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## Demand for JPC on Adani rocks Houses

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Both houses of Parliament were adjourned for the day on Thursday amid noisy scenes and ruckus with slogan-shouting Opposition members demanding a joint parliamentary committee probe into the fraud allegation against Adani group.

The stock prices of the Adani group witnessed another day of carnage on Thursday following charges made by a US-based research company against it. The rout in Adani group stocks has threatened the value of investments made by the Life Insurance Corporation and public sector banks.

The Congress, the Shiv Sena, the Left, the Aam Aadmi Party, and other Opposition parties tried to raise in both Houses of Parliament the issue of allegations levelled by the Hindenburg Research firm against the Adani group.

In the Lok Sabha, Speaker Om Birla adjourned the proceedings till 2 pm as members of almost all Opposition parties rushed to the Well of the House raising slogans on the tanking of Adani group scrips and sought a probe into the business practices of the corporate giant.

Birla asked members not to make unsubstantiated claims and said Question Hour was an important part of Parliamentary proceedings which should not be disrupted. As the House resumed,



Proceedings of the Rajya Sabha underway during Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Thursday

PTI

Opposition MPs stormed the Well of the Lok Sabha raising slogans against the Narendra Modi Government and the Adani group.

Amid the sloganeering, Rajendra Agarwal, who was in the Chair, allowed the laying of parliamentary papers in the House.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi appealed to the Opposition members to allow discussion on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address to a joint sitting of both Houses.

"I plead with folded hands, please follow Parliamentary traditions and take up the debate on the Motion of Thanks," Joshi said.

In the Lok Sabha, MPs from almost all Opposition parties rushed to the Well of the

House raising slogans and sought a probe into the business practices of the corporate giant.

As the protests and sloganeering continued, the presiding officer adjourned the proceedings of the House for the day.

Adani group stocks, where LIC is heavily invested, have lost over \$100 billion in value since a tiny New York short seller came out with a damning report alleging financial and accounting fraud by the ports-to-energy conglomerate. The Adani group has denied all charges and called the report malicious and full of lies.

In the Rajya Sabha, 9 MPs, including Leader of the Opposition and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Shiv Sena's Priyanka

Chaturvedi, and Aam Aadmi Party's Sanjay Singh, gave notices under rule 267.

They sought the suspension of regular business to discuss the Adani group stock route and its impact on millions of small investors as well as the hard-earned savings of crores of Indians being endangered in loss of value of investments of LIC.

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar rejected all the notices, saying they were not in order. This infuriated the Opposition MPs who rose in their places to protest.

Dhankhar called for order in the House but the MPs continued to raise their demands, which also included the Constitution of a JPC to probe the entire fiasco.

## Adani group shares tank, Enterprises down by 26%

### Most group of firms also fall

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Adani Enterprises stumbled over 26 per cent on Thursday, a day after the firm said it has decided not to go ahead with its Rs 20,000-crore Follow-on Public Offer (FPO) and will return the proceeds to investors. The stock tanked 26.50 per cent to settle at Rs 1,564.70 on the BSE. During the day, it tumbled 28.88 per cent to Rs 1,513.90 — its 52-week low. Most of the other group firms also declined for the sixth day in a row.

The 10 listed Adani Group firms have faced a combined erosion of over Rs 8.76 lakh crore in 6 days.

Shares of Adani Transmission fell 10 per cent on Thursday, Adani Green Energy tanked 10 per cent, Adani Total Gas 10 per cent, Adani Ports 6.13 per cent, Adani Wilmar 5 per cent, NDTV 4.99 per cent and Adani Power lost 4.98 per cent.

Many of the group firms also hit their lower circuit limits during the morning trade. However, shares of Ambuja Cements jumped 5.33 per cent and ACC inched up 0.05 per cent. Adani Group stocks have taken a beating on the bourses after US-based Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations in a report, including fraudulent transactions and

share price manipulation at the Gautam Adani-led group. Adani Group has dismissed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements.

"The Board of Adani Enterprises Ltd., (AEL) decided not to go ahead with the fully subscribed FPO. Given the unprecedented situation and the current market volatility, the company aims to protect the interest of its investing community by returning the FPO proceeds and withdraws the completed transaction," the company said in a statement late on Wednesday.

As many as 4.62 crore shares were sought as against an offer of 4.55 crore.

Non-institutional investors put in bids for over three times the 96.16 lakh shares reserved for them, while the 1.28 crore shares reserved for qualified institutional buyers (QIBs) were almost fully subscribed, according to BSE data. There was, however, a muted response from retail investors and company employees.

Retail investors, for whom roughly half of the issue was reserved, bid for just 11 per cent of the 2.29 crore shares earmarked for them. Employees sought 52 per cent of the 1.6 lakh shares reserved for them. Adani Enterprises, the flagship company of the Adani Group, had a lacklustre start to its FPO, with only a 1 per cent subscription on the first day of the share sale.

## RBI seeks details of banks' exposure to Adani group

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has sought details about lenders' exposures to the Adani Group, banking sources said, a day after the conglomerate withdrew the Rs 20,000-crore follow on public offer (FPO) of its flagship firm Adani Enterprises amid the steep fall in its stock prices.

On Wednesday, Swiss lender Credit Suisse stopped accepting bonds by Adani group companies as collaterals for margin lending.

The going has been tough for the diversified conglomerate over the past week ever since US-based short seller Hindenburg Research levelled a slew of allegations about the group's operations, calling it the biggest corporate con ever.

The Ahmedabad-headquartered group has denied all the allegations but failed to convince analysts and investors.

The RBI gets access to banks' large corporate borrowers on a regular basis as part of the central repository of information on large credits (CRILC) data base, the bank-

ing sources said.

Many a time bank lending happens against pledged securities and a massive fall in the price of the equity shares of the Adani group's 10 listed entities could have accordingly lowered the value of the pledged securities.

There has been selling pressure in banks' stocks since the Hindenberg Research's report released on January 24 as investors are concerned about the impact of the crisis on banks' books. Country's largest lender SBI had said it's exposure to Adani group is fully secured by cash generating assets, in an attempt to assuage investor concerns. Another public sector lender Bank of Baroda has said its total exposure to the embattled group stood at Rs 7,000 crore, which are also fully secured.

Government-owned life insurance behemoth Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) has disclosed of having an exposure of Rs 36,474.78 crore to Adani group's debt and equity, and added that the amount is less than one per cent of its total investments.

## Herbicide-tolerant rice developed at NRRI

PNS ■ CUTTACK

Weed infestation causes 18-48% yield loss in rice. The weeds are managed by keeping stagnant water in the field or through manual or mechanical weeding. Thus, availability of any cost-effective weed control method will make rice cultivation economically viable and sustainable.

Besides, broad leaf and grassy weeds, weedy rice is an emerging problem under direct seeded conditions. Its competitive ability is very high and traditional herbicides can't control such weeds. Herbicides which kill the weedy rice also kill the rice crop. Thus, there is a need for developing rice varieties which can control weedy rice as well as other weeds.

In India, scientists could successfully develop a mutant line 'Robin' in upland variety N22 which tolerates the herbicide Imazethapyr due to a



mutation in Acetohydroxy Acid Synthase (AHAS) gene.

At the ICAR-National Rice Research Institute here, this herbicide-tolerant gene has been introgressed in four popular rice varieties, (Sahbhagidhan, Naveen, SwarnaSub1 and Pooja) and are currently under national testing.

Imazethapyr herbicide,

when sprayed 21 days after sowing, effectively controls the weeds of rice as well as weedy rice without affecting the yield potential of the tolerant variety. Release and large-scale adoption of the herbicide tolerant rice can significantly reduce the cost of cultivation and enhance the acreage under direct seeded rice in India.

### Naba Das murder

## 'Let Central forces look into Gopal's security'

### Demands Leader of Opposition

AK SAHOO ■ BHUBANESWAR

Leader of Opposition (LoP) in State Assembly Jayanarayan Mishra on Thursday expressed his apprehension over security of Gopal Das, the Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) of Police who shot Health Minister Naba Kisore Das on January 29.

Mishra said he was sensing that Das, like some other accused who had previously been found involved in some high profile murder cases, might be killed in police custody or in jail to erase the links of ruling party politicians.

The LoP told the media,

"All of us know what happened to Gobinda Sahu, the prime accused in the sensational Mamita Meher murder case, inside jail. He died in jail under mysterious circumstances. The prime accused in Mahanga double murder case was found dead on a National Highway and the incident was painted as an accident. The two accused were linked to two influential leaders of the ruling BJD whose names had cropped up in Mamita and Mahanga double murder cases."

Stating that he was concerned about Gopal Das' security, Mishra said,

"I have no faith in the Odisha Police. Hence, ad-equate Central force should be

provided for security."

He further said there is every possibility that Gopal's family may keep mum owing to political interest and other reasons. But it is absolutely necessary that the State Government recommends a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

The Crime Branch is likely to take Gopal Das to the spot for recreating the crime scene. Meanwhile, the investigating agency has taken Gopal on a four-day remand.

In the latest development, the Crime Branch on Thursday recovered a dozen handwritten letters allegedly thrown into the septic tank of the Jharsuguda Airport police station by Gopal Das.

## State Assembly session from Feb 21

### Budget to be tabled on Feb 24

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Budget Session of the State Assembly would commence from February 21 and conclude on April 6, stated an official notification on Thursday.

The session will have 27 business days and 18 No Meeting days.

The 12th session of the 16th Odisha Legislative Assembly will begin at 11 am on February 21 with Governor Prof Ganeshi Lal's address. Discussions on the Governor's address will take place on February 22 and 23.

As per the notification issued by the Parliamentary Affairs Department following the order made by the Governor, the Annual Budget for the



year 2023-24 will be tabled on February 24.

Discussions on the Budget will be held on February 27, 28 and March 1. The reports of department-related Standing Committees will be presented on March 10. The Appropriation Bill on the Budget will be tabled on March 31.

The Private Member's Business (Bills and Resolutions) will be presented on April 4 and 6.

## Kappan walks out of prison

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Kerala journalist Siddique Kappan walked out of jail on bail on Thursday, over two years after he was arrested for allegedly trying to instigate violence after the death of a woman in Hathras.

The release came almost six weeks after the Allahabad High Court granted him bail in a money laundering case filed by the Enforcement Directorate. In September, the Supreme Court granted him bail in another case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

A day earlier, his lawyer submitted two sureties of ₹1 lakh each at the special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court here, fulfilling a bail condition.

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Famous for its masterpiece architectural features, 'Syunrakot ka Naula', a 100-year-old water reservoir at Syunrakot village in Uttarakhand's Almora has been declared as a monument of national importance.

This is for the first time that such an aquifer that is primarily used for drinking purposes has been brought by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI) under its ambit.

A senior official from the ASI said naulas are part of the surface-water harvesting method typical to the hilly areas and they are small wells or ponds in which water is collected by making a stone wall across a stream.

Intricately designed pillars

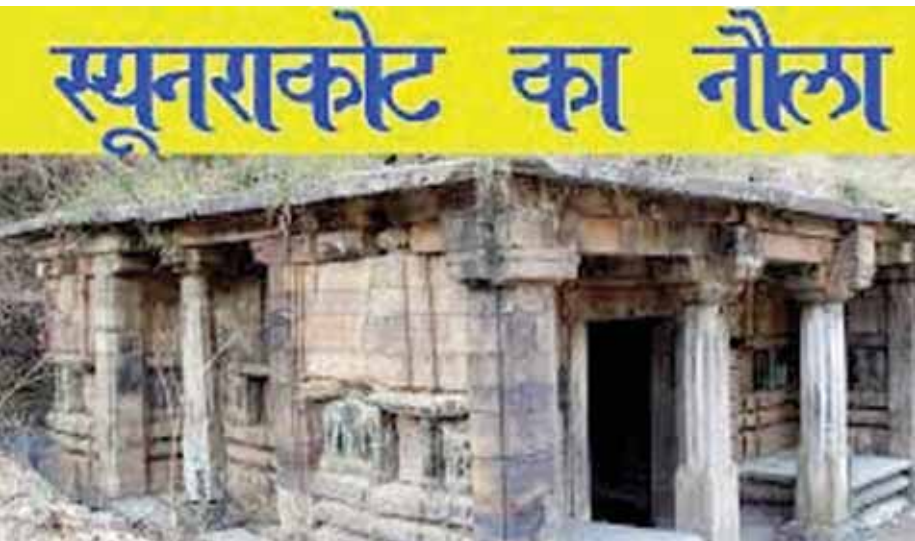
and carved steps around the water pond makes the Syunrakot ka Naula one of the most beautiful naulas dotting the region.

This most unique and elaborate water storage system with a roof and a porous floor which houses an aquifer was constructed in the 14th century during the Katyuri kingdom.

The locals had been demanding its conservation with experts asserting that the structure and design of naulas is the evidence of great ancient scientific knowledge of the ethnic people of Himalaya.

Structurally naula has a roof sloping on all four sides like a temple, and not on two sides like a house.

This was considered a sacred site as on the top of the roof, a round stone is always



placed which is considered to be the idol of lord Vishnu,

according to reports.

Naula consists of a tank

that is closed on three sides and covered. The fourth side, which

is open, has steps that lead down to the tank. There is a pillared verandah around them with engravings.

As the construction of naulas was considered prestigious, these structures can be found in ancient towns, in and outside villages and on important roads. Some naulas are emblazoned with intricate architectural designs. At times they are massive in size with a raised platform for both bathing and washing.

For example the interior of the naulas was always designed like a series of layered steps which were built to narrow and deepen the naula which helped in minimising the water loss due to evaporation.

"Such traditional naulas are now dying due to lack of forest and tree cover, irregular

and unpredicted rainfall pattern, loss of traditional knowledge, modernisation and uncontrolled development.

"These naulas become the target of popular attention only when modern water pipelines stop working.

"Among the important reasons behind the negligence of these important naulas is modernisation, which has caused a loss of traditional knowledge systems among rural communities along with a lack of maintenance due to out-migration of villagers to nearby towns and cities for better job opportunities," said Suman Joshi Suman Joshi, research scholar from Kumaun University, Nainital in her article published in Researchgate.



# Union Budget to boost infra sector: UCCI

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Utkal Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UCCI) president Brahma Mishra termed the Union Budget 2023-24 as balanced in view of the highest economic growth India posted despite the ongoing global recession.

Mishra said in the Budget there is a high emphasis on renewable energy, solar energy, biogas, MSME sector and start-up. He mentioned that India is the 3rd largest country in startup success. There is a huge variety of provisions granted in the Railway Budget, he said.

Mishra observed that infrastructure sector development will get a huge leverage by the budgetary provisions. Skill development and schools will get a lot of advantages. Infrastructure sector, youth affairs and airports are in the list of developments in this Budget



which will generate a lot of employment opportunities for the youths.

Besides, scrap import without duty is to continue which will enhance production of green steel and green metals.

Import duty on raw materials is proposed to be decreased and this might impact adversely higher production in manufacturing

sector. Mishra also mentioned that the manufacturing sector contribution of 17% to the GDP needs to be increased to 27%.

He also said that the Budget has taken good care of senior citizens. Tax benefit has been extended which will take care of the market inflation. Tax free zones are enhanced. Health, education, infrastructure and railways are

all allocated balanced budgets. Input duty on textiles has been enhanced which will impact the domestic textile industry. Overall, the Budget is good for domestic market and the local manufacturers, Mishra opined.

Mishra opined that Personal Tax and Corporate Tax should be simplified, lowered

## ‘Budget skips social security for unorganised workers’

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

INTUC State president Dr Rama Chandra Khuntia has lamented that the Union Budget 2023-24 has no provision for social security benefits for 48 crore agriculture and unorganised workers.

He further said that in view of the ILO decision declaring health and safety as the fundamental rights of workers, the Government of India should amend the

Constitution of India and make health, safety and social security as fundamental rights of the people of India and accordingly make the provision in the Budget.

Former MP Khuntia was speaking at a meet at the State INTUC office here. Among others, general secretary Kishore Jena, vice president Madan Mohan Dhal, joint general secretary Akshaya Tripathy, treasurer\ Dharanidhar Swain and Basanti Samal were present.

rationalised. Capital Gain Tax should also be simplified, Tax range should be enhanced, GST and TDS be rationalized in the Corporate Tax sector.

He said that unemployment is a big problem, hence more

investment is required in many sectors, more so in the infrastructure sector.

He, however, observed that the funds allocated in railways for Odisha are very low and inadequate.

# State’s ‘first’ hybrid surgery at KIMS



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Doctors at the KIMS here claimed to have performed the first hybrid surgery in Odisha, for which patients had to go outside the State and spend a lot earlier.

The surgery, performed on Sushama Rana (50) from Ratagada village under Banki block of Cuttack district, was necessitated as she complained of severe pain in her chest, back and belly.

The cardiology and cardiac surgery team started the action. As the first step, cardio thoracic and vascular surgery

(CTVS) surgeons Dr A Sharda and Dr Chandan Ray Mohapatra did a bypass surgery and joined the aorta with the vessels supplying blood to left arm and brain.

After the bypass graft prevented brain stroke and maintained blood supply to the left arm, the cardiology team led by Dr Anupam Jena put a covered stent inside the damaged aorta to seal its tear.

With the help from cardiac anaesthesiologist Dr Ashok Badmali, the surgery continued for about five hours. Five days later, cured Sushama returned to her village.

# 5T Secy reviews OUAT makeover

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

On the instructions of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, 5T Secretary VK Pandian visited the Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT) here on Thursday and took stock of the different projects being carried out under the 5T transformation initiative.

Pandian initially reviewed the under-construction state-of-the art auditorium which would be completed by December 2023. National and international training



programmes and conferences would be hosted at the 1,000-seat auditorium.

Later, the 5T Secretary inspected the Farmers' Hostel renovation work which would be completed by September. He also reviewed the university hostel's construction work, where arrangements have been made to house 500 students.

Before concluding his visit, he took stock of the women's hostel's renovation work and interacted with the students about their wellbeing.

# Odisha’s MUKTA wins WRI ROSS Centre Prize

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The urban wage employment scheme of Odisha Government, MUKTA, has been selected as one of the winners of the 2021-2022 World Resources Institute (WRI), Ross Centre Prize for Cities.

The winners were announced at Prize for Cities event held at the Ford Foundation Centre for Social Justice in New York City on February 1. Principal Secretary, Housing and Urban



Development (H&UD) Department G Mathi Vathanan received the award.

The award, administered by an International Jury, selected "MUKTA" as a winner through a competitive process from amongst 260 applications from 155 cities in 65 countries.

The award acknowledged MUKTA's innovative

approach to responding to uncertainty, disruption and crisis by creating large-scale jobs for the urban poor, informal and migrant laborers by engaging them in development works as a mechanism for cities to live and thrive in turbulent times.

Till date, 7 lakh urban poor and migrant workers across

Odisha's 114 cities have been engaged in 22,500 community-level development works worth Rs 208 crore, which includes paved roads, drains, rainwater harvesting, community centres, plantation, water bodies rejuvenation and public space development.

Besides, 5,368 Mission Shakti Groups and 438 slum dwellers associations have also been engaged as implementation partners under the ambitious Scheme of the State Government.

# MLA Saluja’s son arrested in Balangir

Rs 19L cash, liquor seized from gym

PNS ■ BALANGIR

Hours after the arrest of Kantabanji Congress MLA Santosh Singh Saluja's younger son Seji Singh Saluja in connection with an assault case, police seized cash of Rs 19 lakh and liquor from his gym on Wednesday night, sources informed on Thursday.

Seji underwent medical examination at the Belpada Community Health Centre (CHC) on Thursday morning before being forwarded to a local court.

According to reports, some



people had created a ruckus in the Alishan Cinema Hall at Kantabanji a few days ago when Seji was present at the movie theatre; and he indulged into an argument with a police personnel. The video showing the incident went viral on social media, following which police arrested him. He was booked under Sections 384, 506 and 353 of the IPC and various sections of the Arms Act. Sources said that no weapon was seized from his possession so far.

## Minister’s killing

‘People don’t trust CB, order CBI probe’

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government has no moral right to probe into the murder of Minister Naba Kisore Das. In the past, the Crime Branch (CB) has worked as a tool of the Government, alleged the BJP on Thursday.

Earlier, the Crime Branch was entrusted with the Kulamani Baral and Mamita Meher murder cases by the Government. But no proper investigation was conducted; and before the probe was completed, the guilty and the witnesses were murdered. People of the State don't have faith on the Crime Branch; so,



the Government should order a CBI probe into the Minister's murder, demanded BJP State general secretary Lekhashri Samantsinghar.

When the Government wants to hide evidences, it gives responsibility to the Crime Branch. If a Cabinet Minister was not safe, how can the common man be safe in the State, she questioned.

# Youth beaten to death at de-addiction centre

3 arrested

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A man, who was assaulted at a drug de-addiction centre at Bhotapada under the Mancheswar police station in the city on Wednesday, succumbed to his injuries while undergoing treatment at a private hospital on Thursday.

The deceased Sarbeswar Behera had been critically injured after he was assaulted by three persons at the Sai Kripa Drug de-addiction centre.

On Wednesday, police arrested three accused in this connection on the basis of a complaint of the deceased's

wife Urmila. The arrested trio was identified as Anirudha Ray (30), Ankit Rout (25) and Antaryami Mishra (25).

According to sources, Sarbeswar was a habitual drunkard. So, his wife Urmila got him admitted to the de-addiction centre. The main accused assured her to help Sarbeswar quit drinking and took Rs 7,000 from her. However, Urmila came to know that her husband was brutally beaten by the accused trio and admitted to hospital.

Based on Urmila's a complaint, police registered a case and produced the three in court. They were later sent to judicial custody.

## SOCIAL CANVAS

# Inequality in land ownership hits SCs in Odisha

The NSO survey 2019 revealed that the social groups which have very less assets are the scheduled castes in India. Land and building is the most primary asset for a household. After independence, it was expected that all the households of the country would have access and ownership over minimum land holding and other assets required for the basic necessities such as housing and livelihood. Let's see both the reports - All India Debt and Investment Survey NSS 77th round and Agricultural Census of Odisha to get a quantitative picture of status of SCs in ownership of assets, specifically ownership over the land.

