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'INDIA'S GDP LIKELY GREW
5-5.1% IN Q3 OF FY-23'

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Dissolve EC: Uddhav; party moves SC over 'real Sena'

Hearing today; Shinde faction takes 'control' of Sena office in Assembly

TN RAGHUNATHA/PNS
NEW DELHI/MUMBAI

Even as the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) on Monday approached the Supreme Court challenging the decision of the Election Commission recognising the Eknath Shinde-led bloc as the real Shiv Sena and allotting the "bow and arrow" poll symbol to it, Uddhav demanded that the Election Commission of India should be dissolved.

Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi mentioned the matter before a bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud for an early listing of the petition, but the apex court refused to pass any order. "The rule applies equally to all, whether left, right or centre. Come tomorrow through proper process," the bench said.

While recognising the Eknath Shinde-led bloc as the real Shiv Sena, the Election Commission had reasoned that MLAs backing Shinde got nearly 76 per cent of votes polled in favour of the 55 winning Shiv Sena candidates in the 2019 Maharashtra Assembly polls, while the Uddhav faction's MLAs got



Former Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray with Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Raut addresses a press conference at Shiv Sena Bhavan in Mumbai on Monday PTI photo

23.5 per cent of votes polled in favour of the winning Shiv Sena candidates.

The plea filed by the Thackeray faction stated the points raised in the petition have a direct bearing on the issues which are being considered by the Constitution bench. The petition contended the poll panel erred in holding that disqualification under the Tenth Schedule and proceedings under the Symbols Order operate in different spheres and that disqualification of MLAs is not based on cessation of membership of a political party.

Talking to the media, Uddhav said: "We have lost our faith in the Election Commission...our only ray of hope is the Supreme Court... If this is not stopped, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections may turn out to be the last elections in the country as after that there would be a naked dance of dictatorship."

Uddhav opined that the Election Commissioners

Raut booked for insulting remarks against Shinde

Nashik: Police have registered a case against Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut for allegedly making derogatory remarks against Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, an official said on Monday.

Shinde faction officer-bearer Yogesh Beldar lodged a complaint at Panchavati police station here alleging that during an interaction with a TV channel, Raut used derogatory words against Shinde. PTI

we have taken control of the Sena's legislative party office is an incorrect interpretation. We have requested the Speaker to use the office in the run up to and during the Budget Session. And we are using the office for our legislative party work."

On its part, the Shiv Sena (UBT) dismissed the rival Sena faction's threat, saying the whip to be issued by the Shinde faction had no bearing on it in the wake of EC's order. "The whip is not applicable to our MLAs, given that the Election Commission has itself said that the Sena led by me and Shinde are two entities. How can the whip of one be applied to another?" Uddhav asked.

When his attention was drawn to the Shinde Sena's claim over his party's properties and party funds, Uddhav said, "The Election Commission has a right to give its ruling on the party name and symbol. Apart from that it does not have a right to decide on other matters like party's properties or funds."

ED raids Cong leaders in C'garh coal levy scam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Monday conducted searches at multiple locations in Chhattisgarh, including on premises linked to Congress party leaders, as part of an ongoing money laundering investigation into the coal levy scam.

The searches that came days ahead of the three-day plenary session of the Congress party from February 24 in State capital Raipur sparked a political slugfest between the ruling Congress in Chhattisgarh and the BJP-ruled Centre under which the ED functions.

The Congress Government in the State is ruled by the party under Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel.

The searches began early on Monday at over a dozen locations, including the premises of MLA Devendra Yadav in Bhilai (Durg district), Chhattisgarh Pradesh Congress Committee treasurer Ramgopal Agrawal, chairman of Chhattisgarh State Building and Other Construction Workers Welfare Board Sushil Sunny Agrawal and party's State spokesperson RP Singh in Raipur, officials said.

The premises of some other ruling party leaders were also covered in the searches, they said.

The ED is investigating suspects who have been the "beneficiaries" of the proceeds of crime of the alleged coal levy scam perpetrated during the tenure of the current Government.

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Security personnel outside the residence of a Congress leader during a raid by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in connection with a mining case, in Raipur on Monday PTI

Shame! Cong speaking on vindictiveness: Sitharaman

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rejecting the Congress' recharge linking ED's raids against its leaders in Chhattisgarh to vendetta politics, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday accused the Opposition party of indulging in "spit and run" tactics. She said the Congress should not speak on corruption as it lost power on the issue and asserted that the probe agencies do their homework and investigate only when they have necessary prima facie evidence.

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Raids third-rate politics of vendetta, says Cong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Monday slammed the Government after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) conducted raids against its party leaders in Chhattisgarh, saying it was an example of "third-rate politics" of "vendetta, vengeance and harassment" and asserted that it will not be intimidated by such "tactics". The raids come days before the plenary session of the Congress party from February 24-26 in the State Capital Raipur.

This is not 'Amrit Kaal' but

an "undeclared emergency", Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said at a joint Press conference with party spokesperson Pawan Khara and coined a new name for the ED saying it stood for "Extremising Democracy". "If anything, these raids have increased our determination. If anything, these raids have given us a booster dose to be even more aggressive against the Prime Minister and his third-rate politics of vengeance, vendetta and harassment," Ramesh said at the AICC Press conference.

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CAPSULE

GUJ EX-GUV OP KOHLI DIES, PM PAYS TRIBUTE

New Delhi: Former Gujarat Governor and veteran BJP leader from Delhi O P Kohli passed away on Monday, according to a Delhi BJP statement. Prime Minister Narendra Modi condoled the death of former Governor.

CBI SUMMONS SISODIA FOR GRILLING ON FEB 26

New Delhi: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has summoned Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia for questioning on February 26, in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case. The CBI had deferred Sisodia's questioning on Sunday after he sought time from the agency citing the Delhi government's ongoing budget exercise.

SAHIL HAD PLAN TO PUSH NIKKI OUT OF MOVING CAR

New Delhi: Sahil Gehlot, accused of killing his first wife Nikki Yadav, had plans to push her out of his car and pass it off as an accident, sources said.

Kushwaha parts ways with Nitish to form his new political party

PTI ■ PATNA

Disgruntled JD(U) leader Dhirendra Kushwaha on Monday resigned from Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U), less than two years after returning to the party, and announced formation of the 'Rashtriya Loktantrik Janata Dal'.

JD(U) national president Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias "Lalan", however, berated the former parliamentary board chairman as an over-ambitious party-hopper, whose return was "opposed by all, but materialised only at the insistence of the CM" whom Kushwaha had assured "I will now live and die here".

"I will seek an appointment with chairman of the legislative council to resign from membership of the House", Kushwaha said.

See P5

Rahul-led Cong will vanish after '24: Shah

PTI ■ MON

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday assured the people of Nagaland that the BJP-led Central Government wants a quick solution to the decades-old Naga peace talks.

He also took a swipe at the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi. Shah alleged that the tendency of the Congress leaders to indulge in mud-slinging against Prime Minister Narendra Modi has increased since Rahul became its leader.

"The kind of language the Congress spokesperson has used (for PM) and the sort of reaction it has drawn from people from across the country... You will see Rahul Gandhi that the Congress will not be visible even through telescope after the Lok Sabha polls in 2024. People will respond through the ballot box," Shah told the rally.

The veteran BJP leader



Union Home Minister Amit Shah waves at supporters during a public rally, in Nagaland's Mon on Monday PTI

also asserted that addressing the issues of the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO), which has been demanding a separate state, will be the responsibility of the next NDPP-BJP government.

"The NDPP-BJP coalition will form the government in Nagaland (again) after polls. We will solve all problems of the State," Shah said, addressing an election rally here.

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Waqf moves HC against Centre's bid to take over 123 properties

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Waqf Board (DWB) has moved the High Court against the Centre's decision to take over 123 Waqf properties.

DWB chairman Amanatullah Khan on Monday said the Congress was responsible for the dispute.

Meanwhile, Alok Kumar, the central working president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), claimed that the Delhi unit of the organisation had "saved" 123 prime properties situated at strategic locations in the national Capital.

"It's our pleasure to say that after a legal battle of 40 years, we have saved 123 such properties valued at around ₹20,000 crore from the illegal occupation of the DWB," he said.

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Subrahmanyam appointed Niti Aayog CEO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former IAS officer BVR Subrahmanyam was on Monday appointed the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Niti Aayog replacing Parameswaran Iyer, who has been named as the Executive Director of World Bank.

Subrahmanyam, a 1987-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Chhattisgarh cadre, was last year appointed as chairman and managing director, India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) on contract basis for a period of two years after his superannuation on September 30.

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved Subrahmanyam's appointment for a period of two years from the date of assumption of the charge of the post, a Personnel Ministry order said.

Opp parties must give & take for unity sake; CWC needs young Turks: PC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Days ahead of the Congress' crucial plenary session, senior leader P Chidambaram on Monday said half of the CWC members should be elected as per the AICC constitution and batted for younger leaders' inclusion in the party's top decision-making body.

In an exclusive interview with PTI, Chidambaram said he has learnt that there are issues about the strength of the electoral college that will elect the Congress Working Committee (CWC) which must be resolved by the party's poll panel.

The former Union Minister asserted that an objective analysis of the political situation will lead to the conclusion that the Congress has to be the "pole" around which

Opposition unity in the 2024 Lok Sabha election can be built. "I think an objective analysis of the political situation will lead to the conclusion that the Congress has to be the pole around which Opposition unity in the Lok Sabha election can be built. All parties, including the Congress, must approach the task with a spirit of give-and-take and of humility," he asserted.

Asked whether he believes that elections to the party's highest decision-making body CWC were essential, Chidambaram said, "My personal view is that one-half of the CWC should be elected as per the Constitution of the party... However, I learn there are issues about the strength of the electoral college that will elect the CWC."

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You've made India proud, Modi hails Op Dost team on return from Turkiye

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday lauded the Indian assistance and disaster relief teams which were deployed in quake-hit Turkiye and said that in the last few years India has strengthened its identity not just as a self-sufficient but selfless country.

A total of three NDRF teams were sent to the quake-affected country on February 7 following Prime Minister Modi's directive to offer all possible assistance to that country.

The Indian Army's medical team had also been deployed for providing extensive services to a large number of earthquake-hit people.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with NDRF personnel involved in 'Operation Dost' in Turkiye and Syria, in New Delhi on Monday PTI photo

Addressing the personnel who had returned from quake-hit Turkiye, Modi said, "You

have done great service to humanity and made India proud."

"We consider the world as one family and see it our duty to quickly help any member in crisis," Modi told the relief teams.

India has strengthened its identity in last few years as a country of self-sufficiency which is also selfless and helps other countries, he said.

He said India is always ready to be the first responder whenever there is a crisis in the world.

"We have to strengthen our identity as the world's best relief and rescue team," he added.

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President Joe Biden, right, being welcomed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at Mariinsky Palace on Biden's unannounced visit to Ukraine, in Kyiv, on Monday (Report on P8) AP | PTI

Bihar jail inmate swallows phone during checking

PTI ■ GOPALGANJ

In a bizarre incident an inmate of Bihar's Gopalganj district jail reportedly swallowed a mobile phone during checking out of fear being caught by prison officers, an official said on Monday.

Qaisar Ali, the prisoner, swallowed the phone on Saturday during inspection.

The matter, however, came to light on Sunday after Ali developed extreme pain in his stomach.

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Baby declared dead by LNJP docs found alive

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a shocking case of medical apathy, a newborn baby who was allegedly declared dead by the doctors at the Lok Nayak Jai Prakash Hospital (LNJP Hospital) was found alive after two-and-a-half hours at home.

The newborn's family claimed that the infant was certified dead by hospital staff and handed over to them in a box on Sunday afternoon.

However, the baby was found alive and breathing when the family opened the box at home. The incident came to light on Monday after a video showing the baby in a box went viral on social media.

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Initially planned to push Nikki out of car to pass it off as accident: Sahil

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a startling revelation in the Nikki Yadav murder case Sahil Gehlot, who has been accused of killing his first wife and keeping her body in a refrigerator, had plans to push her out of his car and pass it off as an accident, police sources said on Monday.

When his plan did not succeed, he strangled her inside the car at the Nigambodh Ghat parking here, they said.

Sahil allegedly killed Nikki, stuffed her body inside a refrigerator of his *dhaba* in southwest Delhi, and went off to marry another woman. The incident had come to light on February 14, Valentine's Day, four days after the crime.

The police have so far arrested Sahil, his father and four others — two cousins and two friends — in connec-

tion with the case. The police claimed that the accused had planned to get rid of Nikki so that Gehlot could marry a second time to a woman of the family's choosing.

Sources also said that Sahil's father knew about Nikki's murder and allegedly supported his son. He had no qualms in admitting his role in the murder and told police that they had to somehow get rid of Nikki, the sources said.

They said one of the cousins of Gehlot arrested in the case is a policeman and an FIR under IPC Section 354 (assault of criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) was registered against him at the Kanjhawala police station in a separate incident.

The Delhi Police, meanwhile, took Sahil to the Arya Samaj Mandir in Greater Noida where the couple had solemnised the marriage. According

to the sources, police have recorded the statements of the temple's priest and the witnesses who were present at the time of the marriage. Sahil had married Nikki at an Arya Samaj temple in 2020. The couple had not informed their respective families about their marriage.

In another revelation, the Delhi Police said that the accused Sahil's father Virender has a criminal past. As per the police, he had been arrested in a murder case earlier.

In a related development, a metropolitan court on Monday extended his police custody by two days. The link court of Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Samiksha Gupta remanded the other five co-accused in the case in judicial custody for 14 days. The investigation officer had sought a three-day extension of Sahil's custodial interrogation.

Last Tuesday, Chief



Metropolitan Magistrate Archana Beniwal had remanded Sahil (24) in five days' police custody. Sahil's father Virender Singh, cousins Naveen and Ashish and friends Lokesh and Amar were sent to police custody last Friday after being produced before a Duty Magistrate. Police had said the five co-accused were arrested after their roles in the killing of Nikki were ascertained.

Police had initially said Sahil, after being arrested on

February 14, had confessed to killing Nikki as she was pressuring him to marry her.

In a twist in the case, police later said Nikki was Sahil's wife and the couple had tied the knot in 2020. According to a top Delhi police officer, Nikki was opposed to the impending marriage of Sahil that his family had fixed. Sahil killed Nikki after he could not convince her to allow him to go ahead with the wedding.

Excise case: CBI to grill Sisodia on Feb 26

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has summoned Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia for questioning on February 26, in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case. The CBI had deferred Sisodia's questioning on Sunday after he sought time from the agency citing the Delhi Government's ongoing budget exercise.

According to sources, the notice was issued on his request as he had sought deferment of his previously scheduled questioning on February 19. After receiving the summons, Sisodia stated: "On February 26, the CBI called me again for questioning. I will go for inquiry." He was addressing a Press conference on Monday.

The CBI had filed its first chargesheet against seven people on November 25 last year



in which Sisodia was not named as an accused. The officials said in its further probe into the money trail and links between liquor traders, AAP leaders, middlemen and politicians, the CBI has gathered elaborate material on which it needs clarifications from Sisodia who is the prime accused in the FIR.

The CBI has kept open the probe against Sisodia and other accused named in the FIR. Three months after the chargesheet was filed, the officials said, they have found details of meetings, message exchanges and transactions on which explanation could be

sought from the Deputy Chief Minister.

The CBI is also armed with the confessional statement of Sisodia's alleged "close associate" Dinesh Arora, who is understood to have spilled the beans about how the excise policy was allegedly swung in favour of some liquor traders and the "South Lobby" of Hyderabad-based politicians and liquor traders who are under scanner of agencies.

It is alleged that the Delhi Government's policy to grant licences to liquor traders favoured certain dealers who had allegedly paid bribes for it, a charge strongly refuted by the AAP.

"It was further alleged that irregularities were committed including modifications in the excise policy, extending undue favours to the licensees, waiver/reduction in licence fee, extension of L-1 licence without approval etc," a CBI spokesperson had said.

Prisons Dept seeks death warrant for guilty in 2000 Red Fort attack case

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Prisons Department has written to a city court to issue a death warrant against the guilty in the 2000 Red Fort attack case.

The Supreme Court in November last year dismissed a plea by Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist Mohammad Arif alias Ashfaq seeking a review of its verdict awarding him death penalty.

A senior jail official said they have written to a court earlier this month and initiated further procedure. Arif has not appealed to the President for reducing his term.

The case is listed for February 27, official added. On the night of December 22, 2000, some intruders entered the Mughal-era fort where unit

7 of Rajputana Rifles of the Indian Army was stationed and opened fire at them. Three Army jawans were killed in the attack. The intruders later escaped by scaling the rear side boundary of the fort. Arif was awarded death sentence by a trial court in October 2005 affirmed by Delhi High Court in September 2007.

He then approached the apex court challenging the high court's verdict. The top court in August 2011 affirmed the death sentence awarded to Arif. The Supreme Court had noted that the conviction and sentence do not warrant any intervention. The attack at the Red Fort raised questions about the security situation.

According to a report then Defence Minister George Fernandes had then said that the Red Fort was not a high-



security area and army battalions present inside were on a peace posting. The accused persons in the case were released by Delhi High Court in 2007.

On December 22, 2000, some intruders started indiscriminate firing, killing three security personnel who were guarding the Red Fort. The intruders as per the police were successful in escaping the

bullet as well as arrest as they scaled over the rear side boundary wall of the Red Fort. On the basis of some "secret information," the accused Arif was apprehended as per prosecution from Ghazipur on the intervening night of December 25-26, while he was entering the house of Farzana Farukhi, his divorcee sister-in-law, as per media report.

90% of parents optimistic about kids' future in Delhi Govt schools, official cites UK study

‘90.71% of parents say teachers care for students’

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Over 90 per cent of parents stated that they are optimistic about the future of their children studying in Delhi Government schools, a city Government official said on Monday, citing a study conducted by a UK university.

In a statement, the Delhi Government said that it's education model has been touching new heights every day, under the leadership of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.

University of Glasgow, United Kingdom has released its interim findings of an impact study on the Government's parental engagement initiatives in Delhi Government schools, it said.

As per the findings, more than 90 per cent of parents stated that they are optimistic about the future of their children studying in Delhi Government schools. 90.51 per cent of parents agreed that Delhi Government schools are doing a good job and 90.71 per cent agreed that teachers in schools care for students.

These findings were shared by the University of Glasgow with Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia in a meeting held on Monday. The study conducted by Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow focuses on the impact of the Delhi



Government's various parental engagement initiatives running in schools measured in the context of the 'Parents Satisfaction Index'.

The study also highlighted that nearly 90 per cent of parents agree that Head Teachers at take their responsibilities very seriously. Nearly 80 per

cent of parents are satisfied with the quality of teachers and school management and 87 per cent of parents stated that teacher performance in Delhi Government schools is exceptional. A majority of parents confirmed attending a parent-teacher meeting as frequently as once a quarter.

Never transferred PWD Secy in 9 month tenure: LG

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor (L-G) VK Saxena has denied that he has transferred Secretary of the Public Works Department (PWD) during his nine month tenure after assuming charge on May 26, 2022. Terming Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's statement that frequent transfer of PWD Secretaries was affecting projects, as "false and misleading", the L-G's secretariat has claimed that not a single secretary of the PWD has been "transferred" and Sisodia is trying to divert the attention from his failures.

