right to life and personal liberty (life with dignity, is an inferred right under Article 21) enshrined in Article 14 and 21 respectively. The then Congress government under Rajiv Gandhi at the Centre resorted to the worst appeasement tactic of the radical Islamists and the Union government brought Muslim Women (Protection on Divorce Act) 1986, a law in the Parliament to overturn the decision of the Supreme Court, and it instead provided maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman only during the period of iddat.

## Sandeshkhali could be for Mamata what Singur-Nandigram was for Left

In a conversation a few years ago, one of the prominent English-speaking faces of TMC had narrated an anecdote about his leader Mamata Banerjee's political acumen. He said 'Didi' had asked him to make a PowerPoint presentation on how to win the 2011 Bengal election by beating the Left Front. In his presentation, he proposed building a parallel grassroots organisation. Banerjee sat patiently through it. At the end, she shook her head and told him: "That is exactly their strength. We can't beat them at their game. We need events which will make their own organisation in towns and villages collapse out of anxiety, fear." Protests against land acquisition in Singur and Nandigram proved to be those events. The Left's heavy-handedness and arrogance instilled fear across Bengal that their land holdings would be snatched away. CPM's use of brute force made it believable. Atrocities by TMC goons in Sandeshkhali could become for Mamata Banerjee what Singur and Nandigram were for the Left Front government. Bengal has already established itself as the Mecca of misrule (the phrase may please Didi since it backhandedly fits into her lexicon of minority appeasement). Brutal



pre- and post-poll violence are in the courts, wanton corruption has blazed across TV screens of every household, anger of the jobless has spilled onto the streets, and the state's debt has touched Rs 6 lakh crore. **Along comes Sandeshkhali.** Suffering indignity and violence in silence for decades, the dam of citizens' patience has been breached. Woman after woman has from the wetlands of North 24 Parganas are coming out to narrate how TMC goon and once member of the CPM's 'Harmad' militia Sheikh Shahjahan and his men would handpick women and take them away from their husbands, keep them for nights and return them when they were satisfied. Shahjahan is absconding after his men thrashed an ED team which had gone to question him in the ration distribution scam. Forced dispossession and sexual

exploitation have reached a point where the locals do not care to even risk their lives. They have been protesting against Shahjahan's barbaric presence. The West Bengal police have been arresting the protesters while Shahjahan roams free. **Why could this be the inflection point for the Mamata Banerjee government?** Because of the same creeping, growing, universalising fear of ceding both property and dignity, losing land and wife and sisters and daughters to jihadis; something that Bengal knows very well from the memories of a bloody Partition. The heat of this fear will begin to melt the rural unitary structures of the TMC's support base. Eight or nine people including the Panchayat members, banker, teacher and others form the power structure of a village. If Hindus start fearing complete dispossession and humiliation like the kind meted out

## India must borrow from Western playbook to fulfil its strategic goals

New Delhi hosted a very interesting guest this week, Canadian politician Scott Moe, who happens to be the Premier of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan is a Canadian province that borders the United States to the South and is also one of the world's largest producers of uranium. He has been ruling as the head of its provincial government since 2018. Moe was not only received warmly in India but was even granted an audience with India's Minister for External Affairs, S Jaishankar. The two met on Tuesday and

discussed ways to foster closer collaboration between India and Saskatchewan province. However, this wasn't the first time that Moe has visited India. In March last year as well, he had visited the country as part of a Canadian delegation and met Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar. This time he is leading a delegation from his province to elevate trade and investment ties with India with Saskatchewan contributing more than a third of Canadian exports to India, key among

which are lentils and potash. Interestingly while India laid out a red carpet to welcome Premier Moe and extended him the privilege of a meeting with EAM Jaishankar, the overall India-Canada ties continue to be frosty. Even the much-awaited free trade agreement with Canada continues to be in a state of limbo due to that country's overt support to Khalistan cause. In September 2023, India had announced that trade talks have been put on hold due to "political reasons" when the Justin Trudeau government

not only failed to take any action against Khalistan referendum held in British Columbia, Canada, but also defended it as an issue of "freedom of expression" and "freedom of protest". Later Prime Minister Trudeau launched an attack on India accusing the country of hatching a conspiracy to assassinate Khalistani terrorist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. Since then, India's overall relations with Canada have continued to suffer due to their prime minister's appeasement of the Khalistan lobby.



## 5 students of Akash Byjus Bhiwani achieved more than 99 percentile



**Bhiwani:** Aakash Byju's is proud to announce the remarkable achievement of its 5 students from Bhiwani who have scored above 99 percentile in the first session of Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) Main 2024. 11 students scored more than 98 percentile. 21 students achieved more than 95 percentile. 27 students achieved more than 90 percentile. A student scored 100 percentile in Physics. The National Testing Agency had declared the results last Tuesday. Among the notable achievers, Manuj secured 99.95, Piyush secured 99.58,

Tanishk secured 99.47, Saksham Wadhwa secured 99.34 and Anuja Gupta secured 99.16 percentile. Top percentage of students show their unwavering commitment and academic excellence in one of the most renowned competitive examinations of India. The National Testing Agency today unveiled the results of Session 1, the first of two scheduled joint entrance examinations for engineering this year. Congratulating the students, Parmeshwar Jha, Regional Director, Aakash Byju's, appreciated, "The remarkable

performance of the students reflects Aakash Byju's commitment to empowering students with comprehensive coaching and innovative learning solutions, enabling them to crack competitive examinations. Can achieve excellence in. We wish him all the best for his next endeavor as well as his future endeavours." Moreover, in the recently declared NSE results, 8 students from Bhiwani scored above the Minimum Admissible Score and 1 student has been selected for the Indian National Olympiad 2024.

## Chhattisgarh security force officer axed to death by Maoist hit team

**RAIPUR:** A Chhattisgarh Armed Force (CAF) officer was hacked to death by a Maoist hit team in Bijapur district of Bastar on Sunday morning. He was buying vegetables from a local market. Inspector Tijau Ram Bhuvarya was killed barely 100m from the recently set up Jaigru security camp in Kutru (445km from Raipur) in Chhattisgarh, police said. The region is a Maoist hotbed, close to the Maharashtra border, and locations like Gangaloor, Kirandul and Bhairamgarh have seen

many a gun battle. Bhuvarya, head constable Shyam Bihari and some other personnel were out to buy vegetables on Sunday morning. Two Maoists, disguised as villagers, attacked him with axes and fled before anyone could challenge them. By the time help arrived, the inspector had bled to death. He hailed from Bargaon village in Kanker district, around 345km north of where he was posted. Bijapur SP Jitendra Kumar Yadav told TOI that it's the modus

operandi of small 'action teams' of Maoists to execute such attacks in public places, particularly weekly markets. "They attack all of a sudden and flee the spot within seconds," he said. The attack comes barely 10 days after the Maoists' Dandakaranya Special Zonal Committee demanded "creation of a favourable environment for talks."

