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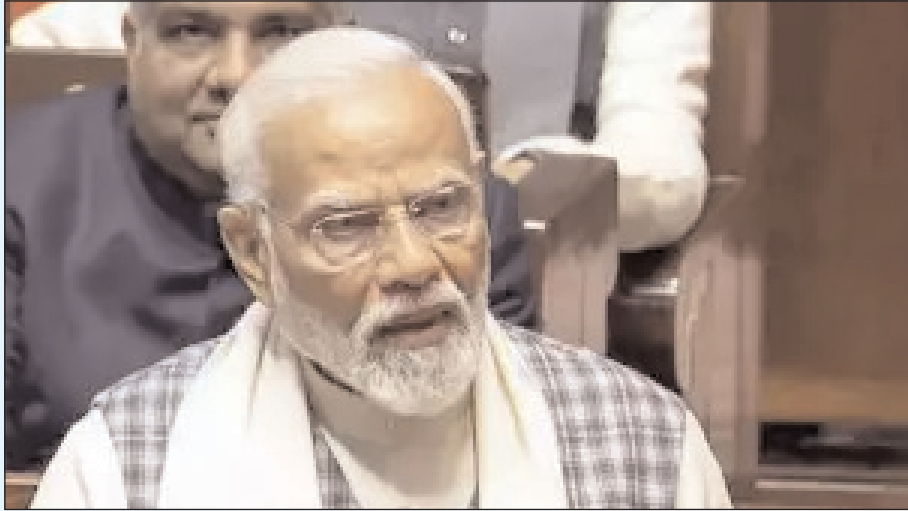
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UNIQUE GIFT OF KRIYAYOGA ASHRAM AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE TO GIVE IMPETUS TO WORLD BUILDING AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

Congress peddling narrative to create North-South divide: PM Modi

NEW DELHI: PM Modi on Wednesday tore into states such as Congress-governed Karnataka, which are questioning devolution formula and demanding a share of taxes in line with their contribution. This narrative is an attempt to create a North-South divide, he said. His comments came after Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah landed in Delhi for a dharna to highlight the Centre's alleged injustice in transfer of taxes. Karnataka is being backed by some opposition-governed states, such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala, which have never shied away from hitting out at the Centre over GST and resource transfer. "The way language is being spoken to break the country, these new narratives are being made for political gains. It is particularly distressing that such language is emerging from a national party," Modi said, blaming



Congress for what he called a divisive demand. "What will be the fate of the country and where is it going to end? Instead, strive to foster unity and solidarity," he said in Rajya Sabha while participating in a debate on motion of thanks to President's address. **Congress left PSUs sick, we nursed them back to health: PM Modi** **NEW DELHI:** PM Narendra Modi on Wednesday said his govt nursed public sector companies back to health after the UPA

had left them in shambles and their value in the stock market is soaring despite "falseness" being spread by Congress and its "commandos". "Congress said that we sold PSUs, destroyed them. Remember who destroyed BSNL and MTNL? What was that period when they were destroyed? Remember what was the state of affairs at HAL? People, who destroyed HAL, used to sit outside its gate and prepare the agenda for 2019 elections. Who destroyed Air

India, who brought it to that state? Congress party and UPA. They can't shy away from the 10 years when you were in power. The country fully knows that," Modi said while replying to the motion of thanks to the President's address in Rajya Sabha. He also accused Congress and other opposition parties of spreading rumours about LIC, in what was a reference to the fall in the public sector insurer's share price after the Hindenburg report on Adani group

Inflation in tolerance band, result of govt measures: FM

New Delhi: Retail inflation is stable and well within the central bank's tolerance band of 2-6% as a result of the Centre's efforts to rein in prices, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in Lok Sabha on Wednesday as she rejected the Opposition's criticism over the price situation. Responding to the Opposition's charge that inflation, poverty and unemployment continued to rise despite the government's claims of a booming economy,



Sitharaman, during a discussion on the Interim Budget 2024-25 in Lok Sabha, said retail inflation has declined from an average of 6.8% in April-December 2022 to 5.5% in the corresponding period of 2023. Retail inflation based on the Consumer Price

Index (CPI) stood at 5.7% in December 2023. She detailed the measures unleashed by govt to check volatility in prices of onions and said govt has progressively increased its buffer size from one lakh metric tonnes (LMT) in 2020-21 to 7 lakh tonnes in 2023-24.

She also said govt launched 'Bharat dal' to make pulses available at concessional rates across retail markets, and chana dal is now available at Rs 60 per kilo in a single pack and at Rs 55 per kilo for a 30kg pack. Lok Sabha on Wednesday approved the Rs 47.7 lakh crore Interim Budget with a voice vote. A budget of Rs 1.8 lakh crore for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir was approved and the Finance Bill was also cleared late evening, completing the budget exercise.

CDS Chief Chauhan asks industry to help boost defence space

NEW DELHI: All stakeholders in the defence space arena should work on bolstering India's counter-space capabilities, chief of defence staff General Anil Chauhan said on Wednesday, in remarks that come in the back-

drop of China rapidly developing and deploying potent anti-satellite (A-Sat) weapons. Indian armed forces will roughly spend over 25,000 crore in the next few years to meet its defence space requirements, ranging from

building a constellation of surveillance satellites to secure communications networks. "It is the right time for the private industry to utilise this opportunity. I think it is time to build a highly-capable atmanirbhar (self-sufficient) defence

space ecosystem," the CDS said, inaugurating the three-day 'DefSat' seminar and exhibition here. The industry should partner the armed forces in augmenting ISR (intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance).

India may host NSA-level Quad meeting later this month

NEW DELHI: India may host a meeting of Quad at the level of national security advisors on the margins of the Raisina Dialogue that will take place from February 21 to 23. Efforts are still on to finalise the meeting which, if it happens, will provide an early opportunity for the Quad countries — Australia, India, Japan and US — to reaffirm their support to cooperation on a range of issues, after the Quad summit couldn't take place last month because of President Joe Biden's unavailability. The summit will now be hosted by India towards the end of the year, after US elections. Quad foreign ministers had met on the sidelines of the Raisina Dialogue last year, while their Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov was still in Delhi. Lavrov has not yet been invited this year for the Dialogue, which is hosted by the ORF in partnership with India's foreign ministry, according to a source who spoke on condition of anonymity. Greek Kyriakos Mitsotakis is expected to be chief guest at the event. US NSA Jake Sullivan will be here for the conference including a meeting with his counterpart Ajit Doval in which they will undertake a comprehensive review of Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) under which two sides are looking to expand technology and defence industrial cooperation.

ED: AAP used bribes from DJB contract for polls; party says will sue

NEW DELHI: Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday claimed that a former chief engineer of Delhi Jal Board (DJB) gave contracts to an ineligible company in exchange for bribes which were shared with Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) functionaries to be used as the party's campaign fund. A day after searches were conducted on the prem-



ises of Bibhav Kumar, personal secretary of CM Arvind Kejriwal, and AAP treasurer N D Gupta, ED claimed that its probe into DJB had found that bribes were received by AAP functionaries and used by the party for elections. "Investigations and digital evidence show that Jagdish Kumar Arora (ex-chief engineer of DJB) passed on bribes (received from contractors) to various persons con-

nected with DJB, including persons connected with AAP. Bribe amounts were also passed on as election funds to AAP," ED said in a statement. The agency further said its probe found that the DJB contract was awarded at highly inflated rates so that bribes could be collected from the contractors from the inflated cost.

'Congress split Punjab, Bengal in the past. It's now driving north-south wedge'

NEW DELHI: BJP member Nishikant Dubey on Wednesday accused Congress of trying to create a north-south divide in the country. "Prime Minister Modi has been here for 10 years, you were in power for 70 years. When you say poverty is not getting eradicated, have you ever looked at yourself? Who is responsible for this?" Dubey asked while participating in the debate on the interim budget in the Lok Sabha. "Congress creat-



ed a licence, permit, quota raj... Only Congress-supported industrialists could manufacture cars, scooters, cement... From 2004 to 2014, they went into a loot raj

with 2G, 4G, coal scams... Since 2014, not just the Ram temple but Ram Rajya has been brought," said Dubey. On a day when Congress leaders from Karnataka, led by chief minister Siddaramaiah, staged a protest at Delhi's Jantar Mantar against the BJP-led Centre over "injustice" meted out to the southern state in the devolution of taxes, Dubey accused Congress of trying to create a rift between the north and the south.

Centre, states unite to push for sub-classification of SC quota

NEW DELHI: The Centre and state govts on Wednesday set aside their differences to unanimously tell Supreme Court that sub-classification of Scheduled Caste communities would enable needy and weakest groups to get a bigger share of reservation and prevent those who bet-



tered their social standing from cornering the lion's share of the quota. Attorney general, solicitor general Tushar Mehta, sen-

ior advocate Kapil Sibal and states represented by senior advocates sought review of the SC five-judge bench's E V Chinnaiah judgment, which in 2004 had ruled that all SC communities which suffered ostracisation, discrimination and humiliation for centuries represented a homogeneous

class, incapable of being sub-categorised. The show of unanimity stood out not just due to the backdrop of partisan feuds but also because, until recently, the political class had appeared wary of acknowledging the reality of all Scheduled Castes not being similar.

SC: Mere presence near crime scene will not attract murder charge

NEW DELHI: Granting relief to a man who was sentenced to life imprisonment along with three others in a murder case, Supreme Court has commuted his sentence to 10-year jail term after holding him guilty of culpable homicide and not murder. Setting aside orders passed by a trial court and Telangana

high court, a bench of Justices B R Gavai and P S Narasimha said, "In fact, both the courts have mechanically drawn an inference against A3 (accused number 3) under section 34 of the Act merely based on his presence near the scene of offence and his familial relations with the other accused."

After examining the statements of eye-witnesses, the court said it was not possible to contend that "A3 would have had the intention to commit the murder of the deceased" in light of statements of eye-witnesses coupled with the post-mortem report and he could not be convicted under section 302 IPC.

Supreme Court ticks off NGT for ex parte orders, damages of crores

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court has pulled up the National Green Tribunal (NGT) for passing orders without giving a hearing to affected parties and set aside one of its ex parte orders. "National Green Tribunal's recurrent engagement in unilateral decision making, provisioning ex post facto review hearing and routinely dismissing it has regrettably become a prevailing norm. In its zealous quest for justice, the tribunal must tread carefully to avoid the oversight of propriety. The practice of ex parte orders and the imposition of damages amounting to crores of rupees have proven to be a counterproductive force in the broader mission of environmental safeguarding.

'Only asked for three places': Yogi makes Kashi, Mathura pitch

LUCKNOW: Krishna asked for five villages to be given to the Pandavas, but Hindus seek just three centres of faith linked to three deities, CM Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday as Kashi, Mathura and mythology resonated in the UP assembly. Yogi's statement is the first known instance of a front-ranking BJP functionary publicly endorsing the demand for temples at disputed sites in Mathura and Varanasi. The CM also quoted from Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's poem 'Krishna Ki Chetavani', part of the book 'Rashmirathi', to buttress his point days after a Varanasi court allowed the worship of Shringar Gauri and other Hindu deities to resume in the southern cellar of Gyanvani Masjid. ASI said this



week that the Keshavdev temple in Mathura was demolished for the construction of a mosque. "Injustice was done to Ayodhya. When I talk about injustice, we remember something that happened 5,000 years ago... For past many years, (Hindu) society has been talking about only three places. These are special places where our gods were reincarnated themselves," Yogi said. Invoking the episode from Mahabharat where Duryodhana's stubborn refusal to cede five villages to the Pandavas led to war, the CM said.

