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6% IN 23-24: NITI AAYOG EX-VC

NEW DELHI, MONDAY FEBRUARY 20, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3

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Cong not 2-faced, knows its role: Party's Nitish snub

Any Opp unity sans us is not possible, party plenary from Feb 24, says Cong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's statement that the Congress should take the initiative in bringing Opposition unity, the Congress on Sunday took a swipe at Nitish saying that the party knows its lead role in uniting Opposition as it has never compromised with the BJP.

Ahead of its plenary this week, the Congress said the party top brass will deliberate and give direction on ways to forge Opposition unity during the three-day conclave at Raipur in Chhattisgarh and reiterated that no alliance or front can defeat the Modi juggernaut without the grand old party being the major stakeholder.

The party said talks on Opposition unity will come from the party's plenary session, where the issue will be deliberated upon as the main job is to defeat the BJP in 2024 and before that several assembly elections lined up.

"Congress understands its role in bringing together various Opposition parties for forging an alliance ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections to take on the BJP and oust it from power. The party has already taken the initiative and has been in touch with various



Congress leader KC Venugopal, with party leaders Jairam Ramesh, Tariq Anwar, Pawan Kumar Bansal and Selja Kumari, addresses a press conference regarding the 85th Plenary Session of Congress, at AICC headquarters in New Delhi on Sunday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

political parties. There is a clear-cut initiative taken by the Congress in bringing opposition parties together and we will certainly bring them together against the BJP in the 2024 elections," AICC general secretary organisation KC Venugopal said during the party's briefing on the plenary.

The plenary session in Chhattisgarh's Nava Raipur will start from February 24 and is expected to be attended by around 15,000 delegates.

Congress chief spokesman Jairam Ramesh added, "Nobody needs to give us a certificate that we have to lead because any Opposition unity without the Congress will be unsuccessful. So we welcome

the statement of Nitish Kumar, and as Venugopal ji has said this will be discussed in the plenary and whatever we have to do for the 2024 polls."

"But before that there are several Assembly polls. But without a strong Congress, strong Opposition unity is impossible," Ramesh said.

"He (Nitish) has acknowledged that the Bharat Jodo Yatra has had an impact not only on the Congress but on Indian politics... It is a transformational moment for Indian politics, he has acknowledged," Ramesh said referring to Bihar CM's statement on the success of the Kanyakumari-Kashmir yatra that ended in Srinagar last month.

"We welcome this and we know our role very well. The Congress is the only political party that has never made a compromise with the BJP anywhere. There are some opposition parties who come for (Rajya Sabha Leader of Opposition) Mallikarjun Kharge's meetings but their actions are in favour of the ruling party. We are not two-faced with respect to the BJP," Ramesh said.

He said he is opposed to the BJP and wants a joint parliamentary committee probe into the Adani issue and that it will keep raising the issue till the investigation is ordered into the "scam".

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Sena' name & symbol row not my business, says Pawar

PTI ■ PUNE

Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar on Sunday said he has clarified his stand on the Election Commission's decision to recognise Eknath Shinde-led faction as the real "Shiv Sena" and allocation of the "bow and arrow" poll symbol to it, and will not get involved in the controversy over it.

In its decision on Friday, the EC allowed the Uddhav Thackeray faction to retain the name Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) and the 'flaming torch' poll symbol, given to it in an interim order in October last year, till the conclusion of upcoming Assembly bypolls in the State.

Pawar on Friday said the loss of "bow and arrow" will not make any difference to the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena faction as people will accept its new poll symbol.

To a query over the issue on Sunday, the NCP chief, who was in Pune's Baramati town, said, "I do not want to get involved in the controversy regarding the name and symbol given to Eknath Shinde. I have already clarified my stand on the same two days back."

Asked about Union Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to Pune, Pawar said Shah was here for the Sahkar Maha Conclave. "I was present at the opening ceremony of the event. There were talks about policies and issues in the field of cooperation. There is no difference between us. I found his points were correctly mentioned during his speech," Pawar said.

Shah on Saturday said the cooperative sector in the country needs to introspect to improve its systems.



Union Home Minister Amit Shah, with his wife Sonal Shah, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, Deputy CM Devendra Fadnis, releases New Education Society's centenary souvenir at a function, in Kolhapur on Sunday
PTI

Shah jeers at Uddhav for surrender to Pawar, exhorts BJP to win all Maha LS seats

Mumbai: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday set the BJP and its allies a target of winning all 48 seats in Maharashtra in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls.

Addressing a gathering of BJP workers in Kolhapur, he also lashed out at Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray for "surrendering at the feet of (Nationalist Party Congress chief) Sharad Pawar" to become Chief Minister.

Thackeray had broken the alliance with BJP after the 2019 Assembly poll results were declared claiming the latter had reneged on its promise to share the chief ministerial tenure with the Shiv Sena.

He teamed up with the

NCP and Congress and led the Maha Vikas Aghadi, till a rebellion by Eknath Shinde brought it down in June last year.

"In 2019, the BJP and its allies won 42 out of 48 seats. This time, we should win all 48 seats," Shah told his party workers.

Attacking Thackeray, Shah said, "Hindu Friday Samrat Balasaheb Thackeray's Shiv Sena was surrendered at the feet of Sharad Pawar. (Thackeray) contested Assembly polls with us with the largest cut-outs being that of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. But after the results were out, he (Thackeray) surrendered at the feet of Pawar."

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Raut claims deal over Sena name, Shinde's party rejects claim

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Sunday claimed a "deal of ₹2000 crore" has taken place so far to "purchase" the Shiv Sena party name and its 'bow and arrow' symbol, two days after the Election Commission allotted them to the group led by Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

Legislator Sada Sarvankar from the camp led by Shinde dismissed the claim and asked, "Is Sanjay Raut a cashier?"

Maharashtra Minister BJP leader Sudhir Mungantiwar also hit back at Raut saying such baseless comments were an attempt to malign independent institutions like the Supreme Court and the Election Commission of India.

Raut in a tweet claimed the ₹2,000 crore was a preliminary figure, and that this was 100 per cent true.

He also told reporters that a builder close to the ruling dispensation shared this information with him.

The Rajya Sabha member said his claim was backed by proof which he would disclose soon.

"The EC's decision is a deal," he alleged.

The Election Commission on Friday recognised the Eknath Shinde-led faction as the real Shiv Sena and ordered allocation of the 'bow and arrow' poll symbol to it.

Momentum 2.0 to take Metro riders on shopping binge

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro will soon launch an app which will enable commuters to buy a range of products and book various services, including those for last-mile connectivity. 'Momentum 2.0' — India's first virtual shopping app for the metro — will also include features such as instant recharge of Delhi Metro's smart cards and smart payment options for other utility services, officials said on Sunday.

The app will "enable the metro commuters to buy a range of products and book services while travelling in the metro and collect their orders at the destination stations", the DMRC said in a statement.

'Momentum 2.0' will pro-

vide users instant access to custom-made services such as last-mile connectivity options, a wide array of e-shopping choices, and digital lockers for quick and safe deliveries.

In February 2022, PTI reported that Delhi Metro had embarked on a visionary project that seeks to integrate its regular services with e-commerce via cutting-edge digital platforms, with the hiring of a top consulting firm to work on the plan. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has been adding digital services for commuters in line with the government's Digital India vision.

The DMRC had in February last year launched its revamped website and a mobile app with extra features.

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CBI defers Sisodia quiz in liquor scam on Dy CM's request



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Citing Budget preparatory meeting, Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday urged the CBI to defer his questioning in the excise policy scam case till the last week of February.

The AAP leader has not been named as an accused in the chargesheet as the investigation against him and other suspects is still going on.

The BJP has called it an

excuse to run away from the CBI. BJP leader Shehzad Poonawalla on Sunday accused him of making excuses. Sisodia had been called for questioning on Sunday in connection with the case, nearly three months after a chargesheet was filed in the matter.

Following that, the CBI accepted his request seeking more time to join the probe. The CBI will now issue a fresh summons with a new date soon from him to join the probe. During its probe into the money trail and links between liquor traders, AAP leaders, middlemen and politicians, the CBI has gathered elaborate materials on which it needs clarifications from Sisodia who is the prime accused in the FIR, officials said.

Continued on Page 2

Redress grievances with human touch, Modi urges babus

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked employees of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions to break down silos and redress grievances with a human touch for nation-building.

"Break silos, increase teamwork, rise above hierarchies & redress grievances with a human touch," he was quoted saying in a "chintan shivir" or a brainstorming session organised for the ministry's officials on Saturday.

The PM on Saturday addressed the officials. Some details of the deliberations were made public by the government on Sunday.



"An effective grievance redressal system is the true strength of a democracy," Modi had said emphasising the importance of timely grievance redressal to build a stronger democracy for the collective welfare of the nation.

US-India's fresh move for cooperation in civil nuclear energy sector

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In the face of growing global concerns over energy security triggered by the Ukraine conflict, India and the US are giving a fresh look at exploring practical cooperation in the civil nuclear energy sector after failing to move forward since inking a historic agreement over 14 years back for partnership in the area.

Ways for bilateral cooperation in areas of clean energy including nuclear commerce under the framework of the India-US nuclear agreement of 2008 figured prominently in the talks US Assistant Secretary of State for Energy Resources Geoffrey R Pyatt had with Indian interlocutors in Delhi on February 16 and 17.

In an exclusive interview to PTI, Pyatt described India as a

very crucial partner for the US in ensuring global energy security in view of serious disruptions in supplies of fossil fuel resulting from Russia's "brutal" invasion of Ukraine.

Continued on P2

US warns China against helping Russia

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned China that its material support for Russia's war against Ukraine would attract sanctions and condemned "unacceptable violation" of American sovereignty by an alleged Chinese spy balloon as he met Beijing's top diplomat Wang Yi.

CAPSULE

DEMOLISH HOTEL IN SUNDARBANS: NGT

New Delhi: The National Green Tribunal has directed authorities in West Bengal to demolish a hotel constructed in Sundarbans in violation of environmental norms. The tribunal was hearing a matter pertaining to the permissibility of a hotel construction in Sundarbans, for which the West Bengal State Coastal Zone Management Authority (WBCZMA) had raised objections.

PRE-POLL VIOLENCE IN NAGALAND, 5 INJURED

Kohima: At least five people were injured and several vehicles were damaged in pre-poll violence in Nagaland, police said on Sunday. NPP and LJP supporters clashes in Thonoknyu Assembly seat in Noklak district on Sunday.

Bodies of 3 MBBS students fished out from Ganga

PTI ■ BUDAUN

Bodies of three MBBS students from Government Medical College, Budaun, who had gone missing after they ventured into deep water while bathing in the Ganga, were fished out on Sunday.

District Magistrate of Budaun Manoj Kumar said that NDRF (National Disaster Relief Force) was pressed into search operation late Saturday night after the incident, and it resumed its operation Sunday morning. During the rescue operation, which lasted nearly eight hours, NDRF fished out bodies of Jai Maurya, 26, Pavan Yadav, 24, and Naveen Sengar, 22, from a spot 500 metres from the ghat.

Continued on P2

Jadeja steers India to Gavaskar trophy win

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ravindra Jadeja thoroughly exposed a technically ill-equipped and mentally messed up Australian batting unit with a career-best seven for 42 as India won the second Test by six wickets to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy here on Sunday.

The Australian batters paid the price for some atrocious shot selection as Jadeja, who enjoyed a 10-wicket match haul, along with Ravichandran Ashwin (3/59) decimated the visitors in the morning session, bowling them out for 113 in 31.1 overs.

The last nine wickets fell for 52 runs. KL Rahul (1) cut a sorry figure but Indian batters showed how to play spin as the target of 115 was complet-

ed in 26.4 overs.

Cheteshwar Pujara had something to cheer about on his 100th Test appearance as he remained unbeaten on 31 and fittingly hit the winning boundary.

India have now put one foot in the final of the World Test Championship in England in June, having taken an unsailable 2-0 lead in the four match series.

The win was India's 100th against Australia across formats. The third Test will be played in Indore from February 27.

Starting the day at 61 for 1, Jadeja's arm balls became a lethal weapon with as many as five Australian batters getting out trying to play sweep shots of deliveries that kept low on a typical third day Ferozshah



Indian and Australian players greet each other after the end of the 2nd test cricket match between India and Australia, at the Arun Jaitley Stadium, in New Delhi on Sunday
PTI photo

Kotla track.

Australia lost nine wickets for only 52 runs and it was not the pitch but the fear of unknown that led to their eventual downfall.

Steve Smith, Matt Renshaw, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins and Matt Kuhnemann were all guilty of playing the ugly slog sweep and some tried non-existent reverse sweep off deliveries bowled on either middle or leg stump line.

They were either bowled or adjudged leg before in the process as the deliveries started keeping low.

Ashwin also played the supporting act to perfection as eight Australian batters failed to reach double figures save overnight pair of Travis Head (45) and Marnus Labuschagne (35), who had briefly counter-

attacked last evening with some degree of success.

But it all changed in the morning session once Head got an off-break from Ashwin and the edge was picked up by Kona Bharat behind the stumps. It is a cardinal mistake to play a sweep or reverse sweep off straighter ones or sliders if there isn't enough bounce.

The ball that trapped Steve Smith plumb in-front was on leg-middle and it was a fair call.

The ideal technique of playing on tracks where ball starts keeping low is to plunk the front-foot forward and play with a straight bat.

When a player stretches the front-foot forward, the chances of silly point or short leg being in business also reduce.

Continued on P2

Protest against attacks on churches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Members of the Christian community staged a protest at Jantar Mantar here on Sunday against alleged “attacks on churches, violence and arrests” in different parts of the country.

“We are being accused of forcibly converting people to Christianity. Churches are being attacked, our people are being beaten up and arrested. The community members are living in a constant state of panic,” Steven from Uttar Pradesh said.

He claimed that the country saw “525 cases of atrocities against the members of the community in 2021 and 600



cases in 2022”.

“In Uttar Pradesh, the number of such cases increased from 70 in 2020 to 183 in 2022,” he claimed.

Shivpal from Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh alleged that the state police has been arresting people over allegations of forced conversions.

“We are not even allowed to pray in our houses. A few women were arrested for offering prayers during a birthday celebration,” he said.

One of the FIRs filed against the members of the community names an 11-year-old and a person who died in 2010, Steven alleged.

Churches are being attacked and our community members harassed in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and many other states. Cases are being filed against them on the basis of false charges. We have come here to express solidarity with our brothers and sisters,” Poonam, who came from Delhi’s Punjabi Bagh, said.

2 killed, 8 injured after under-construction building collapses in Roop Nagar

STAFF REPORTER ■ GHAZIABAD

Two labourers were killed, eight injured and some others feared trapped after the roof of an under-construction building collapsed on Sunday, police said. The incident took place in the Roop Nagar industrial area in Loni, neighbouring Delhi. Deputy Commissioner of Police Ravi Kumar said 10 labourers were pulled out from the debris. Two of them were declared dead and eight are injured. A rescue operation is underway for the others.

The victims have been identified as Sameer and Rajesh. The injured labourers have been identified as

Kamlesh, Balkrishna, Mangesh, Anil, Sunny, Sanjeev, Sohail and Prakash.

They are undergoing treatment at GTB Hospital. The condition of two labourers is critical, Kumar said. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) is doing its last clearing operation.

“The NDRF rescue operation is in progress. They are expecting that two-three more people might still be under the debris,” he said.

The police had initially feared 15-16 people were trapped under the debris. Local residents said the labourers were working on a construction site owned by one Madan Lal Sharma.

Domestic help tortured for five months returns home

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

A 17-year-old minor domestic help, who was tortured by her employers for five months has been returned to her native place after recovering from her injuries.

“A team from Jharkhand Police’s anti-human trafficking wing is taking her and her family to their home in Jharkhand via train on Saturday. The accused are still in jail. We are probing the matter further,” Inspector Dinkar, station house officer of New Colony Police Station said.

Meanwhile, the city police said that they have recorded

their statement and that further probe is underway.

In the case, the Gurugram police had arrested a couple Manish Khattar (36) and his wife Kamaljeet Kaur (34) who were later sacked by their firms. Both of their companies announced their termination through Twitter.

Meanwhile, the police had also nabbed an employee of the placement agency in Delhi, which had provided the minor to that couple at a salary of Rs 10,000 per month.

Jharkhand CM office had also intervened in the matter and urged to provide the necessary support to rehabilitate the girl back to her family.

Naxalites torch 3 machines engaged in road construction work in Chhattisgarh

PTI ■ KANKER

Women Naxalites have set blaze three machines engaged in road construction work in Chhattisgarh’s Kanker district, police said on Sunday.

No one was injured in the incident which took place on Saturday evening between Kamteda and Gattakal villages under Partapur police station limits, about 200 km from the state capital Raipur. Additional Superintendent of Police (Pakhanjore) Dharendra Patel said.

The road construction work was being carried out under the Prime Minister



Gram Sadak Yojna.

According to preliminary information, a group of armed women Naxalites, clad in uniform, stormed the construction site, threatened the workers to stop the work and snatched their mobile phones, the official said.

The Naxalites then set ablaze two earth-moving machines and a mixture machine and fled, he said.

Soon after being alerted, a police team was sent to the spot, Patel said, adding a search operation was underway there to trace the culprits.

Naxalites have frequently tried to disrupt road construction works in Chhattisgarh’s Bastar division, which consists of seven districts including Kankder, by launching attacks on security forces and damaging the roads, vehicles and machines used in the work, according to police.

People throng CP as ‘Raahgiri’ returns to Delhi after 3 years

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Scores of people gathered at Connaught Place on Sunday morning to enjoy games and other recreational activities as ‘Raahgiri’ returned to the national capital after a three-year gap.

Dozens of fun activities were organised including drawing competitions, games and different kinds of dances. People in their colourful ensembles were seen doing Zumba. The Raahgiri has returned after a three-year COVID-19-induced gap.

“More walking and more use of the streets for pedestrians for the people will improve the social fabric of the society and that is why NDMC and Delhi Police are contributing whatever little bit we can contribute towards the society,” Delhi Police Commissioner, Sanjay Arora said. There were a lot of fun activities at the event including a puppet show. People also appreciated the artwork of several artists that were exhibited here.



The event was also attended by the officials of Delhi Police and New Delhi Municipal Committee (NDMC). On the day, the streets of Connaught Place were transformed into a car-free zone, allowing residents to participate in a range of activities, including yoga classes, Zumba, sports zones, games, music, dance, and even educational programs on different issues such as road safety, walkability, and women safety.

On the first day of its re-launch, the activities started at 7 in the morning and continued till 10 am. A cycle school was organised for people who do not know how to cycle, especially women and children.

Momentum 2.0 to take Metro...

From Page 1

The app will also allow users to have digital lockers at metro stations, officials said on Sunday.

Commuters using this app will be able to book bikes, e-rickshaws, cabs and also get timetable of feeder buses, DTC buses, and cluster bus routes from Delhi Metro’s stations. “The app includes features for

e-shopping options with a wide array of goods to choose from. This innovative ‘brick & click’ store experience will provide users with the convenience of shopping for groceries and other essential items at the metro stations,” the transporter said in a statement.

Selected brands will display their products and services in the app through extended real-

ity tools, and travellers can make purchases using a QR code, it said. The immersive and dynamic content at these virtual stores that display the goods on offer at the station will bridge the gap between digital and real-life shopping, officials said.

DMRC is in the process of installing digital lockers named ‘Smart Boxes’ at select stations, where goods ordered through e-shopping on this app can be deposited safely and can be collected by the respective buyers once they arrive at their destination station, it said. These smart boxes will offer secure, tech-enabled management of parcels, security

items, and products. These user-friendly lockers will work for the fastest delivery and retrieval cycles in association with e-commerce players. In addition, passengers can also use the smart boxes on a payment basis, the statement said.

