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# Demand for JPC on Adani rocks Houses

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

As the House resumed,



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

# Adani group shares tank, Enterprises down by 26%

NSE puts 3 firms under scanner to curb short selling

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Adani Enterprises tumbled over 26 per cent on Thursday, a day after the firm said it had decided not to go ahead with its ₹20,000-crore Follow-on Public Offer (FPO) and will return the proceeds to investors. The stock tanked 26.50 per cent to settle at ₹1,564.70 on the BSE. During the day, it tumbled 28.88 per cent to ₹1,513.90 — its 52-week low. The 10 listed Adani Group firms have faced an combined erosion of over ₹8.76 lakh crore in 6 days.

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

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

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missed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements.

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

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

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

Retail investors, for whom roughly half of the issue was reserved, bid for just 11 per cent of the 2.29 crore shares earmarked for them.

With a view to safeguard investors from the sharp volatility in stocks of Adani Group companies, the National Stock Exchange has moved Adani Enterprises NSE -26.7%, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone, and Ambuja Cements NSE 5.52% under the short-term additional surveillance measure framework.

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Industrialist Gautam Adani addresses investors from an unknown location

## RBI seeks details of banks' exposure

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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

## BJP, AAP in slanging match on ED liquor scam chargesheet

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A AP convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday dismissed the Enforcement Directorate's supplementary chargesheet in the excise scam case, alleging cases filed by the agency are "fake" and are used to "topple" or form governments.

He charged that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) does not file cases to eradicate corruption but to help poach MLAs and topple governments. "ED has filed 5,000 charge sheets under the tenure of current Government. How many people have been sentenced? All the cases filed by ED are fake and they are used to topple governments or form them," Kejriwal said in a Press conference.

The BJP slammed the AAP Government saying, the ED charge sheet exposed the real face of Kejriwal and his party.

"The liquor mafia paid ₹100 crore on being asked by Kejriwal, through communication in charge of the party



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal with Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia during the inauguration of BR Ambedkar School of Specialised Excellence at DESU Colony

Vijay Nair, for Goa elections. Kejriwal through a facetime video asked liquor mafia to pay ₹100 crore to Nair," BJP MP Manoj Tiwari alleged.

This is the real face of Kejriwal and his AAP, he said, citing the ED chargesheet.

"Indulgence in corruption by Kejriwal and use of money paid by liquor mafia was per-

haps a sin that caused the defeat of AAP in the Goa elections and the Delhi people will not forgive them for it," he said.

In its chargesheet, the ED alleged a close aide of Kejriwal received kickbacks to the tune of ₹100 crore from a group, on behalf of AAP leaders.

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## No decision on bringing UCC in force: Rijiju to RS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There has been no decision "as of now" on the implementation of a uniform civil code in the country, the Government informed the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

In a written reply, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said the Government had requested the 21st Law Commission to undertake examination of various issues relating to uniform civil code and to make recommendations.

"The term of the 21st Law Commission ended on August 31, 2018. As per the information received from the Law Commission, the matter related to uniform civil code may be taken up by the 22nd Law Commission for its consideration," he said. "Therefore, no decision on implementation of uniform civil code has been taken as of now," he said.

The term of the present law panel ends later this month. Government sources indicated that the panel's three-year term could be extended.

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## MVA candidate wins Maha Council seat in Gadkari home turf

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an advantage for the MVA candidate Sudhakar Adbale, a candidate supported by the Maharashtra Opposition alliance stormed to victory against its BJP rival in the Nagpur division teachers' seat of the Maharashtra Legislative Council on Thursday.

Nagpur, where the headquarters of RSS is located, is also the home district of Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Union Minister Nitin Gadkari.

MVA-supported Sudhakar Adbale defeated Nagorao Ganar, a BJP-backed independent and the sitting MLC from the seat.

However, BJP candidate Dnyaneshwar Mhatre won the election to the Konkan division teachers constituency. Mhatre, the BJP candidate, also backed by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde-led Balasahebanchi

Shiv Sena, won the Konkan teachers constituency trouncing MVA-supported nominee Balaram Patil.

Polling for biennial elections to five seats of the Upper House of the legislature was held on January 30. The counting of votes for three other seats — the Aurangabad division teachers constituency and Amravati and Nashik division graduates segments — was underway.

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## Threat call to blow up Ram Janmabhoomi

PTI ■ AYODHYA

A phone call from an unidentified man, threatening to blow up the Ram Janmabhoomi complex here, was received by an Ayodhya resident, police said on Thursday.

The call was received by Manoj, who lives in the Ramkot area of this Uttar Pradesh district. He alerted police about the call received on his mobile phone.

According to police, the caller threatened to blow up the temple area at 10 am on Thursday.

As soon as the information was received, police issued an alert to all personnel deployed at various locations in the district.

Station House Officer (SHO) of the Ram Janmabhoomi police station Sanjiv Kumar Singh said they have registered a case and are conducting an enquiry.

Efforts are on to ascertain the identity of the caller, he added.

## BBC film: SC hearing today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court asked petitioners to mention again on Friday for urgent listing of their plea seeking a complete ban on the British Broadcasting Corporation in India for its controversial documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots.

A bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud told the lawyer appearing for the petitioner to mention the matter on Friday on the top court was hearing a plea filed by Vishnu Gupta, president of Hindu Sena, and Beerendra Kumar Singh, a farmer, which has also sought investigation against BBC and its employees.

Alleging that BBC has been biased against India and Indian Government, the plea said the documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi is result of deep conspiracy against global rise of India and its Prime Minister.

The plea has also sought quashing of "all orders directly or indirectly censoring" the information including those shared on social media.

## Kappan walks out of prison

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

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

water pond makes the Syunarakot ka Naula one of the most beautiful naulas dotting the region.

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

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

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

This was considered a sacred site as on the top of the roof, a round stone is always placed which is considered to be the idol of lord Vishnu.



according to reports.

Naula consists of a tank that is closed on three sides and covered. The fourth side, which is open, has steps that lead down to the tank. There is a pillared verandah around them with engravings.

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

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

Such traditional naulas are now dying due to lack of forest and tree cover, irregular and unpredicted rainfall pattern, loss of traditional knowledge, modernisation and uncontrolled development. These naulas become the target of popular attention only when modern water pipelines stop working.

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

## Almora's 100-yr-old water reservoir gets monument national tag

# Reveal 'deal' with RJD, Kushwaha asks Nitish

PTI ■ PATNA



Dissatisfied JD(U) leader Upendra Kushwaha on Thursday 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.

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 decentralization 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. "I request the chief minister, our supreme leader, and national president Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan to come out with the truth behind these rumours," said Kushwaha.

Notably, speculations about Kumar having agreed to make way for Yadav have gained ground with the CM himself dropping ample hints in the past that he was ready to pass on the mantle to his deputy, the younger son of Lalu Prasad.

Kushwaha claims that he had returned to JD(U) at the instance of Kumar who was shattered by the party's drubbing in 2020 assembly polls. While Kumar has made it clear that Kushwaha has now become dispensable ('jahaan jaana ho jaa sakte hain'), the latter has made it clear that he will fight for his "share".

# Adani stock rout: Gehlot says future of employees cannot be left to mercy of share market, raises pitch for old pension scheme

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Referring to the rout in Adani group stocks, Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday said the future of government employees cannot be left to the mercy of the share market and added his government reintroduced the old pension scheme as funds under the new scheme were invested in shares.

The chief minister said the old pension scheme (OPS) should be reintroduced in the entire country. He said the Centre should return the funds of the state government employees deposited in the

new pension scheme (NPS), else the state government will move the Supreme Court. "Employees are our brothers and we cannot leave them to the mercy of the share market. Shares of Adani Saab have fallen and there is a turmoil in the entire country and abroad. Shares of those who have given loans (to Adani group) have fallen including SBI and LIC," Gehlot said.

