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Hathras stampede
administrative lapse:
Judicial panel

Vatika Times

HATHRAS: A judicial commission investigating the deadly stampede at a 'satsang' in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras, in which 121 people died on July 2 last year, has placed the blame squarely on "administrative lapses" while acknowledging the possibility of a larger conspiracy. The report did not hold Bhole Baba aka Narayan Saakar Hari personally responsible for the incident and instead pointed to administrative failures and his 'sevadars' as key factors contributing to the tragedy. In its 1,680-page report, tabled in the UP assembly on Wednesday, the panel said while permission had been granted for an audience of 80,000, the turnout swelled to 2.5 lakh to 3 lakh. It said the administration did not make any effort to check the arrangements.

**'Basic safeguards ignored':
Hathras panel on stampede**

Led by retired Allahabad HC judge Brijesh Kumar Srivastava, along with retired IAS officer Hemant Rao and former IPS officer Bhavesh Kumar Singh, the commission said "basic safeguards had been ignored". In response to the findings, the commission has put forward more than 20 recommendations aimed at preventing such disasters in the future. The report pointed out that there had been no proper route plan for the arrival and departure of self-styled preacher Bhole Baba, a factor that added to the disorder. It added that fire safety protocols and emergency measures, conditions required for event approval.

Decks cleared for Kedarnath, Hemkund Sahib ropeways



Vatika Times

NEW DELHI: The cabinet on Wednesday approved two ropeway projects - Sonprayag to Kedarnath and Govindghat to Hemkund Sahib - in Uttarakhand, which will reduce travel time to less than an hour from close to 10 hours now. Govt has also lined up over half a dozen ropeway projects for Maa Kamakhya temple in Assam, across Sangam in Prayagraj, for Bijli Mahadev in Kullu, and another from Kathgodam to Hanumangarhi in Uttarakhand. The estimated cost of the two projects that the cabinet approved is around Rs 6,811 crore and will be completed in six years. Officials in National Highway Logistics Management Ltd, central govt agency for ropeway projects, said bids for both

will be opened late this month.

Fast & smooth link to shrines

These will be implemented on a public private partnership (PPP) mode. Considering the high demand of pilgrims and tourists, govt expects it won't need to provide any financial support.

Providing details of the projects approved a day before PM Modi visits Uttarakhand, Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said these will be big boon for pilgrims visiting the shrines of Lord Shiva and Guru Gobind Singh, as these would provide environment-friendly, comfortable and fast connectivity. Modi had laid the foundation stones for the projects in Oct 2022. The Sonprayag-Kedarnath ropeway will be based on the latest 'gondola technology';

each gondola will be able to accommodate 36 passengers. The travel time in one direction will come down from about 8-9 hours to 36 minutes. The other ropeway project will provide convenience to pilgrims and tourists visiting the Valley of Flowers and will ensure all-weather last mile connectivity between Govindghat and Hemkund Sahib. Sahib last year and the project is expected to increase the number of people visiting the shrine by 10 times. Thanking the PM for the decisions for fulfilling the long-standing demand, Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami said, "These projects will reduce the long hours of travel to a few minutes for those visiting Kedarnath and Hemkund Sahib. This will also boost the economy."

International students who were victims of OPT fraud have more to worry about

Vatika Times

MUMBAI: Erstwhile international students, now working in the US and even those currently undergoing Optional Practical Training (OPT), need to be aware of a revised 'Issue of notice to appear' policy recently issued by The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Jonathan Wasden, immigration attorney, who has represented several such students in the courts,



explained to TOI, "Department of Homeland Security (DHS) - which houses USCIS, has taken its enforcement of the secret fraud findings a step further. According to the new policy they will begin issuing 'Notices to Appear' to those with these 'secret fraud find-

ings'. This begins the deportation process. It can lead to arrest and detention."As the international student victims are labelled as guilty of fraud under the secret fraud findings by USCIS of OPT scams, in the light of the revised policy, immigration attorneys state that international students take immediate legal recourse to clear their names. Students are eligible for a one-year OPT to gain work experience in the US.

New Zealand outbat South Africa to set up Champions Trophy final with India

Vatika Times

NEW DELHI: In the Champions Trophy semi-final, New Zealand secured a comprehensive 50-run victory over South Africa on Wednesday, setting up a summit clash against India. After electing to bat first, New Zealand posted an imposing total of 362/6, courtesy of fluent centuries from Rachin Ravindra (108 off 101 balls) and Kane Williamson (102 off 94 balls). Their knocks, laced

with boundaries and some commendable strike rotations, provided the foundation for a mammoth score. South Africa's run chase started promisingly, but they faltered in the middle overs, losing crucial wickets and eventually falling short at 312/9. David Miller remained unbeaten on 100, while Temba Bavuma (56) and van der Dussen (69) contributed with , but their efforts were insufficient against the daunting target.

Punjab couple made Rs 3,500 crore selling cloud space

NEW DELHI: A couple arrested by ED from Punjab on Friday, who had masterminded a multi-level marketing fraud by duping investors with promises of handsome rental value on purchase of cloud space & leasing it back, has been remanded in ED custody. On Saturday, a special PMLA court in Jalandhar remanded Sukhvinder Singh Kharour to 10 days and Dimple Kharour to five days in ED custody.

US held direct talks with Hamas in secret, meetings in Doha: Report

Vatika Times

NEW DELHI

The United States has held direct talks with Hamas in recent weeks over the release of the US hostages held in Gaza and the possibility of a broader deal to end the war, Axios reported citing two sources. The report confirmed that the US never engaged directly with Hamas before, as it designated Hamas as a terrorist organization in 1997. The meetings were held in secrecy



between US presidential envoy for hostage affairs Adam Boehler and Hamas officials. Israel was not informed of what was discussed at these direct meetings as the report said that Israel learnt "about aspects of the talks through other

channels". However, the Trump administration consulted with Israel about the possibility of engaging with Hamas, the report added. The Axios report said that the talks mainly focused in part on the release of US hostages. But there were also discussions of a broader deal to release all remaining hostages. White House envoy Steve Witkoff also planned to travel to Doha this week to meet the prime minister of Qatar.

Trump again rails at India over tariffs, announcing reciprocal duties from April 2

Vatika Times

Washington: US President Donald Trump continued his fixation with tariffs and India, clubbing New Delhi with countries having far bigger trade surpluses and announcing reciprocal tariffs from April 2, even as the International Chamber of Commerce warned that his move would crash the world economy and lead to 1930s kind of Great Depression. Trump went on his familiar rant on tariffs in a joint address to the US Congress on Tuesday night that was replete with falsehoods and hyperbole, saying "countless other nations charge us tremendously higher tariffs than we charge them" and reciprocal taxes would bring in "trillions and trillions of dollars and create



jobs like we have never seen before." "It's very unfair. India charges us auto tariffs higher than 100 percent. China's average tariff on our products is twice what we charge them...This is happening by friend and foe," Trump said in a 100-minute speech, the longest ever to the US Congress by a

President, and full of self-aggrandizement that his MAGA faithful lapped up and liberal critics excoriated. Trump's obsession with India's tariffs is inexplicable considering New Delhi barely makes the list of top ten US trading partner and its \$ 45 billion trade surplus is one-sixth that of China and one-fourth that of

Mexico. The US has larger trade deficits with Ireland and Vietnam, and in terms of ratio of exports to imports vis-a-vis US, Indonesia and Thailand rank higher than India. Yet Trump complained about allies and friendly countries such as South Korea and India ripping off the US, even as China warned that it is ready for any "type of war" after the US President announced reciprocal tariffs, the basis for which is also the purported free flow of the opioid fentanyl into America via Mexico and Canada. "If the US truly wants to solve the fentanyl issue, then the right thing to do is to consult with China on the basis of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit to address each other'.

'Repatriate Kerala man's mortal remains killed in Jordan':Tharoor

Vatika Times

NEW DELHI:

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor and BJP leader V Muraleedharan have sought ministry of external affairs' intervention in the repatriation of the mortal remains of the Kerala man shot dead at the Israel-Jordan border last month.

Tharoor said that he had written to MEA and the embassy "requesting urgent action to expedite the return of the mortal remains to the family in Thiruvananthapuram." "This is the most unfortunate and tragic situation, Thomas Gabriel from my constituency, was shot dead by apparently by Jordanian security forces in Jordan at the border with Israel, we are not fully aware of the circumstances.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk: I will buy a Cybertruck for anyone who can provide proof of...

Vatika Times

NEW DELHI:

Tesla CEO Elon Musk recently mocked a group of Democratic senators for sharing nearly identical videos featuring the same talking points. At least 22 senators posted videos on X (formerly Twitter) using a verbatim script and matching interstitial footage, criticising President Donald Trump for allegedly worsening inflation. Each video starts with a clip of Trump promising to "bring prices down starting on day one," followed by the senators refuting this with a blunt "s-- that ain't true" before delivering the same scripted message. "Since day one of Trump's presidency, prices are up, not down," the senators uniformly state. "Inflation is getting worse, not better."

Elon Musk takes jabs at Democratic senators

In a series of posts, Musk took a dig at these Democratic senators that included the likes of Sen. Ted Cruz, Sen. Booker, Sen. Cory and Sen. Schumer. In one such post, Musk wrote "Now we're up to 22 Dem senators all doing the same cringe video simultaneously! I will buy a Cybertruck for anyone can provide proof of who wrote this particular piece of propaganda. First person to post proof in the replies to this post gets the truck!" "And who told them ALL to hold the microphone like they're a teenager doing TikTok videos," he said in another post. "Worst puppet show ever?" the Tesla CEO wrote. "Can't someone be bothered to write three speeches? This is just lazy ??," Musk mocked. "Ok, so who is sending the social media interns of the politicians what to post?" he

'Under Trump's strong leadership': Zelenskyy's new tone amid US aid uncertainty

Vatika Times

NEW DELHI: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron spent five days urging Zelenskyy to recalibrate.

Their advice? The shift became urgent when the White House abruptly froze US aid to Ukraine on Monday. By Tuesday, Zelenskyy made his move. Ditching his usual directness, he lavished Trump with praise, hailing his "strong leadership" and going so far as to suggest Ukraine was ready to work under him to secure peace. He even entertained one of Trump's key demands—offering a potential missile truce.



Wife sits on my chest to drink blood in nightmares': UP constable explain

Vatika Times

NEW DELHI:

A UP constable who was recently show-caused for being late in a morning meeting blamed his wife as he said he can't sleep at night as his wife comes in his nightmare. The reply went viral prompting the officials to investigate the identity of the constable and whether he actually wrote it, news agency PTI reported. "My wife gives me nightmares, which keep me awake at night and cause delays," the Provincial Armed



Constabulary (PAC) constable in Uttar Pradesh's Meerut wrote in his response. An inquiry has been ordered since the reply has gained traction on social media. Commandant of the 44th Battalion PAC Sachindra Patel told PTI on Wednesday.

A notice was issued on February 17 by Battalion In-Charge Dalnaya Madhusudan Sharma to the PAC constable for negligence in duty. The notice accused the constable of arriving late for a morning briefing on February 16, being improperly groomed and frequently missing unit activities, which was deemed a serious violation of discipline. The constable responded, saying he suffers from insomnia due to ongoing marital disputes.

