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

Eye on 370 seats, BJP to focus on 161 it lost in 2019 polls

NEW DELHI: With a target of 370 seats in Lok Sabha polls, BJP has decided to focus on 161 seats it lost in 2019, with the party leadership telling that the cadre that it can achieve the goal set by PM Narendra Modi by winning 67 of those seats.

"We have to cross 370 seats and NDA has to cross 400," Nadda said in his inaugural address at the party's National Council meet on Saturday.

Speaking of the importance of winning the seats BJP lost last time, he said development of the constituencies concerned under the watch of 'pravas mantris' will help, even as it drew out the outreach plan for the party workers over the next 100 days, right from the booth level, to take the message of 'Viksit Bharat' and 'GYAN' - Garib (poor), Yuva (youth), Annadata (farmers) and Nari (women).



Nadda underscored the party's meteoric rise since PM Modi took office and lauded his leadership in the past decade. The Modi government will score a hat-trick and retain power for a third straight term, he told the nearly 11,500 party delegates. He listed the 16 victories in 26 elections post-2019 and said: "It's all because of the trust of the people on Modi and his guarantees. They have endorsed PM Modi's work.

Modiji has fulfilled the commitment he has made." Significantly, Nadda also asserted that BJP would win the next state polls in Bengal, a state where it is expected to do well along with Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh where it is on the verge of finalising a tie-up with TDP. Nadda's claim about BJP's prospects in Bengal coincides with the indication of the imminent notification

of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). Enacted to provide citizenship to non-Muslim communities facing religious persecution in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan, CAA is of special significance for West Bengal, home to lakhs of Hindus who escaped from Bangladesh. He said, "In West Bengal, BJP rose from 10% votes and three seats (in 2016) to 38.5% votes and 77 seats (in 2021).

Ideals of Ram Rajya realised in last 10 yrs: BJP resolution

NEW DELHI: BJP passed a political resolution on the first day of its two-day National Council meet, endorsing the 10 years of the Modi gov't and likening it to "Ram Rajya", which will lead to a developed India - Viksit Bharat - by 2047, the party's central plank for Lok Sabha polls.

"The past 10 years have witnessed realisation of the ideals of Ram Rajya under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. During this period, the country has gone through an uninterrupted journey of secu-



urity, prosperity and happiness for all. Under PM Modi's leadership, the nation has taken the Panch Prans of freeing itself from the mentality of slavery; learning to be proud of our heritage; resolving to be a developed nation; demonstrating strength in our unity;

and fulfilling the duties of citizens with honesty," the party stated. Earlier, when the PM reached the dais for inauguration of the meet in Bharat Mandapam, its main Hall echoed with chants of "Modi Modi" and "Modi Hai to Mumkin Hai" for which

he expressed gratitude to the over 11,500 excited delegates present. Proceedings on day one were dedicated to PM Modi's talismanic aura in steering BJP to dominate the political landscape even as "Pran Pratishtha" of Ram Lalla in Ayodhya and nullification of Article 370 were on the forefront of the discourses. As the saffron party passed the political resolution, "Viksit Bharat-Modi Ki guarantee", a host of party leaders highlighted gov't's development

9 Congress MLAs head to Delhi, seek removal of 'its ministers'

RANCHI: As many as nine Congress MLAs headed to Delhi on Saturday evening to meet the AICC central leadership with a demand to "remove existing ministers" from the party quota in Champai Soren gov't and

replace them with new faces. The move followed after a series of unsuccessful meetings of 12 dissident Congress MLAs since Friday's oath-taking ceremony. Even on Saturday, MLAs went into a huddle sev-

eral times at Circuit House and later at a city hotel before flying to Delhi. Hours before that, ally JMM's Dumka MLA and newly inducted minister Basant Soren also met the upset Congress MLAs at the hotel as part of the

coalition camp's mediation attempts but to no avail. Congress, part of the ruling camp, has 17 MLAs in its fold. Of them, barring four ministers, four MLAs stayed back due to other engagements.

Kamal Nath & son Nakul in Delhi as buzz grows over switch to BJP

BHOPAL: In mounting jitters for Congress ahead of Lok Sabha elections, party stalwart Kamal Nath arrived in New Delhi on Saturday afternoon, amid swirling speculation that he would join BJP with his son Nakul Nath, MP for Chhindwara in Madhya Pradesh.

Sources said the 77-year-old former MP CM was likely to meet Union home minister Amit Shah on Saturday night.

"It is not about denying, you are saying this (that he may join BJP). You people are getting excited. I am not getting excited whether this way or that. But if there is any such development, I will inform you first," he told reporters in Delhi, refusing to deny that he was joining BJP.

The next 48 hours could be crucial in the father-and-son story. And for Congress, a nerve-wracking wait.

Kamal Nath cut short his five-day visit to Chhindwara (scheduled from Feb 14 to 18), while his son, before leaving for Delhi, erased the Congress symbol from his social media handles. And Kamal Nath's close ally and former minister Sajjan Singh Verma did the same. Congress can't shake off the feeling of deja vu as Jyotiraditya Scindia had omitted all references to his Congress posts in his Twitter bio before switching to BJP in March 2020 with 22 MLAs, pulling down Kamal Nath's gov't.

After Congress's debacle in MP assembly elections, Kamal Nath was pained when a party national spokesman, while talking to media, accused him of being hand-in-glove with BJP, a senior party leader said. Though a show-cause notice was served to spokesman, no action was taken against him. Nath was also not sent to Rajya Sabha while the party removed him from the post of state Congress president and appointed a much junior, two-time MLA, Jitu Patwari, as PCC chief. Patwari dismissed all talk of Nath joining BJP. "All this speculation is baseless.

Spycam pen, phone found in Amritpal Singh's NSA cell in Assam

DIBRUGARH: In a major security lapse, a spy camera pen and other incriminating items were found in NSA cell of high-security Dibrugarh central jail, where Waris Punjab De chief Amritpal Singh and nine of his associates are incarcerated, sending law-enforcing agencies into a tizzy. Prison staff conducted a search of the jail premises on Saturday, leading to discovery of



unauthorised items, including a spy-cam pen, a smartphone with a SIM card, a key-pad phone, a TV remote with a keyboard, pendrives, bluetooth head-phones, speakers, and a smartwatch, in pos-

session of the accused. Radical pro-Khalistan separatist, Amritpal, was taken to Dibrugarh jail on April 23, 2023, after being held from Moga by Punjab Police following a manhunt of over a month. Assam DGP G P Singh said in a post on X that following information about unauthorised activities taking place in the said cell, additional CCTV cameras were installed in public area of NSA block and a search was carried out: "Source of these unauthorised articles and mode of induction is being ascertained. Steps are being taken to prevent recurrence."

Factional fires, seat row take Cong's focus away from yatra

NEW DELHI: Rahul Gandhi's grand messaging about bigotry, unemployment and cronyism is clashing with petty organizational fires that has dispirited the Congress after the initial enthusiasm triggered by Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra, which the insiders had hoped would prove a nationwide

launchpad for the LS polls. The eruption of public protest by Jharkhand Congress MLAs barely days after Rahul's joint show with ally JMM in the state laid bare the disconnect between the latter's anti-BJP campaign and concerns of the party's ground troops. Now, the Yatra has entered its

most fraught lap of Uttar Pradesh, where lack of finesse could dampen the party mood further amid an inhouse desperation that it seal the much-delayed deal with the Samajwadi Party. Congress' seeming indulgence of SP rebels and its demands for specific seats could be the

deal-breaker, and many have urged the party to tread with caution. All eyes are on the next five days when the Yatra traverses UP, with SP chief Akhilesh Yadav having announced that he would join Rahul at Rae Bareilly-Amethi. Factional fires, failure to clinch seat-sharing with allies.

EAM S Jaishankar, Canada minister Melanie Joly hold 'frank' talks

NEW DELHI: Amid little indication of any improvement in India-Canada relations, which have been upended by Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's "credible allegations" of Indian involvement in the killing of a Sikh separatist, foreign minister S Jaishankar and his counterpart Melanie Joly had a "frank" discussion on the present state of bilateral ties. This was only the first officialy confirmed.

meeting between the two leaders since Trudeau's allegations in the Canadian Parliament last year in September of India's role in the assassination of Khalistan leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar. They were said to have met in Washington the same month to discuss the issue but that meeting was never confirmed by the Indian side. Jaishankar reiterated New Delhi's concerns about the anti-India activities of the Khalistan separatists in Canada and the threat from terrorism and extremism which, as Indian authorities have repeatedly stated, Ottawa.

'Irregularities' by RJD ex-ministers being probed, says Bihar CM

PATNA: Bihar CM Nitish Kumar said on Saturday that he had learned of many irregularities that took place when RJD was in government with him and that all such irregularities were being investigated. Responding to media queries about gov't's Friday order to review all decisions taken by departments led by ex-deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav and RJD ministers Lalit Yadav and Ramanand Yadav, Nitish said, "If there is any irregularity in any place (dept), it is necessary to probe it. Things are being investigated.

We won't tolerate irregularities." Meanwhile, the CM downplayed RJD boss Lalu Prasad's remark that his "doors are

always open for Nitish", saying he maintains "good relations with allies as well as oppn leaders". Nitish might expand cabinet soon or after budget session Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar downplayed RJD boss Lalu Prasad Yadav's remark that his "doors are always open for Nitish", saying he maintains "good relations with allies as well as oppn leaders". "It was a chance meeting... I shake hands with them whenever I meet them. That's all. Nothing more." Asked about the possibility of a cabinet expansion, Nitish, who currently heads a nine-member cabinet, said, "Ho jayega (It will be done).

MTP for minor rape survivor risky, says HC, quashes plea

MUMBAI: Bombay high court refused to permit medical termination of the over 30 weeks pregnancy of a 15-year-old sexual assault survivor considering the risk to her life and long-term neurological complications for the baby if born alive. Justices Prakash Naik and Nitin Borkar passed the

order on Friday on a petition by the survivor's mother as the pregnancy was beyond the 24-week legal limit for termination. While the parvivors were at work, a neighbour had forcibly and repeatedly raped the minor. On Feb 3, an FIR was registered against him under sections of IPC and Pocsso. On

Feb 13, HC directed the district medical board to examine the girl at Thane Civil Hospital. The 7-member medical board's Feb 15 report said there is no abnormality in the fetus and minor mother. "The risk of termination is no higher than the risk at the time of full delivery.

Ajit Pawar hints at wife Sunetra contesting against cousin Supriya at Baramati

Baramati

Ajit Pawar's speech fuelled speculation that the party will field his wife Sunetra against his cousin, the incumbent Baramati MP, Supriya Sule.

