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HURT INDIA EYE **SWEEPING CHANGES**



BUDGET REINFORCES PILLARS OF VIKSIT BHARAT

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¬he Interim Budget for Viksit Bharat reaffirmed Modi Narendra G o v e r n m e n t's

commitment pillars development - the young, poor, women, and farmers — but has also intensified its focus women's empowerment. Initiatives

are set in motion to invigorate their economic participation and overall well-being. The Budget aims to catapult

he number of Lakhpati Didis, women earning at least ₹1 lakh per annum, from 2 crore to 3 crore. The Lakhpati Didi scheme is geared towards intensively training women in self-help groups, effecting transformative changes in rural socio-economic landscapes, and fostering self-reliance. Moreover, the Ayushman Bharat programme is slated to broaden healthcare coverage to encompass all ASHA and Anganwadi workers, acknowledging their pivotal role in the health sector.

While maternal and child care schemes are poised to amalgamate into a cohesive plan, the government plans to vigorously champion the immunisation of girls aged 9-14 to thwart cervical cancer. In

admirable 28 per cent surge in achieved in science, technology, engineering and mathematics technology, (STEM) courses. Girls and women presently comprise 43 per cent of STEM course enrollment, propelling India to the forefront among global leaders in this realm.

OPINION 6: THE UNIVERSAL APPEAL OF HINDUISM | **MONEY 10:** INDIA NEGOTIATING INVESTMENT TREATIES: FM

higher education in the last The Budget recognises the decade, there has been an substantial momentum women's female enrollment, with a empowerment through noteworthy spike of 28 per cent entrepreneurship over the last decade. The government underscores the triumph of direct benefit transfers, amounting to ₹34 lakh crore through Jan Dhan accounts, leading to significant savings of ₹2.7 lakh crore. Also, it highlights the distribution of

women in the past 10 years. Reorienting attention towards infrastructure development, the Budget delineates strategies for executing three significant economic railway corridor programmes transformation of 40,000 conventional railway coaches to meet the Vande Bharat standard.

across sectors in the last 10

measures to boost tourism,

housing, and renewable energy. Giving a sneak preview of what will be the

Modi Government's priority

in the third term if re-elected,

she said economic policies

that foster and sustain growth, facilitate inclusive

development, and contribute

to the generation of resources

to power investments will be

adopted towards making

India a developed country by 2047. "The next five years will

be years of unprecedented

development and golden

moments to realise the dream

and

Continued on Page 2

announced

Sitharaman matches Morarji milestone

RAJESH KUMAR **NEW DELHI**

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented her sixth consecutive budget with a speech lasting 56 minutes, her shortest ever, equaling the record set by former Prime Minister Morarji Desai. Sitharaman is the first full-time woman Finance Minister of the country, having presented five full Budgets since July 2019. She has surpassed the records of her predecessors such as Manmohan Singh, Arun Jaitley, Chidambaram, and Yashwant Sinha, all of whom had presented five

Budgets in a row.

On the other hand, Desai, as

Finance Minister, presented

them, including one interim, consecutively. The first Budget of Independent India was presented by the inaugural finance minister, R K Shanmukham Chetty. After the 2019 general elections, in the Modi 2.0 Government, Sitharaman was assigned the finance portfolio. She became the second woman to present a Budget after Indira Gandhi, who

five annual Budgets and one

interim Budget between

1959 and 1964. Former

Prime Minister Morarii

Desai, who holds the record

for presenting 10 Budgets -

the most by any finance

minister — delivered six of

had presented the Budget the financial year

1970-71. Continued on Page 2

Centre resists populist measures in poll year PIONEER NEWS SERVICE government's achievements

 $F_{\text{Sitharaman on Thursday}}^{\text{inance Minister Nirmala}}$ pledged to continue with reforms, firmly resisting the temptation of resorting to populist measures in the Modi Government's last Budget before the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, just a couple of months away. Presenting a vote on account or an interim Budget for 2024-25, she announced a substantial ₹11.11 lakh crore spending on infrastructure. Importantly, she opted to stay on the path of deficit reduction while implementing measures targeted at specific focus



Sitharaman proposed no changes in income tax rates individuals and corporates, as well as import duties. However, extended amnesty disputed income tax demands from the period before 2014-15, providing relief to small taxpayers. In her nearly hour-long Budget speech in the Lok Sabha, she listed her

of a developed India by 2047, she said. Continued on Page 2

Budget created for India's future: PM Modi

folder-case

2024-25

containing the

Interim Budget

Ranjan Dimri/The Pionee

Prime Minister Narendra Modi characterised the Interim Budget tabled on innovative," one that "carries the confidence of continuity." This was a reference to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's assertion in Parliament that it will be yet another Modi-led

Government that will present the full Budget in July after the Lok Sabha election. PM Modi said the Budget reflects the young aspirations of a young India. In a televised address following

the budget, he mentioned that it will empower the four pillars of a developed India the young, poor, women, and farmers.

"This is a Budget for creating India's future," Modi said, adding it reflects the young aspirations of a young India. While keeping the fiscal deficit under control, the prime minister noted that



expenditure experienced historic increase to ₹11,11,111 crore in this budget. "In economists' parlance, this is a kind of sweet spot," the PM said. He mentioned that the Budget will create millions of employment opportunities for Índia's

youth, along with the development of modern infrastructure for the 21st

century. Asserting that the

"confidence of continuity," he

carries

budget

described it as "not merely an interim budget but an inclusive and innovative

Budget." Citing the announcement of a ₹1 lakh crore fund for research and innovation, the Prime Minister emphasised that the "historic" Budget has also offered rebates for start-ups. It includes provisions for substantial capital expenditure of ₹11.11 lakh crore while keeping the fiscal deficit under

control, he added. Continued on Page 2 Solemn pledge to empower women PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

 $P^{\rm romotion~of~vaccination}_{\rm against~cervical~cancer~for}$ girls in the age group of 9-14 years, extending health cover for ASHA and Anganwadi workers, setting up more medical colleges, and child healthcare schemes are some of the key features of the Interim Budget 2024-25 announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday.

A committee for establishing marginal compared to last consolidated

infrastructure in hospitals will be set up to examine the issues and make relevant recommendations.

However, there has been no Budget allocation extending Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) to all and Anganwadi The Health Budget ASHA workers for 2024-25 saw a marginal increase from ₹86,306.15 crore last year to ₹90,658.63 crore. It included an allocation of ₹3,001 crore in health research, which was healthcare schemes will be



All maternal and child under

comprehensive program to synergy ensure implementation. The upgradation of Anganwadi

under Anganwadi' and Poshan 2.0 will be expedited to enhance nutrition delivery, early childhood care, and development, as stated by the Minister.

To further the Digital India initiative of the Government, the Minister proposed the of the newly designed U-WIN platform. This platform will be utilised for managing immunisation and advancing efforts under Mission

Indradhanush, she added. Continued on Page 2

Fortifying India: Defence gets 4.7 per cent hike

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

In an effort to sustain the ongoing modernisation drive and ensure operational readiness, the Interim Budget for Defence for 2024-25 is pegged at ₹6.21 lakh crore. The allocations for 2023-24 were ₹5.94 lakh crore. The modest hike is 4.72 per cent. Moreover, the



Finance presented Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. She announced in her Budget speech an ambitious scheme worth ₹1 lakh crore corpus for "deep-tech" technologies in the military domain. Sitharaman said that ₹1.72 lakh crore were allocated as capital expenditure for procuring aircraft and

Soren sent to judicial custody,

court to fix duration today

allocation is 13.04 per cent of warships, a jump of nearly the total Union Budget ₹10,000 crore from the capital outlay for defence in 2023-24. The increased capital outlay for the next fiscal year comes in the backdrop of the Navy proposing to procure fighter jets for its aircraft carriers and six submarines, while the Indian Air Force seeks to bolster its fighter aircraft squadron strength.

Continued on Page 2

Delhi encounters freak blend of rain, fog

NEW DELHI

Delhi and its adjoining National Capital Region (NCR) witnessed unexpected rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms for the second straight day on Thursday amid harsh winter conditions. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) recorded 30.8 mm of rainfall in Safdarjung until 8:30 am, surpassing the monthly rainfall normal of 21.3 mm on the first day of February itself. In Palam, the rainfall was recorded at 23 mm so far. This comes after a very dry January when the capital saw 0 mm of rainfall against the normal of 19.1 mm, marking a -100 per cent departure

from normal. The rainfall was recorded at Lodhi Road, 23 mm in Ujwa, Wednesday failed to give 24 mm in Narela, 23 mm in 20.5 mm in Gautam Budh respite from the cold winds 15 mm in Pusa, 19 mm in



the

Ridge, 16 mm in Pitampura, Nagar, and Ghaziabad recorded 18.5 mm.

coming from the hills, adding to the chill here. The Pragati Maidan, 19 mm in The incessant rainfall since minimum temperature on temperature settled at 18.6

recorded in Palam at 18.5 degrees Celsius, Pitampura at 19.8 degrees Celsius, Lodhi Road at 18.4 degrees Celsius, Ridge at 18.6 degrees Celsius, and Ayanagar at 18.4 degrees Celsius. The intense downpour, which

Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

Thursday was recorded at

12.3 degrees Celsius, four

notches above the seasonal

normal, while the maximum

started on Wednesday, has led to road blockages and widespread waterlogging. Overnight heavy rain in the national capital to traffic snarls in several parts of the city on Thursday, causing inconvenience to This commuters. compounded the challenges for the city's residents, who were already grappling with the severe winter conditions.

degrees Celsius, four notches

IMD data shows the

temperature

below the normal.

maximum

Several trains and flights have also been delayed owing to adverse weather

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI/NEW DELHI

The special PMLA court here sent former I harkhand chief minister Hemant Soren, arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case, to judicial custody for a day, lawyers said. The ED sought 10 days remand for Soren. The court reserved its order for Friday.

Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan, who appeared for Soren, said outside the court that the JMM leader was sent to judicial custody till an order was passed. "The entire case is driven by wrong intentions. This is a conspiracy to topple the government. There is no evidence in the entire proceedings against the former chief minister. His arrest was made when proceedings were on to record his statement, which is illegal," he said. Soren was arrested on Wednesday night after

a seven-hour grilling by the ED in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam. He resigned as the chief minister before that. The JMM leader was taken to the Birsa

Munda Birsa Munda Central Jail here. As the ex-chief minister was brought outside Continued on Page 2 | the court building on the way to the jail, his



Zindabad".

Soren was informed about his arrest at about 5 pm last evening but he was "reluctant" to receive the order as he first wanted to submit his resignation from the chief minister's post, the Enforcement Directorate claimed on Thursday.

Continued on Page 2



Infrastructure gets booster dose

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The infrastructure received a booster dose for roads, highways and aviation with the shot in arm to railways sec-

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced to implement three major economic railway corridor programmes and convert 40,000 normal railway bogies to Vande Bharat standards.

Presenting the interim budget for 2024-25, the FM said that creating the corridors will decongest high-traffic corridors and also improve passenger train operations.

The FM said that the expansion of existing airports and development of new airports will continue expeditiously.

An allocation of Rs 2.70 lakh crore was made for the highways sector for 2023-24, which was revised to Rs 2.76 lakh

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman marginally increased allocation to stateowned National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to Rs 1.68 lakh crore for 2024-25 from last year's revised allocation of Rs 1.67 lakh crore.



The pre-election Budget 2024-25 document has allocated marginally enhanced outlay of Rs 2.78 lakh crore for the high-

NHAI and National Highways Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) are primarily responsible for the construction of national highways and expressways in India.

While railway corridors will improve efficiency of logistic services and reduce cost, conversion of coaches will increase safety, convenience and comfort of passengers, she said.

passengers", Sitharaman said. Together with dedicated freight corridors, these three economic corridor programmes will accelerate our GDP growth and reduce logistic costs," the finance minister

ty and higher travel speed for

She said that "40,000 normal rail bogies will be converted to Vande Bharat standards to enhance safety, convenience and comfort of passengers". "The aviation sector has been galvanised in the last 10 years and the number of airports have doubled to 114," said the Finance Minister.

"A total of 517 new routes are carrying 1.3 crore passengers. Indian carriers have proactively placed orders for over 1,000 new aircraft. Expansion of existing airports and development of new airports will continue expeditiously," she

"We have a fast expanding middle class and rapid urbanisation is taking place, metro rail and Namo Bharat can be the catalyst for the required urban transformation. Expansion of these systems will be supported in large cities focusing on transit-oriented development," said Sitharaman.

Indian Navy set to commission survey vessel Sandhayak

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The Indian Navy is all set to commission its latest survey vessel Sandhayak in Visakhapatnam on Saturday and the ship is expected to boost the force's surveillance apparatus in the strategic waterways.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and Vice Admiral Rajesh Pendharkar, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Naval Command will be among the distinguished guests to grace

"The event will mark the formal induction into the Navy of the first of four survey vessel (large) ships under construction at M/s Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers (GRSE), Kolkata," a Navy spokesperson said here on Thursday.

Sandhayak was delivered to the Indian Navy on December 4 after completing a rigorous and comprehensive trial programme both in the harbour



The primary role of the ship would be to carry out full scale hydrographic surveys of ports, harbours, navigational channels, coastal areas and deep seas, with an aim to enable safe marine navigation.

In its secondary role, the ship will be capable of undertaking a range of naval operations. Sandhayak is equipped with state-of-the-art hydrographic equipment including deep and shallow water multibeam echo-sounders, autonomous underwater vehicle, remotely operated vehicle, data acquisition and processing system and satellite-based positioning

Environment Ministry allocation 0.07 per cent of total expenditure



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE **NEW DELHI**

t was a lackluster budget for Ithe Union Environment Ministry which got just Rs 3,265 crore, a marginal increase over Rs 3,231 crore earmarked in the financial year 2023-24. Percentage wise, the Ministry's budgetary allocation for the next financial year is just 0.07 per cent of the total estimated expenditure.

The allocation for autonomous bodies such as the GB Pant Himalayan Institute of Environment Development, the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education and the Wildlife Institute of India has, however, reduced from Rs 573.73 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 391

The total budgetary allocation

for statutory and regulatory bodies such as the Central Pollution Control Board, the Central Zoo Authority, the National Biodiversity Authority and the Commission for Air Quality Management has been increased from Rs 158.60 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 192 crore in

The budget for the National Mission for a Green India, which aims at increasing forest cover and protecting existing forest land, has been increased from Rs 160 crore to Rs 220 The government has set aside

Rs 450 crore, compared to Rs 350 crore in 2023-24, for the integrated development of wildlife habitats.

23.74 per cent rise in budget allocation for Ayush Ministry

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

While a full budget for 2024-25 will be announced after the new government is formed following the Lok Sabha elections later this year, the interim Budget allocation for the Ayush Ministry has been increased to Rs 3,712.49 crore for 2024-25 from Rs 3,000 crore (revised estimates) in 2023-24, recording a rise of 23.74 per cent.

The National Medicinal Plants Board (NMPB) has been allocated Rs 14.63 crore while the Pharmacopoeia Commission for Indian Medicine and Homoeopathy (PCIM&H) allocated Rs 20.80 crore.

The autonomous bodies have been allocated Rs 1,848.40

crore, of which Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences has been given Rs 413.54 crore, Central Council for Research in Homeopathy Rs 144 crore, Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine Rs 228.05 crore and the All India Institute of Ayurveda has got Rs 227.20

The Government has been stressing on evidence-based research through Ayush research.

At the initiative of the National Medicinal Plants Board, 32 State Medicinal Plants Boards in 27 states and five Union territories have been constituted for providing impetus to cultivation of high priority medicinal plants for domestic consumption as well as export.

Mamata dares BJP to arrest her

SAUGAR SENGUPTA KOLKATA

corridor programmes will be

implemented. These are: ener-

gy, mineral and cement corri-

dors, port connectivity corri-

dors, and high-traffic density

The projects have been iden-

tified under PM Gati Shakti for

enabling multi-modal connec-

tivity. They will improve logistics efficiency and reduce cost,"

she said. The creation of new

railway corridors will result in

decongestion of high-traffic

corridors and "will also help in

improving operations of pas-

senger trains, resulting in safe-

corridors," Sitharaman said.

n a speech apparently betray-Ling apprehensions of arrest in Bengal Chief Minister's mind, Mamata Banerjee on Thursday dared the BJP Government to arrest her and see the consequence.

Banerjee told a gathering at Shantipur in Nadia district that she would burst a hole in the jail and come out of it if arrested by the agencies.

"They have made it a policy to arrest all the people who are against them ... let them arrest me and put me in the jail ... I will burst a hole and come out of the it," Banerjee said a day after the Enforcement Directorate arrested Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren. Banerjee's remarks did not go responded. Bengal BJP president Sukanto Majumdar promptly took a jibe at her saying if she was so much scared of her footprints and "so much sure of her arrest then she should take precautionary measures before her arrest ... and make arrangements for one Champai Banerjee before-

Soren had hours before his arrest nominated his cabinet colleague and senior Jharkhand Mukti Morcha leader Champai Soren as his successor.

Banerjee who has already announced to start a dharna demonstration against the Centre's alleged financial discrimination against her State said, "the way things are taking place it seems that they are out to put everyone behind the bars before the elections," wondering "where is the need of holding elections spending so much money ... simply you can put all the opposition in jail and declare yourself elected.

Delhi encounters freak blend of rain...

systems.

From Page 1

Heavy rainfall in Delhi and the National Capital Region has failed to bring any respite from the winter chill, as the maximum temperature in the city dropped to 18 degrees Celsius, four notches below the season's normal. However, the IMD has said that no cold wave conditions are expected in Delhi and NCR over the next five days, despite the rains that have lashed since January 31. However, the IMD has said that no cold wave conditions are expected in Delhi, NCR over the next five days, despite the rains that have lashed since January

The Delhi Police reported on X that traffic is affected on the Ring Road in the carriageway from the Hanuman Mandir towards the ISBT due to waterlogging near the outgate of ISBT. The police also mentioned that traffic was affected on the outer Ring Road in the carriageway from Nehru Place towards Hauz

Khas due to waterlogging near the Chirag Delhi Flyover. "Traffic is affected on MB Road in the carriageway from Tughlakabad Khanpur due to waterlogging near Ratiya Marg and Hamdard T-point. Traffic is affected on MB Road in the carriageway from Khanpur towards Tughlakabad due to waterlogging opposite the Ambedkar Nagar Bus Depot, Tigri Mor, and Vayusenabad," it was stated on X. Similarly, traffic was also on Chaudhary affected Charan Singh Marg from the

towards Ashram due to waterlogging. According to the IMD, the all-India seasonal cumulative rainfall percentage departure during this year's Winter Season's Rainfall for the period from 1 to 31 January 2024 is -58 per cent.

Apsara Border towards Anand Vihar, on Rohtak

Road from Rajdhani Park

towards Mundka, and on

Mathura Road from Badarpur

Bengal CM throws barbs at CPM for hijacking Congress

SAUGAR SENGUPTA

Even as Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee jerked away the Congress' hand in Bengal the Left Front acted quickly to hold it while their topmost of leaders from the State joined Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra in various phases and cities including on Thursday when Bengal State CPI(M) secretary and politburo member Md Salim, central committee member Sujan Chakrabarty and State committee member Shatarup Ghosh took part in the Yatra. The three leaders, particularly Ghosh one of the Left youth icons in the State had extensive discussion with Gandhi while Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee continued to throw barbs at the Left for hijacking the Congress.

While Gandhi mingled with the muhalla people at Raghunathganj a few miles away from former President Pranab Mukherjee's house in Murshidabad district trying to understand the bidi workers' issues Banerjee chose the Marxists as her target saying, "though we had a good chemistry with the Congress it was the CPI(M) which destroyed it," insisting once again, "we will fight alone in Bengal." She said, "after the elections the regional parties will sit together and decide about the

leadership but before that we

will fight alone because only the TMC can defeat the BJP."

Solemn pledge to... From Page 1

According to the Minister, new nursing colleges will be established, co-located with the 157 recently established During the medical colleges. Sitharaman presentation, she has also announced a mission

to eliminate sickle cell anemia by 2047, which will involve screening seven crore people. budget announced that facilities in

select ICMR labs would be made available for research by public and private medical college faculty and the private

In Financial Year 2023-24, the

expenditure of the Union Health Ministry estimated to be Rs 89,155 crore, reflecting a 13 per cent increase from the revised estimates for 2022-23.

Sitharaman...

From Page 1

That year, Sitharaman did away with the traditional budget briefcase and instead opted for a 'bahi-khata' with the National Emblem to carry the speech

At 56 minutes, it was Sitharaman's shortest budget speech. She also holds the distinction of delivering the longest budget speech at two hours and forty minutes in 2020. In 2019, as India's first full-time woman finance minister, Sitharaman's Budget speech lasted for two hours and 17 minutes. In 2021, her speech lasted for one hour and 50 minutes, followed by 92 minutes in 2022 and 87 minutes in 2023.

for elections this fiscal

निर्वाचन सदन NIRVACHAN SADAN भारत निर्वाचन आयोग ELECTION COMMISSION INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Election Commission has been granted Rs 385.67 crore for conducting elections this fiscal, according to documents provided after the presentation of the interim budget on Thursday.

Lok Sabha elections are due this summer and could be announced sometime in

The Law Ministry ministry has been provided Rs 2,502.30 crore this fiscal and Rs 34.84 crore in 2024-25 for procurement of electronic voting machines (EVMs) for the poll panel.

The sum is meant for providing funds to the Election Commission for procurement of Ballot Units, Control Units and Voter-Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) Units by the Election Commission and ancillary expenditure on EVMs and destruction of obsolete EVMs.

One control unit, at least one ballot unit and one VVPAT unit make up for one EVM. An expert committee oversees the destruction of old EVMs. An EVM has an average shelf life of 15 years.

The poll authority has also been provided Rs 306.06 crore for elections under budget

While the Centre has achieved the target of three crore houses in rural areas under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, the Budget promises to set up 2 crore affordable houses in 5 years. Housing finance companies stand to gain from these initiatives, potentially amplifying the credit influx into this sector. Despite apprehensions about liquidity, the anticipation of a borrowing reduced programme Government of India in the upcoming fiscal year is poised to alleviate the potential rise

in funding costs for these

lenders.

The government plans to borrow ₹14.1 lakh crore via bonds, with a lower gross borrowing target than the previous year. Subsidies are projected at 1.2 per cent of GDP, slightly lower than the outgoing financial year, while the divestment target is set at ₹50,000 crore. By projecting the fiscal deficit for the financial year 2024-25 at 5.1 per cent of GDP, the Government demonstrated commitment to fiscal

consolidation even in an election year. The Interim Budget aims to reduce the fiscal deficit to below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26.

towards private and public investments in post-harvest activities, comprehensive programme envisioned

development of dairy farmers and fisheries. To invigorate tourism, the Government intends to provide interestfree loans to States for developing tourist centres and enhance port connectivity, fostering growth in the hotel and travel industries.

To promote environmental sustainability, the Budget aims to expand and strengthen the electric vehicle ecosystem by supporting manufacturing and charging infrastructure. Additionally, a new scheme for bio manufacturing is set to be launched to encourage

green growth. Though for the salaried class, the Budget has withdrawn pre-2009-10 disputed tax demands of up to ₹25,000, bringing relief to many, there are no changes in direct and indirect taxation.

Thus the Interim Budget for 2024-25 envisions a holistic approach to economic development, emphasising the empowerment of women and bolstering infrastructure, aligning with government's vision of a progressive and developed

Soren sent to...

It also alleged that a dozen land parcels in Ranchi measuring about 8.5 acres in total are in "illegal possession, occupation and use" of the JMM leader and are proceeds of crime under the anti-money laundering law.

'He (Soren) was informed about his arrest at around 5 pm. However, he was reluctant to receive the orders before he tendered his resignation from the post of chief minister to the Hon'ble Governor, Jharkhand," the Central agency informed a special PMLA court while seeking his custody.

Fortifying India: Defence... crore for defence services, and Given the tense situation at

the border facing China and the dynamic geopolitical landscape, the government has assured that additional funds will be made available as and when required to maintain the operational readiness of the armed forces, as per recent information. Finance Minister Sitharaman

also announced a new scheme aimed at strengthening deeptech technologies for defense purposes and expediting 'atmanirbharta' or selfreliance in this domain.

The total revenue expenditure has been pegged at Rs 4,39,300 crore, which includes Rs 1,41,205 crore for defence pensions, Rs 2,82,772

15,322 crore for the Ministry of Defence (Civil). In the capital outlay for defence services, Rs 40,777 crore has been allocated for aircraft and aero engines, while an amount of Rs 62,343 crore has been earmarked for "other equipment." An outlay of Rs 23,800 crore has been designated for the naval fleet, and Rs 6,830 crore has been allocated for naval dockyard

projects. In the Budget, the capital outlay for the Indian Air Force was the highest at Rs 57,137.09 crore, including Rs 15,721 crore for the procurement of aircraft and aero engines and Rs 36,223.13

crore for other equipment.

Budget... From Page 1 The Budget empowers the

poor and middle class and create countless employment opportunities for the youth, Modi said. He added that the government sets a big goal, achieves it, and then sets an even bigger target

for itself. Highlighting the Government's efforts for the welfare of the poor and the middle class, he referred to the construction of over four crore houses in villages and cities, with an increased target to build two crore more

houses. Underlining the emphasis on the empowerment of women, the Prime Minister said, "Our

goal was to make two crore 'lakhpatis' among women. Now, this goal has been increased to make three crore 'lakhpatis."

praised He also the government's flagship Ayushman Bharat scheme for its significant assistance to the poor, extending its benefits to Anganwadi and ASHA workers. Modi highlighted the government's emphasis on empowering the poor and the

middle class by creating new

opportunities for them in the

Budget. He spoke of the rooftop solar campaign, where one crore families will avail free electricity while also earning an income of Rs 15,000 to Rs 18,000 per year by selling excess electricity to the

and other documents.

