

THE ASIAN AGE

NEW DELHI THURSDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2024

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In last 10 years, National Highway network expanded from 91 thousand kms to 1 lakh 46 thousand kms

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Singer Kylie Minogue at the premiere of *Bob Marley: One Love* in Los Angeles on Tuesday. — AFP

Hemant ED remand extended by 5 more days in PMLA case

Ranchi: A special PMLA court on Wednesday extended the ED remand of former chief minister Hemant Soren by five days in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam, lawyers said. Mr Soren on February 2 was remanded to five days' ED custody by the special PMLA court which ended on Wednesday. "The ED had prayed for seven days of remand which we objected saying no further remand is required because he has already been interrogated for eight hours on January 20 and another eight hours on January 31," advocate-general Rajeev Ranjan said. — PTI Full report on Page 4

SP removed after MP blast, 3 jailed

Bhopal: The Madhya Pradesh government on Wednesday transferred the SP of Harda, a day after a blast at a factory killed 11 people. Two owners of the factory and their associate were arrested and sent to judicial custody. Full report on Page 4

Haley loses to 'none of above' in Nevada

Las Vegas: Nikki Haley has suffered a humiliating defeat in the Republican primary in Nevada, despite facing no competition in the absence of Donald Trump. She received fewer votes than "none of these candidates" by a large margin. — PTI Full report on Page 6

COUNTERPOINT



2 km morning walk is not enough... take at least 20 km padayatra every day!

WEATHER

Max: 18°C
Min: 8°C
RH: 42%
Rain: 0%

Forecast: Clear

ASTROGUIDE

Shubhkrut: Uttarayana
Titih: Pushya Bahula
Triyodasi till 11.13 am
Star: Uttarashada till 2.11 am
Variyam: 11.47 am to 1.14 pm
Durmuhurtam: 10.37 am to 11.22 am; 3.09 pm to 3.55 pm
Rahukalam: 12 pm to 1.30 pm
SUNSET TODAY 6.05 PM
SUNRISE TOMORROW 7.05 AM
MOONRISE TOMORROW 6.44 AM
MOONSET TODAY 4.12 PM

Targets UPA's record; says India to 'relive golden era' by 2047 Modi lays roadmap for 3.0 govt; raps Cong for 'divisive' agenda

AMRESH SRIVASTAVA
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Confident of a third term by securing a massive majority in the coming Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday outlined his vision for his next five-year term saying the Modi 3.0 government will put all its might to strengthen the foundation of "Viksit Bharat", or a developed nation.

Severely criticising earlier Congress-led governments for their mismanagement of the economy, he said in the Rajya Sabha that his government had in the past 10 years worked for the development of all sections of society.

The Prime Minister said India has moved out of the "Fragile Five" during the Congress-led UPA government to be among the top five economies of the world. "Sabka saath is not a slogan, it is Modi's guarantee," the Prime Minister said in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar at a meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday.

SEVERELY CRITICISING earlier Cong-led govt for their mismanagement of the economy, he said in the RS that his govt had in the past 10 years worked for the development of all sections of society

his spirited 90-minute reply to the discussion on the motion of thanks to the President's address in

the Upper House. "During the Congress government's 10 years of rule, the entire world used words like 'fragile five' and 'policy paralysis' for India, and in our 10 years among the Top 5 economies. That is how the world talks about us today", he said.

The Modi government is completing its second five-year term and the

Won't leave NDA again: Nitish after meeting PM

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

In his first meeting after dumping the Opposition alliance and rejoining the BJP-NDA last month, Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar on Wednesday met the BJP top brass, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda, in the national capital.

After meeting Mr Nadda, Mr Kumar said, "We (the BJP and the JDU) have been together since 1995... In between, we were separated twice, but not anymore... we are not going anywhere now."

On the issue of seat-sharing for the Lok Sabha elections, Mr Kumar said, "There is no logic behind discussing this. That will be done. They know everything from the beginning..."

The meeting between the Bihar CM and the BJP's top brass took place five days ahead of Mr Kumar's government trust vote in the Assembly on February 12. Mr Kumar had taken the oath along with eight ministers on January 28. An expansion of the council of ministers is on the cards. According to sources, discussions on the Rajya Sabha were also held. Six RS seats in Bihar are falling vacant.

LS passes Finance Bill; FM says govt has not cut any allocations

MADHUSUDAN SAHOJ
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Exuding confidence in India's economic growth, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday said that no allocations have been cut under any head in the interim Budget for 2024-25. The finance minister said that the allocations in the flagship schemes have either remained the same or gone up in the



Nirmala Sitharaman

Replying to the debate in the Lok Sabha, Ms Sitharaman said that retail inflation has been

stable, within the tolerance band of the Reserve Bank of India, while the labour force has gone up and the unemployment rate has declined.

On Wednesday, the Lok Sabha passed the ₹47.66-lakh crore interim Budget 2024-25 of the Union government with a voice vote. It also approved the ₹1.8 lakh crore budget of Jammu and Kashmir. ■ More on Page 3

K'taka CM protests in Delhi over 'injustice'

Kerala CM to protest today

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah, deputy chief minister D.K. Shivakumar and several other Congress ministers, MLAs and MPs from the state protested at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi on Wednesday against the "injustice" done to the state in the devolution of taxes and grants-in-aid over the past few years.

The Karnataka Congress politicians began gathering at Jantar Mantar around 10.30 am amid sloganeering and



Siddaramaiah

holding banners and placards that read "Our Sweat, Our Blood, Our Tax" and "We Demand Fair Share, Justice For Karnataka". As Kannada songs blared from loudspeakers, Siddaramaiah addressed the gathering from 12 pm to 1 pm ■ Turn to Page 4

New name for Sharad Pawar's unit in RS polls

New Delhi, Feb. 7: The Election Commission on Wednesday accepted the Sharad Pawar group's choice of name the "Nationalist Congress Party Sharadchandra Pawar" for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections for six Maharashtra seats.

This is a one-time option given to the Sharad Pawar group after the EC on Tuesday ruled in favour of his nephew Ajit Pawar, giving him the control and name of the NCP that was founded by Mr Pawar in 1999. ■ More on Page 3

Court calls Kejriwal Feb. 17 over skipping ED summons

Studying the order: AAP Running from probe: BJP

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

A Delhi court on Wednesday asked chief minister Arvind Kejriwal to appear before it on February 17 on a complaint filed by the Enforcement Directorate for skipping summons in an excise policy-linked case and noted that prima facie the AAP chief was "legally bound" to comply.

Additional chief metropolitan magistrate Divya Malhotra said that Mr Kejriwal "purportedly failed" to appear before the investigating agency



Arvind Kejriwal

Enforcement Directorate and summoned him for the offence under Section 174 of the IPC (non-attendance in obedience to an order from a public servant).

The AAP said it was studying the order; however, it maintained that

the multiple notices by the ED against the Delhi chief minister were "illegal" and said it will apprise the court of its stand. "We are studying the court order and will take the necessary legal steps accordingly," AAP leader Jasmine Shah told the media.

Soon after the court's order, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva asserted that the accused in the "liquor scam" will have to face the probe. He alleged that Mr Kejriwal is "running away" from the probe.

"The liquor scam ■ Turn to Page 4

Migrant shot dead in J&K by terrorists

Srinagar, Feb. 7: Terrorists shot dead a worker from Punjab while another sustained injuries in the Shalla Kadal area of the city on Wednesday.

Amritpal Singh, a resident of Amritsar, was shot by the terrorists from point blank range with A-K rifle at Shalla Kadal locality in Habba Kadal around 7 pm, the officials said.

Singh died on the spot while another non-local worker identified as Rohit, aged 25, sustained injuries. ■ More on Page 4

Day before polls: Twin blasts kill 26 in Pak

Karachi, Feb. 7: At least 26 people were killed and 42 others injured on Wednesday in two devastating bomb blasts targeting election offices in Pakistan's restive Balochistan province, a day before the general election in the coup-prone country.

In the first incident, a powerful blast outside the office of Independent candidate Asfandiyar Khan Kakar in Pishin district killed 18 people and wounded 30 others.

Less than an hour later, another bomb blast took place outside the election office of the Jamiat-Ulema

Nawaz Sharif frontrunner

Islamabad, Feb. 7: Pakistanis will vote on Thursday to elect a new government to rule the cash-strapped country amid a spree of violence including deadly blasts on the eve of elections in which the frontrunner former Prime Minister

Nawaz Sharif is believed to have the backing of the powerful military. With ex-PM Imran Khan in jail, Mr Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz is tipped to emerge as the single largest party in the elections. ■ More on Page 6

police official in Balochistan Panjgur, said that the blast outside the election office of candidate Asfandiyar Khan Kakar was detonated

remotely and was placed in a bag outside the building. "The condition of some of the injured is critical and they have been rushed to Quetta for treatment," he said.

He said so far the body count from the blast was 18 but the casualties could rise. "Terrorists are targeting the election candidates to deter people from going to the polling stations but security personnel are being increased further to ensure the elections go ahead on schedule," Mr Zehri said. — PTI ■ More on Page 6



A rush of tourists at the Taj Mahal during the 369th Urs of Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in Agra on Wednesday. — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Man gets 7-yr in jail for attacking woman

Gurgaon: A man was sentenced to seven years of imprisonment for attacking a woman with a knife here in 2019, the police said. The court of additional district and sessions judge Tarun Singal also imposed a fine of ₹1 lakh on the accused, and added that in case he fails to pay the fine, he will have to face an additional jail time of one year, police spokesperson Subhash Boken said. According to the police, on April 19, 2019, a man attacked a woman with a knife with the intention to kill her in Sector 18 area of the city. The woman was injured badly in the incident and an FIR was registered on her complaint under sections 323 (causing hurt), 325 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt), 307 (murder attempt) of the IPC, they said. The police arrested the accused, Jharsa village resident Pritam, the next day and later he was sent into judicial custody. — PTI

Tihar inmate dies mysteriously at hosp

New Delhi: A 33-year-old undertrial prisoner of Tihar died during treatment at Deen Dayal Hospital (DDU), the police said on Wednesday. Gurdeep Singh alias Gora had been undergoing treatment at the hospital since February 1 after falling unconscious in jail number 3, said an officer. Gurdeep Singh was arrested in a case of theft in Vikaspuri and sent to Tihar jail on Jan 29, the officer said. The officer said Gora was previously involved in 11 cases of theft and Arms Act in Hari Nagar and Vikaspuri. The prison authorities have ordered an inquiry into the cause of the death and also informed the family members.

City temp at 20.7°C, AQI is 'moderate'

New Delhi: Delhi on Wednesday recorded a maximum temperature of 20.7°C, three notches below normal, while the air quality remained in the "moderate" category, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD). The Air Quality Index (AQI) of the national capital was recorded in the "moderate" category with a reading of 175, according to the Central Pollution Control Board. On Tuesday, the 24-hour AQI stood at 141, whereas on Monday, it was 180 and on Sunday, 280, according to the CPCB's data. The MeT department has forecast a largely clear sky for Thursday with strong surface winds with a speed of up to 20-30 kilometres per hour, while the minimum and maximum temperatures are expected to hover around 7 and 21°C respectively.

2 FRIENDS HELD FOR BIZMAN SON'S MURDER IN NOIDA

Noida: Seven days after a businessman's teenage son went missing in Greater Noida, the police on Wednesday said it has nabbed two of his friends, including a juvenile, after a gunfight for allegedly killing him. The police claimed the duo has confessed to killing their friend and then dumping his body in Khareli canal. The body is yet to be found. Family members and relatives of Vaibhav Singhal, 16, protested at the local police station on Wednesday, and many traders in Bilaspur town downed shutters over the killing and demanded strict action against culprits. Aruj Singhal, Vaibhav's father, who lives in Bilaspur town, had lodged a complaint at the local Dankaur police station about his son going missing after which an FIR was lodged under Indian Penal Code section 363 (missing), a police officer said. When the matter was investigated, the police zeroed in on two of his friends - a 19-year-old Maj Pathan, and another, a 15-year-old, a police spokesperson said. "On Wednesday, the two suspects were traced by the police between Dhanauri and Sakka on the basis of electronic and manual surveillance. On seeing the police party, they turned around and ran towards a field, an attempt was made to stop them but did not stop. One of them opened fire at the police team, prompting a retaliation in self defence, in which he was hit by a bullet in the leg," the police spokesperson said. — PTI

ED officials did not conduct searches, alleges Atishi Bribe in DJB case passed on as election funds to AAP: ED

BHASKAR HARI SHARMA NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Hours after AAP leader Atishi launched a scathing attack on the ED claiming that the agency did not carry out any searches nor found any papers or made any inquiries, the Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday said that "incriminating" documents and digital evidence apart from valuables of ₹1.97 crore and foreign currency worth ₹4 lakh were seized during the raids conducted in regards to Delhi Jal board case on Tuesday in Delhi, Varanasi and Chandigarh. ED further alleged that the bribe money generated from corruption in a DJB contract was "passed on" as election funds to the Aam Aadmi Party that rules the national capital.

Responding to the allegations, the AAP in a statement however said, "we condemn any kind of wrongdoing done by DJB officials or its contractors, if proven true. We also condemn the ED's blatantly false allegation that AAP or its leaders have anything to do with this case. Not a single penny or piece of evidence has been recovered from the AAP leaders who were raided yesterday by ED."

The statement further stated, "It's clear that the Modi government is a big believer in Hitler's ideology, 'if you repeat a lie a



Delhi minister Atishi addresses a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

thousand times, people will start believing in it'. Over the last 10 years, the Modi government and their 'mayajal' of agencies like ED and CBI have filed over 230 cases against AAP leaders. Yet not a single one has been proven in courts. This shows their only purpose is to defame Mr Kejriwal and the party by creating a media sensation every day. By yet again naming AAP without any evidence, ED has proven it is nothing but a mouthpiece of the BJP. We will take legal action against the ED for defaming AAP."

However, the ED statement did not specify what was seized from where. The agency had raided the premises of Bibhav Kumar, personal assistant to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, AAP Rajya Sabha MP N.D. Gupta, former DJB mem-

ber Shalabh Kumar, chartered accountant Pankaj Mangal and some others as part of this ongoing money laundering investigation.

This is the second case where the probe agency has charged the AAP with taking kickbacks. It has claimed that bribe money from the scrapped Delhi excise policy was used by the AAP for campaigning in Goa assembly elections.

The agency said that the DJB contract was awarded at "highly inflated rates" so that the bribes could be collected from the contractors. "As against the contract value of ₹38 crore, only about ₹17 crore were spent towards the contract and the remaining amounts were slipping off in guise of various fake expenses. Such fake expenses were booked for bribes and election funds," the ED

claimed. City minister Atishi claimed that the ED, who raided the residence of Bibhav Kumar, sat in the living room of his house and did not even pretend to carry out any searches. They did not search any rooms or look for any documents and did not even care to explain in connection with which case they had come, she alleged.

"It must have been the first time in the history of ED that such a raid took place," Atishi said adding that "Yesterday, the ED, the favourite weapon of the BJP-led central government, raided the house of the chief minister's PA for 16 hours and the house of AAP MP for 18 hours".

