

Inspiration: Late. Dr. L.C. Wallia

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'Will continue to expose traitors': Abhishek Banerjee to join BJP?



Vatika Times
NEW DELHI: Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Abhishek Banerjee on Thursday denied reports of him joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), saying that he remains committed to his party.

"I am a loyal soldier of TMC," Banerjee said, rejecting claims of differences with party chief Mamata Banerjee. "My leader is Mamata Banerjee," he added.

"I will continue to expose traitors" Speaking at a TMC party conference in Kolkata, Banerjee said he would continue to expose "traitors" within the party. "I will continue to expose traitors in TMC, just like I did during the last assembly polls," he said. He also accused those spreading rumors of his defection of misleading people. "Those who are saying that I am joining the BJP are spreading canards," Banerjee said.

"Till the time all of you are with us, we will continue to demolish BJP's 'chakravayuh'... Those who spoke ill about the party have been identified. I was the one to identify people like Mukul Roy and Suvendu Adhikari who went against the party," the Diamond Harbour MP

'25 languages destroyed by Hindi-Sanskrit,' says TN CM Stalin

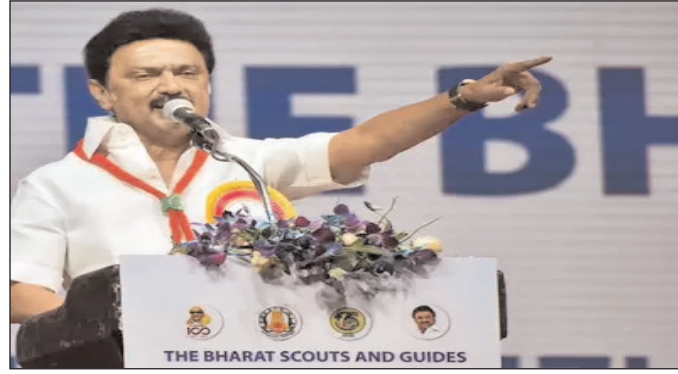
Vatika Times
NEW DELHI:

Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin on Thursday stepped up his attack at the BJP-led central government over alleged "Hindi imposition", saying Hindi "swallowed" over a score of regional languages in the North.

Calling the "real" regional languages of North India "relics of the past", Stalin said "push for a monolithic Hindi identity is what kills ancient mother tongues".

"More than 25 north Indian native languages have been destroyed by the invasion of hegemonic Hindi-Sanskrit languages. The century-old Dravidian movement safeguarded Tamil and its culture because of the awareness it created and the various agitations," the ruling DMK chief said. In a sharp-worded criticism of the ruling BJP's three-language policy under NEP, the Tamil Nadu CM claimed that "invaders with ethnic hostility for centuries have attempted to destroy the unique Tamil culture".

Intensifying his attack, the CM said the "three-language policy, we find that in most states, either Hindi or Sanskrit is being prioritised over other Indian languages". "Will oppose Hindi imposition. Hindi is the



mask, Sanskrit is the hidden face," he said in a letter to partymen. "My dear sisters and brothers from other states, Ever wondered how many Indian languages Hindi has swallowed? Bhojpuri, Maithili, Awadhi, Braj, Bundeli, Garhwali, Kumaoni, Magahi, Marwari, Malvi, Chhattisgarhi, Santhali, Angika, Ho, Kharia, Khortha, Kurmali, Kurukh, Mundari and many more are now gasping for survival. The push for a monolithic Hindi identity is what kills ancient mother tongues. UP and Bihar were never just "Hindi heartlands." Their real languages are now relics of the past," the DMK chief wrote on X.

Stalin further said the dangers of "forcing Hindi upon non-Hindi states have been widely discussed. However, this hegemonic project is also swallowing up languages like Magadhi and Bhojpuri in the Hindi-speak-

ing belt itself".

Only Tamil language and culture survived while many other languages which gave way to Hindi, got swallowed," he claimed. "The native languages of this land have been shattered by the aggressive expansion of Hindi as a dominant language," he added. On Tuesday, Stalin said that Tamil Nadu was prepared for "another language war" as tensions continue to rise with the Centre over the alleged 'imposition of Hindi' through the National Education Policy (NEP).

The NEP is a direct threat to our children's future. We do not oppose any language. But we will always resist any attempts to impose a language on us," Stalin asserted. He further clarified that their opposition to the NEP is not solely because it promotes Hindi, but because the policy pushes students out of schools.

Our schemes inspired by antyodaya, 'integral humanism': Amit Shah

Vatika Times
BHOPAL:

Nanaji Deshmukh's concept of Antyodaya and Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay's "integral humanism" have been the twin inspirations for the Narendra Modi govt's welfare initiatives, home minister Amit Shah said in MP's Chitrakoot on Thursday. In just 10 years, the Centre, under Modi, has given basic amenities to 60 crore poor in the country, Shah said. Shah was in Chitrakoot in MP's Satna district to pay hom-

age to Jan Sangh neta and Bharat Ratna awardee Nanaji Deshmukh on his 15th death anniversary. Shah also unveiled a statue of Jan Sangh co-founder Deendayal Upadhyay. It was Shah's second visit to MP in three days. "When the country became independent and policies were being framed, those who knew and respected India were looking at independent India's policies with a lot of sadness and concern. Be it our

country's foreign policy, economic policy, agricultural policy or education policy - none of them had the essence of our ancient culture and the nation's soil," Shah said in his address. At that time, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay introduced the principle of "Ekatma Manavwad (integral humanism)", on how our economic philosophy, our foreign policy should be and the way we should look at the world, he said. "

Interfaith couple flees Jharkhand, gets married in Kerala, secures HC

Vatika Times
KOCHI:

Kerala HC Thursday granted police protection to an interfaith couple from Jharkhand who fled after threats from their families, sought refuge in the southern state and got married recently. A bench of Justice C S Dias issued the order on a petition filed by Asha Verma and Mohammad Galib, currently residing at Kayamkulam in Alappuzha.

HC also directed police to ensure that the petitioners were not

forcibly taken back to their home state during pendency of the petition, after the couple alleged that their family, along with Jharkhand police, had arrived in Kerala and threatened them.

The petitioners stated that they hailed from Chitarpur in Jharkhand's Ramgarh district, and had been in a relationship for 10 years. Fearing 'honour killing', they moved to Kerala on Feb 2 and got married on Feb 11 as per Islamic rites.

Odisha HC grants bail to thief with 'sapling plants' condition

Orissa

An Orissa HC judge has granted bail to a man facing prosecution for alleged theft on the condition that he plant 200 saplings of local varieties such as mango, neem, and tamarind around his village in Jharsuguda district and maintain them for two years, reports Lalmohan Patnaik. Manas Ati had been in judicial custody since December 25 last year for allegedly stealing six electric poles in villages under Kolabira police.

DKS hits back after row over attending event graced by Amit Shah

Vatika Times
BENGALURU:

Karnataka deputy CM and Congress state president DK Shivakumar's participation in Mahashivratri celebrations in Isha Foundation in Coimbatore, also attended by Union minister Amit Shah, has drawn criticism from within his party, with some suggesting he is aligning with BJP. They see this as a strategic attempt to push Congress high command to acknowledge



his ambition to become CM.

He responded by questioning criticism of his religious participation. "Our Congress president's name is Mallikarjun Kharge. Who is Mallikarjuna? It's Shiva.

Should he change his name," he asked.

His visit triggered reactions from Congress functionaries, including AICC secretary PV Mohan, who shared a screenshot of Shivakumar's post on X & remarked, "Thanking for an invitation from someone who mocks Rahul Gandhi and aligns with RSS's narratives, while serving as president of a secular party, misleads party workers."

12 states and counting: Authorities widen probe into 'death insurance' scam

Vatika Times
MEERUT:

Trilok Kumar died twice in six months. That is confirmed by official records from two govt institutions. The insurance payout came twice, too. Days after uncovered an elaborate insurance scam originating in UP and running into hundreds of crores - where insurance agents, claims officials, panchayat authorities and even doctors and bank staff conspired and colluded to insure the dying and sometimes the dead - investigators now say the fraud runs deeper than initially thought. They say many more agencies and institutions are involved and that from the initial eight states from which they have nabbed some of the accused, they are now



looking at "12 states and counting". They cited the case of Trilok Kumar in Delhi as an example. The first time Kumar died, it was cancer. That's what MCD records and receipts from the Nigambodh Ghat cremation office in Delhi showed. A resident of Shaktinagar, Kumar was cremated on June 19, 2024,

with an official Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) document listing cancer as the cause of death. That should have been the end of his story. It wasn't. Six months later, an MCD death certificate surfaced, now claiming Kumar had died on Dec 27, 2024, at Govind Ballabh Pant Hospital. This time it was

cardiopulmonary arrest. The paperwork was flawless - stamps, seals, signatures. TOI has the documents in its possession.

"You can't admit a man who's already dead, run medical tests on him, and then hand over his body - all in a single day," said Sambhal ASP Anukriti Sharma, one of the lead investigators in a case that has exposed what police in UP are calling "one of the most calculated and ruthless insurance swindles" in recent memory. A senior doctor at GB Pant Hospital said: "When a patient arrives in the emergency, we do not waste time on formalities. But if scammers convince a patient to provide a false name in exchange for money, with the promise of guaranteed.

Post election crackdown: CBI arrests 6 Delhi Transport Department officials in corruption case

NEW DELHI: In a significant post-election crackdown, the CBI has arrested six officials from the Delhi Transport Department on charges of corruption and bribery, marking the first major action in the capital after the Aam Aadmi Party's recent electoral defeat, officials said on Wednesday. The agency had been receiving multiple complaints about rampant corruption within the department, prompting an extensive surveillance operation to verify the allegations before making the arrests, they said. Following the verification process, investigators found prima facie evidence indicating corruption at various levels.

Earphone use for long hours may cause permanent hearing loss: Health ministry

Vatika Times
NEW DELHI:

The health ministry has issued a warning against prolonged use of earphones and headphones, suggesting that these devices, whether wired or wireless, should not be used for more than two hours daily. If used for this duration, frequent breaks should be taken during listening sessions.

In a letter to all states/UTs for further dissemination to the public, director general of health services Dr Atul Goel said recent studies have shown prolonged and excessive exposure to loud music and other sounds through personal audio devices can lead to irreversible hearing damage. "Evidence has shown there is a temporary shift of hearing acuity (ability to hear and distinguish sounds) after prolonged use of an earphone/headphone or

ear plug, which is generally a high-frequency hearing loss that is not easily noticeable in day-to-day life," he said.

"If unsafe use of earphones/headphones/earplugs is prolonged and persistent, this shift of hearing acuity can be permanent and result in permanent hearing loss. Certain individuals may also develop a persistent ear ringing or buzzing noise called tinnitus because of prolonged unsafe use," the senior official said.

The young population, Goel said, is at a higher risk due to unsafe listening practices. The rise of online gaming culture is also putting children at risk of exposure to the impulse of high decibel sounds, he added. "Once hearing is permanently impaired, normal hearing will never be restored by hearing aids.

