



Opp ups the ante, to corner Govt on Adani issue again

Strategy meet of 16 parties called before House resumes today

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The ongoing Budget Session of Parliament is likely to witness another chaotic day on Monday as the Opposition parties in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha have scheduled a crucial strategy meeting on Monday before the House resumes functioning. The first two days of the Budget Session last week were a complete washout as they commenced in the backdrop of an expose on the Adani Group by the US-based Hindenburg Research. The Leaders of Opposition of both Houses will hold a protest in front of the Mahatma Gandhi statue in the Parliament complex.

Due to the solidarity of the Opposition parties on this particular matter, the discussion on the 'Motion of Thanks' to the President's Address has not started as yet in the first part of the Budget Session of Parliament which is scheduled to end on February 13.

With the Opposition being adamant on demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the Hindenburg report and the Adani Group, no business took place due to the



A file photo of Opposition members in the Rajya Sabha during the ongoing Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi, on Friday. PTI Photo

ruckus in both the Houses in the first week of the Budget Session. According to parliamentary convention, the discussion on the 'Motion of Thanks' should have started on February 2, the day after the Union Budget's presentation, but it could not happen due to the Opposition's uproar.

The Opposition parties have demanded a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe or a Supreme Court-monitored committee investigation into the Adani issue while also seeking a discussion on it in Parliament.

Sources said leaders and representatives of 16 Opposition parties have confirmed their presence for the meeting that is likely to be conducted in the chamber of Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha and

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge. A similar meeting was held last Friday in the same chamber where the Opposition framed its collective strategy to step up the attack on the Modi Government over a range of issues, particularly the Adani and China crisis.

The 16 parties include the Congress, DMK, SP, AAP, BRS, Shiv Sena, RJD, JDU, CPIM, CPI, NCP, NC, IUML, Kerala Congress (Jose Mani), KC (Thomas), and the RSP.

In the backdrop of the clamour for Opposition unity to take on the Modi juggernaut in next year's Lok Sabha elections, this is the first time that majority of the parties have come together under an umbrella to corner the BJP-led Government.

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PM's silence smacks of collusion: Cong

Party to pose three questions to Modi daily, hold nationwide stir from today

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

Mounting pressure on the Narendra Modi Government over the alleged Adani Group expose that has also stalled the functioning of Parliament, the Congress on Sunday said that it will pose three questions daily to the Prime Minister pertaining to the financial crisis until he comes out with an explanation. The Congress is also set to launch nationwide protests against the ongoing Adani issue in front of Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) offices and State Bank of India (SBI) branches on Monday. In Delhi, the protests will be held by NSUI-Youth Congress outside the banks located at Parliament police station, while party MPs will protest near the Gandhi statue inside Parliament, reported news agency ANI.

Meanwhile, on Sunday, the



Grand Old Party also took a swipe at Modi saying after the Panama Papers' leak no action was taken despite assurances from the Prime Minister, hence it wondered what fate this Hindenburg Research expose would meet at the hands of the Prime Minister and his team.

The Congress also sought to know whether Modi will direct the Central probe agencies against Adani and alleged that he has been using agencies like the ED, CBI and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) for political interests and had also tightened the noose on industrialists and the business community.

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NIA arrests 2 PFI members from Bihar

The two were conspiring to carry out targeted killings in East Champaran

RAKESH SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday arrested two suspects from Motihari, Bihar, in the Phulwarisharif Patna Popular Front of India (PFI) case, a day after conducting multiple searches in that State. The PFI is a banned terror outfit.

"With these arrests, a PFI module planning targeted killing and disruption of communal harmony has been unearthed and busted," the agency said in a statement.

The PFI was suspected to be radicalising and recruiting Indian youths for ISIS in order to carry forward the inimical agenda of the global terror group. ISIS on its part has opposed the ban against PFI through its propaganda magazine 'Voice of Khurasan'.

After conducting raids at eight locations "to disrupt a conspiracy hatched by PFI cadres to carry out targeted killing", in East Champaran district in Bihar on Saturday, the NIA arrested the two suspects on Sunday.

The two suspects had



allegedly arranged weapons and ammunition to carry out the killing. They had also reconnoitered to execute a target, the agency said without elaborating on the specifics.

"The arms and ammunition had been handed over to a PFI trainer, Yakoob, who had been conducting training sessions for PFI cadres. Some days ago, Yakoob, the PFI trainer, had posted a derogatory and inflammatory Facebook video post, which was aimed at disturbing peace and communal harmony. Other users of FB had commented and trolled this post abusively," the agency alleged. The absconding accused Yakoob and two arrested accused had identified some of those who had trolled his post and had conspired to execute the killing of targeted persons, it said.

The raids and arrests were made in the NIA case relating to involvement of PFI, its leaders and cadres in violent and unlawful activities, who had assembled for that purpose in the Phulwarisharif area of Patna. Continued on page 2

CAPSULE

MEITY ASKS MHA TO BAN CHINESE APPS

New Delhi: Following constant complaints against Chinese loan and betting apps, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) has started the process of banning 138 betting apps and 94 lending apps that had Chinese links, on the instructions of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs.

FIR AGAINST KAMBLI FOR ASSAULTING WIFE

Mumbai: Mumbai Police has registered an FIR against former Indian cricketer Vinod Kambl for allegedly assaulting and abusing his wife in an inebriated state at his home in suburban Bandra, officials said on Sunday.

SUNAK JOINS INDIA-UK SECURITY DIALOGUE

London: In a "special gesture", British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak joined a UK Cabinet Office meeting here between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and British counterpart Tim Barrow. Sunak highlighted the UK Government's support to deepen strategic partnership in areas such as trade, Defence and science and technology during the meeting.

QUETTA BLAST: PLAYERS MOVED TO SAFETY

Quetta: Pakistan Captain Babar Azam and Shahid Afridi, among others, were taken to the safety of the dressing room after a terror attack a few miles down road where they were playing on Sunday. An exhibition match of the Pakistan Super League (PSL) at the Nawab Akbar Bugti Stadium was halted for some time following an explosion in Police Lines area, which left five people injured.

Regulators must be on toes to keep market stable: FM

Adani issue a company-specific matter, says Sitharaman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI



Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that regulators Sebi and RBI should always be on their toes to keep the equity market stable and indicated that the Adani stock rout following the Hindenburg report was a company specific issue.

She said banks and insurance companies are "not over-exposed" to any one company and assured that Indian markets are very well managed by its regulators. "Yes, there have been occasional blips in the market, maybe small or big, but they do address issues like

that. And I strongly believe that our regulators are seized of this matter," Sitharaman said in an interview to a media house.

Adani Group stocks are witnessing a meltdown on the bourses after the US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations in a report, including fraudulent transactions and share price manipulation at the Gautam Adani-led group. The Adani group has dismissed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements.

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Mastermind of Kargil War dead

Pak's ex-military ruler Pervez Musharraf dies in Dubai; to be buried in Karachi

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD/DUBAI

Pakistan's wily former military ruler General Pervez Musharraf, the architect of the Kargil War in 1999, died on Sunday in Dubai after battling an incurable disease.

Musharraf, 79, who lived in self-imposed exile in the UAE to avoid criminal charges against him in Pakistan, died after a prolonged illness at the American Hospital in Dubai.

He was suffering from amyloidosis, a rare disease caused by a build-up of an abnormal protein called amyloid in organs and tissues throughout the body, according to his family.

In a statement issued immediately after Musharraf's death, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistan military,

said that Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee General Sahir Shamshad and all the services chiefs express their heart-felt condolences.

"May Allah bless the departed soul and give strength to the bereaved family," it said. Musharraf's family has filed an application in the Pakistani Consulate in Dubai to shift the former military leader's body to Pakistan.

A special jet will fly to Dubai from Nur Khan airbase in Rawalpindi to bring Musharraf's mortal remains back to Pakistan. Musharraf will be buried in a Karachi graveyard, confirmed his family sources.

His illness came to light in 2018 when his party - the All Pakistan Muslim League (APML) - announced that the former military ruler was suffering from amyloidosis.

In June last, he was hospitalised in Dubai for three weeks. "Going through a difficult stage where recovery is not possible and organs are malfunctioning. Pray for ease in his daily living," his family said at the time in a statement after the news of his demise had started



In this Sunday, July 15, 2001 file photo, Pakistan's then President Pervez Musharraf poses with his wife Begum Sehba at Taj Mahal in Agra. PTI Photo

ed circulating on social media.

Musharraf was the main architect of the Kargil War that took place months after then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed a historic peace accord with his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lahore.

After his misadventure in Kargil, Musharraf deposed the then Prime Minister Sharif in a bloodless coup in 1999 and ruled Pakistan from 1999 to 2008 in various positions — first as the

chief executive and later as the President. Born in a middle-class family of Urdu-speaking Mohajir parents in Delhi in 1943, Musharraf migrated to Pakistan with his family after the Partition in 1947.

Pakistan's last military dictator died on Sunday as a forgotten man in politics after spending his final years in self-exile in the UAE to avoid criminal charges against him in his country.

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US shoots down Chinese spy balloon

America rushes to recover debris, China vows revenge

PTI ■ WASHINGTON/BEIJING

The US military has downed the suspected Chinese spy balloon over the Atlantic Ocean and launched a mission to recover all the equipment from its debris, drawing a strong reaction from China which on Sunday warned of repercussions over America's use of force against its civilian unmanned airship.

At the direction of President Joe Biden, the US military at 2.39 PM EST on Friday shot down the Chinese surveillance balloon in the Atlantic Ocean, some six miles (9.65 kms) away from the US shores in South Carolina, with no damage to the life and properties of Americans, a senior Defence official told



In this photo provided by Chad Fish, the remnants of a large balloon drift above the Atlantic Ocean, with a fighter jet and its contrail seen below it.

AP/PTI

reporters in Washington. Fighter aircraft from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia inspired a single missile into the balloon, causing it to crash into the ocean within the US territorial airspace, said the official, adding that as of now there are no indications that any people including US military personnel, civilian aircraft or maritime vessels were harmed in any way.

"I told them to shoot it down," Biden told reporters in Hagerstown, Maryland.

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President Droupadi Murmu with Chief Justice of India Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and judges of the Supreme Court during their visit to Amrit Udyan on the premises of Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi, on Sunday PTI Photo

Cracks in budding cricketers' future

Cracks in Doda buildings force sports club to close its doors to youngsters

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

For about two years now a group of young players in the age bracket of 14 to 16 years have been practicing their cricketing skills in a private sports club managed by a young cricketer Yawar Khan in Thathri area of landlocked Doda district.

During this period some of these budding cricketing stars shone with their spectacular performances in the local club level cricket and also won lau-

rels for themselves and more importantly for their families who were toiling hard to help them realise their dream of making it big on the 22-yard pitch. Unfortunately, for the past one week none of these players have played a shot or delivered a dream spell of yorkers and bouncers on their favourite practice pitch inside Khan Sports Club, Thathri.

Speaking to *The Pioneer* over telephone from Thathri, Khan, who is himself a right handed batsman and is currently preparing for his upcoming Ranji trials said, "After several residential structures, constructed on a steep mountain slope, developed cracks in the area, the sports club was also closed down to prevent any mishap".

"We never wanted to take any chance as children from far

off villages are camping here in Thathri for their studies and training purposes".

On Friday the district administration had relocated 19 families from the Nayi Basti area after several structures were declared unsafe by the team of experts. A team of scientists from the Geological Survey of India visited Thathri to follow up on the issue of land subsidence and took samples.

Referring to the ground situation, Khan told *The Pioneer*, "I was myself in New Delhi in connection with my practice. I returned home after I came to know about these cracks". He said on Saturday morning when he visited the club he noticed several cracks had surfaced inside the sports club as well. "Without wasting time I immediately removed the astroturf, bowling machine and

speed gun and informed the club members about this development. They were all disturbed and feeling sad as they won't be able to practice unless some alternate arrangements were made," he said.

Khan, who is himself playing cricket since 2017 and has played in tournaments organised by Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association, had set up the sports club to groom local cricketing talent. To provide a stimulating environment to these young lads Khan had pasted several posters of cricketing heroes inside the hall to motivate them. Khan said, around 15 players are receiving training free of cost as their families could not afford the fee. He said around 50 players are enrolled in the club and practice in the evening.

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KCR calls for Govt of farmers

Says ‘water wars’ between States being encouraged

PTI ■ NANDED

Telangana Chief Minister and Bharat Rashtra Samithi president K Chandrasekhar Rao on Sunday alleged "wars" between states over water were being encouraged and targeted the Centre on the import of coal and the Adani Group "scam" as he gave a call for installing a "Kisan Sarkar" in the first rally of BRS outside the southern state.

Rao promised to revolutionise water policy for the country if elected to power and implement welfare schemes for farmers and Dalits. He said the current trend of privatisation in the power sector will be reversed and women's representation of up to 33 per cent will be mandatory in the state Assemblies and Councils.

Taking a dig at the BJP-led NDA government's 'Make in India' initiative at the public meeting at Nanded in Maharashtra, Rao, who spoke in Hindi, said it has become a 'Joke in India' as there are China bazaars in every street (in the country)

Amid talks of an alternative front to challenge the BJP in the 2024 elections, Rao hinted at taking "like-minded people" along when he addressed a presser.

Maharashtra has recorded the highest number of farmers'

suicides in the country and the time has come for peasants to take the reins, he said.

"That's why BRS's slogan is 'Abki ki baar, kisan sarkar' (This time around, a government for the farmers). If we unite, it is not impossible. In our country, farmers constitute more than 42 per cent and if the number of farm labourers is also added to that it will be more than 50 per cent which is sufficient to form the government," Rao told the rally where leaders belonging to various political parties joined BRS.

Rao, popularly known as KCR, welcomed the leaders by offering them pink scarves.

Earlier in the day, he visited the famous Nanded gurdwara.

Rao said if BRS comes to power, the Telangana government's flagship Dalit welfare scheme 'Dalit Bandhu' (grant of Rs 10 lakh to each household) would be implemented across the country with 25 lakh households per year and also Telangana's 'Rythu Bandhu' (for the welfare of farmers) will be implemented throughout the country.

"India is a country of intellectuals and not fools. When the Emergency was imposed in the country (in 1975), during that time on a call given by 'Loknayak' Jayaprakash Narayan, (socialist leader of the



anti-Emergency movement), the entire country got united and rejected the great leaders of that time. Today, the time has come. 75 years is a long period. Farmers should also be able to write and make rules. You have to make 'kisan sarkar,' he said.

There are several rivers like Krishna and Godavari flowing in Maharashtra. Even then, why is there a water shortage in Maharashtra, he questioned.

"Why there is a scarcity of water in Maharashtra? Who is responsible for it? Think over it. Congress ruled the country for 54 years and BJP ruled for 16 years. These two parties are 'kasooravaar' (guilty). I want farmers' suicides to stop. If a farmers' government is formed then the water problem for drinking and irrigation will be solved," Rao said.

He said even after 75 years of the country's independence and after so many govern-

ments, Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers at the helm, the country continues to face drinking water issues, irrigation woes and power shortages.

He said within the next 10 days, the BRS party vehicles will go to every village in all 288 Assembly constituencies in Maharashtra to form farmers' committees.

"We will visit the birthplace of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj at Shivneri, take blessings and pledge to make a farmers' government. The process to make farmers' committees in entire Maharashtra will begin," he said.

Speaking at a media briefing after the rally, Rao said the BRS aims to change the water policy and bring in a new mechanism for water supply in the country.

"Why are water wars between states being encouraged when there is adequate water to irrigate every acre of land in India?" he asked.

Maha CM appeals to Pawar, State Cong chief for unopposed Assembly bypolls in Pune

PTI ■ THANE

Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde on Sunday said he has requested NCP president Sharad Pawar and leaders of Congress to honour the political tradition in the state to ensure unopposed bypolls to the seats that fall vacant due to the death of sitting lawmakers.

The byelections to Kasba Peth and Chinchwad constituencies in Pune, scheduled for February 26, were necessitated due to the death of MLAs Mukta Tilak and Laxman Jagtap, respectively. Both of them belonged to the BJP.

The results of these bypolls will be declared on March 2.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which shares power with Balasahebchandra Shiv Sena led by Shinde, on Saturday announced the candidature of Hemant Rasane from Kasba Peth constituency and Ashwini Jagtap, widow of Laxman Jagtap, from Chinchwad seat in Pimpri-Chinchwad township.

Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), an alliance of Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Congress, has so far not declared its candidates for the



byelections.

"I spoke with NCP Chief Sharad Pawar, Leader of Opposition Ajit Pawar, state NCP chief Jayant Patil, his Congress counterpart Nana Patole, and MNS president Raj Thackeray on Saturday.

"I requested them that the tradition of the unopposed election of candidates fielded from the seats that fall vacant due to the death of sitting representatives be upheld," Shinde told reporters in Kalyan.

He recalled the BJP had withdrawn its nominee for the Andheri assembly bypoll in Mumbai last year on the appeal made by Sharad Pawar and Raj Thackeray.

The BJP's move ensured that Rutuja Latke, the candidate for the Uddhav faction of the Shiv Sena, sailed through comfortably.

That byelection was necessitated by the death of Latke's husband and Shiv Sena legislator Ramesh Latke in May.

Rijiju supports view that advocates with political affiliation can become judges

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Law Minister Kiren Rijiju on Sunday appeared to support the view that lawyers with political affiliation can become judges.

This comes amid a debate on the issue following a recent recommendation by the Supreme Court Collegium.

Rijiju retweeted a post by Supreme Court advocate and former governor Swaraj Kaushal who said that in the past too, sitting members of Parliament representing political parties had been elevated as high court judges.

Justices K S Hegde and Baharul Islam were both sitting Congress MPs when they were

appointed as HC judges. Justice V R Krishna Iyer was a Cabinet Minister in Kerala. Once you take the oath of office, you have to live by the oath," Kaushal had tweeted a couple of days ago.

Kaushal tagged a news report which said that Madras High Court advocates had urged the SC Collegium to recall its proposal to elevate Victoria Gowri, who had been associated with the BJP, as a high court judge citing her alleged remarks against minorities and political affiliation.

According to reports, another group of lawyers supported judgeship for her citing her hard work and commitment to the profession.

Pope planning India, Mongolia trips after Lisbon, Marseille

AP ■ ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE

Pope Francis said Sunday he is planning to visit India next year and is studying a possible trip to Mongolia later in 2023 in what would be a first for a Pope.

Pope Francis outlined his upcoming travel schedule during his flight back to Rome from South Sudan.

He confirmed that he would be in Lisbon, Portugal for World Youth Day the first week of August and would participate in a Sept. 23 meeting of Mediterranean bishops in Marseille, France.

He said there was "the possibility" that he would fly from Marseille to Mongolia, which would be a first for a Pope.

Cracks in budding...

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To provide better training

facilities the club was equipped with an indoor and outdoor astroturf, bowling machine, box net and speed gun facilities.

Son of a school principal, Khan was supported by his family and friends to start this training facility. Praying for the well-being of families relocat-

ed to safer areas, Khan also made a passionate appeal to the administrators of Jammu and Kashmir Cricket Association to support him and help him find a new piece of land where he can raise the training facility and restart his sports club at the earliest.

US shoots down Chinese spy...

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"On Wednesday, when I was briefed on the balloon, I ordered the Pentagon to shoot it down as soon as possible. They decided -- without doing damage to anyone on the ground -- the best time to do that was as it got over water, outside within the 12-mile limit," Biden said.

Responding to the downing of the balloon, China expressed strong dissatisfaction and opposition towards the US use of force to attack China's civilian unmanned airship, State-run Xinhua news agency cited a statement from the Chinese Foreign Ministry as saying on Sunday.

"The US insisting on the use of force is an obvious overreaction and a serious violation of international practice. China will resolutely uphold the relevant company's legitimate rights and interests, at the same time, reserving the right to take further actions in response," said the Foreign Ministry statement in Beijing.

The Chinese side has, after verification, repeatedly informed the US side of the civilian nature of the airship and conveyed that its entry into the US due to force majeure

was totally unexpected, the statement said, noting the Chinese side has clearly asked the US side to properly handle the matter in a calm, professional and restrained manner.

Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin said that at the direction of President Biden, fighter aircraft assigned to US Northern Command successfully brought down the high-altitude surveillance balloon launched by and belonging to the People's Republic of China (PRC) over the water off the coast of South Carolina in US airspace.

"The balloon, which was being used by the PRC in an attempt to surveil strategic sites in the continental United States, was brought down above US territorial waters," Austin said.

China has claimed that the balloon was merely a weather research "airship" that had been blown off course.

This action of downing the balloon of the size of three buses was taken in coordination, and with the full support, of the Canadian Government. Defence officials told US media the debris landed in 14m of water - shallower than they had expected - near Myrtle Beach,

South Carolina.

The military is now trying to recover debris which is spread over seven miles (11 km).

The Pentagon official told reporters that they took immediate steps to protect against the balloon's collection of sensitive information mitigating its intelligence value to China.

By shooting down the balloon, it addressed the surveillance threat posed to military installations and further neutralise any intelligence value it could have produced, preventing it from returning to China.

"In addition, shooting the balloon down could enable the US to recover sensitive PRC equipment. While we took all necessary steps to protect against the PRC surveillance balloon collection of sensitive information of the surveillance balloons overflight of US territory, which was of intelligence value to us," the official said without divulging much of the information.

"I can't go into more detail, but we were able to study and scrutinise the balloon and its equipment, which has been valuable. The Chinese officials have themselves acknowledged the high-altitude surveillance

balloon which has been useful to the People's Republic of China," said the official.

Now that the balloon has been shot down, the focus has shifted to the recovery mission, which is already underway.

Multiple vessels are on the spot along with the divers, to go down if needed. The US has also deployed unmanned vessels that can go down to get the structure and lift it back up on the recovery ship, said the official. FBI officials are also on board as well as other counterintelligence authorities to categorise and assess the platform itself.

According to the second senior defence official, the Pentagon has been tracking this high-altitude balloon for some time. It entered Alaska on January 28. It then entered into Canadian airspace on January 30 and re-entered US airspace over Northern Idaho on January 31.

"With confidence, the high-altitude balloon was a PRC surveillance balloon. We assessed that it did not pose a threat at any time to civilian air traffic and because of the altitude of the balloons. We also assess it did not pose a military or kinetic threat to

US people or property on the ground, although we were constantly updating both of those assessments and prepared to take it out if that threat profile changed," said the official.

