

Inspiration: Late. Dr. L.C. Wallia

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## Siddaramaiah says he learnt of 2010 Kesare land deal only in 2013

**Vatika Times** MYSURU: The final report of the Lokayukta investigation into the Mysore Urban Development Authority (Muda) site allotment case has revealed that chief minister Siddaramaiah was not involved in the Kesare land transactions, and the 14 compensation sites allotted to his wife, BM Parvathi. Sources say the report, recently submitted to the Karnataka high court, states that the chief minister became aware of the disputed land only in mid-2013. Sleuths questioned over 100 officials from Muda, revenue, and land records departments, besides several politicians, but reportedly found no substantial evidence linking Siddaramaiah to the case. During questioning, sources say Siddaramaiah said he was unaware that his brother-in-law, BM Mallikarjuna Swamy, had purchased de-notified land in 2005 or the subsequent transfer of three acres and 16 guntas to his wife in 2010. He said that he learnt about it only after the 2013 assembly elections and, as an elected representative, had declared it in his 2014 assets and liabilities report to the Lokayukta as per rules. During an interrogation in early Nov, Siddaramaiah reportedly answered over two dozen queries. When asked about his election affidavit, he said, "I don't exactly remember the declaration of land and sites." Denying any influence over the transactions, Siddaramaiah said he had no acquaintance with Kesare landowner Devaraju.

## In Supreme Court, govt. opposes life ban on convicted netas

**Vatika Times** NEW DELHI: Opposing the plea that the six-year disqualification for convicted persons from contesting polls be turned into a life-long ban, Centre has told Supreme Court that the present law was constitutionally sound and it should be left to Parliament to decide on amending the law and the judiciary should refrain from passing direction. In an affidavit filed in SC, the Centre argued that there was nothing wrong in imposing time-bound penalty as other grounds of disqualification - such as holding an office of profit, unsoundness of mind, insolvency and not being a citizen of India - were not permanent but time-bound and disqualification was tied to the existence of a supervening circumstance. According to Section 8 of Representation of the People Act, the period of disqualification kicks in six years from the date of conviction or in case of imprisonment, six years from the date of release. Challenging the provision, advocate Ashwini Upadhyay, now with BJP, filed a petition seeking SC's direction to do away with time-bound penalty and bar a convicted



person for life from contesting MP/MLA election, forming political party or becoming office-bearer of a political party. Disputing the contention, the Centre said, "Disqualifications made under the impugned sections are limited by time as a matter of parliamentary policy and it would not be appropriate to substitute the petitioner's understanding of the issue and impose a lifetime ban. As a matter of judicial review, the court can declare the provisions to be unconstitutional and declare them to be inoperative, however, the relief that he is seeking amounts to rewriting of the provision as it effectively seeks to read 'lifelong' instead of 'six years' in all sub-sections of Section 8 of the Act." "Only Parl can decide if lifetime ban would be appropriate or not" The govt said whether a

lifetime ban would be appropriate or not was a question that was solely within the domain of Parliament. "Numerous laws provide for penalties limited by time, in the same manner as in the impugned Act. It is submitted that this is in line with well-established principles governing penal law. By confining the operation of the penalty to an appropriate length of time, deterrence is ensured while undue harshness is avoided," the affidavit said. "The issues raised by the petitioner have wide-ranging ramifications and clearly fall within the legislative policy of Parliament and the contours of judicial review would be suitably altered in such regard. SC has held that legislative choice over one option or the other cannot be questioned in courts over its efficacy or otherwise," it added.

## Cabinet clears decks for tabling of Waqf bill

**Vatika Times** NEW DELHI: Cabinet has approved the proposed amendments to the Waqf (Amendment) Bill incorporating the changes recently recommended by the Parliamentary panel, paving the way for it to be tabled for discussion and passage in the second half of the budget session. govt has incorporated most of the changes recommended by the Joint Parliamentary

Committee (JPC) headed by Jagdambika Pal and the Cabinet cleared it last week along with the Indian Port Bill. The bill has been put in the priority list by the govt as part of its legislative business. The bill was referred to the JPC in August 2024 after it was introduced in the Lok Sabha by minority affairs minister Kiren Rijju. The parliamentary panel adopted the report with majority vote while all 11 MPs from opposition parties in the panel

had objected to the report. They had also moved dissent notes. The 655-page report was submitted to both the Houses of Parliament earlier this month. The panel while doing away with the "Waqf by User" provision, going forward, has allowed only existing "Registered Waqf by User" to be recognised as waqf. This will exclude the cases where the properties are under dispute or owned by the govt.

## DOGE plans to replace of Education contract workers with AI chatbots

**Vatika Times** NEW DELHI: Trump DoE to replace human workers with AI: The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), spearheaded by Elon Musk, is reportedly considering replacing contract workers in the Department of Education with AI chatbots. Internal department documents reveal that Musk's allies within the Education Department are exploring the use of generative AI to manage student and parent inquiries, according to a

New York Times report. This initiative aligns with President Trump's broader efforts to shrink the federal workforce and modernize public services using artificial intelligence. Currently, 1,600 call center agents handle over 15,000 student loan inquiries daily, but the introduction of AI could drastically reduce the need for human workers. The chatbot system would replace or supplement existing services, such as Accenture's help desk contract, valued at over \$700 million.

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

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

## India will not fail my daughter: Father of dead KIIT student seeks justice

**Vatika Times** DEHRADUN/PITHORAGARH: In a corner of Bhubaneswar, a hostel room has been emptied. Its door, indistinguishable from the others lining the corridor, remains locked. Inside, the personal touches that once marked the space are gone, leaving no trace of the young woman who aspired to build a future there. Yet, beyond these walls, the name Prakriti Lamsal resonates.



In Odisha, where students are protesting. In Kathmandu, among Nepal's student communities, within govt offices and the PMO. No action was taken on her complaints: Dead KIIT girl's dad Days after Prakriti's death,

her father, Sunil Lamsal, searches for answers while holding onto his belief that India will deliver justice for his daughter. "Since the era of Ramayan, both countries have maintained the rotibeti ka rishta," he told TOI over the phone from Kathmandu on Wednesday. "I cannot be in Odisha for the entire duration of the probe, but I am confident that the Indian govt will do what it needs to."

## Amid M K Stalin's LS seat-cut claims, Amit Shah says Tamil Nadu tally to stay intact

**Vatika Times** COIMBATORE: Union home minister Amit Shah said Wednesday that CM M K Stalin is misleading people of Tamil Nadu with his claims that the state would stand to lose a number of parliamentary constituencies after the delimitation exercise. Shah's assertion comes a day after Stalin called for an all-party meeting on March 5 to discuss the consequences of the exercise. Addressing BJP workers here, Shah said, "The PM has made it clear that no state will lose its Lok Sabha seats due to delimitation. Instead, Tamil Nadu and other southern states will only gain constituencies on a pro rata basis." Asking Stalin to explain the basis of his



claim that TN would lose Lok Sabha seats due to delimitation, Shah said, "It is condemnable to mislead the people." Back of the envelope calculations using India's population as of March 2025 according to projections by the Census office show that if no major state is to suffer a decline

in LS seats but their shares are to reflect population shares, the size of LS would have to expand to about 790. In such a scenario, Kerala's LS seats would remain at 20 while all other major states would see an addition to their seat tally. In terms of the share of LS seats, the southern states, however,

would suffer a significant loss. Presently, the five southern states amongst themselves have 129 of the 543 LS seats or about 24%. In an LS with 790 seats, they would have 152 seats or just over 19%. TN's present share of 7.2% in the LS would reduce to 5.4%. In contrast, the Hindi belt states of UP, Bihar, Rajasthan, MP currently have 174 or 32% of LS seats. In the 790-member House, that number would jump to 300 or about 38% of the total. UP's tally alone would rise from the current 80 to 133 seats. Shah's visit to TN comes amidst an intense Centre-state tussle over alleged Hindi imposition and inadequate fund allocation.

## Earthquake of magnitude 5 jolts Assam's Morigaon district

**NEW DELHI:** A 5.0 magnitude earthquake jolted Assam's Morigaon district on Thursday during the early morning hours, the National Center for Seismology (NCS) said. The seismic activity was recorded at 2:25 am with its epicentre at a depth of 16 kilometres. "EQ of M: 5.0, On: 27/02/2025 02:25:40 IST, Lat: 26.28 N, Long: 92.24 E, Depth: 16 Km, Location: Morigaon, Assam," the NCS posted on X. Previously, the Bay of Bengal experienced a 5.1 magnitude earthquake on Tuesday morning. The NCS reported that this seismic event occurred at 6:10 am, with its epicentre located 91 kilometres below the surface. "EQ of M: 5.1, On: 25/02/2025 06:10:25 IST, Lat: 19.52 .