The LG secretariat in its statement said that "If at all any delay happened in execution of projects or the prevalent rampant inaction in the PWD, it can be directly attributed to the fact that his colleague in the Council of Ministers, and the minister in-charge for PWD, for years together, Satyendar Jain, was busy defending himself in money laundering cases and has been thereafter lan-

guishing in jail". This comes after Sisodia hit out at the Lieutenant Governor for frequent transfers of secretaries of the crucial PWD and "intentionally" keeping the post vacant, alleging that the action

LG approves formation of 11 medical boards in city districts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena has approved the formation of medical boards in all 11 districts of the city for dealing with matters related to the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021, Raj Niwas officials said on Monday.

The Act was notified by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on December 25, 2021.

Section 4(iii) of the Act states that no surrogacy or surrogacy procedure shall be conducted, undertaken, performed or initiated without the intending couple possessing a certificate issued by the appropriate authority (district

has stalled major infrastructure projects in the national capital. In a statement, the AAP government had also claimed that since September 2020, the PWD had five different secretaries.

LG approves formation of 11 medical boards in city districts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

medical board) specifying the need for gestational surrogacy. "However, constitution of the district medical boards (DMBs) was kept pending by the Delhi government ever since the regulation was notified by the central government, which forced intending beneficiaries to approach court," an official said.

"Pending since December, 2021, after the Central Legislation was enacted and notified, it took the court of Metropolitan Magistrate on 25.06.2022 and the High Court on 11.07.2022 to nudge the AAP Government into constituting the Board," an official said.

‘Stepped up to prevent demolition of temples, mosques, gurudwaras’

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Monday said he stepped up to prevent the demolition of 74 temples, mazars, and gurudwaras for infrastructure development projects in Delhi.

The Deputy CM made an appeal to Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena arguing that these religious structures are visited by lakhs of devotees and have strong emotional connections with people, and their demolition could trigger a law and order situation in the capital, the Government said in a statement.

This appeal comes after the Delhi Police released reports regarding the religious structures, recommending that they should not be demolished.

However, the LG had claimed that the Government was holding back files related to the demolition of temples, mazars, and gurudwaras, which he claimed was affecting various development projects. A total of 67 temples, six mazars, and one gurudwara have been identified for demolition in 19 files, it said.



Sisodia proposed that modifications could be made to the designs of the infrastructure development projects to avoid demolishing these religious structures.

He argued that in an era when modern architecture and technology have advanced, it is possible to modify designs to meet the requirements of the environment, and the same can be done in this case to save the temples, mazars, and gurudwaras. He also emphasised that development is essential, but it should not hurt people's religious sentiments.

The proposed infrastructure projects that identified the religious structures for demolition include the construction of several flyovers, roads, and housing projects by the central Government.

LG trying to ‘act against’ Vidhan Sabha committees, says AAP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The AAP on Monday alleged that Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena is trying to "act" against Vidhan Sabha committees and has written to the Chief Secretary and the Assembly seeking details on their functioning.

Party national spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj told a Press conference that the Petitions Committee of the Delhi Assembly had recommended action against officials on three different issues. But the L-G, instead of taking action against them, decided to take action against the committees, he alleged.

"The Delhi LG is trying to act against Vidhan Sabha committees. He has written to Chief Secretary Nareish Kumar and the Delhi Vidhan Sabha questioning how the committees are functioning and whether they are going against the law," the AAP said. "He feels

that they are interfering in the work of government officials. The LG has problems with the committees. This makes it clear that whatever the officials do to interfere in the functioning of the government is done at the behest of the LG," he alleged.

Citing instances where the Petitions Committee of the Delhi assembly intervened, Bhardwaj said that the committee had taken up the matter of sacking of OPD (out-door-patient department) employees in state-run hospitals. "OPD employees working for months were sacked, leaving the counters empty. During the Petitions Committee hearing, it was found that two IAS officers were deliberately sitting on files and when the committee intervened, those issues were resolved," he said.

"The committee had recommended to the LG to take action against Health Secretary Amit Singla and Principal Secretary, Finance, AC Verma

but nothing was done," Bhardwaj claimed. He said that Singla and Verma were also found to be involved in stopping salaries of doctors employed in Mohalla Clinics.

"Despite having crores of rupees in its (mohalla clinics' dedicated) account, mohalla clinics were unable to disburse salaries of doctors and money was stopped for conducting tests. It was found by the committee that Singla and Verma were involved in too," he said.

In another instance, Bhardwaj claimed, before Diwali, the social welfare department had stopped disbursing pension of senior citizens and poor people. "The Petitions Committee had recommended action against Social Welfare Director Pooja Joshi but again no action was taken against here by the LG. This goes to show that all this was being done on the directions of the LG," he said.

7,000 kg of SUPs seized by authorities in February: MCD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 7,000 kilogram of single-use plastic (SUP) has been seized by the civic authorities in February so far in the city under a 100-day campaign. In a statement, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) said that as many as 587 penalties have been issued to the violators from February 1-20.

Among the 12 zones of the MCD, the maximum amount (1,263 kg) of single-use plastic has been seized from Shahdara South Zone. This is followed by Rohini Zone (1,003 kg), Najafgarh Zone (977 kg) and South Zone (789 kg).

Delhi Lieutenant Governor

V K Saxena on January 21 had kicked off a thematic 100-day campaign to make areas under the municipal corporation free of plastic.

"The MCD has seized 6,939 kg of SUP plastic items and issued 587 challans from 1st February to 20th February 2023," the statement said. Strict action is being taken by zonal teams of the MCD to curb single-use plastic (SUP), it said.

The identified SUP items include earbuds with plastic sticks, plastic sticks for balloons, plastic flags, candy sticks, ice-cream sticks, polystyrene (thermocool) for decoration, plates, cups, glasses, forks, spoons, knives, straws, trays, wrapping or packaging films



around sweets boxes, invitation cards, cigarette packets etc.

Enforcement teams have been constituted at the zonal level to eliminate stocking, sale and usage of the banned SUP items. "The Municipal Corporation of Delhi is taking all necessary steps to ensure the enforcement of the ban. Teams at the zonal level are also

spreading awareness, amongst the public/street vendors/shopkeepers/market association etc regarding the usage of jute/cloth/permitted bags in place of single-use plastic in the institutions and subzi/fruit mandis falling under jurisdiction of the concerned municipal ward assigned to them," the statement read.

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Monday lashed out at the Congress for electing Jagdish Tytler as an AICC delegate, saying the move shows there is a "pathological dislike for Sikhs" in the grand old party's DNA.

Alleging that Tytler was involved in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the AAP also demanded that the Congress take steps to bring him to justice, instead of rewarding him with promotions in the party.

The Arvind Kejriwal-led party termed the inclusion of Tytler's name on the list of the AICC delegates as "disgusting and cheap" and demanded his

name be removed "with immediate effect". The AAP's reaction came after the Delhi Congress released a list of the elected AICC members which included Tytler's name.

"With another promotion for Jagdish Tytler, Congress' message for Sikhs is clear - that it will continue to indulge in a brazen display of insensitivity towards Sikhs. Like I said earlier, a pathological dislike for Sikhs is in Congress' DNA," AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Raghav Chadha, who is also party's spokesperson, said in a tweet.

The name of Tytler, once a formidable leader of the Congress in Delhi, had figured in a report of the Nanavati Commission which probed

into the anti-Sikh riots. Slamming the Congress' move, AAP MLA Jarnail Singh said, "On the one hand Rahul Gandhi says he has come to open Mobabbat Ki Dukaan (shop of love) and on the other hand the Congress indulges in such cheap and disgusting activity by making the main accused an AICC delegate."

With Tytler's election as AICC delegate, there is so much anger "among the Sikh and other communities" across the country, the Tilak Nagar MLA said. "Expel Tytler from this committee with immediate effect and take action to bring him to justice," Singh said.

The AAP leader also took

on the BJP and accused it of not doing anything to bring the perpetrators of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots to justice.

After coming to power at the Centre in 2014, the BJP-led government "hurriedly" set up an SIT to probe the 1984 riots, he said. "People believed that justice could finally be served. The SIT also promised to bring the killers to justice within a year, but nearly 10 years since then, we are yet to see any progress," the AAP MLA said. "We request the BJP-led Central government to deliver justice to the victims of the 1984 riots and bring the murderers to their end instead of conspiring with them," he added.

14 Indian States vulnerable to climate change: XDI

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

At least 14 States in India, are among the top-100 provinces in Asia that stand exposed to damage from extreme weather and climate change, according to a first-of-its-kind analysis of potential damage to infrastructure that has found, China, India and the USA as the most vulnerable countries.

The XDI Gross Domestic Climate Risk data by Cross Dependency Initiative (XDI) compared these territories according to modelled projections of damage to buildings and properties from extreme weather and climate change such as flooding, forest fires, heatwaves and sea level rise.

Asia dominates the list of provinces at risk with more

than half (114) of the top 200 in 2050 in this region, with special focus on China and India.

India has set 2070 as Net Zero emission goal and is looking towards foreign investment in a big way.

XDI noted that entities not on the list are not at "low risk" and said many States and provinces facing high risk from extreme weather climate change hazards are not appearing at the top of this ranking due to the lower number of residential, commercial and industrial buildings they had.

According to the analysis, 80 per cent of the top 50 most at-risk States and provinces in 2050 are in China, the US and India. After China, India has the highest number of States (9) in the top 50, which include Bihar (22nd spot), Uttar Pradesh (25th), Assam (28),

Rajasthan (32), Tamil Nadu (36), Maharashtra (38), Gujarat (48), Punjab (50) and Kerala (52), it said.

The rest of the States in the top 100 are Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Haryana, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Assam would see the maximum increase — over 330 per cent by 2050 as compared to 1990 — in climate risk to the built environment. This is the first time there has been a physical climate risk analysis focused exclusively on the built environment, comparing every State, province and territory in the world.

Highly-developed and globally-significant Asian economic hubs in the top 100 at damage risk include Beijing, Jakarta, Ho Chi Minh City, Taiwan and Mumbai.

The report is particularly significant for investors, as extensive built infrastructure generally overlaps with high levels of economic activity and capital value.

"In terms of overall scale of damage risk, and in terms of risk escalation, Asia has the most to lose as climate change extreme weather increases, and the most to gain from preventing worsening climate change and accelerating climate resilient investment. This is the most sophisticated global analysis of physical climate risk to date, offering a breadth and depth and granularity on a scale we haven't seen before. Now — for the first time — the finance industry can directly compare Mumbai, New York and Berlin using a like-for-like methodology," said XDI CEO Rohan Hamden.



In China, which dominates the ranking, at-risk States and provinces are concentrated in the globally-connected east and south, along the floodplains and deltas of the Yangtze and Pearl rivers.

In the US, the economically important states of

California, Texas and Florida would be most affected.

Other countries with multiple provinces and States in the top 50 include Brazil, Pakistan and Indonesia. In Europe, high-ranking States encompass the cities of London, Milan, Munich and Venice.

Modi, Singapore PM to witness launch of connectivity between UPI & PayNow

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong on Tuesday will witness the launch of cross-border connectivity between the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) of India and PayNow of Singapore at 11 AM (IST) via video conferencing.

The launch of the real time payment systems linkage between the two nations will be done by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das and Ravi Menon, Managing Director, Monetary Authority of



Singapore (MAS), the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Monday. India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing ecosystems for fintech innovation. Modi's visionary leadership has been instrumental in driving globalisation of India's best-in-class digital payment infrastructure, the MEA said.

One tiger died daily on average in February, says NTCA data

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tiger fatalities have alarmingly increased in the second month of this year as on an average one big cat has died daily with data available from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) showing that 18 big cats have died between February 1 and February 19.

Overall 30 striped cats including eight females have died in this year till date i.e. in between the period from January 1 to February 19. In 11 tiger death cases, the authorities are yet to ascertain the sex of the predators. However, as per the information available on the website of the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), an NGO in the sector has put the mortality figure at

33 including 10 due to poaching.

The Government data shows that Madhya Pradesh, which is in the spotlight for being home to the cheetahs at Kuno Palpur Park in Sheopur district, has, sadly, reported the highest number of deaths of 9 striped cats which are in the endangered species category, followed by Maharashtra (7), Rajasthan (3), Karnataka (2), Uttarakhand (2) and one each from Assam and Kerala. While 15 tigers died within their habitat range, 16 succumbed outside the periphery of the tiger reserve due to various reasons including man-animal conflict. As per the Government report, only one case of tiger poaching has been reported till date. This is from Tamil Nadu.



Last year i.e. in 2022, a total 121 tigers died against 127 the previous year. In the last three years, tiger mortality has crossed the 100 mark annually in the country. In 2019, the country reported 96 tiger deaths.

As of November last year, there are 53 tiger reserves

across the country with Durgavati Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh and Ranipur Tiger Reserve in the Chitrakoot district of UP the latest one to be included in the list after they got the nod recently. As per the 2018 Tiger Census, the total tiger population in India is estimated at 2,967.

SC nixes S Bhatt's plea against Guj HC order in drugs case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday dismissed a petition filed by jailed former IPS officer Sanjiv Bhatt challenging a Gujarat High Court order which set a deadline for completion of trial in a 1996 drug seizure case. A bench of Justices BR Gavai and Aravind Kumar also imposed a cost of Rs 10,000 on Bhatt for filing a "frivolous" petition. Bhatt is already convicted and in jail for the past five years in a custodial torture case.

The top court directed Bhatt to deposit the amount with the Gujarat State Legal Services Authority. "The Petitioner rather than

approaching this Court ought to have cooperated with the trial court for expeditious disposal. "The grant of extension is matter for the trial court. The petition is found to be absolutely frivolous and costs of Rs 10,000 are imposed," the bench said.

Senior advocate Devadatt Kamat, appearing for Bhatt, submitted that a number of witnesses have not yet been examined and directions, as issued by high court, will prevent the trial court from deciding the matter in a judicious manner. Senior advocate Maninder Singh, appearing for Gujarat, argued that parties in criminal trial should be keen on swift disposal of the matter

Scholz lauds EAM's take on 'European mindset'

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/MUNICH

Favoring a more robust engagement with Asian and African countries to address critical issues, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has appreciated External Affairs S Jaishankar's remarks about doing away with "European mindset". Scholz will visit India for two days starting February 25 and hold talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi.

The German Chancellor's observations regarding the "European mindset" in the Munich Security Conference over the weekend came in the backdrop of Jaishankar's reply last year during the 17th edition of the GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum in Slovakia in



the context India's stand on the ongoing Ukraine-Russian conflict.

The minister had said, "Europe has to grow out of the mindset that Europe's problems are the world's problems, but the world's problems are not Europe's problems."

The context was used by the German Chancellor on Friday last during the Munich Security Conference as he suggested a change in the so-called "mindset" and said Jaishankar has "a point".

Will seek death for 11 Godhra train burning convicts, Guj tells SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Gujarat Government on Monday told the Supreme

Court that it will press for death penalty for 11 convicts whose sentences in the 2002 Godhra train burning case were com-

muted to life imprisonment by the High Court. A Bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices PS



Narasimha and JB Pardiwala also fixed the bail pleas of several accused in the case for hearing after three weeks. It asked the counsel for both sides to file a consolidated chart giving details such as sentences awarded to them and the period spent in jail till

now. "We will be seriously pressing for award of death penalty to the convicts whose death penalties were commuted into life imprisonment (by the Gujarat High Court). This is the rarest of rare cases where 59 people, including women and children, were burnt alive," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Gujarat Government, told the Bench. "It is consistent everywhere that the bogey was locked from outside, 59 died, including ladies and children," he added.

India, Aus to mull ways to boost ties at Modi, Albanese March meet



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India and Australia will review the whole gamut of their bilateral ties and discuss ways to further enhance strategic relations during a summit here in early March between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his counterpart Anthony Albanese.

Incidentally, Australia for the first time will host the Malabar series of naval drills off its coast in August comprising the Quad nations including India, US and Japan besides its own navy.

India will reportedly deploy its frontline warships and P8 I long range maritime reconnaissance aircraft for the annual exercise so far held off Indian coasts and in the Indo-Pacific region since 2009. Australia has also invited India for the 'Talisman Sabre' Tri-Services drill. Several countries including the US are likely to take part in the exercise from July 21 to August 4.

As regards the visit of the Australian Prime Minister, sources said here on Monday it will be first tour of Albanese

as the Prime Minister.

He is set to commence his visit on March 8 and accompanied by Prime Minister Modi is likely to travel to Ahmedabad to witness the fourth cricket Test match between India and Australia. The fourth Test is scheduled to be held at Ahmedabad from March 9-13.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar visited Australia last week ostensibly to prepare for Albanese's visit to India. There is no official announcement of the visit yet.

However, Albanese mentioned about his visit to India in a tweet after meeting Jaishankar on Saturday. "It was wonderful to meet with @DrJaishankar his morning ahead of my trip to India next month. We discussed our strategic partnership, economic opportunities and the people-to-people ties that enrich our nations," he tweeted. Sources said expansion of cooperation in the Indo-Pacific in the backdrop of China's growing military muscle-flexing in the region is expected to figure in the talks during Albanese's visit to India.

NIA files 2nd chargesheet in Mundra Port narcotics seizure case



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Monday filed the second supplementary charge-sheet against 22 people in the Mundra Port narcotics seizure case, alleging sale proceeds of the drugs were channelised to the Lashkar-e-Tayabba (LeT) terrorists for spreading terrorism in the country.

"Investigation established that funds generated through the sale proceeds of heroin were provided to operatives of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) for furtherance of terrorist activities in India," the NIA said in a statement.

"During further investigation of the case, it was found that there is an organised criminal conspiracy to smuggle illegal consignments of heroin through international trade routes to India from Afghanistan, hatched by the accused. While investigating forward and backward linkages of the crime, a well-oiled network of operatives involved in the import, facilitation and transport of drug laden consignments has been uncovered. It has also been revealed that consignments were being imported through multiple fake/shell import proprietorship firms floated in India through multiple accused," the NIA said.

The prime accused Harpreet Singh Talwar alias Kabir Talwar visited Dubai, United Arab Emirates on multiple occasions and willfully participated in the conspiracy for exploiting the commercial sea-route of import, in order to smuggle heroin into India in commercial quantities, it said.

He is running multiple trades in New Delhi, like clubs, retail showrooms and import firms. These firms are opened by Kabir Talwar in the names of his employees, relatives and friends, which are solely operated by him.

Tender Document for VARIABLE MESSAGING SCREEN WITH WORKSTATIONS
Reference : Notice Inviting Tender (NIT) :

POLICE TELECOMMUNICATION HEADQUARTERS, M.P.,
Bhadrabhadra Road, Bhopal-462003
Fax No. 0755-2443674, E-mail: ssp_radio@mppolice.gov.in
NIT No. PDM/Pur/VMS-PTRI/D-2849/2023, Dated: 07.02.2023

e-Tender Notice
e-Tender/Sealed tenders are invited by Senior Superintendent of Police (Radio) MP Bhopal on behalf of DGP MP Bhopal for the following items :-

S.NO.	ITEM NAME	QTY	Required EMD Rs.	Tender Fee Rs.
1	Outdoor Variable Messaging Screen (as per specifications)	53	30,00,000/-	15,000/-
2	Workstations with all accessories including UPS (as per specifications)	03		

1. Cost of tender documents (Tender Fee) is non-refundable and cannot be exempted in any condition.
2. The Tender should be submitted online on website <https://www.mptenders.gov.in> in favour of SSP (Radio) MP, Bhopal within scheduled date and time. Tender fees and EMD should be deposited online through the website.
3. Tender documents are also available on the website of MP Police (www.mppolice.gov.in) for ready reference.
4. This is a turn-key project.
5. Schedule : -

Documents download/Sale Start Date	08/02/2023 from 1800 Hrs.
Bid Submission Start Date	22/02/2023 from 1830 Hrs.
Bid Submission End Date	02/03/2023 at 1700 Hrs.
Opening of bid Date	03/03/2023 at 1720 Hrs.

