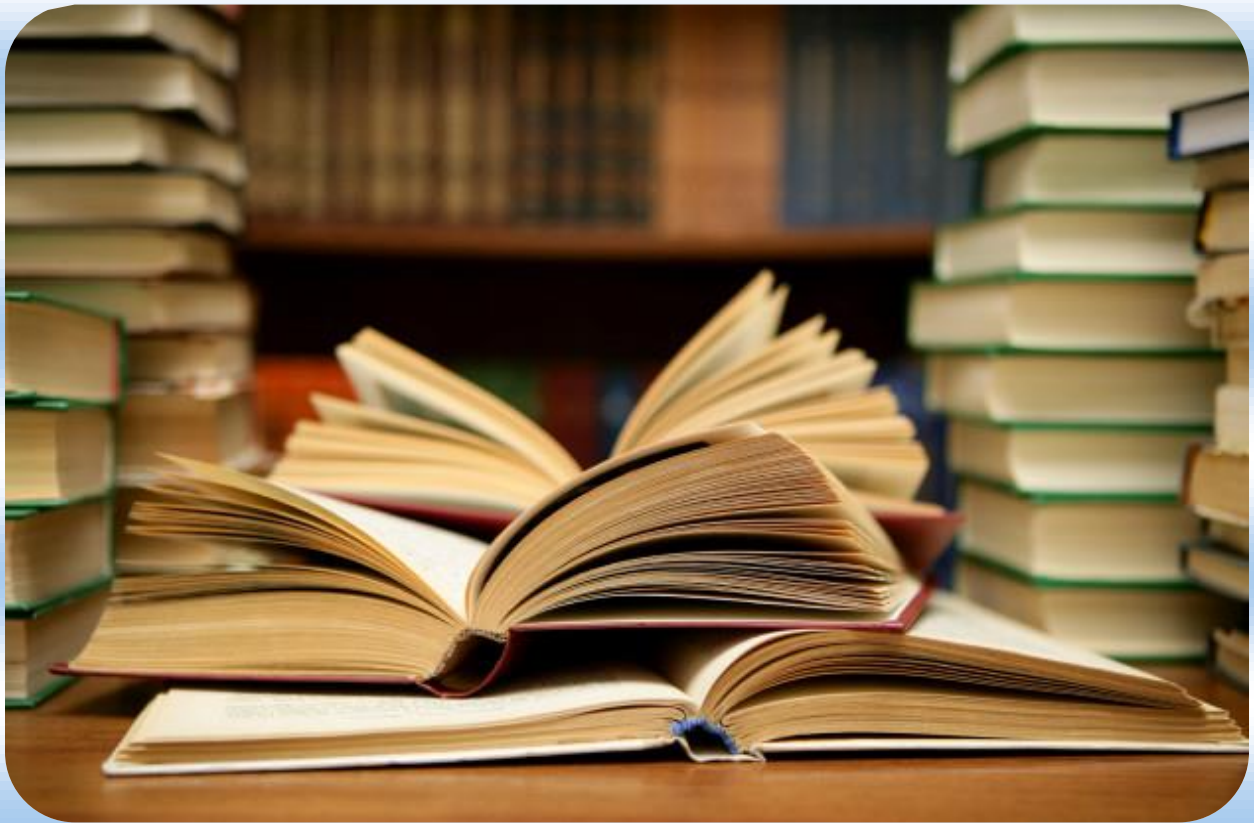


LIBRARY & RESOURCE CENTER, NOIDA

GENERAL KNOWLEDGE MONTHLY



FEBRUARY-2024

NATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

Interim Budget 2024-2025 Speech Of Nirmala Sitharaman

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Interim Budget 2024-2025 in the Lok Sabha on February 1. Highlighting the achievements of the Modi Government for the past 10 years, Ms. Sitharaman left the tax slabs unchanged and stuck to the convention of not making any major announcements while presenting the interim Budget.



Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) Portal Surpasses 1.45 Crore Youth Registrations In Three Months

The Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) portal has marked a significant achievement, surpassing 1.45 crore registrations as of January 31, 2024. This success is attributed to the portal's user-friendly interface, enabling quick registrations within minutes and making a impact on engaging the nation's youth in constructive and transformative activities. Launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on National Unity Day, October 31, 2023, in New Delhi, the MY Bharat platform is designed as a technology-driven facilitator for youth development.