In addition, the app will enable commuters to instantly recharge their smart card from anywhere. There is an auto-top-up facility for smart cards inbuilt into the app. The app will also facilitate smart payments. By setting up automatic instructions, recurring payments such as insurance, electricity, gas payments or FASTag recharge can be made easily, officials said. The app will also

provide detailed information on facilities available at metro stations such as the location and condition of gates, lifts, escalators, platforms, train timing, occupancy of coaches, and space availability.

Users can get real-time information on the arrival time of trains, subject to operational feasibility, location of platforms and exit gates. This will help commuters book bikes or cabs before stepping out of the metro and have the vehicle ready on arrival at the destination station. The app will also offer information on shops, outlets, kiosks, and ATMs available at the stations, the DMRC said.

Jadeja steers...

From Page 1

Instead, if you are on the backfoot or trying to play across the line shots like sweep and reverse, there is every possibility that spinners will mostly keep it in line of stumps waiting for either bowled or leg before decision.

Labuschagne, who looked confident until then, went on backfoot to a delivery that was supposed to be met on the front-foot with a big stride. The result was the ball kept low and the batter was castled. Matt Renshaw doesn’t have the technique or wherewithal to guts it out on these Indian dustbowls and he has been a ‘walking wicket’ for the home team. Having replaced a concussed David Warner, Renshaw went for a sweep off Ashwin when the ball kept really low and the shot was not on. The only delivery that was

classic left-arm orthodox one was bowled to Peter Handscomb (0), the best batter in the first innings. Jadeja, for a change, tossed it up and drew him forward before it turned away enough to get an outside edge into Virat Kohli’s hands.

Pat Cummins’s ugly slog sweep shot was more out of anger and frustration rather than purpose and Matt Kuhnemann, while giving Jadeja his seventh wicket, looked as clueless as possible. Rohit showed how to play spinners on low bounce track. When India started the chase, their skipper Rohit Sharma (31 off 20 balls) showed how to tackle the Australian spinners before being run-out due to a mix-up. Unlike Labuschagne, who preferred to stay on backfoot even to flighted deliveries, the moment Rohit saw the ball being given air, he would put a big stride forward and lift it in the arc between sight screen and cow corner. Rohit’s stay was short and sweet one but certainly a lesson in playing spinners.

Shah jeers at Uddhav for surrender...

From Page 1

“We are not greedy for power nor have we ever sacrificed our principles. The last Maharashtra assembly election was contested under the leadership of then chief minister Devendra Fadnavis. PM Modi and I had openly said this

during our rallies. Despite this, (Thackeray) joined hands with the opposition,” he added.

Hailing the Election Commission’s decision on Friday to recognise the Shinde faction as the real Shiv Sena and giving it the bow and arrow symbol, Shah said they (Thackeray group) will now learn a lesson.

“By deceit you can attain power for few days, but when it comes to the battlefield, you need courage to win,” Shah said without naming Thackeray.

CBI defers...

From Page 1

Sisodia said he would be available for questioning after a week. “I have told them that I will visit the CBI office by the end of February, whenever they will call me. Being the Finance Minister of Delhi, preparing the Budget is very important, so I have requested to shift the date. I have always cooperated with these agencies,” Sisodia told media persons.

“It’s my duty as Finance Minister to present the Budget on time and I have been working 24 hours for it. I have

requested the CBI to allow me to come after the last week of February and answer all their questions,” he told reporters.

Sisodia charged that the BJP was using the probe agency to take “revenge” on him and expressed apprehension that he would be arrested.

Referring to the apex court ordering issuance of a notice for convening the first meeting of the civic body to fix the date of elections for the MCD mayor, the AAP leader said, “The BJP lost elections and then they lost again on Friday in the Supreme Court. So this is their revenge”. “They are using the CBI to take revenge and I am sure they will do that by getting me arrested,” he charged.

Maintaining that he was not scared of getting arrested or

Several injured in traffic pile up on Meerut expressway

STAFF REPORTER ■ GHAZIABAD | NOIDA

Several people on Sunday morning received injuries in a traffic pile up at the Delhi-Meerut Expressway in Ghaziabad and Delhi Saharanpur highway due to foggy conditions and low visibility.

One person was injured in a traffic pileup of at least 35 vehicles amid foggy conditions and low visibility on the Delhi-Meerut Expressway in Ghaziabad on Sunday.

According to the police, the incident happened around 8 am. Around five people received minor injuries but one truck driver is seriously injured on the Delhi-Saharanpur highway after a collision involving over a dozen vehicles.

“There was heavy fog in the morning and due to this vehicles were moving slowly. In this situation, a car suddenly stopped on the highway due to the fog. A catcher vehicle was just behind the car and had to stop. At that moment, a trailer vehicle hit the catcher and passed through the left side. There was an oil tanker behind the trailer and it collided with the catcher and stopped there. After this, other vehicles collided with each other,” said Ghaziabad’s Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic) Ramanand Kushwaha.

Kushwaha said the driver of the catcher vehicle was injured and was sent to the hospital by the police for treatment.

“The traffic police immediately got the highway cleared. Some of the more damaged vehicles were picked up by cranes and others were driven by their drivers. Now, the traffic is normal,” said Kushwaha.

Meanwhile, heavy fog caused another multi-vehicle collision on the Delhi-Saharanpur highway on Sunday morning. Several individuals were injured, as per reports.

Bodies of 3 MBBS students...

From Page 1

Their bodies will be sent for a post mortem, Kumar said.

The three victims were part of a team of five MBBS students, who had gone to take a bath at Kachhla Ganga Ghat Saturday afternoon. The other two of them were rescued by local divers on Saturday.

College Principal Dr Dharmendra Gupta said the students are from the 2019 batch.

The three victims, Jai Maurya, Pavan Prakash, and Naveen Sengar were from Jaunpur, Ballia, and Hathras, in that order.

The other two rescued were Pramod Yadav and Ankush Gehlot from Gorakhpur and Bharatpur in Rajasthan.

They all had gone to bathe in the river without informing the college administration, Gupta said.



CHANGE OF NAME

I, Dalbir Alias Dalbir Singh S/o Late Sh. Mala Ram R/o Flat No. 532, Sanjay Enclave, Opp. GTK Bus Depot, Jahangir Puri, Delhi-110033, have changed my name to Dalbir Singh Punia for all purposes.

PD(90272)A

Cong not 2-faced...

From Page 1

He said there would be deliberations on things such as whether there would be a pre-poll alliance or other such modalities, and pointed out that the Congress was in alliance with several parties in various states.

Venugopal said the agen-

da for the three-day 85th plenary session of the party from February 24 to 26 would be finalised in the steering committee meeting to be held on the first day and thereafter, the subjects committee will give final shape to the resolutions to be adopted.

He said this will be the party’s first plenary session to be held outside Delhi since the last one in Hyderabad in 2005.

Venugopal termed the plenary session an “important milestone” in the journey towards the 2024 parliamen-

tary elections and that around 15,000 delegates from across the country will participate in it.

Giving the break-up of the number of delegates, he said there are 1,338 All India Congress Committee delegates and 487 co-opted ones, which comes to a total of 1,825 delegates.

Besides, there will be a total of 9,915 Pradesh Congress Committee delegates attending the session, Venugopal said.

Party treasurer Pawan

Kumar Bansal said the session will end with a public rally in Raipur, which top leaders will address.

Kumari Selja, who is the AICC general secretary in-charge for Chattisgarh, said of the total AICC delegates, there are 235 women and 501 below 50 years of age. Besides, there will be 704 from the general category, 228 from among minorities, 381 from other backward classes, 192 from among scheduled castes and another 133 from among the scheduled tribes.

School owner among 5 charged with arson in 2020 Delhi riots

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A city court has charged a school owner and four others of rioting and arson in an alleged case of torching of properties and stone pelting during the 2020 northeast Delhi riots. The court was hearing a case against Faisal Farooq, the owner of Rajdhani School, Md Parvez, Ashraf Ali, Sonu Saifi and Anis Qureshi.

They were accused of being a part of a riotous mob that torched a school (DRP Public School), houses and shops, besides pelting stones and throwing petrol bombs in the Dayalpur area on February 25, 2020.

According to the prosecution, the riotous mob was "using Rajdhani School as a base for the purpose of throwing petrol bombs and pelting stones at the properties belonging to Hindus".

"I find that (all) accused persons... are liable to be tried for offences punishable under



sections 120B (criminal conspiracy) read with 147 (rioting) 148 (rioting, armed with a deadly weapon), 153A (punishment for promoting enmity between different groups on the ground of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language), 427 (punishment for committing mischief and thereby causing loss or damage to the amount of Rs 50 or upwards) and 436 (mischief by fire or explosive substance with intent to destroy house) of the

Indian Penal Code," Additional Sessions Judge Pulastya Pramachala said in a recent order.

Farooq was also liable to be tried for offences under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 109 (punishment of abetment if the act abetted is committed in consequence and where no express provision is made for its punishment) and 505 (statements conducing to public mischief), the judge said.

The four other accused

were further charged under sections 149 (every member of unlawful assembly guilty of offence committed in prosecution of common object) and 188 (disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant) of the IPC, Judge Pramachala added.

The court, however, discharged the accused from the provisions of the Prevention of Damage to Property (PDPP) Act, saying the investigating agency was "lax in not obtaining particulars of the properties allegedly damaged by the mob".

It also discharged them from the charge of attempt to murder, saying admittedly no injury was caused out of the alleged firing from the side of the mob, nor it could be said that such firing was done with the intention to kill anyone.

The court said it was clear from the statements of several witnesses that accused Farooq instigated the mob to carry an attack on DRP School and destroy it as well "to teach a les-

son to Hindus". After Farooq allowed his school to be used as a base by the riotous mob, arrangements were also made there to throw petrol bombs by catapult, the court said.

It said that "all these acts of accused Faisal (Farooq) show that he had a meeting of mind with other members of the mob". "In this case, accused Parvez, Ashraf Ali, Sonu Saifi and Anis Qureshi indulged in targeting the properties of Hindus and their acts were apparently prejudicial to the harmony between communities of Muslims and Hindus and they did disturb the public tranquillity through their actions while accused Faisal Farooq instigated this mob to attack upon the property belonging to Hindu," the court said.

The Dayalpur police station had filed a chargesheet against the accused persons under various sections of the IPC and provisions of the PDPP Act.

Cow vigilante accused of lynching 2 in Haryana to lose arms licence

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM



The Haryana Police has started a process to cancel the arms licence of Mohit Yadav, alias Monu Manesar, who is among the four on the run in the Nasir and Junaid murder case.

The police are also checking the record of other members of the cow protector group having arms licenses and if involved in the heinous crime. The deceased are residents of Ghatmeeka village in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan whose charred bodies were found inside a burnt Bolero car in Loharu in Bhiwani in Haryana on Thursday morning.

The victim's family had named five men linked to the Bajrang Dal in their complaint to the police. DCP Manesar Manbir Singh said as per the rules, an arms licence is cancelled if the licence holder is booked for a serious crime.

"The process of cancellation of the arms license of Manesar has been started and it will be cancelled soon. Different police teams including crime units of

the Gurugram police are also searching him and he will be arrested soon," Singh said.

Apart from this, CCTV footage of Manesar's house has surfaced on social media in which around 9 am on February 15 he can be seen in the video. The victim's family alleged that at the same time, the duo was abducted by the accused.

Manesar is one of the prime accused in the brutal killing and is on run. Yadav is a Gurugram district president of Bajrang Dal who joined as was a member of the district cow protection task force in 2011. Manesar was earlier named in an attempt to murder case registered against him at Pataudi police station area on

February 7. Manesar is usually known for chasing, confronting, and nabbing alleged cattle smugglers. He along with his team members has a solid network of illegal transportation of cattle. Manesar has 83,000 followers on Facebook and 2,05,000 subscribers on YouTube. He received a silver play button from YouTube in October last year. Manesar is an influential personality. Several photos of him with police officials and bureaucrats have surfaced. The videos on his YouTube channels are mostly on how the cow vigilante group catches cow smugglers. These videos, mostly live streams, have thousands of views and comments.

Budget preparations: Sisodia discuss issues with market bodies

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Sunday held a stakeholder meeting with the representatives of various market associations in order to tailor the Budget in keeping with the government's priority to create more opportunities for them.

The main aim of the meeting was to include the suggestions of the stakeholders in the budget-making process so that it can be shaped as per their requirements, the government said in a release.

"In the meeting, representatives of market associations demanded special packages from the government for their markets and sectors in the budget. Parkings, pink toilets, and cleanliness of markets and roads were the main demands of traders," it said.

Representatives of more than 15 market associations related to textile, paper, automobile, furniture, timber, food grains, medicines, bakery and dry fruits participated in the meeting.

Delhi Transport and Revenue Minister Kailash Gahlot and Chamber of Trade



and Industries Chairman Brijesh Goyal were also present during the meeting. Sisodia has earlier urged the CBI to defer the questioning on Sunday in the excise policy case due to budget preparatory meeting with traders.

While interacting with the representatives, Sisodia, who also holds the finance portfolio, said that it is his priority to make the budget along with the stakeholders.

"To ensure the same, various stakeholder meetings are organised ahead of the Budget session. During the preparation of the budget, the government tries to understand the expectations of the stake-

holders every year by conducting meetings with the representatives of different markets of Delhi and then tries to include them in the budget. This is done so that markets can flourish and create more avenues of business for them," Sisodia said.

This year too, the Delhi government is conducting various meetings with the market associations and understanding their expectations so that provisions can be made in the budget regarding the same, he further said.

"It is the responsibility of the government to understand their requirements and develop better facilities for them. This will help the mar-

kets attract more customers and business opportunities," he said. One of the major demands of the market association representatives in the meeting was to establish a better road network around various godowns located in outer Delhi. Taking quick cognisance of this, Sisodia instructed the officials to conduct a survey and prepare a blueprint to establish a better road network around the godowns built in the areas around GT Karnal Road. After the completion of this survey, the work of road construction will start there soon, and lakhs of traders will be benefited from this.

The representatives of Naya Bazar, Rohini and Model Town Market Association raised a demand to solve the problem of cleanliness and parking in the market. The Deputy Chief Minister directed the officers to identify sites for parking in these markets. Sisodia also instructed the MCD officials to identify the reasons behind the non-commissioning of 4-storey multi-level parking in Model Town and start the work immediately.

BJP raps Dy CM for request to defer CBI quiz in liquor scam

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Taking a dig at the Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's request to the CBI to defer his questioning, the BJP has called it an excuse to run away from questions while the Delhi Congress demanded his resignation saying the investigating agency should not allow Sisodia to evade questioning in the excise policy scam case. Sisodia had been called for questioning on Sunday in connection with the case, nearly three months after a charge sheet was filed in the matter.

BJP leader Shehzad Poonawalla on Sunday accused him of making excuses. Poonawalla said it has now become an SOP for AAP to influence investigations. "Budget is just an excuse, the real aim is to run away from questions Sisodia ji. Till yesterday they used to say that

there was no scam, today the body language seemed nervous. Don't be afraid of facing tough questions," Delhi BJP spokesperson Harish Khurana remarked in a video.

Taunting Sisodia, who is in charge of Delhi's excise department, BJP's Delhi spokesperson Harish Khurana said he looked nervous from his body language. He also questioned why Sisodia scrapped the excise policy after the Lieutenant Governor ordered an investigation into it.

Delhi BJP Working President Virendra Sachdeva has said that it is really surprising that has for long been saying that he is always prepared for inquiry and that there was no scam in liquor policy but moment CBI called him he has started finding excuses to evade inquiry for as long as possible. "Yesterday Sisodia tweeted there is nothing against me with CBI & I

am being harassed as I am doing good work on education but this morning instead of going before CBI Sisodia called media to tell that I have written to CBI that I am preparing Delhi Budget so need time to appear before them," he added.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri also lambasted the deputy chief minister saying that he is just buying time to evade his arrest. "The time has come that he should be arrested in the excise policy scam case. If he has not committed any wrongdoings why he is afraid," Bidhuri added.

Sisodia has earlier said the policy was going to be cancelled because the BJP was using the investigating agencies it controls to intimidate vendors.

Delhi Congress President Ch Anil Kumar said that it was shocking that the CBI has

allowed a corrupt Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi, to evade it's summons for questioning him today in which he had been named as the No. 1 accused in the CBI FIR on the Liquor Scam, citing that he was busy with the Delhi Budget, as it will allow him a week's time to tamper with evidence.

He said that the CBI has reportedly collected damning evidence against him in the multi crores scam after questioning his Personal Secretary and he should not have been allowed to evade questioning today.

Kumar said that he had cautioned when CBI omitted Sisodia's name from its charge sheet filed in the court two months ago in the liquor scam case that it would boomerang on the investigating agency for excluding Sisodia's name from among the 7 persons named in the charge sheet.

NDMC issues challans to people littering on roads, illegal hawkers

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

To maintain the sanitation condition and public hygiene, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) on Sunday issued challans to 145 people littering on roads / parks, unauthorised vendors / hawkers and others for dumping waste in the open at Kartavya Path and India Gate surrounding areas. The aim is to keep the surroundings clean around Kartavya Path and not let vendors sell items illegally or encroach on public land.

According to officials, the NDMC has constituted 10 teams of its sanitary staff as a part of the anti-insanitary drive in surrounding area of India Gate and Karavaya Path. Apart from imposing fine on



violators Visitors, the civic body teams are also spreading awareness and educating the public about the ill effects of in-sanitary and unhygienic condition in public places.

The NDMC has earlier issued a notification regarding prohibition against accumulation of rubbish in public places under section 267 (3) (a) of

NDMC Act 1994 in which "No person shall deposit rubbish, filth and others polluted and abnoxious matter in any Street" and to compound of any violation of this provision will be fine of Rupees -50/ only. In case of non-payment of fine by offender, a complaint will be lodged in the Court for prosecution as per the provisions of NDMC Act.

If the violator has no money to pay the fine, they will be produced before the special municipal magistrate to take action as per the provisions of the law.

NDMC has also engaged dedicated teams from the health, enforcement and security departments for carrying out regularly drives against defacement, encroachment, littering and spitting in the area.

Thousands of people flock the revamped Kartavya Path on the weekend after it has been opened to public. NDMC has allocated sites at the earmarked vending zones to the vendors. The six zones are located close to Man Singh Road, C Hexagon and Rafi Marg.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Students' body of South Asian University (SAU) on Sunday accused the institute of "arbitrarily" expelling two students and rusticing two others. The university has also imposed a penalty on a student, the varsity's General Body of Students said in a statement. The alleged actions by SAU have come weeks after the protests by a group of students demanding increase in scholarships and stipends. There was no immediate response from the varsity administration.

The students' body claimed that last month five students received show-cause notices and were interrogated by an ad-hoc "high-powered" committee



and on February 18, the students received emails from the proctor informing them of their expulsion and rustication.

"SAU student community expresses their concerns over the recent wave of disciplinary actions; demands withdrawal of expulsions and rustications," the statement said.

According to the students' body, the administration has

nary actions is happening as the family of Ammar Ahmed, an MA (sociology) student who attempted suicide due to "institutional harassment", goes ahead to file a police complaint against the university authorities, the students' body said.

Ammar was also "arbitrarily rusticated" by the university administration and suffered prolonged hospitalisation and continues to have long-term complications including difficulty in mobility and speech, it claimed.

"It all began with Ammar collapsing. Today there are four expelled students and two rusticated. The administration is going to build this university upon our tombs," said Apoorva YK, an expelled student.

The new wave of discipli-

22-yr-old man held for cow slaughter

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 22-year-old man was arrested for allegedly being involved in cow slaughter in north Delhi's Gulabi Bagh area. According to police, the accused was identified as Aftab Ahmad alias Lukman, a resident of Janta Majdoor Colony, Babarpur.

On February 7, police got information regarding an incident of cow slaughter near a vacant plot at Roshnara underpass of Gulabi Bagh. Police collected the remains of the animal from the scene and sent them to a government veterinary hospital." Following preliminary investigation, the accused was arrested on Saturday under relevant sections of the Delhi Agricultural

Cattle Preservation Act, Indian Penal Code and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, Deputy Commissioner of Police (North) Sagar Singh Kalsi said.

