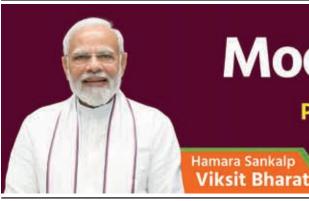
THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI FRIDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2024



Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

PM SVANidhi ensuring self-reliance in business

Collateral-free loans to 78 lakh street vendors

Vol. 30 No. 347 | 16 pages | ₹5.00





Shubman Gill during a practice session on Thursday ahead of the 2nd Test against England in Visakhapatnam beginning on Friday. ■ Report: Page 8 - PTI

US Fed holds key rate steady, says **March cut unlikely**

Washington: The US Federal Reserve voted Wednesday to leave interest rates unchanged for the fourth straight meeting, while indicating it was moving toward future cuts but probably not before May at the earliest. The Fed confirmed in a statement that it was holding its benchmark lending rate steady at its 23-year high, between 5.25 and 5.50 percent. "I don't think it's likely that the committee will reach a level of confidence by the time of the March meeting to identify March as the time to cut, Fed chair Jerome Powell said - AFP

PM on 2-day Assam visit from tomorrow

Guwahati: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will embark on a two-day visit to Assam from February 3 and is scheduled to inaugurate multiple developmental projects worth ₹11.000 crore besides addressing a public rally at Khanapara veterinary college Full report on Page 6

'Corrosive' substance

attack in London

London: A woman and her two young daughters had a corrosive substance thrown on them in London. The police said the suspect fled on foot after he crashed into a stationary vehicle in his attempt to drive away from the scene and the search is still underway. - AP

COUNTERPOINT



I don't care about the tax slabs... I have no income, I am unemployed!





Min: 10°C **RH:** 80% Rain: 0%

Forecast: Clear

ASTROGUIDE

Shubhakrut: Uttarayana Tithi: Pushya Bahula Saptami till 3.58 pm Star: Swati till 5.56 am Varjyam: 9.06 am to 9.52 am; **Durmuhurtam:** 10.37 am to 11.22 am; 3.08 pm to 3.53 pm Rahukalam: 10.30 am to 12 pm

SUNSET TODAY 6.01 PM SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.09 AM MOONRISE TOMORROW 12.44 AM MOONSET TODAY 11.07 AM

RNI No. 57290/94, Regd No: DL-SW-05/4189/15-17

■ Housing scheme for middle class ■ Food, fuel subsidies will be cut Huge boost in infra spending MGNREGA allocation undisturbed

FM shuns populism, vows more reforms, growth in next 5 yrs; no tax rate changes

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO

With no "big-bang" announcements ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the Narendra government focused Thursday mostly on women, the poor, youth and farmers in its interim Budget. While keeping the slabs unchanged for all direct, indirect and corporate taxes for the next financial year and disappointing the salaried and middle class, it also offered a lucrative and affordable housing plan for them in its interim Budget.

Besides, the government also announced several measures to enhance the skill, capacity and regulatory framework with a special focus on the massive infrastructure spend to boost the sector and generate employment in the country for the next financial year. The gov-ernment also hinted that there will be unprecedented development in

the next five years. While tabling a vote on account, or an interim Budget, for 2024-25 in Parliament, Ms

Sitharaman announced ₹11.11 lakh crore spending on infrastructure and vowed to continue reforms as she resisted resorting to populist measures in the Narendra Modi government's last Budget before the general election, instead choosing to stay on the path of cutting the deficit while bolstering measures for focus groups. "No changes in income-tax rates for individuals and corporates, as well as import duty, but offered amnesty for disputed income tax demands of the period prior to 2014-15 as a relief to small taxpayers," she proposed in her speech.

Reacting to the Budget, Prime Minister Narendra Modi called Ms Sitharaman's interim Budget "inclusive and innovative", reflecting the young aspirations of a young India. "For research and innovation, a fund of ₹1 lakh
■ Turn to Page 6

PAGES 3,4,5

Sounded like Modi govt's final **budget: Tharoor** Govt to launch housing scheme for middle class ▶ Tech R&D gets ₹1L crore worth corpus for funding



Poor, women, youth, farmers 'highest priority' for govt: FM

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB.1

With the Lok Sabha elections just around the corner and the Narendra Modi-led government confident of scoring a hattrick, the incumbent gov-ernment's interim Budget tabled by Union finance Sitharaman on Thursday had no populist measure but the government's reit-

THE GOVT claimed that the interim Budget carries its emphasis on the Indian economy's 'profound positive transformation in the last 10

eration of its "highest pri-ority" on "four major castes" — the poor, women, youth and farm-

The minister listed vari-

schemes by the government aimed at benefiting women, youth, farmers and the poor, the four sections considered a major vote bank of Mr Modi since 2014 and also on top of the priority list of the ruling BJP's election strategies.

Lauding the interim Budget, the Prime Minister dubbed it the Turn to Page 6

Govt's focus on four HIGHLIGHTS 'castes' - Garib, Yuva

No changes to taxation for direct, indirect & corporate taxes, including import duties; tax refund in 10 days now

and Annadata & Nari

2 crore more houses for Awas Yojna **▶ FY25 CAPEX HIKE:**

Capital spending for 2024-25 raised by 11% to ₹11.11 lakh crores or 3.4% of GDP

Fiscal deficit for FY25 estimated at 5.1% of GDP against 5.8% in the current fiscal

Terming the interim

Budget presented by Union finance minister

Nirmala Sitharaman as

inclusive and innovative,

Prime Minister Narendra

Modi on Thursday said

that it carries the guaran-

tee of strengthening the foundation of "Viksit

Asserting that the

Budget carries the confi-

dence of continuity, the

Bharat by 2047".

NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

3 new corridors for the railways — energy, mineral and cement corridor, port connectivity corridor and a high traffic density corridor; 40,000 bogies to be converted to Vande Bharat

standard Rooftop solarisation of 1cr houses will enable 300 units free electricity

Ayushman Bharat scheme: Healthcare cover under the scheme will be extended to

Anganwadi workers and

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister said that

it will empower all four pillars of developed India

and farmers.

– the poor, youth, women

Commending the Union

finance minister for her

Asha workers,

helpers as well

MEDICAL COLLE The government plans to set up more medical colleges by using existing hospital infrastructure.

▶ 'Lakhpati Didi' scheme was initially set at 2cr women, has been enhanced to 3cr

▶ E-vehicles to be expanded, ecosystem to be strengthened

83 lakh self-help groups, collectively impacting the lives of nine crore women across the nation

ASSERTING THAT the

Budget carries the con-

fidence of continuity,

of developed India -

and farmers

vision,

the PM said that it will

empower all four pillars

the poor, youth, women

vision, the Prime Minister said, "Nirmala

Ji's Budget is a Budget for

building the future of the

country. This Budget car-

ries the guarantee of

strengthening the founda-

Budget for 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047: PM

Biased, says Opp: All data given by **FM challenged by** economists: PC

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI. FEB. 1

The Opposition parties hit out at the Modi government over the interim Budget presented on Thursday. Former Union finance minister and Congress leader P. Chidambaram claimed that economists have challenged every num-ber FM Nirmala Sitharaman has given

Budget is biased in favour of the rich, he said, adding, "The FM did not acknowledge the rampant unemployment and did not utter a word on how the government intended to address the

problem."

SP Akhilesh Yadav called it a "farewell Budget" by the BJP gov-

ernment.
"The FM has presented the Modi government's last Budget," Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav

Thackeray said.

More on Page 3

Centre will set up panel to address population growth

New Delhi: The government will form a high powered committee to look into the challenges arising from fast population growth and demographic changes, finance Nirmala minister Sitharaman said on Thursday.

Presenting the interim Budget 2024-2025 in Parliament, she said the committee will be man-dated to make recommendations for addressing these challenges comprehensively in relation to the goal of "Viksit Bharat" by 2047.

tion of Viksit Bharat by

"This Budget is a reflec-

tion of the aspirations of young India," Mr Modi said as he highlighted a fund of ₹1-lakh crores and

the extension of tax

economists' par-

exemptions for startups.

lance, this is a kind of sweet spot. It will create millions of new employ-

ment opportunities for

the youth along with the

creation

■ Turn to Page 6

43 MLAs backing us: Champai asks gov for an 'invite'

Former Jharkhand chief minister and JMM leader

Hemant Soren being taken into custody by the ED offi-

■ Ex-J'khand CM sent to 1-day custody ■ Hemant plea against ED in SC today

NAYYAR AZAD and **RAKESH K. SINGH** PATNA/NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

JMM leader and transport minister Champai Soren on Thursday evening met Jharkhand governor C.P. Radhakrishnan to convince him that he has the support of 43 MLAs and urged him to accept his claim to form the government. In another major development, former Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren was sent to judicial custody for one day in connection with the land scam case.

Citing "confusion" in the state, which has been without a chief minister since the resignation of Mr Soren and the deepenpolitical crisis, Champai Soren urged the Jharkhand governor to invite him to form the government at the

JMM LEADERS said that Champai Soren will likely meet the governor again on Friday and convince him that the alliance has adequate numbers to form a government in Jharkhand

Talking to reporters outside the governor's house, Champai Soren said, "Our delegation tried to convince the governor that we have adequate numbers to form the government. We have the support of 43 MLAs and they can be paraded before the governor if the need arises.

Sources said that Champai Soren, during his meeting with the governor, handed out a letter of support with the signatures of 43 MLAs. He also reportedly showed video clip of the MLA

Kejriwal may skip 5th ED summons today, will join stir

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal is unlikely to appear before Directorate on Friday for questioning in a money laundering case linked to the now-scraped Delhi excise policy. The financial probe

agency on Wednesday issued the fifth summons to Mr Keiriwal after he skipped four earlier summonses issued by the ED over the last four months. Though the AAP remained tight-lipped

about whether the AAP supremo will appear before the probe agency, sources in the party said that he will likely skip



the summons this time too. The AAP has maintained that its legal team is studying the summons issued to Mr Kejriwal in connection with the excise policy-linked money laundering case.

Mr Kejriwal is scheduled to participate in a protest along with his counterpart Punjab Bhagwant Mann outside the BJP headquarters on ■ Turn to Page 6

EU agrees on \$54bn aid package for Ukraine despite Hungary veto threat Brussels, Feb. 1: The lead-

ers of the 27 European Union countries sealed a deal on Thursday to provide Ukraine with a new 50-billion-euro (\$54 billion) support package despite Hungary's weeks 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," Mr Michel said in a post on X. He said the agreement "locks in stead-

president Charles Michel said the agreement demonstrated that the 'EU is taking leadership and responsibility in

fast. dictable 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

EUROPEAN COUNCIL

support for Ukraine' long-term, aged economy.

were made to secure Hungarian PM Viktor Orban's approval He raised staunch objec-

tions to the financial aid package in December and in the days leading up to Thursday's summit in Brussels. Several fellow leaders had lashed out at Mr Orban, accusing him of blackmail and playing political games that undermined support for Ukraine and the country's war-rav-

More on Page 8



Tourists play with snow amid snowfall in Shimla on Thursday. Moderate to heavy snowfall continued in high hills and tribal areas of Himachal Pradesh while the state capital received the first snowfall of the season bringing cheer to residents, tourists and farmers. Report on Page 6

SC asks Gyanvapi mosque panel to move HC over puja New Delhi: The

Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Gyanvapi masjid committee to approach the Allahabad high court against a Varanasi district court's order that a Hindu priest can perform prayers before idols in a cellar of the mosque. Lawyers representing the mosque panel moved the SC registrar seeking an

urgent hearing.

More on Page 6

SHORT TAKES

Sanjay Singh moves city court for bail

New Delhi: Senior AAP

leader Sanjay Singh on Thursday moved a Delhi court seeking interim bail in a money laundering case related to alleged excise scam to take oath as a member of Rajya Sanjay Singh



Sabha and attend the ongoing Parliament session. Special judge M.K. Nagpal issued notice to the ED on Mr Singh's application and directed the central probe agency to file its reply by February 3 on the application seeking interim bail from February 4 to 10. "It is found that the main case is already listed for hearing before the court on February 3, 2024...Let notice

of this application be issued to the IO (investigating officer)/ SPP (Special Public Prosecutor) for FD for the above said date and time.

Man stabbed for not

withdrawing case

New Delhi: A 22-year-old man was stabbed by a group of people in northwest Delhi's Netaji Subhash Place area allegedly for not withdrawing criminal cases against two of their associates, the police said on Thursday. The attackers were closed associates of Anas alias Rahul and Harsee, both of whom are facing two criminal cases, including an attempt to murder, in Budh Vihar area, the police said. The incident happened on Monday when Pankaj, the victim, had gone to see his grand mother at her house in Netaji Subhash Place. Three or four people followed him and attacked him with knives, wounding him in his thigh, among other places, a police officer said. Pankaj is under treatment at a hospital, he said.

APPLY ONLINE FOR LS TICKETS: CONG ODISHA INCHARGE

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO

BHUBANESWAR, FEB 1 **All India Congress** Committee (AICC) Odisha in-charge Dr Ajoy Kumar on Thursday said prospective candidates seeking party tickets to contest the upcoming Lok Sabha and state Assembly polls shall have to apply online. The candidates have to furnish in detail about their activities in constituencies and explain what edge they have over their possible rivals. The decision to ask the aspiring candidates to apply online was taken following a closed-door meeting at the state guest house here. **Odisha Pradesh Congress** Committee (OPCC) president Sarat Pattanayak, Odisha in-charge of the Congress Ajoy Kumar, and AICC screening committee chairman Madhusudan Mistry were also present at the

meeting. Sources close to the party said the AICC has entrusted the responsibility of bringing transparency in ticket distribution to party leader Pravin Kumar. Soon e-forms will be made available for aspiring candidates

to apply. In case of more than one aspirant, the Pradesh Election Committee will study the winnability of the candidates and choose one from among them. Then, a list of the aspiring candi-

dates will be sent to the Screening Committee. After their approval tickets will be given to the suitable candidates, informed sources.

BJP putting everyone in jail to win polls, says Mamata

'If you put me behind bars also, I will make a hole and come out'

RAJIB CHOWDHURI

A day after Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee asserted that if she were also put in jail she would manage to sneak out of it.

In an oblique reference to Soren's fate, the Trinamul Congress supremo also attacked the BJP rule in the Centre over its vendetta against the leaders of the states, under the Opposition parties' rule, to win the Lok Sabha election.

She is likely to visit New Delhi next week, according to her party sources.

Spewing venom against the BJP, Ms Banerjee claimed at a TMC rally at Shantipur in Nadia on Thursday, "If you put me in jail also, after putting others behind bars under threat, I will make a hole and come out. They (BJP) are getting everyone arrested and imprisoned to win the polls. Are we all thieves and they are saints?"