## Woman raped in bus at busy Pune station located opposite thana

**Vatika Times** PUNE: A 26-year-old preoperative counsellor with a Pune hospital was allegedly raped inside a parked bus at the city's Swargate terminus around 5.30am Tuesday. The accused is a criminal with past cases of theft and robbery. Police teams are combing through CCTV footage and local networks to track the fugitive suspect. The crime occurred at one of Pune's busiest transport hubs, which sees a daily footfall of 60,000 passengers and 600 bus movements. Swargate police station is located opposite the bus terminus, raising concerns over security lapses. "After the assault, the survivor was so traumatised that she couldn't raise an alarm," DCP Smartana Patil said. He said the survivor was at Swargate depot to take a morning bus home when

the accused approached her. "The suspect struck a casual conversation with her, asking about her destination," Patil said. "A little later, he told her that a bus parked nearby, where passengers usually board in advance. He led her to the bus, and when she entered to check for seats, he followed her inside, bolted the door from inside, and raped her." Transport minister Pratap Sarnaik ordered an inquiry into the lapses and 23 security personnel have been removed from service. The crime has sparked widespread outrage across the state. Shiv Sena (UBT) supporters protested at Swargate terminus, vandalising the ticket counter. Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, NCP (SP) MP Supriya Sule, state women's commission chairperson Rupali Chakankar and others.

## It's wild that I have never been to Delhi before: Ed Sheeran

**Vatika Times** NEW DELHI: After his opening song, the Photograph singer shared how, until now, all his performances in India had been limited to Mumbai. "In 2015, we played in Mumbai. The next time we came, we played in Mumbai. And the next time, we played in Mumbai. So the last time, I said, 'Why don't we play anywhere else? From now on, let's play everywhere except Mumbai!'" Expressing his excitement about finally performing in other cities, including Delhi, he went on to share his experience of exploring the capital while shooting for music videos, Sheeran said, "It's amazing to see everything. We went to Old Delhi, and it's been an incredible experience." With just his guitar and loop station, Sheeran showcased his signature performance style-building songs in real time without backing tracks.

## After watching porn, teen tries to rape 4-year-old, kills her

**Vatika Times** RAIPUR: In a horrific incident in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh, a 14-year-old juvenile after watching porn content on a mobile phone lured a 4-year-old girl in his neighbourhood with chocolates and took her to a desolate under-construction building and tried to rape her and later murdered her when she tried to raise an alarm. The juvenile was detained by the police and sent to a correction home. The incident took place on Feb

24 and the juvenile accused was arrested on Feb 25. The girl had gone missing from the Sarkanda region in the evening when she left home for playing around 6 pm and didn't return. Her parents and neighbours searched for her till late hours. The juvenile accused also joined the search operations and misled them by not allowing them to go near the crime spot. Tired, the parents of the girl called off the search late at night, assuming that she

might be staying back at a friend's house in the neighbourhood. They reported the matter to police on Tuesday morning when the girl did not return. During the day, a labourer found the blood smeared seminude body of the minor girl on the roof of an under-construction house. Police were informed and the body was identified. Based on statements of labourers in the area and CCTV footage, the juvenile was detained.



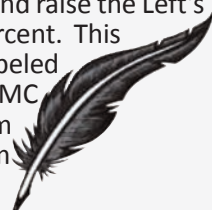
Editorial

It can take a cue from Rahul Gandhi

Ritu Walia

"This time, I had anticipated that Bengal would give the CPI (M) at least three seats. And without a doubt, Bhattacharyya, our Srijan, would be among the winners. Sayan Banerjee, Dipsita Dhar, and Srijan, our fine girls and lads, could not turn the CPI(M) around, not even Rahul Gandhi could turn the Congress around. The disenchantment of supporters such as Biswas is understood by Srijan Bhattacharyya, 31, the state secretary of the Students' Federation of India and the CPI(M) candidate for the Jadavpur Lok Sabha constituency. Bhattacharyya became the darling of many young voters from Jadavpur University with his clever one-liners and upbeat campaign message centered on "people's issues," and sizable crowds flocked to his rallies in the predominantly middle-class area. However, on results day on June 4, he received 258,712 votes, placing him third behind Saayoni Ghosh of the Trinamool Congress (717,899 votes) and Anirban Ganguly of the BJP (459,698 votes). Some of us from the CPI(M) received a tonne of support from the public and on social media. However, Bhattacharyya informed over the phone that it was a bubble. We must now venture outside of our echo chambers. The large number of people that attended our Brigade Parade event on January 7th did not result in any seating. At the historic Brigade Parade Ground on January 7, the CPI(M), a party that is frequently criticized in West Bengal for not being able to shake off the legacy of the Jyoti Basu, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Anil Biswas, and Biman Bose era, held a symbolic rally to give the baton to the next generation. Bose followed Biswas as the state secretary in charge of party affairs, and Basu and Bhattacharjee led Left Front governments in the state for a total of 34 years. Md. Salim, the state secretary at the moment and another seasoned leader, hinted to a generational change inside the party at the much-maligned rally. "In order to assist the seeds become plants, we are sowing them. To aid in their growth, we'll pretend to be gardeners, supply fertilizer, and properly irrigate the field," he declared to the applauding audience. At the rally, everyone noticed how many new faces there were. Journalist Swati Das noted that the CPI(M) had brought in youthful leaders who had established themselves in student politics to replace its "weather-beaten and battle-scarred veterans." " she noted, appeared to be being shed by this, she noted.

That was hardly the only astute remark. Many Left sympathizers were hopeful that the CPI(M) wouldn't lose this time around because of the focus on roti, kapda, and makaan that Bhattacharyya and the other newcomers . to the polls placed throughout the campaign. In keeping with their pledges made at Brigade Ground, the CPI(M) displayed a youthful vigor. In addition to Srijan Bhattacharyya, there were numerous other candidates, including Debraj Barman, 36, from Jalpaiguri; Nirab Khan, 43, from Bardhaman Purba; Saira Shah Halim, 46, from Kolkata Dakshin; Dipsita Dhar, 30, from Sreerampur constituency; Sayan Banerjee, 30, from Tamluk; and more. On June 4th, they all lost, including the senior group. Following their defeat, the CPI(M) conducted an internal investigation and came to the conclusion that the TMC and BJP's "communal binary" had radically divided the state along religious lines, benefiting both parties while keeping the CPM (M) and other Left parties out of the race. Saira Shah Halim, the Kolkata Dakshin candidate, directly attributed her defeat to this "binary." "In the Ballygunge Assembly votes of 2022, I was able to break through this binary and raise the Left's vote share from 5 to 30 percent. This time, I failed because I was labeled as a lesser Muslim by the TMC and a few local Muslim leader.s, Halim told Halim cited the following



Workplace mental health: Time for sane Thinking

Suman

What defines the real wealth of a nation? Is it the towering skyscrapers that shape its skyline, the bustling industries that fuel its economy, or the global influence it commands? Perhaps it's something much deeper—the well-being of its people, their minds, and their hearts. In a rapidly transforming India, where the pace of professional life is accelerating, workplace mental health has emerged as a crucial but often overlooked concern. As organisations strive for efficiency and output, the mental well-being of employees is under increasing strain. According to a survey by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the global economy loses an estimated \$1 trillion per year due to depression and anxiety alone. A study by Deloitte (2022) reveals that nearly 80 per cent of the Indian workforce faces some degree of mental health issues, yet a mere 20 per cent seek professional help. This alarming gap is exacerbated by the stigma associated with mental illness, inadequate awareness, and limited access to mental health services in workplace settings. A recent tragedy in Noida has brought the issue of workplace mental health into sharp focus. A bank employee took her own life after enduring harassment from her colleagues. The deceased left behind a five-page suicide note in which she revealed how her co-workers subjected her to derogatory slurs such as "bandariya" and "dimag se pagal". In the note, she named six of her colleagues, including two managers,



who allegedly contributed to her emotional breakdown. Another incident from Pune: a 26-year-old chartered accountant from Kerala took her own life after enduring four months of immense work pressure. Her mother's powerful letter to EY India sheds light on the "callous attitude" towards employee well-being that, unfortunately, seems to be a growing concern in many workplaces today. These heart-breaking incidents highlight the toxic environments that many Indian employees silently endure, emphasising the urgent need to address mental health issues in the workplace. For many Indian professionals, the culture of overwork, coupled with societal expectations, creates immense pressure to perform. Long working hours, tight deadlines, job insecurity, and an absence of work-life balance contribute to heightened stress, anxiety, and burnout. In a society where mental health is still a taboo topic, employees often refrain from discussing their struggles, fearing judgement or negative

career consequences. No job is worth a life, and it is time for a systemic change to ensure that every employee feels safe, valued, and heard. **Government Policies and Corporate Initiatives** India has made strides in addressing mental health in the workplace, but much progress is still required. The Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, provides a legal framework ensuring individuals' rights to mental health care, including mandated insurance coverage for mental health treatments. However, its corporate implementation remains limited. The National Mental Health Policy (2014) advocates for workplace mental health awareness and encourages supportive environments, though widespread adoption is yet to be seen. Nonetheless, companies like TCS and Wipro are pioneering employee wellness programs, offering counselling and stress management initiatives. The pandemic also spurred firms like Accenture, Google, and Microsoft to introduce teletherapy and burnout prevention strate-

gies. However, the government's 2024–25 Union Budget underscores a significant funding gap in addressing India's mental health challenges. Although the allocation for the National Tele Mental Health Programme has been increased to ₹90 crore from the previous year's ₹65 crore, this modest rise falls far short of the resources needed to meet the country's escalating mental health demands. A more comprehensive investment in workplace mental health remains critical for sustainable progress. **Role of Leadership** Corporate leadership plays a pivotal role in shaping workplace mental health. The tragic case of the Noida bank employee's suicide underscores the importance of leadership accountability in preventing workplace harassment. Had there been a proactive, supportive management encouraged workplace bullying and provided a safe space for employees to raise their concerns, the outcome might have been different. Leaders must take responsi-

bility for creating a healthy, inclusive work culture that discourages toxic behaviour. Creating a mental health-positive workplace culture requires a top-down approach where leaders not only encourage open dialogue but also normalise seeking help for mental health issues. Human Resources departments need to adopt a proactive role in identifying mental health risks and offering solutions, wellness check-ins, and mental health days.

