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Actor's arrest in gold case sparks BJP-Congress slugfest

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BENGALURU: Kannada actress Ranya Rao's alleged involvement in the gold smuggling case has triggered a political slugfest in Karnataka with Congress and BJP trading charges of favouritism and cover-up. Harshavardhini Ranya alias Ranya Rao was arrested a week ago for allegedly smuggling gold worth Rs 12 crore from Dubai. While BJP alleged the involvement of an influential minister in shielding the actress, Congress countered the charge by accusing BJP of allotting 12 acres to Rao to set up a TMT steel bar factory. Karnataka minister M B Patil clarified that the land allotment did not materialise as Rao's company failed to make the prescribed payment. In a post on 'X', BJP Karnataka chief B Y Vijayendra said, "Media reports about involvement of a prominent minister in Siddaramaiah's govt in one of the biggest gold heists come as no surprise — especially given this govt's track record of churning out scandals in increasingly "innovative" ways! (sic)" The MLA said the blatant violation of govt protocols that allegedly enabled Rao to smuggle gold could not have happened without support of influential figures within govt. The BJP state chief further added that if these reports were true, then it raised serious concerns about the extent of the alleged nexus. "Any attempt by govt to shield those responsible will backfire, especially with CBI now stepping in. The truth will come out, and any cover-up will only further expose the govt's complicity in this grievous offence," he said.

Opposition demands discussion on 'voter list discrepancies'

Vatika Times
NEW DELHI: Led by Congress and Trinamool Congress, opposition parties Monday demanded a discussion in Parliament on alleged discrepancies in voter lists, with Rahul Gandhi raising the issue in Lok Sabha. Bringing up the matter during zero hour, Rahul said several states had found discrepancies in voter lists. "Voter lists are being questioned across country and the entire opposition has been demanding a discussion on the matter. Questions have been raised by opposition in one voice in every state, including Maharashtra," he said. Congress, however, failed to bring it up in Rajya Sabha when party president Mallikarjun Kharge was not allowed to raise the matter. Later, Kharge posted on X, "The abrupt and unwarranted deletion of voters, presence of duplicate EPIC numbers, and other such crucial issues affecting integrity of our electoral process require urgent attention and discussion in Parliament." SP, AAP and RJD too said it was an extremely serious matter and Parliament needed to take it up. TMC's Saugata Roy demanded a thorough



revision of voter lists, particularly ahead of assembly elections in Bengal and Assam next year. "There are some serious flaws. This has been pointed out with respect to Maharashtra, which had inflated voter lists. This was pointed out in Haryana. They are now trying to jump into Bengal and Assam where elections are due next year," Roy claimed. Party MP Kalyan Banerjee sought action against EC and said the poll body had "failed" to conduct fair and transparent elections over the past few years. He said the West Bengal CM had already drawn the EC's attention to numerous instances of "duplicate" voter cards. Nadda flags oppn bid to raise matters via Rule 267. Leader of the House in RS J P Nadda Monday said govt is ready for discussion on any issue and questioned opposition's intent over try-

ing to raise matters through Rule 267 which calls for suspension of scheduled business to discuss urgent matters. He termed practice of opposition MPs giving notices under Rule 267 despite elaborate rulings by the chairman on the issue a "vicious design to demean Parliament". Harivansh did not allow leader of opposition Mallikarjun Kharge to make his submission. Opposition MPs then protested for a while before walking out. Condemning the walkout, Nadda said opposition was not interested in debate and when their notices were rejected by the chair based on previous rulings, they wanted to give an impression that govt did not want to answer queries. "Govt under PM Modi is ready to discuss anything under this roof. But there are rules & regulations for debates.

ED searches Baghel, son's premises in Chhattisgarh booze scam

Vatika Times
RAIPUR: ED on Monday searched the premises of former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel as an extension of the probe against his son Chaitanya in an alleged liquor scam and money laundering case of Rs 2,161 crore. ED teams arrived at 14 locations in Durg district, including Baghel's house in Padumnagar, early morning. A cash-counting machine was taken into the house by ED officials during the



search, officials said. The agency issued a statement saying searches were carried out under Prevention of Money Laundering Act at premises related to Baghel, Chaitanya and close associate Laxmi Narayan Bansal alias Pappu Bansal. "ED has

gathered that Chaitanya is also the recipient of proceeds of crime generated from the liquor scam, wherein the total proceeds of crime are around Rs 2,161 crore, siphoned off through various schemes," ED said. The agency said searches were carried out at Baghel's Bhillai residence since Chaitanya stays with his father and he's suspected to be linked with the alleged liquor scam that ED says caused "massive loss".

Foreigners entering Myanmar via Mizoram to train rebels: CM

Vatika Times
Mizoram CM Lalduhoma AIZAWAL: **Foreigners**, including those from the US and the UK, are crossing into Myanmar via Mizoram to impart arms training to insurgents there, CM Lalduhoma informed Mizoram assembly on Monday. The CM said while nearly 2,000 foreigners visited Aizawl between June and Dec last year, they were never seen in the streets, alluding to the fears that their main intention had been to

cross into Myanmar to interfere in its internal affairs. Centre has been closely watching the situation in the border areas after China and the US involved themselves in Myanmar conflict. The recent visit of Mizoram by the US ambassador to India without any prior information also came as a surprise, he said. Union home ministry re-imposed the protected area regime in Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram to monitor the movement of foreigners.

ED searches in Rajasthan, Noida, Mumbai

NEW DELHI: ED searched 16 locations in Jaipur, Ajmer, Udaipur, Noida and Mumbai on Friday in connection with alleged money laundering involving illegal foreign remittances of more than Rs 400 crore. The agency said huge remittances were made in lieu of gold/diamond/precious stones smuggling. It has seized Rs 10 lakh in cash and digital records. ED's case is based on FIRs registered by the Customs Jodhpur.

Jewellery worth Rs 25 crore robbed from showroom

Vatika Times
ARA: Hours after robbers looted cash and gold, silver and diamond jewellery worth Rs 25 crore in from a premier showroom in Ara district on Monday, Bihar Police arrested two suspects after a high-speed chase and gunfight, and recovered from them jewellery worth Rs 15 crore. The showroom's security guard said, "Six criminals posing as customers came on two bikes and snatched



my rifle before assaulting me. They seized staff's phones at gunpoint and began looting jewellery." Later in the day, three suspicious bikes were intercepted on Ara-Babura road. Two

suspects abandoned their bike and attempted to flee. "When cops chased them, they opened fire. In self-defence, police retaliated and injured the criminals in the leg," said a cop.

Drug trafficker wanted by FBI held in Punjab

Vatika Times
TARN TARAN/AMRITSAR: Police arrested an Indian-origin international drug lord wanted by the US from Ludhiana on Monday, reports Yudhvir Rana. Shehbaz Singh, alias Shawn Bhinder, was a native of Mandiala village and currently residing in Brampton, Canada. He is wanted by FBI in one of the largest recent drug seizures in the US, on Feb 26. Ferozepur DIG Swapan Sharma said Shawn was a key player in a global narcotics syndicate, smuggling cocaine from Colombia into the US and Canada. After the crackdown by FBI, Shawn managed to secretly arrive in India. Cops said Shawn was also wanted in an Arms Act case in India. He had been operating under the guise of a legitimate transportation.

Muted ceremony marks Giani Kuldeep's jathedar installation

Vatika Times
AMRITSAR: The coronation of Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj as jathedar of Takht Kesgarh Sahib and as officiating jathedar of Akal Takht early Monday was marked by the absence of traditional grandeur, religious rituals, and participation from high-ranking community members. No senior officials from SGPC and SAD, typically present on such occasions, attended the ceremony at Takht Kesgarh Sahib, held quietly at 2.30am. The function at Akal Takht took place discreetly later in the evening. Heads or representatives of Sikh organisations such as jathedars of other Takhts, Nihang organisations, Sikh Sewa Societies, and Singh Sabhas didn't attend the ceremonies. Former Akal Takht jathedar Bhai Ranjit Singh expressed his disappointment over the lack of religious rituals, highlighting that the installation of a

jathedar is an occasion akin to a Gurburb and should have been marked with greater respect and celebration. "To what extent Giani Kuldeep will be able to hold authority within the Panth," he questioned. Panthic Talmel Sangathan, a conglomerate of around 150 Sikh bodies, announced to stage protests in front of homes of executive committee members of SGPC who signed the decision to relieve the two jathedars. However, Sikh intellectual Harjit Singh believes that almost every organisation has always been divided into two or more factions, and the same situation is unfolding here. "Those who are opposing were appointed through the same procedure by SGPC, which was then supported by Shiromani Akali Dal. Now, after being dismissed on various charges.

Vatika Times
NEW DELHI: Britain's Opposition Conservative Party lawmaker Bob Blackman on Thursday raised the issue of the "attack" on External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in London by "Khalistani thugs" in the House of Commons. During a Business of the House session, the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee described the security breach on Wednesday evening as an affront to democracy and called on Home Secretary Yvette Cooper to make a statement in Parliament on the issue of safety of Indian visitors to the UK. It came soon after the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) had issued a state-



ment strongly condemning the incident outside Chatham House in central London. "Yesterday, the External Affairs Minister from India, Shri Jaishankar, was attacked when he was leaving a public venue where he had been addressing an audience of Indian people in this country," said

Blackman. "He was attacked by Khalistani thugs. That is against the Geneva Convention, and it appears that the police and the security forces failed to ensure that he was made safe. That is an affront to democracy, and an affront to our friends and allies in India," he said. "We need to

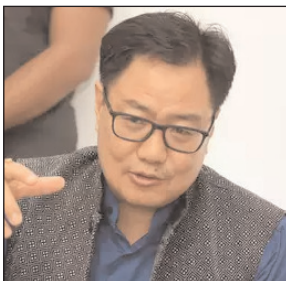
Assam in talks with Isro, may be first state to have own satellite

Vatika Times
NEW DELHI

Assam is in talks with Isro to launch a Rs 450-500 crore geostationary satellite to monitor illegal infiltration, provide flood warnings, and support farmers with weather data. CM Himanta Biswa Sarma announced the plan after allocating funds in the 2025-26 budget. The proposal includes other tech initiatives such as an AI-powered anti-deepfake lab and a bamboo smart city. Assam has opened talks with Isro to become the first state to launch a geostationary satellite worth Rs 450-500 crore that can provide information on illegal infiltration, give advance flood warnings and generate weather inputs to benefit farmers, CM Himanta Biswa Sarma said Monday after earmarking funds in the 2025-26 state budget for an unprecedented digital leap. The govt's budget, buoyed by what finance minister Ajanta Neog said.

Muslim literacy, participation of women in workforce up: Rijiju

Vatika Times
NEW DELHI: Government on Monday told Parliament that the literacy rate among Muslims as well as the share of women from the community in the labour force had increased in recent years. In a written reply in Rajya Sabha, minority affairs minister Kiren Rijiju said that Periodic Labour Force Survey data for 2023-24 estimated literacy among Muslims (aged seven years or more) at 79.5%, although it was lower than the 80.9%-level for



all religions groups. In Census 2001, the literacy rate among Muslims was pegged at 59.1% as compared to the all-India literacy rate of 64.8%. The literacy rate among Muslims was 68.5% in 2011 as compared to the all-India rate of 73%. "Thus, the

literacy rate among Muslims has increased by 9.4 percentage points in Census 2011 as compared to Census 2001," Rijiju said. Replying to another question, he pointed to PLFS data on minorities to show that between 2021-22 and 2023-24, the percentage of women workers among Muslims in the labour force reflected a significant increase of over six percentage points from 15% in 2021-22 to 21.4% in 2023-24. In fact, it had dropped to 14.2% in 2022-23.

