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Parl stalled over Adani as Opp sticks to JPC guns

Govt urges Opp to allow Motion of Thanks to Prez Address

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The noisy row on the Adani Group stock rout continued in both the Houses of Parliament which were adjourned for the day on Friday amid an unrelenting Opposition demanding a probe by the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC).

The Government held on to its stand as articulated by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Prahlad Joshi that the Opposition should allow Motion of Thanks to the President's Address.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor accused the Modi dispensation of "stalling" the Opposition's demand for discussions on every issue which would embarrass it, while BJP MP Mahesh Jethmalani dismissed the Opposition's allegation that investments by LIC in the Adani Group were made at the Government's behest. Jethmalani, instead, said the SEBI and the RBI will look into it. "Let their reports come in," he said.

Prior to the ruckus in Parliament, leading to the adjournment of both Houses for the second day, Opposition



Opposition members in the Lok Sabha during Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi on Friday

PTI

parties came together at a meeting convened by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge to coordinate their strategy in Parliament and resolved to insist on a JPC probe or a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the issue.

The TMC, which wants only a Supreme Court-monitored investigation, was not part of the Opposition meeting.

A number of Opposition members, including Rajya Sabha Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge, DMK

Rajya Sabha member Tiruchi Siva, Congress MP Pramod Tiwari, BRS MP K Keshava Rao, Shiv Sena MP (Uddhav Thackeray faction) Priyanka Chaturvedi, Congress Rajya Sabha MP Dr Syed Naseer Hussain, and CPI(M) MP Elamaram Kareem gave suspension of Business notice to their respective Houses to hold a discussion on the allegations levelled by US-based Hindenburg Research against Adani Group.

Soon after the Lok Sabha met for the day, Opposition

members were on their feet shouting slogans and demanding a probe into the tanking of the Adani Group scrips and sought a probe into the business practices of the corporate giant.

Speaker Om Birla appealed to members to participate in the discussions during the Question Hour, which he termed as significant. He said the House will take up the Motion of Thanks to the president for her address at the beginning of the Budget Session.

SBI, LIC exposure to Adani within permitted limits: FM

'India's regulators very stringent, nation has well-regulated financial market'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said the exposure of the State Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation in the Adani Group companies is within permitted limits and asserted that India is a well-governed and well-regulated financial market wherein regulators are "very stringent" about certain governance practices.

When asked about the latest row concerning the Adani Group in an interview with CNN-News-18, the FM said, "India remains a well-governed, well-regulated financial market. Our regulators are very stringent about certain governance practices. So many lessons have been learnt over the decades."

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.

Citing the statement issued by the heads of both the SBI and the LIC on the Adani crisis, she said they are not overexposed.

"I want to recall the



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman leaves after addressing BJP members on Union Budget at Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Friday. Union Ministers of State Bhagwat Kishanrao Karad, V Muralidharan and Arjun Ram Meghwal are also seen

PTI

words...coming from the horse's mouth has more credibility. Both SBI and LIC have issued detailed statements. And I know the chairperson or the CMD... he has himself come out and explained how they are not overexposed or whatever they said.

"And also said, look, we are sitting over profits for the exposure that we have which is well within the limit. That's what I understood. I read it through the media," Sitharaman said.

The FM asserted that the Indian banking sector today is at a very comfortable level and their position is very sound, adding that she made the statement with a sense of responsibility.

"She pointed out that NPA was coming down and recov-

ery was improving and that is why banks got a good response when they went to raise money in the market.

The FM praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership for guiding India tackle the crisis triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as the Russia-Ukraine war, adding that people of the country must also be credited with "absorbing" the Government's

strategies.

Sitharaman said she had no precedent before her to handle the situation as she looked back on the pandemic.

"To capture the experiences, the 'anubhav' and look back at it now when you are probably slightly out of it is very difficult to describe in a short answer," the FM said. "There were no templates. There were no examples to follow. There were no theories that would have worked in such a context. Essentially, we were going by continuous conversation with all kinds of stakeholders. We had to engage in conversation with all people, take their view, and see which one works out and also have the courage to say one way may not work out for us," she added.

Hailing Modi for guiding the country through such a grim phase, Sitharaman said, "I would immensely recall the ways in which PM Modi led the conversation with us. He would never tire of meeting us, would never say not today. Following all necessary precautions for Covid-19, we would still meet and talk about things."

Rating agencies help ease Adani pressure, French partner backs investment

But S&P Global revises outlook on Adani Ports and Adani Electricity to negative from stable

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After a tumultuous past few days that almost halved value of the Adani Group, embattled tycoon Gautam Adani-led conglomerate had some pressure eased on Friday as two global rating firms stuck with their calls on its credit profile and its French partner backed its investments in the group firms.

Also for the first time since January 24, shares of the group's flagship firm Adani Enterprises ended in positive territory after erasing an intraday loss of 35 per cent. Adani Ports and SEZ also ended 8 per cent higher.

This is after an over USD 100-billion rout in value of group stock since the US short seller Hindenburg Research accused Adani Group of stock manipulation and accounting fraud. Adani Group has repeatedly denied any wrongdoing and has threatened to sue Hindenburg.

Six other group stocks however, revised lower.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued a statement that did not name Adani but said as

a regulator and supervisor, the central bank maintains a constant vigil on the banking sector and on individual banks with a view to maintain financial stability.

"The banking sector remains resilient and stable. Various parameters relating to capital adequacy, asset quality, liquidity, provision coverage and profitability are healthy," it said.

In an interview to PTI, Finance Secretary TV Somanathan said the stock market turmoil created by rout in Adani group shares is a "storm in a teacup" from a macroeconomic point of view and that India's public financial system is robust.

Separately, Fitch Ratings said there's no immediate impact on the credit profile of the Adani companies it rates following the Hindenburg report and that it doesn't expect material changes to the forecast cash flow.

Its peer Moody's Investors Service warned that the rout in Adani Group shares could hurt the conglomerate's ability to raise capital to fund committed capex or refinance maturing debt over the next 1-2 years.

S&P Global Ratings, however, revised outlook on Adani Ports and Adani Electricity to negative from stable while affirming the rating.

GF Somalika's complaint

Police register fresh case against BJD MLA Das

After High Court direction

AK SAHOO/ KAHNU NANDA ■ BHUBANESWAR/ JGAGATSINGHPUR AK SAHOO/ KAHNU NANDA

Trouble mounted against Tirtol BJD MLA Bijaya Shankar Das as police registered a fresh case against Das

on Friday over a complaint of his girlfriend Somalika Dash following a direction from the Orissa High Court.

Justice SK Panigrahi heard a petition of Somalika and asked police to register her case.

In her petition, the 29-year-old Somalika challenged the "illegal action" and "inaction" of police. She said the Jagatsinghpur police station Inspector-in-Charge (IIC) is

not registering the case on an FIR filed by her.

On May 13, 2022, she had approached the IIC with the FIR against the MLA accusing him of betrayal. The IIC allegedly did not register the FIR. She had later approached the district Superintendent of Police (SP) to record her statement under Section 154 (3) of Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) but to no avail.

The High Court said, "The petitioner is directed to approach the IIC of Jagatsinghpur police station along with a copy of this order." The court also directed the IIC to register a case if any cognisable case is made out.

Following the court's order, Somalika approached the IIC and filed a written complaint. The IIC also assured her of

registering a case this time.

Earlier, Somalika had alleged that the MLA was operating sex rackets to raise money for his election expenses. She also accused him of cheating, harassment and not turning up for marriage at the Registrar of Marriage office at Jagatsinghpur.

She levelled allegations of rape against him and maintained that she has proof to

corroborate her charges. However, the MLA termed the rape allegation as baseless and said it was a conspiracy against him.

Somalika and Bijaya were scheduled to marry at the Sub-Registrar office in Jagatsinghpur. However, Bijaya did not turn up at the venue feigning ignorance of the marriage registration date.

DGP breaks silence 6 days after Naba murder

Says it will take time to establish motive

AK SAHOO ■ BHUBANESWAR

Breaking his silence six days after the murder of Health Minister Naba Kisore Das, Director General of Police (DGP) Sunil Bansal on Friday said, "It will take some time to unravel the mystery shrouding the incident."

The DGP told the media, "This is a high-profile murder case and a police officer has confessed to have assassinated the Minister. It is tough to unravel the mystery in two or four days in such cases. Even though some facts have emerged, it will take some time to arrive at the motive behind the crime."

According to Bansal, following the murder, the State Government handed over the investigation to the Crime Investigation Department of (CID) of the Crime Branch. Additional Director, ADG CB, Arun Bothra, who was in the CBI and one of the best officers, is camping at the spot and personally investigating the case.



The entire investigation is being monitored by a retired Orissa High Court Judge.

Bansal further said police has contacted the Central Forensic Science Laboratory (CFSL) to assist in the ongoing probe. "I have personally discussed the matter with Union Home Ministry officials and they assured us to extend all possible help. A CSFL team will also visit Odisha," he said.

On recovery of some material objects like paper from a sewage tank, the DGP said it would be premature to say anything on the matter till a complete forensic examination of the papers is done.

"The principle of any good investigation is to keep all options open. We are not closing our minds. Whatever clue

Naba's viscera sent to SFSL for test

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Crime Branch (CB) of Odisha Police on Friday sent the viscera of slain Minister Naba Das to the State Forensic Science Laboratory (SFSL) here for chemical examination.

Meanwhile on the second of his three-day remand, alleged killer ex-ASI Gopal Das was taken to his Government quarters in Brajarajnagar and questioned for over two hours. In another development, police reportedly recovered the bullet that pierced through the Minister's body and got stuck in his car.

On Thursday, a CB team had retrieved pieces of papers from a septic tank in which Gopal had dumped them. The accused had reportedly jotted down in red letters the motive behind the heinous crime. The papers will be sent to forensic and handwriting experts for reconstruc-



tion and examination.

Reports from Ganjam said verification of the medical treatment records and financial behaviour of Gopal was underway by a CB team. The team was also engaged in the examination of the near and dear ones of the accused to ascertain the plea advanced by him. Interrogation of Gopal's elder brother at Brahmapur has been completed.

or evidence comes, we will take it to a logical conclusion," he said.

Bansal said the principal accused Gopal Krishna Das was an ASI of Police when he fired

at the Minister. In order to ensure transparency and rule out any kind of interference in the probe, all senior police officials in the district have been transferred as a 'precau-

tion.' He informed that a detailed investigation is being conducted to review all aspects as the role of the Minister's Personal Security Officer (PSO) was to ensure his pro-

tection. "The PSO was present on the spot when the incident occurred. We will investigate what his mistake was and other lapses and the prescribed punishment," the DGP said.

LoP surrenders PSO



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Leader of Opposition (LoP) Jayanarayan Mishra discontinued availing the service of his Personal Security Officer (PSO), a policeman, stating that he has no faith on the State police after an ASI of Police killed Health Minister Naba Kisore Das on January 29. The BJP leader described the ASI Gopal Das' crime as unprecedented in the history of the Odisha police and strongly decried the deteriorating law and situation in the State. On the other hand, the Odisha Police Association in a Press meet condemned Mishra's statement against the police force and demanded its withdrawal.

Virtual HC opened at Balangir



PNS ■ BALANGIR

Chief Justice of India Dr Justice DY Chandrachud inaugurated a virtual High Court of Orissa here on Friday in virtual mode in the presence of Chief Justice of Orissa High Court Dr S Muralidharan and Administrative Judge Sangam Kumar Sahu.

In the pre-Independence period, a High Court was functioning at Balangir. Advocates

and various organisations of Balangir agitated for setting up a High Court Bench at Balangir.

Now, local people can file petitions and get certified copies here without having to go to Cuttack for High Court work, said Balangir Bar Association president Amarish Tripathy. Among others, District and Sessions Judge Lalatendu Jena and judges of different courts were present.

Pangolins in peril due to poaching in State

Forest Dept's lax enforcement adds to menace
SAROJ MISHRA
BHUBANESWAR

Pangolins, which are found in all the districts in Odisha, are in peril due to the growing menace of poaching and the inefficiency of the authorities to control it, said the Wildlife Society of Odisha (WSO) here on Friday. The Forest Department has not made any efforts to gather intelligence on this illegal trade. While the Crime Branch's Special Task Force (STF) has used intelligence to seize and arrest

wildlife smugglers, forest officials have continued to depend on chance encounters. So, it is no surprise that police have seized more live pangolins than forest officials, said Wildlife Protection Survey of India (WPSI) project director Biswajit Mohanty. Anil Dhir of WSO said that until three years ago, the Forest Department was unaware about threats to the pangolins. On June 18, 2018 when notorious wildlife smuggler Shamsuddin Khan was caught by forest officials, they had no clue about his past. Thankfully, the STF stepped in and arrested six more accomplices,



including two international smugglers, from north-east India. Mohanty said that for the

last five to six years, the demand for live pangolins has gone up sharply in international markets,

particularly China. Finding that the trafficking of animal is lucrative than ivory or drug trade, organised mafia gangs have entered the illegal business which is comparatively easier for them. But the Forest Department is yet to understand the enormity of the pangolin smuggling rackets in Odisha and how its curativeness has attracted organised gangs. Of the 49 live pangolins' seizures in 48 cases till now, 24 seizures carried out by police, primarily by the STF. Of the 114 men arrested in the 48 cases, 64 were nabbed by the Forest Department and 50 by police, he added.

'Restart PMGKAY for food security of poor'

BJD urges Centre
PNS BHUBANESWAR

Following presentation of the Union Budget 2023-24 in Parliament, the BJD has appealed to the Centre for resumption of the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) for food security of the poor. BJD vice-president Debi Prasad Mishra told the media on Friday that Centre was providing additional 5-kg free rice per person under the PMGKAY apart from 5-kg rice under the National Food Security Act (NFSA). However, the discontinuation of the scheme would affect the

household food security of poor as well as farmers. In the Budget, the Centre has reduced the provision in the food security by about Rs 71,000 crore as compared to the amount spent by the Centre in 2021-22. "This reduction is primarily due to the stopping of the PMGKAY. After the Covid pandemic, the industries and livelihood are still to come back to normalcy. Stopping of PMGKAY now will affect the poor and their chance to get their live back to normalcy," Mishra said. The farmers would also be affected due to this. The Budget has also a reduction of about Rs 20,000 crore compared to the amount

spent by the Centre in 2021-22 in the procurement of food grains. This is again due to the stopping of PMGKAY and, therefore, reduction in procurement from farmers. Due to the reduced procurement, farmers would also be deprived of getting their Minimum Support Price (MSP) for food grains, he said. Before stopping such a huge programme, the Centre should have either provided an alternate programme or taken care of the financial adverse impact it could cause to the poor, he said, adding that in the interests of poor and farmers, the Centre should think on these lines and restart the PMGKAY.

Book on Jayee Rajguru unveiled

PNS BHUBANESWAR

A book titled "Resisting Dominance: Situating Jayee Rajguru in the Khurda Uprising of 1804" was released by Utkal University VC Prof Sabita Acharya, in the department of history. The book is an anthology of essays that intends to provide elaborate views on theoretical and thematic aspect with specific reference to anti colonial resistance of Khurda in 1804 under Jayee Rajaguru. Each essay is unique in its own way where the authors have presented their views with growing body of evidence, basic information and insight. VC Prof Acharya



congratulated the authors and editors of the book, particularly the academicians, research scholars and students. She highlighted about the land of Odisha and how the leadership of Rajguru led the first freedom movement despite he is not a fighter or an administrator. He is one of the finest war planners and made five Paika Akhadas in Khurda

district during 1804. A man of profound integrity, he symbolised the heroism in Odia land, elaborated Prof Harihar Panda, retired Professor of NDA, Pune and a Member of Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). Prof Somarani spoke about the purpose of the book and focused on the background of Odia nationalism.

In Baleswar Sub-Collector injured in sand mafia attack

Official vehicle also vandalised
PNS BALESWAR

Sub-Collector Kunal Sitaram Chouhan was brutally assaulted allegedly by the members of a sand mining mafia gang at Dahapada under the Sahadevkhunta police station in Baleswar district on Friday. As per reports, Chouhan was on his way to Baleswar from Fuladi when he spotted a sand laden truck on the Fuladi

bridge. When Chouhan got down from his vehicle to check the papers, the sand mafia gang members allegedly attacked Chouhan and his driver. The miscreants hit his head with a stone seriously injuring him in the process. The mafia also vandalised the Sub-Collector's official vehicle as well. Following the attack, Chouhan was rushed to the District Headquarters Hospital. Baleswar Collector

Dattatreya Bhausaheb Shinde said, "We had conducted raids in Mandarpur and Dahapada areas last night following a tip off on illegal sand mining and confiscated several tipper trucks, tractors and JCBs. Today, the Sub-Collector was sent to the area again to calculate the seized machines and vehicles to begin the auction process." "The sand mafia and some of their supporters attacked him and his driver near Dahapada," he added.

Increase milk price to Rs 40, demands OMFA

Otherwise, threatens demo before Assembly
PNS BHUBANESWAR

The Amul company has increased milk price by Rs 3 per litre. As a result, the Amul milk which was sold earlier at Rs 63 is now being sold at Rs 66 and Amul buffalo milk is being sold at Rs 70. But sadly, till now, the Odisha Milk Federation (OMFED) has not hiked its milk price, said the Odisha Milk Farmers' Association (OMFA) on Friday. In the last few years, cattle feed which was earlier sold at Rs 900 has now reached Rs 1,400. Similarly, the prices for medicines for cattle and other things have increased. Earlier,

despite repeated demands before the Government, the milk price was not increased. As a result, the farmers are forced to sell milk at Rs 33 to Rs 35, said OMFA president Rabi Behera. Due to this, more than 11 lakh milk farmers are living in misery as in the meantime the prices of essential commodities have skyrocketed. Though big companies like Amul have increased milk prices, the OMFED should hike it to at least Rs 40 in the interest of the 2.68 lakh milk farmers who are dependent on the OMFED. Otherwise, the farmers would be forced to hold an agitation in the coming session of the State Assembly by spilling milk, said Behera.

Who after Naba? BJD may find it difficult to fill leadership vacuum soon

PNS BHUBANESWAR

With the murder of senior BJD leader and Cabinet Minister Naba Kisore Das, the ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) is searching for a tall leader to fill up the vacuum created in western Odisha. The BJD is always facing a tough fight against opposition BJP and Congress in the western region as all three political parties have a strong base in different districts and pockets in the area. To deal with it, the BJD had brought many senior Congress leaders including Naba Das and Bhupinder Singh into its fold. Besides, the party had also picked up veteran bureaucrats like Asit

Tripathy and Nalini Kanta Pradhan to further strengthen its base in the region. Among all, late Minister Naba Das was a great asset for the party. He was not only a good organiser but also supported the party in raising funds as he was very actively involved with trade and business in the western region of the State. He was having a strong organisation in many of the western districts like Jharsuguda, Bargarh, Sambalpur and Sundargarh. So, it is clear that the BJD has suffered a heavy loss with the death of Das. According to sources, the BJD is very likely to pick up Das's daughter Dipali for the by-



poll as it was a wish of the deceased Minister to bring his daughter in electoral politics. According to local political pundits, Dipali may fill the vacancy in the Assembly in the event she wins but in terms of finding an experienced leader of strong organisational skill like Das, the vacuum may stay. So, the ruling party would try its best

to search for tall leader of western Odisha before the upcoming polls. "There are three or four senior BJD leaders in the western Odisha, who are, we can say, under-utilised now. The leaders are Kalikesh Singhdeo and Nalini Kant Pradhan. Besides, the party can also promote active leaders like Asit Tripathy, Susanta Singh and Prasanna Acharya," said a political expert. Kalikesh is a young dynamic political personality and belongs to a major political family having wide influence in western Odisha. Prasanna Acharya and Susanta Singh are also good organisers and ensured the party's victory in all by-polls held recently in

Bargarh Lok Sabha constituency. As the party nowadays is giving much importance to bureaucrat-turned politicians, so, leaders like Tripathy and Pradhan may also be brought to the forefront by the BJD boss in place of Das, the expert said. However, the BJD will definitely look into the criteria like loyalty to the party and leadership, organising quality, public relations, money power and acceptability within the party, he added. Meanwhile, the Odisha Assembly Secretariat has already notified the vacancy of Jharsuguda Assembly seat and the bypoll to the seat may be held anytime soon.

5T Secy visits Gupteshwar Temple



Master plan for renovation soon
PNS BHUBANESWAR

Directed by Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, his 5T Secretary VK Pandian on Friday visited several heritage and tourist places of Koraput district and initiated steps for their renovation. Pandian visited the

Gupteshwar Temple and the Sabari River Ghat. After discussion with the priests and local administration, he advised to prepare a master plan for development of the shrine. He then visited the Damyanti Sagar in Kotpad and advised to take up beautification and peripheral development in the adjoining areas of the town. He visited

the Indoor Multi-Purpose Hall under construction and asked the authorities to complete in time. He visited the Kotpad College and asked the district administration to prepare proposals for augmentation of classroom facilities. He also visited the Jagannath Sagar in Jeypore and advised taking up phase-wise development of the lake.

HITTING THE BULL'S EYE BRS eager to set its foot in Odisha; will it succeed?

In a recent development, a group of former MPs, MLAs, former Chief Minister Giridhar Gamang, social workers, farmer leaders, journalists and lawyers of Odisha joined the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) in Hyderabad (Telangana) on January 25. It is said that some retired bureaucrats, politicians and journalists, who are promoting the process from behind, are likely to join the BRS afterwards.



