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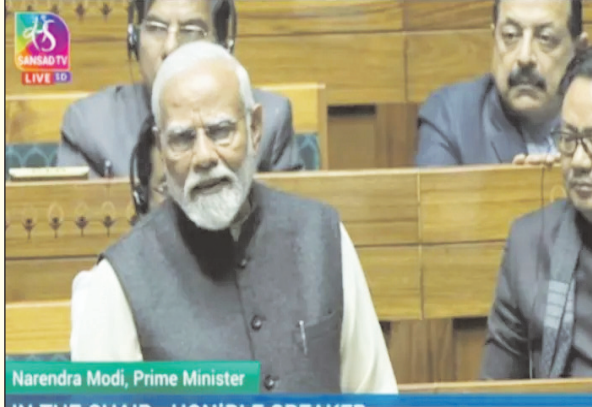
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UNIQUE GIFT OF KRIYAYOGA ASHRAM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO GIVE IMPETUS TO WORLD BUILDING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

Parliament temple resolution a constitutional nod to celebrate heritage: PM

NEW DELHI: PM Modi on Saturday said a resolution, a first, passed by Parliament to hail Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, and the Pran Pratishtha on Jan 22, will give constitutional sanction to future generations to take pride in its heritage. Marking yet another push to formally raise the consecration ceremony to the level of a national celebration and mark it as a day of historic importance, Modi said, "The House's adoption of a laudatory resolution on Ram temple will give constitutional strength to future generations to feel proud of the country's values." The PM's praise was accompanied by a jibe at the opposition for not joining the celebration even when it reflected a spirit of reconciliation rather than confrontation. "This is true that not everyone has the capacity for such developments. Some people are brave to face it while others run away from the battlefield. The speeches (welcoming the conse-



cration) made today, that showed sensitivity, resolve and sympathy, will be appreciated in future." His remark followed Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's accusation that BJP was inspired more by Nathuram Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi, than Ram. Speaker Om Birla described the temple's construction as a historic achievement and said it will give values of hope and unity to future generations. In his speech, the PM catalogued the entire gamut of laws enacted by his govt during the 17th Lok Sabha's term: women's quota, criminalisation of triple

taqa, 27-week maternity leave, removal of antiquated laws that burdened citizens with unnecessary compliances, enactment of Bhartiya Nyay Samhita to replace penal codes of the colonial era, and recognition and help for transgenders. Talking of the bill which scrapped the special status of J&K by reducing Article 370 to a mere shell, Modi said the decision helped plug a big gap in Constitution to complete integration. For generations, people dreamt of one Constitution and this House made that possible. "The country has moved

towards big changes at a fast pace and all members made an important contribution," he said, adding that the members of the outgoing House were a privileged lot also because many works for which people had "waited for centuries" got completed during their term. On the enactment of new penal laws, Modi said, "We can proudly say that this country might have lived under 'penal code' for 75 years but now we live under 'Nyay Samhita.'" Speaking about Sengol, which was established in the new Parliament building, the PM underlined that it is a symbol of the reclamation of India's heritage and remembrance of the first moment of Independence. He also said that his govt has been a source of reassurance for people living on the margins of society, while highlighting measures taken to empower transgenders. A transgender person was also given a Padma award, he added.

CAA will be notified before Lok Sabha elections: Shah

NEW DELHI: Home minister Amit Shah on Saturday accused Congress general secretary Rahul Gandhi of concocting a conspiracy theory around the caste census by bringing up the issue of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's caste, while asserting that the Citizenship Amendment Act would be notified before LS elections. Shah, who was speaking at ET Now Global Business Summit, said that minorities, particularly Muslims, were



being misled on CAA that had no provision to take away anybody's citizenship. He said Uniform Civil Code (UCC), recently enacted by Uttarakhand, would be adopted by other states/UTs based on the outcome of discussions by social and

religious groups on its provisions as well as legal scrutiny. While accusing Rahul of following the policy of telling lies publicly and repeatedly despite knowing that PM Modi's caste, Ghanchi Modh, was categorised as an OBC caste, Shah said "it is

unfortunate that the caste of a globally-respected leader like PM Modi is being raised. Rahul has no idea of the difference between a caste and bloc. Modi ji had only said that he is an OBC. Let me clarify that Modi's caste was included in Gujarat's OBC list on July 25, 1994, by then Congress govt led by Chhabildas Mehta. Later in 2000, based on Congress recommendation from 1994, it was also included in the Central OBC list as well.

Dalits, OBCs, tribals benefited most from schemes: PM

GANDHINAGAR: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that Dalits, Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and tribals are the biggest beneficiaries of his govt's pro-poor schemes, asserting that the greatest

achievement in the past ten years has been pulling 25 crore people out of poverty. Speaking after inaugurating and laying the foundation stones of 1.3 lakh houses under the Prime Minister Awas Yojana (PMAY)

via videoconference, Modi said that for any poor person having his own house is a guarantee of his better future. "See the figure of 1.3 lakh houses. Even when I attended a national-level programme for giving

houses under PMAY, I did not see such a huge figure. I congratulate Gujarat govt," Modi said. Prime Minister Modi said that the poor, youths, farmers and women are pillars of developed India.

Why this telecom company is blaming Canadian government for thousands of job cuts

Telecom giant Bell Canada has announced a major restructuring this week, slashing 9% of its workforce (around 4,800 jobs) in a bid to control costs. The company cited declining revenue from traditional phone and news businesses, along with "unsupportive" government and regulatory decisions as key factors. This marks Bell's second major shakeup in a year, following a 1,300-worker cut in 2023. CEO Mirko Bibic blamed the federal government for failing to support Canadian telecom companies against global tech giants and criticized a recent ruling by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) that forces Bell to share infrastructure with competitors. What CEO Mirko Bibic blamed the job cuts on Bibic criticized the Canada's federal government for not creating a level playing field with global tech giants and expressed concern over the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) decision requiring Bell to share its infrastructure with competitors. The CRTC justified this decision by citing limited competition in the high-speed internet market. Bell retaliated by reducing capital expenditure by \$1 billion. Also, traditional phone and news operations are losing ground, impacting revenue.

Impact of job cuts The job cuts are expected to save Bell Canada C\$150-\$200 million annually, while also drawing criticism from Canadian politicians. Heritage Minister Pascale St-Onge expressed disappointment and urged Bell to contribute more to the industry. British Columbia Premier David Eby took a harsher stance, calling Bell and similar companies "corporate vampires" and urging the federal government to intervene. Despite the job cuts, Bell reported an increase in operating revenue for the fourth quarter.

Congress has mastered art of ruining govt's achievements: FM

NEW DELHI: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday took a dig at Congress, saying the party had mastered the art of "ruining accomplishments (gur gobar karna)", alleging that the UPA govt couldn't keep prices under check even when its predecessor NDA govt handed it over an economy with inflation below 4%. Replying to the short duration discussion



on 'white paper' on India's economy in Rajya Sabha, Sitharaman said, "Repeatedly there are figures thrown at us - inflation is this, inflation is that. I just want to highlight, inflation in the last year of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's NDA govt was below 4%. What did you do with it? Ill-targeted reckless fiscal policy, ill-targeted subsidies, wasteful expenditure, all done for political gains... They have mas-

tery over 'gur ko gobar karna.'" Sitharaman quoted former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's observation at the AICC meeting in Jaipur in 2013 that "inflation management was one shortcoming" during UPA govt. Sitharaman charged that there was mismanagement of the economy during 2004-2014 by Congress-led UPA govt.

MP ex-CM Kamal Nath eyes Parliament return, likely to take RS route

BHOPAL: After spending six years in Madhya Pradesh politics, former chief minister and senior Congress leader Kamal Nath is likely to go to Rajya Sabha in April. Five Upper House seats are being vacated from the state on April 2 — four are with BJP and one with Congress. Nath, who represented the Chhindwara Lok Sabha seat for nine terms from 1980 to 2019, will return to Parliament, party sources told TOI



Saturday. Nath, the Chhindwara legislator, has called a dinner for all Congress MLAs at his residence on Feb 13. Party sources said he will file his papers for

the Rajya Sabha election on Feb 15, the first day of nominations. The former Union minister had taken over the reins of the party six months before the 2018 assembly polls. Congress fell just short of majority but formed govt with the help of allies and Nath became CM. Fifteen months into the Congress tenure, Jyotiraditya Scindia rebelled along with some loyalists and switched to BJP. The Nath govt fell.

Ecozen empowers farmers with 4G-enabled smart Ecotron solar pump sets

Hissar: Ecozen, a prominent player in cleantech, has announced the introduction of India's first 4G-enabled smart Ecotron solar-powered pump controller. This groundbreaking technology is now accessible to farmers in Haryana under the PM KUSUM Yojana, with a 75% subsidy. The selection window for these



pumps commences from February 7th feb and extends to February 10th, 2024, allowing farmers to make Ecozen's Ecotron their primary choice

for solar pump installations. Ecozen is dedicated to crafting innovative solutions that empower farmers to enhance yield, minimize waste, and boost earnings. Renowned for its solar pump sets in India, Ecozen has revolutionized farming practices with its Ecotron smart solar pump controllers and positively impacted

over 160,000 Indian farmers. To ensure that the pumps are installed quickly under the PM Kusum Yojana, Ecozen has partnered with Mahindra Solarize. This partnership helps the farmers of Haryana get Ecozen's advanced technology backed by the wide and efficient installation network of the Mahindra team.

Indian-origin IT exec attacked 7 blocks from White House dies

WASHINGTON: A 41-year-old Indian-origin IT executive has died after suffering life-threatening injuries during an assault outside a restaurant in the American capital here, the seventh death of an Indian or Indian-American in the US in two months. The victim, identified as Vivek Taneja, a resident of Alexandria, a Virginia suburb of Washington DC, was attacked on Feb 2 in the 1100 block of 15th Street NW, which is seven blocks away from the White House. The police reached the assault scene at 2am and found that he was suffering from life-threatening injuries as a result of the assault. He was transported to a trauma centre unconscious and with severe head injuries. "On Feb 7, the victim succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced dead," said the metropolitan police.

BJP never took political advantage of Ram temple issue: J P Nadda



NEW DELHI: BJP president J P Nadda said the day the idol of Ram Lalla was consecrated at the temple in Ayodhya "is a day of renaissance of spiritual and cultural consciousness of the country which will be remembered for centuries" even as he asserted that its construction was never a political issue for his party and they never tried to take advantage of it. Participating in a short discussion in Rajya Sabha on the historic construction of Ram temple and the Pran Pratishtha ceremony, Nadda said the temple will serve as a

symbol embodying finest human values and stand as a reminder of peaceful coexistence, even amid global conflict. PM Narendra Modi joined the session near the end of the discussion. Rejecting opposition's allegations that the Pran Pratishtha ceremony was made an event of BJP and RSS, Nadda said despite being president of the party, he could not be a part of the ceremony. Without explicitly mentioning former PM Jawaharlal Nehru, Nadda alluded to a time when a PM considered attending the consecration ceremony of Somnath a crime.

Punjab-Haryana border sealed ahead of farmers' march on February 13, internet suspended

NEW DELHI: Elaborate arrangements have been made to close off the Punjab-Haryana borders in Ambala, Jind, and Fatehabad districts ahead of the farmers' proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march on February 13. Their demands include the enactment of a law to guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) for crops. The

Haryana Police has issued a traffic advisory, urging commuters to limit travel on the main roads of the state to urgent situations on February 13, as there may be potential traffic disruptions on major routes from Haryana to Punjab. To ensure security, the Haryana government has also suspended mobile internet

services and bulk SMS in seven districts: Ambala, Kurukshetra, Kaithal, Jind, Hisar, Fatehabad, and Sirsa. Haryana Director General of Police Shatruej Kapur, along with other police officials, visited the Shambhu border near Ambala to assess the situation and make necessary arrangements.

