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

Outreach to farmers, stab at Congress: Ratna for Charan Singh, Narasimha

NEW DELHI: Bharat Ratna to former PMs PV Narasimha Rao and Charan Singh, and legendary agriculture scientist MS Swaminathan, announced on Friday, was also being seen as a taunt at Congress for not honouring these stalwarts, including their very own Narasimha Rao allegedly because he did not belong to the "family". The honour for Rao, who, during his 1991-1996 term as PM, heralded liberalisation by casting aside the "licence and permit" tyranny which had stifled the economy and pushed the country to the brink of bankruptcy, was widely seen as recognition for the man responsible for the economic recovery in the 1990s. It also marked an embarrassment for Congress, which had abandoned the party veteran to such an extent that the speculation that he was not allowed to be cremated in Delhi and the Army cortege was not allowed inside the headquarters of the party which he had headed, has

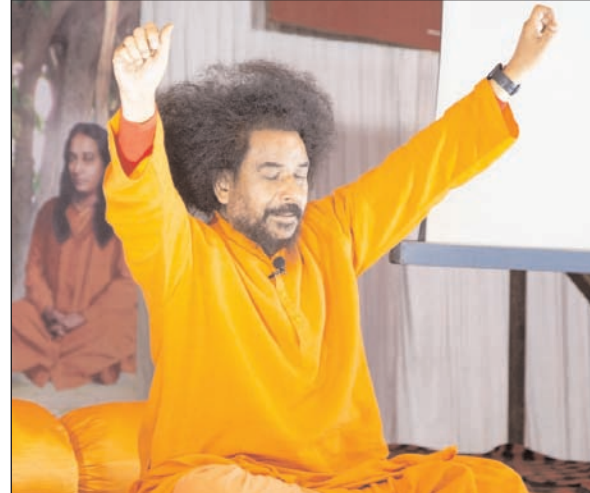


become part of contemporary political lore. Coming at a time when both Andhra Pradesh CM YS Jaganmohan Reddy and his principal rival and predecessor, TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu, appear to be keen on a tie-up with BJP, it was also seen as a message to southern state where BJP does not have strength of its own. The award for Charan Singh, who continues to be revered as 'Chaudhary Sahab' by fellow Jats in western UP, Haryana and Rajasthan, came as BJP is in talks with his grandson Jayant

Chaudhary for a tie-up. But it was an acknowledgement of the contributions of the veteran leader who many credit with saving the farm sector by standing up to first PM Jawaharlal Nehru's Soviet-inspired push for collectivisation of agriculture. At Congress's Nagpur session in 1957, Singh had stunned all by opposing the party's official resolution which called for collective farming. It was a risky venture, considering both Nehru's hold over the party as well as his fascination with the Soviet model, but Singh not just stood his ground,

his defiance found support from the majority of delegates and the official resolution had to be amended. The subsequent shift of Singh, then a powerful minister in the Congress govt of UP, to a relatively obscure department has been attributed to his boldness. If so, the change failed to chasten him as he pursued with his advocacy for minimum support price for farm produce. He left Congress to launch a party, Bharatiya Kranti Dal, and soon, along with Deendayal Upadhyay, one of the ideological mentors of BJP, and socialist ideo-

Mauni Amavasya is the pride of Sanatan Dharma : Swami Shri Yogi Satyam



Prayagraj. In the present Ascending Dwapara Yuga, the Spiritual Science - Kriyayoga, is spreading continuously. Kriyayoga was lost in the Dark Ages and was again rediscovered by The Deathless Saint, Mahavatar Babaji, who imparted the same to his most ardent disciple, Yogavatar Lahiri Mahasaya, who transferred this great knowledge to, Gyanavatar Swami Sri Yuktेश्वar Giri ji for the welfare of humanity. Swami Sri

Yuktेश्वar Giri ji imparted this sacred knowledge to Paramahansa Yogananda ji, who is the perfect incarnation of Lord Krishna, and Jesus Christ. Paramahansa Yogananda spread Kriyayoga science successfully in the world. When we practise Kriyayoga Meditation, we can experience the true consciousness of Mauni Amavasya within our self. "Mauni Amavasya is composed of the



words 'Maun', 'I', and 'Amavasya'. 'Maun' represents the state of consciousness where we can deliver complete knowledge without any mistakes. 'I' represents towards self, and 'Amavasya' represents complete ignorance (dark light). It has been observed that if we try to express true knowledge through spoken and written words, we commit mistakes. Therefore, we need to practice Kriyayoga - the Highest Science of delivering knowl-

edge without any mistakes, which is the perfect state of 'Maun'. Now, it is clear that whenever we experience oneness with Kriyayoga, we can spread the message everywhere without spoken and written language, as it was done by Ascended Masters." The above message was delivered by Kriyayoga Scientist, Gurudev Swami Sri Yogi Satyam, at Kriyayoga Shivar on Akshyavat Marg, Maghmela.

PM takes MPs to surprise lunch at canteen



Eight MPs, including Union minister L Murugan and BJP's Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, enjoy an impromptu lunch and informal chat with PM Modi in his Parliament office. Conversation veers away from politics, covering topics like Modi's favorite food and his visit to Pakistan in 2015. MPs praise Modi's charisma and easygoing nature during the meet. PM takes MPs to surprise lunch at canteen

A surprise invitation to chat with PM Modi in his Parliament office turned into an hour-long informal luncheon meet for eight MPs on Friday. The impromptu chat with the PM, which began with his issuing a jocular threat of 'punishment' to them, metamorphosed into what several MPs described as a "disarming, informal" conversation away from politics and reflecting Modi's "charisma and easygoing nature".

Sources said the eight MPs - Union minister L Murugan, BJD MP Sasmit Batra, RSP's NK Premachandran, TDP's Ram Mohan Naidu, BSP's Ritesh Pandey and BJP MPs Jamyang Tsering Namgyal, S Phangnon Konyak and Heena Gavit - were led by PM Modi to the Parliament House canteen where they proceeded to sit down to a sumptuous lunch and a freewheeling conversation. The chat on diverse topics ranged from his favourite food to his daily schedule, and to his unscheduled visit to Pakistan in 2015.

Indians in US urge students back home to re-evaluate their 'American dream'

HYDERABAD: The current slowdown in the job market coupled with the rise in tuition fee over the last few years, have put Indian youth in the United States on the back foot. So much so that many of them are now advising aspirants back home to be cautious. Especially if they are planning to take a hefty to loan to pursue a Master's degree in



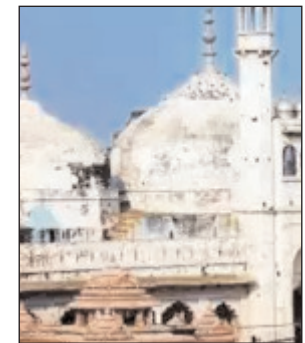
the US, in hope of fulfilling their 'great American dream'. In recent times, numerous posts on social media are doing the rounds where Indians based in the US are seen discouraging people

from going there, amid the current situation. Lack of employment in the tech industry and the poor pay in jobs, are being cited as primary reasons for this concern. Indians in US urge students

back home to re-evaluate their 'American dream' Those living there expect the situation to remain the same, for the next two years. "The golden age of living the American dream is over. It is now a waste of money and energy to come to the US for higher studies unless you intend to return after your degree.

Bareilly tense after cleric's 'jail bharo' call on Gyanvapi

BAREILLY: Security was beefed up in Bareilly after hundreds of supporters of cleric Tauqeer Raza assembled in the city's Islamia ground after Friday prayers. Situation became tense after they started raising slogans against the PM, Uttar Pradesh CM and Uttarakhand CM. There were sporadic incidents of vandalism in some places including Shyamaganj and three persons were injured, police said. Raza had called for 'jail bharo' on



Friday to protest recent developments related to Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi and Uttarakhand administration's anti-encroachment operation in Haldwani.

Raza, who is also the head of Bareilly-based political party Ittehad-e-Millat Council, was briefly detained. ADG Bareilly Prem Chand Meena said, "The city has been divided into zones and heavy forces deployed to maintain peace and order.

Intelligence agencies are keeping a close watch." As a precaution, all marketplaces in sensitive areas were shut and schools were closed early.

Only Preamble I've seen that comes with a date: SC judge

NEW DELHI: Justice Dipankar Datta questioned if the Preamble could have been amended without changing the date of adoption by the Constituent Assembly. Swamy argued against the amendments made during the Emergency in 1976. Advocate Sriram Parakkat argued that the addi-



tion of 'secularism' and 'socialism' in the Preamble did not violate the basic structure of the Constitution. Only Preamble I've

seen that comes with a date: SC judge This is the only Preamble I have seen that comes with a date... The text says 'in our Constituent Assembly this 26th day of November, 1949, do hereby adopt, enact, and give to ourselves this Constitution,' Justice Dipankar Datta said,

adding it was not that the Preamble could not have been amended, but from an academic point of view, could it have been done without changing the date? Swamy told SC bench also comprising Justice Sanjiv Khanna that amendments were pushed through during the "dark era of Emergency".

5 dead in Haldwani, dist admin says violence was premeditated

DEHRADUN: Five persons were killed and nearly 15 injured, three of them critically, in the violence that broke out on Thursday evening in Haldwani even as curfew and shoot-at-sight orders in the town continued for the second day on Friday. The violence had erupted over an anti-encroachment drive in

Haldwani's Banphoolpura area to demolish what district officials said was an 'unauthorised' madrasa and a prayer site. Nainital DM Vandana told media-persons that violence in Banphoolpura, which also saw several vehicles being set ablaze, was pre-planned. Nainital district administration

said on Friday that the deceased were identified as Prakash Kumar, Faeem Qureshi, Zahid, Mohammad Anas and Shabban. 4 held; Net, bus & train facilities remain suspended in Haldwani. Further details on how the five were killed and the time of their death were yet to be divulged.

Cabinet OKs spectrum sale, fixes reserve price at Rs 96,000 crore

NEW DELHI: As digital consumption grows at a breakneck speed across the country, govt on Thursday approved the sale of spectrum across eight frequencies with a reserve price of Rs 96,318 crore. The cabinet also decided to allot spectrum for safety of railway and metro passengers, apart from re-farming of the airwaves for better utilisation of the natural resource. To improve consumer mobile services, govt has been looking to make spectrum auctions an annual feature as telecom companies expand their high-speed 5G services across metros and other parts of the country. Spectrum auctions will be held across the frequencies of 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz, 2300 MHz, 2500 MHz, 3300 MHz, and 26 GHz.

Sharif trails Imran-backed independents, seeks allies



ISLAMABAD: Independents backed by jailed former PM Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led in 95 National Assembly seats out of 266, but it was his formerly exiled predecessor Nawaz Sharif's PML-N that claimed victory on Friday despite bagging only 64 seats in a poll race bedevilled by allegations of rigging and blatant misuse of military and administrative muscle. While Sharif usurped the mantle of "single-largest party", PML-N admitted it wasn't in a position to

form the govt. Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) won 50 seats with results for about 40 still to be declared. Sharif invited the Imran-backed independents to sit with him and directed his younger brother, ex-PM Shehbaz Sharif, to reach out to PPP chief Asif Ali Zardari and other smaller parties. "All parties should get together to form a govt," the three-time former PM said, adding it would have been ideal had his party got a majority.

India to vote for Modi 3.0 but NDA won't go '400 paar', predicts survey

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led BJP will win mandate for a third straight term, winning 304 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections on its own, according to an opinion survey conducted by a media house.

