

OPINION 6

TRAGEDY OF THE
COMMONS

WORLD 9

META TO RESTORE TRUMP'S FB,
INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS

MONEY 10

ADANI SAYS EXAMINING LEGAL
OPTIONS AGAINST HINDENBURG

NEW DELHI, FRIDAY JANUARY 27, 2023; PAGES 12 ₹3



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SHAW WILL
HAVE TO WAIT,
SAYS HARDIK
12 SPORT

India's military might, diversity on show

The 74th Republic Day parade on Kartavya Path saw 'Agniveers' participate for the first time ■ Women and 'Shramyogis' got place of prominence

STAFF REPORTER ■
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday displayed its military prowess and cultural diversity during the Republic Day parade at Kartavya Path with special focus on 'nari shakti' (women empowerment) and 'atmanirbharta' (self-reliance) in Defence production. 'Agniveers' took part in the parade for the first time since the Aginpath scheme for recruitment in the armed forces was launched in June last year.

President Droupadi Murmu took the salute and Egypt President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi was the chief guest. A marching contingent from his country also took part in the parade to celebrate the 74th Republic Day of India.

A group of 'Shramyogis' involved in the construction of the Central Vista, the Kartavya Path, and the new Parliament Building, along with milk, vegetable, and street vendors were specially invited for the parade.

Continued on Page 2



President Droupadi Murmu with chief guest Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 74th Republic Day parade at the Kartavya Path, in New Delhi on Thursday.



Maharashtra tableau on display during the 74th Republic Day Parade at the Kartavya Path, in New Delhi, on Thursday.



The NAG Missile System (NAMIS) being showcased during the 74th Republic Day Parade at the Kartavya Path, in New Delhi, on Thursday.

BBC docu wildfire spreads across States

Ignoring police crackdown students in Hyderabad, Mumbai watch film, Kerala Cong screens it too

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ignoring the police crackdown on students in several varsities for screening of the BBC documentary 'India: The Modi Question', student bodies in Hyderabad and Mumbai and the Congress in Kerala on Thursday screened the documentary.

The Centre last week directed blocking of multiple YouTube videos and Twitter posts sharing links to the documentary. Meanwhile, student groups at Kolkata's Presidency and Jadavpur universities and Mumbai's Tata Institute of Social Sciences have planned multiple screenings of the controversial BBC documentary on their campuses over the next few days.

Though there is no declared ban on viewing the documentary, universities have disallowed students from screening it and the police have cracked down on those defying the unofficial firman. The Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) on Thursday screened the BBC documentary at the Shangmugham beach here for the general public.

The screening of the documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots when Prime Minister Narendra Modi helmed the western State was first done at

the KPCC headquarters here for its staff and party workers, KPCC general secretary GS Babu said. He further said the response indicates that people want to know what is there in the documentary and what it is all about. Various wings of the Congress have already screened the first part of the documentary in several parts of the State.

In Hyderabad, the Student Federation of India (SFI) of the University of Hyderabad (UoH) screened the two-part BBC documentary for over 500 students at the campus' North Hostel Gate on Thursday evening.

SFI HCU president Abhishek Nandan said the SFI is not looking for any altercation with the ABVP, which is currently screening 'The Kashmir Files.' "We do not want to create any ruckus or fight with the ABVP. In fact, we do not want any kind of disturbance. Students just want to watch the BBC documentary," Nandan said.

Meanwhile, the police in Chennai briefly detained A Priyadharshini, the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) Councillor for Teynampet, on Thursday, during a protest against the Union Government's decision to block links on the BBC documentary on Prime Minister Modi.

Several students were detained on Wednesday at Jami University in Delhi for trying to screen the documentary. The Students of JNU and Punjab University have also tried to screen the documentary on the campus.

US: We support
importance of free
Press globally,
made this point in
India as wellPNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW
DELHI/WASHINGTON

In the backdrop of restrictions on screening of the controversial BBC documentary on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the US has said it favoured freedom of Press and expression around the world and has conveyed this point to India as well. This US assertion came days after it steered clear of the controversy and said it was not "familiar" with it. Asked by a Pakistani journalist on Wednesday about the US' views on the ban on the documentary, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said it supports the importance of a free Press around the world and has made the point in India as well.

"I'll say generally, when it comes to this, we support the importance of a free Press around the world," Price replied. "We continue to highlight the importance of democratic principles, such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, as human rights that contribute to the strengthening of our democracies." Continued on Page 2

JD(U) chief not to join Rahul for Yatra finale

PTI ■ NEW DELHI/PATNA

Janata Dal (United) president Lalan Singh on Thursday expressed his inability to attend the concluding event of the Rahul Gandhi-led Bharat Jodo Yatra in Srinagar on January 30 and asked the Congress to take appropriate steps to unite the Opposition.

In a letter to Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Singh cited his scheduled engagement for a political programme in poll-bound Nagaland to skip the Yatra's conclusion.

Though the Congress has invited heads of several non-BJP parties to attend the event to finish the mega exercise



aimed at rejuvenating its organisation in the run up to the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, it remains to be seen how many of them turn up. Some regional party chiefs may send their

representatives at a time when the Opposition is itself divided over what shape any such alliance against the BJP should take and who should be the spearhead. Contd on Page 2

'ED's power confined to probing PMLA cases'

Can't assume predicate
offence committed: HC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has held that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) has the power to investigate and inquire into an offence of money laundering under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) only and it cannot assume that a predicate offence has been committed.

The High Court said the predicate offence has to be necessarily investigated and tried by authorities empowered by law in that regard and the ED cannot possibly arrogate unto itself the

power to investigate into the alleged commission of those offences. "What needs to be emphasised is that the PMLA empowers the ED to investigate Section 3 offences only.

"Its power to investigate and enquire stands confined to offence of money laundering as defined in that Section. However, the same cannot be read as enabling it to assume from the material, that it may gather in the course of that investigation, that a predicate offence stands committed.

"The predicate offence has to be necessarily investigated and tried by authorities empowered by law in that regard," Justice Yashwant Varma said in a 111-page judgement.

Continued on Page 2

AAP moves SC, seeks mayoral polls in time-bound manner

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidates for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) mayoral polls, Shelly Oberoi Goyal and Mukesh, have moved the Supreme Court for the completion of the election in a time-bound manner.

The AAP leaders also sought the top court's intervention for the prohibition on voting by Aldermen as per law. On the other hand, the BJP has accused the AAP and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal of diverting the issue, saying it was the AAP leaders who created chaotic scenes in the House which led to the adjournment for the second time. The Congress said it was a political stunt to go to the top court for holding

Mayoral polls. The MCD House was adjourned on January 24 without electing the Mayor and Deputy Mayor amid a ruckus by some Councillors. This was the second time in three weeks wherein a ruckus broke out in the House minutes after the nominated members and Councillors were sworn in and the mayoral poll was going to start. The AAP and the BJP blamed each other for the ruckus. Accusing the BJP of hooliganism and halting MCD House proceedings, AAP national spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj said that the Leader of the House, Mukesh Goel, and mayor candidate Shelly Oberoi approached the top court to allow the mayoral elections be conducted in a time-bound manner. Continued on Page 2



vaccine marks a glorious tribute to the call for Atmanirbhar Bharat, Dr Mandaviya said adding that "India's vaccine manufacturing and innovation capability is appreciated all over the world as it has made a mark in producing quality and affordable medicines." Continued on Page 2

CAPSULE

IMRAN'S WORKERS
GIVE HIM SECURITY

Lahore: Supporters of Pakistan's ousted Prime Minister Imran Khan on Thursday gathered outside his residence here to provide security and resist his possible arrest, days after the caretaker Government of Punjab province withdrew the additional security provided to him following an assassination attempt.

DELHI HC's SOP FOR
RAPE VICTIMS

New Delhi: Imposing the responsibility of motherhood on a sexual assault victim would amount to denying her the human right to live with dignity, the Delhi High Court has observed while passing a slew of guidelines for medical examination of such victims in cases where pregnancy exceeds 24 weeks.

B-town parties as 'Pathaan' scores big

Mumbai: Amid fan frenzy of the kind that the Hindi film industry had not witnessed in a very long time, Shah Rukh Khan's 'Pathaan's' box office performance has been better than expected on opening day, and that, too, without the help of traditional marketing tools.

"Love wins" was the larger message that Hindi film personalities, including Karan Johar, Pooja Bhatt and Mohd Zeeshan Ayyub, sent out following the success of 'Pathaan' which raised a whopping Rs 57 crore as domestic box office numbers on its opening day.

The early response to the stylish spy thriller, also featuring Deepika Padukone and John Abraham, appears to be a shot in the arm for Bollywood reeling under the pandemic-induced losses, a series of box-office failures in 2022, and calls for boycott by a section of



people on social media and elsewhere. According to production house Yash Raj Films (YRF), the movie's net day one collection stood at Rs 55 crore, the "highest grossing first day for a Hindi film". Its dubbed versions in Tamil and Telugu fetched additional Rs 2 crore from theatres across the country. Karan, frequent collaborator and close friend of Shah

Rukh, praised team 'Pathaan' for crossing the Rs 100-crore mark in reported global earnings. "Hits beyond a century!!! Rs 100 crore and above in one day! GOAT mega star SRK, visionary and legendary YRF and Adi... Sid, Deepika, John!!! Wow. Love forever trumps hate! Mark this date..." the filmmaker wrote on his Instagram Stories on Thursday.

"Love in action! #Pathaan. Thank you @iamsrk for far more than the movies," tweeted Pooja.

Zeeshan, who has worked with Shah Rukh in "Raees" and "Zero", said he watched a late night show of "Pathaan" which had over 95 per cent occupancy. "Love wins and you are love @iamsrk sir... @deepikapadukone superb. #JohnAbraham terrifying. Kudos to the whole team. @yrf #SiddharthAnand Thanks!" he added in his tweet.

The Siddharth Anand directorial, which faced boycott calls over the song "Besharam Rang" for allegedly hurting religious sentiments, had sold 4.19 lakh tickets till Tuesday in advance booking reflecting 80 per cent occupancy on day one, even for early morning shows beginning at 6 AM or 7 AM, said industry insiders. PTI

Treats not threats is Rlys' way to stop stone pelting

Railways adopts
'Gandhigiri' to curb
stone pelting on
Vande Bharat trainsDEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■
NEW DELHI

In a 'Gandhigiri' gesture to curb the menace of stone pelting on trains, particularly on the aesthetically-designed Vande Bharats, the Indian Railways has started a unique initiative to reach out to the locals where the focus will be on winning their trust rather than hold out the threat of punitive action. As part of the exercise, the Railway Protection Force has started



distributing chocolates and gifts to children living in slums along the tracks to deter them from throwing stones at the semi-high-speed train. More than 1,500 stone pelting cases on trains were recorded across the country in 2022 and over 400 people were arrested for

the offense. "The national transporter does not believe in having acrimonious relations with the citizens who can actually be the real guards to the rail infrastructure. Hence we want to reach out to them and win their trust," said a railway official. Continued on Page 2

Mission to study Sun likely to be launched by June-July: ISRO

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA) on Thursday handed over to ISRO, the Visible Line Emission Coronagraph (VELC), the primary payload on board Aditya-L1, which is India's first dedicated scientific mission to study the Sun, to be launched by June or July.

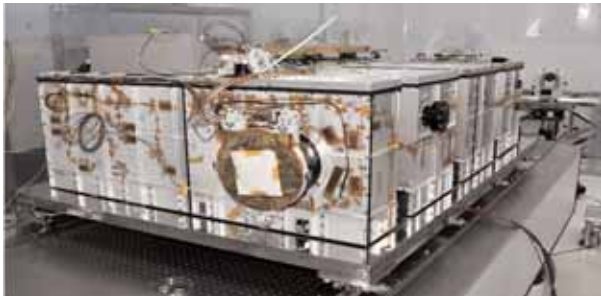
The handing over ceremony was held in the presence of the ISRO Chairman S Somanath at the Centre for Research and Education in Science and Technology (CREST) campus of IIA near here.

IIA said it has successfully finished assembling, testing and calibrating the VELC, which is the largest and one of the most technically challenging of the seven payloads/telescopes that will fly on Aditya-L1, at its CREST campus.

ISRO will now conduct further testing of VELC and its eventual integration with the Aditya-L1 spacecraft, it said in a release.

Congratulating the VELC team, Somanath said the launch of Aditya-L1 is expected to be around June or July.

He said, "Understanding the effect of the Sun on Earth and its surroundings has become very important now and Aditya-L1 aims to shed light on this topic. It has taken 15 years for VELC from concept to completion, and this period was needed for a complex system like this. The VELC has been the finest collaboration between IIA and ISRO"



Aditya L1 is the first space-based Indian mission to study the Sun from a halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L 1) of the Sun-Earth system.

This mission with seven payloads on board to observe the photosphere, chromosphere and the outermost layers of the Sun (the corona) will provide greater advantage of observing the solar activities and its effect on space weather, according to officials of Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

Noting that ISRO aims to play an important role in future science experiments in space and an ecosystem needs to be created for this, including a roadmap for the next few decades, Somanath said ISRO encourages Indian scientists to come up with new and novel ideas for future space science instruments that have not been done before by others in the world. "Many students tell me that they want to become

astrophysicists and institutes like IIA should further enhance their efforts to explain their work to the public," he said. IIA Director Prof. Annappurni Subramaniam, who released the official logo of the VELC payload, said "VELC is a team effort and is a major milestone for the institute. The effort has involved close collaboration between IIA, ISRO and many industries across India. We look forward to exciting science results coming from this payload after it is operational."

The space solar mission was initially conceived as Aditya-1 with a 400 kg class satellite carrying one payload (VELC), and was planned to be launched in an 800 km low earth orbit.

Since a satellite placed in a halo orbit around the L1 of the Sun-Earth system has the major advantage of continuously viewing the Sun without any occultation/eclipses, the mission was revised to Aditya-L1, and it would now be inserted in a halo orbit around the L1, which is 1.5 million km

from the Earth towards the Sun. The other six payloads are: Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope, Aditya Solar Wind Particle Experiment, Plasma Analyser Package for Aditya, Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer, High Energy L1 Orbiting X-ray Spectrometer, and Magnetometer

The scientific studies by the satellite will enhance our current understanding of the Solar Corona and also provide vital data for space weather studies", ISRO officials said.

The Principal Investigator of the VELC payload, Prof Raghavendra Prasad explained that no other solar coronagraph in space has the ability to image the solar corona as close to the solar disk as VELC can.

"It can image it as close as 1.05 times the solar radius. It can also do imaging, spectroscopy and polarimetry at the same time, and can take observations at a very high resolution (level of detail) and many times a second", he said, adding that this capability will revolutionise solar astronomy around the world and the data is expected to answer many outstanding problems in the field.

Former Chairman of ISRO A S Kiran Kumar said, VELC is not a trivial piece of engineering and it has taken 15 years to produce such a complex system. "This augurs well for future space missions and I look forward to more such novel space science missions in the future."

JD(U) chief not to join Rahul for...

From Page1

Singh said, "My party sincerely feels that the need of the hour is an unified Opposition and expects that the Indian National Congress takes appropriate steps in this direction".

The JD(U) has in the past highlighted its preeminent leader and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar as prime ministerial candidate, without officially projecting him as its choice for the face of the Opposition.

Singh, however, shared Kharge's sentiments against the BJP, saying there are "no two opinions that there is a decline in democratic values in the country and that the Constitutional institutions that are supposed to ensure checks and balances on unrestrained executive power are being systematically destroyed".

The pace at which the country is fast transforming itself from an "electoral democracy to an electoral autocracy" is frightening, Singh said.

He termed the concluding event of the yatra as "historic" and wished it success.

"I, on behalf of my party, the party's supreme leader, Mr Nitish Kumar, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Bihar and crores of members of the party wish the event every success," said the JD(U) president.

"The Bharat Jodo Yatra has also given an opportunity to study, experience and sense the mood and anxieties of the people first hand, which I am sure will go a long way in helping us formulate joint strategies in the run up to the 2024 Lok Sabha elections," he said.

The march started from Kanyakumari on September 7 and entered Jammu and Kashmir via Punjab on Thursday last.

The marathon march will culminate with Gandhi unfurling the national flag at the party headquarters in Srinagar and addressing a grand rally at the Sher-e-Kashmir Cricket Stadium on January 30.

The JD(U) has the Congress as its alliance partner in Bihar. Chief Minister Kumar, a strong votary of opposition unity that could take on the BJP in Lok Sabha polls next year, has made it clear he was not in favour of a "third front" and also not averse to Congress projecting Rahul as its prime ministerial candidate.

US: Support importance of free Press...

From Page1

"This is a point we make in our relationships around the world. It's certainly a point we've made in India as well," he added. Last week, UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak defended Prime Minister Modi and distanced himself from the BBC documentary series, saying he "does not agree with the characterisation" of his Indian counterpart.

The BBC's two-part series on Modi's tenure as the Chief Minister of Gujarat (during the 2002 riots) sparked a major controversy and hence, was removed from social media platforms.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) had responded to the BBC story by saying it was entirely biased. "We think this is a propaganda piece. This has no objectivity. This is biased. Do note that this hasn't been screened in India. We do not want to answer more on this so that this does not get much dignity," MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi had said.

On R-Day India gets 1st desi intranasal Covid vax

From Page1

India has taken a lead in developing vaccines and medicines for diseases common in the developing world, added Dr Jitendra Singh.

The nasal vaccine - BBV154 - received the Drugs Controller General of India's (DCGI) approval in November for restricted emergency use among adults as a heterologous booster dose. iNOVACC is a recombinant replication-deficient adenovirus vectored vaccine with a pre-fusion stabilized spike protein.

This vaccine candidate was evaluated in phase I, II and III clinical trials with successful results, the Hyderabad-based vaccine maker had said.

The company, in December 2022, got the approval for the primary 2-dose schedule, and as a heterologous booster dose. Before that, the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) had approved the restricted use of the intranasal vaccine in emergency situations in the age group of 18 and above. The nasal vaccine cannot be administered to those who have taken a precaution or booster dose, the head of the country's vaccine task force told NDTV last month, a week after the vaccine was introduced on the CoWin platform.

As per Bharat Biotech, one can book an appointment for the intranasal vaccine dose by visiting the CoWin website. iNOVACC was developed in partnership with Washington University, St. Louis, which had designed and developed the recombinant adenoviral vectored construct and evaluated in preclinical studies for efficacy. Product development and clinical trials were funded in part by the Government of India through the Department of Biotechnology's Covid Suraksha programme.

A rollout of iNOVACC is expected to begin in private hospitals that have placed advance orders. An initial manufacturing capacity of several million doses per annum has been established, this can be scaled up to a billion doses as required.

'ED's power...

From Page1

The High Court said, "The primary function to investigate and try such offences remains and vests in authorities constituted under those independent statutes...In any case, it (ED) cannot and on its own motion proceed on the surmise that a particular set of facts evidence the commission of a scheduled offence and based on that opinion initiate action under the PMLA."

It said if in the course of its enquiry and investigation, ED was to come to the conclusion that the material in its possession evidences the commission of an offence created under any other enactment, it would be obliged to furnish requisite information in respect thereof to the agency concerned for necessary action.

The high court's verdict came while allowing two separate petitions filed by Prakash Industries Limited and Prakash Thermal Power Limited challenging the Provisional Attachment Orders (PAO) issued by the ED on November 29, 2018. The proceedings drawn by the ED emanate from an allocation of the Fatehpur Coal Block in Chhattisgarh.

It was alleged that the two companies misrepresented their net worth to procure coal block. An FIR was lodged by the CBI under the provisions of the Indian Penal Code and Prevention of Corruption Act. Based on the FIR, the ED registered an Enforcement Case Information Report on the allegations relating to share price manipulation and generation of proceeds of crime from such activities.

Later, the allocation of coal block was cancelled following the Supreme Court's judgement in 2014. The high court quashed the November 29, 2018 PAO as well as the original complaint. It also dealt with the objection raised by ED counsel that in view of the directions of the Supreme Court, the high court would not be permissible to either entertain these petitions or take cognisance of the challenged raised.

The ED counsel referred to the July 25, 2014 order passed by the apex court in the coal

block allocation matter in which was held that any prayer for stay or any order impeding the progress of investigation relating to coal block allocations would be liable to be placed before the special court only and that no other court could entertain the same.

