

WORLD 5
SOLDIERS FREED IN RUSSIA,
UKRAINE PRISONER SWAP**MONEY 6**
INDIA WILL GET INTO GLOBAL BOND
INDICES ON OWN TERMS: OFFICIAL**SPORT 8**
UAE SET TO HOST
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sunday pioneer

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SC gets 5 judges as Govt keeps pledge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after promising the Supreme Court that the Collegium's pending recommendations for the elevation of five High Court judges to the apex court will be cleared soon, the Centre on Saturday notified the appointments. The five judges elevated to the apex court are Justices Pankaj Mithal, Sanjay Karol, PV Sanjay Kumar, Manoj Misra and Ahsanuddin Amanullah.

Law Minister Kiren Rijiju tweeted to announce the appointment of the judges.

Justices Pankaj Mithal, Sanjay Karol and PV Sanjay Kumar are Chief Justices of Rajasthan, Patna and Manipur High Courts respectively. Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah is a judge of the Patna High Court and Justice Manoj Misra is a judge of Allahabad High Court.

On Friday, the Supreme Court had expressed displeasure and pulled up the Central Government for delaying the appointments of the five judges, who were recommended by Collegium on December 13, last year. A Bench of Justices Sanjay Kishan Kaul and Abhay S Oka had given the Centre an ultimatum to process the appointments within ten days, after Attorney General N Venkataramani had submitted that they would be done "soon".

When the Bench insisted for a specific timeline, the AG said that appointment warrant



will be issued on Sunday.

Justice Pankaj Mithal, currently serving as the Chief Justice of Rajasthan High Court, was Chief Justice of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court. His parent High Court is the Allahabad High Court. Justice Sanjay Karol is currently the Chief Justice of Patna High Court and was Chief Justice of Tripura High Court. His parent High Court is the Himachal Pradesh High Court.

Justice PV Sanjay Kumar is Chief Justice of Manipur High Court and served as a judge of Punjab & Haryana High Court. His parent High Court is Telangana. Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah is presently a judge of the Patna High Court and was a judge at Andhra Pradesh High Court before being transferred back to Patna, his parent High Court. Justice Manoj Misra has been a judge of the Allahabad High Court for the past 12 years.

Currently, the Supreme Court has 34 judges and there

are seven vacancies. With these five new judges, its strength will up go to 32, with just 2 vacancies. On January 31, the SC Collegium had recommended the names of Allahabad High Court Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal and Gujarat High Court Chief Justice Aravind Kumar for elevation to the Supreme Court.

Public is 'malik', nobody can give warning: Rijiju

Prayagraj: A day after the Supreme Court warned of action for any delay in clearing transfer and appointment of judges, Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju on Saturday said, "Public is 'malik' (master) of this country and we are servants. We all are here for service and the Constitution is our guide.... The country will be governed under the guidance of the Constitution and wishes of the public. Nobody can give warning to anyone."

India's image unaffected by Adani's FPO pullout: FM

PNS ■ MUMBAI

India's economic image is not affected due to Adani Group's recent decision to pull out ₹20,000 crore FPO amid allegations of financial wrongdoings, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday.

The Finance Minister said there has been an accretion of USD 8 billion to the forex reserves in the last two days alone. "...Our macroeconomic fundamentals or our economy's image, none of which has been affected. Yes, FPOs (follow-on public offers) come in, and FIIs (foreign institutional investors) get out," Sitharaman told reporters here.

The Minister said there are "fluctuations" in every market but the accretion over the last few days establishes the fact that the perception of both India and its inherent strengths is intact.

Answering a broader question on the allegations against Adani Group, she said the country's independent financial sector regulators will be looking into the aspect and added that capital markets watchdog Securities and Exchange Board of India has the wherewithal to ensure stability in markets.

"...For keeping the market and the markets regulated in prime condition, the Sebi is the authority. And it has the wherewithal to keep that prime condition," she said.

The FM also said that the RBI has already spoken out on the issue, referring to Friday's statement, which said the bank-



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with MoS for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary addresses a press conference in Mumbai on Saturday

PTI

ing sector is resilient and stable.

About ten days ago, US-based short seller Hindenberg Research made a slew of allegations on the corporate governance front against Adani Group. The Ahmedabad-based group has denied all the allegations and termed it as a calculated attack on India. It has cancelled the FPO even after managing subscriptions to it.

Finance Secretary TV Somanathan on Saturday stood by his comment on the controversy where he called it a storm in a teacup, clarifying that this is in the context of macroeconomic terms and the stability of India's public financial institutions.

Meanwhile, on the decision to convert outstanding dues into equity at Vodafone Idea, Somanathan said the transaction is being done as a package for all telcos.

He said the Government share will be held by the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) where the stake will be considered as a public shareholder.

DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said the price has been taken at ₹10 despite the Vodafone Idea shares trading lower on bourses because, as per laws, preferential allotments have to happen at the face value of a share.

The Finance Ministry officials present at the meet also made it clear that the tweaks on taxation in the insurance front will not impact the policy agenda of deepening penetration and clarified that there was sufficient data to suggest that investments were masquerading as insurance premiums due to which a decision was taken to tax the same.

Steps in place to address excess volatility: Sebi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a raging controversy over a meltdown in Adani Group stocks, regulator Sebi on Saturday said it is committed to ensuring the stock market's integrity and all necessary surveillance measures are in place to address any excessive volatility in individual shares.

Without naming Adani Group specifically, the capital markets watchdog said in a statement that unusual price movement in the stocks of a business conglomerate has been observed in the past week. Officials confirmed that the statement has been issued in the wake of the Adani matter only.

"As part of its mandate, Sebi seeks to maintain orderly and efficient functioning of the market and has put in place a set of well-defined, publicly available surveillance measures (including the ASM framework) to address excessive volatility in specific stocks. This mechanism gets automatically triggered under certain conditions of price volatility in any stock," Sebi said.

BSE and NSE have put three Adani group companies under their short-term additional surveillance measure (ASM).

TN firm linked to vision loss, death in US told to stop making eye drops

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tamil Nadu-based Global Pharma Healthcare, which is facing allegations that its eye drop was linked to vision loss of five people and death of a person in the US, has been asked to stop manufacturing all ophthalmic products till the inquiry is completed in the matter, officials said on Saturday.

Officials in the Union Health Ministry said the direction came after the manufacturing plant of the Global Health Pharma was inspected by Indian drug regulatory bodies. A three-member team each from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) and the State Drug Controller visited the plant in Tamil Nadu's Kancheepuram, 40 km from Chennai, on Friday after the company recalled the eye drop.

The teams have also collected samples of eye drop — Artificial Tears — which were exported. The eye drops are



not sold in India.

According to an official report, the joint investigation at the firm's manufacturing site at Thirupurur in Tamil Nadu's Kancheepuram was conducted on February 3 by the team of senior central and state drugs officials, under the supervision of Tamil Nadu's Director of Drugs Control and CDSCO's Assistant Drugs Controller (South Zone).

During investigation, it was found that the firm has exported two consignments of 24 batches of Artificial Tears to the USA which were manufactured in 2021 and 2022.

Sharjeel among 11 'scapegoats' freed in Okhla violence case

STAFF REPORTRE ■ NEW DELHI

A court here on Saturday discharged 11 people, including student activists Sharjeel Imam and Asif Iqbal Tanha, in the Jamia Nagar violence case, saying as the Delhi Police was unable to apprehend the actual perpetrators, it booked the accused as "scapegoats".

The court, however, ordered framing of charges against one of the accused, Mohammad Ilyas.

"Marshalling the facts as brought forth from a perusal of the chargesheet and three supplementary chargesheets, this court cannot but arrive at the conclusion that the police were unable to apprehend the actual perpetrators behind the commission of the offence, but surely managed to rope the persons herein as scapegoats," Additional Sessions Judge Arul Varma said.

An FIR was lodged in connection with the violence



that erupted after a clash between police and people protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in the Jamia Nagar area here December 2019.

The judge said there were admittedly scores of protesters at the site and some anti-social elements within the crowd could have created an environment of disruption and havoc.

"However, the moot question remains — whether the accused persons herein were even prima facie complicit in taking part in that mayhem? The answer is an unequivocal no," he added.

Modi to open India's largest copter making unit in K'taka tomorrow

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of rapid indigenisation in defence manufacturing, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday will dedicate a helicopter manufacturing factory in Karnataka. It will produce light utility helicopters designed within the country.

Giving details here on Saturday, Defence Ministry officials said Modi will dedicate the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) factory at Tumakuru. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and senior officials of the Ministry of Defence will be present on the occasion.

The Prime Minister had laid the foundation stone of the plant in 2016.

The Greenfield Helicopter Factory, spread across 615 acres, is planned with a vision to become a one-stop solution for all helicopter requirements of the country.

It is India's largest heli-



copter manufacturing facility and will initially produce Light Utility Helicopters (LUHs).

The LUH is an indigenously designed and developed 3-tonne class, single engine multipurpose utility helicopter with unique features of high maneuverability. Initially, this factory will produce around 30 helicopters per year and can be enhanced to 60 and then 90 per year in a phased manner. The first LUH has been flight tested and is ready for unveiling.

ED seizes heroin, arms in 10 raids on Punjab border dist

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Searches by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case linked to a Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act case on 10 different premises in different villages of Tarn Taran district in Punjab led to the recovery and seizure of 2.2 kg of heroin and other contraband items weighing about 14 kg of narcotics.

In addition, the ED also recovered documents of properties besides two rifles, three pistols and live ammunition from the premises of the suspects.

The ED had launched the search operations on Friday at 10 premises in Sheron, Naushera Pannuan and Bugha villages of Tarn Taran district.

The agency searched the business and residential premises of Skattar Singh, alias Laddi, Gajjan Singh, Makhan Singh, other members of their family and some other associates under the



Prevention of Money Laundering Act, officials said.

"During the course of search, various incriminating evidence was recovered and seized relating to numerous immovable properties worth crores of rupees in the names of these accused persons, members of their family and their associates," the agency said in a statement.

A few packets of psychotropic substance appearing to be opium and its derivative products, including heroin, were also recovered from the residential premises of Skattar Singh and his family at Sheron village.

Orphans will study free of cost in DU: VC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi University Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh on Saturday stated that thousands of orphan children, including those who lost their parents to COVID-19, will get an opportunity to pursue higher education free of cost with the university's new initiative to reserve seats for them.

The vice chancellor said the university has been responsible for providing education to the students seeking higher education without any discrimination on any grounds.

The varsity decided to reserve seats in its UG and PG programmes for orphans under supernumerary quota from the next academic year.

Veteran singer Vani found dead at Chennai home

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ CHENNAI

Vani Jairam, the versatile playback singer who strode over the South Indian film industry for more than five decades, is no more.

Jairam (77) was found dead in her residence in Chennai on Saturday morning by her maid servant Kalaivani. Chennai Police, who rushed to her home on being informed about her death, held a preliminary inquiry and shifted the mortal remains to Government Hospital for autopsy.

A case under sections of unnatural death has been



registered by the police. Last week the Government of India had honoured Vani Jairam with Padma Bhushan, the third highest civilian award of the country.

'AI could help deliver personalised cancer treatment'

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In good news in the cancer care segment, a team of researchers have leveraged artificial intelligence (AI) technology to identify genes critical to a cancer cell's survival, and could help deliver personalised cancer patient treatments.

They analysed different types of cancer cells to understand different gene dependencies for identifying the genes, the study said.

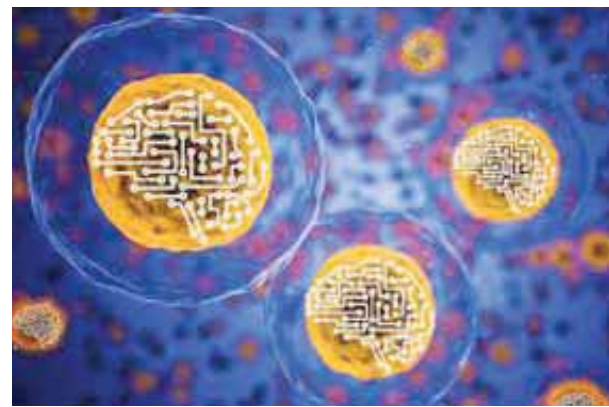
Researchers at the University of Sussex, UK, have done this by developing a prediction algorithm that works out which genes are essential in the cell, by analysing the genetic changes in the tumour.

This can be used to identify actionable targets that in time could guide oncologists to personalise cancer patient

treatments, the study said.

"Our vision is to take advantage of the decreasing cost of DNA sequencing and to harness the power of AI to understand cancer cell differences and what they mean for the individual patient's treatment. "Through our research, we were able to identify cell-specific gene dependencies using only the DNA sequence and RNA levels in that cell, which are easily and cheaply obtainable from tumour biopsy samples," said Dr Frances Pearl, Senior Lecturer in Bioinformatics at the University of Sussex.

"This is an incredibly exciting step in our research which means that we can now work to improve the technology so that it can be offered to oncologists and help in the treatment pathways for their patients," said Pearl.



Cancer treatments are primarily prescribed on the basis of the location and type of cancer. Genetic differences in tumours can make standard cancer treatments ineffective.

Using a personalised approach to guide treatment could improve life expectancy,

quality of life and reduce unnecessary side effects of cancer patients, the study said.

In each cell, there are around 20,000 genes that contain the information needed to make proteins. Around 1,000 of those genes are essential, meaning they are required for the cell

to survive.

When normal cells become cancer cells, oncogenes, or genes with the potential to cause cancer, become activated and tumour suppressor genes become inactivated, causing a rewiring of the cell.

This causes the cell to become dependent on a new set of genes to survive, and this can then be exploited to kill the cancer cells. By using this new AI technology to target protein products of tumour-specific dependent genes, cancer cells can be killed, leaving the normal cells which are not dependent on these genes relatively unharmed, the study said.

Although dependencies can be determined using intensive laboratory techniques, it is costly and time consuming and would not be feasible to analyse all tumour samples in this way, the study said.

Opportunity for selected students to participate in schemes

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that nation's upliftment is possible only through the upliftment of villages. It is necessary to make development a mass movement. We will work with the youth power to make Madhya Pradesh self-reliant. The youth have to take the responsibility of changing the lives of the people. If there is passion, nothing is impossible. The public should get the benefit of the leadership potential of the youth.

The youth who have completed the leadership training course will work to deliver the government's schemes to the public. Youth associated with Madhya Pradesh Jan Abhiyan Parishad have done wonderful work in various fields. They are expected to play such a role in the future as well. Various facilities will also be provided to the youth associated with the Community Leadership Training Programme. Chouhan today said at the Community Leadership Youth Samagam under the Chief Minister's Community Leadership Capacity Development Programme (CMCLDP) at Bhopal's Jamboree Ground that the Jan Abhiyan Parishad will be the nodal agency for the Community Leadership Training Programme. This course will be considered at par with the students of other regular courses of the government. The students of this course will get the benefit of schemes of higher education and other departments. In order to ensure participation of

the selected students of the Community Leadership Training Scheme in the schemes, arrangements will be made for community engagement/internship projects in the concerned departments. Students will be authorised to evaluate the schemes of the government. They will also be given honorarium for this work. Chouhan said that the country is moving forward under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. A glorious and powerful India is coming up. India now talks eye to eye with the countries of the world, not by bowing down. There was a time even small countries challenged India. The situation has changed after the year 2014. Madhya Pradesh is also changing. Madhya Pradesh will change further

with public co-operation. The support of the society especially the youth is must for development. The Chief Minister said that after listening to the views of some youths in this gathering today, I can see a yearning and fire for development in them. Man is a part of God, son of Amrit. Nothing is impossible for him, just self-confidence is needed. Defining youth, Chouhan said that not just the people in the age group of 15 to 35 considered youth, but youth are those who are fast, have fire and have dreams in their eyes. If they are determined, they show it by completing their work. In the year 2019, Chouhan termed the decision of the then government to discontinue the leadership training programme as being against the youth. The

Chief Minister said that now no one will be able to stop this useful programme. On the development of Madhya Pradesh, Chief Minister Chouhan said that the state's growth rate is 19.7 percent, which is more than all other states. It is mentioned in the report of the Government of India. Speaking at the event Margaret Gwada, Chief UNICEF Madhya Pradesh congratulated the Chief Minister for mobilising young people as change makers. She applauded young people who had been selected as interns and said congratulations for being selected. You are change makers and have to mobilize communities, and communicate that you learn so that you can influence your peers and community.



Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses a Yuva Samagam programme at Jamboree ground in Bhopal on Saturday. Pioneer photo

Man caught for cheating for admission in nursing college

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Cyber crime team arrested a man from Narmadapuram who cheated in the name of providing admission in Nursing College, accused of collecting lakhs of rupees in the name of admission fees of the students. The accused Balam Saha used to transfer money from students to their accounts through UPI. In the name of admission of students in Nursing College through UPI in different installments The accused who cheated the complainant to the tune of Rs1.2 lakh was arrested from the district Narmadapuram. On January 14, 2023, the applicant had given a written complaint application in the Cyber Crime



Branch District Bhopal that through contacted mobile number 7000384794 to get brother admission in Nursing College, Bhopal, which gave me the admission of Nursing College. The caller posed as an employee of a nursing college and asked to deposit money in advance for admission, then he cheated a total of Rs 120000 through UPI in different installments.

Police registered a case under section 419 and 420 of the IPC. One accused was arrested from Narmadapuram district and Android mobile phones, SIM cards were seized. Meanwhile crime Branch Bhopal arrested a bookie and recovered betting slips and Rs 15,500 in cash were recovered from the possession of the accused. The accused used to

write the number for betting in the register through mobile phones from the customers. Action is being taken against the accused after getting information about their connection with bookies in Bhopal. The team of the crime branch searched for the criminals and reached Nariyalkheda and detained a person who was taking betting slips and money from mobile phones and visitors. The accused was identified as Faraz Sheikh. Mobile phone and cash of Rs 15,550 of a Redmi company were duly seized by the police. On the spot, when the accused was questioned about betting, he told that he takes and books betting slips through mobile phones. The police registered a case under section 41(1)(a) CrPC.

Union Budget 2023 was organised at the UG campus of the Prestige Institute

PNS ■ INDORE

A special session on Union Budget 2023 was organised at the UG campus of the Prestige Institute of Management & Research, Indore, to enlighten the students about the union budget, various economic reforms discussed in it and the role of budget in economic and industry growth. The panel speaker Kamlesh Bhandari, Former Dean of Commerce Department at Devi Ahilya Vishwa Vidyalaya talked on how the Union budget will add to the economic development of the country. He further emphasized on the Resource allocation among different strata of the society. According to him, the focus of the government has been on key aspects like self-reliance, Make in India, empowering youth and healthy India.

CA Niranjan Lahoti connected the topics of Budget with the student's curriculum topics to make them understand the concepts better

CA. Apurva Mehta explained the differences and benefits of New Tax Regime and Old Tax Regime. He further covered the concepts related to Section 54, 54F, 44 AD, 44 ADA and Section 194. Mehta also talked about the accelerating growth of MSMEs and Credit Guarantee Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises

(CGTMSE) scheme, provisions related to tax collection at source, updated returns within 2 years for correcting errors, increasing tax deduction limit on Employer's contribution to NPS account of State Govt. Employees, Tax reliefs to persons with disability and other provisions. The key economic agenda included concepts of GDP, Purchasing Power Parity, contribution to the agricultural sector, why people refrain from filing income tax returns, Foreign exchange rate differences, imports-exports etc. CA Niranjan Lahoti connected the topics of Budget with the student's curriculum topics to make them understand the concepts better. PIMR UG Director, S Ramen Iyer and other faculty members of Finance and Management also attended the session.

Two die, as their car falls into a pit in Omkara Sewania

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Two men died after their car fell in a pit at Omkara Sewania late in the night on Thursday; two were relatives and were returning home after a booze party, Sukhisewania police have started an investigation. The two were badly trapped inside the car which got damaged completely and cutters were used to cut the car and remove the two who died in the accident. The deceased was identified as Manoj Gaur (36) and Kallu Gaur (30). The driver who was driving the car lost control over the car which led to the accident. Manoj used to work as a farmer while Kallu used to work with a borewell machine. In the initial investigation police have found that Manoj had gone out telling that he is going to Bhopal and later picked Kallu from Neemkheda Berasia. The two had drinks and on their way back at around 2 in the night met with an accident. Their car fell in a pit and the reason remained unknown. The deceased Kallu married five years ago and is survived with two kids and wife. Manoj is survived by two children and his wife. Police said that possibly the driver lost sight and later his car turned turtle. After the preliminary investigation the body was sent for the post mortem. The car was hit by some other vehicle is unclear and would be investigated and further investigation.



Indian Police Services (IPS) officers pose for a group photograph during Indian Police Service Meet at Kushabhau Thackeray International Convention Center in Bhopal on Saturday. Pioneer photo

Reiki Healing to boost the recovery of cancer patients

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

World Cancer Day targets misinformation to raises awareness and reduces stigma. Multiple initiatives are run on World Cancer Day to show support for those affected by cancer. When it comes to cancer treatment, most people think of radiation and chemotherapy and while treating the physical causes of cancer is an obvious part of treatment, alternative treatments that address the spiritual, Mental and emotional needs of cancer patients have begun increasingly popular at cancer treatment centers and programs. The benefits of Reiki are most effective when they accompany traditional cancer treatments. Reiki, a Japanese Healing technique and its roots are connected with India, has become a concept of curiosity for cancer patients everywhere. Studies and anecdotal evidence have shown that, Reiki can be used to encourage healing and provide other benefits also. In fact, some studies have even explored the effect of Reiki on patients who are



undergoing cancer treatment concurrently. These studies have found that, although Reiki is not a substitute for other cancer treatments, but it enhance these treatments and offer a number of benefits to patients as they deal with the symptoms and stresses of cancer. Ayush Gupta who is the world's youngest Reiki Healer, Renowned Celebrity Tarot Card Reader & Numerologist, Started an initiative with his team to do absolutely free REIKI HEALING for Cancer Patients who are actually in need and cannot afford Alternate Healing Therapies. He says that 'as Reiki Helped healed most difficult situations of his life'. His Family faced difficult times when his mother got diagnosed with throat cancer.

Chouhan reviews paddy procurement

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan has said that paddy should be purchased from the remaining farmers who have not been able to supply paddy within the period prescribed for paddy procurement. Ensure prompt payment to farmers whose payment is pending in paddy procurement and strict action should be taken against service co-operative societies and self-help groups that indulge in irregularities in paddy procurement. Chouhan was reviewing the procurement of Kharif marketing year 2022-23. Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Protection Minister Bisahul Singh, Commissioner Co-operative Alok Singh, Director Food and Civil Supplies Deepak Saxena and other officers were present in the meeting held at Samatva Bhawan at the CM's residence. It was informed that paddy worth Rs 9 thousand 427 crore 60 lakh was purchased from 6 lakh 46 thousand 279 farmers, out of which payment of Rs. 214 crore 20 lakh to 10 thousand 319 farmers is under process.

BALCO's journey: a story of growth, determination, and transformation

STAFF REPORTER ■ BHOPAL

Aluminium is a strategic metal, vital for the growth and progress of any nation. To make the nation self-dependent, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India sowed the seeds of many maiden industries among which Bharat Aluminium Company Limited (BALCO) was one. BALCO was established in 1965 as a Public Sector undertaking in Korba, Chhattisgarh. The company created an aluminium manufacturing complex with a production capacity of 1 lakh tonnes/annum, supported by power generation facility of 270 MW, with the vision of contributing significantly towards development of the country. The strategic acquisition of BALCO in 2001 by Vedanta, led to the company's turnaround at an unprecedented scale and BALCO became one of India's greatest privatisation success stories. Vedanta Limited is one of the

world's leading natural resources conglomerate with operations in India, South Africa, Namibia and Australia. It is a leading producer of Aluminium, Copper, Oil & Gas, Zinc, Lead, Silver, Iron Ore, Steel and Commercial Power. Vedanta contributes 1% towards India's GDP, as per IFC. Currently, Vedanta Limited has a 51% stake in the company, and the Government of India has a 49% stake. BALCO is part of Vedanta's Aluminium Business, which is India's largest aluminium manufacturer, producing half of India's aluminium (around 1.97 million tonnes in FY21). Vedanta Aluminium is a leader in value-added aluminium products that find critical applications in core industries, such as aerospace, aviation, automobile & transportation, building & construction, electrification, energy, consumer goods and more. Today, BALCO stands tall as India's iconic producer of a vital raw material for the country -



Senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh comes out after appearing in the court in connection with a hearing of a defamation case filed by BJP State President VD Sharma, in Bhopal on Saturday. Pioneer photo

Parikshit lawn inaugurated by Minister Sarang

Bhopal: Parikshit lawn was inaugurated by Vishvas Kailash Sarang, Minister of Medical Education, Madhya Pradesh and Prof Ajai Singh, Executive Director, AIIMS Bhopal on 4th February 2023 on occasion of World Cancer Day. The lawn has been developed under the Smriti Upvan Project a sustainable green campus clean campus initiative by Executive Director AIIMS Bhopal Prof. (Dr) Ajai Singh. The Parikshit lawn has plants

with anti-cancer property like tulsi and green grass and is a home to more than 1000 medicinal plants, including vinca, tulsi, ashwagandha, Indian long pepper, bamboo, and other plants known for their medicinal properties. These plants will not only provide a beautiful and natural environment for patients, but they also have the potential to improve their health and wellbeing. Besides, the hospital has also created a selfie point for patients in

the lawn. This gives patients an opportunity to take a break from their treatment and enjoy the beautiful environment. It also allows them to document their journey and share it with their loved ones. The Smriti Upvan Project has targeted to plant 10000 trees this year out of which 42% target has already been completed in last two months. The lawn has been developed to provide a peaceful and inviting environment for everyone.

Accept positive aspects of Ramcharitramanas: Baghel

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday said the need of the hour in the present context is to accept and imbibe Ramcharitramanas. There is no need for controversies.

"We can see Lord Ram in any way and any form. Some say Mara Mara while some say Rama Rama. What difference does it make? Finally, the word uttered is Ram only," he told the media before leaving for Kharsia.

He was reacting to a row created by some over some verses of Ramcharitramanas. The BJP has sought to derecognize the parties raking up the controversy.

Quoting Vinoba Bhave, Baghel said religious texts



and other manuscripts have been written years ago as per the prevailing conditions and philosophy.

In the present scenario, a deeper analysis of the script is required and their positive

aspects can be adopted and accepted, he said.

He said the Ramayan has been written in many languages. Some stanzas or lines may be right for someone and wrong for the other.

There is no need to rake up a controversy, he said.

Making a scathing attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party, Baghel said the BJP has been doing only vote bank politics on the matter.

World Cancer Day celebrated



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Day-long events marked World Cancer Day on Saturday in Raipur, organized by the Regional Cancer Institute at the Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Memorial Medical College Hospital.

A marathon, Canethon 2023, was held from Marine

Drive (Telibandha) to RCI in which 250 students of the Medical College Raipur and hospital staff participated.

The first three winners got cash prizes of Rs 3,000, Rs 2,000 and Rs 1,000 respectively. Children undergoing treatment in the cancer department, medical students and children of hospital staff participated in a poster competition.

In the children's category, Ishanya was first and Navya second. In the senior category, the winner was Rahul Maravi followed by Dr. Awadhesh Bharat and Hemlata. Loni and Shubhangi won consolation prizes. Around 80 adults and children who had recovered from cancer were felicitated. They related how they won the battle with cancer.

CM to interact with Mayors on Feb 15

RAIPUR: Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel will have a direct dialogue with elected Mayors and Presidents of all urban bodies on February 15.

The Urban Administration and Development Department is organizing a one-day awareness programme for the Mayors and Presidents, an official communication said on Saturday.

Urban Administration Minister Dr. Shiv Kumar Dahriya said brief information about the schemes of the government will be given at the event.

The civic bodies declared best performers in schemes like the Chief Minister Slum Health Scheme, Shri Dhanwantri Generic Medical Stores Scheme, Swachh Bharat Mission, Housing Mission for All and Urban Livelihood Mission will be awarded.

The Chief Minister will discuss with the Mayors and Presidents steps to be taken to ensure rapid and well-planned development of the cities. Brainstorming will be done to expedite urban development.

Tiger kills man



STAFF REPORTER ■
MANENDRAGARH

A tiger killed a 37-year-old man in Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur district of Chhattisgarh, an official said on Saturday.

The incident took place in Kachhod village on Friday evening when Budhram Agariya went for fishing nearby, Manendragarh Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) Loknath Patel said.

A search was launched

for him when he did not return home.

His mutilated body was found on Saturday morning in the forest, he said.

Pugmarks of a tiger were spotted near the place.

The villagers were asked to avoid stepping out after sunset after pugmarks were spotted in the Kolhari circle forest a few days ago, the officer added.

An interim relief of Rs 25,000 was given to the family of the deceased.

Rajim Maghi Punni Mela from today

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

The 15-day Rajim Maghi Punni Mela held on the occasion of Magh Purnima will start on February 5 at Rajim in Gariyaband district of Chhattisgarh.

It will conclude on February 18, which marks Mahashivaratri.

The fair is organized at the confluence of rivers Mahanadi, Pairi and Sondhur.

The Kuleshwar Mahadev temple is situated in the middle of the confluence site, an official communication said.

Devotees start the



Panchkoshi Yatra a fortnight in advance. During the yatra, the devotees visit Pateshwar, Fingeshwar,

Bramhaneshwar, Kopeshwar and Champeshwar Nath on foot.

The journey of 101 km

ends and the fair begins. The devotees visit Lord Rajeev Lochan and Kuleshwar Nath Mahadev temples.

Two held with brown sugar valued at Rs 10L



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Saturday arrested two drug peddlers and seized 104 grams of charas valued at Rs 10 lakhs here. One accused is on the run.

Raipur Additional Superintendent of Police

(West) D.C. Patel identified them as Kanwaljeet Singh (22) and Balraj Singh (20), both from Punjab. Efforts are on to nab Rupinder Singh alias Pinder of Raipur city.

They were caught in Saraswati Nagar following a tip that they brought the consignment from Punjab to deliver it to Pinder.

CM flags off C'garh's first mobile millet cafe

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIGARH

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday flagged off the state's first mobile millet café, Millet on Wheels, at Kharsia in Raigarh district.

He cut a cake made of ragi to formally open the café.

Appreciating the initiative, he said it would help to increase awareness on the need to consume millets, an official communication said.

The Raigarh district administration has started the Millet on Wheels. It will



be run by the Anubhav women's group.

The outlet will serve dishes made of ragi, kodo and kutki. The cuisines are

ragi cheela, dosa, millets paratha, idli, millets manchurian, pizza, kodo ki biryani and cookies.

Chhattisgarh is promot-

ing the production and consumption of millets. The government also procures kodo, kutki and ragi at support price.

Couple, toddler among four killed in accident



STAFF REPORTER ■
BALODABAZAR

Four of a family including a couple and their toddler were killed on Saturday after a pick-up van hit their motorcycle in Balodabazar district.

The deceased were Puran Bhardwaj (26), his wife Lata (23), their 15-month-old boy Khilesh and Bhardwaj's mother-in-law Sushila Ratre, all from Kusmi village in the district, Palari Station House

Officer Purushottam Kurre told The Pioneer.

The incident took place when they were headed to Dharsela village to attend a birthday function, Kurre said.

A speeding pick-up van hit the motorcycle near a fuel station, killing Bhardwaj on the spot while the three were shifted to community health centre. Two of them succumbed to their injuries.

The driver of the killer vehicle was arrested.