Editorial

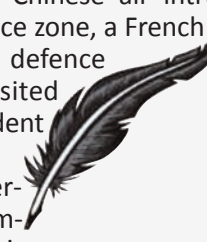
Europe amid great power contestation

Ritu Walia

On his first visit to Europe post-pandemic, Xi Jinping met French President Emmanuel Macron. Xi lauded China's ties with France as a "model for the international community amid threats of a trade war over Chinese electric cars and French cognac". Xi Jinping's tour through Europe, analysts point out, highlighted China's audacious strategy to exploit the fissures within Europe amid great power contestation. Among many other developments, the armed forces of China and France announced the setting up of a new inter-theatre cooperation and dialogue mechanism. This collaboration between the two militaries' naval and air forces is aimed at further deepening mutual trust and cooperation and jointly safeguarding regional security and stability.

Such a move towards forging closer Sino-French military ties, especially amid Beijing's assertive manoeuvres in the Indo-Pacific and the South China Sea, begs the question: Can Europe, and particularly France, remain a reliable ally, or will it become more accommodating of China's controversial actions in its neighbourhood? Countries like India are watching closely, concerned about France and Europe in the future and potentially succumbing to China's diplomatic and economic enticements. China claims to be "not at the origin of the Russian-Ukraine crisis, nor a party to it, nor a participant", and thus legitimises its silence. Can we anticipate a similar approach by Europe on issues concerning Taiwan and the Philippines? In the past few years, France's relationship with China has been marked by a mixture of scepticism and strategic engagement, reflecting broader geopolitical objectives and national interests. In the recent past, France has been quite critical of China, viewing it as a 'strategic threat'. The 2021 update to France's 2017 Defence and National Security Strategic Review painted China as a 'systemic rival', 'economic competitor', and 'sometimes an important diplomatic partner'. Even as Paris sought engagement with Beijing in 2019, substantial tensions clearly existed. During Xi Jinping's previous European tour, President Macron rallied a united European front to challenge Beijing on critical European issues like unfair trade practices, restricted market access for European companies, opaque financing under the BRI, and human rights abuses in Tibet and Xinjiang.

Recent events and official statements have further underscored this stance. A parliamentary report on foreign interference in France, requested by Marine Le Pen's far-right party, highlighted China's "aggressive and increasingly malicious methods". Labelling China as the "second most serious threat to France after Russia", the report echoed sentiments from Bernard Emié, Director of French External Intelligence (DGSE), who described China as an 'aggressive power' with 'unbridled diplomacy'. Furthermore, the issue of France selling arms to Taiwan resurfaced during the pandemic when Taiwan announced plans to buy defence equipment from France to upgrade missile systems on French warships purchased in 1991 and 1992. Beijing expressed 'serious concern' and urged Paris to avoid actions that could strain Sino-French ties. Following Chinese air intrusions into Taiwan's air defence zone, a French delegation led by former defence minister Alain Richard visited Taipei to meet with President Tsai Ing-wen. This visit was seen as a powerful symbol of France's commitment to opposing China's unilateral aggression.



The regime's policy changes with vision

Mahesh Singh

Roam around Riyadh, the capital, and you see it buzzing with young and aspirational Saudis making the most of the newfound freedoms and opportunities. According to the 2022 census, 63% of Saudis are under the age of 30. And the regime's policy changes are guided with this key statistic in mind. The biggest beneficiaries of the new openness are the Saudi women, who never had it so good. The Kingdom's inclusive Vision 2030 aims to diversify and strengthen the nation's economy. According to a World Bank report, Saudi Arabia is now ranked at the top in terms of economic and social progress for women out of 190 economies. The country's women are now truly in the driver's seat. The lifting of restrictions on their movement and choices has meant that Saudi women are steering the social, cultural and economic transformation of their country. Till a few years ago, they had to look to their fathers, husbands and brothers for even the basics like permission to travel or work. With Vision 2030, female workforce participation has gone up to nearly 40% now compared to about 15% a few years ago. This progress is evident in the increasing number of women receiving advanced degrees, enrolling in STEM fields, and owning 40% of small and medium-sized startups. Right from the moment you land in Riyadh, you see women taking up



key jobs. From immigration counters to shopping malls to government offices, Saudi women are everywhere. I saw women making presentations at key government events, doing camera work, running stalls at local markets.

The presence of women in the workforce has also meant increased intermingling of genders and rewriting of many social norms and gender behaviours. A big focus of Vision 2030 is also the cultural and social integration of all those living and working in Saudi Arabia. The Media Ministry's Global Harmony project is aimed at enhancing understanding and collaborations between diverse groups that call Saudi home. According to the Saudi Deputy Minister of Media, Dr Khaled Bin Abdulqader al Ghamdi, the Global Harmony project aims

to make expats feel more at home. But more than that, it aspires to make local Saudis understand better the various communities that live among them. So, during the Riyadh Season, which starts in September and continues till February-March, you see a host of public cultural and social events to bring communities together. It's a true celebration and appreciation of diversity. Even among the expats, special attention is on Indians, who are the largest expat group in Saudi Arabia. At present, 2.6 million Indians live in the Kingdom, working in the domestic sector as well as private jobs, and running both start-ups as well as big companies. Recognising the role of India, Dr Khaled calls the community "an integral part of the Saudi story". This year, the Media Ministry dedicated the Suwaidi Park

festival exclusively to India. The 10-day festival saw a celebration of Indian culture, food, music and art. People from all communities streamed into the vast Suwaidi Park to savour a slice of India. The Global Harmony project attempts to present Saudi as an inclusive and harmonious society where people from all backgrounds live and celebrate their own cultures, traditions and festivals. And, it's not some civil society gig. It's a government policy initiative with clear objectives and plans.

That makes it an attempt worth emulating for many countries that are facing social fissures due to their diversity. As Saudi strides into modernity, it is also conscious of its history and heritage. It's encouraging studies and excavations at heritage sites, such as at al Ula, and is promoting its pre-

Islamic history too. Nouf Marwaai, a yoga instructor and also a consultant with the Saudi government, gave us a presentation on the historical and social similarities between India and Saudi Arabia. In her talk, she went back to 6000 BCE to trace the Almagar Civilisation. Clearly, the new Saudi Arabia projects itself as an old civilisation, and not just as a society defined by the advent of Islam 1,400 years ago. That is now portrayed as only an important event, not the sole marker of the civilisational identity. The Kingdom is also promoting its historical sites. The Diriyah town, just outside Riyadh, is one such heritage site that has a UNESCO tag. It was the home of the Saudi royal family and also served as the capital of the Emirate of Diriyah under the first Saudi dynasty from 1744 to 1818. Today, Diriyah is one of the foremost cultural hubs and the centre of many sports and adventure activities in the Kingdom. Even so, its historical character has been maintained all along.

On the one hand, you have mega infrastructural projects, new businesses and modern wave sweeping Saudi, and on the other, there is a renewed focus on its over 1,400-year-old history. Coming back to the India connect: wherever there are Indians, there is music. Indian film music has been a great brand ambassador and unifier across the world. Saudi Arabia is no different.

India was a British colony, robbed of its wealth and morale

Suman

The original "Great Game" was fought in the mid-1800s between the Russian Empire and the combined might of the British, French and Ottoman Empires over control of Central Asia. The British feared an attack by the Imperial Russian Army through Afghanistan on their Indian colony. The Ottomans, though in decline, wanted to guard against Russian incursions into their Balkan possessions. As a report by Kallie Szczepanski (thought.com) described it: "Britain's Lord Ellenborough started 'The Great Game' on January 12, 1830, with an edict establishing a new trade route from India to Bukhara, using Afghanistan as a buffer

against Russia to prevent it from controlling any ports on the Persian Gulf. Meanwhile, Russia wanted to establish a neutral zone in Afghanistan allowing for their use of crucial trade routes." "The Great Game officially ended with the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907, which divided Persia (Iran) into a Russian-controlled northern zone, a nominally independent central zone, and a British-controlled southern zone. The Convention also specified a borderline between the two empires running from the eastern point of Persia to Afghanistan and declared Afghanistan an official protectorate of Britain." Russia's invasion of Ukraine nearly two centuries later has trig-

gered a new Great Game but with vastly different actors, motives and possible outcomes. In the mid-1800s the United States did not count. It was convulsed by a Civil War (1861-65) between northern unionist states and southern confederate states over slavery. China had been humiliated by Britain during the Opium Wars (1839-60). It lay in repose. India was a British colony, robbed of its wealth and morale. Today Russia lies weakened, its Soviet-era satellite states absorbed into NATO. They form a Western knife aimed at Moscow's jugular. Ukraine remains a non-NATO buffer state. If it joins NATO in future, Russia would be completely encircled.

The emergence of new-era 'Leviathans'

Rashi Singh

In China, the fear of chaos that can come from within and from without is a central rationale that legitimises Xi Jinping's power grab. Image: REUTERS Thomas Hobbes' seminal work, Leviathan, published in 1651, posits the necessity of a powerful, centralised authority to prevent societal chaos and ensure peace and security. Hobbes had a way with words; he famously said that without an all-powerful state, whom he calls the Leviathan, life would be nasty, brutish, and short. Those powerful words have a global resonance today, giving the state across the world a free run. We saw it in Washington when more than \$3 trillion was printed in monetary easing. In Paris, monetary welfare spending is out of hand, and the Leviathan dares not withdraw the free fund, for that itself causes riots and chaos. In China, state capitalism is running wild, and in India, the state subsidises everything from fertiliser and maternity care to free food to the tune of \$10 billion a year. Everywhere, a man who wrote 350 years ago rules. In our turbulent world, Hobbes' premise of avoiding chaos is so powerful that both autocracies and democracies are utilising it to empower the state further. It is not as if he has not been proved right. In fact, rarely in contemporary history has Hobbes gone wrong. In Iraq, Libya, and Egypt, when the Leviathan was toppled, it created chaos beyond imagination,

only to be replaced by the iron fist of the state. In China, the fear of chaos that can come from within and from without is a central rationale that legitimises Xi Jinping's power grab. Indeed, it's replacing the promise of prosperity as the basis of the communist party's hold over China. The fact that the Federal Reserve's policy of quantitative easing following the 2008 financial crisis and the purchase of government securities to increase the money supply were unquestioned exemplifies Hobbes' idea of the sovereign exercising control to prevent economic disorder and maintain stability. That, in the bastion of capitalism, it did not raise concerns about the erosion of financial autonomy and the distortion of free markets underlines the astonishing relevance of Hobbes. France's robust welfare state epitomises Hobbes' notion of the sovereign's responsibility to ensure the well-being of its citizens. The French government maintains an extensive social safety net, including comprehensive healthcare, unemployment benefits, and retirement pensions. During the COVID-19 pandemic, France's welfare spending surged as the government implemented measures to protect jobs and support incomes. However, this extensive welfare system can be critiqued for fostering dependency and reducing individual responsibility. The welfare-to-GDP ratio in 2023 was an astonishing 36 per cent. This is clearly unsustainable, but every time France has tried to

pull back the Leviathan or cut back welfare, there have been dramatic riots. Once you create the Leviathan, clearly, there is no way back. In 2020, the French government introduced the 'Solidarity Fund', providing financial aid to businesses affected by the pandemic, and expanded unemployment benefits to cover those furloughed under the 'partial activity' scheme. These interventions, amounting to over €100 billion in expansive welfare spending, can lead to high taxation, which burdens individuals and businesses, and totally stifles entrepreneurial spirit and innovation. Additionally, the extensive welfare system creates a culture of dependency, reducing the incentive for personal initiative and self-reliance. France and its Leviathan are in a doom loop. China's model of state capitalism illustrates Hobbes' concept of the sovereign's expansive control over economic life. The Chinese government exercises significant influence over the economy through state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which dominate key industries such as energy, telecommunications, and finance. While this control allows the state to direct economic development and maintain social order, it also restricts economic freedom and individual rights. The role of SOEs in China's economic strategy is particularly evident in the "Made in China 2025" initiative, aimed at transforming China into a global leader in high-tech industries.

