Israel intercepts an apparent Houthi attack nearthe port city of Eilat

Brazil calls for reform of UN as it starts its G20 presidency



Haryana Assembly takes up notrust motion against Khattar govt

Murder of democracy: Congress slams govt over X's statement



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DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG

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PAGES 12

PRICE ₹8



Modi Sarkar ki Guarantee

Prosperous Farmers, Prosperous Nation

- 1,389 mandls and 1.8 crore farmers connected with e-NAM
- Farmers getting better prices for agricultural products through 'Beej se Bazar tak' initiative





Manipur HC revokes inclusion order for Meitei

Himanta vows to clear all land impediments

Land pattas under Mission Basundhara 2.0 distributed in Dhemaji district

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 22: Assam government will wipe out all landrelated encumbrances as part of its land-reform measures, said state chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday.

Sarma said that government has been taking many revolutionary steps to wipe out the menace of middlemen in land dealings.

"The government is committed to wiping out all encumbrances associated with land in the state as a part of its land-reform initiatives," Sarma said while addressing a gathering during a programme in Dhemaji district where he started the process of distribution land pattas under Mission Basundhara 2.0.

The chief minister further stated that ever since the present regime in the state took over the reign of the government, it has been work-

ing dedicatedly to bring about socio-economic-academic empowerment narrative in the state.

Bharat' (developed India).

The PM was addressing a gathering of nearly

one lakh people, mostly cattle-rearers and farm-

ers, at the Narendra Modi Stadium in Motera

area of Ahmedabad on the golden jubilee cele-

Opposition creates ruckus

in Assam Assembly over

misconduct' in board exams

He said the schemes such as Orunodoi, waiver of microfinance loans, ration cards, health insur-

jobs recruitment, among others, are testament to the government's commitment of making Assam free of all negative practices.

"The government is taking steps to ensure all beneficiaries of Orunodoi shall be entitled to the benefits

of Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana for which the premium will be paid by the state government,'

Coming to pattas distribution, Sarma personally handed over a few land pattas to beneficiaries of Mission Basundhara 2.0 at a ceremony held at Kachari field in Dhe-

It is worth mentioning that under Mission Basundhara 2.0, a total of 38.000 applicants in Dhemaji district were found eligible for receiving land patta from the Assam government.

Speaking on the same, Sarma said all these years, members of the indigenous communities inhabiting in the state did not have documentary land records to legally claim their possession over the plot of land under their possession since

"Realising this irony, the state government brought about an amendment into the land rights Act. This led to the government deciding to provide land rights to the landless indigenous people," the chief minister stated.

"I am happy to have started the process of distributing land pattas under Mission Basundhara 2.0 from Dhemaji district, as this process will enable our indigenous landless people to have official documents over his or her plot of land," he added.

The chief minister also said that these land pattas shall enable the land-holders to record ownership of their land and empower them to use them as collateral, adding, "The digital form of the pattas would enable the beneficiaries to trace them in digilocker in the event of the (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Referring to the BJP government's ambitious

plan of creating 10,000 FPOs or Farmer Pro-

ducer Organisations, PM Modi said his govern-

ment was on a mission to turn small farmers

In his address, he listed many schemes meant

"With Micro ATMs installed in villages, cat-

into "agri entrepreneurs and exporters".

Mantri Kisan Samridhi Kendras.

a paragraph from a March 2023 order that urged the state to consider including the Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribe list, saying the paragraph was in conflict with the Supreme Court's constitution bench stance. The March 27, 2023 directive,

believed to be a catalyst for ethnic unrest that claimed over 200 lives, was rescinded by a single judge bench of Justice Golmei Gaiphulshillu during a review petition hearing on Wednesday.

IMPHAL, Feb 22: The Manipur

High Court has ordered deletion of

The contentious paragraph from last year's verdict, instructing the state to expedite consideration of Meitei community inclusion, was deemed for deletion.

The paragraph of the last year verdict stated the state government "shall consider the case of the petitioners for inclusion of Meetei/Meitei community in the Scheduled Tribes list, expeditiously, preferably within a period of four weeks" from the date of receipt of the order.

Justice Gaiphulshillu's ruling on for farmers and village-dwellers, such as Micro February 21 emphasised the neces-ATMs, GOBARdhan scheme and Pradhan sity of removing the directive, pointing to the Government of India's stipulated procedure for Scheduled Tribe list amendments. tle-rearers don't have to go far to withdraw

Justice Gaiphulshillu said, "Accordingly, the direction given at



para no. 17(iii) needs to be deleted and is ordered accordingly for deletion of the para no. 17(iii) of the judgment and order dated March 27, 2023...".

Referring to the constitutional protocol detailed in the Ministry of Tribal Affairs' 2013-14 report, the court highlighted the need for alignment with the Supreme Court's constitutional interpretation. "...I am satisfied and of the view that the direction given at Para no. 17(iii) of the single judge dated March 27, 2023...which is impugned herein needs to be reviewed, as the direction given at para no. 17(iii) of the single judge is against the observation made in the constitution bench of the Supreme Court," the high court said in its 19-page verdict.

The high court's detailed 19page verdict underlined the legislative limitations on judicial interference concerning Scheduled Tribe classifications, as outlined by a constitution (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

HTBRIEFS Karbi Lammet Amei

DIPHU: The Government of Assam has declared a special casual leave from Feb 22 to 25, 2024 to state government employees and teachers who will be participating as delegates in the 32nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of Karbi Lammet Amei. The AGM will be held from Feb 22 to 25 at Rongthelu Aklam, Amlokhi in Karbi Anglong district.

Fire breaks out

DIPHU: Five shops were gutted as massive fire broke out in Bakaliaghat market in the early hours. No casualty was reported The locals said that the fire may have started from a short circuit from one of the cloth stores and has engulfed adjoining shops. The locals blamed the delay of fire extinguishers reaching the place to dose off the flames. They said there is no fire brigades in Bakulia and has to come from either Howraghat or Diphu and demanded that a fire station be set-up at Bakulia.

COCOMI NRC

IMPHAL: Coordinating Committee on Manipur Integrity (CO-COMI) on Thursday insisted that the upcoming Manipur legislative Assembly session should take a unanimous decision on implementation of NRC in the state. The budget session of the Manipur Legislative Assembly which will have five sittings is scheduled to commence from Feb 28. COCOMI further demanded the session to discuss the "violation of the ground rules" of SoO by the Kuki based militant groups and take a concrete decision to abrogate the truce.



bration of the Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marcash. We are also planning to give RuPay credit

keting Federation (GCMMF), which owns the cards to cattle-rearers. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Nagaland Assembly likely to discuss

proposed India-Myanmar border fencing KOHIMA, Feb 22: The proposed

GUWAHATI, Feb 22: The Assam Assembly was adjourned for 10 minutes on Thursday as opposition parties created an uproarious scene demanding an adjournment motion to discuss allegations of misconduct in state board examinations, including a purported question

paper leak When the House re-assembled, the Congress and the lone Independent legislator staged a walkout as the Speaker remained firm on disallowing the adjournment motion.

Leader of opposition Debabrata Saikia, along with others of his Congress party, and Independent MLA Akhil Gogoi had given separate notices for adjournment motions to discuss the allegations of problems in conducting the class 10 and 12 state board exams, which are underway currently.

Saikia said that question paper leaks had happened in class 10 exams last year, which led the government to order a CID enquiry. He demanded to know what cor-

rective measures were taken based on the CID's probe report. "There may not have been paper

leaks this time, but there are reports of wrong labelling of question paper bundles and other such mistakes since the first day of the exams. We will allocate funds for the department but we also want to know how it is utilised," the Congress leader said.

Gogoi, however, alleged that a question paper has been leaked this year also and cited newspaper reports indicating problems in the conduct of the exams. He also demanded the resignation of education minister (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

fencing of the India-Myanmar border and the suspension of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) with the neighbouring country are likely to be discussed during the upcoming budget session of Nagaland Assembly, sources said.

Tribal bodies and civil society organisations in Nagaland, which shares 215 km of the India-Myanmar border, have decried the Centre's decision to fence the border and suspend FMR as many people in border areas have farmlands on the other side. Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio had also said that the decision needs thorough discussion and the government has to consult the people for a workable formula before implementation.

Assembly sources said that the five-day budget session scheduled to commence on February 26 would take up the border fencing and FMR issues for discussion as "matters of



urgent public importance". The session will commence with

Governor La Ganesan's address to the 60-member House on Monday. The legislators will also participate in the election of Deputy Speaker of the House on the same day. The chief minister, who also holds the finance portfolio, will present the budget on February 27. Besides the Question Hour,

other provisional programmes for the session include the laying of the annual administrative report, presentation of assembly committee reports, introduction, consideration and passage of government bills and resolutions, and presentation of CAG reports. The session will conclude on March 1 with four-day sittings and one day of recess on

KABS, Hindi speakers urge restraint amid **Karbi Anglong unrest**

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, Feb 22: Amid on-

going tensions in Karbi Anglong over encroachments on Village Grazing Reserve (VGR) and Professional Grazing Reserve (PGR), the Karbi Anglong Bhojpuri Samaj (KABS), Diphu has appealed to people not to make provocative comments on social media platforms. The appeal follows an alleged provocative statement made by Krishna Chauhan on a social

"I humbly request all of you not to make any provocative comments in the form of video, voice messages, or statements on different social media platforms. I condemn the statement made by Krishna Chauhan on Facebook and also warn him to refrain from making such videos, comments, and statements that may disturb the current peaceful situation. I also urge all (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

If they are short-sighted...: Jaishankar slams UN Security Council reforms

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday suggested that the "shortsighted" approach of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council is holding back forward movement in the long-pending reform of the global

In an interactive session at the Raisina Dialogue, he said the "biggest" opponent for reform of the UN Security Council is not a Western country, in remarks seen as an oblique reference to China.

The external affairs minister said the sentiments for changes in the UN system is "very strong, but the challenge has been to get the concurrence for it from certain quarters".

"If you are going to ask five countries saying would you mind changing the rules that you would have less power, guess what the answer is going to be," he said. "If they are wise, the answer would be something else. If they are short-sighted, the answer is what it is

today," he said. The five permanent members are Russia, the UK, China, France and the US and these countries can veto any substantive resolution.

There has been growing demand to increase the number of permanent members to reflect the contem-



porary global reality.

India, Brazil, South Africa, Germany and Japan are strong contenders for permanent membership of the UNSC which has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. 'When the UN was invented, it had approximately

50 members. We have four times the members. So it is a common sense proposition that you can't continue the same way when you have four times the members," Jaishankar said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

Preterm birth risk to increase by 60 per cent from exposure to extreme temperatures: Study

Geography too dictated the health impacts of climate change, the researchers found

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: Exposure to extreme temperatures driven by climate change will increase risk of preterm birth by 60 per cent, causing several lifelong complications for millions of children around the world, a new research has found.

Analysing results from 163 health studies globally, researchers said they have determined that climate change will be directly responsible for multiple detrimental health impacts in children, including higher occurrences of respiraillnesses and hospitalisations.

The researchers, led by those at The University of Western Australia, warned that lack of global action on climate change will likely devastate children's health



They said their study, published in the journal Science of the Total Environment, was the first to collect all the available scientific evidence for the effects of climate

The team also said they have distinguished which particular climate-driven extremes were linked to what kind of health impacts in

"The children's health issues we identified depend on weather extremes - cold extremes give rise to respiratory diseases, while drought and extreme rainfall can result in stunted growth for a population," said study author Corey Bradshaw from Flinders University, Australia. The team said that most of the studies they analysed were in high-income nations, despite the fact that children in lower-income countries are most likely to go without adequate access to healthcare, infrastructure, and stable food supply.

Their study revealed that even advanced economies would not avoid the impacts of climate change on children's health, even as they said health risks varied across (CONTD. ON PAGE-9)

SIDBI's outstanding to MFI sector to touch ₹ 10,000 cr this fiscal: Official

MFIs were considered to be poverty-alleviating entities

KOLKATA, Feb 22: Outstanding of SIDBI to the micro-finance institutions (MFIs) will touch ₹ 10,000 crore by the end of the current financial year ending March 2024, an official said on Thursday.

In the last financial year, the refinancing development financial institution (DFI) had an outstanding of ₹ 5,000 crore to the NBFC-MFI sector, the official said.

"SIDBI started supporting MFIs since 1995-96 and has done enough capacity building for the MFI sector. Last fiscal, the total outstanding to the MFIs was ₹ 5,000 crore. This fiscal, this will touch ₹ 10,000 crore", Deputy managing director (DMD) of SIDBI Prakash Kumar said.

Kumar told PTI on the sidelines of the Eastern India Microfinance Summit here that the the DFI expects this outstanding amount to rise 40 per cent during the next financial year.

Govt allows onion exports to Bangladesh, Mauritius, Bahrain, Bhutan

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: The government on Thursday permitted traders to export 54,760 tonnes of onion to Bangladesh, Mauritius, Bahrain and Bhutan till March 31.

"We have allowed export of 50,000 tonnes of onion to Bangladesh, 1,200 tonnes to Mauritius, 3,000 tonnes of Bahrain and 560 tonnes to Bhutan with immediate effect," consumer affairs secretary Rohit Kumar Singh told

Traders are allowed to export this quantity till March 31. The modalities are being worked out,

Singh said the decision has been taken following a recommendation

from the external affairs ministry. Currently, there is a ban on onion exports till March 31. The ban was imposed on December 8, 2023, in order to boost the domestic supply and check price rise. (PTI)

Gold slips ₹ 50; silver tumbles ₹500



NEW DELHI, Feb 22: Gold prices fell ₹ 50 to ₹ 62,800 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday, according to HDFC Se-

The precious metal had finished at ₹ 62,850 per 10 grams in the previous close.

Silver also tumbled ₹ 500 to ₹ 75,200 per kilogram, while it had ended at ₹ 75,700 per kg in the previous trade.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 62,800 per 10 grams, down by ₹ 50 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities,

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading flat at USD 2,027 per ounce, unchanged from the previous close.

However, silver was down at USD 23 per ounce.

Following the release of the latest Federal Reserve's meeting minutes, which indicated that the US Fed is willing to maintain interest

rates higher for longer. Accordingly, the yellow metal prices slightly declined on Thursday, Gandhi added. (PTI)

NAME CORRECTION

I, Gojen Teron do hearby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of the below mentioned address and citizen of India by birth. That my name has been wrongly recorded as Gajen Teron. That this affidavit is required to be produced before the authority concerned as a piece of evidence.

Name: Gojen Teron C/O Hemchandra Teron Address: Kulai Kro Gaon

P.O: Ok-Kereng P.S: Howraghat Pin: 782481



He said to gauge the impact assessment of the MFIs in the society, SIDBI has commissioned a study which is being conducted jointly by the self-regulatory body Sa-Dhan and Indira Gandhi Institute of Developmental Research

(IGIDR) based out of Mumbai. He said that the sample size

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 22: Metalbook, a digital plat-

form for the global metals supply chain, an-

nounces launching of new business verticals,

product categories and a user friendly, tech-first

app post its Series A funding round of \$15 mil-

lion in June 2023. The round was led by Rigel

Capital, with participation from FJ Labs, as well

as existing investors, Axilor Ventures, Founda-

mental, Stride Ventures, Trifecta Capital, and

others. Founded in 2021, Metalbook helps enter-

prise & SME customers through their entire

metal manufacturing & procurement cycle, in-

cluding buying, selling, excess inventory liqui-

dation, customisation, logistics, financing,

e-auctioning, scrap recycling, credit & project

Metalbook, a rapidly expanding B2B platform

management solutions.

considered for the study is 5000, which according to him, is fairly large. Kumar said this study is important to ascertain whether MFIs are run for purely commercial interests or do have a social

According to him, MFIs were considered to be poverty-alleviat-

Metalbook launches new verticals, improving technological infrastructure

profitable and caters to over 1,000+ customers

across 450 markets and has recently launched

new categories across Copper, Aluminium,

Metal Scrap and has built out a global footprint

of processing centers, recycling networks and

Speaking on the announcement, Raghavendra

Pratap Singh, co-founder, Metalbook said, "Our

expanded global footprint and entry into new

metal categories exemplifies our commitment to

serving a diverse range of industries. As we look

to the future, we feel that our solid foundation of

integrity, innovation, customer centric approach

and sustainability will enable us to achieve

growth and profitability at scale. We want to

make sure that there is enough of a track record

for market investors to look at before we plan for

an Initial Public Offer (IPO) in 4-5 years."

1,000+ suppliers across 80 geographies.

"But they are now considered a part of the financial inclusion pro-

Business

gramme of the state", he stated. Kumar said that though there had been some criticism about the interest rates charged by them, the operational costs of the MFIs are very high as they deliver doorstep

"The average cost of funds for the MFIs is around ten to 12 per cent. The cost is high for the small MFIs and low for the big ones. As defaults keep happening, this has to be factored in the credit costs",

Earlier, there was a cap on interest rates charged by the MFIs. Now RBI has deregulated that which is very progressive in nature, he added.

In the summit, CGM of Nabard Usha Ramesh viewed that there is a need for common accounting standards for the MFI sector. (PTI)

Paper industry for adopting sustainable growth path

KOLKATA, Feb 22: The paper industry in the country has called for adopting a sustainable growth path as it provides direct employment to five lakh people and indirect jobs to around 15 lakh, an official said on Thursday.

Secretary general of Indian Pulp & Paper Technical Association (IPPTA) M K Goyal said that the paper industry plays a significant role in the economy of the country.

"There are 850 paper mills functioning all over the country with a total production of 25 million tonnes per annum," he said.

Goyal told reporters here that the size of the industry is ₹ 80,000 crore, providing direct employment to five people and indirect employment to 15 lakh people.

"Since the demand for paper is growing, the players need to take significant steps to follow a sustainable growth path to secure energy conservation in future," he

The IPPTA urges the companies to shift from the traditional source of energy to renewable sources and adopt energy-efficient technologies, he said. (PTI)

expand into new verticals. They have emerged

into one of the fastest growing marketplace busi-

nesses in the world. We are glad to double down

on this round as they continue to build out their

global footprint and add new business verticals.

Foundamental - "We are thrilled to triple down

on our seed investment in Metalbook. Under the

leadership of RP, Pulkit and Aman, Metalbook

has blossomed into the pre-eminent one-stop-

shop for the metal industry by offering a suite of

solutions enabling the Circular economy. We

have been fortunate to witness their rise as a

cash-efficient growth machine from Day-1 as in-

siders, and are excited to see them build on their

Looking ahead, Metalbook is poised to deepen

its impact on the manufacturing and infrastruc-

ture supply chains playing a pivotal role in

streamlining both ferrous and non-ferrous metal

sourcing, logistics, and financing solutions for

market leading position."

Shubhankar Bhattacharya, general partner at

X disagrees to block accounts, posts linked to farmers' protest



NEW DELHI, Feb 22: Social media platform X on Thursday expressed disagreement with the Indian government's order to block accounts and posts related to the ongoing farmers' protests and called for extending freedom of expression to the affected posts.

The Ministry of electronics and IT has ordered social media platforms to temporarily block 177 accounts that were linked to farmers' protests on request of the Ministry of Home Affairs, according to

"The Indian government has issued executive orders requiring X to act on specific accounts and posts, subject to potential penalties including significant fines and imprisonment. In compliance with the orders, we will withhold these accounts and posts in India alone; however, we disagree with these actions and maintain that freedom of expression should extend to these posts," X said in a post.

The social media platform said that a writ appeal challenging the Indian government's blocking orders remains pending and called for making the order public to enhance transparency.

"Due to legal restrictions, we are unable to publish the executive orders, but we believe that making them public is essential for transparency. This lack of disclosure can lead to a lack of accountability and arbitrary decision-making," X

The social media firm has provided the impacted users with notice of the government actions in accordance with the company's

Farmers from across the country have been protesting to press for their demands, including a legal guarantee for minimum support price (MSP) for crops and farm debt waiver.

Meanwhile, farmer leaders on Wednesday put their march to the national capital on hold for two days after a protester was killed and about 12 police personnel were injured in clashes at one of protest sites on the Punjab-

in India, is anticipated to achieve an annualized Nandan Venkatachalam, principal at Axilor revenue run rate of \$200 million by the end of Ventures, that led the company's seed round in FY24, demonstrating a growth of over 15 times 2022 commented, "Metalbook has demonstrated in the past two years. The company has been strong, capital efficient execution and ability to **SBI** approves ₹ 110 crore loan to AMSL for new

project in Telangana

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: Infrastructure solutions provider AMSL on Thursday said SBI has sanctioned a loan of ₹ 110 crore for the company's new project in Hyderabad.

On Tuesday, Apollo Micro Systems Ltd (AMSL) announced plans to set up a facility in Telangana at ₹ 210 crore investment for manufacturing of defence products.

"The company has received sanction for a term loan of ₹ 110 crore from State Bank of India (SBI) for the implementation of our upcoming project in Hardware Park. This funding is allocated towards the establishment of the Integrated Plant for Ingenious Defence Systems (IPiDS),"AMSL said in a statement.

In addition to the loan, the bank has also sanctioned the renewal and enhancement of other credit facilities for a 12-month period up to February 8, 2025.

The cash credit limit has been

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 22: Chemex Global's state-of-the-art

pharmaceutical API (Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients)

manufacturing facility which is equipped with the latest

technologies and built as per world class standards has been

inaugurated by PVSLN Murty, CMD of NEDFI in Guwa-

hati on February 22 amongst august presence of several

dignitaries and guests. The plant is first of its kind in the

entire north eastern region and one of the biggest in eastern

India. This comprises of highly sophisticated and fully in-

tegrated R&D Lab and bulk production facility. At full

strength, the facility will employ more than 200 people.

Pratik Jain, the MD of Chemex Global, a unit of Jain Group



renewed and enhanced to ₹ 57.50 crore from the existing limit of ₹ 52.50 crore, while the inland bank guarantee limit has been enhanced to ₹ 50 crore from ₹ 40 crore currently. Another inland letter of credit (ILC) limit has been renewed to ₹35 crore.

Hyderabad-based AMSL offers technology-based solutions in sectors like infrastructure, transportation, and aerospace, among others.

Last year, AMSL incorporated wholly-owned subsidiary Apollo Defence Industries Private Ltd, to take forward its plans of manufacturing defence equipment. (PTI)

India's first API/bulk drug plant inaugurated

Hopeful of resolving farmers' concerns before wheat procurement season: Food Secy

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: The government is hopeful of finding a resolution to the concerns of farmers before the start of wheat procurement season from March, Union food secretary Sanjeev Chopra said on Thursday.

His comments also come against the backdrop of farmers' protest raising various demands, including guaranteed minimum support price

At a briefing here, he also said that wheat crop is in good condition and procurement may commence early depending on arrivals in growing states.

Barring rice, prices of wheat, wheat flour, sugar and edible oils are stable, he said.