Maoist arrested in Dantewada

STAFF REPORTER ■
DANTEWADA

A Naxalite was arrested on Saturday in Dantewada district in Chhattisgarh.

Dantewada Superintendent of Police Siddharth Tiwari told The Pioneer that Malla alias Daka Muchaki (34) was apprehended by the District Reserve Guard from a jungle between Gondaras and Potli villages.

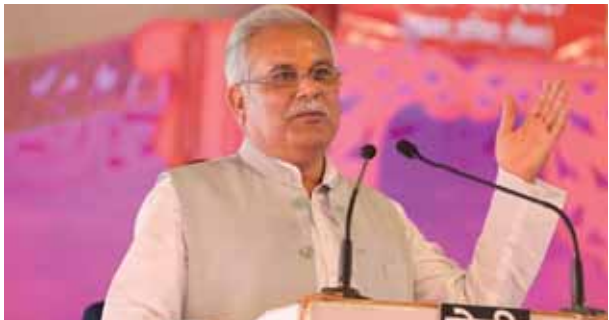
He was the militia platoon section deputy commander of Gondaras Panchayat of the outlawed Maoist outfit, he said.

He was involved in several Naxalite incidents last year.



He was the militia platoon section deputy commander of Gondaras Panchayat of the outlawed Maoist outfit

Kabir Sansthan to come up in Nava Raipur: CM



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel on Saturday pledged to construct a Kabir Sansthan (institute) in Nava Raipur. It will include a Kabir memorial, a museum and a research centre. He was addressing the International Kabirpanth

Sant Mahasammelan at Kharsia in Raigarh district.

He said Kabir's teachings were still relevant and continue to guides the society.

Kabir has underlined that salvation cannot be attained without the blessings of the Guru. He worked to remove hypocrisy and distortions in the society by paving the path to lead a simple life.

C'garh disburses subsidy to electric vehicle owners



STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh's Transport on Saturday disbursed a subsidy of Rs 1.55 crore to 888 people who bought electric vehicles.

Transport Minister Mohammed Akbar said the government is taking the initiative to promote electric vehicles. Under the Electric Vehicle Policy, any person purchasing an electric vehicle can get a subsidy from the

government.

The seller has to give his account number and IFSC code. Ten percent of the value of the vehicle, subject to a maximum of Rs 1.5 lakh, will be directly transferred by the Transport Department to the account of the buyer, he said.

On Saturday, a subsidy of Rs 1.55 crore was released for 888 electric vehicle owners. Earlier, in the first phase, a subsidy of Rs 80 lakh was disbursed to 404 beneficiaries in December, the Minister said.

Researchers develop device to detect brain tumour through urine

■ IANS

A team of researchers in Japan have developed a new device to identify a key membrane protein in the urine that indicates if the patient has a brain tumour.

A research group led by Associate Professor Takao Yasui and Professor Yoshinobu Baba of Japan-based Nagoya University in collaboration with the University of Tokyo has developed a new analysis platform for brain tumour EVs using nanowires at the bottom of a well plate.

They used this device to identify two types of extracellular vesicle (EV) membrane proteins known as CD31 and CD63 in urine samples from brain tumour



patients. Doctors may be able to identify tumour patients before they develop symptoms if they look for these tell-tale proteins.

The presence of tumour-related extracellular vesicles (EVs) in a person's urine is

one possible sign that they have a brain tumour.

EVs are nanoparticles that perform a variety of functions, including cell-to-cell communication.

"Currently, EV isolation and detection methods

require more than two instruments and an assay to isolate and then detect EVs," said Yasui.

Moreover, the researchers believe that the key membrane protein present in the urine could be used to detect brain cancer, eliminating the need for invasive tests and increasing the likelihood of tumours being detected early enough for surgery.

"Liquid biopsy can be performed using many body fluids, but blood tests are invasive," Yasui said.

"Urine tests are an effective, simple, and non-invasive method because the urine contains many informative biomolecules that can be traced back to identify the disease," he added.

Agniveer recruitment through e-test

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Given the rapidly changing nature of warfighting with stress on technology, the Army has decided to conduct written examination for all the aspiring Agniveers. Once they clear the examination, the candidates will have to undergo physical endurance test followed by the medical test. The Navy and the IAF are already following the process in the same order.

The new tweaking in selection by the Army will commence mid February, sources said here on Saturday. Prospective candidates will first be required to take an admission examination online.



The physical and medical examinations will take place later.

Previously, the Army would undertake a physical and medical examination first.

Only after passing the first two tests were candidates permitted to take the written examination. They said the new method will also help in easing screening process and the

logistics involved. For the first time in 2022, the Indian Army recruited soldiers under the Agniveer programme. Agniveer recruitment followed the same procedure as regular

soldier recruitment.

A large number of candidates are said to congregate at army recruitment rallies, which occasionally causes law and order issues. Additionally, it consumes a lot of resources.

The written examination in the first step will screen out candidates. Those who pass the written exam will be authorised to take the physical and medical exams.

"The changed methodology will ensure increased focus on cognitive aspect during selection. It will have wider outreach across the country and also reduce the large crowds seen during recruitment rallies to make them more manageable and easier to conduct," sources said.

Public 'malik', says Rijiju

Min says after SC's strong remarks over judges' transfers



PNS ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A day after the Supreme Court warned of action for any delay in clearing transfer and appointment of judges, Union Law Minister Kiren Rijiju on Saturday said the country will be governed according to the Constitution and wishes of the people and nobody can give warning to anyone.

"Public is 'malik' (master) of this country and we are servants. We all are here for service and the Constitution is our guide.... The country will be governed under the guidance of the Constitution and wishes of the public. Nobody can give warning to anyone," Rijiju said.

"Sometimes discussions are held in the country on some matters and in a democracy everyone has the right to express their opinion. But people sitting in responsible positions have to think before saying anything, whether it will benefit the country or not," he said, referring to reported remarks of a Supreme Court bench.

The minister was addressing an event on the 150th anniversary of the Allahabad High Court Bar Association here as the chief guest.

His remarks came a day after a bench of Justices S K Kaul and A S Oka expressed displeasure over the delay in clearing recommendations for transfer of high court judges, calling it a "very serious issue", and warned that any delay in this matter may result in both administrative and judicial actions which might not be

palatable. On Saturday, the Supreme Court also questioned the government over the delay in clearing the names of five high court judges who had been recommended for elevation to the Supreme Court. The judges were elevated to the Supreme Court on Sunday.

The remarks are the latest in a tug of war between the judiciary and the executive over the process of appointment of judges of the Supreme Court and high courts.

On the pendency of cases, Minister Rijiju said, "At present, 4 crore 90 lakh cases are pending in various courts across the country. We are solving this problem." He said that in view of the huge number of pending cases, the government has made preparations to implement the Legal Information Management System so that a person will be able to get information about the status of the case in any high court on one click.

"Being the largest high court of the country, I wish that the Allahabad High Court should play a leading role in implementing the e-courts project. The government has abolished 1,486 old and outdated laws and the process of removing 65 such laws is going on in the current Parliament session," he said.

The minister also said the Arbitration Bill is in the final stages of preparation and after its passage, a parallel judicial system will be established in the country. With the system of arbitration, small cases will be settled outside the court and the burden on courts will be reduced, he said.

ED questions Rahul's aide in money laundering case against TMC functionary

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Enforcement Directorate has questioned and recorded the statement of Alankar Sawai, a close aide of Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, in a money laundering case in which TMC spokesperson Saket Gokhale was recently arrested by the agency in Gujarat, officials said.

Sawai was questioned and also confronted with Gokhale in Ahmedabad over three days earlier this week, they said.

A former banker, Sawai is considered to be a close aide of Rahul, a former Congress president, and is stated to be heading his research team.

The federal probe agency

summoned Sawai after it arrested 35-year-old Gokhale on January 25 while he was in the Gujarat Police's custody in connection with alleged financial irregularities in raising funds through a crowd funding platform.

The Enforcement Directorate (ED), while seeking Gokhale's remand on that day, had informed a Ahmedabad court that when he was asked about Rs 23.54 lakh deposited in his bank account in cash over a year, Gokhale had told the agency that "this amount was given in cash by Alankar Sawai of the India National Congress for social media work and other consultancy".

India, UAE, France to speed up trilateral bid on climate

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India, France and the United Arab Emirates on Saturday discussed the way to hasten up a trilateral initiative among the three countries on issues like climate change, protection of biodiversity and joint training and joint production of weapon systems.

These issues were reviewed during a telephonic conversation between the foreign ministers of the three countries on Saturday, ministry of external affairs (MEA) said here later. A joint statement was also issued.

Giving details of the initiative, MEA said on 19



September 2022, on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, the Foreign Ministers of India, France and the UAE met for the first time in a trilateral format.

In acknowledgement of their shared desire to promote international stability and prosperity, and to further build upon the constructive and collaborative ties that exist between the three countries, the Foreign Ministers of India,

France and the UAE agreed to establish a formal trilateral cooperation initiative, with the aim of expanding cooperation in various fields of mutual interest. It is in this context that a phone call between the three Ministers was held on Saturday to adopt a roadmap for the implementation of this initiative.

The three sides agreed that the trilateral initiative will serve as a forum to promote the design and execution of cooperation projects in the fields of energy, with a focus on solar and nuclear energy, as well as in the fight against climate change and the protection of biodiversity, particularly in the Indian Ocean region.

BMC budget pro-contractor, it will spell Mumbai's financial bankruptcy, alleges Aaditya

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Mumbai civic body's budget for 2023-24 is pro-contractor and will pave the way for Mumbai's financial bankruptcy, said Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Aaditya Thackeray on Saturday, while the Bharatiya Janata Party called it "truly for Mumbaikars".

The Aam Admi Party and the Congress also criticised the Rs 52,619-crore budget, which was presented by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) chief and administrator Iqbal Singh Chahal.

"The unconstitutional state Govt and the BMC governed by the administrator has been showing moral and legal bankruptcy for 6 months. Today's BMC budget shows that it has begun to pave way for Mumbai's financial bankruptcy," tweeted Aaditya Thackeray.

Until the term of the corporators got over last March, the Shiv Sena had ruled the BMC for more than two decades. The Uddhav Thackeray-led party split in June 2022 following a rebellion by Eknath Shinde, who joined hands with the BJP to form the government in the state. BMC elections are expected to be held this year.



Demanding the BMC to explain "hiked expenses" in its "pro contractor" budget, Aaditya Thackeray said, "While on one hand, we clearly see contractor friends of this unconstitutional State Govt benefitting, the MC's (Chahal's) speech finds a mention of curbing expenses, which should be told to the bosses in Govt rather than Mumbaikars."

The AAP targeted the BMC over utilisation of funds.

The Arvind Kejriwal-led party, which is trying to expand its footprints in Mumbai, said the budget is "an annual ritual" aimed at throwing big numbers but utilisation of funds year after year reveals a "sordid saga of ineptitude and incompetence".

The allocation of Rs 3,347 crore for education is a mere 6.36 per cent of the overall outlay, while healthcare saw a 9 per cent dip to Rs 6,309 crore and is 12 per cent of the overall figures, said AAP.

Attempts underway by Centre to malign Bengal, says Abhishek

PTI ■ KESHPUR

TMC general secretary Abhishek Banerjee on Saturday slammed the Centre for sending central teams to West Bengal, and said attempts are on to malign the state government as Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had not bowed before it.

He also dubbed the state BJP leaders "anti-Bengal", as they have also "played a role in stopping the flow of funds" to the state.

"People here know how the BJP-led central government has halted funds for Bengal. It is doing this out of vengeance, because the party could not win the assembly elections in 2021," he said, while addressing a mega rally at Keshpur.

Abhishek Banerjee said the TMC leadership would never surrender before the "corrupt" BJP regime.

"Mamata Banerjee has never bowed her head in front of these dishonest BJP politicians, and she will never do it. She has the love and affection of the people, and they will give the answer to BJP's injustice."

"BJP leaders are sending central teams... However, they couldn't find even one case of fraud. The teams were sent to malign the people of the state," he alleged.

Doctors welcome FM's call to increase NCCD on cigarettes

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Doctors and activists have welcomed the Union Finance Minister's announcement to increase national calamity contingent duty (NCCD) on cigarettes to 16 per cent in the annual Budget of 2023-24, asserting that the move would strengthen various initiatives aimed to reduce cancer causing tobacco use in India.

However, at the same time they have urged the Government to augment these efforts increasing taxes on bidis and smokeless products that are becoming health as well as fiscal burden in the country. The NCCD on specified cigarettes was last revised three years ago.

Bhavna Mukhopadhyay, Chief Executive, Voluntary Health Association of India hailed the decision but felt that the percentage increase is minimal. "We hope that in future, the Finance Minister

will ensure a significant increase in taxation and decrease in the affordability of all tobacco products to match the message that has been sent so strongly in this budget".

The present GST rates on tobacco products combined with the compensation cess for all tobacco products is much lower than the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended tax burden of at least 75% of retail price for all tobacco products.

The total tax burden is currently only about 53% for cigarettes, 22% for bidis and 60% for smokeless tobacco. According to international experts, raising the price of tobacco products through tax increases is the most effective policy to reduce tobacco use. Higher tobacco prices decrease affordability, encourage quitting among users, prevent initiation among non-users, and reduce the quantity consumed among continuing users.

Shah hails Naga group ENPO's decision to withdraw poll boycott call

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday lauded the decision by Eastern Nagaland Peoples Organisation (ENPO) to withdraw its assembly election boycott call, saying it is an expression of trust in the Modi government.

The ENPO, which has been demanding separate statehood - Frontier Nagaland - comprising six districts of Mon, Tuensang, Longleng, Kiphire, Shamatore and Noklak, had given the poll boycott call to press for their demand.

"It is heartening that in an expression of trust in the Modi government, the Eastern Nagaland Peoples Organisation (ENPO) in Nagaland has withdrawn its call to boycott the assembly elections. The decision will help in keeping the ongoing process of peace and development unhindered," Shah said in tweets.

The home minister said he was grateful to the group for the positive gesture reaffirming ENPO's commitment to democratic processes.

Shah said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has made untiring efforts to assure the people of Northeast India that the government is with them and the ENPO's move is an approval of these endeavours.

According to an ENPP release, the decision was taken during its executive meeting



held in Dimapur on Saturday following the request of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to review the August 26, 2022 resolution of ENPO and its constituent tribal bodies and frontal organisations to abstain in any election process.

The ENPO also requested all citizens to cooperate with the government in the conduct of the election and not create any law and order problems.

In a release, the ENPO said the meeting discussed the assurance given by Union Home Minister Amit Shah to ENPO office bearers on February 2 and after due consultation with its constituent tribal bodies and frontal organisations relaxed its resolution with immediate effect.

PNS ■ DEOGARH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday claimed that demographic change in Jharkhand has seen the percentage of the 'Adivasi' (tribal) population declining during the Hemant Soren government's tenure in power.

Addressing the BJP's 'Vijay Sankalp Maha Rally' here, the senior party leader claimed that the population of Adivasis has declined from 35 per cent to 24 per cent due to massive infiltration from across the international border, which has been 'encouraged by the Hemant Soren government for vote bank politics'.

He alleged that infiltrators were grabbing land in the state after marrying tribal women.

"The Hemant Soren government is the most corrupt in the country. Resources are being looted using railway wagons and tractors. People will unseat this government from power in the state as it failed to fulfil the 'aspirations of development' for which the separate state was created," he said.

Shah said the BJP will win all 14 Lok Sabha seats in the state in the elections next year.

Referring to the killing of a class 12 student, who was burnt alive by her stalker in Dumka last year, Shah said, "Adivasi girls are being murdered while the Hemant Soren government is indulging in politics of appeasement."

Earlier in the day, the Cooperation Minister said the Union government has decided to provide 300 services of the Centre as well as the state governments through the Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS).

Shah said PACS would now function as Common Service Centres (CSC) and farmers can avail benefits of 300 services including no-dues certificates, birth and death registration, and many more.

