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

## Centre urges farmers to shun violence, come for talks

**NEW DELHI:** Awaiting protesting farmers' response to its invitation for further discussion, govt on Thursday once again appealed to them to shun violence and come for talks to find a solution peacefully, even as Samyukta Kisan Morcha - the umbrella body of farm organisations which spearheaded the 2020-21 farm agitation against the now-repealed farm laws - lined up multiple activities in next few days to press for their pending demands. Government reiterated its invitation despite unease at Centre over farmers' stand of rejecting the offer made during fourth round of talks. Officials believe farm unions have staked long-term interests of Punjab's farmers for their short-term interests by rejecting the offer from Centre. Asserting that Modi govt has taken steps to ensure higher income for farmers, information and broadcasting



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

Further hurting the small and marginal farmers. SKM on Thursday decided to organise mobilisation of farmers with a slew of programmes to be observed all over India in support of its demands. The Morcha called for observing "Black Day/Akrosh Diwas" on Friday by protest demonstrations and burning effigies. No

breakthrough in Farmer-Centre talks, next round of discussions on Sunday Farmers protest not just in Punjab but will continue across the country: Rakesh Tikait on farmer's issues and Delhi March. Expressing their anguish over such rejection, officials believe that the protesting farm unions are not only barring farmers from exploring new markets by not allowing them to move away from wheat and paddy but also adding to the groundwater stress that will push up the input costs for the farmers. Depletion of groundwater will eventually make parts of Punjab unfit for paddy and wheat cultivation in a few years.

minister Anurag Thakur said govt has doubled the MSP and

increased procurement by more than two times.

## Sharad Pawar faction gets 'man blowing turha' as poll symbol

**NEW DELHI:** Election Commission on Thursday allotted the poll symbol 'man blowing turha' to Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar, which the party had indicated as its first preference, reports Bharti Jain. Asked by the poll body to choose from the list of 'free symbols' - or symbols other than those 'reserved' for exclusive use by recognised parties - NCP(SCP) had listed three choices: 'man blowing turha' (trumpet), 'autorickshaw' and



'torch' in order of preference. Sources said 'man blowing turha' being a free symbol, there was no scope for EC to raise any objection to its use by NCP(SCP), including in the imminent general elections. "Man blowing turha is allotted to the group/party in all the

parliamentary constituencies in the state of Maharashtra," EC said in a letter sent to Sharad Pawar on Thursday, citing the request received from Supreme Court to this effect. NCP(SCP) had, in its original application to EC, suggested three poll symbols

of own choice; 'banyan tree', 'whistle' and 'cup and saucer', in that order of preference. However, while 'banyan tree' was turned down by EC as it is seen as a symbol with religious connotation, 'whistle' as well as 'cup and saucer' were already allotted to other parties. With EC approval for the first preference, all NCP(SCP) candidates can now contest on a common symbol. Based on the party's performance in these polls, EC may later decide on recognition of NCP(SCP) as a state party.

## Odysseus becomes first US spacecraft to land on moon after 1972

**NEW DELHI:** US achieved its first touchdown on lunar surface in over 50 years on Thursday as a spacecraft built and flown by Texas-based company Intuitive Machines landed near moon's south pole. According to a joint

webcast from Intuitive Machines' mission operations center in Houston, the robot lander, Odysseus, touched down at approximately 6:23 pm EST. Signals sent back to mission control confirmed the successful landing of the spacecraft.

However, there was a delay in re-establishing communication with the lander, causing uncertainty about its condition and position. The spacecraft was not equipped to provide live video coverage of the event. The landing

took place as planned at a crater called Malapert A near the moon's south pole. The touchdown came after a last-minute issue with the spacecraft's navigation system, which was resolved by engineers on the ground.

## In Odisha, Rajnath Singh talks of double-engine government

**BHUBANESWAR:** Confident of returning to govt at Centre for a third straight term, defence minister Rajnath Singh said Thursday he was of the "firm conviction" that PM Narendra Modi would secure a third term. "Here, in the sacred land of Lord Jagannath, I express my wish that Hindustan would also like to see Modi Ji serve as PM for a fourth term," Rajnath said at a rally in Baripada, Mayurbhanj district. Rajnath, who was on a day-long visit to Odisha ahead of simultaneous Lok Sabha and assembly elections in the state, addressed three meetings, the other two in Nabarangpur and Berhampur. Stating that respect for India has gone up internationally because of Modi's leadership and people's faith in him, Rajnath said, "India is scaling new heights. From the 11th-largest economy, India is now in the top five, and under Modi Ji it will be among the top three by 2027. PM's vision of a developed India by its centenary year in 2047 is going to be a reality." Rajnath said no force can prevent BJP from establishing a "double engine sarkar". He refrained from directly criticising CM Naveen Patnaik or BJD, but was unsparing of Congress. "You saw what Congress govt did for so many years. Congress leaders would say they would end poverty. But in 70 years did they end poverty? However, Modi Ji took 25 crore people out of poverty in nine years," he said. He said past govts made so many promises that people's faith in politicians and parties had started eroding. "But BJP has ended the crisis of credibility in politics. We have fulfilled all the promises made in our election manifesto," he said.

## SKM joins stir, calls for highway rallies, mega meet in Delhi

**BATHINDA/PATIALA:** An uneasy calm prevailed at Shambhu and Khanauri protest sites on Punjab-Haryana border on Thursday, but more trouble loomed for the Centre as Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), at forefront of 2020-21 farm agitation, joined the ongoing stir. It announced farmers would organise tractor marches on highways on Feb 26



and convened an All Mazdoor India All Kisan Mahapanchayat at

New Delhi's Ramlila Maidan on March 14. SKM, which represents 40 farm unions across India, demanded Haryana CM Manohar Lal Khattar and home minister Anil Vij be charged with murder following a Punjab farmer's death due to a suspected bullet wound during clashes with Haryana police and central forces at Khanauri Wednesday.

## Fresh tension in Sandeshkhali after locals torch Shahjahan brother's asset

**SANDESHKHALI/KOLKATA:** Fresh prohibitory orders were clamped on Thursday in five gram panchayats of trouble-hit Sandeshkhali in Bengal's North 24 Parganas district after locals torched a bamboo structure set up to oversee fishing at a bheri (pond) allegedly



controlled by Sandeshkhali has been witnessing protests and retaliatory attacks since Feb 7 against associates of Shahjahan,

who has evaded authorities since Jan 5 when a mob attacked and wounded three ED officers during a search operation at his home as part of an investigation into an alleged Rs 550 crore ration scam. The associates have been accused of grabbing land.

## Manipur HC revokes directive to consider ST status for Meiteis

**GUWAHATI:** Manipur high court has removed a contentious paragraph from its 2023 directive to the state govt to consider giving scheduled tribe (ST) status to the Meitei community, which some blame for the ethnic violence that has ravaged the state for nine months.

Justice Golmei Gaiphulshillu modified former acting Chief Justice MV Muralidharan's directive of March 27, 2023, while hearing a review petition filed by Meitei Tribes Union, whose earlier plea was the genesis of the order. The union had originally petitioned HC to ask Manipur's BJP-led govt to

recommend to the Union tribal affairs ministry that Meiteis be put on the ST list. Justice Gaiphulshillu cited a 2001 observation by a Supreme Court Constitution bench in the State of Maharashtra vs Milind & Ors case that courts cannot modify, amend or alter the ST list.

## Government allows donor egg & sperm in surrogacy

**NEW DELHI:** There is new hope for couples dreaming to become parents via surrogacy. The Centre has amended Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022 to allow use of a donor gamete - ova or egg cells and sperm - if one of the partners is certified to have a medical condition that prevents use of his or her own gametes. In usual circumstances, a couple undergoing surrogacy must have both gametes. from the intending couple. But Surrogacy (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2024, that have been notified by the government, state that the district medical board must certify that either spouse is suffering from such a condition. It further says that "surrogacy using donor gamete is allowed subject to the condition that the child to be born through surrogacy must have at least one gamete from the intending couple". asadsfsdt adds, "Single women (widow or divorcee) undergoing surrogacy must use self-eggs and donor sperm.

## INDIA bloc's first poll test will be February 27 UP Rajya Sabha contest

**LUCKNOW:** The newly-formed alliance between SP and Congress is set to face its first electoral test of strength on February 27, when polling would be held for 10 Rajya Sabha seats from UP. The election was necessitated after BJP fielded former MP Sanjay Seth as its eighth candidate, taking the total number of candidates in fray to 11. Both BJP and SP-Congress combine are not leaving any stone unturned to accumulate requisite poll strength to get their candidates sail through. Given the existing strength of the UP assembly, each candidate will have to garner the support of 37 MLAs. SP, which has fielded three candidates - Jaya Bachchan, Ramji Lal Suman and Alok Ranjan - requires the support of

111 MLAs. However, it has the support of 110 (108 of SP and two of Congress). Of them, two SP MLAs - Irfan Solanki and Rama Kant Yadav - are lodged in jail on criminal charges, while another party MLA Pallavi Patel has announced that she won't vote for the party, accusing SP chief Akhilesh Yadav of ignoring its PDA (Pichhda, Dalit, Alpsankhyak) philosophy. SP-Congress strength thus comes down to 107, which is four short of the required number. BJP-led NDA requires the support of 296 MLAs to get its eight candidates elected. The saffron camp, however, has the support of 277 MLAs at present - BJP (252), Apna Dal (S) (13), SBSP (6), Nishad party (6).