A Holistic Approach

While government policies and corporate initiatives are crucial, sustainable change requires a multi-faceted approach. **Increased Awareness and Training:** Regular mental health awareness campaigns within organisations can help destigmatise mental health issues. Training managers and employees to recognise early signs of distress and offer support will create a safer environment for discussing mental health concerns. **Mental Health Infrastructure:** Companies need to invest in mental health infrastructure, including easily accessible counselling services, confidential helplines, and designated wellness officers. **Telehealth platforms,** which have seen increased use since the pandemic, can play a critical role in connecting employees with mental health professionals. **Work-Life Balance:** Flexible working hours, hybrid models, and vacation policies that prioritise rest over constant productivity can significantly reduce burnout. Encouraging employees to disconnect after working hours.

How Iran's pan-Islamic obsession pits it against Israel

Sandeep Singh

Is a war between Israel and Iran on the cards? Outbreak of full-scale hostilities between Israel and Iran was often feared during the last two decades. However, it was not until earlier this year that the Islamic Republic actually chose to hit Israel directly. Under Operation "True Promise", Iran fired a barrage of around 300 ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and suicide drones upon Israeli targets the night of April 13-14, 2024, almost a fortnight after Israeli airstrikes on the Iranian consulate in Damascus, Syria (April 1) had killed 16 persons, half of whom were officers of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Uzi Rubin, an expert of missile defence systems and a senior researcher at the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University, disabuses the notion that the attack was a mere face saver aimed at inflicting minimal damages. Rubin argues that it was a strike of

unprecedented magnitude, which was even more powerful than the Russian opening strike against Ukraine in February 2022. Israel's ability to intercept and deflect these attacks was a testimony to the success of its missile defence system. Recently, Tehran saw a merit in repeating those attacks as Operation "True Promise-2," after Israel booby-trapped Hezbollah's pager devices and launched devastating airstrikes in Lebanon that killed Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah in his secret bunker. Whether Israel retaliates or decides to tactically overlook the volley, as it did last April, is a matter of speculation. If indeed Israel seeks reprisal, it has plenty of high-value targets on the ground in Iran to choose from. They include military and intelligence sites, military command sites, oil terminals and refineries, and even nuclear reactors. Iran's poorly developed air defence system is unlikely to provide cover from Israel's vastly superior air strike.

Zakir Naik's Pakistan Visit Will Further Stoke Fire of Islamic Extremism

Abhinav

**Controversial** Islamic preacher Zakir Naik is currently on a visit to Pakistan, where he is scheduled to deliver a series of public lectures across major cities, including Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, from October 5 to October 20. His arrival at the invitation of the Pakistani government has ignited considerable concern regarding the potential ramifications of Naik's ideology on a nation already wrestling with escalating fundamentalism and sectarian violence. Born in 1965, Naik is infamous for his provocative and often divisive sermons that have gained a global audience. His lectures advocate a stringent interpretation of Islam and frequently challenge the beliefs of other religions, asserting a narrative of Islamic superiority. In 2016, he fled from India amidst allegations of inciting terrorism and hatred, subsequently finding refuge in Malaysia. Since then, he has continued to attract significant attention, both from supporters who view him as a visionary promoting interfaith dialogue, and critics who contend that his rhetoric often strays into incitement, fostering fundamentalist interpretations that may lead to radicalisation. One of the most concerning aspects of Naik's influence is its documented ties to extremist groups. In the past, multiple Bangladeshi militants have openly acknowledged being inspired by his teachings. Particularly alarming is the fact that Bangladeshi youth who carried out the 2016 Dhaka café attack at the behest of ISIS ideology had cited Naik's lectures as a crucial motivating factor behind their actions. These admissions reveal a disturbing truth: Naik's sermons are

not merely educational but can act as a conduit for violent extremism. In light of this context, his forthcoming lectures in Pakistan are especially troubling. The country has long struggled with fundamentalist ideologies, resulting in the emergence of extremist factions that target minorities and incite sectarian violence. Naik's presence is poised to intensify these tensions, further polarising an already divided Pakistani society. For decades, Pakistan's landscape has been deeply scarred by religious extremism. The emergence of fundamentalist groups has not only jeopardised the secular fabric of society but has also incited violence against religious minorities. Communities such as Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus and Shias have endured systemic discrimination, violence, and persecution, frequently rationalised by extremist interpretations of Islam. As the nation continues to grapple with its multifaceted identity, the influx of radical ideologies presents a significant threat to its minorities. The Pakistani government has made no efforts to counter extremist narratives and hence the societal currents of fundamentalism remain robust. The minorities in Pakistan—particularly Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus and Shia Muslims—are surviving in a precarious situation. Ahmadis, for instance, are legally designated as non-Muslims and have to endure persecution, violence, and even murder. The blasphemy laws, frequently exploited to target these communities, have resulted in mob violence and wrongful imprisonments. Christians and Shia Muslims also face targeted assaults from extremist factions.

Who - And What - Will Fill The Vacuum In Iran's Resistance Axis?

Saariq

The killing of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah in Israeli airstrikes on the Dahieh suburb of Beirut, a predominantly Shia stronghold, was a tectonic event both for the group and the region. Nasrallah had been the leader of Hezbollah for over three decades. The outfit itself was designated as a terror group by the US and others in 1997, two years before even Al Qaeda was labelled as such. In response to his death, Iran has launched a ballistic missile attack against Israel, upping the ante. The crisis today for Hezbollah, founded in 1982 from the ashes of the

Lebanese Civil War, is more existential in nature than ever before. Along with Nasrallah, a majority of the group's military and political hierarchy has also been eliminated. While Israel's offensives against Hezbollah's leadership are not new, the 2006 Israel-Lebanon war, where Israel failed to deliver a thumping defeat, was a focal moment in its strategic thinking. The 2008 assassination in Syria of the group's second in command and founder of the Lebanese Islamic Jihad Organisation, Imad Mughniyeh, was a turning point, one that ultimately culminated in Israeli operations inside Lebanon over the

past two months, such as targeting communication lines used via old pagers and walkie-talkies. Moving forward, reconstructing Hezbollah in a post-Nasrallah era will not be easy. Israel, with these strikes, followed by a real threat of a region-wide escalation, may have found ample time for itself to hope for a political alternative emerging from within Lebanon, a country where Hezbollah was a state within a state and challenged the normal functioning of politics. Lebanon has had no president since 2022. Along with Nasrallah, the killing of senior Hezbollah commanders, such

as the southern front chief Al Karaki and Iranian commander Abbas Nilforoushan, amongst others, also significantly disrupts the chain of command. The Iranian retaliation against Israel in the form of ballistic missiles was explicitly highlighted as a response to these assassinations. The next leader of the group is widely expected to be Hashem Safieddine, a senior member and cousin of Nasrallah. Safieddine, by some accounts, is more radical and less politically astute than his predecessor. Sporting a black turban, he believes that he is a direct descendant.



## HSGMC Adhoc Committee violating rules and laws : Didar Singh Nalvi



**Jasbir Singh Duggal**  
**Kurukshetra:** A meeting of some newly elected members was held at the head office of Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee on Wednesday. The meeting was chaired by Parkash Singh Sahuwal. In the meeting held yesterday, the matter of retiring the Chief Secretary and giving directions to the employees was discussed by the Executive Committee of the Adhoc HSGMC. In a press note issued after the meeting, Akal Panthak Morcha President Jathedar Baldev Singh Kaipur, Didar Singh Nalvi and

Parkash Singh Sahuwal said that the 11-member executive committee of the Haryana Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (Adhoc), which includes Jathedar Bhopinder Singh Asandh, Jathedar Baljit Singh Daduwal, can only serve as caretakers. These office bearers neither have the authority to convene the executive committee meeting nor can they take any action or pass any agenda. Along with this, after the elections, the adhoc committee has neither the authority to retire anyone nor to transfer anyone. These newly elected members said that the appointment of

the Chief Secretary was made by the executive committee for two years and now the executive committee also has the authority to retire him and the house of newly elected members of the Haryana Committee has not been completed till now after the elections. He said that the service of the Chief Secretary is going on regularly and the removal of him from the job by the adhoc committee is illegal. He said that in today's meeting, a unanimous decision was taken to continue the service of the Chief Secretary, while the adhoc committee condemned the instructions given to the employees.