According to him, there is no proposal to allow further diversion of sugar for ethanol produc-

Ventures (P) Ltd who have been a pioneer in pharmaceuti-

cal industry in the region for the past 30 years confirmed

that the plant is equipped with the latest technologies with

respect to production equipments, robust HVAC systems,

sophisticated Analytical/ OC instruments, clean rooms and

water purification system. "We are research driven indige-

nous solution provider with a team of experienced profes-

sionals dedicated to ensuring the quality of our products.

Our mission is to put Assam on the world pharma map.

Currently the API units are largely concentrated in Gujarat

and Hyderabad. With numerous formulation facilities in

Sikkim, Guwahati and the south east asian region, Assam

Rupee rises 13 paise to close at 82.83 against US dollar

MUMBAI, Feb 22: The rupee appreciated 13 paise to minutes released on Wednesday were slightly hawkclose at 82.83 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, tracking the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market and positive domestic equities. Forex traders said elevated crude oil prices weighed on the local unit and restricted a sharp uptick.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 82.94 against the greenback. It hit an intraday high of 82.83 during the day.

The domestic unit finally settled at 82.83 (provisional) against the dollar, higher by 13 paise from its previous close of 82.96. The Indian rupee appreciated on Thursday on weak US dollar and mixed-to positive domestic markets, said Anuj Choudhary,

Research Analyst, Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

However, a surge in crude oil prices capped sharp gains. The US dollar declined on rise in risk appetite in global markets and positive European markets ahead of PMI data from Eurozone and Germany.

Analysts attributed the retreating dollar index to the US Federal Reserve's minutes that reflected policy makers' cautious approach, ebbing the possibility of interest rate cuts in the immediate future.

'The Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC)

ish," Choudhary said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies,

was trading 0.31 per cent lower at 103.68. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, rose 0.37 per cent to USD 83.34 per barrel.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on the weak tone in the US dollar and positive global markets. However, rising global crude oil prices and geopolitical tension in the Middle East may limit the gains in the

ices PMI, weekly unemployment claims and existing home sales data from the US. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹82.60 to ₹83.10," Choudhary added. On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex advanced 535.15 points, or 0.74 per cent, to

The Nifty rose 162.40 points, or 0.74 per cent, to hit an all-time high of 22,217.45. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Wednesday as they purchased shares worth ₹ 284.66 crore, according to exchange data. (PTI)

[See Regulation-15 (1)(a)] / 16(3

Premature move on monetary policy could undermine efforts to check

MUMBAI, Feb 22: The Reserve Bank of India's job to bring down inflation is not

According to the minutes of the February Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) meeting released by the central bank on Thurs-

inflation: RBI Governor

over, and any premature move on the policy front could undermine the success achieved so far on the price situation, according to RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das.

day, Das had said at this juncture, monetary policy must remain vigilant and "not assume that our job on the inflation front is

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL GUWAHATI Suwarna Bhawan, House No. 12, New Town Path, Near Hanuman Mandir, G.S. Road, Ulubari, Guwahti- 781007 (Assam) Case No.: OA/439/2023 Summons under sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, read with sub-rule

(2A) of rule 5 of the Debt Recovery Tribunal (Procedure) Rules, 1993. YES BANK LTD MR RATAN MANDAL & Ann MR RATAN MANDAL C/O BIDIT DEY HOUSE NO 353 BASISTHA NAGAR BASISTHA ROAD

GUWAHATI KAMRUP (M) ASSAM-781029 VILL CHAURAGURI GORAIMARI CHIRANG BONGAIGAON ASSAM-78339 MRS RINKU MANDAL

C/O RATAN MANDAI BASISTHA CHARIALI BYELANE 10 P.O BELTOLA BASISTHA GUWAHATI KAMRUP (METRO) ASSAM-781029 SUMMONS

WHEREAS, 0A/439/2023 was listed before Hon'ble Presiding Officer/Registrar of WHEREAS this Hon'ble Tribunal is pleased to issue summons' notice on the sai

Application under section 19(4) of the Act, (OA) filed against you for recovery o debts of Rs.3106518.76/- (application along with copies of documents et In accordance with sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, you, the defendants are

firected as under:-(I) to show cause within thirty days of the service of summons as to why relie

prayed for should not be granted (II) to disclose particulars of properties or assets other than properties and asset

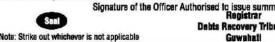
specified by the applicant under serial number 3A of the original application; (iii) you are restrained from dealing with or disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application, pending hearing and disposal of the application for attachment of

(Iv) you shall not transfer by way of sale, lense or otherwise, except in the ordinar course of his business any of the assets over which security interest is create and/or other assets and properties specified or disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application without the prior approval of the Tribunal;

(v) you shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds realised by safe of secure assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of business an deposit such sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank of financial institutions holding security interest over such assets.

fou are also directed to file the written statement with a copy thereof furnished t the applicant and to appear before Registrar on 25/03/2024 at 10:30 A.M. failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absenc

Given under my band and the seal of this Tribunal on this date: 17/02/2024.



Debts Recovery Tribuna Guwahati

Culinary, sustainable tourism

is poised to become the next big pharma hub.

Goa govt, MakeMyTrip ink pact to promote state's culture

MUMBAI, Feb 22: The Goa government and online travel firm MakeMyTrip on Thursday signed an agreement to promote the state's cultural heritage and culinary traditions to make it into a year-round destination, moving beyond the sun, sand and beaches, according to a statement.

As per the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), a public-private partnership, Make-MyTrip will highlight the state's inland cultural richness and culinary traditions, which usually take a back seat to popular coastal attractions by curating a cultural map of Goa, pushing various initiatives to promote the multi-faceted state, the department of tourism, government of Goa, and MakeMyTrip said in a joint statement.

"Our collective vision of 'Goa Beyond Beaches' is to bring the hidden splendours of the state to the forefront, celebrate its rich cultural heritage, take tourism to the hinterlands of Goa and ensure sustainable and regenerative tourism practices that preserve our natural resources for



generations to come. Our partnership with Make-MyTrip will help us introduce tourists to the heart and soul of Goa, ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are equitably distributed across the state," Goa Minister of Tourism, IT, E&C, and Printing and Stationery Rohan Khaunte said.

MakeMyTrip co-founder and Group CEO Rajesh Magow said, "We are excited to embark on this journey with the government of Goa. Our efforts will be directed towards showcasing the unexplored facets of Goa, promoting homestay penetration across the interiors of Goa and collaboratively nurture a sustainable tourism ecosys-

MakeMyTrip will also curate unique travel itineraries, and promote various festivals of Goa,

"We are also focused on spotlighting Goa on the spiritual tourism map of India combining it with the wellness options the state has to offer. We have launched the 'Ekadasha Teertha' campaign as part of our Regenerative Tourism initiative where we are connecting 11 places of worship to form a travel circuit.

"We are working towards building plastic-free and sustainable ecosystems in and around these sites," Suneel Anchipaka, Director Tourism and MD, GTDC Goa Administration, said. (PTI)

Sri Guru Singh Sabha forms first women's committee

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Feb 22: A meeting was convened by the Committee of Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Fancy Bazar, Guwahati, at Gurdwara Gopinath Nagar, Near Meen Bhawan, Guwahati, at 11 am on Thursday. It was decided to dissolve the Advisory cum Steering Committee with immediate effect due to its failure to meet the aspirations of the Sadh Sangat on various fronts. Furthermore, it was resolved to dissolve the Executive Committee of Sri Guru Singh Sabha, Fancy Bazar, Guwahati, with immediate effect.

A new committee has been formed to replace the old committee, with Kawal Kaur (Neeru) as the president, Bhupinder Kaur as the vice president, Gurdeep Kaur as the general secretary, Rajinder Kaur as the treasurer, Parmeet Kaur as the stage secretary, and other members. This marks a historic moment for the Gurdwara, as it is the first time in its 110-year history that a Women's Committee has been established. This decision is a significant step towards empowering women and promoting gender equality. The new president expressed gratitude to the Sadh Sangat of Greater Guwahati for their trust and reiterated her wholehearted commitment to working for the betterment of the Sadh Sangat. The outgoing committee expressed full confidence in the new committee and extended congratulations to its

Man allegedly murders daughter-in-law

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, Feb 22: In a shocking incident, one Muruli Tanti of Ahutoli under Rangalu Police Outpost chopped his daughter-in-law Dipali Guwala to death at his residence and also injured her daughter, Jina Tanti, with a sharp weapon on Wednesday night here. Sources said that on being informed, the local police from Rangalu Outpost immediately rushed to the spot and arrested the father-in-law, Muruli Tanti. Besides, police also sent his injured granddaughter, Jina Tanti, to Guwahati Medical College Hospital in a very critical condition, sources said, adding that the husband of the victim stayed outside the state and worked on a private farm. The victim woman stayed along with her daughter and fatherin-law at their Ahutoli residence here. The reasons for the sensational incident are to be ascertained until the time of filing this report, sources added further.

Unidentified body found

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, Feb 22: An

unidentified dead body of a man was recovered from the Old Dibrugarh Railway Station on Thursday. His body was found on Platform

no 1 of the railway station. The person was wearing a blackcoloured pant and a marooncoloured jacket. His age is estimated to be around 40 years.

Meanwhile, a postmortem was conducted at Assam Medical College and Hospital.

'We have not found anything in his possession that could help identify him. For the next 72 hours, his body will be kept at the AMCH morgue," said a police official.

Due to the construction of the Dibrugarh Overbridge, the old Dibrugarh Railway Station has become non-functional. The railway station has now become a hub of anti-social activities. If anyone has information about his family, please contact 9395546616.

Goel interacts with stakeholders, urges improvements in facilities and rehabilitation efforts

NHRC special monitor conducts comprehensive review of institutions in Nagaon



HT Correspondent NAGAON, Feb 22: National Rights Commission (NHRC) special monitor Balkrishan Goel visited the Tukulai Bebejia Primary School situated in Nagaon on Thursday and interacted with the students and staff. During his visit, he took stock of the infrastructure, educational facilities, midday meal, and the over-

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Feb 22: Inglongcherop village, under Ward

no 5 of Diphu town, celebrated its Golden Jubilee with

a daylong programme at the village public play-

ground. The celebration commenced with the hoisting

of the flag by the president of the Inglongcherop De-

velopment Committee, Sing Kro, followed by homage

A felicitation cum meeting of senior citizens of the

village was held, presided over by the president of the

Inglongcherop Development Committee, Kro. In the

meeting, the village headman, Mohendro Teron, men-

tioned that the village was established on February 22,

1974, by youths from the village who came to Diphu

were only youths for studies and no families. Now,

there are 107 families," stated the village headman

He further mentioned that over these 50 years, the

Social worker passes away

HT Correspondent MORIGAON, Feb 22: Sharat Ch Koch (65), the founder

secretary of Morigaon Zila Gramya Puthi Bharal Santha

(MZGPBS), passed away due to cardiac arrest in the wee

Zila Gramya Puthibharal Santha since its inception until

2019. He was also an active worker of the Srimanta

Sankardeva Sangha. People from the area paid their re-

spects to him at his residence. He is survived by two

President of the District Satra Mahasabha Dr Sunil

Kumar Goswami, secretary Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya,

Morigaon District Information and Public Relations Of-

ficer Pompi Devi, former Morigaon MLAs Harendra Bora

and Munin Mohanta, Assam Jatiya Parishad Morigaon

District Committee president Jayant Kumar Deka, and

Morigaon Jatiya Vidyalaya principal Jagdish Nath were

daughters, a son, and a wife.

d. Born in 1959 at

Jagi, Jagiroad, he

was a devoted

practitioner of

Sankari religion

and culture. He

was also the

founder of Sar-

vodaya Public

gaon. Sharat Ch

Koch had been

serving as the

secretary for the

NGO Morigaon

Mori-

School,

village has produced qualified individuals. Notably,

Padmashree Dhaneswar Engti hails from the village.

"When the village was established in 1974, there

for educational purposes.

Accompanied by additional district commissioner (Social Welfare) Phyllis V L H Hrangchal and DCPO Anjali Arya, Goel and other officials also interacted with some of the parents and guardians of the students and took their views about the functioning of the school as well. He then visited the Bhogeswari Phukanani Civil Hospital in Nagaon and reviewed the OPD services provided by the hospital, ease of navigation in the re-

ception area, the mortuary facility, among others. He particularly took stock of the medical services and facilities available in the hospital and interacted with the superintendent, other doctors, and nursing staff regarding service delivery and any grievances or issues that they may be facing. He specifically interacted with ICU patients, inquiring after their health, the quality of

Inglongcherop village celebrates 50 years of heritage and progress

leges, engineers, teachers in high school, ME and LP, businesspersons, and elected representatives. Four individuals, namely Rupsing Teron, Mondol Sing Bey, Dhaneswar Engti, and Sing Kro, are receiving literary pensions from the state government.

There are doctors, lecturers working in different col-

Fifty senior citizens of the village, aged 60 years and above, were felicitated with a memento.

In the public meeting, SGB Rajendro Terang appreciated the village headman, the Inglongcherop Development Committee, and the villagers for organising the celebration. He described it as a significant moment for the villagers to celebrate the past and look into the future. As a Karbi village, he urged the village headman and the villagers to uphold customary laws and practices. The SGB also encouraged the youth to actively participate in village activities and to learn from their seniors. Village headmen of Chephongsajir, Ram Teron; Lorulangso, Modon Teron; and Chephongchingri, Angthip Teron, attended as guests. Umesh Chandra Teron serves as the secretary of the Inglongcherop Development Committee.

and the quality of medical service. Goel mentioned that efforts were being made by the NHRC to prevent any form of violation of human rights, and he also instructed the hospital authorities to practice utmost sensitivity in dealing with patients and visitors to the hospital, especially in cases of differently-abled persons and senior citizens.

Later, Goel also visited the State Home for Women and Children in Nagaon, which also houses within its premises the Observation Home for Girls, Children Home for Girls, and State Home for Destitute Women. He discussed the issues of the residents with the officials and staff engaged in all the wings of the institution. He directed the officials to improve the services available to the residents, work actively towards the rehabilitation of the children brought to the facility, and focus on proper counseling of the residents and maintaining updated record-keeping of the children brought to the home, an official release stated.

Spot evaluation zone commences

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, Feb **22:** The spot evaluation zone for the HSLC Examination 2024 for the Biswanath sub-division formally began at Gyan Vikash Academy, Sootea, on Thursday. In this connection, an inaugural session was held at the conference hall of the Gyan Vikash Academy with Jadab Bora, the zonal officer of 34 Sootea Zone for HSLC Spot Evaluation 2024 in the chair. Assistant zonal officer Utpal Bora conducted the proceedings of the inaugural session. Addressing the gathering, the zonal officer briefly stated the latest guidelines issued by the SEBA regarding the recent evaluation process. The inaugural session was attended by Sanjib Bormudoi, assistant zonal officer, Kamala Das, along with the head examiners, scrutinis-

Development Authority employees endure salary delay

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Feb 22: The employees of the Jagiroad Development Authority have not received their salaries for the last 45 months. It is learned that not only Jagiroad, but also the employees of all other 24 Development Authorities in the state have been without salaries for the past year. Consequently, the employees are facing acute financial hardship to meet their day-to-day needs.

On the other hand, it has been reported that an employee of the JDA, belonging to the general caste, recently applied for an Economically Weaker Section (EWS) certificate for his son's academic purposes at the Circle Officer's Office, Mayong RC, in the district of Morigaon. However, the circle officer rejected the application. It is learned that the circle officer denied the employee's son the academic benefits despite the employee fulfilling all the eligibility criteria applicable to the EWS certificate. He urged the concerned authorities of the district to consider the obstacles to their hopes of ed-

Murder of elderly woman suspected of witchcraft

HT Correspondent GOSSAIGAON, Feb 22: Maino Hasda,

the wife of the late Mosse Murmu, met a tragic end as she was brutally killed under suspicion of practicing witchcraft. The harrowing incident unfolded in Paharpur, located within the jurisdiction of Gossaigaon Police Station in Satyapur.

The assailants mercilessly ended the life of the elderly woman by inflicting a fatal blow to her neck with a sharp

weapon, sending shockwaves throughout the community.

A local resident of Paharpur village recounted the horrifying details of the incident. "Our local woman had her throat slit, and though the exact timing is uncertain, it seems to have taken place around midnight. The villagers have been quick to label her as a 'witch', suggesting that this tragedy stems from a case of witch

Sustainability champion shares insights on e-mobility and net-zero emissions



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Feb 22: Sushil Reddy, an acclaimed alumnus of IIT Bombay and HEC Paris, continues to make waves in promotsustainable worldwide. With a Guinness World Record under his belt for the longest journey on an e-bike, Sushil embarked on a new endeavour—a 60-day, 9000+ kilometer journey on an electric car. His recent stop at Bongaigaon included an impactful engagement with the students of Notre Dame Academy at NTPC Bongaigaon Salakati in Kokrajhar.

During a guest lecture session conducted on Thursday for the students from Class 5 to 8, Sushil captivated the audience with a hands-on presentation, delving into the concepts of net-zero emissions and the pivotal role of organisations and individuals in driving sustainability. Drawing from his practical journey experiences, he emphasised the importance and benefits of e-mobility, shedding light on its positive effects and advocating for sustainable driving practices in a simple and lucid

The session, which lasted approximately one hour, was followed by an interactive O&A session, where students eagerly posed pertinent questions on e-mobility. Sushil's enthusiastic engage-

ment and practical demonstrations of the electric vehicle further fueled the students' curiosity and enthusiasm sustainable transportation solutions. The children took autographs from Sushil and expressed their thanks for the guidance.

The presence of the principal of Notre Dame Academy, along with teachers and representatives from the HR department, underlines the significance of the program and the school's commitment to holistic education encompassing sustainability and innovation. Such initiatives not only enriched students' learning experiences but also empowered them to become informed and responsible global

The event left a lasting impression on the students, evident from their eagerness to take autographs and explore the electric vehicle up close. Their deep interest and active participation reaffirm the growing awareness and curiosity about sustainable practices among the vounger generation.

Sushil Reddy's visit to Notre Dame Academy exemplifies the power of education and community involvement in fostering a culture of sustainability. His efforts continue to inspire and drive positive change, paving the way for a greener and more sustainable

NFR honours outstanding employees at Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar ceremony

GUWAHATI, Feb 22: The Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar ceremony, held on the occasion of the 68th Railway Week, took place at the Luitgarh Railway Officers' Club in Maligaon. Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, general manager of NF Railway, presented awards to achievers from various departments of the five divisions and headquarters of NF Railway. A total of 56 individual awards, 25 group awards, and 35 efficiency shields were distributed for outstanding performance during the last year. Additionally, six individuals received the roll of honour for the ' Award' for the year 2023 from various departments.

The Vishisht Rail Seva Puraskar has been instituted to recognise the efforts and endeavours of railway employees towards their efficient and dedicated discharge of duties. In his speech, Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, general manager of NF Railway, highlighted that NF Railway has achieved an all-round increase in productivity and efficiency through the unwavering commitment, hard work, and coordinated team effort of staff

The Dibrugarh Station received the Best Kept Station Shield for the year 2022-23. The Divisional Railway Hospital, Dibrugarh, was awarded the Best Kept Hospital award. Both New Bongaigaon and Dibrugarh workshops received the Best Kept Workshop Shield, while the Officers' Railway Colony of Rangapara won the Best Kept Railway Colony Shield.

Alipurduar and Lumding divisions jointly received the shields for the Personnel department, while Lumding division received it for the Mechanical and Operating departments. Rangiya division won it for the Engineering department. Tinsukia division received it for the Commercial department, while Katihar won the Efficiency Shields for the Accounts, Security, and Stores departments. The Shield for Signal & Telecom and Safety departments was awarded to the Alipurduar division.

Lumding and Tinsukia divisions of NF Railway jointly received the Overall Efficiency Shield for their all-round performances during the last financial year. Apart from these, various departments and workshops that excelled in various fields were given efficiency shields. Railway officials involved in activities related to Rajbhasha, railway unions/associations, and sports, etc., were also honoured for their excellent performance dur-

among those who paid their respects. AAI's Regional Sports Control Board launches cycling expedition



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Feb 22: To promote environmental consciousness, the Regional Sports Control Board for the North Eastern Region (RSCB-NER) of the Airports Authority of India (AAI) is spreading the message against singleuse plastic. Their initiative involves organising

the 'All India AAI Relay Cycling Expedition' with the slogan 'Pedalling against single-use

The journey, spanning 1600 km, commenced on February 20 from the AAI RHQ-NER Community Hall near Guwahati Airport. The inaugural event saw the participation of 12 cyclists, including four women and eight men, in the

In his inaugural address, Sanmukh Jugani, the regional executive director of AAI's NER, stated that the initiative by RSCB-NER is a welcome step for participants. Apart from conveying a message to society, the initiative promotes unity among diversity and is also beneficial for health. The drive also allows cyclists to explore North-East India.

Over the course of the 20-day cycling expedition, which traverses national and state highways, a total of 60 cyclists will take part. They will be divided into five legs, each comprising 12 cyclists along with two coordinating officers. The entire expedition will be supported by an ambulance and a pick-up truck.

The primary objective of the event is to raise awareness about the detrimental impact of single-use plastic and advocate for the use of ecofriendly alternatives such as jute bags. To further bolster this cause, the cyclists will distribute jute bags across Assam, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh, making stops at 18 locations before concluding the expedition in Guwahati on March 10, 2024.

Sonitpur KVK hosts productive SAC meeting



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Feb 22: The Scientific Advisory Committee (SAC) Meeting of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Sonitpur, was held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Dr Raniit Kumar Saud, associate director of Extension Education, Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat.

District commissioner, Sonitpur,

dress, advised KVK, Sonitpur, to work in a convergence mode with PNRD and NABARD for the better livelihood of farmers in the Sonitpur district. The action plan for the next financial year, action taken report of the last year, and progress report of the current year were reviewed in the meeting.

Deba Kumar Mishra, in his ad-

(vety) AAU, Khanapara; (i/c) associate dean, BNCA; chief scientist, AICRP-Dryland, AAU; and other officials from line departments were present at the meeting. Members from FPCs, NGOs, progressive farmers, farm women of the district, and entrepreneurs were also present and shared their views The Resource Inventory of

Sonitpur district, training notepad of KVK, Sonitpur, and 8 leaflets on various topics related to agriculture and allied sectors were inaugurated at the meeting. Additionally, a counseling center was inaugurated at KVK, Sonitpur campus by district commissioner, Sonitpur, Deba Kumar Mishra. This center will provide counseling on health, nutrition, psychologwellbeing, vocational guidance, drudgery reduction, and overall wellbeing of the commu-

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

God has given you one face, and you make yourself another. -William Shakespeare

Kamal Nath's **Political Crossroads**

In the labyrinth of Madhya Pradesh politics, the enigma surrounding Kamal Nath's political trajectory has sparked fervent speculation and intrigue. The veteran Congress leader, a stalwart of the grand old party, finds himself at a crucial juncture, with swirling rumours suggesting an imminent departure. Yet amidst the cacophony of conjecture, one thing remains certain: Kamal Nath's decisions could significantly shape the political landscape of the state. For decades, Kamal Nath has been synonymous with the Congress, his unwavering loyalty seemingly ingrained in his political DNA. However, recent events have cast a shadow of doubt over his allegiances, prompting frenzied speculation about his intentions. While some assert that he remains steadfast in his commitment to the Congress, others hint at a potential defection, with the BJP looming as a possible destination. The intricate dance of political manoeuvring unfolds against a backdrop of conflicting narratives. On one hand, leaders within the state Congress adamantly declare Kamal Nath's fidelity to the party, citing his deep-rooted ties and his status as the 'third son' of Indiraji. Meanwhile, voices from the BJP openly rebuff any notion of Nath's ingress into their ranks, with prominent figures like Kailash Vijayvargiya vehemently opposing his potential induction.