Paytm shares rally 10% as co sticks to 'no probe' claim

Mumbai: Shares of One97 Communications, Paytm's parent, rallied for the second day on Wednesday, with shares hitting the 10% upper circuit. The shares gained in hopes that services as a third-party UPI app would continue even if the restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL) were to be sustained. The company's shares closed 10% higher at Rs 497 and rose 3% on Tuesday.

Perform transplant first, charge patient later, panel tells hospital

MUMBAI: Patients awaiting an organ transplant for years often turn down the chance when a donor finally becomes available, all because of insufficient funds on the very day the organ becomes available. Now for the first time, the Zonal Transplant Coordination Committee (ZTCC), which distributes cadaver organs, has persuaded Jaslok Hospital, Pedder Road, to proceed with the kidney transplantation of a 12-year-old boy, urging it to perform the surgery first and raise the funds from various sources later. The young recipient, the son of a mechanic who was not prepared with the requisite funds, would have been passed up for another patient on the wait-list if not for the ZTCC intervention. The ZTCC now intends to encourage more hospitals to adopt a similar approach, ensuring that individu-



als in need of organs are not overlooked solely due to financial constraints. The cost of a transplant can range from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 30 lakh, depending on the organ involved and the centre where the surgery is being performed. "This issue is prevalent nationwide, where patients frequently find themselves unprepared financially on the day when an organ becomes suddenly available," S K Mathur, president, ZTCC, said. In situations where funds are anticipated from trusts or government schemes, hospitals can be confident that the necessary finances will eventually materialise. In the state, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule Jan

Arogya Yojana (MJP-JAY) pays Rs 2.5 lakh for kidney transplants. The new version of scheme will increase it to Rs 4 lakh. The CM's Relief Fund also supports transplant patients. Mathur said Jaslok Hospital cooperated in the case of the 12-year-old boy, Aditya Chaudhary, and made the surgery possible. Recipients may face wait times ranging from months to eight or nine years and often receive short notice, sometimes just hours, to come for the transplant once an organ becomes available. Chaudhary, who had been waiting for a kidney for months, suddenly found a rare paediatric donor last week.

ED attaches JD(U) MLC's properties worth 26 crore

ED on Tuesday said it has attached two immovable assets worth over Rs 26.1 crore of JD(U) MLC Radha Charan Sah, as part of its probe of money laundering linked to in alleged illegal sand mining in the state, reports Madan Kumar. The case stems from 19 FIRs filed by Bihar police under various IPC sections. "Probe showed illegal sale of sand and its mining was controlled by a syndicate," it said. Sah, being a syndicate member, generated huge proceeds of crime through Broadsons... which he used to acquire the properties. The case stems from a total of 19 FIRs regis-



tered by state police under various IPC sections and the Bihar Mineral (Concession, Prevention of Illegal Mining, Transportation and Storage) Rules, 2019 against Broadsons Commodities Pvt Ltd and others.

HC refuses to quash '22 case, Sidda fined 10k

BENGALURU: In a major setback for Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah, Karnataka high court on Tuesday refused to quash proceedings against him and his senior cabinet colleagues Ramalinga Reddy and MB Patil, Randeep Surjewala,



Congress general secretary in charge of Karnataka, and KPCC

working president Saleem Ahmed in a case of unlawful assembly registered against them. HC also slapped Rs 10,000 fine each. The case relates to a protest march in the city that Congress functionaries had participated in on Aug 14, 2022.

MGNREGS funds: ED searches WB officials' homes, TMC cries foul



KOLKATA: ED officials knocked on the doors of govt officials and office-bearers of zila parishads and panchayats in four districts of Bengal on Tuesday and seized what it said were incriminating documents linking some of them to anomalies in MGNREGS payments and issuance of fake job cards. The coordinated search of homes across six locations included an embarrassing moment for the agency when a team deputed to search the premises of a Hooghly panchayat functionary identified as Sandip Sadhukhan mistakenly raided the Chinsurah home of a namesake. CM Mamata Banerjee's TMC questioned the "pre-poll ED raids", saying it was too much of a coincidence that the crackdown followed opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari's "action-reaction" remark after meeting Union home minister Amit Shah and finance minister Nirmla Sitharaman.

Odisha minor tried as adult, gets 20 yrs jail

BHUBANESHWAR: An Odisha children's court on Tuesday sentenced a 17-year-old minor to 20 years of jail after trying him as an adult under the amended Juvenile Justice Act of 2015 for alleged rape and murder of a five-year-old in Nayagarh district in 2020, re-



This is the first instance in Odisha of a minor being tried and found guilty under the amended law. The 2015 amendment empowers juvenile justice boards to treat as adults those minors who are accused of heinous crimes. It came about after the 2012 Nirbhaya case where one of the suspects was a juvenile and

escaped the gallows. In Odisha, the teenager was a neighbour of the deceased and his crime had triggered outrage across the state. The child went missing while playing outside her house on July 14, 2020. Her skeletal remains were found near a pond 500 metres from her home nine days later. As the death mystery deep-

ened a nd Nayagarh police failed to unravel the truth, her parents attempted self-immolation outside the assembly in November that year, drawing the govt's attention. Four days later, the govt constituted an (SIT) led by an ADG, Arun Bothra, to probe the case under the supervision of the Orissa high court. The

minor was detained in December 2020.

"We placed adequate evidence, backed by scientific and forensic investigations, against the accused. The murder motive was sexual assault. We had found semen stains on the girl's dress," an SIT officer said. According to public prosecutor Chittaranjan Kanungo, 31 witnesses were examined during the trial. "Had the accused not been a minor, he would have been sentenced to life imprisonment or capital punishment," Kanungo said. Defence lawyer Bijay Mishra said he would challenge the verdict in the high court.

HC confirms bail granted to Kochhar couple last Jan

Mumbai: Bombay high court on Tuesday confirmed an interim bail granted last Jan to Chanda Kochhar, former CEO and MD of ICICI Bank, and her businessman husband Deepak Kochhar. Last Jan, in a major interim relief to the couple, HC had held as "unacceptable" their Dec 23, 2022, arrest by Central Bureau of Investigation in an alleged corruption case over high value loans, and had directed their release on cash bail of Rs 1 lakh each. The final reasoned order pronounced on Tuesday by a division



bench of Justices Anuja Prabhudessai and NR Borkar will be made available later. Stating that the grounds for arrest flouted criminal procedural law, an HC bench of Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Prithviraj Chavan had last Jan, in the interim relief to the couple, said:

"Courts have time and again reiterated the role of courts in protecting personal liberty and ensuring that investigations are not used as a tool of harassment." CBI's reasons for arrest are "casual, mechanical, perfunctory, clearly without application of mind," the interim order had

said. CBI arrested the Kochhars based on a Jan 2019 FIR about alleged offences of corruption, cheating and causing loss to ICICI Bank by sanctioning Rs 3,200 crore loans to the Videocon group when she was at the helm. Last month, Justice Prabhudessai-led bench had closed for orders the petition filed by the Kochhars for quashing of their arrest. The Kochhars, represented by senior counsel Amit Desai, argued that the arrest was illegal as the offences alleged were punishable by jail time of less than 7 years.

Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra enters Odisha

BIRMITPUR: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra entered Odisha on Tuesday after Jharkhand. The Yatra was accorded with a grand welcome in Biramitrapur, a small industrial town in Sundergarh district. On this occasion, Jharkhand Congress President Rajesh Thakur handed over the national flag to Odisha Congress President Sarat Patnaik. Biramitrapur was decked up with banners, cut-outs and hoardings of Gandhi before the yatra entered the town. "We have taken up the flag of justice to fight injustice. Together we have decided that we will keep moving forward until we get our right to justice. Many thanks to the people of Odisha for the enthusiastic welcome," the Bharat Jodo Nyay



Yatra's handle posted on X. Although the Biramitrapur assembly seat is now represented by the BJP, it had earlier elected Congress and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha candidates. The Yatra will be in Sundergarh district, including Rourkela City, Congress General Secretary of Communication Jairam Ramesh said. "Today the Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra bid goodbye to Phase I of its Jharkhand leg. We will return to the State for Phase II on 14th

and 15th February. We'll be setting up camp in Rampal, Odisha tonight. Tomorrow, the Yatra will be in Sundargarh district, including Rourkela City, land of historic locations associated with India's industrialisation that began in the 1950s," he said. He further said that on February 8, the Yatra will go through Jharsuguda district before entering Chhattisgarh and setting up camp in Darramuda, Raigarh District.

Indian visitors to see maximum rise from 2019 levels by 2027: US commerce department

NEW DELHI: Uncle Sam expects the maximum increase in visitors (over pre-Covid 2019 levels) from India over the next four years. The US commerce department Monday released its official forecast of international visitation to the country — 7.7 crore in 2024, up 15.4% 2023, and reaching 8.5 crore in 2025, surpassing pre-pandemic 2019 visitation of 7.9 crore. While the average overall visitation from all foreign countries is expected to be 115% of 2019 levels in 2027, the increase for India is the highest among the top 20 source countries at 126% over 2019 levels. The forecast for 2023-2025 shows India



reaching the highest share of 2019 levels for overseas countries (that does not include Canada and Mexico which share a land border with the US). US commerce department's International Trade Administration (ITA) data shows 14.7 lakh Indian visited the country in 2019. This number then fell to 3.4 lakh in 2020 and then marginally rose to 4.3 lakh in 2021 before reaching 12.5 lakh in 2022 (actual numbers). While the actual number for 2023 are awaited, ITA

forecast shows Indian visitors touching 14.2 lakh, 15.6 lakh, 16.3 lakh, 17.3 lakh and 18.6 lakh in 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026 and 2027, respectively. In comparison with 2019 visitation, the number of expected visitors from India in 2027 is the highest at 126%. The US Embassy in India in 2023 had processed the highest ever number of visa applications in a year at 14 lakh.

And the increased staffing along with other innovative means used to cut the

backlog has led visitor visa appointment wait times here dropping by 75% — from a 2022 high of an average of 1,000 days to 250 days last year, the US embassy in New Delhi had recently said in a statement.

"Demand across all visa classes was unprecedented, with a 60% increase in applications compared to 2022. Indians now represent one out of every 10 US visa applicants around the world.

Visitor visas (B1/B2) have rebounded to represent the second highest number of applications in the US mission's history — over 700,000," the embassy statement had said.

Suspicious boat found near Mumbai coast, police launch probe

MUMBAI: Mumbai police have launched a probe after a fishing boat was suspiciously found roaming near the city's coast area on Tuesday, officials said. According to police, a suspicious boat named "Abdullah Sharif" was found roaming near the Gateway of India. The boat had three people on board, all of them hailing from Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari, and they are being questioned. However, for now, nothing suspicious has been found from the suspects. "The boat has arrived from Kuwait and has been impounded. The three people are being questioned. Colaba Police is present at the spot," officials said. Further investigation is underway, they added.

'Chalo Delhi': Karnataka ministers, Congress MLAs protest at Jantar Mantar

NEW DELHI: The Karnataka Congress legislators on Wednesday staged a protest in New Delhi against the "financial injustice" meted out to the state in the last five years.