There are a total 16 lakh SC households and about 85 per cent of its population lives in rural areas while a majority of them primarily depend on agricultural activities as agricultural workers and sharecroppers. The major reason for asset inequality among social groups is because of historical denial of access to land rights to SCs and



MANAS JENA

the non implementation of land reforms programmes in the post-independent phase by subsequent State Governments.

The Agricultural Census for the year 2010-11 says the scheduled castes in Odisha have a total 7, 02,478 holdings and the total land area was 5,65,464 hectares (ha). The average size of holding is 0.80 ha. For the same period the all India average size of holding is 1.08 ha and the average size of holding of the State of Odisha is 0.95 ha. The number of marginal farmers owning below one ha of land was 5, 64,873 which is more than 80

per cent of the total holding of SCs. The number of small farmers above 1 ha and below 2 ha was 1, 07,608 having 1, 71,927 ha of land. The number of semi medium farmers with a holding of above 2 ha and below 4 ha was 26,277 owning 76,401 ha, while the number of medium farmer above 4 and below 10 ha was 3,230 with 18,702 ha. The number of large farmers having more than 10 ha was only 150 having 2,316 ha land. During the period from 2005 to 2010 the share of SC holding in the operated area had increased from 10.50 per cent to 11.65 per cent. If we compare the land ownership status of SCs with STs and other social groups the report finds that the STs and others have a better position in access and ownership over land in comparison to SCs.

The households with marginal and small holding together constituting almost 95 per cent of the total holding are mostly small farmers, seasonal agricultural workers and sharecroppers, who are

struggling to continue with agriculture as their primary livelihoods are increasingly facing challenges of mechanisation, marketing, input and credit needs. Land ownership is closely linked to the production process and whole input subsidy and MSP system of the Government. It is also linked to compensation and rehabilitation laws. The banks and other financial institutions are mostly demanding ROR of land as collateral security and land record is referred to as the most credible document for identity proofs in matters of legal rights. Unfortunately, a sizable section of SC households, about one-fourth, have no record of rights of homestead land. This deprives them of a dignified living and all Government entitlements. The SC inhabitants in the outskirts of the village are struggling to get physical access to common lands in the absence of a socially inclusive living environment. Many of the SC communities have very restricted access to use the

land/common property resources of the village such as village forest, water bodies, temple land, play ground, burial ground and grazing land etc. There have been a number of cases mostly reflecting social conflicts of SCs with other social groups. The fact is our unwritten hegemonic social laws are more powerful in every village. In spite of constitutional governance and laws in place there has been very little impact over age-old customs and traditions in practice. This continued inequality in access to such important resources is denial of human rights and participation in land based developmental activities to almost one-fifth of population of the State. In case of forest land in forest areas and forest fringe villages though the FRA has provision of lease to SCs under the categories of other forest dwellers but unfortunately the Government has not been implementing this provision for deserving landless households.

The SC communities in the coastal

and lagoon areas are also denied rights over water bodies. There has been a conflicting situation facing fisher folk communities in Chilika areas of Puri and Ganjam districts, where the SC communities are subjected to all kinds of social subjugation.

It has been noticed that a tribal centric campaign for rights over land, water and forest without integrating other deprived communities such as fisher folk and SCs in the movement has failed to do social justice. Experience shows that SCs are only vulnerable communities that face social exclusion while accessing water, forest and land resources because of their social identity.

The position in the pre-independent era has not changed much in the post -independent phase as the post-independent laws have not resolved the issues of conflict among communities over the resources and especially the issues of SC communities have not been addressed systematically in resource governance policies. Currently, the most growing

challenge is low income of full time farmers in agriculture as well as full time employment of agricultural workers with low wage without social security benefits. The available size of holding is not economically viable for a farmer's family to sustain with their current income from agriculture. Now, there will be an increase in contract farming by large farmers and it will be very challenging for small farmers to survive as a result of which they have to either lease out or sell off their small piece of land to new contract farmers. This will further increase loss of agricultural land among SCs.

The current trend is the SC households in rural areas are migrating to urban locations and outside the State in search of livelihood aiming for a socially decent living. It is impacting the State's agriculture production and having ramifications over the social-political and socio-economic life. (manasbbsr15@gmail.com)



# Bakul gets Most Innovative Library Award

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Much to the delight of book lovers in Odisha, the Bhubaneswar-based Bakul Foundation was presented the Most Innovative Library Award category in the 5th edition of the India Reading Olympiad held in Hyderabad recently.

It was the only organisation or individual that was shortlisted in categories of "Best NGO" and "Most Innovative Library" and won the "Most Innovative



Library" award for its innovations in promoting reading.

The jury was impressed with Bakul's innovations such as unmanned libraries in

refrigerator at Ekamra Haat, tree library in Forest Park and a library in an old discarded bus in the parking area of Kalabhoomi in Bhubaneswar.

Bakul Foundation founder Sujit Mahapatra and two of its volunteers Nilanjana Das and Debajyoti Baij received the award. The India Reading Olympiad, instituted by the Food 4 Thought Foundation, recognises the efforts of individuals and organisations to promote reading in India. The awards are given in 14 different categories.

## TPSODL GM arrested in DA case

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Vigilance police on Thursday arrested and forwarded to court Pramod Kumar Choudhury, General Manager (GM), Electrical, South Co, Brahmapur, presently Senior GM, TPSODL corporate office, Courtpeta in Brahmapur, for possession of disproportionate assets, which he could not account for satisfactorily.

The anti-graft agency during raids found Choudhury in the poseesion of three multi-storied buildings , a farm house worth Rs 1.05 crore,

nine plots in and around Chhatrapur, bank and insurance deposits worth Rs 36 lakh, cash of Rs 67,000, gold and silver jewellery worth Rs 13 lakh, one three-wheeler, one four -wheeler and three two-wheelers

After thorough search, inventory and further inquiry, the income, expenditure and assets of Choudhury were calculated and he was found in possession of disproportionate assets which is 111% higher than his known sources of income. Further investigation of the case was in progress.

## INBRIEF

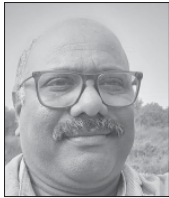
### VIKRAM DEB COLLEGE NOW AFFILIATED UNIVERSITY

Bhubaneswar: Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday approved up-gradation of the Vikram Deb Autonomous College in Jeypore, Koraput to an affiliated university. The CM is scheduled to attend the platinum jubilee celebrations of the educational institution on Friday. Earlier, the college was an autonomous one of the Berhampur University. It was established in 1947 by Vikram Deo Verma, erstwhile king of Jeypore. It got its autonomous institution status in 2004.



### NOTHING FOR INTER-STATE BORDER ISSUE IN UNION BUDGET

Bhubaneswar: There are border disputes between many States of the country such as Haryana-Himachal Pradesh, Assam-Meghalaya, Odisha-Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra-Karnataka, but there is no provision in the Union Budget 23-24 for a 'Border Security Parishad', said president of the Mancheswar unit of Utkal Sammilani advocate Dillip Dashsharma in a Press release. He said that though the Sammilani has demanded time and again for formation of such a Parishad before the Union Government, nothing has happened so far.



### UNION BUDGET: TOWARD A VIBRANT ECONOMY

Bhubaneswar: DSBM Principal Dr DN Mishra has commented, "The Union Budget 2023-24 is a growth-oriented one in the Indian economy that will empower farmers, students, MSME entrepreneurs, rural communities and senior citizens in a phased manner. The need-based structural reforms in both direct and indirect taxes would power corporate houses and salaried persons. Huge capital investment outlays such as infrastructure and support to the State Governments regarding 50-year interest-free loans, Rs 2.40 lakh crore to Railways and urban infrastructure development fund would have multifold benefits which would supplement a vibrant Indian economy."



### BHAGABATI PANIGRAHI BIRTH ANNIV HELD

Cuttack: A prayer meet was organised by the Smt. Nandini Satpathy Memorial Trust (SNSMT) here on Wednesday to mark the 115th birth anniversary of legendary leader Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi. SNSMT chairman Suparno Satpathy chaired the meeting. Several noted personalities from the literary world, cinema, defence forces, judiciary, civil servants and social activism attended it on online mode. Chief Historian, Freedom Struggle Museums (Govt. of India), Prof Kapil Kumar spoke on Panigrahi.



### SHARMA NEW NALCO DIRECTOR (PRODUCTION)

Bhubaneswar: Pankaj Kumar Sharma has taken over as the Director (Production) of the National Aluminium Company Limited (Nalco). Earlier, Sharma was serving in the NMDC as Chief General Manager at Global Exploration Centre, Raipur and was also shouldering the responsibility as CEO of the JV Company NMDC-CMDC Ltd and CEO of Bastar Railway Pvt Ltd, Raipur.



### PPA RECORD IN RAKES-HANDLING

Paradip: Team PPA (Paradip Port Authority) bettered its record of highest number of single-day rakes-handling as it clocked the highest-ever 52-rake unloading on Wednesday. The previous best was 51 achieved on January 21, 2023. In another development, vessel MV ERATO with highest-ever import parcel load of 1,48,521 MT of coal at 16.0m-draft berthed at KICTPPL Terminal on Thursday.



### PANI PANCHAYAT FORTNIGHT IN JAGATSinghpur

Jagatsinghpur: The yearly Pani Panchayat Fortnight kick-started in a function here with Government Chief Whip Prashant Muduli flagging off the Pani Panchayat chariot on Wednesday. Muduli said the fortnight aims to create awareness among the stakeholders of water resources regarding water management and its proper distribution among farmers and other water users. With the implementation of the Pani Panchayat scheme in the State, a massive change has occurred in water management while the agro production level has also increased.



### MANCH CLEANS PANCHALINGESWAR SHRINE

Baleswar: The members of the Nagarik Manch, Gopalpur, Baleswar conducted their 434th weekly programme under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on Sunday. About 67 members of the organisation under the leadership of Sudarsan Mohapatra cleaned the bus stand and picnic spots of Panchalingeswar Saiva pitha from 8.30 to 11.30 am. Later, an awareness meeting was held presided over by Kamala Kanta Das. Girish Dash, Aviram Sahu, Harish Jena, Barendra Sethi, Satya Manjari Dash, Premalata Maharana, Biswambar Dash and Maheswar Senapati were present.



### SACHIN WINS GOLD IN STATE KARATE CHAMPIONSHIP

Koraput: Sachin Biswakarma from the Utkal Karate School Semiliguda branch represented Koraput district in 34th under 21 years senior State Karate championship at Utkal Karate School, Bhubaneswar organised by the Orissa State Karate Do Association. Sachin won gold medal in Kumite (fight) in under 21 years category and silver medal in senior male category. Now, he will represent Odisha in national championship at Dehradun on Feb 17. OSKA president Dr Hari Prasad Pattanayak, State Karate Do Association secretary Dr Gouri Mohanty, Koraput District Karate Association secretary Durga Prasad Rath, Utkal Karate School Semiliguda's Manoj Patnaik and coach Rajendra Samal conveyed him best wishes.



## In Baleswar Rs 8L brown sugar seized; 2 women held



PNS ■ BALESWAR

The Sahadevkhunta police in Baleswar district conducted raids and arrested two women on the charge of drug peddling following seizure of 81 grams of brown sugar from their possession. The estimated market value of the seized contraband was around Rs 8 lakh.

Baleswar district SP Sagarika Nath said that after ascertaining that the two women were involved in illegal narcotics trade the cops were tracking their activities and movements.

However, getting reliable intelligence inputs their residential houses were raided in Masjidgali of Aradbazar by a police team and the contraband was seized from their possession.

Earlier, on January 24, the police had seized 17.2 gram of brown sugar from Aradbazar and arrested a 65-year -old woman, a habitual offender, in this connection, Nath said.

Notably, Aradbazar under the Sahadevkhunta PS has turned into a drug distribution hub and several women are involved in the trading of narcotics.

## In Malkangiri 2 minor girls fall into water-filled pit, die

PNS ■ MALKANGIRI

Two little girls drowned in a water-filled pit at Dhepa Sahi under Chittrakonda GP in Malkangiri district on Thursday morning. They were identified as Subhadra Kamhar (4) and Sumee Janam (3).

The kids were playing on the village road when they slipped into the pit. Though they were rescued and rushed to the Sub-Divisional Hospital at Chittrakonda, doctors there

declared them brought dead.

Meanwhile, locals have blamed the contractor, who had dug the pit to conserve water for road construction, for the kids' death. They alleged that the pit, which had been dug during road construction to hold water, was not filled up after completion of the work. The contractor was responsible for the incident. Villagers have demanded adequate compensation for family of the two girls.

## Assistance to NSKY beneficiaries in JSpur



PNS ■ JAGATSinghpur

Odisha Building and Other Construction Workers' Welfare Board Chairman Shreemayee Mishra distributed different social security benefits and pecuniary assistance to the beneficiaries coming under

the Nirman Shramika Kalyana Yojana (NSKY) in a function in the District Labour Office here on Wednesday.

Mishra extolled the State Government's pro-labour measures under the NSKY, which provides the registered labour class social security

assistances such as death benefits, medical expenses, maternity benefits, loans and advances for construction of houses, education and skill up-gradation assistance, marriage assistance, pension and assistance for funeral expenses.

The meeting was attended

by Government Chief Whip Prashanta Muduli and the Zilla Parishad President. District Labour Officer Baba Ananda Ranjan Das informed that financial assistance to the tune of Rs 1 crore 5 lakh 45,000 has been distributed to 284 beneficiaries under the NSKY scheme in the district.

## Elephant carcass found; tusks stolen

PNS ■ ATHAGARH

The carcass of a young tusker was retrieved about five days ago from Hitinda jungle under the Badamba Range of Athagarh Division on Wednesday.

A search operation had been launched by the Forest Department on a tip-off from a few wood cutters of the locality about the death of the tusker.

The autopsy of the tusker carcass was done in presence of Athagarh DFO JD Pati, ACF Ghanashyam Muduli, Badamba Range Officer Subrat Behera, other forest officials, besides Block Veterinary Officer of Badamba and veterinary surgeon of Satkosia Wildlife Division on Wednesday.



Both the tusks of the pachyderm had been taken away by the poachers, informed Badamba RO Behera.

As regular patrolling not

done in the jungle due to staff crunch, the poachers by watching the movements of the patrolling team killed the tuskers and stolen its precious tusks, admitted

Behera.

Athagarh DFO doesn't respond to any query of the mediapersons. ACF Muduli denied commenting on the matter.

# The fateful meeting of Savarkar and Netaji Subhas

Even during the post-Independence Nehru era, both Savarkar, the prophet of India's armed revolution, and Subhas Bose who had carried it to its logical end, had fallen from official grace and were deprived of their due, their contributions being overshadowed by an euphoria of Gandhian ahimsa propagated by the Congress. Secret meetings of these two great revolutionaries, particularly the one of June 22, 1940, had remained a hush-hush affair. Referring to that, Savarkar's biographer Dhananjay Keer wrote, "In the course of discussion, Savarkar, the Indian Mazzini, inspired Subhas Bose, the Indian Garibaldi, with the idea of an armed revolution from outside in order to intensify the struggle for freedom."

Only in 1952 when Savarkar dissolved his revolutionary organisation, Abhinav Bharat Society in a meeting, Bose's portrait was reverentially put on the chair of the chief guest,



DR GOUR MOHANTY

and there in his speech, Savarkar revealed the details of his meeting with Bose on that fateful day. Savarkar's narration was on following lines.

"I asked Subhasbabu the main question, tell me one thing; in the current World War, what is a person like you doing in India and leading petty movements like bringing down the statues in Calcutta and getting arrested and going to prison?"

That was relating to Subhas Bose agitating for removal of the Holwell monument in Calcutta, a symbol of alleged savagery of Sirajuddwala, the erstwhile Nawab of Bengal in a bid to woo Muslims. If a spirited leader like him courts imprisonment, said an anguished Savarkar, then that was exactly what the Government desired. Savarkar reminded of their secret meeting when Bose was the Congress president. "With the same confidence, I wish to make a sincere request to you. When I am propagating militarisation, you had been opposing it just like moderate Congress leaders who believe that I am providing manpower to the British. But the fact is I am insisting on Hindus being recruited in the army so that in future these warfare-trained men can revolt against the British and start an armed revolution to gain freedom from the British Rule. During the First World War, we revolutionaries had reached an

understanding with Germany against the British," Savarkar told Bose about all the efforts they had taken during the First World War.

Then, Savarkar produced a secret letter of Rash Behari Bose from Japan brought to him by Buddhist monks. From the letter, it was evident that Japan was going to blow the war horns within a year. "If that happens, we would get the golden opportunity to attack the British from outside with the help of the German and Japanese weapons and thousands of trained Indian soldiers," suggested Savarkar. It would be unfortunate if at such a crucial hour a brilliant leader like him courts arrest. "You too must escape like Rash Behari and other revolutionaries and openly accept leadership of the Indian army against the British. As soon as Japan enters war, with whatever possible means either through the Bay of Bengal or through Burma, attack the British rule in India from the

outside," suggested the master strategist. Of the very few Indians capable of such bravery, it is you alone upon whom I have very high hopes," exhorted Savarkar.

Six months later, Netaji fled India dramatically and went ahead with the plans chalked out. He took charge of the Indian Independence League (later INA) founded by Rash Behari, who kept secretly corresponding with Savarkar.

To Savarkar's delight and surprise of others, on the June 25, 1944, Netaji's voice was heard from Singapore Radio, "When due to misguided political whims and lack of vision, all the leaders of the Congress party decreed the soldiers in the Indian Army as mercenaries, it is heartening to know that Veer Savarkar fearlessly exhorting the youth of India to enlist in the Armed Forces. These enlisted youth themselves provide us with trained men from which we draw the soldiers of our Indian National Army."

The rest is history. Even if the acknowledgement was made by the British Prime Minister Clement Attlee in conversation with Justice PB Chakravarty, the then Governor of West Bengal, that in the British decision of granting independence, Gandhiji's influence was insignificantly 'minimal'; and it was the spectre of fear created by Bose's INA and the sympathetic revolt in Indian defence that made them quit. This truth had been kept under wraps by the Nehruvian Congress. The belated recognition from the Indian Government, however, came when Prime Minister Modi on October 21, 2018 hoisted the National Flag on the Red Fort marking 75th anniversary of Netaji's Declaration of Independence and further when, with celebration of India's Amrit Mahotsav, a grand statue of Netaji was installed by him at the India Gate of capital Delhi.



# India eyes USA's predator drones to man borders

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON**

In an effort to enhance surveillance along the borders with China and Pakistan besides the strategically important Indian Ocean region, India is likely to ink with the USA a deal for 30 MQ- 9B Predator armed drones worth over three billion dollars.

"The two sides are negotiating the proposed contract for the last five years for the US-made drones and the ball is now in India's court," officials said late Wednesday in Washington. These remarks came in the backdrop of National Security Adviser

(NSA) Ajit Doval holding talks over the last two days with top US policy makers besides his counterpart Jake Sullivan.

It was believed the Predator issue also came up for discussion between the two NSAs. Doval also met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken late Wednesday and exchanged views on a wide range of global and regional issues and discussed deepening the bilateral strategic partnership.

Blinken had just arrived from a trip to the Middle East, including Israel and Egypt.

"The United States is expanding cooperation with India to address global challenges," Blinken said in a

tweet after the meeting.

"I had a good meeting with Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval today to discuss deepening our strategic partnership," Blinken tweeted.

"Both sides exchanged views on a wide range of global and regional issues of mutual interest and how to further strengthen the #India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership," the Indian Embassy here said in a tweet. Doval is leading a high-powered delegation to the US.

During the meeting between the two NSA, India and the US elevated their strategic partnership with the launch of the initiative on



Critical and Emerging Technology or iCET.

As regards the drones, the Indian Army, IAF and Navy will get ten Predators each if the deal is firmed up. The Predator is seen to be a key part of India's national security and defense needs. Officials did not elaborate

further but ruled out that there was any bureaucratic hurdle or regulatory issues involved.

"I have to take that back and check on that," Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs Jessica Lewis told reporters here when asked for the delay in the pro-

posed deal, which was announced in the summer of 2017.

During the meetings, it is believed that both sides expressed their eagerness to see that the drone deal is fast tracked. India is eager that an early decision would help it get an early delivery of MQ-98 predator armed drones that would strengthen its national security and surveillance not only in the Indian Ocean, but also along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Early in the day, Assistant Secretary of State for Political Military Affairs Lewis told reporters that the India-US defense relationship has gained pace.

"When we look at the

relationship with India and our security cooperation with India and the defense relationship with India over the past 10 years or even a little bit longer, we've really seen that grow and evolve and change...in very positive ways," Lewis said in response to a question.

"I think all the discussions (during this week's iCET dialogue) are in that context," she said, a day after the two countries embarked upon the ambitious initiative in critical and emerging technologies.

Responding to a question, the State Department official said the US is ready to help India diversify its defence needs.

Meanwhile, India and the

United States signed an agreement that would streamline the selection and funding process of research projects between scientists and engineers from the two countries.

The opportunities under the arrangement are broad and can nimbly adjust to strategic priorities and researcher interests in computer science and engineering, geosciences, math and physical sciences, engineering, and emerging technologies, the National Science Foundation (NSF), an independent agency of the US that supports fundamental research and education in all the non-medical fields of science and engineering, said on Wednesday.

## BJP lists 60 candidates for Meghalaya Assembly polls

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The BJP on Thursday announced the name of all 60 candidates for the State Assembly elections in Meghalaya.

The BJP will contest all the 60 seats in the Meghalaya Assembly for the upcoming elections in the state.

The ruling national party BJP is confident of winning the Assembly polls in Meghalaya. BJP has titled its poll campaign as M-Power Meghalaya.