Centre resists populist measures in poll...

Guided by the principle of "reform, perform, and transform", the government undertake nextgeneration reforms and build consensus with the states and stakeholders for effective implementation, she said.

The interim Budget seeks Parliament's authorisation for spending for four months, and the full Budget for the fiscal year starting in April will be presented in July by the government elected in the April-May general elections. Sitharaman's Budget proposes to reduce food, fertilizer, and fuel subsidies by 8 per cent in 2024-25 compared to last year, while keeping the allocation for the rural employment

MGNREGA unchanged. Spending on infrastructure, such as roads, ports, and

airports, has been increased by 11 per cent to Rs 11.1 lakh crore in an effort to sustain the current world-recordbeating economic growth and create more jobs. The Union government will also provide Rs 1.3 lakh crore in long-term loans to States for spending. infrastructure Additionally, the government aims to build 2 crore

affordable houses in the next

5 years and will launch a

housing scheme for the middle class. "It will develop tourist centres and market them on a global scale, while also providing viability gap funding for harnessing wind energy

potential, starting with an initial capacity of 1 gigawatt. Moreover, both private and public investments will be promoted in post-harvest activities, including modern storage and supply chains, to enhance self-reliance in oilseeds.

A comprehensive programme for the development of dairy farmers is being planned, along with an increase in spending on fisheries to boost productivity in the sector. All of this will be achieved while adhering to the fiscal consolidation path, which aims to reduce the fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent of GDP in 2024-25, compared to the revised deficit estimate of 5.8 per cent for the current

financial year ending March

31. Notably, the deficit for the current fiscal is lower than the 5.9 per cent projected when Sitharaman presented her last Budget in February 2023. On tax measures, the finance

minister announced that investments by sovereign wealth funds and pension funds will be tax-free for one more year. Total revenue receipts for

2024-25 were estimated at Rs 30 lakh crore as compared to revised estimate of Rs 26.99 lakh crore in the previous year. Tax-GDP ratio is seen at 11.7 per cent as opposed to 11.6 per cent of GDP in 2023-Stating that every challenge of

pre-2014 era was

overcome through economic

management and governance,

July Budget, will present a detailed roadmap to make India a developed country. 'We continue on the path of fiscal consolidation, as

she said the government, in its

announced in my Budget speech for 2021-22, to reduce the fiscal deficit below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26," Sitharaman said. the headline Among

announcements in the Budget are rooftop solar installations at one crore households to deliver up to 300 free units of electricity per month, a corpus of Rs 1 lakh crore for innovation and technology by providing financing at low or nil interest rates, and a new scheme to strengthen deep tech in the defence sector.

EC granted ₹385.67 crore

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE



City allocated ₹1,168 crore in interim Budget

¬he Union Territory of Delhi I was allocated Rs 1,168 crore in the 2024-25 interim Budget on Thursday, the same as in 2023-24, with the AAP Government accusing the Centre of giving it "step-motherly" treatment. The transfer to Delhi from the Union Home Ministry included Rs 1,168 crore under the revenue head and Rs 0.01 crore under the capital head. In the 2022-23 budget, Delhi was allocated Rs 960 crore. It was increased to Rs 1,168.01 crore in 2023-24 and remains the same for 2024-25. There were no grants in lieu of share in central taxes and duties for Delhi. It was Rs 325 crore in the 2022-23 budget. In the interim budget for Delhi, Rs 2 crore was also allocated as enhanced compensation to the victims of the 1984 riots. Grants towards contribution to the UT Disaster Response Fund allocation was Rs 15 crore and an additional central assistance of Rs 200 for exteraided projects (Chandrawal water treatment plant) was also there like the

previous year budget. The grants in return of Delhi's share in the pool of central

the "central assistance to Union Territories" in the budget estimates of 2023-24 and has remained so this year, the budget document said.

The allocation under central assistance to Delhi in the budget 2024-25 estimates was Rs 951 crore like the previous budget for 2023-24. It is provided for financing the schemes of the Delhi government. Delhi Finance Minister and

AAP leader Atishi alleged that this budget has once again proved that the BJP-led central government is actually a government of hollow promises and "step-motherly" treatment has been meted out to Delhi. "Delhi has a share of Rs 15,000 crore in central taxes but it has only been allocated Rs 1,100 crore by the Centre. Like every time, we have been given stepmotherly treatment. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has not been given a single penny," she said.
"The government has provided central assistance of Rs

15,000 crore to Rs 16,000 crore to urban local bodies but no allocations has been made for the MCD. They do not have money for the Delhi government or the MCD," Atishi said.

taxes and duties was clubbed in On Sitharaman's announcement that the government has decided to enhance the target for creating 'Lakhpati Didis' from two crore to three crore. the AAP leader said that at a time, when "women are worried about atta, dal and buying LPG cylinders, this is a huge joke that women will be made 'lakhpatis'". "Where are jobs and business opportunities for women?" she asked.

The 'Lakhpati Didi' scheme is aimed at training women in self-help groups (SHGs) so that they can earn a sustainable income of at least Rs 1 lakh per annum.Targeting the central government, Atishi said, "I want to tell the Centre and the BJP to stop 'jumlebaazi'. The entire country has seen how in the last 10 years, you have done nothing to curb price rise, unemployment and bring about the country's economic once again proved that the Modi government is actually a

raised questions over the quality of food served to them. The food quality did not improve "This budget has but the jawan lost his job. We hope that the bravehearts who guard our borders get those 'jumlewali' government (a government of hollow promises). funds in reality," she added. Delhi Congress President There is no relief in cost of LPG Arvinder Singh Lovely said that the Modi Government's cylinder and no relief in income tax slabs. There is last interim Budget before the nothing for creation of jobs. There is no relief on GST on Lok Sabha elections was totally disappointing as it was silent

tors like jobs, employment and price rise. He said that the Budget was a clear indication that BJP's "Achhe Din" was not for the common people of the country, but a few chosen ones. Lovely said that it was disappointing that the BJP Government's last budget before the Lok Sabha elections have neglected employment generation, small and medium industrialists and traders, fac-

of the BJP Government. He said it was foolish to expect anything new from the Modi Government which had done nothing for the welfare of the struggling masses for the past 10 years. Meanwhile, the Leader

tory owners, women, youth,

labour and farmers who don't

figure in the scheme of things

of Opposition in Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri showered effusive praise on the interim budget presented by the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, the last before the Lok Sabha polls this year.

Bidhuri said that this budget presents a picture of the way the country is moving on the path of development under the leadership of PM Modi. The budget also has taken a revolutionary step by proposing a housing scheme for the middle class, he said. The BJP leader said the budget accurately captures PM Modi's unwavering pursuit of inclusive development centred around

Bidhuri said that the budget has focused on women, poor, youth and farmers. "Sabka Sath Aur Sabka Vishwas" in the Modi government is clearly reflected in this budget. "It has been told in the budget that in the country under Mudra Yojana, loans worth Rs 30 crore were distributed to women in 10 years, one crore youth were given training, free ration was provided to 80 crore poor people and 4 crore farmers were benefited through crop insurance

Delhi Police budget cut by 4.47 per cent, Metro granted ₹21,247 crore STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI Upgradation or expansion

 $T^{\text{he Delhi Police has been}}_{\text{allocated Rs }11,397.98\text{ crore}}$ in the interim Budget for 2024-25, a decrease of 4.47 per cent from the last fiscal while Delhi Metro has been allocated Rs 21, 247.94 crore in the fiscal year 2024-25.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday presented the interim Union Budget for 2024-25. The Delhi Police is responsible for maintaining and enforcing law and order in the National Capital Territory of Delhi. The responsibility also includes traffic management in the city.

The provision is for routine expenses as well as for various schemes to be implemented by the Delhi Police such as developing traffic and communication networks in NCR mega cities and a model traffic sys-

Upgradation or expansion of communication infrastructure and training, induction of latest technology and installation of traffic signals, are some of the other works which come under the remit of the Delhi

For the financial year 2023-2024, the budget allocated to the law enforcement agency was Rs 11,932.03 crore. However, it was revised to Rs 11,940.33 crore for the same

The interim budget 2024-25 on Thursday allocated Rs 202868.70 crore to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) with the highest share of funds going to the paramilitary forces ike CRPF, BSF and CISF, showing priority on internal security and border guarding.

The 2023-24 budget allocation to the MHA, helmed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, was Rs 196034.94 crore.

sticks and were thrashed

After the attack, the accused

fled from the farmhouse and

the injured were rushed to a

privaté hospital where Praveen

died during treatment. While

six others - Narveer, Ankur,

Gaurav, Dipanshu, Gurveet

Singh, Aditya and Vishal Rao

Kejriwal likely to skip 5th ED summons today **STAFF REPORTER** ■ NEW DELHI

food items like atta, pulses," she

Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal is unlikely to appear before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Friday for questioning in a money laundering case linked to the Delhi excise policy, sources in the party said.

The ED on Wednesday issued a fresh and the fifth summons to Kejriwal after he skipped four earlier summonses issued by the federal agency over the last four months. Though the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) remained tight-lipped about whether the Delhi CM will appear before the probe agency, sources in the party said that he is likely to skip the summons this time too. The AAP has maintained that its legal team is studying the summons issued to Kejriwal in connection with the excise policy linked money laundering case. Kejriwal is scheduled to par-

ticipate in a protest along with



Bhagwant Mann outside the BJP headquarters on Friday against the alleged cheating in Chandigarh mayoral polls. On Tuesday, in a setback to the

Congress and the AAP -- both INDIA bloc members -- the BJP swept the Chandigarh mayoral polls. The AAP-Congress combine alleged that the presiding officer had tampered with the ballot papers.

Kejriwal skipped ED summonses for November 2 and December 21 in 2023 and January 3 and January 18 this

notices "illegal". It is alleged that the Delhi government's excise policy for 2021-22 to grant licences to liquor traders allowed cartelisation and favoured certain dealers who had allegedly paid bribes for it, a charge repeatedly refuted by the AAP.

The policy was subsequently scrapped and Delhi Lt Governor VK Saxena recommended a Central Bureau of Investigation probe, following which the ED registered a case under the Prevention of Money

es/handbags, water bottles, and

milk bottles for infants.

Provision for drinking water,

toilets, and first aid/medical

facilities will be made at vari-

ous places along the public

The Udyan will be open for

special categories on February

22 (for differently abled and

visually challenged persons),

February 23 (for personnel of

defence, paramilitary, and police forces), March 1 (for

women, tribals, and women

self-help groups), and March 5 (for children of orphanages),

Apart from the Amrit Udyan,

Apart Holli the Allint Odyan, people can also visit Rashtrapati Bhavan and Rashtrapati Bhavan Museum

six days a week (from Tuesday

to Sunday). They can also wit-

ness the change-of-guard cer-emony on every Saturday except on gazetted holidays.

"More details are available at

visit.Rashtrapatibhavan.Gov.In,

Utsav, school students can visit

the museum free of cost.

it said. During the Udyan

the statement said.

route," it added.

Security to be beefed up in city central parts

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

on the the worst affected sec-

said. Atishi welcomed the hike

in the defence budget to Rs 6.21

lakh crore for 2024-25 from last

She said the defence forces

should get the best of facilities

but stressed that the allocated

We had seen how one jawan

year's Rs 5.94 lakh crore.

funds should reach them.

Security will be beefed up in the central parts of the city on Friday in view of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and BJP protests to maintain law and order situation, police said. The AAP has called for a protest outside the BJP head-

quarters over alleged cheating in the Chandigarh mayoral polls, while the Bharatiya Janata Party said it will mount a demonstration near the AAP office on Friday against alleged corruption of Arvind Kejriwal government.

We will make adequate security arrangements for the protest and to maintain law and order situation. Additional forces will also be deployed. No



law and order," an officer said. According to police, traffic will be diverted from Deen Dayal Upadhayay Marg to other routes on the day.

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann will also take part in the protest. On Tuesday, in a setback to the Congress and the AAP -- both partners in the opposition INDIA bloc -- the BJP swept

DTU student injured in farmhouse attack succumbs during treatment Parveen were attacked with

STAFF REPORTER GURUGRAM

A BTech student of the Delhi Technical University injured in an attack by assailants in a farmhouse died during treatment at Delhi AIIMS, said police on Thursday.

In the attack in the Oasis Garden farmhouse in the Baliawas village, the owner of the farmhouse was killed while seven others, including stu-dents, were injured, they added.

According to police, the deceased student, identified as Gajendra, was a resident of Nagaur in Rajasthan. Gajendra was on ventilator since he was seriously injured in the attack on Saturday night. His condition was "very serious" and he succumbed to the injuries during treatment on Tuesday late night at Delhi AIIMS, said police.



were treated in hospital, Gurugram for a birthday party. police said. The students who were leaving On the complaint of another farm house operator Naresh after partying were boarding two cars parked outside. In the Kumar, an FIR was registered at the DLF Phase 1 police stameantime, four vouths from the Bandhwari village came in tion under relevant sections of a car allegedly drunk and a the IPC, including murder brawl broke out between them, and attempt to murder. they added.

The team of the Sikanderpur Soon after, more than a dozen crime unit arrested two accused identified as Sachin youths reached the farm house, first beat up the stuand Ashish, residents of the dents in the parking area and Bandhwari village. After sending the arrested accused to jail, then entered the farmhouse with sticks in their hands. the police are now searching The students and farmhouse's for the remaining accused,

inaugurates Udyan Utsav



STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday inaugurated 'Udyan Utsav 2024' at the Amrit Udyan, which will be opened for the public from Friday, the Rashtrapati Bhavan said. Spread over 15 acres, this time the famed garden will showcase over 85 species of flowers besides a floral clock and a selfie point among oth-

"The President of India, Droupadi Murmu graced the Udyan Utsav- I, 2024 today (February 1, 2024)," a statement issued by the President's office

Under the Udyan Utsav-I, Amrit Udyan will remain open for the public from February 2 to March 31, 2024 (except on Mondays which are maintenance days), it said.

For the first time, a theme garden with 42,000 tulips of 18 varieties has been developed for visitors to the Amrit Udyan. A 225-year-old Sheesham tree and a Bonsai garden (with more than 300 Bonsais many of which are decades old) are among the key attractions for

visit.Rashtrapatibhavan.Gov.In as well as through self-service kiosks placed outside gate no 35. Booking of slots is free," it

Entry and exit for all visitors will be from gate no. 35 of the President's Estate, close to where North Avenue Road meets Rashtrapati Bhavan.

a shuttle bus service from Central Secretariat Metro Station to gate no 35 will be available at the interval every 30

An elevated artistic 'Amrit

Udyan' garden signature has been placed in the backdrop of the theme garden to provide a beautiful selfie point as well. A 'floral clock' -- a floral art manifesting in the form of a stationary clock, is also among the attractions, the statement

Bookings can be made online

For the convenience of visitors,

minutes between 9.30 AM to 5

pm the statement said. "Visitors can carry mobile

President Droupadi Murmu | LG chairs meet to review DMs | ED arrests 2 in money experiences in 'Samvaad' visits



STAFF REPORTER NEW DELHI

Delhi Lt Governor (LG) VK Saxena on Thursday chaired a meeting to review the experiences gathered and gained by the District Magistrates (DMs) over their last two "Samvaad" visits to villages across the city aimed at formulating the way forward under the "DilliGramodayaAbhiyan" of the Delhi Development Authority(DDA).

The major issues including lack of civic infrastructure, connectivity and sanitation came to the fore in the feedback to Saxena.

The DMs had visited identified villages on January 7-8 and January 27-28 and stayed the night over, apart from interacting with the residents of these villages and those in the neighbourhood, to get a first-hand experience and feedback about the problems faced by them.

The LG had instructed for this exercise to be undertak-

en so that developmental and upgradation projects under the recently launched "DilliGramoʻdayAbhiyan" being implemented by the DDA, could be in sync with the actual deficiencies and demands on ground. The DMs, who had visited

these areas along with officials of all stakeholder departments / agencies like DDA, MCD, PWD, DJB and I&FC shared their experiences and apprised the LG of the feed-

in the shortest possible time-

frame so that people could

back from ground.
The LG directed the DMs to submit a report listing five most important issues being faced by the villages in their respective districts within two days and also enlist tangible projects to address them. He being conducted. Those present in the meeting included the Chief Secretary, advised that these projects to be undertaken under the "DilliGramodayaAbhiyan", should be implemented with-

start benefitting from them immediately. Saxena also directed that in

the next visit to be planned by the middle of this month, Principal Secretaries Secretaries / HoDs, apart from the Chief Secretary himself will visit identified villages, stay the night over and take stock of the situation on ground. He further asked the DMs to undertake regular field visits in the villages every Saturday.

It was informed that the work of providing piped gas to all the villages was in advance stages, wherein 69 villages had already been provided with the same, 39 villages where work was expected to be completed within a month and 142 villages where surveys were

Divisional Commissioner, VC Development (DDA), Commissioner, Principal Secretary (PWD) / CEO Commissioner (MCD), all DMs and other

laundering probe into DJB irregularities

The Enforcement Directorate has arrested a Enforcement retired chief engineer and a contractor in connection with its money laundering probe its money laundering probe into alleged irregularities in the tendering process of the Delhi Jal Board. Jagdish Kumar Arora, a retired chief engineer, and contractor Anil Kumar Aggarwal have been taken into custody under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) and produced before a special court which remanded to four day custody on

Thursday. Special judge Bhupinder Singh sent Jagdish Kumar Arora, a retired chief engineer, and contractor Anil Kumar Aggarwal, both arrested on Wednesday, to the custody of the Enforcement Directorate after the federal agency claimed that their custodial interrogation was required to unearth the "larger conspiracy". In its application seeking accused's seven-day custody, the ED submitted that the accused were required to be confronted with the digital data recovered during investigation. The ED further claimed that some other people are being summoned in the case and the accused were required to be confronted with them. The federal agency had conducted raids in this case in July last year. The ED is conducting investigation in two separate matters of irregularities in the tendering process of the DJB and its criminal case stems from an FIR of the CBI and from the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) of the Delhi gov-

The CBI FIR alleged that officials of the DJB gave "undue advantage" Infrastructure Limited while awarding tender to the company for supply, installation,

testing and commissioning of electro-magnetic flow metres in

connivance with officials of NBCC (India) Limited. The second allegation pertains to the ACB complaint of November, 2022 where it was stated that DJB awarded a tender for setting up automotive bill payment collection machines (kiosks) in its different offices for facilitating consumers in bill payment.

Criticising the AAP government, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has said that Kejriwal government has become synonymous with corruption and now every day a new scam comes to light. Sachdeva said that between 2012 and 2015, Arvind Kejriwal used to call auto magnetic water meters as loot meters and never got tired of accusing the then Sheila Dikshit government of corruption, but under the rule of Kejriwal government, new scams are coming out daily in the Delhi Jal Board.

"It would not be an exaggera-tion to say that today the Kejriwal government has become synonymous with corruption," he said. The BJP leader said the people of Delhi are shocked to know about the auto magnetic meter scam of Rs 38 crore in Delhi Jal Board during the Kejriwal regime in which ED has made 2 arrests



₹310 crore for training **Government employees**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Over Rs 310 crore has been allocated to the Personnel Ministry for the next fiscal for the training of government employees, both in India and abroad, and augmenting necessary training related infrastructure, according to the interim Union Budget 2024-25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday.

Of the total outlay of Rs 312 crore for 2024-25, Rs 105.31 crore is to meet establishmentrelated expenditure for

"Training Division, Institute of Secretariat Training and Management (ISTM) and Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA)", Rs 120.56 for "Training Schemes" and Rs 86.13 crore for "National Programme for Civil Services Capacity Building" or Mission Karmayogi.

The Mission Karmayogi, dubbed as the biggest bureaucratic reform initiative, is aimed at making government employ-ees more "creative, proactive, professional and technologyenabled".

The Training Division, ISTM in Delhi and Mussoorie-based LBSNAA arrange several training programmes including foundation courses, refresher courses, mid-career training and the likes to equip all levels and grades of secretarial functionaries with adequate exposure to the latest rules and reg-



Expenditure on domestic and overseas travel, course fees and the likes in respect of Central Secretariat Service (CSS) and Secretariat Stenographers Service (CSSS) officials who are to undergo mandatory training at ISTM as a pre-condition for considera-

tion for promotion to next higher grade have also been included centrally under Rs 105.31 crore budgetary provi-

The amount of Rs 120.56 crore is for schemes like "training for all", domestic funding for for-eign training, upgradation of LBSNAA to a centre of excellence and augmentation of training facilities at ISTM, according to the Budget documents. An amount of Rs 10 crore has been allocated for the administrative reforms.

'This includes scheme provision for Department of Administrative Reforms and Public Grievances scheme for cated Rs 414.15 crore for

Paramilitary forces get highest share of funds PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The interim budget 2024-25 on Thursday allocated Rs 202868.70 crore to the Ministry of Home Affairs with the highest share of funds going to the paramilitary forces like Central Reserve Police Force(CRPF), Border Security Force(RSF) Border Security Force(BSF) and Central Industrial Security Force(CISF).

While Rs 132345.47 crore was given to the police under which the paramilitary forces come, Rs 37277.74 crore was given to Jammu and Kashmir, which has been a Union Territory after the abrogation of Article 370 and bifurcation of the state in 2019. Ladakh got Rs 5958 crore, Andaman and Nicobar Islands Rs 5866.37 crore, Chandigarh Rs 5862.62 crore, Puducherry Rs 3269.00 crore, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Dama and Diu Rs 2648.97 crore and Rs 1490.10 crore was given to Lakshadweep and Rs 1168.01 to Delhi.

A sum of Rs 1248.91 crore was given to cabinet under which the expenditure on council of ministers, cabinet secretariat, Prime Minister's Office, hospitality and entertainment of the government come.

Among the paramilitary forces, Rs 32809.65 crore was given to the CRPF from a revised estimate of Rs 31389.04 crore in 2023-24, Rs 25027.52 crore to the BSF (Rs 25038.68 crore in



8253.53 crore to ITBP (Rs 8203.68 crore in 2023-24), Rs 8485.77 crore to SSB (Rs 8435.68 crore in 2023-24) and Rs 7368.33 crore to the Assam Rifles (Rs 7276.29 crore in The CRPF is mostly deployed

for internal security duties, operations against terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, Naxals in central and eastern India and the insurgents in the Northeast. The BSF mostly guards the Indo-Pakistan and Indo-Bangladesh borders besides it is also deployed internal security duties. The CISF guards vital installations like nuclear plants, airports, metro networks. The Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) guards the Sino-Indian border, the

Shashastra Seema Bal (SSB)

guards the Indo-Nepal and

Indo-Bhutan borders, the

Assam Rifles protects India's

border with Myanmar.

Charts pathway | Rural Development fund for developed India by 2047, say Ministers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

Several Union Ministers hailed the interim Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, asserting that it charts a definitive pathway for a fully developed and economically robust India

Reacting to the interim Budget which was presented in Parliament on Thursday, Union Minister Rajnath Singh said it outlines the vision for a "confident, strong and self-reliant Viksit Bharat". He stressed that he was sure of the size of the Indian economy growing to more than USD 5 trillion by

In a post on X, he said there is something in this Budget for "every section of the society". The government is working to make India a developed country by 2047, Sitharaman said on Thursday while presenting the interim Budget 2024-25.

This is an interim Budget. But this interim Budget that she has presented is very encouraging and raises hope for the way ahead also. And the size of India's economy at this time... I am assured that whatever indications we have received from this Budget, the size of our economy, which is in top five counties right now, will grow to more than USD 5 tril-

lion by 2027. By 2030, it will

grow to more than USD 7 tril-

lion," Singh told reporters out-



The Government on Thursday increased the Union Rural Development

Ministry's budget to Rs 1.77 lakh crore for 2024-25 from last year's Rs 1.57 lakh crore, an increase of around 12 per cent. However, when compared to the revised estimates, a midyear review of expenditure done by the ministry that stood at Rs 1.71 lakh crore, the increase is three per cent. In the interim budget present-

ed in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, the allocation for the flagship Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for 2024-25 was Rs 86,000 crore, around 43 per cent more than Rs 60,000 crore made in the last budget.

However, the revised estimate shows the expenditure on the scheme in the last financial year was Rs 86,000 crore, same as the allocation made for the coming fiscal.

In 2022-23, the government had allocated Rs 73,000 crore for the scheme, while the actual expenditure, according to that year's budget document, was Rs 90,805 crore. In 2021-22, Rs 73,000 crore was

allocated to the scheme under the rural development ministry, while Rs 98,467.85 crore was the actual expenditure. In 2020-21, Rs 1.11 lakh crore was spent on the scheme, according to budget documents. The scheme provides guaran-

teed 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult mem-

bers volunteer to do unskilled manual work. It also earmarks at least one-third of jobs for

In her pre-election budget,

Finance Minister Sitharaman also announced that another two crore houses will be constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin in the next five years. The allocation for the scheme was Rs 54,500 crore in the budget presented. In 2023-24, Rs 54,487 crore was provided for the PMAY(G). However, the revised estimate stands at Rs 32,000 crore, around 41 per cent of the allocated amount. Sitharaman also announced that the target for creating 'Lakhpati Didis' has been increased from two crores to three crores. Under the 'Lakhpati Didi' initiative, which comes under DAY-NRLM, each self-help group (SHG) household is encouraged to take up multiple livelihood activities coupled with value chain interventions, resulting in a sustainable income of Rs 1 lakh or more per year.

