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FEBRUARY 2024

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NATIONAL NEWS

PM Modi inaugurates BAPS Mandir, the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the majestic Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) Mandir, the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, UAE.
- Upon his arrival at the temple premises, PM Modi was welcomed by BAPS' Ishwarcharandas Swami.
- He offered prayers at the temple and performed aarti. The temple was inaugurated on the auspicious occasion of Basant Panchmi.
- The mandir stands at 108 feet and is situated on 27 acres of land gifted by the UAE leadership. The foundation stone was laid by PM Modi in 2017, reflecting collaborative efforts to bring this vision to life.

Assam declares Kaji Nemu as the Official State Fruit

- Assam declares Kaji Nemu (citrus fruit) as the state fruit, highlighting its cultural and nutritional significance.
- Kaji nemu, a unique lemon variety exclusive to Assam, is celebrated for its aroma and health benefits.
- The decision aims to promote local farmers and gain global recognition for the fruit.
- The fruit received a Geographical Indication tag in 2019 ensuring its quality and origin.

Key Points

Assam's Chief Minister	– Himanta Biswa Sarma
Assam's Governor	– Gulab Chand Kataria
Assam's capital	– Dispur

Anurag Singh Thakur announces setting up of film certification facilitation office in Chandigarh

- Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting Anurag Singh Thakur announced the setting up of a regional facilitation office of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) in Chandigarh to promote ease of doing business for filmmakers of the region.
- This move will further strengthen the Punjabi film industry.

Key Points

CBFC's headquarters	– Mumbai, Maharashtra
Chairman	– Prasoon Joshi

Banaras Hindu University (BHU) creates North India's first human DNA bank under the Make in India initiative

- North India's first human DNA bank was launched at the Gnyaneshwar Lab in the Zoology Department, BHU.
- It is equipped with an automated DNA extractor machine which is developed indigenously under the 'Make in India' initiative.
- The bank aims to advance genetic research in personalised medicine and wildlife conservation and is inspired by Estonia.

India's first Museum of Epigraphy inaugurated in Hyderabad

- Union culture minister G. Kishan Reddy laid the foundation stone for India's digital national museum of Epigraphy at the Salar Jung museum in Hyderabad to preserve ancient writings.
- It will have the information about writing, scripts and languages using all multimedia installations.
- The government had earlier launched the Bharat Shared Repository of Inscriptions (BharatSHRI) project to digitise ancient inscriptions for wider accessibility and scholarly research.

Uttarakhand becomes the first state to implement a Uniform Civil Code in India

- Uttarakhand is the first state in India to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) to standardise personal laws regardless of religion.
- A high-level committee led by retired Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana P Desai drafted the UCC Bill in Uttarakhand.
- Under the UCC, there will be common laws for marriage, divorce, inheritance of property, etc.

Key Points

Uttarakhand's Governor	– Gurmit Singh
Uttarakhand's Chief Minister	– Pushkar Singh Dhama
Uttarakhand's Capital	– Bhararisain and Dehradun (Winter)

Large deposits of iron ore found in Karauli, Rajasthan

- The Rajasthan Mines department has started preparations for the auction for composite license of iron ore blocks in an area of about 1,888 hectares near Hindon in Karauli district after large deposits of iron ore were found there.
- There are deposits of more than 840 million tonnes of iron ore in Khoda, Dadaroli, Todupura and Liloti near Hindon in Karauli.
- In the initial exploration done by the department, indications of both magnetite and hematite of iron ore have been found.

Key Points

Rajasthan's Chief Minister	– Bhajan Lal Sharma
Rajasthan's Governor	– Kalraj Mishra
Rajasthan's Capital	– Jaipur

Tamil Nadu passes resolutions against delimitation, 'one nation, one poll'

- The Tamil Nadu legislative assembly has passed two resolutions opposing the delimitation exercise and the 'one nation, one election' policy proposed by the Indian government.
- The resolutions argue that the delimitation exercise should be based on the 1971 census and not the 2026 census, and that the proposed simultaneous elections are impractical and against the constitution.

Key Points

Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister	– M. K. Stalin
Tamil Nadu's Governor	– R. N. Ravi
Tamil Nadu's capital	– Chennai

ISRO launches INSAT-3DS weather forecasting satellite

- ISRO launched INSAT-3DS, an advanced meteorological satellite, to enhance weather forecasting and environmental monitoring.

- The objectives of the mission include surface and ocean monitoring, atmospheric condition analysis, data collection and search and rescue support.
- It features cutting-edge payloads for accurate weather forecasts, benefiting sectors like agriculture and disaster management.

Key Points

Chairman	– S Somnath
Headquarters	– Bengaluru

Union minister G Kishan Reddy and MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav laid the foundation stone for Komuravelli Railway Station in Siddipet, Telangana

- Union Tourism Minister G Kishan Reddy and Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav laid the foundation stone for Komuravelli Railway Station in Telangana to improve transportation to Komuravelli Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple.
- Komuravelli village is home to the famous Komuravelli Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple.
- The temple town attracts millions of devotees annually from four states.

Prime Minister Modi unveils 125-foot statue of Bir Lachit Borphukan in Assam

- PM Modi unveiled a 125-foot statue of Bir Lachit Borphukan in Jorhat, Assam, honouring the state's rich history.
- Bir Lachit is a celebrated general who is best known for his leadership in the 1671 Battle of Saraighat where he thwarted the Mughal invasion.
- The statue symbolises the bravery of the Assamese people and serves as an inspiration for future generations.

Key Points

Assam's Chief Minister	– Himanta Biswa Sarma
Assam's Governor	– Gulab Chand Kataria
Assam's capital	– Dispur

PM Modi virtually inaugurates Mahabharata theme-based Jyotisar Anubhav Kendra museum in Kurukshetra

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi virtually inaugurated Jyotisar Anubhav Kendra, a museum inspired by the Mahabharata in Kurukshetra, Haryana.

- The project aims to enhance cultural and spiritual tourism with state-of-the-art galleries and exhibits.
- The centre is located at the revered site where Lord Krishna imparted teachings to Arjuna.
- It plans to boost the local economy by attracting tourists and devotees.

Uttar Pradesh to establish its 'first turtle conservation reserve'

- The Forest department in Gonda, Uttar Pradesh, is collaborating with the Turtle Survival Alliance Foundation India to create a turtle conservation reserve along the Sarju river.
- The Sarju river is home to nine turtle species, including the critically endangered 'crowned river turtle'.
- The river is a tributary of Ghaghra.

Madhya Pradesh schools allow students to go 'Bag Less' once a week

- The Madhya Pradesh government has announced 'bagless school' once a week, during which students can participate in sports activities, play games, attend cultural activities and many more in the schools.
- The initiative will be introduced by the government for students of classes 1 to 12 from the upcoming new academic session 2024–25 in the state.
- This step will reduce the stress of the students. This initiative will apply to all government and private schools operated in Madhya Pradesh.

Key Points

Madhya Pradesh's Chief Minister	– Mohan Yadav
Madhya Pradesh's Governor	– Mangubhai Chhaganbhai Patel
Madhya Pradesh's Capital	– Bhopal

The first Skill India Centre (SIC) inaugurated in Sambalpur, Odisha

- Union Minister for Education and Skill Development Dharmendra Pradhan inaugurated India's inaugural Skill India Centre (SIC) in Sambalpur, Odisha, affirming its role in enhancing the nation's workforce.
- The centre aims to empower over 1,200 students with skills for the job market.
- It offers a mix of classroom and work-based learning with modern facilities.