In a joint press conference held here at the BJP headquarters, BJP National Secretary Rituraj Sinha stated that the people of Meghalaya are fed up with corruption and the slow pace of development in their state.

"The people are suffering due to poor rural roads, power



cuts for long hours and lack of basic facilities", added Rituraj Sinha. Sinha further added, "The central schemes are not being implemented in the state. People trust that PM Modi can give corruption-free, fast-track development".

Nominations for the elections in the state have started on 31st January and the papers can be submitted till 7th of

February.

TMC, Congress and NPP all have declared a list of all 60 candidates while UDP has announced a total number of 45 candidates including 15 from Garo Hills. Meanwhile BJP got a shot in the arm when 5 times MLA and NPP candidate from Ranikor constituency, Martin M Dango yesterday joined the party.

## India condemns attack on temples in Canada, Australia

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

India has condemned the recent acts of vandalism against some Hindu temples in Canada and Australia and urged the authorities there to bring the perpetrators to justice. While the Canada issue figured in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, an Indian origin Member of Parliament in Canada Chandra Arya raised the matter of "hate crime" in parliament there late Wednesday.

Minister of State for external affairs V Muraleedharan said in the Upper House, the safety and well-being of Indian nationals in Canada is a priority for the government. His remarks came in response to a question in the house on instances of increasing hate crime and sectarian violence against Indians in Canada.

Muraleedharan said India regularly takes up with Canada untoward incidents affecting

the Indian community and requests it to bring the perpetrators to justice after carrying out proper investigation.

"The safety and well-being of Indian nationals in Canada is a priority for the government. The Indian Mission/Consulates in Canada are constantly engaged with the Indian community, including on measures to ensure their safety and well-being," he said.

"The ministry and our Mission/Consulates in Canada regularly take up any untoward incidents related to the Indian community, with the concerned Canadian authorities and request them to ensure proper investigation, identify the perpetrators and impart justice," he said.

Muraleedharan said the ministry as well as the Indian mission and consulates in Canada have issued advisories from time to time, asking Indian nationals residing in that country to exercise due caution and remain vigilant.

Meanwhile, the condemnation regarding Canadian incidents came two days after Gouri Shankar Mandir in Brampton was vandalised with anti-India graffiti. "Hindu Canadians are deeply pained by the rising Hinduphobia in Canada," Arya said in the Canadian parliament. Calling it an "alarming trend," he called upon Canada to stop rising hate-crimes against Hindus.

Quoting a study, the MP said Hinduphobia turns into physical attack. Earlier on Tuesday, he had said, "the attack on Gouri Shankar Mandir in Brampton is the latest in attacks on Hindu temples in Canada by anti-Hindu and anti-India groups."

The Indian Consulate General in Toronto also condemned the act of vandalism at Gauri Shankar Mandir on Tuesday and said the defacing of the temple has deeply "hurt the sentiments" of the Indian community in Canada.

"We strongly condemn the



defacing of Gauri Shankar Mandir in Brampton, a symbol of Indian heritage, with anti-India graffiti. The hateful act of vandalism has deeply hurt the sentiments of the Indian community in Canada. We have raised our concerns on the matter with Canadian authorities," the Indian mission wrote in its tweet.

As regards the recent vandalism incidents by so-called Khalistani supporters in Australia, ministry of external affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said on Thursday, "we conveyed our firm rejection of

so called Khalistan referendum and politically motivated exercises. We've requested Australia to ensure safety of Indian community and do not allow use of Australian territory that'll be detrimental to integrity of India, its national security."

He also said "we strongly condemn such attacks by extremist elements and urge local authorities to punish perpetrators. We have been repeatedly taking up our concern with Australian authorities about action by elements including proscribed terrorist organisations."

## Modi's 21 trips abroad since 2019 incurred ₹22.76 crore, RS told

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

The Government on Thursday informed the Rajya Sabha that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has undertaken 21 trips abroad since 2019 and over Rs 22.76 crore was spent on these visits.

The President undertook eight trips abroad and an amount of over Rs 6.24 crore has been spent on these trips since 2019, Minister of State for External Affairs V Muraleedharan said in a written reply to a question in Rajya Sabha.

The government incurred an amount of Rs 6,24,31,424 for President's visits, an amount of Rs 22,76,76,934 for prime minister's visits and an amount of Rs 20,87,01,475 for External Affairs Minister's visits since 2019, according to the minis-



ter.

While the President undertook eight visits abroad, the Prime Minister undertook 21 trips since 2019. During this period, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar undertook 86 visits abroad.

Since 2019, the prime minister has visited Japan thrice, and the US and the UAE twice.

Among the president's visits, seven out of the eight trips were undertaken by Ram Nath Kovind, while current president Droupadi Murmu visited the UK last September.

## Left Front, Cong finalise seat-sharing in Tripura

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/AGARTALA**

The CPI(M) led Left Front and Congress on Thursday finalised their seat sharing agreement for the February 16 Assembly election in Tripura. The seat sharing was arrived at on Thursday, the last day for withdrawal of nomination papers.

Party sources said the poll understanding was deadlocked after the Left Front on January 25 announced candidates for 47 seats out of the total 60, leaving only 13 for Congress. The Congress had reacted by fielding candidates in 17 constituencies.

The deadlock was resolved on Thursday after central leaders of the two parties agreed to accept the formula of 47 seats to LF and 13 to the Congress to defeat BJP. Following it the Congress withdrew three of the 17 candidates it had declared. Another Congress candidate



had not filed his nomination papers.

"The seat sharing deal between CPI(M) and Congress for the upcoming election was finalised on Thursday, the last day of withdrawal of nominations. All the three Congress leaders, who had submitted nomination papers have withdrawn their papers according to the agreement," Pradesh Congress president Birajit Sinha told a news agency.

The CPI(M) candidates who had submitted nominations in 13 constituencies before the seat sharing agreement too withdrew their

papers, he said.

Senior CPI(M) leader Pabitra Kar said the impasse over the seat adjustment with the Congress has been "neutralised finally" through discussion. "Now we will fight the election jointly to defeat the BJP which has befooled the people and won the last elections". Sinha said both parties will campaign jointly to ensure the defeat of the BJP, which has "throttled democracy during the past five years in the state".

Asked, Kar, a CPI(M) state committee member, said it is yet to be decided whether the LF and Cong will campaign jointly but the parties' leaders and workers will help each other locally during canvassing for votes. To questions about Tipra Motha's decision to go solo, Sinha said it has not fielded any candidate against him in Kailashahar seat and CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Choudhury, who is contesting from Sabroom.

## Disabled neglected in Union Budget, says rights group

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Disability rights groups have expressed disappointment over differently-abled people being "neglected" in the Union Budget 2023-24 presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday.

The National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled (NPRD) in a statement here said that this year's budget has been no different as far as the disabled community is concerned. "In comparison to the previous year, there is merely a 1% increase. However, it needs to be underlined that the amount allotted for 2022-2023 was underutilized by Rs. 196 crore.

"It is disturbing that the allocations for the Scheme for Implementation of the (Rights of) Persons with Disabilities Act has been severely reduced by 90 crores, from Rs. 240.39 (BE) last



year to Rs. 150 crore this year, despite the mandates of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, which the government has miserably failed to implement.

"It is the woefully inadequate allocation that is in the main responsible for the failure in implementing the provisions of accessibility within a span of five years as mandated by the RPDA Act," said Muralidharan, General Secretary of the NPRD.

Sadly, even support for important autonomous bodies established by Acts of

Parliament that cater to persons with disabilities, like the National Trust and the Rehabilitation Council of India, remains the same, he noted.

Despite the devastating effects of the pandemic, the government has refused to heed the demand for free and universal health coverage for all disabled; removing the income criteria in the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana for persons with disabilities as also making a substantial increase in allocations towards mental health programmes.

## Cong seeks JPC, SC-monitored probe against Adani Group

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI**

Congress on Thursday demanded an impartial investigation under the supervision of the Supreme Court or a joint parliamentary committee to probe the charges raised in the Hindenburg report against the Adani Group. The party has also decided to protest outside the offices of LIC and SBI in all districts across the country on February 6.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge termed it as a "scam" and said the opposition parties have also called for day-to-day reporting of the joint parliamentary committee (JPC) or the SC-monitored probe into the issue concerning public money.

"Keeping public interest in mind, we want a thorough probe into the Adani issue either by a joint parliamentary committee or a Supreme Court-monitored probe. There should also be day-to-day reporting of the investigation on the issue," he told reporters.

Kharge said on behalf of like-minded opposition parties,

he demands either a JPC or an SC-monitored investigation in the manner in which government owned companies "are forced to invest in firms that have been exposed by the Hindenburg report".

He said along with him eight other opposition MPs had given notices in the Rajya Sabha for a discussion on the Adani Group crisis and investment of PSUs like Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) and State Bank of India (SBI) in the group.

"Whenever we have given a notice, it has not been accepted by the chair", the Congress leader said, noting that this is the reason all opposition parties jointly decided to raise the issue in the Upper House. That is why, we decided to raise the (Adani) issue in one voice in the House as crores of money of common people is invested in LIC, and public money in banks is being given to such companies against whom foreign agencies have come out with charges of irregularities," he said.

AICC general secretary K C Venugopal said responding to the "public sentiments and



outrage against the moves of the government", the Congress Party has decided to hold a nationwide district level protest on Monday, February 6, 2023, in front of LIC offices and SBI offices. "The government can't jeopardize the hard earned money of the people of India to profit the crony friends of the Prime Minister," Venugopal said.

He also said all the PCCs (Pradesh Congress Committees) have been requested to issue necessary instructions to the District Congress Committees (DCCs),

so that apart from senior leaders, party functionaries and workers' mobilisation from Block Congress Committees, panchayat and booth level is ensured in full measure.

"The Modi government is protecting its best friend by repeatedly adjourning Parliament and scuttling the opposition's voice. We demand a JPC and a Supreme Court-monitored probe to investigate the entire matter and the government's involvement in this massive scam," Venugopal said on Twitter.

He claimed that the LIC

has "invested a total of Rs 36,474.78 crore" in Adani Group, whereas Indian banks together have "invested nearly Rs 80,000 crore" in the same and they continue to do so even when there is allegations of stock manipulation, accounting fraud and other malfeasance.

AICC head of media and publicity department, Pawan Khera, said the Congress has raised three important demands from the Narendra Modi government.

"An impartial investigation under the Chief Justice of Supreme Court, with day-to-day reports, should be carried out, or a JPC should be formed to investigate the Hindenburg Research report in detail," he said at a press conference.

"Risky investments" by LIC, SBI and other nationalised banks in Adani Group should be discussed in Parliament and appropriate steps be taken to protect the investors, he said.

Congress leader and whip in Lok Sabha Manickam Tagore, who had given an adjournment notice in the Lower House to discuss the row, also said that the party wants a JPC probe into the

entire matter along with a discussion on the issue.

Congress MP Manish Tewari tweeted "JPC on Adani Saga" and said the party will demand that a JPC be constituted to investigate the allegations.

"It is not a question about one promoter, but about the efficacy of the entire regulatory system," he said, adding that the Congress and other political parties demand JPC on "a-la-affaire Adani".

Earlier, the Congress was supported by several other opposition parties, including DMK, TMC, SP, JD(U), Shiv Sena, CPI(M), CPI, BRS, NCP, IUML, NC, AAP, Kerala Congress and RJD in demanding the JPC probe or SC-monitored investigation into the row.

Khera said the Congress strongly underlines that when Rahul Gandhi talks about "Suit Boot Ki Sarkar", "Hum Do, Hamare Do" and now "Mitra Kaal", he is not talking about any particular industrialist, "he is talking about the murky system that Modi ji has set up for his selected friends to loot the country".

## CRPF's base reopens Tamarind trade route after 17 years



**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

The CRPF on Thursday said it has created a forward operating base (FOB), housing armed troops in one of the remotest and high-Maoist violence-affected districts of Chhattisgarh that has led to the re-opening of a Tamarind trade route after 17 years.

The strategic FOB has been created at Bedre in the Sukma district of Bastar region on the southernmost tip of the Central Indian state, along the tri-junction of Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Odisha borders.

The base has been established by the joint efforts of the 165th battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and the Chhattisgarh Police.

"This FOB will effectively help in the re-opening of the old trade route connecting the Tamarind market at Jagargunda with the nearby districts of Bijapur and Dantewada and will also choke the transit corridor that Maoists used for movement between west Bastar and south Bastar," a CRPF spokesperson said.



# Lawyers flag Gowri’s elevation as HC judge

TN lawyers write to Murmu against collegium recommendation

IAN S ■ CHENNAI

A group of 21 lawyers from Tamil Nadu has written a petition to the President Draupadi Murmu requesting her to reconsider the Supreme Court collegium recommendation of elevating advocate Victoria Gowri as Madras High Court judge.

The advocates which include seniors like R Vaigai, V Suresh and NGR Prasad have, in their petition dated January 17, stated that Victoria Gowri in her capacity as a BJP leader had made several hate speeches against minorities. The advocates said these hate speeches are available on YouTube as also in publications associated with the RSS.

The lawyers also attached a screenshot of Gowri’s tweet-



Secretary of Mahila Morcha'. Advocates, in the petition, said the screenshot was taken a few days back and that she had recently deleted her Twitter account.

The petitioners said she had made extreme comments about love-jihad and religious conversions and had accused the Roman Catholics of nefarious activities. They also said she had even said in public that Bharathanatyam should not be played during Christian songs. In the petition, the advocates said she was unfit to be made a High Court judge

due to her regressive views that were purely antithetical to the foundational constitutional values. The advocates also said that her views reflected her deep-rooted religious bigotry. The advocates also asked whether any minority belonging to the Christian or Muslim community would get justice in her bench if Gowri is made a judge.

The lawyers also flagged the Collegium’s recommendation and said recommending such a person who harbours strong antipathy towards the minority community was disturbing. It may be noted that late Justice VR Krishna Iyer had been a Minister in the Left-Front Government of Kerala before becoming a judge of the Kerala High Court and then Supreme Court.

# 15-yr-old auctioned, gangraped in Agra

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 15-year-old, who ran away from her home to live with her alleged lover, was sold off by him and then 'auctioned' and gang-raped, in Agra. The Agra police said they had arrested seven people, including three women, in connection with the case and were looking for another accused.

The police action came after the Agra unit of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) got to know about the minor’s ordeal and then took her to the area police station for lodging a first information report (FIR). Later, the girl’s statement was recorded before the CWC members in the presence of the area police station officers on January 30.

The FIR was lodged under Section 376 DA (gang-rape of minors below 16 years) of the Indian Penal Code and provisions of the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act, and the



Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. “On the basis of the statement of the victim, we first arrested her alleged lover and then made all the other arrests one by one based on information we collected during the interrogation of the arrested man.

We formed three teams for the purpose and raids were being conducted to nab one who remains unidentified so far. All the arrested people were sent to jail late on Wednesday,” said the in-charge of the area police station.

The police said victim was employed in packaging division of a meat unit in Agra along with her mother where she met the man, 22, and fell in love with him.

# Teachers’ scam: Judge agrees that Partha ‘privileged’

IAN S ■ KOLKATA

A judge of the special court of Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Thursday, during a hearing on the multi-crore teachers’ recruitment scam in West Bengal, observed that former West Bengal Education Minister and ex-Trinamool Congress secretary general Partha Chatterjee was a “privileged” person.

During the hearing in the matter, judge Arpan Kumar Chattopadhyay observed that of the seven accused in the scam presented at the court on Thursday was sitting on a bench, while two others were standing.

Besides Chatterjee, the four others sitting were former president of West Bengal Board of Secondary Education (WBBSE) Kalyanmoy Ganguly, former chairman of West Bengal School Service Commission (WBSSC) Subirish Bhattacharya, former WBSSC secretary Ashok Saha and former head of the commission’s screening committee SP Sinha. However, two mid-



dlemen arrested in connection with the scam, namely Prasanna Kumar Roy and Pradip Singh were standing in court. “Why are they standing? I understand that Partha Chatterjee is privileged. It is all right that he is sitting. But if others get an opportunity to sit, then why are the remaining two standing? This does not look good. Everyone should have equal rights,” he said.

In fact, every time while objecting to Partha Chatterjee’s bail plea, the CBI counsel had given the argument of “privileged” and “influential” theory against him. On Thursday, the bail application of Chatterjee and six others were rejected and all of them were remanded to judicial custody till February 16.

# 51 IEDs recovered in Singhbhum after blast injures three jawans

PTI ■ CHAIBASA

Fifty-one IEDs were found in a search operation in Jharkhand’s West Singhbhum district on Thursday after three para-military jawans were injured, police said.

The IEDs, planted by banned Maoists, were recovered at a forest near Meralgada village in Goukera police station area, Superintendent of Police Ashutosh Shekhar said.

A bomb disposal squad defused the explosives at the spot, he said, adding that the search operation was still underway. Three CRPF jawans of the 60th battalion were injured when Maoists triggered an IED blast at the forest around 11 am. Acting on a



tip-off that Maoist leaders have assembled at the forest, a search operation was launched by the security forces and during that time, the IED exploded. Three jawans, identified as Rakesh Pathak, BD Anal and Pankaj Yadav, were injured in the explosion, Shekhar said.

They were airlifted to a hospital in Ranchi where they were undergoing treatment, he said. The conditions of the three jawans were stated to be stable, he added.

# ‘Perfume’ IED found from J&K teacher-turned terrorist

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Jammu & Kashmir Police claimed to have recovered a perfume IED’ for the first time from the custody of a government school teacher-turned-terrorist allegedly involved in a series of IED blasts including a bus blast near Katra and the recent twin blasts at Narwal.

The school teacher turned terrorist has been identified as Mohd Arif, hailing from Reasi. According to police, he was enrolled as a teacher in the Rehbar-e-Taleem scheme and was regularised in 2016.

Addressing a press conference in Jammu, Director General of Jammu and Kashmir Police Dilbag Singh



said Arif, who was working at the behest of his Pakistan based handlers since 2019, was arrested following the investigation into the recent twin blast in Jammu’s Narwal that left nine people injured on January 21, 2023. “So far we had seen IED with explosive materials, sticky bombs and timer fitted IEDs but a new type of IED was recovered from Arif which is a Perfume IED. This IED is in a

bottle form and seems like a perfume bottle but contains explosive material,” the DGP said, adding that “since the IED is new to us, experts will see how harmful and how powerful it can be. We have not touched it so far”, DGP explained.

The Police Chief also claimed that Arif had admitted to his role in the attack on a bus carrying Vaishno Devi pilgrims in which four people were killed in May last year. He said the accused was working under the influence of a Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorist named Qasim and his uncle Qamardin, also a Reasi resident, presently operating from Pakistan.

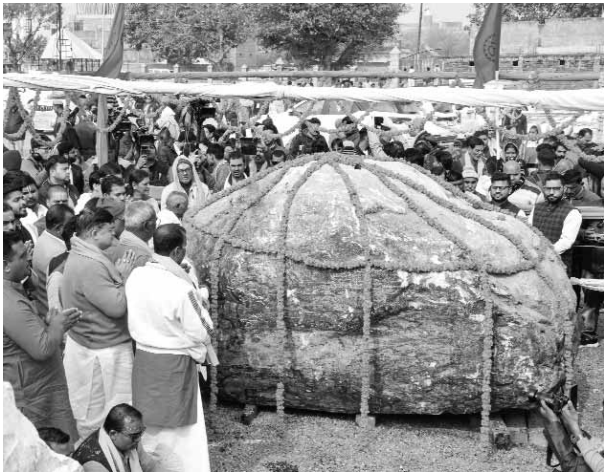
# Rare rocks for Lord Ram idol reach Ayodhya from Nepal

KAMLESH SRIVASTAVA ■ AYODHYA

There was an upsurge of faith at the banks of river Saryu in Ayodhya when the Shaligram shilas (rocks), from which the idols of Lord Ram and Sita are to be carved out, were worshipped there.

These shilas have been brought from the river Kali Gandaki in Nepal. The Shaligram shilas are considered to be very sacred and have been gifted by Nepal to India.

Mahant Ram Tapeshwar Das of Janaki Temple in Janakpur, the capital of ancient Mithila in Nepal, worshipped the Shaligram shilas before



they were handed over to the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secre-

tary Champata Rai. Deputy Prime Minister of Nepal Vimalendra Nidhi was also

present on this occasion. Prior to this, 51 Vedic acharyas worshipped the rocks along with Mahant Girish Pati Tripathi of Ayodhya Teen Kalsa Tiwari Temple.

After the worship, a meeting was organised in which all the speakers explained the relationship between Ayodhya and Janakpur.

Mahant Ram Tapeshwar Das of Janaki Mandir even raised the slogan ‘Dulha-Dulhan Sarkar ki Jai’ Mahant Ram Roshan Das, the successor of the Janaki temple, said that the Shaligram rock was considered an incarnation of Vishnu and therefore pran pratishtha of Shaligram shila was not done.

According to Hindu mythology, a Shaligram, or Shaligram shilas are typically fossils of ammonite shells from the Devonian-Cretaceous period of 400 to 66 million years ago. The fossils are considered holy by Hindus because Madhvacharya received it from Vyasadeva, also called Astamurti, and also they resemble symbols associated with God Vishnu, mainly the shankha (conch shell). It is considered that Lord Vishnu had taken the form of Shaligram shila to defeat the demon king Hayagriva.

Since then, the stone has been worshipped as a symbol of Lord Vishnu’s power and is

considered to have divine properties.

On this occasion, former deputy prime minister of Nepal said that earlier he wanted to present Dhanush to Ram Lalla in line with the legacy of Ram associated with Janakpur, but after two years of dialogue with the Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, it was decided that Nepal should present the Shaligram from which idol of Ram Lalla will be carved out.

Trust general secretary Champat Rai explained in detail the journey of the shila to Ayodhya and expressed his gratitude towards Janakpur temple, Government of Nepal and the people there.