Parliament approves 3 bills on J-K local bodies' quota, SC/ST lists

New Delhi: The Rajya Sabha on Friday passed three bills pertaining to reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in local bodies and modification of the lists of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in Jammu & Kashmir. Rajya Sabha cleared the 3 bills by a voice vote on Friday. (ANI)

Rajya Sabha cleared the 3 bills by a voice vote on Friday. (ANI) The Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024, the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024 and the Constitution (Jammu and Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024 – all of which were cleared by the Lok Sabha on Tuesday – were tabled and passed by voice vote in the Rajya Sabha. The Jammu and Kashmir Local Bodies Laws



(Amendment) Bill, 2024 seeks to provide reservation to OBCs in panchayats and municipalities in Jammu & Kashmir and bring consistency in the local body laws of the Union territory with the provisions of the Constitution. Currently, there is no provision for reservation of seats for OBCs in panchayats and municipalities of the Union territory. Read more: Watch: Massive avalanche hits Jammu and Kashmir's Sonamarg, no damage Speaking on the legislation, minister of

state for home affairs Nityananda Rai said the government has taken several steps for the welfare of OBCs in Jammu & Kashmir and this amendment is another step in that direction. According to Rai, there are three main amendments to the bill. Firstly, the bill ensures reservation for OBCs in panchayats and municipalities in Jammu & Kashmir. Secondly, the state election commission will be in-charge of conducting elections to panchayats and municipalities, he said.

Raj Thackeray, Sanjay Raut demand 'Bharat Ratna' award for Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray

Maharashtra

Navnirman Sena chief Raj Thackeray on Friday demanded the Bharat Ratna (posthumously), India's highest civilian award, for his uncle and the late Shiv Sena founder Bal Thackeray. In a post on X (formerly Twitter) Raj Thackeray wrote, "Former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, Chaudhary Charan Singh, and S Swaminathan, father of the Indian Green Revolution, were posthumously award-

ed Bharat Ratna. S Swaminathan passed away just a few months ago. A scientist who achieved so much should have received this honour during his lifetime. Anyway." On Friday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that the Bharat Ratna will be bestowed upon former prime ministers Chaudhary Charan Singh and PV Narasimha Rao. Additionally, MS Swaminathan, recognised as the pioneer of the green revolution, will also receive this prestigious award. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut made a similar request on Friday. Taking to X, Sanjay Raut said, "Prime Minister Modi who calls himself Hindutva-vadi has once again forgotten Hindu Hridayasamrat Balasaheb Thackeray. First two and now three leaders have been honoured with Bharat Ratna in barely one month.

Journalist Nikhil Wagle's car attacked by BJP workers in Pune, Opposition says 'goonda raj'

Opposition parties hit out at the Maharashtra government after a car in which senior journalist Nikhil Wagle was travelling was allegedly attacked by Bharatiya Janata Party workers at Khandoji Baba Chowk in Pune on Friday evening. The BJP workers were reportedly protesting Nikhil Wagle's remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi and LK Advani after the ruling party veteran was awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian award. A Deccan police station official said BJP workers threw ink on the car in which Nikhil Wagle and two others, Aseem Sarode and Vishwambhar Choudhary, were travelling under police protection to the 'Nirbhay Bano' event organised by the Rashtra Seva Dal in Singhad Road area in Pune. Reacting sharply to the incident, Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) MP Sanjay Raut alleged that several Maha Vikas Aghadi women workers were beaten up by "BJP goons" and eggs, stones and bricks were hurled at them, while the Pune Police remained spectators. "Senior journalist Nikhil Wagle's car smashed, ink, eggs thrown at his car. Brazen Bid to murder democracy by BJP in Pune... MVA will not be deterred, Shame on you Devendra Fadnavis, you are ordering your cadre to harm and injure hapless daughters of Maharashtra...Maharashtra will not forgive you," Sanjay Raut wrote on social media platform X (formally Twitter). Another Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka Chaturvedi also reacted to the Pune incident. "Less than 24 hours since the untimely and unfortunate killing of our former corporator, Abhishek Ghosalkar and now we have this attack on activists who are critical of the BJP. Goondagardi under the gundaraj," Priyanka Chaturvedi wrote on X.

Aryan Khan case: Sameer Wankhede faces money laundering charges by ED

New Delhi: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a money laundering case against former zonal director of Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB), Sameer Wankhede, who is accused of demanding ₹25 crore bribe from actor Shah Rukh Khan for

not framing his son Aryan Khan in a drug case in October 2021 besides amassing wealth more than his known sources of income, people familiar with the development said on Saturday. The financial crimes probe agency has registered the case against Wankhede,

an Indian Revenue Service (IRS) officer, a few days back based on the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) first information report (FIR) filed in May last year. He is likely to be soon summoned for questioning in the matter by the ED.

BRS leader meets Revanth, set to join Cong with his wife

Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) legislative council member (MLC) and former Telangana minister Patnam Mahender Reddy met chief minister A Revanth Reddy on Thursday night and announced his intention to quit the BRS and join the ruling Congress.

Mahender Reddy, along with his wife Sunitha, who is the chairperson of Vikarabad zilla parishad, called on the chief minister at the latter's residence and discussed his plans to join the Congress. State



health minister Damodar Rajanarasimha and senior leader Rohin Reddy were also present at the meeting. Speaking to reporters later, Sunitha said she and her husband would

formally join the Congress party within a week. "We have served the BRS for a long time, but have not got any recognition there. We have decided to quit the party after consulting our followers and

well-wishers," she said.

According to a Congress leader familiar with the development said Mahender Reddy has requested the chief minister to consider his candidature for Lok Sabha elections from Chevella parliamentary constituency. In fact, Mahender Reddy had been sulking in the BRS ever since he was denied the party ticket for the assembly elections from Tandur, which was given to sitting MLA Pilot Rohit Reddy.

Chhattisgarh has set target to double state GDP in 5 years: FM Choudhary

Choudhary, who presented a budget of 1,47,446 crore for 2024-25 in the state assembly on Friday, said that in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to make India a five-trillion-dollar economy and a developed nation by 2047, the state budget has paved the way for inclusive development and economic growth. "At a time when the country is marching ahead with zeal and enthusiasm to achieve the single goal of



becoming a developed India. Chhattisgarh too has set a vision of transforming into a developed state in the Amrit Kaal," he said in a write-up after presenting the budget. Through its annual budget, Chhattisgarh has laid the foundation of this new era

with a focus on the prosperity of GYAN, stimulating infrastructural growth by increasing capital expenditure, and employment and livelihood promotion for youths of the state, he said. "The development of Chhattisgarh was under the shadow

of corruption in the past few years but the power of democracy defeated these negative forces and ensured Chhattisgarh's contribution in the development journey of India," he said. The BJP-led government under Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai came to power in December after defeating the Congress in the Assembly polls. "The previous government has pushed the state on the verge of bankruptcy in the past five years.

Kerala Cong launches protest against policies of LDF, Centre

Kochi: Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Congress in Kerala launched a mega statewide protest on Friday aiming to puncture holes in the policies of the CPI(M)-led state government and the BJP-led union government. Titled 'Samaragni', the statewide march was inaugurated by AICC general secretary (organisation) KC Venugopal in the northernmost district of Kasaragod and will be jointly led by state Congress chief K Sudhakaran and Leader of the Opposition VD Satheesan. The yatra, which will travel through all 14 districts and culminate in Thiruvananthapuram on Feb 29, will see top leaders of the party addressing 30 public meetings including four major conventions in Kozhikode, Thrissur,



Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram. Experience Delhi's rich history through a series of heritage walks with HT! Participate Now Apart from public meetings, Sudhakaran and Satheesan will also interact with people from all sections of the society to understand the pulse on the ground, party leaders said. The issues and public grievances emanating from these meetings will feature in the party's election campaign as it takes on the CPI(M)-led LDF and the BJP-led NDA. "The first objec-

tive of 'Samaragni' is to declare that the forces at the Centre which are trying to spew hate in society and divide people will be destroyed. Second, this protest is a charge sheet against the state government which over the last eight years has looted the state and committed corruption and financial mismanagement. We have realised that these two governments at the state and centre are two sides of the same coin. Both are trying to create communal polarisation in the state.

Kokborok script row: Student body calls for roads, railway blockade from Feb 12

Agartala: The Tipra Indigenous Students Federation (TISF), the student wing of Tripura's main opposition TIPRA Motha, on Friday said they would hold an indefinite protest and declared the blocking of roads and railway movement across the state from February 12 to increase pressure on the state government on its demand for allowing students to write their Kokborok language papers in Roman script in board examinations. This comes hours after Tripura Board of Secondary Education (TBSE) president Dr Dhananjay Ganchoudhury made a U-turn over allowing Roman script for Kokborok subject. "The TBSE president first said that both scripts would be allowed but later he changed his version saying that only Bengali script will be allowed. For several years, Kokborok was written in both scripts. So, opposing his statement, we, TISF are



going to hold an indefinite road and railway blockade throughout the state from February 12," TISF central president Sajra Debbarma said. He also said that the strike would continue till they were assured of a solution to the issue and sought a written assurance of allowing Roman script for Kokborok in the examinations. He added that they have formed a committee to decide the places where they would hold indefinite blockade. "We are not against Bengali script. Our demand is to allow both the scripts so

that the students could write in the script of their choice," he said. The TBSE chief earlier this January asked all the examination centre in-charges to allow only Bengali script for writing Kokborok papers for the Class 12 and 10 board examinations scheduled to begin from March 1 and 2 due to insufficiently qualified evaluators to check answer copies written in Roman script. This invited protests from the TIPRA Motha and other different social organisations after which the TBSE chief said that the students would be allowed to write in the script of their preference. However, he was later instructed by his higher authority to continue the board exam only allowing Bengali script till the Central Board of Secondary Education gives a reply on it. "The state government already wrote to the CBSE on the issue.

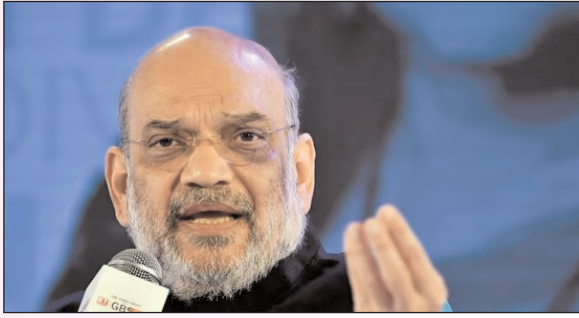
Haldwani violence: Curfew partially lifted; 6 rioters killed, 5 arrested

Haldwani

Authorities on Saturday lifted the curfew from the outer areas of violence-hit Haldwani in Uttarakhand, two days after restrictions were imposed as communal tensions and violence gripped the town over a demolition drive. Six rioters were killed in Thursday's violence, officials said. However, the curfew will remain in place in the Banbhoolpura area where massive violence took place. The internet services also remain suspended in violence-hit Haldwani, the police said. Security personnel walk past bricks and stones scattered on a road, a day after the religious clashes sparked following the destruction of a madrasa (an Islamic school) in Haldwani district of the northern state of Uttarakhand on February 9, 2024.

Shah accuses Congress of appeasement on UCC, says Nehru-signed agenda ignored

New Delhi: Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday said the Uniform Civil Code was a constitutional agenda signed by first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru but the Congress party later ignored it due to its appeasement politics. Amit Shah also attacked the opposition over the Ram Temple. Amit Shah also attacked the opposition over the Ram Temple. "But the Congress had ignored it due to appeasement. The enforcement of the UCC in Uttarakhand is a social change. It will be discussed on all forums and face legal scrutiny. A secular country cannot have religion-based civil codes," Shah said at the ET NOW Global Business Summit 2024. The Uttarakhand assembly, earlier this week, passed the UCC bill, which seeks to replace the religious personal laws with laws applicable to all religions



equally. Muslim bodies have opposed the law. He also made a sharp attack at Rahul Gandhi over his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, saying he had no rights to carry out the yatra because his party was responsible for the partition of the country in 1947. Amit Shah also attributed the delay in the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya to appeasement. "However, due to the politics of appeasement and citing law and order, the construction of the Ram temple was not allowed," he said. **Amit Shah on CAA** Meanwhile, Shah declared that the Citizenship (Amendment) Act

(CAA) will be implemented before the Lok Sabha elections. The law, enacted in 2019, makes it easier for non-Muslim refugees from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh to get Indian citizenship. The law had triggered a year-long protest by the Muslim community at Delhi's Shaheen Bagh. "Our Muslim brothers are being misled and instigated (against the CAA). The CAA is only meant to give citizenship to those who came to India after facing persecution in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. It is not for snatching anyone's Indian citizenship," he said.