D.I.G. (Telecom)
Sr. Superintendent of Police (Radio)
Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal

G-23211/22

SPECIAL BRANCH
POLICE HEADQUARTER, M.P., BHOPAL
NO. SB/Store/2023-25 (38), Bhopal, Dated 06.02.2023

"ONLINE E-TENDER NOTICE"
E-tender are invited by Assistant Inspector General of Police, Special Branch (G) M.P., Bhopal on behalf of DGP MP Bhopal for the following item on website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>:-

S. NO.	Name of Item (s)	Qty.	Tender Fees (Rs.)	EMD (Rs.)	Tender No.
1	Night Vision Device (NVD)	75	10,000/-	7,00,000/-	3rd Tender

1. Cost of tender document (Tender Fee) is non refundable and cannot be exempted in any condition & must submit online through website <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>.
2. Tender document can be download from the website of MP Police (www.mppolice.gov.in)
3. Bids shall be submitted online only at MP Tenders website: <https://mptenders.gov.in/nicgep/app>
4. Tender Schedule :

No.	Tender Activity	Tentative Date & Time
i	Submission of written queries - through e-mail: sec24-sb@mppolice.gov.in	13/02/2023 up to 1700 hrs.
ii	Pre Bid Meeting along with written queries	14/02/2023 at 1100 hrs.
iii	Bid Submission Start Date	20/02/2023 at 1000 hrs.
iv	Last date of online e-Tender submission	06/03/2023 up to 1600 hrs.
v	Bid will be opened on	07/03/2023 up to 1600 hrs.
vi	Demonstration from	10/03/2023 at 11.00 hrs.

A. I.G. of Police
Special Branch (G) M.P. Bhopal
Tel. No. 0755-2443654

G-23207/22

Indian, Uzbek armies participate in joint military exercise DUSTLIK

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In an effort to boost bilateral Defence ties between the two countries, the fourth edition of the 14-day-long joint military exercise "DUSTLIK" between the Indian Army and Uzbekistan Army commenced on Monday in Foreign Training Node, Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand).

Giving details of the drill, officials said here 45 Soldiers each from Uzbekistan and the Indian Army are participating in this exercise which is aimed at promoting positive relations between both the militaries. The Indian Army contingent comprises of troops from an Infantry Battalion from the Garhwal Rifles Regiment. The first edition of the exercise was held at Uzbekistan in November 2019.



The joint exercise will focus on joint counter-terrorist operations in mountainous and semi-urban scenario under United Nations(UN) mandate and will include field training exercises, combat discussions, lectures, demonstrations and culminate with a validation exercise, they said. Both sides will jointly train, plan and execute a series of tactical drills for neutralisation of likely threats, while learning to exploit new generation equipment and technology for conducting joint operations.

M.P. HOUSING & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER
Online percentage rate bids for the following work are invited from registered contractors and firms of repute fulfilling registration criteria:-

S. No.	System Tender No.	Name of Work	Probable Amount of Contract (Rs. Lakh)	1. Amount of E.M. & 2. Cost of Bid Form	Completion Period (Month)	Date of Submission of Bids (Last Date)	Date of Opening of Tenders
1.	2023_MPHID_253611 (1st Call)	Development Work Phase-I and Phase-II of 26.09 Acres Land at Khajuri Kalan Bhopal, M.P.	2071.05 Lakhs	Rs.10.36 Lakhs Rs.0.59 Lakh	18 Months	13.03.2023	20.03.2023 (Financial Bid)

1. Interested bidders can view the detailed NIT on website www.mphousing.in and <https://www.mpeproc.gov.in>.
2. The bid documents can be purchased online only as per schedule S.No. (1) 22.02.2023 at 12.00 hrs. to 13.03.2023 at 15.30 hrs.
3. Amendments to NIT if any would be published on website only, and in newspapers.

Website : www.mphousing.in
E-mail : eedh4bbpl@mp.gov.in
M.P. Madhyam/108633/2023

(D.K. Batham)
EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, Div.-4., Bhopal
Ph. : 0755-2689106, Mob.: 9425013202

Perils of moralisation

The MP Govt's restrictions on alcohol can have an adverse effect on investment and tourism

The Madhya Pradesh Government has ordered the closure of all bar shops, including 'ahatas' (the areas attached to liquor shops where drinking is allowed), even though the shops have been allowed to sell liquor. The decision is said to be in response to former MP chief minister Uma Bharti's demand for a "controlled liquor policy" in the state. One wonders why our politicians are so much worried about our moral health. Why do they love moralising, moral policing, and sanctimoniousness? In an essay, American economist and social theorist Thomas Sowell wrote that "morality is hard and sanctimoniousness is easy." Political morality is difficult, for it is predicated upon a commitment to and exertion for good governance, prudent public finance, respect for political adversaries, and decency in public life. Moralising and sanctimoniousness, on the other hand, are easy, as one doesn't have to do anything meaningful; just making a few statements, however deplorable, is enough. Or one can loudly espouse some emotive issue; a politician can claim to be upholding secularism (which is usually a dog whistle for religious appeasement) or guarding the sentiments or morals of a community (by banning or proposing to ban a movie, song, etc.). And politicians of all hues are always eager to save the moral health of the people they claim to represent; this often requires policing—something that our political masters never shy away from.

Prohibition, in some form or the other, is a good choice for them. So, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar proscribed alcohol in April 2016. As per the National Family Health Survey 2019-20, Biharis consumed more alcohol than Maharashtrians. There has been a large number hooch tragedies; the justice system has been burdened unnecessarily; but this has not made him rethink the policy itself, or at least relax it a bit. Self-righteousness, after all, is the sibling of moralisation. And now MP has been infected with the virus of prohibition. Not a full-blown case as yet, but you never know when the viral load becomes critical. Bharti may be seeing a political weapon in her anti-alcohol campaign. After all, she has been in the wilderness for quite some time. She played the most important role in ousting the Congress government under Digvijay Singh in the state in 2003, and yet she herself was removed as chief minister. She became a minister in the Union Cabinet under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but she lost that office too. MP Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan may see the restriction on liquor as a concession to Bharti; he may even hope that this would placate her. But there is also a possibility of her upping the ante over the issue; she may now fight for complete prohibition. That would be unfortunate, especially because the Hindi-speaking state is trying to emerge as an investment and tourism destination. Moralisers can be more than killjoys; they can hurt development.

PICTALK



A farmer works in a mustard field on the outskirts of Poonch

PTI

Conduct census asap

Any further delay in conducting the census could have adverse effect on policy making

For the first time, the census — which was set to be held in 2021 — has been delayed. The last census was conducted in 2011. The delay in the Census could have many adverse consequences for the policymakers as well as the people. It could lead to people being excluded from welfare schemes to incorrect resource allocation by the policymakers. The census is not simply a count of the number of people. It provides data needed to make decisions that must be taken to ensure the welfare schemes reach the right people at the right time. India's census is conducted under the provisions of the Census Act, of 1948. The census was of course hit by the pandemic. The exercise was postponed while travel and movement were restricted and the govt was in a firefighting mode to deal with the covid. But now that covid is gone and most eligibles have got their Covid vaccinations. Besides, several states have held assembly elections and life is back to normal. The Census is crucial for policymakers to develop and implement effective social welfare programs that address the needs of the people. For example, data on income, education, and employment help identify areas of high poverty and target resources to those who need them the most.

The census also provides important data on health, sanitation, and housing, which can help improve the living conditions of the population. Moreover, the census helps in identifying the demographic structure of the population, such as age, gender, and ethnicity. This data is critical for planning and implementing effective public policies, as different groups have different needs and require different resources. For instance, an aging population requires more healthcare resources, while a young population needs more education and job opportunities. It also helps in ensuring fair representation in the government. The census data is useful to redraw the boundaries of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, which ensures that each constituency has roughly the same population. This is crucial for maintaining a healthy democracy. The government must ensure that the census is conducted as soon as possible to provide accurate and up-to-date information on the socio-economic characteristics of the population. Any further delay in the census would have long-lasting adverse effects on the welfare of the people.

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Let Gandhian values guide us

Those who seek power must win the hearts of people and rise above the differences of caste, colour, language, and religion

India is the dream of the land of MK Gandhi, it has been often spoken of as a land that gave birth to a nonviolent freedom movement. Gandhi spoke of freedom which was not only from external rulers but also from vices within us. Seventy-four years have passed since we lost Gandhi. Today, we celebrate his return to India from South Africa as Pravasi Bhartiya Divas. With that legacy, India welcomes its diaspora to invest in their homeland and revive their emotional connections. These celebrations recently concluded in my hometown of Indore in Madhya Pradesh on 9th January. They were also taken to the newly renovated spiritual city, Ujjain. The Mahakal corridor attracted everyone with a lot of fervor. At this time, I appropriately picked up R K Narayan's book, 'Waiting for Mahatma'. My generation has not seen Gandhi, but we have experienced him through his books and writings on him. For me, his ideas of a minimalist lifestyle, somber living, and looking around in a non-judgemental way are indicative of a good life.

The Gandhian path may look simple, but it is equally difficult to be followed in today's fast life. More so, neither was it easy, back then. Many of us are inspired by him and are willing to follow it now. Rahul Gandhi's 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' is a political revival of the way in which Mahatma used to pursue his work, walking through the real India, rural India. Rahul Gandhi's walk is real or reel is not my inquisition. The term 'Yatra' was taken from Mahatma's Dandi Yatra. The Satyagraha is for people's right to make their own salt. The revival of this Yatra is at a time when the country's roots are shaken. Parliament is fraught with accusations, the ruling party is questioned, the opposition is still weak, and the common people are struggling for basic amenities. It was this walk that connected Kanyakumari to Kashmir, it brought a ray of hope to people that made them feel connected to the corridors of power.



However, how long this connection stays, is a question. It was Gandhi's charisma that brought others to follow his path of truth and non-violence. If one needs to have the charisma of Mahatma, which made the entire nation walk behind him, one needs to continuously work for the people. This honest work requires patience, which is difficult in this world of instant gratification. There is also a space in people's hearts for such charismatic leaders as they are always looking for one. It seems like a messiah who can bring happiness in their times of sorrow. As their leader gives recognition to their identity, they believe they are enhanced in the leader as their own. Today, India relates to the charismatic personality of Prime Minister Modi. Prime Minister after two terms in power holds that charm amongst people. So, like Mahatma, if one day he fasts there will be many who will be concerned in the country. This is the connection that people feel with him. Be it death for his mother, be it his presence in the

“AMONGST MANY VALUES THAT GANDHI TAUGHT US, ONE IS TO ALWAYS ADHERE TO THE TRUTH IN THE TOUGHEST CIRCUMSTANCES”

international arena, his Mann ki Baat, many amongst us are walking with him.

With great power comes great responsibility. For those who want to stay in power, consistent efforts in nation-building play an important part in winning the hearts of people. Our political hero is based not only on their politics but also on their emotional charm. However, this charm can be manufactured and the public may never know the truth. In this age of social media, it is difficult to distinguish between fact and fake. There was a time when this charisma brought freedom to our nation. But today, it is bad for our democracy. This takes away our sense of right and wrong, and we don't hold them responsible for their actions. We become enchanted followers. This system corrupts our lives, mind, and body, and takes away our rationality. As a democracy moves into its mature stage, the idea of waiting for Mahatma is disappointing. As, we are not taking up logical critiques or challenging the system, but waiting for a

charismatic hero to do that for us. Max Weber said, In a democracy, the people chose a leader whom they trust. Then the chosen leader says, 'Now shut up and obey me.' People and parties are then no longer free to interfere in his business. And later to justify their choice, people hide in the shadow of this charisma.

Amongst many values that Gandhi taught us, one is to always adhere to the truth in the toughest circumstances. Standing by truth may be hard and not rewarding, but it is our highest dharma. Rather than searching for Mahatma, we all must become Mahatma in this political journey. Not Gandhi, but Gandhian value is our lighthouse. In these times, our democracy must evolve. We have to be our own conscience keeper and walk for India which is not a poster child of few, but a representation of all of us.

(The writer is a visiting Researcher at International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICC-CAD), Bangladesh. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE BJP OF ATALJI AND ADVANIJI

Sir — The power struggle in Maharashtra has reached an extreme point of bad blood and struggle. It is not possible to say where and where the lust for power will lead anyone. Also, how many more episodes of this political drama are going to occur in future? The Eknath Shinde group has done the job of breaking the equation of "Shiv Sena means Thackeray". It is quite well known who are the real masterminds behind them. But was it necessary to do all this?

By forming an alliance in Maharashtra, the BJP spread everywhere in the State on the "muscle power" of Shiv Sena. The best example of a regional party becoming a national party over time is Aam Aadmi Party, which will now become a national party. But the Shiv Sena, with which it fought the elections, is now using a strategy to embarrass the same party. People are watching this with open eyes. Shouldn't politicians keep it? Or because we have the system in our hands, we should use it as we want to discredit the opponents? Is this the BJP of Atalji and Advaniji? That is the question.

Dattaprasad Shirodkar | Mumbai

CONGRESS IS POSTURING?

Sir — As soon as Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar decided to throw his hat in the ring for the Prime Minister's post in 2024 elections and, in the same breath, sought the green signal from the Congress, it created disorder in bringing like-minded parties together. The remark jolted the Congress but it still came out with a terse statement that no Opposition alliance was possible without the Congress. But does it indicate arrogance? Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said that none needed reminders about the party's role in forging an alliance comprising anti-BJP parties when it had already taken steps towards bringing the Opposition on a common platform.

It also shows that after ignominious defeats, Congress leaders do not feel ashamed to indulge in rhetoric. However, as the ticklish subject has been intently

Give the EC more teeth



The role of the Election Commission of India in conducting free and fair elections across the length and breadth of the country is immense. It enjoys a constitutional status, which means its powers are paramount and that it cannot be harnessed by the Government. But there is a very big loophole left by the Constitution makers which puts a damper on the commission's powers. The ECI is tasked to register political parties and give them recognition as 'national' or 'State', based on the criteria they fulfill but the commission cannot deregister political parties. As a result, the number of Registered Unrecognised Political Parties (RUPPs) has grown to the tune of 2,796 as of 2022.

These 2796 RUPPs have the potential to be involved in money laundering and hawala activities as political parties do not need to disclose their income. The political parties also get a 100 per cent tax exemption which clearly they are misusing because, according to the ECI's reports, more than 2,000 of these parties have not submitted their annual audited accounts. The more than Rs 1,000 crore in donations these parties have garnered is also in question as they have not been able to mention the source. There is a need for an exclusive and comprehensive legal framework that empowers the ECI to deregister and de-recognise political parties. To achieve this end, the Representation of the People Act 1951 needs serious amendments.

Noopur Baruah | Tezpur

watched by political parties, Congress once again reminded the Opposition that it needed no certificate to take a lead in forging Opposition unity. Though Nitish did come out with a subdued clarification, resistance from regional outfits like the BRS, TMC, AAP, SP and BSP to the critical remarks of Congress sends a message that all is not well about Opposition unity to take on the BJP.

KR Srinivasan | Secunderabad

RIP, BALARAM!

Sir — Legendary Indian footballer, bachelor Tulsidas Balam (85), the last of the magical trinity of Indian footballers, is no more. Balam belonged to the golden generation of Indian football in the 1950s and '60s when he paired with legends such as Chuni Goswami and PK Banerjee. I'm lucky that during the trinity's golden years, I was among the daily visitors to Maidan (1958 to 1968). I still remember the great Pelé dodge his

marker and trap the ball, dribbling his way furiously to Mohun Bagan's goal-mouth (match between Mohun Bagan AC and New York Cosmos in Kolkata on September 24, 1977). The match ended 2-2.

Balam's second goal in 1961 return-leg derby was a piece of pure magic, and how can one forget its beauty? Starting his run from centre, Balam met with a strong challenge from Jarnail Singh on entering the Mohun Bagan box. As he was about to lose balance and fall, Balam showed exemplary flexibility, managing to drive the ball towards the goal. The Bagan goalkeeper Sanat Sett was equal to the task, denying him with a remarkable save. But Balam sprang into life in a jiffy and snapped up the rebound before anyone in the Bagan box.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

SOUND BITE

Yesterday, the Election Commission did 'doodh ka doodh, pani ka pani' (bring out absolute truth). Yesterday, the term 'satyamev jayate' (truth always triumphs) was characterised.

Union Home Minister — Amit Shah

The concern that we have now is based on information we have that they're considering providing lethal support.

US Secretary of State — Antony Blinken

Social media has become really powerful today. In social media, everyone has come to know the strength of their voice.

Actor — Shatrughan Sinha

It wasn't Chole Bhatore, it was Kulcha Chole. He (Virat) was tempting me with it, but I said I'm 50 years old, and I can't handle so much cholesterol anymore.

Head Coach — Rahul Dravid

They tried it several times but failed to come near him. People of the state increased Pinarayi Vijayan's mandate during his second stint.

CPM Kerala state secretary — MV Govindan

FIRST COLUMN

WOMAN VS MACHINE: GADIAS' NEW RIVALS

Machine tools increase Gadia Lohar women's suffering



SHEFALI MARTINS

“Earlier everything was made by hand. Now, there are machine-made goods which are way cheaper. We don't have money to buy the production machines—their cost often runs in lakhs. We make different sizes of, say, an axe depending on what you want to cut with it. The price could be Rs 1,300, Rs 600 or Rs 300 per piece. Three-four of us get together to make one axe in a day. A machine-made one would make a number of them in a day and each would cost Rs 150 instead of Rs 300. Why would anyone then buy what we make?” says Dali Gadia Lohar, a 60-year-old woman.

She is from a settlement off the Ajmer-Jaipur highway in Padasoli village. It is a settlement of Gadia Lohars, who live in extreme poverty.



Now, besides what they make themselves, one can see the Lohar women sitting on the roadside selling metallic utility items like locks, chains, kitchen knives, bells, spoons of different kinds, woks, rat traps and the like. They purchase these and sell them for a minuscule profit. “If we buy goods worth Rs 20,000, our total earning will be Rs 2,000. That's it! We are able to make Rs 2,000-3,000 per month. This involves running this roadside stall from morning till evening. See, I have been sitting here since morning and still have earned just Rs 50 today. It is past afternoon. We can't even buy the vegetables we need to eat with this amount,” says Kamla Gadia Lohar, who sits by a noisy crossroad off the Ajmer-Jaipur highway at Dudu village.

Other women of her community also sell their fare at this crossroad. Santosh Gadia Lohar has the same story. “We earn Rs 5-10 per item. We make axes and a few other items, but everything else we purchase to sell. Our family work of beating iron into goods has taken a hit,” she says.

Mooli Devi, an elderly woman among them, says, “We don't have any land. What else would we do? We buy this stuff from Jaipur and Ajmer and sell it here on the roadside. We have been residents of the Gadia Lohar Colony at Malpura Road nearby for over 50 years now.”