She alleged, "They are the biggest of thieves. Empty vessels sound much. Today they are in power. That is why they are roaming around with agencies and misusing them. Tomorrow, when they will not be in power, everything will fall flat."

Clarifying her stand on seat-sharing in the anti-BJP forum INDIA bloc, Ms Banerjee explained, "We wanted an alliance but Congress did not agree with us. They have joined



Banerjee during a roadshow in Krishnangar on Thursday.

help the BJP in the polls." She once again stood by expelled TMC MP of Krishnanagar Mahua Moitra and predicted her win from her seat in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.
The TMC chief added,

"They threw out Mahua because she used to speak for people. They might have been able to do so but it's my belief that she will win with the votes of people. People will give the

Expressing confidence that BJP will lose the election. Ms Baneriee said that after the polls are

other regional parties would decide on the strategy to form the government in the Centre.

The chief minister also cautioned locals about not accepting any identity cards issued by the BSF in the bordering area. The BSF "must concen-

trate" on manning the border and keep a check on illegal activities there, she said.

She also instructed DMs. BDOs, and SDOs to issue permits to people who need to cross the international border to work and keep an eye on the BSF in

Bengal will get its dues if it meets Centre's

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB 1

conditions: Gov

As West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee gets ready to launch her dharna in city on Friday to press for the release of the central funds

pending under welfare various social schemes to her governgovernor Ananda Bose on Thursday assured her of the disbursement of the dues by

the Centre, subject to some conditions. Mr Bose made the assurance in the evening after meeting vice-president Jagdeep Dhankhar and Union home minister Amit Shah in New Delhi. Referring to Ms Banerjee, the governor said, "What

transpired between me and

the union home minister is

not normally said in the public domain. But I understand your concern. He elaborated, "Whatever dues are there for the people of Bengal will certainly be given provided the requirements laid down by the Government of India are met. The state government has given the answers in the last few months

through the various queries raised by the

Ĝovernment of India.

■ Leads to traffic snarls in several parts of city

Heavy rain adds chill to Delhi winter, improves air quality

New Delhi, Feb. 1: Heavy rains that lashed Delhi added to the winter chill and improved the city's air quality on Thursday. Overnight heavy rains in the national capital led to traffic snarls in several parts of the city causing inconvenience to commuters.

The Safdarjung observatory, considered the official marker for Delhi, received 27 mm of precipitation in the last 24 hours ending at 8.30 am on Thursday, an official

Delhi's air quality index (AQI) on Thursday morning stood at 250, which is a marked improvement compared to 386 at 7.00 pm on Wednesday.
An AQI between zero

and 50 is considered 'good,' 51 and 100 'satisfactory,' 101 and 200 'moderate,' 201 and 300 'poor,' 301 and 400 'very poor,' and 401 and 500 'severe.'

observatory, considered the official marker for Delhi, received 27 mm of precipitation in the last 24 hours ending at 8.30

am on Thursday

The minimum temperature on Thursday was recorded at 12.3° C, a notch below the season's average while the humidity at 8.30 am was 100 per cent.

The weatherman has forecast a generally cloudy sky with very light rain for the day. The maximum temperature is expected to settle around

Parts of the national capital were lashed by rainfall on Wednesday with the city recording a significant drop in the maximum temperature. Harsh Kumar, who was

travelling Ghaziabad

was heavy near Anand Vihar.

'The traffic was heavy from Ramprastha towards Anand Vihar. I took alternative routes to reach Mayur Vihar," Mr Kumar said.

The Delhi police wrote on X that the traffic is affected on the Ring Road in the carriageway from the Hanuman Mandir towards the ISBT due to waterlogging near the out-gate of ISBT.

The police also said that the 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 the M.B. Road in the carriageway Khanpur due to waterlogging near Ratiya Marg and Hamdard T-point.



Vehicles stuck in a traffic jam on NH-9 amid low visibility due to fog in Ghaziabad on

'Step-motherly' treatment: AAP as Delhi gets ₹1,168cr

Got ₹1,100cr out of ₹15K cr share in Central taxes: Atishi

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

The Union Territory of Delhi was allocated ₹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-motnerly treatment while the Delhi LoP claimed that it is a roadmap for development with special focus on women, youth, poor, and farmers.

The Arvind Kejriwal government is expected to table the 2024-25 budget of the city government on February 17.

The transfer to Delhi from the Union home ministry included ₹1,168 crore under the revenue head and ₹0.01 crore under the capital head.

In the 2022-23 budget, Delhi was allocated ₹960 crore. It was increased to ₹1,168.01 crore in 2023-24 and remains the same for

There were no grants in lieu of share in Central taxes and duties for Delhi. It was ₹325 crore in the 2022-23 budget.

The grants in return for Delhi's share in the pool of Central taxes and duties were clubbed in the "Central assistance to Union Territories" in the budget estimates of 2023-24 and has remained so this year, the budget document

The allocation under Central assistance to

Delhi police gets ₹11,397cr, 4% increase from last fiscal

AGE CORRESPONDENT **NEW DELHI, FEB 1**

The Delhi police has been allocated ₹11,397.98 crore in the interim Budget for 2024-25, a decrease of 4.47 per cent from the last fiscal, according to the official data released on

minister Finance 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 Territory Capital of

Delhi. The responsibility also includes traffic management in the city.
The provision is for rou-

tine 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 system. 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 police.

Delhi in the budget 2024-25 estimates was ₹951 crore like the previous budget for 2023-24. It is provided for financing the schemes of the Delhi government. City finance minister Atishi alleged that this budget has once again proved that the BJP-led Central government is actually a government of hollow promises and "stepmotherly" treatment has

been meted out to Delhi. "Delhi has a share of ₹15,000 crore in Central taxes but it has only been allocated ₹1,100 crore by the Centre. Like every time, we have been given step-motherly treatment.

The MCD has not been given a single penny," she told the media.

Assembly LoP Singh Bidhuri, Delhi Ramvir meanwhile, said, "'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 the Mudra Yojana loans worth ₹30 crore were distributed to women in 10 years, one crore vouth were given training, free ration was provided to 80 crore poor people, and 4 crore farmwere benefited

through crop insurance

US nod to predator drone sale to India "India has demonstrated ▶ THE US said that this

The US state department on Thursday approved the foreign military sale to the government of India of an armed MQ-9B predator drone and related equipment for an estimated cost of \$3.99 billion.

US Defense Security Cooperation Agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of this possible sale

The government of India requested to buy 31 MQ-9B Sky Guardian air-

Prime Ahead of Minister Narendra Modi's

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) headed by defence minister Rajnath Singh had in June 2023 approved the proposal to acquire 30 MQ-9B predator armed drones deal at a cost of over \$3 billion from the US The US said on Thursday

that this proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the United States by helping to strengthen the US-Indian strategic relationship and to improve the security of a major defence partner which continues to be an important force for politi-

and national security objectives of United States by helping to strengthen the US-Indian strategic relationship cal stability, peace, and

proposed sale will sup-

port the foreign policy

economic progress in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia region. The proposed sale will

improve India's capability to meet current and future tnreats enabling unmanned surveillance reconnaissance patrols in sea lanes of operation, it said.

ernising its military and will have no difficulty absorbing these articles and services into its armed forces," said the US. The proposed sale of this equipment and support will not alter the basic

a commitment to mod-

military balance in the region, said the US. The principal contractor will be General Atomics

Aeronautical Systems, The purchaser typically requests offsets. An set agreement will

defined in negotiations between the purchaser and the contractor.

NINE PLUS INFRASTRUCTURE

PRIVATE LIMITED CIN: U45400HR2007PTC073696

Corporate Office: 524, 5th Floor,

Galleria, DLF City Phase-IV,

Gurgaon, Haryana-122009 Tel: 0124 - 4052649

Form INC-26

NOTICE

Before the Central Government

Regional Director (Northern Region)

-2 Wing, 2nd Floor, Paryayaran Bhawai

CGO Complex, New Delhi - 110003

U'khand BJP incharge hits out at 'INDIA'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB 1

BJP national general Uttarakhand state incharge Dushyant Gautum on Thursday called India alliance Opposition partners a group of dogs that bark on each other but unite to shout at catcher when latter comes to cage them. He said they are trying to divide people on regional, caste, communal and religious

lines.
"They are like group of dogs of a colony who keep barking and shouting at each other persistentl" said Mr

NIA charges against 2 more KTF operatives

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA NEW DELHI, FEB 1

The National Investigation Agency on Thursday said that it had filed a chargesheet against Khalistan Terrorist Force (KTF)
members Manpreet Singh alias Peeta and Mandeep Singh, who were deported from the Philippines recently in the gangster-terror-nexus case.

The duo have been chargesheeted, which was filed in special court here, the agency has identified them as associates of 'listed individual terrorist' Arshdeep Singh alias Arsh Dalla.

"Dalla had recruited Peeta and Mandeep, who were operating from the Philippines on his direction. The duo was actively involved in recruiting youth into Dalla's terror and crime syndicate," a senior NIA official said..

'The two were playing a vital role in the larger conspiracy terror against India by raising funds for the proscribed terror outfit KTF through large-scale extortions in India and "routing the extorted money into drug and other businesses" in various countries through the hawala network,

official further alleged. "They were als "They were also involved in smuggling of arms and ammunition from Pakistan into the Indian territory, he alleged.

n the matter of sub-section (4) of Section 13 of Companies Act, 2013 and clause (a) of sub-rule (5) of rule 30 of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014 AND In the matter of M/s NINE PLUS
INFRASTRUCTURE PRIVATE LIMITED aving its registered Office at SHOP NO.

MSOZ36 MEGA MALL GOLF COURSE ROAD DLF PHASE-1, Gurgaon, Haryana-122001 (Petitioner) Notice is hereby given to the General Public that the company proposes to make application to the Central Government under section 13 o the Companies Act, 2013 seeking confirmation of

alteration of the Memorandum of Association o the Company in terms of the special resolution passed at the Extra Ordinary General Meeting held on 30th November , 2023 to enable the company to change its Registered office from "State of Haryana" to "State of Gujarat." Any person whose interest is likely to be affected by the proposed change of the registered office of the company may deliver either on the MCA-21 portal (www.mca.gov.in by filing investor complaint form or cause to be delivered or send by registered post of his/he objections supported by an affidavit stating the opposition to the Regional Director, Northern Region, B-2 Wing, 2nd Floor, Paryavaran Bhawan, CGO Complex, New Delhi - 110003, within Fourteen days from the date of publication of this notice with a copy of the applicant company at its registered office at the address mentioned below: ADDRESS OF REGISTERED OFFICE: SHOP NO. MS0236 MEGA MALI GOLF COURSE ROAD DLF PHASE-1 Gurgaon, Haryana-122001 (Present Address) and CIN-U45400HR2007PTC073696 For and on behalf of

M/s NINE PLUS INFRASTRUCTURE PRIVATE LIMITED

Director (Megha Anand) DIN: 07958829 Tel. No.: 0124-4052649 nineplusinfrastructure@gmail.com

43 MLAs backing us: Champai asks gov for an 'invite' Hyderabad on Friday if lenging his arrest in the country," Mr Sibal told a

camping in the circuit house, hoping to be invited by the governor.

JMM leaders said that Champai Soren, along with four other MLAs of the coalition, will likely meet the governor again on Friday and convince him that the alliance has adequate numbers to form a government in Jharkhand.

governor exuded confidence that they will get a call to form a government in the "Further delay in forming the government could lead

Other leaders who met the

to a crisis. There is no government in the state after Mr Soren resigned as the Wednesday evening," the JMM leaders said. Sources said that the gov-

ernor is still not convinced and is seeking legal help over the issue. Amid the evolving political situation, Champai Soren tried to send the 39

coalition MLAs Hyderabad to avoid poaching attempts by the BJP. However, their chartered plane remained stranded at the airport and couldn't take off due to bad weather conditions and low visibilitv. The MLAs were brought back to the circuit house in

said that the MLAs are likely to leave for

weather conditions improve.

According to reports, Champai Soren also chaired a meeting in the circuit house to discuss future strategies.

Meanwhile, Mr Soren was produced at the PMLA court in Ranchi on Thursday after being arrested by the Enforcement Directorate late on Wednesday evening. The court will resume hearing in the case on Friday, his lawyers in Ranchi said.

also agreed to hear on

Friday Mr Soren's plea chal-

lenging his arrest by the ED.

He had first moved the

Jharkhand high court chal-

The Supreme Court has

Justice Anubha Rawat Choudhary Jharkhand high court were scheduled to hear Mr Soren's plea at 10.30 am on Thursday. However, senior advocates Kapil Sibal and Abhishek Singhvi changed

their strategy and decided

to move the top court

instead of seeking relief

from the Jharkhand high

Acting Chief Justice Shree

Chandrashekhar

court.
"We will be withdrawing the petition in the high The manner of arrest just before the general election has an adverse impact on the polity of the

bench comprising Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta and additional solicitor-general S.V. Raju opposed Mr Soren's plea, saying the high court is already scheduled to hear the petition. Mr Mehta said thousands

of people are arrested by the ED and all of them cannot come to the top court straightaway.
"We will keep it tomorrow...We haven't read the

papers," the CJI said, asking the lawyers of both sides to their ammunition ready for Friday.

MOIDE.

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority Administrative Building, Sector - 6, Noida - 201301 (U.P.)