The 'panchnama' document showed that the ED team took with it just two gmail account downloads and three family phones from Mr Kumar's house, Atishi claimed. "Earlier, raids were carried out in the name of probing a case but now all those things have been done away with. Raids are being carried out without specifying the case," she said.

The city BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva meanwhile said, everyday Ms Atishi spends time on defending the corruption of her government, if only she spends the same time on her administrative duties then water supply and sewage treatment in Delhi would improve.



Delhi mayor Shelly Oberoi speaks as Opposition councillors protest inside the Municipal Corporation of Delhi at the Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Civic Centre in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

MCD Budget 2024-25: Garbage mgmt likely to get major share

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The AAP-led MCD's budget for 2024-25 is expected to focus on the city's garbage management, which is blighted by mountains of garbage in its three landfill sites.

Delhi chief minister had in March last year promised to flatten the three mountains of garbage by this year. His another poll promise was to timely disburse the salary of MCD employees - a long standing demand of the aggrieved staff.

The civic body, however, may find it hard to come good on that front since a big chunk of its allocation of ₹1,500 crore towards workers' salaries is proposed to be spent for other expenses.

The corporation has proposed to divert ₹500 crore towards garbage management in the 2024-25 budget through motions tabled by

THE MOVE has drawn flak from Opposition BJP, which has accused the corporation of being corrupt and diverting funds allocated for such work as road repair, upkeep of parks and landscaping, budget for salary of employees and several other expenses on education and health

AAP councillors in a special House meeting on Tuesday to hold deliberations on the upcoming budget.

The move has drawn flak from Opposition BJP, which has accused the corporation of being corrupt and diverting funds allocated for such work as road repair, upkeep of parks and landscaping, budget for salary of employees and several other expenses on education and health.

The civic body is slated to

announce its final budget for 2024-25 on Thursday. Ahead of the MCD polls in 2022, Mr Kejriwal had made 10 promises, including clearing the city's landfill sites, which accumulate millions of tonnes of legacy waste. His other guarantees were making MCD corruption-free, bringing ease in trade licensing procedure, repair of roads and lanes, regularisation of contractual employees, and timely payment of salaries to all municipal staff.

As per the estimates for 2024-25 budget, the civic body has proposed to increase the allocation for garbage management by transferring the funds from other expenses to speed up the process and achieve the set goal. It claimed that the diversion of this amount especially to the discretionary fund of mayor Shelly Oberoi will pave the way for increasing her financial power.

HC rejects Sanjay Singh bail petition

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The Delhi high court on Wednesday refused to grant bail to arrested A A P Leader Sanjay Singh in a money laundering case related to the Delhi excise policy 'scam'.

"No ground for grant of bail to the accused at this stage is made out," Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma said, pronouncing the order.

The judge, while rejecting Mr Singh's bail plea, directed the trial court to expedite the trial.

"No ground for grant of bail is made out. We direct the trial court to expedite the trial. No unnecessary adjournment be sought by either side," the court said.

Hitting at AAP, Delhi BJP chief Virendra Sachdeva said, after so many bail rejections leaders like Mr Singh and Manish Siso-dia have lost the right to be in public life. The entire AAP has been feigning innocence in liquor scam and alleging political persecution but after the rejection of bail plea it stands established that ED has a water tight case against the AAP leader.

Mr Singh sought bail on the ground that he has been in custody for over three months and no role has been attributed to him in the predicate offence.

Govt's counsels 'misleading' HC: L-G on excise policy row

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Delhi lieutenant-governor V.K. Saxena on Wednesday said government counsels have made "misleading" statements before the high court related to a report on the opening of liquor vends in conforming and non-conforming wards while implementing the now-rescinded excise policy in the national capital.

The city minister Atishi as the minister of law and finance, meanwhile convened a meeting with the excise department and concerned counsels to understand why the miscommunication has happened with the high court regarding the status of the file. It is imperative to ensure clear communication channels and resolve any issues promptly.

L-G office said, the proposal of the excise commissioner to submit the report of the committee - set up on the orders of the Delhi high court regarding conforming and non-conforming wards - to the court was moved for LG's approval on August 18, 2022. However, it was stalled by the then minister twice, officials said.

"All this while the government kept telling on record in HC, that the report was pending with L-G. It prompted the court to request the L-G thrice to clear the file for submission of the report expedi-



V.K. Saxena

ously, despite the fact that the file was not with L-G. "The proposal was cleared by Atishi (Delhi minister) who sent it for further recommendation to CM Arvind Kejriwal, who cleared it on January 16 this year and sent it to L-G," an official said.

In a file to Mr Kejriwal, Mr Saxena noted that the file relating to the approval of the report was received at the L-G Secretariat on January 16 this year - after a lapse of one year and five months since it was first moved for L-G's approval on August 18, 2022, the official said.

Mr Saxena noted in the file that the case is a "sad reflection on the manner in which the state government counsels made false and misleading statements" before the court, showing the L-G and his office in poor light.

International visa racket busted, 3 arrested

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The officials said that all three were involved in a syndicate which used to lure victims on the pretext of sending people abroad by offering approved passports/visas of foreign countries at lucrative prices.

Their arrest came after three Indian nationals namely Gurmeet Singh, Sahil Kumar and Vikram Singh arrived as deportees from Istanbul by a flight at IGI Airport in 2022 and a probe was initiated to unearth the whole conspiracy.

"During scrutiny of their travel documents, it was noticed that the pax Gurpreet departed from IGI airport on November 7, 2022, pax Sahil departed from Jaipur on November 16, 2022 and Vikram also departed from Jaipur on November 14, 2022 and they all departed to Baku (Azerbaijan) and from there they reached Istanbul on November 18, 2022 where their entry was denied on the ground of fake Guyana Visa," said the deputy commissioner of police (IGI airport) Usha Rangnani.

During the probe, Sahil disclosed that he wanted to go to abroad to earn livelihood and his journey was arranged by agent namely Kewal Singh and his associate agents Udit Moga and Sagar Dabas in lieu of ₹20 lakhs out of which ₹2 lakhs was paid to them in cash as advance and it was agreed that remaining amount would be paid after reaching Guyana.

"With the help of technical surveillance, one absconding agent Udit Moga was arrested from one of his hideouts in Delhi. The accused con-

fessed his crime and disclosed that he is post graduate in MCA and is owner of Rupali Travels Pvt Ltd, Mahipalpur," said the DCP.

"During business terms, he became friends with Kewal Singh and Sagar Dabas. Thereafter, they started alluring victims on the pretext of sending them abroad by offering approved Passports/Visas of foreign countries on lucrative prices. The accused Udit Moga further disclosed that they used to take money into the account of Rupali Travels," said the DCP.

Noida: Newborn's body found in society dustbin

Noida, Feb. 7: The body of a newborn child was recovered from a dustbin in a posh group housing society in Noida, the police said on Wednesday.

Efforts are underway to establish the identity of the newborn and trace those linked to the case, they said.

The body, which was found in the basement of a tower in Sector 104 around 2.30 pm on Tuesday, has been sent for post mortem and its result is awaited, they added.

"On Tuesday, Ravendra Mishra, the security officer of ATS One Hamlet, informed the local police about the body of a newborn being found in a dustbin in the garbage

collection area in the second basement of Tower 7 of the society," a police spokesperson said.

"When alerted, officials of the local Sector 39 police station rushed to the spot and an inspected the area after which the body was taken into custody and sent for post-mortem after due legal proceedings," the spokesperson said.

Sector 39 police station in-charge Jitendra Kumar Singh said so far no FIR has been lodged in the case but the matter is being probed.

"The body has been sent for post-mortem and its report is awaited. Further legal proceedings and investigation in the case would be carried out accordingly," Mr Singh said. — PTI

IMA raises concerns over NExT in letter to IMA

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The Indian Medical Association has written to the National Medical Commission stating that the implementation of the Next Exit Text (NExT) without proper evaluation would jeopardise the affordability and accessibility of medical education and urged it to reconsider certain provisions.

The NMC has sought comments from all the stakeholders on the implementation of conducting the NExT by filling up the feedback form by February 7. The stakeholders have also been requested to go-through the NMC National Exit Test Regulations, 2023.

The IMA said bringing in the NExT defeats the vision of the Prime Minister and government of affordable and accessible medical education by seriously hampering the survival of medical institutions in underprivileged communities. "We cannot afford to train doctors and deny degree to practise," it said.

The association pointed out that currently, uniform standards of medical education across all academic institutions do not exist and testing the entire country with one test would not be feasible.

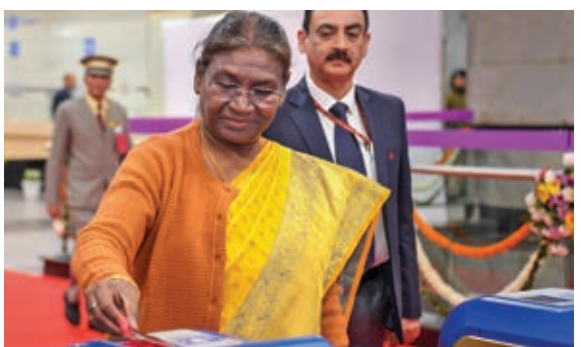
"Using the same exam to test the basic minimum required for licensing and highest standards required for post-graduate entrance assessment is completely illogical," it said.

Murmu takes ride in Metro, interact with school students

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

President Droupadi Murmu on Wednesday took a ride in the Delhi Metro and interacted with school students. This was the first time Ms Murmu took a ride in the Metro after assuming the office of the President. Ms Murmu is the second serving President of India to travel by the Delhi Metro. In 2012, the then President Pratibha Patil had also travelled in the Metro.

"President Droupadi Murmu travelled in Delhi Metro and interacted with school children during the



President Droupadi Murmu swipes her Metro card at a station in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

ride," the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a post on X. She boarded the Metro train at the Central

Secretariat, travelled up to the Nehru Place Metro station and then came back to Central Secretariat.

V-P: Women greatest stakeholders in India

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Vice-president Jagdeep Dhankhar on Wednesday praised the contribution made towards women's education by Delhi University's Indraprastha College for women. It was the first female college of Delhi University.

Addressing the centenary celebration of college the vice-president said, "The journey of a hundred years is never easy but this institution has an unrivalled record of traversing a journey of a century

with commendable achievements, high credentials making everyone proud."

"This institution is an epicentre of change, a nerve centre to formulate a new Bharat," he expressed.

The V.P said women are the greatest stakeholders in Indian democracy and asked corporates to come forward and contribute towards the empowerment of girls.

The V.P said educating a girl can transform an entire generation thereby beginning a revolution.

NORTHERN RAILWAY e-OPEN E-TENDER NOTICE

No: -128-W/280/Tender Notice/23-24/W-(NIT-55) Dated: 06.02.2023

Sr. Divisional Engineer-Northern Railway, New Delhi for and on behalf of President of India invites e-tender on the prescribed form for the under noted work.

Name of work with location.	Construction of a permanent relay hut building for existing relay hut no. 07 and 10 to enhance single reliability and safety in the section of SSEW/SNP under ADEN/INP
Approx. Cost	Rs. 5637037.01/-
Earnest Money	Rs. 112800/- Earnest Money should be in the form of net banking or payment gateway only. Note: FDR or Demand Draft will not be accepted as EMD for tender invited on IREPS as per Railway Boards letter No. 2015/CE-1/C/76/1 dated 31.08.2016.
Completion period	06 Months
Date and time of submission of tender and opening of tender	Upto 15.00 hrs on 01.03.2024 opening of e-tender at 15.00 hrs on 01.03.2024
Website particulars, published tender, notice location etc complete details of tender can be seen and web site where the tender form can be downloaded	Above tender available on IREPS site i.e www.ireps.gov.in
Similar nature of work	Supply and erection of prefabricated structure (Building, Cabin, Toilet etc.

NOTE: All attachments must be self attested by the tenderers and the affidavit should be submitted in the new format attached with tender conditions as per Annexure-KXIV is compulsory.

SERVING CUSTOMERS WITH A SMILE 401724

SHORT TAKES

PM speaks as if he is in Opp: CM Stalin

Chennai: Tamil Nadu chief minister M.K. Stalin on Wednesday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of speaking the language of Opposition and targeting the Congress party as if it was the ruling party at the Centre. On his arrival here from Spain, completing his foreign tour to attract investments, Mr Stalin said investment commitments to the tune of ₹3,440 crores have been made by several companies during his visit abroad, which showed the confidence of multinational firms in Tamil Nadu and the DMK. Speaking to reporters, he said the "Lok Sabha polls are round the corner and further visits to attract investments may be scheduled only after the polls." Asked about the PM Modi's address in Parliament, he said ever since Mr Modi assumed power, he has been speaking as if the BJP is in the Opposition and the Congress at the Centre. — PTI

SC collegium picks name for K'taka CJ

New Delhi: The Supreme Court collegium headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Wednesday recommended the name of Gujarat high court judge N.V. Anjaria as the chief justice of the Karnataka high court. The collegium, also comprising Justices Sanjiv Khanna and B.R. Gavai, said a vacancy in the office of the chief justice of the Karnataka high court would arise after the retirement of Justice P.S. Dinesh Kumar on February 24. The collegium has proposed to appoint Justice Anjaria as the chief justice of the Karnataka high court with effect from the date the incumbent chief justice demits office on retirement, the collegium said. "Justice Anjaria was appointed as a judge of the high court of Gujarat on November 21, 2011," it said.

AIADMK says door is 'closed' for BJP

Chennai: Tamil Nadu's main Opposition AIADMK on Wednesday said it had already shut its door on the BJP, and ruled out joining forces with the Saffron party for the Lok Sabha polls. Following Union home minister Amit Shah's remark that "the BJP's doors are open for the AIADMK" senior party leader D. Jayakumar said BJP's top leader Shah has spelt out his party's stand. "Amit Shah has said the doors of his party are open for the AIADMK. As regards the stand of our party, the BJP was once a friendly party. Now, it is a party that we oppose out-and-out," Mr Jayakumar said. Without naming Tamil Nadu BJP president K. Annamalai, the AIADMK leader alleged that the Dravidian stalwarts C.N. Annadurai and late J. Jayalalitha were belittled by him. — PTI

ED RAIDS CONG NETA IN U'KHAND OVER PMLA CASE

AGE CORRESPONDENTS DEHRADUN/DELHI, FEB. 7
The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday raided several premises of Congress leader and former forest minister Harak Singh Rawat and others as part of a money laundering investigation. The raids continued till late Wednesday evening. ED sleuths carried out the searches at Mr Rawat's house at Defence Colony in Dehradun and several other premises in Delhi, Chandigarh, Pauri and Srinagar (Uttarakhand) on Wednesday. The officials also raided three Indian Forest Services officers, including a retired DFO languishing in jail, for "illegal" felling of trees and construction in the state's Corbett Tiger Reserve. Sources informed that the ED also interrogated Mr Rawat's family members in the tree felling scam. Around 16 establishments of the Congress leader were raided for his involvement in money laundering and amassing disproportionate assets against his known sources of income. The probe also entails allegations against Mr Rawat and his associates for fraudulently acquiring land in Dehradun district for an ayurvedic college run by a trust linked to a politician.