The high court, however, said it was unable to accede to the preliminary objection raised by ED and said the special court which came to be constituted was so identified solely to deal with and exclusively try offences emanating from coal block allocations and for the trial of offences that may have been alleged to have been committed either under the IPC, PC Act and PMLA.

"The direction for transfer of pending cases also clearly appears to be confined to criminal matters arising out of coal block allocations," it said, adding that those directions cannot possibly be construed or interpreted as extending to PAOs that may be made under PMLA.

Justice Varma said the special judge constituted to try criminal cases and offences would clearly lack the authority to either deal with or rule upon the validity of PAOs that may be made.

"If the submission addressed by and on behalf of the ED in this regard were accepted, it would also amount to short circuiting the adjudicatory mechanism with respect to attachment orders as structured and placed in terms of the provision of the Act," the high court said.

It said the apex court's directions cannot be construed as denuding the high court of the jurisdiction to entertain a challenge relating to a PAO and the exercise of power by the ED under Section 5 of the PMLA.

If the submissions of ED are accepted, it would essentially amount to recognising a power inhering in the special judge to not only don the robes of the adjudicating authority but to also deprive the appellate forums of the jurisdiction to decide appeals against the orders that may ultimately come to be passed under section 8 of the PMLA.

AAP moves SC...

From Page1

The case is likely to be taken up on Friday, AAP leaders said. Bharadwaj said that the party has also sought a prohibition on voting by aldermen as per law. "We have placed two major demands in the Supreme Court, the first is to elect the mayor in a time-bound manner and form the Government in the MCD. Second, as aldermen do not have the right to vote under Article 243R of the Constitution and Section 3 of the DMC Act, they should be prohibited from casting votes," he said.

"They have no moral right to capture and illegally control the MCD for so long. The MCD was put under the central Government on the pretext of unification and delimitation works. People of Delhi gave the AAP the mandate in the MCD and despite that, the BJP resorted to dirty politics. They (BJP) have been creating ruckus and not allowing the mayoral elections to be conducted in the House," he alleged. Lashing out at the

AAP for approaching court, BJP State working president Virendra Sachdeva alleged that Kejriwal and the AAP have been misleading the public and that they have no faith in the Constitution.

"Whenever they have to divert people's attention from their mistakes, they move the court. Later when the court decision doesn't favour them, they refuse to accept it. The AAP should also tell the court how it resorted to hooliganism in the House, who threw the mic and which party's councillors climbed the chair of the presiding officer," Sachdeva said. He further claimed that there are photographs and videos in the House which "prove" that the AAP councillors "deliberately obstructed" the mayoral election.

Leader of Opposition Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said that AAP was running away from the mayoral election by first creating the ruckus and now moving the court where no one knows how much time it may take for a decision. Bidhuri said going to the court is a ploy to delay the election as AAP is not sure of its majority.

Treats not threats is Rlys' way to stop stone pelting

From Page1

Incidents of stone pelting on other trains have gone largely unreported, but similar cases involving the indigenously manufactured Vande Bharat have made big news. All the existing eight Vande Bharat trains have faced damage due to stone pelting.

"Several formats of awareness drives and campaigns are being undertaken by RPF using different means to educate residents near railway tracks. Our men are going with sweets, chocolates, some valuable gifts like pen, handkerchiefs to win over the youngsters," said a Railway

Ministry spokesman. The zonal railways have written to the Sarpanch of villages located en route to Vande Bharat to reach out to people and convince them that railway is their own property and they should protect it against damages.


"This kind of action has received a good response in the case of the Mumbai-Ahemdabad Vande Bharat train," said a Western Railway spokesman. To sensitise people to effective crowd management within the Indian Railways system, RPF has tied up with Rapid Action Force (RAF) Academy for Public

Order (RAPO), the only institute in the country specialising in public order management (POM). The training module mainly focuses on crowd/riot control, law and order, mob psychology, gender sensitisation, and human rights.

RAPO DIG Akhilesh Kumar Singh will be needed to play a crucial role in this mission. The POM is a very dynamic and challenging domain in the current world scenario. Officers/personnel of all the security forces must have the practical knowledge and training to handle situations effectively. As of now, newly inducted IRPSF proba-

tioners of the Civil Service Examination (CSE)-2020 batch have been undergoing the POM course from January 23 to January 28, 2023, at the Meerut-based RAPO.

The RPF has also rescued more than 17,500 children from rail premises and 559 people from traffickers so far this year under Operation Nanhe Faristey while the railway saved 852 lives of passengers, who slipped while boarding trains. Under operation Matrishakti, women personnel of the RPF assisted in 209 childbirths on board trains last year, according to a RPF statement said.



New Okhla Industrial Development Authority
Administrative Building, Sector - 6, Noida - 201301 (U.P.)
Website : www.noidaauthorityonline.com

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tender are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lucknow for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule intentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on NOIDA Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.com & <http://etender.up.nic.in>. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc. (A)

- 28/S.M.(JAL)-I/ET/2022-23**, Water Chlorination (Two Years Annual Repairing, Operation and Maintenance of Chlorination Plants at GH-110, UGR-110, UGR-58, UGR-Salarpur & UGR-Hazipur) Noida. Cost Rs. 70.14 Lacs
- 29/S.M.(JAL)-I/ET/2022-23**, Strengthening of Sewerage (S/F of Non Clog Submersible Motor Pump at SPS-122) Noida. Cost Rs. 52.77 Lacs
- 31/S.M.(JAL)-I/ET/2022-23**, M/o Water Supply (Two Years Annual Repairing of Bowl/Assly. & Tube Shaft Set of Network-17, 18, 19, 27, 66, 67 & 68) Noida. Cost Rs. 71.65 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date:- 09.02.2023 upto 5.00 PM.
Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date:- 10.02.2023 at 11.00 AM. (B)

- 47/DGM/AO/SM(JAL-OA)/2022-23**, M/o of STP (Cleaning and Replacement of Damaged pipes of 900 mm dia NP-3 Pipe Treated Water line from Sec.-123 to Near Hindon River) Noida. Cost Rs. 52.50 Lacs
- 48/DGM/AO/SM(JAL-OA)/2022-23**, STP Treated water line in Sewerage District-D (P/L Testing and Commissioning of Treated water PVC Pipe line from STP Sec.-168 to Wetland of Irrigation area in Sec.-135) Noida. Cost Rs. 53.92 Lacs
- 49/DGM/AO/SM(JAL-OA)/2022-23**, C/o of STP (Replace of unserviceable chain pulley operated crane by Supply, Erection and Commissioning of fully Automation Electrical Operated Tower crane (EOT crane) for 50 MLD STP RSPS and 25000 KL UGR, Sec.-168) Noida. Cost Rs. 33.35 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date:- 02.02.2023 upto 5.00 PM.
Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date:- 03.02.2023 at 11.00 AM.

Office:-
Sector-5, Noida

Dy. General Manager (Jal)
NOIDA

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA



NORTHERN RAILWAY
1st CORRIGENDUM



Tender No. 30-Elect-27-T-R3-22-23-E3
Name of Work : Comprehensive annual maintenance contract (CAMC) of 04 nos. Escalators of Autometer make installed at FOB-2 Ajmeri Gate side & Paharganj side at New Delhi Railway station for three years.
The amendments in above said tender are as under:

| Tender No.-: 30-Elect-27-T-R3-22-23-E3 | | |
|--|---|---|
| | Earlier published | Amended |
| Name of work | Comprehensive annual maintenance contract (CAMC) of 04 nos. Escalators of Autometer make installed at FOB-2 Ajmeri Gate side & Paharganj side at New Delhi Railway station for three years. | Comprehensive annual maintenance contract (CAMC) of 04 nos. Escalators of Autometer make installed at FOB-2 Ajmeri Gate side & Paharganj side at New Delhi Railway station for three years. |
| Approx. Cost of the works in | Rs. 41.97 lacs | Rs. 41.97 lacs |
| Address of the office | Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/ General, New Delhi. | Sr. Divl Elect. Engineer/ General, New Delhi. |
| Bid Security | Rs. 84000.00 | Rs. 84000.00 |
| Date & time of submission of tender | 27.01.2023, 12:00 Hrs. | 07.02.2023, 12:00 Hrs. |
| Opening of tender | 27.01.2023, 12:00 Hrs. | 07.02.2023, 12:00 Hrs. |

The tender document of above mentioned tender has been modified kindly go through the amended documents available on www.ireps.gov.in and submit your offer accordingly.

27/3/2023

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE

R-Day: 1st parade on Kartavya Path held

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As India celebrated its 74th Republic Day on Thursday, it was also the first time the parade was held on the revamped Rajpath that was renamed the Kartavya Path last year.

India became a Republic on January 26, 1950, and since 1951, all Republic Day celebrations have been held on this historic avenue that was officially known as Rajpath till early September 2022.

The Central government then rechristened it and Prime Minister Narendra Modi had on September 8 inaugurated the Kartavya Path, the stretch of road from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate.

And, with this year's Republic Day parade, the historic precinct of Delhi and the history associated with it has also turned a page.

For people in India who have grown up in post-Independence era, Rajpath had become synonymous with Republic Day celebrations, thanks to the annual ceremonial parade that it hosted every January 26 with many heads of state and other eminent personalities gracing the event as a chief guests.



Contingents of Indian Armed Forces march during the 74th Republic Day Parade at the Kartavya Path in New Delhi on Thursday
Ranjan Dimri | Pioneer

But, January 26, 2023 was in many ways both an ordinary and an extraordinary day for India. Ordinary as it was yet another Republic Day celebration, but extraordinary as the venue was referred to in writing and verbally by commentators of the event and many others as 'Kartavya Path', a new identity the boulevard has been lent by the government.

However, the Central government's rechristening of Rajpath to Kartavya Path last September had drawn mixed reactions from the public, and criticism from a section of scholars and historians, who

have alleged that it was an "attempt to erase history".

On the day of its inauguration, Modi had said Rajpath symbolised India's "slavery" and it has now been consigned to history, as he dedicated the revamped avenue to people and also unveiled a statue of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose at India Gate.

The Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, earlier had said that the new stretch will be more pedestrian-friendly because of the new red granite walkways spreading 15.5 km, replacing 'bajri' sand that lined the ground earlier.

Poor visibility due to fog dampens fly-past excitement

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Spectators could not fully enjoy the fly-past during the Republic Day parade at the Kartavya Path as a layer of fog lowered visibility levels to around 800 metres in the national capital on Thursday. The fly-past is one of the major attractions during the parade.

Fifty aircraft took part in the 74th Republic Day celebrations that included an aerial display by Rafale, Mig-29 and Su-30 MKI fighters as well as C-130 Super Hercules and C-17 Globemaster transport planes.

People stood at their places with their phone cameras open but faced trouble capturing aircraft formations due to the layer of fog and smoke cloaking the capital.

Their eyes probed the skies searching for the flying machines, but could only hear the roar of passing aircraft.



According to the Central Pollution Control Board data, Delhi's air quality index stood at 287 at 12 noon, rapidly worsening from 160 at 4 pm on Wednesday.

The India Meteorological Department said visibility levels stood at 600 metres at 7 am and improved to 800 metres by 11 am. Overcast conditions prevailed in Delhi and the minimum temperature settled at 12.8 degrees Celsius, the highest this month so far.

Delhi Police's women pipe band participates in parade for first time

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police's women pipe band participated in the Republic Day parade for the first time on Thursday. They were part of the Delhi Police band led by Inspector Rajender Singh that marched on the Kartavya Path. They played the "Delhi Police Song".

According to a book of commentary on the 74th Republic Day celebrations issued by the Government, band master Singh led the Delhi Police band comprising one inspector, nine sub-inspectors, nine assistant sub-inspectors, 15 head constables and 42 constables.

The Delhi Police Women Pipe Band comprising 35 women constables participated in the parade for the first time, it said. Assistant Commissioner of Police and IPS officer Shweta K Sugathan led the Delhi Police marching contingent at the parade this year.



The Delhi Police marching contingent comprised one gazetted officer, three sub-inspectors, 44 head constables and 100 constables, all smartly clad in red safa.

All the members of the contingent were more than six feet tall. The Delhi Police's marching contingent has a unique distinction of partici-

pating in every Republic Day parade ever since India became a republic on January 26, 1950.

It has been adjudged the best marching contingent of the Republic Day parade 15 times. Its motto is "Shanti, Seva aur Nyaya", meaning "Peace, Service and Justice".

It also won the best marching contingent in 2021.

Modi dons Rajasthani turban symbolising India's rich culture

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a symbolic representation of India's diverse culture, Prime Minister Narendra Modi donned a multi-coloured Rajasthani turban during the Republic Day ceremony on Thursday.

Before the Republic Day parade, as PM Modi arrived at the National War Memorial, the first look at his outfit was revealed. Clad in a white kurta and pants complemented with a black coat, PM Modi took a white stole. The multicoloured turban with a long tail stood out in the black-and-white ensemble.

The Republic Day celebrations commenced with the homage ceremony at the National War Memorial where PM Modi paid floral tributes to fallen heroes by laying a wreath.

"My best wishes on Republic Day. This time the occasion is more special because we are celebrating it during the Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav. I wish we move ahead united to make the dreams of the great freedom



fighters of the country come true. Happy Republic Day to all fellow Indians!" PM Modi tweeted in Hindi.

During last year Republic Day, PM Modi's costume had a distinct touch of Uttarakhand and Manipur as he wore a Brahmakamal cap from Uttarakhand and a Leirum Phee stole from Manipur. Kamal is Uttarakhand's flower, which the PM uses on every visit to Kedarnath.

In 2021, on the 72nd Republic Day, PM Modi wore a red bandhje headgear which was a gift from Jammu's Royal Family. In 2020, PM Modi wore a saffron bandhje headgear.

Special remissions announced for 243 jail inmates

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Prisons department on Thursday announced the Government's special remission to 243 inmates on the occasion of Republic Day. The department celebrated the 74th Republic Day where Director General (Prisons) Sanjay Baniwal unfurled the tricolour.

A combined parade was organised by Delhi Jail, Delhi Police and paramilitary forces in the lawns of the prisons headquarters here.

Baniwal announced the Government's special remission in conviction for inmates subject to their good conduct in jail. The remission varies from 20 to 90 days for women inmates and for men inmates above the age of 65 years; and for 15 to 60 days for other inmates, depending upon the sentence period served in the jail, the statement said.

"On the occasion of Republic Day 2023, the Government has provided special remission to 243 eligible

inmates. Further, 24 inmates serving life sentence are being released on recommendation of the Sentence Reviewing Board (SRB). Also three economical-ly weaker inmates are being released with the help of financial assistance from NGOs and six inmates are being released on the basis of government remission under the 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' programme," the statement said.

The D-G also highlighted that due to decline in Covid-19 cases, the physical 'mulakat' has been started again in all jails leading to daily meeting of around 2,000 inmates with their families/relatives. In addition, around 300 inmates are benefiting daily through e-mulakat, it stated.

A skill development programme has been initiated for inmates by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojna-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) by which approximately 1,020 inmates will be benefited, it said.

Kejriwal, L-G greet people on R-Day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal greeted people on the occasion of Republic Day on Thursday, and asked them to strengthen democracy and the Constitution of the country. The Chief Minister also unfurled the national flag at his official residence in Civil Lines.

Extending his good wishes to the people on the occasion, the LG paid tribute to freedom fighters and martyrs.

He called upon people to safeguard, nourish and strengthen the ideals, values and provisions contained in the Constitution.

"Let us again dedicate ourselves to safeguard, nourish and strengthen the ideals, values and provisions contained in our Constitution and move forward shoulder-to-shoulder for making a strong, peaceful and powerful India," Saxena said in a tweet.

In his Republic Day message, Kejriwal asserted it was responsibility of all to strength-

en democracy in the country. The people and the rule by the people are the most important in a republic, Kejriwal said.

"Many congratulations and good wishes to all the countrymen on Republic Day. In a republic, the people and the rule by the people are most important. Our freedom fighters made many sacrifices to establish the republic of India. Now it's our responsibility to strengthen this republic," he said in a tweet in Hindi.

At the Delhi Government's Republic Day function on Wednesday, he had raised the issue of alleged "harassment" faced by States and UTs at the hands of the Centre-appointed governors and LGs.

Meanwhile, traffic islands and roundabouts in Lutyens' Delhi have been decked up with artistic floral designs for the 74th Republic Day.

The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) said 18 flower boards and as many flower fountains have been set up and the civic body's building has been illuminated with tricolour for the occasion.

L-G invites CM; Kejriwal requests him to reschedule as he will be in Punjab

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has invited Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, his Ministers and 10 AAP MLAs for a meeting with him at the Raj Niwas on Friday evening, amid the ongoing tussle between the elected government and the LG office but the Chief Minister requested for the meeting to be rescheduled as he will be in Punjab on the given date and time.

Earlier, Raj Niwas has asked the Chief Minister to come to the meeting alongside his Cabinet colleagues and any 10 MLAs of his AAP at 4 pm on Thursday. In a statement, Kejriwal thanked the LG for his invitation but said, "I am going to Punjab tomorrow. We are requesting Hon'ble LG for some other time." According to government officials, Kejriwal



will inaugurate 400 Mohalla Clinics in Punjab on Friday.

The LG's invitation assumes significance as his office and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) dispensation have been at loggerheads over multiple issues, a Delhi Government proposal to send its teachers for training in Finland being the latest bone of contention.

The LG and the Chief Minister have their weekly meetings on Friday. The scheduled meetings were disrupted with tensions rising between the LG office and the AAP dispensation. On January 16, Kejriwal and his party MLAs



had marched from the Vidhan Sabha to Raj Niwas to meet Saxena over the teachers' training proposal.

The Chief Minister returned after waiting for nearly an hour, claiming the Lt Governor refused to meet him, his deputy Manish Sisodia and AAP MLAs.

Saxena denied the charge in a letter he wrote to Kejriwal days later, saying the Chief Minister insisted for a meeting which would be attended by all his MLAs, and that it was not possible at a short notice.

Kejriwal, replying to the LG letter, had suggested a fresh proposal for a meeting between

the two sides. However, AAP leaders had later claimed that Saxena refused to meet the Chief Minister and AAP MLAs. A scene of bonhomie was, however, witnessed as Kejriwal attended the 'at home' function ahead of Republic Day hosted by the Lt Governor at Raj Niwas on Tuesday.

The two were seen warmly greeting each other during the function that was also attended by politicians from BJP and other parties.

The relations between the two sides have worsened in recent weeks with the AAP dispensation hitting out at the LG over his decisions to nominate the presiding officer and aldermen to the Municipal Corporation of Delhi House, Haj Committee members and the row over the proposal to send Delhi government teachers to Finland for training.

BBC docu screening at Jamia: 13 activists still detained, claims SFI

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Students Federation of India (SFI) on Thursday claimed that 13 students, detained for organising a screening of a controversial BBC documentary on the 2002 Godhra riots at the Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI) on Wednesday, have not been released by police yet. There was no immediate response from the Delhi Police to the claim made by the Left-backed student's body on Thursday.

The Government had recently directed social media platforms to block links to the documentary titled "India: The Modi Question". The external affairs ministry has trashed the documentary as a "propaganda piece" that lacks objec-



tivity and reflects a colonial mindset.

Meanwhile, JMI on Thursday afternoon played down reports of ruckus on its campus over attempts to screen the controversial BBC documentary on prime minister Narendra Modi. University vice-chancellor Najma Akhtar said that, "nothing happened inside our university.. attempt was made but it was completely foiled." "Whatever happened... on the streets... small incident blown out of proportion.

Precautionary measures were good."

However, Jamia administration said no screening would be allowed without permission." University reiterates no meeting of students or screening of any film will be allowed in the campus without permission," a notification read.

Scores of students were detained on Wednesday as they gathered outside the university gate to protest against the detention of four Students Federation of India (SFI) members hours before the proposed screening of the documentary.

While police released a majority of the detained students on Wednesday evening, 13 are still in detention, the SFI claimed.

The screening of "India: The Modi Question" was announced by the SFI on Wednesday. The student's outfit had said the documentary would be screened at the MCRC lawn gate number 8 at 6 pm on Wednesday.