In N. India, short winter doesn't always lead to searing summer

Vatika Times
NEW DELHI:

Winter has ended early in north India and February in Delhi is set to be among the three warmest in the last 15 years. So, does the early conclusion of winter indicate a long and scorching summer ahead? Contrary to the general view, data from past years shows that a warm Feb doesn't necessarily lead to a searing summer in north India. monthly average maximum temperatures in north India since 1971 and picked the 10 warmest months of Feb during this period. In five of these years, the corresponding months of April were indeed warmer or significantly than normal but in the other five, April temperatures were either close to normal (four years) or below normal (one year). These two months were chosen for the analysis because Feb is the last month of winter in north India, while April marks the beginning of full-blown.

Allow Saarc meet, blocked since Uri hit: Dhaka to Delhi

Vatika Times
Foreign minister S

Jaishankar met Bangladesh foreign adviser Touhid Hossain on the sidelines of Indian Ocean Conference in Muscat on Sunday amid tense bilateral ties over the presence of ousted ex-PM Sheikh Hasina in India since last August. While Jaishankar said the conversation was focused on the bilateral relationship and cooperation under Bimstec, a Bangladesh readout said Hossain requested India to consider a hud-

dle of Saarc standing committee that hasn't met since the 2016 Uri attack when India decided to block the process because of Pakistan's support to cross-border terror. Sunday's talks come ahead of a possible meeting between PM Modi and Bangladesh chief adviser Md Yunus on the margins of Bimstec summit in Thailand on April 3-4. India attempts to promote Bimstec, which excludes Pakistan. If it happens, it would be the first bilateral

meeting between the two after Yunus assumed office. Both Modi and Yunus are likely to attend the Bimstec summit in person. Modi had discussed concerns related to Bangladesh in the meeting with Trump last week.

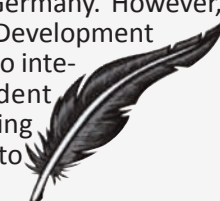
In his meeting with Jaishankar, Hossain also called for talks for renewal of Ganges Water Treaty, adding both sides recognised the challenges in the relationship and the need for joint efforts to address those.

Editorial

India's naval advancements will fuel its Indian Ocean ambitions

Ritu Walia

Thailand decided to proceed with the acquisition, underscoring China's persistence in maintaining its naval export commitments. Additionally, Pakistan is set to acquire at least eight Hangor-class submarines and other naval equipment from Beijing, further enhancing China's presence in the region. India has increasingly aligned itself with Western naval powers to address maritime challenges through collaborative efforts. France was among its earliest Western partners, and the countries' cooperation has grown stronger over time. India also participates in joint maritime missions with European nations and European Union Naval Force (EUNAVFOR) initiatives such as Operation Atlanta and Aspides. Furthermore, India contributes to significant maritime security dialogues such as the Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) and Enhancing Security Cooperation In And With Asia (ESIWA). India's 2023 inclusion in the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), led by the US Central Command, underscores its dedication to enhancing collaborative security in the western Indian Ocean. The IFC-IOR exemplifies India's commitment to collective security, even though it remains a preliminary step toward a more robust maritime security framework. Advancing to the next level will require India to engage in the technically complex task of real-time information sharing through secure legal frameworks beyond Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT). The Quad's Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) initiative highlights the challenges in achieving seamless data-sharing capabilities. To counter hybrid threats and protect critical infrastructure, India must prioritise sharing vital intelligence and deploying unmanned systems for coordinated surveillance. Strengthening such partnerships will bolster India's naval capabilities and contribute to broader maritime security across the Indian Ocean Region. The commissioning of new naval platforms marks a significant milestone for India but also highlights persistent challenges, particularly in achieving technological self-reliance in engine manufacturing. Although the INS Surat, INS Nilgiri, and INS Vagsheer were designed by India's Warship Design Bureau and built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited, their engines were procured from foreign manufacturers, exposing a critical dependence on external sources. INS Surat, the fourth and final ship of the P15B Guided Missile Destroyer Project, employs a Combined Gas Turbine and Gas Turbine (COGAG) propulsion system. This system uses MeGE and DT-59 reversible engines sourced from Ukraine's Zorya Mashproekt, a key supplier for India's frontline warships. Despite the ongoing war in Ukraine, India has continued to rely on Zorya, underscoring the critical nature of this dependence. To secure the supply chain, Bharat Forge acquired a 51 per cent stake in Zorya's India arm in 2023. Similarly, INS Nilgiri, the first ship of the P17A Stealth Frigate Project, launched in 2019, uses a Combined Diesel and Gas (CODAG) propulsion system. This system incorporates LM2500 engines from General Electric in the US and MAN diesel engines from Germany, further emphasising India's reliance on imported technology despite its strong indigenous design capabilities. INS Vagsheer, the sixth and final submarine of the P75 Scorpene project developed in collaboration with France, also depends on imported MTU diesel engines from Germany. However, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) plans to integrate an Air-Independent Propulsion (AIP) system during its mid-life refit, aiming to modernise.



The possibility of an upside earlier expected on the revenue front

Suman

With tax revenue growth slowing in the last few months, the possibility of an upside earlier expected on the revenue front may be receding rapidly. Revenue expenditure is also rising at a rate higher than the budgeted 6 per cent. If the fiscal deficit target of 4.9 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) has to be met for 2024-25, which the government must in view of the uncertainties and challenges emerging both domestically and globally, the finance ministry may see in the composition of the current year's capex a sliver of hope. The finance ministry should not spend ~0.83 trillion for equity infusion into BSNL. Instead, it should ask the telephone company to raise resources from the market. The ministry should also desist from spending the remaining ~0.6 trillion earmarked for capital allocation to new schemes. Saving about ~1.43 trillion (a little less than half a percent of GDP) will be a cushion against other expenditure slippages and revenue shortfall. Not too many tears would be shed for a squeeze on capex if the hit is primarily on infusing equity into a state-owned enterprise and on new schemes that are yet to be announced. Quite ironically, a slowdown in the government's capex may well turn out to be an opportunity.

In contrast, such transfers during the entire 2023-24 had risen sharply by about 24 per cent to ~1.15 trillion. It appears that



these transfers will take a hit in the current year and for the first time since this initiative to help states boost their capex was undertaken a couple of years ago. Significantly, this has not yet adversely impacted the states in a big way. The capex of 25 states (accounting for 95 per cent of all the states' and Union territories' total capex budget) has risen by just about 1 per cent in the April-November 2024-25 period, although states like Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Mizoram, Odisha, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal saw their capex fall by varying margins. Eventually, however, this will have an adverse impact on the states' capex programme and its growth-enhancing effect. There are two more sectors that account for another 13 per cent of the Centre's capital expenditure budget. But they bring out an intriguing aspect of why the government's capex has been slowing. They suffer from a peculiar problem, which has nothing to do with either the relevant sectors' expenditure-absorbing capacity or the absence of effective expenditure monitoring.

The bulk of the capex under telecommunications was meant for infusing equity into state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd, or BSNL. Of the total capex of ~0.84 trillion, the proposed amount for BSNL's equity infusion accounted for as much as ~0.83 trillion. But the total expenditure under this head in the first eight months of 2024-25 is only 6 percent of what has been budgeted. In other words, a decision to transfer the equity amount promised to BSNL would increase the government's capex by a significant margin. Why this money has not been transferred is puzzling. Last year, against a budgeted BSNL equity infusion of ~0.53 trillion, the actual infusion was higher at ~0.65 trillion. This year, no action on this front even after eight months is a puzzle as this failure also contributes significantly to the decline in the Centre's capex. More importantly, the Budget for 2024-25 had allocated a significant amount of ~0.66 trillion for capex on central sector

schemes and projects. Of this, a large chunk, estimated at ~0.62 trillion, was earmarked for new schemes that the government would announce during the year. However, in the first eight months of the current year, only 4 percent of that total outlay has been used up, leaving ~0.63 trillion yet to be spent. It is likely that the government may not need this amount or it may have kept its powder dry to meet any new schemes that it might announce later in the year, for which such capital allocations will be useful. For the Union finance ministry, currently busy preparing the Budget for 2025-26, such a state of play with regard to slowing capital expenditure could well be an opportunity. The Union government's capital expenditure (capex) continues to be a cause for concern. Of course, the extent of its decline has reduced somewhat — from 35 per cent at the end of the first quarter of the current financial year to 15 per cent at the end of six months. But the latest number for the April-November 2024-25 period shows that the Union government's capex was still 12 per cent lower than what it was in the same period of 2023-24. Instead of aiming for the targeted 17 per cent growth to ~11.11 trillion in capex for 2024-25, the government will have to strive hard to at least cross the figure of ~9.48 trillion reached last year. What has led to this decline? A widely held view is that the seven-phase general elections, which

began on April 19 and ended on June 1 last year, caused a slowdown in capex. But if that indeed is the reason, the decline in capex in the first quarter should have been reversed in the second quarter of 2024-25. And certainly, the first two months of the third quarter should have raised the trajectory of capex growth to a higher level. There has been some improvement, but a 12 per cent decline in the April-November 2024-25 period is no comfort. Look at the slightly different trajectory seen in the Union government's revenue expenditure growth during the same period. The Budget for 2024-25 had projected a rise of over 6 per cent to ~37.1 trillion in revenue expenditure. At the end of June 2024, the growth was just about 2 per cent, but it has been rising since then, reaching 4.2 per cent by the end of the first six months of 2024-25 and climbing even higher to 7.8 per cent during April-November 2024-25. So, if revenue expenditure has gained momentum, why has capex failed to follow suit? A close analysis of the government's capex numbers presents an interesting picture. Over 90 per cent of the Centre's total capex during 2024-25 was accounted for by just six sectors — roads, railways, defence, telecom, transfer to states and new schemes. Their share in total capex in 2023-24 was a little less at 87 per cent. But the 12 per cent decline in the first eight months of 2024-25.

he right-wing parties in Israel's ruling coalition also threatened

Rohit Singh

The right-wing parties in Israel's ruling coalition also threatened to bring down the Netanyahu government if he agreed to a ceasefire deal. Indeed, one right-wing leader, Ben Gvir, has openly admitted to successfully blocking previous attempts. Trump's pressure to agree to the ceasefire has come as a shock to right-wing Israelis, who hailed his election victory in November. In his first term, Trump moved the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and recognised Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights, a Syrian territory occupied by Israel after the 1967 war with Arabs. When Trump announced the appointment of an Evangelical Christian Mike Huckabee as his ambassador to Israel, many right-wing Israelis were thrilled, particularly those who wanted new Israeli settlements in Gaza. Huckabee is on record saying there is no such thing as the West Bank or the occupation. So, why has Trump pushed for the ceasefire? Apart from taking cred-

it for ending one of the most brutal wars in recent history, Trump may like to focus on larger issues, like relations with China and ending the Russia-Ukrainian conflict. In the Middle East, he wants Saudi Arabia to recognise Israel, which will be a huge achievement of his administration. With the continuing war in Gaza and the terrible sufferings of Palestinians at the hands of Israel, Saudis could not afford to consider having diplomatic ties with Israel. But Trump is unpredictable, which is also a reason for both Hamas and Israel to accept the ceasefire deal. Turkey, Egypt and Qatar—the host of ceasefire negotiations—pressured Hamas to accept the agreement. And while Netanyahu may have defied Biden for so long, he could not do the same to Trump and must keep him on his side. Starting on Sunday, January 19, the ceasefire will last 42 days. It will see the exchange of 33 Israeli hostages detained by Hamas and Palestinians held in Israeli prisons.