Editorial

Nancy meets Lama as shows eagerness to engage India on Tibet

Ritu Walia

For Tibet watchers, the past few weeks have been special; one does not know which side to turn one’s attention to. Apart from the ‘courtesy calls’ to the Dalai Lama by some of the candidates during the campaign for the legislative elections, an announcement about renaming some places in Tibet has been making the rounds (this, however, remains irrelevant as nobody has seen the new names yet). More important was the news from Washington that the US Congress has passed the ‘Resolve Tibet Act’, now waiting for President Joe Biden’s signature to become law. Among other things, the Act mentions that the “claims made by officials of the People’s Republic of China and the Chinese Communist Party that Tibet has been a part of China since ancient times are historically inaccurate”. It has serious implications for India’s northern border, which for millennia had been with Tibet; unfortunately, after Tibet’s invasion in the early 1950s, it ended up being the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China. The Act also speaks of Beijing’s current policies, which “are systematically suppressing the ability of the Tibetan people to preserve their religion, culture, language, history, way of life, and environment”. Since 1959, when the Dalai Lama crossed the Indian border into Arunachal Pradesh (then the North East Frontier Agency), successive governments in Delhi have supported the Dalai Lama and his followers in this regard and ensured that India was their second home. Today, projects such as the Nalanda University in Bihar could further strengthen the relations between Tibet, where the ‘Nalanda Tradition’ was practiced for centuries, and India. Then, the Act says that Beijing “is failing to meet the expectations of the United States to engage in meaningful dialogue with the Dalai Lama or his representatives or to reach a negotiated resolution that includes the aspirations of the Tibetan people”. It is doubtful that concrete progress will be seen in this regard in the near future for the single reason that Beijing is today not in a mood to listen to any ‘advice’ from the US (or India). Perhaps more meaningful is the following point: “The US public diplomacy efforts should counter disinformation about Tibet from [Beijing], including disinformation about the history of Tibet, the Tibetan people, and Tibetan institutions, including that of the Dalai Lama.” Apart from the new law, the visit to India (and Dharamsala) of former United States House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, along with other members of a Congressional delegation and their audience with the Dalai Lama, needs to be looked into as it raises several questions. Why did the US delegation visit Dharamsala just a few days before the Dalai Lama leaves for the US for knee surgery? Could not the delegation have met the religious leader in the US? But perhaps Washington was keen to involve India in the Tibetan issue? That Delhi agreed to this is clear, as the same delegation was received in Delhi by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Jaishankar on its return from Dharamsala. The media missed another visit, which was certainly not a coincidence. Xinhua News Agency reported that on June 18, the day the US delegation arrived in Dharamsala, President Xi Jinping conducted an ‘investigation’ at the Hongjue monastery in Xining City (Qinghai province): .



Key concepts in Sanatan Dharma

Suman Singh

One of the key concepts in Sanatan Dharma is ‘maya’. Nothing is what it seems. This illusory nature of maya leads us into delusion and prevents us from understanding the true nature of things. In the material world, for instance, that which appears ‘spontaneous’, ‘coincidental’, ‘unrelated’ at first glance might have an underlying connection that eludes the naked eye. Take for example, foreign interference in Indian elections, or the illegitimate intrusion of international lobbies in Indian domestic politics. Foreign interference is a serious issue that compromises the sovereignty and integrity of a nation. Chinese manoeuvring in Australian domestic politics led the bilateral relationship almost to a point of no return. The US Senate formed a high-powered intelligence committee to probe allegations of Russian efforts to influence 2016 presidential elections. Despite a restive debate in India that has led the external affairs minister and even the prime minister to comment on the topic bang in the middle of general elections, it is difficult to pinpoint the nature of the meddling, the source, and the way public discourse is being subtly remodelled to build and suit narratives by influence operations. There is no fixed template for foreign interference. Given its amorphous nature, it becomes even



more difficult to combat such information warfare in an open society like India that has a democratic political system, a complex, ram-bunctious polity and a discursive tradition of argumentation and debate. Swirling allegations in India of western interference have always been met with layers of incredulity and plausible deniability. If we can’t pinpoint the players in this murky game of shadows, if we can’t access their motives, mitigating the challenges becomes nearly impossible. We often hear about Western ‘Deep State’ and foreign lobbies that are opposed to the so-called ‘Hindu nationalist’ regime in India, working to subvert the democratically elected government or even trying to shape electoral outcomes. What is this ‘Deep State’? How does it operate? What is its motive? Is it a signifier for the shape-shifting aggregation of western intelligence agencies, perma-bureaucracy, academia, major founda-

tions, multinational corporates, civil society, political activists, ‘human rights’ organizations, ‘democracy rating’ agencies, media outlets and think tanks that further each other’s interests and all curiously end up advancing the major goals of American foreign policy, neoliberals and globalists? It all sounds very far-fetched and fantastic, and therein lies its effectiveness. Diffusion is an instrument of statecraft. Tracing the source of influence operations led by the Deep State could be a bit like tracing hackers who keep their IPs bouncing around the globe. And if you can’t trace it, you have no case. The omnipotence and omniscience of this ambiguous clique of vested interests paint a mayajaal (an illusory network) of narratives in a way that not only pushes and establishes preset western notions/ interpretations, but also make the viewpoints and perspectives seem ‘organic’ and even indigenous. It also makes targeted action difficult and

open to criticism. If a foreign journalist’s visa is not renewed by the Indian govssernment, the focus is likely to be on the controversy. The government will inevitably be painted as a ‘thin-skinned bully’ and the fact that a foreign national working in India may have wilfully blurred the line between ‘journalism’ and ‘political activism’ will be silently glossed over. It’ll invite even more charges of ‘democratic backsliding’ and ‘repression’, no matter how ill-placed and misleading those charges are. There have been allegations that the major narrative weapons in the Opposition’s armoury, such as ‘caste census’, in the just concluded general elections where the Narendra Modi-led BJP saw an erosion in power, were provided by shadowy figures of this nebulous foreign adversary. According to painstaking research by Disinfo Lab , an independent OSINT-based research organization, that went after the hydra-headed money trail, it appears that liberal ‘philanthropy’ funds were pumped out to various fronts, think tanks, western media outlets, and members of academia in nations such as France and the US to influence public discourse in India through a tsunami of macro, micro and meta narratives and impact voter mindset. The pattern of funding, according to their findings, suggests an aim to invalidate the legitimacy of Indian

electoral process and undermine Indian democracy, the world’s largest where 642 million Indians recently exercised their voting rights. Former Prasar Bharati chief Shashi Shekhar Vempati’s compilation of some of these media headlines are worth a look, if only to have an idea about the depth and scale of the ‘seemingly uncoordinated’ operations. As I said, ‘maya-jaal’. These patterns are visible, however, with a degree of effort. For instance, there has been a lot of noise of late over a report by Australian government-funded ABC News’s ‘Four Corners’ report that highlighted India’s alleged actions against Khalistani terrorists based in Australia, one of the nations in the Five Eyes (FVEY) Anglosphere intelligence network comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the US. India is already involved in major controversies with Canada and Washington over the issue of Khalistani terrorism, and the report, named ‘Infiltrating Australia’, claims that the Indian government is prying into the lives of the Indian diaspora to smoke out the Khalistani network, and that at least four Indian diplomats were asked to leave by the Australian government on charges of “spying”. Interestingly, while the Australian government has sought to play down the controversy.

Critical revamping needed in war against terrorism

Lipi Singh

Even before the abrogation, the authorities made claims that their counter-terrorism efforts had confined the terrorism to three districts of South Kashmir and that the Pir Panjal area, i.e., the Jammu region, had been rid of militancy a long time ago. Hence, post-Article 370 abrogation, the real test was in the Kashmir valley. No one thought of the Pir Panjal area. So, today, almost five years after August 5, 2019, in Kashmir, the spike in the brutal terror attacks in Pir Panjal, an area declared terrorism-free long ago, is more than shocking. Sounding an alarming note, the recent devel-

opments suggest the following: First, contrary to official and media versions, the state’s success in crushing the Pakistan-sponsored terrorism is not good enough. Second, in the Kashmir valley, though the big-ticket terror attacks and fidayeen missions are not visible, Islamist outfits like Jamaat-e-Islami are massively working on the ground on radicalisation, restructuring, and strengthening their terror and Islamist networks. Third, the fact that the hard-core Pakistani terrorists infiltrate and strike in Pir Panjal (Jammu region) shows they have robust intelligence penetration and networks and a support

base among the local population. Trends in Kashmir valley One needs to look at the sentiment in the Valley and the other developments to understand the trajectory of future trends. The phase after August 5, 2019, has seen a massive boost in tourism in Kashmir. Every year, the tourist footfall breaks its previous records. The local economy and trade have boomed, resulting in a large inflow of capital and growth in the economic prosperity of Kashmir. Present-day Kashmir may have strong separatist and fundamentalist ideological fervour coupled with unprece-

China’s name change spree in Xinjiang and Tibet continues unabated

Saariq

The Chinese Central government has not only been devising but also religiously implementing the policy to change the names of streets, villages, places, and townships in the country, especially in the minority-dominated areas in its western part. The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) have borne the maximum brunt in this process. For example, in Chinese academic parlance, Tibet has been described as Xijang since 2023. This Chinese trick has two mottoes: firstly, China deliberately attempts to dilute the culture of the minority people, or perhaps aims at stamping out ethno-religious or ethno-cultural identities of the minorities, particularly the Uyghurs and Tibetans; and secondly, it wants to expand the process of sinification by dint of imposing the overarching Chinese communist ideology on the minority people. In a joint report published recently by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and a Norway-based Uyghur organisation (Uyghur Help), the Chinese atrocities on Uyghur culture and identity have come to light time and again. According to the report, the Chinese Central Government has been “systemati-

cally changing hundreds of village names” bearing historical, religious, and cultural meanings for Uyghurs into new names that faithfully reflect the ideology of the Communist Party of China (CCP). It is important to note herewith that the name-changing spree in Tibet and Xinjiang by the Chinese can be traced back to the end of the 2000s, particularly after the Tibet unrest in March 2008 and the Urumqi riots (5 July 2009) in XUAR. Along with the stern policy of “Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure” in both Tibet and Xinjiang, it led to massive securitisation and surveillance in both the restive regions in the later period. The Chinese authorities have meted out excesses against Tibetans and Uyghurs. They slyly began one of the government-sponsored measures of “cultural erasure” of the Uyghurs and Tibetans as part of their sinification design. It has been an uphill task for these hapless minorities to maintain their centuries-old unique culture against 75 years of Chinese onslaught.