E-TENDER NOTICE

E-Tenders are invited from eligible contractors/firm for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on Noida Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in & https://etender.up.nic.in. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc.

| A) lender work: - | | | |
|-------------------|---------|--|----------------------------|
| SI. No. | Job No. | Name of Work | Tender Amount (in Lacs) |
| | | Supply For Power in Different Location CCTV Work Noida. | 25.07 |

The above tenders can be uploaded by dated 08.02.2024 up to 5.00 PM Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on dated 09.02.2024 at 11.00 AM. Dy. General Manager Office:

(NTC) NOIDA CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

years

FASTER REFUNDS: Reduction in

average processingtime of returns

from 93 days (2013-14) to 10 days

largely positive

'Eco will grow to



This inventive **Budget aligns** seamlessly with PM Modi Ji's commitment to uplift farmers women, youth, and the under-



India has sustained its export growth notwithstanding the global challenges emerging due

the Israel-Hamas war and the Budget has laid out a strong foundation to push the economic growth - PIYUSH GOYAL

What was 'extremely worrying' was the increasing fiscal deficit because the

numbers that have been pre-

Rs 18 lakh crore is the unfunded extent of the Union Budget, and 'the number is going to increase over the next year'

- MANISH TEWARI Congress leader

The BJP govrecord by compeople budgets,



which will never break

Samajwadi Party president



Sitharaman, was a "copy-paste" of last year's budget and there was nothing in it to benefit the people or the economy

> K.N. BALAGOPAL Kerala finance minister

hopeful that the finance minister would inform us about the target of the Prime



vide two crore jobs every year and accordingly whether the employment (in ten years) during the period has been

> - KAMAL NATH Congress leader

that they would





Nothing new was there in the Budget. No relief for the middle class, farmers or students - SACHIN PILOT

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has presented the Narendra Modi government's



UDDHAV THACKERAY Shiv Sena (UBT) president

OPP. DUBS BUDGET AS INSIPID

■ NDA'S APPROACH TO ECONOMY. GOVERNANCE IS BIASED IN FAVOUR OF RICH: PC ■ INTERIM BUDGET REVEALS GRIM SITUATION, POOR BECOMING POORER: CPM

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

HE ASIAN AGE | FRIDAY | 2 FEBRUARY 2024 | NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties hit out at the government over the interim Budget presented by the Central government on Thursday. Former Union finance minister and Congress leader P. Chidambaram said that every number given by the finance minister has been challenged by economists and domain experts. He fur-ther added, "The finance minister spoke about youth. She did not speak unemployment. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) (July 2022-June 2023) and the State of Working India report, 2023, the unemployment rate among youth between the age of 15 and 29 is 10 per cent (Rural 8.3, Urban 13.8). Among graduates under the age of 25, the unemployment rate is 42.3 per cent. Even when the graduates reach the age of 30-34 years, the unemployment rate is still 9.8 per cent. The finance minister did not acknowledge the rampant unemployment and did not utter a word on how the government intended to address the problem."

Taking on the government, Mr Chidambaram further added, "The fundamental flaw in the NDA's approach to the economy and governance is that it is biased in favour of the rich. It is a government of the rich, by the rich, and for the rich.'

Left parties also hit out at the government and said, "The interim Budget reveals the "grim" eco-nomic situation confronting India's working people, and the government's idea of development is making the rich richer and the poor poorer," the CPI(M) alleged.

In a statement, the Left Party said that while the actual Budget for 2024-25 will be the responsibility of the new government and Parliament to be formed after the 2024 general elections, the revised figures for 2023-24 reveal that expenditure in social sectors has "gone down". "This will impact future ine CPI(M) said

DMK MP Dayanidhi Maran said that finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman took a long time to hail praises, but delivery was zero. "They are going to present a

white paper on the previ-

Pinarayi Vijayan

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM,

Kerala's chief minister,

expressed his disap-

Ūnion Budget, stating

that it had overlooked

the state's needs and

pointed out that the

Budget had failed to

address the issue of pro-

tecting rubber cultiva-

tion by not increasing

the import duty on rub-

Additionally, no special consideration had been

given to Kerala's paddy.

coconut, and spice culti-

Mr Pinarayi also high-

lighted the fact that

Kerala had not been allot-

ted premier institutions

such as the All India

Furthermore, the Budget

had not taken into

account any of Kerala's

including new trains, rail

surveys, Sabari line, and

Sciences

legitimate

track doubling

Medical

(AIIMS).

demands,

Pinarayi

pointment

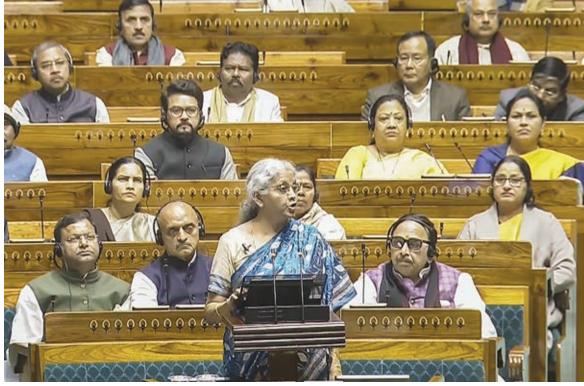
aspirations.

The chief

Vijayan,

with the

minister



Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman presents the interim Budget 2024 in the Lok Sabha at Parliament House

ous government. The people of the country are already disappointed. Moreover, you realise that performance incentives are given to the bridge companies and not to the deserving ones. People rejected this Budget," Mr Maran said.

Shiromani Akali Dal MP Harsimrat Kaur Badal slammed the BJP and said that the interim Budget 2024 was hollow. "There was nothing for the youth, women, or farmers. I saw arrogance when they said that they would present the Budget in July. You cannot take any election for granted," she said.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav called the interim Budget pre-sented by the BJP government a "farewell Budget". The BJP government

has created a shameful record by completing a decade of anti-people Budgets, which will never break because now the time has come for a positive government to be formed. "This is the BJP's farewell Budget," he said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) also hit out at the government. inance minister Nirmala Sitharaman has presented the Narendra Modi government's "last" Budget," Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray said, taking a swipe at the BJP-led Centre govern-

New Delhi, Feb. 1: There was not a word on funds to

states in the 2024-25 inter-

im budget, senior TMC

leader Derek O'Brien said

on Thursday, accusing the

'Budget sets tone for Viksit Bharat vision'

New Delhi, Feb. 1: Several Union ministers hailed the interim Budget presented by fina Nirmala finance Sitharaman, asserting that it charts a definitive pathway for a fully developed and economically robust India by 2047. Reacting to the interim Budget which was presented in Parliament on Thursday, Union home minister Amit Shah said the interim Budget 2024-25 draws the roadmap to achieve Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of

a developed Bharat by 2047. "The Union Budget draws the roadmap to achieve PM Shri @narendramodi Ji's vision of a Developed Bharat by 2047. The Budget speech sheds light on the milestones achieved by the Modi govt in the last 10 years on its journey to make Bharat the foremost nation in every sector during the Amrit Kaal," Mr Shah said on X with the hashtag

#ViksitBharatBudget. Women and child development minister Smriti Irani said under the visionary thinking and strong



Union home minister Amit Shah with BJP MP Hans Raj Hans at Parliament House in New Delhi on Thursday.

leadership of PM Modi, the government has redefined the meaning of development for the welfare of the poor and rural India.

#DevelopedIndiaBudget, mention has been made of construction approximately three crore nouses under the Pradhan Mantri (Rural), marking a significant milestone in infrastructure development. she said in a post on X.

for the developed India by

Awas Yojana

Law minister Arjun Meghwal said the Budget laid a strong foundation

2047. "All the indicative meas-

ures taken in today's Budget, along with future trends and facts, have been incorporated. Either the Opposition has not paid attention to the interim Budget or they will now obtain review it. I believe that no sector has been left untouched in this interim Budget. Everything we need to focus on in the coming times is included in this interim Budget,

government to power at the Centre, Mr O'Brien said, "This is hubris. They

are in a bubble and they

cannot see the reality.

Eventually, people will

to

remarks

teach them a lesson".



Nirmala Sitharaman, Mr Yadav said nearly 25 crore people have been pulled out of poverty due to the policies of the governunder Minister Narendra Modi and it is a big achievement. policies have These

helped India emerge as the fourth largest economy in the world and they will also lead to the fulfilment of the PM's dream of taking India to the third spot, said Mr Yadav. Ms Sitharaman on Thursday presented her sixth straight Budget,

ahead Parliamentary elections. She presented a pre-election Budget, which technically is a vote on account and popularly termed an interim Budget to meet the Centre's essential expenditure for the first four months of the new fiscal year that

Budget provision of providing 2 crore houses to the



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 \$5 trillion by 2027. By 2030, it will grow to more than \$7 trillion," Mr Singh said.
Asked about the roadmap

New Delhi, Feb. 1: Union minister Rajnath Singh

on Thursday said the

interim Union Budget

outlines the vision for a

"confident, strong and self-reliant Viksit

Bharat", and asserted that

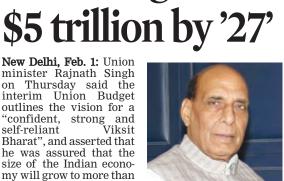
he was assured that the

size of the Indian econo-

Budget. But this interim

laid down by the govern-ment for 2047, he said, "We will reach that target. We are fully confident.

Mr Singh later also posted on X to congratulate Ms Sitharaman for "presenting a positive and encouraging "interim Budget" which outlines "interim the vision for a confident,



@narendramodi's vision of making India a developed nation by 2047, this Budget gives the glimpse of India's rapid economic transformation. There is something in this Budget for every section of the society. There is big push for infrastructure, construction, manufactur-ing, and housing and technology development in this Budget.

During the Covid pandemic, when the world faltering, India emerged as the beacon of hope. This Budget is perfectly aligned with PM's 'Panchamrit Goals' and it also paves the way for the next five years of unprecedented growth,' he posted.

Budget in interest of all, says MP CM

Has nothing on jobs, I-T relief: Nath

Bhopal, Feb. 1: Madhya Mohan Yadav Thursday hailed Union Budget, saying it is in the interest of all, but Kamal slammed it over jobs and for not providing any relief concerning the

Mohan Yadav ment's flag-

interim Ayushman Bharat scheme. The CM praised the pro vision of the ₹75,000 crores interest-free loan for giving a boost to tourism. The sector has an immense potential in MP and will see a turnaround, he said.

(Accredited

S o c i a l H e a l t h

Activist)

workers

He said the decision to develop and expand airports on 517 new routes will prove to be a milestone in the aviation sector.

However, Mr Nath criticised the Budget and said it has "exposed the anti-people face" of the Modi government.

"We were hopeful that ne finance minister would inform us about the target of the Prime Minister to provide 2 crore jobs every year and accordingly whether the aim of giving 20 crore employment (in ten years) during the period has been achieved or not?," Mr Nath asked.

He said the Modi government had promised to double farmers' income by 2022, but in the interim Budget for 2024-25, not a single good thing is mentioned in "their (farmers)

Central government of "cheating" federalism and Referring Sitharaman's committing "financial teris only giving 'gyan'. There that meeting the needs and is no action on the ground Mr O'Brien, whose party fulfilling the aspirations of Derek O'Brien is in power in West four "major castes" — the poor, women, the youth Bengal, also alleged that reporters here as he raised budget presented by the issue of "pending' dues to West Bengal. and farmers — are the govlittle for women and the ernment's highest priority, finance minister Nirmala youth, and is yet to fulfil the TMC leader claimed

Centre 'cheating' federalism: TMC

Budget ignores rorism" with states. Kerala's needs, says Vijayan the government has done **GILVESTER ASSARY**

> farmers' income. "The Budget is only giving "gyan". There is no action on the ground," he said on the pre-election

its promise of doubling



Sitharaman.

"There was not a word on funds to states in the Budget. They are cheating federalism and committing financial terrorism with done little for women and the youth, and is yet to fulfil its promise of doubling farmers' income and said that the Budget

DEREK O'BRIEN alleged

that the government has

On the finance minis-

ter's statement that the government in the next Budget will present a detailed roadmap achieve "Viksit Bharat", indicating a return of her

the 2024 poll results are a

foregone conclusion, and

said the interim Únion

cent the population possesses only 3 per cent wealth and household savings are at a 50-year low".

that the "bottom 50 per

starts in April. Mr Yadav lauded the



Health allocation evokes experts' mixed reaction

AVINASH PRABHAKAR NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

After finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday presented the interim Budget and allocated funds for the healthcare sector, top industry experts gave the "mixed response" for the sector. While experts lauded the center's efforts for vacci-nation for girls, they also highlighted the absence of push for technology in

the medical sector. Serum Institute of India CEO Adar Poonawalla hailed the government's announcement and said, 'I applaud the announcement to vaccinate girls aged 9-14 against cervical

cancer. Let's pledge to prevent HPV (Human Papillomavirus) ensure easy access to vacand anganwadi workers colleges and streamlining healthcare commitment to health, he wrote in a post on X.

Extending health cover for ASHA setting up more medical maternal and child schemes demonstrate a holistic WHO representative to

ister Nirmala Sitharaman for describing GDP as gov-India Dr Roderico H. ernance, development and applauded the performance, Mr Tharoor extension of healthcare said that under this dis-pensation "G" stands for coverag under Ayushman Bharat saying ASHA workers, anganwadi for governmental intrusion and tax terrorism, workers and helpers are "D" for demographic betrayal and "P" for poverat the forefront of health and care delivery. ty and rising inequality.

'Sounded like Modi govt's final Budget' New Delhi, Feb. 1: "Picture abhi baki hai," This time it is going to be Ram Mandir and no doubt the Abu Dhabi Mandir is senior Congress leader going to be added to the mix. That is Shashi Tharoor asserted on Thursday as he rejected the BJP's claims that not what governments are elected to

do, they are elected to improve

this government done that?

the lot of the common man. Has

■ 'Picture abhi baki hai': Tharoor rejects BJP's claims on polls

budget sounded like the — Shashi Tharoor, Modi government's final. Congress leader Criticising finance min-Terming the interim Union Budget "disappointing", Mr Tharoor said the omissions were startling with unemployment completely escaping the finance minister's speech. The government

the lives of the common person, he said. "Inflation, particularly of food items, has been so

shocking that people at the bottom 20 per cent are unable to buy in the bazaar what they could buy a year or two ago. That is a lived reality of the ordinary

government wants them to vote out of pride for a Ram Mandir or out of pride for bashing Pakistan on Balakot, Pulwama...That is what they did last time in 2019," he said. "This time it is going to

be Ram Mandir and no doubt the Abu Dhabi mandir is going to be added to the mix. That frankly is not what governments are elected to do, governments are elected to improve the lot of the common man and woman. Has this government done that? I would say on that particular yardstick, they get a failing grade," he said. — *PTI*



















gets a "failing grade" on

the count of improving









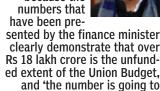


diverse interests of the society, emphasising infrastructure









ernment has



because now the time has come for a positive government to be formed. This is BJP's farewell budget - AKHILESH YADAV

The interim presented by

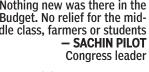


Minister to proaim of giving 20 crore achieved or not?

nothing for the youth, women, farmers. I saw arrogance when they said

take any election for granted - HARSIMRAT KAUR BADAL SAD leader

There was address the risissues related to employment. It



'last' Budget

"The Interim Budget 2024 lays a strong foundation for building a prosperous and inclusive India, in line with the



-NADIR GODREJ Chairman, Godrej Industries

"The budget demonstrates India's confidence as an economy of substance and immense promises. The budg-



-SANJIV PURI Chairman and MD, ITC

transformation,"

"A confident budget of a confident government that focuses on the objective of ensuring that India becomes



a \$5 trillion economy by 2025 and a developed nation by 2047. The emphasis on clean energy, technology and digital infrastructure will make India a world leader,"

> -AJAY SINGH president, ASSOCHAM

"The budget also creates opportunities for the FMCG sector to enhance infrastructure and improve distri-



bution, facilitating a more extensive reach into the rural market. The sector is strategi-cally poised to leverage the industry's potential, aiming to strengthen the market share in these crucial areas," -MAYANK SHAH VP, Parle Products

"The emphasis on 'Garib Kalvan, Nari Shakti, Yuva (youth empowerment), and Annadata



of farmers)' by prioritising their needs and aspirations reflects a commitment to the holistic development of all, aligning with the government's vision of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas',"

-PAWAN MUNJAL MD and CEO, Hero MotoCorp

"The focus on manufacturing, youth, skilling and women empowerment in the interim budget is truly commendable



and will pave the way for a more inclusive growth and economy. The emphasis on making energy security and affordable for the many people resonates with IKEA's sustainability vision,"

> -SUSANNE PULVERER CEO, IKEA India

"The announcement of a corpus of ₹1 lakh crore for the technology sector is a positive measure as access to capi-



tal is a critical factor to support innovation and growth. We are hopeful that in the post-election full budget, the industry's suggestions to reduce regulatory levies will be considered,"

> -S P KOCHHAR Director General, COAI

DAIKIN INDIA CMD KANWAL JEET JAWA

appreciated the government's recognition of the HVAC industry's pivotal role in fostering sustainable infrastructure and environmental efficiency.