Of the 13, four — SFI Jamia Unit secretary Azeez, SFI South Delhi Area vice president Nivedya, and SFI unit members Abhiram and Tejas — were detained on Wednesday morning, it alleged, adding that they are all students of the Jamia Millia Islamia.

"Four students were detained on Wednesday morning. Its been over 24 hours since they have been detained. The rest were detained later in the evening," SFI Delhi committee secretary Pritish Menon.

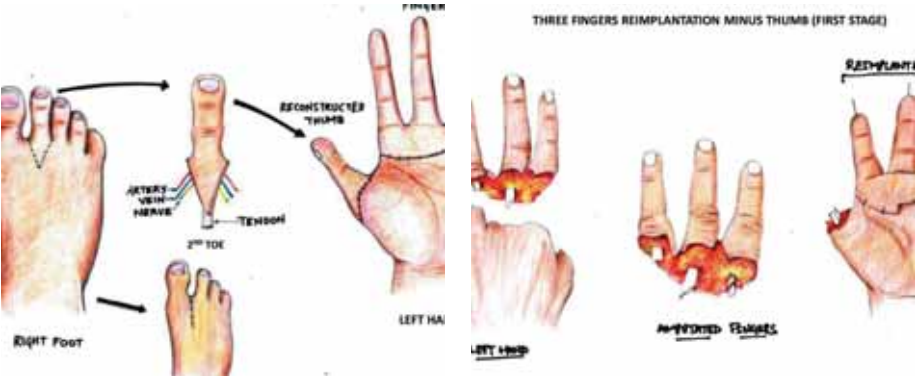
Rare surgery: 3 fingers rejoined, thumb reconstructed from toe

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

In a rare surgery, doctors at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital rejoined three fingers including index, middle and ring finger and reconstructed a thumb with a toe finger in a 44-year-old patient from Uttarakhand who had suffered an industrial injury. The patient, a factory worker, severed his index, middle, ring finger and a thumb during an accident at his unit in Uttarakhand.

Patient arrived at Sir Ganga Ram hospital in the evening around 8 hrs after injury, bleeding profusely bringing the severed 3 fingers in a polythene bag but the thumb was not present in the bag.

According to Dr. Mahesh Mangal, Chairman, Department of Plastic & Cosmetic Surgery, Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, "The challenge for us was not only to rejoin the three crushed fingers back to hand but the biggest challenge



was to reconstruct the missing thumb. For this we decided thumb reconstruction by 2nd toe transfer from right foot of the patient to make his hand fully functional."

For this a team was formed under Dr. Mahesh Mangal which consisted of Dr. S.S. Gambhir, Dr. Nikhil Jhunjhunwala and Dr. Pooja Gupta from the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive surgery, and Dr. Manish Dhawan from the Department

of Orthopaedics. Patient was immediately shifted to OT and after 10 hours long microsurgery all the three fingers were reimplanted (rejoined) by joining the blood vessel, nerve, bones and tendons under microscope. Since the thumb was not brought, thumb reconstruction was planned by 2nd toe transfer from right foot to make his hand fully functional.

Microsurgery was started in 1981 in The Department of Plastic surgery at Sir Ganga

Ram Hospital, Delhi.

Dr. Mangal, says since then the department has grown to become a center of excellence in Reimplantation of cut body parts due to industrial, agricultural, household, road traffic accidents, etc.

"They had two more patients in the same week, all of them in different age groups and at different levels of amputation with different mode of trauma," hospital said in a statement.

Cong ‘Hath se Hath Jodo’ drive to expose Modi Govt’s failures

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Thursday launched the nationwide public outreach programme ‘Hath se Hath Jodo’ campaign, under which it plans to reach out to tens of thousands of people and make them aware of the “failures” of the Modi Government.

In this campaign, party workers will hand over and also read out a letter by Rahul Gandhi, who is all set to complete a 3500 kilometer Kanniyakumari to Kashmir padyatra on Monday.

“As we celebrate the biggest festival of democracy today, we announce the launch of the #HaathSeHaathJodo campaign. After the immense love received for #BharatJodoYatra, we are sure that the Haath Se Haath Jodo campaign will also win everybody’s hearts,” Congress said in a statement.

As per the programme, the party workers will deliver a letter written by Rahul Gandhi and a “charge sheet” against the Central government to each household. During the programme which is scheduled to end on March



26, party workers will reach out to 2.5 lakh Gram Panchayats, six lakh villages and 10 lakh booths. Congress chief spokesperson Jairam Ramesh said Hath se Hath jodo campaign will take forward the grand old party’s symbol and the political message from the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

However, he said that this is a tough task as in some states the organisation is weak, but it will be accomplished. In the letter, Rahul had mentioned, “There is a palpable economic crisis brewing - joblessness among the youth, unbearable price rise, severe farm distress, and a complete corporate cap-

ture of the country’s wealth.” “People are worried about losing their jobs, their incomes are falling further, and their dreams of a better future are shattering and there is a deep sense of hopelessness across the country. Today, even our plurality is under threat. Divisive forces are attempting to turn our diversity against us - different religions, communities, regions are being pitted against each other.

These forces, which are only a handful in number, know that only when people feel insecure and scared can they sow the seeds of hatred for the ‘other,’” Rahul Gandhi wrote in his letter. The AICC will also send its leaders to address press conferences on the campaign throughout the country. While some States like Bihar, Assam, and Odisha are already undertaking a sequel of Bharat Jodo Yatra within their territorial boundaries, Congress is also scheduled to start a West to East Yatra which will be a combination of foot march and through caravans.

Another section called ‘Prachaar and parivaarvaad’ talks about money spent on the publicity of the PM, electoral bonds received by the BJP, and about how the Home Minister Amit Shah’s son Jay “runs Indian cricket while Agniveers are told to become security guards”.

India urges Australia to ensure safety of Indian community

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/MELBOURNE

With alleged Khalistani supporters vandalising Hindu temples in Australia in the last few days, India on Thursday strongly condemned the incidents and said these were clear attempts to sow hatred and division among the peaceful multi-faith and multicultural Indian-Australian community.

The High Commission highlighted “that pro-Khalistan elements are stepping up their activities in Australia, actively aided and abetted by members of proscribed terrorist organisations such as the Sikhs for Justice (SFJ) and other inimical agencies from outside Australia.”

“It is hoped that not only will the perpetrators be brought to justice but suitable action will also be taken to prevent further attempts,” the statement said. In addition, the High Commission has conveyed concerns about the so-called referendum in Melbourne and Sydney, announced by the proscribed organisation, the Sikhs for Justice next week.

The High Commission urged the Australian Government to ensure the safety and security of members of the Indian community and

Melbourne were defaced by ‘anti-social elements’ with anti-India graffiti.

The High Commission also noted that these incidents were clear attempts to sow hatred and division among the peaceful multi-faith and multicultural Indian-Australian community.

“This came about after three incidents of targeting the temples in the last few days. Earlier, this month, the Swaminarayan temple in Melbourne, the historic Shri Shiva Vishnu Temple in Carrum Downs, Victoria and the ISKCON temple in

their properties in Australia and to not allow the use of Australian territory for activities detrimental to the territorial integrity, security and national interest of India. The Australian High Commission in New Delhi has also expressed concern over the incidents, saying the matters are under investigation.

“Like India, Australia is a proud, multicultural country. We have been shocked at the vandalism of two Hindu temples in Melbourne, and Australian authorities are investigating. Our strong support for

freedom of expression does not include hate speech or violence.” Australia’s High Commissioner to India Barry O’Farrell tweeted recently. According to the 2011 census, about 2,95,362 in Australia were born in India and there were 3,90,894 responses for Indian ancestry.

In 2011-12 Indians were the largest source of permanent migration to Australia. Indians formed 15.7 per cent of total migration programme in 2011-12, according to information from Indian High Commission in Canberra website.



Rly rejects MHA proposal for free travel passes to Police Medal awardees

RAKESH K SINGH ■ NEW DELHI

The railways have turned down a proposal of the Union Home Ministry for a grant of complimentary passes (free travel facility) in Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains for recipients of the Police Medal for Gallantry (PMG) and President’s Police Medal for Gallantry besides widows of winners of gallantry awards.

The proposal was mooted by CRPF and taken up by the Home Ministry with the Railways.

“On the request of CRPF, MHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) had taken up a proposal for extension of the facility to travel in Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains to the recipients of PMG/PPMG with Govt. of India, Ministry of Railway but the same has not been agreed

to by the Competent authority of Railway,” reads a recent communication of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) that was circulated for information. Following this, the Railway Ministry communicated to the IRCTC asking it to examine the request in consultation with the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS) and the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), and send a detailed proposal on this. The Railway Board said, “.....the proposal to extend travel by Rajdhani and Shatabdi trains to Police Medal for Gallantry (PMG) /President’s Police Medal for Gallantry (PPMG) has been examined several times by this Ministry, but the same has not been agreed to by the Competent Authority for financial and other reasons.”

CBI personnel receive 30 Pres’ Police Medals



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has awarded 30 officers of the CBI with the President’s Police Medal for Distinguished Service and Police Medal for Meritorious Service on the occasion of Republic Day.

President’s Police Medals for Distinguished Service have been awarded to six officers and Police Medals for Meritorious Service have been awarded to 24 other personnel,

the agency said in a statement. Joint Director Viplav Kumar Choudhary who is overseeing recent cases related to online peddling of Child Sexual Abuse Material and the death of Akhil Bharatiya Akhara Parishad president Mahant Narendra Giri in Prayagraj, among other special crime cases, was awarded the PPMDS, it said.

Deputy Inspector General Gagandeep Gambhir, a 2004-batch IPS officer, who supervised corruption cases related to the National Highways

Authority of India, AgustaWestland chopper deal corruption case, Vijay Malhya case, alleged corruption case against former Allahabad High Court judge Justice S N Shukla among others was awarded the PMMS, it said.

A d d i t i o n a l Superintendents of Police Satya Narayan Jat and Thanglian Mang M, and Head Constables Adu Ram and Goutam Chandra Das were also awarded the PPMDS.

Superintendent of Police Pravin Mandloi; Additional Superintendent of Police Kaushal Kishore Singh; Deputy Superintendents of Police Jagrup Singh, Darvin KJ, Bikash Chandra Chourasia, Javed Akhtar Ali, Kumar Abhishek, Manoj Kumar, Girish Soni, Jagadev Singh Yadav and Mukesh Kumar among others received the PMMS.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays homage at the National War Memorial on the occasion of 74th Republic Day, in New Delhi, on Thursday

PTI Photo

‘China has strong eco, strategic needs in eastern sector, hence aggressively building its army to dominate’

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

China has a strong economic and strategic need in the Ladakh sector, which is why it is aggressively building its army to dominate the unfenced locations on the Indian side to lay claim on more areas, according to an official paper circulated at a high-level meeting.

The paper, prepared by Indian Police Service officers and submitted at the DGP/IGPs meet held last week, said the country’s border defense strategy should be given a new meaning and purpose with an economic incentive for the future, given India’s limitation to be a part of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) or the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. The paper suggests the strategy needs to be area-specific

ic e.G. Border tourism can be promoted aggressively in the Turtuk or Siachen sector, and Daulat Beg Oldi (DBO) or Dapsang plains. On the the Karakoram pass in the DBO, the paper said it is an ancient connection to India’s silk route history, and opening the area to domestic tourists shall counter the remoteness of the idea. It suggested that expeditions on the pass which were famous since the 1930s can be restarted and trekking and hiking areas be opened in a limited manner.

China has a strong economic and strategic need in eastern border sector and they are aggressively building up their army to dominate unfenced areas marked by patrolling points (PPs) on the Indian side to lay their claim on area for further domination, the paper noted.

Review procedure for declaring monuments to be of national importance, Govt told

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has suggested that the government should come up with substantive criteria and a detailed procedure for declaring monuments to be of national importance.

In a report titled ‘Monuments of National Importance - Urgent Need for Rationalisation’, the EAC-PM pointed out that expenditure on the conservation and maintenance of monuments of national importance is inadequate.

“Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) should come up with substantive criteria and a detailed procedure for declaring monuments to be of national importance. “It also should publish a book of notifications with detailed information about the provenance of all Monuments of National Importance (MNI),” the report said. India currently has 3,695 MNI that are under the protection of ASI. The

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act), 1958, (amended in 2010) provides for the declaration and conservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance.

The report prepared by EAC-PM member Sanjeev Sanyal has also recommended that the proceeds from these monuments should vest with the implementing bodies.

As per the report, a large number of the present list of MNI were identified as such before 1947 under colonial-era laws.

No attempts were made to comprehensively review the list after independence, it added.

EAC-PM also recommended that minor monuments and antiquities protected as monuments should be denotified as MNI and monuments with local importance should be transferred to respective states for protection. “Allocation of funds

for the protection of MNI should be increased,” the report said, adding that at the same time, revenue streams such as tickets, events, fees and other sources should be leveraged more proactively.

The EAC-PM is of the view that an effort should be made to restore geographical balance in the list of MNI.

“Along with rationalising the existing list, other monuments should be added to the list based on well-defined criteria and procedures,” it said.

According to the report, around 75 British cemeteries/graves are considered as ‘monuments of national importance’.

“Also, various monuments declared as MNI are of local importance and do not necessarily have national significance per se,” the report said, adding that 24 monuments of national importance are untraceable. The report pointed out that over 60 per cent of MNI are located in just 5 states - Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

Probe death of MBBS student in 2017 in UP, SC directs CBI

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has directed the CBI to probe the death of a 19-year-old MBBS student, who allegedly hung herself from the ceiling fan of her hostel room in Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh in 2017.

Taking note of contradictory reports by probe agencies, a bench of Justices Aniruddha Bose and Sudhanshu Dhulia directed CBI to file report before an appropriate court after conclusion of investigation. “A young girl child has died an unnatural death while pursuing medical studies and two investigating agencies have given reports, one in the form

of charge sheet arraigning two individuals as accused and the other filing closure report. “In view of the fact that there appears to be contradiction in the two reports filed by the two investigating agencies and also considering the nature of these cases, we are of the opinion that further investigation ought to be undertaken by Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the two investigating agencies shall assist the CBI in this regard,” the bench said.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by father of the student who was enrolled in an educational institution pursuing MBBS course. She died an unnatural death on September 5, 2017.

Traffic pollution can impair brain function in just 2 hours: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Common levels of traffic pollution can impair human brain function in only a matter of hours, according to a peer-reviewed finding, published in the journal Environmental Health.

The study showed that just two hours of exposure to diesel exhaust can cause a decrease in the brain’s functional connectivity, thus providing the first evidence in humans, from a controlled experiment, of altered brain network connectivity induced by impure air.

“For many decades, scientists thought the brain may be protected from the harmful effects of air pollution,” said senior study author Dr. Chris



Carlsten, professor and head of respiratory medicine and the Canada Research Chair in occupational and environmental lung disease at UBC.

“This study, which is the first of its kind in the world, provides fresh evidence supporting a connection between air pollution and cognition.” For the

study, the researchers briefly exposed 25 healthy adults to diesel exhaust and filtered air at different times in a laboratory setting. Brain activity was

measured before and after each exposure using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI).

The researchers analyzed changes in the brain’s default mode network (DMN), a set of inter-connected brain regions that play an important role in memory and internal thought. The fMRI revealed that participants had decreased functional connectivity in widespread regions of the DMN after exposure to diesel exhaust, compared to filtered air.

“We know that altered functional connectivity in the DMN has been associated with reduced cognitive performance and symptoms of depression, so it’s concerning to see traffic pollution interrupting these same networks,” said Dr. Jodie

Gawryluk, a psychology professor at the University of Victoria and the study’s first author. “While more research is needed to fully understand the functional impacts of these changes, it’s possible that they may impair people’s thinking or ability to work.”

Notably, the changes in the brain were temporary and participants’ connectivity returned to normal after the exposure. Dr. Carlsten speculated that the effects could be long lasting where exposure is continuous.

He said that people should be mindful of the air they’re breathing and take appropriate steps to minimize their exposure to potentially harmful air pollutants like car exhaust. “People may want to think

twice the next time they’re stuck in traffic with the windows rolled down,” said Dr. Carlsten.

“It’s important to ensure that your car’s air filter is in good working order, and if you’re walking or biking down a busy street, consider diverting to a less busy route.” While the current study only looked at the cognitive impacts of traffic-derived pollution, Dr. Carlsten said that other products of combustion are likely a concern.

“Air pollution is now recognized as the largest environmental threat to human health and we are increasingly seeing the impacts across all major organ systems,” says Dr. Carlsten. “I expect we would see similar impacts on the

brain from exposure to other air pollutants, like forest fire smoke.

With the increasing incidence of neurocognitive disorders, it’s an important consideration for public health officials and policymakers.”

The study was conducted at UBC’s Air Pollution Exposure Laboratory, located at Vancouver General Hospital, which is equipped with a state-of-the-art exposure booth that can mimic what it is like to breathe a variety of air pollutants.

In this study, which was carefully designed and approved for safety, the researchers used freshly-generated exhaust that was diluted and aged to reflect real-world conditions.

Avoid using media to air issues, Kushwaha told

PTI ■ PATNA

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday advised Upendra Kushwaha, the disgruntled JD(U) parliamentary board chief, to give up airing his grievances through the media and raise his concerns at the party forum.

Kumar, the JD(U)'s supreme leader, made a remark to the effect in response to queries from journalists about a tweet of Kushwaha on the previous day wherein the latter had said he will "not give up my own share".

"He should understand that he returned to the party, after having parted ways, for the third time, but was treated with respect. If he has a grouse he should express the same inside the party. You do not go about airing your views in public through the media or social media", a visibly displeased Kumar said.

Kushwaha returned to the JD(U) in 2021, merging his Rashtriya Lok Samata Party,



and was immediately given the top party post and rewarded with a legislative council membership shortly afterwards.

The views expressed by Kumar, at the sidelines of the Republic Day ceremony in the state capital, were endorsed by Deputy CM Tejashwi Yadav who stood by his side.

"I saw a tweet (of Kushwaha) and cannot comment on what he wants to convey. But I too am of the opinion that if he wishes to raise any issue concerning his party, he must not take to social media for the same", said the RJD

leader.

Incidentally, Kushwaha's disgruntlement has become pronounced ever since Kumar ruled out having any other Deputy CM besides Yadav whom he has also, virtually, declared as the future face of the ruling 'Mahagathbandhan'.

Kushwaha had been with the 'Mahagathbandhan', as the RLSP chief, for more than a year before breaking away ahead of the 2020 assembly polls. In his mid-60s, he has been known to be uncomfortable with accepting Yadav, nearly three decades his junior, as his leader.

4 detained for threatening to carry out bomb blasts in Guj on Republic Day

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Four persons, including one from Uttar Pradesh, have been detained by the Gujarat Police for allegedly threatening to carry out serial bomb blasts in Ahmedabad city on the Republic Day on Thursday, an official said.

The action was taken based on a letter received two days back by the Ahmedabad police commissioner's office, in which the threat of serial bomb blasts was given, the senior official of the city crime branch said. The Ahmedabad crime branch had swung into action after the letter, he said. "The sender of the letter threatened to carry out bomb blasts at different places in Ahmedabad, including at the railway station and bus stand, on the Republic Day on Thursday. Following a probe, four persons have been detained for questioning," the official said. While three per-



sons were detained from Ahmedabad, the fourth one named Om Prakash was held by the Uttar Pradesh Police from Ballia district after getting a tip-off from the crime branch here about his role, he said, adding that a team has been sent to UP to take his custody. "A preliminary probe has revealed that Om Prakash from Ballia is the key accused in sending this threat letter, which turned out to be a hoax. We are yet to find out the exact motive behind this act," the official said.

Govt made mockery of MSY by conferring Padma Vibhushan on him: SP leader

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The Government has made a mockery of Mulayam Singh Yadav's stature and contributions by conferring the Padma Vibhushan on him, Samajwadi Party leader Swami Prasad Maurya said on Thursday, demanding the country's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna for him.

Yadav was on Wednesday posthumously conferred the Padma Vibhushan, the country's second highest civilian honour.

Reacting to the award, SP MLA Maurya tweeted in Hindi, "By giving Padma Vibhushan posthumously to Netaji Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Government of India has made a mockery of Netaji's stature, work and contributions to the nation. If Netaji had to be respected then he should have been honoured with Bharat Ratna."

Similar views were expressed by party spokesperson I P Singh.