The HRW Report gives detailed information, elaborating that as many as 3,600 of a total of 25,000 villages in Xinjiang (almost 15 per cent of the total villages) have witnessed name change

in the last one and a half decades (from 2009 to 2023). In 630 villages (nearly one-fifth of the total of 3,600 villages), the names bearing the religion, culture, and history of Uyghurs have witnessed change. The popular Uyghur names, such as Mazar (shrine), Hoja (Sufi teacher), Meschit (mosque), Haniqa (Sufi meeting place), Gumbez (dome), Orda (palace), Xelpe (Khalifa), Wap (Islamic Foundation), Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), Dutar (an Uyghur music instrument) and Sultan (Emir), are now replaced with pejorative Chinese names such as Hongxing (Red Star), Qianjin (Forward), Hongqi (Red Flag), Youyi (F r i e n d s h i p) , Guangming (Light), Bostan (Oasis), Hexie (harmony), Tuanjie (unity) and Xingfu (happiness). It is found to be a classic case of sinification that Chinese authorities have been imposing on minority nationalities, especially against Uyghurs and Tibetans, since Qing rule. The process of sinification has taken on a new tone and tenor since the communist takeover of Xinjiang in 1949. However, what is not reported in the media is the renaming of some famous streets in the capital, Urumqi, and Kashgar, as confirmed news.

Climate hypocrisy: West’s moral high ground

Ravi Singh

In 2019, during the UN Climate Action Summit in New York, leaders from industrialised nations delivered impassioned speeches about the urgency of addressing climate change. Yet, behind closed doors, they continued to approve new fossil fuel projects and delay meaningful climate finance commitments. This dichotomy highlights a fundamental hypocrisy in global climate politics: The West often preaches sustainability but falls short in practice, prioritising economic interests over environmental imperatives. As the count-

down to the COP29 climate summit in Azerbaijan this November continues, the Bonn Climate Change Conference in Germany concluded in a stalemate last week. Nations disagreed on the size and scope of loss and damage financing, representing a significant setback in global climate negotiations. The Bonn talks did not achieve meaningful progress on climate financing, underscoring a persistent issue: industrialised nations, which bear the greatest responsibility for the current climate crisis, resisted calls from Global South countries to compensate those who suf-

fer the most but have contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions. Over a decade ago, developed nations pledged to mobilise \$100 billion annually by 2020 to support climate action in developing countries. Copenhagen Accord in 2009 and reiterated in the Paris Agreement, has not been met. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported that climate finance reached only \$79.6 billion in 2019. It was only in 2022 that developed countries provided and mobilised \$115.9 billion in climate finance for

developing countries.

By the end of COP29, all parties must agree on a “new collective quantified goal” (NCQG) to guide the provision of climate finance, intended to replace the \$100 billion target after 2025. Progress on negotiating the NCQG has been slow. Disagreements persist on almost every aspect of the new target, including the amount of money to be provided, the sources of these funds, the recipients, and the specific forms of financial assistance. Ready to move in 4 BHK from 4.15 Cr* for a limited period.

'Attempting to avoid extradition': Vanuatu PM orders cancellation of Lalit passport

NEW DELHI: Vanuatu Prime Minister Jotham Napat on Monday ordered the cancellation of the Vanuatu passport issued to fugitive businessman Lalit Modi after recent international media reports. "I have instructed the citizenship commission to immediately begin proceedings to cancel Lalit Modi's Vanuatu passport," Napat said. "While all standard background checks, including Interpol screenings, conducted during his application showed no criminal convictions, I have been made aware in the past 24 hours that Interpol twice rejected Indian authorities' requests to issue an alert notice on Lalit Modi due to lack of substantive judicial evidence. Any such alert would have triggered an automatic rejection of Lalit Modi's citizenship application," he added. Republic of Vanuatu The Vanuatu PM speci-



requests to issue an alert notice on Lalit Modi due to lack of substantive judicial evidence. Any such alert would have triggered an automatic rejection of Lalit Modi's citizenship application," he added. Republic of Vanuatu The Vanuatu PM speci-

fied that holding a Vanuatu passport is a privilege, not a right, and that applicants must have legitimate reasons for seeking citizenship. "None of those legitimate reasons include attempting to avoid extradition, which the recent facts

brought to light clearly indicate was Lalit Modi's intention," he added. Also read: Lalit Modi applies to give away India passport, now a Vanuatu citizen Meanwhile, former IPL chairman has previously submitted an application to surrender his

Indian passport at the High Commission in London after acquiring citizenship of the Pacific island nation. The ministry of external affairs stated that his request would be reviewed under "extant rules and procedures." "We are also given to understand that Lalit Modi has acquired the citizenship of Vanuatu. We continue to pursue the case against him as required under law," an MEA spokesperson had said earlier. India has repeatedly sought assistance from the UK in extraditing Lalit Modi, who has been facing legal proceedings related to financial irregularities.

'Maha Kumbh water fit for bathing': Centre tells Parliament citing new CPCB report

NEW DELHI: The BJP-led central government on Monday asserted that the Maha Kumbh water was fit for bathing citing the new Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) report. This came after the UP CM Yogi Adityanath had rejected the previous CPCB report that had termed Kumbh waters unfit for bathing citing high levels of faecal bacteria. Responding to a query from Samajwadi Party MP Anand Bhaduria and Congress MP K Sudhakaran, Union environment minister Bhupender Yadav cited the CPCB report, stating that the median levels of pH, dissolved oxygen (DO), biochemical oxygen demand (BOD), and faecal coliform (FC) at all monitored sites were within the permissible

bathing limits. The government said that it allocated Rs 7,421 crore to the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) for river cleaning across 2022-23, 2023-24, and 2024-25 (until March 9). The river pollution issue gained momentum recently after the opposition leaders criticised the UP government over the previous report by the pollution control board which had said in its report that the river water quality in Prayagraj during Kumbh "was not conforming to the primary water quality for bathing with respect to faecal coliform at all the monitored locations on various occasions." This report was dismissed by the Yogi government, which

had called it an effort to "defame the Maha Kumbh." However, in its new report, CPCB said that the water quality during Maha Kumbh was "fit for bathing" citing "variability in data". Also read: Maha Kumbh water fit for bathing, says new CPCB report, cites 'variability in data' The report explained that an expert committee examined data variability and determined that the findings reflect only a snapshot of water quality at a specific time and location. It emphasized that water quality can vary significantly due to factors like upstream human activities, flow rate, sampling depth, collection time, river currents, and mixing patterns, among other influences.

'Shock & anger understandable': J&K CM Omar Abdullah

NEW DELHI: Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday sought a report on the fashion show in the ski resort of Gulmarg during the fasting month of Ramzan that received widespread criticism. Expressing disapproval to the pictures, the CM said that the images he had seen showed a complete disregard for local sensitivities. Responding to the post of Kashmir's chief priest Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, who called the fashion show

"obscene," Omar Abdullah said, "The shock & anger are totally understandable. The images I have seen show a complete disregard for local sensitivities & that too during this holy month. My office has been in touch with the local authorities & I've asked for a report to be submitted within the next 24 hours. Further action, as appropriate, will follow from this report." The mirwaiz expressed his views on X, stating: "Outrageous! That in

the holy month of Ramzan an obscene fashion show is organised in #Gulmarg, pictures and videos from which have gone viral sparking shock and anger among people. How could it be tolerated in the valley known for its Sufi, saint culture and the deeply religious outlook of its people?" Those involved should be immediately held accountable. Such obscenity in the name of tourism promotion will not be tolerated in #Kashmir!"

Key diabetes drug to cost up to 90% less in a few days



NEW DELHI: Several domestic drug companies are set to transform diabetes therapy by launching the blockbuster drug Empagliflozin at a fraction of the innovator's Rs 60 per tablet, sources said. Most generic versions will cost Rs 9-14 per tablet, disrupting the high-growth diabetes therapy market valued at nearly Rs 20,000 crore, up 43% from Rs 14,000 crore in 2021. The launch of generic Empagliflozin, used to treat diabetes, related comorbidities, including heart failure, promises to slash therapy costs, making it more accessible to millions of diabetics and easing the financial strain of this debilitating disease. Those looking to launch the drug include Mankind Pharma, Torrent, Alkem, Dr Reddy's and Lupin.

Going off-patent Mankind Pharma, India's fourth-largest firm by market share, plans to offer Empagliflozin at one-tenth of the innovator's Rs 60 per tablet, disrupting the high-growth diabetes therapy market valued at nearly Rs 20,000 crore, up 43% from Rs 14,000 crore in 2021. The launch of generic Empagliflozin, used to treat diabetes, related comorbidities, including heart failure, promises to slash therapy costs, making it more accessible to millions of diabetics and easing the financial strain of this debilitating disease. Those looking to launch the drug include Mankind Pharma, Torrent, Alkem, Dr Reddy's and Lupin.

Iran minister to visit India

Amid the precarious West Asia situation, Iranian vice-minister for foreign affairs Takht Ravanchi is expected to visit India, sources said. The minister is expected to discuss efforts to defuse tensions in the region, including over Tehran's disputed nuclear programme, before Donald Trump's return to White House. Talks will also focus on bilateral cooperation including over the Chabahar port project in Iran. As Gaza conflict threatens to spread across region, PM Modi has remained in touch with the leaders of both Iran and Israel to emphasise the significance of dialogue and diplomacy in resolving the crisis.



CAG-itated politics: How audit reports upend political fortunes

NEW DELHI: Political parties and CAG reports have shared a hot and cold relationship in Indian politics over the decades. Interestingly, the two become quite inseparable when the elections approach. Delhi witnessed this recently when audit report of exorbitant spending on CM's official residence, injected into public consciousness as 'sheeshmahal' scam, was one of the key reasons that helped the Bharatiya Janata Party seal the fate of Aam Aadmi Party. A simple look at the CAG website and the number of reports released in a year shows a drop by almost half, relatively during poll years, exception being 2014. This indicates how the ruling parties have done their best to keep the report away from the public glare, while the opposition has ensured it puts a spotlight on it. So, while several reports were used to shape the collective consciousness of the public towards parties like the Congress and the AAP, many other reports were carefully brushed under the carpet. Any discussion on CAG report and politics would perhaps be incomplete without a mention of the 2G scam and the coal block scam that played a key role in the downfall of Manmohan Singh-led UPA government in 2014.

The scam that wasn't The 2G spectrum "scam" that led to the loss of Rs 1.76 lakh crores to the exchequer did not turn out to be a scam after the Supreme Court acquitted everyone. The apex court even pulled up the CBI saying that "the prosecution miserably failed to prove any charge against any of the accused, made in its well choreographed chargesheet." No matter the verdict, the "scam" did what it was supposed to -- put a final lock on the UPA government's fate -- paving way for the "Modi wave". **'Conscience' shaking scam** The coal scam that led to the downfall of UPA government was much talked about. Referring to this, the NDA government last year dubbed it as the scam that "shook the conscience of the nation in 2014", with a loss of Rs 1.86 lakh crore to the exchequer. "These actions were scrutinised by investigation agencies, and in 2014, the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India cancelled the allocation of 204 coal mines/blocks allocated since 1993," the central government said and rightly so. After BJP came to power in 2014, it had introduced a revamped coal auction and allocation system, facilitating the distribution of those 204 coal blocks. However, in doing so, it ignored warnings from its own leaders who said that it would lead to corruptions and scams. An investigation by The Reporters' Collective revealed that the Union government had received early warnings in 2015 that its new coal auction system was vulnerable to corruption. However, no action was taken upon those warnings and the government went ahead with the new coal auction regime.