The insurgents were responding to deputy chief minister Vijay Sharma's offer for unconditional talks via video-conference.

## Three electrocuted by live wire trap laid by poachers

**BHOPAL:** Three members of a family were electrocuted by a live wire trap laid by poachers to snare wild boar in Madhya Pradesh's Sidhi district late Saturday. The victims were identified as Prashant Kewat (22), Anil Kewat (32),

and Narmada Kewat (50), who lived in Devri village on the edge of Sanjay Gandhi National Park. They used to catch birds by covering entire trees with large nets tied to bamboo poles, Majhau police station in-charge Deepak Singh

Baghel. Every evening, they would do a recce to locate the trees where the maximum birds were resting. Then, they would return to place their nets on those trees, Baghel said. "They left home around 3pm Saturday.

## Ujjivan Small Finance Bank's 187 Unbanked Rural Centres now cater to over 5.5 lakh customers in rural India

**Jhajar:** Ujjivan Small Finance Bank (Ujjivan SFB), one of the leading small finance banks in the country, now caters to the banking needs of 5.5 lakh un-served and under-served rural customers through its vast network of 187 Unbanked Rural Centres (URCs). Through these URCs, Ujjivan SFB offers Agriculture and Crop Loans, Affordable Housing Loans, Individual Loans, and Business Loans for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises. The Bank also provides Term Deposits and Savings Account at attractive interest rates and Current Accounts. These URCs offers personalised banking services like doorstep banking and technology enabled hassle-free banking experience, reducing the need for long-distance travel for banking needs. Ujjivan SFB offers a range of Agriculture and Crop Loans starting from 26,000 to 25 lakh, catering to the banking and financial needs of the rural population operating in different segments of farming and allied occupations. Ujjivan Kisan Pragati Card (KPC), a crop loan facility, empowers farmers by providing convenient access to timely credit for their crop production needs. The KPC Kisan Abhiman loans offers enhanced credit to progressive farmers with diverse income sources, offering financial assistance for increased capital expenditure in farming activities. Affordable Housing Loan ranging from 2 lakh to 275 lakh for those looking to purchase/construct their dream home, as well as Individual loans from 35,000 to 3 lakh, Business Loans for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises ranging from 10 lakh to 210 crores.

## Hardwyn India Ltd. Reports Stellar Earnings for Q3FY24, PAT Jumps 191% QoQ

**CHANDIGARH:** Hardwyn India Ltd. (BSE: 541276, NSE: HARDWYN), a leader in architectural hardware and glass fittings, has announced stellar earnings for the quarter and nine months ended 31 December 2023. For the quarter ended 31 December 2023, (Cons), the company reported a 25% growth QoQ in its revenue from operations, rising from Rs. 31.94 Crores (Q2FY24) to Rs. 39.90 Crores (Q3FY24). The EBITDA grew 185% QoQ, from Rs. 2.36 Crores (Q2FY24) to Rs. 6.72 Crores (Q3FY24). EBIT-

DA margins grew 944 bps from 7.37% in Q2FY24, to 16.81% in Q3FY24. PAT jumped 191% QoQ, from Rs. 1.48 Crores (Q2FY24) to Rs. 4.31 Crores (Q3FY24). PAT Margins increased by 616 bps, from 4.62% in Q2FY24 to 10.78% in Q3FY24. For the nine months ended 31 December, 2023 (Cons), the company reported its revenue from operations, at Rs. 108.70 Crores (9MFY24). The EBITDA was reported at Rs. 10.86 Crores (9MFY24). PAT stood at Rs. 6.90 Crores (9MFY24). Earlier, the

company had announced that it's newly formed Subsidiary 'Slim-X' has unveiled a range of innovative products. The new brand, with cutting-edge technology, now plans to generate revenue of Rs 100 crore in the next two years, leveraging the growth potential of innovative products-ultra-slim, high-performance aluminum profiles- for industries. Hardwyn India Ltd. is a leading brand among the architectural hardware manufacturers in India. For over half a

century, Hardwyn India Ltd. has been redefining perfection in the realm of architectural hardware. The company offers comprehensive solutions for residential and commercial structures as an unwavering manufacturer of architectural hardware and glass fittings. Through rigorous testing and relentless research and development practices, Hardwyn has earned a stellar reputation for benchmark quality through a customer-centric philosophy and relentless pursuit of world-class quality.

## Apollo Micro System Ltd. To Establish Integrated Plant for Ingenious Defence Systems (IPiDS)

**CHANDIGARH:** Apollo Micro Systems Ltd. (BSE: 540879, NSE: APOLLO), a pioneer in Design, Development and assembly of Custom Built Electronics and Electro-mechanical solutions, has announced that it will conduct the groundbreaking ceremony and foundation stone laying for integrated plant for Ingenious Defence Systems (IPiDS). The company added, "We

are pleased to confirm that, as previously communicated, an application for an additional 2.5 acres of land adjacent to the existing allotted land of 2.5 acres is made, for which advance payment is also released, which would make the total land extent to 5.00 acres." This 5.00 Acre land will be utilized for the establishment of the Integrated Plant for Ingenious Defence Systems (IPiDS), with a

proposed investment totaling Rs. 210 crores. We are delighted to announce that Apollo Micro Systems Limited will be conducting the Foundation Stone Laying and Groundbreaking Ceremony for our Integrated Plant for Ingenious Defence Systems (IPiDS) on Monday, 19 February, 2024 at Hardware Park-II, Hyderabad. The Hon'ble Minister for ITE&C, Industries &

Commerce and Legislative Affairs, Government of Telangana, has graciously accepted the invitation for Stone Laying and Groundbreaking ceremony. "We believe that the establishment of our IPiDS plant will have a positive impact, enhancing our capabilities and enabling us to contribute towards the growth of the Defence industry," the company further added.