The allocation for the National Livelihood Mission-Ajeevika was Rs 15,047 crore, around six per cent more than last year's

Civil Aviation Ministry gets ₹2,300 crore | ₹1,277.8 crore allocated for census

offices, pilot projects on admin-

istrative reforms which consists

of promotion of e-governance,

fostering of good governance,

learning from success, sevot-

An amount of Rs 39.44 crore

has been allocated for 2024-25

to meet establishment-related

expenditure of Central

Information Commission and

Public Enterprises Selection

A fund of Rs 2.6 crore has been

earmarked for the propagation

of Right to Information (RTI)

Act during 2024-25. The Central Administrative

Tribunal (CAT), which is

entrusted with the redressal of

grievances of public servants,

has been allocated Rs 157.72

crore for the next financial year

to meet establishment-related

Commission (SSC), which

conducts various recruitment

examinations for central gov-

ernment jobs, has been allo-

Selection

Staff

expenditure.

tam, etc," it said.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE

The Ministry of Civil Aviation will get Rs 2300 crore in the year 2024-2025, lower than the current fiscal's revised estimate of Rs 2922.12 crore, and initial estimate of Rs 3113.36 crore.

Presenting the interim Budget for 2024-25, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said that Indian airlines have placed orders for 1.000 new aircraft since the aviation sector has seen an expanment 2.0's policies. India's regional air connectivity scheme Udan will receive Rs 502 crore in the next fiscal year, lower than the revised estimate of Rs 850 crore for the year 2024 and the initial estimate of Rs 1,244 crore. The amount will be spent to revive 22 airports, start 124 air routes, and finance viability gap funding for northeast connectivity.

She further said that the number of airports in India has doubled to 149 and 517 new air routes are carrying upto 1.3



of existing airports and development of new airports will continue expeditiously. India is one of the fastest growing civil aviation markets in the world and domestic air passenger traffic is on the rise.

"The aviation sector has been galvanised in the past ten years. Number of airports have doubled to 149. Roll out of air connectivity to tier-two and tierthree cities under UDAN 19 scheme has been widespread. Five hundred and seventeen new routes are carrying 1.3

crore passengers. Sitharaman crore passengers. Indian carriorders for over 1000 new aircrafts. Expansion of existing airports and development of new airports will continue expeditiously," Sitharaman said.

"Roll out of air connectivity to tier-two and tier-three cities under UDAN scheme has been widespread. Five hundred and seventeen new routes are carrying 1.3 crore passengers," she said. Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) or the regional air connectivity scheme is mainly aimed at making flying more afford-

"Expansion of existing airports and development of new air-ports will continue expeditiously," the minister said. Three domestic carriers -- Air India, IndiGo and Akasa Air -

- have together ordered a total of 1,120 planes in less than one year. Air India, now owned by the Tata Group, has placed orders for 470 aircraft- 250 from Airbus and 220 from Boeing. Of the 220 planes Air India will India will purchase from Boeing, 190 will be B737 MAX, 20 B787 and 10 B777X. In together placed orders for 970 planes with Boeing and Airbus. Last month, Akasa Air announced an order for 150 Boeing 737 Max aircraft

According to budget document, out of the total amount, Air India Asset Holding Ltd (AIAHL) will get Rs 1,158.79 crore in the next fiscal, higher than Rs 713.92 crore allocated for 2023-24. The provision is kept for servicing of loans transferred to AIAHL as a result of financial restructuring of Air India, as per the Budget

document. AIAHL is a special purpose vehicle formed by the government that holds various assets of the national carrier Air

The allocation for Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Drone and Drone Component has been hiked to Rs 57 crore for 2024-25, from Rs 33 crore in the current fis-

According to the Budget document, the money earmarked for the regulators -- DGCA and BCAS -- have been reduced for 2024-25. The budgetary allo-General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) will be Rs 302.64 crore and for the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), the amount is Rs 89 crore. In the revised Budget estimate for 2023-24, the allocation for DGCA and BCAS is Rs 397.55 crore and Rs 100.02 crore, respectively.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the interim Budget on Thursday and it is also the last Budget of the Modi government before the general polls.

The interim budget 2024-25 on Thursday allocated Rs 1,277.80 crore for census, a significant reduction from 2021-22 when Rs 3,768 crore was allocated and an indication that the exercise may not be carried out even after three years of delay.

A meeting of the Union cabinet on December 24, 2019 had approved the proposal for con-

approved the proposal for conducting census of India 2021 at a cost of Rs 8,754.23 crore and updating the National cost of Rs 3,941.35 crore.

The house listing phase of the census and the exercise to update the NPR were scheduled to be carried out across the country from April 1 to September 30, 2020 but postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The census operation continues to be on hold and the government has not yet announced the new schedule. Officials said since general elections are due this year, the census is unlikely to be carried out in 2024.



allocated for census surveys and statistics (Rs 520.96 in 2023-24). The entire census and NPR exercise is likely to cost the government over Rs 12,000 crore, officials said. This exercise, whenever it will happen, will be the first digital census giving citizens an opportunity to selfenumerate. The NPR has been made com-

pulsory for citizens who want to exercise the right to fill the census form on their own rather than through government enumerators. For this, the

farmers to retail outlets. To attain the goal of a Viksit India by 2047, Sitharaman

people's capabilities and

Prime Minister Narendra

According to the interim bud- census authority has designed which is yet to be launched. During self-enumeration, Aadhaar or mobile number will be mandatorily collected. The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner had prepared 31 questions to be asked to the citizens.

Those questions include whether a family has telephone, internet connection, mobile or smartphone, bicycle, scooter or motorcycle or moped, whether they own a car, jeep or a van.

Revitalising urban mobility

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

Prioritising urban public transport, the Government proposed to allocate Rs 1,300 crore to procure electric buses and Rs 24,931 crore in the interim Budget to fund various metro projects in the country. There is a 7.57 per cent increase in funds for the mass rapid transit system and metro projects in comparison to the last year's allocation of Rs 23,175 crore.

In the interim Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Rs 26,170 crore has been set aside for the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) -- an increase of 4.3 per cent.

The Prime Minister Street Vendor's AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM SVANidhi), a microcredit scheme that provides collateral-free working capital loans of up to Rs 50,000 to street vendors, has been allocated Rs 326 crore against Rs 468 crore in the last Union Budget.

The Smart Cities Mission received Rs 2,400 crore in the interim Budget while it had been allocated Rs 8,000 crore in the 2023-24 General Budget. The period of the mission is scheduled to end in



The Swachh Bharat Mission,

another flagship programme of the Modi government, has been given Rs 5,000 crore. The government has proposed to allocate Rs 1,300 crore to

procure electric buses under the PM-eBus Sewa scheme. Under the scheme, 10,000 electric buses will be provided to 169 cities under the public-private partnership model. Last month, Union Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Singh Puri had said the government has floated tenders for procuring e-buses

under the scheme. The scheme, which will continue till 2037, will have an outlay of Rs 57,613 crore, of which Rs 20,000 crore will be provided by the Centre and

While presenting the interim Budget, Sitharaman said that rapid urbanisation is taking place in the country, asserting that metro rail and NaMo Bharat trains can be catalysts for the required urban transformation.

She said expansion of these systems will be supported in large cities focusing on transitoriented development.

In October last year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged off the country's first Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS). It was named NaMo Bharat train.

'We have a fast-expanding middle class and rapid urbanisation is taking place," Sitharaman said.

Budget for Ministry of Agriculture higher than current fiscal

The Modi Government has ■ allocated Rs 1.27 lakh crore Budget for the Ministry of Agriculture for 2024-25, marginally higher than the current fiscal. According to the Budget document, the Agriculture Ministry has been allocated Rs 1,27,469.88 crore for 2024-25 financial year, of which the Department of Agriculture will get Rs 1,17,528.79 crore while the Department of Agricultural Research and Education (DARE) Rs 9,941.09 crore. As per the revised estimates of the current fiscal, the department of agriculture has been allocated Rs 1,16,788.96 crore while the DARE Rs 9,876.60 crore.

The allocation for flagship PM-KISAN scheme under the department of agriculture remains unchanged for next fiscal at Rs 60,000 crore. Under this scheme, the government provides Rs 6,000 per year to farmers in three equal instalments. According to the budget papers, the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution has been allocated Rs 2.13 lakh crore for

the next fiscal year, lower



than the 2023-24 allocation. Presenting the interim budget, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that every year, under PM-KISAN SAMMAN Yojana, direct financial assistance is provided to 11.8 crore farmers, including marginal and small farmers, while crop insurance is given to 4 crore farmers under PM Fasal Bima As per the document, the

Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying has been earmarked Rs 7,105.74 crore for the next fiscal. Out of this, the department of

fisheries' allocation has been increased to Rs 2,584.50 crore in the next fiscal from Rs 1,701 crore in the current 2023-24 fiscal.

The department of animal husbandry and dairying has been allocated Rs 4,521.24 crore in 2024-25 from Rs 3,913.93 crore in the current fiscal.

Enumerating the benefits of the agriculture schemes implemented by the Modi government in her interim budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday, touted that the PM Kisan SAMPADA (Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters) Yojana has benefited 38 lakh farmers and assisted 2.4 lakh self-help groups (SHGs). The scheme uses modern infrastructure and supply chain management to ease the

transfer of farm goods from

Modi's four major focus areas, namely 'Garib' (Poor), 'Mahilayen' (Women), 'Yuva' (Youth), and 'Annadata' (Farmer), she asserted that their needs, aspirations, and welfare take precedence. She stated that these, besides several other programmes, are assisting 'Annadata' in

producing food for the country and the world and added that the worries about food have been eliminated through free ration for 80 crore peo-Sitharaman mentioned that

Pradhan Mantri Kisan Sampada Yojana has benefitted 38 lakh farmers and generated 10 lakh employment. The Finance Miniser said National Electronic Agriculture Market has integrated 1361 mandis, and is providing services to 1.8 crore farmers with trading volume

of Rs 3 lakh crore. To reduce dependence on imports of edible oils to meet domestic demand, the interim Budget also proposes that a strategy will be made to

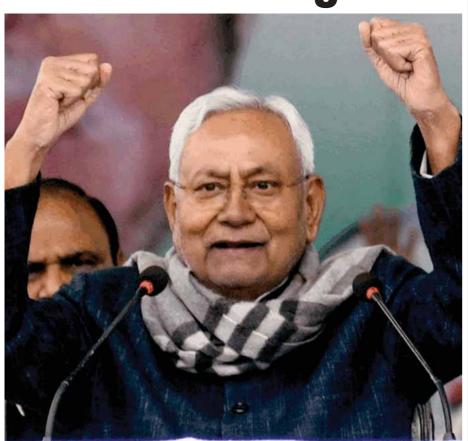
make the country self-reliant by boosting domestic production of oilseeds.

stressed the need to enhance "Building on the initiative announced in 2022, a strateempower them. Aligning with gy will be formulated to achieve 'atmanirbharta' for oilseeds, such as mustard, groundnut, sesame, soybean, and sunflower. This will cover research for high-yielding varieties, widespread adoption of modern farming techniques, market linkages, procurement, value addition, and crop insurance," Sitharaman Industry leaders expressed

optimism and anticipation in response to the budget. Dr. KC Ravi, Chief Sustainability Officer at Syngenta India Pvt Ltd & Chairman, CropLife India, praised the government's focus on infrastructure. Ajai Rana, Chairman of Federation of Seed Industry of India (FSII) and CEO and Managing Director of Savannah Seeds, commended the vision for making India Viksit by 2047. Siba P Mohanty, Managing Director of Hindustan Urvarak & Rasayan Limited (HURL), applauded the adoption of Nano Urea and the announcement by FM on expansion of Nano DAP application across agro climatic zones.



Nitish showers praise on interim Budget



Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on Thursday showered effusive praise on the interim budget presented by the Narendra Modi government at the Centre, the last before the Lok Sabha polls this

The JD(U) president, who returned to the BJP-led NDA less than a week ago, after having fought it tooth and nail for more than a year, described the budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman as one that was "positive" and "deserved to be

PUBLIC NOTICE TO WHOMSOEVER IT MAY CONCERN

This is to inform all concern that my clier Mr. Sagir Khan, S/o Shakil Ahamad Khan R/o. I-1707, Proview Laboni Apartment Crossing Republic, Ghaziabad U.P 201016, having resigned from Samial International Builders Pvt. Ltd. and therefore, he has no liabilities over any previous or future work

Asghar Khan & Associates (Advocates) Ch.-498. Patiala Court. New Delhi-110001 Enrl.-D/521/1986, Mob. 98110045583

Kumar, who had held the Railways portfolio in the government headed by late Atal Bihari Vajpayee, lauded the decision to set up "three new economic corridors", saying these would bring "logistical efficiency" and help accelerate overall economic growth of the

He was also appreciative of measures like a special housing scheme for the middle class, a

This Notice is hereby given to general public tha Mr. Punit Jain who claimed to be owners and it possession of Property as Property No. X251 area measuring 100 sq. yds. i.e. 83 61 sq. grt. Para of Khasra No. 250. Gali No. 5, Raghuba Pura No. 2, Gandhi Nagar, area of Villaga Seelampur, Illaqa Shahdara, Delhi-11003 by virtue of Sale Deed dated 14.10.202; Document No. 10393 now Mr. Punit Jain is selling the said property to Mr. Virender Bhaga and Mr., Virender Bhaga thas approached IDB Bank Limited for financial assistance an therefore shall be mortgaged with the said Bank We give this public notice that if any person having any claim/objection regarding ownershift and/or creating mortgage of the said property oany part of the said property in favour of 101 Bank Ltd is/are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to undersigned with supporting documentary evidence at the address mention below within 7 days from the date of publication of this notice, failing which any claim, if any, o such persons will be consider to have been waived and/or, abandoned and our client sha proceed with the disbursement of loan agains the said property and subsequent creation of Mortgage in respect thereof.

E-56, LGF, Greater Kallash Enclaive Part

THANKS GIVING Thank you holly spirit for

hike in the MGNREGA budget

"from Rs 60,000 crore to Rs

86,000 crore" and tax benefits

CHANGE OF NAME

I, Abhishek Rajput S/o Shri

Anil Kumar R/o A-26 Giri

Marg Mandawali Fazalpur

Delhi-110092 declare that

my father name wrongly

mentioned in my 10th and

12th class certificate &

marksheet as Anil Kumar

Rajput instead of Anil

Kumar. hence Anil Kumar

Rajput and Anil Kumar both

are same and one person.

for startups

PD(257)C

December

PD(255)C

29/06

For Juris NextGen Lav. E-56, LGF, Greater Kallash Enclave Part-1 New Delhi-110048 PUBLIC NOTICE

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Landmark Dullding, 7411 Boll, 2011 Boll, Road, Kolkata 700020 CIN No: L65190GJ1994PLC021012, www.icicibank.com Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Landmark Building, 4th Floor, 228A, AJC Bose The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtaine by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice. Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Date of Notice Sent/ Outsta-nding as on Date of Notice Property Address of Secured Asset

Number) & Address
 2 Plus/ Kunj Bihari Goyal, Jyoti Goel, Karishma Goyal, Savitri Remedies Pvt. Ltd. (Represented By Directors Jyoti Goel & Kunj Bihari Goyal, Guarantor/ Savitri Remedies Pvt. Ltd. (Represented By Directors Jyoti Goel & Kunj Bihari Goyal) Mortgagor/ Represented By Proprietor Karishma Goyal Near Hebe ISPAT Compound Agamkuan Choti Pahari Road,

Property on Land Being Part of Municipal Survey Plot No.284, Sheet No.68 Under Patna City Municipal Survey of 1932-33, Municipal Holding No.131/157 (Old) and 213/157 (New), Circle No.24, Old Ward No.9, New Ward No.41/30 and Zone No.4, Mohalla Gobind Mitra Road, Revenue Mauza Moharrampur, P.S. No.137, Tauzi No.263, P.S. Pirbahore, District Patna, Sub Registration Office & District Registration Agankuan Rasida Chak Patna 800007/ 057905501520/ Office Patna Within The Limits of Patna Municipal Corporation, Patna (Admeasuring

26, 2023 96,63,629/-

057955000013 an Area of 1509.5 Sq Ft The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financia Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002.

Date: February 02, 2024 Place: Delhi

PUBLIC NOTICE

LET IT BE KNOWN TO ONE AND ALL that ou

client have agreed to purchase, occupy and

Authorized Office

Himanta hails Budget as exceptional



PTI GUWAHATI

ssam Chief Minister Assam Cine
Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday hailed the interim "exceptional", asserting it serves the twin aim of establishing India as the world's fastest-growing economy for a sustained period and laying the foundation for becoming the third-largest financial power by 2029.

Sarma also opined that the fiscal information provided by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during her budget speech shows that the people will elect Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the third consecutive term during the forthcoming Lok Sabha polls.

"I congratulate Hon'ble Prime Minister and Hon'ble Minister Finance @nsitharaman ji for this exceptional Budget! The

यह भी सुचित हो कि :-

डिस्टेंसिंग का पालन करना अनिवार्य होगा।

कम 02 मींटर की दुरी रखना अनिवार्य होगा।

निर्देशों का अक्षरशः पालन किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।

Continues! The Interim Budget 2024-2025 sits on the pedestal of outstanding governance over the last 10 years," he said in a post on X. In a nutshell, this interim budget serves the twin aim of firmly establishing India as the world's fastest-growing economy for a sustained period of time and laying a strong foundation for the nation's journey in becoming the third-largest economy by 2029, Sarma said.

"Action speaks louder than words — the developmental data presented in today's

LOST & FOUND

Original Share Certificates of Himadr

known as Himadri Chemicals & Industries Ltd.) 200 Shares in the name

of Pranab Rastogi and Meenaksh

Rastogi Folio No. R004346

Certificates Nos. 0016468 and

0019847, Distinctive Nos. 003529901

003530000 and 003867801

छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल

पर्यावास भवन, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.)

// सर्व संबंधित को सचना //

भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय द्वारा जारी ई.आई.ए

नोटिफिकेशन, 2006 (यथा-संशोधित) के तहत् सर्व संबंधित को सूचित किया

जाता है कि मेसर्स मोहरेंगा ऑर्डिनरी सेण्ड क्वारी (प्रो. श्री बसंत सिन्हा) ग्राम

मोहरेंगा, तहसील- मगरलोड, जिला- धमतरी (छ.ग.) में स्थित पार्ट ऑफ खसरा

क्रमांक - 1332, कुल क्षेत्रफल 15.00 हेक्टेयर मे रेत (गौण खनिज) क्षमता

4,50,000 घनमीटर प्रतिवर्ष के पर्यावरणीय स्वीकृति बाबत् **लोक सुनवाई दिनांक**

04/03/2024 को दिन सोमवार अपरान्ह 02:30 बजे से स्थल- ग्राम पंचायत **भवन मोहरेंगा, तहसील- मगरलोड, जिला- धमतरी (छ.ग.)** में नियत की गई है।

लोक स्नवाई के दौरान सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों को फिजिकल / सोशल

2. लोक सनवाई में सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों द्वारा मास्क का उपयोग किया

3. लोक सनवाई स्थल पर सम्मिलित होने वाले व्यक्तियों की बैठक व्यवस्था कम से

कोरोना वायरस के नियंत्रण एवं रोकथाम हेत शासन द्वारा जारी समस्त दिशा-

ई.आई.ए. नोटिफिकेशन. 14 सितम्बर. 2006 (यथा-संशोधित) के अनसार

संबंधित व्यक्तियों के अवलोकन / पठन हेतु ड्राफ्ट ई.आई.ए. रिपोर्ट, कार्यपालक

सार हिन्दी एवं अंग्रेजी भाषा तथा सी.डी. (सॉफ्ट कॉपी) डायरेक्टर, भारत सरकार,

जावेगा तथा समय-समय पर सेनेटाईजर का उपयोग किया जाना अनिवार्य होगा।

budget reflects the nationwide consensus that people will elect Hon'ble Prime Minster for a record third time," he asserted.
The chief minister also claimed Modi delivered historic accomplishments in the last one decade

the last one decade, transcending the cumulative achievements of the past. Sarma also listed a few salient features of the interim

Sitharaman announced a Rs

11.11 lakh crore spending on

infrastructure and vowed to continue reforms as she resisted resorting to populist measures Modi government's last budget before general elections, instead choosing to stay on the path of cutting deficit while bolstering measures for focus groups. Presenting a vote on account

or an interim budget for 2024-25, she proposed no changes in income tax rates individuals corporates, as well as import duty but offered amnesty for disputed income demands of the period prior to 2014-15 as a relief to small taxpayers.

Name of the Borrower/

Focus on poor, farmers; will help in fulfilling Modi guarantees: Sai

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Thursday hailed the interim Union Budget for 2024-25, focuses on saying it empowerment of the poor, women, youths and farmers, and will help in realising the goal of making India a developed nation by 2047.

He said the interim budget or vote on account, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha, will prove to be a milestone in fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's guarantees given to the people of the country.

Sai, in a statement here, said the budget focuses on empowerment of the poor, women, youth and farmers. Prime Minister Modi has called for making India a developed country by 2047 and this budget will prove to be a milestone in realising this goal, said the BJP leader, who took over as chief minister in December last year.

'People have seen that the central government has paved the way for an all-round development of the country. In the last 10 years, success has been achieved in lifting 25 out of crore people multidimensional Also, 1.40 crore youths have been given training in employment-oriented works," said Sai. Since 2014, when the BJP came to power at the Centre with full parliamentary majority, the economic condition of people has improved vastly, said the CM. "The economic condition of

people has improved as a result of which the average income of Indians has increased by 50 per cent in these years", he said. The budget has proposed special initiatives for tribes and promote inclusive development and provide more and more employment

Date of Notice NPA

opportunities to averred the CM.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, 3rd Floor, Plot No- 23, New Rohtak Road, FICICI Bank Karol Bagh, Delhi- 110005.

The following borrower/s have defaulted in the repayment of principal and interest of the loans facility obtained by them from the Bank and the loans have been classified as Non-Performing Assets (NPA). A notice was issued to them under Section 13 (2) of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcemen of Security Interest Act-2002 on their last known addresses, however it was not served and hence they are hereby notified by way of this public notice.

Property Address

	003867900 have been lost. If any body has information regarding the same may kindly contact at 9667541900		Name of the Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Guarantor/ (Loan Account Number) & Address	Property Address of Secured Asset/ Asset to be Enforced	Date of Notice Sent/ Outsta- nding as on Date of Notice	NPA Date
Criginal share Speciality Ch Known as H Industries Ltd. of Pranab Ra Kumar Rastos 0023102, Disti 0 0 3 7 5 9 6 0 0 004193400 H body has Infosame may	Pranab Rastogi LOST & FOUND Original share certificates of Himadri Speciality Chemicals Ltd. (Formerly Known as Himadri Chemicals & Industries Ltd.) 200 Shares in the name of Pranab Rastogi and Dharmendra	1.	Bharti Fashions, Soni Kumari Patil As Alias As Soni Patil & Soni Kumari (Proprietor), Sandeep Kumar Patil, 335905000298 Represented By The Proprietor Soni Kumari Patil, 1712, Ab Mall Road, Tilak Nagar, New Delhi, New Delhi- 110018	Plot No.1, Shyamganj Thana No. 413 Within Deoghar Nagar Nigam Ward No. 20, Jamabandi No. 7/2930 & 7/2930 (KHA), Jharkhan & Mig Flat No. Bb-37- D, First Floor With Scooter Garage, Block- BB, Situated at Janakpuri, New Delhi- 110058.	08/12/2023 Rs. 51,07,426.00/-	14-07- 2023
	Kumar Rastogi Folio No. R004365, Certificates Nos. 0018764 and 0023102, Distinctive Nos. 003759501- 003759600 and 004193301- 004193400 Have been Lost, if any body has Information Regarding the same may kindly Contact at 9667541900	2.	Aditya Overseas, Prashant Sharma (Proprietor), Yogesh Sharma, Sanjay Sharma, 113805501393, 6024 Gali Arya Samaj Near P N B Bank, Khari Baoli Central Delhi Delhi- 110006	Built Up First Floor & Second Floor, Without Roof/ Terrace Rights, With 25% Each Floor Share Of Stilt Parking Rights, Part Of Free Hold Property Bearing Municipal No. 74/2, Area Measuring 148 Sq. Yrds, Built on Plot No. 124 & 86, Situated at East Moti Bagh, Sarai Rohilla, Delhi-110007	28/12/2023 Rs. 2,03,47,099.00/-	08-08- 2023
₹	Pranab Rastogi		Future U India Ltd, Vishal Kumar Bansal, Sweety Bansal, Feroz Khan, 000705052462, Represented By Directors Vishal Kumar Bansal, Sweety Bansal, Feroz Khan And Vijay Aggarwal O- 96a, Mahabir Nagar West Delhi New Delhi - 110018	Property Bearing Flat No. 501, 5th Floor Measuring Area 1715 Sq Feet, Part of Plot No. Gh-08, Complex Known as ' The Adhunik Cghs Ltd.', Situated at Sector-52, Tehsil Wazirabad and District Gurugram, Haryana	Rs. 1,55,09,334.00/-	08-08- 2023

The steps are being taken for substituted service of notice. The above borrower/s and/or their guarantors (as applicable) are advised to make the payments of outstanding within period of 60 days from the date of publication of this notice else further steps will be taken as per the provisions of Securitisation and Re-construction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002. Date: February 02, 2024

Place: Delhi/ NCR



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

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 he opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on NOIDA Authority's official wcbsite www.noidaauthorityonline.com & http://etender.up.nic.in Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

(A) (1) 39/DGM(JaI)/A.O./Sr.M.(JAL)-I/E.T./2023-24, M/o W/s (S/F) of Line Shaft for UGR & TWs in Sector-8 to 12 & Ranney Well-9 (TWS), Noida. (For Two Year). Cost Rs. 59.94 Lacs

2. 36/DGM(JaI)/A.O./Sr.M.(JAL)-I/E.T./2023-24, M/o W/s (Two Year Maintenance of R/o 40, 100 HP VT Motor, Submersible Motor, Starter & R/o Transformer in Network Sector-8 to 12, 14 to 16, 14A to 16A & R.W.