He was replying to a discussion on the governor's address to the state assembly. Gehlot said the entire NPS fund is being pumped into the share market and this argument was given by the state

government when it implemented the old pension scheme (OPS) in the state. He said Prime Minister Narendra Modi should answer why he wants NPS to continue.

"I would like to say again that the entire House should unite to talk about it. OPS will have to be implemented - today or tomorrow.

The Centre is not giving us our money deposited in the NPS. It is our money. If they will not give, then we will move the Supreme Court," Gehlot said. Rebuffing the claim of the leader of the opposition that the Centre is trying to take all sections of society

together, Gehlot said there cannot be a bigger lie than the claim that the NDA government takes all religions and castes together.

"This is the issue of our party. This is what Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Yatra campaign is all about... There should be peace, brotherhood and love in the country. This is our thinking.

We think that Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Jains should all remain united in the country," the senior Congress leader said. He said there is not a single Muslim member from the BJP in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. "What

kind of democracy do you talk about, do you have democratic thinking? There is a 20 per cent population of such a big religion and your party did not give a single ticket. It neither gave a ticket in Lok Sabha nor in Uttar Pradesh. It did not allow any Muslim to enter Rajya Sabha (on its ticket).

How can you say that you take everyone along," he said targeting the opposition BJP.

The chief minister said his government has fulfilled 80 per cent of its poll promises and the work is underway on the remaining promises. Referring to the management of the coronavirus pandemic in the

protection requirements or requiring local storage and processing of data or similar requirements that could increase the cost and complexity of delivering our services, cause us to cease the offering of our products and services in certain countries, or result in fines or other penalties," the filing dated February 1 said.

Meta has also cautioned investors that it could also face fines, orders restricting or blocking services in particular geographies, or other government-imposed remedies as a result of content hosted on its services citing examples of India and Germany.

"For example, legislation in Germany and India has resulted in the past, and may result in the future, in the imposition of fines or other penalties for failure to comply with certain content removal, law enforcement cooperation, and disclosure obligations," the filing said.



2022, increased by 2 per cent to 2.96 billion from December 31, 2021. India stood among the top three contributors in terms of monthly active users to the same period in 2021," Meta said.

The company defines a daily active user as a registered and logged-in Facebook user who visited Facebook through its website or a mobile device, or used the Messenger application (and is also a registered Facebook user), on a given day. The monthly active users (MAUs) as of December 31,

# SC to hear plea to ban Feb 5 hate speech event



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday agreed to hear a plea seeking to prohibit an alleged hate speech event scheduled to be held on February 5 in Mumbai.

A bench of Justice K M Joseph, Justice Aniruddha Bose and Justice Hrishikesh Roy said it will seek instructions from Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and subject to his approval post the matter for hearing on Friday. "We are with you on this, but understand that the Supreme Court cannot be triggered every time there is a rally notified.

We have already passed an order which is clear enough. Just imagine rallies happening all across the country. Every time there will be an application before the Supreme Court.

How can that be feasible? "You ask us to be embarrassed again and again by getting an order. We have passed so many orders yet nobody is taking action. The Supreme Court should not be asked to pass an order on an event to event basis," the bench observed.

The observation came after a lawyer mentioned the matter,

saying the issue needs urgent hearing against the alleged hate speech rally in Mumbai to be organised by the Hindu Jan Akrosh Morcha. She submitted that a similar rally was organised a few days ago in which 10,000 people participated and gave a call to boycott Muslim communities economically and socially.

On continuous persistence of the lawyer, the court asked her to serve a copy of the application to the counsel for Maharashtra. "Serve a copy on the State, we will list it tomorrow subject to orders of the CJI. Only this case, not the entire batch," the bench said.

Holding that the Constitution of India envisages a secular nation, the top court on October 21 last year directed the Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments to come down hard on hate speeches, promptly registering criminal cases against the culprits without waiting for a complaint to be filed.

The court had also warned that any delay on the part of the administration in taking action on this "very serious issue" would invite the court's contempt.

# Demand for JPC on Adani rocks Houses

from Page 1

Others who gave notices include CPI's Binoy Viswam and P Santhosh Kumar, BRS MP K Keshava Rao, CPM's Elamaram Kareem and V Sivasadan, and DMK's Tiruchi Siva. Dhankhar said he had on December 8, 2022, and thereafter indicated the requirements for accepting a 267 notice.

I have carefully gone through all the notices received. I find they are not in order as none of the notices fulfills the requirement that is expressly mandated in rule 267. In such a helpless situation, I am unable to accede to the same. They are declined."

With the MPs not relenting, he adjourned the proceedings till 2 pm. Soon after the afternoon session resumed, Opposition members continued their demand and Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar announced adjournment of the proceedings of the Upper House for the day.

Outside the House, Kharge said the Opposition parties want day-to-day reporting of the Joint Parliament Committee (JPC) or the SC-monitored probe into the issue which concerns public money.

"Keeping public interest in mind, we want a thorough probe into the Adani issue either by a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) or a Supreme Court-monitored panel.

There should also be day-to-day reporting of the investigation on the issue," he told reporters.

Earlier in the day, leaders of several Opposition parties met to evolve a joint strategy to take on the government during the Budget Session. At that meeting, they decided to press for a JPC on the issue as well as a discussion in both houses.

Leaders of like-minded parties met in the chamber of Kharge. Leaders of Congress, DMK, TMC, SP, JD(U), Shiv Sena, CPI(M), CPI, NCP, IUML, NC, AAP, and the Kerala Congress were present at the meeting.

# K'taka sex CD scandal Govt prepares to hand over case to CBI

IANS ■ BENGALURU

Congress President D.K. Shivakumar to jail, adding that hundreds of politicians from state, officers and top officers in Bengaluru are trapped in CD conspiracy. "I have 120 pieces of evidence. I am not releasing them here. The matter has to be investigated by the CBI."

Jarkiholi alleged that Shivakumar had hit him by hatching a conspiracy and got that video made to finish him off politically.

The alleged sex CD released in March 2021 created a huge controversy in the state.

Following the embarrassing, he adjourned the proceedings till 2 pm. Soon after the afternoon session resumed, Opposition members continued their demand and Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar announced adjournment of the proceedings of the Upper House for the day.

Jarkiholi had played a prominent role in 'Operation Lotus' carried out by the BJP to come to power in the state. He was at the forefront of the collapse of the coalition government headed by the JD-S and the Congress.

Earlier, the Special Investigation Team probing allegations of rape against Jarkiholi had filed a 'B' report in the case, stating that no evidence to prove the charge or the other allegations made against him.

Currently, Jarkiholi is seeking a cabinet position in the state.

# Adani group MVA candidate wins Maha Council seat...

from page 1

The six-year term of five Council members - three from teachers and two from graduate constituencies - is expiring on February 7. Returning officer and divisional commissioner Mahendra Kalyankar, who announced the results of the Konkan teachers con-

# Adani group

from page 1

The offer was opened for public subscription from January 27-31. Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities Ltd, said the rout in Adani Group stocks continued to play havoc on domestic markets as benchmark indices gyrated sharply intra-day before recouping lost ground.

In volatile trade, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex ended 224.16 points or 0.38 per cent higher at 59,932.24.

"Participants were anticipating some respite after the dovish tone from the US Fed, however continuous decline in Adani group counters combined with the scheduled weekly expiry kept the tone negative for most of the session," said Ajit Mishra, VP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

The above-mentioned borrowers(s)/guarantor(s) are hereby given a 30 day notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on the expiry of 30 days from the date of publication of this Notice, as per the provisions under the Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

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Place: Delhi & Gurgaon

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Date: February 03, 2023

Place: Delhi & Gurgaon

Authorized Officer

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# DELHI EXCISE SCAM Court takes cognisance of ED's supplementary chargesheet

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A court here on Thursday took cognisance of a supplementary charge sheet filed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against five individuals and seven companies in connection with the alleged Delhi excise scam.