1.47 lakh cr budget presented in Chhattisgarh Assembly; no new taxes proposed

New Delhi: Rs.8,369 crore has been allocated in the budget for the construction of 18 lakhs (1.8 million) houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Rs.10,000 crore under Krishak Unnati Yojana for strengthening small and medium farmers and Rs.4,500 crore for Jal Jeevan Mission Ritesh Mishra: Chhattisgarh finance minister OP Choudhary on Friday presented a budget of Rs.1,47,446 crore for 2024-25 in the state assembly with no new taxes and said it focused on prosperity for 'gareeb, yuva, annadata

and naari' or GYAN as well as stimulating infrastructure growth. Chhattisgarh finance minister OP Choudhary (left) with chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai (Twitter/@BJP4CGState) Chhattisgarh finance minister OP Choudhary (left) with chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai (Twitter/@BJP4CGState) The finance minister announced a provision of Rs.8,369 crore for the construction of 1.8 million houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Rs.10,000 crore under Krishak Unnati Yojana for strengthening small and medium farm-

ers and Rs.4,500 crore for Jal Jeevan Mission, which was promised by BJP under 'Modi Ki Guarantee'. The estimated revenue expenditure was pegged at Rs.1.24 lakh crore, with an estimated capital expenditure of Rs.22,300 crore, official data showed. In 2024-25, the gross fiscal deficit of the state is estimated to be Rs.19,696 crore (including Rs.3,400 crore of special assistance for capital expenditure by the Union government), while the net fiscal deficit is estimated at Rs.16,296 crore, which is 2.90 per cent of GSDP, official data showed.

Am I the spokesperson of Babur, Jinnah, Aurangzeb: Owaisi on Ram Mandir debate

Owaisi said he respects maryada purushottom Lord Ram. Nishikant Dubey asked Owaisi whether he considered Babur as an invader. Asaduddin Owaisi on Saturday asked whether the Modi government only serves one community and one religion and

whether the January 22 consecration event of Ayodhya's Ram Temple was a triumph of one religion over the other. Taking part in a discussion on Ram Temple inauguration, Owaisi said Muslims of the country are repeatedly asked to prove their patriotism. "Am I the

spokesperson of Babur, Jinnah or Aurangzeb? I respect Lord Ram but I hate Nathuram Godse who killed that person whose last words were Hey Ram," Owaisi said citing the 2019 Supreme Court order which said the mosque demolition was an 'egregious act'.

50 lakh contract given to kill me': NCP MLA Chhagan Bhujbal on receiving death threat letter

A day after Maharashtra minister and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) MLA Chhagan Bhujbal received a death threat letter, he said on Saturday that the letter detailed how a ₹50 lakh contract was given to kill him. He said, "I did receive a threat letter, it came to my office. It read that a contract of ₹50 lakh has been given to kill me. It has the number plates of some cars, some phone numbers, details of where the meetings were held and a few other things." Bhujbal added, "A lot of such threats have come in the past few months, and I have also received threat calls." Bhujbal's office told news agency ANI that an unknown person sent a letter in Nashik to the NCP leader's office informing him of a contract given to kill him. The letter stated that the contract was given to five people for 50 lakh. Bhujbal also said, "Since I have been in politics, I have received several threats over the years and have also been attacked. Like always, it has been forwarded to the police." Supporters of Bhujbal have requested increased security measures for him, reports said. Nashik police are currently investigating the threatening letter and assessing whether additional security is warranted for the NCP leader, officials told ANI. This threat emerged shortly after the Election Commission's decision to allocate the NCP name and symbol to the faction led by Ajit Pawar, dealing a significant setback to the faction led by party founder Sharad Pawar. Consequently, the Sharad Pawar faction was renamed on Wednesday as 'Nationalist Congress Party - Sharadchandra Pawar'. The Election Commission's decision followed over 10 hearings spanning more than six months. It was based on tests assessing the maintainability of the petition, including scrutiny of the party constitution's aims and objectives, and the majority in both organizational and legislative wings.

UP Assembly passes lift and escalator Bill

Speaking on the lift and escalator Bill, Energy Minister Arvind Kumar Sharma said that after an incident in Noida, MLAs Dharendra Singh and Pankaj Singh had demanded that a law be made for lifts and escalators. Sharma said that a provision has been made in the Bill that registration will be mandatory for installing lifts and escalators in public. A provision has also been made for immediate information in case of an accident and for insurance and compensation. Once the Bill becomes a law, lifts and escalators cannot be installed without obtaining the approval



of the Energy Department. It will be mandatory for the agencies that manufacture and install lifts and escalators and the agencies that maintain them to register with the Directorate of Electrical Safety.

It will have to be renewed every five years. It will also have to be tested every year

and a fee of ₹1,500 needs to be deposited for this. A fine will be imposed on the owner or the institution concerned if they fail to get the repairs done and ignore the standards. Describing the Bill as the need of the hour, Sharma also said that states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, West Bengal and Haryana have their

own laws for installing lifts, but there was no such provision for it in Uttar Pradesh. He said that its implementation will not only curb accidents, but will also strengthen the system. BJP member Dharendra Singh expressed his gratitude to Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Energy Minister Sharma for bringing the Bill and said it will prove to be a "milestone". However, Samajwadi Party members Dr R K Verma, Amitabh Vajpayee and Kamal Akhtar talked out the "shortcomings" of its draft and demanded that it be handed over to a Select Committee.

President Murmu to visit Andaman & Nicobar Islands from Feb 19

New Delhi: President Droupadi Murmu will arrive here on February 19 on a five-day visit to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, an official said on Saturday. The president will arrive here around 1 pm on February 19 at INS Utkrosh in Port Blair where she will be welcomed by Lt Governor Admiral (Retd) D K Joshi, Commander-in-Chief, Andaman and Nicobar Command (CINCAN), Air Marshal Sajju Balakrishnan, and senior officials. During her stay in Andaman



and Nicobar Islands from February 19-23, the president will visit Cellular Jail, Swaraj Dweep popularly known as Havelock Islands, Campbell Bay, Indira Point (the southernmost point of India) and will interact with various communities and officials to get a first hand experience about the island.

She will also visit Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose Dweep (previously known as Ross Island) where the managing director of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIIDCO) Nandini Paliwal will brief her about the proposed

development of a National Memorial. Also, there will be a film presentation on Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Andaman and Nicobar Islands and a special screening on Pradhan Mantri Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan. The president will also interact with the tribal community on various issues. Meanwhile, security has been beefed up in the union territory in view of the scheduled visit of the president to the archipelago.

BJP MP quotes Nehru, says India's long-suppressed soul awakened with Ram temple opening

New Delhi Senior BJP leader Satyapal Singh on Saturday quoted from Jawaharlal Nehru's "tryst with destiny" speech, saying the country's long-suppressed soul found utterance on January 22, when a grand Ram temple was consecrated at Ayodhya. Initiating a discussion in the Lok Sabha on "the construction of historic Shri Ram Temple and Pran Pratishtha of Shri Ramlala", Singh also slammed the Congress for questioning the existence of Lord Ram, which he said has pushed the party to the opposition benches.



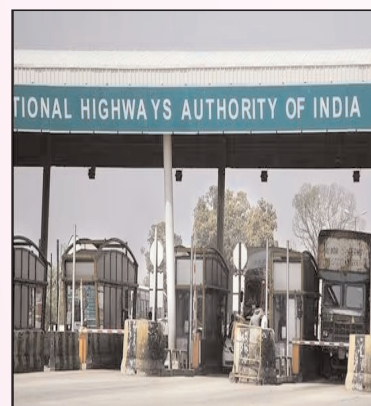
the chair to admit an adjournment motion. They walked out of the House after Speaker Om Birla disallowed the notice for the adjournment motion. Singh, a former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer who represents the Baghat constituency in Uttar Pradesh in the Lok Sabha, said it was a historic moment to witness the inauguration of the Ram temple and the "pran pratishtha" (consecration) of the idol of Ram Lalla in the present times. "Shri Ram does

not belong to Hindus alone, he belongs to everyone.

Bhagwan Ram is our ancestor as well as our inspiration," the former Union minister said, adding that the temple is not a "communal" issue as some people perceive it. At the same time, he slammed the previous Congress government for giving an affidavit in the court stating that "Ram Setu" was not a man-made structure and that Lord Ram was imaginary.

Parliamentary standing committee recommends elevation of NHs to lower accidents

New Delhi: The Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on transport, tourism and culture has recommended raising the height of national highways, which could lower the incidents of stray cattle/wildlife roaming on the national highways. The committee made these recommendations considering the high number of crashes and fatalities on the national highways. The committee headed by Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP) MP V Vijayasai Reddy has also recommended the development of helicopter ambulance landing facilities at toll plazas across the country in a bid to enable urgent medical assistance to accident victims. Responding to the recommendations, the ministry of road transport and highways of India (MoRTH) notified that the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) and the National Highways Logistics Management Limited (NHLML)



were developing Wayside Amenities across national highways & expressways wherein a few WSA sites in Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, Trans Rajasthan & Trans Haryana has the infrastructure provision for Helicopter landing facilities. The ministry underlined in its response that the recommendation of the committee had been noted for implementation "as per feasibility." The committee in its report on 'Issues relating to Road Sector' has further recommended that the ministry examine the feasibility of

raising the height of national highways, which the committee feels could lower the incidents of stray cattle/wildlife roaming on the national highways. The committee while noting that it was "dismayed" that fencing/boundary wall to prevent wildlife/cattle is planned after several incidents of fatal accidents, has recommended formulating a mechanism to monitor the frequency of such incidents. Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari last year said that the government intends to build helpads and drone landing facilities along national highways to deal with emergency situations. Gadkari had also urged the chief ministers of all states to put up fences along the expressways and national highways to keep stray animals off roads. The Centre too has launched several projects to develop roads in the country and prevent accidents caused by cattle coming onto the highways.

Chaudhary lauds Modi government in Parliament amid alliance rumours

New Delhi: In a comment that signalled his tilt towards the Bharatiya Janata Party, Jayant Chaudhary lauded the central government in the Rajya Sabha on Saturday for conferring Bharat Ratna on his late grandfather and former prime minister, Chaudhary Charan Singh. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's working style is similar to that of his grandfather. Jayant Chaudhary, whose RLD is influential in UP's Jat-dominated areas, had announced an alliance with the Samajwadi Party last month. However, recently, media reports suggested that he was mulling an alliance with the BJP for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Editorial

France offers a welcome breather for India

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with chief guest French President Emmanuel Macron during the 75th Republic Day parade, at the Kartavya Path, in New Delhi, on 26 January, 2024. PTI

Between them, US President Joe Biden and rival Republican Party's Nikki Haley seem bent on pushing India closer to France for a balanced relationship in the western world that has all the ingredients of strategic stability, both in the bilateral and multilateral contexts. That is if one were to leave out India's Russia relations, which many believed were rocky but became sort of rock steady all over again owing to the Ukraine War, where the long American arm was seen all over the place.