Behind closed doors, negotiations simmer, with whispers of Kamal Nath's overtures to the BJP leadership for assurances mirroring Jyotiraditya Scindia's strategic gambit before his high-profile defection. However, reports suggest that Nath's overtures were met with reluctance, as the BJP leadership balked at his demands, leading to a retraction by legislators aligned with him. Yet amidst the political machinations, underlying grievances simmer. Kamal Nath's purported disillusionment with the Congress leadership, particularly Rahul Gandhi, underscores a deeper rift within the party. Allegations of neglect and marginalisation following the election setback have left Nath embittered, with purported slights during crucial junctures further exacerbating tensions. The ramifications of Kamal Nath's potential departure extend beyond mere party politics, with broader implications for the electoral landscape. His sway in Chhindwara, the lone bastion retained by the Congress in the 2019 elections, underscores his pivotal role in shaping electoral outcomes. The specter of his departure looms large, potentially tilting the balance of power in favor of his chosen path. Moreover, Nath's departure would compound the woes of an embattled Congress, already reeling from a series of setbacks. The exit of stalwarts like Ashok Chavan has left the party grappling with internal dissent and external challenges, further eroding its

Amidst the tumult, the specter of the 1984 Sikh genocide looms large, serving as a contentious backdrop to Nath's political fortunes. The accusations leveled against him by the Sikh lobby cast a shadow over his legacy, complicating his potential forays into new political arenas. As the saga unfolds, Madhya Pradesh braces itself for a seismic shift in its political landscape. Kamal Nath stands at a crossroads, torn between loyalty and opportunity, as the specter of his departure casts a pall over the state's political future. Whether he remains within the folds of the Congress or ventures into uncharted territory, his decisions will reverberate far beyond the confines of party politics, shaping the destiny of a state at the

The electoral bonds debacle

By: Dipak Kurmi

L toral bonds scheme, introduced by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in 2017, marks the conclusion of one of the most obscure, cunning, corrupt, and undemocratic methods of political financing in the nation.

The highest court has deemed the electoral bonds scheme, allowing individuals and companies to acquire bonds from the State Bank of India (SBI) and contribute them to preferred political parties with complete anonymity and without restrictions, as a violation of the right to information. Consequently, the court declared it ultra vires Article 19 (1) (a) of the Constitution.

Additionally, the court disapproved of unlimited corporate funding, citing concerns about potential influence on policymaking, deeming it inconsistent with the principles of free and fair elections. Furthermore, the court invalidated the amendments to the Representation of the People Act, the Companies Act, and the Income Tax Act that were introduced to facilitate the operation of the electoral bonds scheme.

A significant outcome of the ruling mandates the State Bank of India (SBI) to disclose comprehensive details of bond sales, encompassing information about the purchaser (individual or company) and the receiving political party, from April 2019 to the Elec-

The Election Commission is required to publish these details on its website by March 13, offering the public insights into the transactions facilitated by the scheme. Notably, reports indicate that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) received ₹ 10,122 crores, constituting nearly 60 percent of the total 16,437.63 crores collected through electoral bonds between 2018 and 2022, according to data from the Election Commission. The Congress, as the primary opposition party, trailed behind sig-

have been evident since its incepfor introducing transparency in

political funding through the banking system, citing anonymity The Supreme Court's deci- to prevent retribution by political sion to invalidate the elec- parties, has been called into ques-

> Both arguments lack credibility. The notion of political parties receiving funds, including from corporates, in a transparent manner is commendable, as it could serve as a legitimate means to shield them from potential quid pro quo demands, a breeding ground for corruption. However, this rationale loses its merit when the electoral bonds scheme guarantees complete anonymity for both the purchaser and the beneficiary party. The introduction of a banking channel in this context essentially transforms what should be a transparent financial process into a veiled act resembling bribery.

> As emphasized by the court. achieving transparency in political funding is unattainable when absolute exemptions are granted. While the electoral bonds scheme provides anonymity, this privilege is extended primarily to the public and the opposition parties. The party in power retains the option to access information about the purchasers and beneficiaries of the bonds, leaving room for potential retribution, thereby undermining the intended transparency of the process.

The electoral bonds, in reality, turned out to be a remedy more detrimental than the ailment it sought to address. Instead of combating corruption, it effectively sanctioned and legalized it. Furthermore, its repercussions directly affected the fairness of the electoral process, a fundamental pillar of democracy. The Chief Justice of India, in his judgment, underscored the vital role that information about political party funding plays in ensuring the

The government should learn from the unsuccessful endeavor and engage with individuals committed to advancing democracy to devise more effective and transparent methods of political funding. Numerous superior models exist globally within democratic frameworks, notably in the United States, where legal provisions allow for transparent and restricted funding to political parties. (The writer can be reached at dipaknewslive@gmail.com)

Israel puts Qatar in crosshairs as Hamas reasserts itself on Gaza Strip

and prisoner exchange talks stalled, Israel and its hardline US supporters have stepped up long-standing efforts to discredit Qatar, the main mediator between Hamas and the Israeli government.

The anti-Qatar campaign accuses the Gulf state, of forging relations with problematic groups and supporting the likes of Hamas and the Taliban as part of its conflict mediation policy, even though those relationships were encouraged by the United States and, in the case of Hamas, Israel.

The stepped-DEGREE OF THOUGHT to infiltrate its up efforts coincide with Israel By James M Dorsey effectively walking away

from Qatari, Egyptian, and US efforts to negotiate a pro-longed ceasefire in the four-month-old Gaza war and a prisoner exchange that would free the remaining 136 Hamas-held Israeli hostages and the bodies of captives killed dur-

Hamas abducted some 250 people during its October 7 attack on Approximately 120 hostages were released in November during a one-week Qatar-mediated truce in exchange for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli pris-

The anti-Qatar campaign scored a tangible success earlier this month with Texas A&M University's announcement that it was shutting down its twodecade-old Qatar campus. Handsomely funded by Qatar

Foundation (QF), Texas A&M is one of eight foreign universities, including Georgetown, Northwestern, Well Cornell Medicine, and Carnegie Mellon, alongside Qatar's Hamid bin Khalifa University, with operations in the Gulf state's Education City.

In a statement, the foundation said Texas A&M's decision was "influenced by a disinformation campaign aimed at harming the interests of QF... It is deeply disappointing that a globally respected academic institution like Texas A&M University has fallen victim to such a campaign and al-

decision-making processes." Texas A&M said its decision was "due to

lowed politics

heightened instability in the Middle East." The closure followed the publi-

cation of a report by the New York-based, pro-Israel Institute for the Study of Global Anti-semitism and Policy (ISGAP) alleging that Texas A&M had shared sensitive nuclear energy and weapons development research with the Qatari government. Texas A&M denied the ISGAP report, which said Qatar paid Texas A&M more than US\$1 billion for the rights to all intellectual and material assets developed in more than 500 technology projects in sensitive fields such as nuclear science, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, robotics, biotechnology, and advanced weapons development.

Conveniently, Israel, as it de-

monises Qatar, buries its own engagement with Hamas as well as the fact that Egypt long saw the group as an asset in countering Islamist militants in the Sinai Peninsula. The Israeli campaign is not that far in time from the days that Netanyahu asked Qatar to fund the salaries of Gaza's Hamas administration and some reconstruction after five earlier wars.

The Middle East Media Re-Institute (MEMRI), founded by Yigal Carmon, a former advisor to Israel's West Bank and Gaza occupation authority and Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin, has produced in recent months a series of reports designed to bolster Israel's campaign against Qatar.

In MEMRI's latest broadside, Carmon asserted, echoing Netanyahu, that the hostage negotiations were faltering "because Oatar is not pressuring Hamas.

It sees itself as a mere go-between. Qatar isn't pressuring Hamas despite the fact that in reality, Qatar is the lifeline of Hamas – its hope, its future, its power to continue to fight and to hold the hostages.

Ignoring that Hamas was founded in 1986 in Israeli-occupied and besieged Gaza at a time that Israel tacitly saw the group as an anti-dote to Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), Carmon charged that "Qatar built Hamas from a small organization into a military and political power.

It took pride in its training of 'Hamas security officials.'...

Without doomed." To be fair, Carmon's tirade also took Netanyahu to task for allowing Qatari funds to flow to Hamas.

Netanyahu "violated Israeli and international anti-terrorism laws by allowing the money from Oatar, a state sponsor of terrorism. to reach Hamas, recognized as a terrorist organization across the West – thereby transforming this violation into a policy – until it exploded in his face," Carmon

On Sunday, Netanyahu asserted that "the release of hostages can be achieved through strong military action and tough negotiations, very tough negotiations. That tough position has to involve the exertion of pressure. And the exertion of pressure is not merely on Hamas itself, but on those who can exert pressure on Hamas, beginning with Qatar."

In response, Qatar foreign ministry spokesman Majed Al-Ansari called on the prime minister "to focus on the path of negotiations that serves the security of the region and end the ongoing tragedy of the war instead of issuing such statements whenever it suits his narrow political agenda.'

Netanyahu's hard line in the ceasefire negotiations and effort to discredit the mediator has as much to do with domestic Israeli politics as with not wanting to hand Hamas a victory when Israel has yet to show substantial progress in destroying the group not only militarily but also politically and organisationally.

position in the ceasefire and prisoner exchange negotiations highlights Israel's failure so far to wipe the group off the face of the

US intelligence estimated earlier this month that Israel has killed or captured at most 30 per cent of Hamas' 30,000-strong fighting force. The Israeli military said in early January that it had killed or captured up to 9,000 Hamas fighters.

Adding fuel to the fire, Hamas has resurfaced in parts of Gaza from which Israeli forces have withdrawn in the past month in the belief that they had eliminated the group's presence in parts of the Strip. A man sits on the rubble as others wander among debris of buildings that were hit by Israeli airstrikes in the northern Gaza Strip.

In Gaza city, the Strip's largest urban area, Hamas has recently deployed uniformed and plainclothes police officers to prevent the looting of shops and houses abandoned by residents and restore law and order and paid salaries to some of its civil ser-

In doing so, Hamas, on the back of its governance infrastructure and charity network, positions itself as the only entity willing and able to administer Gaza and provide essential services in a wasteland in which Israel curtails the flow of desperately needed aid and seemingly systematically destroys Gaza's civilian infrastructure. (IPA Service)

India is working successfully on sea bed Julian Assange, explained: mining to get access to ocean resources A man without a country

By: Girish Linganna

The head of the International Seabed Authority (ISA), a United Nations body that regulates deep-sea mining, has highlighted the growing reality of mining the ocean floor for precious metals. This move is increasingly seen as unavoidable, according to Michael Lodge, the ISA's secretary-general.

During a discussion with CNBC, Lodge pointed out the significant global interest in deep-sea mining, underlining its critical role in the transition to renewable energy, as reported by Interesting Engineer-

The ISA, created 30 years ago to oversee mining in roughly half of the world's oceans, is preparing for discussions on deep-sea mining in Kingston, Jamaica, Lodge points out that the increase in interest is due to the commercial appeal, with the ocean offering more minerals at possibly cheaper rates than mining on land.

The debated method entails utilizing large equipment to harvest metals such as cobalt, nickel, copper, and manganese, which are present in nodules about the size of potatoes on the seabed.

These minerals are crucial for numerous technologies, including batteries for electric vehicles, wind turbines, and solar panels. Even with the potential for resource extraction and the use of sophisticated technology, worries about the environmental impact remain.

unavoidable

damage to ecosystems. Researchers warn that it's difficult to fully understand the environmental effects of deep-sea min-Environmental organizations dispute its sustainability, foreseeing certain ecosystem damage and the loss

Foreseeing

of species. Despite the uncertainties, Norway has recently given the green light to a proposal that would allow deep-sea mining in a large oceanic area, highlighting the increasing worldwide interest in this activity.

Lodge points out the absence of definitive proof concerning the possible harmful effects of deep-sea mining, underscoring the careful and gradual exploration that has been in progress for more than three decades. He refers to recent technological trials that indicate a comparatively minor environmental footprint than other types of mining

thority (ISA) Council, which includes 36 member countries, is working towards completing regulations for deep-sea mining by July 2025.

The International Seabed Au-

Meanwhile, 24 nations globally have requested a halt or pause on the industry, and leading companies such as Google, Samsung, and Volvo have committed to avoiding the procurement of minerals from the ocean floor.

Campaigners are worried that activities related to exploration and extraction in the deep sea might cause irreversible changes to marine ecosystems, about which there is still much to learn.

However, Lodge maintains that technological advancements are ongoing, and the latest outcomes from technology trials suggest a smaller impact on the environment in comparison to traditional mining techniques.

Amid increasing worries, the global demand for minerals essential for the energy transition is rising sharply. The International Energy Agency (IEA) has issued a warning that the existing mineral supplies are insufficient to meet the requirements for transforming the energy sector.

Lodge underscores the pressing nature of the issue, stating that the circumstances are

He points out that as the need for critical minerals is projected to surge, the existing reserves on land and their production levels may not meet future demands. This makes the prospect of mining in the deep sea a compelling alternative.

As the International Seabed Authority (ISA) prepares for debates, the future of deep-sea mining remains uncertain. Nations are considering the economic gains alongside possible environmental impacts, while the global community tackles the challenge of finding sustainable ways to meet the escalating demand for minerals crucial for energy transitions.

In 1987, India was the first country to gain the title of pioneer investor from the ISA, getting exclusive rights to explore and develop an area of 75,000 square kilometres in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) for polymetallic nodules.

The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) has carefully planned long-term projects that include surveying, assessing the environment, and creating deep-sea technology. These projects are being carried out in a detailed and scientific man-

India is working on establishing dependable deep-sea mining to access the ocean's wealth in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB), believed to contain approximately 380 million tonnes of polymetallic

These nodules have an estimated 4.7 million tonnes of nickel, 4.29 million tonnes of copper, 0.55 million tonnes of cobalt, and 92.59 million tonnes of manganese.

By tapping into these vast mineral reserves, India aims to achieve self-reliance in these essential metals and reduce its dependence on external supply chains. India has significantly

boosted its Deep Ocean Mission (DOM) by allocating a budget of Rs 4,077 crore for five years starting from 2021-

The technology for mining deep-sea resources, which is not only technically demanding but also carries strategic importance, is not readily available on the commercial market. The National Institute of

Ocean Technology (NIOT) is dedicatedly advancing the development of this intricate homegrown technology in stages. It has successfully developed an in-situ soil tester and demonstrated its functionality at a depth of 5,462 meters at the Test mine site. A trial was conducted for a

mining machine's movement and agility at a depth of 5.270 meters in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) to evaluate how different systems perform under high hydrostatic pressure and low temperatures.

The machine functioned for 2.5 hours and travelled 120 meters, marking it as the first machine of its kind to work at such depth while connected by a tether.

It is now being enhanced with additional components like a mechanical pickup, collection system, crusher, feeder, and pumping system.

At the same time, efforts are underway to create an Unmanned Remotely Operable Vehicle (ROSUB 6000) capable of reaching depths of up to 6,000 meters, alongside a manned submersible named MATSYA, which can carry three people and is designed for depths of up to 6,000 meters. These developments are part of Mission Samudrayaan, aimed at exploring and extracting deep-sea minerals.

The agreement between the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) and the International Seabed Authority (ISA) for the exploration of Polymetallic nodules was first established in 2002 for a 15-year term and has since been renewed twice for five years each in 2017 and

Moreover, in 2016, a separate agreement was signed for the exploration of Polymetallic Sulphides in the Central Indian Ridge and Southwest Indian Ridge areas. These initiatives align with India's self-reliance vision, known as 'Atmanirbharta'. (IPA Service)

founder of WikiLeaks, finds him-J self entangled in a contentious legal battle as the British court issues a formal order for his extradition to the United States. This order, pronounced by a judge at Westminster Magistrates' Court during a brief hearing, underscores the intricate web of legal, political, and ethical dilemmas surrounding Assange's case.

Assange's trajectory into the labyrinth of extradition proceedings originates from his pivotal role in disseminating thousands of classified documents during the years 2010-11. His actions, aimed at exposing government secrecy and misconduct, propelled him into both fame and in-

As the British court grapples with the extradition question, the stakes could not be higher for Assange, facing the ominous specter of up to 175 years in prison if found guilty of the charges leveled against him by the United States.

The gravity of Assange's predicament is compounded by allegations of conspiracy to commit hacking, a charge brought forth by American authorities in

April 2019. The subsequent filing of 17 espionage cases against Assange by a United States grand jury on Mav 23. 2019, serves as a chilling reminder of

ble legal arsenal arrayed against him. The specter of a protracted legal battle looms large as Assange's legal team endeavors to mount a robust defense against the extradition order.

Assange's status as an Australian citizen further complicates the extradition proceedings, adding yet another layer of complexity to an already labyrinthine legal landscape. His incarceration in Belmarsh prison since 2019 serves as a stark reminder of the formidable obstacles confronting him in his quest for legal redress. The specter of a draconian prison sentence looms large, casting a pall of uncertainty over Assange's

Assange faces a real risk of serious human rights violations, including possible detention conditions that would amount to torture and other illtreatment (such as prolonged solitary confinement).

The fact that he was the target of a negative public campaign by US officials at the highest levels undermines his right to be presumed innocent and puts him at risk of an

Julian Assange's publication of disclosed documents as part of his work with WikiLeaks should not be punishable, as this activity mirrors conduct that investigative journalists undertake regularly in their professional capacity.

Prosecuting Julian Assange on these charges could have a chilling

Tulian Assange, the enigmatic effect on the right to freedom of expression, leading journalists to selfcensor from fear of prosecution.

At the heart of Assange's legal odyssey lies the contentious issue of press freedom and government transparency. His decision to publish classified military and diplomatic documents on the WikiLeaks website ignited a firestorm of controversy, drawing both accolades and condemnation from across the political spectrum. Assange's critics decry his actions as reckless and irresponsible, while his supporters hail him as a champion of free speech and government accountability.

The release of secret documents by Assange laid bare the dark underbelly of government secrecy and institutionalized violence, exposing the grim realities of modern warfare in Iraq. His revelations implicated the armies of America, England, and NATO in alleged war crimes, thrusting him into the maelstrom of geopolitical intrigue and diplomatic fallout.

Moreover, Assange stands accused of complicity in Russian intelligence agencies' alleged hacking of Hillary Clinton's campaign during the US

tial election, further complicating an already Byzantine legal **EPIC AFFAIRS** quagmire. The murky nexus bestate-spon-

> sored espionage and journalistic integrity underscores the ethical and legal conundrums inherent in Assange's case.

SHASHANKA DAS

Assange's sojourn in asylum at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London serves as a poignant reminder of the Kafkaesque dimensions of his legal ordeal. His decision to seek refuge from Ecuador in 2012 was emblematic of his desperate bid for political sanctuary in the face of mounting legal threats and persecution.

However, his arrest following a missed court appearance in April 2019 marked a dramatic turning point in his tumultuous saga, heralding the onset of a new chapter in his protracted legal battle.

In conclusion, Julian Assange's extradition saga epitomizes the collision of conflicting imperatives – the imperatives of justice, national security, and press freedom.

As the wheels of justice grind inexorably forward, the world watches with bated breath, cognizant of the far-reaching implications of Assange's legal travails. In the crucible of legal scrutiny, Assange's fate hangs in the balance, emblematic of the perennial struggle between power and principle, secrecy and transparency. As the legal drama unfolds, the legacy of Julian Assange and the fate of press freedom hang in the balance, a testament to the enduring power of the written word and the indomitable spirit of human resilience.

tion Commission of India. meaningful exercise of the vote.

nificantly with ₹ 1,547 crores. The flawed nature of the scheme and its underlying logic tion. The government's argument



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024

ASEAN's evolving dilemma in the Indo-Pacific

By: Don Mclain Gill

The rise of the Indo-Pacific construct is coupled with the intensification of power competitions on the one hand and increasing levels of economic connectivity on the other. Such tumultuous dynamics have compelled middle and small powers of the region to strive harder to gain more agency and political autonomy. Among the regional players, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is at the heart of this strategic dilemma.

The primary catalyst for ASEAN's creation in 1967 was not integration, but rather ensuring the survival and resilience of its members amidst the exacerbating power dynamics of the Cold War and the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia.

However, with the dissolution of the erstwhile Soviet Union and the expansion of membership within ASEAN, the turn of the century witnessed how the bloc sought to leverage its experience in community-building to serve as an institutional anchor throughout Asia by promoting ASEAN-centric norms of consensus decision-making, informal diplomacy, non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and the preservation of the bloc's centrality. Thus, the expansion of ASEAN-led mechanisms and the growing adherence of major powers towards the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) provided a much-needed structure for countries with diverse interests to cooperate at a time when distrust was prevalent among emerging powers.

The primary catalyst for ASEAN's creation in 1967 was not integration, but rather ensuring the survival and resilience of its members amidst the exacerbating power dynamics of the Cold War and the spread of communism throughout Southeast Asia.

Escalating Chinese assertiveness: Navigating geopolitical challenges

Of late, the foundation of these ASEAN-led mechanisms has come under strain due to the competitive nature of contemporary Indo-Pacific geopolitics. While several structural factors encompass Indo-Pacific security, the unfolding power competition between the United States (US) and China has the most immediate impact on ASEAN member countries. Southeast Asia is geographically located at the intersection of the traditional sphere of US influence and the emerging locus of Chinese power. Since 2008, China has been increasing its provocations against the security architecture of Southeast Asia through its expansionist interests in the South China Sea.

It continues to assertively alter the balance of power and geography of the disputed maritime territory to its favour, at the expense of the sovereignty and sovereign rights of its less powerful neighbours, thus directly challenging the stability of the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. This has inevitably catalgrowing belligerence and expansionist

Along with this response is the proliferation of security arrangements amongst like-minded democracies, such as the Quad and the AUKUS—Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the US trilateral—to preserve and secure the established regional order. However, this has resulted in a more acute focus on South-

east Asia, making it a hotspot for a potential shooting war within the greater Indo-Pacific.