"The decision was taken on Friday. The IT Ministry has supported the Cooperative Ministry in this regard," he said, while laying the foundation stone of a Rs 450-croreIFFCO nano urea

plant in Jasidih in Deogarh district.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on Friday to enable the PACS to provide services offered by Common Service Centres.

According to the agreement, more than 300 services will be made available to the rural population, including 13 crore farmer members of PACS, a statement said.



HM lays foundation stone of ₹450-cr nano urea plant in J'khand

PTI ■ DEOGARH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday laid the foundation stone of a Rs 450-crore nano urea plant and township of the Indian Farmers Fertiliser Cooperative (IFFCO) in Jharkhand's Deogarh.

Shah said it will help in reducing the dependence on import of urea and usher in development of the eastern region, particularly the Santhal Paraganas.

"Nano urea will benefit farmers, and it is already being exported to five countries," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated the world's first nano urea plant in Gujarat last year, according to IFFCO. This will be India's fifth such plant.

"PM Modi has given priority to all works related to land conservation across the country..."

Many urea factories were revived by Modi, and this

small liquid urea factory built on 30 acres will manufacture about six crore bottles every year, which will make India self-sufficient by reducing imports in this sector," Shah said.

The facility will prove to be useful in increasing production not only in Jharkhand but also in Bihar, Odisha and Bengal, he said.

Nano urea improves crop productivity, soil health and nutritional quality of the produce, IFFCO said.

RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

Soldiers freed in Russia, Ukraine prisoner swap

AP ■ KYIV

Dozens of Russian and Ukrainian prisoners of war have returned home following a prisoner swap, officials on both sides said Saturday.

Top Ukrainian presidential aide Andriy Yermak said in a Telegram post that 116 Ukrainians were freed.

He said the released POWs include troops who held out in Mariupol during Moscow's monthslong siege that reduced the southern port city to ruins, as well as guerrilla fighters from the Kherson region and snipers captured during the ongoing fierce battles for the eastern city of Bakhmut.

Russian defence officials, meanwhile, announced that 63 Russian troops had returned from Ukraine following the swap, including some "special category" prisoners whose release was secured following mediation by the United Arab Emirates.

A statement issued Saturday by the Russian Defence Ministry did not provide details about these "special category" captives.

At least three civilians have been killed in Ukraine over the past 24 hours as Russian forces struck nine regions in the country's south, north and east, according to reports on Ukrainian TV by regional gov-



ernors on Saturday morning.

Two people were killed and 14 others wounded in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region by Russian shelling and missile strikes, local Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said in a Telegram update on Saturday morning.

The casualty toll included a man who was killed and seven others who were wounded Friday after Russian missiles slammed into Toretsk, a town in the Donetsk region.

Kyrylenko said that 34 houses, two kindergartens, an outpatient clinic, a library, a cultural centre and other buildings were damaged in the strike.

Seven teenagers received shrapnel wounds after an anti-

personnel mine exploded late on Friday in the northeastern city of Izium, local Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said on Telegram.

He said they were all hospitalised but their lives were not in danger.

Elsewhere, regional Ukrainian officials reported overnight shelling by Russia of border settlements in the northern Sumy region, as well as the town of Marhanets, which neighbours the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant. Kyiv has long accused Moscow of using the plant, which Russian forces seized early in the war, as a base for launching attacks on Ukrainian-held territory across the Dnieper river.

China plays down Blinken's cancelled visit over balloon

AP ■ TAIPEI

China played down the cancellation of a visit by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken after a large Chinese balloon suspected of conducting surveillance on US military sites roiled diplomatic relations, saying that neither side had formally announced any such plan.

"In actuality, the U.S. And China have never announced any visit, the US making any such announcement is their own business, and we respect that," China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement Saturday morning.

Blinken was due to visit Beijing on Sunday for talks aimed at reducing US-China tensions, the first such high-profile trip after the countries' leaders met last November in Indonesia.

But the US abruptly cancelled the trip after the discovery of the huge balloon despite China's claim that it was mere-



ly a weather research "airship" that had blown off course.

The Pentagon rejected that out of hand — as well as China's contention that the balloon was not being used for surveillance and had only limited navigational ability.

Uncensored reactions on the Chinese internet mirrored the official government stance that the US was hyping up the situation.

Many users made jokes about the balloon. Some said that since the U.S. Had put restrictions on the technology that China is able to buy to weaken the Chinese tech industry, they couldn't control the balloon.

Others called it the "wandering balloon" in a pun that refers to the newly released Chinese sci-fi film called "The Wandering Earth 2."

ASEAN vows to conclude pact with China on disputed territory

AP ■ JAKARTA

Southeast Asian foreign ministers vowed to finalise negotiations with China over a proposed pact aimed at preventing conflicts in the disputed South China Sea in their annual retreat on Saturday in Indonesia's capital.

In the final session of their two-day meeting, the ministers from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations also agreed to unite in their approach to implement a five-step agreement made in 2021 between ASEAN leaders and Myanmar's military leader, Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing,

that seeks to end that country's worsening crisis.

China and the ASEAN member states, which include four rival claimants to territories in the South China Sea, have been holding sporadic talks for years on a "code of conduct," a set of regional norms and rules aimed at preventing a clash the

disputed waters.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said that Indonesia, this year's ASEAN chair, is ready to host more rounds of negotiations over the proposed pact, the first of which will be held in March. She said ASEAN members are committed to concluding the

discussions "as soon as possible." "Members are also committed to promote implementation of a declaration of conduct," Marsudi added.

Marsudi did not elaborate, but in the past, China has accused Washington of meddling in what it calls an Asian dispute.

Israeli army besieges homes of fugitives in West Bank raid

AP ■ AQABAT JABR REFUGEE CAMP

The Israeli army raided a refugee camp near the Palestinian city of Jericho on Saturday, besieging houses it said were being used as hide-outs for Palestinian attackers and shooting at residents who opened fire.

The fighting wounded six Palestinians, two seriously, said the Palestinian Health Ministry, and jolted a generally quiet oasis town that has seen less violence than other West Bank cities.

The army said it entered the Aqabat Jabr refugee camp southwest of Jericho in the occupied West Bank to search for suspects involved in a shooting attack last week at a nearby Israeli settlement.

Last Saturday, with the West Bank on edge after the deadliest Israeli military raid in two decades and two subsequent Palestinian attacks in east Jerusalem that killed seven people, the army said a Palestinian gunman had opened fire in a restaurant at a settlement near Jericho. After firing one bullet, the gunman



fled the scene, the army said. No one was wounded.

The army said several Palestinians had holed up in their homes after the shooting with the help of family and were planning future attacks.

To force the fugitives to surrender, a military bulldozer clawed at the walls of one of the homes as an Israeli commander shouted threats over a loudspeaker.

Camp residents reported receiving text messages urging families to keep their children inside and avoid clashing with Israeli troops.

The suspects and family members trickled out of one of the homes and turned themselves in, the military said. Security forces had leveled much of the house, leaving a pile of rubble and twisted metal.

Qatar boosts influence in Lebanon amid crises

AP ■ BEIRUT

Most wealthy Gulf Arab Nations followed Saudi Arabia's lead in recent years and ostracised crisis-hit Lebanon because of the growing influence of the Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah. The exception was Qatar.

Doha has been silently expanding its influence in Lebanon. It continued receiving Lebanese leaders and pumped tens millions of dollars into helping the country's armed forces amid a historic economic meltdown.

The small, gas-rich nation in late January began seeing the fruits of its investment, when state-owned Qatar Energy replaced a Russian firm in an international consortium that will search for gas in the Mediterranean Sea off Lebanon's coast.

And on Monday, Qatar will for the first time join a meeting in Paris along with officials from France, Saudi Arabia and the US for discussions focusing on Lebanon's political and economic crises.

Qatar portrays itself as a more neutral force in a coun-



try where for decades outside powers have used Lebanon's sectarian divisions to fight their proxy battles. Saudi Arabia long backed Lebanon's Sunni Muslim factions and tried to push out Iran's influence through Shiite Hezbollah. The rivalry repeatedly pushed Lebanon to the brink of armed conflict.

Qatar, which has good ties with Iran, has been trying to advance negotiations between Tehran and Gulf nations. Its

inclusion in the upcoming talks "is a signal that Iran will not be completely left out of that meeting and a recognition of the influence that Tehran has over Lebanon," said Mohamad Bazzi, a professor and director of the Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies at New York University.

"With Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states less heavily involved in Lebanon, Qatar is trying to revive its mediator role in the country," he said.

Pope encourages South Sudanese, will raise plight of women

AP ■ JUBA

Pope Francis sought Saturday to console the long-suffering people of South Sudan as he opened his first full day in a country beset by conflict, poverty and humanitarian crises, encouraging priests and nuns to serve their flocks by joining in their tears.

After arriving in the world's newest country on the first-ever papal visit Friday, Francis was spending Saturday ministering first to church personnel and then to South Sudanese who have been forced by fighting, flooding and other crises to leave their homes.

Francis was highlighting in particular the plight of South Sudanese women, half of whom are married before age 18, are subject to rampant sexual violence and then face the world's highest maternal mortality rate.

"Let us ask ourselves what it means for us to be ministers of God in a land scarred by war, hatred, violence, and poverty," Francis said in St. Theresa Cathedral in the capital, Juba. "How can we exercise our



ministry in this land, along the banks of a river bathed in so much innocent blood, among the tear-stained faces of the people entrusted to us?"

Lush in oil and other natural resources but beset by years of civil war and conflict, South Sudan is one of the world's poorest countries and is responsible for Africa's worst refugee crisis: More than 2 million people have fled the country and another 2 million are displaced within its borders.

Joined by Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby and the Presbyterian head of the Church of Scotland, Francis is seeking to draw global attention to the country's plight.

Wikipedia blocked for not removing blasphemous content in Pak

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan has blocked Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, for its failure to remove offensive or blasphemous material, the country's telecomuni-cation authority said on Saturday.

The blacklisting of Wikipedia comes days after the Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) degraded Wikipedia services for 48 hours, threatening to block it if the content deemed 'blasphemous' was not deleted.

Wikipedia is a free online encyclopedia, created and edited by volunteers around the world and hosted by the Wikimedia Foundation.

PTA spokesperson Malahat Obaid said the ban had primarily been imposed for non-compliance with the orders.

"The decision can be reviewed once Wikipedia removes sacrilegious content that has been identified by the regulatory authority," the spokesperson added.

The PTA spokesperson earlier stated that Wikipedia was approached for blocking/removal of the said content by issuing a notice.

13 dead in Chile amid struggle to contain raging wildfires

AP ■ SANTIAGO

At least 13 people were reported dead as of Friday night as a result of the more than 150 wildfires burning across Chile that have destroyed homes and thousands of acres of forest while the South American country is in the midst of a scorching heat wave.

Four of the deaths involved two separate vehicles in the Biobio region, around 560 kilometers (348 miles) south of the capital of Santiago.

"In one case they were burned because they were hit by the fire," Interior Minister Carolina Tohá said. In the other case, she said, the victims died in a crash, "probably trying to escape the fire."

The fifth victim was a firefighter who was run over by a fire truck while combatting a blaze in the area.

Later in the afternoon, a helicopter that was helping combat the flames crashed in the Araucania region, killing the pilot, a Bolivian national, and a mechanic, who was Chilean.

Democrats set to shake up start of 2024 presidential primary

AP ■ PHILADELPHIA

Democrats are poised to reorder their presidential primary schedule beginning next year, replacing Iowa with South Carolina in the leadoff spot as part of a major overhaul meant to empower Black and other minority voters critical to the party's base of support.

The Democratic National Committee has worked for months to revamp the start of its voting calendar, and the full membership is set to vote on the plan on Saturday.

Although changes are still possible throughout the summer and beyond, the formal endorsement during the party's meeting in Philadelphia is acknowledgement that the start of 2024's primary will look very different than the one in 2020.

The proposal has been championed by President Joe Biden and would have South Carolina hold its primary on Feb. 3. That would be followed three days later by New Hampshire and Nevada, the latter of which is swapping the caucus it used to hold in favour of a primary. Georgia would vote fourth on Feb. 13, followed



by Michigan on Feb. 27, with much of the rest of the nation set to vote on Super Tuesday in early March.

"This isn't just about us," Trev Robertson, president of the South Carolina Democratic Party, told a gathering of the DNC Southern caucus earlier this week. "This is a regional thing, and it's making us all look good."

States voting early in the primary have major influence since White House hopefuls struggling to raise money or gain political traction often drop out before visiting areas outside the first five. The move marks a major shift from the current calendar, which had started with Iowa's caucuses for the last five decades, followed by New Hampshire's primary and subsequent contests in Nevada and South Carolina.

Iranian director freed on bail after going on hunger strike

AP ■ DUBAI

Acclaimed Iranian director Jafar Panahi was released on bail Friday, two days after going on hunger strike to protest his imprisonment last summer, his supporters said.

Panahi was arrested last July and later ordered to serve six years on charges of propagandising against the government, a sentence dating back to 2011 that had never been enforced.

He is among a number of Iranian artists, sports figures and other celebrities who have been detained after speaking out against the theocracy. Such arrests have become more frequent since nationwide protests broke out in September over the death of a young woman in police custody.

Panahi, 62, had continued making award-winning films for over a decade despite being legally barred from travel and filmmaking. His latest film, "No Bears," was released to widespread praise in September while he was behind bars, a week before the protests erupted.

Pak to seek Af Taliban leader's help to control TTP

PTI ■ PESHAWAR

A desperate Pakistan has sought Afghan Taliban chief Haibuttallah Akhundzada's help to rein in the outlawed Pakistani Taliban outfit responsible for a wave of terror attacks in the country, including the recent Peshawar mosque carnage that killed over 100 people, according to a media report on Saturday.

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

In the Peshawar mosque attack on Monday, a Taliban suicide bomber blew himself up during the afternoon prayers, killing 101 people and injuring more than 200 others.

During the Apex Committee meeting here on Friday, Pakistan's civil and military leadership decided to seek Afghan Taliban chief Haibuttallah Akhundzada's intervention to control the



Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), according to The Express Tribune newspaper.

Pakistan's Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, who attended Friday's meeting, said the masterminds of the Peshawar Mosque attack could be in Afghanistan, and added that the federal government would raise this issue with their Afghan counterparts, the report said.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday acknowledged the failure to avert the Peshawar carnage that killed over 100 people and called for "national unity" to tackle the menace.

"There is a need for unity across the political spectrum. This act of terrorism managed to breach the security check post and reach the mosque. We should not feel hesitant in admitting the facts," Sharif said at the meeting.

Sudan demands United Nations immediately lift arms embargo

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

Sudan is demanding the UN Security Council immediately lift an arms embargo and other sanctions imposed during violence in the western Darfur region in 2005, saying the punishment did not include conditions or require the military government to meet UN benchmarks.

Sudan's UN ambassador, Al-Harith Idriss Mohamed, said in a letter to the council circulated Friday that the sanctions "are no longer relevant to the magnificent reality on the ground in Darfur today compared to the situation in 2005."

"Darfur has, for the most part, overcome the state of war, as well as previous security and political challenges," he said.

Mohamed said Sudan's transitional government is committed to addressing the remaining social and security issues in Darfur, including sporadic tribal clashes. He added that efforts are being made to form and deploy a Joint



Security-Keeping Force to protect civilians.

The Sudanese government has repeatedly urged the Security Council to lift sanctions but this letter was much stronger. It said that "Sudan will accept nothing less than the immediate lifting of these sanctions without conditions or benchmarks."

The Darfur conflict began in 2003 when rebels took up arms against the authoritarian government in Khartoum then led by Omar al-Bashir, accusing it of discrimination and neglect. The UN previously estimated 00,000 people died in the conflict and 2.7 million fled their homes.

Al-Bashir is wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged atrocities in Darfur.

India will get into global bond indices on own terms: Official

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India will not bend over backwards to get included in the global bond indices, a top finance ministry official said on Saturday.

