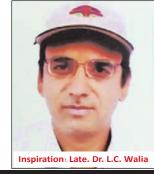
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Farm sector can't stay closed, open it up, at least in part: **US urges India**

Vatika Times

NEW DELHI: US commerce secretary Howard Lutnick called upon India to open up the agricultural sector for trade, saying "it just can't stay closed".

The farm sector has remained a nogo area for government that has cited domestic sensitivities, even as US has insisted on greater access for American nuts, fruits and poultry. "Indian market for agriculture has to open up... How you do that and the scale by which you do that, may be, do quotas, may be do limits. You can be smarter when you have your most important trading partner on the other side of the table," he said, indicating that the US acknowledged that an openended liberalisation may not be

While suggesting that India should "step out of the model" he repeatedly called for a bilateral deal, arguing that a pact "with the largest consuming economy in the world" would be beneficial.

Speaking at the India Today Conclave, Lutnick sought a "grand deal": "Let's bring India's tariff policy towards America down, and America will invite India to have really an extraordinary opportunity and relationship with us."

Responding to a question on the larger India-US ties amid too much emphasis on trade and tariffs during Trump's second term, he said: "there are plenty of levers that govts can pull while doing business with each other.

Jan Aushadhi guarantees cheap treatment: Prime Minister

Vatika Times

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said on Jan Aushadhi Diwas that the central government will open 25,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras across the country to provide affordable and quality generic medicines. The Prime Minister said this while addressing the gathering after inaugurating and laying the foundation stone of several development projects worth more than Rs 2580 crore for the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu at a program in Silvassa. The Prime Minister said that today is also Jan Aushadhi Diwas. He described Jan Aushadhi as a guarantee of cheap treatment. He said that the mantra of Jan Aushadhi is Daam Kam, Dawai Mein Daam'. Modi said that our government is also building good hospitals, providing free treatment under Ayushman Yojana and also providing cheap medicines through Jan Aushadhi Kendras. In the coming years, we are moving ahead with the target of opening 25,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras across the country. So far, the government has sold cheap medicines worth more than Rs 6,400



crore, which is expected to save more than Rs 30,000 crore to the beneficiaries. Prime Minister expressed concern over the obesity of the countrymen and stressed the need to reduce the consumption of edible oil. Citing a report, he said that by 2050, 44 crore Indians will be obese. He called it a shocking and dangerous figure. He warned that every third person can suffer from serious diseases due to obesity. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday described the role of nutritious food as important in the journey of developed India and said that our goal is to provide adequate nutrition to every family in the country to get rid of problems like malnutrition and anemia. The Minister was Prime addressing the public meeting after launching the Surat Food Security

Saturation Campaign in Gujarat. The Prime Minister said that the Surat Food Saturation Security Campaign is a remarkable step in the country's food and nutrition security mission. He said that Surat is a leading city in the country as well as Guiarat in many matters. Surat is today leading in providing food and nutritional security to poor and deprived.Modi said that this saturation campaign will leave the feeling of appeasement and promote the feeling of satisfaction. He said that this saturation campaign being run in Surat will also become an inspiration for other districts of Gujarat and the rest of the states of the country. He said that when the government itself is going to the door of the beneficiary, how will anyone be left out.

Stalin vs BJP: Why Congress, INDIA bloc are in a fix over delimitation

Vatika Times New Delhi

Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin is on a warpath with the BJP-led NDA government. The two major issues at the center of the now almost everyday war of words are delimitation and the Hindi "imposition" row concerning the National Education Policy (NEP).

On Friday, Stalin wrote to his counterparts of seven states, including Bengal's Mamata



Banerjee, Bhagwant Mann, and also BJP-ruled Odisha's Mohan Chandra Majhi to fight the delimitation exercise. Stalin also wrote to the chief of political parties if these

forces to chart a "collective course forward." Stalin has claimed that the representation of the South in the Lok Sabha would be reduced due to delimitation exercise.

states proposing the

inaugural joint action

committee meeting in

Chennai on March 22,

urging the leaders to join

If the current 543 Lok Sabha seats remain, Tamil Nadu could lose eight seats.

Manipur: Bandh over arrest of armed men paralyses normal life

Vatika Times

IMPHAL: Normal life was affected in the five districts of Imphal Valley on Saturday due to a bandh called over the arrest of six armed men and the death of one in a gunfight with the police in Thoubal on December 14. Shops and other commercial establishments closed, while public vehicles remained off the road.Supporters of the bandh, called by the Joint Action Committee, demonstrated in the middle of the road and burnt tyres at Lamphel Sanakeithel in Imphal

West.In Bishnupur district. bandh supporters vandalised four-wheelers that were out on the roads. The 24-hour shutdown began at 6pm on Friday. It was supported by the students' and women's wings of the Coordination Committee on Manipur Integrity (COCOMI), a conglomeration of several Meitei civil society bodies. Police said that the six persons it arrested and the one killed in the gunfight at Salungpham in Thoubal were members of the banned outfit PREPAK who were allegedly involved in extortion.

Cold wave to grip **North India from** Sunday; Delhi sees wettest December

NEW DELHI: The India Meteorological Department on Sunday forecasts cold wave conditions across North India starting from Sunday, December 29, as per a statement released by the agency. From December 29 to January 1, isolated cold wave conditions will affect Himachal Pradesh, while Punjab and Haryana will face similar conditions until January 3. Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, and Rajasthan may also experience cold wave conditions December 30 and 31.

Just hours after threatening Russia with sanctions, Trump says he trusts Putin

Vatika Times NEW DELHI:

US President Donald Trump on Friday claimed that he finds working with Russia "easier" than Ukraine over his ongoing efforts to end the war between the two countries.While briefing the media from the Oval office in White House, Trump said that he trust Russian President Vladimir Putin."I believe him," he

"I'm finding it more difficult frankly to deal with Ukraine and they don't have the

High court comes to aid of ex-soldier's kin, grants disability pension

CHANDIGARH: Punjab and Haryana HC has ordered that a disability pension be granted to the legal heirs of a soldier who was discharged on medical grounds for neurosis which manifested as recurrent nightmares after his lover killed herself, reports Ajay Sura. A division bench compris-

ing Justice Sureshwar Thakur and Justice Sudeepti Sharma passed these orders recently while allowing a plea filed by a former Indian Army gunner from Punjab's Hoshiarpur. The petitioner, who had moved HC in 2020, died on May 14, 2021, during the pendency of the case, which was represented by his legal heirs after his death. The soldier was enrolled in the Indian Army on July 30, 1971., in a fit state of health and was invalided out of service from March 3, 1979



cards. It may be easier dealing with Russia," he added. This came just hours after Trump threatened Russia saying that he is "strongly considering" levying new sanctions and tariffs for its war against Ukraine.

Trump, in a post on his Truth Social platform, said he was considering the action "based on the fact that Russia is absolutely 'pounding' Ukraine on the battlefield right now."

"To Russia and Ukraine, get to the table right now, hefore it is too late "Trump added in his post.

Earlier, Trump had also paused the military aid and intelligence sharing with Kyiv.Days earlier, he and Vice President JD Vance publicly rebuked Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, accusing him of lacking gratitude for US military support.

Afghan forces hit back after deadly Pakistani airstrikes

Vatika Times

Afghanistan's defence ministry reported launching retaliatory strikes on Pakistani positions after Pakistan's recent airstrikes in Paktika province caused significant casualties, including women and children. The Taliban claimed their response targeted militant hideouts used to plan attacks in Afghanistan, while Pakistan insisted the Taliban are not sufficiently curbing cross-border militant activities. A Pakistani paramilitary soldier died and seven others sustained injuries during cross-border fire exchanges with Afghan forces, according to a security source on Saturday. Meanwhile, hundreds of Afghans demonstrated against the deadly Pakistani air strikes carried out last

Tuesday that sparked the clashes. Officials from both nations reported sporadic fighting, including the use of heavy armaments, occurring overnight between border forces along the frontier sep-

arating Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and Afghanistan's province. These exchanges of fire followed accusations by Afghanistan's Taliban authorities that Pakistan had caused 46 fatalities, mostly women, i

n air strikes near the border in Paktika province this week.A senior Pakistani security source indicated they had targeted "terrorist hideouts", although Islamabad has not formally acknowledged.

conducting the bombardment.."One frontier corps (FC) soldier has been reported dead, and seven others have been injured," a senior security source at the border informed AFP, noting that clashes occurred in at least two locations in Pakistan's Kurram border district.

The Afghan defence ministry said on X that "several points" across the Pakistani border "where the attacks in Afghanistan were organised were targeted in retalia-

Governor presented the vision of developed Haryana-developed India

Vatika Times

Chandigarh The budget session of the Assembly began with the address of Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatreya. The Governor first of all saluted all the members of Assembly Constituent including the architect of the Constitution, Bharat Ratna Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and presented the vision of developed Haryana-developed India. The Governor called upon the members to make good use of every moment of the House's time and give priority to public interest so that there is no obstacle in the achievement of the resoludeveloped of Haryana-developed India. He expressed hope that



sion and this House will be successful in fulfilling the aspirations of the people Haryana.Bandaru Dattatreya said that 75 years of our republic have been completed and on this occasion, Constitution-Our Respect' campaign is being run across the country. It is there will be constructive a matter of pride that eight great men of Haryana -

Pandit Thakur Bhargava, Master Nandlal, Chaudhary Ranbir Singh Hooda, Lala Deshbandhu Gupta, Chaudhary Nihal Singh Takshak, Bhargava, Gopichand Chaudhary Surajmal Advocate and Pandit Shriram Sharma made significant contributions in the

Constituent Assembly. Our

Constitution gives equal rights to every citizen of our vast country with unity in diversity. The Governor also paid homage to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the immortal symbol of national unity, and Bharat former Ratna Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.He said that the whole world has seen the proof of the great cultural unity of the country in the form of Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj recently.The state government is developing Haryana with good intentions, determination, honesty and workBandaru Dattatreya said that the state government is continuously working with good intentions, determination, honesty and hard work to take Haryana to new heights in terms of development and public welfare.

Musk responds to tech CEO who asked if foreign-born workers are really taking jobs

discussions during the ses-

Amjad Masad, who is the CEO of Replit – an online integrated development environment (IDE) which allows users to write,



run, and share code without the need for local setup – posted on X asked for an evidence to support the claim that qualified Americans are being passed over for tech jobs in favor of foreign workers.

"Genuinely curious: Are there actual instances where qualified native born Americans couldn't get jobs in tech because foreigners took all of them? I'd be surprised if it's true because at any given point there are hundreds of thousands of unfilled jobs in tech."

To this, Musk replied by saying that there has always been a shortage on engineering talent in the country. "There is a permanent shortage of excellent engineering talent. It

Major powers should not bully weak': China slams Trump's 'two-faced acts'

Vatika Times

"The US shouldn't return good with evil or even impose arbitrary tariffs on Chinese products," Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi

China on Friday vowed to retaliate against the United States for its "arbitrary tariffs," accusing Washington of unfairly penalizing Beijing despite China's cooperation on key global issues. Speaking at a press conference Friday on the sidelines of China's annual par-



liamentary session, foreign minister Wang Yi criticized the US for implementing punitive tariffs while benefiting from China's assistance in tackling its fentanyl crisis.