LALIT MOHAN MISHRA side story for new political parties in the State. On the supply side, the AAP's electoral success in Punjab might have motivated regional parties to expand their operation from their mother States to other States to upscale their status from a State to a national party. Their motivation could range from becoming a true Samaritan of the people of another State to becoming a national political player, from increasing

fund-raising and business - promotion scope to attaining a bargaining power to vote-division in the newly entered State and creating political chaos and divisive tendencies in the new State. Unless a trans-boundary regional party explains its intention of expansion very convincingly, there shall be an obvious doubt on the genuine intention of a State party looking for green pasture in another State. What has been the performance of the regional parties in Odisha in the 21st century? Except the BJD, no other State parties, either floated by leaders of Odisha or landed from other States, have survived in Odisha during the post-2000 electoral period. The NCP got electoral success in 2009 poll due to its alliance with the BJD. The three current political processes like the undiminished popularity of Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, rise of the BJP and revival efforts of the Congress are not leaving any politically viable space for a

new political party in Odisha now. In this situation, the AAP has declared to intensify its existing presence in Odisha while the BRS has entered into Odisha based on its own political calculations. People are discussing about the reason of the BRS' expansion to Odisha instead neighbouring and culturally more compatible States like Karnataka or Andhra Pradesh. There are various speculations making rounds concerning the BRS Chief and Telangana CM K Chandrasekhar Rao's (KCR) plan. One such speculation attributes to fund-raising and good will vote gain for the BRS for the Telangana Assembly election due in December from its expansion to Odisha, especially to the mining and Polavurum project-belt of south Odisha. Poll strategist Prashant Kishore's prescription of generating good will vote by spreading the pre-Assembly poll message of becoming a national party has helped the regional parties like the AAP and TMC to

fight successfully against the BJP in the past Assembly elections. The BRS might be following the same strategy for the next Telangana Assembly poll to fight against the BJP and the Congress. There is another speculation too. The Central BJP is focussing on West Bengal, Odisha and Telangana as an electoral-cluster for 2024 Lok Sabha poll and has appointed its senior strategist and national general secretary Sunil Bansal as in-charge of the region. When the BRS is focussing on Odisha instead of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, there appears to be a match between the BJP and the BRS. Political observers speculate that the BRS's expansion to Odisha may give it a political bargaining power vis-a-vis the BJP which it could use for changing the political equations in Telangana and Odisha in the forthcoming elections. A few political theories emerge regarding the BRS's eye on Odisha. One theory says that the expansion

is for votes for converting the party from its regional status to the national status. The second theory says that the party might give the leadership of the Odisha-unit to someone from the undivided Koraput and heighten its presence with more focus on the undivided Koraput region till the Telangana Assembly poll and then slow down till 2024 general election and finally fizzle out. The third speculation speaks about the BRS helping the BJP indirectly in 2024 poll by giving candidates to the dissidents or anti-BJD leaders to cut a small amount of BJD's votes in certain low-margin segments while a fourth speculation speaks about the BRS helping the BJD to defeat the BJP by filling up the vacuum of the Congress in certain segments. The fifth speculation links the BRS's expansionist move to its strategic fund-raising interests in mineral and dam concentrated south Odisha. The sixth speculation attributes to BRS's ambition of

playing a leadership role among the opposition parties in 2024- Lok Sabha poll. It is unlikely that the three major political players of Odisha such as the BJD, the BJP or the Congress shall go for pre-poll alliance with the BRS for 2024 election. Similarly, the BRS shall find it difficult to get a slice of the cake from the vote banks of the BJD or BJP or Congress in the villages. Coastal -Andhra telugu migrants will not like BRS, for sure. Its votes shall primarily come from the opposition or the non-committed voters. Three factors shall contribute to the vote-building process of the BRS in Odisha such as its Chief Ministerial face for the State, the grassroots strength of the contesting candidates, the political narrative of the party and the communication system. Simple gathering of former leaders and novices might not help the party even to cross 5% vote share. (Phone: 9439178588)

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'Join conservation actions to protect wetlands'

Min urges youths while unveiling factsheet at Konark

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Minister of State for Home Tusharkanti Behera unveiled a "Factsheet on Coastal Wetlands" prepared as part of the World Wetlands Day 2023 actions by the Youth4WaterIndia campaign at the Kushabhadrā mouth of Bay of Bengal near Konark. The event was organised by the School of Sustainability, XIM University. Minister Behera invited the youths to participate in the campaign actively and be champions in conservation actions to protect wetlands.

Development Commissioner - cum-Additional Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena also was present.



Joining the occasion, Odisha's Water Man and Co-founder of the Youth4WaterIndia campaign Ranjan Panda informed that the factsheet gives an introductory understanding on coastal wetlands and also tips to youths on what they can do to conserve these precious coastal commons as well as other wetlands. He thanked the Wetlands International South Asia office for providing the technical and other support in preparation

of the factsheet. Panda also thanked the School of Sustainability, XIM University, Bhubaneswar for having partnered with the campaign and for organizing the Sustainability Summit and Wetlands Day action programmes at the Kushabhadrā mouth where about a hundred youths and other experts participated in beach cleaning and other local conservation actions under the guidance of Prof Sutapa Pati,

Dean of the institution. Panda informed that a photography competition for youths on the theme "Wetlands and Us" has been announced by the #Youth4WaterIndia campaign as part of its World Wetlands Day 2023 actions. A drawing and painting competition on wetlands has also been planned at Sambalpur on February 5 and an exposure-cum-interaction programme for youths to the Hirakud Ramsar Site is planned on February 12.

Man held with fake currency worth Rs 31LTOP

PNS ■ BALANGIR

Police have arrested a 50-year-old man for alleged possession of counterfeit currency at Titilagarh in Balangir district. The accused, identified as Lingaraj Behera of Kantamal in Kalahandi district, was apprehended near the main gate of bus-stand park under the Titilagarh police limits on Wednesday evening. Official sources said Behera was arrested basing on reliable inputs about illegal business and possession of Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN). During search, he was found to be in possession of FICN to the tune of Rs 31,27,500.

Other incriminating materials were also recovered from the accused. Behera was arrested after he could not furnish any valid authority in support of possession of the counterfeit currency notes and later forwarded to the Court of SDJM, Titilagarh. A case has been registered and the seized fake notes would be sent to the Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudrana Pvt Ltd in Paschima Medinapore, West Bengal for examination and opinion. Investigation into the case was on, police said. Till date, STF has seized Rs 78,70,600 FICN including this seizure.



IN BRIEF

CONSTABLE DIES IN ROAD MISHAP IN GANJAM

Chhatrapur: A Constable of the Odisha State Armed Police (OSAP) 8th Battalion was killed in a road accident in Ganjam district on Friday. Bishnu Behera, a resident of Takiria in Brahmapur, died when he was hit by a tractor on NH-16 near Agasti Nuagaon. Irate locals blocked the highway. Police reached the spot, pacified the agitators and send the body for postmortem.

BIJAY NAYAK NEW CHIEF OF BSNL ODISHA

Bhubaneswar: Bijay Kumar Nayak has been appointed as the chief of Odisha region and deputy of the Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) Bhubaneswar Head Office from January 30. An officer of the 1985 batch of the Telecommunications Department, Nayak has worked in various important posts in Odisha and outside efficiently. Nayak said he would try to ensure that the people of Odisha avail 5G services at affordable prices, informed local BSNL PRO Manoj Sarangi.



AMITAV GHOSH OPENS TATA STEEL BBSR LIT MEET

Bhubaneswar: The 7th edition of the Tata Steel Bhubaneswar Literary Meet began at the Bhubaneswar Club on Friday. The three-day festival was inaugurated by Jnanpith awardee Amitav Ghosh. The inauguration was followed by a discussion on a very relevant issue of modern world, the impact of climate changes.



LMS LAUNCHED AT BIREN MITRA WOMEN'S COLLEGE

Cuttack: The Library Management System (LMS) was inaugurated at the Biren Mitra Memorial Women's (Degree) College here by Mo College Abhijan Chairperson Akash DasNayak on Wednesday. The event was held under the supervision of Principal Prahalad Chandra Biswal. College founder Prasanna Kumar Tripathy and guest of honour Er Nagendra Kumar Mohanty were present. DasNayak said, "The LMS is the support system for traditional face-to-face instruction as well as blended/hybrid and distance learning environments. College Co-Coordinator of Mo College Abhijan Dr Rajashree Swain spoke about the functions of digital library.



DR PARIDA IN CHARGE AS AIIMS MED SUPER

Bhubaneswar: AIIMS Bhubaneswar Radiation Oncology Department HoD Prof Dillip Kumar Parida has been assigned additional charge of Medical Superintendent of the institute. He will be in-charge of the post till its filling-up on a regular basis or till further order. AIIMS Bhubaneswar Executive Director Prof Ashutosh Biswas congratulated Dr Parida.



TPSODL LAUNCHES OTS SCHEME

Brahmapur: As per the guidelines of the Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC), the TP Southern Odisha Distribution Limited (TPSODL) has launched an OTS (One-Time Settlement) scheme for its customers. The scheme covers eight southern districts, Ganjam, Gajapati, Koraput, Rayagada, Nabarangpur, Malkangiri, Boudh and Kandhamal. The scheme provides up to a 30% rebate on electricity arrears till April 21. "We are sure this scheme will provide much-needed relief to our consumers and will benefit them in more ways than one," said TPSODL CEO Arvind Singh.

VEDANTA LANJIGARH WINS GOLDEN PEACOCK AWARD

Lanjigarh: The Vedanta Limited, Lanjigarh was recently awarded the Golden Peacock Award for Corporate Social Responsibility in recognition of its developmental initiatives in Kalahandi and surrounding areas. GG Pal, Dy. CEO, Alumina Business, Vedanta, said, "This award gives us impetus in our endeavour to continue creating positive socioeconomic impact."



ASUS INDIA LAUNCHES STORE IN BHUBANESWAR

Bhubaneswar: As a step towards strengthening the brand's retail footprint across the country, the ASUS India has announced the launch of an exclusive store in Bhubaneswar. The store at Saheed Nagar is set to host an extensive range of electronics and computer hardware, including the ASUS flagship products such as VivoBook, ZenBook, Zenbook-Flip, Republic of Gamers (ROG) laptops and accessories.

In Ganjam Sick woman dumped by bus staffs on road, dies



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

In an inhuman incident, a sick woman died on roadside after she was forcefully deboarded by the staffs of a bus midway on National Highway-16 in Ganjam district.

The deceased woman was identified as Runu Swain, a resident of Padmatola village under Patapur block in the district.

According to reports, the ailing woman was travelling with her son Suji in a private

bus to the Bhubaneswar AIIMS on Thursday. At around 3.30 pm, the health condition of the woman suddenly worsened in the bus. With no alternative left, her son pleaded with the bus staffs and co-passengers to take her to a nearby hospital. However, the bus staffs forced the duo to alight near a temple in Ganjam town on the NH. A few minutes later, the woman died. Getting information, a police patrolling team reached the spot and sent the body to her village in an ambulance.

In Gajapati Man held for impregnating minor

PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

One Sumanta Sahu (45) of Uliapada village of Birikote panchayat under Mohana block was arrested by the Adava police for keeping illicit relationship with a minor girl and making her pregnant.

Sumanta used to keep physical relationship with the 17 years old girl taking

advantage of her vulnerability. The victim was staying with her widowed mother. She was found conceived after a medical test recently. After an FIR was lodged in this connection, police investigated the matter and arrested Sumant. That victim will be sent to CWC at Paralakhemundi on Sunday for her rehabilitation.

CM attends VD College platinum fest

PNS ■ JEYPORE

A day after declaration of the Vikram Deb University, Jeypore, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik attended the platinum jubilee celebration of the erstwhile Vikram Deb College on Friday.

Addressing students and public, he said, "We are committed for the development of Koraput." The CM dedicated projects worth Rs 1,596 crore to the people of Koraput. While the welcome address was given by KORaput MLA Raghunath Ram Padal, the platinum jubilee address was delivered by the Principal of Vikram Deb College and a vote of thanks by Chandrasekhar Majhi, Chairman, DPC.

This new university will lessen the burden on the Berhampur University. Degree colleges functioning in the districts of Koraput, Malkangiri, Rayagada and



Nabarangpur will come under the Vikram Deb University. Jeypore MLA and chairman of the platinum jubilee celebration organising committee Tara

Prasad Bahinipati said a university status for the Vikram Deb College was a longstanding demand of the people of this region. "We are thankful to the Chief Minister for fulfilling our

demand." Apart from releasing a college souvenir, the CM released a special postal cover on Koraput tourism on the occasion and financial assistance for the women Self-Help Groups.

'Cashew to be grown in 20K ha more area in State'

2-day Nat'l Conf on Cashew begins

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Principal Secretary Arabinda Kumar Padhee said the weather and soil conditions of Odisha are extremely favourable for cashew farming.

"This year more than 20,000 hectares of new land area will be brought under

cashew farming," he announced. More steps are being taken to improve production and productivity of cashew in the State with application of innovations in this field, Dr Padhee said while addressing the National Conference on Cashew. He said that underdeveloped districts and tribal areas will be on cashew farming. More than 250 delegates from 19 States consisting of cashew farmers, processors, exporters, scientists

from research organisations, experts, department officials, field level implementing agencies and officials of Odisha State Cashew Development Corporation participated in the conference which began on Tuesday. In the two-day conference all the aspects of the cashew sector commencing from production of quality planting materials, production technology, integrated pest and disease management, post-harvest management,

value addition, processing, packaging and marketing will be discussed. The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare will prepare a road map for cashew development for overall development of cashew in the country by incorporating the innovative ideas emanated in the conference. The Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare is contemplating achieving self-sufficiency in cashew production by 2029-30.

Wetlands Day celebrated at Ansupa



PNS ■ ATHAGARH

Wetlands are the water recharge house of the earth. They provide innumerable number of unseen benefits along with acting as the source of carbon sequestration, avian habitat and local community livelihood support system. The Ansupa lake is one of such ecologically-rich wetland that got recognition of international importance in recent past. To celebrate these benefits of water bodies, the World Wetlands Day was celebrated

on Thursday (February 2) at the Eco Park of Ansupa lake. Chilika Development Authority (CDA) Range Officer Satyabrata Pradhan conducted the programme. Children and teachers from the Saranda High School, Ansupa Development Committee president Gatikrushna Swain, Ostia Sarpanch Artabandhu Behera, Subarnapur Sarpanch Hiranyamayee Dalai, Kadalibadi GP representative Jitu Pradhan, Samiti Sabhya Fakir Mohan Sethi, Subarnapur ex-Sarpanch Tarun Kanta Mahapatra, SSG

members and villagers participated in the event. CDA Scientist Dr Rabinranath Samal explained the history of Ramsar and importance of wetlands. Gatikrushna Swain gave a proposal to prepare waste disposal rooms at every corner of the Ansupa lake. CDA Researcher Tuhinansu Kar conducted quiz among children. Gayatri Devi, wildlife research biologist and chairman of GROW with Nature, explained the importance of Ansupa lake and gave a vote of hanks.

India's pragmatic approach towards global trade

For several years now, India's Annual Budget, presented at the beginning of the year, has included a few lines that dismayed economists. Successive Finance Ministers have raised tariffs, reversing a quarter-century-long trend dating back to when the Indian economy was first liberalised in 1991.

The good news is that the Government may be undergoing a change of heart ahead of this year's Budget or, at least, it may not be quite as willing to revel in protectionism as before. The bad news for United States companies is that their own Government's inward turn may still hold them back in India. In recent months, senior officials have insisted that India integrate further with the global economy. Several free trade agreements have



SOURAJEET PRADHANI

been signed this year or are under negotiation. Perhaps most strikingly, there are hints that current tariffs may even be cut. It is accepted that protectionism didn't sit well with India's new industrial policy of providing subsidies for export-focused manufacturers. Of course, officials are still aiming for an India that is "self-reliant". Any trade liberalisation is likely to be limited and wouldn't necessarily reflect a

fundamental change of heart by the Government. Nevertheless, India does have good reason to rethink its course. Concluding more high-profile free trade agreements, particularly with the European Union and the United Kingdom, is clearly a priority. Lowering import barriers would be "in sync" with India's expectations from those FTAs, according to trade experts, and would signal goodwill as well, increasing the chances of a successful conclusion of negotiations. The fact is that in today's constrained trading environment, countries such as India need a good reason to drop tariff walls. Making it easier to sign mutually-beneficial trade agreements may be enough incentive. But tariffs aren't the only obstacles that companies operating in India face. Non-tariff barriers and regulatory hurdles are

easily as problematic, if not more. In the past, tempted by promises of access to the US market, India would at least be willing to give US industry aggrieved by non-tariff barriers a hearing. That's less and less the case, as retailers and other consumer-facing services firms that compete with Indian national champions are discovering. US policy is not making things easier for such companies. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework that US President Joe Biden announced in May is supposed to address, among a host of other things, from corruption to green energy, some of these non-tariff barriers. Negotiators met in Brisbane recently for the first time to begin to hash out details. But Biden's "foreign policy for the middle class" means, in practice, that

Washington has taken the US market access off the table. In contrast, there's an inexhaustible appetite for news of progress on free trade negotiations with the EU. And policymakers in New Delhi are preparing themselves to make some painful compromises to see those negotiations through. What the US needs to realise is that India is now approaching trade policy from a transactional mindset. In the absence of any concrete benefits, India is not going to be interested in fixing problems that overt or covert protectionism may create for US companies. Tactical policymaking is all about give-and-take. If the US has nothing to give, then its companies will find they have nothing to take home from India. That's bad news for US companies, and for the workers they employ.

Rahul urges PM to solve Kashmiri Pandits' woes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to look into the "plight" of Kashmiri Pandit employees who do not want to return to the Kashmir Valley without a guarantee of their security, and accused the Union Territory administration of adopting an "insensitive" approach towards them.

In a letter to Modi, Rahul flagged the issue of the recent spate of targeted killings of Kashmiri Pandits and others by terrorists, which he said, has created an atmosphere of fear and gloom in the Valley.

He wrote to the prime minister, saying a delegation of Kashmiri Pandits met him during the Jammu leg of the Bharat Jodo Yatra that was aimed at uniting the whole of India in a thread of love and unity.

"They (Kashmiri Pandits) said government officials are forcing them to go back to work in the Kashmir Valley. In these circumstances, forcing them to go back to the Valley without any surety of their



safety and security is a cruel move," he said. Till the situation improves, the government can take services from these Kashmiri Pandit employees in other administrative and public facilities, the former Congress chief said in his letter in Hindi to Modi.

"At a time when the Kashmiri Pandits are pleading for their safety and families' concerns, and expecting sympathy and affection from the government, use of words like 'beggars' by the Lt. Governor for them is irresponsible. Prime Minister, you may not be familiar with this insensitive style of functioning of the administration," Rahul said.

"I have assured the Kashmiri Pandit brothers and sisters that I will try my best to

convey their concerns and demands to you. I hope that you will take appropriate steps in this regard as soon as you get this information," he said in the letter. A Kashmiri Pandit delegation had called on Rahul Gandhi during his Bharat Jodo Yatra in Samba district and briefed him about their issues, including the "targeted killings" by terrorists and the resultant protest by those employed under the prime minister's package.

Nearly 4,000 Kashmiri Pandits are working in different departments in the Kashmir Valley after their selection under the prime minister's employment package announced in 2008. The package has two major components — 6,000 jobs for the youth from the community and building as many accommodation units for the recruited employees.

However, many of the employees fled to Jammu after one of their colleagues, Rahul Bhat, was shot dead by terrorists inside his office in Budgam district on May 12 last year in what was described as a case of targeted killing.

QUAD vows to boost cyber security with tech; ensures free, open Indo-Pacific region

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

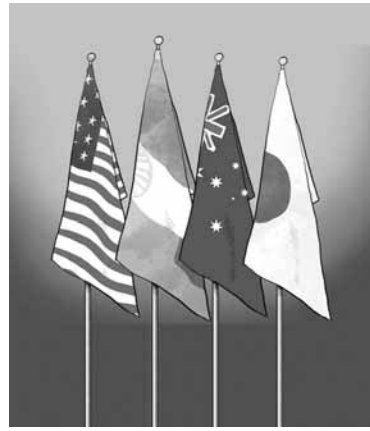
In an effort to enhance cyber security, the Quad combine comprising India, US, Japan and Australia have agreed to leverage Machine Learning (ML) and related advanced technologies for the purpose. The four countries have also reaffirmed their commitment to advance a free and open Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient.

This reiteration in the backdrop of China adopting an aggressive stance in the strategically important Indo-Pacific region came during the two-day meet of the Quad grouping in New Delhi on January 30-31.

Moreover, Beijing has all along opposed the Quad grouping claiming it will lead to militarization of the Indo-Pacific. As regards the meeting in the Indian capital, the White House in a statement late Thursday said officials of Australia, India, Japan and the United States met for the Quad Senior Cyber Group.

In the longer term, the Group committed to leverage machine learning and related advanced technologies to enhance cyber security and establish secure channels for Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERT) and private sector threat information sharing.

The Group also committed to create a framework and methodology for



ensuring supply chain security and resilience for information communication technologies (ICT) and operational technology (OT) systems of critical sectors, the White House said, adding these objectives form an important part of the future-looking, leading-edge work plan for the Group.

The White House said progress on these objectives will enhance Quad members' national cyber capabilities, lowering the number of serious cyber incidents and improving their response capabilities.

Closer collaboration on machine learning research will enable better detection of network intrusions and improving cyber risk management of critical infrastructure, it said. The

framework for secure threat information sharing by CERTs and private sector entities will enable better real-time cooperation and assessments as cyber incidents arise, the White House said.

"A supply chain methodology will encourage major software services, products, and providers leveraged by governments to adhere to a Quad-endorsed best practice guideline for cyber security ICT and OT requirements for critical infrastructure," it added.

Observing that telecom security is a core function of national security, the statement said working in conjunction with Quad CET Working Group, the Group will strive to ensure that security-by-design and best practices of cyber security are incorporated in ORAN and 6G technologies. "Our meeting advanced the Group's positive and ambitious agenda.

Quad partners are working together to better secure cyberspace and foster an international digital economy that works for everyone, including regional partners in the Indo-Pacific," the White House said.

The Quad countries, it said, are committed in the near term to drive more secure software services and products by common Quad government security practices, establish common cyber security requirements for nations' critical infrastructure, conduct a Quad Cyber Challenge (a cam-

paign to raise awareness among our populations and drive action to improve cyber security), collaborating on capacity-building activities and information sharing in the Indo-Pacific region under the Quad Cybersecurity Partnership.

Among other things, the Group discussed the importance of utilising trusted vendors in telecommunications infrastructure as part of our shared commitment to promote safe, resilient networks and technologies, including through exploration of open and interoperable network solutions which are occurring in each of and among our countries, the statement said.

These efforts demonstrate the Quad's commitment to building regional capacity and ensuring the delivery of an open and secure telecommunications infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific, it said.

According to the statement, the Quad Cyber Challenge Campaign will promote basic cyber security awareness among individuals, organisations, businesses and governments throughout members to prevent them from becoming victims of cyber crimes and threats that can cause untold financial and personal damage.

"We are committed to provide educational resources to our citizens to increase their cyber security as part of this effort," it said.

Protect small investors, Sena leader urges SEBI after Adani bloodbath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amidst the raging demand of a JPC over the alleged irregularities by Adani Group, Rajya Sabha MP Priyanka Chaturvedi on Friday wrote to the SEBI to take concrete steps to ensure that the actions of private business entities do not cause market instability and put the hard-earned money of India's middle-class investors at risk.

In a letter addressed to the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Chairperson Madhabi P. Buch, the Deputy Leader of Shiv Sena in Rajya Sabha stated all the allegations against the Adani Group exposed by the Hindenberg are of serious concern not only for the shareholders but for India's national interest.