The Chinese authorities have denied it is a spying aircraft, and instead said it was a weather ship blown astray.

"We're also looking at the intel value of the balloon throughout. We are going to learn more as we pick up the debris that was not likely to provide significant added value over and above other PRC intel capabilities such as satellites in low Earth orbit, for example," said the official.

But nevertheless, this balloon was clearly crossing over sensitive sites, including sensitive military sites. As such, the Pentagon took additional precautions to make sure that whatever added intelligence value was minimised.

Through constant monitoring and surveillance, the US has learned technical things about this balloon and its surveillance capabilities. "I suspect if we are successful in recovering aspects of the debris we will learn even more," said the official.

Regulators must be on toes to...

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Hindenburg released the report on January 24 -- the day on which Adani Enterprises' Rs 20,000-crore follow-on share sale opened for anchor investors, while the allegations have been rejected by the conglomerate. Though the follow on public offer (FPO) was over-subscribed, the Adani group decided to scrap it.

"I don't want to have any view on it except that the regu-

lators should act, act in time, and act to keep the market stable, act to keep India's regulatory functions at its best, whether it is the Reserve Bank, or SEBI. Sitting in the Finance Ministry, my view would be that the regulators should be always on their toes. And that is where I would comment on what's got to be done," Sitharaman said.

The Minister was replying to a question on whether the Adani group stock rout was just

a market activity, or this has happened for just one stock.

The stock price of Adani Enterprises fell by over 70 per cent from its peak of Rs 4,190 in December, last year.

Since January 24, the BSE Sensex has slumped by over 1,000 points largely driven by sell off in Adani group stocks.

Asked if the Adani issue is just a company problem, Sitharaman said: "I would think so".

Congress.

"What does the fact that a business entity you are well acquainted with faces serious allegations tell us about the quality and sincerity of your investigations?" he asked.

Jairam Ramesh further said, "

Over the years you have misused agencies like the ED, CBI and DRI to intimidate your political opponents and to punish business houses that do not fall in line with your cronies' financial interests.

"What action has been taken, if ever, to investigate the serious allegations made over

the years against the Adani Group? Is there any hope of a fair and impartial investigation under you?" he said.

"How is it possible that one of India's largest business groups, one that has been allowed to build monopolies in airports and seaports, could have escaped serious scrutiny for so long despite persistent allegations? Other business groups have been harassed and raided for much less.

Was the Adani Group essential to a dispensation that has profited from 'anti-corruption' rhetoric all of these years?" he asked.

After the December 2007 assassination of Opposition leader Benazir Bhutto, his allies suffered crushing losses in the 2008 elections, leaving him isolated.

In more than seven years in office, he oversaw a stint of economic growth while dodging at least three assassination attempts.

Musharraf won a five-year term as president in a 2002 referendum, but reneged on promises to quit as army chief until late 2007.

Musharraf's plan to return to power in 2013 was dashed when he was disqualified from running in an election won by Sharif, whom he had deposed in 1999.

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While Kharge made the demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) investigation or a Supreme Court-monitored probe, a section of the leaders also favoured an inquiry by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Shiv Sena (UT) leader and Rajya Sabha member Priyanka Chaturvedi told *The Pioneer* that so far the Opposition bench have unitedly led the charge against the Centre over the issue and if the Modi government does not budge from its rigidity and keep on ignoring the Opposition democratic demands then the

agitation shall continue for the remaining part of the budget session.

"Most of the MPs in the upper house have given adjournments notices. And it is not correct to say that Opposition did not allow to function the Parliament rather it was the government that adjourned without even hearing us," Chaturvedi said. On Friday, leaders of several opposition parties continued to submit adjournment notices in both houses of Parliament demanding an immediate discussion on the Adani Group issue as well as the border situation with China.

Congress MP in Lok Sabha Manish Tewari said, "SEBI has increased the margin money on Adani derivatives to 100%. The normal market rule is 10%-15%. This collusion between regulator & a particular industrial group raises questions about institutional integrity of the regulator & that's why a JPC is important," Tewari said.

Earlier TMC MP Mahua Moitra also questioned SEBI officer's links to billionaire Gautam Adani's family as she tweeted: "Greatest respect for ace lawyer Cyril Shroff but his daughter is married to Gautam Adani's son."

in 2005 as President to watch an India-Pakistan One-day Cricket match and in 2009 to attend a media event after shedding power.

Musharraf, the second of three brothers, spent his early years in Turkey, from 1949 to 1956, as his father Syed Musharraf-ud-din was posted in Ankara.

He joined the Pakistan Military Academy in 1961 and was commissioned into the Artillery Regiment in 1964.

He fought in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 as a young officer, and also participated in the Indo-Pak War of 1971 as a Company Commander in the Commando Battalion.

Musharraf rose to the rank of General and was appointed as the Chief of Army Staff on October 7, 1998, by then prime minister Nawaz Sharif.

He was given additional charge of the Chairman Joint Chiefs Staff Committee on April 9, 1999.

Six months later, he toppled the Sharif government and became the head of the state designated as Chief Executive.

Musharraf was living in Dubai since March 2016, when Pakistan's Supreme Court lifted a travel ban on him to seek medical treatment there.

He married Sehba Musharraf in 1968 and has a son and a daughter.

Mastermind of Kargil War...

From Page 1

During his stint as the head of the Pakistan Government, Musharraf allied with America in the war against terror after the 9/11

attacks on the US and cracked down on Islamist groups and banned dozens of radical outfits, a move that angered radicals. He even escaped assassination attempts in later years.

Nawaz Sharif's younger brother and current Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif extended condolences and sympathy to Musharraf's family.

"Praying for the forgiveness of the deceased and patience of the family," he said in a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office.

Nawaz Sharif, who was sentenced to life by a court during Musharraf's regime and was later exiled to Saudi Arabia following the intervention of the Gulf Kingdom, tweeted in Arabic a verse from Holy Quran with hashtag

PUBLIC NOTICE
Known to all through this public notice that my client **Sh. Rajbir Singh S/o Sh. Rajaram** and his wife **Smt. Premilata R/o D-112, Gali No-7, Sanjay Mahila, Bhajan Pura, Delhi-53**, have debared their elder son namely **Anil** and his wife **Anju** their all movable and immovable properties and have served all relations from them, due to their irresponsible & quarrelsome behavior as they are not under control of my clients, if any body deals with them, in that circumstances my clients shall not be responsible for the same.

ARUN RAGHAV (Advocate)
DELHI HIGH COURT
Ch. No. G-220, Karkardooma Court, Delhi

Public Notice
This is to inform General Public that Mr. Satish Dhoot has acquired the Freehold Industrial Property Bearing No. B-86, Land area measuring 133 sq. yds. i.e. 111.38 Sq. Mtrs. Built on Plot No. 66, in Block-B, Situated in the Layout Plan of Ware Housing Scheme (W.H.S), Kirti Nagar, New Delhi-110015 by way of two separate Reinforcement Deed both dated 0.16.2022 Docnos. 12865 & 12871. Now, Mr. Satish Dhoot is mortgaging the above said property with HDFC Bank Ltd. & in case anyone has any objection, the same may be raised within 07 days of this publication to Mr. Munish Dhawan/ Mr. Sudhir Jain (Advocates), Law Veritas North, Unit no 907, 9th Floor, GD-ITL Tower, (B-08), Netaji Subhas Place, Delhi-110034 or contact at 9066707172/ 9816223638 (M).

After 2 failed attempts, Mayor election today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi municipal House is set to convene on Monday to elect a mayor for the city after failing to complete the poll in two previous attempts.

As per the DMC Act 1957, the mayor and the deputy mayor are to be elected in the very first House that convenes after the civic polls. However, it's been two months since the municipal elections were held, and Delhi is not to get a mayor.

The first two sessions — held on January 6 and January 24 — were adjourned by the presiding officer without electing a mayor following a ruckus and acrimonious exchanges among the members of the BJP and the AAP.

While the first session of the 250-member House after the December 4 poll went fully in vain, in the second session, the nominated members took oath. After the oath-taking exercise, the second municipal

House was adjourned till the next date by Presiding Officer and BJP councillor Satya Sharma. While BJP members had walked out of chamber shouting anti-AAP and anti-Arvind Kejriwal slogans, the AAP members held a peaceful protest in the House for nearly five hours.

Before dispersing from the Civic Centre, senior leaders of AAP, including Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh told reporters after emerging from the House that by "not allowing" the mayoral election to take place, the BJP was "strangling democracy" and "starting a dangerous tradition".

AAP leader and party MLA Atishi had appealed to Lt Governor V K Saxena to ensure the election for mayor, deputy mayor and six members of the standing committee are held at the earliest.

Later, AAP's mayoral candidate Shelly Oberoi had moved Supreme Court on the delay in holding the mayoral election. Now, the third session of the House is slated for



Monday to elect a mayor. The civic polls were held on December 4 and the counting of votes took place on December 7.

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) had emerged as a clear winner in the polls, bagging 134 wards and ending the BJP's 15-year rule in the civic body.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won 104 wards to finish second, while Congress won nine seats in the 250-member

municipal House which will convene on February 6 for the third time after the 2022 civic polls. BJP's mayoral candidate is Rekha Gupta.

The nominees for the post of deputy mayor are —Aaley Mohammad Iqbal (AAP) and Kamal Bagri (BJP). Besides mayor and deputy mayor, six members of MCD's standing committee are also slated to be elected during the municipal House.

Debar Aldermen from voting: AAP Councillors

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The councillors of AAP on Sunday wrote to MCD's presiding officer seeking debarment of aldermen from voting in election of mayor, deputy mayor and Standing Committee on February 6, saying that if it happens, it will be an insult to the people of Delhi.

Aam Aadmi Party's 134 councillors said nominated members cannot vote in accordance with the Constitution and the DMC Act. The Delhi municipal House is set to convene on Monday to elect a mayor for the city after failing to complete the poll in two previous attempts.

The councillors have raised their concerns regarding BJP's conduct preceding the election which "shows an intention to influence and manipulate the exercise", according to the letter. "This is to reiterate that as per the Article 243 R of the Constitution of India and as given in the Proviso to Section 3 (b)(i) of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957, the nominated members (aldermen) are not entitled to vote in



the elections," the letter said. Section 3(b)(i) of the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957 states that "...The persons nominated under this-clause shall not have the right to vote in the meetings of the Corporation."

"It is, therefore, the bounden duty of the Proteem Speaker of MCD to respect the law of the land Constitution of India and ensure that these laws debarbing the nominated members from voting are implemented in letter and spirits in the ensuing election to the post of Mayor, Dy Mayor and Standing Committee of the MCD," read the letter.

"We, therefore, humbly

request you that under no circumstance, the nominated members (aldermen) be allowed to vote in the upcoming elections of Mayor, Dy Mayor and Standing Committee.

Any attempt on the part of the nominated councillors (Alderman) to vote in the ... Election will be direct affront and insult to the mandate of the people of Delhi which had sent the Aam Aadmi Party with a majority to the MCD in the 2022 elections," it added. The first two sessions — held on January 6 and January 24 — were adjourned by the presiding officer without electing a mayor following a ruckus and acrimonious exchanges among the members of the BJP and the AAP.

While the first session of the 250-member House after the December 4 poll went fully in vain, in the second session, the nominated members followed by elected members took oath. After the oath-taking exercise, the second municipal House was adjourned till the next date by the presiding officer and BJP councillor Satya Sharma.

Even Parliament has acknowledged city's air quality has improved: Kejriwal

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Even Parliament has acknowledged that the air quality in Delhi has improved significantly, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said on Sunday, citing a news report.

He credited the continued efforts of Delhiites for the improvement in the air quality.

Taking to Twitter, Kejriwal shared a screenshot of a news report which stated that the Economic Survey 2022-23 mentioned that the number of 'good', 'satisfactory' and 'moderate' air quality days increased to 197 in 2021 as compared to 108 in 2016.

"Even the country's Parliament has accepted that the air quality in Delhi is improving.

"This is the result of the continued efforts of Delhiites. Every difficult task is possible when you are determined to do it.

"Similarly, we have to further improve the air quality in future," the chief minister said in a tweet in Hindi.

LG has taken over services dept unconstitutionally: Deputy CM Sisodia: Saxena withholding appointment of 244 Govt school principals

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday accused Delhi Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena of withholding approval for the appointment of 244 government school principals and taking over the services department unconstitutionally.

Had the services department been with the Delhi government, "each school would have had its own permanent principal" today, said Sisodia who is also the city's education minister.

This comes a day after Saxena approved 126 posts of principals and deputy education officers in city government-run schools which had lapsed for "lying vacant" for more than two years. "...In a very unfortunate manner, the LG claimed that he has revived



the lapsed post of 126 principals. The reality is that the LG has held back the approval on the appointment of principals on 244 posts and asked the department to conduct an assessment study to check whether these principals are required in schools or not.

These posts had been lying vacant for over the past five years. What kind of a joke is this?" Sisodia told a press conference. Raj Niwas officials had said on Saturday that the 126 posts had lapsed due to the



"apathy and inaction of the AAP government". "This is another ridiculous 'bunch of lies' presented by the LG office.

The LG has made a mockery of the whole governance system in Delhi, just because he has unconstitutional power to control the services department.

If the LG had not taken over the Services Department unconstitutionally then today each school would have had its own permanent principal," Sisodia told a press conference.

Targeting the BJP-led Centre and Saxena, he said they are "adamant" about keeping control of the services department, but determined not to appoint principals.

"The LG even asked the services department officials to bypass the protocol of showing files to the education minister. Not only this, the LG even refused to answer the questions in Vidhan Sabha that provides the budget to the government," he said.

Sisodia said they ensured that the file for the appointment of 370 principals to the LG was sent since the administration of schools was being affected. "Since 2015, we have been sending proposals for the appointment of principals in schools, in these years the number of schools increased and the serving principals retired. The LG is making a

mockery of Delhi's education system by asking for a study on the need for Principals in schools," he alleged.

He said these schools are running under vice-principals. "The LG is bullying the Delhi government by not allowing the appointment of Principals". "It is unfortunate that a person occupying a Constitutional post is seeking a report on whether a principal is required to run the school or not," he said.

Sisodia asked the LG to "stop disrupting the work of the government on the pretext that schools should have a Principal or not". "This is not a joke but a serious issue related to running schools," he said. Sisodia said that when they came to power in 2015, the services department was under Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. "The decisions on the appointment

of principals were taken by the CM, Deputy CM and the Education Minister then. During that time we got many appointments done which were pending for a long time.

Vacancies for principals released by the UPSC were lying vacant since 2010. We sent the proposal for the appointment of Principals on 370 posts after that. As soon as the proposal was sent, the LG office took over the services department unconstitutionally," he said. Sisodia said the UPSC asked a few questions regarding the 370 posts.

"The LG had taken over the services department by then, but his office never provided satisfactory answers to the UPSC. It has been eight years since the LG is dealing with the issue of the appointment of principals but nothing has happened so far," he said.

Delhi Riots 2020: HC to hear Sharjeel's bail plea in UAPA case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court will on Monday hear a bail plea by JNU student and activist Sharjeel Imam in a UAPA case related to the alleged conspiracy behind the 2020 riots here.

Imam, who was arrested in February 2020, was on Saturday discharged along with 10 others in the 2019 Jamia Nagar violence case, with the court saying they were made "scapegoats" by police.

The plea, which was filed in April 2022 against a trial court order refusing to grant bail to Imam in the matter, is listed before a bench of Justices Siddharth Mridul and Rajnish Bhatnagar. In this case, Sharjeel Imam and several oth-



ers, including Umar Khalid, have been booked under the anti-terror law Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and provisions of the Indian Penal Code for allegedly being the "masterminds" of the February 2020 riots in the North-East Delhi, which left 53 people dead and over 700 injured.

2nd list for nursery admission in pvt schools to be out today

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A few private schools in Delhi are expected to publish the second list of shortlisted students for admission to entry-level classes on Monday with many others having already closed the process with their first list itself.

The first list was issued on January 20. President of Delhi State Public School's Management Association R C Jain said several schools do not issue a waiting list or a second list of students as the seats fill



up after the first draw of lots itself. The draw of lots is con-

ducted under videography and its footage are retained by the school. The slips are shown to the parents before being put in the box used for the draw of lots.

A child needs to be at least four years old to fill out the form for nursery admission. The age limit is five years for admission in kindergarten and at least six years for Class 1 as on March 31, 2023. The registration process for admission to entry-level classes in more than 1,800 private schools in Delhi for the 2023-24 academic

session began on December 1 and ended on December 23. The Department of Education had said that a non-refundable amount of Rs 25 can be charged as admission registration fee.

The purchase of a prospectus of a school by the parents will be optional, it had said. According to the circular, all private schools will reserve 25 per cent of seats for economically weaker sections and disadvantaged group students as well as for differently-abled children.

Prime accused in Bhalswa Dairy murder case arrested

New Delhi: A 23-year-old man, who is the prime accused in a murder case in outer Delhi's Bhalswa Dairy area last year, has been arrested by the Delhi Police's Crime Branch, officials said on Sunday.

Gautam Kumar, a resident of Bhalswa Dairy, had been absconding since the incident last October. Police said his two accomplices — Istekar alias Rocky and Ajay—were already arrested and efforts on to nab a fourth accused, identified as Rizwan.

The murder took place over a monetary dispute, they said. On how Kumar was arrested, Special Commissioner of Police (Crime) Ravindra Singh Yadav said their team received information that a person wanted in a murder case in Bhalswa Dairy area would come near Bhalswa lake. On basis of tip-off, a team was constituted and a trap was laid near Bhalswa and accused was apprehended.

2 men arrested for swindling Rlys job seekers of ₹2.68 cr

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a major breakthrough, Delhi Police's Economic Offences Wing has arrested a 67-year-old man and his 43-year-old accomplice for being part of a gang that scammed 28 people from Tamil Nadu of Rs 2.68 crore with the promise of a job and "training" them in counting trains at New Delhi Railway Station, officials said on Sunday.

Sivaraman V, who hails from Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu was arrested from government servant quarter here on Mahadev Marg, while his accomplice, Vikas Rana, who is a resident of Govindpuri, was arrested from Darjeeling where he had been hiding, they said.

Police said Sivaraman, a freelancer, was ready to do any job to make easy money while Rana, who worked at National Museum of Natural History as an educational assis-



tant but had quit his job in March 2022. At least three teams of EOW worked to crack the case, police said.

Police have identified a 35-year-old Satender Dubey from Bihar as the kingpin of the gang. He lived in southwest Delhi's Uttam Nagar. Dubey, along with an accomplice of his, 24-year-old Rahul Chaudhary, are on the run, police said.

According to Rana, it was Dubey who had contacted him to place two people in contractual positions in his department at the Natural Museum of Natural.

4 gang members held for blackmailing man in sexual assault case

New Delhi: Four members of a gang, including one who posed as a policeman, were arrested for allegedly trying to extort Rs 10 lakh from a 46-year-old man by threatening to implicate him in a false case of sexually assaulting a minor, police said on Sunday. The accused were identified as Sunny Suneja, Md Shafiq,

Deepak Budhiraja and Hemlata. Police said the matter came to light on January 29 when a resident of Shahdara filed a complaint at Seemapuri police station.

In his complaint, the man stated that he came across a number on the internet dialling and he got in touch with a lady who introduced herself as a

masseuse. They later became friends. The next day, he met the lady at Signature Bridge. The complainant said she kept texting and calling him on WhatsApp, a senior police officer said.

The complainant said, "On January 29, the alleged lady asked him to meet him at DTC Depot Seemapuri. SR

Cops plan to offer reward for helping identify 3 bodies

New Delhi: The outer-north district of the Delhi Police has planned to suitably reward those who would be able to help investigators in identification of the bodies of a woman and two children which were found near the railway tracks in Narela a few days ago, officials said on Sunday. They are planning to reward Rs 10,000 to

those who can help police in identifying the bodies. However, this has been decided at the district level but the reward amount has not been made official yet, the officials said.

The three bodies were found near the railway tracks in northwest Delhi's Narela area on January 28, police said. SR

NDMC to organise G-20 food festival on Feb 11-12

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) will organize a G-20 Food Festival on the themes "Taste the World" and "International year of Millets" at Talkatora Stadium next week.

NDMC has invited 29 countries to participate in the Food Festival, to be held on February 11 and 12. "The main purpose of the Food Festival is for the public to enjoy food delicacies of G-20 member countries and guest countries. All the G-20 member nations and guest countries are invited to participate in this food festival," the



Delhi walls get murals as the city is decorated ahead of the forthcoming G-20 Summit, in New Delhi on Sunday, Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

NDMC said in a statement. Required space or stall and other on-site logistic support will be provided to all interested G20 members and guest countries, the civic body said.

Those interested are required to bring their own chefs, manpower and materials for the preparation of various delicacies. The food prepared may be sold to visitors on a payment basis, it said.

The food festival would generate awareness on international cuisines as well as will provide education and guidance on nutritional health and food preparation.

G20 posters, logos & banners displayed in Metro trains

New Delhi: Thematic posters hailing India's year-long presidency of the G20 have been put up inside coaches of several Delhi Metro trains, and the DMRC is working on prominently displaying the logo of the influential bloc at all stations on its network.

India assumed the presidency of the G20 on December 1 last. Over 200 meetings are planned to be

hosted at 55 locations across country, that will end with a summit in Delhi in September.

Many government complexes, public buildings and offices have already displayed posters, banners and standees in their premises, bearing logo, and theme of the G20 under India's presidency — 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' or 'One Earth, One Family, One Future'. SR



A Delhi garden decorated with the Tulip flowers for G-20 Summit, in New Delhi on Sunday, Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

Know 5 new judges of SC who will take oath today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Five new judges appointed to the Supreme Court will take the oath of office Monday morning.

Three of them — Justice Pankaj Mithal, Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice P V Sanjay Kumar — were the chief justices of the high courts of Rajasthan, Patna and Manipur respectively. The other two are Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah of the Patna High Court and Justice Manoj Misra of the Allahabad High Court.

Here is what you need to know about the five new judges:

JUSTICE PANKAJ MITHAL

Justice Mithal, whose parent cadre is the Allahabad High Court, had been serving as the Chief Justice of the Rajasthan High Court since October 14 last year.

Born on June 17, 1961, Justice Mithal is a 1982 commerce graduate from Allahabad University. He completed his LLB in 1985 from Meerut College and enrolled as an advocate in the Bar Council of Uttar Pradesh the same year.