The 2024 contest for Baramati will be one of the most keenly watched battles. On Friday, without naming names, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) president Ajit Pawar made an emotional appeal to his constituents to elect a "first timer" who is though surrounded by "experienced people."

Ajit Pawar's speech fuelled speculation that the party will field his wife Sunetra against his cousin, the incumbent Baramati MP, Supriya Sule. The deputy chief minister himself is the sitting MLA from Baramati. The local NCP unit also used the occasion to launch a chariot that will run through the constituency talking up the social initiatives taken up by Sunetra



Pawar. While speaking to his party workers, a day after Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narwekar upheld the Ajit faction as real NCP, Ajit Pawar told party workers in Baramati that he would field a candidate who has not contested an election earlier, but that person would have the support of those with ample experience. People, he added, should vote for his candidate as if he himself were in the fray. "As party workers, you should tell voters without hesitation that the elected MP from here will work more for the development as compared to the one you have been electing for the last three to four terms.

Tell the voters that this is a prom-

ise to them from Ajit Pawar that even if our candidate is a first timer, they are surrounded by people with ample experience of winning polls." Although she has stayed away from active politics so far, Sunetra Pawar, 60, hailed from a political family before marrying into another one. Her brother Padamsinh Patil is a former minister while her nephew Rana Jagjitsinha Padamsinh Patil is a BJP from Osmanabad. The Pawar couple's elder son, Parth, had unsuccessfully contested the 2019 Lok Sabha elections from Maval. The Pawar clan may have had a serious political cleave in the last one year, their personal relations have remained close.

Drone delivering frozen chicken crashes at Gurugram

Gurugram

A drone delivering frozen chicken struck a television antenna atop a house before crashing to the ground in Gurugram's Sector 50, triggering a panicked commotion in the residential neighbourhood and leading to a police case. The company operating the drone, Skye Air, said it had to carry out an emergency landing because of a "sudden object in its path", and that there were no injuries or major damage to property. The residents welfare association, however, said the device left a crater where it fell, illustrating the risk it posed



to anyone on the ground if it struck a person. "The impact was so loud that residents thought it was some blast and ran out of their houses. We saw drone had created a big hole and the broke a

part of awall and the dish antenna it hit. It was fortunate that no resident was walking or standing where it fell," said Satish Yadav, president of G Block RWA of South City-2.

FB pages of DSGMC ex-presz Sarna, GK removed 'without explanation'

Jalandhar: Meta has removed the Facebook pages of former presidents of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee Paramjit Singh Sarna and Manjit Singh GK. Both the leaders said they did not receive any notification or explanation from Meta about any issue

with their accounts. "This action appears to be a blatant attempt to suppress my voice on matters pertaining to Punjab, Punjabi, and panth," said Manjit Singh GK, while Sarna alleged that it was done "apparently at the instance of the anti-farmer and pro-govt

lobbyists like Manjinder Singh Sirsa". Sirsa, a bête noire of Sarna and GK, is BJP national secretary and former DSGMC president.

"We did receive complaints that Sirsa has been issuing strikes on several panthic online social accounts.

Sandeshkhali: Who is TMC's Sheikh Shahjahan targeted by BJP over sexual abuse?

Tensions remain high in Sandeshkhali, an assembly constituency in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district, over allegations of harassment and exploitation by local Trinamool Congress leaders.

Sandeshkhali came to the spotlight on January 7 when an Enforcement Directorate team that arrived to raid local TMC leader Sheikh Shahjahan's house in connection with the public distribution system scam was attacked by a mob. Even as Sheikh Shahjahan has evaded arrest, since February 7, villagers led by local women have held violent protests against alleged harassment and exploitation by local TMC leaders. Shahjahan is charged with a host of offences ranging from money laundering to harassment. He is absconding. While the ruling West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has blamed the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) for the tensions, the BJP and Congress have accused the TMC chief of protecting those accused of sexual exploitation. "Sheikh Shahjahan and his gang established a 'reign of terror' where the dignity and modesty of women from the SC and ST communities have been repeatedly violated," Leader of opposition in West Bengal and BJP Nandigram MLA wrote on X on February 11. Union minister Smriti Irani had also criticised Mamata Banerjee alleging that young Hindu married women are being deliberately targeted in Sandeshkhali.



Paytm FASTag: Can I continue to use it to pay toll? RBI issues FAQs for customers

New Delhi:

The Indian Highways Management Company Ltd (IHMCL), toll collecting arm of state-owned NHAI, has advised highway users to buy FASTags from 32 authorised banks without Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL) for hassle-free travel. The 32 authorised banks include Airtel Payments Bank, Allahabad Bank, Bank of Baroda, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, IDBI Bank, Punjab National Bank, State Bank of India, and Yes Bank, among others. After March 15, 2024, you will not be able to top-up or recharge your FASTag issued by Paytm Payments Bank.

However, on Friday, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in its frequently asked questions (FAQs),



said one can continue to use FASTags to pay the toll up to the available balance. The RBI also advised customers as well as merchants of Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to shift their accounts to other banks by March 15, giving 15 more days to the beleaguered entity to close most of its operations, including deposit and credit transactions. The RBI has issued a list of 30 FAQs, for the convenience of cus-

tomers of PPBL, and the general public at large. I have a FASTag issued by Paytm Payments Bank. Can I continue to use it to pay toll after March 15, 2024? Yes. You can continue to use your FASTag to pay toll upto the available balance. However, no further funding or top ups will be allowed in the FASTags issued by Paytm Payments Bank after March 15, 2024. It is suggested that you procure a new FASTag issued by another bank before March 15, 2024, to avoid any inconvenience. No. After March 15, 2024, you will not be able to top-up or recharge your FASTag issued by Paytm Payments Bank. It is suggested that you procure a new FASTag issued by another bank before March 15, 2024.

'Modi govt a curse for farmers': Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge

NEW DELHI: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government and described the government as a 'curse' for the country's farmers. Kharge also accused the government of treating farmers like enemies. Kharge asserted that only the Congress party can provide farmers with the legal right to a Minimum Support Price (MSP). "The Modi government is a curse for the country's food-



providing farmers. Due to the continuous false 'Modi's Guarantee', the first 750 farmers lost their lives and now, yesterday, 1 farmer has been martyred and 3 have lost their eyesight due to rubber bullets. The Modi government has treated farmers like enemies, Only

Congress will give them the legal right of MSP!" he said in a post on 'X'. The security forces deployed at the Shambhu Border continued to resist the agitating farmers attempting to enter the national capital as the protests entered the fifth day on Saturday.

Hundreds of farmers and some journalists have been injured as the protestors clashed with the police many a time trying to break the multi-layer barricades. The protesting farmers have been camping at the border points since the start of the March on Tuesday, February 13. A third round of talks with the central government ended in a stalemate on Thursday, amid the standoff between the protestors and security personnel on the Punjab-Haryana border.

Siddaramaiah accuses central govt of discrimination

Bengaluru

Siddaramaiah's budget on Friday launched a scathing attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party-led Union government, accusing it of discrimination in devolution of funds. "The collection of cess and surcharges for 2023-24 has increased by 153%... if cesses and surcharges are shared with the states, a total of ₹11,34,301 crore was available for devolution for all states. Due to non-sharing of cesses and surcharges by the Union government, the state suffered a loss of ₹45,322 crore in the last seven years," he said. The CM blamed the Centre's "unscientific implementation of GST" for the losses. "Unscientific implementation of GST, increase in cesses and surcharges and change in allocation formula—these three injustices meted out by the central government cou-



pled with the short release of funds to the states have adversely affected the financial strength of all the states of the country. As the ruling party in several states are same as that in the Centre, these states are unable to raise their voice against the injustices meted out against them."

He further alleged that the state suffered staggering losses due to changes in the method of calculating state income and the use of the 2011 census instead of the 1971 census, resulting in a shortfall of 62,098

crore under the devolution of Central Taxes over six years. Furthermore, despite the 15th Finance Commission's recommendations for special grants and development funds, totalling 11,495 crore., the central government rejected these proposals, exacerbating Karnataka's financial strain.

This rejection highlights a trend of the central government withholding crucial funds from progressive states, prompting Siddaramaiah's government to take a stand against such injustices.

Court records govt clarification in liquor case

New Delhi: Delhi High Court on Friday recorded a clarification submitted by Delhi govt's counsel that the matter of 76 non-conforming areas in the liquor policy case reached the LG on Jan 16 this year.

Disposing of an application filed by Delhi govt's counsel Arun Panwar, the court took on record his statement that on 18.09.2023 and 04.12.2023 (when the court requested the LG to take a call on the issue) the final report had yet not been placed before the LG. Panwar clarified that what was mentioned in the report of the committee set up by LG was being considered by the govt at various levels, since there were huge financial implications involved. The MP High Court in Bhopal and Jabalpur directed the state government to pres-



ent a status report on DNA-FSL reports in court cases. The court is concerned about the delay in providing these reports, which leads to a backlog of cases. Chief Justice Ravi Malimath and Justice Vishal Mishra are hearing the case as a public interest litigation. Excise policy case: Delhi court extends interim bail of businessman Sameer Mahendru

Delhi court extends Sameer Mahendru's interim bail till February 15 in money-laundering case linked to excise policy scam. Mahendru files fresh medical document on wife's complications after hospital discharge. Reports on corruption and irregularities in Delhi excise policy ordered. Delhi High Court Orders Coaching Centres to Move Out

of Residential Areas The Delhi High Court ordered tutoring facilities with more than 20 students to relocate from residential areas to commercial spaces due to safety concerns. The court discussed the inclusion of coaching centres in the definition of "educational buildings" and referred to a previous fire incident involving a coaching centre in Mukherjee Nagar.

Mumbai pip Delhi in five-set thriller

Chennai: Mumbai Meteors notched up a thrilling 3-2 (15-13, 17-15, 13-15, 13-15, 17-15) win over debutants Delhi Toofans in their opening match of the Prime Volleyball League at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here on Friday. Mumbai won the first two sets, before Delhi levelled the contest 2-2 with a fightback and forced a decider. But Mumbai produced a comeback when it mattered the most, ensuring they began their campaign on a winning note. In the second match of the day, which was a battle between two Kerala teams, Calicut Heroes recorded a 3-1 (15-8, 15-12, 12-15, 15-12) win over Kochi Blue Spikers. On Saturday, 'hosts' Chennai Blitz will look to register their first win of the season when they take on Hyderabad.