"I am writing this letter out of deep concern over the market volatility due to the alleged irregularities by a crucial business firm — Adani Group. The market capitalisation of the 10 Adani Group of companies have so far lost 43 per cent which translates into a loss of around \$100 billion or Rs. 8.3 lakh crore.

The total investment value of individual investors in the 10-listed Adani group of firms

declined to Rs 41,499 crore on January 30, 2023, from Rs 54,066 crore on January 24, 2023," Chaturvedi mentioned. She further said there are serious allegations levelled against the group including that of market manipulation, improper use of off-shore tax havens, risks to the retail investors, over-pricing of stocks and over-exposure of public sector entities etc.

"The concerns have also been raised regarding the independence of auditors, transparency in accounting, liquidity risks due to short term liabilities, off-shore funding through shell companies and other irregularities in compliance of SEBI rules.

In the light of the systemic importance of the firm in India's economy and its presence in critical infrastructure such as coal, cement, energy, natural gas, electricity, airport operations, infrastructure etc., please take urgent measures," she wrote.

She also recalled that SEBI had initiated investigations against some companies of the group in 2021, however, no closure report has been filed in this regard nor any reasons for the delay have been apprised by the regulator to the investors and general public.

India imported ₹2 L cr weapons in 5 yrs: MoS to LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of enhancing operational readiness of the armed forces, India in the last five years imported weapons and allied systems worth over Rs 1.93 lakh crore, the Government informed the Lok Sabha on Friday.

Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt said the major defence equipment that were imported included helicopters, aircraft radars, rockets, guns, assault rifles, missiles and ammunition.

The data provided by him regarding the procurement of military hardware pertained to the period from 2017-18 to 2021-22. Weapons were pro-

cured from US, Russia, France, Israel and Spain besides others. He also informed the Lok Sabha some military units reported minor injuries to paratroopers while using airborne helmets last year.

Bhatt said this while replying to a question on whether airborne helmets procured for Special Forces malfunctioned resulting in injuries to troops. He said necessary proceedings were initiated to take action as per laid down policy.

The contract for procurement of ballistic helmets at a cost of Rs 170.81 crores was signed in December, 2016.

"While conducting para jumps, some of the units reported minor injuries to para troopers while using the airborne helmets during the year 2022,"

Bhatt said. "The item was trial evaluated in the year 2016 by Integrated Headquarters of Ministry of Defence (MoD) Army and ballistic testing of samples was done at Terminal Ballistics Research Laboratory (TBRL), Chandigarh," he added.

The minister said airborne helmets, based on technical specifications obtained after trials, were duly inspected by the Authority Holding Sealed Particulars (AHSP) that is Controlotrate of Quality Assurance (General Stores), Kanpur.

Bhatt said the procurement was undertaken post clearance by the AHSP. The airborne helmets were found suitable for induction after being trial evaluated by the Indian Army. The contract for procurement of ballistic helmets at a cost of Rs 170.81 crores was signed in December, 2016, he

said. On procurement of weapons for the armed forces, the minister of state for defence said the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP 2020) with a focus on 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant India) and 'Make in India' introduced major policy initiatives for boosting indigenous defence capability and reduction of reliance on imports.

"Further, DAP-2020 provides the highest preference to Buy Indian (IDDM) category of acquisition and 'Buy Global' is only permitted in exceptional situations with specific approval of Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)/the Defence Minister," he said in the written reply.

According to the details provided by Bhatt, procurement from foreign countries in 2017-18 was Rs 30,677.29 crore, while it went up to Rs 38,115.60 crore in 2018-19 and

Rs 40,330.02 crore in 2019-20. The amount in 2020-21 was Rs 43,916.37 crore and came down to Rs 40,839.53 crore in 2021-22. The total comes to Rs 1,93,878.81 crore.

"During last five financial years (2017-18 to 2021-2022) and current financial year 2022-23 (up to December, 2022), total 264 capital acquisition contracts have been signed for procurement of defence equipment, out of which, 88 contracts accounting for 36.26 per cent of total contract value have been signed with vendors from foreign countries such as the US, Russia, France, Israel, Spain etc.," Bhatt said.

Replying to another question, Bhatt said the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) is working on 55 'mission mode' projects for a total sanctioned cost of Rs 73,942.82 crore. He said

these are in the areas of nuclear defence technologies, air independent propulsion (AIP), combat suite, torpedo, fighter aircraft, cruise missile, unmanned aerial vehicle, gas turbine engine, assault rifle, warhead, light machine gun, rocket, advanced towed artillery gun system, infantry combat vehicle command, surface-to-air missile, anti-ship missile, anti-airfield weapon and glide bomb.

To another question on whether the government proposes to make public the report of the One Member Judicial Committee (OMJC) constituted to look into the grievances of the defence veterans pertaining to One-Rank-One-Pension (OROP), Bhatt said "no." Final decision on the recommendations of the One Member Judicial Committee has not yet been taken by the government," he said.



Study: Men fare worse than women in Covid

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Males fare worse than females with the COVID-19 disease because the virus more readily attacks females' fat tissue, instead of lung tissue, thus sparing them from a greater viral load and preventing pulmonary damage due to infiltrated immune cells.

In contrast, Covid-virus infect male lung tissues, as per a study. It is published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences.

The research indicates males fare worse than females with the COVID-19 disease because the virus more readily attacks females' fat tissue, in lieu of lung tissue.

"Our data suggested that in female mice adipose tissue may act as a sink/reservoir for SARS-CoV-2 and thus spares

the lungs from a greater viral load, preventing pulmonary damage due to infiltrated immune cells and activated pro-inflammatory cytokines," said Jyothi Nagajothi, from the Hackensack Meridian Center for Discovery and Innovation (CDI), US.

The researchers evaluated the effect of SARS-CoV-2 infection on the function of adipose (fat) tissue and the impact of disease on fat loss in a COVID-19 model.

They examined hACE2 mice of both sexes and performed a comparative analysis. The hACE2 serves as an entry receptor for SARS-CoV-2 to infect people via binding to envelope spike proteins.

The Nagajothi Lab's mouse models, mimicking the human immune system, showed that females lost more fat compared to males when

infected with COVID-19. The study found that males had more virus in their lungs, while the females showed more virus in their fat tissue. The theory is that the adipose (fat) tissue in females may act as a "sink" or "reservoir" of the virus, the researchers said.

The study follows a paper published last year in the journal Frontiers in Cardiovascular Medicine in which the team showed the virus infiltrated the lungs of males much more readily than it did in females.

The latest paper shows that an inverse relationship exists between the viral loads in the lungs and adipose tissue, and it differs between males and females, the researchers said.

They found that SARS-CoV-2 infection alters immune signalling and cell death signalling differently in Covid-19 infected male and female mice.

PM to address 6 rallies in Tripura

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the campaign heat rises for the Tripura Assembly polls, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address six election rallies in West and South Tripura districts on February 13. Modi will be visiting Tripura on the last day of the campaign, sources said. Union home minister Amit Shah will address as many as 10 rallies and roadshows in three visits to states.

He is expected to address campaign rallies on February 6 and February 12. The ruling BJP is seeking to make a second come-back to power as against the tough challenge from the Congress-Left alliance and the TMC.

BJP president J P Nadda on Friday addressed the first election rally at Kumarghat in Unakoti district followed by roadshows seeking votes for BJP candidates.

Summit on radicalisation, terror concludes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to meet the challenge of radicalization, experts from several countries shared their views and discussed ways to counter fundamentalism, international terrorism and misuse of social media. The two-day virtual meet ending Friday was hosted by India. Giving details of

conclave, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here, countries including Bangladesh, Cambodia, Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Türkiye, Uzbekistan and Vietnam participated under aegis of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA). The MEA in cooperation with

the Ministry of Home Affairs [Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD)] jointly with its outlying training unit, the Central Detective Training Institute (CDTI) organised the virtual workshop on 'Counter Radicalization.'

The virtual workshop was addressed by Mahaveer Singhvi, Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, Neeraj Sinha,

Additional Director General, BPRD and Anurag Kumar, Director, BPRD.

Invited speakers shared their expertise on various topics including radicalization and extremism, rise of fundamentalism and its global impact, misuse of social media as a tool for radicalization, models of de-radicalization and radicalization and international terrorism.

'India sees 8 L cancer deaths annually; cases to spurt by 2026'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the World Cancer Day on Saturday, health experts have warned that India's cancer burden is projected to increase from 14 lakh to 20 lakh by 2026 mainly because of unabated consumption of tobacco and junk food besides pollution, chemicals, poor lifestyle and genetic reasons. Every year, around 8 lakh Indians succumb to cancer.

However, they said that early detection, timely diagnosis and comprehensive management can help bust the common myth that cancer is the end of life and it is incurable. Prof Sushma Bhatnagar, Head of Department of Oncology and Palliative Medicine at AIIMS Delhi said



that at the AIIMS "we are undertaking a multi-disciplinary approach including research and capacity building to treat and manage the disease."

Dr SVS Deo, Head of Surgical Oncology at AIIMS, Delhi and National Cancer Institute, Jhajjar talked about advancement in the sector which has ensured better cure rate. Unfortunately, 70 per cent cases the AIIMS receive are in

an advanced stage, said the doctors in an interaction here with reporters as they also shared various activities planned for the D-Day that include discussions, walk and public lecture to create awareness about the disease.

In fact various activities are lined up for the day. For instance, the WHO on its part has initiated a campaign to prevent 30-40 percent of deaths in females due to cervical cancer,

the second most common cancer among women and India contributes the largest proportion of global cervical cancer.

The WHO ran a month-long campaign in January to create awareness on cervical cancer, including on social media campaigns like Instagram. In line with the WHO objectives, the Union Health Ministry has also decided to curb it by initiating HPV vaccines early at the age of 9.

A senior official from the Ministry said that all States have been asked to create awareness on prevention of cervical cancer and the importance of the HPV vaccine among girl students across the country.

The Government is planning to introduce cervical cancer vaccines for girls aged

between 9 to 14 years. Primarily, the girls will be provided the vaccines through schools, he said, adding that cervical cancer is caused by chronic infection with human papillomavirus (HPV), which is a sexually transmitted virus.

If the vaccine is given to girls before sexual exposure between 9-14 years, it is more than 99 per cent effective in preventing cervical cancer, the doctors said adding that parents and caregivers should be made aware of the need to administer the vaccine between the age of 9 to 14 years as a major preventive exercise against cervical cancer.

The WHO has also released a new Global Breast Cancer Initiative Framework providing a roadmap to attain the targets to save 2.5 million

lives from breast cancer by 2040.

The new Framework recommends to countries to implement the three pillars of health promotion for early detection, timely diagnosis and comprehensive management of breast cancer to reach the targets.

There are more than 2.3 million cases of breast cancer that occur each year, which make it the most common cancer among adults. In 95 per cent of countries, breast cancer is the first or second leading cause of female cancer deaths.

Yet, survival from breast cancer is widely inequitable between and within countries; nearly 80% of deaths from breast and cervical cancer occur in low- and middle-income countries.

Cong suspends Capt's wife Preneet Karu for anti-party activities

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress disciplinary committee on Friday suspended party's Lok Sabha MP Preneet Karu and asked her to explain within three days why she should not be expelled for anti-party activities. Former Union Minister Preneet Karu is the wife of former Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, who was ousted from the party and he later joined the BJP.

Congress disciplinary panel member secretary Tariq Anwar said the action follows complaints against her from

Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Raja Warring and other state leaders that she was helping the BJP.

"The Congress president has received a complaint from Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, president of PCC Punjab, alleging that Preneet Karu, MP (Lok Sabha) from Patiala is indulging in anti-party activities to help BJP. Some other senior Congress leaders of Punjab also share this view," Anwar said in a statement. He said the complaint was referred to the Disciplinary Action Committee (DAC) of AICC for necessary action.

Doda goes Joshimath style! 20 families moved to safety

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Around 20 families were relocated to safer areas by the district administration in Doda after their houses, constructed on a steep mountain slope, developed cracks in the Nayi basti area of Thathri on Friday.

The cracks were developed following fresh landslides in the area on Thursday.

Panic stricken residents, mostly families of retired soldiers, policemen shifted their household items before vacating the structures.

According to local reports, the first cracks emerged in a few houses in the month of December. With the passage of time some more houses developed minor cracks but the situation aggravated on Thursday as around 20 houses were declared unsafe by the local district authorities.

According to Sahil Randhawa, Tehsildar Thathri, "19 families comprising 102 souls were relocated from Nayi



Basti area and accommodated in prefabricated structures in view of adverse weather conditions on Friday". According to him 15 houses were completely damaged and four others had developed major cracks and were declared unsafe for living purposes.

Additional Deputy Commissioner, Doda Dr RK Bharti also visited the area to supervise their shifting to safer locations. The district administration had also summoned experts and Geologists to ascer-

tain the cause behind the sinking of earth in the area.

"Geologists from Chenab Valley power projects and National Highways Authority of India have already inspected the site and briefed the district authorities", official sources said.

Meanwhile, several other families, living in the same stretch, continue to stay put inside their houses despite warnings by the local authorities to relocate to safer areas for the time being.

MVA bags 3 of 5 seats in MLC polls BJP suffers setback as Cong candidate defeats 2-time MLC in Nagpur

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a clear reflection of the changing political mood in Maharashtra, the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) — comprising the Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena — has outsmarted the ruling Balasahebchandra Shiv Sena-BJP alliance, by winning three out of five seats in the biennial MLC elections to the Teachers and Graduates' constituencies.

The BJP suffered a major jolt in the RSS headquartered city of Nagpur, as the Congress candidate Sudhakar Adbale trounced sitting two-time MLC Nago Ganar, an Independent nominee supported by the BJP in the elections to the Maharashtra Legislative Council from the Nagpur Division Teachers' constituency.

The electoral defeat in the MLC poll from Nagpur Division Teachers' constituency is being seen as a personal setback for Maharashtra's deputy chief minister Devendra Fadnavis and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, both of whom



Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena (UBT) workers celebrate their candidates' victory on the Graduates and Teachers constituency seats, in Solapur on Friday PTI

hail from the orange city of Nagpur.

The Congress' victory in the Nagpur Division Teachers' constituency is of considerable political significance, as it comes two years after its candidate Abhijit Wanjari romped home in the Nagpur Division Graduates' constituency, by defeating the BJP's Sandeep Joshi by a comfortable margin of 18,910 votes.

The BJP's debacle in the December 2020 election to the

Nagpur Division Graduates' constituency had come in the backdrop of the fact that this seat was represented in the past by senior party minister and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari and former Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis's father Gangadharrao Fadnavis in the past. Gadkari, it may be recalled, had won this seat for four terms since 1989 before he contested successfully the 2014 Lok Sabha election from Nagpur.

Apart from the Nagpur Division Teachers' seat, the Opposition MVA scored comfortable victories over the BJP in the Amravati Division Graduates' and Aurangabad Teachers' constituencies.

Dhiraj Lingade of the

Congress snatched away the Amravati seat from the BJP by defeating its candidate Dr Ranjit Patil, a two-time sitting MLC and a former minister in the erstwhile BJP-Shiv Sena government. Dr Patil is a leading orthopaedic surgeon.

Cong woos rebel to rejoin party after his triumph

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ MUMBAI

Within hours after Congress rebel Satyajeet Tambe won the MLC poll from the Nashik Graduates Constituency as an independent candidate, leader of the Opposition Ajit Pawar on Friday advised Satyajeet to sort out his differences with his parent party and return to the Mallikarjun Kharage-headed party.

Satjheert was placed under suspension for six years by the Maharashtra Congress for anti-party activities and contested the MLC poll from the Nashik

Graduates Constituency as an Independent candidate.

Pawar said that Satyajeet, who hails from a family of Congress loyalists, could sort out issues with his father and senior Congress leader Sudhir Tambe, who was also suspended from the party a fortnight ago, and also his father-in-law, Balasaheb Thorat, who is the current Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader and return to the Congress.

State BJP president Chandrashekhar Bawankule chose to remain non-committal on whether Satyajeet would join the BJP.

Akhilesh has narrow escape after cavalcade pile-up in Hardoi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav had a narrow escape when the cars of his cavalcade collided with each other in Hardoi.

As per reports, four to five cars belonging to SP workers that were following Akhilesh Yadav's cavalcade collided with each other in Hardoi. The accident took place when the car ahead suddenly applied brakes. Around three to four occupants of the vehicle sustained injuries in the accident. However, none of them was seriously hurt.

The SP president was travelling to Harpalpur in Hardoi on Friday to attend a wedding function. The accident took place on Mallawan Bilgram road in Khempur village area.

BJP urges Muslims to throw out Didi Govt

Party should first explain why it has no Muslim MP or Min, counters TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a move indicative of BJP's changing tack vis-a-vis the minorities, particularly Muslims, senior Bengal saffron leaders including Mithun Chakraborty, Dilip Ghosh and Opposition Leader Suvendu Adhikari have appealed to the Muslims to help them throw out the Mamata Banerjee Government from power.

While Adhikari had on Thursday appealed to the Muslims to remove a corrupt BJP regime, Bollywood star-turned-saffron leader Mithun Chakraborty on Friday said his party had never been against the Muslims.

BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh too asked the Muslims to consider whether they wanted to continue with

Mamata Banerjee or be a part of the massive developmental projects initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"About 95 percent of Muslims vote for Mamata Banerjee which means she is in power because of you... Now it is upto you to decide whether you want to be a part of her corrupt regime or otherwise... I am not asking for votes but requesting you to think over what I said," Adhikari had told on Thursday in a meeting at Kultali in South 24 Parganas.

His views were echoed by Chakraborty who on Friday said BJP had never been against Muslims. "A narrative is being created that BJP is against Muslims... BJP has never been against Muslims. Rather we have always endorsed the cause of Hindustani Muslims," he said.



BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh too said how the Muslims in Bengal were being deprived of the various schemes launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The Prime Minister has introduced a number of schemes for the poorer sections but those schemes are not reaching the Muslims because of a corrupt TMC government. Time has come when the

Muslims should take a stand and be a part of the ongoing developments," Ghosh said.

The Bengal BJP's changed stance comes in the wake of the Prime Minister's direction to the saffron leadership to reach out to the minorities.

Reacting to the BJP's "reach-out efforts," senior TMC minister Firhad Hakim said no secular people worth their salt would go with BJP. "It is the same party that killed 2,000 people in Gujarat and Delhi... Now the cat is going to Haj after eating 100 rats."

TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh said how the BJP was hailing Lord Rama and "doing the politics of Ravana ... First they should answer why there is no Muslim MP or Minister from BJP before asking for their votes."

Assam cops arrest 2044 in crackdown on child marriage

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam Police arrested over 2044 people on Friday in a crackdown on child marriage, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said. The crackdown began early in the morning and it will continue over the next three to four days, Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a programme here. The police had registered 4,004 cases of child marriage in less than a fortnight since the State Cabinet decided on January 23 to take action, with the arrest of offenders and a simultaneous launch of an extensive awareness campaign. The Chief Minister said the crackdown was continuing and a clear picture will emerge by evening on the number of arrests and the districts from where those were made. The highest number of

136 arrests so far has been made in Dhubri where 370 cases have been registered, followed by 110 in Barpeta and 100 in Nagaon. Those having married girls below 14 years of age will be booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and cases under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 will be registered against those who have married girls in the 14-18 years age group.

They will be arrested and the marriages will be declared

illegal. If the boy is also below 14 years of age, he will be sent to a reform house as minors cannot be tried in the court. The priests, kasis and family members involved in the conduct of such marriages will also be booked, Sarma had said earlier.

"Assam Govt is firm in its resolve to end the menace of child marriage in the state. So far @assampolice has registered 4,004 cases (of child marriage) across the state and more police action is likely in days ahead."

CDS chairs security meet over rising terrorist attacks in Valley

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

Amid rising incidents of terrorist violence across Jammu region in the recent months, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan chaired a high level security meeting at Nagrota based headquarters of White Knight Corps along with Northern Command, Army Commander Lt-Gen Upendra Dwivedi on Friday.

During the security meeting CDS General Anil Chauhan was briefed by GoC Upendra Dwivedi on Friday. During the security meeting with DGP, Dilbagh Singh, ADGP Mukesh Singh and others at the Air Force Station.

Principal Spokesperson of the Defence Ministry A Bharat Bhushan Babu tweeted, "Gen Anil Chauhan accompanied by Army Commander Northern Command, Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi arrived at

Infiltration Obstacle system (AIOS) and operational readiness of troops in the hinterland.

During the meeting General Anil Chauhan appreciated the professional competence of all personnel in successfully overcoming challenges.

On his arrival in Jammu via Srinagar CDS General Anil Chauhan was received by Air Officer Commanding, Air Force Station Jammu, Air Commodore G S Bhullar. CDS chaired a separate meeting with DGP, Dilbagh Singh, ADGP Mukesh Singh and others at the Air Force Station.

The Chief of Defence Staff had earlier visited forward areas and hinterland formations in Kashmir on the first day of his visit and was briefed about the security situation by a field officers. General Chauhan later returned to Delhi after visiting Nagrota cantonment.



Jammu. The CDS chaired a high level security meeting attended by Army Cdr NC, DGP Dilbagh Singh, ADGP JKP, Lt Gen Sandeep Jain GOC 16 Corps & GOC 26 Infantry Div".

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Jaish module busted in J-K's Kulgam district, six arrested

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Security forces on Friday busted a module of the Jaish-e-Mohammad in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam district by arresting six overground workers and recovering a huge cache of arms and ammunition, officials said. Acting on specific information on subversive activities in the Mirhama and Damhal Hanji Pora areas, a joint team of police and the army arrested six terror associates, they said.

Reveal truth of your 'deal' with RJD: Kushwaha to Nitish

PTI ■ PATNA

Disgruntled JD(U) leader Upendra Kushwaha demanded that party supremo Nitish Kumar reveal the truth behind rumours of an alleged "deal" struck with the RJD over the Chief Minister's post, when the two decided to forge an alliance last year.

The JD(U) leader, who has been sulking ever since the Bihar CM ruled him out as his second deputy, besides RJD's Tejashwi Yadav, made a statement to the effect at a function here on Thursday.

Kushwaha, who had merged his Rashtriya Lok Samata Party with the JD(U) less than two years ago, accused the RJD of having strayed from the socialist ideal of decentralisation of power and "concentrating all authority within a family".

"They (RJD) speak as if socialism was all about reversing the power structure, making some OBC groups the new elite. It was not. And it was in revolt against this tendency of



theirs that Samata Party came into being which later came to be known as JD(U)," said Kushwaha.