Why it matters

The US recently imposed new tariffs on

China, Canada, and Mexico over accusations of fentanyl smuggling. Beijing, which has repeatedly asserted that it has taken substantial steps to curb the export of fentanyl precursor chemicals, views the latest tariffs as unjustified. The escalating trade measures mark a continuation of economic hostilities that have intensified since US President Donald Trump's return to office."No country should fantasize that it can suppress China.

Editorial

Beijing might claim that packing the plateau

Ritu Walia

Therefore, the frontier highway will also be an economic asset, apart from being a strategic masterstroke. This will also develop a connectivity conduit by interlinking the East-West Industrial Corridor Highway and the Trans-Arunachal Highway. It will also discourage migration from the border space to urban areas. The development will become more distributive than concentric. Pressure on the urban space will be primarily eased. The volatilities of the border space and Chinese hegemonic gravity will be minimised because of India's fully prepared, vigilant presence in the

The Myanmar chapter is currently in the doldrums. The Chinese alleged involvement in derailing democratic government there disturbs the geopolitics in the region, which imposes a cloud of uncertainty around India's infrastructure projects in Myanmar. Given the geopolitical complexity in the region, India makes measured strategic progress and anchors its hold firmly and irreplaceably. Building tunnels, bridges, airports, railroads, highways, etc, has become part of the process that systematically ensures India's strength and resilience. On the contrary, China's determined efforts in building highways, tunnels, bridges, railways, etc, on the Tibetan Plateau explain its preparedness. The skirmishes it indulges in along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) indicate its ulterior motive. Though Beijing might claim that packing the plateau with high-tech infrastructure is mainly for the economic development of Tibet, the territorial desires embedded in this exercise cannot be ignored. The Nyingchi-Lhasa rail line and highway that Beijing has built, as well as some sections that remain under construction, come close to the McMahon Line. Its concept of reconstituting border villages and a host of other things are symptoms of the region's complex geopolitics. Chinese brinkmanship has been primarily responsible for the disturbed geopolitics of the region. Much of these crises is expected to be resolved by the frontier highway. Therefore, India puts the required effort in the right direction to ease these tensions in the region.

West Siang, Upper Siang, Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang Valley, Anjaw, and Changlang in Arunachal Pradesh adjoining

Tibet and Myanmar is a geostrategic milestone. It was conceived in 2016 and is expected to be completed in 2027. Work in this direction has started at a quick pace. This shows the urgency and importance India gives to its terri-

The infrastructural development that China has brought along the McMahon Line is quite extensive. The frontier highway is a precise and direct response to this and to curb China's irrationality. The highway will become an allweather road to handle any geopolitical and geostrategic pressure likely to emanate from the other side of the border. From Tawang to Vijayanagar, which covers the entire border space in Arunachal Pradesh, the frontier highway is a milestone in India's robust preparedness in the eastern Himalayas. The dragon finds a fitting competitor. The scale with which China develops its infrastructural might, both at the border and in the hinterland, the frontier highway is a geostrategic imperative. The risk these complex infrastructures present leaves no scope for a second thought but to act urgently to protect the territorial integrity of India. The frontier highway manifests India's right intent and seriousness in addressing the possible dangers that the enemy constantly poses. The frontier highway will present the required checkmate to Chinese bullying attitudes in the region. Beijing's reaction to these infrastructural initiatives is not new. It always does this to keep itself relevant in the thick of things. However, it has no business in making any comment as Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of the sovereign India. China uses this drama to keep the issue alive and effectively uses its propaganda

Well-functioning market requires a suitable regulatory role of the state

Deepesh Sharma

The Modi government's main move in the Union Budget 2025 has been to cut personal income tax. As finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her speech, it is meant to boost demand in the economy. However, the government doesn't expect a higherthan-usual increase in other non-debt receipts and has budgeted a decline in the deficit. The budgeted capital expenditure is the same as the revised estimates for 2024-25.The tax cut should be seen in the context of other fiscal policy moves the Modi government has made in the last decade to boost growth.Since 2016, the Indian economy has struggled to sustain rapid growth. From 2016 to 2019, it was in a relentless showdown, with GDP growth falling to 3.9 per cent in 2019-20. The GDP then fell sharply in 2020-21 due to the pandemic.After this sharp decline, high GDP growth numbers created a false sense of complacency, but the compound annual growth rate between 2019-20 and 2024-25 is only 4.8 per cent. The latest GDP estimates suggest that the economy is slowing down again with growth clocking at 5.4 per cent in the July-September quarter of 2024. Even if we set aside the critiques of GDP estimation in India, growth remains a topic of concern in policy conversations.The government's response to an economic challenge depends on what it considers to be the root cause. The Modi government's actions over the past



decade suggest that it seeks to address India's economic growth pangs through fiscal policy. Consequently, fiscal policy has done much of the heavy lifting in the government's growth strategy over the past decade.In the economic slowdown from 2016-17 to 2019-20, the government sought to maintain its expenditure. To do so without increasing the reported fiscal deficit, from 2017-18 to 2019-20, it transformed a significant part of its onbudget expenditure into offbudget expenditure done by public enterprises. It also sharply raised cesses and surcharges on petroleum products, which are not shared with the states. These unusual tactics allowed the government to spend more, and expenditure continued outpace growth.These tactics also allowed the government to introduce new cash transfer schemes such as PM KISAN and increase allocations to existing schemes.In 2019, in an effort to stimulate investment, the government announced major tax breaks for corporates, especially in manufacturing. At the time, corporate tax collection had

been growing rapidly while other taxes were struggling to deliver the budgeted increase. The tax cut led to a sharp reduction in the corporate tax to GDP ratio in the subsequent years.As the pandemic hit, fiscal policy became even more central. The pandemic allowed the government to suspend its concern for deficits and bring the off-budget expenditure to the Budget in 2020-21. For a few years, revenue expenditure as a percentage of GDP was higher than its prepandemic levels. Among other things, this allowed the government to increase subsidies and cash transfers, and introduce production-linked incentives for manufacturing in India. Total subsidies as a percentage of GDP have now gone back to their pre-pandemic levels.The most important change in expenditure since the pandemic has been in its composition. Of the Union government's total expenditure, the share of capital expenditure has increased. Its share rose from 12.5 per cent of total expenditure in 2019-20 to 22.2 per cent in 2023-24.In 2019-20, capital expenditure

was 1.67 per cent of GDP. It

rose to 3.21 per cent. in 2023-24, before moderating to 3.14 per cent in 2024-25 (revised estimates). It is again budgeted to be 3.14 per cent of GDP in 2025-26.At the same time, there was a reduction in capital expenditure by public enterprises in these years. If we consider the combined capital expenditure by the Union government and its public enterprises from the prepandemic years, there has been a decline.Between 2017-18 and 2019-20, the combined capital expenditure was 4.94 per cent of GDP, while it has been only 4.32 per cent of GDP between 2022-23 and 2024-25. This probably shows the limitations of implementation capacity that a capital expenditure strategy tends to run into.So, in the last decade, the government has tried a variety of fiscal tactics—from increasing expenditure by "creatively" easing the Budget constraints, to giving generous corporate tax cuts, to introducing new welfare schemes, to increasing on-budget capital expenditure. The cut in the personal income tax is the latest in this series of measures. If this does not work, there are other arrows in the fiscal quiver—cut in GST, for instance. The fiscal policy landscape in India is such that there are always some instruments at the government's disposal, especially because it borrows domestically for the most part, that too, through financial institutions it controls.All this tells us something about the govhow the economy works and what the challenges are. The government probably does not see deeper problems in the political economy. Now that it has made so many fiscal policy interventions, perhaps it should consider whether these can truly address the growth pangs of the Indian economy. The fundamental challenge for the Indian economy for over a decade has been the lack of revival of private investment and the lackadaisical performance of merchandise exports. While the latter performed well for about six quarters in the post-pandemic period, this was due to temporary opportunities created at that time—the exports are now back to low growth. Similarly, there have been a few quarters of better private investment activity in recent years, but we are not yet in a period of revival.On the other hand, some highproductivity services sectors continue to be the silver lining. The IT services exports have continued to grow and export services such as business and management consultancy as well as public relations have doubled from the pre-pandemic years. The FM's Budget speech and Economic Survey 2024-25 hinted at actions beyond fiscal policy—deregulation and tax code simplification. Depending on what reforms will follow, these can be steps in the right direction. However, two points are worth considering.

First, mere deregulation is not enough—a well-functioning market requires a ernment's explanation of suitable regulatory role.

It shouldn't take anybody that much time to explain the applicable tax rates

Swati

While this may seem like a trivialisation of GST, it actually lays bare how the system has now rebounded on its initial promise of bringing ease of doing business in the country. The Finance Minister's four-minute explanation on the taxation of popcorn highlighted how complex the system has become. It shouldn't take anybody that much time to explain the applicable tax rates on a single product. Since then, GST has been ridiculed, derided, lamented about, and generally panned by laypeople and even former government officials who worked on its implementation. That is why India's Goods and Services Tax is ThePrint's Newsmaker of the Week. So, what is the issue behind GST on popcorn? You see, as per the taxman, depending on your taste preferences, popcorn can either be a namkeen (salty) or a salted caramel popcorn.

mithai (sweet) — forget that those two terms have never been used by anyone to refer to popcorn. Readyto-eat popcorn, salted and spiced for taste, and sold loosely attracts a GST rate of 5 per cent. That same popcorn, if packaged and labelled, attracts a rate of 12 per cent. One wonders what happens if the vendor tears open the packet and sells loose popcorn to the customer. Perhaps the universe will explode, who knows? Things get even trickier when you talk about caramel popcorn. Those who prefer this flavour will have to shell out 18 per cent GST, regardless of whether it is packaged or sold loose. Then some head to the movie hall and ask for salted and caramel popcorn mixed together. What happens to them? Over the week, one particular meme stood out among the lot. It was a picture of

A hundred and twenty years later, historians remain sceptical

Suman Singh

machinery to develop.