Retail inflation stable, labour force has gone up and unemployment rate declined, says FM in Lok Sabha

Allocations not cut in interim Budget: Sitharaman

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Exuding confidence in India's economic growth, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday said that all the allocations have not been cut under any head in the interim Budget for 2024-25; it, rather, has either remained the same or gone up in FY25 Budget in the flagship schemes. Besides, retail inflation has been stable, within the tolerance band of Reserve Bank of India (RBI), while labour force has gone up, unemployment rate has declined, she said while replying in Lok Sabha. Meanwhile, the Lok Sabha also passed the ₹47,66-lakh-crore interim Budget 2024-25 of the Union government with a voice vote, approving the

₹1.8 lakh crore Budget of the Union territory of Jammu and Kashmir with a voice vote as well. The two Budgets, along with the supplementary demands for grants and relevant appropriation bills, were piloted by Ms Sitharaman. "The fiscal deficit of the Central government is proposed to be brought down to 5.1 per cent of the GDP during 2024-25," the minister said while replying in LS. Concerned about the Centre not giving funds to states, Ms Sitharaman assured the House and said, "Whatever the Finance Commission has recommended, I do follow it to the last word. As far as Karnataka is concerned, the state is receiving funds as per finance commission recommendation and on time as well. In



Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman with Union minister of parliamentary affairs Pralhad Joshi during a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

addition, Karnataka has also been provided interest-free loans for 50 years for undertaking infrastructure development activities." Reeling out numbers, she said, as per the recommendation of 13th Finance Commission, Karnataka was given ₹61,691 crores

while ₹1,51,309 crores were provided as recommended by the 14th Finance Commission. "About ₹1,29,854 crores has been provided to the state for four years as against the five-year term of the 15th Finance Commission," she replied on an allegation made by Karnataka chief

minister Siddaramaiah as 'injustice' meted out by the Centre on devolution of tax share to the state. On a query on retail inflation, she also said that prices of essentials including, aata, oil, rice have come down due to steps taken by the government to contain inflation. "The retail inflation is now stable and within the notified tolerance band of RBI. The workforce has gone up, the unemployment rate has declined significantly and numbers show people are getting enrolled into jobs as seen in EPFO payroll data," the FM said. She added that in order to check the volatility in prices of onion, the government has progressively increased its buffer size from 1 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) in 2020-21 to 7 LMT in 2023-24.

Restore expunged parts of my speech, Kharge to Chair

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha and Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday urged Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar to restore the expunged parts of his speech on the "Motion of Thanks" on the President's address. Raising the issue during Zero Hour, Mr Kharge said two pages from his February-2 speech were removed, leading to distortion of intent. "I had raised certain points. They have been removed from the record," the Congress president said,

while emphasising that he had not taken anybody's name nor had violated rules. He cited rules to support his argument against the removal of parts of his speech. The Congress leader added that he did not make any remarks on "persons in high authority", liable to be expunged. "I lodged my objection. I would like to request you to restore the expunged part," Mr Kharge in his letter to Mr Dhankhar said. The RS Chairman said he would look into the matter and give his ruling, adding that there is a book on "unparliamentary words".

J'khand CM Champai will expand Cabinet on Feb. 16

Ranchi, Feb. 7: Jharkhand chief minister Champai Soren will expand his Cabinet on February 16, rescheduling the event, which was initially planned for Thursday, a minister said. "The swearing-in ceremony has been deferred. Now, it will take place at 3 pm on February 16 at Raj Bhavan," state minister Alamgir Alam told PTI. He cited the two-day "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" led by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi in the state starting on February 14 as the reason for the change of schedule of the swearing-in event.

Mr Gandhi's yatra is scheduled to enter Jharkhand on February 14 from Chhattisgarh and proceed to Bihar on February 15. Champai Soren, the 67-year-old Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader, was sworn in as the 12th chief minister of the state on February 2, after his predecessor Hemant Soren was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate last week in a money laundering case. On the same day, two ministers — Alamgir Alam of the Congress and Satyanand Bhokta of the RJD — took oath. — PTI



West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee felicitates a scheme beneficiary during a meeting in Howrah on Wednesday. — PTI

'Raising retirement age for judges may lead to favouritism'

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The Centre feels that increasing the age of retirement of the Supreme Court and high court judges is not feasible as this may result in "undue favouritism" and reduce vacancies. The government, in its response to the Parliament's standing committee on law and personnel, also said linking performance evaluation to the issue of increase in retirement age will result in empowering the Supreme Court collegium for the evaluation of the judges at the time of giving extensions on individual basis and will further erode the powers of Parliament and empower judiciary through the SCC to take decision on the enhancement of age. At present, the Supreme Court judges retire at the age of 65 years, judges of the 25 high courts demit office at 62. The standing committee recommended that relevant articles of the Constitution of India need to be amended and the age of retirement of judges of the Supreme Court and high courts

may be increased appropriately keeping in mind the increase in life expectancy and advancement in medical sciences leading to improved health of the population. The Centre in its reply to the committee said this step might result in undue favouritism, and make the judges susceptible to pressures, thus impinging on their performance as impartial judges. Besides, this would create an avoidable burden on the limited manpower resources in the judiciary and the executive, who are involved in the appointment process, it added. The government told the panel that the increase in the age of retirement of HC judges would bring parity in the retirement age of high courts and Supreme Court judges, and would reduce attraction among HC judges for getting elevated to Supreme Court.

BJP, BJD 'in partnership' in Odisha: Rahul

AKSHAYA KUMAR SAHOO ROURKELA, FEB. 7

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday attacked Prime Minister Modi and Odisha chief minister Naveen Patnaik, saying both the leaders are "partners" in running governments. Mr Gandhi also accused the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Odisha's ruling Biju Janata Dal, accusing them of running the state government in "partnership." "There is a partnership between PM Narendra Modi and

Odisha CM Naveen Patnaik. The BJD and BJP are also running the Odisha government in partnership. I also see in the Parliament that whenever the PM needs BJD's help, the members of the latter start harassing us on Modi's instructions. It is only the Congress which is fighting against the BJD-BJP partnership in Odisha," Mr Gandhi said in a rally on the second day of "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" in Odisha. According to the Congress leader, around 30 lakhs people from Odisha



Rahul Gandhi

have migrated and have been working as labourers in other parts of the country, as the state government is not doing its work. "About 30 industrialists and billionaires from outside have come to loot the

natural resources of Odisha. Many of the old industries have been closed and there is highest unemployment in the state and other parts of the country," he added. The Congress leader also blamed the Narendra Modi government for the rise in prices of essential commodities. After the Panposh public rally, Mr Gandhi participated in a roadshow at Rourkela and addressed another public rally there. Later, he left for Jharsuguda where he will make a night halt and

address a public rally on Thursday. Responding to Mr Gandhi's allegations, BJP MLA Nauri Nayak said, "The allegations are baseless; rather BJD and Congress are in partnership as the Congress is supporting the BJD here. The Congress bigwigs are joining BJD whenever it is required and the people of Odisha are aware of this." The BJD MLA Snehangini Chhuria said, "No matter who comes to Odisha and does Padayatra, it will not have any impact here."

15 former TN MLAs, ex-MP join BJP ahead of LS elections

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Ahead of the coming Lok Sabha elections, a number of leaders from Tamil Nadu, including 15 former MLAs and an ex-MP, joined the BJP on Wednesday. Many of them who joined the saffron party were from the AIADMK, a former BJP ally in the state said. The joining of the leaders took place at the BJP headquarters in the presence of Union ministers Rajeev Chandrasekhar and L. Murugan and state BJP president K. Annamalai. Welcoming the new leaders in the saffron fold, Mr Annamalai said they racked up a wealth of experiences to the BJP and sought to strengthen the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as he is coming back to power for a straight third term. They have been witnessing the happenings in Tamil Nadu, he said in an apparent swipe at the state's ruling DMK and its main rival AIADMK. "Tamil Nadu is going the Bharatiya Janata Party way," claimed the young leader. He added that the joining at such a big scale shows PM's popularity in Tamil Nadu, where the BJP is lacking a big force. Many of these new seats to match the tally of 370 seats by BJP and 400 by NDA together would come from Tamil Nadu, he claimed.

EAM & Bangladesh minister review ties

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Bangladesh's new foreign minister Hasan Mahmud on Wednesday held talks in national capital with external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, during which they "reviewed the progress in wide-ranging areas of bilateral relations, including cross-border connectivity, economic and development partnership, cooperation in defence and security, power, energy, water resources and people-to-people exchanges". New Delhi said, "They also discussed areas of future engagement in line with the national development goals of the two countries, including the visions of 'Viksit Bharat 2047' and 'Smart Bangladesh 2041'." The two leaders also

exchanged views on regional and multilateral issues of common interest. They expressed commitment to further enhance their collaboration to promote sub-regional cooperation within the framework of Bimstec, IORA and BBIN." Mr Mahmud also met National Security Advisor Ajit Doval who, according to media reports, had recently visited Dhaka and called on Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Mr Mahmud will also visit Kolkata on Friday before his departure back to his country. The deteriorating situation in Myanmar, which has seen heavy fighting between the ruling military Junta and insurgent groups, was also discussed during talks.

Back 'quota within quota' for SCs and STs, Centre tells SC

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The Centre on Wednesday told a seven-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court that it is in favour of sub-classification of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for grant of quota within quota. "The Union government said, "The government is committed to the declared policy of reservation for backward classes, as a measure of affirmative action to bring equality to those who have suffered of discrimination." The seven-judge Constitution Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud is examining the validity of its 2004 Chinnaiiah judgment which had held that states do not have the power to further sub-classify SCs and STs for grant of quotas. Solicitor-general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, opposed the E.V. Chinnaiiah judgment and said, "The sub-classification furthers the actual purpose behind reservations. It is submitted that the legitimate state aim behind reservations is to support the backward classes who have had a history of discrimination for centuries and aiming to provide equality of opportunity."

The Chinnaiiah judgment had held that any "sub-classification" of the SCs would violate Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution. The verdict had stated that only Parliament, and not state legislatures, can exclude castes deemed to be SCs from the Presidential List under Article 341 of the Constitution. The SC is examining questions — whether sub-classification inside the SCs and STs categories be permitted like in the case of other backward classes (OBCs), and if the state Assemblies are competent to introduce laws empowering the states to undertake this exercise. The judgment disempowered the state to frame policy by sub-classifying the zone of reservatio, Mr Mehta said.

'Talks within INDIA camp to wrest Jammu, Ladakh seats'

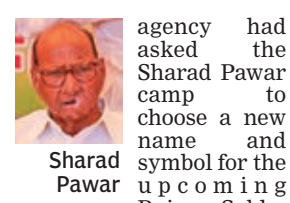
YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, FEB. 7

Jammu and Kashmir former chief minister and National Conference (NC) vice-president Omar Abdullah on Wednesday said an all-out effort would be made by the INDIA bloc to wrest the Lok Sabha seats of Jammu, Udhampur and Ladakh from the BJP. The three remaining seats of erstwhile J&K state, viz. Srinagar, Anantnag and Baramulla were bagged by the NC in the 2019 elections. Mr Abdullah, while addressing reporters at the party headquarters in Jammu, said: "We haven't talked yet on seat-sharing (within the INDIA alliance). Congress is ready for the talks, and they want us to talk to them. In the coming days, there will be a discussion, especially about the three seats (Jammu, Udhampur and Ladakh) which are with the BJP now." Asked if he is hopeful of the alliance to win any of the LS seats in Jammu and Ladakh, Mr Abdullah said the NC had won Parliamentary polls in these two regions in the past, and that an all-out effort would be made to wrest these seats from the BJP in the coming elections. "We have won the Jammu seat once and Ladakh more than once. We will discuss the way to get back the seats presently with BJP."

EC allots new name to Sharad camp for RS polls

BHAGWAN PARAB MUMBAI, FEB. 7

The Election Commission on Wednesday sanctioned a new name to the Sharad Pawar faction as "Nationalist Congress Party-Sharadchandra Pawar" as the one-time option for the Rajya Sabha elections. However, the poll body is yet to allot a symbol to the Sharad Pawar-led faction. The EC on Tuesday had recognised the faction led by Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar as the real NCP, allotting it the party name and "clock" symbol. The poll



Sharad Pawar

elections for six seats in Maharashtra. They were asked by the poll body to submit their options by Wednesday. Ajit Pawar had broken from his uncle's side in July last year to align with the BJP and was sworn in as Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister. He has 53 MLAs and only 12 have sided with Sharad Pawar.

The supporters of Sharad Pawar on Wednesday demonstrated in various parts of Maharashtra to protest against the EC decision to allow the NCP party name and symbol to Ajit. Calling it a blank day, they said the decision was a violation of the constitution. However, reacting to the EC decision, Maharashtra BJP leader and deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis said that those who murdered the democracy in 2019 have now realised the power of democracy. "The EC's decision is a victory of democracy," Mr Fadnavis said.

Ajit camp files caveat in SC

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The Ajit Pawar faction on Wednesday filed a caveat in the Supreme Court seeking an opportunity to be heard if the Sharad Pawar group moves before it challenging an Election Commission order recognising the party led by the Maharashtra deputy chief minister as the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). The caveat filed through advocate Abhikalp Pratap

Singh seeks to ensure that no ex-parte order is passed against the Ajit Pawar faction if the other group moves the top court. On Tuesday, the Election Commission (EC) announced that the Ajit faction is the real NCP, in a major setback to Sharad Pawar, party founder and uncle of Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar. The Election Commission also allotted the NCP symbol "clock" to the group led by Ajit Pawar.

SHORT TAKES

EU-India meet on unmanned threats

New Delhi: The first-ever European Union (EU)-India dialogue on countering the use of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) — popularly known as drones — by extremists and non-state actors will take place in New Delhi on Thursday. The day-long EU-India roundtable “seeks to better understand the range of current and emerging threats particularly involved with consumer-grade UAS technology and the best practices regarding regulatory, tactical and investigative responses to addressing UAS threats in both regions”. The EU pointed out that “commercial UAS have been developing rapidly in recent years, both in terms of technological sophistication and consumer availability” and that “violent extremists have exploited these inexpensive and adaptable consumer devices for different purposes”. “This roundtable is part of a series of ongoing counterterrorism engagement between the EU and India,” the EU said.

The meeting will discuss the use of UAS in the context of terrorism and the need for a common framework for the use of UAS. The EU also expressed its concern over the use of UAS in the Kashmir region and the need for a common framework for the use of UAS in the region.

Court calls Kejriwal on Feb. 17 over skipping summons

Continued from Page 1
happened under his nose and his former deputy chief minister (Manish Sisodia) and an MP (Sanjay Singh) of his party are in jail in connection with it. I welcome the court order.”

In its complaint, the ED alleged that the Delhi chief minister intentionally did not want to obey the summons and kept on giving “lame excuses.” If a high-ranking public functionary like him disobeyed the law, it would “set the wrong example for the common man, i.e. the aam aadmi,” the agency said.

“From the contents of the complaint and the material placed on record, prima facie offence under Section 174 of the IPC is made out and there are sufficient grounds for proceeding against accused Mr Kejriwal... Accordingly, issue summons to accused Mr Kejriwal for the offence under Section 174 of the IPC for February 17,” the judge said. On February 2, Mr Kejriwal skipped the fifth ED summons. On February 3, the ED filed a fresh complaint against Mr Kejriwal for non-compliance with its summons. “The respondent of the summonses, i.e., the accused, is legally bound to attend in person in pursuance of the same, but purportedly he failed to do so,” the judge said.