The former Union minister, however, added that "our party, too, has fallen short of devolving power to the lowest strata of the society. And the rumours of a deal with the RJD is leading to tremendous disappointment among JD(U) rank and file."

He alleged that RJD leaders had been openly stating that it was high time that the CM stepped down for Tejashwi Yadav to take over, "as per the deal". Silence on part of our party is only making matters worse, Kushwaha said.

PTI ■ PATNA

Two stone idols believed to be about 1,200 years old was found from a waterbody close to the ancient Nalanda University during desilting of a pond, an ASI official said.

The idols were found earlier this week from Tarsinh pond at Sarlichak village near the ancient Nalanda Mahavihara, a world heritage site about 88 km from here, during desilting under Bihar government's 'Jal-Jeevan-Hariyal' project launched to protect and conserve water and the environment.

Details of the two idols were, however, not divulged either by Archeological Survey of India or the administration.

Goutami Bhattacharya, Superintending Archaeologist (ASI, Patna circle) said there are reports that when villagers living in the area came to know about the discovery of the idols, they started making plans to build a temple to house these.

"Our officials posted there came to know about it and immediately informed the local police. According to feedback that we have received, both the idols, which are probably 1200 year old, are now in the custody of the local police," she told PTI.



"We want to display them at the Nalanda Museum. I have requested the state government to immediately hand over these idols as per the provisions of the Indian Treasure Trove Act, 1878," Bhattacharya said.

The official said it is seen that any antiquities or treasure when found beneath the surface are usually brought to a nearby temple or other religious places by locals. But whenever any antiquities or artefacts exceeding the value of Rs 10 are found they should be deposited at the nearest government treasury by the finder, according to the Indian Treasure Trove Act, 1878. The collector of the concerned district has the power to acquire the treasure on behalf of the government.

Hike in taxes to offset ₹24K cr revenue deficit in Kerala Budget

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Though the Kerala budget 2023-24 presented on Friday by Finance Minister K N Balagopal portrays the State as a role model for the rest of the country in economic growth, social and cultural reforms, the public will face tough days ahead as the Minister has steeply hiked taxes on all spheres of life to mobilise ₹3,000 crore. This is the highest ever additional tax slapped on the people of Kerala during the last ten years.

While presenting the Budget which shows a revenue deficit of ₹24,000 crore, Balagopal blamed the Centre for all ills faced by the State. He said that the BJP-ruled Union Government's measure to restrict the borrowings by the State has upset Kerala's dreams of emerging as the numero uno in the country.



Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan welcomes Finance Minister KN Balagopal as he arrives to present the State Budget 2023-24 in the Assembly, in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday PTI

The additional taxes fetched by the Kerala Government in previous years reads like this. In 2016-17, the finance minister slapped an additional tax of ₹805 crore and this has touched the ₹2955 crore in the 2023-24 Budget.

The fair price of land was hiked by 20 per cent while price

of new apartments would go up by 2 per cent.

Though the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front had promised in its election manifesto that prices of all commodities would be brought down, Friday's budget saw the prices of petrol and diesel going up by ₹2 per litre with immediate effect.

Opposition slams Kerala budget

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The opposition Congress-led UDF on Friday slammed the Kerala state budget for the fiscal 2023-24 in which it has proposed a cess on petrol, diesel and liquor and said the Left government was looting people.

Kerala Finance Minister K N Balagopal on Friday presented the Left government's budget for the fiscal 2023-24. Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan said the Left government was hiding the critical financial situation of the state and has increased the tax burden on the people. "The budget is hiding the critical financial situation faced by the State Government and the proposals amount to looting the people. The decision to impose cess on liquor will lead to more people shifting towards drugs."



The floating restaurant 'MV Ganga Vihar' that was inaugurated by Bihar Deputy Chief Minister Tejashwi Yadav, in Patna on Friday PTI

Protest in AMU for reinstating student who raised religious slogans on R-day

PNS ■ ALIGARH

A large number of students took out a march in the campus on Friday evening in AMU. They reached the main gate of the university and raised slogans of Allah Hu Akbar.

The students warned that if the suspension of the student who raised the slogans of Allah Hu Akbar is not revoked within 24 hours, then they will protest the same way daily in front of the main gate.

The students said that the examination of the suspended student is to start from the February 7.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Debate needed

Discussion in Parliament over the Adani affair will help the Government rather than the Opposition

The free fall of Adani scrips, which began after the US short-seller Hindenburg Research's report last week, continued on Friday. Bad news for the group continues to pour in; S&P Dow Jones Indices on Thursday removed Adani Enterprises shares from the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices. This, S&P Dow Jones Indices, said was "triggered by allegations of stock manipulation and accounting fraud." The carnage on Dalal Street found its resonance in Parliament. With the Opposition determined to have a discussion on the Adani Group, proceedings of the Budget Session were disrupted on the fourth day on Friday. While Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar adjourned the House for the first half of the day, in the Lok Sabha too the proceedings were adjourned till 2 pm. On Thursday also both Houses got adjourned for the day amid shouting by Opposition members. They wanted discussions over the allegations of fraud by the Adani Group. The issue seems to have united the Opposition, with Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge seeking an investigation into the matter either by a Joint Parliament Committee or a CJI-appointed panel. Neither the presiding officers of the two Houses nor the Government seems inclined towards a debate. Kharge is reported to meet the floor leaders of Opposition parties in his chamber on Friday. Evidently, the parties against the Bharatiya Janata Party scent an opportunity to launch a serious attack on it.

So far, the Opposition has not been able to hurt or even badly embarrass the BJP or its Government at the Centre. Anti-BJP leaders have said a lot of bad things about Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the ruling party, and the saffron bodies seen aligned with the regime; the Government is flayed, rightly, over its inability to generate jobs; high oil prices and soaring inflation last year also attracted a great deal of criticism; allegations of cronyism are made routinely against the Government. But all the criticisms are just water off a duck's back; nothing sticks. This time, it may be different—this seems to be the idea that is animating the Opposition. The Government would be well-advised to let discussions happen over the subject; this will help the Government rather than the Opposition, for it would be able to easily deflect the charges of favouritism. This will also deprive the Opposition of the opportunity to say that the Government is fearful of discussing the issue involving a controversial tycoon. Second, this will send across a good signal to the public, investors, and the corporate sector that the Government is concerned about the capital market. Third, meaningful discussions, if they take place in Parliament, can also throw up ideas that would strengthen the functioning of the stock market. Finally, this will strengthen our system, for good debates in Parliament are the soul of democracy. And when democracy is strengthened, it is a win-win situation for all parties.

PICTALK



Devotees take part in a religious procession ahead of Ravidas Jayanti, in Jammu

A tale of two nations poles apart

Pakistan and Bangladesh charted their course differently, while former was fixated with the 'two nation theory' latter adopted a liberal approach



BHOPINDER SINGH

Two nations emerged from non-contiguous territories in 1971, one willingly and the other unwillingly, after violently disproving a religion-based assumption i.e., the 'two-nation theory' that beset the 'idea of Pakistan'. Over fifty years since, both these countries have invested and institutionalized a starkly different path, trajectory, and consequently an inevitable socio-economic narrative. Bangladesh under Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had inherited a land subjected to genocide and plunder that had ensured shipment of anything of value to West Pakistan (soon, just Pakistan) — even in defeat, Pakistani leadership had displayed unbelievable avarice and wantonness. While newly independent Bangladesh had gone about putting its ravaged house in order, Pakistan had simply refused to learn any lessons. The Pakistani leadership baton passed from its defeated dictator, General Yahya Khan, to an equally unhinged, imperious, and morally compromised, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Instead of reflecting on its regressive underpinnings of the 'two-nation theory', Pakistan under the civilian leadership of Zulfikar Bhutto further strengthened its religio-populism with puritanical moves — he appeased the pernicious clergy, declared Ahmadis as heretics, recklessly funded the 'Islamic Bomb', banned alcohol (even though he drank himself), etc. Whereas Mujibur Rahman decided to walk a contrarian path in terms of land reforms, nationalization, and perhaps the most revolutionary of all, adopted the word 'secularism' in its newly adopted constitution. It had inadvertently modeled itself like another Muslim-majority Turkey (of Kemal Ataturk's sensibilities, not Erdogan's) — whereas Pakistan after tenures of Zulfikar Bhutto and General Zia-ul-Haq went on a sliding slope of a total abyss.

Indeed, Bangladesh's story was not linear or smooth and it had to deal with its subliminal regressions, natural disasters, and frequent disruption to democracy. Mujibur Rahman himself toyed with a one-party state and



while things were not going in his favour. He was assassinated in a military coup. Bangladeshi Military soon rewrote the constitution obliterating the word 'secularism' and the same was reinstated only in 2010, when the Bangladesh Supreme Court ruled that the removal was illegal, leaving Bangladesh with a coexistent State religion and the principle of 'secularism', to imply neutrality of religion. Again, the phenomenon of Pan-Islamism and political Islam has not spared Bangladesh either, yet in relative terms, Bangladesh under the current Awami League government has not gone the Pakistani route of religious puritanism.

Importantly, Sheikh Hasina has insisted, "You live in equal rights. You will observe your religion and celebrate festivals with equal rights. This is the real policy of Bangladesh and our ideal. I urge you never to think of yourself as a minority". While there have been multiple communal issues and provocations in Bangladesh, at least the leadership has spoken in favour of religious pluralism. Contrast this with Pakistan even in recent times, with the former Imran Khan (popularly known as Talib Khan) promising a 'Riyasat-e-Madina' and even the current coalition government has Maulana Fazlur



WHILE NEWLY INDEPENDENT BANGLADESH HAD GONE ABOUT PUTTING ITS RAVAGED HOUSE IN ORDER, PAKISTAN HAD SIMPLY REFUSED TO LEARN ANY LESSONS

Rehman, the emir of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, as its Presidents! These political-societal wirings have inevitable socio-economic consequences owing to governance structures and choices and therefore the contrasting fate of current Pakistan and Bangladesh is only natural. This week the headlines from Bangladeshi newspapers were 'Metro Rail transported 3.35 lakh commuters since opening', 'Two committees formed over mistakes and errors in textbooks', 'cancellation of Jamaat's registration', 'Bangladesh to get \$4.7 bn IMF package' etc.. Whereas the headlines from across the Line-of-Control (LOC) were 'Death toll from an attack on mosque rises to 92', '35-rupee hike in petrol prices, failed policy of suing for peace with terror group' and 'No IMF loan, a mission to visit Pakistan for talks on 9th review!'. A combusting Pakistan grapples with abject political, financial, diplomatic, security, and social failure. On easily securing the IMF loan as opposed to a Pakistan, Bangladeshi Finance Minister said, "This loan approval proves that our economy is standing on a solid foundation and our fundamentals are better than many other countries". However, the Pakistani Finance Minister in 2023 was still banking on divine intervention as he stated incredulously, "If Allah can create Pakistan, then he can

also protect, develop, and make it prosper". Pakistan's fixation with its foundational 'two-nation theory' and its inevitabilities have led to imploding relations with neighboring Afghanistan to a perennially tense equation with Iran. Pakistan simply refuses to come to terms with its genealogical flaw, which was wisely skipped by the founding fathers of Indian independence and constitutionality who opted for an inclusive, liberal, and progressive agenda.

Bangladesh went ahead of even India in 2021-22 in terms of per capita income, and this is especially impressive as in 2007 (15 years back), India's per capita income at \$1028 was almost double of Bangladesh at \$558. It is the same story with various UN Sustainable Development Goals. The invaluable lesson to India, given that Pakistan suffers from ostrich syndrome and simply refuses to learn, is to put economic and progressive agendas over petty religious 'divides' and the supposed rewriting of history. Our politics could look westwards or eastwards for learning different lessons and implications of choices made.

(The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INCOMPREHENSIBLE BUDGET

Sir — Apropos union budget 2023-24 is called the 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat ka budget' but it is very unplanned and unrelated with the ongoing socio-economic situation of the country. The trade deficit with China is soaring while there are hardly any steps to reduce imports of petroleum products from the gulf and mineral-rich countries.

The defense sector primarily depends on France and Russia for the import of modern aircraft and equipment. Modernization of agriculture has been overlooked. Budget allocation for the Education and Health Sector is decreased. There is hardly any serious mention or proposed roadmap about the mass employability and skill development of youths in the budget. Tax rebate is of no use for a large section of underprivileged or poor people in society.

However, macroeconomic indices like the economy's predicted growth rate of 7% and the reduction of the fiscal deficit to 5.9% of GDP are positive signs. The increased funding for the railroads and the encouragement of tourism expansion is both much-needed and always appreciated but time-bound completion of projects is still a major and critical challenge that often results in cost overruns and budget constraints. Overall, this budget is not much promising as several key components and areas of development are missing out with a big question mark.

Bishal Kumar Saha | *Murshidabad*

AMRIT ALL THE WAY

Sir — Nirmala Sitharaman needs to be complimented for a perfect budget. Even political leaders do not have words to criticize and waited for a day to provide false allegations after paying money to experts. Anyway, it was not a budget that stole Paul to pay Peter. Moreover, this government is functioning without corruption and that itself is a boon to the people. People around the world are admiring the state of affairs in India and admire the administration of 130 crore people in the most admirable way. In between such print media is look-

SBI at risk



India's largest bank, the State Bank of India has an exposure of around \$2.6 billion (over Rs 21,000 crore) of public money to the crisis-hit Adani group, the latest report from Bloomberg has claimed. SBI has reportedly given loans of this amount to companies of the Adani Group. The exposure of SBI to Adani includes \$200 million from its overseas units, the unidentified source further revealed. SBI

Chairman Dinesh Kumar Khara said that the loans were being serviced by Adani Group companies. The report comes after the Reserve Bank of India had on Thursday asked banks about details of their exposure to Adani group companies amid the ongoing rout. Adani group stocks have lost over \$100 billion in value in six days since the damaging report by New York-based short seller Hindenburg Research. Another public sector bank, Bank of Baroda has said its total exposure is Rs 7,000 crore, asserting that it is fully secured. Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) has disclosed having Rs 36,474.78 exposed to Adani group's debt and equity. With this, all is not well with public money which has been pocketed.

Bhagwan Thadani | *Mumbai*

ing at Amrit all the way and poking their nose in an indifferent way.

After all, Budget means a balancing act and that is done most meticulously. When everything went normal and to the liking of many it was a fake call to find fault. Balancing growth and fiscal constraints will be a knack and the taskmaster had a task cut out and succeeded in a very successful way.

Chitra Krishnan | *Mumbai*

THE CONTROVERSIAL AWARDS

Sir — The Padma Awards have frequently generated controversy, especially in recent years. The main complaint has been that undeserving individuals have received them or that deserving individuals have been excluded, that the governments have weighed choices based on political, personal, and other factors. For instance, SM Krishna received the Padma Vibhushan. No doubt, he is a great man, but why not for HD Deve Gowda, the former prime minister?

In the election-bound state of Karnataka, Krishna is a leader of the powerful Vokkaliga community, and Mulayam continues to be one of the most well-known figures among the OBCs, whom the BJP has been trying to woo with a

brazen political message.

Similar to how former Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's surgeon was honoured in 2001, the surgeon who operated on Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has earned a spot on the list. Even though treating a prime minister's health is crucial for the nation, it cannot be justified as a public service worthy of recognition. The majority of doctor awards have gone to people who work in the corporate sector, with doctors from Delhi receiving an outsized amount of these honours.

Former President Abdul Kalam has counseled then-Prime Minister Vajpayee to exercise caution in the selection of awardees. When KR Narayanan was vice president, and a committee produced some excellent proposals. The Supreme Court once addressed the matter and established a process. Even after all of this, several undeserving individuals have succeeded in leaving with the honours, while deserving individuals have fallen short. The prestige associated with the awards has suffered, and they have been devalued in the process.

KV Chandra Mouli | *Mysuru*

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Rejig higher education

The UGC guidelines for foreign universities to setup campus in India are ill-conceived

Higher education in India has always been an underperformer. Though we have 40,000 colleges and 1000 universities most of them do not impart quality education to the students and leave them high and dry after they pass out. This is one big reason for unemployment as most students passing out from the colleges with degrees are unemployable as the curriculum, as well as the quality of education they receive, is below par. Though we have world-class institutions like IITs and IIMs, they can be counted on tips and even there after taking a subsidized fee structure students to leave the shores and give their best years to the multinational companies abroad. Some \$3 billion are spent by Indian parents to fund their children's education abroad. But the fact is most of them have good returns as they get employed easily and are able to pay back their loans etc. On the other hand, students who study in India go through a grind to get a job; their ordeal begins after they leave college and most end up working in jobs they were not trained for.

The government has recently come up with the idea to offset this lacuna by allowing foreign universities to open their campuses in the country. But that the UGC guidelines to this effect are flawed and would not lead to universities from abroad coming here and starting their classes here. The biggest problem is that in India education institutions cannot make a profit that is they have to work on a pro bono model. If the foreign universities set up campuses here, the same rule would apply to them and they would not be able to remit money. After all profit would be their motive to come here. Most private colleges make a profit by manipulating the account books to skirt this clause. Moreover, the foreign campuses would indeed hit the private colleges hard as they would not be able to compete with them on brand and facilities, curriculum, etc. Moreover, if foreign universities do come to India they would have their own agenda and not the best interest of India in mind which is another major drawback. UGC had earlier invited foreign universities, but none showed interest. So the Government would do well to go back to the drawing board and rethink the whole higher education policy rather than finding easy solutions. Besides the interest of the private colleges must also not be overlooked and a level playing field must be provided to all else it would destroy the education system we have.

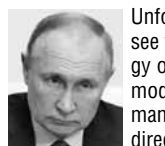


SOUNDBITE

Zindagi ke saath thi, ab Adaniji ke saath hai (remained with life, now with Adani. This is the situation of LIC. And the Prime Minister is silent on the issue.



Congress leader — Pawan Khera



Unfortunately, we see that the ideology of Nazism in its modern form and manifestation again directly threatens the security of our country. Again and again, we have to repel the aggression of the collective West.

Russian President — Vladimir Putin

She was super chill the whole time. I was very impressed. It was wonderful to have her and my wife, (Priyanka Chopra), out.



Singer — Nick Jonas



Shafali led from the front. She injected confidence into the team. She always said 'Chhinta mat karo hum jeetenge'.

Wicketkeeper U-19 women's cricket team — Richa Ghosh

This will play out in the market. This is one company's events and the regulator will have a look at whether they have adhered to the norms of the market.



Economic Affairs Secretary — Ajay Seth

FIRST COLUMN
MILLETS' IMPORTANCE GROWS WORLDWIDE

They help us fight problems of malnutrition, obesity



SHARMILA OSWAL

Millets were a major crop consumed in India and numerous other nations till about five decades ago. According to a 2014 National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) report, the plate share of millets has declined significantly in favour of wheat, rice, and processed foods.

As a result of increased land being used for wheat and rice production, the cultivation area for millets has decreased by 58 per cent for small millets, 64 per cent for sorghum, 49 per cent for finger millet, and 23 per cent for pearl millet since 1956. Millets are considered to be the sole crop that can handle critical challenges in the future such as food, fuel, malnutrition, health, and climate change.

With India's growing malnutrition problem—both under-nutrition (vitamin, mineral, and protein deficiencies) and over-nutrition (obesity, metabolic syndrome, and lifestyle diseases)—there is a growing awareness of the need to move to healthier, more accessible, and inexpensive diets that include millets. In addition to being naturally gluten-free and nutrient-dense, millets are also a rich source of protein, essential fatty acids, dietary fibre, and vitamin B.



When it comes to the global scenario of millet production, India is the top producer of millets in the world and the fifth-largest exporter of millets globally. As the demand for millets rises quickly, their exports are expanding dramatically. More business opportunities are being created for entrepreneurs as millets' demand rises.

The millet market has a value of over \$9 billion in 2018, and is expected to grow at a rate of over 4.5 per cent from 2018 to 2025, with a value projection of over \$12 billion.

Apart from creating business opportunities, millets also aid in the prevention of numerous non-communicable lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease, and are considered to be a potential choice or solution to lessen the negative effects of rising malnutrition and to improve the food and nutrition security of the nation.

Due to their adaptability to a wide range of temperatures and moisture regimes as well as their low input requirements, millets are resistant to climate change. They are resilient crops with small water and carbon footprints.

Millets can withstand droughts and can even survive on 350-400 mm of rain, making them an ideal crop for production.

As proposed by India to the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution declaring 2023 as the International Year of Millets. The main goal of this initiative is to raise public awareness of the health benefits of millets and their suitability for cultivation under challenging conditions brought on by climate change.

The International Year of Millet provides an excellent chance to:

1. improve millets' contribution to food security
2. increase millet output globally
3. make sure that the processing, transport, storage, and consumption are efficient
4. and sustainable millet production and quality with stakeholder participation

Millet farming is still an area with a lot of room for ecosystem-level interventions. Promoting millets not only raises awareness of these wonder crops, but also of women farmers and their farming knowledge.

Raising awareness among farmers and the general public about the numerous benefits of millets can help to revitalise millets production and consumption in India.

(The author is Founder and MD, Gudmom by 10Organic, and Millet Evangelist)

Govt must step in to help tobacco users

PRITAM SENGUPTA

In several countries, the government has provided tobacco alternatives to deal with nicotine use and addictions

The Constitution asks citizens to develop a scientific temper and this could well be their greatest contribution to health. The Covid-19 has been an eye-opener to the importance of modern science. Many understand diseases better and that knowledge helps to combat it through vaccines, prophylactics and medical treatment.

That same scientific temper is lacking when it comes to tobacco use. More than a third of the Indian male population uses tobacco. The situation is particularly grim in rural India, where 42 per cent of men use tobacco products. It is time to employ science to combat death and disease by tobacco.

The data is culled from the National Family Health Survey, which is an important vehicle to understand the status of India's health. The most recent one, NFHS-5, was carried out in 2019-21.

The data from the NFHS on the consumption of tobacco in India has thrown up shocking data. There has been a little change in patterns of tobacco use amongst the Indian population despite advertising ill-effects.

There are graphic images on tobacco pouches and cigarette packets yet these seem to have little effect. The data on tobacco use also throws up several scary observations on the smoking population, which is quite high. But the message is not percolating down to the smokers, particularly in rural areas.

The study of tobacco consumption also shows that the prevalence of smoking decreases with increased exposure to schooling. The NFHS-5 reports that 39 per cent of men and nine per cent of women age 15 and over currently use any tobacco products. This percentage is less than reported in the NFHS-4 (conducted in 2015-16) which had shown that tobacco use amongst 45 per cent of men and seven per cent of women in the 15-49 age group.