PEOPLE-CENTRIC



ALL PARTS OF

becoming active

economic growth

participants in

COUNTRY



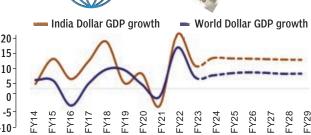
via GST



STRUCTURE-PHYSICAL,







Govt to launch housing scheme for middle class

WORLD DOLLAR

GDP GROWTH

To give two crore more houses in next five years under PMAY- Grameen

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, FEB. 1

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday announced that a scheme targeting the middle class would be launched soon wherein people living in rented houses, slums or unauthorised colonies can either buy or build their own houses.

'Our government will launch a scheme to help deserving sections of the middle class living in rented houses, or slums, or chawls and unauthorised colonies to buy or build their own houses," said the Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her interim Budget speech. She also said the government will give two crore more houses in the next five years under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna - Grameen.

Despite the challenges due to Covid, implementation of PM Awas Yojana (Grameen) continued and

AGE CORRESPONDENT,

The interim budget on

₹1.277.80 crore for census.

a significant reduction

from 2021-22 when ₹3,768

crore was allocated and

an indication that the

exercise may not be car-

ried out even after three

Earlier, a proposal was approved for

updating

national

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

The census operation

continues to be on hold

and the government has

not vet announced the

Officials said since gen-

eral elections are due this

year, the census is unlike-

ly to be carried out in

Covid-19 outbreak.

new schedule.

Thursday

years of delay.

conducting cen-

sus of India 2021

at a cost of

₹8,754.23 crore

population regis-

ter (NPR) at a cost

of ₹3,941.35 crore.

Census gets

₹1,277 crore

allocated

PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS
YOJANA (Grameen) close to achieving target of 3 crore houses, additional 2 crore targeted for next 5 **HOUSING FOR MIDDLE** CLASS scheme to be launched to promote middle class to buy/built their own houses

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. This was Sitharaman's last Budget before the Lok

According to the inter-

im budget, ₹1277.80 crore

has been allocated for

census surveys and statis-

The entire census and

NPR exercise is likely to

cost the government over

₹12,000 crore, officials

This exercise, whenever

first digital census giv-

opportunity

ing citizens an

self-enumerate. The NPR has

been made com-

pulsory for citi-

to exercise the

enumera-

self-enumera-

Commissioner

right to fill the

census form on their

own rather than through

tors. For this, the census

authority has designed a

self-enumeration portal, which is yet to be

tion, Aadhaar or mobile

number o will be manda-

torily collected. The Office of the

Registrar General and

had prepared about 31

questions to be asked to

the citizens during the

government

launched.

Census

During

it will happen, will be the

tics (₹520.96 in 2023-24).

Chandra Ghosh, managing director and chief executive offi-cer, Bandhan Bank, "The focus on the housing sector will benefit a range of peripheral sectors cements, paints, and steel, among others, and create employment opportuni-

DBT has led to

savings of ₹**2.7 lakh cr**

DECLINE IN

Percentage of

population who are

multidimensionally

PAWAN BALI NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

At a time of heightened

tensions with China, gov-

ernment hiked defence

capital outlay for the mod-

ernisation of the armed forces through acquisi-

tion of latest weapon sys-

tems by 5.78 per cent to

₹1.72 lakh crore in the

interim budget 2024- 25

presented by the Union

finance minister Nirmala

budget was hiked by 4.5

per cent to ₹6.21 lakh

crore for 2024-25 from last

overall

Sitharaman.

RATIO

HEADCOUNT

set up since 2014: FM

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

In order to boost the educational sector at every level, seven IITs and IIMs, 16 IIITs, 15 AIIMS and 390 universities have been set up since 2014, finance Nirmala Sitharaman said on Thursday, adding that the budget for school educa-tion has seen an increase by over ₹500 crore but the grant for higher education has been reduced by over ₹9,600 crore from the previous fiscal year's.

Sitharaman announced that the funding for University Grants Commission has been brought down to ₹2,500 cr from previous year's ₹6409 cr. Budget for IITs has also

GARIB KALYAN, DESH KA KALYAN

25 CRORE PEO-

Multidimensional

poverty

PLE moved out of

Defence budget hiked

4.5% to ₹6.2 lakh crore

year's allocation of ₹5.94 lakh crore. This comes out

to be 13.04 per cent of total

Union Budget, which was

presented by the finance

Out of ₹6.21 lakh crore,

30.68 per cent will go for

pay and allowances, 22.72

per cent for defence pen-

sions, 27.67 per cent to

capital, 14.82 percent for

revenue expenditure on

sustenance and opera-

tional preparedness, and 4.11 per cent for civil

organisations under the

that a new scheme will be

Sitharaman announced

ministry of defence.

minister Sitharaman.

seen a marginal dip of ₹60

However, the support grant for central universities has increased by over 28 per cent from ₹1,5472 crore to ₹12,000.08 crore. Further to boost the school education, the budget has increased from ₹72,473.80 cr to ₹73,008.10 crore. The budget for higher education has dropped from ₹57,244.48 crore to ₹47,619.77 crore.

According to the MoE, this is the highest-ever budget outlay for school education.

The Budget allocation for the FY 2024-25 of 73,498 crore is the highest-ever for the Department of School Education and Literacy," the MoE said in

CREDIT ASSISTANCE to

PM-SVANidhi

78 lakh street vendors under

launched for strengthen-ing deep-tech technologies for defence purposes and

expediting 'atmanirbhar-

ta'. The total budgetary

allocation on account of

defence pensions is ₹1.41

lakh crore which is 2.17

per cent higher than the

allocation made during

The allocation to the

armed forces for suste-

nance and operational commitment for FY 24-25

There is 30 per cent jump

in allocation to the Border

Roads Organisation for

2024- 25 at ₹6.500 crore.

was ₹92,088 crore.

Many edu institutions

and helpers.

demic been strong.

Ayushman Bharat scheme has been extended to ASHA workers and Anganwadi workers and helpers. there are 1.2 million Anganwadi workers and 8.57.000 ASHA workers in India. However, the allocation for medical and public health in the interim budget has only been marginally increased by 2 per cent to ₹39,603 crore against ₹38,774 crore in the previous budget. In the revised budget, however, the allocation had come down to ₹36,742 crore.

Further,

Lakshadweep on tourism radar

SANGEETHA G

Ahead of the elections, the interim budget sought to make political statements by mentioning the development of Lakshadweep tourism destination and

promotion of spiri-tual tourism. States will receive longterm interestfree loans for development of iconic tourist centres. "Tourism, includ-

ing spiritual tourism, has tremendous opportunities for local entrepre-neurship," the finance minister said in her Budget speech made days after the consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

To address the emerging fervour for domestic tourism, projects for port connectivity, tourism infrastructure, and amenities will be taken up on our islands, including Lakshadweep. This will help in generating employment also, she said. States will be encouraged to take up comprehensive development of iconic tourist centres, branding and

SPIRITUAL TOURISM has tremendous opportunities for local entrepreneurship, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech made days after the consecration of Ram temple in Ayodhya.

> marketing them at a global scale. A framework for rating of the centres based on the quality of facili-ties and services will be established.

Long-term interest-free loans will be provided to states for financing such development on a matching basis. The success of organising G20 meetings in sixty places presented the diversity of India to a global audience and made the country an attractive destination for business and conference tourism.

"The focus for promotion of MICE, religious tourism, iconic tourism centres and domestic tourism will lay the foundation of tourism devel-opment," said Pradeep Shetty, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations

Healthcare gets a Budget boost

SANGEETHA G and **AVINASH PRABHAKAR** NEW DELHI/CHENNAI, FEB.1

The government has proposed to extend health insurance cover under Ayushman Bharat scheme to all ASHA workers, anganwadi workers,

Without putting much pressure on the exchequer, the interim budget made a few announcements for healthcare, while the demand

increased allocation for healthcare after the panhas

schemes for maternal and

child care will be brought under one comprehensive programme for synergy implementation. Upgradation

Anganwadi centres under "Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0" will be expedited for 14 improved nutrition delivery, early childhood care, and devel opment, the budget said.

The budget also revealed the government's plan to set up more medical colleges by utilising the existing hospi-

tal infrastructure under various departments. A committee this purpose will be set up to examine the issues and make relevant recommendations.

It will also encourage vaccination for the age group of 9 to 14 years for the prevention of cervical cancer. The newly designed U-WIN platform for managing immunisation and intensified efforts of mission indradhanush will be rolled out expeditiously throughout the country, it said.

The centre plans to set up more medical colleges y using existing hospital infra and to encourage the vaccination of girls against cervical cancer. finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

INDIA GIVES ₹2,068-CR ASSISTANCE TO BHUTAN IN THE INTERIM BUDGET

SRIDHAR

KUMARASWAMI NEW DELHI, FEB. 1 India's small but strategi-

cally-important himalay-an neighbour Bhutan has got the lion's share of the assistance to foreign nations in the Budget estimates for 2024-25 with a massive allocation of ₹2,068 cr that includes a capital expenditure of ₹989 cr,

Union Budget figures submitted to Parliament on Thursday showed.

This comes at a time when China has been making a strong push to improve ties with Bhutan. Interestingly, the revised estimates for current year 2023-24 showed that nearly ₹2400 cr had been earmarked for Bhu-tan out of which a ₹1,614 cr was capital expenditure.

GROWTH I DRIVE Effort is to fortify manufacturing capabilities and to fuel job creation in economy

entre lays out schemes for 'Viksit Bharat'

defence

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

As India has been witness-

robust economic growth, the interim budget of 2024 has set a vision to make India a developed nation by 2047 with several measures, including contain fiscal deficit to manageable levels, momentum to nari shakti, welfare of farmers (annadatas), empowering youth and poor, boosting agriculture and food, solar and electric

vehicles, resilient per-

formance of Indian econo-

my among others.
"We are confident that

the government's ambitious drive to boost domestically produced goods will not only fortify manufacturing capabilities but also fuel job creation, contributing to the development of the economy," finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said.

The Budget's focus on agriculture, capex, and tax promises an reforms increased disposable income for consumers in the short term, and sustained growth in the long run. This budget fuels optimism for a thriving nation working harmoniously to realise the visionary goal of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047.

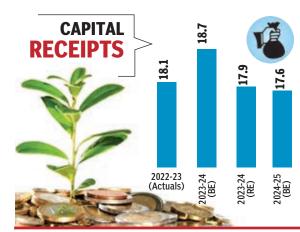
Citing an example, Sitharaman said government would provide ₹75,000 cr as interest-free loan for 50 years to support reforms by states for realising the vision of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Total resources being transferred to the states, including the devolution of states' share, grants, loans and releases under

centrally sponsored schemes in 2024-25 (Budget centrally Estimates), stand ₹22,22,264 crore. "This is an increase of ₹4,13,848 crore over actuals of fiscal year 2022-23," it said.

"The interim budget con-

solidates India's economic strategy prioritising capex driven-growth that boosts demand and improves the competitiveness of industrv. The strategy has led to India becoming a bright spot in the midst of a slowing global economy," said Chandrajit director general of CII.



HOME MINISTRY EARMARKED ₹2.02 LAKH CR

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

The union home ministry has been allocated ₹2.02 lakh crore. This is ₹6,833.76 cr more than ₹1.96 lakh cr last year. Out of the total alloca-

tion. ₹1.32 lakh crore was given to the central police force. About ₹1,248 cr was

given to the cabinet under which the expenditure on council of ministers, cabinet secretariat, PMO, and hospitality and came.

'NET ZERO' BY 2070

rooftop

households will be enabled

to obtain up to 300 units of

free electricity per month

Adoption of e-buses

for public transport

• Strengthening e-

and charging.

vehicle ecosystem by

liquefaction capacity

supporting manufacturing

PNG, and compressed biogas

network

As part of

solarisation.

one crore

· Viability gap funding for wind energy

· Setting up of coal gasification and

· Phased mandatory blending of CNG,

43% of female enrolment in STEM courses





Shortest budget in 56 minutes

New Delhi: Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday presented her sixth consecutive budget with a speech lasting 56 minutes, her shortest-ever.

Sitharaman, who holds the distinction of delivering the longest budget speech at 2.40 hours in 2020, was

cheered at regular intervals by the treasury benches -her remarks on the presenta-tion of the full budget by 'our government" in July receiving the loudest applause. Opposition members paid rapt attention.

Govt to increase 'Lakhpati Didi'

New Delhi: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced on Thursday that the government has decided to enhance the target for creating 'Lakhpati Didi' from two crore to three crore. 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 `1 lakh per annum. Presenting the interim Budget 2024-25, the Union minister said 83 lakh self-help groups (SHGs) with nine crore women are transforming the rural socio-economic landscape with empowerment.

Investment to boost

power mills

New Delhi: The government has proposed increasing the investment of eight stateowned power companies by 14 per cent to ₹67,286 cr during the financial year

2024-25. This compares to an investment of ₹59,119.55 cr for the current finan-

cial year under revised estimate. The annual investment by these eight power sector firms for the 2023-24 fiscal was budgeted at ₹60,805.2 cr. Power Grid witnessed the highest increase in proposed investment at ₹12,250 cr.

India negotiating bilateral treaties

New Deini: India is negotiate ing bilateral investment treaties with different countries with a view to promote foreign inflows. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said. She said that foreign direct investment (FDI) has doubled during 2014-23 to \$596 billion compared to the inflow received during 2005-14. "To encourage sustained foreign investment, we are negotiating bilateral investment treaties with our foreign partners, in the spirit of 'first develop India'," the finance minister further said while presenting the interim Budget 2024-25.