The court passed the order on the complaint, which claimed that instead of appearing pursuant to the summons, “Mr Kejriwal raised frivolous objections and deliberately created grounds that clearly show that he intentionally did not want to obey the summons.”

The AAP supreme had earlier written a letter to the ED, terming the summonses “illegal and politically motivated.” The agency claimed that Mr Kejriwal “intentionally disobeyed” each summons, “making each such omission or disobedience a separate offence.

Gunmen shoot dead Amritsar resident in J&K, 1 injured

AGE CORRESPONDENT SRINAGAR, FEB. 7

Gunmen shot at two Punjab residents from close range at Shalla Kadal, a congested locality of central Srinagar, on Wednesday evening, leaving them in a pool of blood.

As the police rushed to the spot, they found one of them had already succumbed. He has been identified as Amritpal Singh, a 31-year-old resident of Amritsar. The other victim, Rohit Kumar (25), also a non-local worker, received a deep bullet wound in the abdomen and has been admitted to city's Sri Maharaja Hari Singh Hospital.

“Terrorists fired upon a non-local identified as Amritpal Singh resident of Amritsar at Shaheed Gunj Srinagar, who succumbed to the injuries. One more person is grievously injured and evacuated for medical attention. Area has been cordoned off. Further details shall follow,” the Kashmir zone police said in a post on “X”.

Police sources said the shooting incident took place at around 7 pm in the Shaheedgunj police station area and that the preliminary investigations revealed that the assailant used an AK assault rifle to target the duo.

₹25K for info on Mahadev app accused: C'garh police

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY RAIPUR, FEB. 7

The Chhattisgarh police on Wednesday announced a cash reward of ₹25,000 to anyone who provides clues leading to the arrest of Sourav Chandrakar, one of the alleged promoters of online betting Mahadev app.

The two alleged promoters of the betting app, Chandrakar and Ravi Uppal — both are residents of Bhillai in Durg district in Chhattisgarh — were detained by the Dubai police following an Interpol red notice issued at the behest of the Enforcement Directorate (ED), currently probing the case. Durg district superintendent of police (SP) Jitendra Shukla said that the name of the informer would be concealed.

The Durg police had earlier announced a cash reward of ₹10,000 to anyone who could provide clues leading to the arrest of Chandrakar.

Unit inspector suspended ■ CM meets injured MP blast rescue op called off, SP is removed; 3 jailed

RABINDRA NATH CHOUDHURY BHOPAL, FEB. 7

The rescue operation launched at the firecracker factory in Madhya Pradesh's Harda that was blown up in a devastating blast and blaze on Tuesday, killing 11 people and injuring over 200 others, was called off on Wednesday afternoon, officials said. Meanwhile, Harda district superintendent of police (SP) Sanjeev Kumar Kanhan was shunted out of his post and posted in police headquarters.

The state government also placed the factory inspector of Sagar division, Navin Kumar Barba, under suspension for dereliction of duty.

Chief minister Mohan Yadav visited the injured in the district hospital in Harda. He also held dis-

ussions with the local administration to take stock of the situation. “Exemplary punishment will be given to the guilty in the incident,” he said. The debris of the collapsed factory buildings and the burnt firecrackers at the mishap site was cleared with the help of JCB machines to find out if any victim still remained buried under it. The rescue operation

was finally called off at around 5 pm, officials said. No fresh death was reported in the incident on Wednesday, local sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) K.C. Parte said.

Meanwhile, the two owners of the factory Rajesh Agrawal and Somesh Khan alias Manni Patel, who were arrested late on Tuesday night, were on Wednesday produced before the local chief judicial magistrate court, which remanded them to judicial custody. A Congress team, headed by state party president Jitu Patwari, visited the injured people in hospital and interacted with the family members of the victims in the incident. Mr Patwari blamed the local administration for the incident.

Pahari-Gujjar tension: Net blocked in Poonch-Rajouri

‘Barred’ from visiting region, claims NC leader Omar

YUSUF JAMEEL SRINAGAR, FEB. 7

A day after the Lok Sabha passed the Constitution Jammu and Kashmir Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Bill, 2024 to provide scheduled tribe (ST) status to Pahari and three other communities in the Union territory, the authorities suspended mobile internet services and banned mass gatherings in the twin districts of Rajouri and Poonch “as a precautionary measure.”

Meanwhile, former chief minister and National Conference (NC) vice-president Omar Abdullah claimed on Wednesday that he was stopped by the authorities from visiting the Sunderbani area of Rajouri where he was scheduled to address a public rally.



Omar Abdullah

Brahmins communities in the list of ST in J&K would have no impact on the current level of reservations available to the existing ST communities like Gujjars and Bakarwals and that they would continue to get reservations like before, the move has angered the latter.

Tribal Gujjars and Bakarwals have over the past few months held a series of protests across J&K particularly Poonch-Rajouri region against the Centre's including the

UT's one million Pahari speaking community to the ST list.

However, the recently formed J&K Gujjar Bakarwal Joint Action Committee had in November last year “discontinued” a “paid march” or foot march from Kupwara in the Kashmir Valley to Kathua in Jammu region midway following Union home minister, Amit Shah's, assurance that there will be no dilution in the existing quotas in government jobs, admissions to professional institutions and other benefits guaranteed to Gujjars and Bakarwals as STs. The action committee had also planned to march on Delhi in the second phase of the agitation under the “save tribals march” programme to resent the move of granting ST status to the Paharis.

6 women construction workers killed in Nilgiris



Rescue operation underway after a building collapsed at a construction site at Udhagamandalam in Nilgiris district on Wednesday. Six women construction workers died after they got buried under sand and rubble.

Time to build defence space ecosystem: CDS ‘Armed forces earmarked ₹25K-cr for space capabilities’

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen. Anil Chauhan on Wednesday said that the Indian armed forces have earmarked funds to the tune of ₹25,000 crores to meet its defence space requirements, ranging from building a constellation of surveillance satellites to secure communications networks.

Gen. Chauhan stressed that as the country is going through “Amrit Kaal”, it is time for building a highly capable “Atma Nirbhar” defence space ecosystem.

Inaugurating “DEF-SAT”, a three-day space seminar and exhibition at the Manekshaw Centre, Gen. Chauhan underlined that from space augmen-

tation to exploration, the government has envisioned big targets for the nation. “To execute our future requirements, if I make a rough estimate, our outlay in the coming few years would be more than ₹25,000 crores. It is the right time for the private industry to utilise this opportunity. This period

may be the Amrit Kaal for the private space industry. I think it is time to build a highly capable Atma Nirbhar defence space ecosystem,” Gen. Chauhan said.

Listing out the requirement of the armed forces, he urged the industry to partner in augmenting intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities by developing multi-sensor satellites, launch-on-demand services and a robust network of ground stations.

Mentioning the major initiatives of the government to capitalise space to strengthen the armed forces' capabilities, the CDS mentioned the 75 space-related challenges as part of Mission DSpace 2022 under the IDEX initiative.

Soren's ED remand extended by 5 days

Ranchi, Feb. 7: A special PMLA court on Wednesday extended the Enforcement Directorate (ED) remand of former chief minister Hemant Soren by five days in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam, lawyers said.

The former chief minister, on February 2, was remanded to five days' ED custody by the special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court, which ended on Wednesday.

“The Enforcement Directorate had prayed for seven days' remand, which we vehemently opposed. The ED was granted five days' remand,” advocate general Rajeev Ranjan Singh told reporters.

Mr Soren was arrested on the night of January 31 after a seven-hour grilling by the ED in the



Hemant Soren

money laundering case. He resigned as the chief minister before that.

Earlier during the day, the ED took the former CM to the civil court in Ranchi amid tight security. Mr Soren waved at his supporters, who raised slogans such as “Hemant Soren Zindabad” and “jail ka darwaja tootega, Hemant bhैया chootega”. Mr Soren's wife Kalpana earlier met her husband at the ED office and posted on X on the occasion of their 18th wedding anniversary that she is the life partner of a warrior and will always be his strength.

Nod to waiver over BRO's casual paid labourer issue

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Defence minister Rajnath Singh has approved a proposal for waiver of the provision to complete 179 working days, at the time of accident, for payment of ex-gratia lump sum compensation to Casual Paid Labourers (CPLs) working in Border Roads Organisation (BRO) and General Engineering Reserve Force (GERF).

Currently, Casual Paid Labourers (CPLs), who have worked at least 179 days in BRO, are covered

for payment of ex-gratia lump sum compensation of Rs five lakh. Several families of deceased CPLs are deprived of the grant due to this constraint of 179 working days.

The BRO units are located in far-flung/snow-bound/high-altitude areas where no proper public as well as medical facilities are available. Factors namely un congenial climate, inhospitable hilly terrain, hazardous work sites and occupational health hazards pose enormous risk to life of the CPLs.

States' debts affect nation's credit rating, Govt tells SC

RAKESH K. SINGH NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

Asserting that public finance management is a national issue, the Centre has told the Supreme Court that Kerala is one of the most financially unhealthy states and debts of states affect the country's credit rating.

In an ongoing case before the apex court between the Centre and Kerala over the limits imposed on borrowing capacity, attorney-general R. Venkataramani in his note submitted, “Kerala's financial stress is due to its mismanagement. Kerala has been categorised by the Reserve Bank of India as among the five highly-stressed states requiring urgent corrective measures.”

Uncontrolled borrowing by states would affect the credit rating of the whole country and the fiscal edifice of Kerala has been diagnosed with “several cracks”, the note said. The A-G said if the state indulges in reckless borrowing to finance unproductive expenditure or poorly targeted subsidies, it will crowd out private borrowing from the market. “Debt of states affects the credit rating of the country. Moreover, default by any state in debt servicing would create reputational issues and will have a domino effect endangering the financial stability of the whole of India,” the note said.

Modi lays roadmap for 3.0 govt

Continued from Page 1
next general election is due in April-May.

Criticising the main Opposition party, he said: “The Congress strangled democracy for power and dismissed democratically elected governments. The Congress has been against Dalits, backwards, tribals and had it not been for Babasaheb Ambedkar, they would not have got any reservation.” The PM also accused it of “creating narratives to divide the country”.

Mr Modi was referring to the protest dharna by the Congress led by Karnataka chief minister Siddaramaiah over alleged “injustice” meted out by the Centre on devolution of the tax share to the state.

Taking a dig at the Congress, he said the party that had ceded large chunks of the country's land to an enemy nation was now giving sermons to us on internal security. “The Congress does not have a guarantee of its own leaders and policies but is questioning Modi's guarantees,” he said, adding that it was aware of the problems facing the country but did nothing to resolve them. “Viksit Bharat is not a word play, but it is our commitment...” Mr Modi said, while outlining an ambitious roadmap for the next five years.

Giving insights about the President's address regarding the four most important castes

— namely Nari Shakti, Yuva Shakti, the poor and annadata — the PM reiterated that the development and progress of these four main pillars of India will lead to the nation becoming developed. He said that the 20th-century approach will not work if we want to achieve Viksit Bharat by 2047, when the country will be celebrating the 100 years of Independence.

Speaking about the development of SC, ST and OBC communities, the PM said that the abrogation of Article 370 ensured that these communities get the same rights as the rest of the country in Jammu and Kashmir. Similarly, the Forest Rights Act, Prevention of Atrocities Act and domicile rights for the Balmiki community in the state were also implemented only after the abrogation. He also mentioned the passing of the bill for OBC reservation in the local bodies of the Union territory on February 6.

He said that in the last 10 years, scholarships for SC and ST students were increased, enrollment numbers in schools rose, dropout rates were reduced significantly, a new Central Tribal University was established taking the number from one to two and the number of Ekklavya Model Schools increased from 120 to 400. He said that enrolment of SC students in higher education has increased by 44 per cent, ST students' enrolment by 65 per

cent and OBC enrollment went up by 45 per cent.

Describing the earlier mess in public sector enterprises under the previous government, the Prime Minister said that enterprises like BSNL and HAL were doing record manufacturing and Asia's largest helicopter factory was run by HAL in Karnataka. LIC too was thriving with record share prices. He also informed the House that the number of Public Sector Units (PSUs) in the country had increased from 234 in 2014 to 254 today, and most of them are giving record returns, drawing attention of investors. The PSU Index in the country has witnessed a two-fold rise within the last year.

Highlighting the strides in the field of Digital India and fintech, he said that the next five years present a positive future for India's digital economy. “Digital services will further India's progress and I have full faith that our scientists will take us to new heights in the field of space technology.”

Talking about the grassroots economy, Mr Modi mentioned self-help groups and noted that “three crore lakhpatis didis will write a new script of women's empowerment.” The PM added that “by 2047, India will relive its golden period”, as he underlined his government's commitment to Viksit Bharat.

K'taka CM protests over ‘injustice’

Continued from Page 1
surrounded by Karnataka state flags.

The Congress alleged that “injustice” has been meted out to Karnataka in tax devolution and grants-in-aid over the past few years. The protesters demanded that the Centre set right the losses to the tune of ₹1.87-lakh crores allegedly incurred by Karnataka under the 15th Finance Commission. Siddaramaiah said this protest is not against the BJP but discrimination against Karnataka.

“We are raising the issue of discrimination meted out by the government of India to the state of Karnataka and other southern states,” Siddaramaiah said while addressing the protesters, adding, “This is why I had written a letter to all the MPs of the BJP and the JD(S) asking them to participate in this agitation.” The Karnataka chief minister said that the 15th Finance Commission changed the formula used under the 14th Finance Commission to devolve taxes to the states, especially Karnataka, and called for reverting to the old formula to stop the loss of revenue for his state.

Mr Shivakumar, who also spoke during the protest, said, “Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman is saying that the Central government doesn't have any powers and it all depends upon the Finance Commission. It is an autonomous body, I agree. But

the discrimination has to be set right. It is the duty of the government of India.”

Hitting back at the Congress, Ms Sitharaman said that the Karnataka government is wasting taxpayers' money on newspaper advertisements by making outrageously false claims. She said that the Karnataka government claims zero funds have been given as drought and disaster relief by the Central government. The fact is, combining both disaster management and capital investment, a total of ₹12.47 crores has been given.” Giving a point-by-point rebuttal to the Karnataka government claims, the Union finance minister accused the chief minister and his colleagues of spreading “false narrative”.

“These claims come from a separatist mindset... The Congress is with those who want ‘tukde tukde’ of the country,” Ms Sitharaman said, claiming that the Siddaramaiah government is feeling the heat due to the financial burden of nearly ₹58,000 crore for the implementation of his party's poll promises. “Karnataka's claims are full of ‘factual errors, false monetary claims, misleading statements and selective mention of certain losses allegedly suffered without mentioning the gains that have accrued to the state in the 15th Finance Commission period,” the Centre asserted.

Also, several Karnataka BJP MPs addressed a press confer-

ence in the national capital on the allegation levelled by the Siddaramaiah government. Tejasvi Surya, a Lok Sabha member, accused the Karnataka chief minister of making baseless and false allegations as his government cannot fulfil unrealistic promises made during the Assembly polls.

