

14- Feb 2024

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NATIONAL NEWS

Assam government declares 'Kaji Nemu' as state fruit

Assam, the state government has officially declared **Kaji nemu (Citrus limon)**, a variety of lemon unique to the region, as the 'State Fruit'.



- The announcement was made by State Agriculture Minister Atul Bora, following a Cabinet meeting, underscoring the fruit's cultural, traditional, and nutritional significance to the state and its people.
- Kaji nemu, known for its juicy, aromatic nature, and immense nutritional value, holds a special place in Assam's agricultural landscape. This citrus fruit, exclusive to Assam and parts of the northeast, is celebrated for its unique aroma and antioxidant properties, which have long enriched local cuisines and traditional practices.

Arvind Panagariya holds first meeting of 16th Finance Commission

The **16th Finance Commission (XVI-FC)** held its first meeting in **New Delhi** under the chairmanship of **Arvind Panagariya**



- The commission stressed on the **need for wide-ranging consultations with stakeholders, particularly states.**
- The commission will recommend a devolution formula for tax revenues between the states, and also suggest measures to augment states' resources for local bodies besides reviewing the existing arrangements for financing disaster management initiatives.
- In its first meeting, the XVI-FC discussed its terms of reference (ToRs) and "acknowledged the need for wide ranging consultations with various stakeholders,

including state governments, local bodies, ministries of Government of India, and experts.

NITI Aayog launches GROW initiative to transform India's wastelands through agroforestry

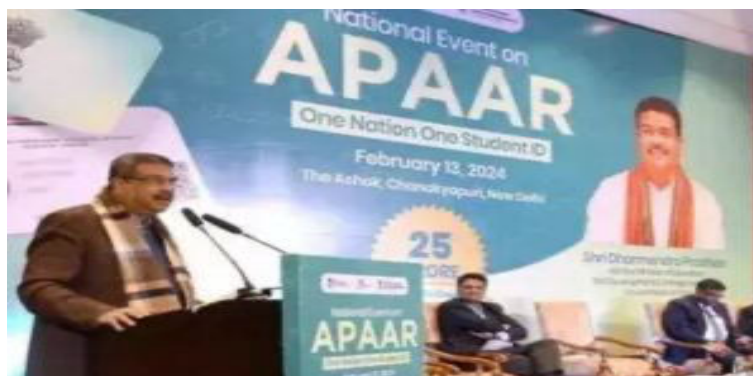
NITI Aayog unveiled the Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW) report and portal, aiming to bolster efforts in environmental conservation and sustainable land use across India.



- The GROW initiative includes the launch of the “Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW)-Suitability Mapping” portal on ‘Bhuvan’ (https://bhuvan-app1.nrsc.gov.in/asi_portal/), ensuring universal access to state and district-level data. This portal is expected to significantly boost the promotion of agroforestry initiatives by government bodies.
- Presently, agroforestry covers 8.65% of India's total geographical area, encompassing approximately 28.42 million hectares. The GROW report emphasizes the immense potential of converting underutilized areas, particularly wastelands, into productive agroforestry zones.
- This initiative aligns with national commitments to **restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030** and establish an additional carbon sink capable of sequestering 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent.

‘APAAR ID’ to be global document for students: Dharmendra Pradhan

Education Minister **Dharmendra Pradhan**, unveiled the **Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) initiative** during the National Conference on APAAR held in New Delhi.



- The initiative, aligned with the National Education Policy (NEP) and the National Credit and Qualifications Framework (NCrF), aims to revolutionize the academic experience for students across the country.
- The cornerstone of APAAR is the assignment of a unique and permanent **12-digit ID to every student**, consolidating their academic achievements in a unified and accessible platform.

Hyderabad's 36th National Book Fair honours Gaddar

The **NTR Stadium in Hyderabad** is bustling with activity as it hosts the **36th edition of the National Book Fair** on its expansive grounds. Organised by the Hyderabad Book Fair Society, the annual fair kicked off, drawing bibliophiles from all corners of the city.



- This year's fair showcases a vast array of literature across 365 stalls, with 115 exclusively featuring Telugu works. Visitors can also browse through works of renowned publishers from various States, published in multiple languages. Books of all kinds will be displayed, including comics, drawing books, biographies, fiction of all genres, classical literature, and novels.
- While the **venue for this year's exhibition is named after** the civil rights activist **Gaddar**, the stage bears the name of Ravva Srihari, a renowned scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu. A monument honouring Telangana martyrs is also erected on the exhibition premises.