## TOLINS TYRES LIMITED FILES DRHP WITH SEBI

**GURUGRAM :** Tolins Tyres Limited, a company based in Kerala and one of leading player in the Tyre & Treads industry with all India presence, has filed its Draft Red Herring Prospectus ("DRHP") with market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India ("SEBI"). The Company's initial public offering comprises a fresh issue of up to 2200 Crores and an offer for sale (OFS) of Equity Shares aggregating upto 30 Crores by selling shareholders. The offer for sale comprises of Equity Shares aggregating up to 15 Crore by Dr. Kalamparambil Varkey Tolin, Promoter, Chairman and Managing Director and Up to 15 Crore by Ms. Jerin Tolin, promoter, Non-Executive & Non Independent Director. The company proposes to utilize the 62.5 Crores of Net Proceeds from the offer towards the repayment/prepay-



ment of certain outstanding loans (including foreclosure charges, if any) available by the Company, 75 Crores towards augmentation of long-term working capital requirements of the Company, and 24.3 Crores towards Investment in their wholly owned subsidiary, Tolin Rubbers Private Limited to repay and/ or prepay, in full, certain of its short term and long term borrowings and augmentation of its working capital requirements; and balance amount will be used for general corporate purposes. Tolins

Tyres Limited commenced their operations in 1982 as a proprietorship concern for manufacture of tread rubber, incorporated in 2003 and commenced production and sales in the year 2005 by Dr. Kalamparambil Varkey Tolin, Promoter, Chairman and Managing Director and Mr. Sankar Krishnan Ramalingam, Whole Time Director. Since 2004 Ms. Jerin Tolin, promoter, Non-Executive & Non Independent Director. The tyre retreading solutions provider operates its business.

## Discussions on Innovative treatments for Burn Management at NABICON

**GURUGRAM:** The National Academy of Burns organized the NABICON 2024 - a platform to exchange knowledge and explore the recent advances in all aspects of burn prevention, burn wound management, burn reconstruction, rehabilitation and research. The event witnessed a stellar line up of speakers comprising dedicated Burn & Plastic surgeons and burn care specialists from India and across the globe. Some of the key topics covered in the Conference included Training in Burn Management, Advances in Keratinocyte Delivery In Wounds, Post Burn Deformities Correction, Setting Up



Of An Ideal Burn Unit And Awareness In Burns, and many more. Several experts presented scientific and medical papers on relevant topics on management and burn care. The conference is being held in Ranchi, Jharkhand under the leadership of Dr Anant Sinha, President of NABI & Organizing Secretary of NABICON 2024. Speaking on the sidelines of NABICON 2024, Alok Khetry, COO- India Business, BSV, said, "Despite the

daunting toll burns take globally, there is a light at the end of the tunnel." He emphasized the power of modern burns treatment, to uplift survivors both physically and emotionally. Burn Survivors are often stigmatized with scars (dead tissues) and other deformities that remain a life-long emotional and physical challenge. However, with scientific advancements in burn treatments, burn survivors can now be hopeful of

overcoming these challenges without any intrusive surgeries. BSV, known for empowering women's health now extends its care to burn management. Their innovative treatment, gentle yet effective promises hope by removing eschar in just four hours without harming the surrounding healthy tissues. At BSV we remain committed to providing quality care for burns survivors nationwide, marking a new chapter in healing. Adds Prof Lior Rosenberg, Chief Medical Officer Director, MediWound, "Burn Management is based on the three tenets of patient care: No death, no suffering and no scars (dead tissues).

## NCW chairperson leads delegation to Kolkata amidst unrest in Sandeshkhali

**KOLKATA:** A delegation led by the National Commission for Women (NCW) chairperson Rekha Sharma has left for Kolkata ahead of her Sandeshkhali visit. The area has been witnessing unrest for over 10 days as women protesters seek justice against alleged atrocities committed by TMC leader Sheikh Shajahan and his aides. Speaking to ANI, the NCW chief expressed her concern about the injustice done to women and her intention to visit every street and talk to the women to assure them of her support. During her visit, she plans to meet the governor of West Bengal and later meet President Droupadi Murmu. Rekha Sharma stated, "Very disturbing news is coming from Sandeshkhali.



## 'When people from outside...': Top-order batter Shubman Gill opens up on lean patch



**NEW DELHI:** Entering the Test series against England, Shubman Gill faced a dual challenge -- a lean patch spanning nine innings and the pressure of adjusting to his new No.3 slot in the longest format. However, three Tests into the ongoing series against England, Gill has managed to overcome the hurdles. The top-order batter has 252 runs to his name at an average of 42, including a crucial 104 in Visakhapatnam and a stylish 91 in Rajkot, both contributing significantly to his team's success. Gill's resurgence can

be attributed more to his mental approach than any drastic alterations to his technique. The youngster focused on managing the expectations he had set for himself, ultimately leading to his improved performance on the field. "It is a bit tough (living up to his own expectations). When people from outside talk about all those things, it did not make much difference to me. But the expectations that I kept on myself made me a bit disappointed," Gill said in a press conference here on Wednesday.

However, Gill said he has still placed the same level of expectations on him but has learned to adjust to them. "You will definitely have some expectations on you as to how you want to play for the team, the country. But I don't think that has changed my mindset. I still have the same set of expectations for myself. "It is all about how you are able to forget them and move on quickly and be ready for the next challenge. That is the difference between a big player and an average player," he added.

## Is Bumrah a perfect fit to succeed Rohit as captain?

**NEW DELHI:** How effective are bowlers, particularly fast bowlers, when they take the captaincy duties? The example of Australia's skipper Pat Cummins comes to mind in this ongoing debate. Since taking over the reins of the Australia team in Tests and ODIs, Cummins hasn't disappointed as a leader and has been commendable in all departments. Under his captaincy, Australia clinched the ICC World Test Championship title in 2023 by defeating India in the final, followed by a triumph in the ICC ODI World Cup, where they conquered India once again on their home turf. This victory marked



Australia's sixth ODI World Cup title. Cummins has led Australia in 41 matches across formats, while also contributing significantly with the ball, bowling 879.5 overs and claiming 121 wickets. These stats showcased the 30-year-old's exceptional ability to manage both the responsibilities of captaincy and his performance on the field,

especially with the ball. So, is India pacer Jasprit Bumrah a perfect fit to succeed Rohit Sharma, following in the footsteps of Cummins? PTI Photo The 30-year-old Bumrah has had the experience of leading the Indian national team, as he has stood-in as captain on three occasions in which he has also claimed 9 wickets.

## Sachin Tendulkar visits Aman Setu in Jammu and Kashmir's Uri

**BARAMULLA:** Cricketing great Sachin Tendulkar on Wednesday visited the Aman Setu bridge -- the last point on the Line of Control in Uri sector of Jammu and Kashmir. Tendulkar interacted with the soldiers at the Kaman Post, near Aman

Setu, during his visit that lasted around one hour, officials said. The Little Master played roadside cricket with a bunch of boys in Uri. The boys keenly watched Tendulkar's footwork and how he played the shots. Tendulkar, accompanied

by wife Anjali and daughter Sara, is on a visit to Kashmir over the past few days. He visited a cricket bat manufacturing unit at Chursoo on Srinagar-Jammu national highway. He also visited Pahalgam tourist destination in south Kashmir.