Circa 1900: Rudyard Kipling wrote Kim, placing the eponymous hero at the centre of the Great Game of espionage between the British Empire and Russia in the 19th century. The book is set after the Second Anglo-Afghan War, which ended in 1881, but before the Third, likely in the period 1893-98. Kim, short for Kimball O'Hara, is an impoverished Irish orphan who lives on the streets of Lahore and works for Mahbub Ali, a Pashtun horse trader. He later befriends an aged Tibetan lama, accompanies him on his journey along the Grand Trunk Road, learns

Mahbub Ali, who works for the British Secret Service in their quest to extend influence in both Afghanistan and Tibet.Whether or not the Great Game—the expression used by British imperialists to describe the perceived expansion of Russian influence in Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Tibet—actually existed, the fact remains that surveys were undertaken, expeditions mounted, spymasters recruited, and novels written, even as soldiers lost their lives. Taking a cue from Viceroy George Curzon, all pro-establishment papers—from the

about the Great Game, and is Civil and Military Gazette of eventually recruited by Lahore to The Pioneer of Lucknow, The Statesman of Calcutta (now Kolkata), and The Times of India of Bombay (now Mumbai)—concurred that Tsarist Russia posed a real threat to the jewel in Britain's crown. A hundred and twenty years later, historians remain sceptical of Curzon's assertions.Is the hue and cry about the Deep State similar to the Great Game? Whether or not it exists, whether it operates in all countries, and whether the 'deep state' of one country is connected with others through the dark web or entrenched corporate inter-

ests remains unclear, as the discourse is more ideological than empirical. Sometimes, those who claim to be part of the deep state ascribe to themselves a larger-than-life role in state affairs—for example, AS Dulat and Asad Durrani in their 2018 book The Spy Chronicles: RAW, ISI and the Illusion of Peace. Their claim to be arbiters of one of the most tense and difficult relationships in the region has been widely critiqued by reviewers.The term first gained wide currency in the context of Türkiye as derin devlet, which literally translates to "deep state" in

The fourth anniversary of the notorious fatwa of the late Imam Khomeini

reminded of what is most beautiful almost leads one to believe in the about religious faith: its ability to give solace and to inspire, its aspiration to these great and lovely heights, in which strength and delicacy are so perfectly conjoined. In addition, to be asked to speak here on this day, the fourth anniversary of the notorious fatwa of the late Imam Khomeini, is a particular honour. When I was an undergraduate at this college, between 1965 and 1968, the years of flower-power and student power. I would have found the notion of delivering an address in King's Chapel pretty far-out, as we used to say; and yet, such are the journeys of one's life that here I stand. I am grateful to the Chapel and the college for extending this invitation, which I take as a gesture of solidarity and support, support not merely for one individual but, much more importantly, for the high moral principles of human rights and human freedoms that the Khomeini edict seeks so brutally to attack. For just as King's Chapel may be taken as a symbol of what is best about religion, so the fatwa has become a symbol of what is worst. It feels all the more appropriate to be speaking here because it was while in my final year of reading history at Cambridge that I came across the story of the so-called satanic verses or temptation of the Prophet Muhammad, and of his rejection of that temptation. That year, I had chosen as one of my special subjects a paper on Muhammad, the rise of Islam, and the caliphate. So few students chose this option that the lectures were cancelled. The other students switched to different special subjects. However, I was anxious to continue, and Arthur Hibbert, one of the King's history dons, agreed to supervise me. So as it happened I was, I think, the only student in

Cambridge who took the paper. The

next year, I'm told, it was not offered To stand in this house is to be again. This is the kind of thing that workings of a hidden hand. The story of the 'satanic verses' can be found, among other places, in the canonical writings of the classical writer al-Tabari. He tells us that on one occasion the Prophet was given verses which seemed to accept the divinity of the three most popular pagan goddesses of Mecca, thus compromising Islam's rigid monotheism. Later he rejected these verses as being a trick of the devil saying that Satan had appeared to him in the guise of the Archangel Gabriel and spoken 'satanic verses.' Historians have long speculated about this incident, wondering if perhaps the nascent religion had been offered a sort of deal by the pagan authorities of the city, which was flirted with and then refused. I felt the story humanized the Prophet, and, therefore made him more accessible, more easily comprehensible to a modern reader, for whom the presence of doubt in a human mind, and human imperfections in a great man's personality, can only make that mind, that personality, more attractive. Indeed, according to the traditions of

> the Prophet, even the Archangel Gabriel was understanding about the incident, assuring him that such things had befallen all the prophets, and that he need not worry about what had happened. It seems that the Archangel Gabriel, and the God in whose name he spoke, was rather more tolerant than some of those who presently affect to speak in the name of God. Khomeini's fatwa itself may be seen as a set of modern satanic verses. In the fatwa, once again, evil takes on the guise of virtue; and the faithful are deceived. It's important to remember what the fatwa is. One cannot properly call it a sentence, since it far exceeds its author's jurisdiction; since it contravenes fundamental principles.

Jharkhand BJP leader Sita Soren alleges assassination attempt by aide at Dhanbad hotel

The accused was identified as Devashish Manoranjan Ghosh. According to officials, Soren's assistant allegedly pointed a handgun at her following an argument.

NEW DELHI: BJP leader Sita Soren has accused her assistant of attempting to shoot her at a hotel in Jharkhand's Dhanbad district, police said on Friday. The accused was identified as Devashish Manoranjan Ghosh.

According to officials, Soren's assistant allegedly pointed a handgun at her private hotel in the shooter, according to the



following an argument. Soren was in Dhanbad to attend a wedding. After the event, she checked into a her life from the alleged

Saraidhela area, where the alleged attack took place. Soren's bodyguard saved

police."Her pounced on Ghosh and saved Sita Soren. After getting the information, the police reached the hotel.

bodyguard

Ghosh was taken into custody and a country-made pistol was also recovered,' Dhanbad DSP (Law & Order) Naushad Alam said.

The accused, Ghosh, had

been accompanying Soren and reportedly drove her car earlier that evening. Following the incident, Soren filed a formal complaint at Saraidhela police station. Police are also investigating whether there was a security lapse that allowed the incident to occur. Sita Soren is the sister-in-law of Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren and a former three-term JMM MLA. Soren had switched from JMM to BJP in March last year, ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. She later contested from Jamtara in the November assembly polls but lost to a JMM candidate.



Amid tariff-for-tariff response from Canada, China, Mexico, India takes a cautious route in trade war

NEW DELHI: The ministry of external affairs on Friday addressed the tariff imposition threat from US President Donald Trump from April 2. The MEA said the country intended to "reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers" with the intention to "deepen India-US two-way trade". Amid stern response from Canada, China and Mexica, who have imposed reciprocal tariffs on the States and have also filed a complaint with the World Trade Organisation, India, in its cautious response said, "Our objective through the BTA is to strengthen and deepen India-US two-way trade across the goods and services sector, increase market access, reduce tariff and non-tariff barriers, and deepen supply chain integration between the two countries." Trump has repeatedly said that India is a high-tariff nation and has expressed his intentions to pull off a tit-for-tat. "And the big one will be on April 2, when reciprocal tariffs, so if India or China, or any of the countries that really...India is a very high tariff nation," he said on

Is Tesla eyeing no tariffs?

The MEA response comes in amid reports of Trump administration pushing for India's consent to eliminate tariffs on automobile imports as part of a proposed bilateral trade deal. However, India remains cautious about bringing the duties down to zero immediately, though it is open to considering potential reductions, sources told Reuters. India imposes import duties of up to 110% on vehicles, a tariff Tesla CEO Elon Musk has criticized as one of the highest globally.

TTP now among deadliest terror groups in the world

Pakistan is grappling with a severe resurgence of terrorism with its homegrown Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) emerging as one of the deadliest terrorist organisations globally, as per the Global Terrorism Index 2025. According to the report, the four terrorist groups responsible

for the most deaths globally in 2024 were Islamic State (IS), Jamaat Nusrat Al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and al-Shabaab. Deaths attributed to these groups increased by 11 per cent to 4,204 deaths in 2024, or 80 per cent of deaths that were and its affiliates remained the

attributed to a specific group. In 2014, these four groups were responsible for less than 40 per cent of terrorism deaths that were attributed to a group, highlighting the large global shifts in terrorism over the past decade. Islamic State (IS)

world's deadliest terrorist group in 2024, and is active in 23 countries, one more than in 2023. Deaths attributed to the group and its affiliates declined by ten per cent, from 1,996 to 1,805 deaths.Of the major terrorist organisations, TTP was responsible for the largest increase..

India inks \$248 million deal with Russia for T-72 tank engines

NEW DELHI: India on Friday inked a \$248 million contract with Russia's state-owned Rosoboronexport (RoE) for procurement of 1,000 HP (horsepower) engines for its fleet of T-72 Tanks in "fully completely knocked down and semi knocked down" conditions. "The deal also includes transfer of technology (ToT) from Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited (or the Heavy Vehicles Factory) at Avadi, Chennai, for integration and subsequent licensed produc-



tiative," a defence min-Russian-origin T-72s are HP the mainstay of the enhance the battlefield Army tank fleet, which mobility and offensive tion of engines to boost at present are fitted capability of the Army,"

the 'Make in India' ini- with a 780 HP engine. Equipping the fleet of istry official said. "The T-72 Tanks with 1,000 engines

he added. Along with a fleet of 2,400 T-72 tanks, the Army has so far inducted 1,300 T-90S 'Bhishma' tanks of the 1,657 being produced by the Heavy Vehicles Factory under licence from Russia. The Army force is now

also inducting 118 indigenous Arjun Mark-1A tanks, with 14 major 57 minor "upgrades" to enhance mobility, firepower, endurance and protection, ordered for Rs 7,523 crore in Sept These 118 'improved' tanks will add to the first 124 Arjun tanks inducted

Jaishankar's security breach: MEA slams UK for 'license accorded to extremist forces'

NEW DELHI: The ministry of external affairs on Friday reacted to the recent security breach EAM involving Jaishankar's convoy in London, acknowledging the UK's condemnation of the incident. However, it emphasised that the sincerity of this condemnation would "depend on the action taken against culprits".

During the weekly press briefing, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said India has conveyed "deep concern to the UK authorities" over the incident, stating that there is "a larger context to the



incident". "We have con- incident," Jaiswal said. "It veyed our deep concern to the UK authorities about the breach of security arrangements by UKbased separatist and extremist elements dur-



brings out both the license accorded to such forces, as well as indifference to their intimidation, threats, and other actions aimed at impeding the EAM's visit. There ing our legitimate diplois a larger context to the matic activities in the UK.

While we have noted the statement issued by the UK Foreign Office on the matter, our view of its sincerity would depend on the action taken against culprits on this and previous occasions," he added. This comes a day after Jaishankar was heckled by Khalistani extremists while leaving an event at the Chatham House think tank in London. A group of Khalistani extremists staged a protest, chanting slogans and waving flags, which escalated into a direct confrontation with the minister's convov.

China's offer to India amid tariff stand-off with US

NEW DELHI: Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi on Friday the said that "boundary question" and specific differences between India and China must not dictate the bilateral relations between the two countries.

While addressing his annual press conference in Beijing, Yi said that Indo-China relations made positive strides over the past year after the successful meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping at Kazan in Russia. "As two ancient civilisations, we have enough wisdom and capability to maintain peace vided strategic guidand tranquility in the ance able solution to the After this, both sides normalisation boundary issue," Yi earnestly followed bilateral tie.



said. never allow bilateral relations to be defined by the boundary question or specific differences to affect the overall picture of our bilateral ties. China believes that as the largest neighbours, both should be partners in each other's success," he added.