## Terrorists attack Army patrol vehicle in Rajouri



**JAMMU:** Terrorists fired at a patrol vehicle of 9 J&K Rifles in Sunderbani sector of Jammu division's Rajouri district Wednesday afternoon. "The attack occurred near Phul village, with no reported casualties," an official said. Army, police, and CRPF launched a search operation in the forested area to track down the terrorists, while additional reinforcements were deployed. The attack follows multiple

recent security threats in Jammu region, including an IED blast near the LoC in Akhnoor on Feb 11 that killed two soldiers, a Feb 8 attack on a military patrol in Keri sector, and a Feb 19 sighting of suspicious movement along the LoC in Sunderbani. On Feb 12, Pakistani soldiers violated the ceasefire in forward areas along the LoC in Poonch district in an attempt to push terrorists into India, using cover fire as a decoy. Security forces are on high alert as most infiltration attempts happen when melting snow in mountainous regions eases movement for terrorists. This year's winter lull may be brief, as warmer temperatures signal an early spring. Top military and security officers, including Lt Gen MV Suchindra Kumar and Lt Gen Navin Sachdeva, have been reviewing operational readiness in Jammu, Rajouri, and Reasi sectors.



## Jaipur LPG tanker crash: Investigation finds fault on part of NHA and tanker's owner and consigner

**NEW DELHI:** An investigation into the Jaipur LPG tanker crash that claimed 21 lives has pointed out faults on the part of NHA and its agencies, and the owner and consigner of the tanker for non-compliance of safety standards as well as negligence of the deceased driver of the goods truck that hit the tanker. The findings of the crash investigation conducted by the Institute of Road Traffic Education (IRTE) with support from the Jaipur Police was presented at a mock court, chaired by former IPS Kiran Bedi, on Wednesday at the College of Traffic Management in Faridabad. The probe report mentions that the tanker driver can be absolved of the offence of dangerous or negligent driving as he took the U-turn on the highway "cautiously". However, the FIR by the Jaipur Police, registered hours after the fatal crash, has accused the drivers of the LPG tanker and the goods truck of speeding and negligence, which, according to police, resulted in the accident. The FIR has not mentioned any other entity for the crash. Police are yet to file a chargesheet in the case. The crash happened on the Jaipur-Kishangarh highway in Rajasthan on Dec 20 last year. The goods-carrier truck collided with the BPCL tanker carrying LPG when the tanker was making the U-turn. There was an explosion due to gas leak from the tanker as its inlet-outlet nozzle had broken in the accident. The findings of another crash investigation carried out by SaveLife Foundation for the road transport ministry, which was presented to minister Nitin Gadkari recently, identified almost similar reasons behind the fatal accident.

## Panel: Give 'exemplary penalty' to curb 'sarpanch patis' practice

**NEW DELHI:** To curb the practice of proxy participation of husbands and other male relatives often referred to as "Sarpanch patis", "Mukhiya Patis" and "Pradhan Patis" in place of elected women 'pradhans' in gram panchayats, an advisory committee set up by the ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) has suggested that "exemplary penalties" should be enforced for proven cases of proxy leadership. The committee has also suggested a robust reporting mechanism through helplines and womens watchdog committees for confidential complaints about proxy leadership, with whistleblower rewards in verified cases. The report on "Transforming Women's Representation and Roles in Panchayati Raj



Systems and Institutions: Eliminating Efforts for Proxy Participation" submitted to the secretary of the ministry has also suggested a detailed roadmap on the way forward with interventions ranging from behavioural change through capacity-building and mentorship, and establishing a monitoring framework from the grassroots to the top.

The advisory committee was set-up by the ministry in September 2023 following the Supreme Court's order of July on the issue. Besides research of available literature and extensive consultations with the state govts, the report is based on interactions of four intensive regional workshops involving 14 States. Secretary MoPR, Vivek

Bharadwaj told that they are developing an action plan which will be discussed and shared with states for consultation and execution. "To begin with we will be launching a capacity building programme exclusively for elected women representatives next week which will be looking at leadership and its challenges from the women's perspective to equip them better to execute their roles," Bharadwaj said. On the suggestion for penalties and punishments in cases of proxy leadership, he said that they are considering setting up a committee of secretaries of states going forward to study and decide how legal measures can be standardised and executed on the ground to create deterrence.

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

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



address to the RBI board. "And I strongly believe that the road map that the PM has set for the country should certainly take Delhi on the top priority and serve its people from every point of view, for all the Human Development Indicator-related issues and also the fundamental infrastructure, schools, hospitals, people's healthcare, and the capital worth India's 'Viksit Bharat' aspirations," Sitharaman said. Days before the Delhi polls, Sitharaman had announced a Rs 1 lakh crore income tax relief for the middle class, including a rebate for those earning up to Rs 12 lakh annually.

## UP to support state's temples, mosques turn environment friendly

**NEW DELHI:** The 45-day Maha Kumbh that ended on Wednesday saw a first-of-its-kind declaration by the Uttar Pradesh govt, in which it resolved to support all religious centres, including temples, mosques and faith-based organisations, in the state to turn green by adopting multiple environment friendly measures. The govt's commitments under the 'Mahakumbh Declaration on Climate Change' include supporting these religious centres/institutions in adopting renewable energy such as installing solar panels, waste management, energy and water conservation, afforestation and other eco-friendly technologies. Implementing rainwater harvesting systems, banning single-use plastic within the premises of the reli-



gious institutions, and creating green zones around sacred spaces are the other measures which will be taken up to reduce the carbon footprint of temples, mosques, gurdwaras, churches and other faith-based organisations. The govt through the declaration, released by UP chief secretary Manoj Kumar Singh during the country's first ever conference on faith and climate change on the sidelines of the Maha Kumbh in Prayagraj on Feb 16, also resolved to assist in setting up

environment and climate education programmes for religious centres, faith-based and spiritual organisations in the state. UP CM Yogi Adityanath had also attended the conference. "The UP govt also plans to release a guideline on eco-friendly religious events. The declaration and the commitment made by the state is a great beginning to involve faith leaders and organisations in climate and environment protection," said Chandra Bhusan, climate change.

## Let's finish what we started for our own benefit: EU chief on FTA

**NEW DELHI:** Ahead of her visit to India, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tells the EU will work to uphold the rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific and reinforce defence cooperation with India. Responding to Trump's tariff threats, she said EU will respond to any unjustified tariff. As PM Narendra Modi hosts European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen this week for talks to further deepen EU-India cooperation in trade, technology and economic security, the EU chief told an exclusive interview that the 27-member union is committed to upholding the rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific, including through security engagement. With the EU preparing to unveil a new strategic agenda with India at the EU-India summit, which



will be held later this year, the president sought stronger cooperation for a common tech agenda, advancement of FTA talks and a reinforcement of defence and security cooperation. The EU has described von der Leyen's visit to India this week as unprecedented, as this is the first time she's leading a delegation of the entire EU College of Commissioners to the country. As both sides prepare for another round of FTA talks next month, von der Leyen said she's convinced

the agreement can be achieved if both sides commit to it, adding there are 6000 EU companies in India that have together created 8 million jobs. "So, now let's finish what we started, for the benefit of both our economies," she said. And as President Trump throws the transatlantic alliance into disarray, battering friends and foes alike with tariffs, von der Leyen said there are no winners in a trade war and unjustified tariffs won't go unanswered. In this era of multiplying conflicts

and intense geostrategic competition, Europe wants to strengthen its partnership with India, one of its most trusted friends. This is why I am coming with all Commissioners to New Delhi, as one of the first trips of my new mandate. There is a great, positive momentum in our relations. Together, we can drive forward trade, economic security, and resilient supply chains. Let's also strengthen our cooperation on a common tech agenda, as well as reinforce security and defence cooperation. Europe has many ideas to strengthen our partnership with India, and we look forward to discussing them with the Government of India. Before the summer, we will present a new Strategic Agenda for our relations, laying the foundation for further progress at our upcoming

EU-India summit. We aim to advance discussions on a free trade agreement, expand cooperation on digital technologies, particularly AI, and accelerate our work on clean technologies like electric vehicles and green hydrogen. On security, we will deepen collaboration in cybersecurity, counterterrorism, maritime security, and even space security! Talks on a free trade agreement were revived in 2021 and we are now preparing for a 10th round of negotiations in Brussels. There is more work to be done at technical level, but I'm convinced we can cross the finish line if we both commit to it. Europe is already India's biggest trading partner and third-largest investor. Over the last twenty years, our trade has tripled. European businesses in India are thriving.



## Salman Khan joins Mountain Dew as its latest brand ambassador



**Vatika Times**  
**AMBALA:** Mountain Dew, PepsiCo India's bold and fearless beverage brand, is gearing up for summer with an exhilarating new campaign. We are thrilled to announce that Mountain Dew creates history by uniting Indian megastars - Salman Khan and Hrithik Roshan to embrace the spirit of Darr Ke Aage Jeet Hai—which means victory lies beyond fear. The duo features in a never-seen-before TVC that showcases that we can overcome any challenge that life throws our way through courage and camaraderie. Talking about the campaign, Akankshaa Dalal, Category Lead, Mountain Dew, PepsiCo India said that Mountain Dew embodies fearlessness, and this campaign takes that to the next level by showcasing the power of camaraderie. Courage grows when

challenges are faced together, and that's something our audience truly connects with. Bringing Hrithik Roshan and Salman Khan together for the first time isn't just about their individual grit—it's about the exciting energy they create as a team. This campaign is all about pushing limits, embracing challenges, and proving that with the right support, no fear is too big to conquer. "This is literally the first time that the world will see these two action heroes Salman Khan and Hrithik Roshan together on the screen and what a delight it will be for the consumers and fans. In an exhilarating film, we

see a group of friends on a cable car journey through stunning snow-capped mountains. Suddenly, disaster strikes as the cables snap, sending the car tumbling towards a gorge. Amidst the chaos, Hrithik and Salman display incredible bravery and teamwork, working side by side to avert almost certain disaster. This narrative resonates with anyone who has ever faced fear, reminding us that teamwork amplifies courage. Speaking about his latest campaign as Mountain Dew's brand ambassador, Salman Khan said, "I'm excited to join hands with Mountain Dew® as the face of the brand.