ED summons TMC MP Dev and ex-MP Mahua to Delhi next wk

KOLKATA/NEW DELHI: The ED on Thursday summoned two Trinamool leaders - actor-MP Dev and former MP Mahua Moitra - to its Delhi offices next week. The former has been called on Feb 21 in connection with the agency's ongoing probe into the cattle-smuggling racket; the latter on Feb 19 over some foreign currency transactions. The summons to the actor-politician, who represents the Ghatal Lok Sabha constituency in West Midnapore, barely three days after he announced that he was not quitting politics, has prompted cries from the TMC of this being another example of Centre's "vendetta politics". Sources said Moitra has sent a lawyer's letter to the agency, questioning whether it could probe the charges against her. The timing of the summons to Dev prompted a sharp response from TMC. On Monday, at a meeting in Hooghly's Arambag - where party chief



and CM Mamata Banerjee was present - Dev said he was staying back in politics, adding that it was for Banerjee that he was doing so. Before Monday, there was buzz in political circles that Dev was unwilling to continue as MP. Trinamool spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said the timing of the ED summons to Ghatal MP Dev - just three days after he expressed his admiration for Mamata Banerjee, while saying he would stay on in politics - was an example of BJP's vendetta politics. "Dev didn't bow his head in spite of intimidation. He has said that he is with TMC under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee and would

contest this Lok Sabha election from the same Ghatal seat. The ED notice, right after that statement, proves that BJP is using ED to threaten TMC leaders," Ghosh said, adding, "Had he shifted allegiance to BJP, he wouldn't have got a notice. He has been summoned because he is with TMC." Dev had been questioned by CBI in connection with the same case at its Kolkata office two years ago, on Feb 15, 2022. The MP himself did not react to TOI's queries. But a source close to him said he would attend the summons in Delhi. In Mahua Moitra's case, the ED has not disclosed any details of the specific charges.

Delhi Police on high alert, security beefed up

NEW DELHI: Delhi Police is on high alert and security has been tightened in the national capital in view of the 'Bharat Bandh' call given by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), officials said on Friday. Traffic may be affected in the national capital with barricades put up in several areas, according to police. The SKM has called for the 'Bharat Bandh' to press the BJP-led central government to accept farmers' demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for crops. Farmers from Punjab began their 'Delhi Chalo' march on Tuesday but were stopped by security personnel at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between



Delhi and Haryana. The protesting farmers have been camping at the border points ever since. Their agitation entered the fourth day. The two border points between Delhi and Haryana remained closed for traffic with heavy deployment of security personnel in anti-riot gear. Due to border closure, commuters have been facing difficulties in passing through certain stretches. Traffic move-

ment is allowed at the Ghazipur border with Uttar Pradesh. Delhi Police is keeping an extra vigil and has put up barricades in the central part of the city leading to the Parliament and other sensitive locations, the police officials said. In view of the 'Bharat Bandh' called by the SKM, Delhi Police is on high alert, a police official said. A senior police officer said traffic movement in the city may be affected due to the bandh. A marathon meeting between three Union ministers and leaders of protesting farmer unions on Thursday night remained inconclusive. The two sides will now meet for the fourth round of talks on Sunday.

Delhi tourism to organise heritage walks at 50 places

NEW DELHI: Delhi's tourism department is organising heritage walks at 50 different locations across the capital from Saturday. These walks will continue till March 31 with the first inaugural walk scheduled at Mehrauli Archaeological Park. According to the tourism

department's website, Mehrauli Archaeological Park, which is uniquely dotted with ruins from early medieval times to the 19th century, is one of the most popular heritage sites in the city. The major attractions at Mehrauli Archaeological Park include the mosque and tomb of Jamali, a

royal tomb which is the first building in the sub-continent to use the true arch, a beautiful step well with subterranean rooms and residence of a British official (which was built out of a tomb). The site is adjacent to another historically important place, the Qutub complex.

CAPSULES

LG to govt: Give equal perks to welfare officers on contract

New Delhi: Lieutenant governor VK Saxena has directed Delhi govt to implement the judicial orders to provide the same amount of house rent and travel allowance to contractual welfare officers in the social welfare department as paid to the regular employees.

In a note to the state govt, the LG expressed displeasure that there had been recurrence of delays in handling such administrative matters by the department. He



directed the department to identify and fix responsibility of the officials responsible for causing undue delay in the above matter within 15 days. He further asked the department to avoid any such delays in future and process all administrative matters with "due care and alacrity".

Taking note that Central Administrative Tribunal, Delhi High Court as well as the Supreme Court passed orders in favour of the contractual officers for extension of equal benefits, the LG said that the department exhibited a "lackadaisical and dilly-dallying attitude" in critical administrative matters.

Citing the SC's March 2023 order, Saxena said it was "unreasonable and unjustified" that the social welfare department took another eight months to process the matter. AAP govt, however, said services related matters were being handled by the LG since 2015.

HC raps child rights body, says it acted irresponsibly

New Delhi: Delhi High Court on Friday rapped the Delhi Commission for Protection of Child Rights (DCPCR) for acting irresponsibly with regard to a petition it filed against the alleged stoppage of funding by LG VK Saxena on the basis of a "non-existent press release". Justice Subramonium Prasad said the petitioner's response to the lieutenant governor's specific stand that there was no order to withhold funding was "wishy washy" and the body should have been more responsible when making allegations against a constitutional authority. "The petitioner acted completely irresponsibly. When you are making allegations against constitutional authority, you have to be



more serious," the court remarked orally, adding that one cannot "bring down" the LG's office in this manner. The court also noted that the Comptroller and Auditor General of India could audit DCPCR's account. The commission approached the high court last year, challenging an inquiry and special audit

ordered against it and the alleged stoppage of funds. The court listed the matter for further hearing on Feb 29. Last year, LG Saxena approved the Women and Child Development Department's proposal to institute an inquiry and ordered a special audit over the alleged misuse of government funds by DCPCR.

Delhi weather: Slight rise in temperature, rain likely from Monday

NEW DELHI: The city witnessed clear skies on Friday with a slight increase in day temperature. No significant change in day temperature is expected for the next two days, but rain is likely to lash Delhi from Monday night to Wednesday.

According to India Meteorological Department, the maximum temperature on Friday rose to 27.2 degrees Celsius, three degrees above normal. It was 1.2



degrees Celsius higher than Thursday's maximum temperature. The minimum temperature was 7.3 degrees Celsius, four

notches below normal. The maximum temperature is likely to hover around 27 degrees Celsius for the next two days, while the minimum

temperature may rise to 8-9 degrees Celsius. Delhi's air quality continued to stay in 'poor' category with an AQI of 269.

Alipur fire: Hope for bright future burnt to ashes

New Delhi: During a conversation with son Harsh on Thursday, Anil Thakur talked about picking up groceries on his way home from work at the factory. Little did they know it would be their last exchange. As the sole breadwinner in his family of four, Thakur's absence is an impossible void to fill. Like many others caught in the blaze at the paint factory in northwest Delhi's Alipur, Thakur had journeyed to the city from another state, Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh in his case, for a simple reason: to provide a brighter future for his children. At the mortuary of Babu Jagjivan Ram Hospital in Jahangirpuri on Friday, grieving families gathered to identify their loved ones. Shaken awake by the horrors of the preceding night, they anxiously awaited any morsel of informa-

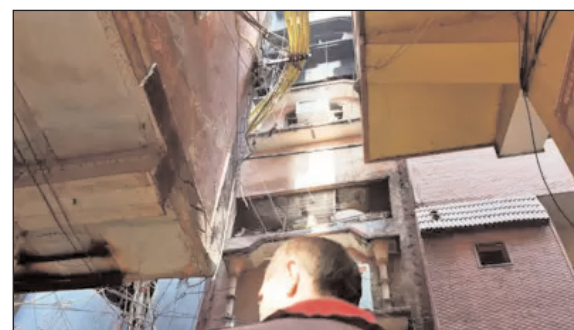


tion. We've been here since 6am, but there's no word, was the collective concern of the bereaved kin. Harsh recounted his last interaction with his father with a heavy heart. "I spoke to him around 4pm," said the Class X student. They heard of the fire half an hour later. "I called my father repeatedly but there was no answer. After a few rings, his phone switched off." Harsh told that his mother and elder sister were at home unable to deal with the sudden upheaval in their lives. Pintu Goud's relative,

Vishal, too perished in the blaze. "He was just 18 years old, but I encouraged him to come with me from our village in Azamgarh, believing he could earn a better living here," said Goud with moist eyes. The family had planned a long-awaited homecoming for April, but the eagerly anticipated village reunion will forever remain unfulfilled. "It was almost a year since Vishal had been home. His brother had a get-together scheduled in Azamgarh and Vishal was looking forward to that," Goud added.

Delhi inferno: 800 factory fires recorded in city in last 2 years

NEW DELHI: In the last two years, there have been 800 incidents of fire in factories in Delhi, the majority of them nestled in residential houses. However, no corrective measure has been taken, indicating that the authorities have learnt no lessons despite accidents at these unauthorised factories and godowns happening on such a large scale. None of these places has a no-objection certificate from the fire department but that has not proved to be deterrent for them as they collude with other authorities and function without any hindrance. Data shared by the fire department has revealed that in 2022 and 2023, there have been around 400 fire incidents every year. Fifty-four cases of facto-



ry fires were reported in Jan this year. It was the same month when four people died in a fire at a rubber-making unit in Shahdara. Even in that incident, the only exit and entry passage that existed was blocked, leading to casualties. In Dec 2019, at least 43 labourers died in a blaze in an illegal factory in north Delhi's Anaj Mandi. 17 people were killed and 30 injured after a massive fire gutted a factory in outer Delhi's Bawana industrial area in 2018. The fire department mandates fire certifi-

cates for factories, but violations are common. Officials have found that most factories operate in structures originally built for residential use, which don't meet safety standards for industrial activity. "This significantly increases the fire risk, as evidenced by past incidents," a fire official said.

Delhi fire chief Atul Garg said that in most of the cases they found that there was no fire safety arrangement inside the factory. Whenever a fire breaks out in a factory in the

city, Delhi Police arrests the accused owners and files chargesheets. However, these are not deterrents and infernos continue to claim lives. In the Anaj Mandi fire, which took place in Dec 2019, the cops arrested four people - building owner Rehan, his brother Imran, Furkaan (Rehan's manager) and another man named Mohammad Suhail. In 2020, the crime branch filed the chargesheet saying that none of the owners was aware of the number of people working in the factory and had taken no precautions for their safety. In the Bawana factory fire reported on Jan 20, 2018, the police arrested two co-owners Manoj Jain and Lalit Goyal, Surjeet Goyal and Girish Rathore, their partners in another factory in Bawana and Jain's son Rinku.