3. 37/DGM(Jal)/A.O./Sr.M.(JAL)-I/E.T./2023-24, M/o Sewerage (Two year Repairing, Raising, P/F Manhole Cover frame & Cleaning of Sewer Line Manholes in Village-Jhundpura, Nayabans, Sector-8 to 12, 14A to 16A & 14 to 16 Network), Noida. Cost Rs. 69.11 Lacs 4. 38/Sr.M.(JAL)-I/E.T./2023-24, M/o Sewerage (Two year S/o Mustard Oil & Soap in Division-I Store

Sector-5), Noida. Cost Rs. 39.73 Lacs 5. 33/S.M.(JAL)-I/E.T./2023-24, M/o Sewerage (Repairing, painting with other miscellaneous civil work in

SPS Compound, Sector-66), Noida. Cost Rs. 64.68 Lacs 6.34/S.M.(JAL)-I/E.T./2023-24, Strengthening of W/s (Boring & Making New Tubewells for Golf Course

Sector-151A) Noida, Cost Rs. 92.51 Lacs 7. 33/S.M.(JAL)-II/E.T./2023-24, M/o Sewerage (Desilting of Deep Sewer Line by Super Sucker Machine in

Sector-28, 29, 37, 99, 100), Noida. (For Two year Maintenance). Cost Rs. 95.91 Lacs

8. 34/S.M.(JAL)-II/E.T./2023-24, M/o Sewerage (Rewinding of 75 & 50 HP Submersible Non Clog Motor in SPS Sec.-28, 38 & Sumpwell 98 T-Point Sector-100 and other allied work, Noida. (For Two year

Maintenance), Cost Rs, 64.32 Lacs

9. 35/S.M.(JAL)-II/E.T./2023-24, M/o W/s (Running mid Opration for 01 No UGR, Sumpwell & 05 Nos. TWs in Network Sector-99, 100 Noida. (For Two Year). Cost Rs. 75.18 Lacs

10. 27/S.M.(JAL)-III/E.T./2023-24, P/L, Sewer & Water line in Newly allotted 5% Plot in Village-Barola (Balance work), 5% Sector - 51& 5% Sector-42, Noida. Cost Rs, 43.27 Lacs

11. 28/S.M.(JAL)-III/E.T./2023-24, Strengthening of Sewerage (P/L) Sewer & Water Line Connection Manyawor Kushiram Group Housing Seetor-45 to Deep Sewer line in Sector-45), Noida. Cost Rs. 96.96

12. 29/S.M.(JAL)-III/E.T./2023-24, Strengthening of W/s (Repair & Finishing of OHT Sector-96, 43, 44 (94),

45, & 125, 126 & 127, Shahpur) Noida. Cost Rs. 87.59 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date:- 15.02.2024 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date:-16.02.2024 at 11.00 AM.

(B) 1. 25/S.M.(JAL)-I/E.T./2023-24, M/o Sewerage (Repairing & Painting of SPS Compound in Sector-18,

55, 115 & 122), Noida. Cost Rs. 54.50 Lacs 2. 28/S.M.(JAL)-I/E.T./2023-24, M/o Water Supply (Shifting of 11 KV HT Over Head Line and Poles of

UGR/OHT-105 in Sector-105), Noida. Cost Rs. 43.13 Lacs 3. 14/S.M.(JAL)-O.A./2023-24, M/o UGR STP (Annual Cleaning and removal of existing Desilting/Debrisi/Silt rubbishi/Bio Mass/Grit & Sediment Material from covered UGR including cleaning of all wall/floor/ceiling by Super Sucker Machine/Mechanical Cleaning machine/chemical cleaner in STP Compound 34 MLD UGR at Sector-50) Noida. Cost Rs. 31.00 Lacs

4. 24/S.M.(JAL)-III/2023-24, M/o W/S (Rewinding of V.T. Motor, R/o Transformer & Panel at UGR/TWs in Network Sector-126 (125 & Raypur) & Sector-127 (126 & 127) & Miscellaneous Electrical work, Noida. (AMC for Two Year) Cost Rs. 39.53 Lacs

Which can be uploaded by date:- 08.02.2024 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date: - 09.02.2024 at 11.00 AM. Dy. General Manager (Jal)

CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

Dated: 31/01/2024

पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवायु परिवर्तन मंत्रालय, जोर बाग रोड, नई दिल्ली, भारत सरकार, पर्यावरण, वन एवं जलवाय परिवर्तन मंत्रालय. एकीकृत क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय. अरण्य भवन, नार्थ ब्लॉक, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, छत्तीसगढ़, कार्यालय कलेक्टर धमतरी, जिला- धमतरी, मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, जिला पंचायत धमतरी, जिला- धमतरी, महाप्रबंधक, जिला व्यापार एवं उद्योग केन्द्र, जिला- धमतरी, मुख्य कार्यपालन अधिकारी, जनपद पंचायत, मगरलोड, जिला- धमतरी, कॉर्यालय सरपंच, ग्राम पंचायत मोहरेंगा तहसील- मगरलोड, जिला-धमतरी क्षेत्रीय कार्यालय, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, न्य ऑफिस बिल्डिंग, रिंग रोड़ नं.- 2, टाटीबंध, रायपूर, जिला - रायपूर एवं मुख्यालय, छत्तीसगढ़ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल, पर्यावास भवन, सेक्टर-19, नवा रायपुर अटल नगर, रायपुर में रखी गई है। सदस्य सचिव

छत्तीसगढ पर्यावरण संरक्षण मंडल. नवा रायपुर, अटल नगर, जिला- रायपुर (छ.ग.)

Office of the Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department, Pithoragarh



Letter No.: 528 / 208C-03(Yata 'D')/2024

National Competitive E-Tender Notice

The Superintending Engineer 3rd Circle, Public Works Department Pithoragarh invites tender through E-Tendering (Two Bid System) on behalf of "Hon'ble Governor of Uttarakhand" for following works in anticipation of sanction. All other information will be available online from date 03-02-2024 at 5.00 PM onward on website http://www.uktenders.gov.in

SI. No.	Name of Work	Earnest Money (in Lac)	Cost of Tender (₹)	Validity of Tender (day)	of	Contractor's Category of Registration
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Renewal and improvement work by BM and BC in Dhunaghat- Reethasahib, Taladi- Reethasahib and Reethasahib- Minar divisions of State Highway No. 64 of Champawat district Under the Central Road Infrastructure Fund.	36.00	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	15	Category 'A' & higher for Road works, in State Govt./ Govt. of India
2	Renewal and improvement work by BM and BC in Champawat- Khetikhan division of State Highway No. 64 of Champawat district Under the Central Road Infrastructure Fund.	18.00	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	15	Category 'A' & higher for Road works, in State Govt./ Govt. of India
3	Renewal and improvement work by BM and BC in Champawat-Manch-Tamli division of State Highway No. 64 of Champawat district Under the Central Road Infrastructure Fund.	28.00	5000.00 +18% G.S.T.	120	15	Category 'A' & higher for Road works, in State Govt./ Govt. of India

possess the Ground Floor of Property No A-60, NDSE-I, New Delhi-110049 (hereinafter the "Said Property") from Mr. Puneet Sharma S/o Sh. Anil Sharma C/o A 60, Ground Floor, NDSE-I, New Delhi-110049. (hereinafter called the "Seller" being the current owner and occupier of the Said Property, who have agreed to sell the same to our client against earnest money so received. That the said seller have further declared that he is the only owner of the said property by virtue of Will/inheritance.

Accordingly Notice is hereby given to all persons or entities claiming any interest, title ownership etc in the Said Property by way of any sale, inheritance, exchange, gift etc, are hereby required to make the same known in writing, to the undersigned within 15 days from the date of publication hereof, failing which, it will be presumed that no such interest, claim and /or demand exist and all the Claims shall be deemed as waived against the Said Property, and it will be deemed that the Said Property is free and clear from all claims charge and encumbrances and further, my client and the Seller shall proceed with the transaction proposed. Gaurav Gambhir & Mitali Sett

(Advocates) Gambhir & Jurists F-50, South Market East Kidwai Nagar, N.D # 9013351003

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PAPER WITH PASSION-

No entry

Entry restrictions on non-Hindus in Tamil Nadu temples raise questions about religion, rights

emple entry restrictions have often sparked debates, particularly in Tamil Nadu, where the Madras High Court has now barred non-Hindus from entering the sanctum areas. The court has directed Tamil Nadu's Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments (HR&CE) Department to install signboards, proclaiming "non-Hindus are not allowed inside the temple beyond the *kodimaram* (flagpole)", in all Hindu temples in the State. Temples are not tourist/picnic spots and Hindus have a fundamental right to practice their religion, the judgment stressed. The decision has raised concerns regarding its constitutional validity and potential social repercussions. The practice of restricting entry into certain sections of temples based on religious beliefs has a long history in India. Traditionally, temples have been considered sacred spaces where rituals are performed according to the tenets of Hindu religion. However, over the years, societal norms have evolved and discussions around inclusivity and equal rights have gained



prominence. The Constitution guarantees fundamental rights to all citizens, including the right to freedom of religion and the right to equality. The key question here is whether temple entry restrictions infringe upon the right to equality. Courts have often emphasised that the right to manage religious affairs is not absolute and must be exercised in conformity with other fundamental rights. The imposition of entry restrictions has significant social implications: It can perpetuate social divisions and reinforce notions of exclusivity, potentially increasing communal tension.

Moreover, such restrictions may adversely affect the tourism industry since India attracts a large number

of international and domestic tourists interested in exploring its rich religious and cultural heritage. Exclusionary practices could deter potential visitors and harm the nation's overall image. India has always had very diverse views on everything under the sun, and it is not easy to reconcile all viewpoints. We have seen how ugly the spat can be, as was the case with the Sabarimala controversy. It is always good that the courts are kept out of such issues. Many ASI monuments are places of worship as well and, if this logic were applied to all, it would prohibit all foreigners from entering those. Balancing the right of religious denominations to manage their affairs with the constitutional guarantees of equality and freedom of religion requires a nuanced approach. The courts play a crucial role in interpreting these constitutional provisions and ensuring that these are harmonised to promote inclusivity without unduly interfering with religious practices. Even this judgment is likely to be challenged in the Supreme Court. Dialogue and engagement among various stakeholders — including religious authorities, legal experts and civil society — are essential to finding a middle ground that respects both the religious sentiments and constitutional principles. This could involve revisiting and reforming traditional practices to align them with modern societal values.



A folk artiste performs during the Jaipur Literature Festival, in Jaipur

The universal appeal of Hinduism

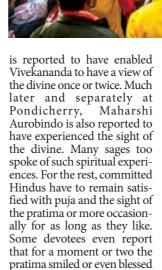


Lord Ram is not exclusive to Hindus, He is for everyone; anyone with a soft spot for life, fair play and kindness could be drawn to His life lessons

Ayodhya on January 22, several speakers, especially the Prime Minister, emphasised that Lord Ram is not exclusively for Hindus, but for everyone. He is worshipped in many countries, including Islamic ones like Indonesia and Malaysia. Anyone who has a soft spot for living life, fair play and kindness to all, friend or foe will be drawn by Lord Rama. People outside India enduring wars and suffering may get attracted to Hinduism. There is much that the faith offers to humans in search of spirituality. The source of the Abrahamic religions is Prophet Abraham who lived and preached about 4,000 years ago. He began life in Mesopotamia (Iraq), and all probability, had to shift to Canaan (today's Israel). With the experience gained over 700 years, Prophet Moses delivered his Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. The Third Commandment says, 'Thou shalt not take the name of thy Lord in vain". There shall also not be any reproduction, imaginary or otherwise, of a picture or profile of God: nor can any worshipper hope to meet God or even have a glimpse.

The Jews have obeyed Moses faithfully; Christians, more or less, while the Muslims have followed him strictly and scrupulously. When the Christians (and later Muslims) came to India, they reacted as preached by St. Thomas. The Muslims justified the demolition of Hindu temples by citing idolatry as the main reason. As a result of this conviction, Abrahamic religions have denied themselves the opportunity to experience any spirituality, which is largely associated with either meeting divinity or having a glimpse of a profile of God.

On the other hand, Hindu tradition has encouraged the worshipper to come as near as possible to When Swami Vivekananda met Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he iskea the latter whether he could enable him to get a view of the divine. When Paramahansa replied yes, possibly, Vivekananda became his disciple. Ramakrishna main temple for darshan.



When I was five years old in 1942, I travelled with my parents to Palitana (Gujarat). We stayed with the family of a medical doctor, Pandya, for four days. Mrs. Pandya did puja every evening at sunset. On the third evening, a few minutes into the puja the lady began levitating up to three feet and then again doing the same thing for about ten minutes. I have not forgotten those scenes in my life. I was explained this phenomenon by my father years later, as an inci dent of spirituality. During the same trip, we stopped at Dwaraka and went to the

the worshipper.



ON THE OTHER HAND, HINDU TRADITION HAS **ENCOURAGED THE WORSHIPPER TO** COME AS CLOSE AS POSSIBLE TO DIVINITY

There my mother exhorted me to fold my hands and turn my head. Instantly, I told my mother that Krishna was smiling at me. Growing up, I dismissed this as my imagination. Over and about this, there is colour, music dancing and gay abandon, not to forget jewellery. If that is not enough, there are also flowers as well as prasad, mostly sweets and delicacies. Other faiths have not encouraged gaieties, much less liberties. Even our puja can be fun-filled and not as sombre as a Western prayer. There are colours of Holi festivities, yellows at Basant Panchami and multi-coloured kites flying in the sky, the lights at Diwali and also multi-coloured rangolis. The distinguishing feature is the application of deductive logic which says there is only one God, which is mine; there is none other. The common folk may readily accept what the cleric says and the Holy Book prescribes. But with the progress of education and enlightenment, a person is

In contrast, Hinduism has no authoritative holy book that holds the supreme steering wheel for its followers. The faith implicitly expects every follower to choose his dharma or mission in life; if one cannot choose or decide, one's caste is the guide. Thereafter, the person's karma moulds his fate, which is a scientific principle. For every action in nature, there is an opposite

Each believer is free to choose a version of the divine he prefers. There are believers, worshippers and agnostics. The seeker is free to opt for spirituality to attain the divine. This is the reason the West, whether Europe or America, is welcoming temples, the most recent one being an imposing one in New Jersey in the US, the next one being in Abu Dhabi in the UAE. A temple is the residence of God because it is a place for attaining spirituality, while Abrahamic places of worship are only prayer halls and can be shifted or sold.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

The role of reviews and ratings in healthcare



Their responsible and effective use has the potential to revolutionise healthcare positively and ensure maximum benefits for the patients

the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the healthcare landscape globally, exposing the vulnerabilities in the healthcare system and emphasizing the need for digital transformation. In the post-pandemic era, healthcare providers grapple with the challenge of meeting increasing demand while upholding the highest standards of care. In this context, reviews and ratings (R&R) have emerged as crucial tools, providing trans-parency, accountability, and patient-centric care, essential for making informed healthcare decisions.

In the contemporary world, access to online information about healthcare providers is integral. Without such resources, patients would navigate a complex healthcare system with minimal knowledge about a doctor's credentials and patient feedback. They will have to rely solely on recommendations from friends and relatives. This scenario underscores the importance of R&R in facilitating informed decision-

The significance of reviews

to offer transparency into the

quality of healthcare services. Found on various platforms, including healthcare provider websites and social media, these tools allow patients to share experiences and rate services, clinics, and providers. They provide transparency into the quality of care, empowering patients to make informed decisions about where to seek care.

Healthcare providers are increasingly aware that their performance is under public scrutiny and recognise the impact of reviews and ratings. Positive feedback reflects excellent care, while negative reviews prompt improvements. This makes them more accountable and fosters an environment where providers continuously enhance the patient experience and quality of care.

Globally, many developed nations utilise online reviews and ratings lies in their power and ratings to guide health-

care choices. Systems in the US, UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia provide patients with essential information to build con-

fidence in their healthcare providers. Access to online information enables patients to choose healthcare providers based on their unique needs and knowledge, reducing the risk of subpar care. This empowerment of patients enhances decision-making, contributing to better healthcare outcomes. Moreover, the surge in telehealth adoption post-pandemic has seen reviews and ratings play a crucial role in building trust in virtual healthcare services. However, challenges exist, such as fake reviews and biased ratings can mislead patients and tarnish a provider's reputation. At the same time, patients can make their decision solely based on reviews without considering their specific requirement. This makes education on interpreting reviews crucial for patients. Also, it underscores the significance of integrating robust verification

processes for review givers to

ensure the authenticity of the

To gauge the significance of online ratings and reviews in the selection of healthcare providers - I ran a 24-hour poll on Twitter (now X) and asked the following question: Are online ratings and reviews important from other patients while choosing a doctor? In the over 1000 voluntary responses, the overwhelming majority of respondents said, "Yes". This result was statistically significant (p=0.001) indicating that online ratings and reviews are important when choosing a doctor. India, in particular, can lead by establishing a robust R&R platform to promote fair healthcare. The vision of integrating technology as a catalyst for transformative change aligns with the evolving healthcare landscape. All stakeholders must collaborate to ensure the accuracy, dependability, and accessibility of online healthcare information, benefiting

patients universally. (The writer is serving as the National Zonal Coordinator for IMA-MSN and making a significant impact as a health activist, views are personal)

COMPLEXITIES OF THE BUDGET

Sir — The approach of India's Union Budget 2024 has heightened interest across the nation. Each year, this pivotal fiscal announcement captures the attention of stakeholders ranging from large corporations to everyday citizens, all keen to understand how the new policies will affect their financial strategies for the upcoming year. In 2024, the backdrop of global economic challenges, such as persistent inflation and central banks' tightening of monetary policies, has prompted retail investors in India to seek actionable insights. They are eager to identify strategies to fortify their portfolios in response to the forthcoming budgetary provisions. Social media and news outlets are abuzz with speculation and expert predictions regarding the content of Union Budget 2024. Amidst this fervour, individuals are sifting through the noise, searching for well-informed guidance tailored to their unique investment queries. With the Union Budget 2024 on the horizon, now is the opportune moment for finance professionals to engage with this audience, offering clarity and confidence as they navigate the complexities of the financial year ahead.

CK Subramaniam | Chennai

THE OPPOSITION BLOC IN A DISARRAY Sir — This refers to the editorial, 'Win Some, Lose Some' (January 31) wherein the bitter truth was elaborated that as a prime mover of the INDIA bloc, Nitish's departure puts a cloud over the coalition's future. Nitish Kumar as convener of the INDIA bloc failed to capture leadership traits. His ideology to unite opposition parties against NDA could not gain momentum thereby thus giving a major setback to INDIA Bloc. Moreover, the increasing differences between JD(U) and RJD leaders multiplied miseries for Tejashwi Yadav. Nitish Kumar's strategy to join hands with NDA may not have long-lasting results, but this has adversely affected Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo

Farmers' concerns

most likely to question the

ven premise not backed up

by evidence. After all, no

Prophet had a universal survey

conducted before pronouncing



hen our hardworking farmers were continuously protesting on the streets in 2020 and 2021 demanding anti-farmer laws of the Central Government and an increase in the minimum support price, at that time it seemed that injustice was being done only to the farmers of India. But these days, when I see the farmers of France, Belgium and Germany, which are known to be advanced countries of the world, blocking the roads and

national highways with their tractors, then it seems that the plight of the food providers is the same all over the earth. A little more and somewhere a little less. Farmers

in France, the EU's biggest agricultural producer, say they are not being paid enough and are frustrated by excessive regulation on environmental protection. These French farmers appear to be right to say that efforts by the government and retailers to reduce food inflation have left many producers unable to cover the high costs of energy, fertilizer and transportation. Meanwhile, Belgium farmers stopped about five trucks loaded with Spanish vegetables and dumped the produce near the distribution centre near Brussels. Germany has also faced tensions, with protests breaking out after the government decided to phase out tax breaks on agricultural diesel. Yes, the plight of the farmers of these developed countries has not become so severe that they have to commit suicide like the

farmers of India Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

created clouds of uncertainty in anti-BJP campaigning programmes. Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

Kumar's farewell from the INDIA bloc has

PAK SHOULD REPAY INDIA'S DEBT Sir — The rescue of 19 Pakistanis from the clutches of the Somalian pirates by the Indian Navy has created a sense of camaraderie towards India among the Pakistanis. The incident has sent a veiled message of friendship to Pakistan. Will this act of humanity on the part of India go a long way in easing the strained relationship between the two countries? Superficially, yes; but on serious thinking, a big no. Let us face it. When a Pakistani baby is born, the Maulavi recites azan in one ear and in the other ear he says, "India is our enemy". When the child is brought up on this kind of staple food, needless to say, in the early years of his youth he Nyay Yatra wandering in Bihar. Nitish becomes a hardcore terrorist. Towards

this, numerous stories are concocted to malign the neighbour throughout his academic years. Then what he does to India is much too well known.

However, the rescue operation has provided a rare opportunity for Pakistan to bury the hatchet and turn into a brotherly neighbourhood. The good gesture on the part of India should stir Pak's conscience and it should let bygones be bygones. It should repay India's rescue debt by putting an end to the proxy war with India it has waged in J&K for a long. It is high time it discarded its India-specific policies and took the road to development and prosperity by holding the big brother's finger. This way it can also eliminate the begging bowl it has been hold-

Arvind Tapkire | Mumbai

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FIRST COLUMN

WATERS TURN CHOPPY FOR SEA SUPREMACY

The West Asia crisis has spilled into the Red Sea, which is vital for Indian trade



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The oceans surrounding most regional powers are turning out to be new hotspots of clashes among individual nations over their sovereign spaces and deep dives into the choppy waters of global supremacy. The crisis brewing in West Asia with Israel and many of the Western forces, determined to provide Hamas terrorists a just response, has spilled out into the Rea Sea and near to maritime zones of India. The Red Sea serves as a crucial maritime route for global commerce and energy. Some rebel groups, with robust support from Iran, are targeting any ship or consignment headed towards Israel or any country sympathetic to it, forcing long circuitous routes for shipments, to avoid harm to life or goods on board. India which relies on the Red Sea route for nearly 50% of its exports and 30% of imports has taken up the matter with almost every stakeholder in West Asia, including with Iran. Interestingly Indian navy, this week also managed to sanitise an Iranian ship, hijacked by Somalian pirates off India's west coast.

French President Emmanuel Macron was on a high-level visit to India where Prime Minster Modi raised the Red Sea crisis. The joint statement read "They also expressed grave concern at the possibility of further expansion of the conflict in the region, including in the Red Sea, which already has a significant economic impact in the world."

All of this was occurring in the backdrop of China, pushing more spy vessels in the Maldivian oceanic territory. The new Maldivian government has retraced from previous regimes 's 'India First', foreign policy approach to 'India out' stance. It has instead, decided to bring China



as its strategic ally. China has been for the past many years snooping on Indian critical security assets near the oceans by sending what it calls 'research' boats. These boats besides spying on India's critical security establishments, also scout for sea bed minerals. It has been regularly sending these research vessels to Sri Lankan and Thailand territories and now it has nearly secured a free run in Maldives.

The Indo-Pacific theatre which got a huge bipartisan sponsor In Washington till May 2023, in the form of several QUAD leaders and senior ministers' summit, seems to have lost some steam. The QUAD is an alliance of the US, Australia, Japan and India for keeping the Indo-Pacific region rules bound, as China tries to steam in through the waters. Elections in the US and India, the failure of the IPEF's(Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, also formed on the sidelines of the QUAD leaders' summit), failure to come up with a concrete economically beneficial partnership among the partnering countries seem to have blown a hole through the QUAD. It is highly unlikely that there will be a high-level leaders summit of the QUAD till the election cycle is over for the US and India. US election outcomes would impact the future of QUAD and its strategic focus on cooperation among the participating countries.

Meanwhile, in a run-up to the interim budget which also was presented this week, the Chief Economic Advisor of India released a report on a review of the Indian economy. This document has huge references to geo-political headwinds and their impact on India's growth story. One clear trend that the new government of India has to watch out as mentioned in the report is "The era of hyper-globalisation in global manufacturing is over, However, that will not deter governments from pursuing onshoring and friend-shoring of production with a consequent impact on transportation, logistics costs, and, hence, the final prices of products. Recent events in the Red Sea may have brought back concerns over reliance on global supply chains. In other words, exporting one's way to growth will not be easy. This reinforces the need to lower logistics costs". Geopolitics in 2024 and beyond would be more local than global.