The Mood of the Nation opinion poll by India Today, in its February 2024 edition, has predicted 335 seats for the BJP-led NDA, which is comfortably above the majority mark of 272. However, the prediction falls short of PM Modi's ambitious target of 400 seats for NDA and 370 for BJP in the 2024 general election. Interestingly, the survey predicted 304 seats for BJP in the coming election, which is just one higher than the party's 2019 tally of 303. However, NDA's overall seat share will be 18 short of its 2019 tally of 353, the survey predicted.



Meanwhile, the opposition bloc INDIA, which also includes Congress, is predicted to clinch 166 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha.

The predictions suggest that the anti-BJP front will fall enormously short of the numbers required to challenge PM Modi. Notably, the survey predicted 71 seats for Congress in the coming elections. If the predictions hold true, it will be a marked improvement for the grand old party compared to its previous two tallies of 52

(2019) and 44 (2014). The survey also predicted that BJP will see a huge bump in its 2024 vote share, securing 40% of the total votes compared to 31% in 2019.

Congress will grab 19% of the ballot, which is more or less similar to its previous figure of 19.3%, according to the survey. Lok Sabha elections are due in April-May this year. PM Modi is confident of securing a third term in office, saying that the nation has already made up its mind.

Criminal justice system mis-used by vested interests: SC

NEW DELHI: Observing that there has been a recent tendency to misuse the machinery of criminal justice by lodging false and frivolous cases, SC has said that judiciary should be vigilant not to allow such proceedings, which must be nipped in the bud, reports Amit Anand Choudhary.

A bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Augustine George Masih said that the criminal process must not be allowed to be utilised for any oblique purpose and FIR should be quashed if the offence is not



prima facie established and chances of a conviction ultimately are bleak. Court quashed the criminal proceedings against the principal of the Bishop Johnson School and College in Lucknow against

whom FIR was lodged in 2017 and a chargesheet filed for allegedly embezzling fees paid by students. "We find that in recent years the machinery of criminal justice is being mis-used by certain persons for their vested interests and for achieving their oblique motives and agenda. Courts have therefore to be vigilant against such tendencies and ensure that acts of omission and commission having an adverse impact on the fabric of our society must be nipped in the bud," the bench said.

SC says 'bail, not jail' rule not applicable in UAPA cases

NEW DELHI: In an important ruling, Supreme Court has held that conventional idea of 'bail is the rule, jail is exception' is not applicable when an accused is facing charges under anti-terror law UAPA and, also, that delayed trial proceedings in grave offences could be a ground to seek bail.

Delineating Section 43D(5) of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, a bench of Justices M M Sundresh and Aravind Kumar said that wording of the provision is in contrast with wording of bail provision under Section 437(1) of Criminal Procedure Code, indicating that for UAP Act,

the legislature's intent was to make bail, the exception and jail, the rule. "The conventional idea in bail jurisprudence vis-a-vis ordinary penal offences that the discretion of courts must tilt in favour of the oft-quoted phrase - 'bail is the rule, jail is the exception'.

ED finds 2cr cash in tree-felling case

An ED team, in a series of raids conducted at 17 locations in Uttarakhand, Delhi and Haryana till late Wednesday, found approximately Rs 2 crore worth of cash, gold and valuables, along with documents related to immovable properties worth crores in connection with its investigation into the Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) scam in which over 6,000 trees were illegally cut even though permission was obtained for just 163, reports Gaurav Talwar.

'Give same benefits to Agniveer martyrs'

Families of Agniveers who lose their lives during operational service should get the same benefits provided to next of kin of 'regular' soldiers, a parliamentary standing committee on defence recommended.

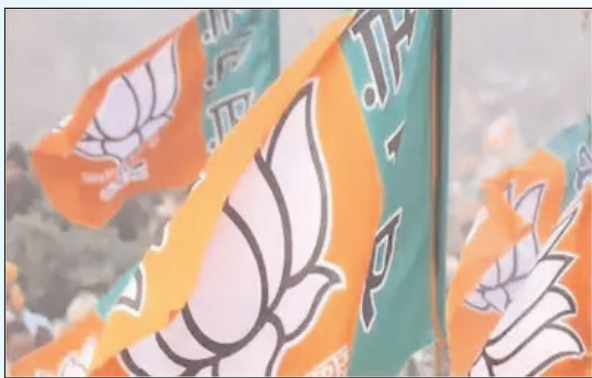
Opposition protests changes to water bill, says it is 'draconian'

NEW DELHI: Opposition parties, including DMK, RSP, Congress, TMC, strongly opposed a bill amending the Water Act, in Lok Sabha on saying it is "draconian", intended to override the powers of states and pave the way for corporates to get away at the cost of environmental damage. They also asked the govt to refer the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Amendment Bill, 2024, to the standing committee for scrutiny. Participating in the debate on the bill, DMK's DM Kathir Anand said that this is a "draconian" bill and will impact the autonomy of states. The Vellore MP alleged that the Centre has brought similar laws on the national education policy and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act to take away the powers of states. The bill was passed in the Rajya Sabha on Feb 6. It seeks to decriminalise minor offences related to water pollution. RSP's N K Premachandran said he "strongly" opposed the bill. The govt, he said, is trying to do ease of doing business for the industry at the cost of environment. Supriya Sule from the NCP-Sharad Pawar echoed the sentiments..

BJP's receipts in 2022-23 up by 23% to 2,361 crore

NEW DELHI: BJP's total receipts during 2022-23 rose by 23% to around Rs 2,361 crore, 54% of which came via electoral bonds, from Rs 1,917 crore in 2021-22. Its expenditure, meanwhile, surged by 59% to Rs 1,361 crore in 2022-23 from Rs 854 crore in the previous year.

As per BJP's annual audit report for 2022-23 made public by Election Commission on Thursday, electoral bonds brought in Rs 1,294 crore for the party, up 25% from Rs 1033.7 crore received in 2021-22. Other contributions,



including donations from individuals, corporates and electoral trusts, totalled Rs 648 crore, down from Rs 721.7 crore in 2021-22. Receipts from Aajiwani Sahayog Nidhi rose to Rs 177.2 crore in 2022-23

from barely Rs 19.9 crore in 2021-22. Interest from banks totalled Rs 237.3 crore in 2022-23, way beyond the Rs 133.3 crore interest earned the previous year. On the expenditure side, 80% of the total

spending in 2022-23 was on poll and general propaganda. Over Rs 1,092 crore was spent on this head, up from Rs 645.8 crore spent in 2021-22. This included Rs 844 crore spent on advertisement and publicity and Rs 132 crore on travel. In comparison, Congress's total receipts during 2022-23 fell to Rs 452 crore from Rs 541 crore in 2021-22, while its expenditure rose to Rs 467 crore from Rs 400 crore a year ago. Its contribution receipts via electoral bonds in 2022-23 were down to Rs 171 crore.

ED summons Jharkhand MP for questioning in Soren case

RANCHI/NEW DELHI: The Enforcement Directorate has summoned Congress Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand Dhiraj Prasad Sahu for questioning in a money laundering case in which the central agency recently arrested former chief minister Hemant Soren, official. Sahu, 64, was in the news after the Income-tax department in December recovered Rs 351.8 crore cash, an all-time high seizure, during raids against Odisha-



based Boudh Distillery Pvt. Ltd, promoted by the family of the Congress legislator. The MP is understood to have been summoned to appear on February 10 at the ED office in Ranchi.

A response from Sahu in this con-

text is awaited. Sources said the ED wants to question and record Sahu's statement in connection with his purported links with Soren and a BMW SUV that was seized by the agency from the JMM leader's house in Delhi during searches last month.

According to the ED sources, agency officials found the keys of the vehicle in the Jharkhand govt leased residence in south Delhi and they took the SUV with them at the conclusion of the raids and parked it at their headquarters in the national capital. The agency also raided a premise in Kadarapur village in Gurugram on Wednesday on whose address this Haryana number plate bearing SUV is stated to have been registered, the sources said.

Eye on their domestic constituencies, MPs opt for native tongues

NEW DELHI: Ahead of the general elections, the last sitting of the 17th Lok Sabha is seeing a large number of Parliamentarians switching to their native tongues to deliver what might be their farewell speeches in lower House.

During Wednesday's discussion on the Interim Budget in Lok Sabha, for instance, Tamil Nadu MPs cutting across parties participated in the debate in Tamil. While DMK's Dayanidhi Maran and T Sumathy, and Congress' Jothimani spoke in Tamil, Shiv Sena (Uddhav) faction's Vinayak Raut spoke in Marathi. Karnataka MPs Pratap Simha intervened in the discussion in Kannada and was joined by Tejaswi Surya, who has deliv-



ered speeches in English and even intervened in Hindi. During the budget discussion, IUM's Abdussamad Samadani, a scholar and writer, spoke in Malayalam with a smattering of Hindi. Punjab MPs Harsimrat Kaur Badal and Congress' Ravneet Singh Bittu, meanwhile, held forth in Punjabi. Though MPs delivering speeches in their native language is not unusual, and both Houses have a fair number of polyglots, the 'Vocal in Local'

pitch appears to be an outreach to constituents back home ahead of the polls. The trend continued Thursday, with Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia underscoring his Maratha antecedents and responding to a question hour intervention on civil aviation in Marathi, and Congress' Manish Tewari, eloquent in English and Hindi, turning to Punjabi to make a zero hour intervention on farm distress and the plight of farmers in Punjab.

Govt: In adoption cases health status of biological parents can be shared only if their "privacy" is not violated

NEW DELHI: Clearing the air on whether the health status of the biological parent of a child placed in the adoption pool should be disclosed to prospective adoptive parents, the government has said that such information may only be shared if it "does not violate the privacy of the biological parents". The steering committee of the Central Adoption Resource Authority under the ministry of women and child development at its meeting last month took into consideration two conflicting opinions received from AIIMS and NIMHANS on the matter by CARA and finally after a "detailed discussion" decided to go with the opinion offered by the latter. The matter was placed on the agenda for opinion, as CARA has been receiving requests from stakeholders for providing guidance over disclosing health status of biological parents to PAPS, be it HIV positive or mental instabili-



ty/illness. "Moreover, it has also been observed that in the case of a surrendered child, where the health status of biological parents is disclosed in the child study report (CSR), PAPS are not accepting the child," it is cited in the minutes of the meeting available in the public domain on the CARA website. CARA received two conflicting views on the matter. "The expert from AIIMS is of the opinion that complete information about the mother's status should be furnished as it is legally required to do so. On the other hand,

NIMHANS representative has stated that such information may only be shared if it does not violate the privacy of the biological parents," said the steering committee in its decision concluded that following discussions in detail, the opinion of NIMHANS has been approved. The adoption regulations deal with the issue of 'background information of the biological parent'. The 2022 regulations address the issue in the section on information regarding the social background of a child. It states that "do not give identifying information about the natural parent". Social background should include a child's social history which can be a brief background about the birth parents and circumstances necessitating the child's surrender or abandonment. However, "identifying information such as the name and address of birth parents or relatives is prohibited".

Bouquets for Manmohan, brickbats for Mallikarjun

NEW DELHI: Amid lack of clarity whether former PM Manmohan Singh will get another term as Rajya Sabha MP, the upper House on Thursday bade a warm farewell to him and 67 other retiring members, with PM Narendra Modi praising his predecessor for his commitment as a parliamentarian. Modi praised Singh for his "invaluable thoughts" and recalled that the economist-turned-politician had recently turned up for a Rajya Sabha vote in a wheelchair despite knowing that the treasury had an unassailable lead. On another occasion, he came in a wheelchair to vote in an election to choose members of a committee. "This shows how alive he was towards his duties as an MP. It can be said that he turned up to strengthen somebody.