**Vatika Times**  
**HISAR:** Shakti Pumps (India) Ltd., announced a significant investment of Rs 1700 crore in Madhya Pradesh. The expansion to be done on approximately 64 hectares of industrial land in Pithampur will set up state-of-the-art manufacturing units for solar cells, solar pumping systems and electric vehicle components from renewable energy solar wafers, creating huge employment opportunities in the state. Once production starts in these projects, Shakti Pumps will be the first company in the country to have the capability to manufacture all the needs of the solar pumping industry such as pumps, motors, solar panels, structures, VFDs, inverters etc. Established in 1982, Shakti Pumps has a rich legacy of over 40 years in the Indian market. The company offers a wide range of pumps, including domestic, agricultural, industrial, solar and sewage pumps, that cater to a wide range of



needs. A recognized leader in the Indian solar pump market, Shakti Pumps exports its products to over 100 countries across the globe with an emphasis on energy efficiency and sustainability. The company has consistently demonstrated strong financial performance and profitability. Shakti Pumps is also a channel partner of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) PM KUSUM Yojana for solar pumps, underlining its commitment to renewable energy solutions.

Mr. Dinesh Patidar, Chairman, Shakti Pumps (India) Ltd. said, "This significant investment underlines our unwavering commitment to Madhya Pradesh and its growth trajectory. We believe in the immense potential of the state and its favourable business environment. This expansion will strengthen our position in the renewable energy and electric vehicle sectors, as well as contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the region by creating substantial employment opportunities."

## Sahil Goyal appointed National Secretary of Bajrang Sena

**Jasbir Singh Duggal**



**Kurukshetra:** Sahil Goyal, a young leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, has been appointed as the National Secretary of Bajrang Sena. His appointment was made by Ashok Sharma, Founder/ National Chief of Bajrang Sena, and Mahender (Bhaiyu Yadav), National President. They expressed hope that Sahil Goyal would contribute to the protection of cow and Hindu culture, as well as help in creating a narcotics-free nation. Expressing gratitude to the national leadership for his appointment, Sahil Goyal said that the primary objective of Bajrang Sena is to protect the interests of Hindus and promote Sanatan Dharam. The organization's main objectives are service, bravery, security, and culture. His primary goal would be to declare India a Hindu nation and provide services and assistance to society. Sahil Goyal stated that Bajrang Sena is working on a large scale to protect Hindus. The organization has established units in all states and is forming committees in all units. He added that Bajrang Sena has set up its head office in Jaipur and would soon visit several states to establish the organizational structure. Sahil Goyal emphasized that he is a loyal soldier of the Bharatiya Janata Party and would work for the party's causes while also serving as the National Secretary of Bajrang Sena.

## Research & Development backbone of Higher Education : VC KUK

**Jasbir Singh Duggal Kurukshetra. 26 February.** While speaking as the chief guest in the inaugural session of "Ten-day Research Methodology Course for PhD/PDF Scholars in Social Sciences" organized by KUK's Centre for Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Studies, Vice Chancellor Kurukshetra University Prof Som Nath Sachdeva said that research is vitally required to solve problems and make life better. Technological developments make countries prosper economically which is possible because of research. To make India a Global knowledge superpower research is imperative. Research and development is the backbone of high-



er education. Prof Sachdeva explained the difference between method and methodology. Survey, data collection comprise various types of methods whereas methodology is a philosophy that tells which method is to be used. A research work begins with

problem identification and finding gaps. Then the research scholar needs to address the gaps. Literature review should be covered to explore the gaps in literature. Centre Director Dr. Pritam Singh welcomed the dignitaries and informed that this ten day Research

Methodology Course is sponsored by ICSSR which will have resource persons from IITs/ IIMs/ TISS/ NITs/ Central Universities, State Universities. The keynote speaker, Prof MM Shamim from Aligarh University told about the significance of research work with the integration of artificial intelligence and informed about the methodology of doing quality research work and the importance of journals. Course Director Prof. Mahabir Narwal gave detailed information about the ten-day research workshop and told about the features of research. The stage was moderated by Dr Sangeeta.

## Delhi has practically exhausted groundwater

**Delhi:** While Delhi is facing a water crisis and civic authorities endeavor to boost groundwater availability, the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) reported that yearly recharge and groundwater for extraction had declined. The analysis anticipated Delhi's net annual groundwater recharge in at 0.38 billion cubic meters (bcm), 0.34 of which was accessible for extraction. Alarmingly, most groundwater has been removed. It means 99.1% of groundwater is extracted. The groundwater recharge was 0.41 bcm, with 0.37 bcm available for extraction and

0.36 bcm pulled out. The analysis showed Delhi's groundwater extraction rising from 98.16% in 2022 to 99.13% in 2023 despite a drop in recharging. While some places have made headway in maintaining safe groundwater levels, Delhi still struggles to properly manage its groundwater resources. With 15% of Delhi's assessment units categorized as "safe" for groundwater levels in 2023, up from 12% in 2022, the CGWB report was pleased. In stark contrast, important groundwater regions increased from 21% of the city in 2022 to 35% in 2023. CGWB assesses groundwater in 34 Delhi tehsils, each an assessment unit. Out of 34 evaluation units, 13 (38%) were 'over-exploited', 12 (35%) were 'critical', four (12%) were semi-critical', and five (15%) were safe'. Improvements since 2022 include an increase in safe zone tehsils from four to five, a decrease in over-exploited areas from 15 to 13. Critical regions expanded from seven tehsils in 2022 to 12 in 2023. To address the groundwater alarm, CGWB recommends mandating rainwater harvesting in water-depleted areas.

## CDSL IPF conducts Investment Awareness Program in Fatehabad educating students to be Atmanirbhar



**Vatika Times**  
**Fatehabad:** CDSL Investor Protection Fund (CDSL IPF) organized an investment awareness program for students in Fatehabad, Haryana. The initiative was organized in GM Gurukul Academy, Thakar Basti Near Jiwan Hospital Fatehabad. The program focused on promoting financial literacy and empowered investors to make informed decisions

regarding their investments in capital markets, while also delving into the core principles of investing. To ensure the initiative covered a wide audience, the program was conducted in Hindi and English languages. The speakers simplified investment concepts for the students, covering topics like Basics of Investment & Depository Services. As investor education plays a key role in

achieving financial inclusion in the capital markets, CDSL IPF aims to provide investors with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the complexities of the capital markets with confidence and be an #AtmanirbharInvestor. Committed to spreading financial literacy, CDSL IPF will continue to deliver more investor awareness programs nationwide this year.

## NEC Group Hosts Grand Sai Sandhya with Renowned Sufi Singer Hamsar Hayat at Siri Fort Auditorium

**Vatika Times**  
**New Delhi :** NEC Group, under its esteemed brand NEC Wire & Cables & Nitya Electrocontrols, successfully organized its much-awaited annual spiritual event, Sai Sandhya, at the prestigious Siri Fort Auditorium, New Delhi. The grand event featured an electrifying performance by renowned Sufi singer Hamsar Hayat, who mesmerized the audience with his soul-stirring renditions of Sai Bhajans and Sufi devotional songs. On this auspicious occasion, Mr Prashant Srivastava, Managing Director of NEC Group, expressed his heartfelt gratitude and shared the significance of the event, stating: "Sai Sandhya is our way of seeking Sai Baba's blessings for the well-being of everyone associated with NEC



Group and society at large. Through this gathering, we pray for prosperity, good health, and a bright future for all. This year, our prayers also extend towards the continued progress of our nation and the upliftment of humanity." Continuing its commitment to innovation and excellence, NEC Group has recently opened one more production setup in Noida. As a proud contributor to the Make in India initiative, NEC Group is heavily investing in the country's manufacturing sector. With four state-of-the-art production units located in Noida and Greater Noida, NEC is actively

expanding its operations to create employment opportunities and strengthen India's self-reliance in electrical manufacturing. Moreover, NEC remains committed to environmental sustainability by promoting clean and green energy solutions in its business processes. With all employees, associates and family members, the evening was a resounding success, filled with spirituality, devotion, and musical brilliance. The program commenced with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp, followed by a sacred Ganesh Vandana, setting an auspicious tone for the event.