He started practising in the Allahabad High Court in 1985 and served as the standing counsel for the Uttar Pradesh Avas Evam Vikas Parishad. He was also the standing counsel of Dr B R Ambedkar University, Agra, between 1990 and February 2006.

Justice Mithal was elevated as an additional judge of the Allahabad High Court on July 7, 2006, and took oath as a permanent judge on July 2, 2008. He took oath as the Chief Justice of the Common High Court for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the



Combo photo of newly-appointed Supreme Court judges; (L-R) Rajasthan HC Chief Justice Pankaj Mithal, Patna HC Chief Justice Sanjay Karol, Manipur HC Chief Justice P.V. Sanjay Kumar, Patna HC judge Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah, and Allahabad HC judge Justice Manoj Misra

PTI photo

Union Territory of Ladakh on January 4, 2021.

JUSTICE SANJAY KAROL

Justice Karol, the second senior most judge who will take oath on Monday, belonged to the Himachal Pradesh HC cadre. He was the Chief Justice of the Patna High Court at the time of his elevation to the Supreme Court.

Justice Karol was born on August 23, 1961. An alumnus of the prestigious St. Edward School of Shimla, he graduated with honours in History from Government Degree College, Shimla.

A native of Kangra district, he obtained his degree in law from Himachal Pradesh University and enrolled as an advocate in 1986. Justice Karol practised in various courts, including the Supreme Court. He has specialised in matters related to Constitution, taxation, corporate, criminal and civil cases.

He was designated as a senior advocate in 1999.

Justice Karol was also the advocate general of Himachal Pradesh from 1998 to 2003 and was elevated as a judge of the Himachal Pradesh High Court on March 8, 2007. He was appointed as acting Chief Justice of the high court with

effect from April 25, 2017. He was appointed as the Chief Justice of the Tripura High Court on November 9, 2018, and of the Patna High Court on November 11, 2019.

JUSTICE P V SANJAY KUMAR

Justice Kumar, who originally belonged to the Telangana High Court, is the third in seniority in the list of five judges. He was the Chief Justice of the Manipur High Court when his name was cleared for elevation to the Supreme Court.

Born on August 14, 1963, he did his graduation in Commerce from Nizam College, Hyderabad and secured his LLB degree from Delhi University in 1988. Justice Kumar enrolled as a member of the Bar Council of Andhra Pradesh in August 1988 and served as a government pleader in the Andhra Pradesh High Court from 2000 to 2003.

He was elevated to the bench as an additional judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on August 8, 2008, and assumed charge as a permanent judge of the court on January 20, 2010. Justice Kumar assumed charge as a judge of the High Court of Punjab and

Haryana on October 14, 2019. He took oath as the Chief Justice of the Manipur High Court on February 14, 2021.

JUSTICE AHSANUDDIN AMANULLAH

Justice Amanullah of the Patna High Court is the fourth judge in the list who has been appointed for the judgeship in the apex court.

Born on May 11, 1963, he enrolled with the Bihar State Bar Council on September 27, 1991, and was standing counsel for the state government from March 2006 to August 2010.

He was a government advocate in the Patna High Court till his elevation as a judge in the same court on June 20, 2011. He was transferred to the Andhra Pradesh High Court on October 10, 2021, and transferred back to the Patna High Court on June 20, 2022.

JUSTICE MANOJ MISRA

Justice Misra was born on June 2, 1965. He enrolled as an advocate on December 12, 1988, and was elevated as an additional judge of the Allahabad High Court on November 21, 2011. He took oath as a permanent judge on August 6, 2013.

India, Canada to review bilateral ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Canada will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral ties during Foreign Minister Melanie Joly's two-day visit to New Delhi beginning Monday. She will hold extensive discussions with her Indian counterpart S Jaishankar and the visit aims to deepen bilateral ties and foster stronger partnerships.

Incidentally, the visit comes at a time when alleged Khalistani supporters have indulged in some anti-India activities in Canada and recently vandalised a temple.

It is Joly's first visit to India as the foreign minister and both the sides are optimistic about ties between the two countries witnessing further cementing in all the spheres.

Announcing the schedule of her visit, Canada's foreign ministry said late Saturday the upcoming tour is positive. "Because of its strategic, economic and demographic importance in the world, India is a critical partner in Canada's pursuit of its objectives under our Indo-Pacific strategy (IPS) and on the global stage," it said.

Joly will be in New Delhi on February 6 and 7 and hold a bilateral meeting with Jaishankar. The official release said the objective is "to deepen bilateral ties and foster stronger partnerships". Joly will "build on the two countries' shared tradition of democracy and pluralism, a common commitment to a rules-based international system and multilateralism, mutual interest in expanding our commercial relationship and strengthening our extensive



and growing people-to-people connections," it said.

"Both ministers will identify areas where Canadian and Indian interests converge and where the two countries could further collaborate on global and regional issues, especially as India holds the presidency of the G20 this year," it stated.

"As I depart for my first official trip to India, I'm looking forward to strengthen our relationship, putting our Indo-Pacific Strategy into action," Joly tweeted on Saturday evening.

Prior to this visit, Joly has twice met Jaishankar in person on the margins of multilateral events and they have also had two telephonic conversations.

"The wide-ranging bilateral cooperation between Canada and India spans the fields of science and technology, finance, education, defence and security," the Canadian government said.

The release added that Joly will also engage with key stakeholders in India's business and civil society communities regarding Canada's "robust agenda" with India under the IPS. The Indo-Pacific region and how India and Canada can productively collaborate in this sphere will be the "key focus" of the bilateral talks, officials said.

'3 lakh doses of intranasal Covid vax sent to hospitals'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bharat Biotech dispatched three lakh doses of its intranasal Covid-19 vaccine to some hospitals two days ago, the company's executive chairman Krishna Ella said on Sunday.

He was speaking on the sidelines of an event here at which a bilateral agreement was



signed between the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison Global Health Institute (GHI) and the Ella Foundation for the establishment of the first-ever UW-Madison One Health Centre in Bengaluru.

INCOVACC, the world's first intranasal Covid-19 vaccine, was launched on January 26. The vaccine is now available on CoWIN and priced at Rs 800 for private markets and Rs 325 for the government of India and state governments.

"We dispatched three lakh doses of the world's first intranasal Covid-19 vaccine to some hospitals two days ago," Ella said.

On whether Bharat Biotech is looking at exporting the vaccine, he said some countries and international agencies are approaching the company for the intra-nasal vaccine.

INCOVACC is also the world's first intranasal Covid-19 vaccine to receive approval for the primary 2-dose schedule, and as a heterologous booster dose for adults.

Ella said the UW-Madison One Health Centre in Bengaluru is expected to be operational by the end of 2023.

It will advance the development and production of new vaccines for India. Furthermore, the partnership

will enable collaboration across disciplines and geographic boundaries, provide Indian students and researchers access to UW expertise and training, and build research capacity in India, he said.

"Both Ella Foundation and UW-Madison GHI share a common vision to advance innovation in science, research, and knowledge sharing. Establishing the UW-Madison Global One Health Centre holds great significance as it will advance global health through research, education, and community engagement by facilitating student, faculty exchanges, research and education," he added.

UW-Madison GHI director Jorge Osorio said, "We are energised by the opportunity to partner with the Ella Foundation to bring UW knowledge and expertise to expand innovative and impactful health initiatives outside Wisconsin to India."

The India One Health Centre joins a global network that includes Africa and Latin America and will open new opportunities for research, education, and provide actionable outcomes to benefit humans, animals, and ecosystems that advance equitable and sustainable health across India and the world.

Plea seeking review of verdict on demonetisation filed in SC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A plea seeking a review of the judgement that upheld the Centre's 2016 decision to demonetise Rs 1,000 and Rs 500 currency notes was filed in the Supreme Court on Sunday.

A five-judge Constitution bench, in a 4:1 majority verdict, on January 2 had given its stamp of approval, saying the decision-making process was neither flawed nor hasty.

The review plea was filed by lawyer ML Sharma, one of the 58 petitioners who had moved the top court challenging the demonetisation exercise announced on November 8, 2016.

Sharma, in his review



plea, contended that the bench did not consider his "written arguments" in its verdict on the batch of pleas which led to "serious injustice and miscarriage of justice".

"It is, therefore, most respectfully prayed that ... May be pleased to: (i) Review the Judgment..." it said.

Observing that the scope of judicial review in matters of

economic policy is "narrower", a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice S A Nazeer, since retired, had said there has to be great restraint in matters of economic policy and the court will not interfere with any opinion formed by the government if it is based on the relevant facts and circumstances or on expert advice.

Justice B V Nagarathna, however, had dissented and said the demonetisation of the Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 currency notes was "vitiated and unlawful". The top court's judgment came on a batch of 58 petitions including the one filed by lead petitioner Vivek Narayan Sharma challenging the demonetisation exercise.

'Huge opportunity': Sqdn Ldr Avani on becoming IAF's first woman pilot to participate in aerial wargame abroad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Weeks after scripting history by becoming the first woman fighter pilot of the Indian Air Force (IAF) to take part in an aerial wargame abroad, Squadron Leader Avani Chaturvedi says flying combat aircraft is exciting and the sky is the limit for young people wanting to pursue a career in the force.

Chaturvedi, a Su-30MKI pilot, was part of the IAF contingent that participated in a 16-day mega air combat exercise with the Japan Air Self Defence Force (JASDF) at the Japanese airbase of Hyakuri from January 12 to 26.

"It is always a good experience to participate in flying exercises, especially with a for-

eign air force. This is more so because this was the first time that I was involved in an international exercise. It was a huge opportunity for me and a wonderful learning experience," Chaturvedi told PTI.

The exercise, "Veer Guardian-2023", was the first such wargame between the IAF and the JASDF with a focus on air-combat manoeuvring, interception and air-defence missions.

"I would like to convey to all the young, aspiring girls and boys that the sky is the limit for you. The IAF is a wonderful career option and flying fighter aircraft is really exciting," Chaturvedi said.

"I would like to tell all IAF aspirants that you should set your eyes on the goal and go for



it with dogged determination," she said when asked how arduous was the path for her to become a fighter pilot.

A B.Tech in computer science, Squadron Leader Chaturvedi was among the first three women fighter pilots commissioned into the IAF in June 2016. The other two were Bhawana Kanth and Mohana Singh.

"This exercise has given us a great opportunity to learn from each other. The endeavour is to understand each other's working philosophies, planning processes or any good practice in general. It is a mutual learning exercise," Chaturvedi said.

According to officials, women fighter pilots in the IAF had participated in air exercises within the country, but this was for the first time that one of them was part of a military drill abroad.

In February 2018, Chaturvedi, who hails from Madhya Pradesh, became the first Indian woman to fly a fighter aircraft solo when she flew a MiG-21 bison. She undertook the sortie from the IAF's Jamnagar base.

Chaturvedi, Kanth and Singh were commissioned into the IAF in 2016, less than a year after the government decided to open the fighter stream for women on an experimental basis.

The IAF currently has around 20 women fighter pilots.

Last year, the defence ministry said it had decided to convert the experimental scheme for the induction of women fighter pilots in the IAF into a permanent one. In 2020, the Navy announced deploying its first batch of women pilots on the Dornier maritime aircraft. In December, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar said the Indian Navy is looking at opening all its branches for women from 2023.

'State drugs regulators should merge with Central body to ensure one quality, standard'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

All state drug regulatory bodies should be merged with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) to ensure "one quality one standard" for Indian drugs, Bharat Biotech's Executive Chairman Dr Krishna Ella has suggested.

His comments came on Sunday in the backdrop of questions being raised about the quality of Indian drugs over the past few months. The latest instance was on Friday, when the Tamil Nadu-based Global Pharma Healthcare recalled its entire lot of eye drop linked allegedly to vision loss in the US.

Before that, India-made cough syrups were allegedly linked to children deaths in the Gambia and Uzbekistan last year.

whole of Indian pharmaceutical industries cannot be sullied for a handful of cases, he said. "Even in Western countries, some of the companies are penalised on quality issues."

"There should be a single regulatory framework in India. All state drug regulatory bodies should be merged with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO)



and that will solve the problem," Ella said.

"But somewhere a political decision and commitment is required for this," he said on the sidelines of an event in which an agreement was signed between the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Madison Global Health Institute (GHI) and the Ella Foundation in Delhi for establishment of the first ever "UW-Madison One Health Centre" in Bengaluru.

It is important to centralise the system, he said. "The licences for the cough syrups that were under question in the recent cases were given by state regulatory bodies, not by the Central (body)".

A day after its plant was inspected by Indian drug regulatory bodies over allegations that its eye drop was linked to vision loss in the US, Tamil Nadu-based Global Pharma Healthcare on Saturday was asked to stop manufacturing all ophthalmic products till the inquiry is completed.

Ombudsman, ethical officer should be appointed in sports bodies: NHRC

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Months before the accusation of sexual harassment against Wrestling Federation of India President by some wrestlers of international repute rocked the sports world, the NHRC has suggested a string of measures including appointment of Institutional Ombudsman and Ethical Officer in sport bodies at national, state and district level to address the grievances of the sportspersons.

The human rights body has also recommended the Centre to undertake periodic audits by an independent expert agency to assess adherence to 'National Sports Development Code of India' and 'Human Rights Strategic Framework' by all national sports federations and made the reports public to ensure transparency.

Also, the Government shall initiate "measures to promote sports literacy. These measures may include, among others, development and promotion of basic alphabetical sports booklets, inclusion of modules of sports in school curriculum," the NHRC has suggested.

On its part, the NHRC has plans to develop a "Handbook on Human Rights in Sports" and translate the same in all 22 rec-

ognized languages.

A module on "Human Rights in Sports" for incorporation in training courses for coaches organised by the Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports and its Centres and similar courses run at the State level institutions for coaches and the share the same with various state and central government sports bodies is also on its agenda.

In this regard, the NHRC in collaboration with Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports may organize Training of Trainers (ToT) on these modules.

The NHRC has also asked the State Government and the Centre to take measures to create awareness among various stakeholders about the Human Rights Framework established by the International Olympic Committee.

The NHRC and the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports may endeavor to enlist a renowned sport celebrity to work (on pro-bono basis) as ambassadors of the human rights body for protection and promotion of human rights in sports sector.

The Centre should explore the feasibility to earmark minimum 10 per cent Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds for promotion of the sports sec-



tor, says the human rights body.

These suggestions are based on the outcome of a meeting held November last with human rights and sports experts and chaired by Dr D.M. Mulay, NHRC member.

Others who attended the meeting from NHRC were HC Chaudhary, Justice Arun Mishra (Chairperson) members MM Kumar, Rajiv Jain, Devendra Kumar Singh (Secretary General), Manoj Yadava, Director General.

Shri Kunal, Joint Secretary (Sports - Development), Dpt. of Sports, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Rohit Bhardwaj, Secretary, Sports Authority of India, Col. Raj Singh Bishnoi, Senior Executive Director & Head, Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports, Patiala and Dr. Sudarshan Pathak, Chairperson, Hockey India Sexual Harassment Committee also attended the meet.

Sports finally being viewed from athletes' perspective in country, says PM Modi

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said his government is encouraging youngsters to pursue a career in sports and the ministry's budget has been increased almost three times since 2014.

There was no lack of passion and talent for sports among the youth in India but it was the unavailability of resources and support from the government that created hindrances in the past, he said and underlined that these issues are now being addressed.

"In the Amrit Kaal of independence, the country is forging new definitions and creating a new order," the prime minister said, noting that sports is finally being viewed from the athletes' perspective and not from the government's.

"Our government is attentive that no youth should be left behind due to shortage of money," the prime minister said, adding the Centre is now supporting the best-performing players by providing them up to Rs 5 lakh annually. Modi was addressing virtually the 'Jaipur Mahakheh' sporting event being organised by Lok Sabha MP from Jaipur Rural and former Union minister Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore. Nothing is impossible for the youngsters of India and every objective becomes easier when the strength of their capabilities is realised and they are given adequate encouragement, the prime minister said.

He said that today's youth does not want to remain confined to just one field due to their multi-talented and multi-dimensional capabilities. "We are encouraging youngsters to pursue a career in sports. Initiatives like TOPS (Target Olympic Podium Scheme) are benefiting youngsters in preparing for major sporting events," he said.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during the 'Khel Mahakumbh' being held in Jaipur, via video conferencing, in New Delhi on Sunday

PTI

India sees 6-fold jump in voters since 1951; total electorate on Jan 1 over 95 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India has witnessed a nearly six-fold increase in the total number of voters since 1951 to over 94.50 crore this year, but almost one-third of them stayed away from exercising their franchise in the last Lok Sabha polls. This has prompted the Election Commission to walk the extra mile to bring them to the polling booths.

In 1951, when the voter lists for the first general elections were prepared, India had 17.32 crore registered electors and 45.67 per cent had turned up to exercise their franchise in the newly-born Republic.

The number of registered electors witnessed a gradual increase over the years.

In the 1957 general elections, the number of registered electors was 19.37 crore and 47.74 per cent cast their ballots to send their representatives to the Lok Sabha. Amid talks of taking the voter turnout to 75 per cent, the Election Commission has flagged the issue of the 30 crore voters who did not turn up at the polling booths in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections.

2,278 held in 3 days in Assam’s child marriage crackdown

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The Assam Police continued with its crackdown on child marriage in the state for the third day in a row, with the number of arrests touching 2,278 on Sunday.

A police statement said the arrests were made based on 4,074 FIRs across the state.

At least 139 people have been apprehended in Biswanath, followed by 130 in Bapeta and 126 in Dhubri, the statement said.

Other districts where over 100 arrests have been made are Baksa (123) and Bongaigaon and Hojai (117 each), it maintained.

Dhubri registered the highest number of FIRs against child marriages at 374 cases, followed by Hojai at 255 and



Morigaon at 224.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had on Saturday asserted that the drive against child marriage will continue till the next assembly elections in 2026.

He had said parents involved in underage marriages are currently being let off with a notice.

The CM added that men marrying girls below 14 years of age will be facing non-bailable charges, while those marrying girls between 14 to 16 years of age will be charged under bailable sections.

The state cabinet had recently approved a proposal to book men who have married girls below 14 years of age

under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Cases under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 will be registered against those who have married girls in the 14-18 years' age group, the cabinet decided.

The offenders will be arrested and the marriages declared illegal.

If the groom is below 14 years of age, he will be sent to a reform house.

Assam has a high rate of maternal and infant mortality, with child marriage being the primary cause, according to reports by the National Family Health Survey (NFHS).

An average of 31 per cent of marriages registered in the state are in the prohibited age group, the NFHS had noted.

TMC releases manifesto for Tripura polls, promises ‘Bengal model of development’

PTI ■ AGARTALA

The Trinamool Congress released its manifesto for the Tripura assembly elections on Sunday, promising 2 lakh new jobs, Rs 1,000 per month for school students in classes 4 to 8 and unemployed youths, and social welfare schemes on the lines of those in West Bengal.

The manifesto was launched a day ahead of party chief Mamata Banerjee's visit to the state. The TMC is fighting 28 assembly seats in the February 16 election.

Addressing a press conference, West Bengal education minister Bratya Basu said that if the party is voted to power in the state, it will create 2 lakh jobs in five years with 50,000 new jobs in the first year itself.

"All vacant posts in the



government departments will be filled up on mission mode," he said.

"The TMC will provide assistance of Rs 1,000 per month to jobless youths, and 10,323 retrenched teachers will also get the benefit until their legal matter is resolved," he said. The TMC promised a skill university, student credit cards and easy loans for those who

want to pursue higher education.

"Rs 1,000 annual stipend will be given to the students in classes 4 to 8," he said.

West Bengal Industries Minister Shashi Panja said the Trinamool Congress is committed to implement welfare schemes such as Kanyashri and Lakkhir Bhandar, among others, in the Northeastern

state. TMC's state in-charge Rajib Banerjee said the promises made in the manifesto will be implemented in true spirit if the party is voted to power.

"Our leaders Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek Banerjee do what they promise unlike others," he said.

Claiming that no other state in the country has seen as much growth as West Bengal in the last 11 years, he said the manifesto has been formulated in accordance with the 'Bengal model of development'.

The West Bengal chief minister will reach Tripura on Monday to lead the party's election campaign, state TMC president Pijush Kanti Biswas said, adding that during her visit, she will hold a roadshow and address a rally.

Bihar Govt's claim that State's growth higher than national average misleading: Panda

PTI ■ PATNA

BJP national vice president Bajjant Jay Panda on Sunday termed as "misleading" the Nitish Kumar Government's claim that Bihar's growth rate is higher than the national average.

Panda said there are several states that are much ahead of Bihar.

The senior BJP leader denied the allegations of the Nitish Kumar government that the Centre has reduced allocation of funds to the state and instead claimed that the state government has been unable to properly utilise central funds.

Interacting with media persons here, Panda said, "Several development works have been hampered in Bihar due to negligence of the state government which has been unable to spend funds properly, especially the Central funds."

"The central government has been releasing funds for various development activities, but Bihar government has not been able to spend it. The Bihar government's claim that the state's economic growth rate is higher than the national average is misleading. There are several other states which are ahead of Bihar", Panda said.

He denied that allegations of the 'Mahagathbandhan' government in Bihar that the Centre has reduced allocation of funds to the state government in the next financial year.

Panda said, "Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget speech for the year 2023-24 said that the Centre will continue its 50-year interest-free loans to state governments in order to aid infrastructure investment with an outlay of Rs 1.3 lakh crore. Amounts of Rs 11,830 crore

and Rs 14,186 crore were provided to states in FY21 and FY22 as 50-year interest-free loans under the Scheme for Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment. During FY23, the allocation was raised to Rs 1.05 lakh crore to give an additional impetus to capex plans by states. Therefore, such claims are baseless".

"Bihar government failed to utilise Rs 12,000 crore under the 'Har Ghar Nal Ka Jal Yojana' scheme. Despite Centre's repeated reminders, the Bihar government has so far not been able to provide land for setting up of All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Darbhanga and opening of Rs 600 crore IT park in the state. So, who is creating obstacles in the development of Bihar? It is the Nitish Kumar government that is least bothered about the development of Bihar", said Panda.

Uncertainty persists in Joshimath as residents await permanent rehabilitation

PTI ■ JOSHIMATH

It has been more than a month since Bharti Devi left her home which was damaged due to cracks after the soil began sinking in Joshimath in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand.