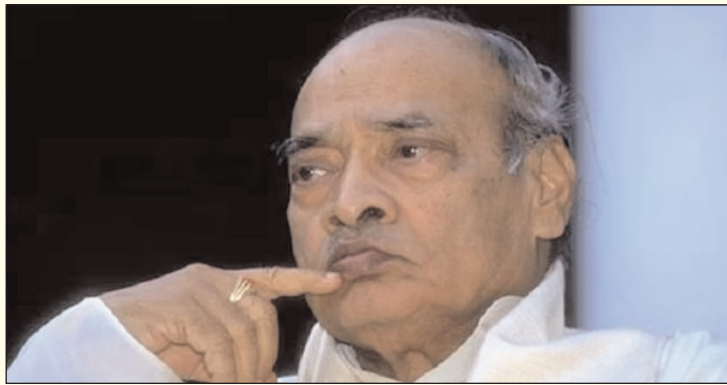
Yes, Nikki Haley, 51, is not even Biden's likely rival in the US presidential polls in November. She did not mean to question, challenge or rebuke India, either. Instead, by claiming that India was moving closer to Russia than the US, implying that the Biden presidency did not inspire confidence not only in New Delhi, but also in Tokyo and Seoul, Canberra and Wellington, Haley was only targeting the incumbent back home. But her choice of India, and not any of America's NATO allies, for example and her choice of words, gave the impression that she was trying to convince a certain section of Republican voters that she was all American, and not Indian. It has to be front-runner and former president Donald Trump. Haley is trailing the Republican primaries and polled lower than their kind of NOTA in Nevada, but that does not make sure that Trump's name will be on the ballot. Indications are that at some point, either the Republican Party bosses or American courts could make it embarrassing for Trump's name to be on the ballot. Haley seems hoping for that day and is persisting in the primaries precisely for this reason. Maybe, like a typical Indian-origin woman that she is, Haley is hoping for 'sympathy votes' or 'survivor's votes', first in the primaries and later in the presidential poll. Of course, there is a long way to go this time than any time in the past.

Disappointment for India

Biden kept India waiting and eventually turned down the invitation to be the chief guest at the annual Republic Day celebrations. Information about India's invitation having spread after a time (generally it is kept secret until accepted — which again used to be a formality), Biden's avoidably-delayed rejection was a disappointment for India. It is not known how the Indian-American supporters of Biden and the Democratic Party feel about it. Not-so-official news sources claimed that Biden's decision owed to the election year commitments on campaigns and other essentials. In his place, another Democratic president, Barack Obama, took a short break from his so-called pressing engagements back home to be present in Mumbai first and Delhi next, where he was the chief guest at the 2015 Republic Day. Of course, in true American form and style, it was not a visit confined to honouring contemporary India's tryst with destiny. Obama did hard-selling business in an election year and took back orders for Boeing, which he said would ensure 20,000 Americans did not lose their jobs. Biden was constrained by domestic perceptions, both inside the Democratic Party and outside. Maybe, Team Modi too thought that having Biden would be a high-profile commencement to the ruling BJP-NDA's campaign for the Lok Sabha polls in the summer. To an extent, it compares with the 'Namaste Trump' show that India put out for the US President of the time, in February 2020 amid the farmers' rally in New Delhi. The Ahmedabad rally in particular was only a mirror-image of the Trump show for the Indian prime minister, 'Howdy Modi' in Houston months earlier in Houston, Texas.

Narasimha Rao was a Batman of Indian politics, Bharat urgently needed to acknowledge

Former Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao, in a true sense of the word, was a Batman of Indian politics. He became Prime Minister at a time when India's chips were badly down. In 1991, the country had to pledge its gold to pull the economy from the brink. He reoriented India's pro-Soviet Union foreign policy to bring it closer to the Western order. He reached out to Israel without leaving the Palestinian cause — an axis on which the Indian foreign policy still revolves around. And all this he delivered with a minority government. Still, Narasimha Rao remains largely forgotten and uncredited — Batman-like. Sanjaya Baru, in his book 1991: How PV Narasimha Rao Made History, emphasised at this phenomenon, with a tinge of sadness, when he recalled how "at an interaction with students at a university near Delhi, in the winter of 2015", he asked the audience "what the year 1991 meant to them". One student readily stood up to say he was born that year — and the entire audience burst into laughter. When Baru insisted on thinking more, there was silence. PV Narasimha Rao, Charan Singh, MS Swaminathan: Why they deserve Bharat Ratna Later, the same year, Baru addressed "a meeting of the Hyderabad Management Association" and he repeated



the same question. Many were quick to reply this time: The government that year had "introduced new economic policies that opened up the Indian economy", Baru was told. And who was responsible for this? "Manmohan Singh," pat came the reply! Some even credited P Chidambaram and Kamal Nath! Later, in an interaction with this author, Baru expressed his surprise at the height of Indian ignorance: "No one mentioned PV Narasimha Rao. Ironically, this incident took place in Hyderabad, which was Rao's own city."

When I asked Baru why Rao had been forgotten, he cited two reasons. "One, he faced several corruption cases, especially towards the fag end of his rule. But most importantly, the Congress decided to erase the memory of Narasimha Rao, to make the point that no person from outside the family can ever be a successful PM. After all, what did Rao prove? He

proved that someone doesn't need to be related to the Nehru-Gandhi family to be a successful prime minister. By becoming the first PM outside the family to run the country for a full term, he effectively challenged this notion." It's ironic to see the Congress disowning one of its own prime ministers, especially the one "whose impact on the nation's fortune went way beyond the economy", as Baru wrote in 1991. But then it was an obvious outcome for a non-Gandhi leader in the Congress. It had happened in the past with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and it took place after Narasimha Rao, as was the case with Pranab Mukherjee. Anyone seen to be eclipsing the halo of the Gandhi-Nehru family was systematically targeted to be pushed to the footnotes of the party's — and by extension, the nation's — history. This explains Sonia Gandhi's hostility for Rao, to the extent that the former Prime Minister was denied a well-

deserved memorial in Delhi, even when lesser worthies could find space in the national capital. Author Vinay Sitapati, in Half Lion: How PV Narasimha Rao Transformed India, gives a graphic detail on how the late Prime Minister was denied a rightful place and space in Delhi after his death. "The home minister, Shivraj Patil, suggested to Rao's youngest son, Prabhakara, that 'the body should be cremated in Hyderabad'. But the family preferred Delhi. After all, Rao had last been chief minister of Andhra Pradesh more than thirty years ago, and had since worked as Congress general secretary, Union minister, and finally prime minister — all in Delhi. On hearing this, the usually decorous Shivraj Patil snapped, 'No one will come,'" Sitapati writes. Thereafter, Ghulam Nabi Azad and YS Rajasekhara Reddy reached out to Rao's family — Reddy, being the chief minister of Andhra Pradesh, promised a grand memorial for Rao in Hyderabad! Later in the day, prime minister Manmohan Singh entered the room and asked Prabhakara: "What do you want to do with the body?" To this, Rao's son replied, "These people say it should be in Hyderabad... This (Delhi) is his karmabhoomi. You should convince your Cabinet colleagues." Manmohan nodded. Sonia Gandhi was standing near, but

mostly kept quiet. When Sanjaya Baru arrived, Ahmed Patel sought his intervention. Baru's bureaucrat father knew Rao from the 1960s — and he was close to the family. "Sonia's political secretary tapped him on the shoulder. 'You know the family,' Patel said. 'The body should be taken to Hyderabad. Can you convince them?'" Sitapati quotes Prabhakara as saying, "We sensed even then that Sonia-ji did not want Father's funeral in Delhi. She did not want a memorial (in Delhi)... She did not want him (to be seen) as an all-India leader." The next morning, when Rao's body, draped in the national flag, was being taken to the airport, it was planned to stop at 24 Akbar Road, the Congress headquarters. "As the body approached 24 Akbar Road, located adjacent to Sonia Gandhi's residence, the funeral procession slowed. The entrance gate to the compound looked firmly shut. There were several senior Congressmen present, but hardly any cadres had been rustled up. No slogans filled the air, just deathly silence. The carriage stopped on the pavement outside, as Sonia Gandhi and others came out to pay their respects." "It was customary for the bodies of past Congress presidents to be taken inside the party headquarters so that ordinary workers could pay their respects.

Why India's \$100 bn proposed trade deal with Europe is different

In the pursuit of economic growth, the Maldives seems to have missed a crucial lesson: relying solely on a handful of major players isn't a sustainable strategy. The key to sustainable growth lies in opening up to broader economic participation.

India is a case in point

India stands on the brink of sealing a significant trade deal that could have far-reaching implications. Negotiations with Europe are nearing completion, with the potential for India to attract a staggering \$100 billion in investment. This proposed agreement with Europe is noteworthy for several reasons. Unlike conventional trade deals focused on tariff reduction, India is poised to open up its markets in exchange for substantial

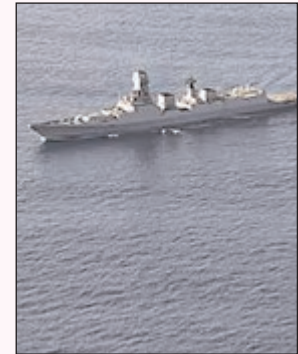
investment, a move that could inject significant capital into its economy over the next 15 years. The pact, unlike typical free trade agreements, comes with binding investment guarantees, a rare feature that could set a precedent for future trade negotiations. The investment is slated to originate from a special bloc of European nations known as the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), comprising Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein and Switzerland. While negotiations involve this bloc rather than the entire European Union, the agreement could serve as a model for broader regional trade engagements.

The potential investments are earmarked for both new and existing manufacturing projects,

promising to create over a million jobs and bolster India's industrial landscape. Beyond the economic windfall, the deal offers additional perks for India, including enhanced visa provisions for Indian professionals seeking access to the EFTA countries. In return, the EFTA nations seek expanded market access for their goods in India, spanning processed foods, beverages, electrical machinery, engineering products, pharmaceuticals and medical devices. While the deal holds immense promise, its fruition has been a long time coming, with negotiations spanning back to 2008. However, recent reports indicate that key issues have been resolved, paving the way for a potential agreement, pending finalization.

Anchored in Shivaji's spirit, India's naval operations get a desi touch in international waters

By carrying out back-to-back rescue operations in the past month, the Indian Navy has emerged as the bright spot in the otherwise unstable waters of the Red Sea. The Israel-Hamas war has not only thrown the Middle East into a flux but its effects are now also spilling over to South Asia and the wider expanse of the Indian Ocean Region. The worsening security concerns in the Red Sea due to constant attacks from the Yemen-based Houthis on cargo ships have further been exacerbated with Somali pirates also targeting the ships passing through this region. As the security situation in the Red Sea and also in the Arabian Sea has deteriorated, the Indian Navy has now emerged as the net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region. Indian Navy has always been exemplary in its duty and in particular, has always been proactive in benign causes like Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations. However, with the spill-over effects of the war in the Middle East threatening the security of the Indian Ocean Region, India is asserting its position as the resident power and as the primary stakeholder in the security architecture of the region. India's rescue



operations and in particular the role of the Indian Navy not only correspond to the existing global order. The current security concerns may have pronounced the role of the Indian Navy. But there is also a strong civilisational undertone to India's naval operations. This undertone could be considered from decolonisation and indigenisation perspectives. The decolonisation narrative has been a major issue in the Indian political discourse for a long time. However, in the past few months, there has been a tangible and accelerated effort towards decolonisation and indigenisation across different spheres. Some important steps in this direction include the use of the name Bharat instead of India. This was the highlight when India hosted the G20 Summit in September 2023 as the placard in front of Prime Minister Narendra Modi displayed the name Bharat. Besides, three

criminal justice laws, the Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, the Bharatiya Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act, recently passed by the Indian parliament also seek to replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act. The recent consecration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya is projected as one of the most prominent steps towards decolonisation. Also, the scope of the decolonisation narrative has now expanded. For decades, only the 200-year British rule in India was earmarked as the colonial period in the collective memory of the Indian people. Now the 200-year period is being replaced by a period of about 1,000 years which includes the Islamic invasions in India. This indigenisation process which is becoming visible in the political, legal and cultural domains is gradually gaining emphasis in the security domain as well. Just as the decolonisation debate has been restricted to British rule, the same principle was evident in Indian strategic thought as well for a long time. As one of the relics of British rule, the continental mindset had remained a norm in Indian strategic thought for a long time.