(The writer is a policy analyst. The views expressed are personal)

An enigma called Pakistani politics



It is difficult to fathom the civil-military relations in Pakistan and the obstacles encountered by politicians. The recent incarceration of Imran is a case in point

s one of South Asia's two nuclear powers, Pakistan gears up for parliamentary elections this coming Thursday. Key contenders, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN), and Pakistan People's Party, have unveiled their manifestos. Notably, a common theme emerges amid the manifestos – a commitment to long-term peace between India and Pakistan. Bhutto, in his policy paper, emphasizes the necessity of normalised relationship to the commitment of the tions with India for regional peace. Sharif's PML-N manifesto echoes this commitment but conditions it on a reversal of New Delhi's actions in Kashmir. Bhutto's manifesto uniquely prioritizes reforming the security state and overseeing intelligence agencies, while Sharif's PML-N seems to downplay these structural challenges, raising questions about strategic omissions in pursuit of electoral victory. Understanding these aspects becomes crucial in unravelling Pakistan's administrative complexities and persistent challenges.

Reflecting on Pakistan's history since its inception in 1947, the nation has grappled with the intricate balance between civilian governance and military influence, a challenge identified by Huntington that underscores the potential breakdown in civil-military relations, threatening democratic stability. Pakistan has been a nation in turmoil, serving as both a buffer state and a manipulated territory under Western influence. It has unfortunately become a breeding ground for individuals, initially termed as liberators, but associated with terrorism. Consequently, Pakistan is often referred to as Asia's conflict corridor in modern history. Pakistan's reality often diverges from the envisioned norm of civilian dominance in a democratic state, echoing Huntington's observation of weak and 'praetorian' civil institutions. This institutional deficiency creates a praetorian state, where social structures become politicized. Addressing these structural issues becomes imperative for Pakistan to navigate its democratic path effectively. The recent ten-year jail sentence handed to former Prime Minister Imran Khan, accused of disclosing state secrets to the public, exemplifies the unfortunate consequences of Pakistan's civil-military bureaucratic complex. This reflects a distressing and lethal historical pattern deeply rooted in Pakistani politics.

Imran Khan's incarceration, however, is not an isolated incident; numerous prominent Pakistani political figures have faced arrest and imprisonment throughout the nation's history. The fifth Prime Minister, Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy, was detained in January 1962 on fabricated charges of "antistate activities" for refusing to support military ruler General Ayub Khan. The ninth Prime Minister, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, faced arrest in 1974 on charges of plotting to assassinate a political opponent, ultimately leading to his execution on April 4, 1979. Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first woman prime minister, endured multiple arrests, including in 1985, facing house arrest, detention for denouncing military dictator Zia-ul Haq in 1986, and sentencing for corruption in 1999. Another former prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, experienced arrest after General Pervez Musharraf assumed power in 1999 and was later exiled for a decade. In 2018, he was sentenced to 10 years in prison for corruption and, in December, to seven years in prison. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, another former prime minister, was arrested in July 2019 in connec-



KHAN'S FOREIGN POLICY VISION **EMPHASISES** SOVEREIGNTY

COMPREHENSIVE **REVIEWS WITH NEIGHBOURING** COUNTRIES, **PARTICULARLY** INDIA, URGING DISPUTE

RESOLUTION **THROUGH POLITICAL** DIALOGUE AND THE RESTRAINT OF INTELLIGENCE

ACTIVITIES

tion with an LNG corruption case but was later released on bail. Imran garnered recognition for vociferously condemning U.S. inter-

ference in internal affairs, stressing the unsustainability of military policies and financial improprieties within the ruling elite. The WikiLeaks revelations underscored his belief that internal unrest within the military could lead the country into chaos. In his book, "Pakistan - A Personal History," Khan high-lighted the ruling elite's two-faced allegiance to the U.S. Embassy, expressing discontent with Pakistan's perceived dependence as

a "beggar and borrower." This narrative unveils the intricate dynamics shaping Pakistan's rela-tions with external powers, significantly influencing its political tra-jectory. Khan's foreign policy vision emphasises sovereignty and comprehensive reviews with neighbouring countries, particularly India, urging dispute resolution through political dialogue and the restraint of intelligence activities. He asserts that only a government with credibility and sovereignty can effectively prevent terrorism from originating on Pakistani soil in the future, critiquing Muslim leaders who compromise with the U.S. and pointing out a lack of courage or genuine understanding

in the West regarding this intricate

relationship.
Interestingly, according to recently declassified CIA assessments in the mid-80s, Pakistani military officials hold ambivalent views on Islamabad's close ties with Washington. While they appreciate the contribution of U.S. defence assistance to Pakistan's strengthening, many officials, especially at junior and mid-levels, identify more with the Islamic world. This stems from the perception that U.S. Middle East policy is anti-Islamic, and past U.S. arms embargoes have bred distrust among younger offi-cers. The trial and conviction of Imran Khan are pivotal in understanding Pakistan's complex and tutional dissolution of the govern-

prioritizes serving foreign forces over its national interests, it reflects a profound crisis in national identity. That is why, to understand the root causes of Pakistan's civil-military bureaucratic complex, it is crucial to delve briefly into the early challenges faced by the nation. Imagining a scenario where a nation established by a man known as 'the best-dressed man' becomes a metaphorical naked nation raises profound questions about Pakistan's history and its formation. Jinnah's ourney, from his Hindu roots to becoming a central figure in the creation of Pakistan, raises doubts about whether the birth of Pakistan was a mere coincidence or the result of a grand convention.

Jinnah's identity was significantly shaped by his father, Jinabhai Panjai Thakkar, a Gujarati Hindu who converted to Islam. At a 1940 Muslim League meeting in Lahore, Jinnah highlighted the challenge of Hindus understanding Islam and Hinduism, emphasising the difficulty of achieving a common nation. The conflicting beliefs and duality among Pakistan's founders led to the creation of a confused nation. Postindependence, Jinnan considered shifting to Bombay for a peaceful end, but Pakistani authorities thwarted the plan, fearing it would undermine the nation's foundation. His daughter, Dina, chose to stay in Bombay, marrying into the well-known Parsi Wadia family. Intriguingly, Jinnah's ancestral village, Moti Paneli, in Gujarat's Saurashtra, lies 80 km from Porbandar, Mahatma Gandhi's birthplace, making Saurashtra the only region to birth both Jinnah and Gandhi as fathers of their nations. In the immediate post-independence era, Pakistan faced challenges like the divisive division between eastern and western sectors, communal riots, and a leadership crisis. The weakened Muslim League saw a rise in military and civil bureaucratic power, marked by internal divisions and the unconstiharsh political reality. When a state ment between 1953 and 1958. The

officially sponsored Pakistani Republican Party and prolonged Constitution drafting added to political fragility, leading to the ironic abrogation of the Constitution in 1958. General Iskandar Mirza's martial law paved the way for Ayub Khan's tenure, followed by General Yahya Khan in 1969. This phase witnessed political fluctuations, clashes with the civil service and military largely governing. The recurrent military involvement in civilian rule, from Ayub to Musharraf, reflects a unique dynamic, where military control is downplayed during civilian rule, acknowledging the prime minister's supremacy. The post-independence army, predominantly Muslim, showed ethnic disparities, and its increasing role in civil administration highlights the intricate interplay shaping Pakistan's

political trajectory.
In the context of Pakistan's upcoming elections, the likelihood of a significant change in the current system remains uncertain. The new government may face immediate challenges and internal turmoil, while external influences on political and security matters are expected to complicate the situation. The prevailing reality underscores a deceptive use of democracy by politicians known for empty promises. Pakistan grapples with critical issues, including 23 million out-of-school children aged five to sixteen, ranking second globally. The intensity of deprivation is 51.7 per cent, indicating the average deprivation score among those in multidimensional poverty. With a 6.3% unemployment rate, rebuilding the deteriorated state for the new government seems daunting. If the root causes of its dilapidation are addressed, it could be a turning point, fostering hope for India and Pakistan to come to the table for lasting peace and stability in South (The writer is a Sri Lankan

journalist and worked as a communications consultant for the Government of Sri Lanka. Views are personal)

Secessionist voices in south India are getting louder

The secessionist demands in Tamil Nadu and Kerala must not be taken lightly; if left unchecked, such undertones will only grow

⊣he Center and the Constitutional authori-L ties in the country should take serious note of the secessionist demands brewing up in Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Though the DMK has been demanding more autonomy for Tamil Nadu since the days of CN Annadurai, the former chief minister and founder of the party, the AIADMK, its political offshoot always maintained a subdued silence on this stance. The AIADMK, launched by Ramachandran (popularly known as MGR), always preferred cordial ties with the Center. It is an open secret that MGR had told his confidants and political heir J Jayalalithaa not to have any kind of tension with New Delhi. The tenures of MGR, Jayalalithaa and even



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Edappadi Palaniswamy stand out because of their ties with the Centre. The same cannot be said about the DMK and the fringe outfits operating as constituents of the Rainbow Alliance led by the former. The cat came out of the bag in March 2018 when M K Stalin, the present chief minister who was the then leader of Opposition called for a separate Dravidian nation that

States. "If such a situation comes, it would be welcome. We hope that such a situation arises," Stalin was heard telling in a press meeting at Erode. K Thirunavukkarassu, the DMK's official intellectual, endorsed Stalin's view and explained that all five South Indian States and the union territory of Pudussery should jointly raise this demand. "The need to have a separate Dravidian nation is specified in the Constitution of the DMK and it is still valid," said the party intellectual. Though the DMK had openly advocated for the formation of a separate Dravida Nadu, when Annadurai in a speech in Rajya Sabha on 1 May 1962 called for the independence of Dravida Nadu from the Indian included all South Indian union. But he had to fall in line courts even after nearly eight

after the Parliament passed the 16th Amendment of the Constitution to prohibit the fissiparous and secessionist tendency among certain political outfits. The passage of the amendment made it impossible for parties calling for secessionism to fight elections and the DMK was forced to relegate the call for Dravida Nadu to the backburner. The recent tendencies of the

DMK-led Tamil Nadu Government show that the ruling party is strengthening and fortifying its demand for secession from the Indian Union. The refusal of the chief minister to dismiss his cabinet colleague Senthil Balaji who has been arrested by the ED on charges of money laundering and was denied bail by the

months of his arrest, the refusal of permission to the DMK Government to allow Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas in the State and the State's intransigent attitude against NEET (the common admission test to select students to undergraduate and graduate medical schools in the State) are just tip of the iceberg. Like a contagious disease, the

demand for a separate country has spread out to the CPI(M) ruled Kerala too. Though the CPI(M) had ruled the State six times in the past, there were no such demands during that tenure. But Kerala after the 2016 assembly election was not the same State. If one goes through the demands made by the ministers and leaders of the CPI(M), the call for secession from the Indian

Union is discernible.

The ongoing slugfest between the State and the Centre over the latter's refusal to grant permission for limitless borrowing from other agencies, the suit filed by the State in the Supreme Court asking the apex court to issue a directive to the Governor to kowtow to its orders are signals in this regard. Both the CPI(M) and the DMK want the Governors in their States to be subservient to the chief ministers of the respective States. "The sheep does not have a beard. Hence what is the need for a State to have a Governor?", R s Bharati, an acolyte of Stalin was heard asking in a public meeting. Bharati's is the only printable comment made by a DMK leader against the

The situation is no different in Kerala where the CPI(M) has fielded its student wing leaders and former ministers to take on the Governor. Waving black flags at the Governor, shouting obscene slogans against him, and putting banners across the thoroughfares through which the Governor travels have become part of the daily routine in Kerala. The CPI(M) is annoyed with the Governor for delaying the party diktat to appoint persons of their choice as vice-chancellors and faculty members in the universities.

The move to appoint a former chief justice of Kerala High Court as chairman of the State Human Rights Commission instead of favours received from the

former too was spiked by the Governor and this led the chief minister to deploy MM Mani MLA and former minister to tackle Arif Md Khan. Mani has not let his master down and unleashed a string of expletives.

No State other than Tamil Nadu has called for the cancellation of NEET and this is being seen as a ploy to help the management of private medical colleges (most of them owned by DMK leaders or their relations) to sell seats at exorbitant rates. The CPI(M) staging the seminar "Cutting South" in March 2023 was further proof of the party's intention to launch a separate Kerala Republic.

(The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

Report: Pakistan police raid central secretariat of Imran Khan's party

In a crackdown against Pakistan's former prime minister Imran Khan's party, police and security officials in plainclothes reportedly raided and took control of its central secretariat here and stopped members from entering the premises, a media report said on Thursday. Quoting unnamed party sources, Dawn News reported that the raid happened a day after Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi were sentenced to 14 years of rigorous imprisonment each in a corrup-

It came just before a general body meeting of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party on Wednesday in Islamabad's Sector G-8. The PTI general body, however, managed to hold a virtual meeting in which it decided to hold organisational elections within a fortnight.

Khan's party faced numerous troubles before the Feb 8 general elections starting with the denial of its election symbol, the cricket bat, to the rejection of nomination papers of Khan, former foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and several other party leaders.

An official of the capital police denied the allegation, pointing out that a raid could not be conducted without having permission from a magistrate and no such order was issued on Wednesday.

He claimed on condition of anonymity they went there to provide security.

"[As] a judgement against Imran Khan and Bushra Bibi was announced, there was a possibility that a protest would be held there. Police did not enter the secretariat and remained outside," the unnamed official said A PTI representative, requesting anonymity, said the general body meeting was planned to be held in Islamabad, all provincial capitals and Gilgit Baltistan for which an arrangement was made to connect all stations thro-ugh the internet. "However, in Islamabad, pol-ice along with people in civil dress reac-hed the central secretariat, removed gu-a-rds and took control of the secretariat. Staff was told to go out and a few of them, who wished to stay there, were restricted to their offices.

US wants to see 'free, fair polls' in Pakistan

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A week before general elections in Pakistan, the US has said it wants to see "free and fair elections" in the country and that it strongly condemns any violence that undermines the electoral process.Matthew Miller, spokesperson of the US State Department was asked a question about pre-poll violence and the Pakistan government not allowing former prime minister Imran Khan's supporters from his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) party to hold peaceful election rallies and instead arresting them. "It looks like no more free-

dom of speech just for one party. No further —," the questioner said just this when Miller cut in, refusing to comment on this specific question because he hadn't seen it and said, "But I will say, as we have long said, we want to see free and fair elections take place in Pakistan." Incarcerated Imran Khan

and his party colleagues have been facing numerous hurdles in Pakistan ahead of the general elections on February 8. His party's election symbol, the iconic cricket bat has been snatched away; Khan himself and his senior colleague Shah Mahmood Qureshi have been sentenced to imprisonment in multiple cases and their nomination papers rejected too.

On Wednesday, Khan's wife Bushra Bibi was also sentenced in a corruption case along with the former prime minister. Referring to a bomb blast in Pakistan at one of the PTI election rallies, the questioner sought Miller's comments on that, when the US official referred to the department's comment on the issue earlier in the day when the assistant secretary issued a tweet on it. "We, as we did in that comment earlier today, extend our deepest sympathies to those affected by the attack on the PTI party rally in Pakistan," Miller

The post on X that Miller referred to was by the US State Department's Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA), which said: "The US strongly condemns the attack on PTI party rally in Sibi killing 10 people, which undermines the electoral process. Pakistani people have the right to choose their leader without fear for the country's stability and prosperity. Our deepest sympathies to those affected." Miller further said, 'We believe in the resilience of the Pakistani people and their ability to recover. This attack is one of many we have seen in the last month against multiple parties across Pakistan. The election

PAK GENERAL ELECTIONS ON FEBRUARY 8

commission itself has come

under attack in several places."

Despite increasing poll-related violence, Pakistan's acting interior minister Gohar Ejaz on Thursday dispelled all doubts about holding the general elections on the already announced date of February 8.

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) had summoned a meeting on Thursday to discuss the worsening law and order situation in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

It was attended by the Interior Minister, Secretary of Interior, Chief Secretaries, Inspector Generals of Police from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, along with representatives from intelligence agencies.

Ejaz, the acting interior minister, while briefly talking to the media after the security meeting, said that after the recent spate of terrorist attacks in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan, "There should not be any doubt about elections. No matter what happens."

"The government will ensure that the elections are held on February 8," he said in response to a question regarding rumours about a possible delay in the elections in some regions due to security reasons. With just a week left for the elections, the country is facing a rising threat of attacks by militant outfits, especially in the two provinces bordering Afghanistan.

Russia's Putin

vows to make

military gains

in Ukraine

Pak airlifts bodies of 9 killed in Iran

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan has airlifted the bodies of nine of its nationals from Punjab province who were killed in a brutal attack in Iran last week, days after the tensions erupted between the two nations following a tit-for-tat cross-border fire, according to a media report on Thursday.

The nine Pakistani workers were gunned down and three others were injured on January 27 by unidentified attackers who opened indis criminate fire on them in Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province near the border with Pakistan.

"The mortal remains of nine Pakistani nationals, who were killed in a terrorist attack in Sistan Baluchistan province of Iran on January 27, 2024, have been airlifted. All the bodies were brought to Quetta from Iran yesterday but yet to be flown to Multan but would be done soon," a senior official was quoted as saying by Dawn News. According to officials, there was confusion among the relatives of the deceased at the Multan airport as the flight carrying the bodies did not arrive at its scheduled time since it could not take off from Quetta due to poor weather condi-

Last week, soon after the gruesome killing, Pakistan condemned the incident while demanding the Iranian government to take action against the perpetrators. The victims belonged to the Punjab province of Pakistan and had been living in Iran as workers

Tensions escalated between Islamabad and Tehran after Pakistan on January 18 conducted "precision military strikes" against what it called "terrorist hideouts" in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province that killed 9 people. The attack was seen as retaliation to Iranian missile and drone attacks on two bases of the Sunni Baloch militant group Jaish al-Adl in Pakistan's unruly Balochistan province.

TTP backed by Al Qaeda, Afghan Taliban: UN PTI ■ ISLAMABAD repeatedly expressed its frustration over the Afghan

The banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terror group has been receiving significant support from Al Qaeda and other militant factions for executing attacks in Pakistan in addition to support from the Afghan Taliban, a media report on Thursday quoted a ÛN report as saying.

Dawn News reported that this information was disclosed in the 33rd report submitted to the United Nations Security Council Commi-ttee by ISIĹ (aka Daesh) and Al Qaeda/Taliban Monitoring

The collaboration includes not just the provision of arms and equipment but also active on-ground support for the banned TTP's operations against Pakistan.Islamabad has

Taliban's inaction against the outlawed TTP, which has been responsible for major terrorist attacks within Pakistan.

Afghan Taliban's failure to curb TTP's activities has led to strained relations between the two countries. Pakistan views Kabul's reluctance to tackle the TTP as a direct threat to its national security.

The report noted that despite the Afghan Taliban's official stance discouraging the TTP's activities outside Afghanistan, many TTP fighters have engaged in cross border attacks in Pakistan without facing any substantial repercussions. Citing reports, it said that some Taliban members, driven by a perceived religious duty, have joined TTP's ranks, bolstering their opera-

Moreover, TTP members and their families are said to receive regular aid packages from the Afghan Taliban, signifying a deeper level of sup-

The Afghan Taliban's temporary imprisonment of between 70 and 200 TTP members and their strategy of moving personnel northward, away from the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions, is perceived as an effort to alleviate Pakistani pressure to tackle the banned TTP activ-

In mid-2023, it recalled that the banned TTP established a new base in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where a large number of individuals were trained as suicide bombers. Additionally, Al Qaeda core and Al Qaeda in the subconin providing training, ideological guidance, and support to the outlawed TTP, illustrating the intertwined nature of these militant networks.

Reported orders from Al Qaeda to allocate resources to the banned TTP indicated a deep-rooted collaboration aimed at destabilising the region, the report said.

Also, the formation of TJP (Tehreek-i-Jihad Pakistan) as a front to provide the outlawed TTP with plausible deniability, and the involvement of other groups like ETIM/TIP (East Turkestan Islamic Movement/Turkestan Islamic Party) and Majeed Brigade in joint operations with TTP, underscore the multifaceted and transnational threat posed by these militant alliances, according to the Dawn report.

Ukraine claims

its sea drones

sank Russian

Pak forces kill 21 terrorists

Pakistani security forces have killed at least 21 terrorists linked to a banned separatist group in the troubled Balochistan province since Monday night in an operation launched after militants launched three coordinated attacks, including one on a high-security prison, in the area, a security official said on Thursday.
Following a brazen attack

by heavily armed terrorists on the Mach town and Kolpur areas in Balochistan on Monday night, the security forces launched an operation to repulse the attacks and hunt down the perpetrators.

"As a result of the operation in Mach and Kolpur so far 21 terrorists have been eliminated," the official said.

Four security personnel and two civilians have also been killed during the operation according to the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the military's media

wing.
The ISPR has so far officially confirmed the death of 12 terrorists but the security Brigade had been killed.



He also said that the death toll in the security forces could be higher but so far there was no confirmation from the concerned authorities.

On Wednesday, the military's media wing, reported that multiple terrorists, including suicide bombers, launched attacks on Mach and Kolpur, apparently the target being to penetrate the Central Mach Jail where several high profile of the banned groups and death row prisoners are jailed.

At present, the Mach jail has around 800 prisoners.

A government official said the operation was in its final stages to root out the last remaining terrorists who had rity forces and installations and civilians has increased manifold in Balochistan which is considered a safe haven for militants belonging to extremist Islamic groups and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.

The Pakistan government has complained regularly to Iran and Afghanistan, with which it shares a border, to rein in the militants belonging to the TTP and other splinter groups who cross the border and carry out strikes in Balochistan.

Pakistan and Iran's relations nosedived earlier this month when Iran violated Pakistani airspace to attack what they claimed were terrorist hideouts in Balochistan. Pakistan responded with swift airstrikes in the Sistan-Baluchestan area in Iran against armed groups.

corvette Kyiv (AP): Ukraine claimed Thursday it used sea drones to sink a Russian corvette in the Black Sea as Russian investigators alleged that a Russian military transport plane that crashed last month was

brought down by two US-made Patriot missiles fired by Kyiv's forces. Ukraine's military intelligence agency, known by its Ukrainian acronym GUR, published a video it said showed naval drones assaulting the Russian missile-armed cutter

Ivanovets on Wednesday night. The footage released on GUR's social media purports to show multiple naval drones crashing into a vessel and exploding. According to GUR, the ship costing between \$60-\$70 million was on patrol on Lake Donuzlav in western Crimea, when a GUR special unit struck it. The lake has been more of a bay since 1961, when a channel connecting it

to the Black Sea was dug out. Disinformation has been part of the grinding war, which marks its second anniversary on Feb 24, and it was not possible to independently verify either side's claims.

The private security firm Ambrey said Ukraine used up to six sea drones, each of which usually carry 300 kg (661 pounds) of explosives, in the attack. The GUR footage

showed the ship was sinking. Russian officials made no immediate comment on the

Ukrainian attacks on Russian aircraft and ships in the Black Sea have helped push Moscow's naval forces back, allowing Kyiv to increase crucial exports of grain and other goods through its southern ports. Ambrey, the security company, noted that any unex-

ploded drones could be a threat for Black Sea shipping. Meanwhile, Russia's Investigative Committee, the main state criminal investigation agency, said Thursday it deduced that the Russian Il-76 military transport plane that crashed near the border with Ukraine on Ian 24 was downed using the US-made Patriot air

defense system, which Western allies have supplied to Kyiv. Russian officials claimed

there were 74 people on board, including 65 Ūkrainian prisoners of war, six crew members and three Russian servicemen. Hong Kong court convicts 4 of rioting

official without wanting to be fled into the mountains in named said 21 terrorists darkness after their attack was belonging to the Baloch repulsed and foiled by the Liberation Army Mujahid security forces. Since last year, the number of attacks on secu-

Moscow (AP); President Vladimir Putin vowed Wednesday to push back Ukrainian forces to reduce the threat of attacks on Russian territory as he met with activists running his campaign ahead of the March presidential election that he's all but certain to win.

Asked about plans for the military campaign in Ukraine, Putin said the line of contact needs to be pushed back to "such a distance from our territory that will make it safe from Western-supplied longrange artillery that Ukrainian authorities use for shelling peaceful cities."

He added the Russian military has been doing just that, pushing the enemy back from vital populated centers."

"This is the main motive for our guys who are fighting and risking their lives there to protect the Motherland, to protect our people," he added.

Ukraine has struck inside Russia recently, including a December 30 attack on the border city of Belgorod that killed 25 people, injured over

Putin also said Russian investigators concluded that Ukraine used US-supplied Patriot air defense systems to shoot down a Russian military transport plane in the Belgorod region on January 24. Russian authorities said the crash killed all 74 people onboard, including 65 Ukrainian POWs heading for a swap.

Ukrainian officials didn't deny the plane's downing but didn't take responsibility and called for an international investigation. Putin said Russia wouldn't iust welcome but would "insist" on an international inquiry on what he described as a "crime" by Ukraine. Putin, 71, who is running as an independent candidate, relies on a tight control over Russia's political system that he has established during 24 years in power.

days leading up to Thursday's

1eaders of the 27 European Union countries sealed a deal on Thursday to provide Ukraine with a new 50-billion-euro (USD 54 billion) support package despite Hungary's weeks of threats to veto the move. European Council President Charles Michel announced the agreement about only an hour into the leaders' summit in Brussels.