The fairs that are the prime space for handiwork promotions are also not easy for the Lohars. “Pushkar Fair, the biggest fair of the area, is no longer profitable time for us. The organisers charge us Rs 3,000 per foot to sit and sell our fare. And, even after paying that amount, they keep shifting us from one place to the other. Whether or not we sell anything, we have to pay this rent,” Dali says.

“Our lives have gone like this only sitting on the roadside, but we do hope for a better future for our children,” Dali says. Meanwhile, her granddaughter, Bhawana, a student of Class 2, returns home from school. Ask her what she'd want to be and she proudly answers, “A soldier.”

Bhawana and her cousins have their own dreams. “We have heard about online work. Maybe, if our children are able to complete their studies, they can look at online options for showcasing our work. But, who would buy them?”

Dali's question remains even as she proudly looks at Bhawana, who is now running around the settlement in her ‘uniform’.

Would Dali's grit and Kitab's motivation shape the direction of their grandchildren's lives into newer equipment of hope, like the iron they shape ceaselessly? Many questions remain unanswered as these hard-working women stare at another day where the work of their hands may or may not sell. (concluded)

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

Budget revolutionises personal income tax



UTTAM GUPTA

The new personal income tax regime will spur economic growth as it leaves more cash in the hands for people

In Budget 2023-24, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has made some radical changes in the structure of personal income tax (PIT). To get a sense, let us first take a look at what she did in her Budget 2020-21. Then, Sitharaman had announced the Modi Government's intention to move towards a regime that was simple, free from a plethora of exemptions and deductions, and reduced the tax liability of assesses, thereby leaving higher disposable income in their hands.

From the perspective of the economy, the idea was to give a boost to aggregate demand and drive growth. Under the old regime (prior to 2020-21), a person having an income of Rs 250,001-Rs 500,000 per annum was required to pay tax of 5 per cent, those earning more than Rs 500,000 but less than Rs 1,000,000 paid 20 per cent tax, whereas someone having an income higher than Rs 1,000,000 paid 30 per cent. However, individuals enjoyed a variety of exemptions and deductions which offered the possibility of significantly reducing their tax liability.

For instance, a person having an annual income of Rs 1,500,000 and availing tax breaks of Rs 375,000 (Section 80C: 150,000; Section 80D: 25,000; Section 24: 200,000), pays Rs 150,000 as tax; without these, she would have paid Rs 112,500 more. But this comes at the cost of blocking Rs 375,000 in long-term investments—necessary for availing tax break. Plus, Rs 150,000 being the outgo on tax, a total of Rs 525,000 is knocked off from her income, leaving only Rs 975,000 for meeting current consumption needs.

Individuals earning less, especially those with annual income less than Rs 1,000,000, don't have surplus funds to invest; they end up paying much higher tax as they can't avail tax breaks. Apart from hampering the ability of assesses to lead a better living, this tax regime also impacts economic growth by compressing demand.

To address these concerns, in the 2020-21 Budget, the FM gave another option. Even while retaining 5 per cent tax for annual income in the Rs 250,001-Rs 500,000 range, on income higher than Rs 500,000, the government levied: 10 per cent on Rs 500,001-Rs 750,000; 15 per cent on Rs 750,001-Rs 1,000,000; 20 per cent on Rs 1,000,001-Rs 1,250,000; 25 per cent on Rs 1,250,001-Rs 1,500,000. For income above Rs 1,500,000, the 30 per cent tax continued. No exemptions and deductions were allowed under this regime.

However, individuals were given the choice to go either for the new regime or continue with the old regime. The Budgets of 2021-22 and 2022-23 left the PIT unchanged.

The new regime didn't make things any better. Under it, a person earning Rs 1,500,000 had to pay tax of Rs 187,500 which is much higher than Rs 150,000 payable under the old regime (albeit with



IRRESPECTIVE OF THE ASSET AN INDIVIDUAL DEALS IN AND THE HOLDING PERIOD, THE CAPITAL GAINS ARISING THERE FROM ARE AN ADDITION TO HIS INCOME IN THE RELEVANT YEAR. THEREFORE, TAX SHOULD BE LEVIED AT THE RATE APPLICABLE TO THE SLAB HIS TOTAL INCOME FALLS IN

(The author is a policy analyst)



tax breaks).

This is because under the former, the cut in rates was not enough to make up for the denial of exemptions and deductions.

In Budget 2023-24, while making no changes in the old regime, Sitharaman has altered the new structure to provide for nil tax on income up to Rs 300,000; 5 per cent tax on income in the Rs 300,001-Rs 600,000 bracket; 10 per cent in the Rs 600,001-Rs 900,000 bracket; 15 per cent in the Rs 900,001-Rs 1,200,000; 20 per cent in Rs 1,200,001-Rs 1,500,000; and 30 per cent on above Rs 1,500,000. Furthermore, there won't be any tax on annual income up to Rs 700,000.

This is a significant improvement over the 2020-21 package. Under it, a person with an annual income of Rs 1,500,000 needs to pay Rs 150,000 as tax, down from Rs 187,500 payable under the 2020-21 package. But this amount being exactly the same as the tax payable under the old regime, a natural question arises as to why would she go for the new (albeit modified) regime?

The big advantage of the new (modified) regime lies in the person having cash-in-hand of Rs 1,350,000 (after paying tax), whereas under the old regime she would be left with only Rs 975,000. Under the former, salaried persons can also claim standard deduction of Rs 50,000 which is not available under the latter. This gives an added advantage to the new regime.

For persons earning less, especially those having an income of Rs 1,000,000 per annum and without

surplus funds to invest, a case for the new regime becomes even more compelling. This is all the more because of the higher exemption limit of Rs 300,000 under this regime (under the old regime, it remains at Rs 250,000) and significantly lower tax rates under the applicable slabs. Thus, a person earning Rs 900,000 pays Rs 45,000 or 5 per cent of the income as tax.

Furthermore, the tax liability will be 'nil' if her annual income is Rs 700,000. On the other hand, under the old regime, she would end up paying Rs 52,500 as tax.

In September 2019, the FM had announced a steep reduction in corporate income tax (CIT) rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises and to 22 per cent for existing firms. The PIT then remained high, this created an anomaly vis-à-vis CIT. The reductions in PIT as per Budget 2020-21 didn't help much in addressing this anomaly. A further lowering of tax rate under the modified regime has brought PIT more or less on par with CIT.

Thus, individuals with income in Rs 900,001-Rs 1,200,000 pay tax @5 per cent, whereas those earning in Rs 700,001-Rs 900,000 range pay tax @10 per cent and nil for Rs 700,000.

In Budget 2020-21, the FM had abolished dividend distribution tax or DDT. From April 1, 2020, the dividend is taxed in the hands of shareholders.

But they didn't gain from this shift as the tax rate under the old PIT regime at 30 per cent for income Rs 1,000,000 was higher than 20 per cent DDT payable prior

to 2020-21. Even the tax rate of 20 per cent on income in the Rs 500,001-1,000,000 range was the same as the 20 per cent DDT.

Under the new (modified) regime wherein the tax rates are 10 per cent in the Rs 600,001-Rs 900,000 and 15 per cent in Rs 900,001-Rs 1,200,000, the shareholders will stand to benefit from the transition to taxing dividend in their hands.

To conclude, the Modi Government has made the new PIT regime sufficiently attractive to propel en masse shift of assesses to it. It will also bring an end to the era of exemptions and deductions. It will give a massive boost to the aggregate demand spurring investment and growth.

However, it also needs to look into the regime for capital gains tax (CGT). At present, the capital gains tax (CGT) rate varies widely depending on the asset such as equity share, bonds (there is further differentiation depending on whether the bonds are listed or unlisted), real estate, holding period, etc. Such a highly differentiated tax structure is prone to arbitrage/misuse, evasion and protracted litigation. There is an urgent need for a simple and standardized CGT regime.

Irrespective of the asset an individual deals in and the holding period, whether the bonds are listed or unlisted, the capital gains arising there from are an addition to his income in the relevant year. Therefore, tax should be levied at the rate applicable to the slab his total income falls in (all sources put together).

POINT COUNTERPOINT

A DEAL OF Rs 2,000 CRORE HAS TAKEN PLACE TO PURCHASE THE SHIV SENA'S NAME AND ITS BOW-AND-ARROW SYMBOL.
— SHIV SENA (UBT) LEADER
SANJAY RAUT



SUCH BASELESS COMMENTS ARE AN ATTEMPT TO MALIGN INDEPENDENT INSTITUTIONS LIKE THE SUPREME COURT AND THE ELECTION COMMISSION.
— MAHARASHTRA MINISTER & BJP LEADER
SUDHIR MUNGIANTWAR

No woman should die from cervical cancer

Effective communication strategies to debunk misinformation related to vaccines will promote vaccine uptake and help fight cervical cancer

While the term ‘cancer’ evokes fear, helplessness and fatalism, the reality is that almost 30-50 per cent of cancers are preventable. Cervical cancer, the cancer of the cervix in the uterus, is one of those preventable cancers. In India, cervical cancer is the second most common type of cancer among women. Compared to global cervical cancer estimates, India has higher rates of incidence as well as mortality. The five-year survival rate of patients diagnosed with cervical cancer in India is 46 per cent, which is much lower compared to the developed countries (66 per cent) as well as its neighboring Asian countries like China (67 per cent).

Cervical cancer dispro-



K VISWANATH



DHRITI DHAWAN



RAMYA PINNAMANENI

portionately affects relatively young women. Over 95 per cent of cervical cancers are caused by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). The World Health Organization recommends vaccination against HPV as the primary approach to eliminate cervical cancer. Research suggests that HPV vaccination offers the most protection when given to girls under the age of 15 years.

While getting vaccinated does not eliminate the need for HPV screenings, it surely protects against high-risk HPVs, making it an essential component of cervical cancer prevention strategy.

In the National Family Health Survey 5 (2019-2021) of India, women cited money, distance and transportation to

health facilities, and unavailability of a female health provider as problems in accessing healthcare. Limited access to healthcare hinders early detection.

Getting vaccinated against HPV, therefore, can significantly reduce the spread of HPV and lower the incidence of cervical cancer. Child marriages also increase the risk of exposure to and transmission of HPV and cervical cancer.

In India, at least 15 lakh girls under 18 years of age get married every year. HPV vaccination can have long-term benefits.

Given the significant cervical cancer burden, it would be timely for India to invest in an HPV immunization programme. India has time and again proven its ability to

successfully run immunisation programs at scale. In addition to running a routine childhood immunization program, conducting the world's largest vaccination drive to control and prevent Covid-19 has only strengthened India's immunization infrastructure. Digital platforms, like Co-WIN created to track and ensure Covid-19 vaccination coverage, can be adapted to track beneficiaries for eligibility as well as coverage of HPV vaccination.

Vaccines save lives. This has been extensively proven by vaccines against polio, measles, tetanus and most recently, Covid-19. HPV vaccines have proven to be safe and effective in preventing morbidity and mortality due to cervical cancer. However,

despite the global availability of HPV vaccine since 2006 and evidence of its efficacy, the uptake of the vaccine is somewhat low due to multiple challenges. First, the cost of the vaccine is the biggest barrier to access it, especially in developing countries. Second, there is lack of knowledge among different publics about the impact and consequences of cervical cancer on female morbidity and mortality. Third, the perception that HPV is only a sexually transmitted disease discourages conversation. Lastly, vaccine misinformation is widespread.

Effective communication strategies to create awareness and debunk misinformation related to vaccines will promote vaccine uptake. Communication around HPV vac-

cines should focus on the many benefits of the vaccine, which include preventing a highly prevalent cancer as well as the socio-economic repercussions of the disease and its treatment.

The campaigns should customize the messages keeping in mind the socio-cultural sensitivities of their audiences. Involving healthcare workers including anganwadi workers and ASHAs, and also teachers while creating awareness about HPV vaccines could be an effective strategy to encourage vaccine uptake. For disseminating messages on scale and promoting broad-based awareness, mass and social media are essential.

India has an impressive track record in vaccination with mass mobilization strate-

gies. Such mass mobilization, Jan Andolan, is what is called for in this case. We have an incredible opportunity to eliminate cervical cancer as we know it in India. HPV vaccination is a viable and effective strategy based on science, logic, economics, and ethics. It is an opportunity to eliminate suffering that disproportionately affects women and girls.

(Prof K Viswanath is Lee Kum Kee Professor of Health Communication at Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health. Dr Dhriti Dhawan is a Data Programmer Analyst at the Dana Faber Cancer Institute in Boston, USA. Dr Ramya Pinnamaneni is a Research Associate at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health)

Biden by Zelensky's side in show of solidarity

AP ■ KIVY

President Joe Biden paid an unannounced visit to Ukraine on Monday to meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in a defiant display of Western solidarity with a country still fighting what he called "a brutal and unjust war" days before the one-year anniversary of Russia's invasion. "One year later, Kyiv stands," Biden declared after meeting with Zelenskyy at Mariinsky Palace. Jamming his finger for emphasis on his podium flanked by U.S. and Ukrainian flags, he continued: "And Ukraine stands. Democracy stands. The Americans stand with you, and the world stands with you."

Biden spent more than five hours in the Ukrainian capital, consulting with Zelenskyy on next steps, honouring the country's fallen soldiers and meeting with US embassy staff in the war-torn country.

The visit comes at a crucial moment: Biden is trying to

keep allies unified in their support for Ukraine as the war is expected to intensify with spring offensives.

Zelenskyy is pressing allies to speed up delivery of promised weapon systems and calling on the West to provide fighter jets — something that Biden has declined to do.

The US president got a taste of the terror that Ukrainians have lived with for close to a year when air raids sirens howled just as he and Zelenskyy wrapped up a visit to the gold-domed St. Michael's Cathedral.

Looking solemn, they continued unperturbed as they laid two wreaths and held a moment of silence at the Wall of Remembrance honoring Ukrainian soldiers killed since 2014, the year Russia annexed Ukraine's Crimean peninsula and Russian-backed fighting erupted in eastern Ukraine.

The White House would not go into specifics, but national security adviser Jake Sullivan said that it notified Moscow of Biden's visit to Kyiv

shortly before his departure from Washington "for deconfliction purposes" in an effort to avoid any miscalculation that could bring the two nuclear-armed nations into direct conflict.

In Kyiv, Biden announced an additional half-billion dollars in U.S. assistance — on top of the more than \$50 billion already provided — including shells for howitzers, anti-tank missiles, air surveillance radars and other aid but no new advanced weaponry.

Ukraine has also been pushing for battlefield systems that would allow its forces to strike Russian targets that have been moved back from front-line areas, out of the range of HIMARS missiles that have already been delivered.

Zelenskyy said he and Biden spoke about "long-range weapons and the weapons that may still be supplied to Ukraine even though it wasn't supplied before." But he did not detail any new commitments.

"Our negotiations were very fruitful," Zelenskyy added.

Biden's mission with his visit to Kyiv, which comes ahead of a scheduled trip to Warsaw, Poland, is to underscore that the United States is prepared to stick with Ukraine "as long as it takes" to repel Russian forces even as public opinion polling suggests that US and allied support for providing weaponry and direct economic assistance has started to soften.

For Zelenskyy, the symbolism of having the US president stand side by side with him on Ukrainian land as the anniversary nears is no small thing as he prods the US and European allies to provide more advanced weaponry and to step up the pace of delivery.

"I thought it was critical that there not be any doubt, none whatsoever, about US support for Ukraine in the war," Biden said.

Biden's visit marked a brazen rebuke to Russian President Vladimir Putin, who had hoped his military would swiftly overrun Kyiv within days. Biden, a Democrat,

recalled speaking with Zelenskyy on the night of the invasion, saying, "That dark night one year ago, the world was literally at the time bracing for the fall of Kyiv. Perhaps even the end of Ukraine."

Biden warned that the "brutal and unjust war" is far from won. "The cost that Ukraine has had to bear has been extraordinarily high. And the sacrifices have been far too great," Biden said.

"We know that there'll be very difficult days and weeks and years ahead. But Russia's aim was to wipe Ukraine off the map. Putin's war of conquest is failing." "He's counting on us not sticking together," Biden said of the Russian leader.

"He thought he could outlast us. I don't think he's thinking that right now. God knows what he's thinking, but I don't think he's thinking that. But he's just been plain wrong. Plain wrong."

The trip gave Biden an opportunity to get a firsthand look at the devastation the Russian invasion has caused on

Ukraine.

Thousands of Ukrainian troops and civilians have been killed, millions of refugees have fled the war, and Ukraine has suffered tens of billions of dollars of infrastructure damage.

Biden, wearing a blue suit and his signature aviator sunglasses, pledged long-term support for Ukraine, saying that "freedom is priceless. It's worth fighting for as long as it takes." "And that's how long we're going to be with you, Mr. President, for as long as it takes," Biden promised.

Zelenskyy, speaking in English, responded: "We'll do it." The Ukrainian leader, wearing a black sweatshirt, as has become his wartime habit, said through an interpreter that the "wide discussion" in their meeting "brings us closer to the victory" — hopefully, he added, this year. "Right now, in Ukraine, the destiny of the international order ... is decided," Zelenskyy said. He added words of gratitude to Biden and to the American people for their support.

EU mulls ways to sustain ammunition supply for Ukraine

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The European Union must find ways to quickly provide thousands of artillery shells to Ukraine or face the prospect that it might lose the war against Russia, top EU diplomats warned Monday, as ammunition stocks in national EU armories dwindle.

"The most important, pressing issue today for the Ukrainian army is to have a continuous flow of ammunition," EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said before chairing a meeting of the bloc's foreign ministers. "If we fail on that, really, the result of the war is in danger."

Borrell spoke as US President Joe Biden made a surprise visit to Ukraine.

Borrell said that Russian forces are firing about 50,000 rounds of artillery each day and

that Ukraine's supplies must be lifted to the same level.

Other estimates suggest that Ukraine is firing up to 6,000-7,000 artillery shells daily, around a third of Russia's total one year into the war.

Most sought after, Borrell underlined, are 155mm artillery cartridges.

Borrell said that discussion would focus on ways to make joint purchases of ammunition and use a special EU fund to provide extra financing.

However, the defense industry requires solid, long-term orders to stand up and expand its production lines and cannot simply ramp up supplies overnight.

Last week, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said that the waiting time for the supply of "large-caliber ammunition has increased from 12 to 28 months," and that "orders placed today would only be delivered two-and-a-half years later."

Estonia, which shares a border and long history with Russia, is driving the EU and its NATO allies to provide 1 million artillery shells, at an estimated cost of 4 billion euros (\$4.3 billion).

"Russia uses daily (what) the European Union produces per month, and in the current military industry capabilities, we can reach the need of Ukraine (in) around six years, so this is fully unacceptable," Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Reinsalu told reporters.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has appealed to his Western allies to quicken their military support, warning that delays would play into Russia's hand as the invasion approaches its anniversary on Feb. 24.



A carnival float depicts Russia's President Vladimir Putin taking a blood bath during the traditional carnival parade in Dusseldorf, Germany, on Monday.

AP/PTI

'People's court' tries Putin for war crimes

AP ■ THE HAGUE

A "people's court" put Russian President Vladimir Putin on trial Monday for the crime of aggression over his invasion of Ukraine, in a symbolic move to close an "accountability gap" in the absence of an international tribunal with jurisdiction.

The court has no legal powers but prosecutors said they will present evidence that Putin committed the crime of aggression by ordering the invasion nearly a year ago, unleashing a devastating war that has killed thousands and left towns and cities in ruins.