Special Judge M K Nagpal summoned the accused persons — Vijay Nair, P Sarath Chandra Reddy, Benoy Babu, Abhishek Boinpally, Amit Arora — on February 23.

He also directed the representatives of the accused companies — Trident Chemphar Ltd, Sri Avantika Contractors (I) Pvt Ltd, Organomix Ecosystems Pvt Ltd, Pernod Ricard India Pvt Ltd, KSMJ Spirits LLP, Buddy Retail (TI) Pvt Ltd and Popular Spirits Pvt Ltd - to appear before the court on the next day.

"This court is of the considered opinion that there are sufficient grounds and material to proceed further in the matter against all the twelve



accused being prosecuted through this supplementary complaint as they all, either directly or indirectly, are found to have attempted to or indulged in or knowingly assisted or have been a party to or actually involved in the process or activities connected with proceeds of crime generated through the above scheduled offences case, including its concealment, possession, acquisition, use and projection or claiming it to be untainted properties," the judge said.

The Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22 has now been scrapped after allegations of irregularities in its implementation.

This is the second prosecution complaint (charge sheet) filed by the federal investigative agency in this case, registered under various sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). The first was filed in November last year.

A total of 12 entities, which include people arrested by it in the case till now, have been named in the latest charge sheet, sources said.

The money laundering case stems from a CBI FIR that had also named Sisodia as an accused among others. The CBI had raided the premises of the deputy chief minister and some Delhi government bureaucrats after filing the case.

The excise scheme came under the scanner after the Delhi lieutenant governor recommended a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities in its implementation. The LG had also suspended 11 excise officials.

A 25-year-old man allegedly molested two sisters, aged six and five, during a birthday party in southwest Delhi's Uttam Nagar on Thursday, police said.

The accused, Deepak who is a rag picker, has been arrested, they said.

The birthday party of the victim's relative was organised outside the house in a tent. The accused, who is the relative's neighbour lured the two minor girls and took them to his shanty where he allegedly touched them "inappropriately" and molested them, police said.

When the relatives did not find the girls, they started looking and found them at Deepak's place, police said.

The mother of the victim later filed a complaint with the police, officials said.

2 minor sisters molested by man during birthday party



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

## LG misusing powers, not allowing Govt to send teachers abroad for training: Sisodia

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena is "misusing the powers of the unconstitutional GNCTD Act" by not allowing the Delhi Government to send its teachers abroad for training, alleged Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Thursday.

He said the Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab Government is sending its teachers to Singapore for a training programme on Saturday. However, in Delhi, Saxena is "stopping" the Kejriwal government from doing the same.

He alleged that the amendment in the Government of



National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCTD) Act has given LG powers to interfere in the functioning of the Delhi government.

"This is happening because he is misusing the powers given to him by the constitutionally amended GNCTD Act," he claimed, adding this is why "the Delhi government today is not able to send its teachers for training abroad."

The 2021 amendment act had come into force after being

passed by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha on March 22 and March 24, respectively.

The AAP-led Delhi government has approached the Supreme Court on the matter.

Sisodia, who also holds the education portfolio, said Punjab is learning from Delhi's experience.

"After forming the government, we started sending our teachers on training in the second and third year. But the Aam Aadmi Party government in Punjab is learning from Delhi's experiences and has started sending its teachers on international training in the first year itself," the senior AAP leader said.

## Sparks fly as car drags bike for over 3 km in G'gram

**Gurugram:** In another shocking incident, a man was arrested for dragging a motorcycle by his speeding car for more than three kilometres ignoring attempts by other commuters to stop his vehicle, the Gurugram Police said on Thursday.

The car first hit the motorcycle parked along the roadside and when the two-wheeler got stuck beneath it, the speeding

vehicle dragged it for kilometres on Wednesday night, police said.

The motorcycle owner, a bouncer, said the incident took place around 11.30 pm when he was returning to home from duty.

He said he had a narrow escape as he was standing near his motorcycle parked on the roadside when the car hit his two-wheeler.

**Hubby, male family member not protected under domestic violence law, says HC**

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**

**T**he Delhi High Court has said that prima facie the protection under the domestic violence law, which aims at protecting married women from cruelty, is not available to a male member of the family particularly the husband.

The high court took into consideration the definition of section 2(a) of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (DV) Act which says that "aggrieved person" means any woman who is, or has been, in a domestic relationship with the respondent and who alleges to have been subjected to any act of domestic violence by the respondent.

Justice Jasmeet Singh, who was hearing a woman's plea seeking quashing of the complaint filed against her by her husband before a magistrate court here, stayed the proceedings initiated by the man under the provisions of the DV Act.

"In the present case, the respondent, that is, the husband of the petitioner (woman) has initiated proceedings under Section 12 of the DV Act. Prima facie it seems in view of Section 2(a), the protection of the Act is not available to a male member of the family and more particularly the husband.

## Hope SC declares GNCTD Amendment Act brought by Centre as unconstitutional: CM

and March 24, respectively.

The Delhi Government has approached the Supreme Court on the matter.

Elaborating about the Delhi Government's plan to send teachers to different countries for training, the chief minister said, "We have been able to send 1,000 teachers so far to different countries."

"It was informed that a bulk of the work was in the domain of PWD, Delhi Government, MCD (Municipal Corporation of Delhi) and railways and the same was getting hampered because of unauthorised and illegal occupation of Government land and roads," the statement said.

The LG insisted that nobody should be removed in a callous and inhuman manner without providing them the required rehabilitation, relocation and assistance as provided by law, it said.

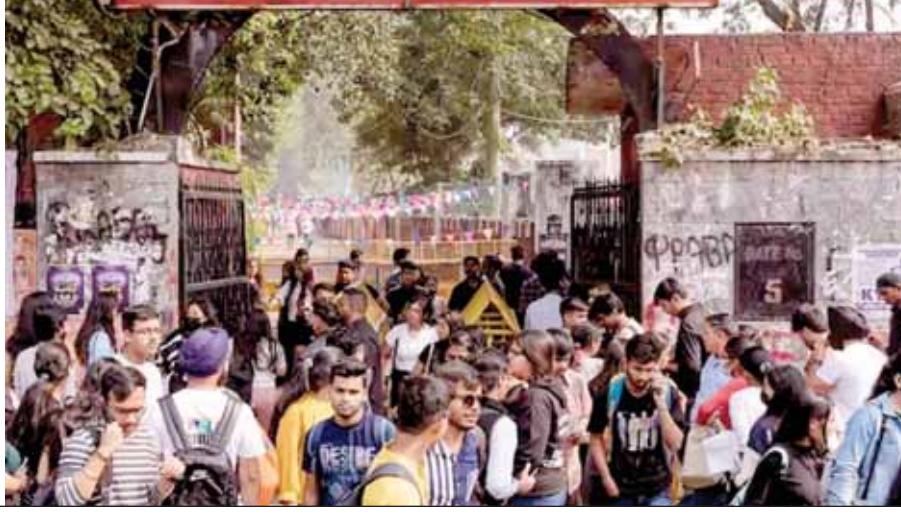
# 1,700 students apply for DU's fee waiver scheme

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

**S**tudents coming from economically weaker sections are applying for fee waiver scheme. Around 1,700 applications have been received for the Delhi University's fee waiver scheme for students from an economically weak background, an official said on Thursday.

The university will examine the applications and release the final list of the students who will become beneficiaries of the Financial Support Scheme (FSS), the official said.

January 31 was the last date for applying for the



Man beaten to death after quarrel over petty issue

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A man was allegedly beaten to death following a quarrel in west Delhi's Ranholi area, police said on Thursday.