FM Sitharaman Declares Free Cervical Cancer Vaccine For Girls Aged 9-14

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1 announced the government's plans to focus on vaccination against cervical cancer for girls aged 9 to 14 as part of her Interim Budget 2024. The Finance Minister also announced multiple other health-related schemes in her speech, including extending Ayushman Bharat cover to all Asha workers and Anganwadi workers and helpers. Ms

Budget 2024 Unveils INR 1 Lakh Crore Corpus For Private Sector R&D Incentives

In a significant initiative to incentivise research and development in the private sector, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday announced the establishment of a financial corpus of Rs 1 lakh crore that will provide low-cost or zero-interest loans for research and innovation. In the interim Budget for this year, Sitharaman said private companies could avail of interest-free loans for up to 50 years through this new mechanism.

Adani Group's \$1.2 Billion Copper Plant Boosts India's Metal Independence For Energy Transition

Gautam Adani-led group is building single-location copper manufacturing plant at Mundra in Gujarat, which will help cut the country's dependence on imports and aid energy transition, sources said. The \$1.2-billion facility will start operations of the first phase by March-end and full-scale 1 million tonnes capacity by FY29 (March 2029), two sources with knowledge of the matter said.

Mukesh Ambani Tops Global Brand Guardianship Index 2024

Reliance Industries Limited (RIL) chairman and managing director Mukesh Ambani has been ranked first among all the Indians and second globally in the Brand Guardianship Index 2024 compiled by Brand Finance. He was ranked ahead of global corporate leaders such as Microsoft's Satya Nadella, Sundar Pichai of Google, Apple's Tim Cook and Tesla's Elon Musk, as well as fellow Indians such as Tata Sons chairman N. Chandrasekaran.

Ranveer Singh Joins boAt As A Stakeholder And Brand Ambassador

Leading audio wearable brand boAt has roped in actor Ranveer Singh as the brand ambassador, and he has also invested an undisclosed amount in the company, becoming a key stakeholder in the company. Singh will be the star of the company's immersive new campaign, "Lost in Nirvana".



India's Woman Robot Astronaut "Vyommitra" Will Fly Into Space Ahead Of ISRO's Ambitious "Gaganyaan" Mission

Woman Robot Astronaut 'Vyommitra' will fly into space ahead of ISRO's ambitious Gaganyaan mission, which will be India's first human-manned space flight carrying Indian astronauts into space. Union Minister Jitendra Singh made this announcement in Delhi during an interaction with the media persons on Sunday.



Bina Modi Named 'Outstanding Business Woman Of The Year 2023'

New Delhi [India], February 1: Dr. Bina Modi, Chairperson of Modi Enterprises, was honoured with the 'Outstanding Business Woman of the Year - 2023' Award by Rajnath Singh, Defence Minister of India. The award, presented to her at a prestigious conference by the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) on 'Strengthening Indo-US Relationship in Amritkal-Aatmanirbhar Bharat', on Tuesday, 30th January, 2024.



Uttar Pradesh Government Enhances 'EV Upyog' Portal To Promote Electric Vehicles

In line with its dedication to promoting the use and manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (EVs) in Uttar Pradesh, the state government is currently focusing on the enhancement of the 'EV Upyog' portal. The government intends to engage a software development agency to get several attractive features added to the portal, an official statement said. As per the intention of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the process of hosting of the EV Upyog portal on the cloud server and integrating it with the official website of Invest UP has been started.

Fitch Predicts India's Fiscal Deficit At 5.4%, Exceeds Government Target

The interim Budget does not significantly change the sovereign credit profile of India even as the government has aimed at slightly faster pace of deficit reduction, international credit ratings agency Fitch Ratings has said. India's fiscal deficit and government debt ratio are high relative to peer medians, but the government's emphasis on deficit reduction helps to stabilise the debt ratio over the medium term, Jeremy Zook, Director, Sovereign Ratings, said. Zook said the interim Budget presented on Thursday was broadly in line with Fitch Ratings' expectations, though with a slightly faster pace of deficit reduction, from when it affirmed India's 'BBB-' rating with a Stable Outlook in January 2024.