India's stand should Iran want a revival of its nuclear plan?

Samay Sharma

What will, for example, be India's stand should Iran want a revival of its nuclear plan? India's past tussles with the West over its own nuclear programme may trigger another round of strategic unpleasantness over New Delhi's stance. India has a long-standing policy of strategic autonomy, and the complexity of its relations with the West is par for the course. The question is only of degree. The scope of India's support to its alliance partners in any overtures, real or perceived, against the West needs to be clearly defined, if not announced. While BRICS has achieved precious little in tan-

gible terms in the past 15 years, the symbolism of grouping may have consequences for India as ongoing conflicts stretch into the future and new challenges around them emerge. On the other hand, the internal dynamics of the expanded BRICS are going to pose another challenge. BRICS, only a little more than an ad hoc grouping with diverse challenges and interests, has miles to go to emerge as a counterforce to alliances like the G7 or the Five Eyes, where members have been able to thrash out at least a common minimum programme. All eyes have been on Iran for more than a year. Naturally, the first

BRICS summit with Tehran's membership is bound to breed speculation about what the prospective new world order would look like. At home, there needs to be an examination of India's bilateral ties with a country that is seen firmly anti-West in its outlook. Iran and India are sailing in the same boat, at least momentarily: of the West's castigation. The temptation may be high on both sides to form a joint front against Western hegemony in the security space. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has held bilateral talks with the new Iranian President, Masoud Pezeshkian, with a focus on strategic cooperation

in and beyond the Middle East. It can be endlessly debated without itching anywhere close to a resolution whether multilateral global groupings make any difference to realpolitik either domestically or internationally. The signalling, however, remains crucial. To begin with, the West is already perceiving the summit as Russia's show of strength. Headlines like 'Putin Gathers Allies' and 'Putin Hosts Global South Leaders at BRICS Summit Meant to Counterbalance Western Clout' in Western media outlets expose apprehension. A complex interplay of sectarian interests and regional dynamics.

Tata Motors Drives India's Green Future with Country's First Hydrogen Truck Trials

Vatika Times FARIDABAD: In a landmark development towards India's vision of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, Tata Motors, the country's largest commercial vehicle manufacturer, has launched the first-ever trials of hydrogen-powered heavy-duty trucks. This historic trial, which marks a significant step towards sustainable long distance cargo transportation, was flagged off by Shri Nitin Gadkari, Hon'ble Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways, Shri Pralhad Joshi, Hon'ble Union Minister of New and Renewable Energy. The ceremony also saw the participation of Mr. Girish Wagh, Executive Director, Tata Motors, among other distinguished delegates from the Government of India and the two companies.



Through this pioneering initiative, Tata Motors underscores its commitment to leading the charge in sustainable mobility solutions, aligning with India's broader green energy goals. It was awarded the tender for this trial, which is funded by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy under the National Green Hydrogen Mission. It marks a significant step forward in assessing the real-world commercial viability of using hydrogen powered vehicles for long distance haulage as well as setting-up the requisite enabling infrastructure for their seamless operation. The trial phase will span up to 24 months and involves deployment of 16 advanced hydrogen-powered vehicles with varying configurations and payload capacities. These trucks, equipped with new age Hydrogen Internal Combustion Engines (H2-ICE) and Fuel Cell (H2-FCEV) technologies, will be tested on India's most prominent freight routes, including those around Mumbai, Pune, Delhi-NCR, Surat, Vadodara, Jamshedpur and Kalinganagar.

Students, teachers, players and officials joined the bucket challenge and said that a drug-free life is a unique life

Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra: Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau is working on a war footing to connect the youth with the drug-free campaign by running a bucket challenge campaign under the guidelines and guidance of Haryana State Narcotics Control Bureau Director General of Police Mr. OP Singh and under the leadership of Superintendent of Police Mr. Mohit Handa and Superintendent of Police Pankhuri Kumar. On social media, every person feels proud to be associated with this campaign. Bureau's Awareness Program and Rehabilitation Incharge/Sub Inspector Dr. Ashok Kumar Verma reached Sector-3 Kurukshetra this morning and connected DAV Public School with this campaign. Teachers and



students participated in this campaign under the leadership of teacher Ram Ratan Sharma. Thereafter, the bucket challenge campaign was accepted under the leadership of Geeta Niketan Vidya Mandir Kurukshetra Managing Director Colonel SN Sharma and Principal Sumit Kumar. Many people from Sector 3 participated in this campaign. Secretary of Haryana State Legal Services Authority and Chief Judicial Magistrate Nitin Raj accepted the challenge and said that everyone will have to participate to completely eradicate drug addiction from the society. Superintendent Ruman Gupta also participated in this campaign. Teacher Dr. Ishwar Singh joined this campaign. Thereafter many people including Robin Verma joined this program and said that a drug-free life is a unique life. Under the drug-free awareness program, the Bureau's Awareness Program and Rehabilitation Incharge/ Sub-Inspector Dr. Ashok Kumar Verma also connected people to the drug-free campaign by organizing a bicycle rally.

CAPSULES

Sebi may strengthen derivatives trade, financial influencer rules

Delhi: Sebi is poised to tighten derivatives trading rules and limit brokers and mutual funds' use of unregistered financial influencers in marketing campaigns, Reuters reports, citing persons with direct knowledge of the situation. The Sebi board meeting may address these market manipulation-fighting measures after a sharp increase in sophisticated financial instrument trading. Eliminating illiquid stock derivatives is the goal. According to Reuters, India's option trades more than doubled to \$907.09 trillion in 2023-24 from the previous year. Index option contracts dominate Indian options trading. Reuters reported earlier this month that Sebi is investigating technical tweaks to index options, even though it has not yet regulated them. The COVID-19 pandemic increased retail investor engagement in equity markets, leading to more financial advice from social media influencers. Brokers and mutual funds should stop working with unregistered influencers to avoid them from deceiving investors, according to Sebi. According to one source, the markets regulator has formed a group of exchanges, brokers, and mutual funds to recommend new measures to reduce manipulation and protect retail options contract investors.

Nothing Phone (3a) and Phone (3a) Pro Launched in India

Vatika Times KARNAL: Nothing today introduced the Phone (3a) Series, elevating its mid-range lineup with advanced features. Building on the acclaimed Phone (2a), it boasts an advanced triple-camera system with optical zoom, a powerful Snapdragon® processor, a brighter, more responsive display, and Nothing OS innovations like Essential Space—all wrapped in two uniquely refined designs. Both the Phone (3a) and Phone (3a) Pro feature a more sophisticated look and feel,



with upgraded glass back panels, enhanced symmetry in the internal structure, and refined visual details and elements throughout the finish. Further, The Phone (3a) Series also upgrades its durability to an IP64 rating. When it comes to the cameras, Nothing introduces its most advanced camera system in the Phone (3a) series till date. Phone (3a) will feature an upgraded 50MP main

sensor and a Sony ultra-wide sensor, along with optical zoom for the first time. Phone (3a)'s telephoto camera features a powerful 50MP sensor combined with a fast f/2.0 aperture for detailed shots at its 50mm equivalent focal length. The 2x optical reach lays the foundation for a quality zoom, while the high resolution enables up to 4x lossless in-sensor zoom. When you need to zoom in even further, the Phone (3a) harnesses AI clarity-enhancing algorithms for 30x ultra zoom.

National Workshop on One Nation One Election held at KUK

Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra: Institute of Law and Legal Cell of Kurukshetra University organized one day workshop on 'One Nation One Election.' The Chief Guest of this workshop, Cabinet Minister, Social Justice, Empowerment Mr. Krishan Kumar Bedi, emphasized that 'One Nation One Election' is the biggest need of Modern India. Under this provision, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha and State Legislature Assembly Elections can be held simultaneously which will bring conti-



nunity in governance, reduce financial burden and workload on administrative officers. The keynote speaker, National General Secretary, Bharatiya Janata Party, Sunil Bansal said that healthy and fair elections are the building blocks of democracy. If we look

at the elections held in India, we find that elections are held in some state or the other every year. This not only affects administrative and policy decisions but also puts a heavy burden on the country's treasury. To avoid all this, the policy makers have come up with

the idea of holding the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies elections simultaneously. Some distinguished speakers like Inderjit Mehta (Member Haryana State Law Commission), Advocate Vijaypal (State Convenor, One Nation One Election Committee), Madan Mohan Chhabra (Chairman 48 Kos Tirth Monitoring Committee, Kurukshetra Development Board emphasized the importance of One Nation One Election.

DPCC issues SOP to seize, dispose of plastic

Delhi: The Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) has a regular operating system for seizing and disposing of unlawful plastic items sold or used in the city. According to the amended plastic waste management laws, illegal plastic will be defined and DPCC staff will investigate various locations. It said that only a waste-to-energy plant would dispose of seized plastic products including polyethylene, earphones, silverware, etc. The DPCC seizure procedure requires a team of authorities to take samples of plastic carry bags and sheets from the unit during inspection of all producers, importers, and brand owners and include them in the report. Teams must seize, transport, and store non-authorized plastic objects at the



DPCC lab until disposal. "The unit owner/occupier must pay for seizure, loading/unloading, transportation, storage, waste-to-energy plant disposal, etc. A recent DPCC portal document indicated that the team would take geotagged photos and video of the seized samples and the full seizure procedure of banned/non-permissible stuff. It said that "all the seized non-permissible plastic carry bags/sheets/

Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra: The Women in STEM forum, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra organised one day seminar on 'Innovating the Future: Women in STEM' and Prize distribution function of 'Science Carnival' on March 5, 2025, in the Faculty Lounge. Chief Guest, Dr. Mamta Sachdeva said to the young minds of STEM girls, "You are the future of innovation. The world needs your innovative ideas, your discoveries, and your leadership." Dr Sachdeva motivated them to contribute meaningfully to the world of STEM. The keynote speaker, Prof. Neelima R Kumar, a distinguished scientist from Panjab University Chandigarh spoke on 'Women in STEM:



Beekeeping a novel strategy' and said that Women in STEM are increasingly exploring innovative fields, and beekeeping is emerging as a novel strategy for environmental sustainability and economic empowerment. Combining biology, technology, and conservation, women-led beekeeping initiatives contribute to biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable agriculture. Scientific advancements, such as smart hives and AI-

driven monitoring, are enhancing productivity while fostering female entrepreneurship. Dr. Anita Bhatnagar, Professor Department of Zoology and Coordinator of the WIS Forum, delivered the welcome address and elucidated on the objectives of WIS Forum. Deputy Director, Public Relations, Dr Jimmy Sharma informed that Science carnival was organised from Feb 28 to March 4 in which Ms. Sheetal of IHS

stood first in Declaration Contest at UG level and Ms. Prachi of Department of Zoology was first in PG Category. Navjot and Sheetal Devi were first in Slogan writing at PG and UG level respectively. Ms. Neha of Department of Microbiology and Parsdeep of IHS were first in Poster making Contest. Dean of Sciences Prof. Sanjeev Arora graced the occasion. During the function Dr. Dipti Grover, Member WIS Forum, moderated the stage and Dr. Urmila, secretary of WIS Forum proposed vote of thanks. Other Members of the WIS Forum Dr. Suman Chauhan, Dr. Lalita, Dr. Monika, Dr. Poonam, Dr. Jitender Bhardwaj and Dr. Kanwal Garg actively participated in the organisation of the function.