This creates two problems for ASEAN. First, the preservation of autonomy and sovereignty amidst external power fluctuations is at the heart of ASEAN's external outlook. Amidst a highly competitive strategic environment brought about by the exacerbating US-China power competition in Southeast Asia, ASEAN countries face a growing challenge when it comes to pursuing their economic and security interests while also ensuring their survival and political autonomy. It is also important to note how ASEAN comprises dynamic countries with varied threat perceptions, interests, and sensitivities, resulting in varied reactions to the unfolding power competition.

While the presence of the US as a potential balance to Chinese dominance in the region is welcomed, the majority of Southeast Asian countries remain cautious of aligning too deeply with Washington given their wariness of the US's "value-based" foreign policy, its historic inconsistency as a security provider, and the perils of the US being geographically distant. Moreover, while Washington's military pre-eminence in the region is undeniable. China has been able to deepen its influence through its growing economic activities in Southeast Asia. Since

has cemented its role as ASEAN's top trading partover, Beijing is Cambodia and Laos's leading source of developassistance, while Indonesia is Southeast Asia's largest

beneficiary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Furthermore, since the 2021 coup in Myanmar, China has been taking advantage of the domestic unrest in the Southeast Asian country to further its interests and strengthen its influence given the former's geostrategic relevance in the

Therefore, while Beijing presents a challenge to the stability of Southeast Asia. ASEAN countries refrain from overtly taking sides against it to avoid having their actions misconstrued in a way that resembles bloc politics, which can have several consequences given China's advantageous geographical proximity and its notorious record of using economic coercion and the conducting of grey-zone activities in the South China Sea. Even for countries like Vietnam and most recently the Philippines, which have been quite vocal about their opposition to Chinese unilateralism in the disputed maritime territory, prudent steps are still being taken by Hanoi and Manila in maintaining a defensive position visà-vis the US-China power competition.

Diminishing credibility of ASEAN: Challenges in regional leadership and

As ASEAN countries strive to maintain political autonomy and ensure survival amidst the intensifying US-China power competition, it would be vital for them to incorporate the strategy of denial

more effectively, which entails preventing immediate great power/s from attaining monopoly over regional affairs by forging close ties with other major powers to act as a strategic buffer. This will require a serious foreign policy reorientation amongst Southeast Asian counby prioritising partner diversification and leveraging ties with emerging powers that identify themselves as independent forces rather than shadows of the US-China strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific. Accordingly, there are positive trends in this regard. such as the strengthened ties between Southeast Asian countries and other Indo-Pacific powers, such as India, France, and Japan in the realms of economic and defence cooperation.

Second, as the polarisation of power continues to deepen in the Indo-Pacific, the resilience and effectiveness of ASEAN-led mechanisms have been questioned. Realising the risks of becoming marginalised in regional politics, ASEAN eventually adopted the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) in 2019 to reemphasise the continued importance of ASEAN-led institutions in enhancing regional multilateralism and cooperation. However, while incorporating the Indo-Pacific into ASEAN's strategic lexicon was a step in the right direction for the bloc, its difficulty in operationalising the AOIP on the ground

> more significant impediment. The long-term success of ASEAN-led mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific highly dependent on the bloc's cohesion

serves as a

and the ability of its dialogue partners to foster a conducive environment for multilateral processes.

While institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS) remain relevant avenues for cooperation in contemporary Indo-Pacific affairs, the polarising dynamics of power in the region makes it difficult to rule out possible credibility issues that such ASEAN-led mechanisms may face in the long term. This is mainly due to ASEAN's internal constraints, which hinder it from forging a unified position on crucial regional security issues, particularly in Myanmar and the South China Sea. While this is not new, given the diverse interests of its members, the stakes are much higher today for ASEAN to keep all major powers engaged to maintain their influence in the region.

Therefore, while ASEAN is an essential player in Indo-Pacific affairs, its influence over the emerging security shifts in the region is being questioned due to the bloc's growing vulnerabilities to power politics and its members' need for more cohesion on several pressing issues. Therefore, to maintain its credibility at a time of significant geopolitical turbulence, ASEAN should consider structural and cultural reformation. At the same time, its members must pursue a more diversification-driven foreign policy to ensure greater strategic flexibility. (Courtesy: ORF)

The security of Indians abroad is paramount

By: Siddharth Mishra

The year 2024 began with a series of tragic incidents involving some Indians living in the USA, starkly highlighting the vulnerability of persons of Indian origin abroad. Recently an IT executive Vivek Taneja, 41, was killed when he tried to save a female colleague from molestation outside a restaurant in Washington. Vivek became the seventh victim of attacks that took place on Indians in America this year. A spate of incidents of death of Indians living in foreign countries has ensued in the recent past. The government of India had recently informed the Parliament that around 403 incidents of death of Indian students living abroad have been reported since 2018 due to various reasons including natural causes, accidents and medical conditions. The data reveals a disheartening scenario for Indians aspiring to go abroad for various purposes as it showed that 91 Indian students died in Canada, 48 in the UK, 40 in Russia, 36 in the US, 35 in Australia, 21 in Ukraine and 20 in Germany, 14 in Cyprus, 10 each in Philippines and Italy and nine each in Qatar, China and Kyrgyzstan.

Among other factors responsible for the death of Indians abroad, the crimes and attacks upon Indians have emerged as a major cause of concern. The recent incidents of attacks on Indians in America also raise concerns about the probable escalation of xenophobia and hate crimes against immigrants and minority communities in the United States. The attacks highlight the vulnerability of Indian Americans and other minority groups and underscore the need for increased awareness and intervention if the attacks were prompted by hatred and discrimination. These incidents might also be a reflection of the broader trend of racially motivated violence and anti-Asian hate crimes that witnessed a surge in anti-Asian racism and violence especially during and post the COVID-19 pandemic.

The year 2024 has witnessed many consecutive deaths of Indian or Indian-origin students due to various causes, some of which the cause of deaths is still unclear. These incidents serve as a catalyst for a broader discussion about the challenges faced by Indians living overseas. While the specific details surrounding each death remain under investigation, they collectively underscore the critical need to address the risks and dangers encountered by Indian nationals abroad. As investigations into the recent incidents continue, it is crucial to examine the root causes and systemic issues that contribute to the vulnerability of Indians living abroad. Factors such as racism, xenophobia, inadequate security measures, and cultural misunderstandings are likely to play

a role in endangering the lives of Indian nationals overseas. Organizations like the South Asian Americans Leading To-

gether (SAALT) report hate violence against South Asian communities, including Indians, and press for increased measures to address these crimes and enhance community safety. It is likely that systemic racism still continues in various institutional practices and policies, creating a disadvantageous environment for Indians and other minority groups in the USA.

Disparities in hiring and promotion practices, unequal treatment within the criminal justice system, and limited access to quality education and healthcare are probable systemic issues that might require immediate attention. Reports suggest a need for greater awareness and accountability regarding systemic racism, requiring policy reforms and initiatives that promote equity and inclusion as Indian Americans become targets of hate crimes fuelled by racial or ethnic animus resulting in incidents of verbal harassment, vandalism, and physical assaults across the nation.

In cases where individuals are found responsible for crimes against Indian nationals abroad, there is a growing demand for extradition and legal accountability. Extradition of guilty persons to India for trial and punishment is essential to ensure justice and deter future crimes. India and the US had signed an extradition treaty in 1997. This treaty outlines the process for extraditing individuals who commit crimes in one country and flee to the other. While the extradition treaty exists, navigating it is usually complex and time-consuming. Delays occur due to lengthy legal processes, gathering evidence, potential appeals etc.

The Government of India bears a significant responsibility for safeguarding the interests and security of its citizens living abroad. The Indian government has taken up such matters with foreign governments and has constantly expressed its concerns in the past. Indian consulates in the US and elsewhere must enhance the process of providing assistance to Indian citizens, offer guidance on various issues like legal rights, visa concerns, and emergency support etc.

The government must raise awareness about safety concerns and resources available to Indian citizens in foreign lands, including collaborating with community organizations. The Indian government may also consider collaborating with organizations like SAALT to provide support, resources, and advocacy for Indian communities abroad.

Consulates can connect Indian citizens with legal resources and provide guidance on navigating the foreign legal system in case of discrimination or hate crimes. Tragedy in the US underscores the urgent need for multifaceted solutions. The death of Indian or Indian-origin individuals in America serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need for comprehensive measures to address the safety and security of Indian nationals living abroad. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

India's Ukraine and Gaza policies are consistent with the great power aspirations of its elites

By: Inderjeet Parmar and Atul Bhardwaj

The simultaneous wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and India's seemingly contradictory policy responses towards them, shine a light on the drivers of Indian power: traditional great power ambitions within the US-led international order, coupled with more recent economic and civilisational self-confidence.

These drivers have been more or less hidden in plain sight since 1947, and perhaps even before Independence, under a convenient veneer of anti-colonialism, non-alignment, principled friendship with the Soviet Union (and later Russia) as well as alleged Nehruvian attachment to Soviet economic planning.

India's foreign policy establishment, initially nurtured under British colonial rule and only periodically and pragmatically modified since, has helped craft a self-serving myth of post-colonial idealism, non-alignment, and third worldism/Global South(ism), while all the while remaining well within the mindsets, relationships, and opportunities afforded by the Anglo-American liberal international system.

That India's power elite continues successfully to pull off this smokeand-mirrors strategy is quite remarkable but it could not do it alone. The image is also projected by other liberal international order powers to help maintain the myth because it has served them well to have India seen that way.

"We have no eternal allies...Our interests are eternal"

Ultimately, the seemingly contradictory policies towards Ukraine and Gaza are consistent if a bird's eye lens is taken. There are pragmatic and historical reasons for India's stance on Russia's aggression in Ukraine – going back to the 1950s, as we explain below. And there are reasons why the United States, which is officially unhappy with India's stance, continues to engage ever more deeply with the emerging great power.

India's geopolitical location – in the so-called Indo-Pacific – is a key factor in US calculations and cautious language towards India. And reasons rooted in India's power politics and geo-economics explain why the above stance is consistent with its Israel-Gaza policy.

In contrast, there are those who argue that India is driven by its position as a leader of the Global South. as a postcolonial state, as a member of the BRICS+ that's challenging the US-led liberal order. Yet others suggest that India is a US satellite especially in its attitudes towards China, and its membership in a growing number of multilateral groupings in the Indo-Pacific region that exclude and seek to 'contain' and subordinate

The reality is more complex and reveals a sophisticated foreign policy establishment, embedded in a thin layer of politically-expedient feelgood idealistic post-colonialism that veils an iron-fisted pragmatic great power in the making.

What British foreign secretary Lord Palmerston said in the House of Commons in 1848, applies to India today: "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to

India supports normalisation with Israel, de-hyphenation of Israel-Palestine Regarding Israel's catastrophic war

in Gaza - in regard to which the International Court of Justice has ordered Israel to refrain from and prevent genocide - India condemned Hamas' attacks of October 7, 2023, then refused, for three months, to support a ceasefire resolution at the UN, and has since called for a two state solution in general terms. This is for pragmatic reasons of power politics including a long-term shift towards delicate bilateral relationship building across the region, including Israel, Arab states, and Iran.

Palestine has been compartmentalised and relegated, in service of Indian elite interests, "de-hyphenated", separated from India's relations with Israel. As an MEA spokesperson noted in January in response to a question about India's position on South Africa's genocide charge against Israel at the ICJ: "Our position on the conflict, the Israel-Hamas conflict is... it has been consistent and steadfast. We have condemned terrorism, we have called for release of hostages, we have sought protection of civilians and... we have called for provision of humanitarian assistance and of course we stand for a long-term two-state solution.

Yet, convenient mythologies per-

There is an enduring perception in strategic circles that PM Narendra Modi has riled America, its close strategic partner, and the European Union (EU), by refusing to unreservedly condemn the Russian invaKremlin an aggressor. New Delhi also abstained from voting against Russia in the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and Human Rights Council.

The Modi government has openly defied western sanctions against Russia by indulging in opportunistic purchases of cheap Russian oil. In 2023, India was the largest buyer of Russian seaborne crude, accounting for 38% of these exports. Many commentators have been unduly perturbed about India inconsistency in supporting the so-called rule-based order especially when the trans-Atlantic powers are focused on making Russia capitulate.

However, Modi has not been as brazen as the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Mihály Orban, who has called the Russian invasion of Ukraine "a military operation" and not war. India has provided tacit support to Putin simultaneously reiterating conventional diplomatic wisdoms like 'upholding international law and national sovereignty, while at the same time pushing for a pragmatic and permanent solution to the con-

Consequently, those who were hoping that New Delhi, because of its alignment with the United States, would declare the Kremlin a geo-political burden are disappointed. The Russia-Ukraine war instead of accelerating has retarded the decline in India-Russia relationship. India stood with Russia for both strategic as well as pragmatic reasons. Since the mid-1950s Russia has vetoed every move by the US and its allies in the United Nations Security Council to browbeat India on the Kashmir issue.

In the mid-1960s, Russia supported India's defence needs. It mediated peace at the end of Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. In the 1971 Bangladesh war, Moscow again helped New Delhi ward off the threat posed by a US Navy carrier battle group in the Bay of Bengal.

Indo-Russian nuclear cooperation has been the lynchpin of the bilateral ties. It is thanks to decades of India-Russia naval engagement that today India is one of the few countries in Asia that can build a nuclear submarine. Russia may have joined the rest of the UN Security Council in condemning India for its 1998 nuclear tests but it refused to impose sanctions on India, unlike the US, Japan and others.

Notwithstanding the criticism levelled against India in the western media, the US State Department, more concerned with India as a counterpoise to China, has been accommodative of India's reluctance to Middle East; again, challenging decouple from Russia. In July last China's BRI. year, the US Congress approved a waiver to India against the punitive Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) sanctions for its purchase of the S-400 missile defence system from Russia.

CAATSA authorises the US administration to impose sanctions on countries that purchase major defence hardware from Russia. These sanctions had come into force in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US presidential elections.

Things are not always what they seem in international relations. It is not always necessary for partners and allies to converge on every issue. In the conduct of international relations, short-term tactical divergences between partners and allies may be necfor larger strategic essarv convergence. We must consider the deeper tides rather than surface rip-

A very special double act shows

how it works Look at post-war Anglo-American relations. The former colonial power recognised the communist regime in China in 1950 while the latter was completely opposed to Beijing's entry in the United Nations.

In the mid-1950s when the US started poking China in Tibet and Taiwan, London was Beijing's biggest trading partner. Britain's subtle pro-China stance was not necessarily antithetical to America's larger strategic needs to woo China away from the Soviet Union, while the policy also helped it to protect its territorial possessions within China. Britain could take a divergent stand partly because China was not America's peer competitor at that stage.

India's engagement with Russia cannot be viewed as completely selfish. New Delhi's involvement with Moscow is essential for America too as it seeks to woo Russia back into the western camp and split the Sino-Russian "no-limits partnership". Washington is unlikely to permit similar engagement by New Delhi in the Indo-Pacific where China, its peer competitor, is to be tamed.

Different region, same principles India's foreign policy stance on Israeli military action and large-scale killing of Palestinians has been

equally criticised by many used to seeing India take an unequivocal stand in favour of Palestinians. Although India has issued politically correct statements in support of a two-state solution for resolution of the long-standing Israel-Palestine conflict, its heart is with the Israeli state and even the Netanyahu regime. As the Israeli bombing moved though gear, New Delhi pointedly abstained from voting in the UN General Assembly resolution that urged a humanitarian truce in Gaza on the grounds that the resolution did not condemn the terror attacks of Octo-

India sees Israel as an important partner in its quest to indigenise defence technology as well as a ally in its competition for new trade routes with China. New Delhi is looking forward to the development of the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a multimodal transportation corridor stretching across the Arabian Sea from India to Israel via the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan to counter China's increasing presence in West Asia affairs. IMEC is backed by the United States (US) along with the European Union (EU), mainly to counter China's increasing footprint in West Asia and curtail Iranian ambitions.

The BJP government has built on the India's earlier strategy of transforming bilateral relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council states, Israel and Iran – simultaneously. These relationships are now more comprehensive than oil-related links - spaninvestments, technology collaborations in food security and renewable energy.

The Gulf region is now the source of India's third- and fourth-largest trading partners (UAE and Saudi Arabia respectively), as India-Israel trade volume exceeded \$10.1 billion (excluding defence) in 2022-2023. India has proven attractive to a region seeking to diversify away from oil and energy.

Such increasing convergence of strategic and economic interests between India, Israel, and the UAE led them to sign a quadrilateral agreement with the United States (US) known as I2U2, in October 2021. The focal point is mitigating global challenges: India, Israel and the UAE initiated plans in 2022 for a India-Middle East Food Corridor, followed by the India-Middle East-Economic Corridor (IMEEC), launched at the September

2023 G20 Summit in New Delhi, aiming to bolster economic integration between Asia, Europe, and the Israel and Palestine are now 'de-

hyphenated' in India foreign policy compartmentalised, much as they are in the attitudes of the Gulf states since the inking of the Abraham Accords in 2021. The current conflict however will likely have multiple effects - cooling further bilateral developments with Israel for fear of Arab reactions, while solidifying further India and Israel's anti-terror cooperation. Rising tensions in the Red Sea are also driving increased maritime 'security' cooperation.

At times New Delhi's foreign policy approaches may seem to be in divergence and defiance of the west. However when it comes to China, there is no ambiguity in New Delhi's mind that its big neighbour is a monster that has to be tackled in collaboration with the United States and its allies. Washington doesn't mind Modi's flirtations with Putin as long as he is willing to join the chorus in condemning and containing the Communist Party of China and its leader-

Bye bye Nehruvian symbolic idealism, hello India First

Two elements that guide New Delhi's recent foreign policy choices are its efforts to jettison overt displays of Nehruvian idealism normally associated with Indian foreign policy and to openly declare its ambitions as a great power capable of guiding the destinies of the global

The ideological element in India's foreign policy comes from its "India First" approach that prioritises national interests over largely symbolic expressions of morality in conduct of international relations. This is reminiscent of Donald Trump's muscular but no-war approach. Therefore, under Prime Minster Modi, India may conduct 'surgical strikes' but is likely to refrain from full-fledged

Though predictions of an emerging 'Indian century' maybe somewhat premature, the ambition has been there since the creation, long before the current rebranding of India as a civilisational power.

India's Ukraine and Gaza war responses are consistent not contradictory. What conventional observers call hypocrisy should be called by its true name: self-interested elite power politics. (Courtesy: The Wire)



The Israeli military later described the interception as being carried out by its Arrow missile defense system

Israel intercepts an apparent Houthi attack near the port city of Eilat

DUBAI, Feb 22: Israel intercepted what appeared to be an attack launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels on Thursday near the port city of Eilat as the group escalates its assaults over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip, authorities said.

Sirens sounded early on Thursday morning over Eilat, followed by videos posted online of what appeared to be an interception in the sky overhead.

The Israeli military later described the interception as being carried out by its Arrow missile defense system.

Israel did not identify what the fire was, nor where it came from. However, the Arrow system intercepts long-range ballistic missiles with a warhead designed to destroy targets while they are in space.

The system "successfully intercepted a launch which was identified in the area of the Red Sea and was en route to Israel," the Israeli military said. "The target did not cross into Israeli territory and did not pose a threat to civilians."The Houthis did not immediately claim the attack. They typically acknowledge assaults they conduct hours afterward.

Eilat, on the Red Sea, is a key port city of Israel. On Oct. 31, the Houthis first



claimed a missile-and-drone barrage targeting the city. The rebels have claimed other attacks targeting Eilat, which have caused no damage in the city.

Since November, the rebels have repeatedly targeted ships in the Red Sea and surrounding waters over Israel's war against Hamas in the Gaza Strip. They have frequently targeted vessels with tenuous or no clear links to Israel, imperiling shipping in a key route for trade among Asia, the Mideast and Europe. Those vessels have included at least one with cargo for Iran, the

Houthis' main benefactor.

Despite a month of U.S.-led airstrikes, the Houthi rebels remain capable of launching significant attacks. This week, they seriously damaged a ship in a crucial strait and downed an American drone worth tens of millions of dollars. The Houthis insist their attacks will continue until Israel stops its combat operations in the Gaza Strip, which have enraged the wider Arab world and seen the Houthis gain international

On Wednesday, ships in the Red Sea off

the Houthi-held port city of Hodeida in Yemen reported seeing an explosion, though all vessels in the area were said to be safe, according to the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations centers. The UKMTO earlier reported heavy drone activity in the area.

The U.S. military's Central Command acknowledged shooting down a Houthi bomb-carrying drone during that time. U.S. airstrikes separately targeted seven mobile anti-ship cruise missiles and one mobile anti-ship ballistic missile prepared to target ships in the Red Sea, Central Command said. The U.S. State Department criticized "the reckless and indiscriminate attacks on civilian cargo ships by the Houthis" that have delayed humanitarian aid including food and medicine bound for Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen. That includes the Sea Champion, a ship carrying corn and other aid to both Aden and Hodeida.

"Contrary to what the Houthis may attempt to claim, their attacks do nothing to help the Palestinians," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said in a statement. "Their actions are not bringing a single morsel of assistance or food to the Palestinian people." (AP)

Brazil calls for reform of UN as it starts its G20 presidency

Biden calls Putin a 'crazy SOB' and takes aim at Trump during fundraiser for 2024 election

SAN FRANCISCO, Feb 22: During a fundraiser for his reelection campaign on Wednesday night, President Joe Biden called Russian President Vladimir Putin a "crazy SOB" and took aim at former President Donald Trump's comments comparing himself to the Russian opposition leader who died last week in an Arctic prison.

Biden was talking about climate change when he said, "We have a crazy SOB like Putin and others, and we always have to worry about nuclear conflict, but the existential threat to humanity is climate."

Speaking to donors at a private San Francisco home on Wednesday as part of a three-day California swing to raise money for his 2024 reelection campaign, Biden also said he was astounded by recent comments made by his likely Republican challenger.

Trump compared the suspicious prison death of Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to his own legal troubles in the U.S. Trump was fined \$350 million after a New York judge found he lied for years about his wealth on financial statements in his companies.

Trump said the ruling was a form of "communism or fascism."

"Some of the things that this fellow's been saying, like he's comparing himself to Navalny and saying that -- because our country's become a communist country, he was persecuted, just like Navalny was persecuted. I don't know where the hell this comes from," Biden said.

"I mean, if I stood here 10, 15 years ago and said any of this, you'd all think I should be committed," he said. "It astounds me."

"I've been around a long time and I've never quite seen a crowd like this MAGA Republican crowd." Biden added, referring to Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan. "They seem to have very little moral compass on what is important

to people. During a campaign fundraiser in Beverly Hills on Tuesday night, Biden highlighted his efforts to help middle-class Americans and warned that a win in November for Trump could lead to a nationwide abortion ban, more Republican efforts to undo the health insurance program started during President Barack Obama's administration and more policies that would disproportionately help the wealthy. (AP)



RIO DE JANEIRO, Feb 22: Brazil's foreign minister called for reforms of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions Wednesday while criticizing their inability to prevent global conflicts, as his country kicked off its presidency of the Group of 20 na-

Mauro Vieira told fellow foreign ministers during opening remarks for a G20 meeting in Rio de Janeiro that the U.N. Security Council has been unable to prevent or halt conflicts such as those playing out in Ukraine and the Gaza Strip.