Now the septuagenarian spends half her day near her now-abandoned home which she misses regularly and other half at the sub-divisional office, hoping to receive some positive news about their permanent rehabilitation.

Bharti Devi is currently living in a temporary relief camp at an abandoned army barrack. She was among the first families of Joshimath whose houses became uninhabitable after the land-subsidence situation began aggravating.

"The land beneath our home began to sink on January 2 and by the very next day our house had become uninhabitable. All this happened suddenly," she said.

"We and nearly half a dozen neighbouring families picked up whatever we could from our homes and took refuge in a nearby school which was closed at that time. But now it has been opened and we have been ousted from there as well," she added.

Each night weighs heavy on her as she struggles to sleep.

The future seems uncertain for the people of Joshimath whose lives continue to reel under the impact of land subsidence that hit this city tucked away in the mountains more than a month ago.

PTI ■ SHAHDOL

Shahdol district in Madhya Pradesh has reported its second child death allegedly due to branding with a hot iron as part of a woman faith healer's traditional method to cure ailments, officials said on Sunday.

A 3-month-old girl who was admitted in the government-run medical college here on Wednesday and shifted to a private facility for treatment after being branded 20 times with a hot iron, died late Saturday night, Chief Medical and Health Officer RK Pandey said.

The child has been identified as Shubhi Kol, daughter of Suraj Kol, a resident of Samatpur village under Sinhpur police station limits, he added.



On Friday, the body of a two-and-half-month-old girl was exhumed after dying in similar circumstances.

The infant's mother, a resident of Kathotia village in Sinhpur, had told authorities the child was unwell and she took her to a woman faith healer who branded her more than 50 times with a hot iron.

The child died in Shahdol Medical College on Wednesday, officials had earlier said.

On Sunday, officials said

the services of two ASHA workers and a supervisor were terminated in the wake of these two incidents, while the faith healer has been booked.

A case has been registered against the 40-year-old woman faith healer under Indian Penal Code and Drugs and Magic Remedies Act provisions but she is yet to be arrested, Sinhpur police station in charge MP Ahirwar said.

Meanwhile, district collector Vandana Vaidya said awareness was being created against the tradition of getting children branded with hot iron to cure ailments.

The post mortem report of the child whose body was exhumed on Friday will be available in seven days, she added.

Ramdev booked for remarks at seers' meet

PTI ■ BARMER

An FIR was registered on Sunday against Yoga guru Ramdev for allegedly promoting enmity and outraging religious feelings over his provocative remarks at a meeting of seers in Rajasthan's Barmer district, police said. The FIR was registered based on a complaint filed by a local resident, Pathai Khan, a police officer said.

According to Chauhatan police station SHO Bhutaram, the case was registered under IPC sections 153A (promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion,

race, place of birth, residence), 295A (deliberate and malicious acts, intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) and 298 (uttering, words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound the religious feelings of any person).

At the meeting of seers on February 2, Ramdev accused Muslims of resorting to terror and abducting Hindu women while comparing Hinduism to Islam and Christianity.

He alleged that the two faiths were obsessed with conversion while Hinduism taught its followers to do good.

UP's Deputy CM backs Opp in caste census demand

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh's Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya has backed the opposition demand for a caste census, a move that is being viewed by analysts as a ploy to undercut the opposition plan to corner the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the issue.

"I am all for it," Keshav Prasad Maurya said, adding, "Neither me nor my party are in opposition on the subject."

Maurya said this in Unnao on Sunday.

Maurya had no answer as to why UP has not yet followed the Bihar example, where a caste

census has been announced.

Samajwadi Party was quick to join the issue, saying Maurya's statement had no meaning.

"Mere statement in favour of caste census has no meaning. This statement should come from Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. If you are sincere then resign from the BJP and join the SP," the SP in a tweet on Sunday.

In another tweet, the SP said, "By supporting the demand for a caste census, Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya has now raised questions about his own party's governments at the Centre and in UP. Akhilesh Yadav was the first to raise the



caste census demand and has since done that continuously. Now, will Yogi Adityanath tell when, like Bihar, caste census will be ordered in UP?"

The demand for a caste census -- or scientific count of castes last undertaken in 1931

-- is based on the premise that it will help the government rework social justice rollout and identify such caste groups that are unrepresented or under-represented. Socio economic caste census was conducted in 2011 but its data was not made public.

Asked about the move by Bihar's Other Backward Class parties -- Janata Dal (United) and Rashtriya Janata Dal -- to go for caste census, Keshav Prasad Maurya, a prominent OBC face of the UP BJP, said: "Caste census taken up by any state government is the prerogative of that government."

"How can I say if they are

acting against the Constitution?" he said to queries on the caste census in Bihar though he firmly made it clear that the BJP and he were not against the demand.

In its first term, the Yogi government had set up samajik nyay (social justice) survey though the survey committee report, which outlined more representation for lesser represented Dalit and OBC groups, has not been implemented yet.

The Om Prakash Rajbharled Suheldev Bhartiya Samaj Party, while parting ways with the BJP in 2019, had cited non-implementation of the social justice committee report as one of the reasons for its decision.

Bengal BJP MLA Suman joins TMC ahead of local poll

PTI ■ KOLKATA

West Bengal BJP MLA Suman Kanjilal joined the Trinamool Congress in Kolkata on Sunday, the TMC said in a statement. TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee handed over the party flag to Kanjilal, the MLA of Alipurduar in the northern part of the state.

The BJP leader shifted allegiance to the Mamata Banerjee-led party ahead of the panchayat elections due in the state this year.

2 TMC men die while making bombs

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Birbhum and some other parts of Bengal continued to simmer ahead of the upcoming panchayat elections with two persons including a brother of a Trinamool Congress panchayat pradhan (chairman) died hours after bombs they were allegedly manufacturing went off on Saturday night.

Both were rushed to Kolkata and Rampurhat hospitals with severe burn injuries where they succumbed to their injuries on Sunday leading to a political backlash with the Opposition BJP and Left accusing the TMC of converting Bengal into a bomb-hub of India.

The incident occurred at Margram barely a few miles away from Bagtui village where last February, eleven people were charred to death when their houses were set on fire by the rival groups of the ruling party.

The deceased, identified as, Laltu Seikh, brother of TMC Panchayet Pradhan, died on Sunday afternoon at SSKM Hospital in Kolkata. Another injured TMC worker Newton Seikh died late on Saturday night at Rampurhat hospital where he was admitted with severe burn injuries. The incident comes within a few days



of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee personally taking charge of TMC's organisational affairs in Birbhum district in the absence of party strongman Anubrata Mondal who was presently in jail in cattle smuggling case.

Birbhum SP Nagendranath Tripathi was immediately transferred and replaced by Sunderbans SP Bhaskar Mukherjee. Tripathi who was made the OSD, Police Directorate however got six crucial arrests to be made

saying two prime accused who were at large would soon be arrested.

The Birbhum incident comes in tandem with another blast where at least four persons were severely injured when crude bombs went off on Sunday noon. The four-some were injured when they were allegedly making bombs at Aam Jhora village in Basanti area of South 24 Parganas, sources said adding the four

persons were TMC members.

Incidentally at least half-a-dozen children have died and many more have been injured in the past a few months while trying to play with bombs taking them as balls.

Political slugfest started soon after t he Birbhum incident with Bengal Minister Firhad Hakim seeing BJP and Congress hands behind the Birbhum blasts wondering the materials that were used to make the bombs were not easily available and that they had to be fetched from the defence godowns.

"Birbhum is a district bordering Jharkhand which is a Maoist zone, besides the materials like red powder that were being used to make the bombs are not easily available in the open market ... they have to be fetched from the open market ... so it is very much possible that the BJP may be smuggling such materials into Bengal to malign the TMC," he said.

BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh immediately hit back wondering why no bombs were found in BJP leaders' houses and why bombs were only found in the houses of Trinamool men. "It is possible that if you search you may find bombs in the house of Firhad Hakim's house," Ghosh said.

Govt schemes not just for vote bank, says Yogi ‘A medium for society to achieve self-reliance’

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Urging educational institutions to create maximum awareness among the youth regarding the government schemes, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday said that schemes were not just for 'votebank', but were a medium for society to achieve 'self-reliance'.

"Society must participate equally and move ahead of the government to achieve 'self-reliance'," he said.

Participating in the 'bhoomi puja' of a hostel in Mahamana Shikshan Sansthan run by Bhaurao Deoras Sewa Nyas in Lucknow, Yogi Adityanath said, "The public, and particularly the youth, must be aware of what the government is planning for them. A society can progress and achieve self-reliance only when it becomes a participant and moves ahead of the government."

The chief minister on the occasion urged the educational institutions to ensure that the students were aware of the various Central and state government schemes and initiatives for them to benefit maximum. "There are immense possibilities for startups in the agriculture sector in UP, we have to prepare the youth. Micro, small and medi-



um enterprise (MSME) has the largest base in UP, our government's little encouragement to UP's exports has resulted in an annual export of Rs 1.60 lakh crores taking place today. The fourth phase of the PM Skill Mission is about to start, we have to prepare our youth for this. It is necessary to make all the plans a part of the curriculum so that after getting the degree the youth do not have to wander anymore," Yogi added.

Highlighting the various efforts of the state government towards bringing gender equality in the state, Yogi said, "Kanya Sumangala Yojana is not only curbing female feticide but a provision of Rs 15,000 as a package from the government level is enabling the daughters to achieve their dreams and fulfill all their essential needs. Schemes like Mission Indradhanush are

eliminating gender bias by ensuring that the girl child gets proper healthcare"

He continued: "The Abhyudaya coaching is providing free coaching to the aspiring youths of the state both through physical and virtual means. About 43 candidates qualified in the UP Public Service Commission through the Abhyudaya coaching and got selected. We are also making efforts to make youth technologically advanced through the provision of two crore tablets and smartphones."

Yogi said that the students aspiring to set up their startups must be made aware of the incentives given by the government and schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Chief Minister Yuva Swarojgar Yojana, and the One District One Product (ODOP).

AIMPLB opposes uniform civil code, anti-conversion law



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) has opposed the uniform civil code and anti-religious conversion laws enacted by various state governments.

The AIMPLB also described the organisations pursuing the legal case for restoring the Gyanvapi masjid in Varanasi and Idgah (Krishna janmabhoomi) at Mathura as separatists.

"Implementing the uniform civil code is against the spirit of the Constitution as this will deprive citizens of the privileges provided by the Islamic personal law. Such a code is neither relevant nor beneficial for a multi-religious, multicultural and multilingual society like India," said a resolution adopted by the AIMPLB in a meeting of its executive committee held here on Sunday.

Issuing a warning to the Narendra Modi government, the resolution said, "If taking advantage of its majority in Parliament, the government passes the bill and implements the uniform civil code, it will affect the unity, integrity and harmony that binds the nation."

The AIMPLB appealed to the Central government to not pursue this agenda and focus on the present issues of the people and the country.

Expressing concern over the pending litigation over the Gyanvapi mosque at Varanasi and Idgah at Mathura, the resolution said, "Places of Worship Act, 1991 was passed by the then Congress government of PV Narasimha Rao and it is the duty of the Central government to ensure its implementation in national interest otherwise it could lead to endless differences among different religious groups."

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PAPER WITH PASSION

Shot down

The US shot down the Chinese balloon that was suspected of carrying out espionage activities

Was it a spy aircraft? It is not known as yet, but the US shot down the Chinese balloon anyway. Almost the size of three buses, it had intruded into US airspace, and American security experts believed that it had surveillance capabilities. Its occurrence had forced the shutdown of three airports in a “national security effort.” Beijing did own up the airship but claimed it was meant for civilian meteorological and other scientific purposes; it also regretted the airship’s straying into US airspace. Perhaps what China said is correct, but it is undeniable that the dragon is pugnacious by temperament. Under Xi Jinping especially, China has undergone a dangerous transformation: communism and jingoism, both violent ideologies, have blended, resulting in a political doctrine whose lethality is more than that of either of its parents. China tends to weaponise everything — from its businesses to the apps and gadgets it sells all over the world. Apart from stealth, there is also direct action. A few months ago, a tracking and satellite support vessel, Yuan Wang 5, reached Sri Lanka’s Hambantota port. India objected to the arrival of the ship but neither the Chinese Communist Party nor Colombo paid any heed to our concerns. This was despite the fact that India had come to the rescue of Sri Lanka at the time of its greatest economic crisis in recent times. This underlined the influence China enjoys in Sri Lanka (as also in many other

smaller nations). Military experts believe that Yuan Wang 5 at the Hambantota port, strategically located in the Indian Ocean, could have an adverse effect on our missile and satellite programmes. Evidently, Yuan Wang 5 was part of the Chinese project of encircling India.

But it is the US which Xi’s China, which dreams of global hegemony, sees as its main adversary. The balloon too could very well have been one of the many espionage undertakings. It is unhappy that the US continues to support Taiwan. Some time ago, US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi even visited the nation that China claims as its province. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken recently postponed a weekend visit to Beijing that was expected to thaw the ties between the two biggest economies; this must have further annoyed CCP bosses. Two and a half years ago, it was glaring at Japan in the east, threatening Australia in the Indo-Pacific, posing belligerently in the Himalayas against India, annoying other neighbors, blasting the Five Eyes alliance, fighting a trade war with the US. Even Adolf Hitler dreaded a two-front engagement when he began the Second World War, but not Xi. However, a lot has happened since then, the most important of which are the setbacks Russia, China’s ‘no limits’ ally, has received in the Ukraine war. Big powers under dictators must face blowback. Even when they fly balloons.



SEBI disappoints

Billions of dollars were wiped off at the stock market while SEBI remained a mute spectator

It is not about the Adani Group or Hindenburg report but about the national regulator of the stock market, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) which has the primary duty to ensure that the stock market functions smoothly and the investors’ money is not swindled by the scamsters. The recent stock market crisis over the last ten days clearly demonstrates the failure of the regulatory body to perform its responsibilities with transparency and diligence. It slept over as billions of dollars were lost in the market in the Adani Group shares and hundreds and thousands of investors saw their fortunes plummeting. Many a time the top performing Shares of Adani group hit the lower circuit while the SEBI did not bother to even come up with a statement assuring that it was in control of the situation and that the market would correct itself soon. It was all happening after the short seller Hindenburg Research, a

US-based short-selling firm released a 106-page report on the Adani group, calling it the biggest scam in history and claiming that the Adani Group has indulged in stock manipulation and skirting the Indian laws (which SEBI is supposed to protect) by floating over 40 shell companies working from Mauritius and other countries which bought the Adani shares working on modus operandi of ‘pump and dump’ the stocks. The investors saw their life-saving wiped off in days while the designated protector remains a mere spectator as if its hands have been tied and mouth zipped? After ten days when this all began, SEBI came up with a press communique saying that it would step up the surveillance and that it was observing the developments, market was not convinced. Not a word about the Adani Group or how it has lost billions of dollars on the stock market which might tank several public sector banks which had generously lent it the money or the LIC which has exposure worth thousands of crores in the Adani Group. Even the overvaluation of the Adani Group did not raise SEBI’s eyebrows. It did not bother to take cognizance of the fact that most of its stocks were trading several times their intrinsic values and that most of the growth had come during the pandemic when most stocks were in the red. It is about time SEBI should become proactive and at least bring about some semblance of order in the stock market else there is a real danger of foreign investors losing faith in the Indian stock market.

Our silence emboldens China

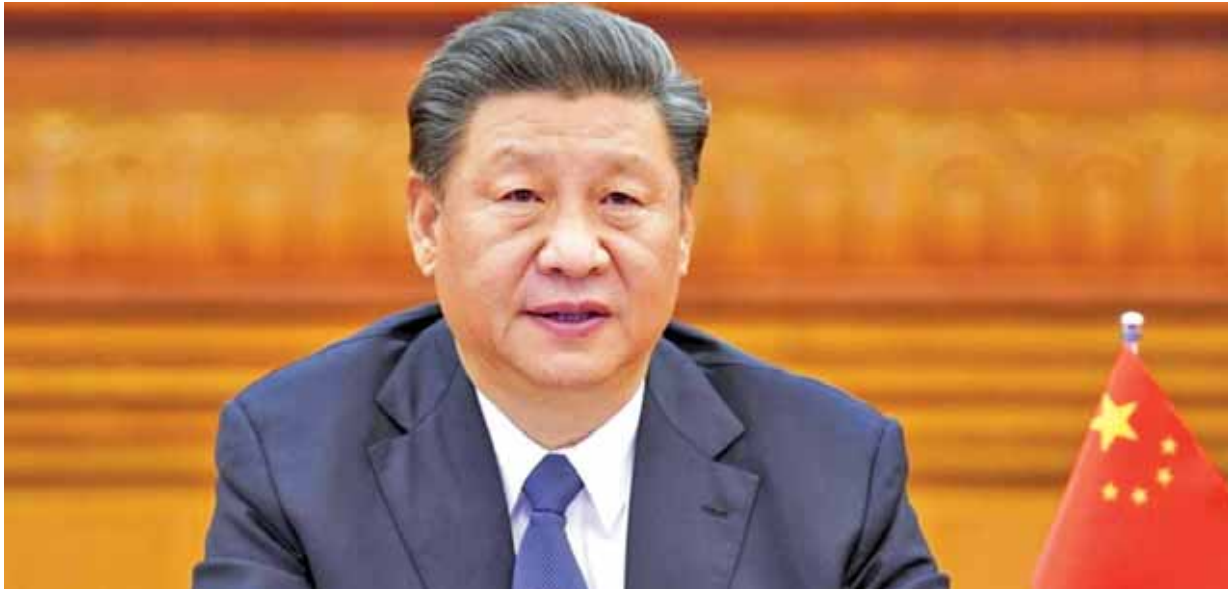
The fact is that we have lost our sovereign territory to China in the Eastern sector. It doesn’t help India’s cause to misstate the facts.

At the recently concluded Home Ministry’s DGP/IGP Conference, the prevailing situation on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China was discussed. The conference chaired by the Home Minister was also attended by Prime Minister Modi and Mr. Doval, his National Security Advisor.

A paper, now unavailable on the website, presented by SP Leh, Ms. PD Nitya, brought out that the Chinese have pushed the border into our territory by establishing buffer zones whereby our patrols can no longer show their presence at 26 of the 65 patrolling points in Eastern Ladakh. This has impeded the movement of locals and officials and also resulted in graziers not being able to use some of their traditional grazing grounds. The implications are serious and require the reader to be cognizant of the significance of the LAC.

As is well-known, following Independence our boundary with Tibet continued to remain undefined and disputed. A situation made more complex following the annexation of Tibet by China in 1949. In 1959, Premier Zhou Enlai of China in a letter to Prime Minister Nehru suggested the concept of the LAC, as the “line up to which each side exercises actual control”. This was rejected by Nehru as being “incoherent”, though it did de facto come about following the 1962 Conflict.

It was only in 1993 that this was formalized by both sides, though that agreement included a clause that “the two sides agree that references to the line of actual control in this Agreement do not prejudice their respective positions on the boundary question”. In 1996 it was further clarified that “no activities of either side shall overstep the line of actual control”. The ruggedness of the terrain does not practically allow us to establish and maintain posts all along the LAC, unlike the situation along the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir. The LAC thus remains only a notional line not delineated on the ground, which



has resulted in differing perceptions on both sides.

However, since forward troops require to be given specific areas that they would be responsible for guarding, the China Study Group, designated “Patrolling Points” on the ground that points up to which troops would patrol based on the frequency laid down. This Group is an inter-ministerial Secretary level informal official committee, established in 1970 and presently headed by the NSA that recommends policy towards China to the Government. The designated “Patrolling Points”, give a more realistic “on-ground” picture of our control along the LAC.

So, what are we to make of all this? It now emerges that we have been pushed back by the Chinese in 2020 from a third of the territory we earlier controlled in Eastern Ladakh. That by any measure is a loss of sovereign territory and one cannot help but conclude that the Prime Minister was prevaricating when he publicly stated that the Chinese had not intruded and occupied any territory, despite knowing this to be untrue.

That other ministers, bureaucrats, and what is worse, the military hierarchy went along with this fiction,



THE CHINESE HAVE PUSHED THE BORDER INTO OUR TERRITORY BY ESTABLISHING BUFFER ZONES WHEREBY OUR PATROLS CAN NO LONGER SHOW THEIR PRESENCE AT 26 OF THE 65 PATROLLING POINTS IN EASTERN LADAKH

without so much as a modicum of protest speaks volumes of their integrity, character, and qualities of leadership. While most of us have little expectations of our politicians and bureaucrats, that our military leadership has also fallen so low is indeed tragic. How will they ever look our soldiers in the eye and expect to lead them into battle? Also, as is to be expected, once the political leadership is complicit in covering up, there is no question of those responsible for this debacle ever being held to account.

In any case, given the disorganized and diffused state of our border management, who is to be blamed? While defence against external adversaries should rightly be the responsibility of our Armed Forces, in this case, we also have the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, over a divisional-sized Central Armed Police Force under the MHA, interposed in between and reporting directly to Delhi. Coordination and passage of information between the ITBP and the Army are left to individual personalities and not institutionalized, as should have been the case, by placing them under command of the Army. Can the China Study Group be unaware of such basics,

surely not.

Interestingly, our CAPF reportedly has a strong double that of our Army. Not being a police state, the necessity for the MHA to have such a large armed force under its control can only imply that the political establishment is ever fearful of being deposed, as has happened elsewhere in our neighborhood. That also explains why our military has been targeted over the years, its customs and traditions interfered with, its standing tarnished, and now its recruitment pattern demolished. Isn’t it odd that a junior police officer responsible for law and order, located over 150 Kms from the LAC, with no experience in combat or high-altitude warfare, presents a report belittling the Army, albeit obliquely, and inferring that we were pushed back because they could not withstand the rigors of rugged terrain and inclement weather and dominate the areas? That too for the Prime Minister’s ear, Mughal Court intrigue anyone?

(The writer, a military veteran, is a visiting fellow with the Observer Research Foundation and a senior visiting fellow with The Peninsula Foundation, Chennai. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WINNING AND LOSING ARE PART OF LIFE

Sir — Losing and winning are two aspects that are completely different from each other. In victory, a person feels himself to be a lucky person and is in great emotion and excitement and when a person loses, he gets disappointed and it is also the case that defeat weakens a person completely. But in this difficult phase, a person needs courage and courage which does not allow a person to fall.