It is not only Karnataka, but Kerala will also protest against the Centre's discrimination on Thursday. CPI(M) veteran and Kerala chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, along with his Cabinet colleagues, will stage a protest in Delhi against the Centre's alleged negligence towards the southern state on February 8.

Mr Vijayan said: “Kerala is poised for a historic protest in Delhi on Thursday. Ministers, legislators, and parliamentarians from the state will actively participate in this protest. We have had to resort to such an unprecedented struggle, as it is essential for Kerala's survival and advancement.”

The Kerala chief minister further added: “This agitation is intended to safeguard the constitutional rights of all states, not merely Kerala's. The aim of this struggle is not to triumph over anyone but to secure what we rightfully deserve instead of surrendering. We believe that the entire country will stand with Kerala in support of this protest.”

The BJP has dubbed this protest as passing on its failures to the Centre.

U'khand 1st to pass landmark UCC bill

Continued from Page 1
discrimination.”

The Uttarakhand chief minister said: “This is the time of change and progress, as stated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The UCC will safeguard mothers, sisters and daughters... The new law guarantees equality to about 50 per cent of the population of India, starting from Uttarakhand.”

Earlier, the Opposition parties, including the Congress and BSP legislators, agreed to the bill but opposed certain clauses regulating live-in relations and property inheritance, alleging these provisions violate fundamental rights of the citizens. Leader of the Opposition in the House Yashpal Arya, his Congress colleague and MLA Pritam Singh and BSP MLA Haji Shahjad, along with other speakers from the Opposition benches, demanded the draft legislation be referred to a select committee on the ground that they did not get enough time to study its provisions.

Assembly Speaker Ritu Khanduri refused to accept the Opposition's demand and the bill was put to vote, leading to its passage with a huge majority. The bill effectively bans polygamy and ‘halala’ practised among a section of Muslims. The bill titled “The Uniform Civil Code 2024” says that it “governs and regulates the laws relating to marriage and divorce, succession, live-in relations and the matters related thereto.” The bill categorically states that a marriage may be solemnised between a man and a woman only if “neither party has a spouse living at the time of marriage.”

THE ASIAN AGE

8 FEBRUARY 2024

UCC can't be state-specific; 'live-in' rules are troubling

The Uniform Civil Code Bill, 2024, that the BJP government passed in the Uttarakhand Assembly on Wednesday appears to be the antithesis of the very idea our Constitution-makers proposed when they added Article 44 in the Constitution as part of the Directive Principles of State Policy. The article says "the State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India".

It is for the BJP, which is also the ruling party at the Centre, to explain how each state making its own UCC falls within the definition of the UCC which is specific that it will be in force "throughout the territory of India". In fact, the Uttarakhand UCC gives exemption to the small minority community in the state, betraying the inapplicability of a uniform civil code even in a small state. A point of serious contestation will be compulsory registration of live-in relationships. It can be argued that the bill seeks to legalise such relationships. However, it does not require a deep understanding of sociology or the law to find that mandatory registration of live-in relationships runs contrary to its very idea.

We do have an institution called marriage, which is a contract between two persons, and to which the State is also a party through laws and regulations.

It does not require a deep understanding of sociology or the law to find that mandatory registration of live-in relationships runs contrary to its very idea

People who do not want to go through the rigour of marriage choose live-in relationships but the Uttarakhand bill seeks to have a say even in such relationships.

The State could at best hold up registration as an option but making it mandatory and prescribing punishments including a jail term for those who fail to do so make a mockery of the very idea. It is all the more worrisome that the records are kept with the police, given the dubious history of the force across the country when it comes to parsing sociological nuances.

Further, it is incomprehensible how the state of Uttarakhand will take action against those couples who live outside the state, as the bill suggests.

The new code virtually bans polygamy, which is one of the aims of the code, by stating that a marriage may be solemnised between a man and a woman only if "neither party has a spouse living at the time of marriage". It is indeed a welcome attempt to introduce advancements of the human civilisation in our very own society. But it remains to be seen if such a provision contradicts the personal laws of communities which are protected under the Constitution.

The provision to ensure equal rights in property to the sons and daughters of all faiths is also a welcome move. Courts now consider children born in a marriage or outside it as having equal rights and the bill seeks to put a stamp of approval on it.

The founding fathers were mindful of the diversity of this country, India that is Bharat, and hence placed the UCC as a directive principle, or a desirable goal, in the Constitution. But we, as a nation, will have to travel a lot before bringing in a common law that can govern the private lives of all its citizens.

The government of Uttarakhand, the Union government and the BJP which controls both must step back a bit and ponder how the clamour for a UCC can benefit the people. A UCC must reflect the thoughtfulness of a society about its own realities. It should not be a product of political expediency of the ruling party.

Pak votes, but Army calls shots

To paraphrase Josef Stalin, the people who cast the votes don't decide an election, the people who count the votes do. It may have never rung truer than in 2024, the global year of elections in which democracy has been under threat like never before.

The moderns have gone way beyond Stalin's critique of elections. Take Pakistan, for instance, which is one of three countries going to the polls this year with at least one major opposition leader in jail - Bangladesh was one and Russia will soon be another.

In Pakistan, it is not in the counting of votes that the predetermination of election results lies as much as in who is allowed to contest, a fact determined by the courts but with the Army brass, the real power behind the throne, calling the shots.

The unprecedented legal action against one former Prime Minister in Imran Khan — four convictions with concurrent sentences, 150 legal cases and a cramped cell in Adila Jail — as opposed to the pardons that another former PM, Nawaz Sharif, has received, giving ample indication of what the results will be in the February 8 general elections to the National Assembly.

It is not the plight of the common people, among whom are 127 million voters, that will be in focus as they grapple with 24 per cent inflation in an economy that is in tatters and was rescued recently by Saudi Arabia and China, besides the IMF.

In the grip of an eternal power crisis that affects everyone's lives, most Pakistanis are said to be fed up with the unending political fracas and hardly believe things will be any different this time, with militancy also contributing to a permanent unsettled feeling. There are 44 parties in the fray, including Imran Khan's PTI, but there is as much a fear of low voter turnout as there is of vote rigging.

Nawaz Sharif's PML(N), with ally Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's PPP, is in pole position and at least India may not mind such a result too much as there is every chance of Nawaz Sharif being amenable to mend frosty relations with a neighbour, though he would need the Army's endorsement before making any peace overtures.

The man who will wield the winner's chequered flag is Gen. Asim Munir, Pakistan Army chief who was heading the ISI when he was dethroned by Imran Khan, a deed still unforgiven and which has catalysed these events facilitating the return of Nawaz Sharif.

THE ASIAN AGE

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Subhani



Budget: Is govt trying to do too much to be effective?



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

High growth generates the comfort of public unwillingness to look a gift horse in the mouth. When growth is more than double the global levels and the highest achieved by any comparator entity, there are even fewer quibbles. This is true for both startups and national economies. Both are subject to "analyst fog" about an uncertain future which puts an analytical premium on a very rosy present.

The present looks exceedingly bright for India. Growth in the current fiscal, ending March 31, 2024, is projected at 7.3 per cent in real terms by the National Statistical Office on the back of a 7.7 per cent growth in the first half of the fiscal year. The IMF has upped its October 2023 estimate of 6.3 per cent to 6.7 per cent in its January 2024 assessment. The Reserve Bank of India projects growth at seven per cent in the next fiscal versus the IMF, which projects 6.5 per cent.

The rest of the world does not glow as brightly. The IMF assesses growth in emerging economies during 2023 at 4.4 per cent, projected growth in 2024 at 4.3 per cent and 4.1 per cent in 2025. This makes India the fastest growing large economy next fiscal (2024-25) as well, ahead of China, which is projected to drop from 5.2 per cent in 2023 to 4.6 per cent in 2024. There is a decisive consensus on India's economic prospects looking ahead even to fiscal 2025-26, when the IMF projects growth for India at 6.5 per cent — cautiously lower than in FY2024-25 but still well ahead of the projected growth for emerging economies in 2025 at 4.2 per cent and China at 4.1 per cent.

So, is this what the "Amrit Kaal" (Prime Minister Narendra Modi's moniker for a golden period) looks like? To be fair,

A smart national strategy for remaining ahead of the curve can be crafted around three pillars. Public welfare is central for all lower-middle economy governments.

investment.

The net tax collected by the Union government of ₹26 trillion (\$313 billion) does not align with "big government" aspirations — intervening directly in manufacturing, building public infrastructure, and providing private capital goods like affordable homes, new public facilities like hospitals, schools and colleges. Revenue receipts must increase by two to three per cent of GDP — either by collecting more tax or by generating sufficient "other non-tax revenue" by monetising built public assets and privatising public sector companies and banks. The interim Budget targets just ₹4.1 trillion (1.2 per cent of GDP) under this head equal to the spend on subsidies.

Linking receipts to tangible demands for expenditure could, possibly, sharpen aggression.

Linking "other capital receipts," notionally, to budgetary outlays on welfare subsidy payments and development subsidies like subsidies for MSMEs, viability gap funding for green energy technology and grids, electrification of transport and hi-tech manufacturing can determine the minimum scale and scope of this neglected revenue source. With capital outlays increasing by 50 per cent from 2022-23 (by ₹4.5 trillion or 1.4 per cent of GDP) we cannot hope to sustainably "borrow" to cover both the capital requirements and a revenue gap.

The public debt (Union and states) is already close to 90 per cent of GDP versus the norm of 60 per cent. To enforce discipline in capital use, the Comptroller and Auditor-General should examine the efficiency of our invest-

ment plans and allocations. The Incremental Capital Output Ratio (ICOR) is increasing — a potential red flag that either capital allocations are not efficient, or project execution is tardy.

Third, a key function of the Union government is to maintain fiscal stability. The Narendra Modi government, early on in its first term, focused on reducing the fiscal deficit (FD) from 4.5 per cent to 3.5 per cent by 2017-18. The previous government had abandoned the attempt by 2013-14 as post-Western financial crisis debris. By adopting a hard budgetary stance of keeping pump (retail) prices high despite declining global oil prices, public resources increased enabling FD decline. This hit the middle class hard — a core constituency of the new government. But it built a stable fiscal foundation and fiscal credibility. This came in handy to increase FD sharply to 9.2 per cent in 2020-21 to deal with the economic shock from Covid-19. That fiscal commitment is missing in the protracted path being followed to a normative FD of four per cent of GDP only by 2026-27 — perilously close to the next general election in 2029.

More generally, the Union government is a prisoner of overreach. The notion that wisdom laced with finance can be forced downwards is questionable. We reject this approach internationally, and it cannot be the best option for a continental-sized Bharat. The Union government would do well to focus budgetary outlays within its core mandates — security, diplomacy, national standards, space, science and technology, external trade, regulating financial markets and banks, cross-border networks, pan national health, education, and environmental matters. This is not the case today. It allocates capital for a mind-blowing 170 "major schemes", up from just 73 in 2017-18. Doing less is sometimes more effective and efficient than doing everything.

The writer is adviser, Observer Research Foundation

LETTERS
PROTECT THE WORKER

Such is the state of unemployment in India, that workers are more than ready to work in conflict zones and risk their lives. The Government of India must take some responsibility for these workers and ensure that no harm comes to them. The workers must also be made aware of the risks involved and all protection against death or injury in the form of insurance and incentives must be discussed. A close watch on the agents must be kept by India and Israel. It is not unusual to find unscrupulous agents taking advantage of the poor uneducated worker and depriving them of a major part of their earnings.

Anthony Henriques
Mumbai

AJIT EDGES PAST PAWAR

THE AJIT PAWAR faction stole the thunder from Pawar Senior as the Election Commission of India recognised them as the true Nationalist Congress Party. The EC stated that Sharad Pawar couldn't prove he had the backing of most NCP legislators. Sharad Pawar has been given a special concession by the EC to name his new political faction considering the imminent Rajya Sabha elections. This development could rock the INDIA bloc boat, where Mr Pawar is a key leader.

N.J. Ravi Chander
Bengaluru

AN EQUAL CODE

THE SUCCESS of Uttarakhand's uniform civil code will prove to be the bellwether for the rest of the country. Both pros and cons are associated with it. Its main take-away is that a uniform code for all people in the domain of gender justice in marriage, divorce and inheritance across the communities will create an even playing field. The miniscule number of tribals being kept out of its ambit won't hurt this. It will, on the other hand, help safeguard their traditions currently under threat. Such a code has been a prolonged demand of the proponents of our Constitution and the country's highest jurisprudence. Now it is time to show proactivity and make it happen.

Chanchal Nandy
Durgapur, West Bengal

Every Monday the best letter of the week wins ₹500. Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Dilip Cherian
Dilli Ka Babu



Switching tracks, ex-railway boss plans to bring his new vision to Trai

Guess who's wearing a new hat? Anil Kumar Lahoti, the ex-bigwig at the Railway Board, has just become the head honcho at the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai). A seasoned railway official with an illustrious career, his appointment showcases the versatility and transferability of skills across domains.

The transition from leading the railway sector to heading the telecom regulatory body might seem unconventional at first glance. But Mr Lahoti is not the typical railway guy. His tenure as the former chairman and CEO of the Railway Board demonstrated his adeptness in managing complex infrastructural projects. He was pivotal in planning and executing projects like the Anand Vihar Terminal and the slick Ajmeri Gate side station building in New Delhi. He was also closely associated with planning for the redevelopment of the New Delhi railway station as a world-class station railway, including the commercial development of the land.

Mr Lahoti's extensive experience in project management and strategic planning equips him with a unique skill set. And now he's got his eyes set on the telecom world. His

appointment not only bridges sectors but also highlights the importance of leadership qualities that transcend specific domains, emphasising the value of a well-rounded and visionary leader in steering diverse sectors towards innovation and growth. Fasten your seatbelts — Mr Lahoti's bringing the railway vibe to your calls and data!

FINANCE COMMISSION'S NEW FACES

The recent announcements regarding the composition of the 16th Finance Commission paint an interesting picture of strategic appointments by the Modi Sarkar. Former deputy chairman of Niti Aayog Arvind Panagariya's appointment as the chairman of the finance commission set the stage for the inclusion of four members of the commission.

Interestingly, two of the full-time members of the new commission are former finance ministry officials. Ajay Narayan Jha, a retired IAS officer, brings a wealth of experience to the commission. His prior role as expenditure secretary and involvement in the 15th Finance Commission make him a valuable asset. Annie George Mathew, formerly special secretary in the department of

expenditure, has joined Mr Jha in the panel, and their combined expertise hints at a comprehensive approach to financial matters, suggesting a nuanced understanding of the task.

In an interesting mix, Dr Niranjan Rajadhyaksha, executive director at Artha Global, will bring a private sector perspective to the commission's deliberations, stressing a diverse approach to financial planning. Dr Soumya Kanti Ghosh, group chief executive adviser at the State Bank of India, brings a unique blend of private and public sector insights to the table.

A lot is riding on this eminent group and its recommendations, especially when revenue sharing among states has become a rather controversial issue.!