"This is a crime that belongs in the annals of infamy. It is a crime that demands accountability," said Drew White, a Canadian lawyer acting as one of the court's prosecutors.

While the International Criminal Court has opened an investigation into crimes committed in Ukraine, it does not have jurisdiction to prosecute Russia's leaders for aggression.

However, international pressure is mounting for a special tribunal to be established to prosecute the crime.

The Netherlands, home to several international courts, has offered to host the court. The people's court is an

initiative of rights group Cinema for Peace, Ukraine's Center for Civil Liberties and Ben Ferencz, the 102-year-old lawyer who is the last surviving prosecutor from the post-World War II Nuremberg trials of senior Nazi leaders.

A week of hearings opened in The Hague two days after US Vice President Kamala Harris said that Washington has determined that Russian forces in Ukraine have committed crimes against humanity and insisted that perpetrators are brought to justice.

The first day Monday also coincided with an unannounced visit to Kyiv by US President Joe Biden.

The court is scheduled to deliver a verdict on Friday, the anniversary of Russia's invasion. Putin was invited to participate in the hearing, but organizers got no response from the Russian embassy in The Hague.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Oleksandra Matviichuk of the Ukraine civil liberties organisation made a statement via a video link ahead of the opening session.

The first witness was a Ukrainian journalist, Angela Slobodyan, who told a panel of three judges that she was in the city of Kherson when Russian forces rolled in "shooting everything that was moving."

Netanyahu advances judicial changes despite uproar

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's government on Monday was pressing ahead with a contentious plan to overhaul the country's legal system, despite an unprecedented uproar that has included mass protests, warnings from military and business leaders and calls for restraint by the United States.

Thousands of demonstrators were gathering outside the parliament, or Knesset, for a second straight week to rally against the plan as lawmakers prepared to hold an initial vote. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies, a collection of ultra-religious and ultranationalist lawmakers, say the plan is meant to fix a system that has given the courts and government legal advisers too much say in how legislation is crafted and decisions are made. Critics say it will upend the country's system of checks and balances and concentrate power in the hands of the prime minister. They also say that Netanyahu, who is on trial for a series of corruption charges, has a conflict of interest.

The standoff has plunged Israel into one of its greatest domestic crises, sharpening a divide between Israelis over the character of their state and the



values they believe should guide it.

"We are fighting for our children's future, for our country's future. We don't intend to give up," opposition leader Yair Lapid told a meeting of his party in the Knesset as protesters amassed outside.

Monday's vote on part of the legislation is just the first of three readings required for parliamentary approval. While that process is expected to take months, the vote is a sign of the coalition's determination to barrel ahead and seen by many as an act of bad faith.

Israel's figurehead president has urged the government to freeze the legislation and seek a compromise with the opposition. Leaders in the booming tech sector have warned that weakening the judiciary could drive away investors. Tens of thousands of

Israelis have been protesting in Tel Aviv and other cities each week. Last week, some 100,000 people demonstrated outside the Knesset as a committee granted initial approval to the plan. It was the largest protest in the city in years.

On Monday, thousands were rallying outside the Knesset, waving Israeli flags and holding signs reading "saving democracy."

Earlier in the day, protesters launched a sit-down demonstration at the entrance of the homes of some coalition lawmakers and briefly halted traffic on Tel Aviv's main highway. Hundreds waved Israeli flags in Tel Aviv and also in the northern city of Haifa, holding signs reading "resistance is mandatory." "We're here to demonstrate for the democracy. Without democracy there's no state of Israel. And we're going to fight till the end," said Marcos Fainstein, a protester in Tel Aviv. The overhaul has prompted otherwise stoic former security chiefs to speak out, and even warn of civil war.

In a sign of the rising emotions, a group of army veterans in their 60s and 70s stole a decommissioned tank from a war memorial site and draped it with Israel's declaration of independence before being stopped by police.

Heavy rains leave 36 dead in Brazil, Carnivals cancelled

AP ■ SAO PAULO

Heavy rain caused flooding and landslides that have killed 36 people in Brazil's north Sao Paulo state, officials said Sunday, and the fatalities could rise.

Sao Paulo state government said in a statement that 35 died in the city of Sao Sebastiao and a 7-year-old girl was killed in neighbouring Ubatuba.

The cities of Sao Sebastiao, Ubatuba, Ilhabela and Bertioja, some of the hardest hit and now under state of calamity, cancelled their Carnival festivities as rescue teams struggle to find missing, injured and feared dead in the rubble.

"Our rescue teams are not managing to get to several locations; it is a chaotic situation," said Felipe Augusto, the mayor of Sao Sebastiao. Later, he added there are dozens of people missing and that 50 houses collapsed in the city due to the landslides.

Augusto posted on social media several videos of widespread destruction in his city, including one of a baby being rescued by locals lined up on a flooded street.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said on Twitter he will visit the region Monday.

Sao Paulo state government said in a statement that precipitation in the region has surpassed 600 millimetres (23.6 inches) in one day, one of the highest amounts ever in Brazil in such a short period.

Bertioja alone had 687 millimetres during that period, the state government said. Gov. Tarcisio de Freitas said in a statement he requested support from the army, which sent two airplanes and rescue teams to the region.

Trump absent as Iowa '24 GOP caucus train rolls

AP ■ CEDAR RAPIDS (US)

Nikki Haley is swinging through Iowa this week fresh off announcing her presidential campaign. Her fellow South Carolinian Republican, Sen. Tim Scott, will also be here as he decides his political future. And former Vice President Mike Pence was just in the state court- ing influential evangelical Christian activists.

After a slow start, Republican presidential prospects are streaming into the leadoff presidential caucus state. Notably absent from the lineup, at least for now, is former President Donald Trump.

Few of the White House hopefuls face the lofty expectations in Iowa that Trump does. He finished a competitive second to devout social conservative Ted Cruz in 2016, and went on to carry the state twice, by healthy margins, as the Republican presidential nominee in the 2016 and 2020 elections.

"It is genuinely impossible for this guy to try to manage these expectations. They are enormous. They are self-made," said Luke Martz, a veteran Iowa Republican strategist who helped lead Mitt Romney's 2012 Iowa caucus campaign. "I don't see how anyone who is saying 'I'm the guy' can come in and even get even a second-place finish."

Yet, in the three months since he announced his bid for a comeback, Trump has not set foot in Iowa, the first place his claim of party dominance will be tested early next year.

To be sure, Trump has a campaign presence in Iowa. Alex Latham, who is

part of Trump's national team but is based in the state, has been working on landing a caucus campaign director. But Trump held a kickoff rally on Jan. 28 in South Carolina, where his 2016 primary victory sealed his status as GOP frontrunner.

And he squeezed in a speaking spot earlier that day at the annual state GOP meeting in New Hampshire, where he also won the first-in-the-nation primary seven years ago.

Though the caucuses remain nearly a year off, they remain the first event on the calendar, and some Iowa GOP activists have taken notice of Trump's absence.

"I found that quite interesting," Gloria Mazza, chairwoman of the Polk County GOP, said of Trump's New Hampshire and South Carolina stops. "Because Iowa is first in the nation, doesn't everybody come here first?"

Meanwhile, others are making inroads.

Though Pence is not yet a candidate, his advocacy group Advancing American Values last week launched a campaign to organise opposition to school policies like one in an eastern Iowa district that has become a flashpoint among conservatives.

Pence was in Cedar Rapids on Wednesday rallying opponents of a policy by the nearby Linn-Mar Community School District that's at issue in a federal lawsuit. The school board last year enacted a measure allowing transgender students to request a gender support plan to begin socially transitioning at school without the permission of their parents.

EU sanctions on 9 more top Myanmar officials

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The European Union announced Monday that it has imposed sanctions on nine officials in Myanmar and seven entities, including government departments and companies, linked to rising violence, human rights abuses and security threats.

The 27-nation bloc imposed a travel ban and asset freeze on the officials — among them the energy minister and top military brass — over "actions that threaten the peace, security or stability of Myanmar." It also froze the assets in Europe of defense ministry departments and several companies.

Myanmar languished under strict military rule for five decades. That led to international isolation and sanctions. As the generals loosened their grip, and Aung San Suu Kyi became leader in 2015 elections, the international community eased most of the sanctions and poured investment into the country.

That ended with a military coup on Feb. 1, 2021. It was launched after the military rejected the results of November 2020 elections, which were won overwhelmingly by Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party.

'All Quiet' wins 7 prizes, including best film, at BAFTAs

AP ■ LONDON

Antiwar German movie "All Quiet on the Western Front" won seven prizes, including best picture, at the British Academy Film Awards on Sunday, building the sombre drama's momentum as awards season rolls toward its climax at next month's Oscars.

Irish tragicomedy "The Banshees of Inisherin" and rock biopic "Elvis" took four prizes each.

"All Quiet," a visceral depiction of life and death in the World War I trenches, won Edward Berger the best director award. Its other trophies included adapted screenplay, cinematography, best score, best sound and best film not in English.

Austin Butler was a surprise best actor winner for "Elvis." Baz Luhrmann's flamboyant musical also won trophies for casting, costume design and hair and make-up. Cate Blanchett won the best

actress prize for orchestral drama "Tár".

Martin McDonagh's "Banshees," the bleakly comic story of a friendship gone sour, was named best British film.

"Best what award?" joked McDonagh of the film, which was shot in Ireland with a largely Irish cast and crew. It has British funding, and McDonagh was born in Britain to Irish parents.

"Banshees" also won for McDonagh's original screenplay, and awards for Kerry Condon as best supporting actress and Barry Keoghan for best supporting actor.

The prizes — officially the EE BAFTA Film Awards — are Britain's equivalent of Hollywood's Academy Awards and will be watched closely for hints of who may win at the Oscars on March 12.

Madcap metaverse romp "Everything Everywhere All at Once," the Academy Awards



Austin Butler, Cate Blanchett, Ian Stokell (left) and Lesley Paterson pose for photographers at the 76th British Academy Film Awards, BAFTAs, in London on Sunday.

front-runner, — was the night's big loser, winning just one prize from its 10 BAFTA nominations, for editing.

Actor Richard E Grant was a suave and self-deprecating host for the ceremony at London's Royal Festival Hall, where the UK's movie academy heralded its strides to become more diverse but said there was more to be done.

Grant joked in his opening monologue about the infamous altercation between Will Smith and Chris Rock at last year's Oscars.

"Nobody on my watch gets slapped tonight," he said. "Except on the back."

Guests and presenters walking the red carpet on the south bank of the River Thames included Colin Farrell, Ana de Armas,

Eddie Redmayne, Brian Cox, Florence Pugh, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Cynthia Erivo, Julianne Moore and Lily James.

Heir to the throne Prince William, who is president of Britain's film and television academy, was in the audience alongside his wife, Kate. William wore a tuxedo with black velvet jacket, while Kate dressed in a floor-length Alexander McQueen dress

that she also wore to the 2019 BAFTAs.

Helen Mirren paid tribute to William's grandmother, Queen Elizabeth II, who died in September. Mirren, who portrayed the late monarch onscreen in "The Queen" and onstage in "The Audience," called Elizabeth "the nation's leading lady."

Britain's film academy introduced changes to increase the awards' diversity in 2020, when no women were nominated as best director for the seventh year running and all 20 nominees in the lead and supporting performer categories were white.

This year there were 11 female directors up for awards across all categories, including documentary and animated films. But just one of the main best-director nominees was female: Gina Prince-Bythewood for "The Woman King."

BAFTA chair Krishnendu Majumdar said the academy's soul-searching had been "a nec-

essary and humbling process." He said the "vital work of levelling the playing field" would continue. "West Side Story" star Ariana DeBose opened the show by performing "Sisters are Doin' it for Themselves," with an added rap shoutout to some of the nominated women, including Michelle Yeoh, Cate Blanchett and Viola Davis.

Blanchett said it had been "an extraordinary year for female performers. To be counted among them is really special."

It was a strong year for Irish actors at the BAFTAs, with Deryl McCormack up for the BAFTA Rising Star award — though he lost out to Emma Mackey — and Condon, Keoghan, Farrell and Brendan Gleeson all getting acting nominations for "Banshees." McCormack hailed the event as "the Irish BAFTAs."

"It is a small country, but to see the talent that comes out of it is quite amazing," he said.

Three-time Oscar winner

Sandy Powell became the first costume designer to be awarded the academy's top honor, the BAFTA fellowship.

The harsh world outside showbiz intruded on the awards when Bulgarian journalist Christo Grozev, who works for investigative website Bellingcat, said he was now allowed to attend the awards because of a risk to public security. He features in "Navalny," a film about jailed Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny that won the best documentary BAFTA.

"Navalny" producer Odessa Rae dedicated the award to Grozev, "our Bulgarian nerd with a laptop, who could not be with us tonight because his life is under threat by the Russian government and Vladimir Putin."

Jamie Lee Curtis, a supporting actress nominee for "Everything Everywhere," said the chance awards season provides to celebrate cinema was more important than who wins.

Turkiye rejects links between NATO expansion, F-16 deal

AP ■ ANKARA (TURKIYE)

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Monday called for Sweden and Finland to be accepted into NATO "as quickly as possible," although his Turkish counterpart dismissed the possibility of any link between their accession and Türkiye's request for F-16 fighter jets.

Turkiye has delayed the Nordic countries' admission to the trans-Atlantic defense alliance, citing concerns over terrorism. Meanwhile, members of the US Congress have tied approval of the F-16 deal to Ankara retracting its opposition to the NATO enlargement.

"We're confident that NATO will formally welcome them in soon," Blinken told a joint news conference with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara. "And when that happens, it will enhance the security of every NATO member, including the United States, including Türkiye."

Cavusoglu repeated Türkiye's stance that it would be willing to approve Finland joining NATO before Sweden. Türkiye has complained about what it sees as Stockholm's tolerance of support for the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which has waged a 39-year insurgency against Ankara.



US Secretary of State Antony Blinken (left) shakes hands with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu before their meeting in Ankara on Monday. AP/PTI

"Unfortunately PKK supporters are still present in Sweden," he said. "They are recruiting people and they are financing terror acts and they are carrying out terror propaganda in Sweden ... because they don't want Sweden to become a NATO member."

While acknowledging that Sweden had made constitutional changes in a bid to satisfy Türkiye's demands, he said that more needed to be done to "convince our parliament and people."

The Turkish minister made clear his country objects to the sale of F-16 jets being tied to ratifying the NATO membership of Sweden and Finland which must be agreed by all 30 members of the alliance. Only the parliaments of Türkiye and Hungary have yet to give consent.

"It would not be right or fair to make two independent issues — the two countries' isy Türkiye's demands, he said that more needed to be done to "convince our parliament and people."

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"It would not be right or fair to make two independent issues — the two countries' isy Türkiye's demands, he said that more needed to be done to "convince our parliament and people."

NATO membership and the purchase of F-16s — conditional on each other," Cavusoglu said.

"It would not be possible for us to purchase the F-16s under these conditions."

Ankara has been seeking to upgrade its F-16 fleet after it was kicked off the project to develop the next-generation F-35 fighter following its acquisition of Russian air defense missiles.

Underlining the US administration's support for the F-16 deal, Blinken said it was "very important for ongoing NATO interoperability and in the national interest of the United States."

Blinken also commented on reports that China is considering military support for Russia in its war in Ukraine.

"We are concerned that China is considering supporting Russia's war effort in Ukraine with lethal assistance, something that we are watching very, very closely," he said.

Reiterating that there would be "real consequences... were China to provide lethal assistance to Russia" or help Moscow evade sanctions in a "systematic way," he said there was a "real concern that China is considering doing just that."

Take steps to function as a country, IMF tells Pakistan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Cash-strapped Pakistan must take steps to ensure that its high earners pay taxes and only the poor get the subsidies if it wants to function as a country, the International Monetary Fund has said, amid looming fears of a default.

In an interview with the German state broadcaster Deutsche Welle on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in Germany on Friday, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva said Pakistan needs to take strong measures to avoid getting into a "dangerous place" where its debt needs to be restructured.

She said the IMF was very clear that it wanted the poor people of Pakistan to be protected, the Dawn newspaper

reported,

"It shouldn't be that the wealthy benefit from subsidies. It should be the poor [who] benefit from them," she said. "What we are asking for are steps Pakistan needs to take to be able to function as a country and not to get into a dangerous place where its debt needs to be restructured," she said. Pakistan was devastated by last year's flash floods that affected one-third of its population, she said. "I want to stress that we are emphasising two things. Number one: Tax revenues. Those who can, those that are making good money [in the] public or private sector need to contribute to the economy."

"Secondly, to have a fairer distribution of the pressures by moving subsidies only towards

the people who really need it. It shouldn't be that the wealthy benefit from subsidies," she said.

The IMF chief's statement came days after the two sides concluded the ninth review of the USD 6.5 billion bailout package without a staff-level agreement after 10 days of talks. However, both sides agreed to a set of measures that could still help clinch the deal.

Pakistan, which is in dire need of funds as it battles a wrenching economic crisis, has received financial assistance from the IMF in the past and is presently in discussions with the organisation to resume its loan programme.

An agreement on the ninth review of the programme would release over USD 1.1 billion. A resumption of the IMF

programme would also unlock other avenues of funding for Pakistan.

Meanwhile, foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan have fallen to around USD 3 billion, barely enough to cover three weeks of controlled imports.

Earlier, the IMF said in a statement that both sides have agreed to stay engaged and "virtual discussions will continue in the coming days to finalise the implementation details" of the policies, including the tax measures, discussed in Islamabad.

The government is in a race against time to implement the tax measures and reach an agreement with the IMF. The IMF has given a deadline of March 1 to Pakistan for implementing all the measures.

China in quandary as Pak faces debt default

PTI ■ BEIJING

Watching warily Pakistan plunging into the worst economic crisis with prospects of defaulting on foreign loans, China which holds Islamabad's largest debt on Monday said it backed measures taken by its "all-weather friend" to tide over the disastrous situation and hoped it will, in the end, pull through.

Pakistan's current account deficit shrank 90.2 per cent to USD 0.24 billion in January from USD 2.47 billion in the same month last year, according to the data shared by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) on Monday, as import restrictions continue to persist amid a balance of payments crisis that has brought the country on the verge of default.

Compared to December's USD 0.29 billion, the deficit decreased by 16.55 per cent, the Dawn newspaper reported on Monday.

The deficit was recorded as import restrictions continue to persist amid a balance of payments crisis that has brought the

country on the verge of default, it reported.

Analysts say Pakistan's economic crisis coming close to that of Sri Lanka's and perhaps followed by deeply indebted African nations is turning out to be a crisis of sorts for China itself as it doled out huge loans criticised by many as predatory in nature with demands to write off could have consequences for Beijing's own slowing down the economy.

Cash-strapped Pakistan was optimistic that China will not allow it to go down the Sri Lanka way of declaring complete insolvency.

According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) data, China holds roughly USD 30 billion of Pakistan's USD 126 billion in total external debt.

This is thrice its IMF debt (USD 7.8 billion) and exceeds its borrowings from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank combined, according to Dawn's report.

In a stunning remark on Sunday, Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said

Pakistan has already defaulted.

"You may have learned that Pakistan is going bankrupt or that a default or meltdown is taking place. It has already taken place. We are living in a bankrupt country," he said.

Asked for its reaction to Asif's remarks, the Chinese Foreign Ministry, in a written response to PTI here, said China sympathises with Pakistan.