Govt tweaks rules for speedy electricity connection, rooftop installation

- The government has approved amendments to the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020.
- The amendments simplified the process of rooftop solar installations and empower consumers living in multistoried flats to choose connection type and ensure separate billing for common areas and back-up generators in residential societies, thus enhancing transparency.
- The revised rule provides for checking meters installed by distribution companies in case of consumer complaints to verify electricity consumption.
- New electricity connections will be as fast as three days in metropolitan areas, seven days in municipal areas and 15 days in rural areas.

PM Narendra Modi inaugurates India's longest cable-stayed bridge, Sudarshan Setu

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated India's longest cable-stayed bridge, Sudarshan Setu, in Gujarat's Devbhumi Dwarka district.
- It is 4.77 km long and is also known as Signature Bridge. It was constructed for ₹ 978 crore and connects Okha town in the Devbhumi Dwarka district with Beyt Dwarka island in the Gulf of Kutch.
- Beyt Dwarka is an island near Okha port, which is nearly 30 km from Dwarka town, where the famous Dwarkadhish temple of Lord Krishna is situated.
- The 4.77-km-long sealink has a 2.32 km (2,320 metres) bridge section, including a 900 metres (0.90 km) cable-stayed section, the longest in India. The cable-stayed structure will allow navigation of fishing boats and other vessels.
- The 2.32-km-long superstructure of the bridge is supported by 32 piers, including two towers rising 18 metres above the sea.
- The bridge was constructed as part of National Highway 51 and funded by the Centre.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicates five AIIMS at Rajkot, Bathinda, Raebareli, Kalyani and Mangalagiri to the nation

- In a landmark development towards strengthening India's tertiary health care infrastructure and services, Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated to the nation five All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) at Rajkot (Gujarat), Bathinda (Punjab), Raebareli (Uttar

Pradesh), Kalyani (West Bengal) and Mangalagiri (Andhra Pradesh).

- He also inaugurated, laid the foundation stone of, and dedicated to the nation a total of 202 Health Care Infrastructure Projects worth more than ₹ 11,700 crores across 23 States and UTs.

Key Points

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare – Dr Mansukh L. Mandaviya

PM Modi inaugurates space infrastructure projects of ISRO

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated three major space infrastructure projects of ISRO during his visit to the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) at Thumba.
- The projects are – a Trisonic Wind Tunnel at VSSC, a Semi-Cryogenic Integrated Engine and Stage Test Facility at ISRO's propulsion complex in Mahendragiri, Tamil Nadu, and the PSLV Integration Facility at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre (SHAR) in Andhra Pradesh's Sriharikota.
- These three projects, which will provide world-class technical facilities for the space sector, have been developed at a cumulative cost of about ₹ 1,800 crore.
- VSSC, the lead centre of the Indian Space Research Organisation, is responsible for the design and development of launch vehicle technology.
- He also reviewed ISRO's Gaganyaan human spaceflight programme during his visit. He revealed the identities of the four pilots training for Gaganyaan mission at VSSC in Kerala. They are Group Captain P Balakrishnan Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, Group Captain Angad Pratap, and Wing Commander S Shukla. The mission aims to send a crew of three into orbit for three days between 2024 and 2025.

Reliance launches 'Vantara,' a national initiative for animal welfare

- Reliance Industries and Reliance Foundation have launched Vantara (Star of the Forest) to rescue, treat, and rehabilitate animals.
- The initiative, led by Anant Ambani, aims to make a global impact on animal welfare.

- It is located in a 3,000-acre sanctuary within the Green Belt of Reliances Jamnagar Refinery Complex. Vantara provides a natural habitat for animals to heal and thrive.
- The programme focuses on state-of-the-art healthcare, dedicated hospitals and research centres to set new standards in animal care.
- Vantara collaborates with international organisations like the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) and has rescued over 200 elephants and rehabilitated endangered species.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurates Swaminarayan Institute of Medical Science and Research in Gujarat

- Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Amit Shah inaugurated the 'Swaminarayan Institute of Medical Science and Research' of Shri Swaminarayan Vishwamangal Gurukul at Kalol in Gandhinagar, Gujarat.
- The institute aims to provide top-tier medical education and facilities, with plans to offer postgraduate courses soon.

Govt declares Muslim Conference J&K (Sumji faction) and Muslim Conference J&K (Bhat faction) as unlawful associations

- The Central Government has declared two factions of the Muslim Conference in Jammu & Kashmir as unlawful associations under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 to combat terrorism and protect national security.

U Tirot Sing's bust unveiled in Dhaka, Bangladesh

- U Tirot Sing Syiem, a revered freedom fighter from the Khasi community, was commemorated for his indomitable spirit and sacrifice as the Meghalaya government unveiled his life-size bust at the Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre (IGCC) in Dhaka, Bangladesh.
- He played a pivotal role in the fight against colonial oppression.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

National Commission For Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) launches GHAR (GO Home and Re-Unite) portal for child restoration and repatriation

- The GHAR portal was developed to digitally monitor and track the restoration and repatriation of children as per the protocols under the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and Rules thereof.
- The Ministry of Women and Child Development developed the 'Track Child Portal', which enables tracking of the missing and found children in all States/UTs including Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, North Eastern States and Jharkhand.
- One component of the Track Child Portal is 'Khoya-Paya' where any citizen can report any missing or sighted children.
- Track Child Portal, GHAR, portals track missing and found children, aid in restoration and repatriation, and protect vulnerable minors under the Juvenile Justice system.

Shri Dharmendra Pradhan launches EdCIL Vidyanjali Scholarship Programme

- Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan launched EdCIL Vidyanjali Scholarship Programme to help underprivileged students access quality education in line with National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 goals.
- 70 students from Navodaya Vidyalayas will receive a total of ₹ 5 crores in scholarships.
- The programme aims to encourage more involvement in education from individuals and companies.

PM Modi inaugurates projects worth ₹ 7,300 crore in Jhabua, MP

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of several development projects worth ₹ 7,300 crore in Jhabua (MP) to uplift the tribal population by improving water supply, education, and road infrastructure.
- Under Aahar Anudan Yojna, PM Modi provided monthly ₹ 1,500 to 2 lakh women from backward tribes for nutritious food, ensuring their well-being.
- Through SVAMITVA Scheme, 1.75 lakh individuals received land rights documents, empowering them and boosting the region's socio-economic fabric.

- PM Modi laid the foundation stone for 'CM Rise School' and 'Tantya Mama Bhil University' to modernise education infrastructure and promote higher education for underprivileged youth.