Khap give an ultimatum of 48 hours to remove barricading placed near Dumarkha village on Delhi

JIND: A bangar area khap called 'dhaharn khap' has given an ultimatum of 48 hours to remove barricading placed near Dumarkha village to prevent farmers else major decision would be taken. A meeting of khap members was held at the chabutra of village Palwa in which khap leaders made a strategy on the ongoing agitation. Notably, dhaharn khap is a prominent khap of bangar area which played a key role during the farmers agitation against three farm laws which now have been repealed. Khap leaders warned Haryana police that they should remove all hurdles erected near Dumarkha village else khap will do the same with the help of tractors and trailers or JCBs. Everyone is facing trouble as commuters have to travel for a long time to reach their destinations.

Editorial

How UPA government helped China grow at India's expense

"In my third term, I promise that India will become the third largest economy in the world," the Prime Minister said in his recent speech to the Lok Sabha. This is "Modi ki guarantee," he added. In the last 10 years, India has jumped six places, from 11th largest in 2014 to fifth in 2024. The Prime Minister has now set a target of 2029 to make India the world's third largest economy. Latest calculations by the IMF suggest it could happen even earlier, likely by 2027. That would leave the Indian economy behind only China and the United States. Compare this to the target of 2043 set by the previous UPA government while presenting its final budget in 2014. But senior Congress leader P Chidambaram, who had presented that budget in 2014, was not impressed. "China's GDP is five and a half times more than our GDP," he reminded us. Now, Chidambaram's numbers are a bit off the mark. China's GDP is a little under five times our GDP, not five and a half times. But that is not the point. There is a huge gap between India and China. We must deal with this difficult fact. But how did it get this way? To begin with, here are two surprising facts. In 2004, India's economy was about 37 percent the size of China. By 2014, it was only 19 percent. In other words, during the UPA years, India's economic size relative to China was cut in half. Second, when you are shopping, whether online or otherwise, does it ever bother you that so much of our stuff seems to be made in China? But it was not always this way. Would you believe that in 2004, India actually used to run a trade surplus with China? It was a surplus of \$1.75 billion in 2004. By 2014, it had turned into a deficit of \$38 billion! So how did we become so dependent on China? Here is that story. In a surprise result, the Congress party came to power after the 2004 elections. At the time, the world was just entering a period of high growth. For decades, India had been an economic underperformer. But now, everyone was talking about the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China). These four emerging powers were supposed to lead the world. Everything was going upwards: markets, business confidence, economic growth numbers. India on the way to becoming an economic superpower? The UPA government could hardly believe its luck. But the Chinese were only too happy to take advantage of the UPA's giddy feeling. In April 2005, Chinese premier Wen Jiabao visited India. By the 2004-05 financial year, India was already running a small trade deficit with China, about \$1.48 billion. The Chinese premier must have felt extra welcome in India, because the UPA needed the support of the Communist parties to stay in power. That is when the UPA agreed on its first "trade target" with China. At the time, India's trade with China was worth about a billion dollars a month, or roughly \$12 billion a year. The two countries agreed to raise this to at least \$20 billion over the next three years. But this "target" was achieved quickly. Too quickly, in fact. Chinese President Hu Jintao traveled to New Delhi in November of 2006. India promptly agreed to double the "trade target" to \$40 billion a year. There wasn't much of anything "bilateral" about this trade. Indian markets were being flooded with Chinese goods. Almost unbelievably, the UPA government did not seem to notice at all. Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh even boasted about it during his visit to China. "Our trade target of \$20 billion by 2008 was reached two years ahead of schedule."



The latest example of nations adopting double standards emerged post a drone strike launched by the Islamic Resistance, a pro-Iran group based in Iraq, on a US base in Jordan, killing three US service personnel and wounding 40 more. In retaliation, US air force struck multiple targets in Iraq killing at least 16 civilians and wounding dozens more. The Iraqi government spokesperson responded by accusing the US of 'violating international law and lying about the circumstances surrounding its retaliatory strikes'. Subsequently another US drone strike killed the commander of the Iraqi militia group Kataib Hezbollah, who was an Iranian, on Iraqi soil. Similar strikes also took place in Syria. Both Iraq and Syria objected to the US unilaterally conducting air strikes on their soil. In the UN Security Council, Russia and China accused the US of violating the territorial integrity of these nations. They also accused the US of escalating the ongoing conflicts. But the US was least concerned. This is not the first time that the US has conducted strikes in Iraq.

Iraq is not an enemy of the US but an ally whose armed forces are being trained by them. Since when is unilaterally launching air strikes and killing scores of civilians as a counter to three soldier deaths by a militant group



legally justified, especially when the nation involved is an ally. The US ignored the criticism of Iraq and did not even bother to respond or address its concerns, treating it as a non-entity, solely because Baghdad lacks military power. At the same time, it continues to demand that India investigate who is behind the attempted assassination of a known anti-India terrorist, Gurpatwant Singh Pannun. Why double standards?

In the West, even joking about hijacking an aircraft or being a member of the Taliban is considered a crime. People are arrested and face jail terms. However, Pannun, who threatened to hijack Indian airlines flights is permitted to do so without even a whimper from the US and Canadian governments. If this is not adopting double standards, wonder what would be. Canada accused India of interfering in their elections. A declassified Canadian government docu-

ment stated, 'India engages in foreign interference activities.' On the accusation the Indian spokesperson mentioned, 'We strongly reject such baseless allegations of Indian interference in Canadian elections, it is not govt of India's policy to interfere in the democratic process of other countries, in fact, quite on the reverse it is Canada, which has been interfering in our internal affairs.' Earlier Justin Trudeau had claimed that India was behind the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, a declared terrorist by India. India refuted the accusation and sought evidence, which New Delhi claims is yet to be received. On the subject of interference, during the height of the farmers' agitation in 2020-21, Trudeau had mentioned, "The situation (farmers protest) is concerning and we're all very worried. Let me remind you, Canada will always be there to defend the rights of peaceful protest." When Amritpal

Singh, the radical Sikh preacher, was arrested in March last year, Canada's foreign minister, Melanie Joly stated, "We are aware of the evolving situation in Punjab, and we are following it very closely. We look forward to a return to a more stable situation." Justin Trudeau stated, "We are looking forward to a swift return to a more stable situation." On Canada's truckers' agitation over which Ottawa applied illegal laws, India's only comments were, 'We have noted that the government of Canada has actually invoked the Emergency Act. Let us leave it at that on that issue.' When comments from leaders of both states are compared, it is evidently Ottawa which is commenting on India's internal affairs, rather than New Delhi, though it accuses India of interference in its internal affairs. Globally, India was criticised over its handling of the farmers' strike, which remained largely peaceful, while Ottawa was backed and supported when it applied emergency laws to forcibly quell the truckers' agitation. Why double standards? Post Tucker Carlson's recent interview of Vladimir Putin, the European Union began considering imposing sanctions on him.

A member of the European Parliament mentioned, "As Putin is a war criminal and the EU sanctions all who

assist him in that effort, it seems logical that the External Action Service examine his case as well." The sanction would prevent Carlson from entering the European Union. Simultaneously, European nations have adversely commented on freedom of press in India. Post the detention of Mohammed Zubair in August 2022, the German foreign ministry mentioned, "Free reporting is beneficial to any society and restrictions are a cause for concern."

After raids on the BBC offices for tax evasion, India came in for western criticism on grounds of curbing press freedom. Not a word was mentioned when the BBC acknowledged in June last year that it has been paying lower taxes in India. Another example of double standards. Globally, India is ranked 161 in the press freedom index while European nations, seeking to impose sanctions on Tucker Carlson just for an interview are considered far more liberal. Simultaneously, those who interview Zelenskyy are praised. What a paradox. When a Surat court sentenced Rahul Gandhi to two years in a defamation case in July last year, leading to his suspension from the Lok Sabha, there were negative comments from the west. The US state department spokesperson mentioned.

Why impeachment of Biden's cabinet secretary is a big deal

It is the first in 150 years. The matter will now move to the Senate, where the Democrats have a majority. So, in all likelihood, Mayorkas will keep his job. But for the Biden administration, it is a historic rebuke; under Joe Biden, border crossings have touched a record high. This impeachment comes in an election year when the Republicans are fighting on the issues of border security and immigration. So for them, it is a symbolic victory. Three Republicans sided with the Democrats; there was dissent in the ranks, but in the end, Mayorkas was impeached. "On this vote, the yeas are 214 and the nays are 213. The resolution is adopted pursuant to

Section 2A of House Resolution 996. House resolution 995 is hereby adopted," said Speaker of the US House of Representatives Mike Johnson. This wasn't their first attempt; the Republican-led House tried to impeach Mayorkas last week. That vote failed. It was almost embarrassing for them. So this was their second attempt at it, and it worked out narrowly for them. However, for the Biden administration, it is a historic rebuke. Until now, only one cabinet secretary has been impeached in American history: Secretary of War William Belknap in 1876. So why did the Republicans impeach Mayorkas? He faced two articles of impeachment. One for

refusing to enforce existing immigration laws, and two for lying to Congress that the border was secure. But many say the charges amount to just a policy dispute. Simply put, the Republicans did not like Biden's border policies, but that doesn't make it a crime. Especially one viable for impeachment. Mayor Kaskas has called the charges baseless, and President Biden has called it a "political stunt." Next, the matter will go to the Senate. If it wants, the Senate can hold a trial; if not, it can send the issue to a committee. Either way, a conviction is unlikely. It needs a two-thirds majority in the Senate. But the Senate is led by the Democrats. So, Mayorkas is likely to keep his job.