HDFC Bank Receives RBI Approval For Stake Acquisition In Six Banks

HDFC Bank Group on Tuesday announced that it has received the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) approval to acquire "aggregate holding" of up to 9.5 per cent of the paid-up share capital or voting rights in six banks. These banks include Axis Bank, Survoday Small Finance Bank, ICICI Bank, Bandhan Bank, YES Bank and IndusInd Bank. In a regulatory filing, the Bank said, "The approvals were granted pursuant to applications made by HDFC Bank (as a promoter/sponsor of the Group) to RBI on December 18, 2023."

IRCTC Initiates Ramayana Circuit Train To Bolster Tourism

Following the inauguration of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has designed a comprehensive tour program based on places of pilgrim importance as cited in the Ramayana.



Uttarakhand Pioneers Uniform Civil Code Implementation In India

A day after Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama introduced the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, the state Assembly passed it on Wednesday. With the House nod, Uttarakhand became the first state in the country to implement a Uniform Civil Code, which presents common law for marriage, divorce, inheritance of property, etc. The UCC Bill, which will now become an Act is based on the draft submitted by a high-level committee formed by the Uttarakhand government under the chairmanship of retired Supreme Court judge Justice Ranjana P Desai.

RBI Grants Payment Aggregator Licences To Juspay, Zoho, And Decentro

At a time when the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is bringing the regulatory hammer down on fintechs in the country, several startups have received regulatory approvals to operate as payment aggregators. This month, two fintech startups Decentro and Juspay, and enterprise software-as-a-service (SaaS) firm, Zoho, have received final authorisation from the RBI for payment aggregator (PA) licences. Food delivery major Zomato, and fintech firms Stripe and Tata Pay were among the companies to have bagged the licence in January. They joined the likes of Razorpay, Cashfree Payments, and EnKash, among others, who got approval last year.

Tata Group Achieves Historic ₹30 Lakh Crore Market Cap, With TCS Crosses 15 Lakh Crore

Tata Group achieved a historic milestone as its combined market capitalization surpassed Rs 30 lakh crore on February 6, making it the first Indian business house to reach this valuation. The overall valuation of Tata Group now stands at Rs 30.6 lakh crore, making it the most valued conglomerate in the country, surpassing Reliance Group and Adani Group in market cap rankings. TCS, the flagship company, witnessed a notable surge of over 9% in 2024, reaching a market cap of Rs 15 lakh crore on February 5.

UAE Awards 'Golden Visa' To Super 30 Founder Anand Kumar

Super 30 founder Anand Kumar on Tuesday joined the elite list of Indian celebrities, including Bollywood actors Shah Rukh Khan and Sanjay Dutt, who have been granted the 'Golden Visa' by the United Arab Emirates government.



Tata Trusts To Inaugurate India's First Small Animal Hospital In Mumbai

Mumbai: Tata Trusts is set to launch India's first state-of-the-art Small Animal Hospital in Mahalaxmi, Mumbai. ADVERTISEMENT The hospital is a first-of-its-kind and spans over 98,000-square-foot, across 5 floors with a capacity of over 200 beds.



IIT Madras To Spearhead Development Of India's First Indigenous 155mm Smart Ammunition

IIT Madras has joined hands with Munitions India (MIL), a defense public sector enterprise, to develop India's first indigenous 155mm guided smart ammunition. This collaboration aims to enhance the accuracy and range of the existing shells used in artillery guns, a TOI report stated. According to a statement, the objective is to achieve a circular error probable (CEP) of 10m for the 155mm shell, which refers to the radius of a circle centered at the aimpoint. Currently.

RBI To Introduce Offline Capability For E-Rupee Transactions

Digital Rupee users will soon be able to execute transactions in areas with limited internet connectivity as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on February 8 announced that offline capability will be introduced on the Central bank digital currency (CBDC) pilot project. RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said that programmability-based additional use cases will be introduced as part of the pilot project. RBI launched a pilot of the retail CBDC in December 2022 and achieved the target of having 10 lakh transactions a day in December 2023.