NITI Aayog launches Greening India's Wastelands with Agroforestry (GROW) report and portal

- Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW) report and portal was launched by Prof Ramesh Chand, Member, NITI Aayog at NITI Aayog.
- The 'GROW-Suitability Mapping' portal allows universal access to state and district-level data. Currently, agroforestry covers 8.65% of India's total geographical area, totalling about 28.42 million hectares.
- The initiative aligns with national commitments, aiming to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030 and create an additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

PM Modi launches Amrit Bharat Station scheme, lays foundation for 554 stations

- PM Narendra Modi laid the foundation for 554 Amrit Bharat stations, a government initiative to revamp key railway stations across the country, and inaugurated rail overbridges and underbridges.
- The initiative aims to improve railway station facilities by developing rooftop plazas and city centres, with an investment of ₹ 40,000 crore.
- In a move to nurture talent and celebrate creativity, prizes will be distributed to around 50,000 school students. These students showcased their skills in speech, essay and poetry writing contests centered around the theme '2047 – Viksit Bharat ki Railway.'

SECI unveils India's largest solar-battery project, pioneering renewable energy innovation in Chhattisgarh

- The Solar Energy Corporation of India Limited (SECI), under the aegis of the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, has successfully commissioned India's largest Battery Energy Storage System (BESS), which stores energy using solar energy.
- The 40 megawatts (MW) / 120MWh BESS with a solar photovoltaic (PV) plant which has an installed capacity

of 152.325 megawatt hour (MWh) and dispatchable capacity of 100 MW AC (155.02 MW peak DC) is located in Rajnandgaon, Chhattisgarh.

- The energy would be purchased by the state of Chhattisgarh, thus contributing to meeting the peak energy demand of the state using green electrons and also towards its renewable purchase obligations.

Four transformative portals to revolutionise the media landscape in India launched

- The Minister of Information and Broadcasting Shri Anurag Singh Thakur launched four transformatory portals that promise to revolutionise the media landscape in India.
- These four portals aim to boost efficiency and transparency in government operations. The portals are:
 1. The Press Sewa Portal simplifies newspaper registration and related procedures.
 2. Transparent Empanelment Media Planning and eBilling System streamlines media planning processes.
 3. The NaViGate Bharat Portal hosts videos on government development and citizen welfare measures.
 4. The National Register for LCOs centralises the registration of Local Cable Operators, promising an organised cable sector. These portals represent a step towards a more transparent, efficient and business-friendly future in India.

Union Education Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan launches SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) Plus

- Union Minister of Education and Skill Development & Entrepreneurship Dharmendra Pradhan launched the SWAYAM Plus platform. IIT Madras will be operating the platform.
- The SWAYAM Plus platform will now include courses supporting industry needs that enhance learners' employability. These include programmes developed in collaboration with industry giants like L&T, Microsoft, CISCO and others. SWAYAM Plus will also feature multilingual content, AI-enabled guidance, credit recognition and pathways to employment.
- SWAYAM, which is a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) platform, offers educational modules and was launched by the Union Ministry of Education in 2017.

Uttarakhand police adopt self-balancing e-scooters for smart patrols

- Uttarakhand police have adopted smart policing with the introduction of self-balancing electric scooters. These were donated by Utkarsh Small Finance Bank.
- The electric scooters are set to enhance crowd management and promote sustainability in Haridwar.

Maharashtra introduces 'Chief Minister Vayoshree Yojana' for senior citizens

- Maharashtra Government launched the 'Chief Minister Vayoshree Yojana' which is expected to benefit 15 lakh senior citizens with disabilities, offering financial assistance and various other initiatives.
- The senior citizens above 65 years suffering from physical or mental disabilities will receive ₹ 3,000 after screening.

Delhi announces free bus travel in Delhi for the transgender community

- Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal announced that his government will provide free travel on DTC and cluster buses to individuals belonging to the transgender community.
- Women in the national capital already enjoy free travel on these buses. The initiative for women commenced in October 2019.

PM Modi launches 'Muft Bijli Yojana' to provide 300 units of electricity per month

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana to provide free electricity to its beneficiaries.
- As per the scheme, the central government will provide 300 units of free electricity per month to its beneficiaries by investing worth ₹ 75,000 crores.
- Urban Local Bodies and Panchayats shall be incentivised to promote rooftop solar systems in their jurisdictions.

Realigned Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) scheme launched

- Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry & Dairying, Shri Parshottam Rupala launched the realigned AHIDF scheme and released the Radio Jingle on AHIDF.
- The Cabinet approved the realignment of the AHIDF under the Infrastructure Development Fund with an outlay of ₹ 29,610 crores. Now the total fund will be of

₹ 29,610 crores instead of ₹ 15,000 crores. The realigned scheme will be implemented for a further period of three years from 2023 till 2025–26.

- In the realigned scheme, Dairy Infrastructure Development Fund has been subsumed. Now the Dairy Cooperatives will avail benefit of interest subvention of 3% under AHIDF instead of 2.5% which was received in DIDE.
- The Dairy Cooperative will also get Credit Guarantee support under the Credit Guarantee Fund of AHIDE. The scheme will help the Dairy Cooperatives to upgrade their processing infrastructure with an updated processing technology. This will benefit a large number of milk producers in the country.

Rajasthan Mukhyamantri Vishwakarma Pension Yojana 2024 launched

- The Rajasthan government announced a special scheme for labourers and street vendors, named the Mukhyamantri Vishwakarma Pension Yojana.
- Under this scheme, eligible workers aged 60 or above will receive a monthly pension of ₹ 2,000.
- This pension aims to assist street vendors in meeting their daily needs without relying on others.

Key Points

Rajasthan's Chief Minister –	Bhajan Lal Sharma
Rajasthan's Governor –	Kalraj Mishra
Rajasthan's Capital –	Jaipur

Haryana Chief Minister launches 'Van Mitra' scheme to boost green cover

- Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar launched the 'Van Mitra' scheme and its portal to encourage community participation in tree planting activities in non-forest areas.
- The members of families with an annual income of less than ₹ 1.80 lakh can register to become 'Van Mitras'. Each 'Van Mitra' will receive an incentive based on the maintenance of the plant and they can plant a maximum of 1,000 saplings.

Uttarakhand CM launches 'Himalayan Basket' to empowering local economy

- Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami unveiled the 'Himalayan Basket' initiative.
- This initiative was initially conceived by local entrepreneurs Sumit and Sneha Thapliyal in 2018 to harness the agricultural riches of Champawat district.
- The 'Himalayan Basket' initiative is designed to boost local employment by capitalising on the district's abundant agricultural resources.
- The initiative focuses on the procurement of milk, turmeric, and mint from local farmers and export high-demand products such as 'churpi' and ghee.

'Investor Information and Analytics Platform' launched

- Union Minister of State for Electronics and IT, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and Jal Shakti, Rajeev Chandrasekhar launched 'Investor Information and Analytics Platform' developed by IIT Madras.
- This platform will act as a one-stop shop for startups to seamlessly access Venture Capitalists (VCs) and investor networks, Govt schemes and several other components of the startup landscape for all stakeholders.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

France becomes the first European country to issue digital Schengen visas

- France became the first European country to issue digital Schengen visas to visitors for the upcoming Paris Olympics.
- It began operations of the 'Olympic Consulate' system on January 1, 2024 – dedicated to processing visa applications for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

- The 'Olympic Consulate' is expected to handle applications from 15,000 international athletes, 9,000 journalists, and delegations from foreign countries participating in the upcoming sporting events.
- The initiative aims to streamline the visa application process, avoiding any mix-up with the surge of files currently undergoing processing at French visa centres worldwide.