"Except the Bharat Ratna,



the highest civilian honour, no other honour befits the son of the soil, Late Mulayam Singh Yadav. An announcement should be made to give Bharat Ratna to our respected Netaji without any delay," Singh tweeted.

Yadav, the Samajwadi Party founder and three-time Uttar Pradesh chief minister, died on October 10 last year.

When asked about it, SP leader Shivpal Singh Yadav told reporters in Etawah his brother Mulyam Singh Yadav got the award for his work.

He raised the voice for the poor, labourers, youth, students, lawyers, unemployed and worked for every section of society and took historic decisions in favour of army personnel when he was defence minister, Shivpal Singh Yadav said.

Padma awardee Super 30 founder grateful to people for supporting him

PTI ■ PATNA/NALANDA

Anand Kumar, the founder of Super 30 coaching centre and one of the three Padma Shri award winners from Bihar this year, thanked the people for their support in tough times.

While Kumar has been selected for the award in the field of literature and education, two others from the state - Subhadra Devi and Kapil Dev Prasad - were selected for their contributions to the field of art.

Super 30 was founded by Kumar, a mathematics teacher, in 2002.

The programme selects 30 talented candidates each year from economically underprivileged sections of the society and trains them for the JEE-Main & JEE-Advanced, the entrance examination for the India Institute of Technology (IIT).

Kumar, while speaking to PTI, said, "I am overwhelmed with this honour. I am grateful to the Centre and the people".

Valley celebrates 74th R-Day peacefully

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ JAMMU

The 74th Republic Day celebrations passed off peacefully across the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday amid tight security arrangements.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha unfurled the National Flag at the UT level function here at MA Stadium while a series of functions were today held across Kashmir division with great enthusiasm and patriotic fervour to mark the day.

Meanwhile, unfurling of the National Flag was held amid impressive Parades and mega cultural events at all venues of functions organised at district, sub-division, tehsil and block levels across Jammu Kashmir.

Earlier, the Lieutenant Governor laid wreath at Police Martyrs Memorial & Balidan Stambh and paid tributes to brave hearts & war heroes of Mother India who made supreme sacrifices while protecting the territorial integrity of the nation.

In his Republic day address LG Manoj Sinha said that sustained efforts of security agencies have resulted in a marked decrease in terror incidents and that security forces have intensified direct attacks on the ecosystem that supports and finances terror.

"Every drop of blood and tears" shed in Jammu and Kashmir due to the barbaric killings of innocents at the behest of the neighbouring



country will be avenged",he added.

He assured the families, who lost their loved ones, that the entire nation stands with them and concrete measures will be taken to ensure that the families of the bravehearts live a life of comfort and dignity.

"Today, I bow to the brave soldiers of Jammu and Kashmir police, army and central security forces, who displayed unmatched heroism and the spirit of sacrifice in defending the motherland", he said.

On terrorism, the LG said, 180 terrorists were neutralised last year and there has been a corresponding reduction of 55 percent in civilian killings and 58 percent in the martyrdom of security forces.

"The security grid has been strengthened and anti-terror operations have been intensi-

fied through direct attacks on the ecosystem that supports and finances terror", he said.

"A befitting reply is being given to narco-terrorists and seizures and arrests in narco-terror cases have increased. During the 'Back to Village' programme, a drug-free Jammu and Kashmir campaign was organized in several identified panchayats. Those profiting from this vile business of death are to be blamed than those caught in the grip of drugs and the administration is determined to rehabilitate addicted youth", he said.

Referring to the issue of ensuring safety and security of Kashmiri pandits working in the Kashmir valley, LG Manoj Sinha said their safety is our topmost priority. "The administration is trying to solve the problems of Kashmiri pandits

with utmost sensitivity. All PM package and minority employees working in the Kashmir valley have been deployed at safe places". A nodal officer has been appointed in the Raj Bhawan and in every district to resolve issues related to their security and other problems. "The long standing issue of availability of land for their accommodations has been resolved and construction of 3000 accommodations for kashmiri pandits shall be completed this year". Sinha said, the Kashmir Migrant portal which was launched in September last year for registering grievances for illegally encroached properties during the 1990's has registered 8408 applications and action has been taken on 6336 applications resulting in removal of encroachment on 2608 kanals

of land.

Highlighting the prevailing investment scenario LG Sinha said, the Jammu and Kashmir is witnessing an Industrial Revolution for the first time in the last seven decades. It has opened up doors of immense possibilities for the new generation. Private investment proposals worth 66000 crore have been received within a period of around one year, during which 1455 Industrial units started their operations. The foundation stone of Emaar group Shopping mall and IT Tower shall be laid in March 2023 and 52 other Industrial units will also start their operations during the same month. Further, land has been allotted to 1711 Industrial units which is also a new record. Another 77 Industrial units are being developed on private land and in the last three years 500 start ups have come up which have ushered in a new social revolution.

The Republic Day celebrations were attended by Chief Justice (A) Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court; Judges of the J&K and Ladakh High Court; Chief Election Commissioner of Jammu & Kashmir; Mayor, Jammu Municipal Corporation; Members of Parliament; DDC Chairperson, Jammu; Chief Secretary; DGP; Chairperson J&K Waqf Board; elected representatives of ULBs and PRIs; former Legislators; senior Civil, Police and Army officers; political and social leaders; prominent citizens, media persons and the citizenry.

Bharat Jodo Yatra to resume from Banihal in J&K today

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

The Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi will resume from highway town of Banihal in Jammu and Kashmir on Friday after a day's break.

"The Bharat Jodo Yatra will resume from Banihal tomorrow morning. We will make up the distance that we could not do yesterday," Congress general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh told reporters after finalising the Friday's schedule for the march. The yatra will enter Kashmir valley on Friday for its last leg before culminating in a rally in Srinagar on January 30.

Ramesh said the yatra has passed through various districts of Jammu and covered almost 90 kilometres. "Wherever we went, the yatra has been received well. People of all ages, genders and from all walks of life have realised that the message of Rahul Gandhi is one of unity, love and harmony", he added.

Ramesh said he expects a good response to the yatra in Anantnag and Srinagar districts as well. "There will be a press conference by Rahul Gandhi in Srinagar before the rally on January 30 which will mark the culmination of the yatra," he added.

Ramesh said that the yatra was a "revolutionary" change in the Indian politics.

"It's not an event like Narendra Modi does but a revolutionary transformation



for Indian politics. This is a mass movement which will create awareness among the people while strengthening the Congress party as well," he said. Responding to a question, the Congress leader said the statehood should be restored to Jammu and Kashmir.

"There are examples in our

country where Union territories were upgraded to statehood. Jammu and Kashmir is the only state to be made a Union territory. Statehood should be restored to Jammu and Kashmir while Ladakh should be brought under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution," he said.

Cong's 'Hath Se Hath Jodo' campaign launched in Raj

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The Congress party's 'Hath Se Hath Jodo' campaign in Rajasthan began on Thursday. Under the campaign, the party will reach out to the people of the state with its message.

The party leaders and workers took out marches at booth level. "campaign began this morning which will continue for next two months. Rallies will be taken out at booth level across the state for strengthening the party," a state

Congress spokesperson said.

Under the outreach activity, the Congress flag would be unfurled in every village and party leaders would go door to door, interact with people and inform them about the state's current situation, know about their problems and also inform about the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

State Congress chief Govind Singh Dotasra took part in the march in the Jamwa Ramgarh constituency of Jaipur district.

Betrayal, defections defamed Maha, Sena, says Uddhav in Shinde stronghold Thane

PTI ■ THANE

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Thursday inaugurated a medical camp in Maharashtra's Thane city on the eve of the birth anniversary of late Anand Dighe, a hugely popular politician considered the mentor of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde.

Dighe's massive popularity made Thane one of the safest seats of the undivided Sena but Shinde's rebellion last June led to a vast majority of the rank and file in the region moving to the latter's Balasahebchichi Shiv Sena.

Thackeray's visit as well as the mega medical camp organised to commemorate Dighe's anniversary, which falls of

Friday, are being seen as an attempt to rebuild the Shiv Sena (UBT) in Thane.

He also paid floral tribute to Dighe at Anand Math, the de facto centre of the Sena movement in Thane for decades now.

Speaking on the occasion, Thackeray said Shiv Sena and Maharashtra have been defamed due to the "betrayal and defections" that took place, a reference to Shinde and 39 MLAs bringing down the Maha Vikas Aghadi government.

Thackeray said Thursday's visit was a brief one to take care of the "health of citizens here" but promised he would return to address a mass gathering to take care of the "political health of Thanekars".

Change in BJP poster stokes hope in Vasundhara Raje camp in Rajasthan

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan politics is abuzz with speculations on return of former Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje as the BJP's CM candidate, ever since she has appeared on a poster outside the party's office here.

Raje's picture in the poster outside the BJP's state headquarters has stoked her supporters' hope that the leader may yet again be made the party's CM face in the state.

The poster had been replaced recently ahead of the party's working committee meeting which was held on Sunday and Monday at Entertainment paradise, with the concluding session address by BJP president JP Nadda.

The earlier poster bore

photos of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and party chief JP Nadda on one corner, and those of BJP state president Satish Poonia and Leader of Opposition Gulab Chand Kataria on the other, with the name and symbol of the party in the middle. In the poster that hangs now outside the party office, Raje finds a place between Poonia and Kataria.

Her supporters believe her picture is a message from the party high command that she may be made the CM candidate in the coming election.

However, the anti-Raje camp dismissed the change in poster as a mere balancing act ahead of the elections, which they say has been done in several other states before a major poll.

Rift between BRS Govt, T'gana Guv surfaces again

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

The differences between the BRS government and Raj Bhavan in Telangana came to fore once again on Thursday with Chief Minister K Chandrasekhar Rao staying away from the Republic Day celebrations held at Raj Bhavan here. Soundararajan, who assumed office as Governor in 2019, has been accusing the state government of not adhering to protocol with regard to her office.

Pointing to officials not observing protocol during her visits to districts, she has maintained that the office of Governor should be respected. However, the ruling BRS has denied the charge and said prior to her appointment as the Governor, she was president of BJP in Tamil Nadu, and was using the constitutional post to indulge in politics.

Asked what the Constitution says about CM attending the Republic Day event and others, legal expert and former Central Information Commissioner Madabhushi Sridhar Acharyulu stated that these are conventions which need to be followed by all to maintain the dignity of the occasion. A row broke out last year when the Governor's customary address to the Assembly did not take place. Soundararajan had expressed displeasure over the CM not attending the customary 'At Home' hosted by her at the Raj Bhavan.

Avalanche in HP's Kinnaur closes highway; snow blocks roads across State

PTI ■ SHIMLA

An avalanche hit Kinnaur district on Thursday, leaving the Hindustan-Tibet road blocked, officials said.

The avalanche struck near Tinku nullah in Pooh and efforts to reopen the road (National Highway 5) are

underway, they said.

According to the officials, snowfall in other parts of the state left 256 other roads, including four national highways, blocked.

National Highway (NH) 3 near Rohtang Pass, NH 305 near Jalori Pass, NH 505 from Gramphu to Lossar and NH 5 in Pooh were closed due to

snowfall, the officials said.

At 137, the maximum number of roads were blocked in Lahaul and Spiti. Fifty-three roads were blocked in Chamba, 33 in Kullu, 13 in Shimla, six in Sirmaur, five in Kinnaur and Mandi each, they said.

Besides, 1,024 transformers were disrupted, they added.

Gondla received 20 cm of



snow, Kothi 12 cm, Khadrula 10 cm, Keylong 9 cm, Keylong 8 cm, Kalpa 7 cm, Sangla 7 cm, Shillaroo and Tissa 5 cm each, according to the meteorological department.

Intermittent rains also lashed several parts of Himachal Pradesh, the weather department said.

Kheri was the wettest place

in the state with 88 mm of rainfall. Saloni recorded 43 mm of rainfall, Dharmshala 29 mm, Sangrah 26 mm, Jogindernagar 24 cm, Nadaun 22 cm, Mehre 20 cm, Jattion Barrage and Mandi 14 mm each, Gaggal 13 mm, Ghamroor 12 mm and Bajnath 10 mm.

The weather office has issued a 'yellow' warning for

heavy rain and snow at isolated places over mid and high hills and thunderstorm, lightning and hailstorm in the plains, low and mid-hills on January 29 and 30.

It has predicted a wet spell in the region from January 28 to 30 with a fresh western disturbance likely to approach the state.

FIRST COLUMN

BUDGET: A TIGHT-ROPE WALK FOR THE FM

She has to strike a balance between prudence and populism



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Budget for 2023-24 will be presented in less than a week's time. However, there are additional policy documents such as the Economic Survey which really are a better report card of the country's economic health and the direction it will take in the medium term.

Last year's Economic Survey was a clever document which insisted on a "agile approach" in policy response, for an economy facing the downturn and uncertainty of a once in a century pandemic. It was pointed out that some of the elements in the "policy feedback loop" were always present, however, the agility in policy making became the key element with the boom in datasets available to policy makers on a real time basis. Put simply it means policy makers had access to huge swathes of datasets such as digital payments, movement of trucks across highways, railway freight, trade numbers, etc., at the click of a button and it helped them tailor-make policies for a specific sector or target group.

The second theme highlighted in last year's Economic Survey was the "art and science of policy making during extreme uncertainties." This was a great attempt to provide a curious person , peek into the minds of the lawmakers. The survey stated "that various policies of the Government of India are all about protection from or taking advantage of an uncertain future." The uncertainties highlighted were rapid shifts in technology, consumer behaviour, corporate work styles, geopolitical calibration, climate change, etc., in the post-Covid world.



The Economic Survey is a less glamorous document (generally in two volumes) as compared to the Budget, providing diagnosis on the economic health and suggested remedies, or wellness solutions.

The Govt of late, keeping with the times, started to make this document less of a statistical aggregate and more of a short nonfiction novel. This is a welcome change and it would be worth a wait if, Finance Ministry officials and the Chief Economic Advisor, take a cue from information technology ministry colleagues, who have started attaching an explanatory note on all major policy documents. The Economic Survey is not a regulatory policy document, but more of a diagnostics report, written in simple language with ample real-life illustrations, could make it more reader-friendly. Meanwhile, the extreme uncertainties impacting global growth have increased significantly. Last year the economic survey hadn't factored the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has pushed global growth rates further south. The uncertainty over fuel prices, rapid changes in geopolitical alignments, the heightened threat from non-state actors using emerging technologies such as AI to disrupt critical national infrastructure, slowdown in the US and Europe, post-zero-Covid China, emerging cyber-security challenges, have just been added to the list.

Some of these are sure to find their place in the economic survey for FY 2022-23 and more importantly the final full budget of the Government. The task set out for the Finance Minister and her team is to find a judicious balance between fiscal discipline and populism. She will have to, more than in any other year, present a right mix of political populism while leaving ample trails for the fiscal prudence glide path. To paraphrase PMI's now famous quote, this is not a time for wasteful expenditure. The spending power of the common household will be the deciding factor for the Finance Minister, as she would like the economy to pick up towards the third quarter, once some of the larger shocks in the global economy have passed. The Govt's current policy of investing heavily in creating public infrastructure, pushing enterprises and global businesses to set up factories through various incentives and schemes, thereby creating more skilled jobs are in the right direction. However, persuading the private sector, which is more sensitive to 'extreme uncertainties' as a result of global headwinds, to start investing in the domestic economy again, would be critical.

(The author is a foreign affairs commentator)

Some Bollywood stars live in virtual reality

Utterances and actions of the Aam Aadmi Party clearly reveal that they are living Bollywood

Bollywood has entertained the people for decades. Films have fired the dreams of audiences. They have also made the people laugh and cry. But in the age of virtual reality when the lines are fast getting blurred, Bollywood has sneaked into the daily lives.

The election for Delhi mayor could not be held. The circumstances under which the mayor poll was not held have been seen by all with dismay. It's disheartening to see that the MCD House, in which once political luminaries sat, has now become a place for hosting theatrics.

Utterances and actions of the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) clearly reveal that they are living Bollywood. They see a film star in Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. Stages are set, and scripts are written for him to enact the roles, which the party cleverly crafts, to fool the people in the national capital.

Students of political science may take time to research and find out a list of films of Bollywood and stars, which have been embraced by the AAP and its akas in Delhi. By the evening of Monday, the AAP camp was shivering with reports that a number of councillors in their ranks were opposed to the choice of mayor, who was chosen by a few at the top of the leadership of the party without consultations with others.

Within the MCD House, during the swearing in of the members ahead of the mayoral poll, the managers of the AAP were working their phones in desperation to reach out to the missing party councillors. It had become all clear that if the election was held for the post of mayor, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) would have easily won the coveted post. So, the mayor election had to be sabotaged, and it was done as part of a script perfectly staged by the AAP leaders, essaying their roles with finesse, which may give a run for money to the theatre actors.

In fact, the public utterances and also within the Constitutional body such as the Delhi Assembly of the chief minister are baffling to the extent that they look unreal, as if the cine screen has been transported into the real life. The insinuations made against the office of the Delhi Lieutenant Governor and the languages used by Kejriwal may fail to find a parallel in Indian political history. To say that he is an anarchist and is presiding over anarchy in the national capital will be too mild a criticism, for there is something deeper and more sinister, which is seeping into the polity of the country.

We are in the midst of the pandemic and several ailments are infectious. Even the political virus of anarchism thriving in the laboratory of AAP in Delhi is threatening to infect others. Looking at Congress and the utterances of the party's former president Rahul Gandhi, one gains an impression that Bollywood has



CONSTITUTION HAS LAID DOWN THE WORKING FRAMEWORK FOR THE ORGANS OF THE STATE. IF VARIOUS CONSTITUENTS IN THEIR BID TO PLAY TO THE GALLERY RESORT TO TRAMPLE UPON THE CONSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS, POSTERITY WILL SUFFER A HUGE BLOW

(The author is a political analyst)



indeed infected the very core of the Opposition parties. Rahul Gandhi is truly living in the dreamland in the company of fantasy kings of his party.

Rahul Gandhi's policy prescriptions are borrowed from the holy book of freebies of Kejriwal. Rahul Gandhi is in a hurry to beat Kejriwal in his game of freebies. The rush for the restoration of the 'Old Pension Scheme', which has invited the ire of the former deputy vice chairman of the erstwhile Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia is a classic case of Congress taking the Bollywood route on its inglorious path.

In Tamil Nadu and Telangana, their respective Chief Ministers are espousing utter disregard to the Constitutional norms. MK Stalin and K Chandrashekhhar Rao are resorting to extreme theatrics against the Constitutional positions in their clear attempts to play to the galleries. The films made in Hyderabad and Chennai borrow scripts from the dream land, driving high doses of fantasy intoxication. They seem to have also infected the conduct of their respective Chief Ministers. Sluggests in Tamil Nadu and Telangana against the Constitutional arrangements do not augur well for the healthy democracy and also the spirit of cooperative federalism.

The judiciary too is in some way not immune to the Bollywood virus. The vicious attempt to pro-

tect hegemony over the collegium system without offering cogent reasoning is failing Indian conscience, which is based on rationality. There was a selective leakage from the top court to reveal the details of the exchanges with the government over appointment of judges, yet the Supreme Court wants to stay away from the public scrutiny. Such pick and choose in the way the top court deals with the people is indeed weird.

Also, there is an explicit celebration of rigidity on the parts of the judiciary and a section of the judicial luminaries. Time changes and newer challenges emerge in the country and the society. How could a society be fixated to what had been thought as the best possible framework decades ago? The intransigence against flexible outlook and resistance to adjust to the emerging challenges of the nation is also borrowed from the theatrical attitude.

Judges appoint judges and they will not take accountability for the millions of cases pending in courts are strange for a 21st Century India, which is in a leadership role in technology adoption. The judiciary goes on vacation, while the country works 365 days a year. Such irony cannot be fathomed. Also, the judiciary's aversion to people's mandate is totally unexplainable.

At a time when the country is celebrating the Republic Day and patriotism is high among the peo-

ple, it will augur well for the judiciary to be subject to the timely reforms, which cannot be delayed any further. Timely access to justice is a right of the people. The litigants cannot wait for ages for resolution of cases. The status quo will amount to failing the Constitution. The judiciary should be subject to reasons, and stop taking refuge in what had been decided decades ago.