## CAPSULES

### Ashwin has not always got enough credit for what he is: AB de Villiers

**NEW DELHI:** Former South Africa skipper and batting great AB de Villiers on Wednesday praised Ravichandran Ashwin, labeling him a legend of the game and emphasized that the senior Indian spinner hasn't always received the full credit he deserves for his contributions to the game.

Ashwin reached a significant milestone, claiming his 500th Test wicket during the third match against England, earning a place in the exclusive company of cricketing greats.



De Villiers heaped praise on the 37-year-old and said, "What a fantastic achievement! Congratulations Ash, you are one of the toughest bowlers I have ever played against - an incredible asset for the Indian cricket team with both bat and ball." He's been a stalwart, but not always getting enough credit for what he is and the role he plays in the Indian team. What a legend!" De Villiers advised England's batters to stay positive and use their feet a lot more against Ashwin in the remaining two Tests of the five-match series. India lead the series 2-1 after their massive 434-run win in the third Test in Rajkot. "The one thing that stands out is he's (Ashwin) a tall guy, so he's got natural variation and bounce. He's got subtle changes with his wrist - undercut more and get over the top a little bit more.

## Vamshhi slams six sixes in an over, joins Indian trio in elite list

**Pulling off a miraculous effort, Krrishna became only the fourth Indian batter after Ravi Shastri (1985), Yuvraj Singh (2007) and Ruturaj Gaikwad (2022) to crack six sixes in an over**

**NEW DELHI:** Andhra batter Vamshhi Krrishna achieved a remarkable and rare feat on Wednesday as he clobbered six sixes in an over during a Col CK



Nayudu Trophy match against Railways in Kadapa. Pulling off a miraculous effort, Krrishna became only the fourth Indian batter after Ravi Shastri (1985), Yuvraj Singh (2007) and Ruturaj Gaikwad (2022) to crack six sixes in an over. In a stunning exhibition of clean striking, Krrishna collected 36 runs in

the Damandeeep Singh over amid his breathtaking 64-ball 110 on the fourth and final day of the Andhra vs Railways encounter. It turned out to be an absolute nightmare for Damandeeep as Krrishna slammed him for six maximums -- all coming on the on-side.

## 'To predetermine a way in Test cricket...': AB de Villiers on 'Bazball'

**NEW DELHI:** Former South Africa cricketer AB de Villiers has entered the conversation surrounding England batter Joe Root's struggles and the team's 'Bazball' approach. Root, known for his classical batting style, has come under scrutiny for his lack of runs in the ongoing five-Test series against India, accumulating only 77 runs in six innings. De Villiers shared his perspective on England's 'Bazball' approach, acknowledging its entertainment value while also expressing



caution about its potential drawbacks in the context of Test cricket. He highlighted the importance of adaptability and smart decision-making, particularly when facing challeng-

ing situations. "I like what Bazball represents, which is aggressive cricket, but I have said this that I want players to confront different situations and that's what Test cricket

is all about. To predetermine a way you're going to play in Test cricket is very dangerous." De Villiers pointed out the risks of a predetermined aggressive approach, especially after England's dramatic collapse in the Rajkot Test where they squandered a commanding position. The former South African cricketer emphasised the importance for England to prioritize playing the situation and adopt a sensible batting approach to enhance their chances of success in Test cricket.

## Ranji Trophy: A winning finish for Jharkhand, Saurabh Tiwary and Varun Aaron

**KOLKATA:** Though the beginning of the match as well as the Ranji Trophy campaign was not on a positive note for them, Jharkhand finished their 2023-24 domestic season on a high with an 89-run thrashing of Rajasthan in Jamshedpur. This also called for a winning farewell to domestic stars Saurabh Tiwary and Varun Aaron at their hometown -- Keenan Stadium, Jharkhand's only international venue before JSCA International Cricket Stadium in Ranchi hosted its first game in January 2013. However, as the veterans called it a day -- Tiwary from all forms of cricket and former India speedster Aaron in red-ball format -- the chief architect of Jharkhand's win was young Kolkata Knight Riders allrounder



Anukul Roy, who bagged his fifth five-wicket haul in their last Group A contest. The hosts, defending 248, had left Rajasthan tottering at 120 for six in their second innings at stumps on Day 3. And on last day, with Rajasthan still needing 128 more with four wickets in hand, Jharkhand completed the task with the 25-year-old left-arm spinner adding two more wickets to his overnight tally to complete his five-for. Meanwhile, it was outgoing pacer Aaron (1/22) who provided the first breakthrough in the morning when he returned overnight batter

Sampit Joshi (23) in the third over of the day. Mahipal Lomror, too, could add another 18 runs to his score of 30 before falling prey to Roy, who also cleaned up rival captain Aniket Choudhary for a duck as his fifth victim to complete a memorable win on several counts. With their second victory of this edition, Jharkhand signed off at sixth spot on the group table above bottom-placed Manipur and Maharashtra. Brief scores: Jharkhand 188 & 269. Rajasthan 210 & 158 all out in 68.1 overs (M Lomror 48; A Roy 5/36, S Nadeem 3/53). Jharkhand won by 89 runs.

## Not confirmed but..': Ollie Pope on Ben Stokes bowling in fourth India Test

**NEW DELHI:** England's chances receive a potential lift as captain Ben Stokes may take to bowling in the upcoming fourth Test against India in Ranchi, according to vice-captain Ollie Pope on Wednesday. The English team, trailing 1-2 in the series, is eager for a win after consecutive losses. Initially committed to playing as a batsman due to a persisting knee issue, the 32-year-old all-rounder Stokes surprised by participating in bowling sessions during practice on Wednesday. His struggles with the left knee have kept him from bowling in the last three Ashes Tests in 2023 and the ODI World Cup. "There's definitely a chance,"



vice-captain Pope said of the probability that Stokes will bowl in the fourth Test. "He's not confirmed it even in the changing room so we will see. He bowled at the batters today," he added. "See how he pulls up, and if that's good, hopefully we will see him with the ball in hand in the game." Stokes, who underwent knee surgery in November, has been diligently working on his recovery to regain full fitness. Despite ini-

tial plans to focus solely on batting during the series against India, Stokes has shown determination by participating in bowling sessions during practice. "If he's got full confidence in his knee I guess you've got to trust the medical advice and trust his opinions as well," added Pope. Stokes, the right-arm fast bowler, achieved a significant milestone by completing his 100th Test in England's recent 434-run loss to India.