We expect continuation and maybe broadening of the PLI support

Sameer Singh

Jacob highlighted that there may be some rationalisation of duties on capital goods required for solar upstream manufacturing could be seen so that overall that industry can really take off. "We expect continuation and maybe broadening of the PLI support towards the solar module value chain. We already have a few interventions there, which are likely to be extended deeper," Dwivedi said. Similarly, on the battery manufacturing front, the industry expects localization of the value chain given competing countries have already advanced beyond India. In the green hydrogen segment, the industry believes the government may bring in hydrogen purchase for specific sectors like (green) steel. On the EV front, the industry seeks more support towards building public charging infrastructure given the anticipated increase in the EV penetration. "Under the PM E-drive, we already have an allocation of about Rs 1,100 crores for FY26. Given that the final guidelines have not been released until now, I think even the allocation under FY25 may get added and FY26 budget may be increased as the country expects an acceleration in EV adoption in FY26," Dwivedi said. While the government has already launched a rooftop solar scheme and announced viability gap funding for offshore wind projects, industry players expect increased allocations, particularly towards solar and wind, along with higher budgetary capital expenditure in green hydrogen and battery storage infrastructure. Along with this, the sector also expects the government to increase its coverage of households under PM Suryaghar. "Under the Atmannirbhar Bharat scheme, there should be a scheme for the home grown EPCM companies to create indigenous technical capabilities in the country and reduce the

foreign exchange outflow. We would also like to see a reduction on GST for engineering equipment and a reduction in import duties on chemicals in India," said Umesh Sood, CEO Simon India Ltd. Sunil Singhvi, President, Indian Electrical and Electronics Manufacturers Association noted that there is a need for strong policy support to foster growth, drive innovation, and enhance sustainability in the power sector. "One of the main requests is to expand the PLI scheme, which aims to increase domestic production of crucial electrical components necessary for large and essential power projects, such as the advanced High Voltage Direct Current (HVDC) systems," he said. Extension of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for solar energy value chain, increased allocation towards PM Suryaghar Muft Bijlee Yojana, and greater thrust to distribution and transmission infrastructure are likely to be the key features of the upcoming Budget, as far as the energy sector is concerned. Sources said these proposals figured not only in the budget wish lists of the industry, but also in the respective recommendations from the ministries of power and renewable energy to the finance ministry, ahead of the Budget. "Given the success of PM Suryaghar scheme with almost 600,000 installations in just nine months since its launch, one could probably see additional allocation to target more households," said Ashwin Jacob, partner at Deloitte India. "As far as evacuation of power from offshore wind projects is concerned, we would want to see the VGF or budgetary support to continue or get enhanced," he added. "We hope to see a decisive increase in funding to accelerate the green energy transition. Priorities must include scaling renewable energy by addressing grid and transmission challenges, advancing Battery Energy Storage

The funds stolen from Bangladesh belong to its people

Abhinav

But some of the mud will stick. That's the tragedy for the daughter of Bangladesh's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman—even her staunchest supporters admit her chances of ever returning to her motherland look very slim. Not just her niece, several other members of Sheikh Hasina's family are also under investigation for corruption that, some estimates say, totals a mind-boggling \$5 billion. The corruption case is linked to an alleged land grab in Dhaka and, more infamously, to a Russian-funded nuclear power plant. In 2013, Sheikh Hasina travelled to Moscow to

seal the deal and was photographed standing beside President Vladimir Putin, Siddiq, and other members of her family. When questioned about her presence in Moscow, Siddiq tried to explain it as a family event, but the photo was impossible to dismiss. Apart from family, powerful ministers and industry leaders—allegedly with Sheikh Hasina's blessings or blind eye—also cost Bangladesh billions. A white paper on the economy, presented in Dhaka by a specially appointed finance committee in December, put the cost of corruption across public and private sectors at a staggering

sum. Perhaps the most striking was the claim that "illicit financial outflows averaged \$16 billion annually from 2009 to 2023—more than double the combined foreign aid and FDI inflows." Whether investigations into this immense corruption have yielded documentary evidence or not is open to debate. But for now, Chief Adviser Mohammed Yunus has made his administration's objective clear. "The theft of billions of dollars in public funds has left Bangladesh with a significant financial deficit," Yunus said in a statement this week. "The funds stolen from Bangladesh belong to its people. We will

continue to work with our international partners to ensure that justice is done." Bangladesh's current dispensation has also moved court against Sheikh Hasina on charges of "crimes against humanity." In October, the International Criminal Tribunal (ICT)—that she herself founded—issued an arrest warrant against her and 45 others for the deaths of an estimated 1,000 people in the violence that preceded her ouster on 5 August. "Sheikh Hasina was at the helm of those who committed massacres, killings, and crimes against humanity in July and August.

Over 45% of Himachal at risk of landslides, floods: IIT



DEHRADUN: Over 45% of Himachal Pradesh's area is highly prone to natural disasters such as floods, landslides, and avalanches, according to a study by researchers from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ropar. The team recently completed a hazard susceptibility mapping of the state as part of a broader effort by researchers and scientists from multiple IITs to assess multi-hazard vulnerability across the Himalayan states. The goal is to identify regions at high risk from multiple natural hazards simultaneously and aid in targeted disaster risk reduction strategies.

The IIT Ropar team presented its findings at the 2nd Indian Cryosphere Meet (ICM), held at IIT Bombay on Feb 14-15, which was attended by nearly 80 glaciologists, researchers, and scientists from around the world. The study, conducted by MTEch scholar Daishisha lawphniaw under the guidance of Reet Kamal Tiwari, an associate professor at IIT Ropar, used geospatial data to evaluate the state's vulnerability. Tiwari told TOI, "The study found that areas with mean slopes between 5.9 degrees and 16.4 degrees and elevations up to 1,600

metres are particularly prone to both landslides and floods. Meanwhile, higher-altitude regions with slopes between 16.8 degrees and 41.5 degrees are more likely to experience both avalanches and landslides." He added that steep mountain slopes and elevations above 3,000 metres are at the "highest risk". Using GIS-based mapping, the study classified hazard-prone regions, showing that flood and landslide-prone zones are typically located in lower-elevation river valleys, while high-altitude mountains face a greater threat of avalanches.

UTCA's Chandra Shekhar Azad T20 Tournament Kicks



NEW DELHI: The Indian Army opened a retaliatory firing at the Pakistani troops across the Line of Control (LoC) on Sunday. The incident occurred in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch sector at about 11 am. "At about 11 AM today, Pakistan troops opened small arms fire on own (Indian) post across LoC in Poonch Sector, J&K. The fire was retaliated appropriately by the Indian Army. No casualties to own side," the Army officials told news agency ANI. On February 8, terrorists fired at a patrol from a forested area across LoC in Keri sector of Rajouri, prompting a retaliatory response from Indian soldiers.

In the intervening night of February 4 and 5, a landmine explosion in Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch district caused casualties among terrorists attempting to cross LoC. However, there was no official confirmation on the number of deaths. J&K saw a spate of terrorist attacks between May and December last year, prompting heightened counteroffensives by security forces. More than 30 terrorists were eliminated before the onset of the region's harsh winter. Security forces also recorded 25 fatalities during this period — 19 in Jammu and six in Kashmir. Official sources estimated that of the 70 to 80 Pakistani terrorists

active in J&K, nearly 55 to 60 are in Jammu zone. These "highly trained intruders" operate in small groups of three to four, armed with sophisticated weapons such as M4 carbines, and use advanced techs like iridium satellite phones and thermal imagery. On Saturday, three J&K government employees - a police constable, a teacher, and an orderly in the forest department - were dismissed by order of lieutenant governor Manoj Sinha for alleged terror activities, including arranging weapons, providing targets for terror attacks, and fueling violent protests in the Valley, all at the behest of handlers based in Pakistan and POK.



Register all live-in relationships

Delhi: Justice Anoop Kumar Dhand ordered the state government and Union social welfare and justice secretary to create a legislative format for registering live-in couples by March 1. The HC requested a plan to hold male and female partners accountable for the education, health, and upbringing of their children. The male partner must also be held responsible for supporting his non-earning female partner and their children, the court ruled. The single bench asked the chief justice to form a larger bench to explore the issue of protecting married people cohabiting with remarried partners or married people from separate marriages living together without dissolving their marriages. The Rajasthan High Court ordered that live-in relationships be registered by a government entity or tribunal until the Union and state governments legislate.

Delhi's 180cr Allocation Boost

Delhi: The Union Budget for 2025-26 allocates Rs 1,348 crore to Delhi. It's Rs 180 crore more than the 2024-25 Rs 1,168 crore allotment. The capital has been provided with Rs 968 crore as grant-in-aid and Rs 380 crore as loans and advances. Unlike last year, there is no specific provision for the disaster response fund, the externally funded Chandrawal water treatment plant, or increased compensation for the 1984 riot victims. In the revised projections, Delhi's loans and advances budget for FY 2024-25 was raised by Rs 80 crore for capital projects. In the 2025-26 budget.

Must respect characteristic traits of other communities: Mohan

TALIT (BURDWAN): Diversity is intrinsic to India's existence and reflected in its culture of embracing pluralism, RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said at an event in Bengal's Burdwan on Sunday. "Indian civilisation is ancient. Every community has its character. Hindus know it and accept that. They know that our pluralist character is a manifestation of unity," he said during the rally in Talit, calling for "sanhati" (unity) of all Hindus.

"We should respect the separate characteristic traits of different communities. Diversity of language and culture has always been part of the Indian ethos. This culture created our identity as Hindus. 'Hindu' is not people from a particular community



or religion. Hindus believe in 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam' (the world is one family). We have always believed in harmony, even with our enemies." Alluding to Pakistan, the RSS chief said "those who felt they couldn't remain within this harmonious soci-

ety made their own country" while "those who didn't leave the country accepted the nature of Indian society". Bhagwat reminded RSS swayamsevaks of "rajdharm", citing Ram as the epitome of this ideal. "India remembers the king who

decided to spend 14 years in the wilderness just to keep his father's word. It also remembers the king who put the exiled king's shoes on the throne and ruled the country." He expressed happiness at RSS expanding its network in Bengal.

Delhi mandate to bring a govt that serves its people: Nirmala

NEW DELHI: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said the poll verdict in Delhi will help its citizens get a govt that serves their interests. "... (I am) happy to know that because under Modi's leadership, we are very keen that Delhi gets a govt which serves its people. And that's something which is the need of the hour for attaining 'Viksit Bharat 2047'. Top 10 winners and losers in Delhi elections India's NCT should have a govt that serves the cause of its people," she told reporters after her customary post-budget



address to the RBI board. "And I strongly believe that the road map that the PM has set for the country should certainly take Delhi on the top priority and serve its people from every point of view, for all the Human Development Indicator-related issues and also the fundamental infra-

structure, schools, hospitals, people's healthcare, and the capital worth India's 'Viksit Bharat' aspirations," Sitharaman said. Days before the Delhi polls, Sitharaman had announced a Rs 1 lakh crore income tax relief for the middle class, including a rebate for those earning up to Rs 12 lakh annually.