## Tata Tea Premium Introduces Tata Tea Premium Care – Delicious Tea with goodness of Natural Ingredients

**Vatika Times**  
**PANIPAT/AMBALA :** Tata Consumer Products Limited (TCPL) continues to innovate in the premiumization and wellness category, adapting to the evolving needs of today's consumers. Strengthening its commitment to quality and well-being, Tata Tea Premium, Desh Ki Chai introduces Tata Tea



Premium Care—an expertly crafted blend with the natural goodness of Tulsi, Ginger, Brahmi, Elaichi, and Mulethi. Through its commitment to consumer-centric innovations, TCPL is redefining everyday beverages, transforming them into purposeful experiences that resonate with the preferences of modern consumers. Tata Tea Premium Care is a perfect blend of taste and wellness, crafted for India's love for strong chai with the added goodness of natural ingredients. Designed for consumers who seek a strong cup of tea, it seamlessly combines kadak chai with the benefits of natural ingredients. With trust and reliability at its core, this special blend is tailored for today's lifestyle. Speaking about the launch, Puneet Das, President - Packaged Beverages (India & South Asia), Tata Consumer Products, said, "Tata Tea Premium Care is a natural extension of our premiumization strategy.



## Jaipur LPG tanker crash: Investigation finds fault on part of NHAI



**NEW DELHI:** An investigation into the Jaipur LPG tanker crash that claimed 21 lives has pointed out faults on the part of NHAI and its agencies, and the owner and consigner of the tanker for non-compliance of safety standards as well as negligence of the deceased driver of the goods truck that hit the tanker. The findings of the crash investigation conducted by the Institute of Road Traffic Education (IRTE) with support from the Jaipur Police was presented at a

mock court, chaired by former IPS Kiran Bedi, on Wednesday at the College of Traffic Management in Faridabad. The probe report mentions that the tanker driver can be absolved of the offence of dangerous or negligent driving as he took the U-turn on the highway "cautiously". However, the FIR by the Jaipur Police, registered hours after the fatal crash, has accused the drivers of the LPG tanker and the goods truck of speeding and negligence, which, according to

police, resulted in the accident. The FIR has not mentioned any other entity for the crash. Police are yet to file a chargesheet in the case. The crash happened on the Jaipur-Kishangarh highway in Rajasthan on Dec 20 last year. The goods-carrier truck collided with the BPCL tanker carrying LPG when the tanker was making the U-turn. There was an explosion due to gas leak from the tanker as its inlet-outlet nozzle had broken in the accident.

## Display 'be kind to animals' message on public transport, Centre suggests

**NEW DELHI:** In the first such move in the country to sensitise people about animal safety, the Centre has suggested all states/UTs to display the slogan "Be kind to Animals" in English, Hindi, or regional languages on all public transport vehicles with effect from April 1. Sending an advisory on the proposal, the road transport and highways ministry on Tuesday (Feb 25) said the slogan can be painted or can be put in the form of a sticker. The ministry noted that the move to display such slogans was taken based on the receipt of submissions with respect to "promoting compassion



towards animals and to promote safety of animals on roads". It advised that the colour of the font may be selected to enhance the readability depending on the colour of the public transport vehicle used in the respective state. "This will help drivers be mindful of animals/birds on the

streets and make roads safer for all," said animal welfare activist Gauri Maulekhi while applauding the move. Underlining that the slogan resonates with India's cultural ethos, she said the ministry's initiative will not only enhance road safety but also advance animal welfare.

## Delhi's BJP promises 2500 for women and cheaper LPG

**Delhi:** The BJP's program for the Delhi assembly elections includes welfare pledges such as 2,500 monthly for impoverished women, 21,000 one-time aid for expectant women, 500 LPG cylinders for the needy, and 2,500 pension for older residents. JP Nadda said the first of the

three-part BJP manifesto will build a "developed Delhi" by focusing on women and welfare. He said the BJP's resolution for a developed Delhi prioritizes women's empowerment and older citizens' welfare. "The BJP does what it says, while the Congress and AAP lie and

betray the public." Nadda responded to the AAP's claim that the BJP would cancel all Delhi public welfare projects if it won the February 5 elections by saying they will continue. "We will make the schemes free of corruption and strengthen them," Nadda added.



## Air hostesses used to visit Subrata Roy in jail, I informed Kejriwal: Former Tihar official's explosive claim

**NEW DELHI:** Former Tihar PRO Sunil Kumar Gupta made an explosive claim that air hostesses of Sahara Airlines used to come to Subrata Roy in jail and remain with him for hours. This was one of the many facilities provided to the late founder of Sahara Group when he was in jail. In an interview with ANI, Gupta claimed that Arvind Kejriwal, then-chief minister of Delhi, was aware of all that but did not take any action. Recounting his experience with Subrata Roy when Roy was an inmate, Gupta said he was first kept in a regular jail. But he needed a facility with video conferencing so that he could negotiate with the buyers of his hotels following which he could pay the lenders back. "The Supreme Court's direction said that everything has to be done legally. But I saw that a lot of illegal things were happening... Before this, the Delhi High Court had called me and it said that there are several complaints of bribery and extortion at the jail," Gupta said. Gupta said he raised the issues at meetings chaired by DG Prisons but the DG thought Gupta was complaining against him. Then Gupta approached Kejriwal and informed him about the facilities that he thought were being extended to him illegally. "Arvind Kejriwal asked me if I could shoot a video of it. I told him it wouldn't be right for me and he could come here and check it for himself. He then said that DG Prison is an IPS officer who comes under Central Govt and we do not know if we can do anything about him..." he said.

## In a 1st in India, bird flu detected in domestic cats

**PUNE:** The first cases of avian influenza virus (H5N1) in domestic cats in India were reported from Chhindwara district in Madhya Pradesh, raising concerns about the bird flu pathogen mutating and infecting humans.

"H5N1 is classically an avian virus, but certain mutations allow it to replicate in mammalian hosts. This adaptability raises concerns because influenza viruses have the potential to trigger pandemics, as seen in past outbreaks like Covid-19," a scientist said. Scientists from ICAR-NIHSAD and Union govt's animal husbandry department have documented the cases this Jan in Chhindwara, which borders Nagpur - where several big cats died of bird flu in Dec last year.



The scientific team identified the virus as belonging to the 2.3.2.1a lineage, a variant of H5N1 that has caused outbreaks in poultry across India. "These cases represent the first documented instances of this particular strain infecting domestic cats in India," the study says.

It found that all infected cats exhibited symptoms such as high fever, loss of appetite, and lethargy before succumbing to the illness within one to three days after sample collection. The study identified 27 mutations in the virus found in cats. Scientists called for enhanced surveillance in domestic poul-

try, wild birds, and mammals, including pets and humans, given the virus's ability to jump between species.

"Although human infections have been rare, we must anticipate the virus adapting to efficient transmission to and between humans. Human-to-human transmission is still not efficient, but ongoing changes in the virus signal to us to stay vigilant and prepared even for a pandemic," virologist Jacob John said. On the virus's potential to cause a global outbreak, John cautioned: "H5N1 is new for humans. We do not have immunity against it. If human-to-human transmission becomes efficient, as an extension of the present pattern of mammalian transmission, it is going to be a concern.

## Fleeing perverts, event management firm owner dies in road crash

**PANAGARH/CHANDERNAGORE:**

A high-speed car chase on national highway 2 early Monday ended in tragedy as 27-year-old dancer and event manager Sutandra Chatterjee lost her life when her vehicle overturned. Chatterjee, a resident of Chandernagore in Bengal, was traveling to Gaya in Bihar for work when the accident occurred around 12.30am. While Chatterjee, seated in

the front passenger seat, bled to death, at least two of her colleagues suffered injuries. Police have seized both vehicles involved in the chase, but have yet to make any arrests.

Durgapur-Asansol police commissioner Sunil Kumar Choudhary said the crash resulted from an overtaking attempt gone wrong. "We have studied CCTV footage and have found that trouble arose when a white car, while over-

taking the woman's car, grazed it. As per CCTV footage, the woman's car was chasing the other vehicle and met with the accident leading to the woman's death. We have started a case based on a complaint by one of the occupants of the car in which the woman was traveling," he said. Chatterjee's colleagues, including Mintu Mondal - who later lodged an FIR - and driver Rajdeo Sharma, gave a different account.

## To make space for car park, part of Nek Chand's garden to be razed

**CHANDIGARH:** The iconic Rock Garden in Chandigarh is facing the UT administration's bulldozers, and citizens are up in arms to stop them.

A portion of the outer wall of the Rock Garden is being demolished and trees on either side of it being cut following a directive by Punjab and Haryana high court. It is part of a road widening project for creation of additional parking space and traffic decongestion on the road near the high court abutting the Rock Garden. Outraged by the administration's move, citizens have started campaigns to save the legacy of Nek Chand - whose waste-to-art project has been part of the city's identity for decades.

"So sorry, Nek Chand Saini; your precious creation is being demolished in part to



make way for a road and parking of polluting vehicles. We, the people of Chandigarh and the administration, have let you down, that too in your birth centenary year," wrote Manmohan Sarin, a lawyer and member of Chandigarh Heritage Conservation Committee, in a post on X on Feb 22. The wall that is being razed is near the 'high court gate' or 'VIP gate' of the Rock Garden. "It is the same gate from which Nek Chand ji used to enter the Rock Garden when he lived in it for around three years," said Nek

Chand's son Anuj Saini, adding, "The wall can be rebuilt, but the heritage value of the area will be lost." Citizens have been holding protests, and have initiated online petitions - 'Save Rock Garden, Save Chandigarh' and 'Saving Chandigarh' - to halt the demolition. The UT administration, however, said it is mandated to address the traffic bottleneck. It added that the compound was "not integral to the Rock Garden", but was originally built to enclose the adjacent forested land.