Despair to jubilation, asserts white paper on 10-year journey

NEW DELHI: From an economy that was on the road to nowhere and faced a crisis in 2014, the Modi gov't rescued it from a state of despair and paralysis, containing prices to provide relief to households and repairing public finances through prudent fiscal policies, said the white paper on the economy unveiled in Parliament by the Centre on Thursday. "Worse, the UPA gov't, in its quest to maintain high economic growth by any means after the global financial crisis of 2008, severely undermined the macroeconomic foundations. One such foundation that was severely weakened by the UPA gov't was price stability," it said. Average annual inflation between FY14 and FY23 declined to 5% from an average inflation of 8.2% between FY04 and FY14 after NDA gov't mounted efforts to remove what it says was the sting of the high cost of living



for households. "To tackle the enduring challenge of high inflation inherited from UPA gov't in 2014, our gov't strategically addressed the root cause of the problem by implementing responsible fiscal and monetary policies," according to the document released by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman. It said fiscal discipline undergirded gov't's spending decisions. In 2016, gov't gave the mandate to RBI to target inflation in the band of 2% to 6%. "But for the geopolitical developments that significantly escalated global commodity prices, the average inflation in the last 10 years would have been even lower. Yet gov't had inflation in control through diversifying supply sources and strengthening buffers of key food items," according to the white paper. Highlighting its fiscal management, the paper said that contrary to UPA gov't's approach of expanding the budgets during the high growth periods (pro-cyclical), the present gov't has followed a prudent fiscal policy.

Land-for-jobs scam case: Court grants interim bail to Rabri Devi, daughters Misa Bharti and Hema Yadav

NEW DELHI: Former Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi, along with her daughters Misa Bharti and Hema Yadav, has been granted interim bail on Friday by the Rouse Avenue Court in connection with the land-for-jobs scam case. The bail is valid until the next date of hearing, which is scheduled for February 28. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) had earlier issued notices against Amit Katyal, Rabri Devi, Misa Bharti, Hema Yadav, and

Hridayanand Chaudhary to appear on February 9, 2024, for further trial in the alleged 'land for job scam'. Lalu Prasad's family - wife Rabri and daughters - appeared before the court, while Katyal appeared through video conferencing. The ED had filed a prosecution complaint on January 1, 2024, under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, against the four and two companies - A K Infosystems Private Limited and A B Exports

Pvt. Ltd. The complaint was filed before the Special Court (PMLA) in New Delhi. The investigation by the premier agency was initiated based on an FIR registered by the CBI, alleging corruption by Lalu Yadav, the then Railway Minister, in the appointment of Group D substitutes in Indian Railways between 2004 and 2009. The candidates were allegedly asked to transfer land as a bribe in return for jobs in Indian Railways.

Congress MP Manish Tewari moves adjournment motion in Lok Sabha

NEW DELHI: Congress MP Manish Tewari has moved an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha seeking a discussion on the border situation with China in the Lower House on Friday. The MP from Sri Anandpur Sahib constituency sought suspension of Zero Hour,

Question Hour, and other businesses of the day. "Since 2019, there have been constant border clashes between India and China. The Government has stonewalled every attempt made by the Opposition to have a discussion regarding this

urgent issue. Since this Budget Session is the final session of the 17th Lok Sabha prior to the General Elections, I request that this House be adjourned to discuss the India-China border situation," Tewari wrote in a letter to the Lok Sabha Secretary General..

Backward panel says Rahul must apologise

NEW DELHI: The National Commission for Backward Classes led by chairman Hansraj Ahir has issued a statement demanding an apology from Rahul Gandhi to the OBC community for his claims regarding the OBC status of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. "Crores of OBC people across India are seething with anger at the pathetic conduct of Rahul Gandhi because of his mindless utterances against our respected Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During one of his public meetings, he made claims about the OBC status of PM Modi and the caste Modi belongs to," the statement issued by Ahir's office asserts.

Islanders worried over opaque proceedings for Agatti airport expansion

KAVARATTI: The sides of a sleepy road, leading to a non-descript airport, the only one in the Lakshadweep islands, are filled with coconut trees, with white and red painted upto a quarter of their heights. A comparatively active ocean on the Eastern side and a calm, bluish ocean on the Western side gives the road an out of the world charm. The people on this tranquil stretch are either sitting idle or carrying on with their chores, but in a very relaxed manner that is so typical of an islander. If the proposed airport expansion, not the limited expansion that has been on the cards for nearly a decade, but the massive one that popped up only after the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi earlier last month, materialises, then this tranquil corner of Agatti Island will become a hub of hectic activity. The islanders, with their usual friendly demeanour, welcome the airport expansion plan and are jubilant at the prospects of development attached to it. But behind their friendly, welcoming faces, there lies a concern of them losing their lands without proper compensation. "We wholeheartedly welcome the airport expansion and bringing in new tourism projects.

Manipur-based tribal groups oppose decision to scrap India-Myanmar FMR

NEW DELHI: Members of Manipur-based tribal groups have opposed the central government's decision to scrap the India-Myanmar Free Movement Regime (FMR).

The FMR allows people residing close to the India-Myanmar border to venture 16 km into each other's territory without any documents. The reaction of the groups came on Thursday after Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the Centre has decided to scrap the FMR to maintain the country's internal security and



demographic structure of northeastern states. "The tribal communities in Manipur and Mizoram are not happy with the

decision of the FMR and they will make sure to take whatever steps required to oppose the decision at higher level,"

spokesperson of ZO United Ginza Vualzong said.

"We had a three-hour meeting with home ministry officials on Wednesday. During the meeting, we spoke about the various issues that we are facing back home. They have listened patiently to our issues and concern. They said that they will take it up to the higher authorities," Vualzong said.

Zo United is a coordinating body which comprises all apex bodies like Kuki Inpi Manipur, Zomi Council, ITLF, COTU, HTC and all tribe councils.

Patnaik aide's remark sparks buzz over BJP-BJD ties



BHUBANESWAR:

Speculation about an understanding between BJP and BJD ahead of the LS polls was rife after Naveen Patnaik's ex-secretary-turned-BJD member V K Pandian testified Thursday to the Odisha CM's "rapport" with PM Modi and their "tremendous respect for each other", reports Ashok Pradhan. "Whenever Modi and Naveen meet, they do so like two friends reconnecting after a long time. They share a commitment to cooperative federalism. They both realise that each

has a mandate to work for a cause, and they respect that," said Pandian. The PM had addressed Patnaik as his friend at a recent event in Sambalpur. "After Modi took over as PM in 2014, Centre-state relationship improved tremendously", Pandian, a 2000-batch IAS officer who took voluntary retirement last

year to join BJD, said Thursday. The remarks by Pandian, perceived to be the most powerful face in Odisha's governing party after Naveen, come ahead of Lok Sabha and assembly elections, and coincide with BJP-led NDA's expansion effort and several opposition-governed states demanding

their "rightful share" of central resources as part of fiscal federalism. Speculation about an understanding between BJP and BJD has invited barbs from Congress MP Rahul Gandhi, who, during his Bharat Jodi Nyay Yatra in Odisha on Wednesday, accused both of running "a partnership gov't" in Odisha. Naveen had warmly reciprocated Modi's praise during the inauguration of IIM-Sambalpur's permanent campus last week, lauding him for making India an economic powerhouse.

'One Nation, One Election': AAP leaders meet Kovind-led panel, oppose idea of simultaneous polls

NEW DELHI: A delegation of AAP leaders on Thursday met the high-level committee on 'One Nation, One Election' and opposed the idea of simultaneous polls. The government had in September last year notified the panel under former president Ram Nath Kovind to examine and make recommendations at the earliest on the issue of holding simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha, state assemblies, municipalities and panchayats. Senior AAP leader Jasmine Shah who along with Pankaj Gupta met Kovind said in a post on X that the AAP is "vehemently" opposed to simultaneous polls in the country. "Met former President Sh. Ram Nath Kovind and other members of the high-level



Committee for 'One Nation, One Election' today along with AAP national secretary Pankaj Gupta to present the views of Aam Aadmi Party," Shah said in his post. He said simultaneous polls will dilute voter accountability and the tenets of the Constitution and democracy cannot be sacrificed for "narrow financial gains or

administrative convenience". The AAP leaders during the meeting with the committee also pointed out "flawed nature" of the current consultation which is taking place on a vague idea without any policy draft on table. Opposition parties such as the CPI and CPI(M) had met the panel recently.

Ex Sena corporator shot at in Borivli during live video, shooter dies by suicide

MUMBAI: In a shocking incident of firing in the midst of a Facebook Live session on Thursday evening, former Shiv Sena (UBT) corporator Abhishek Ghosalkar from Borivil-Dahisar was shot dead by Mauris Noronha, a local businessman who called himself a social worker and aspired to contest civic elections, in the latter's office in I C Colony in Borivli (West). Noronha was then found dead and is believed to have shot himself. Ghosalkar was rushed to Karuna Hospital in Borivli West and died after attempts by doctors to revive him failed. The incident comes less than a week after BJP's Kalyan East MLA Ganpat Gaikwad fired on Shiv Sena functionary Mahesh Gaikwad and another Shiv Sainik inside a police station in Ulhasnagar. People close to Ghosalkar said Mauris and Abhishek had a history of disputes over several issues, and tensions had been brewing over the past couple of



years. While Morris had been featured in the media for some humanitarian work done during the Covid-19 pandemic, in June 2022 he was arrested from the Mumbai airport after his return from the US following a lookout notice issued against him. The lookout notice was issued in connection with a case of rape, blackmail, cheating and threatening a 48-year-old homemaker of Rs 88 lakh. People close to Abhishek said he had stood by the complainant in that case,

and that had also upset Mauris as it had landed him behind bars for a while. Abhishek was the son of veteran Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Vinod Ghosalkar. Vinod was an MLA from Dahisar from 2009 to 2014 and was also a former corporator. The father-son duo have been known to hold clout in the Borivil-Dahisar area. Abhishek's wife Tejaswi was also a former corporator from ward number 1, which includes parts of both Borivil and Dahisar and which Abhishek had represented earlier. Mauris was preparing to contest the BMC elections from the same ward. However, despite their festering feud, Mauris on Thursday lured Abhishek to his office on the pretext of extending a hand of friendship and invited him to a joint Facebook Live address. In that address, both pledged to distribute saris and foodgrains to poor families of Borivil-Dahisar belt. The shootout occurred during this Facebook Live session around 7.30 pm.

Ratan Tata finally completes work on his 'pet' project

MUMBAI: At 86, Ratan Tata is ready to roll out his latest and long-pending 'pet' project — an animal hospital for Mumbai. Conceived out of his struggle and the transcontinental quest to find advanced health-care for his injured dog, the hospital is all set to finally see the light of day in the first week of March. Spread across 2.2 acres and built at a cost of Rs 165 crore, the facility will be one of India's few 24x7 hospitals for dogs, cats, rabbits, and other small animals. In an exclusive interview with TOI ahead of the inauguration of the Tata Trusts Small Animal Hospital in Mahalaxmi, Ratan Tata said, "A pet is no different from a member of one's family today.

Editorial

Modi's Rajya Sabha speech rekindles Sitaram's humiliating ouster from Congress

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reference to former Congress president Sitaram Kesri during the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address in the Rajya Sabha has rekindled a lot of memories particularly in the context of how Kesri was unceremoniously removed as head of the grand old party. "Sitaram Kesri who belonged to a backward caste and was the Congress president, was thrown onto the footpath. The country saw what the Congress did to Sitaram Kesri," Modi had said.

Here is an account of what had happened to Kesri.