"We have a deal," Michel said in a post on X, formerly known as Twitter. He said the agreement "locks in steadfast, long-term, predictable funding for Ukraine," and demonstrated that the "EU is taking leadership and responsibility in support for Ukraine; we know what is at stake."

It was not immediately clear if any concessions were made to secure Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's approval. He raised staunch objections to the financial aid

summit in Brussels.

On their way into their meeting, several fellow leaders had lashed out at Orban, accusing him of blackmail and playing political games that undermined support for Ukraine and the country's war-ravaged econ-

Almost two years after Russia's invasion of Úkraine, the war has ground to a halt and Ukraine's economy desperately needs propping up. But political infighting in the EU and in the United States has held up a long-term source of funding.
Concern has mounted that

public support to keep pouring money into Ukraine has started to wane, even though a Russian victory could threaten security across Europe.

"There is no problem with the so-called Ukraine fatigue issue. We have Orban fatigue now in Brussels," Polish Prime reporters Thursday. "I can't understand. I can't accept this very strange and very egoistic game of Viktor Orban."

In December, the 26 other

leaders agreed on an aid package worth 50 billion euros (USD 54 billion) for this year through 2027. They also agreed to make Ukraine a candidate for EU membership, which Orban reluctantly accepted. But the financial package was part of a review of the EU's continuing seven-year budget, which requires unanimous approval. Orban, the EU leader with the closest ties to Russia, is angry at the European Commission's decision to freeze his government's access to some of the bloc's funds. The EU's executive branch did so over concerns about possible threats to the EU budget posed by democratic backsliding in Hungary.In response, Hungary etoed statements at the EU on a range of

AP HONG KONG

Hong Kong court on Thursday convicted four

people for rioting over the storming of the city's legislative

council building at the height

of the anti-government protests

more than four years ago. The

break-in on July 1 in 2019 —

the 22nd anniversary of the for-

mer British colony's return to

China - was one of the most

chaotic episodes of the massive

protests sparked by a now-

swarmed into the legislature

that night, defacing pictures

and smashing furniture. Some

spray-painted slogans in the

chamber and painted over the

territory's emblem on a wall

before vacating the site as riot

police cleared surrounding

streets with tear gas and then

moved inside. The legislature

eventually spent about 36 mil-

Hundreds of protesters

withdrawn extradition bill.

the problem to NATO, by blocking high level meetings with Ukraine until only recently. Budapest is also holding up Sweden's bid for membership in the military organization.

"I don't want to use the word blackmail, but I don't know what other better word" might fit, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas told reporters as she arrived at EU headquarters.

"Hungary needs Europe," she said, highlighting the country's own economic problems and high interest rates. "He should also look into what it is in it for Hungary, being in Europe." Tusk insisted that there could be "no room for compromise on our principles, like rule of law. And for sure there is no room for compromise on the Ukraine question." The recently elected Polish leader added: "If his position will dominate in Europe, then Ukraine will lose

All were reported killed.

Sri Lanka's online safety bill becomes law

Colombo (PTI): Sri Lanka's Parliament on Thursday endorsed a controversial bill to regulate online content despite criticism from the Opposition that claimed it will stifle freedom of speech. Parliament's communica-

tions office in a release said that Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena certified the bill with his signature. The Speaker's endorsement came despite demands internationally and locally to refrain from signing it. The Parliament had

approved the bill with amendments last week. The new legislation would

lead to the establishment of the Online Safety Commission which is empowered to make punitive rulings on offenses. A false statement online

would be liable, if convicted, to

imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand Sri Lankan rupees. Earlier, the bill was severely criticised as one which

impinged on the freedom of expression. The opposition argued, citing the Asian Internet Coalition (AIC), that the bill

would hamper efforts to invite foreign investment. The Opposition also vowed to repeal it when in power. The AIC had said, "The proposed legislation, in its present form, poses significant challenges that, if not

economy. The highest court had ruled to amend at least 31 of the full 57 clauses of the bill.

addressed comprehensively,

could undermine the potential growth of Sri Lanka's digital

lion Hong Kong dollars (US\$4.6 million) on repairing Wong said he was at the scene to deliver chargers to a reporter. the damages, the court heard But the judge challenged his earlier. Six defendants, includarguments, saying he had ing actor Gregory Wong and two reporters Wong Ka-ho

On Thursday, judge Li Chiho found four of the six defendants, including Gregory Wong, guilty of rioting. Wong Ka-ho and Ma were acquitted of the rioting charge but were convicted for unlawful entry into the legislature.

and Ma Kai-chung, last year

pleaded not guilty to rioting.

Li said in his written judgment that there was a directive to ask all people to leave. "I can't see how the defense can distort the meaning of the word and exclude journalists from everyone," he said.

He added it was a "wrong idea" for Wong Ka-ho to think that reporters can stay there to document the developments. During the trial, Gregory

hugged a protester before leaving the chamber as an expression of support. "His intention of entering the legislature is obvious, it is to join this riot," he said.

Eight others, including activists Ventus Lau, Owen Chow and former student

leader Althea Suen, were also charged for rioting in the same case and previously entered a guilty plea. The 2019 protests were sparked by a proposed extradition law that would have

allowed Hong Kong criminal suspects to be sent to the mainland for trial. The government withdrew the bill, but the protesters widened their demands to include direct elections for the city's leaders and police

with the "pre-planned" attack on the Prosecutor General of Maldives that left his arm fractured a day before, an incident that triggered a slugfest between President Mohamed Muizzu's government and the Opposition. Prosecutor General Hussain Shameem was out jogging on a street in Male City on Wednesday morning when he

Two held in connection

with attack on Maldives'

two people on a motorbike. Sun.mv, a news portal, reported that Commissioner of Police Ali Shujau, in a press briefing, said the two suspects were arrested shortly before the news conference but declined to disclose any details regarding the suspects, even their gender and

was attacked with a hammer by

wo persons were arrested

▲ on Thursday in connection

age.
"The initial findings establish that the attack had been pre-planned," Shujau said, adding that the suspects had their faces covered and were heavily disguised. As I mentioned, we utilised all our resources and have now identified them and taken them into custody," Shujau said. The police also believe, he said, that it is likely there are more people behind the attack. Head of Criminal Investigations, Chief Superintendent of Police Ahmed Nafiz said the belief is based on the experience with similar cases. "The attack had come just after the security the police had been providing to Shameem due to a court case ended," Nafiz said. Shameem was provided

with security after a threat assessment run in connection with a court case that flagged him as a possible high-risk target. "The security coverage was dropped after the court case ended," Shujau said. On Wednesday evening, after getting treatment at the ADK Hospital, Shameem posted on Facebook his photo - wearing a cast on his left arm - and



thanked Allah and everyone else for their good wishes. .will be back at work stronger and be back running, cycling and swimming even faster," he

said in the post. The Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) has now strengthened Shameem's security in the wake of the attack

Following the attack on the Prosecutor General, former Maldivian president Ibrahim Mohamed Solih said it was a "politically motivated," inci-

This prompted the Home Minister Ali Ihusan to ask Solih to share information to back his In a post on X, Solih, also the interim leader of the largest

opposition outfit, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), said: 'Politically motivated acts of violence have no place in a democratic society and I call on the government to be swift in bringing the perpetrators to justice."Home Minister Ihusan asked Solih to share information to back his claim that the violent attack on Prosecutor General Shameem was politically motivated. Condemning the attack on Shameem, the MDP said in a statement: "The alleged close ties between top government officials and criminal gangs were resulting in open violent assaults on top state officials." The MDP accused President Muizzu's administration of failing to provide proper protection to officials charged with fulfilling constitutional duties and responsibilities.

EU agrees on new 50 billion-euro aid package for Ukraine

US blames Iran-backed militias for Jordan drone attack

AP WASHINGTON

The United States has attrib-**1** uted the drone attack that killed three US service members in Jordan to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of Iran-backed militias, as President Joe Biden weighs his options to respond to the strike.

Iran on Wednesday threatened to "decisively respond" to any US attack on the Islamic Republic after the US said it held Tehran responsible.

The US has signalled it is preparing for retaliatory strikes in the Mideast in the wake of the Sunday drone attack that also wounded more than 40 troops at Tower 22, a secretive base in northeastern Jordan that's been crucial to the American presence in neighbouring Syria.

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday the US believes the attack was planned, resourced and facilitated by the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group that includes the militant group Kataib Hezbollah. He said Biden "believes that it

is important to respond in an appropriate way."
He said Biden was contin-

uing to weigh his options, but Kirby said "the first thing you see won't be the last thing," adding it "won't be a one-off."

Kirby dismissed a statement by Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah announcing "the suspension of military and security operations against the occupation forces in order to prevent embarrassment to the Iraqi government."

He said the group can't be taken at face value, and he added, "they're not the only group that has been attacking

As of Wednesday, Kataib Hezbollah and other Iranaligned militias had launched 166 attacks on US military installations since October 18, including 67 in Iraq, 98 in Syria and the one in Jordan, according to the US military.

The US has struck back at the militias a few times over the past three months. On October 27, US fighter jets struck two weapons and ammunition storage sites in eastern Syria near Boukamal

that were used by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Iranian-backed groups.

Also in Syria, fighter jets dropped bombs on an IRGC weapons storage facility near Maysulun in Deir el-Zour on November 8.

And US airstrikes targeted a training facility and a safe house in the Bulbul district of Mayadin on November 12.

On December 26, the US launched strikes on three locations in Iraq used by Kataib Hezbollah and affiliated groups, and on January 23, the US struck three sites in Iraq, again targeting Kataib Hezbollah.

Any additional American strikes could further inflame a region already roiled by Israel's ongoing war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The war began with Hamas attacking Israel on October 7, killing some 1,200 people and taking about 250 hostage. Since then, Israeli strikes have killed more than 26,000 Palestinians and displaced nearly 2 million others from their homes, arousing anger throughout the Muslim

across the Mideast, with Iran striking targets in Iraq, Pakistan and Syria, and the US carrying out airstrikes targeting Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels over their

interests and nationals under attacks on shipping in the Red Sea. Some observers fear any pretexts," IRNA quoted Iravani as saying. He described any possible Iranian retaliation a new round of strikes targeting Iran could tip the region as a "strong response," without elaborating.
The Iranian mission to

A US official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss military operations, said American F/A-18 fighter jets on Wednesday struck and jets of well struck and jets the UN did not respond to requests for comment or elaboration Wednesday on Iravani's remarks. Iravani also denied that Iran and the US had destroyed 10 Houthi drones

that were prepared to launch. The US military's Central
Command said later
Wednesday that the guided exchanged any messages over the last few days, either through intermediaries or missile destroyer USS Carney directly. The pan-Arab satellite had shot down one anti-ship channel Al Jazeera, which is ballistic missile fired from based in and funded by Qatar, Houthi-controlled areas of reported earlier that such com-Yemen toward the Gulf of munication had taken place. Aden. The Carney also shot Qatar often serves as an interdown three Iranian drones, mediary between Washington and Tehran. Central Command said.

But Iran's government has taken note of the US threats of retaliation for the attack on the base in Jordan.

"Sometime, our enemies

according to the state-run we hear some threats in between words by American IRNA news agency. "The Islamic Republic officials," Revolutionary Guard

would decisively respond to commander Gen. Hossein any attack on the county, its Salami, who answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said at an event Wednesday. "We tell them that you have experienced us, and we know each other. We do not leave any threat with-

out an answer." We are not after war, but we have no fear of war," he added, according to IRNA.

Kirby, for his part, said the US doesn't "seek a war with Iran. We're not looking for a broader conflict."

On Saturday, a general in charge of Iran's air defenses described them as being at their "highest defensive readiness." That raises concerns for commercial aviation traveling through and over Iran as well. After a US drone strike killed a top general in 2020, Iranian air defenses mistakenly shot down a Ukrainian passenger plane, killing all 176 people on board.

Meanwhile, attacks by the Houthis and counterattacks

by the US continue in the Red

The private security firm Ambrey reported Wednesday night that a ship was targeted with a missile southwest of Aden, Yemen, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The Houthis claimed an attack on a vessel at the time called the Koi, a Liberian-flagged container ship. The ship's managers could not be immediately reached for comment. It was unclear if the reported missile attack caused any damage or injuries.

A missile launched Tuesday night targeted the USS Gravely, a guided missile destroyer, Central Command said in a statement. No injuries or damage were reported.

A Houthi military spokesman, Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, claimed responsibility for the attack in a statement Wednesday morning, calling it "a victory for the oppression of the Palestinian people and a response to the American-British aggression against our

Saree claimed the Houthis

fired "several" missiles, something not acknowledged by the US Navy. Houthi claims have been exaggerated in the past, and their missiles sometimes

crash on land and fail to reach their targets. Since November, the rebels have repeatedly target-

ed ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive against Hamas in Gaza. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous

or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade between Asia, the Mideast and Europe.
The Houthis hit a com-

mercial vessel with a missile on Friday, sparking a fire that burned for hours. The US and the United

Kingdom have launched multiple rounds of airstrikes targeting the Houthis as allied warships patrol the waterways affected by the attacks.

The European Union also plans to launch a naval mission in the Red Sea within three weeks to help defend cargo ships against the Houthi attacks, the bloc's top diplomat said Wednesday.

Explosion strikes near vessel in Red Sea off Yemen

AP JERUSALEM

Yemen's Houthi rebels fired two ballistic missiles on Thursday at a Liberianflagged container ship in the Red Sea, a US defense official said, the latest attack by the rebels as America launches airstrikes targeting them. The attack happened west of Hodeida, a port city in Yemen long held by the rebels, said the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations, a British military group overseeing Mideast waterways. It said the crew and the vessel were safe and the blast came far off the vessel's starboard

The US defense official identified the targeted container ship as the Koi. Its management could not be immediately reached for comment. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

The Houthis did not immediately claim responsibility for the assault.

The private security firm Ambrey reported Wednesday night that a ship was targeted with a missile southwest of Aden, Yemen, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The Houthis claimed that attack also targeted the Koi, though American officials had no immediate information on any attack Wednesday night. Since November, the rebels have repeatedly target-

ed ships in the Red Sea over Israel's offensive in Gaza against Hamas. But they have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for global trade between Asia, the Mideast and Europe. The Houthis hit a commercial vessel with a missile on January 26, sparking a fire that burned for hours. Late Wednesday, American F/A-18 fighter jets struck and destroyed 10 Houthi drones that were prepared to launch, as well as a ground control station used by the rebels, the US military said. The US also intercepted a ballistic missile and other drones already in the air dur-

US hikes visa fees for various categories

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

into a wider war.

 $T^{\text{he US has announced a}}_{\text{steep increase in fees for}}$ various categories of nonimmigrant visas like the H-1B, L-1 and EB-5, the most popular among Indians.

The Iranian warnings first

came from Amir Saeid Iravani,

Iran's ambassador to the

United Nations in New York.

He gave a briefing to Iranian

The fee hike, first after 2016, will come into force from April 1. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The EB-5 programme, launched by the US government in 1990, enables high-networth foreign investors to obtain a US visa for themselves



and their families by investing a minimum of USD 5,00,000 in a US business that helps create 10 jobs for American workers.

To come into force from April 1, the new H-1B application visa fee, which is form I-129, has been increased from USD 460 to USD 780. The H-1B registration will increase from USD 10 to USD 215, but from next year. The fee for L-1 visas has

been increased from USD 460 to USD 1,385, and that of EB-5 visas, popularly known as investors visas, has jumped from USD 3,675 to USD 11,160, according to a federal notification issued on Wednesday. The L-1 visa is a non-

immigrant visa category in the

US that is designed for intracompany transferees. It allows multinational companies to transfer certain employees from their foreign offices to work in the US temporarily.

The fee adjustments, as well as changes to the forms and fee structures used by United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), will result in net costs, benefits, and transfer payments, the

Department of Homeland Security said in its federal notification.

For the 10-year period of analysis of the rule (FY 2024 through FY 2033), the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates the annualised net costs to the public will be USD 157,005,952, discounted at three and seven per cent.

Estimated total net costs over 10 years will be USD 1,339,292,617 discounted at three per cent and USD 1,102,744,106 discounted at seven per cent. DHS argued that the

changes in the final rule will also provide several benefits to it and applicants/petitioners seeking immigration benefits.

For the government, the primary benefits include

dens and fee processing errors, increased efficiency in the adjudicative process, and the ability to better assess the cost of providing services, which allows for better-aligned fees in

reduced administrative bur-

future regulations.

The primary benefits to the applicants/petitioners include reduced fee processing errors, increased efficiency in the adjudicative process, the simplification of the fee payment process for some forms, elimination of the USD 30 returned check fee, and for many applicants, limited fee increases and additional fee exemptions to reduce fee burdens.

In many categories, the federal notification has made a minor reduction in visa application fees as well.

Xi Jingping calls for boosting 'disruptive innovation' amid increasing US curbs

PTI ■ BEIJING

China on Thursday slammed as "baseless allegations" Washington's claim of dismantling a Chinese net-President Xi Jinping called for stepped-up efforts to boost "disruptive innovation" amid increasing technology curbs from the US and the EU.

China must strengthen scientific and technological innovation - especially "original and disruptive" innovations - as well as achieve scientific and tech self-reliance and "fight the battle in core technologies," Xi told the 24member Politburo meeting of the ruling Communist Party of China (ČPC) on Wednesday.

He also stressed the importance of improving the "resilience and security" of supply chains and ensuring that the industrial system is "autonomous and controllable, safe and reliable," the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

"Developing new productive forces is the intrinsic requirement and an important focus of promoting high-quality development, and it's necessary to continue to well leverage innovation to speed up the development of new productive forces," state-run Xinhua news agency quoted Xi as saying. His

No. MD/MK/04/4000



comments came as the Chinese economy struggled to shake off the slowdown mode leading to increasing pressure on the job market accentuated by increasing technology curbs from the US. On Thursday, China slammed FBI Director Christopher Wray's claim that the American officials have dismantled a Chinese network of hackers that targets US public infrastructure saying Washington is resorting to baseless allegations.

"Just this morning, we announced an operation where we and our partners identified hundreds of routers that had been taken over by the PRC state-sponsored hacking group known as Volt Typhoon," Wray told lawmakers, according to

reports from Washington. Hours later, reacting sharply to Wray's allegation, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin told a media briefing here that China firmly opposes and cracks down on all forms of cyber attacks under

"Without valid evidence the US jumped to an unwarranted conclusion and made groundless accusations against China. It is extremely irretortion of facts. China firmly opposes this," he said.

The US itself is the origin of and the biggest perpetrator of cyber attacks, he said, adding, the US Cyber Force Command has openly declared that the critical infrastructure of other countries is a legitimate target for US cyber-

About the US allegations that China's leading memory chip maker, as well as AI company, were associated with the Chinese military, Wang said Beijing firmly opposes the US overstretching the concept of national security, setting up all kinds of discriminatory lists, going after Chinese companies and disrupting normal eco-nomic and trade cooperation between China and the US.

This is a complete departure from the principles of market competition and international trade rules that the US has long claimed to champion. Such moves erode the confidence of foreign companies to invest and operate in the US and undermine the interests of US companies and investors. It is bound to backfire," he said.

UK lawmaker quitting Parliament after abuse, death threats

London (AP): A Conservative lawmaker in Britain said on Thursday he will step down when an election is called later this year because of abuse and death threats he says are linked to his support for Israel. Mike Freer said an arson attack on his office in December was the "final straw." He told the BBC that wher people go into politics, "we kind of sign up for it, we take it on the chin. ... But it's not fair on our families.'

Freer represents the London constituency of Finchley and Golders Green, which has

a large Jewish population. Freer said he had received death threats from a group called Muslims Against Crusades and began wearing a stab-proof vest after learning his office had been staked out by Ali Harbi Ali, an Islamic State group supporter who stabbed Conservative lawmaker David

Amess was the second British lawmaker murdered in the past decade. Labour legislator Jo Cox was killed in 2016 by a far-right attacker. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesperson, Max Blain, said the abuse and threats aimed at Freer were "an attack on British democracy." House of Commons Speaker Lindsay Hoyle urged lawmakers to set an example and "turn down the heat" of their often-fiery debates. "People reflect how we treat each other, and that's why I want us to have a nicer politics within the House," Hoyle told Sky News.

PUBLIC NOTICE

We Mannish Garg Sio Sh. M.L. Garg and Santosh Kumari w/o Sh. M.L. Garg hereby intends to create a charge viz Mortgage for availing a loan/credit facility from State Bank of India, SME RAI Industrial Area, Sonepat, Haryana-131029 on the basis of Laminated Original Conveyance Deed dated 07.05.1993 of Plot No. 160, Vaishali, Pitampura, Delhi-110034 executed by DDA in favour of Smt. Santosh Kumari and Mr. Ravinder Mohan Garg registered as document No. 6757 on 25.08 1993.

Notice is hereby given to the general public at large that if (i) any person/entity has any rights, stitle or interest, of any nature whatsoever. in respect of the said property or any

(i) any personner in as any injuris, use of initiests, or any nature whatsoever, in respect of the said property or any part thereof, (ii) any person/entity has any objection, claim, interest or dispute in respect of the above mentioned said property or any part thereof, then he/she/they/it shall intimate the objection in writing to the undersigned and State Bank of India with documentary proof within 15 (Fifteen) days from the date of publication of this notice if there are no third party claims / objection / disputes in respect of the said property and part thereof, and eafter no claims, objection, disputes etc., of any nature tsoever, will be entertained.

UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR **Tender Notice Reference**

The Department of G.N.D.U. Amritsai

Closing date & time: 22-02-2024 at 5:00 P.M.

details www.eproc.punjab.gov.in Note: Any corrigendum(s) to the the above website only

Assistant Registrar (General) **Guru Nanak Dev University**

PROJECT MANAGER

UTTARAKHAND PEYJAL NIGAM Date: 31-01-2024 Letter No.: 01/Camp Haldwan E-Tender Notice

Nishtha Parisar, Bijalee Nagar, Govindpura, Bhopal-23 Phone No.: 0755-2602033-36, Fax: 2589821, 2586636 Bhopal, Dated: 01.02.2024

M.P. MADHYA KSHETRA VIDYUT VITARAN CO. LTD.

(Govt. of M.P. Undertaking)

TENDER NOTICE

Tender Specification Number	Particulars of Material for Procurement	Approx. Value (Rs. Lakh)	Tender Fee (incl. GST) (in Rs.)	Date of Pre Bid Conference	Date of Opening of Tender
MD/MK/ 04/1037	Rate Contract for Supply of "ISI" marked Raccoon All Aluminium Alloy (AAA) Conductors for a period of one year	1634.76	11800	06.02.2024 3.00 PM	14.02.2024 3.00 PM
MD/MK/ 04/1038	Rate Contract for Supply of "ISI" marked Dog Aluminium Conductor Steel Reinforced (ACSR) Conductors for a period	529.32	11800	06.02.2024 3.00 PM	14.02.2024 3.00 PM

of one year Other details and full tender document would be available on our Company website https://portal.mpcz.ir & Govt. website https://mptenders.gov.in very shortly. M.P. Madhyam/113561/2024

CHIEF GENERAL MANAGER (PROC.)

Amess to death in 2021.

GURU NANAK DEV

No. GNDU/Gen/02/2024 invites online bids for the following: Sr. No.1

Item: Hiring of fully managed dedicated secure server. Quantity: 02

NA/12/21680/2023/31942

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	SI. No.	Name of the work	Tender Value without GST (Rs. In Lakh)	
	1.	CONSTRUCTION OF 1 BIOLOGY LAB, 1 CHEMISTRY LAB, 1 PHYSICS LAB AND 1 LIBRARY AT GIC CHORMANEYA, PITHORAGARH	Rs. 70.42	12 Months
	2.	CONSTRUCTION OF 1 ART AND CRAFT ROOM, 1 COMPUTER ROOM AND 1 PHYSICS LAB AT G.I.C DEVALTHAL, PITHORAGARH	Rs. 47.79	12 Months
	3.	CONSTRUCTION OF 1 COMPUTER ROOM & 1 SCIENCE LAB AT G.H.S JARAJIBALI, PITHORAGARH	Rs. 31.63	12 Months

- Date and Time of availability of Bid documents in the portal: 02-02-2024 (12.00 hrs)
 - Online Bid submission: End date: 17-02-2024 (17.00 hrs) Date & Time of Technical bid Opening: - 20-02-2024 (11.00 hrs)
 - Name and Address of the Officer inviting bid: Project Manager Construction Unit Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam, Pithoragarh.

documentation etc. may be obtained from the e-Procurement portal

Pre-bid meeting details (if required) Date & Place :- 07-02-2024 (11.00 hrs) Project Manager Construction Unit Uttarakhand Peyjal Nigam Pithoragarh. 9. For further details, details of subsequent Amendment / correction

www.uktenders.gov.in

SRF LIMITED Regd. Office: The Galleria, DLF Mayur Vihar, Unit No. 236 & 237, 2nd Floor,

Mayur Vihar Place, Noida Link Road, Mayur Vihar Phase I Extn, Delhi-110091 Corporate Office: Block-C, Sector 45, Gurugram, Haryana-122 003 Tel. No (Regd office): (+91-11) 49482870; Fax: (+91-11) 49482900 E-mail: cs@srf.com, Website: www.srf.com; CIN: L18101DL1970PLC005197

NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that Share Certificates pertaining to shares of the Company detailed below

SI. No.	Folio No.	Name of the Share Holder / Legal Heir (Claimant)	Cert-No.	Dist-No.	Lost Shares
1	R 0001337	RINA AGRAWAL	1132020	295233510-669	160
			90034621	7404738-77	40
2	K 0005499	0005499 KARAKKAT CHANDRASEKHARAN	33981	2266251-75	25
			65902	3384720-30	11
			126814	5291287-304	18
			320055-9	16109526-73	48
			469055-9	24129318-65	48
			1137919	296430754-1553	800
			90161808	12194595-644	50
3	H 0000705	HARI VALLABH SHARMA	21388	1902151-200	50
			62133	3309855-70	16
			119960	5104056-88	33
			430451-3	18538569-625	57
			570451-3	26559361_417	57

579451-3 26558361-417 1135980 296038910-9761 852 4 S 0012038 SNEHLATA LAKHOTIA 5949568-617 149937 50 (Deceased Shareholder) 16644823-72 JT 1: KAMAL LAKHOTIA 345884 18610624-48 25 977234 1133754 295585970-6469 500 THUNA PAL (Deceased) 419590-3 18086559-758 200 JHUMA MULLICK (Claimant) 568590-3 26106351-550 200 6 SRF0108148 BHAWARIDEVI H TANI 2077401-50 (Deceased Shareholder) JT 1:RESHMA HASTIMAL TANI 1137930 296433574-773 (Claimant) SRF0111844 HARSHAD J CHOKSI 1134103 295658534-733 200 90204447 15490905-54 50 RANJAN KUMAR (Deceased 435355-6 21510738-62 25 t 1: RITA PRASAD (Claimant) 1138770 296602650-849 200 90195775 15149510-34 25 9 S 0012805 SUMATHI JAIN 1000 295237822-8821 1132028 1000 295237822-8821 90108783-5 7703344-493 150 10 A 0002570 ARUNA JAIN 2539576-600 25 43938 95524 4093313-24 12 1133186 295451318-641 324 90010960-1 6144174-217 44 11 SRF0041529 INDRAVADAN DALAL 9567626-725 100 90086947-9 Deceased Shareholder t 1: RAJESH DALAL (Claimant) 1133492 295529810-30209 400 12 SRF0101103 DEEPAK GOVIL 391132-4 17420832-54 23 540132-4 25440624-46 23 1135126 295858222-565 344 90050208 8197582-621 40 13 K0000154 20 K C MALIK (Deceased 124204 5232342-61

1134196 295678274-513 240 Any person having any claim /objection in respect of the above requests should lodge such claim/ objection with the company at its Corporate Office within 15 days of the publication of this notice failing which the company will consider to give effect to the above requests.