With a current tally of 197 wickets, he stands merely three wickets away from a remarkable achievement -- becoming only the third player in the history of five-day cricket to secure both 6,000 runs and 200 wickets. In the upcoming fourth Test in Ranchi, England are likely to make strategic decisions, including the potential rest of pace bowlers James Anderson and Mark Wood. This decision is influenced by the expected pitch conditions in Ranchi, which are anticipated to favor spinners. Stokes' possible return to bowling in this context could provide a crucial balance to England's bowling attack in the quest for a much-needed win in the series.

## Indian men, women lose in pre-quarter-finals of World TT

**NEW DELHI:** The Indian men's and women's teams on Wednesday faced defeats in the pre-quarter-finals of the World Table Tennis Championships in Busan, South Korea. The women's team, led by Manika Batra, lost 1-3 to Chinese Taipei, while the men's team was defeated 0-3 by South Korea for the second time in the competition. Despite these losses, the Indian teams are likely to secure berths at the Paris Olympics based on their world rankings. The final confirmation will be announced on March 5 after considering the points earned from the World Championships. The event offered Olympic quotas to the quarter-finalists but the men and women from India are likely to make the cut through their world rankings. "In all likelihood, the men and women have qualified for the Olympics but we will have to wait till March for an official announcement.



## 10 students of Akash Byjus Narnaul achieved more than 98 percentile



**Narnaul:** Akash Byjus is proud to announce the remarkable achievement of 10 of its students from Narnaul who have scored above 98 percentile in the first session of Joint Entrance Exam (JEE) Main 2024. 4 students achieved 99 percentile. In this sequence, 17 students obtained more than 95 percentile. 24 students achieved more than 90 percentile. A student secured 100 percentile in Chemistry. The National Testing Agency had declared the results last Tuesday. Among the notable achievers, Anup Yadav scored 99.91 percentile,

Janhvi Mittal scored 99.86, Aman Kumar scored 99.71, Himanshu Tanwar scored 99.31 and Dhruvanshu scored 97.67 percentile overall and 100 percentile in Chemistry. Top percentage of students show their unwavering commitment and academic excellence in one of the most renowned competitive examinations of India. The National Testing Agency today unveiled the results of Session 1, the first of two scheduled joint entrance examinations for engineering this year.

Congratulating the students, Parmeshwar Jha,

Regional Director, Akash Byjus, appreciated, "The remarkable performance of the students reflects Aakash Byjus's commitment to empowering students with comprehensive coaching and innovative learning solutions, enabling them to crack competitive examinations. We wish him all the best for his next endeavor as well as his future endeavours." Moreover, in the recently declared NSE results, 6 students from Narnaul scored above the Minimum Admissible Score and 1 student got admission in Indian National Olympiad 2024.

## RIL-backed AI model set to launch in March

A consortium backed by Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries and the country's top engineering schools aim to launch its first ChatGPT-style service next month, a big step in the country's ambitions to become a player in the field of artificial intelligence. The BharatGPT group - encompassing an arm of India's most valuable company and eight affiliated universities - offered a sneak peek of the large language model on Tuesday during a technology conference in Mumbai. In a video played before delegates, a motorcycle mechanic in southern

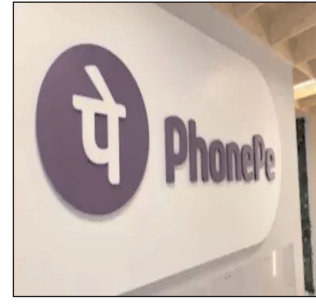
India queried an AI bot in Tamil, a banker conversed with the tool in Hindi, and a developer in Hyderabad used it to write computer code. If successful, the model - dubbed Hanooman - will represent an advance for India in the accelerating race to develop potentially transformative AI technology. BharatGPT envisions the model working via 11 local languages in four main fields: health care, governance, financial services and education. It developed the model in collaboration with the IITs including in Bombay, backed by wireless carrier Reliance Jio

Infocomm and govt.

A swath of startups such as Sarvam and Krutrim, backed by prominent VC investors such as Lightspeed Venture Partners and billionaire Vinod Khosla's fund, are also building open-sourced AI models customised for India. While Silicon Valley companies like OpenAI are building ever-larger LLMs, those efforts involve workarounds because of computational constraints and simpler models affordable to smaller businesses and govt departments. "It's a different genre of LLMs," said Ganesh Ramakrishnan.

## PhonePe sets up app store for Android

**MUMBAI:** Walmart's PhonePe launched an Android app store on Wednesday. The firm's homegrown Indus Appstore is betting on localisation to differentiate itself in the space dominated by tech giants Google and Apple. To get more developers on board, a factor that



will be key to its growth, Indus Appstore will allow them to

choose any third-party payment gateway for in-app billing and they will also not be charged any commission if they use an external payment gateway. In recent months, local app developers and Google have been engaged in a tussle over Play Store policies and commission fees.



## Sarveshwar Foods Ltd. Reports Stellar Earnings for Q3FY24, Board to Consider Fund Raise

**Chandigarh:** Sarveshwar Foods Limited (BSE: 543688, NSE: SARVESHWAR), a leader in the business of manufacturing, trading, processing, and marketing of branded and un-branded basmati and non-basmati rice, has announced stellar earnings for the quarter and nine months ended 31 December 2023. For the quarter ended 31 December 2023 (Cons), the company reported a 25% growth YoY in its revenue from operations, rising from Rs. 183.91 Crores (Q3FY23) to Rs. 229.38 Crores (Q3FY24). The EBITDA grew 97% YoY, from Rs. 8.93 Crores (Q3FY23) to Rs. 17.55 Crores (Q3FY24). PAT jumped 187% YoY to Rs. 4.93 Crores. (\*EBITDA Includes Other Income) For the nine months ended 31 December 2023 (Cons), the company reported a 25% growth YoY in its revenue from operations, rising from Rs. 559.52 Crores (9MFY23) to Rs. 622.27 Crores (9MFY24).

The EBITDA grew 63% YoY, from Rs. 28.35 Crores (9MFY23) to Rs. 46.13 Crores (9MFY24). PAT jumped 113% YoY to Rs. 12.76 Crores. (EBITDA Includes Other Income) Further, the board will meet on 21 February 2024 to consider a fund raise by way of issue of equity shares or any other equity linked instruments or including convertible preference shares/ fully or partly convertible debentures or by way of a composite issue of non-convertible debentures and warrants entitling the warrant holder to apply for equity share, subject to necessary statutory and member approvals.