'\$21M for voter turnout in India': DOGE cuts grant

New Delhi: Elon Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) under the Donald Trump administration announced on Sunday a series of expenditure cuts, including the cancellation of \$21 million intended for "voter turnout in India." BJP responded, alleging "external interference in India's electoral process." Sharing a post on X, the official DOGE handle outlined the list stating that, "US taxpayer dollars were going to be spent on the following items, all of which have been cancelled." Poll Global Support Can Strengthen Democracy Countries Should Handle Their Own Elections. It also canceled several other US spending, including \$ 29 million allocated for "strengthening the political landscape in



Bangladesh" and \$ 10 million for "Mozambique voluntary medical male circumcision," aimed at saving US taxpayer money. BJP's Amit Malviya took to X, responding to the announcement, stating that the \$21 million allocated for voter turnout in India amounts to external interference in the country's electoral process and questioned who would benefit from it. "\$486M to the Consortium for Elections and Political Process

Strengthening,' including \$22M for 'inclusive and participatory political process' in Moldova and \$21M for voter turnout in India," Malviya wrote in a post on X. "\$21M for voter turnout? This definitely is external interference in India's electoral process. Who gains from this? Not the ruling party for sure!" he added. The Department of Government Efficiency further cancelled \$39 million designated for "fiscal federalism" and "biodiversity conservation" in Nepal.

'We sold our land for a dream, now we have nothing': Indian migrants on US deportation

New Delhi: A US military aircraft landed at Amritsar airport on Saturday night, carrying 116 Indian migrants who had been deported from the United States. Among them was Daljit Singh, who had left his village in Punjab last year with hopes of a better future. Instead, he returned in shackles, his hands cuffed and legs chained throughout the journey. "Our legs were chained and hands were also cuffed throughout the journey. There were three women and three children on board who were not cuffed," Daljit told news agency PTI upon arrival. His experience reflects the harsh reality of illegal migration, where many fall prey to fraudulent travel agents and endure gruelling journeys, only to be deported back home. Among the deportees, over 60



were from Punjab, 33 from Haryana, eight from Gujarat, two each from Uttar Pradesh, Goa, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan, and one each from Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir. "I was deceived by an agent Daljit recounted how he was lured by a travel agent in 2022, who promised to take him to the US legally in exchange for Rs 65 lakh. To secure the deal, he handed over an advance agreement for an acre of his land. His journey began in November 2022, when

he was first sent to Dubai. After spending nearly 18 months there, he returned to India, only to be sent to South Africa for four-and-a-half months. From there, he was taken to Brazil on August 26 last year and embarked on a treacherous route through multiple countries. The journey involved walking through dense forests, crossing rivers, and surviving on minimal food. Eventually, he reached Mexico, where he was forced to stay for a month while his travel agent coerced his

wife into signing over his land. Finally, he crossed into the US on January 27, only to be caught and detained by US Border Patrol. "I was given only a bottle of water, a packet of chips, and an apple daily," he told PTI. "We were told we were being shifted, but they sent us back" Sourav, a 20-year-old from Punjab's Ferozepur district, also shared his harrowing experience. His family spent Rs 45-46 lakh to send him to the US, selling farmland and borrowing money from relatives. "We were kept in a camp (detention centre) for 18 days," he said. "A day before our deportation, we were told that we would be shifted to another camp. When we boarded the plane, they said we were being taken to India." Sourav had travelled through Amsterdam, Panama,

and Mexico before attempting to cross the border on January 27. "Our mobile phones were confiscated, and we had no contact with our families. Our hands and legs were tied. We cooperated with the US authorities, but no one heard our appeals." "My family spent Rs 90 lakh for this shattered dream" Harjit Singh, from Gurdaspur district, was deported alongside his cousin. His family spent Rs 90 lakh in hopes of securing a future in the US. "We were assured that we would be taken legally, but we were not," he told PTI. Harjit was caught while crossing the border on January 27 and detained for 18 days before being deported on February 13. Sahil Preet Singh's parents, from Kapurthala district, spent Rs 40-45 lakh, selling their farmland and gold.

Momentum Index Funds Attract Investors as Confidence in Factor Investing Grows

Vatika Times GURUGRAM:

Momentum investing has gained strong traction, driven by the growing interest in factor-based index funds. The National Stock Exchange (NSE) now offers 31 factor-based indices, reflecting the rising demand from mutual funds.

Factor investing relies on persistent return drivers such as momentum, low volatility, and value, enabling investors to gain exposure to stocks with specific characteristics that historically influence returns. The Nifty Midcap 150 Momentum 50 index, for instance, tracks the top 50 stocks from the Nifty Midcap 150 index selected based on their Normalized Momentum Score. Over the past four months, the market has experienced corrections and remained volatile. Most major indices have posted negative returns during this period, erasing all year-to-date gains. Despite this sustained



market turbulence, index funds tracking the Nifty Midcap 150 Momentum 50 index have continued to attract inflows. The Tata Nifty Midcap 150 Momentum 50 index fund is one such fund underscoring the rising traction of momentum investing. In 2024, inflows into this fund through digital and direct channels tripled year-on-year to ~Rs 500 crore from 199 cities. In Delhi, inflows surged to over ~Rs 27 crore in 2024, a sharp rise from ~Rs 1.25 crore in 2023, while new PAN registrations in the fund jumped to 169 from just 15. Similar strong inflows and new investor participation were observed in Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Chennai. (Source:

Internal Data) "Momentum investing allows investors to capitalise on strong price trends while eliminating emotional bias.

The Tata Nifty Midcap 150 Momentum 50 Index Fund provides a disciplined approach to factor investing, balancing risk and reward. Given its track record and the historical resilience of midcap stocks, investors may consider allocating a portion of their portfolio to this strategy for potential long-term gains," said Anand Vardarajan, head of passive investment at Tata Asset Management. Mr. Kapil Menon manages the Tata Nifty Midcap 150 Momentum 50 index fund, which was launched in October 2022. With the increasing adoption of factor investing and the momentum-based strategies, the Tata Nifty Midcap 150 Momentum 50 Index Fund stands as an option for investors seeking to enhance portfolio diversification.

Indian Ocean Rim Association- A Key bloc for India: VC KUK

Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra:

International Centre for Indo-Pacific Studies (ICIPS), & Department of Economics, Kurukshetra University organised a one-day international conference in hybrid mode on "India and IORA: Pathways Ahead" on February 27, 2025 in collaboration with Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA). Conference Patron and Kurukshetra University Vice Chancellor Prof. Som Nath Sachdeva said that this conference will explore different aspects of maritime security, trade, sustainable development, blue economy and disaster risk reduction. Chief Guest, Ms. Paramita Tripathi, JSIP, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi said that India, as the founder member of Indian Ocean Rim Association for regional cooperation (IOR-ARC), has played a significant role to make it a dynamic and strategically important Inter-Governmental organization. Dr. Pragya Pandey from Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi said that this council aims



to promote the study of Indian and international affairs and to promote India's relations with other countries through study. Prof. Anil Sooklal, High Commissioner, Republic of South Africa to India, New Delhi said that IORA is vital for maritime security in the Indian Ocean. Prof. V.N. Attri, Director, ICIPS KUK welcomed the dignitaries and gave an outline of the conference. Deputy Director Public Relations Dr Jimmy Sharma informed that this confer-

ence comprised five technical sessions in which Prof. S.K. Mohanty, RIS, New Delhi, Ambassador Sanjay Panda, Ambassador Anup Mudgal, Dr. Emadul Islam, SRF, Ocean Policy Research Institute (OPRI), Sasakawa Peace Foundation Tokyo Japan, Vice Admiral, Pardeep Chauhan, DG, National Maritime Foundation, New Delhi, Ambassador Rajiv Bhatia, Ms. Ashima Chaturvedi, NSCS, New Delhi were the resource persons.

52 donated blood in voluntary blood donation camp at Law Institute on death anniversary of Chandershekhar Azad



Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra:

A voluntary blood donation camp was organized at the Law Institute of Kurukshetra University on the death anniversary of Chandershekhar Azad, the great hero of the Indian freedom struggle, under the guidance of Vice Chancellor Prof. Somnath Sachdeva. Director of Law Institute Prof. Sushila Devi Chauhan was present as the chief guest in the camp while the camp was presided over by Deputy Director Prof. Ramesh Sirohi. Dr. Ashish Aneja and Prayas Foundation head Naresh Saini were present as special guests in the camp. The coordinator of the camp was Dr. Ashok Kumar Verma, who was awarded the President's Police Medal. Chief guest Prof. Sushila Chauhan, Director of Law Institute, encouraged the blood donors by putting badges on them and said that Chandershekhar Azad is a source of inspiration for the youth. Youth need to learn the spirit of patriotism from his life. Prof. Ramesh Sirohi said that blood donation is a very noble deed. Prof. Amit Ludri, who specially attended the program, said that every drop of blood donation works as a new life. Camp coordinator Dr. Ashok Kumar Verma said that the youth should stay away from the habit of addiction and adopt the hobby of blood donation, which will benefit them as well as give new life to other people.

Manjinder Singh Sirsa's appointment as Cabinet Minister boosts Sikhs' morale : Bhupinder Singh

Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra:

Bhupinder Singh Asandh, President of the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee, said that the appointment of Manjinder Singh Sirsa as Cabinet Minister in the Delhi government has boosted the morale of the Sikh community. Sirsa, a resident of Haryana, has always worked for the welfare of his community and raised his voice for their rights.

Asandh, who met Sirsa in the Delhi Assembly to congratulate him on his appointment, said that Sirsa has always served the Sikh community with dedication, whether as the President of



the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee or as a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Asandh added that the BJP has always worked for the welfare of Sikhs, and Sirsa's appointment as Cabinet

Minister is another example of this. Kawaljit Singh Ajrana, former spokesperson of the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee and BJP leader, said that Manjinder Singh Sirsa has made Haryana's

name shine in national politics. Sirsa, a resident of Sirsa district, has been called the "Bhishma" of national politics. Ajrana said that Sirsa's journey in politics has been remarkable, and he has proven his capabilities at every step.

Ajrana added that the BJP has always worked for the welfare of Sikhs, and Sirsa's appointment as Cabinet Minister is another example of this. He listed several examples of the BJP's work for the Sikh community, including the celebration of the centenary of the Sikh Gurus, the opening of the Kartarpur Corridor, and the abolition of the black list.

Faculty of Technology at CEPT University Invites Applications to UG and PG Programs 2025

Vatika Times Gurugram :

The Faculty of Technology (FT) at CEPT University, formerly known as the School of Building Science and Technology (SBST), established in 1982, invites applications to its UG and PG programs for 2025. Focusing on the requirements of the ever-evolving fields of Civil Engineering, Building Energy Performance, Geomatics, Structural Engineering Design, and Construction

Engineering and Management, FT offers unique engineering programs renowned for their problem-solving and outcome-based pedagogy. This approach, coupled with a strong emphasis on practical learning through studio-based projects, equips graduates with the skills and knowledge that is highly sought after by industry leaders in the rapidly evolving urban infrastructure and built environment sectors. Prof Aanal Shah, Dean, Faculty of Technology,

CEPT University says "M.Tech programs entail application of engineering and scientific principles to building and built-environment related design problems. These problems are increasingly complex while addressing societal, environmental and economic realities of today. The University believes in capturing ideas of design and innovation and critical thinking in its M.Tech programs beyond domain specific disciplines."