The protest by all Congress legislators and MPs from the state, including ministers that comes ahead of the ensuing Lok Sabha polls would demand Centre set right the losses allegedly incurred by the Karnataka to the tune of Rs 1.87 lakh crore, during five years under the 15th finance commission. "Karnataka is number two as far as tax collection is concerned, Maharashtra is number one. As a matter of fact, this year Karnataka is contributing more than Rs 4.30 lakh crores as tax. If we collect Rs 100 as tax and give it to the government of India, we are only getting Rs 12-13 back, that is our share," Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah said, while addressing the demonstrators at Jantar Mantar. When ques-



tioned about the timing of the protest, with the 15th finance commission tenure coming to an end and demand for increased devolution to Karnataka may not find any voice, DK Shivakumar had said the intent of the protest was to ensure that Delhi takes note of the injustice and that it has the mandate to do so. Amidst a proposal within the ruling Congress in Karnataka suggesting that Siddaramaiah spearhead the formation of a forum comprising southern states to ensure fair distribution of resources from the Centre, including tax devolution from the divisible pool, a protest

in Delhi has been organized. Siddaramaiah has repeatedly criticized the central government for what he alleges as "stepmotherly" treatment towards Karnataka and disrespect towards the federal structure. He has targeted BJP leaders in the state and their past administration for not addressing the injustices caused by the Centre's policies. In response, BJP leaders, including Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, have vehemently refuted allegations that the Centre is withholding funds intended for non-BJP governed states like Karnataka.

As Pak, China fly ahead, India guns for 12 more 'eyes in sky'

NEW DELHI: India is now stepping on the gas to develop and induct advanced indigenous airborne early-warning and control (AEW&C) aircraft or "eyes in the sky", which will boost surveillance and detection capabilities along the China and Pakistan borders as well as help direct friendly fighters during air combat with enemy jets. The DRDO-IAF combine is actively pushing ahead with programmes to develop six Mark-1A as well as six Mark-2 versions of the Netra AEW&C aircraft, three of which were earlier built and inducted from February 2017 onwards. Sources said defence



ministry will next week take up the acceptance of necessity (AoN) for the six Mark-1A aircraft, which will entail mounting active electronically scanned array antenna-based radars, electronic and signal intelligence systems on Brazilian Embraer jets, at a cost of around Rs 9,000 crore. "These six AEW&C aircraft will be like the first three Embraer-145 jet-based Netra, which have

240-degree radar coverage. But there will be better software and more advanced technologies like new gallium nitride-based TR (transmit/receive) modules for the radars," a source said. The developmental work on the six Mark-2 aircraft, with bigger and more capable versions of the AEW&C radars and sensors to be mounted on second-hand Airbus-321.

ED raids multiple locations linked to Harak Singh Rawat

NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday conducted searches against Congress leader and former minister Harak Singh Rawat in connection with forest scam case. The searches took place at various loca-

tions in Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Chandigarh. During his time as the state forest minister in the BJP government, Rawat and some of his departmental officers faced serious allegations regarding illegal tree cutting and construction in the Pakhro range of

Corbett Park under the Tiger Safari Project. The Forest Survey of India (FSI) reported that over 6,000 trees were illegally cut in the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) for the Pakhru tiger safari, despite only 163 trees being permitted.

Aurangzeb demolished temple at site of Mathura's Krishna Janmabhoomi complex: ASI

AGRA: In response to an RTI query, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has disclosed information based on historical records of a 1920 gazette about Mathura's Krishna Janmabhoomi temple complex. Attaching an excerpt from the Nov 1920 gazette, the ASI stated in its response: "Portions of Katra mound which are not in the possession of nazul tenants on which formerly stood a temple of Keshavdev which was dismantled and the site utilised for the mosque of Aurangzeb..."

The RTI was filed by Ajay Pratap Singh, a resident of Mainpuri in UP, and the reply came from the office of superintending archaeologist of ASI, Agra circle. Singh had sought specific information about "dismantling" of Keshavdev temple — claimed to be part of Krishna Janmabhoomi temple complex. The RTI reply, while not specifically mentioning the words "Krishna Janmabhoomi," confirmed the demolition of the former temple of Keshavdev at the disputed site by the Mughal emperor. Advocate Mahendra Pratap Singh, president of Shri Krishna Janmabhoomi Mukti Nyas, said that "he will place the key piece of evidence before Allahabad HC and SC". "On basis of historical evidence, we had in our petition mentioned that Aurangzeb issued a decree in 1670 CE to demolish the temple. Following that, Shahi Idgah Mosque was built there. Now ASI in reply to the RTI query has attested the information. We'll put forward ASI reply in HC during the Feb 22 hearing," he said.

3 Delhi men including teenager receive hands from brain dead donors

NEW DELHI: Three patients including a teenager successfully underwent hand transplantation surgeries including two bilateral in two different hospitals — Sir Ganga Ram hospital in Delhi and Amrita hospital in Faridabad after the families of brain dead patients agreed to donate the hands along with other organs of their loved ones.

All patients are doing well and their hands will be fully functional within 6 months to one



year, said doctors. According to doctors at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, a 45-year-old man, a resident of Nangloi, who had lost both his hands at the level of elbow after a tragic train accident in Oct 2020, got a new life

after receiving hands from brain dead Meena Mehta (60). The family of Mehta, a retired vice principal of New Greenfield School, Kalkaji, agreed to donate her organs including her hands after she was declared

brain dead on Jan 19. Talking to TOI, Dr Nikhil J h u n j h u n w a l a , Associate Consultant, Hand and Microsurgeon, Dept of Plastic surgery, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital said, "since the blood group of the recipient and the brain dead donor were the same and immunological crossmatch negative, the bilateral hand transplantation was performed," he said, adding that the surgery lasted for 12 hours by a team of doctors.

A first: Nine seats for every extra seat, India tells Kuwait as it seeks more bilaterals

NEW DELHI: In a first for India, the country has sought nine additional seats for every extra seat given to Kuwait under an enhancement of existing bilaterals or flying rights sought by it. India, which is seeking to develop its own hubs as desi carriers -- Air India, IndiGo and others like Akasa -- grow in heft, has proposed the 9:1 ratio as Kuwaiti carriers get nine points of call (cities they fly to) in India, our airlines fly to only Kuwait City there. "So far flying rights' enhancement have



always been discussed on a bilateral or 1:1 basis. This is the first time that the aviation ministry has proposed a ratio for the same to a foreign country seeking more flying rights with India," said highly placed sources. Under existing bilater-

als, designated airlines of Kuwait and India can operate about 12,000 seats per week each. "These bilaterals have not been hiked for almost a decade. Kuwait sought about an additional 7,000 seats," said people in the know.

With India is developing its own mega hubs and airlines, it is not keen on giving more seats to nearby hubs abroad that have historically been used by passengers mainly to fly between India and the rest of the world via them on their home airlines.

Like Emirates at Dubai, Etihad at Abu Dhabi, Qatar Airways at Doha and Singapore Airlines at Changi. The bilateral policy of Modi government in the last 10 years has kept the interests of Indian airlines and hubs first.

Navya Ayodhya Ramayana's essence in a futuristic township

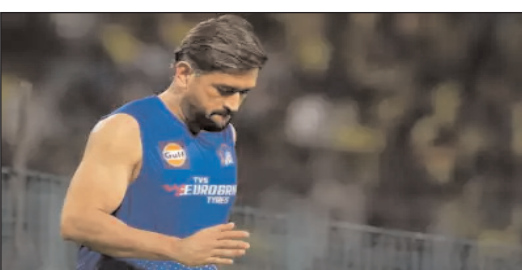
While the makeover of Ayodhya has enamoured people from all over the world with its vibrance and grace, its extension as Navya Ayodhya is also attracting attention with its vision that has integrated modern living with wisdom from the Ramayana, reports Shailvee Sharda. The compendium of shlokas compiled in sarga-5 of the Valmiki Ramayana's Bal Kand gives a glimpse of the city of Ayodhya, as described by King Dashrath. "A deeper look and contemplation of that chapter compels one to conclude that modern day benchmarks of quality of life and sustainable co-existence were a reality of the city. One can also gather that the ecosystem of Ayodhyapuri must have served as the basis for evolution of what the world knows as 'Ram Rajya'," remarks Ranvir Prasad, secretary, UP housing and urban planning department, while setting the context of



Navya Ayodhya — the name given to Ayodhya's Green Field Township (GFT). Stating that Navya Ayodhya is emerging as a natural extension of the original town in letter and spirit, Prasad says: "Once in place, Navya Ayodhya would serve as a reference point for those willing to achieve the benchmark of sustainable living." TOI delves deeper into the defining thought: Balancing elements of nature: Descriptions in the Ramayana indicate that a fine balance of all the five elements of life existed in Ayodhya. Embracing the thought as a guiding principle, the brains behind

Navya Ayodhya decided to strike a balance between earth, air, water, fire, and space elements. For instance, greenery has been given significant importance while conceptualizing the design. About 24% of the area in the city has been set aside for green and blue infrastructure which is to be achieved by development of natural water bodies, orchards and parks, landscaping, and so on. Notably, several incidents in the Ramayana are set in forests. It has a rich description of different types of forests — alpine, deciduous, tropical, semi-tropical, rain forest.

Supreme Court stays 15-day jail to ex-IPS in contempt case filed by Dhoni



NEW DELHI: Supreme Court on Monday stayed the order of Madras high court which had convicted and sentenced retired IPS officer Sampath Kumar to 15 days in prison for contempt of court on a petition moved by former Indian cricket captain M S Dhoni. Agreeing to hear the ex-IPS officer's appeal, a bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan issued notice to Dhoni on his petition against the HC order. The HC sentenced him to fifteen days of imprisonment in December. Dhoni had filed the contempt petition against him for making contemptuous remarks against the Supreme Court. The officer had filed a written submission on a defamation case filed by Dhoni against him in which he had said that "SC deviated its focus on the rule of law and shelved the deposition of the Justice Mudgal Committee (constituted to probe 2013 match-fixing allegations) and kept it in a sealed cover for reasons he failed to comprehend". The cricketer thereafter brought the controversial statement before the high court in contempt proceedings.

Amidst diplomatic row, China displaces India as largest tourism market for Maldives

MALE: Amidst a diplomatic row between the Maldives and India, Chinese tourists have overtaken Indian holidaymakers visiting the archipelago nation, according to official figures released here on Monday. According to official statistics from the Maldivian Ministry of Tourism, as of February 4, China, with 23,972 tourists occupied the number one slot (11.2 per cent market share in 2024); it was on the number three spot in 2023. India, which was on the number 1 slot in 2023, has slipped down to 5th position as of Sunday with 16,536 tourists (7.7 per cent market share in 2024) coming to this island nation. The development could be a fallout of a full-blown backlash directed at the Maldives following the derogatory remarks against India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on social media by three Maldivian ministers after Modi posted photos and video on X of his visit to the pristine Lakshadweep Islands on India's west coast earlier in January. Soon after the remarks against Modi went viral, hundreds of social media users, including celebrities, protested with calls.