India and the UAE: A confluence of cultures and commerce

The Prime Minister just concluded a very successful visit to the UAE. This was his seventh trip to the country since 2015. A key highlight of prime minister's visit was the inauguration of the grand BAPS Temple in Abu Dhabi on 14 February, the UAE's first traditional Hindu stone temple. This was evidence of solid cultural ties between the two countries. At the same time, it also highlights the UAE's commitment to multiculturalism and religious tolerance. There were two other highlights of this visit. First was the prime minister's address at the World Government Summit. At the Summit, the prime minister emphasised the significance of governance that prioritises inclusivity, technological advancement, transparency, and environmental sustainability. He expressed appreciation for the UAE's leadership in creating a platform that brings together global thought leaders to discuss the pressing challenges of the 21st century. These include issues related to food, health, water, energy security, and the imperative of fostering an inclusive society. The prime minister highlighted technology's role as both a disruptor and an enabler, and the need for con-



certed efforts to tackle terrorism and climate change. He advocated for governments to adopt approaches that ensure minimal interference in people's lives while maximizing governance efficiency. The prime minister shared insights from his extensive experience in governance, advocating for policies that promote digital identity, financial inclusion, women's empowerment, and the development of a vibrant startup ecosystem. He called for global cooperation to address challenges in the digital age, such as artificial intelligence, cryptocurrency, and cybercrime, stressing the need for a balance between national sovereignty and international law. The prime minister's vision for the future of governance is one of learning and collaboration, where solutions emerging from summits like these shape a better global future, embodying the principles of "One Earth, One

Family, One Future". Second was the signing of the Bilateral Investment Treaty between the two countries. This BIT is designed as a mechanism to further bolster the investment flows between the two nations, ensuring a robust framework for investor protection and dispute resolution. This treaty will be instrumental in elevating the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. By establishing clear legal parameters for investments, the BIT aims to significantly enhance investor confidence, facilitating a surge in Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) and Overseas Direct Investments (ODIs). The technical provisions within the treaty are expected to streamline investment processes, reduce risks associated with cross-border investments, and foster an environment conducive to increased capital flows, thereby contributing to economic growth and

Farmer protests, contours of anarchy and an NCR under siege

As Delhi turns into a fortress with the farmer protests, one is reminded of the anarchy that disguised itself as dissent in 2021. Khalistani infiltration and banned organisations like 'Sikhs For Justice' were found to be involved in the 2021 farmer agitation. Khalistani slogans were raised and the protestors held up posters of Khalistani terrorist Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale. At the time, farmer organisations also included in their charter of demands the release of certain prisoners, which included Sharjeel Imam and Umar Khalid. They were at the forefront of organising protests against CAA and NRC and had been booked under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). Imam



had gone to the extent of exhorting people to cut off Assam permanently from the rest of the country. Their charter had also called for the release of terrorist sympathisers such as Varvara Rao and Sudha Bhardwaj amongst many others. The farmer protests that ended with the government repealing the farm laws, gave

the impression that the protests were engineered by vested secessionist groups with an agenda of taking the Modi-led government on while reviving Khalistani sentiments. Today, as we step into 2024, the farmers are once again trying to make their way to Delhi via Haryana armed with a new set of demands. These demands, some seemingly innocuous and some inconceivable, include pensions for farmers and India's withdrawal from the WTO amongst others. Ironically, some of these protesting farmers have been seen arriving at the protest sites in ultra-luxury vehicles.

West's glaring double standards on terrorism So far, it has been a wait-and-

watch game for most to see if these protests have been hijacked, like in 2021, by the intersectionality of separatist and political grievances. But the signs of a resurrection are becoming difficult to ignore. Farmer organisations started their journey on 12 February, arriving in modified tractors and SUVs with trucks full of food grains and other necessary goods sufficient for the next six months, at the least. This is a glaring indicator for even the layman to realise that they are here for the long run. Irrespective of the pressures that security forces across the country will have to bear, especially with the 2024 general elections around the corner.

Farmers' protest: Grameen Bandh keeps business shut, buses off roads in Punjab



BATHINDA/PATIALA/AMRITSAR/MEERUT/MUZAFARNAGAR: The call for a Grameen Bharat Bandh drew a response even in Punjab's urban areas where a number of business establishments remained shut while public buses did not ply. Several private bus operators, too, suspended operations, inconveniencing commuters. Sanyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) constituents blocked roads, freed toll plazas and held demonstrations across the state. Traffic on various national highways, including Bathinda-Chandigarh, Bathinda-Amritsar and Jalandhar-Barnala, was disrupted at a number of

places by farmer protests. In Patiala, the situation was peaceful but the absence of buses caused problems for commuters. Bus stands in Patiala, Sangrur and other districts were a deserted look. Shops and establishments mostly remained closed between 6 am and 4 pm. However, public transport was inaccessible even after the strike hours. The bandh call, however, got a mixed response in Amritsar where some marketplaces, such as Hall Bazaar and Katra Jaimal Singh, were shut, but many shops on Lawrence Road and Cooper Road remained open. Despite the bandh, many schools

remained open. In Haryana, following a call by BKU state president Gurnam Singh Charuni, farmers closed several toll plazas in solidarity with their Punjab counterparts who have been camping at the Khanauri and Shambhu borders. The farmers gave free passage to commuters at toll plazas from 12 pm to 3 pm in Jind, Kaithal, Panipat, Karnal, Sonapat, Bhiwani, Hisar, Dadri, Kurukshetra and other districts. SKM farmers also blocked national highways at different places, including Uchana Kalan in Jind district and Kalayat town in Kaithal, for three hours. They said toll plazas would

Union education minister to head TISS Society, Tata Trusts to have 1 member

MUMBAI: The Union education minister will soon be the chairman of the new Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) Society. The executive council of the premier institute, which will replace the governing board, will be chaired by the vice chancellor and will have four nominees of the education minister and academic representatives from TISS. Tata Trusts, which had two senior members on the governing board, will now have only one member in the society. TISS Society will facilitate the

functioning of TISS, while the executive council will have the power of management and administration. The norms are in line with those of regulatory bodies in central universities. Last year, Centre had decided to bring all institutions that receive over 50% govt funds under its jurisdiction. TISS, a centrally funded deemed-to-be university, has, therefore, been brought under govt's ambit. The drafting of a new memorandum of agreement (MoA) had been pending for some time. The executive coun-

cil, as per the proposed MoA, will replace the governing board of the institute. The agreement said the institute will be fully funded by govt. Earlier, the institute was managed by Tata Trusts and the governing board had a nominee of the trust as its chairperson. But, for some time, Tata Trusts has been funding only a few projects, under which there are ad hoc teaching and non-teaching positions in the institute. As per TISS's 2022-23 annual report, 181 teaching positions are sanctioned.

Congress alleges bank accounts frozen, government says Rs 115 crore attached by I-T

NEW DELHI: Congress on Friday alleged that the income tax department had frozen all its bank accounts, crippling its activities ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, a charge that was rejected by official sources as "misleading and misrepresentation of facts". Official

sources said the IT department had attached Rs 115 crore in various accounts of Congress in pursuance of a tax demand pending since 2018-19 and following a process which applies to all taxpayers. The tribunal will hear the matter on Feb 21

before a final decision is taken. At a hurriedly convened press conference in the morning, Congress treasurer Ajay Maken said the I-T dept had frozen the party's main bank accounts on the "flimsy" ground of delay in filing returns years ago.

CAPSULES

Goods train derails near Delhi's Sarai Rohilla railway station



NEW DELHI: A goods train derailed near Delhi's Sarai Rohilla railway station on Saturday. The Railway police said that casualties have not been ruled out as yet. Ten bogies of the train derailed on Patel Nagar-Dayabasti section. The incident occurred near the Zakhira flyover. Team of Railway officials and fire tenders have been rushed to the spot. Rescue operation is currently under way. "Iron sheet rolls were loaded in the goods train. Possible casualty of a person on the track not ruled out," the official said.

French journalist leaves India amid OCI row

NEW DELHI: French journalist Vanessa Dougnac, threatened with cancellation of OCI status because of alleged "malicious" reporting, left India on Friday. France had raised her issue with govt during the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India last month. The journalist, who had come to India 25 years ago, made it clear that she was being forced to leave the country by saying in a statement that she was unable to work and that she had been unfairly accused of prejudicing India's interests.

Defence panel approves acquisitions worth Rs 84,560 crore to boost capabilities of armed

NEW DELHI: The Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Rajnath Singh, approved capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 84,560 crore to enhance the capabilities of the Armed Forces and the Indian Coast Guard. Amendments to the Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020 were also approved. Additionally, a proposal to buy nine maritime surveillance aircraft and six maritime patrol aircraft worth Rs 29,000 crore was approved. Defence panel approves acquisitions worth Rs 84,560 crore to boost capabilities of armed forces, coast guard

Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020, were also approved to promote procurement of advanced technologies from start-ups and MSMEs

on Friday cleared capital acquisition proposals worth Rs 84,560 crore "to boost the capabilities of the Armed Forces and the Indian Coast Guard". Acquisition proposals include new generation anti-tank mines, air defence tactical control radar, heavy-weight torpedoes, medium-range maritime reconnaissance & multi-mission maritime aircraft, and flight refueller aircraft.

The approvals lay

special emphasis on procurement of various equipment from Indian vendors. Significantly, amendments to the Defence Acquisition Procedure, 2020, were also approved to promote procurement of advanced technologies from start-ups and MSMEs. "This will provide the much-needed incentive along with a supportive business environment for the start-ups and MSMEs under iDEX and TDF schemes, truly in the spirit of 'Ease of Doing Business'," the defence ministry said in a statement. 15 maritime patrol aircraft Earlier in the day, the defence ministry had approved a proposal to buy nine maritime surveillance aircraft for the Navy and six maritime patrol aircraft for the Indian Coast Guard.

'Didn't comply with provisions': Air India gets notice after 80-year-old flyer dies

NEW DELHI: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday issued a show cause notice to Air India in connection with the incident where an 80-year-old man passed away after he walked to the terminal due to lack of wheelchair assistance at airport. The DGCA in its notice stated that the airline did not comply with the provisions of the said CAR in violation of Aircraft Rules, 1937. Air India has been asked to



respond to the notice within seven days. "DGCA has issued Car section 3, series 'M', part I on "carriage by Air - Persons with Disability (Divyangjan) and/or Persons with Reduced Mobility".

As per the Para 4.1.7 of the CAR, airlines are mandatorily required to provide assistance to persons with disability or reduced mobility's particular needs and ensure their seamless travel from the

departure terminal of the departing airport upto the aircraft and at the end of the journey from the aircraft terminal exit," the notice said. "Further, an advisory has also been issued to all airlines to ensure that an adequate number of wheelchairs are available for passengers who require assistance during embarking or disembarking from the aircraft during their journey," it added.

Sandeshkhali violence key developments: NCSC submits report to Murmu, recommends President's rule in Bengal

NEW DELHI: Amid Sandeshkhali violence, the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) has submitted a comprehensive report to President Droupadi Murmu, recommending the imposition of President's rule in West Bengal. NCSC Chief Arun Halder disclosed that the commission's report highlighted the alleged harassment of women by Trinamool Congress (TMC) supporters in Sandeshkhali. Meanwhile, the political delegations faced road-blocks as they attempted to address the alleged atrocities against women amidst ongoing protests. A six-member BJP delegation was stopped by the police on their mission

to investigate the reported incidents, while the Congress chief questioned the restriction on opposition parties. Simultaneously, the Supreme Court took notice of the escalating violence, agreeing to consider a PIL seeking a court-monitored probe. NCSC submits report to President, recommends President's rule in Bengal A delegation of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) had visited Sandeshkhali on Thursday after a large number of women claimed that TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh and his supporters captured swathes of land by force and also sexually harassed them. Speaking to reporters

after submitting the report to the President, NCSC chief Arun Halder shared a brief account of "atrocities and violence endured by the people of Sandeshkhali". "We have recommended that President's rule should be imposed in West Bengal over the situation there under Article 338 that aims to safeguard rights of SCs," Halder said.