Indian consulate on hospitalised Indian student: 'In constant touch with hospital,

NEW DELHI: The Indian consulate in San Francisco on Thursday posted an update on X on Nilam Shinde case extending its support to her family of Nilam Shinde. She was seriously injured in a road accident in California on February 14 and is currently receiving treatment at UC Davis Health hospital near Sacramento, the consulate said.

In the statement, the consulate expressed its "sympathy and solidarity" with Shinde's family and assured that it has been in constant touch with the hospital, her family, and friends. "We have been rendering all possible assistance and will continue to remain engaged to support her and the family," the post read. The Indian



authorities, including the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Indian Embassy in the United States, are closely monitoring the situation. Further details on Shinde's condition or the circumstances of the accident have not been disclosed. Earlier, news agency PTI reported that the MEA has taken up the request for an urgent

visa by the family of Neelam with the US. Shinde reportedly suffered severe injuries to her head, hand and chest. Her family has sought an urgent visa to travel to the US to be by her side. The MEA has taken up the matter with the US. The US side is looking into the formalities for early grant of visa for the applicant's family, the sources said.

Protein gives strength and power to muscles and fights diseases: Dr. Ruchi

Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra:

A healthy mind resides in a healthy body. With this thought, an awareness program was organized on National Protein Day at Major Nitin Bali Gita Niketan Vidya Mandir. On this special occasion, Dr. Ruchi Jain, a gynecologist and obstetrician from D.R. Jain Neurocare and Multispecialty Hospital, and Dr. Sanjay Sharma, an Ayurveda specialist, made students and their parents aware of the importance of protein, diseases caused by its deficiency, and simple and accessible sources of protein. Dr. Ruchi Jain explained that protein is not just a nutrient, but the foundation of the body. It gives strength to muscles, increases the power to fight diseases, and plays a crucial role in the mental and physical develop-



ment of children. She said that without a balanced diet, good health is impossible, and protein plays the most important role in it. If the body does not get protein on time, it becomes weak, energy decreases, hair falls, skin becomes dry, and children's height and weight do not increase properly.

Dr. Sanjay Sharma, under whose leadership the 1982nd camp was organized, addressed the students and said that when it comes to health, awareness is the solution. By making small changes in their diet, they can avoid many serious diseases.

The principal of the school, Manjula, and the management committee honored Dr. Ruchi Jain, Dr. Sanjay Sharma and Monika, the coordinator, by presenting them with a memento. They appreciated D.R. Jain Neurocare and Multispecialty Hospital, saying that this is not just a program for students, parents, and teachers, but a new beginning. It is a commendable effort to lay the foundation for a healthy future, strong, and aware society. The school management committee will continue to organize such programs from time to time.

Three years of preparation, Rs 5000 crore investment, helped railways run over 17,000 trains for Maha Kumbh

NEW DELHI: Three years of preparation ahead of Maha Kumbh with an investment of Rs 5,000 crore to upgrade infrastructure and streamline maintenance helped the railways to run over 17,000 trains in 45 days, four times more than the last Kumbh, without a single instance of failure of locomotives, track or overhead wires.

During the Maha Kumbh period, around 4.5-5 crore people took trains for Prayagraj, railway minister Ashwini Vaishnav said on Thursday while giving details of the preparation, coordination and execution to run the record number of trains. This was the largest train operation for any festival in the railway's history. To run more passenger trains, all freight trains were shifted to the Dedicated Freight Corridors, officials said. Vaishnav, who visited Prayagraj, lauded the seamless coordination between different departments. He said while the original goal was to operate around 13,000 trains, the railways managed to run 16,000 trains without any problems. "Every train operated effectively, guaranteeing devotees a hassle-free trip," he said. Praising the efficient use of the Prayagraj junction area and the logistical arrangements, the minister said an example has been set and this can be emulated for future large-scale gatherings, including the upcoming Kumbh and Ardh Kumbh melas. "The experience gained during the historic Maha Kumbh will be of great help in managing future events," he said. Officials said over 200 trains were put into service in the Kumbh area. These were either trainsets or had engines on both sides to avoid shunting operations.

Pilgrims choke Varanasi, Ganga aarti suspended



VARANASI: As lakhs of pilgrims from Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj continued to reach Varanasi, district authorities extended restrictions while CM Yogi Adityanath conducted an aerial survey of the congested city roads Saturday afternoon to assess the situation. Ganga aarti at the ghats were suspended until Feb 26. Classes up to 8 remained suspended. Schools will be online only. Traffic restrictions and diversions were strictly enforced to manage the swelling crowd. The influx of pilgrims has led to record-breaking numbers at Kashi Vishwanath temple, which saw more than 8 lakh devotees Thursday alone. The trend continued through Friday and Saturday, keeping the temple premises heavily crowded. After his helicopter sortie, chief minister Yogi adjusted his schedule, forgoing his planned visit to Kaal Bhairav temple and instead reaching Kashi Vishwanath temple. He did not take the jam-packed roads -

First GBS death in Andhra, 2 Maha casualties take all-India toll to 19

KOLHAPUR/GUNTUR: Three more deaths from Guillain Barre Syndrome (GBS) - two in Maharashtra's Kolhapur and one in Andhra Pradesh's Guntur - in the last 24 hours took the nationwide toll in the outbreak since Jan to 19. While Andhra Pradesh reported its first death from the rare neurological disorder, the fatality count in Maharashtra has now reached 15. Assam, Tamil Nadu and Bengal account for a death each. With a 65-year-old man from Kolhapur and a 64-year-old from Karnataka's Chikodi dying at Kolhapur's CPR Hospital on Saturday night from



lin therapy and provided ventilator support. However, there was little chance of survival," said More, adding that nerve conduction tests were carried out on both the patients. Significantly, no fresh cases or deaths were reported from Pune on Sunday for the first time since the outbreak on Jan 5. GBS, three people have died at the govt facility within a week. Both men who died on Saturday had a history of hypertension and diabetes, Dr Satyawan More, dean of CPR Hospital, said. "By the time they were brought in, their symptoms had progressed significantly. We started them on immunoglobu-

The central agency had got a Red Notice issued against him from Interpol's Secretariat

NEW DELHI: Central Bureau of Investigation coordinated the return of a 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.

Upstox forays into insurance distribution

Chandigarh: Upstox, one of India's premier wealth management platforms, today announced its entry into the insurance distribution business. While Upstox has traditionally been recognized for its offerings in Stocks, F&O, and Mutual Funds, the introduction of Insurance marks a significant stride towards evolving into a comprehensive wealth-building platform. Today, Upstox is a one-stop-shop for a wide array of financial instruments including Stocks, IPOs, F&O, Commodities, Currencies, Fixed Deposits, P2P Lending, Government Bonds, T-Bills, NCDs, Gold, Insurance and much more. With this launch, the company aims to revolutionise India's insurance landscape by offering its users a simplified, transparent and customised experience of purchasing insurance in line with their needs. Currently, Upstox is offering Term Life Insurance on its platform and is planning to roll out Health, Motor and Travel Insurance soon. HDFC Life is among the first insurers to partner with Upstox and feature their Term Insurance plans on the platform. Kavitha Subramanian, Co-Founder, Upstox said, "We are thrilled to expand our offerings on Upstox and foray into the insurance distribution segment. We have recognized that navigating the insurance landscape is a daunting task. Customers are inundated with so many questions - which is the right plan, what should be the correct criteria to select a plan, how much insurance cover will be enough. At Upstox, we understand these challenges, and we're dedicated to helping our customers get answers to all of these without overwhelming them."

Salasar Techno Engineering Ltd. Executes acquisition of EMC Ltd.

CHANDIGARH: Salasar Techno Engineering Ltd. (BSE: 540642, NSE: SALASAR), is a one stop engineering and infrastructure solution provider. The Company is engaged in providing turnkey EPC services for Railway and Power sectors and is also engaged in designing and manufacturing of telecom towers, Monopoles and other Heavy Steel Structures. The company announced that it has executed the acquisition of EMC Ltd. on an "As is where is," "As is what is," "Whatever there is," and "No recourse" basis as a going concern. This acquisition has been executed in compliance with the terms and conditions outlined in the E-Auction Process Information Document issued by the Liquidator. A Sale Certificate has been issued by the Liquidator in favor of Salasar confirming completion of sale. Earlier, Salasar announced that it effectively completed the payment of balance amount of Rs. 1,680 Mn for acquisition of EMC Ltd. (Formerly known as Electrical Manufacturing Company Limited). This demonstrates a pivotal moment in Salasar's continuous pursuit of expanding market presence and capabilities. Commenting on the above status, the management team of Salasar said, "We are thrilled to announce the timely completion of the payment for the acquisition of EMC Ltd., marking a monumental milestone in our journey of strategic

expansion. Our ability to swiftly settle the full amount underscores our commitment to executing our plans with precision and agility. This acquisition represents more than just a business transaction; it symbolizes our dedication to inorganically expand into allied areas within the engineering and infrastructure solutions sector. By integrating EMC Ltd.'s capabilities into our operations, we are not only broadening our service offerings but also strengthening our market position and enhancing our ability to cater to the evolving needs of our clients. Our decision to pursue this acquisition aligns seamlessly with our long-term strategic objectives. It reflects our confidence in the growth potential of the EPC industry and our readiness to seize opportunities that align with our vision for sustainable expansion. The successful completion of the payment for the acquisition of EMC Ltd. is a testament to our unwavering commitment to creating value for our stakeholders. We are confident that this strategic investment will yield significant returns, further solidifying our position as a leader in the field of engineering and infrastructure solutions. As we embark on this new chapter of growth, we remain focused on leveraging our combined strengths to drive innovation, deliver excellence, and achieve sustainable success.