# Novel of Tamil’s master storyteller getting translated into English

CHENNAI: Sivakami’s Vow, a Tamil classic novel, is getting translated into English and will hit bookstores across the nation on February 6. Authored by Kalki, Tamil’s master storyteller, Sivakami’s Vow is an action packed historical work that would keep the reader on tenterhooks once he/she begins reading the book.

Though there are many novelists and novels in Tamil, no one has risen to the level of Kalki (pen name of Ramaswamy Krishnamurthy 1899-1954), according to Jayashanthi, a celebrated writer of the modern genre.

The novel was first published during 1944-46 as a serial in the magazine Kalki founded by Krishnamurthy, himself a freedom fighter. Sivakamiyin Sapatham (Sivakami’s Vow), published as a book in 1948 was the gamechanger in Tamil literature, according to Jayashanthi, a former professor of Tamil in a leading college in Chennai.

Set in the 7th century Tamil social and political life, the novel has the Pallava emperor Mahendravarmam and

his son Narasimhavarman as the protagonists. Sivakami’s Vow narrates the storyline of different characters across generations, appealing to readers who like history and adventure.

It captures a young man, who trudged from a tiny Chola village to Kanchi, the great city of art and learning, hoping to discover his destiny; a bikshu, who wandered around the Pallava empire, befriending lonely souls; spies, who lurked in the shadows, and even statues of the Lord Buddha conceal secrets.

It highlights how Emperor Mahendra Pallava, connoisseur beyond compare, ruled with compassion and justice, while his son, Kumara Chakravarthy Narasimhar, fell deeply in love with the greatest dancer of the empire, Sivakami.

The novel also recounts how the fearsome Chalukyas planned an invasion, their war elephants, horses and how infantry swept towards the Pallava empire while Emperor Pulikesi eyed Kanchi as the crowning glory to his martial achievements.

# Drone show to give viewers glimpse of modern UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In order to make the Uttar Pradesh Global Investors Summit (UPGIS) a grand glitzy affair, the state administration is organising a number of cultural events, including a spectacular drone show, that will give viewers a glimpse of a modern UP.

As many as 600 drones will illuminate the entire venue (Vrindavan Yojana) to greet the delegates. As per instructions issued by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, elaborate preparations are being made to wel-

come and facilitate the guests at the tent city of Vrindavan Yojana and the drone show is part of it.

A gallery will be available for seating the guests to watch the drone display/lighting show. The drone show will be one of the highlights of the events to be organised during the summit.

Over 600 drones will be used for this event, covering the venue’s horizon with vibrant lights. In Uttar Pradesh, there have already been two occasions when drone displays have been held.

Recently, as part of the Kakori Balidan Diwas, a mega drone show was organised in Gorakhpur by the administration to pay tributes to freedom fighters involved in the 1925 Kakori train action. As many as 750 drones formed different formations over a park here.

Earlier, 500 drones were used during the ‘Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav’ programme organised in the Residency during the year 2021 in the state capital.

Inspired by the success of these two events, the state government is going to include the drone show as a signature blockbuster event in the GIS as well. For this, all the necessary works are being done by the administration.

It is anticipated that the testing process will begin soon on a fixed coordinate prior to the show. For the convenience of the participants, a separate audience gallery is being constructed at the venue from where everyone will be able to enjoy the show.

The CM has invited investors from the state, the country, and even the world for the GIS to achieve the ambitious goal of making the state a trillion-dollar economy in the next five years. Even before the main event, the UP government received investment proposals worth more than Rs 20

lakh crore. UPGIS 2023 will serve as a unique platform for business networking, knowledge sharing and strategic partnership by bringing together business leaders, political and economic dignitaries, entrepreneurs and industry partners from across the globe. This is the reason why the government is leaving no stone unturned to present this grand programme in a new format and create a distinct and modern identity of Uttar Pradesh among investors from India and abroad.

## ‘Zero emission’ golf carts to be pressed into service

**Lucknow:** ‘Zero emission’ golf carts will be used for transportation at the venue. These golf carts are battery-powered and the venue has set up charging stations for them.

This entire exercise will serve as a link in effort to give investors attending the event ‘carbon-less travel’ and ‘environment-friendly premium class travel’.

Ten golf carts are currently being used for transportation at venue, and their number may be raised, if necessary, throughout the event. **PNS**

# Newlywed woman burns husband alive

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a sensational incident in Etah, a woman who got married just eight days ago, allegedly burnt her husband alive after giving him and his children food laced with sedatives.

The deceased, identified as Dushyant Singh, was the only son of Ravipal Singh. He

was a driver attached with the Jawahar Thermal Project. He had returned from work on Wednesday night after which he had dinner and turned unconscious shortly afterwards. He was then burnt alive in a premeditated manner.

The incident took place in the Nigoh Hasanpur village of Thana Malavan area.



Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge with other Opposition parties MPs addresses the media at Vijay Chowk during the Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Thursday

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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Time to act

The Government and regulators must ensure the meltdown of Adani stocks doesn't cause more pain

Amid the war in Ukraine, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message to Russian President Vladimir Putin was: "Today's era must not be of war." With bloodbath on Dalal Street unabated, his Government must send a similar message across the political parties. The facts are horrifying. After the publication of the Hindenburg Research report, the market-cap of seven listed Adani Group companies has declined by about \$100 billion. The Adani Group had to call off its Rs 20,000-crore follow-on public offering (FPO), the largest in the country, to shield its investors from potential losses. Group chairman Gautam Adani said in a statement that "it would not be morally correct" to proceed with the FPO. In fact, the entire stock market, especially banking scrips, has suffered because of the meltdown of Adani shares. Even the excellent Budget, which has been widely hailed as pro-growth, could not lift the investors' spirits. It must be noted here that the free fall of Adani shares should not be seen as something that only its promoters and investors (institutional or retail) should be worried about; this also affects banks which have lent to the group. Furthermore, this also affects the public exchequer, for most banks in our country are in the public sector; and losses to them necessitate recapitalisation, which the taxpayer has to bear. Consider this fact: public sector banks had to be paid Rs 310,997 crore of taxpayer money for their recapitalisation in just four years, between 2016-17 and 2020-21.

Against this backdrop, the response of the political class to the crisis occasioned by the US short-seller Hindenburg's report is anything but responsible; instead of taking on the crisis head on, our politicians are trying to score brownie points. In Parliament, Opposition parties demanded a discussion on the risks Indian investors face because of the unrelenting decline of Adani shares. They also demanded an investigation by a parliamentary committee or one appointed by the Supreme Court. Both Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Rajya Sabha Chairperson Jagdeep Thakur rejected these demands, leading to pandemonium in the Houses. The Government's silence over the mayhem in the capital market is not helping anyone. The Adani Group has also failed to convince the investors. Calling Hindenburg as the "Madoffs of Manhattan" which has "no credibility or ethics" doesn't do any good to the conglomerate. Its invocation of nationalism — labeling Hindenburg's allegations as not "merely an unwarranted attack on any specific company but a calculated attack on India" and its growth story — also cut no ice. Not with the investors anyway; the Hindenburg report seems to have woken them up, for it was not secret that Adani stocks were majorly overvalued. Hindenburg's allegations of fraud and market manipulation are new though. Even if the allegations are wrong, one wonders why didn't the regulators never warned and took against overvaluation. It is time for action.

### PICTALK



Sant artist Ajay Rawat creates a sand art for the upcoming Jaisalmer Desert Festival 2023, in Pushkar

PTI

## Don't Weaken MNREGA

Allocation for MNREGA has been slashed in the Budget which would hit hard the downtrodden

While the tax slabs hogged the limelight of the Budget 2023 presented by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, one thing that has been overlooked by most is that the budget for the MNREGA has been slashed along with other social security schemes. The impact of weakening MNREGA could be really bad for the rural poor. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) is the lifeline for poor village women workers who work in the vicinity of their homes to earn their subsistence. The Finance Minister has reduced the allocation to MNREGA to Rs 60,000 crore, the lowest in the last four budgets. This year's budget allocation for the scheme has declined by 29000 crores. The scheme was introduced in 2005 by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance and is aimed at ensuring the livelihood security of households in rural areas. The demand-driven scheme guarantees 100 days of unskilled work annually for every rural household and covers all districts in the country. In fact, it has been so popular that even the World Bank took note of it and praised it. MNREGA has been ranked as the world's largest public works program by the World Bank, providing social security net to almost 15 percent of the country's population.

Besides MNREGS, the government has cut down the National Social Assistance Program to Rs 9,636.32 crore from the 2022-23 revised estimate of Rs 9,652 crore. The program provides financial assistance to the elderly, widows, and persons with disabilities in the form of social pensions. The budget for Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2, aimed at welfare of children and women, has been brought down to Rs 20,263 from the 2022-'23 revised estimate of Rs 20,554. It is rather sad that the Central Government is reducing the subsidies and also weakening the social security net which is the need of the hour, especially after the pandemic as many people who suffered have not recovered fully. MNREGA is an excellent scheme for it provides work and does not give freebies and that too in the vicinity of the beneficiaries so is convenient for the women. In 2022-23 6.49 crore households demanded work under the Scheme. Out of this, 6.48 crore households were offered employment by the government. The budget allocation to MNREGA as for other social schemes must not be cut, it would hit the poorest of the poor. The Govt must revise its budget allocation to strengthen the social security.

# Budget booster for tech-economy

The Finance Minister has done well to give a fillip to the tech-based skills in the budget to give a leg up to the economy

This 'techade' (decade of technology) will serve as an important period to close the gaps in digitization and accelerate growth in the nation's technology sector. 2023 has been identified as a crucial year for the elimination of the digital divide, as stated in The NITI Aayog 'India @ 75' report, and aggressively strengthening digital literacy, specifically among rural demographics and marginalized communities, is of the essence. The Union Budget 2023-24, steered by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, by placing emphasis on both inclusive development and youth empowerment among its key economic priorities, sets a positive tone for the way forward.

Several progressive initiatives were announced during the Budget presentation, including the expansion of the Skill India Digital platform and its linking with employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, the launch of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 to skill lakhs of youth in modern technologies like AI, robotics, and soft skills would enable future-ready talent, especially from Tier 2 and 3 cities at scale and foster greater employment opportunities. Entrepreneurship has been given a major fillip through the introduction of collectives formed to support entrepreneurs with product design, branding, product marketing, and market expansion. The efforts of mobilizing resources and enabling entrepreneurship opportunities for rural women will be instrumental in facilitating better livelihoods for marginalized communities. As the technology and skilling ecosystem joins the nation in formulating its vision for 'India @ 100', considering current systemic realities and strategizing solutions to bridge crucial gaps is the need of the hour. The NITI Aayog, in its 'India @ 75' report, identifies a few of these challenges that need to be overcome in order to support the empowerment of marginalized demographics: a) limited industry knowledge and immersion among graduates, b)



little to no integration of the informal sector into the skill economy, c) limited provisions to align skilling certifications with international parameters, d) limited avenues for an apprenticeship, e) little to no inclusion of vocational training as a part of the educational curriculum. Achieving inclusive digitization, catalyzing rural women's empowerment, and accelerating the pace of skilling would call for a comprehensive strategy rooted in an understanding of the complex issues facing each priority area.

Social stigma prevalent in sections of rural society prevents women from gaining access to mobile devices, let alone having access to the internet. Research conducted by J-PAL in Niger reveals that families with women members having access to mobile devices and the internet contributed greatly to their agency in family decisions. Empowering women through access to technology and quality entrepreneurship opportunities has a ripple effect on the local community and the economy at large. Lessons from grassroots initiatives also reveal that connecting digitization and skilling initiatives to a strong objective had a higher degree of success among women beneficiaries. Rural women, for instance, had a greater chance of acquainting



SEVERAL PROGRESSIVE INITIATIVES WERE ANNOUNCED DURING THE BUDGET PRESENTATION, INCLUDING THE EXPANSION OF THE SKILL INDIA DIGITAL PLATFORM

themselves with the internet in order to support their children's education. Encouraging the use of mobile technology among women and sustaining a well-knit entrepreneurial ecosystem with provisions for knowledge sharing can help counter social stigma and restrictive gender ideas.

The Budget announcements tailored to increase the knowledge base of the rural youth can be further complemented by incentives for apprenticeship and mentorship programs. The Union Budget for the previous financial year laid the foundation for digital skilling through initiatives such as the DESH Stack e-portal and the launch of several online courses aimed at increasing employability among the youth and equipping them with the tools to build a stable livelihood. Aligning the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) with the evolving requirements of multiple industries was also a priority. Apprenticeship programs incentivize rural youth to gain employment experience in close proximity to their place of stay and subsequently enrich their community's skill base. Mentorship programs can help them be aware of the career opportunities awaiting them and give them access to hands-on training that will enhance their growth prospects. More

rural youth can be included in the skilled talent pool of India by way of these initiatives.

Acknowledging and understanding the heterogeneity of rural demographics is the first step toward designing, strategizing, and deploying solutions. Placing the user at the center of any intervention and facilitating its seamless integration into their routines are crucial to their success. In a similar vein, programs such as Aspirational Districts and the newly announced Aspirational Blocks Programme can efficiently close the key infrastructure and knowledge gaps in rural regions. Maintaining the momentum of digital skilling drives and expanding its ambit to demographics that have little to no access to the internet or cell phones will remain a key priority for 2023 and the years to come. With the appropriate Budgetary push both at Union and State levels, many of the challenges that hamper the expansion of upskilling programs can be effectively addressed. All round-stakeholder participation will be required to support the budgetary initiatives and make inclusive digitization a reality.

(The writer is CEO NASSCOM Foundation, a social development sector professional. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### DON'T FORGET THE DOWNTRODDEN

Sir — A much popular veteran Bollywood superstar had tweeted with much pleasure that the "whole country" will go to sleep "peacefully" at night from now (following the attainment of that statistical jugglery named "Century of Centuries" by a certain cricketing "God")! That means the poorest of poor dominating the landscape of India were possessing only one aspiration in life — "When that elusive 100th ton would come"! Now that it has come, we can afford to "enjoy" a "sound sleep" or "sweet dreams" every night! What a naked display of inhuman indifference to the plight of millions of Indians who have to go to bed with deadly pangs of hunger in their stomachs night after night! Or might be in the eyes of class-conscious Indians, the marginalised poor simply don't exist or just do not matter at all! After all the country is the "zamindari" of privileged class only; no wonder why "subsidies" to poor are so frowned upon, but tax breaks concessions free medical/travel facilities for the industrialists corporate honchos and high salaried class are always welcomed with open arms in the name of "incentives"! In this pathetic inhumanitarian perspective, it is natural that the trumpet of "Each and every Indian today stands at the summit of self-confidence" would be blown in regular intervals!

When millions are at their wits' end how to survive the day, procure health care with uncountable children getting brutally exploited in labour market (not to speak of bonded labours) and adults compelled to leave for civil war-torn Middle East or Africa to toil in slave-like conditions; how heartlessly can an image of an exclusive well-fed much-nourished India being blatantly projected either to sweep the scars of the society under "patriotic" carpet or to simply convey that non-privileged Indians do not matter at all in "national consciousness"! Nothing can be more heartless than such a mindset!

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

## India on top of the world



India is on top of the world, won the 3rd T20 versus New Zealand by a big margin of 168 runs. It won the series hands down 2-1. It fell short of just 5 runs to equal the world record

### SAVE TREES, SAVE LIFE

Sir — The Tree is a big creature of nature, it is very beneficial thing for entire world, it purifies the earth from pollution and gives fresh air, most important thing is it gives shade, fruits and food for Animals, its wood have many benefits too, people make different furniture. In India the government forbids people to cut down the tree, but many people do cut down and take their wood for burning and making food, as a result the air has been polluted. If the air is polluted how can we survive?

That is why many of the campaigns to save trees are launched. Your planet needs you, unite to combat, climate change. Pure air is nothing but life. Save forest Save wildlife. Save trees!

Sufyan Nazeer Al Qasbi | Bijnor

### THE MALES DOMINATE THE JOBS

Sir — The overall job scenario both in terms of nature and duration of contracts is strongly tilted in favour of males as females often tend to lose job on account of family compulsions, night shifts and other economic constraints that several surveys and studies have clearly demonstrated. Enrollment must increase in S.T. E.M. Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics for women folk so as to make it more representative and economically viable. The All India

margin of Romania. The highest T20 cricket's victory margin records are: 173 runs margin of Romania (on 29th Aug 2019) and 172 runs margin of Sri Lanka (vs Kenya in Sept 2007). India scored a big score of 234 for 4 in the 3rd T20. Indian bowlers milled NZ to a paltry 66 off 12.1 overs. All cricket fans are waiting for the Australian team's visit to India, for 4 test matches series (9th Feb to 13th Mar 2023) and 3 ODIs series (17th, 19th and 22nd Mar 2023). So long test series of 4 matches, after a long time for India and cricket fans.

PV Srinivas Nivriti | Secunderabad

Survey on Higher Education report (A.I.S.H.E.) 2020 21 report too shows some worrisome trends, like more man opting for sciences and less women folk taking science stream which must change for the better irrespective of the fact that women enrolment has increased manifold from 18.8 million in 2019 .20 to 20.1 million in 2020.21.

However, women are under represented in engineering and management courses i.e. less than 30% and 40% respectively. The U.G.C has come up with a plan to conduct Social outreach programmes by involving parents special interactive sessions. So, harnessing the true potential of skilled female labour force will not just launch the country on the path of development but also reduce gender disparity apart from making them economically secure. An enabling environment in work places by providing women mentors can be encouraging. The educationalists and policymakers have their task cut out. Let us not forget women are fifty percent of humanity and they deserve a better deal. Give them a better deal and the world would become a better place.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Almora

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## SOUNDBITE

Today's budget is against the poor people. It's anti-people. That's why I condemn this budget. There is no light in this budget, it's only darkness. It contains lies, bluff. It's to show people something and misinformation because of upcoming elections.

West Bengal chief minister

— Mamata Banerjee



The activists who carried out the demonstrations act as "useful idiots" for foreign powers who want to inflict harm on the Scandinavian country as it seeks to join NATO.

Swedish Prime Minister

— Ulf Kristersson

I love my wife. I love my family. I'm in love with life. I think that is what reaches the audience.



Actor

— Vicky Kaushal

It's a slap on our cricket system that we are not able to find a high-profile full-time coach.



Former Pakistan captain

— Misbah-ul-Haq/Misbah

MitthKaal' Budget has: No vision to create Jobs No plan to tackle Mehngai No intent to stem Inequality. This Budget proves Govt has No roadmap to build India's future.



Congress leader


— Rahul Gandhi



FIRST COLUMN

ECO-POLITICAL SURVEY HAS EYES ON '24 POLLS


It highlights the reforms regime brought in by current Govt



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The Economic Survey is a policy document that gives a diagnostic report regarding the state of the economy and growth prospects. The survey for 2022-2023 (based on nearly nine months of economic data for the fiscal) is far more insightful on the tone of the economic political narrative, which is going to play out in the run up to the mother of all democratic processes, the national general elections of 2024.

In a somewhat break from past Economic Surveys, this year's economic survey seems more of a political document, highlighting through charts, graphs and illustrations, the economic welfare agenda of the current government starting from 2014. It was expected to be in the budget, but with the economic survey grabbing many of those, easy to grasp charts, suggests that the Modi government is really gearing up for pushing India to be the third largest world economy in about a decade's time (caveat that is two new governments, one or both of which is unlikely to have Mr Modi leading the country from the front).



The Economic Survey highlights the reforms regime brought in by the current government immediately after it came to power, which were aimed at enhancing the overall structural efficiency and fundamentals of the economy. The finance ministry's press statement read: "With an underlying emphasis on improving the ease of living and doing business, the reforms after 2014 were based on the broad principles of creating public goods, adopting trust-based governance, co-partnering with the private sector for development, and improving agricultural productivity."

Some examples of those reforms included improved fiscal transparency and realistic revenue assumptions in the budget bringing down extra budgetary borrowings for the government to nearly nil for fiscal year 2023. The major reforms from previous budget documents highlighted in the economic survey included reduction in non-plan expenditure in the budget, thereby, efficiently streamlining government's expenditures towards targeted sectors, while sticking to a fiscal discipline.

The merger of the railways budget with the main budget since fiscal year 2018 helped the government have better management of finances and allowed the finance ministry to focus more money on the integrated infrastructure divisions of railways, roads and ports more efficiently. The Economic Survey did not mention that this smart move brought an efficiency in railways governance, which prior 2014, has been used as a separate vote bank, since some of the most visible and sought after government jobs are in the railways. Finally, the Economic survey does highlight that advancing the general budget to February 1 gives an additional month for all departments of the government for better planning and implementation of the budget schemes.

It is important to understand that the Economic survey presents a macro narrative for the political economy. This document has tons of easily digestible data. The Survey for the first time includes chapters on social sector and climate change and environment, two themes very close to the Prime Minister's inclusive sustainable economic growth agenda. The preface reads, "These chapters highlight how the use of technology has enhanced the quality of life for citizens to ensure the reach of social sector schemes to intended beneficiaries, especially during the pandemic. The transformations in the lives of the citizens happening through the Aspirational Districts Programme, Direct Benefit Transfers, use of Aadhaar and various initiatives in the education, health and basic infrastructure availability are highlights of the chapter."

Clearly the economic report card of Modi government's two consecutive terms is out, and much to the innovative thinking of the current bunch of policy makers, who have pushed it out even before the opposition parties have asked for it. This sets the agenda and helps the political class to take the lead in the perception game. It is up to the various political players within the ruling dispensation to take advantage.

*(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)*

# Bringing back OPS may be catastrophic

The new pension scheme or NPS has addressed the inequity issue by providing a platform to the private sector

Even as the finances of states were beginning to look better as reflected in decline in the ratio of state government debt to GDP from 31.2 per cent during 2021-22 to 29.5 per cent during 2022-23—as per the budgetary estimate (BE)—the political brass in different states have made populist announcements which don't augur well for the future. One of these relates to the revival of the old pension scheme (OPS).