The accused revealed that he, along with his associates Arkam, Saleem, Maruf and Altamas, have slaughtered cows to sell their meat on multiple occasions, police said.

On the intervening night of February 6 and 7, he, along with co-accused persons, went to Gulabi Bagh area in his Honda City car. He was driving the vehicle.

The co-accused caught a cow on their way and took it to the vacant plot in Gulabi Bagh for slaughter, police said. The plot is adjacent to a temple, they added.

DU Pondicherry VC continues to occupy official house post retirement

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Even after three years of his retirement from DU, Pondicherry University Vice Chancellor Gurmeet Singh continues to occupy the official accommodation at his former varsity with Rs 23 lakh pending in dues, according to official documents.

Singh said the delay was initially due to COVID-induced lockdowns and later due to incorrect calculation of dues by Delhi University as well as paucity of time at his end.

He also accused the university of treating him unfairly and holding Rs 50 lakh of his retirement funds.

The university sent its latest notice to Singh last week, asking him to either



vacate the 'Type 5' bungalow in North Campus' Cavalry Lines or face disconnection of electricity and water connection and other such actions by the varsity.

The notice is the ninth in the series of notices served to him during the period.

"Neither you have vacated the university accommo-

dation nor you have cleared outstanding dues towards damage charges applicable at the rate of 50 times the normal license fees plus water charges. Government of India rules don't permit stay after retirement beyond six months," said the notice sent by DU.

"On the contrary, you have overstayed for a period of over 2 years and 9 months without even paying the penal rent. This has been viewed seriously by the university authorities," it added.

The Delhi University claims the Vice Chancellor owes it Rs 23.70 lakh in penal rent and water charges.

A reputed expert in the fields of corrosion chemistry and nanofilm deposition, Singh had taken charge as

Pondicherry University Vice Chancellor in 2017. He was granted an extension of one year in September last year. Singh is also holding additional charge as Vice Chancellor of Gandhigram Rural Institute, a deemed-to-be university in Tamil Nadu.

He retired from Delhi University in October 2019 and was supposed to vacate the official accommodation by April 2020. Singh confirmed that he is occupying accommodation at Pondicherry University too.

"I have served the Delhi university for over 43 years in various capacities and my retirement dues worth Rs 50 lakh are still pending with the university. My grace period to vacate the accommodation ended in April 2020, howev-

er, the COVID-19-induced lockdowns and movement restrictions did not allow me to vacate the residence and I have been duly informing the university about it despite them treating me unfairly" Singh told PTI.

"For the past five months, I have been getting letters and notices which have unparliamentary language and this propaganda against me is being spread with an ulterior motive. The amount quoted to me for pending dues is incorrect and I have asked for a correction. Once that is done, I will settle the dues and vacate the accommodation at the earliest," he added.

Singh also said being at the helm of affairs at two important universities and personal exigencies also left

him with little time.

Delhi University had in October last year issued an eviction order to Singh terming his act as "grave misconduct."

"There is a long pending queue of the officials who are waiting for allotment of university flat or bungalow and are in dire need of accommodation and therefore any occupant who is holding the premises in an unauthorised manner beyond the stipulated time creates an impediment for the administration.

"This act of the respondent is grave misconduct. Such an act after serving the institution for so many years calls for introspection," said the eviction order issued by the Court of Estate Officer, Delhi University.

Nadda reaches poll-bound Karnataka on 3-day visit

DEEPAK K UPRETI ■ NEW DELHI

After focusing on the Assembly polls in Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland, the BJP has turned its full attention to Karnataka that would elect a new Assembly before May with its National President Jagat Prakash Nadda on Sunday reaching the State on a three-day campaign visit and among other events, participate in a 'mega bike rally' on Tuesday.

Tripura has voted on February 16 while Meghalaya and Nagaland will vote on February 27. Besides Karnataka, BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh, Congress-run Rajasthan and Chattisgarh and the BRS-ruled Telangana will also elect new assemblies this year.



Karnataka is witnessing a keen triangular contest with Congress and JDS rivaling the BJP. To beat anti-incumbency, the BJP high command had already replaced BS Yediyurappa with BS Bommai as Chief Minister.

BJP leaders are not ruling out a 'similar change' of leadership in Madhya Pradesh where the saffron party will face a direct and evenly-poised challenge from the Congress.

Nadda will be reaching Karnataka by the Sunday night and address two rallies in Udupi and Belur.

He will be in Mangaluru too and take part in a bike rally at Chikkamangaluru.

According to BJP's chief spokesperson Anil Baluni, Nadda will offer prayers at Krishna Temple in district Udupi, Karnataka and then participate in the District Booth Committee Convention

at MGM College Ground, Udupi. Nadda is to address a 'massive public rally' in Nagucity Hosaru, Mullikatte Ground, Baidoor at Udupi and at afterwards will proceed to Chikkamagaluru.

On Tuesday BJP President will be visiting BJP National Secretary C. T. Ravi's house at Chikkamagaluru participating in a Bike Rally.

Nadda will also participate in the District Booth Committee meeting in South Karnataka's Hassan District.

BJP is contesting Karnataka elections by itself without any alliance and banking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ability to woo voters. Modi who in recent months has visited the state many a time is to be the main face of the BJP campaign and set to address atleast ten public rallies in the state sources said.

Rly zones ordered to follow prescribed speed limit in trains with German brakes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Railways on Sunday directed its zones to instruct loco pilots to follow prescribed speed limit in trains fitted with a controversial German-made braking system, a day after a preliminary report revealed that the faulty brakes were likely to have caused the Sultanpur collision.

It has also instructed the zones to monitor the loco pilots' braking techniques.

After a series of complaints and accidents involving goods trains fitted with the German-made Bogie Mounted Brake System (BMBS), railway zones were last year instructed to restrict the maximum speed of loaded trains, with more than 50 per cent wagons fitted with the system, to 50 kmph on down gradients of 1 in 100, 65 kmph on level tracks of IR and 80 kmph on DFC.

On Thursday, two goods trains collided near the southern cabin of Sultanpur district. One of the trains involved in the accident was loaded and running at 65 kmph on a route that had a downward gradient and the brakes were ineffective, an initial report said.



ern cabin of Sultanpur district.

One of the trains involved in the accident was loaded and running at 65 kmph on a route that had a downward gradient and the brakes were ineffective, an initial report said.

On Sunday, the Railways issued instructions for the zones to begin a month-long safety drive in view of increasing SPAD (signal passed at danger) cases.

'Each accident shows slackness regarding one or the other aspect of the same. In view of this, an intensive Safety

Drive of one month is to be launched immediately wef 19.02.2023," the Railway Board order said.

Special emphasis is to be given to certain aspects to prevent SPAD cases, which includes "ambush checks" of running staff by inspectors to check if protocols are being followed by loco pilots and assistant loco pilots, use of mobile phones on the run, and specific monitoring of crew regarding train control on yellow signal and train control in gradients so as to stop before a red

signal. "Specific monitoring of braking techniques of LP (loco pilots) for different types of load. Working beyond stipulated hours of duty of running staff may lead to fatigue and should be prevented. It should be ensured that LP and ALP (assistant loco pilots) are given adequate outstation rest as stipulated.

Following prescribed speed restrictions by LPs of goods trains having more than 50 per cent BMBS in the rake," the order said.

All wagons with BMBS are provided with twin pipe system and they are to be run in "twin-pipe mode" for higher average speed of freight trains along with more safe operations on long steep gradients.

The BMBS was red-flagged by the Research Design and Standards Organisation (RDSO) in July 2022. It said a committee report found "deficiencies" in the system's braking power.

Indian Army's medical team returning from Turkiye

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Army's medical team at Turkiye's Iskenderun region is returning home after providing extensive services to a large number of earthquake-hit people.

India launched 'Operation Dost' to extend assistance to Turkiye as well as Syria after various parts of the two countries were hit by a devastating earthquake on February 6 that has killed over 30,000 people.

"IndianArmy Medical Facility at Iskenderun, Hatay, concluded their services amidst gratitude and applause from the locals. The team of 60 Para Field Hospital will be returning to India after their selfless efforts in earthquake affected Turkiye," the Army tweeted.

Separately, External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson



Arindam Bagchi said the final NDRF team returned from Turkiye.

"Final NDRF team under #OperationDost returns home from Turkiye. 3 Teams of 151 @NDRFHQ personnel & dog squads extended assistance to earthquake affected Turkiye," Bagchi said on Twitter.

rescue & relief operations including life detection in 35 work sites of Nurdagi & Antakya," he said.

India sent relief materials as well as medical and rescue teams to Turkiye following the quake. As part of quake assistance, India also sent relief materials and medicines to Syria.

Railways conducts exams for 929 Group 'B' posts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The railways conducted a centralised computer-based exam on Sunday against a 70-per cent quota for 929 vacancies.

The exam was conducted in 14 cities and 19 centres for Group "B" (officer-level) posts, the Indian Railways said. A total of 6,031 candidates were scheduled to appear in the exam.

These exams are being held after a policy was introduced last year as part of the measures taken by the Railway Board for bringing in reforms in the selection process for promotion to Group "B" posts in the railways.

It was decided to introduce the Centralised Computer Based (CBT) objective-type examination for conducting



70 per cent selections and 30 per cent Limited Departmental Competitive Examinations (LDCEs) in all departments that have organised services from the vacancy cycle starting January 2023.

The selections and LDCEs for promotion to Group "B" posts are presently conducted by the respective zonal railways or production units independently.

On Sunday, 1,987 (84 per cent) of the 2,368 candidates appeared for the exam in the

morning shift and 2,872 (78.4 per cent) out of 3,663 turned up in the afternoon shift. The overall attendance was 80.6 per cent. The supplementary CBT for the eligible absentees is scheduled to be held on March 5.

The decision to centralise departmental promotion is a major policy change, which means that all Group "C" employees eligible for elevation would appear in the CBT, ensuring a level-playing field for everyone.

Focus on improving people's lives, civil servants told

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former foreign secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla has called upon civil servants to focus on improving people's lives, according to an official statement on Sunday.

Addressing the valedictory session of a capacity building programme for civil servants of the Maldives and officers of Jammu and Kashmir, Shringla emphasised the need for accelerated and inclusive development for a resilient growth and stressed the importance of technology in transforming the lives of citizens.

Shringla, who is also the chief coordinator for India's G-20 presidency, called for creat-



ing a conceptual framework to meet the needs and expectations of people and work for the holistic development of the region and countries.

He also highlighted the importance of building relationships and creating an enabling environment among countries by forging partnerships.

Parties in arbitration must learn to accept awards rather than engaging in further litigation: SC judge

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Parties involved in arbitration proceedings must learn to accept the arbitral award, instead of carrying on a battle through multi-tiered scrutiny, Supreme Court judge Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul said on Sunday while hailing the fact that virtual court hearings have raised the level of efficiency.

Justice Kaul said it is necessary to utilise the virtual system for which a vast infrastructure has been created and a large amount of money sanctioned by the government.

"Parties must learn to accept (arbitral) awards and unfortunately, the public sector more so requires this and there is no need to carry a battle through two or three-tier scrutiny just to complete the formality. I think that is something I am sure the law minister will look into," the apex court judge said while speaking at the concluding session of the four-day "Delhi Arbitration Weekend".



Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju was the chief guest at the concluding session.

Justice Kaul said the international arbitration community shifted to the virtual system after the COVID-19 pandemic and gradually, virtual or hybrid hearings will become a norm and physical hearings will become an exception.

To keep the wheels of justice moving as much as possible, virtual hearing was introduced in the courts of India and being a developing country, there were issues related to infrastructure and connectivity, but it did not take long for the stakeholders to find a way to operate efficiently, he said.

Justice Kaul was speaking

on the topic of "Arbitration Vision 2030: What the Future Beholds?"

"I would say the virtual system has actually increased the efficiency level and hence, even today, I operate on a hybrid level where I permit lawyers to appear through video-conferencing," he said while pointing out that the virtual system has reduced the cost of travelling and allows lawyers to prepare for their cases in a short time.

"This is something the chief justice of India also on recent occasions emphasised that having created this vast infrastructure, it is necessary to utilise it to the best possible way, considering that the government has also sanctioned a large amount for further use of technology to strengthen the judicial system," Justice Kaul said.

He said the virtual system has done away with the need of unnecessarily spending money on travelling to different parts of the world for conferences or hearings and it has also become

easier for arbitrators and practitioners to find a suitable date of hearing.

Some arbitration institutions have explicitly come out with virtual arbitration rules, he said, adding that arbitrators and practitioners will be required to know the basics of technology with an attention to cyber security and other issues.

Justice Kaul further said he does not consider virtual hearings to be a foolproof system and the experience has shown that they come with their own set of problems.

He said parties can also insist on physical or hybrid hearing to use it as a means to delay the arbitration process and the arbitral tribunal has to take due steps to balance the process and not delay it.

Regarding artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT, the top court judge said people can get answers to any query and to explore the use of AI, the Supreme Court has formed a committee that is looking into various aspects.

"However, AI tools must be used very carefully as they come with risks of due process rights and public policy violations," he said.

Justice Kaul also said arbitration constantly reflects the needs of the parties in dispute and the factors that have helped India move towards an arbitration-friendly regime include institutionalising the arbitration system.

He said the mediation bill, which will see the light of the day possibly this year, is also geared towards this institutionalisation.

"There is strict adherence to the principles of non-interference with the arbitral awards by courts. Indian courts have shifted towards this," Justice Kaul said.

He said future developments for arbitration in India will be in tandem with those taking place globally and added, "We are at an exciting stage domestically and globally with respect to arbitrations."

Law not static but dynamic: SC judge stresses importance of continuous learning

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Stressing the importance of continuous learning, Justice B R Gavai of the Supreme Court said on Sunday that law is not static but dynamic and changes should be taken into account by legal practitioners.

Justice Gavai was speaking at the closing ceremony of the 19th K K Luthra Memorial Moot Court at the Campus Law Centre of Delhi University.

He said law students today are "lucky" as they get both legal and practical education and added that in his time, "law school was considered a last resort".

According to a statement, "He stated that the practice of law is an eternal process of learning and that one must continue to learn until the end



of one's career.... Law by its nature is not static but dynamic, and changes should be taken into account because the law and the Constitution are for the people."

The Campus Law Centre hosted the moot court in the memory of noted jurist K K Luthra.

The international moot court saw participation from 96 institutions from India and

countries such as the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Brunei.

This year's moot problem invited teams to explore the legal and constitutional boundaries of sedition and free speech, along with the intricacies of national extradition laws.

The School of Law in Thirumalaisamudram won the competition.

1,338 elected AICC members to have voting rights in Cong plenary

IAN S ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress Steering Committee will meet on February 24 to finalise the agenda for the party's plenary session in Raipur, while the party cleared the names of 1,338 elected and 487 co-opted AICC members who will attend.

The plenary will discuss the roadmap for the upcoming Assembly elections in 2023 and the General Elections in 2024.

There will around 15,000 people present, including 9,915 PCC delegates with 3,000 co-opted PCC delegates.

Others will include district Presidents of the party and the 120 who walked beside Rahul Gandhi all through the Bharat Jodo Yatra and office bearers of frontal organisations.

However, as per the Congress Constitution, only elected AICC members can vote in the elections to the Congress Working Committee (CWC), the party's highest decision-making body.

As per Article 14 of the Constitution: "The co-opted members at the AICC, PCC and lower levels shall not exercise any voting right in any organisational election nor shall they contest any election in the organisation."

"However, no person who is a co-opted member shall be debarred for that reason from seeking election to full membership of any Committee in normal manner."

If the voting takes place, the party will ensure proper representation from SCs, STs, women, OBCs, and minorities, party leaders said, adding 704

AICC delegates are from general category, 381 from OBC, 228 from minority communities, 192 from Scheduled Castes and 133 from Scheduled Tribes.

At a joint press conference, General Secretary Tariq Anwar said: "In the plenary, the roadmap for the election will be discussed as the party has rejuvenated during the Bharat Jodo Yatra."

General Secretary, Organisation K.C. Venugopal said that the tagline of the plenary will be "hath se hath jodo" -- the ongoing outreach programme which started on January 26.

Congress General Secretary in-charge of Chhattisgarh, Kumari Selja said 235 of the delegates are women and 501 delegates are below the age of 50 years.

15K organ transplants in 2022: Health Secy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After two-year Covid-induced hiatus, organ transplant activities have started picking up in the country as for the first time more than 15,000 transplants a year in 2022 has been achieved, i.e. an annual increase of 27 per cent in the transplant number over the previous year.

However, more needs to be done in the sector given that India has a growing geriatric population quality of life has to be assured to them, said Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan on Sunday while underlining three priority areas -- programmatic restructuring, communication strategy and skilling of professionals.

He was speaking at the "National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO) Scientific Dialogue 2023", organised by the Union Ministry of Health, bringing all the stakeholders under one



roof to brainstorm ideas about interventions and best practices in the field of organ and tissue transplant that can be taken up for saving lives

Highlighting the need to update the existing structures and guidelines, he said, "Though we have existing structures at various governance levels like NOTTO at the national level, SOTTO at the state level and ROTTO at the regional level, it needs to be ensured that they work as a well-oiled machinery while performing their mandate."

Bhushan welcomed the changes that have taken place, such as updated guidelines and the domicile requirement being done away with.

Underscoring the changing demography of the country, Bhushan noted that India has a growing geriatric population and to ensure quality of life for them, it is critically important to update the communication and awareness strategy, so that potential organ donors come forward.

Thus, he pushed for a multi-stakeholder exercise for

communicating effectively and making people realise their contributions towards a greater good.

Highlighting the need for capacity building of the country's medical institutions, Bhushan said, "Despite having 640-plus medical hospitals and colleges, transplants remain a specialised service limited to some hospitals only. There is a need to expand the number of institutions where surgeries and transplants are undertaken."

Thus, to increase the num-

ber of surgeries and transplants in the country, along with sensitisation and training for healthcare professionals, the physical infrastructure must be optimally utilised, he said, adding that there is also a need to identify the high-case-load institutions and bring them under the NOTT programme network.

According to official data, the number of organ transplants has increased from 4,990 in 2013 to 15,561 in 2022. The total number of kidney transplants from living donors has increased from 3,495 in 2013 to 9,834 in 2022 and from deceased donors, it has increased from 542 to 1,589 in 2022.

The total number of liver transplants from living donors has increased from 658 in 2013 to 2,957 in 2022 and from 240 to 761 in 2022 from deceased donors while the total number of heart transplants have increased from 30 in 2013 to 250 in 2022 while lung transplants from 23 to 138.

Nitish call to cut BJP to 100 seats good: Khabri

PTI ■ BALRAMPUR

Uttar Pradesh Congress on Sunday said Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's call to bundle out the BJP to "less than 100" seats in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls is in the "interest of the country", but asserted that it's not possible without the help of the grand old party.

UP Congress chief Brijlal Khabri also extended support to Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on caste-based survey in UP, but claimed that the ruling BJP does not want to go ahead with the survey.

"Congress is the biggest opposition party in the country. The fight (against the BJP) is not possible without taking Congress along. This thought is in the interest of the country. If all of us put up a fight at our respective places, then the BJP



will face difficulty in crossing the 100-mark (in the Lok Sabha polls)," Khabri said.

Addressing a programme held here, Khabri said that parties, which want to work in the interest of the nation, can align with the Congress.

The Bihar chief minister on Saturday said the Congress must not rest on its laurels and make use of the momentum gained during Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' in forging a coalition of parties opposed to the BJP.

The JD(U) leader had

asserted that such a formation must take shape "at the earliest" so that the BJP, which has a brute majority in the Lok Sabha with more than 300 seats, could be bundled out for "less than 100" in the general elections next year.

At present, the BJP has 303 MPs in the Lok Sabha.