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Panel seeks jobs, aid for deported rural youths Media and travel dominate political parties'

ATTARI: most of Punjab's youth deported from the US coming from rural areas, Border Area Sangharsh Committee voiced its concern on Sunday over the financial sacrifices made by parents and the utility of illegal immigration. The committee demanded that state govt create local employment opportunities for the unskilled workforce. "Farmers are already burdened with debt, and their children

abroad through illegal means, resorting to selling their land and plunging themselves into poverty. Arjan Singh from the border area said their goal is to raise awareness through meetings, warning both those willing to send their children abroad and urging the govt to create job opportunities and prevent the villagers from taking desperate steps of going abroad, specially illegally. A lack of employment opportunities in both the private and govt sectors," the committee's general secretary Singh Randhawa said following a series of emergency meetings. He said jobless youth, yearning for a life of material comfort, often take illegal routes to achieve the American dream. In such circumstances, many parents, driven by hope, take the extreme step of sending their children

abroad through illegal means, resorting to selling their land and plunging themselves into poverty. Arjan Singh from the border area said their goal is to raise awareness through meetings, warning both those willing to send their children abroad and urging the govt to create job opportunities and prevent the villagers from taking desperate steps of going abroad, specially illegally. A lack of employment opportunities in both the private and govt sectors," the committee's general secretary Singh Randhawa said following a series of emergency meetings. He said jobless youth, yearning for a life of material comfort, often take illegal routes to achieve the American dream. In such circumstances, many parents, driven by hope, take the extreme step of sending their children

Now, long wait for many wanting to renew US visa - esp B1/B2

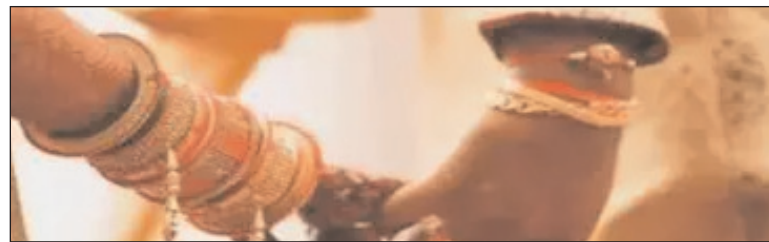
NEW DELHI: Renewing the same class of US visa could now mean a long wait for many applicants in India. Uncle Sam has returned to its pre-Covid policy of allowing travellers to renew their visa without appearing at the embassy/consulate for an interview if their previous same-class visa is still valid or expired within the last 12 months. In Nov 2022, when the wait time for B1/B2 (business and tourism visa) interview had crossed 999 days (touching almost three years) in India, the US increased the eligibility for same class drop box visa renewal - which does not require interview - from 12 months to 48 months. Since then the waiting period for B1/B2 interview has less than halved, it is currently over 440 days in Delhi &



Mumbai; 436 in Chennai; 429 in Hyderabad and 415 in Kolkata. With such a long waiting, the reduction of drop box eligibility for renewal will mean more people again seeking appointments for same class visa renewal and further prolonging the queue. Asked in this backdrop if it planned to take any step in India to reduce the waiting, the US embassy said it had "anything additional". Anil Kalsi, Travel Agents Federation of India VP, said: "This makes travel difficult for people who were banking on renewal. Since it's announced and is already in effect, a lot of people have been caught unawares. There are anyway no interview dates available (in India) without a long waiting period. Some time should have been provided before the change took effect." Repeat travellers to the US may, under some circumstances, renew their visas without appearing at the embassy or consulate for an interview. The visa waiver checklist for applicants, except those 14 years of age and 80 & above.

Groom's kin complains of poor food for 'baraatis', killed by bride's uncle

Kasganj DSP (Sahawar) Shahida Nasrin said, "A case of murder has been registered against the bride's uncle, Vijay Kumar. He has been arrested." The incident took place in Roshan Nagar village in Sahawar area of Kasganj district. Arun Kumar, 37, was part of the



wedding procession which had come from Sikandrarao in Hathras. His brother Lalit said that Arun, while having food

after the wedding ceremony, had remarked that it wasn't cooked properly and quality was not good either. "Hearing the complaint, the bride's uncle (in his early 50s) had a heated argument with him and in a fit of rage, pulled out an illegal 315-bore firearm and shot him in the head."

DU to expand PhD admission slots by 20-25 pc

Delhi: Delhi University's executive council (EC) resolved to boost PhD admission seats by 20-25% from the last round of admission. The EC also allowed a university representation on St. Stephen's College's governing body to connect DU and the college. DU also updated donation rules to fund scholarships, honors, and capital assets. Under this, the government, trusts, and corporations may set up scholarships.

Triple jeopardy: After dairy biz & horse trading, US bet also fails

BATHINDA: He tried his hands at a dairy farm but lumpy skin cattle disease put a spanner in his plans. He then got into horse trading but that didn't run, either. Then 32-year-old Gurpreet Singh Bhangu tried to sneak into the US, only for his fortunes to take a turn for the worse. A resident of Baggeana village in Faridkot, Gurpreet was among 116 illegal immigrants deported by the US on Saturday. The family is so shattered that they declined to speak to anyone for the time being. Village residents,



too, are at pains to describe the ordeal of Gurpreet, also known as Prince Bhangu. He reached home in the wee hours of Sunday but stayed put inside home. Baggeana former panchayat member Mangal Kumar recalled Gurpreet's failed dairy

venture, saying lumpy skin disease killed many of his cattle and led him to shut down the business. The chain of failure extended to horses. Having decided there was no way to make a living at home, Gurpreet tried to settle

in foreign shores and reached Italy. The family had earlier told TOI that during his stay in Italy, Gurpreet met a travel agent who promised him entry into the US. Gurpreet arranged Rs 25 lakh & reached US through donkey route. But once there, he was caught and put in a detention centre, from where he was finally deported. Mangal contended that the central and state govts must come to the support of families whose members migrate for greener pastures spending huge sums of money.

Sold 2 acres, took Rs 45L loan, and now back to square one

BATHINDA: Paramjit Singh, aka Saurav, set off from his native village of Chandiwala in Punjab's Ferozepur on December 17 last year, his mind a welter of emotions. The 23-year-old's family had sold two acres and taken a loan to raise the Rs 45 lakh he needed to pay an immigration agent for illegal passage to US. They knew the journey was fraught with peril, but promise of a prosperous life was too strong to resist. As he bade goodbye to his loved ones, Saurav told himself he couldn't fail them. Two months later, he is back in Chandiwala, a physical and mental wreck. The money is gone, and his illusions lie shattered. "The last 40 days were the toughest. I saw how a life choice you make can become your biggest enemy," said Saurav, among the 116 illegal Indian immigrants on the second deportation flight from an



American city to Amritsar in 10 days. "I was hoping to somehow reach the US, and life would finally be easy. The two-month ordeal started with him first landing in Malaysia, where he spent a week before his immigration agent put him back on a flight to Mumbai. After 10 days there, Saurav was taken to Amsterdam and then to Panama. Saurav and many other illegal immigrants were made to walk from Panama, passing through jungles, to reach Mexico City, where they were made to wait another three days. From there, the group was taken to a spot

near the US border by taxi and asked to cross the border on their own, only to be spotted by guards and arrested. Saurav recalls being taken to a border police post, where they were asked to give their fingerprints, photographed and given sheaves of documents to sign. The group was next taken to a detention centre, where they spent 18 days. On Feb 13, all the deportees were shackled and handcuffed before being told they were being shifted to another place. Instead, they were taken to a military plane and informed that they were being deported to India.

He paid Rs 35L, then starved in jungles for months

JIND: Ravi, a resident of Haryana's Jind, faced a 220-day ordeal even after payment of around Rs 35 lakh to an unauthorised travel agent to reach the US. Of this, Rs 6 lakh was forked out by his family after the 26-year-old was starved in the jungles of Panama and allegedly taken hostage. Ravi had travelled across ten countries, spent a few months in the jungles, and jumped over a wall to reach the US about 20 days ago, only to be caught and deported. Ravi's brother Amit said the agent had promised to send his sibling to the US legally for Rs 29 lakh.



Ravi was first sent to Dubai, where he was kept for several months. In the jungles of Panama, Ravi was not given food for days and spent five-six months facing numerous difficulties. "When the agent asked for an additional Rs 6 lakh, our father sold our farmland and took out a loan to raise the money.

This was then given to the agent," Amit said. The family of Ravi, who had dropped out of his BA, named three agents involved behind his ordeal - Deepak Malik, Rajat Mor and Manish Pandit. Police claimed they had no complaint yet. "If that is done, action will be taken," said a cop.

Gold loans rise 50% in seven months

Delhi: Bank loans against gold jewelry rose 50.4% in the first seven months of the year. Despite single-digit growth in every other personal loan area, credit rose sharply. RBI issued sectoral deployment of bank credit Gold loans totaled Rs 1,02,562 crore in March 2024. Growth was 56% year-over-year, up from

13% in October 2023. NBFCs' move and a preference for secured loans over unsecured ones contributed to the first-seven-month gold loan surge, bankers said. Bank loans to NBFCs fell 0.7% to Rs 1.5 lakh crore in the first seven months. Bankers also said that rising gold prices allow borrowers to repay previous loans

and get higher new ones. Analysts see rising gold loan demand as an indication of financial instability. RBI ordered banks and financial companies to review and fix their gold loan rules and procedures within three months last month. After an examination, evergreening was found to hide bad loans.

Commercial LPG hike by Rs 16.5 per cylinder, jet fuel up 1.45%; household cooking gas remains unchanged

NEW DELHI: The cost of commercial LPG and aviation fuel prices surged on Sunday following the monthly revision aimed at aligning with trends in international oil prices. State-owned oil firms raised commercial LPG rates, used in hotels and restaurants by Rs 16.5 per to Rs 1818.50 per 19 kg cylinder. Aviation turbine fuel (ATF) prices in Delhi, which hosts one of India's most active airports, saw an increase of Rs 1,318.12 per kilo litre, marking a 1.45 per cent increment. The new rate stands at Rs 91,856.84 per kl, according to state-owned fuel retailers. The prices of ATF and LPG vary from state to state, depending on local taxes, including VAT. This marks the second consecutive monthly increase in jet fuel prices, which were previously raised by Rs 2,941.5 per kl, or 3.3 per cent, on November 1. ATF prices were reduced by 6.3 per cent (Rs 5,883 per kl) on October 1 and by Rs 4,495.5 per kl, or 4.58 per cent, on September 1. In Mumbai, the ATF price increased to Rs 85,861.02 per kl on Sunday from Rs 84,642.91 previously. The price of commercial LPG have also increased for the seventh consecutive month. In the most recent review on November 1, commercial LPG prices were raised by Rs 62 per 19-kg cylinder. Over the course of five price hikes, commercial LPG prices have increased by Rs 172.5 per 19-kg cylinder, reaching their peak this year. Four monthly price reductions before the current cycle began in August were offset by the recent hikes. Prices for 19-kg cylinders were reduced by Rs 148 across the four rounds. Currently, commercial LPG costs Rs 1,980 in Chennai, Rs 1,927 in Kolkata, and Rs 1,771 in Mumbai for a 19-kg cylinder. However, the rate of cooking gas used in domestic households, however, remained unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder. State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) revise the prices of ATF and cooking gas on the first of each month.