However, it is far from ideal in the modern world. Those who smoke in a family are not smoking alone. The NFHS-5 survey revealed that, in 25 per cent of Indian households, at least one person smokes tobacco on a daily basis, exposing others to passive smoking and its ill-effects. This is down a few notches from 29 per cent in NFHS-4.

The percentage of men aged 15 years and above who use any kind of tobacco exceeds 40 per cent in most parts of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Northeastern states, northern part of Maharashtra, western Gujarat, and southern Rajasthan.

Use of tobacco is also high (30-40 per cent) in Ladakh, Uttarakhand, most parts of Maharashtra, Karnataka, northern parts of Rajasthan, and north-western Gujarat.

The lowest kind of tobacco use (below



THE NFHS-5 SHOWS THAT TOBACCO CONSUMPTION IS MUCH HIGHER IN RURAL INDIA THAN URBAN. AMONG WOMEN, THERE ARE 5.5 PER CENT TOBACCO USERS IN URBAN AREAS AND 10.5 PER CENT (OR NEARLY DOUBLE) IN RURAL AREAS

(The author is a data journalist with experience in reporting health and science)



30 per cent) is mostly observed in Punjab and southern states. The five states with the highest tobacco use in rural population are Mizoram (73.1), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (58.7), Manipur (58), Meghalaya (57.8), Tripura (57.2). For women, it's Mizoram (61.7), Tripura (50.5), Manipur (43.3), Andaman & Nicobar Islands (31.2), and Meghalaya (28.3).

The data shows that these five states have the highest percentage of tobacco users for both men and women. These five states are also the top five states of India with the highest tobacco consumption in rural areas.

The NFHS-5 shows that tobacco consumption is much higher in rural India than urban. Among women, there are 5.5 per cent tobacco users in urban areas and 10.5 per cent (or nearly double) in rural areas. For the men, there are 28.8 per cent tobacco users in urban areas and 38 per cent in rural areas.

Indians both smoke and chew tobacco. The smokers consume bidis and cigarettes and account for around 20 per cent of tobacco users in the country. The rest use different forms of chewing tobacco.

The chewing or buccal consumption of tobacco is a traditional practice that was once rooted in consumption of paan. Traditionally, tobacco (zarda, kimam, patti) was added to betel leaves along with betel nuts, ground limestone and other natural substances. That has undergone a sea change in recent years. Most chewing tobacco consumers prefer gutka, or packets of readymade paan-like products. Previously, these came in two varieties: a benign one

without tobacco and one with tobacco pre-mixed into it. Following changes in regulations, all manufacturers were asked to sell packets of tobacco separately with the risks of cancer advertised through graphic images on tobacco pouches, same as on cigarette packets.

The paan is a perishable item but the gutka packets are convenient to buy and store for long periods. The result is that there are different grades available and their quality is subject to manufacturing standards and preservatives may be added to make them last longer. This means that inorganic substances are added to preserve the tobacco or betel nuts in the packets.

Another popular form of chewing tobacco is khaini—raw tobacco mixed with limestone and stored in the cavity between the gums and the cheeks for the buccal absorption of nicotine.

Indian law prohibits the sale of tobacco to minors. But, when was the last time you saw a tobacco seller asking for proof of age? The NFHS-5 survey was conducted amongst those who are aged 15 and above. This itself is an indicator that minors in India are using tobacco products. Most minors use tobacco secretly and away from the gaze of their parents and guardians. There is no evidence that minor tobacco users have scientifically explained the consequences of using tobacco, that it leads to an addiction and attracts a range of diseases.

The NFHS report says: "Tobacco use is associated with a wide range of diseases, including several types of cancers and heart and lung diseases, diabetes, eye disease, and rheumatoid arthritis. Studies have shown that in addition to sharing the same health risks as men, women who use tobacco experience difficulty in becoming pregnant and are at an increased risk of infertility, pregnancy complications, premature births, low birth-weight infants, stillbirths, miscarriages, and infant deaths."

Earlier, some doctors would ask smokers to cut down during the course of ailments or treatments and would tell them to quit in case of some conditions. Now, doctors advise all smoking patients to quit smoking.

This is regardless of whether the patient has a lifestyle disease, a life-threatening one or one that directly affects the lungs. Even for bone or muscle injuries, physiotherapists and orthopaedic doctors advise quitting smoking because tobacco use can delay/stunt the healing time and process.

The NFHS-4 survey had found that around 50 per cent of all tobacco users were asked by a doctor to quit smoking tobacco in the 12 months before the survey. Where does science come in?

Creating regulations and following the bare minimum will also reap the bare minimum results. A sea change in attitudes is required and this is only possible with sustained, aggressive drives to create awareness amongst the Indian population.

In several other countries, the government has provided tobacco alternatives to deal with nicotine use and addictions. These alternatives have to be pushed especially amongst the rural population amongst India, where the numbers of tobacco users is increasing.

The celebration by a healthy, tobacco-free nation will be the biggest tribute to the republic.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

THIS IS NOT MERELY AN UNWARRANTED ATTACK ON ANY SPECIFIC COMPANY BUT A CALCULATED ATTACK ON INDIA,

— BUSINESSMAN GAUTAM ADANI



IT IS A MATTER OF CONCERN THAT A GROUP AGAINST WHOM SERIOUS ALLEGATIONS HAVE BEEN MADE IS USING THE INDIAN FLAG AND HAS THE AUDACITY TO SAY THAT IT IS AN ATTACK ON INDIA.

— RJD LEADER MANOJ JHA

Intelligent automation can transform businesses

It helps them streamline processes, reduce costs, improve compliance, measure performance, and optimise resource utilisation

In recent years, the business world has seen its share of dramatic changes, ranging from inflationary pressures to disruptions in supply chains and talent shortages. These factors have pushed businesses to become more agile and find new ways of improving efficiency. One such method is intelligent automation (IA)—a concept that combines artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning with human-centered design principles to streamline processes and make them more efficient.

IA can help businesses stay ahead of the competition by automating mundane tasks, freeing up valuable resources for higher-level jobs, increasing profitability, and enabling faster decision-making.

With the help of IA solu-



SRIVIDYA KANNAN

(The author is Director and Founder, Avaali Solutions)

tions, organisations can increase their operational efficiency and cost effectiveness while making better decisions in a more structured and data-driven way. For example, IA can be used to detect patterns in customer data or feedback to uncover hidden insights into how customer needs are evolving. Additionally, AI algorithms can automate tedious tasks such as invoice processing or workflow management. In addition, it will also enable businesses to optimise their processes and operations through automation to gain a competitive advantage while reducing human errors and inconsistencies. By 2023, IA solutions are expected to become an integral part of business operations, enabling companies to optimise opera-

tions and increase efficiency without sacrificing quality or customer satisfaction. IA is a set of advanced technologies that allow computers to perform tasks that require human intervention. This includes machine learning algorithms that can automate decision-making processes, intelligent capture solutions, workflow automation, low-code/no-code solutions, and robotic process automation (RPA), which automates repetitive and rule-driven tasks such as data entry or invoice processing. The main benefit of using IA is that it can speed up processes while maintaining accuracy and reliability. Furthermore, IA solutions can help reduce costs associated with manual labor, thus improving overall profitabili-

ty. IA solutions can help automate many activities, including customer service, financial management, marketing campaigns, and product delivery. AI-enabled robots can process large amounts of data quickly and accurately. Additionally, AI-powered solutions can be used for predictive analytics, which helps organisations make informed decisions about future trends based on past performance data. Another significant advantage of IA solutions is improved governance. Automation helps ensure compliance with regulations by providing accurate records and documentation which can easily be audited if required. This ensures that the organisation's activities are conducted within acceptable legal parameters.

Finally, IA solutions are also beneficial for companies looking to adopt sustainable practices as they can minimise their carbon footprint while still achieving their goals effectively. IA can be used to monitor energy consumption patterns more closely so that unnecessary usage can be avoided or minimised; this reduces both wastage and costs over time. The introduction of RPA within the organisation's supply chain could reduce waste generated due to inefficient manual processes while helping them comply with strict regulations set forth by various government agencies such as GDPR or other ethical rules related to consumer protection. Moreover, automated systems can optimise resource utilization more effi-

ciently than humans can do manually, thus reducing waste production while maintaining quality standards. The rise in IA presents a massive opportunity for businesses looking to improve their operations in the coming years; however, some challenges must be considered when introducing this technology into existing systems. Firstly, there is always the question of security when dealing with automated systems; ensuring that sensitive data remains protected and inaccessible by unauthorised parties is paramount when implementing any automated system. Secondly, organisations need to consider how they will manage any potential disruption caused by introducing new technologies into existing operations—ensuring

employees are aligned with how the process would run post-automation is essential for successfully adopting these solutions in the long term.

In conclusion, IA presents an exciting opportunity for business transformation in 2023 and beyond; by leveraging these solutions correctly, enterprises will be able to run more profitably while still adhering to sound governance principles and best-in-class sustainable practices that respect both the environment and society around them.

IA will enable organisations to streamline processes, reduce costs, improve compliance, measure performance, and optimise resource utilisation—helping them maintain a competitive edge regardless of industry or sector.

US to send Ukraine longer-range bombs in latest turnaround

AP ■ WASHINGTON

After months of agonizing, the U.S. has agreed to send longer-range bombs to Ukraine as it prepares to launch a spring offensive to retake territory Russia captured last year, U.S. Officials said Thursday, confirming that the new weapons will have roughly double the range of any other offensive weapon provided by America.

The U.S. Will provide ground-launched small diameter bombs as part of a \$2.17 billion aid package it is expected to announce Friday, several U.S. Officials said. The package also for the first time includes equipment to connect all the different air defense systems Western allies have rushed to the battlefield and integrate them into Kyiv's own air defenses, to help them better defend against Russia's continued missile attacks.

For months, U.S. Officials have hesitated to send longer-range systems to Ukraine out of concern that they would be used to target inside Russia, escalating the conflict and drawing the U.S. Deeper in. The longer-range bombs are the latest advanced system, such as Abrams tanks and the Patriot missile defense system, that the



U.S. Has eventually agreed to provide Ukraine after initially saying no. U.S. Officials, though, have continued to reject Ukraine's requests for fighter jets.

Ukrainian leaders have urgently pressed for longer-range munitions and on Thursday, officials said the U.S. Will send an undisclosed number of the ground-launched, small diameter bombs, which have a range of about 95 miles (150 kilometers). The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss details of the aid package not yet made public.

To date, the longest-range missile provided by the U.S. Is about 50 miles (80 kilometers). The funding in the aid package is for longer-term purchases, so it wasn't clear Thursday how long it will take to get the bomb to the battlefield in Ukraine.

Ukraine's defense minister Oleskii Reznikov said Thursday the country is prepared to offer guarantees to its Western partners that their weapons won't be used to strike inside Russian territory, adding that Kyiv needs weapons with the range of up to 300 kilometers (186 miles) to expel the Russian forces.

"If we could strike at a distance of up to 300 kilometers, the Russian army wouldn't be able to mount a defense and will have to withdraw," Reznikov said at a meeting with EU officials. "Ukraine is ready to provide any guarantees that your weapons will not be involved in attacks on the Russian territory. We have enough targets in the occupied areas of Ukraine, and we're prepared to coordinate on (these) targets with our partners," the minister said.

The U.S. Aid package includes \$425 million in ammu-

nition and support equipment that will be pulled from existing Pentagon stockpiles and \$1.75 billion in new funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative, which is used to purchase new weapons from industry.

The USAI, which will pay for the longer-range bombs and the air defense system integration, also funds two HAWK air defense systems, anti-aircraft guns and ammunition, and counter-drone systems. Since Russia's invasion last February, Western allies have pledged a myriad of air defense systems to Ukraine to bolster Kyiv's own Soviet-made S-300 surface-to-air missile defense systems, and the latest aid package aims to provide the capability to integrate them all, which could improve Ukraine's ability to protect itself against incoming Russian attacks.

The U.S. Has pledged medium- to long-range National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, or NASAMS, and truck-launched short-range Avenger air defense systems; the Netherlands, Germany and the U.S. Are sending Patriot missile defense systems; Germany is sending medium-range IRIS-T air defense systems; and Spain is sending Aspide anti-aircraft air defense systems.

EU officials hold Kyiv talks in show of support for Ukraine



AP ■ KYIV

Top European Union officials were due to meet Friday in Kyiv with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a show of support for the country as it battles to counter Russia's invasion and strives to join the EU as well as NATO.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President Charles Michel, as well as 15 European commissioners, travelled to the Ukrainian capital for what they described as a summit meeting.

The last such summit was held in Kyiv in October 2021 — a few months before the war started. The highly symbolic visit is also the first EU political mission of its kind to a country at war.

"There will be no let-up in

our resolve," Michel said in a tweet on his apparent arrival in Kyiv. "We will also support (Ukraine) every step of the way on your journey to the EU."

EU assistance for Ukraine has reached almost 50 billion euros (USD 55 billion) since the fighting started, according to EU officials.

The EU is providing Ukraine with financial and humanitarian aid, among other things. It also plans to adopt a 10th package of sanctions against Russia in the coming weeks. The EU has also announced it's ramping up its military training mission for Ukraine, from an initial target of pushing 15,000 troops through the schooling to up to 30,000 troops. One focus is to train the crews of tanks that Western countries have offered Ukraine. Ukraine wants to join the 27-nation bloc, and formal-

ly submitted its application last June, though that could take years and require the adoption of far-reaching reforms. In the meantime, von der Leyen said Thursday that the European Commission is willing to let Kyiv join what she called some "key European programmes" that will bring benefits similar to membership. Those programmes were due to be discussed in Friday's meeting, which will also address one of the main obstacles to Ukraine's EU membership: endemic corruption. Von der Leyen, on her fourth visit to Kyiv since Russia's invasion, said Thursday she was "comforted" by Ukraine's anti-corruption drive. The previous day, Zelenskyy had taken 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 channel billions of dollars to help Kyiv fight Moscow's forces. 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.

Along Ukraine — Belarus border, a war of nerves — and drones

AP ■ BELARUS BORDER

The reconnaissance drones fly several times a day from Ukrainian positions deep inside the thick forest that marches across the border into Belarus, a close Russian ally, scouring sky and land for signs of trouble on the other side.

Ukrainian units are monitoring the 1,000-kilometre (650-mile) frontier of marsh and woodland for a possible surprise offensive from the north, a repeat of the unsuccessful Russian thrust toward Kyiv at the start of the war nearly a year ago.

This time the Ukrainians are taking no chances. Since the summer they have been reinforcing defences, building and expanding trenches and laying mines in the forest ahead of the springtime offensive military officials expect.

Residents of villages in the region that were temporarily occupied last year are horrified by the prospect of it all starting again.

"We're listening out for every small sound and noise. This isn't a way to live," said Valentina Matveva, 64, from the village of Ripke. "When you're in constant fear, that's not life."

Concerns of a renewed military push were stirred in January after Russia and Belarus held joint air force drills, one month after a rare visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin to Minsk.

Military experts and Western intelligence have played down the possibility of a renewed northern offensive. The British Defence Ministry tweeted on January 11 that Russian aircraft and existing Russian troops in Belarus, though numerous, are "unlikely to constitute a credible offensive force."

Belarusian officials attribute the troop deployment along the border to "strategic deterrence" according to local reports. The country's authoritarian president, Alexander Lukashenko, has insisted he will not send troops to Ukraine.

But Ukrainian commanders are wary, remembering how Russia used Belarus as a launching pad in early 2022.

"We continuously monitor the enemy from the ground and observe the movement of troops, if they are moving, how many troops, and where they are moving," the area's army intelligence unit head said during a



press tour this week a few kilometres from the border. The officer only identified himself by his first name, Oleksandr, citing security reasons.

Unlike the east with its devastating artillery duels, here in the north it's largely a war of quadcopters. Oleksandr said the Belarusians and Russians are "constantly monitoring our guard changes, trying to find our military's positions."

At times, Oleksandr's unit detects enemy reconnaissance drones and shoots them down using anti-drone rifles. Or an

enemy drone detects a Ukrainian one and tails it, at which point the Ukrainians try to capture and add it to their stock.

"We got four of their drones this way recently, and they took two of ours," Oleksandr said.

He says the reconnaissance missions have revealed no sign of worrying activity — yet. "They have a reinforcement section, and the patrol has been strengthened, but we do not observe a significant accumulation of troops from our section," he said.

Ukraine's Lt. Gen. Oleksii Pavlyuk, who is responsible for Kyiv province, was quoted in local reports as saying his country was preparing for a possible fresh attack through Belarus.

"We've created a group on the border with Belarus, which is ready to meet the enemy with dignity," he was quoted as saying.

Ukrainian officials argue that no one can know how Moscow will move in the coming months, and that a state of alert is necessary along the border.

Ukraine may also get old Leopard 1 tanks from German stocks

AP ■ BERLIN

Ukraine could add old Leopard 1 battle tanks from German defense industry stocks to deliveries of modern tanks that Berlin and other governments pledged last week to counter Russian forces in the war.

German government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit confirmed Friday that "export authorization has been granted" but declined to give numbers or other details, saying that they may become more concrete "in the coming days and weeks."

He told reporters in Berlin that the application from industry to permit delivery of Leopard 1 tanks had been made "some time" ago. Hebestreit's comments came after the daily Sueddeutsche Zeitung reported that the government had cleared the export of the tanks and that they could be sent as soon as the defense industry gets them in working order.

It said that two companies, Rheinmetall and FFG, want to prepare dozens of Leopard 1 tanks that could be delivered to Ukraine if it is interested. But it also said that there are issues so far with securing sufficient



ammunition for the vehicles. It wasn't immediately clear when any deliveries might be possible, but it appeared unlikely to be a quick process. The Leopard 1, manufactured between the mid-1960s and the mid-1980s, was the first battle tank built for West Germany's Bundeswehr. The German military hasn't had any of the tanks since 2003, Defense Ministry spokesman Arne Collatz said. Germany last week agreed to send 14 modern Leopard 2 A6 tanks from its military's current stocks. Several other European countries have equipped their armies with Leopard 2 tanks, and Germany's move — which followed weeks of mounting pressure to supply battle tanks — meant that they also can give some of their stocks to Ukraine.

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)

N.I.T. No.	39-2022-23-W-V
1. Name of work with its location	Removal of muck/malba in the section of ADEN/DEE under Sr.DEN-V. Similar Nature of Work: Any civil work other than track.
2. Approx. Cost of work	Rs. 5000330.72
3. Earnest Money Deposit	(It should be in the form of net banking or payment gateway Only. Note:- FDR will not be accepted as EMD for tender invited on IREPS as per Railway Boards letter no. 201025/SC-IC/JT/51 dated 31.08.2016) Rs. 100000.00
4. Completion period of work	5 Month
5. Date and time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Upto 15:00 hrs on 24.02.2023 Opening of tender at 15:00 hrs. On 24.02.2023
6. Website particulars notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc.	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in

No- 128-W/280/OET/2022-23-W-V/NIT-39-2022-23-W-V
Dated : 03.02.2023

NORTHERN RAILWAY TENDER NOTICE
Invitation of Tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)

N.I.T. No.	41 (A, B)22-23WE
Name of work with its location	(A) Annual zone work of staff quarters and service buildings at S.P. Marg, Barar Square and other offices and colonies for the period ending on 30.06.2023 in the section of SSE/WSP Marg under ADEN/E-II
Approx. cost of work	(A) 9999654.66 (B) 9499930.14
EMD amount	(A) 200000.00 (B) 190000.00
Completion period of work	(A) 04 Months (B) 04 Months
Date and Time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Closing date of tender on 28.02.2023 at 15:00 hrs.
Website particular notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc.	Above tender available on website i.e. www.ireps.gov.in

128-W/269/OET/22-23WE/NIT/41 (A, B) Dated : 30.01.2023
SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 367/23

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given to the General Public on behalf of our client i.e. HFC Bank Ltd. that of Mr. Rajesh Mittal is owner of entire Second floor without rights (said floor) built on Plot No. 08, admeasuring 60 sq. mtrs. in Pocket H-3, Sector-11, Situated at Rohini, New Delhi (the said property) by virtue of Sale Deed dated 19.12.2022, Registration No. 14925, executed by Mrs. Anita Jain, has lost /misplaced Death Certificate of Late Mrs. Sheila Kapoor, & Mr. Indrajit Kapoor, along with SMC certificate stating legal heirs of late Mrs. Sheila Kapoor & Mr. Indrajit Kapoor. All persons are hereby informed not to deal or carry out any transaction with anyone on the basis of the said missing document. If anyone has already carried out or being carried out kindly inform the undersigned in writing on the below mentioned address within 07 days of the present.

AD REM LEGAL SOLUTION
Ch. No. 760, Dwarka Court Sector-10, Dwarka, New Delhi-75
M:- 9899010318

PUBLIC NOTICE
This is for the information of all concerned that our project of "Group Housing Complex at Plot No. 254 VII, Sector - 19B, Dwarka, New Delhi - 110075, has been accorded the Environmental Clearance from Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (Issued by the State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), Delhi) vide their approval no. SEIAA-D/C-429/EC-369/2022 dated 31st January 2023 subject to the conditions enumerated herein and copies of clearances letter are available with the MoEF&CC and may also be seen on the website of MoEF&CC / SEIAA website.

KAWAL KUMAR GARUR ENTERPRISES LLP
A-1/172, 2ND FLOOR, JANAK PURI NEW DELHI - 110058

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Regd. Off: Judges Boreilly Road, Rampur-244801 U.P.

NOTICE OF BOARD MEETING
In pursuance of Regulation 47 of SEBI (LODR) 2015, Notice is hereby given that the meeting of the Board of Directors will be held on Tuesday, the 14th February 2023, at 4:00 P.M. at its Regd. office: Judges Boreilly Road, Rampur-244801 (U.P.), inter alia, to consider, approve and adopt unaudited Financial Results for the quarter ended on December 31st, 2022 pursuant to Regulation 33 of LODR. The said information is also available on the Company's website at www.rampurfert.com and the same has been also sent to CSE and MSE to upload on their websites i.e. www.cse-india.com, www.mseil.in respectively.

By order of Board
Sd/-
Rajeev Kumar
(Company Secretary)

Place: Rampur
Date: 03.02.2023

Public Notice
I, Rajesh Kumar Gupta S/o late Shri Shanti Swaroop Gupta R/o House No. T4/805, Akash Residency, Near Madhubani Park, Kanth Road, Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh- 244001 have declare that my Son Sankalp Gupta has very bad habits and very poor in Character. Hence, I have disowned my son Sankalp Gupta from all my movable, immovable property. Only he will be responsible for all his actions and transactions.