The Constitution has laid down the working framework for the various organs of the State. If various constituents in their bid to play to the gallery resort to trample upon the Constitutional arrangements, posterity will suffer a huge blow. They will fail to see the template on which they will build the country for the future generation.

In the eagerness to gain quick glory, the actors of today may leave behind sour taste for the future generation. It has to be known to the core of the heart that today's actors have to discharge their duties in undiluted commitment to the best interest of the country and the people. Virtual reality should, as a technology, work in the interests of the people. The speed to fame inspired by Bollywood in public life may take the actors in the political and other arena to the fast path of destruction. The actors who are camouflaging must be exposed by people. If there is a need, let there be changes in Constitution to stem the rot.

POINTCOUNTERPOINT

HE (MAURYA) NEVER MADE SUCH STATEMENTS. AFTER JOINING THE SP, STATEMENTS DISRESPECTING HINDUISM IS COMING FROM HIM.
— UP BJP SPOKESPERSON RAKESH TRIPATHI



PM MODI TALKS ABOUT 'VASUDEV KUTUMBHAKAM'. EVERYONE SHOULD TRY HAVING A BIGGER HEART, ELSE WE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO FULFILL HIS DREAM.
— BJP LEADER SANGHMITRA MAURYA

East meets West for fusion of learning in NEP2020

It will be good for aspiring students to study in premier institutes of the world without leaving their homeland

It is a well-established fact that India is essentially a welfare state and has shown exemplary commitments for inclusive development. Apart from reservation in education and employment, India has been successfully implementing several other welfare measures aimed at raising the quality of lives of the underprivileged sections of the society.

The Narendra Modi Government has added many new schemes to the kitty of welfare measure bonanza. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana, Shramew Jayate Yojana, Atal Pension Yojna, Gramoday Se Bharat Uday are only a few to name. Such schemes have ensured that



RAGHAVENDRA P TIWARI

(The author is Vice-Chancellor, Central University of Punjab, Bathinda)

the poor sleep under a roof with at least a square meal. The education sector is no exception to this trajectory of development.

Students of all levels from the underprivileged sections of society enjoy reservations in admissions to various professional and traditional programs of study, apart from enjoying various types of scholarships and fellowships. People from such sections have also been beneficiaries of reservations in teaching and non-teaching recruitments. While such reservations and facilities have ensured inclusivity, the net impact of these in the quality of education is a point worthy of serious discourse.

Some sections of the academia, especially in the Modi

era, are strategically engaged in a debate detrimental to the Indian learning ecosystem. Today's youth live in the era of 4.0 Version of Education which is outcome-based and can be realised through quality education only.

Moreover, we urgently need to develop global competencies in our learners to empower them with skills to face the challenges of the highly uncertain and volatile future that 21st Century has in store for them.

A recent case in point is the draft document of the University Grants Commission on 'Setting up and Operation of Campuses of Foreign Higher Educational Institutions in India Regulations'. This regulation stipulates a standard

operating procedure for maintaining and operating campuses in India by the top 500 foreign universities. A major bone of contention in this context is the lack of provision for social equity especially with regard to reservations to the underprivileged.

Moreover, it is alleged that such campuses will essentially serve the cause of the affluent sections of Indian society. However, even if only some so-called upper sections of the social strata were beneficiaries of the education system prevailing from the dawn of the Indic civilization, the majority of them were as poor as the others, and they got enlightenment under extreme poverty in thatched huts in forests, strictly adhering to the doctrine of 'Less is More'. They created a plethora of doctrines of a supreme quality, such as the Vedas and the Upanishad, which have relevance across time and space.

If human civilization progresses along the contours of these doctrines, its longevity, quality, vitality and health can be ensured. The moot questions, thus, are: Can we recapitulate and recapture this supreme quality in sharpening minds for the creation of abstract knowledge again? Should we not desist from criticism and downplaying of such policies which aim at restoring much-needed universal quality in education? Should we not exclude such policies from the basket of policies in vogue for the uplift of the underprivileged sections?

Why should affluent sections from our own society be deprived from access to quality education merely on the grounds that the underprivileged sections will be left behind? The quality bars and the rigorous process of recruitment of faculty and staff, pay-package and amenities, admission criteria, infrastructure, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment tools, skill development and campus placement initiatives, etc., on such campuses should be similar to the main campus of foreign universities. These campuses should be allowed to offer new-age programmes only.

It will be good for aspiring students to study in premier institutes of the world without leaving their homeland. This may also work as a stimulus to

Indian institutions.

Moreover, this may also discourage our youth from studying abroad at an exorbitant cost and will eventually halt currency, brain and cultural drain. Lastly, the argument that our youth will fall prey to foreign culture in these campuses holds no water as the all-encompassing Sanatan culture is robust enough to embrace all other cultures and yet maintain its unique traits.

After all, one of our cultural traits is 'Aano Bhadra Kritvo Yantu Vishwatah'. In essence, this regulation will facilitate the fusion of learning systems of the East and the West in Modi's India and pave the path for the internationalization of education—one of the key elements of New Education Policy or NEP2020.

Russian attacks on Ukraine reported; tank training to start

AP ■ KYIV

Russian forces fired another rash of missiles and self-exploding drones across several parts of Ukraine early on Thursday, causing the first attack-related death of the year in Kyiv even as air defences shot down many of the incoming projectiles. The attacks adhered to Russia's recent pattern of launching widespread strikes about every two weeks. But the wave of weapons came a day after Germany and the United States upped the ante in Russia's 11-month war by promising to send high-tech battle tanks to Ukraine and green-lighting other allies to do the same.

Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko said a strike killed one person, the city's first such death since New Year's Eve. Two others were injured, he said. The head of the Kyiv

city administration, Serhii Popko said Ukrainian air defences shot down 15 cruise missiles heading to the area were shot down.

Russia has carried out massive strikes on Ukrainian power plants and other infrastructure since early October. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the commander of Ukraine's armed forces said Thursday's volley involved 55 missiles, of which 47 were intercepted.

Self-exploding drones swept in overnight before the missile strikes, in what a spokesperson for Ukraine's Southern Defence Forces said appeared to be a Russian attempt to overwhelm or distract Ukraine's air defences.

It was the first such barrage of Russian firepower across the country since January 14.

Maksym Marchenko, the governor of southern Ukraine's Odesa region, said energy



infrastructure facilities were damaged in his and several other regions, causing "significant problems with electricity supply".

The regional administra-

tion in the nearby Kherson region, where Ukrainian troops recaptured the regional capital in November, said Russian shelling killed two people and wounded five over the past day.

The attacks came a day after Germany said it would supply 14 high-tech Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine and authorise other European countries to send up to 88

more. The US said it planned to ship 31 Abrams M1 tanks to Ukrainian forces.

Along with Germany and the US, Britain, Poland, the Netherlands and Sweden are

among the nations that have sent or announced plans to supply hundreds of tanks and heavy armored vehicles to fortify Ukraine as it enters a new phase of the war and tries to break through entrenched Russian lines.

The conflict has largely been a stalemate in recent months, though Ukrainian forces acknowledged on Wednesday a controlled pullout from the salt-mining town of Soledar in Donetsk province, a battle-scarred area of eastern Ukraine that has been embroiled in war since Russia-backed separatists seized large swaths of the broader Donbas region in 2014.

Gian Gentile, a US Army veteran and senior historian with the Rand think tank, said the M1 Abrams and the Leopards would give Ukraine a "mechanized armoured punching force."

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said Ukrainian crews will start their training in Germany in coming days on German-made Marders, which are infantry fighting vehicles, while training on the heavier Leopard 2 tanks would start "a little later". "In any case, the aim with the Leopards is to have the first company in Ukraine by the end of March, beginning of April," he added. "I can't say the precise day."

In an interview with Britain's Sky News on Wednesday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he didn't know when the tanks from the US and Europe would arrive.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, also speaking to the British network, declined to speculate on the timing, but said "allies are extremely focused on the importance of speed".

Ukraine lauds Western move on tanks

AP ■ KYIV

From Washington to Berlin to Kyiv, a Western decision to send battle tanks to Ukraine was hailed enthusiastically. Moscow sought to downplay it.

The Kremlin has previously warned that such tank deliveries would be a dangerous escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, and it has strongly denounced the watershed move by Germany and the United States to send the heavy weaponry to its foe.

But it insists the new armour won't stop Russia from achieving its goals in Ukraine.

"The potential it gives to the Ukrainian armed forces is clearly exaggerated," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said. "Those tanks will burn just like any others."

Moscow played down the move in an apparent attempt to save face as the West raised the stakes in Ukraine. Some Russian experts also emphasised that the supply of the deadly armour will be relatively limited and could take months to reach the front.

On Thursday, Russia launched a new wave of missile and self-exploding drone attacks across Ukraine. The attack initially appeared to be a continuation of previous attacks rather than retaliation for the announcements on the tanks.

President Vladimir Putin, his diplomats and military



leaders have repeatedly warned the West that supplying long-range weapons capable of striking deep inside Russia would mark a red line and trigger a massive retaliation. While other weapons like tanks and certain air defence systems have drawn warnings from Russian officials, the wording has been deliberately vague, perhaps to allow the Kremlin to avoid getting cornered by making specific threats.

Poland, the Czech Republic and other NATO allies have provided Ukraine with hundreds of smaller Soviet-made tanks from the Cold War era when they were part of the Soviet bloc.

Ukrainian armed forces, who have used similar aging weaponry, needed no extra training to use them. They played an important role on the battlefield, helping Ukraine reclaim broad swaths of territory in 11 months of fighting.

As Ukraine's armoured units suffered attrition and stockpiles of the old T-72 tanks ran dry in the arsenals of its allies in Central and Eastern Europe, Kyiv has increasingly pushed for delivery of German-made Leopard 2 and US M1 Abrams tanks.

After weeks of hesitation, Germany said Wednesday it will provide Ukraine with 14 Leopard 2 tanks and allow

other allies willing to follow suit to deliver 88 Leopards to form two tank battalions. The US announced it will send 31 M1 Abrams tanks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his officials, who long have said the country needs hundreds of tanks to counter a foe with a far superior number as well as other weapons, greeted the Western decision as a major breakthrough, voicing hope that more supplies will follow.

"The deliveries of Leopard 2 will take our ground forces to a qualitatively new level," Ukrainian military expert Oleh Zhdanov told The Associated Press.

Even though Leopard 2s

are heavier than Soviet-designed tanks, they have a strong edge in firepower and survivability.

"One Leopard 2 could be equivalent to three or five Russian tanks," Zhdanov said.

But he noted that the promised number of Western tanks represents only the minimum that Ukraine needs to repel a likely offensive by Moscow, adding that Russia has thousands of armoured vehicles. "Kyiv is preparing for a defensive operation, and its outcome will determine the future course of the conflict," Zhdanov said.

Russian military analysts were more sceptical about the Western tanks, arguing that while Abrams proved clearly superior to older models of Soviet-built tanks during the war in Iraq, newer Russian models are more closely matched. They also charged that Leopard 2 tanks used by the Turkish army against the Kurds in Syria proved vulnerable to Soviet-era anti-tank weapons.

Some Russian online media quickly posted diagrams of the vulnerable points of the Leopard 2. "Hit Leopard as your grandfather hit Tiger and Panther!" one headline said, referring to Nazi tanks in World War II.

Andrei Kartapolov, a retired general who heads the defence affairs committee in the lower house of the Russian parliament, argued that both Leopard 2 and

Abrams are inferior to Russia's T-90, a modified version of the T-72.

The latest Russian tank, the T-14 Armata, has been manufactured only in small numbers and so far hasn't been used in the war. The British Ministry of Defence said in its latest intelligence update that Russia has worked to prepare a small batch of T-14s for deployment in Ukraine, but said it had engine and other problems.

Russian observers, meanwhile, noted it could take a significant time for the Western tanks to reach Ukraine, adding that training Ukrainians to use them and properly maintain them would add to the challenge.

"It likely means that the Ukrainian military will probably receive a few small batches of tanks that could be incompatible with each other," Moscow-based defense analyst Ilya Kramnik said in a commentary.

Zhdanov, the Ukrainian military analyst, argued that by agreeing to provide Ukraine with tanks, the West crossed an important psychological barrier and could eventually follow up by supplying even more deadly weapons.

"Handing over Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine marks a major change in the policy of Western allies, who stopped fearing escalation and are now ready to challenge Russia in the war of resources," he said.

Scattered by war, Ukrainian preteens head to hockey tourney



AP ■ MONTREAL

Sean Berube said he thought it was a joke when he was first asked to help assemble a team of Ukrainian preteen refugees, displaced by war and spread out across Europe, to play in a renowned Quebec City hockey tournament.

Berube, a businessman from the Quebec City region, was having a beer in Bucharest last March with Evgheny Pysarenko, whom he played hockey with in Ukraine as a teenager.

The businessman - with the help of Pysarenko - had just travelled to Ukraine to help his former Ukrainian hockey coach and the coach's family flee the Russian invasion. To show his gratitude, Berube said he owed Pysarenko a beer.

"Then he (Pysarenko) said, 'No, I've got a different thing to ask you. I have a different favour.'"

That favour morphed into a mission, culminating with travel visas to Canada for a group of 11- and 12-year-olds from Ukraine to play in the Quebec International Peeewee Hockey Tournament, which has hosted greats such as Wayne Gretzky and Guy Lafleur.

The Ukrainian team is scheduled to take to the ice at the Videotron Centre on February 11 to play the Junior Bruins from Massachusetts.

"My thrill is to see them smile after all the mess and all the trouble they've been through for the last few months," Berube said this week before heading to Europe.

US: Goal to get Ukraine capabilities to succeed on battlefield against Russia



PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The Biden administration's goal is to get Ukraine the requisite capabilities needed to be successful on the battlefield against the Russian troops, the White House has said, after Washington and Berlin announced they will send advanced battle tanks to Kyiv.

President Joe Biden has announced that the US will send 31 state-of-the-art Abrams battle tanks to Ukraine to help its troops push back Russian forces that remain entrenched in the country's east for almost a year since Moscow's invasion.

The US decision came after Germany agreed to send 14 Leopard 2 A6 tanks to Ukraine.

"It is our goal -- and a goal shared by our allies and partners that we get to Ukraine the capabilities they need to be successful on the battlefield today but, just as critically, in the future, going forward this year," National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby told reporters during his daily news conference on Wednesday.

Kirby said the Germans

would help organise another two battalions, the British have agreed to send their Challenger tanks, while the French will also be contributing with armoured vehicles.

"This very much just follows right along with the kinds of discussions we've been having with the Ukrainians for months about making sure that they can fight on the terrain that they're in and that they can prepare for operations going forward this year," Kirby said.

Both Leopard 2 and Abrams are state-of-the-art tanks and considered more superior than Soviet-era tanks fielded by the Russian forces.

Earlier, Biden said the delivery of these tanks will "take time" that Washington will use to ensure "Ukrainians are fully prepared to integrate these tanks into their defences."

The Hill reported that Ukraine would also push for F-16 fighter jets from the US.

Kirby acknowledged that while the fighting between the Russian and Ukrainian forces has slowed down during the winter, he expects the tempo to pick up once the weather improves.

"We have to be ready for that. I know the Ukrainians feel they have to be ready for that," he said. "So, it's about helping Ukraine defend itself but also, helping Ukraine be able to go on the offensive when the weather conditions and when the operational conditions are permissive," Kirby added.

At a separate news conference, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said the US wants to equip Ukraine not only with deterrent capabilities, but also defensive capabilities if Russia once again makes a disastrous decision to cross international borders to attack Ukraine in the future.

Responding to a question, Price said Moscow has already inflicted a strategic failure on itself.

"We've seen this strategic failure since the earliest days of this war, when President Putin sent his forces into Ukraine under the erroneous assumption that Kyiv would fall, that the country would be his, that more so than the territorial conquest that he'd be in a position to erase Ukraine, erase its identity, erase its people, subsume the country," he added.

Nobel laureate wants more help to probe Russian war crimes

AP ■ BRUSSELS

A Ukrainian human rights lawyer who shared last year's Nobel Peace Prize called Thursday for more international investigative and legal help to deal with the staggering amount of war crimes cases since Russia invaded its neighbour almost a year ago.

Oleksandra Matviichuk of Ukraine's Centre for Civil Liberties told a session of the 46-nation Council of Europe, the continent's foremost human rights organisation, that Ukraine had documented some 31,000 cases of potential war crimes since the February 24, 2022 invasion.

But the glut of work the process entailed left the legal system unable to properly deal with most of them, Matviichuk said. "The war has turned people into numbers. The scale of

war crimes grows so large that it's become impossible to recognise all the stories," she said, insisting it remained essential to give each individual a sense of justice done.

The war crime allegations against Russians involve the rape, torture and murder of innocent civilians, forced deportations, child abductions and the destruction of churches, schools and hospitals, the human rights lawyer said.

"I work with people who have survived hell," Matviichuk continued, "and I'm certain that above and beyond their own lives, ruined families, ruined vision of the future, these people crave to restore their trust that justice exists, even though delayed in time."

The United Nations human rights office said that as of January 23, 7,068 civilians had been killed in the war.

While Ukrainian officials have called for modern tanks and advanced weapons to beef up the defence of their nation, Matviichuk wants a similar effort to reinforce its legal capabilities.

"We must ingrain international elements into the level of national investigation and national justice," she said.

She called on the Council of Europe to help set up a system where more international investigators and judges could be brought in to reinforce Ukraine in prosecuting cases.

In October, Matviichuk's organisation, the Centre for Civil Liberties, was named a co-winner of the 2022 Nobel Peace Prize along with Russian human rights group Memorial and Ales Bialiatski, head of the Belarusian rights group Viasna.

In her impassioned Thursday speech in the hall of



Council of Europe, she also rued with a trembling voice that the International Criminal Court was centring on a select few cases and had no jurisdiction over the crime of aggression, for which many in the international community want Russian President Vladimir Putin and other top Kremlin officials prosecuted.

The European Parliament and the European Union's

executive commission have called for the establishment of a court to prosecute the crime of aggression, and Matviichuk urged the Council of Europe to also take a leading role in it.

Something has to happen soon, she said, because, as a legal expert, she only has one answer for her nation's plight: "Provide Ukraine with modern weaponry because now the law doesn't work."

New US Ambassador arrives in Moscow amid high tension

AP ■ MOSCOW

The United States' new ambassador to Russia, Lynne Tracy, has arrived in Moscow, the US embassy said Thursday.

Tracy most recently was the ambassador to Armenia and served as the deputy chief of mission in Moscow in 2014-17. She replaces John Sullivan, who resigned in September.

It was not immediately clear when Tracy would present her credentials.

Her arrival comes amid high tension between Russia and the United States, most



recently sharpened by President Joe Biden's decision Wednesday to supply advanced Abrams battle tanks to Ukraine.

In recent years, staffing at the embassy in Moscow has been significantly reduced, obstructing visa applications and other consular services.

Germany arrests 2nd suspect in Russia spying case

AP ■ BERLIN

German authorities said Thursday that they have arrested a second person in connection with a high-profile espionage case that embarrassed Germany's foreign intelligence agency.

Federal prosecutors said Arthur E., whose surname wasn't released for privacy reasons, was detained at Munich airport last month after arriving from the United States.

Prosecutors said the suspect, a German citizen, is accused of treason for passing secrets obtained by Carsten



L., an acquaintance working at Germany's BND spy agency, to Russian intelligence.

Arthur E. Was not an employee of the BND, prosecutors said.

German authorities received support in their investigation from the FBI, they said.

Meta to restore Trump’s FB, Instagram accounts

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Meta Platforms Inc has said that it will restore former US President Donald Trump’s Facebook and Instagram accounts, which were suspended following the Capitol Hill riots on January 6, 2021.

Trump, 76, announced in November last year that he will make another dash for the White House in 2024.

Before his accounts got suspended, he had 34 million followers on Facebook and 23 million on Instagram.

"The suspension was an extraordinary decision taken in extraordinary circumstances," Nick Clegg, president Global Affairs, Meta said in a blog post on Wednesday.

"The public should be able to hear what politicians are saying so they can make informed choices," he said.

Clegg asserted that under

its new newsworthy content policy if Meta assesses there is a public interest in knowing that Trump made the statement that outweighs any potential harm, it may opt to restrict the distribution of such posts but still leave them visible on his account.