The Chinese foreign minister said that the Xi and PM Modi profor

"We should through on important common understanding of the leaders, "strengthened exchanges and practical cooperation at all levels and achieved a series of positive outcomes", added. he comes months after countries India and China completed the contentious disengagement process in Depsang Demchok in Eastern Ladakh, bringing to an end the 54the month-old military border areas pend- improvement of ties standoff in the area, ing a fair and reason- at the Kazan meeting a giant step towards

'One step away from shutting down': Sanjay Nirupam on Maharashtra Congress office **NEW DELHI:** Shiv Sena videos," Nirupam said "This is the result of

leader Sanjay Nirupam on Friday claimed that the state unit of Congress is going through a severe monetary crunch leading to nonpayment of rent and electricity bill of the party office. Former state president of the grand-old-party, who joined Eknath Shinde months before the assembly elections said that the incompetence of the state and the national leadership of the party led to this situation."The Mumbai Congress is just one step away from being shut down. The current ineffective and incompetent leaders of the Mumbai Congress are to blame for this situation. The office, which operates in the premises of the Maharashtra government's PWD department, has not paid rent for several years, resulting in an out-



standing bill of 18 lakh rupees. The electricity bill has reached nearly 5 lakh rupees, and the electricity supply comeventually removed the meter and disconnected the power," Nirupam said. 'This situation reflects the lack of leadership and capability among the leaders. For about 9 to 10 months, Mumbai Congress employees have not received their salaries. The party is in a silent mode with no events being organized, mainly because the leadership has completely

failed," he added. Further, taking a jibe at Rahul Gandhi, Nirupam said that leaders seldom meet party workers in the state and make a video for YouTube and leave. blamed Congress' alliance with Thackeray's party, Shiv Sena (UBT), for its decline."Rahul Gandhi yesterday came to Mumbai not as a Congress leader but as a YouTuber to make a video in Dharavi. While the Mumbai Congress' condition is getting worse, their leaders are more busy making

effective leadership. In when the alliance between Shiv Sena and Congress was forming, I advised against it, warning that the Congress party would gradually weaken. Five to six years later, this prediction is coming true, with only three MLAs remaining, who rely heavily on Muslim votes. Currently, in Mumbai, Uddhav Thackeray's party is the first choice because they appear strong. The Mumbai Congress and the Congress party have become subordinate to Uddhav Thackeray's party, and the incompetence of Delhi's leaders is evident. They have accepted that they cannot stand on their own and rely on allies, leading to the party's downfall. In the coming days, the Congress party.

CISF woman head constable shoots self with service revolver at Delhi airport

NEW DELHI: A woman head constable of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) posted at Indira Gandhi International Airport died by suicide on Friday in a washroom at Terminal 3 (T3) of the airport. She used her service pistol to take her own life, according to Delhi Police. A team from the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) visited the scene and collected evidence. However, no suicide note was found at the site. The body has been shifted to Safdarjung Hospital, where a postmortem examination is being conducted.

Authorities launched an investigation into the incident to determine the circumstances that led to the officer's death.





Gender Equality through decisive actions needed: VC KUK

Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra: On the occasion International Day, Women's Women's **Studies** Research Centre, KUK, in collaboration with, Haryana State Women Commission organised a Poetry Competition in the honour of women's contribution and to celebrate their achievements, fostering awareness of women's rights, equality and empowerment on 7th March at Kurukshetra

University. In the presidential address, Chancellor KUK, Prof Som Nath Sachdeva said that there is a dire need to drive gender equality through bold and decisive actions. At present, women are making a significant contribution by participating actively in every field for the development of the country. The Chief Guest, Chairperson, Haryana



State Women Commission, Renu Bhatia said that women should face the challenges of life by strengthening themselves. There is a need to change the attitude towards women in society because till the time the negative thinking towards women does not end, exploitation of women will not end. Renu Bhatia called upon women to be aware of their rights and duties. She talked about men respecting women and protecting them from Director. insult. Women's Studies Research Centre, Prof. Anita Dua welcomed all the guests and presented the outline of the program. Deputy

Public Director, Relations, Dr Jimmy Sharma informed that students Kurukshetra University, Geeta University and Maharishi

Markandeya University participated in the poetry competition, in which six presentations were selected for the final round. In the competition, the Commission awarded Rs 21 thousand to the winner of the first prize Sumit Kumar, Rs 11 thousand to the winner of the second prize, Anjali Banga and Rs 5100 to the winner of the third prize, Sanjeev Kumar. The jury includ-Dr. Vijayvanti, Gayatri Kaushal and

Toyota Kirloskar Motor Introduces Hilux Black Edition -The Ultimate Blend of Boldness, **Power and Sophistication**

Vatika Times AMBALA/KURUK SHETRA: **Toyota** Kirloskar Motor (TKM) today announced the Introduction of the new Hilux Black Edition in India, to cater to the desires of the customers seeking an incredible lifestyle utility vehicle that is best suited for off-roading adventure drives on tough terrains and everyday city use. Designed to keep up with evolving customer expectations, the new Hilux Black Edition aims to deliver aggressive and sophisticated allblack theme, while retaining its legendary toughness, power and performance. At the heart of the Hilux Black Edition is a 2.8L Four-Cylinder Turbo-Diesel Engine, available with a 6-Speed Automatic Transmission (500 Nm torque). It's 4X4 drivetrain ensures a seamless off-road experience,



making it the perfect combination of performance, power, and sophistication. Toyota's world-class engineering, advanced safety features, and best-inclass comfort make the Hilux Black Edition a standout in its segment, offering segment-leading 500 Nm torque, an innovative multi-purpose vehicle (IMV) platform, and an exceptional 700mm water wading capacity.

The Hilux Black Edition features all-new blackthemed exterior, giving it a dominant road pres-Key design enhancements include

a black-coloured front radiator grille, muscular bonnet line and 18-inch black alloy wheels with customized hub caps. The additional styling elements such as the black ORVM covers, door handles, fender garnish, and fuel lid garnish contribute to a sleek, aggressive look. The front bumper features an Under Run adding a sporty touch. Completing the modern and premium aesthetic are the sharp sweptback LED headlights and LED rear combination lamps, ensuring a distinctive lighting signature.

Body of 7 year old girl thrown into canal recovered after 7 days

Jasbir Singh Duggal

Kurukshetra: The body of 7 year old Aanchal, who was thrown into a canal in Kurukshetra, was recovered after 7 days on Friday from near Sambhi in Distt. Karnal. However, Aanchal's dead body was found mutilated as stray dogs had bitten her neck and mouth while she was stuck in the debris. The body was identified by her school uniform and two broken front teeth, which matched her family's description.

Aanchal's father, Lalit, had thrown her into the canal near Mijarpur bridge. A team of divers, SDRF, and police had been conducting a search operation since then. According to reports, on March 1, Lalit, a resident of Khedi Ramanagar village, had thrown his 7 year old daughter into the Narwana Branch canal near Mijarpur-Kirmach village. Initially, Lalit had claimed that he had left his daughter at a relative's house, but when the case reached the police, he confessed to throwing her into the canal. Lalit had misled his wife, Shanti, by telling her that he had left their daughter with relatives in Delhi. When Shanti went to Delhi with Lalit to pick up their daughter, Lalit abandoned her at the New Delhi bus stop.

Two IAF aircraft incidents in a day: AN-32 crash lands in Bagdogra, Jaguar goes down in Ambala

NEW DELHI: A transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) made a crash landing at Bagdogra in West Bengal on Friday, officials confirmed.

The crew of the AN-32 aircraft escaped unhurt, and efforts are underway to recover the aircraft from the site. "An accident involving an AN-32 transport aircraft at Bagdogra airport has come to light today. The aircraft is being recovered from the site. The crew of the aircraft is safe," the IAF said in a statement.

Special seminar organized at Navyug School on the eve of International Women's Day

Jasbir Singh Duggal

Kurukshetra: On the eve of International Women's Day, a special seminar was organized for mothers at Navyug Senior Secondary School, Mohan Nagar, with the theme "Jagruk Nari Jagruk (Aware Woman Samaj" Aware Society). All mothers were welcomed with a tilak ceremony and a certificate of Renowned appreciation. poetess and social worker Dr. Mamta Sood was the special

The seminar began with the lighting of a lamp in front of Goddess Saraswati. School Principal Dr. Devender Arora welcomed all the mothers and the special guest. Dr. Mamta Sood addressed the



mothers, saying that we should always remember six (worship), Pooja Pranayam (breathing exercistion), Parampara (tradition), Prerak Prasang (inspiring stories), and Prasad (offerings). She emphasized that parents should teach their children good habits and values from an early age, making them Vice-Principal Riddhima said self-reliant and responsible. that times have changed, and ior staff members.

Dr. Sood advised mothers to discipline their children from a young age, saying that the attitude "he's still small, he'll es), Pratiyogita (competi- learn later" is wrong. She also cautioned against scolding or physically punishing children for not understanding something, as this can make them stubborn and rebellious.

children have become more outspoken. Parents should be friends with their children, rather than being authoritarian.Principal Preeti Mishra advised parents to make their children selfreliant from childhood, allowing them to make small decisions on their own.

Coordinator Ritu Chaudhary cautioned against imposing parents' expectations on children, leading to stress and hindering their natural devel-

School Director B.D. Gaba thanked all the mothers and the special guest, presenting them with mementos. The event was attended by Manager Vikas Gaba and sen-

Canon targets chip companies opening India operations

Delhi: Japanese image and optical products giant Canon India President and CEO Toshiaki Nomura feels its semiconductor lithography equipment for chip production has a bright promise in India and is in negotiations with firms putting up facilpotential since several chip manufacturers are considering India for semiconductor manufacturing. Many chipmakers are con-

sidering India as a facilities. new manufacturing location.

that they are discussing our product and service with all chip manufacturers. He said this is a "good opportunity for us" for the Tokyo-based business to conities here. Canon did tribute its technology, not identify names goods, and services but said there is huge to this Indian market area. "We install digit growth, and for equipment to make chips using our technology and goods. confident to achieve We help chipmakers double-digit growth

facturer builds the Nomura informed us facility in India, we will install our equipment and contribute to the Indian semiconductor industry

Once the chip manu-

with our good product and service, "Nomura stated. Negotiations underway. "In 2024, we are quite close to double-

coming years, I am very optimistic and create strong India year by year.

Haryana, the only state in the country where all 24 crops are procured at MSP- Governor

JAG MOHAN THAKEN Chandigarh: Haryana Governor Bandaru Dattatraya, in his address during the Budget session of the Vidhan Sabha, highlighted Haryana's unique distinction as the only state in the country where all 24 crops are procured at MSP. Governor Dattatraya reiterated the Haryana government's strong commitment to enhancing the economic well-being of farmers, ensuring agricultural profitability, and supporting their welfare. He highlighted various initiatives aimed at directly benefiting farmers and ensuring their financial security. The Governor said that over the last nine seasons, a total of Rs. 1,25,000 crore has

been transferred to the

bank accounts of 12 lakh

farmers for the purchase

of crops at Minimum



Support Price (MSP) through the e-Kharid portal. This initiative is aimed at facilitating the procurement process and providing direct financial relief to the farming community. In a significant policy move, the government has abolished the centuriesold practice of 'Abiyana', which had been in place since the British era. Recognizing the chaldelayed monsoon last year, Governor Bandaru

that the government has

granted a bonus of Rs. 1,345 crore to farmers, offering Rs. 2,000 per acre to provide relief during the sowing season of Kharif crops. This bonus marks the firstever instance of such financial assistance being provided during sowing.

The Governor further emphasized the success of the 'PM Kisan Samman Nidhi' scheme, lenges posed by the under which Rs. 6,563 crore has been disbursed to 20.24 lakh Dattatraya pointed out farmers in Haryana through 19 instalments.