## CM and BJP State President will participate in MP Sports Competition on 24th in Kaithal: Saurabh Chaudhary

**Kaithal:** BJP Business Cell Haryana co-coordinator Saurabh Chaudhary Goyal said that state Chief Minister Manohar Lal and BJP state president Naib Singh Saini will participate in the MP sports event on 24th February. Regarding which there is huge enthusiasm among BJP officials, workers and general public. While talking to BJP state president Nayab Singh Saini in a meeting here after a formal meeting at the Chandigarh office last day, Saurabh Chaudhary Goyal said that BJP state president and MP Nayab Singh Saini had organized the MP sports competition at the block level on January 12 in Lok Sabha, Kurukshetra. Was started. In which all the block level teams coming to Kurukshetra Lok Sabha will play and the block level team will come out victorious. He said that this commendable initiative of the MP in the field of sports will prove to be a boon for the players and through such events, the hidden talent within



the players will be exposed and along with getting inspiration to move forward, mutual brotherhood will also increase. BJP leader Saurabh Chaudhary said that the sports policy of the Manohar government of the state is proving to be a milestone for the players and today the players, on the basis of their talent, are making the country and the state proud by winning medals in sports with high standards. In winning medals, players are also being honored by Manohar Government by giving them cash prize money. Co-coordinator Saurabh Chaudhary Goyal said that Kabaddi teams will also play in the MP sports event. Its final

will be held at Police Line ground in Kaithal. In which Chief Minister Manohar Lal and BJP State President Naib Singh Saini will participate and the Chief Minister and the State President will honor the teams coming first and second by giving them tractors as prizes on 24th February. BJP Business Cell Co-Coordinator Saurabh Chaudhary said that the wave of BJP is going on in the country and the state and the people of the country believe in the guarantees of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and under the able leadership of Modi, the popularity of India is ringing all over the world. In the Lok Sabha and

## Sachin Pilot aide Khiladi Lal Bairwa likely to join BJP, says many Congress leaders in queue

**JAIPUR:** Amid speculations flying thick and fast about Congress MLA and former state cabinet minister Mahendrajeet Singh Malviya being all set to switch over to BJP, statements by a close aide of senior Congress leader and former deputy CM Sachin Pilot in support of such crossovers have come as an unsettling development for the grand old party's state unit. Khiladi Lal Bairwa, a former Congress MP and MLA known as a Pilot loyalist, also said several Congress leaders are poised to shift allegiance to the saffron party in near future. Bairwa, who was expelled from Congress after he con-

tested as an independent candidate from Baseri in last year's assembly elections, held former CM Ashok Gehlot responsible for the unfolding scenario. "Good leaders are moving to BJP. There is a long list of Congress leaders who are poised to join BJP. You will be surprised to learn the names of those departing the party," said Bairwa. Bairwa has reportedly engaged with BJP leaders in recent weeks with plans to join the party as the chances of his getting a Congress ticket for Dholpur LS seat have diminished lately. Sources said he is among the second rung of Congress leaders likely to

join BJP in the next few weeks. "Leaders who know politics also know the benefit of switching sides and how they can be stronger," said Bairwa, who was among the Congress MLAs who had supported Pilot during the latter's power struggle with Gehlot in 2021. Bairwa has served as a Congress MP (2009-2014) and MLA (2018-2023). attack on Gehlot, Bairwa said, "He (Gehlot) has led Congress to ruin, and he will be left alone in the party due to the indifference of senior leaders." Bairwa has been one of the most vocal critics of Ashok Gehlot and had held him responsible for the denial of an assembly ticket to him.

## Nagpur 1 of India's hottest cities, getting hotter: Study

**Vatika Times Daily** maximum temperature in Nagpur rose by 0.5C, from 39.5C to 40C, between 1969 and 2015, according to a study. Heatwave days when temperatures exceed 45C increased in this period from six days in 1969 to 12 days in

2015, reports Vaishnavi Chandrashekhar. Severe heatwave days- crossing 47C-also increased after 2005, as did the occurrence of night-time minimum temperatures crossing 32C, the study found. "There is a clear trend of rising heat," said Rajshree

Kotharkar, professor of architecture and urban planning at Visvesvaraya National Institute of Technology, who steered the research. The team mapped urban heat using real-time measurements and computer model simulations and street surveys.



## Indian Navy swiftly responds to distress call from Iranian fishing vessel, extends medical aid to crew

**NEW DELHI:** Amid a series of attacks on cargo vessels, the Indian Navy once again swung into action after Iranian Fishing Vessel FV Al Arifi made a distress call. Responding to the distress call from the fishing vessel, the Indian Naval ship INS Shivalik Mission, deployed in the Gulf of Aden, rendered medical assistance including critical medical supplies to the 18 Pakistani crew onboard. "INS Shivalik is deployed in the region in consonance with the Indian Navy's mandate of Maritime Security Operations under the broader ambit of the Prime Minister's vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)," Indian Navy posted on X, formerly Twitter. This is not the first time the Indian Navy has come to the aid of distressed vessels. Earlier this month, an Indian Naval ship mission deployed in the North Arabian Sea for maritime security operations provided damage control assistance to the Iranian Fishing Vessel (FV) Ameen, with six Iranian crew onboard, operating East of Duqm. Medical aid was also extended to three injured crew members. The FV sustained extensive damage, including a hull breach leading to water ingress. Earlier in January, Indian warship INS Sumitra rescued hijacked Iranian-flagged fishing vessel Al Naeemi with 19-member Pakistani crew off the east coast of Somalia. In the same month, the firefighting team of INS Visakhapatnam successfully controlled a fire onboard the merchant vessel Marlin Luanda. The Indian Navy's prompt

## People should get their health checked regularly: Alka Chaudhary

### Health of 70 people checked in medical camp

**Karnal:** A free medical camp was organized in Sector-6 by BJP Urban Mandal Mahila Morcha President Mrs. Alka Chaudhary and her team. In which Chief Minister's representative Sanjay Bathla mainly participated as the Chief Guest. Apart from this, many dignitaries like Sector 6 councillor Megha Bhandari, senior worker Kuldeep Sharma, former councillor Yashpal Mittal, Welfare Organization head Satish Goyal, Ravi Chaudhary, Shashi Tandon, Mukta Kalra, Ranju,



Saroj Parashar, Seal Pahwa etc. were present in the program. In this medical camp, health of 70 people was checked, in which BP, sugar and cholesterol tests were also done. On this occasion, Alka Choudhary said that all people should be

conscious about their health and should regularly get medical check-ups and tests done keeping their health in mind from time to time. He said that this camp has been organized to make people aware and such camps will be organized in future too.

## See How Amazon Delivers Customer Orders at 4,500 feet above sea level in Indian Himalayas

amazon

**Faridabad:** Situated in the upper Himalayas, nestled at 4500 feet above sea level, Maharishi Ashram in Gajoli is a serene haven for close to 60 meditation practitioners in India. It's an ashram where people come from around the world to practice meditation and find inner peace. The ashram is isolated and disconnected from the rest of the world to ensure no distraction from the external world. While this is a conducive environment for the practitioners, the location makes it extremely challenging for them to access daily essentials. This journey is not only difficult

but also time-consuming, as there are no shops or delivery options in and around the Ashram area. Things changed in 2020, when Amazon.in became the first and only e-commerce company to deliver to Maharishi Ashram in Gajoli village. It opened a world of possibilities where practitioners could order things from any part of India, and they were delivered to them right at their doorsteps. Amazon launched its operations in the region with a Delivery Service Partner station in

March 2019, catering to the population in and around Uttarkashi. Identifying a specific need for the Maharishi Ashram in Gajoli, the station started delivering to the ashram in early 2020. More than 4 years of being the only e-commerce company delivering in Maharishi Ashram is a testament to Amazon's customer obsession in India. "In our relentless pursuit of customer obsession, we have built a strong operations network in India," said Dr. Karuna

Shankar Pande, Director, Amazon Logistics, Amazon India. "Over the last few years, we have significantly ramped up our infrastructure and delivery technology across all three miles, building a fast, safe, and resilient network to serve the varied needs of our customers, reaching the remotest corners of the country. The challenging terrain and extreme climate of Uttarkashi have traditionally posed obstacles to transportation, but I am humbled and thankful to the team that's making the deliveries possible to the Ashram."

## Varthana Makes Affordable Schools a Reality in Punjab & Haryana

**Chandigarh :** In an era where education has become a lucrative industry, there are still a handful of schools that use their positive influence to improve the lives of their students and pave the way for a better future for them. While the rich have an abundance of educational choices, the situation is starkly different for the middle-class and lower-income groups. For children from these groups of population, education is the sole gateway to a better future. Students hailing from a financially stable environment enjoy the choice of a wide array of schooling options, including international institutions. However, this landscape does not mirror the entirety of society in India. There are a large number of poor and middle-class people in India who rely entirely on government schools and affordable private schools. Though

these schools have been established with the aim of bringing seminal changes in the lives of students from middle- and lower-income groups, these schools face numerous challenges. Owners face financial constraints, staffing shortages, gender-based reluctance towards education, teaching quality concerns, student dropouts to enter the labour market, technological limitations, and inadequate emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic only added to these struggles. While the government has initiated various programmes to aid such schools, the rollout has often proved sluggish, leaving school owners seeking alternative solutions. Enter Varthana, a non-banking financial company (NBFC), which specialises in extending loans to private affordable schools for the develop-

ment of infrastructure and other amenities. Its client base resides across all regions of India. Interestingly, they all have a story to tell of the way Varthana helped them in their growth journey. Attesting to Varthana's impact on the school's growth journey, Mr. Rohit Sharma, School Owner of Rishikul Public School, Hisar, Haryana said: "I found Varthana through a social media ad when my friends and I were discussing loans. Within three days of reaching out, Varthana got in touch with me. I couldn't believe how smooth the process was! It was a massive relief for me when the loan was approved and disbursed. The manager who helped me in the process was awesome. Thanks to the loan, I'm building a second floor for my school, helping us take in 200 more students."