According to the police, the body was recovered on Tuesday morning from near the house of the victim, identified as Deepak.

The post-mortem was conducted on Wednesday at Deen Dayal Upadhyay Hospital and the body was handed over to the family members, they said.

## 3 hurt as DTC bus rams into subway crossing in Naraina

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In another road accident, three people were injured when a DTC bus hit a car before ramming into a subway crossing in west Delhi's Naraina on Thursday, police said.

A senior official said the Delhi Transport Corporation has ordered an inquiry into the accident.

The driver, conductor and the marshal of the bus suffered injuries. They have been taken to the Metro hospital in Ranjit Nagar, they said.

The two passengers of the

can get up to a 100 per cent fee waiver, depending on their family income. A full-time bona fide student studying in the university is eligible to apply for it.

"A student with a family income of less than Rs 4 lakh (annually) will be eligible for up to 100 per cent fee waiver, while students with a family income of Rs 4 lakh to 8 lakhs can apply for a 50 per cent waiver," the official said.

Based on their family income, a list will be prepared to see who all are eligible, the official said.

"It will be seen whether the students are eligible for full waiver or half. In case of confusion, we might call the stu-

dents for an interview," the official said. Students with ER (essential repeat) and arrears of previous examination papers are not eligible to apply, according to the official.

The DU had asked students applying for the scheme to submit an annual family income certificate for the last financial year issued by the tehsildar or equivalent competent authority, copies of income tax returns of parents, wherever applicable, and copies of fee receipts.

A copy of a bank passbook showing the student's name, account number, the IFSC code of the bank and a photograph pasted at the appropriate place were also sought.

The high court took into consideration the definition of section 2(a) of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (DV) Act which says that "aggrieved person" means any woman who is, or has been, in a domestic relationship with the respondent and who alleges to have been subjected to any act of domestic violence by the respondent.

Justice Jasmeet Singh, who was hearing a woman's plea seeking quashing of the complaint filed against her by her husband before a magistrate court here, stayed the proceedings initiated by the man under the provisions of the DV Act.

"In the present case, the respondent, that is, the husband of the petitioner (woman) has initiated proceedings under Section 12 of the DV Act. Prima facie it seems in view of Section 2(a), the protection of the Act is not available to a male member of the family and more particularly the husband.

## Ashram flyover extension by Feb end to ease traffic



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Commuters from Delhi and Noida will be able to travel hassle-free after the completion of the Ashram flyover extension by February end, the Delhi government said in a statement on Thursday.

The flyover will allow passengers to bypass three traffic lights between Ashram Chowk and DND, making vehicular movement smoother, it said.

On Thursday, Deputy Chief Minister and Public Works Department (PWD) Minister Manish Sisodia conducted an on-site inspection to assess the progress of the work.

The minister said it was a herculean task to build a flyover in the middle of such a busy road but the PWD engineers undertook the challenge and delivered.

He said after the completion of this flyover, lakhs of people commuting from Noida and other parts of Delhi to South Delhi will get rid of traffic jams.

At present, vehicles coming and going from Noida and Ghaziabad to South Delhi

## Govt: Redevelopment of Sarojini Nagar, Kasturba Nagar colonies held up in absence of tree transplantation nod



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The redevelopment of three general pool residential accommodation (GPRA) colonies — Sarojini Nagar, Kasturba Nagar and Srinivasapuri — has been stalled as the permission from the city Government for tree transplantation is still awaited, the Government said.

In a written reply to a question in Lok Sabha, Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs Kaushal Kishore said the Kasturba Nagar project will be executed in two phases.

He said the progress of this project achieved for one pack-

age is eight per cent as on date, adding that the other package has not been taken up for want of tree transplantation permission.

The Sarojini Nagar project comprises general pool residential accommodation and commercial property.

The city forest department's no objection certificate for developing type IV quarters is awaited.

The minister said the other packages are majorly held up for want of tree transplantation permission and encroachments.

## 2 more held for killing 18-yr-old

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday criticised the GNCTD Amendment Act brought by the Centre in 2021 and hoped that the Supreme Court declares it unconstitutional.

Addressing a Press confer-

ence, Kejriwal reiterated that LG V K Saxena was raising unreasonable objections over Delhi government's proposal to send teachers to Finland.

"Constitution and the law states that LG is bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers. This means that the files should not go to the LG. It is wrong that the LG is

sent files and he objects.

"In 2021, the GNCTD Amendment Act was brought by the Centre which is unconstitutional. I hope the Supreme Court declares it unconstitutional," Kejriwal said.

"According to the MLC, Rohtash (driver) and Gaurav (marshal) got minor injuries on their forehead and hands while Ramesh (conductor) suffered injuries in his abdomen and is under treatment in the Metro Hospital.

Naraina bus depot, police said.

During enquiry, it was found that the DTC bus was going towards Naraina Depot after dropping all the passengers at the stop. The bus col-

lided with a car near the subway of Naraina flyover. To save the car, the bus rammed into the metro crossing, Deputy Commissioner of Police (West) Ghanshyam Bansal said.

"The driver, conductor and the marshal present in the bus were injured and two persons in the car are safe," he said.

"According to the MLC, Rohtash (driver) and Gaurav (marshal) got minor injuries on their forehead and hands while Ramesh (conductor) suffered injuries in his abdomen and is under treatment in the Metro Hospital.

## G-20 events: Drives to check stray dogs, training of cab drivers part of preparations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a meeting to review preparations for the G-20 Summit and related events in the city, Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena was informed on Thursday that the work by different departments was being "hampered" due to unauthorised and illegal occupation of government land.

It was decided in the meeting to train Uber drivers and make their payment portals compatible to transactions

through international credit cards, and to carry out special drives to tackle the problem of stray cattle, dogs as well as monkeys and pigeons.

A total of 26 departments and agencies are working on specific tasks assigned to them, of which 24 submitted their action plans for consideration in the meeting.

The railways and the CPWD that did not come up with their action plans were directed to submit the same within a week, according to a statement from the LG's office.

# India eyes USA's predator drones to man borders

PIONEER NEWS  
SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

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

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

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

tweet after the meeting.

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

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

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

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



Critical and Emerging Technology or iCET.

As regards the drones, the Indian Army, IAF and Navy will get ten Predators each if the deal is firmed up. The Predator is seen to be a key part of India's national security and defense needs.

Officials did not elaborate further but ruled out that there was any bureaucratic hurdle or regulatory issues involved.

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

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

During the meetings, it is believed that both sides expressed their eagerness to see that the drone deal is fast tracked. India is eager that an early decision would help it get an early delivery of MQ-9B Predator armed drones that would strengthen its national security and surveillance not only in the Indian Ocean, but also along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

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

"When we look at the

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

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

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

Meanwhile, India and the

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

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

## BJP lists 60 candidates for Meghalaya Assembly polls

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The people are suffering due to poor rural roads, power

## India condemns attack on temples in Canada, Australia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

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

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

Muraleedharan said India regularly takes up with Canada untoward incidents affecting

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

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

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

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

Meanwhile, the condemnation regarding Canadian incidents came two days after Gouri Shankar Mandir in Brampton was vandalised with anti-India graffiti.

"Hindu Canadians are deeply pained by the rising Hinduphobia in Canada," Arya said in the Canadian parliament. Calling it an "alarming trend" he called upon Canada to stop rising hate-crimes against Hindus.

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

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

"We strongly condemn the

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

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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI



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

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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI/AGARTALA

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

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

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

had not filed his nomination papers, he said.

"The seat sharing deal between CPI(M) and Congress for the upcoming election was finalised on Thursday, the last day of withdrawal of nominations.

All the three Congress leaders, who had submitted nomination papers have withdrawn their papers according to the agreement," Prades

h Congress president Birajit Sinha told a news agency.