PUBLIC NOTICE FOR LOSS OF FORM 31/38
The general public is hereby informed that the Import declaration Forms 31/38 having Form No. 3052941 to 3052960 and 2568716 to 2568724 (total 29 forms) issued to Pasupati Spinning & Weaving Mills Ltd by VAT Department, Noida, UP has been lost. A F.I.R., bearing No. 113303/2023 has been submitted with SO No: 430/2014 Delhi Police on 03/02/2023. The general public is advised not to deal, in any manner whatsoever, in the aforementioned forms. In case the forms are found by any person, the same may kindly be returned to the undersigned.

Sd/-
Mukesh Kalkar
Son of Late Sh. Darshan Lal Kalkar
(For and on behalf of Pasupati Spinning & Weaving Mills Ltd)
127-128, Tribhuvan Complex,
Ishwar Nagar New Delhi-110065
Email Id: m.kalkar@pasupatitextiles.com
Mob : +91 93136 39245

Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam Limited (GMVN)
14, Rajaraj Road, Dehra Dun - 248001
CIN: L15136UP1988PLC010084

E-TENDER NOTICE
Tender are invited by GMVN from Reputed firm/Eligible Bidders for the supply of Rafting Equipments for rafting center GMVN at Rishikesh Distt. Dehradun.

Detailed Terms & Conditions for applying tender are given in the tender document. Tender document can be downloaded from the websites www.uktenders.gov.in and/or www.gmvn.in.

The Tender procedure will be done through "Electronic Tendering system" through the website www.uktenders.gov.in.

M-9536006156 Managing Director

NATO urges Russia to respect nuclear pact with US

AP ■ BRUSSELS

NATO called Friday on Russia to respect the only treaty it has with the United States aimed at keeping a lid on nuclear weapons expansion and urged Moscow to allow on-the-ground inspections of military sites to resume.

The so-called New START Treaty was signed by Russia and the US in 2010. It caps at 1,550 the number of long-range nuclear warheads they can deploy and limits the use of missiles that can carry atomic weapons. It allows short-notice inspections of each other's nuclear bases and support facilities. "We note with concern that Russia has failed to comply with legally-binding obligations under the New START Treaty," NATO ambassadors said in a statement.

The 30-nation US-led military alliance supports the treaty and believes that it helps to limit the expansion of nuclear forces. The envoys said that Russia's refusal to hold consultations or to allow US inspections since last August "prevents the United States from exercising important rights under the Treaty, and undermines the United States' ability to adequately verify Russian compliance with the Treaty's central limits."

"We call on Russia to fulfil



its obligations under the Treaty by facilitating New START inspections on Russian territory, and by returning to participation in the Treaty's implementation body," the forum in which the two sides could consult, NATO said. President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly ramped up his nuclear rhetoric since he ordered Russian troops into Ukraine almost a year ago, raising concern among Western allies and the public over whether he might actually use such weapons. The US-Russia committee formed under the treaty last met in October 2021, but Russia

unilaterally suspended its cooperation with the pact's inspection provisions in August 2022 to protest US support for Ukraine. Inspections of US and Russian military sites under the New START treaty were paused by both sides because of the spread of the coronavirus in March 2020. The US State Department warned on Tuesday that "Russia's refusal to facilitate inspection activities prevents the United States from exercising important rights under the treaty and threatens the viability of US-Russian nuclear arms control.

Chinese spy balloon spotted over US airspace

Beijing says it is mainly used for 'meteorological purposes'

or physical threat to people on the ground."

"NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) continues to track and monitor it closely," he said, adding the balloon was spotted over Montana on Thursday and is "said to be the size of three buses".

Montana, a sparsely populated state, is home to one of only three nuclear missile silo fields in the US, at Malmstrom Air Force Base.

"Once the balloon was detected, the US government acted immediately to protect against the collection of sensitive information," Ryder said.

Reacting to the Pentagon's report, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson confirmed that the balloon was a Chinese "civilian airship" which had deviated from its planned route.

"The airship is from China. It is a civilian airship used for research, mainly meteorological, purposes," the spokesperson said in a statement posted on the Chinese foreign ministry's website.

"Affected by the Westerlies and with limited self-steering capability, the airship deviated far from its planned course. The Chinese side



regrets the unintended entry of the airship into US airspace due to force majeure," the statement said.

Earlier, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters in Beijing on Friday that

China was verifying the Pentagon's report on the balloon.

She urged calm "until the facts are clear."

"China is a responsible country and always abides strictly by inter-

national law. We have no intention of violating the territory or airspace of any sovereign country," she said.

In Washington, Pentagon spokesman Ryder said the balloon is travelling at an altitude well above

commercial air traffic and does not present a military or physical threat to people on the ground.

US President Joe Biden was briefed about the incident, a senior defence official said, adding the Pentagon is exploring various options.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen Mark Milley and US Northern Command Gen Glen VanHerck have recommended not to "take kinetic action" because of the potential risk to the safety and security of people on the ground from the possible debris field, officials said.

"Currently, we assess that this balloon has limited additive value from an intelligence collection perspective. But we are taking steps nevertheless to protect against foreign intelligence collection of sensitive information," said a defence official.

The US government has engaged with the Chinese government both through the Chinese embassy in Washington and the US diplomatic mission in China.

US national security officials have constantly warned about growing Chinese espionage efforts and the balloon's presence in the US comes at a sensitive moment with Secretary

of State Blinken expected to travel to Beijing next week, a significant trip meant to follow up on President Joe Biden's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in November last year in Bali, Indonesia.

Biden has declared China "America's most consequential geopolitical challenge" and competition between the two major powers is growing. Bilateral tensions have flared over the self-governing island of Taiwan, China's human rights record and its military activities in the South China Sea, among a host of other issues.

Meanwhile, Canada said on Thursday that it is also tracking the Chinese balloon's movements and working with their American partners.

Balloons are one of oldest forms of surveillance technology. Compared to other air types of surveillance devices, the unmanned balloons can be operated cheaply.

The US believes Chinese spy satellites in low Earth orbit are capable of offering similar or better intelligence, limiting the value of whatever Beijing can glean from the high-altitude balloon, CNN quoted a defence official as saying.

China confirms offer to Sri Lanka of debt moratorium

AP ■ BEIJING

China's Government on Friday confirmed it is offering Sri Lanka a two-year moratorium on loan repayments as the Indian Ocean island nation struggles to restructure USD 51 billion in foreign debt that pushed it into a financial crisis.

China lent to Sri Lanka as part of Beijing's multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative to increase trade by building ports and other infrastructure across Asia and Africa.

The International Monetary Fund offered a USD 2.9 billion emergency loan but wants other creditors to cut debts, which Beijing had resisted, possibly for fear other borrowers would want the same relief.

China presented a plan to "provide an extension on debt service due in 2022 and 2023,"



said a foreign ministry spokeswoman, Mao Ning.

"During that period, Sri Lanka would not have to pay the principal and interest due on bank loans."

China is Sri Lanka's third-biggest creditor after Japan and the Asian Development Bank, accounting for about 10 per cent of its debt.

But its lack of agreement blocked a final settlement.

Sri Lanka used Chinese loans to build an airport and other projects that failed to pay for themselves.

India, which China sees as a strategic rival, announced last month it gave the IMF assurances to facilitate a bailout plan. India has given Sri Lanka USD 4.4 billion in emergency credit.

Sri Lanka ran out of foreign currency last April, leading to food shortages, power cuts and protests that forced a prime minister to resign and a president to flee the country. Debt repayment to China, Japan and other foreign lenders was suspended.

The island's government is cutting spending and says it will cut the size of its 200,000-member military by almost half by 2030.

S Korean court sentences ex-Min to 2 yrs in prison

AP ■ SEOUL

A South Korean court on Friday sentenced a former justice minister, Cho Kuk, to two years in prison, after he was found guilty of creating fake credentials to help his children get into prestigious schools, a scandal that rocked the country's previous government and sparked huge protests.

Cho was also found guilty of abusing his powers while serving as a senior aide to former President Moon Jae-in, by blocking an investigation into a former Financial Services Commission official seen as close to Moon who was eventually arrested for taking bribes from businesspeople.

But the Seoul Central District Court decided not to place Cho under immediate arrest.

ASEAN Foreign Ministers meet under shadow of Myanmar crisis

AP ■ JAKARTA

Southeast Asian foreign ministers met in Indonesia's capital on Friday for talks overshadowed by the deteriorating situation in military-ruled Myanmar despite an agenda focused on food and energy security and cooperation in finance and health.

Myanmar belongs to the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations, but the annual ministers' retreat is being held in Jakarta without its foreign minister, Wunna Maung Lwin.

His forced absence is a result of Myanmar's lack of cooperation in implementing a five-step agreement made in 2021 between ASEAN leaders and Myanmar's military leader, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing. In the agreement, Myanmar's military leaders promised to allow a special ASEAN envoy to meet with jailed ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi and others to foster dialogue aimed at easing the crisis, set off by the military's seizure of power two years ago.



ASEAN, JAKARTA

Last year, when ASEAN was chaired by Cambodia, Min Aung Hlaing was not invited to the November meeting of ASEAN leaders after Myanmar declined to let an ASEAN envoy meet with Suu Kyi.

Analysts said the military takeover in Myanmar loomed large over the foreign ministers' meeting, even as Indonesia, the chair of ASEAN this year, seeks to dampen concerns that the issue will hold the bloc "hostage."

Kicking off the country's

turn as chair of the regional bloc, Indonesian President Joko Widodo said late last month that ASEAN will continue contributing to making Indo-Pacific a peaceful and stable region and maintaining regional economic growth.

In her opening remarks on Friday, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said the ministers were meeting in the midst of immense global challenges in which the Indo-Pacific region is not immune, including geopolitical, food, energy, financial and ecological crises, as well as major power rivalries that could spill over and potentially destabilise the region.

Sorry, not sorry: Some 1/6 rioters change tune after apology

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Appearing before a federal judge after pleading guilty to a felony charge in the deadly Capitol riot, former West Virginia lawmaker Derrick Evans expressed remorse for letting down his family and his community, saying he made a "crucial mistake."

Less than a year later, Evans is portraying himself as a victim of a politically motivated prosecution as he runs to serve in the same building he stormed on January 6, 2021.

Evans is now calling the Justice Department's Jan. 6 prosecutions a "miscarriage of justice" and describes himself on Twitter as a "1/6 Patriot."

"Some ppl have said I need to apologize and condemn #1/6 if I want to win my election as the media will attack me," he tweeted recently after announcing his bid for a US House seat in 2024. "I will not compromise my values or beliefs. That's what politicians do. We need Patriots not politicians."



Evans joins a series of January 6 defendants who — when up against possible prison time in court — have expressed regret for joining the pro-Trump mob that rattled the foundations of American democracy only to strike a different tone or downplay the riot after receiving their punishment.

The very first January 6 defendant to be sentenced apologized in court and then went on Fox News Channel shortly after and seemed to minimize the riot.

Another defendant who called January 6 "horrifying and disgusting" later donned an orange jumpsuit to play the part of a distraught prisoner in a bizarre tribute to

imprisoned Capitol rioters during a conservative conference.

Some defendants have drawn ire from judges or the Justice Department for their inconsistent comments. But there's not much the legal system can do for an adjudicated defendant. And because some conservatives hold up January 6 defendants as martyrs, there's a political and possibly financial incentive for them to change their tune.

It could push judges to impose stronger punishments for rioters who haven't yet made it to the end of their criminal cases. Even before Evans' sentencing, the judge who heard his case began questioning the sincerity of rioters' apologies after he felt duped by another defendant, saying he was "all too familiar with crocodile tears."

Before being sentenced last June to three months behind bars for a civil disorder charge, Evans said he regrets his actions every day and told Senior Judge Royce Lamberth he is a "good person who unfortunately was caught up in a moment."

Pope heads to South Sudan to urge peace as fighting kills 27

AP ■ KINSHASA

Pope Francis opened the second and final leg of his African pilgrimage by heading to South Sudan on Friday, hoping to encourage the young country's stalled peace process and draw international attention to continued fighting and a worsening humanitarian crisis.

Francis had one final appointment Friday in Kinshasa with Congo's bishops before flying to the South Sudanese capital, Juba. There, he joins the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Rt. Rev. Iain Greenshield, in a novel ecumenical push for peace.

Together, the three represent the religious leadership of the overwhelmingly Christian country, the world's youngest, which gained independence from the majority Muslim Sudan in 2011 but has been beset by civil war and conflict.

Satellite photos: Damage at Iran military site hit by drones



AP ■ DUBAI (UAE)

Satellite photos analysed by The Associated Press on Friday showed damage done to what Iran describes as a military workshop attacked by Israeli drones, the latest such assault amid a shadow war between the two countries.

While Iran has offered no explanation yet of what the workshop manufactured, the drone attack threatened to again raise tensions in the region.

Already, worries have grown over Tehran enriching uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels, with a top US Republican nuclear official warning the Islamic Republic had enough fuel to build "several" atomic bombs if it chooses.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose earlier tenure as premier saw escalating attacks targeting Iran, has returned to office and reiterated that he views Tehran as his country's top security threat.

With State Department spokesperson Ned Price now declaring Iran has "killed" the opportunity to return to its nuclear deal with world powers, it remains unclear what diplomacy immediately could ease tensions between Tehran and the West.

Cloudy weather had prevented satellite pictures of the site of the workshop since it came under attack by what Iran described as bomb-carrying quadcopters on the night of January 28.

Quadcopters, which get their name from having four rotors, typically operate from short ranges by remote control.

Images taken Thursday by Planet Labs PBC showed the workshop in Isfahan, a central Iranian city some 350 km (215 miles) south of Tehran. An AP analysis of the image, compared to earlier images of the workshop, showed damage to the structure's roof. That damage corresponded to footage aired by Iranian state television immediately after the attack that showed at least two holes in the building's roof.

The Iranian state TV footage, as well as satellite photos, suggest the building's roof also may have been built with so-called "slat armour." The structure resembles a cage built around roofs or armoured vehicles to stop direct detonation from rockets, missiles or bomb-carrying drones against a target.

Installation of such protection at the workshop suggests Iran believed it could be a drone target.

Notice Inviting re-Tender
No.SSA-20014/2/2022-Equity-SSA /114524/2023 Date:02.02.2023
Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilpara, Guwahati-19, Assam invites following bid through GeM portal.
1. GEM/2023/B/3004857 Dated 18-01-2023 for Menstrual Hygiene Management and Adolescent Info Booklet Paper-based Printing Services - Printing with Material.
Interested bidder may visit GeM portal and submit their bid on GeM portal accordingly.
Sd/-Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilpara, Guwahati-19
Janasanyog/CF/4225/22

UNITED LEASING AND INDUSTRIES LTD.
Regd. Office:- Plot No.66, Sector-34, EHTP, Gurugram, Haryana-122001
CIN:- L17100HR1983PLC033460, Phone:- 011-26258237, 49075251
Email. Id:- investorrelations@ulltdl.com, website:- ulltdl.com

COMPANY NOTICE
Pursuant to Regulation 29 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, notice is hereby given that 06th/02/2023 meeting of the Board of Directors of the United Leasing & Industries Limited will be held on Monday, 13 February 2023, at 12:30 PM at D-41, South Extension Part-II, New Delhi-110049, to inter alia consider & approve the Un-Audited Financial Results for the Quarter ended December 31, 2022.
For United Leasing & Industries Limited
Sd/- Shashi Shekhar
Company Secretary
Membership No ACS 30145
Place: New Delhi
Date: 03rd February, 2023

UJVN LTD.
H.O.: 'UJJWAL', Maharani Bagh, G.M.S. Road, Dehradun-248006
Telephones : 0135-2763808 & Fax : 0135-2763508
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvnl.com

e-Tender Notice Dated 03.02.2023
Office of the Executive Engineer (Generation) Chibro Power House, Chibro, invites online bids from interested parties. Brief summary of tender is given below:
Tender No.28e/EE(G)/CPH/2022-23
Name of work/supply/services etc. "Fabrication, supply, installation & commissioning of 1 set (12 Nos.) bearing coolers for 60 MW Generator Unit 2&4 at Chibro Power House"
Estimated cost: 36,50,540.00 + GST Extra.
Date of availability of bid document on website:03-02-2023 from 10:00 Hrs.
Last date for submission of bids on website : 24-02-2023 up to 17:00 Hrs.
For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>
E.E (Gen), CPH, Chibro.

UJVN LTD.
H.O.: 'UJJWAL', Maharani Bagh, GMS Road, Dehradun-248006
Telephone No.. 0135-2763808 Fax No. 0135-2763508
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvnl.com

e-TENDER NOTICE Date: 03-02-2023
Office of the Executive Engineer (Civil) ManeriBhali Stage - Ist(Maneri), Uttarkashi invites online bids from interested parties. Brief summary of tenders is given below:
1- NIT No: 23/EE(Civil)/MB-I/TN/2022-23 & 2- NIT No. 24/EE(Civil)/MB-I/TN/2022-23
Name of work/supply/services: 1- Annual sweeping and cleaning work of DGM(CM-BV) Office and Maneri Dam Colony at Maneri, Uttarkashi. 2- Supply of Inverter, Ceiling Fan and Street Light in Dy. General Manager Office Building, Field Hostel and Officers Transit Camp at Maneri Dam Colony, Maneri, Uttarkashi.
Estimated cost : Rs 27.70 Lac (GST Extra) & Rs. 2.53 Lac (GST Extra)
Date of availability of bid document on website : 03 /02/2023
Last Date for submission of bids: 23 /02/2023(17:00 hrs)
For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in> Executive Engineer (Civil) MB-I,Maneri
"AVOID WASTEFUL USE OF ELECTRICITY"

MODI RUBBER LIMITED
CIN: L25199UP1971PLC003392
Registered Office: Modinagar - 201204; Dist. Ghaziabad, (U.P.)
Corporate Office: 4-7C, DDA Shopping Centre, New Friends Colony, New Delhi-110025; Website: www.modirubberlimited.com
Email: investors@modigroup.net; Phone: +91-11-47107398

NOTICE
Pursuant to regulation 29 of SEBI (LODR) 2015, Notice is hereby given that a 300th Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Company is scheduled to be held on Tuesday on 14th day of February, 2023 at 2.30 PM at Corporate Office: 4-7C, DDA Shopping Centre, 4th Floor, New Friends Colony, New Delhi-110025 to inter-alia approve the following:
(1) Unaudited Financial Results (Standalone and Consolidated) of the Company for the quarter ended December, 2022 and review limited review report of the Statutory Auditors for the publication as per SEBI LODR requirements.
For Modi Rubber Limited
Sd/-
Place : New Delhi (S K Bajpai)
Date : 3rd February, 2023 Head - Legal & Co. Secretary

OFFICE OF THE PROJECT MANAGER, CONSTRUCTION UNIT, UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM
GHINGARIKHAL, RANIKHET, DISTT-ALMORA 263645
Letter No.: 266/NIVDA/63 Date : 02-02-2023

E-Tender Notice
1. Name of the work: CONSTRUCTION OF REPAIRING WORKS OF TYPE-II RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS FOR REVENUE DEPARTMENT AT TEHSIL RANIKHET, DISTRICT ALMORA.
2. Estimated Cost: - Rs. 22.58 Lakh
3. Period of Completion:- 04 Month
4. Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal:- 03-02-2023 (10.00 hrs)
5. Online Bid submission: End date :- 16-02-2023 (17.00 hrs)
6. Date & Time of Technical bid Opening :- 17-02-2023 (16.30 hrs)
7. Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid: - Project Manager, Construction Unit, Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Ranikhet.
8. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal www.uktenders.gov.in PROJECT MANAGER

MY MONEY SECURITIES LIMITED
REGD. OFF. 10-A, UNDERHILL LANE, CIVIL LINES, DELHI-110054
CIN : L67120DL1992PLC047890; Website : www.mymoneyviews.com
E-mail id : mymoneyviews@outlook.com; Tel No. : 011-47087300, 011-23930655

NOTICE OF POSTAL BALLOT
NOTICE is hereby given to the Members of My Money Securities Limited ("the Company") pursuant to the provisions of Sections 108, 110, and other applicable provisions, if any, of the Companies Act, 2013 ("the Act") read with Rule 20 and 22 of the Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 ("the Rules"), Regulation 44 and other applicable provisions of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 ("SEBI LODR Regulations"), Secretarial Standard on General Meetings issued by the Institute of Company Secretaries of India ("Secretarial Standard-2") (including any statutory amendment(s), modification(s) or re-enactment(s) thereof, for the time being in force and as amended from time to time) read with General Circular no. 14/2020 dated April 8, 2020, General Circular no. 17/2020 dated April 13, 2020 read with other relevant circulars, General Circular no. 3/2022 dated May 5, 2022 and General Circular no. 11/2022 dated December 28, 2022 issued by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India (collectively referred to as "MCA Circulars") and/or any other applicable law, rules or regulations (including any statutory modification(s) or re-enactment(s) thereof for the time being in force), for seeking the approval of the Members of My Money Securities Limited to transact the Business as set out:-
1. To approve entering into Material Related Party Transactions with Promoter Group Companies.
2. To approve Material-related party transactions for subscribing to securities issued by the related parties and purchasing securities (of related or other unrelated parties) from related parties.
3. To approve entering into Material-Related party transactions by way of a lease deposit agreement with the promoter Shri Govind Narain Seth.
4. To approve entering into Material Related Party Transactions with Companies having the same Director/Promoter and same as contained in the Postal Ballot Notice dated 30th January 2023 ("Postal Ballot Notice") by passing the said resolutions through Postal Ballot, only by way of remote e-voting process. The Postal Ballot Notice along with explanatory statements have been sent on 03.02.2023 by e-mail only to those eligible Members who have already registered their e-mail address with the Depositories / the Company's Registrar and Share Transfer Agents i.e. M/s. M&S Services Limited / the Company on Cut-off date i.e. on 27th January 2023. The remote e-Voting facility would be available from Friday i.e. 10th February 2023, 9:00 a.m. to Saturday i.e. 11th March 2023, 5:00 p.m. Members are requested to record their assent (FOR) or dissent (AGAINST) through the remote e-Voting process not later than 5.00 p.m. (IST) on 11th March 2023. Remote e-Voting will be blocked by NSDL immediately thereafter and will not be allowed beyond the said date and time. The voting rights shall also be reckoned on the paid-up value of shares registered in the name(s) of the Member(s) as on the cut-off date. Once the vote on a resolution is cast by a Member, the Member shall not be allowed to change it subsequently. The results of the postal ballot will be announced on or before 13th March 2023 and the same will be uploaded on the website of the Company and will be communicated to BSE Ltd. The process and manner for remote e-Voting are detailed in the Notes forming part of the attached Notice and the notice will also be available on the Company's Website: www.mymoneyviews.com.
In case of any queries, you can call on Toll Free Nos.: 1800 1020 990/ 1800 224 430 or send an email to NSDL at evoting@nsdl.co.in or write an email to mymoneyviews@outlook.com.
By Order of the Board FOR MY MONEY SECURITIES LIMITED
Sd/- Vikas Seth
Managing Director
DIN : 00283194
10-A, Under Hill Lane, Civil Lines- Delhi-110054
Date : 03.02.2023
Place : Delhi

Sensex, Nifty jump over 1%

On heavy buying in banking stocks



PTI ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty rallied over 1 per cent on Friday due to heavy buying in banking and financial counters amid mixed trend in the global markets. The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex zoomed 909.64 points or 1.52 per cent to settle at 60,841.88. During the day, it jumped 973.1 points or 1.62 per cent to 60,905.34. The broader NSE Nifty advanced 243.65 points or 1.38 per cent to end at 17,854.05.