Bharat Ratna To Honour PV Narasimha Rao, Chaudhary Charan Singh, And MS Swaminathan

After senior BJP leader LK Advani, former Prime Ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, and eminent agricultural scientist MS Swaminathan will be conferred with the highest civilian award 'Bharat Ratna'. Hailing from Warangal district of Telangana, Narasimha Rao was the first Congress Prime Minister outside the Gandhi family, from 1991 to 1996, and is widely acknowledged for heralding the economic liberalisation of India.

AIIMS Launches IOncology.Ai For Early Cancer Detection

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Delhi, in collaboration with the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing, Pune, has launched an Artificial Intelligence (AI) platform - iOncology.ai. - designed for the early detection of breast and ovarian cancer. While this indigenously developed technology has already been deployed in five district government hospitals, including Mathura and Faridabad.

India's Foreign Exchange Reserves Reach One-Month High To \$622.47 Billion

India's foreign exchange reserves rose for a second straight week to a one-month high of \$622.47 billion as of Feb. 2, data from the central bank showed on Friday. The reserves rose by \$5.74 billion in the reporting week, the biggest rise in nearly two months. Reserves had risen by \$590 million in the prior week. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) intervenes in the foreign exchange market to curb excess volatility in the rupee. Changes in foreign currency assets are caused by the RBI's intervention as well as the appreciation or depreciation of foreign assets held in the reserves.

EPFO Raises Interest Rate On PF Deposits To 8.25%, A Three Year High

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has fixed an 8.25 percent interest rate on employees' provident fund for 2023-24, sources told PTI on February 10. This is a three-year high from the retirement fund body. In March 2023, EPFO raised the interest rate on EPF slightly to 8.15 percent for 2022-23, compared to 8.10 percent in 2021-22. Earlier in March 2022 however, it had reduced the interest rate on EPF for 2021-22 to 8.1 percent, marking the lowest since 1977-78 when the EPF interest rate was 8 percent.

Launch Of UPI And RuPay Card In Sri Lanka And Mauritius

India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services were on February 12 rolled out in Sri Lanka and Mauritius, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi describing it as linking historic ties with modern digital technology. India's RuPay card services were also launched in Mauritius at a virtual ceremony attended by Prime Minister Modi, his Mauritian counterpart Pravind Jugnauth and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

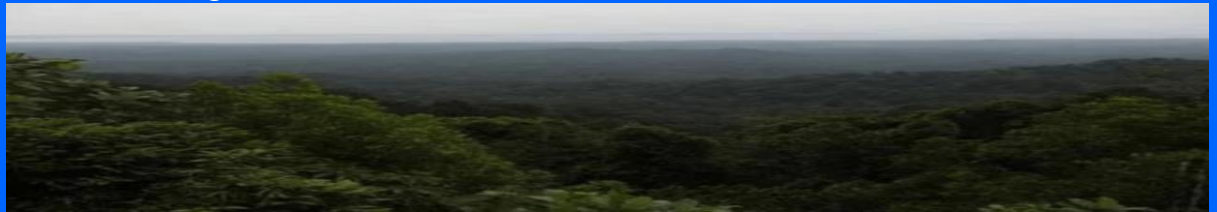
Southern Railway Appoints First Transwoman TTE, Breaks Barriers In Dindigul

Sindhu Ganapathy (37) has emerged as the first transwoman Travelling Ticket Examiner (TTE) of Southern Railway. For G. Sindhan, who had joined the Railways as a male employee in 2003 life was easy-going initially. But, hormonal changes in his physique turned his life upside down.



Gupteswar Forest, Odisha's New Biodiversity Heritage Site

The pristine Gupteswar Forest, adjacent to Gupteswar Shiva temple in Odisha's Koraput district has been declared as the fourth Biodiversity-Heritage Site (BHS) of the state, a government notification said. The site is spread over 350 hectares of demarcated area. Along with its sacred grooves traditionally worshipped by the local community, the site is bestowed with a wide range of flora and fauna, the notification said.