## BML Munjal University drives Startup and Entrepreneurship Ecosystem through Propel

**Gurugram :** BML Munjal University (BMU), a Hero Group initiative, further solidified its commitment to fostering entrepreneurship within higher education by successfully concluding Propel Pitchfest24 on February 15-16, 2024. Hosted by BMU's Atal Community Innovation Centre (ACIC), the event served as a dynamic platform for emerging entrepreneurs from across India to showcase their innovative ventures, engage with industry veterans, and compete for vital funding opportunities. Running parallel to Pitchfest was the second



instalment edition of the Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Social (EIS) conference, which delved into the intricate landscape of societal challenges and sought to uncover groundbreaking solutions through social enterprises, burgeoning startups, and social innovation, all amidst the backdrop of today's rapidly evolving

digital era. The collaborative synergy between Pitchfest and EIS aimed to unlock the growth potential of startups spanning various sectors, including deeptech, mobility, MedTech, and more. With participation from over 500+ startups nationwide, the grand finale on February 16, 2024, witnessed a panel

of investors evaluating 12 shortlisted startups based on their live presentations and their capacity to address societal challenges through social enterprise and innovation. The top 12 ideas across segments like sustainability, e-mobility, manufacturing, and automation, under both pre-revenue and revenue tracks, earned the opportunity to incubate their ventures at Propel Incubator @BMU. This year's edition placed a heightened emphasis on women-founded startups, as well as those driving sustainability and social impact.

## Democracy won due to Supreme Court's decision in Chandigarh Mayor election: S. Gajjan Singh

**Kaithal:** Aam Aadmi Party Kaithal District Executive under the chairmanship of District President Sardar Gajjan Singh Gobindpura celebrated the victory of joint candidate of Aam Aadmi Party and Congress Kuldeep Kumar in Chandigarh at the district office on Wednesday. Laddoos were distributed with great fanfare in the district party office along with drums to celebrate the victory. All



the workers greeted each other enthusiastically. Party District President S. Gajjan Singh Gobindpura said that democracy has won with the decision of the Supreme Court. India alliance has also started winning. After Delhi and Punjab, Aam

Aadmi Party will rule in Chandigarh also. This proves that Aam Aadmi Party and Congress together can defeat BJP. The victory in the Chandigarh Mayor elections has increased the public confidence that the Bharatiya

Janata Party can defeat the BJP. The whole country had seen how BJP had tried to kill democracy. He said that now after Delhi, Punjab and Chandigarh, Aam Aadmi Party government will also be formed in Haryana in 2024. Aam Aadmi Party has started brainstorming for the Lok Sabha elections. As per the decision of the central leadership, Aam Aadmi Party will contest the elections.

## Fintech loan defaults drop to pre-Covid level: Report

**MUMBAI:** Loans provided by fintech companies through digital platforms, which are overdue for more than 90 days, constitute 3.6% of their total portfolio as of Sept 2023, according to a study released by Fintech Association for Consumer Empowerment. The delinquency ratio has shown improvement since reaching a peak of 11.1% in March 2021 and is now better than the pre-Covid level of 3.9% as of March 2020. West Bengal has the highest delinquency rate for digital loans at 4.3%, followed by Rajasthan at 4%, and Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra tied for the third spot at 3.9%. Tamil Nadu has the lowest 90-day delinquency rate of 3.1%. Interestingly, urban and metro areas have the lowest default rates of 3.3%, while

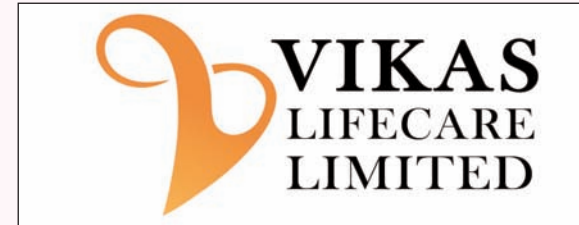


rural areas have a higher default rate of 4.1%. Female borrowers are less likely to default at 3%, compared to male borrowers at 3.7%. Out of the 12 crore outstanding personal loans totalling Rs 11.9 lakh crore as of Sept 2023, fintech NBFCs account for Rs 55,353 crore, NBFCs for nearly Rs 2 lakh crore, and banks for Rs 9.4 lakh crore. Although fintech NBFCs have disbursed 4.15 crore loans compared to banks' 4.9 crore loans, their average loan value is only Rs 13,328, whereas banks' average loan value is Rs 1.9 lakh.

have witnessed steady growth. The report said that the emergence of fintech loans has played a transformative role in bringing a new market segment to formal credit by sanctioning over 18 crore personal loans, crossing Rs 2 lakh crore since April 2018. In the first half of FY 2023-24, more than a third of the sanctioned value went to borrowers from tier-3 cities and beyond. For every 10 loans in H1 FY23-24, four were granted to borrowers from tier-3 cities and beyond, which witnessed a three-fold increase in their overall share in sanctioned value from FY18-19.

## Vikas Lifecare Limited Announces Formal Commencement of Miss World Event in India

**CHANDIGARH:** Vikas Lifecare Limited (VLL) (BSE: 542655, NSE: VIKASLIFE), is proud to announce the Kickstarter event commemorating the commencement of the series of events lined up in India for the 71st Miss World Pageant. The Miss World Pageant has been organised this year in India, presented by a subsidiary of VLL, PME Entertainment (Portfolio Managing Events LLC). The Miss World Pageant will host participants hailing from more than 120 countries from around the globe, hoisting the cultures of their respective countries at the renowned international dais of the Miss World Pageant with Grace, Elegance and Beauty with a remarkable media coverage of



global scale. The Miss World event is not just a platform for beauty and glamour; it is also an opportunity for these young women to immerse themselves in different cultures, promote humanitarian causes, and foster global unity. Vikas Lifecare Limited and PME are honoured to be a part of this prestigious event, which aligns with its commitment to promoting diversity, empowerment, and cultural exchange. PME Entertainment is a Dubai-based global entertainment firm,

producing concerts and events for notable figures and luminaries such as HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, the Norwegian Nobel Committee, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureates. Vikas Lifecare Limited (VLL) is an ISO 9001:2015 certified company, conventionally engaged in manufacturing and trading of Polymer and Rubber compounds and Specialty Additives for Plastics, Synthetic & Natural

Rubbers. Manufacturing up-cycled compounds from industrial and post-consumer waste materials like EVA, PVC, PP, PE etc., while actively contributing to the Environment Protection initiatives from the Government of India and fulfilling the mandated EPR obligations for the conglomerates consuming hundreds of thousands of tons of plastic products and packaging materials. VLL is also a Del-Credere agent of ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Ltd.) Petro Additions Limited, a public sector undertaking producing a wide variety of base Polymers and Commodity Plastic Raw Materials. VLL's subsidiary M/s Genesis Gas Solutions Pvt. Ltd. is engaged in the business.