On SP's demand for a caste-based survey, Khabri said, "Caste census must take place, as it will help find out the (caste-wise) count. When the population of animals can be counted, then why can't caste census take place?"

Training his guns at UP Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, Khabri said, "Keshav Prasad Maurya is parroting the written script of the BJP. But, from inside (his heart), he wants the caste census to take place. But he is unable to express himself."

The UP Congress chief blamed the state government for the recent deaths of a woman and her daughter during an anti-encroachment drive in Kanpur Dehat.

"BJP's bulldozer policy has started to swallow people, and this policy of the BJP should be opposed throughout the country," he said.

BJP launches street corner meetings to reach out to voters in Telangana

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The BJP in Telangana has launched street corner meetings titled 'Praja Gosa-BJP Bharosa' across the state to reach out to the public ahead of the assembly elections, scheduled to be held this year.

The mass outreach programme, 'Praja Gosa-BJP Bharosa' (people's suffering - BJP's assurance) is aimed at strengthening the party's leadership at the grassroots level and "expose" the BRS government's alleged failures.

The campaign kick-started on February 10 and will go on till February 25. The saffron party has set a target to organise 11,000 street corner meetings in 15 days, BJP vice president in Telangana Kaasam Venkateswarlu, state coordinator for the campaign, told PTI here on Sunday.

The meetings are being conducted at the level of the party's 'shakti kendras' (that comprise three-four polling booths).

While bolstering local leadership, the campaign will "expose" grassroot-level issues, including corruption by ruling party MLAs, without losing sight of the BRS government's failures

and its "family rule" at the state level.

Besides, the campaign will also highlight the welfare schemes and achievements of the Modi government at the Centre like distribution of free rice, Rs 10,000 loan to street vendors, free COVID-19 vaccines, funds to Gram Panchayats, and recovery of nation's economy post COVID-19 pandemic.

The party chose to organise 11,000 street-corner meetings as it boasts of over 9,000 'shakti kendras' and 2,000 more meetings have been added to reach out to remote habitations, Venkateswarlu noted.

As part of the campaign, pamphlets carrying a phone number of the party to give a missed call would be distributed to people.

Since January 10, over 3,000 street-corner meetings have been conducted and the party is confident of achieving at least 90 per cent of the target by February 25.

Last month, BJP MP and party OBC Morcha's national president K Laxman had said his party has set a target of 10,000 village-level meetings as part of its Mission-90 (winning 90 out of the total 119 Assembly seats in Telangana).

'Confident Modi Govt will take positive decision on conducting caste census'

PTI ■ SULTANPUR

Uttar Pradesh minister and Apna Dal (Sonelal) leader Ashish Patel on Sunday expressed confidence that the Modi government would take a positive decision on conducting a caste census in the near future.

"My party has been demanding a caste census from the beginning. As far as backward classes are concerned, whether it is NEET exam or admission in central school, Navodaya Vidyalaya and Army School, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has done the job of giving

reservation. This shows how much he cares for the backward classes," Patel, the technical education minister, told reporters here.

"I have full confidence that the way the government at the Centre took a positive decision in these examinations, the same way it will take a decision regarding caste census in the near future," he said. Targeting the SP over its demand for a caste census, the minister said there is a lot of difference between the actions and words of the opposition party.

"The SP is making a hue and cry about caste census owing to its vote bank poli-

tics.... When SP founder Mulayam Singh Yadav was the defense minister, why did he not give reservation to the backward classes in Army Schools," he said.

Noting that the Uttar Pradesh Global Investors Summit held in Lucknow this month was a huge success, the minister said Japan has promised to invest heavily in the state. "This will provide employment to thousands of youths," he added.

Patel, who is in charge minister of Sultanpur district, held a meeting with district officials to review ongoing projects.

Modi's gift to German chancellor sparks demand for hand-engraved vessels

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Dilshad Hussain has been hand-engraving brass vessels for decades but never have the demand and popularity for his wares been as high as after Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifted a nickel-coated "matka" to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz last year.

"The popularity of 'matka' has increased many times since the prime minister chose to present it to the German chancellor. Now I keep getting orders," Hussain, 75, told PTI.

During a G7 Summit last year, Prime Minister Modi gifted to the German chancellor a nickel-coated hand-engraved brass vessel from Moradabad, also known as "Peetal Nagari" or brass city of Uttar Pradesh.

Hussain was recently conferred the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian honour of the country, for his work. The septuagenarian artisan said he learnt the craft under the guidance of his grandfather.

He also received the "Shilpa Guru" award six years ago from then president Ram Nath Kovind.

Hussain said he recently got an order from Mumbai and delivered the vessels at a rate of Rs 18,000 a piece.

Orders are coming in from other cities too, he said.



Sharing the technique behind his craft, Hussain said the design is first sketched on a paper. Then an outline of the whole design is done with a fine engraving tool hammered with a wooden block. This particular type of engraving is called "Marodi", he said.

Hussain praised Kshipra Shukla, the chairperson of the Uttar Pradesh Institute of Design and Research (UPIDR), for extending help in popularising his craft.

"I never faced any discrimination due to my religion. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has praised my work many times," he said.

Hussain said he has been training youngsters, many of them women.

The UPIDR chairperson said they have been providing help to artisans and craftsmen at the grassroots across the state without any consideration of caste, religion or gender.

No special aid for poor States will increase regional disparities, says Bihar FM

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Finance Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary said that if the poor states are not given special assistance by the Centre then regional disparities are bound to increase in the country.

He made the comment on Saturday referring to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's statement that the Finance Commission has made a recommendation to the Centre, in which it said that no state will be accorded the special status.

"I don't know how the Union Finance minister made such a statement. When the NITI Aayog talks about special assistance to the poorest states, the comment of the Union finance minister will certainly increase regional disparities," Choudhary told PTI.

He said Bihar is the most deserving state that needs special financial assistance from the Centre.

Bihar's growth is better

than the national average but it is among the poorest states in the country, he added.

"NITI Aayog has admitted that Bihar made tremendous progress across multiple sectors in the last decade, but owing to its weak base, it may take some more time to catch up with the others. This is the reason that we have been demanding special assistance from the Centre," Choudhary said.

The special category status was introduced in 1969 to benefit certain backward states having hilly terrains, strategic international borders and economic and infrastructural backwardness.

Eleven states -- Assam, Nagaland, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Uttarakhand and Telangana -- have been accorded the special category state status.

Telangana, the newest state of India, was accorded the status as it was carved out of another State -- Andhra Pradesh.



Lord Lingaraj temple illuminated with lights during 'Maha Shivratri' celebrations, in Bhubaneswar on Saturday

PTI

IIT-B announces changes in curriculum after student's death

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In a major announcement made on the heels of first-year B.Tech student Darshan Solanki, Indian Institute of Technology-Bombay said here on Saturday that it had initiated the process to bring about changes in its under-graduate curriculum to make it more relevant and motivating to students, and also to reduce some of their stress.

"We are also working towards changes in our UG curriculum, starting with the batch of 2022, to make it more relevant and motivating to students, and to reduce some of the stress. There surely is more room for improvement and we look forward to students' participation and suggestions in that direction. In particular, let us work together to ensure that such an unfortunate incident never happens," IIT-B

Director Prof. Subhasis Chaudhuri said in a statement issued here.

Prof Chaudhuri also announced the setting up of in-house committee headed by Prof. Nand Kishore, who till recently was the IIT-B's Chief Vigilance Officer, to look into the circumstances leading to the death of Solanki, who committed suicide his by jumping from the eighth floor of an IIT-B hostel on February 12.

Prof Chaudhuri said that the investigations being carried out by the committee headed Prof. Nand Kishore is in addition to the investigation being carried out by the police and IIT-B. The Nand Kishore-headed committee includes SC/ST student cell members including both faculty and students, some of the student mentor coordinators and the In-charge Chief Medical Officer of the IIT-B hospital.

'Shivaji inspiration from Kashmir to Kanyakumari' Shah launches 'Shiv Srishti' park on life of Shivaji Maharaj in Pune

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

As he inaugurated the first phase of ₹438 crore 'Shiv Srishti', a theme park based on the life of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in Pune, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Sunday that the Maratha warrior's life continued to inspire the people across the country. "Shivaji's life is a message that continues to inspire people from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Dwaraka to Calcutta's Ganga Sagar even today," Shah said, while inaugurating the theme park on the life of Maratha warrior on the occasion of Shiv Jayanti — the birth anniversary of Shivaji.

"Shivaji Maharaj fought for Swadharma, Swabhasha and establishment of Swaraj. He gave a message to the whole world that no one can oppress India, no one can humiliate its people. This message of Shivaji Maharaj remained prevalent in



the freedom struggle of 1857," he said.

"Starting from a small battle for Swaraj, Shivaji Maharaj became the Chhatrapati of a huge empire at the age of 50. This journey of Shivaji's struggle did not stop even after 1680. Even after him, many Chhatrapatis and Peshwas came and they carried forward this tradition till 1818," Shah said.

"The struggle for Swaraj started by Shivaji Maharaj is continuing even today. His insistence for Swaraj, Swadharma and Swabhasha reflected in everything he did," he said. Shah said that Shivaji Maharaj also laid the foundation of village-based economy in the country by implementing several schemes for the welfare of the people. He said that the British had already arrived

during the time of Shivaji Maharaj. "To protect the western coasts from the British, Shivaji established a navy. Shivaji Maharaj created a large army of people who fought for Swaraj, which gave competition to the Mughal Raj and in 1771, under the leadership of Maharaj ji Scindia, captured Delhi and extended his empire from Attock to Cuttack," he said.

The Shivrishiti theme park — which will be thrown open to the people from Monday onwards — is under construction at Ambe village near Pune. "It is going to be the grand historical theme park in the entire Asia region as this concept of historical theme park is hardly available anywhere in Asia," Shah said.

Shah said that in the four phases of the theme park, an effort had been made to preserve many incidents of Shivaji Maharaj's life at a cost of ₹60 crore.

Union dares Bengal Govt to go for 'dies non' rule against staff likley to join 2-day strike for allowance demand

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

The Joint Action Committee of 34 employees' unions have dared the Bengal Government to go ahead with its decision to crack the "dies non" (breakage in service) rule on the employees who join the two-day pen-down strike from Monday in support of their demand for an increased dearness allowance as directed by the State administrative tribunal and the Calcutta High Court.

A large section of the Bengal Government employees who have been getting 3 per cent DA as against their demand of 39 per cent — that will put them on par with their counterparts from other



States and the Centre — have been holding a sit-in demonstration in Kolkata for the last three weeks.

"We have not said that we will go on a strike ... neither have we said that we will stop essential services ... we will come to our offices but will put our pens down ... this is a foolish of a government that is trying to browbeat us into submission as they have been doing for the past several years

... we will not submit to their threat and go ahead with our programme ... let them do what they want to do ... then we will take them on," said S Chakrabarty a senior leader of the employees.

Another Forum office bearer said that the "the Government has been so insensitive that they did not even think it fit to send representatives to talk to the employees who have been observing sit-in demonstration for the last three weeks ... this government has already brought us on the verge of starvation ... what more they will do ... let them do whatever they want ... actually, the government is scared that the movement on this issue will take a massive shape in the-

coming days ... so they are trying to intimidate us ... if they take any strong action then the entire system will explode and the government will collapse."

The Government had earlier issued a notice asking the employees to mandatorily join work on February 20 and 21 failing which a day from their service career would be deducted leading to breakage in service that will have its impact on increments, and other post-retirement benefits, sources said. The State Finance Department has also made it clear that no state government employee will be allowed to opt for a casual leave on that day, with exception to those who are already on pre-approved earned leave.

End sit-in at HM house or face music: BJP to TMC State BJP warns ruling party of dharna at Mamata, Abhishek's houses

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

In a renewed war of words, the Opposition BJP has warned the ruling Trinamool Congress to withdraw the sit-in demonstration outside the house of junior Union Home Minister Nishit Pramanik in 48 hours or face a tit-for-tat action outside the residences of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her nephew and party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

Upon the instruction of junior Banerjee, thousands of TMC workers led by Bengal Minister Udayan Guha, former Ministers Paresh Adhikari and others on Sunday staged a dharna outside the residence of Pramanik at Bhetaguri village in North Bengal.

The sit-in demonstration is being organized in protest against what Banerjee claimed, the "wrongful execution" by the



Border Security Force of Prem Kumar Burman — a 24-year-old youth belonging to the Raj Bangshi community.

The BSF gunned down the man allegedly while he was indulging in cattle smuggling an act that his family and villagers have denied.

"The BJP after failing to win Bengal is trying to rule the State by widening the jurisdiction of the BSF from 15 km to 50 km — a proposal that had been vehemently opposed by our Chief Minister ... the gunning down of Prem Burman is a

part of Centre's attempt to usurp State's power ... we will not let it happen ... the people involved in the crime will have to be punished or else the house of Nishit Pramanik will be gheraoed," Banerjee had earlier said.

The BJP leadership on Sunday hit back saying that "this new culture of taking the battles at the door steps of the politicians will lead to very bad consequences."

BJP national vice president Dilip Ghosh said that "the BJP will then reserve its rights to gherao the houses of the Chief Minister and her nephew Abhishek Banerjee with larger number of people ... this is a bad precedence ... already the people of Bengal are livid against them ... now if this dharna is not lifted then the BJP will resort hit back in equal measure."

State BJP president Sukanto Majumdar too said that the TMC was inviting a similar treatment for its senior leaders.

A big ‘if’

Nitish Kumar is waiting for Congress’ response for unity, but anti-BJP leaders don’t seem ready

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar’s statement on Saturday smacks of wishful thinking rather than realistic assessment of the political situation. If the Opposition is united, the BJP would not be able to cross 100 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, he said. The operative word here is ‘if,’ and it’s a big ‘if’; for what passes off as the Opposition are the Congress and a bunch of regional smaller parties. None of these is in any position to challenge the much mightier Bharatiya Janata Party on its own—a situation that did not exist in the country for decades. In fact, one has to be a zealous anti-BJP activist to believe, as things stand now, that any non-BJP party would be able to cross the three-digit mark in the general elections next year.

The grand old party, despite its impressive 138-year-old history and all-India footprint, could not even garner enough seats to become the official Opposition party, which means 10 per cent of seats in the Lok Sabha. Worse, Opposition parties may be small but their leaders have big egos and bigger ambitions; and this has a major effect on their perspectives and plans. Telangana Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao, for instance, has national aspirations. So, he renamed his Telangana Rashtra Samithi as the Bharat Rashtra Samithi; but he has done little else to bring Opposition parties together.

Besides, he insists on keeping the Congress out of any anti-BJP alliance—an insistence that has been challenged by many. The GOP got 13.12 per cent of the votes polled in the country, against the BJP’s 25.16 per cent. And it got 19.7 per cent of the total valid votes polled in the constituencies where it contested, against the BJP’s 37.76 per cent. In short, the Congress may be down but not out. KCR’s obsession with forging an alliance of non-Congress Opposition parties has not found favour with his Bihar counterpart. “I am now ready [to move outside Bihar and work for Opposition unity]. I have been getting calls from several Opposition parties. I am only waiting for a Congress signal,” Kumar said. But is the Congress ready? Senior party leader Rahul Gandhi’s Bharat Jodo Yatra may have helped him in his image makeover and enthused the cadre, but not many tangible benefits to the party are evident. Also, is even Kumar himself really ready? Though he has marketed himself in the political marketplace as ‘Sushasan Babu,’ not many outside his party would find this sobriquet accurate. The situation is better than it was during the Lalu era, but that benchmark is very low. The second biggest Hindi-speaking state is certainly not a shining example of governance. Narendra Modi, on the other hand, was able to convince people about the virtues of the ‘Gujarat model’ in 2014. Neither Kumar nor any other Opposition leader has the stature to sway the electorate and peddle an alternative narrative. Kumar and other Opposition leaders have to work harder to defeat Modi.



Women cricket shines

Indian women cricket has come of age, it is a force to reckon with and posting impressive wins

Indian women cricket has come a long way over the past few years, with the team’s performances on the international stage improving drastically. From being an afterthought to the men’s team, women’s cricket in India is finally starting to get the recognition and respect it deserves. The Indian women’s cricket team has been around for over 40 years, but it wasn’t until the mid-2000s that the team started to gain some recognition. Prior to that, the team played very few matches, and their performances were often overlooked by the media and the public. However, in recent years, the team’s fortunes have turned around, and they are now one of the top teams in the world. Some recent achievements of the Indian women’s cricket team have been spectacular. The Indian women’s cricket team won their first T20 World Cup title in March 2020 by defeating Australia in the final. This was a historic moment for Indian women’s cricket, as it was their first major ICC trophy. Under-19 Women’s T20 Asia Cup win in 2019: The Indian under-19 women’s cricket team won the T20 Asia Cup in 2019 by defeating Bangladesh in the final. This was the first time an Indian team had won the tournament. The Indian women’s cricket team won the 2018 Women’s Asia Cup by defeating Bangladesh in the final. This was India’s sixth Asia Cup title and their first since 2012. These achievements demonstrate the rapid progress of Indian women’s cricket in recent years and provide a glimpse of the potential of the team for future success.

Their wins have given them a new zeal and boosted their morale. Several young players are coming through the ranks and making a name for themselves. Players like Smriti Mandhana, Harmanpreet Kaur, and Jemimah Rodrigues have become household names in India, and are inspiring a new generation of young girls to take up the sport. One of the reasons for the team’s success has been the establishment of the Women’s T20 Challenge, a tournament that takes place alongside the Indian Premier League (IPL) and features some of the best players from around the world. This has given Indian players the opportunity to play alongside and against some of the best players in the world, and has helped to raise the standard of women’s cricket in India. In the past, women’s cricket was often seen as a poor cousin to the men’s game, and players had to make do with substandard facilities and equipment which is no longer the case.

Remove barriers for social justice

Social justice as enshrined in the constitution is the cornerstone of our political setup. We have done a lot but still have a long way to go

Social justice is at the core of our collective resolve and action to achieve wholesome growth by reaching the last mile and leaving no one behind! The 2023 World Day of Social Justice is suitably themed on ‘Overcoming Barriers and Unleashing Opportunities for Social Justice’ which is in sync with the global efforts to build an inclusive socio-economic and political order through fostering dialogue with all stakeholders, ensuring empowerment of all through inclusion. Though an integral part of human development and discourse since time immemorial, the need for social justice has been greatly felt in view of the economic and social crises of recent years!

There is near unanimity among experts that without taking care of the downtrodden with a multilateral set of actions and interventions to provide them with an inclusive ambience, sustainable development is not possible. The challenge is not only to deliver and bring solutions to people’s daily problems but to empower them holistically. For this, we need to address a multitude of problems such as poverty, gender inequality, unemployment, human rights abuse, social protection to weaker sections of society, and adopting a fulsome inclusive approach without any discrimination.

As we talk of social justice, I am tempted to refer to some of the prominent observations made by the renowned Hindu monk Swami Vivekananda who strongly felt that the real cause of India’s backwardness was the neglect and exploitation of the masses who produced the wealth of the land and the subjugation of women. “So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them.” Our Puranas and philosophies teach us many valuable things about human relations and justice. They teach us that there is divinity in every human being. However, in practice, we give better treatment to our pets than those who belong



to the lower strata of society. We still hear of painful incidents of untouchability where people are not allowed to enter temples.

Many social reformers like Shri Adi Shankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, Shri Basaveshwar, Shri Aurobindo Ghosh, Rajaram Mohan Roy, Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Gandhi, and Shri Veeresalingam Pantulu dedicated their lives for the upliftment of the downtrodden. They succeeded to a great extent but not fully. Social justice is linked to social equality and poverty eradication. In our country, SCs, STs, and OBCs have faced a lot of inequalities in the past decades. It is a fact that they do not get proper education, employment, and health facilities. There is no dearth of merit among them. The first and foremost example is the life of Dr. BR Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar hailed from a very humble background but he studied with great persistence and received three doctorates from three of the best universities in the world. The Constitution he wrote has proved a milestone in our endeavors for empowerment through inclusion.