"Multilateral institutions are not adequately equipped to deal with current challenges, as demonstrated by the unacceptable paralysis of the Security Council in relation to ongoing conflicts," Vieira said.

Foreign ministers of the 20 leading rich and developing nations are gathering this week to discuss poverty, climate change

and heightened global tensions, setting a roadmap for work to accomplish ahead of a Nov. 18-19 summit in Rio.

One of Brazil's key proposals,

set by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, is a reform of global governance institutions such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and multilateral banks, where he wants to push for stronger representation of developing nations. The leftist leader reiterated on Feb. 18 his interest in expanding the U.N.'s Security Council, contemplating the entry of more countries from Africa, Latin America, as well as

India, Germany or Japan. "We need to add more people and end the right of veto in the U.N., because it is not possible for a country alone to be able to veto the approval of something approved by all members," Lula said while on a state visit to

Whether Lula's push will be

successful remains to be seen, as permanent members of the Security Council have in the past been dismissive of attempts at reform that would result in a loss of their

"Currently there is no momentum to reform the U.N. The U.N. is in crisis, and maybe transforming the Security Council now is not ideal," said Lucas Pereira Rezende, a political scientist at the Federal University of Minas

Vieira said Brazil was "deeply worried" by the proliferation of conflicts around the world - not just in Ukraine and Gaza, but in more than 170 locations, according to some studies, he said.

Vieira said more than \$2 trillion a year is spent on military budgets globally and that more of that money should go toward development aid programs.

"If inequalities and climate change do, in fact, constitute existential threats. I cannot avoid the feeling that we lack concrete actions on these issues," Vieira said. "These are the wars we must fight in 2024."

Earlier on Wednesday, Lula met with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in the capital, Brasilia, for about two hours to discuss global governance and other issues. Blinken, who is on a three-day trip to Brazil and Argentina, later headed to Rio for

the G20 meeting. The pair also discussed the conflict in Gaza, including working urgently to facilitate the release of all hostages and to increase humanitarian assistance and improve protections for Palestinian civilians, according to a statement from the U.S. Department of State.

They made no public comments on the diplomatic row between key U.S. ally Israel and Brazil following Lula's controversial comments comparing Israel's military offensive in Gaza to the Holocaust.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday at the African Union summit in Ethiopia, Lula said that "what is happening in the Gaza Strip and to the Palestinian people hasn't been seen in any other moment in history. Actually, it did when Hitler decided to kill the

In response, Israel declared Lula a "persona non grata", summoned Brazil's ambassador to Israel and demanded an apology. In retaliation, Lula recalled Brazil's ambassador for consultations.

After years of diplomatic isolation under former President Jair Bolsonaro, Lula has sought to reinsert Brazil on the center stage of global diplomacy since returning to power in January of 2023.

G20 finance ministers and central bank presidents are set to meet next week in Sao Paulo, and a second meeting of foreign ministers is scheduled for September.

Iran begins first election campaign since the 2022 mass protests over Mahsa Amini's death in custody

TEHRAN, Feb 22: Candidates for Iran's parliament began campaigning on Thursday in the country's first election since the bloody crackdown on the 2022 nationwide protests that followed the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody.

State television said 15,200 candidates will compete for a four-year term in the 290-seat chamber that hardliners have controlled for

decades. That is a record number and more than

the twice candidates who contested the 2020 election, when

turnout was just over 42%, the lowest since 1979.

Amini died on Sept. 16, 2022, after her arrest by Iran's morality police for allegedly violating the country's strict headscarf law that forced women to cover their hair and entire bodies.

The protests quickly escalated into calls to overthrow Iran's clerical rulers.

In the severe crackdown that followed, over 500 people were killed and nearly 20,000 arrested, according to human rights activists in Iran.

On Wednesday, the Guardian Council election watchdog sent the names of the 15,200 qualified candidates to the interior ministry, which holds the election.

Any candidate for elections in Iran must be approved by the Council, a 12-member clerical body, half of whom are directly appointed by the supreme leader. years. (AP)

The candidates include 1,713 women, which is more than double the 819 who competed in

The election will be held March 1, and the new parliament will convene in late May.

Current parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf will run for election from his hometown, a constituency in the remote northeast, after winning a seat in

> the capital Tehran four years ago. Such a change in districts usually indicates shrinking popularity In recent

years, his fellow hardline

critics occasionally accused him of ignoring the rights of other par-

liament members and disregarding reports of corruption while he was Tehran mayor. Incumbent assembly member

President Ebrahim Raisi will seek reelection to the assembly in a remote constituency in South Khorasan province, competing against a low-profile cleric.

In a simultaneous election, 144 clerics will compete for the allcleric 88-seat Assembly of Experts that functions as an advisory body to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has final say on all state matters. Their term of service is eight years.

Under Iran's constitution, the assembly monitors the country's supreme leader and chooses his successor. Ayatollah Khamenei will be 85 in April. He has been supreme leader for 34

Albania is expected to approve a deal with Italy to process thousands of migrants' claims for asylum

TIRANA, Feb 22: Albania's Parliament votes on Thursday on a deal with Italy to hold thousands of migrants rescued in international waters by the Italian authorities while their asylum applications are processed. Under the five-year deal, Albania would shelter up to 3,000 migrants at any one time.

With asylum requests expected to take around a month to process, the number of asylum-seekers sent to Albania could reach up to 36,000

Two processing centers will be set up in Albania at a cost to Italy of more than 600 million euros (about \$650 million) over five years. With Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama's left-wing Socialist Party holding 74 of Parliament's 140 seats, the deal is expected to pass. The president will also issue a decree as the final step of approval.

A group of 30 lawmakers attempted to block ratification by appealing to the Constitutional Court, but in late January the court said a deal could go ahead.

Italy's lower chamber of parliament approved the deal in January, followed by the Senate earlier this month.

The agreement, signed in November between Rama and Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, is part of Meloni's efforts to share the burden of addressing migration with other European countries. It was endorsed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leven but has been widely criticized by human rights groups.

The two facilities in Albania would be fully run by Italy while it fasttracks their asylum requests. Meloni has said she expects them to become operational by the spring of 2024. Italy would remain legally responsible for the migrants throughout

the process. It would welcome them in should they be granted international protection or organize their deportation from Albania if refused. Those picked up within Italy's territorial waters, or by rescue ships

operated by non-governmental organizations, would retain their right under international and EU law to apply for asylum in Italy and have their claims processed there. Rama has said that Albania stands beside Meloni in a sign of gratitude

on behalf of Albanians who found refuge in Italy and "escaped hell and imagined a better life" following the collapse of communism in Albania Italy has sought more solidarity from fellow European Union nations

to help it handle the increasing number of arrivals. The number of migrants arriving in Italy by boat had nearly doubled to about 160,000 compared to the same period a year ago. (AP)

At least 14 confirmed dead after an illegal open-pit gold mine collapses in Venezuela Ríos said she is worried that bodies could

LA PARAGUA, Feb 22: The collapse of an illegally operated open-pit gold mine in central Venezuela killed at least 14 people and injured several more, state authorities said Wednesday, as some other officials reported an undetermined number of people could be

Bolivar state Gov. Angel Marcano told local reporters that 14 bodies had been removed so far and authorities knew of at least 11 people injured. 'We continue to carry out rescue work," he

said, with relatives demanding swift rescue The accident took place in the Angostura

municipality Tuesday, when a wall collapsed at a mine known as Bulla Loca, which can only be reached by an hours-long boat ride. Angostura Mayor Yorgi Arciniega said late Tuesday that he planned to take "some 30 caskets" to a community near the mine, indicat-

ing that officials feared the death toll could



Relatives of the miners gathered in La Paragua, the closest community to the mine, to ask the government to send aircraft to the remote location to rescue the injured and recover bodies.

"We are here waiting, please, for the government to support us with helicopters, planes, anything," said Karina Ríos, whose daughter's father was trapped in the collapse. "There are quite a few dead, there are people wounded. Why don't they give us support, quickly decompose because of the area's con-Venezuela's government in 2016 estab-

lished a huge mining development zone stretching across the middle of the country, to add new revenues alongside its oil industry. Since then, mining operations for gold, diamonds, copper and other minerals have proliferated within and outside that zone.

Many mines operate outside or on the margins of the law. They offer lucrative jobs for ordinary Venezuelans, but conditions are bru-

Miner Carlos Marcano, 71, survived the collapse and arrived at a triage medical tent in La Paragua Wednesday. He said the desperate situation at the mine "was terrifying. "One would not want a colleague, a human

being, to die like that," he said. "Some of us made it. There are a few wounded, but there are still a number of dead who have not been rescued and are buried there." (AP)

China plans to send San Diego Zoo more pandas this year, reigniting its panda diplomacy

SAN DIEGO, Feb 22: China plans to send a new pair of giant pandas to the San Diego Zoo, renewing its longstanding gesture of friendship toward the United States after nearly all the iconic bears on loan to U.S. zoos were returned as relations began to sour between the two nations.

San Diego Zoo officials told The Associated Press that if all permits and other requirements are approved, two bears, a male and a female, are expected to arrive as early as the end of summer, about five years after the zoo sent its last pandas back to China.

"We're very excited and hopeful," said Megan Owen of the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance and vice president of Wildlife Conservation Science. "They've expressed a tremendous amount of enthusiasm to re-initiate panda cooperation starting with the San

Diego Zoo.' In November, Chinese Presi-

dent Xi Jinping raised hopes his country would start sending pandas to the U.S. again after he and President Joe Biden convened in Northern California for their first face-to-face meeting in a year and pledged to try to reduce tensions. China is considering a pair that includes a female descendent of Bai Yun and Gao Gao, two of the zoo's former residents, said Owen, an expert in panda behavior who has worked in San Diego and China.

rise into the dozens.

Bai Yun, who was born in captivity in China, lived at the zoo for more than 20 years and gave birth to six cubs there. She and her son were the zoo's last pandas and returned to China in 2019.

Gao Gao was born in the wild in China and lived at the San Diego Zoo from 2003 to 2018 before being sent back.

Decades of conservation efforts in the wild and study in captivity saved the giant panda species



from extinction, increasing its population from fewer than 1,000 at one time to more than 1.800 in the wild and captivity.

The black-and-white bears have long been the symbol of the U.S.-China friendship since Beijing gifted a pair of pandas to the National Zoo in Washington, D.C., in 1972, ahead of the normalization of bilateral relations. China later loaned pandas to zoos to help breed cubs and boost the popula-

Demands for the return of giant

pandas, known as China's "national treasure," grew among the Chinese public as unproven allegations that U.S. zoos mistreated the pandas flooded Chinese social

Fears over the future of socalled panda diplomacy escalated last year when zoos in Memphis. Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., returned their pandas to China, leaving only four pandas in the United States, all at the zoo in Atlanta. That loan agreement expires later this year.

Many loan agreements were for 10 years and often were extended well beyond. But negotiations last year to extend the agreements with U.S. zoos or send more pandas did not produce results. China watchers speculated that Beijing was gradually pulling its pandas from Western nations due to deteriorating diplomatic relations with the U.S. and other countries.

Then on Nov. 15, 2023, a week after the National Zoo's pandas departed for China, Xi spoke at a dinner in downtown San Francisco with American business executives and signaled that more pandas might be sent. He said he learned the San Diego Zoo and people in California "very much look forward to welcoming pan-

das back. "I was told that many American people, especially children, were really reluctant to say goodbye to the pandas and went to the zoo to see them off," Xi said

The San Diego Zoo continued to work with their Chinese counterparts even after it no longer had any pandas.

Owen said China is particularly interested in exchanging information on the zoo's successful breeding of pandas in captivity. Giant pandas are difficult to breed in part because the female's reproductive window is extremely narrow, lasting only 48 to 72 hours

each year. Bai Yun's first cub, Hua Mei, was also the first panda born through artificial insemination to survive into adulthood outside of China, and would go on to produce 12 cubs on her own after she was sent to China

Bai Yun, meanwhile, remained at the zoo where she gave birth to two more females and three males. With cameras in her den, researchers monitored her, contributing to the understanding of

maternal care behavior, Owen

"We have a lot of institutional knowledge and capacity from our last cooperative agreement, which we will be able to parlay into this next chapter, as well as training the next generation of panda conservationists," she said.

Chinese experts would travel with the bears and spend months in San Diego, Owen said.

She said the return of the bears is not only good for San Diego but the giant panda's recovery as a

"We do talk about panda diplomacy all the time," Owen said. "Diplomacy is a critical part of conservation in any number of contexts. If we can't learn to work together, you know, in sometimes difficult situations or situations that are completely out of the control of conservationists, then we're not going to succeed.'

Roads in north, east Sikkim blocked due to heavy snowfall

GANGTOK, Feb 22: Several strategically important roads in north and east Sikkim are blocked due to heavy snowfall, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) said in a statement on Thursday.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2024

Strategically important roads along Lachung and Lachen axis and the national highway to Nathu La and Tamze have experienced exceptionally heavy snowfall, causing disruption of socio-economic activities and posing a challenge to all road users.

"Due to disturbance from the western Himalayan region, the weather in Sikkim has taken a swift turn because of which the northern and eastern parts of Sikkim are experiencing heavy snowfall," it said. Further, post devastating flash



munication, leading to north Sikkim, especially to Lachen Valley have suffered extensive damage, the BRO said, adding it had

ditions, a team of 758 BRTF remains committed to keep these

vital lines of communication open so that the movement of men and material does not suffer. Freezing temperatures, insufficient oxygen, high winds, blizzards, etc could not deter the will and determination of the brave workers of BRO, who despite all odds, has ensured unhindered movement of vehicles in north and east

heavy snowfall, a team of 758 Bor-

der Road Task Force (BRTF) under

Project Swastik of Border Roads

Organization (BRO) has mobilised

their heavy machinery and man-

power to keep strategic roads lead-

"Despite inclement weather con-

ing to border areas open.

Mizoram govt to clear all pending healthcare bills by new fiscal

AIZWAL, Feb 22: The Mizoram government has decided to disburse all pending healthcare bills under the state healthcare scheme before the new financial year 2024-25, the assembly was informed on

State health minister Lalrinpuii said more than ₹ 45.59 crore is due for release to beneficiaries under the Mizoram State Health Care Scheme (MSHCS).

She said that the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government has earmarked ₹ 40 crore from funds allocated under the Socio-Economic Development Policy (SEDP) of the previous Mizo National Front (MNF) government to clear the pending bills.

Apart from ₹ 40 crore, Mizoram chief minister Lalduhoma, who also holds the finance portfolio, has released ₹ 15 crore for clearing the pending bills, she

"All the pending healthcare bills will be paid to the beneficiaries before the start of the new financial year 2024-25," the minister said while replying to a query from an opposition MNF member, K Laldawngliana.

The healthcare bill was one of the major political issues before the assembly polls in 2023.

The MNF government headed by former chief minister Zoramthanga drew severe flak from different quarters as it failed to pay pending healthcare

Lalrinpuii also informed the house that the state government will borrow ₹ 1,000 crore from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to implement the



healthcare scheme.

This was initiated by the MNF government and even though the loan agreement was on the verge of signing during its rule, it was delayed due to the state assembly polls held in November last year, she said.

Sabha polls this year," the minister said. The health minister also informed the assembly that there are 391 health and wellness centres in the

'The loan agreement will be signed after the Lok

She said that the government is making efforts to overcome the shortage of doctors and health workers in various hospitals of the state. (PTI)

Nagaland Christian org flays Assam CM's statement on 'magical healing'

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Feb 22: An apex church organisation of Nagaland flayed Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for calling the Assam Healing (Prevention of Evil) Practices Bill, 2024, approved by the Assam cabinet, an "important legislation" as one of the most insensitive acts of religious bigotry. "It is unfortunate that such a statement is uttered by a respectable personality who is looked upon to pull the region together on all fronts," the Nagaland Baptist Church Council (NBCC) in a statement issued by its general secretary Rev. Zelhou Keyho, said on Thursday.

Sarma told journalists recently that the Assam cabinet passed a resolution endorsing a bill to ban magical healing practices with the explicit



goal of curbing evangelism. The NBCC said to ban healing in order to curb evangelism is a direct attack on the Christian community, which is most unfortunate for a respectable leader in the region to utter it with pride and consider it very nportant legislation. The NBCC said any discrimina-

tory statement referring to any community of faith or ethnic group in the region cannot be considered important. It stressed that any legislation must be logical and sensitive to the diverse socio-ethnic and religiouscultural spectrum of the region. It said the use of "highly professional terminology without proper definition" has caused suspicions in the minds of Christians in the region. According to the NBCC, to accuse the healing ministry of the Christians of being a means of converting the tribals is discriminatory in nature.

"If what is done to serve humanity is considered a threat to others, how do we coexist peacefully in our diversity?" it asked.

Saying that the healing ministry of the church from a professional standpoint has come a long way, the church organisation said it has been the calling of the Christians to provide care and compassion to every section of society. It added this attestation can be seen in the Christian hospitals in the country and beyond, which provide affordable health care to every section of the population regardless of caste and religion.

"Therefore, to come up with such legislation in any state is not only discriminatory but also vindictive," it added

Manipur lawyers stage protest against actions by security forces

IMPHAL, Feb 22: Lawyers in Manipur have staged a sit-inprotest against the chaos created inside a court complex in Imphal on February 20, in which a lawyer and one reporter sustained injuries in actions by the police and RAP

personnel. While strongly condemning the incident, the lawyers under the joint aegis of All Manipur Bar Association (AMBA) and High Court Bar Association (HCBA) on Wednesday demanded an inquiry into the incident by a committee led by a retired justice of the high court. The inquiry should be ordered within a week's time.

There was a scuffle between the security forces (police and RAP) and women protesters inside the Cheirap Court Complex in Imphal on February 20 when six persons arrested by the police in relation with a recent arms looting case were produced in the court of special National Investigation Agency court, Imphal East. The RAP personnel, who were called out to assist the police, in their bid to take control of the situation, resorted to using force besides firing tear gas shells to disperse protesters, resulting in several injuries. (NNN)

of 'Sarva Jan Hitay, Sarva Jan Sukhaay' SHILLONG, Feb 22: Union health minister, Mansukh Mandaviya has said that the central government has formulated policies and schemes to create a health model that gives meaning to the spirit of 'Sarva Jan Hitay, Sarva स्वास्थ्य एवं परिवार कल्याण मेत्रालय Jan Sukhaay'. भारत सरकार MINISTRY OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE

Centre's health model created in spirit

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

country have got free dialysis serv-

ice, about 6 crore people of the

country have received free treat-

ment through PMJAY and out of

pocket expenditure of the total

health expenditure of the citizens

has reduced from 62.6 per cent to

During the occasion, the Union

health minister also inaugurated a

market place and launched a Mas-

ter's Programme on Health Eco-

Bharati Pravin Pawar said that

under the visionary leadership of

the Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, India has made phenome-

nal progress in delivering health-

care services to the innermost

She said that the northeastern

regions and remote areas of the

states have benefitted immensely

from innovations and initiatives

taken in the health sector, and

schemes like Avushman Bharat

Health and wellness centers among

others are successfully providing

primary healthcare services at the

other stakeholders for successfully

hosting the research orientation

workshop for the northeast region,

the first of its kind, in the beautiful

belief that there will be many pos-

itive takeaways for the northeast-

city of Shillong. She expressed her

She congratulated ICMR and

grassroot level.

Technology

and

Assessment in IIPH, Shillong.

47.1 percent.

nomics

Mandaviya said this while virtually inaugurating the 'Regional Consultative Workshop on Research Priority for Providing Accessible and Affordable Healthcare for the Northeastern States of India' in Shillong on Wednesday.

restored connectivity for the armed

forces deployed along Lachen Val-

ley via Donkyala pass located at

Bharati Pravin Pawar, Union minister of state for health and family welfare and state health minister Mazel Ampareen Lyngdoh were also present on the work-

The two-day workshop was jointly organized by the Department of Health Research, Union ministry of health and family welfare, Indian Institute of Public Health, Shillong and Indian Council of Medical Research - Regional Medical Research Centre, Dibru-

Addressing the gathering, Mandaviya said that PM Modi's dream is to create a healthy India, a developed India, in which every citizen of the country should get quality health facilities on time. Health facilities and medicines should become easily affordable, accessible and available. They should be spread across in all geographical areas and have balanced availabil-

"The effort of our government is on ensuring that everyone gets access to health facilities in an equal manner without any distinction between rich and poor. To achieve this objective, the government has worked with policies and various schemes to create a health model that gives meaning to the spirit of Sarva Jan Hitay, Sarva Jan Sukhaay," he said.

On the commitment of the Union government for the development of the Northeast, Mandaviya said, "In the last 10 years, efforts have been made to bring the Northeast into the mainstream of the country by enhancing connectivity through roadways, railways, I-ways, waterways, roapways, etc. For the first time the region has started to be seen as the growth engine of the country. Healthcare today has become accessible and available for this entire region." "Instituto like RIMS (Regional

Institute of Medical Sciences), RI-PANS (Regional Institute of Paramedical and Nursing Sciences), NEIGRIHMS (Northeastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences) and Assam AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences) have been established and 23 new medical colleges have opened in the region. ICMR has also developed various health facilities in the region," he further said.

The Union health minister informed that more than 31 crore people have been given Ayushman card for accessing in-hospital treatment under which free family treatment up to ₹ 5 lakh is being provided annually. 11,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras are open where 50-80 per cent cheaper medicines are available. More than 1.64 lakh Ayushman Arogya Mandirs have come up, which are considered as the health gate keeper of the people and complete health surveillance system and One Health Initiative is being implemented from 48 BSL Labs.

He also highlighted that more than 22 lakh kidney patients in the

shop and through these learning they will try to make health technologies available, accessible, affordable and equitable in their respective states in the coming Explaining the purpose of the workshop, Rajiv Bahl, secretary of

ern states at the end of this work-

the department of health research and DG, ICMR said, "Through this workshop we want to discuss all the research priorities for the northeast states so that we can start specific research projects for NE". He said that Prime Minister

Narendra Modi's focus on research and innovation is exemplified from the fact that he has added the term Jai Anusandhan to the ever popular slogan Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vi-

He added, "The Prime Minister

is giving extreme importance to innovation and research and I also have the opinion that we cannot become Viksit Bharat without becoming a powerhouse in research. We also believe that research is to solve the problems of the people, and therefore we have to discuss the problems that the northeastern states, the National Health Missions in the states are struggling with. So we want to identify those priorities and start projects on those priorities."

Bahl said that another objective night. of the workshop is to make affordable health technology available to the state. "We should use the resources in the most judicious way and we should get it at the lowest cost and make it affordable to the people of India. This will only be possible through products which are developed and made in India," he added.