975829

Public is hereby cautioned against dealing with the aforesaid share certificates for SRF LIMITED

RAJAT LAKHANPAL Sr. VP (Corporate Compliance) & Company Secretary

18567299-338

Place: Gurugram Date: 01-02-2024

Shareholder

KAMLEŞH CHAKRAVERTY

India negotiating investment treaties: FM

ndia is negotiating bilateral investment treaties with different countries with a view to promote foreign inflows, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday

She said that foreign direct investment (FDI) has doubled during 2014-23 to USD 596 billion compared to the inflow received during 2005-14.

"For encouraging sustained foreign investment, we are negotiating investment treaties with our foreign partners, in the spirit of 'first develop India," she said while presenting the interim Budget 2024-25.

India is negotiating this treaty with countries such as the

These investment treaties help in promoting and protecting



Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the Interim Budget 2024 in the Lok Sabha, at Parliament House in New Delhi

investments in each other's countries.

These pacts are important as India has earlier lost two international arbitration cases against British telecom giant Vodafone and Cairn Energy plc of the UK over the retrospective levy of taxes. Foreign direct investment (FDI) equity inflows in India declined 24 per cent to USD 20.48 billion in April-September 2023, according to government data. The total FDI which

includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other reinvested earnings and other capital — contracted 15.5 per cent to USD 32.9 billion during the period under review against USD 38.94 billion in April-June 2022. The top investor countries include Singapore, Mauritius, the US, the UK, and the UAE. Computer software and

Computer software and hardware, trading, services, telecommunication, automobile, pharma and chemicals are some of the key sectors that attract FDI into India

An official had earlier said that hardening interest rates globally and worsening geopolitical situation impacted FDI inflows into India in 2022-23



Industrialists after watching the live telecast of the presentation of the Interim Budget 2024 by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, at Bengal Chamber of Commerce & Industry, in Kolkata

Interim Budget to support growth, enhance sentiment: Industry captains

Several industry captains on Thursday lauded the interim budget, stating that it will support the country's economic growth and enhance investors' sentiments.

ITC Ltd Chairman and MD Sanjiv Puri said the budget demonstrates India's confidence as an economy of substance and immense promises.

'The budget builds on the extraordinary vision of the prime minister to spearhead an era of 'Amrit Kaal' and positions India on the global stage as a shining example of socio-economic transformation," he said.

The sharp focus on the welfare of farmers, setting up aqua parks, support to dairy farmers and other announcements will trigger a virtuous cycle of productivity, income generation and consumption, Puri said.

He also said the proposal to increase public spending is commendable, which together with astute fiscal prudence will lead to better utilisation and targeting of public funds.

The banking sector and microfinance institutions also hailed the interim budget

North Eastern Electric Power

Corporation will invest Rs

1,841.18 crore in 2024-25

compared to the revised

estimated investment of Rs

1,150.02 crore for this fiscal.

estimate was Rs 2,018.59 crore for 2023-24.

Tehri Hydro Development

Corporation will invest Rs

3,440.96 crore in the next fiscal

against revised estimates of Rs

4,877.22 crore for 2023-24. The

budgeted investment for the

company was Rs 3,900.41 crore

According to the Budget

expenditure of the power

ministry has also been pegged slightly higher at Rs 20,502 crore for 2024-25 against

revised estimated expenditure

of Rs 17,635 crore for this

expenditure for the ministry

was at Rs 20,671.32 crore for

The

the

budgeted

for the current fiscal.

document,

fiscal.

the current fiscal.

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Thursday. Bandhan Bank MD & CEO

Chandra Shekhar Ghosh said the interim budget focuses extensively on inclusive development and is a step forward towards aspirations of a USD 5 trillion economy of the country.

He said the focus on the housing sector will benefit ancillary industries like cement, paints and steel among others, creating employment opportunities.

The focus on women empowerment will further boost the economy, he said, adding that the emphasis on adding that the emphasis of infrastructure and rural development will lay a strong foundation for India's growth. Kuldip Maity, MD and CEO of VFS Capital, a microfinance institution (MFI), said the budget focuses on 'Viksit Bharat' with emphasis on the Bharat' with emphasis on the welfare of the poor, women, youth and farmers.

Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC) said that the proposals in the budget are set to further enhance investor sentiments promote manufacturing to make the

presented by Union Finance Indian industry competitive globally.

The announcements about green mobility and technology show the government's commitment towards transforming the economy, the council said. MSME Development Forum West Bengal president Mamta Binani said the interim budget carries significant implications for the micro, small and medium industries sector.

The emphasis on de-risking credit inflows to the MSME sector such as automotive and electronics through measures like credit guarantees and schemes commendable.

Senco Gold and Diamonds MD&CEO Suvankar Sen said that the focus is on infrastructure and making the country a global manufacturing powerhouse. He said the budget proposals will augur well for the iewellerv sector as well.

The Budget is a roadmap to prosperity, unity, and a better quality of life, said Sanjeev Ingti, Director & Co-founder, Eliea Wellness. Focus on inclusivity would give a boost to consumption-led growth, said Harsh Pati Singhania, Director, JK Organisation &

Stock markets close lower on Budget day

PTI ■ MUMBAI

 B^{enchmark} equity indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on the Budget day on Thursday as investors resorted to profit-taking in capital goods, metal and realty shares amid no big announcements by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

After shedding early gains, the markets turned volatile during the presentation of the interim Budget, where in the capital expenditure outlay was marginally hiked but there were no major announcements

The 30-share BSE Sensex settled lower by 106.81 points During the day, it gyrated between a high of 72,151.02 and a low of 71,574.89.

The Nifty dipped 28.25 points or 0.13 per cent to 21,697.45. It oscillated between the day's high of 21,832.95 and a low of 21.658.75.

Market sentiment was also dampened after the US Federal Reserve indicated it likely won't cut interest rates in March.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday hiked capital expenditure by 11 per cent for the next fiscal to sustain world-beating economic growth rate while trimming the deficit in a reform-oriented interim Budget that also gave relief to common man from disputed small tax demands of up to Rs

Presenting a vote on account or an interim Budget for 2024-25, Sitharaman proposed no changes in income tax rates for individuals and corporates, as well as customs duty.
In less than an hour-long

budget speech, she presented Modi government's achievements in the last 10 vears that transformed India from being a 'fragile' economy to the world's fastest-growing major economy.

She hiked capital expenditure to Rs 11.11 lakh crore for 2024-25 while trimming the fiscal 5.8 per cent, from the budgeted 5.9 per cent of GDP, and further lowering to 5.1 per cent in the next fiscal.

"The domestic market was marginally disappointed by lower-than-expected infra spending in the interim However, government's commitment to

fiscal prudence, targeting a fiscal deficit of 5.1% for FY25, is expected to improve the outlook on economic ratings," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial

Meanwhile, the US FED's decision to maintain rates without clear guidance on future cuts dampened market sentiments, he added.

HUDCO stock zooms 20 per cent

PTI NEW DELHI

of state-owned Chares SHUDCO zoomed 20 per cent higher on Thursday after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced building 2 crore more houses for the rural poor in the next five years.

These 2 crore houses will be built under the PM Awas Yojana (Grameen). The stock surged 19.99 per cent to close at Rs 206.80

apiece, its upper circuit limit as also a 52-week high level on On the BSE, shares of HUDCO zoomed 19.62 per cent to settle at Rs 206.35 per

The Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDĈO) provides financial assistance for housing and

government has

during

I proposed increasing the

investment of eight state-

owned power companies by

financial year 2024-25.

compares

investment of Rs 59,119.55

crore for the current financial

vear under revised estimate.

The annual investment by

these eight power sector firms for the 2023-24 fiscal was

budgeted at Rs 60,805.22 crore.

According to the budget

Power Grid Corporation — a

central public sector enterprise

administrative control of the

witnessed the highest increase

in proposed investment at Rs

12,250 crore for the next fiscal

from Rs 8,800 crore budgeted

of

under

presented in

on Thursday,

Power

crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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document

Parliament

(CPSE)

Ministry

urban infrastructure projects. the budget announcements, shares of construction company NBCC (India) advanced 12.01 per cent to finish at Rs 145 apiece and also its 52-week high level on the NSE.

9.78 per cent to end at Rs 142.05 per piece. In the broader equity markets, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 106.81 points or 0.15

On the BSE, the stock climbed

per cent to close at 71,645.30, while NSE Nifty fell 0.13 per cent to end at 21,697.45. In her interim budget speech on Thursday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a scheme to help those living in rented

accommodation or slums to acquire a house. She also announced building of 2 crore more houses for the

and revised estimate of

Investment by hydro power

giant SJVN Ltd has been hiked

to Rs 12,000 crore for 2024-25,

from the revised and budgeted

amount of Rs 10,000 crore for

Another hydro power giant

NHPC Ltd will increase its

investment to Rs 11,761.87

crore in 2024-25 compared to

investment of Rs 9,006.31 crore

for the current fiscal. NHPC's

investment

estimated

revised

investment for 2023-24.

the ongoing fiscal.

investment to rise 14 per cent

rural poor in next five years under the continuing PM Awas Yojana (Grameen). "Our government will launch

a scheme to help deserving sections of the middle class 'living in rented houses, or or chawls and unauthorized colonies' to buy or build their own houses, Sitharaman said.

"Despite the challenges due to COVID, implementation of PM Awas Yojana (Grameen) continued and we are close to achieving the target of three crore houses. Two crore more houses will be taken up in the next five years to meet the requirement arising from increase in the number of families," she said.

The overall target is to construct 2.95 crore pucca houses with basic amenities by

Public sector power companies Paytm shares slump 20 per cent

One97 Scommunications Ltd, which owns Paytm brand, plummeted 20 per cent on Communications Ltd (OCL)
Thursday as the RBI directed and Pavtm Pavments Services Paytm Payments Bank Ltd (PPBL) to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTags and other instruments

after February 29 The stock cracked 20 per cent to Rs 608.80 — its lower circuit

limit — on the BSE At the NSE, it tumbled 19.99 per cent to hit the lowest trad-

ing permissible limit for the day of Rs 609.

The company's market capitalisation (mcap) also eroded by Rs 9,646.31 crore to Rs 38,663.69 crore in early trade. However, any interest, cashbacks, or refunds may be credited back to customers anytime. The direction follows persistent non-compliances and contin-

cerns, the central bank said in a statement. RBI also said the 'nodal accounts' of

ued material supervisory con-

are to be terminated at the earliest, in any case not later than February 29, 2024. OCL, which owns Paytm brand, holds a 49 per cent stake

in PPBL but classifies it as an associate of the company and not as a subsidiary.

The RBI's order will have an impact of Rs 300-500 crore on annual operational profit of the

company 'Depending on the nature of the resolution, the company expects this action to have a worst case impact of Rs 300-

500 crore on its annual EBIT-DA going forward. However, the company expects to continue on its trajectory to improve its profitability," Paytm said in a regulatory filing.

Royal Enfield posts 2 per cent rise in sales in Jan

PTI MUMBAI

 $M^{\rm otorcycle}$ maker Royal Enfield said on Thursday its total vehicle sales grew 2 per cent year-on year to 76,187 units in January 2024.

The company had sold a total of 74,746 motorcycles in January 2023. The domestic sales were up 4

per cent at 70,556 motorcycles last month compared to 67,702 units while exports declined 20 per cent at 5631 units from 7044 units in January 2023, it stated.

launched recently "Our motorcycles continue to perform well across markets, and we have had a great start to the new year. We are confident that we will sustain our growth momentum for months to come," said B Govindarajan, CEO at Royal Enfield.

US hikes H-1B, EB-5 visas fees

The US has announced a steep increase in fees for various categories of non-immigrant visas like the H-1B, L-1 and EB-5, the most popular among Indians.

The fee hike, first after 2016, will come into force from April 1. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. Technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

The EB-5 programme, launched by the US government in 1990, enables high-net-worth foreign investors to obtain a US visa for themselves and their families by investing a minimum of USD 5,00,000 in a US business that helps create 10 jobs for American workers.

To come into force from April 1, the new H-1B application visa fee, which is form I-129, has been increased from USD 460 to USD 780. The H-1B registration will increase from USD 10 to USD 215, but from next year.



The fee for L-1 visas has been increased from USD 460 to USD 1,385, and that of EB-5 visas, popularly known as investors visas, has jumped from USD 3,675 to USD 11,160, according to a federal notification issued on Wednesday.

The L-1 visa is a non-immigrant visa category in the US that is designed for intracompany transferees. It allows multinational companies to transfer certain employees from their foreign offices to work in the US temporarily. The fee adjustments, as well as

changes to the forms and fee

structures used by United States

Citizenship and Immigration

Services (USCIS), will result in

net costs, benefits, and transfer

payments, the Department of

Homeland Security said in its

federal notification.

For the 10-year period of analysis of the rule (FY 2024 through FY 2033), the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates the annualised net costs to the public will be USD 157,005,952, discounted at three and seven per cent.

Estimated total net costs over 10 years will be USD 1,339,292,617 discounted at three per cent and USD 1,102,744,106 discounted at seven per cent.

DHS argued that the changes in the final rule will also provide several benefits to it and applicants/petitioners seeking immigration benefits. For the government, the primary benefits include reduced administrative burdens and fee processing errors, increased efficiency in the adjudicative process.

Toyota registers highest ever monthly sales in January

budgeted at Rs 10,857.22 crore

In the case of NTPC Ltd, the

investments have been slightly increased to Rs 22,700 crore

for the next fiscal compared to

the revised as well as budgeted

estimates of Rs 22,454 crore for

Damodar Valley Corporation's

investment has been pegged at Rs 3,262 crore for 2024-25,

higher than the revised as well

as budgeted estimates of Rs

According to the Budget,

2,708 crore for 2023-24.

for 2023-24.

2023-24.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Thursday reported its highest-ever monthly wholesales in January with dispatch of 24,609 units, an increase of 92 per cent over same month last

The automaker had dispatched a total of 12,835 units to dealers in January last year. Last month the company sold

23,197 units in the domestic market. It also exported 1,412 units of the Urban Cruiser Hyryder. 'The company's MPV and

SUV offerings continue to be our greatest strength with major contributions from the Innova Hycross, Urban Cruiser Hyryder, Innova Crysta, Fortuner and the Legender," Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) Vice President, Sales-Service-Used Car Business Sabari Manohar said in a statement.



Stocks of solar solutions providers rally post Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

 $S_{\text{providers}}^{\text{hares of solar solution}} - KPI \text{ Green}$ Energy and Websol Energy climbed on Thursday after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced rooftop solarisation to ensure free electricity of up to 300 units per month for one crore households. KPI Green Energy stock zoomed 9.48 per cent to settle at Rs 1,996.65 on the BSE. During the day, it rallied 9.99 per cent to reach its 52-week high of Rs 2,006,15.

Shares of Websol Energy System climbed 4.99 per cent to hit its one-year peak of Rs 388.15, and Sterling and Wilson Renewable Energy ended 1.07 per cent higher at Rs 572.45 after jumping 4.16 per cent to Rs 590 during the session. In her interim Budget speech,

she mentioned about rooftop solarisation to ensure free electricity of up to 300 units per month to one crore households. leading to household savings of Rs 15,000-18,000 annually. "The Budget reinforces its com-

mitment to green growth, introducing initiatives to enhance the environment for electric vehicles biomanufacturing. Particularly noteworthy is the emphasis on rooftop solarisation," said Harjeet Singh Arora, Managing Director, Mastertrust



Ashok Leyland sales decline in January

PTI MUMBAI

Commercial vehicle maker Ashok Leyland on Leyland on Thursday said its total vehicle sales, including exports, declined 7 per cent to 15,939 units in January. It had sold 17,200 units in the

year-ago period, according to a statement. The company's total MHCV (Medium and Heavy Commercial Vehicle) sales

dipped 8 per cent to 14,899 units last month as against 16,198 vehicles a year ago. The Light Commercial Vehicle (LCV) segment volumes fell 7 per cent to 5,721 units in the reported month from 6,150 vehicles sold in January 2023, Ashok Leyland said.

BFI TO HOST ELITE MULTINATIONAL TRAINING CAMP

n a major initiative ahead of 2024 Olympics, Boxing Federation of India, in collaboration with Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC), has begun an elite multinational training camp at Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports in Patiala. The 13-day camp, which began on January 29 and will go on till February 10, is expected to give the boxers much-needed

Asian Games bronze medallist Parveen (57kg), World Championships bronze medallists Deepak Bhoria (51kg), Mohammed Hussamuddin (57kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg)

Avani opens Women

4-under 68, on tied 4th

rough.

Asia Pacific with

PTI PATTAYA

Thursday.

Amateur

under 67

each.

India's Avani Prashanth made a smart recovery

from a bogey start to finish

the opening day of the

Women's Amateur Asia

Pacific with a strong 4-under 68 card that placed her on a

creditable tied fourth here on

Avani, winner of the Queen

Sirikit Cup individuals last year, and fourth at the World

Championships in 2023, had

six birdies against two bogeys on a satisfying day. Three players including Eila

Galitsky, bidding to become

the first player to win the

WAAP twice, her Thai team-

Soontreeyapas, who regis-

Wu were in shared lead at 5-

One shot behind, Avani was

tied with Thailand's Pimpisa

Rubrong, Amy Im of New Zealand and China's Yahui

Xhang, returning scores of 68

Among other Indians,

Vidhatri Urs (73) and debu-

tant Saanvi Somu (73) were

tied 39th, while things did not go well for debutants Keerthana Rajeev Nair (81)

Heena Kang (81) at tied 84

and Mannat Brar (82) was

"I am definitely pleased. The

way I started, I was quite con-

fused about how the day was

going to go. But then, I took

control of my full round by

the time I was on the 13th,

and that really put things in

"I started on the tenth, which

is a par-5. I was really happy

last night thinking I'm going

to tee off on a par-5, you know, a big advantage. But

then I proceeded to duck

hook my drive and then did-

n't get any contact on the ball

place," said Avani.

Novaporn

international exposure ahead of the crucial Olympics quali-



are among 30 Indian boxers, including 13 female, who are part of the camp that also features seven male and five

because I was down in the

Then I duck-hooked my 3-

wood into the left -- the fair-

way bunker and I chunked

that. Finally, I made an up

and down from like 35 yards

for bogey. Not how you want

Avani hoped for an even

"I put myself in good posi-

tions from there on and I set myself up for a birdie on

nearly every hole from there.

The ones that dropped,

dropped, and the ones that

didn't, I'll probably get them

Avani had a good run from

Avani played with World No.

4 Minsol Kim and Mikhaela

Rianne Malixi, who won the Australian Masters of The Amateurs last month, edging

the Indian into second place. Rianne and Minsol carded 2-

Leaderboard: 67: Navaporn

Soontreeyapas (Tha), Chun-

Wei Wu (CTP), Elia Galitsky

68: Ávani Prashanth (Ind),

Pimpisa Rubrong (Tha), Amy Im (NZL), Zhang Yahui

Indian scores: Avani Prashanth (68, Tied 4th);

Vidhatri Urs (73, Tied 39th),

Saanvi Somu (73, Tied 39th)

Keerthana Rajeev Nair (81,

Tied 84th), Heena Kang

(81st, Tied 84th), Mannat

Brar (82, 86th).

under 70 each.

(Chn)

tomorrow.

to start," she added.

better second round.

female boxers from England. Subsequently four male boxers from Russia will also be part of

"The Boxing Federation of India and REC are committed to the growth of Indian boxing and the multinational camp is

tion as it provides players an international exposure, elevating the standard of boxing," said BFI secretary general Hemanta Kumar Kalita.

The camp will also boost their preparations for the Paris 2024 Olympics. It provides an unique opportunity to our athletes to hone their skills, learn new things and build a sense of camaraderie and sportsmanship," he said in a release.

The multinational camp offers a perfect platform for the Indian pugilists to prepare for the Olympic Games qualification. tion tournaments as they will work on sharpening their skills while training alongside international boxers.

The reigning national champions Anamika (50kg), Sonia

Lather (57kg), Jasmine (60kg) and Pooja Rani (75kg) are the other Indian women boxers participating in the camp. Among men, Hangzhou Asian

Games bronze medallist Narender (92+kg) and reigning national champions Shiva Thapa (63.5kg), Lakshya Chahar (80kg) and Sanjeet (92kg) are part of the camp. Besides the multinational camp, the BFI, in association with REC, has been also organising open talent hunt programmes to discover and nurture India's next boxing heroes.

The Southern Open Talent Hunt Programme will be held at the Sri Jayaprakash Narayan National Youth Training Centre in Bengaluru from February 2 to 18.

Sports Ministry gets ₹45 crore boost in **Union Budget**

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry was on Thursday allocated Rs 3,442.32 crore, a hike of Rs 45.36 crore as compared to last year, in the interim Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. In the previous budget, the Sports Ministry had got a revised allocation of Rs 3,396.96 crore.

The Olympic Games in Paris, to be held from July 26 to August 11, will be the country's main focus during the 2024-25 financial year.

The ministry's flagship programme, Khelo India, was allotted Rs 900 crore, an

increase of Rs 20 crore from the previous budget. The Sports Authority of India (SAI), which organises nation-

al camps, provides infrastructure and equipment to athletes, appoints coaches among others, saw Rs 26.83 crore increase in its budgetary allocation from the previous year's revised expenditure of Rs 795.77 crore. The National Sports Federations (NSFs) will receive Rs 15 crore more this time, as compared to the 2023-24 revised budget of Rs 325 crore. The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) too got a raise with the government allocating Rs 22.30 crore in the

interim budget as compared to Rs 21.73 crore in 2023-24. The National Dope Testing Laboratory (NDTL), which conducts the testing of dope samples, will receive Rs 22 crore, Rs 2.5 crore more than the previous budget.

The budget for National Centre of Sports Science and Research has been reduced to Rs 8 crore from Rs 10 crore prev while the National Sports University will get an increased allocation of Rs 91.90 crore from Rs 83.21 crore of 2023-24 budget.

tives to sportspersons saw a significant reduction from Rs 84

The allocation for National Sports Development Fund was also reduced to Rs 18 from Rs 46 crore. The Pandit Deendaval Upadhyay National Welfare for Sportspersons scheme got Rs 2 crore. allocation The

Enhancement of Sports Facility in Jammu and Kashmir was also brought down to Rs 8 crore from previous budget allocation of Rs 20 crore.

In the previous budget, the allocation for Commonwealth Games was Rs 15 crore, which was brought down to Rs 0.01 crore this time.

IOA chief PT Usha welcomes budget boost

Indian Olympic Association President PT Usha said that the fund boost would help the athletes in having specialized training programmes.

"In this Olympic year, the positive aspect is the increased support for athlete training programmes. With enhanced funding, our athletes can access better coaching, sports science support, and other essential resources, ultimately improving their performance on the global stage," Usha told PTI. "This is a positive step towards nurturing talent from the grassroots level and creating a robust sports ecosystem in the country. It will also help in talent identification at the grassroots level through Khelo India programmes."