Protection of personal data part of right to privacy: Gavai

NEW DELHI: At a time when privacy violations in the age of internet and AI concerns many, Justice B R Gavai, the next in line to be CJI, on Monday said protection of personal data in the digital age was an integral part of right to privacy, which in turn was part of right to life. Addressing judges and



advocates in the Kenyan Supreme Court, he said there was increasing conflict these days between right to free speech and expression, and reasonable restrictions

under Article 19(2) of the Constitution. Justice Gavai is leading a delegation to Kenya that includes Justice Surya Kant. "Courts are increasingly being called upon to balance freedom of speech and expression with the need to curb misinformation and online harassment," he said.

'Mentioned as pond in revenue records': Stepwell

BAREILLY: A stepwell believed to be 150 years old, along with a tunnel that may have served as an escape route during the 1857 rebellion against the British Raj, was discovered during an anti-encroachment drive in the Laxman Ganj area of Chandausi, Sambhal. The structure is located near the Banke Bihari temple, which has fallen into disrepair and is part of ongoing efforts to uncover historical sites in the area. Sambhal DM Rajender Pensiya and SP Krishan Kumar Bishnoi inspected the

site on Sunday. Pensiya said, "The stepwell (baoli) spans 400 square metres and is recorded as a pond in revenue records. The excavation is proceeding carefully to avoid damage. Encroachments around the site will also be removed." An Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) team surveyed five shrines and 19 wells in the region, including the newly discovered site. The inspection lasted nearly 10 hours and covered 24 locations. Pensiya said, "The ASI's findings will guide .

Actress Ranya sent to judicial custody till March 24 in Rs 12 crore gold smuggling case

NEW DELHI: Kannada actress Harshavardhini Ranya, popularly known as Ranya Rao, has been sent to judicial custody till March 24 in connection with an alleged Rs 12 crore gold smuggling case. The development comes amid fierce political battle in Karnataka, with the ruling Congress and the opposition BJP exchanging accusations over alleged favoritism and cover-ups. **BJP alleges minister's role, Congress hits back** The BJP has alleged that a prominent minister in chief minister Siddaramaiah's government is shielding Ranya Rao, suggesting a deep-



rooted nexus in the smuggling operation. Karnataka BJP president B Y Vijayendra, in a post on 'X', called it "one of the biggest gold heists in recent times," blaming the Congress government for "churning out scandals in increasingly innovative ways." Vijayendra further claimed that such large-scale smuggling could not have occurred without the involvement of

influential figures within the government. He warned that any attempts to suppress the investigation would backfire, especially with the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) stepping in. Meanwhile, the Congress has turned the tables on the BJP, revealing that the previous BJP government had allotted 12 acres of land in Sira, Tumakuru, to Ranya Rao's compa-

ny, Ksiroda India, for a steel plant in February 2023. Minister M B Patil shared official documents to back the claim, suggesting that the BJP, now raising questions, had granted land to the same individual they were accusing of a crime. **Government defends probe, DRI arrests hotelier's son** State home minister G Parameshwara urged patience, stating that with both state and central agencies involved, the truth would emerge. "Neither I nor the government can comment until the investigation is complete," he said.

CM Saini will present a pro-people budget: Jagmohan Anand

DILPREET WALIA
Karnal: Karnal MLA Jagmohan Anand said that Haryana Chief Minister Naib Singh Saini will present a public welfare budget. The entire bureaucracy is busy preparing the budget of Haryana for the year 2025-26. While CM Naib Singh Saini has received suggestions from about 10 thousand people from across the state, he has also sought the opinion of his cabinet ministers, MPs, MLAs and leaders of opposition parties along with prominent people from every sector. While the state government's budget will provide adequate funds for the already running development projects, budget provision will be made for new projects. In the budget, the government is going to emphasize on reducing revenue expenditure and increasing capital expenditure. MLA Jagmohan Anand said that as Finance Minister, Chief Minister Naib Singh Saini can present a



budget of about two lakh crore rupees for the year 2025-26 this time. Last year, the then Chief Minister Manohar Lal had presented a budget of Rs 1.89 lakh crore. The slogan of Non-Stop Haryana will be visible in Naib Singh Saini's budget. As soon as he took over the power of the state, Naib Saini gave the slogan of Non-Stop Haryana for the development of the state, which he now has a great opportunity to prove. The state budget will be presented on Tuesday, March 17. MLA Jagmohan Anand said that this time the government is going to focus on welfare schemes for the poor and needy people. The scope of the Chief Minister's Tirtha Yatra

Yojana will increase and the scheme of LPG cylinder for Rs 500 for poor women will continue. The government plans to provide poor people their own houses under the Chief Minister's Rural and Urban Housing Schemes. The pension of the elderly can be increased in this year's budget.
Focus will also be on farmers: MLA Jagmohan Anand said that the second sector is of farmers i.e. Annadaata. In this sector, the government is going to start many new schemes for the welfare of farmers by guaranteeing the purchase of all their crops at MSP. Farmers are being given huge subsidy on electricity, which can be continued this time also. Farmers are provided subsidy of about seven thousand crore rupees every year. The government will encourage natural farming in this year's budget and can provide a subsidy of 30 thousand rupees on the purchase of cow.

Benefits of Education and Technology Should Reach Every Village: President Murmu

JAG MOHAN THAKEN
Chandigarh: "Preparing the young generation according to the changing global demands is a challenge for higher education institutions. For the balanced and sustainable development of the country, it is also necessary that the benefits of education and technology reach every village", said Smt Droupadi Murmu, the President of India. She added that in this context, higher education institutions like Guru Jambheshwar University play a very important role. I have been told that the number of students coming from small towns and rural backgrounds in this university is high. I would appeal to those students to tell the people of their villages and cities about the importance of education, and motivate them to get a good education. The President Smt Droupadi Murmu graced the convocation ceremony of Guru Jambheshwar University of Science



and Technology, Hisar, Haryana on Monday. Speaking on the occasion, the President said that preparing the young generation for the changing global demands is challenging task for higher education institutions. For the balanced and sustainable development of the country, it is also necessary that the benefits of education and technology reach villages. Higher education institutions like Guru Jambheshwar University have a very important role in this context. She was happy to note that this university has a high number of students from small towns and rural areas. She urged those students to make the people of their village and city aware of the impor-

tance of education, and inspire them to get a good education. The President said that world-class research conducted in higher educational institutions would play an important role in establishing India as a Global Knowledge Super Power. She was happy to note that its students and faculty members have made many significant achievements in various research and research projects. It has special departments for Incubation, Start-up, Patent filing and Research projects. She expressed confidence that all these efforts would develop the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship among the students and help in making India a Global Knowledge Super Power.



Police team raided the spa center

A girl was found who was being forced to do child labour in a spa centre

DILPREET WALIA
Karnal: While counseling a girl, Child Welfare Committee Chairman Umesh Kumar Chanana received information that a prostitution racket was being run in a spa centre in Karnal and minor girls were also employed there. He immediately spoke to the Superintendent of Police, Karnal. Superintendent of Police Karnal Shri Gangaram Punia took immediate action and put DSP Rajiv Kumar on duty. He immediately instructed City SHO Puneet Kumar and WPS Karnal Mrs. Satwinder Kaur to help the rescue team along with their team. Umesh Kumar Chanana, police team and Garima and Renu from the social organization team raided the spa centre. During this, a minor girl was found working there. When the girl was questioned, she told that she was married. Child labour was being done with that girl in the spa. The girl has also accused of prostitution. The Child Welfare Committee has instructed the police to get the girl medically examined and register a case against the operator of the spa centre. Child Welfare Committee Chairman Umesh Kumar said that when they raided the spa centre, the girl's age was stated to be 17 years but she appeared to be even younger than that. The girl said that she was married, on the basis of which a case of child marriage and trafficking is made. When the girl was counselled, she said that she was also forced into prostitution.

Education is essential for human development : Kaur

Jasbir Singh Duggal
Kurukshetra: Zila Parishad Chairperson Kawaljeet Kaur said that human development is only possible through education. Therefore, we must provide our children with not only school education but also moral education, so that their all-round development is possible. She was speaking as the chief guest at the annual festival of FirstCry Intellitots Pre-School in Jyoti Nagar. She appreciated the cultural program presented by the young students and encouraged them. Uma Sudha, former chairperson of Thanesar Municipal Council, presided over the function and urged the students to set goals, study, and work hard. She also praised the students' discipline.



Earlier, school director Sweeti Kaushik and Pawan Mittal, district coordinator of Seva Trust UK India, welcomed the guests. The guests lit the lamp to inaugurate the program. The young students presented a grand cultural program, earning applause from the audience. During this time,

children studying in the pre-school participated in various competitions. All the parents and guardians of the children were delighted and gave the pre-school a five-star rating. The guests also praised the staff and management members. School director Sweeti Kaushik said that FirstCry

Intellitots Pre-School is equipped with state-of-the-art facilities and is unmatched in Kurukshetra. Present on the occasion were Priyanka Sharma, Poonam Sharma, Dr. Neha Sobti Child Psychiatrist, Sonu Sharma, Naresh Sharma, and parents and guardians of the children.

DTP team demolishes illegal construction in Mirzapur village

Jasbir Singh Duggal
Kurukshetra: The District Town Planner (DTP) team has demolished illegal construction in Mirzapur village, Kurukshetra, spread over 5.5 acres. The action was taken on the orders of the Deputy Commissioner. According to DTP Officer Vikram Kumar, the team, along with the police, demolished the illegal construction, including kutchra roads and buildings, in the village. The department had issued notices to the landowners and prop-



erty dealers under the Haryana Development and Regulation of Urban Areas Act, 1975, but they failed to comply. The DTP officer warned people not to buy plots

from property dealers without verifying the authenticity of the colony. He also advised them to obtain necessary permissions from the department before purchasing land.

Bollywood Superstar Salman Khan brings 10 Ka Dum to GRM Overseas Ltd's 10X Classic Chakki Fresh Atta with its Campaign "Better Half Ki Better Choice"

Vatika Times
New Delhi : GRM Overseas Limited or "GRM", a prominent FMCG player in India, is poised to transform the Wheat Flour market with its innovative campaign for 10X Classic Chakki Fresh Atta, featuring the company's recently appointed Brand Ambassador, Bollywood superstar Salman Khan. GRM is focussed to guide consumers towards a healthier lifestyle by transitioning to superior-quality, hygienic and healthier branded packaged Atta, from the traditional unpackaged, market-sourced Atta. The company is committed to provide pure, unadulterated wheat flour that delivers consistent quality and enhanced nutrition for

families across India. Mr. Atul Garg, Managing Director of GRM Overseas, said: "We are excited to announce the launch of an ambitious campaign for 10X Classic Chakki Fresh Atta, with the support of our new Brand Ambassador, Salman Khan. As one of the leading FMCG companies in India, we recognize the importance of innovation and quality in driving the industry forward, especially in the packaged staples market." "Our focus with this campaign is to encourage a significant shift in consumer behaviour and guide them towards making informed choices by choosing superior-quality, hygienic, and nutritious branded packaged products. We believe that this campaign is not just about

offering a product, but about promoting a lifestyle that prioritizes well-being and health," said Mr. Garg. Mr. Garg, added, "We are thrilled to embark on this journey with Salman Khan, a figure who embodies the spirit of our brand – trustworthy, reliable, and a symbol of outstanding quality, and are confident that the new campaign will elevate the brand's mass appeal further. India's Packaged Atta market presents a huge opportunity for us as it is expected to grow at a 16% CAGR to reach \$197 billion by 2030 as per industry reports, driven by increasing urbanization, a rising middle-class population, and a growing emphasis on health and convenience among consumers."