According to the mandate given to the NCSC under Article 338 of the Constitution, it is the duty of the Commission to present to the President annually and at other times as the Commission may deem fit, reports upon the working of the constitutional safeguards of the Scheduled Castes.

In boost for India, US House passes bill on Quad: What it means for China?

US-India-Australia-Japan Quad alliance, the US House of Representative has passed the "Quad Bill" with a near-unanimous vote to establish a body facilitating closer ties between the four countries. The bill was cleared by a roll call vote of 379 in favour and 39 against. The bill, officially called the "Strengthen US-Australia-India-Japan Cooperation", directs the US State Department to submit a roadmap to increase engagement with Quad members. The bill seeks to foster closer collaboration between Quad members with an aim to strengthen the alliance across various cooperation areas. It proposes that Biden administration must develop strategy to



address cooperation on issues including (1) preparing for the next pandemic, (2) co-developing new innovative technologies, and (3) deepening economic engagement and integration. Greater cooperation between Quad nations matter since the group is seen as a counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific region. It has openly advocated

for a "free and open Indo-Pacific". **What's driving the news** The bill directs the US State Department to ... ?Submit to US Congress a strategy within 180 days of bill's enactment to increase engagement and cooperation with the Quad Enter into talks with India, Japan and Australia to establish a

Quad Intra-Parliamentary Working Group within 60 days of bill's enactment. Establish a US group, with maximum 24 members of Congress, to represent America in the working group. Establish guidelines for annual meetings and group leadership. Submit an annual report to the Congressional foreign affairs committees. My legislation works to ensure the Quad's success and longevity by calling on the State Department to develop a strategy on bolstering democratic coordination in the Indo-Pacific region, and establishes a Quad Intra-Parliamentary Working Group to facilitate greater engagement and cooperation among the four legislatures

CBI ensures murder convict sent back to India from UAE

NEW DELHI:

Central Bureau of Investigation coordinated the return of an absconding life convict charged with murder from United Arab Emirates, following a detailed operation which involved geo-locating and tracking the suspect through Interpol. The subject was identified as Narender Singh. The central agency had got a Red Notice issued against him from Interpol's General Secretariat on Nov 7 last year on the request of Haryana Police.

The notice, as per the protocol, was circulated to all member countries for location and arrest of the subject. After the subject was located, the global operations centre of CBI coordinated with Interpol-Abu Dhabi, Haryana Police, Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi and the ministry of external affairs to initiate the process for his return.

Entire stretch from DND Flyway to Delhi-Mumbai Expressway to be opened by year-end: Gadkari

NEW DELHI: Come December, commuters from Delhi, Noida and Ghaziabad will not have to take the congested Mathura Road to head towards Agra or the newly-built stretch of Mumbai Expressway. The entire 59 km stretch, from DND Flyway (near Maharani Bagh) to Delhi-Mumbai Expressway (at Sohna), will be opened for traffic by the end of this year, road transport minister Nitin Gadkari said on Wednesday. Gadkari conducted a physical inspection of the 33 km stretch between DND Flyway and Ballabgarh Bypass on Wednesday with top officials and local leaders. The 26-km road from Ballabgarh to Sohna on Delhi-Mumbai Expressway was opened for traffic in March 2023. The three packages are being built with an investment of Rs 7,000 crore, including land value and civil construction. "Besides providing direct connectivity to Delhi-Mumbai Expressway, this link



● "The company has fallen roughly 70% since a \$2.5 billion 2021 IPO as investors fret about persistent losses

from DND Flyway can be used by commuters to reach Palwal in just 25-30 minutes. Mathura Road, which is currently the only major road for vehicles heading towards Faridabad, Palwal, Agra and beyond, will be decongested as well," said a senior NHA official. Moreover, completion of this link will mean that people trav-

elling from Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand can drive non-stop to Mumbai taking the Delhi-Dehradun and Delhi-Meerut expressways. But this will be a reality next year, sources said. Delhi-Dehradun and Delhi-Mumbai stretches are set to be fully operational in 2025. Speaking to reporters after inspection of ongoing work, Gadkari said Delhi is facing problems of both air pollution and congestion. "This is not good for the capital city of our country. That's why we have undertaken massive road development work to improve traffic flow and air pollution.

Farmers' 'Delhi Chalo' march enters fifth day, BKU (Ugrahan) to protest outside BJP leaders' homes

CHANDIGARH: The Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan) will on Saturday hold dharnas outside the residences of three senior BJP leaders in Punjab on the fifth day of the farmers' protest over their various demands, including a legal guarantee for MSP. Apart from holding dharnas outside the homes of former Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh, the BJP's Punjab unit chief Sunil Jakhar and senior leader Kewal Singh Dhillon, the union will also hold protests at toll plazas in the state, extending support to the



farmers' "Delhi Chalo" call. On the fifth day of their "Delhi Chalo" march -- called by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha -- the farmers stayed put at the two border points of Punjab and Haryana as they press the Centre to accept their demands, including a legal guarantee of a

Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops. The farmers from Punjab began their march to Delhi on Tuesday but were stopped by security personnel at the Shambhu and the Khanauri points of Punjab's border with Haryana.

The protesters have stayed put at the two border points since then. The Gurnam Singh Charuni-led Bhartiya Kisan Union (Charuni), which is based in Haryana, will on Saturday take out a tractor rally in solidarity with the protesting farmers.

Heart attacks claim lives of protesting farmer, cop

AMBALA/PATIALA: A 78-year-old farmer from Punjab and a cop on duty in the ongoing farmer protests at Shambhu on the Punjab-Haryana border died Friday even as appeals went out to "bring JCB machines to uproot" police barricades."Gian Singh (78) of

Gurdaspur complained of breathlessness and low blood pressure. He died at Rajindra Hospital (Patiala). It seems to be a case of heart attack. Post-mortem report is awaited," said Dr HS Rekhi, medical superintendent of the hospital. Gian's nephew Kashmir

Singh alleged that tear-gas shells fired by Haryana police led to his death. The deceased cop was identified as SI Hira Lal. "Hira Lal suffered a heart attack on Feb 13. He was taken to civil hospital, Ambala Cantonment, where he died."

BKU (Ugrahan) to back farm agitation

● "We could not sit back and have decided to support the protests in a coordinated manner"

BATHINDA: BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) has announced its support to the ongoing protests at Shambhu and Khanauri borders between Punjab and Haryana for demands pending from the previous march to Delhi and will hold protests outside the residences of Punjab BJP president Sunil Jakhar at Abohar, former CM Capt Amarinder Singh's at Patiala and BJP leader Kewal Singh Dhillon's at Barnala on Saturday, reports Neel Kamal. The farmer union will also free



toll plazas on the same two days. BKU (Ekta Ugrahan) president Joginder Singh Ugrahan said, "It would have been better had the two farmer forums (SKM non-political and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha) taken other

groups along before announcing their Delhi Chalo plan. As the central and Haryana govts are resorting to repression, we could not sit back and have decided to support the protests in a coordinated manner."

Digvijaya, Kamal Nath manage to get their Rajya Sabha pick nominated over Rahul Gandhi's choice

NEW DELHI: Congress's nomination of Ashok Singh from Madhya Pradesh for Rajya Sabha marked a climbdown for Rahul Gandhi who was pushing for former MP and confidante Meenakshi Natarajan for the upper House. The advantage for Singh was that he became a sort of joint candidate of veterans Digvijaya Singh and Kamal Nath, while the central leadership is learnt to have stuck to Natarajan for elevation. Singh's profile is intriguing as he has lost four consecutive Lok Sabha elections from Gwalior, even though it is argued in his defence that he came second by close margins in a tough constituency. But what became his calling card was that he has been "pathologically" opposed to former



party insider Jyotiraditya Scindia. This testimonial seems to have clinched his case, since the party is looking to rebuild in the Gwalior-Chambal region after Scindia's exit and defeat of key leaders in the recent assembly polls. That he is an OBC only boosted his claim. But sources said Singh's camp credentials became mysteriously bipartisan this time around. While he has been known as a loyalist of Digvijaya Singh, and Nath was said to have lobbied for himself for RS, sources

close to Nath said he had indeed put forward Singh's name. The surprise now is that once Nath was turned down by the party brass, he suggested Singh for RS. "Ashok Singh is a Digvijaya man, but Nath made him the treasurer of the state Congress," a leader said. In contrast, Rahul preferred Natarajan in the upper House. She had won the Mandsaur LS seat in 2009, but has since lost the polls. A close aide, she has overseen projects close to Rahul's heart in Congress.

BJP's Sadhvi Pragya Thakur accuses Akasa Air of causing 'huge loss'; airline

● "I came to Delhi from Mumbai to Delhi Akasa Air flight number QP1120, duty manager Imran and his associates conspired and tried to cause huge loss"

NEW DELHI: BJP leader and MP Sadhvi Pragya Thakur on Friday alleged that Asaka Air staff attempted to create a "huge loss" for her at the Delhi Airport. The Bhopal MP accused the Akasa Airline staff of hurting her during deboarding at Delhi Airport while flying from Mumbai to Delhi on Thursday. The MP from Bhopal today in a post on social media platform X (formerly Twitter), addressed Union civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and sought action into the matter. "Union Minister Scindia, when I came to Delhi from Mumbai to Delhi Akasa Air flight number



QP1120, duty manager Imran and his associates conspired and tried to cause huge loss to me. I hope you will definitely take action into the issue," the BJP MP posted on X. After the MP posted the incident on X, Asaka Air expressed regret and assured that it would probe the matter in detail. In a statement, Akasa Air

spokesperson said, "We regret the de-boarding experience that Member of Parliament Pragya Thakur had on our flight QP1120 on February 15, 2024. We apologise for any inconvenience caused to her.

While we will investigate the incident in detail, we take this as an opportunity to learn and to continue improving on our services."

PM Modi to flag off first electric train in Kashmir on Tuesday

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will flag off the first electric train in Kashmir on Tuesday and will also inaugurate the 48-km recently completed rail link from Banihal to Sangaldan (a town near district headquarter of Ramban) section in the Valley. This will be PM's first public engagement in the region after nullification of Article 370 in 2019. Officials said the railways will script a new history of trains running on clean fuel in the Valley and also host



the biggest ever programme in its history next week for inauguration and foundation stone laying of nearly 2,000 projects in one go. These include

revamp of over 500 stations and construction of rail over bridges and under bridges. These two will be major programmes before the poll code is announced.