Dr Bahl said that the workshop will discuss in detail the concept and domains of health technology assessment (HTA), recent advancements in the field and its role in policy making in the healthcare sector. Anu Nagar, joint secretary of the Department of Health Research, Sampath Kumar, principal health secretary of Meghalaya and senior officials of the central and state governments were present on the occasion. (NNN)

3 arrested, meth tablets, heroin worth ₹35 cr seized in Mizoram



AIZWAL, Feb 22: Three persons were arrested and methamphetamine tablets and heroin worth ₹ 35 crore have been seized in Mizoram's Champhai district, an official of Assam Rifles said.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of Assam Rifles and Mizoram Police conducted a raid at Dungtlang village on Wednesday and seized 11.39 kg of methamphetamine tablets and 218 gm of heroin, he

A man hailing from Assam's Silchar town and two women from Zotlang in Champhai district have been arrested for possessing the drugs, the official added. (PTI)

HT Correspondent DIMAPUR. Feb 22: An NSCN-

IM leader was shot dead by unidentified assailants in Mon district of Nagaland on Wednesday

six gunmen barged into the house of Khampei Opeiham Konyak, a kilonser (minister) of the NSCN-IM, at his Namsa village residence under Tizit Police Station in Mon district at around 9.30 pm on Wednesday night and pumped bullets into him.

According to sources, Konyak was shot twice in the head and once in the chest. He succumbed to bullet injuries while being taken to a nearby hospital.

Konyak was previously in the Yung Aung faction of the NSCN (K) before he joined the NSCN (IM). The cause of the incident could not be ascertained immediately.

Meanwhile, the police have launched an investigation into the

Women's mock parliament debate held as part of SVEEP campaign

Campaign aimed at promoting voters' literacy, increasing voters' turnout by 75% in Lok Sabha polls

HT Correspondent DIMAPUR, Feb 22: The Wokha district administration and district election office, in collaboration with Lotha Eloe Hoho (Lotha women organization) and the Wokha District Hub for Empowerment of Women, organised a women's mock parliament debate on the topic 'Men dictate the vote and voice of Naga women' at the Wokha DC's conference hall on Thursday.

In his keynote address, Wokha additional deputy commissioner K Furhesie said this event has been organised for the second time under the systematic voters' education and participation (SVEEP) campaign in Wokha district to educate the voters and promote voters' literacy in

He also stated that it is a

the country.



multi-intervention programme that aims to reach out to the voters and citizens through different modes and media to increase their awareness of the election process and promote their informed participation.

Furhesie added the other obiectives of this campaign are to increase the voter turnout by 75% in the coming Lok Sabha

elections, purify the electoral roll in every polling booth, bridge the gender gap in enrolment turnout, address urban and youth apathy in electoral participation and enhance the quality of electoral participation in terms of ethical voting through such awareness programmes. 10 women participants took

part in the debate competition. Students and Lotha Eloe Hoho representatives led by their chairperson Thungbeni Ngullie attended the programme. Wokha assistant election of-

ficer, Chisho K Swu briefed the participants about the functioning of the EVM and also gave hands-on demonstration during the programme.

Khandu hails Union cabinet decision to continue FMBAP scheme

ITANAGAR, Feb 22: Arunachal Pradesh chief minister Pema Khandu has hailed the Union cabinet's approval of the continuation of the Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP), a centrally sponsored scheme. The Union cabinet has approved the continuation of FMPAB with a total outlay of ₹ 4,100 crore for a period of 5 years from 2021-22 to 2025-26. "I welcome Union cabinet's approval on the continuation of

centrally sponsored scheme, Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP), with total outlay of ₹ 4,100 crore for a period of 5 years from 2021-22 to 2025-26", Khandu posted on X on Thursday. Under Flood Management Programme (FMP) component, central assistance is to be provided to state governments for taking up critical works related to flood control, anti-erosion, etc.

Under River Management and Border

Areas (RMBA) component, flood control and anti-erosion works on common border rivers with neighbouring countries are

to be taken up with full central assistance. Expressing gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Khandu said, "The work implemented under River Management and Border Areas component also protect important installations of security agencies, border out-posts along the border rivers from flood and erosion". (PTI)

Dated Kokrajhar, the 22/02/2024

No.KED/NIT-66/2023-24/356

may be present at the time of opening tender.

DETAILS TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender in prescribed form affixing non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight & paise twenty five) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed "F-2" form with validity period of "90 (Ninety)" days from the date of receipt of tenders are invited from the Registered Class-I (A,B,C) & Class-II P.W.D. Electrical Contractor under P.W.D. Guwahati Electrical Circle, Guwahati-1 and the Registered Class-III P.W.D. Kokrajhar Electrical Division of 2023-24 and having valid Electrical Contractor licence for the following electrical works and will be received in the Office of the undersigned up to 2.00 P.M. of 27/02/2024 and will be opened at 3.00 P.M. of the same date. The Contractors or their authorized agents

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx Estimated Value	Time of Completion	Earnest Money
	Providing & Installation of CCTV Camera, Desktop Computer, Duplex Colour Scanning Printer and Internal Electrification to the Juvenile Justice Board of District Centre at Mushalpur in Baksa District	10.22	15 (Fifteen) Days	General 2 % (Two) P.C. of Tender value (1% of Tender value in case of OBC/SC/ST)

Tender forms can be had from the Office of the undersigned and Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar during working hours and up to 2.00 P.M. 26/02/2024 on application mentioned registration No. etc. on payment of Rs. 300.00 (Rupees Three hundred) only per set by Indian crossed postal order payable to the Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar.

IPR(BTC)-2023-24/1447

Executive Engineer, P.W.D., Kokrajhar Electrical Division, Kokrajhar

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Haryana Assembly takes up no-trust motion against Khattar govt

No-trust motion against the BJP-JJP govt, which was brought by the Congress three years ago amid stir against now repealed farm laws, was defeated

CHANDIGARH, Feb 22: A no-confidence motion against the BJP-JJP government, brought by the main opposition Congress, was taken up for discussion in the Haryana Assembly on Thursday.

Speaker Gian Chand Gupta admitted the notice of no-confidence motion against the Council of Ministers headed by chief minister Manohar Lal Khattar, with the Congress taking on the ruling combine on various

Speaking in the House after the motion was taken up for discussion, Congress members targeted the Khattar government on various issues, including ongoing farmers' agitation on Punjab-Haryana borders.

Congress member Shamsher Singh Gogi raised the protesting farmers'

Gogi said a farmer who died on Wednesday at Khanauri on the Punjab-Haryana border was among the protesting farmers who are seeking a legal guarantee to minimum support price for crops

'The border has been made like India-Pakistan border...the government should resolve the issue," said

Leader of Opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda said the situation is serious and government should resolve

the issue through talks.

The BJP MLAs, who spoke against the motion, said government has undertaken all-round development and Haryana was marching on path of

Congress MLA B B Batra said the BJP talks about establishing "Ram Rajya", but it is a government which has been hit by scams while corruption is rampant in various spheres.

"It is a government hit by scams and all people are fed up with it. There has never been a government which was so corrupt," said Batra, alleging a mining scam in Yamunanagar had even changed the course of Yamuna river.

However, transport and mining minister Mool Chand Sharma countered Batra, saying the government has taken several steps to curb illegal

Congress' Batra also talked about Haryana's Anti-Corruption Bureau recently busting a major scam in the integrated cooperative development project, unearthing a Rs 100-crore 'corruption racket'

He also dubbed the state government's flagship family ID scheme Parivar Pehchan Patra as "unconstitutional". It is not within parameters, he

However, chief minister Khattar



countered him, saying if the Congress feel so, they can move court.

This is the second no-confidence motion brought by the Congress in the second term of the Khattar gov-

The no-trust motion against the BJP-JJP government, which was brought by the Congress three years ago amid stir against now repealed farm laws, was defeated.

Hooda had recently accused the Khattar government of having failed on all fronts and said the Congress would bring a no-confidence motion during the Budget session.

During the discussion, Congress members also brought up the issue of charges under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) slapped against party MLA Mamman Khan in Haryana in connection with a Nuh violence case.

Hooda said when the MLA had secured bail in a FIR, why UAPA charge had been added six months later. "Don't treat MLAs like this. UAPA is slapped against terrorists,'

Hooda and another Congress leader Kiran Choudhary said that slapping UAPA on the MLA should be reconsidered.

However, chief minister Khattar said the government does not interfere in a issue in which investigation is going on. If a new charge has been added, the government has no role in

Congress member Gogi said, "Is

UAPA being slapped against Mamman Khan because he belongs to a particular community"

During the discussion, there was a brief verbal exchange between ruling JJP's Ram Kumar Gautam and deputy chief minister Dushyant Chautala after Gautam made some remarks against him which were expunged by the Chair.

Gautam also indulged in a verbal duel with minister of development and Panchayats Devender Babli, also from JJP, after the former made some remarks on e-tendering system in

The speaker asked Gautam to stick to the topic and expunged the remarks. Later, while speaking against the motion, deputy CM Chautala said Gautam's problem is that he did not make him a minister.

Congress MLA Varun Chaudhary said tall promises were made by the BJP-led government including doubling of farmers' income, but these were not met.

Chautala took a swipe at the Congress members during the discussion and said big leaders have left the party which also includes many tall political leaders in the past from the state

BJP MLA Aseem Goel also said that the Congress was "shrinking" and many leaders were deserting it.

Goel said the Khattar government has provided a transparent administration and jobs are being given purely on merit basis.

He said Haryana was marching on the path of progress during the past nine-and-a-half years.

Chautala said the state government is undertaking equitable development. "It is result of our alliance that women are enjoying 50 per cent reservation in panchavats".

"I hope when the next assembly elections are held in 2029, the assembly will also have 50 per cent women members," he said.

Earlier, on the request of Congress members, the Chair extended the time for discussion on the motion from two to three hours.

At present, the BJP has 41 MLAs in the 90-member House while its alliance partner, the Jannayak Janta Party (JJP), has 10. Besides, six of the seven independent members in the House support the BJP, which also enjoys the support of the lone Haryana Lokhit Party MLA, Gopal

The main opposition Congress has 30 MLAs and the Indian National Lok Dal has one. (PTI)

Murder of democracy: Cong slams govt over X's statement

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: The Congress Thursday alleged that democracy is being "murdered" in the country after microblogging platform X voiced disagreement with the Centre's order to block accounts and posts related to ongoing farmers' protests.

Attacking the Centre, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi claimed the public knows that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has "murdered democracy" and the public will give an answer to it.

"If farmers ask for MSP, shoot them -- is this the mother of democracy? When the youth ask for appointment, then refuse to even listen to them - this is the Mother of Democracy? If the former governor tells the truth, then send CBI to his house -- is this the mother of democracy?" he asked.

"Freeze the bank account of the most prominent opposition party is this the mother of democracy? Section 144, internet ban, sharp wires, tear gas shells - is this the mother of democracy? Be it media or social media, suppressing every voice of truth - is this the mother of democracy?" the former Congress chief said.

"Modi ji, the public knows that you have murdered democracy and the public will answer!" Gandhi said. X has also called for extending freedom of expression to the affected posts.

Sources said the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has ordered social media platforms to temporarily block 177 accounts linked to the farmers' protests on the request of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).

Tagging a statement issued by X's Global Government Affairs team, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "Murder Of Democracy in India." (PTI)

BJP alleges Karnataka govt eyeing temple

Income

BENGALURU, Feb 22: Karnataka minister Ramalinga Reddy on Thursday defended the state government's move to collect funds from temples having gross income of ₹ ten lakh.

The Transport and Hindu Religious Endowments Minister's reaction came after the BJP mounted an attack on the government for introducing the Karnataka Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments (Amendment) Bill.

The saffron party alleged that the Congress government wanted to fill it's 'empty coffers' with tem-Regarding the bill that was

passed by the Karnataka Assembly Wednesday, the state gover ment said it was necessary to enhance the amount of common pool fund, include a person skilled in Vishwa Hindu Temple architecture and sculpture in the committee of management of notified institutions and to form district and statelevel committees to improve temples and infrastructure for the safety of pilgrims.

Reddy told reporters that the provision was not new but has existed since 2003.

There are 3,000 C-Grade temples in Karnataka, which have less than ₹ five lakh income from where 'Dharmika Parishad' gets no

ment for the benefit of pilgrims. There are B-Grade temples with

Punjab Cabinet gives nod for convening Budget Session from March 1

CHANDIGARH, Feb 22: The Punjab Cabinet Thursday gave a nod for convening the budget session of the state assembly from March 1 till 15 while the state budget will be presented on A decision in this regard was taken by the

council of ministers in a meeting chaired by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. Sharing details of the Cabinet meeting, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said the

state Budget Session of the Punjab Assembly will be convened from March 1 till 15. The Budget for the financial year 2024-25 will be presented on March 5, he further said

while speaking to reporters. The Budget Session will commence with the governor's address on March 1, he added.

The debate on the governor's address will be conducted on March 4 and the discussion on the budget estimates will be conducted on March

6, he said. In another decision, the Cabinet approved an ex-gratia grant, as a special case, to the family of home guard Jaspal Singh, who was killed on duty at Sultanpur Lodhi last year.

The state government has equated the "supreme sacrifice" of the home guard volunteer with police officers, residents of Punjab serving in paramilitary forces and Army jawans,

said an official release. Singh was killed when a group of 'Nihangs' allegedly resorted to unprovoked firing in Sultanpur Lodhi in Kapurthala in November last



year. The incident took place when policemen tried to get Gurdwara Akal Bunga Sahib in Sultanpur Lodhi vacated from a faction of 'Ni-

The Cabinet also gave approval for setting up of 'MSME Punjab' wing in the Department of Industries and Commerce for boosting micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) in the

The 'MSME Punjab' will work towards enhancing competitiveness of MSMEs, ensuring a steady flow of credit from financial institutions and banks to MSMEs, enabling them to fuel their expansion and innovation, according

It will also provide hand-holding to the MSMEs in adopting advanced technologies and modernising their operations to stay ahead in the global marketplace, facilitating setting up of common facility centres in the areas of modern testing facilities, etc. There are about eight lakh MSMEs in the state.

The Cabinet also gave the consent to amend the 'The East Punjab War Awards Act 1948' by placing an amendment Bill in the Assembly to double the 'War Jagir' (financial assistance) from the existing ₹ 10,000 to ₹ 20,000, said the

The state government gives 'War Jagir' to the parents whose only child or two to three children had served in the Indian Army during the Second World War, National Emergency 1962

Currently, there are 83 beneficiaries getting benefit of this scheme.

In another decision, the Cabinet gave approval to amend the Teachers Transfer Policy, 2019 for teachers falling in the exempted cate-

The Cabinet further gave nod to finalise the service rules of group B and C employees in the department of Defense services welfare after restructuring of the department.

After military service, group B and C employees are appointed in the department and now their service rules have been finalized, said the statement.

The Cabinet also gave approval to the design wing of the water resources department to provide design and consultancy services to private entities on lines similar to that of the government-owned aided colleges and staff of engineering colleges, said the statement. (PTI)

ED upgrades Look out Circular against BYJU's promoter Byju Raveendran

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: The Enforcement Directorate has upgraded its Look out Circular (LC) issued against BJYU's founder and CEO Byju Raveendran in connection with a FEMA probe, seeking to stop him from going abroad.

The earlier such alert meant that immigration authorities had to just intimate the agency about his movements through various ports.

Official sources said that the over an year old LC was revised sometime back in light of investors' concerns and ongoing adjudication of a FEMA contravention case against Raveendran and some others.

BYJU's did not comment on the development.Raveendran is currently stated to be in Dubai.

The ED has asked the Bureau of Immigration to upgrade the LC against Raveendran so that he is not allowed to go abroad from any Indian land, air or land port before the investigating officer (IO) of the case is informed.

Under the new LC, it will be the decision of the IO to either totally stop his foreign travel or allow him to do so after asking some questions

and getting assurances, the sources The LC in operation till now

against Raveendran only stipulated the immigration authorities to inform the ED about his entry and exit from the country. The agency, in November last vear, had slapped a foreign exchange violation show cause notice of more than ₹ 9,300 crore against BYJU's and Raveendran. The federal probe agency spelled

out multiple grounds for charging the ed-tech company and its chief promoter that included charges of "failing" to submit documents of imports against advance remittances made outside India; failing to realise proceeds of exports made outside India by delayed filing of documents against the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) received into the company, among others.

The Karnataka High Court on Wednesday had refused to stay an emergency shareholder meeting called by select investors of Think and Learn Pvt Ltd -- the owner of BYJU'S -- to oust Raveendran and his family from the leadership in the

edtech firm. (PTI)

Odisha needs double engine 'Sarkar': Rajnath

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: The Enforcement Directorate has issued fresh summons to Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, asking him to appear before it on February 26 for questioning in the excise policy linked money laundering case, official sources said Thursday.

The central agency, while issuing the seventh summons under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), has rejected Kejriwal's contention that a fresh notice for his attendance was wrong as the matter of the issuance of these summons was sub-judice before a local court

Kejriwal has skipped all the summons, terming them as "illegal" and has written to the ED seeking their

The ED had recently filed a fresh complaint before a local court against the 55-year-old national convenor of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for dis-

The court listed the matter for further hearing on March 16 as it exempted Kejriwal from personal appearance last week.

ED issues seventh summons to Delhi CM

The court also said that from the contents of the complaint and the material placed on record (by the ED), prima facie offence under Section 174 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) is made out and there are sufficient grounds for proceeding against the accused (Kejri-

The ED believes that the local court has prima facie held Kejriwal guilty of "disobeying" the earlier notices issued to him in this case, warranting the seventh summons, official sources said.

The question in front of the court is not about the validity of the summons rather the illegal act on part of Kejriwal of intentionally disobeying the said summons, the sources had said.

Kejriwal's name has been mentioned multiple times in charge sheets has said that the accused were in touch with him regarding the preparation of the now-scrapped Delhi Excise Policy 2021-22. AAP leaders Manish Sisodia and Sanjay Singh apart from communications in-charge of the party Vijay Nair have been arrested in this case by

the ED till now The ED had claimed in its charge sheet that the AAP used "proceeds of crime" to the tune of about ₹ 45 crore in its Goa election campaign.

The agency is also expected to file a fresh supplementary charge sheet in the case and may name the AAP as a "beneficiary" of the alleged kickbacks that were generated through the excise

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

BERHAMPUR (ODISHA), Feb 22: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday emphasised the importance of establishing a "double engine" government in Odisha to ensure steady progress for the state, aligning it with the development trajectory of the rest of the country. Singh said this while addressing a public meeting at Ambapua near Berhampur town here.

Party workers from five Lok Sabha segments such as Berhampur, Aska, Bhubaneswar, Kandhamal and Puri attended the meeting

"No force can stop BJP from forming the government in Odisha this time," he said.

Encouraging party workers to engage with the public, Singh urged them to communicate the welfare measures initiated by the Modi government for various segments of society. He called upon BJP workers to commit to the formation of a "double-engine sarkar" in Odisha, asserting that the party would perform well not only in the Lok Sabha polls but also in the Vidhan Sabha elections, which are scheduled alongside the Lok Sabha polls.

"We will not only do well in Lok Sabha polls, but

Singh highlighted Prime Minister Narendra Modi's focused attention on Odisha, contrasting the financial support provided by the previous Congress-led UPA government with the substantial allocation under the BJP-led NDA government.

"While the previous Congress-led UPA government had provided only ₹ 3 lakh-crore to the state in 10 vears, the BJP-led NDA government has allotted over ₹ 18 lakh-crore to the state after coming to power in 2014," he said. He emphasised India's and Odisha's aspirations for development and praised the country's economic progress under Modi's leadership, citing endorsements from global institutions like the IMF.

"Once we were standing in front of IMF as petitioners. However, things have changed during Modi's tenure," Singh said. Singh asserted that because of India's global goodwill, the death sentence of eight former Indian sailors in Qatar was pardoned.

"No one else could have done this work except Modiji," the defence minister said.

Singh credited Modi with enhancing India's global reputation, citing instances of diplomatic successes

Dharmika Parishad is a committee to improve the temple manage-

income between ₹ five lakh and ₹ 25 lakh from where five per cent of the gross income had been going to the Dharmika Parishad since 2003.

Easing of FDI norms: Space industry says it will pave way for growth, innovation

nascent private space industry on Thursday welcomed the easing of

policy for the sector, terming it as a "pivotal move" to boost investments and help the country increase its share in the global space econ-

"The easing of FDI norms will have a similar impact on the space sector as the 1991 liberalisation policy had on the overall economy," Tushar Jadhav, co-founder and Chief Executive Officer Man-

astu Space told PTI. Industry leaders said the government decision to permit 100 per cent overseas investment in making components for satellites and up to 49 per cent FDI through the automatic route for launch vehicles and associated systems or subsystems, creation of spaceports for launching and receiving spacecraft has given the much needed clarity for

the sector.

amples of how foreign investors were hesitant to invest in the space sector through the government route, which was the case earlier, due to a series of approvals that were required as part of the

"It was a big risk for anybody to put in huge money and then getting locked with that money in India as government approvals would be required to even sell shares," an industry leader said.

Industry bodies – Indian Space Association (ISpA) and Satcom Industry Association of India (SIA-India) – also hailed the decision of the Union Cabinet to amend the FDI policy for the space sector.

"This will give India access to the latest tech advances and muchneeded funds not only from the country but from international investors too," Lt Gen A K Bhatt (retd), Director General ISpA, said. "It gives much needed regulatory

clarity for foreign investments for all domains in India's space sector. For Skyroot being in the launch vehicle domain, 49 per cent FDI in automatic route and 100 per cent FDI in government route will help boost investments and open access to capital easier and at par with global standard," Pawan Kumar Chandana, co-founder and CEO. Skyroot Aerospace, told PTI.

"It is a very big boost. We consider it a blessing. This will promote investments in the space sector in India," Yashas Karanam, Director, Bellatrix Aerospace said.

"We do expect a lot of FDI. Space is international so there could be a lot of collaboration. We might have strategic tie-ups with larger space companies and there could be investments through such kinds of arrangements as well," Karanam said.

He said India was well positioned to do more affordable and frugal engineering and it made



sense for larger space companies to put money into Indian space-tech companies and the sector was likely to boom into a big one.

"This historic decision paves the way for unprecedented growth and innovation, fostering a new era of space exploration and commercialisation in India," Sanjay Nekkanti, CEO, DhruvaSpace, said.