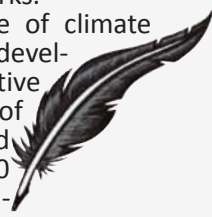
Should IAS, IPS officers' kids get quotas, asks judge

Should IAS, IPS officers' kids get quotas, asks judge Undeterred by the Chinnaiya ruling, Congress government in Punjab led by Amarinder Singh had identified Balmikis and Mazhabis (Sikhs) as Maha Dalits and earmarked 50% of the 15% quota govt jobs for which recruitments were done as per Punjab Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (Reservation in Service) Act, 2006. Punjab and Haryana high court had struck it down and the state government challenged it in the apex court. Politicians have flinched from upsetting the status quo; just as in the case of OBC quotas, for the fear of attracting the wrath of those who have profited the most from it. The Punjab government under Amarinder Singh deviated from the pattern and AAP government took up from where it had left off. Opening the debate before a bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices B R Gavai, Vikram Nath, Bela M Trivedi, Pankaj Mithal, Manoj Misra and Satish Chandra Misra, Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh said the most backward among backward class communities must be identified and provided with the means to make them equal in terms of availing opportunities in employment. Senior advocate Nidhesh Gupta said SCs constitute 33% of Punjab's population and among them, Balmikis (Churas and Bhangis) and Mazhabis (Sikhs) constitute 29%. He said 43% of Scheduled Caste communities occupy 81% of SC posts in the state govt. The advocate general said, "A member of the backward class securing 56% would have to be preferred over a forward class person securing 99% in the recruitment examination as the latter had access to aeroplanes and all amenities in life, whereas the backward class person had struggle.

Editorial

Beyond trade and technology, it's time US got over 'my terrorists vs yours' dictum

Relationships are built on trust, mutual respect, mutual interests, and regard for mutual sensitivities. India and the US have often been defined as natural partners, given the fact that both are proud of their democratic values, institutions, and rule of law. India is the largest democracy, and the USA is the greatest one. Yet both had to traverse different global and ideological trajectories to align their interests and convergences while overcoming or even maintaining some of their fundamental divergences on global issues to become Global Comprehensive Strategic partners over time. The fact that the geopolitical and geoeconomic pivot has moved towards the South, and India as a major power and pole in that dynamic, has helped enrich the ties in a more strategic manner. India and the US are both together in their efforts to ensure a rule-based international order in the maritime domain, as well as in making multilateral organisations more topical and relevant to the 21st century, where India's role is seen as critical. The world looks at India as an important pillar of stability. A friend who can be trusted, a partner who believes in people-centric development, a voice that believes in global good, a voice of the Global South, an engine of growth in the global economy, a technology hub for finding solutions, a powerhouse of talented youth, and a democracy that delivers...said PM Modi while addressing the 10th Vibrant Gujarat Summit. The US recognises this strength of India and has worked through institutionalised mechanisms to support and cooperate with New Delhi on several landmark initiatives. No wonder the US Ambassador to India, Garcetti, recalled that President Biden had told him that India was the most important country in the world. During the prominent state visit by PM Modi in June 2023, President Biden himself reiterated that his country's partnership with India is 'the most consequential in the world'. There is a bipartisan consensus in the US about India's importance and benign leadership, as the interpersonal relations between the leaders across the political spectrum remain steadfast. They meet quite frequently at the G7, QUAD, Democracy Summit, G20, and so on, apart from bilateral formats. Both have tremendous convergences and concerns with regard to global challenges, even though their approaches might differ sometimes. This is more so as the Sino-US geopolitical and geoeconomic competition intensifies with the fractured global order, and ipso facto, this makes India a strategic pivot, which is following a conscious and national interest-driven yet principled policy of multi-alignments and strategic autonomy in her international discourse. India's unique and successful presidency of the G20, when President Biden visited New Delhi and supported Indian initiatives, is a testament to that. More importantly, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit, the US and India, along with other partners, launched a critical and mutually beneficial project, India-Europe-Middle East Economic Connectivity (IMEEC), covering geographies of mutual interest, which is said to be a game-changer once completed. Both also work closely in the IUSU (India, the US, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) and I2U2 (India, the UAE, Israel, and the USA) matrix, which have enabled India's regional and sub-regional approach to its extended neighbourhood. Likewise, both countries also work in trilateral formats in Africa and Southeast Asia, as well as even in South Asia, through the Blue Dot Network and other frameworks. On the existential challenge of climate change, both countries have developed a sustainable collaborative matrix within the context of the 'US-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership' across mitigation, adaptable, and renewable energy and technologies.



Staking Maldives, looking Lakshadweep: Why India needs the neighbourhood

In what must be a unique phenomenon for any country, the Maldives periodically chooses between two of the largest contestants on earth in a national election. The individual candidates may go by any other name but beyond the venter, the influencer emerges from among the behemoths: India or China. Over successive polls, power has changed hands with such metronomic fidelity that the losing candidate bides time to turn the tables by the next election. When President Mohammed Muizzu seized power in Male, shocking

Ibrahim Solih, it was known that the incumbent would lean towards China. With his 'India Out' election campaign, Muizzu hoped to get closer to China. In Muizzu's early days, with Beijing promising increased infra investments, there was an eagerness to cosy up. This wasn't unusual since past Male governments had sided with either of the two powers. But this time, a fine balance was sacrificed in favour of brazenness and antipathy towards an old friend. Maldives' Deputy Ministers Malsha Shareef, Mariyam Shiuna and Abdulla Mahzoom

Majid threw the gauntlet by ridiculing India's Prime Minister in an unacceptable manner and rousing anti-India sentiments. The improper comments upset Indian citizens whose anger virtually scorched the digital space. The Maldives government acted in time and suspended the deputy ministers but the damage had been done. The fact that junior ministers could actually whip up a frenzy and had the agency to drive a wedge in the India-Maldives equation was worrisome. Conversely, it also meant that any traveling lowball could

catch India's heels. Such is the vulnerability. Does a collective national outburst to any comments, even excessive ones, make India too predictable? Does it hurt India's journey to becoming a bigger force in the region? The rivalry in the region between India and China has turned into a surrogate one. The scrimmage in the Himalayas is likely to be of contained tactical importance, since neither can make headway in the mountains. However, when dimensions of conflict expand to include the oceans and states that dot them.

Temple entry ban is not on non-Hindus but non-respectful



Earlier this month the Madras High Court directed the state government's Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) department to install boards in Palani Dhandayuthapani Swamy Temple (and all other Hindu temples), stating that non-Hindus are not permitted beyond the Kodimaram (flagstaff). This created an impression that hordes of 'non-Hindus' would be turned away from temples. But it appears to be much ado about nothing. Because the 'ban' is not a blanket one: the order also says if a non-Hindu wants to "visit a particular deity in a temple", the person has to give an undertaking to the temple authorities that he/she has faith in the deity, and would "follow the practices of Hinduism, and of the temple." She would then be allowed to have a darshan of the deity temple. This seems a valid caveat. Who would want to visit a functioning temple but refuse to abide by and respect its customs? How many obstinate non-Hindus may potentially be refused entry by this verdict? Only 2.8 million Indians or 0.27 per cent of the 1.2 billion totted up in the 2011 census did not state a religion. Some 79.8 per cent or 966 million were Hindus, which surely crossed 1 billion in the 14 years since then. Of

the remaining 19 per cent non-Hindus, how many head to temples is moot. Also unclear is how many such atheists are hardcore enough to refuse to make even a token declaration of faith.

Vidyasagar, Nara and Rama Before the pandemic skewed foreign tourist inflows, India got around 11 million annuals, including desis holding other passports. But the number of Indians who visited pilgrimage places within the country in 2022 stood at a whopping 1.43 billion, which means they travelled to several such destinations in a year, accounting for the largest segment of domestic tourism. And according to Statista, this faith-based tourism in India generated US\$902 million in 2022. So, in addition to local Hindus frequenting nearby temples, the chances are that tourists visiting them from elsewhere in India are mostly of the same faith too. And though customs and practices do differ from place to place and even

temple to temple, there are some universally followed principles. The high court was right to point out that reasonable restrictions for conduct to ensure respect are more conducive to peaceful inter-community relations than a free-for-all.

As the case in question arose amid reports of "non-Hindus" using a certain Tamil Nadu temple's premises as picnic spots—and eating non-vegetarian food there—rather than being mindful of the sanctity of the place, the court's caution is timely. Other incidents of "non-Hindus" bringing their "holy book" to temples and attempting to conduct their religious practices within their precincts were also mentioned in the court's judgment and probably prompted the final order. In fact, the High Court aptly pointed out that if a non-Hindu who declines to follow customs is allowed inside the temple, it would affect the sentiments of the large number of

Hindus there who practice the faith. And that in turn would affect the religious right of those Hindus guaranteed under the Constitution. The 'secular' Tamil Nadu government was also reminded that its HR & CE Department is mandated to protect the Hindu religion, its temples, customs and practices. The plea that "Non-Hindus not allowed" boards hurt the religious sentiments of those who would like to visit the temple did not stand to reason either. Given that exceptions will be made for those who sign an undertaking, the court rightly averred that if a non-Hindu is denied entry because he does not have faith and declines to follow customs, "there is no question of hurting his sentiment." If there is no reverence for the deity, denial will hurt egos, not sentiments. Non-Muslims are not allowed inside Mecca much less the Kaaba itself. There has been no protest about hurt sentiments on that count from visitors to Saudi Arabia who are not of the Islamic faith. Many Orthodox churches do not allow lay people, especially women, into the sanctum sanctorum, the equivalent of the garbha griha of temples. While many formerly prohibited places of Abrahamic faiths are now accessible, respect is a reasonable precondition for entry. Ignorant Indians could, of course, pre-

sume important Hindu temples, especially in south India, are actually picnic spots as these are managed by respective state governments by virtue of controlling their endowments or funds through a series of legislations. Some state governments are deliberately lax about ensuring the decorum of the temples under their charge as the primary interest is controlling the use of the money collected in the hundi, so picnics are possible. Curiously, government control of places of worship applies only to temples, not places of worship of any other religion, no matter how prominent and wealthy those may be. Corruption is also rife among government employees controlling the temples. How states and centre are involved in religious matters—financial administration of temples cannot be wholly secular—given the separation of powers principle is strange too. That, however, is a separate debate. Why anyone would think that a functioning temple is an appropriate place for a picnic is hard to understand, although the Church of England has resorted to even parties inside some cathedrals in the hope that people drawn there by the food, alcohol and pop music would be captivated enough to come back to the Church, literally and figuratively.

What Satendra Siwal spying case tells India about ISI's game

An Indian named Satendra Siwal, who is a 28-year-old security official, has been caught spying for Pakistan. Siwal was posted at the Indian mission in Moscow. He is said to have taken money from an Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) handler to steal confidential documents and leak them to Pakistan. Though shocking, it is hardly surprising. He is not the first Pakistani spy caught by India, and he won't be the last. Since independence, both India and Pakistan have spied on each other. There's only one rule in this game: don't get caught. When you do, all bets are off. The ISI is a key intelligence agency in Pakistan. The ISI handlers use money and honeytraps for recruitment. India to

replace military personnel in 3 aviation platforms in Maldives by May 10. Earlier, such operations were limited to India's High Commission in Pakistan. But now, they're being extended to Indian missions in friendly countries. All they have to do is spot a vulnerability. In this case, it was money. Satyendra Siwal hails from the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh; three years ago, he was posted to Moscow. The appointment was done by India's Ministry of External Affairs. The ministry runs a bureau of security, which recruits security assistants. Usually, they come from the Indian Police Force—constables and head constables—and are chosen to serve at Indian missions abroad to look

after the security of the mission. The tenure is usually three years for this deputation. Out of which, an officer must spend at least two years overseas. So in 2021, Satyendra Siwal was sent to Moscow on deputation as a security assistant. It's not clear when the ISI turned to him. But recently, he came on the radar of Indian security agencies. They got intelligence that Satyendra Siwal was a spy. They suspected that he was passing sensitive information to an ISI handler. The information was linked to India's defence and foreign ministries and also to India's military establishment. The charge is that he sold India's secrets to Pakistan and that he was in touch with a female ISI handler.