However, the attitude of people on this occasion is completely contradictory. They encourage winners and discourage losers. Although the defeat of one person is inevitable, so we should not lose heart, we should work hard, success will one day be forced to take steps on its own.

Mufti Sufyan Nazeer AlQasmi | Bijmor

AUSTRALIA RIDS OF COLONIAL PAST

Sir — Australia is set to get rid of a few of its ubiquitous colonial remnants, which formed a part of its culture for several decades even after gaming freedom from the colonial hangover. The recent announcement by the Reserve Bank of Australia to do away with the image of monarchs in dollar 5 notes, now king Charles, is a symbolic gesture of severing its friendly ties with the mother country. This comes on the heels of the July 23 Referendum that will vote on the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the country’s constitution. Australia rejected dominion status in 1986.

While it is still a matter of debate as to what extent it should retain its colonial ties with Britain, it would honor the culture of its aboriginals i.e native people who arrived here about 30,000 years ago from the Bering strait. It is a well-known fact that Queen Elizabeth’s image continues to find a prominent place on certain banknotes and coins across the 54 Commonwealth countries, which were colonized by the U.K. If we go by the Guinness world record the queen appeared on at least 33 different currencies more than any other monarch. The currency of a country is the embodiment of its values, ideas, belief sys-

Modi’s popularity



Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s popularity has soared high despite some media channels and papers unleashing misinformation and malicious propaganda against him. The approval rating of Modi as a popular global leader is 78 percent according to the Global Leader Approval survey carried out by the US-based Morning Consult from January 26 to 31 featuring 22 global leaders.

The second most popular leader is Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (Mexico) while Alain Berset (Switzerland) stands third. Astonishingly, neither Vladimir Putin nor Xi Jinping figured among the 22 popular leaders. Probably Putin’s popularity has nose-dived after the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Jingpin’s China has territorial disputes with India, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam. China’s imperialistic ambition inherited by

Jingpin from his ascendant leaders can hardly make him popular. The popularity of China dipped after it was found that Wuhan is the birthplace of Covid-19. Justice Arun Mishra has hailed Modi as “a versatile genius, who thinks globally and acts locally”. This is true. Bhutan has conferred its highest civilian declaration “Order of the Druk Gyalpo” on Modi.

India’s track record of handling the coronavirus and vaccination program was lauded by many foreign governments and international agencies. The abolition of Article 370 and the resolution of the Rambhoomi-Babri Masjid disputes are important milestones in the regime of Modi though they have not been backed by the entire people of India. The majority of people are in favor of the action taken. There are listeners of Modi’s words in an international forum. Modi got 8 standing ovations with applause during a speech in the US Congress. Washington DC has reported that the speech will be remembered as one of the best speeches ever. Modi’s mindset to help the countries that need help has taken him to a new height in terms of popularity.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

tems, and rich and varied culture. For instance, the Ashoka Chakra and the image of Gandhiji on currency notes, etc are reminders of the country’s rich and varied cultural traits and peaceful coexistence. This initiative speaks volumes about the colonial baggage of things that the country is slowly shedding to embark on the path of self-reliance, indigenous and independent identity, and inclusive growth.

Vijay Singh Adhikari | Almora

VANI JAIRAM IS NO MORE

Sir — Playback singer Vani Jairam (78) one of India’s most versatile voices, was found dead in her residence. She probably died due to head trauma after a fall and didn’t get any help in the proper time frame.

Who will forget Vani Jairam’s (78) Humko Mann Ki Shakti Dena, which became a school prayer since the release of the song in 1971 and continues to be

even now? The versatile artist recently completed 50 years as a professional singer and had recorded more than 10,000 songs in nearly 1000 films. In her breakthrough with the Hindi film Guddi (1971) directed by Hrishikesh Mukherjee, the song “Bole Re Papihara”, became a talk-of-the-town song and gave her instant recognition. This versatile singer Vani Jairam has not only won National Film Awards for Best Female Playback Singer thrice, but also received State awards from Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Gujarat, and Odisha. She has worked with legendary composers. Vani Jairam is no more but her song is always lingering in the mind of her fans. My heartfelt respect to the departed great soul. RIP.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Growth is the main focus. We want to sustain that recovery, sustain that growth.



Union Finance Minister — Nirmala Sitharaman

Do you know why the Chinese are suddenly flying balloons over the continental US? Because Fang

Fang’s boyfriend is no longer on House Intel. Businessman — Donald Trump Jr.

Shalin raised a finger at my character and was so aggressive that he tried to hit me once. Probably he is a good actor than a better person.



Actor — Tina Datta

Countries playing at home are entitled to produce pitches to suit their team. That’s not unfair, it’s what makes Test cricket great. Former India coach — John Wright

Opposition insults the President again and again. Their attitude is unfortunate and their reaction to the President’s address is condemnable. They should apologize. Union I&B Minister — Anurag Thakur



FIRST COLUMN

REGULAR HOMEWORK IS INVESTMENT IN KIDS

Maharashtra Govt should rethink move against homework

VIVEK B KORDE

The Centre and states are implementing various experiments in education. Although some have been beneficial, there are a few proposals such as doing away with homework in school that need to be reconsidered. Recently, Maharashtra Education Minister Deepak Kesarkar stated in a report that the state government is contemplating to eliminate homework for students from the first to the fourth standard. “Children’s brains need to be developed. Also, homework cannot be an easy way out for teachers. They should teach in an easy-to-understand manner so that there is no need for homework,” he claimed. Is handing out homework to students an easy escape route for teachers? We need to consider what makes it essential in school education. Most students dread the word homework, but it is an integral part of traditional schooling. Homework is important, because it develops key skills in children which help them in school and in everyday life. Improving grades, discipline, time management, using resources, and improving communication are all key life skills. One can improve upon them with homework, opening doors to unique opportunities, helping children succeed in their careers.



Regular homework should be considered as an investment in a child’s future, as it leads to several benefits. Many people believe that one of the positive effects of homework is that it inculcates a discipline for practice. Although it’s time- consuming and tedious, this is necessary to master any skill. Homework helps make concepts clearer. Every child learns at a different pace and classroom time may be insufficient for some to fully grasp key concepts of a subject. Having extra time to study at home helps children gain a deeper understanding of subjects. Homework is important because it gives parents and children the freedom and time to focus on subjects they may be struggling with. This extra time makes a big difference when it comes to examinations and grades. Homework makes it necessary for parents to be involved in their children’s lives. It motivates them to participate in their academic success and allows them to keep up with what exactly the child is doing in school. In short, homework acts as a bridge and helps teachers and parents know how to approach learning and development of the child. Homework encourages children to plan their time and complete all their assignments on time. Homework helps students practice their problem-solving skills and independent thinking by learning to manage their time. Another positive effect of homework is that it encourages children to learn decision-making and fight for excellence. Regular homework helps children the practice they need for important tests and examinations. Children who are familiar with homework find it easier to adjust to a schedule for completing it. Children learn skills such as accessing learning materials, time management and discipline. Hence their grades improve. School hours are not enough for the children to understand basic concepts. Homework, on the other hand, overcomes time constraints. It benefits children in the long run. It helps children control their workload and improve their time management skills. Homework helps children think independently, solve problems and develop skills. Time management is an important life skill, which helps children in higher education and their careers. Most children spend hours watching TV. If they are not in school, these hours increase even more. Although homework is often unwanted, it encourages good study habits and discourages spending time in front of the TV. We can also think of it as an extracurricular activity. It is like a medicine or a dietary supplement. It can cause complications - even if one takes too much or too little of it. Therefore, it would be useful to do away with the viewpoint of “no homework” and adopt it for the utmost benefit of a child. *(The author is from Maharashtra: Charkha Features)*

Sitharaman delivered a milestone budget

In the years to come, Budget 2023 may be looked back on as a game changer which helped India take a giant leap

The world is watching India more closely. India is on the course to hit the \$5 trillion economy bar soon. By 2035, India is poised to become the third largest economy in the world. India has to aim to take the second slot soon after. The journey of the Indian economy for the next 25 years is paved with several opportunities. The Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is thus a milestone.

There must now not be any doubt in any quarter about the undiluted commitment of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his statecraft of ‘India First’. The country is the top commitment for the government. The thought process of the Modi government is to take India forward. There is no scope for compulsions. India must march ahead. Fundamentals of the economy must remain robust. There should be no harm to the fundamentals of the economy at the cost of the interests of the next generation.

In 2008, the Centre headed by Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister had unveiled the Union Budget to ensure that Congress was positioned well in the 2009 Lok Sabha Elections. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government came out with the farmers’ loan waiver scheme in the 2008 Budget.

The burden on the exchequer was in excess of Rs 63000 crores. The Congress-led UPA retained power and formed the government for another five years. The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) came out with an exhaustive report on the way the farm loan waiver scheme was implemented. The report remains a case study in blundering away the financial assets of the country in search of a short cut by the ruling political party to win elections. The banks were burdened. Undeserving people who may not have ever done farming pocketed the money of the national exchequer.

In the second tenure of the UPA government, the 2008 vote buying Budget measure became a template for governance. Crony capitalism became the policy mantra of the Manmohan Singh government. The banks advanced loans to private companies on flimsy assessments and valuations. By the time the UPA left office, the public sector banks were destroyed. They were sent into the ICU.

In such circumstances, PM Modi took charge of the policy management of the country. He set out to retrieve the critical banking sector out of the ICU so that the engines of the economy can begin functioning to their optimum capacities.

In 2023 Sitharaman presented the Union Budget with zero freebies. There is not even one proposal which can be called a freebie. She outlined ‘Saptrishi’, the seven guiding principles of the Union Budget. Each principle is a spoke in the wheel of the Indian economy accelerating to take



SEVERAL COUNTRIES AND ECONOMICS LAUREATES ARGUED FOR INDIA TO PRINT CURRENCY AND DISTRIBUTE TO THE PEOPLE AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC. BUT THE MODI GOVERNMENT WAS CLEAR-HEADED THAT THE VULNERABLE SECTIONS BE PROTECTED

(The author is a policy analyst)



the coveted position in the global supply chains.

During the tenures of the UPA government, the newspapers tired of headlining the cases of suicides committed by the farmers. The farm loan waiver scheme failed to arrest the cases of farmers’ suicides. Even the rather affluent sugarcane farmers were faced with arrears. The sugar mills didn’t make the payments to the farmers.

The Modi government through the budgetary proposals sought to cure the Indian agriculture of several ailments. The PM Kisan Samman scheme empowered the farmers, who had no compulsions to go to the moneylenders. With careful designing of several schemes in the past nine Budgets, the Modi government has worked to take the welfare interventions to the saturation levels.

Several countries and economics laureates argued for India to print currency and distribute to the people after the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. But the Modi government was clear-headed that the vulnerable sections be protected. That was done through the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna. The government ran the scheme for 80 crore people. It was subsumed in the National Food Security Scheme only when it became evident that the purpose had been achieved and the people started demanding that the intervention be relooked after the fulfilment of the objective.

Thus, the food subsidy bill has been lowered in the Budget proposed by FM Sitharaman. There are measures unveiled in the Union Budget which seek to rationalize the fertilizer subsidies. This

is in contrast to the reckless proliferation of fertilizer and food subsidies in the past.

With 33 per cent enhancement in the budgetary allocation for infrastructure through public expenditure, which is now Rs 10,00,000 crores, FM Sitharaman has reiterated the ‘India First’ commitment of the Modi government. The policy thrust is to create the next generation infrastructure across the country. New airports will connect the tier II cities with the world. The tier III cities will also connect with the economic engines of the country. This should facilitate the emergence of a closely knit India where the people can find employment close to their habitations. This also aims that the people don’t have to migrate to bigger cities.

The metropolitan cities are already beyond their carrying capacities. It had been argued for years that the economic activities must spread out across the country. The Modi government’s nudge to the state governments to promote one district one product programme would immensely benefit from the accelerated infrastructure development in the country. The access to reliable infrastructure will also act as a pull to the investments which may come to states which have lagged the developed regions of the country so far.

In addition, FM Sitharaman has committed the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Yojna 4.0. The skilling of the youth to the needs of the emerging industrial requirements along with the well-funded incentives and financial support by the government will help the country

gain from a skilled workforce. This is much needed. India through bilateral pacts with Germany, Australia and the UAE is seeking greater access to the trained manpower of India in their markets. At a time when the world is facing the shortage of trained manpower, the Budget commits to the priority to rapidly skill the manpower in the country.

In another reiteration of the ‘India First’ commitment of the Modi government in the Union Budget, FM Sitharaman has laid out a well-planned blueprint for adoption of the next generation technology such as artificial intelligence (AI). This is path-breaking. The Budget proposal will give a major fillip to the accelerated adoption of the technologies in diverse areas. There is a greater competition worldwide in adoption of AI in healthcare, defence, agriculture and other sectors. India has committed to its adoption by giving centre stage to AI in the Budget.

This is indeed ‘India First’ Budget. FM Sitharaman has carefully taken a closer look at the items which are being imported in the country. She has made distinctions between raw materials, which are needed for the manufacturing in the country along with intermediaries and the finished goods. This distinction by imposing duties accordingly is a signal to the Indian manufacturers to scale up the domestic manufacturing.

In years to come, the Budget unveiled by FM Sitharaman may be looked back on as a milestone, which laid the foundation of a major leap for India in the coveted global space.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

THOUSANDS OF HUSBANDS WILL BE ARRESTED IN THE NEXT FIVE-SIX MONTHS AS IT IS A CRIME TO HAVE SEXUAL RELATIONS WITH A GIRL BELOW 14 YEARS OF AGE, EVEN IF HE IS HER LEGALLY WED HUSBAND. — THE CHIEF MINISTER OF ASSAM HIMANTA BISWA SARMA



NOW THAT YOU ARE ARRESTING THE MEN, WHO WILL LOOK AFTER THOSE MARRIED GIRLS? WILL THE CM LOOK AFTER THEM? FOR THE LAST SIX YEARS, THE BJP HAS BEEN IN POWER. IT IS THEIR FAILURE THEN. — AIMIM CHIEF ASADUDDIN OWAIISI

ChatGPT is an enabler in tech-enabled ecosystem

It is a revolutionary technology because it is trained to learn what humans mean when they ask a question

The invention of the telephone in 1876 followed by the invention of mobile phones in 1984 brought a revolution in the lives of the people. If used properly, it can be a blessing, but if misused they can prove to be a curse. Similarly, J. L. Baird’s invention of television in 1962 was a wonder wherein one could get themselves entertained or attain knowledge about the happenings around the world at their comfort or at their own home.

As time passed and generations changed, so did the transformations in the technology. Nowadays, with a click of a few buttons – start, choose what you want, enter the address, select the mode of payment and done, customers can order anything from food



SAKSHI SETHI

(The author is a teacher at a reputed school in Delhi)

to clothing to booking tickets for cinema or even flights.

Technology has brought about a major revolution in the field of entertainment, education and communication with the recent being ChatGPT or Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer - a computer language model that relies on deep learning techniques to produce human-like text based on inputs. Since its release, the impacts have been staggering and the power is just beginning to be understood.

ChatGPT is a variant of the GPT language model that was developed specifically for generating human-like text in a conversational context. Launched by openAI, (a research institute and technology company that develops and promotes AI that is safe,

beneficial and aligned with human values) in November 2022 – ChatGPT is fine-tuned with both-supervised and reinforcement learning techniques and demonstrates a thorough mastery of both - coding and written languages.

It is a revolutionary technology because it is trained to learn what humans mean when they ask a question. ChatGPT is one the best artificial intelligence that chatbot has ever released to the public. Its ability to generate human-like text makes it a revolutionary technology. This tool can help one write literally anything. It can understand and produce human-like responses to a wide range of questions and requests. Many users even call it a replacement for GoogleMost of the users

are amazed at how intelligent the AI powered bot sounds—almost like a personal all-knowing teacher—aiding a wide range of tasks that require the understanding and generation of natural language.

What distinguishes ChatGPT from other chatbots is that it interacts in a conversational way. The dialogue format makes ChatGPT possible to understand the target audience, answers and solutions to complex questions (even includes ways to write codes), challenge incorrect premises, admit its mistakes and even reject inappropriate requests.

It can also help in writing contents for websites, solve mathematical equations and even answer customer queries. Also, being persis-

tent, having long term memory as well as providing quick task execution distinguishes it from search engines which have short term memory when providing results.

It can also help in providing 24/7 customer support, helping customers answer their queries quickly and effectively, teaching students in an interactive and engaging manner, helping travellers book flights in a few clicks, providing personalised recommendations for movies, music or shows and plays.

Even it can help in giving legal advice and make their work efficient and effective are a few examples that show how ChatGPT can streamline roles and fundamentally change how people create value.

The use of the ChatGPT

can also be effective in organisations as it creates personalised learner feedback. Employees’ progress can be tracked and feedback on their performance can be provided to them.

The ability of ChatGPT to follow a conversation is noteworthy. Not only for organisations, ChatGPT can also be a powerful research tool, and support student presentation and creation. It even supports a form of education that considers each event from multiple perspectives, wherever and whenever possible resulting in students and educators developing their powers of imagination, learning and application.

While many people were in awe of the abilities of the bot, some were also quick in

spotting its limitations. Being a language model, there is a possibility of providing incorrect answers.

It can even generate discriminatory results. The current model takes a guess and does not clarify questions, which it should ideally do. It is sensitive to slight tweaks in the input. It also provides limited knowledge of the world and events after 2021.

However, the interesting part is that this technology will not replace people’s jobs. Being a powerful tool, it will be used to augment tasks but not replace them.

Also, if put to good use and embraced correctly, it will give time to people to focus more on higher tasks involving more creativity and problem solving.

Putin promised not to kill Zelenskyy: Ex-Israeli PM



AP ■ TEL AVIV

Former Israeli prime minister who served briefly as a mediator at the start of Russia's war with Ukraine says he drew a promise from the Russian president not to kill his Ukrainian counterpart. Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett became an unlikely intermediary in the war's first weeks, becoming one of the few Western leaders to meet President Vladimir Putin during the war in a snap trip to Moscow last March.

While Bennett's mediation efforts appear to have done little to end the blood-

shed that continues until today, his remarks, in an interview posted online late Saturday, shed light on the backroom diplomacy and urgent efforts that were underway to try to bring the conflict to a speedy conclusion in its early days.

In the five-hour interview, which touched on numerous other subjects, Bennett says he asked Putin about whether he intended to kill Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"I asked what's up with this? Are you planning to kill Zelenskyy? He said I won't kill Zelenskyy. I then said to him I have to understand that you're giving me your word

that you won't kill Zelenskyy.' He said I'm not going to kill Zelenskyy."

Bennett said he then called Zelenskyy to inform him of Putin's pledge.

"Listen, I came out of a meeting, he's not going to kill you.' He asks, are you sure? I said '100 per cent he won't kill you.'" Bennett said that during his mediation, Putin dropped his vow to seek Ukraine's disarmament and Zelenskyy promised not to join NATO. Bennett, a largely untested leader who had served as prime minister for just over six months when the war broke out, unexpectedly thrust himself into international diplomacy after he had positioned Israel into an uncomfortable middle ground between Russia and Ukraine.

Israel views its good ties with the Kremlin as strategic in the face of threats from Iran but it aligns itself with Western nations and also seeks to show support for Ukraine.

An observant Jew and little known internationally, he flew to Moscow for his meeting with Putin during the Jewish Sabbath, breaking his religious commitments and putting himself at the forefront of global efforts to halt the war.

But his peacemaking efforts did not appear to take off and his time in power was short-lived. Bennett's government, an ideologically diverse union that sent current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu into a brief political exile, collapsed in the summer over infighting.



Ukraine: 5 injured in rocket attacks on 2nd-largest city

AP ■ KYIV, UKRAINE

Five people were injured in Russian rocket attacks Sunday in the center of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, officials said.

Kharkiv regional governor Oleh Syniehubov said four people were injured when a Russian S-300 missile fell near an apartment block and another was hurt when a missile hit a higher-education building. Local media reports said the building hit was the National Academy for Urban Economy, about 700 meters from the city's central square.

Meanwhile, heavy fighting continued in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, one of four regions that Russia illegally annexed last year even though its forces do not fully control the region. Donetsk governor Pavlo

Kyrylenko said five civilians were wounded in rocket attacks during the night in the city of Druzhkivka and that the town of Avdiivka and its outskirts were also fired on.

In the Black Sea port of Odesa, workers labored to connect temporary generators shipped in to try to restore electricity. The city and surrounding area were plunged into darkness over the weekend following a large-scale network failure.

Grid operator Ukrenergo said that the failure involved equipment "repeatedly repaired" after Russia's savage strikes on Ukraine's energy grid, and that residents should brace themselves for lengthy blackouts.

As of Sunday afternoon, about 280,000 customers remained without power, said prime minister Denis Shmyhal.

US states take control of abortion debate with funding focus

AP ■ LAWRENCE, KAN.

Though the Insight Women's Center sits at the epicenter of a reinvigorated battle in the nation's culture wars, the only hint of its faith-based mission to dissuade people from getting abortions is the jazzy, piano rendition of "Jesus Loves Me" playing in a waiting room.

The Republican-controlled Kansas Legislature is considering allocating millions of dollars in state funds to similar anti-abortion centers that persuade people to bring their pregnancies to term by offering free pregnancy tests and sonograms, as well as counseling and parenting classes taught by volunteers. They're also considering offering millions more in income tax credits for donors supporting what they call "crisis pregnancy centers."

When the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade last year and gave control of abortion policy to the states, it led to bans and restrictions in some states, and executive orders and laws protecting access in others. Those debates continue, but perhaps less noticed is how this change refueled the renewed



battle over taxpayer money.

Supporters say the effort shows abortion opponents are addressing families' social and financial needs. But critics say the amount of new funding proposed for organizations like Insight — either in direct funding or tax credits for their donors — fall far short of what's necessary to improve people's access to health care and address ongoing poverty.

"You funnel money through a short-term solution that makes it appear as though you are doing something," said Alesha Doan, a University of Kansas associate professor who has studied and written books about abortion politics.

Turmoil risks financial stability Peru long took for granted



AP ■ CUSCO, PERU

Marco Gonzales ventured to the Andean city of Cusco from his home in the Peruvian Amazon in 2007 with little more than \$20, a smidgeon of English and a change of clothes poorly suited for the icy mountain air.

He started offering walking tours of the former Incan Empire capital in exchange for tips. Along the way he fell in love with a British backpacker, Nathalie Zulauf, and together the couple built a travel business and family.