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

**Kasganj**

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



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

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

## DU to expand PhD admission slots by 20-25 pc

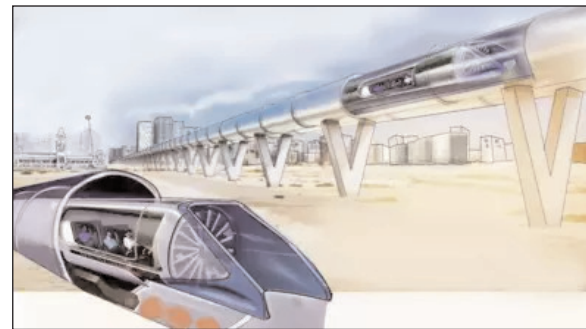
**Delhi:** Delhi University's executive council (EC) resolved to boost PhD admission seats by 20-25% from the last round of admission. The EC also allowed a university representation on St. Stephen's College's governing body to connect DU and the college.

DU also updated donation rules to fund scholarships, honors, and capital assets. Under this, the government, trusts, and corporations may set up scholarships.

## After hyperloop breakthrough, government eyes 50km commercial link

**NEW DELHI:** After the breakthrough in developing a hyperloop test track (422m) by IIT Madras with support from Indian Railways, the government is now planning development of a 50km corridor for commercial transport, said minister Ashwini Vaishnaw. It may be the longest hyperloop track in the world.

"The first tube will go a long way in developing technologies. The time has come when after the first two grants of \$1million each (nearly 9cr), the third grant of \$1million will be given to IIT Madras for fur-



ther developing the hyperloop project in a nice way. And once we see the commercial or rather pre-commercial where the product is ready, then within the railway set-up we will start the first commercial project. We will decide a site, which can be used for good com-

mercial transportation of 40km-50km and then we will go for it," Vaishnaw said while addressing the closing ceremony of Asia's first Global Hyperloop Competition by IIT Madras. Sources said the test track for commercial operation will help railways assess

viability of the technology. The hyperloop track can allow speeds of up to 1,200kmph. The successful development of the first test track, which was completed in Dec last year, will be the base for future development. There are 8 hyperloop projects around world. Hyperloop systems are expected to dramatically reduce travel times between cities, offering an alternative to traditional rail and air travel. The hyperloop concept envisions high-speed, low-pressure pods travelling at speeds of up to 1,200 kmph.



## Engineering faculty to now 'intern' in factories, labs & boardrooms

**MUMBAI:** In a striking reversal of roles, campuses across India will send engineering faculty into factories, boardrooms and laboratories of the industries they prepare their students to join. For a full year, faculty will trade lectures for deadlines, syllabi for budgets, and the structured rhythms of academia for the relentless pace of the private sector. This AICTE industry internship isn't just a handshake between academia and industry; it's an immersion, designed to sharpen understanding and strengthen collaboration. Professors will navigate the same pressures as the engineers they teach—long hours, tight budgets, and unyielding expectations. To support this transition, over and above their salary, All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) will offer them an honorarium of Rs 75,000 a month while



the companies hosting them will provide a monthly stipend of Rs 25,000. "This is an ambitious endeavour, a deliberate break from tradition, and it has full backing of AICTE's executive committee. We are setting the stage for 300 faculty members—young, under 45, and eager to step beyond the lecture halls to take up real-world problem-solving inside a public limited company," said AICTE vice-chairman Abhay Jere. Draft guidelines with minute details are being designed, but important criteria include the standing of the companies that faculty can join and the fact that faculty

who can apply will be mid- and senior-level teachers. "The fellowships will be of two kinds: 200 will work for an entire year and the remaining faculty can work for two stretches of six months each. We are experimenting with two models, to which industry and institutes can respond," said Jere. A selection committee of AICTE will pick faculty who apply, industry will interview them, and if they are found suitable, they will be awarded the fellowship. The scheme is rooted in a deep problem statement: On the one hand, colleges are complaining that industry is saying that students

## Goa tourists to get QR codes for smooth ride

**PANAJI:** Goa became the first state in the country to issue a QR code to tourists travelling with vehicles in the coastal paradise. Once their vehicle documents are checked, a QR code is generated, and it is valid for 12 hours. Tourists can show the QR code to traffic personnel if they are stopped again for checks of vehicle documents. Once the QR code is scanned, police personnel will know that the tourist possesses all the relevant documents, and the tourist will be allowed to proceed without further checks. So far, Goa police have issued 4,000



QR codes to tourists to help them avoid harassment during their holidays. "Goa police have introduced the Quick Pass mobile application for traffic officials, designed to streamline traffic compliance and reduce inconvenience for motorists," crime branch SP Rahul Gupta told TOI. "This innovative app generates a QR

code sent as an SMS to rule-abiding commuters. It is valid for 12 hours." Gupta added, "If the rider is stopped again for routine checks, he can show this QR code. With this initiative, document verification becomes hassle-free, ensuring smoother movement of vehicles while maintaining compliance with traffic.

## Gold loans rise 50% in seven months

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

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

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

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

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

## Roads choked, youth paraglides to exam hall

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



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

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

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

## Row erupts as NIT-Calicut appoints professor, who praised Godse, department dean

**NEW DELHI:** NIT-Calicut professor Shaija A who was charged with praising Nathuram Godse on Mahatma Gandhi's Martyr's Day last year has been appointed as the dean of the planning and development department with effect on March 7. The move has triggered opposition from Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the youth wing of the CPI(M), which has announced a protest march to NIT. Shaija was arrested and



She had allegedly said in her comment that she felt "proud" of Godse for assassinating Mahatma Gandhi, claiming it "saved India." She was questioned by Kunnamangalam police at her residence in Chathamangalam after a case was registered against her under Section 153 of the IPC for wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause riots. The Kunnamangalam court later granted her anticipatory bail.

granted bail in February last year after organizations like DYFI, SFI, and the Youth Congress filed complaints over her social media post praising Godse, which was in response to a post shared by a right-wing advocate.

## Political storm brews over plane landings in Amritsar

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

Bhagwant Mann reacted only after Congress highlighted the flights landing in Amritsar. "AAP is following RSS agenda," he claimed. For his part, Mann blamed "past govts' failures" for pushing youth to seek opportunities abroad. "Deportation from US should be a wake-up call. Instead of endangering their lives through illegal migration, they should contribute to Punjab's progress," he said. Mann claimed Punjab is experiencing "reverse migration", with youth returning from abroad for govt jobs. He said over 50,000 govt positions have been provided on merit in the past three years. Punjab BJP vice-president and ex-MLA Arvind Khanna blamed AAP govt's policies and linked the deportations to broader issues

in Punjab, such as unemployment and drugs. SAD functionary Bikram Singh Majithia swiped at Mann, accusing him of "playing to the gallery" and indulging in "dirty politics" when US authorities are forcing Sikh youth to return.

### NBCC India will buy sick PSUs and redevelop land banks

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

## Jobless Goa duo took donkey route in January



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

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

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

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



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



## Trump says Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky to sign minerals deal in US



**KYIV:** President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky will visit the White House on Friday to sign a long-sought minerals deal that will closely tie the two countries together for years to come. Trump made the announcement at start of the first cabinet meeting of his second term, hailing the deal as "a very big agreement". Trump has framed the emerging deal that would give the US access to so-called rare earth deposits in Ukraine as a chance for Kyiv to pay back the US for aid already sent for the war effort under Democratic President Joe Biden. "The previous administration put us in a very bad position, but we've been able to make a deal where we're going to get the money back and a lot of money in the future," Trump said. Trump says Zelensky to sign minerals deal

in US Zelensky said a news conference early Wednesday in Kyiv that a framework of an economic deal had been reached, but that it did not yet include US security guarantees, which his country sees as vital. The full agreement could hinge on the upcoming talks in Washington. "The framework is a preliminary step toward a comprehensive package that will be subject to ratification by the Ukrainian parliament," Zelensky said. Ukraine needs to know first where the US stands on its continued military support, Zelensky said. "This (economic) agreement may be

part of future security guarantees, but I want to understand the broader vision. What awaits Ukraine?" he said. "This deal could be a great success or it could pass quietly. And the big success depends on conversation with Trump." The latest version of the agreement, seen by AP, says the US "supports Ukraine's efforts to obtain security guarantees needed to establish lasting peace." But it doesn't spell out any US commitment to provide them. Trump has abruptly ditched some previous Washington policies, scrapping efforts to isolate Russian President Putin. On Wednesday,

## UN chief to visit Bangladesh in March

**UN** UN chief to visit Bangladesh in March UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres, who is scheduled to visit Dhaka on March 13-16, has assured that the UN will continue to mobilise the international community to support Bangladesh as a host to the



chief adviser office on Wednesday, said, "I will continue to exercise my good offices, including through my special envoy on the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, to work closely with regional actors,

Asean and other stakeholders, towards a political solution to the crisis in the state of Myanmar, including creating conditions conducive to safe and voluntary return of Rohingya to Rakhine."