Key Points

France's President	– Emmanuel Macron
France's Prime Minister	– Gabriel Attal
France's Capital	– Paris

Google rebrands its Chatbot Bard as Gemini

- Google has rebranded its Chatbot as Gemini and introduced a new subscription plan, putting it in direct competition with OpenAI in the AI race.
- Gemini features the advanced Ultra 1.0 model, excelling in tasks like coding and logical reasoning.
- It integrates with Google products for a seamless user experience and supports text, speech, and image interaction.
- Google plans to expand Gemini to more languages and countries to make AI accessible globally.

Key Points

Headquarters	– California, US
CEO	– Sundar Pichai
Founders	– Larry Page and Sergey Brin

NASA discovers potentially habitable 'super-Earth' 137 light-years away

- In a groundbreaking discovery, scientists at NASA have found a 'super-Earth,' a planet that could potentially support life.
- This planet, called TOI-715 b is 137 light-years away from us and is about one and a half times as wide as Earth.
- It revolves around its parent star in the conservative habitable zone, which could 'give the planet the right temperature for liquid water to form on its surface.'
- In comparison to planets orbiting stars like the Sun, red dwarfs are smaller and colder, which allows planets to cram closer while remaining safely inside the star's habitable zone.

Japan hosts the Ukraine reconstruction conference to showcase its support

- Japanese Prime Minister Kishida reaffirmed Japan's commitment to Ukraine's long-term reconstruction ahead of the anniversary of Russia's invasion.
- This includes a strategic partnership focusing on inclusivity, humanitarianism, and technology sharing.

- Japan also announced a significant aid package for demining operations and reconstruction in energy and transportation sectors.

Key Points

Japan's Prime Minister	– Fumio Kishida
Japan's capital	– Tokyo
Ukraine's President	– Volodymyr Zelenskyy
Ukraine's capital	– Kyiv

India sends Buddha relics to Thailand

- India has sent several sacred relics of Lord Buddha and his disciples – Arahant Sariputta and Arahant Maha Moggallana to Thailand, where they were personally received by Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin.
- The relics were excavated at Piprahva, considered a part of the ancient Buddhist site of Kapilavastu, while the relics of the disciples are from a monastery at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh.
- Their exposition in Thai cities was arranged to mark the friendship between the people of India and Thailand and the 72nd birth anniversary of King Maha Vajiralongkorn.
- This development is being seen as part of New Delhi's efforts to counter Beijing's attempts to use Buddhism to project soft power in Southeast Asia.

Key Points

Thailand's Capital	– Bangkok
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Peru declares health emergency amidst dengue surge

- In Peru, the government has declared a health emergency due to the rapidly rising cases of dengue fever across the South American country.
- The move will enable the government to transfer funds more quickly to affected regions and more easily deploy doctors and nurses.
- Peru has been experiencing high temperatures and heavy rains since 2023 due to the El Nino weather pattern, which has warmed the seas off the country's coast and helped mosquito populations grow.

BANKING, FINANCE AND ECONOMY NEWS

Interim Union Budget 2024–25

- Interim budget is the budget which is presented by a government ahead of general elections. It ensures continuity of government expenditure and essential services until the new government can present a full-fledged budget after taking office.
- The interim budget 2024–24 was presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with a vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, with all-round, all-pervasive, and all-inclusive development. It was presented with the 'mantra' of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, and Sabka Vishwas' and the whole of nation approach of 'Sabka Prayas.'
- An 11.1% increase in the capital expenditure outlay for 2024–2025 was announced while capital expenditure is set at ₹ 11,11,111 crore, constituting 3.4% of the GDP.
- The real GDP growth is projected at 7.3%, aligning with the RBI's revised growth projection.
- The Fiscal deficit is estimated at 5.1% of GDP in 2024–25, aligning to reduce it below 4.5% by 2025–26.
- The Interim Budget maintained the existing rates for direct and indirect taxes, including import duties. The Corporate Taxes will be 22% for existing domestic companies, 15% for certain new manufacturing companies. No tax liability for taxpayers with income up to ₹ 7 lakh under the new tax regime. There are certain tax benefits for start-ups and investments extended by one year up to March 31, 2025.
- The total receipts are estimated at ₹ 30.80 lakh crore, excluding borrowings with the total expenditure projected at ₹ 47.66 lakh crore. The tax receipts are estimated at ₹ 26.02 lakh crore.
- There will be an establishment of coal gasification and liquefaction capacity of 100 million tonnes by 2030.
- A new scheme of biomanufacturing and bio-foundry will be launched to support environment-friendly alternatives.
- The government plans to subsidise the construction of 30 million affordable houses in rural areas.
- As a part of rooftop solarisation, 1 crore households will be enabled to obtain up to 300 units of free electricity per month.
- The Ayushman Bharat scheme will be expanded to include all ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers, and helpers.
- The government will encourage Cervical Cancer Vaccination for girls aged 9–14 years. The causative agent for cervical cancer is Human PapillomaVirus (HPV).
- The government will encourage the use of 'Nano Diammonium Phosphate (DAP)' for various crops across all agro-climatic zones to correct the nitrogen and phosphorus deficiencies in standing crops.
- A new department named 'Matsya Sampada,' to address the needs of fishermen will be established.
- There will be a continuation of the 50-year interest-free loan scheme for capital expenditure.
- There will be an establishment of a corpus of ₹ 1 lakh crore with a 50-year interest-free loan to encourage research and innovation in sunrise domains.
- The government will form a high-powered committee to address rapid population growth and demographic shifts.
- Forty thousand normal rail bogies will be converted to Vande Bharat standards for enhanced safety, convenience and passenger comfort.
- A corpus of ₹ 1 lakh crore to be established with 50-year interest free loan to provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil interest rates.
- A new scheme to be launched for strengthening deep-tech technologies for defence purposes and expediting 'atmanirbharta.'
- The number of airports in the country will be doubled to 149.
- The three major economic railway corridor programmes identified under the PM Gati Shakti will be implemented to improve logistics efficiency and reduce cost. These are:
 - Energy, mineral and cement corridors
 - Port connectivity corridors
 - High-traffic density corridors

Jammu and Kashmir granted \$14 billion from interim budget

- India has allocated a significant \$14 billion interim budget for Jammu and Kashmir for fiscal year 2024–25, highlighting its commitment to development.
- This amount is much larger than what Pakistan received in IMF bailout, showing contrasting approaches to economic growth.

- Pakistan has received a \$3 billion bailout with a recent \$700 million tranche released after IMF review.
- India's investment in Jammu and Kashmir focuses on governance, development, revenue and infrastructure.
- The budget announcement on Kashmir Solidarity Day signifies India's dedication to the region's economic progress.

Key Points

Lt. Governor	– Manoj Sinha
Jammu and Kashmir's Capital	– Srinagar (Summer) and Jammu (Winter)

Japan commits Official Development Assistance (ODA) loan of Japanese Yen (JPY) 232.209 billion for nine projects in various sectors in India

- The Govt. of Japan has committed an Official Development Assistance loan of an amount of JPY 232.209 billion for nine projects in various sectors.
- India and Japan have had a long and fruitful history of bilateral development cooperation since 1958.