Regional aviation gets Air India route

Delhi: Air India stated that it would begin using Airbus A350-900s on the Delhi-London Heathrow route on On the route, the airline will fly twice daily. The A350-900 will replace the 777-300ER and 787-8 Dreamliner on 14 of 17 weekly flights. The business claimed in a news statement that the replacement would add 336 weekly seats on the Delhi-London Heathrow route. Flying our flagship A350s and B777s with updated cabin interiors to London Heathrow is a milestone for Air India. It shows our dedication to providing a world-class travel experience and exceeding customer expectations as we upgrade our fleet, said Campbell Wilson, CEO & Managing Director, Air India. The new Airbus planes will enhance 90% of its trips to London Heathrow. Air India began flying the new Boeing 777-300ERs between Mumbai and London Heathrow in 2025.

Scientists and students from Gujarat Agricultural University receive training in natural farming

Jasbir Singh Duggal
Kurukshehra: A 31-member team from Gujarat Agricultural University, led by Director of Extension Education Rashmikant Anantre, received training in natural farming at the Natural Farming Training Center at Gurukul Kurukshehra from March 3 to 5.



The team, which included experts and postgraduate students, learned about the various aspects of natural farming and visited the farm to see the mixed crop and vegetable models.

The training was conducted under the guidance of senior agricultural scientist Padma Shri Dr. Hariom, and experts Dr. Baljit Saharan, Dr. Vijay, Dr. Pradeep Kumar, and Dr. Manisha provided special support. Gurukul's administrator Ramnivas Arya said that under the guidance of Governor Acharya Devvrat, a campaign is being run

across the country to promote natural farming. As part of this campaign, experts from Gujarat Agricultural University, including Dr. Prabhu Nayaka, Dr. SP Deshmukh, Dr. Krishna, and Dr. Alpesh Beamani, received training at Gurukul. In addition to the experts, postgraduate students Keshavala Bhumii, Jay Patel, Vishal Vaylu, Daksh Patel, Mahender Mevada, Mauli Patel, and Shradha Chaudhary also participated in the training camp and learned about the latest experiments in natural farming.

Agricultural experts Dhum Singh, Dinesh Kumar, and Ravindra Singh from Delhi also received training. Dr. Hariom said that natural farming is the need of the hour, and farmers' trust in natural farming is increasing gradually. With the efforts of Acharya Devvrat, natural farming is being adopted by farmers not only in Himachal Pradesh but also in Gujarat and across the country. As the ill effects of chemical and organic farming are becoming apparent, natural farming is becoming the only viable option.

BJP MLAs walk out after J&K speaker expunges remarks of LoP

JAMMU: BJP legislators on Wednesday walked out after Jammu & Kashmir assembly speaker, Abdul Rahim Rather, expunged the "ungracious and blunt words" of the leader of opposition (LoP), Sunil Sharma, spoken for those killed on July 13, 1931. Commotion in the proceedings began after Sharma objected to the speech of Waheed-ur-Rehman Para, MLA of PDP, who demanded restoration of public holidays on July 13 (Martyrs Day) and December 5 (birth anniversary of NC founder Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah) during a discussion on the motion of thanks on



the lieutenant governor's address. As Para concluded his speech, Sunil Sharma stood up and objected to his demand and made the remarks, now expunged by the speaker. After walking out of the house, Sharma spoke to reporters and made his and his party's position clear. "July 13 should be remembered in the name of Maqbool

Sherwani, Major Somnath Sharma, Brigadier Rajinder Singh, and others who rendered their services to the nation and protected J&K from the enemy. Martyrs day cannot be celebrated in the name of traitors and anti-nationals. Those killed on July 13, 1931, outside Central Jail, Srinagar, were arsonists," Sharma told reporter outside the house.

Adani Defence & Aerospace buys Air Works for Rs 400 crore

Delhi: Adani Defence & Aerospace said that it had reached a formal agreement to acquire Air Works, India's largest private-sector MRO provider, for Rs 400 crore. "Adani Defence Systems & Technologies Ltd (ADSTL) has signed a

share purchase agreement to acquire 85.8 per cent shareholding in Air Works India (Engineering) Private Ltd," a press release said. Air Works maintains narrow-body, turboprop, and rotary aircraft in Hosur, Mumbai, and Kochi

with regulatory permits from over 20 countries. The statement stated Air Works, a civil aviation industry leader, has deep defence MRO capabilities, executing projects for major Indian Navy and Air Force aircraft.

Redeveloping railway stations opens Rs 30,000 cr in business opportunities

Delhi: EPC companies are expecting Rs 30,000 crore in business from contracts to redevelop/revamp railway stations in the next two years. The Railways have sanctioned 1,318 station redevelopment/revamps, which Iira Ratings estimates will provide Rs 30,000 crore in commercial potential for EPC firms over the next two years. The government previously planned most station renovation projects as public-private partnerships, accounting for 12% of the national asset monetisation pipeline target. However, due to pricing restrictions, real estate development market risks, and a lack of PPP experience in railways, the government reallocated station redevelopment work to the EPC mode in December 2022 and increased the budgetary allocation by more than seven times from Rs 2,159 crore in FY23 to Rs 15,511 crore in FY25. Railway station rehabilitation offers EPC businesses Rs 30,000 crore in business potential due to intense competition in traditional segments like roads and buildings, according to Vinay Kumar G of the agency. In the past two years, station redevelopment project awards have seen modest competition, with maximum discounts of up to 18% and a median discount of up to 4%, similar to other railway EPC projects with a median discount of up to 5%. UP has the most stations being redeveloped at 149, followed by Maharashtra at 126, Bengal at 94, Gujarat at 87, Bihar at 86, Rajasthan at 82, and MP at 80. Foundation stones have been set for 553 stations, and nearly Rs 20,000 crore has been given for station redevelopment.

Over 1.6 crore Jio subscribers leave in four months

Delhi: At Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd., India's largest telecom operator, approximately 1.65 crore subscribers have dropped in the past four months. Reliance Jio lost 37.6 lakh mobile users in October, 79 lakh in September, 40 lakh in August, and 7.58 lakh in July.

The GST panel postpones calling for reduced insurance costs

Delhi: The GST Council voted to exempt gene therapy used to cure cancer from taxes. and postponed a proposal for lower rates while lowering the tariff on fortified rice kernels used in PDS to 5%. The council determined that 18% GST would be applied to the margin of suppliers for all used cars, including electric vehicles. Even though there won't be any tax transactions involving private citizens, businesses or used car sellers would be subject to the fee. According to Sitharaman, states desired a greater fee, but the Center had suggested a 5% tax on EVs. The GST Council issued a number of clarifications, one of which was that ready-to-eat popcorn would be subject to a 12% tax, similar to the namkeen tax, if it were pre-packaged with salt



" The 'penal costs' that banks and NBFCs impose and collect from borrowers for failure to comply with loan terms do not need the payment of GST "

and spices. Caramelized sugar will be subject to an 18% tax. In a similar vein, the council stated that as voucher transactions were neither a delivery of commodities nor services, they would not be subject to taxes. It also made it clear that small enterprises that pay rent to unregistered landlords and are covered by the reverse charge system will not be required.

BSNL launches free mobile intranet TV, national wi-fi roaming

In collaboration with OTTplay, BSNL launched BiTV as a pilot service, offering Puducherry mobile subscribers complimentary access to over 300 live television channels, including premium content. The service uses BSNL's mobile intranet to provide stable streaming of television programmes, films, web series and documentaries in multiple languages. "With BiTV, through our partners, BSNL is giving every customer the power to access entertainment on the go, 'anytime, anywhere', free of cost, irrespective of the plan they are, making it a perfect alternative.

Starbucks workers expand strike across several US cities



Starbucks workers have extended their ongoing strike to four more cities, including New York, according to the union that represents more than 10,000 coffee shop workers. The strike stemmed from failed negotiations between Starbucks and union representatives, with disputes over wages, staffing levels, and work schedules remaining unresolved. According to news agency Reuters, the five-day strike, which began on Friday, initially impacted Starbucks locations in Los

Angeles, Chicago, and Seattle. As of Saturday, the industrial action has expanded to include New Jersey, New York, Philadelphia, and St. Louis. While the union did not specify the location of the walkout in New Jersey, it confirmed that the strike continues to disrupt operations in the newly added cities. The union's strike spans in 10 cities, including Columbus, Denver and Pittsburgh, during the festive period, potentially affecting the company's Christmas revenue. The workers United had earlier indicated that the industrial action could extend to "hundreds of stores".

Funding requirements increased under the US start-up visa program

For want of a better term, the International Entrepreneur Rule (IER) is often referred to as the 'start-up' visa. IER enables 'qualified' international entrepreneurs (based on prescribed criteria including funds raised, to obtain immigration 'parole' - that is to temporarily enter and stay in the US and nurture their startup, despite not having a work visa or a green card. Commonly, IER is known as the startup visa, but it is actually a permit for eligible foreign entrepreneurs to stay in the US for two and a half years with the possibility of another extension of a similar tenure. Recently, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has updated the threshold amounts for the IER program and updated the supporting evidence required. Starting



October 1, 2024, there are new changes to the investment and revenue requirements. The program has had a contentious history. Originally created at the end of the Obama Administration, IER was targeted for removal by the Trump Administration before it was launched. Due to a successful lawsuit filed by the National Venture Capital Association, it remained in force but was not seen as a viable option as the Trump administration repeatedly tried to end the program.

Honda proposes CAFE compliant EVs and hybrids

Delhi: A top Honda Cars India executive said the next stage-3 of the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) regulations will tighten pollution standards, therefore the company will sell hybrid and electric cars in the future years. It wants to launch three new electric vehicles by 2026-27 to align its India portfolio with its global electrification aspirations.

Indian steel imports from China reached record high

Delhi: Provisional government statistics revealed that India's completed steel imports from China reached an all-time high in the first eight months of the fiscal year to March 2025, raising fears among domestic mills over cheap Chinese supplies. With India, the world's second-largest crude steel producer, a net importer, finished steel imports reached an eight-year high. Data revealed India shipped 6.5 million metric tons of completed steel, up 26.6% year-over-year. Data indicated China shipped 1.96 million metric tons of steel to India in April-November, rising 22.8% year-over-year. Beijing exported mostly stainless steel, hot-rolled coil, plates, electrical sheets, galvanized plain or corrugated



Rising 22.8% year-over-year. Beijing exported mostly stainless steel, hot-rolled coil, plates, electrical sheets, galvanized plain or corrugated sheets, pipes, bars

ed sheets, pipes, bars, and rods. The report showed that Japanese finished steel imports more than doubled to 1.4 million metric tons in April-November, a six-year high. India imported 79% of finished steel from China, Japan, and South Korea. After hot-rolled coils, bars and rods were the most imported non-flat steel products. New Delhi

is investigating whether to levy a 25% safeguard duty to control unbridled steel imports. India began importing steel in the financial year ending March 2024, and imports have gradually climbed. New Delhi joins a growing list of countries considering import restrictions as cheap Chinese steel has forced India's smaller factories.