## Farmers protest: What Centre proposed to farm leaders at key meeting?

● "The Union minister said there will be no limit on the quantity (purchased) and a portal will be developed for this. "It will save Punjab's farming"

**Chandigarh** Union minister Piyush Goyal said that the "innovative" and "out-of-the-box" idea came up during the discussions with the farmers. The central government on Sunday night held the fourth round of talks with the leaders of farmers' unions amid the ongoing 'Delhi Chalo' march demanding unmet promises. During the meeting in Chandigarh, the government proposed some ideas, including a five-year plan, to the farmers' leaders. Following this, the farmers have put a hold on the march, general secretary of Punjab Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee Sarwan



Singh Pandher said. Talking to reporters after a four-hour-long meeting, which commenced at 8.15 pm, Union Minister Piyush Goyal said that an "innovative" and "out-of-the-box" idea came up during the discussions and the farmer leaders would decide on the government's proposal by Monday morning. This was the fourth meeting between union ministers and farmer leaders. They had met earlier on February 8, 12 and 15 but talks remained inconclusive. According to Piyush Goyal, cooperative societies such as the NCCF (National Cooperative

Consumers Federation) and NAFED (National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India) will enter into a contract with those farmers who grow 'tur dal', 'urad dal', 'masoor dal' or maize for buying their crop at MSP for next five years. The Union minister said there will be no limit on the quantity (purchased) and a portal will be developed for this. "It will save Punjab's farming, improve the groundwater table, and save the land from getting barren which is already under stress," Piyush Goyal said.

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

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



## 'Starting new journey': Day after quitting Congress, Chavan says he is joining BJP

**NEW DELHI:** A day after quitting Congress, former Maharashtra chief minister Ashok Chavan on Tuesday joined BJP in the presence of Devendra Fadnavis.

"Today around 12-12:30, I am going to start a new journey of my political career, I am going to join BJP," Chavan told reporters.

Chavan is the third big name to desert the Congress ship in Maharashtra following the exit of former South Mumbai MP Milind Deora and former MLA Baba Siddique. "I have quit the Congress Party, as MLA and from all other party posts today... I have broken all my involvement with the party. I have no complaints and till yesterday I worked honestly for the party," Chavan had said on Monday after leaving the grand old party.

There were strong speculations that Ashok Chavan was headed for BJP. After



leaving Congress, Chavan had said that he will decide his political path in 48 hours. Who is Ashok Chavan? Son of late Congress CM Shankarao Chavan, Ashok Chavan is a political heavyweight in Maharashtra and seen as a leader with mass base in Nanded region. He began his political career from Congress, holding the position of General Secretary of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee from 1995 to 1999. He later ascended to the role of president of the state Congress unit, a position he held from 2014 to 2019.

During 1987 to 1989, Chavan represented the Nanded Lok Sabha constituency as a Member of Parliament. His political trajectory continued in 1992 when he secured a seat in the Maharashtra Legislative Council, assuming responsibilities as the minister of state for public works, urban development, and home in March 1993.

In 2003, he took on the role of Minister for Transport, Ports, Cultural Affairs, and Protocol in the Congress-NCP government under the leadership of the late Vilasrao Deshmukh.

## US envoy Eric Garcetti celebrates Tibetan New Year in Uttarakhand

**DEHRADUN:** US Ambassador to India, Eric Garcetti shared the joy of being in Uttarakhand during the Tibetan New Year. In some regions, Tibetan people celebrate Losar for 15 days. It is a festival for all Tibetans world over where they come together, offer prayers, perform group dance and perform rituals. "Thrilled to be in Uttarakhand this Losar--the Tibetan New Year," US envoy shared a post on X. He further visited the Hanifl Centre at Woodstock School, where he witnessed the impressive efforts by the centre in shaping the next

generation by conserving and restoring the beautiful landscape and biodiversity of the Himalayas. "I visited the Hanifl Centre at Woodstock school where I'm excited to see the impressive efforts by the center in shaping the next generation in conserving and restoring the beautiful landscape and biodiversity of the Himalayas. #IncredibleIndia," the post added. Hundreds of Tibetans in exile gathered to participate in a circle dance in the North Indian hill town of Dharamshala on the second day of Losar, the Tibetan New Year. It's like a festival for

all Tibetans across the world, where they come together, offer prayers, perform group dances, and do their rituals. Many Tibetans, mostly in traditional dresses, participated in a group dance in McLeodganj to celebrate the second day of their Tibetan new year-2151, 'Dragon Wood' year according to the Tibetan lunar calendar. Polam Dolma, a Tibetan woman in exile said, "It is the second day of Losar, the Tibetan new year and here we are participating in a circle dance so many people have joined with our traditional clothes.

## Defamation complaint against Tejashwi Yadav quashed by Supreme Court

**NEW DELHI:** The Supreme Court on Tuesday quashed the defamation complaint against RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav over his alleged "only Gujaratis can be thugs" remark. A bench of Justices A S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan granted the relief to Yadav after

noting that he has withdrawn his statement. "We have quashed the complaint," the bench said. The top court on January 29 had directed Yadav to file a "proper statement" withdrawing his alleged remark that "only Gujaratis can be thugs". Yadav on January

19 filed an affidavit in the apex court withdrawing his alleged "Gujarati thugs" remark. The top court, while hearing the RJD leader's plea, had earlier stayed the proceedings in the criminal defamation complaint and issued notice to the Gujarat resident.

## Hyderabad man finds live worm in Dairy Milk Chocolate, Cadbury

**NEW DELHI:** A Hyderabad man, Robin Zaccheus found a live worm crawling in a bar of Cadbury Dairy Milk Chocolate that he purchased from a store at Ameerpet metro station on Friday.

In a post on X, formerly known as Twitter, Robin shared a video of the worm infested chocolate bar and included the receipt for the Rs 45 Cadbury that he bought at the Ratnadeep Retail store at the metro station. "Found a worm crawling in Cadbury chocolate purchased at



Ratnadeep Metro Ameerpet today. Is there a quality check for these near to expiry products? Who is responsible for public health hazards?" Robin wrote on X. The images prompted varied reactions from

social media users. In response to the viral post, Cadbury Dairy Milk wrote, "Hi, Mondelez India Foods Private Limited (formerly Cadbury India Ltd) endeavours to maintain the highest quality standards, and we regret to note that you have had an unpleasant experience. To enable us to address your concern, please write to us at Suggestions@mdlzindia.com providing us with your full name, address, phone number and purchase details. To enable us to

action your complaint we request all these details. Thank you, Consumer Conversation, Mondelez India Foods Private Limited (formerly Cadbury India Ltd)." In a separate response, Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation said, "The Concerned Food Safety team @AFCGHMC have been alerted on this issue and the same will be resolved at the earliest." Netizens swarmed the comment section and expressed disappointment.

## Supreme Court: Won't interfere in EC work on voter lists

**NEW DELHI:** Supreme Court on Monday expressed full satisfaction with the work being done by Election Commission in preparing the final voter list for the coming general elections and said there was no room to accuse the poll supervisory body of not taking enough steps to weed out duplicate and ghost voters. Appearing for EC, advocate Amit Sharma told a bench of CJI D Y Chandrachud, and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra that generally people, especially the first time voters, are



enthusiastic about registering their names in the voters list, but there is a discernible lack of effort on the part of electorate to help Election Commission in deleting duplicate entries and the names of the dead from voters list. For this reason, Election Commission and a large

contingent of booth level officers conduct house to house verification, he said. "An IT-enabled system generates lists of probable Demographic Similar Entries (DSEs) & Photo Similar Entries (PSEs). House-to-House verification acts as an assistive tool for Electoral

Registration officers (EROs)/AEROs, who must complete the process as defined in concerned Act & Rules," he added. As per the finally published electoral roll, a total of over 96.9 crore voters are registered across the country, EC said. More than two crore young electors, spanning the 18-19 and 20-29 age groups, have been added to the electoral roll. After hearing Sharma, the bench disposed of a PIL, which had alleged that large-scale duplicate entries and ghost voters.

## Supreme Court refuses to interfere with HCs' orders in Indiabulls case

**NEW DELHI:** Supreme Court on Monday turned down Enforcement Directorate's plea challenging Delhi and Bombay HC orders quashing police and ED investigation against Indiabulls Housing Finance Ltd (IHFL) and asked the agency to resort to alternative remedies, including seeking review of the orders. Bombay HC had in May last year allowed a plea by IHFL seeking to quash an FIR, filed in Wada in Palghar district, for cheating, criminal breach of trust, and other charges levelled by a shareholder. As ED had also initiated a probe against the company and its officials on the basis of predicate offence after registration of



FIR, IHFL had moved Delhi HC for quashing of ED proceedings and HC had allowed its plea in Sept last year. Challenging both orders, ED moved SC and additional solicitor general S V Raju submitted that it should be allowed to go ahead with the probe. But senior advocates Mukul Rohatgi and Siddharth Luthra, appearing for the

company, argued ED had no locus standi to challenge the order to quash the FIR filed by police which resulted in quashing of ED probe. SC, after hearing both sides, noted that Bombay HC had quashed the FIR after questioning the conduct of the complainant who lodged the FIR and the court passed the order without hearing ED.

## Ram temple not of stone, but of devotion, conscious sacrifice: Sadhguru

**AYODHYA:** Calling the inauguration of Ram temple in Ayodhya a 'civilisation moment' achieved after a relentless struggle of over 500 years, Isha Foundation founder Sadhguru on Monday said it is not a temple of stone, but of devotion and conscious sacrifice.