But now it's all at risk of collapsing along with so much of Peru's once enviable economic stability. The couple's company, Bloody Bueno Peru, which caters to mostly foreign tourists from Britain

and elsewhere, hasn't seen a customer since December, when protesters demanding the resignation of caretaker President Dina Boluarte all but cut off access to the ancient ruins of Machu Picchu. Groups have canceled reservations months in advance, forcing the couple to dip into savings already depleted by the coronavirus pandemic.

"We're waiting until March to see if the situation improves," said Gonzales, 38, staring at a calendar he no longer bothers to update. "If it doesn't we'll have to explore other options, like shutting down the business and emigrating. At least in England we have Nathalie's family."

Others in Cusco have far less to fall back on. The city of 450,000, normally a polyglot mecca of foreign travelers, is a ghost town these days. The Plaza de Armas, where women dressed in colorful Andean textiles used to pose for snapshots, now attracts demonstrators playing cat-and-mouse with heavily armored riot police.

Political turmoil is nothing new in Peru, which has seen six presidents in the last five years. In 1969, with a military dictatorship in power, Nobel Prize-winning author Mario Vargas Llosa posed this now iconic question to start his novel "Conversations in the Cathedral": "At what precise moment did Peru screw itself?"

Funeral held for Belarusian activist killed in Ukraine

AP ■ KYIV, UKRAINE

A funeral for a Belarusian military volunteer and activist who died fighting on the frontlines in eastern Ukraine was held in Kyiv on Saturday.

Eduard Lobau was killed in fierce artillery battles in Vuhledar against Russian troops as part of a small but dynamic regiment of Belarusian dissidents fighting alongside the Ukrainian armed forces. His body will be taken to Warsaw for burial.

Russian troops have ramped up attacks in the east of Ukraine, particularly in the industrial towns of Bakhmut and Vuhledar. Moscow has said its main goal is to capture the eastern Donetsk province which it considers a part of Russia.

Lobau is the latest casualty of the Kalinowsky Regiment, the unit named after a prominent Belarusian revolutionary who initiated an uprising against imperial Russia in the late 1800s. Volunteers oppose Belarusian



authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko, a close ally of Russia. They believe Ukraine's victory over Russia will spur regime change in Minsk.

"This is a very special regiment, consisting only of Belarusians. This is not their country, this is not their nation,

but it's their war," said Bohdan Yaremchenko, a lawmaker in Ukraine's parliament who attended the funeral. "I am here as a sign of my support, and of my solidarity from my heart to theirs."

Olena Kharkhel, held a portrait of Lobau in the church as

his comrades paid their last respects. Her husband, also a Belarusian dissident, died fighting in the east with the regiment in June. He and Lobau had been good friends.

"By fighting against Russia, we can liberate Belarus from Lukashenko's regime," she said.

One by one, the volunteers walked to Lobau's coffin, draped with the Belarusian flag to pay their last respects in Kyiv's Cathedral of St. Alexander. Most covered their faces to conceal their identities.

Lobau served four years of jail time for acts of disobedience in his native Belarus in 2010. Following his release in 2014 he fled to Ukraine and joined the armed forces as a military volunteer.

Belarusians make up a prominent contingent of foreign fighters in Ukraine. Russia's invasion of Ukraine propelled them to mobilize. The regiment itself was formalized in March 2022 and has been active in numerous key battles from the early days of the war, including in Mykolaiv, Kherson and the defense of Bucha and Irpin. Lobau participated in the latter.

"We can say he spent his entire life defending high ideals and sacrificing for others," said friend and fellow volunteer Jan Melnikov.



How will EU ban and West's price cap on Russian diesel work?

AP ■ FRANKFURT, GERMANY

The European Union is taking another big step toward cutting its energy ties with Russia. The 27-nation bloc is banning Russian refined oil products like diesel fuel and joining the U.S. and other allies in imposing a price cap on sales to non-Western countries.

Europe's ban takes effect Sunday following its embargo on coal and most oil from Russia. The move is meant to further slash reliance on Russian energy and payments into the Kremlin's war chest as the anniversary of the invasion of Ukraine nears.

The newest energy sanctions have risks: Diesel prices have already jumped since the war started on Feb. 24, and there's uncertainty about how the EU embargo and price cap by the Group of Seven major democracies will affect the market for a fuel crucial to the global economy.

Most things people buy or eat are transported at some point by trucks, which mostly run on diesel. It also powers farm equipment, city buses and industrial equipment. The higher cost of diesel is built into the

price of almost everything, helping push up inflation that has made life harder for people worldwide.

Companies have already felt the pain. "We're leaving money in the road to provide our services," said Hans-Dieter Sedelmeier of the family-run German bus and travel company Rast Reisen.

Here are key facts about the sanctions on Russian oil products:

HOW WILL THE EMBARGO AND PRICE CAP WORK?

European importers have had months since the ban was announced in June to line up new supplies. They have already cut Russia's share of EU imports to 27% in December from more than half before the war began.

U.S. suppliers have stepped up shipments to record levels, from 34,000 barrels a day at the start of 2022 to 237,000 barrels per day so far in January, according to S&P Global.

New refinery capacity coming on line this year in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia and next year in Oman also could help. India is another potential source. Russia, on the other hand, would have to find new customers.

AP ■ INDIANAPOLIS

Republicans in some heavily conservative states won their campaigns for secretary of state last year after claiming they would make sweeping changes aimed at keeping fraud out of elections.

So far, their efforts to make good on their promises are mixed, in some cases because their rhetoric has bumped up against skepticism from members of their own party.

Voters in politically pivotal swing states such as Arizona, Michigan and Nevada rejected candidates seeking to oversee elections who had echoed former President Donald Trump's false claims about the 2020 presidential election. But newly elected secretaries of state in Alabama, Indiana and Wyoming who had questioned the legitimacy of that election won easily in those Republican-dominated states.

They are now facing the task

of backing up their campaign pledges in states where Republicans have already set strict election laws.

In Indiana, Secretary of State Diego Morales has been relatively quiet. He has not been making the rounds at the Statehouse trying to persuade lawmakers to embrace the wide-ranging tightening of voting rules he promoted as a candidate.

After defeating the incumbent secretary of state for the Republican nomination last summer, Morales dialed back his description of Joe Biden's 2020 presidential election as a "scam" and his calls for tighter voting laws. That push included cutting Indiana's 28-day early voting period in half and requiring new voters to prove their U.S. citizenship when registering.

No bills for such steps were introduced for this year's legislative session. Morales, who was an aide to Mike Pence when the former vice president



was governor, also did not seek any money in his budget request to lawmakers for creating an "election task force," which he had discussed as a candidate, that would investigate voting "shenanigans" around the state.

A concept backed by Morales for requiring voters to include a copy of their driver's license with a mail-in ballot application is being sponsored by a Republican lawmaker, but he said he wasn't working with Morales on the proposal.

election confidence and integrity," he said.

Indiana House Speaker Todd Huston, also a Republican, said recently he had talked with Morales and told him he was "comfortable" with the state's election laws.

"I think our election laws are as good as any in the country," Huston said.

Morales was among the otherwise unsuccessful candidates associated with the America First Secretary of State Coalition, which called for large-scale changes to elections with candidates aligned with Trump's views. The group supported losing candidates in several battleground states.

They claimed widespread fraud and manipulation of voting machines, but there has been no evidence of either as exhaustive reviews in states lost by Trump have not revealed wrongdoing. That hasn't stopped Republican candidates, particularly in contested pri-

marys, from parroting the false claims that have taken hold among the party's supporters.

9 missing after fishing boat capsizes in South Korea

AP ■ SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

South Korean coast guard vessels and aircraft on Sunday were searching for nine fishermen who disappeared after their boat capsized off the country's southwestern coast.

The coast guard from the southwestern port city of Mokpo said that three crew members were rescued by a nearby commercial vessel following the accident late Saturday near Daebichi Island in the sea county of Sinan.

Survivors said the boat's engine room had quickly filled with water before the 24-ton vessel tipped over, according to the coast guard.

Officials were planning to salvage the boat, but it wasn't known whether the nine missing crew members would be inside. The Ministry of the Interior and Safety said seven of the missing were South Korean nationals and the two others were foreigners, but it didn't immediately confirm their nationalities.



More than 30 coast guard vessels and at least eight coast guard and military aircraft were searching the area on Sunday afternoon.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol called for officials to mobilize "all available resources" to widen the search and also to provide support to the families of the missing fishermen, his office said.

EU migration impasse leaves many refugees out in cold

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Some refugees and asylum-seekers in Brussels have been spending months in between the Street of Palaces and the Small Castle — quite literally.

Unfortunately, it's not a dream come true at the end of their fearful flight from halfway across the globe. It's a perpetual nightmare.

Petit Chateau, which means small castle, is a government reception center that often does anything but welcome arrivals. The Rue des Palais — street of palaces — has the city's worst squat, where the smell of urine and the prevalence of scurvy have come to symbolize how the European Union's migration



policy is failing.

They are only 2½ miles (four kilometers) from the sleek Europa Building where EU leaders will hold a two-day summit starting Thursday to deal with migration issues that have vexed the 27 member nations for more than a decade.

Shinwari, an Afghan army captain who long helped Western powers try to stave off

the Taliban, now lives in a makeshift tent camp right on the canal opposite Petit Chateau.

It's a place as desolate as it is hopeless.

"It is very cold. Some guys have different diseases and many of us are suffering from depression, because we don't know what will happen tomorrow," said the 31-year-old, who left behind his wife and four children, convinced that Taliban forces that took over in August 2021 would kill soldiers like him who worked with NATO countries.

"They search houses. No one's life was safe," Shinwari said. "They have already once told my family 'your son has taken refuge in an infidel country.'"

‘China spy balloon threat to American sovereignty’

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The flight of the Chinese spy balloon over the US is a reminder of threats posed by the ruling Communist Party to the national sovereignty of America and many of its own neighbours, including Taiwan, Indian-American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said on Sunday.

The US military on Friday downed the balloon over the Atlantic Ocean and launched a mission to recover all the equipment from its debris. Speaking to CNN, he defended President Joe Biden's decision to wait before shooting the balloon down, saying it was the "right thing" to take it down over the ocean.

"Now we get to salvage it and determine exactly whether it was a weather balloon, or whether. It was a surveillance balloon, which is what we all suspect and believed to be the case at this point," said Krishnamoorthi, a ranking member of the new China Select Committee in the House of Representatives.

At the direction of President Joe Biden, the US military at 2.39 pm EST on Friday shot down the Chinese surveillance balloon in the Atlantic Ocean, some six miles (9.65 kms) away from the US shores in South Carolina, with



no damage to the life and properties of Americans

"I think that it just reminds us of the threats posed by the Chinese Communist Party and, and that's the reason for the formation of the committee," he said when asked about the incident.

"...We know that there are military, technological national security threats, of course, this particular balloon. The balloon reminded us that these threats exist, that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is aggressive and that they are, unfortunately, committing surveillance and violations of our own national sovereignty, not to mention violations of the national sovereignty of so many of their neighbours, including Taiwan and others," he said.

China views Taiwan, a self-

ruled island, as a rebel province that should be reunified with the mainland, even by force.

When asked if Biden did the right thing by waiting to shoot down the huge Chinese spy balloon, he said: "I think he did exactly the right thing... First of all, the threat of its collection capabilities were severely mitigated, I think through countermeasures that we've taken to jam their electronics and so forth. But there was a threat of a large debris field and also they wanted to probably collect on the balloon as he (Biden) was on his journey to learn as much as possible about its capabilities.

"And then finally, when people and property were out of harm's way to take it down. So I think it was exactly the right course," he said. He said

the US will soon find out the nature of the balloon and know who, what, when, where and how related to that balloon once it salvages the technology. "But at the end of the day, I think that probably there were actors within the Chinese Communist Party who continued with their aggressive surveillance. And it's not even clear whether the left and the right hands knew what they were doing in terms of the Chinese foreign ministry, and others knowing about this. Of course, if they did, it would really question the sincerity of their diplomatic overtures," he said.

Krishnamoorthi said the US must question how eager he is to solve our diplomatic issues and to do so in a responsible way.

When asked how this downing of the balloon was going to impact ties, he said: "The Pentagon has, you know, flatly denied the Chinese government's claim that the balloon was serving some sort of civilian research purpose like weather for example.

"I particularly think that the Chinese are going to have some explaining to do and they're gonna have to own up to it. But regardless, it doesn't decrease tensions if anything, it just keeps them at the state they are at and maybe worsens them.

UK ex-PM Truss attempts dramatic political comeback with swipe at Sunak

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's former prime minister Liz Truss, who has the ignominy of being the country's shortest serving in the top job at just 49 days, on Sunday made a dramatic attempt at a comeback to frontline politics with an indirect swipe at successor Rishi Sunak's policies.

Truss, whose mini-budget in September last year was widely blamed for setting the UK on a spiralling economic downturn, claims she was never given a "realistic chance" to implement her tax-cutting vision for growth.

In a lengthy essay in 'The Sunday Telegraph', the former party leader admitted she was not "blameless" but argued that her mandate as the Conservative Party leader was not respected and that her premiership was the casualty of the "left-wing economic establishment".

"I wanted to become prime minister to change things, not to manage decline or to preside over our country sliding into stagnation," she writes.

"In the medium term, I believed my policies would have increased growth and therefore reduced debt. Five-year forecasts are treated as accurate predictions and therefore filling the 'gap' becomes the imperative of government policy... As a result, the government is forced to make economically detrimental decisions, such as raising corporation tax, based on uncertain forecasts that may not come to fruition," she said, indirectly referencing the Sunak-led government's policies.

The timing of Truss' essay,



just as Sunak marked his first 100 days as British Prime Minister this week, is widely being seen as the now backbench MP's attempt at keeping her dream of returning to the front benches alive ahead of a general election expected next year.

She reflected on the "deeply disturbing" moment she had to sack her chancellor, Kwasi Kwarteng, despite his "brave" economic package — widely known as the disastrous mini-budget, which ultimately precipitated her exit from Downing Street after her own party MPs turned on her. She writes: "I am not claiming to be blameless in what happened, but fundamentally I was not given a realistic chance to enact my policies by a very powerful economic establishment, coupled with a lack of political support.

"I assumed upon entering Downing Street that my mandate would be respected and accepted. How wrong I was. While I anticipated resistance to my programme from the system, I underestimated the extent of it."

The 47-year-old former

Tory leader, who had defeated Sunak in the leadership election in early September, announced her resignation within weeks. The party MPs then overwhelmingly backed the British Indian leader to take over after a speeded-up leadership race with Penny Mordaunt, now a member of the Sunak Cabinet.

Sunak's Business Secretary, Grant Shapps, came out in defence of the government on Sunday in response to the essay. The minister said that while Truss had the right priorities, she failed because she did not try to deal with the "big structural issues" first and bring soaring inflation under control as a priority — a pledge Sunak made on taking charge a day after Diwali on October 25, 2022.

"I noted that she said that they hadn't prepared the ground for these big tax changes," he told 'Sky News'.

"And I think the truth is, and we know this, what you've got to do first is deal with the big sort of structural issues. Deal with inflation first, deal with the debt so you're on a downward trajectory. And then you look towards tax cuts."



Pope makes final bid for peace, forgiveness in South Sudan

AP ■ JUBA (SOUTH SUDAN)

Pope Francis made a final appeal for peace in South Sudan on Sunday as he celebrated Mass before tens of thousands of people to close out an unusual mission by Christian religious leaders to nudge forward the country's recovery from civil war.

On the last day of his African pilgrimage, Francis begged South Sudanese people to lay down their weapons and forgive one another, presiding over Mass at the country's monument to independence hero John Garang before an estimated 70,000 people, including the country's political leadership.

"Even if our hearts bleed for the wrongs we have suffered, let us refuse, once and for all, to repay evil with evil," Francis said. "Let us accept one another and love one another with sincerity and generosity, as God loves us."

His message aimed to revive hopes in the world's youngest country, which gained independence from the majority Muslim Sudan in 2011 but has been beset by civil war and conflict.

President Salva Kiir, his longtime rival Riek Machar and other opposition groups signed a peace agreement in 2018, but the deal's provisions, including the formation of a national unified army, remain largely unimplemented and fighting has continued to flare.

"We have suffered a lot," said Natalima Andrea, a 66-year-old mother of seven who wiped a tear from her eye as she waited for Francis' Mass to begin. "We need a permanent peace now and I hope these prayers would yield to lasting peace."

In a bid to spur the process along, Francis was joined on the novel ecumenical peace mission by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Rt. Rev. Iain Greenshields. The aim of the Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian leaders was to push Kiir and Machar to recommit themselves to the 2018 deal.

Welby and Greenshields joined Francis on the altar at Mass on Sunday and were to accompany him on the flight back to Rome.

Nepal's RSP withdraws from coalition Government of PM Prachanda

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) on Sunday decided to withdraw from Nepal's ruling coalition after Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" refused to reinstate the party's flamboyant chairman Rabi Lamichhane as the home minister after he recently reacquired his citizenship.

The decision was taken after a joint meeting of RSP's central members and lawmakers.

Lamichhane, 48, was elected from Chitwan-2 constituency during the elections held in November last year.

He subsequently lost the status of a lawmaker following a verdict by Nepal's Supreme Court on January 27, which stated that the citizenship certificate he produced to contest the parliamentary election was invalid, according to the Kathmandu Post newspaper.

Subsequently, he also lost his ministerial portfolio and the presidency of the party because one needs to be a Nepali citizen



to hold those positions, it said.

On January 29, he reacquired his citizenship, following which he met Prachanda and demanded that he be restored to his former Cabinet position, the report said.

But the Nepal Prime Minister was in no mood to relent, it added.

Lamichhane was appointed Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister on December 26 last year.

The RSP, floated by Lamichhane, won 20 seats in the

federal polls, making its fourth largest force in parliament.

Lamichhane, a former television personality, shot to fame while attempting to set the Guinness world record for hosting the longest-ever marathon talk show in 2013.

During a press conference organised after the joint meeting of RSP's central committee, Lamichhane said that in the past, efforts were made to entangle him in several controversies, but he has always managed to steer out of it.

RSP's decision to withdraw from the coalition government does not alter Prime Minister Prachanda's political fortunes.

That's because even though the RSP has decided to recall their ministers, they will continue to support this government, the Post report added.

Last month, 'Prachanda' received the support of 268 of the 270 lawmakers who were present in parliament — the highest number of votes a prime minister has ever received in a vote of confidence in parliament.

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran's supreme leader on Sunday reportedly ordered an amnesty or reduction in prison sentences for "tens of thousands" of people detained amid nationwide anti-government protests shaking the country, acknowledging for the first time the scale of the crackdown.

The decree by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, part of a yearly pardoning the supreme leader does before the anniversary of Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, comes as authorities have yet to say how many people they detained in the demonstrations.

State media offered a list of caveats over the order as well that means those with ties abroad or facing internationally criticised spying charges wouldn't be eligible.

State media reports about the decree offered no explanation for the decision by Khamenei, who has final say on all matters of state in Iran.



However, prisons and detention facilities already had faced overcrowding in the country after years of protests over economic issues and other matters.

Authorities also did not name any of those who had been pardoned or seen shorter sentences.

Instead, state television for instance referred to the demonstrations as being a "foreign-backed riot," rather than homegrown anger over the September

death of Masha Amini, an Iranian-Kurdish woman detained by the country's morality police.

Anger also has been spreading over the collapse of the Iranian rial against the U.S. Dollar, as well as Tehran arming Russia with bomb-carrying drones in its war on Ukraine.

More than 19,600 people have been arrested during the protests, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group that's been tracking the crack-

Foes and friends condole Musharraf's demise

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Foes and friends of Pakistan's former military ruler General Pervez Musharraf on Sunday condoled his demise with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif saying that he was "praying for the forgiveness" of the deceased.

Musharraf, 79, lived in self-imposed exile in the UAE to avoid criminal charges against him in Pakistan, died after a prolonged illness at the American Hospital in Dubai.

President Arif Alvi sent condolences to the former president's family, according to a statement by the President's Office. "President Arif Alvi has expressed his sorrow at the death of former president and army chief General (retired) Pervez Musharraf," according to the statement.

Prime Minister Sharif, whose family suffered the most after Musharraf's coup in 1999, also offered condolences to the former president's family and prayed for the departed soul.

"I offer my condolences to the family of General (rtid) Pervez Musharraf. May the departed soul rest in peace!" he tweeted. "Praying for the forgiveness of the deceased and patience of the family," he said in a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office.

Musharraf was the main architect of the Kargil War that took place months after then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the brother of PM Shehbaz Sharif signed a historic peace



accord with his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lahore.

After his failed misadventure in Kargil, Musharraf deposed the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a bloodless coup in 1999 and ruled Pakistan from 1999 to 2008 in various positions - first as the chief executive of Pakistan and later as the President. After his ouster, Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to life after a Pakistani court convicted him of kidnapping, hijacking and corruption.

Later, Nawaz Sharif and his family have been exiled to Saudi Arabia. Former prime minister Yousuf Raza Gilani's son Ali Musa Gilani said in a tweet: "Musharraf is dead... Democracy is alive, people who died for this cause are alive. Musharraf rule not only took 5 years of my father's life but took the childhood of many including me."

Gilani was convicted by an anti-corruption court headed by an active-duty officer appointed by General Musharraf and spent nearly six years in prison.

Voting starts for Cyprus' presidency, with 3 front-runners

AP ■ NICOSIA

Cypriots on Sunday began voting for their eighth new president in the ethnically divided island's 63-year history as an independent republic, with three front-runners each portraying themselves as the safest bet to guide the country through turbulent economic times and to seek peace with break-away Turkish Cypriots.

Opinion polls indicate that none of the three — all of whom have been close associates of outgoing President Nicos Anastasiades — will muster more than half of the votes, which is the bar for an outright win in the first round. Instead, the top two will likely move forward to a runoff in a week's time. Some 561,000 citizens are eligible to vote. Official figures show about a third of voters cast their ballots roughly halfway through the election, 3.5% more than the 30.2% who voted through the same time period in the 2018 presidential poll, so far defying concerns of a low turnout.



Averof Neophytou, 61, who took over the leadership of the country's largest Democratic Rally party from Anastasiades has banked on his message as a veteran insider and the steadiest hand to ensure stability in times fraught with economic uncertainty. "Today, the people will decide the future course of their country through their vote," Neophytou said outside the polling station where he voted.