On 14 March, 1998, the Congress' 24 Akbar Road headquarters was a mute witness to a coup that saw the rather unsavoury exit of an "elected" Congress president and the appointment of Sonia Gandhi as party chief. Kesri, then in his 79th year, had arrived at the CWC meeting convinced that a party president could not be forced out. He did not know that before the 11 am meeting, most CWC members had gathered at Pranab Mukherjee's house to endorse two crucial statements. The first was an ultimatum asking Kesri to step down; the second, a resolution replacing him with Sonia. The moment Kesri stepped into the hall, he knew something was amiss. Loyalist Tariq Anwar was the only one who stood up to greet him. After Kesri sat down, Mukherjee began reading out a resolution "thanking" him for his services. A horrified Kesri shouted, "Arre yeh kya keh rahe ho (What are you saying)", but there was a smirk on the faces of his colleagues. Kesri raved against the "unconstitutional" meeting and stormed out, followed by loyalist Anwar. As he was getting into his car, he was heckled and some Youth Congress workers even tried to pull down his dhoti. By the time Kesri exited 24 Akbar Road, the nameplate outside what used to be his room had already been replaced with a computer printout that read: "Congress President Sonia Gandhi." When Kesri reached his Purana Qila residence, he was in no mood for his favourite Pomeranian Ruchi's joyous welcome. Eyewitnesses, however, recalled that the moment he kicked her, Kesri was overcome with remorse. The finest of biscuits — presented to Kesri during his tenure — were offered to the puzzled Ruchi. Arriving journalists found the Congress veteran calmer. He bad-mouthed Mukherjee, Jitendra Prasad and Arjun Singh but the ingrained reverence for the "Family" prevented him from attacking Sonia. Kesri later told this writer he was hoping for "correction" from Sonia after his ouster. When the new party chief arrived a few hours later to comfort him, Kesri rushed to greet her. Neither mentioned the "coup". Sonia sought Kesri's blessings and guidance and the old man puffed up with pleasure. By 7 pm, he was singing paeans to the Nehru-Gandhis while promising to get even with Mukherjee, Prasad and Arjun Singh. The Congress had become disillusioned with "Chacha" Kesri after the 1998 general election, when it won only 142 seats. The party had asked "nephews" Ahmad Patel and Ghulam Nabi Azad to persuade the old man to quit but Kesri had refused. Then Manmohan Singh, Mukherjee and AK Antony had called on Kesri and got him to meet Sonia. On 9 March, five days before his ouster, Kesri announced he would resign to make way for Sonia but soon changed tack. He said he wanted a meeting of the 1,300-member AICC, which would need over a month to arrange, before quitting. On 13 March, Prasad hosted a lunch where 13 of the 17 CWC members signed Kesri's political death warrant. Patel, Prasad, Mukherjee, RK Dhawan, Arjun, Azad, Sharad Pawar, Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy, Antony, Manmohan, Meira Kumar, Oscar Fernandes and Madhavsinh Solanki signed the ultimatum to Kesri.

Narendra Modi, Naya Bharat and a war of narratives

Noted journalist Javed Anand, on the morning of 22 January, 2024, writing in a prominent newspaper said, "For the Muslims it (Babri Masjid) was only a property dispute. It (the mosque) had no religious or historical significance. It was so obscure that locating it in the then narrow and dusty lanes of Ayodhya was bit of a task." He holds forth that the Muslim leadership should have volunteered to hand over the structure to the Hindus, whose sentiments were so deeply ingrained in the structure. While Anand blames the Muslim leadership of failing to see the sentiments, he has not placed on record the role of Left-leaning historians like Irfan Habib, RS Sharma and DN Jha, who derided the Hindu belief in the location being the place of birth of their cultural and not just religious icon — Ram, the Prince, and later the King of Ayodhya. The role of the Left-'liberal' influence on the succeeding governments of post-Independence was not just limited to their position on the Ram Mandir issue but in different sectors of policy-making. In the midst of the high-energy celebrations over the consecration of the Ram temple, Utpal Kumar's recently launched tome *Bharat Rising: Dharma, Democracy, Diplomacy* may not get a viral-type reception in the market but it's set for a



long inning in the world of books.

Speaking at the launch of the book, Bibek Debroy, the Chairman of the Economic Advisory Committee to the Prime Minister, mentioned that the Narendra Modi regime would be judged by history but for sure it did unseat the deeply entrenched thoughts and ideas in post-colonial India. There is no disagreement on this, however, the problem that Modi would pose for future historians is the lack of quality work to justify his acceptance as a mass leader, who changed the grammar of Indian politics for good. To Utpal Kumar's own confession, he is no Nehru-baiter for the sake of being part of a nationalist jingoism. In fact, he says that there are no doubts about first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru being a patriot, who wanted his country to do well. He, however, says that his policies cannot be held in the same high esteem as they were

flawed and reflective of the mindset which resisted taking pride in our civilisational roots.

The author, through the 12 diverse essays, tries to establish the viewpoint that Nehruvian influence on Indian polity, culture and economy have been the biggest impediments in the rise of a new post-colonial India. This he does as a virtuoso of a seasoned researcher. His arguments are pegged on convincing facts, which somebody disagreeing with this line could find difficult to demolish intellectually. His most lucid remark on Nehru's policies is captured on page 103: "Nehru could not always run with the hare and hunt with the hounds." This imaging of Nehruvian policies can be seen in many governance initiatives of post-colonial India. Utpal Kumar's arguments can be likened to those of the best legal minds. Like on pages 165-166, he deflates the British Broadcasting

Corporation's claims of journalistic autonomy by pitching the Modi documentary issue of 2023 to the sacking of their highest-paid anchor Gary Linekar two months later in March. The book is full with each argument having a counter-argument. At a time when debates on television have been reduced to very medieval blood and gore duels, such arguments and counterarguments are very refreshing. It helps one to understand the philosophic grounding of many policies of the Narendra Modi regime. The author is very critical of Lutyens' elite which he doesn't consider any less vicious than a cabal, "fiercely defending entry" and the elite prospering on the patronage of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. The author, however, fails to suggest how 'Moditva' was going to guard against the emergence of a similar clique under the present establishment. He quotes from Raj and Romesh Thapar's, 'All These Years', "PN Haksar looked after the Left intellectuals and academia; Inder Kumar Gujral managed the media; and Pupul Jaykar looked after the 'needs' of the art world." But can he contest that this role has now been passed on to certain apparatchiks of a different hue, who have been as unfairly benevolent to their own favourites as were their predecessors in the Lutyens'

cabal? A book would have its shortcomings; in fact, what's a book without shortcomings? It's also true that the more rigorous the work of scholarship, the more rigorous the evaluation is. The look becomes harder if the book advocates the thoughts and philosophies of the establishment. There are several arguments which can be effectively countered but for sure not dismissed. The essays in 'Bharat Rising: Dharma, Democracy, Diplomacy' are advised as compulsive reading for those averse to the Moditva especially the Left-'liberals' for several reasons. First being the emergence of a scholar like Utpal Kumar on the Right, and second being the presence of several students at his book launch despite the winter chill at the prestigious Shri Ram College of Commerce of Delhi University. New establishment throws up pretenders, their books sell well with the official patronage but they do not invite scholastic respect beyond the regime. Regimes come and go, books live beyond them. The post-independence discourse is finding a new passage which for sure is through belief in India's civilisational roots. This may not be getting effective and appreciative replications in the official organs and publications of the establishment but certainly.

Ahmadis: Pakistan's persecuted 'others' struggle for recognition

Ahmadis in Pakistan society suffer from social, religious, economic persecution, hatred and violent attacks. They face constant threats from Pakistani authorities and extremists. Even worse, in death, Ahmadi tombstones are desecrated expunged of their Muslim identity if not outright destroyed. Besides, criminal charges are brought against its leadership in Pakistan and abroad. In one such incident, on 26 January, 2024, police under pressure from religious extremists destroyed the tombstones of 80 graves of the Ahmadi community in Punjab province. The incident occurred in Daska, some 100 km from Lahore, the provincial capital. According to the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya Pakistan, "The police destroyed the tomb-

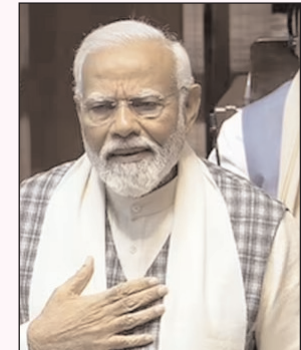
stones of Ahmadi graves even though the graveyard was allocated to the Ahmadi community by the government of Punjab". The 500,000-member Ahmadi community is a well-proclaimed and mostly neglected religious minority in Pakistan. A decision of the Lahore High Court in August 2023 said the 1984 prohibition on building Ahmadi places of worship did not allow authorities to destroy or alter structures built before then. Still, such a verdict does not deter the ruthless demolition of Ahmadi mosques and other religious edifices.

As written above, police continue to demolish Ahmadi mosques and graves over allegations against them masquerading as Muslim worship places. Ahmadis are barred from giving the

Islamic call to prayer or even displaying "Muslim names" in front of their homes. The Pakistani Constitution formally declares the Ahmadi sect of Islam to be "infidels" and bars members of the community from "posing as Muslims". As reported in September 2023, approximately 75 graves and minarets of two worship places belonging to the Ahmadi minority community have been demolished by police and radical Islamists in Punjab province. Also, it is reported that since 1984, some 4,000 Ahmadis have faced criminal charges because of their faith. Religious bigots who continue to consider themselves as saviours of Islam fail to comprehend that tarnishing graves is not exactly associated with the traditions.

PM Modi's Rajya Sabha address: Shock and awe for Congress; vision for 'Vikshit Bharat'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at Rajya Sabha, his reply to the Motion of Thanks on President's statement, was his final address to the Parliament in this term. The prime minister seemed convinced that his third term is a mere formality, and as such his Wednesday's speech may be interpreted as the official launch of BJP's general election campaign. The prime minister is an orator nonpareil. His Rajya Sabha oration took off from where he left it at Lok Sabha on Monday, and both his addresses should be viewed as a coherent whole instead of two separate discourses. While he set the terms of election campaign with an audacious 370-seat target for BJP (and 400+ for NDA) at the Lower House, at the Upper House he revealed two major themes. The first was an unabashed attack on Congress packed with sardonic wit, humour and facts. The second was laying down the vision for Modi government 3.0 — with a subliminal message that election results are almost a foregone conclusion. This was as much a message to the voters as to the Opposition that they stop wasting time in forming unnatural alliances to keep him at bay. Mind



games aside, the speech was a masterclass in political messaging. Worth noting that Modi once again trained his guns exclusively on Congress, and he came to the floor well-prepared with a battery of facts, annotations and quotes to rebut and ridicule each of Congress's poll agendas one by one. It was excruciating or exhilarating, depending on which side of the political fence you sit. This facet needs to be explored. Given the fact that Congress is struggling to retain its relevance, footprint and has been reduced to a cipher, and given the fact that BJP's toughest opponents are regional outfits such as Trinamool Congress or DMK, why did the prime minister repeatedly and singularly attack the grand old party? Interesting to note that late on Wednesday night Telugu Desam president N Chandrababu Naidu called on Union home minister Amit Shah at his residence in New

Delhi late purportedly to join the NDA alliance ahead of elections in April-May. Evidently the BJP wants to keep its options open in pre-and-post-poll scenarios. Even though it appears to be the frontrunner in the upcoming elections with the Congress gasping for breath, the BJP wants to leave nothing to chance. That is the kind of realpolitik, tactical planning and killer instinct Modi and Shah bring to the table. Rahul Gandhi has been positioning himself as a 'champion' for Dalits, Adivasis and backward sections of the society and recently launched a high-octane campaign, promising to "throw out" the 50 per cent cap on reservation if INDI Alliance is voted to power. To rebut Congress's narrative on social justice, Modi sought to prove that Congress has always been anti-reservation and acted against the interests of backward classes, and presented BJP as the true champion of SC, ST and OBCs. Modi alluded to a letter written by former prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru to then chief ministers, where the Congress leader writes, "I dislike any kind of reservation, more particularly in services. I react strongly against anything which leads to inefficiency."