Name Change

I, Kamala Devi, wife of Shri Pratap Singh, resident of village Tosham, Tehsil Tosham, District Bhiwani, state that my son's name is Keshav, whose date of birth is 27/06/2007. That my name is Kamala Devi, my husband's name is Pratap Singh. In the session 2022-2023 of son Keshav, my name in the CBSE Board (DMC) is Kamala and my husband's name is Pratap, which is incomplete. That my name is Kamala Devi and my husband's name is Pratap Singh. All documents are registered in Aadhar Card, PAN Card, Voter Card etc. I want to get my name Kamala Devi and my husband's name Pratap Singh changed in my son's name (DMC) by CBSE Board which is correct and correct, I will not offer any change in future. I will abide by the above statements.

Name Change

I Pratap Singh son of Shri Ran Singh resident of village Tosham, Tehsil Tosham District Bhiwani state that my son's name is Keshav whose date of birth is 27/06/2007. That my name is Pratap Singh and my wife's name is Kamala Devi. In the session 2022-2023 of my son Keshav, my name in the CBSE Board (DMC) is Pratap and my wife's name is Kamala, which is incomplete. That my name is Pratap Singh, wife's name is Kamala Devi. All documents are registered in Aadhar card, PAN card, voter card etc. I want to get my name changed to Pratap Singh and wife's name changed to Kamala Devi in my son's name by CBSE board (DMC) which is correct and correct, I will not offer any change in future. I will abide by the above statements.

Bitcoin rally fizzles as Token's record-breaking winds down



Delhi: India's Google regulatory issues are growing. In 2022, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) fined the US tech giant for abuse of dominant position in its Play Store and Android mobile device ecosystem. Now, the fairplay regulator is investigating a complaint filed by gaming company WinZO. CCI directed its investigation arm to investigate and report within 60 days after finding a prima facie case. "Based on the facts and circumstances of the case, the commission believes Google is in violation and justifies further inquiry. The CCI bench, chaired by Ravneet Kaur and three members, ordered the director general to investigate. A Google spokesman declined to comment. WinZO, an online gaming company, claimed that Google's Play Store prohibits Real Money Game hosting. "Due to Google's unreasonable and restrictive policy, all apps offering real money games of skill

are only available for download from their website (a process called sideloading)," it told CCI. On Android devices, using this process to reach WinZO displays a disclaimer/warning, tarnishing its image. WinZO stated warnings are without validity and "completely illegal" and cost the company. It also claimed Google displays another "baseless warning" when users pay for skill-based games. "Such payment warnings are arbitrary as Google has not set any criteria for displaying them," WinZO complained to CCI. The gaming company also claimed that Google has enabled

Foodgrain output set to scale new peak in 2025

NEW DELHI: India is poised to achieve new heights in foodgrain production in 2025, driven by favourable monsoon, though significant challenges persist in pulses and oilseeds production as the country's agricultural sector shows signs of robust recovery. The Agriculture Ministry's initial projections paint an optimistic picture, with kharif (summer) foodgrain production estimated at a record 164.7 million tonnes.

Akasa Air pilots demand DGCA audit amid training concerns



NEW DELHI: A group of Akasa Air pilots continues to express discontent over alleged training concerns and seeking a thorough DGCA audit following the regulator's decision to suspend two senior officials. Additionally, the pilots have informed the civil aviation ministry and DGCA about their plans to establish a pilots' union. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation has issued 10 showcause notices to the airline recently for various alleged irregularities. Meanwhile, the airline has not responded to queries regarding these matters. The airline previously dismissed claims

about pilot training practices and attrition as unfounded when these issues were raised by certain pilots earlier this month. On December 27, the DGCA suspended Akasa Air's directors of operations and training for six months due to training deficiencies. The pilots have noted that the suspended director of operations maintains the position of vice-president of operations.

The airline, operational for over two years, maintains a fleet of 26 aircraft and employs approximately 870 pilots. Several pilots reportedly face insufficient flying hours due to slower-than-expected fleet expansion. Akasa Air had earlier stated that 324 pilots had joined since October 2023, with an annualised attrition rate below 1 per cent for this category of staff.

Vodafone Group clears 11,650 crore dues raised against VIL shares

NEW DELHI: UK-based Vodafone Group has cleared dues of around Rs 11,650 crore or about 109 million pound that it raised against shares of Vodafone Idea, according to a regulatory filing. Vodafone Group had pledged almost

the entire stake in VIL to raise the debt. The pledge was created in favour of HSBC Corporate Trustee Company (UK) for the debt raised by Mauritius and India-based entities of Vodafone Group. "On 27 Dec 2024, HSBC

Corporate Trustee Company (UK) Limited acting as the security trustee for the lenders has released the pledges pursuant to repayment of the outstanding dues owed to the lenders by the Vodafone Promoter Shareholders.

India's exports to Australia up 64.4 per cent: Commerce ministry data

NEW DELHI: India's exports to its trade agreement partner Australia rose 64.4 per cent year-on-year to USD 643.7 million in account of healthy growth in sectors such as textiles, chemicals and agricultural products, according to the commerce ministry data. However, the country's merchandise exports recorded a decline of 5.21 per cent year-on-year to USD 5.56 billion during 2024-25, the preliminary data showed. India and Australia implemented an interim trade pact -- economic cooperation and trade agreement (ECTA) -- on December 29, 2022 and are now in negotiations to widen the scope of the pact and make it a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA). On the completion of two years of ECTA, commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal said the agreement has brought with it increased market access for Indian exporters, expanded opportunities for MSMEs and farmers, and generated several employment avenues. It has also enabled growth in exports by 14 per cent in 2023-24; notable boost in IT/ITeS, business and travel services; and port-study work and work holiday visas, he said in a post on social media platform X. "The expanding trade and investment ties between the two countries under the agreement reflect the growing business-to-business and people-to-people engagements. We are committed to building on the momentum that the Ind-Aus ECTA has generated and achieve the USD 100 billion trade target by 2030," Goyal said. In a statement, the commerce ministry said the key sectors like textiles, chemicals.



ED names Russian as Rs 800 crore OctaFx scam mastermind

MUMBAI: Russian national Pavel Prozorov is the mastermind in fraudulent activities via OctaFx India Pvt Ltd, through unauthorised forex trading, allegedly earning over Rs 800 crore, said Enforcement Directorate in the chargesheet filed before the special court against him and 53 others. ED attached Pavel's Spanish assets valued at Rs 42 crore after collecting their details and plans to enforce the attachment order in Spain through Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. OctaFx has no office or any base in India, but is conducting business in the country, said ED. Pavel, collaborating with Russian partners and two non-resident Indians, used OctaFx's forex trading application to mislead investors with promis-



Pavel, collaborating with Russian partners and two non-resident Indians, used OctaFx's forex trading application to mislead investors with promises of high returns

es of high returns. ED's probe showed OctaFx illegally transferred fraudulently earned profit internationally using false import documents through mule accounts (provi-

sion by shell firms-individual charging commission). According to ED's chargesheet, OctaFx's CEO Anna Rudaia, who managed Indian operations.

BSNL launches free mobile intranet TV, national wi-fi roaming

In collaboration with OTTplay, BSNL launched BiTV as a pilot service, offering Puducherry mobile subscribers complimentary access to over 300 live television channels, including premium content. The service uses BSNL's mobile intranet to provide stable streaming of television programmes, films, web series and documentaries in multiple languages. "With BiTV, through our partners, BSNL is giving every customer the power to access entertainment on the go, 'anytime, anywhere', free of cost, irrespective of the plan they are, making it a perfect alternative.

Zydus Wellness arm gets Rs 56.33 crore GST demand



NEW DELHI: Zydus Wellness Ltd on said its wholly-owned arm has received a GST demand of Rs 56.33 crore, along with applicable interest and penalty from the tax authority. Zydus Wellness Products Ltd (ZWPL), a wholly-owned subsidiary company, has received an intimation from the Directorate General of Goods and Services Tax Intelligence, Surat Zonal Unit, alleging GST demand of Rs 56.33 crore, along with applicable interest and penalty. Zydus Wellness Ltd said in a regulatory filing.

The intimation alleges that the GST was payable in relation to the acquisition of intellectual property rights from Heinz Italia S.P.A. by Heinz India Pvt Ltd, now merged with ZWPL, it added. "ZWPL believes that there is a strong merit in the case, and ZWPL is evaluating the next steps based on a detailed review of the intimation," the filing said. The period covered by the order relates to the pre-acquisition period prior to January 30, 2019, the filing said. Due to this order, there is no impact on financial, operation or other activities of the company/ZWPL, it added.

Cardano as top performing Layer 1 blockchains with 200% gains



The battle of the top performing Layer 1 blockchains has been pretty wild this year, with the likes of ETH, SOL, TRX, BNB, Toncoin (TON) and Cardano (ADA) fighting to claim the leadership mantle. However, out of all these networks, TON blockchain is showing huge promise as it records approximately 200% gains. Conversely, Cardano network is also making waves, especially as its new Hydra scalability solution is set to potentially unlock 1 million TPS. On the other hand, predictions about a fast-rising presale star—Lunex Network (LNEX) are blowing up as it shows the potential of overthrowing TON and ADA in 2025. TON's Partnership with Telegram for Blockchain-based mini-games spurs growth. Over the past year and counting, TON blockchain has been

widely popular for one major thing—blockchain lucrative games. The partnership between Toncoin and Telegram to bring mini-games to millions of users was a very profitable one. From launching several tap-to-earn games to furthering its expansion in P2E games, Toncoin has been able to rack up approximately 200% NET gains. As experts rank Toncoin (TON) alongside cryptos to buy, analysts are starting to give bullish predictions. Although TON price is currently down by 11%

Banks sue US Fed over stress tests, seek transparency

Banking and business groups sued the US Federal Reserve over the central bank's annual stress tests, saying they're seeking more transparency in how the rules are adopted. The groups, including the Bank Policy Institute and American Bankers Association, contend that the Fed's criteria for the tests are designed in secret and produce "vacillating and unexplained. as it trades .

Rexas Finance presale is on fire! First ten stages sold out months



Rexas also features a Launchpad for raising funds. Token projects can use this tool to access global investors, fostering growth. The platform's scope extends beyond real estate

Rexas Finance is reshaping the investment world by tokenising real-world assets (RWAs) such as real estate, commodities, and art. Through blockchain and decentralised finance, the platform eliminates traditional barriers like high entry costs and limited liquidity. For instance, an Asian investor can purchase a fractional share of a commercial property in Europe, earning rental income without managing the property themselves. The platform enables seamless tokenisation through its Rexas Token Builder, allowing users to create tokens representing proportional ownership in any asset. Additionally, Rexas QuickMint Bot simplifies the process by enabling token creation on Telegram or Discord, compatible with multiple Ethereum-based

blockchains. Rexas also features a Launchpad for raising funds. Token projects can use this tool to access global investors, fostering growth. The platform's scope extends beyond real estate, covering commodities like gold and oil and high-value collectibles like art. Rexas Finance paves the way for a decentralised and inclusive investment market by bridging blockchain

and tangible assets. The RXS presale is a prime example of the platform's momentum. Opting for a public presale rather than venture capital funding, Rexas Finance allows the broader community to join this financial revolution. The approach has resonated strongly, with all tokens in stages 1-10 selling out rapidly. Investors have already.