## We negotiate trade deals with fairness, says Piyush Goyal

**NEW DELHI:** Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said India negotiates trade and investment agreements with fairness and an open mind, and takes care of the interest of its people. He said countries that are negotiating trade agreements and investment pacts with India should keep in mind that New Delhi offers a huge market to them in terms of demand and business opportunities. "I can assure you that India negotiates with fairness, with an open mind... India also takes care of its wider and larger interest in the long run," he said at the CII India-Europe conclave. FTAs or bilateral investment treaties, or agreements on geographical indications, will have to stand the test of fair, equitable, and balanced agreements as the level of economic developments varies, he said.



## The glory of Naimisharanya is unparalleled: CM Yogi

Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, emphasized the boundless splendor of Naimisharanya, noting its significance echoed across various religious scriptures. During the inauguration of the 'Sthapna-Pran-Pratishtha Mahotsav' of Sri Sri Jagdamba Raj Rajeshwari Temple and the Chitshakti gate of the new temple, he highlighted its reference in revered texts such as the Ramcharit Manas by Saint Tulsidas. "It was here that thousands of sages, guided by Lord Vedvyas, engaged in deep meditation and gave India's rich heritage of Vedic wisdom and science a written form." Further elaborat-



ing, he mentioned significant events tied to Naimisharanya, such as Maharishi Dadhichi's donation of his bones during the Devasur battle. "Part of Sati's tongue had fallen at this place in the form of Lalita Devi. Shaktipeeth, the sacred abode of Maa Lalita Devi and Chakratirtha, is located here. Connecting the dots, Saint Sanmukhanand Puri Ji Maharaj established

Rajarajeshwari Temple and Ashram," he said. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, after offering prayers at the site, underscored the significance of Jagdamba Rajarajeshwari, whose rituals serve as a guiding light for the nation, society, and individual conduct towards public welfare.

"Keeping in mind the importance of Naimish Tirtha, the government has taken several steps.

Action is underway to develop it as a pilgrimage site." Highlighting that religion is much more than just a set of rituals, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasized its role in guiding individuals towards virtuous paths. He stressed the universal significance of Sanatan Dharma, stating that as long as it thrives, humanity will continue to progress towards collective welfare. Conversely, any threat to Sanatan Dharma jeopardizes the well-being of humanity as a whole. Reflecting on the spiritual journey of Saint Sanmukhanand Puri Ji Maharaj, who devoted years to meditation along the banks of the river Narmada, the Chief Minister noted the

tangible fruits of his devotion in the form of the Rajarajeshwari Ashram and temple. A new dimension and gem is being added to Naimish area with the Rajarajeshwari Ashram and temple (Naimish kshetra mein nayi kadi aur nayi mani judne ja rahi hai)," he remarked. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath praised the nationwide initiatives led by Prime Minister Modi aimed at revitalizing India's rich cultural heritage. He highlighted the remarkable transformation of iconic sites like Kashi Vishwanath, Mahakaal, Kedarpuri, Badrinath Dham, and Ayodhya, which have rekindled the faith of millions of Sanatan Dharma followers after centuries.

## Indians more hit by long-term lung damage after Covid: Study

MUMBAI: A significant proportion of Indians who recovered from Covid had lung function impairment and lingering symptoms for months, a study published by Christian Medical College, Vellore, has revealed. It found Indians had more lung function damage when compared to Europeans and the Chinese. While gradual return to normalcy may occur over up to one year in some, others may have to live with lung damage for life, it stated. The study, touted as the country's largest to investigate SARS-CoV-2's impact on lung function, examined 207 individuals. Conducted during the first wave of the pandemic, this study was recently published in the PLOS Global Public Health journal. After over two months of recovery, complete lung function tests, six-minute walk test, blood tests and quality of life



assessments were carried out for these patients who suffered mild, moderate and severe Covid. The most sensitive lung function test namely gas transfer (DLCO), which measures the ability to transfer oxygen from the air breathed to the bloodstream, was affected in 44%, which CMC doctors called "very worrying"; 35% exhibited a restrictive lung defect, which would affect the ability of the lung to inflate with air as they breathe and 8.3% had an obstructive lung defect, which would affect the ease with which air could move in and out of the lungs. Quality of

life tests also demonstrated an adverse impact. "In all aspects, Indian patients fared worse," the principal investigator of the study, Dr D J Christopher, professor, department of pulmonary medicine, CMC, Vellore, told TOI. Additionally, more Indian subjects had comorbidities like diabetes and hypertension compared to Chinese and European subjects. According to Dr Sail Bendre, head of pulmonology at Nanavati Hospital, a subset of Covid patients who experienced moderate to severe infection, requiring hospitalization approximately.

## Rasika Shekhar, Ricky Kej enthral Lucknowites

Lucknow

Galaxy of artistes regaled the audience with their scintillating musical performances on the second day of GBC 4.0. It included performances by the devotional band, three-time Grammy Award winner Ricky Kej and a mesmerizing flute recital by Rasika Shekhar. People also were treated to various folk dances such as Mayur, Faruwaahi, Avadhi, Rai, Bamrasiya, etc., performed on several stages set up in the city. Notably, Ricky Kej and his band's performance was organ-

ized by the Department of Culture, Uttar Pradesh, at the Main Hangar of the Indra Gandhi Pratishthan. The program commenced with the bhajans dedicated to the Ganga River. Following this, the audience was treated to the enchanting melody of "Padharo Mhare Des," showcasing the rich cultural heritage of our country. The rendition of "Bam Lahiri - Om Namah Shivay" referred to Lord Shiva, with Sudhir Yaduvanshi providing melodic accompaniment, Ricky Kej on the

Siddharth on the guitar, Varija Shree on the flute, and Pramath Kiran on the drums, created a harmonious music. Bollywood singer Rasika Shekhar performed on the songs 'Kaun Kehte Hain Bhagwan Aate Nahitum Mere Ke Jaise Bulaate Nahi,' Hothon Se Chhu Lo Tum-Mera Geet Amar Kar Do, etc. Rasika also struck a rapport with the audience of Awadh by playing the flute. She was accompanied by Jigar Shah on drums, Chaitanya on guitar, Archit Shah on keyboard, and others.