"As an all-weather strategic cooperative partner and 'hard-core' friend, China sympathises with Pakistan's current difficulties and supports Pakistan in taking active measures to deal with it," it said.

"China is and will continue to firmly promote China-Pakistan mutually beneficial cooperation and provide all necessary support for Pakistan to achieve stability and sustainable development," it said but did not provide any details.

"We believe that Pakistan will be able to overcome difficulties and achieve stable economic and social development," it said.

China is already in quandary

about how to extend support to Sri Lanka which has already defaulted on its USD 51 billion external debt which included a 20 per cent loan owed to China.

After India, last month issued a letter to the IMF giving required assurances for Sri Lanka to get the USD 2.9 billion bailout package, China's EXIM Bank has issued a letter granting Colombo a two-year moratorium on repayment and agreeing with the IMF's extended fund facility (EFF) amid doubts that it may not be enough for it to secure the loan.

On Monday, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin told the media here that the Export-Import Bank of China in its letter to the IMF said that it is going to provide an extension on the debt service due in 2022 and 2023.

This means "Sri Lanka will not have to repay the principal and interest due of the Bank's loans during the above-mentioned period, so as to help relieve Sri Lanka's short-term debt repayment pressure", he said

Minister who spent childhood in India runs for top job in Scotland

PTI ■ LONDON

The finance minister of the devolved Scottish government, who spent some of her formative years in India where her parents worked as Christian missionaries, on Monday threw her hat in the ring to be elected Scotland's First Minister.

Kate Forbes, 32, cut short her maternity leave to join the race to replace Nicola Sturgeon as the leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP) after the 52-year-old leader stepped down last week after eight years of leading the party advocating for Scottish independence from the United Kingdom.

Forbes is seen as one of the frontrunners for the top job and will go head-to-head with Pakistani-origin health minister Humza Yousaf and member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) Ash Regan, among those who have declared their candidacy so far.

"I can't sit back and watch our nation thwarted on the road to self-determination," said Forbes in a video posted on Twitter to declare her candidacy.

"We need to choose strong, competent leadership to deliver independence — the leadership that I can offer. I believe we need someone who can unite our party and our movement. I'm a unifier," said the MSP for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch in the Scottish Highlands.



Candidates have until Friday to secure 100 nominations from at least 20 local branches to secure their place on the ballot, with the winner to be announced on March 27.

Forbes has long been considered a credible successor to Nicola Sturgeon after she was parachuted in as Secretary for Finance in her Cabinet to deliver the Scottish budget in 2020 after a predecessor resigned in disgrace. As a member of the Free Church of Scotland, which follows a strict interpretation of the Bible, she has spoken openly of her Christian faith.

"We were a fairly ordinary family that found ourselves in India. My dad was involved with Bible teaching and he's also an accountant, so he was managing the finances of a group of mission hospitals, trying to ensure that people were able to access free healthcare," Forbes told 'Premier Christianity Magazine' in an interview back in October

2021.

She was born in Dingwall in the Scottish Highlands and was first taken to India as an infant and then returned again a few years later to be enrolled in Woodstock School in Mussoorie.

"Aged 10, I left my very safe primary school (in Scotland) and arrived in India to sit in a classroom with 60 other kids. If you got poor test results, you would feel a ruler on the palm of your hand. So, while I had the safety and security of my own family, it felt like everything else had changed," she recalls in the interview.

Living through an earthquake while in India and navigating a clash of cultures, Forbes feels her Christian faith got stronger.

"There was one thing that was consistent between Scotland and India — and that was God," she told the magazine. Returning to Glasgow aged 15, Forbes went on to study history at Cambridge University and then accounting before politics happened as "an accident" when she was selected as a candidate.

"One of the things that have always attracted me about the SNP is how diverse it is, from branch members all the way through to the Westminster group. That means people of diverse political views, backgrounds and religious views can come together," she said.

Tagore statue at Dhaka Univ campus 'reappears'

PTI ■ DHAKA

A newly-unveiled statue of Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore installed by students at the prestigious Dhaka University campus, which was vandalised last week, has been partially re-installed by authorities.

On February 14, students of Dhaka University's Faculty of Fine Arts installed a Tagore statue with duct tape plastered on his mouth, showing him holding a copy of Gitanjali, with a nail pierced through it, according to news agency UNB.

The symbolic statue was installed near the Raju Memorial Sculpture, a prominent landmark on the campus, to protest the censorship on the campus, the report said. On February 16, the statue mysteriously disappeared, with its severed head being found nearly 2km from the university campus.

On Sunday, the statue was partially re-installed at the same spot — only with the head but the duct tape was removed, the report added. Shimul Kumbhakar, president of a faction of Dhaka University's Student Union, who was involved in the making of the statue, told UNB: "Dhaka University's proctor removed the sculpture in the dark of night and cut it into two parts. We collected the broken parts from Suhrawardy Udayan and re-installed it."

Pak, Afghan Taliban trade fire at border crossing

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

Pakistani border guards and Afghan Taliban forces traded cross-border fire on Monday morning, officials said, a day after Afghanistan's Taliban rulers closed the Torkham border crossing amid increasing tensions between the two neighbours. There was no immediate word on casualties on either side.

On Sunday, the Afghan Taliban shut Torkham, a key trade route, over Pakistan's alleged refusal to allow Afghan patients and their caretakers to enter Pakistan for medical care without travel documents, Pakistani security officials said.

They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss border issues. Khalid Khan, a local

Pakistani police official, confirmed the border closure and what he described as intermittent exchanges of fire at Torkham, located in Pakistan's northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Pakistan's military and the Foreign Ministry made no immediate comments.

Mullah Mohammad Siddiq, a Taliban-appointed commissioner at Torkham, said Pakistan has not been abiding by its "commitments, so the crossing point was shut down." He did not elaborate.

Siddiq advised Afghans to avoid travelling to the border crossing, located on Afghanistan's side in the country's eastern Nangarhar province, until further notice. Cross-border fire and

shootouts are common along the Afghan-Pakistan border. Each side has in the past closed Torkham, and also the Chaman border crossing in southwestern Pakistan, for a multitude of reasons. Both crossings are vital for landlocked Afghanistan for trade and travel.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in August 2021 as

US and NATO troops were withdrawing from the country after 20 years of war. Like the rest of the world, Pakistan has so far not recognised Afghanistan's Taliban government. The international community has been wary of the Taliban's harsh measures, imposed since their takeover, especially in restricting the rights of women and minorities.

Imran appears before court amid high drama

PTI ■ LAHORE

Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan on Monday appeared before the Lahore High Court which granted him protective bail in a case linked to violent protests outside the election commission, amidst high drama inside the court premises where hundreds of his supporters converged to show solidarity with him.

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) activists staged a violent protest after 70-year-old Khan was disqualified by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in the prohibited funding case last year.

Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh had directed Khan to appear before court for hearing of his protective bail petition in the case.

A court official told PTI that a two-member bench of LHC led by Justice Ali Baqar Najafi granted the protective bail to the PTI chairman till March 3.

"Khan appeared before the court and told him that he wanted to appear before it last week but doctors had advised him to rest as his leg wound would heal in over two weeks. He also said he always respect-



ed the courts as he is an upholder of justice. He said 'justice' is also included in his party's name," the official said.

Justice Najafi appreciated Khan for submitting to the law. The judge granted him protective bail till March 3 and refrained police and any other agency from arresting him.

Khan evaded the PML-N government's plan to arrest him as he appeared before the court and secured the protective bail in the case in which he was booked under terrorism charges.

A team of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and police were present on the federal coalition government's directive at the court premises to arrest Khan in case of denial of his bail.

This was the first time

Khan appeared before a court of law after he sustained bullet injuries in November last year's attack on his rally in Punjab province.

Thousands of workers of Khan's party thronged the route of his Lahore's residence to the LHC that made him cover a 10-minute distance in more than two hours.

Khan's vehicle was showered with rose petals as it made its way inside the LHC premises with a large number of PTI supporters chanting slogans in his support and against the PML-N-led coalition government.

And despite his arrival at the court's premises, Khan could not manage to reach the courtroom in 90 minutes because of a crowd of the PTI workers. Sporting a blue salwar kameez, Khan got off his vehicle at 7.15 pm (local time) and reached the courtroom in heavy security cover.

Thousands of people were present outside the LHC and there were hardly any security arrangements.

After hearing the news of Khan's protective bail, a large number of PTI supporters present out the court chanted slogans in his favour and the judiciary.

Kerala farmer goes missing in Israel

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Authorities in Israel have registered a police case against a 48-year-old Kerala farmer, who reportedly went missing in Israel earlier this month while visiting the country on a state government-sponsored trip to study Israeli modern agricultural techniques. Biju Kurian, a native of Ulikkal panchayat in Kannur district, was part of a 28-member Kerala government's delegation of farmers, sent to Israel to study state-of-the-art techniques such as hydroponics and precision farming.

On February 17, Kurian reportedly went missing. Despite Israel's law enforcement agencies' best efforts to trace him, Kurian's whereabouts were not known. "We have registered a police case against him. He will be deported once we nab him," an official said. The delegation, led by Principal Secretary B. Ashok, left for Israel on February 11. The farmers' delegation left Israel on Sunday without Kurian, they added.

Kurian's family in Kannur are also clueless about his mysterious disappearance and were making desperate attempts to reach out to him.

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER

No. SS/CW/RR/78/2023/125 Dated 17.02.2023

The Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, invites bids from registered Contractor under Govt. Department, Assam for Repair & Renovation Works of State Mission office of Samagra Shiksha, Assam, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19 as per the detailed notice inviting tender which can be downloaded from the website <https://www.assamtenders.gov.in>.

The last date of submission of tender is 10/03/2023 upto 2:00 PM.

Sd/-Mission Director
Samagra Shiksha, Assam
Kahilipara, Guwahati-19

Janasanyog/CF/4470/22

G20 NORTHERN RAILWAY

OPEN-E-TENDER NOTICE

The Sr. Divisional Engineer-III, Northern Railway, Delhi Division invites E-Tender for the following work.

1	Name of work	CTR(P) at Km 6.0 to 13.0 UP line by TRT in DBSI-SSB YD-NNO in the section of SSE/PWAY/SSB under ADEN/DLI.
2	Approx cost of work	Rs. 74,41,796.90/- (Rupees Seventy Four Lakh Forty One Thousand Seven Hundred Ninety Six and Ninety Paise Only)
3	Earnest Money to be deposited	Rs. 1,48,800/- (Rupees One Lakh Forty Eight Thousand Eight Hundred Only)
4	Cost of tender document	Rs. 0.00/-
5	Date & Time of submission of tender bid and opening of tender	14.03.2023 at 15:00 Hrs.
6	Website particulars where complete details of tender documents can be seen	www.ireps.gov.in
7	Allocation	29314103

• The tenderer/s must be registered on the Indian Railway E-Procurement system (IREPS) site i.e. www.ireps.gov.in for participating in the e-tender system. • For all terms and conditions please refer tender document. • No manual offers are acceptable. • Cost of tender document and Earnest money will be acceptable through net banking or payment gateway only. No. No. 128-W/280/e Tender Notice/NIT/115/2022-23/W-3 Dated :- 17.02.2023 539/2023

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PUBLIC NOTICE

My Client, Tajinder Singh S/o Late Baldev Singh, is Owner of Plot No. C-111A Area 50.16 Sq. Mtr (Ground and First Floor) Out of Khazra No. 1023 Situated at Colony Shyam Vihar Phase-II Deenpur Najafgarh, Delhi Vide Authorization Slip Executed by DDA Reg. at S.R. (X New Delhi as Doc No. 860 Dated 27/01/2023. This Property was Earlier Owned by Late Mrs. Puspita W/o Late Mr. Baldev Singh and now inherited by my client as legal heir. Above said Property is going to be Merged with Hero Housing Finance Limited Any Person/Bank/financial institution having any claim/right, Lien, Any Objection whatsoever in regard to above property, should write the same to the undersigned Adv. Vishal Mehan, E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092. Alongwith Documentary Evidence Through Registered A/D within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice failing which any claim, Lien or any objection shall be deemed to be waived off.

Vishal Mehan (Advocate)
E-713, Karkardooma Court, Delhi-110092
Mobile No. 9812151811

PUBLIC NOTICE

To be known to all that my client, Sh. Ajay Kumar Sharma, S/o Late Sh. Under Sen Sharma, R/O H.No.C-12/384, Yamuna Vihar, Delhi-110053, Mutatee/Owner of Plot No. 384, Block-C-12, Area Measuring 70.005 Sq. Mtrs., situated at Yamuna Vihar, Delhi, has applied for conversion of the aforesaid property from lease hold to free hold vide DDA File No. 17 (2500) 1976/ (LAB/RES) in GDA. The original documents i.e. Perpetual Lease Deed of the above said property has been lost. An NCR/IR No. 157869/2023 dated 16/02/2023 to this effect has been lodged in P.S. Crime Branch, Delhi. Any person (claiming any right, interest, having any objection or found in possession of original documents, may write/contact with above named person at above Address/Phone No. 9212664144 within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. The person claiming any right, interest, objection with respect to this property, can personally inform or write to Deputy Director (LAB/RES) or Director (LAB) Resd., C-Block, 3rd Floor/Vikas Sadan, New Delhi

INDIAN RAILWAYS

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA (BHARAT SARKAR)

MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS (RAIL MANTRALAYA)

(RAILWAY BOARD)

No. 2022/RS(WTA)-148/TENDER/532 New Delhi, dated 20/02/2023

CORRIGENDUM NO.6 to the Tender No. WTA-532

Sub :- E-Tender No. WTA-532 due on 27.02.2023 for "Manufacturing cum Maintenance of 100 nos. of New Generation Energy Efficient Vande Bharat Trainsets with Concentrated Power System including upgradation of the Government Manufacturing Units & Trainset Depots."

The due date of the subject tender is postponed from 27.02.2023 to 27.04.2023 (Thursday). The prospective Bidders are requested to visit website- <https://ireps.gov.in> for more details.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RAILWAY STORES (RS)

MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS

(RAILWAY BOARD)

RAIL BHAWAN, RAISINA ROAD, NEW DELHI-110001
Email- dsrm@rb.railnet.gov.in 549/2023

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

G20 NORTHERN RAILWAY

TENDER NOTICE

Invitation of tender through E-Tendering (E-Procurement Systems)

N.I.T. No.	46-22-23/WE
Name of Work with its Location	Housekeeping Of Bungalow no 1 CF Road officers Rest House Se road cleaning of ORHS and Transit Camp at SE road for a period of 23 months in the S/o SSE/W.T. CAMP under ADEN/E-II. Providing Security Services for ORHS and Transit Camp at SE road for a period of 23 months in the S/o SSE/W.T. Camp under ADEN/E-II
GEM/2023/B/3147691	
Approx. Cost of Work	9739460.66
EMD amount	194800.00
Completion Period of Work	1 Year 11 Months
Date and Time for submission of tender and opening of tender	Closing date of tender on 14.03.2023 at 15:00 hrs.

Website particular notice board location complete details of tender can be seen and address of the office from where the tender form can be purchased etc. www.gem.gov.in

128-W/269/OET/22-23/WE/NIT/46 Dated: 20.02.2023 543/23

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

'India's GDP likely grew 5-5.1% in Q3 of FY '23'

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The economy is likely to have grown at 5-5.1 per cent in the October-December 2022 quarter due to normalising base, much lower than the 6.3 per cent growth recorded in the previous quarter, according to analysts.

Normal base refers to the comparable figure of the corresponding period of the preceding fiscal. But the base is lowered for calculating growth rate when the previous numbers are not comparable due to certain extreme conditions.

Compared to the pre-Covid number, the GDP is likely to have grown 11.6 per cent in Q3 from 7.6 per cent in the previous quarter, boosted by continued recovery in the services sector, said Aditi Nayar, chief economist and head of research at Ibra Ratings.

On the other hand, Rahul Bajoria, head of British brokerage Barclays India, said the economy would have grown at a tad lower at 5 per cent in the October-December quarter of FY23.

The government is expected to release the third quarter



macroeconomic data on February 28. The government expects the economy to close the current fiscal with 7 per cent or higher growth.

"Economic activity in Q3 remained distinctly uneven, amid the upsides offered by robust demand for contact-intensive services and upbeat festive season sentiment. Trends in government spending were disparate, with a healthy revenue spending by the Centre amid a base effect-led contraction in capital spending.

"Similarly, while services exports jumped 25 per cent, non-oil merchandise exports contracted by 8.2 per cent in the quarter. The advance esti-

mates of kharif production, too, indicate a mixed trend in crop output, with rise in sugarcane, cotton, coarse cereals and oilseeds, and a decline in rice and pulses. Amid continuing input price pressures for certain sectors, we project GDP to have grown 5.1 per cent in Q3," Nayar said.

The rise in gross value added at basic prices is likely to have moderated to 4.9 per cent in Q3 from 5.6 per cent in Q2. While growth in services would display a base effect-led moderation (to 7.4 per cent from 9.3 per cent, respectively), it would outpace the rise in agriculture, forestry and fishing (4 per cent) and industry at 1 per cent, she said.

Sensex, Nifty extend losses for second day

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty declined for a second straight session on Monday, losing more than half a per cent due to selling in energy, banking and financials stocks amid lingering concerns over interest rates and inflation.

Reversing its early gains, the BSE Sensex closed lower by 311.03 points or 0.51 per cent at 60,691.54 as 18 of its scrips declined. The index opened higher at 61,112.84 and gained further 290 points to hit the day's high of 61,290.19.

However, selling in index major Reliance Industries, HDFC twins, ICICI Bank Maruti and Kotak Bank dragged down the barometer to a low of 60,607.02.

The NSE Nifty fell 99.60 points or 0.56 per cent to end at 17,844.60 as 30 of its constituents declined while 20 advanced. Nifty touched a high of 18,004.35 in early trade but later fell to a low of 17,818.40.

Sensex lost nearly 317 points while Nifty declined by 91 points on Friday.

From the Sensex pack, Maruti, HDFC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, Reliance



Industries, Nestle and ICICI Bank were among the major laggards.

UltraTech Cement, Tech Mahindra, Power Grid, Infosys, Tata Motors, HCL Technologies, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bharti Airtel were the major winners.

"Stocks are getting beaten ahead of the release of Fed minutes on Wednesday. Maintaining its guard against inflation, the Fed is expected to remain hawkish. As expected, it is unlikely to have a dire effect on the global stock market.

"However, the consequence of constant high interest rates is causing a slowdown

in demand and the earnings outlook, hence the near-term trend will be cautious," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Markets started the week on a subdued note and lost over half a per cent, in continuation of the recent fall. "The continuous pressure in the banking and financial pack combined with a downturn in energy majors kept the tone negative," said Ajit Mishra, VP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd. "Drubbing in banking stocks dragged down the markets today, which languished in the negative territory for a major part of the trading session. Factors such as more pain going ahead through further rate hikes, rising inflation, and the recent Adani saga continue to weigh on investors' minds.

"Also, Indian stocks are still expensive compared to China, and hence investors are taking this opportunity to curb their holdings," Shrikant Chouhan, Head of Equity Research (Retail), Kotak Securities Ltd, said.

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge dipped 0.16 per cent and midcap index fell 0.12 per cent.

Sugar output up nearly 3% at 23 mn tonne so far this marketing year: ISMA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's sugar production rose 2.8 per cent to 22.84 million tonne till February 15 of the ongoing marketing year, according to industry body ISMA.