RCF Plans To Launch Vande Metro Prototype By April

The Rail Coach Factory (RCF) in Kapurthala in Punjab is aiming to roll out the first prototype of Vande Metro coach for intercity travel by April this year, its general manager S Srinivas has said. A total of 16 such coaches are expected to be ready by the later part of 2024-25 financial year, he said. Vande Metro, which is designed on the concept of India's first indigenous semi-high-speed train Vande Bharat, will cater to intercity passengers covering up to a distance of 250 km.

Noida Recognized As "Water Warrior" City

The department of water resources, river development and Ganga rejuvenation of the Union water ministry has selected Noida as "water warrior" city for the steps it took for waste water treatment and reuse for irrigation purposes. The Noida authority additional chief executive officer Satish Pal and deputy general manager RP Singh of the authority's water department received the award in Delhi on Monday.

Reliance Industries Hits ₹20-Lakh Crore Market Cap Milestone

The market capitalization of Reliance Industries Ltd, the oil-to-telecom conglomerate, surged past the Rs 20 lakh crore mark on Tuesday. This achievement comes on the heels of the flagship company RIL's shares hitting a record high in today's trading session. As of 11:28 am, Reliance industries was trading 1.55% higher at Rs 2,947.95 per share. Reliance Industries makes history as it becomes first Indian company to reach Rs 20 lakh crore market capitalisation.

India's First Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) To Start From Uttarakhand

India's first Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) will be started from Uttarakhand, Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Thursday said. "I want to inform the people of Uttarakhand that the country's first HEMS service will be launched from the state," Scindia said in a video shared on X. A helicopter will be stationed under the service at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) from where it will be sent anywhere within a radius of 150 km to airlift anyone who has met with an accident to the medical facility.

MSME Minister Narayan Rane Launches Rs 20 Lakh Scheme Under CGTMSE For GST-Exempted Micro Units

MSME Minister Narayan Rane on Wednesday launched a special scheme for informal micro enterprises (IMEs), which are exempted from the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, to access collateral-free loans up to Rs 20 lakh under the government's Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE). The scheme 'Special Provision for Informal Micro Enterprises under Credit Guarantee Scheme' enables micro or nano enterprises with credit support from lenders and aims "at moderating the credit risk perception."

Fintech Startup 'Paymart' Partners With Five Indian Banks For Virtual ATM Service

New Delhi: Fintech startup Paymart on Friday said that it has partnered with five Indian banks to offer its innovative virtual, cardless, and hardware-less cash withdrawal service. Paymart has partnered with five prominent banks, including IDBI Bank, Indian Bank, Jammu & Kashmir Bank, and Karur Vyasa Bank, to roll out this service nationwide. The company is also in advanced discussions with four additional banks for further collaboration.

Reliance Industries, Tata Power, Adani Power, And Vedanta Ltd: Private Investment In India's Nuclear Energy Sector

In a world where our population is booming and our reliance on technology is ever-growing, the demand for electricity has never been greater. From keeping our mobile phones charged to powering our homes and businesses, electricity is the lifeblood of modern society. However, as we strive to meet this demand, we're faced with a pressing challenge to lower carbon dioxide emissions.

Reliance Industries Is Set To Launch 'Hanooman', A ChatGPT-Style AI Service

In a significant step towards the development of indigenous artificial intelligence (AI) in India, the BharatGPT group, backed by Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Industries and top engineering schools in the country, aims to launch its first ChatGPT-style service next month. The AI model is being developed in collaboration with eight Indian Institutes of Technology and is backed by Reliance Jio Infocomm and the central government.

India Opens Space Sector To 100% Foreign Investment

Satellite-related activities under the space sector can get Foreign Direct Investment between 49-100 per cent as the Union Cabinet approved an amendment in FDI policy for the space sector on Wednesday. According to a government statement, under the amended FDI policy, 100 per cent FDI is allowed in the space sector. Now, satellite manufacturing & operation, satellite data products and ground segment & user segment can get FDI up to 74 per cent under the automatic route, beyond which government route will be applicable.