Suyash Singh, Co-founder and CEO, GalaxEye Space said this policy amendment is a very positive and much awaited move, en-

abling more private sector participation within the Indian Space Ecosystem. At GalaxEye, this means easier

Make in India for the World, he added Awais Ahmed, founder and CEO, Pixxel, said, "This significant policy shift marks a new era in the liberalisation of India's space in-

dustry. It will go a long way in fos-

tering an ecosystem ripe for

access to global capital invest-

ments, further fuelling our ideal to

innovation, growth, and global collaboration. Director General, SIA-India, Anil Prakash said by offering 100 per cent automatic routes for various activities, including manufacturing components and systems, the policy aims to generate employ-

tion, and foster self-reliance. "It aligns with 'Make In India' and 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' initiatives, facilitating the integration of

ment, promote technology absorp-

chains," Prakash said. Chennai-based Agnikul Cosmos,

which is aiming to launch its first sub-orbital rocket Agnibaan next month, welcomed the move. "There is finally the much needed clarity here. It is a big boost

for the sector as a whole and I think

this will help all of us in our capital

raise efforts and rapid growth plans," Agnikul Cosmos CEO Srinath Ravichandran said. Ravichandran described the announcement as a "momentous shift" that would herald a new era of collaborative exploration and technological advancement and

pave the way for unprecedented

economic growth. "India's space sector is poised at the brink of a transformative journey, ready to leverage these changes for the greater good of our industry and country," Dr Subba Rao Pavuluri, President SIA-India said. (PTI)



CBSE to conduct trials of open-book exams for classes 9-12; no plans to adopt format in boards

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) is planning a pilot run of Open-Book Exams (OBE) in selected schools for classes 9 to 12 later this year, according to offi-

The idea was floated in the last governing body meeting of the Board in December, 2023. Officials, however, said there is no plan to adopt the format in class 10 and 12 board exams.

"The CBSE is planning a pilot run of open-book assessments in selected schools, targeting subjects — English, Mathematics, and Science for Classes 9 and 10, and English, Mathematics, and Biology for Classes 11 and 12. The aim is to gauge the time taken by students to complete these tests and gather feedback from stakeholders.

"The plan is in line with recommendations made in the National Curriculum Framework. These tests would undergo a pilot phase in schools to evaluate various aspects such as completion time, suitability for formative and summative assessment, and stakeholders' perceptions," a senior board official said

Russian national booked by Goa police for sexually assaulting minor girl

PANAJI, Feb 22: A case has been registered against a Russian national for allegedly sexually assaulting a six-year-old girl, who also belongs to his country, in North Goa district, police said on Thursday.

The incident took place on the intervening night of February 4-5 when the victim, who is currently on a vacation in Goa with her parents, attended an overnight study camp organised by the accused at Arambol in North Goa.

She informed about it to her parents on Monday, as per a complaint filed by them with the Women and Child Protection Unit of Goa police.

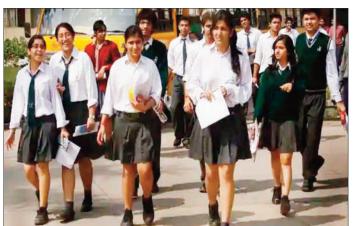
The accused, identified as Ilia Vasulev, has been conducting such study camps in Goa, mostly for the children of foreign nationals, according to police.

Superintendent (Women and Child Protection Unit) Bousette Silva told PTI that the accused "inappropriately touched the victim, which she narrated to her parents on Monday, much after the incident took place.

Following the complaint filed by the girl's parents on Monday, an FIR was registered against the accused under Indian Penal Code section 376 (rape), and provisions pertaining to sexual assault under the Goa Children's Act and the Protection Of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, he said.

"The police are on the lookout for the accused. We have written a letter to the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) to check his whereabouts and ascertain whether he is still in the country or has left for Russia," the official said. Silva said both the parents of the

victim are Russians. (PTI)



In an open-book exam, students are allowed to carry their notes, textbooks, or other study material and refer to them during the exam.

The pilot will be focused on assessing higher-order thinking skills, application, analysis, critical and creative thinking, and problem solving abilities. While the design, development, and review of Open Book Tests is proposed to be completed by June 2024, the pilot testing of the materials in schools is being planned in November-De-

Drawing from this experience, discussions within the curriculum committee emphasised the importance of high-quality textbooks and suggested involving teachers in the initial OBE trials to ensure standards akin to advanced placement exams

NATION

In the governing body meeting, the board also contemplated on making the teachers take the openbook exams first to grasp the "potential" of multiple answers in OBE questions.

The CBSE chairman stressed upon the need to learn from Delhi University's experiences to calibrate CBSE's OBE preparations effectively.

Jyoti Sharma, a professor from Delhi University, who was present at the meeting drew parallels with the Advanced Placement (AP) exams for US college entrance, lauding their question clarity and quality, advocating for a similar high standard in OBE content.

She suggested CBSE should consider AP questions as benchmark for drafting quality CBSE based on negative feedback from OBE content. (PTI)

Normalisation of scores likely to be done away with for CUET-UG, exam rejig underway: UGC chief

"The method could be used in

internal exams to promote innova-

tive thinking among students.

However, it is only in an ideation

phase, and there is no plan to adopt

the OBE format in the CBSE class

10 and 12 board examination," the

The CBSE had previously ex-

perimented with an Open Text-

Based Assessment (OTBA) format

for the year-end exams of Classes

9 and 11 for three years from 2014-

15 to 2016-17, but it was scrapped

official said.



NEW DELHI, Feb 22: Normalisation of scores for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG is likely to be done away with this year, with the National Testing Agency (NTA) planning a rejig of the crucial exam for its third edition, according to top officials.

The exam, which is spread over a month, is likely to be conducted in a shorter duration as the agency is contemplating a hybrid mode, including OMR sheets and a computer-based test. The move will also ensure that most of the students get a chance to take the exam in a city of their choice.

"The NTA is working on the possibility of conducting papers with a large registration in the OMR mode. This will help us choose a large number of schools as test centres. This will ensure that the students will get a centre within their town or city and do not have to travel to faraway places," University Grants Commission (UGC) Chairman M Jagadesh Kumar told PTI.

"Adopting the pen-and-paper mode for subjects with a large registration and a computer-based test for papers with a smaller registration will ensure that the CUET-UG can be conducted in a shorter duration unlike in the last two years. The hybrid mode promotes equal opportunities for all, ensuring that geographical constraints do not hinder the students' educational aspirations in rural and remote areas." Kumar said.

He said conducting the exam for a subject on a single day will eliminate the need for normalisation of scores. "For the last two years, we had to conduct the test for the same paper over a period of two or three days in our

endeayour to provide the first-choice centre to the students as much as possible. But this year, by adopting the OMR mode, a large number of centres will be available at schools and colleges, enabling us to conduct the test across the country on the same day. "If the test is conducted on multiple days for the same

paper, normalisation is required and it is a scientific

method," the UGC chairman said.

Students have been raising concerns about the normalisation of scores "unfairly" impacting their performance in the exam.

Another feature that is part of the CUET-UG's rejig plan is restricting students to appear for a maximum of

"This year, instead of attempting 10 papers, students will be permitted to write a maximum of six papers. The rationale behind this decision is that only a tiny percentage of students opted for 10 papers in last year's test. However, the scheduling of the papers becomes very complex, leading to conducting the test over several

"Since students can write six papers in different combinations, such as four domain papers, one language paper, one general test paper or three domain papers, two language papers and one general test paper, the CUET-UG can be scheduled over fewer days, which is good for the students," Kumar said.

The UGC chairman said the difficulty level of the questions in the CUET-UG will be moderate because students are more likely to perceive it as a fair and manageable challenge.

"Ensuring a moderate difficulty level in an entrance test for university admission can contribute to reducing the students' reliance on coaching centres. We want to keep the difficulty level of the questions in the CUET-UG moderate because students are more likely to perceive it as a fair and manageable challenge.

"Answering such reasonably difficult-level questions can improve the students' intrinsic motivation and selfefficacy, as they will believe in their ability to prepare for and perform well in the test without undue external help. This positive feeling experienced by the students diffuses from one batch to another and reduces their dependency on coaching," he said.

The CUET-UG is the second-largest entrance exam in the country in terms of the number of applicants. As many as 11.11 lakh candidates had appeared for the second edition of the exam.

"The hybrid mode acknowledges the importance of adapting to diverse testing environments for the convenience of the students. This will ensure that we will be able to announce the results by the third week of June. HEIs (higher educational institutes) can then carry out admissions and start the academic session by the end of July or beginning of August," Kumar said. (PTI)

Russian skier dead in Gulmarg avalanche, 7 rescued

GULMARG (JK), Feb 22: A Russia and his body has been Russian skier died while seven others, including a local guide, were rescued as an avalanche struck the ski slopes of Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir on Thursday, officials said.

The avalanche struck the Khilan Marg on Afarwat Peak near the Army Ridge at around 2 pm, trapping several skiers under its debris, the officials said.

According to police, the group of seven Russians and a local guide ventured into a non-ski zone in the Army Ridge area, which is avalanche prone.

"There was an avalanche warning but they still ventured into that zone and unfortunately one skier died," Gulmarg police station SHO Haroon Kar said.

As the news of the avalanche broke, a joint effort was initiated by the Gulmarg Ski Patrol of the Tourism Department, police and the Army to rescue the trapped skiers. The deceased was identified as Hanten from Moscow in

taken to the Tangmarg sub-district hospital for post-mortem, the police officer said.

The rescued persons were treated at a local hospital and one foreigner was being shifted to Srinagar for special treatment.

A government spokesperson said the ongoing 4th Khelo India Winter Games remain unaffected by the incident Jammu and Kashmir Sports

Council secretary Nuzhat Gull said all athletes participating in the ongoing 4th Khelo India Winter Games in Gulmarg were safe. "All Khelo India athletes are

safe after the avalanche hit Khilanmarg area of Gulmarg... All the fixtures are being run as per schedule," Gull posted on X.

The Winter Games began on Wednesday and will conclude on Sunday. A spokesman of the Sports Council said all precautionary measures were in place to ensure safety of the players. National Conference leader

Omar Abdullah, who was skiing in Gulmarg till Wednesday, prayed for the safety of the skiers.

"While the details are still sketchy some skiers are reportedly missing after an avalanche was triggered in the area around Gulmarg. It appears the skiers were skiing off the piste or groomed slopes in the 'back coun-

"Days like today remind us that while the skiing is fun, the fresh powder exhilarating & the visuals spectacular, skiing is not without its dangers & risk to lives. Praying that all the missing skiers are found alive & the reports of a casualty end up being unfounded," Abdullah said in a post on X.

The last avalanche in Gulmarg was in February last year, when two Polish skiers were killed and over a dozen were rescued.

Avalanches are very common in Gulmarg. In 2010, at least 17 soldiers were killed after an avalanche hit the Army's High Altitude Warfare School. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Himanta vows to clear

pattas getting lost or misplaced". He added these land rights shall also enable the beneficiaries to enjoy the benefits of other government schemes. Launching the distribution of land pattas under Mission Basundhara 2.0 from Dhemaji is a manifestation of the government's commitment towards safeguarding the land rights of the people of the state, he remarked."The distribution of land pattas is also an initiative on the part of the gov ernment to empower the people. 84 per cent of the beneficiaries under this scheme are from the scheduled caste (SC)/Scheduled Tribe (ST)/Other Backward Class (OBC) and other backward communities and therefore, granting them land pattas will ensure their empowerment," he concluded.

Manipur HC revokes

bench ruling in November 2000. "Courts cannot and should not expand jurisdiction to deal with the question as to whether a particular caste, sub-caste; a group or part of tribe or sub-tribe is included in any one of the Entries mentioned in the Presidential Orders issued under Article 341 and 342 particularly so when in Clause (2) of the said Article, it is expressly stated that said orders cannot be amended or varied except by law made by Parliament" the verdict of Supreme Court's Constitution bench in November 2000 said.

The constitution bench had elucidated that courts should not overstep their jurisdiction in determining such categorisations. Following the eruption of violence post the March 27 order, a series of petitions, including challenges to the high court directive, were presented to the Supreme Court.

The apex court, on May 17 of the same year, denounced the high court's directive as "obnoxious" and considered staying the order due to its perceived inaccuracies.

A bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud had said, "I will tell you (lawyers) one thing that the high court order was incorrect... I think we have to stay the order of the high court. The high court order is absolutely wrong." The apex court bench had made clear it will not deal with legal issues arising out of the Manipur High Court's decision on grant of reservation to majority Meiteis as the pleas challenging the order were pending with the larger division bench there.

Amid the legal discourse, the Supreme Court refrained from addressing the core legal aspects arising from the Manipur High Court's decision, as the challenges were pending before a larger division bench.

The court invited tribal participation, particularly from Kukis, in the ongoing legal proceedings related to the intra-court appeals. The violent unrest in Manipur, triggered by dissent over Meitei community's Scheduled Tribe status aspiration, underscores the complex demographic fabric of the region.

Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mainly in the hill districts. (PTI)

Centre giving priority

As a pilot project, we have launched that scheme in Banaskantha and Panchmahal districts here," he said. Mahatma Gandhi used to say that India's soul rests in her villages. Therefore, in order to create Viksit Bharat (developed India), we must have a strong rural economy, he added. "We are giving priority to each and every aspect of villages and our focus is on improving the lives of small farmers, on improving the health of livestock and how farmers get more income through allied activities such as fishing and bee-keeping. That is why we have decided to give Kisan credit cards to fishermen and cattle-rearers too," he said.

Modi said his government also gave seeds that are capable of fighting the effects of climate change. To protect livestock from the deadly foot-and-mouth disease, his government has launched a free vaccination drive for cattle at a cost of Rs 15,000 crore and nearly 60 crore jabs were already given, he added.

"We have also set up Kisan Samridhi Kendras across the country so that farmers get scientific solutions to their problems near their villages. We are also making arrangements to help farmers in making organic fertilis ers," he said. Referring to solar panel installations in fields and setting up of bio-gas plants which in turn produce bio-fertiliser from cow dung, the PM said his government wants to turn "anna data" into "urja data" and "uvarak data" (food grain growers into producers of energy and fertilisers). "We are providing solar-based pumps and helping farmers in installing solar plants in their fields. Under our GOBARdhan project, we will buy cow dung from farmers to produce gas. This bio-gas is then used for producing electricity for dairy plants. The biofertiliser produced during that process will be given back to farmers," Modi said.

The BJP government at the Centre is planning to create 10,000 FPOs or Farmer Producer Organisations or FPOs and nearly 8,000 have already been created, the prime minister added.

"These FPOs are big organisations of small farmers. This is our mission to turn small farmers into agri entrepreneurs and exporters. We are also providing crores of rupees as assistance to such FPOs and PACS (Primary Agricultural Credit Societies)," he said.

PM Modi informed the audience that his government took some important decisions during the cabinet meeting held late on Wednesday night. Among others, the government has decided to reduce the premium to be paid by farmers under the Livestock Insurance programme, he said. Referring to the past droughts in Gujarat and the hardships faced by people, Modi said Narmada river water has now changed the fortunes of the arid regions which were hit badly earlier. "We also constructed 60,000 Amrit Sarovars (lakes), which will help in strengthening the rural economy. Our efforts are to connect farmers with the latest technology, such as drip-irrigation. In Gujarat, this irrigation method has become popular over the years and the state government also provides assistance to farmers to adopt this irrigation technique," the PM said. (PTI)

Opposition creates ruckus

Ranoj Pegu over the matter. Speaker Biswajit Daimary, rejecting the adjournment motion notice, said though the matter is of importance, it can be discussed under other provisions and the government can reply to it. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika maintained in the House that no question paper leak has happened this year. The opposition members, however, were not pacified and as a ruckus ensued, Daimary adourned the proceedings for 10 minutes. When the House re-assembled, Congress MLAs and Gogoi once again tried to raise the issue and staged a walkout as the Speaker refused to allow their motion. (PTI)

KABS, Hindi speakers urge

community members to take initiative in maintaining peace and order in the district," urged KABS president Sohan Prasad Mahato In addition to KABS, numerous Hindi-speaking people have also echoed the same view of not disturbing peace and harmony in the region with their comments.

Preterm birth risk to increase

continents and socio-economic circumstances. "Given that climate influences childhood disease, social and financial costs will continue to rise as climate change progresses, placing increasing pressure on families and health services. "For example, asthma has been estimated to cost as much as USD 1.5 billion due to a single fire season in the future, while another study estimated the costs of a single case of childhood asthma at up to USD 23,573 in the coming years," said Bradshaw. Geography too dictated the health impacts of climate change, the researchers found. While extreme temperatures have led to higher preterm births in Australia's East Coast, Northern Territory, and Western Australia and enhanced respiratory issues in Queensland, similar temperatures have increased mortality rates in South Africa, they said. Action in terms of developing public health policies to counter these climate-related diseases, alongside efforts to reduce anthropogenic climate change, is required to protect current and future children, said lead researcher Lewis Weeda from The University of Western Australia. "Finding solutions and implementing climate adaptation and mitigation policies would positively impact multiple United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Climate change is universal and adversely affecting all countries and people, and we must prepare societies for mounting threats to child health," said Weeda. (PTI)

If they are short-sighted

Asked about various complex geopolitical challenges and diverse positions on them by key nations, he said the endeavour has to be to find middle ground. If you take UN Security Council reform, the biggest opponent is not a Western country, Jaishankar said. "So let's get the totality of the problem. I think the reality is we will have to battle bit by bit to create groups which will push for change," he said. "On many issues, you will get different combinations of countries and we'll have to live with a long period

of incremental progress before we get to some kind of landing point," he said. The Raisina Dialogue is India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-strategy. The three-day conference

began on Wednesday. The theme of the three-day conference is "Chaturanga: Conflict, Contest, Cooperate,

Chief Wildlife Wardens can declare wild boars vermin: Union minister

WAYANAD (KERALA), Feb 22: Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav on Thursday said that Chief Wildlife Wardens (CWW) are empowered under the the Wildlife Protection Act to declare wild boars as vermin and therefore the law does not need to be amended.

The minister also emphasised that the CWWs have the power under the Act to permit trapgently and cautiously"

nificance as the Kerala assembly recently passed a resolution seeking to get the wildlife protection law amended to prevent human-animal conflict in the state

One of the suggested amendments in the res-

ping, capture and killing of problematic animals, but urged the state to use this power "dili-

The union minister's statement assumes sig-

PUBLIC NOTICE

No. SSA/PM-POSHAN/Engagement/171/2024/10533

In pursuant to the advertisement published vide No. SSA-18011(12)/1/2023-MDM-Sarba Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)/I/356476/2023 dated 04.12.2023, it is for general information to all concerned that the interview schedule for the posts under PM-POSHAN as mentioned below:

Post Name	Date of Schedule of Interview	
Accounts Assistant [For State Nodal Office]	01.03.2024	
Accounts Officer[For State Nodal Office]	01.03.2024	
Accounts Officer [For District Mission Office]	02.03.2024 and 04.03.2024	
District Programme Manager/For District Mission Office	05 03 2024 and 06 03 2024	

The date-wise list of short-listed candidates is uploaded in the official website of Samagra Shiksha Axom at https://ssa.assam.gov.in

The short-listed candidates are requested to attend in the interview from 9.30 am onwards as per the scheduled date at the State Mission Office, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19 with the original testimonial relating to Educational Qualification, Experience and other relevant documents, etc. Sd/- Executive Director

Janasanyog/DF/2800/23/23-Feb-24

Samagra Shiksha Axom Kahilipara, Guwahati-19 olution was to declare or classify as vermin wild boars that come out of the forests and multiply in human-inhabited areas

Yadav, while speaking to the media after a meeting with the local administration and forest officials here, said, "No amendment is required. Under section 11 of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, enough powers have been vested with the Chief Wildlife Warden of the state.

"So, the power is already there. Under that power, he can issue permission to trap, capture or kill any problematic animal. I urge the government of Kerala that they diligently and cautiously use this power to protect the farming community and their crops.

Later in a post on social media platform X, he blamed the Kerala government and the local representatives of Wayanad and adjoining regions for allegedly ignoring the escalating human-animal conflict in the district.

"This is rather unfortunate and has led to people losing lives. We request the state to be prompt in its response so that lives can be saved and wildlife can flourish," the minister said on

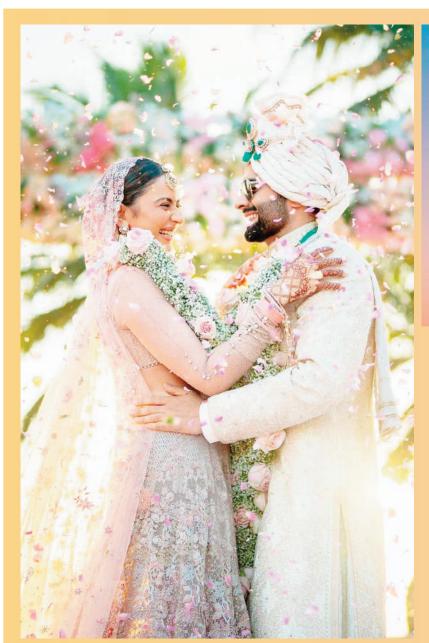
said that the central government has enhanced the compensation for human casualties in animal attacks to ₹ 10 lakh from ₹ 5 lakh. He said that the payment is to be made by the state government which is provided the re-

During the press briefing, the union minister

quired funding based upon the Annual Plan of Operation (APO) raised by it. "The payment has to be done by the state government. They should do it immediately and

in a transparent manner," he said.

Yadav requested the state government to create a suitable mechanism and protocol for payment of the compensation in a transparent manner. (PTI)





RAKUL PREET SINGH MARRIES JACKKY BHAGNANI IN GOA

MUMBAI, Feb 22: Bollywood actors Rakul Preet Singh and Jackky Bhagnani tied the knot in Goa at a five-star hotel on Wednesday. The couple got married as per Punjabi and Sindhi ceremonies, in the presence of their family and industry friends including Akshay Kumar, Tiger Shroff and Shilpa Shetty Kundra. Singh, 33, was seen wearing a pastel shade lehenga, while Bhagnani, 39, opted for beige sherwani. (PTI)

Varun Dhawan, Janhvi Kapoor to star in 'Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari'

Decision to do more live stunts in 'Crakk' completely technical: Aditya Datt



NEW DELHI, Feb 22: (PTI) Director Aditya Datt says he opted for more live stunts than visual effects in his latest film "Crakk" as he wanted to give the audience "quality over quantity". The filmmaker, known for "Aashiq Banaya Aapne", "Table No. 21" and "Commando 3", praised leading man and producer Vidyut Jammwal for taking the risk both physically and financially.

"I would like to explore VFX more than what I have going forward. But as far as 'Crakk' was concerned, my decision to do more live stunts was completely technical. I didn't want the audience to come in and say the concept and everything was great, but the VFX were so tacky.

"So, I thought I'll give you something real, I'll give you quality over quantity. Plus, I have support from the actors who can do that stuff on their own. But the risk is involved in (doing live stunts). That's why other actors don't do that, but then I have an actor (Jammwal) who is crazy enough to say 'Take the real shot and I'll give it to you'. That's where 'Crakk' lies," Datt told PTI in an interview here.

lies," Datt told PTI in an interview here.