Govt pegs

non-tax revenue

New Delhi: The government has pegged non-tax revenue collection estimates from the communications sector at about ₹1.20 lakh crore for

2024-25 and expects to exceed the budget estimates for the current fiscal. As per the interim budget



the revenue estimate from other communication services' for the current fiscal to ₹93.541.01 crore from the earlier projection of ₹89,469 crore mentioned in the previous budget.

Govt to borrow

₹14.13 lakh cr

New Delhi: The government on Thursday projected a dividend income of ₹1.02 lakh crore from the RBI and public sector financial institutions in the next financial year. The government is set to earn a higher dividend of ₹1.04 lakh crore in the current fiscal against the Budget Estimate of ₹48,000 crore. The current financial year estimate exceeded the Budget estimate (BE) as RBI paid a dividend of ₹87.416 crore in May last year. In the previous financial year, the government mobilised

₹39,961 crore from RBI and

public sector institutions.

GREEN MOBILITY, POWER GET BOOST

Railways will build three new corridors for energy, minerals, cement and high-density passenger routes

biomass aggregation

machinery

of biomanu-

facturing and

bio-foundry to

friendly

Imple-

major railway

corridor programmes under

PM Gati Shakti-to improve

logistics efficiency and

reduce cost

be launched to

environment

alternatives

mentation of 3

New scheme

Financial assistance for procurement of

SANGEETHA G

The interim budget found rail and air transport as well as renewable energy as promising sectors.

The Budget proposed the implementation of three major economic railway corridor pro-grammes under PM Gati Shakti to improve logistics efficiency — energy, mineral, and cement corridors, port connectivity corridors, and high-traffic density corridors. The resultant decongestion of the high-traffic corridors will also help in improving the operations of passenger trains, resulting in safety and higher travel speed for passen-

gers.
Further, 40,000 normal rail bogies will be converted to the Vande Bharat standards to enhance the safety, convenience, and comfort of

passengers, it said. However, the allocation for railways has not seen a substantial increase to support the freight corridors under development as well as the proposed ones. The allocation has gone up to ₹ 2.7 lakh crore from ₹2.58 lakh crore in the previous budget.

Considering Metro Rail and NaMo Bharat as the catalysts for the required urban transformation, the expansion of these systems will be supported in large cities.

The government will also expand and strengthen the e-vehicle ecosystem by supporting manufacturing and charging infrastructure. Greater adoption of e-buses for public transport networks will be encouraged through payment

security mechanisms. On the renewable energy front, through rooftop solarisation, one crore houses will be enabled to obtain up to 300 units of free electricity every month. This will hike savings up to ₹18,000 annually for households from free solar electricity, selling the surplus to distribution companies and charging electric

achieving

vehicles

Towards

iet zero bility gap funding will be provided for harnessing offshore wind energy potential for initial capacity of one gigawatt, and coal gasification and liquefaction capacity of 100 MT will be set up by 2030. This will also help in reducing imports of natural methanol, and ammonia. The government will also mandate phased blending of compressed biogas (CBG) in compressed natural gas (CNG) for transport and piped natural gas (PNG) for domestic purposes. Financial assistance will be provided for the procurement of biomass aggregation machinery

to support collection. To promote green growth, the minister proposed a new scheme bio-manufacturing and bio-foundry will be launched. The allocation for new and renewable energy has been increased from ₹9,168 crore to ₹11,182 crore.

Tech R&D gets ₹1L crore worth corpus for funding **SANGEETHA G** research and innovation income of some IFSC

CHENNAI, FEB. 1

Tech companies and startups have something to cheer about as the budget promised a fillip to research and development and continuity in tax

The interim budget has proposed to establish a corpus of ₹1 lakh crore with 50-year interest-free loan. The corpus will provide long-term financing or refinancing with long tenors and low or nil

This will encourage the private sector to scale up significantly in sunrise

domains. "We need to have programmes that combine the powers of our youth and technology," said finance minister Nirmala Sitaraman.

A new scheme will be launched for strengthening deep-tech technologies for defence purposes and expediting "atmanirbhar-

ta," she said.
Further, the tax benefits provided to start-ups and investments made by sovereign wealth or pension funds as well as tax exemption on certain units were expiring on March 31, 2024. To provide continuity in taxation, the budget proposed to extend

it till March 31, 2025. She said the Skill India Mission has trained 1.4 crore youth, upskilled and reskilled 54 lakh youth, and established 3,000 new ITIs and PM Mudra Yojana has sanctioned 43 crore loans aggregating to ₹22.5

lakh crore. In STEM courses, girls and women constitute 43 per cent of enrolment and helped in increasing participation of women in

Centre withdraws disputed tax demands up to ₹25,000

FALAKNAAZ SYED MUMBAI, FEB. 1

Providing some relief to taxpayers involved in tax disputes, the Interim Budget 2024-2025 on Budget 2024-2025 on Thursday proposed to withdraw a large swathe of outstanding petty direct tax demands.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced withdrawing outstanding tax demands up to ₹25,000 in disputed cases pertaining to the financial year 2009-10 and up to ₹10,000 from 2010-11 to 2014-15. The finance minister said that the move is expected to benefit about a crore of tax payers and will help reduce the backlog of disputed tax cases signifi-

cantly.
The Budget did not make any changes to taxation and retained the same direct and indirect tax including import

duties. The Union Finance Minister further stated that the average time for refunds has been reduced from 93 days in 2013-2014 to just 10 days in the last year. She added that the average real income of people has increased by 50

Referring to her decision on withdrawing disputed tax liability, the minister said that there were a "large number of petty, non-verified, non-reconciled or disputed direct



2023-24 (BE) 2023-24 (RE) 2024-25 (BE) 2021-22 2022-23 The minister further stated that the average time for refunds has been reduced from 93 days in 2013-2014 to just 10 days in the last year. She added that the average real income of people has

tax demands, many of them dating as far back as

increased by 50 per cent.

the year 1962, which continue to remain on the books, causing anxiety to honest tax payers and hindering refunds of subsequent years.

Disputed tax is the income tax (including surcharge and cess) payable by the taxpayer in a financial or assessment year, as demanded by the tax department under the

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD PROCESSING

 Government will promote private and public investment in post-harvest activities

 Application of Nano-DAP to be expanded in all agro-climatic zones

Strategy to be formulated to achieve atmanirbharta for oilseeds

Implementation of Pradhan Mantri Matsaya Sampada Yojana to be stepped up to enhance aquaculture productivity, double exports and generate more opportunities

Integrated Aquaparks to be

set up

 Comprehensive programme for dairy development to be formulated **INCREASED ALLOCATION FOR BLUE REVOLUTION** 2023-24 (BE) 2025 2024-25

INCREASED ALLOCATION FOR PM- FORMALISATION OF MICRO FOOD PROCESSING ENTERPRISES SCHEME

2023-24 639

Cos to get pie in post-harvest biz

CHENNAI, FEB. 1

Boosting prospects of large corporates involved in agri and food retail, the Interim Budget proposes to promote private investment in post-harvest activ-

The Budget increased allocation for agriculture and allied activities by 2.5 per cent against the last budget and reduced it by six per cent against the revised budget while retaining MGNREGA allocation as per the revised

"The government will further promote private and public investment in post-harvest activities including aggregation,

allocation for agriculture and allied activities by 2.5 per cent against the last budget.

 Aquaculture productivity will be enhanced from the existing three to five tonnes per hectare, doubling exports to ₹1 lakh crore

modern storage, efficient supply chains, primary and secondary processing and marketing and branding," it said. This will help large companies procure food articles for their enterprises by investing in post-harvest activities

Under Matsya Sampada

ductivity will be enhanced from the existing 3 to 5 tonnes per hectare, doubling exports to ₹1 lakh crore and generating 55 lakh employment opportu-

nities in the near future. Five integrated aqua parks will be set up. However, the allocation for fisheries has been raised from a meagre ₹562 crore to ₹606 crore.

It will formulate a comprehensive programme for dairy farmers and control foot and mouth disease. However, the allocation for dairy has come down from ₹849 crore in the previous budget estimate to ₹787 crore. Hoping that after Nano

Urea, increased applica-

nium Phosphate will bring down fertilizer subsidies, the nutrient-based subsidy scheme allocation has been brought down to ₹45,000 crore from ₹60,300

The budget aims at "atmanirbharta" for oil seeds such as mustard, groundnut, sesame, sovbean, and sunflower, through research for highyielding varieties, wide spread adoption of modern farming techniques, market linkages, procurement, value addition, and crop insurance.

The allocation for MGN-REGA in a poll year has been retained at ₹86.000 crore against the revised budget of last year.

FM limits fiscal deficit to 5.1%

Deficit

Trends

3,9 Revenue Deficit

2.9 2.8

2.3

ary 1.7 1.8

2022 23:24 23:24 24:25 23 (BE) (RE) (BE)

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, FEB. 1

Adhering to fiscal prudence, the government abstained from announcing populist measures in the interim Budget. This strategic move is poised to trim the fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in the upcoming fiscal year and further down to 4.5 per cent in FY26.

The projected nominal GDP growth for the next financial year stands at 10.5 per cent, a slight adjustment from the earlier estimated 11 per cent. Finance minister

Sitharaman's Nirmala pre-poll budget delivered a strong signal to the market and rating agencies, showcasing the central government's commitment to reducing its debt

The fiscal deficit is set to decrease to 5.1 per cent of GDP in FY25, down from 5.9 per cent in FY24. The projected nominal for BE 2024-25 is ₹3,27,71,808 crore, assuming a growth of 10.5 per cent over the estimated nominal ₹2,96,57,745 crore, as per First Advance Estimates of FY2023-24.

During the presentation of the interim Budget

Sitharaman refrained from introducing any tax sops or populist measures ahead of the upcoming general elections. Fueled by an improvement in tax buoyancy, the government successfully achieved a fiscal deficit of 5.8 per cent, surpassing the budget esti-mate of 5.9 per cent for the current financial

"The Revised Estimate (RE) of the fiscal deficit is 5.8 per cent of GDP, improving on the Budget Estimate (BE), notwithstanding moderation in the nominal growth esti-mates," she stated while unveiling the interim Budget 2024-25.

DALAL STREET

State-run banks emerge as major gainers, yield on government bond declines

Centre's fiscal prudence cheers up markets

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, FEB. 1

Public sector bank shares experienced a notable surge following the fiscal prudence measures unveiled in the Interim Budget, with gains ranging from 1.25 per cent to 7.5 per cent at market close. Simultaneously, government bond yields witnessed a decline, with the 10-year yield dropping to 7.03 per cent intra-day from 7.14 per cent and ultimately closing at 7.06 per cent.

Analysts point out that PSU banks, given their substantial investments in securities, stand to benefit from the maturation of govern-

The finance minister's commitment to lower the fiscal deficit for FY24 to 5.8 per cent (lower than the budgeted 5.9 per cent) and further reduce it to 5.1 per cent in FY 25, aiming for a 4.5 per cent fiscal deficit target by FY 26, resonated positively with the bond market. The announcement of a lower-thanexpected gross borrowing number of ₹14.1 trillion, well below market estimates of ₹15-15.2 trillion, contributed to this senti-

ment bonds in March 2024.

'The benchmark 10-year yield witnessed its most significant drop in more than a year, following the government's announcement of a lower-thanexpected borrowing program,' highlighted Deepak Jasani, head of Retail Research at HDFC Securities.

The Sensex surged past the 72,000 mark, reaching a high of 72,151.02 points at the start of the Budget speech. However, profittaking ensued after the vote on account was passed, with the market realising that announcements only follow the formation of the new government.

Ultimately, the Sensex closed at 71,645.30, a decrease of 106.81 points or 0.15 per cent, while Nifty-50 closed at 21,697, down by 0.13 per cent or

28.25 points. Profit-taking was evident in the broader market, as the BSE Midcap index fell by 0.40 per cent, and the BSE Smallcap index fell by 0.22 per In the banking sector, the

Nifty PSU bank index recorded a notable gain of 3.11 per cent, with top performers including Punjab & Sind Bank (7.47 per cent), Indian Overseas Bank (6.31 per cent), UCO Bank (5.48 per cent), Indian Bank (4.86 per cent), Bank of India (4.82 per cent), Canara Bank (4.49 per cent), PNB (4.24 per cent), Union Bank (3.68 per cent), Bank of Baroda (3.59 per cent), among others.

Budget Impact on Sensex Intra-day on Feb 1, 2024 Budget speech 61,000 60,500 71,998.78 60,000 59,500 71,752.11 71,645.30 59,500 59,500 59,000 58,500 **Past Budgets** 1 1 1 1 Feb 1, Feb.1, Feb 1, Feb 1. Feb 1, Feb 1, July 5, 213 -988

DISINVESTMENT **TARGET SET AT** ₹50,000 CRORE

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The government on Thursday pegged disinvestment target for 2024-25 fiscal at ₹50,000 crore in the interim budget for 2024-25, up from ₹30,000 crore in the revised estimate for the current financial year.

During the current fiscal (2023-24), the revised estimates of disinvestment mop-up has been pegged at ₹30,000 crore, lower than ₹51,000 crore budgeted at the time of Budget last year. As per the Interim Budget 2024-25, the government is not expected to receive any money from monetithe current fiscal. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Hold J&K & LS polls together, says Omar

Srinagar: National Conference vice-president Omar Abdullah on Thursday said if the BJP really believes in "one nation, one election", then the government should set the ball rolling by conducting simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and Jammu and

Kashmir Assembly, "The government and the BJP talks about one nation, one election, their report is ready, and if they really believe it, then they should start by conducting Assembly elections in J&K along with the Lok Sabha elections. But if they don't

believe what they are saying, then what can we say, betraying people is their old habit." Abdullah said. - PTI

Toll in Baramulla

accident rises to 10

Baramulla: The death toll in Wednesday's accident in J&K's Baramulla district has increased to ten as three more people who were hospitalised succumbed to their injuries, officials on Thursday said. Three more people died on Thursday, taking the toll to 10, they said. Seven people died on Wednesday when a vehicle they were travelling in skidded off the road and fell into a deep gorge, the police said. Lieutenant-governoi Manoj Sinha has expressed grief and announced an exgratia of ₹5 lakh each for the next of kin of those who lost their lives. — PTI

Kejriwal may skip 5th ED summons today, will join stir

■ Continued from Page 1

Friday against the alleged "cheating" in the Chandigarh mayoral polls. The AAP supremo has so far skipped four ED summonses -- November 2 and December 21, last year, and January 3 and January 18. He termed these notices "illegal and "politically motivated"

The ED has mentioned Mr Kejriwal's name multiple times in its chargesheets filed in the case. The agency claims that the accused were in touch with the Delhi chief minister regarding the preparation of

the now-scrapped excise policy. 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. Delhi lieutenant-V.K. Saxena recommended a Central Bureau of Investigation probe, following which the ED registered a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh, along with communications incharge of the party Vijay Nair and some businessmen, have been arrested in this case by the ED till now. The Central financial probe agency's chargesheet claims that the AAP used "proceeds of crime" of about ₹45 crores in its Goa election campaign.