RADHA RATURI IS FIRST WOMAN CHIEF SECY OF UTTARAKHAND

Uttarakhand got its first woman chief secretary with the appointment of Radha Raturi, an IAS officer of the 1988 batch. She has succeeded batchmate Sukhbir Singh Sandhu, whose tenure ended last month. Her ascent to the highest administrative post not only underscores her achievements but also sym-

bolises a broader shift towards inclusivity in the state's governance.

To be sure, India has come a long way since 1970, when women made up only nine per cent of those joining the IAS. At present, 21 per cent of serving IAS officers are women. Several states have seen women head the IAS from time to time, the most recent being Usha Sharma in Rajasthan in 2022, but the numbers are still low enough that such appointments, when they occur, create a buzz.

On her journey to Uttarakhand's top administrative post, Ms Raturi held several important positions, first in undivided Uttar Pradesh and then in Uttarakhand. Interestingly, her husband, Anil Raturi, an IPS officer, retired as director general of police of Uttarakhand in 2020.

The state, which was formed in 2000, is now witnessing a transformative moment with the breaking of the glass ceiling in its administrative echelons. Meanwhile, India still awaits its first female Cabinet secretary.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

SHORT TAKES

SOVEREIGNTY LAW, WASTE: EU RAPS HUNGARY, SPAIN

Brussels, Feb. 7: The EU on Wednesday said that it had launched action against Hungary after Budapest passed laws it says are intended to "protect Hungary's sovereignty" and curb foreign influence. Critics say the laws are the latest bid by PM Viktor Orban's nationalist government to silence opponents before EU and Hungarian municipal elections in June. The European Commission also said it was suing Spain for failing to apply the waste management requirements due to existence of unclosed illegal landfills.

CAMPBELL IS U.S. DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE

Washington, Feb. 7: The US Senate has overwhelmingly confirmed President Joe Biden's top Asia aide Kurt Campbell as the deputy secretary of state, described as one with deep experience to excel in this post. Considered a veteran in the US-Asia engagement scenario, Campbell, 67, was confirmed on Tuesday by the US Senate in a clear 92-5 bipartisan vote. "I congratulate Kurt Campbell on his confirmation to serve as our new deputy secretary of state and thank Toria Nuland who has been serving in an acting capacity," secretary of state Antony Blinken posted on X.

LANKA ARRESTS 50K CRIMINALS IN ANTI-DRUG OP

Colombo, Feb. 7: The Sri Lankan government has said that more than 50,000 criminals were nabbed and narcotics worth millions of rupees were seized during an ambitious operation against drugs in the island nation in 50 days. Conceptualised by minister of public security Tiran Alles and overseen by acting IGP Deshabandu Tennakoon, the controversial Operation Yukthiya (the Sinhala term for justice) was launched on December 17 with a June 30 deadline to end the drug menace plaguing the country and arrest all the drug dealers.

WILLIAM RETURNS TO FILL ROYAL FRONTLINE DUTY

London, Feb. 7: With his father King Charles III undergoing treatment for cancer and his wife recovering from surgery, Britain's Prince William will return to royal frontline duties on Wednesday. The king's shock cancer diagnosis, announced on Monday, and Catherine's abdominal operation have left William shouldering a heavy royal burden. William, 41, Charles's eldest son and heir to the throne, postponed public engagements to care for his wife, the Princess of Wales, and their three children after she was admitted to hospital on January 16.

MUSLIM REBELS, THAILAND AGREE ON PEACE MAP

Kuala Lumpur, Feb. 7: Malaysia's facilitator said on Wednesday that the Thai government and Muslim separatist rebels in southern Thailand have agreed in principle on a roadmap to try to end a decades-long Muslim insurgency. The sides held two days of talks in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, and will meet again over the next two months to iron out details of the peace plan, said Malaysian facilitator Zulkifli Zainal Abidin. "It is a major breakthrough after the dialogue was stalled the past year due to the Thai election."

MILEI'S ECONOMIC REFORMS STALL IN ARGENTINA CONG.

Buenos Aires, Feb. 7: Argentine President Javier Milei was dealt a major setback in parliament Tuesday when his deeply controversial deregulatory reform package was prevented from advancing and sent back for a rewrite, legislators said. Just as the Chamber of Deputies was preparing for a vote on the bill, the President's La Libertad Avanza (L.A.) party suddenly requested and obtained the adjournment of the session. "The governors (of the provinces) did not keep their word," said Oscar Zago, leader of the ruling party faction.

Hamas offers 135-day truce if Israel pulls out from Gaza

Saudi Arabia rules out Israel ties without recognition of Palestinian state

Doha, Riyadh, Feb. 7: Hamas has proposed a ceasefire plan that would quiet the guns in Gaza for four-and-a-half months, during which all hostages would go free, Israel would withdraw its troops from the Gaza Strip and an agreement would be reached on an end to the war. Saudi Arabia has told the US it will not open diplomatic relations with Israel unless an independent Palestinian state is recognised on 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, its foreign ministry said on Wednesday.

The statement added that "Israeli aggression" against the Gaza Strip must also stop and Israeli forces must withdraw from the territory. Hamas group's proposal — a response to an offer sent last week by Qatari and Egyptian mediators — comes in the biggest diplomatic push yet for an extended halt to the fighting, and was met with hope and relief in the Gaza Strip. There was no immediate public response from Israel, which has said it will not pull its troops out of Gaza until

Hamas is wiped out. According to a draft document seen by Reuters, the Hamas envisages three phases of a truce, lasting 45 days each. Militants would exchange remaining Israeli hostages they captured on Oct. 7 for Palestinian prisoners. The reconstruction of Gaza would begin, Israeli forces would withdraw completely, and bodies and remains would be exchanged. US secretary of state Antony Blinken arrived overnight in Israel after meeting the leaders of mediators Qatar and Egypt in an attempt to reach an extended truce.

A source close to the negotiations said the Hamas counterproposal did not require a guarantee of a permanent ceasefire at the outset, but that an end to the war would have to be agreed during the truce before the final hostages were freed. "During the first 45-day phase, all Israeli women hostages, males under 19 and the elderly and sick would be released, in exchange for the release of Palestinian women and children from Israeli jails. Israel would also withdraw its troops from populated areas during the first phase. Implementation of the second phase would not begin until the sides conclude "indirect talks over the requirements needed to end the mutual military operations and return to complete calm".

The second phase would include the release of remaining male hostages and "the withdrawal of Israeli forces outside the borders of all areas of the Gaza Strip".



An injured man with a bandaged head looks on while standing next to the rubble and debris of a destroyed building in the aftermath of Israeli bombardment on Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday. — AFP

CIVILIANS AMONG 10 DEAD IN ISRAEL STRIKES ON SYRIA

Beirut, Feb. 7: Six civilians were among 10 people killed in Israeli air strikes on the central Syrian city of Homs early on Wednesday, a war monitor said. "Ten people, including six civilians and two Hezbollah fighters, were killed in Israeli strikes on a building in the Hamra neighbourhood of Homs," the head of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, Rami Abdel Rahman, told AFP. The strikes completely levelled the building in one of the city's most affluent districts, and also hit other targets linked to Iran-backed groups, Abdel Rahman said.

Three students and a woman were among the dead, two of whom have yet to be identified, Abdel Rahman added. "Two Hezbollah fighters were among the dead, a source to the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group confirmed to AFP. — AFP

Bodies and remains would be exchanged during the third phase. The truce would also increase the flow of food and other aid to Gaza's desperate civilians, who are facing hunger and dire shortages of basic supplies. "People are optimistic, at the same time they pray that this hope turns into a real agreement that will end the war," said Yamen Hamad, a father of four, living in a UN school in Deir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip. — Reuters

Blasts kill 26 on Pak poll eve

Islamabad, Feb. 7: Two explosions near electoral candidates' offices in Pakistan's southwestern province of Balochistan killed 26 people and wounded dozens on Wednesday, officials said, raising concerns over security on the eve of a general election. Pakistan goes to the polls on Thursday amid rising militant attacks and the jailing of Imran Khan, the winner of the last national election, who has been dominating the headlines despite an economic crisis and other woes threatening the nuclear-armed country. Authorities have said they are boosting security at polling booths.

The first attack, which killed 14 people, took place at the office of an independent election candidate in Pishin district. The second explosion in Qilla Saifullah, near the Afghan border, detonated near an office of Jamiat Ulema Islam (JUI), a religious party that has previously been the target of militant attacks, according to the province's information minister. The deputy commissioner of Qilla Saifullah, Yasir Bazzi, said that 12 people were killed and 25 wounded by a device planted on motorcycle parked near the office. It was not immediately clear who was behind the attacks. Several groups, including the Islamist militant Pakistani Taliban (TTP) and separatist groups from Balochistan, oppose the Pakistani state and have carried out attacks in recent months. A TTP spokesman claimed an attack on Monday that killed 10 people at a police station in north-west Pakistan. The TTP has said it was targeting police and security officials rather than electoral candidates.

Pakistan's foreign office said in a statement its western border crossings with Iran and Afghanistan would close and re-open on Friday to ensure security during the election. Khanzai hospital, close to the site of the explosion in Pishin on Wednesday, put the death toll at 14 and said more than two dozen

Pakistanis to vote for new govt today

party of its iconic election symbol cricket 'bat'. Sharif, 74, will be eying the premiership for a record fourth time. The contest also involves the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) of Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, who has been declared as the party's prime minister face. Nearly 6,50,000 security personnel have been deployed across the country as authorities were busy setting up 90,675 polling stations to enable more than 12.85 crore registered voters to cast their ballot. A total of 5,121 candidates are in the race for the National Assembly seats. For the four provincial assemblies, 12,695 candidates are in the fray. — PTI

BALLOT BATTLE
6,50,000 security personnel have been deployed across the country.
12.85 crore registered voters to cast their ballot in the general elections.
90,675 polling stations set up all over the country.
29,985 declared as sensitive.
16,766 are highly sensitive.
5,121 candidates are in the race for the National Assembly seats.
12,695 candidates are in the field for the four provincial assemblies.

KEY PLAYERS

IMRAN KHAN
The embattled ex-PM (71) is imprisoned since August 2023 and is receiving multi-year bans from taking part in politics over a plethora of corruption and criminal charges.

MARYAM NAWAZ SHARIF
Maryam Nawaz Sharif (50) plays an influential role in the PML-N party, and has been presented by her father as his political heir apparent. She is senior vice president of the party.

NAWAZ SHARIF
Ex-PM Nawaz Sharif (74) is considered a front-runner to lead the country, having buried a long-running feud with the country's powerful military. But there are questions over his health.

SHEHBAZ SHARIF
The younger brother of Nawaz, Shehbaz (72) is believed to be closer to Pakistan's powerful military than Nawaz and has long been an intermediary between the two.

BILAWAL BHUTTO ZARDARI
Bilawal Bhutto Zardari was the country's foreign minister until a caretaker government took over late last year. His party could play king-maker.

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MUIZZU: SOON NO 'FOREIGN' ARMY IN MALDIVES

Male, Feb. 7: President Mohamed Muizzu on Wednesday said by bolstering the defence capabilities of the Maldives, the country will soon reach a point where there is no "foreign" military presence, weeks after he sought the withdrawal of Indian defence personnel from the nation. The statement comes a day after Muizzu, who rode to power on anti-India posturing, declared that the Maldives will maintain autonomous control over all its territories, including maritime, aerial, and terrestrial domains apart from enhancing Maldives' capabilities for conducting underwater surveys. — PTI

JOE BIDEN WINS PRIMARY IN NEVADA

Las Vegas, Feb. 7: Nevada's duelling presidential caucuses and primaries this week are creating confusion among voters, and those who cast ballots in the first contest on Tuesday had the option of supporting none of the candidates. Nikki Haley ran in Tuesday's Republican primary, which won't count for the GOP nomination, while Donald Trump is the only major candidate in Thursday's Republican caucuses, which does. The split races have undercut the influence of the third state on the GOP calendar. It also may have brought a ho-hum approach to Tuesday's contests, where the day started with lower-than-expected voter turnout. In the first two hours after polls opened, officials said 183 had voted in person in Washoe County, the state's second-largest county by population. — AP

Border security, Ukraine aid deal fails in US Cong.

Washington, Feb. 7: A Senate deal on border enforcement measures and Ukraine aid suffered a swift and total collapse on Tuesday as Republicans withdrew support despite President Joe Biden urging Congress to show some spine and stand up to Donald Trump. Just minutes after the Democratic President's remarks at the White House, Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell emerged from a Grand Old Party (GOP) luncheon at the Capitol and acknowledged that the deal was dead. "It looks to me and to most of our members that we have no real chance here to make a law," the Kentucky Republican told reporters.

The split-screen moments in Washington represented a rapid turn of events that showed McConnell's slipping control of his GOP conference, Trump's growing influence, and Biden's ability only to look on as a cornerstone of his foreign policy halting Russian President Vladimir Putin's advance into Europe — crumbled in Congress. Out of funds, the Pentagon is sending no more arms shipments to Kyiv just as the war — entering its third year — reaches a critical juncture. Ukraine is struggling with ammunition and personnel shortages while Russia is on the offensive, mounting relentless attacks. — AP

U.S. LAWMAKERS REJECT \$17.6 BN ISRAEL HELP BILL

Washington, Feb. 7: US lawmakers voted on Tuesday to reject a standalone Israel aid bill denounced by critics as a "cynical" bid to thwart a cross-party border security and foreign aid package that would include cash for war-torn Ukraine. Republicans scheduled the vote after the Democratic-led Senate released a bipartisan bill Sunday pairing billions of dollars for Israel and Ukraine. — AFP

THOSE IMPACTED BY SUDAN WAR NEED \$4 BN, SAYS UN

Geneva, Feb. 7: The United Nations appealed Wednesday for \$4.1 billion to provide desperately needed aid to civilians in war-ravaged Sudan and those who have fled as refugees, warning the conflict had fuelled "epic suffering". The brutal conflict that erupted in April last year has caused a humanitarian collapse and left over half of the country's population — around 25 million people — in urgent need of assistance and protection. — AFP

Russian missiles rain on Ukraine

Kyiv, Feb. 7: Russia fired dozens of missiles and drones at Ukraine on Wednesday in a "massive" early morning attack that killed at least five people and injured more than 30, officials in Kyiv said. The wave of strikes came as the EU's top diplomat was in the Ukrainian capital and with Kyiv calling on its Western allies to ramp up supplies of much-needed military aid, including air defenses. A strike on the capital Kyiv killed four people when a high-rise residential building was hit, triggering a large fire and engulfing its top floors in black smoke. "Another massive attack against our country," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a post on social media. Missile and drone attacks were also recorded in the northeast and south of the country as well as in the western Lviv region, hundreds of kilometres from the frontlines. At least four people were killed in the hit to the residential building in Kyiv, while one person was killed in the southern Mykolaiv region, officials said. Ukraine's commander-in-chief Valery Zaluzhny said Russia used drones, cruise, ballistic and anti-aircraft missiles in the barrage. He said Russia fired a total 20 drones and 44 missiles in the morning attack — with Ukraine shooting down 15 drones and 29 missiles. — AFP