Shades of surrealism: Exploring Pakistan's electoral quandary

An air of the surreal dominates the discourse in Pakistan's 8 February 2024 elections. The campaign has been lacklustre, with the absence of a level playing field and expectations of a predetermined outcome, favouring a weak Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N) led coalition. This impression was strengthened with three quick judgments in succession by courts last week, imposing long incarcerations against former prime minister Imran Khan. This seemed a brazen message from the powerful military establishment to the latter's die-hard fan club that he would not be allowed to play any political role in the foreseeable future. The electorate comprises 128.5 million registered voters, out of a total population of 241.5 million. This includes almost 57 million young voters between the ages of 18-35, comprising 47 per cent of the electorate. The strength of the National Assembly (NA) is now 336, comprising 266 general seats. Sixty seats are reserved for women and 10 for non-Muslims. These are allotted to political parties based on proportional representation. The magic numbers for forming the



government are 134 and 169, after the addition of reserved seats. Of the 266 general seats, Punjab has 141, Sindh 61, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 45, Baluchistan 16 and the Federal Capital area of Islamabad three seats. Punjab has more seats than the other three provinces combined. The party which controls Punjab controls Pakistan. Provincial Assemblies (PAs) will also be elected simultaneously. Punjab has 371 members (MPAs), Sindh 168, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) 145 and Balochistan 65 seats. A total of 5,113 candidates are contesting the NA elections while 12,638 candidates are in the fray for the PA elections. After the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was denied the 'bat' symbol, it will not be in a position to claim its proportion of reserved seats for women and minorities. Percentage-wise, 63 per cent of Independent candidates are contesting the NA elections

and 66 per cent remain in the PA field. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf unveils manifesto ahead of elections. After the army blessed thrice elected former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's return from almost 4 years of exile in the UK and the judiciary followed suit, giving quick relief in cases against him, reducing also a life disqualification to five years, the PML (N) seems poised to recover lost ground in its main bastion, Punjab. Despite this boost, Nawaz Sharif seemed rather listless in the election campaign, obsessing mainly on past injustices against him. He did not attack the military establishment. His dilemma has been to search for a counter-narrative to offset Imran Khan's persisting popularity. He also has to decide who should inherit his mantle, whether charismatic daughter Maryam or docile brother, Shehbaz Sharif, who remains more acceptable to the army.

What is Bharat Dal? This Modi government initiative becomes the best selling pulse brand;

The government has launched 'Bharat Rice' for retail sales, allocating 5 LMT of rice under the brand. Managed by NAFED, NCCF, and Kendriya Bhandar, it is available at Rs 29 per kg in 5 kg and 10 kg bags. Mobile vans and physical outlets will sell it, with efforts to expand availability through retail chains and e-commerce platforms.

What is Bharat Dal? This Modi government initiative becomes the best selling pulse brand; check details here

Bharat Dal: The government, in its efforts to control food prices for consumers, initiated the sale of chana dal under the brand name 'Bharat Dal' at subsidised rates. Priced at Rs 60 per kg for a 1 kg pack and Rs 55 per kg for a 30 kg pack, Bharat Dal has quickly emerged as the highest-selling brand in the country.

Where to find Bharat Dal?



According to ET, Bharat Dal is readily available at various retail outlets managed by organisations such as NAFED, NCCF, Kendriya Bhandar, and Safal. Additionally, it can be conveniently purchased from numerous e-commerce platforms. To further enhance its accessibility, state governments have the option to procure chana dal for distribution in welfare schemes through state-controlled cooperatives and corporations. The government keeps stocks of key pulses like chana, tur,

urad, moong, and masur in the Price Stabilization Fund (PSF) to keep pulse prices stable. These stocks are released strategically to control prices. Also, to stabilise prices, the government has removed import duties on tur and urad until March 31, 2024, and reduced import duties on masur to zero to improve domestic availability and keep prices moderate. Additionally, stock limits on tur and urad have been set under the Essential Commodities Act.

Woodside, Santos scrap talks on \$52 billion merger

Australia's Woodside Energy and Santos said on Wednesday they had ended talks to create a possible A\$80 billion (\$52 billion) global oil and gas giant, and Santos flagged it would look for other ways to bolster its value. Woodside, which is more than twice as large as Santos by revenue and market capitalisation, said it would only pursue a deal that would clearly benefit its shareholders. Santos shares fell nearly 9% after the announcement and closed down 5.8% while Woodside's stock ended up 0.5%. The talks, first announced in

December, fell apart as the two companies could not agree on a valuation level, according to two sources with direct knowledge of the matter who could not be named discussing confidential information. A firm bid did not emerge from Woodside following the almost two months of due diligence and negotiations that the parties undertook, one of the sources said. Woodside declined to comment on those points and Santos did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Santos said in a statement that after "an initial exchange of

information, sufficient combination benefits were not identified to support a merger that would be in the best interests of Santos shareholders". If the merger had taken place, it would have created a major global liquefied natural gas (LNG) producer that could attract more offshore investors as gas is seen as a key bridging fuel in the shift to cleaner energy. "While the discussions with Santos did not result in a transaction, Woodside considers that the global LNG sector provides significant potential for value creation.

Dollar slips, Fed policy path on interest rates in focus

NEW YORK: The dollar slid against major currencies on Tuesday, a day after it rose to its highest level in almost three months, as strong economic data and a hawkish stance on interest rates by Federal Reserve officials bolster the US currency. Robust

US economic data, including a blowout unemployment report on Friday, and recent remarks from Fed Chair Jerome Powell have quashed speculation about early and steep rate cuts by the US central bank that the market had widely anticipated.

Cleveland Fed President Loretta Mester said on Tuesday that if the US economy performs as she expects, it could open the door to rate cuts. But Mester said she was not ready to provide timing for easier policy amid ongoing inflation uncertainty.

After a 'cold' start, India renews \$78 bn Qatar gas deal with \$6 bn savings

BETU (GOA): India has renewed for 20 years a 1999 contract for shipping gas from Qatar at a lower rate and more favourable terms that will lead to an estimated savings of \$6 billion over the extended period, assuming the current Brent crude price of \$80 per barrel.

India's largest gas importer Petronet-LNG and QatarEnergy on signed on the sidelines of India Energy Week here the agreement extending the contract, which expires in 2028, for importing 7.5 million tonne of LNG (liquefied natural gas) annually for an estimated \$78 billion. India meets 40% of its gas needs through imports. The contract with

● Sources said the fixed charge has been scrapped under the revised contract, while the slope largely remains the same as before

QatarEnergy accounts for 35% of total gas imports. Qatar began supplying LNG from 2003-2004 under the existing deal that is priced at a 'slope' (per cent) of 12.67% of the current Brent crude futures rates and a fixed charge of 52 cents per unit (million British thermal units or mmbtu) of gas. Sources said the fixed charge has been scrapped under the

revised contract, while the slope largely remains the same as before. The revised terms will also save shipping cost as QatarEnergy will bear the cost of delivering gas at the port designated by Petronet under DES (delivered basis) arrangement, where buyer arranges shipping, in the existing contract. Altogether, the saving will come to \$0.8 per unit of gas. The favourable terms in the renewed contract indicates India's rising clout as the pivot of global energy demand growth. Indian negotiators leveraged this fact to drive a hard bargain during long-drawn negotiations.

PhonePe appoints former revenue secretary Tarun Bajaj, two Walmart executive

MUMBAI: Walmart-owned PhonePe has appointed former revenue secretary Tarun Bajaj to its board as an independent director. Bajaj will also assume the position of the chairman of the risk committee, a company spokesperson said on Tuesday. Besides Bajaj, John D Rainey, executive vice president and chief financial officer at Walmart and Donna Morris, executive vice president, chief people officer at Walmart have also joined the



fintech startup's board as non-executive directors. With glaring compliance and corporate governance lapses surfacing in two of India's biggest startups Byju's and Paytm, companies are getting more vigilant and seem to be taking steps to

strengthen their corporate governance practices. Besides, PhonePe is also preparing for a potential public listing. The company is currently valued at \$12 billion and is India's most valued privately held fintech startup. The PhonePe board will

now include co-founders Sameer Nigam and Rahul Chari, Walmart executive Leigh Douglas Hopkins, industry expert Rohit Bhagat, Flipkart co-founder Binny Bansal and new entrants Donna Catherine Morris, John David Rainey Jr. and Tarun Bajaj. Last week, RBI put curbs on the operations of Paytm Payments Bank following lapses complying with the regulatory framework on KYC and relationship with parent.

Transforming employee commute with machine learning

Deepesh Agarwal and Akash Maheshwari's MoveInSync has helped transform the commute for employees in India. The two had founded MoveInSync in 2019, in the backdrop of the global economic meltdown, and at a time when transportation was unorganised and unsafe. "Employee commute was the third largest cost to a company. With Google (in India) as our first client, we started building a track record for cost effective, safe and on time performance," says Deepesh. He and Akash were batchmates at IIT BHU. Deepesh went on to work at Infosys, Tech Mahindra and Motorola, and Akash at Infosys, Impulsesoft, and Microsoft, before the two founded MoveInSync. Their flagship Employee



Transportation Solution (ETS) today is a SaaS solution that is used to track employee cab usage records, provides automated billing with reduced discrepancies, and carries safety features for female passengers. It provides transport administrators complete control and visibility over their transport operations in real time. Deepesh Agarwal (R) and Akash Maheshwari The entire architecture is hosted on the cloud, and is based on Java 17,

Angular 15 and SQL/NoSQL technologies and framework. "Using such technology has enabled us to scale fast for over 300 enterprise requirements including 70 of Fortune 500 companies," says Deepesh. Machine learning based systems learn the traffic and employee clubbing patterns to ensure an average of three employees in every trip. In 2014, they received funding from Saama Capital, Athera Ventures, and Qualcomm.

Paytm crisis: One 97 Communications shares surge 9% after Vijay meets FM Nirmala

Despite reports of potential probes into money-laundering and KYC violations, Paytm's stock saw an upturn today.

Paytm share price today: The roller-coaster journey of One 97 Communications, the parent company of Paytm, continued as its shares surged up to 9% to reach Rs 495.75 on the BSE. This increase followed meetings between company CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma and officials from the RBI and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. At 10:58 AM, shares of One 97 Communications were trading at Rs 490.20, up almost Rs 40 or 8.66%. Despite reports of potential probes into money-laundering and KYC violations, Paytm's



stock saw an upturn today. After experiencing three days of continuous decline, resulting in a 42% crash, the shares ended 3% higher yesterday. Currently, investor sentiment regarding regulatory issues and Paytm's ability to address them remains the main driving force behind its shares, according to an report. During the meeting with

the Finance Minister, Sharma reportedly discussed the company's stance on RBI's concerns. Sitharaman emphasized the need for dialogue between Paytm and the RBI to address the flagged non-compliances. Sharma also sought an extension of the February 29 deadline and presented a transition plan during the RBI

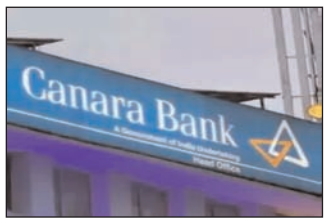
meeting, outlining efforts to meet regulatory compliances.

While some speculate that the stock may have bottomed out, analysts caution long-term investors against hasty decisions.