"We default to letting people speak, even when what they have to say is distasteful or factually wrong. Democracy is messy and people should be able to make their voices heard," Clegg wrote.

"We believe it is both necessary and possible to draw a line between content that is harmful and should be removed, and content that, however distasteful or inaccurate, is part of the rough and tumble of life in a free society," he said.

Clegg said Meta has put new guardrails in place to deter repeat offenses.

Facebook is not only the



world's largest social media site, but also a critical source of fundraising for Trump's political campaigns.

In a post on Truth Social, Trump responded by saying: "FACEBOOK, which has lost Billions of Dollars in value since 'deplatforming' your favorite President, me, has

just announced that they are reinstating my account. Such a thing should never again happen to a sitting President, or anybody else who is not deserving of retribution."

Trump was reinstated by Twitter in November last year after Elon Musk took over the company.

UK hails ‘another year of cooperation’ amid Republic Day wishes to India

PTI ■ LONDON

The United Kingdom on Thursday expressed its greetings for India's 74th Republic Day with a personal message from the country's foreign minister James Cleverly to his Indian counterpart, Dr S. Jaishankar.

UK Foreign Secretary Cleverly took to Twitter to wish his "friend" and the people of India on the celebration of the day India adopted its Constitution to become a Republic.

"Happy Republic Day to my friend Dr Jaishankar and the people of India. We look forward to another year of friendship and cooperation! #RepublicDay2023," tweeted Cleverly.

The Indian High Commission in London held its customary flag-hoisting ceremony at India House on Thursday morning. The Indian High Commissioner to the UK, Vikram Doraiswami, addressed the diaspora gather-



ing to convey the speech of Indian President Droupadi Murmu.

"The Indian Constitution is a pretty remarkable document in itself. But also because it created at its get-go an equality of expectation among every citizen of India, regardless of race, creed, ethnicity or gender, that their rights were the same," Doraiswami said on the eve of Republic Day, addressing the India Global Forum UK-India Parliamentary Lunch on

Wednesday.

The High Commission will be hosting its annual Republic Day celebrations at the iconic Guildhall in London on Thursday evening, complete with patriotic fervour and cultural performances reflective of different parts of India.

Several Indian diaspora organisations have been marking Republic Day with activities involving schoolchildren and cultural events since last weekend and will continue to

hold festivities over the coming weekend as well.

Several temples have organised special aartis and patriotic musical events to mark the day.

The first-ever India UK Achievers Honours, celebrating the educational and professional achievements of Indian students who studied at UK institutions, celebrated India's Republic Day with a gala awards ceremony in London on Wednesday.

Panama ex-President, sons barred from US for corruption

AP ■ PANAMA CITY

The U.S. State Department banned former Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli from ever traveling to the United States, saying Wednesday that he had participated in "significant corruption" in awarding government contracts.

The ban also applied to two of the former president's sons, who returned to Panama on Wednesday after completing prison sentences in the United States for laundering millions of dollars in bribes from Brazilian construction giant Odebrecht.

"Martinelli accepted bribes in exchange for improperly awarding government contracts during his tenure as the president" from 2009 to 2014, the State Department said in a statement.

The sons, Luis Enrique Martinelli Linares and Ricardo Martinelli Linares, arrived Wednesday evening, said an official in the National



Immigration Service, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

Expectations were running high for the brothers' return because they will be among 36 people going on trial in August for the Odebrecht scandal. They are accused of laundering millions of dollars in bribes paid by Odebrecht during their father's administration.

Their father and another former president, Juan Carlos Varela, also await trial in the case.

The elder Martinelli hopes

to run for re-election in the 2024 national elections.

Attorney General Javier Caraballo said Tuesday that his office has high expectations to see the brothers face justice in Panama.

The brothers paid about a \$14 million bond in advance of their arrival to avoid being detained in Panama. They served three-year sentences in the United States for conspiring to launder about \$28 million in bribes from Odebrecht.

Before being extradited to the United States, they were held in Guatemala for 23 months.

Workers stage three-hour strike in Cyprus to demand pay raises

AP ■ NICOSIA

Thousands of workers in Cyprus, including government employees, teachers and builders walked off the job Thursday for an island-wide, three-hour work stoppage to protest what they claim is employers' backpedalling on a deal for inflation-linked pay increases.

Some 14 trade unions representing a diverse range of workers from bus drivers to airport staff responded to a call by union bosses to stage the brief strike as a warning to employers and government mediators that they won't accept any rollbacks on what they say they're lawfully entitled to.

Hundreds of workers gathered in the capital, Nicosia, to march on the Labour Ministry demanding higher pay.

Some 22 flights in and out of the island's two airports

shuttling 4,000 passengers will be affected by the strike. Airport operator Hermes says most flights have been rescheduled around the work stoppage.

According to Labour Minister Kyriakos Koushos, the chasm between employers and unions representing workers is too wide for the outgoing government to broach before elections next month.

The labour unrest will be a priority for the next administration that will take over in March.

The dispute revolves around the longstanding Cost of Living Adjustment granting workers pay raises intended to offset inflation. The deal was suspended following a 2013 financial crisis that brought the island to the brink of bankruptcy.

Employers and trade unions agreed in 2017 to eventually reinstate the deal in full, but starting at only half



of pre-2013 levels determined by indicators measuring economic output.

Trade union bosses accuse employers of balking on the 2017 agreement, saying that workers are now trying to cope with high inflation that has cut deep into workers' purchasing power, just as profits for busi-

nesses have grown.

Cyprus Employers & Industrialists Federation Chief Michalis Antoniou said employers are willing to hash out a deal that would increase salaries, but one that wouldn't undercut the competitiveness of business. He said only about a fifth to a quarter of

private-sector workers are entitled to a raise under the Cost of Living Adjustment.

Andreas Matsas, general secretary of the Cyprus Workers' Confederation trade union told private TV channel Alfa that businesses can well afford the salary hikes amid increased profits.

Imran’s supporters gather outside his home after Punjab’s caretaker Govt withdraws security

PTI ■ LAHORE

Supporters of Pakistan's ousted prime minister Imran Khan on Thursday gathered outside his residence here to provide security and resist his possible arrest, days after the caretaker government of Punjab province withdrew the additional security provided to him following an assassination attempt.

The additional security provided to Khan, the chief of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, in November was removed on Tuesday night.

"The Punjab government under CM Mohsin Naqvi has withdrawn additional police security of Khan and also former chief minister and Khan's ally Chaudhary Parvez Elahi," a government official told PTI.

He said the commandos of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province who were deployed at the Zaman Park Lahore residence of Khan have also been with-

drawn following dissolution of the assembly and installation of a caretaker setup there.

The PTI chief's security was beefed up following a gun attack on him in November last in the Wazirabad area of Punjab province.

PTI Punjab's senior leader Musarrat Cheema said that a number of party workers are stationed outside Khan's residence.

"A good number of PTI workers have been camping outside Khan sahib's residence for the last two days to resist any possible attempt to arrest him," Cheema told PTI.

She said a 'puppet' caretaker Chief Minister has been installed to take action against the PTI leadership.

Cheema said the PTI workers would not only provide security to Khan but stop the government from arresting him.

On Wednesday, Police arrested PTI's senior leader

Fawad Chaudhry during a predawn raid on charges of 'inciting violence against a constitutional institution.

Former interior minister Sheikh Rashid said that there are chances that Imran Khan may be poisoned.

"I have asked Khan to be very careful as a conspiracy is being hatched to give him poison in his food," Rashid said.

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif, however, claimed that the government has no plans to arrest Khan.

Earlier, Khan said he sacrificed the party's governments in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa because the country needed free and fair elections.

He demanded that the judiciary ensure that general elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa be held within 90 days of the dissolution of assemblies.

"If there is a Constitution and law in this country, the



election cannot go beyond 90 days," he said and urged the Chief Justice of Pakistan to look into the matter.

Khan said that he is shocked to see how the military establishment has chosen to side with those (Sharifs and Zardaris) who had been looting the country for the past three decades.

The provincial assemblies in the two provinces -Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa- were dissolved prematurely

this month by the PTI party to force the federal government in Islamabad to call for early general elections.

However, the federal government refused to bow before the pressure and has been so far adamant to hold elections on time after August this year.

Mohsin Naqvi was sworn in as the caretaker chief minister of Punjab on January 22, while Mohammad Azam Khan as the chief executive of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on January 21.

Syrian Kurdish forces arrest IS commander in eastern region

AP ■ RAQQA

Syrian Kurdish-led forces captured a local commander of the Islamic State group in eastern Syria as part of an ongoing operation targeting sleeper cells in the city of Raqqa, the US-backed forces announced on Thursday.

The commander served as the chief of the extremist group's faction for Raqqa and was among the 68 militants detained in the operation, the Syrian Democratic Forces said.

The operation started earlier this week, in response to a December attack by IS that targeted military and security buildings in Raqqa and killed at least six Syrian Kurdish fighters.

A Kurdish commander, Mazloum Abdi, said they had indications of "serious preparations" by IS for attacks.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a Britain-based opposition war monitor,



said IS militants also targeted a military intelligence prison holding some 200 militants in the December attack.

IS lost all territorial control in Iraq and Syria in 2019, following a yearslong US-backed campaign that defeated the so-called caliphate, where Raqqa was once the IS de facto capital.

However, militant sleeper cells persist and have since killed scores of Iraqis and Syrians. Syrian Kurdish and US

forces frequently conduct raids targeting IS sleeper cells in northern and eastern Syria.

The captured IS commander was identified as Atallah al-Maythan. Syrian Kurdish forces said he headed the militant group's operations across Raqqa province, and allegedly "confessed to his involvement in planning and leading terrorist acts," extorted money from residents in the area and kept IS sleeper cells in contact.

Israel’s Pres Herzog urges EU to fight resurgent anti-semitism

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Israeli President Isaac Herzog said Thursday that antisemitism is on the rise in the Western world and urged the European Union to ensure that Jews can live safely on the continent where the Holocaust took place.

Speaking at the European Parliament on the eve of the annual commemorations of the liberation of the Auschwitz death camp, Herzog said EU countries as well as the 27-nation bloc's officials should use legislation, education and security to eradicate antisemitism.

"You must read the warn-

ing signs, detect the symptoms of the pandemic of antisemitism, and fight it at all costs," he said. "Unfortunately, the picture is disturbing. Deeply disturbing. Antisemitic discourse festers not only within dark regimes, but within the heartlands of the free, democratic West."

Antisemitism gained traction during lockdowns as the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated hatred online. Herzog said antisemitism is spreading "at record pace, at the click of a button."

"The distance between a viral video and a physical attack hardly exists at all," he added. "The distance between a

Facebook post and the smashing of headstones in a cemetery is shorter than we would think."

In Germany, a group tracking antisemitism said it documented more than 2,700 incidents in the country in 2021, including 63 attacks and six cases of extreme violence, while Europe's Fundamental Rights Agency said nine out of 10 Jews think antisemitism has increased in their country.

Incidents of bias and hate speech have also been rising in the US.

International Holocaust Remembrance Day falls on the anniversary of the liberation by Soviet troops of Auschwitz-

Birkenau, the most notorious of the death camps where Nazi Germany carried out its Final Solution seeking to murder the Jewish people of Europe.

Nazi German forces killed 1.1 million people at Auschwitz, most of them Jews, but also Poles, Roma and others. The UN General Assembly adopted a resolution in 2005 establishing International Holocaust Remembrance Day as an annual commemoration.

About 6 million European Jews and millions of other people were killed by the Nazis and their collaborators. Some 1.5 million were children.

As Israel celebrates its 75th anniversary later this year,

Herzog said his country is open to criticism but argued that casting doubt about the State of Israel's right to exist equates to antisemitism.

"It is antisemitism in the full sense of the word, and it must be thoroughly uprooted," he said. "The rule is simple: Criticism of us must pass the basic test of fairness and integrity, and it must not cross the line into dehumanisation or delegitimation."

Herzog also lashed out at Iran as Tehran continues its brutal crackdown over widespread protests led by young Iranians. He called for the international community to fight against "the forces of

darkness and hatred that threaten to destroy us."

"I speak first and foremost of the Iranian regime, which not only publicly calls for the complete annihilation of my country but is also murdering its own countrymen and women, who are demanding liberty and human and civil rights, stoking civil wars throughout the Middle East, playing an active and lethal role in the war in Ukraine, and developing weapons of mass destruction on the way to dramatically threatening the stability of the entire globe," he said.

The European Union earlier this week imposed sanc-



tions on dozens of Iranian officials and organisations suspected in the security crackdown on protestors.

The 27-nation bloc has

also imposed punitive measures on Iranian individuals linked to supplying Russia with explosive drones to use in its war against Ukraine.

FinMin contemplating sops for middle class

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The finance ministry is considering proposals to benefit the middle class in its last full Budget of the Narendra Modi 2.0 government to be presented on February 1 in the Lok Sabha.

The finance ministry is looking into proposals sent by various government departments on specific steps which may be announced in the Budget, benefiting a large section of the middle class, sources said.

The government has not raised income tax exemption limit from Rs 2.5 lakh which was fixed in 2014 by the then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his first Budget.

Also the standard deduction has remained at Rs 50,000 since 2019. Several experts

are of the opinion that the exemption limit as well as standard deduction need to be increased to compensate salaried middle class for elevated level of inflation.

The recent statement of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman that she was aware of pressures of the middle class has raised hope that some incentives may come for them in the upcoming Budget.

"I too belong to the middle class so I can understand the pressures of the middle class. I identify myself with the middle class so I know," she had said earlier this month.

In the same breath, the minister reminded that the present Modi government has not imposed any fresh taxes on the middle class.

She said the government

has taken various measures like developing the metro rail network in 27 cities and building 100 smart cities to promote ease of living.

The minister gave the assurance that the government can do more for the middle class as its population is growing and it has become sizeable now.

"I quite recognise their problems. The government has done a lot for them and continue doing the same," she said without making any commitment.

Besides tinkering with exemption limit and standard deduction, the finance ministry is also looking at the possibility of increasing limit under 80C which includes investment in life insurance, FD, bonds, housing and PPF, among others.



Payment towards medical insurance premium is also being looked at, sources said, adding, the government may simplify capital gains tax rules to benefit the middle class investors which have started investing in capital markets.

The insurance industry has been pitching for a separate tax deduction provision for life insurance, tax waiver for annuity income, and high-

er deductions for health insurance premiums.

If there is an increase in the limit under 80C with special focus on the insurance segment, it will help push term insurance or other protection scheme, which can provide essential financial protection to the family in the event of an untimely death of the earning member, said Max Life Insurance MD and CEO Prashant Tripathy.

Adani says examining legal options against Hindenburg

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

A day after Adani Group's shares took a beating as Hindenburg Research made damaging allegations against it, the group on Thursday said it is examining legal options to take "punitive action" against the US activist investor for its "reckless" attempt to sabotage a share-sale at the conglomerate's flagship firm.

"The maliciously mischievous, unresearched report published by Hindenburg Research on January 24, 2023 has adversely affected the Adani Group, our shareholders and investors. The volatility in Indian stock markets created by the report is of great concern and has led to



unwanted anguish for Indian citizens," the group's lead head Jatin Jalundhwala said in a statement.

The report and its unsubstantiated contents were designed to have a deleterious effect on the share values of Adani Group companies as Hindenburg Research, by their own admission, is positioned to benefit from a slide

in Adani shares, he said.

"We are deeply disturbed by this intentional and reckless attempt by a foreign entity to mislead the investor community and the general public, undermine the goodwill and reputation of the Adani Group and its leaders, and sabotage the FPO (Follow-on Public Offering) from Adani Enterprises," he said.

'Halwa' ceremony returns as prep of FM's Budget enters final stage

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The 'halwa' ceremony, an annual ritual that heralds the Union Budget, returned after a year's break with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday stirring a 'kadhai' to mark the traditional event.

The ceremony is an annual ritual in which traditional dessert 'halwa' is prepared and served to officials and staff members of the finance ministry who were involved in the preparation of the Budget.

It is organised every year in the basement of North Block, which houses the ministry in the national capital, and is attended by the finance minister and other high-ranking officials.

The ceremony was curtailed last year in view of the COVID-19 pandemic and instead sweets were distributed to the core staff. This year, the customary 'halwa' ceremony, performed every year before the 'lock-in' process of Budget preparation begins, coincided with Republic Day.

Besides Sitharaman,



Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary and Bhagwat K Karad and other senior officials including Finance Secretary T V Somanathan, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth, DIPAM Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey, and Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra were present at the ceremony on Thursday, visuals of the event shared on the

official twitter handle showed.

Chief Economic Advisor Anantha V. Nageswaran, Central Board for Direct taxes (CBDT) Chairman Nitin Gupta, Central Board for Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) Chairman Vivek Johri, Additional Secretary (Budget) Ashish Vachhani and other officers and staff of Ministry of Finance, involved in the

Budget preparation and compilation process, were also present on the occasion.

Sitharaman is scheduled to present on February 1 her fifth straight budget for the fiscal year beginning April 1. Like the previous two, Union Budget 2023-24 will also be delivered in paperless form.

All the 14 Union Budget documents, including the

Annual Financial Statement (commonly known as Budget), Demand for Grants (DG), Finance Bill etc. As prescribed by the Constitution, will be available on the "Union Budget Mobile App" for hassle-free access of Budget documents by Members of Parliament and the general public, the finance ministry said in a statement.

The app is bilingual (English & Hindi) and will be available on both Android and iOS platforms. It can also be downloaded from the Union Budget Web Portal www.Indiabudget.Gov.In, it said.

The Budget documents will be available on the app after the completion of the Budget speech by the finance minister in Parliament on February 1, 2023, it added.

As part of the 'halwa' ceremony, the finance minister also took a tour of the Budget Press and reviewed the preparations besides extending her best wishes to the officials concerned.

What is 'halwa' ceremony? The ceremony is kind of a 'send-off' for finance ministry

officials and staff involved with the preparation of the Union government's annual financial statement.

They enter what is called a 'lock-in' period, during which they stay in the basement of North Block, cut off from the world outside with a view to maintaining the secrecy around the final budget document.

They will emerge only after the finance minister completes her Budget speech in the Lok Sabha on February 1. It is considered a gesture of appreciation for those who have worked on the Budget.

The basement of North Block houses a printing press that was traditionally used to print budget documents for 40 years from 1980 to 2020. Thereafter, the budget went digital with bare minimum documents printed and the bulk distribution happening via mobile app or on the website.

Going digital also meant that the lock-in period has gotten shorter to just five days from the previous one that lasted up to two weeks.

Govt may announce measures to further strengthen startup ecosystem

PTI ■ NEW DELHI,

The government is expected to announce in the forthcoming Budget steps to further strengthen the startup ecosystem in the country and address inverted duty issues in certain sectors to promote domestic manufacturing, official sources said. Fiscal incentives under the production linked incentive (PLI) scheme to some more sectors are also likely to be announced in the Budget, which will be presented on February 1.

Besides, the government may consider providing funds to infrastructure projects approved by the Network Planning Group (NPG), constituted under the PM Gati Shakti initiative, they said.

On October 13 last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Gati Shakti - National Master Plan aimed at developing integrated infra-

structure to reduce logistics costs. The NPG has representations from various connectivity infrastructure ministries/ departments involving their heads of network planning division for unified planning and integration of the proposals. All these departments approach the NPG first for approval before making a DPR (detailed project report) at the planning stage.

Inverted duty structure refers to taxation of inputs at higher rates than finished products that results in build-up of credits and cascading costs.

The government has already taken a series of steps to promote startups in the country. Under the Startup India initiative, Fund of Funds for Startups (FFS) scheme, Startup India Seed Fund Scheme (SISFS) and Credit Guarantee Scheme for Startups (CGSS) are implemented to provide capital at various stages.

Wheat prices may come down by ₹5-6/kg: Flour millers on Govt move to sell wheat in open mkt

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Roller Flour Millers Federation of India (RFMI) on Thursday hailed the government's decision to sell 30 lakh tonnes of wheat in the open market and said the move will lead to a reduction in wheat and wheat flour (atta) prices by Rs 5-6 per kg.

The Centre on Wednesday announced the sale of 30 lakh tonnes of wheat in the open market from its buffer stock to check the rise in prices of wheat and wheat flour (atta).

The stocks will be sold by the state-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) during the next two months through various channels.