UPPER HOUSE APPROVES SEIZING ASSETS OF CRITICS

Moscow, Feb. 7: After a brief discussion, the upper house of Russia's Parliament on Wednesday endorsed a bill that would allow authorities to confiscate money, valuables and other assets from people convicted of spreading deliberately false information about the country's military. The bill, which was approved equally quickly by the lower house last week, is expected to receive Russian President Vladimir Putin's signature and become law soon. — AP

NO JURISDICTION: NORD STREAM PROBE CLOSED

Stockholm, Feb. 7: A Swedish prosecutor probing the 2022 sabotage of the Nord Stream gas pipelines linking Russia and Germany said on Wednesday he was closing the probe because Sweden doesn't have jurisdiction. Mats Ljungqvist said there had been "in-depth cooperation" with Germany over the Sept. 2022 seabed operation and he would "hand over material that can be used as evidence in the German investigation." — AFP

BORDER | POROUS January immigration to EU from Western Africa rose 10 times in 2024

Impossible to stop migration: EU agency

Warsaw, Feb. 7: Irregular immigration to the EU from Western Africa rose more than ten times in the year in January, according to the bloc's Frontex border agency, which expects overall arrivals to grow in 2024 and says halting the movement of people completely is impossible. Frontex head Hans Leijtens spoke in his Warsaw office ahead of a trip by the EU chief executive and Spanish prime minister on Thursday to Mauritania, which has recently become a major point of departure for Europe. Asked about a June EU-

wide parliamentary election, in which migration is a top issue, the former Dutch border guard told Reuters that stopping irregular arrivals completely was not realistic. "Migration is a global phenomenon. We need to manage migration because we can't cope with unmanaged migration to Europe," he said. "But a full stop — for me that seems very difficult, not to say impossible." Leijtens said orderly management of the bloc's external borders was an important part of a broader "European portfolio" needed to face the

U.S. SOUTHERN BORDER BECOMES ENTRY POINT FOR ASYLUM SEEKERS

Washington, Feb. 7: The journey of Barry by land from Mexico to US reflects the growing reality of the southern US border becoming a global way station for asylum seekers. But of the nearly 2.5 million crossings recorded by Customs and Border Pro-

tection in fiscal year 2023, 1.26 million originated from outside of Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala and El Salvador. That represents a 234 per cent increase from 2021, when some 3,78,000 "other" country nationals crossed the southern border. — AFP

challenge and stressed the need for EU development and other aid to foreign countries. Last year, Frontex recorded 3,80,000 irregular border crossings, the highest since 2016. That marked another consecu-

tive year of growth since the 2020 Covid pandemic lows, a trend Leijtens saw holding in 2024. "I don't think there will be a new trend in terms of the numbers going down," he said, expecting more people from sub-Saharan Africa to seek to get to Europe, while the situation of Palestinians fleeing Gaza was uncertain. "I don't want to sound very alarmist but I think it's an assumption that can be proven right." Those fleeing wars have the right to asylum in the EU, which has sheltered millions of Ukrainians fleeing Russia's invasion since 2022. Africans are mostly seen as labour migrants and the bloc wants to keep a tight lid on such arrivals. Reuters saw the Frontex January data ahead of official publication. It showed the Atlantic route as the busiest irregular migration path into the EU, representing almost a half of the total nearly 14,000 arrivals last month. Overall, irregular arrivals fell marginally year-on-year and by a third from Dec., the data showed, with winter months typically seeing low numbers. — Reuters

quick BITES

INDICATORS	%
Sensex	72,152.00 -0.05
Nifty 50	21,930.50 0.01
S&P 500*	4,976.79 0.46
Dollar (₹)	82.96 0.12
Pound Sterling (₹)	104.82 -0.63
Euro (₹)	89.34 -0.25
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	62,416.158 -0.25
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	78.95 0.46
IN 10-Yr bond yield	7.073 -0.019
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.129 0.037

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Servotch inks pact with Adani arm for EV charges

Electric vehicles (EV) charging solution provider Servotch Power Systems has inked an annual rate contract with Adani TotalEnergies E-Mobility for supply of EV chargers. The company will be responsible for manufacturing, supplying and installing AC EV chargers at different airports and other said locations, playing a key role in driving widespread EV charging solutions, vital for decarbonized mobility.



NTPC to raise ₹6,222 cr in debt under ECB

State-owned NTPC Ltd is looking to raise up to \$750 million (about ₹6,222 crore) in debt from foreign investors. The proposed facility is being raised under automatic route as permitted under external commercial borrowing (ECB) guidelines of RBI. NTPC said the bids from banks/financial institutions should be a comprehensive and fully underwritten offer for the full amount of the proposed facility.

Esconet Tech gets orders from NICS to deliver servers

Esconet Technologies said on Wednesday it has secured an order from National Informatics Centre Services Inc (NICS) to deliver servers and object storage for the immigration, visa and foreigners registration and tracking application of the FRRO. The servers and object storage will transform the user experience and provide seamless access to the e-FRRO service, the company said in a release.

GCEL files papers with Sebi to raise fund through IPO

Garuda Construction and Engineering Ltd (GCEL) has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of 1.83 crore equity shares and an offer for sale of 95 lakh equity shares by promoter PKH Ventures Ltd, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) uploaded on Sebi's website.

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PSU shares gained sharply after Modi's speech in LS

Indian PSUs M-cap crosses ₹62 lakh cr

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD
MUMBAI, FEB. 7

Top listed public sector undertaking (PSU) companies shares including banks and insurance companies gained sharply on Wednesday. Several large PSUs including LIC, SBI, and other PSU banks shares shined as Prime Minister Modi highlighted PSUs success story during NDA regime in the Parliament.

Modi said there were 234 PSUs in the country in 2014. Today, the number has increased to 254. He also blamed opposition for undermining public sector undertakings like BSNL, MTNL, HAL and Air India during their tenure and the current



● **LIC SHARES** touched a new all time high of ₹1,050.5 and finally closed 1.98 per cent higher at ₹1,045 on BSE with a market cap of over ₹6.6 lakh crore.

government has made efforts to turn them around.

Prime Minister also said BSNL that the Congress destroyed is now moving towards Made in India 4G and 5G. HAL is showing record revenue generation and it has become Asia's largest helicopter manufacturing factory.

"We have turned around the story. Today LIC's

shares are breaking records," Modi said.

Life Insurance Corporation of India's (LIC) shares touched a new all time high of ₹1,050.5 and finally closed 1.98 per cent higher at ₹1,045 on BSE with a market cap of over ₹6.6 lakh crore.

Top PSU bank SBI's shares also gained 3.78 per cent closing at ₹675.50 with a market cap of over

₹6.02 lakh crore.

Other public sector undertaking bank gainers included Indian Overseas Bank (18.03 per cent), UCO Bank (16.18 per cent), Central Bank of India (11.54 per cent), Bank of Maharashtra (8.07 per cent), Canara Bank (6.23 per cent) and SBI (4.16 per cent).

As per department of investment and public Asset Management market cap of public sector undertaking banks and insurance companies stood at over ₹24.78 lakh crore and market cap of all central public sector enterprises (CPSE) stood at over ₹37.59 lakh crore taking market cap of all listed PSUs and CPSEs to over ₹62.37 lakh crore.

India to make \$100-bn trade deal with Europe nations

New Delhi, Feb. 7: India is close to finalising a first-of-its-kind trade deal that could see a small group of European nations invest as much as \$100 billion over 15 years in exchange for easier trade access to the world's most populous nation, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

The European Free Trade Association, which comprises Switzerland, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, made a commitment to invest in India as part of a trade pact that's in the final stages of negotiations, the people said, asking not to

be identified as the talks are still ongoing.

The contours of the deal have been agreed and deliberations currently centre on the final investment amount, which could be as much as \$100 billion over 15 years, some of the people said. While India wants the commitment to be legally binding, one of the European officials said the amount will likely be framed as a goal, with no legal means to claim it included in the language of the agreement.

If finalised, it would mark the first time an investment commitment

of this nature is secured by India as part of a free trade agreement.

Switzerland's Economy Minister Guy Parmelin said last month that the outline of a deal had been agreed upon, without giving details. Legal clarifications are currently being rushed so the deal can be signed before India holds elections likely from April, a European official with knowledge of the matter said.

The Swiss economy ministry said in a statement that the text of the agreement is "still to be finalised and both parties have agreed not to disclose

the details at this stage."

The main points where agreement has been reached include "patent protection, which was controversial in the past, as well as a new type of investment promotion chapter," it said.

The deal would also ensure easier movement of Indian professionals to the bloc and market access for some agricultural products, the people said. While Switzerland, the biggest economy in the EFTA bloc, is usually very protective of its farmers, easier market access for Indian rice could be acceptable. — Bloomberg

Tax devolution to states needs a hike

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

If the cesses and surcharges were included in the divisible pool of central taxes, the tax devolution to states would have gone up from 35.5 per cent to 40 per cent in FY25, finds India Ratings.

Apart from various taxes, the reliance of the union government on cesses and surcharges has increased in recent years. The total cesses and surcharges, excluding GST compensation cess, collected by the union government have been budgeted at 10.2 per cent of the gross tax revenue in FY25BE.

As cesses and surcharges are not part of the divisible pool of the union government as per the Article 270 of the Indian constitution, states feel deprived off of their legitimate revenue.

In FY25, the union government has budgeted to share 35.5 per cent of the divisible tax pool with states, lower than 41 per cent recommended by 15th Finance Commission. Furthermore, the states' share in central taxes has been trending downwards. The share of states averaged 35.4 per cent of the divisible pool during FY21-FY25BE,



down from 39.8 per cent during FY16-FY20.

As states are responsible for over 60 per cent of general government expenditure, lower than the recommended level share of states in central taxes coupled with cess and surcharges, will remain an important issue before the 16th FC.

"Had the cesses and surcharges, excluding GST compensation cess, been included in the divisible pool of taxes, then states would have received roughly 4.2 per cent more, thereby taking the tax devolution to states to nearly 40 per cent in FY25," said Paras Jasraji, Senior Analyst, Ind-Ra.

The government has been turning the revenue expenditure levels back to the pre-pandemic levels in the past few years, and intends to continue with that trend in FY25. The revenue expenditure as a percentage of GDP has been budgeted at 11.2 per cent in FY25.

VC invests \$9.2 bn in India's energy sector

New Delhi, Feb. 7: Funding through venture capital route into India's energy storage sector has registered a 59 per cent growth while the overall investments in the segment reported a 28 per cent decline, Mercom Capital said in a report on Wednesday.

The corporate funding in 2023 includes \$9.2 billion funding through Venture Capital (VC), \$9.8 billion

through debt and public market financing, the research firm said.

VC/PE funding in the energy storage space in 2023 was the highest-ever compared to the \$5.8 bn raised in 2022.

However, the total corporate funding in the energy storage sector in 2023 was 28 per cent lower against \$26.4 billion in 2022, the 'Mercom Annual and Q4 Funding Report' said.

● **LITHIUM-ION-BASED** battery technology companies received the most VC funding in 2023. Other top-funded categories included battery recycling, nickel-based battery technology

"Energy storage companies saw their highest VC funding in 2023, largely on account of the (USA's)

Inflation Reduction Act's Investment Tax Credit and other incentives like manufacturing credits for battery components.

Thea merger and acquisition activity lagged due to high asset valuations, elevated interest rates, and investor caution," Raj Prabhhu, chief executive officer of US-based Mercom Capital Group, said.

Lithium-ion-based battery technology compa-

panies received the most VC funding in 2023. Other top-funded categories included battery recycling, nickel-based battery technology, energy storage downstream, and materials and components companies. In India, Graphite India has entered into a definitive transaction to invest ₹50 cr in convertible preference shares of GODI Energy, and BatX Energies raised \$5 mn. — PTI

Government listed fair price shops on ONDC platform

MADHUSUDAN SAHOO
NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

In an attempt to access a maximum customer base and compete with big-ticket retailers and e-commerce platforms, the government on Wednesday for the first time, unveiled a pilot project to onboard 11 fair price shops (FPS) in the Una and Hamirpur districts of Himachal Pradesh onto the open network digital commerce or ONDC platform.

The initiative, however, aims at providing additional avenues of income generation for FPS dealers along with enhancing the beneficiary's satisfac-



tion as well. The Centre has been pushing for greater retail participation on ONDC platform for a long time to expand its reach. Announcing this initiative, Sanjeev Chopra, secretary, department of food and public distribution, said that the initiative added to the continuous

efforts of the department to transform the fair price shop across the country.

He virtually initiated a pilot to connect six shops in Hamirpur and five in Una. "This effort aims at providing additional avenues of income generation to FPS dealers along with beneficiary satisfaction," he said.

The government supplies food grain and other essential commodities through ration shops to the beneficiaries at a lower price. "Himachal Pradesh pilot's success would serve as a model for future adoption on a state and national level," Chopra said.



COAL PRODUCTION GROWS 12% TO 778 MILLION TONNE IN CURRENT FISCAL

SANGEETHA G
CHENNAI, FEB. 7

Coal production in the current fiscal has gone up by 12 per cent compared to same period last year.

Till Jan. 2024, domestic coal production has increased by around 12.11 per cent compared to the same period of last year. In FY23, coal production had increased by 14.77 per cent from 778.21 million tonnes in FY22 to 893 million tonnes in FY23. In FY21 the country had produced 716 million tonnes.

Meanwhile, the exports of coal have come down from 2.945 million tonnes in FY21 to 1.316 mn tonnes in FY22 and further down to 1.166 mn tonnes in FY23. In FY24 till Nov, it stood at 0.78 mn tonnes.

According to the government, it wants to increase the domestic production of coal and reduce the import of coal. A single window clearance portal has been set up for the coal sector to speed up operationalisation of mines. Under the commercial mining scheme, rebates of 50 per cent on the final offer would be allowed for the quantity of coal produced earlier than the scheduled date.

AMAZON LAYOFFS HUNDREDS OF EMPLOYEES IN HEALTHCARE UNIT

Seattle, Feb. 7: Amazon.com Inc. is laying off hundreds of employees in its health care division, stepping up an ongoing campaign to trim costs.

The job cuts will impact "a few hundred roles" between the One Medical chain of doctors offices Amazon acquired last year and the company's online pharmacy operation, Neil Lindsay, chief of Amazon Health Services, said.

The layoffs follow rolling reductions in late 2022 and early 2023 that ultimately totaled more than 27,000 employees, as Chief Executive Officer Andy Jassy looked to cut costs after expanding rapidly during the pandemic. He has also axed dozens of projects concocted during the Jeff Bezos era.

Since then, Amazon has continued trimming across its businesses, without announcing mass workforce reductions. Cuts in the last several months fell on the division responsible for its voice-activated Alexa assistant as well as in the music unit, the Prime Video and studios business, as well as Twitch.

Lindsay told employees the company had "identified areas where we can reposition resources so we can invest in inventions that have a direct impact on our customers." — Bloomberg

BIG IMPACT Microsoft CEO points out new-age tech can distribute growth equally

India, US need to frame AI rules: Nadella

Mumbai, Feb. 7: India and the US need to cooperate on framing regulations on artificial intelligence (AI), Microsoft's chief Satya Nadella said on Wednesday, stressing that the new-age technology can "equally distribute" growth.

The India-born chairman and chief executive officer of the global tech giant said the company will be skilling 20 lakh Indians on AI by 2025.