Roads choked, youth paraglides to exam hall

KOLHAPUR: Samarth Mahangade was hard at work, his hands sticky with the juice of freshly pressed sugarcane as he served weekend travellers at his roadside stall on a crisp winter morning at Harrison's Folly, a stunning cliffside viewpoint, 5km from Panchgani. Then came the call. "Samarth, where are you? The exam's already starting." It was his friends, their voices frantic. The 19-year-old BCom first-year student froze. The natural dissolution management paper - his first-semester university exam that had been postponed - was today. And he had no clue because his hall ticket hadn't been updated. Panic set in. The exam centre was in Pasarni village, at the base of the steep and winding Pasarni Ghat - 15km



away. The serpentine road, notorious for its slow-moving traffic, would take at least 30 minutes. Time he simply did not have. His mind raced. He needed a miracle. And then it struck him - the sky. Samarth burst through the doors just as question papers were being

handed out. Across the clearing stood paragliding instructor Govind Yewale, who ran adventure flights from Harrison's Folly. BCom first-year student Samarth sprinted toward him. "Bhau, I need your help. I have an exam in 10 minutes. Can you take me there?" Yewale

frowned, his eyes narrowing. "An exam? And you forgot the date?" He shook his head, exasperated. But the urgency in the boy's eyes - it was impossible to ignore. After a moment's hesitation, Yewale waved over one of his paragliders. "Strap in," he ordered. "Hold on tight." Heart pounding, Samarth was buckled into the harness. And then, with a running start, they leaped off the cliff. The ground fell away in an instant, and he was flying. In 5 minutes, they were over the exam centre. As he soared through the sky, another friend rushed to his home, retrieving his hall ticket, writing pad, and pens. The pilot expertly steered the glider, bringing them down onto the school grounds. Samarth unbuckled himself mid-stride and ran.

Rs 45L Haryana house sold for US gamble



KARNAL: A family in Haryana's Karnal, like countless others in state and elsewhere, sold their house for Rs 45 lakh to fulfil their son's American dream, only for him to be sent back Saturday after

four months to Amritsar along with other deportees. Devastated by Anuj's return after he took the "donkey route" to give wings to his dream, his family in Jundla village is now seeking govt intervention to prevent others from being duped by dubious travel agents. Of the 116 deportees who arrived Saturday in Amritsar on a US military plane, 33 are from Haryana.

Political storm brews over plane landings in Amritsar

CHANDIGARH/JALAN DHAR: The choice of Amritsar as arrival point for American planes carrying Indian deportees has become a hot-button political topic in Punjab, triggering a blame game between Congress, AAP, SAD, and BJP. Congress questioned why the deportees were flown specifically to Amritsar, alleging a political motive behind the decision. "Why have they picked Amritsar, especially when the air route of the planes is from the eastern side and they are crossing over the entire country to reach Amritsar? Is the agenda to defame Punjab?" Congress spokesperson Alok Sharma asked. He also criticised PM Modi for remaining silent on the deportations.



Congress MLA Pargat Singh alleged Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann reacted only after Congress highlighted the flights landing in Amritsar. "AAP is following RSS agenda," he claimed. For his part, Mann blamed "past govts' failures" for pushing youth to seek opportunities abroad. "Deportation from US should be a wake-up call. Instead of endangering their lives through illegal migration, they should contribute to Punjab's progress," he said.

NBCC India will buy sick PSUs and redevelop land banks

Delhi: Two sources say NBCC India Ltd. wants to buy defunct public sector undertakings (PSUs) to redevelop and monetize their land. The state-run construction company wants to leverage its success in developing government-owned companies. Developer is in talks to acquire non-operational PSUs through a new entity to monetize their land banks.

Jobless Goa duo took donkey route in January



Goa's job scarcity and allure of the American dream spur desperate youths to trudge and trek via South America's donkey route. Once they cross Mexico-US border, they are smuggled to small towns where they then hope to find work as petrol pump operators, gardeners or delivery agents after paying lakhs to unscrupulous agents. For two young Goans who had left for the US only last month, this dream came crashing as they sat

shackled and handcuffed on a US C-17 military transport aircraft on Saturday during their disconsolate journey back to where they started: home. Sarzora lad AC Mascarenhas, in his twenties, found his hopes crushed even before he could make it to US soil. His dangerous trek through several countries and his audacious plan of being smuggled by human traffickers in pursuit of the American dream ended at the US bor-

der. For company, he had a compatriot from Shiroda, G Souza. The two returned home quietly on Sunday, accompanied by Goa cops. This was the first instance of Goans being sent back in handcuffs with their legs chained during the flight. "It's unfortunate that Goan youths were part of the group deported. They can't get jobs here, which is why they go to find jobs abroad. Time for govt to study why youths risk their lives.

Punjab cop's son paid Rs 80L to reach US



A married couple who spent Rs 80 lakh to reach the US was arrested on arrival and deported. They landed in Amritsar Saturday night on the second US deportation flight and reached their native place at Lalru in Punjab's Mohali district on Sunday. Gurpreet Singh (30) and Amanpreet Kaur (26) got married a year-and-a-half ago, left the country soon after and kept wandering from one country to the other for nine months before American immigration agents arrested them as soon as they entered that country. Gurpreet's father Jaswinder Singh is a Punjab cop. Gurpreet and Amanpreet, who hails from Haryana's Shahzadpur, are the second couple from Mohali to have been deported from the US. The couple are traumatised and unwilling to reveal details of their nine-month-long route to the US. The family is now worried how to get Rs 80 lakh, paid to an agent in Haryana, back.

Olympic champions Hassan, Tebogo named "Athletes of the Year"

Delhi: Marseille moved into second place in Ligue 1 after a Mason Greenwood penalty in the 89th minute gave them a 2-1 win over Monaco while Lyon thrashed Nice 4-1 with a hat-trick from Alexandre Lacazette. After Montpellier scored late, Lille missed the chance to move into third place in Ligue 1. The second- and third-placed teams had a chance to catch leaders Paris Saint-Germain after their Saturday draw. Marseille took advantage of that opportunity, leapfrogging Monaco into second place on goal difference with 26 points, seven behind PSG. Marseille coach Roberto De Zerbi called it their "best match of the season at the Velodrome" on DAZN.

"We played well against Monaco, a fantastic team. However, I'm confident we can improve," Italian added.



Monaco took the lead four minutes before halftime when Aleksandr Golovin deflected a shot. Greenwood beat the goalkeeper to complete De Zerbi's comeback. Lacazette scored twice in the first half and added a 69th-minute penalty for Lyon. After Sofiane Diop equalized for Nice midway through the first session, Lacazette and Jordan Veretout scored to lead 2-0 by halftime. Lyon have 22 points, two ahead of Nice in sixth and one behind Lille in fourth.

Le Havre, who plummeted to 16th, lost 1-0 at Angers, giving them three crucial points in the relegation battle.

BBL: Melbourne Stars sign Adam Milne

Melbourne: The Melbourne Stars have signed New Zealand fast bowler Adam Milne to play in the Big Bash League (BBL) before Christmas. He will replace Pakistan leg-spinner Osama Mir, who will not be able to play in the first three matches of this season. The Stars are set to announce a new captain this week after Glenn Maxwell became captain at the end of last season. Maxwell is unlikely to be fit for the first match against the Perth Scorchers on December 15.

LG junks IP Univ plea for fee hike

Delhi: officials from the LG secretariat announced on that Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena had turned down a proposal from Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University (GGSIPU) to charge affiliation fees to government institutes that are affiliated with it.

The decision was taken to safeguard students' interests, as the affiliation fee would have increased the total fee that students would have to pay. According to an official from the LG secretariat, this change could have a disproportionate impact on low-income students who depend on public universities for their affordable higher education.



At the same time, LG has proposed that GGSIPU look at other ways to make money to supplement their budget. All institutions that raise their own funds are required by law to pay an affiliation fee (Statute 24, Clause 5), although schools that get no funding from the federal or state govern-

ments are exempt from this requirement. Officials from the LG noted that government institutes already have a lot on their plates financially, what with paying for things like provisional affiliation applications and affiliation renewals. The course and institute's location determine the exact amount.

Shooting, hockey out of 2026 Youth oly

Delhi : For the long-awaited 2026 Youth Olympics in Dakar, Senegal, the executive body of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) removed shooting, weightlifting, and hockey from the list of medal sports, severely hurting India's medal hopes.



Among the ten non-medal sports that will comprise the YOG's "engagement programme" are shooting, weightlifting, and hockey. With four medals from shooting (two gold and two silver), two from hockey (two silver each), and one from weightlifting, India brought home thirteen medals from the 2018 Youth Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Cabinet gives the go-ahead for additional KVs and NVs to improve educational infrastructure

Delhi: New 85 Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and 28 Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs) under the civil and defence sectors have been approved by the Cabinet. This program showcases the implementation of NEP, 2020 through PM Shri schools and strives to increase access to high-quality education for all children, particularly those in rural and underprivileged communities. The government claims that the schools, which are nearly all KVs and NVs now that they are PM Shri schools, will lead the way in terms of student outcomes, infrastructure, and pedagogy.

Over 13,56 lakh students are being educated by 1,256 KVs (including 3 overseas) at the present time.



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Rajasthan, followed by Andhra Pradesh and Odisha, with eight apiece.

Manika wants top-15, Worlds medal

Delhi: Manika Batra is modest after becoming the first Indian paddler to reach the Olympics' Round of 16, beating a former world champion and world No.2 to reach her first Saudi Smash quarterfinals, and becoming the first Indian table tennis player to reach the WTT Champions final eight. "Quite a balanced year," she remarks. There have been good wins and awful losses. I enjoyed reaching the Paris Olympics third round and beating world No.2 Wang Manyu. I'm not done or satisfied. I constantly aspire higher." That means Batra wants a top-15 finish next year. The 29-year-old, rated 25th, two places behind Sreeja Akula, the best-ranked Indian woman in the world, believes she can defeat the world's finest. "Top-15 is achievable given my confidence and game. I can now beat top-ranked players consistently thanks to this year.



Batra, the first Indian woman paddler to get into the top-25 this year, says she is delighted to approach the new Olympic cycle in this mindset. This season, Batra will play with world No.60 Manav Thakkar. The pair lost their first international match at the Asian Championships in October to Singapore's Ser Lin Qian and Yew En Koen Pang in the second round. Next year is the World Championships, and I want to win a medal.

After maths, CBSE to bring 2-tier system for science, social science

Delhi: Starting in 2026-27, CBSE schools will use a 'two-tier' system for science and social science. This fits the dual-level math scheme. The Board wants to apply this to other subjects as part of National Education Policy 2020. After CBSE's curriculum committee endorsed this plan, the governing body must approve it.

IIT-D placements rise 25%, 53% of students get jobs in last drive

Delhi: A recent IIT Delhi departure poll reveals the diverse career prospects of its 2024 graduates. The poll of August graduates shows a shift toward off-campus placements. The survey found 53.1% of students (1,411) got jobs. Meanwhile, 8.4% (224 students) self-employed, 1.7% (45 students) joined startups, and 2.5% (66 students) started businesses. Many graduates pursue intellectual or competitive goals. About 13.5% (359 students) have chosen higher education, and 1.8% (47 PhD holders) are awaiting postdoctoral research or faculty employment. 12.1% (321 students) are preparing for civil services, engineering, and government career exams. The institute's August 10 convocation event



" Many graduates pursue intellectual or competitive goals. About 13.5% (359 students) have chosen higher education, and 1.8% (47 PhD holders) are awaiting postdoctoral research or faculty employment "

awarded 2,656 degrees and emphasized these tendencies. This includes 481 PhD and dual PhD degrees, 1,001 BTech degrees, 529 MTech degrees, and others from MBA, MSc, MS (Research), and PG Diploma programs. The institute praised its students for pursuing entrepreneurial and administrative careers in a state-

ment. "Our graduates are keen to explore multiple opportunities, including startups, entrepreneurship, higher studies, post-doctoral research, and civil services," the group added. These data show that many IIT Delhi graduates are choosing unorthodox careers that match their goals.