Haldwani to Bareilly, seven decades of pseudo secularism has come home to roost

Haldwani, a small but bustling town in Uttarakhand, is the gateway to the Himalayas and ascent to tourist spots like Nainital and Bhimtal. Today, it is a far more dramatic dot on Bharat's map. On February 9, the town with an 18.55 percent Muslim population erupted with violence which left two dead and 250 injured. Islamist mobs attacked a demolition squad with accompanying cops and mediapersons when it went to demolish an illegally built mosque and madrasa. The mob hurled petrol bombs and stones, nearly set policemen on fire, and used women and chil-

dren as human shields.

Uniform Civil Code Bill tabled in Uttarakhand Assembly: How was the draft prepared?

Drone shots later revealed that the violence was unprovoked and planned. Images showed heaps of stones stored on rooftops. The very next day, 100 km away in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly, another Islamist mob attacked the police with stones after Muslim cleric Tauqueer Raza was detained for giving a 'jail bhara' over the Gyanvapi mosque issue. Raza did not forget to mention the Haldwani mosque demolition as ghee on fire. Earlier in the week, a mob

surrounded a police station in Madhya Pradesh's Damoh after a dispute between a tailor, his customer, and a cleric who intervened. A man in the crowd, Akram Khan, took a loudspeaker and threatened violence. The Left-Islamist ecosystem has been shaken by the Pran Prathista at the Ayodhya Ram Mandir.

The legal challenge to the Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi, built after demolishing a part of Kashi Viswanath temple, has created further flutter. The mood of the nation after the Ram temple opening and a fast-crumbing Opposition alliance

point to another election victory for Narendra Modi.

One takes to the streets, of course, and with wanton violence, tries to overturn court orders or people's verdict. For seven decades since Independence, a perverted secularism actively supported by political parties have signalled to Muslims that they should never peacefully coexist with the majority, must always be in victimhood mode, and heed the law of the land only if it suits them. The community has been told that its power lies in existing as an impoverished and irascible mass.

NBFC rules not on par with banks: RBI deputy governor



MUMBAI: RBI deputy governor M Rajeshwar Rao said that large finance companies retain certain advantages over banks and face comparatively lighter regulation due to RBI's nuanced regulatory approach. Rao, who was refuting criticism that finance companies were being regulated on a par with banks, said that NBFCs have a less stringent regulatory framework. The deputy governor said that NBFCs here have bucked the global trend of contraction and grown to control a significant chunk of the country's loans. In a speech titled 'No

more a shadow (of a bank) at a summit organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry here, Rao said, "Globally, the non-bank financial intermediation sector has shrunk by 3% in 2022, while in India have expanded by about 10%, the highest among all economic categories monitored by the Financial Stability Board." The deputy governor noted concern areas, particularly in NBFC peer-to-peer lending, where most of the lenders were individuals. He also raised the issue of NBFCs being

overdependent on banks for funds and lax underwriting standards in a bid to grow fast. "It's time that the NBFC sector comes out of its own shadow as well as that of the banking sector," said Rao. Rao noted India's position as one of the few countries experiencing an increase in share of total financial assets held by NBFCs. "As of March 2023, NBFCs accounted for 12.6% of the credit to GDP ratio and constituted 18.7% of banking sector assets, marking a substantial increase from 13% a decade ago," he said.

Reliance buys 82-year-old Ravalgaon candy brand

MUMBAI: Reliance Consumer Products, the FMCG arm and a subsidiary of Reliance Retail Ventures, has acquired the trademarks, recipes and intellectual property rights of Ravalgaon Sugar Farm's confectionery business in a Rs 27-crore deal. The details were disclosed by Ravalgaon in an exchange filing on Friday. RCPL has been expanding its footprint in the market through a mix of acquisitions and partnerships. The latest acquisition will add to its FMCG portfolio that includes brands like Campa, Toffeeman and Raskik, widening the product basket for con-



sumers. The 82-year-old Ravalgaon brand owns nine confectionery labels like Pan Pasand and Coffee Break. As FMCG companies compete for a larger share of the consumer's wallet, they have been attempting to ramp up product portfolios with acquisitions to get more customers. RCPL did not issue any statement. A dwindling market share on the back of surging competition from both organised and unorganised industry players prompted Ravalgaon to make the move.

Moderna-backed Metagenomi cuts US IPO valuation target to \$563 million

Genetic medicines company Metagenomi Technologies said on Thursday it is aiming for a valuation of \$563 million in its US initial public offering (IPO), a number that is at the low end of its initial target range. The company, backed by Moderna and Bayer Healthcare, plans to

raise about \$93.8 million by selling 6.25 million shares at \$15 apiece. That is the lower end of its price range of \$15-\$17 per share. At \$17 per share, Metagenomi would have had a market value of \$638 million. Metagenomi, one of a string of healthcare companies that have

recently sought to go public, is developing therapies for genetic diseases like hemophilia A. All of its revenue has been generated from three collaboration agreements, including one with Moderna, and not any product sales. The company is yet to turn a profit.

McKinsey places 3,000 staffers on review as economies slow

McKinsey & Co has warned about 3,000 of the firm's consultants that their performance was unsatisfactory and will need to improve. The firm gave these employees a so-called "concerns" rating as part of their performance reviews in recent months, according to people familiar with the matter. With that rating, employees are typically given about three months to show improved performance. If they're unable to do so, the firm may begin counseling some of them to leave the company entirely. While the proportion of staffers receiving the "concerns" rating is largely in line with past years, the fact that the firm's headcount has swelled so dramatically in recent years has



meant that the ratings have been handed to far more employees than in prior periods, according to the people familiar with the matter. McKinsey's headcount has swelled to about 45,000 employees, up 60% from the 28,000 it had in 2018. "Our proportion of concerns ratings is consistent with our historical range," a McKinsey spokesperson said in an emailed statement. "It is not an unprecedented year.

The performance evaluation process we have today also remains consistent with years past." It's the latest sign that the consulting industry is pulling back after the boom times of the pandemic spurred hiring sprees across the industry. Now, some of the world's largest consultancies have said a growing number of clients are shelving longer-term investments as they navigate an uncertain macroeconomic environment, meaning there is less work for their consultants to come in and advise companies on. Accenture Plc last year said it would slash 19,000 jobs. Ernst & Young LLP in December said it was cutting jobs and delaying start dates for some new hires across the US.

EPFO fixes Employees' Provident Fund interest rate for 2023-24 at three-year high;

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has announced a three-year high interest rate of 8.25% on employees' provident fund (EPF) deposits for the fiscal year 2023-24. This decision was made by the EPFO's apex decision-making body, the Central Board of Trustees (CBT), during their meeting on Saturday. The interest rate for the previous fiscal year, 2022-23, was marginally increased to 8.15% from 8.10%



in the year before. This decision comes amidst robust financial performance by EPFO, bolstered by investments in equity and minimal Covid-related withdrawals, according. In 2021-22, the EPFO had lowered the interest rate on EPF to a four-decade

low of 8.1%, which was the lowest since 1977-78 when the interest rate stood at 8%, according to a PTI report. However, for the fiscal year 2020-21, an interest rate of 8.5% was provided. The interest rate for each fiscal year is decided by the CBT

and then sent to the Ministry of Finance for approval. Once the government ratifies the interest rate, it will be credited to the accounts of over six crore subscribers of EPFO. It is important to note that EPFO provides the rate of interest only after it is approved by the government through the finance ministry. Over the years, the interest rate on EPF deposits has varied. In 2019-20, the interest rate was lowered to 8.5%, the lowest in seven years.

Bezos sells \$2 billion of Amazon shares in first major stock sale



Jeff Bezos sold 12 million Amazon shares, his first sale since 2021, netting over \$2 billion. This follows Amazon's announcement that Bezos may sell up to 50 million shares within a year. His fortune increased by \$22.6 billion this year, reaching \$199.5 billion. The Amazon founder has sold over \$30 billion in shares since records going back to 2002. The gap between Bezos and Musk has been narrowing as Amazon and Tesla Inc shares move in

opposite directions. Jeff Bezos unloaded 12 million shares of Amazon.com Inc. this week, the first time the billionaire has sold the company's stock since 2021. The sales took place on Wednesday and Thursday and netted just over \$2 billion, according to a filing. Amazon disclosed on February 2 that Bezos plans to sell as many as 50 million shares of Amazon over the next 12 months, potentially cashing in on a stock surge that's put him within

reach of becoming the world's richest person. His fortune has climbed \$22.6 billion this year to \$199.5 billion as of Friday, according to the Bloomberg Billionaires Index. The Amazon founder has sold over \$30 billion in shares since records going back to 2002, including about \$20 billion combined in 2020 and 2021. He has primarily been gifting stock, including shares worth roughly \$230 million that were given to nonprofit organizations in November.

Moody's downgrades Israel's credit rating due to Hamas conflict

Moody's also lowered its outlook for Israel's debt to "negative" due to "the risk of an escalation" with the far more powerful Lebanese militant group Hezbollah. In a significant financial development, Moody's, a leading US ratings agency, has announced a downgrade of Israel's credit rating from A1 to A2 on Friday, attributing the decision to the detrimental impacts of the ongoing conflict with Hamas in Gaza. This marks the first time Israel has experienced a downgrade by Moody's, as reported by Bloomberg. The agency justified its decision by highlighting the increased political risk and the weakening of Israel's executive, legislative institutions, and fiscal strength due to the "ongoing military conflict with Hamas, its aftermath, and wider consequences." Furthermore, Moody's adjusted its outlook on Israel's debt to "negative," signaling concerns over potential escalations with Hezbollah, a powerful Lebanese mili-



tant group operating along Israel's northern border. The conflict, which escalated following Hamas's unprecedented attack on October 7, has led to significant casualties. According to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures, approximately 1,160 people in Israel, predominantly civilians, have lost their lives. In retaliation, Israel's military actions in Gaza have resulted in at least 27,947 fatalities, mostly women and children, as reported by the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory. In the wake of these events, S&P Global Ratings revised Israel's credit outlook from stable

to negative, citing the potential for the Israel-Hamas conflict to widen. Similarly, Fitch, another major US ratings agency, placed Israel on negative watch, reflecting concerns over the conflict's implications. Moody's statement further elaborated on the rationale behind the downgrade, pointing to a deteriorated security environment, increased social risk, and a reversal in the previously projected downward trend in Israel's public debt ratio. The agency anticipates a significant rise in Israel's debt burden beyond initial projections due to the conflict. The ongoing war, which

has persisted since October 7, represents the latest chapter in the protracted conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, a situation that has continually destabilized the Middle East. Despite intermittent reductions in fighting intensity and temporary ceasefires, there remains no durable agreement to conclusively end hostilities or a long-term plan to restore and enhance security for Israel. Moody's also forecasts a substantial increase in defense spending, nearly doubling the 2022 level by the end of this year. The agency's baseline scenario reflects the financial strain imposed by the conflict, with Israel having launched an extensive air and land offensive in response to Hamas's deadly attacks and hostage-taking. As negotiations for the hostages' release and a temporary ceasefire continue, the outcome and potential for a lasting peace agreement remain uncertain.

TCS gives final warning to staff: Resume work from office or face consequences

Indian IT giant Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has extended the deadline for employees to return to the office by another quarter, until the end of March. However, the company has made it clear that this will be the final deadline. Chief Operating Officer NG Subramaniam that there will be consequences for employees who fail to resume work from the office by then. Subramaniam emphasized the importance of work culture and security issues as the reasons behind this decision. While TCS has shown patience, the company firmly believes that employees need to get back to the office. The final communication regarding this matter has been sent to employees, and those who do not comply will face consequences.