After paying obeisance to Ram Lalla, Sadhguru posted on 'X': "Profound gratitude for generations of people who strived to bring this to fruition. This is not a temple of stone, but of devotion and conscious sacrifice." This was Sadhguru's first visit to Ayodhya since the 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony. Earlier in the day, He said: "Today, I am going to Ayodhya to honour a great being of the past and to honour all the people who have kept up a relentless struggle to manifest the inspiration that this being has been for this civilization. After over



500 years of struggle, the devotees have manifested this. Lord Ram is definitely an inspiration from the past but very relevant for the future. Your personal likes and dislikes, longings, and loves are important, but when it comes to larger well-being, when it comes to the larger good, you learn to keep your own most important things aside and do what is right for the maximum number of people. Rama has been an embodiment of this." "And above all, no matter what

life throws at you--to maintain equanimity, to maintain freedom from the invasion that life can make into your mind and your heart--not be invaded by what's around you, embodied with the divine possibility. This is Rama," Sadhguru added. "This should be the future of the world in many ways. Do not think in terms of just worshipping someone. The most important thing is emulating that possibility--emulating those values, emulating that nature of a

human being that can choose to be the way it wants to be, no matter what life does," he underlined. Sadhguru had called on Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday and lauded his leadership. "Shri Yogi Adityanath ji's vision and leadership are steering Uttar Pradesh towards becoming an epitome of development and culture. His dynamism and dedication to people's wellbeing is truly commendable," he had posted on X.

## Supreme Court Bar Association urges CJI to initiate suo motu action against erring farmers

**NEW DELHI:** Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Adish Aggarwala on Tuesday wrote a letter to Chief Justice of India (CJI), D Y Chandrachud to take suo motu action against erring farmers for forcibly trying to enter Delhi in a bid to create nuisance and disturb the daily life of citizens. He also requested CJI Chandrachud to issue directions to courts to not pass any adverse order due to the non-presence of lawyers before the courts. "I am compelled to write this letter to bring to your kind notice that despite the best efforts of the Government of India to protect the interest of the farmers, some farmers are enroute to Delhi from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Punjab and are gearing up for a large-scale protest in the national capital on February 13," Adish Aggarwala stated in the letter.



## Editorial

### Double standards on terrorism

Subsequently another US drone strike killed the commander of the Iraqi militia group Kataib Hezbollah, who was an Iranian, on Iraqi soil. Similar strikes also took place in Syria. Both Iraq and Syria objected to the US unilaterally conducting air strikes on their soil. In the UN Security Council, Russia and China accused the US of violating the territorial integrity of these nations. They also accused the US of escalating the ongoing conflicts. But the US was least concerned. This is not the first time that the US has conducted strikes in Iraq.

Iraq is not an enemy of the US but an ally whose armed forces are being trained by them. Since when is unilaterally launching air strikes and killing scores of civilians as a counter to three soldier deaths by a militant group legally justified, especially when the nation involved is an ally. The US ignored the criticism of Iraq and did not even bother to respond or address its concerns, treating it as a non-entity, solely because Baghdad lacks military power. At the same time, it continues to demand that India investigate who is behind the attempted assassination of a known anti-India terrorist, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Why double standards?

In the West, even joking about hijacking an aircraft or being a member of the Taliban is considered a crime. People are arrested and face jail terms. However, Pannun, who threatened to hijack Indian airlines flights is permitted to do so without even a whimper from the US and Canadian governments. If this is not adopting double standards, wonder what would be. Canada accused India of interfering in their elections. A declassified Canadian government document stated, 'India engages in foreign interference activities.' On the accusation the Indian spokesperson mentioned, 'We strongly reject such baseless allegations of Indian interference in Canadian elections, it is not govt of India's policy to interfere in the democratic process of other countries, in fact, quite on the reverse it is Canada, which has been interfering in our internal affairs.' Earlier Justin Trudeau had claimed that India was behind the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a declared terrorist by India. India refuted the accusation and sought evidence, which New Delhi claims is yet to be received. On the subject of interference, during the height of the farmers' agitation in 2020-21, Trudeau had mentioned, "The situation (farmers protest) is concerning and we're all very worried. Let me remind you, Canada will always be there to defend the rights of peaceful protest." When Amritpal Singh, the radical Sikh preacher, was arrested in March last year, Canada's foreign minister, Melanie Joly stated, "We are aware of the evolving situation in Punjab, and we are following it very closely. We look forward to a return to a more stable situation." Justin Trudeau stated, "We are looking forward to a swift return to a more stable situation." On Canada's truckers' agitation over which Ottawa applied illegal laws, India's only comments were, 'We have noted that the government of Canada has actually invoked the Emergency Act. Let us leave it at that on that issue.' When comments from leaders of both states are compared, it is evidently Ottawa which is commenting on India's internal affairs, rather than New Delhi, though it accuses India of interference in its internal affairs. Globally, India was criticised over its handling of the farmers' strike, which remained largely peaceful, while Ottawa was backed and supported when it applied emergency laws to forcibly quell the truckers' agitation. Why double standards? Post Tucker Carlson's recent interview of Vladimir Putin, the European Union began considering imposing sanctions on him.

# The favourite problem of the economist is food inflation

On the face of it, the farmers' demand is only fair. Why shouldn't one get the fair for his labour?

The Modi government has also realised this need, and hence aggressively campaigned for a doubling farmers' income programme and yet failed to see results in the past decade. The favourite problem of the economist is food inflation, if the farmers are given a fair price then the food economy will experience hyperinflation. Of course, this could potentially be a problem, but eventually, prices will stabilise once fair prices are given. The government could eventually reduce fertilisers and other chemical agri-input subsidies, providing relief to the taxpayers too.

In a second scenario from last year, 2023 was one of the worst years for food inflation with hyperinflation in vegetables, wheat, etc. while the farmers got less than Rs 2/kg for their tomatoes. There was a huge gap in what the farmers got and what the consumers paid. Compare over 220/kg paid by people in metro cities while the farmers got under 5/kg for tomatoes. The key lesson is supply management, prices can be managed with better supply management. If most resources are spent improving supply management, the



farmers, traders and consumers can all get a portion of food at fair prices. Oversupply at harvest time, without inadequate storage facilities, is leading to price volatility. The Green Revolution also started spreading to other areas in India but the APMC market yards did not. Farmers in these newer areas got higher yields but no market to sell. This led to an over-supply of cereals like rice and wheat, while indigenous crops like oilseeds and legumes declined rapidly. Most of the paddy and wheat varieties are grown strictly for the market, not for farmers themselves. Traders took advantage of this over-supply and started to manipulate farmers and decrease prices. Most Indian farmers are small-scale farmers, owning less than two acres,

and lacking grain storage facilities. They are forced to sell their crops to local traders as soon as they harvest or risk losing their harvest altogether — another vulnerability that traders tend to take advantage of. The Green Revolution has transformed Indian agriculture. While it made India cereal sovereign, Indians got more than they bargained for — monocultures, shortage of oilseeds, disappearance of trace minerals from diets, the emergence of diseases like cancer. And all these came hand in hand with MSP — all part of the industrial system of agriculture. Even now, after the laws are repealed, the farmers hope that with a law on MSP, they will be lifted out of the agrarian crisis.

But the MSP system itself has

trapped farmers in the wheat/rice paddy growing cycle. As irrigation use is increasing, even dryland farmers are abandoning indigenous, locally adapted crops for wheat and rice. MSP is plugging more farmers into the industrial agriculture system and the consequent oversupply of agricultural commodities is crashing prices. Heavy government subsidies that support the fertiliser and oil industry are also draining the Indian economy. So in many ways, the current situation is a catch-22. Without MSP, farmers can't survive economically. But by growing MSP crops like wheat and rice, they destroy land, water, and soil and get exploited by the industrial market system. If MSP is not diverted towards agroecological farming, MSP backing an industrial system of agriculture could potentially be risky. Farmers and the government should reimagine MSP to serve national and environmental interests not just market ones. From tear gas to iron spikes, the government has left no stone unturned to stop the farmers' march on the Punjab-Haryana border. Thousands of farmers have been blocked on the Punjab side with an overwhelming police presence on the Haryana side. Local police and para-

military battalions have been deployed in heavy numbers. But what led to such a confrontation? We have to rewind to 2022, when the Modi government rescinded the three farm laws and asked the farmers to go back home as there will be a government committee formed to look into the minimum support price (MSP). Since January 2022, the government hasn't given any clear answers to the questions of MSP, debt waiver, electricity bills, etc. As 2024 began, a splinter group of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (non-political) declared their intention to revive the demand for MSP and were willing to do a tractor-cade to Delhi on 13 February to reassert themselves and pressure the government to make MSP the legal right of farmers. Now even before we begin to analyse this demand let's understand what MSP is and how it came to be. In the 1960s, India's war with China and constant droughts devastated the Indian food distribution system. India was forced to import wheat from the US to feed its own people. But as a condition of receiving food aid, India had to agree to structural adjustment and subscribe to an industrial agricultural model. The Green Revolution.