Key Points

Japan's Prime Minister	– Fumio Kishida
Japan's capital	– Tokyo

97.5% of ₹ 2,000 notes already returned: RBI

- RBI announced the withdrawal of ₹ 2,000 denomination banknotes from circulation on May 19, 2023.
- The facility for deposit and/or exchange of the ₹ 2,000 banknotes was available at all bank branches in the country up to Oct 07, 2023.
- From October 9, 2023, RBI issue offices were also accepting ₹ 2,000 banknotes from individuals or entities for deposit into their bank accounts.
- The status of withdrawal of ₹ 2,000 banknotes is published by the banking regulator from time to time.
- On January 1, 2024, it was revealed that 97.38% of ₹ 2,000 notes in circulation were returned.

Prama India and Government of India's C-DAC (MeitY) announced partnership for Thermal Camera Technology

- Prama India and the Government of India's C-DAC (MeitY) recently announced a technology partnership through the 'Transfer of Technology' (ToT) Pact for Thermal Cameras with Centre for Development of

Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India.

- The ToT agreement with (C-DAC) enables Prama India as a technology partner to manufacture, market and support innovative solutions.
- With this significant initiative, Prama India has created a new benchmark in the Indian Security Industry.
- This new initiative by Prama India will bolster R&D and help to develop innovative thermal technology applications.

Tata Steel partners with IIT Bhubaneswar REP to drive innovation

- Tata Steel partnered with IIT Bhubaneswar for innovation and entrepreneurship.
- The collaboration focuses on materials processing, energy, environment, low-carbon steel production, and circular economy.
- The goal is to build a stronger ecosystem for sustainable growth and technological advancement in the steel industry.

LIC launches Amritbaal for children

- LIC has launched 'Amritbaal', a new insurance plan for children, with guaranteed additions and flexible age and term specifications.
- This plan aims to support children's education and future needs, reflecting LIC's commitment to innovative financial solutions for its customers.
- The plan is available for entry from 30 days to 13 years, with a maturity age of 18 to 25 years. The minimum sum assured is ₹ 2,00,000, with no maximum limit. This move aligns with LIC's focus on the child segment and its goal of ensuring a secure financial future for the younger generation.

Key Points

LIC's headquarters	– Mumbai
Chairman	– Siddhartha Mohanty

8. CIAL signs agreement with BPCL to set up first green hydrogen plant at Cochin airport

- Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL) and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL) have joined forces to establish a Green Hydrogen plant at the Cochin Airport, a groundbreaking move in sustainable aviation.

- Through this collaboration, they aim to create the first Green Hydrogen plant and fueling station within an airport, showcasing their commitment to renewable energy and environmental stewardship.
- Green hydrogen, produced from water using renewable energy sources, is recognised as a future fuel and aligns with zero-carbon energy strategies.

Reliance Industries will launch Hanooman, a ChatGPT-style AI service

- Reliance Industries is set to launch the innovative ChatGPT-style service 'Hanooman' in collaboration with top engineering institutions.
- The AI model can operate in 11 languages and is versatile in various fields.
- Reliance Jio plans to extend AI capabilities through 'Jio Brain' for its large subscriber base.

Key Points

Headquarters	– Mumbai
Founder	– Dhirubhai Ambani
Chairman and Managing Director	– Mukesh Ambani

HDFC bank leads profitability rankings from April to December

- HDFC Bank emerged as the most profitable company in the first nine months of the current fiscal year, with a net profit of ₹ 44,300 crore.
- State Bank of India (SBI) and Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) follow closely, reporting profits of ₹ 40,378 crore and ₹ 34,781 crore, respectively.

Key Points

Headquarters	– Mumbai, Maharashtra
Chairman	– Atanu Chakraborty
CEO	– Sashidhar Jagdishan

Fintech startup 'Paymart' partners with five Indian banks for virtual ATM service

- Paymart, a fintech startup, announced its partnership with five Indian banks to introduce a groundbreaking virtual, cardless and hardware-less cash withdrawal service.
- The partnered banks include IDBI Bank, Indian Bank, Jammu & Kashmir Bank and Karur Vyasa Bank, with discussions underway with four additional banks for further collaboration.

iCreate, Microsoft and MeitY join hands to transform and boost Indian startups in Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Technology (iCreate), Microsoft signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) facilitated by the Ministry of Electronics & IT to boost AI startups in India.
- The MoU between Microsoft and iCreate will lead the way to the launch of the IMPEL AI (iCreate-Microsoft programme for Emerging Leaders in Artificial Intelligence) programme that will catalyse AI startups in India.

Dvara Money and Jana Small Finance Bank Partner to facilitate digital banking in Bharat with Spark Money

- Dvara Money and Jana SFB have formed a strategic partnership to enhance digital banking services.
- The collaboration aims to integrate third-party applications and a Unified Payments Interface into the Spark Money platform for a seamless banking experience.
- The focus is on simplifying the account opening process, especially for customers in the Bharat segment, through Video KYC technology.
- The combined technological infrastructure of the two companies will create an efficient and user-friendly digital banking solution.

DEFENCE NEWS

IIT Madras to develop India's first smart bullets

- In a strategic partnership, IIT Madras and Munitions India Limited (MIL) are collaborating to develop 155 smart ammunition to enhance India's self-reliance in defence.

- It will be led by G. Rajesh from IIT Madras and focuses on improving the accuracy and lethality of 155 mm shells crucial for military operations.
- The partnership aims to reduce the Circular Error Probable (CEP) to 10 metres, significantly enhancing the ammunition's effectiveness in combat.

Embraer Defense and Mahindra Defense system partner on C-390 Millennium Medium Transport Aircraft in India

- Embraer Defense & Security and Mahindra have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to jointly fulfil the acquisition of the C-390 Millennium multi-mission aircraft by the Indian Air Force in its upcoming Medium Transport Aircraft (MTA) procurement project.
- The C-390 Millennium is a revolutionary military airlift technology with a capacity for a 26-ton payload, speed of 870 km/h, and versatility for various missions.
- The strategic collaboration aims to address defence needs and contribute to the Make in India initiative.

Indian Air Force test-fires SAMAR air defence system

- The SAMAR (Surface-to-Air Missile for Assured Retaliation) air defence missile system was fired at the Vayushakti Exercise for the first time in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer.
- SAMAR is developed in-house by the units of the Indian Air Force's (IAF) Maintenance Command. It was conceived using outdated Russian-origin air-to-air missile systems.
- Operating at speeds ranging from 2 to 2.5 Mach, the system features a twin-turret launch platform capable of launching two missiles in single and salvo modes, depending on the threat scenario.

Key Points

Chief of Air Staff (CoAS) – Vivek Ram Chaudhari

Indian Air Force (IAF) conducts Exercise Vayu Shakti-24

- The IAF conducted Exercise Vayu Shakti-24 at Pokhran range, showcasing its aerial firepower.
- The exercise featured over 120 aircraft executing precision strikes on simulated enemy targets.

200 BrahMos Extended Range (ER) supersonic cruise missiles for deployment on Indian Navy warships to be acquired

- The Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has given its nod for the acquisition of over 200 BrahMos Extended

Range (ER) supersonic cruise missiles for deployment on Indian Navy warships in a deal over ₹ 19,000 crores.