Technological Innovation cornerstone of developed India: VC KUK

Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra: The

Mechanical

Department, UIET organised a Five-day "EV workshop on Saksham: Electric Vehicle Design and Development." During Valedictory Ceremony of this workshop, the Chief Guest, Vice Chancellor Kurukshetra University, Prof Som Nath said that Sachdeva technological innovation is the cornerstone of developed India. The present time is of EV and vehicle Government of India has given the mission to phase out petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030, due to which the demand of EV vehicle is increasing in the market. Prof Sachdeva added that there are about 2 thousand components in a fossil fuel vehicle, whereas there are only 20 components inside an EV vehicle.

Prof Sachdeva inspected



two EV formula racing cars made by the students of UIET institute. Prof. Sachdeva congratulated UIET Institute Director Prof.

Sunil Dhingra, UIET teachers and students' team and said that this effort will provide opportunities to students to learn the latest technology in the coming time. Prof. Sachdeva called upon the young students to take consistent steps towards startups so that become providers rather than job seekers. Prof. Sachdeva also inspected the Wolf 2.0 Adventure

Welcoming the chief

guest, UIET Director Prof. Sunil Dhingra said that students and teachers have been connected in UIET Institute under the Society of Automotive Engineers in which innovation is done through experimental work. On this occasion, Dr. Vishal Ahlawat presented a detailed report of the five-day workshop. EV Saksham CEO Mayank Arora, UIET Institute's Dr. Vijay Garg, Dr. Nikhil Mariwala, Dr. Sanjay Kajal, Dr. Vishal Ahlawat, Dr. Sunil Nain, Dr. Upendra Dhul, Dr. Ram Avatar, Dr. Ajay Jangda, Dr. Priyanka Jangda actively participated in the workshop.

'It doesn't work like that': Puri slams Tamil Nadu CM Stalin

NEW DELHI: Union minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Friday slammed Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin over his recent remark urging couples to have more children immediately to secure greater representation of the state in Parliament amid concerns over the upcoming delimitation

exercise. Puri dismissed the idea that states with higher birth rates would automatically benefit from the process, asserting that India's governance system was mature and

need to rush.

democratic. "It doesn't work like that; those states who produce more kids will benefit more during delimitation. We are not only the world's largest democracy but also the world's most mature governance system," Puri said while interacting with women journalists on the eve of International Women's Day, according to the news agency ANI. His remarks come in response to Stalin's remark on Monday, where he urged Tamil Nadu's residents to reconsider family planning norms, citing concerns that the proposed delimitation exercise could reduce the

state's political representation. Speaking at a

wedding ceremony, Stalin said, "Before, we used

to say don't give birth to a child immediately, no





International Yoga festival concludes in Rishikesh

International Yoga Festival Rishikesh,

Uttarakhand, global participation, concluding with recognition of yoga's benefits and various initiatives tourism announced by Satpal Maharaj. Thousands of yoga proponents participated, high-Rishikesh's lighting role as a spiritual epi-Renowned center. yoga instructors were honored for their contributions. Yoga International Festival, held from March 1 to 7 in Rishikesh, concluded Friday. Uttarakhand tourism minister Satpal Maharaj highlighted the state's significance as the birthplace of

During the closing cer-Satpal emony, described Maharaj as the Rishikesh 'World Capital of Yoga and Spirituality.' He emphasised that yoga pranayama, developed by ancient sages in this holy land, have become a gift to

yoga and the sacred

Ganges.



humanity. "Uttarakhand is not just the gateway to the Char Dham Yatra but also the global centre for yoga and spirituality," he said. The week-long event saw participation from around 410 yoga enthusiasts, including 38 international practitioners from Spain, Canada, Israel, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Japan, Romania, Singapore, US, Mexico, Indonesia, Argentina, and other countries. Daily yoga sessions were held along the banks of the Ganges. Maharaj also underscored the role of yoga in boosting immunity, stating that yoga and pranayama

helped people combat the Covid-19 pandemic. He noted that yoga now widely embraced across the world as part of a healthier lifestyle.

The minister also announced several initiatives to enhance tourism in Uttarakhand. Plans

include developing border villages like Jadung as homestay destinations, reviving the historic Gartang Valley route, and promoting Timmarsain Mahadev, known for its natural ice Shiva Lingam, as a religious site. Additionally, pilgrims will soon be able to view Mount Kailash from Lipulekh Pass without crossing

Cabinet approves revised I-T bill for Parliament

approved the new income tax bill, which will replace the six decades old I-T Act, sources said. The new bill aims to clarify tax law without adding new taxes. It will have no caveats, explanations, or extended phrases. The Cabinet, led by PM Modi, passed the New Income Tax Bill, sources said. Sources said the revised income tax measure will now be tabled in the Parliament next week and will be sent to Parliament's Standing Committee on Finance. The budget session's first leg ends Feb. 13. The session will resume on March 10 and end on

Delhi: The Union Cabinet



April 4. In Budget 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the new tax bill will be submitted in

Parliament. In the July 2024 Budget, pledged a full revision of the Income-tax Act, 1961. The CBDT has established an internal committee to oversee the review and make the Act succinct, clear, and easy to comprehend, which

will reduce conflicts, litigations, and provide greater tax certainty to taxpayers. Also, 22 expert sub-committees have been established to study the various parts of the Income Tax Act. Four categories were open to public input: language simplification, litigation reduction, compliance reduction, and redundant/obsolete pro-

CAPSULES

Centre plans pension scheme for gig workers, employers to contribute



Delhi: The labor and employment ministry is creating a transaction-based pension strategy to improve gig workers' social security, requiring aggregators to contribute 1-2% of their yearly turnover. The effort is targeted at almost one crore platform workers across India, a govt source statedEach gig worker will get a global account number, allowing deductions based on wage transactions across platforms. Employers will pay per bill. The insider said, "State governments are being consulted, and the plan will soon go to the cabinet.

"The effort tackles the issue of employer accountability owing to gig workers' use of numerous platforms. This policy matches the e-Shram platform, which was introduced in Aug 2021 to register unorganised sector workers. As of January 27, 30.6 crore workers have signed up for the platform, which has 12 social security plans.India had 77 lakh gig workers in 2020-21, and today has over 1 crore, says a 2022 NITI Aayog report. Currently, 47% of gig jobs are medium-skilled, 22% high-skilled, and 31% low-skilled.

CISF woman head constable shoots self with service revolver

head constable of the Industrial Security Force (CISF) posted at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport died by suicide on Friday in a washroom at Terminal 3 (T3) of the airport.

NEW DELHI: A woman pistol to take her own shifted to Safdarjung life, according to Delhi Police.

> from the A team Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) visited the scene and collected evidence. However, no suicide note was found at the site.

She used her service The body has been

Hospital, where a postmortem examination is being conducted.

Authorities launched an investigation into the incident to determine

the circumstances that led to the officer's

India inks \$248 million deal with Russia for T-72 tank engines

NEW DELHI: India on Friday inked a \$248 million contract with Russia's state-owned Rosoboronexport (RoE) for procurement of 1,000 HP (horsepower) engines for its fleet of T-72 Tanks in "fully formed, completely knocked down and semi knocked down" conditions.

"The deal also includes transfer of technology (ToT) from M/s RoE to M/s Armoured Vehicles Nigam Limited (or the Heavy Vehicles Factory) at Avadi, Chennai, for integration and subsequent licensed production of engines to boost the 'Make in India' initiative," a defence ministry official said."The Russian-origin T-72s are the mainstay of the Army tank fleet, which at he added. present are fitted with a 780 Along with a fleet of 2,400 T-HP engine. Equipping the 72 tanks, the Army has so far



fleet of T-72 Tanks with 1,000 HP engines will enhance the battlefield mobility and offensive capability of the Army,"

inducted 1,300 'Bhishma' tanks of the 1,657 being produced by the Heavy Vehicles Factory under licence from Russia.

The Army force is now also inducting 118 indigenous

Arjun Mark-1A tanks, with 14 major and 57 minor "upgrades" to enhance firepower, mobility, endurance and protection, ordered for Rs 7,523 crore in Sept 2021. These 118 'improved' tanks will add to the first 124 Arjun tanks inducted well over a decade ago.

Then, there are the 354 indigenous light tanks for high-altitude warfare to be inducted under Project Zorawar for around Rs 17,500 crore. The need for such tanks, each weighing less than 25 tonnes with a high powerto-weight ratio as well as superior firepower and protection, has been driven home by the continuing almost four-year-long military confrontation with China in eastern Ladakh.

Zomato's renaming's impact on biz, investors

say Zomato Ltd's plan to create a separate identity for its parent business will let it pursue its goals without risking everything and give investors more detailed information about the company. Four years after Facebook changed to Meta Platforms Inc. and a decade after Google's parent became Alphabet Inc., Zomato announced that its board had approved the changing of its corporate identity as Eternal Ltd. The name change needs shareholder approval.

Air India updates its fleet of planes to operate on US-Canada routes

Delhi: Industry experts



Hyperpure (restaurant core supplies), and District business."Experts said (events platform), industry stated. Anupriya Saxena, a partner at JMJA & Associates Llp, a corporate consultancy, it can also manage IP said, "The Zomato app and prospective acquibrand are

and possible future expansions beyond its Zomato can now expercompanies risking one brand's impact on another, and sitions.

India concludes massive naval combat exercise amid growing Pak maritime collusive-

NEW DELHI: India's massive three-month long naval combat exercise, with 65-70 warships, 10 submarines and over 80 aircraft and helicopters, has now ended after testing operational preparedness and honing warfighting skills in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), amid expanding marcollusiveness itime between China and Pakistan.

The Tropex or the 'theatre level operational exercise', readiness which is conducted biennially, brought the Navy's western and eastern fleets together as well as included "substantial participation" from the Army, IAF and Coast Guard for the intense drills.

"The exercise provided the south and 5,000 a valuable evaluation nautical miles from the of the Navy's ability to



respond to multifarious challenges in a synchronised and integrated manner to defend national maritime security interests. It helped validate many concepts of operations," Navy spokesperson Captain Vivek Madhwal said on Friday.The theatre of operations for the exercise extended approximiles from the north to

Strait of Hormuz in the

west to the Sunda and Lombok Straits in the east.The Navy deployed indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, the Visakhapatnam and Kolkata-class guidedmissile destroyers and Kalvari-class dieselelectric submarines, among others, as well as MiG-29K fighter jets, P-8I long-range maritime patrol aircraft, mately 4,300 nautical MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones and MH-60R submarine-hunting helicopters for the exer-

Delhi: Under this interim solution, the airline will install new

seat covers, cushions, curtains, and carpets, all aligned with Air India's new logoAir India has begun updating its Boeing 777s that fly to the US and Canada, while global supply chain concerns have delayed the upgrade, authori-



ties said. The airline has 13 legacy B777 aircraft operating

and authorities routes, claimed that all these are scheduled to be refreshed under this temporary configuration , "The cabin's heavy refresh will include basic repairs and sprucing up lavatories, cabin walls, meal tables, armrests, and galleys."

on these ultra-long-haul But they won't cover the IFE (in-flight entertainment) or livery change. Air India is boosting its premium services and flight times to lure more US travelers. Once the refurbishment starts, it will take around two years to bring the widebody fleet to international standards, he said.