RBI Approves HDFC Bank's 90% Stake Sale In HDFC Credila

HDFC Bank said that it has received approval from markets regulator Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to offload 90 percent of HDFC Credila's total issued and paid-up share capital. The company said in an exchange filing, "This is in connection with our earlier intimation dated June 19, 2023, wherein we had informed that erstwhile Housing Development Finance Corporation Limited ("HDFC Limited") had executed definitive documents on the said day, for disinvestment/sale of approximately 90% of HDFC Credila's total issued and paid-up share capital, to the Acquirers (the "Proposed Transaction"), subject to regulatory approvals and dispensations (including the RBI and Competition Commission of India ("CCI")."

PM Modi Inaugurates Sikkim's First Railway Station In Rangpo

Bringing a new dawn in the country's rail connectivity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi lays the foundation stone for Sikkim's first railway station viz Rangpo station today, a railways official informed. With this introduction, Sikkim will now be connected with a railway line, marking the third mode of transportation for its residents, who have relied on air travel and roads hitherto.



INTERNATIONAL CURRENT AFFAIRS

India Launches UPI Payments At Eiffel Tower In Paris

India on Friday formally launched UPI at the iconic Eiffel Tower here, terming it as taking Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of taking UPI global. "UPI formally launched at the iconic Eiffel Tower at the huge Republic Day Reception.



France Takes Lead As First EU Nation To Offer Digital Visas

France will become the first European country to issue digital Schengen visas to visitors for the upcoming Paris Olympics. France has announced plans to shift entirely to online procedures for 70,000 French Schengen Visas, in a move that aligns with the EU's digitalization plans. France began operations of the "Olympic Consulate" system from January 1, 2024 - dedicated to processing visa applications for the 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Michelle O'Neill Becomes Northern Ireland's First Minister

Michelle O'Neill, Sinn Féin's deputy leader, has made history as the first nationalist to hold the role of first minister at the Northern Ireland Assembly. Sinn Féin became the biggest party at Stormont after the election in May 2022, meaning Ms O'Neill has been entitled to the role since then. But the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) had refused to join a power-sharing executive as part of its protest against post-Brexit trading regulations, preventing her from taking up the post.

Russian Cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko Sets World Record For Most Time In Space

A Russian cosmonaut has set a world record for the most time spent in space on Sunday, after logging more than 878 days or nearly two-and-a-half years. As of 0830 GMT, Oleg Kononenko overtook the record set by his compatriot Gennady Padalka, according to Russia's space corporation Roscosmos. Padalka logged 878 days, 11 hours, 29 minutes and 48 seconds during five space flights before retiring in 2017.

Yemen Appoints Ahmed Awad Bin Mubarak As New Prime Minister

Yemen's internationally recognised government has named Foreign Minister Ahmed Awad bin Mubarak as the new prime minister in a surprise appointment. Bin Mubarak replaces Maeen Abdulmalik Saeed at a time of rising tensions in the Arabian Peninsula's poorest country after a spate of Red Sea attacks by Houthi rebels on ships that have prompted retaliatory strikes by the United States and the UK.



Sri Lanka Pursues Free Trade Agreements With India To Boost Economic Growth

Sri Lanka on Tuesday said it has plans to establish a free trade agreement with India by the end of 2024, Foreign Minister Ali Sabry said here as the cash-strapped island nation tries to spur economic growth. Similar Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) would be worked out for Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, and China too by the year's end, Sabry told reporters here. These agreements will open up new markets for the cash-strapped Sri Lankan businesses, contributing directly to the nation's economic growth.

Google Rebrands Its Chatbot, Bard, As Gemini

Google has announced today that it will be rebranding its AI chatbot Bard as Gemini, the underlying large language model while also releasing the advanced tier Ultra. The updated Bard will now be called Gemini Advanced. The company is also launching a new Gemini app on Android and on the Google app on iOS where users can access Gemini Advanced. In a blog released by a spokesperson, Google explained, "Gemini is evolving to be more than just the models.



Pathum Nissanka Smashes Sri Lankan Records With Historic 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 scored the country's first-ever double century in the format during the first ODI of the series against Afghanistan in Pallekele. The opener remained unbeaten on 210 off just 139 balls, smashing 20 fours and eight sixes in a magnificent knock, steering Sri Lanka to a mammoth score of 381/3.