I am glad to share that social justice is one of the cor-

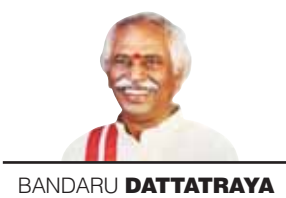


SOCIAL JUSTICE IS LINKED TO SOCIAL EQUALITY AND POVERTY ERADICATION. IN OUR COUNTRY, SCs, STs, AND OBCs HAVE FACED A LOT OF INEQUALITIES IN THE PAST DECADES

nerstones of the Government of India under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji. Seven priorities of the Union Budget – Saptarishi – consist of inclusive development, reaching the last mile, infrastructure and investment, unleashing the potential, green growth, youth power, and the financial sector.

The Central government will recruit 38,800 teachers and support staff for the 740 Eklavya Model Residential Schools, serving 3.5 lakh tribal students over the next three years. The development of more than 14,500 schools across the country as PM SHRI Schools will nurture holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with key 21st-century skills. Providing quality education to rural children through model schools will enhance their chances of growing equally with the rest of society. The Central government is taking steps to modernize model schools across the country to match the standards of Central Vidyalayas.

Similarly, 157 new nursing colleges are to be established in co-location with the existing 157 medical colleges established since 2014. The outlay for the PM Awas Yojana is being enhanced by 66 per-



BANDARU DATTATRAYA

cent to over Rs 79,000 crore. A one-time new small savings scheme-Mahila Samman Savings Certificate - has been announced in the Union Budget 2023-24, which will offer a deposit facility of up to Rs 2 lakh in the name of women or girls for the tenure of 2 years up to March 2025 at a fixed interest rate of 7.5 per cent.

As India marches ahead to lead the world in ensuring cultural, social, and economic resilience for shared prosperity, we need to work harder to build a better social order. Efforts should also be made to ensure due representation of SCs, STs, OBCs, in jobs in different fields.

The idea of the last mile development encompasses the well-being of all sections of society – culturally, socially, educationally, and politically. It is true that all five fingers cannot be equal but we have to ensure that they are equally powerful and respected by all. No social group can be discriminated against on the basis of their caste, religion, and affluence. Efforts should be initiated to make the poor richer by giving them the best facilities and opportunities.

(The writer is the Governor of Haryana. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

EARTHQUAKE PREDICTION

Sir —After devastating earthquakes, many discuss earthquake predictions. But it is a known fact that neither scientists nor geologists can predict earthquakes. They have a pretty good idea of where an earthquake is most likely to hit, but they still can’t tell exactly when it will happen. According to the US Geological Survey, no scientist has ever predicted a major earthquake. In fact, Michel Bruneau, Professor at the University at Buffalo in New York, has said: “There is no science, magic or wizardry right now that exists that makes one able to predict an earthquake within a certain window.”

In spite of all the above facts, it is still an enigma as how the Dutch expert Hoogerbeets Frank was able to make the impossibly exceptional ‘prediction’ of the recent temblor in the twin nations of Turkey and Syria, noting on Twitter that “sooner or later there will be M-7.5 earthquake in South-Central Turkey, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon”. His prediction earned him recognition over social media. If his name rings a bell, it might be because Hoogerbeets also famously claimed in 2015 to know even the exact date that California would be hit by a big quake — May 28.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

PENSION TENSION

Sir — Pension has brought the senior citizens a sense of security for living a decent life. The scheme is praiseworthy and gives lots of advantages to the seniors when they face tough times in their lives. Thus, pensions play a pivotal role and we all welcome the move. However, there is a greater demand pressing hard for revision of pension and that, though seemingly being considered seriously, has not been considered for a very long time since the increase appears attractive but the means to put additional burden on the exchequer is giving a headache to the pensioners.

Today the world over, even in highly protected societies in Europe, pension as a concept is being thought of as a burden to the exchequer and in the society.

BJP in Meghalaya polls



Addressing an election meeting in Meghalaya, Union Home Minister Amit Shah termed the Conrad Sangma-led Government of the National People’s Party ‘one of the most corrupt’ in the country. He added that’s why the BJP pulled out of the Meghalaya Democratic Alliance before the polls. Shah said people were deprived of uninterrupted power supply and drinking water facilities, pointing to the rampant corruption. In the 2018 Assembly elections, Congress won 21 seats, the NPP 20,

the BJP two and the other regional parties and independents the rest. The NPP formed the Government with the support of regional parties and the BJP. Alexander Laloo Hek, BJP MLA and national executive member, joined the Council of Ministers and stayed in charge of the major departments.

This was the government that the Home Minister called the most corrupt. Further, the possibility of the BJP rejoining the coalition cannot be ruled out. After calling Meghalaya “one of the most corrupt States in the country due to the inefficiency of the State Government,” the BJP asks the people to vote for it. As many as 20 MLAs switched sides during their tenure in the 60-member Assembly. At least 17 of the defectors, including eight MLAs from other parties, have been fielded now. Four-time independent MLA Samuel Sangma and many prominent leaders, who had been in the thick of things all along, have joined the BJP.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

ASSAM AS ‘BUTTERFLY CAPITAL’

Sir — Assam is known all over the world for its one-horned rhinoceros and its flavourful tea but only a few would be aware of the fact that Assam hosts about 50 per cent of the butterfly species found in India. There are about 1500 species in India and Assam hosts more than 700 of them. Butterflies are excellent indicators of biodiversity and can serve as early warning signs of nature. The colour of their wings is not

just for aesthetic purposes, these wings tell a lot about what is happening in nature. Butterflies prefer a mild climate for laying eggs.

But the warmer autumn months are having a bad impact on their reproductive cycle. In Assam, most of these species are found in the Bodoland territorial region and Raimona National Park is the preferred home of these beautiful insects (150 species). But there is little or no sensitisation among people about these beautiful creatures. There is also very scantily researched material on them for reasons unknown. I urge the Central Government to earmark special grants for research on these beautiful creatures and also officially recognise Assam as the ‘Butterfly Capital’ of the nation.

Noopur Baruah | Tezpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

The Election Commission, PM Modi’s slave, has done something that has never happened before.

Former Maharashtra CM — Udhav Thackeray

If Putin thinks he can wait us out, he is badly mistaken...we have examined the evidence, and there is no doubt, these are crimes against humanity.

US Vice President — Kamala Harris

No need to overreact, it’s ok not to carry Bhagwa Jhandi everywhere, our actions speak louder than words.

Actor — Kangana Ranaut

And the torrid run continues. More to do with the rigidity of the management to persist with a player (KL Rahul) who just hasn’t looked the part.

Former cricketer — Venkatesh Prasad

As of May 31, we cleared all the dues. There was something left in the name of dues for June. Even that is getting cleared.

Finance Minister — Nirmala Sitharaman

FIRST COLUMN

GADIA LOHAR WOMEN
BEAT LIVELIHOOD ODDS

Lohars, originally from Mewar, made weapons for rulers



SHEFALI MARTINS

Farming, a key occupation of our country, receives ample mention in the traditional professions of India. Often, in an expression of gratitude, we are asked to trace our food back to the farmer who grew it. But what goes unnoticed is the set of hands that helped the farmer grow the grain in the first place. Such hands created the equipment that empowered the farmers, the hands that have been shaping metal from ancient times—the hands of the unsung Gadia Lohars (blacksmiths)—who have been applying traditional sciences to their work without ever going to school or being recognised as practitioners of science. And, like many traditional occupations, the women are equal if not greater contributors in taking this work ahead.



Off the Ajmer-Jaipur highway in Padasoli village, a settlement of Gadia Lohars lives in extreme poverty. Dali Gadia Lohar, a 60-year-old woman from the settlement, says, “We don’t know what a school looks like. We started working from the age of 15 years. Earlier, we moved with our parents from village to village selling iron goods on a bullock cart. We used to get food sometimes and had to go hungry at other times. There was no surety. Centuries have changed, but not our plight.”

The Lohars were originally from Mewar and made weapons for the rulers. When Maharana Pratap lost the kingdom to Akbar, the Lohars swore to the lives of nomads until their kingdom was free again. Their gaadi (cart) on which they went around making and selling their goods earned them the name Gadia Lohar.

Kitab (63), Dali’s sister-in-law, has had a similar life journey. She started making farming and sheep-rearing equipment when she was 15 years old. In this blacksmith community, the woman plays an important role in shaping the metal into equipment. While the man sits on a raised surface to heat the coal and the iron, the woman first fan the coals and then as the metal is being shaped, she hits it from the other side to give it a form. This painstaking, labour-intensive process requires an accuracy and scientific precision which the community learns while being on the job.

The women, besides making the equipment, also go from village to village, fair to fair, to sell the fare. “We make the chimta (pair of tongs), chhalni (sieve), daantli (hand saw), kulhari (axe), kassi (spade) and take them from village to village. We source the iron and coals from the city,” says Kitab.

The women of the next generation of their family, Badam (40), Sugna (30) and Mamta (32) also do similar work and have barely had any exposure to education. But now, since they are settled at one place for the past decade or so, their children go to the government school close-by.

The women start their day early in the morning. If people come to them to buy equipment, they sell it to them, else they go to the village. Their work involves a significant risk to health, not just in terms of sitting by the fire, but the possibility of injury, too.

“We do get injured at times, but there is not much we can do about it,” says Dali. “We have been doing this day in and day out for so many years now; it is just so exhausting! We often run out of breath,” adds Kitab.

However, despite their hard work, these women don’t have a daily income. And, even though the Lohars are settled at one place now, their lives have only become tougher. Large-scale mechanisation has deprived them of their already-low remuneration.

(To be concluded...)
(The author is an independent journalist and educator from Ajmer, Rajasthan: Charkha Features)

We need a robust scientific workforce

Our scientific strength will improve only if researchers produce good publications, innovations, and patents

Scientific research in India is often the same research problem done by different people in different universities. If we look at the database of submitted PhD theses, we can see that many of them submitted in various universities have even similar titles. As of now, there is no rule that prohibits a scholar from carrying out similar work carried out in other universities.

Of course, in research even if the title rhymes similarly, people can argue that the content may be different. But what is the use of repeating the same work, if it’s done using public money? If we go through the profile of PhD supervisors, we can see that most simply work on the topics that their supervisors taught them decades earlier.

Scientific research should be dynamic, and every supervisor and scholar should work on new challenging topics that are relevant to today’s society. There is also the question of publications that come out of the research. Is publication a must for awarding a PhD degree? Do publications define the quality of research?

The recent suggestion by the UGC regarding scrapping the rule regarding compulsory publication for the award of a PhD degree has met with skepticism from the academic community. This decision vertically splits the academic and research community in the country. Even though many prominent scientists and professors support this suggestion, many are apprehensive about it. The current regulation of UGC states that to award a doctoral degree, the student should have at least one publication in a UGC care-listed journal.

Various universities have their mandatory requirements. Some universities need to have two publications in SCOPUS, Web of Science Indexed, or UGC care-listed journals. In some national institutions, there is no requirement for publication.

The reasons cited by UGC regarding a proposal for scrapping the publication rule are the undue pressure on students to publish and the proliferation of “predatory” journals in due course. It’s true that most of the time students’ focus is only on how to get publication rather than on research. Good authentic research cannot be designed to focus on the requirements of journals. In most of our labs, researchers try to incorporate tools, techniques, and analysis software that suit specific journals, even at the experiment designing stage. This leads to prejudice and bias in the research.

Ground-breaking discoveries and innovations will emerge only if one works with a prejudice-free mind and creativity. Even though there has been an exponential rise in scientific publications in the last 10 years, our researchers failed to produce a Nobel Prize after Sir CV Raman.



GROUND-BREAKING DISCOVERIES AND INNOVATIONS WILL EMERGE ONLY IF ONE WORKS WITH A PREJUDICE-FREE MIND AND CREATIVITY. EVEN THOUGH THERE HAS BEEN AN EXPONENTIAL RISE IN SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATIONS IN THE LAST 10 YEARS, OUR RESEARCHERS FAILED TO PRODUCE A NOBEL PRIZE AFTER SIR CV RAMAN

(The author is a science communicator and columnist)



So it is evident that the increase in the number of publications alone cannot be considered a parameter for quality research.

In certain domains of science, the review process of journals takes more than a year, causing undue delay in completing a PhD. In India, it’s not uncommon to see students spending more than five years getting a PhD degree, whereas their counterparts in western Universities complete it within two or three years. In most cases, the students are forced to work in the lab to get a publication.

Is it worth it for a student to spend six or eight years for a doctoral degree? There should be a strong regulation for making research supervisors accountable for any delay in submitting a thesis within a stipulated period of three to four years. It’s the duty of supervisors to see that students submit their thesis on time, if there is any lacuna from the student it should be reported to the concerned authority.

Most researchers in science suppress their grievances from a lab fearing the omission of their names from the paper and other repercussions from the supervisors. Few research supervisors take advantage of this situation and make scholars work in their labs without any remuneration even after the PhD degree is awarded to the student. The main aim of most researchers is to secure a post-doctoral position in some foreign universities. Unfortunately, this is a prerequisite to getting a good job in India. For most post-doctoral positions, publication in high-impact

journals is the main criterion for selection.

Because of compulsion, our scholars publish at least a couple of papers in good journals. No one will ever try to write a scientific article if it’s not a compulsion. Writing is an essential skill that scholars should impart during their PhD period. Only if our scholars are trained in scientific communication can we achieve the objectives mentioned in the recently published Scientific Social Responsibility (SSR) guidelines for promoting science communication.

It’s true that many so-called “predatory” journals or low-quality journals have evolved in recent times. The UGC should highlight the list of such “predatory” journals on its website so that scholars won’t fall into the publishers’ trap. The term “predatory” journal itself is a misnomer. Many people have defined a predatory journal as one that takes processing charges. In that case, many high-impact journals should also be classified as predatory, as they charge authors lakhs of rupees. An average middle-class student may not be able to afford such an immense amount.

If we need to improve the quality of Indian science, we need stringent regulations for the award of PhD degrees. There should be a minimum guarantee from the government that PhD holders will get a job, at least for those passing out from national institutions, as they are admitted after a rigorous selection process. The PhD positions in specific areas can be notified based on the need. The vari-

ous fellowships provided by CSIR, UGC, ICAR, ICMR, DBT in a year can be modified based on the availability of job positions. This will help authorities select the best people suited for a particular area of research.

While filling out the application, the student should be allowed to make research area preferences. This can be in line with a transdisciplinary outlook. Instead of conducting the CSIR-UGC JRF examination on broad topics like Life sciences, Physical sciences and Chemical sciences, students should be allowed to take tests based on specific research topics, irrespective of their basic degree. Even an engineering student interested in studying plant physiology should be allowed to take the exam and vice versa.

The students qualifying in these tests should be allotted to work in an institution where there is an ensuing position. This practice will make students understand the institution’s mandate properly and work for its betterment. The students recruited in this way should not be allowed to leave the job for at least 10 years.

There is no sense in training scholars to better another country through our public money. The country’s scientific strength will improve only if our researchers produce good publications, innovations, and patents. We need to build a robust scientific workforce, which can be created only through quality research scholars. Any dilution in the quality of scientific research will badly affect our vision to transform into a developed nation.

POINT COUNTERPOINT

INDIA IS A DEMOCRACY BUT ITS LEADER IS NO DEMOCRAT. THE ADANI GROUP STOCK CRASH WILL LEAD TO DEMOCRATIC REVIVAL IN INDIA.
— BILLIONAIRE INVESTOR
GEORGE SOROS



SOROS’ COMMENTS REFLECT A EURO-ATLANTIC VIEW. HE IS AN OLD, RICH, OPINIONATED AND DANGEROUS PERSON SITTING IN NEW YORK.
— EXTERNAL AFFAIRS MINISTER
S JAISHANKAR

It is time to battle drugs in Punjab at various levels

The BJP will be launching a yatra in Punjab to free it from the clutches of drug menace, as the state cannot wait anymore

Reports and studies have given several accounts of the drug menace in Punjab. The magnitude of drug addiction among the people in Punjab is mind-boggling. People from all walks of life are being drawn into the cobweb of addiction.

Punjab has been the bulwark of India. Since time immemorial, Punjab has been the soul of India. The name of the state means the place of five rivers. The fertile land of Punjab nursed the Indian civilisation. The idea of India came from the land of Punjab.

Punjab is a land of valour. Bravery of the people of Punjab scared the world conqueror Alexander. Supreme courage and sacrifice of Punjab extinguished the



TARUN CHUGH

(The author is National General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party)

Mughal flame in India. The glory of Punjab brought civilisational gains to the people living even in Afghanistan.

Punjab, thus, is an envy of India’s neighbours. Pakistan set its nefarious designs in Punjab. Its military designs were crushed on the battlefields. Still, Pakistan didn’t mind its ways. Islamabad switched gears to the proxy war. Terrorism was exported to Punjab. India defeated Pakistan even on the proxy front.

Now Pakistan has resorted to a new warfare. Drugs are the new weapons of Pakistan. With drugs, Pakistan wants to subdue the bravery of the people of Punjab.

Pakistan has spread vast tentacles to push drugs into

Punjab. Drones are being used for peddling drugs. Cross-border smuggling of drugs is also rampant. Even the sea routes to push the drugs sourced from Afghanistan are being used. There is a syndicate of drug-peddlers active in Punjab.

The extent of challenge has overwhelmed the existing facilities of de-addiction centres. Families are shaken. Jails are crowded with drug-peddlers. Hospitals are also overwhelmed. Stories of agonies chronicling broken households, financial stress, indebtedness of the rural people, and death are commonplace.

This calls for a national response. This is a social cause that must be on the top



agenda of all the stakeholders. Civil society must step up their resources to deal with the issue. Political parties too must own up the challenge. Social activists must counter the sociological and psychological aspects of the crisis. Religious leaders too have an abundant duty to intervene

and rescue the people.

Social service drives the Bharatiya Janata Party. Politics for the BJP is the means to serve the people. ‘Sewa (service)’ is the mantra of the BJP. In times of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the people faced hardships on account of the national lockdown, BJP workers were on the street for ‘Sewa’, to ensure that none went hungry and there was no suffering. They don’t need to be directed by the party leadership to respond to social crises.

The BJP will be launching a yatra in Punjab to free the state from the clutches of drug menace. This is the duty of BJP workers. Punjab cannot wait anymore. Time to crush the tentacles of drug menace cannot be postponed

for one more day.

Top leadership of the BJP has taken a call to launch the yatra against the drug menace in Punjab. Minister of Home Affairs Amit Shah will take part in the yatra. BJP president Jagat Pratap Nadda will also take part in the yatra. Several top leaders of the BJP will walk alongside the people of Punjab to send out the message that the drug menace has to be crushed in the state.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP has taken several causes. The Central Government has come out with a policy response to deal with social challenges. Some of the northern states had a very poor sex ratio in the 0-6 age group. A few of

the states had seen mushrooming of ultrasound clinics. They had come up solely to meet the growing demand to kill the girl child in the fetus.

PM Modi rose to the occasion and gave a clarion call to the nation with ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’. Within a few years, the practice of killing the girl child is now mostly eliminated. Similar results were seen with the campaign of ‘Swachhata Abhiya’. Sanitation became the mantra of the nation. This helped India in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic effectively.

Now, the BJP is taking out yatra to extinguish drug menace in Punjab. This is to rescue Punjab. Enemies of India can never succeed.

Blinken arrives for tour of Turkey's quake zone



AP ■ ISTANBUL

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken arrived in southern Türkiye on Sunday and set off on a tour of the earthquake disaster zone accompanied by his Turkish counterpart. State-run Anadolu news agency reported that Blinken and Mevlut Cavusoglu, left Incirlik air base near Adana by helicopter for nearby Hatay province, one of the areas hardest hit by the February 6 quake. Blinken had earlier arrived at Incirlik, where US troops are based, from Germany.