While wheat will be sold to bulk consumers like flour millers through e-auction, the FCI will offer wheat at Rs

23.50 per kg to public sector units/cooperatives/ federations, K e n d r i y a Bhandar/NCCF/NAFED for converting the grain to atta and offer it to the public at a maximum retail price (MRP) of Rs 29.50 per kg.

"We welcome the government decision. It should have been taken a month ago. It is a right step. Wholesale and retail prices will come down by Rs 5-6 per kg," RFMI President Pramod Kumar told PTI.

As per the government data, the average price of wheat across major cities stood at Rs 33.43 per kilogram on Wednesday, up from Rs 28.24 per kg a year ago. Average prices of atta (wheat flour) stood at Rs 37.95 per kg against Rs 31.41/kg a year ago.

The FCI will offload 30 lakh tonnes of wheat from the

central pool stock to the market through various routes under the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic), the food ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

The ministry had said that sales of wheat in the market through this scheme will have an "immediate impact on the soaring wheat and atta prices and will help contain the rising prices and will bring much relief to the common man".

In order to address the rising prices of wheat and atta, the group of ministers headed by Home Minister Amit Shah met on Wednesday and discussed the buffer stock position of the country.

The committee decided that wheat will be offered to the flour millers, bulk buyers etc through e-auction for a maximum quantity of 3,000 tonnes

per buyer per auction.

Wheat will also be offered to states and Union Territories for their schemes without e-auction.

"Wheat will be offered at a concessional rate of Rs 2,350 per quintal to government PSUs/cooperatives/federations, K e n d r i y a Bhandar/NCCF/NAFED etc without e-auction.

"The sale under this special scheme will be subject to the stipulation that the buyer will convert wheat to atta and offer it to the public at a maximum retail price of Rs 29.50 per Kg," the ministry had said.

The FCI will offload wheat within the next two months to the market. It will start the process of e-auction of stocks immediately throughout the country from January to March 2023.

FCI, the government's nodal agency for procurement and distribution of foodgrains, had around 171.70 lakh tonnes of wheat as on January 1 in the buffer stock.

Under the OMSS policy, the government allows FCI to sell food grains, especially wheat and rice, at pre-determined prices in the open market from time to time to bulk consumers and private traders.

The purpose is to boost the supply during the lean season and moderate the general open market prices.

The Centre had banned wheat exports in May last year to control prices, after a slight fall in domestic production and a sharp decline in the FCI's procurement for the central pool.

India's wheat production fell to 106.84 million tonnes in



the 2021-22 crop year (July-June) from 109.59 million tonnes in the previous year due to heat waves in a few states. The procurement fell sharply to

19 million tonnes this year from around 43 million tonnes last year.

The area under coverage for wheat crops in the current

rabi (winter-sown) season is slightly higher. The procurement of new wheat crops would commence from April 2023.

Indian stock markets migrating to T+1 settlement cycle from today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian stock markets are embarking on a shorter settlement cycle or T+1 regime for the final list of large stocks from Friday, a move that will help reduce margin requirements for clients and boost retail investment.

T+1 (trade plus one) means that market trade-related settlements will need to be cleared within one day of the actual transactions taking place. Earlier, trades on the Indian stock exchanges are settled in two working days after the transaction is done (T+2).

The stock exchanges -- NSE and BSE -- in November 2021 in a joint statement announced that they will implement the T+1 settlement cycle in a phased manner, starting February 25, 2022, with the bottom 100 stocks in terms of market value.

Thereafter, 500 stocks were added based on the same market value criteria

from the last Friday of March and so on every following month.

From January 27 onwards, all trades in the equity cash segment (including Futures and Options on stocks) will be conducted on a T+1 basis.

The final batch of securities -- including stocks, ETFs, debt instruments, real estate investment trusts (REITs) and infrastructure investment trusts (InvITs) -- will be moving to the T+1 settlement cycle from Friday, information available with the Zerodha website showed.

This is not the first time that markets regulator Sebi has chosen to shorten the settlement cycle. Earlier in 2002, the capital markets regulator had cut the number of days in the settlement cycle from T+5 days to T+3 days, and then in 2003, it was reduced to T+2 days.

Market experts believe that the T+1 settlement system will allow the cycle of money to move faster without waiting for an extra day.

'India's democracy has survived unfractured for over 75 years'



PNS ■ KATTANKULATHUR

The greatest aspect of Indian democracy is that the country has survived very well unfractured for over 75 years, Dr Justice M Jaichandren, Former Judge of Madras High Court, said on Wednesday.

Delivering the Republic Day Special Address at SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Justice Jaichandren said. At the same time, this was a big achievement, the people had to continue to do even better, considering the diversity - of cultural and traditional values, religions, and languages.

DLF sales bookings rise 45% to ₹6,599 crore in Apr-Dec

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty major DLF Ltd has achieved a 45 per cent growth in sales bookings to Rs 6,599 crore in April-December this fiscal on better demand and is on track to achieve its annual sales guidance of Rs 8,000 crore, a senior company official said.

DLF's -- the country's largest realty firm in terms of market capitalisation -- sales bookings stood at Rs 4,544 crore in the year-ago period.

"We have achieved robust growth in our sales bookings in the first nine months of this fiscal year. The sales are driven by demand for good quality products," DLF Group Executive Director and Chief Business Officer Aakash Ohri told PTI.

He said the company has launched apartments and independent floors at different price points, which helped in achieving better sales.

DLF has launched residential projects in Delhi, Gurugram, Panchkula and Chennai.

Asked about sales bookings for the entire fiscal, Ohri said



the company has given a guidance of Rs 8,000 crore for the 2022-23 fiscal and is expected to achieve it comfortably.

"We are on track to meet our sales booking targets. We may even do better than that. But we are sticking to our guidance," he added.

"Demand is very strong. People have the desire and money to purchase real estate. Customers want the safety of their money. So, they are now investing in projects of trusted real estate developers like us," Ohri said.

DLF achieved one of the highest quarterly new sales bookings of Rs 2,507 crore, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 24 per cent.

In its investors' presenta-

Suzuki Motor Corp to launch six battery electric vehicles in India by FY2030

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Japan's Suzuki Motor Corporation on Thursday said it will introduce six battery electric vehicles in India by FY2030 as part of its growth strategy and achieve carbon neutrality by 2070 as per the target set by the government.

In the growth strategy for FY2030 shared on BSE by its Indian arm Maruti Suzuki India, Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC) said in India, it will provide not only battery EVs but also carbon-neutral internal combustion engine vehicles using CNG, biogas and ethanol mixed fuels.

On its battery EV introduction plan, SMC said, "In India, we will introduce the SUV battery EV announced at the Auto Expo 2023 in FY2024, with six models to be launched by FY2030".

By FY2030, the company said battery EVs will account for 15 per cent of its total product portfolio, while internal combustion engine vehicles will be 60 per cent and hybrid



electric vehicles at 25 per cent.

The company's arm Maruti Suzuki India is the largest passenger vehicle maker by sales in the country. At the Auto Expo 2023 held earlier this month, SMC unveiled the concept electric SUV 'eVX' -- slated to hit the market by 2025.

SMC also highlighted the biogas business in India as one of the key focus areas.

"While we expect the Indian market to grow toward FY2030, we also expect that an increase in total CO2 emission amount is unavoidable, regardless of the reduction in CO2 emission from products. We will challenge to strike a balance between increasing sales units and reducing total CO2 emission amount," it said.

No surprises: World's top 4 battle out in semis of WC

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The four top-ranked sides expectedly made it to the semi-finals of the FIH Men's World Cup but with little separating Australia, Germany, Netherlands and Belgium it is difficult to predict which two's quest for the title will continue after the last four stage matches here on Friday.

World number one Australia face Germany, ranked fourth in the FIH chart, in the first semifinal while defending champions Belgium take on last two edition's runner-up Netherlands in the second last four match in the Battle of Lowlands at the Kalinga Stadium on Friday.

Of the four teams, world number three and three-time champions Netherlands have had the easiest passage to the semifinals with a 5-1 win over South Korea, who punched above their weight, in their quarter-final match.

Germany, who have won the tournament twice but made it to the last four for the first time since 2010, had the toughest route to the semifinals. They had to play in the crossovers after finishing second in their pool, while the other three teams directly qualified for the quarterfinals.

Germany were all but out of the semifinal race after trailing 0-2 till the 58th minute of their quarterfinal

match against a brilliant England side but the never-say-die Die Honamas struck twice in the last two minutes through Grambusch brothers to take the game to the penalty shootout, which they won 4-3.

Australia, the last edition bronze medallists, may start as slight favourites against Germany but it will be anybody's game as the Kookaburras have also shown their vulnerability in the two of the four matches they have played in this World Cup so far.

The Australians needed a 58th minute goal from their star penalty corner expert Blake Govers to steal a draw against Argentina in their pool match.

They also trailed 0-2 till just before the half time against Spain in the quarterfinals and had to toil hard to win the match 4-3. The match could have gone to the penalty shootout -- where it could have been anybody's game -- but for a costly penalty stroke miss from Spain captain Marc Miralles.

Australia have scored the most number of goals from penalty corners with nine coming from the set piece. They have scored 24 goals, second most after the Netherlands (27) with penalty corner experts Jeremy Hayward and Blake Govers in top form.

Hayward is currently the highest



goal scorer with seven strikes while Govers is joint-third with five.

Australia's physical and attacking play will be matched by the Germans who can also play power games, along with a well organised defence and counter-attacking hockey.

Captain Mats Grambusch and his younger brother Tom, as well as Niklas Wellen, who have scored five goals, will be the key players for Germany while they would hope that penalty corner expert Gonzalo Peillat also comes good after scoring just two

goals so far.

"We have to be at our best, there is no escape from that. It will be a tough match," Australia captain Aran Zalewski said ahead of the semifinals.

"Australia is a great team, physically very strong and with some very

good individual players. But it is the same as we have. We will analyse our game and will improve, especially with the ball. It is going to be a tight match but hoping that we will get through," Germany captain Mats Grambusch said.

Playing in their 12 straight semi-finals, Australia are looking to make their fifth final appearance in the last six editions and clinch their third title in the last four editions. They finished runners-up in 2002 and 2006, won titles in 2010 and 2014 before winning bronze in the last edition.

Netherlands would be looking for their third straight final but they will face the toughest test of the tournament in the form of defending champions and reigning Olympic gold medallists Belgium.

The Dutch have not faced much resistance from any opposition, be it in the pool stage where they have easily won all their three matches or in the quarterfinals. The second semifinal will be a contest between the oldest and one of the youngest sides in the tournament.

Belgium have 11 players above the age of 30 while the Netherlands have eight players below 25 and just two above 30.

The Red Sticks, who have come with almost all the players who have won gold in Tokyo, are among the fittest and no doubt among the most

experienced sides.

Netherlands have scored most goals in the tournament with 27 strikes and Friday's second semifinal will be a contest between the most attacking side against a team with a top class attack and defence with the added advantage of winning high pressure and most crucial games.

Belgium will depend mostly on Tom Boon -- the second highest scorer with six strikes -- for goals while Arthur Van Doren and Arthur de Sloover will be the main men at the defence after they lost Alexander Hendrickx due to injury. Captain Felix Denayer and Victor Wegnez will try to control the midfield.

The Dutch, on the other hand, are expected to continue their attacking game with with striker Koen Bijen and captain Thierry Brinkman being in great touch with five goals apiece.

Drag Flicker Jip Janssen will be their main penalty corner taker and he is also in good form with five goals from four matches.

"Playing against Belgium is always special. They are a very experienced side, the oldest team in the tournament. We are one of the youngest sides. We want to go out and play free-flowing hockey. It will be an interesting game against Belgium," said Netherlands coach Jeroen Delmee, who won two Olympic gold medals as a player.

Brother power comes to fore as Germany 'Grambusch' England

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Brothers playing for the same national team is not new but siblings scoring goals in the same match is rare.

The Grambusch brothers -- Mats and Tom -- achieved the distinction in the FIH Men's World Cup quarter-final, helping Germany rally from a 0-2 deficit to take the match against England into penalty shootout.

Germany then won the shootout 4-3 to set up a semi-final clash against Australia on Friday.

Mats and his younger brother Tom scored a goal each with just two-and-a-half minutes left in the match, sending the capacity crowd at the Kalinga Stadium into a tizzy.

Mats scored in the 57th minute and, a minute later, asked Tom to take the penalty stroke after Christopher Ruhr had missed from the spot just a few minutes ago.

Tom repaid his elder brother's trust by scoring the equaliser to take the match into penalty shootout where the 'Die Honamas' won 4-3 in a match which England captain described as a "cruel" one.

An ecstatic Tom punched the air while Mats and the other team-mates converged to celebrate the sensational comeback.

Asked why his elder brother asked him to take the penalty stroke, Tom said there was no favouritism.



"Christie (Christopher Ruhr) took the first one and missed. Then we switched because I am the second penalty-stroke taker in the team. So, Mats told me to take it and I did.

"Luckily, I scored. My mom must be proud as both of us scored. They were watching on TV," the 27-year-old six-feet tall defender told PTI.

Mats and Tom hail from Monchengladbach, which had hosted the FIH Men's World Cup in 2006. They have studied in the same college and currently play for the same club, Rot-Weiss Kohn, in Cologne.

"Tom started his international career in 2016. So, it was in February 2016 when we first played together for the national team and then we played

together in the 2016 Rio Olympics," Mats said. "I started a little bit early (in 2011) as I am a little bit older. We are also playing for the same club now," said the 30-year-old midfielder.

Asked how their parents would react to the feat, Mats said, "They will probably scream first and then one of them will have tears of joy.

"Me and Tom scored the goals to take Germany to victory. We have taken the team to the semi-finals. They (parents) would not have been prouder than this.

"All said and done, it is a team game and we are happy to have helped our country win the match and enter the semi-finals. That is more important."

The Spanish and Wales sides in this edition of the World Cup too have siblings in their squads. While Spain have the Cunill brothers, Pau and Pepe, Wales have the Furlong siblings, Gareth and Rohdri. Spain lost to Australia 3-4 in the quarterfinals, while Wales were eliminated early, finishing fourth and last in their pool.

The Indian gold-winning teams at the 1932 and 1936 Olympics had brothers Dhyan Chand and Roop Chand playing together.

Gurbax Singh and Balbir Singh Grewal were part of the same India team that won bronze at the 1968 Olympics. Brothers Harmik Singh and Ajit Singh also won a bronze medal in the 1972 Munich Olympics.

Rybakina tops Azarenka to make Australian Open women's final

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina reached her second final in the past three Grand Slam tournaments by beating Victoria Azarenka 7-6 (4), 6-3 at the Australian Open on Thursday.

Rybakina added to what already was an impressive run through a string of top opponents. Azarenka, the champion at Melbourne Park in 2012 and 2013, joined a list of players eliminated by Rybakina over the past two weeks that includes No. 1 Iga Swiatek and No. 17 Jelena Ostapenko -- both owners of major titles -- and 2022 Australian Open runner-up Danielle Collins.

As usual, Rybakina did it with her powerful serve, delivering it at up to 117 mph (189 kph) and accumulating nine aces on Thursday to bring her total to a tournament-high 44, and stinging groundstrokes that she used to close points seemingly at will. The performance was particularly noteworthy against a returner and defender as established on hard courts as Azarenka, a former No. 1 and a three-time runner-up at the U.S. Open.

In Saturday's final, Rybakina will take on either No. 5 Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus or unseeded Magda Linette of Poland. Sabalenka took a 9-0 mark in 2023 into Thursday's second semifinal, while Linette made it to that stage of a Grand Slam tournament for the first time in



30 appearances.

Rybakina is just 23, 10 years younger than Azarenka, and the future sure looks bright at the moment.

Rybakina might be seeded just 22nd in Melbourne, and ranked just 25th, but those numbers are quite misleading and not indicative at all of her talent and form. She did not get the usual bump from her title last July at Wimbledon, where zero rankings points were awarded after the All England Club banned players from Russia and Belarus because of the invasion of Ukraine.

Rybakina was born in Moscow, but she has represented Kazakhstan since 2018, when that country offered to fund her tennis career.

It was breezy and chilly at Rod Laver Arena from the start of Rybakina vs. Azarenka, with the temperature dipping below 70 degrees Fahrenheit (20 degrees Celsius).

That could have played a role in the way the first set was as much of a seesaw as can be, with each player seeming to gain the upper hand -- and then ceding it just as quickly.

Rybakina's occasional inconsistency was encapsulated by the very first game. She began, inauspiciously enough, with a double-fault, before holding with the help of three aces.

Azarenka nosed ahead by breaking for a 3-2 lead on a leaping, full-extension volley winner with both women at the net. Rybakina, though, broke right back, and then once more to go up 5-3.

That allowed Rybakina to serve for the set, and she was a point from owning it at 40-30. But Azarenka conjured up a terrific down-the-line forehand passing shot to erase that chance, and wound up taking the game with a big backhand winner she accented with a shout of "Let's go!"



Shubhankar to start a day late as rain plays havoc

PTI ■ DUBAI

Shubhankar Sharma was unable to get a hit on the opening day of the Hero Dubai Desert Classic as heavy overnight rain forced a delay at the Majlis Course at the Emirates Golf Club.

Sharma will now come out to play his first round early on Friday and will have a long day as he will then be required to start the second round, too, late in the afternoon.

Sharma plays his first and second rounds with Jordan Smith and Thorbjorn Olesen.

Thomas Pieters, who missed the cut at the Abu Dhabi HSBC Championships where he was defending the title, looked to make amends as he was 5-under through 15 holes when darkness stopped play.

Two-time champion here, Rory McIlroy was one-under through 15 holes and sitting on a four-foot putt for birdie on the seventh, his 16th hole of the day.

With less than five hours available on Thursday on account of a six-hour five-minute delay, there was a scramble to finish the round by some of the earliest groups to tee off.

Only two groups from either side were able to finish, with three players, Matthew Jordan, Daniel Gavins and Oliver Wilson -- all from England -- carding 4-under 68 each.

Thomas Bjorn, the former Ryder Cup captain, finished 2-under in fading light, as did fellow Dane, Oliver Hunderbult, who came in for Richie Ramsay, a late withdrawal.

McIlroy opened his round with a birdie on the 10th, missed the green on the 12th and ended with a bogey and then again missed the green on Par-3 15th and failed to hole a 9-foot putt for a second bogey.

He did well to birdie the 18th after getting on to greenside bunker with his second shot and then putted from nine feet to get to even par. A good chip-putt from 35-odd yards saw him get to red numbers.

He was 1-under through 15 holes and had a short birdie putt on his 16th hole, when play was stopped due to darkness. He will come back early to complete the round.

The morning start was delayed by over six hours on account of heavy overnight rain because of which the conditions at the Emirates Golf Club were rather difficult, with standing water at various places, including the first fairway.

International soccer transfer market rebounds in 2022



AP ■ ZURICH

Soccer's international transfer market continued to rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic with a record 20,000 deals between clubs from different countries last year, FIFA said Thursday.

Total spending worldwide was \$6.5 billion in transfer fees for players who moved across borders between FIFA member federations -- an increase of 33.5% from 2021, according to FIFA's annual review of the transfers it processed.

"While this figure is still below the levels of 2018 and 2019, clubs are clearly recovering," FIFA said in a 75-page report.

The biggest deals in the report included Erling Haaland to Manchester City, Antony and Casemiro to Manchester United, Aurelien Tchouameni to Real Madrid and Darwin Nunez to Liverpool.

The FIFA report, however, does not include

domestic deals between two clubs in the same country, like Arsenal buying Gabriel Jesus and Oleksandr Zinchenko from Manchester City.

Chelsea's spending spree on Wesley Fofana, Marc Cucurella and Raheem Sterling, Tottenham signing Richarlison and Antoine Griezmann's return to Atletico Madrid from Barcelona are also not included.

International spending included \$73 million paid as a share of transfer fees to clubs which previously helped develop a player between the ages of 12 and 23.

FIFA expects hundreds of millions will be rightfully paid each year with the launch last year of its transfer clearing house in Paris to process payments and ensure clubs get what is due.

Although the majority of cross-border deals involved free agent players and no transfer fee, FIFA noted a record 950 clubs spent money on acquiring players.