## Darkest blots on the progressive, secular credentials

This remains one of the darkest blots on the progressive, secular credentials of Rajiv Gandhi and shows to what extent humanitarianism can be sacrificed for political brownie points. It was seen as an attack on Muslim Personal Law by radical Islamists and a section of the political class that believed in the appeasement of radical Muslims by catapulting their radicalism at the cost of progressive ideas and the constitutional mandate in favour of equality before the law and right to life and personal liberty (life with dignity, is an inferred right under Article 21) enshrined in Article 14 and 21 respectively. The then Congress government under Rajiv Gandhi at the Centre resorted to the worst appeasement tactic of the radical Islamists and the Union

government brought Muslim Women (Protection on Divorce Act) 1986, a law in the Parliament to overturn the decision of the Supreme Court, and it instead provided maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman only during the period of iddat. The Uniform Civil Code has been a legally contentious issue. Despite being envisioned in the Directive Principles of the State Policy as a non-justiciable right under Article 44, as rightly observed by the Supreme Court it is regrettably lied as a 'dead letter'. However, this explains the situation till the Modi government came into power. UCC envisages a uniform set of laws intended to encompass customary laws across various religious communities, regulating civil matters like marriage, divorce, inheritance, suc-

cession, maintenance etc. It is known that the UCC has been occupying centre stage since the Shah Bano Case (Mohd. Ahmed Khan Vs. Shah Bano Begum, 1985), in which the Supreme Court had adjudicated in favour of Shah Bano. Shah Bano, 62, wife of Mohammad Ahmad Khan filed a petition at a local court in Indore, against her husband under section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, asking him for a maintenance amount for herself and her children. Husband gave an irrevocable talaq (divorce) to her which was his prerogative under Muslim Personal Law and took up the defence that since Shah Bano had ceased to be his wife and therefore, he was under no obligation to provide maintenance for her as except prescribed under the Muslim

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

Suffering indignity and violence in silence for decades, the dam of citizens' patience has been breached. Woman after woman has from the wetlands of North 24 Parganas are coming out to narrate how TMC goon and once member of the CPM's 'Harmad' militia Sheikh Shahjahan and his men would handpick women and take them away from their husbands, keep them for nights and return them when they were satisfied. Shahjahan is absconding after his men thrashed an ED team which had gone to question him in the ration distribution scam. Forced dispossession and sexual exploitation have reached a point where the locals do not care to even risk their lives. They have been protesting against Shahjahan's barbaric presence. The West Bengal police have been arresting the protesters while Shahjahan roams free. Because of the same creeping, growing, universalising fear of ceding both property and dignity, losing land and wife and sisters and daughters to jihadis; something that Bengal knows very well from the memories of a bloody Partition. The heat of this fear will begin to melt the rural unitary

structures of the TMC's support base. Eight or nine people including the Panchayat members, banker, teacher and others form the power structure of a village. If Hindus start fearing complete dis-possession and humiliation like the kind meted out in Sandeshkhali, they will turn. Even ordinary Muslims won't feel safe from the Shahjahan's of Bengal. Already, protests are erupting elsewhere in the state, against Sheikh Khalil in Howrah, for instance. Those could only grow. Mamata Banerjee will have to summon her best political instincts to salvage the situation. The fact that her nephew and scion Abhishek Banerjee is facing multiple corruption cases complicates matters for her. But a cornered Mamata is a dangerous animal. The BJP will do well to remember that. So far, the BJP has shown some spunk by organising local and state protests. But the intensity it can unleash, as well as using this opportunity to unite its otherwise fractious state unit, still seems missing. It has the finest street fighter to learn from if only it cares to look at the formidable cre-

entials of its opponent - in - chief, Mamata Banerjee. Banerjee sat patiently through it. At the end, she shook her head and told him: "That is exactly their strength. We can't beat them at their game. We need events which will make their own organisation in towns and villages collapse out of anxiety, fear." Protests against land acquisition in Singur and Nandigram proved to be those events. The Left's heavy-handedness and arrogance installed fear across Bengal that their land holdings would be snatched away. CPM's use of brute force made it believable. Atrocities by TMC goons in Sandeshkhali could become for Mamata Banerjee what Singur and Nandigram were for the Left Front government. Bengal has already established itself as the Mecca of misrule (the phrase may please Didi since it backhandedly fits into her lexicon of minority appeasement). Brutal pre- and post-poll violence are in the courts, wanton corruption has blazed across TV screens of every household, anger of the jobless has spilled onto the streets, and the state's debt has touched Rs 6 lakh crore.

## When the spiritual needs of non-Muslims seemed overlooked

India and the UAE have cultivated a deep connection, ranging from official diplomatic engagements to vibrant cultural exchanges at the grassroots level. As both nations navigate the complexities of modern diplomacy, their historical ties serve as a sturdy foundation upon which to build a future of prosperity and friendship. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inauguration of the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi on Wednesday marks yet another milestone in this journey. During my

childhood in Abu Dhabi with my parents, we, as Muslims, did not feel any lack of religious fulfilment. However, despite the city's cosmopolitan atmosphere, there were moments when the spiritual needs of non-Muslims seemed overlooked. My mother often recounted tales of our Hindu friends yearning to visit temples, especially during festivals and special occasions—a sentiment I found deeply saddening. Coming from India, where minorities are afforded dignity and their rights, including reli-

gious freedom, are respected, it was disheartening to witness this disparity. India boasts lakhs of mosques despite the minority status of Muslims, so it felt strange and sorrowful to see that the UAE lacked similar provisions for people of other faiths, even if they were expatriates rather than citizens. The contrast left one questioning the UAE's stance toward religious tolerance and diversity. However, the scenario has been improving slowly. In contrast to other regions in the UAE, Dubai's Sheikh Rashid bin

Saeed al Maktoum took a significant step in 1958 by allowing a place of prayer for Hindus to be built. This temple was established on the first floor above a maze of traditional shops in Bur Dubai. Unfortunately, this historic temple closed its doors last month, and relocated, along with the gurudwara at the Bur Dubai complex, to another site in Jebel Ali. For decades, this temple stood as the solitary sanctuary for Hindus, who constitute roughly 6.6 per cent of the UAE's population.



## MSCI raises Indian stocks' weightage to record high in key index

MSCI raises Indian stocks' weightage to record high in key index India's weightage in the index has nearly doubled since November 2020. It is currently at 17.9%.

MSCI announced an increase in India's representation in its Global Standard index to a record 18.2% on Tuesday, anticipated to bring about \$1.2 billion in inflows, as per analysts' estimates.

Following MSCI's February evaluation, this adjustment is set to take effect post the market's closure on February 29, a Reuters report said.

Since November 2020, India's position in the index has seen a significant rise, currently standing at 17.9%.

Tata Motors and Macrotech Developers have been introduced to the MSCI Domestic Indexes as large-caps, with Punjab National Bank, Canara Bank, and Embassy Office Park REIT joining the mid-cap segment. Bharat Heavy Electricals, Persistent Systems, MRF, Suzlon Energy, and Cummins India were transitioned to the mid-cap index from



the small-cap category, and approximately 27 small-cap stocks were newly added to the MSCI Domestic Index, with six others being reclassified or removed. This elevation is largely credited to the continuous surge in India's stock market and the comparative lag in performance of other emerging markets, notably China, as stated by Nuvama Alternative & Quantitative Research. India now holds the second-largest weight in the MSCI Global Standard index, following China. Nuvama predicts that with ongoing investments from domestic institutions and active participation by foreign portfolio investors, India's share in the index could exceed 20% by the early months of 2024. In its recent update, MSCI included five new Indian compa-

nies in its Global Standard index, while choosing not to remove any. Conversely, it excluded 66 Chinese companies but added five. Punjab National Bank and Union Bank of India were included in the large-cap segment, while Bharat Heavy Electricals and NMDC were added in the mid-cap category. GMR Airports Infrastructure was reclassified to the mid-cap segment from the small-cap category. Nuvama projects that the February assessment could result in up to \$1.2 billion in passive foreign investments flowing into India. The MSCI Global Standard Index is a prominent stock index created by Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) that represents large and mid-cap equity performance across 23 developed market countries.

## World stocks at two-year high, US inflation data in focus

LONDON: European stocks opened higher on Monday and world stocks were steady at their highest in more than two years, as investors waited for US inflation data due this week to give clues about when the US Federal Reserve might cut rates.

The S&P 500 rose above 5,000 points for the first time ever last week, boosted by tech stocks, and world equities have risen for three weeks straight, even though US Treasury yields have edged higher recently as investors lower their expectations for how soon the Fed could cut rates.

With most major Asian markets closed for holidays, analysts said they expected a quiet day in markets as traders wait for US inflation data on Tuesday, as well as British inflation data and euro zone GDP on Wednesday.

"We are seeing markets dialling back expectations for rate cuts," said UBS multi-asset strategist Kiran Ganesh, adding that markets were pricing fewer than five cuts in the US this year, down from six or seven at the start of the year. "The equity market has remained relatively immune to that because the reason

why we've seen less interest rate cuts expectations has been down to stronger economic growth which of course is good for equities as well." Strong US jobs data earlier in February meant investors reduced expectations for a Fed rate cut at its next meeting, with markets pricing an 84.5% chance of rates remaining unchanged in March. At 0857 GMT, the MSCI world equity index,

which tracks shares in 47 countries, was flat on the day, having touched its highest since January 2022 earlier in the session.

## Oil prices near flat as demand worries offset Middle East risk

Oil prices were little changed on Tuesday for a second straight day as uncertainty about the pace of potential US interest rate cuts and the impact on fuel demand offset worries about Middle East tensions that could disrupt supply. Brent futures edged 1 cent lower

\$81.99 a barrel. US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude rose 1 cent to \$76.93 a barrel. On Monday, Israel freed two Israeli-Argentine hostages held by Hamas in Rafah in a ferocious rescue operation that killed 74 Palestinians in the southern Gaza city where about one million

civilians have sought refuge from months of bombardments. The New York Fed said its January Survey of Consumer Expectations showed the outlook for inflation a year and five years from now were unchanged, with both remaining above the Fed's 2% target rate.