Sugar production in India, a major producer of the sweetener in the world, stood at 22.22 million tonne in the same period of the previous marketing year.

Sugar marketing year runs from October to September.

According to the Indian Sugar Mills Association (ISMA), around 505 mills were in operation in the period under review as against 522 mills earlier.

After diversion for ethanol production, the country's total sugar production was at 22.84 million tonne during the October-February 15 period of the ongoing 2022-23 marketing year, the industry body said in a statement.

Sugar production in Uttar Pradesh rose marginally to 6.12 million tonne from 5.99 million tonne, while in Maharashtra it declined slightly to 8.59 million tonne as



against 8.62 million tonne during the period.

Sugar production in Karnataka rose slightly to 4.61 million tonne as against 4.54 lakh tonne. Other states contributed 3.51 million tonne of sugar during October-February 15 of the ongoing marketing year as against 3.07 million tonne in the year-ago period.

Last month, ISMA had revised downwards its sugar production estimate for 2022-23 to 34 million tonne over its earlier estimate of 36.5 million tonne issued in October 2022.

Sugar production stood at 35.8 million tonne in the 2021-22 marketing year.

Gold gains ₹50; silver advances ₹140

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose ₹50 to ₹56,307 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid gains in the precious metal globally, according to HDFC Securities.

The yellow metal had ended at ₹56,257 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver prices also increased by ₹140 to ₹65,770 per kg.

"Spot gold prices in Delhi traded at ₹56,307 per 10 grams, up ₹50 per 10 grams," said Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities.

In the overseas market, gold and silver were trading higher at \$1,845 per ounce and \$21.82 per ounce, respectively.

International gold rebounded from morning lows in the Asian trading hours on Monday, Sriram Iyer, Senior Research Analyst at Reliance Securities said.

Rupee gains 9 paise to close at 82.73 against US dollar

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The rupee appreciated by 9 paise to close at 82.73 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as the American currency retreated from its elevated levels.

Forex traders said a muted trend in domestic equities and foreign fund outflows weighed on investor sentiments and restricted the appreciation bias.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 82.69 against the American currency and finally settled at 82.72 (provisional) against the greenback, registering a gain of 10 paise over its previous close of 82.82.

During the trading session, the rupee touched a high of 82.62 and a low of 82.74 against the dollar.

The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six curren-



cies, rose 0.04 per cent to 103.90.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude futures advanced 1.05 per cent to USD 83.87 per barrel.

"Rupee traded strong near 82.75 as dollar index traded below USD 104 guiding rupee strength. Asian currencies were trading strong on the back of weakness in the dollar," said Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst at LKP Securities.

Trivedi further noted that the US Fed's minutes update will be keenly watched this week for further trend.

Zydus gets USFDA nod for generic products

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Zydus Lifesciences on Monday said it has received approval from the US health regulator to market generic medicines in the American market.

The company has received approval from the US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) to market Gabapentin tablets which are indicated for the management of postherpetic neuralgia (PHN).

As per IQVIA MAT data, the medication had annual sales of USD 90 million in the US.

The company said it also has received approval from the US health regulator for diabetes drug Canagliflozin and Metformin Hydrochloride tablets.

As per IQVIA MAT data, Canagliflozin and Metformin Hydrochloride tablets had annual sales of USD 49.4 million in the US.

FPIs' investment value in Indian equities drops 11% to \$584 bn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The value of foreign portfolio investors' (FPI) holdings in the domestic equities reached USD 584 billion at the end of December 2022, which was 11 per cent lower from preceding year, according to a Morningstar report.

This was largely on low return given by the Indian equities and exodus of foreign money from the domestic stock market.

Going by the report, the value of FPIs investments in Indian equities dropped to USD 584 billion as of December 2022 as compared to USD 654 billion at the end of December 2021.

On a quarter-on-quarter basis, the value of FPIs investment grew 3 per cent from USD 566 billion in the three months ended September 2022. This was also the second consecutive quarter, when the



value of their investment in the domestic stock market had increased.

Consequently, FPIs' contribution to Indian equity market capitalisation also went up during the quarter to 17.12 per cent from 16.97 per cent in the September 2022 quarter.

After posting a robust growth in 2020 and 2021, the global equity markets went through a turbulent phase in 2022. In fact, 2022 was a difficult year as the world witnessed multiple challenges that weighed on the international markets.

Govt opposes Vedanta move to sell zinc assets

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a setback to billionaire Anil Agarwal's mining group, the government has opposed Vedanta Ltd's proposal to sell its international zinc business to Hindustan Zinc Ltd for USD 2.98 billion over concerns of valuation.

The government has threatened to take legal action to stop the sale of the Africa-based assets to HZL, in which it holds a 29.54 per cent stake.

In a letter to HZL, posted by the company to stock exchanges, the Ministry of Mines said the deal is a "related party transaction" and the government would "like to reiterate" its dissent.

HZL in January agreed to buy THL Zinc Ltd Mauritius from its parent, Vedanta Ltd, for USD 2.98 billion in phases over 18 months.



Vedanta holds a 64.92 per cent equity share of Hindustan Zinc Ltd (HZL), which is an integrated producer of zinc, lead and silver.

HZL in a separate filing said it would place the ministry's letter before the board and that a meeting of the shareholders to approve the deal was yet to be called.

The company has long been a cash cow for Agarwal's Vedanta group, squeezing out, rich dividends. The latest proposed transaction is being seen as another way of extracting more funds out of HZL.

The ministry in the letter

said it is writing on behalf of the government on the resolution approved by the HZL board in its meeting on January 19 "for the creation of a wholly-owned overseas subsidiary of the company, funding such subsidiary to the extent of USD 2.981 billion and such subsidiary acquiring the shares of THL Zinc Ltd from THL Zinc Ventures Ltd (an entity of the Vedanta Group)." It said its nominee directors on the board had recorded their dissent to the proposal.

"The proposed resolutions which envisage the acquisition of THL Zinc (a Vedanta company) by HZL (also a Vedanta company) thus being a related party transaction, we, the government of India would like to reiterate our dissent on the matter and the resolutions forming part of the agenda matter," it said.

'Cereal prices likely to remain elevated going into next fiscal'

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prices of cereals are unlikely to rise further as witnessed in the recent past but may remain elevated well into the next fiscal due to vagaries of climate change, strong global and domestic demand, rating agency Crisil said.

Domestic production of cereals has grown consistently in the past 50 years. However, prices of cereals have risen faster. The weighted average crop price index for cereal crops logged 3-4 per cent CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) over fiscals 2017-2022, it said in a report.

Even in the current fiscal, prices of cereals have risen significantly on-year in the first nine months — of wheat and paddy by 8-11 per cent and of maize, jowar and bajra by 27-



31 per cent, it added.

"...The price sentiment for cereal crops is expected to be strong in absolute terms," Crisil said.

Anticipation of higher production of wheat in current rabi season is expected to improve the stock condition, which may put downward pressure on prices, though heatwaves remain a key monitorable, it said.

For kharif crops such as paddy, maize, and millets, the

production expectations would be positive if normal, well-spread monsoon prevails.

"However, prediction of higher chances of El Nino impact on south-west monsoon by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration would be a major monitorable as El Nino had resulted in 14 per cent lower rainfall and a 2-3 per cent lower kharif cereal production during 2015," the report added.

JK Tyre looks to expand retail presence; bolster presence in SUV, EV space

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

JK Tyre Industries is looking to expand its retail network across the country by up to 20 per cent over the next 12-18 months, a top company official said on Monday.

The company, which on Monday expanded its retail presence in North India by opening six outlets, is also looking to bolster presence in the fast-growing sports utility vehicle and electric vehicle verticals.

"We currently have around 650 brand shops across the country. Over the next 12-18 months we expect a 15-20 per cent addition in these outlets as we look to go nearer to the customer," JK Tyre and Industries President (India) Anuj Kathuria told PTI here in an interaction.

The company on Monday



launched six new brand shops spread across Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan as part of its plans to improve presence especially in smaller towns and rural areas.

JK Tyre now has 221 brand outlets in the northern part of the country.

"Customer needs are now not limited to the big centres. With growing car parc, customers in smaller cities and towns also seek services locally. So we will keep coming up with sales outlets to cater to this demand," Kathuria said.

Crayons Advertising files draft papers with NSE Emerge for IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Advertising agency Crayons Advertising Ltd on Monday said it has filed draft papers with NSE Emerge for its initial public offering (IPO).

The company plans to offer 64.30 lakh equity shares of face value ₹10 each through the book-building process, according to a statement.

Proceeds to the tune of ₹15.28 crore from the issue will be used in building infrastructure and cutting-edge technology for expansion and ₹14.5



crore for funding working capital requirements.

Corporate Capital Ventures is the book-running lead manager to the issue and Skyline Financial Services is registrar to the issue.

Servotech Power, Dubai's Al-Ansari Motors ink pact to install EV charging solutions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Homegrown Servotech Power Systems Ltd (SPSL) has inked a pact with Dubai-based Al Ansari Motors to provide electric vehicles charging solutions to the Middle Eastern and African markets.

The two entities have signed a sole distributorship agreement, which will see Al Ansari Motors bring Servotech's EV charging capabilities to the potential electric vehicle adopting segment in

these markets, SPSL said in a statement on Monday.

Al Ansari Motors LLC is into motor vehicles and accessories trading, it said.

Raman Bhatia, Founder and MD of SPSL said, the Middle East and Africa present a huge untapped market potential and a sea of potential electric vehicle users. Each charging point installed under the pact will be accessible to all electric four-wheelers.

Mohammad Humaid Alansari, Founder at Al Ansari

Motors said: "This pact gives us a chance to make Servotech's extensive EV charging solutions more accessible and affordable in our native markets. This will result in both generating sustainable profits and evolving the future of electric vehicles."

The partnership aims to create an organised and integrated EV charging infrastructure in the Middle East and African region while also offering a firm path for future developments.

Govt sets up committee to monitor impact of rise in temp on wheat crop

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Monday said it has set up a committee to monitor the impact of rise in temperature on the wheat crop.

The move comes amid a forecast by the National Crop Forecast Centre (NCFC) that maximum temperature in major wheat producing areas barring Madhya Pradesh was higher-than-average of the last seven years during the first week of February.

Even the Met Department



has projected above-normal temperature in Gujarat, Jammu, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, in next two days.

Speaking to reporters, Agriculture Secretary Manoj Ahuja said, "We have set up a committee to monitor the situation arising due to increase in temperature on the wheat

crop."

The committee will issue advisories to farmers on adopting micro irrigation, he said.

The committee, to be headed by the Agriculture Commissioner, will also have members from Karnal-based Wheat Research Institute and representatives from major wheat growing states, he added.

The Secretary, however, said there won't be an impact of rise in temperature on early-sown varieties and even heat resistant varieties have been sown in large areas this time.

BARCA RESTORE LIGA LEAD

AP ■ BARCELONA

Robert Lewandowski and Sergi Roberto's goals helped Barcelona beat Cadiz 2-0 and restore their eight-point lead at the top of La Liga on Sunday.

Elsewhere Antoine Griezmann's superb strike helped Atletico Madrid earn a 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao to tighten their grip on fourth place.

Champions Real Madrid's win at Osasuna on Saturday pulled them closer to Xavi Hernandez's Barca, who had one eye on Thursday's Europa League play-off second leg against Manchester United at Old Trafford.

However an inspired Ferran Torres helped Sergi Roberto to break the deadlock and Lewandowski added a second to leave Cadiz, 17th, two points above the relegation zone. The visitors had two Roger Marti goals disallowed and made Barcelona uncomfortable at times at Camp Nou but their victory rarely seemed in doubt.

Xavi began with Sergi Roberto in midfield, replacing Pedri, who suffered a thigh injury in the Europa League 2-2 first leg draw with Manchester United last Thursday.

The coach passionately defended the Catalan after the game, saying he was a player often used as a scapegoat.

"I've heard the most unjust criticism (aimed at him) in my life," Xavi told reporters.

"He's a homegrown player, with a spectacular attitude, always trying to help the team, he's unselfish."

However it was Torres' arrival that made the key difference for Barcelona in the first half. The winger has struggled badly at times this season, but with Ousmane Dembele injured and Raphinha rested to face United, he took his chance with both hands.

Torres was hyperactive, dribbling past defenders at pace and tying Cadiz's defence in knots.

One such run down the right saw him cross for Lewandowski after 43 minutes and although the Polish striker's effort was saved, Sergi Roberto was on hand to smash home the rebound.

Three minutes later Barcelona doubled their lead when Lewandowski collected the ball on the edge of the Cadiz box and fired a low strike into the



bottom corner.

"I work to show my football, it's true I've not had many minutes and (not had that much) importance in the team," Torres told Movistar.

"Every time the coach gives me his confidence, I go out to show him what I've got."

Some Barcelona fans sang Torres's name in response to his electric performance, encouraging the forward after his difficult spell.

"I'm proud that they chant my name," he added. "There is still work to do, the hard thing is to keep it up."

Barcelona took their foot off the gas in the second half, although Lewandowski clipped the top of the crossbar.

La Liga's top scorer with 15 goals, Lewandowski has not been at his sharpest since the World Cup but slowly seems to be returning to it.

Marc-Andre ter Stegen kept yet another clean sheet, with Barcelona having conceded just seven goals from 22 matches in La Liga.

In Europe it has been another story, with Xavi hoping his side can prove more sturdy at the back against Man United than they were in the first leg.

CLASSIC SHIRTS

Atletico's victory over Athletic helped them cut the gap on third place

Real Sociedad to two points, after the Basque side drew on Saturday.

Athletic played in their classic red and white striped kit, and Atletico in away shirts, even though Diego Simeone's side were at home at the Metropolitano stadium.

The hosts wanted to pay tribute to celebrate Athletic's 125th anniversary — with Atletico having been formed as a branch of Athletic back in 1903.

Griezmann made the difference in a tight clash after 73 minutes when he combined with Depay.

The pair exchanged passes and Griezmann drove into the box to net his seventh league goal of the season.

Rayo Vallecano and visitors Sevilla shared a 1-1 draw, with the hosts, sixth, unable to exert maximum pressure on the sides above them in the quest to secure European football next season.

Sevilla have struggled on the road in recent weeks, while their home form has helped them move up to mid-table after a poor start to the season.

Jorge Sampaoli's side took the lead when Suso's effort from distance deflected in off Oscar Valentin, but Florian Lejeune headed home from a corner to level.

Sergi Darder's late strike snatched Espanyol a 1-0 win at bottom-of-the-table Elche.



Spurs sink West Ham

AP ■ LONDON

Son Heung-min produced the perfect response after being dropped as the South Korea forward came off the bench to seal Tottenham's 2-0 win against West Ham on Sunday.

Son has struggled badly this season and his poor form convinced Tottenham's absentee boss Antonio Conte to axe him for the Premier League clash.

Prior to this weekend, the 30-year-old had scored in only four matches this season.

But Son made his point to Conte as he came off the bench to net Tottenham's second goal after Emerson Royal put the hosts ahead in the second half.

Son's ninth goal in all competitions this season mirrored his hat-trick against Leicester in September, which came after he was dropped and then introduced as a substitute.

"Nobody wants to sit on the bench but it's a decision you to have accept. The decision is always made by the manager and I need to accept," Son said.

"I tried my best to help the team. I got the chance and I was happy to score. The pass was really good and my first touch

helped to make the goal."

Tottenham's win over their struggling London rivals lifted them one point above Newcastle into fourth place, although the Magpies have a game in hand.

Conte was watching on television back home in Italy after deciding he had returned too soon following his gallbladder surgery, with assistant coach Cristian Stellini taking instructions from his recuperating manager. It was a much-needed victory for Tottenham, who were thrashed at Leicester last weekend, then lost 1-0 at AC Milan in the Champions league last 16 first leg.

Stellini has now won all three matches while deputising for Conte this season.

"The moment was important and it was the moment for Son. With the space, Son is an amazing player and we try to use him in this way," Stellini said.

"Son has a goal so we are happy for him. He has to stay calm and produce his best performance. At the moment he is not 100 percent so we have to manage him."

West Ham remain third bottom after a first defeat in four league games.

Dortmund go level at top of Bundesliga

AP ■ BERLIN

Borussia Dortmund blew the Bundesliga title race wide open with a 4-1 win over Hertha Berlin on Sunday, but in-form striker Karim Adeyemi limped off clutching his hamstring in the first half.

The win saw Dortmund pull level on points with league leaders Bayern Munich and high-flying Union Berlin, who were held to a 0-0 draw at home to Schalke earlier on Sunday.

"We're on a great run of form and we want to keep riding this wave and see where it leads in the end," said captain Marco Reus.

Adeyemi's injury made for a bittersweet evening, with the 21-year-old limping off almost in tears just minutes after putting his side on their way with a quickfire goal and assist.

Dortmund started a little sluggishly after their 1-0 Champions League win over Chelsea in midweek, and Hertha could have taken the lead when Jessic Ngankam skimmed the ball early on. The Signal-Iduna-Park was soon bouncing, though, as Adeyemi gave Dortmund the lead with a brilliant backheel on 27 minutes.

Adeyemi set up Donyell Malen for his side's second with a brilliant cross four minutes later, but was already clutching his hamstring as he curled the ball into the box.

There was fresh hope for relegation-threatened Hertha when Lucas Tousart thundered the ball in off the bar just after the break to halve Dortmund's lead.

But Dortmund overcame their nerves once more and Reus smashed a direct free-kick



into the top corner to restore the two-goal cushion. Julian Brandt made it four late on, linking up with Jamie Bynoe-Gittens to score for a third league game in a row. In one of the most intriguing Bundesliga title races for years, Dortmund, Union and Bayern are now all on 43 points after Bayern's surprise defeat to Borussia Moenchengladbach on Saturday.

"There's a long way to go yet, not just for us, but also for Union and Bayern," said Brandt.

UNION STUMBLE

Union missed the opportunity to leapfrog Bayern into first with a miserable 0-0 draw

at home to bottom club Schalke.

Schalke have now battled to a league record four goalless draws in a row, and they frustrated Union with another dogged performance.

"It's normal that we have the odd game like this and Schalke played really well. We know every point is important and I am happy that we are still unbeaten this year," said Union captain Christopher Trimmel.

Union remain in the title race ahead of their clash with reigning champions in Munich next weekend. Schalke, meanwhile, are still six points adrift of safety, having not won in the league since last November.

Alcaraz captures Argentina Open title

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Carlos Alcaraz marked his return to action for the first time in almost four months with a 6-3, 7-5 win over Cameron Norrie in the final of the Argentina Open on Sunday.

It was a seventh career title for the 19-year-old Spaniard and first since winning the US Open in September before he went on to become the youngest ever world number one.

"I felt very comfortable playing the final," Alcaraz said.

"I knew that it was going to be really difficult. I started really focussed on what I had to do at the beginning, my game, my level. This is the level that I have to play in finals."

A leg muscle tear at the Paris Masters in November meant Alcaraz missed the start of this season, including the Australian Open won by Novak Djokovic. He also lost his top ranking to the Serb.

World number two Alcaraz took

his head-to-head record over the 12th-ranked Norrie to 4-1 thanks to his 93-minute victory on Sunday.

He turned an early 2-3 deficit into an impressive 6-3, 3-0 lead and he did not face a break point until he failed to serve out the match at 5-3 up.