'No comments required': Delhi HC as woman claims machine gun injuries healed by homeopathy

NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court has dismissed a petition filed by a woman who claimed she healed from 25 bullet injuries solely through homeopathic medicines. The woman had sought a summons against those she accused of attacking her, but the court refused to interfere with the lower courts' decisions that had earlier rejected her plea. Justice Anup

Bhambhani upheld the

orders of the sessions

court and the magis-

trate court, both of

which had refused to summon the accused named in her 2012 complaint. The high court said it found "no coherence or cogency"

in her arguments. According to news agency PTI, the woman in her petition alleged

that she was attacked by individuals wielding "fully loaded revolvers and a machine gun." She claimed that she suffered multiple gunshot wounds but did seek medical not attention. Instead, she

took

homeopathic

Calendula 30, Silicea 30, and Arnica 200, which she said caused the bullets to "come out" from her head, heart, and hand without any surgical intervention.

medicines such as

Dismissing the plea on March 6, the high court stated, "Clearly, no comments are required from this court in relation to the petitioner's testimony." It also pointed out that both subordinate courts had rightly dismissed her claims, terming them "improbable and unbeliev-

Referring to the sessions court's observations, the high court noted that the allegations were "patently absurd and improbable." If the woman's version were to be believed, the court said, the bullets "would have been embedded deep in her vital organs, making it impossible for her to survive without multiple surgeries."

The sessions court also remarked that it was "reserving its comments on her psychological state



Bihar CM remark sparks spat with opposition women lawmakers

NEW DELHI: Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Friday once again indulged into a heated argument with an RJD MLC, claiming that women had no issues in the state. This came after the opposition party leader questioned the JDU government over higher education of females in the state.Urmila Thakur was voicing her dissatisfaction with education minister Kumar's response to a question she had raised in the House when the chief minister began recounting what his government had done for the female literacy in the state. Thakur highlighted the situation in her Begusarai district, where many girls are deprived of education due to the need to walk four to five kilometers to reach the nearest school.The chief minis-

ter defended his gov-

ernment saying, "Do

you people even know

what we have done for



Village girls hardly went to schools in Bihar until we came to power."Citing her own example, Thakur responded saying, "Sir please do not say that. I too hail from a village. I belong to an older generation, yet I

complete my schooling. Another RJD MLC Munni Devi Rajak then stepped in, and questioned the seasoned leader: "You have no idea what has been done by us for women. You may be women yourselves but what has been your contribution?" Visibly offended by this, Kumar stood up launched a direct swipe at former CM Rabri Devi saying, "When her husband

began to sink, he installed his wife (in the CM's post)."

He further attacked

the RJD's reign and said, "Your party (RJD) did nothing. You people know nothing. . Whatever has been done for women, it has been done by me. Now women have no problems." RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav criticised the comments and reminded Kumar that Rabri Devi was first woman CM of Bihar.

"CM Nitish Kumar should remember that Rabri Devi is the first CM female Bihar...There is nothing much to comment anything on him. His deteriorating health signals that he is no

'South states need to boost productivity'

CHENNAI: Southern states can do more to improve labour productivity, gross value addition, research and skilling, said chief economic adviser V Anantha Nageswaran. Speaking at the CII South Global Linkages Summit, he said the southern states have performed well in

per capita, labour force participation, skilling and gross value addition in manufacturing there is room for improvement.

He said the number of persons engaged in manufacturing south India is 33% but



output share is about 26%. "So that kind of tells you there is scope for improvement in productivity," he said, adding, while these states have basic skilled workforce, it needs to improve professional skills and 'very high order' professional skills,

especially with the global developments of high value added manufacturing and adoption of artificial intelligence. Southern states have done well in economic and social progress and should benchmark themselves against the world, not within India, he added.

Gold loans rise 50% in seven months

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

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

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

'Uncompromising fight': CM Stalin asks CMs of 7 states to unite amid delimitation row

NEW DELHI: Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin on Friday announced launching a joint action committee with the chief ministers of several states against Centre's bid to reorganise the constituencies for Lok Sabha. Reiterating his stance that Union government's push for delimitation is a "blatant assault on federalism", Stalin wrote to chief ministers of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Telangana, Punjab and Odisha seeking allegiance "for an uncompromising fight against this unfair exercise." In a social media post on X, Stalin said, "The Union govt's plan for Delimitation is a blatant assault on federalism, punishing States that ensured population control & good governance by stripping away our rightful voice in Parliament. We will not allow this democratic injustice!" "I have written to Hon'ble chief ministers Thiru Pinarayi Vijayan, Siddaramaiah, Revanth Reddy, Chandrababu Naidu, Mamata Banerjee, Bhagwant Mann and Mohan Majhi and party heads in Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, West Bengal, Odisha & Punjab, calling for an uncompromising fight against this unfair exercise," he added. He also called upon political parties to send sen-

ior representatives for the joint action committee scheduled to be held at Chennai on March 22. "We are forming a Joint Action Committee (JAC)

to defend our States from being silenced. I call upon parties to send a senior representative. First JAC meeting in Chennai on March 22, 2025. Let us stand together not as separate political entities but as protectors of our people's future," Stalin said. This comes amid the ongoing rift between Tamil Nadu chief minister and Centre over delimitation and New Education Policy. Stalin expressed concern about the potential reduction in Parliamentary seats, attributing it to the state's successful implementation of family planning initiatives. Stalin had also suggested newly married couples to start families quickly to ensure adequate political representation post-delimitation. He acknowledged the state's successful.

Telangana govt forms independent panel to study caste survey data

NEW DELHI:

The Telangana government on Friday constituted an independent committee of prominent personalities to study the data of caste survey conducted by it. The appointment of the panel came against the backdrop of opposition BRS and BJP raising doubts over accuracy of the survey's data. Deputy Chief Minister Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said the committee would be headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice Sudarshan Reddy. While former professor Kancha Ilaiah would act as chairman, Praveen Chakravarthy is its convener. Economist and activist Jean Dreze would be a special invitee to the committee, an offi-



has been formed to analyse the survey data to ensure that any anomolies are ruled out. He requested the panel to submit a report within a month to the state government's planning department. The comprehensive house-

cial release quoted him as say- hold survey encompassing ing. Vikramarka said the panel socio-economic, political, and educational status of citizens was taken up at the instance of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and AICC President Mallikarjun Kharge with a noble objective, he said.

The Congress government under the leadership of Chief

Minister A Revanth Reddy got the survey done with sincerity as it wanted to lay foundation for social justice in the society, he said.

The Deputy CM added that "socially conscious intellectuals in the state and the country" have been made partners with an independent status to study the data collected in the household survey with an intention to dispel any misconceptions about the survey and to rule out any inaccura-

The BRS had alleged that the population of backward classes has declined as per the caste survey when compared with the data of an 'intensive household survey' held during the BRS regime.

FM: RBI's gold buying not to replace \$ for settlements

NEW DELHI: Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday clarified in the Lok Sabha that India's rising gold reserves, including those held by RBI, is not intended to replace any international currency.

She responded to Congress MP Manish Tiwari's concerns about whether the global shift towards gold signalled a move away from the US dollar as a dominant settlement mechanism.

Sitharaman said, "Gold is also kept in the Reserve Bank and gold is also being bought by the Reserve Bank. But



rency or potential currency, there is not tuting only 6% of global much for me to comment at this stage." Congress MP Tiwari stated that since the US

abandoned the gold standard in 1971, gold had lost its significance as a major financial asset. However, in recent years, central

banks worldwide have increased their gold holdings. From constireserves in 2006, gold now makes up about 11% in 2024. Countries China, like India, Poland, and Turkey have been among the most aggressive buyers, and domestic gold prices in India have

surged as well.

Pegasus snooping row: SC adjourns hearing of case for April 22

DELHI: The NEW Supreme Court on Friday posted for hearing on April 22 a batch of pleas seeking inquiry into the allegations of government allegedly using Israeli software Pegasus for snooping.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for Centre, told a bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotishwar Singh that the matter came after a long time and urged to hear it in April. The bench then posted the case for hearing on April 22.

The top court had constituted technical committee and overseeing committee, on the alleged use of Pegasus spyware to snoop on phones of politicians, activists and journalists. The apex court had appointed a committee headed by a former top court judge to look into Pegasus's snooping



allegations. The committee, headed justice (retd) Raveendran was tasked to oversee the functioning of the technical committee and was assisted by Alok Joshi, former IPS officer and Sundeep Oberoi, chairman, sub-committee in (international organisation of standardisation/international electro-technical commistechnical sion/joint

committee). The three members of the technical committee consisted Naveen Kumar Chaudhary, professor (cyber security and digital forensics)

dean, National and Forensic Sciences University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat; Prabaharan P, professor (School of Engineering), Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Amritapuri, Kerala; and Ashwin Anil Gumaste, Institute Associate Professor (Computer Science and Engineering), Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, Maharashtra. In its report, the committee concluded that spyware was not found in the 29 mobile

phones it examined,

but malware was found

in five mobile phones.

India one step closer to getting 26/11 accused Tahawwur Rana

Washington: Delhi is close to having Tahawwur Rana, a former Pakistani Army doctor and 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attack accused, brought to justice after US Supreme Court Associate Justice Elena Kagan rejected his emergency application on Thursday to stay his extradition to India. Rana's

attorneys immediately bumped up the application to Chief Justice John Roberts, likely the last court of appeal, with little possibility of reprieve after President Trump personally assured his extradition during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Washington DC last month and the Department signed off on handing him over to Indian

On Thursday, Rana played the religion and health card, citing possible religious persecu-

authorities.



tion and torture in India on account of his Muslim faith, besides serious medical condition, to forestall the extradition, which he argued through attorneys would be a "de facto death sentence. " But Justice Kagan, who serves as the Circuit Justice for the Ninth Circuit which had earlier upheld the extradition, rejected his Emergency Application for Stay Pending Litigation of Petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus."

"Application...denied by Justice Kagan," the US SC website said in a terse announcement, without elaborating.

Rana has fought the extradition for almost four years purportedly with help from the Pakistani establishment loath to give up one of their own because of the precedent it would set. But the state department has already signed off on handing him over to India, and New Delhi has already made arrangements to take him into custody and fly him back to face justice for one of the most egregious terrorist attacks on Indian soil that also claimed the lives of 26 foreign nationals,

including

Americans.

Biocon's growth formula: **Generics & biosimilars**

BENGALURU: Biocon is betting big on new product launches in its generics and biosimilars portfolios, which are expected to fuel its expansion in the next 2-3 years. The company is leveraging the Viatris acquisition to provide a significant boost towards an integrated biosimilars enterprise model.

This integrated approach encompasses complete oversight of valuegeneration through development production,



alongside value-realisation through distribution and market deployment. "We have an experienced and committed team in the US which is focused strongly on biosimilars. And the fact that we are now a fully integrated biosimilars company has enabled us to position ourselves in a strong position with the payers, the PBMs (pharmacy benefit managers) and HMO (health maintenance organisation) sectors. We are India's premier biosimilars company and we are making a brand presence in the global markets. We are building Brand Biocon and getting a 20% plus market share in the US for some products is significant," said Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, chairperson of the Biocon Group. Its subsidiary Biocon Biologics completed the acquisition of the global biosimilars business of its partner Viatris. As a part of the transaction, Biocon Biologics issued compulsorily convertible preference shares. (CCPS) in the company valued at \$1 billion, equivalent to an equity stake of at least 12.9% on a fully diluted basis.