Why drug smuggling is more important than conspiracy to murder

Fans of true crime stories on OTT platforms in India may recall the tragic case of a little boy who was murdered in 2017 along with his uncle in the hinterland of Gujarat. The intrepid cops traced the crime to a non-resident Indian woman and her Gujarati immigrant toy boy. The closing scene of the episode had the patriotic inspector telling the smirking woman over an international call that he would get the two of them back to India to face justice. Sadly, he was wrong. That is because a British senior district judge refused the extradition of the diabolical duo—Arti Dhir and

Kaval Rajjada, now married—because they would face long prison terms in India which would breach Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights which protects against "inhumane sentences"! That judge, Emma Arbuthnot, would also be familiar to those who follow the cases of two other fugitives wanted by India, Vijay Mallya and Nirav Modi.

Arbuthnot concluded in 2019 that as "there is no possibility of a review either at state level or by the President of India, in those circumstances, there will be no 'hope' or the possibility of exceptional release." So, she dis-

charged the two and scotched India's extradition request as there was "substantial grounds for believing that they would face a real risk of being subject to treatment, a lack of a review of a life sentence, which would be inhuman and degrading".

Crime is mostly pretty inhuman and quite degrading too. But if it pertains to a non-third world country then the same perpetrators face a very different outcome, it seems. Having avoided extradition (and even prosecution in UK) for the murder of the two Indians, now Dhir, 59, and Rajjada, 35, have been sentenced to 33 years in

jail for smuggling 514 kg of cocaine, valued at £57 million, to Australia through their air freight business, as well as for money laundering. That is cold comfort for the rural Gujarati woman who lost her husband and 11-year-old brother to the avarice of Dhir and Rajjada. Clearly, the justice system of the UK considers a 33-year custodial sentence for smuggling cocaine from one First World country to another to be neither inhuman nor degrading but a potential similar sentence ordered by Indian courts for the masterminds of a double homicide to be both.

GST evasion by bogus firms was highest in Delhi

NEW DELHI: Delhi has earned the dubious distinction of having the highest amount of goods and services tax (GST) evasion by bogus firms in the third quarter of 2023-24 financial year.

According to officials, between Oct and Dec 2023, 483 bogus firms were busted in the capital, which were involved in suspected GST evasion of Rs 3,028 crore. Delhi was third only to Maharashtra (926) and Rajasthan (507) in the number of bogus GST firms that were detected by the authorities in the third quarter of FY24.

They, however, added that the suspected amount of GST evasion in Maharashtra and Rajasthan was estimated at Rs 2,201 crore and Rs 197 crore only, respectively. GST formations, under the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, and respective state and union territory govts have been carrying out a drive since May 2023 to identify bogus regis-



trations and issuance of fake invoices without any underlying supply of goods and services.

In the quarter ending Dec 2023, a total of 4,153 bogus firms that involved in suspected input tax credit evasion of around Rs 12,036 crore were detected across the country and 41 arrests were made. In Delhi, the authorities managed to block input tax credit of Rs 90 crore and made arrests of 11 people involved in the fraud. In terms of estimated GST evasion, Delhi is followed by Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh (Rs 1,645 crore), Andhra Pradesh (Rs 765 crore) and Haryana (Rs 624 crore).

Since the initiation of the special drive, a total of 29,273 bogus

firms involved in suspected ITC evasion of Rs 44,015 crore have been detected across the country.

While no reaction was available from the office of finance minister Atishi, the officials of the trade and taxes department claimed that measures were being taken to check the entry of fake firms in the GST network. "We have set up a centralised GST registration cell to receive and process new applica-

tions. This has helped in bringing down the number of deemed registration of firms and thus restricted the entry of bogus trading firms, curbing GST evasion and subsequent revenue loss to the government," said an official, requesting anonymity.

ITC slips as top shareholder BAT looks to cut stake

MUMBAI: ITC stock fell 4% on Thursday, the most among sensex constituents, after the Kolkata-headquartered conglomerate's single-largest shareholder British American Tobacco said it was looking at ways to dilute its stake in the company. This was the second time in the last one month that BAT - one of the largest cigarette makers in the world - said it was willing to cut its holding in ITC, which has a substantial presence in the country's cigarettes, luxury hotels, foods and FMCG sectors. Industry sources said that the market may have overreacted to the



news about BAT's intentions about its holding in ITC, which currently stands at a little over 29%. "Informally, BAT, over several months, has communicated that it may sell up to 4% in ITC, but would like to retain at least 25% in the company now," said a

source.

At Thursday's close on BSE, ITC - with a market capitalisation of Rs 5.2 lakh crore - is the 10th most valued company in the country. BAT's stake in ITC is currently valued at about Rs 1.5 lakh crore, translating to a little over \$18 billion.

A 4% stake dilution could fetch nearly \$2.5 billion for the UK-based company. Although BAT has not sold any shares of ITC through the open market or block deals, its shareholding in ITC in the last four years has come down by about 0.42% mainly because of issuance of stock options by the Indian company.

Rs 7 Lakh crore: LIC beats ICICI Bank to be fifth most valued company

MUMBAI: A stock rally spanning two and a half months that added nearly Rs 3.2 lakh crore to life insurance major LIC's market value, on Thursday, made it the fifth most valued company in India. At the close of trade on BSE, LIC's market cap was just a tad below Rs 7

lakh crore, ahead of ICICI Bank, which was at Rs 6.9 lakh crore and just behind Infosys at Rs 7.02 lakh crore, data from the bourses showed. For a brief period during the day, as LIC's stock hit a life-high of Rs 1,144, the life insurer was the fourth most valued company in

the country, ahead of Infosys. But at close of the session, as its stock price dipped a bit from the earlier high, it settled at the fifth spot. Currently, with a market cap of Rs 19.6 lakh crore, Reliance Industries is the most valued company in the country.



Monthly SIP flows at record Rs 18,000 crore

MUMBAI: A volatile stock market in Jan notwithstanding, monthly inflows through SIPs in MF schemes went past the Rs 18K crore mark to settle at Rs 18,838 crore, while assets under management for the industry scaled a peak at Rs 52.7 lakh crore. Last month, a record 51.8 lakh new SIPs were opened, data released by MF industry body Amfi showed, while the total number of folios were almost at 17 crore - also an all-time high number. The surge in SIP accounts, coupled with the milestone of 51.8 lakh new SIP registrations, underscores the commitment of investors towards disciplined wealth creation, said Amfi chief executive, Venkat Chalasani. "Moreover, the industry's net AUM soaring to Rs 52.7 lakh crore further accentuates the resilience and potential of mutual funds as a preferred investment avenue," Chalasani said.

Adani net worth tops \$100bn again after a year

MUMBAI: Billionaire investor Gautam Adani's net worth topped the \$100 billion mark again on Wednesday, more than a year after Hindenburg Research, a US-based short seller, came out with a report on the group alleging several corporate malpractices that the Ahmedabad-based conglomerate had denied. Following the publication of the report, stock prices of all 10 Adani Group companies had nosedived, which also pushed Gautam Adani - the group's main promoter - out of the top 25 richest people in the world. According to Bloomberg Billionaires Index, on Feb 7, Gautam Adani's net worth was \$101 billion.

Paytm shares tank nearly 9 per cent; fall for 2nd day

NEW DELHI: Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns the Paytm brand, tanked nearly 9 per cent on Friday as investors continued to dump the stock. Extending its previous day's decline, the stock dived 8.67 per cent to Rs 408.30 on the BSE. Shares of the company tumbled 8.20 per cent to Rs 410 on the NSE. Shares of One97 Communications Ltd fell 10 per cent to hit lower circuit limit on Thursday, after a two-day rally in the stock fizzled out. One97 Communications stock price had climbed 10 per cent on Wednesday and rebounded over 3 per cent on Tuesday after three days of sharp fall. From February 1-5 (three days of trading), the company's stock tumbled over



42 per cent, wiping out Rs 20,471.25 crore from its market valuation, following the Reserve Bank of India's crackdown. On January 31, the RBI ordered Paytm Payments Bank Ltd, a restricted bank that can take deposits but cannot lend, to not take any further deposits or conduct credit transactions or carry out top-ups on any customers accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, and cards for paying road

tolls after February 29.

Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Thursday said there are no systemic worries and the action on Paytm was driven by a "lack of compliance" at Paytm.

Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) is an associate of One97 Communications Ltd. One97 Communications holds 49 per cent of the paid-up share capital (directly and through its subsidiary) of PPBL. Founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma has a 51 per cent stake in the bank. Paytm Payments Bank independent director Manju Agarwal is learnt to have resigned from the board after an RBI order imposed restrictions on the bank's operations.

Provident Fund interest rate: EPFO likely to propose 8% rate for FY24

EPFO interest rate FY24: The Central Board of Trustees (CBT) of the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is expected to propose an interest rate of around 8% for the financial year 2023-2024, according to sources familiar with the matter. In the previous years, the EPFO had credited 8.15% interest in FY23 and 8.10% in FY22. The CBT will meet on Saturday. The EPFO is also planning to seek approval



from the board to increase its investment in stocks from the current 10% to 15% in order to improve the return on investments. An EPFO board member told ET that the government, being an election year, aims to provide a sustainable

rate of return on provident fund (PF) deposits, keeping it in line with the existing rates to avoid any backlash. Provident Fund interest rates over years Provident Fund interest rates over years Above is the interest rates on Provident

Fund deposits for the last 10 years.

The state-run retirement fund body has over 60 million subscribers. The final rate of interest for the provident fund will be notified by the Ministry of Finance after considering the recommended rate. The EPFO has shared the agenda for the 235th CBT meeting scheduled for February 10, which includes updates on pensions, budgetary estimates, and compliance issues.

Disclose all loan fees upfront to customers, RBI instructs lenders



MUMBAI: Consumer loans will get more transparent with Reserve Bank of India Thursday directing lenders to disclose all associated fees upfront. This move is part of ongoing regulatory efforts to enhance transparency and disclosure in loan pricing and charges imposed on customers by regulated entities. While the move will take a few months to be implemented, RBI governor Shaktikanta Das said that henceforth, lenders will furnish borrowers with a key fact statement. "KFS contains essential information about loan agreements, including

total cost of loan, presented in a simple and easily understandable format. We have also asked them to mention the annualised interest rate, which is essential for transparency in loans," Das said.

Borrowers find hidden surprises

Borrowers often find it tough to know the exact cost of a loan and often realise that there are some "hidden surprises". "At present, banks disclose all charges on a term sheet. However, an ordinary borrower does not always read the four-five pages of terms and conditions, so we have

already mandated this document in microfinance and digital lending. We are now asking this for all lenders," said RBI governor Shaktikanta Das. The move aligns with RBI's commitment to foster greater transparency and disclosure, ensuring consumers have necessary information to make informed decisions. With upfront disclosure of charges associated with loans, consumers can better understand actual cost of borrowing, mainly in case of some short-term low-value loans where outgo on charges is almost equal to interest rates.