- The BrahMos is the main weapon for anti-ship and attack operations for the Indian navy warships which have been regularly firing the weapon system.
- The BrahMos Aerospace is a joint venture between India and Russia that makes supersonic cruise missiles that can be fired from submarines, ships, aircraft, or land platforms.

Turkey's first fifth-generation aircraft, KAAAN, completes Maiden Flight

- Turkey celebrated a significant milestone achievement as its first fifth-generation aircraft, KAAAN, completed its inaugural flight, marking a significant advancement in the country's military capabilities.
- KAAAN embarked on its first flight, soaring through the skies for 13 minutes and reaching an altitude of 8,000 feet, highlighting Turkish engineering and aviation expertise.

DURGA-2 India's own laser weapon being developed by DRDO

- 'DURGA-2' project is a Directed-Energy Weapon (DEW) being developed by the Defense Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- It aims to overcome the limitations of anti-aircraft and anti-missile systems by offering a 100% kill probability, potentially revolutionising the military landscape.
- The Laser Science and Technology Centre (LSTC) in New Delhi is spearheading the project, developing various laser generation techniques for both defensive and offensive purposes.
- The project, funded with \$100 million, aims to integrate the laser system with land, sea, and air platforms.

Key Points

DRDO chief	– Sameer V Kamat
Headquarters	– New Delhi

PEOPLE IN NEWS/APPOINTMENTS

Name	Designation
Anil Kumar Lahoti	Chairman of Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)
Jay Shah	President of the Asian Cricket Council
Pawan Kumar	Chief Adviser (Cost) In Ministry of Finance
Ranveer Singh	Brand ambassador and stakeholder of boAt
Justice Ritu Bahri	Chief Justice of Uttarakhand High Court
Upendra Dwivedi	Army Vice Chief
Rajendra Prasad Gupta	Advocate General of Rajasthan
Mio Oka	Country Director for India, Asian Development Bank (ADB)
Justice Vijay Bishnoi	Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court
Olzhas Bektenov	Prime Minister of Kazakh
Naveen Tahilyani	CEO & MD of Tata Digital
Ravi Kumar Jha	MD & CEO of LIC Mutual Fund
Venkatachalam H	MD & CEO of Tata AIA Life
Ashish Vijayakar	MD & CEO of SBM Bank India
KVS Manian	JMD (Joint Managing Director) of Kotak Mahindra Bank
Shubman Gill	State icon for Lok Sabha polls of Punjab
Pradeep Kumar Sinha	Non-Executive Part-time Chairman of ICICI Bank
Nawaf Salam	President of the International Court of Justice (ICJ)
Nikhil Joshi	Managing Director of Boeing Defence India
Virendra Bansal	MD & CEO of SBI Capital Markets (SBICAPS)
Sanjay Kumar Jain	Chairman & Managing Director of Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd (IRCTC)
Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal	President of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)
Charanjot Singh Nanda	Vice-President of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI)
Katrina Kaif	Brand Ambassador of Chennai Super Kings
Sindhu Ganapathy	First Transwoman Travelling Ticket Examiner (TTE) of Southern Railway
Narendra Kumar Yadav	Brand Ambassador of Fit India Movement
Ajay Kumar Choudhary	Non-Executive Chairman of National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI)
Ravindra Kumar	Director (Operations) of NTPC Ltd.
Renu Sud Karnad	Chairperson and Independent Director of PayU
Justice A M Khanwilkar	Chairperson of Lokpal
Maryam Nawaz	Pakistan's First Woman Chief Minister
Geeta Batra	Director of the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the World Bank's Global Environment Facility (GEF)
Salil Parekh	Board of Directors of the US India Strategic and Partnership Forum (USISPF).
A S Rajeev	Vigilance Commissioner in the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)

BOOKS AND AUTHORS

Books	Authors
Assam's Braveheart Lachit Barphukan	Arup Kumar Dutta
Ek Samandar, Mere Andar	Sanjeev Joshi
Dabbling in Diplomacy	Prof. S.D. Muni
Maha Swaapnikudu	P. Vikram
Sculpted Stones: Mysteries of Mamallapuram	Ashwin Prabhu
Basic Structure and Republic	P. S. Sreedharan Pillai
Swallowing the Sun	Lakshmi Murdeshwar Puri

OBITUARIES (NATIONAL)

Name	Occupation
R. Champakalakshmi	Historian
Farooq Nazki	Poet and Sahitya Akademi Winner
A Ramachandran	Artist
Usha Kiran Khan	Writer
Dattajirao Gaekwad	Cricketer
Imtiaz Qureshi	Chef
Kavita Chaudhary	Actor
Suhani Bhatnagar	Actor
Rituraj Singh	Actor
Acharya Vidyasagar Maharaj	Monk
Fali S Nariman	Senior Supreme Court Advocate
Ameen Sayani	Radio Presenter and Voice of Geetmala
Manohar Joshi	Politician
K Hoysala	Cricketer
Kumar Shahani	Filmmaker
Pankaj Udhas	Ghazal Singer
Raja Venkatappa Naik	Politician
Shafiqur Rahman Barq	Politician/ Senior-most MP in Parliament and a member of the Samajwadi Party

OBITUARIES (INTERNATIONAL)

Name	Occupation
Carl Weather	Actor
Sebastian Pinera	Politician and Former President of Chile
Andreas Brehme	Footballer

DAYS AND THEMES

Date	Day	Theme
February 1	Indian Coast Guard Day	
February 2	World Wetlands Day	Wetlands and Human Wellbeing
February 2	Rheumatoid Arthritis Awareness Day	
February 4	World Cancer Day	Together, We Challenge those in Power
February 4	National Day of Sri Lanka	
February 4	International Day of Human Fraternity	
February 4–10	International Development Week	
February 6	International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation	Her Voice. Her Future
February 6	Safer Internet Day	Inspiring Change. Making a difference, managing influence and navigating change online
February 7	National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD)	Engage, Educate, Empower: Uniting to End HIV/AIDS in Black Communities
February 10	International Day of the Arabian Leopard	
February 10	National Deworming Day	
February 10	World Pulses Day	Pulses: Nourishing Soil and People
February 11	World Day of Sick	
February 11	International Day of Women and Girls in Science	Women and Girls in Science Leadership, a New Era for Sustainability
February 12	National Productivity Day	Artificial Intelligence (AI) – Productivity Engine for Economic Growth
February 12	World Radio Day	Radio: A Century Informing, Entertaining and Educating
February 12	International Day for the Prevention of Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism	Living Together: Fostering Community Resilience to Prevent Violent Extremism as and when Conducive to Terrorism
February 13	International Epilepsy Day	Milestones on My Epilepsy Journey
February 14	World Congenital Heart Defect Awareness Day	
February 15	International Childhood Cancer Day	
February 15	World Hippo Day	
February 16	World Anthropology Day	
February 17	Global Tourism Resilience Day	
February 17	World Pangolin Day	

February 18	World Whale Day	
February 20	World Day of Social Justice	Bridging Gaps, Building Alliances
February 21	International Mother Language Day	Multilingual education is a pillar of intergenerational learning
February 22	World Thinking Day	
February 24	World Peace and Understanding Day	
February 24	Central Excise Day	
February 27	World NGO Day	Building a Sustainable Future: The Role of NGOs in Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
February 28	National Science Day	Indigenous Technologies for Viksit Bharat
February 29 (Last Day of February)	World Rare Disease Day	

REPORTS, RANKINGS AND INDEX

India is the third largest digitised country in the world-ICRIER

- According to the State of India's Digital Economy Report, 2024, by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER), India is the third largest digitised country in the world, only behind the United States of America (USA) and China.
- However, at the level of individual users, India is ranked 12th in terms of digitalisation among the G20 countries.
- The study is based on the 'CHIPS' framework wherein it has scored countries on five pillars – Connect, Harness, Innovate, Protect and Sustain.

Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2023 released

- The Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for 2023 was released by Transparency International. Denmark maintains its position as the least corrupt country with a score of 90, while Somalia tops the list as the most corrupt with a score of 11.
- India Ranks 93rd with neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Sri Lanka also struggling with corruption.
- The Rule of Law Index indicates a connection between access to justice and corruption levels. The top 10 most corrupt countries in the world for 2024 include Somalia, Venezuela and Syria.

TomTom Traffic Index 2023: London slowest, Bengaluru second most congested city

- According to Dutch location technology specialist, TomTom's report, London experienced the slowest traffic in 2023 and Bengaluru ranked second for traffic

congestion in 2023. London was the most traffic-clogged city centre with commuters taking 36 minutes and 20 seconds to cover 10 km.

- Bengaluru was ranked the second most congested city in the world in the city centre (BBMP area) category. On average, it took 29 minutes and 10 seconds to cover 10 km.

World Bank's Logistics Performance Index 2023

- India has made significant progress in improving its logistics performance, moving up to the 38th position out of 139 countries in the World Bank's Logistics Performance Index (LPI) ranking.
- This advancement is a result of collaborative efforts among various ministries and departments, as well as the implementation of key policies and initiatives to enhance competitiveness on a global scale.
- The National Committee for Trade Facilitation (NCTF) and initiatives like the PM GatiShakti National Master Plan and National Logistics Policy are driving reforms and improving connectivity and efficiency in the logistics sector.

International IP index 2024 released

- India ranked 42nd in the International IP Index for 2024, out of 55 countries. India's overall score also remained unchanged at 38.64% according to the 12th edition of the US Chamber of Commerce's Global Innovation Policy Center's International IP Index.
- The index evaluates the IP frameworks of the world's top 55 economies, revealing significant improvements in 20 economies.

- The United States is once again the world leader, there were notable advancements led by Saudi Arabia, Brazil and Nigeria.
- The IP Index also serves as a compass to guide world leaders on proven methods to champion innovation and creativity at home.

EVENTS

PM Modi inaugurates the ninth edition of the Raisina Dialogue

- Prime Minister Modi inaugurated the ninth Raisina Dialogue in New Delhi along with Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis as the chief guest.
- The focus was on mutual investment and strengthening ties between the two countries, with India's investment in Greek infrastructure as a key example.
- The Raisina Dialogue focuses on global challenges and collaboration, with over 100 countries represented in the three-day conference.
- The event underscores the importance of meaningful dialogue and collective action in fostering collaboration, innovation, and peace on a global scale.

PM Modi inaugurates 200th Jayanti celebrations of Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati in New Delhi

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the year-long celebrations commemorating the 200th birth anniversary of Maharishi Dayanand Saraswati, at Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium in Delhi.
- Swami Dayanand was the founder of Arya Samaj and an advocate for Vedic principles and social reform. He was born on February 12, 1824.

11th International Puppet Festival in Chandigarh

- Chandigarh hosted the 11th International Puppet Festival at Tagore Theatre, celebrating the rich legacy of puppetry.

- The festival featured performances by the Novosibirsk regional puppet theatre and a puppet exhibition, offering visitors a glimpse into the artistry behind puppet-making. Special morning shows for school students and evening performances for the general public made the festival accessible to enthusiasts of all ages.

Tripura CM Manik Saha inaugurates 2nd State Level Shehri Samridhi Utsav

- Tripura Chief Minister Prof Dr Manik Saha inaugurated the second state level Shehri Samridhi Utsav in Agartala, focusing on urban livelihood opportunities and women's empowerment.
- He highlighted government initiatives to empower women, including job reservations and market stall allocations.

Electronics & IT Ministry hosts first Digital India Future SKILLS Summit in Guwahati

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and the National Institute of Electronics and IT (NIELIT) hosted the Future Skills Summit in Guwahati.
- The event aims to bring together young Indians, experts and policymakers to discuss preparing talent for the future.
- The summit focuses on emerging technologies like AI and cybersecurity, aligning with PM Modi's vision for India to become a global talent hub.

AWARDS AND HONOURS

India wins Prestigious GovTech Prize 2024 for iRASTE Project

- India was awarded the eminent GovTech Prize instituted by the government of UAE at the World Government Summit.
- India won in the 'AI-Powered Government Services' category for its innovative iRASTE project that utilises artificial intelligence to transform road safety.

- It is a project by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways, which uses AI to improve road safety. The project aims to reduce accidents and fatalities by 50% in urban areas and enhance transportation efficiency.
- The prize recognised the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways' pioneering implementation of predictive analytics and AI across urban transportation networks.

Veteran music composer Pyarelal Sharma honoured with Lakshminarayana International Award

- Pyarelal Sharma, one-half of the renowned composer duo Laxmikant-Pyarelal, has been honoured with the prestigious Lakshminarayana international award in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Indian music.
- The award was presented at the Lakshminarayana Global Music Festival.

Gulzar and Rambhadracharya to be honoured with Jnanpith Award for 2023

- Renowned Urdu poet Gulzar and Sanskrit scholar Jagadguru Rambhadracharya were named the recipients of the 58th Jnanpith award.
- Sampooran Singh Kalra, popularly known as Gulzar, is celebrated for his works in Hindi cinema and is considered one of the finest Urdu poets of this era.
- Rambhadracharya, the founder and head of Tulsi Peeth in Chitrakoot, is a renowned Hindu spiritual leader, educator and writer of more than 240 books and texts, including four epics.
- Jnanpith award is the highest Indian literary award presented annually by the Bharatiya Jnanpith to an author for their 'outstanding contribution towards literature'. It is bestowed only on Indian writers writing in Indian languages included in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India and English.

Bharat Ratna Award 2024

- Bharat Ratna is the highest civilian award in India and is conferred in recognition of 'exceptional service/performance of the highest order.'
- The last Bharat Ratna award was conferred upon Pranab Mukherjee in 2019 and was posthumously awarded to Bhupendra Kumar Hazarika and Nanaji Deshmukh. The award was not given to anyone between 2020 and 2023.
- The recommendations for Bharat Ratna are made by the Prime Minister himself to the President. The number of Bharat Ratna awards is restricted to a maximum of three in a particular year. However, this rule was broken for the first time in 1999 when four

recipients were conferred the award in a year. They were – Jayaprakash Narayan, Amartya Sen, Gopinath Bordoloi and Ravi Shankar.