Though the railway officials were hopeful of train operations beginning from Srinagar to Jammu before the Lok Sabha election—a long standing promise to connect the Valley by train—it may take another six months due to delay in the completion of two tunnels between Sangaldan and Katra. Officials said though the 18-km stretch between Dugga and Reasi is complete, trains can't be operated unless the two stretches on both sides are complete.

Farmers' protest: Talks on Sunday, farmers stay put at Shambu border

NEW DELHI: After meeting overnight in Chandigarh for their third round of discussions, Centre and farmers will meet again on Sunday to discuss a way forward at a time when talks are stuck primarily on three key demands - legal guarantee to MSP, using comprehensive cost formula (C2+50%) to arrive at it & farm loan waiver. The protest is expected to expand on Friday to "immediately intensify" the stir. Farm stir likely to expand as SKM decides to join protest Though the govt side — Union ministers Arjun Munda, Piyush Goyal and Nityanand Rai — assured farmer leaders they would get back to them for the fourth round of talks on Sunday evening after consulting higher-ups, the protesters decided to continue with their 'Delhi Chalo.'

ED summons: Delhi CM Kejriwal appears before court via video conferencing

NEW DELHI: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday appeared before Rouse avenue court via video conferencing in connection with the Enforcement Directorate's complaint against him for skipping summons linked to a probe related to the excise policy case.

The court had granted an exemption to Kejriwal from personal appearance for the day. Kejriwal informed the court that he was unable to appear before it due to the ongoing Budget session of the Delhi assembly. Appearing for Kejriwal, senior advocate Ramesh Gupta told the court that the Delhi chief minister will appear before it in person on the next date of hearing. The next hearing will take place on March 16. "Today, Arvind Kejriwal was supposed to appear in person to the summons issued to him. However, an application for exemption for personal appearance was moved as he was busy. Today is



the budget session and trust motion. The application was allowed, and the matter has been adjourned for March 16 for his appearance," Gupta said. In its complaint, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has alleged that the Delhi chief minister intentionally did not want to obey the summons and kept on giving "lame excuses". If a high-ranking public functionary like him disobeyed the law, it would "set a wrong example for the common man ie the 'Aam Aadmi'", the agency said. The ED had on February 3 filed a fresh complaint case against Kejriwal for non-compliance of its summonses. The AAP convenor had earlier

written to the ED, describing the summons issued to him as "illegal and politically motivated". He had alleged that the summonses were aimed at preventing him from campaigning in elections. Meanwhile, stating that BJP had "unsuccessfully tried to topple AAP govt" in Delhi but his MLAs were firmly behind the party, CM Arvind Kejriwal moved a motion of confidence in Delhi Assembly, to be taken up for discussion in the House on Saturday. Kejriwal said despite money being offered, none of his MLAs changed sides. "To show people AAP MLAs are firmly standing with the party, the confidence motion.

SCB ready with policy to check illegal borewells

Secunderabad: Secunderabad Cantonment Board (SCB) has formulated a comprehensive policy to arrest the illegal borewell digging and extracting groundwater indiscriminately. According to SCB official records, over 500 borewells were dug up in the cantonment area with the contribution of MLA's constituency development program (CDP).

Besides these, thousands of borewells were dug up by the residents on their premises in 350 RWAs. SCB officials had asked the cantonment residents to give suggestions and



objections on its proposal of fixing automated water metres (AMRs) for resident borewells. However, the responses were lukewarm, according to a senior SCB official. Upon the instruction of the central ground water authority and the ministry of Jal Shakti, chief executive officers of all the 61 cantonment boards

had issued guidelines to implement ground water extraction rules. Based on that, SCB officials have prepared a draft of the regulations for digging and using borewells in the cantonment areas. According to the officials, in the next board meeting, the responses on the policy will be tables and a resolution will be passed.

Warship returns from Somalia to Chennai port after anti-piracy ops

CHENNAI: The warship INS Chennai, which was involved in a recent rescue operation of 15 Indians on board a ship that was hijacked off Somalia coast, arrived at the city port on Friday. The crew is set to head to Visakhapatnam for MILAN 2024, India's flag-

ship multinational naval conference from Feb 19 to 27. More than 50 countries will be participating in the conference this year. Two ships, along with INS Chennai, will represent the state and Puducherry at the conference. MILAN is a biennial multinational naval exer-

cise which started in 1995 with the participation of four countries Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Thailand. INS Chennai Captain Raghu Nair said this will be an opportunity to promote synergy and understand how they can improve operations among participating.

CAPSULES

False, baseless: CPM on bond funding reports

NEW DELHI: CPM on Friday referred to as "false and baseless" reports that it had received funds through the electoral bond route. The Left party, which asserted that the scheme was "unscrupulous" and "designed to help the ruling party", said it became a petitioner in Supreme Court against it because it did not accept any contributions through it. "The Party wishes to clarify that these reports are false and baseless.

The fact is that CPM has refused to accept electoral bonds on principle. That is why it did not even open a designated SBI account as required by the law to accept electoral bonds. CPM had appealed to the SC against the electoral bonds scheme because of this basic opposition," the party said.

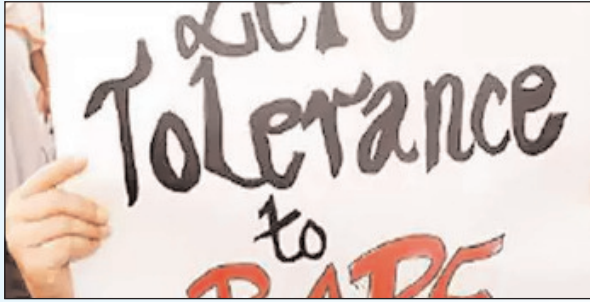
25L have benefited from Naan Mudhalvan scheme so far: Udhaya

Chennai: A total of 25 lakh students and youth benefited from the 'Naan Mudhalvan' scheme so far, and the DMK government was committed to the welfare of youth in the state, said minister for youth welfare and sports development Udhayanidhi Stalin. He inaugurated the new office of Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation (TNSDC) at the CMRL building in Nandanam in Chennai at a cost of 8 crore and gave away job offers to some students at the event.

The DMK government has implemented many schemes for the benefit of youth and students in the state in the last 33 months, he said.

3 cops booked for raping woman bootlegger in Gujarat for not paying hafta

RAJKOT: Four people, including two policemen and one home guard, in Gir-Somnath district have been booked for allegedly raping a 27-year-old woman bootlegger multiple times in Una town over the past few months. The woman continued with her husband's illicit business after his death a year ago. The FIR states that the accused forced her into a sexual relationship for not taking hafta (protection money). Those named in the FIR were Salim Baloch, head constable posted at the police headquarters; Mohan



Makwana, head constable at Gir-Gadhada police station. Hanif Shahmadar, the home guard in Una, and Paresh Singod, who impersonated a cop to rape the woman. The four were detained by the Gir-Gadhada police and booked under IPC sections 376 (2) (N) (repeatedly raping the

same woman), and 354 (A) (unwelcome sexual behavior, including physical contact, demands for sexual favours, showing pornography against a woman's will), and 354 (D) (stalking), said Arvindsinh Jadeja, in-charge inspector of the special operations group (SOG). The

police swung into action after the woman submitted an application for complaint with the assistant superintendent of police, Una, and posted the same on social media. The woman said that Baloch and Makwana approached her after getting to know that she was selling liquor and demanded hafta for not taking action against her. Baloch then allegedly sent her messages on WhatsApp demanding sexual favours. The woman submitted screenshots of messages in her application.

Rooftop hoardings: SCB serves notices, says tough action soon

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



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

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

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

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

NEW DELHI: It almost seemed like lava was flowing in the drains when the paint factory went up in flames in northwest Delhi's Alipur on Thursday evening, recalled eyewitnesses. A massive blast rocked the area, leaving residents



with the sensation of an earthquake. Drums filled with chemicals were flung into the air and then fell on roads, houses and drains, flowing and quickly spreading the fire. "Everything was like we have only seen in movies. Had I not seen it with my own eyes, I would have never believed it," said Rajesh Chaudhary, a shop owner in the Mandir Wali Galli, where the fire broke out. Eyewitnesses told that the chemicals acted as a catalyst and the blaze spread furiously. Though at least 20 families were able to evacuate to safety, eight houses were burnt down.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



LUCKNOW: 'Dum Pukht', the Nawabi Lucknow's slow cooking style, owes as much to Imtiaz Qureshi, the grand old man of Indian culinary arts, as vice versa. While Qureshi carried it from the esoteric Persian manuscripts to the world map of gastronomy, 'Dum Pukht' catapulted the Lucknow-born chef to heights of fame previously unknown to any Indian cook.

Qureshi, who became the first practising member of his fraternity to ever get a Padma Shri in 2016, passed away in Delhi on Friday. He was 93. The slow cooking style has its origin - like most good things in Lucknow - in a story. During the time of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah in 1784, Awadh was faced with a ravaging famine. Jobs were lost and people were on the brink of starvation.

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



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

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

9 tech companies that have asked employees to work from office



Companies are transitioning from work-from-home to office-based work, with tech giants like TCS, Infosys, HCL Technologies, Wipro, Meta, IBM, Dell, Google and Amazon implementing policies to require employees to return to the office a minimum number of days per week. Non-compliance may have consequences, including termination and limited career advancement.

to work from the office. These companies include Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Infosys, HCL Technologies, Google and Amazon, among others. It has been reported that several employees are refusing to work from the office as they will have to relocate. However, companies have resorted to strin-

gent measures to call employees back to work. **TCS changes work from home policy** TCS made it mandatory for employees to work from the office for at least three days a week by March 31. Non-compliance could lead to "consequences," and the company justifies the move by citing factors like improved col-

laboration, better training, and increased productivity. HCLTech makes work from office compulsory HCLTech has made work from office compulsory for all its employees starting February 19. The company requires its employees to work from their designated HCLTech offices for a minimum of three days a week. Those who do not follow the directive will face disciplinary action **Infosys asks employees to work at least 10-days a month** Infosys instructed its employees to work from the office for a minimum of 10 days, which is at least three days a week. Infosys claims that this policy is aimed at enhancing

teamwork and employee well-being Wipro asks employees to come at least 3-days-a-week Wipro told its employees last year that they are required to be physically present in the office for a minimum of three days per week. Those who do not comply with this policy may face disciplinary action. Wipro claims that this policy is aimed at enhancing teamwork, innovation, and culture. Google to monitor employees' attendance Google also asked its employees to come to office and it was reported that the company also told employees to work on alternate days to implement its co-working space policy.