President will honour Padma Shri Professor Harminder Singh Bedi

Vatika Times
Chandigarh: Padma Shri Professor Harminder Singh Bedi, a well-known writer of Hindi literature, will be awarded the Gyan Ratna Award by President Draupadi Murmu at the convocation ceremony of Punjab University, Chandigarh.



Padma Shri Professor Harminder Singh is currently the Chancellor of Central University, Himachal Pradesh. He is also the advisory member of Hindi in the Prasar Bharati Ministry of the Government of India. Bedi has previously been honoured with the National Hindi

Seva Award, Padma Shri and Rajbhasha Award by the Government of India. The Punjab Government has also honoured him with the honour of Shiromani Hindi Sahityakaar. Padma Shri Professor Harminder Singh Bedi has written 35 texts in Hindi, Punjabi and English.

Rishikesh to get two Oberoi properties

NEW DELHI: Hospitality major Oberoi Group will open two properties in Rishikesh, including a 80-key "Vilas" and a 120-room Trident. The properties will come up in partnership with Ladhani Group and are a part of Oberoi's strategic expansion plans. The two resorts in Rishikesh to be managed by EIH (Oberoi Group's parent company) are in addition to the 19 properties previously announced as part of EIH Ltd's growth strategy, that includes 16 hotels.

Vatika Times
KARNAL : Nothing, the London-based technology company announced the open sales for the Nothing Phone (3a) Series across Flipkart, Vijay Sales, Croma and all leading retail stores in India, starting 11 March. As a special introductory offer on day 1, Phone (3a) will be available for as low as 19,999, and the Phone (3a) Pro for as low as 24,999 (including all offers). Nothing launched the Phone (3a) Series globally on March 4, 2025,



with major camera upgrades. The Phone (3a) features a 50MP main sensor, a Sony ultra-wide sensor, and a 50MP telephoto lens with 2x optical zoom, while the Phone (3a) Pro with a periscope camera, boasts 60x ultra zoom. For

selfies, the Phone (3a) has a 32MP front camera, while the Pro model features a 50MP sensor with 4K video recording. Both phones feature the Snapdragon® 7s Gen 3 Mobile Platform and 5000mAh batteries delivering up

to two days of use on a full charge. With upgraded fast charging now at 50W, the Phone (3a) Series delivers a full day's power (50%) in under 20 minutes. Furthermore, both phones boast an immersive display of 6.77 inches with Full HD+ resolution. Visuals look crisp with 387 pixels in every inch of screen, and a fluid 120Hz adaptive refresh rate. The display offers 1000 hz sampling rate in gaming mode making gaming smooth and responsive.

'Hotel owned by relatives': BJP targets J&K CM Omar Abdullah over Gulmarg fashion show row

NEW DELHI: A fashion show held in Gulmarg during the holy month of Ramzan has triggered a massive row in Jammu and Kashmir. The BJP levelled accusations against Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah, alleging that his family members own the hotel where the event took place. Omar clarified that it was a private function without any government involvement. Former chief minister Mehbooba Mufti also criticised the event, calling it "deplorable" and an attack on Kashmiri values. Jammu and Kashmir leader of opposition and BJP MLA Sunil Sharma directly challenged the chief minister's claim that he was unaware of the event. "Omar Abdullah lies both inside the Assembly and outside. How is it possible that such a big function was happening in a hotel owned by your relatives, and you had no



idea? You must have organised this programme yourself. Now, since people have raised this issue, you are claiming an inquiry will be conducted. He should accept the truth instead of lying," Sharma said. He added that the excise department had issued a short-term licence for the event, suggesting that authorities had prior knowledge. The controversy erupted after videos and images from the fashion show surfaced online, sparking outrage across the region. Former chief minister and PDP leader Mehbooba Mufti condemned the event, call-

ing it "deeply troubling" and criticising the government's attempt to distance itself from the matter. She said, "It is deplorable that private hoteliers are allowed to promote such vulgarity through these events, which blatantly contradict our cultural values. The government cannot absolve itself of responsibility by labelling this a private affair." Religious leaders also expressed their discontent. Kashmir's chief priest, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, strongly condemned the event, calling it "outrageous" and saying that "obscurity in the name of tourism promotion.

'Baap ka raaj hai kya': Tejashwi Yadav on BJP MLA asking Muslims to 'stay indoors' on Holi

NEW DELHI: Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav rebuked a BJP MLA's appeal to Muslims to "stay indoors" on Holi and said that Bihar was a state where "designs of RSS-BJP and Sangh Parivar have often been foiled."

Demanding an FIR against Haribhushan Thakur Bachaul, Yadav said, "It is not his father's rule (baap ka raj). There should be an FIR against him for trying to whip up communal tension." "But Bachaul should remember this is Bihar, where designs of RSS-BJP and Sangh Parivar have often been foiled. He thinks he can strike terror into our Muslim brethren. But ours is a land where every single Muslim would be protected by at least five to six Hindus", he added. He further called upon chief minister Nitish Kumar to take action against this MLA for flaring communal tensions in the state. "I would also like chief minister



Nitish Kumar to summon Bachaul and pull him up for his tirade against the minority community. Though that may be too much to expect from the Leader of the House who no longer seems to be in his senses," he said.

Yadav assured safety of Muslims in the state and said, "This is Bihar! Here, for every Muslim's support and protection, five Hindus stand together. Don't mock the Constitution—know your limits and place. As long as there are people in Bihar who follow the ideology of RJD and Lalu Ji, we will not let any riots happen, whether it brings us to power or costs power." Bachaul's com-

ments reiterated what UP cop's recent remarks that Holi comes once a year and jumma (Friday), 52 times a year. "I want to appeal to Muslims there are 52 jummas (Fridays) in a year. The one this week coincides with Holi. So, they should let Hindus celebrate the festival and not take offence if colours are smeared on them. If they have such a problem, they should stay indoors. This is essential for maintaining communal harmony," Thakur said. "They have always had double standards. They are happy to make money by setting up stalls selling abir-gulaal (coloured powders), but if a few stains land on their clothes.



Tata Electronics will build 2 additional Dholera fabs

Delhi: Dholera, India's first semiconductor fab, would start making chips in 2026 with Tata's Rs 91,000-crore plant in cooperation with Taiwan's Powerchip Semiconductor Manufacturing Corporation (PSMC). However, the second and third fab partnerships and timetables are still being determined. Next-generation fabs are planned to start production in five to seven years at the same scale as the first. "The nodes and technology will be decided once the first fab is at full capacity and will depend on the global demand and technology development within the semiconductor industry," a source said. A top government official said the first semiconductor fabrication plant is being built. Dholera Special Investment Region development commenced in March by Tata Electronics. The company is evaluating the installation capacity needed to test equipment and start a pilot production line before commercial manufacturing. A senior official said that since the fab will produce chips at several nodes, certain infrastructure could be created by all three fabs during the initial phase. Thus, while future phases will require enormous investment, it is unlikely to match the multi-billion-dollar first fab. Tata is negotiating with buyers for first-fab chips.

Temasek wants 20% of visa co VFS

Delhi: According to sources, Singapore state-owned investor Temasek Holdings is close to buying a major minority share in VFS Global, which may value the visa outsourcing and technology services provider at \$7 billion including debt. Due to confidential discussions, Temasek is

Hours after citizenship blow, Lalit calls Vanuatu 'truly heavenly' despite passport cancellation order by PM Napat

NEW DELHI: Just hours after Vanuatu Prime Minister Jotham Napat ordered the cancellation of Lalit Modi's passport, the former IPL chief shared breathtaking pictures of the island nation, calling it a "heavenly country" and urging people to visit. "Vanuatu is a beautiful country. You must put it on your bucket list. Away from all the pollution and noise. Truly heavenly country," Modi wrote, seemingly unfazed by the storm brewing over his citizenship. Vanuatu PM drops the hammer Earlier today, PM Napat directed the Citizenship Commission to revoke Modi's passport, citing concerns that



the fugitive ex-cricket administrator was attempting to dodge extradition. Also read: 'Attempting to avoid extradition': Vanuatu PM orders cancellation of Lalit Modi's passport

Modi, who fled India in 2010 and has been living in London, had filed an application on March 7 with the Indian High Commission in London to surrender his Indian passport. His Vanuatu citizenship—once a

safe haven—now appears to be at risk.

Interpol rejection raises eyebrows

What makes the case even murkier is that despite India's efforts, Interpol has twice rejected requests to issue an alert notice against Modi, citing a "lack of substantive judicial evidence." "While all standard background checks, including Interpol screenings, conducted during his application showed no criminal convictions, I have been made aware in the past 24 hours that Interpol twice rejected Indian authorities' requests," the Vanuatu PM said in a statement.

'Arrogant, need to be disciplined': TN CM Stalin hits out at Union education minister

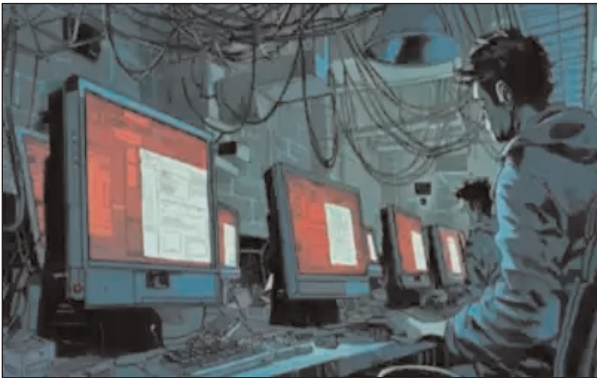
NEW DELHI: Tamil Nadu chief minister MK Stalin on Monday lashed out at Dharmendra Pradhan and said that the Union education minister "thinks of himself as a king and speaks arrogantly." His comments came in response to Pradhan's remark during Lok Sabha proceedings where he termed the State government as "dishonest" and claimed that they are "ruining" the future of students. In a post on X, written in Tamil lan-

guage, Stalin said Tamil Nadu is not willing to implement the National Education Policy plan, and no one can force him to do so. "The Union Education Minister, who thinks of himself as a king and speaks arrogantly, @dpradhanbjp They need to be disciplined! Are you saying that you are being rude to Tamil Nadu MPs by defrauding them of Tamil Nadu's funds? You are insulting the people of Tamil Nadu. Does the Honorable Prime Minister @naren-

dramodi accept this? Are you the one who wrote to me saying that the PM SHRI (Rising India scheme) MoU sent by the Tamil Nadu government completely rejected the NEP and the three-language policy?" Stalin said. Mr. Pradhan, We act only by respecting the thoughts of the people! Not by being bound by the words of Nagpur like you!! We are not willing to implement your plan, and no one can force me to do so.