Making a statement in the Lok Sabha, the Minister of State for Finance Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad said, "The state governments of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, and Jharkhand have informed the Central government about their decisions to restart OPS for their respective employees."

The Congress government in Himachal Pradesh has also announced restoration of OPS. In view of impending elections in nine state assemblies during 2023 and almost all non-BJP parties more than willing to please voters, more and more states are expected to join the bandwagon. As for the central government employees, although for now, Karad informed Parliament that the Centre has no proposal to resurrect the OPS.

At the outset, let us understand pension. A pension provides a person with monthly income when he is old and hence not productive enough to be able to earn. The increase in life expectancy and rise in the cost of living further reinforces the need for assured monthly income for a decent and dignified life in old age.

Under the OPS, retired employees received 50 per cent of their last drawn salary as monthly pension. As on date, the minimum pension paid by the government is Rs 9,000 a month, and the maximum is Rs 62,500 (50 per cent of the highest pay in the Central government, which is Rs 125,000 a month).

Just as the government offers its employees an adjustment in dearness allowance or DA - calculated as a percentage of the basic salary - to offset increase in the cost of living, the monthly payouts of pensioners also increases. Since, the DA hikes are announced twice a year, generally in January and July, a retiree also gets hikes in pension. For instance, with a 4 per cent increase in DA, a pensioner eligible for Rs 62,500 would get a monthly pension of Rs 65,000.

A government employee under OPS could not have gotten anything better. He was entitled to a decent 'pre-determined' monthly amount; the pension was fully protected against inflation and got it as long as he lived. After death, his wife gets the same amount for seven years and thereafter the family pension being around 60 per cent of this till she is alive.

However, from the perspective of the government, the arrangement could not have been worse. Given the architecture of the scheme, there was an inherent tendency of pension liabilities to balloon due



AS ON OCTOBER 31, 2022, APART FROM AROUND 8,200,000 NPS SUBSCRIBERS IN THE GOVERNMENT (STATES 5,900,000 AND CENTRE 2,300,000), THE CORPORATE SECTOR HAD ABOUT 1,600,000 SUBSCRIBERS, AND THE UNORGANISED SECTOR 2,550,000

*(The author is a policy analyst)*



to addition to the pensioners' club every year, higher salaries of those joining, inflation indexation, increased longevity and so on. The proof of pudding is in the eating.

In 1990-91, the Centre's pension bill was Rs 3,272 crore. By 2020-21, it had jumped 58 times to Rs 190,886 crore. The outgo for all states put together shot up 125 times from Rs 3,131 crore in 1990-91 to Rs 386,001 crore in 2020-21. Overall, pension payments by states accounted for a quarter of their own tax revenues.

For some states, pension payments took away a much higher share of their own tax revenue. For Himachal Pradesh, it was 80 per cent whereas for Punjab and Rajasthan, it was 35 per cent and 30 per cent respectively.

After payment of wages and salaries to the serving employees and other routine expenses, hardly any money was left with these states for meeting development and welfare expenses.

Prudent financial management required that every year, the government set aside capital which together with return accruing thereon would create a growing corpus sufficient to pay for the pension liabilities. This would have provided for a sustainable basis for discharging these liabilities without causing any stress on the budget. In short, there was a need for funding the pension liability. That was never done.

Instead, both the Centre and states have followed 'pay-as-you-go' impacting their budgets in a totally uncontrolled manner, besides making the present generation of taxpayers to bear the continuously rising burden of pensioners. Moreover, given the persistent shortfall in tax revenue, they

were forced to borrow more and more thereby passing on the burden to future generations of taxpayers as well.

According to an expert committee (2000) under S A Dave, a former chairman of SEBI, on Old Age Social and Income Security (OASIS), just 3.4 crore people, or less than 11 per cent of the estimated total working population of 31.4 crore (as per 1991 census), had some post-retirement income security such as government pension, Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), or the Employee Pension Scheme (EPS).

The rest of the workforce had no means of post-retirement economic security. In this backdrop, using a disproportionate share of state resources for benefiting a tiny section of the working population was iniquitous and unconscionable.

To address the above concerns, a new pension scheme (NPS) was introduced for government employees joining service from January 1, 2004. NPS is a contributory pension scheme under which employees contribute 10 per cent of their salary (Basic + Dearness Allowance). The government contributes 14 per cent towards the employees' NPS accounts.

NPS is free from all the malaises afflicting OPS. It offers a self-financing and fully funded arrangement for discharging pension liabilities in which the state knows for certain 'how much it has to contribute'. There won't be any major stress on the budget even as the employee gets a good pension depending on the amount of contribution made, the age of joining, type of investment, and the income accruing from that investment.

Under this scheme, the pensioner enjoys a lot of flexibility; he

can increase the pension amount by asking his fund manager to invest in say a 'growth fund' wherein 50 per cent of the corpus can be put in equity which is capable of generating better returns than investment in corporate bonds or government securities.

The government has made NPS more attractive by offering fiscal incentives such as deduction up to 10 per cent of salary (basic+ DA) within overall ceiling of Rs.150,000/- u/s 80C in respect of employee contribution; deduction up to Rs.50,000 u/s 80 CCD(1B) for additional (albeit voluntary) contribution and deduction up to 10 per cent of salary u/s 80 CCD(2) towards employer contribution (this is over and above the limits u/s 80C).

The NPS has also addressed the inequity issue by providing a platform to the private sector, including the unorganised sector to secure pension post-retirement.

As on October 31, 2022, apart from around 8,200,000 subscribers in the government (states 5,900,000 and Centre 2,300,000), the corporate sector had about 1,600,000 subscribers, and the unorganised sector 2,550,000. In addition, there were around 4,200,000 subscribers under the NPS Swavalamban scheme—designed especially for the poor and the under-privileged citizens.

Having made good progress in providing a sustainable basis for financing pension liabilities under NPS, for states now to go back to OPS is a retrograde move. This must be avoided or else India could plunge into fiscal catastrophe, come 2034 when they will have to start paying pension to the first lot of those who came under NPS in 2004 and now being shifted to OPS.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THE INDIAN RAILWAYS CAPITAL OUTLAY HAS BEEN SET AT 2.40 LAKH CRORE, HIGHEST EVER; 9X OF WHAT WAS IN 2013.

— FINANCE MINISTER NIRMALA SITHARAMAN





IS THIS FOR THE EMPLOYEES OR FOR NEW RECRUITMENTS OR IS IT JUST FOR THE MODERNISATION OF RAILWAYS BEFORE SELLING IT TO PRIVATE COMPANIES.

— CHHATTISGARH CHIEF MINISTER BHUPESH BAGHEL

# Cyber security, technical education on the horizon

The Indian education sector will see a surge in courses such as risk assessment, financial fraud protection, and system auditing



ABHISHEK MITRA

The education sector in India is sprouting with both elaborate masterclasses and crash courses to facilitate technical education among the youth and cope with its trend simultaneously. Cyber security employment will be in a great demand in future if the

(The author is CEO and Founder of Indian Cyber Security Solutions)

current trend continues.

India's cyber security colleges have been offering a variety of courses that are relevant to the shifting conditions. Given India's massive demand for cyber security specialists, anyone interested in studying a cyber-security education will benefit in the long run. Technical education promotes manpower development and equips persons with skills that will enable them to create, develop and establish industries in various areas.

There are several reasons contributing to the buzz across the education sector pertaining to cyber security and technical education. One of the major factors that are causing Indian students to be more inclined towards cyber security and technical education-based

courses is a global wave of demand for skilled resources in these disciplines. This upsurge in demand has come with the advent of the technology-based revolution which positively impacted all sectors from government to banking. This trend is also evergreen by design, as the new frontier of industries will require a knowledge and tech-skill-based workforce. Owing to this, students are demanding more related courses. Also, there is a demand for a sustainable career, which is future shock proof. We are all familiar with the buzz of how growing advancements in the field of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and automation is causing the eradication of the human labour force.

However, this threat is not

there in the domain of cyber security and other technical-based jobs because it requires constant human intervention and check-ups along with building new frameworks and firewalls; this as of today is not efficiently possible by AI or ML alone. As a result, high schools, community colleges, policymakers, and families are trying to prepare children for a rapidly changing future, and stakeholders across the Indian education ecosystem are competing to provide them with better technical education.

The enormous demand for a competent cyber security savvy and technically sound workforce have arisen across a variety of different sectors as a result of how internet and software integration has affected all industries, sectors, and

sub-sectors, bringing about a fundamental change in the way things are done. Financial institutions, law businesses, real estate companies, stock brokerage firms, insurance companies, and many more are examples of the range and amount of demand from which students can choose.

The government realised the significance of technical courses and how they can contribute to the nation's society and economy. Multi-disciplinarity and a holistic education across the technical studies to ensure the unity and integrity of all knowledge forms is a salient feature of the New Education Policy-2020. The government endeavoured for the promotion of technical education across the country by estab-

lishing various Institutes of National Importance that include 23 Indian Institutes of Technology. Scheme for promotion of Research and Academic Collaboration (SPARC), National Initiative for Design Innovation (NIDI), Scheme for Transformational and Advanced Research in Sciences (STARS), etc., are implemented in the Ministry of Education for the promotion of technical education and research ecosystem in Higher Education Institutes.

Auxiliary factors responsible for the rapid growth of the hype in cybersecurity-related courses and other technical courses is the scarcity of efficient talent in the tech-first labor market coupled with the huge and diver-

sified demand by organizations across sectors, the monetary remunerations are quite lucrative. Small-duration certification programs directed toward a specific discipline or sub-arena of cyber security are gaining quick momentum and vivid popularity among both young students and professionals. These are acting as a quick guide and gateway into these detailed studies.

In the coming times, the Indian education sector will observe dynamic demand surges concerning technical studies, vocational studies, and cyber security courses such as risk assessment, financial fraud protection, and system auditing among others in both long and short formats across both institutions and ed-tech companies.

# US, Philippines agree on larger American military presence

AP ■ MANILA

The United States (US) and the Philippines announced an agreement Thursday to expand America’s military presence in the Southeast Asian country, with US forces granted access to four more Philippine military camps, effectively giving Washington new ground to ramp up deterrence against China.

The agreement between the longtime treaty allies under a 2014 Defence pact was made public during the visit of US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, who has led efforts to strengthen America’s security alliances in Asia amid China’s increasing assertiveness toward Taiwan and in the disputed South China Sea.

The allies also said in a joint statement that “substantial” progress has been made in projects at five Philippine military bases, where US military personnel were earlier granted access by Filipino officials under the Enhanced Defence Coopera-

tion Agreement, or EDCA. Construction of American facilities in the camps has been underway for years but has been hampered by unspecified local issues.

Austin thanked President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, whom he briefly met in Manila, for allowing the US military to broaden its presence in the Philippines.

In a televised news conference later with his Philippine counterpart, Carlito Galvez Jr, Austin gave assurances of US military support and said the 1951 Mutual Defence Treaty, which obligates the US and the Philippines to help defend one another in major conflicts, “applies to armed attacks on either of our armed forces, public vessels or aircraft anywhere in the South China Sea.”

“We discussed concrete actions to address destabilizing activities in the waters,” Austin said without elaborating. “This is part of our effort to modernize our alliance and these efforts are especially important as the People’s Republic of China con-



tinues to advance its illegitimate claims in the West Philippine Sea.”

Austin and Galvez declined to provide more details on the agreement. The US defense

chief said it did not mean the re-establishment of permanent American bases but noted that “it’s a big deal.”

Galvez said there was a need for more consultations,

including with local officials in provinces where visiting US forces would establish a presence in Philippine military camps.

China claims the self-ruled island of Taiwan as its own ter-

ritory, to be taken by force if necessary, and Beijing has sent warships, bombers, fighter jets and support aircraft into airspace near Taiwan on a near-daily basis, sparking concerns of a potential blockade or military action. Philippine military and defence officials said in November the US had sought access to five more local military camps mostly in the northern Philippine region of Luzon.

Two of the additional camps where the US wanted to gain access are in Cagayan province near Luzon island’s northern tip, across a sea border from Taiwan, the Taiwan Strait and southern China. Other camps that would host American forces are along the country’s western coast, including in the provinces of Palawan and Zambales, which face the disputed South China Sea. China and the Philippines, along with Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan have been locked in increasingly tense territorial disputes over the busy and resource-rich South China Sea.



## Reps ask Blinken to hold China liable for abuses, India, Taiwan aggression

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Several influential Republican lawmakers have urged Secretary of State Antony Blinken to hold China accountable for its egregious human rights abuses, unfair trade practices and aggression towards the US and its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, including its unacceptable and provocative behaviour against India and Taiwan.

The lawmakers wrote a letter to Blinken and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, ahead of their upcoming trips to Beijing. Blinken heads to China on Sunday. Yellen is expected to travel there later in February.

“The CCP (Chinese Communist Party) has stepped up its aggression in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond,” the Republican Senators led by Marco Rubio from Florida wrote in the letter on Wednesday.

They urged them to avoid giving the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP) a propaganda win and hold the CCP accountable for its egregious human rights abuses, unfair trade practices, leading role in the fentanyl crisis, and aggression towards allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Signatories to the letter in addition to Rubio are Senators Chuck Grassley, Bill Cassidy, Eric Schmitt, Dan Sullivan, Kevin Cramer, Ted Budd, Rick Scott, Marsha Blackburn, Lindsey Graham, Shelley Moore Capito, Pete Ricketts, John Hoeven, and Bill Hagerty.

According to the Biden administration’s National Security Strategy, China is “the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.”

Chinese President Xi Jinping stated in his 20th Party Congress report that the CCP has “shown a fighting spirit and

a firm determination to never yield to coercive power.”

“As we have seen recently, General Secretary Xi has engaged in unacceptable and provocative behaviour in the Taiwan Strait and along the Himalayan border with India,” the letter said.

“Beyond the Indo-Pacific, the CCP has...Intelligence collection outposts in the United States, Japan, and throughout Europe to suppress dissidents and keep tabs on those who Beijing deems a threat. It is evident that General Secretary Xi is determined to use coercion and aggression against the US and our allies and partners to achieve his geopolitical goals. Detering the CCP from achieving these goals, therefore, must be our top priority,” the Senators wrote.

India, the US and several other world powers have been talking about the need to ensure a free, open and thriving Indo-Pacific in the backdrop of China’s rising military manoeuvring in the resource-rich region.

China claims nearly all of the disputed South China Sea, though Taiwan, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Vietnam all claim parts of it. Beijing has built artificial islands and military installations in the South China Sea. China also has territorial disputes with Japan in the East China Sea. According to the Senators, the CCP is the worst offender of human rights.

Both the Biden and Trump administrations have determined that Beijing’s actions against Uyghurs, and other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups, in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) - including its system of mass surveillance and internment, denial of individuals’ rights to peacefully practice their religion, and use of forced labour, sexual violence, forced abortion, and forced sterilisation of women - constitute genocide and crimes against humanity.

## Imran’s ally arrested for accusing Zardari of plotting to kill ex-Premier

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistani police on Thursday arrested former Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed from his home for accusing ex-President Asif Ali Zardari of plotting to kill former Prime Minister Imran Khan, according to media reports.

An ally of Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, Ahmed is the chief of Awami Muslim League (AML).

Confirming the incident, his nephew Sheikh Rashid Shafique told *Geo News* that the AML chief was arrested from his home in a private housing society in Islamabad. He was arrested by Islamabad police in the early hours of Thursday in connection with remarks he allegedly made against former President Zardari, accusing him of hatching a “murder plot to eliminate PTI chief Imran Khan.”

He was arrested on a police complaint filed by Raja Inayat-ur-Rehman, a vice-president of PPP Rawalpindi Division, where-in he said that the AML chief, in a television interview on January 27, alleged that Pakistan People’s Party co-chairman Zardari got the assistance of some terrorist to kill Khan.

Khan also in a television address on January 27 had alleged that Zardari was



behind a fresh assassination plot — a “plan C” — and a terror group had been engaged for the purpose. He offered no evidence to back up his accusation.

In remarks quoted by BBC Urdu, Ahmed claimed that around 300 to 400 policemen barged into his house, thrashed staffers, and forcibly took him away.

He alleged that some (personnel) used ladders to enter his house. He went on to say that he had been arrested despite getting relief from the Islamabad High Court.

The AML leader vowed to challenge his arrest in court.

In a video message shared by the PTI on its official Twitter account, Ahmed told

journalists that police ransacked his house and beat up domestic staffers while attempting to arrest him.

He claimed that lawyer Mian Tahir had secured his bail and went on to allege that Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah was behind the incident.

Reacting to the arrest, Khan said: “Never in our history have we had such a biased, vindictive caretaker government appointed by totally discredited the ECP (Election Commission of Pakistan). The question is: can Pak afford a street movement which we are being pushed towards at a time when we have been bankrupted by imported government?”

## Pak court axes Khan’s petition against EC in prohibited funding case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

In a setback to former Pakistan Premier Imran Khan, a High Court on Thursday dismissed his petition against the country’s top election body’s verdict in the prohibited funding case.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), in a long-awaited case filed in November 2014, issued its verdict on August 2 last year, holding the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party of Khan responsible for hiding its funding.

It ruled that the political party led by the cricketer-turned-prime minister received millions of dollars in prohibited funds from 351 foreign companies and 34 foreign nationals, including a US-Indian businesswoman, and ordered that notice be issued, seeking an explanation from the PTI as to why the prohibited funds it received should not be forfeited.

The party then challenged the decision in the Islamabad



High Court (IHC), where a three-member larger bench comprising IHC Chief Justice Aamer Farooq, Justice Miangul Hassan Aurangzeb and Justice Babar Sattar concluded the hearing last month but reserved the judgment.

The court issued a short verdict on Thursday and dismissed the petitions by endorsing the ECP’s fact-finding report on PTI funding and the decision to issue a show-cause notice to the party. The PTI leaders can challenge the verdict in the Supreme Court, or the party would have to contest the case in the ECP, where the funds can be confiscated, and its leader Khan penalised for providing wrong statements about the financial affairs of the party.

## Iran blames Israel for drone attack, threatens retaliation

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran on Thursday formally blamed Israel for a drone attack that targeted a military workshop in its central city of Isfahan over the weekend, warning it “reserves its legitimate and inherent right” to retaliate.

Iran’s mission to the United Nations, in a letter it published on its website, attributed the attack late Saturday to Israel.

“Early investigations suggest that the Israeli regime was responsible for this attempted act of aggression,” the letter signed by Iranian ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani said.

Israeli officials declined to comment. However, Israel has carried out a series of attacks targeting Iran’s nuclear programme and other sites since the collapse of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Details on the Isfahan



attack, which happened around 11:30 p.M. Saturday, still remain scarce days after the assault. A Defence Ministry statement described three drones being launched at the facility, with two of them successfully shot down. A third apparently made it through to strike the building, causing “minor damage” to its roof and wounding no one, the ministry said.

The state-run IRNA news

agency later described the drones as “quadcopters equipped with bomblets.” Quadcopters, which get their name from having four rotors, typically operate from short ranges by remote control. Iranian state television later aired footage of debris from the drones, which resembled commercially available quadcopters.

It remains unclear what the workshop produced.

Iravani’s letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council warned Tehran could respond to the attack.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its legitimate and inherent right...To defend its national security and respond resolutely to any threats or wrongful actions by the Israeli regime, wherever and whenever deemed necessary,” the letter read.

## 4 Indian-American lawmakers appointed members of key US House committees

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Four prominent Indian-American lawmakers — Pramila Jayapal, Ami Bera, Raja Krishnamoorthi and Ro Khanna — have been appointed members of three key House panels, reflecting the growing influence of the community in US politics.

Congresswoman Jayapal has been named Ranking Member of the powerful House Judiciary Committee’s panel on Immigration, making her the first immigrant to serve in a leadership role for the subcommittee.

Jayapal, 57, representing the 7th Congressional District of Washington State succeeds Congresswoman Zoe Lofgren to serve on the Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement, a media

release said.

“As the first South Asian woman elected to the US House of Representatives and one of only two dozen naturalised citizens in Congress, I am honoured and humbled to serve as the Ranking Member of the House Subcommittee on Immigration Integrity, Security, and Enforcement,” said Jayapal.

Bera, 57, has been appointed as a member of a powerful US House committee handling intelligence-related matters.

The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence is charged with providing oversight of the country’s intelligence activities, including the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI), National Security Agency (NSA), as well as military intel-



ligence programmes.

Krishnamoorthi has been made Ranking Member of a newly created House committee on China that will look into various aspects of Chinese behaviour, its threat being posed to the US and the world.

US House of Representatives Minority Leader Jeffries on Wednesday announced the appointment of Krishnamoorthi

as Ranking Member of the House Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Another Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna has also been made a member of this new committee, formed in the 118th Congress by Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy for the specific purpose of investigating and developing policy to address the United States’ economic, technological and security competition with the Chinese Communist Party.

Krishnamoorthi, 49, is the four-term Congressman representing the eight Congressional districts of Illinois, while Khanna, 46, is the four-term lawmaker representing the 17th Congressional district of California.



## Taiwan’s Tsai welcomes retired US Admiral for China talks

AP ■ TAIPEI

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen on Thursday welcomed the former head of the US Indo-Pacific Command, who had warned the island could face an invasion from China this decade, as the mainland ramps up pressure on the self-governing island.

Retired Admiral Phil Davidson, along with a group including colleagues from the US think tank the National Bureau of Asian Research, arrived Monday in the capital Taipei following a string of delegate visits to Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory, since tensions with the mainland spiked in August with the visit of then-US Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

“I’m here to listen and learn from our hosts; thus far, I’ve done both,” he said. “I’m looking forward to continuing our discussions with President Tsai today and hearing her perspectives on the security environment and her outlook on US-Taiwan relations.”

China’s People’s Liberation Army has stepped up its pressure on Taiwan in the past few years, sending navy vessels and fighter planes near the island.