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

papers, he said.

Senior CPI(M) leader Pabitra Kar said the impasse over the seat adjustment with the Congress has been "neutralised finally" through discussion. "Now we will fight the election jointly to defeat the BJP which has foisted the people and won the last elections".

Sinha said both parties will campaign jointly to ensure the defeat of the BJP, which has "throttled democracy during the past five years in the state".

Asked, Kar, a CPI(M) state committee member, said it is yet to be decided whether the LF and Cong will campaign jointly but the parties' leaders and workers will help each other locally during canvassing for votes. To questions about Tipra Motha's decision to go solo, Sinha said it has not

fielded any candidate against him in Kailashbari seat and CPI(M) state secretary Jitendra Choudhury, who is contesting from Sabroom.

## Disabled neglected in Union Budget, says rights group

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

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

The National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled (NPRD) in a statement here said that this year's budget has

been no different as far as the disabled community is concerned.

"In comparison to the previous year, there is merely a 1% increase. However, it needs to be underlined that the amount allotted for 2022-23 was underutilized by Rs. 196 crore.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI



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

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

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

Kharge said on behalf of like-minded opposition parties,

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

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

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

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

outrage against the moves of the government", the Congress Party has decided to hold a nationwide district level protest on Monday, February 6, 2023, in front of LIC offices and SBI offices.

"The government can't jeopardize the hard-earned money of the people of India to profit the cronies of the Prime Minister," Venugopal said on Twitter.

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

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

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

# Lawyers flag Gowri's elevation as HC judge

TN lawyers write to Murmu against collegium recommendation

IANS ■ CHENNAI

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



er account where she claimed herself as t h e 'National General Secretary of Mahila Morcha'. Advocates in the petition, said the screenshot was taken a few days back and that she had recently deleted her Twitter account.

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

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

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

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

## 51 IEDs recovered in Singhbhum after blast injures three jawans

PTI ■ CHAIBASA

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 15-yr-old auctioned, gangraped in Agra

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

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

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

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



Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POSCO) Act

"On the basis of the statement of the victim, we first arrested her alleged lover and then made all the other arrests one by one based on information we collected during the interrogation of the arrested man."

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

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

## Teachers' scam: Judge agrees that Partha 'privileged'

IANS ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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



dlemen arrested in connection with the scam, namely Prasanna Kumar Roy and Pradip Singh were standing in court.

"Why are they standing? I understand that Partha Chatterjee is privileged. It is all right that he is sitting. But if others get an opportunity to sit, then why are the remaining two standing? This does not look good. Everyone should have equal rights," he said.

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

## Didi terms Budget disastrous

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued to slam the Centre for preparing a "disastrous Budget" that nearly brought the Narendra Government down on Wednesday.

Picking up from where she left on Wednesday, Mamata on Thursday claimed that the BJP government was on the verge of collapse in the wake of post-budget crash in the share market.

"I have information that this Government had almost collapsed" but for some timely management and pumping in of several thousand crores into the money market at the behest of some influential people," Banerjee told a meeting at East Burdwan.

She said how "desperate calls were made to some people to provide funds to that person whose share prices were going down fast," adding she knew all the players in the game but would not name anyone in particular.

"I know who approached whom for funds but I will not take names as this will put those people in problem," she said adding about half-a-dozen people were contacted for funds.

"I have information that at least six to seven people were called up. Some were asked to pay Rs 10,000 cr others were told to give Rs 20,000 cr and yet others were asked to pay Rs 30,000 crore to the person whose companies share prices fell," Banerjee said wondering how a government with no plans could function.

Slamming the Centre for producing high-sounding nothing in the name of income tax relief Banerjee said how the Government provided relief on one hand and took it away from the other.

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

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU



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

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

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



Tamil Nadu Chief Minister being greeted by Naruvi Hospitals chairman

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# SURAJKUND International Crafts Mela-2023 INAUGURATION

Chief Guest  
**Sh. Jagdeep Dhankhar**  
Hon'ble Vice President

Guest of Honour  
**Sh. Manohar Lal**  
Chief Minister, Haryana

Date : Friday, February 3, 2023 | Time : 5:00 PM  
Venue : Surajkund, Faridabad, Haryana







## FIRST COLUMN ECO-POLITICAL SURVEY HAS EYES ON '24 POLLS

It highlights the reforms regime brought in by current Govt



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)

# Bringing back OPS may be catastrophic



UTTAM GUPTA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

(The author is a policy analyst)



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

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



IS THIS FOR THE EMPLOYEES OR FOR NEW RECRUITMENTS OR IS IT JUST FOR THE MODERNISATION OF RAILWAYS BEFORE SELLING IT TO PRIVATE COMPANIES.  
— CHHATTISGARH CHIEF MINISTER BHUPESH BAGHEL



# Cyber security, technical education on the horizon

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

**T**he government has been at the forefront of driving technology-led initiatives through flagship programmes like Startup India and Digital India to foster a favorable business environment for existing and new businesses to become global unicorns. Therefore, it is now the best time to encourage Indian students to choose cyber security as a career option to introduce young talent at the gates of Indian cyber security.

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



ABHISHEK MITRA

current trend continues.

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

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

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

However, this threat is not

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



# US, Philippines agree on larger American military presence

AP ■ MANILA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Galvez said there was a need for more consultations,

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

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

pin region of Luzon.

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



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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

a firm determination to never yield to coercive power."

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

Beyond the Indo-Pacific, the CCP has...Intelligence collection outposts in the United States, Japan, and throughout Europe to suppress dissidents and keep tabs on those who Beijing deems a threat. It is evident that General Secretary Xi is determined to use coercion and aggression against the US and our allies and partners to achieve his geopolitical goals.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

The AML leader vowed to challenge his arrest in court.

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

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

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

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

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



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

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## Iran blames Israel for drone attack, threatens retaliation

AP ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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

Details on the Isfahan



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

It remains unclear what the work produced.

Iravani's letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the Security Council warned Tehran could respond to the attack, which happened around 11:30 p.m. Saturday, still remain scarce days after the assault. A Defence Ministry statement described three drones being launched at the facility, with two of them successfully shot down.

A third apparently made it through to strike the building, causing "minor damage" to its roof and wounding no one, the ministry said.

The state-run IRNA news

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

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

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

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



ligence programmes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

"The beauty of foundation models is they can potentially be



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Beyond providing a resource to researchers, the new language model for

# Russia strikes civilian target anew as EU officials visit Kyiv

AP ■ KYIV (UKRAINE)

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

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

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

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was due



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

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

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

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

rebuild," Borrell tweeted.

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

Ukraine's anti-corruption drive was expected to be on the agenda of the talks. Kyiv's long path toward potential membership in the 27-nation bloc

will be a key issue under discussion, with stamping out corruption a key condition for joining.

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

en further our support and cooperation."

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

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

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

Ukraine's government is keen to get more Western military aid, on top of the tanks pledged last week, as the warring sides are expected to launch new offensives once winter ends.

Kyiv is now asking for fighter jets. US President Joe Biden has ruled out providing F-16s to Ukraine.

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

# Putin commemorates Stalingrad battle, echoing Ukraine fight

AP ■ MOSCOW

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

Some Russians on Thursday made the connection explicit.

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

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

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

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



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

AP ■ COPENHAGEN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

## Syria slams chemical watchdog's report on 2018 attack



AP ■ DAMASCUS (SYRIA)

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

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

"The report contained false accusations aimed at increasing pressure and escalating Western positions hostile to Syria," he said.

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

## UK defends BBC's freedom



PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

## Lankan Buddhist clergy opposes autonomy to Tamils

PTI ■ COLOMBO

ical autonomy to the minority Tamils in the country.