Deploying a sartorial analogy, Finance Secretary TV Somanathan said the indices are an exclusive club or gymkhana, which insists on entry only for those wearing ties.

"...If we get into this club, it will be with our dhoti and saree. We will not change our domestic policies to suit foreign investors," he said, addressing a post-budget interaction with industry players in the financial capital.

He said there are both positives and negatives of such an inclusion, which was spoken about in a previous budget announcement, and India will not "bend over backwards" to gain entry.

India's policies will be



based on domestic requirements, and there will not be any change to the stance to suit the fancy of global bond investors, he said.

The global indices should allow entry for India only if such a stance is acceptable to them, he said.

Positives of gaining entry include higher fund flows, but the same also exposes us to risks of volatility and pullouts due to non-domestic factors, Somanathan said, pointing to the experience of "destabilisation" in some east-Asian

economies.

Ajay Seth, the economic affairs secretary, hinted that there is no immediate plan of joining the indices.

"At the moment, there is quite a bit of uncertainty at the global level both in terms of the exchange rate and interest rate etc. It is not the right time to press the pedal on that aspect."

"When the global markets are a little bit more uniform, then at that point of time this piece will have to be picked up again," he said.

Govt to push primary steel producers to use 50% of input from recycled steel by 2047: Scindia

PTI ■ KOCHI

Union Steel Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday said his ministry will push primary steel producers to use 50 per cent of their input from scrapped/recycled steel by 2047 to help achieve the government target of moving into a circular economy.

Currently, the level of recycled steel usage in primary steel production is only around 10 per cent even though recycled steel contributes to 22.5 per cent of the domestic total steel production of 140 million tonnes, the minister said while addressing the last day of the three-day international conference of material recycling here.

The 10th conference is being organised by the Material Recycling Association of India and is attended by over 2,000 delegates from 38 countries.

Noting that recycling is the key cog in the wheel of manufacturing as economies move

into a circular model of development, he said, "Going forward the industry should focus on the 6Rs philosophy of reduce (exploitation of natural resources), recycle, reuse, recover, re-design and reinforce".

He said the government is committed to reducing CO2 emissions in the steel sector by 5 per cent by 2030 from the current 2.85 to 1.4 CO2/tonne of crude steel, and to achieve this recycling scrap steel is an extremely important source.

"Today, scrap usage is only 15 per cent in primary steel production. We will push the steel industry to increase this to 25 per cent in the next five years, and by 2047, this should double to 50 per cent. This means that the primary steel producers consume only 50 per cent of iron ore by then," Scindia said.

This is needed as the natural resources are finite and the demand looks infinite, he said, adding the steel industry has the biggest role to play in the whole process.



The country currently produces 25 million tonne of scrap steel and annually imports 5 million tonne of scrap steel with zero import duty, he added.

The recycling industry is highly unorganised and is worth about USD 50 billion now. There are over 25,000 recycling units in the country. However, in the metals space almost 95 per cent are organised, Material Recycling Association president Sanjay Mehta said.

He also urged the minister to extend the duty-free

Godrej Properties sales bookings rise 77%: Pirojsha

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Godrej Properties sales bookings rose 77 per cent year-on-year to Rs 8,181 crore in the April-December period on strong housing demand, and will cross the target of Rs 10,000 crore for the full fiscal, its Executive Chairman Pirojsha Godrej said.

The company's sales bookings stood at Rs 4,613 crore in the first nine months of the last financial year.

In an interview with PTI, Pirojsha Godrej said: "We are very happy with the quarter gone by. Operationally, it has been a very strong quarter".

Sales booking during the October-December period jumped over two-fold to Rs 3,252 crore from Rs 1,541 crore in the year-ago period.

Not Enough: Tech industry seeks more from FM to bridge digital divide

ANS ■ NEW DELHI

Hailed as a progressive and forward-looking one by the IT and technology honchos, the Union Budget 2023-24 did fall short on some expectations by the industry, especially around consumer electronics manufacturing and bridging the digital divide in the country.

According to the India Cellular & Electronics Association (ICEA), the latest steps will have no significant impact on the final product price but are generally in the right direction.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman mentioned that the mobile manufacturing sector crossed Rs 2,75,000 crore in 2021-22. The targeted number for 2022-23 is Rs 3,50,000 crore and Rs 4,40,000 crore in 2023-24.

She also proposed the removal of 2.75 per cent basic customs duty (BCD) on camera lens; removal of duty on inputs to parts of connectors - Palladium Tetra Amine Sulphate; reduction of BCD on parts of open cell of TV panel from 5.5 per cent to 2.75 per cent; continuation of custom exemption notifications which were facing a sunset on March 31, 2023 for another one year.

According to Pankaj Mohindroo, Chairman, ICEA, a high-performing sector's genuine requests have not been addressed.



"These could have provided a significant impact on competitiveness leading to better exports, arresting the grey market and boosting revenue," he said in a statement.

For example, capping of basic customs duty (BCD) on import of high-end mobile phones is required to arrest the burgeoning smuggled market which has crossed Rs 12,000 crore in 2023.

"This measure would have boosted government revenue, reduced smuggling, ensured fair trade and helped build legal businesses in India," said Mohindroo.

Also required is the removal of input duties on resin, mesh, sponge, film, gasket, logo, cover tape, adhesive tape from 8.25 per cent to 16.5 per cent to zero level.

This was essential to promote the manufacturing of a very critical vertical -- mechanics. The government should also remove input duties of 2.75 per cent duty imposed in the previous budget on the many

inputs of PCBA, inputs of connectors and inputs of camera modules.

"Removal of duty on certain parts of the chargers is also required. While we have built a huge charger manufacturing industry, these changes would have helped us to become more competitive," Mohindroo added.

The Indian industry met the 2021-22 manufacturing target of Rs 2,75,000 crore but we may fall short of the manufacturing target of FY 2022-23 because of domestic demand shrinking in 2022-23.

In spite of a glorious performance in exports which will cross Rs 70,000 crore in 2022-23 (versus Rs 45,000 crore in 2021-22 plus 50 per cent increase), the 50 per cent increase in GST from 12 per cent to 18 per cent "has dealt a very cruel hand to this high-performing industry which kept the nation's economy moving during the pandemic," said the ICEA.

According to the Internet

and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), there have been two critical concerns for the digital industry.

"First, the growth rate of digital penetration has slowed down and secondly, there is a clearly identifiable digital divide in India with some sections getting marginalised as they are not onboarded digitally," said the IAMAI.

"While the budget announcement marks the correct intention and fiscal incentives, other ministries need to complement the Finance Minister's grand vision to help realise her vision," said the industry body.

'According to Sandip Patel, Managing Director, IBM India/South Asia, it is a progressive budget that underscores technology-driven growth.

"The investment in core infrastructure will require significant thrust on digital infrastructure including digitization and automation. The budget has outlined measures to provide impetus for technology-driven accelerated change and technology will also work as a key deflationary measure," said Patel.

"India is all set for leading the change and usher in green growth which is aptly visible in the green credits to green energy to green mobility to green farming, which has found its place in the budget this year," he added.

Revival of rural economy to take time in absence of specific triggers



ANS ■ NEW DELHI

Focus on the rural economy in the budget has been waning over the years and in such a scenario a revival of the rural economy would take time, JM Financial said in a report.

In the absence of a specific focus on the rural economy in the Union Budget for 2023-24, analysts don't see immediate triggers for revival in the rural economy. Moreover in the absence of specific or enhance-ment of allocation towards the rural economy, we believe that the rural environment would have to revive on its own. Hence we would view businesses dealing with price sensitive low ticket items as less likely to benefit, JM Financial said.

An attempt is made to make the new tax regime more

attractive after getting a low response in FY23, however we believe the benefits in the form of tax saving on enhanced no-tax limit (INR 0.2mn) is unlikely to spur demand in a meaningful manner, JM Financial said in a report.

Unlike the anticipation by a section of the market, rural focus was missing in the budget announcements. The expectations of a populist budget was linked to 9 state elections in 2023, moreover with FY24 being the last full year budget before the general elections in CY24. However, we believe that the schemes relating to empowerment of women Self Help Groups, artisans and setting up of digital infra for agriculture and farmer centric solutions would provide opportunities in the rural economy to improve their livelihood, JM Financial said.

Educationists say more funds are required to meet NEP targets



ANS ■ NEW DELHI

In Budget 2023-24, the Education Ministry has been allocated Rs 1,12,899.47 crore - the highest ever. Due to this, the share of higher and school education has also gone up.

An amount of Rs 44,094.62 crore has been allocated for higher education, which was around 8 per cent higher than the previous year's allocation of Rs 40,828.35 crore. However, some educationists believe that the higher education need even more funds to meet the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) targets.

Professor Mamidala Jagadeesh Kumar, Chairman, UGC said, "his is to overcome the learning losses of the Covid-19 pandemic and inject more digital technology into higher education for more access and equity. Increased fund allocation will accelerate the implementation of NEP 2020, bringing further dividends to the students to make them employable and strengthen our efforts in

making India a knowledge-based economy, Kumar added.

Arvind Chaturvedi Pro Vice Chancellor, IILM University, Gurugram said that an 8 per cent increase in allocation to education sector is not sufficient. "A higher allocation was expected."

"Educationists were expecting a higher allocation to meet the NEP target of 6 per cent of GDP. In that sense, it is disappointing. However, the focus of budget proposals has been on IT education and skill development, which is a welcome move," he added.

Shishir Jaipuria, Chairman, Seth Anandram Jaipuria Group of Educational Institutions, and Chairman of FICCI Arise have a different opinion. He said, "The Union Budget 2023-24 spells out progressive initiatives and reforms for the Indian education sector in many areas, including skill development, teacher training, future-readiness of learners, and greater accessibility of learning content."

कार्यालय : निदेशक उत्तराखण्ड चाय विकास बोर्ड, अल्मोड़ा जिला पंचायत परिसर, धारानौला, अल्मोड़ा-263601

पत्रांक : 849/4-स्टर/निविदा सूचना/2022-23 दिनांक : 04 फरवरी, 2023

अल्प कालीन ई-निविदा सूचना

उत्तराखण्ड चाय विकास बोर्ड, अल्मोड़ा द्वारा अपने चाय बागानों में उपयोग हेतु क्रय की जाने वाली, जैविक खाद व नर्सरी सामग्री की आपूर्ति हेतु इच्छुक निविदादाताओं से ई-निविदाएं दिनांक 06-02-2023 से ऑनलाइन **Website www.uktenders.gov.in** पर दिनांक 15-02-2023 को सायं 5.00 बजे तक आमंत्रित की जाती है। निविदाओं से सम्बन्धित निविदावार अलग-अलग विवरण (निविदा प्रपत्र निविदा शर्तें, सामग्री का विवरण इत्यादि) ऑनलाइन अवलोकन/डाउनलोडिंग हेतु **Website www.uktenders.gov.in** पर उपलब्ध है।

निदेशक

उत्तराखण्ड चाय विकास बोर्ड,
जिला पंचायत परिसर, धारानौला, अल्मोड़ा (उत्तराखण्ड)

RATHI STEEL AND POWER LIMITED

CIN: L27109DL1971PLC005905
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Mathura Road, New Delhi- 110044
Email ID: investors@rathisteelandalpower.com, Website: www.rathisteelandalpower.com

This is to inform you that pursuant to the Regulation 33 of SEBI (Listing Obligations And Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015 meeting of the Board of Directors of M/s Rathi Steel and Power Limited is to be held on Monday the 13th Day of February 2023 at the Registered office of the Company at 4.00 PM to consider and approve following businesses as under :-

ITEM NO.	AGENDA FOR DISCUSSION
Take note and confirm the following:-	
1.	To appoint Chairman of the meeting to call the meeting to order.
2.	To Ensure Quorum of the Meeting
3.	To grant leave of absence, if any.
4.	To take note and confirm the minutes of previous meeting of board of directors of the Company.
Consider and Approve following:-	
5.	To consider and approve Unaudited Financial Results for the nine month ended and Quarter ended on December 31, 2022
6.	Any other businesses with permission of the Chair.

For and on behalf of Board
Sd/-
(PREM NARAIN VARSHNEY)
MANAGING DIRECTOR
Place: New Delhi
Date: 04-02-2023
DIN: 00012709

FM's bullishness on millets must translate into benefits for farmers

ANS ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana figured just once, albeit tangentially, in the February 1 Union Budget speech by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman when she announced that the

Hyderabad-based Indian Institute of Millets Research (IIMR), an affiliate of the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), will be transformed into a centre of excellence to make India a global millets hub.

The ICAR-IIMR will share best practices, research and technologies at the international level, the Minister announced but made no financial allocation for the proposal.

This was the only announcement which brought some cheers for Telangana in what many termed as a disappointing

Budget. In tune with its focus on millets, the Centre made the key announcement in the Union Budget for 2023-24. However, the roadmap to achieve the goal of boosting production and procurement of millets was not mentioned.

Calling millets 'Shree Anna' or mother of all grains, Sitharaman quoted Prime Minister Narendra Modi to say that India is at the forefront of popularising millets, whose consumption improved food security and the well being of farmers.

The Finance Minister pointed out

that India is the largest producer and second largest exporter of millets.

"We grow several types of Shree Anna, such as Jowar, Raagi, Bajra, Ramdana, Cheena and Saama. These have a number of health benefits and have been an integral part of our food for centuries," she said.

The UN has declared 2023 as the International Year of Millets (IYM) at the request of the Indian government to raise awareness and increase the production and consumption of millets.

The declaration has allowed the Centre to take the lead in celebrating IYM 2023. As part of this, Central Ministries, state govern-

ments and Indian Embassies will hold events throughout the year to promote and spread awareness about the benefits of millets.

Support will be provided for post-harvest value addition, enhancing domestic consumption, and for branding millet products nationally and internationally. As per the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), India is the largest producer of millet in the world with a share of 41 per cent in 2020

Nine types of millets are grown as Kharif crops in over 20 states. Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh are the leading producers.

Exposition to promote clean fuels inaugurated

PTI ■ GURUGRAM

Union Minister for Heavy Industries Mahendra Nath Pandey on Saturday inaugurated a conference and exposition here on schemes for promotion of cleaner fuels in the automotive sector.

The event, named 'Towards Panchamrit', is being organised at the International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT), Manesar.

To drive India towards cleaner mobility, the government is giving a major push to clean fuels. "Towards Panchamrit" event is an effort in this direction to promote adoption of "Panchamrit" or five clean fuels -- Hydrogen, Ethanol, Bio Diesel, Gas and Electric Vehicles.

Pandey said in line with Prime

Minister Narendra Modi's announcements at COP 26 — "Panchamrit Ki Saugat", five commitments to achieve the vision of becoming a carbon neutral country by 2070, ministries are taking comprehensive efforts to move towards fulfilling this goal.

The government is also working to achieve self-reliance in the automotive industry, he added.

Minister of State for Heavy Industries Krishan Pal Gurjar highlighted the initiatives taken by the ministry to promote clean and green mobility.

He said these initiatives will give a boost to domestic manufacturing, help in employment generation, reduce dependence on exports and thereby help in achieving the vision of 'Atmanirbhar Bharat'.



UJVNL LIMITED

(An Uttarakhand Govt. Enterprise)

H.O. : "UJJWAL", MAHARANI BAGH, G.M.S. Road, Dehradun-248006
Tel.: 0135-2763508, 2763808, Fax: 0135-2763507, Website: www.ujvnl.com

No. 116 Date: 04.02.2023

e-Procurement Corrigendum No.-02

Due to unavoidable circumstances, e-Tender Notice Reference: NCB/17/EE(E&M)/MB-II/Barrage/2022-23 (Tender ID 2022_UJWB2_52260_1) Name of work: Design, Manufacturing, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Trashrack panels & one no. Hydraulically Operated Movable Trash Rack Cleaning Machine (TRCM) to safely handle rake capacity of 2.0 Tonne as well as log grappler capacity of 2.0 Tonne including dismantling of existing Trash rack panels & TRCM at Joshiyara Barrage, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, India, is amended and Corrigendum No.02 has been uploaded on the e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>. Other terms and conditions will remain unchanged.