■ Assam CM holds several meetings in view of PM Modi's visit

Modi on 2-day Assam visit from Feb. 3, will open ₹11K-cr projects

MANOJ ANAND GUWAHATI, FEB. 1

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will embark on a two-day visit to Assam from February 3 and is scheduled to inaugurate multiple developmental projects worth ₹11,000 crores besides addressing a public rally at Khanapara veterinary col-lege grounds here on Sunday.

Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in a social media post made this announcement and said that Mr Modi will lay the foundation stone and dedicate several welfare works of over ₹11,000 crores to the peo-

In his social media post Mr Sarma said, "I share this with immense joy that in a great honour for

C'garh nod to

PM to inaugurate power stn in Odisha district tomorrow

BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 1: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will dedicate to the Thermal Power

Station on February 3.
Located in Sundergarh district of Odisha, Darlipali STPP, built with an investment of ₹14,822 crore, is a pit-head power station with supercritical technology. It is supplying low-cost power to its benestates such as Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Gujarat and Sikkim. Besides, the PM will lay

expansion project \and NTPC Talcher Thermal Power Project, Stage-III, with estimated project costs of ₹2,312 crore and ₹11,844 crore, respectively.

the foundation stones for

the NSPCL Rourkela PP-II

The total investment for the three projects has been estimated at ₹28,978 crore. Addressing the media, Sudip Nag, NTPC regional executive director the development developmental power projects to be flagged off by PM Modi on the sidelines of his visit to Odisha on February 3.

us Hon'ble Prime Minister has gracefully accepted

with people here. Hon'ble PM will be in Guwahati on the 3rd and 4th of February to lay the foundation stone and dedicate several welfare works of over ₹11,000 crore to the people."
The PM will arrive here

on Saturday night and will take part in a roadshow the next day before addressing the public rally. This will be Mr Modi's last official visit to the state before the Lok Sabha polls. Meanwhile Assam chief

minister also held a series of meetings with various departments at the secretariat in view of the PM's scheduled visit.

He also reviewed all arrangements pertaining to the visit and directed grand success

Move HC over puja verdict: SC to Gyanvapi Masjid panel

'No reason for administration to undertake this task in hot haste'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB 1

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee that manages the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi to approach the Allahabad high court against a Varanasi district court's order that a Hindu priest can perform prayers before idols in a cellar of the mosque.

Advocates representing the Anjuman Intezamia Masjid Committee moved the apex court registrar seeking an urgent hearing. The registrar conveyed to them that Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud had asked them to approach the High Court.

Advocates Nizam Pasha and Fuzail Ahmad Ayyubi in their applications sub-

IN A major development in the legal tussle over the mosque adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, the district court on Wednesday ruled that a priest can perform prayers before the idols in a cellar of the

mitted that under the garb of the order, the local administration, in haste", has deployed a massive police force on the site and is in the process of cutting the grills located at the southern side of the mosque.

Gyanvapi Masjid

"There is no reason for the administration to undertake this task in hot haste in the dead of the night as the order passed by the trial court had already given them one

week to make the necessary arrangements. The obvious reason for such unseemly haste is that the administration in collusion with the plaintiffs is trying to foreclose any attempt by the Mosque Managing Committee to avail of their remedies against the said order by presenting them with a fait accompli," the lawyers said in their let-

In a major development in the legal tussle over the mosque adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, the district court on Wednesday ruled that a priest can perform prayers before the idols in a cellar of the Gyanvapi Masjid.

According to the order by judge A.K. Vishvesha, the local administration will make arrangements within seven days for prayers in the cellar.

AMU minority tag: **SC** reserves verdict

AGE CORRESPONDENT

After holding marathon hearings for eight days, the Supreme Court on Thursday reserved its verdict on the vexed issue of status of Muslim University, which was stripped of its minority a five-judge Constitution Bench order in the S. Azeez Basha versus Union of India case in

seven-judge Constitution Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, heard the arguments from the parties over eight

The top court will decide if AMU is a minority status under Article 30 of the Constitution of India. the Article 30 of the Constitution provides that

based on religion or language, shall have the right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

The bench also compris-Justices Khanna, Surya Kant, J.B. Pardiwala, Dipankar Datta, Manoj Misra and Satish Chandra Sharma. The issue of AMU's minority status has been caught in a legal maze for

the last several decades. The top court had on February 12, 2019 referred to a seven-judge bench the contentious issue. A similar reference was also made in 1981.

five-judge Constitution Bench in the S. Azeez Basha versus Union of India case in 1967 held that since AMU was a Central university, it cannot be considered a

Tension in MP's Guna after temple is vandalised

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, FEB 1

Unidentified miscreants on Thursday morning vandalised a Shiva temple in Bamori under Guna district in Madhya Pradesh, sparking tension in the area, police

The incident came to light when devotees visited the temple at around five am to worship the presiding deity

of the shrine.
Villagers visiting the temple found that the 'Shivling' was uprooted and the idol of 'Nandi', installed inside the installed inside the shrine, was damaged,

police said.
The locals immediately reported the matter to the police. The desecration of the temple has caused strong resentment among

the villagers.

The locals staged demonstrations in the town demanding imme-

diate arrest of the accused, police said. The irate villagers also observed a shutdown in the area in protest

against the incident. Police rushed to the spot to take control of

the situation.

According to Bamori police station in-charge Aurovind Gaud, the villagers suspected involvement of six-seven people in the incident.

A case has been registered against unidentified miscreants in connection with the incident under appropriate sections of Indian Penal Code (IPC), Mr Gaud

wage hike for pluckers, ₹1K aid to women **RABINDRA NATH** CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, FEB. 1

Chhattisgarh Cabinet has cleared the proposal to hike the remuneration for "tenu patta" collectors from ₹4,000 per standard bag to ₹5,500. The Cabinet also decided to implement a scheme to provide a monthly incentive of ₹1,000 each to the mar-

ried women in the state. which met late on Wednesday under the chairmanship of chief minister Vishnu Deo Sai, approved the two proposals. The two proposals were part of the "Modi guarantees" unveiled by the ruling BJP before the November Assembly polls in the state.

'The state Cabinet has decided to implement a new scheme to ensure social security of 'tendu patta' collectors," a spokesman of the Chhattisgarh govern-ment said on Thursday.

Under the new scheme. 75 per cent of the financial assistance will be provided by the government, while the remaining 25 per cent will be provided by state minor forest produce federation, the spokesman said.

The Cabinet also decided to implement a welfare scheme for women christened as "Mahtari Vandan Yojana" under which married women will receive financial assistance of ₹1,000 per month, directly credited to their bank accounts through direct benefit



Mata Vaishno Devi Bhavan covered in snow after fresh snowfall at Katra in Reasi dis-

■ Gift for rabi, horticulture crops, tourism U'khand sees much-awaited snow, 566 roads blocked in HP

AGE CORRESPONDENT with agency inputs DEHRADUN/SHIMLA/SRINA

Uttarakhand finally witnessed season's much-awaited snowfall and showers in the last 48 hours as several hill areas, including Char Dham snrınes Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath, were laden with the snow for the first time this winter. The incessant rains came as a timely gift for the rabi and horticulture crops and brought cheer to people in the tourism industry.

Locations in Gangotri, Badrinath. Yamunotri. Hemkund Kedarnath, Sahib and Flowers in Chamoli, Rudraprayag and Uttarakashi districts were covered with sheets of

also reported in the most sought-after tourist places Surkanda Devi. Dhanolti, Rudranath, Tehri, New Mati, Nanda Ghunghati, Auli, Neeti and Gorson and Mana valleys. Heavy rains and snowfalls in both Kumaon and Garhwal Garhwal regions also resulted in disruption of electricity supply in several areas. Srinagar and other plain areas of Kashmir also

received this winter's first The snowfall in the plain areas began late Wednesday night and continued till Thursday morning at most places, officials said. Meanwhile, moderate to heavy snowfall continued in high hills and

tribal areas of Himachal

Pradesh on Thursday while the state capital

of the season bringing cheer to residents, tourists and farmers. Shimla was wrapped in a thin blanket of snow while the 5-km stretch between Kufri and Fagu was entirely covered in snow

Braving the cold, tourists and residents thronged the Mali Road and Ridge in the heart of the city to enjoy

Shimla was lashed by a hailstorm on severe Wednesday night followed by intermittent rains. Over 566 roads, including six national highways, in the state have been closed for vehicular traffic following heavy snowfall and rain, said public works department minister Vikramaditya Singh, adding that 138 roads were expected to be opened by Thursday night.

MEA says keeping a watch over China ship in Maldives

New Delhi, Feb. 1: In the wake of the Maldives granting permission to a Chinese research vessel to dock at its Capital Male and some media reports claiming that a second fisheries research vessel is also in Maldivian waters, India on Thursday said it monitors and takes necessary

measures to safeguard its interests. In response to queries about political tumult in the archipelago nation which is India's southwestern maritime neighbour, MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal referred to what he said were the

"internal affairs" of that nation and did not comment any further.
The Maldives had last

week confirmed that the Chinese research vessel "Xiang Yang Hong 3" – widely regarded as a spy ship mapping the Indian Ocean — was granted permission to dock in the archipelago nation, in what has sent alarm bells ringing in New Delhi.

The Maldives had however claimed last week "research vessel" would not be conducting any research in Maldivian

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi during the "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" in West Bengal's Murshidabad district on

Landmark Indo-Pacific pact will come into force Feb. 24

New Delhi, Feb. 1: The US on Thursday announced that a landmark agreement on supply chain resilience under the Indo-Pacific economic framework involving 14 partner nations, including India, Japan and Australia, will come into force February 24.

US commerce secretary Gina Raimondo said the pact will facilitate a collaborative approach to strengthen supply chains and prevent potential dis-

ruptions.
The US Department of Commerce said the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF)

agreement relating to supply chain resilience will enter into force on February 24. The agreement is aimed at coordination among the IPEF partners on building resilient, efficient, productive, sustainable, transparent, diversified, secure, fair, and inclusive supply chains. "This is a critical step in

bringing the landmark, first-of-its kind agreement into action and promoting coordination among the IPEF partners on building resilient, efficient, productive, sustainable, transparent, diversified, secure, fair, and inclusive supply chains," it said.

Budget for 'Viksit Bharat' by '47: PM

infrastructure for the 21st century in India," Mr Modi said.

The Prime Minister also spoke about the announcement to manufacture 40,000 modern bogies of Vande Bharat standard and install them in general passenger trains, which will further heighten the comfort and travel experience of crores of passengers on different rail routes in the country.

Mr Modi said, "We set a big goal, achieve it and then set an even bigger goal for ourselves.'

Highlighting the government's efforts for the welfare of the poor and middle class, the Prime Minister referred to the construction of over 4crore houses in villages and cities and increasing the target to build 2-crore more houses.

Underscoring the emphasis on empowerment of women, the PM said, "Our goal was to make 2crore 'lakhpatis' among women. Now, this goal has been increased to make three crore 'lakh-

■ Continued from Page 1 scheme for its significant assistance to the poor, extending its benefits to Anganwadi and Asha

He highlighted the government's emphasis on empowering the poor and middle class by creating new opportunities for them in this Budget. Mr Modi also talked

about the "rooftop solar campaign", where 1 crore families will avail free electricity while also earning an income of ₹15,000 to ₹18,000 per year by selling excess electricity to the government.

The Prime Minister mentioned the income tax remission scheme announced in the interim Budget that will provide relief to about 1 crore citizens belonging to the middle class.

Speaking about the major decisions taken for farmer welfare in the Budget, Mr Modi mentioned the use of Nano DAP (fertiliser), a new scheme for animals, the expansion of the "PM Matsya Sampada Yojana" and the "atma nirbhar oil seed campaign", which will increase the income Mr Modialso praised of farmers and reduce the Ayushman Bharat expenses.

FM vows growth in next 5 yrs; no tax rate changes

crore has been announced. The Budget gives the guarantee of making India a developed country by 2047," he said, adding that this interim Budget has confidence of continuity. "It will empower all four pillars of Viksit Bharat — Yuva, Garib, Mahila and Kisan. This Budget gives the guarantee of making India a developed nation by Briefing the media, Ms Sitharaman said this interim Budget was presented just before just the elections and called it as GDP — governance, development and performance. "G is for governance, where the Budget speaks from a position where we've delivered on development. We managed the economy with correct intentions, correct policies and correct decisions, so it's governance with care. D stands for people living better, earning better and having high aspirations for the future, and if I move to the 'P' the performance three consecutive years of 7 per cent growth faster-growing economy in G-20 all parts of the country participating in the growth" she said. In her close to an hour-long Budget speech in the Lok Sabha, she also exuded confidence in the Indian economy

and detailed the last 10 years of

achievements of the govern-

ment, saying that there would

be unprecedented development

■ Continued from Page 1

in the next five years. Giving a sneak preview of what will be the Narendra Modi government's priority in a third term, if re-elected, she said economic policies that foster and sustain growth, facilitate inclusive development and contribute to generation of resources to power investments will be adopted towards making India a developed country by 2047. She also announced that the

government will be launching a scheme to help the deserving sections of the middle class, as quoted by Mr Modi "living in rented houses, slums or chawls or unauthorised colonies", which will help them to buy or build their own houses. Among several announcements for the youth, poor, women and farmers, the minister also highlighted that the healthcare cover Ayushman Bharat will be extended to all ASHA and Anganwadi workers and helpers. Ms Sitharaman's Budget pro-

fuel subsidies by 8 per cent in 2024-25 over last year while keeping the allocation for the employment scheme MGNREGA unchanged. Spending on infrastructure such as roads, ports and airports has been raised by 11 per cent to ₹11.1 lakh crore in a bid to sustain the current worldbeating economic growth and create more jobs.

poses to cut food, fertiliser and

Poor, women, youth, farmers 'priority': FM ■ Continued from Page 1 "guarantee" of strength-

ening the foundation of a developed India, which carries the "confidence of continuity"

the counter Opposition's "Jitni aabadi utna haq" plank, aimed at wooing the numerically strong OBC vote bank, Mr Modi had termed farmers, women, youth and the underprivileged as the only four castes on his government's priority list. The BJP reaped its benefits in the recently concluded Assembly polls.
Instead of announcing

any major promises, like

the BJP-led NDA govern-

ment did in 2019's inter-Budget announced the PM-KISAN scheme, this interim Budget was on the expected lines. The government claimed that the interim Budget carries its emphasis on the Indian economy's "profound positive transformation in the last 10 years" and the faith that the "people of India are looking ahead to the future with hope and optimism."