"Markets are rising, assuming that we are in the last phase of the rate hike cycle as indicated by the Fed statement," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services. Some Adani Group stocks revived post the confident statement by TotalEnergies, a French energy company, raising the sentiment of the market, Nair added. From the Sensex pack, Titan, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, HDFC, State Bank of India, Mahindra & Mahindra and IndusInd Bank

were among the major winners. HCL Technologies, Wipro and Tech Mahindra were among the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge declined 0.47 per cent and midcap index dipped 0.04 per cent. Among sectoral indices, consumer durables climbed 2.61 per cent, financial services rallied 2.15 per cent, bankex jumped 2.02 per cent, services advanced 1.64 per cent and consumer discretionary gained 0.85 per cent. Utilities fell 2.79 per cent, power declined 2.24 per cent, oil & gas (0.88 per cent) and realty (0.53 per cent). Elsewhere in Asia, equity markets in Seoul and Tokyo ended in the green, while Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. Equities in Europe were trading mostly lower during mid-session deals. Markets in the US ended mostly in the positive territory on Thursday. International oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.44 per cent to USD 82.52 per barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) again offloaded shares on Thursday after a day's breather. They sold shares worth Rs 3,065.35 crore, according to exchange data.

Sebi tweaks operational framework on credit rating agencies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi on Friday tweaked its Operational circular on credit rating agencies (CRAs), asking them to have a detailed policy by March-end in respect of non-submission of crucial information, including quarterly financial numbers, by the issuers.

Also, the detailed policy should contain methodology in respect of assessing the risk of non-availability of information from the issuers, including non-cooperative issuers and the steps to be taken under various scenarios in order to ascertain the status of non-cooperation by the issuer company. Further, CRAs will have to follow a uniform practice of



three consecutive months of non-submission of no-default statement (NDS) as a ground for considering migrating the ratings to INC (issuers not cooperating) and need to tag such ratings within 7 days of three consecutive months of non-sub-

mission of NDS. The CRA in its judgement may migrate a rating to the INC category before the expiry of three consecutive months of non-receipt of NDS. In its fresh circular for CRAs, the regulator said that

these requirements would be applicable by March 31, 2023.

Prior to that, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) came out with an operational circular on CRAs in January, which was to come into effect from February 1.

In its fresh circular, Sebi said that the MD or CEO of a CRA and any person within CRA who has business responsibility would not be a member of rating committees of the agency.

At the time of withdrawal of any credit rating of securities that are listed on a stock exchange, the CRA would have to assign a rating to such security and issue a press release in a prescribed format, except in cases where there are no outstanding obligations under the

security rated by the CRA or the company whose security is rated is wound up or merged or amalgamated with another firm.

Further, the press release should also mention the reason for withdrawal.

With regard to guidelines on the listed securities or instruments falling under the purview of other financial sector regulators, Sebi said that issuers of such securities and any person connected therewith would abide by the rules as prescribed by such financial sector regulator.

Further, if such instruments are listed on a stock exchange, the rules specified by Sebi from time to time would continue to be applicable.

Reduced exposure to Adani Group in 2 yrs, no concern on asset quality: Bank of Baroda

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Public sector lender Bank of Baroda on Friday said it has reduced exposure to the embattled Adani Group entities over the last two years, and has no concerns on asset quality issues with the conglomerate.

The bank's managing director and chief executive Sanjiv Chadha told reporters that the bank's overall exposure to the ports-to-media conglomerate's entities is one fourth of the single group exposures allowed under the Large Exposures Framework (LEF) but refused to



share a number. In the LEF, RBI says all the exposure values of a bank to a group of connected counterparties must not be higher than 25 per cent of the bank's available eligible capital base at all times. Without revealing the quantum of investments, Chadha said that 30 per cent of the bank's

total exposure to Adani group companies is towards entities that are in joint venture with state-run entities or the exposure is backed by a guarantee from government-owned entities.

He said the overall exposure has reduced as a percentage of the balance sheet over the last two years.

Answering a specific question on Adani Group exposures, the MD and CEO of the bank said there is "absolutely no concern" from an asset quality perspective and there is no request from the group for refinance as well.

India's forex kitty jumps USD 3.03 bn to USD 576.76 bn in third weekly rise

PTI ■ MUMBAI
India's forex reserves increased by USD 3.034 billion to USD 576.76 billion as of January 27, making it the third consecutive week of a jump in the kitty. The overall reserves had risen by USD 1.727 billion to USD 573.727 billion in the previous reporting week. It can be noted that in October 2021, the country's forex kitty had reached an all-time high of USD 645 billion. The reserves have been declining as the central bank deploys the kitty to defend the rupee amid pressures caused majorly by global developments. For the week ended January 27, the foreign currency assets, a major component of the reserves, increased by USD 2.66 billion to USD 509.018 billion, according to the Weekly Statistical Supplement released by the RBI on Friday.



Expressed in dollar terms, the foreign currency assets include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of non-US units like the euro, pound and yen held in the foreign exchange reserves. The gold reserves continued to rise, increasing by USD 316 million to USD 44.027 billion, the RBI said. The Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) were up by USD 46 million to USD 18.478 billion, the apex bank said.

IndiGo profit soars to ₹1,422.6 cr in Dec quarter

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
InterGlobe Aviation, the parent of the country's largest airline IndiGo, on Friday reported a steep rise in profit at Rs 1,422.6 crore in the three months ended December 2022, primarily fuelled by robust demand for air travel. The company had a Profit After Tax (PAT) of Rs 129.8 crore in the same period a year ago. IndiGo's total income jumped to Rs 15,410.2 crore in the third quarter of the current fiscal, from Rs 9,480.1 crore in the year-ago period, according to a release. "Third quarter performance was strong both operationally and financially in the backdrop of robust demand for air travel. The wide range of initiatives that were set in motion across the organisation have started to yield results," IndiGo CEO Pieter Elbers said.

Savings via tax-free instruments ₹4L cr: Revenue secretary

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Household savings through tax saving instruments is just Rs 4 lakh crore, which is 16 per cent of total savings, and shifting to new tax regime won't endanger the country's savings rate, Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra said on Friday.

He said the total household savings today are 27-30 per cent of India's GDP and the schemes announced in budget, especially for senior citizens and women, will help the country in improving the savings rate. "I would also like to point out that the savings through tax exemptions is actually a very small portion of the total savings of our country, which are about Rs 25 lakh crore for households. Savings through tax (saving) instruments are only Rs 4 lakh crore. You know people are now investing otherwise," Malhotra said at a CII post-budget event.

To encourage taxpayers to shift to exemption-less tax regime, the Budget 2023-24 has proposed changes to the new

optional tax regime which provides that no tax would be levied on annual income of up to Rs 7 lakh. It also allowed taxpayers to claim standard deduction of Rs 50,000 — a move seen as a push for the salaried class to switch to the new tax regime where no exemptions on investments are provided. Under the old regime, people with income of up to Rs 5 lakh do not pay any income tax. Besides, various deductions and exemptions can be claimed on savings and expenditures, making it lucrative for people to stay in old regime.

There were concerns that if people shift to exemption-less new tax regime, savings through insurance and other tax savings instruments will go down. Malhotra also said the government is looking into rationalisation of tax deducted at source (TDS) provision. "TDS is something that we need to look at. Whatever scope there is to simplify it, to reduce the number of TDS rates or eliminate, we will certainly look at that," he said.

Gold tumbles ₹681; silver plummets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold price tumbled Rs 681 to Rs 57,929 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid a decline in rates of precious metal globally, according to the HDFC Securities.

The yellow metal had ended Rs 58,610 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver also plummeted Rs 2,045 to Rs 70,335 per kilogram. "Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at Rs 57,929 per 10 grams, down Rs 681 per 10 grams," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst — Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the overseas market, both gold and silver were traded in red at USD 1,913 per ounce and USD 23.38 per ounce, respectively.

BSNL expected to clock net profit in FY27: MoS Communications

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned telco BSNL is expected to turn around, generating net profit in fiscal year 2026-27, with the implementation of the approved revival measures, Parliament was informed on Friday.

Losses of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) were pegged at Rs 3,589 crore in April-September 2022-23 as it clocked an income of Rs 9,366 crore and incurred total expenditure of Rs 12,956 crore, Minister of State for Communications Devusinh Chauhan said in a written reply in Rajya Sabha.

In 2021-22, losses stood at Rs 6,982 crore, against income of Rs 19,052 crore and expenses of Rs 26,034 crore.

"BSNL is expected to generate net profit in financial year

2026-27 with the implementation of the revival package," Chauhan said in reply to another question.

The Cabinet had approved a revival package for both BSNL and MTNL in 2019.

Further, the Union Cabinet on July 2022 cleared a Rs 1.64 lakh crore revival package for BSNL. The revival measures focus on infusing fresh capital for upgrading BSNL services, allocating spectrum, de-stressing its balance sheet, augmenting its fibre network by merging Bharat Broadband Nigam Limited (BBNL) with BSNL.

As part of the Cabinet approval, a capex of Rs 22,471 crore has been approved for BSNL as equity infusion over a period of four years from 2022-23 to 2025-26 through budgetary allocation.

Wheat prices fall over 10% in 7 days on selling of FCI wheat in open mkt: Govt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Friday said wheat prices have fallen more than 10 per cent in the past one week following its decision to sell the grain in open market to check rising prices.

State-run Food Corporation of India has so far sold 9.2 lakh tonnes of wheat to bulk users at an average rate of Rs 2,474 per quintal on the first two-days of e-auction held this week.

Recently, the Centre decided to offload 30 lakh tonnes of wheat from the buffer stock in the open market under the open market sale

scheme (OMSS). Out of which 25 lakh tonnes will be sold to bulk consumers, flour millers, 3 lakh tonnes to institutions like Nafed and remaining 2 lakh tonnes to state governments. "The e-auction has already left an impact of a fall in market prices of wheat by more than 10 per cent in the past one week," the Food Ministry said in a statement.

"The prices are set to fall further" after wheat sold in the e-auction is lifted and wheat flour (atta) is made available in the market, it said.

As per the data maintained by the consumer affairs ministry, the average all India retail price of wheat was ruling at Rs 33.47 per kg and price of wheat flour was at Rs 38.1 per kg on February 2. On the same date in 2022, average retail price of wheat and wheat flour stood at Rs 28.11 per kg and Rs 31.14 per kg, respectively, the data showed.

FCI has already commenced the sale of 25 lakh tonnes of wheat to bulk users across the country. It has sold 9.2 lakh tonnes of wheat at an average rate of Rs 2,474 per quintal through e-auction on February 1-2, generating Rs 2,290 crore, the statement said.

More than 1,150 bidders participated in the e-auction held in 23 states. Due to technical glitches, the e-auction in Rajasthan was held on February 2. Otherwise, the FCI plans to hold a weekly e-auction every Wednesday for the sale of wheat till March 15.



The government said small and medium flour millers and traders actively participated in the auction because there was more demand for quantities in the range of 100 to 499 tonnes, followed by 500-1000 tonnes and 50-100 tonnes. Only 27 bids were received for a higher quantity of 3,000 tonnes at one go, it said. Meanwhile, the FCI has allocated 2.5 lakh tonnes of wheat to institutions like Kendriya Bhandar, Nafed and NCCF for converting the grain into atta and sell at a maximum retail price of Rs 29.50 per kg. Already, Kendriya Bhandar has started selling wheat flour at a lower

rate and cooperative Nafed will start selling at the same rate soon in eight states. Wheat and wheat flour prices in the country have firmed up due to tight domestic supplies in the wake of a fall in domestic output.

Under the OMSS policy, the government allows FCI to sell foodgrains, especially wheat and rice, at predetermined prices in the open market from time to time to bulk consumers and private traders. The purpose is to boost the supply during the lean season and moderate the general open market prices.

The Centre had banned wheat exports in May last year to control ris-

ing prices, after a slight fall in domestic production and a sharp decline in the FCI's procurement for the central pool. India's wheat production fell to 106.84 million tonnes in the 2021-22 crop year (July-June) from 109.59 million tonnes in the previous year due to heat waves in a few growing states.

The procurement fell sharply to 19 million tonnes this year from around 43 million tonnes last year. The area under wheat crop in the current rabi (winter-sown) season is slightly higher. The procurement of new wheat crops would commence on March 15.

Union Budget's Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0 hailed

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The Association of Industries and Institutions (AII) has hailed the Government for releasing the first Union Budget of Amrit Kaal calling it "a ray of hope at a critical juncture of human history, with wars and pandemics leering over India". It appreciated the efforts of the Government for providing mechanism in the Budget to tackle "joblessness and skill deficiency" via Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana 4.0.

Rupee gains 34 paise to close at 81.86 against US dollar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The rupee appreciated by 34 paise to close at 81.86 (provisional) against the US currency on Friday, supported by a rebound in domestic equities and easing crude oil prices.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.15 against the American currency and finally settled at 81.86 against the greenback, registering a gain of 34 paise over its previous close of 82.20. During the trading session, the rupee also touched a low of 82.31 against the dollar.



The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, declined 0.12 per cent to 101.63. Global oil benchmark Brent

crude futures advanced 0.39 per cent to USD 82.49 per barrel. "Indian Rupee appreciated on a rebound in domestic equities and weakness in crude oil prices. However, positive US Dollar capped sharp gains," said Anuj Choudhary — Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Choudhary further noted that the rupee depreciated earlier today as PMI data was disappointing. India's services PMI fell to 57.2 in January from 58.5 in December while the composite PMI fell to 57.5 from 59.4 during the same period. "We expect the Rupee to trade with a slight positive bias as a rebound in domestic equities may lead to fresh foreign inflows. Decline in crude oil prices and weak Dollar amid dovish Fed may support Rupee at lower levels," Choudhary said. Market participants may remain cautious and ahead of non-farm payrolls and ISM services PMI data from the US. While the payroll data is expected to show a slowdown in the pace of job additions, services PMI is expected to show the sector move to expansion territory, Choudhary added.

POWERGRID posts 11% PAT

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Power Grid Corporation of India Limited (POWERGRID), a Maharatna firm under Ministry of Power, has announced the Unaudited Financial Results of the company for the quarter and nine months ending December 31, 2022. During Q3FY23, the company has reported PAT of ₹3,645 crore and total income of Rs 11,530 crore on consolidated basis registering a YoY growth of 11% and 8% respectively.

The company has posted PAT and total income of ₹3,702 crore and ₹11,472 crore respectively registering a YoY growth of 11% and 8%.

BSES transforms waste dumping site into public EV charging station

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL), in collaboration with the MCD & Verde Mobility Pvt Ltd has transformed a waste dumping site into a Public EV Charging Station at R.K Puram, promoting the adoption of clean mobility & impede open waste dumping. It was inaugurated by the Addl Deputy MCD Commissioner Amit Bhardwaj in presence of senior BRPL officials. Comprising of four-charg-



ing points, consumers can book an appointment through their smartphones & charge their 2, 3 & 4 wheelers at this EV Charging station. More such 30 EV Charging Stations will be set-up under the collaboration.

REAL CUT BARCA'S LEAD



AP ■ MADRID

Real Madrid reduced Barcelona's La Liga lead to five points with a 2-0 win over Valencia on Thursday, thanks to spectacular goals from Marco Asensio and Vinicius Junior.

The duo struck in a three-minute second half salvo which stunned the visitors at the Santiago Bernabeu, and Valencia were later reduced to 10 men when Gabriel Paulista took a wild hack at Vinicius.

Madrid dominated throughout but an otherwise good night was tainted when captain Karim Benzema went off injured in the second half with an

apparent thigh problem, and Eder Militao was also replaced for a similar reason.

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti confirmed Benzema's injury was "very light" but that Militao would miss Sunday's trip to face Real Mallorca.

The game will likely be remembered for Gabriel's red card tackle on Vinicius, who netted his 50th goal for Madrid on his 200th appearance at 22 years old.

"We have to protect Vinicius a bit, he's a very expressive kid, he dribbles a lot and defences don't like that," Real Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois told DAZN.

"We need that Vini. In a lot of

games he's been kicked a lot. I am happy that the referee had the bravery to send off Paulista.

"Not just because it's Vini -- if we did that then we would have to be sent off too."

Valencia's interim coach Voro, taking over for the eighth time on a temporary basis after Gennaro Gattuso departed by mutual consent on Monday, had a tough night visiting the reigning champions.

Los Che sit 14th, just one point clear of the relegation zone, and will now be without experienced defender Gabriel.

"We had a good first half, that was our plan, leaving them little space, but

in the second it was harder for us," Valencia's Hugo Guillamon told DAZN.

Ancelotti started with Eduardo Camavinga at left-back again and made two changes from Sunday's draw with Real Sociedad, bringing in Luka Modric and Asensio.

The duo combined after three minutes with the Croatian playmaker feeding the forward, who should have scored, but Valencia goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili made a fine save down to his right.

Asensio was denied again after a brilliant Benzema backheel set him up, with Gabriel throwing himself in the way of the Spaniard's shot and deflecting it over.

Vinicius sent a tame effort at Mamardashvili, while Camavinga rifled into the side netting as Madrid monopolised the chances but failed to break through.

Antonio Rudiger headed home from a corner in stoppage time but the goal was ruled out by VAR after a push from Benzema in the face of Yunus Musah was spotted.

CHANGING GEARS

Madrid stepped up several gears after the break and quickly moved in front.

Asensio broke the deadlock with a rocket from the edge of the box which ripped past the helpless Mamardashvili in the 52nd minute.

Two minutes later Vinicius doubled their lead, with Benzema sending him sprinting through on the halfway line, outpacing the defence and tucking home.

Benzema had a chance to score the third but his effort was blocked by Mouctar Diakhaby, before the Frenchman limped off holding the back of his thigh.

Gabriel was dismissed for his hack at Vinicius as the former Arsenal defender lost his head when his Brazilian compatriot flew past him.

Madrid kept theirs to secure the three points and stay five points behind Barcelona at the halfway point of the season.

Ancelotti played down the clash between Gabriel and Vinicius.

"(They) had clashed very few times in the game, I think it was just the frustration, they were losing," Ancelotti told reporters.

"I can understand it. It's a bit of an ugly tackle, but Gabriel Paulista has always behaved well.

"Sometimes the frustration doesn't let you think in the right way."



India maul Bhutan 12-0 in SAFF U-20 Women's C'ship

PTI ■ DHAKA

Three players scored a hat-trick each after coming in as substitutes as India mauled Bhutan 12-0 in their opening match of the SAFF U-20 Women's Championship here on Friday.

Neha (45+2, 55th and 90th), Anita Kumari (50th, 69th and 78th) and Lynda Kom (61st, 63rd and 75th) netted three goals each after coming off the bench, as India completed the demolition job.

The other goals were scored by Apurna Narzary (29th and 36th) and Nitu Linda (43rd).

It, however, took them around 30 minutes to break the deadlock, but once that was done, the floodgates opened.

Kajol D'souza drove her way into the Bhutan box and squared it for Apurna, who poked it past a hapless Bhutan keeper for India's first goal in the 29th minute.

Head coach Maymol

Rocky made an early change, bringing on Neha in place of Sumati Kumari, and India soon doubled their lead.

Apurna was again in the thick of things as she beat Bhutan keeper Norbu Zangmo, and calmly put it into the back of the net.

Substitute Neha soon made her mark as sent in a low cross for Nitu Linda to tap it in. Neha turned scorer two minutes into the first half added time, as India took a four-goal lead at the breather.

The Indians pumped in eight more goals in the second half to run over the Bhutanese whose defence crumbled while facing waves of Indian attack.

"We are absolutely elated over the performance of the girls today. They were all over the place, and played very well. But now, it's time to get ready for the next game," coach Maymol said after the game. India next play hosts Bangladesh on Sunday in their second round-robin league match.

You are my new hero: Sunil Gavaskar tells Lakshya Sen

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A star-struck Lakshya Sen couldn't believe his eyes when the legendary Sunil Gavaskar dropped in at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy (PPBA) in Bengaluru to meet him and the youngsters.

The 73-year-old Gavaskar, a member of the 1983 World Cup-winning cricket team, paid a visit to the academy during a regular trip to the city on Thursday.

"He had a meeting in Bengaluru and decided to meet the young aspiring kids of the academy. Badminton and cricket are two of his favourite sports. He was here with us for about an hour," Vimal Kumar, co-founder, director and chief coach of the PPBA, said.

Gavaskar later posted a picture with Lakshya Sen on Instagram and captioned it: "My new badminton hero Lakshya Sen, after the one and only Prakash Padukone."

The legendary cricketer had hailed Padukone several times while doing cricket commentary over the years, saying he is one of India's greatest sportspersons.

Sen, who has been one of India's most prolific sportspersons in 2022, said he was too star struck to react.

"It feels good to hear such things from such big personalities. Honestly, I was too star struck to react," Sen said.

The 21-year-old from Almora won gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games and the India Open Super 500. He



Praneeth loses in Thailand quarterfinal

PTI ■ BANGKOK

Indian shuttler B Sai Praneeth's impressive run came to an end after he went down fighting to China's world number 23 Li Shi Feng in the men's singles quarterfinals of the Thailand Open Super 300 badminton here on Friday.

Praneeth, who had competed at the Tokyo Olympics, blew a substantial lead of 15-10 in the opening game to lose 17-21, 23-21, 18-21 to bring down curtains on India's campaign here.

was also a member of the historic Thomas Cup win. He also won silver at the All England Championships and

is also the winner of the 2021 World Championships bronze medal.

"Gavaskar sir spoke about the Thomas Cup win. I have heard so much about him from my parents and all the seniors. Also when I watched the movie '83', I got to know what went behind that epic win," he said.