## No place is better than UP for effective utilisation of CSR funds

Cabinet Minister Anil Rajbhar said on Tuesday that there is no place better than Uttar Pradesh for effective utilisation of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) funds, adding that UP has 8.39 crore registered workers, providing a significant opportunity for utilizing CSR funds". He was speaking at the the Corporate Social Responsibility Conclave at Indra Gandhi Pratishthan on the second day of Ground Breaking Ceremony (GBC 4.0) on Tuesday. During the conclave, the government made fervent appeal to the companies to utilize their CSR funds for carrying out constructive activities in social interest. The Conclave also saw participation from Minister of State Aseem Arun, and Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra, who engaged in discussions with CSR heads of various companies. Speaking at the session, the Minister of State Aseem Arun remarked that CSR is essentially a practice

that gives the society the right direction. He added that CSR is akin to the guard's compartment in a double-engine government, which ensures that no compartment is left behind. "The essence of CSR lies in ensuring that no section of society remains deprived of development", he stated. Chief Secretary Durga Shankar Mishra announced that the state government will soon organize the UP CSR Summit. He further mentioned that a new chapter of development has been written in the context of UP with the blessings of the Prime Minister, the determination of the Chief Minister, and the efforts of officials and representatives. "No one had imagined that we would organize events of this kind. People used to say that getting a proposal for investment and its actual implementation are two different things.

However, in UP, now projects worth more than Rs 10 lakh crores have been implemented.

## Delhi: Two banquets in Karol Bagh fined for noise pollution

NEW DELHI: Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has served a show-cause notice to two banquet halls in Karol Bagh and imposed an environmental damage compensation of Rs 70,000 for causing noise pollution in the area. A team of DPCC conducted an inspection of Ajmal Khan area of Karol Bagh on Jan 5. Of the three banquet halls inspected, DPCC said it found two were having some event. Though a DJ system was not used, the noise norms were still found to exceed both the daytime and night-time standards, said DPCC, which submitted a report to the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on Feb 15. DPCC also informed the tribunal that it has imposed a fine of Rs 60,000 and Rs 10,000 on two banquet halls for the violations.

## BJP MLAs challenge suspension in Delhi high court

NEW DELHI: Seven MLAs from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have approached the Delhi high court to challenge their suspension from the Budget session of the Delhi assembly. The suspension was imposed after they repeatedly interrupted the Lieutenant Governor's address. The MLAs had sought to criticize the Arvind

Kejriwal government on the various issues during the address. The matter was mentioned before Acting Chief Justice Manmohan and Justice Manmeet PS Arora, who allowed it to be heard on the same day. Senior advocate Jayant Mehta argued that the suspension of the MLAs was unconstitutional and violated their right

to participate in the proceedings. He also stated that the motion to suspend the MLAs was contrary to the rules and that, at most, the suspension should have been for three days, not indefinite. The Speaker of the Delhi Assembly, Ram Niwas Goel, accepted the resolution moved by AAP MLA Dilip Pandey to take action.

## Atishi clears projects for strengthening roads in Shahdara

New Delhi: PWD has conducted a thorough assessment of the roads and has been instructed to initiate the upgrading.

process. Officials said the minister also stressed the importance of ensuring minimal disruption to commuters during the work. Public Works Department (PWD) minister Atishi recently approved projects for repairing and strengthening various roads in Shahdara district, Delhi govt said. The projects include nine roads across Shahdara, including GT Road to Road number 64 via telephone exchange, R-block Road, LIC Road (from Malaria office MCD to GT Road), road stretch from divider road to Gurudwara road near Pummy Sweets, road stretch in front of Hans Raj Public School in Dilshad Garden.

## CM Yogi for increasing CD ratio to 65% in next fiscal year as UP achieves 59% target successfully

Lucknow

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed his satisfaction with the state's current credit-deposit (CD) ratio at 58.59%, setting an ambitious goal to elevate it to 65% in the next financial year. He committed to offering all necessary support and security to facilitate this growth for banks. Furthermore, the Chief Minister emphasized the importance of adopting a mission-driven approach to expand digital banking and financial literacy across all 75 districts. Reviewing the quarter of the current financial year ending December 2023 in the meeting of the State



Level Bankers on Wednesday, he said, "Banks have played a commendable role in our efforts to provide financial incentives in the form of loans to every needy and energetic youth. This sequence of loan fairs should continue further. Do not hesitate in

extending loans." In each of its schemes, the government will ensure training and capacity building of the beneficiaries before providing loans, he added. Referring to the state government's ambitious scheme 'Family ID', he said that all the banks should provide com-

plete data of beneficiaries of central and state government schemes so that the situation of every family in the state can be accurately assessed. The Chief Minister also reviewed the progress of key social security programs, including the Atal Pension Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana. He highlighted that, in alignment with the Prime Minister's vision, the state has been successful in ensuring that every citizen benefits from these crucial social security schemes. In the special meeting,

## Yogi govt implements strict measures to prevent unfair practices in board exams, those trying to leak papers will land in jail

Lucknow

The Yogi government has implemented strict measures to ensure that board exams, starting in the state from Thursday (February 22), are conducted without any cheating and unfair practices. From WhatsApp to social media, activities of unruly elements are being monitored. If anyone is found responsible for leaking question papers, parts of question papers, or their solutions for a subject before the exam, strict action will be taken against them under the relevant laws. Sensitive and highly sensitive examination centers and districts have been identified by the Secondary Education Council and special monitoring arrangements have been made through STF and local notification units to prevent any untoward incident. In addition, to control the possibility of cheating, question papers will be opened under the surveillance of CCTV cameras, and armed forces and live CCTV cameras have been arranged for 24-hour monitoring at collection centers and strong rooms. The morning inspection of the strong room will be conducted by a special team. To ensure that anti-social elements or outsiders do not gather within a 100-meter radius of exam centers, district administration has been instructed to take precautionary measures, including imposing Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code and other necessary precautions. Board exams will be completed in 12 working days. Deepak Kumar, Additional Chief Secretary Secondary Education, provided information regarding the board examinations in Lok Bhavan on Wednesday. He mentioned that in the year 2024, the board exams will be completed in a total of 12 working days. Before 2017, it used to take more than a month to conduct these exams. In the high school board exams, a total of 29,47,311 students, including 15,71,184 boys and 13,76,127 girls, will appear. In the intermediate board exams, there will be a total of 25,77,997 students, including 14,28,323 boys and 1,149,676 girls will. The combined total of examinees is 5,525,308, with 5,360,745 institutional and 164,563 private candidates. He explained that due to effective measures against cheating, 164,563 students registered as private candidates in 2024, compared to 353,106 in 2017. Additionally, the number of candidates from other states appearing for the exam has dropped from 1,50,209 in 2017, to 4905 in the year 2024. He informed that the determination of examination centers by the present government was made online through software, making full use of their holding capacities. Unlike before 2017 when there were more than 12,000 centers, the online center allocation system has reduced the number of examination centers to 8,265 for the 2024 exams.