## Shooting, hockey out of 2026 Youth oly

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



non-medal sports that will comprise the YOG's "engagement

programme" are shooting, weightlifting, and hockey. With four medals from shooting (two gold and two silver), two from hockey (two silver each), and one from weightlifting, India brought home thirteen medals from the 2018 Youth Games in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

## Musk takes centre stage at Trump's first cabinet meet as prez backs layoff spree

**New York** Donald Trump's administration Wednesday laid the groundwork for more large-scale layoffs, as downsizing czar Elon Musk pledged that he would move quickly to slash spending. At the first meeting of Trump's cabinet, Musk said he aims to cut the \$6.7 trillion budget by \$1 trillion this year, an ambitious target that could entail significant disruption of govt programmes. Trump reiterated his promise to refrain from cutting popular health and retirement benefits that account for nearly half of that total. "We're not going to touch it," said Trump, whose unprecedented govt overhaul has so far fired more than



20,000 workers, frozen foreign aid, and disrupted construction projects and scientific research. But it has not slowed spending so far. According to a Reuters analysis, the govt spent 13% more during Trump's first month in office than during the same time last year, largely due to higher

interest payments on the debt and rising health and retirement costs incurred by an aging population. "If this continues, the country will go de facto bankrupt," Musk said at the cabinet meeting, where he wore a black "Make America Great Again" baseball cap and a t-shirt that read

"tech support". The layoffs so far have focused on probationary workers who lack full employment protections. Trump's administration is preparing for deeper cuts targeting career employees. A memo released ahead of the cabinet meeting called for a "significant reduction" but did not specify how many workers should be laid off, beyond the 100,000 of the nation's 2.3 million civilian federal workers who have already taken a buy-out or been fired. Agencies would have to submit plans by March 13, a day before current government funding is due to expire, according to the mem. Some senior members of Trump's administration were surprised by a Saturday

## NMC will penalize colleges who refuse stipends and reduce seats

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



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

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

## Trump administration creates registry for immigrants who are in the US illegally

**New York** The Trump administration is creating a registry for all people who are in the United States illegally, and those who don't self-report could face fines or prosecution, immigration officials announced Tuesday. Everyone who is in the U.S. illegally must register, give fingerprints and provide an address, the Department of Homeland Security said in a statement. It cited a section of the Immigration and Nationality Act - the complex immigration law - as justification for the registration process, which would apply to anyone 14 and older. The announcement comes as the administration seeks to make good on campaign promises to carry out mass deportations of



people in the country illegally and seal the border to future asylum-seekers. "An alien's failure to register is a crime that could result in a fine, imprisonment, or both," the statement said. "For decades, this law has been ignored - not anymore." On its website, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service said it would soon create a form and process for registration. In one of his 10 inauguration day executive orders related to immigration, President Donald Trump initially outlined plans for cre-

ating a registry and required that Homeland Security "immediately announce and publicize information about the legal obligation of all previously unregistered aliens in the United States to comply." It was not immediately clear how many people living in the country illegally would voluntarily come forward and give the federal government information about who they are and where they're living. But failure to register would be considered a crime, and the administration has

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

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



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

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

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

## Exam centers to get CCTVs from NIOS to reduce malpractices

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



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



## KMC cancels Eid holiday notification after BJP's attack

**NEW DELHI:** Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) IT cell head Amit Malviya on Wednesday sharply criticised West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee over a recent Kolkata MCD notification changing the holiday schedule. In his remark, he referred to the Mamata-led government as "Mamata Banerjee's Islamic caliphate of West Bengal." However, KMC clarified later that the notification was issued without approval from the competent authority and has since been cancelled. KMCKMC stated that the matter is being taken seriously, and action is being initiated against the officer responsible for the oversight. The now-cancelled notice had announced two days off for Eid-ul-Fitr while removing the holiday for Vishwakarma Puja. Malviya shared Kolkata MCD's notification on X, captioning it as, "Welcome to Mamata Banerjee's Islamic Caliphate of



West Bengal." He accused the Trinamool Congress (TMC) government of religious appeasement and targeted Kolkata's Mayor, Firhad Hakim, alleging that he ordered the removal of the Hindu holiday. In his post, Malviya linked the holiday adjustment to broader political motives, claiming it revealed Banerjee's "anti-OBC mindset" and a strategy to consolidate Muslim votes amid shifting political dynamics. He argued that the decision deprived Hindus of cultural observances while burdening Muslim daily wage earners with an additional day off, rather than fulfilling their needs of "education and employment." Malviya also accused

Banerjee of earlier altering the OBC sub-quota to include Muslims, a decision struck down by the Calcutta high court and currently under Supreme Court review. He vowed that the BJP would ensure justice through constitutional means. "BJP will ensure justice as per constitutional provisions," he said. The BJP leader also added in his statement that "Banerjee's Muslim appeasement is destroying West Bengal's social fabric. If she continues in office, in a few years, it will be difficult to recognise whether our Bengal is still the land of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Tagore, Swami Vivekananda, Netaji, and Syama Prasad Mookerjee."

## Bihar cabinet expansion: 7 new BJP faces inducted into Nitish government

**NEW DELHI:** Nitish Kumar led-NDA government on Wednesday expanded its cabinet ahead of the assembly elections scheduled in November this year. Seven BJP MLAs including Sanjay Saraogi, Sunil Kumar, Jibesh Mishra, Motilal Prasad, Krishan Kumar Mantoo, Raju Kumar Singh and Vijay Kumar Mandal took oath as cabinet ministers. "As a party worker and MLA, I have always been in the habit of fulfilling responsibilities. Though this role is new for me, the experience I have gained while working within the organisation will certainly help me.



Whatever department I am assigned, I will carry out my duties with complete dedication," Moti Lal Prasad said after taking oath. Bihar governor Arif Mohammed Khan administered the oaths. The expansion comes days before the commencement of the

Bihar Budget Session on Friday. Earlier, revenue minister and BJP state president Dilip Jaiswal announced his resignation from his ministerial post, citing the party's "One Person, One Post" policy. "I am going to resign from the post of revenue minister.



## Panel seeks jobs, aid for deported rural youths



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

## Health and wealth benefit from flexible work hours

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

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

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

## Supreme Court: No minimum age for witness; kid's evidence

**NEW DELHI:** Holding that the evidence of a child witness stands on the same footing as any other witness if the child is competent to testify, Supreme Court has convicted and sentenced a man to life imprisonment for killing his wife by relying upon the statement of the couple's seven-year-old daughter who witnessed the incident. A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra set aside the order of Madhya Pradesh high court acquitting the accused by discarding the statement of his daughter who was present in the house when her mother was killed. Child witness on same footing as others, but must be reliable: SC. The top court said the Evidence Act does not pre-



scribe any minimum age for a witness, and evidence of a child witness cannot be rejected outright. "The only precaution which the court should take while assessing the evidence of a child witness is that such witness must be a reliable one due to the susceptibility of children by their falling prey

to tutoring," the bench said. However, this in no manner means that the evidence of a child must be rejected outright at the slightest of discrepancy, rather what is required is that the same is evaluated with great circumspection," the bench said. It added, "While appreciating the testimony of a child wit-

ness, courts are required to assess whether the evidence of such witness is its voluntary expression and not borne out of the influence of others and whether the testimony inspires confidence." Terming child witnesses as dangerous because they are prone to being influenced, the apex court said trial courts should be alert about this aspect while recording the statement. It said there is no rule requiring corroboration to the testimony of a child witness before any reliance is placed on it and the insistence of corroboration is only a measure of caution and prudence that the courts may exercise if deemed necessary in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case.

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

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

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

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

## Israel, Hamas resolve delay in Palestinians release, 4 hostage bodies to be returned

**Hamas was set to hand over the bodies of four hostages late Wednesday night in exchange for Israel's release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, just days before the first phase of the ceasefire between the warring parties was to expire. Israel has delayed the release of 600 Palestinians since Saturday to protest the cruel treatment of hostages during their release by Hamas. Plans for the release were confirmed by Israel's govt and Hamas's military wing. Hamas said the bodies of Tsachi Idan, Itzhak Elgarat, Ohad Yahalomi and Shlomo Mantzur would be**

released. PM Netanyahu's office said the release would be carried out without a ceremony, in a quieter fashion than past Hamas releases. The latest agreement would complete both sides' obligations of the first phase of the ceasefire. With the 42-day truce due to expire Saturday, it remains unclear whether an extension will be agreed or whether negotiations can begin on a second stage of the deal. The resolution came on the same day as the funeral of the Bibas family following the handover of the bodies of nine-month-old Kfir,

his four-year-old brother Ariel and their mother Shiri last week. Thousands of people carrying blue and white Israeli flags or photos of the family, walked in procession or waited as a convoy bearing the coffins drove past. Many were carrying orange balloons, a symbol of mourning for the hostages, matching the red hair of the Bibas boys. Yarden, Shiri's husband, paid tribute in an emotional eulogy at the funeral. "I hope you know I thought of you every day, every minute. I'm sorry I couldn't protect you all," he said. agencies

## Price pressure caps senior citizen health premium hikes at 10%

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



advised to standardize hospital empanelment and negoti-

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

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

## Green energy can be driver of growth

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



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

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

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

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