Confident of retaining power, Ms Sitharaman, in her Budget speech,

said, "...in the full Budget in July, our government will present a detailed roadmap for the pursuit of Viksit Bharat." The Union finance minister's assertion drew loud cheers from the treasury benches.

Listing the achievements of the Modi government's tenure since 2014, including the Ram Mandir, Ms Sitharaman asserted that the next five years will be "years of unprecedented development and golden moments to realise the dream of a developed India by 2047".

The Union finance minister asserted that the next five years will be 'years of unprecedented development and golden moments to realise the dream of a developed India by 2047' BJP president

Nadda maintained that the interim Budget offers the vision of rajya" and underscores the pledge for a selfreliant country. Union home minister Amit Shah said the inter-

im Budget 2024-25 draws the roadmap to achieve Mr Modi's vision of a developed Bharat by



THE ASIAN AGE

2 FEBRUARY 2024

FM signals what might lie ahead in a 3rd Modi govt

inance minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented in Parliament a performance report and track record of achievements during the decade-long rule of the Narendra Modi-led BJP government while presenting the vote-onaccount, popularly known as the interim Budget for the Union government. The vote-on-account is typically presented by an incumbent government ahead of the general election to ensure that funds are made available to meet its obligatory and standard expenditures, until a newly elected government takes charge to finalise its fiscal policy for the remainder of the financial year. Therefore, no major policy decisions are expected or taken in an interim Budget.

The only exception was the 2019 interim Budget, which introduced the Pradhan Mantri Kisan scheme, just a couple of months ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. However, it is commendable that the Narendra Modi government went back to complying with a long tradition of minimalist interim Budgets even if some critics will sadly try to portray it as a sign of the government's confidence in the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya to reap electoral dividends and not having to depend, as a result, on any additional announcements of a financial nature.

Whatever the reason, a minimalist interim Budget is the way to go ahead of the general election and all political parties must appreciate and uphold this conven-

The government's intent to use existing hospital infrastructure to set up more medical colleges is an important step to improve healthcare as India has one of the lowest doctorsto-population ratios

tion as well as welcome the ruling party for doing so. The Budget, however, gives interesting insights into future economic policy, if the BJP government is re-elected and takes charge for a third consecutive time. The broad theme would be freeing India of its dependence on fossil fuels. Its components were announced in the Budget as rooftop solarisation, viability gap funding for harnessing offshore wind energy capacity, three dedicated railway corridors and strengthening of the electric vehicle ecosystem by charging supporting and infrastructure.

While roof-top solarisation and offshore wind power will reduce India's dependence on coal-based power generation and cut transmission losses, dedi-

cated railway corridors and the support for electric vehicles will reduce India's reliance on foreign crude oil, which has destabilised the economy and its forex reserves time and again since Independence. Both these measures, if implemented effectively, could change the dynamics of the Indian economy and foreign affairs. The bio-manufacturing and bio-foundry scheme aims to provide environment-

friendly alternatives for biodegradable production, which could potentially reduce the use of harmful plastic, which again is based on imported crude oil based

The government's intent to use existing hospital infrastructure to set up more medical colleges is one of the important steps to improve healthcare in India as the country has one of the lowest doctors-to-population ratios. Any step towards improving and increasing the capacity of higher medical education is badly needed and welcome.

The provision to create a corpus of ₹1 lakh crore to scale up research and development in sunrise industries will hopefully enable India to compete with developed countries in high-tech industries. The scheme to help the middle classes to buy or build their own house will give a boost to infrastructure-related sectors and also help the common man and woman get a decent house.

While 50-year interest-free loans of ₹75,000 crores to states to realise the dream of developed India is a good idea, its utilisation should be monitored for its effective implementation. The intent to promote public and private investment in post-harvesting agriculture activities could help in promoting value-added farm products, which, in turn, could enhance agriculture's contribution to the economy.

On this front, the government should focus on supporting micro-enterprises to take up post-harvesting farm activities to boost micro-level industrialisation at the block level. The government announcement to set up a committee to look into the challenges of population growth is the most important one to prevent demographic explosion in the country, in view of scarce land and commodities, and the shrinking job market.

Hemant arrest raises questions

7ith a lot of courage, outgoing Jharkhand chief minister and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha supremo Hemant Soren said, "I won't accept defeat", as his first reaction to being apprehended by the Enforcement Directorate in Ranchi on Wednesday, less than an hour after he quit as CM by submitting his resignation to the governor.

rge as CM on December 29, 2019, was quizzed by F officials for several hours, when he appeared before them finally after skipping nine prior summonses. Jharkhand will now have a 12th CM in its 23-year history as a separate state after being bifurcated from Bihar. Hemant Soren was the third chief minister of the state to be arrested, allegedly for his role in money-laundering linked to a land scam.

Hemant's father and JMM founder Shibu Soren and Madhu Koda had also faced arrest on corruption charges. While Madhu Koda was imprisoned for alleged involvement in taking bribes in allotment of coal mines and accused of money laundering and accumulating disproportionate assets as well as having a hand in other hawala cases, Shibu Soren was sentenced to life imprisonment for his role in

the abduction and murder of his private secretary.

After being arrested by ED sleuths late Wednesday night, Hemant was promptly sent to judicial custody. He will appear in court to face a hearing, in which the ED has asked for at least 10 days' custody for questioning.

Interestingly, allaying rumours that his wife could be named as the next CM in a Rabri Devi template, the JMM legislature party elected Champai Soren, who is not

related to him, as its leader and the next CM.

After his arrest, Hemant said, "Life is a great battle. I have fought every moment. I will not beg for compromise. Jai Jharkhand." But his arrest, ahead of elections, as an Opposition leader and a key constituent

of the INDIA alliance does raise several questions. It also creates paranoia among other leaders across the spectrum who are outside the BJP-led NDA fold.

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Boost for aspirational India, inclusivity and green energy



Chandrajit Banerjee

ne interim Budget encapsulates the singular commitment of the government to proceed on the "Amrit Kaal" journey with elan and fulfil the aspirations of a "New India" that is ready to take a winning leap forward to realise a higher goal of becoming a developed country by 2047. While providing primacy to growth with inclusion, the Budget at-tempts to infuse a new momentum to the economy and strengthen India's remarkably resilient ecosystem so that the country emerges as a growth engine of the world. The accent on addressing the socioecochallenges and improving the quality of life of every citizen of the country, with a special focus on vouth, women, poor and farmers, is equally notewor-

thy and resonates well with the vision of New India. The provisions to empowpillars of the Budget and will increase women's participation in the workforce. The move to extend the coverage under the Ayushman Bharat scheme to all ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers and helpers, expediting Poshan 2.0, improved nutritional delivery, encouraging vaccination for girls in the age group of nine to 14 years for prevention of cervical cancer, etc., will increase the participation of women in the country's workforce.

The decision to enhance the target for "Lakhpati Didi" from two crores to three crores would promote entrepreneurship among women. In fact, the self-help groups (SHG), some of which have become lakhpati didis, have been one of the best instruments for women's empowerment by helping the marginalised and poor women come together and work towards economic self-sufficiency.

A well-articulated Budget the government's determination to move ahead with the execution of its vision to create infrastructure assets and channelising resources towards capital expenditure is exemplary and would spur the virtuous growth cycle and create jobs. The rise in capex outlay by 11.1 per cent to ₹11.11 lakh crores is noteworthy. So is the announcement of continuing the 50-year interest-free loan to states for capital expenditure. The PM Gatishakti rail corridors for en-ergy, minerals, cement, port connectivity and high-traffic routes announced in the Budget are heartening and would improve logistics effi-ciency while bringing down

logistics costs. ucation. Empowering the youth **INTERIM BUDGET 2024** interim via the Budget Education Policy 2020, sethas an unmissable agricul-

ture pivot with a firm commitment towards rural uplift and improving consumption demand while alleviating rural distress caused by patchy monpath towards achieving the dream of "Viksit Bharat" hinges essentially on the transformation of the rural economy, the government has at the outset, announced its commitment to promote the much-needed investments in agri infrastructure by encouraging public and private investments in postharvesting activities. Besides, the government would step up efforts for increased value addition under existing PM-SAMPADA and PM-FME which are expected to be beneficial to farmers and promote inclusive growth.

Further, the electronic agri mandi network and an accent on entrepreneurship and innovation will help in the deployment of technology solutions to make agriculture climate resilient. The move to set up a separate department for fisheries to encourage aquaculture production and exports, promotion of dairy sector, the "atma nirbhar oilseed mission, etc, would encourage diversification beyond agriculture. The

agriculture, the social sector has been a priority in the Budget to ensure protection of lives and livelihoods. The emphasis here is on health and education.

rural housing sector would get a fillip through the Rural Awas Yojana (Gramin) and act as a boon for the rural economy as it would create rural assets, transform rural growth, boost consumption, and rejuvenate the demand drivers in the rural economy.
Along with agriculture,

the social sector has been a priority in the Budget to protection of lives and livelihoods. The emphasis here is on health and ed-

ting up new institutes for higher learning, promoting skill development, consti-

tuting a committee for

building of more medical

colleges and sanctioning of loans to mee neurship aspirations of youth are vital for improving employability and gearing up the growth engines of the economy The MSME sector, comprising 29 per cent of GDP, would gain significantly from government support towards the availability of timely and adequate credit, support to develop relevant technologies, provision of conducive regulatory environment and appropriate training for the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises sector. This will encourage units to build

> scale and compete globally. Similarly, support to tech nology, R&D and an impetus to bolster the green economy reflects the futuristic vision of the government. The establishment of a corpus of ₹1 lakh crore with a 50-year interest-free loan, which would provide longterm finance at low or nil interest rates, would encourage the private sector to step up investment in R&D and strengthen India's competitiveness in the glob

al landscape. Similarly, the new scheme for strengthening deep-tech technologies for defence purposes would promote "atma nirbharta" in high-tech manufacturing and sunrise industries in a big way At the same time, the

focus on green energy is commendable. The provision of viability gap funding to harness offshore wind energy, strengthening the evehicle ecosystem and charging infrastructure, coal gassification, rooftop solarisation, among others, would promote sustainability and green growth.

Recognising that many of the announcements would achieve fruition essentially through participation with the states, the Budget proposes to build a consensus with the states for effective implementation of reforms

a pivotal move which would unlock the potential of the economy. The government's move to withdraw certain outstanding direct tax demands would reduce tax litigation and improve ease of paying taxes.

The finance minister deserves credit for displaying astute financial management and eschewing populism to adhere to the fiscal deficit target at better than expected 5.8 per cent of GDP or the current retaining the focus on capital expenditure which is no mean achievement considering the daunting external milieu and its impact on India. Moreover, the fiscal arithmetic appears to be broadly credible. The government has also done well to restrict fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent of GDP for 2024-25. thus adhering to the glide path of achieving the goalpost of below 4.5 per cent of GDP by 2025-26.

Overall, the Budget outlines a broad direction for the economy — that of addressing short-term issues without losing sight of building long-term capabilities in the economy. No wonder, it is packed with a multitude of measures which would provide a fillip to growth with inclusion while adhering to the vision of making the Indian economy futureready in our journey during the "*Amrit Kaal*".

> The writer is the director-general of the Confederation of Indian Industry

The delicate equilibrium of ocean ecology is seriously threatened by bottom trawling. Bottom trawling is the process by which fishing is done by dragging enormous nets down the seafloor. According to an essay published in Marine Science, this mechanism emits 370 million tonnes of carbon dioxide annually. The volume is too great to be disregarded. Akin to marine deforestation, it also uproots flora and fauna habitats, destroying biodiversity.

Arka Goswami Durgapur, West Bengal

SLEIGHT OF HAND

A MAYORAL ELECTION may not amount to much. But the brazenness with which the electoral officer ensured a BJP victory must worry all those who want democracy in India. Invalidating eight out of 36 votes is simply unbelievable. The is no limit and extent the BJP seems will not go in order to win elections. Many Opposition leaders including CMs are on the radar of the ED. The courts have been approached but like in many cases the proceedings continue until the term of the elected individual end Which makes little sense. All elections must be free and fair. If they are not democracy is the loser.

Anthony Henriques

WHITHER HERITAGE?

THE VARANASI DISTRICT court's allowing Hindu prayers to be offered inside the sealed basement area of the Gyanyapi mosque complex which will be challenged by the Anjuman Intezamia Committee in the Allahabad high court recalls the opening of the locks at the Babri Masjid in 1986. It seems after establishment of Ram Mandir at the site of the Babri Masjid, many other mosques are being targeted, no matter how old they are. Such an order may cause the disturbing of peace and order in the country and this parochial verdict is completely against the spirit of universal brotherhood. Would the judge who passed it on his last working day have lost his pension if he hadn't? And if so, why couldn't he take that risk? Hope this verdict is overturned the first such at opportunity.

Mohammad Taukir Bettiah, Bihar

Kamal Davar



he turmoil in neighbouring Myanmar almost turning into a civil war has prompted the Government of India to decide that the country's border with Myanmar will be covered by barbed wire fencing, like the India-Bangladesh border. Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram share a 1,643-km border with Myanmar. There is also a rethink on the free movement agreement with Myanmar that allows people living 16 km on either side unfettered cross-border movement on the production of border passes. The fierce fighting raging in Myanmar has led to deep security concerns in India, including of a large influx of refugees.

India's Northeast, often regarded as a "distant frontier" is described in the government's Vision Document 2020 as "rainbow country". It is surrounded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Nepal and Myanmar. It includes the "seven sisters" — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura — as well as Sikkim. It has wide disparity in customs, languages and traditions. Geographic distance and economic disparities have further widened the chasm between the Northeast and the rest of India.

The Northeast has seen turmoil since Independence, at times due to external influence, fratricidal tribal conflicts or differences with New Delhi on issues including sovereignty. Yet, over the

years, there is an unmistakable improvement with tribals living in various states joining the national mainstream. While a majority of tribes are now enthusiastic votaries of the country's democratic system, some serious intra-tribal conflicts persist. A few are engineered from across the porous international borders, with China supporting insurgencies.