For fuller & further details, kindly visit e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>

Executive Engineer E&M

"Avoid wasteful use of Electricity"



UJVNL Limited

(An Uttarakhand Govt. Enterprises)

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Telephones: 0135-2763508, 2763808 & Fax: 0135-2763507
CIN No. U40101UR2001SGC025866, Website: www.ujvnl.com

R.O. No.: 115 Date: 04.02.2023

E-Tender Time Extension Notice-4

Due to unavoidable circumstances the date of submission and opening of NIT No - NCB/17/EE(E&M)/MB-II/Barrage/2022-23: "Design, Manufacturing, Supply, Installation, Testing & Commissioning of Trashrack panels & one no. Hydraulically Operated Movable Trash Rack Cleaning Machine (TRCM) to safely handle rake capacity of 2.0 Tonne as well as log grappler capacity of 2.0 Tonne including dismantling of existing Trash rack panels & TRCM at Joshiyara Barrage, Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, India" invited by the office of Executive Engineer (E&M), Joshiyara Barrage, Joshiyara, Uttarkashi is hereby extended as follows:-

Last Date/Time for receipt of bid in the portal - 10.02.2023 up to 16:00 Hrs.

Last Date of receipt of hard copy of bid - 13.02.2023 up to 11:30 Hrs

Date of opening of bid on the website - 13.02.2023 at 11:30 Hrs.

Details of subsequent addendum/corrigendum/cancellation etc. may be obtained from the e-procurement portal <http://uktenders.gov.in>.

Executive Engineer

"Save Electricity in the Interest of Nation"

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is informed to the general public that my client Mrs. Phionema Lal (wife) Late Mr. Daniel M.Lal - R/o M.No. 38, Gali No. 5 A-2 Block, West Sant Nagar Buzar, North Delhi-110084, Evicting from her all property, house, bank balance to his son and his family. Respectively: Nathaniel Lal (Son), Premilata Lal (daughter in law) Prince Lal (grandson), Syntha Lal (Princed's wife), Femina Lal (granddaughter) - being fed up of their ill-behavior and misbehaviour, and being out of their complete control. We have severed our relationship with them, in future our client will not be responsible for any act or transaction of these people, he himself will be responsible for it.

SATYENDRA KUMAR SHARMA (Advocate)

Enrl. No. D-9-B/03

Chamber No F-716, 7th Floor,

Karkardooma Court, Delhi- 110032

नगर निगम फरीदाबाद के भवन का रिकार्ड में वृद्धि प्राप्ति आई नं. 189FB379 व भूकान नं. 2H-22/2 एन. एच 2 फरीदाबाद श्रीमान नवीन कुमार कालरा व श्रीमान आनंद प्रकाश कालरा के नाम पर दर्ज है। श्रीमान आनंद प्रकाश कालरा पुत्र श्रीमान खेमचंद कालरा की मृत्यु दिनांक 8.02.2017 के पश्चात जो कि इस भवन के रजिस्ट्री शुदा मालिकों में से एक थे के बारे में प्राणी श्रीमान नवीन कुमार कालरा, श्रीमती राज रानी(पत्नी) व श्रीमान भवन कुमार कालरा(पुत्र) ने आवेदन किया है कि वृद्धि प्राप्ति आई नं. 189FB379 व भूकान नं. 2H-22/2 एन. एच 2 फरीदाबाद के कानूनी मालिक हैं जोर इस की मालिकता श्रीमती राज रानी व श्रीमान नवीन कुमार कालरा के नाम दर्ज की जाए। यदि इस मालिकता जिसका वृद्धि प्राप्ति आई नं. 189FB379 व भूकान नं. 2H-22/2 एन. एच 2 फरीदाबाद को प्राणीय श्रीमती राज रानी कालरा व नवीन कुमार कालरा के नाम पर दर्ज होने हेतु किसी भी व्यक्ति को कोई एवारा है तो वह वैधिक एवारा समार प्रभ में प्रकाशित होने के 30 दिन (1 महीना) के भीतर अपना एवारा अयोग्यताओं के कारणों में दे सकता है। समारवधि समाप्त उपरान्त भवन का रिकार्ड में प्रस्तुत दस्तावेजों के आधार पर दिया जाएगा। नगर निगम फरीदाबाद इसका उपराद्ध नहीं होगा। सूचित रहे। क्षेत्रीय एवं काराधान अधिकारी-III

नगर निगम फरीदाबाद

ARSENAL'S PREMIER LEAGUE TITLE CHARGE HALTED BY STRUGGLING EVERTON

AFP ■ LIVERPOOL

Mikel Arteta said Arsenal must now show the resolve of champions after a shock 1-0 defeat to Everton dented the Gunners bid to land a first Premier League title in 19 years.

Arsenal still lead Manchester City by five points at the top of the table, but blew the chance to extend that advantage as they suffered just a second league defeat of the season.

James Tarkowski headed in the winning goal for the Toffees on the hour mark as Everton made a perfect start to life under new manager Sean Dyche to climb out of the relegation zone.

"This is not going to be a rose pathway," said Arteta of Arsenal's road to the title. "This is going to be tricky and we will have to dig in and play much better than we did today."

Everton came into the game on a run of four league defeats at Goodison for the first time since 1958.

That disastrous form cost Frank Lampard his job and Dyche's appointment got the desired bounce with a first win in 11 games.

"The minimum requirement is maximum effort and we saw that today," said Dyche.

Everton's board again stayed away due to rising tensions



between the club's hierarchy and supporters.

Protests were planned for before and after the game for fans to voice their anger at the running of the club.

The Toffees were the only Premier League club to not make any signings in the January transfer window despite their perilous position in the table.

But the home side showed there is still enough talent available to Dyche to dig themselves

out of trouble if they can harness the same level of energy and intensity on a more regular basis.

GOODISON 'ROCKING'

A first victory since October was no more than Everton deserved and it was two of Dyche's former Burnley players who combined for the only goal of the game on the hour mark as Tarkowski headed in Dwight McNeil's corner.

"The fans are going to be massive for us. I have been here when it has been rocking. It was rocking today. But we have to give the fans something," added Dyche.

"Of course I'm going to drive home and think what a great start but I'm not naive. We have to keep working and improving."

Keeping Dominic Calvert-Lewin fit will be critical to Everton's survival hopes, but the

England international showed his rustiness in front of goal in a second consecutive injury-impacted season.

Amadou Onana's surging run and ball across the face of goal just needed a finishing touch that Calvert-Lewin could not stretch to make.

Moments later Abdoulaye Doucoure, who had been frozen out by Lampard, headed a glorious chance wide when unmarked inside the box.

It took Arsenal half an hour to even threaten Jordan Pickford's goal, but they should have led when Eddie Nketiah fired high and wide with just the goalkeeper to beat.

Conor Coady then had to react quickly to turn Bukayo Saka's volley off the line as the visitors began to find their rhythm.

Arsenal were brighter at the start of the second period and Martin Odegaard will feel he should have hit the target when teed up by Nketiah.

But just as the Gunners were beginning to turn the screw, their luck at the back ran out.

Tarkowski was fundamental to Dyche overachievements in keeping Burnley in the Premier League for six consecutive seasons between 2016 and 2022 and the centre-back rose highest to power home.



Arsenal lacked composure in shock Everton defeat: Arteta

AFP ■ LIVERPOOL

Mikel Arteta admitted Premier League leaders Arsenal lacked composure in their shock 1-0 defeat at struggling Everton on Saturday.

James Tarkowski's second half header condemned Arsenal to just their second league loss this term. It was a frustrating blow for Gunners boss Arteta, who had hoped to open up an eight-point lead over second placed Manchester City.

For the first time since losing at Manchester United in September, Arsenal tasted defeat and Arteta claimed his players weren't composed enough to cope with Everton's aggres-

sive game-plan under new boss Sean Dyche.

"We had loads of the ball but we lacked that purpose and quality in the final third, we generated many chances. But then we conceded and they slowed the game down and we struggled," Arteta said.

"Everton do this to every team that is their strength with the height, the physicality is their strength, if you want to control the game against them you have to control this. We did not do that today.

"We needed more composure and to control emotionally the game better. We gave away so many unnecessary free-kicks and that's what they

want." Manchester City could close the gap on Arsenal to two points if they win at Tottenham on Sunday.

But, despite his criticism of their tepid performance at Everton, Arteta backed his players to survive the tense title race.

"Today I love them much better than the week before or a month ago. It is easy to be next to someone when they are winning well. I am still so proud of all of these players, they deserve it," he said.

"This is not going to be a rose pathway. This is going to be tricky and we will have to dig in and play much better than we did today."

Bopanna-Bhambri lose in Davis Cup



PTI ■ HILLEROD (DENMARK)

Indian duo Rohan Bopanna and Yuki Bhambri lost to world number 9 Holger Rune and Johannes Ingildsen in straight sets to hand hosts Denmark a 2-1 lead after the doubles tie in the Davis Cup World Group Play-Off on Saturday. The Danish pair made short work of the Indians winning 6-2 6-4 in just 65 minutes as Rune's presence proved to be a decisive factor.

Earlier on Friday, India's number one Sumit Nagal had erased a one-set deficit to pip August Holmgren 4-6 6-3 6-4 in two hours and 27 minutes. Nagal restored the parity after Bhambri had a forgettable opening singles losing 2-6 2-6 to the rising teen sensation Rune.

Bhambri has quit singles and now plays only doubles on tour. The 25-year-old Nagal, ranked 506, dropped serve in the very first game of the match but once he got hold of his nerves, he was his usual fighting self.

He got the break back but squandered the chances when Holmgren offered them.

The Danish player, ranked 484, eventually sealed the set.

In the second set, it was Nagal who drew the first blood and went up 5-2. He served out the set in the ninth game to force a decider.

Nagal had a chance to get the first break when he made a deep return and Holmgren's forehand return sailed over the baseline at 30-all but the home player served well to save the chance. Nagal got another chance when Holmgren netted a forehand at deuce point in the third game but he himself made a forehand error on the break-point.

While Nagal preferred to hit from the baseline, Holmgren charged the net often to create chances for volley winners.

Holmgren handed Nagal another break chance when he tried to pick a low volley but could not keep the ball in the court and followed that up with

Zverev storms to Davis Cup win after being cleared of abuse



AFP ■ PARIS

Alexander Zverev defeated a three-time major winner Stan Wawrinka in the Davis Cup on Friday as the German star returned to the courts for the first time since being cleared of domestic abuse.

The 25-year-old Zverev swept past Wawrinka 6-4, 6-1 in Trier to bring Germany level with Switzerland after the opening day of their qualifier.

On Tuesday, Zverev was told by the ATP that there was

"insufficient evidence" to substantiate allegations against him of abusing a former girlfriend. Former world number two Zverev always denied the claims, describing them as "baseless".

On Friday, Wawrinka, who helped his country win the 2014 Davis Cup, was returning to the team competition for the first time in eight years. Now ranked 135 in the world, he was comfortably beaten for the fifth time in five meetings by Zverev.

a double fault, allowing the Indian to take a mini 3-2 lead.

That lead stayed with Nagal and he came out serving for the match in the 10th game. Holmgren's forehand error gave the Indian three match points and converted the first one on

home team player's unforced error.

In the opening singles, Rune broke Bhambri twice in each set. The 19-year-old converted four of the seven break chances while the Indian did not get a single chance to break his opponent.

Dipa Karmakar handed 21-month ban after failing dope test

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star gymnast Dipa Karmakar has been handed a 21-month ban for failing a dope test conducted by the International Testing Agency, contrary to claims made by Indian officials that her "suspension" last year was not related to doping offence.

Karmakar's dope sample collected out-of-competition by the ITA, an independent organisation that manages the anti-doping programme of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG), was found to contain Higenamine, which is a prohibited substance under World Anti-Doping Agency Code.

Her ban period will, however, end on July 10 this year as it was counted from the day (October 11, 2011) the sample was collected.

"The ITA confirms that Dipa Karmakar has been suspended for a 21-month period, effective until 10 July 2023 after testing positive for higenamine (53. Beta-2 Agonists as per the World Anti-Doping Agency prohibited list)," the ITA said in a statement late on Friday.

"The positive sample was collected on behalf of the FIG in the scope of an out-of-competition control on 11 October 2021," it added.

The Switzerland based non-profit organisation works under the supervision of WADA and International Olympic Committee to implement anti-doping



programmes for various international federations. The ITA further said Karmakar's dope issue was resolved under a case resolution agreement pursuant to article 10.8.2 of the FIG Anti-Doping Rules and equivalent provision in the WADA.

"The athlete's results have been disqualified from October 11, 2021 onwards."

Karmakar, who shot to fame after finishing fourth in the 2016 Rio Olympics in the vault

event, has been struggling with injuries ever since she underwent a surgery to treat an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury in 2017.

Her last FIG event was the 2019 World Cup in Baku.

The ban on Karmakar flies on her face as well as on the Gymnastic Federation of India officials who have been claiming ignorance after she was put in the "suspended" category by the FIG in February last year.

GFI president Sudhir Mittal had then said that he had not received any communication from the FIG regarding her suspension.

Karmakar herself and her coach Bisheshwar Nandi kept quiet at that time.

Other GFI officials went to the extent of saying that the 'suspended' status could be due to other issues, like ethical or disciplinary, not related to doping violation.

Chelsea can't buy a goal in Fulham stalemate

AFP ■ LONDON

Chelsea manager Graham Potter pleaded for time to gel his expensive collection of new stars after the Blues were held 0-0 at home by Fulham on Friday.

Enzo Fernandez made his Chelsea debut after becoming the most expensive player in British football history with a £107 million move (\$132 million) from Benfica on transfer deadline day.

Mykhailo Mudryk was also given his Stamford Bridge bow, while Noni Madueke and David Datro Fofana came off the bench for their Premier League debuts.

Chelsea's record investment of over £300 million in the January window took the total spend on players in their first season under new ownership to over half a billion.

Co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali were in attendance, but will not have been impressed as another chance to close on the top four slipped by.

Potter's men sit ninth in the table, still nine points adrift of the Champions League places.

"New players are adapting to a new country and a new league. It's not straightforward. When the price tag is what it is questions will be asked, it's the nature of the business,"

said Potter.

"The decision we took in the window you can see the profile in terms of age. We feel we have a very strong group of players. We have to gel and become a really good team. That's where the work is."

Fulham had secured a first victory in the west London derby since 2006 when the teams met just three weeks ago.

Marco Silva's men sit two points and three places above their local rivals in the table in their first season back in the top flight.

HAVERTZ'S HAT-TRICK OF MISSES

Fulham were seeking a first ever league double over Chelsea and came close to achieving it as Andreas Pereira forced Kepa Arrizabalaga into a flying save low to his right.

For the enormous sums spent by Chelsea's new owners, their lack of a clinical goalscorer was exposed once more.

Kai Havertz had a hat-trick of big chances to break the deadlock before half-time.

The German international failed to get enough contact on Thiago Silva's brilliant pass to divert the ball beyond Bernd Leno.

Havertz then could not stretch to turn Mason Mount's dangerous



cross on target.

But his best opening came when he hit the post with a lob over Leno from Hakim Ziyech's defence-splitting pass.

Ziyech would have been a Paris Saint-Germain player this week had Chelsea not submitted the wrong paperwork in the minutes before Tuesday's transfer deadline.

The Moroccan is just one of a wealth of wide options now available to Potter and he wasted no time in hooking Mudryk despite his price tag after a disappointing first 45 minutes.

The Ukrainian joined from Shakhtar Donetsk last month for a fee that could rise to 100 million euros (\$110 million).

Madueke was introduced in his place and Potter also threw on Raheem Sterling from the bench on the hour mark in the search for a winner.

Fernandez was inches away from the perfect debut as the Argentine World Cup winner flashed a shot wide from distance 20 minutes from time.