## Auto retail sales up 15% in January but high inventory remains a concern

NEW DELHI: Retail vehicle sales across India saw strong growth across all vehicle categories this January, with the overall market expanding by 15 per cent. Two-wheelers (2W) sales grew 15 per cent, followed by three-wheelers (3W) at 37 per cent, passenger vehicles (PV) at 13 per cent, tractors at 21 per cent and commercial vehicles (CV) at a modest 0.1 per cent. The Federation of Automobile Dealers Association, in a release Tuesday, said demand for two-wheelers stayed strong, fuelled by the rural

market. The two-wheeler segment is likely to benefit from the government's good crop production estimates and continued support for the rural economy, the Association said. The passenger vehicle segment achieved a new all-time high in January, retailing 393,250 vehicles and surpassing the previous record set in November 2023. However, a persistent concern lies in high inventory levels, which still hover in the 50-55-day range, posing a challenge for auto dealers. Sales in the tractor seg-

ment also saw a positive uptick after a slow-down in previous months, likely driven by anticipation of a good rabi crop output and favourable weather conditions for wheat cultivation. The Association asserted that the commercial vehicle segment might experience a slight demand taper in the fourth quarter due to a high base effect and upcoming elections. However, long-term fundamentals, it said, remain positive, with expectations of a post-election rebound. as industries resume tender processes.

The government's optimistic crop production estimates and continued support measures are expected to boost the rural economy, potentially leading to even higher tractor demand and increased sales of entry-level 2Ws in rural areas, the Association said. Faced with high inventory levels, FADA President, Manish Raj Singhania, suggested recalibration of production in line with the market demand. "However, despite this achievement, serious concerns remain regarding PV inventory levels.

## Vedanta Aluminium launches e-commerce platform

NEW DELHI: Vedanta Aluminium said it has launched an e-commerce platform for facilitating the sale of primary aluminium products. The e-commerce platform will provide buyers with just-in-time delivery, real-time AI-based price discovery, and end-to-end visibility of their purchase, from order placement to delivery. The company has listed over 750 aluminium products on the e-superstore, 'Vedanta Metal Bazaar'. The platform has integrated several global-first features, including

product availability, online price discovery, long-term contracts, on-the-spot orders, live shipment tracking, financial reconciliation, and all critical documentation like test certificates, bank guarantees, and letters of credit. Customers have the option to choose from a selection of channel finance and logistics providers to facilitate their procurement journey. "For small and medium-sized companies, this is going to be a real game changer," Vedanta Aluminium CEO John Slaven told

PTI. Further, Slaven termed the e-commerce platform as a breakthrough for the industry in India as it would help the company in serving its customers a full range of products. "Over 750 products are available and all aspects of the buying process from really identifying which products they want, understanding pricing, and then everything from negotiating the contract, documenting, and then managing the logistics... and then delivery to

the to their site. And then for financial reconciliation, all of that can be done on this platform," he added. Products on offer include ingots, billets, primary foundry alloy, wire rods, rolled products, flip coils, hot metal, and Restora -- low-carbon aluminium. In addition, the superstore also offers customised solutions tailored to the needs of the company's customer base. Vedanta Aluminium, a business of Vedanta Ltd, manufactured 2.29 million tonne of aluminium in FY23.

## Retail traders are losing billions in India's booming options market

In India, retail investors account for 35% of options trading, while institutions, aiming to mitigate risk or generate profits for their companies, manage the remainder. This trend has regulators concerned as ordinary individuals are steering away from traditional wealth-building methods like long-term investments in stocks and mutual funds, opting instead for speculative trading. Like a movie star at a premiere, Mohammad Nasiruddin Ansari steps out of the back seat of a white Mercedes. Flanked by a phalanx of black-clad bodyguards, he strides into the lobby of a luxury hotel and takes center stage in a ballroom as indoor fireworks machines spew fountains of sparks. "If you don't make money in three months, I will give you 2 million rupees [\$24,000]," he declares



to cheers from the adoring crowd in a scene that's still playing on YouTube. Ansari is meeting his fans in Pune, about 90 miles south of Mumbai. He's selling the dream of stock market riches to India's fast-growing cadre of small investors. With half a million social media followers, he's pushing an especially risky strategy: trading stock options, often as all-or-nothing bets on future share prices. In 2023, Indian investors traded 85 billion options -contracts, more than anywhere else in the world.

The country has topped the charts since

2019, when it first overtook the US in the volume of annual trades. (The US still buys and sells the most by dollar value.) At conferences like Ansari's, promoters, or influencers, encourage the rank and file to get their piece of one of the world's best-performing economies and stock markets. Video courses flood the internet with catchy titles: "Become a PRICE ACTION Beast." "Easy Options." "Options Trading Tricks." "Best Scalping Strategy Ever." "Become a Supply & Demand 'SNIPER.'" In India retail investors make up 35% of options trades. Institutions, seeking to hedge their risk or profit for their companies' accounts, handle the rest. Regulators are alarmed that regular folk are bypassing the tried-and-true way to build wealth: buying and holding stocks and mutual funds.

## NPCI - US and India tie-up Real-time payment service

Real-time payment service between India and US banks soon? NPCI in talks for linking NPCI is working with Indian and foreign banks to explore potential partnerships. The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and banks in the US and India are in advanced discussions to establish a real-time payment link between the two countries, according to sources familiar with the matter. The initiative aims to leverage NPCI's expertise in cross-border payment systems. NPCI is collaborating with Indian banks experienced in the unified payments interface (UPI) system and foreign banks to develop models and conduct pilot tests, sources told. NPCI is working with Indian and foreign banks to explore potential partnerships. They are engaging with



FedNow or its UPI equivalent and seeking involvement from major US banks to facilitate testing and use-case development. The process is well underway, one source stated. NPCI - US and India tie-up NPCI - US and India tie-up FedNow, launched by the US Federal Reserve in July 2023, is a real-time payment service. NPCI has not responded to queries as of press time. The current focus is on establishing connectivity to ensure the feasibility of any future

collaboration, another source added. The proposed payment model between the US and India would initially focus on small consumer transactions due to the absence of a nationwide system in the US akin to India's UPI, sources revealed. It's real-time, so the transactions would be limited in scale and value. They plan to start with modest payments. Currently, the US lacks a UPI equivalent but has alternatives like Paytm-style wallet and FedNow, stated one source.

## The \$10 billion mistake that will revive Canadian oil

For the last decade, the Canadian oil industry has experienced firsthand the meaning of "with friends like these, who needs enemies." To its south is an obvious export route and a huge client: the US. But American courts and politicians blocked new oil pipelines, strangling the industry to the north. The bottleneck has cost Canadian oil companies billions of dollars in forgone revenue, delaying the industry's growth. With existing pipelines full, any extra barrels have had to move via costly railway, depressing their value. At the worst point in late 2018, Canadian crude sold at a discount of \$50 a barrel less than American petroleum. After years in the wilderness, the Canadian oil sector has now solution. It's an expensive one, however. At a cost of \$35 billion (\$26 billion), the government, rather than the private sector, has built a pipeline linking the oilfields in Alberta with a port near Vancouver on the Pacific coast.



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



**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.

"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.

## Pakistan's army chief congratulated the country on for the "successful conduct"



**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan's army chief congratulated the country on 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 released a 'victory speech' in his AI-enabled voice

**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 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.

## CAPSULES

### 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 "Mar-

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.

## Exchange of gunfire and vehicle crash at a busy intersection

**SACO:** Police in Saco, Maine, asked residents to shelter in place 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. Goaltender 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

**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**

.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

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.



## Punjab De Sher launches its team jersey under the aegis of CCL

**Chandigarh:** Punjab De Sher launched its team jersey in view of the Celebrity Cricket League (CCL) which is going to start from February 23 at Sharjah, UAE. Team owner Puneet Singh and co-owner cum player Navraj Hans along with other players of the team also marked the occasion. Those who included were Binu Dhillon, Aparshakti Khurana, Dev Kharoud, Dakssh Ajit Singh, Rahul Jaitley, Mayur Mehta, Babbal Rai, Suyyash Rai, Manmeet Singh, Gavie Chahal, Ninja, Viral Patel and Sahil Anand.



This is the tenth edition of CCL which is being organized in Sharjah as well as in India in a bigger format than in previous years. Speaking on the launch occasion during a press conference organized at Hotel Hyatt Regency, Puneet Singh said that as many as 200 cinestars from all the eight film industries of the coun-

try are participating in this league. The league will end with the final on March 17. He said that the team is very excited and has the ability to give a tough challenge to other teams. In the last months, the team's players have improved their game during many exhibition matches. The participating teams have been divided into two groups. The team will start its campaign against Chennai Rhinos in Sharjah on February 25. Thereafter, the team will face Telugu Warriors at Hyderabad on March 1. The team will take on Bengal Tigers at their Home Ground, Chandigarh

## Bijwasan rail terminal not on 'protected' forest land: NGT

**New Delhi:** The National Green Tribunal has observed that the land on which Rail Land Development Authority (RLDA) is constructing the Bijwasan rail terminal station in Dwarka is not a protected forest or deemed forest area. The tribunal has disposed of the plea that said the terminal was being built on "protected" forest land. It gave permission for the project to proceed. However, NGT has asked the project proponent to ensure that any further felling of trees is done after seeking permission from the forest department, which had imposed a fine of Rs 5.93

crore on RLDA in 2022 for the illegal felling of 990 trees in the area. For cutting trees in the city, permission from the forest department under the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994, is required. However, if an area is a protected forest, or a deemed forest, permissions are also required under the Forest Conservation Act, 2023. A deemed forest is not a notified or a reserve forest and different states have different criteria.

In Delhi, any area over 2.5 acres with over 100 trees per acre is a deemed forest. Similarly, 1-km stretches of roads and drains with the

same tree density are also deemed forests.