After 42 years, luxury train 'Palace on Wheels' to embark on spiritual journey to Ayodhya, Kashi, Varanasi

Luxury train, **Palace on Wheels**, will reportedly **alter its route after 42 years** as it will make the journey to the sacred Indian cities—**Ayodhya, Kashi, and Varanasi** in Uttar Pradesh.



- Traditionally, the award-winning Palace of Wheels has covered destinations like Jaipur, Jaisalmer, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Ranthambore National Park, and Agra.
- However, in May this year, the Palace on Wheels will be introducing religious tours after 42 years of its existence. The train was launched in **1982** in association with the Rajasthan Tourism Development Corporation (RTDC).
- The world's second most luxurious train will take passengers on a **six-day spiritual journey** from Delhi to Ayodhya, Prayagraj, Varanasi, Mathura, and Vrindavan.

J&K Chief Secy inaugurates 2nd edition of SARAS Aajeevika exhibition

J & K Chief Secretary **Atal Dulloo** inaugurated the **2nd edition of the SARAS Aajeevika Mela**, a vibrant 11-day event highlighting the resilience and creativity of rural women entrepreneurs.



- Organised by the Jammu & Kashmir Rural Livelihoods Mission (JKRLM) under the Department of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj, the exhibition opened its doors to a diverse array of art, craft, culture, and cuisine, echoing the spirit of ‘vocal for local’.
- Featuring over 220 rural women from across 15 states, the SARAS Aajeevika Mela provides a platform for self-help group women artisans to exhibit their exemplary craftsmanship, artistry, and traditional skills.

RCF aims to roll out first prototype of Vande Metro coach by April, says its general manager

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.
- The Vande Metro is designed on the concept of India's first indigenous semi-high-speed train, **Vande Bharat**, catering to intercity passengers covering distances of up to 250 km. Each Vande Metro train will consist of 16 air-conditioned coaches and can run at a maximum speed of 130 km per hour.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

PM Modi inaugurates BAPS Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi

Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** inaugurated **Abu Dhabi's first Hindu stone temple**, describing it as a symbol of the shared heritage of humanity and thanked the UAE for scripting a new golden chapter of human history.



- BAPS represents a socio-spiritual Hindu faith rooted in the Vedas, pioneered by Bhagwan Swaminarayan in the late 18th century and formally established in 1907 by Shastriji Maharaj
- Ahead of the opening ceremony of the temple, Sadhu Brahmaviharidas recognized the significant contribution made by the benevolence and camaraderie of leaders from the UAE.
- The proposal of the Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi came during the first visit of PM Modi to the UAE in 2015 after which the government allocated land for the BAPS temple.

Dubai to have world's first air taxi, agreements inked at World Government Summit 2024

In a pathbreaking move set to revolutionize urban transportation, **Dubai** has **inked agreements** at the World Government Summit 2024 to launch the **world's first air taxi service**.



- The agreements pave the way for Dubai to pioneer the deployment of a city-wide electric aerial taxi service and vertiport network. The air-taxi network will commence its operations in **2026**.
- This initiative, centered around the innovative Joby Aviation S4 aircraft, promises to revolutionize Dubai's cityscape with its electric-powered, environmentally friendly design.

Trinidad & Tobago Declares National Emergency after Ghost Ship Oil Spill

The **Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago** has officially declared a **state of "national emergency"** following a significant **oil spill** in the eastern Caribbean.



- The spill, originating from an overturned vessel near Tobago, has led to widespread environmental damage along the coastline, prompting concerns about the impact on the nation's economy, particularly its tourism sector.
- Prime Minister Rowley emphasized the gravity of the situation, highlighting that the response to the oil spill will require extraordinary funding due to its uncertain extent and magnitude.

BUSINESS & ECONOMY

Amrit Kaal, Kartavya Kaal: Centre's white paper on economy in 10 points

The government came up with a **white paper on the Indian economy** in which it presented how the economy **improved from 2014 to 2024** in comparison with the time period between 2004 and 2014 when, the white paper claimed, the UPA hurt the economy, robbed the economy. Despite inheriting a healthy economy, the UPA turned it into a non-performing one, the white papers said.

1. The white paper said the NDA government in 2014 found the economy in bad shape and crisis. The challenge to fix the economy was 'hydra-headed'. At that time, the Indian economy was among the fragile five.
2. "Then, we had 2G scam; now, we have extensive coverage of the population under 4G with the lowest rates and the world's fastest rollout of 5G in 2023," it said in a Then versus Now comparison.
3. "Then, we had 'policy-paralysis'; infrastructure was not a priority; now, the wheels of the virtuous cycle of 'investment, growth, employment and entrepreneurship, and savings' leading to more investments and productivity has been set into fast motion."
4. The NDA government understood the need to make tough decisions for the greater economic good.