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

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

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

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

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

## Myanmar army places restive areas under martial law

AP ■ BANGKOK

Martial law was declared in several areas of military-run Myanmar on Thursday, a day after authorities announced that a state of emergency has been extended throughout the country, which is wracked by violence that some U.N. Experts have described as a civil war.

State-run MRTV television broadcast an announcement by Aung Lin Oo, secretary of the military's State Administration Council, imposing martial law in 37 townships across eight of the country's 14 regions and states.

Eleven of the affected townships are in Sagaing region and seven in Chin state, areas in the northwest where fighting has been fiercest between the army and guerrillas belonging to pro-democracy People's Defense Forces and their allies in ethnic minority militias.

### PASUPATI ACRYLON LIMITED

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

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

NOTE : The above is an extract of the detailed format of quarterly Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the Quarterly Financial Results are available on the Company's Website ([www.pasupatilacrylon.com](http://www.pasupatilacrylon.com)) and National Stock Exchange of India Limited ([www.bseindia.com](http://www.bseindia.com)) and for Pasupati Acrylon Ltd. (Rs. in Crores)

Vineet Jain Managing Director

Place : New Delhi Date : 2<sup>nd</sup> February, 2023



### Aro granite industries ltd.

(100% Export Oriented Unit)  
CIN : L74899DL1988PLC031510

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

The ruling came after two separate orders of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) passed in 2018 were challenged by the six applicants.

The case relates to Ramalinga Raju and Rama Raju -- who were promoters and directors of Satyam Computer Services -- falsifying the company's financial statements and making illegal gains by way of insider trading.

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

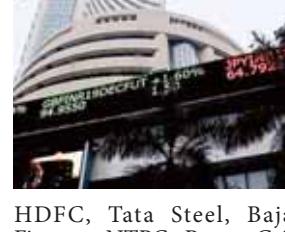
PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

## Tea sector unhappy over total neglect in Union Budget

IANS ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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

According to the director (operations & plantations) of Chamong Tea, Indranil Ghosh, to his surprise the long-standing demand of the planters, especially those from the Darjeeling, Terai and Dooars region, was that the Union government should implement an effective police mechanism to restrict circulation of spurious Darjeeling tea in the market.

"However, to my surprise the Budget speech was totally silent on this issue," she said.

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

"There had been a long-standing demand for giving the small planters the status of agricultural farmers and the status of agricultural workers for the workers employed in smaller tea gardens.

Unfortunately, this issue also found no mention in the Budget speech," said Goswami.



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

IANS ■ VIENNA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Gold rallies ₹770 amid strong global trends

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

USD 1,956 per ounce and USD 14.15 per ounce, respectively.

Comex gold prices traded their highest levels in more than nine months in Asian trading hours on Thursday after investors access dovish policy from US Federal Reserve, the analyst said.

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

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

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

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

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

IANS

ernments and union territories levying high VAT on ATF. As a result, VAT on ATF has been reduced by 17 states and UTs.

The reply said that Goods and Services Tax (GST) on rate has been reduced from 18 per cent to 5 per cent for domestic Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) services.

The Ministry further informed that the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and other airport developers have targeted a capital outlay of approximately Rs 98,000 crore in the next five years for expansion and modification of new and existing terminals as well

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

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

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



as the strengthening of runways, among other activities.

The Centre has also approved the Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) to the aviation sector, according to the Ministry.

Based on the industry demand, the scope of ECLGS has been enhanced to provide credit support to these companies upto 100 per cent of their total credit outstanding (both fund based and non-fund based outstanding) as on reference dates, subject to a cap of Rs 1,500 crore per borrower, whichever is lower, it said in its reply.

The Ministry further informed that the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and other airport developers have targeted a capital outlay of approximately Rs 98,000 crore in the next five years for expansion and modification of new and existing terminals as well

## Rupee tumbles 40 paise to 82.20 against US dollar

low of 82.20. It finally settled at 82.20, down 40 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee had appreciated 8 paise to close at 81.80 against the dollar after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for 2023-24. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.12 per cent lower at 101.10, after the US Fed hiked the interest rate along expected lines by 25 basis points to 4.50-4.75 per cent. Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures declined 0.14 per cent to USD 82.72 per barrel.

PTI

NEW DELHI | FRIDAY | FEBRUARY 3, 2023

# MESSI SCRIPTS PSG's WIN

AP ■ PARIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

## MESSI ON TARGET

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

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

one back.

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

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

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

The win for PSG came after

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bottom side Angers suffered a new French top-flight record

13th consecutive defeat as they conceded in stoppage time to lose 2-1 at home to Ajaccio.

That result leaves them 11 points from safety.

"I think we had a good

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

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

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

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

The Andalusians sit three points behind Atletico Madrid in fourth.

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

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



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

AP ■ SEVILLE

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

"After undergoing tests, Kylian Mbappe suffered an injury to the left thigh at the level of the femoral biceps," said a club statement. If he misses three weeks as expected, Mbappe can also expect to sit out next mid-week's French Cup last-16 tie against Marseille and faces a race against time to return for a potentially pivotal Ligue 1 game away to the same opponents at the end of this month.

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

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

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

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

Raphinha put Barcelona

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

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

"I think we had a good

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Cancelo helps Bayern find form

AP ■ MUNICH

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

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

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

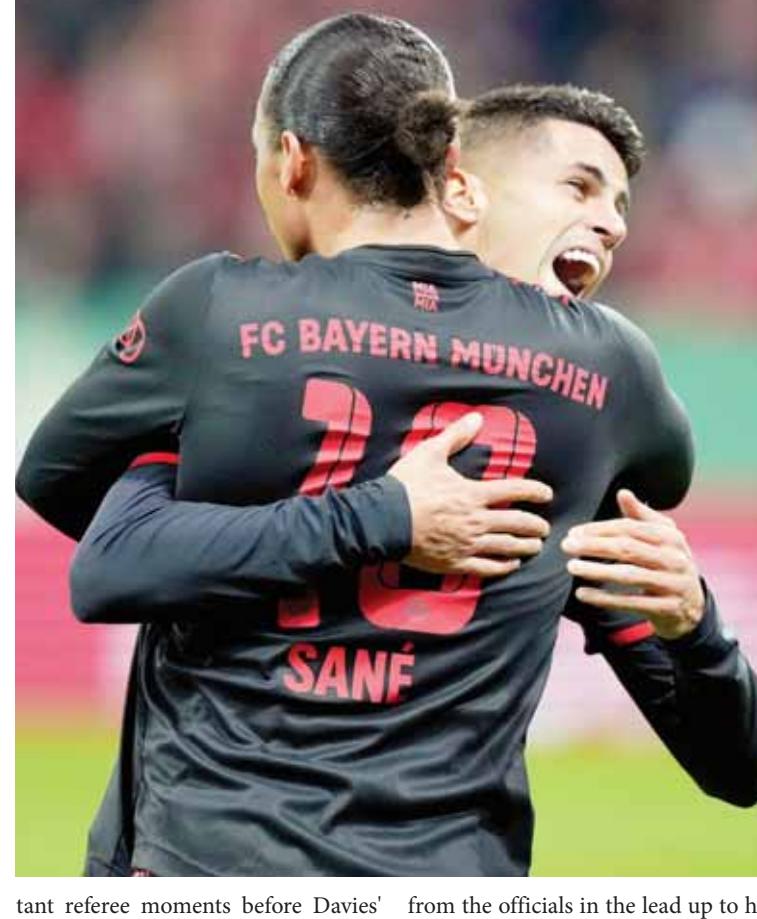
Choupo-Moting's 17th-minute strike settled the visitors' nerves and they had a second on the 30-minute mark when Bayern veteran Thomas Mueller found teenage forward Jamal Musiala, who slammed the ball across the face of goal to make it 2-0.

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

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

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

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



tant referee moments before Davies' goal.