The plea against the building of the terminal was filed by RM Asif, a local resident, in 2023. He claimed that a piece of project land in Dwarka's sector 21 was forest land and permission from the central govt under the Forest Conservation Act had not been taken. The plea claimed that over 1,100 trees stood on the land, which would be cut for the project.

However, in an affidavit last week, the department had told NGT that the area was not a protected forest, but it may be a deemed forest, based on the density.

## Gang barges into Bengaluru villa, robs Rs 1 lakh valuables at gunpoint

**BENGALURU:** A three-member gang allegedly barged into a villa in a gated community in North Bengaluru, threatened a woman and her two teenage sons before robbing them of mobile phones, silver articles, a gold chain and Rs 10,000 in cash - all amounting to

Rs 1 lakh - at gunpoint on Friday afternoon, reports Swamy. Bagalur police have filed a case based on a complaint filed by the woman's elder son, 15, and are searching for the trio, who struck terror for 30 minutes. Only after intruders' arrest, police said, they can confirm

whether the guns were real. The incident took place between 12.30pm and 1pm at the duplex in Royal Palm Enclave, near Sathanur, on Bagalur Main Road, off Yelahanka. Gang of robbers made away with phones, ornaments & 10k cash from villa. The elder.

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

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

the renowned international dais of the Miss World Pageant with Grace, Elegance and Beauty with a remarkable media coverage of global scale. The Miss World event is not just a platform for beauty and glamour; it is also an opportunity for these young women to immerse themselves in different cultures, promote humanitarian causes, and foster global unity. Vikas Lifecare Limited and PME are honoured to be a part of this prestigious event, which aligns with its commitment to promoting diversity, empower-

ment, and cultural exchange. P M E Entertainment is a Dubai-based global entertainment firm, producing concerts and events for notable figures and luminaries such as HRH Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, the United Nations General Assembly in New York City, the Norwegian Nobel Committee, and Nobel Peace Prize Laureates. Vikas Lifecare Limited (VLL) is an ISO 9001:2015 certified company, conventionally engaged in manufacturing and trading of Polymer and Rubber compounds and

Specialty Additives for Plastics, Synthetic & Natural Rubbers. Manufacturing up-cycled compounds from industrial and post-consumer waste materials like EVA, PVC, PP, PE etc., while actively contributing to the Environment Protection initiatives from the Government of India and fulfilling the mandated EPR obligations for the conglomerates consuming hundreds of thousands of tons of plastic products and packaging materials. VLL is also a Del-Credere agent of ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Corporation).

## Rooftop hoardings: SCB serves notices, says tough action soon

**Secunderabad:** The Secunderabad Cantonment Board (SCB) has banned installation of hoardings on the rooftops of residential properties. During its board meeting on Wednesday, the SCB officials passed a unanimous resolution in this regard. The SCB officials, who studied the GHMC rules and regulations on the rooftop hoardings last year, have decided to implement the same in SCB areas. The officials cited threat to nearby residents and commuters as reason behind the move, CEO



Madhukar Naik said. However, a few property owners opposed the move and approached the high court. The court pronounced a judgment on December 11 last year in favour of the SCB. The court also asked the board to take appropriate action as per sections

297 and 318 of Cantonment Act 2006 after issuing notice to the parties concerned. While interacting with reporters, Madhukar Naik further said that owners of over 160 private properties, who had installed hoardings, had been served the notices.

The SCB will now take tough action against them, said Naik. These property owners collected lakhs of rupees in rentals from private advertisement agencies by leasing out their rooftops for hoardings. This has been going on over a decade and the cantonment did not gain a single penny from these advertisements, the CEO added. In another key resolution, the CEO authorised the officials concerned to serve demolition notices to the property owners who deviated from the sanctioned plans and built

## Fire flowed like lava, it was like a movie scene' in Delhi's Alipur

**NEW DELHI:** It almost seemed like lava was flowing in the drains when the paint factory went up in flames in northwest Delhi's Alipur on Thursday evening, recalled eyewitnesses. A massive blast rocked the area, leaving residents with the sensation of an earthquake. Drums filled with chemicals were flung into the air and then fell on roads, houses and drains, flowing and quickly spreading the fire. "Everything was like we have only seen in movies. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed it," said Rajesh Chaudhary, a shop owner in the Mandir Wali Galli, where the fire broke out. Eyewitnesses told that the chemicals acted as a catalyst and the blaze spread furiously. Though at least 20 families were able to evacuate to safety, eight houses were burnt down.



Sumit Bharadwaj, 40, said that after fuelled by the chemicals, the fire flowed in the drain water and onto the road, affecting many houses. "The flames stood as high as the first floor of the building," Bharadwaj said. "People were screaming and running everywhere. The situation was horrific."

The chemicals on the road caused the fire to erupt, said area resident Deepak. Locals said that labourers were trapped inside the paint factory and were beating at the locked door, screaming for help. A paint drum thudded down in front of the gate and caught

fire due to which rescue became difficult. "I heard the labourers screaming," said Usha, "and I asked people to break open the door. They tried, but the fire spread in seconds and engulfed the factory." Anil, who runs an alcoholics rehabilitation centre adjacent to the factory, said that the impact of the blast broke all his building's windows and slammed chemical drums into the wall. "We had a close shave, but the centre which I've been running for almost 25 years was burned down," he said. A pall of gloom descended on Mandir Wali Galli.

## As Sonia exits Rae Bareli, Irani plans 'grih pravesh' in Amethi

**LUCKNOW:** While Congress leader Sonia Gandhi has made a formal exit from her parliamentary seat of Rae Bareli, in neighbouring Amethi, BJP MP and Union minister Smriti Irani is gearing up to settle down as a local resident.

Irani, who defeated Congress's Rahul Gandhi in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, has got a house constructed for herself in Gauriganj and is all set to organize a grand 'Grih Pravesh' on Feb 22.

Sources said that Smriti has sent nearly 25,000 invites to people, including local MLAs and MLCs, cutting across party lines, for the ceremony.

The sprawling single-story house, constructed over an area of around 15,000 square feet in Medan Mawai village, is situated barely 2 kilometres away from the local BJP office on Sultanpur Road.

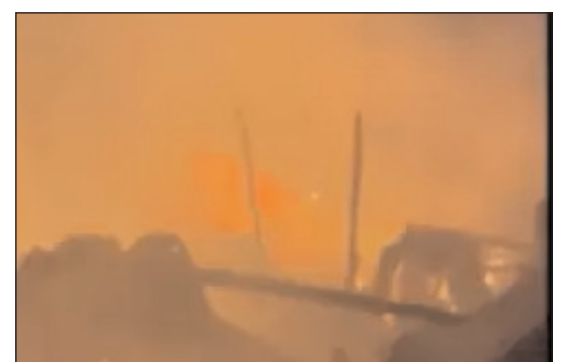
Last year in Jan, Irani had organised a 'Khichdi Bhoj' at the same residence, describing it as a function which had nothing to do with politics. The event was then attended by opposition MLAs, including Gayatri Prajapati's wife and Amethi MLA Maharaji Prajapati. "Irani has fulfilled the promise (of making a house in Amethi and settling as a local resident) she made to the people of Amethi in the 2014 LS elections," said BJP's Amethi spokesperson Govind Chauhan.

## Awadh loses its 'dum' in Imtiaz Qureshi's demise



**LUCKNOW:** 'Dum Pukht', the Nawabi Lucknow's slow cooking style, owes as much to Imtiaz Qureshi, the grand old man of Indian culinary arts, as vice versa. While Qureshi carried it from the esoteric Persian manuscripts to the world map of gastronomy, 'Dum Pukht' catapulted the Lucknow-born chef to heights of fame previously unknown to any Indian cook. Qureshi, who became the first practising member of his fraternity to ever get a Padma Shri in 2016, passed away in Delhi on Friday. He was 93. The slow cooking style has its origin - like most good things in Lucknow - in a story. During the time of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah in 1784, Awadh was faced with a ravaging famine. Jobs were lost and people were on the brink of starvation.

## 15 commercial units, houses damaged in fire in Mumbai's Govandi



**MUMBAI:** A fire broke out in a chawl in Mumbai's Govandi area early on Saturday, damaging around 15 commercial units and some houses.

Fortunately, no injuries were reported, according to an official. The fire brigade received a call at 3.55am, alerting them about the blaze. "Around 15 galas (commercial units) on the ground floor and some houses on the first floor were damaged in the fire that broke out in a chawl at Bainganwadi in Adarsh Nagar area of Govandi," the fire brigade official said. The fire engulfed electrical wiring, installations, plastic sheets, household items, wooden planks, and furniture. Efforts are currently under way to extinguish the flames. Water tankers and an ambulance were dispatched to the scene, the official added.