Nearly 300 Indians brought back from Myanmar scam

NEW DELHI: Nearly 300 Indian nationals returned home via Thailand on Monday after being freed from scam centers in Myanmar, as reported by AFP. A crackdown on these illegal online fraud hubs, largely run by Chinese operators, has led to the release of around 7,000 workers from over two dozen countries. Many of the freed individuals, mostly Chinese, remain stranded in poor conditions near the Myanmar-Thai border. Indian officials escorted seven buses carrying 266 men and 17 women—along with three additional buses transporting their luggage—to Thailand's Mae Sot airport. The government deployed a C-17 transport aircraft to bring them back, with another 257 nationals set to be



repatriated the following day. China, which has already repatriated over 2,000 of its citizens, continues efforts to dismantle these scam operations that thrive in Myanmar's lawless border regions. These centers, part of a billion-dollar industry, exploit foreign workers for online fraud, including romance and investment scams. Many workers report being lured into these jobs under false pretenses and subjected to abuse.

SpiceJet's vital financing is gaining investor support.

Delhi: Sources suggest the airline's Rs 3,000-crore QIP is oversubscribed. Tata Mutual Fund, Bandhan Bank, Discovery Fund, Plutus, Jupiter Fund Management, and Think Investments may invest. Ace investors Madhu Kela, Akash Bhansali, Sanjay Dangl, and Rohit Kothari's family offices also subscribed to the QIP.

Most Indians avoid internet purchasing this holiday due to delivery delays and return hassles

Delhi: FarEye's holiday shopping poll found that not everyone is ready to spend online. Nearly 60% of shoppers would avoid online shopping this holiday season due to shipping

delays and return issues. The survey of 1,000 Indians found that 41% plan to shop from e-commerce merchants during the holidays, but nearly 60% do not owing to delivery delays

and returns issues. Poor delivery terms are causing 63% of shoppers to leave carts, and 54% predict delays during the holidays. Powered By "Consumers are frustrated

with getting their deliveries on time, every time, and don't want to pay extra for returns or faster delivery," said FarEye co-founder and COO Gautam Kumar.

We deeply regret any hurt': Designers Shivan & Narresh apologise for Gulmarg fashion show row

NEW DELHI: A fashion show held in Gulmarg during the holy month of Ramzan has sparked outrage in Jammu and Kashmir, with designers Shivan & Narresh facing criticism for displaying "obscene" garments. As the controversy grew, the designer duo issued an apology, saying they deeply regretted any hurt caused by their presentation. The Delhi-based designers, Shivan Bhatiya and Narresh Kukreja, showcased their skiwear collection on Friday, March 7 to mark the 15th anniversary of their label. However, the event drew sharp criticism from religious and political leaders, with many calling it insensitive given the timing and location. Following the backlash, Shivan & Narresh posted an apology, saying their



intention was to celebrate creativity, not hurt people's sentiments. They shared the apology on their official X page, stating: "We deeply regret any hurt caused by our recent presentation in Gulmarg during the holy month of

Ramadan. Our sole intention was to celebrate creativity and the ski & apres-ski lifestyle, without any desire to offend anyone or any religious sentiments. Respect for all cultures and traditions is at our heart, and we acknowledge the concerns raised. We sincerely apologise for any unintended discomfort and appreciate the feedback from our community. We remain committed to being more mindful and respectful." Kashmir's chief priest, Mirwaiz Umar

Farooq, was among the first to criticise the event, calling it "outrageous." "Outrageous! That in the holy month of Ramzan, an obscene fashion show is organised in Gulmarg, pictures and videos from which have gone viral sparking shock and anger among people. How could it be tolerated in the valley known for its Sufi, saint culture and the deeply religious outlook of its people? Those involved should be immediately held accountable," he posted on X.

Sun Pharma to acquire US oncology company for over Rs 3,000 crore

Sun Pharma, India's largest pharmaceutical company, is set to acquire Checkpoint Therapeutics for \$355 million. This strategic acquisition will enhance Sun Pharma's specialty portfolio, including UNLOXCYT, an FDA-approved treatment for advanced skin cancer, expanding its global presence in oncology treatments. File photo Sun Pharma, India's largest drugmaker, is acquiring Nasdaq-listed Checkpoint Therapeutics, an immunotherapy and targeted oncology company, for \$355 million (over Rs 3,000 crore).The acquisition will bolster the company's specialty portfolio. Checkpoint is a commercial-stage company that develops novel treatments for patients with solid tumor cancers, and the acquisition includes UNLOXCYT, an FDA-approved treatment for advanced skin cancer, says a company statement.



Dilip Shanghvi, CMD of Sun Pharma, said, "Combining UNLOXCYT, an FDA-approved anti-PD-L1 treatment for advanced cutaneous squamous cell carcinoma, with Sun Pharma's global presence means patients may soon have access to an important, new treatment option. The acquisition further bolsters our innovative portfolio in onco-dermatology." James Oliviero, president and chief executive officer of Checkpoint, said, "This transaction will maximise value for our stockholders and provide accelerated access to UNLOXCYT in the United States, Europe and other markets worldwide." Upon completion of

the transaction, Sun Pharma will acquire all outstanding shares of Checkpoint and Checkpoint stockholders will receive, for each share of common stock they hold, an upfront cash payment of \$4.1.The transaction is subject to Checkpoint's shareholder and regulatory approvals and is expected to be completed in Q2CY25 In connection with the transaction, Checkpoint, Sun Pharma and Fortress Biotech, Checkpoint's controlling stockholder, have entered into a royalty agreement, under which following the closing of the transaction, Fortress would be entitled to receive royalty.

The Union government wants 100% FDI in insurance

Delhi: The Union Finance Ministry proposed raising the insurance sector's FDI ceiling from 74% to 100% in a consultation paper. The insurance FDI limit was raised from 49% to 74% in February 2021. The government said the proposal to alter insurance legislation will make insurance more affordable, grow the insurance industry, and streamline corporate operations. An office memorandum dated November 26 proposed lifting the FDI ceiling in Indian insurance businesses from 74% to 100% and



allowing insurers to conduct one or more kinds of insurance business and associated or incidental operations. The suggestion also cut foreign reinsurers' Net Owned Funds from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 1,000 crore. IRDAI can also set lesser entry capital (Rs 50 crore) for underserved or unserved regions on

a case-by-case basis. The sector regulator is trying to increase capital in this capital-intensive industry. The Chairman of IRDAI suggests that the insurance market requires 50,000 crore yearly to double penetration in the country. Insurance penetration is the ratio of annual premiums issued to GDP.

'Recovery in rural demand to be faster'

CHENNAI: Recovery in rural consumption will be faster than the urban areas, said Godrej Consumer Products (GCPL) MD & CEO Sudhir Sitapati. "Rural markets have actually picked up, but they got compensated by a very poor urban performance in Q3 (FY25). Our anticipation is rural recovery will be



faster than the urban recovery. There were some particular factors

in the third quarter, which affected urban consumption.

Fund-raise for startups touches four-year low

MUMBAI: The size of funds collectively raised by investors for allocating to Indian startups dropped to a four-year-low of \$2.7 billion in 2024 as big players like SoftBank and Tiger Global refrained from making big bets, largely issuing smaller follow-on cheques for portfolio companies and remained cautious on overall deployment of capital. In 2023, investors had raised \$4 billion, about 33% higher, a report by Bain & Company and Indian Venture and Alternate Capital Association (IVCA) showed. A global tech downturn, which had gripped markets in parts of 2022 and 2023 nudged venture capital (VC) and growth funds to go slow on investments — this basically meant that they could not deploy all the funds raised earlier and are still sitting on sig-



nificant capital, readjusting their new fund targets. Local family offices lead investment "Leading VC funds had sizeable fundraises in 2022 and 2023 and deployments were measured in H2 (second half) of 2022 and 2023. Most of the top VCs did not see the need to raise

another big fund," Prabhav Kashyap, partner at Bain & Company told. In fact, the number of \$100 million plus funds raised shrunk to four last year from 10 in 2023. VC firm Accel was an outlier though, having closed a \$650 million fund to back local startups. "Fund-raising declined as top investors

(barring Accel) tempered activity....crossover funds remain subdued. Tiger Global maintained its focus on backing existing portfolio companies without making new bets. SoftBank marked its return to Indian startups after an 18-month hiatus by exclusively funding existing investments," analysts at Bain said. Tiger Global's last venture capital fund closed in early 2024 and raised \$2.2 billion, short of its initial target of \$6 billion and lower than its previous \$12.7 billion fund raised in 2022. "From a value creation and returns perspective, funds want to focus on topline growth and margin expansion, and not multiple expansion. In India, the valuation multiples are still elevated compared to most other markets despite a correction," said Kashyap.

Nasdaq down 3% on slowdown fears



MUMBAI: The tech-heavy Nasdaq led sharp losses among major US stock indexes on Monday, dropping over 3% to a near six-month low, on fears that US President Donald Trump's tariff policies would spark an economic slowdown. The benchmark S&P has fallen over 8% from its Feb high.Financial markets have been volatile in recent weeks as rising trade tensions and signs of slowing US economic growth weighed on consumer confidence and business activity. Richly valued US tech stocks have borne the brunt

of the recent selloff on Wall Street. "The Nasdaq has been risk-off all year long ... that's just the unfortunate combination of very high valuations, which is where we started the year, and increased uncertainty in general," said Chris Zaccarelli, chief investment officer.The S&P is poised to close below

its 200-day moving average for the first time since Nov 2023. A Reuters poll showed 91% of economists see higher recession risks due to Trump's shifting trade policies. HSBC also downgraded US stocks.Trump declined Sunday to rule out the possibility that the US might enter a recession this year.

US stock market sell-off deepens as tariff and economic fears mount

Delhi: Wall Street's sell-off deepened Monday, with growing concerns about the economy and President Donald Trump's tariffs driving US stocks further from their recent record highs.In early trading, the S&P 500 dropped 1.4%, following its worst week since September. As of 9:35 a.m. Eastern time, the Dow Jones Industrial Average was down 430 points, or 1%, and the Nasdaq composite had fallen 2.1%, according to news agency AP. The primary US stock market measure is now headed for its seventh swing of more than 1%, up or down, in the last eight days, after a tumultuous period dominated by fears that Trump's on-and-off tariffs could either directly harm the economy or create enough uncertainty to paralyze US companies



and consumers. The S&P 500 is down 7.4% from its all-time high reached on February 19.The economy has shown signs of weakening, mainly reflected in surveys indicating increased pessimism. Additionally, a real-time collection of indicators compiled by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta suggests the US economy could already be contracting. When asked over the weekend about the possibility of a recession in 2025, Trump told Fox News Channel, "I hate to predict things like that.

There is a period of transition because what we're doing is very big. We're bringing wealth back to America. That's a big thing." He added, "It takes a little time. It takes a little time." On the same weekend, US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick stated on NBC's "Meet the Press" that 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum imports would take effect Wednesday. While the US job market remains stable and the economy ended last year with solid growth.

China strikes back at Trump tariffs with 15% levies targeting US farmers

Delhi: China retaliated against President Donald Trump's tariffs with an additional 15% tax on key American farm products, including chicken, pork, soybeans and beef. The escalating trade tensions punished US markets Monday as investors fearful of the damage from Trump's trade wars put their money elsewhere. The Chinese tariffs, announced last week, were a response to Trump's decision to double the levy on Chinese imports to 20% on March 4. China's Commerce Ministry had earlier said that goods already in transit would be exempt from the retaliatory tariffs until April 12.Imposing tariffs on imports is a key part of Trump's agenda. He believes the import taxes can raise money for the Treasury, protect American indus-



tries and pressure foreign countries to do what he wants in a range of issues, including immigration and drug trafficking. On Wednesday, Trump is set to remove exceptions on 25% steel tariffs he imposed in 2018 - effectively raising the taxes - and raise his levy on aluminum from 10% to 25%.In a bewildering series of announcements last week, Trump slapped tariffs on Canadian and Mexican imports, then delayed many of them for 30 days. Next month, he could plaster "reciprocal tariffs" - meant to raise U.S. tariffs to match higher

tariffs imposed by foreign countries - on a wide range of imports from around the world.Economists warn that tariffs raise prices for consumers and make the US economy less efficient as protected American companies have less incentive to innovate. There's also the threat of retaliation, and farmers, who are among Trump's most loyal supporters and also have vigilant defenders in Congress, make a tempting target.China also hit American farm products during the president's first-term trade wars.