Reliance acquires Karkinos Healthcare for Rs 375 crore

NEW DELHI: Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries has acquired technology-driven and oncology-focused healthcare platform Karkinos for Rs 375 crore, the firm said on Saturday. Reliance Strategic Business Ventures (RSBV), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Mumbai-listed India's most valuable company, completed the acquisition of Karkinos Healthcare Pvt Ltd with allotment of requisite shares, the firm said in a stock exchange filing. Karkinos was incorporated in India on July 24, 2020, and is in the business of providing technology-driven innovative solutions for the early detection, diagnosis, and management of cancer. It had a turnover of about Rs 22 crore in the 2022-23 fiscal. "Reliance Strategic Business Ventures Ltd has on December 27, 2024, subscribed to and has been allotted 1 crore equity shares of Rs 10 each, for cash, aggregating Rs 10 crore and 36.5 crore optionally fully convertible debentures of Rs 10 each, for cash, aggregating Rs 365 crore of Karkinos," according to the filing. Karkinos, it said, has cancelled the existing outstanding 30,075 equity shares held by the erstwhile shareholders of the company in accordance with the approved resolution plan. It, however, did not give details. Its previous prominent investors included Ewart Investments Limited (100 per cent subsidiary).



'Physical, technical external interference': Azerbaijan Airlines

Azerbaijan Airlines on Friday revealed that initial investigation into the crash of its aircraft in Kazakhstan that killed 38 was likely due to "external interference of a physical and technical nature", fuelling discussions about potential involvement of Russian air defence systems. The airline has also halted operations to 10 airports in Russia, stating their decision was "based on the preliminary results of the investigation into the crash of the Embraer 190 aircraft operating the Baku-Grozny flight J2-8243 of Azerbaijan Airlines due to physical and technical external interference". This comes after, Russia, earlier in the day, put the blame on Ukraine, claiming that Ukrainian drones were attacking the city of Grozny as the Azerbaijani Airlines plane attempted to land, before its subsequent crash in Kazakhstan. "Ukrainian military



drones were carrying out terrorist attacks on civilian infrastructure... at the time," Chief of Russia's civil aviation authority Dmitry Yarov said, adding that the plane made two unsuccessful attempts to land. "The pilot was offered alternative airports. He took the decision to go to Aktau airport" in Kazakhstan, he said. Also read: 'Ukrainian military was carrying out terrorist attacks when Azerbaijani flight tried to land,' claims Russia However, Ukraine has put the blame on Russia and said, "Russia must be held responsible for the downing of the Azerbaijan Airlines .

Balaji's mother opens up on his death: 'It doesn't look normal'

Balaji, who played a key role in organising data for OpenAI's models, resigned in August, calling its practices unfair. By November, The New York Times' lawyers named him as a key figure in their copy-right case against OpenAI. However, on November 26, shortly after his 26th birthday, Balaji was found dead in his San apartment. Authorities ruled his death a suicide, yet his family remains unconvinced, pushing for a deeper investigation.

Elon criticises Bezos' ex-wife Scott for \$16 billion donation

Tech mogul Elon Musk described the philanthropic efforts of Mackenzie Scott, the ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, as "concerning." His comment came in response to a social media post scrutinising Scott's extensive donations, alleging that her initiatives primarily fund non-profits promoting divisive ideologies rather than addressing pressing global issues. The post highlighted Scott's "trust-based philanthropy," which involves providing no-strings-attached grants to over 2,500 non-profits. It alleged that her focus on causes such as racial



equity, immigrant rights, and LGBTQ justice feeds what the post described as an "NGO/non-profit complex," creating jobs for individuals seeking to validate their expensive degrees. The post further detailed Scott's \$16 billion in donations over

five years, noting her wealth remains substantial at \$36 billion, boosted by Amazon's rising stock price. Scott, the ex-wife of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, has become one of the most prolific philanthropists in recent years.

MAGA Civil War: Why Indian-Americans, the new Jews, are irking Donald Trump supporters

There's a theory out there—wild, audacious, but surprisingly hard to dismiss—that just about everything worth celebrating in Western civilization was dreamed up, built, or perfected by Jews. From splitting the atom to decoding life itself, from rewriting the

rules of music to redefining what it means to be human, Jewish brilliance turned the world into their intellectual playground. Let's take a stroll down the hall of fame: J. Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb," quite literally blew the lid off 20th-

century science. Albert Einstein, the cosmic poet, bent time and space to his will. Jonas Salk saved millions from polio, and Rosalind Franklin cracked the code of life itself with her DNA discoveries. And that's just the lab coats.

Shark Tank's Kevin says half of Canadians are interested in becoming 51st state

Shark Tank's Kevin O'Leary said most of the Canadians are interested in merging with the US.



Shark Tank's Kevin O'Leary, a Canadian, said he is very much enthusiastic about the idea of Canada being merged with the United States and half of the Canadians are but they don't want Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to do the deal with President-elect Donald Trump. The Canadian businessman said he would go to Mar-a-Lago to talk about a US-Canada merger. "There are 41 million Canadians, basically the population of California, sitting on the world's largest amount of all resources, including the most important: energy and water. Canadians, over the holidays, the last two days, have been talking about this. They want to hear more. Obviously, there are a lot of issues, more details of what could be the beginning of an economic union. Think about the power of combining two economies erasing the border between Canada and the United States and putting all that resource up to the northern borders where China and Russia are knocking on the door. So secure that, give a common currency, figure out taxes across the board...I like this idea and at least half of the Canadians are interested," Kevin O'Leary said. But the problem is, Kevin O'Leary continued, that most of the Canadians don't trust Trudeau to carry out the negotiation with his government collapsing and hence he said he would go to Mar-a-Lago to talk to Trump about this. He said he believed that Canadians would trust him with the negotiation. The issue started as a joke at a Mar-a-Lago dinner where Justin Trudeau and his government officials joined Donald Trump. It was a courtesy visit from Trudeau after Trump said he would impose a 25 per cent tax on Canada .

CNN's Scott Jennings mocks Vivek for 'prom queen' dig: 'Someone got stuffed in a locker'

CNN's Scott Jennings made fun of Vivek Ramaswamy's rant against the American culture over the H-1B row and without naming the DOGE co-chief, Jennings said someone got stuffed in a locker. "I'm not going to say who. Look, I think there's a way to talk about this that doesn't denigrate all of American culture," Jennings said without covering his feelings of hurt caused by Ramaswamy's strong words against America's prom queen culture. "I'm now understanding more and more how he got 100 votes in Iowa or whatever it was he got during the Iowa caucus," Jennings said taking another dig at Ramaswamy who had challenged Donald Trump in the



Republican primaries but got a very poor electoral support in Iowa which prompted him to end his campaign following which he endorsed Trump. After Trump's win in the election, Trump made Vivek Ramaswamy the co-chief of the Department of Government Efficiency along

with Elon Musk. The row goes back to Sriram Krishnan's advocacy for removing the visa cam for countries. Sriram Krishnan will work for artificial intelligence at the White House but the Indian-American's lobbying for more Indians in America by removing the cap on H-1B visas.

'Settle issues' of 1971, Yunus urges Pakistan PM, but mum on apology

Bangladesh's chief adviser, Muhammad Yunus, urged Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif to resolve outstanding issues from 1971 to improve bilateral relations. While Sharif highlighted the 1974 tripartite agreement, Yunus emphasized the importance of a SAARC summit. Both leaders agreed to strengthen ties through trade, cultural exchanges, and cooperation in areas like sugar industry and dengue management.

Pak minister defends military trial of civilians

ISLAMABAD: A Pakistani minister on Wednesday defended the military trial of civilians, saying that such courts were competent to deal with the cases related to attacks on army facilities. Information minister Attaullah Tarar also urged the opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led by Imran to refrain from politicising or disputing the issue of military trials. "When an attack is carried out on a defence institution or its property is set ablaze, it becomes the responsibility of the relevant authorities to



apprehend the culprits. Just as railway police handle crimes on railway premises, military courts address offences targeting assets. So, when attacks on military assets occur, the Military Act is enforced," he said while addressing a press conference. Tarar criticised Khan's party for using military courts as a political

tool, aiming to create controversy around them. He clarified that military courts only handle cases involving attacks on defence establishments, citing incidents such as the attack on the Corps Commander's House in Lahore. The minister also criticised the PTI for changing its stance regarding trials of civilians in the military courts, recalling that during Khan's tenure, military court trials were praised. "The statements praising the military courts from PTI's leadership are still available on social media.

Rice shipment from India, first for Yunus government, to arrive today

DHAKA: Bangladesh is set to receive its first consignment of rice imported from India since the formation of the new interim govt even as it looks to be drawing closer to Pakistan than to its immediate neighbour India, which stood beside Bangladesh in 1971 through shared sacrifices. Bangladesh had witnessed ships coming from Karachi twice in recent days. On Nov 13, for the first time since independence, a container-carrying ship sailing directly from Karachi had docked at Chhattogram (Chittagong). This time the ship "MV Tanais Dream", carrying 24,690 metric tonnes of parboiled rice imported from India under the open tender agreement, will arrive at Chaudagram port at 5.30am on Thursday. This is also the first consignment of parboiled rice



imported from India under the Nov 11 agreement. The unloading of the rice will start soon after samples of the rice are collected and after physical examination, said a senior Bangladesh food ministry official. Talking to diplomatic correspondents in Dhaka recently, Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh Pranay Verma had said he was optimistic about Dhaka-Delhi relationship, despite changes happening around. "This is how we look at the relationship. We have so many things to offer

Ramaswamy-critic Ann says H-1B workers are indentured servants

Author and Conservative commentator Ann Coulter, who once said she would not vote for Vivek Ramaswamy only because he is of Indian origin, has commented on the ongoing H-1B row and said that H1B workers can't leave a company, unlike American workers. And that's what tech like Elon Musk, Vivek Ramaswamy, Sriram Krishnan want - she implied.

each other with our growing.

Pak military court sentence 60 more civilians, including Imran's nephew

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's military courts sentenced another 60 civilians on Thursday to prison terms ranging from two to 10 years for their alleged involvement in violent attacks on military installations during the nationwide protests on May 9, 2023 following the brief arrest of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan on graft charges. The latest sentences were announced just days after the same courts handed prison terms ranging from two to 10 years to 25 civilians on similar allegations. Imran's nephew Hassan Khan Niazi, who was taken into military custody in Aug 2023, was one of two people sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment. The convictions followed a Supreme Court constitution bench order that had



Imran's nephew Hassan Khan Niazi, who was taken into military custody in Aug 2023, was one of two people sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment

conditionally allowed military courts to pronounce verdicts on 85 under-custody civilians in cases related to the May 9 riots. "The Field General Court Martial has promulgated the punishments to the following remaining 60 culprits after examining all evidence, ensuring the provision of all legal rights to the convicts, completion of due process and the

appropriate legal proceedings," Inter-Services Public Relations, the army's media wing, said. "All convicts retain the right to appeal and other legal recourses, as guaranteed by the constitution and law." it stated. "The nation, govt, and the armed forces remain steadfast in their commitment to upholding justice and ensuring .