NMC will penalize colleges who refuse stipends and reduce seats

Delhi: The National Medical Commission (NMC) has issued a show-cause notice to medical colleges that have not submitted intern/resident stipend details. Deans and principals of 115 government and 83 private medical institutions received the notice recently. Maulana Azad Medical College, Atal Bihari Vajpayee Institute of Medical Sciences, Dr. RML Hospital, and Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Medical College is Delhi government college. The Commission



inquired why erring institutes should not be penalized in its notice. The NMC provided a list of government and private colleges without stipend details. The official NMC notification reads, "Many universities have yet to supply the required data on the above email

addresses. These medical colleges' failure to submit information reg. [regarding] resident stipend payment is taken seriously, and those who have not submitted the necessary information are directed to show cause why they should not be penalized." The delinquent med-

Exam centers to get CCTVs from NIOS to reduce malpractices

Delhi: To ensure transparent and seamless assessments, the Board of Secondary Education (BSE) will use AI-powered CCTV cameras and webcasting of the annual High School Certificate (HSC) exam 2024. Pauses, violations of rules, such as logistical issues in storing or distributing question papers, cheating, malpractice, invigilator incompetence, or cell phone use in HSC exam centers, can now be identified quickly. The board has strategically placed AI-supported CCTV cameras and webcasting for real-time test hall surveillance. Advanced features in these cameras can detect strange behavior in the medical room. "The annual matric examination 2024 will be completely hi-tech and technology-enabled to make the process transparent and error-free," stated BSE secretary Nihar Ranjan Mohanty.



Over 5.5 lakh students will take the yearly HSC exam from February 20 to March 4, 2024. More than 2,990 centers will host the exam this year. Hypersensitive and sensitive test centers, strong rooms where question papers will be maintained, and district education officers will have AI-enabled CCTV cameras. "We are working on identifying the centres based on the reports of DEOs," he said. The BSE sends a three-tier squad of 160 persons to examination centers to check for wrongdoing and ensure smooth board exams.

Microsoft's AI-powered "first line of defense against scams"

Microsoft's AI-powered "first line of defense against scams" is now available for these users. Microsoft has started to roll out a new feature in its Edge browser called "scareware blocker" to protect users from increasingly sophisticated online scams, particularly those employing scareware tactics. The company announced the feature at its Ignite conference last November and is now inviting users to preview and test it.

What is a scareware scam? Scareware scams employ aggressive web pages designed to deceive users into believing their system is infected with malware. These scams often pressure victims to call fake tech support numbers, potentially leading to financial loss and compromised personal information. Microsoft says that its data revealed a significant rise in online scams, with Edge blocking five times more scams in



2024 compared to just three years prior. While Edge currently utilizes Microsoft Defender SmartScreen to block known scams, the new scareware blocker aims to provide a proactive defense against emerging threats. **How does Microsoft's scareware blocker work?** Microsoft says that its scareware blocker leverages a machine learning model to identify the characteristics of scareware scams and empowers users to regain control of their browsing experience. "Scareware blocker adds a new, first line of defense to help protect the users exposed to a new scam if it attempts to open a full screen page. Scareware

blocker uses a machine learning model that runs on the local computer. The model uses computer vision to compare full screen pages to thousands of sample scams that the scam-fighting community shared with us. The model runs locally, without saving or sending images to the cloud," Microsoft said. Users can then choose to report the malicious site to Microsoft, contributing to the improvement of Defender SmartScreen's ability to detect and block similar scams across the web. Users can also report false positives, helping to refine the scareware blocker's accuracy and reduce the likelihood of legitimate pages being mistakenly.

SGPC arranges turbans for bare-headed Sikh deportees



AMRITSAR: Around two dozen Sikhs among the 116 illegal Indian immigrants deported from the US to Amritsar on Saturday were bareheaded, without any turbans or patkas. The turban is one of the articles of

faith in Sikhism. A Shiromani Gurdwara Parbhandhak Committee (SGPC) team, with help from the airport staff, reportedly procured patkas for such deportees. Later, they arranged a bus and lan-

gar for them. Sufficient turbans would be kept at the airport Sunday when another flight with deportees is expected, an SGPC official said, adding the issue would be taken up with US government.

Health and wealth benefit from flexible work hours

Delhi: The Economic Survey supports allowing manufacturers to average legally capped working hours over three weeks or longer rather than week-by-week. Industry captains want larger hours. It claims that agile regulations will assist management satisfy production

demands and grow. "New Labour Laws are an improvement. With flexible legislation and competent implementation, firms may develop and create more jobs. They protect labor rights and boost wages," it stated. The Survey complained that labor laws like the

Factories Act (1948) limit working hours to 48 per week, whereas other nations "allow these caps to be averaged over multiple days and weeks". It said India's working hour laws impede manufacturers from satisfying demand and competing globally.



Panel seeks jobs, aid for deported rural youths

ATTARI: With most of Punjab's youth deported from the US coming from rural areas, Border Area Sangharsh Committee voiced its concern on Sunday over the financial sacrifices made by parents and the futility of illegal immigration. The committee demanded that state govt create local employment opportunities for the unskilled workforce. "Farmers are already burdened with debt, and their children face a lack of employment opportunities in both the private and govt sectors," the committee's general secretary Rattan Singh Randhawa said following a series of emergency meetings. He said jobless youth, yearning for a life of material comfort, often take illegal routes to achieve the American dream. In such circumstances, many parents, driven by hope, take the extreme step of sending their children abroad through illegal means, resorting to selling their land and plunging themselves into poverty. Arjan Singh from the border area said their goal is to raise awareness through meetings, warning both those willing to send their children

abroad and urging the govt to create job opportunities and prevent the villagers from taking desperate steps of going abroad, specially illegally.

Inter-faith marriage not wrong, but ... ': Maharashtra CM

NEW DELHI: Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnavis defended the state government's decision to form a committee to examine legal options against "love jihad". He said that while interfaith marriages are not wrong, deceitful conversions through false identities must be addressed. "The Supreme Court has also acknowledged the reality of love jihad in its decision. Even in Maharashtra, we are seeing an increase in such cases. It is not wrong for a person of one religion to marry a person of another religion. But marrying someone by lying and showing false identity is wrong. These incidents are very serious, and action must be taken," Fadnavis said, as reported by news agency ANI.



The Maharashtra government has established a seven-member panel to explore legal provisions on forced conversions. Led by the state's Director General of Police (DGP), the committee includes senior officials from departments such as law and judiciary, women and child development, minority

affairs, social justice, special assistance, and home affairs. The panel will study similar laws in other states and recommend measures to tackle reported cases. BJP leaders, including Union minister Ramdas Athawale, have welcomed the move, calling for stricter laws to prevent religious conversions

through coercion. "There should be a law against love jihad. The conversion of women is not right. Two youngsters of different religions coming together is normal, but girls shouldn't be forcefully converted," Athawale said. Maharashtra minister Mangal Prabhat Lodha also expressed support, claiming that the number of such cases has risen, particularly in Mumbai. He said that when he raised the issue in the Vidhan Sabha, Samajwadi Party MLA Rais Shaikh opposed it and even filed a court case against him. "Does he want to encourage love jihad?" Lodha questioned. He added that many cases go unreported and thanked Fadnavis for setting up the committee.

'Cooperation key to economic stability in strife-hit world'

NEW DELHI: Amid geopolitical tension, economic uncertainty and climate-related challenges, global cooperation remains critical for economic stability and security, ministers from Sri Lanka, and Albania said at Global Business Summit 2025. "We are living in a disputed, politically divided world. The next generation is asking us what we are doing for them. The world is demanding a peaceful environment for business. All leaders must work together," Sri Lanka's minister for

industries Sunil Handunneththi said during a panel discussion. Myanmar's Union investment and foreign economic relations minister Kan Zaw emphasised that the era of a unipolar world order is over. "A unipolar world will not emerge again, it is a thing of the past. We are now in a multipolar world where not only the US and China are powerhouses, but India and other Brics nations are also rising. Myanmar remains neutral and works with all friendly international partners," Zaw said.

Albania, which is actively working toward EU membership by 2029 and is aligning itself with Western economic and political policies, said its deputy minister of economy, culture and innovation Olta Manjani. "It is the best and worst of times. We face numerous issues, including climate change. The world is both more united and more divided than ever. Leaders like (Donald) Trump raise scepticism about global institutions. Populism, nationalism, and protectionist policies .

Public infrastructure spending rises, but private sector participation falls

Delhi: The 2024-25 Economic Survey delivered to Parliament found that India still struggles with infrastructure development despite government efforts. The union government's capital investment on major infrastructure sectors grew 38.8% from FY20 to FY24, although private sector participation in core areas remained low, according to the survey. "India needs a continued step-up of infrastructure investment over the next two decades to sustain a high rate of growth," the research says. The National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP) program has met its FY22-24 objective .



The National Critical Mineral Mission gets 16,300 crore from the cabinet

Delhi :The Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, launched the National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM) with a 16,300 crore expenditure and a projected 18,000 crore investment from PSUs and other businesses. "Several crucial decisions have created new scientific and technology prospects for our children, future generations, and the economy. Minister told a Cabinet briefing that PM Modi the National Critical Minerals Mission today.

Price pressure caps senior citizen health premium hikes at 10%

As medicare policy rates skyrocket for seniors over 60, Irdai has ordered insurers not to raise senior people's health premiums by more than 10% without approval. Before canceling senior health coverage, insurers must get regulator clearance. As healthcare prices rise, insurers are



advised to standardize hospital empanelment and negoti-

ate package rates like the government's PM Jan Arogya Yojana. Irdai reported a large increase in prices for various health insurance policies for subscribers over 60. Premium rates depend on projected claims, administrative expenditures, and acquisition costs, the regulator said. Private

insurance doesn't standardize hospitalization expenses, unlike PMJAY, which negotiates consistent package rates, which drives these rises. Seniors have reported virtually doubling their costs when entering a higher age category during an insurer's pricing change.

Green energy can be driver of growth

NEW DELHI: The renewable energy sector is not just about clean energy - it's also a powerful driver of economic growth. The renewable energy sector alone created over one million jobs here in India - 7% of the global renewable energy workforce. "This is just the start; new manufacturing and onshoring, supply chains particularly in sectors like electric vehicles will create millions more jobs driving economic



growth and shared prosperity," Simon Stiell executive director United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change said on

Sunday. Lauding India's efforts, he said it is a solar superpower reaching 100 GW in record time, putting the country on a path to meet PM Narendra

Modi's ambitious 500 GW target for clean energy. "Clean energy has broken through; \$2 trillion worldwide was invested just last year - climate action clearly isn't charity. Investment only reaches levels like these because of commercial and economic self-interest and India is a case in point," he added. Talking about the benefit of clean energy, he said "sharing these world leading lessons

through International Solar Alliance, Indian companies and more like them see huge potential and profits. Their investment means cheaper energy prices for other companies across Indian Industries, and consumers shielded from the worst impacts of the highly volatile global energy crisis that fuel inflationary pressures. India can build a wider clean industry and manufacturing boom, he added.