Brazilian players were again the most traded internationally with 2,061 transfers -- more than double the next highest, Argentina -- and spending on them totaling \$843.2 million.

Portuguese clubs made 901 transfer signings of players, and clubs in Brazil released the most players with 998 outgoing deals. The 338 transfers to Portugal from Brazil was the most common transfer path.

Shakhtar Donetsk had the most outgoing transfers of all European clubs with 51. Next highest was Dinamo Zagreb's 40.

Shakhtar's total reflects FIFA's emergency transfer rules after Russia's military invasion last February that let players with Ukrainian clubs suspended their contracts and leave on loan deals. Foreign players in Russia could also suspend their contracts.

Shakhtar and a group of Russian clubs failed in legal challenges at the Court of Arbitration for Sport against the FIFA rules.

Chase for Champions League spots intensifying in Serie A

AP ■ MILAN

While it seems only a total collapse could keep Napoli from winning its first Serie A title in 33 years, the chase for the three remaining Champions League spots is intensifying.

Napoli's victory over Salernitana on Saturday combined with losses for AC Milan and Inter Milan has given the southern team a 12-point lead at the top of the standings. Only three points separate the five teams immediately below it -- with second-place Milan having 38 points; Lazio, Inter and Roma with 37; and Atalanta with 35.

Milan will be hoping to end a terrible run when the defending champions host Sassuolo on Sunday, less than a week after Tuesday's 4-0 loss at Lazio left the team without a win in its past five matches.

That streak has seen Milan eliminated from the Italian Cup by Torino before drawing 2-2 at Lecce. Perhaps the most painful loss came last week when Milan was beaten by city rival Inter 3-0 in the Italian Super Cup.

"We lost in the Super Cup, we've conceded 11 goals in three matches. This is a delicate moment," Milan director Paolo Maldini said. "At the same time we're alone in second place, so I don't think it's a massive disaster. "It's clear that this is a



rough moment. In terms of technique, tactics, but above all state of mind, this isn't our best moment. That's really clear."

The last time Milan was in a similarly negative period it almost fired coach Stefano Pioli at the start of 2020 -- just a few months into his tenure -- to replace him with Ralf Rangnick. Milan was in advanced negotiations with the German coach before changing its mind.

Maldini laughed off suggestions the title-winning coach's job was again at risk.

"That is a question I hoped I wouldn't get. But I'd have to

answer yes (we have faith in him) ... we're second in the standings, and I'll remind you that two years ago, after a seven-year absence, we qualified for the Champions League, then we deservedly won the Serie A title last season, and we're second in the league," Maldini said.

"With all due respect for the criticism, which is deserved, I'd look at the facts. We'll beat this slump in the usual way, with hard work and all pulling in the same direction ... At the moment the team isn't playing well, it's not in great shape physically or mentally, but it's

still there." Milan will have to get out of its slump fast, especially with the Serie A derby against Inter coming up on Feb. 5.

Inter also has been in mixed form and its Super Cup celebrations were hampered by a home loss to Empoli on Monday. The Nerazzurri next face last-place Cremonese on Saturday before taking on Atalanta in the Italian Cup quarterfinals.

Atalanta hosts relegation-threatened Sampdoria, also on Saturday, while Lazio plays Fiorentina and Roma visits Napoli on Sunday.

INDIA BRACE FOR T20 APPETISER AGAINST NZ

PTI ■ RANCHI

India are set for a T20 appetiser ahead of their marquee Test series against Australia when they face the touring New Zealand in a three-match series beginning here on Friday.

With less than two weeks left for the Border Gavaskar Trophy matches against Australia that will determine India's World Test Championship Final fate, a T20 series in the midst of a packed ODI calendar ahead of the 50-over World Cup may seem purposeless.

As a result, Hardik Pandya, who led a 2-1 series win over Sri Lanka earlier this month, is back leading the T20 side with some regulars and fringe players in the squad.

While skipper Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, KL Rahul, Mohammed Siraj and Mohammed Shami are being rested, the likes of Shubman Gill, Suryakumar Yadav, Ishan Kishan and Kuldeep Yadav will get an extended run before they assemble for Test series camp at Nagpur from February 2.

There is also the welcome addition of attacking Mumbai opener Prithvi Shaw, who returns to the team on the back of a series of superlative performances in the domestic cricket including a record-breaking 379 against Assam in the Ranji Trophy.

It's been over a year since the 23-year-old last played for India in July 2021 — and it remains to



be seen if Pandya is tempted to fiddle his set opening combination of Gill and wicketkeeper batter Ishan Kishan.

Gill has been in the form of his life, especially in the ODIs where he has scored his career-best 208 to go alongside two centuries in last four innings.

When it comes to the T20 format, the elegant Punjab batter may look a bit iffy but he has showed that he has all the shots in his armoury to cement the opening slot.

In such a scenario, it remains to be seen how Pandya slots in the spirited Shaw as he

may have to wait for his chance.

Suryakumar also had a quiet ODI series against New Zealand but when it comes to T20 format the 360-degree batter becomes a dangerous entity as he would look relish the challenge and come back into groove ahead of the Test series.

While the batting looks sorted, it's the bowling department that may demand some attention.

Left-arm pacer Arshdeep Singh, who returned from injury, was in the eye of storm in the series against Sri Lanka. He leaked 37 runs in two overs

as India lost the T20I in Pune, their only reverse in the 2-1 series win. He would look to come up with a tidy show.

But there was also a bright spot in the bowling department with Shivam Mavi capping an impressive debut with 4/22.

Mavi bowled with pace and the way he cleaned up Pathum Nissanka is still fresh in the mind. The speedster would look to form a potent combination with Umran Malik.

In the last ODI, India had got a chance to witness 'Kul-Cha' in action after a long time but come the T20s, India may have

to fret over the inclusion of either Kuldeep Yadav or Yuzvendra Chahal.

Chahal has been the preferred option in the format and in the absence of Axar Patel it remains to be seen if the leg-spinner is persisted.

India have been at their marauding best in the ODIs they would expect some fightback by the Kiwis team led by Mitchell Santner in the T20 leg.

Left-hander Devon Conway showed his imperious form for the Black Caps scoring 138 from 100 balls as they gave India a run for their money in their defence of 386 in Indore.

Michael Bracewell too was at his consistent best with 188 runs from three matches as they would look to carry their momentum in the T20 leg.

TEAMS (FROM)
India: Hardik Pandya (Captain), Suryakumar Yadav (vice-captain), Ishan Kishan (wk), Shubman Gill, Prithvi Shaw, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Deepak Hooda, Rahul Tripathi, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Umran Malik, Shivam Mavi and Mukesh Kumar.
New Zealand: Mitchell Santner (Captain), Finn Allen, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway (wk), Dane Cleaver (wk), Jacob Duffy, Lockie Ferguson, Benjamin Lister, Daryl Mitchell, Glenn Phillips (wk), Michael Rippon, Henry Shipley, Ish Sodhi and Blair Tuckner.

Hardik says Shaw will have to wait considering how Gill is batting

PTI ■ RANCHI

India skipper Hardik Pandya on Thursday said in-form opener Shubman Gill will start the T20 series against New Zealand ahead of Prithvi Shaw, who has made a comeback to the national team.

Considering Gill's sensational run in ODIs, Hardik said his selection was a no-brainer. Gill has smashed three hundreds including a double ton in his last four innings.

Ishan Kishan is expected to open alongside Gill.

"Shubman has done well and will start the series. The way he is batting and was already in the team," said Hardik ahead of the first T20I.

Hardik bowled with the new ball in the T20Is against Sri Lanka before doing the same in the third ODI against New Zealand on Tuesday with Mohammed Shami and Mohammed Siraj being rested from the game.

Hardik said he likes bowling with the new ball.

"I have always enjoyed bowling with the new ball. Since quite a number of years whenever I bowl in the nets, I pick the new ball. I am used to the old ball so that I don't feel the need to practice with the old ball as much. It has helped in match situations.

"With our two main bowlers rested in the last game, I had to be ready. But (it) has never been about pressure, half of the times pressure is gone if you prepare well," said Hardik.

We now talk more about life than game: Hardik on meeting



Dhoni.

Getting to play in Ranchi also has added benefits for the entire team including Hardik. The players got to meet MS Dhoni at the ground ahead of the game.

"Mahi bhai is here which is good as we get to meet him. We can get out of the hotel also (to meet him). Otherwise, the way we have played in the last one month, it has just been hotel to hotel. "And when we meet we try to talk about life rather than the game. When we played together I learnt a lot from him. I have squeezed a lot out of him (knowledge)... There is not much left," said Hardik.

The skipper also said wick-

etkeeper Jitesh Sharma has been rewarded for his performances in the IPL and domestic cricket but did not commit whether he will be in the playing eleven.

"Our strategy will be seen on the ground. Jitesh has been rewarded for his performances. Unfortunately, Sanju Samson got injured and Jitesh got the opportunity.

"We will try to win obviously. New Zealand is a good team both in T20Is and ODIs. They always challenge you. We will have to be at their best to beat them," he added.

India won the ODI series 3-0 and it is being followed by three T20Is in Ranchi, Lucknow and Ahmedabad respectively.



Santner looks to apply his learnings at CSK as New Zealand captain

PTI ■ RANCHI

Mitchell Santner says that time spent under Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Stephen Fleming at Chennai Super Kings will come in handy as he leads New Zealand in the T20I series in India.

Santner had also led the side in the third and final T20I in India back in 2021. He is captaining the side in the absence of regular skipper Kane Williamson.

"If you look at both of them (Dhoni and Fleming), they're both very calm and very level-headed, which I like as I feel I'm similar in that respect. To work under and alongside MS (Dhoni) has been a pretty cool experience for a few years now.

"I guess it's nice to be back at his home ground as well. And Flem (Fleming) -- he's the same, very level-headed and keeps it pretty relaxed and that's what we try to do in this set-up as well," said the left-hander ahead of the series opener.

ODIs take a precedence

over T20Is in a World Cup year but Santer said playing every game for the country is an honour.

"I guess the way ODI cricket is going at the moment with high scores, you know it's not too different to T20. So, banking the experiences in T20 cricket this year will be similar to what we got in the one-day series, where we saw some high scores and good hitting.

"I guess trying to bank those experiences from that series... yes, we obviously lost 3-0, but we showed glimpses in games that we want to take forward in this series," said the all-rounder.

Would he continue to be calm under pressure now that he is leading the side?

"Yeah, I guess that's my nature, and it has been like that for a little while now. But obviously there's also bit more nerves (now) and very exciting to captain another series in India -- it doesn't get much better than that. So, definitely looking forward to it and it's going to be a challenge, no doubt," he added.

Finn Allen experiment failing; look at way Rohit plays: Former Kiwi opener Cumming

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Former New Zealand cricketer Craig Cumming is unhappy with head coach Gary Stead's persistence with opener Finn Allen, who failed with the bat in the recently-concluded three-match ODI series against India.

The hosts whitewashed the Kiwis 3-0 with Allen, 23, scoring two consecutive ducks and a 40, raising doubts about his selection in the New Zealand side with the ODI World Cup in India less than nine months away.



The cricketer had made his 50-over debut last year with a few impressive scores against Ireland and the West Indies but has quickly gone into a downward spiral.

"I'm concerned around the style of cricketers we're trying to produce. I want to produce Devon Conways, I want to produce Kane Williamsons; the guys that have got craft and can bat and they've got more than one (skill)?," Cumming told SENZ Mornings on Thursday.

"Finn Allen at the moment,

It's global cricketing issue to keep players inspired for all three formats: AB de Villiers

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

South Africa great Ab de Villiers feels it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep players "inspired" for all three formats amid the punishing schedule, creating a pressing need for cricket boards and cricketers to have an honest communication over the latter's preferred choice of formats.

The 38-year-old, who shocked the cricketing world with his international retirement in 2018, said his playing career too could have been managed better. Three years later, he retired from all forms of cricket.

He left the game to spend more time with family, something which has become a luxury for an all-format modern cricketer. Considering the ever-crowded international calendar and mushrooming of T20 leagues around the world, playing all three formats has become

impossible without taking frequent breaks in between.

England Test captain Ben Stokes was forced to retire from ODIs last year as he could not go on giving his best across formats.

"That's a tough question," De Villiers told PTI when asked about the need for picking formats amid the relentless scheduling.

"Because I don't want to be the guy to just say give up a format or two. And once again, it's a global cricketing issue at the moment to keep the players inspired to play all formats of the game for their countries."

De Villiers believes the players' careers could be extended if they were clear about their ambitions across formats. He also expects the cricketing boards to clearly communicate to the players over where they stand in their scheme of things.

"But I do think there's room with the various boards around



the world to pinpoint players, to have community discussions and communication early on in players' careers, to understand what they want to achieve, first of all, and secondly, where they fit in with regards to the cricket in their own country to represent the country internationally.

"But also to be happy to play leagues around the world. And to gain experience, it's invaluable. We spoke about it earlier, players like SKY (Suryakumar), Dewald Brevis and myself, the

way we took our games to the next level, largely because of these leagues.

"So ultimately, that is what we want to achieve. If it's not achievable. And if there's a clear sign that a player is maybe a bit weak in one format, or is maybe not as inspired to achieve milestones to go a long way in one or two formats, then yes, but that communication needs to happen.

"And I think during my career communication could have been better from my side, but also from the Cricket South Africa side to make sure that we plan accordingly. So it comes down to communication," said 'Mr.360'.

De Villiers is part of the SA20 commentary panel. The inaugural competition has taken an eight-day break to accommodate the ODI series between hosts South Africa and England, highlighting the scheduling challenges faced by boards.



Ready for Oz series, says Jadeja after seven-wicket haul against TN in Ranji

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja, on a comeback trail following a knee injury and a long layoff, said on Thursday that he is ready for series against Australia after picking up seven wickets for Saurashtra against Tamil Nadu in a Ranji Trophy game here. "Yes, yes, yes...," the left-handed all-rounder said in response to a question if he was ready for touring side led by Pat Cummins after the third day's play of the Ranji Trophy fixture at the MA Chidambaram stadium here.

Jadeja's haul helped Saurashtra bowl out TN for 133 in the second innings and the visitors require 262 runs for an outright victory on Friday. Jadeja last played for India in the Asia Cup in August last year. India take on Australia in the four-Test Border-Gavaskar series beginning at Nagpur on February 9. Jadeja, who is leading Saurashtra in place of the rested Jaydev Unadkat in the final Ranji Trophy league fixture, had figures of 7/53 in 17.1 overs in the second innings.

Jadeja said it was good to pick up a five-wicket haul and that he was "feeling very good" playing after such a long time. "Feeling very good, playing a game after a long time. Hopefully I am good to go now. It was tough on the first day but as the game progressed, I was feeling good," Jadeja said. Asked about bowling 12 overs at a stretch in the second spell, he said, "I (am) used to bowling long spells. Nothing new for me. I was enjoying...Ball was turning..." He further said, "The pitch was assisting me. When we were batting, the odd ball was spinning, the odd ball was keeping low, so I was keen to bowl a long spell. Luckily I got wickets." To a question if he felt he was there in terms of fitness, Jadeja said, "Yes, I am almost there...It is just a matter of little bit of confidence. Luckily I bowled enough overs in the match, like almost 37 overs in the game (41 — 24 in the first innings and 17.1 in the second)." Asked if he felt any discomfort, Jadeja said, "no discomfort... Not really."

"When you get seven wickets, obviously you feel confident. When you take a five-for in a first-class game it is always good...," he added.

Karnataka thrash Jharkhand by nine wickets

PTI ■ JAMSHEDPUR

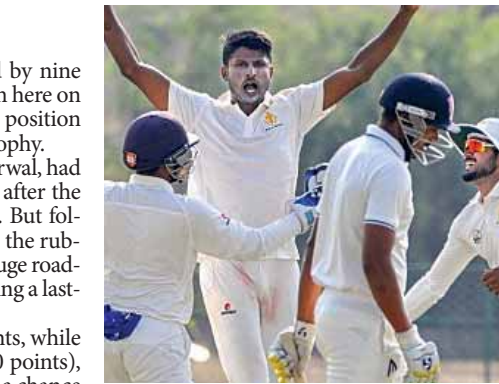
Karnataka thrashed Jharkhand by nine wickets at the Keenan Stadium here on Thursday to further cement their position at the top of Group C in Ranji Trophy.

The team, led by Mayank Agarwal, had made it to the quarter-final stage after the previous round of Ranji matches. But following the six points earned from the rubber on Thursday, they have put a huge roadblock in Jharkhand's path to securing a last-eight berth.

Karnataka are now on 35 points, while Jharkhand have 23. Rajasthan (20 points), Kerala (20) and Goa (18) too have a chance of making the last-eight from the group.

Karnataka, who had restricted Jharkhand to 164 in the first innings and then notched up 300 to take a handsome 136-run lead, struck back in the second innings with their veteran off-spinner Krishnappa Gowtham grabbing another five-wicket haul.

The hosts were dismissed for 201 in their second essay, giving Karnataka a paltry target of 66 to chase down.



Karnataka achieved victory in the 19th over of their innings with Nikin Jose (42 not out) and Ravikumar Samarth (24 not out) guiding them to the target.

Much of Karnataka's bowling revolved around the 34-year-old Gowtham. He broke partnerships at crucial junctures to ensure Jharkhand batters didn't score big.

Gowtham first dismissed opener Kumar Deobrat, who was caught by Agarwal. The off-spinner then returned to remove the

No.3 and No.4 batters — Kumar Suraj (34) and Kumar Kushagra (36) — who had started to firm up their partnership.

But with Jharkhand folding up at 201 in 78.5 overs, it was a matter of time before Karnataka finished the job.

While Devdutt Padikkal was dismissed in the first over for duck, Ravikumar Samarth and Nikin Jose ensured no more hiccups as Karnataka earned six more points to take their tally to 35 points.

BRIEF SCORES:

At Jamshedpur: Jharkhand 164 and 201 in 78.5 overs (Supriyo Chakraborty 48; Krishnappa Gowtham 5/75) lost to Karnataka 300 and 66 for 1 in 18.1 overs by nine wickets.
At Raipur: Chhattisgarh 531 for 9 decl vs Goa 359 in 92.5 overs (Ishaan Gadekar 80, Snehal Kauthankar 147 n.O.; Ravi Kiran 3/66) and f/o 4 for no loss.

At Puducherry: Puducherry 371 and 34 for 1 in 14 overs vs Kerala 286 in 113 overs (Akshay Chandran 70; Sagar Udeshi 5/62).

At Jodhpur: Services 178 and 276 vs Rajasthan 136 and 107 for 6 in 38 overs (Yash Kothari 72; Pulkit Narang 4/20).

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Left-arm spinner Akash Pandey claimed a career-best six-wicket haul to complement Himanshu Sangwan's menacing spell in the first innings as Railways thrashed hosts Gujarat by an innings and 56 runs in their Ranji Trophy group D match here on Thursday.

Medium pacer Sangwan was the wrecker-in-chief in their first innings as Railways bundled out the home side for 208 in 59.1 overs in the first innings.

Following on, Gujarat's second innings folded for 247 in 69.3 overs with Pandey wreaking havoc this time. Sangwan gave the first breakthrough dismissing Aditya Patel in the first innings.

Gujarat were soon reduced to 33/2 inside 10 overs but



thereafter skipper Het Patel rebuilt the innings with a fighting century before Karn Sharma's double blow derailed

the home side. Pandey then returned to clean up the tail to complete a bonus point victory that came with a day to

spare. Railways had amassed 508 in their first innings.

BRIEF SCORES

In Ahmedabad: Railways 508. Gujarat 205; 59.1 overs (Heman Patel 39; Himanshu Sangwan 4/75, Karn Sharma 3/38) and following on and 247; 69.3 overs (Het Patel 84, Umang Kumar 42; Akash Pandey 6/65). Railways won by an innings and 56 runs. Points: Railways 7, Gujarat 0.

In Indore: Tripura 362. Madhya Pradesh 159/2; 57 overs (Shubham Sharma 55, Yash Dubey 48 batting, Harsh Gawli 33 batting; Rana Dutta 2/44). Madhya Pradesh trail by 203 runs.

In Mohali: Vidarbha 88/2; 31 overs vs Punjab. No play on day three.

In Chandigarh: Chandigarh 18 for no loss; 6 overs vs Jammu and Kashmir. No play on day three.