The continuing violence in Manipur for over nine months symbolises internecine tribal fissures, which need to be addressed by the Centre with alacrity and sensitivity. It cannot be denied that the civil war raging in neighbouring Myanmar for over the last three years has also contributed to instability in Manipur and now threatens to spread to Mizoram and perhaps even other states. That India's Northeast is the gateway for the successful pursuit of New Delhi's "Look East Policy", referred to now as the "Act East Policy". The significance of eace and political stability in Myanmar impacting India's overall East Asian strategies cannot thus be over-emphasised.

A dispassionate look at the current situation in Myanmar is most essential for Indian policies to be formulated in the foreseeable future. The present conflict in Myanmar was triggered by the February 2021 military coup that toppled the democratically elected government. Apart from causing unjustified casualties to peace-loving civilians and the total disruption of human rights among its citizenry, Myanmar's military junta has shown its incompetence in ruling the nation. In the last three years, tens of thousands have fled their homes in Myanmar and sought refuge in India's Northeast, further affecting the security situation there and augmenting tribal fissures.

Due to the ethnic bonhomie with incoming refugees, initially state governments in Manipur and Mizoram, contrary to the Centre's directives, showered some humanitarian munificence on the refugees. Ironically, though itself a strong democracy, India has always retained a close relationship with Myanmar's military.

India feels the military junta's cooperation is essential for New Delhi to deal with the many insurgent outfits roaming around this region and on its periphery. Myanmar's assistance in counter-insurgency operations by striking cross-border against Chinese proxy gangs, based in Myanmar's inhospitable border regions, is required by India's security force. However, it is also a fact that the Myanmar military junta has miserably failed to contain its own insurgencies.

Currently, Operation 1027, against the military junta, launched by the Three Brotherhood Alliance members comprising the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, based in the states of Rakhine and Shan in Myanmar, has

achieved substantial success. Many other smaller insurgent groups have joined this alliance. But the United States has been supporting for many years the National Unity government comprising insurgent groups against the junta.

This US policy has forced the Myanmar military government to look towards China and Russia for sustenance and military support. For India, the international pulls and pressures within Myanmar, the inability of the junta to maintain peace inside the nation and the proliferation of strong insurgent and separatist groups portends ominous tidings. The influx of illegal immigrants and an increase in the already existing substantial drugs trade and weapons to fuel local insurgent groups within Northeast region is fraught with serious security concerns. The current situation in Manipur is a manifestation of this ascending malady.

Apart from an increase in tribals clamouring for economic dominance in parts of the Northeast, there exists among some of them separatist tendencies. Our security establishment must devote adequate time to holistically evolve a comprehensive and firm policy to ensure peace in the Northeast.

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, was the first head of India's Defence Intelligence Agency, is a long-time Pakistan watcher and has been involved in Track-2 diplomacy.













SHORT TAKES

India U-19 keen

to seal semi berth

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

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. — PTI

Hamilton could switch to Ferrari

Paris: Seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton could make a surprise switch to Ferrari for the

2025 Formula One season, according to several reports on Thursday. The Italian team want the 39-year-old Briton to partner current driver Charles

Leclerc, according to the BBC, Sky, Autosport, Italian newspaper Gazzetta dello Sport and other media. It would be a surprise move given that Hamilton has signed a two-year contract with his current team Mercedes for the 2024 and 2025 seasons, but the deal reportedly contains

a clause allowing him to leave after one season A Ferrari spokesman said: "We do not comment on rumours.' Mercedes did not reply when contacted. - AFF

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HOSTS EYE EVENS Treesa-Gayatri

Hurt India look to bounce back in second Test

An 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

seldom India are seldom stretched at home but fol-lowing 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

Three years ago, the mighty hosts found themselves in a similar situation having lost the open-ing 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 190-run lead on a turning

England batters, led by Ollie Pope, swept and reverse swept their way to success in the first 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 lux-ury of fielding Jadeja in this game but Ashwin, four shy of the 500-wicket milestone in Tests, and Axar will need to redraw their plans to come back hard at their 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



India's Shubman Gill (left) and Yashasvi Jaiswal take a break during the practice session in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. – K. MÜRALI KRISHNA

and play another spinner, possibly off-spinning all-Washington

Uncapped left-arm spinner Sourabh Kumar has also been added to the

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 a seemingly forgettable debut into a match winning one.

Rohit, perhaps, was the only frontline batter who looked assured in the sec-

ond 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

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.

ENGLAND BRING IN ANDERSON, BASHIR

England, on the other

opportunity to take a 2-0 lead 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

masterclass.

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.

PANT REVEALS HE FEARED LEG AMPUTATION

New Delhi, Feb. 1: India wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant has revealed that he feared the amputation of his right leg in the aftermath of the horrific car crash which he survived 13 months ago. Pant was driving from Delhi to his hometown Roorkee to meet his family when his car crashed into the median divider on the road in December, 2022.

He had just returned from Bangladesh after playing a major role in India's win in the second Test in Mirpur.

"If there was any nerve damage, there was a possibility of amputation. That is when I felt scared," Pant said in Star Sports series 'Believe: To Death & Back' which doc-

uments his recovery.
"I had taken an SUV, but what I was seeing was a sedan," he quipped as he remembered his mangled

vehicle.
Recounting the initial moments after the crash, the 26-year-old said he was in excruciating pain as his right knee had dislocated, turning 180 degrees to the right as he lay face down.

"There was someone around so I asked if he could help getting the leg back in the position. He helped the knee get back in place."

"It was the first time I had such a feeling in life. At the time of the accident, I was aware of the wounds, but I was lucky as it could have been even more serious," he recol-

enter quarters

Bangkok, Feb. 1: Sixth seeds Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand entered the women's doubles quarterfinals, but former world No. 1 Kidambi Srikanth was upstaged by lower-ranked compatriot Mithun Manjunath on a mixed day for Indians at the Thailand Masters bad-minton tournament here on Thursday.
With the tough three-

game win over Srikanth, Manjunath, along with Ashmita Chaliha in the women's draw, progressed to the last-eight stage of the singles' competition.

Treesa and Gayatri beat fellow Indians Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa 21-15, 24-22 in their round of 16 match.

They will next be up against fourth seeds Febriana Dwipuji Kusuma and Amallia Cahaya Pratiwi of Indonesia.

Manjunath, the current

ranked 63rd in the world, had to sweat it out for 54 minutes to get the better of former world no.1 Srikanth 21-9, 13-21, 21-17 in a round of 16 match. Manjunath will play

Netherlands Mark Caljouw in the last-eight

However, it was curtains for the other Indian in men's singles draw, S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian.

Subramanian, a qualifier, lost 9-21, 11-21 to Chinese Taipei's Chun-Yi Lin to exit the tournament. Ashmita also made the next round, beating Chinese Taipei's Yu Po Pai 21-12, 15-21, 21-17 in women's singles. But Malvika Bansod made an early exit in women's singles, losing 22-24, 7-21 to local shuttler Busanan Ongbamrungphan in the

Top names for Mumbai Open

AGE CORRESPONDENT

Ankit Raina, Sahaja Yamalapalli and Rutuja Bhosale, India's top three ranked women and promising teenager Vaishnavi Adkar of Maharashtra have been given the singles main draw wild cards at the Mumbai Open Tennis championships, where Australian Open

champion Aryna Sabalenka had announced her arrival in the tennis world with a title in 2017. The third edition of the Mumbai Open, to be played after a hiatus of six years, will feature players

There will be three top 100 players in the singles and six top 100 players in the doubles event of the tournament, which is a part of the WTA \$125K

The qualifying matches will be played on February 3 and 4 whereas the main draw will start on February 5 with the finals scheduled for Sunday, February 11.

The tournament will be played at the newly laid tennis courts at the Cricket Club of India.

PEGASUS TARGETS

MANY IN JORDAN.

INFORMS AN NGO

Paris, Feb. 1: Hackers have used the notorious

Pegasus spyware to break

into the phones of dozens

of journalists and activi-

sts in Jordan over the past

four years. The Access Now NGO highlighted 35

SHORT TAKES

MAN TAKES P&G STAFF HOSTAGE

Istanbul, Feb. 1: An armed man took staff hostage at a Procter & Gamble PG.N factory in northwestern Turkev on Thursday in apparent protest against Israel's attacks on Gaza.

The unidentified man entered the factory in Gebze industrial zone in Kocaeli province around 3 pm (1200 GMT).

The police rushed to the

scene and were trying to persuade him to give himself up. The Kocaeli governor was on his way to the scene, according to private NTV.

IRAN BEGINS BUILDING 4 MORE NUCLEAR PLANTS

Tehran, Feb. 1: Iran began construction on four more nuclear power plants in the country's south, with expected total capacity of 5,000 megawatts.

Iran seeks to produce 20,000 megawatts of nuclear energy by 2041. The country has one active nuclear power plant, a 1.000 megawatt plant that went online with help from Russia in 2011. It's also building a 300-megawatt plant in Khuzestan province, near the western border with Iraq. The UN's nuclear watchdog said last year that Iran has increased the rate at which it is producing near-weapons grade uranium.

EU seals deal to give Kyiv 50-billion euro aid package

Russia says it has evidence US Patriot missiles downed transport plane

Brussels, Moscow, Feb. 1: The leaders of the 27 European Union countries sealed a deal on Thursday to provide Ukraine with a new 50-billion-euro (\$54 billion) support package despite Hungary's weeks of threats to veto the move even as Russian investigators saidthey had evidence showing that Ukraine's military shot down a Russian Il-76 military transport plane last week with US-made Patriot surfaceto-air missiles.

The Russian Air Force Il-76 fell from the skies on Jan. 24. Russia said all 74 people on board, including 65 captured Ukrainian soldiers en route to be swapped for Russian prisoners of war, were killed, and blamed Kyiv for downing the plane.

The investigators released footage of body parts which they said proved those aboard were Ukraini

an military personnel. 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 demonstrat-

VOTE AGAINST PUTIN AT NOON, SAYS NAVALNY

Ukraine says 'destroyed' Russian warship in Black **Sea off Crimea**

Ukraine said on Thursday it had destroyed a Russian warship in the Black Sea off the Crimean peninsula, which has come under increasing Ukrainian attacks. "An enemy missile corvette was destroyed" during the night, Ukraine's military intelligence agency said in a statement online. Russia made no immediate comment.

Navalny asks Russians to protest against Putin by all voting at noon

Jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny on Thursday urged Russians to protest against President Vladimir Putin on election day in March by all turning out to vote at noon. He argued it was not enough to vote against Putin because the Kremlin would rig the result anyway.

This handout photograph released by the Ukrainian Presidential Press Service, shows Ukrainian former prisoners of war reacting following a prisoner exchange with Russians.

Dissident Russian rock band arrives in Israel after facing deportation from Thailand

A dissident Russian rock band Bi-2 angered by Moscow's war in Ukraine has arrived in Israel after being deported from Thailand under suspected pressure from the Kremlin, the performers said on

UK judge throws out Trump's 'Russia file' claim A UK judge on Thursday dismissed a claim by Donald Trump against a former spy who compiled a salacious dossier containing allegations of the former US president's links to Russia.

Imran's party raided by cops

ed that the "EU is taking leadership and responsibility in support for Ukraine: we know what is

It was not immediately clear if any concessions were made to secure Hun-

garian PM Viktor Orban's approval. He raised staunch objections to the financial aid package in Dece-

mber and in the days leading up to Thursday's 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 economy.

Almost two years after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the war has ground to a halt and Ukraine's economy desperately needs pr-

only 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 is waning, 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 Minister Donald Tusk told reporters on 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

there to provide security.

"(As) a judgment against

Imran Khan and Bushra

Bibi was announced, there

was a possibility that a pr-

otest would be held there.

Police did not enter the

secretariat and remained

A PTI representative, re-

questing anonymity, said

the general body meeting

Blast reported near ship off Red Sea's Yemen coast

Dubai, Feb. 1: An explosion was reported near a ship off the Red Sea coast of Yemen, British maritime security agency UKMTO said on Thursday, adding that both the vessel and crew are safe.

"Master reports an explosion a distance off the vessel's starboard side" west of the port city of Hodeida, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations said, adding that "vessel and crew are safe and proceeding to the next port of call".

There was no immediate claim for the blast, which followed a flurry of Red Sea missile strikes by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels. The Houthis have been harassing Red Sea shipping for months, triggering US and British reprisal attacks. The Houthis have launc-

hed more than 30 attacks on commercial shipping and naval vessels since Nov. 19, the Pentagon said on Tuesday. In a separate attack,

STRIKES AGAINST IRANIAN TARGETS

maritime security firm Ambrey said a missile fired from Yemen hit a $\begin{array}{ccc} \text{merchant vessel early on} \\ \text{Thursday.} & -AFP \end{array}$

cases of hacking that date back to 2019, with targets like lawyers and a politi-**U.S. APPROVES**

Washington, Feb. 1: The United States has approved plans for multi-day strikes in Iraq and Syria against multiple targets, including Iranian personnel and facilities. President Joe Biden said on Tuesday he had made up his mind on how to respond to a drone

Wings clipped at airport, no injury

Tokyo, Feb. 1: The wing Kansai Airports said. tips of two passenger jets "scratched" each other at a Japanese airport on Thursday, an airport operator said, the latest in a string of aviation mishaps

in the country. Reports said no one was injured in the incident involving the two All Nippon Airways aircraft at Osaka's Itami airport for

domestic flights. We've been told wing tips of two ANA planes scratched each other" shortly after 10:00 am (0100 GMT), a spokesman for

No passengers or crew were injured, local media said, just weeks after a spate of plane-related woes made headlines. The most serious was a

near-catastrophic collisi-

on at Haneda airport bet ween a Japan Airlines aircraft and a smaller coast guard plane on January 2. All 379 people on board the JAL Airbus escaped, but five of the six people

on the smaller aircraft died as a result. Fourteen plane were hurt. -AFP

Lanka's online safety Bill becomes law

Colombo, Feb. 1: Sri Lanka's Parliament on Thursday endorsed a controversial Bill to regulate online content despite criticism from the Opposition that claimed it will stifle free-

dom of speech. Parliament's communications office in a release said that Speaker Mahinda Yapa Abeywardena certified the Bill with his signature. His 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 offences. A false statement online would be liable, if convicted, to jail for a term not exceeding five years or to a fine not exceeding five hundred thousand Sri Lankan rupees.

down against Pakistan's ex-PM Imran Khan's party, police and security officials in plainclothes reportedly raided and took co-

ntrol 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 happen-

ed a day after Khan and

his wife Bushra Bibi were

sentenced to 14 years of

each in a corruption case. 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

Quetta, Feb. 1: In a crack-rigorous imprisonment its election symbol, the cricket bat, to the rejection of nomination papers of Khan, former foreign min-Shah Mehmood Oureshi 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

official said.

was planned to be held in Islamabad, all provincial capitals and Gilgit Balt-