Svensson complained that the German champions got better treatment

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

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

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

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

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## Indian women's team opens campaign against Bhutan



Shahid Shipahi Mostafa Kamal Stadium here.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



AP ■ PARIS

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

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

The Manchester United defender made his France debut in 2013 and won 93 caps for Les Bleus. He had been in the running to take over as captain following the retirement of Hugo Lloris last month.

"To represent our magnificent country for a decade has been one of the greatest honours of

my life. Each time I wore this special blue shirt I felt immense pride," said Varane.

Varane's decision to call time on his France career leaves Kylian Mbappe as the frontrunner for the captaincy, with Didier Deschamps' side set to begin Euro 2024 qualifying at the end of March with a double-header against the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland.

The former Real Madrid star played every minute of his country's triumphant 2018 World Cup campaign as France defeated Croatia 4-2 in the final.

He was one of five French players who also started the 2022 final defeat by Argentina on penalties, recovering from a leg injury that ruled him out of the start of the tournament.

"I'll definitely miss these moments with you, but the time has come for the new generation to take over," he said, thanking Deschamps and his coaching staff as well as the supporters.

"We have a group of talented young players who are ready to step up and who deserve their chance."

Deschamps paid tribute to Varane and praised him for the leadership qualities he had brought to the team throughout his time with France.

"I cannot turn this page without some emotion, given the bonds we have formed," said Deschamps, who gave Varane his international debut in a 2014 World Cup qualifier against Georgia.

"I respect his decision even if it may seem a bit unfortunate given everything he was able to do with the national team through to the World Cup, during which he behaved like the leader we know he is from start to finish."

# TACKLING SLIDE SPIN WILL BE KEY TO OZ'S SUCCESS IN INDIA, SAYS McDONALD

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Australia head coach Andrew McDonald believes the biggest challenge for his side in the upcoming Border-Gavaskar Test Trophy will be to tackle "slide spin" from the Indian tweakers in the early overs.

As the tourists got down to the business of preparing for the gruelling four-Test series beginning in Nagpur on February 9, McDonald also warned his batters that they will have to come up with individual methods and techniques to counter the sliding deliveries.

The Australians have chosen to train all by themselves instead of playing tour games as they feel practice matches serve little purpose.

Both McDonald and Steve Smith have said that serving green tops for tour games and spinning tracks for actual games defeat the very purpose of playing practice matches.

"I think the new ball is the one that creates more of that slide and when the batters do get done on the inside ... we're preparing for that (during the preparatory camp in Bengaluru)," McDonald had said before the team's departure for Bengaluru on Wednesday.

On Thursday, cricket.com.au re-tweeted images of the squad training at Alur, clicked by its journalist, which showed the touring party batters going about their paces in the nets.

"That slide spin, we'll expect the spinners to bowl early against our opening batters as well with the new ball so all that is taken care of in the training environment and (batting) co-



ach) Diva (Michael Di Venuto) does a fantastic job in preparing.

McDonald said that despite the squad training on their own, there will still be variation in the track offered at Alur and the ones on which Test matches will be played, and here batters will have to use their judgement while playing shots.

"We'll be trying to make sure the batters are clear on their method," said McDonald, adding, "You're never going to get exactly the same as you're going to get in a game, and that's one of the real complexities

earnest.

McDonald said that despite the squad training on their own, there will still be variation in the track offered at Alur and the ones on which Test matches will be played, and here batters will have to use their judgement while playing shots.

"We haven't played a tour game, for three years. It's probably not something new to us, but it that way," McDonald said.

"We value freshness at the back end of the tour. Something we've seen teams go there before and expend a lot of energy at the

front end. We feel with the profile of this group, quite an experienced group, quite an experienced batting unit as well, who have been there before, I think 11 out of the squad has been there before.

"A significant chunk of the squad that's been there before, so we feel that better places them leading in and then you never get guarantees over those practice game surfaces you get.

Often, there's no real connection

between that practice game into the first Test match. We feel as though we can control the surfaces here," he added. He said the strategy would be to prepare a blueprint while training in Bengaluru and replicate it in Nagpur during the first Test.

"(Well) get a bit more control in Bangalore to replicate what we're going to come up against and then we go into Nagpur fresh and hopefully it pays dividends at the back end."

## Australia will win on 'fair Indian wickets': Healy

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Hosts India will have the upper hand if the tracks are rank turners in the upcoming Test series but Australia will win on "fair" pitches, feels former wicketkeeper Ian Healy.

"I think if they produce fair Indian wickets, that are good batting wickets, to start with, (that) probably spin and spin pretty consistently but spin a long way, late in the match ... we (Australia) win," Healy said on "SENQ Breakfast".

"That's an escape, you shouldn't be doing it, you're dodging, just be very aware of what you are feeling at any given time. Immerse yourself before you really get to deploy your technique... don't drop catches, fielding can be difficult over there."

"What happens in India, to get ten wickets, you'll only get ten chances, whereas in Australia with bounce, carry and speed you can create 13 chances and you can waste a couple... but they don't come along as easy in India. I just think they have to live and breathe that pressure and have a philosophy over there."

Healy advised the less-experienced Australian players to soak in the pressure and not commit any fielding lapses.

"I want the players to be very aware if they are escaping that pressure (from the locals) if you're escaping that pressure and hiding in your room using the golf simulator... I think you've got to do something else," he said.

"I'm worried about (Mitchell) Starc and (Nathan) Lyon in the first Test ... if they're unfair wickets which I've seen in the last series, where balls were jumping ridiculously and sliding down low from day one, I think India play those conditions better than us," Healy said.

"What happens in India, to get ten wickets, you'll only get ten chances, whereas in Australia with bounce, carry and speed you can create 13 chances and you can waste a couple... but they don't come along as easy in India. I just think they have to live and breathe that pressure and have a philosophy over there."

Australia haven't won a Test series in India since 2004.

Technically & tactically, it was a near-perfect game for me: Shubman Gill



also secure a 2-1 series win.

"To be able to play how I play, I have to be mentally clear," Gill said during an interaction with skipper Hardik Pandya, a video of which was posted on BCCI.Tv.

"This is what you (Hardik) told me. Every time I hit a six, he came and told me -- hold your shape in the next ball, you don't have to do anything extra, just do what you are doing and don't try to go too hard. Every ball he kept reminding me and that helped."

"In the last over of (Mitchell) Santner, I was in the zone and I was hitting. So, I thought I will go after him but you asked me to hold myself back and target other bowlers because he (Santner) is bowling well in the entire T20 series. So, tactically and technically it was a near-perfect game for me."

Player of the series' Pandya snapped four wickets as he bowled with the new ball to dismiss Finn Allen and Glenn Phillips. He later returned to take two more wickets to demolish the Kiwis.

"Four wickets, to be honest, are just part and parcel of the sport but I think I bowled at 145 (kmph) if I am not wrong and that kind of gave me the happiness and the smile you can see. So, I told him (Gill) today that it is my last game and I am going on a break," said Hardik, who will play his next game in about two months' time.

"So, today (Wednesday) gonna be full all guns blazing and I am going to bowl as fast as possible and, to be honest, the kind of start we got, it made our life very easy."

## Hardik doesn't mind playing Dhoni's role for Team India

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Star India all-rounder Hardik Pandya feels he has developed the ability to absorb pressure and doesn't mind playing the anchor role that the great Mahendra Singh Dhoni played for the team.

The 29-year-old has always been known for his batting pyrotechnics but says he has now learnt to take the back seat and anchor the innings, something which master chaser Dhoni did in the fag end of his international career.

"See, to be honest, I've always enjoyed hitting sixes, but I have to evolve and that is life," the stand-in T20 skipper said during the press conference after India sealed the T20 series against New Zealand 2-1.

"I have to take the other part where I've always believed in partnerships. I want to give my team and the other person more calmness and the assurance that at least I'm there."