They warn of potential downsides if UPI payments cease after February-end. "I think there are better opportunities in the market and acting when you know there is regulatory action impending is speculation.

So I would avoid till more clarity comes. It (Paytm) is at an all-time low but in these things you do not know what the bottom is, especially when it comes to regulatory action, Gurmeet Chadha of Complete Circle Consultants was quoted as saying.

Canara Bank board to consider stock split on February 26



NEW DELHI: Canara Bank on Wednesday said it is planning split of the equity shares of the state-owned bank to boost the stock's liquidity. The decision in this regard will be taken by the bank's Board of Directors in a meeting, which is scheduled on February 26, Canara Bank said in a regulatory filing. The meeting's agenda is "to seek in principle approval from the board of directors for sub-division/split of the equity shares of the bank, subject to prior approval of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other statutory/regulatory/Government of India approvals, as may be required," it said.

Loharu bar election issue again in headlines

Meeting to be held in Chandigarh on 9th regarding bar elections

Vatika Times

Loharu: The issue of bar elections held last December has once again come into limelight. Raising questions on the Loharu Bar election process, the Bar Council of Punjab and Haryana has called a meeting in Chandigarh on February 9 to investigate the matter, in which the election committee and the observers appointed to conduct the elections, considering Surendra Chaudhary as the head of the Loharu Bar, has been summoned. After this, the market of discussions has become heated in Loharu Bar and everyone's eyes are fixed on this meeting. It is noteworthy that Loharu Bar elections were proposed in the month of December and after the controversy during this, the election committee resigned due to allegations. After this, observers were appointed by the Bar Council of Punjab and Haryana to conduct the elections. Election Observer Ompal Potalia had sent a letter to the Bar Council complaining about elections not being held in Loharu Bar and making several allegations,

while the other Observer Mukesh Chauhan appointed Surendra Obara as the head without elections. In this matter, the complaint was sent to the Bar Council, after which orders have been passed by the Special Committee of the Bar Council of Punjab and Haryana on February 4 regarding the conduct of elections of Loharu Bar Association of the High Court Bar Council and hearing of several objections and the letter. Under serial number 7920-7926/2024 dated 5 February 2024, a special meeting has been called in the Bar Council of Punjab and Haryana on Friday to conduct elections for the President and Secretary of Loharu Bar Association. In this, Loharu Bar President Surendra Chaudhary, Secretary Ravi Yadav, Chairman of Loharu Bar Association Election Committee and RO Shishram, ARO Dharmendra Bodalia, ARO Ashok Yadav, besides election observer Ompal Potalia and observer Mukesh Tanwar Chauhan have been summoned on 9 February. Keep in mind that for this, a representation signed by 100 members of Loharu Bar Association was presented before the Honorable Chairman Bar Council of Punjab and Haryana. Bar head Surendra Chaudhary said that as per the rules of the Bar Council,

Loharu Bar elections could not be held on December 15. Whereas through the letter issued by the Bar Council it has been clearly stated that electing the officers of the new office through the election process, which was beyond the scope of the observer because the observers are appointed only to observe the election whether A report had to be sent regarding whether the process had been adopted. In this regard, the Chairman of the Bar Council has constituted a committee by order. It has been found by the Committee that it has been pointed out by Observer Ompal Potalia Advocate that the Election Committee has already resigned and there is no election related issue. Material is available. He particularly observed that he was mistreated by some members. It has been further said by him that even one of the observers, Mukesh Chauhan, was helping some advocates and not for the observer, it is clearly stated in the order that this letter will be sent to the Bar Council office on 15th December 2023, the very day of election. Was duly received. In the order by the Bar Council regarding the election of Loharu lawyers, it has been mentioned that it has appointed officers to the office on the verbal orders of an unauthorized person.

ED attaches JD(U) MLC's properties worth 26 crore

Vatika Times

ED on Tuesday said it has attached two immovable assets worth over Rs 26.1 crore of JD(U) MLC Radha Charan Sah, as part of its probe of money laundering linked to in alleged illegal sand mining in the state, reports Madan Kumar. The case stems from 19 FIRs filed by Bihar police under various IPC sections. "Probe showed illegal sale of sand and its mining was controlled by a syndicate," it said. Sah, being a syndicate member, generated huge proceeds of crime through Broadsons... which he used to acquire the properties. The case stems from a total of 19 FIRs registered



by state police under various IPC sections and the Bihar Mineral Concession, Prevention of Illegal Mining, Transportation and Storage) Rules, 2019 against Broadsons Commodities Pvt Ltd and others.

RBI orders Paytm Payments Bank to suspend most services after Feb. 29

Delhi: The Reserve Bank ordered Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL) to suspend taking deposits or top-ups in user accounts, wallets, FASTags, and other instruments after February 29. Customers may receive interest, cashbacks, or refunds at any time. The central

bank stated that chronic non-compliances and serious supervisory concerns prompted the direction. The RBI barred PPBL from enrolling new customers immediately on March 11, 2022. Paytm group firm PPBL did not comment on the RBI's bank-related direction. After February 29,

customer accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, FASTags, NCMC cards, etc. cannot be deposited or topped up, except for interest, cashbacks, or refunds, which can be credited whenever "RBI. Up to their available balance, users can withdraw or use balances.

Zee demands 700 crore from Sony

Delhi: Zee spent 700 crore to meet Sony's stipulations, according to legal documents acquired by the business line. Zee will argue at the National Company Law Tribunal that it has spent around 700 crores on divestment, frivolous claims, guarantees, tail insurance, and business discontinuation on Sony's instructions. Zee will contest Sony's termination notification asking \$90 million in damages for alleged breaches. Zee denies any meaningful detrimental effect on the merger agreement, per Sony's termination notification. Legal sources said Zee would establish that it had many meetings with Sony, including



on the joint business plan, where Sony received month-by-month profit and loss and cash flows. Zee and Sony discussed the combination for a long time. Sony repeatedly recom-

mended Zee to take specific steps to finalize the deal quickly, and Zee did so. Zee spent a lot of time and money to please Sony, according to a legal document. It also stated

that Zee notified Sony that divestments, which are necessary to meet these conditions, are permanent, irrevocable, and irreversible moves done solely for the merger.

HDFC Bank raises \$ 300 million through maiden Sustainable Finance Bond Issue

Vatika Times

Chandigarh: HDFC Bank Limited announced that it has raised \$ 300 million through its first ever sustainable finance bond issue. This is part of an overall raise of \$ 750 million through Regulation S Bonds. While \$ 300 million has been raised for a tenure of three years with a 95 basis points spread over US Treasury, another \$ 450 million has been raised for a tenure of 5 years, with a spread of 108 basis points over US Treasury. These are the tightest credit spreads achieved by an Indian



issuer for a three-year sustainable bond and five-year senior unsecured bond for a similar size of USD Reg S issuance. The proceeds of the sustainable finance bond will be utilised for funding green and social loans in accordance with the sustainable finance

while the rest of the proceeds will go towards financing general banking activities. "The funds raised through the sustainable finance bonds will be prioritised for lending towards electric vehicles, SMEs and affordable housing. We are strongly committed

towards building a green and social portfolio even as we continue adhering to the Bank's risk philosophy," said Mr Arup Rakshit, Group Head-Treasury, HDFC Bank. The bonds will be listed on India International Exchange (India INX) in GIFT IFSC. The paper was rated Baa3 (stable) by Moody's and BBB- (stable) by S&P. The bank had mandated Barclays, BofA Securities, J.P. Morgan, MUFG and Standard Chartered Bank as Joint Global Coordinators and Joint Lead Managers.

Tata AIA appoints Venkatachalam H. as Chief Executive officer and Managing Director

Vatika Times PANIPAT/KARNAL:

Tata AIA Life Insurance Company Limited, one of India's fastest growing life insurance companies, announced today that its Board has appointed Venkatachalam H. as the new Chief Executive Officer & Managing Director, subject to regulatory approval from IRDAI. Venkatachalam H. will take over from current Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director, Naveen Tahilyani who moves to another role in the Tata Group and has been elevated as a Non-Executive Director of Tata AIA Life Insurance Company Ltd. Venky as he is fondly known, has over 27 years' experience spanning Life Insurance, Asset Management and



Custodial Services. He has expertise in Sales & Distribution, Strategy, Business and Process Development and Key Account Management. He joined Tata AIA in 2016 and was President and Chief Distribution Officer in his previous role. Venky has also led several initiatives in areas such as marketing, strategy, analytics, and direct digital business. Naveen has been a visionary leader, spearheading the transformation of Tata AIA into a market-leading and digitally enabled multi-

channel business. Tata AIA has consistently outperformed the market, with VONB increasing by three and a half times between 2018 and 2022. Under Naveen's leadership, Tata AIA has risen to become number 3 company on retail weighted new business premium and is ranked number 1 in retail sum assured among private sector life insurers. Tata AIA has been awarded the Kincentric Best Employer seven times in a row as well as certified as a Great Place to Work.

DrinkPrime Launches Advanced Copper Filtration System For Clean & Safe Drinking Water Across India

Vatika Times NEW DELHI

DrinkPrime, at the forefront of innovation in smart water purification in India, proudly unveils its latest product upgrade: RO+UV+Copper filtration system. This state-of-the-art technology seamlessly integrates reverse osmosis (RO) and ultraviolet (UV) purification, enhanced by the health advantages of a Copper filter. Addressing mounting concerns about water safety and wellness, DrinkPrime's advanced filtration system provides residents of Bengaluru, Delhi, Faridabad, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon, Hyderabad and Noida with a holistic solution for clean, safe and healthy drinking water. Integrating a



Copper filter into the filtration process offers a multitude of health benefits - improves digestion, strengthens immune system, enhances taste and reduces inflammation. Copper's antimicrobial properties effectively purify water, ensuring overall well-being. The DrinkPrime filtration system operates in

stages, eliminating impurities and heavy metals, and guaranteeing safe drinking water for all. "We're happy to unveil our latest product," said Vijender Reddy Muthyala, Co-founder & CEO, DrinkPrime. "DrinkPrime has been on a mission to provide clean, safe and healthy drinking water to all. We have always

said that we will do whatever it takes to ensure this. The latest product launch, with the addition of a Copper filter, validates the claim. We want to offer the best for our subscribers. If it means we need to modify our product to suit the current requirements, we will find a way to do so with zero additional cost to our subscribers." DrinkPrime water purifier combines advanced RO+UV technologies enhanced with Copper along with a taste enhancer to ensure perfectly purified water to all subscribers. The water purifier with multi-stage filtration is available on subscription with plans starting at Rs.333*. Y

Suspicious boat found near Mumbai coast, police launch probe

MUMBAI: Mumbai police have launched a probe after a fishing boat was suspiciously found roaming near the city's coast area on Tuesday, officials said. According to police, a suspicious boat named "Abdullah Sharif" was found roaming near the Gateway of India. The boat had three people on board, all of them hailing from Tamil Nadu's Kanyakumari, and they are being questioned. However, for now, nothing suspicious has been found from the suspects. "The boat has arrived from Kuwait and has been impounded. The three people are being questioned. Colaba Police is present at the spot," officials said. Further investigation is underway, they added.