Tgana rejects Adani's 100-cr contribution

Delhi: Telangana chief minister A Revanth Reddy announced that the state government will not accept the ?100 crore CSR donation from the Adani Group for the Young India Skills University in Ranga Reddy district, citing current circumstances and controversies. We thank you for committing 100 crore to Young India Skills University on behalf of your Foundation via letter. We have not sought donors for physical transfers of monies since the university did not acquire the IT exemption under section 80G, Ranjan wrote. The official added that he was "instructed by the chief minister not to seek the transfer of funds in view of the present circumstances and arising controversies". According to the US Department of Justice indictment, Adani executives and Azure Power executives bribed Indian government officials in five states to win solar energy supply contracts worth over \$2 billion over 20 years between 2020 and 2024. The scam purportedly started in Odisha and spread to Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, and Jammu & Kashmir. The Telangana chief minister said everyone may lawfully invest, despite accusations that the state government accepted Adani Group funding. Reddy said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has stated that the company that wins the bids according to the regulations will invest.



Flushed clothes & bags clogged loos: 'Use lavatories only for purpose they are meant for,' Air India

NEW DELHI: "Urge passengers to use lavatories only for the purposes that they are meant for." Air India on Monday issued this unusual appeal after yet another instance of clogged lavatories affected yet another long haul flight. Flushing the lavs led to AI finding passengers had flushed polythene bags, rags, and clothes that led to clogged pipes and overflowing toilets. AI has long faced this issue, mostly with its old Boeing 777s that are used for the North America long hauls. The most recent instance was on March 5 when a Chicago -Delhi flight had to return to the US after eight of the 12 lavs on the B777 had become unserviceable. The airline found the same reason for toilets clogging this time too, leading it to issue the appeal: "use lavs only for the purpose they are meant for." Meaning, advising passengers

not to flush things like hand towels, blankets and plastic bags that will clog lavs up. Also read: Clogged toilets? Air India flight forced to return to Chicago after 10 hours in air "We are aware of some social media posts about the unserviceable lavatories on AI126 operating Chicago to Delhi on March 5, 2025, that caused the flight's diversion back to its origin, Chicago.... as part of our investigation into the incident, our teams found polythene bags, rags, and clothes that had been flushed down and stuck in the plumbing. This led the lavatories to become unserviceable," AI said in a statement. "While we fully empathise with passengers who faced discomfort and whose travel plans have been affected by the flight's diversion, we would like to put forth the following facts about the flight: "The flight departed in time at

1648 Hrs (UTC). About an hour and forty-five minutes into the flight, the crew reported some of the lavatories in business and economy class to be unserviceable. Subsequently, eight of the 12 lavatories in the aircraft became unserviceable, causing discomfort to all on board. By this time, the aircraft was overflying the Atlantic, leaving points in Europe as potential cities to divert to. However, due to restrictions on night operations at most of the European airports, it was decided to divert back to Chicago," the statement added. "The decision to divert was taken entirely in the interest of passenger comfort and safety. Upon landing at Chicago, all passengers were provided immediate assistance, including hotel accommodation and alternative flight options to continue.

Modi 'my favourite actor', says CM, gives Congress anti-PM ammo



JAIPUR: Rajasthan CM Bhajan Lal Sharma ignited a political controversy after allegedly referring to PM Narendra Modi as his "favourite actor" during an awards function Sunday night. Congress seized the comment to swipe at Modi, asserting that the CM confirmed what they had long maintained about the PM. BJP spokesperson Laxmikant Bhardwaj pushed back, claiming the question posed to Sharma was about his favourite "hero", not actor. Sharma's remark was made in response to a media query. "Question asked to the CM — 'Sir, who is your favourite hero?' CM's answer — 'Narendra

Modi Ji'... Congress members, having stooped to the level of a family's feet, are unsuccessfully trying to continue their tradition of lies and deceit by editing videos and creating fake scripts," Bhardwaj said. The controversy erupted after state Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra shared a video clip of Sharma's response on X. "We've been saying for a long time that Modi is not a leader, but an actor. Even if it's late, the BJP CM has started saying that Modi is not a people's leader, but an actor. He is skilled in camera artistry, teleprompters, costumes, and eloquent

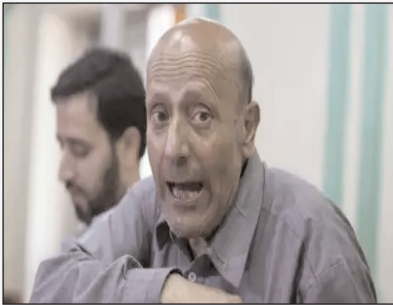
speeches," he posted. Bhardwaj accused Congress of spreading "propaganda by editing videos", arguing that millions of people see Modi as a hero. His rebuttal on X, however, came nearly eight hours after Dotasra's post had already gained over 50,000 views. Adding to the controversy, LoP Tikaram Jully remarked: "Modi ji is not a chaukidaar (watchman) but a kalakaar (artist). We have been saying from the beginning that Modi ji is not a watchman, but a great artist. Today, Bhajan Lal Sharma, himself acknowledged that PM Narendra Modi ji is not a public servant but an #actor."



Court rejects Rashid's plea for parole to attend House

NEW DELHI: A Delhi court rejected Monday J&K MP Engineer Rashid's plea for custody parole to attend Parliament's ongoing budget session. Judge Chander Jit Singh said the order on the Baramulla MP's regular bail plea would be passed on March 19.

Rashid has been in Delhi's Tihar jail since 2019 after his arrest in 2017 under UAPA in an alleged terror funding case.



Rashid's application, filed on Feb 27, had sought parole on the grounds that he needed to attend Parliament to fulfil his duty as MP. NIA had opposed the plea. The court was to pronounce its order on this on March 7 but had deferred the matter to Monday. Last month, Delhi high court had granted Rashid two-day custody parole to attend Parliament on Feb 11 and 13. Rashid had defeated Omar Abdullah, now J&K CM, in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls from Baramulla. In Sept last year, he was granted interim bail to campaign for the J&K assembly polls.

File report on need for Sambhal masjid whitewash: HC

PRAYAGRAJ: Allahabad high court directed Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Monday to file a specific reply on whether whitewashing, extra lighting and decorative lights were required outside the disputed Jama Masjid in Uttar Pradesh's Sambhal. It directed ASI to file its reply in an affidavit within 24 hours, fixing March 12 as the next hearing date. This followed a plea by the mosque management committee for whitewashing, cleaning and lighting. The Mughal-era structure shot into national spotlight after four deaths in unrest on Nov 24, 2024 over a survey on a local court's orders. On Monday, Justice Rohit Ranjan Agarwal directed



that in case there was need for further examining the structure for whitewashing and other related works, ASI was free to send its team there. The court directed UP advocate-general Ajay

Kumar Misra to seek a copy of an agreement alleged to have been executed between mutawallis (keepers) of Jama Masjid and the state on Jan 19, 1927. The agreement reportedly

defines the roles of various agencies in the upkeep of the structure. Mosque committee senior advocate SFA Naqvi contended that ASI had not specified clearly that it was opposed to whitewashing along with extra lighting. No painting is required in the inner part of the site, Naqvi said. ASI's counsel Manoj Kumar Singh pointed out though there was some flaking on the outer portion of the monument, a final call could only be taken after a proper survey by archaeologists and experts. Even so, there is no need for whitewashing, Singh argued. The HC then pointed out that this position was not clearly spelt out in ASI's affidavits.

Set up NIA-like agency to fight cybercrime, says Parliament

NEW DELHI: A parliamentary committee, noting the meagre Rs 575 crore provided in the 2025-26 Budget for census and NPR updation, has recommended that census may be completed at the earliest. Census 2021 and NPR updation exercise were to start in 2020 but put on hold due to the Covid outbreak. The panel, while noting manifold increase in cybercrimes across country, recommended setting up of a separate central police force, on lines of NIA or CBI, to deal with



cybercrimes. It noted with concern how actual allocations for many central police forces like CRPF, BSF, etc in 2025-26 have fallen short of projections. Noting that such reductions may hit

critical schemes and police modernisation programmes, it recommended home ministry talk to finance ministry to seek increased allocations at revised estimate stage.

After 'rutting' at Mumbai e-way's Sohna-Dausa section, NHAI orders testing of SMA material

NEW DELHI: Learning from the "rutting" (permanent depressions) at several portions of the Mumbai Expressway's Sohna-Dausa section last year, which attracted huge criticism, the NHAI has directed detailed testing of the stone mastic asphalt (SMA) material used in other highway projects. Deficiency in the quality of SMA used on this section was identified as one the major reasons for the expressway getting damaged less than two years after its inauguration. Several projects, including the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra Expressway, have

been constructed or are being constructed using 50 mm SMA — a gap-graded hot mix asphalt that contains a large percentage of coarse aggregate (over 70%) and bitumen filler mastic. This is used since it is strong, durable, and resistant to deformation. The investigation into the Sohna-Dausa stretch had found that the highway builder had used SMA having 13 mm aggregate, while 19 mm aggregate was preferable. The probe also found that rutting mostly developed during the summer when the temperature of the pavement was more than 70 degrees Celsius. An

expert panel had observed that the grade of bitumen used could not sustain high temperatures and recommended use of higher-grade bitumen. It recommended the removal of the SMA layers in stretches where the average rut depth was more than 10 mm, and relay the stretch with 50 mm SMA, having 19 mm aggregate with higher quality bitumen. Officials said the work has been completed. "Since this incident came to our notice, we are carrying out tests across all other stretches where SMA has been used to detect if there are similar issues.

India airlifts 283 citizens rescued from Myanmar

NEW DELHI: A C-17 Indian military plane Monday evacuated 266 men and 17 women stuck at the Thai-Myanmar border for weeks after being rescued from scam call centres in Myanmar's Myawaddy. A second batch of 240 are expected to be repatriated Tuesday. The evacuees belong to multiple states, including Andhra, Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, UP and Bengal. It was not immediately known where the plane landed in India. K Madhukar Reddy, a native of Rangapeta in Telangana's Karimnagar district, said over the phone Indian embassy officials and Myanmar's Border Guard Force facilitated the evacuation. 'Living conditions at Myawaddy decent, terrible near border'



According to an AFP report, a group of Indian officials crossed into Myanmar to accompany seven buses taking the freed Indian nationals — as well as three more carrying their luggage — to Mae Sot airport in northwest Thailand. Authorities in Myanmar, under pressure from ally China, have cracked down in recent weeks on illegal online fraud operations that have flourished in the country's lawless borderlands. Around 7,000 workers from at least two dozen countries have been freed, the majority of them Chinese, but many have been languishing in squalid con-

ditions in temporary holding camps on the Thai-Myanmar border. "We just want to get out of these detention centres and return home," one of them told TOI. An Indian currently in detention described the conditions. "The accommodation is decent at Myawaddy detention. They have provided well-maintained AC rooms, but the food is inadequate — sometimes we get one meal a day." He said conditions were much worse at the border. "There are over 500 people there, with no proper toilets or food. They are forced to stay in army camp-like tents.