Dubai Launches World's First Air Taxi Service at World Government Summit 2024

The agreements pave the way for Dubai to pioneer the deployment of a city-wide electric aerial taxi service and vertiport network. At the heart of the initiative lies the Joby Aviation S4, an innovative aircraft designed to comfortably accommodate four passengers along with a pilot. Sporting six propellers and powered by four battery packs, the S4 boasts a maximum range of 161 km and a top speed of 321 km per hour.



Germany Overtakes Japan As Third-Largest Economy

Japan has been eclipsed by Germany as the world's third-biggest economy and has slipped into recession, according to data released Thursday, as the country battles a weak yen and an ageing, shrinking population.



Japan Commits To Long-Term Engagement In Ukraine's Reconstruction

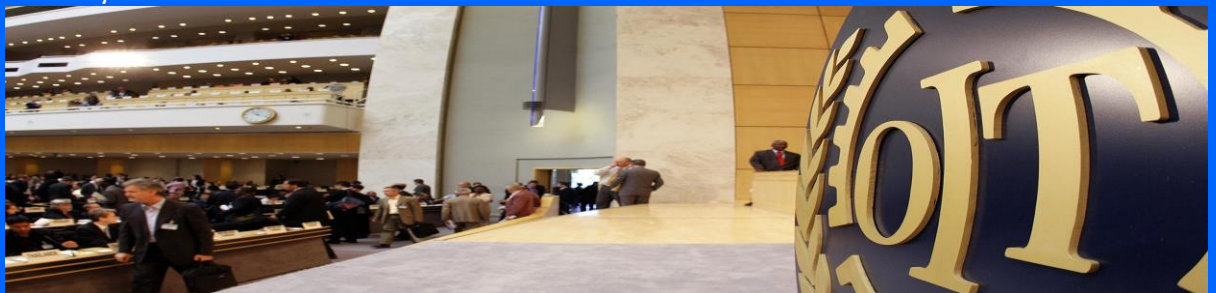
Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Monday pledged his country's long-term engagement in Ukraine's reconstruction, calling it a future investment, as Japan stressed its commitment to supporting the war-torn country ahead of the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion. In his keynote speech at a conference Japan co-organized with the Ukrainian government and business organizations, Kishida said Japanese public and private cooperation will be a long-term partnership based on inclusivity, humanitarianism as well as technology and knowledge.

America's Odysseus Spacecraft Makes 1st Commercial Moon Landing In History

The Odysseus lunar lander has made the first United States landing on the moon in more than 50 years, in what has been described as similar to a "cargo mission". The moment marks the first successful landing of a commercial spacecraft on the moon, following an unsuccessful US lunar lander mission last month. What's the Odysseus moon lander? Odysseus is the first craft launched from the US to land on the moon's surface since the Apollo 17 in 1972.

Philippines Becomes First Asian Country To Ratify ILO Convention To End Workplace Violence And Harassment

MANILA — The Philippines has been the first Asian country to ratify a convention to end workplace violence and harassment, the International Labor Organization (ILO) said Friday. The ILO said that the Philippines deposited the instrument of ratification of the Violence and Harassment Convention 2019 (No 190) with ILO Deputy Director-General Celeste Drake on Tuesday.



Dubai Introduces 5-Year Multiple-Entry Visa For Indian Travelers

Dubai has introduced a five-year multiple-entry visa to enhance travel between India and Dubai, reflecting the commitment to sustained economic collaborations and encouraging tourism and business ties. The visa, issued within two to five working days, allows a 90-day stay, extendable once, with a total stay not exceeding 180 days in a year, it said at the travel event SATTE.



UAE Removed From FATF Gray List

The international body that oversees the fight against money laundering has removed the United Arab Emirates from its “grey list”, two years after it identified weaknesses in the Gulf state’s ability to tackle financial crime. The Paris-based Financial Action Task Force said on Friday that the UAE was no longer subject to additional scrutiny by the body, having demonstrated that its ability to police illicit money flows had significantly improved.

Maryam Nawaz Becomes First Woman Chief Minister of Pakistan

Islamabad, Pakistan – Maryam Nawaz, the daughter of three-time former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, has been elected the chief minister of the key province of Punjab – the country’s first woman to hold the post.