5. In the UPA rule, India had double-digit inflation, now the inflation has been brought down to little over 5%, it said.
6. “Then, we had the economy facing a ‘twin balance sheet problem’; now, we have turned the economy to having a ‘twin balance sheet advantage’ for companies as well as banking sector with ample capacity to ramp up investments and credit and generate employment,” it said.
7. The white paper said the introduction of the GST regime was a much-needed structural reform. “Prior to the introduction of the Goods & Service Tax (GST), the mélange of state levies, more than 440 tax rates, excise duties and the compliance requirements of multiple agencies administering these rates meant that India’s internal trade was neither free nor united.
8. The budgeted capital expenditure has increased over five-folds from FY14 to FY24 (RE), without any heating-up of the economy, it said.
9. Referring to the welfare steps, the white paper said, “Empowerment through welfare has been the leitmotif for our government. We adopted the philosophy “sabka sath, sabka vikas” prioritising universal access to basic amenities, and a participatory, mission-mode approach in actualising this philosophy.”
10. The white paper said the NDA government successfully overcame the challenges left by the previous government but is not resting on its laurels. “There are miles to go and mountains to scale before we sleep. The Amrit Kaal has just begun and our destination is “India a developed nation by 2047”.

Reliance becomes 1st listed Indian firm to cross Rs 20 lakh crore m-cap mark

The **market value of Reliance Industries breached ₹20-lakh crore**, the first company on Indian bourses to go past this mark. The conglomerate had reached a market cap of ₹15-lakh crore in September 2021.



- RIL shares hit a fresh high of ₹2,958 on the BSE and gained 1.8 per cent intra-day. RIL ended the day 0.88 per cent higher at ₹2,930. The shares have gained 13.4 per cent in the year to date and surged 26.1 per cent in the last one year.
- RIL reported an in-line results for the third quarter ended December, with an operating profit at ₹40,660 crore , a growth of 15.4 per cent year-on-year. EBITDA growth was supported by upstream oil & gas and the retail segment.

India's WPI inflation eases to three-month low of 0.27 per cent in January

India's **wholesale price index (WPI)-based inflation rate eased to a three-month low of 0.27 per cent** (year-on-year) in January due to moderation in prices of food articles and manufacturing products, according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. In December 2023, the factory gate inflation had stood at 0.73 per cent

- This is the **third consecutive month** that the wholesale inflation rate has remained in positive territory after recording deflation for the major part of 2023-24.
- Inflation in food prices slowed to a three-month low of 6.85 per cent in January from 9.38 per cent in December, led by deceleration in the prices of paddy (9.56 per cent), cereals (4.07 per cent), pulses (16.06 per cent), vegetables (19.71 per cent), onion (29.18 per cent), fruit (1.01 per cent), and milk (5.38 per cent).

Services trade surplus hits record \$44.9 billion in December quarter

India's **services trade surplus** shot up to a **record \$44.9 billion in the October-December quarter** (third quarter, or Q3) of 2023-24 (FY24), growing 16 per cent year-on-year, showing resilience amid strong global headwinds. This is likely to reduce the current account deficit (CAD) in Q3.



- According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data, services exports grew 5.2 per cent to \$87.7 billion during Q3, while services imports contracted 4.3 per cent to \$42.8 billion during the same period.
- India's CAD moderated to 1 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the first half (April-September) of FY24 from 2.9 per cent of GDP during the same period of 2022-23 (FY23), on the back of a lower merchandise trade deficit and higher net services receipts.

SPORTS

Union Home Minister Amit Shah inaugurated the Gandhinagar Premier League

Union Home Minister **Amit Shah** inaugurated the **Gandhinagar Premier League (GPL)** in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Hardik Pandya, an India all-rounder, was spotted with Union Home Minister Amit Shah at the Gandhinagar Premier League's launch.

- The event, graced by the presence of Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel among other dignitaries, marks a pivotal step towards enhancing grassroots cricket and fostering local talent across the nation.



- The Gandhinagar Premier League stands out as a monumental event with the participation of 1,078 cricket teams, showcasing the fervent enthusiasm for cricket in Gandhinagar.

APPOINTMENTS

ICAI elects Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal as President, Charanjot Singh Nanda as Vice President

The chartered accountants' apex body Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) said **Ranjeet Kumar Agarwal and Charanjot Singh Nanda** have been elected as **President** and **Vice President** of the institute, respectively.



- Both have been elected by the institute's central council for the 2024-25 term, according to a release.
- Agarwal is the 72nd President of ICAI and served as Vice President in 2023-24.
- Among other responsibilities, Nanda has served as the chairman of various ICAI committees, including those on internal audit standards board, and on financial markets & investors protection.