Vietnam's restrictive internet law comes into force

A new internet law in Vietnam, Decree 147, gives the government increased control over internet access and content in the name of national security and social order. It mandates tech companies to store user data, verify accounts, and remove deemed illegal content within 24 hours. Critics argue this suppresses free speech and impacts livelihoods. A new internet law that gives the Vietnamese government expanded powers over internet services and people using them is set to officially take effect Wednesday. Decree 147 expands government control over access to information on the internet for reasons of "national security" and "social order." The law requires social media platforms providing services to users in Vietnam to store user data and provide it to authorities on demand. The government issued the decree this November, and it requires organizations to take down anything the authorities consider "illegal content" within 24 hours. Decree 147 has sparked concerns, with researchers and experts tracking the country saying that the law is part of a growing crackdown on civil society. "Because the Vietnamese police treat any criticism of the Communist Party of Vietnam as a national security matter, this decree will provide them with yet another tool to suppress dissent," said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. The decree requires tech giants like Facebook and TikTok among other organizations,



Aurangzeb remark row: BJP, SP face off over Azmi's comment

NEW DELHI: Mughal emperor Aurangzeb became a political flashpoint between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Samajwadi Party (SP), yet again! The controversy that began with SP leader Abu Azmi's remark hailing Aurangzeb snowballed into a massive slugfest after Azmi was suspended from the Maharashtra assembly on Wednesday for his statement. Weighing into the controversy, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath lashed out at Azmi, while SP chief Akhilesh Yadav backed his party leader and called the action an attempt to muzzle the truth. Addressing the UP assembly, Yogi Adityanath challenged Akhilesh Yadav to expel Azmi over his remark, saying: "Remove that person from (Samajwadi) party and send him to UP, we will do his treatment." Adityanath also questioned Azmi's legitima-



cy to stay in the country, saying: "The person who feels ashamed about the heritage of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and considers Aurangzeb his idol, does he have the right to stay in our country?" On the contrary, Akhilesh Yadav hit out at the BJP over Azmi's suspension, calling it the action against his party leader was an attempt to "silence the truth". "If suspensions start being influenced by ideology, then what will remain the difference between freedom of expression and subjugation? Whether it's our legislators or parliamentarians, their fearless wisdom is

unparalleled. If some people think that a "suspension" can silence the truth, then it is nothing but the immaturity of their negative thinking," Akhilesh Yadav wrote on X. As the controversy raged, Azmi reacted to his suspension labelling action against him "unfair" and an "injustice" to the "millions of people" he represents. "My suspension from the Maharashtra assembly for the budget session is not just an injustice to me but also to the millions of people I represent. This is an unfair action against me. I would like to ask the Maharashtra government—are there two sets of laws.

Trump orders advisers to destroy Iran if it assassinates him

US President Trump on Tuesday said that he has directed his advisers to destroy Iran if it attempts to take his life. "If they did that they would be obliterated. I've left instructions if they do it, they get obliterated, there won't be anything left," Trump said to reporters while signing an executive order calling for the US government to impose maximum pressure on Tehran. For years, American authorities have been monitoring Iranian threats targeting Trump and other administration officials. In 2020, Trump authorised the elimination of Qassem



Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force. A credible Iranian threat to Trump's safety prompted increased security measures before a July campaign rally in Pennsylvania where Trump sustained

an ear wound. However, officials indicated that Iran was not believed to be involved in that attack. In November, the Justice Department revealed they had prevented an Iranian scheme to assassinate Trump prior to the presidential election.

MAGA Civil War: Why Indian-Americans, the new Jews, are irking Donald Trump supporters

There's a theory out there—wild, audacious, but surprisingly hard to dismiss—that just about everything worth celebrating in Western civilization was dreamed up, built, or perfected by Jews. From splitting the atom to decoding life itself, from rewriting the

rules of music to redefining what it means to be human, Jewish brilliance turned the world into their intellectual playground. Let's take a stroll down the hall of fame: J. Robert Oppenheimer, the "father of the atomic bomb," quite literally blew the lid off 20th-

century science. Albert Einstein, the cosmic poet, bent time and space to his will. Jonas Salk saved millions from polio, and Rosalind Franklin cracked the code of life itself with her DNA discoveries. And that's just the lab coats.

Aga Khan: Billionaire and jet-setter spiritual leader

Prince Karim Al-Hussaini who, at 20, became the 49th hereditary Imam or spiritual leader of Shia Ismaili Muslims, and led the community with a blend of modernity and entrepreneurial flair, died Tuesday in Lisbon. He was 88. As founder-chairman of Aga Khan Development Network, the Aga Khan IV, as he is known, will also be remembered for endowments that helped restore the iconic Humayun's Tomb and Sunder Nursery in Delhi along with the Qutub Shah Tombs near Golconda Fort in Hyderabad, writes Mohammed Wajihuddin. The restoration of the gardens at Humayun's Tomb, in fact, was a gift on the 50th anniversary of India's Independence. The Aga Khan himself visited India in Sept 2013 to inaugurate the



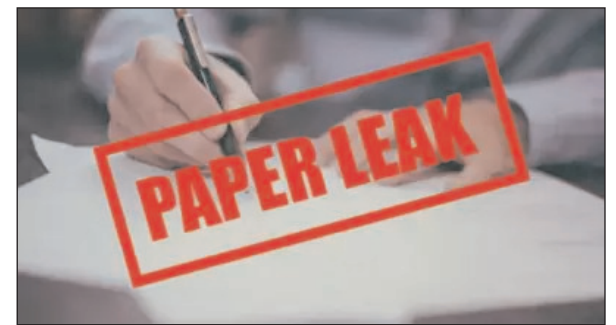
restored Tomb. Suave and soft-spoken, Prince Karim commanded respect globally for his modern outlook and interpretation of Islam as a thinking faith that teaches compassion and tolerance. Late Wednesday, Prince Karim's son Rahim Al-Hussaini was named the new Aga Khan. Unlike most Muslim spiritual

leaders who are bearded, Prince Karim was clean shaven and donned contemporary attire. The jet-setting spiritual leader was also counted among the world's wealthiest people. According to The New York Times, the Aga Khan's fortune was variously estimated at \$1 billion to \$13 billion, with a substantial family

inheritance as well as private investments in luxury hotels, airlines and racehorses. He had a global following of approximately 15 million. The projects he supported ranged from health initiatives in developing countries to upscale development on the island of Sardinia in the Mediterranean Sea. The Aga Khans have a strong connection with India. Hasan Ali Shah, the 46th Imam of the Shia Ismailis who was bestowed the title of the Aga Khan (commanding chief) after he deported immigrants for questioning after their arrival in Amritsar married the then Shah of Iran Fatehali Shah Kachar's daughter, emigrated to India in the early 1840s and settled in Mumbai (then Bombay).

After paper leak, RRB moves to computer-based job exams

NEW DELHI: The railway ministry on Wednesday roped in the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) to conduct all departmental promotion examinations through a centralised computer-based test. This comes a day after CBI arrested 26 officials of the East Central Railway for allegedly leaking papers of a departmental examination and seized Rs 1.2 crore cash during raids. "All zonal railways will make a calendar for the examination. All the examinations will be conducted on the basis of a calendar only," the



ministry said. It added RRB has been given the responsibility after considering its experience of transparent, fair and highly appreciated examinations conducted in recent years. As per the railways, since 2015, more than 7.7 crore candidates have appeared in exams through com-

puter-based tests without any paper leakage, impersonation, remote log-in and use of spy devices. It said the fair examination has been made possible due to selection of exam-conducting agencies through open tender with the criteria of 'quality and cost based selection.'

Army jawan 'deserts' unit for job abroad



PANCHKULA: An Indian Army havildar has allegedly deserted his unit in Chandimandir in Haryana's Panchkula, leaving behind a hand-written note mentioning that he has got a visa and is going abroad to pursue his dream job. Non-commissioned officer unit supervisor Vinay Kumar Tiwari

filed a police complaint, stating that havildar Yaali Ansari was last seen during the morning physical training session on March 4.

When his colleagues went to look for him, they found his military I-card and a note on his bed, the complaint added. Ansari wrote in the

note he was feeling unwell for the past couple of months and had been trying to get a visa to go abroad. Ansari also wrote that he had not informed his family about his decision and had left behind his Armed Forces Personnel Provident Fund amount and salary, totalling Rs 10 lakh, added the FIR.

Japan Airlines plane collides with parked Delta Airlines aircraft at Seattle-Tacoma

A Japan Airlines aircraft collided with a parked Delta Airlines plane while taxiing at Seattle-Tacoma Airport on Wednesday morning, causing damage to both planes but no injuries were reported. The incident took place at 10:17 am when the moving aircraft's wing struck the tail section of the parked Delta aircraft. Travellers at the airport shared photographs on social media platforms showing the Japan Airlines wing sliced halfway through the Delta aircraft's tail section. The airport authorities said that the incident caused minimal disruption to regular operations. "There are no injuries reported at this time. SEA is working with both airlines to safely deplane passengers and bring them to the terminal," the airport's said. The collision happened when the the aviation

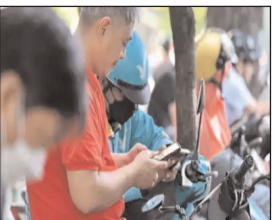


sector is facing heightened concerns in the US. A collision between a US Army helicopter and an American Airlines aircraft at Reagan National Airport claimed 67 lives just a week ago. Later, in Philadelphia, a medical transport aircraft crashed onto a crowded street and burst into flames, resulting in seven fatalities - six aboard the aircraft and one pedestrian. Adding to these incidents, the Federal Aviation Administration's Notice to Air Missions system (NOTAM), crucial for communicating

flight safety information, experienced a failure on Saturday night. Although the system was restored by Sunday, the disruption had already caused hundreds of flight delays across the network. A Japan Airlines aircraft collided with a parked Delta Airlines plane at Seattle-Tacoma Airport, causing damage but no injuries. The incident led to minimal disruption. This collision adds to recent aviation accidents, heightening concerns in the sector. The Federal Aviation Administration's NOTAM system also experienced.

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A new internet law in Vietnam, Decree 147, gives the government increased control over internet access and content in the name of national security and social order. It mandates tech companies to store user data, verify accounts, and remove deemed illegal content within 24 hours. Critics argue this suppresses free speech and impacts livelihoods. A new internet law that gives the Vietnamese government expanded powers over internet services and people using them is set to officially take effect Wednesday. Decree 147 expands government control over access to information on the internet for reasons of "national security" and "social order." The law requires social media platforms providing services to users in Vietnam to store user data and provide it to authorities on demand. The government issued the decree this November, and it requires organizations to take down anything the authorities consider "illegal content" within 24 hours. Decree 147 has sparked concerns, with researchers and experts tracking the country saying that the law is part of a growing crackdown on civil society. "Because the Vietnamese police treat any criticism of the Communist Party of Vietnam as a national security matter, this decree will provide them with yet another tool to suppress dissent," said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. The decree requires tech giants like Facebook and TikTok among other organizations, to verify user accounts using people's phone numbers or personal identification numbers.