Nitish Kumar loses cool, again: Why Bihar CM's frequent outbursts may upend state politics



NEW DELHI: Is Nitish Kumar losing his cool way too often these days? On Friday, the Bihar chief minister lost his temper inside the state legislative council and surprised many with his choice of words to refer to former chief ministers Lalu and Rabri Devi."Jab iske husband doob gaye to apni wife ko bana diya (When her husband began to sink, he installed his wife (in the CM's post))", Nitish said referring to Lalu Prasad's move to make Rabri Devi the chief minister after he was forced to resign from the post following an arrest warrant in a fodder scam case.

It all started after RJD MLC Urmila Thakur, citing the example of her Begusarai district said "in many villages, girls are deprived of education as reaching the nearest school requires them to walk four to five kilometers". This irked Nitish Kumar, who lashed out at the opposition and said: "Do you people even know what we have done for girls' education? Village girls hardly went to schools in Bihar until we came to power." When Urmila objected, Nitish stepped up his attack. "The education

system had collapsed

during the RJD govern-

ment. It was I who revived it," the CM said. "What did the RJD government do women? Where did women study earlier? They barely had access to primary education," he added.

Then the Bihar chief minister went on to launch a frontal attack on Rabri Devi and mocked at the way she was made the chief minister by her husband Lalu Prasad. Leader of opposition Tejashwi Yadav strongly objected to the language used by Nitish Kumar for his parents and once again raised questions over Bihar chief minister's health.

Crowd management: Station directors to control ticket sale as per station capacity

NEW DELHI: Now station directors will control the sale of tickets as per station capacity and available trains, a high-level meeting chaired by railway minister Ashwini Vaishnaw decided on Friday. Besides this, there will be permanent waiting areas outside 60 busy stations and wider foot-over bridges, moves that will help in better crowd management. Station directors, who

are the overall in-charge of their stations, will be financially empowered to take on-the-spot decisions to improve facilities. The decisions come barely weeks after a stampede at the New Delhi station claimed 18 lives. Though a probe into the incident is underway, one of the probable reasons was the sale of a high number of tickets from its counters.In an official statement, the railway ministry said the highlevel committee held detailed deliberations on crowd control at stations, particularly at 60 locations where footfall is exceptionally high during certain festive periods. It added that permanent outside waiting



areas will be created at these stations which "periodically face heavy crowd". Pilot projects have been started at New Delhi, Anand Vihar, Varanasi, Ayodhya and Patna stations."With this arrangement in place, sudden crowding will be contained within the waiting area. Passengers will be allowed to go to platforms only when trains arrive there. This will decongest stations," a ministry spokesperson said.As per the decisions, there will be complete access control at these 60 stations. While passengers with confirmed tickets will be given direct access to platforms, those without a ticket or with a waiting list ticket will have to be in the waiting area. All

points will also be sealed. Another major decision was to construct wider foot-over bridges (FOB). Two new designs - for 12-metrewide (40 feet) and sixmetre-wide (20 feet) standard FOBs - have been developed. These wide bridges with ramps were effective in crowd management during the Kumbh. Moreover, war rooms will be developed at large stations, and officers of all departments will work in the room if there is a surge in people at the stations. The ministry has also decided to communication equipment such as walkie-talkies, announcement systems, and calling systems.

unauthorised



In 2024, the Indian Real **Estate Sector Expects Equity** Investments of Rs 74,815 **Crore**

Delhi: According to a survey by CBRE South Asia, the real estate sector registered equity investments of \$8.9 billion (Rs 74,815 crore) in the first nine months of 2024, surpassing the increase of \$7.4 billion (Rs 62,210 crore) in 2023 and demonstrating a year-over-year rise of 46%. The Indian real estate market has experienced a massive boom, reaching its highest point since 2018. A significant quarterly equity investment totaling \$2.6 billion (Rs 21,857 crore) between July and September 2024 is highlighted in the report.

Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai drove this expansion, contributing 66 percent of equity inflows in Q3 2024 with their respective subscriptions of \$0.96 billion (Rs 8,070 crore), \$0.40 billion (Rs 3,362 crore), and \$0.34 billion (Rs 2,858 crore). With capital inflows of \$0.31 billion (Rs 2,605 crore), \$0.27 billion (Rs 2,269 crore), and \$0.02 billion (Rs 1,681 crore), respectively, Delhi-NCR, Pune, and Hyderabad also saw a sizable portion of investments. Domestic investors, especially construction businesses, who accounted for roughly 79% of equity inflows during the July-September quarter, were the main drivers of the increase in investment momentum.

Of the overall inflows of foreign investments, 73% came from Singapore and 22% from the US.

India's servers will host DeepSeek's Al models for security

Delhi :The

Indian government said it will host Chinese startup DeepSeek's AI models on its computers to monitor security and safety. The country increased its efforts to give computers to entrepreneurs and researchers to accelerate the development of localized Al 'foundational models' or tech solutions to offset US and Chinese AI developments. IT and electronics minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the government is buying 18,693 GPUs to provide "affordable compute" to for special uses. Vaishnaw about India being late in its large and growing II enterprises and AI researchers. Foundation models are AI solutions educated on large datasets to fulfill several tasks. The models are adaptable and can be customized



constructed with 2,000 GPUs, therefore the Rs 10,372 crore IndiaAl mission's high-tech GPUs are enough to power India's Al quest. He dismissed concerns

Al quest, saying it has US assistance as a valued partner. We are punctual. Computer access is most vital. This is now accessible. We are fit. Getting the computer facility was crucial to

optimistic Nvidia will provide GPUs regularly despite US government limitations on some countries. "I'm reiterating that we are seen as a trusted country, we're seen as a country which respects IP rights, (and) we're seen as a country which understands the technological development prospects and all the points related to that." DeepSeek's recent popularity hasn't concerned the government. The good news is that DeepSeek is open source and we will soon host it on Indian servers like we did Liama. Everything open source can be hosted on our servers to ensure data privacy. He said we'll do that soon. Vaishnaw claimed preparations have begun.

A warning against bogus syllabuses and sample question papers is released by CBSE

mation and unreliable

Delhi: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) issued a warning alert informing parents and students to be wary of false information pertaining to the curriculum, study guides, and practice exams for the 2024–25 school year. The Board has issued a warning to pupils about the dangers of falling for online scams that spread false information. We've noticed

some websites and online portals are disseminating stale infor-

formal break

updates about curriculum, sample question resources, and activities. The alert said, "These links and news erroneously assert to offer up-to-date information for the session 2024-25. "In the interest of the public, we wish to emphasize that information from unauthorized sources can be misleading and may cause unnecessary confusion among schools, students, parents, and continued. Due to sig-

practical scores in a few courses, CBSE has recently instructed schools to assess practical exams appropriately. In a notification, the CBSE said that, based on data from prior years' results, it had used sophisticated AI

nificant discrepancies

between theory and

techniques to identify significant disparities between theory and practical grades in specific courses among 50% or more students other stakeholders," it in about 500 CBSE-affiliated schools.

brochure. The KEA was

told to ensure the original

documents are returned

to the candidates to

enable them to join the

all-India quota seats at the

The petitioners -- and sim-

ilarly situated candidates

earliest.

The National Critical Mineral Mission gets 16,300 crore

Delhi :The Union announced NCMM's abroad and strength-Cabinet, led by Prime creation in the 2024-Minister Narendra 25 Union Budget on with resource-rich Modi, launched the July 23, 2024. The nations. The plan National Mineral (NCMM) with a ?16,300 crore expenditure and a projected ?18,000 crore investment from PSUs and other businesses."Several crucial decisions have created new scientific and technology prospects for our children, future generations, and the economy. Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw told a Cabinet briefing that minerals from over-PM Modi approved the National Critical Mission today. Finance PSUs and private Minister Nirmala enterprises to buy

Critical Atmanirbhar Bharat also calls for a Mission mission seeks to national stockpile of assure India's crucial mineral sector selfreliance, recognizing its importance in high-tech industry, lean energy, and defence.The Mission exploration, mining, iation, ssing, and end-of-life product gy research. India has recovery in the 24 critical minerals: essential mineral value chain. It aims Cobalt, to speed up mining project approvals, incentivize explo- L i t h i u m , ration, and recover Molybdenum, burdens and tailings.The mission encourages Indian Sitharaman vital mineral assets

en economic ties essential minerals to secure supply.The Mission will promote mineral processing parks and crucial mineral recycling.A Centre of Excellence encompass on Critical Minerals will encourage critical mineral technoloadmium, Beryl, Gallium, Glauconite, Graphite, Indium, Nickel, Niobium, Phosphate (without uranium), Platinum group of elements, Potash, Rare earth minerals (excluding

Mani Shankar 'Aiyo': Congress' all-weather disaster man In the annals of politi-

cal faux pas, Mitt Romney's infamous '47%' comment or Hillary Clinton branding Trump supporters as 'deplorables' stand out as classic cases of plain speaking gone horribly wronginstances where opponents easily cast them as out-of-touch elitists. But perhaps no selfgoal in Indian politics has been as monumental as Mani Shankar Aiyar's 2014 'chaiwala' jibe at then-Gujarat Minister Narendra Modi. Modi may well have ascended to the Prime Ministership without that gaffe, but Aiyar's ill-timed comment ensured that the crumbling edifice of UPA-2 was buried six feet under. Narendra Modi, who had always sought to play on the theme of the entitled versus the commoner, lapped up the 'chaiwala' moniker

like a fish to water.



If that was not enough, Aiyar repeated history just a few years later, once again helping PM Modi secure his home turf. In 2017, as the BJP grappled with antiincumbency, the Patel agitation, and Dalit uprisings in Gujarat, Aiyar's 'neech aadmi' remark gifted Modi the perfect opportunity to reframe the election as a question of Gujarati asmita (pride). The result? A last-minute consolidation of core voters, allowing the BJP to scrape through in a tough contest. A red-faced Congress suspended Aiyar, but the damage was already done. While that may have been

between Aiyar and the Congress, the former Union minister has continued to embarrass the party. The latest episode? A backhanded compliment to Rajiv Gandhi, where Aiyar, in his characterbluntness, istic detailed how the former Prime Minister flunked Cambridge and later at Imperial College, London. It provided fresh ammunition to the BJP, all too keen to puncture the image of the technocratic PM, who has been widely hailed for bringing the first wave of the IT revolution to the country. Furious Congress leaders wasted no time in denouncing Aiyar-Maharashtra's Nana Patole labelled him "mentally unstable," Harish Khare called him "frustrated," and former Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot dismissed him.