Pakistan must shift away from 'anarchy and polarisation,' says army chief



COAS Munir stated that elections and democracy are tools to serve the people rather than an end in themselves. He highlighted the need to move away from divisive politics and focus on the progress of the nation.

NEW DELHI: Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Asim Munir, has emphasised the importance of stable governance and a unified government representing Pakistan's diverse political landscape, according to a report by Dawn. COAS Munir stated that elections and democracy are tools to serve the people rather than an end in themselves. He highlighted the need to move away from divisive politics and focus on the progress of the

nation. "The nation needs stable hands and a healing touch to move on from the politics of anarchy and polarisation, which do not suit a progressive country of 250 million people," Dawn quoted Pak General Munir. In his statement, General Munir called for political parties to demonstrate political maturity and unity, as the people of Pakistan have shown their trust in the Constitution. The unofficial provisional results indicate that independent can-

didates, largely supported by Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), are leading with 97 seats out of 241. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is the largest party with 72 seats, followed by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) with 52 seats. The Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), Jamiat-e-Ulami-Faizal (JUI-F), and Balochistan National Party (BNP) are expected to win 15, 3, and 2 seats respectively.

Army chief congratulates Pakistan on 'successful conduct' of elections



ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's army chief congratulated the country on Saturday for the "successful conduct" of its national elections, saying the nation needed "stable hands" to move on from the politics of

"anarchy and polarisation". The United States, Britain and the European Union on Friday each expressed concerns about Pakistan's electoral process in the wake of

Thursday's vote, urging a probe into reported irregularities. The parties of former Prime Ministers Nawaz Sharif and the jailed Imran Khan, also a former premier, both claimed victory.

Imran Khan claims victory in Pak general elections in AI-enabled speech

ISLAMABAD: Amid the Election Commission of Pakistan drawing flak over the delay in declaration of the results of the general elections, former PM and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan on Saturday released a 'victory speech' in his AI-

enabled voice, saying that the 'London Plan' of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supremo Nawaz Sharif failed with the massive turnout of voters on polling day. "My beloved countrymen. By turning out in such huge numbers and exercising your demo-

cratic right of franchise, you have laid the foundation for the restoration of the freedom to exercise citizens' rights. I congratulate you all on helping us win the elections handsomely. I had full faith in your turning out in such large numbers to cast your ballot.

Shohei Ohtani tries to blend in with Los Angeles Dodgers, even if that might prove impossible

NEW DELHI: In his new spring training environment, Shohei Ohtani made a notable entrance, clad in a plain white T-shirt boldly emblazoned with the word "BOSS" in large, dark letters. While Ohtani may not hold the reins of the Los Angeles Dodgers, his presence undeniably commands attention as the two-time Most Valuable Player. Addressing a crowd of over 50 reporters during his inaugural interview at Camelback Ranch, Ohtani found himself in the spotlight, fielding inquiries as baseball's sole \$700 million figure. The spectacle highlights the challenge of blending in when one is the focal point. Yet, Ohtani endeavors to assimilate seamlessly, adopting a rookie-like demeanor in his new team environment. "I'm on a brand new team, so I'm going to act like a rookie," Ohtani remarked through an interpreter, emphasizing his intent to foster camaraderie among teammates. As the Dodgers kicked off their spring training with pitchers and catchers reporting, Ohtani's multifaceted talents take center stage. Although his pitching duties are paused due to recovery from elbow surgery, his prowess at the plate remains undiminished. Despite missing a substantial portion of the previous season, Ohtani's offensive performance was stellar, boasting a .304 batting average alongside 44 home runs. Now liberated from pitching concerns, Ohtani anticipates further offensive prowess. "I feel like there's not just one level, but several levels ahead offensive-wise," he expressed.

Kirill Kaprizov's go-ahead goal pushes Minnesota Wild past Pittsburgh Penguins

NEW DELHI: In a thrilling matchup in St. Paul, Minnesota, the Minnesota Wild clinched a hard-fought 3-2 victory over the Pittsburgh Penguins, with Kirill Kaprizov emerging as the hero with the go-ahead goal midway through the third period. Kaprizov's decisive strike, accompanied by goals from Matt Boldy and Jonas Brodin, propelled the Wild to their second consecutive win following the NHL All-Star break. The electric atmosphere was further enhanced by the Wild's celebration of "Marc-

Andre Fleury Night," paying tribute to the veteran goaltender with pregame ceremonies and heartfelt video tributes. Fleury, living up to the occasion, showcased his brilliance by turning away 34 of the 36 shots fired by his former team, securing his 553rd career win in an impressive display between the pipes. Pittsburgh, despite spirited efforts, fell short in their quest for victory, with Reilly Smith and Sidney Crosby notching goals for the Penguins. Goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic made 27

saves but couldn't prevent the Penguins from succumbing to defeat. The Wild drew first blood with a power-play goal late in the first period, as Kaprizov orchestrated a slick pass to Boldy, who rifled home a wrist shot from the slot. However, Pittsburgh quickly responded in the second period, as Evgeni Malkin set up Smith for a thunderous one-timer, leveling the score at 1-1. Undeterred, the Wild surged ahead once more midway through the second period, with Brodin exhibiting his offensive prowess by

maneuvering past defenders for a skillful finish, reclaiming the lead for Minnesota. The relentless Penguins fought back early in the third period, with Crosby capitalizing on the power play to knot the game at 2-2. Yet, it was Kaprizov who proved to be the difference-maker, seizing the moment with a timely goal off a broken play, restoring the Wild's lead and ultimately securing the crucial victory. Kaprizov's clutch performance, coupled with stellar contributions from Boldy and Brodin, propelled the Wild to triumph.

Police in a Maine city ask residents to shelter in place after gunfire at a intersection

SACO: Police in Saco, Maine, asked residents to shelter in place Friday afternoon while they searched for suspects after an exchange of gunfire and vehicle crash at a busy intersection spurred a brief citywide school lockdown. The reports of gunshots came in at about the same time as the multi-vehicle crash downtown, police said. It involved a school bus that had children on board, but none were hurt, city spokesperson Emily Roy said. A police spokesperson described the investiga-



tion as "an ongoing, fluid situation." Police said they were searching for four people who fled from one of the cars involved in the crash, and that one of the people appeared to have been shot. They also said they recovered a firearm from one of the vehicles

involved in the crash. Roy said the crash involved the school bus from nearby Old Orchard Beach and another vehicle. "There were reports of gunfire downtown and then reports of a vehicle crash involving a bus from Old Orchard Beach," Roy said.

"Right now there is police activity due to the ongoing incident." Ryan Guay, a supervisory Deputy U.S. Marshal in Portland, Maine, said the U.S. Marshals Service was on the scene helping the Saco Police Department. He said there was some type of motor vehicle crash and that the suspects fled the scene and dispersed into the Saco area. The situation sparked a large police presence in downtown Saco, with members of several police departments responding.

Kane's hat trick leads Edmonton Oilers past Anaheim Ducks

NEW DELHI: In an exhilarating clash between the Edmonton Oilers and the Anaheim Ducks, the Oilers staged a remarkable comeback to secure a thrilling 5-3 victory, highlighted by Evander Kane's sensational hat trick and Leon Draisaitl's decisive third-period goal. Kane stole the spotlight with his eighth career hat trick, showcasing his offensive prowess and igniting the Oilers' resurgence after falling behind early in the game. His timely goals, coupled with Connor McDavid's three assists, powered Edmonton's offensive surge as they bounced back from their previous defeat in Las Vegas to snap the Ducks' winning streak. McDavid's stellar performance extended his impressive five-game point streak, further solidifying his status as one of the league's



premier playmakers. Meanwhile, Zach Hyman's contribution with a crucial goal added to the Oilers' offensive firepower, highlighting the depth of their scoring talent. Goalie Calvin Pickard stood tall between the pipes, making 24 saves to secure his fifth consecutive victory and anchor Edmonton's defense in the face of Anaheim's relentless offensive pressure. For the Ducks, Ryan Strome's two goals and Cam Fowler's goal and assist showcased their offensive capabilities, but it wasn't

enough to withstand the Oilers' relentless onslaught. Despite a valiant effort, Anaheim's two-game winning streak came to an end as they fell victim to Edmonton's resilience and determination. The game was characterized by back-and-forth action, with momentum swinging in both directions. After falling behind early, the Oilers fought their way back into contention, with Kane's heroics propelling them to a hard-earned victory.

Second baseman Jonathan India and Cincinnati Reds agree to 2-year contract

NEW DELHI: The Cincinnati Reds and second baseman Jonathan India have reached a two-year contract agreement, effectively sidestepping an arbitration hearing that was slated for the following week. India, the recipient of the 2021 NL Rookie of the Year award, will continue to don the Reds uniform under this new deal. India, who was hand-picked by Cincinnati as the fifth overall selection in the 2018 amateur draft, has swiftly solidified his place within the team's roster. Over the course of three seasons, he has showcased his prowess at the plate, boasting a .255 batting average complemented by 48 home runs, 171 RBIs, and an impressive on-base percentage of



.350. As India entered arbitration eligibility for the first time, negotiations ensued between the player and the Reds management. India sought a significant increase in salary, tabling a request for \$4 million, a substantial leap from his previous \$760,000 earnings. Conversely, the Reds countered with an offer of \$3.2 million when arbitration

salaries were initially exchanged last month. The agreement reached between the two parties now provides clarity and stability for India's future with the team. However, India's continued presence in the lineup poses a challenge for the Reds, as they navigate the influx of young talent vying for playing time. With the emergence

of promising prospects such as Elly De La Cruz, Matt McLain, Spencer Steer, Christian Encarnacion-Strand, and Noelvi Marte, alongside the addition of infielder Jeimer Candelario through free agency, the Reds find themselves in a position of strategic roster management. Balancing the development of these burgeoning talents with India's established role will be a focal point for the team's coaching staff as they embark on the upcoming season. In securing India's services for the next two years, the Reds have made a commitment to continuity and stability within their roster, setting the stage for a promising future both on and off the field.

Nawaz Sharif pitches for coalition as poll results sway towards hung mandate

NEW DELHI: In a bid to cling to a record fourth term as Pakistan Prime Minister, PML(N) chief Nawaz Sharif has pitched to form a coalition government as his party failed to cross the magic marks of 169 in the 336-seat National Assembly. The former exiled leader has been planning to reach out to jailed Imran Khan-backed independent candidates, who have performed surprisingly well beyond predictions. Nawaz Sharif informed his supporters that he would be sending his brother and former PM Shehbaz Sharif to meet the leaders across party lines, particularly the ones backed by former PM Imran Khan, and invite them to form the new government. Sharif made the claim for a coalition government amid the Imran Khan party's allegations asserting tampering in the vote-counting procedure.

Kohli to miss last three Tests against England; KL Rahul, Ravindra

NEW DELHI: As expected and reported, former India captain Virat Kohli was not named in the squad announced by the national selectors on Saturday for the remaining three Test matches against England. Kohli missed the first two Tests as well and will continue to excuse himself due to personal reasons. "Virat Kohli will remain unavailable for selection for the remainder of the series due to personal reasons. The Board fully respects and supports Kohli's decision," BCCI said in a statement. The national selection committee has named senior players Ravindra Jadeja and KL Rahul in the squad, pending clearance from the BCCI's medical team. Both players are nursing injuries, with Jadeja suffering from a hamstring issue and Rahul experiencing a slight right quadriceps niggle. "The participation of Ravindra Jadeja and KL Rahul is subject to fitness clearance



from the BCCI medical team," the BCCI statement added. However, the medical status of senior batter Shreyas Iyer, who has been left out of the squad due to groin and lower back stiffness, remains undisclosed by the BCCI. It is speculated that Iyer would likely have been dropped regardless of his injury, making the selectors' decision more straightforward. The 17-man squad features one new face in Bengal speedster Akash Deep, who has been rewarded for his consistent performances in first-class cricket and the recent India A vs England Lions Test series. Left-arm spinner Saurabh Kumar has

been omitted from the squad to accommodate the return of Jadeja, while pacer Mohammed Siraj replaces Avesh Khan in the lineup. Siraj's inclusion bolsters the pace bowling department, providing additional depth to the Indian bowling attack. The five-match series is level at 1-1, and the third Test starts in Rajkot from February 15. India Squad: Rohit Sharma (c), Jasprit Bumrah (vc), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, KL Rahul*, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (wk), KS Bharat (wk), R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja*, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep.