Blinken is on his first trip to NATO ally Türkiye since he took office two years ago. He is due to visit a tent city in Hatay established for those displaced by the earthquake, which has killed at least 44,000 in Türkiye and Syria, before touring an aid distribution centre, said Turkish officials who were not authorised to be identified publicly. On returning to Incirlik, he will meet US and Turkish service personnel, as well as Turkish military families affected by the 7.8-magnitude earthquake. The top US diplomat will also inspect American aid

efforts organised from the base and speak to members of USAID's Disaster Assistance Response Team, a quick reaction group of disaster experts. He will fly to Ankara later Sunday for discussions with Turkish officials on Monday, including an anticipated meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. As well as the effects of the earthquake, Blinken is expected to discuss Sweden and Finland's efforts to join NATO, which Türkiye is delaying, calling for Sweden in particular to tighten its approach to Kurdish rebels that Ankara considers terrorists.

Biden's test: Sustaining unity as Ukraine war enters year 2

AP ■ WASHINGTON

One year ago, President Joe Biden was bracing for the worst as Russia massed troops in preparation to invade Ukraine. As many in the West and even in Ukraine doubted Russian President Vladimir Putin's intentions, the White House was adamant: War was coming and Kyiv was woefully outgunned. In Washington, Biden's aides prepared contingency plans and even drafts of what the president would say should Ukraine's capital quickly fall to Russian forces — a scenario deemed likely by most U.S. officials. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was offered help getting out of his country if he wanted it. Yet as Russia's invasion reaches the one-year mark, the city stands and Ukraine has beaten even its own expectations, buoyed by a U.S.-led alliance that has agreed to equip Ukrainian forces with tanks, advanced air defense systems, and more, while keeping the Kyiv government afloat with tens of billions of dollars in direct assistance. For Biden, Ukraine was an

unexpected crisis, but one that fits squarely into his larger foreign policy outlook that the United States and like-minded allies are in the midst of a generational conflict to demonstrate that liberal democracies such as the U.S. can out-deliver autocracies. In the estimation of the White House, the war transformed what had been Biden's rhetorical warnings — a staple of his 2020 campaign speeches — into an urgent call to action. Now, as Biden prepares to travel to Poland to mark the anniversary of the war, he faces a legacy-defining moment. "President Biden's task is to make the case for sustained free world support for Ukraine," said Daniel Fried, a U.S. ambassador to Poland during the Clinton administration and now a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council. "This is an important trip. And really, Biden can define the role of the free world in turning back tyranny." Biden administration officials are quick to direct primary credit for Ukraine's staying power to the courage of its armed forces, with a supporting role to the Russian mili-



tary's ineptitude. But they also believe that without their early warnings and the massive support they orchestrated, Ukraine would have been all but wiped off the map by now. Sustaining Ukraine's fight, while keeping the war from escalating into a potentially catastrophic wider conflict with NATO, will go down as one of Biden's enduring foreign policy accomplishments, they argue. In Poland, Biden is set to meet with allies to reassure them of the U.S. commitment to the region and to helping Ukraine "as long as it takes." It's a pledge that is met with skepticism both at home and

abroad as the invasion enters its second year, and as Putin shows no signs of retreating from an invasion that has left more than 100,000 of his own forces killed or wounded, along with tens of thousands of Ukrainian service members and civilians — and millions of refugees. Biden's job now is, in part, to persuade Americans — and a worldwide audience — that it's more important than ever to stay in the fight, while cautioning that an endgame is unlikely to come quickly. His visit to Poland is an opportunity to make the case to "countries that repudiate archa-

ic notions of imperial conquest and wars of aggression about the need to continue to support Ukraine and oppose Russia," said John Sullivan, who stepped down as the U.S. ambassador to Moscow in September. "We always preach, we are seeking to protect a rules-based international order. It's completely done if Russia gets away with this." The U.S. resolve to stand up to Russia is also being tested by domestic concerns and economic uncertainty. Forty-eight percent of the U.S. public say they favor the U.S. providing weapons to Ukraine, with 29% opposed and 22% saying they're neither in favor nor opposed, according to a poll published this past week by the The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. It's evidence of slipping support since May 2022, less than three months into the war, when 60% of U.S. adults said they were in favor of sending Ukraine weapons. Further, Americans are about evenly divided on sending government funds directly to Ukraine, with 37% in favor and 38% opposed, with 23% saying neither, according to the AP-NORC poll.

Ukrainian grain shipments drop as ship backups grow

AP ■ LONDON

The amount of grain leaving Ukraine has dropped even as a U.N.-brokered deal works to keep food flowing to developing nations, with inspections of ships falling to half what they were four months ago and a backlog of vessels growing as Russia's invasion nears the one-year mark. Ukrainian and some U.S. officials are blaming Russia for slowing down inspections, which Moscow has denied. Less wheat, barley and other grain getting out of Ukraine, dubbed the "breadbasket of the world," raises concerns about the impact to those going hungry in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia — places that rely on affordable food supplies from the Black Sea region. The hurdles come as separate agreements brokered last summer by Turkey and the



U.N. to keep supplies moving from the warring nations and reduce soaring food prices are up for renewal next month. Russia is also a top global supplier of wheat, other grain, sunflower oil and fertilizer, and officials have complained about the holdup in shipping the nutrients critical to crops. Under the deal, food exports from three Ukrainian ports have dropped from 3.7

million metric tons in December to 3 million in January, according to the Joint Coordination Center in Istanbul. That's where inspection teams from Russia, Ukraine, the U.N. and Turkey ensure ships carry only agricultural products and no weapons. The drop in supply equates to about a month of food consumption for Kenya and

Somalia combined. It follows average inspections per day slowing to 5.7 last month and 6 so far this month, down from the peak of 10.6 in October. That has helped lead to backups in the number of vessels waiting in the waters off Turkey to either be checked or join the Black Sea Grain Initiative. There are 152 ships in line, the JCC said, a 50% increase from January. This month, vessels are waiting an average of 28 days between applying to participate and being inspected, said Ruslan Sakhaudinov, head of Ukraine's delegation to the JCC. That's a week longer than in January. Factors like poor weather hindering inspectors' work, demand from shippers to join the initiative, port activity and capacity of vessels also affect shipments. "I think it will grow to be a problem if the inspections con-

tinue to be this slow," said William Osnato, a senior research analyst at agriculture data and analytics firm Gro Intelligence. "In a month or two, you'll realize that's a couple a million tons that didn't come out because it's just going too slowly." "By creating the bottleneck, you're creating sort of this gap of the flow, but as long as they're getting some out, it's not a total disaster," he added. U.S. officials such as USAID Administrator Samantha Power and U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield have blamed Russia for the slowdown, saying food supplies to vulnerable nations are being delayed. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said in statement Wednesday on Facebook that Russian inspectors have been "systematically

delaying the inspection of vessels" for months. They accused Moscow of obstructing work under the deal and then "taking advantage of the opportunity of uninterrupted trade shipping from Russian Black Sea ports." Osnato also raised the possibility that Russia might be slowing inspections "in order to pick up more business" after harvesting a large wheat crop. Figures from financial data provider Refinitiv show that Russian wheat exports more than doubled to 3.8 million tons last month from January 2022, before the invasion. Russian wheat shipments were at or near record highs in November, December and January, increasing 24% over the same three months a year earlier, according to Refinitiv. It estimated Russia would export 44 million tons of wheat in 2022-2023.



War in Ukraine hasn't left Europe freezing in dark

But it has caused energy crises in unexpected places

THE CONVERSATION ■ NEW YORK

Through a year of war in Ukraine, the US and most European nations have worked to help counter Russia, in supporting Ukraine both with armaments and in world energy markets. Russia was Europe's main energy supplier when it invaded Ukraine, and President Vladimir Putin threatened to leave Europeans to freeze "like a wolf's tail" — a reference to a famous Russian fairy tale — if they imposed sanctions on his country. But thanks to a combination of preparation and luck, Europe has avoided blackouts and power cutoffs. Instead, less wealthy nations like Pakistan and India have contended with electricity outages on the back of unaffordably high global natural gas prices. As a global energy policy analyst, I see this as the latest evidence that less wealthy nations often suffer the most from globalised oil and gas crises.

With less need for electricity and natural gas, European governments were able to delay drawing on natural gas inventories that they built up over the summer and autumn of 2022. At this point, a continental energy crisis is much less likely than many forecasts predicted. European natural gas stockpiles are around 67% full, and they will probably still be 50% full at the end of this winter. This will help the continent position itself for next winter as well. The situation is similar for coal. European utilities stockpiled coal and reactivated 26 coal-fired power plants in 2022, anticipating a possible winter energy crisis. But so far, the continent's coal use has risen only 7%, and the reactivated coal plants are averaging just 18% of their operating capacity.

THE US ROLE Record-high US energy exports in the summer and fall of 2022 also buoyed European energy security. The US exported close to 10 million cubic metres per month of liquefied natural gas in 2022, up 137% from 2021, providing roughly half of all of Europe's imported LNG. Although domestic US natural gas production surged to record levels, some producers had the opportunity to export into high-priced global markets. As a result, surpluses of summer natural gas didn't emerge inside the US market, as might otherwise have happened. Combined with unusually hot summer temperatures, which drove up energy demand for cooling, the export surge shocked US consumers with the highest natural gas prices they had experienced since 2008.

Memphis police say 1 dead, 10 injured in overnight shootings

AP ■ MEMPHIS (US)

One person was killed and 10 were injured early Sunday after a pair of shootings in Tennessee that police believe are connected, according to a news release from the Memphis Police Department posted on Twitter. Police responded to a shooting at a Memphis nightclub at 12:43 a.m., according to the release. Two victims were transported to the hospital in critical condition. Five others with less serious injuries went to area hospitals in private vehicles. While police were on the scene, they were notified of a second shooting about a mile away. At that scene, one male victim was pronounced dead and three other victims were



transported to the hospital in critical condition, according to police. Police do not know what led to the shooting or whether the shooter knew the victims. They do not yet have a solid description of the shooter or shooters.

Estonian leader: Russia must be held accountable after war

AP ■ MUNICH

Estonia's prime minister on Sunday insisted that once the war in Ukraine ends, Russia must be brought to justice for war crimes as well as for the decision to invade its neighbour if it is to have any chance of developing a normal relationship with the West. Kaja Kallas, whose small Baltic country is the biggest per-capita contributor of military aid to Ukraine, told The Associated Press that the conflict cannot end with a peace deal that carves up the country and doesn't hold Moscow to account. "I don't think there can be any relations as usual with a pariah state that hasn't really given up the imperialistic goals," she said on the sidelines of a major security conference in Munich. "If we don't learn this lesson and don't prosecute the crimes of aggression, the war crimes will just continue." She spoke the day after Vice President Kamala Harris said the United States has determined that Russia has committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine and needs to be held accountable. "Justice must be served," Harris said in her speech to the conference. The Russian ambassador to Washington, Anatoly Antonov, dismissed the U.S. Announcement "as an attempt to demonize Russia." Kallas noted that while Nazi crimes were prosecuted in the Nuremberg trials following World War II, no tribunal was set up following the Cold War to prosecute crimes by the Soviet Union, including mass deportations of Estonians,

are prolonging the war by arming Ukraine, Kallas said that while everyone wants peace, a deal that cedes Ukrainian territory to Russia would signal to the world that "aggression pays off." Russia's invasion must come at a "higher price, so that all the aggressors or would-be aggressors in the world would make the calculation that it doesn't pay off," Kallas said. Kallas, 45, leads Estonia's center-right Reform Party and has been prime minister since 2021. Not everyone supports her line on Ukraine. Ahead of parliamentary elections in two weeks, opposition leader Martin Helme of the far right Conservative People's Party has called for a more cautious approach and accused Kallas of emptying Estonia's own arsenals, leaving the country vulnerable. This time, Russia's leadership has to be held responsible. "There has to be accountability (before) we can talk about our relations with Russia," she said. Asked about China's calls for peace talks and suggestions that Western countries



Latvians and Lithuanians during the five-decade-long Soviet occupation. "There has to be accountability (before) we can talk about our relations with Russia," she said. Asked about China's calls for peace talks and suggestions that Western countries

Ukraine in mind, US frantic to avert Mideast showdown at UN

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration is scrambling to avert a diplomatic crisis over Israeli settlement activity this week at the United Nations that threatens to overshadow and perhaps derail what the U.S. Hopes will be a solid five days of focus on condemning Russia's war with Ukraine. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made two emergency calls on Saturday from the Munich Security Conference, which he is attending in an as-yet unsuccessful bid to avoid or forestall such a showdown. It remained unclear whether

another last-minute intervention might salvage the situation, according to diplomats familiar with the ongoing discussions who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. Without giving details, the State Department said in nearly identical statements that Blinken had spoken to Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from Munich to "reaffirm the U.S. Commitment to a negotiated two-state solution and opposition to policies that endanger its viability." "The secretary under-

scored the urgent need for Israelis and Palestinians to take steps that restore calm and our strong opposition to unilateral measures that would further escalate tensions," the statements said. Neither statement mentioned the proposed U.N. Security Council resolution demanding an immediate halt to Israeli settlements. The Palestinians want to bring that resolution to a vote on Monday. And neither statement gave any indication as to how the calls ended. But diplomats familiar with the conversations said that in his call to Abbas,

Blinken reiterated an offer to the Palestinians for a U.S. Package of incentives to entice them to drop or at least delay the resolution. Those incentives included a White House meeting for Abbas with President Joe Biden, movement on reopening the American consulate in Jerusalem, and a significant aid package, the diplomats said. Abbas was noncommittal, the diplomats said, but also suggested he would not be amenable unless the Israelis agreed to a six-month freeze on settlement expansion on land the Palestinians claim

for a future state. Blinken then called Netanyahu, who, according to the diplomats, was similarly noncommittal about the six-month settlement freeze. Netanyahu also repeated Israeli opposition to reopening the consulate, which was closed during President Donald Trump's administration, they said. The U.S. And others were hoping to resolve the deadlock on Sunday, but the diplomats said it was unclear if that was possible. The drama arose just ahead of the one-year anniversary of the Russian invasion of

Ukraine, which will be the subject of special U.N. General Assembly and Security Council sessions on Thursday and Friday. The U.S. Opposes the Palestinian resolution and is almost certain to veto it. Not vetoing would carry considerable domestic political risk for Biden on the cusp of the 2024 presidential race and top House Republicans have already warned against it. But the administration also fears that using its veto to protect Israel risks losing support at the world body for measures condemning Russia's war in Ukraine.

Blinken meets Wang, condemns China's spy balloon ops

PTI ■ WASHINGTON/MUNICH

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned China that its "material support" for Russia's war against Ukraine would attract sanctions and condemned the "unacceptable violation" of American sovereignty by a Chinese spy balloon as he met Beijing's top diplomat Wang Yi.

Blinken and Wang held talks on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Munich, Germany on Saturday, in the first high-level meeting since the spy balloon row began earlier this month.

"The Secretary directly

spoke to the unacceptable violation of US sovereignty and international law by the People's Republic of China high-altitude surveillance balloon in US territorial airspace, underscoring that this irresponsible act must never occur again," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said.

"During the meeting, Blinken made clear the United States will not stand for any violation of our sovereignty, and that the Chinese high-altitude surveillance balloon programme — which has intruded into the airspace of more than 40 countries across five continents — has been exposed to the world," he

said.

The relations between the US and China strained further after Washington said Beijing flew a spy balloon over America before US fighter jets shot it down on President Joe Biden's orders.

The balloon incident prompted Blinken to postpone a planned visit to Beijing. The February 5-6 trip would have been the first by a US secretary of state to China in five years and was seen by both countries as an opportunity to stabilise their strained ties.

The meeting between the two senior officials came hours after Wang on Saturday renewed



Beijing's criticism of the US for shooting down what Washington says was a Chinese spy balloon, arguing at the con-

ference in Germany that the move doesn't point to US strength.

"The actions don't show

that the US is big and strong, but describe the exact opposite," Wang, the ruling Chinese Communist Party's most senior foreign policy official, asserted.

Wang called the balloon episode a "political farce manufactured by the US" and accused them of "using all means to block and suppress China".

China continues to deny that it sent a spy balloon, even as the US continues to disclose more details of the object to back up its allegation. Blinken also raised the Russia-Ukraine war during his meeting with Wang, the Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs.

"On Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, the Secretary warned about the implications and consequences if China provides material support to Russia or assistance with systemic sanctions evasion," Price said.

US Vice President Kamala Harris also alluded to China's support for Russia during her speech in Munich.

"We are also troubled that Beijing has deepened its relationship with Moscow since the war began," Harris said on Saturday.

"Looking ahead, any steps by China to provide lethal support to Russia would only reward aggression, continue the

killing, and further undermine a rules-based order," she said.

Blinken also condemned the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) test by North Korea as the latest destabilising act carried out by Pyongyang, and emphasised the need for responsible powers to respond to such significant international challenges.

During the meeting, Blinken reaffirmed there had been no change to the long-standing 'One China' policy of the US, and he underscored the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, the spokesperson said.

N Korea makes fresh threats, US bombers fly after ICBM test

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea said Sunday its latest intercontinental ballistic missile test was meant to further bolster its "fatal" nuclear attack capacity and threatened additional powerful steps over upcoming military drills between the United States and South Korea.

The United States responded by flying long-range supersonic bombers in a show of force later Sunday for separate joint exercises with South Korean and Japanese warplanes.

Saturday's ICBM test, the North's first missile test since Jan. 1, signals its leader Kim Jong Un is using his rivals' drills as a chance to expand his country's nuclear arsenal to get the upper hand in future dealings with the United States.

An expert says North Korea may seek to hold regular operational exercises involving its ICBMs.

North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency said its launch of the Hwasong-15 ICBM was organised "suddenly" without prior notice at Kim's direct order.

KCNA said the launch was designed to verify the weapon's reliability and the combat readiness of the country's



nuclear force.

It said the missile was fired at a high angle and reached a maximum altitude of about 5,770 kilometers (3,585 miles), flying a distance of about 990 kilometers (615 miles) for 67 minutes before accurately hitting a pre-set area in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan.

The steep-angle launch was apparently to avoid neighboring countries. The flight details reported by North Korea, which roughly matched the launch information previously assessed by its neighbours, show the weapon is theoretically capable of reaching the mainland U.S. If fired at a standard trajectory.

The Hwasong-15 launch demonstrated the North's

"powerful physical nuclear deterrent" and its efforts to "turn its capacity of fatal nuclear counterattack on the hostile forces" into an extremely strong one that cannot be countered, KCNA said.

Whether North Korea has a functioning nuclear-tipped ICBM is still a source of outside debate, as some experts say the North hasn't mastered a way to protect warheads from the severe conditions of atmospheric reentry. The North says it has acquired such a technology.

The Hwasong-15 is one of North Korea's three existing ICBMs, all of which use liquid propellants that require pre-launch injections and cannot remain fuelled for extended periods.

The North is pushing to build a solid-fuelled ICBM, which would be more mobile and harder to detect before its launch.

"Kim Jong Un has likely determined that the technical reliability of the country's liquid propellant ICBM force has been sufficiently tested and evaluated to now allow for regular operational exercises of this kind," said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Chang Young-keun, a missile expert at Korea Aerospace University in South Korea, said that North Korea appeared to have launched an upgraded version of the Hwasong-15 ICBM.

Chang said the information provided by North Korea showed the missile will likely have a longer potential range than the standard Hwasong-15.

Later Sunday, U.S. B-1B bombers and other aircraft separately trained with South Korean and Japanese fighter jets over and near the Korean Peninsula.

A South Korean military statement said Sunday's training reaffirmed Washington's "iron-clad" security commitment to South Korea.

US SC weighs liability shield for internet giants

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Islamic State gunmen killed American college student Nohemi Gonzalez as she sat with friends in a Paris bistro in 2015, one of several attacks on a Friday night in the French capital that left 130 people dead.