Taiwan’s Defence Ministry said Tuesday that 20 Chinese aircraft crossed the central line in the Taiwan Strait — a long-time unofficial buffer zone between the sides, which separated during a civil war in 1949. It sent 14 other planes in nearby airspace.

## NASA, IBM team up to spur new discoveries about Earth

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

NASA and IBM have collaborated to develop artificial intelligence (AI) based models that will make it easier to mine vast datasets to advance scientific knowledge about Earth, and help the world to adapt to a changing environment.

The joint work will apply AI foundation model technology to NASA’s Earth-observing satellite data for the first time, NASA said in a statement.

Foundation models are types of AI models that are trained on a broad set of unlabelled data, can be used for different tasks, and can apply information about one situation to another.

“The beauty of foundation models is they can potentially be



used for many downstream applications,” said Rahul Ramachandran, a senior research scientist at NASA’s Marshall Space Flight Center.

“Building these foundation models cannot be tackled by small teams; you need teams

across different organisations to bring their different perspectives, resources, and skill sets,” Ramachandran said in a statement.

One project will train an IBM geospatial intelligence foundation model on NASA’s

Harmonized Landsat Sentinel-2 (HLS) dataset, a record of land cover and land use changes captured by Earth-orbiting satellites, the statement said.

By analysing satellite data to identify changes in the geographic footprint of phenome-

na such as natural disasters, cyclical crop yields, and wildlife habitats, this model technology will help researchers provide critical analysis of our planet’s environmental systems.

Another output from this collaboration is expected to be an easily searchable corpus of Earth science literature.

IBM has developed a natural language processing (NLP) model trained on nearly 300,000 Earth science journal articles to organise the literature and make it easier to discover new knowledge, the company said.

Beyond providing a resource to researchers, the new language model for Earth science could be infused into NASA’s scientific data management and stewardship processes.

## Israeli jets hit Gaza rocket workshop in reply to strike

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Hours after Palestinian militants fired a rocket toward Tel Aviv, Israeli aircraft struck a rocket production workshop in the Gaza Strip early on Thursday, the Israeli military said.

The exchange further raised tensions during a particularly violent period in the long-running conflict.

The Israeli military said the workshop contained chemicals and was run by the militant Hamas group, which controls Gaza. Late Wednesday, Israeli air defenses intercepted a rocket from Gaza, the army said.

There were no reports of casualties from the rocket or the airstrike. Last week, Gaza mili-

itants and Israel broke months of cross-border calm by exchanging rockets and airstrikes after Israel killed 10 Palestinians, most of them militants, in a military operation in the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin.

The latest friction point appeared to be over Palestinian prisoners held by Israel on security charges. Israel’s National Security Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, an ultra-nationalist and a senior member of the most right-wing government in Israel’s history, has pledged even tougher treatment of the prisoners in recent days.

Ben-Gvir said rockets from Gaza won’t stop him from implementing punitive policies against the prisoners.



# Russia strikes civilian target anew as EU officials visit Kyiv

AP ■ KYIV (UKRAINE)

Russian missiles hit residential areas in an eastern Ukrainian city Thursday for the second time in 24 hours, while top European Union officials held talks with the Government in Kyiv as the war with Russia approaches its one-year milestone. The latest strikes in Kramatorsk came as rescue crews searched for survivors in the rubble of an apartment building hit late Wednesday by a Russian missile that killed at least three people and wounded 21 others. At least one more victim was thought to be under the debris, Ukraine's presidential office said.

The scene of devastation in the eastern Donetsk provincial city of Kramatorsk, where emergency workers spent the night searching for survivors after the missile hit late Wednesday, served as a grim reminder of the war's toll almost a year after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Russia has frequently struck apartment buildings during the war, causing civilian casualties, although the Kremlin has denied targeting residential structures.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due



to meet with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell before what officials described as a summit on Friday.

Borrell tweeted that the visit aimed "to convey the EU's strongest message of support to all Ukrainians defending their country."

EU assistance for Ukraine, he said, has reached 50 billion euros (USD 55 billion) since the start of Russia's war on February 24.

"Europe stood united with Ukraine from day one. And will still stand with you to win and

rebuild," Borrell tweeted. It was Von der Leyen's fourth visit since the invasion. The last such summit was held in Kyiv in October 2021 — a few months before the war started.

Ukraine's anti-corruption drive was expected to be on the agenda of the talks. Kyiv's long path toward potential membership in the 27-nation bloc will be a key issue under discussion, with stamping out corruption a key condition for joining.

Von der Leyen tweeted, "We are here together to show that the EU stands by Ukraine as firmly as ever. And to deep-

en further our support and cooperation."

Zelenskyy on Wednesday took aim at corrupt officials for the second time in the space of a week. Several high-ranking officials were dismissed.

Zelenskyy was elected in 2019 on an anti-establishment and anti-corruption platform in a country long gripped by graft.

The latest corruption allegations came as Western allies are channelling billions of dollars to help Kyiv fight Moscow's forces and as the Ukrainian government is introducing reforms so it can potentially join the EU one day.

Ukraine's government is keen to get more Western military aid, on top of the tanks pledged last week, as the warring sides are expected to launch new offensives once winter ends. Kyiv is now asking for fighter jets. US President Joe Biden has ruled out providing F-16s to Ukraine.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Thursday during a trip to the Philippines that the focus of American aid is to increase Ukraine's military capabilities by sending artillery, armour, air defence and providing training to Ukrainian troops.

# Putin commemorates Stalingrad battle, echoing Ukraine fight

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday attended commemorations of the 80th anniversary of the Soviet victory over Nazi forces in the battle of Stalingrad, a long and grueling fight that resonates in the current conflict in Ukraine.

Putin laid a wreath at the eternal flame of the memorial complex to the fallen Red Army soldiers in Volgograd, the current name of the city, which stretches along the western bank of the Volga River.

The memorial is dominated by an 85-metre (279-foot) sculpture of a sword-wielding woman, Europe's tallest statue.

The Russian leader is set to speak at a memorial event and have a meeting with activists later in the day.

The city was renamed in 1961 as part of the Soviet Union's rejection of dictator Joseph Stalin's personality cult. But the name Stalingrad remains inextricably linked to the historic battle that turned the tide of World War II.

There have been calls for the restoration of the city's old name, but they haven't received the Kremlin's blessing.

The five months of fighting in Stalingrad between August 1942 and February 1943 is



regarded as the bloodiest battle in history with the death toll for soldiers and civilians reaching as high as 2 million. Most of the city was reduced to rubble before Nazi forces surrendered on February 2, 1943.

The Soviet victory was a major turning point in the European theatre of World War II and the battle remains an immense point of pride in modern Russia, lauded as a demonstration of military might and moral seriousness.

As Russian forces struggle to gain ground in Ukraine, lawmakers from the dominant United Russia party have been told to liken the Ukraine fight to Stalingrad, the newspaper Kommersant reported.

Some Russians on Thursday made the connection explicit.

"The achievement of our fathers and grandfathers, showing unprecedented heroism, valour and self-sacrifice during the defence of Stalingrad, still inspires our courageous soldiers who carry out responsible combat missions on the fields of the special military operation and defend the sovereignty, independence and security of our country," said Russian Orthodox Church head Patriarch Kirill, using the official characterisation of the conflict that began nearly a year ago.

Communist Party head Gennady Zyuganov, after laying flowers at the Unknown Soldier memorial outside the Kremlin, said that he hoped that Russian forces would prevail in Ukraine.

"To do this, it is necessary to adopt the unique experience of the victorious Red Army, the Battle of Stalingrad, Oryol, Kursk," Zyuganov said.

Sergei Naryshkin, head of Russia's foreign intelligence agency the SVR, said that "no matter how many years have passed, the image of the unconquered city on the Volga, Stalingrad, will forever remain a symbol of the resilience and courage of our people, a strong spiritual support in the face of any external threats and challenges, in the face of any enemies.



# Norway PM says oil profits to fund more aid to Ukraine

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store of Norway said Thursday that the oil-rich Scandinavian country will become one of the world's top donors to Ukraine when his two-party centre-left government presents another planned military and civilian aid package.

Norway's profits from oil will finance the additional aid, and there will be a temporary increase in the use of oil money, Gahr Store told the Norwegian parliament. He did not reveal how large the contribution will be, but he said the government would make it soon.

"We are in a situation where we have room for action due to extraordinary income from the petroleum sector," said the prime minister, who leads Norway's Labor Party. He said the aid would be arranged in a way that has very little impact on the level of activity in the Norwegian economy.

Norway is one of Europe's largest fossil-fuel exporters, and the conflict in Ukraine has boosted its gas revenues. However, Norway has fended off accusations that it's profiting from the war in Ukraine. Last year, the country gave Ukraine more than 10 billion kroner (USD 1 billion) in civilian and military aid.

"We are now stepping up this aid. We will contribute even more to the repair and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure," Gahr Store said.

"The war will very likely last for a long time, and there is a risk that the human suffering will get even worse," he said, noting several times that Russia's war in Ukraine is about to enter its second year.

Lawmakers from the 10 parties in the 169-seat Stortinget plan to meet Monday to discuss aid to Ukraine. Rigmor Aasrud of Gahr Store's Labor Party said she hoped a large majority would back the government's plan.

# After Tyre's funeral, Biden faces pressure on policing

AP ■ WASHINGTON

When Vice President Kamala Harris was called to the pulpit at the funeral for Tyre Nichols, she said the White House would settle for nothing less than ambitious federal legislation to crack down on police brutality. Back in Washington, however, progress appears difficult, if not unlikely. Bipartisan efforts to reach an agreement on policing legislation stalled more than a year ago, and President Joe Biden ended up instead signing an executive order named for George Floyd, whose murder at the hands of Minneapolis police set off nationwide protests nearly three years ago.

Now, with a new killing in the headlines, Biden and Harris will meet with members of the Congressional Black Caucus on Thursday to explore whether it's possible to get legislation back on track. "I am working to make sure that we have a clear plan," said Rep. Steven Horsford, D-Nev., who chairs the caucus.

The White House is facing fresh pressure to advance the issue, and even some political allies are frustrated with excess caution from Biden. "I think the president is missing the opportunity to be a historic president when it comes to the social issues that plague our country," said Rep. Jamaal Bowman.

# Syria slams chemical watchdog's report on 2018 attack



AP ■ DAMASCUS (SYRIA)

Syria on Thursday dismissed the global chemical weapons watchdog's statement that investigators found "reasonable grounds to believe" the air force dropped two cylinders of chlorine gas on the city of Douma in 2018. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons produced a detailed report following a fact finding mission that investigated the April 7, 2018 attack. Medical workers and activists said at the time more than 40 people were killed in the attack. OPCW inspectors headed to the site of the attack days later.

The US, Britain and France blamed Syrian government forces and launched airstrikes. Syria and key ally Russia deny

any chemical attack. Douma was the final target of the Syrian government's sweeping campaign to reclaim control of the eastern Ghouta suburbs of Damascus from opposition forces, who gave up the town days after the alleged chemical attack.

Syria's permanent representative to OPCW, Ambassador Milad Attieh, told reporters that the OPCW has been biased towards "Western positions."

"The OPCW's report relied mostly on information obtained from countries hostile to Syria and some other media and social networking sites run by terrorist organisations," he said. "The report contained false accusations aimed at increasing pressure and escalating Western positions hostile to Syria," he said.

# UK defends BBC's freedom



PTI ■ LONDON

The UK Government has defended the BBC as a media outlet "independent in its output" in the wake of widespread Indian diaspora protests against the controversial documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Addressing reporters at Downing Street on Wednesday, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesperson echoed a statement issued by Foreign Secretary James Cleverly in Parliament earlier this week to add that the government continues to invest in its relationship with India.

"The BBC is independent in its output and we would stress that we continue to regard India as an incredibly important international partner," the spokesperson said in response to a question about India's condemnation of the documentary 'India: The Modi Question' questioning the then chief minister's role in the 2002 Godhra riots.

"We will be investing heavily in our relationship with India over the coming decades and we're confident it will only go from strength to strength," the spokesperson said.

# Lankan Buddhist clergy opposes autonomy to Tamils

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe's plan to fully implement India-backed 13th Amendment to grant political autonomy to the minority Tamils received a blow on Thursday as the powerful Buddhist clergy expressed strong opposition to the move, claiming it challenges the unitary nature of the country.

The four chief prelates of the main Buddhist sects handed over a letter to Wickremesinghe in the central town of Kandy.

The letter charges that Wickremesinghe's plan had created dissent in the country as the move challenges Sri Lanka's sovereignty.

It reminds Wickremesinghe that his predecessor presidents didn't go ahead with the 13th Amendment's full implementation due to the danger posed to the unity of the country. He shouldn't try it and earn public wrath, the letter warns.

"We are not in agreement with proposals that would endanger the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country," the Buddhist clergy said in their letter. President Wickremesinghe has underlined the need to fully implement the 13th Amendment to the Constitution to grant polit-

ical autonomy to the minority Tamils in the country.

Last week, he offered the full implementation of the 13th Amendment as a solution to the long-standing demand for political autonomy by the Tamil community in Sri Lanka.

The 13A provides for the devolution of power to the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. India has been pressing Sri Lanka to implement the 13A which was brought in after the Indo-Sri Lankan agreement of 1987. Wickremesinghe, who took over as the president last year amidst the unprecedented economic crisis and political turmoil, said that as the head of the nation, it was his duty to implement the prevailing laws.

"As the president, I am duty bound to implement the prevailing law of the country," Wickremesinghe told an all-party meeting.

# PASUPATI ACRYLON LIMITED

CIN : L50102UP1982PLC015532

Regd. Office : Kashipur Road, Thakurdwara, Distt. Moradabad (U.P)

Corp. Office : M-14, Connaught Circus (Middle Circle), New Delhi-110 001

Tel. No. : 91-11-47627400, Fax No. : 91-11-47627497

E-mail : delhi@pasupatiacrylon.com, Website : www.pasupatiacrylon.com

Kashyap Assuring Company  
ISO-9001

(Rs. in Crores)

## UNAUDITED FINANCIAL RESULTS (REVIEWED) FOR THE QUARTER AND NINE MONTHS ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER, 2022

Sl. No.	PARTICULARS	Quarter Ended (Un-audited)			Nine Months Ended (Un-audited)		Year Ended (Audited)
		31.12.2022 Reviewed	30.09.2022 Reviewed	31.12.2021 Reviewed	31.12.2022 Reviewed	31.12.2021 Reviewed	31.03.2022 Audited)
1.	Total Income from operations	194.64	208.41	206.60	655.51	508.46	784.27
2.	Net Profit for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and / or Extraordinary items)	14.24	5.77	15.12	34.70	56.04	61.83
3.	Net Profit for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	14.24	5.77	15.12	34.70	56.04	61.83
4.	Net Profit for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary items)	10.52	4.32	10.93	25.77	41.35	45.89
5.	Total comprehensive income for the period (Comprising Profit for the period (after tax) and other comprehensive income (after tax)	10.57	4.35	10.94	25.91	41.58	46.05
6.	Paid up Equity Share Capital (Face Value Rs.10/-)	89.14	89.14	89.14	89.14	89.14	89.14
7.	Other Equity (excluding Revaluation Reserve)	-	-	-	-	-	190.38
8.	Earnings Per Share (Rs.10/- each)						
	Basic :	1.18	0.48	1.23	2.89	4.64	5.15
	Diluted :	1.18	0.48	1.23	2.89	4.64	5.15

**NOTE :** The above is an extract of the detailed format of quarterly Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly Financial Results are available on the Company's Website (www.pasupatiacrylon.com) and BSE Limited (www.bseindia.com) and National Stock exchange of India Limited (www.nseindia.com).

for Pasupati Acrylon Ltd.

(Sd/-)

Vineet Jain

Managing Director

Place : New Delhi

Date : 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2023



# X-57: Nasa's electric plane is preparing to fly to advance emissions-free aviation

AGENCIES ■ CAMBRIDGE

The experimental aeroplane X-57, developed by Nasa, is due to fly for the first time this year. It has an impressive 14 propellers along its wings and is powered entirely by electricity.

This sounds great considering we have to get off fossil fuels yet our demand for aviation is growing. But how much closer will Nasa's plane bring us to this goal?

Finding an alternative to aviation fuels such as kerosene will be key if we want to continue flying. The X-57 uses lithium batteries to run electric motors for its propellers. But the energy you get from batteries, relative to their weight, is 50 times less than you can get from aviation fuel.

The X-57 is a modified, four-seater, Italian-built Tecnam P2006T aircraft. It relies on a

combination of lots of propellers, small motors and many batteries spread out across an aircraft, known as "distributed propulsion".

This approach represents an exciting area of research and development that can be found in many experimental electric aircraft designs.

What's different about the X-57 is that the wings are completely redesigned with propellers positioned to optimise air flow around them. When a propeller is not needed, its blades can be folded back to reduce drag.

Propeller technology generally is having a rebirth. Designs are becoming not just more efficient, but also less noisy and more affordable. The speed and pitch angle of propellers can even be changed during flight to adapt to the different aircraft speeds required for takeoff, landing and cruising.

# N Korea warns of 'overwhelming nuclear force' to counter US

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea said on Thursday it's prepared to counter US military moves with the "most overwhelming nuclear force" as it warned that the expansion of the United States' military exercises with rival South Korea is pushing tensions to an "extreme red line."

The statement by Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry came in response to comments by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, who said on Tuesday in Seoul that the United States would increase its deployment of advanced military assets to the Korean Peninsula, including fighter jets and aircraft carriers, as it strengthens joint training and operational planning with South Korea. South Korea's security jitters have risen since North Korea test-fired dozens of missiles in 2022, including potentially nuclear-capable ones designed to strike targets in South Korea and the US mainland.

In a statement attributed to an unidentified spokesperson of its Foreign Ministry, North Korea said the expansion of the allies' drills is threatening to turn the Korean Peninsula into a "huge war arsenal and a more critical war zone."

NORTHERN RAILWAY			
Tender Notice No.: Inj. Medicines Date: 01.02.2023			
Invitation of Tenders through E-Procurement system			
Principal Chief Materials Manager, Northern Railway, New Delhi-110001, for and on behalf of the President of India, invites e-tenders through e-procurement system for supply of the following items:-			
S. No.	Tender No.	Brief Description	Closing date
01	82231160	Linagliptin 5 Mg Tab.	17.03.2023
02	82231162	Sitagliptin 100mg	17.03.2023
NOTE- 1. Vendors may visit the IREPS websites i.e. <a href="http://www.ireps.gov.in">www.ireps.gov.in</a> for details. 2. No Manual offer will be entertained. 350/2023			
Serving Customers with a Smile			

कार्यालय अधिशासी अभियन्ता, अनुसूचक खण्ड, उत्तराखण्ड

# उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान

लेन नं.-1, कृष्ण विहार, मोरारोवाला रोड, देहरादून-248001

Phone/Fax No.: 0135-2671940, E-mail: [eeendugs@rediffmail.com](mailto:eeendugs@rediffmail.com)

पत्रांक: 4957/ई-निविदा सूचना/2022-23 दिनांक: 02.02.2023

## ई-निविदा सूचना

मुख्य महाप्रबन्धक, उत्तराखण्ड जल संस्थान देहरादून की ओर से निम्नलिखित कार्यों हेतु ई-निविदा सिंगल बिड के आधार पर निम्नानुसार आमंत्रित की जाती है।

निविदा क्र. सं.	कार्य विवरण	धरोहर क्षमता (क्यू.से.)	निविदा का मूल्य (क्यू.से.)	कार्य पूर्ण करने की अवधि
	2	3	4	5
1.	अभिकेस में जल गुणवत्ता परीक्षण प्रयोगशाला के लिए भवन का निर्माण कार्य।	84000.00	3000+G.S.T.	06 माह
2.	विकासनगर में जल गुणवत्ता परीक्षण प्रयोगशाला के लिए भवन का निर्माण कार्य।	83400.00	3000+G.S.T.	06 माह

## निविदा समय सारणी (मुख्य तिथियाँ) निम्नवत् हैं:

क्र. सं.	विवरण	अनुसूची
1.	ऑनलाइन प्रकाशन की तिथि	04.02.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
2.	निविदा प्रश्न डाउनलोड करने की तिथि	04.02.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
3.	बिड ऑनलाइन जमा करने की प्रारम्भ तिथि	11.02.2023 at 11:00 Hrs
4.	बिड ऑनलाइन जमा करने की अन्तिम तिथि	20.02.2023 up to 17:00 Hrs
5.	ऑफ लाइन रूप से जमा किये जाने वाले प्रश्न (निविदा प्रश्न हेतु निर्धारित शुल्क, बिड सिक्योरिटी, स्टाम्प पेपर एवं अन्य सम्बन्धित दस्तावेज)	20.02.2023 up to 17:00 Hrs
6.	बिड खोलने की तिथि	21.02.2023 at 11:00 Hrs

ई-निविदा से सम्बन्धित समस्त जानकारीयां व शर्तें उत्तराखण्ड राज्य की वेबसाइट [www.uktenders.gov.in](http://www.uktenders.gov.in) पर ऑन लाइन देखी/प्राप्त की जा सकती है।

“जल संस्थान-जीवन संस्थान”

राजेश्वर पास  
अधिशासी अभियन्ता

# ARO granite industries Ltd.

(100% Export Oriented Unit)

CIN : L74899DL1988PLC031510

Regd. Office : 1001, 10th Floor, DLF Tower A, Jasola, New Delhi - 110025

Ph. : 011-41686169, Fax : 011-26941984, Email : [investorgrievance@arogite.com](mailto:investorgrievance@arogite.com), Website : [www.arogite.com](http://www.arogite.com)

## EXTRACT OF STANDALONE AUDITED FINANCIAL RESULT FOR THE QUARTER AND NINE-MONTHS PERIOD ENDED 31ST DECEMBER 2022

(Rs. in lacs)

Sl. No	Particulars	Quarter Ended	Year Ended	Quarter Ended
		31.12.2022 (Audited)	31.03.2022 (Audited)	31.12.2021 (Audited)
1	Total Income from operations	3,448.63	22,610.14	5,882.56
2	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period (before Tax Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	(679.09)	1,077.57	104.68
3	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	(679.09)	1,077.57	104.68
4	Net Profit / (Loss) for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/or Extraordinary Items)	(714.12)	890.59	113.32
5	Total Comprehensive Income for the period [Comprising Profit / (Loss) for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax)]	(718.96)	901.61	118.97
6	Paid up Equity Share Capital	1,530.00	1,530.00	1,530.00
7	Reserves (excluding Revaluation Reserve) as shown in the Audited Balance Sheet of the previous year		18,112.19	
8	Earnings Per Share (of Rs.10/- each) (for continuing and discontinued operations)-			
	1. Basic:	(4.70)	5.89	0.78
	2. Diluted:	(4.70)	5.89	0.78

### Note:

The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly/Annual Financial results filed with the Stock Exchange under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly/Annual Financial results is available on the websites of the Stock Exchange(s), [www.bseindia.com](http://www.bseindia.com), and [www.nseindia.com](http://www.nseindia.com) and the Company's website [www.arogite.com](http://www.arogite.com).