Career diplomat Andreas Mavroyiannis, 66, who served under Anastasiades as his chief negotiator in peace talks with Turkish Cypriots, has appealed to voters disgruntled with a decade of Anastasiades' rule, especially members of the communist-rooted

AKEL party that's supporting his candidacy. "I have trust in our people's judgment, I trust that with their vote and participation, we'll lead our homeland to better days," Mavroyiannis said after voting.

Nikos Christodoulides, 49, a former government spokesman and foreign minister who has consistently led all opinion polls throughout the monthslong campaign, is running as the candidate who can bridge party affiliations and ideological fault lines to unite a fractured electorate.

"Only through unity, through our collective efforts can we truly live up to the expectations of the Cypriot people," Christodoulides said after casting his ballot.

Opinion polls have consistently shown Christodoulides will head into the runoff against either Mavroyiannis or Neophytou.

Voter Andreas Mashas said peace efforts with Turkish Cypriots and allegations of corruption hounding the outgoing government were among the factors that made up his mind on who he'd vote for.

Five injured in TTP-orchestrated explosion in Pakistan's Quetta city

PTI ■ KARACHI

At least five people, mostly policemen, were injured in an explosion in Quetta on Sunday in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, in yet another instance of systematic attacks targeting security officials in the country orchestrated by the outlawed Pakistani Taliban.

The explosion took place at Quetta Police Lines Area, and the injured, who are mostly policemen, were shifted to the



Civil Hospital in the city. Police officials said the site was cordoned off.

It's not immediately clear the nature of the explosion.

The outlawed Tehreek-e-

Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the attack.

It stated that security officials were targeted in the blast. Meanwhile, a Pakistan Super League (PSL) exhibition match featuring high-profile players like captain Babar Azam and former all-rounder Shahid Afridi, being played at the Nawab Akbar Bugti stadium in Quetta had to be halted briefly due to the blast.

None of the players were

injured, officials said.

The latest incident comes days after a Taliban suicide bomber blew himself up during the afternoon prayers in a Peshawar mosque, killing 101 people and injuring more than 200 others.

Pakistan has been hit by a wave of terrorism, mostly in the country's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, but also in Balochistan and the Punjab town of Mianwali, which borders the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.



Iraqis protest gender violence after YouTube star killed

AP ■ BAGHDAD

Dozens of Iraqi protesters gathered Sunday to decry the so-called "honour killing" of a 22-year-old YouTube star who was allegedly strangled by her father, adding fuel to calls for legal reforms protecting women.

Interior Ministry spokesman Saad Maan on Friday announced that Tiba Ali was killed Jan. 31 in the central city of Diwaniyah by her father, who then turned himself in to the police. Reports say the father strangled Ali at night while she was asleep.

The so-called "honour killing" was met with condemnation from women's rights groups and residents, who sounded the alarm on violence against women in Iraq and the need to reform legislation to impose harsher punishments on perpetrators.

The protesters held banners condemning the killing and demanding legislative reforms.

"There is no honour in the crime of killing women," one placard read.

"Anyone who wants to get rid of a woman accuses her of disgracing her dignity and kills her," protester Israa al-Salman told The Associated Press, who also wanted Ali's father executed. Article 41 of the country's penal code allows husbands to "discipline" their wives, which includes beatings.

Meanwhile, Article 409 reduces murder sentences for men who kill or permanently impair their wives or female relatives because of adultery to up to three years in prison.

Rosa al-Hamid, an activist with civil society group the Organization for Women's Freedom in Iraq urged the authorities to pass a long-stalled draft law against domestic violence that has been lingering in Iraqi Parliament since 2019. "Tiba was killed by her father under tribal justifications that are unacceptable," she told the AP.

FPIs register steepest outflow in 7 months

At ₹29 K cr in Jan due to attractive Chinese market

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors pulled out ₹28,852 crore from Indian equities in January, making it the worst outflow in the last seven months, primarily due to attractiveness of the Chinese markets.

This came following a net investment of ₹11,119 crore in December and ₹36,238 crore in November, data with the depositories showed.

Going ahead, FPI flows are expected to remain volatile as Indian equities continued their large underperformance compared to global markets, Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research(Retail), Kotak Securities, said.

According to the data, FPIs withdrew a net sum of Rs 28,852 crore from equities in January. This was also the biggest monthly withdrawal by FPIs since June 2022, when they had pulled out ₹50,203



crore from equities.

The outflow in January is followed by a net withdrawal of more than ₹5,700 crore from equities in the first week of February.

FPIs are selling in India and buying in cheaper markets like China, Hong Kong and South Korea where valuations are attractive, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services, said.

“This ‘short India and long other cheaper markets’ strategy has led to big underperformance of Indian market, so far this year,” he added.

While China, Hong Kong and South Korea are up by 4.71 per cent 7.52 per cent and 11.45

per cent respectively so far this year, India is down by 1.89 per cent, Vijayakumar said adding that this kind of under-performance is unlikely to last long.

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar India, said FPIs had adopted a cautious approach towards Indian equities ahead of the Union Budget and the US Federal Reserve meeting. Interestingly, both turned out to be positive indicators.

“The quarter percentage point of rate hike by US Fed signified the downward movement in the quantum of rate hikes. The Union Budget was also positive and focused on infrastructure and economic growth,” he said.

However, these two factors couldn’t lift sentiments largely due to the sharp sell-off in Adani Group companies shares which led the market into a tailspin.

Moreover, banking stocks were impacted on fears of Adani exposure impacting the lenders. However, the RBI message that Indian banking system is healthy improved sentiments leading to late rally in banking stocks.

‘RBI interest rate decision, Q3 earnings to drive market trends this week’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Equity markets’ focus will shift to the RBI interest rate decision scheduled this week, with investors also tracking the ongoing third quarter earnings, global trends and foreign fund trading activity, for further cues, analysts said.

Brent crude oil prices and rupee-dollar movement would also drive the trends in the market.

“The direction of the US market will be closely watched, but the flow of FILs will be crucial because they have been selling heavily in the Indian market since the beginning of 2023, and it has intensified following the Adani Group crisis.

“This week will see the release of Q3 earnings from companies such as Bharti Airtel, Hero MotoCorp, Hindalco and Mahindra & Mahindra as well as macro-economic data from the United States. RBI policy, whose outcome is scheduled for February 8, will be a critical domestic event,” said Pravesh Gour, Senior Technical Analyst, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

Adani Group stocks have taken a beating on the bourses after the US-based Hindenburg Research made a

litany of allegations in a report, including fraudulent transactions and share price manipulation at the Gautam Adani-led group.

Adani Group has dismissed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements.

Industrial Production data for December is scheduled to be out on Friday post market hours.

“We expect volatility to remain high this week as we have important events and data lined up. First, participants will be eyeing the outcome of the RBI policy meeting scheduled on February 8. On the economy front, IIP data will be unveiled on February 10,” Ajit Mishra, VP — Technical Research, Religare, said.



RBI likely to settle for 25 basis points repo rate hike: Experts

PTI ■ MUMBAI

With retail inflation showing signs of softening and the US Fed moderating the pace of increase in its benchmark interest rate, the Reserve Bank is likely to settle for a smaller 25 basis points repo rate hike in its forthcoming bi-monthly monetary policy due later this week.

In its December monetary policy review, the central bank had raised the key benchmark interest rate (repo) by 35 basis points (bps) after delivering three back-to-back increases of 50 bps. Since May last year, the Reserve Bank has increased the short-term lending rate by 225 basis points to contain inflation, mostly driven by external factors, especially global supply

chain disruption following the Russia-Ukraine war outbreak.

RBI’s rate-setting panel - Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) - will start its three-day deliberations on the next set of monetary policy on Monday. The decision will be announced on February 8.

Kotak Institutional Equities in a report said the global inflation environment is gradually turning benign although inflation is still well above every central bank’s target. Inflation will likely moderate further in the next few months, leading to the end of the rate hiking cycle by first half of 2023 and possible rate cuts in late-2023/early-2024.

“However, given large global uncertainties, central banks’ levers for supporting growth through monetary easing remain limited, thereby risking higher rates for an extended period.

“We expect the RBI MPC to hike policy rate by 25 bps to 6.5 per cent, followed by a prolonged wait-and-watch approach, as it assesses the lagged impact of monetary tightening on growth and infla-

tion,” it said.

The RBI has been tasked to ensure that retail inflation remains at 4 per cent with a margin of 2 per cent. However, it failed to keep the inflation rate below six per cent for three consecutive quarters beginning January 2022.

However, the retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has shown signs of moderation in November and December as it fell below the RBI’s upper tolerance level of 6 per cent.

On his expectations from the MPC, Dhruv Agarwala, Group CEO, Housing.Com said amid projections of slower growth than previously forecasted for 2023-24, the RBI will probably stick to a moderate increase in its benchmark lending rate in the upcoming policy announcement, before hitting a pause button on hikes later in 2023.

“The move is likely to have limited impact on real estate demand as home purchase decisions are driven and determined by several factors other than just home loan rates,” he said.

RBI readies draft bill for NFIR; to improve accessibility, affordability of loans: DEA Secy

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Economic Affairs Secretary Aajay Seth has said that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has prepared a draft Bill for setting up a National Financial Information Registry (NFIR) with a view to improve accessibility and affordability of loans.

The proposal to set up a credit repository was discussed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at the meeting of the Financial Stability and Development Council in September, he said.

The Reserve Bank has already prepared the draft bill which is currently being deliberated upon, Seth told PTI in a post-budget interaction.

The objective is to build a public infrastructure for credit-related information and right information can be made available by the NFIR to lending agencies.

A National Financial Information Registry will serve as the central repository of

financial and ancillary information. This will facilitate efficient flow of credit, promote financial inclusion, and foster financial stability, the Finance Minister had announced in her first Budget speech.

A new legislative framework will govern the proposed credit public infrastructure, and it will be designed in consultation with the RBI, she had said.

Apart from having information about loans, Seth said, the proposed NFIR would be a repository for ancillary information like tax paid, electricity consumed pattern etc.

“If a creditor or a potential creditor doesn’t have adequate information, it will put a risk and thereby the interest rate will go up. On the other hand, if risks are well understood, then there can be finer pricing of the credit,” he said.

Going forward, he said, the institution would help in appropriately pricing of loans and bring down risk for all stakeholders.

India’s crude steel output grows to over 124 MT in 2022; consumption rises to 106 MT: SteelMint

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s crude steel production rose by 5.80 per cent to 124.45 million tonne (MT) in 2022, according to SteelMint.

The country had produced 117.63 MT crude steel in 2021, the market research firm said.

The production of finished steel was at 110.03 MT, up from over 104.54 MT a year ago, SteelMint said in its latest report.

The consumption of finished steel rose to 106.48 MT, as against 98.39 MT in 2021, a year-on-year rise of 8 per cent.

SteelMint attributed the increase in output and consumption to “continuous focus of the government on the infrastructure sector.”

According to the report, the exports in 2022 have registered a fall over the previous year, while the imports have grown in the year ended December 31.

At 4.77 MT, the imports were 21 per cent higher against 3.94 MT in 2021.

The exports registered a sharp fall of 44 per cent to 10.37 MT in 2022 compared to 18.5 MT a year ago. The import of raw material coking coal was almost flat at 55.94 MT in 2022, the report said.

Budget 2023: Customs duty on products for marine sector reduced

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has reduced import duty on a number of raw materials such as fish lipid oil, krill meal and algal prime used in the marine sector, to promote domestic production and exports from the segment.

The duty on fish lipid oil and algal prime (flour), used in manufacture of aquatic feed, has been reduced to 15 per cent from 30 per cent.

Similarly, the duty on fish meal and krill meal, used in making aquatic feed, was cut to 5 per cent from 15 per cent in the Budget, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1.

The levy on mineral and vitamin premixes, which are also used in the feed, has been reduced to 5 per cent from 15 per cent earlier, according to Budget documents.

The basic customs duty on



fish feed too has been reduced to 5 per cent from 15 per cent with a view to promoting local production of shrimps.

Fish meal is high in protein and a good source of calcium, phosphorus, and other minerals. It is used extensively by the marine industry.

Imports of fish lipid oil stood at \$7.13 million during April-November 2022. It was about \$14 billion in 2021-22. It is mainly imported from China, Japan,

and the US. Imports of algal prime (flour) was \$0.91 million during the eight-month period. It was about \$4.5 billion in 2021-22. It is mainly imported from Brazil, Thailand and Malaysia.

Imports of fish and krill meal stood at USD 7.68 million during April-November 2022. It was \$19.6 billion in 2021-22. It is mainly imported from Norway, Gambia and the UAE.

Imports of mineral and vitamin premixes were \$207.75 million during April-November 2022. It was \$305.12 billion in 2021-22. It is mainly imported from China, Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Singapore and Thailand.

The finance minister also announced launch of sub-scheme of PM Matsya Sampada Yojana with a targeted investment of ₹6,000 crore to further enable activities of fishermen, fish vendors, and micro and small enterprises, improve value-chain efficiencies, and expand the market.

ONGC to ramp up exploration for oil, gas; looks for collaborations

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s top oil and gas producer ONGC is pivoting a four-pronged strategy of ramping up exploration efforts, quickly bringing discovered resources to production, raising recovery from existing fields and increasing collaborations with experts to reverse years of decline in output, its new chairman Arun Kumar Singh said.

Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is keen to induct internationally renowned exploration firms as strategic partners in difficult areas such as deepsea and bring-in experts who can help raise productivity from ageing and mature fields such as prime Mumbai High, Singh told PTI in an interview here.

ONGC, which contributes around 71 per cent to India’s domestic production, has reported a gradual decline in output for over a decade now primarily because its fields are old and ageing.



It produced 21.707 million tonnes of crude oil, which is refined to produce petroleum products like petrol and diesel, and 21.68 billion cubic meter (bcm) of natural gas, which is used to produce electricity, manufacture fertilizer and as CNG in automobiles.

“We are focusing on three key areas: deepwater exploration, monetising the discovered fields on fast-track and enhancing production from producing fields through enhanced oil recovery and improved oil recovery techniques.

“We are looking for collaborations mainly for deep-water exploration,” he said.

Tata Power to operationalise solar cell, module facility by Dec-end, says CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Power aims to operationalise its solar cell and module facility being set up in Tamil Nadu by December-end of this year, the company’s CEO & MD Praveer Sinha said.

In July 2022, Tata Power inked a pact with the Tamil Nadu government to invest Rs 3,000 crore for setting up a new facility to manufacture solar cells and modules in Tirunelveli district of the state.

The construction work is going on in full swing. The equipment to set up the unit have already been ordered. The aim is to make the plant operational by December-end of this year, Sinha told PTI.

He made the remarks in a reply to a question on the timeline of the project.

As per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Tamil Nadu government, Tata Power company has to set up a greenfield 4GW solar cell and 4GW solar module manufacturing plant in the south-



ern state.

“We expect the module plant to be ready by August-September and roll out the modules September onwards. We are at a very advanced stage of implementing the cell lines that will also be ready by the end of this year,” he said.

On the 225 MW hybrid project in Karnataka, he said the company awaits regulatory approval and clearances from

the regulatory commission for purchase of power.

In December 2022, Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd (TPREL), a subsidiary of Tata Power, had received a letter of award (LoA) from Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd (TPDDL) to set up the wind and solar hybrid power project in Karnataka. TPDDL is a joint venture of Tata Power and the NCT of Delhi.

Tata Motors aims to operationalise Ford’s Sanand plant in 12-18 months

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors is looking to commence operations at the Gujarat-based manufacturing plant it acquired from Ford, over the next 12-18 months to scale up its production capacity, according to its head of passenger vehicle business.

The automaker earlier this month completed the acquisition of Ford India’s manufacturing plant at Sanand through



a subsidiary. In August last year, the company had announced that its arm Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd (TPEML) would acquire Ford India Pvt

Ltd’s (FIPL) Sanand plant, Gujarat for ₹726 crore.

Tata Motors had earlier noted that with its manufacturing capacity nearing saturation, the acquisition is timely and a win-win for all stakeholders. The Sanand plant has a manufacturing capacity of 3 lakh units per annum, which is scalable to 4.2 lakh units per annum.

TPEML is in the process of making necessary investments to reconfigure the plant to

adapt to the Mumbai-based automaker’s existing and future vehicle platforms. The unit is adjacent to the existing manufacturing facility of Tata Motors at Sanand.

In an analyst call, Tata Motors Managing Director - Passenger Vehicle and Electric Vehicles Shailesh Chandra said the company also has the ability to debottleneck capacities at its two existing facilities at Pune and Sanand by an additional 10-15 per cent.

Hike in interest rates, inflationary pressures across geographies may impact demand: JLR

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Hike in interest rates by central banks globally is expected to enhance financing costs for consumers and could impact future demand, Jaguar Land Rover said in a report.

The UK-based marquee brand, which aims to be a full stack battery electric player in the next two years, also pointed out that high rate of infla-

tion exacerbated by the Ukraine conflict, elevated energy prices and post Covid supply disruption as other negative factors.

“Increasing interest rates in 2022 (including the UK, US and Europe) will flow through into financing costs for consumers and could impact future demand,” the automaker said in its Interim Report for the third quarter.



The company is working to offset inflationary trends and other issues like high energy

prices through profitability improvement actions, it said.

The automaker, which is owned by Tata Motors, said that although constraints continue, chip supply is expected to continue to gradually improve.

“Partnership agreements put in place with key chip suppliers are providing greater visibility over near-term supply,” it said.

ADVANTAGE BARCA

Real's title hopes suffer huge blow after Mallorca defeat

AP ■ MALLORCA

Carlo Ancelotti was dealt a blow before kick-off when goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois had to be withdrawn from the starting line-up due to injury, to be replaced by Andriy Lunin.

His mood would not have improved after kick-off as the hosts stormed into an early lead when Dani Rodriguez's cross looped off the head of Real Madrid defender Nacho and into the top corner.

Real struggled to break down a stubborn defensive resolve put up by Javier Aguirre's side, leading to reckless long-range shots from Rodrygo, Antonio Rüdiger and Ernesto Valverde floating harmlessly wide.

But the visitors were given a route back into the game when they were awarded a penalty early in the second half after Predrag Rajkovic had brought down Vinicius Junior.

However, the Serbian shot-stopper redeemed himself by guessing the right way to keep out Asensio's spot-kick.

Ancelotti turned to the likes of Luka Modric, Toni Kroos and David Alaba from the bench but Mallorca held firm leaving Real five points behind the league leaders Barcelona, who can extend that gap when they face Sevilla later on Sunday.

The European champions head off to the Club World Cup on the back of a defeat.

Atletico Madrid were unable to tighten their grip on fourth place in La Liga as they fell to a 1-1 draw with lowly



Getafe on Saturday.

Angel Correa sent Atletico ahead in the derby clash but Enes Unal clinically converted a penalty to level for the relegation-battling visitors.

Saul, who was Atletico's hero last weekend off the bench,

scoring the winner against Osasuna, became the villain at the Metropolitan.

The Spanish midfielder handled Borja Mayoral's header in the box to concede the penalty a few minutes after

coming on.

Diego Simeone's side dominated the first half but failed to create many clear chances.

However they moved ahead on the hour mark when Correa fired home after Thomas Lemar's shot was saved.

The goal was initially flagged offside but was awarded after checking on VAR, by which time Correa had been substituted, celebrating his strike already wearing a big coat on the sidelines.

Atletico's joy was short-lived, with Unal firing home from the spot in the 83rd minute after Saul's handball.

Yannick Carrasco flashed a shot wide after a surging run down the left flank as Atletico chased a late winner.

The Belgium winger wildly hammered another effort over the bar from distance with Simeone urging his team forward from the sidelines.

Atletico striker Memphis Depay, on as a substitute, angrily

appealed for a penalty when he tangled with Dejene Dakonam in the box but referee Mateu Lahoz ignored him.

Getafe goalkeeper David Soria made a fine save to keep the Dutch forward at bay at the death.

Atletico stay fourth but missed a chance to move closer to Real Sociedad, third, four points above the Rojiblancos with a game in hand.

Getafe are 19th on 18 points, two from safety.



Osimhen & Khvicha shine as Napoli go 16 clear at top

AP ■ LA SPEZIA

Victor Osimhen and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia were again the stars of the show for Napoli as the Serie A leaders won 3-0 at Spezia to extend their advantage to a whopping 16 points.

Wing wizard Kvaratskhelia put Napoli ahead from the penalty spot two minutes after the break on the Italian Riviera before Osimhen netted twice, taking his league tally to 16.

Nigeria forward Osimhen pounced on a defensive error to double Napoli's lead in the 68th minute and five minutes later rolled home an easy finish after Mattia Caldara passed

straight to Kvaratskhelia on the edge of his own area.

"All the victories are important, we need to keep the momentum and try to win all games," said Osimhen to Sky in Italy.

"It is not going to be easy of course, Serie A is a very competitive league and we have to be on top of our game. We go back, we prepare for the next game, that is the most important thing."

Osimhen ended the day on top of the world after beginning it going into the stands at the Stadio Picco to apologise to a woman fan who hit with a off-target pre-match practice shot.

The 23-year-old hugged

the woman and posed for selfies before going on to continue Napoli's unstoppable looking title charge.

"I think she was looking at her phone, the ball hit her in the face and I felt so sorry, as I didn't mean to do that," added Osimhen.

"I had to show my appreciation and say sorry for that." Luciano Spalletti's side will be at least 13 points clear come the end of the day as their closest challengers Inter Milan host ailing champions AC Milan in Sunday's late match.

Spezia stay 17th, five points above Verona who are just inside the relegation zone and host Lazio on Monday evening.

Messi hits winner as PSG rally to beat Toulouse

AP ■ PARIS

Lionel Messi scored a superb second-half winner as a Paris Saint-Germain side missing the injured Kylian Mbappe and Neymar came from behind to beat Toulouse 2-1 on Saturday and consolidate their lead at the top of Ligue 1.

Dutch midfielder Branco van den Boomen gave mid-table Toulouse the lead at the Parc des Princes from a 20th-minute free-kick, only for Achraf Hakimi to curl in the equaliser with half-time approaching.

Messi then put PSG in front just before the hour mark with a glorious first-time strike on his left foot low into the corner of the net from just outside the area.

It was Messi's 10th Ligue 1 goal of the season and his 15th for his club this campaign, as the World Cup winner stepped up in the absence of PSG's two other superstar attackers.