VHP moves Calcutta HC, says naming lioness 'Sita' hurt religious sentiments

JALPAIGURI: Vishwa Hindu Parishad has moved Calcutta high court's Jalpaiguri circuit bench against naming a lioness Sita at Bengal Safari Park. The lioness and a lion named Akbar were brought to the facility in Salugara, Siliguri, from Sepahijala Zoological Park in Bishalgarh, Tripura, on Feb 13. Bengal Safari Park officials denied the allegation that they have named the lions, saying the big cats had already been named before they arrived. The arrival of the lions at the facility was greeted with excitement in north Bengal. But as soon as the names were made public, VHP activists protested, claiming that naming a lion after a Hindu goddess hurt religious sentiments.



VHP's north Bengal unit said it learnt from media reports that a lion and lioness with markings as IL26 and IL27, respectively, arrived at the Bengal Safari Park as part of an animal exchange programme and that the lioness was named "Sita". The lioness is aged five-and-a-half years while the lion is seven years and eight months. Both were born in Sepahijala zoo. The pair are compati-

ble as they have lived together earlier in a single enclosure. On Friday, VHP activists Anup Kumar Mondol and Lakshman Kumar Agarwal filed a case against naming the lioness Sita. "It has hurt the religious sentiments of numerous people," said advocate Subhankar Dutta, representing VHP. The matter is likely to be heard on February 20 before a single bench of the court, Dutta added.

JD(U) backs 'one nation, one poll' citing logistics ease

NEW DELHI: JD(U), which only recently returned to the NDA fold, has thrown its weight behind the proposal for 'one nation, one election', citing reduced financial burden, policy continuity and political stability and the logistical ease in conduct of electoral process that simultaneous polls to the Lok Sabha and all state assemblies would entail. Nitish Kumar's party, however, is not in favour of adding local body elections to the synchronised LS and assembly poll exercise. Conveying JD(U)'s stand

to the one-nation-one election committee led by former President Ram Nath Kovind here on Saturday, a delegation comprising JD(U) secretary general Sanjay Jha and parliamentary party leader Rajeew Ranjan Singh said "simultaneous elections (to LS and state legislatures) are important to strengthen the architecture of good governance". It endorsed the view expressed by business associations like CII, Ficci, Assocham etc that economic growth would be the most positive outcome of simul-

taneous polls, with business in all the sectors likely to get a boost. As regards elections to the third tier, that is, panchayats and municipalities, JD(U), in its nine-page memorandum submitted to the Kovind panel on Saturday, said they must "be held simultaneously but separately and not with (polls to the) House of the People and state legislatures". BJP's Bihar ally cited to the Kovind panel 10 advantages of concurrent polls to the Lok Sabha and state/UT assemblies.

Air India gets notice after 80-year-old flyer dies

NEW DELHI: The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) on Friday issued a show cause notice to Air India in connection with the incident where an 80-year-old man passed away after he walked to the terminal due to lack of wheelchair assistance at airport. The DGCA in its notice stated that the airline did not comply with the provisions of the said CAR in violation of Aircraft Rules, 1937. Air India has been asked to respond to the notice within seven days. "DGCA has issued Car section 3, series 'M', part I on "carriage by Air - Persons with Disability (Divyangjan) and/or Persons with Reduced Mobility". As per the Para 4.1.7 of the CAR, airlines are mandatorily required to provide assistance to persons with disability or reduced mobility's particular needs and ensure their seamless travel from the departure terminal of the departing airport upto the aircraft and at the end of the journey from the aircraft to the arrival terminal exit," the notice said.

"Further, an advisory has also been issued to all airlines to ensure that an adequate number of wheelchairs are available for passengers who require assistance during embarking or disembarking from the aircraft during their journey," it added. An 80-year old man who flew in with his wife, both of them booked as wheelchair passengers on an Air India flight from New York, collapsed at Mumbai airport immigration counter and passed away on Monday. The deceased was an Indian-origin, US-passport holder. They had pre-booked Air India's wheelchair facility. The Gujarati couple was booked in economy class of Mumbai-bound Air India flight AI-116 that left New York on Sunday afternoon. The flight landed in Mumbai at 2.10pm on Monday. "There were 32 wheelchair passengers on this flight, but only 15 wheelchairs with accompanying staff on ground waiting on ground to help them," said an airport source requesting anonymity.

Rahul Gandhi's yatra to skip west UP, cut short by 5 days

LUCKNOW: Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra has been curtailed by five days and will skip most of the scheduled stops in western UP. While the party said the decision was taken because of the UP Board examinations from Feb 22, it was viewed as linked to Jayant Chaudhary's RLD quitting INDIA bloc and joining NDA. RLD's base is western UP, where it was supposed to have been the bulwark of the opposition resistance to BJP. There was also a tiff between Congress and Jayant in RS when he was called to speak about the Bharat Ratna to his late grand father and farmer leader Charan Singh, creating bitterness. The yatra will now touch upon western UP only at the exit point to MP, sources said.



GBC@IV: Bundelkhand to receive investments worth Rs 60,000 crores

Lucknow In a resounding testament to its commitment to regional development, the Yogi government is poised to unveil investment projects totaling more than Rs 10 lakh crore during the Ground Breaking Ceremony (GBC@IV), of which a significant portion amounting to Rs 60,000 crore will be directed towards the Bundelkhand region. Spanning all seven districts of Bundelkhand, this transformative investment endeavor is poised to catalyze unparalleled economic growth, obviating the need for youth to seek employment opportunities elsewhere. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's unwavering focus on Bundelkhand's development underscores the region's strategic importance in Uttar Pradesh's growth narrative. Leveraging tailored policies and incentivizing entrepreneurs, the Yogi government has successfully galvanized investor interest in Bundelkhand, paving the way for substantial economic infusion. The paramount objective is to cultivate an industrially robust Bundelkhand, empowering its youth and curbing migration by fostering local employment avenues. The impending investment influx through GBC@IV stands as a pivotal milestone in this transformative journey. Jhansi to receive investment of about Rs 24,000 crore On February 19, projects worth more than Rs 59,288 crore are going to be launched in all the seven districts of Bundelkhand through GBC@IV. Jhansi, a linchpin district in Bundelkhand, is slated to witness an investment surge of approximately Rs 23,739 crore, anchoring the region's economic resurgence. Likewise, Lalitpur will witness the commencement of projects valued at over Rs 15,707 crore by PM Modi and CM Yogi, accentuating the district's pivotal role in Bundelkhand's revitalization efforts. Central to this endeavor, however, is the establishment of the Bundelkhand Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) in Jhansi and Lalitpur, mirroring the successful model of Noida, thereby catalyzing industrial growth and job creation. Furthermore, investment projects worth more than Rs 9,290 crores in Jalaun, over Rs 7,047 crores in Chitrakoot, more than Rs 1,664 crores in Mahoba, more than Rs 596 crores in Banda, and over Rs 1,243 crores in Hamirpur will contribute to the development of these respective areas. The substantial investment inflows earmarked for districts such as Jalaun, Chitrakoot, Mahoba, Banda, and Hamirpur underscore the comprehensive nature of this developmental paradigm, promising inclusive growth and prosperity across Bundelkhand. As Uttar Pradesh charts a course towards sustainable development and economic resurgence, the monumental investment infusion into Bundelkhand through GBC@IV stands as a beacon of hope, heralding a future replete with opportunities and prosperity for its residents.

Bihar CM Nitish Kumar responds to Lalu Prasad's 'doors are always open'

NEW DELHI: Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Sunday responded to RJD supremo Lalu Prasad's "doors are always open" remark, saying he maintains good ties with both his allies and opponents. "I maintain good relations with allies and leaders of opposition parties. I shake hands with them whenever I meet them. That's all", Nitish said when asked

about the remark by Lalu, with whom he was seen warmly shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries inside the assembly premises on Thursday. Earlier this week, Lalu had said that doors were always open for Nitish Kumar, days after the Bihar chief minister walked out of Mahagathbandhan and joined BJP-led NDA. "Ab aayenge toh

dekhenge. Doors are always open," Lalu had said when asked if he would give another chance to Nitish. Meanwhile, Nitish said he exited the Bihar alliance because things were not going well. "I don't think of who says what... Things were not going well, so I left them (RJD)," he said. When asked about cabinet expansion, Nitish said, "Ho Jayega.

EOU to probe JD(U) MLA's horse-trading charge

PATNA: Bihar govt Saturday asked the Economic Offences Unit (EOU) to probe the alleged offer of Rs 10 crore or a cabinet berth

to a JD(U) MLA for switching sides, two days before chief minister Nitish Kumar moved a trust motion in the assembly. On Feb 12, JD(U)'s Harlaxhi MLA Sudhanshu Shekhar had lodged an FIR at Patna's Kotwali police station regarding the offer in exchange for voting against Nitish-led NDA govt. In the two-page FIR, Shekhar further alleged that other party MLAs, Krishna Murari Sharan and Niranjana Kumar Mehta, were also offered a cabinet berth and money, respectively, for voting against govt. "Since all the conversations related to the offers happened through.

Providing opportunities for farmers to progress in every circumstance: CM Yogi

Lucknow Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Saturday, emphasized the unwavering commitment of the double-engine government to empower farmers, ensuring opportunities for progress in every circumstance. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the 55th Regional Fruit, Vegetable and Flower Exhibition-2024 at Raj Bhavan, he said that Uttar Pradesh despite constituting only 11 percent of India's total cultivable land, contributes over 20 percent to the country's overall food grain production. The Chief Minister inaugurated the exhibition with Governor Anandi Ben



Patel. Expressing gratitude to the Governor for her steadfast commitment to hosting this event annually within the Raj Bhavan courtyard, CM Yogi underscored its significance in fostering agricultural advancement. "Within UP, though farmers uti-

lize only 10 percent of cultivable land for horticultural endeavors, they contribute a remarkable 24 percent to the total GDP of agriculture," CM Yogi remarked. He stressed the pivotal role of horticultural farming alongside traditional meth-

ods in significantly augmenting farmers' incomes. In recognition of pioneering efforts, progressive farmers across Uttar Pradesh, championing innovations such as dragon fruit, strawberries, and advanced techniques like polyhouse farming, were felicitated at the ceremony. Subsequently, the Governor and Chief Minister toured the exhibition, which spans three days from February 17 to 19. CM Yogi engaged with department officials and farmers, seeking insights into produce varieties, import-export dynamics, and agricultural trends. Together, they unveiled a commemorative.