For & on behalf of the Board

Place : HOSUR  
Date : 01.02.2023

-Sd-  
Sunil Kumar Arora  
Managing Director  
DIN: 00150668



# Monthly GST revenue at ₹1.50 L Cr new normal in FY 24: CBIC chief

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Monthly GST collection is expected to average around Rs 1.50 lakh crore and it will be the 'new normal' in FY24 in view of concerted efforts to check evasion and bring new businesses within the GST net, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) chief Vivek Johri said on Thursday.

In an interview to PTI, Johri said the GST and Customs revenue collection numbers as given in Budget 2023-24 are realistic based on nominal GDP growth and import trends, respectively and the indirect tax collection target set for next fiscal will be achieved.

Johri said CBIC has drawn up a strategy to augment GST mop-up by way of stricter



audit and scrutiny of tax returns, enforcement action against fake billing and input tax credit claims. "We will focus on increasing the tax-

payer base. Even though the growth in taxpayer base has been quite good, we have more than doubled the number of taxpayers from the time we

started GST, we feel there are some sectors which have much more potential to increase the taxpayer population. "So I feel we have not reached the satu-

ration level and there is scope for increasing the revenue," Johri said. GST collection in current fiscal year is likely to average around Rs 1.45 lakh crore.

The mop-up in January came in as the second highest ever at around Rs 1.56 lakh crore, the highest being Rs 1.68 lakh crore in April 2022. Asked if in next fiscal year, Rs 1.50 lakh crore could be the new normal for monthly GST collection, Johri said "Yes, that I'm confident of."

"There is further scope for growth in GST revenues." The 2023-24 Budget has projected 12 per cent growth in GST revenue at Rs 9.56 lakh crore. The revised estimate for current fiscal pegs GST mop-up at Rs 8.54 lakh crore, up from Rs 7.80 lakh crore originally estimated in the Budget last year.

## Satyam scam: SAT sets aside Sebi's orders; asks it to pass new directive within 4 mths

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Appellate tribunal SAT on Thursday set aside Sebi's orders that had barred Satyam Computer's B Ramalinga Raju, B Rama Raju and others from the securities markets for up to 14 years and asked the markets regulator to pass a fresh order in the 14-year old case.

The ruling came after two separate orders of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) passed in 2018 were challenged by the six applicants. The case relates to Ramalinga Raju and Rama Raju -- who were promoters and directors of Satyam Computer Services -- falsifying the company's financial statements and making illegal gains by way of insider trading.

Besides, B Suryanarayana Raju and SRSR Holdings had allegedly dealt with shares of Satyam Computer on the basis of unpublished price sensitive information. The scam came to



light on January 7, 2009, when Ramalinga Raju -- then Chairman of Satyam Computer -- admitted to manipulating the company's accounts.

In its order passed on October 16, 2018, Sebi had prohibited V Srinivas and G Ramakrishna from the securities markets for 7 years. Further, Srinivas and Ramakrishna were directed to disgorge wrongful gains of Rs 15.65 crore and Rs 11.5 crore, respectively.

In another ruling passed on November 2, 2018, the regulator had restrained Ramalinga Raju, Rama Raju, B Suryanarayana Raju and SRSR Holdings from the securities markets for 14 years. Also, they were asked to disgorge Rs

813 crore of unlawful gains with interest. In these two orders, the regulator had directed them to disgorge the amount along with 12 per cent interest per annum from January 7, 2009. Dismissing Sebi's two orders, the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) said the approach of the regulator is patently erroneous and cannot be sustained as "no reason has been given as to why the magic figure of 14 years of restraint was appropriate".

While setting aside the orders passed by Sebi, SAT asked it to pass a fresh order within four months. Also, it asked the regulator to consider the intrinsic value while calculating the unlawful gain. Moreover, the unlawful gain would be calculated individually for all the appellants.

Further, the tribunal directed Sebi to consider the issue of interest and reconsider the period of restraint afresh for all the appellants.

## TRAI dials telecom firms to discuss service quality issues on Feb 17

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom regulator TRAI has called a meeting with telcos on February 17 to discuss measures and action plan for improving service quality, review of norms, benchmarks for 5G services, and unsolicited commercial communications.

The meeting assumes significance as improvement in telecom service quality is bound to cheer mobile customers, irked by call drops and patchy networks. It also comes at a time when ultra high speed 5G services are rolling out across the country.

So far, as many as 200 cities in India have seen launch of 5G services, the next generation of technology that promises turbocharged speeds (about 10 times faster than 4G) and low latency connectivity.

Issues around service quality have been in the spotlight over the last few months. The Telecom Department back in December met operators to discuss rising instances of call drops and service quality-related issues, as it deliberated on policy measures that can be considered for improving call quality.

In a statement on Thursday, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) said that quality of service (QoS) improvement "is an ongoing exercise, it requires close assessment and monitoring especially with the fast-paced network expansion and introduction of latest technology like 5G."

Accordingly, TRAI has called a meeting with telecom service providers on February 17, 2023, "to discuss measures and action plan for improvement in QoS, review of QoS standards, QoS of 5G services and unsolicited commercial



communications". India, the world's second largest smartphone market, had over 114 crore mobile subscribers as of November 2022. Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, and Vodafone Idea are the key players.

TRAI monitors performance of various connectivity services provided by telecom operators by collecting Performance Monitoring Report (PMR) on quarterly basis.

The PMRs are published on the TRAI website, and the regulator also conducts audits and assessments to gauge the performance of the service providers in respect of the prescribed QoS benchmark.

"Regular interactions are held with concerned stakeholders through meetings, consultation papers and open house discussion to review the status of QoS and measures to further improve the consumer experience," the TRAI statement said.

On December 28, the Department of Telecom had held discussions with telcos to identify policy and operational

measures that can help improve the quality of telecom services in the country. That meeting was chaired by Telecom Secretary K Rajaraman and attended by telecom service providers, including Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio and Vodafone Idea.

The issue of interference from illegal boosters and Right of Way (RoW) challenges had come up for discussion then, and operators had made a detailed presentation to the government on current levels of service quality against stipulated benchmarks.

After those parleys, industry sources had said the DoT flagged consumer complaints on service quality at the meeting, and added that companies maintained that quality of service norms were being met. The industry also mentioned locations that are facing specific problems, due to signal interference or other factors.

In September this year, Communications Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw indicated that telecom service quality parameters could be made more stringent and tighter, possibly to the extent of 3-4 times.

The minister had exhorted the industry, including telecom operators and infrastructure providers, to move "full steam ahead" on improving the quality of services in the country, now that a slew of reforms have been announced and more are being proposed.

## Markets end on mixed note; Sensex climbs over 224 points, Nifty dips 6 pts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity markets witnessed mixed trends on Thursday, with the Sensex climbing over 224 points, while the NSE Nifty dipped almost 6 points in highly volatile trade.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex advanced 224.16 points or 0.38 per cent to settle at 59,932.24. During the day, it hit a high of 60,007.67 and a low of 59,215.62.

However, the broader NSE Nifty dipped 5.90 points or 0.03 per cent to end at 17,610.40, weighed down by continuous selling in Adani group stocks.

From the Sensex pack, ITC jumped 4.74 per cent. The other major gainers were IndusInd Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Infosys, Wipro, HCL Technologies, Tata Consultancy Services and ICICI Bank.



HDFC, Tata Steel, Bajaj Finance, NTPC, Power Grid and HDFC Bank were the major laggards. Elsewhere in Asia, equity markets in Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai ended in the green, while Hong Kong settled lower.

Equities in Europe were trading higher during mid-session deals. Markets in the US had ended in the positive territory on Wednesday. Adani Enterprises on Wednesday said it has decided not to go ahead

with its Rs 20,000-crore Follow-on Public Offer (FPO) and will return the proceeds to investors. The announcement came a day after the company's FPO was subscribed fully on the last day of the offer on Tuesday. Adani Enterprises tumbled 26.50 per cent.

Most of the group firms also ended in the negative territory, including Adani Transmission which tanked 10 per cent, Adani Green Energy slumped 10 per cent, Adani Total Gas (10 per cent) and Adani Ports (6.13 per cent).

International oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.29 per cent to USD 82.78 per barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) turned buyers as they bought shares worth a net Rs 1,785.21 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

## OPEC+ committee recommends staying course on oil output policy

IANIS ■ VIENNA

Leading oil officials on Thursday recommended to maintain the current oil output policy of OPEC+, the OPEC and its allies, amid an uncertain global economic outlook.

The OPEC+ agreed in October 2022 to cut production by 2 million barrels per day from the following month until the end of 2023.

The cut equals to about 2 per cent of the annual global oil demand, Xinhua news agency reported.

Members of the OPEC+ Joint Ministerial Monitoring Committee (JMMC) "reaffirmed their commitment" to the current output plan at a virtual meeting on Wednesday



and "urged all participating countries to achieve full conformity and adhere to the compensation mechanism," according to an OPEC statement. The JMMC comprises oil ministers

from the OPEC+ countries. It has no decision-making power but provides policy recommendations for the OPEC+ ministerial meeting, the group's decision-making body.

It has also the authority to request additional OPEC+ ministerial meetings "at any time to address market developments," according to OPEC.

The JMMC has reviewed the oil production data for November and December last year and "noted the overall conformity" for the OPEC+ countries, OPEC added.

The next JMMC meeting is scheduled for April 3. The next OPEC+ ministerial meeting, where the group will formally decide its output policy, is set for June 4.

## Tea sector unhappy over total neglect in Union Budget

IANIS ■ KOLKATA

As the Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman remained totally silent over the tea industry in her Budget speech, the sector operators are frustrated and the observers of the industry surprised.

According to the Darjeeling Tea Association (DTA)'s principal advisor S. Mukherjee, the tea sector was probably the only industrial segment which was not spared even a word as regards to any industry stimulation package or subsidy.

He pointed out that even the recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee of Commerce & Industry for a one-time package for the revival of the tea sector in Darjeeling was also ignored.

According to the director (operations & plantations) of Chamong Tea, Indranil Ghosh, to his surprise the long-standing demand of the planters, especially those from the Darjeeling, Terai and Dooars region, was that the Union government should impose a very high important duty on tea from Nepal in order to protect the planters in the region.

"A number of bought-leaf factories are importing tea from Nepal and selling them in the market.

This is possible because the production cost of tea in Nepal is one-third of that in India. However, this issue was not at all addressed in the Budget speech on Wednesday," said Ghosh.

According to veteran tea industry observer Nandini Goswami, another long-standing demand from the sector was that the Union government should implement an effective police mechanism to restrict circulation of spurious Darjeeling tea in the market. "However, to my surprise the Budget speech was totally silent on this issue," she said.

She also pointed out the ultimate effect of the ailing nature of the Indian tea sector on the plantation workers, especially those associated with the smaller tea gardens.

"There had been a long-standing demand for giving the small planters the status of agricultural farmers and the status of agricultural workers for the workers employed in smaller tea gardens. Unfortunately, this issue also found no mention in the Budget speech," said Goswami.



## Gold rallies ₹770 amid strong global trends



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price rallied Rs 770 to a record high of Rs 58,680 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday amid a jump in precious metal prices internationally, according to HDFC Securities.

In the previous trade, the yellow metal had settled at Rs 57,910 per 10 grams. Silver also zoomed Rs 1,491 to Rs 71,666 per kilogram.

"Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at a record high of Rs 58,680 per 10 grams, up Rs 770 per 10 grams," said an analyst at HDFC Securities. In the overseas market, both gold and silver were traded in green at

USD 1,956 per ounce and USD 24.15 per ounce, respectively. Comex gold prices traded their highest levels in more than nine months in Asian trading hours on Thursday after investors access dovish policy from US Federal reserve, the analyst said.

On Wednesday, the Fed hiked 0.25 basis point rate after a year of larger hikes. US Fed Governor Powell warned of further monetary policy tightening but also noted the progress on disinflation, which he said is in its early stages.

Today, the traders will focus on European Central Bank and Bank of England policy outcome and further direction, the analyst added.

## Indian aviation industry suffered ₹24K cr loss in 2020-22

IANIS ■ NEW DELHI

India's aviation industry suffered a loss of over Rs 24,000 crore in the last two financial years during 2020-22.

As per the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation, the industry in FY 2020-21 suffered a loss of Rs 12,479 crore and in FY 2021-22 it was Rs 11,658 crore.

In a reply at the Lok Sabha on Thursday, the Ministry said the Centre has taken various initiatives to support the aviation industry. The reduction in Value Added Tax (VAT) on Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) was taken up with state gov-



## Food Secy reviews sale of wheat at nominal price of ₹29.50 per kg

**New Delhi:** Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra on Thursday reviewed the progress of sale of Atta (wheat flour) at Rs 29.50 per kg through various outlets to consumers, a move aimed at checking the high rate of the essential commodity. During the meeting, which was attended by officials of Food Corporation of India (FCI), Kendriya Bhandar, National

Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) and National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Limited (NCCF), it was decided that these institutions will lift wheat up to 3 lakh metric tonnes from FCI depots and after converting it into Atta they will sell Atta to consumers at Rs 29.50 per kg through various retail

outlets. These institutions agreed to supply Atta at the decided price, with the MRP mentioned in bold on the sacks. While Kendriya Bhandar has already started the sale of Atta at the abovementioned price, NCCF and NAFED will supply it from February 6 onwards, it was informed during the meeting, official sources said. IANIS

## Rupee tumbles 40 paise to 82.20 against US dollar

**Mumbai:** The rupee fell 40 paise to close below the 82 per US dollar mark on Thursday, weighed down by foreign fund outflows and corporate dollar demand. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 81.81 against the greenback, and touched an intra-day high of 81.71 and a

low of 82.20. It finally settled at 82.20, down 40 paise over its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee had appreciated 8 paise to close at 81.80 against the dollar after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for 2023-24. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's

strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.12 per cent lower at 101.10, after the US Fed hiked the interest rate along expected lines by 25 basis points to 4.50-4.75 per cent. Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures declined 0.14 per cent to USD 82.72 per barrel. PTI



# MESSI SCRIPTS PSG's WIN

AP ■ PARIS

Paris Saint-Germain extended their lead at the top of Ligue 1 with a 3-1 win at Montpellier on Wednesday but their evening was overshadowed by an injury to Kylian Mbappe, who had earlier missed a penalty.

The France superstar had an eighth-minute spot-kick saved by Montpellier's Benjamin Lecomte and then remarkably saw his second attempt turned onto the post by the goalkeeper after the referee ordered a retake.

Mbappe then limped off with what looked like a hamstring injury midway through the first half, raising the alarm for PSG with the first leg of their Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich now less than two weeks away.

Speaking after the game, coach Christophe Galtier suggested the injury was down to a knock rather than a muscle problem. "He took a knock to the back of the knee or the back of the thigh, so we'll see," said Galtier.

"I'm not too worried," he added. "It's a bruise or a contusion, we don't know yet."

"With the run of matches we don't want to take risks with a very busy fixture list, but it doesn't appear that serious."

PSG host Bayern in Paris on February 14, with the second leg in Germany on March 8. They are desperate to avoid a repeat of last season when they were knocked out at the same stage of the Champions League by Real Madrid.

After winning just one of their last four league games, Wednesday's awkward trip for PSG saw them also lose Sergio



Ramos to injury and have two goals disallowed before Fabian Ruiz put them ahead 10 minutes into the second half.

## MESSI ON TARGET

Ruiz then set up Lionel Messi to make it 2-0 with a deft finish in the 72nd minute, the Argentine scoring his 14th club goal of the season.

Sixteen-year-old midfielder Warren Zaire-Emery made sure of the win in stoppage time after Arnaud Nordin — a friend of Mbappe's from their time together at France's national training academy — had pulled

one back. PSG, who were without the rested Neymar, extended their lead at the top of the table from three to five points after Lens lost 1-0 at home to Nice.

"It was a good performance in general," Galtier said.

"There was an incredible scenario in the first half with the retaken penalty, we hit the post, had goals disallowed and two injuries because Sergio Ramos was involved in a collision and on falling he hurt his adductor, but apparently it is nothing serious."

The win for PSG came after

a frustrating end to the January transfer window on Tuesday as they failed to process the paperwork to complete the loan signing of Hakim Ziyech from Chelsea after the Moroccan winger had passed a medical.

Gaetan Laborde scored the only goal of the game for Nice as Lens dropped points at home for the first time this season after winning all 10 previous matches there.

Marseille climbed above Lens into second place thanks to a 2-0 victory at Nantes earlier, secured by an own goal from Joao Victor and then a late

strike by Azzedine Ounahi, the Moroccan World Cup star making his debut after signing in the January window.

Monaco in fourth beat Auxerre 3-2, while fifth-placed Rennes eased to a 3-0 win against struggling Strasbourg.

On-loan Arsenal striker Folarin Balogun followed up his last-gasp equaliser against PSG at the weekend by netting a hat-trick as Reims came from two goals down to beat Lorient 4-2 and extend their unbeaten run to 15 games.

Bottom side Angers suffered a new French top-flight record

## PSG LOSE INJURED MBAPPE FOR FIRST LEG OF BAYERN CL TIE

AP ■ PARIS

Kylian Mbappe faces three weeks out with a thigh injury and will miss the first leg of Paris Saint-Germain's Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich on February 14, his club announced on Thursday.

"After undergoing tests, Kylian Mbappe suffered an injury to the left thigh at the level of the femoral biceps," said a club statement.

If he misses three weeks as expected, Mbappe can also expect to sit out next midweek's French Cup last-16 tie against Marseille and faces a race against time to return for a potentially pivotal Ligue 1 game away to the same opponents at the end of this month.

However, PSG will hope that Mbappe, who has scored 25 goals in 26 appearances for his club this season, will be fit for the second leg against Bayern in Germany on March 8.

The news is a bitter blow for the French giants, who are desperate to avoid a repeat of what happened last season when they were knocked out of the Champions League in the last 16 by Real Madrid.

13th consecutive defeat as they conceded in stoppage time to lose 2-1 at home to Ajaccio. That result leaves them 11 points from safety.



## Barca earn tense win at Betis to extend La Liga lead

AP ■ SEVILLE

Raphinha and Robert Lewandowski's strikes helped Barcelona move eight points clear at the top of La Liga with a 2-1 win at Real Betis on Wednesday.

The Catalans put pressure on second-placed Real Madrid, who host Valencia on Thursday, by scraping a narrow win from an intense clash at the Benito Villamarin.

With French winger Ousmane Dembele out injured for the next few weeks, Raphinha grabbed his chance to prove himself.

Dembele's superb form had limited the Brazilian's minutes since his move from Leeds United last summer.

Raphinha put Barcelona ahead in the 65th minute and Lewandowski, back after a three-match league ban, netted the second with 10 minutes to go.

Jules Kounde scored an unfortunate own goal to give Betis a fighting chance of a point in the final stages but Barcelona held out for the win.

"I think we had a good

game, our play was very good, excellent I would say," Barca coach Xavi Hernandez told Movistar.

"We played a great game at a very difficult place to come. I'm very happy not just for the result but for how we played, we've improved a lot from the Girona game."

Barcelona had won their previous three league games 1-0, including against Catalan rivals Girona last weekend in a flat performance, but were operating on a higher level in Seville.

Betis, sixth, had William Carvalho sent off after the full-time whistle for protesting some of the refereeing decisions.

The Andalusians sit three points behind Atletico Madrid in fourth.

"Against Barca the games are always like this, it's hard to take the ball off them, they are capable of pushing you back and keeping you in your own half," Betis forward Borja Iglesias told Movistar.

"Until their goal we were doing well, from there it was a different game."

## Man Utd in League Cup final

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag said winning trophies is the standard that should be demanded at Old Trafford after beating Nottingham Forest 2-0 on Wednesday and 5-0 on aggregate to reach the League Cup final.

Anthony Martial and Fred scored the goals for Ten Hag's men in the final 17 minutes of the semi-final, second leg as United set up a meeting with Newcastle at Wembley on February 26.

Three managers have left the club since United last won a trophy under Jose Mourinho in 2017.

But Ten Hag is now just one game away from ending that drought in his first season in charge.

"I think we have a good squad so we have to demand and control the high standards," said the Dutchman. "You have to bring that every game."



"We are Manchester United. When you are a United player you have to match the standards."

The damage was done for the Red Devils in last week's 3-0 win at the City Ground in the first leg as Ten Hag was able to rotate his squad with United still

involved in four competitions.

"We have had to make lots of compromises in the season so far so hopefully now they are all available," added Ten Hag. "If you want to win trophies, you need them all to be available. You saw tonight you can bring a new dynamic off the bench."

Martial slotted home after Rashford's initial effort was blocked to open the scoring.

Three minutes later it was 2-0 as this time Rashford teed up Fred for the simplest of finishes into an empty net.