- This year also five recipients will be conferred with the award and they are:
 - (1) LK Advani in recognition of his contributions to Indian politics and society. He served as the seventh Deputy Prime Minister of India from 2002 to 2004. He also served as a Home Minister and Information and Broadcasting Minister as well.
 - (2) Karpooori Thakur, known as 'Jan Nayak,' served as Bihar's eleventh Chief Minister twice, from 1970–71 and 1977–79. He will be conferred the Bharat Ratna posthumously.
 - (3) MS Swaminathan, the 'Father of India's Green Revolution,' helped India become self-reliant in agriculture and modernised it. He will be conferred the Bharat Ratna posthumously.
 - (4) P. V. Narasimha Rao served as the ninth Prime Minister of India from 1991 to 1996, he will be conferred the Bharat Ratna posthumously.
 - (5) Chaudhary Charan Singh was an Indian politician and a freedom fighter. He served as the fifth prime minister of India and former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh. He will be conferred the Bharat Ratna posthumously.

K.P.P. Nambiar Award for ISRO Chairman S. Somanath

- The Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) Kerala conferred the 2024 K.P.P. Nambiar Award on Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman S. Somanath.
- Mr. Somanath has been pivotal in steering ISRO's lunar exploration programme, Chandrayaan-3, and played significant roles in various Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) and ISRO missions.
- The award commemorates the doyen of the electronic industry K.P.P. Nambiar, who was also the founder chair of IEEE Kerala section.
- It is given to individuals or groups in the State for significant contributions to the IEEE vision of advancing technology for humanity.

SPORTS NEWS

Women Premier League 2024

- The second edition of the Women's Premier League (WPL 2024) began at M Chinnaswamy stadium in Bengaluru.
- The WPL 2024 opener was played between defending champions Mumbai Indians and inaugural edition runner-ups Delhi Capitals. There is no change in the format of WPL 2024 from the previous edition.
- The second edition of WPL will be played in two venues. Bengaluru's M Chinnaswamy stadium will host the first leg of the tournament, while Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium will host the second leg along with the eliminator and final.

Australia beats India by 79 runs in U19 World Cup 2024

- Australia U19 claimed a 79-run victory over India in the U19 World Cup 2024 final, securing their fourth U-19 World Cup title.
- Australia previously won in 2002, 2010 and 2020, showcasing their depth and talent throughout the tournament.

Abhinav Bindra selected as torchbearer for the 2024 Paris Olympics

- Abhinav Bindra was selected as the torchbearer for the 2024 Paris Olympics and will be representing India as a torchbearer for Paris 2024.
- He is India's first individual Olympic gold medalist and an IOC Athletes Commission member.
- The journey will begin from Olympia to Marseille, with the flame set to arrive in Marseille on May 8 for the start of the French Torch Relay.

New Jersey's MetLife Stadium to host 2026 FIFA World Cup final on July 19

- The 2026 World Cup final will be held at the MetLife Stadium in New Jersey. The sporting event will be held in 16 cities across the United States, Canada and Mexico.
- The open-air stadium for the final, which opened in 2010 and cost \$1.6bn, hosted the Copa America Centenario final in 2016 when Chile denied Lionel Messi's Argentina for a second time in a penalty shootout.

Union Sports Minister Anurag Singh Thakur kicks off the first BIMSTEC Aquatics Championships

- Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Shri Sports Anurag Singh Thakur kicked off BIMSTEC Aquatics Championships 2024 in New Delhi.

- BIMSTEC (The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) constitutes a unique link between South and South-East Asian countries with five members from South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal and two members from South-East Asia (Myanmar and Thailand).

Pathum Nissanka becomes first Sri Lankan to smash ODI double century

- Sri Lanka opener Pathum Nissanka created history when he became the first batter from the country to reach the 200-run mark in ODIs.
- Nissanka also registered the highest individual score for Sri Lanka in ODIs, surpassing former opener Sanath Jayasuriya, whose 189 against India stood as a record for over 23 years.

Switzerland Tourism honours Neeraj Chopra with plaque at Jungfrau's Ice Palace

- India's Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra has been honoured with a plaque at the famous Ice Palace at Jungfrau, known as the 'Top of Europe', in Switzerland.
- Chopra donated one of his javelins to the tourist attraction and it has been placed alongside the plaque.
- This prestigious recognition adds another feather to his cap and strengthens the bond between Switzerland and India.

South Africa Tristan Stubbs hits First-Class triple century

- Tristan Stubbs is the eleventh batsman to hit a triple century in South Africa's First-Class cricket history.
- He is also the eighth to achieve this feat since the country's readmission to international cricket, marking a significant boost for the national Test squad.

MS Dhoni named as the captain of IPL's all-time greatest team

- In a celebration of the Indian Premier League's (IPL) monumental success since its inception in 2008, ex-India captain and Chennai Super Kings (CSK) legend MS Dhoni has been chosen to captain the all-time greatest IPL team.
- The selection panel, comprising former cricketers Wasim Akram, Matthew Hayden, Tom Moody and Dale Steyn, along with input from 70 journalists, finalised the 15-member squad.

- The IPL will complete 16 years on February 20, 2024.
- The opening duo includes David Warner from Australia and Virat Kohli, while Chris Gayle occupies the crucial number three spot in the batting order.
- The middle-order boasts the likes of Suresh Raina, AB de Villiers, Suryakumar Yadav along with Dhoni as the wicketkeeper-batter. The all-rounder includes Hardik Pandya and Ravindra Jadeja, accompanied by Kieron Pollard. The spin attack is spearheaded by the trio of Rashid Khan, Sunil Narine and Yuzvendra Chahal, while the pace department sees the inclusion of Lasith Malinga and Jasprit Bumrah.

India women clinch Badminton Asia Team Championships title

- India women's badminton team scripted history in Selangor Malaysia as they won the Badminton Asia Team Championships crown, beating Thailand 3-2 in a hard-fought final.
- This is the first time India has won the prestigious continental team championship title in the history of the sport.
- PV Sindhu, Gayatri Gopichand-Treasa Jolly and teenage sensation Anmol Kharb won their respective matches as India won the final 3-2.

Indian hammer thrower Rachna Kumari banned for 12 years for doping

- Indian hammer thrower Rachna Kumari was handed a 12-year ban for failing multiple dope tests by the international federation's Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU).

- Kumari's dope sample, taken out-of-competition, was found to contain steroids Stanozolol, Metandienone, Dehydrochloromethyltestosterone (DHCMT) and Clenbuterol.

Anurag Singh Thakur launched Khelo India University Games In Guwahati

- Sports Minister Anurag Singh Thakur inaugurated Khelo India University games in Guwahati.
- PM Modi addressed Khelo India University Games being held across the seven states in the Northeast via a video message.
- The event will encompass 20 sports disciplines, spanning from athletics, rugby, swimming, and badminton to hockey and football, among others and held across 18 venues.

Ravichandran Ashwin surpasses Anil Kumble to become the fastest Indian to reach 500 test wickets

- Indian off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin made history by becoming the leading wicket-taker in test matches played on Indian soil, surpassing Anil Kumble's record.
- Ashwin achieved this milestone during the fourth test match against England in Ranchi, reaching a total of 351 wickets in India.
- Anil Kumble became the fastest bowler to take 350 Indian test wickets on home soil and levelled him with the most five-fors by an Indian bowler. This is Ashwin's 59th test in India, which means he reached the milestone of 350 and more on home soil four matches quicker than Kumble.