## India will be the world's third largest economy in PM Modi's third term



**Gorakhpur, Chief Minister** Yogi Adityanath said that India is making rapid strides in development. In Azaadi ka Amrit Mahotsav, becoming the fifth largest economy in the world, leaving behind Britain which ruled the country for two centuries, and now it is set to become the third largest economy in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third term. Speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the new Incore Tax Department building, Yogi said that Uttar Pradesh was keeping pace with the growth in the national economy, adding the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita income of the state have doubled in the past seven

years. The Chief Minister, along with Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Choudhary, inaugurated the newly constructed building of the Income Tax Department in Gorakhpur on Thursday. The Chief Minister remarked: "Uttar Pradesh has the best infrastructure, with the CD ratio reaching around 60 percent, up from 45

percent. The goal for the next fiscal year is to increase it to 65 percent." He added that the number of individuals filing income tax returns in the state has also increased, pointing out that while 1.45 lakh people filed returns in 2014, presently, that number has reached 12 lakhs. Banks have also shown utmost interest in contributing to Uttar Pradesh's development, he asserted. The Chief

Minister mentioned that the government is simplifying processes for taxpayers, emphasizing that the money received from taxpayers is crucial for the country's development. He said that the Prime Minister has pledged to make India a developed nation by the year 2047. Fulfilling this commitment will require citizens to play a significant role. He emphasized that understanding one's role and fulfilling it diligently is essential for achieving the goal of a developed India. He mentioned that citizens also have a responsibility to willingly pay their taxes, as without funds, the development of better infrastructure would not be possible. He further highlighted the transformative impact of

various financial inclusion campaigns, such as the Atal Pension Yojana, Jeevan Jyoti Yojana, Mudra Loan Yojana, PM SVANidhi Yojana, and BC Sakhi, benefiting people on a broad scale. He acknowledged the crucial contribution of the Indian government and the Ministry of Finance in implementing these schemes. Highlighting the success of GBC 4.0 held in the state, the Chief Minister said that it has touched new heights under the leadership of the Prime Minister. He mentioned that when he first proposed hosting an investors' summit after becoming the Chief Minister, he was told that the state could receive an investment of only Rs 20,000 crores.

## Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Hosts An Evening of Love Walk for Humanity



**Bahadurgarh:** Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Hosts An Evening of Love Walk for Humanity. The Embassy of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia hosted a heartwarming "Love Walk for Humanity" on the eve of Valentine's Day, February 14, 2024, curated and presented by Dr. Sanjanaa Jon. The Love Walk for Humanity aimed to transcend the traditional celebration of Valentine's Day by fostering love and compassion for humanity. In a world grappling with conflicts, attacks, and hatred, the event aimed to build a collective love for humanity, extending beyond personal relationships to include care for the environment, animals, and all aspects of life. Distinguished guests in attendance

included Raghav Activist, Fashion Chandra, Managing Director, Audi Delhi South, H.E Demeke Atnafu Ambulo, Ambassador of Ethiopia to India, H.E Fleming Raul Duarte, Ambassador of Jamaica to India, H.E Rodriguez Gonzalez, H.E KL Ganju, Honorary Consul of Comoros, Dimitrius, Greek Embassy, Hissain Omar Saiddon Deputy Chad Embassy, Gokul Ji, Nepal Embassy, Dr. Sanjanaa Jon, Social Philanthropist, Animal Lover, Kiran Chopra Philanthropist, Blossom Kochhar, Chairperson, Blossom Kochhar Group of Companies, Shalu PVR IMAX, DJ Sheizwood, Music Composer, Music Director, Singer, DJ, Dr Aysha Bahabul Bahrain, Rupam Ghosh Violinist Raj Chahar, Pradeep Rai Supreme Court, Dr Vivek Gupta, Mayank Datta CEO Audi DELHI South and other esteemed diplomats, business leaders, and personalities from various fields.

## Yogi ji is a dynamic Chief Minister in true sense: Nirmala

**Gorakhpur, Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister** Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday described Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath as the "dynamic Chief Minister", in the true sense of the term. Addressing the inauguration ceremony of the new Income Tax Department Building, during her maiden visit to Gorakhpur, Sitharaman emphasized the significance of the word 'dynamic' in the context of CM Yogi saying: "Please correct my

number if it's wrong, Mr Chief Minister. There are 75 districts in the state and there are 52 weeks in a year. Yogi ji visits each of Uttar Pradesh's 75 districts at least once, if not twice, within the span of 52 weeks." Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was also present at the event. Highlighting Chief Minister Yogi's tireless efforts in traversing the state like a well-oiled engine, tirelessly working in every district, she further underscored the futility of seeking appointments with him in Lucknow, suggesting instead to

meet him wherever he may be during that week. Regarding her first visit to Gorakhpur, Mrs. Sitharaman said, "First impression is the best impression and I found Gorakhpur more beautiful than I had ever imagined." All projects are guaranteed completion in Modi government. The Finance Minister said that the government under the leadership of PM Modi guarantees inauguration of all the projects whose foundation stone is laid. She mentioned four major projects of Eastern Uttar Pradesh to substantiate her point.

## Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman offers prayers at Gorakhnath temple



**Gorakhpur** The Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during her maiden visit to Gorakhpur also visited the globally renowned Gorakhnath Temple and offered her prayers. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath welcomed her on her visit and provided her a guided tour to the temple complex. Sitharaman visited the temple after participating in the inauguration ceremony of the Income Tax Department building. After the temple tour, the CM

Yogi, in his meeting room, provided detailed information to Nirmala Sitharaman about the Nath sect, the history of the Gorakhnath Temple, the Guru tradition, and shared insights about Mahant Digvijaynath and Mahant Avaidyanath. In the meeting room, Finance Minister Sitharaman also received the Matha Prasad of the temple. On this occasion, he also presented her with the Shri Ram Lalla Pran Pratishtha ceremony.

## BJP MLAs challenge suspension in Delhi high court

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

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

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

## Double-engine govt is committed to doubling income of farmers: CM

**Lucknow, Chief Minister** Yogi Adityanath has thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for increasing sugarcane's

Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) for the season 2024-25. Taking to social media platform X on Thursday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath wrote that the government is committed to doubling the income of farmers. In this regard, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Union Cabinet has decided to increase the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) for sugarcane by eight per cent, setting it at 340 rupees per quintal for the 2024-25 season. CM Yogi further wrote, "Thank you, Prime Minister Ji, for the commendable decision taken for the farmers' welfare."

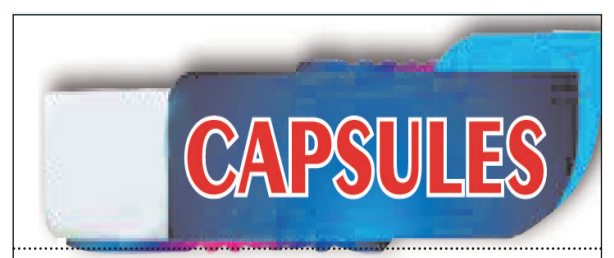
## Tamil Nadu man facing five revenge-murder cases nabbed while plotting 6th hit

**CHENNAI:** A 42-year-old man, who was arrested in connection with five murders and released on bail, was stopped in his tracks on Friday while planning his sixth hit. All his six targets, including the five victims, were named as accused in the murder of the man's elder brother in 2012. In the intervening 11 years, S Suresh Kumar of PV Kalathur in Chengalpet murdered all but one. Every time he got out on bail, he killed another suspected killer of his elder brother and returned to jail. Police said Suresh Kumar's brother S Vijayakumar, a village

panchayat president involved in the Palar sand mining issue with another rival gang from the locality, was murdered in 2012 on road by a gang comprising Kuppan, Duraidass, Chandru, Sekar, Nithyanandam and Venkatesan. In 2012, Kuppan was en route Chennai when Suresh Kumar blocked Kuppan's car with his gang and hacked him to death on road, said police. In 2014, Duraidass was murdered in Guindy. Later that year, Nithyanandam was murdered at P V Kalathur outside his house. In 2015,

Chandru was murdered in Chennai. In 2016, Sekar was murdered in broad daylight in Chengalpet district. The last of the gang, 'Bunk' Venkatesan, absconded, said police. Police arrested Suresh Kumar in connection with all the five murder cases, but he came out on bail and then went underground. Police said three non-bailable warrants had been issued against Suresh Kumar for his failure to attend court proceedings in the Arumbakkam murder case. Recently, police found Venkatesan was hiding in Namakkal and that Suresh Kumar was

also in the locality, plotting to murder him. A special team reached Namakkal and surrounded Suresh Kumar's hideout on Friday. They arrested him at gunpoint and where he was remanded in judicial custody. We also published the following articles recently: Businessman's brother held for plotting his murder Rakesh Arora conspired with Babu Sindhi to murder his brother, Ashok Arora, over a property dispute. The police are investigating the involvement of a Delhi-based builder and a local politician.



## Investment is the prerequisite for a developed country and state: CM Yogi



**Gorakhpur** Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said that investment is the prerequisite for a developed country and state, adding that industrial development is a natural outcome of good governance as well as prevalence of rule of law. Addressing a gathering at a function organized in Sector 13 of Gorakhpur Industrial Development Authority (GIDA) after gifting 20 projects worth Rs 1040 crore to the authority, Yogi said that the double engine government aims to build a 'developed India' under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The projects for GIDA include launch of GIDA's Kalesar Residential Township Scheme with an estimated income of Rs 650 crore, laying of foundation stone of SD International's plastic recycling and food packaging container unit with an investment of Rs 300 crore as well as inauguration/ laying of foundation stone of 18 development projects worth Rs 90 crores. CM Yogi also distributed enrollment certificates to five students of the Skill Training Center of National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT) on the occasion. He stated: "To fulfill this resolution of a developed India, Uttar Pradesh needs to be developed, and for this, Gorakhpur needs to be developed. Industrial investment is a prerequisite for fulfilling this resolution of a developed country, state, and district", he added. The Chief Minister added that the industrial development and creation of employment opportunities being witnessed in the state are the result of better law and order, good governance and election of good public representatives, emphasizing that, "When intentions are good, results are also good." Emphasizing that GIDA is touching new heights, he informed that the Gorakhpur Link Expressway project is expected to be completed soon, providing two routes to travel to Lucknow. He expressed the need for developing this region as an industrial cluster, highlighting the efforts made in recent years. He mentioned investments made in GIDA by companies such as Varun Beverages, Cayan Distilleries, CP Milk, Tatva Plastics, Central Warehousing Corporation, India Autowheels, Balaji Processors, Rungta Industries, Kapila Krishi Udyog, and Singh Paper Projects.