Connor Gallagher came even closer as he hit the side-netting from the edge of the box.

But the best chance fell to Fofana as the Ivorian rounded the stranded Leno, but failed to beat the covering Tim Ream on the line.

WE'VE PLENTY OF OPTIONS IN SPIN DEPARTMENT: CUMMINS

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Australia captain Pat Cummins on Saturday said his team is not fretting over its spin combination as it has enough options to support veteran off-spinner Nathan Lyon in the high-profile four-match Test series against India beginning in Nagpur on Thursday.

The touring Australians have named Mitchell Swepson along with finger spinner Ashton Agar to team up with Lyon.

"We've got plenty of options here (with) finger spin, wrist spin, left arm (pace) when (Mitchell) Starcy comes back," Cummins told reporters in his first media interaction after arriving in India.

"We'll obviously pick the bowlers that we think are going to take 20 wickets. But how we split that up, we're not 100 per cent sure yet."

Asked if it would be a two-pronged spin attack, he said: "I wouldn't say it's a given. Obviously it's very conditions dependent. Particularly in the first test, once we get to Nagpur we will see that."

The Australians are here for a training camp before heading to

Nagpur on Monday.

"The good thing is someone like Agar was in our last team, Swepson played the last two overseas tour, so a bit of experience."

"Murphy played in the last tour. We feel that we got a lot of support in that department for Lyon."

The 29-year-old Cummins pointed out that middle-order batter Travis Head also offers off-spin option.

"Travis Head also bowls really good offspin. We have to balance things. We have got a plenty of variety there to choose from. We have not locked in any bowling line-up so far."

While there is so much talk about spin bowling, Cummins said his side should not forget about their intimidating pace bowling attack.

"I think sometimes, talking about a couple of spinners, you forget how good a lot of our fast bowlers have been in all conditions."

"Even some of the SCG wickets, there haven't been a lot in them for quick bowlers, but the quick bowlers have found a way," he added.



Cummins has come a long way since he made a Test comeback after six years in Ranchi during the last tour of India in 2017.

An injury-prone Cummins then dished out a hostile spell to dismiss the star Indian trio of KL Rahul, Virat Kohli and Ajinkya Rahane en route to figures of 4/106.

"It was my first test in six years. I just wanted to reaffirm that's where I wanted to be in Test cricket. I really enjoyed that spell, you can't be worried about your body or different things. You just got to go all out. I really enjoyed that."

"Test cricket can be really, really harsh. You have got to accept that it's going to be grinding times, and you got to be out for it and embrace that challenge. Coming here to India when a lot of the talks are around, big spinning wicket, it's not always the case."

"You need to get into the grind at times. That role of the fast bowler, bowling a lot of overs for not a heap of reward but doing your job for your team. I really enjoy that aspect of the last tour. Much to play for this time," he said.

OZ can win, India more vulnerable at home this time: Greg Chappell

PTI ■ MELBOURNE

Batting great Greg Chappell believes Australia can win the upcoming high-profile four-match Test series as India are "vulnerable" this time with injuries to key players like Rishabh Pant and Jasprit Bumrah.

While the swashbuckling keeper-batter Pant is ruled out for most part of the year as he continues to recover from injuries sustained during a horrific car crash, Indian pace ace Bumrah (back injury) does not figure in the Indian squad for the first two Tests.

"Australia can win this series. India are more vulnerable at home than they have been for some time due to injuries to key players like Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja and Jasprit Bumrah. They will rely heavily on Virat Kohli," Chappell wrote in an opinion piece for 'Sydney Morning Herald'.

Premier spin-bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, who recovered from a knee injury and made a comeback in the Ranji Trophy last month, is in the Indian squad for the Test series beginning in Nagpur on Thursday.

"Visiting teams are often fooled by a game that seems to be going nowhere but suddenly changes at a frenetic pace. The Indians are used to this, so Australia will need to adapt quickly with mind, bat and ball," said the former India coach.

Finger spinner Ashton Agar, who is Australia's only left-tarm twaker in the squad, should be preferred to partner Nathan Lyon on turning tracks, Chappell said.

"Should the pitches favour spin, which is more likely, I expect Ashton Agar to get the nod because finger spin is con-



impression that it had gone 'the other way'.

"As the leader of the spin attack, Nathan Lyon will need to take pages out of his book and show the way."

Chappell, however, said that Australia will also have issues to iron out.

"David Warner is in patchy form and needs to improve his Test record in India; Usman Khawaja, Alex Carey, Travis Head and Cameron Green will be tested against better quality spin than they encountered in Pakistan and Sri Lanka."

"Marcus Labuschagne will be facing his first big test in the subcontinent; and Steve Smith's recent batting tweaks will be examined more keenly than against the West Indies, South Africa and in the BBL," he wrote.

The series will be like a 'final frontier' for the Pat Cummins-led No. 1 Test side who have been on a roll after the pacer took over from Tim Paine.

Australia have had a fine run recently, winning the Ashes and then the series against Pakistan, West Indies and South Africa. They will be in search of their first series win in India in 19 years.

In their last tour of India in 2017, they began with a big win in the Pune Test but went on to lose the series 1-2. India, on the other hand, have not lost at home for more than a decade and have a record streak of winning 15 series.

"The Australians will have to summon every ounce of their talent and experience during the next month to succeed. India is no longer the mystery it once was. Tours are more regular and the IPL offers valuable exposure."

"Attrition takes a huge toll on touring teams. If India are in the contest on day five, they will win," Chappell said.

sidered to be more accurate," said the 74-year-old Chappell who scored 7110 runs from 87 Tests with an impressive average of 53.86 between 1970 and 1984.

"Anil Kumble who took 619 wickets in Test cricket, rarely strayed off the straight and narrow. His stock in trade were fast, flat leg breaks which were always threatening the stumps. Batters knew if they missed, they were in trouble. Jadeja's stock in trade is similarly unerring."

"Agar has got to emulate their roles. One bowler leaking runs will be the difference in a tight contest."

Recollecting his conversation with Erapalli Prasanna, he wrote the Indian legend would spin the ball hard, try to hit the batter on the pads often, get him thinking about the spinning ball, and then trap him on the crease with a straight one.

"Line, he (Prasanna) said, was optional, length was mandatory. He explained to me that he would lay the seam a bit flatter than for the traditional off spinner and then impart a higher number of rotations on the ball that would make the ball drift like an off spinner but, once it landed on the leather, it would skid on with the arm giving the

Green might have an 'outside chance' of playing Nagpur Test: McDonald

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Dashing all-rounder Cameron Green is making a quick recovery from his index finger injury and has an "outside chance" of making it to Australia's playing eleven for the opening Test against India starting in Nagpur on February 9.

The 23-year-old seam bowling all-rounder, who is recovering from a surgery on his index finger in his right hand, had a bowl at the nets in Alur.

"We haven't put a clear line through him on the team sheet. So, I wouldn't say he was in discomfort when he was bowling," McDonald told reporters here on the sidelines of their four-day training camp.

However there are still some concerns when he is batting, admitted the head coach.

"I would say one of the deliveries jarred the bottom of the bat and that can create discomfort for anyone, but there is a little bit of awareness around that finger. He has made some significant steps forward in the last couple of days, probably to my surprise. "So, there is still an outside chance, everything going well, he might be on the team sheet," McDonald kept the options open.

Skipper Pat Cummins had earlier ruled out Green from bowling in the Test should he play, but McDonald said he has made significant progress.

Green's inclusion would provide Australia with an opportunity to include an extra specialist spinner in their bid to win their first Border-Gavaskar Trophy in India since 2004.

McDonald further said their explosive opener David Warner is fully "recharged" and looking forward to make amends for his poor runs in some of the previous tours in the upcoming Test series.

The 36-year-old, who has a poor record of averaging 24.25 in eight Tests in India, had complained of exhaustion and said he would have preferred the night off from the Cricket Australia awards to recover from a busy home summer.

"I haven't noticed any fatigue in David Warner since I got here," McDonald said.

"I would probably dispel that as a bit of a myth. He has had a couple of days off... He has been there (at training) for one of the two days, and he is not there today."

"We are managing each individual coming in around their specific preparation and



where they have been and there is no doubt it was a demanding summer into BBL, and it creates a challenge back into Test match cricket.

"But we feel the preparation we have him on he will be recharged and ready to go. It has been well documented he hasn't had the series that he would like. It's always challenging."

"I think the way he is applying himself in his downtime to really land on a method to take on the Indian spinners and also the quicks and to have a successful tour, I think you will see him fully invigorated and invested and fully charged for the challenge ahead."

UAE set to host Asia Cup, venue to be finalised in March



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Asian Cricket Council will decide on an alternate venue for the Asia Cup ODI tournament in March after BCCI secretary Jay Shah and PCB chairman Najam Sethi had their first formal meeting in Bahrain on Saturday.

The Asia Cup was initially allotted to Pakistan and was scheduled in September this year but Shah, who is also the ACC chairman, had announced

last October that India will not travel to Pakistan.

It is understood that United Arab Emirates with three venues -- Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Sharjah -- are favourites to host the tournament but the decision has been withheld for the time being.

All heads of ACC member nations attended the emergent meeting which was called at the behest of PCB chairman Sethi after ACC under chairmanship of Shah released the continen-

tal body's itinerary where Pakistan wasn't named the hosts. "The ACC affiliates met today and there were a lot of constructive discussions. But the shift of venue has been postponed till March. But be rest assured that with India not going to Pakistan, the tournament will have to be shifted. A tournament without Virat Kohlis, Rohit Sharmas and Shubman Gill will have the sponsors back out," a senior BCCI official privy to the devel-

opment told PTI.

One ACC insider said Sethi has just taken over PCB and if he would have ceded ground on the hosting rights in the first meeting itself, then it would have led to a bad impression at home.

Pakistan is currently going through an economic crisis and inflation has hit the country very hard with the country's currency (PKR) plummeting to Rs 277 against 1 US Dollar.

Organising a high profile tournament like Asia Cup, even if ACC pays a grant could burn a hole in PCB coffers. So strategically, if the tournament is held in the UAE, there is every possibility that all the member nations will also get to earn apart from the broadcast revenues.

In another decision, the ACC has decided to increase the annual budget allocated for Afghanistan Cricket Association to 15 percent from six.

The ACC has assured that it will help the Afghanistan board in all possible ways so that women's cricket can be revived in the country. Women are banned from playing sport under Taliban rule.

माघे निमग्नाः सलिले सुशीते।
विमुक्तपापास्त्रिदिवं प्रयान्ति॥

राजिम माघी पुत्री मेला 2023

5 फरवरी - 18 फरवरी 2023

पहला स्नान 5 फरवरी, माघी पुन्नी	दूसरा स्नान 14 फरवरी, जानकी जयंती	तीसरा स्नान 18 फरवरी, महाशिवरात्रि
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"I never thought being famous would be wonderful, but my limited exposure to celebrity has shown me the dark side big-time"
—Marianne Williamson



THE CITY OF FLOWERS NOW AN EPICENTER OF VIOLENCE

Peshawar was a peaceful place until the early 1980s when Pakistan’s then-dictator Ziaul Haq decided to become part of Washington’s cold war with Moscow, joining the fight against the 1979 Soviet invasion of neighboring Afghanistan. Write RIAZ KHAN and MUNIR AHMED

Pakistan’s Peshawar was once known as “the city of flowers,” surrounded by orchards of pear, quince and pomegranate trees. It was a trading city, situated at the gates of a key mountain valley connecting South and Central Asia.

But for the past four decades, it has borne the brunt of rising militancy in the region, fueled by the conflicts in neighboring Afghanistan and the geopolitical games of great powers.

On Tuesday, the city with a population of about 2 million was reeling after one of Pakistan’s most devastating militant attacks in years. A day earlier, a suicide bomber unleashed a blast in a mosque inside the city’s main police compound, killing at least 101 people and wounding at least 225, mostly police.

Analysts say the carnage is the legacy of decades of flawed policies by Pakistan and the United States.

“What you sow, so shall you reap,” said Abdullah Khan, a senior security analyst.

Peshawar was a peaceful place, he said, until the early 1980s when Pakistan’s then-dictator Ziaul Haq decided to become part of Washington’s cold war with Moscow, joining the fight against the 1979 Soviet invasion of neighboring Afghanistan.

Peshawar — less than 30 kilometers (20 miles) from the Afghan border — became the center where the American CIA and Pakistani military helped train, arm and fund the Afghan mujahedeen fighting the Soviets. The city was flooded by weapons and fighters, many of them hard-line Islamic militants, as well as with hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees.

Arab militants were also drawn there by the fight against the Soviets, including the scion of a wealthy Saudi family, Osama bin Laden. It was in Peshawar that bin Laden founded al-Qaida in the late 1980s, joining forces with veteran Egyptian militant Ayman al-Zawahiri.

The Soviets finally withdrew in defeat from Afghanistan in 1989. But the legacy of militancy and armed resistance that the U.S. and Pakistan fueled against them remained.

“After the Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1980s, Americans abandoned mujahedeen, Americans even abandoned us, and since then we are paying a price for it,” said Mahmood Shah, a former Pakistani army brigadier and a senior security analyst.

The mujahedeen plunged Afghanistan into civil war in a bloody fight for power. Meanwhile, in Peshawar and another Pakistani city, Quetta, the Afghan Taliban began to organize, with backing from the Pakistani government. Eventually, the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in the late 1990s, ruling until they were ousted by the 2001 American-led invasion following al-Qaida’s 9/11 attacks in the U.S.

During the nearly 20-year U.S. war against the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, militant groups blossomed in the tribal regions of Pakistan along the border and around Peshawar. Like the Taliban, they found root among the ethnic Pashtuns who make up a majority in the region and in the city.

Some groups were encouraged by the Pakistani intelligence agencies. But others turned their guns against the government, angered by heavy security crackdowns and by frequent U.S. airstrikes in the border region targeting al-Qaida and other militants.

Chief among the anti-government groups was the Pakistani Taliban, or Tahreek-e Taliban-Pakistani, or TTP. In the late 2000s and early 2010s, it waged a brutal campaign of violence around the country. Peshawar was scene of one of the bloodiest TTP attacks in 2014, on an army-run public school that killed nearly 150 people, most of them schoolboys.

Peshawar’s location has for centuries made it a key juncture between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent. One of the oldest cities

DURING THE NEARLY 20-YEAR U.S. WAR AGAINST THE TALIBAN INSURGENCY IN AFGHANISTAN, MILITANT GROUPS BLOSSOMED IN THE TRIBAL REGIONS OF PAKISTAN ALONG THE BORDER AND AROUND PESHAWAR. LIKE THE TALIBAN, THEY FOUND ROOT AMONG THE ETHNIC PASHTUNS WHO MAKE UP A MAJORITY IN THE REGION AND IN THE CITY. SOME GROUPS WERE ENCOURAGED BY THE PAKISTANI INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES. BUT OTHERS TURNED THEIR GUNS AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT, ANGERED BY HEAVY SECURITY CRACKDOWNS AND BY FREQUENT U.S. AIRSTRIKES IN THE BORDER REGION TARGETING AL-QAIDA AND OTHER MILITANTS

in Asia, it stands at the entrance to the Khyber Pass, the main route between the two regions. That was a source of its prosperity in trade and put it on the path of armies going both directions, from Moghul emperors to British imperialists.

A heavy military offensive largely put down the TTP for several years and the government and the militants eventually reached an uneasy truce. Peshawar came under heavy security control, with checkpoints dotting the main roads, and a heavy presence of police and paramilitary troops.

TTP attacks, however, have grown once more since the Afghan Taliban returned to power in Kabul in August 2021 amid the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from that country. The Pakistani Taliban are distinct from but allied to the Afghan group, and Pakistani officials regularly accuse the Afghan Taliban of giving the TTP free rein to operate from Afghan territory.

On Wednesday, several police officers joined a peace march organized by the members of civil society groups in Peshawar, denouncing militant attacks and demanding peace in the country. Police said they made some arrest in connection with Monday’s mosque bombing but did not provide details.