Her family's lawsuit claiming YouTube's recommendations helped the Islamic State group's recruitment is at the center of a closely watched Supreme Court case being argued Tuesday about how broadly a law written in 1996 shields tech companies from liability.

The law, known as Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, is credited with helping create today's internet.

A related case, set for arguments Wednesday, involves a terrorist attack at a nightclub in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2017 that killed 39 people and prompted a suit against Twitter, Facebook and Google, which owns YouTube.

The tech industry is facing criticism from the left for not doing enough to remove harmful content from the internet and from the right for censoring conservative speech.

Now, the high court is poised to take its first hard look at online legal protections.



A win for Gonzalez's family could wreak havoc on the internet, say Google and its many allies. Yelp, Reddit, Microsoft, Craigslist, Twitter and Facebook are among the companies warning that searches for jobs, restaurants and merchandise could be restricted if those social media platforms had to worry about being sued over the recommendations they provide and their users want.

"Section 230 underpins a lot of aspects of the open internet," said Neal Mohan, who was just named senior vice president and head of YouTube.

Gonzalez's family, partially backed by the Biden administration, argues that lower courts' industry-friendly interpretation of the law has made it too difficult to hold Big Tech companies accountable.

Freed from the prospect of

being sued, companies have no incentive to act responsibly, critics say.

They are urging the court to say that companies can be sued in some instances.

Beatriz Gonzalez, Nohemi's mother, said she barely uses the internet, but hopes the case results in it becoming harder for extremist groups to access social media.

"I don't know much about social media or these ISIS organisations. I don't know anything about politics. But what I know is that my daughter is not going to vanish just like that," Gonzalez said in an interview with The Associated Press from her home in Roswell, New Mexico.

Her daughter was a 23-year-old senior at California State University, Long Beach, who was spending a semester in Paris studying industrial design. Her last communication with her mother was a mundane exchange about money via Facebook, two days before the attacks, Gonzalez said.

The legal arguments have nothing to do with what happened in Paris. Instead, they turn on the reading of a law that was enacted "at the dawn of the dot-com era," as Justice Clarence Thomas, a critic of broad legal immunity, wrote in 2020.

Indonesian police to deport mafia fugitive back to Italy

AP ■ DENPASAR (INDONESIA)

Indonesian police said Sunday they will escort back to Italy an Italian-Australian fugitive who was arrested on Indonesia's tourist island of Bali after seven years on the run in connection with drug trafficking and organised crime.

Antonio Strangio, 32, appeared on Interpol's "red notice" list when he was stopped and detained in Bali on February 3 after arriving from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Bali police spokesperson Satake Bayu Setianto cited safety reasons in refusing to say when Strangio will be deported to Italy, where he's wanted on charges of trafficking 160 kilograms (352 pounds) of marijuana.

The suspect was shown to reporters at an airport news conference given by the police and was escorted to the departure hall on Sunday afternoon.

Strangio is allegedly connected to the 'ndrangheta mafia, considered by Italian prosecutors to be the most important criminal organisation in the Western world.

Japanese bid farewell to beloved panda returning to China

AP ■ TOKYO

Thousands of Japanese fans, some wiping away tears, bid farewell to a beloved Japanese-born giant panda that made her final public appearance Sunday before flying to her home country, China.

The panda fans gathered at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo for one last look at Xiang Xiang, the park's idol since her birth in June 2017.

Sunday's viewing was limited to 2,600 lucky ones who won their tickets in an extremely competitive lottery. But many others who didn't win came anyway to say their goodbyes from outside of the panda house.

"Xiang Xiang is not only cute but charming and funny. She's so attractive that if you see her once, you want to see her more. I don't think there is any panda like her in the



universe," said a visitor who only gave her first name, Yukie. "I've made friends here by sharing it, and that is also her attraction."

Though she was born and grew up at the Tokyo zoo, Xiang Xiang, whose parents Ri Ri and Shin Shin are on loan from China, must return to

that country.

China sends pandas abroad as a sign of goodwill but maintains ownership over the animals and any cubs they produce. The animals are native to southwestern China and are an unofficial national mascot.

Divided into groups of

about 10, the visitors were given only a few minutes to quietly say goodbye to Xiang Xiang as she nonchalantly nibbled on bamboo sticks. Viewers held up their mobile phones and cameras to capture her every move.

"I wish Japanese-born pandas could stay in Japan," said Takamichi Masui, an auto parts maker who travelled from Mie, in central Japan. "So many people who came today and fans are sad to see her go. When I saw (Xiang Xiang), I got teary. I wish Xiang Xiang could stay, though I understand it's difficult."

He said he worries if Xiang Xiang can smoothly adapt to her new life in China.

Natsuki Mizuguchi, a graphic designer, wore a parka, socks and shoes decorated with Xiang Xiang's head photo that she had taken.

Mizuguchi said she first saw Xiang Xiang when she

was recovering from health issues but has since gotten better. "I wanted to express my appreciation to Xiang Xiang," Mizuguchi said. "I'm certain she will be an idol in China too and I hope she serves the friendship between our two countries."

Her friend, Akane Hiramoto, a nurse, said she could not win a slot Sunday and her visit Saturday became her last.

"I would love to go see her in China," Hiramoto said. "I hope Japan and China can deepen friendship through pandas like Xiang Xiang and also environmental issues, for instance."

Despite strained political ties between Japan and China, pandas have connected people in both countries and contributed to the friendship, Japanese fans say.

Xiang Xiang, accompanied by two Ueno Zoo staff,

will be flown to China on Tuesday. She'll join other pandas at a facility in Sichuan province, close to the original panda habitat.

"I became emotional when I saw many people shedding tears saying goodbye to her," said Ueno Zoo spokesperson Naoya Ohashi.

But there is one more day before her departure, and, "as zoo keepers, we will fulfil our responsibility and do utmost to safely send her to China," he said.

"I hope she will get used to a new environment quickly, find a good partner and have children," Ohashi said.

Pandas, which reproduce rarely in the wild and rely on a diet of bamboo, remain among the world's most threatened species. An estimated 1,800 pandas live in the wild, while another 500 are in zoos or reserves, mostly in Sichuan.

Syrian state media: Israeli airstrikes kill 5 in Damascus



AP ■ BEIRUT

Israeli airstrikes targeted a residential neighbourhood in the Syrian capital of Damascus early Sunday, killing at least five people and wounding 15, Syrian state news reported.

Loud explosions were heard over a central area of the capital around 12:30 a.m. Local time, and SANA reported that Syrian air defences were "confronting hostile targets in the sky around Damascus."

Syrian state media agency SANA, citing a military source, reported that five people had been killed, among them a soldier, and 15 civilians wounded, along with "destruction of a number of residential buildings."

The news agency also reported that the strikes had damaged buildings connected to a medieval citadel in central Damascus and an applied arts institute housed there.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a U.K.-based war monitor, reported

that 15 people, including a woman, were killed in strikes targeting sites connected with Iranian militias and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.

They took place in the Damascus countryside and on an Iranian school in the neighbourhood of Kafr Sousa in the capital, it said.

Suspected female suicide bomber held in Balochistan

PTI ■ QUETTA

Pakistani security forces arrested a woman with a jacket laden with explosives who was planning to carry out a suicide attack in the Balochistan province, police said on Sunday.

The suspect, identified as Mahbal, was arrested on Saturday in Quetta's Satellite Town, a Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) official of the Balochistan police said.

"The woman was arrested on an intelligence tip-off, and a suicide jacket with explosives was also recovered from her bag," the official said.

He said the woman, affiliated to the outlawed insurgent Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), was sent to Quetta for allegedly carrying out a suicide attack.

"The woman was arrested from near a park in Quetta's Satellite Town when teams of CTD and intelligence agencies

conducted an operation in the area against the outlawed Baloch Liberation Front," the CTD official said.

"She had a bag with the suicide jacket that had four to five kilograms of explosives on it," he said.

"We got an intelligence tip-off that the BLF had sent a suicide bomber to carry out an attack on a key installation in Quetta. We have identified her as Mahbal, wife of Bebagar alias Nadeem," he added.

Last year in April, a female suicide bomber of the banned Balochistan National Army (BLA) carried out a suicide attack at the Karachi University's Confucius Institute entrance, killing three Chinese teachers and their Pakistani driver.

The arrest comes days after a deadly attack by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants on the Karachi Police Chief's head office on Friday.

'I just want my legs back': Myanmar landmine casualties soar



AP ■ BANGKOK

The 3-year-old boy had taken only two steps from his mother's lap when a deafening explosion rang out. The blast caught the woman in the face, blurring her vision. She forced her eyes open and searched for her son around the busy jetty where they'd been waiting for a ferry, near their small village in south-central Myanmar.

Through the smoke, she spotted him. His small body lay on the ground, his feet and legs mangled with flesh peeled away, shattered bones exposed.

"He was crying and telling me that it hurt so much," she said. "He didn't know what just happened." But she did.

The woman's son had detonated a landmine, an explosive device designed to mangle or destroy whatever comes into its path.

Landmines have been banned for decades by most countries, since the United Nations Mine Ban Treaty was adopted in 1997. But in Myanmar, which is not party to the treaty, the use of mines has soared since the military seized power from the democratically elected government in February 2021 and armed resistance has skyrocketed.

Landmines are planted by all sides of the bloody conflict in Myanmar, and they're responsible for surging civilian casualties, including an alarming number of children as victims, according to an AP analysis based on data and reports from nonprofit and humanitarian organizations, interviews with civilian victims, families, local aid workers, military defectors and monitoring groups.

In 2022, figures from the U.N. show, civilian casualties

from landmine and unexploded ordnance spiked by nearly 40%. Experts say this and other official tallies are vastly undercounted, largely due to difficulties monitoring and reporting during the conflict.

Despite incomplete numbers, experts agree that the increase in Myanmar is the largest ever recorded.

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Dy. Chief Engineer/ Headquarter (Procurement Cell-2) GGSSTP, Roopnagar invites E-Tender ID No. Tender ID 2023. POWER. 96784. 1 for Routine, Preventive, Breakdown & Shutdown Maintenance work of motorized & pneumatic operated valves and Gear box along with associated Electrical / Pneumatic Actuators of 4x210 MW GGSSTP units, Rupnagar. For Detailed NIT & Tender Specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 17-02-23 onwards.
Note: Corrigendum & addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>
76155/12/1431/2022/21367

RTP-20/2023

Public Notice
My Client **NEELAM SHARMA** W/o Ashok Sharma R/o E-55, New Multan Nagar, New Delhi-56 has debarred & disowned her Son **Himanshu Sharma** from her movable & immovable properties. My Client has also severed all her relation with him. If anybody deals with him in any manner they do so at their own risk & responsibility. Ramesh Chander (Adv), Ch-68, Western Wing, Tis Hazari

PUBLIC NOTICE
It is notified to the general public that my client Mrs. Chhaya K. Gupta, wife of Lt. Kanhaiya J. Gupta, R/o 3 & 7, Ganesh Darshan Apartment, Near Santoshi Mata Mandir, Kalyan- West, Distt -Thane, State Maharashtra-421301, have debarred and disinherited her son Mr. Amit K. Gupta and Mrs. Shruti Gupta, w/o Mr. Amit K. Gupta, currently r/o H. No. L-31, Mahendra Park, Street No. 23, Adarsh Nagar, M S Mandi, New Delhi-110033, from all her movable and immovable properties, including the aforesaid residential property and served all her relations both legal and social with him due to his disobedient and uncaring behavior. Henceforth, Mr. Amit K. Gupta and his wife Mrs. Shruti Gupta shall not have any claim as to their rights, title and interest in any property (movable or immovable), including Flat No. 3 & 7, Ganesh Darshan Apartment, Near Santoshi Mata Mandir, Kalyan-West, Distt. Thane, State Maharashtra-421301 and Rustumjee Azizano A, B & C Wings, Eastern Express Highway, Majpada Junction, Thane-West, Maharashtra-400610. Any person dealing with Mr. Amit K. Gupta and Mrs. Shruti Gupta, shall be doing so at his/her own risk and my client shall not be responsible.
(Kaushal Kishore) Advocate
GF, K-60, Jungpura Extension, ND-14.

India's economy to grow at 6% in 23-24: Niti Aayog ex-Vice Chairman

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is likely to clock 6 per cent growth rate next fiscal and the country can persevere with a high growth rate because of several reforms undertaken during the last eight years by the Narendra Modi government, former Niti Aayog Vice Chairman Rajiv Kumar said on Sunday.

Kumar further said major risks going forward will emerge from a synchronized downturn in the North American and European economies.

"India has a good opportunity to persevere with a high growth rate because of the reforms undertaken during the last eight years. We will manage to grow at 6 per cent in 2023-24," he told PTI in an interview.

According to Kumar, there are several downside risks, especially in the context of an uncertain global situation.

"These will have to be tackled through careful policy measures designed to support our export efforts and at the

same time improve the flow of private investment both from domestic sources as well as from foreign sources," he said.

The Reserve Bank has projected India's economic growth at 6.4 per cent for 2023-24, broadly in line with the estimate of the Economic Survey tabled in Parliament.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is estimated at 7 per cent in 2022-23, according to the first advance estimate of the National Statistical Office (NSO).

The Economic Survey 2022-23 projected a baseline GDP growth of 6.5 per cent in real terms for the next fiscal.

Replying to a question on high inflation, Kumar said the Reserve Bank has said that it will ensure that inflation rate is brought under control.

"Also a good winter crop will help in keeping the food prices low," he noted.

The RBI lowered the consumer price inflation (CPI) forecast to 6.5 per cent for the current fiscal from 6.7 per cent.

India's retail inflation in

January was 6.52 per cent.

To a question on India's rising trade deficit with China, Kumar suggested that New Delhi should re-engage with Beijing on finding greater market opportunities and access in the Chinese market.

"There are several products which India can export more to China.

"That will require a considered re-engagement," he emphasised.

According to Kumar, it would be feasible for India to restrict imports from China because most imported products are quite essential imports.

Indian and Chinese troops clashed along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh on December 9, 2022 and the face-off resulted in "minor injuries to a few personnel from both sides.

According to recent data released by the Chinese customs, the trade between India and China touched an all-time high of USD 135.98 billion in 2022, while New Delhi's trade deficit with Beijing



crossed the USD 100 billion mark for the first time despite frosty bilateral relations.

Replying to a question on the Adani crisis, Kumar said a robust public-private partnership is essential for developing infrastructure at the rate required.

"I don't think that one such incident with a private family company will hamper that effort.

"... There are a large number of private sector companies who have participated in infrastructure development in the past and will continue to do so going forward," he observed.

Adani group has been

Domestic ESG-focused firms performed better than global peers in price volatility, equity returns: RBI study

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Large listed domestic companies with an active ESG (environmental, social and governance) framework have performed better than their broad market counterparts even during extreme market events like the pandemic shocks, says an RBI study.

The RBI study of 18 economies with such frameworks, indicate that investors reward pro-climate and pro-socially oriented companies.

The analysis is based on the 10 emerging countries of Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, South Korea, Malaysia, Russia, South Africa, Taiwan, and Thailand; and the eight advanced economies of Australia, Britain, Canada, Hong Kong, Japan, Sweden, Switzerland, and the US.

The ESG study based on the Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI's) ESG indices is published in the February bulletin of the Reserve Bank.

The study noted that the ESG leaders' indices have outperformed the broad indices for most of the countries in the sample, and the outcomes are based on these numbers from 2010 when the ESG concept



began to gather momentum.

The findings suggested that the companies which have managed and disclosed their ESG related risks better are associated with higher stock prices compared to a larger set of listed companies which do not have such disclosures.

India ranks ahead of all the countries except China and Taiwan in terms of the relative returns in ESG leaders' index but tops the chart in terms of least price volatility during market upheavals, the study said, adding while the average volatility was 86 per cent during the pandemic shocks, India's was only 74 per cent.

The relative growth in India's ESG index is also among the top countries during this period within the set of 18 countries in the sample, the study noted.

During the sample period, there is no clear association between the average annual returns and the average risks in the ESG leaders' price indices among the set of countries. The risks in ESG indices, however, are broadly in line with the risks in the broad indices across countries.

In general, the risk in both broad indices and ESG indices are higher in emerging markets compared to advanced markets and an analysis of the monthly ESG returns suggests that India's ESG companies have given higher returns.

An analysis of the volatility clustering of broad and ESG indices indicated that volatility, in general, is lower in the advanced economies, than emerging markets. But overall India ESG index saw the second least volatility at 78 per cent while Hong Kong had the lowest at 74 per cent.

Mcap of five of top-10 most valued firms jump ₹95,337 cr last week; Reliance steals the show

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Five of the top 10 valued firms together added Rs 95,337.95 crore in their market valuation last week, with index major Reliance Industries Ltd contributing the most.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 319.87 points or 0.52 per cent.

While Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, HDFC, ITC and Bharti Airtel were the gainers from the top-10 pack, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, Infosys, Hindustan Unilever and State Bank of India were the laggards.

The market valuation of Reliance Industries rallied Rs 70,023.18 crore to Rs 16,50,677.12 crore.

ITC's market capitalisation (mcap) jumped Rs



14,834.74 crore to Rs 4,75,767.12 crore.

The valuation of ICICI Bank climbed Rs 6,034.51 crore to Rs 6,01,920.14 crore and that of Bharti Airtel advanced Rs 3,288.43 crore to Rs 4,32,763.25 crore.

HDFC's mcap gained Rs 1,157.09 crore to Rs 4,92,237.09 crore.

However, State Bank of India's valuation eroded by Rs

Global trends to guide equities this week amid lack of major trigger in domestic markets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the third quarter earnings calendar coming to an end and no major domestic trigger in sight, equity investors will focus on global trends and foreign fund movement this week, analysts said.

Markets may face volatile trends amid derivatives expiry during the week, they added.

"Global cues and F&O expiry may cause volatility this week. Although FIIs have shown some interest in purchasing over the past few days, there were a few block pur-

chases last week, so their flow will be crucial," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

FPIs turned net buyers last week with an investment of over Rs 7,600 crore against net outflows of Rs 3,920 crore in the preceding week (From February 7-12).

Brent crude oil movement and the trend in the rupee would also be in focus this week.

"With all major events behind us, the performance of the global markets, especially the US, will be in focus for cues. Besides, crude and rupee

movement will continue to offer indications in between," Ajit Mishra, VP Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE benchmark last week climbed 319.87 points or 0.52 per cent. "Dominated by the release of key macroeconomic numbers and persistent FII buying, domestic markets witnessed a positive trend during the last week.

"However, the unfavourable combination of higher-than-expected inflation and a stronger job market in the US market dragged markets lower towards the



end of the week, raising concerns about tighter monetary policy," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

The lack of major triggers in the domestic market will attract global cues to dictate the market's trend going forward, Nair added.

India-UAE Business Council launched to boost bilateral trade and investment

PTI ■ DUBAI

Marking the first anniversary of the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the two sides have launched the UAE chapter of their joint business chamber to bolster economic ties and facilitate enhancing bilateral trade and investment.

India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) inked a CEPA on February 18 last year to boost trade ties following a virtual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The UAE India Business Council - UAE Chapter

(UIBC-UC) was launched on Saturday by Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, UAE Minister of State for Foreign Trade, in the presence of Ambassador of India to the UAE, Sunjay Sudhir, Consul General of India in Dubai Aman Puri and founding members of the UIBC-UC.

The two nations aim to increase bilateral trade to USD 100 billion and attract USD 75 billion in investment from the UAE to India.

The UIBC-UC is poised to play a crucial role in supporting both governments in achieving these objectives and maximising the potential of the UAE-India relationship.

By leveraging the strong bond between the two nations,

the council brings together key partners and stakeholders from both nations and will serve as a valuable source of policy guidance, fostering innovative collaboration between Emirati and Indian businesses.