A "consensus" on AI, which he termed as a powerful general-purpose technology, is essential at the multilateral levels as

well, he said, adding that a faster "diffusion" of the technology can help us have "equal distribution of economic growth".

Replying to a question on the cooperation between the US and India on AI, Nadella stressed on greater cooperation between the New Delhi and Washington.

"I think it's imperative especially for India and the United States to be able to cooperate, what are the norms, what are the regulations even, instead of fracturing them," Nadella, who is on a two-day visit to the country,



● **NADELLA HINTED** that AI can help boost GDP growth in India as well, and termed India as one of the highest growth markets in the world.

said. Addressing the audience including the business leaders from various fields, Nadella hinted that AI can help boost GDP growth in India as well, and termed India as one of the highest

growth markets in the world.

He also presented a data point from the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) to say that the AI GDP will be \$500 billion by 2025,

when the overall GDP will be \$5 trillion.

Nadella said while efforts are on to increase power generation from renewable sources, India also has to focus on grid stability and added that technology will play an important role in the same.

Citing multiple examples of usage of AI by Indian enterprises and also non-profits, Nadella said the ability to build your own AI applications has never been easier. AI can also be used for furthering scientific progress, he said, — PTI

SHORT TAKES

Kiwis hammer SA in first Test

Mount Maunganui, New Zealand: Black Caps seamer Kyle Jamieson claimed four wickets on Wednesday to drive New Zealand to a 281-run win over South Africa with a day to spare in the first Test. Dogged resistance from the tourists ended with their dismissal for 247 at Mount Maunganui as the Black Caps notched their second-biggest Test victory by runs. New Zealand are a step closer to a maiden series win over South Africa after 17 previous failed attempts, dating back to 1931. Given their struggles at Bay Oval, the vastly inexperienced Proteas will need a dramatic turnaround to win the second and final Test, starting on Tuesday in Hamilton. The tourists were forced to name a depleted tour squad with most first-choice players involved in their domestic Twenty20 competition. — *AFP*

Brief scores: New Zealand 511 & 179/4 decl. (Kane Williamson 109, Neil Brand 2/52) beat South Africa 162 & 247 (David Bedingham 87, Kyle Jamieson 4/58, Mitchell Santner 3/59).

Jordan send S. Korea packing

Doha, Qatar: Jordan overpowered South Korea and a "devastated" Son Heung-min 2-0 on Tuesday to reach their first Asian Cup final and a showdown with Iran or hosts and holders Qatar. Playing in the semifinals for the first time and ranked 64 places below their opponents, Jordan fully deserved their victory over Jurgen Klinsmann's shell-shocked side. South Korea failed to have a shot on target and their talisman Son apologised afterwards as his country's wait for a first Asian Cup since 1960 goes on. Jordan deservedly went ahead soon after the break, Yazan Al-Naimat scoring his third goal of the tournament after South Korea gave the ball away cheaply. They had been in a losing position in four of their matches in Qatar, but there was no way back this time for the Koreans when Mousa Al-Tamari sliced his way through the South Korean defence 13 minutes later. South Korea simply could not handle the lively attacking duo of Naimat and Tamari. — *AFP*

Amit & Akash in Strandja quarters

Sofia, Bulgaria: Commonwealth Games gold medalist Amit Panghal, national champion Akash and Abhimanyu Loura put up a stellar show to move into the quarterfinals of the 75th Strandja Memorial Tournament here on Wednesday. Amit (51kg) had Rudyk Maksym's challenge to tackle as he eyed his place in the quarters. The experienced campaigner quickly got into his groove and his ability to efficiently get into the attacking position was on display throughout the bout. The first two rounds were all about taking on the opponent, while in the third, Amit employed his defensive tactics to frustrate his Ukrainian opponent and capitalise on his errors, advancing with a dominant 5-0 unanimous decision win. Amit will face Aldarkhishig Battulga of Mongolia on Friday. Akash (71kg) was up against Traore Makan of France. Akash started slow but soon picked up the pace as he displayed swift movement and landed a flurry of punches, surprising his opponents and gaining a significant lead. — *PTI*

India face Bangla in summit clash

Dhaka: The Indian football team will be out to break a jinx as it takes on hosts Bangladesh in the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship final here on Thursday. Despite improvement in women's football, India somehow hold a dismal record in this age-group in SAFF. The title has eluded India on more than one occasion, the latest being the SAFF U20 Women's Championship in Dhaka last year, when Bangladesh piped them to win the trophy. The upcoming final will definitely be a huge opportunity for India to put past records on the burner and retain the title. The Young Tigresses will enter the final match with a strong determination to win the championship title and set the records straight from the Indian perspective. In the group stage, India won comfortably against Bhutan (10-0) and Nepal (4-0) but lost to Bangladesh by a solitary goal before entering the final. — *PTI*

BUMRAAH!

Jasprit first Indian pacer to reach No. 1 in Test rankings

Dubai, Feb. 7: Jasprit Bumrah on Wednesday became the first Indian pacer to top the ICC Test rankings after a stellar performance against England in Visakhapatnam. The 30-year-old's nine-wicket match haul has helped him leapfrog Pat Cummins, Kagiso Rabada and Ravichandran Ashwin, making him only the fourth from his country to attain number one position. Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja and Bishan Singh Bedi are the other Indians who have been at the top of the charts. Bumrah, who was named Player of the Match after helping India level the five-match series with a 106-run victory, ended Ashwin's 11-month long reign. Ashwin, on 499 Test wickets, is now third in the standings. Bumrah now has 881 rating points with Ashwin (904) and Jadeja (899) the only India bowlers to have aggregated more rating points. Ashwin and Jadeja also have the unique distinction of being jointly top-ranked in March 2017.

The batting rankings see left-handed opener Yashasvi Jaiswal progress 37 places to 29th after completing a fine double-century in the first innings and Shubman Gill go up 14 places to a career-best 38th after notching a century in the second innings. England opener Zak Crawley is another player to gain after the Visakhapatnam Test, moving up eight places to a career-best 22nd position after scores of 76 and 73. Rookie leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed has moved up 14 places to 70th while Tom Hartley, who became just the second England player with at least 50 runs and five wickets in each of his first two Tests, has advanced in both lists - up from 103rd to 95th in the batting rankings and from 63rd to 53rd in the bowling rankings.

The latest rankings have also factored in performances in the one-off Test between Sri Lanka and Afghanistan in Colombo. Left-arm spinner Prabhath Jayasuriya has moved up to three places to a career-best sixth position. In the ODI rankings, Australia leg-spinner Adam Zampa is up one place to third and fast bowler Sean Abbott's six wickets in the three-match series against the West Indies this past week have lifted him 35 places to joint-33rd position. — *PTI*

● The 30-year-old's nine-wicket match haul has helped him leapfrog Pat Cummins, Kagiso Rabada and Ravichandran Ashwin, making him only the fourth from his country to attain number one position.



Kohli likely to miss next two Tests, doubtful for final game

New Delhi, Feb. 7: India's star batter Virat Kohli is likely to miss the third and fourth Tests against England due to personal reasons, which also kept him out of the first two matches of the series, a BCCI source said on Wednesday. Chances of Kohli playing the final Test of the series in Dharamsala (from March 7-11) are also remote but the board isn't looking that far ahead as that particular match is still a month away. The third Test will be held in Rajkot from February 15-19, while the fourth game is in Ranchi from February 23-27. Recently Kohli's close friend and former South African skipper AB de Villiers had revealed on

his YouTube show that the Indian batting ace is missing in action due to the impending arrival of his second child. The other big question has been Jasprit Bumrah's workload management after the team's bowling spearhead sent down 33 overs for a match-winning haul of nine wickets in the second Test. It is understood that the third Test's result could go a long way in deciding the course of the series which would make it difficult to rest Bumrah in the Rajkot game. If he plays in Rajkot it is a foregone conclusion that he will not play the next game in Ranchi, which would start in three days' time after the third Test.

Among the imminent comebacks, KL Rahul is likely to return to the playing eleven and Rajat Patidar will then have to sit out as Shreyas Iyer, after his tremendous work in the field including a superb run-out of Ben Stokes in Visakhapatnam, will get another go. Ravindra Jadeja's progress has been positive and his hamstring is healing well but it might not be good enough to allow him to get cracking on his home turf in Rajkot. Mohammed Siraj will be back after being given workload-related rest in Visakhapatnam and Mukesh Kumar is more than hundred percent certain to get the axe from playing eleven. — *PTI*

PANT IS FIT TO PLAY ENTIRE IPL, SAYS PONTING

Melbourne, Feb. 7: Rishabh Pant is confident of playing the entire IPL but the flamboyant cricketer could only be available as a batter and not behind the stumps, according to Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting. Pant was involved in a life-threatening car accident in December, 2022 that forced him to undergo ligament reconstruction surgeries. "Rishabh is very confident that he's going to be right to play. In what capacity we're not quite sure yet," Ponting was quoted as saying by *ESPNCricinfo*. "You would have seen all the social-media stuff, he's up and about and running well. But in saying that we're only six weeks away from the first game as well. So we're not sure if we'll get wicketkeeping out of him this year." "We'll just keep our fingers crossed and hope that he can be out there and play."

In case Pant is not able to fulfil wicketkeeping duties, the 26-year-old could play as a pure batter or could be used as an Impact Player in the upcoming IPL. "But I'll guarantee if I asked him now he'll say, 'I'm playing every game, and I'm batting at No.4.' That's just what he's like." David Warner led the Capitals last season and Ponting confirmed that star Australian batter would be captain if Pant is unavailable to do the job. — *PTI*



Joe Root

WE DON'T DO TEAM MEETINGS ANYMORE: ROOT

Visakhapatnam, Feb. 7: England under Ben Stokes are not big on team meetings and prefer organic conversations about the game to get the best out of players, says the team's batting mainstay Joe Root. Root, who is yet to make big runs in the ongoing Test series against India, has fully bought into England's aggressive style of play in the longest format. "We don't really do team meetings anymore. That's one of the great things about how we do all of our conversations away from the game and just that enjoyment and buzz about spending time with each other," Root had told 'Jio Cinema' before the game here. "We don't have to sit in a meeting room and I think it's more authentic and more genuine when you can have it around a dinner table. Having a coffee in the morning or whatever, I think that's when you do your best learning," he said. England found themselves trailing India by 190 runs in Hyderabad before staging a sensational comeback. "Regardless, of the result of the game, we're always going to play how we know. It's what's given us success for a good period of time now. It's what brings the best out of us. We've been in similar situations before," Root said. — *PTI*

RAPE | CASE

Probe against Varun begins

Bengaluru, Feb. 7: Bengaluru Police probing rape charges against Indian national team Hockey player Varun Kumar said they are collecting evidence, scanning through Call detail records, messages and voice notes exchanged between him and the alleged victim as part of the ongoing investigation. The police would soon be approaching the 28-year-old to join the probe, they said. "We are investigating the case and are collecting the required evidence. We have not approached Kumar yet. He is out of Karnataka, so we will be contacting him soon to join the probe. We have not sent any teams to his place where he is currently undergoing training. If he comes, fine, or we will have to send our team there," a senior police officer said. "We have already started collecting evidence. We are scanning through messages exchanged between the victim and Kumar, the voice notes, call detail records. We would also be approaching their mutual friends to record statements," he said. Kumar has been booked under the stringent POCSO act by the

Bengaluru Police after a woman accused him of sexually abusing her multiple times when she was a minor. The 22-year-old, in her complaint filed on Monday, said that she came in contact with Kumar in 2018 through Instagram, and the player raped her on multiple occasions promising her of marriage when she was 17. She said Kumar was training at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) centre in Bengaluru when she met him. Kumar, who got the Arjuna award in 2021, was recently promoted as a DSP in Punjab Police. "Based on the complaint received from the woman, we have registered a case on Monday against the Hockey player under appropriate section of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act and sections 376 (rape) and 420 (cheating and dishonestly inducing delivery of property) of the Indian Penal Code," a senior Bengaluru Police officer said on Tuesday. Kumar, who was on the Indian standby list for the Tokyo Olympics, is currently training with the national squad in Bhubaneswar for the upcoming FIH Pro League. — *PTI*



India's Shrivalli Bhamidipaty plays a shot against Alina Korneeva from Russia during the Mumbai Open second round match on Wednesday. — *DEBASISH DEY*

Shrivalli's dream run comes to end

Mumbai, Feb. 7: Shrivalli Bhamidipaty's dream run this week came to an end on Wednesday evening but not before the 22-year-old Indian out on a tremendous fight against 16-year-old Alina Korneeva, ranked more than 380 spots above her, at the L&T Mumbai Open WTA 125K Series Tennis Championships. Korneeva, the top-ranked junior last year and winner of two junior Grand Slams in 2023, bounced back from the loss of the first set to win 5-7, 6-4, 6-4 in two hours and 25 minutes to advance to the quarterfinals. Earlier, fourth seed Arina Rodionova and fifth seed Laura Pigossi bowed out of the singles event. Rodionova was defeated in straight sets by Dutchwoman Arianna Hartono 4-6, 4-6 while

Pigossi was knocked out by Australia's Storm Hunter 3-6, 3-6. With this, the top five seeds of the tournament have failed to make it past the second round. Sixth seed Darja Semistenaja is now the highest seed left in the singles event as she advanced to the quarterfinals with a 2-6, 6-4, 6-4 win over France's Amandine Hesse. In the doubles draw, the Indian duo of Sahaja Yamalapalli and Vaishnavi Adkar went down fighting to second seeds Sabrina Santamaria and Dalila Jakupovic 3-6, 6-7. Yamalapalli, who knocked out top seed Kayla Day in the first round, will be back in action on Thursday for her second round singles match against Polina Kudermetova.

Krishna eyes IPL, T20 World Cup

AGE CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, FEB. 7

The new season of the Indian Premier League is less than two months away and right-arm quick Prasidh Krishna is hoping to make a comeback for the Rajasthan Royals after missing the 2023 season of the IPL due to a stress fracture surgery. His ultimate goal is to find a place in the T20 World Cup squad though. "It is going to be a challenging year as IPL and T20 World Cup are scheduled back to back. Playing these tournaments is a milestone and going through the grind of challenges is a part of a player's life. I don't know whether I will be selected



or not in the Playing XI... my focus is to work on my craft and play well," Krishna said here on Wednesday. The fast bowler was integral to Rajasthan Royals reaching the final in the 2022 season of the IPL. Krishna took 19 wickets, finishing the season as RR's second highest wicket taker behind Yuzvendra Chahal. Recently, Krishna sustained a quadriceps injury while playing for Karnataka in their Ranji Trophy match against Gujarat at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Ahmedabad in January. "I

am in the process of getting back to full fitness," the 27-year-old said on the sidelines of the launch of the ASICS merchandise for the New Delhi Marathon at ASICS store in Ambience Mall, Gurugram. Krishna looked up to Jasprit Bumrah, who made a comeback from an injury lay-off, as an inspiration. He had learned quite a few tips and tricks from him. "It's great to have spent some time with Bumrah. I have seen a lot of him and he is really inspiring as an athlete. He controls his feelings so well when he is on the field and the kind of performance he is putting through is definitely a lot for me to learn from."