Emphasizing the significance of increased support for athlete training programmes, Usha underlined the crucial role of financial backing of the athletes.

athletes to focus on their training without concerns about resources," she said. "I believe that with collabora-

tive efforts between the government, sports organizations, and the public, we can achieve

Services pip Army in rowing nationals

PTI ■ PUNE



Services ended with 4 gold and 3 silver as against 3 gold and 4 silver by Army. Chandigarh claimed the lone title among state associations.

In the women's section, Madhya Pradesh (4 gold, 1 silver) claimed the top spot while Kerala (2 gold), Manipur (1 gold, 1 silver) finished behind in the seven-race schedule. The men's section was exciting, with the first two finals going

the Services and Army's way respectively. In the double sculls event



Services' Kulwinder Singh and Karamjit Singh -- 6 minutes 48.9 seconds -- pushed aside the Army duo of Gurtap Singh and Ravi (6:55.2).

Army struck back, with Babulal Yadav and Lekh Ram edging out Services' Sanee Kumar and Igbal Singh.

Services. The coxless fours had when the lightweight double

Jaswinder Singh, Bheem Singh, Punit Kumar, Ashish (06:27.3) getting the better of Army's Lakhveer Singh Harinder Singh, Ghurde Patil, Jasmail Singh (06:29.5).

The next race also went the Services way and took their tally to three as against one by Army. The next two races belonged to Services claimed their third

finished ahead of Army's Arwinder Singh and Rohit Army claimed their second title of the day by bagging the quadruple sculls. Ravi, Jaspinder

sculls duo of Nitin Deol and

Ujjwal Kumar Singh (06:48.7)

Singh, Gurpartap Singh, Manjeet Kumar combined to clock 06:19.3, which was better than the 06:21.2 clocked by the Services quartet of Ashish Phugat, Jakar Khan, Karamjit Singh and Kulwinder Singh. The women's section saw Madhya Pradesh dominating and Maharashtra failing to make an impact with single sculler Khushpreet Kaur of MP (08:42.4) emerging stronger than Mrunmayee Salgaonkar

Madhya Pradesh also claimed the quadruple sculls, coxless pairs, the double sculls apart from the single sculls.

(08:48.7).

Third leg of Hero WPGT

Hitaashee takes three shot lead over Ananya

PTI ■ KOLKATA



the 13th to the 16th as she Hitaashee, starting in the final birdied three times. She group, had a bogey-bogey start but a series of birdies saw dropped a shot on Par-4 first, but picked birdies on the sectered a hole-in-one and ond, fifth and ninth for a her roar into contention at the

On her mindset after the bogey start, she said, "The She dropped a shot on the Par-4 12th but got that back with first thing I told myself after her fifth birdie of the day on the Par-4 15th. Her round of hitting the first three shots was that the tournament isn't 68 put her at 1-under 139 and won on the first hole. You three clear of Ananya (68). have 71 more to go. So that's Ananya, looking for her maidwhat I did, and then, thanken win on the Hero WPGT. fully, I started making some made up for her opening

birdies against two bogeys. Ananya is now 2-over for 36 holes at 142. Seher Atwal (71-71), tied sec-

ond, could have been better but for a bogey finish. She also had a double bogey on Par-4 12th. She had three birdies during the day.

Dilawari (69), amateur Anaahat Bindra (71) and Gauri Karhade (73) were in tie for the fifth place at 4-over 144, while Amandeep Drall, who actually went into the lead after a birdie on the second hole, slipped later. Amandeep, playing in the lead

bogey-bogey. Amandeep suffered three bogeys in a row from third to fifth and then had two more

group, birdied the second.

while her playing partners, Hitaashee and Khushi started

bogeys and a double bogey against just one birdie for a round of 76 that saw her drop down to eighth. Karishma Govind (75) and Khushi Khanijau (80) were tied for ninth place, while Sneha Singh (72), winner of

with Kriti Chowhan (72). Overnight leader Khushi had a rough day with a round of 80 that included a two double bogeys on the last two holes as she slipped to tied ninth at 149. The cut fell at 157 and 20 players made it to the final

The budget for giving incencrore to Rs 39 crore.

greater heights in the world of sports," she concluded.

Nagal to spearhead Indian men singles challenge in Chennai Open

PTI CHENNAI

Sumit Nagal, who recently became the first Indian to beat a seeded player in a Grand Slam tournament, will spearhead the Indian challenge in the men's singles competition of the Chennai Open ATP Challenger 100 tournament beginning Sunday.

The 26-year-old Nagal had entered the second round of the Australian Open last month after beating world no. 27 and number 31 seed Bublik of Alexander Kazakhstan. He is currently

ranked 121 in the world. Ramkumar Ramanathan and Mukund Sasikumar will the other Indians in the fray in men's singles as they were among three players who were handed wild cards for the main draw.

Luca Nardi of Italy has been given the top billing as players from 14 countries will be taking part in the tournament here. Last year's winner Max Purcell of Australia will not be competing this time as he is featuring in other ATP events. In the doubles category, India's Arjun Kadhe and Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan are

the top seeds. The tournament is the first of the four Challenger series to be played in the country. The other three will be held in Bengaluru, Pune and Delhi. The competition will be played on hard courts with 32 players in singles main draw and 16 in doubles. The total prize money will be USD 1,33,250.

Speaking during the tournament launch, Indian tennis legend and TNTA President Vijay Amritraj said, "This is proof that the conduct of international tournaments such as the ATP Challenger



enable Indian players to excel

on the world stage." He also congratulated Rohan Bopanna on winning the Australian Open doubles title and reaching the summit of the ATP doubles ranking.

"I am delighted to congratulate Rohan Bopanna on becoming the world's No.1 doubles player and winning the Australian Open title at the same time.
"Having chased his dreams for

such a long time, this is an amazing achievement for Rohan, and even more creditable that it has come at the age of 43," he said.

Harmanpreet to lead 24 members Indian hockey team in home Pro League matches

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ace drag-flicker Harmanpreet Singh will lead the Indian men's hockey team at the upcoming FIH Pro League matches in Bhubaneswar and Rourkela, which are key to the side's

preparation for this year's Paris Olympics. Harmanpreet will have mid-fielder Hardik Singh as his

deputy, as Hockey India on Thursday named a 24-member squad for the double-leg fixtures

The Bhubaneswar-leg will begin on February 10 and end on February 16 while the Rourkela leg will commence on February 19 and conclude on February 25.

India will play against Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, and Australia twice each across both legs.

The hosts will begin their campaign against Spain on February 10.

The squad was on the expected lines with striker Boby Dhami and goalkeeper Pawan missing out from the 26member Indian team that toured South Africa last

month. The Indian goal post will be manned by veteran PR Sreejesh and Krishan Bahadur Pathak.

The defensive line includes Harmanpreet, Amit Rohidas, Jarmanpreet Singh, Varun



Kumar, Sumit, Sanjay, Jugraj Singh, and Vishnukant Singh. The midfield will be marshalled by Hardik Singh, Manpreet Singh, Vivek Sagar Prasad, Shamsher Singh, Rajkumar Pal, Nilakanta Sharma and Rabichandra Singh Moirangthem.

The forward line has plenty of experience along with youthful exuberance in Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Mandeep Singh, Gurjant Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Abhishek, Akashdeep Singh, and Araijeet Singh Hundal, who recently made his debut for the senior side during the South Africa tour. "We've carefully selected a well-balanced squad, blending seasoned expertise with the

vigour of youth. Our goal is to forge a cohesive unit capable of competing at the highest level," India's chief coach Craig Fulton said. "The FIH Pro League serves as

an ideal platform to refine our strategies and measure our skills against top-tier opponents. The league's significance is paramount, with champions earning a coveted spot in the FIH Hockey World

Cup 2026.
"Additionally, it offers a valuable opportunity to pinpoint areas for enhancement, playing a pivotal role in our preparations for the Paris Olympics. We hold the belief that this exposure will elevate our per-

formance and equip us to

confront the impending challenges with confidence," added Fulton. Team: Goalkeepers: PR Sreejesh, Krishan Bahadur Pathak.

Defenders: Jarmanpreet Singh, Sumit, Jugraj Singh, Amit Rohidas, Harmanpreet Singh (C), Varun Kumar, Sanjay,

Vishnukant Singh.
Midfielders: Hardik Singh
(VC), Vivek Sagar Prasad,
Manpreet Singh, Nilakanta
Sharma, Shamsher Singh,
Rajkumar Pal, Rabichandra

Singh Moirangthem.
Forwards: Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Mandeep Singh, Gurjant Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Abhishek, Akashdeep Singh, Araijeet Singh Hundal.

HURT INDIA EYE SWEEPING CHANGES

PTI VISAKHAPATNAM

n under-pressure and under-resourced India will need to think out of the box to counter England's fearless bunch of 'Bazballers' in the second Test beginning here on Friday.

India are seldom stretched at home but following a dramatic loss in Hyderabad, they have plenty to ponder and the absence of injured Ravindra Jadeja and K L Rahul has made their task tougher.

Three years ago, the mighty hosts found themselves in a similar situation having lost the opening Test to England at Chennai but bounced back to win the series.

However, the Joe Root-led side was a different breed then and this time India plan to fightback against a team that has redefined the way Test cricket is played and defied all probability to win the series opener after conceding a 190run lead on a turning track. England batters, led by Ollie

Pope, swept and reverse swept

Test, taking Rohit and his bunch by surprise, while making the most potent spin trio in the world look ordinary. India won't have the luxury of fielding Jadeja in this game but Ashwin, four shy of the 500wicket milestone in Tests, and Axar will need to redraw their plans to come back hard at

uber-aggressive opponents who are sure to employ the sweeping tactics irrespective of the conditions. Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav is expected to

play in Jadeja's absence and it remains to be seen if India go in with only one pacer in Jasprit Bumrah and play another spinner, possibly offspinning all Washington Sundar. all-rounder

Uncapped left-arm spinner Sourabh Kumar has also been added to the squad.

Not just India's lethal spinners were tested against Bazball, their batters' struggles on turning tracks also came to the fore as left-arm spinner Tom Hartley transformed

their way to success in the first seemingly forgettable debut into a match winning one.

Rohit, perhaps, was the only frontline batter who looked assured in the second innings while the young brigade, especially Shubman Gill, were guilty of playing the turning ball with hard hands.

The defensive approach of Gill, who had a breakout 2023 in the shorter formats, contributed to his downfall.

With Virat Kohli set to return in the third Test, there will be immense pressure on the likes of Gill and even Shreyas Iyer to deliver here in Vizag.

The home team batters are not as comfortable as their English counterparts in playing the sweep but they need to find a way to match the visitors' high-

Rajat Patidar, who was also a part of the squad in Hyderabad, is likely to replace

After scoring a bagful of runs in domestic cricket, Sarfaraz Khan has finally got the selectors' nod and would be desperate for an India cap.



However, the management will have a closer look at conditions before taking a final decision

BASHIR: ANDERSON. England, on the other hand, might sense a golden opportunity to take a 2-0 lead on the playing 11. opportunity to take a 2-0 lead ENGLAND BRING IN in the five-match series that

can severely mount pressure on the Indians.

The way Stokes used and backed his resources in the opener was a captaincy

The call to give an extended spell to debutant spinner Hartley in the first innings despite Yashasvi Jaiswal's brutal assault and learning from how Ashwin and Co. Bowled spoke a lot about the leadership style of Stokes, who calls himself a great observer of the Game.

The tourists also have a point of concern after experienced left-arm spinner Jack Leach has been ruled out of the match because of a knee injury and young off-spinner Shoaib Bashir will make his debut

Pacer Mark Wood had failed to make an impact in Hyderabad despite bowling 25 overs across two innings and for this match the visitors have replaced him with veteran pacer James Anderson, whose unerring accuracy can bring higher value if the track remains slow and low.

In that context, England will not put into practice their coach Brendon McCullum's thought of fielding an all-spin attack for this game.

The ACA-VDCA stadium has staged two Tests till date and the pitch usually favours the batters in the first innings.

England have thrown down the gauntlet with a sensational result and it remains to be seen what kind of surface India go with as they seek to draw

parity.
A downright turner could backfire on the hosts, though they would be tempted to take that punt.

SQUADS

INDIA: Rohit Sharma (Captain), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shreyas Iyer, KS Bharat (WK), Dhruv Jurel (WK), Ravichandran Ashwin, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah (VC), Avesh Khan, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Washington Sundar, Sourabh Kumar. ENGLAND (Playing 11): Ben

Stokes (Captain), Ben Duckett, Zak Crawley, Joe Root, Ollie Pope, Jonny Bairstow, Ben Foakes (wk), Rehan Ahmed, Tom Hartley, Shoaib Bashir, James Anderson.

We have plans to counter England aggression: Bharat

PTI ■ VISAKHAPATNAM

There is no panic in the injury-hit Indian camp, declared wicketkeeper K S Bharat on Thursday, asserting that the home side has made fresh plans to deal with England's attacking approach, including employing the sweep shot as and when required in the second Test here.

Bharat, who will be playing in front of his home crowd, said the team has worked on its shortcomings in the seriesopener in which England staged a sensational comeback to win the game by 28 runs. Led by Ollie Pope, England

batters threw the Indian spinners off their plans with a barrage of sweeps and reverse sweeps. They are set to maintain that intensity in the Test beginning here on Friday. "They really played very well. Credit to them. Ollie Pope really played good shots," Bharat said in the pre-match press conference.

Îndia would be without star allrounder Ravindra Jadeja and top batter K L Rahul due to injuries.

"In our team meetings we spoke about the things we could have done better and yes, we certainly have few plans. efinitely the way how they went about the first game, playing some reverse. That's something we have definitely worked on," he

Indian batters, don't play a lot of sweep shots but were seen practising that shot in the two training sessions before the second Test. Does this mean that the home team will play more square of the wicket?

"Playing in India, we play a lot of cricket on these tracks. It's not that we don't know how to sweep, reverse sweep or pedal, but on that particular day depending on the situation of the team, we as batters take our calls," Bharat said.

"And it is very clear to us to bat with freedom. We also practised in the reverse before the first game. But playing out in the centre, it's the batters' individual plan. 'If the team demands us to

play in a certain way, then we are up to it," said the 30-yearold who batted well in the second innings in Hyderabad Tom Hartley. Indian batters surrendering to

the inexperienced Hartley was surprising but Bharat defended their effort.

"We don't play the bowlers, we play the ball. On any given day, can be experienced or

inexperienced (bowler), there is nothing like inexperienced in cricket. On that particular day, if someone bowls well, you have to give credit to them.

"After the game, the atmosphere is absolutely relaxed. They told us not to panic, which we are not. But then the instruction is very clear, it's a long Test series and we have played a lot of series like this in the past," he said.

SIX PLAYERS TRAIN IN

OPTIONAL SESSION: While the whole squad turned up on Wednesday, only six players came for practice in the optional session this morning. They were Yashasvi Jaiswal Shubman Gill, Sourabh Kumar, Dhruv Jurel, Rajat Patidar and Sarfaraz Khan. Uncapped Raiat and

who are fighting for a place in the eleven, had a long healthy chat during the nets. Gill, who has not been able to

replicate his white ball form in Test cricket, put in the hard yards and faced a lot of left-

Stokes keeps his promise with Root

PTI VISAKHAPATNAM

Ben Stokes was on a mission to mould a bowler out of premier batter Joe Root, and the maverick England skipper can afford himself a satisfactory chuckle seeing his venture coming to fruition in the first Test against India in Hyderabad.

Root had picked up five wickets in that match, four in the first innings and the all-important scalp of in-form KL Rahul in the second dig, to play a significant part in England's a significant part in England's stunning come-from-behind 28-run victory. Root got the ball to turn at a

good pace and his straighter one also troubled the Indian

With left-arm spinner Jack Leach out of the second Test,

Root will be expected to shoulder more responsibility in an inexperienced spin department. He had bowled 48 overs in the

first Test. "I did always say to Joe I thought he under-bowled himself as captain, and when he walked off with four-fer I

did say to him, 'see, I told ya I'd

make a bowler out of va.

"Having someone like that out here who is not only someone to throw the ball to and change the pace of the game up - he's bowled me lots of overs, Joe has - then having him batting at four and the runs he's scored and how important he is to us. 'To also have the benefit of Joe's bowling out here is obviously massive. surprised he's not actually mentioned he's nipped above



me, but I think we're just two people who don't really care about stuff like that," said Stokes on the eve of the second

England have brought in the evergreen James Anderson in place of Mark Wood while bringing in uncapped offspinner Shoaib Bashir for the injured Leach. Bashir arrived in India late

because of visa issues and was not available for selection for the opener.

Anderson's return would allow England to do what Jasprit Anderson has taken 34 wickets Bumrah did for India with the

old ball — getting reverse swing. Stokes said Anderson contributes to the team even when he is not playing, like it was the case in Hyderabad. "Bringing Jimmy's experience,

the class that he has, is great and I think it also goes under the radar how good his record in India is.

"Considering what Jimmy is going for — 'the swing king' and all that — it just proves how good a bowler he is. He has different skillsets that I will be able to exploit in Indian conditions.

"It's not just picking Jimmy for the new ball, it's the other stuff he possesses as well. It's great that Jimmy is doing good things for the old boys out there. It's huge credit and lots of people should look up to Jimmy considering he is where he is at 41.

in 13 Tests in India, averaging

Sarfaraz hopes to join league of legends "My father introduced me to

PTI VISAKHAPATNAM

The mountain of runs that he scored in domestic circuit might have opened the doors of Indian cricket to him, but for Sarfaraz Khan the learning never stops as he aspires to join the league of legends like Virat Kohli, Viv Richards and Javed Miandad. Sarfaraz has been recently drafted into the Inc for the second Test against England starting here from Friday after KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja were ruled out due to injuries.

The prolific Mumbai batter

"I like to watch Virat Kohli, AB de Villiers, Sir Vivian Richards, and even Javed Miandad because my dad has told me that I play like him. I watch Joe Root's batting also. "Anyone who is succeeding, I am watching them to see how playing for India in the Sarfaraz future, told JioCinema. But then there is a real-life hero for Sarfaraz his father Naushad Ahmed who dedicated countless turned into a fan-boy while hours to make his son a discussing his learning cricketer.

cricket, and I always wondered why am I even playing. I am an attacking batsman and I used to get out sooner than others and scoring big runs was getting difficult.

"It was disheartening to see they are doing it so I can others succeed while I learn and apply it. I want to wouldn't be among the runs. continue doing this, whether But my dad always believed everything I have is a result of that work," said Sarfaraz. In the 2015-2016 domestic season, Sarfaraz opted to play for Uttar Pradesh after he ran into trouble with Mumbai selectors during an under-19 game.



U19 WORLD CUP India face Nepal in final Super Six match

PTI ■ BLOEMFONTEIN

India will be eager to make their semifinal entry a grand affair when they face a struggling Nepal in their final Group 1 Super Six match of the ICC Under-19 World Cup

here on Friday.
The top two sides from the two
Super Six groups will progress
to the semifinals of the marquee event.

Pakistan (+1.06) are close on their heels with six points but India (+3.32) occupy the top slot because of better net run

The tournament favourites under Uday Saharan are yet to taste defeat in the tournament, and Nepal is unlikely to even stretch this powerful side.

India's dominance is visible in the stats as well. They are on top of Group 1 with an all-win record and six points, while Nepal is yet to notch up any victory.

Musheer Khan, younger brother of prolific Mumbai batsman Sarfaraz, leads the batting chart with 325 runs averaging over 81 with two hundreds and his latest blitz came against New Zealand on January 30.

Musheer's 131 off 126 balls was the leading light in India's thumping 214-run win over the Kiwis in their first Super

Saumy Kumar Pandey then

spot in the bowling table with Pakistan's Ubaid Shah and South Africa's Maphaka.

However, India have more depth in their squad beyond those two obvious stars. Captain Saharan, wicketkeeper batter Aravalli

Avanish and explosive all-rounder Arshin Kulkarni too have made their presence felt in the event at various junctures.

The young stars will be eager to finish off their Super Six engagements on a high, and travel to Benoni for the lastmatch high on confidence.

Opener Adarsh Singh had struggled a bit for consistent runs but a 52, his second fifty here, against New Zealand might have filled him with oodles of confidence.

Left-arm pacer Naman Tiwary, who has contained run-flow effectively in the Power Play section, could be a nagging presence for Nepal

top-order batters. However, writing off Nepal, who scored a thrilling win over Afghanistan in the preliminary stages, will be naive as the team from the Himalayan foothills has the wherewithal to stun the mighty on its day. Skipper Dev Khanal (58) and medium pacer Akash Chand (5/34) were the stars of that win and they would hope to make an impression yet again. India, on the other hand,

would try to avoid any mishap and take a safe path to the

out India A for 192

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

Durham pace duo of Matthew Potts and Brydon Carse wreaked havoc on a depleted India A side as they bowled the hosts out for a modest 192 to give England Lions upper hand in the third and final unofficial Test here on Thursday. At stumps on the opening day of the four-day fixture, England Lions were placed strongly at 98/1, with Alex Lees batting on 48 (106b) in the company of Oliver Price (20; 63b). The visitors trailed by 96 runs in their first innings.

Potts returned with excellent figures of 6/57, his second successive six-wicket haul, and now has 18 wickets from three matches.

Carse finished with 4/52 from his 12 overs as the duo ensured that the hosts, missing the services of Sarfaraz Khan and Washington Sundar, were bowled out inside two sessions. In response, opener Lees anchored the innings with a composed knock and Keaton Jennings contributed 17 runs before being dismissed by Akash Deep. Price and Lees

then put together an unbroken 71-run stand to see through the opening day. For India A, left-arm pacer

Arshdeep Singh bowled a tight spell, but remained wicket-less (8-2-19-0) and he would look to give early breakthroughs to help his team regain control. Leading the three-match series 1-0, the Abhimanyu Easwaranled side was asked to bat first and faced an early setback when the skipper was trapped in front of the match's first ball. After his patient approach, Tamil Nadu left-hander shouldered arm an incoming Potts delivery in another horror lbw dismissal, which left India A at 19/2 inside seven

Potts continued his onslaught, grabbing Tilak Varma (22) and Rinku Singh who made a second successive duck in his debut India A series.

Karnataka batter Devdutt Padikkal emerged as the lone fighter with his 65 (96b) but lacked significant support

from his teammates.
The England Lions pace duo of Potts and Carse maintained pressure on the Indians, with the latter chipping in with four crucial wickets after the early breakthroughs effected by his colleague. India A, who won the previous unofficial Test by an innings and 16 runs, face a daunting challenge to fight back in this game.

England Lions bowl | I am trying to learn from **Kohli batting: Patidar**

PTI VISAKHAPATNAM

Expected to make his India against England in the second Test here, prolific middle-order batter Rajat Patidar says he prides himself in being a good learner and has been trying to upgrade his skills by observing the iconic Virat Kohli.

The injury-forced absence of KL Rahul and Ravindra Jadeja is set to finally open a window of opportunity for the 30-yearold, who has scored tons of runs for Madhya Pradesh in the domestic circuit. I always observe his (Kohli)

batting from back of the nets, especially his footwork and body movement while batting. I try to learn and add these things into my batting," Patidar told BCCI.TV referring to the time spent with Kohli in their IPL team Royal Challengers Bangalore.

Kohli has opted out of the first two Tests owing to personal reasons. "It is not easy but I am

relentlessly after it," Patidar said about his pursuit of excellence. The right-hander from Indore also revealed that sharing the dressing room with chief coach

Rahul Dravid and skipper



Rohit Sharma in the ongoing five-match series has also benefited him immensely. "I have played with many

Indian players in the domestic circuit. I have been interacting with Rahul sir since the last two series. "I had not spoken a lot with

Rohit bhai but I got to speak with him on this tour about batting. He shared his experiences in the nets, all this Patidar said.

has increased my confidence," The late bloomer said he won't curb his attacking style if he gets to make his Test debut on

"I have an aggressive batting

style and I started playing shots

since the beginning of my

domestic career. It is in my habit and it's all about preparation. I have prepared myself that way, so it has become a habit now," he said "I study the pattern of "I study the pattern of opponent bowlers, their field placements. I observe how Rohit bhai makes his field placements. I try to add-on

It has not been smooth sailing for Patidar, who endured his fair share of injury setbacks. The batter underwent a successful surgery to repair an Achilles heel injury that ruled

these learnings into my game,"

he explained.

him out of the last IPL. "It is always difficult for a player when he gets injured. That time, I told myself I cannot change the time I will need to recover from the injury. I accepted this fact and worked in the present moment with a lot of focus," Patidar said.

'To make a comeback after injury, getting my first Test call-up has been the happiest moment for me. It was my dream to represent my country in Test cricket."

India are trailing the fivematch Test series against England 0-1 after losing the opener by 28 runs in Hyderabad.

Sri Lanka to host ICC AGM in July

With their suspension lifted, Sri Lanka will host the Annual General Meeting of the International Cricket Council (ICC) in July, the country's sports minister Harin Fernando said on Thursday. Sri Lanka Cricket was suspended for government interference in its functioning.

opportunity to host the Under-19 World Cup which is currently underway in South Africa. "Sri Lanka gets to host the ICC AGM from July 19-22 in Colombo. This will be a great boost for Sri Lanka with regards to cricket and tourism," Fernando, who is

also the minister of tourism,

regulation

It cost the island nation an

said in a statement. SLC was suspended in November for not meeting its ICC Member obligations, specifically, failing to independently manage its and affairs prevent government interference in

Lanka.

Six match. and administration of cricket in Sri

wreaked havoc on New Zealand's line-up with a fourwicket haul. The left-arm spinner (12

wickets) now shares the top

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