Down 0-15 while serving at 5-5, the Spaniard unleashed a forehand volley to reassess himself.

The next game was the longest of the match as Alcaraz battled through two deuces before sealing victory with a drop shot as Alcaraz showed his mastery of clay courts had not been diminished by his long absence.

Of his seven titles, five have come on clay and he will get the chance to quickly add another as he heads to Rio next week to defend the trophy he won in 2022.

Alcaraz is the first Spanish player to win the title in Buenos Aires since Rafael Nadal in 2015 and he did it in some style, losing just one set in his four victories all week and that was



in his first match back against Serbia's Laslo Djere.

Sunday's win also meant he was the first teenager to capture the title in the Argentine capital.

Alcaraz had a breakout 2022. As well as becoming the youngest US Open champion since Pete Sampras in 1990, he also defeated Djokovic and compatriot Nadal on back-to-back days on his way to the Madrid Masters crown.

He also claimed the Miami Masters and ATP 500-level trophies in Rio de Janeiro and Barcelona.

"It was a very good year. I achieved my dream, my goal, very quickly. I dealt with it as naturally as possible," said Alcaraz on the eve of Buenos Aires.

"After becoming number one I had to set new goals, new things for the long term, to continue to enjoy myself, continue to improve, because I'm very young and I have a lot of things to improve."

Medvedev downs Sinner in Rotterdam final

AP ■ ROTTERDAM

Former world number one Daniil Medvedev captured his 16th career title on Sunday with a tough three-set victory over in-form Jannik Sinner in the Rotterdam ATP final.

Medvedev triumphed 5-7, 6-2, 6-2 over his Italian opponent who had won the Montpellier tournament last weekend.

The 27-year-old Russian took his career head-to-head record against Sinner to 6-0 and will return to the world top 10 on Monday.

"I first came here in 2018



and I straightaway loved it," said former US Open champion Medvedev.

"I love coming back here. The last two times I played here

were terrible and I'm happy to make it better this year."

On Sunday, Medvedev completed victory on the back of converting five of 12 break points and hitting just 17 unforced errors to Sinner's 30.

"Daniil, congrats to you and your team, winning your first title of this season," said Sinner, who will rise two spots to number 12 in the world in the new rankings.

"I think you're going to win many more this year, so I wish you all the best. It has been two positive weeks for me. I played many matches and I'm very proud."



Fritz wins ATP Delray Beach title

AP ■ MIAMI

Seventh-ranked Taylor Fritz defeated Serbia's Miomir Kecmanovic 6-0, 5-7, 6-2 on Sunday to win the ATP Delray Beach Open, ensuring the American a future world top-five spot.

Fritz, already at a world rankings career high, will jump into the top five on February 27, becoming the first American in such a spot since former world number one Andy Roddick.

"This year was incredible after losing in the first and second rounds every single year

I've been here," he said. "I couldn't be happier with coming back and having this result." The 25-year-old Californian captured his fourth consecutive ATP final and improved to 5-5 overall in tour championship singles matches.

Fritz's trophy run also includes last March at Indian Wells, last June for his second Eastbourne title and last October at the Japan Open.

Top seed Fritz improved to 3-1 in tour-level matches against Kecmanovic, having beaten him last year at Indian Wells and Miami.

Solbakken fires Roma third, Juve win at Spezia

AP ■ ROME

Ola Solbakken made an immediate impact on his full Roma debut by scoring the only goal in Sunday's 1-0 win over lowly Verona which pushed Jose Mourinho's team up to third in Serie A.

Norway forward Solbakken has barely featured since moving to Roma in January, but his well-taken low strike on the stroke of half-time was just enough to win a tight contest.

"We had great spirit and we played really well against a team it's very difficult to create against," said Mourinho, who was annoyed at criticism from fans at his team's performance.

"I'm disappointed people aren't

giving them credit for the work we are all doing in very difficult circumstances. Either they don't understand or they don't want to understand."

Mourinho said before the match that he was forced to play Solbakken as Paulo Dybala and Lorenzo Pellegrini had to sit out the match with the hope they will be available for Thursday's Europa League play-off decider with Salzburg.

And Tammy Abraham, who had been suffering with the flu pre-match, had to go to hospital after an accidental boot in the face from teammate Gianluca Mancini left him needing stitches in his left eyelid.

But the 24-year-old Solbakken made sure that Roma would finish



the weekend in the Champions League places, above AC Milan on goal difference.

Roma also lead Lazio by two points, knocking their local rivals out of the Champions League places after they had briefly moved into the top four following a 2-0 win at Salernitana earned with a Ciro Immobile double.

A second defeat since the turn of the year leaves Verona inside the bottom three, two points behind Spezia who were beaten 2-0 by Juventus.

However they will be encouraged in their fight for survival by another strong performance which probably deserved more reward.

Juve would be second, level on 47 points with Inter Milan had they

not been slapped with a 15-point penalty last month for what the Italian Football Federation ruled was illicit transfer activity designed to artificially boost their balance sheet.

Instead they are seventh and awaiting a decision on their appeal against that punishment, Moise Kean and substitute Angel Di Maria scoring the goals in each half which claimed the points at the Stadio Alberto Picco.

Defeat was harsh on Spezia, who are waiting for Leonardo Semplici to become their new coach after sacking Luca Gotti, as they had Juve on the back foot for large chunks of the match and were twice denied by super Mattia Perin saves in the second half.

MANDHANA, D/L HELP INDIAN EVES ADVANCE TO SEMIS

PTI ■ GOEBERHA

Vice-captain Smriti Mandhana stood out with a career-best 56-ball 87 as India entered the semifinals of the Women's T20 World Cup with a five-run win over Ireland in a rain-affected match here on Monday.

On a surface that was far from ideal for batting and where most struggled to force the pace, Mandhana led by example with nine delectable fours and three sixes to help India reach 155 for six in the stipulated 20 overs.

In reply, Ireland got off to a disastrous start as opener Amy Hunter (1) was run out before Renuka Singh bowled Orla Prendergast for nought.

Reeling at 2/1 in the very first over, Ireland recovered to reach 54 for two in the ninth over, when the heavens opened up and forced the players inside. Play did not resume thereafter.

At that point, Ireland needed need 102 runs in 70 balls and were five runs behind the Duckworth/Lewis par score of 59, paving the way for India's victory.

When the game was interrupted, Gaby Lewis and skipper Laura Delany were batting on 32 and 17 respectively.

India are set to take on defending champions Australia in the last four stage.

This is India's third successive semifinal appearance following the one in 2018 and runners-up finish in 2020.

With the win, last edition's runners-up India bounced back from the 11-run defeat to England in their previous match.

Earlier, opting to bat after skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (13) won the toss, India were off to a fine start with



the opening duo of Mandhana and Shafali Verma putting on 62 runs in just under 10 overs at St George's Park.

But Shafali once again got out after getting a start, caught by Amy Hunter off the bowling of captain Delany, who introduced herself into the attack after the frontline bowlers failed to get the team a breakthrough.

Harmanpreet joined Mandhana in the middle, and the two looked to build on a partnership. Playing strokes turned out to be difficult on a surface that appeared to be a bit on the slower side.

The slow nature of the wicket notwithstanding, Mandhana maintained an excellent strike rate and reached her half-century in style, hitting leg-spinner Cara Murray for a six over deep mid-wicket.

Mandhana was lucky to have survive a scare just before getting to her fifty, but Arlene Kelly could not complete the catch after the batter top-edged a tossed-up delivery from Murray towards mid-wicket.

Mandhana then struck two successive fours off Georgina Dempsey, before sending Delany over the corner for another maximum.

Ireland came back with the wickets of Harmanpreet and Richa Ghosh in successive balls, but Mandhana continued to attack the bowlers and hit two more boundaries off Kelly before giving the same treatment to Delany, striking her for a four and a six to help India inch towards 150.

A century was on the cards, but Mandhana's brilliant innings came to an end as she tried to take the aerial route. Jemimah Rodrigues struck two fours in the final over, before getting off in the last ball of the India innings for a 12-ball 19.



New Zealand stay alive, Pak & SL lose

AP ■ PAARL

The battle to reach the Women's T20 World Cup semi-finals will go down to the last group match after New Zealand kept their hopes alive with a 102-run rout of Sri Lanka at Boland Park in Paarl on Sunday.

"We've given ourselves a chance, even it's only a small, tiny chance," said New Zealand captain Sophie Devine.

Australia are assured of winning Group One but the other qualifiers from the group will only be known after South Africa play Bangladesh at Newlands in Cape Town on Tuesday. New Zealand moved into second place, but will be overtaken if South Africa beat Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka, who won their first two matches, finished level on points with New Zealand but were eliminated on net run rate. West Indies beat Pakistan in Group Two in a result that ensured that England would qualify.

That New Zealand would still be in the reckoning seemed impossible when they lost heavily against Australia and South Africa.

But the White Ferns stormed back with an 81-run win against Bangladesh before turning on the power on Sunday, scoring 162 for three and then bowling out Sri Lanka for 60.

"We spoke about scoring 160 even though it was a tougher wicket than Newlands (in Cape Town)," said Devine. That was achieved through half-centuries by Suzie Bates (56) and Amelia Kerr (66) after Bernadine Beuzidenhout set the tone with an aggressive 32 off 20 balls.

"We always knew 160 was going to be competitive and then the bowlers were fantastic," said Devine.

"It was a tough day," said Sri Lanka captain Chamari Athapaththu.

"I have only a few experienced players in the team. We learnt a lot of things today."



We failed the examination of India: McDonald

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Australia chief coach Andrew McDonald made no bones about his team's capitulation in the second innings of the second Test here, saying they "failed the examination" of India.

Australia, who seemed to be shaping up well for the challenge with 61 for one at stumps on day 2, lost nine second-innings wickets for just 48 runs to be all out for 113. India then reached the winning target of 115 for the loss of four wickets to take a 2-0 lead and retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"Our methods are going to be critiqued, and rightfully so," McDonald was quoted as saying by Australian Associated Press on Monday.

"At the end of day two, if you said our preparation was good (with Australia on 61/1), you'd probably have a different slant on it, but within an hour (on day 3) then people start to critique what happened in the past..."

"And day three, as well as we could have been and we failed under the examination of India," added McDonald, who replaced Justin Langer as head coach after Australia's 4-0 win in the Ashes.

The coach said that as far as he understood, the preparatory camp in Bengaluru on turning tracks had provided adequate preparation for the spin test.

"I still wouldn't have changed what we did leading in, there's no doubt about that," McDonald said on Monday.

"I think they (squad) had really good preparation in Bangalore, so there's not any excuses," added the coach. He also said that some players diverted from their time-tested game plan, which resulted in the second humiliating defeat.

"There were some people who went clearly away from the game plan that made them successful over a period of time and that's for us to own as a collective. We've got to be better than that, that's the bottom line, we've got to own it and we are not here to shy away from the fact that wasn't good enough."

The third Test in Indore from March 1, could see Australia usher in major changes in the side, especially with pace bowler Mitchell Starc and all-rounder Cameron Green expected to be fit after missing the first two games.

Cummins flies home, Hazlewood out of India tour

AP ■ SYDNEY

Australia captain Pat Cummins left the tour of India on Monday to return home because of a family illness, but will return in time for next week's third Test.

"Pat Cummins has flown home for personal reasons due to a serious family illness," said a Cricket Australia statement.

"He will return to India later this week to rejoin preparations for the third Test in Indore. We ask media to respect his privacy."

Cricket Australia announced Monday that pace bowler Josh Hazlewood had been ruled out of the rest of the tour with a persistent Achilles tendon injury and would return home.

A spokesman denied Australian media reports that injured opening batsman David Warner would immediately return home after fracturing his elbow and being concussed in



the first innings at Delhi.

"Just to be clear, David Warner is not leaving the tour at this stage," the spokesman said. "Any squad changes will be announced once medical staff and selectors finalise them."

Australia coach Andrew McDonald had better news Monday about Cameron Green and Mitchell Starc.

McDonald declared all-rounder Green 100 percent fit

for the third Test and said that Starc was also in line to play.

Both have been recovering from serious finger injuries and Green was close to being available for the Delhi Test.

McDonald said Starc had been available, despite not being 100 per cent fit, but Australia opted for a third spinner in Matthew Kuhnemann, who made his debut. The third Test in Indore starts on March 1.

Thrilled to find so many Aussies in WPL: CA CEO Hockley

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Cricket Australia CEO Nick Hockley is thrilled that as many as 14 Australians will be taking part in the inaugural Women's Premier League (WPL) to be held in Mumbai next month.

The first edition of WPL, with team valuation of more than Rs 4600 crore and broadcast deal upwards of Rs 950 crore, has already started grabbing eye balls.

"We are so excited to see rapid growth of women's cricket in India and to see full stadium in our last series here is absolutely fantastic and something we had been advocating in Australian cricket," Hockley, who was present at the Ferozshah Kotla during the second India versus Australia Test, told PTI during an interaction.

Ashleigh Gardner, with a Rs 3.20 crore (USD 558,000) deal with Gujarat Giants, is the highest paid Australian star in WPL. "We are absolutely delighted to see WPL starting. It's a great parameter to see how many Australian players are playing in WPL and to have 40 per cent of the Aussie represent the overseas players in WPL, which is a great result."

"And equally in terms of T20 cricket, good number of Aussies are playing in IPL, it is great to see how we are going globally," Hockley stated during the conversation on the opening day of the second Test.

While the Indian men haven't been allowed to play in franchise based T20 leagues across the globe, top woman cricketers like Harmanpreet Kaur, Jemimah Rodrigues, Deepti Sharma, Shafali Verma and Richa Ghosh have all plied their trade in WBBL.

Hockley is confident that it won't stop. "More opportunity that we

have for our female players is just absolutely brilliant. There is now an established pathway to play professional cricket for female cricketers which is so exciting," he said.

"We are proud that WBBL has been a leader and standard of cricket has been exceptionally high. So we would like to see as many Indian players playing in WBBL in foreseeable future."

There are too many men's T20 leagues being played across the globe and Aussie cricketers are the most sought after. But Hockley is against putting a cap on their participation although playing for Australia remains paramount.

"I think it is exciting to see the number of opportunities for cricketers coming through and main thing for us is Baggy Green that remains the pinnacle. As we have demonstrated this season that all players are playing BBL this season," he said.

Clarke lists out 'major, major mistakes' committed by Oz so far

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Australia's wretched run on the tour of India so far has been filled with "major, major mistakes", reckons former captain Michael Clarke.

Clarke feels the biggest mistake Australia made was not playing a tour game ahead of the four Test series that began February 9. Instead, Pat Cummins chose to simulate Indian conditions back home before having a short camp near Bengaluru ahead of the series opener in Nagpur.

Two weeks later, the visitors are 0-2 down in the series and have already lost a shot at regaining the Border-Gavaskar trophy. "I'm not surprised by what I'm seeing because we didn't have a tour game. Major, major, major

mistake. There should have been at least one game over there to get used to the conditions," Clarke said on Monday on Big Sports Breakfast.

The Australian batters' inability to play top-quality spin has been thoroughly expose in the first two Tests.

In Delhi, they tried to sweep their way out of trouble but that play failed miserably. Apart from that, another major mistake, according to Clarke, was not playing Travis Head in the series opener.

The southpaw top-scored for Australia in the second innings with a 43 off 46 balls before his team collapsed to 113 all out. It was also the first time he opened in Tests.

"Selection for the first Test,



major, major mistake. Second Test, blokes sweeping, we saw enough of that the first Test match. They're not the right conditions to sweep when you start your innings. And they're never going to be the right conditions to reverse sweep against the spin at the start of your innings," said Clarke.

Half of the side fell to sweep or reverse sweep on a track with low bounce.

"It doesn't matter how many support staff there are around, you're playing for Australia. Surely as a batsman playing at the highest level, you calculate that risk versus reward."

"Against spin bowling on a pitch like that, you would say my swim between the flags' is play straight, hit with spin."

"Let's just stick to those two theories. Straight bat... I'm going to be playing every single ball with the spin," said Clarke.

He also added that Australia should have learned from India on how to bat in spin-friendly conditions.

"It's like we're not watching India bat," he said. "Why would you not look at that example and go, 'OK, these guys know the conditions so well, and this is how they're playing'. Why would we try and do something different when they have been so good?"

"The game was there for us to win if we make 200... And we were 1-60," he said referring to the dramatic batting collapse with Australia losing nine wickets for 52 runs.

Jamieson ruled out for months

AP ■ MOUNT MAUNGANU

Injured fast bowler Kyle Jamieson was on Monday ruled out of cricket for a lengthy spell in another blow for New Zealand following their 267-run first Test drubbing by England.

Coach Gary Stead confirmed that Jamieson had been diagnosed with a back stress fracture and will undergo surgery this week, with a minimum recovery time of four months.

The 28-year-old had been poised to return from a long layoff for the Test at Mount Maunganui, but could only watch as England consigned the home side to an eighth successive Test without a win.

"It's been a challenging and difficult time for Kyle and a big loss for us," Stead said.



Jamieson, whose absence has coincided with the side's poor run, had been "fantastic" when part of the New Zealand team, Stead said.

"We will know more in about three to four months about what that end prognosis looks like for him," he added.

Jamieson's pace and bounce was missed by New Zealand, whose inexperienced attack struggled to contain England's aggressive batting in the day-night Test at the Bay Oval.

Stead confirmed pace bowler Matt Henry will join the squad for the second Test starting in Wellington on Friday after attending the birth of his first child.

Seamer Jacob Duffy and legspinner Ish Sodhi have been released from the squad.

Top Indian wrestlers again opt out of int'l meet

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Top Indian wrestlers continued to opt out of big events as the likes of Vinesh Phogat and Bajrang Punia have decided to give the upcoming 2nd Ranking Series Ibrahim-Moustafa tournament a miss.

It is the second time in the month that Vinesh, Bajrang, Ravi Dahiya, Deepak Punia, Anshu Malik, Sangeeta Phogat and Sangita Mor have decided to sit out of an important tournament, to be held in Alexandria, Egypt from February 23 to 26. The top grapplers had earlier pulled out of the Zagreb Open, saying they are not ready for the competition.

The Mary Kom-headed



oversight committee managing the WFI affairs cleared a contingent of 27 Indian wrestlers for the upcoming tournament.

The event will be crucial for gaining ranking points for better seeding at the Senior Asian Championships 2023 and the Senior World Championships

2023. The Indian team consists of nine freestyle, eight women and 10 greco-roman wrestlers, besides 16 coaches and support staff.

The 27 wrestlers will also include three Target Olympics Podium Scheme (TOPS) grapplers — Ashu (67kg GR), Bhateri

(65kg women) and Sujett (65kg FS).

TEAM

Greco-Roman: Manjeet (55kg), Vikram Kurade (60kg), Karanjeet (67kg), Nitin (63kg), Ashu (67kg), Ankit Gulia (72kg), Sajan (77kg), Rohit Dahiya (82kg), Narinder Cheema (97kg), Naveen (130kg).

Women: Sushma Shokeen (55kg), Sito (57kg), Simran (59kg), Sumitra (62kg), Bhateri (65kg), Radhika (68kg), Reetika (72kg), Kiran (76kg).

Freestyle: Udit (57kg), Pankaj (61kg), Sujett (65kg), Sagar Jaglan (74kg), Pardeep (79kg), Jonty Kumar (86kg), Prithviraj Patil (92kg), Sahil (97kg), Dinesh (125kg).