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

Bengaluru: The Karnataka high court Tuesday ordered Karnataka Examinations Authority (KEA) to scrap the PG medicine seats allotted in the mop-up round to "ineligible" candidates and make them available in the next round of counselling. National Medical Commission (NMC) and Medical Counselling Committee (MCC) should permit the candidates who were allotted all-India quota seats in the MCC-conducted third round counselling to join the allotted seats till 5pm, Feb 9, a division bench comprising Justices Anu Sivaraman and Vijayakumar A Patil said in its order on a petition filed by Dr Akshay V Thuppad and others, who were aspirants in the mop-up round conducted by the KEA. The KEA was directed not to enforce the penalty clause against the students who were wrongly permitted to participate in the mop-up round in violation of the conditions stipulated in its

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

Net worth may take a hit of around Rs 1,530 crore: IndusInd Bank

MUMBAI: IndusInd Bank said valuation losses in its forex derivative contracts could impact the bank's net worth by up to 2.4% or around Rs 1,530 crore. The announcement came hours after shares of the bank closed nearly 4% lower on Monday. The fall was triggered by RBI's decision to approve only one-year extension for MD & CEO Sumant Kathpalia as against three years proposed by the board. Following a hasty board meeting on Monday, Kathpalia addressed investors in an analyst call. He could not explain the delay in recording the derivative valuation losses but said RBI may be 'uncomfortable with his leadership skills' in the context of his truncated tenure. The bank said it identified the discrepancies, which accumulated over time, by itself and assured that its profitability and capital



adequacy could absorb the one-time impact. An external adviser has been appointed to investigate, with the review expected to conclude by fourth quarter. Net worth may take a hit of around 1,530cr: IndusInd Bk
External advisor to probe
"As part of circular which came in Dec 22/Sep 23, we started reviewing our derivative book as effective April 24, new guidelines for internal trades had to be discontinued. We started observing some discrepancies in our business, which were identified between Sept

and Oct, and we hired an external agency to review our business," said Kathpalia. He said that all the discrepancies pertained to FY24 and earlier. RBI's Dec 2022 circular restricted banks from allowing speculative or unregulated hedging for clients by ensuring that hedging is only permitted for actual or anticipated commodity price and freight risks. Banks also had to ensure that the hedge aligned with the entity's exposure and was restricted to approved products, such as futures, swaps, and options.

7-Eleven in talks with Canadian firm Couche over store sell-offs

MUMBAI Alimentation Couche-Tard (ACT) to address antitrust concerns and a potential merger. Joint efforts by financial advisors are underway to find buyers, aiming to create a feasible divestiture plan. This follows measures to counter ACT's takeover bid, previously rejected for undervaluation. 7-Eleven in talks with Canadian firm Couche Tard over store sell-offs for potential merger
Seven & i Holdings Ltd announced that its convenience store brand 7-Eleven is planning to explore potential store sell-offs with Canadian firm Alimentation Couche-Tard (ACT). This decision follows a series of measures introduced by Seven & i just days ago to counter a takeover bid from ACT, while also addressing antitrust concerns ahead of a possible merger. "Joint outreach by financial advisors to ACT and 7&i to potential buyers has begun," the parent firm said in a statement. The company, which has fully owned 7-Eleven,



the world's largest convenience store brand, since 2005, is now taking steps to determine if a deal could be structured in a way that satisfies regulators. ACT has agreed to work with Seven & i to outline a divestiture plan, which includes defining the operational, management, and financial aspects of the stores that could be sold, as well as identifying potential buyers. "This would provide some insight into the prospects of success along terms that had a reasonable likelihood of satisfying US antitrust regulators," the company added. Seven & i believes these discussions will help determine whether a "credible and actionable remedy and divestiture package can be achieved

that would allow a realistic assessment of ACT's proposal." Earlier, the company had announced a major share buyback and plans to list its US unit on the stock market, another development in an ongoing procedure that began last year when it rejected ACT's initial \$40 billion buyout offer. Seven & i dismissed the bid in September, arguing that it undervalued the business majorly and would likely face regulatory obstacles. If the deal were to go ahead, it would mark the biggest-ever foreign takeover of a Japanese firm, bringing together the 7-Eleven and Circle K brands to create a global convenience store giant. Japan's Yomiuri daily reported that ACT's revised offer, which was reportedly raised.

12 years after life term, SC acquits Tamil Nadu man of burning wife to death

NEW DELHI: Twelve years after being convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for allegedly burning his wife to death in Tamil Nadu, apex court has acquitted the man after noting that there was inconsistency in dying declarations of the deceased and also there was no other evidence to prove his culpability. A bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Ahsanuddin Amanullah said that conviction could not happen if there were major contradictions in the dying declaration of the deceased and there was no other substantial evidence against the accused. "If a dying declaration is surrounded by doubt or there are inconsistent dying declarations by the deceased, then courts must look for corroborative evidence to find out which dying declaration is to be believed. This will depend upon the facts of the case and courts are required to act cautiously in such cases. The matter at hand is one such case. In the present case, the deceased had given two statements which are totally different from her subsequent statements including the statement made before judicial magistrate, which has been considered a dying declaration based on which the appellant has been convicted," the bench said. In this case, the deceased, in her first statement did not blame her husband and said she caught fire while cooking but later on told the magistrate that her husband had poured kerosene on her and set her on fire. After examining statements of other witnesses including the doctors who examined her, the court said there was no smell of kerosene emanating from her body.

Musk, world's richest person, loses \$120 billion!

Delhi Elon Musk, the world's richest person, has seen his net worth plunge by an astounding \$120 billion in just a few weeks. The chief executive of Tesla, SpaceX and X (formerly Twitter), who now serves in a senior advisory position within the U.S. government, has witnessed his wealth decrease by approximately 25 percent since the start of 2025, according to an ET report. Although maintaining his position as the world's wealthiest individual with a net worth of \$330 billion, Musk's significant financial decline has attracted attention from industry analysts. The combination of Tesla's declining share price, increasing scrutiny of his political associations, and diminishing consumer interest has



prompted specialists to question the sustainability of his dominant market position, the report said. It's interesting to note that the majority of Elon Musk's wealth reduction stems from Tesla's performance. The company's share value has declined by roughly 35 percent in the previous two

months, resulting in a \$400 billion reduction in market capitalisation, the ET report said. Several factors have contributed to this situation. A primary issue is Tesla's declining sales performance, with U.S. electric vehicle sales showing a 16 percent reduction from December 2024 to January

2025. The company faces substantial challenges from emerging EV competitors and reduced demand in the premium electric vehicle sector. Additionally, Musk's increased political engagement has created uncertainty among investors, the report said. Following his substantial \$250 million contribution to Donald Trump's re-election efforts, Musk's appointment as head of the newly established Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has generated mixed reactions. Whilst his role focuses on reducing federal expenditure and addressing national debt, his association with the administration has affected Tesla's appeal to certain consumers and investors.

Govt seeks nod for extra Rs 51,000 crore spend

NEW DELHI: Government on Monday sought Parliamentary approval for additional spending, including a cash outgo of over Rs 51,000 crore, with large chunks going towards fertiliser subsidy and pension. Over Rs 14,000 crore is proposed to be spent towards higher fertiliser subsidy, according to the second supplementary demand for grants tabled in Parliament. Permission to make a larger allocation has been sought in case of pensions, with close to Rs 13,500 crore going



towards retired civilians and another Rs 8,500 crore meant to meet defence pension requirements. The supplementary demand for grants also included proposals for technical supplement-

tary grants or appropriations for Rs 6.3 lakh crore, which will be matched by additional receipts or recoveries or through corresponding savings by central ministries and departments.

UK finance minister calls for reform in welfare system to address high inflation

Delhi: Britain's finance minister, Rachel Reeves, has called for urgent reforms to the country's welfare system, citing concerns that it is "costing too much" as the nation grapples with high inflation and rising borrowing. Reeves is expected to announce significant cuts to welfare spending in her upcoming Spring Statement on March 26, following her inaugural budget in October. The government's fiscal position has been further strained by global challenges, including US tariffs and the ongoing war in Ukraine, leading to a depletion of the Labour administration's £9.9 billion



(\$12.7 billion) financial cushion, news agency. In an interview on Sky News' Electoral Dysfunction podcast, Reeves said, "We have to reform our welfare system because, right now, it's letting down taxpayers. It's costing too much and isn't effectively helping those it should." She emphasized the need for a system that does

more than provide benefits, aiming instead to support people back into employment. "We need to get better value for money from taxpayers' contributions," she added. Any reforms could potentially conflict with the finance minister's self-imposed fiscal rules, which prevent borrowing for day-to-day spending.

In FY25, gross direct tax collection increased by 20%

Delhi: According to official data released, net direct tax collection rose 15.88% year over year to approximately ₹16.90 lakh crore as of January 12 of this fiscal year. Since April 2024, the mop-up from net non-corporate taxes—which primarily consists of personal income tax—has exceeded 8.74 lakh crore.



Approximately 7.68 lakh crore was collected in net corporation

tax between April 1, 2024, and January 12 of current year. As of January 12 of this fiscal year, the net amount collected from securities transaction taxes was 44,538 crore. Approximately 3.74 lakh crore in refunds were given out during that time, a 42.49% rise over the same period last year. According to the

report, gross direct tax mop-up rose 20% to 20.64 lakh crore during that time. In the current fiscal year, the government has allocated 22.07 lakh crore from direct taxes, of which 10.20 lakh crore is collected from corporate taxes and 11.87 lakh crore from personal income tax and other taxes.

Struggling retailer Walgreens to be acquired by Sycamore

Delhi: Walgreens Boots Alliance has been acquired by private equity firm Sycamore Partners in a deal worth nearly \$10 billion, as the retailer seeks to turn around its fortunes after years of financial difficulties but still couldn't do it. Announcing the deal on Thursday, the pharmacy company said Sycamore would pay \$11.45 per share, with the potential for shareholders to receive an additional \$3 per share under certain conditions. The agreement



would take the company private, allowing it to restructure its business away from the pressures of Wall Street. Tim Wentworth, Walgreens Boots Alliance CEO said,

"Throughout our history, Walgreens Boots Alliance has played a critical role in the retail healthcare ecosystem. We are focused on making healthcare delivery more effective,

convenient and affordable as we navigate the challenges of a rapidly evolving pharmacy industry and an increasingly complex and competitive retail landscape." The CEO further added that Sycamore will provide the company with the expertise and experience of a partner with a strong track record of successful retail turnarounds. The buyout deal values Walgreens at almost \$24 billion when including debt, and Sycamore's offer repre-

sents a nearly 30 percent premium on its share price from December, when reports of a possible sale first surfaced. Walgreens has also been working to boost its finances, including suspending its quarterly dividend, ending a 90-year streak, and reducing its stake in drug distributor Cencora to free up cash for debt repayment. Ultimately, improving cash flow remains a top priority, whether the company stays public or goes private.