A much tougher test awaits in high-flying Newcastle, but defender Luke Shaw believes United are on the march towards silverware under Ten Hag.

## Cancelo helps Bayern find form

AP ■ MUNICH

New Bayern Munich signing Joao Cancelo set up a goal to help his side secure a first win of 2023 with a 4-0 triumph at 10-man Mainz in the German Cup on Wednesday.

Cancelo, who joined the German champions on loan from Man City on Tuesday, made an immediate impact, floating in a lofted cross to Cameroon striker Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, who hammered home from close range.

Winless in their first three league games of 2023, Bayern entered the game under significant pressure to advance to the German Cup quarter-finals for the first time in three seasons.

Choupo-Moting's 17th-minute strike settled the visitors' nerves and they had a second on the 30-minute mark when Bayern veteran Thomas Mueller found teenage forward Jamal Musiala, who slammed the ball across the face of goal to make it 2-0.

Winger Leroy Sane scored the third with one minute of the first half remaining, sliding in a looped assist from former Mainz forward Choupo-Moting.

Canadian wing-back Alphonso Davies, who came on for Cancelo with 20 minutes to go, added a fourth late in the game, heading in a floated assist from Dutch centre-back Matthijs de Ligt.

Mainz had a number of half chances in an increasingly fiery second half which saw centre-back Alexander Hack sent off for a second yellow card, along with Bo Svensson, who was shown a straight red for arguing with the assistant referee moments before Davies' goal.



Swensson complained that the German champions got better treatment

from the officials in the lead up to his red card.

"I saw a clear difference in the way Bayern's bench were handled and the

way we were handled (by the referees). It's not the first time."

Bayern manager Julian Nagelsmann praised his side, saying they were "much more aggressive" than they have been so far this year.

"I'm glad we won again. I think the style and manner in which we played was very, very good."

Former Chelsea striker Timo Werner scored late to help holders RB Leipzig beat Hoffenheim 3-1. Werner, who returned to Leipzig from a two-year stint at Stamford Bridge in August, had endured a difficult night and was caught offside on multiple occasions.

He got his timing right however in the 83rd minute, latching onto a pass from Danish striker Yussuf Poulsen and driving the ball past Hoffenheim goalkeeper Oliver Baumann to seal his side's win.

Leipzig, who are unbeaten at home in the league this season, struck after just eight minutes, with Swedish forward Emil Forsberg catching Baumann napping to squeeze in a long-range shot at the near post.

Leipzig doubled their lead before half-time, with Austrian midfielder Konrad Laimer collecting the ball on the turn before unleashing a fierce left-foot shot into the far corner of the net.

Kasper Dolberg headed in a sublime cross from former Leipzig wing-back Angelino in the 77th minute to cause some nerves for the home side in the closing stages.

However, Werner scored his fourth goal of the cup campaign with just over five minutes remaining.

## Attempted rape charge against Greenwood dropped

AP ■ MANCHESTER

Charges of attempted rape and assault against Manchester United forward Mason Greenwood have been dropped by prosecutors, British police said on Thursday.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said the withdrawal of key witnesses and new material coming to light were factors in their decision to stop the case against the 21-year-old.

Greater Manchester Police said it was "only fair" that they announce that Greenwood, who was arrested in January last year, would no longer face criminal proceedings "given the significant media coverage of this case".

The striker originally faced one count of attempted rape, one count of controlling and coercive behaviour and one count of assault occasioning actual bodily harm, all against the same complainant.

"In this case a combination of the withdrawal of key witnesses and new material that came to light meant there was no longer a realistic prospect of conviction," the CPS said in a statement.

"In these circumstances, we are under a duty to stop the case." Greenwood, who has played 129 times for United, scoring 35 goals, last played for United against West Ham in January last year.

"Given the significant media coverage of this case, it

is only fair that we share the news that the 21-year-old man, who had been arrested and charged in connection with an investigation opened in January 2022, no longer faces criminal proceedings in relation to this," said chief superintendent Michaela Kerr.

"The investigation team has remained in regular contact with the legal team, providing any updates of note, and so understand the rationale for the discontinuation of proceedings at this stage, and that this decision has not been taken lightly."

"Despite the media and public's interest in this case, we have decided not to comment on it in any further detail."

Greenwood, a product of United's academy, and once considered one of English football's brightest prospects, made his senior debut for the Red Devils in a Champions League victory at Paris Saint-Germain in March 2019.

He signed a new contract at United in February 2021 that runs until at least 2025.

The forward made his England debut against Iceland in September 2020, but he and Manchester City midfielder Phil Foden were sent home after breaching the team's coronavirus guidelines.

Nike suspended and later terminated its sponsorship deal with the player, while Electronic Arts confirmed his removal from active squads on its FIFA 22 game following his arrest.

## Indian women's team opens campaign against Bhutan



PTI ■ DHAKA

Powerhouse India face Bhutan in their opening match of the SAFF U-20 Women's Championship here on Friday, with the team, mainly made up of players from the FIFA U-17 World Cup campaign last year, hoping to clinch the title in the inaugural edition.

Hosts Bangladesh and Nepal are the other teams in the tournament. All the matches will be played at the Bir Sherestha

Shaheed Shipahi Mostafa Kamal Stadium here.

After a four-team round robin, the top two teams will play the final on February 9.

India take on Bangladesh on February 5 and Nepal on February 7.

India head coach Maymol Rocky stressed the importance of having a mix of experienced and young players in the squad, including those who have played in the senior national team already.

"We have a mixture of youth and experience in our team, players that have played at the senior level as well, so I am sure the girls will give their 100 per cent and the results will follow," Maymol said at the pre-match press conference.

When asked about the opposition teams in the tournament, she said, "Bhutan are a good side, as are Nepal. Bangladesh have been doing brilliantly in the last few years, and they are definitely the team to watch out for." "But if we give it our best shot, we can overcome all obstacles."

India captain Martina Thokchom, one of the players to have played in the senior national team, spoke about the advantages of being in the same camp with the senior side in the build-up to the championship.

"Yes, we are a junior team, but we were in the same camp as the seniors, and that has really helped us. We all stayed in the same hotel and even played a match together. It was a good learning experience, especially for the new girls in this team."

## Varane announces int'l retirement



AP ■ PARIS

France centre-back Raphael Varane, a World Cup winner in 2018 and runner-up last year, announced on Thursday his retirement from international duty at the age of 29.

"I've been thinking about it for several months and I decided it was the right time for me to retire from international football," Varane wrote on Instagram.

The Manchester United defender made his France debut in 2013 and won 93 caps for Les Bleus. He had been in the running to take over as captain following the retirement of Hugo Lloris last month.

"To represent our magnificent country for a decade has been one of the greatest honours of

my life. Each time I wore this special blue shirt I felt immense pride," said Varane.

Varane's decision to call time on his France career leaves Kylian Mbappe as the frontrunner for the captaincy, with Didier Deschamps' side set to begin Euro 2024 qualifying at the end of March with a double-header against the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland.

The former Real Madrid star played every minute of his country's triumphant 2018 World Cup campaign as France defeated Croatia 4-2 in the final.

He was one of five French players who also started the 2022 final defeat by Argentina on penalties, recovering from a leg injury that ruled him out of the start of the tournament.

"I'll definitely miss these moments with you, but the time has come for the new generation to take over," he said, thanking Deschamps and his coaching staff as well as the supporters.

"We have a group of talented young players who are ready to step up and who deserve their chance."

Deschamps paid tribute to Varane and praised him for the leadership qualities he had brought to the team throughout his time with France.

"I cannot turn this page without some emotion, given the bonds we have formed," said Deschamps, who gave Varane his international debut in a 2014 World Cup qualifier against Georgia.

"I respect his decision even if it may seem a bit unfortunate given everything he was able to do with the national team through to the World Cup, during which he behaved like the leader we know he is from start to finish."



# TACKLING SLIDE SPIN WILL BE KEY TO OZ'S SUCCESS IN INDIA, SAYS McDONALD

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald believes the biggest challenge for his side in the upcoming Border-Gavaskar Test Trophy will be to tackle "slide spin" from the Indian tweakers in the early overs.

As the tourists got down to the business of preparing for the gruelling four-Test series beginning in Nagpur on February 9, McDonald also warned his batters that they will have to come up with individual methods and techniques to counter the sliding deliveries.

The Australians have chosen to train all by themselves instead of playing tour games as they feel practice matches serve little purpose.

Both McDonald and Steve Smith have said that serving green tops for tour games and spinning tracks for actual games defeat the very purpose of playing practice matches.

"I think the new ball is the one that creates more of that slide and when the batters do get done on the inside ... we're preparing for that (during the preparatory camp in Bengaluru)," McDonald had said before the team's departure for Bengaluru on Wednesday.

On Thursday, cricket.Com. Au re-tweeted images of the squad training at Alur, clicked by its journalist, which showed the touring party batters going about their paces in the nets.

"That slide spin, we'll expect the spinners to bowl early against our opening batters as well with the new ball so all that is taken care of in the training environment and (batting co-



ach) Diva (Michael Di Venuto) does a fantastic job in preparing.

"The key to success there is to have a clear method and that will be individually based and depending on the conditions we're confronted with," McDonald was quoted as saying by Sydney Morning Herald on Thursday.

With prolific Usman Khawaja scheduled to arrive later on Thursday after his visa approval got delayed, he will join the touring party on Friday to prepare for the spin challenge in the right

earnest.

McDonald said that despite the squad training on their own, there will still be variation in the track offered at Alur and the ones on which Test matches will be played, and here batters will have to use their judgement while playing shots.

"We'll be trying to make sure the batters are clear on their method," said McDonald, adding, "You're never going to get exactly the same as you're going to get in a game, and that's one of the real complexities

around preparing for a cricket tour."

The coach, who took over from Justin Langer, said another reason for not playing a tour game in India was to keep players fresh at the back end of the month-long tour.

"We haven't played a tour game, for three years. It's probably not something new to us, put it that way," McDonald said.

"We value freshness at the back end of the tour. Something we've seen teams go there before and expend a lot of energy at the

front end. We feel with the profile of this group, quite an experienced group, quite an experienced batting unit as well, who have been there before, I think 11 out of the squad has been there before.

"A significant chunk of the squad that's been there before, so we feel that better places them leading in and then you never get guarantees over those practice game surfaces you get. Often, there's no real connection

between that practice game into the first Test match. We feel as though we can control the surfaces here," he added. He said the strategy would be to prepare a blueprint while training in Bengaluru and replicate it in Nagpur during the first Test.

"(We'll) get a bit more control in Bangalore to replicate what we're going to come up against and then we go into Nagpur fresh and hopefully it pays dividends at the back end."

## Australia will win on 'fair Indian wickets': Healy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Hosts India will have the upper hand if the tracks are rank turners in the upcoming Test series but Australia will win on "fair" pitches, feels former wicketkeeper Ian Healy.

"I think if they produce fair Indian wickets, that are good batting wickets, to start with, (that) probably spin and spin pretty consistently but spin a long way, late in the match ... we (Australia) win," Healy said on 'SENQ Breakfast'.

"I'm worried about (Mitchell) Starc and (Nathan) Lyon in the first Test ... if they're unfair wickets which I've seen in the last series, where balls were jumping ridiculously and sliding down low from day one, I think India play those conditions better than us," he added.

Healy advised the less-experienced Australian players to soak in the pressure and not commit any fielding lapses.

"I want the players to be very aware if they are escaping that pressure (from the locals) if you're escaping that pressure and hiding in your room using the golf simulator... I think you've got to do something else," he said.

"That's an escape, you shouldn't be doing it, you're dodging, just be very aware of what you are feeling at any given time. Immerse yourself before you really get to deploy your technique... don't drop catches, fielding can be difficult over there.

"What happens in India, to get ten wickets, you'll only get ten chances, whereas in Australia with bounce, carry and speed you can create 13 chances and you can waste a couple... but they don't come along as easy in India. I just think they have to live and breathe that pressure and have a philosophy over there."

Australia haven't won a Test series in India since 2004.

# Technically & tactically, it was a near-perfect game for me: Shubman



PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Young opener Shubman Gill said his unbeaten 63-ball 126 was "tactically and technically" a near-perfect game as it set up India's massive series-clinching 168-run win in the third T20I against New Zealand.

Gill smashed 12 boundaries and seven maximums in his scintillating maiden century in the shortest format to power India to a mammoth 234 for 4 in the final T20I.

The hosts then bundled out New Zealand for 66 in 12.1 overs to not only win the match but

also secure a 2-1 series win.

"To be able to play how I play, I have to be mentally clear," Gill said during an interaction with skipper Hardik Pandya, a video of which was posted on BCCI.TV.

"This is what you (Hardik) told me. Every time I hit a six, he came and told me -- hold your shape in the next ball, you don't have to do anything extra, just do what you are doing and don't try to go too hard. Every ball he kept reminding me and that helped."

"In the last over of (Mitchell) Santner, I was in the zone and I was hitting. So, I thought I will go after him but you asked me to hold myself back and target other bowlers because he (Santner) is bowling well in the entire T20 series. So, tactically and technically it was a near-perfect game for me."

"Player of the series" Pandya snapped four wickets as he bowled with the new ball to dismiss Finn Allen and Glenn Phillips. He later returned to take two more wickets to demolish the Kiwis.

"Four wickets, to be honest, are just part and parcel of the sport but I think I bowled at 145 (kmph) if I am not wrong and that kind of gave me the happiness and the smile you can see. So, I told him (Gill) today that it is my last game and I am going on a break," said Hardik, who will play his next game in about two months' time.

"So, today (Wednesday) gonna be full all guns blazing and I am going to bowl as fast as possible and, to be honest, the kind of start we got, it made our life very easy."

# Malan, Buttler and Archer earn consolation win for England



AP ■ KIMBERLEY

Dawid Malan and captain Jos Buttler hit centuries to set up a 59-run win for England in the third and final ODI against South Africa at the Diamond Oval in Kimberley on Wednesday.

Malan made 118 and Buttler scored 131 in an England total of 346 for seven. South Africa were bowled out for 287 with fast bowler Jofra Archer taking a career-best six for 40.

South Africa had already clinched the series by winning the first two matches but England captain Jos Buttler said Wednesday's win was a reward

for the hard work his players had put in during the short series.

"There's been some really good stuff. Guys getting hundreds and Jofra Archer was brilliant. We've got a good thing going. We're building nicely," said Buttler, who was named player of the match and player of the series.

South African captain Temba Bavuma said the series win was important. "We came in under a lot of pressure. We've done ourselves justice and come closer to automatic qualification for the World Cup."

South Africa need one win in their remaining two matches against the Netherlands to

move ahead of West Indies into one of the eight qualifying places in the World Cup Super League, although Sri Lanka could still move ahead of them in a forthcoming series against New Zealand.

The left-handed Malan and his right-handed captain shared a fourth wicket partnership of 232 off 211 balls after coming together with their team in trouble at 14 for three in the sixth over. A slow start to the partnership became a torrent of runs as they took command on a slow pitch.

England scored 217 runs in the last 20 overs of their innings, scoring rapidly even after the two centuries were dismissed.

# Hardik doesn't mind playing Dhoni's role for Team India

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Star India all-rounder Hardik Pandya feels he has developed the ability to absorb pressure and doesn't mind playing the anchor role that the great Mahendra Singh Dhoni played for the team. The 29-year-old has always been known for his batting pyrotechnics but says he has now learnt to take the back seat and anchor the innings, something which master chaser Dhoni did in the fag end of his international career.

"See, to be honest, I've always enjoyed hitting sixes, but I have to evolve and that is life," the stand-in T20 skipper said during the press conference after India sealed the T20 series against New Zealand 2-1.

"I have to take the other part where I've always believed in partnerships. I want to give my team and the other person more calmness and the assurance that at least I'm there.

"I've played more games than any of those guys out there. So, I've known the experience and more than the experience part, it's where I've batted, and I've learnt how to accept pressure and I've learnt how to kind of swallow the pressure and kind of make sure the team and everything is calm," Hardik



added. Dhoni is known for his calm demeanour and Hardik feels now it is his responsibility to step into the legendary wicketkeeper's shoes as a batter and he is ready to sacrifice his strike-rate to play that role.

"In that way, maybe I have to get my strike rate down or... Taking new opportunities or taking new roles is (something) I've always looked forward to. I don't mind coming in and playing the role which somewhere down the line Maahi (Dhoni) used to play," he said.

Hardik has scored 1271 runs at a strike-rate of 142.17 in 87 T20Is.

"I think at that time, I was young, and I was hitting all around the park, but now since he has gone, all of a sudden that responsibility... It has just naturally come to me, and I don't mind (doing it). We're getting the result we want and it's okay."

## ODISHA ELECTRICITY REGULATORY COMMISSION PUBLIC NOTICE

Hearing of Application for approval of Business Plan for FY 2023-24 for the (1ST Control Period) in compliance to Regulation 2.1 of the OERC (Terms and Conditions for determination of Wheeling Tariff and Retail Supply Tariff) Regulations, 2022.

M/s. TP Central Odisha Distribution Ltd. (TPCODL) has filed an application before this Commission for approval of Business Plan for the FY 2023-24 in compliance to Regulation 2.1 of the OERC (Terms and Conditions for determination of Wheeling Tariff and Retail Supply Tariff) Regulations, 2022. The Commission has registered it as Case No. 11 of 2023 and has decided to dispose of this case through a public hearing along with its ARR application for FY 2023-24. The petition along with all Annexures submitted by M/s. TPCODL in this regard is available in OERC website (www.orierc.org) and also in TPCODL's website www.tpcentralodisha.com. The persons/organizations those who are interested to participate in the above proceeding may file their objections/suggestions, if any, on the present petition of M/s. TPCODL by 13.02.2023 with a copy to the petitioner. M/s. TPCODL is directed to file its rejoinder to the objections/suggestions of the Respondents by 17.02.2023 with a copy to the Respondents. Those persons who have filed their objection/suggestion by the due date to the above application of M/s. TPCODL shall be summoned to participate in the hearing of the application by the Commission.

Dated : 02.02.2023

By Order of the Commission  
Sd/-  
SECRETARY

# Sai Praneeth enters Thailand Open quarters

PTI ■ BANGKOK

India's B Sai Praneeth defeated Korean qualifier Hyeok Jin Jeon in a tough three-game contest to enter the quarter-finals of the Thailand Open Super 300 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

Praneeth beat his Korean opponent 24-22, 7-21, 22-20 in the men's singles second-round match.

He will next face sixth seed Li Shi Feng of China in the last-eight round.

Earlier in the day, Kiran George and Ashmita Chaliha put up gallant fights before going down in three games in the second round of their respective events.

While George, the Odisha Open champion, went down 22-20, 15-21, 20-22 to third seed Lee Cheuk Yiu of Hong Kong in men's singles, Ashmita lost 21-19, 13-21, 27-29 to sixth-seeded Den Højmark Kjaersfeldt of Den-

mark in a gruelling women's singles round-of-16 match.

Eighth seeds Tanisha Crasto and Ishaan Bhatnagar suffered a 19-21, 16-21 loss to Indonesia's Akbar Bintang Cahyono and Marshailla Gischa Islami in mixed doubles.

N Sikki Reddy and Rohan Kapoor also couldn't cross the second round, losing 11-21, 10-21 to sixth seeded Chinese Feng Yan Zhe and Huang Dong Ping.

CHANGE OF NAME (SELF)

I, Ansuman Jayadev resident of Maheswarpur, P.O. Brahmaparada, P.S. Dharmasala, Dist- Jaipur, Odisha have changed my name from Ansuman Jayadev to Anshuman Jaydev vide affidavit dated. 03 Jan 2023 at Dharmasala, Odisha.



B-1214

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA

e-Procurement Notice, ANGUL (R&B) DIVISION

Bid Identification No.36 of 2022-23

e-mail ID- angulrbddivision@yahoo.co.in

1. Number of Works

2. Approximate estimated cost

3. Period of completion

4. Date & Time of availability of bid document

5. Last date / Time for receipt of bid in the portal

6. Date of opening Bid

7. Name and address of the Office Inviting Bid

8. The bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only.

: 1 (One) number of Building work

: Rs.84.19 lakhs

: 06 (Six) Calendar months

: Dt. 06.02.2023 at 10.00 A.M. In the portal

: Dt. 20.02.2023 up to 5.00 P.M.

: Dt. 21.02.2023 at 11.00 A.M.

: Executive Engineer, Angul (R&B) Division, Angul

Further details can be seen from the e-procurement portal https://tendersodisha.gov.in

OIPR-34074/11/0017/2223

Executive Engineer, Angul (R&B) Division



B-1215

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA

E-procurement notice

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER: SONEPUR (R&B) DIVISION, SONEPUR

E-mail - eepwdsnr@gmail.com Phone -06654-221081

BID IDENTIFICATION No. SE/R&B/SNPR/26/2022-23

No. 433

//Dt. 31/1/23

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1. The Superintending Engineer, Sonapur (R&B) Division, Sonapur on behalf of Governor of Odisha, invites Percentage Rate bids in Single & Double Cover System in Online Mode for construction of Road, Building & Electrical works detailed in the DTCN from the Eligible Class of Contractors.

2. No. of work : 06 (Six)

3. Tender Cost : Rs.10,000/- for Serial No.1 : Rs.6,000/- for Serial No.2 to 5 : Rs.4,000/- for Serial No. 6

4. Class of Contractor : "B" Class Contractor for Serial No.1 : "H1" Class Contractor for Serial No.2 to 4 and 6 : "D" & "C" Class Contractor for Serial No.5

5. Date and time Available in Web site & receipt of Bids: From 10.00 A.M. of 06.02.2023 to 5.00 P.M. of 20.02.2023.

6. Date of Opening of Tender: 21.02.2023 at 11.30 A.M.

7. The Bidders have to participate in Online bidding only further details can be seen from the Web Site.

8. Any Corrigendum / Addendum will be displayed in the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in only.

OIPR-34081/11/0017/2223

Superintending Engineer Sonapur (R&B) Division, Sonapur