His absence does not mean...': Former India opener on Virat Kohli's unavailability for England series

NEW DELHI: Former India opener Aakash Chopra has weighed in on the absence of star batter Virat Kohli from the ongoing home series against England, expressing confidence that India can still perform well despite his unavailability. Kohli, who missed the first two Tests due to personal reasons, will continue to be absent for the remaining three matches, a decision supported by the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). Reflecting on Kohli's absence, Chopra highlighted India's historic series win in Australia during the 2020-21 tour,



where they emerged victorious even without Kohli, who played just one of the four Tests. "I would not go that far (losing the series without Virat). Let us be honest, life does not stop because of someone coming or going. Life must go on, the show must go on," Chopra stated

in a YouTube video. Chopra acknowledged the significance of Kohli's absence but emphasized that India had previously overcome challenges without him. He pointed out India's victory in Australia, where they defeated the hosts in his absence, showcasing the team's resilience.

'As a leader, it's crucial to...': Rohit shares insights on his leadership mantra

NEW DELHI: Indian cricket captain Rohit Sharma shed light on his leadership approach, highlighting the significance of fostering confidence and trust among players during an event in Mumbai. Rohit emphasized the multifaceted nature of his role, encompassing strate-

gic decisions on the field and personal interactions off it, aimed at nurturing a cohesive team environment. "As a leader, it's crucial to instill confidence in players and make them feel valued regardless of their role in the team," Rohit stated during the Leo1,

Mastercard & NSDL event. "Each player's contribution is essential to the team's success, whether they play ten balls at No. 6 or 7." The skipper underscored the importance of personal engagement with each player, emphasizing the need for equal treatment

End of Kohli vs Anderson era: Fans react to Kohli's decision to miss entire Test series against England

Virat Kohli has opted out of the ongoing five-Test series against England, citing personal reasons. His absence was confirmed by the BCCI when the Indian cricket board announced the home team's squad on Saturday for the remaining three Tests against the visitors. While some of Kohli's fans expressed disappointment over his omission, others voiced support for his prioritization of family matters. The five-Test series currently stands locked at 1-1, with the third Test beginning in Rajkot on Feb 15. Virat Kohli will miss the entire ongoing five-Test series against England after he continued to excuse himself from cricket duties due to personal reasons. The BCCI announced the Indian squad on Saturday for the last three Tests against the visitors, and Kohli's omission left some of his fans disappointed while others supported his decision to put family first. Kohli had earlier withdrawn himself from the first two Tests in Hyderabad and Vizag, with England winning the opening match and the hosts coming back to win the second to level the five-match series at 1-1 heading into the Rajkot Test, which begins February 15. The fans of the batting icon were quick to point out that it's possibly the end of battles between England's fast bowling legend James Anderson and India's batting icon Kohli. The 41-year-old Anderson, who is only five wickets away from becoming the first fast bowler to take 700 Test wickets, is not likely to be around when an India-England Test series next happens as per ICC's Future Tours Programme. Interestingly, it's the first time that Kohli will miss an entire home series in his decorated career.

Ranji Trophy: Odisha bowlers toil after early wickets

KOLKATA: Asked to field first by Uttarakhand skipper Jiwanjot Singh in their penultimate Ranji Trophy Elite Group D game, hosts Odisha got just the kind of start any team would have wanted. But at the end of Day 1, it was Uttarakhand who were in control of the game at DRIEMS Ground in Tangi near Cuttack on Friday. Losing both their openers inside the eight overs and with only 22 runs on board, the visitors fought back to reach 232/3 in 90 overs



at stumps opting to bat first. Odisha must feel disappointed to let their opponents off the hook after an encouraging start though. Bowling spearhead Rajesh Mohanty induced an edge off

opener Kunal Chandela in the third ball of the day and he was caught behind by Odisha wicketkeeper Aashirwad Swain. Both seamers Mohanty and Debabrata Pradhan

continued to bowl a tight line to keep the scoring rate under 3 runs per over before fellow pacer Sunil Roul gave the hosts another breakthrough in his opening over, removing the other opener Sanjeet Sajwan by rattling his stumps. And at 22/2 in 8th over, the home side had good reasons to cheer before Vaibhab Bhatt (101 batting) and Jiwanjot (90) collaborated to repair the early damage on the way to build a formidable score without any further hiccup.

'He was labelled as a white-ball cricketer...': Ravi Shastri praises Jasprit

NEW DELHI: Former India head coach Ravi Shastri has lauded Jasprit Bumrah's unwavering commitment to Test cricket, emphasizing the pacer's desire to break away from the stereotype of being labelled as a "white-ball specialist." In an exclusive interview with 'The Times', recalling their initial conversation, Shastri reminisced, "I remember my first call to him, it was in Kolkata. I asked him would he be interested in Test cricket. He said that would



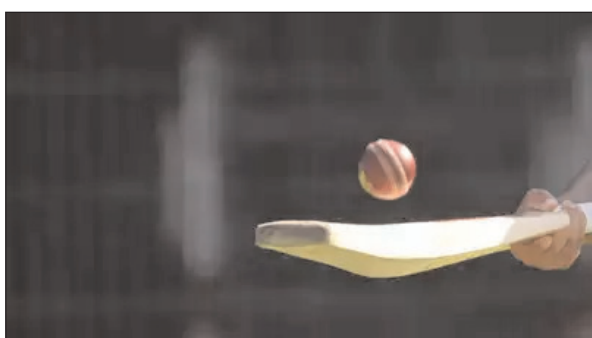
be the biggest day of his life." "He was labelled as a white-ball cricketer without asking him. But I knew. I wanted to see how hungry he was. I told him to get ready, be prepared. I told him I was going to unleash him in South Africa," Shastri said. Despite

Bumrah's remarkable success in white-ball cricket, Shastri emphasized the significance of Test cricket, noting, "They will always remember your numbers in Test cricket." Reflecting on Bumrah's recent exploits, Shastri hailed his exceptional

performance in the Vizag Test, stating, "He's so excited to be playing and doing well in Test cricket." Bumrah's achievement as the fastest Indian bowler to reach 150 Test wickets further underscored his commitment to excel in the traditional format. Shastri's admiration for Bumrah's journey from being labelled a white-ball specialist to becoming the top-ranked Test bowler underscores the importance of embracing challenges in cricket's pinnacle format.

Ranji Trophy: Haryana dominate opening day vs Jharkhand

KOLKATA: Haryana opener Ankit Kumar hit a ton while Himanshu Rana and Rahul Tewatia scored half-centuries as Haryana amassed a huge total on Day 1 of their Ranji Trophy Group A game against Jharkhand at Keenan Stadium in Jamshedpur on Friday. At stumps on the opening day, Haryana were on 338 for six from 89 overs after the hosts pulled things back later in the day. Tewatia (51 batting) and Sumit Kumar (26 batting) were at the crease and put up 67 runs for the unbroken seventh wicket. Anukul Roy and Utkarsh Singh scalped two wickets each for Jharkhand while veteran left-arm spinner Shahbaz Nadeem and debutant pacer Saurabh Shekhar took one wicket apiece. Opting to bat first,



Haryana had the start they looked for before Shekhar bowled opener Mayank Shandilya (20 off 40 balls) in the last ball of the 12th over with the scoreboard reading 46. Despite the early breakthrough, Haryana were sent on a leather hunt for the next 36 overs as Kumar and Rana put 145 runs for the second wicket. Rana scored at a brisk pace for his 82 off 116 balls with 12 fours before returning a catch to Nadeem. Nishant Sindhu then

joined Kumar in the middle and together they put up 49 runs for the third wicket before the former lost his stumps to left-arm spinner Roy. Three balls later, the only centurion of the day holed out to Virat Singh in off-spinner Utkarsh's over. Next batters, captain Ashok Menaria (16) and Rohit Sharma (1), didn't last long as Haryana lost four wickets for just 31 runs. But Tewatia and Sumit held fort thereafter to guide Haryana to 338/6 at close.

Team India eyes record sixth ICC U19 World Cup title in summit clash against Australia

NEW DELHI: The Indian Under-19 cricket team is gearing up to face Australia in the final of the ICC U-19 World Cup, with both teams vying for the coveted trophy. Set to take place on Sunday, the clash promises to be a spectacle of skill and determination as these young cricketers aim to etch their names in history. While memories of the senior team's defeat against Australia in the ICC ODI World Cup 2023 may linger, Indian skipper Uday Saharan asserts that the team is solely focused on the present, refusing to dwell on past disappointments or future uncertainties. The squad remains determined to seize the moment and emerge victorious against their formidable opponents. Australia, with a formidable quartet comprising skipper Hugh Weibgen, opener Harry Dixon, and seamers Tom Straker and Callum Vidler, poses a significant challenge to



India's aspirations. However, with a history of triumphs in the U-19 World Cup, including victories in 2012 and 2018, India enter the final as favorites. The Indian team's consistent success in age-group cricket reflects the country's robust talent pipeline and effective development system. With appearances in nine global finals since 2016, India's young cricketers have consistently showcased their prowess on the international stage. The U-19 World Cup has served as a launchpad for several cricketing luminaries,

including Virat Kohli, Rohit Sharma, and Ravindra Jadeja, highlighting the tournament's significance in nurturing future stars. However, the transition from junior to senior cricket presents its own set of challenges, with many promising talents failing to replicate their early success at the highest level. Amidst the hype and anticipation surrounding the final, the spotlight falls on standout performers such as Sachin Dhas and Saumy Pandey, who have exhibited the potential to excel in senior cricket. While Dhas' batting prowess and Pandey's spin bowling have garnered attention, the team's collective effort and resilience have been instrumental in reaching the summit clash. As the young Indian cricketers brace themselves for the ultimate challenge, their collective determination and skill will be put to the test against Australia.

'He is a car with gears in an era of automatic cars'

Irfan Pathan suggests that KL Rahul batting down the order might work well for the Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in the upcoming IPL season. The team could have a strong playing XI with options like Quinton de Kock, Kyle Mayers and Devdutt Padikkal for the opening positions, which will also allow the team to play with an all-Indian pace attack. The 2024 season of the cash-rich league is likely to begin on March 22, but there is no official announcement yet. Former India allrounder turned commentator Irfan Pathan was at his creative best when asked to analyse if KL Rahul batting down the order for the Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) in the upcoming Indian Premier League (IPL) season will work for the franchise. "He (Rahul) is a car with gears in an era of automatic cars. He can bat in any gear from first to fifth. He even has a sixth gear.

Good governance is a result of extensive reforms, rather than an overnight development in UP: Yogi



Lucknow
Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday said that good governance in Uttar Pradesh was a result of extensive reforms carried out by his government, rather than an overnight development. Addressing the 'Good Governance Day 2024' programme held virtually in New Delhi, Yogi said that Uttar Pradesh stood as a model of good governance in the country today. Outlining the developmental strides made by the state in the last few years, CM Yogi underscored the contrast with previous governments, which perpetuated societal divisions based on caste, creed, region, and language. He said: "Uttar

Pradesh had potential earlier also, but the previous governments failed to make good use of it. We have empowered the impoverished through a multitude of schemes, fostering self-reliance among them. Highlighting India's potential to lead globally, the CM commended the organizers for orchestrating the two-day 'Good

Governance Mahotsav 2024' at the Dr. Ambedkar International Center, New Delhi. He lauded the event for embodying the Prime Minister's vision of a developed India. The Chief Minister asserted that India, in the last decade, has emerged as a beacon of progress globally, capable of leadership even in challenging times.