Ahead of Monday’s suicide bombing, Peshawar had seen increasing small-scale attacks targeting police. In another spillover from Afghanistan’s conflict, the regional affiliate of the Islamic State group attacked Peshawar’s main Shiite mosque in March 2022, killing more than 60 people.

Shah, the former officer, warned that more TTP attacks could follow and said that Pakistan needs to engage the Afghan Taliban and pressure them to either evict the TTP or ensure it doesn’t launch attacks from Afghan territory.

“If we are to have peace in Pakistan, we should talk to TTP from the position of strength with help from the Afghan Taliban,” he said. “This is the best and viable solution to avoid more violence.” (AP)

Pakistan reaches out to Taliban supremo

Pakistan has decided to seek the intervention of Taliban supreme leader Mullah Haibatullah Akhundzada to control the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terror group, according to official sources.

During an Apex Committee meeting in Peshawar, the civil and military leadership held the banned TTP responsible for the carnage in the city this week, and decided to take up the matter with the interim Afghan government at the highest level, with a clear message that Pakistan would no longer tolerate cross-border terrorism, The Express Tribune reported.

Although the TTP has denied its involvement in Monday’s suicide blast at a mosque in the Peshawar Police Lines, a briefing given to the Apex Committee suggested that the banned outfit was indeed the mastermind of the attack.

The meeting at the Governor House in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) capital was held in the wake of a deadly terrorist attack in the Police Lines in which more than 100 people, mostly policemen, were killed.

The meeting was presided over by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The participants of the meeting included Army chief Gen Syed Asim Munir, DG ISI Lt-Gen Nadeem Anjum, Peshawar Corps Commander, DGMO and other military officials as well as senior cabinet members, chief ministers of the four provinces, Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) was invited to the all-impor-



tant meeting but it did not attend.

The marathon meeting discussed how the suicide bomber managed to enter the high security zone, who the perpetrator was and how the government would respond to the renewed threat posed by the TTP.

The meeting was informed that the TTP, indeed, carried out the attack but because of fear of backlash from the Afghan Taliban, it did not own it, publicly.

Insiders told The Express Tribune that Pakistan would seek the intervention of Akhundzada to control the banned terror outfit.

The meeting noted that despite the resurgence of terrorism in the country, terrorists did not hold any specific area, therefore there was no need for a full-scale military operations.

Instead, according to Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah, the intelligence-based operations would continue. (IANS)

"People need to be aware of advanced treatment and facilities available in the country now. For example, our hospital has best-in-class treatment and care for breast cancer patients. It is very disappointing for us that a large number of patients come to us at advanced stages. Early Cancer or Stages I & II are usually treated by surgeries first. Locally advanced stages III requires chemotherapy first followed by surgery and radiation. Hormone and other targeted therapy are needed in the select group of patients who have certain markers present on their tumours. Stage IV (Distant organ spread) is treated either with chemotherapy or hormone therapy or both."

Yemenis’ wait for war crimes justice lingers

The Yemen crisis continues. It has completed eight years. The country’s internal political factions and Saudi-led military intervention have spawned the catastrophe. The intractable civil war initially has gradually transformed into a full-blown tragedy leading to the deaths of millions, especially children and women. And it has added more numbers to the international refugee crisis.

The real tragedy lies in blatant violation of all universal norms set by the UN and prescribed by the international humanitarian laws. The rules and principles of the global humanitarian framework provide full protection to all civilians and others who are not participating in the war. In fact, all sets of international humanitarian law demands and normally ensures from the conflicting groups the greatest possible measures to reduce human suffering during the conduct of fighting. Therefore, these laws clearly distinguish between military objectives and civilian objectives. The final objective is to minimise harm to civil society. What has been observed in Yemen is flouting all humanitarian restrictions while pursuing military objectives. It has led to disproportionate attacks over civilian targets. Thus, many civil society organisations and global human right agencies are claiming that indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks carried out by the warring parties in Yemen are akin to war crimes.

As long as there have been conflicts and wars, attempts have been made by international jurists and other experts to define “war crimes”. However, only by the 20th century, the very concept of war crime was defined in the legal sense of the term. According to the UN, a war crime is a serious breach of international law committed against civilians or enemy combatants during an international or domestic armed conflict. So to have a war crime, there must be an armed conflict. An armed conflict, international or non-international or



Assault rifles and missiles seized by the French Navy lay on the deck of a ship at an undisclosed location on Wednesday. French naval forces in January seized thousands of assault rifles, machine guns and anti-tank missiles in the Gulf of Oman coming from Iran heading to Yemen’s Houthi rebels, officials said on Thursday, the latest such interdiction amid West Asian nation’s long-running war

AP

involving an armed international group is a prerequisite to war crimes and grave breaches (Gary D Solis 2018). In contrast to genocide and crimes against humanity, war crimes have to take place in the context of armed conflict.

Further the meaning of war crimes is clarified in four Geneva Conventions of 1949. Article 147 of the fourth Geneva Convention defines war crimes as “wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment, including... wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health, unlawful deportation or transfer or unlawful confinement of a protected person...taking of hostages and extensive destruction and appropriation of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly”. So the war crime as per this land-

mark article has been recorded in many corners of the world. The International Criminal Court established by the Rome Statute is the first international criminal court when it first started in the year 2002 with 123 member nations. This court has the authority to prosecute individuals — heads of state, military members and others — under three broad frameworks of international criminal acts: crime against humanity, war crimes and genocide. Again, the three main pillars of humanitarian law are the principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. And if any one of these is violated, it could be established that a war crime has been committed.

Now the reality in Yemen is grim. In the year 2019, the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) released a devastating

report on Yemen. The report was prepared by a panel of independent experts empowered by the UNHRC to find out violations of human rights in Yemen during this war. The report clearly established the fact that though it was ostensibly a civil war, the outside powers are both direct and indirect belligerents and are responsible for war crimes. And here the main lead is taken by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The report found a litany of crimes committed by the Saudi-led coalition that has targeted civilian sites a number of times. The report strongly suggested that Saudi Arabia’s western backers, including the US, the UK and France, bear responsibility for war crimes. These global powers are consistently supplying arms and ammunition to the Saudi Arabia for carrying out the war

in Yemen. However, the US has also offered technical assistance to Saudi Arabian forces while conducting massive bombing raids over enemy targets all across Yemen.

Yemen, a small nation located in the Arabian Peninsula has become a permanent war theatre today. The country has turned out to be a grievous site of human suffering particularly of children, women and ageing population. All global governance institutions, including the UN, except delivering peace sermons and urges, have simply become mute spectators, failing to stop the human carnage. And sadly, it is led indirectly by the world’s most powerful nation, the US, on one side and the Islamic Republic of Iran by supporting Houthi Rebels on the other side. Who will be stopping them? Probably, no one until they withdraw on their own from the war field. And Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, popularly known as MBS globally, simply wants to showcase his prowess by demolishing the Iran-backed rebels which are unstoppable for now. At home, MBS remains popular for his innovative strategies to recast the regimes economic and techno visions, but internationally he has been unable to shake off the veil of suspicion for his alleged role in the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey in the year 2018. He is finding it too difficult either to withdraw or to outrightly declare his country as the winner of the Yemen War.

It is well known that the Saudis did not start the conflict. It is the Houthis who did it by marching to the historic capital city of Sanaa and overthrew the legitimate Yemeni Government in late 2014. Nevertheless, the conflict has its roots in the Arab Spring of 2011. Then an uprising of the public forced the country’s long-time authoritarian President Ali Abdullah Saleh to hand over power to his Deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. The transition, as expected by interna-

tional political analysts, was supposed to bring peace and stability to Yemen, one of the poorest nations in the West Asian region.

However, unfortunately Hadi had to subsequently handle militancy, Islamic jihadists, military officers having continued loyalty to former President Saleh and most importantly an economic downturn propelled by massive corruption charges.

When the Houthi Shi rebels took over the capital city of Sanaa, President Hadi had to flee and the real existential crisis of the legitimate government of Iran began. Again, the conflict took a turn of a regional war in March 2015, when Saudi Arabia and eight other, mostly Sunni Arab nations, backed by the US, France, and the UK began strikes against the Houthis to restore the Hadi Government in Yemen. This has given the war an international angle too and the Islamic Republic of Iran openly supported the Houthi rebels. In fact, the Saudis are seriously concerned about the continued success and rampage of the Houthi militants as it would open a stronghold for its rival Iran in its southern backyard for future.

Truly, there has been disaster for everyone whosoever has been involved in the war. But for the most part, it is no other than Yemen’s impoverished and malnourished population who have become the central target of the war. The Yemenis are killing the Yemenis by taking global support for arms and ammunition from warmongering nations. And at the same time, the regional warring parties like Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the rival Iran are bleeding their own coffers simply to re-establish their superiority in West Asia. And the final sufferers are no other than the ordinary Yemenis. It’s time to stop this war crime. Enough is enough.

(The writer is the Head of the Department of Arts and Humanities at Geeta University, Panipat)



MAKHAN SAIKIA

PERSPECTIVE

Budget ensures economy’s fundamentals remain solid

The 2023-24 Budget has proved all pundits wrong as they had predicted it to be a political Budget before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The last full-fledged Budget before the general elections is not populist on any parameter. It takes confidence and commitment to stick to the fundamentals of prudent fiscal management, when it makes complete sense to go all-out political. This attribute which was also visible during the handling of the Covid-19 crisis will keep the economy resilient.

The highlight of the Budget has to be the increased allocation for capital expenditure, which was hiked by 33 per cent to Rs 10 lakh crore and the total capex is expected to be around 13 lakh crore. After two consecutive years of blistering growth in Government capex, there was an expectation that the Centre would step off the accelerator and make more direct cash transfers under various social sector schemes. The increase in capex under this context is indeed a pleasant surprise.

The Budget continues to focus on the smooth functioning of the economy. Capital allocation for collateral-free lending to the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector has been increased to Rs 9,000 crore. This will lead to an incremental lending of Rs 2 lakh crore to this sector. Customs duties have been reduced on a number of commodities to make manufacturing in India more competitive, with raw material availability at lower costs. These steps, together with the continued work on the ease-of-doing-business, will help the micro, small and medium enterprise sector in a major way.

Relief in personal income tax was widely demanded and the Budget has lived up to the expectation of the taxpayers. An individual can now earn up to Rs 7 lakh per annum and not pay any income tax. This is a 40 per cent increase over the current exemption limit of Rs 5 lakh per annum and has led to considerable rejoicing in the middle class. The relief has also been extended with people with very high levels of income. The surcharge on income above Rs 5 crore per annum has also been reduced and the highest marginal rate of taxation will come down from 42.75 per cent to 39 per cent. The Government has thus shown that it is not afraid to provide relief even to the rich if it believed that the rate was too high and political considerations did not come in the way.

This year’s Budget is also a document for the future. The Government has listed seven priorities that will guide policy making on the road to 2047. These have elements of green growth and energy transition while not losing sight of inclusive development and reaching the last mile. The focus and commitment to sustainable growth can be seen from schemes like Mishti, for Mangrove plantation, along the coastline and Amrit Dharohar, for preserving biodiversity in wetlands. Scrapping of old vehicles also finds a detailed mention in the Budget. Establishing a centre of excellence for Artificial Intelligence (AI) shows that the Budget has ambition. The Skill India scheme will, henceforth, include AI, robotics, 3D printing and so on. The Government plans to set up 100 labs for the development of

5G services.

The Government’s support to the agricultural sector and its commitment to the rural economy are evident from the setting up of the Agriculture Accelerator Fund and the mil-lit development programme. Schemes such as GOBARdhan yojana and facilitating natural farming are a case in point. The target for credit to the agriculture sector has been fixed at Rs 20 lakh crore. It will ensure that the agriculture sector continues to grow at a healthy rate.

A major achievement has been the management of fiscal affairs. Several challenges on the macroeconomic front that stemmed from external factors, and were unseen at the time of the presentation of the Budget last year, unfolded as the year rolled by. The actual expenditure on food and fertiliser subsidy for the current year is much more than what was initially budgeted, while the excise tax collected dipped due to excise duty cut on petrol and diesel by the Central Government. Despite this, the Narendra Modi Government has managed to achieve the budgeted target of 6.4 per cent for fiscal deficit for the year 2022-23. The fiscal deficit target for the coming financial year has been put at 5.9 per cent of GDP. Thus, the march on the path of fiscal consolidation continues and while there is an absence of a glide path, the Government has committed to bringing it down to the range of 4.5 per cent by the year 2025-26.

A Budget that is not swayed by considerations of politics shows the maturity of the Government and the confidence it has in the ability of Indian voters’ judgement to reward performance over

Point-counterpoint



rhetoric. This Budget is, therefore, a historic document and shows the nature of changing politics unleashed by the Modi Government. This Budget will ensure that the fundamentals of the economy remain solid and the next Government will be able to build upon it.

(The writer is a Supreme Court advocate)



SAMBHRANT KRISHNA

Budget ignores 90% of India’s population

that loves to claim its nationalist credentials at the drop of a hat, it is not surprising at all that the subject of defence was not mentioned in the Budget speech of the Finance Minister at all. The UPA Government under the Congress devoted more than 2 per cent of the GDP to defence and the BJP at that time used to shout that the allocation was not adequate and it will increase defence allocation when it came to power.

It must also be reminded that the India-China border was largely peaceful during that period and now that the possibility of a border clash between the two countries is a real possibility, the defence sector has been given a short shrift. It is also very likely that the subject of defence was not mentioned in the Budget so that it does not antagonise China and if that’s the case then it’s indeed shameful.

A lot of noise is being made by the Government on its target to reduce the fiscal deficit to 5.9 per cent of GDP next year. If one looks beyond the headlines, one can easily see that the fertilizer subsidy in the coming year will come down drastically as the global prices, which had spiked after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, have cooled down. Moreover, the Government has also stopped the free food grain distribution that it had started in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic and therefore the food subsidy will also come down. The planned reduction on the fiscal deficit therefore is not a result of sound fiscal management by the Government but is a result of factors beyond its control.

Another aspect of the Budget is that the numbers pre-

sented are not honest. While the budgeted increase in capital expenditure is hogging the limelight, revenue expenditure has not been subjected to the scrutiny it deserves. The budget for 2023-24 has projected only a marginal increase in revenue expenditure over the revised estimate for the current year. In fact, if the interest payment is subtracted from the revenue expenditure, the amount is lower than revised estimates for the current year. This is clearly unrealistic and it is very likely that the actual revenue expenditure will exceed the Budget estimates. Moreover, it does not take much to puncture the claim of the Government on achieving very high Central Government capital expenditure as a percentage of GDP. The Government in its last 10 year period has raided the retained earnings of the public sector enterprises as a result of which the capital expenditure by PSUs has come down.

The Government’s only objective seems to win praise from business newspapers and industry bodies. These people dominate any post budget discussion and the concerns of rural and the poor masses are always relegated to the back-ground. The allocation to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee scheme (MNREGA) has been reduced dramatically and the overall allocation to rural areas has come down. The Government likes to pretend that the country has fully recovered from the economic effects of Covid-19 but that is far from the truth. There is still widespread suffering in the rural areas and the Budget should have made increased allocation for the rural sector.

Unemployment is the biggest challenge facing our country but the Budget has nothing substantial for it. It seems that the youth will have no future to look forward to under the Modi Government. There was a lot of discussion on tourism in the Budget. It was projected as a magic pill to address the issue of unemployment in the country. However if one looks at the total allocation to the sector, it remains unchanged from what was allocated to it in the 2022-23 at Rs 2,300 crore.

The Budget is an all-round failure because it fails to prioritise its spending to areas that deserve urgent and continued attention of the Government. It criminally ignores 90 per cent of India’s population and Indian voters will pay back in the coming State elections and the general election in the coming year.

(The writer is spokesperson, Uttarakhand Congress Committee)



DEEPAK BALUTIA