Lionel Messi hopes to play in Inter Miami's pre-season friendly in Japan

NEW DELHI: Lionel Messi expressed uncertainty about his participation in Inter Miami's pre-season friendly in Japan due to a lingering leg injury. Two days ago, furious fans in Hong Kong voiced their disappointment as Messi remained on the bench during a sold-out friendly, prompting calls for refunds. Messi addressed the media ahead of Inter Miami's match against Japanese champions Vissel Kobe on Wednesday, stating, "I don't know if I can (play) or not, but I feel a lot better and really want to do it." The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner acknowledged that his leg injury is "getting better," and he expressed eagerness to contribute on the field. Despite the excitement building for the friendly at Tokyo's National Stadium, Messi's availability remains uncertain. He mentioned, "This



afternoon we're going to practice, we'll try again. I have a good feeling, compared to how I was." The recent controversy in Hong Kong, where fans booed Messi and co-owner David Beckham, has drawn attention. Messi explained, "It was really bad luck that I couldn't play in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, this happens in football, in any game it can happen that you can't play." Messi played down the disappointment, emphasizing his desire to participate, especially

in games where the team travels extensively, and fans are eager to watch. He expressed hope for a future opportunity to play a game in Hong Kong. The ongoing pre-season tour has seen Inter Miami draw attention and excitement, with the team's pink colors adorning parts of Tokyo's Shibuya district. The crowd in Hong Kong, which paid premium prices for tickets, jeered as Messi did not take the field during their 4-1 win against a local select XI.

AIFF legal head alleges victimisation

NEW DELHI: An air of mistrust and allegations of murky dealings hang heavy in the corridors of Football House if details within an internal mail from the legal department of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) to the AIFF president, Kalyan Choubey are anything to go by. The mail sent to the AIFF president's office on Sunday morning, a copy of which is with TOI, has Nilanjan Bhattacharya, nodal legal officer of the AIFF, alleging "massive breach of privacy against the interest of the AIFF" by "not sharing any legal contract and/ or take legal opin-

ion in any matter concerning the federation." "It is important to know and place on record, that any contract as of now are not being vetted or signed by me in my capacity as the nodal legal officer in the AIFF but shared with certain professionals who neither the AIFF legal is aware of, nor any ratification or engagement has been acted upon by any office in the AIFF," the lawyer wrote. In the mail, Bhattacharya alleged that the president's office had wanted him discharged from his position and "advised for the termination of my services". "It is dis-

heartening and insulting to know that your good office has expressly given instruction to not release my contractual monthly retainership but also above all, not share with me any (legal) contract or take legal opinion concerning the federation," said Bhattacharya. He added: "Several personal attacks regarding my family and faith were also made to coerce me into giving my consent all of which has caused tremendous harassment and mental agony to me. I would request you to release my lawful dues so that I may sustain through this current hardship."

Chennai Challenger: Sumit Nagal breezes his way into 2nd round

CHENNAI: The India contingent had a good day with Sumit Nagal and Sasikumar Mukund notching up opening round victories in the ATP Chennai Open Challenger here at the SDAT Tennis Stadium on Tuesday. Second-seed Nagal did not have to

sweat much as he cruised into the pre-quarterfinals by getting the better of compatriot Prajwal Dev 6-1, 6-2. Sumit, ranked 350 plus places higher than Dev, started with an easy service game and backed it up breaking Prajwal in the second.

Nagal played to his strengths, maneuvering the angles by connecting cross-court forehand shots. In the second game, a forehand down the line helped Nagal gain momentum. Meanwhile, Prajwal botched up his first service percentage.

'His coil and bat swing...': Ashwin draws parallel between India U19's Sachin Dhas and West Indies' star batter

NEW DELHI: Indian spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has commended Indian U19 batter Sachin Dhas, likening his batting style to that of West Indies star Shai Hope, after Dhas played a crucial role in India's nervy two-wicket win over South Africa, securing a spot in the U19 World Cup final.



Taking to X (formerly Twitter), Ashwin remarked on the similarities between Dhas's "coil and bat swing" and that of Shai Hope, praising the composure displayed by Dhas and skipper Uday Saharan during their partnership. Hope, the current West Indies ODI skipper, boasts an impressive international record across formats, with 18 centuries and 32 fifties to his name. In the ODIs, he has scored 5,177 runs in 124 matches at an average of 50.26. Dhas, on the other hand, has been instrumental in India's U19 World Cup journey, ranking as the third-highest run-scorer in the tournament with 294 runs at an average of 73.50. In the semi-final clash against South Africa, India faced an early top-order collapse but recovered thanks to a brilliant 172-run partnership between Dhas (96) and skipper Saharan (81). Despite a late wobble, India secured victory with Raj Limbani's calm innings, with Saharan awarded the 'Player of the Match' for his composed half-century. South Africa, batting first, posted 244/7 with Lhuan-dre Pretorius (76) and Richard Seletswane (64) leading the charge. India's bowling unit, led by Limbani's 3/60, restricted the opposition.

Ponting appointed head coach of Washington Freedom for Major League

NEW DELHI: Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting has been named as the head coach of Washington Freedom ahead of the upcoming second season of Major League Cricket (MLC), marking a significant development in American cricket. The franchise made the announcement on X, expressing excitement about Ponting's leadership and the transformation he is set to bring to American cricket. Ponting replaced Greg Shipperd, under whose guidance Freedom finished third in the inaugural season of



MLC. Ponting, eager to embark on this new cricketing journey in the United States, expressed his enthusiasm in a statement, highlighting the rising popularity of cricket in the country. Ponting

praised the efforts of everyone involved with Washington Freedom and emphasized his readiness to build on Shipperd's groundwork for the coming season. Michael Klinger, CNSW head of male T20 cricket

and general manager of cricket at Washington Freedom, emphasized the significance of Ponting's arrival, believing it will have a substantial impact on MLC and cricket in the US. Klinger lauded Ponting's reputation as a respected coach with a keen eye for talent, expressing confidence in his ability to bring out the best in players. Freedom owner Sanjay Govil reflected on the success of MLC's inaugural season and articulated the franchise's aspirations to elevate cricket in the USA. Govil emphasized the

FIFA World Cup 2026: Philadelphia gears up with six matches

NEW DELHI: Philadelphia is set to play a pivotal role in the 2026 FIFA World Cup, hosting six matches at Lincoln Financial Field, and city officials are already diving into comprehensive planning to ensure a successful and memorable event. Meg Kane, Host City Executive for Philadelphia Soccer 2026, expressed the city's commitment to inclusivity, emphasizing the desire for every county in the region to benefit from the prestigious soccer tournament. Kane mentioned



the enthusiastic reception during outreach efforts in counties like Lancaster, York, Berks, and Lehigh. As the city begins the logistical preparations for the World Cup, officials are prioritizing key aspects such as transportation, security, and safety.

Collaborative efforts are underway, involving coordination with law enforcement, security agencies, and homeland security to manage the vast array of logistics. Lincoln Financial Field will host five group stage matches in June, followed by a round of

16 matches on July 4th, coinciding with America's 250th birthday.

The six matches are anticipated to draw over half a million spectators to the region. Preliminary economic impact studies suggest a substantial boost to the area's economy, estimating around \$500 million, with \$262 million attributed to direct spending. These figures underscore the potential financial windfall that the World Cup matches could generate for Philadelphia and its neighboring counties.

'I'm a fast bowling...': Jasprit Bumrah on 'competition' with James Anderson

NEW DELHI: After India's resounding victory in the second Test against England, Jasprit Bumrah took a moment to pay tribute to England's James Anderson, emphasizing his admiration for quality fast bowling. In a post-match interview, Bumrah expressed his appreciation for fast bowling, stating, "Before a cricketer, I'm a fast bowling fan. If somebody's doing well, kudos to them. I look at the situation, at the wicket and think what are my options. I should not be a one-trick pony." Acknowledging his role as a leader in India's evolving Test bowling lineup, Bumrah recognized the transition phase the team is going through. With stalwarts like Mohammed Shami and Ravichandran Ashwin nearing the end



of their Test careers, Bumrah sees himself as the link between the old guard and the new generation of Indian bowlers. "We're going through a transition so I feel it's my responsibility to help them in any way I can," Bumrah remarked, reflecting on his leadership role. Despite playing fewer Test matches in India, Bumrah has impressive statistics, particularly on pitches not traditionally favorable to

fast bowling. His ability to excel in challenging conditions showcases his adaptability and skill. Reflecting on his growth as a bowler, Bumrah revealed, "As a youngster, that is the first delivery I learned (yorker). I used to think that it was the only way to get wickets." Bumrah also highlighted his rapport with skipper Rohit Sharma, with whom he shares a longstanding camaraderie.

You have lost the plot...': Geoffrey Boycott slams England's Bazball mentality

NEW DELHI: Cricketing legend Geoffrey Boycott accused the England team of "losing the plot" and criticized their overly aggressive batting approach in a scathing assessment of their performance in the second Test against India. Boycott, writing in his column for The Telegraph, lambasted England for what he perceived as a reckless pursuit of attacking cricket, particularly in the fourth innings chase of 399 runs. He argued that England's "Bazball" mentality, epitomized by Brendon McCullum and Ben Stokes, led to their downfall. "Bazball is great entertainment when it comes off. But once you believe in an ideal over substance then you have lost the plot," Boycott wrote, highlighting England's propensity to prioritize aggression over solidity. Pointing to Joe Root's frenetic innings of 16 off ten balls, Boycott lamented the departure from Root's usual composed approach, attributing his dismissal to an ill-advised



attempt at aggressive stroke-play. "Joe Root was dancing down the pitch trying to hit over the top and very soon swiped it up in the air. He only scored 16," Boycott observed, emphasizing the failure of England's aggressive mindset. Boycott also criticized England's broader batting philosophy, suggesting that the influence of Twenty20 cricket has led to a mindset where every ball must be attacked aggressively, akin to cricket's answer to baseball. "Twenty20 cricket seems to have got in their head and

made them think that every ball must be scored off with an aggressive stroke, sweep, swipe or cross-batted shot," Boycott remarked, highlighting the team's departure from traditional Test cricket principles. Despite England's valiant effort in the fourth innings, Boycott questioned the team's approach, emphasizing the importance of substance over style in Test cricket. He referenced England's previous struggles in the Ashes series, where a similar approach led to defeat.

Coach Uppal not surprised by Shrivalli's win over Hibino in Mumbai Open

Shrivalli Rashmikaa's coach Vishaal Uppal said he was not surprised by her upset win over World No. 93 Nao Hibino of Japan in the L&T Mumbai Open at the Cricket Club of India courts. "It was not a surprise for me. It will be a surprise for 99 percent of the people because they don't know the amount of hard work that has been put in behind the scenes," Uppal, a former captain of the Indian Billie Jean King Cup team, said. "We have been focusing on following the right process, on shaping her personality, her mindset and everything. "Results are part and parcel of the sport. For me, it was important that she followed the right process in the match."

Agricultural growth rate has increased three times in the state: CM Yogi

Lucknow Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath elucidated the government's steadfast commitment to agricultural development and farmer welfare during his address to the assembly. He underscored the efficacy of the "double-engine" governance approach, which has augmented irrigation capacity by an additional 23 lakh hectares over the past seven years. Highlighting the transformative impact of the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi scheme, he noted that 2 crore 62 lakh farmers have reaped its benefits, leading to a remarkable surge in the agricultural growth rate from 6.6 per cent in 2016-17 to 18.2 per cent now, nearly threefold higher than in previous years. In the ongoing crushing season, CM Yogi emphasized the government's proactive stance in enhancing sugarcane prices, rais-



ing them from Rs 350 to Rs 370 per quintal across all varieties. Noteworthy advancements in sugarcane cultivation and production were also highlighted, with the cultivation area expanding from 20.54 lakh hectares in 2016-17 to 29.66 lakh hectares in 2023-24, and production escalating from 1,486 lakh tons to 2,492 lakh tons during the same period. Emphasizing the government's unwavering support to farmers, CM Yogi elucidated on the significant payments made towards sugarcane prices, totaling Rs 2,33,793 crores directly into farmers' accounts since assuming office.