The Qatar-owned club are now eight points clear at the top of the table from Marseille, who play Nice on Sunday and then host PSG in the French Cup last 16 in midweek.

Mbappe will miss that game and the Champions League last-16 first leg against Bayern Munich on February 14 after being ruled out for three weeks with a thigh injury suffered in the 3-1 win at Montpellier last Wednesday.



Neymar missed a second successive game here with an apparently minor adductor problem, meaning it was left to Messi to lead the attack alongside the

20-year-old Hugo Ekitike with support from Vitinha and Carlos Soler.

But Christophe Galtier's side have other injury issues, with Sergio Ramos

unable to play and Renato Sanches forced to come off in tears just 12 minutes into the game.

The Portuguese midfielder was

starting for just the fifth time since joining from Lille at the start of the season.

He was replaced by teenage defender El Chadaille Bitshiabu, with Danilo Pereira moving up into the midfield, and the substitute was partly responsible when PSG fell behind.

Bitshiabu was booked for bringing down Zakaria Aboukhhal 25 metres from goal, and Van den Boomen sent the resulting free-kick low into the left corner of the net with Gianluigi Donnarumma beaten.

Messi hit the post from a corner and Toulouse had another goal disallowed for offside before the home side drew level seven minutes from half-time as Hakimi collected a Carlos Soler pass, cut in from the right flank and curled a shot on his left foot into the far corner from 20 metres.

Hakimi then turned provider as he set up Messi to make it 2-1 on 58 minutes and the outcome was rarely in doubt after that with PSG — who have had some recent wobbles — deserved winners.

Substitute Mikkel Desler did force a good save from Donnarumma deep into injury time before Messi hit the post again right at the death.

Lyon visit Troyes later before fifth-placed Rennes host Lille looking for an 11th consecutive home league win.

Never 'put personal interests' above Bayern, says sporting director



AP ■ MUNICH

Bayern Munich sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic said on Sunday he was "disappointed" with injured captain Manuel Neuer, who "put his personal interests above" the club.

The statement, which relates to Neuer's tell-all interview with media outlets Sueddeutsche

Zeitung and The Athletic, is the latest in the war of words between the club and its captain.

Neuer, who is currently out injured with a broken leg from a skiing accident in December, criticised the club's decision to fire long-time goalkeeping coach Toni Tapalovic, saying he felt "as if my heart had been ripped out".

Speaking with German tabloid Bild on Sunday, Salihamidzic said: "I understand Manuel is affected personally, but as captain I would have expected a different attitude from him."

"Manuel has put his personal interests above the interests of the club."

"We'll discuss it with him sensibly internally."

The off-field saga is mirrored by poor results on the field for the German champions, who are yet to win a league match in 2023.

Bayern, who sit in second place behind Union Berlin, travel to Wolfsburg on Sunday.

Ten Hag fumes over Casemiro Red Card



AP ■ MANCHESTER

Erik ten Hag criticised "inconsistent" VAR after Manchester United's Casemiro was the only player sent off following a mass brawl in Saturday's 2-1 win against Crystal Palace.

Bruno Fernandes' early penalty and a Marcus Rashford strike put United on course for a 13th successive home win in all competitions.

But Ten Hag's team had to survive a nervous finale at Old Trafford after Brazil midfielder Casemiro was dismissed before Palace's Jeffrey Schlupp scored to reduce the deficit.

Just prior to his goal, Schlupp had shoved United winger Antony off the pitch, sparking a fight involving both sets of players which ended with Casemiro receiving a straight red card for violent conduct.

Referee Andre Marriner was advised to

check the pitchside monitor by the VAR to review images of Casemiro grabbing Palace's Will Hughes by the throat.

"It was a really high level first 70 minutes until the incident takes place and then you see this team stands for each other," Ten Hag said.

"It's such a good spirit for the team and they don't accept when a player from us can be badly injured. That is the way Antony got treated."

"This team sticks together, but of course you have to control your emotions, but it's really difficult in such a moment."

"Then I see two teams fighting each other, I see two teams where players, several players, are crossing the line and then one player is picked out and sent off. For me, that's not right."

United's victory consolidated their grip on third place in the Premier League.

Gloss was taken off the result by Casemiro's red card and Ten Hag said Schlupp took a "big risk" by shoving Antony off the pitch, saying he could have been "badly injured".

The Dutchman also claimed Palace's Jordan Ayew should have "definitely" been sent off for his actions in the fight that followed, with the recent lack of VAR consistency infuriating him.

"You bring it up, but that was one of the players who did even worse, I would say, than Casemiro," Ten Hag said of Ayew.

"With Casemiro, you freeze the moment and he's crossing the line there, but I do definitely."

"You have to be consistent as a VAR. Last week we missed Christian Eriksen (who is out for three months) by a bad foul. No interference from VAR."

"In Crystal Palace (last month), (Jean-Phillipe) Mateta is elbowing (Lisandro) Martinez, he is running for two weeks with a mark on his eyebrow and (VAR's) not interfering. I see this is not right."

Wawrinka claims Davis Cup victory for Switzerland

AP ■ PARIS

Stan Wawrinka took Switzerland to the Davis Cup Finals group stage on Saturday, winning a rollercoaster deciding clash against Germany, just weeks shy of his 38th birthday.

Three-time Grand Slam title winner Wawrinka, who helped the Swiss to the Davis Cup title alongside Roger Federer in 2014, defeated Daniel Altmaier 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 as his country triumphed 3-2 in their qualifying tie.

Former world number three Wawrinka, now down at 135 after a long spell rebuilding his career following two foot surgeries, was playing in the tournament for the first time in eight years having made his debut in 2004.

By contrast Altmaier, 13 years younger, was making his Davis Cup debut in Trier.

Wawrinka, who turns 38 next month, had lost his singles opener on Friday in straight sets to Alexander Zverev.

He was on the losing side again earlier Saturday when he and Dominic Stricker were beaten in the doubles 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 6-4 by Tim Puetz and Andreas Mies.

However, Marc-Andrea Huesler then stunned world number 14 Zverev 6-2, 7-6 (7/3) to bring Switzerland level at 2-2, setting the stage for Wawrinka's moment in the spotlight.



"I'm happy that I won one point and the last one was the most important," said Wawrinka.

"We have a great team. They've been building this team for the last few years. I was happy to come back if they needed me."

The United States, who have won the 123-year-old tournament on a record 32 occasions, also booked their place in September's group stage by seeing off Uzbekistan in Tashkent.

Experienced doubles pair Austin Krajicek and Rajeev Ram

cantered to a 6-2, 6-4 win over Sanjar Fayziev and Sergey Fomini in just 52 minutes.

Serbia shrugged off the absence of Novak Djokovic to comfortably defeat a Norway team missing world number four Casper Ruud.

Ahead 2-0 after Friday's opening singles in Oslo, Nikola Cicic and Filip Krajinovic saw off Viktor Durasovic and Herman Hoeyerhaal 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 for the key point.

France, the 10-time champions, made the next round with

a win over Hungary.

Ugo Humbert, making his tournament debut this weekend, sealed the tie with a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Fabian Marozsan in Tatabanya in the deciding singles.

France were given a scare when Hungary surprisingly claimed the doubles rubber as Marozsan and Mate Valkusz defeated Nicolas Mahut and Arthur Rinderknech 6-2, 7-6 (7/4) before Adrian Mannarino levelled at 2-2 with a straight sets win over Marton Fucsovics.

Sweden also made it through to the September group stage with a 3-1 win over Bosnia.

The Swedes led 2-0 overnight in Stockholm before Bosnia cut the deficit when Mirza Basic and Tomislav Brkic downed Andre Goransson and Elias Ymer in straight sets.

World number 60 Mikael Ymer sealed the tie with a 6-1, 1-6, 6-3 win over Damir Dzumhur.

Britain defeated Colombia 3-1 when Cameron Norrie edged Nicolas Mejia 6-4, 6-4 for his second singles win of the weekend.

Croatia, the champions in 2005 and 2018, are 2-0 up on Austria in Rijeka after the first day with Borna Coric seeing off Dennis Novak 6-3, 7-5 and Borna Gojo getting the better of Dominic Thiem 6-3, 7-6 (7/2).

Chile are 1-1 at home to Kazakhstan, Belgium lead South Korea 2-0, the Netherlands have a 2-0 advantage over Slovakia, Finland and Argentina are 1-1 while the Czech Republic are 2-0 up on Portugal.

There are 12 ties this weekend with the winners securing places in the group stage in September alongside defending champions Canada, 2022 runners-up Australia and wild cards Italy and Spain.

The eight best teams then go through to the finals stage in Malaga in November.

INDIA'S CHANCES IN T20 WORLD CUP WILL BE LARGELY DEPENDENT ON TOP-ORDER: MITHALI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former skipper Mithali Raj feels India's chances of winning the Women's T20 World Cup will depend largely on the top order's form.

The legendary batter added that the Indian bowlers will have to show a marked improvement in testing conditions at the marquee event beginning on Friday in South Africa.

"India's chances will be largely dependent on the top order. Smriti Mandhana is playing well and is a match winner," Mithali wrote in her column for the ICC. "Harmanpreet Kaur has looked in good form too but we have to beat Australia and England you need others batters to come to the party."

The Indian team, which takes on Pakistan in their tournament opener on February 12 in Cape Town, have been playing in South Africa.

The Indian team, which recently finished runners up in a Tri series against hosts South Africa and West Indies, will be fielding a relatively inexperienced pace unit barring veteran Shikha Pandey. "The bowling will be tested and that is where we need to see an improvement," Mithali added.

The 40-year-old hopes the U19 World Cup-winning duo of Shafali Verma and Richa Ghosh make use of the knowledge that they have gained while playing the age group tournament on these conditions.

"I hope Shafali Verma and Richa Ghosh also have a good run at the World Cup consider-



ing they have gained so much experience of the conditions in South Africa.

"I am excited about some of the young players coming through and there is definitely some talent in the Under-19s team which I had the chance to see play at the inaugural ICC Under-19s Women's T20 World Cup."

AUS FAVOURITES

Mithali opined defending champions Australia's excellent batting department make them favourites to win the event for an unprecedented sixth time.

"I think everyone would agree that Australia are the favourites, and deservedly so. I am expecting, tight, competitive matches. They are so difficult to

beat because they bat deep and have an excellent batting line-up.

"There are not many teams who can rival them in terms of big hitters, and the fact they have numerous players who can play a similar role means that if one fails, others can step in.

However, Mithali feels India have a knack of producing their best against Australia.

"We saw recently that when they toured India although that was a very competitive series but when it came down to it, more often than not, it was Australia who came out on top.

"While Australia are definitely favourites, we have seen India and England play some of their best cricket in the knock-out stages of tournaments so I

would not write them off.

"India also have the knack of bringing their best against Australia."

WPL 2023

The inaugural Women's Premier League (WPL) will be played this year with the auction slated to be held on February 13 in Mumbai.

Mithali, who made significant contributions in popularising the women's game during her 23-year long glorious career, feels franchise cricket will not only help the players become financially secure but also enable them to invest in their game.

"What is great at this moment is that the women's game is constantly evolving. Where 140 used to be a par score in a T20, now you can see 160-180 plus chased down, and so many matches go down to the wire.

"That change has come down to the increase of leagues all over the world, with the WBBL in Australia, the Super League in England and of course the Women's Premier League in India which is going to start this year.

"Those platforms not only give local players the chance to interact with overseas stars, but they also offer better financial stability which allows them to invest in their own games, hiring personal coaches or strength and conditioning coaches.

While Mithali, who retired last year, will not be playing in the league, she has been roped in as a mentor and advisor by Gujarat Giants.



Jhulan appointed team mentor of MI women's team

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Recently retired India legend Jhulan Goswami has been entrusted with the dual role of team mentor and bowling coach by Mumbai Indians for the upcoming Women's Premier League (WPL) season.

Former England women's team captain and the second-highest run-getter in women's ODIs and Tests Charlotte Edwards has been appointed head coach of the franchise for the inaugural edition scheduled in March.

Former India all-rounder Devieka Palshikar will be the batting coach, while Trupti Chandgadkar Bhattacharya will be the team manager.

Jhulan, a Padma Shri who retired last year after the series against England, has more than 350 international wickets in a career spanning more than two decades.

She is the highest wicket-taker in WODIs and also has

the distinction of taking maximum wickets in history of Women's ODI World Cup. Jhulan rose to No. 1 in the ICC Women's ODI bowling rankings in January 2016 and post-retirement she is mentoring the Bengal women's team.

Edwards too had a crick-eting career spanning two decades and she led the England side to an ODI and T20I World Cup title triumph. Post-retirement, the 43-year-old has been coaching teams in England and Australia and is an ICC 'Hall of Famer'.

Devieka, a former right-handed batter and leg-spinner, was the assistant coach of India between 2014 and 2016. She was also associated with the Bangladesh team as assistant coach, winning the 2018 Asian Cup with them.

Mumbai Indians, the most successful IPL side, recently bought the Mumbai franchise in the WPL for Rs 912.99 crore.

Indian team focussed on clash against Pakistan despite WPL auction: Harman



PTI ■ CAPE TOWN

The Women's Premier League auction is just around the corner but India are firmly focussed on their T20 World Cup opener against Pakistan as they aim to emulate the U19 girls' title-winning feat, insisted skipper Harmanpreet Kaur. The WPL action is slated to be held on February 13 in Mumbai, a day after India's T20 World Cup opener against Pakistan.

"Before that [the auction], we have a very important game and we are just going to focus on that," Harmanpreet said at the T20 World Cup captains' press conference.

"The World Cup is more important than anything else. Our focus is on the ICC trophy. These things will keep coming, and as a player, you know what's important for you and how you need to keep your focus.

"We are all mature enough and know what is important for us," she added. Led by Shafali Verma, the Indian team won the inaugural U19 T20 World Cup last month and the senior side wants to add another ICC title in India's trophy cabinet.

"After watching the U19 World Cup, we are motivated to do what they have done. They have motivated us to do well, they have done it and we have not done it yet," Harmanpreet said.

"It was a very special moment for all of us and after watching the U19s many of the girls back home will also want to play cricket and that's always our aim to motivate young girls who can come and play cricket."

The flamboyant Indian skipper hoped that the WPL will play a similar role in contributing to the growth of Indian women's cricket like the Women's Big Bash and The Hundred have done in Australia

and England.

"It's a really big day for all of us because we have been waiting for years and years now. The next two or three months are very important for women's cricket. We have seen how the WBBL and the Hundred have helped their countries improve their cricket. Hopefully, the same will happen for our country."

Having played in the Kia Super League, WBBL and Hundred, Harmanpreet is keen to see Indian youngsters getting the opportunity to rub shoulders with international stars.

"That is something which has a very different feeling. When I got that opportunity, it was the biggest life-changing moment. Other girls will also experience this. It will be a great opportunity to improve cricket and grow the game."

New Zealand skipper Sophie Devine and her Australian counterpart Meg Lanning feel the WPL auction being held in the first week of the T20 World Cup will be awkward.

Devine labelled it the "elephant in the room" as she feels players will struggle to not think about it.

All Indians competing in the T20 World Cup, which starts on Friday, and several internationals players have put in their names for the WPL auction.

"It's going to be awkward ... some people are going to get picked up, some won't, and you're going to get a value attached to what you're worth, which as human beings isn't the nicest thing, but it's also a job and it's what we've put our names in for," Devine said.

The entire Australian 15-member World Cup squad has registered for the auction. Up to seven overseas players, of which one must be from an Associate nation, can be picked per team.

Emphasis is on slip fielding: Dravid

PTI ■ NAGPUR

The Indian team is focussing on fielding, especially slip catching, ahead of the opening Test against Australia beginning here on February 9, head coach Rahul Dravid said on Thursday.

The performance of India's slip fielders has been an area of concern in the past and Dravid said the team is trying to strengthen the slip cordon during its preparatory camp here ahead of the four-match Test series.

"Everyone looks in really good shape. It's nice to get the Test team together again. We had a lot of white-ball cricket over the last month or so," Dravid said in a video posted by the BCCI on Twitter.

"Some of those boys, shifting from white-ball to red-ball, it's nice for them to just have that

extended period in the nets. The surfaces have been really good as well," he said.

India are conducting their training sessions at the VCA Stadium in Civil Lines with the first Test scheduled at the VCA Jamtha Stadium on Thursday.

"Fielding side of things as well, that has been really important as well. The close-in catching which we think is going to become a really important part of the series.

"There's a lot of emphasis and focus on close-in catching, slip fielding, things like that when you are on the road all the time and don't get time to build and work on those things."

With the team on the road all through the year, Dravid said there is hardly any time to work with the players and hence it was quite exciting to get this one week ahead of the series.



"We have had a couple of really long sessions. I think it's really exciting as a coaching staff because you don't actually get times like this due to the amount

of cricket we play," he said.

"You don't get time actually to do a camp or you can get an extended period of time where you get to work with play-

ers and build up towards the Test series.

"Just to be able to get this week has been really exciting for us and we, as coaching staff, have

been planning and preparing for this for almost a month or so on what we will do in these four-five days. I'm glad it has all come together really well."

Apart from the Nagpur Test, Australia and India, currently ranked No.1 and 2 respectively in both the ICC men's Test Team Rankings and the ongoing World Test Championship cycle, will also play in New Delhi (February 17-21), Dharamsala (March 1-5) and Ahmedabad (March 9-13).

"Even though this is a short one by my standards, I like to have longer camps where we can work with people. But even then, we're happy to get five days or six days here in Nagpur," Dravid continued.

"It's been really fruitful and the boys are looking good. Hopefully two or three days more into the Test match and then we can take it from there."

Injured Hazlewood set to miss first Test; doubtful for second



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Recovering from an achilles injury, Australia pacer Josh Hazlewood is set to miss the opening Test against India in Nagpur and also remains a doubtful starter for the second game in Delhi.

The 32-year-old had sustained the injury on his left leg after bowling in the rain-affected Sydney Test against South Africa last month.

"Not sure about the first Test. It's still a few days away but it's sneaking up pretty quickly," Hazlewood was quoted as saying by 'Cricbuzz' before Australia's final session at the KSCA Stadium in the outskirts of Bangalore on Sunday.

"Second one is obviously straight after as well. So, we'll play it by ear over the next week and next few days and hope-

ly Tuesday goes well," added the pacer, who is likely to have his first bowl in Nagpur on Tuesday.

The opening Test begins on February 9 and if he misses out, Scott Boland might get his first overseas Test. Australia is already without Mitchell Starc for the first Test as the pacer is nursing a finger injury.

"Just a bit of workload management at the moment. Just managing the Achilles. I was bowling a fair bit leading into the tour at home and sort of just pushing up against it," Hazlewood said.

"Probably wasn't recovering as well as I would have liked between each session so thought we'd give it a few days here straight of the bat and try and get over the hump and have a bowl from Tuesday on (in Nagpur) and hope it goes well."

Hazlewood has had fre-

quent breakdowns in the last two years, having managed to play just four Tests and that too not able to complete a series.

"It's been frustrating playing one Test at a time," said the right-arm pacer, who had played the first Test against West Indies but missed the next three with a side strain.

Hazlewood had made a comeback in the Sydney Test only to injury his Achilles.

"It always feels the hardest Test to play, the first one and they sort of get easier as they go and you get to the other side, the end of the series, it gets hard again. Hopefully I can string a couple together on this tour," he said.

Despite all the injury breaks, Hazlewood's priority remains Test cricket with Australia set to play the World Championships Final and the Ashes apart from the Border Gavaskar trophy in India.

"It's still the same mindset. It's still about taking every game as it comes. It's obviously a huge tour and a long tour as well. It's four Tests. It's not a two-Test series where you might push things to get up for it.

"Four Tests is a long time and the Ashes is there as well and there's cricket all the time. It's just about getting it right, you don't want it lingering around for months on end.

"The Achilles is a hard one, being a tendon it's couple of steps forward, one step back occasionally, which is how it goes for everyone when they've got this type of injury. Feels like it's heading in the right direction," he said.

Sethi threatening to pull out of World Cup in India: PCB source

PTI ■ KARACHI

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman, Najam Sethi has reportedly told BCCI secretary Jay Shah that his country wants to host the Asia Cup and if the tournament is moved out, Pakistan will not send its team for the men's ODI World Cup in India.

Sethi's comments are on similar lines as his predecessor Ramiz Raja, who had reiterated that Pakistan could boycott the 50-over World Cup in India this year if the Asia Cup issue between the two cricket boards wasn't resolved.

Pakistan was originally allotted the Asia Cup in September this year, but Shah, who is the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) president, had said in October last year that the Indian team will not tour Pakistan for the continental tournament due to diplomatic tensions.

The ACC is expected to shift the Asia Cup from Pakistan and decide on the alternate venue in March.

However, a well-informed source in the PCB said that during the ACC executive board meeting held in Bahrain on Saturday, Sethi made Pakistan's stance on the Asia Cup very clear to Shah that his country "will not forgo the hosting rights of either the Asia Cup or the Champions Trophy in 2025".

"Sethi has made his stance very clear (to Shah) and he went to Bahrain after meeting Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif last Tuesday. Apparently, he has discussed the matter with the PM



before going to Bahrain," the source said.

"Sethi was clear that the Asia Cup is a multi-team event and the Pakistan government is willing to give security assurances to the Indian team. So, there is no reason for the BCCI to not send its team to Pakistan in September this year," the source added.

"Sethi also made it clear that if the BCCI cannot get clearance from its government for the Asia Cup, Pakistan will also not travel to India for the (ODI) World Cup."

The source added that Sethi told the meeting in Bahrain that if India didn't come to Pakistan, then both countries could play their matches in the two multi-team event at offshore venues.

The source rubbished reports that other ACC member countries, including Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, had said they would have to get government clearances to play the Asia Cup

in Pakistan.

"No such discussion took place. All the discussions centred around India-Pakistan cricket ties and the Asia Cup and World Cup."

The source said that after Sethi's tough stance, it was decided the ACC will meet again in March and the matter will be taken forward.

"Sethi told the ACC members that before the next meeting, the BCCI should speak to its government and make its stance clear on whether it will send its team for the Asia Cup, so that Pakistan can also discuss with the ICC about playing its World Cup matches in India," the source said.

The source added that Sethi asked the ACC members that when Pakistan was chosen as the host for the Asia Cup and the 2025 Champions Trophy, why didn't the BCCI representatives raise their objection then.