Furthermore, he mentioned the improvement in the domestic security landscape and the effective crackdown on corruption through the JAM Trinity (Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile), alongside ensuring last-mile delivery of government schemes through DBT. Adityanath lamented the historical denigration of Indian traditions but expressed satisfaction in witnessing the global embrace of practices like Yoga, symbolising a revival and recognition of India's ancient wisdom, attributing it to Prime Minister Modi's initiatives.

He said: "The vision of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat is being realized today. As many

as 193 countries of the world celebrate 21st June as International Yoga Day. By connecting with this sage tradition of India, the whole world expresses gratitude towards our traditions. All this has been possible because of Prime Minister Modi." The CM elaborated on ongoing development projects, emphasizing infrastructure and connectivity enhancements in Uttar Pradesh, alongside significant strides in law and order enforcement. He stressed the importance of effective implementation and monitoring of schemes, lauding the government's adept utilization of technology and commitment to transparent governance.

Chaudhary Charan Singh was a seeker of democracy in true sense, CM Yogi on X

Lucknow
Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Friday, appreciated the decision to honor former Prime Ministers Chaudhary Charan Singh and P.V. Narasimha Rao and agricultural scientist MS Swaminathan, father of the Green Revolution, with Bharat Ratna. He paid tribute to the three personalities and expressed happiness over this decision on his social media accounts, mentioning it as 'praiseworthy'. Honour for crores of farmers of the country. Welcoming the announcement of conferring the Bharat Ratna upon Chaudhary Charan Singh, the Chief Minister wrote on social media platform X, "The decision to confer the 'Bharat Ratna' upon former Prime

Minister Chaudhary Charan Singh, a mass leader and messiah of farmers, who dedicated his life for the upliftment of villages, farmers, oppressed, and deprived, is commendable. He was a seeker of democracy in a true sense. This honour is a recognition of his unparalleled contributions in nation-building." Addressing the media, the Chief Minister expressed that conferring the Bharat Ratna upon the farmer's messiah, Chaudhary Charan Singh, is an honor for crores of farmers of the country. This recognition holds particular significance for Uttar Pradesh, given Chaudhary Sahab's tenure as Chief Minister, during which the state witnessed significant progress and

transformation. He further wrote about the announcement of Bharat Ratna for former PM P.V. Narasimha Rao on X, "The decision to honour former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao with 'Bharat Ratna' is highly commendable. His visionary leadership played a pivotal role in driving the country's economic development forward. His contributions to India's progress will always be remembered." While speaking to the media, CM Yogi highlighted how PV Narasimha Rao steered the country through challenging times and implemented crucial economic reforms during his tenure. Furthermore, the Chief Minister welcomed the announcement of conferring the Bharat Ratna.

UP's potential in spiritual tourism was completely ignored by the previous govts: CM Yogi

Lucknow
Taking part in the discussion on budget in the state assembly on Saturday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that during previous governments in Uttar Pradesh many sectors, including the service sector, which had great potential, were neglected. The potential that Uttar Pradesh had in spiritual tourism was completely ignored by the previous governments, he remarked. The Chief Minister said, "Opposition parties were saying that politics

should not be done in the name of Lord Ram. We have never done politics in the name of Shri Ram. Lord Ram is our deity. Without invoking the name of Ram, no work can be done. The chant of "Ram-Ram" is heard in every aspect of life - waking up, sleeping, crying, and laughing." Continuing his attack on the opposition, he added: "They don't go to Ayodhya for fear of losing their vote bank. It's you who is doing vote bank politics, not us. Even before

the construction of the temple, when there was no court decision, we went to Ayodhya and organized the grand celebration of Deepotsav. We are going today and will continue to go in the future. There should be no doubt about it." The Chief Minister mentioned that the government has allocated funds in the budget for Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura-Vrindavan, Barsana, Gokul, Govardhan, Naimisharanya, Vindhyavasini Dham, Devipatan Dham.

Under Yogi govt's campaign, 1748 panchayats of UP claim to be TB-free Health Department

Lucknow
The Yogi government has achieved a significant milestone in its mission to eradicate tuberculosis (TB) from Uttar Pradesh, with 1,748 out of 57,647 gram panchayats claiming to be TB-free. The Health Department will meticulously verify these claims, and upon confirmation, the villages will be honored with a TB-free certificate by the District Magistrate. This accomplishment underscores the dedicated efforts led by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who has been steadfast in advocating for this cause. CM Yogi has consistently emphasized the importance of combatting TB and has been actively involved in monitoring the progress of the Health Department's initiatives through regular review meetings. The assertion of TB-free status by these panchayats is a testament to CM Yogi's unwavering commitment. Last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced this initiative on World Tuberculosis Day (March 24) in Varanasi. Following CM Yogi's directives, the District

Tuberculosis Officer (DTO) and District Panchayat Raj Officer (DPRO) have been tirelessly working to realize the vision of healthier and happier panchayats by eliminating grave diseases like tuberculosis. Across various districts, including Ambedkar Nagar, Barabanki, Kushinagar, Unnao, Mathura, and Lucknow, numerous panchayats have stepped forward to claim TB-free status, reflecting the widespread enthusiasm for this noble cause. Dr. Shailendra Bhatnagar, the Joint Director/State Tuberculosis Control Program Officer, has outlined a stringent verification process based on diverse parameters, ensuring that only deserving panchayats receive the TB-free certification by February 20. This meticulous approach underscores the government's commitment to achieving tangible results in the fight against TB. Under the aegis of the Yogi government's campaign, there's a palpable sense of competition among panchayats to expedite the process of achieving TB-free status.

Lift and Escalator Bill 2024 passed with voice vote in both Houses

Yogi govt takes big initiative to curb the increasing accidents due to lifts and escalators in urban areas of Uttar Pradesh, the Lift and Escalator Bill was passed by voice vote after discussion in both the Houses on Saturday. This bill includes provisions such as registration, maintenance, immediate notification to the relevant authorities during accidents, and compensation for the affected person during accidents. All private and public buildings and premises in the state will come under the purview of this law.



Previous govts exhibited 'inaction,' we transformed UP into a revenue surplus state: CM

Lucknow
Taking part in the discussion on Budget 2024-25 in the Assembly on Saturday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath highlighted the significant aspects of the state government's largest budget, while using couplets from Rahim and Tulsidas to strongly critique the leader of the opposition party. Additionally, the Chief Minister compared the current budget with that of 2016-17. Amidst the slogans of Jai Shri Ram, the Leader of the House expressed happiness over the recognition of Chaudhary Charan Singh and other eminent personalities of the country with the Bharat Ratna. He also extended greetings to all 93 members who participated in the budget discussion. He remarked, "A conducive investment climate has been fostered in Uttar Pradesh. As a result, investments exceeding Rs 10 lakh crore will be implemented in the state through a groundbreaking ceremony scheduled for February 19." He emphasized, "This signifies that Uttar Pradesh possessed the potential; its youth were endowed with talent and aspirations, but the state leadership lacked the determination to act. There was a dearth of foresight, vision, and proactive policy-making. However, today, we have successfully transformed Uttar Pradesh into a revenue-surplus state." Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath launched scathing attacks on opposition leader Akhilesh Yadav using couplets from Rahim and Tulsidas. He quoted, "When they were in power, they had their own priorities, and Tulsidas ji aptly remarked about them, 'Sakal padarath ehi jag mahin, karmaheen nar pavaat naahin'. They lacked the will to act. Their priorities did not include development, farmers, youth, women, or the poor." At the outset of his address, CM Yogi remarked, "It was anticipated that when the issue of farmers is raised in the budget speech, the leaders of the opposition parties would surely invoke Chaudhary Sahab. However, 'bigadi baat bane nahin, laakh karo kin koy, rahiman phaate doodh ko, mathe na maakhan hoy.' This is their current state. No one is willing to come together with them, apprehending deceit." Referring to a couplet by Tulsidas, CM Yogi said, "Lord Shri Ram said to Bharat ji that 'barasat harshat log sab karashat lakhai na koe, tulsii praja subhaag te bhoop bhanu so hoi.'" He explained, "Just as the sun takes water from the sea, river, and pond, but no one notices, when it rains in the form of clouds, everyone does. The same holds true for this 'lok kalyankari' and 'lok mangal' budget. This budget has been presented keeping in mind all 75 districts without any discrimination." Today, Uttar Pradesh stands as a revenue surplus state, marking a remarkable transformation from its BIMARU status within a span of 7 years, achieved without the imposition of any taxes.

FDI worth Rs 2300 crore came to Uttar Pradesh between 2017-23: CM Yogi

Lucknow
In a response to the queries raised by the Opposition during the state assembly's budget discussion on Saturday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath underscored the pivotal role of stability and sustainability in propelling infrastructure and industrial development. He elaborated on the state govern-

ment's proactive measures, notably the establishment of the Bundelkhand Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) between Kanpur and Jhansi, marking a significant milestone after 46 years. Presenting a comprehensive blueprint of the state's transformative journey from a BIMARU state to a burgeoning economic powerhouse, CM Yogi

emphasized, "After nearly five decades, a new industrial city is set to take shape in Uttar Pradesh, supported by provisions delineated in the budget and meticulous adherence to procedural formalities. Our endeavors extend to attracting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and courting investments from Fortune-500 companies.

You looted millions, we will give one trillion to the state: Chief Minister

Lucknow
In a poetic diatribe against the opposition during the budget ses-

sion in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly on Saturday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said: "You gave us a 'failure state', we will give \$1 trillion to Uttar Pradesh. The Chief Minister said that the Uttar Pradesh government is taking forward the development works in the state in mission mode by adopting the mantra of 'Talent, Tradition, Trade, Tourism and Technology.' He added that under the One Family One Identity Scheme, seeding of family IDs of 6 crore 64 lakh beneficiaries has been completed so far and the work continues at a fast pace.

Scope of the agriculture sector has expanded; middlemen have been eliminated: Yogi

Lucknow
During the budget session of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly on Saturday, the Chief Minister focused on the strides made in the agriculture sector. He stated, "On the one hand, the scope of agriculture in the state has expanded, while on the other, under the procurement policy, middlemen have been eliminated and the process of direct purchase from farmers has begun." Highlighting a significant shift, the Chief Minister revealed that Rs 2 lakh 3 thousand crores were paid to sugarcane farmers over 22 years. In contrast, in the last 7 years, Rs 2 lakh 33

thousand crores have been transferred to the accounts of the farmers directly. The Chief Minister further told the House that, as per the demand of the farmers, the per-quintal prices of sugarcane have also increased. He emphasized, "Even amidst the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, we ensured that sugar mills remained operational." The Chief Minister further said, "A lot of politics was done in the name of Chaudhary Charan Singh Sahab," adding that in his government, Chhaprauli Sugar was run with full capacity, expressing respect for

made to provide free electricity to private tube wells, ensuring accessibility for farmers. To ensure that agriculture is not affected by global warming, funds have been allocated for installing automatic weather stations and automatic rain gauges in every village. Funds have also been arranged for agritourism, organic culture labs, and tissue culture labs. Besides, arrangements for the modernization of 6600 tube wells have also been made through the budget." The Chief Minister said that all these works will be done in a time-bound manner.

Chaudhary Sahab. Highlighting the government's achievements, the Chief Minister noted that through Prime Minister Kisan Samman Nidhi, Rs 63 thousand crore has been provided directly into the accounts of 2 crore 62 lakh farmers. "It is the result of our efforts that irrigation potential of an additional 23 lakh hectares of land has been created in the state. Provision of additional funds has been made for the Khet Suraksha Yojana and the State Agricultural Development Scheme." He added: "In this budget, a provision of Rs 24 crore has been