20-30% higher salaries than industry standards! Why Paytm rivals are wary of hiring talent from troubled fintech

Paytm's rivals and other startups may be seeking talent from the troubled fintech company, but the high salaries offered by Paytm make it difficult for these competitors to attract employees. Paytm is known for paying salaries above the industry average, a fact confirmed by industry insiders and executives at recruitment services and search firms. According to them, most Paytm employees receive salaries that are 20-30% higher than the industry standards. This generous compensation has made many startups hesitant to hire Paytm employees, according to report. The same situation was observed with Byju's, a financially-beleaguered edtech firm that was once India's most valuable startup. As a result, many employees at Paytm are open to switching jobs, even if it means accepting



lower pay. This is because the Noida-based company is currently facing regulatory pressures on its operations. According to Ashish Sangneria, senior partner at Transearch, a leading executive search firm, Paytm's leadership talent is willing to take a pay cut because listed companies' stocks are liquid, and many startups cannot match the overall cash, including Restricted Stock Units (RSUs), offered by Paytm.

Paytm employees high salary trouble Industry experts have noted that

most consumer internet startups are currently hiring employees with similar or only marginal pay increases due to the abundance of available talent. This is a significant contrast to the period of the pandemic in 2021-22, when salaries at these firms reached record highs due to a surge in resignations. An executive at a recruitment services firm, who requested anonymity, revealed that Paytm's strategy of offering higher base pay and equity aims to create a competitive advantage by making it difficult for rivals to replicate their talent

pool. This trend of offering generous compensation packages is not unique to startups and is also observed in market-leading organizations across various industries. According to Pranshu Upadhyay, regional director at Michael Page India, market leaders often pay a premium of 15-20% to retain and engage top-notch talent. During the pandemic, there was a high demand for highly-skilled tech talent, particularly in startups and tech companies, which led to a significant increase in salaries. As a result, the salaries of many employees at companies like Paytm were benchmarked at unprecedented levels. However, in the current job market, employees from such companies find it challenging to secure new jobs as the salaries available are often 30-50% lower than what they are currently earning.

ONGC in talks to restart Libya operations, expand in Venezuela

"Once it gets started for Oil India, same applies to us. We are also in the same pact with National Oil Corporation of Libya," Sushma Rawat, director of exploration with ONGC said. Earlier this week, Reuters reported that Oil India is talks with stakeholders to restart drilling in Libya, 13 years after the company exited the country due to political instability. ONGC is also in talks to increase production in Venezuela, Rawat told reporters on the sidelines of India Energy Week event in Goa. Oil India, too, is in talks with operators to ramp up oil production in the South American nation, Reuters had reported this week. The United States had granted sanctions relief for OPEC member Venezuela in October last year in recognition of a deal for elections this year.

Pakistan must end enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings in Balochistan, Sindh: US Congressman

NEW DELHI: US Congressman Brad Sherman on Saturday called out on Pakistan to end "enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings" particularly referring to Balochistan and Sindh regions, The Balochistan Post reported.

Emphasizing that while US does not interfere in Pakistan's domestic affairs, he added that it remains committed to addressing human rights breaches that occur in Pakistan. "Pakistan must put an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Balochistan and Sindh," he said. He was speaking at an event organised by the Congressman at Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. Highlighting the case of MahRang Baloch, a human rights activist, Sherman said on X, "Mahrang Baloch was 16 when Pakistani



security forces abducted her father, who was found dead two years later". "She is now a part of a women-led protest in Islamabad, calling for an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings", he added. According to The Balochistan Post, T Kumar, a former director of Amnesty International, warned that if such practices continue, they would destroy Pakistan's moral foundation. Waheed Baloch, the ex-chairperson of the Baloch Students Organisation (BSO), who was also a part of

the event emphasized the general inhumanity of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings, claiming that no individual with human sensitivity could condone such behavior. Meanwhile, the Baloch Yajjehti Committee and other rights organizations claimed that Pakistan's military are responsible for extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances of innocent people in Balochistan, and that the state's mainstream parties, government, judiciary, and media are complicit in these crimes, Dawn reported.

Revolutionary changes taking place in India-US relationship, says Amb Sandhu

WASHINGTON:

Revolutionary changes are taking place in the India-US relationship, the outgoing Indian Ambassador here, Taranjit Singh Sandhu has said, stressing that the bilateral ties have only covered the tip of the iceberg and are going to go far and wide. Addressing a gathering of Indian Americans at the Republic Day celebration here, Sandhu said it is important that their second generation remains connected to India. "I only wanted to tell you that today revolutionary changes are taking place in

India, also in US-India relations," he said, "And therefore it is important that your children and your families are aware of India, stay connected with India," Sandhu said. The event in McLean, Virginia was organised by the National Council of Asian Associations. The outgoing ambassador was also felicitated by the community leaders for his role in strengthening the India-US relationship. Sandhu speaking at another farewell reception organised by the Indian American Business Impact Group said that the India-US relationship has so far only touched the tip of an iceberg.

for economic and commercial reasons, pay attention, stay connected with India," Sandhu said. The event in McLean, Virginia was organised by the National Council of Asian Associations. The outgoing ambassador was also felicitated by the community leaders for his role in strengthening the India-US relationship. Sandhu speaking at another farewell reception organised by the Indian American Business Impact Group said that the India-US relationship has so far only touched the tip of an iceberg.

Pakistan Stock Exchange plunges 1,700 points amid election result

KARACHI: The Pakistan Stock Exchange's benchmark KSE-100 index went down by 1,700 points on Friday as confusion prevailed over the results of the general elections in Pakistan. Pakistan authorities are moving at a snail's pace to announce the election results that

in a surprising development showed disqualified and jailed ex-Prime Minister Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party supported independent candidates leading the show. A top financial analyst said that the KSE-100 index has plummeted because investors

were looking to sell instead of buying due to the uncertain situation created after the elections. "No one knows what is going to happen and who will form the next government so it is understandable how the investors are reacting today.

Special counsel says Biden 'willfully' kept classified materials: hits him for 'significantly limited' memory

WASHINGTON: In a damaging report ahead of the November 5 polls, a special US counsel has said that President Joe Biden "willfully" mishandled classified documents as a private citizen but concluded that it would be difficult to convict him as he comes across as an "elderly man with a poor memory". The special counsel report said he had kept secret documents related to military and foreign policy in Afghanistan after serving as vice president until 2017.

The comment by Special Counsel Robert Hur in his 345-page report described Biden, 81, as "an elderly man with poor memory", prompting a furious response from the president who held an impromptu press conference at the White House during which he asserted that his "memory is fine." The report was released after an investigation that lasted more than a year and related to classified files found at Biden's home and former pri-

ivate office from 2022-23. The report revealed for the first time that the documents were classified as Top Secret - the highest level of classification, and related to Afghanistan. The files included notebooks containing Biden's entries about national security and foreign policy matters "implicating sensitive intelligence sources and methods". The report criticised Biden for sharing some of the sensitive material in those notebooks with a ghostwriter for

his memoir. Hur said: "We conclude that the evidence does not establish Mr Biden's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt." "Prosecution of Mr Biden is also unwarranted based on our consideration of the aggravating and mitigating factors." Biden's memory was significantly limited, both during his recorded interviews with the ghostwriter in 2017, and in his interview with the Special Counsel's office in 2023, he said.

Trump wins Nevada's Republican caucus after being the only major candidate

Former President Donald Trump won Nevada's Republican caucuses, bringing him closer to securing the GOP nomination. The contest now moves to the South Carolina primary, where Trump remains popular. He is eyeing a significant delegate haul during the Super in March. Former president Donald Trump won Nevada's Republican presidential caucuses Thursday after he was the only major candidate to compete. Former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley skipped the caucuses, which are the



only contest in Nevada that counts toward the GOP nomination. Haley cited what she considered an unfair process favoring Trump and instead ran in Nevada's symbolic state-run presidential primary on Tuesday, when she finished behind the "none of these candidates"

option. Trump's win in Nevada gives him all 26 of the state's delegates. He needs to accrue 1,215 delegates to formally clinch the party's nomination and could reach that number in March. Trump has been the front-runner, Nevada's caucuses were seen as especially

skewed in his favour due to the intense grassroots support caucuses require candidates to harness around a state in order to win. Nevada's state party last year barred candidates from running both in the primary and caucuses and also restricted the role of super PACs like the groups that were key to Florida Gov. Ron ' campaign before he dropped out. Caucuses typically require voters to show up for an in-person meeting at a certain day or time, while elections can offer more flexibility to participate.

Toronto Maple Leafs explode late to take down Winnipeg Jets

NEW DELHI: In Saturday night's matchup, the Toronto Maple Leafs secured a 4-2 victory over the Winnipeg Jets, completing a home-and-home series between the two teams. John Tavares played a crucial role, scoring the go-ahead goal early in the third period.



The Jets opened the scoring in the first period when Dylan Samberg netted his first goal of the season with a wrist shot from above the left faceoff circle. The Maple Leafs dominated early, outshooting the Jets and creating scoring opportunities. However, both teams failed to find the back of the net in the period, leaving the score unchanged. The pivotal moments came in the third period, with Tavares tipping in Morgan Rielly's shot during a power play to give Toronto a 2-1 lead.

setback as defenseman Brenden Dillon left the game with an upper-body injury and did not return. In the second period, the Maple Leafs dominated early, outshooting the Jets and creating scoring opportunities. However, both teams failed to find the back of the net in the period, leaving the score unchanged. The pivotal moments came in the third period, with Tavares tipping in Morgan Rielly's shot during a power play to give Toronto a 2-1 lead.

Matthews extended the lead with his 40th goal of the season, reaching his 600th career point during a five-on-three advantage. Simon Benoit sealed the victory for the Maple Leafs with an empty-net goal at 18:22. Mason Appleton scored a late goal for the Jets at 19:48, but it was not enough to mount a comeback. The win for the Maple Leafs secured a successful conclusion to the home-and-home series, following their 1-0 overtime victory on Wednesday.

Auston

How the hell dare he': Joe angrily pushes back at special counsel's report

The special counsel report is gold dust for Biden's Republican foes, who swiftly used it to paper over their own chaotic political infighting.

US President Joe Biden's advanced age has often been perceived as a vulnerability in his political career—a vulnerability that has been magnified by a startling report from a special counsel investigation. The findings of Special Counsel Robert Hur have provided his political adversaries with potent ammunition by insinuating that he has memory lapses so severe he cannot recall the date of his own son's death.

What's driving the news

A special counsel report released on Thursday has brought President Joe Biden's handling of classified documents into the



spotlight, revealing that he willfully retained and shared highly classified information as a private citizen, including details on military and foreign policy in Afghanistan. While the report by special counsel Robert Hur concluded that criminal charges were not warranted, it has raised serious questions about Biden's competency and memory, intensifying scrutiny on his age as he seeks re-election.

The report found that Biden kept and shared with a ghostwriter classified documents about military and foreign policy in Afghanistan, but concluded that criminal charges were not warranted. The report said Biden could not recall key details about the documents, such as how or when they were packed or moved, and that his memory was "hazy," "fuzzy," "faulty," "poor" and had "significant limita-

tions." The report also said Biden could not remember important events in his own life, such as when his son Beau died of cancer in 2015 or when he was vice president under Barack Obama. **Why it matters** The findings come at a critical time for Biden, who at 81, is already the oldest person ever to serve as US president. The report's critical assessment of his actions and its implications on his mental acuity strike at core voter concerns about his ability to serve another term. This scrutiny is further amplified by Biden's emotional defense of his memory and competency, particularly in light of his vehement denial of sharing classified information and his reaction to questions about his late son, Beau Biden.

Pakistan Elections: Shehbaz Sharif secures victory with 63,953 votes

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President and the country's former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has secured National and Provincial Assembly seats in Lahore, Pakistan-based ARY News reported on Friday citing the Election Commission of Pakistan.