"I can relate to it now, essentially after the Thomas Cup win because back then they were the underdogs and in Thomas Cup, it was us."

India had claimed their first-ever Thomas Cup, beating Indonesia 3-0 in the final at Bangkok in May last year.

Asked what did Gavaskar discuss with the budding shuttlers, Vimal said, "He also gave some tips to the youngsters, asking them to analyse what went right in a day to get the best out of training."

"Gavaskar and Prakash are two self-taught heroes of Indian sport, so coming from him means a lot."

'No excuses' for Arsenal in title bid after January spending: Arteta

AP ■ LONDON

Mikel Arteta says Arsenal can have no excuses if they do not win the Premier League title for the first time in two decades after strengthening their squad during the January transfer window.

Arteta splashed out more than £50 million (\$61 million) on three new signings as the club look to hold onto their lead at the top of the table, bringing in Italy midfielder Jorginho, Belgium forward Leandro Trossard and Poland defender Jakub Kiwior.

The Gunners are five points clear of second-placed Manchester City with a game in hand on the champions and Arteta knows his side are perfectly placed to win the club's first English title since 2004.

Arteta was asked on Friday about whether there would now be no excuses if Arsenal failed to get over the line.

"If you want to put it that way, that's fine," he said. "What we have to do is train really well and win, and play well to win. That's the only thing we can do."

Arsenal would have spent even more on new signings last month but they missed out on Ukraine winger Mykhailo Mudryk, who instead joined Chelsea, and Brighton's highly rated midfielder Moises Caicedo.

Despite those frustrations, Arteta is pleased with the



Newcastle Utd must come to terms with new status: Howe

AP ■ NEWCASTLE

Eddie Howe admits Newcastle's new-found status as a threat to the Premier League's big guns will make it harder to sign players from their rivals in future.

The League Cup finalists added Everton forward Anthony Gordon and West Ham full-back Harrison Ashby during the January transfer window.

But their long-standing interest in England midfielder Conor Gallagher came to nothing as Chelsea refused to allow him to join a top-six rival.

Howe, whose team host West Ham on Saturday, are third in the Premier League

table, with just one defeat all season.

Asked at his pre-match press conference on Friday whether other clubs now see the Magpies as genuine competition, Howe said: "I think it is potentially difficult for us."

"It depends on the player and it depends on the club, but I think we're probably aware we are seen differently this season to how we were last season."

"We are viewed differently probably by some clubs now and that is something we will have to adjust to."

Newcastle beat Southampton in Tuesday's second leg of their League Cup semi-final to reach their first final since 1999 and keep

alive their hopes of ending a trophy drought that dates back to 1969.

When Howe was hired in November 2021, just a few weeks after the Saudi-funded takeover of the club the previous month, he arrived to find Newcastle languishing in 19th place in the Premier League.

Having revitalised Newcastle with remarkable speed, Howe said the Magpies must now adopt a big-club mentality towards fighting on two fronts at the same time.

They are hoping to qualify for the Champions League via a top-four finish, as well as eyeing long-awaited silverware in the League Cup.

backing he received from the Arsenal hierarchy.

"I'm really happy with what we've done," Arteta said ahead of Saturday's trip to struggling Everton. "We knew that in this market you have to adapt and be flexible and ready for inconvenience."

"We've done that and the most important thing is the profile of the person, and the quality that we bring in makes us better."

"We had three main key areas of positions that we wanted to improve and fulfil. It was tricky but positive in the end."

Arteta received more good news on Friday, with the confirmation that Brazilian forward Gabriel Martinelli has signed a new long-term contract.

Martinelli has scored seven league goals this season and the 21-year-old has given Arteta a genuine threat down the left flank.

"It is great news," Arteta said. "He is a player with enormous potential that still has so many things to improve but is already performing at a really high level."

He revealed England forward Bukayo Saka and French defender William Saliba could also be in line for new contracts soon. Arsenal have yet to win at Goodison Park under Arteta and the Spaniard knows Everton could get a boost from the appointment of new boss Sean Dyche.

India rise to No. 3 spot in IBA's world boxing rankings

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India have jumped to third spot in the International Boxing Association's (IBA) latest world rankings.

The Indian boxers have accumulated 36,300 ranking points, having surpassed top boxing powerhouses including USA and Cuba, which are ranked fourth and ninth respectively in the current standings.

Kazakhstan (48,100) is the top-ranked nation followed by Uzbekistan (37,600).

Indian boxing has witnessed an unprecedented rise in recent years with the teams consistently finishing amongst the top five countries at global multi-nation tournaments such as World Championships, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games.

In the last two CWG, the Indian boxers have won an unprecedented 16 medals and they have 140 medals to their names since 2008 in top international events.

Since 2016, the Indian boxers have won 16 Elite World Championships medals across men and women categories.

Boxing Federation of India (BFI) have also hosted several big-ticket international events in the country and from March 15 to 26, they will organise the prestigious Women's World Boxing Championships for the third time in the country.

India's excellent show have also extended to the junior and youth level with 22 medals from the last two Youth World Championships indicating the sport's bright future in the country.

AP ■ SYDNEY

Australian tennis star Nick Kyrgios on Friday pleaded guilty to assaulting a former girlfriend, but avoided a conviction for what the magistrate called a "single act of stupidity."

Appearing in a Canberra court, the Wimbledon finalist admitted assaulting then-girlfriend Chiara Passari on January 10, 2021, by pushing her to the ground after a heated argument.

Kyrgios said he was "not in a good place" at the time, and that he "reacted to a difficult situation in a way I deeply regret."

"I know it wasn't OK and I'm sincerely sorry for the hurt I caused," he said in a statement.

Passari lodged a complaint with police 10 months after the incident, after the pair had broken up, lawyers told the court.

In a statement read to the court, Passari said she had been severely traumatised by

Kyrgios admits assaulting girlfriend, avoids conviction



the incident, experiencing severe weight loss, staying in bed day and night -- unable to sleep or form new romantic relationships.

Lawyers for Kyrgios appealed to have the charge of one count of common assault dismissed on mental health grounds, arguing it was an

isolated incident and out of character.

Psychologist Sam Borenstein told the court Kyrgios suffered from recurring major depression, which included black periods, thoughts of self harm, insomnia, agitation and feelings of guilt.

Magistrate Beth Campbell heard that appeal but ultimately dismissed the case without conviction.

Campbell said Kyrgios acted poorly but the offence was not planned or premeditated and was a "single act of stupidity" by a young man attempting to remove himself from a tense situation.

The court was told Kyrgios shoved Passari, who was preventing him from leaving her Canberra apartment.

"I do not record a conviction against your name, I do not find any necessity to place you on a good behaviour bond," Campbell said.

Kyrgios had hobbled into court in Canberra with a pair of crutches and a brace on his knee, after suffering a "gruesome" injury that sidelined him at last month's Australian Open.

He was flanked by his current girlfriend Costeen Hatzis, an interior designer, and his mother Norlaia.

Canberra-born Kyrgios, known for his mercurial talent and on-court outbursts, later said "mental health is tough".

Gurpreet signs five-year contract extension with BFC till 2028

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian football team goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu on Friday committed his association with Bengaluru FC for another five years as he signed a contract extension with the club till 2028.

Interestingly, Sandhu, the national team's number one goalkeeper, signed the contract on a day when he turned 31.

Sandhu, who joined the club in 2017 after becoming the first Indian player to play in the UEFA Europa League at Norway's Stabaek FC, has been a mainstay in Bengaluru FC's starting XI for the last five years.

"I'm pleased to have extended my stay at Bengaluru FC, a club that has always shown faith in my abilities," Sandhu said.

AUSTRALIA GETS 'ASHWIN DUPLICATE' TO TRAIN AHEAD OF INDIA TEST SERIES



India's 2007 T20 WC hero Joginder Sharma announces retirement

Former India medium pacer Joginder Sharma, who bowled the iconic match-winning final over in the 2007 World T20 summit clash against Pakistan, on Friday announced retirement from all forms of cricket.

The 39-year-old represented India in four ODIs and as many T20s between 2004 and 2007, picking five wickets. He played domestic cricket for Haryana.

"My journey from 2002-2017 has been the most wonderful years of my life for it was an honour representing India at the highest level of sport," he said in a message posted on Twitter.

"To all my team-mates, coaches, mentors and support staff: It has been an absolute privilege to have played with you all, and I thank you all for helping turn my dream into reality."

Handed the ball by skipper MS Dhoni in the final over of the inaugural T20 World Cup final, the inexperienced Sharma bowled India to victory, scripting one of the most iconic moments in the history of cricket.

Pakistan were well on course for a famous win with Misbah-ul-Haq reducing the equation to six runs off four balls. But the Pakistan batter mis-timed a scoop shot with Sreesanth completing a simple catch at short fine-leg to help India lift the trophy.

However, the final was Sharma's last game for India. He turned out for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL before joining the police service where he served as the deputy superintendent of police and was on the frontline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sharma added that he will be exploring new opportunities in the game.

"I am excited to announce that I will be exploring new opportunities in the world of cricket & the business side of it, where I will also continue to participate in the sport that I love and challenge myself in new and different environment."

Aussies will miss Zampa's ability to zip ball: Sriram

Former Australia assistant coach Sridharan Sriram is disappointed that spinner Adam Zampa is not with the touring team for the four-match Test series against India beginning on February 9.

Sriram said that Zampa was someone who could "hold" his action for long periods of time like Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja, something which Ashton Agar and Mitchell Swepson might find difficult in tough subcontinental conditions.

Veteran tweaker Nathan Lyon, Agar, leg-spinner Swepson and young off-spinner Todd Murphy got the nod in the 18-member Australia squad with Zampa missing out.

Sriram, who served the Australian team for six years, has seen Zampa evolve his game, and felt the 30-year-old wrist spinner's ability to zip the ball would be hugely missed by Pat Cummins' side during the Border-Gavaskar series.

"I would have personally loved to see Zampa bowl here (in India), because he's got the pace, he's got that zip off the pitch," Sriram was quoted as saying by 'Sydney Morning Herald' on Friday.

"That's something I keep an eye out for, who has got the ability to beat you off the pitch, so I think that Zampa has got that," said Sriram who has also played eight ODIs for India between 2000 and 2004.

Sriram, also a domestic heavyweight having scored more than 9,500 first-class runs, added Zampa was extremely keen to tour India and had even called him up a couple of times.

"He wanted it more than anyone, he wanted to play Test matches in India, he had called me a couple of times a couple of months ago saying 'Sri, I'm so excited that I could be on that tour', so he wanted it and he started to play first-class cricket for NSW. He did well, three wickets in each innings, so he's pretty disappointed that he's not on this tour."

The Australian batters with the 'side-arm' aid — who first brought Pithiya to the attention of assistant coach Andre Borovec.

He also arranged for Mehrotra Shashank, a left-arm spinner who played first-class cricket for Hyderabad, to attend the camp.

"While no spinner in the world can perfectly mimic the challenge Ashwin will pose in this series, facing Pithiya over the coming days will at least help the Australians come to terms with the visual cues of the world's top-ranked Test spin bowler," the report said.

"The Aussie batters were also tested out by a self-described throwdown specialist Khaleel Shariff, who has worked with numerous Indian Premier League teams and was known to coach Andrew McDonald and Vettori from their time at RCB.



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Australia have roped in Maheesh Pithiya, a 21-year-old spinner with uncanny resemblance to Ravichandran Ashwin, to train on spin-friendly tracks as part of their preparation for the upcoming Test series against India.

Off-spinner Ashwin may prove to be a major threat for Australia, who haven't won a Test series in India since 2004.

Expecting spin to play a major role in the four-Test series, the visitors have opted for tailor-made pitches and have availed the services of Pithiya to get accustomed to the action of Ashwin.

The four-Test series begins in Nagpur on February 9.

"Of all the stops Australia have pulled out to prepare for their trip to India, the most noticeable at their Test tour's first training session was the presence of a Ravichandran Ashwin duplicate," a report in cricket.Com.Au said.

"With facing spin the major focus on Thursday, Pithiya was the standout among the local 'netties', bowling tirelessly and virtually without break through the day as he troubled the likes of Smith, Marnus Labuschagne and Travis Head, who all had long batting sessions."

Pithiya, interestingly, didn't see Ashwin bowl until the age of 11. Growing up in Junagadh, Gujarat he didn't have access to TV and when he finally watched the India

Fit-again Jamieson hopes to make it count against Eng

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

New Zealand pace bowler Kyle Jamieson is hoping to get his rhythm back after returning to the squad for the upcoming two-Test series against England following a long injury layoff.

The lanky seamer had to leave the field during the second Test against England at Trent Bridge due to a stress reaction in his back in June last year and since then has not played an international game.

He was included on Friday in the 14-member New Zealand squad for the Test series against England beginning at Mount Maunganui on February 16.

Jamieson, who has made a successful return to domestic cricket, will now be targeting a spot in the playing XI following his extended period of rehabilitation.

"It's nice to be included in the squad and back in the fold for the first time in a while," Jamieson told SEN Radio.

"My body is feeling good. I'm excited to be back with the group ... I've been bowling plenty of overs in practice and in training, I just need to get used to the rhythm of playing again. I've been bowling to empty nets for a long time so to see a few batters in the middle and see the ball get hit, it's a bit of a change."

He said he had full faith in coach Gary Stead and the support staff despite New Zealand having last won a Test series in 2021.

"Yeah, of course," said Jamieson.

"That's not something we've really thought about because there's so much confidence from the playing group in our coaching staff."

He added that the New Zealand side was a tight-knit unit where players had complete faith in the coaching staff.

"I'm not sure if it (pressure) is there or not, we sort of keep a pretty tight-knit circle. I have complete faith in our group and what we can do."

Jamieson is expected to play just one Test in series as his recovery is monitored, and the pacer said the decision on which match he will play will depend on the conditions.

"It is a little bit different, the first Test will be under the lights with the pink ball. Wellington (venue for the second Test) with the red ball, it tends to be more seamer-friendly than the Mount (Maunganui)," he said.

"But at the Mount (Maunganui) with the pink ball under lights, it could be pretty spicy as well. We'll see how it unfolds and how it goes up there."



WPL: Rachel Haynes appointed head coach of Gujarat Giants

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Multiple-time World Cup winner Australian opener Rachel Haynes has been appointed head coach of the Gautam Adani-owned Women's Premier League (WPL) team Gujarat Giants while Nooshin Al Khadeer, who guided India to U-19 team to World Cup triumph, will be bowling coach.

The Adani Sportsline-owned Gujarat Giants, bought for a whopping Rs 1289 crore, has already roped in former India captain Mithali Raj as their mentor and advisor.

Former senior women's team coach Tushar Arothe will be the team's batting coach and Gavan Twining will look after fielding department.

"Not only have they carved a niche for themselves in their roles, but their stories of resilience will be an inspiration for the team," said Mithali.

"Their combined strengths will enable Gujarat Giants to give their best performance on the ground at the inaugural edition of the Women's Premier League, which will inspire several aspiring women athletes."

Haynes, who has played at the highest level for more than a decade, has won six world championship titles with the Australian team and was the vice-captain of the side from 2017-2022.

The left-handed batter, who was an integral part of the very successful national set-up, is a veteran of 84 T20Is and played crucial roles in the Australian team's title winning campaigns at the 2018 and 2020 T20 World Cups.

Haynes, who was part of the team that won the 2022 Women's Cricket World Cup in New Zealand, has also turned out for the Sydney Thunder in the Women's Big Bash League, often leading the run scoring charts for her side.

"The Women's Premier League is such an exciting addition to the cricket landscape. The opportunity to be involved in the inaugural season with the Adani Sportline owned Gujarat Giants and work with the brilliant Mithali Raj is something I'm really looking forward to," said Haynes.



We will look to take positives from Tri-series into WC: Deepti

PTI ■ EAST LONDON

India all-rounder Deepti Sharma is pleased with their overall effort and said they will look to take positives from the Tri-series into the ICC Women's T20 World Cup beginning on February 10. The Indian women's team, which had secured a maiden final finish in the 2020 ICC T20 World Cup, suffered a five-wicket loss to hosts South Africa in the Tri-series final on Thursday.

"There are lots of positives from the series, we did well as a bowling and batting unit. We have to just carry on these things in the World Cup as well," Sharma said in the post-match press-conference.

"Whether we play England or any other team, we have to just focus on the things we did well here and continue doing that over there as well."

"Obviously South Africa have home conditions. But as a team, we have to carry forward what we have done right in the Tri-series and not think about the opposition but our own team, what we can do better."

Adjudged player-of-the-series for taking nine wickets in five matches, Sharma said she got a lot of help from the wickets in South Africa.

"We have played in South African wickets, spinners get turn here. All these matches that we played in the Tri-series, we got a lot of help from the wicket," she said.

"Harry di (Harmanpreet Kaur) also told me that I should just pick my spot and keep bowling according to the situation and I think we produced a good bowling effort and bowled according to the plan."

The 25-year-old has taken 96 wickets from 87 T20Is so far in her career.

"I had worked with single wicket with different balls like heavy ball, light ball. It was a turning wicket, so I got a lot of help. I bowled to my strength," Sharma said.

"In the powerplay, I go for breakthroughs and it helped the team. Whatever sessions that I did before the World Cup has helped me in my bowling."

India will open their World Cup campaign against Pakistan on February 12 at Newlands, Cape Town.



MP beat Andhra by 5 wickets in Ranji QF, face Bengal in semis

PTI ■ INDORE

Riding on half-centuries from opener Yash Dubey and Rajat Patidar, defending champions Madhya Pradesh completed their remarkable fightback as they beat Andhra by five wickets to enter the Ranji Trophy semifinals here on Friday.

After conceding a big first innings lead of 151, MP bounced back on the third day on Thursday by skittling out Andhra for a mere 93 in 32.3 overs in the visiting side's second innings.

Set a target of 245 to win the quarterfinal match, MP were 58 for no loss on Thursday and they knocked off the remaining 187 runs in 61 overs on Friday to win the match with a day to spare.

The heroic efforts of Andhra captain Hanuma Vihari who batted one-handed in both their innings after a wrist injury went in vain as his team could not stop MP from reaching 245 for 5 in 77 overs. MP will now take on Bengal in the semifinals from February 8 in a repeat of last edition's last-four stage match. MP had won that match by 174 runs at Alur, Karnataka.

BENGAL BEAT J'KHAND

Kolkata: Packed with impact bowlers, a formidable Bengal demolished Jharkhand by nine wickets inside four days to progress to the semi-finals for the third time in a row.

Bengal had played the final in the 2019-20 season and after a COVID induced break, the team qualified for the semifinals last year when it lost to eventual champions Madhya Pradesh. Starting the day at 162 for 7, Jharkhand's lower-order, led by Supriyo Chakraborty (41) did delay the inevitable for just about 15 plus overs in the morning before being shut out for 221. The target of 67 was more of a romp for India A skipper Abhimanyu Easwaran (28 not out) and in-form Sudip Gharami (26 not out) as the umpires extended the first ses-

the semifinals. Resuming at their overnight score of 106 for 3 after following on, Uttarakhand batters could add just 103 runs before being bowled out for 209 in 73.4 overs on the fourth day of the quarterfinal match. Swapnil Singh (51 off 100 balls) top-scored for Uttarakhand.

Shreyas Gopal turned out to be the star for Karnataka, as, after making an unbeaten 161 with the bat in his team's massive first innings total of 606, he returned with figures of 3/26 in Uttarakhand's second essay to claim the player-of-the-match honour. Besides Gopal, Vijaykumar Vyshak (3/55), Vidwath Kaverappa (2/30) and M Venkatesh (2/44) also chipped in with wickets.

SAURASHTRA FIGHTBACK

Rajkot: Fighting half-centuries from skipper Arpit Vasavada, Chirag Jani, Prerak Mankad and Parth Bhut helped Saurashtra make a comeback in their quarter-final against Punjab on day four. Having conceded the first innings lead to Punjab, Saurashtra recovered to score 379 in their second innings to set the opposition a 252-run target. Vasavada (77) and Jani (77) shared a 160-run stand for the fifth wicket before Mankad (88) and Bhut (51) shared a valuable 92-run stand for the eighth wicket.

The game is nicely poised going into day five with Punjab needing 200 runs with eight wickets in hand. Pukhraj Mann (17 batting) and night watchman Siddarth Kaul (2 batting) were in the middle at close of play.

With the pitch offering a lot of turn, 2020 Ranji champions Saurashtra will back themselves to complete the job on Saturday. It will need a special batting effort from Punjab to reach the semi-finals. Saurashtra got a shot in the arm when they removed the opening pair of Prabhsimran Singh and Naman Dhir, who both struck fine hundreds in the first innings to take Punjab to 431.



OFFICE OF THE NOTIFIED AREA COUNCIL, BANPUR
E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
Bid Reference No: E.O-N.A.C-BNR-02/2022-23
Tender Call Notice No. 252/Dt.03/02/2023/

The Executive Officer on behalf of Banpur NAC invites percentage Bid through e-procurement in single cover system according to norm of e-procurement.

1. Type of Works	: Civil construction works as in the D.T.C.N
2. Total No. of works	: 11.Nos.
3. Tender Amount Cost	: Rs. 556647.00 to Rs.1937060 .00
4. Period of Completion	: 60 days
5. Date and time of availability of Bid Documents in the Portal	: From 10.00 A.M. of Dt. 08.02.2023 to 5.00 P.M. of Dt. 17.02.2023.
6. Original Bid documents submission:	Dt 20.02.2023 from 10.30 A.M. to 1.00 P.M. in Tender Box
7. Date & Time of Opening of Tender:	Dt 20.02.2023 at 3.30 P.M.

Further amendments, corrigendum or other communication regarding this letter will be available only on <https://www.tendersodisha.gov.in> and will not be published in print media.

Executive Officer
Banpur NAC

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS DIVISION, SUNDARGARH
E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
E-Mail - rw_sundargarh@yahoo.co.in

BID IDENTIFICATION NO. ONLINE-SESN22-22 OF 2022-23

1. Name of the Work	: Road & Building Works
2. Total No. of works	: 03 nos. Roads & 04 nos Buildings
3. Estimated cost	: Rs. 0.67 Lakhs & 31.93 Lakhs
4. Class of contractor	: 'D', 'C' & 'B'
5. Period of completion	: 01 calendar month
6. Type of Tender	: Single Cover
7. Other details	

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender On-line for bidding	
		From	To
1	2	3	4
Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division, Sundargarh.	Online-SESN22-22 of 2022-23	07.02.2023 10.00 A.M.	13.02.2023 05.30 P.M.

Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersorissa.gov.in

Executive Engineer
Rural Works Division, Sundargarh