"I've played more games than any of those guys out there. So, I've known the experience and more than the experience part, it's where I've batted, and I've learnt how to accept pressure and I've learnt how to kind of swallow the pressure and kind of make sure the team and everything is calm," Hardik added.

Dhoni is known for his calm demeanour and Hardik feels now it is his responsibility to step into the legendary wicket-keeper's shoes as a batter and he is ready to sacrifice his strike-

rate to play that role.

"In that way, maybe I have to get my strike rate down or.. Taking new opportunities or taking new roles is (something) I've always looked forward to. I don't mind coming in and playing the role which somewhere down the line Maahi (Dhoni) used to play," he said.

Hardik has scored 1271 runs at a strike-rate of 142.17 in 87 T20Is.

"I think at that time, I was young, and I was hitting all around the park, but now since he has gone, all of a sudden that difficult role of (bowling first up with the new ball) because if they're put under pressure, then we're chasing the game," Hardik said.

"So, I've always been (like) leading from the front and I've been working on my new-ball skills, which is helping me."

the attack to the opposition as India posted a massive 234 for 4 and then bowled out NZ for 66 for a 168-run win.

With pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah nursing an injury, Hardik has backed himself to bowl more with the new ball, having bowled 12 overs in the powerplay, conceding 86 runs for two wickets this home season.

"I had to bowl with the new ball (in T20Is) because Arshdeep (Singh)... I don't want any new guy to come and have that difficult role of (bowling first up with the new ball) because if they're put under pressure, then we're chasing the game," Hardik said.

"So, I've always been (like) leading from the front and I've been working on my new-ball skills, which is helping me."



Sai Praneeth enters Thailand Open quarters

PTI ■ BANGKOK

India's B Sai Praneeth defeated Korean qualifier Hyek Jin Jeon in a tough three-game contest to enter the quarter-finals of the Thailand Open Super 300 badminton tournament here on Thursday.

Praneeth beat his Korean opponent 24-22, 7-21, 22-20 in the men's singles second-round match.

He will next face sixth seed Li Shi Feng of China in the last-eight round.

Earlier in the day, Kiran George and Ashmita Chaliha put up gallant fights before going down in three games in the second round of their respective events.

While George, the Odisha Open champion, went down 22-20, 15-21, 20-22 to third seed Lee Cheuk Yiu of Hong Kong in men's singles, Ashmita lost 21-19, 13-21, 27-29 to sixth-seeded Den Hojmark Kjaersfeldt of Denmark in a grueling women's singles round-of-16 match.

Eighth seeds Tanisha Crasto and Ishaaan Bhattacharjee also couldn't cross the second round, losing 11-21, 10-21 to sixth seeded Chinese Feng Yan Zhe and Huang Dong Ping.

N Sikki Reddy and Rohan Kapoor also couldn't cross the second round, losing 11-21, 10-21 to sixth seeded Chinese Feng Yan Zhe and Huang Dong Ping.

He swatted three fours, including a reverse sweep but could not do much as the team collapsed to 93 all out in 32.3 overs.

Earlier, resuming at the overnight score of 144 for 4, MP was bowled out for 228 with left-arm medium-pacer Prithvi Raj Yarra picking up five wickets.

Prithvi Raj added the scalps of Harsh Gavali (1), Saransh Jain (8), Avesh Khan (15) and Kumar Kartikeya (24, 4 fours) to finish with superb figures of 5 for 26.

The home team looked in danger of being dismissed below 200 before Kartikeya and Avesh stitched a 48-run stand for the ninth wicket to stretch the score to 228.

With a big lead of 151, Andhra was expected to bat well in the second innings to put MP out of contention. However, the MP bowlers ran through the visiting team's batting unit in just 32.3 overs.

## Malan, Buttler and Archer earn consolation win for England

AP ■ KIMBERLEY



David Malan and captain Jos Buttler hit centuries to set up a 59-run win for England in the third and final ODI against South Africa at the Diamond Oval in Kimberley on Wednesday.

Malan made 118 and Buttler scored 131 in an England total of 346 for seven. South Africa were bowled out for 287 with fast bowler Jofra Archer taking a career-best six for 40.

South Africa had already clinched the series by winning the first two matches but England captain Jos Buttler said Wednesday's win was a reward for the hard work his players had put in during the short series.

"There's been some really good stuff. Guys getting hundreds and Jofra Archer was brilliant. We've got a good thing going. We're building nicely," said Buttler, who was named player of the match and player of the series.

South African captain Temba Bavuma said the series was important. "We came in under a lot of pressure. We've done ourselves justice and come closer to automatic qualification for the World Cup."

South Africa need one win in their remaining two matches against the Netherlands to move ahead of West Indies into one of the eight qualifying places in the World Cup Super

### Ahmed gets Eng white-ball call-up for B'desh tour

AP ■ LONDON

England picked teenage leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed in their white-ball squads for the first time on Thursday ahead of next month's tour of Bangladesh.

The 18-year-old Leicestershire bowler became England's youngest men's Test cricketer against Pakistan in Karachi in December and marked his debut in style with a five-wicket haul.

Ahmed had played just three first-class matches before making his Test bow, but has more experience in white-ball cricket, having appeared regularly for his county side.

Saqib Mahmood has been

included in the ODI squad for the first time since suffering a stress fracture of the back in May last year.

But there was no place for Alex Hales, with the big-hitting batsman set to honour his contract to play in the Pakistan Super League after only returning to England duty last year.

Hales was a key figure in England's T20 World Cup triumph in Australia in November after a positive test for recreational drug use came to light on the eve of the 2019 50-over World Cup led to more than three years of international exile.

England will play three ODIs and three T20s in Bangladesh from March 1 to 14. Saqib Mahmood has been

The T20 fixtures are their first in the format since Jos Buttler's men became world champions, adding to their 50-over global title.

**SQUADS**

**ODI squad:** Jos Buttler (capt/wkt), Tom Abell, Rehan Ahmed, Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Sam Curran, Saqib Mahmood, Dawid Malan, Adil Rashid, Jason Roy, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, James Vince, Chris Woakes, Mark Wood

**T20 squad:** Buttler, Tom Abell, Rehan Ahmed, Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Dawid Malan, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Chris Woakes, Mark Wood

Batting at No. 6, left-hander Ahmed top-scored with a gritty 81 off 120 balls (9x4, 2x6) as Bengal posted 328 in their first innings to secure a healthy first innings lead of 155 runs.

At stumps on Day 3, Jharkhand were ahead by just seven runs, with their second innings in disarray at 162 for 7. A total of 11 wickets tumbled on day three.

The lower order Jharkhand batters are now left battling to delay the inevitable with two more days left in the game.

Ahmed, the left-arm spin bowling all-rounder, also made an impact with the ball, dismissing Anukul Roy (40) and Jharkhand skipper Virat Singh (29) in their second innings.

Opener Aryaman Sen waged a lone battle for Jharkhand with a fighting half century (64 off 132 balls) but Ishan Porel brilliantly set him up with



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Trophy-winning former Mumbai skipper in waiting but it seems a lost battle against the eight-time champions Karnataka who are eyeing their first semi-final appearance since 2020.

Resuming on 474/5, Karnataka had their strategy clear as they bat-taled along with no declaration in sight.

Overnight centurion Gopal, who on Wednesday slammed his first Ranji Trophy century since 2017-18, continued from where he left and in the process completed 3000 runs in first-class cricket.

Vidwath Kaverappa (2/22) claimed the Uttarakhand opening duo of Avneesh Sudha (4) and Jiwanjot Singh (24), while debutant M Venkatesh dismissed former Delhi batter Kunal Chandela, who had played in their 2016-17 final against Vidarbha.

Uttarakhand also have wicket-batter Aditya Tare, the Ranji