The (PML-N) has secured four seats in the National Assembly, Dawn reported today citing preliminary reports from the country's poll panel. According to the results received from all polling stations, Shehbaz Sharif secured victory in NA-123 seat by garnering 63,953 votes while Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)-backed independent candidate Afzal Azeem received 48,486 votes. Additionally, Shehbaz Sharif secured victory in Lahore PP-158 seat by receiving 38,642 votes while independent candidate Yousuf Ali was runner-up with 23,847 votes.

CAPSULES

Storms dump heavy snowfall in northern Arizona after leaving California a muddy mess

Snow, ice and whiteout conditions forced partial closures of Interstates 40 and 17 in and around Flagstaff, northern Arizona's largest city.

Dennis Fritsch, a trucker, was enroute from Georgia to Reno, Nevada, where he has a delivery due Friday. He pulled over at a truck stop along I-40 in Bellemont, Arizona, anticipating the roadway would be shut down after the temperature dropped and the sun disappeared.

"It's pretty brutal, actually," he said. Longtime Bellemont resident Rick Schuler, who was clearing his and a neighbor's driveway, was taking it in stride as his dog, Dakota, ran around in deep snow. "Just enjoying this beautiful weather, plowing snow, playing with the dog, enjoying it," he said. Schools around northern Arizona, including Northern Arizona University, called snow days. Farther south, rain hit the state's desert regions. A low cloud ceiling briefly shut down all flights in and out of Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport — the state's largest airport. The Federal Aviation Administration issued a ground stop for 45 minutes Thursday morning, delaying more than 100 flights, according to the flight-tracking website FlightAware. The rainy weather also disrupted the first-round play at the Phoenix Open. In California, the clear skies over most of the state were welcomed after days of wind, rain and heavy snowfall that caused power outages, street flooding and hundreds of destructive mudslides. The extremely wet weather marked a major turnabout from a very slow start to winter.

Jasprit Bumrah is a source of inspiration, says India's U19 pacer Naman Tiwari

Left-arm pacer Naman, 18, who is grabbing headlines in the ongoing U19 World Cup here, has found the tips he received from Bumrah at the NCA working magic, and is now looking forward to the title clash against Australia on Sunday. Lucknow boy Naman has troubled rival batters with his yorkers and speed, grabbing 10 wickets so far, with a four-wicket haul against Ireland. Naman Tiwari, who is part of India's squad at the ongoing U19 World Cup, aspires to deliver the fastest ball ever bowled, drawing motivation from studying footage of cricket legends and heeding the advice of pace maestro Jasprit Bumrah. At just 18 years old, Naman, the left-arm pacer from Lucknow, has been making waves in the ongoing U19 World Cup. His interactions with Bumrah at the National Cricket



Academy (NCA) have proven invaluable, as he incorporates the guidance into his game, particularly evident in his notable performance against Ireland, where he secured a four-wicket haul. Naman's proficiency in delivering yorkers and his impressive pace have posed significant challenges for opposing batters, resulting in his tally of 10 wickets thus far. As he anticipates the upcoming title clash against Australia on Sunday, his determination to excel and make a mark in the cricketing world remains resolute. "Bumrah is a source of inspiration for us. I watch his bowling videos a lot. I

have met him several times at NCA and talked to him a lot about the mentality and skills of a bowler," Naman told PTI Bhasha on the sidelines of a practice session at Willowmoore Park Stadium in South Africa. "He has explained a lot (of things to me), which is useful. He told me how to bowl accurate yorkers, and I have worked a lot (on that aspect) following his advice. I have to work hard to bring more aggression in this (my bowling)," he said. "I try to learn something from every bowler I like. I try to understand and learn by watching his (Bumrah's) videos.

SAFF U-19 Women's Championship: India, Bangladesh share trophy after lot of drama

KOLKATA: What transpired in Dhaka on Thursday was nothing short of bizarre as India and Bangladesh ended up as joint winners of the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship after the final which ended one-all during playing time, led to a shootout where 11 penalties each were scored by both sides, then a coin toss to decide the winner. It led to onfield protests, a walkout and a lot of drama. In the end, reason prevailed and both teams were declared joint winners. Eleven kicks from each team went unsaved



in the penalty shootout after hosts Bangladesh earned a 93rd-minute equaliser to end regulation time on equal terms — Sagorika for the hosts cancelling Sibani Devi's eighth-minute opener.

Halep's doping appeal hearing commences at Court of Arbitration for Sport

NEW DELHI: The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) has initiated hearings for the appeal filed by former Wimbledon and French Open champion Simona Halep against a doping suspension that poses a threat to her esteemed career. The 32-year-old

Romanian athlete has been under provisional suspension since October 2022 after testing positive for roxadustat, a banned substance known to enhance the production of red blood cells. The positive test occurred during the

U.S. Open held in the same year. Adding to the complexity of the situation, tennis anti-doping authorities have also charged Halep with another doping offense last year, citing irregularities in her athlete biological passport (ABP).

WATCH: MS Dhoni's new CSK jersey for IPL 2024 unveiled

NEW DELHI: Fans are eagerly anticipating the return of their beloved 'Thala' Mahendra Singh Dhoni as he gears up to grace the field in the 2024 edition of the Indian Premier League.

The speculation surrounding whether IPL 2023 marked Dhoni's final appearance for the Chennai Super Kings took a backseat when the legendary captain, who led India to victory in the 2011 World Cup, confirmed his availability for the upcoming season.

As the IPL 2024 prepares to commence on March 22, CSK took to their social media platforms to share a momentous event — the unveiling of the iconic No. 7 jersey, adorned with Dhoni's name, in a grand ceremony.

ISL: Odisha look to continue run in top-of-table clash vs FC Goa

KOLKATA: With a promise of the game going down to the wire, back-in-form Odisha FC host red hot FC Goa in a top-of-table India Super League (ISL) clash at Kalinga Stadium in Bhubaneswar on Friday. The last two encounters between the two sides have finished with the same scoreline — 3-2 — but the competition and winners were different. While Manolo Marquez-coached Gaurs had won the ISL reverse fixture with a last-gasp winner from Jay Gupta, the Juggernauts enjoyed a victorious evening at home when they defeated the west coast side in last group league.

'He needs to play...': Former India opener urges Ishan to make himself available

NEW DELHI: Former Indian opener Aakash Chopra has stressed the importance of left-handed batter Ishan Kishan actively participating in cricket to enhance his chances of selection for the national team. Chopra's remarks come amidst speculation regarding Kishan's absence from recent squads despite his talent. Speaking on his YouTube channel, Chopra echoed India head coach Rahul Dravid's sentiments, emphasizing the need for Kishan to make him-



self available for selection. "What Rahul has said is absolutely correct. Rahul Dravid has said that he should make himself available first and secondly, he needs to play some cricket," stated Chopra.

Highlighting the ongoing Ranji Trophy as an ideal platform for Kishan to exhibit his availability by engaging in first-class cricket, Chopra underlined the significance of active participation. However,

he noted Kishan's failure to communicate his availability to selectors, which could hinder his chances.

Kishan, who last represented India in a T20I match against Australia in Guwahati, has faced challenges in securing a regular spot in the national team.

Despite being part of the T20I squad in South Africa in December 2023, Kishan did not feature in any matches. His absence from the ongoing Ranji Trophy further complicates his national team prospects.

Made a terrible mistake...': de Villiers retracts statement on Kohli's absence

NEW DELHI: Former South African cricket sensation AB de Villiers has found himself at the center of a storm after inadvertently spreading misinformation regarding the absence of Indian cricket stalwart Virat Kohli from the ongoing England Test series.

De Villiers, known for his camaraderie with Kohli both on and off the field, expressed regret over his earlier statement, acknowledging that he had shared false information about Kohli's per-



sonal life. "Absolutely family comes first, it's a priority, as I said on my YouTube show. Also, I made a terrible mistake at the same time and yeah, sharing false information which was not true at all. No one knows what's happen-

ing. That's all I can do is wish him well," de Villiers told Dainik Bhaskar in an exclusive interview. Initially, de Villiers had suggested that Kohli and his wife, Anushka Sharma, were anticipating their second child, linking Kohli's absence from the initial

matches of the England series to family commitments.

However, realizing his error, de Villiers promptly retracted his previous comments, admitting to disseminating false information and extending his apologies for the confusion caused. Despite the clarification, speculations regarding Kohli's prolonged hiatus continue to linger, with reports hinting at the possibility of his absence extending to upcoming Tests in Rajkot and Ranchi.

Injured Shreyas Iyer may miss last three Tests against England: Report

In another injury blow to the Indian team, batter Shreyas Iyer has suffered back and groin injury and is not likely to feature in the squad for the last three Tests of the five-match home series against England, according to a report. Back stiffness and pain in the groin area "while playing forward defence" may force Iyer out of the squad, revealed a report in The Indian Express. The report added that Iyer's equipment has been flown to his hometown Mumbai instead of the venue of the third Test, Rajkot — which confirms that he won't be available for selection. The squad for the last three Tests is likely to be announced by the BCCI selection committee on Friday. Iyer will reportedly



receive treatment at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru and hope to recover in time for the Indian Premier League season. He hasn't been in run-scoring form lately and struggled in the first two Tests. Meanwhile, Virat Kohli is expected to remain unavailable for the third Test, after having

withdrawn himself from the first two matches in Hyderabad and Visakhapatnam. However, KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja, who were ruled out of the second Test, are likely to return to the squad. England opened the series with a win, while India came back to level it at 1-1 in Vizag.

Bhutia not consulted for AIFF technical committee but extends support to chairman

KOLKATA: Former India captain Bhaichung Bhutia on Wednesday said that although he "wasn't consulted" before being re-inducted in AIFF technical committee, he would still be happy to "support" his former teammate and current chairman IM Vijayan.

The 47-year-old, who got thrashed in an one-sided AIFF presidential election to Kalyan Chaubey in 2022, headed the AIFF technical committee from 2013-17 before being replaced by Asian Games bronze medalist Shyam Thapa. Vijayan succeeded Thapa in 2022. "I wasn't consulted, I just saw my name mentioned somewhere. I've no idea who made the committee and how come my name came in. I just saw my name and I didn't say anything," Bhutia told PTI reacting to the development. Bhutia however said he's happy to support Vijayan. "We have a competent chairman in IM Vijayan. I am ready to provide any support I can." In the recent shake-up, AIFF has



removed East Bengal and India legend Manoranjan Bhattacharya and included Santosh Singh, a former Santosh Trophy player of Bihar. The committee also has Shabbir Ali, Thongam Tababi Devi and Victor Amalraj.

Priorities Bhutia continued to criticise the Chaubey-led administration and blamed them for India's recent debacle in the Asian Cup. He said the "top priority" should be three tournaments — Asian Cup, Asian Games and World Cup Qualifiers — to take the football forward. "Firstly, we need to organise ourselves completely and prioritise support for our national

team in key tournaments — Asian Games, Asian Cup, and World Cup Qualifiers. That should be out top, top priority. Success in these will boost football's growth commercially and in popularity." "Imagine if India qualifies for the World Cup — the game will change significantly in terms of fan following, interest, and commercial opportunities. We must not compromise on supporting the national team. Nehru Cup and SAFF Championships can be secondary." The Igor Stimac-coached side lost all their three matches in the Asian Cup in Qatar, conceding six goals and failed to score any. "Blaming the team isn't fair. The lack of support during the Asian Cup was a management failure. We should have prepared better. "Qualifying for such tournaments is rare, and we should be willing to sacrifice for good results. World Cup qualification is a distant goal, and sacrifices are necessary."