Speaking on this occasion, Minister Zeyoudi highlighted that the establishment of the UAE Chapter of the UAE India Business Council marks a significant moment in the deepening of the relationship between the United Arab Emirates and India.

He also mentioned that the Council will play a critical role in supporting the two governments in their joint mission to boost bilateral trade and investment. He expressed con-

fidence that it will catalyse innovative collaboration between our two great nations.

Ambassador Sudhir said, "The launch today marks a significant milestone in the strengthening of the relationship between the United Arab Emirates and India."

The UIBC-UC will serve as the counterpart organisation to the UIBC India Chapter, which was established in New Delhi on September 3, 2015, by Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, UAE Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and Sushma Swaraj, then Minister of External Affairs of India.

The UAE India Business Council - UAE Chapter (UIBC-UC) has been set up

with the approval of UAE's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.

The UIBC-UC will operate under the supervision of the Federation of UAE Chambers of Commerce & Industry and has been registered as a legal and financial entity with the Dubai Chamber of Commerce.

The council will have its office in Abu Dhabi and will be a pan UAE body focussing on promoting trade and investment relations between the UAE and India. Membership to UIBC-UC will be by invitation only, and institutional members will be invited over time.

Faizal Kottikollon, Chairman, of KEF Holdings,

who has been appointed as the Chairman of UIBC-UC, said the council's focus will be to identify significant strategic projects that can be undertaken by both countries.

"This includes investments in large infrastructure projects in India, advancements in manufacturing and technology, and providing Indian manufacturers with the ability to use the UAE as a base for their global expansion," he said.

Rizwan Soomar, CEO & MD (India Subcontinent) at DP World, will serve as the Co-Chairman of UIBC-UC.

Major General (Retd.) Sharafuddin Sharaf, who serves as the Chairman of the UIBC India Chapter, will also hold the position of Vice Chairman of



UIBC-UC.

The founding members of the UIBC-UC from the UAE side are Mubadala - Sovereign Wealth Fund of the UAE, Wizz Financial, DP World, EMAAR, Emirates Airlines, and Emirates NBD Bank.

From the Indian side, large conglomerates such as TATA, Reliance, and Adani as well as tech innovators like OLA, Zerodha, Udaan, and EaseMyTrip along with prominent Indian entrepreneur led Corporations based in the UAE such as KEF Holdings, Buimerc Corporation, Apparel Group, EFS and Lulu Financial are represented.

G20 Finance Ministers & Central Bank Governors' meeting to be held at Bengaluru

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Strengthening multilateral development banks to address shared global challenges of the 21st century, financing for resilient, inclusive and sustainable 'cities of tomorrow' are some of the key agenda items for first G20 Finance Ministers & Central Bank Governors' meeting to be held at Bengaluru later this month.

The First Finance Ministers & Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) meeting under the G20 Indian Presidency is scheduled during February 24-25 and will be chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and co-chaired by Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das.

The G20 FMCBG meeting will be preceded by a meeting of G20 Finance and Central Bank Deputies (FCBD) on February 22, co-chaired by Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth and RBI Deputy Governor Michael D. Patra.

The meeting will see the participation of Finance Ministers and Central Bank



Governors of the G20 members, invitee members and heads of International Organisations. In total, there will be a delegation of 72 members attending the meeting.

The Indian Presidency has designed the meeting agenda in a manner that can foster a meaningful exchange of ideas among Ministers and Governors on pragmatic and meaningful approaches to address some of the key global economic issues, it said.

"The meeting will be spread over three sessions on February 24-25, covering issues such as strengthening multilateral development banks to address shared global challenges of the 21st century, financing for resilient, inclusive and sustainable 'cities of tomorrow', leveraging Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) for advancing financial inclusion and productivity gains," it said.

The sessions will also cover issues related to global economy, global health, and international taxation, it said, adding, the discussions in the G20 FMCBG meeting are intended to provide a clear mandate for the various work streams of the G20 Finance Track in 2023.

"On the sidelines of these meetings, a number of side events have been planned for the visiting Ministers, Governors, Deputies and other delegates, on subjects such as Digital Public Infrastructure, Policy Perspectives on Crypto Assets and the role of National Payment Systems in Cross Border Payments," it said.

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Finmin to meet heads of banks on Feb 22; to review progress ECLGS for MSMEs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry has called a meeting of heads of public sector banks and top four private sector lenders to review the progress of the emergency credit line guarantee scheme (ECLGS) to help businesses affected by COVID-19.

The meeting is scheduled to be held on February 22 to review progress on ECLGS and Loan Guarantee Scheme for COVID-Affected Sectors (LGSCAS), sources said.

The meeting, to be chaired by Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi, would also see participation from top private sector lenders HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank and Kotak Mahindra Bank.

Extension of ECLGS and LGSCAS beyond March 31 as well as challenges related to these would be deliberated.

ECLGS was announced as part of the Atmanirbhar Bharat Package in May 2020 with the objective to help businesses



including MSMEs to meet their operational liabilities and resume businesses in view of the distress caused by the COVID-19 crisis, by providing banks, 100 per cent guarantee against any losses suffered by them due to non-repayment of the funding by borrowers.

The overall ceiling initially announced for ECLGS was Rs 3 lakh crore which was subsequently enhanced to Rs 4.5 lakh crore. Subsequently, the Union Budget 2022-23 announced extension validity of the Scheme up to March 2023 and increase in the limit of guaranteed cover of ECLGS by Rs 50,000 crore to a total cover of Rs 5 lakh crore, with the additional amount being earmarked exclusively for the enterprises in hospitality and related sectors.

Banks' net interest income soars by a record 25.5% in Q3: Analysis

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Net interest income of banks grew by a record 25.5 per cent to Rs 1.78 lakh crore in the December 2022 quarter on-year, driven by a healthy credit off-take and higher yield on advances, according to an analysis.

The quarter saw banks

booking higher yields on advances as the system-wide core profitability metric net interest margin (NIM) rose by 17 basis points (bps) to 3.28 per cent. This was possible as banks repriced existing loans higher at a faster rate and also increased the new loan pricing, but kept deposit rates almost unchanged, according

to an analysis by Care Ratings' senior director Sanjay Agarwal.

But the rise in NIM was led by private sector banks, thanks to their operational efficiencies, at 4.03 per cent, up 15 bps on-year. State-owned banks registered NIM at 2.85 per cent, up 17 bps on-year.



SRMIST's Vice Chancellor Professor Dr C Muthamizhchelvan was conferred with the rank of Honorary Colonel in recognition of his services to the National Cadet Corps during the Pipping Ceremony held on February 18, 2023.

Broadcaster, cable operators exchange barbs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Broadcasters and local cable/multi-system operators on Sunday exchanged barbs over the New Tariff Order (NTO), which came into force in February 2023.

Three leading broadcasters, Disney Star, Zee Entertainment Enterprises and Sony Pictures Networks India Ltd, have already stopped providing feed to cable operators which have not signed fresh agreements with increased prices under the New Tariff Order (NTO) 3.0.

SAURASHTRA WIN RANJI TROPHY

Jaydev Unadkat's side beat Bengal by nine wickets in the summit clash to clinch second title

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Left-arm pacer Jaydev Unadkat returned a match haul of nine wickets, including 6/85 in the second innings, as Saurashtra thrashed Bengal by nine wickets in the summit clash to clinch their second Ranji Trophy title here on Sunday.

Having given away a big first innings lead of 230 runs, Bengal, who were overnight 169/4 in their second essay, folded for 241, handing the visitors a mere 12 runs target to win the final.

Saurashtra lost their opening batter Jay Gohil (0) off the bowling of Akash Deep but eventually went past the target, reaching 14 for 1 in 2.4 overs, to wrap up the match with one day and two full sessions to spare.

Saurashtra's earlier triumph was in 2019-20 season when they defeated Bengal on the basis of first innings lead. In the last 10 seasons, they have made the final on five occasions, underlining their consistency.

A Ranji Trophy title eluded Bengal yet again. They last won it in 1998-90 when they defeated a star-studded Delhi at the same Eden Gardens. Their first title had come in 1938-39 in the pre-independence era.

Earlier in the morning session, Unadkat showed the



way after a freak run-out of Bengal batter Shahbaz Ahmed (27). The veteran Saurashtra skipper added four wickets to his overnight tally of two.

The old Bengal warhorse duo of skipper Manoj Tiwary (68) and Anustup Majumdar (61) slammed valiant half-centuries but the home side were let down by their top-order batters, including the promising Abhimanyu Easwaran who scored 0 and 16 in the two innings.

In-form No. 3 batter Sudip

Gharami, who is fresh from a 112 and 41 in the semifinal against Madhya Pradesh and has 800-plus runs this season, also came a cropper and scored 0 and 14 in the two innings.

The decision to hand debut to Sumanta Gupta in a Ranji final also will rankle Bengal as he did not show any technique of a top-order batter and perished to an outgoing delivery.

State sports minister-cum-cricketeer Tiwary had delayed

his retirement to win a Ranji title from his fourth final, and it remains to be seen whether he continue to play in the upcoming season.

Earlier, the overnight duo of Tiwary and Shahbaz Ahmed committed hara-kiri while going for a third run. Ahmed had to sacrifice his wicket to give Saurashtra their first breakthrough of the day.

It also unsettled Tiwary as he followed suit and got out for 68 after chasing a wide deliv-

ery from Unadkat.

In no time, Bengal were reduced to 205/9, still trailing by 25 runs.

But, Bengal's last pair of Mukesh Kumar and Ishan Porel avoided the ignominy of an innings defeat, scoring 36 runs in 37 balls to delay the inevitable.

Unadkat, who was released from the Indian Test side to play in the Ranji final, had bagged 3/44 in the Bengal first innings. He was ably supported by fellow left-arm pacer

Chetan Sakariya (3/33) after they opted to bowl on a lively pitch. Having prepared a green-top, Bengal were caught in their own web as their top-order batters showed complete lack of application on the opening day.

BRIEF SCORES:

Bengal 174 and 241 in 70.4 overs (Manoj Tiwary 68, Anustup Majumdar 61; Jaydev Unadkat 6/85, Chetan Sakariya 3/76). **Saurashtra** 404 and 14/1 in 2.4 overs.

Ranji triumph is a fitting tribute to Chintu: Unadkat

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Saurashtra skipper Jaydev Unadkat on Sunday dedicated the team's Ranji Trophy triumph to India veteran Cheteshwar Pujara and called him one of the region's favourite sons.

Pujara hit the winning run against Australia in his milestone 100th Test in Delhi.

"Like I'd said before it's a fitting tribute to one of Saurashtra's favourite sons, Chintu (Pujara's nickname). He played his 100th Test for India against Australia in Delhi, but he was equally eager, wishing us all throughout," Unadkat said.

Pujara is the 13th Indian cricketer to play 100 Tests or more. He made his debut in 2010 and has scored over 7000 runs in his 13-year-long Test career.

On the latest triumph, Unadkat, who led the team to three premier domestic titles across formats in as many years, said "this decade and era belongs" to Saurashtra.

Saurashtra defeated Bengal by nine wickets in a

replay of the 2020 final to win the Ranji Trophy for the second time. This was also their second title this season, having stamped their authority in the one-day format by claiming the Vijay Hazare Trophy in December.

"It was important to win this one to prove the dominance and to show everyone that this era, the decade belongs to Saurashtra," Unadkat told reporters after their triumph.

"Three trophies in three years proves that we have been doing a lot of things right. We have set a tone, I'm really proud what this team has achieved."

The 31-year-old, who made a dream Test comeback after 12 years in Bangladesh last year, was busy with India's series against Australia. But Unadkat was "granted" permission to play the Ranji final.

"At the moment, I feel that my body is in a good shape. The ball is coming out nicely off the hand. I'm able to bowl long spells which is crucial."

India look for big win against lowly Ireland

PTI ■ GQEBERHA

A defeat against England denting their confidence, India will look to bounce back with a big win against lowly Ireland to remain in contention for a semifinal berth in the Women's T20 World Cup, here on Monday.

After the 11-run loss to England on Saturday, their first defeat in the showpiece, India are in second spot with four points from three matches behind England (six points from three straight wins) who have qualified for the semifinals.

The Harmanpreet Kaur-led side will now need not only a win against Ireland in their last group match on Monday but also a big one to have any chance of filling up the remaining semifinal spot from Group 2.

They need to improve their net run rate from the current + 0.205.

Pakistan, who have lost to India in their opening match, have two points from two matches and they also have a chance to make it to the last four if they win their last two matches. In that case, they will also have six points.

Currently, Pakistan, who play against the West Indies Sunday night, have a better NRR of +1.542 than that of India, though they are yet to face England who have a NNR of +1.776.

Ireland, on the other hand, are already out of contention for a semifinal berth, having lost all their three matches.

To win big against Ireland, the Indian batting will need to fire, especially captain



Australia into T20 WC semi-finals

AP ■ GQEBERHA

Australia powered their way into the semi-finals of the Women's T20 World Cup on Saturday, confirming their status as favourites, while England looked their most likely challengers.

Australia were put under pressure by South Africa and an enthusiastic home crowd at St George's Park in Gqeberha, but won comfortably in the end by six wickets with 21 balls to spare.

Tahlia McGrath and Ashleigh Gardner ensured



Australia would finish top of Group 1 with aggressive batting after their side had been in trouble.

Chasing 125 to win, Australia slipped to 40 for

three but McGrath and Gardner went for their shots in a fourth-wicket partnership of 81.

McGrath hit 57 off 33 balls before being caught going for a big hit with four runs needed to win. She reached her half-century off 29 deliveries. Gardner made 28 not out off 29 balls.

"Tahlia was excellent, Ash as well," said Australian captain Meg Lanning.

"They summed up the conditions really well and put the pressure back on South Africa."

ter for India with scores of 31, 44 and 47 not out, and she would be looking to continue with her good form against Ireland.

After her match-winning knock of 53 not out against arch-rivals Pakistan, Jemimah Rodrigues has scored 1 and 13 in the next two matches, and she would look to make the most out of a relatively weaker Irish attack.

An impressive 52-run knock from vice captain Smriti Mandhana, though in a lost cause, against England also bodes well for India as she can put the Ireland bowlers to sword if they fail to keep it tight.

In the bowling department, the 5/15 against England -- her career-best -- should spur pacer Renuka Singh to get more against Ireland while the seasoned Deepti Sharma had been the most consistent Indian bowler so far.

India would expect a much better show from seasoned left-arm spinner Rajeshwari Gayakwad who is without a wicket after three matches while Pooja Vastrakar and Radha Yadav also need to contribute more than what they have done so far in the tournament.

For Ireland, top-order batter Orla Prendergast has been in good nick with 109 runs from three matches, while Gaby Lewis has scored 84 in total from the same number of matches.

Cara Murray and Arlene Kelly have taken three wickets apiece and they will be wary of the strong Indian batting lineup.

England thrash NZ by 267 runs in 1st Test

AP ■ MOUNT MAUNGANUI

England completed a resounding 267-run win over the Black Caps in the first Test at Mount Maunganui on Sunday, powering to their first win in New Zealand for 15 years.

The tourists snared the required five wickets in the opening session of day four, dismissing the Black Caps for 126 after they had resumed at 63-5.

Pace bowlers Stuart Broad and James Anderson both finished with four second innings wickets as England took a 1-0 lead in the two-match series.

Broad (4-49) laid the groundwork on Saturday night under lights when he tore through New Zealand's top order, with all four wickets clean bowled to reduce them to 28-5 in pursuit of 394 for victory.

Long-time new ball partner James Anderson (4-18) took over as chief tormentor on Sunday, knocking over four tailenders as New Zealand added 63 more runs in 22.3 overs.

Only Daryl Mitchell, unbeaten on 57, put up any resistance after resuming his innings on 13, striking two sixes on his way to a sixth Test half-century.

It continued Mitchell's record of rearguard innings against the English, having scored 538 at an average of 108 runs during last June's 3-0 series defeat in England.

Michael Bracewell fell for his overnight score of 25 when looping an easy catch off spinner Jack Leach before



Anderson began his clean-up job.

All four of New Zealand specialist pace bowlers fell to Anderson for single-figure scores, including captain Tim Southee for a golden duck.

Southee faces a challenge to lift his team, who are winless from their last eight Tests.

By contrast, England are on a high after tasting their first Test win on New Zealand soil since 2008, having drawn five and lost two matches since.

They have won 10 off their last 11 Tests playing an adventurous brand of attacking cricket, dubbed "Bazball", under coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes.

It was just the second time in 21 day-night Tests that the visiting team has won and ended a streak of five succes-

sive losses in the pink ball format for England.

They tactically dominated the game, batting aggressively and deliberately timing the end of both their innings so New Zealand had to face a new pink ball in lively seam conditions under lights on days one and three.

It meant New Zealand batsmen Kane Williamson, Tom Latham and Henry Nicholls never batted in more benign daylight conditions.

That will change in the second Test starting in Wellington on Friday, which will be played under traditional hours.

The home side are set to regain the services of seam bowler Matt Henry, who was unavailable for the series opener to attend the birth of his child.

Real stumble past Osasuna



AP ■ MADRID

Fede Valverde and Marco Asensio scored as Real Madrid struggled to beat Osasuna 2-0 in La Liga on Saturday, just three days before they head to Liverpool in the Champions League.

Uruguay midfielder Valverde and Spain winger Asensio netted in the final quarter of an hour in Pamplona to cut Barcelona's advantage to five points at the top of the table before the Catalans host lowly Cadiz on Sunday.

Ballon d'Or winner Karim

Benzema was missing from Real's matchday squad as coach Carlo Ancelotti rested the France attacker ahead of Tuesday's Champions League last-16 first leg at Anfield.

"It was a hard-fought, close match, well played by both teams, and we are all the more satisfied to have won," said Ancelotti.

"The boys suffered when they had to and knew how to wait for the moment to score."

With 12 minutes to play Vinicius was the provider as his low cut-back cross set-up Valverde to half-volley home to open the scoring.

Asensio made sure of the three points in injury time with an assist from teenager Alvaro Rodriguez on his Real debut.

Third-placed Real Sociedad were held 1-1 by 10-man Celta Vigo due to Robin Le Normand's 93rd minute own goal.

Liverpool beat 10-man Newcastle

AP ■ NEWCASTLE

Liverpool won at 10-man Newcastle 2-0 and boosted its push for a top-four finish in the English Premier League on Saturday.

The result ended Newcastle's 17-game unbeaten streak in the league and handed Eddie Howe's team just a second loss of the season -- both of them against Liverpool.

A rampant Liverpool was already two goals up by the time Newcastle goalkeeper Nick Pope was sent off in the 22nd minute for a straight red card after handling the ball outside the area. That made the rest of the game largely a matter of seeing things out for the visitors, who cut the gap to fourth-placed Newcastle to six points and have a game in hand to boot.

Darwin Nunez opened the scoring with an emphatic finish in the 10th minute after Trent



Alexander-Arnold sent a ball over the top of the defense to the Uruguayan forward, who managed to control it with the help

of his chest before firing past Pope.

Mohamed Salah then picked out Gakpo in the area

Mane returns to training with Bayern

AP ■ MUNICH

Senegalese international Sadio Mane said "it was just fantastic" to be back in training with Bayern Munich on Sunday three months after suffering the injury that ultimately ruled him out of the World Cup.

The 30-year-old forward has handed the German champions a much-needed boost a week ahead of their top of the table clash with Union Berlin.

with a delicate chip seven minutes later and the Netherlands international finished clinically to double the lead. Gakpo, who

Union Berlin could be two points ahead of Bayern when they meet if they beat rock-bottom Schalke later on Sunday.

Bayern lost 3-2 to Borussia Moenchengladbach on Saturday.

Mane -- who suffered a right leg injury in November and had to undergo an operation -- was all smiles when he turned up for training on Sunday.

"To have this feeling again is just fantastic," he said.

joined from PSV Eindhoven in January, netted his first Liverpool goal on Monday in the 2-0 win over Everton.