Ayodhya a meeting ground of Sanatan Dharma and Sikhism: Puri



NEW DELHI: Asserting that Ayodhya is a living proof of the strong unbreakable ties between Hindus and Sikhs, union minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Tuesday said the revered land has been visited by the Sikh Gurus and it was on instructions of Shri Guru Gobind Singhji that a Nihang army fought with the Mughals to protect the birthplace of Lord Ram.

In a series of posts on X following his visit to the Ram Lalla Temple and Gurudwara in Ayodhya, the minister highlighted the holy city's historic significance. "When religion was in danger in Ayodhya, on the instructions of Sahib-e-Kamal Shri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the Nihang army fought with the Mughals and defeated them to protect the birthplace of Shri Ram. Guru Ji's teachings and ideals for the protection of religion and humanity are a source of inspiration for all of us," Puri stated. The minister

further said, "He must also be feeling happy after seeing the temple of Lord Shri Ram Lala Sarkar... The contribution of Pujya Guru Ji in the struggle and wait for Shri Ram Mandir can be experienced by coming here. I was overwhelmed by coming here," he added.

Puri, who is union minister of petroleum and natural gas, also highlighted the efforts of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in untying the tangled knot of history. "Due to the efforts of PM Narendra Modi, the tangled knot of history got unraveled and the country got the legacy of centuries-old patience. After countless sacrifices, renunciation and

austerity, the country got a 'Rashtra Mandir' in the form of Lord Shri Ram's temple. We are fortunate to have witnessed this," he said. The Pran Pratishtha of Lord Ram Lalla idol in the grand temple in Ayodhya was done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January last year. Puri said the court in its verdict had also referred to history and Guru Nanak Dev's visit to Ayodhya. "Ayodhya is a living proof of the strong unbreakable ties between Hindus and Sikhs. The evidence is present. The first available evidence in the history of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi struggle is of the worship of Nihang Sikh Fakir Khalsa.

Maharashtra MLA Abu Azmi suspended from assembly over Aurangzeb remark



NEW DELHI:

Maharashtra MLA and Samajwadi Party (SP) leader Abu Azmi was suspended from the state assembly on Wednesday over his controversial remark on Mughal tyrant Aurangzeb. Azmi has been suspended till the end of Maharashtra's ongoing budget session. Azmi's statement stroked a controversy after he had claimed that India flourished under Aurangzeb's reign. Reacting to his suspension, Azmi called the action against him "unfair" and "injustice" to the "millions of people" he represents. "My suspension from the Maharashtra assembly for the budget session is not just an injustice to me but also to the millions of people I represent. This is an unfair action against me. I would like to ask the Maharashtra government—are there two sets of laws in the state? One law for Abu Asim Azmi and another for

and the writers have already said about the Mughal ruler and that it was in no manner against Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj or Sambhaji Maharaj adding that his "words were twisted". In a sharp-worded criticism, deputy CM Eknath Shinde called Azmi "traitor". "Azmi is a traitor and has no right to sit in the assembly. He has always been insulting Chhatrapati Shivaji and Sambhaji Maharaj," Shinde said. FIRs were registered against Azmi for hurting religious sentiments and defamation under the BNS, even as the MLA from Mankhurd-Shivaji Nagar issued a statement saying his remarks were in the context of the film "Chhava", which depicts the conflict between Chhatrapati Sambhaji Maharaj and Aurangzeb. Soon after Abu Azmi's suspension, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav hit out at the BJP, saying the action against his party leader.

Bank staff, 3 others use idle IDs to siphon Rs 12 crore from 2 accounts, held

BENGALURU: Karnataka police have arrested an Axis Bank relationship manager in Rajkot and three others in an interstate cybercrime and financial fraud after the four allegedly embezzled over Rs 12 crore from Bengaluru-based Dreamplug Paytech Solutions Pvt Ltd, the operator of Cred, a rewards-based credit card payment platform. The accused include relationship manager Vaibhav Pithadiya (29), a banking agent from Surat Parmar Neha Ben Vipulbhai (26), an insurance agent and Vaibhav's colleague Shailesh (29), and a commission agent from Rajkot Shubham (26). The arrests were made following a complaint by Dreamplug executive Narasimha Vasanth Sastry. The fraud came to light on Nov 12 when Dreamplug executives identified suspicious transactions in their company accounts. Investigations revealed that Rs 12.2 crore was siphoned off from two Axis Bank accounts over 14 days between Oct 29 and Nov 11. The accused gained unauthorised access to Dreamplug's accounts by manipulating key details. They submitted forged documents, including fake signatures and board resolutions, to request changes to the registered mobile number and email ID linked to the accounts. These changes, approved by Axis Bank despite discrepancies, allowed the fraudsters to intercept OTPs and initiate 37 fraudulent transactions. Dreamplug said the fraudulent activity was facilitated by requests submitted at Axis Bank branches in Ankleshwar (July 22) and Abrama in Surat (Oct 12).

'Like a VIP Maharaja': BJP, Congress target Kejriwal over 'lavish convoy' in Punjab



NEW DELHI: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) chief Arvind Kejriwal on Wednesday came under fire as the rival BJP and Congress party criticised the ex-Delhi chief minister for using "VIP convoy" without having a constitutional post. Kejriwal, who reached the AAP-ruled Punjab for "Vipassana" on Tuesday, served as MLA from the New Delhi constituency before the humiliating defeat in the assembly polls last month. Highlighting Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann's absence from the convoy, the BJP lashed out

at Kejriwal, calling it "VIP arrogance at its peak". BJP leader and Delhi minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa shared a quote from Greek philosopher Plato to corner Kejriwal over his Punjab visit, questioning why the Punjab taxpayers' money was used for

"funding" Kejriwal's "Vipassana". "Arvind Kejriwal, who once pretended to be a common man in a WagonR, now moves in a lavish convoy of bulletproof Land Cruisers, 100+ Punjab Police commandos, jammers & ambulances—like a VIP Maharaja all for

Vipassana, a retreat meant for peace! If power was his test, he has failed miserably. What kind of 'Vipassana' requires a grand security parade funded by Punjab taxpayers? Even CM Bhagwant Mann isn't in the convoy! AAP's truth is out—deception, hypocrisy, and VIP arrogance at its peak!" Sirsa wrote on X. The Congress party also spared no words to slam Kejriwal. In a dig, Congress MP Pramod Tiwari said "maybe Kejriwal couldn't handle the defeat [in Delhi assembly polls]."

'Whether she is DGP's, CM's or PMs daughter, law same for all': Karnataka CM



NEW DELHI: Following the arrest of Kannada actress Ranya Rao in the alleged gold smuggling case, Karnataka government asserted that the law applies equally to everyone. "She is an accused for indulging in smuggling. The law will take its course, whether she is the DGP's, the CM's or the prime minister's daughter... If there is any official nexus involved in this, it will come out in the investigation," Karnataka chief minister's legal adviser AS Ponnanna said. Rao's arrest follows allegations of her

involvement in smuggling 14.8 kilograms of gold from Dubai to India. She is the step-daughter of Karnataka's Director General of Police (DGP) K Ramachandra Rao and was detained by DRI officials at

Kempegowda International Airport (KIAD) after arriving on an Emirates flight from Dubai. Acting on a tip-off about her suspected involvement in gold smuggling, authorities had stationed a team at

the airport in anticipation of her arrival. Also read: Gold worth Rs 12.56 crore seized from actress Ranya Rao at Bengaluru Airport After her flight landed, Ranya Rao was arrested by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) and taken into custody. On March 4, 2025, she was presented before a special court for financial offenses, which remanded her to judicial custody until March 18. Before her transfer, she underwent a medical examination at Bowring Hospital in Bengaluru.

At 11%, UP tops 2024 list of JEE (Advanced) candidates



NEW DELHI: Eleven per cent of candidates appearing for Joint Entrance Examination-Advanced (JEE-Advanced) 2024 — the gateway to 23 Indian Institutes of technology (IITs) — will be from Uttar Pradesh.

An analysis of JEE (Main) qualification data also revealed that of the 2.5 lakh candidates who qualified to take the IIT entrance, more than 54% are from just six states and nearly 73% from 10 states. Moreover, though over 75% of the registered candidates opted to take both (Jan and April) sessions of the JEE (Main), which is also an entrance test for centrally funded tech-

nical institutions and others, just around 28% of them managed to improve their results in the second sitting. JEE (Advanced) is considered one of the toughest competitive exams in India, where aspirants must first qualify among the top 2.5 lakh in the JEE (Main) and then compete for 17,000 odd

seats in IITs. Uttar Pradesh (28,300+), Maharashtra (24,500+) and Telangana (24,100+) not only continue to dominate the results, these top three states also account for more than one-third (30.7%) of the total candidates eligible for JEE (Advanced). There are 11 states which have more than 11,000.

'Only a hypocrite would question more funds for Sanskrit over Tamil': BJP



NEW DELHI: Bharatiya Janata Party on Wednesday took a swipe at Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin over asking more fund for Tamil than "dead language like Sanskrit."

In a post on X, BJP Tamil Nadu President K Annamalai questioned Stalin's efforts to spread Tamil beyond the state and claimed that the Tamil Nadu CM deliberately de-spiritualised Thiruvalluvar to suit his propaganda. "Thiru @mkstalin, instead of listing what you have done to propagate our Tamil language beyond the confines of our State, knowing there aren't any, you've decided to move on to the next topic. It was not our

claim; it is a reality, and the Sengol today also stands as a testament in the Parliament to our Hon PM Thiru @narendramodi avl's commitment to spreading the Tamil language and culture. His comments came after Stalin on Wednesday called out BJP's actions, urging them to make Tamil an official language, halt Hindi imposition, and allot more fund for Tamil than Sanskrit.

Stalin said, "Rather than installing Sengol in Parliament, uninstill Hindi from Union government offices in Tamil Nadu. Instead of hollow praise, make Tamil an official language on par with Hindi and allot more funds for Tamil than a dead language like Sanskrit. "He added, "Stop the desperate attempts to saffronise Thiruvalluvar and declare his timeless

classic, Thirukkural, as India's National Book." Replying to Stalin's post, Annamalai said, "Only a Hypocrite would ask about the increased allocation of funds to Sanskrit over Tamil, knowing the rationality behind it very well. We are calling you a "HYPOCRITE" because this is the allocation for the development of Sanskrit & Tamil between 2006-14. Sanskrit: Rs 675.36 Crores Tamil: Rs 75.05 Crores What were you doing back then?" He also asked the Tamil Nadu CM what he did when former home minister Thiru P Chidambaram submitted over 170 recommendations to popularise Hindi nationwide.

Bihar traffic cop shoots dead reveller in 'self-defence'

SASARAM: A police officer opened fire on a group of revellers, purportedly in self-defence, killing a 32-year-old man and injuring two others in Sasaram in Bihar's

Rohtas district on Friday night, reports. Police identified the victim as Rana Om Prakash Singh. His elder brother, Rana Rahul Ranjan, registered an FIR alleging that Om Prakash was shot dead for refusing to bribe the cops. The incident, according to cops, occurred after four men arrived near railway station in an inebriated state. A scuffle broke out between them and a patrolling unit. Traffic DSP Md Adil Bilal witnessed the fight and intervened. During confrontation, one of the youths reportedly fired an air gun.