Disney+Hotstar streams

"Miss Perfect"

elhi: Hotstar has revolutionized online shows. Featuring the lovely Lavanya Tripathi, Miss Perfect has become the talk of the film industry due to its diverse story about society. Characters in the series appeal to everyday viewers. Miss Perfect follows the lives of Miss Lavanya (Lavanya Tripathi), Mr. Rohit, their close neighbors, society, and a maid with pleasant humor and thought-provoking issues. Young director Vishwak Khande Rao directs. This comic series stars Telugu superstar Lavanya Tripathi, famed for Andala Raakshasi, Bhale Bhale Magadivoy, and others. Her character, Lavanya, is a clean freak who denies OCD and will break any rule if it's not flawless. The plot revolves around how her drive for perfection gets her into humorous situations she tries to escape. Harshvardhan, Jhansi, Mahesh Vitta, Abhijeet, Abhigna, Harsh Roshan, Sunayana.

Over 40 lakh new students enroll in government schools of UP: CM

Lucknow

CM Yogi speaks in Vidhan Parishad, says 'Extensive efforts have been made to bring equality in education in UP. Equality in education will help in removing social inequality. Yogi Results of the government's efforts are visible, objective of RTE is being fulfilled: CM Yogi Lucknow, February 9. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath emphasized the significant efforts undertaken to promote educational equality within the state, highlighting its pivotal role in reducing social disparities. During the Question Hour in the UP Vidhan Parishad on Friday, the Chief Minister responded to Dr. Akash Agrawal's question, stating that



there have been concerted efforts in the past seven years to improve the education system in UP. "Under the Operation Kayakalp, efforts have been made to improve the infra-

structure of 1,32,000 schools in the Basic Education Council. Over 40 lakh new students have enrolled in government schools in the state," he noted. CM Yogi further elaborated,

stating, "All students are receiving bags, books, shoes, socks, and sweaters. Furthermore, there is an effort to implement the NCERT syllabus phase-

wise in the UP Board. With the Basic Education Council offering the same curriculum, there's no longer a necessity to send our children to private schools." Additionally, he mentioned that the 'School Chalo Abhiyan' is conducted in April and July. The increase of 40 lakh children in the schools of the Basic Education Department of the state shows that the efforts made by the government are yielding results and the objective of RTE is being fulfilled. In response to another question, the Chief Minister said that the government provides Rs. 1200 to the bank account of each student's guardian for bags, books, shoes, socks, and sweaters.

Yogi govt to foster skill development in 47 ITI and Polytechnic Institutes through PSP Module

Lucknow

With a steadfast commitment to bolstering the technical education system, the Yogi government has turned its attention to the operations of 47 ITI and Polytechnic institutes across the state, while also enhancing the training processes for the students. In line with Chief Minister Yogi's vision, the Directorate of Training and Employment (Training Block) has taken a decisive step to engage private companies in the operation of ITI and

Polytechnic institutes spread across various districts of Uttar Pradesh. Their role will be crucial in ensuring the seamless implementation of training and skill development programs for the trainees. The selection process for these agencies is being conducted based on the Private Sector Partnership (PSP) module. It is noteworthy that upon completion of this process, it will pave the way for smoothly carrying forward all the educational processes and activities

including short-term vocational courses in all these ITI and Polytechnic institutes. The Directorate of Training and Employment (Training Block) has commenced the process of identifying suitable agencies to advance education and training programs through the implementation of the PSP module. Under this procedure, the PSP will cover the payment of employees essential for the proper functioning of these institutions, along with expenses.

9.3% rise in women electorate over 2019, men up 6.9%

NEW DELHI: Since 43.1 crore in 2019 LS polls, the female electorate has grown 9.3% this year, while male voters have risen 6.9% from 46.4 crore. Women electors outnumber male voters in a dozen states/UTs, including Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Kerala. Around 1.85 crore first-time voters in 18-19 age group were added to latest electoral

roll. This is 22.7% more than 18-19 year-olds added in 2019. Also, 10.6 lakh advance applications for enrolment have been received from 17-plus youths. Electors in 20-29 age group, as per final 2024 roll, total over 19.7 crore. Third-gender electors as on Jan 1, 2024, total 48,044, up from 39,683 in 2019, while PwD (persons with disabilities) voters have almost doubled to 88.4

lakh from 45.6 lakh. As many as 1.86 crore senior citizens figure in latest rolls, of which 2.38 lakh are centenarians. A senior EC functionary attributed the notable rise in female electorate, voters aged 18-19 years and PwD voters to focused efforts undertaken by Chief Commissioner Rajiv Kumar to improve not only purity and health of electoral roll but also make it more inclusive

Nirmala Sitharaman lights up rooftop solar scheme with free power pledge

Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman put people at the centre stage of energy

transition by packing the Interim Budget with financial booster shots and policy outlines to promote unconventional energy sources. Building on PM Modi's announcement of rooftop solar for one crore households, the Budget put Rs 10,000 crore on the table as seed money and promised 300 units/month of free power as well as hope for annual savings of Rs 15,000-18,000 in energy bill for each beneficiary household of the Pradhanmantri Suryodaya Yojana. Additionally, the scheme opened additional income avenues for households.

Paytm Bank board alerted by RBI on non-compliance

NEW DELHI: Reserve Bank of India, which has barred Paytm Payments Bank from accepting any fresh deposits starting next month, held discussions with the entity's brass at multiple levels, including the board, before taking the extreme measure. Sometime in Nov-Dec 2021, a top RBI official addressed the bank's board of directors and asked them to ensure compliance with all guidelines.

"The high-ranking officer had shared RBI's sentiment and its serious concerns and sought to impress upon the board to ensure effective compliance," a source familiar with the development told TOI. It has now emerged that two directors of



the bank have resigned. The development comes to light at a time when Paytm management and a handful of startup founders are lobbying with govt and the regulator in a bid to provide a fresh lease of life to the bank. It also suggests that a few months later RBI barred Paytm Payments Bank from onboarding new customers as it did not see such progress on compliance and sent a strong signal, which

(SAS&R). According to Isro, the primary objectives of the mission are to monitor the Earth's surface; carry out oceanic observations and its environment in various spectral channels of meteorological importance; to provide vertical profile of various meteorological parameters of the atmosphere; to provide data collection and data dissemination capabilities from the data collection platforms (DCPs); and to provide satellite aided search and rescue services. INSAT-3DS-2 Many departments of the MoES such as the India Meteorology Department (IMD), National Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF), Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), National Institute of Ocean Technology (NIOT), and Indian National Center for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) and other agencies and institutes will be using the INSAT-3DS satellite data to provide improved weather forecasts and meteorological services.

Don't wait for filariasis symptoms to appear; taking medicine is the only prevention, urges CM Yogi

Lucknow

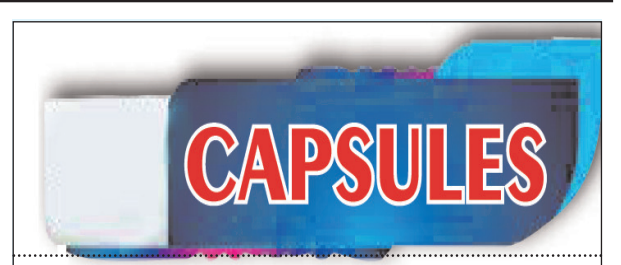
In its ongoing efforts to eliminate filariasis, the Uttar Pradesh government is set to launch a comprehensive campaign across 17 districts of the state, commencing on February 10. This campaign will continue till February 28. Under this, 72,000 health workers will administer filariasis medicine to more than 3.5 crore people of the state. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath himself has appealed to the people of the state to join this campaign. He urged all individuals to consider themselves as potentially affected by filariasis and to proactively take the medication to safeguard themselves and future generations. He emphasized that

symptoms of filariasis, a serious disease caused by Culex mosquito bites, appear within 5 to 15 years. Therefore, it is advisable for everyone to take the medicine without waiting for symptoms to ensure community well-being. The medicine is completely safe, so taking it even before symptoms appear is in the best interest of society. Neglecting and filariasis can lead to disability. With the objective to make Uttar Pradesh free from filariasis, the Yogi government will conduct MDA round in Amethi, Azamgarh, Ballia, Banda, Barabanki, Bareilly, Hamirpur, Jaunpur, Jalaun, Lucknow, Pilibhit, Shahjahanpur, Prayagraj, Pratapgarh, Sonbhadra, Unnao

and Varanasi from February 10 to 28. In Amethi, Azamgarh, Banda, Barabanki, Bareilly, Lucknow, Pratapgarh, Prayagraj, Unnao, and Varanasi, a triple-drug combination (Ivermectin, DEC, and Albendazole) will be administered. In Ballia, Hamirpur, Jalaun, Jaunpur, Pilibhit, Shahjahanpur, and Sonbhadra, a double-drug combination (DEC and Albendazole) will be given. Dr. Ramesh Singh Thakur explained that filariasis not only affects the individual but weakens the entire family. If a breadwinner of the family is affected, and there is no additional source of income, the family gradually becomes weak. If not paid attention to, the disease.

Provide anti-rabies serum at PHCs

Delhi: Anti-rabies serum must be made available at all sub-health centers, primary health centers, and urban primary health centers, per a directive from the Center to all states and Union territories. According to the National Health Mission, financial assistance would be given for the purchase of the anti-rabies serum. When there is a possibility of serious exposure following contact with a rabid animal or when an animal is thought to be rabid, anti-rabies serum is given. In severe cases, it should be administered in addition to the rabies vaccine. According to experts, the majority of primary health centers do not carry it, and each dose costs more over Rs 10,000. In a recent letter to the states and UTs, an NHM official said that rabies is a fatal viral infection and that having access to medications for both prevention and treatment is crucial to preventing the financial and psychological toll that rabies has on families.



UP sets benchmark: First state to achieve 100 percent billing through EMB software

Lucknow

Under the visionary guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leadership of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Uttar Pradesh has achieved an unprecedented milestone in the Jal Jeevan Mission. Uttar Pradesh has become the first state in India to fully implement the Electronic Measurement Bill (EMB) software for billing within the Jal Jeevan Mission. With the introduction of this billing software, companies operating within the Jal Jeevan Mission now receive payment within a mere 14 days. The entire process being conducted online leaves no room for corruption. Uttar Pradesh has emerged as the largest state in the country to execute payments on such a large scale through EMB software. This accomplishment has been achieved before the groundbreaking ceremony. Prior to the implementation of the Electronic Measurement Billing System, companies working under the Jal Jeevan Mission faced delays of at least 41 days in receiving payments. This hindered the pace of work within the mission. However, with the introduction of EMB payments, companies now receive billing within a significantly shorter timeframe, thereby accelerating the progress of the Jal Jeevan Mission. The implementation of EMB has effectively curbed corruption in government departments, there are often complaints of corruption in billing. However, with the introduction of EMB in the Jal Jeevan Mission, stringent measures have been put in place to combat corruption in billing practices. Due to the entire process being conducted online, no officer or employee can unnecessarily delay the file. Additionally, since the entire process is online, the officer can also monitor the file of any payment. Dr. Balkar Singh, the Managing Director of Jal Nigam (Rural), said that in line with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Digital India program and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's zero-tolerance policy, Jal Nigam (Rural) has completely digitized the billing process in the Jal Jeevan Mission. This digitization has not only expedited mission-related work but has also provided an effective mechanism to deter corruption. How does EMB software work? The company engaged in the Jal Jeevan Mission initiates the process by uploading a bill containing all relevant details onto the online EMB platform upon completion of the work. Once uploaded, the Junior Engineer assesses the bill and adds their comments after verifying the provided data. Subsequently, the bill progresses to the Assistant Engineer, who also reviews and comments on it. Following this, a third party provides their approval. Subsequently, the Executive Engineer examines all the details and sends the file to the finance department online. Payment to the company is processed after thorough scrutiny by finance officers.