AWARDS

Havildar Varinder Singh awarded Vishisht Seva Medal for innovative octocopter development

Havildar Varinder Singh, a member of the Sikh Regiment in the Indian Army, has been honored with the **prestigious Vishisht Seva Medal** for his remarkable contribution to **military technology**.



- President Droupadi Murmu bestowed this accolade upon him in recognition of his outstanding efforts in developing a groundbreaking piece of equipment.
- The **‘Multipurpose Octocopter’**, designed by Havildar Singh, can undertake surveillance operations by providing live-camera feed to the operator. It can be used to drop essential supplies to forward posts, including in high-altitude areas.

India wins 9th Gov Tech award at World Government Summit in Dubai

India has secured the prestigious **9th GovTech Prize** for its pioneering endeavors in AI-powered government services, at the **World Government Summit 2024**.



- The annual award is instituted by the government of the UAE and is presented to government entities, central or local, worldwide, to recognize creative and innovative solutions. **India won under the category of ‘AI-Powered Government Services’**.
- The accolade recognizes the remarkable efforts of the Ministry for Road Transport & Highways, Government of India, for its transformative project known as **iRASTE**. iRASTE, a collaborative initiative involving the government, industry, and academia, is revolutionizing road safety through the integration of AI technology.

Shamar Joseph, Amy Hunter crowned ICC Players of the Month for January

International Cricket Council (ICC) has announced the winners of the **ICC Men's and Women's Player of the Month for January 2024**. **West Indies' Shamar Joseph and Ireland's Amy Hunter** have been bestowed with this honour, marking their remarkable contributions to their respective teams in the past month.



- Shamar Joseph celebrates a maiden ICC Men's Player of the Month crown after making a sensational debut for the West Indies in their dramatic Test series in Australia.
- Amy Hunter is named the ICC Women's Player of the Month thanks to her rapid run-scoring feats in Ireland's T20I series victory over Zimbabwe last month.

OBITUARIES

Padma Shri awardee Hindi, Maithili writer Usha Kiran Khan passes away

Renowned litterateur **Padma Shri Dr. Usha Kiran Khan** passed away at a private hospital in Bihar's capital Patna. She was 79.



- Dr Usha Kiran Khan was a celebrated writer in Hindi and Maithili, earning accolades, including the Sahitya Akademi Award for her Maithili novel 'Bhamati: Ek Avismaraniya Premkatha'.
- Her contributions to literature and education were further acknowledged when she was bestowed with the **Padma Shri in 2015**, one of India's highest civilian awards.

Dattajirao Gaekwad, India's oldest Test cricketer, passes away

Former Indian Test cricket team captain **Dattajirao Gaekwad** passed away in the city. He was 95.



- He was the **country's oldest living test cricketer**. Dattajirao hadn't been keeping well for over the last one-and-half years and spent most of his time at his home near the Polo Ground.
- He played in 11 Tests and led the team during India's Tour of England in 1959. Under his captaincy, Baroda also won the Ranji Trophy in the 1957-58 season, beating Services in the final.

ENVIRONMENT

Odisha's Gupteswar Forest declared the state's 4th Biodiversity Heritage Site

Gupteswar Forest, situated in the wildernesses of **Odisha's Koraput district**, has been declared the **fourth Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) of the state** by the Odisha Government. The forest lies right beside the Gupteswar Shiva Temple which falls in the Dhondrakhol reserve forest.



- Odisha Biodiversity Board carried out a survey of Gupteswar Forest where they found out that there are 28 species of mammals, 188 species of birds, 18 species of amphibians, 48 species of reptiles, 45 species of fishes, 30 species of spiders, 43 species of moths, 141 species of butterflies, 41 species of odonates, 20 species of lower invertebrates, and 6 species of scorpions found in the forest.
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IMPORTANT DAYS

India marks 5th anniversary of Pulwama attack

February 14 is the **fifth anniversary of the terror attack on Indian soldiers in the Pulwama** district of Jammu and Kashmir.

- Around 40 Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) soldiers lost their lives in the attack. The convoy of CRPF was passing through Pulwama when a suicide bomber from Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) hit the vehicle full of explosives into a convoy. Due to this terror attack, India marks February 14 as ‘Black Friday.’
- The terror attack took place on February 14, 2019, when a convoy of 78 buses with around 2500 paramilitary personnel were travelling to Srinagar from Kashmir when a vehicle full of explosives rammed into a bus killing 40 CRPF soldiers of the 76th battalion.

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