Scrap mop-up allotment of PG med seats to ineligible: HC

Bengaluru: The Karnataka high court Tuesday **Karn**ataka Examinations Authority (KEA) to scrap the PG medicine seats allotted in the mop-up round to "ineligible" candidates and make them available in the next round of counselling. National Medical

Commission (NMC) and Counselling Medical Committee (MCC) should permit the candidates who were allotted all-India quota seats in the MCC-conducted third round counselling to join the allotted seats till 5pm, Feb 9, a division bench comprising Justices Anu Sivaraman Vijayakumar A Patil said in its order on a petition filed by Dr Akshay V Thuppad and others, who were aspirants in the mop-up round conducted by the

KEA. The KEA was direct-

ed not to enforce the

penalty clause against the

students who were

wrongly permitted to par-

ticipate in the mop-up

round in violation of the

conditions stipulated it its

who were eligible to participate in the mop-up round -- should be permitted to participate in the stray vacancy round where the seats that fall vacant should be made available and seats should be allotted to them on the basis of merit, the bench said. The KEA was directed to take steps to ensure fees -- paid by ineligible candidates who had joined the allotted colleges pursuant to the mop-up round -- are refunded to them at the earliest. The MCC and KEA were told to inform the candidates who had been allotted seats in the third round of all-India quota counselling but were permitted to participate in the counselling of the KEA without eligibility that they have to join the all-India quota seats.

14 gold bars strapped in belt': How Kannada actor and DGP's daughter Ranya Rao's 'golden run' ended at Bengaluru airport

Intelligence (DRI) at tional travel, having Kempegowda

International Airport (KIA) on Monday night for allegedly smuggling gold. Ranya, who arrived from Dubai, was caught with 14kg of gold bars hidden in a belt strapped to her body, along with 800 grams of gold ornaments. She was produced before a magistrate on Tuesday and remanded to 14-day judicial custody. Officials suspect she is part of a smuggling syndicate operating through Bengaluru airport in recent months. PollThe 32-year-old actress has acted in a handful of Kannada and Tamil films, including Maanikya (starring Sudeep), Pataki (with Ganesh), and Wagah (featuring Vikram Prabhu).

Frequent Gulf trips raised red flags

According to sources, Ranya had been under DRI surveillance due to her frequent interna-

reportedly made over 10 trips this year. "Officials became suspicious after noticing her multiple shortduration visits to the Gulf," said an officer stationed at KIA.

SEE ALSO: Who is Ranya Rao? Kannada actor walked through Bengaluru airport with gold unchecked

DGP's actor daughter held at airport with 14kg gold in body belt Based on this pattern, a DRI team was dispatched to intercept her on Monday. "She looked extremely confident as she disembarked, showing no signs of nervousness. But when searched, officers were shocked to find gold bars cleverly concealed in a belt," a source said.

The agency is now reviewing CCTV footage of her previous arrivals to ascertain whether she had smuggled gold on earlier occasions. "In her last four trips over the past 15 days, she wore similar attire, with the belt hidden from view," the source added.

loophole Protocol used to evade checks Investigators believe Ranya managed to bypass frisking by taking advantage of official protocol services meant for senior bureaucrats, including IPS officers. "A protocol officer would meet her at the terminal and escort her out, ensuring she wasn't subjected to physical screening. She would be picked up in a government vehicle, avoiding scrutiny," a

source revealed. **DGP** distances himself from daughter

When contacted, DGP K Ramachandra Rao distanced himself from his daughter's activities. "Ranya married Jatin Hukkeri, an architect specializing in designing pubs

Government meets 13 India Al businesses for services

Delhi: The ministry of electronics and infortechnology mation (MeitY) technical panel met with thirteen companies who bid to deliver AI compute and cloud services under the IndiaAl Mission on Monday. IndiaAl COO Kavita Bhatia led the technical panel, which included MeitY, NIC, CDAC, and two IITs. Thirteen companies were chosen from 19 bidders. Jio Platforms, Tata Communications, CtrlS **Datacenters** Limited, E2E Networks, Yotta Data Services, CMS Computers, Hostin Services, Networks, Orient Technologies, Vensysco



Technologies, CloudThat Technologies, Locuz Enterprise Solutions, and NxtGen Datacenter and Cloud Technologies Bidders had to either have operational AI services on cloud with at least 1,000 AI compute units installed or promise to do so within six months of signing an agreement with

panel asked organizations about their existing capacity, expected capacity in six months, and availability of compute units or GPUs for the IndiaAl Mission. Nvidia leads GPU manufacture internationally, followed by AMD and Intel, but the technical panel inquired if India will make data center servers and other

IndiaAI. The technical Jio Finance is negotiating its first debt sale

Delhi: Jio Finance, a shadow lender controlled by Asia's wealthiest industrialist Mukesh Ambani, is negotiating with a number of lenders to enter the local currency debt market for the first time.

It is anticipated that the business will enter

the market as early as January-March the quarter, which is normally a busy time for credit expansion in India, either by issuing bonds or loans.

According to those who asked not to be named since the talks are secret, the funds will be used to lend to industry. They said that the conditions and amount of the loan are still being worked out. The action was taken because the RBI's stricter regulations make it more difficult for shadow lenders to raise bank loans in local cur-



Google pulls offline map app from Play Store per government requests



Delhi: Google and Apple removed MAPS.Me offline navigation app from Play and App Store. The app misrepresented India's border. To Google's nodal officer, Priyadarshi Banerjee, the Survey of India (SoI) submitted MAPS.Me a notice under Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, 2000, in December 2024. The software misrepresents Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, according to the notice. The app's Google Play Store homepage now displays "We're sorry, the requested URL was not found on this server". Sol reportedly provided notice to Google, but since the app is unavailable on Apple's App Store for Indian consumers, it's unclear if Apple was notified. The publisher accessed the letter using Lumen Database. It says: "The maps.me app on Google PlayStore portrays an Indian map with an incorrect external boundary, endangering India's sovereignty and integrity. The Survey of India (SoI) was appointed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (Meity) in 2020 to "disable access to incorrect maps of India."

Ddouble engine govts proving to be curse for daughters: Lamba

NEW DELHI: Congress on Tuesday accused the BJP of failing to ensure women's safety, claiming that its "double engine" governments are proving to be a "curse for daughters." This criticism came after the harassment of a Union minister's daughter.

The party also asserted its commitment of holding these governments accountable on women's safety. Addressing a press conference, Mahila Congress chief Alka Lamba cited crime statistics from states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Haryana, and Rajasthan to attack the BJP government.

"The BJP's 'double engine' governments in the country are proving to be a curse for daughters. A case of harassment of a Union minister's



daughter and her friends has Union minister herself does that the molester was a former BJP councillor—Piyush More. His pictures are there with the chief minister of Maharashtra and other top BJP leaders," Lamba said. She further added. "If the

come to light in Maharashtra. not get justice, then she After the FIR, it was revealed should resign from her post and fight the battle of her accused allegedly misbehaved daughter along with many daughters."Lamba's remarks followed the Jalgaon police arrested two more individuals and detained a minor boy in connection with the Lamba questioned.

harassment case. Earlier, one suspect, Kiran Mali, was apprehended. On Monday, two more individuals—Aniket Bhoyi and Anuj Patil—were arrested, and a minor boy was detained, an official from Muktainagar police station confirmed.

The incident took place on February 28 at Sant Muktai Yatra in Kothali village, Maharashtra's Jalgaon district. A total of seven individuals have been named in the FIR, filed based on the minister's complaint. Police investigations revealed that the with several girls and clashed with the bodyguards accompanying International Women's Day

them.With approaching on March 8,

BJP will break membership enrolment record in Maharashtra

Kolhapur: Chief minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday said the party will soon break all membership enrolment records.

"Around 1.4 crore members have already been signed up across Maharashtra. Soon the party will achieve a target of 1.5 crore members," he said.

The CM also visited the party office built in Kolhapur last year. "We have got a huge mandate and have a responsibility to fulfil the hopes of the people. Soon, we would have to constitute booth, mandal and dis-



try's first 13-D (dimen- Shivaji sion) theatre at the his- escape from the siege toric Panhala fort. The 13-D theatre gives Before visiting the an advanced immersive Panhala fort, Fadnavis

experience for watching movies. The CM multispecialty.

13-D phenomenon by "Panhalgadacha workers. Earlier, the CM Ransangram" movie inaugurated the coun- based on Chhatrapati Maharaj's of the fort in 1660. inaugurated a 220-bed

Sadhguru visits Anant Ambani's Vantara, calls It a "Visionary approach to life"

NEW DELHI: Spiritual leader Sadhguru recently visited Vantara, the world's largest wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centre, in Jamnagar, Gujarat. He lauded the efforts of Anant Ambani and his team in creating a sanctuary unlike any other. Sharing his experience in a video on Instagram, Sadhguru praised Vantara as an extreme display of human compassion and care," emphasising its unique approach to coexistence between humans and wildlife. View this post on

Instagram A post shared by Sadhguru (@sadhguru) "I have travelled all over the world and been to

every kind of zoo, but I



Vantara—a visionary approach to Life," he shared. He further high-"deep lighted the understanding of the inclusive nature of Vantara, where human life is intricately connected with all living beings. Operated by a dedicated team of global experts, Vantara must say there isn't stands as a pioneering

initiative for wildlife conservation and rehabilitation, offering medical care and a safe haven for rescued animals. The facility, set within the sprawling Existence" embodied at Jamnagar greens, is home to a diverse range of species, each receivspecialised ing care.Encouraging people to visit and witness the efforts firsthand,

Sadhguru extended.

NEW DELHI: A 22-year-old man was found dead near Swarnkar Dharamshala in

northeast Delhi's Kailash Colony on Friday morning, an official said.Police were alerted about an unidentified body through a call at 9:54 am at Jyoti Nagar police station. Upon receiving the infor-



Man found dead near Dharamshala in Delhi

maion, a police team arrived by forensic specialists and a at the location, accompanied

mobile crime unit to examine

the site, according to police officials. Subsequently, the body was transported to GTB Hospital

for postmortem examination, and authorities have registered a case."Teams are working to establish the victim's identity and determine the cause of death.

Kolkata resident alleges Rs 68,300 stolen from luggage

KOLKATA: A Kolkata resident who flew from Delhi to Vijaywada on work on Wednesday alleged that Rs 68,300 in cash was stolen in transit from his luggage. The airline ground staff with whom he lodged a complaint said the carrier is conducting an inquiry.According to Dipak Kumar Joshi of Ghoshpara in Baguiati, he was travelling with only one bag on the IndiGo flight 6E 2263 Delhi from to Vijaywada

Wednesday. Hence, he



kept Rs 2.2 lakh in cash the registered bag.On reaching Vijaywada, he found the bag's chain slightly open, which raised his suspicion. He then took

the bag to the IndiGo counter and opened it. Inside, notes were missing from each of the five bundles — four of Rs 500 denomination and one of Rs 200.

All the bundles, Joshi claimed, were stamped by the bank and contained 100 notes each. "The chain was opened notes were removed from each of the bundles. I do not know whether the theft happened in Delhi or in Vijaywada,"

A veteran aviation security official said the theft could have happened at Delhi after the bundles were detected in X-ray of the registered luggage. "If cash has gone missing from a bag, whoever

he said.

has stolen it must have known about the money. It was not a random pilferage," the official said. A priest by profession,

Joshi travelled to Bengaluru and then to Rajasthan's Mehendipur before making a stop in Delhi en route to Vijaywada. "I have come to Vijaywada for a puja at the factory of a client in Delhi. Since he was delayed, he gave me the cash for use at the puja and was to be handed over

Vijaywada," said Joshi.

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