Furthermore, he underscored the paradigm shift in procurement practices, wherein crops of farmers are being purchased from them directly at MSP. He said that payments totaling approximately Rs 41,301 crores and Rs 74,751.30 crores have been made for wheat and paddy to 47,89,493 and 61,54,251 farmers respectively across the state. CM Yogi also highlighted the government's initiatives to promote sustainable farming practices, such as solarizing tube wells for over 50,000 farmers under the PM-KUSUM scheme, and fostering natural and organic farming methods.

One has to work hard to achieve something: CM Yogi

Lucknow Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Wednesday, emphasized the need for hard work to achieve something, rather than relying solely on dreams. He said that the government made a commitment seven years ago, and now the entire Uttar Pradesh is witnessing the fulfillment of that commitment. The Chief Minister highlighted Uttar Pradesh's status in various schemes including Ease of Doing, UP Diwas. He said, "The concept of Lokmangal (public welfare) is evident in every policy of the UP government. Achieving the first position in ending multidimensional

poverty in the country, 6 crore people have risen above multidimensional poverty in the state as per the NITI Aayog report." Yogi said that until 2016, 1.40 lakh houses were sanctioned. From 2017 to now, 55.83 lakh houses have been constructed (17.65 lakh under PM Urban, 36.15 lakh under PM Rural, and 2.03 lakh under CM Housing Scheme). 97.50 lakh people have benefited from various social security pensions: 55 lakh elderly pensions, 31.50 lakh destitute women pensions, and 11 lakh divyangjan pensions. Further describing the state's development through various

schemes, he mentioned: More than 1.75 crore Ujjwala connections have been provided. Free gas connections have been provided to 56 lakh families during Holi-Diwali. 2.62 crore Izzat Ghar have been constructed in the state. Under the Pradhan Mantri Swamtvya Yojana, drone surveys of the population have been completed in all 90,866 villages. In total, 75,78,935 houses are ready in 52,590 villages, and homes have been provided to 66 lakh 69,000 families. Common citizens are experiencing the 'Ease of Living' through various initiatives such as better education.

CAPSULES

CM Yogi condemns opposition's 'indecent' behaviour during Governor's address

Lucknow Proposing vote of thanks to the Governor, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath condemned the opposition, particularly the Samajwadi Party, for its 'indecent' behaviour during the Governor's address in the State Assembly. He cited the incident as a stark manifestation of their true character and their thinking on crimes against women. In addition to holding the opposition accountable, he also accentuated Uttar Pradesh's strides in critical areas such as women's empowerment, self-reliance, and safety. With a touch of sarcasm, Chief Minister Yogi quipped, "If opposing is your prerogative, do so, but let's not forget the constitution crafted by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. If you harbor objections, feel free to voice them, but the indecorous conduct exhibited by the opposition left me dismayed." He then proceeded to spotlight the government's accomplishments in terms of women's empowerment and Mission Shakti. He noted that the female workforce, which stood at a mere 14 percent before 2017, has surged to 32.1 percent in 2023. Initiatives like Mission Shakti have been instrumental in fostering women's safety, dignity, and self-sufficiency. Chief Minister Yogi further underscored the efficacy of schemes like Mukhyamantri Kanya Sumangla Yojana, which has safeguarded the social security of 17.82 lakh girls, and the Destitute Women Pension, benefiting 31.50 lakh women. He also highlighted initiatives like Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, aimed at alleviating the burden on daughters, and the establishment of BC Sakhi in 57,000 gram panchayats.

EU, US green moves to hit developing nations' exports

New Delhi: Unilateral moves by the European Union and the US, such as the imposition of carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) and deforestation rules, are seen to be hampering not just exports from developing countries, such as, India and Brazil but also stand to impact

the development of poor nations, govt officials said on Wednesday. While carbon tax is proposed to be introduced in 2026, EU has already rolled out CBAM, requiring disclosures and forcing Indian companies to comply with the regulations that stand to push up costs. Steps to negate

carbon emissions will be calculated in local currency, while the levy will be based on estimates in euros, adding to the burden, argued an official. Similarly, when it comes to deforestation rules, exporters from countries, such as, Brazil and some other parts of the world are expected.

Loans worth Rs 2317 crore provided to more than 17 lakh street vendors: Yogi

Lucknow Highlighting the UP's progress in the field of urban development and healthcare in the House on Wednesday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath mentioned the formation of new municipal corporations in Ayodhya, Mathura-Vrindavan, and Shahjahanpur, along with the creation of 113 new municipal bodies, in addition to work done on 08 safe cities and 17 smart cities. The Chief Minister said, "Under PM SVANidhi Yojana, loans worth about Rs 2317 crore have been distributed to maximum 17 lakh 34 thousand street vendors in the state, which is the highest in the country. All districts have been declared open-defecation free in the first phase of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural),

and the construction of community toilets in all 58,856 gram panchayats of the state is complete. 100 percent villages have been declared ODF Plus." On medical-health, CM Yogi said that in comparison to the year 2017, by the year 2023, the deaths of AES patients have decreased by 98 percent and JE patients by 96 percent. The number of AES patients has decreased by 76 percent and JE patients by 85 percent. He stated that progress is being made towards fulfilling the commitment of one medical college per district, adding that several districts are set to receive medical colleges soon. The Ayushman Bharat Yojana and Mukhyamantri Jan Arogya Abhiyan have benefitted 1.8

crore families, he informed, pointing out that over 4.86 crore Ayushman cards have been issued, and by January 19, 2024, 31 lakh 88 beneficiaries have availed free treatment worth Rs 4,677 crore. "A total of more than 12.48 crore patients have benefited from the 131 Mukhyamantri Arogya Swasthya Melas organized till January 14, 2024. Maternal mortality rate was 285 per lakh in 2014, which has reduced to 167 per lakh in the year 2022. The infant mortality rate was 48 per thousand in 2014, which has come down to 38 per thousand in 2020", he added. CM Yogi elaborated on the strides made in healthcare, announcing the provision of free dialysis facilities across all 75 districts.

Handmade food products made by women entrepreneurs are turning a big hit at SARAS fair

Chandigarh: Locals continued throng at the SARAS fair being organised by Rural Livelihood Mission under the aegis of Ministry of Rural Development, Govt of HP in Sector 34, Chandigarh. The fair is witnessing the remarkable presence of enterprising women of self-help groups from different districts of the state. These rural folks are setting a perfect example of women empowerment by



exhibiting and selling their handmade products. Apart from HP, self-help groups from other

states are also participating in the fair. Locals are enthusiastically purchasing the products grown in the hilly

region. The astonishing feature of the mela is the most expensive selling herbal vegetable - Gucchi, whose price is up to Rs 25,000. Kaushalya Devi, who hails from Chaupal informed that it is not cultivated but is extracted after hard work in the dense forests of Himalayas. Preeti Rinvee, who is from Nainital is introducing a new herbal product - Bichhu Booti in her stall.

UP will become the first state in the country to have 21 airports soon: Chief Minister

Lucknow Speaking of the infrastructural development done in the state in the House on Wednesday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that there has been growth in infrastructure on land, water and air in the state.

He informed the House that Uttar Pradesh is soon going to become the first state with 21 airports. The Chief Minister said, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate the Ground Breaking Ceremony in Lucknow on February 19. During this period, an investment of Rs 10 lakh crore will be brought to the ground." He also mentioned a report published in a leading English newspaper, stating that in the Tiruppur district of Tamil Nadu, more than two lakh people from Uttar Pradesh were working. However, in the last seven years, 60,000 of them have returned to UP because they found employment here. Hinting at the opposi-

tion, the Chief Minister said that everyone should accept the development story of UP. CM Yogi informed that after Purvanchal Expressway and Bundelkhand Expressway, Gorakhpur Link Expressway is going to be started. The Ballia Link Expressway is also under construction. Chitrakoot Link Expressway is in the process of being built. Before the Prayagraj Mahakumbh, the government is making efforts to start the Ganga Expressway. He mentioned that with the support of the Indian government, the Lucknow-Kanpur Link Expressway and Ballia Link Expressway are being constructed.

'Mahakumbh of 2025 will transcend the grandeur and divinity witnessed during the 2019'

Lucknow, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, addressing the House on Wednesday, assured that the upcoming Mahakumbh of 2025 will transcend the grandeur and divinity witnessed during the 2019 event. Proposing vote of thanks to the Governor, CM Yogi affirmed, "We are committed to organizing the Mahakumbh of 2025 in a grand manner." Reflecting on the 2019 Prayagraj Kumbh, he noted the absence of key sites like Kashi, Ayodhya, Chitrakoot, Naimisharanya, and Vindhyaasini, which will be integral to the forthcoming event. Anticipating a doubling of devotee turnout compared to 2019, the CM empha-

sized that preparations are underway to enhance infrastructure to accommodate them. Noteworthy developments include the construction of 9 ROBs, establishment of a new civil terminal, and the widening and fortification of over 250 roads, alongside the construction of 114,500 toilets, he pointed out. Describing this year's Magh Mela as a rehearsal to the Mahakumbh in 2025, he said that the fair witnessed the participation of 40 lakh devotees. 2019 Kumbh presented a model of safety, cleanliness and order. The 2019 Kumbh exemplified safety, cleanliness, and orderliness, serving as a model for subsequent events, he said.

CM Yogi emphasized that the Prayagraj Mahakumbh of 2019, attracted over 24 crore devotees and garnered global acclaim for its impeccable organization. For the first time post-independence, 5 crore devotees immersed on Mauni Amavasya, with devotees having seamless darshan of Akshaya Vat and Goddess Saraswati, he stated. CM Yogi highlighted India's cultural resurgence, exemplified by events like Ayodhya's Deepotsav, Braj's Rangotsav, and Kashi's Dev Diwali, which resonate nationally. Uttar Pradesh is emerging as a leader in tourism. CM Yogi said that the systematic development of

religious sites is being carried out through dedicated councils. Milestones include the completion of the Srikashi Vishwanath Dham corridor and the reinstallation of the Mother Annapurna statue after a century. Notable initiatives span the Ramayana, Buddhist, spiritual, Shakti peeth, Krishna/Braj, and Mahabharata circuits, reflecting in last year's visitation figures: 6.30 crore devotees to Srikashi Vishwanath Dham, 6.20 crore to Mathura-Vrindavan, 10 lakh to Naimishdham, 2.55 crore to Bundelkhand, 29 lakh to the Buddhist Circuit, and 8.50 lakh to Shukratirtha, he informed.

2 constables killed in encounter in Jharkhand forest

CHATRA: Two constables were killed and three sustained bullet injuries in an encounter with extremists of the banned Tiritiya Sammelan Prastuti Committee (TSPC) in Jharkhand's Chatra district Wednesday afternoon. One of the injured cops, whose condition was critical, was airlifted to Ranchi. Chief minister Champai Soren condemned the attack and ordered officials to ensure the best treatment for the injured cops. "Govt stands with the families of the martyred constables and will provide them with all possible help," Champai said, adding that govt was taking all necessary steps to control the extremists.