VFX are a boon to cinema but are also expensive and one needs an insane amount of money which generally Hollywood has. "We also have it (funds) here but it's sort of constrained to an extent where the timelines, craft, or hiring that kind of people are concerned. So, we chose to do a little more real stuff so that we are not that dependent on VFX," he added. Also starring Arjun Rampal, Nora Fatehi and Amy Jackson, "Crakk" follows the journey of a man named Siddhu (Jammwal) from the slums of Mumbai to the world of extreme underground sports.

Datt said the film, billed as the first extreme sports action film in India, will be a grand big-screen experience for the viewers. "This is a story we have told with a lot of passion and love. Everything you see is a new attempt at narrating a film. People are not going to see the same old, mundane moments, action or storytelling. This has been shot and narrated for the big screen," he added. Asked if he would like to create a "Crakk" franchise, the filmmaker said he hadn't thought about a sequel yet. "(I'm) scared to think so far. But I would love for the audience to see 'Crakk' so that we can make 'Crakk 2'." "Crakk" hits the screens on February 23. Jammwal has produced the film via Action Hero Films. (PTI)



MUMBAI, Feb 22: Filmmaker Alex Garland's upcoming movie "Civil War" will make its debut in Indian theatres on April 12, PVRI-NOX Pictures.

The film, dubbed as an "adrenaline-fuelled thrill ride through a near-future fractured America", is written and directed by Garland, best known for critically-acclaimed sci-fi hits "Ex Machina" and "Annihilation"

"Civil War" features an ensemble cast of Kirsten Dunst, Wagner Moura, Stephen McKinley Henderson, Cailee Spaeny, Jesse Plemons, and Nick Offerman.

The film's story takes place in a near-future where the United

States finds itself embroiled in a rapidly escalating second Civil War, pitting the oppressive government against the separatist 'Western Forces' led by Texas and

California.

The plot revolves around a courageous team of journalists who embark on a perilous journey across the war-torn nation.

Dunst plays the role of a photojournalist whose lens serves as a window into the brutal realities of a society torn asunder by conflict. As chaos reigns and allegiances shift, the journalists must navigate treacherous terrain, relying on their instincts and resilience to uncover the truth amidst the turmoil, according to the official description. Kamal Gianchandani, CEO of PVR Pictures Limited & PVR Limited, said he is excited for the

India release of "Civil War".

"This heart-pounding film is a must-see for fans of political thrillers and dystopian fiction, discussing important subject matter and posing thought-provoking questions about the future of America. It's a spectacular moviewatching experience & a film on an unprescedented some of scale.

an unprecedented sense of scale.
"The buzz surrounding 'Civil
War' is palpable, and we are excited to bring this experience to
our audiences on 12th April," he
added. (PTI)



MUMBAI, Feb 22: Bollywood stars Varun Dhawan and Janhvi Kapoor are reuniting for romance drama film "Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari", the makers announced on Thursday.

Backed by Karan Johar's Dharma Production, the movie will be written and directed by filmmaker Shashank Khaitan. It will be released in theatres on April 25, 2025.

"Your Sanskari is on his way to get his Kumari! This love story wrapped with entertainment is coming to the big screens! #SunnySanskariKiTulsiKumari in cinemas, 18th April 2025," the studio posted on Instagram.

"Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari" will reunite Dhawan and Kapoor, who most recently worked together for Nitesh Tiwari's relationship drama "Bawaal".

The project reteams Dhawan with Khaitan, who directed the actor in "Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania" (2014) and "Badrinath Ki Dulhania" (2017).

Khaitan had also directed 2018's "Dhadak", which marked the acting debut of Kapoor.

"Sunny Sanskari Ki Tulsi Kumari" will be produced by Hiroo Yash Johar, Karan Johar, Apoorva Mehta and Khaitan. (PTI)

Was waiting to explore horror genre again, says Ajay Devgn on 'Shaitaan'

MUMBAI, Feb 22: Bollywood star Ajay Devgn on Thursday said that horror and supernatural stories are among his favourite genres, and he is thrilled to explore it again in Shaitaan after the success of his 2003 hit Bhoot.

Directed by Vikas Bahl,
Shaitaan, is described as a gripping tale with elements of black
magic. "It's not that we (superstars) don't want to do horror
films. If we get something interesting, then why not?... I like this
genre and I was waiting to explore it again. When I did 'Bhoot'
we got a lot of appreciation after
that I didn't get any script that
was good in this genre," Devgn

said at the trailer launch event of Shaitaan.

The film also features south star Jyotika and R Madhavan. It is a remake of the 2023 Gujarati horror film Vash, which was written and directed by Krishnadev Yagnik.

Devgn said that he liked the basic story of the original film and decided to make it in Hindi. "The base of the story was very strong hence we did this film, and we adapted the film in our own way," he said.

Shaitaan features R Madhavan as the antagonist and Jyothika as Devgn's wife. Actor Janki Bodiwala, who starred in the Gujarati film, Vash, also features in the remake.

When asked if Devgn and Madhavan thought about swapping their roles, Devgn said he wasn't keen to play the negative role as he connected the most with the emotions of a helpless father in the movie.

"When we started shooting, the first thing Maddy (Madhavan) told me was - 'Why aren't you doing this role, why have you given it to me?'. I told him, 'I really feel for the character of the father, so I will not be able to do justice to the other character. It's a stronger character though," the actor said.



Madhavan called Devgn a 'sherdil' (braveheart) and 'Singham' of the industry for being kind enough to pass on the meaty role in Shaitaan. "I can really hope and pray that I could do justice to the kindness that has been shown to me by Ajay sir and his team, I'm very thank-

Bahl, known for films such as Queen, Super 30 and Goodbye, said he was 'nervous' about making a supernatural movie, a first for him. (PTI)

It's a typical Indian wicket with cracks and it will turn: India batting coach Vikram Rathour

RANCHI, Feb 22: India batting coach Vikram Rathour on Thursday said the Ranchi wicket hosting the fourth Test against England has "enough cracks" and would favour the spinners but insisted they have enough firepower to cope with any condition.

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah has been the top-wicketbe missing the fourth Test after reporters on the eve of the match. being given a break to manage

his workload.

The move has led many to believe that India will go for a rank turner for the fourth Test beginning on Friday.

"Everytime we play in India, there's question mark on the pitch ... It's a typical Indian wicket, there are cracks, this wicket altaker of the series but he would ways had cracks," Rathour told

"It will turn, but how much it will turn and from when we are not sure. But we have enough balance in our team."

He said Bumrah is absolutely fine but it was not "advisable" to play him continuously. The India spearhead has bowled 80.5 overs in three Tests, taking 17 wickets

at an average of 13.64. "I think every Test match is a

crucial test match, to be honest. With WTC points, every game is crucial. Even we would love Bumrah to play all the games,'

"But unfortunately that is not very advisable because the kind of workload he has had in the last three games. He has really bowled well and with a lot of

heart, a lot of effort. "For the kind of schedule we

have in the future, with IPL and all, it was felt by everybody involved that he should be given a break. Otherwise he is absolutely fine physically. But it was felt that it is better that he gets a break because there was hardly any turnaround time between the

India's top-order batter KL Rahul, who is doing rehab after too was ruled out of the fourth game, so we are focusing on this Test and seems doubtful for Dharamsala.

"For me either he is fit or he is not. At the moment he is not fit. I am not sure what percent he is fit at the moment and what is the stage," he said.

"I am not sure, the medical team will be able to advise that but as far as we are concerned he

team." Asked about players' skipoing matches in Ranji Trophy, Rathour said: "It's the selectors' job to pick the 15. This question is better asked to them, I used to be a selector but I'm not anymore. "At the moment we see that people who have done well in domestic cricket are promoted. It's good everybody should get is not fit and not available for this chances." (PTI)

Messi gets an assist, Inter Miami open MLS season with 2-0 win over Real Salt Lake

Feb 22: Lionel Messi had two Real Salt Lake defenders on either side of him, two more a few yards in front of him. He quickly tapped the ball away from them all with his left foot, to a spot where only teammate Robert Taylor could reach.

Moments later, Inter Miami had the first goal of the Major League Soccer season.

Taylor's goal in the 39th minute set the tone, Diego Gómez added an insurance score in the 83rd minute and Inter Miami — to start Messi's first full season with the club opened the 29th season of MLS with a 2-0 win over Real Salt Lake on Wednesday night.

Messi was in midseason form, darting through and around defenders, almost giving the sellout crowd what they wanted to see by nearly scoring on a free kick and then a corner kick midway through the first half.

"I think the eyes of the world are on Inter Miami, and I'm hoping that they're able to deliver on that and whatever expectations people have," said MLS Commissioner Don Garber, who was at Wednesday's match. "Mostly, I'd just like his experience to be good, the experience of the team to be successful, how they're positioned both here in the league



the story that I think is most important to us." Messi had 11 goals in 14 total matches with Inter Miami last season, leading the team to a Leagues Cup championship — its first-ever trophy - shortly after he stunned much

2 1/2-year contract worth around \$150 million. He appeared in only six MLS matches in 2023, scoring once. Injuries slowed him late in the 2023 season and Inter Miami, which was way out

of the postseason picture when

Messi joined last summer, didn't

But the craze surrounding him

is not fading. The lines for fans to buy his jersey, which was MLS' top-seller last year and has a new sponsor design this year, was out the door of the team store. He had the assist on the first goal and set up Luis Suarez one of his former Barcelona teammates, like fellow Inter Miami stars Sergio Busquets and Jordi Alba — with the pass that Suarez turned into the assist on Gómez's goal. "I'm so happy," Suarez said. They looked every bit like a contender. That wasn't the case in the exhibition season.

Inter Miami started its season with an international preseason tour with seven matches in five different countries — netting roughly 25,000 miles of travel, a total of eight goals, multiple apologies to refund-seeking fans after Messi missed a game in Hong Kong because of injury, and just one win.

But they completely controlled the first half of Wednesday's match against a team that comfortably made the Western Conference playoffs last season. Messi even flicked the ball around Salt Lake defender Andrew Brody who was injured and down near the top of the penalty box late in the half, weaving around him with ease. Brody

about what this team can do, I think the first half showed them," Inter Miami coach Gerardo

"Tata" Martino said. Inter Miami, according to Fan-Duel Sportsbook, enters the season as the favorite to win just about everything. Messi's team is listed as the 5-2 favorite to win the MLS Cup, while Messi and Suarez are the top two picks to win the Golden Boot — given to the league's leading scorer.

The club is basically an evenmoney favorite to win the Supporters Shield as MLS' top regular-season club. And if someone wagered \$200 on Inter Miami making the Eastern Conference playoffs right now, that bettor would stand to profit exactly \$1 if Messi's club makes the field — meaning it is considered to be an absolute postseason lock. It should be noted that the club has yet to win a playoff match. Inter Miami has been to the playoffs twice, getting eliminated right away on both occasions, both times by 3-0 scores.

"You don't have to jump the gun," Martino said. "It was just one game." But Messi moves the needle — every needle — that much. He turns 37 in June and the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner still attracts attention, on and off the field, like almost no one

before: Stokes on Ranchi pitch

I've never seen

something like that

RANCHI, Feb 22: England captain Ben Stokes believes that the pitch being prepared for the fourth Test against India, starting from February 23 at the JSCA International Stadium, is something which he hasn't been before and has no idea over how it

The pitch for the Ranchi Test has attracted attention due to its dark brown, super dry and cracked nature. Vice-captain Ollie Pope had said on Wednesday that the pitch has already got platey cracks, indicating that turn and variable bounce will come into play from the word go.

will play throughout the match.

"It looked interesting, didn't it? I don't know, I've never seen something like that before so I have got no idea. I don't know what could happen. If you looked down one side of oppoto what I am used to seeing, especially out in India. It looked green and grassy up in the changing-rooms, but then you go out there, it looked different. Very dark and crumbly and quite a few cracks in it," said Stokes to reporters. Though a spin-friendly pitch will bring England's spinners Tom Hartley, Shoaib Bashir and Rehan Ahmed heavily into the equation at Ranchi, where they aim to square the five-game series against India, there has been talk of Ollie Robinson replacing Mark Wood in the play-

ing eleven. Robinson's last Test match for England was the third Ashes game at Headingley last year, where he bowled just 11.2 overs in the first innings before a back spasm forced him on the sidelines for the rest of the series.

Stokes feels Robinson has put in the hard yards to get a look into the Ranchi Test, which will also be his first time of playing in India. "He has worked incredibly hard while he has been out here. It is tough for someone like Ollie, who's played such a big part in the game over the last two years, where he has not taken part in a game and the stuff he has done away from the game itself has been very good.

"I told him he has been a great example of doing the right things and waiting your turn if it comes. Not playing the first three Tests can be tough and disappointing. But the way he has cracked on and got his fitness stuff in and not let disappointment get in the way of a potential chance that might come in this series."

"He's got unbelievable skills to site ends it just looked different be a successful bowler anywhere in the world. What we've seen in England is he's very skilful, but we've seen more than that in Pakistan. It's similar but different here, but the skill he possesses, he can find any movement, and his release point is always going to be dangerous."

> "The skill will always be there. But since that chat (in 2022, where he was lambasted for his fitness levels), he's worked on everything I thought that would get the best out of him, but also the team. Having Ollie Robinson able to bowl three spells and back it up the next day is going to do any team the world of good." Asked about his possibility of bowling at Ranchi, Stokes remained non-committal. "Before I had surgery I was told 12 to 13 weeks before I could start

Lewandowksi, Osimhen trade goals as Barca draw 1-1 at Napoli in 1st leg of CL last 16



NAPLES, ITALY, Feb 22: It was hyped as a matchup between high-scoring center forwards Robert Lewandowski and Victor Osimhen and both strikers found the net in a 1-1 draw between Barcelona and Napoli in the first leg of the Champions League round of 16 on Wednesday.

Lewandowski shot through the legs of Napoli captain Giovanni Di Lorenzo and inside the near post on the hour mark for his 93rd goal in the top club compe-

Osimhen replied 15 minutes later with a shot from near the penalty spot after leaving his marker on the ground for his sixth goal in Napoli's last six home matches in the Champions League.

"We conceded practically nothing besides that goal," Barcelona coach Xavi Hernández said. "I really liked the way

team played." The second leg is scheduled for March 12 in Spain.

Porto beat Arsenal 1-0 in the night's other match.

Napoli had struggled until Osimhen's goal to construct much of anything in the debut of new coach Francesco Calzona, who was hired only 48 hours before kickoff by the struggling Serie A

"It was a good performance Meret. (AP)

against a strong team with great players," Di Lorenzo said. "We were solid. It's a good starting

"We had practically 11/2 train-

Lorenzo added. "This was a small step forward.' Osimhen was playing his first match for Napoli since returning from the Africa Cup of Nations,

ing sessions (with Calzona)," Di

where he helped Nigeria reach the final. "Victor is a great champion, a great professional, and he can give us a hand," Di Lorenzo said. Barcelona is back in the

knockout rounds after two con-

secutive group-stage elimina-

tions. It still had Lionel Messi the last time it made it to the round of 16. Barcelona has been eliminated in the Copa del Rey, is eight points behind leader Real Madrid in the Spanish league and Xavi recently announced he

will leave the club at the end of the season. Napoli has won only one of its last six matches and is only ninth in the Italian league standings, which led to Walter Mazzarri

being fired on Monday. Barcelona controlled at the start and produced a series of shots on target that were stopped by Napoli goalkeeper Alex

It has been a surreal experience: Young India forward Araijeet Singh Hundal

forward Araijeet Singh Hundal playing for the senior Indian men's team at the FIH Pro League and his goal during the shootout against the Netherlands gave him a lot of confidence. Though India ended up losing the tie 2-4 against the World No. 1 team on Wednesday, it was a lot of learning for the 20-year-old Araijeet.

"It has been a surreal experience. Competing against toptier teams such as the Netherlands and Australia, receiving encouragement from both seniors and the coach, is genuinely delightful, and it has also been a valuable learning experience for me," Araijeet said in a Hockey India (HI) release. India kicked off their campaign in Bhubaneswar with a convincing 4-1 victory over



Spain, followed by a thrilling 2-2 (4-2) shootout win against the Netherlands.

India then lost 4-6 to Australia but bounced back with a 1-0 triumph over Ireland to conclude the Bhubaneswar leg on a high. Moving to Rourkela, India carried their momentum from the Bhubaneswar leg, sealing a 2-2 (8-7) shootout win against Spain in a closely contested match.

In yet another nail-biting en-

counter, India, trailing 0-1 at half-time against the Netherands came back to level the score and took the game into a shootout, which they lost 2-4. Araijeet and Lalit Kumar Upadhyay were on target for

against the Netherlands. They advised me to keep an open mindset, play freely, and avoid putting unnecessary pressure on myself," said the Punjab

India during the shootout

voungster. "I would like to thank the coach for providing me with the opportunity to take the shot. I would also like to thank my seniors for encouraging me before I stepped up. It helped me with my nerves.

"I am glad that my shot was on target as it certainly boosted my confidence in my game." India will next play Australia

Focus on young Indian stars as WPL 2nd edition starts with Mumbai-Delhi face-off offers a similar story. Sadhu did WPL contract, but her participanot get a single game despite

BENGALURU, Feb 22: The second edition of the Women's Premier League, beginning here on Friday with a high-profile match between defending champions Mumbai Indians and runners-up Delhi Capitals, will be optimistic about meeting its existential purpose of giving a wider platform to promising homegrown talents.

The foreign stars glittered brightly in the inaugural edition held in Mumbai, and the Indians will be hoping to hog some of the limelight this year as the tournament takes a multi-city format shape with New Delhi being the other host city.

While Capitals' skipper Meg Lanning, who has now retired from international cricket, took the Orange Cap last year for the highest run-getter, the Purple Cap went to Hayley Matthews of Mumbai for taking 16 wickets. Amid this surge of overseas players, the Indian cricketers generally struggled for consistency and impact in the previous year, but now



some of the young domestic stars will eye this WPL with genuine

Let's take Shreyanka Patil of Royal Challengers Bangalore as a case in point. During WPL 2023, she was a wide-eyed young cricketer who was awestruck to rub shoulders with some of the finest names in women's cricket.

She played seven matches, but the spotlight was understandably on players such as Smriti Mandhana or Ellyse Perry or Sophie

-

Devine.

But in the last 10 months or so, Patil has built a place of her own. She earned her maiden India cap in both Test and ODIs in December last year, besides making her mark in the Caribbean Premier League for the Guyana Amazon Warriors.

In this interim, the 21-year-old has also added more arrows to her quiver in the form of power-hitting at the death overs

Titas Sadhu of Delhi Capitals

being in the squad but this year the West Bengal player has a changed

After making her India debut in the Hangzhou Asian Games against Bangladesh, the 19-yearold has grown in stature.

The medium pacer's 4-1-6-3 spell helped India beat Sri Lanka in the Asian Games final while defending a meagre target of 117.

Sadhu proved that that performance was no flash in the pan when she grabbed four for 17 against Australia in Mumbai last month, powering India to a rare T20I win

ver the Aussies. So, it will be hard for Delhi management to overlook her claim to be in the starting eleven

against Mumbai, or at least in a few subsequent matches. The Capitals also have in their ranks a talent who is eager to stamp her mark in the WPL -

Minnu Mani. player from her state to sign a tion last year was limited to just three matches and two innings to

But since then, Minnu has appeared in four WT20Is for India and has shown promise with her crafty off-break bowling.

While it is certain that her brand of bowling will be put to test at the Chinnaswamy Stadium, Minnu has a big chance to brave the odds and make a mighty impression which only adds more torque to her forward journey.

But then the tournament is not just about contenders, it is also about the trailblazers.

The outings of Harmanpreet Kaur, who will have to tame expectations that are generally placed on the title holders, Mandhana, who has the onerous task of landing RCB a maiden title across WPL and IPL, and the UP Warriorz duo of Alyssa Healy and Chamari Athapaththu, two of the best women batters in contempo-The Kerala cricketer is the first rary game, will be closely watched. (PTI)

Ranji Trophy quarterfinals:

Big boys Mumbai, Karnataka,

TN, Saurashtra eye semis berth

tenders to enter the quarterfinals.

Now, they are standing at a point

of no return, as even the slightest

slip can throw them out at the quar-

terfinals stage, beginning across

time champions Mumbai, strong

contenders Karnataka and Tamil

Nadu, giant-killers Vidarbha and

Baroda, the stonewalling Saurash-

tra besides Madhya Pradesh and

Andhra, who are capable of spring-

So, here's a closer look at the

A depleted Mumbai will hope to

make the most of their current

form when they face Baroda here

Without middle-order batter

Shreyas Iyer, who has been strug-

gling for fitness, and star all-

rounder Shivam Dube, who has

been sidelined with a bilateral side

strain. Mumbai have their task cut out against Baroda at the BKC

While Dube could be unavail-

able for the remainder of the sea-

son. the Mumbai squad has been

bolstered with the inclusion of

India's U-19 World Cup star

Having recorded the most points

(37) in the Elite Group B, Mumbai

have been in red-hot form with

their defeat to Uttar Pradesh at the

Wankhede Stadium being an ex-

With Dube unavailable, Mumbai

will hope for right-handed opener

Bhupen Lalwani, who has struck

493 runs in seven games at 49.3

with one century and five fifties,

Mohit Avasthi has been Mum-

bai's key weapon with 31 wickets

from six matches including three

fifers and as many Player of the

Match awards, and he has formed

a potent attack with Royston Dias

(17) and left-arm spinner Shams

Skipper Ajinkya Rahane's form

has been a concern but Mumbai

will hope for fireworks from

Prithvi Shaw, who has made a

comeback midway through the

However, Mumbai will feel they

are favourites given Baroda's re-

cent form — three draws and one

loss - in the last four games de-

spite Shashwat Rawat's (628 runs)

chances against a formidable Kar-

nataka when they meet at the VCA

Vidarbha will fancy their

Vidarbha are the only team apart

from Mumbai to have recorded

five wins in Group A and playing

in their backyard will help their

confidence against Karnataka, who

finished second in Group C behind

But Vidarbha will feel the ab-

consistency with the bat.

Ground in Nagpur.

to continue his run.

Mulani (23).

season.

There are familiar faces -- 41-

India from Friday.

ing a surprise or two.

four last eight clashes.

from Friday.

Musheer Khan.

Confident India face selection dilemma; England aim for redemption in potential series-decider

Bumrah's absence is a concern but an assertive and adaptive India will have the edge against England's seemingly depth-less 'Bazball' approach when the two sides clash in the potentially series-deciding fourth Test beginning here on Friday.

From the dry heat of Rajkot to the much cooler confines of Ranchi, the temperature shift would be the only soothing factor for the Englishmen who have let it slip against the resilient hosts and are trailing 1-2.

Eyeing a 17th series win on the trot at home, India have been near invincible since the shock defeat to Alastair Cook's England in 2012. After that, India have won a staggering 38 out of 47 Tests, and have lost just thrice (two each versus Australia and England) when challenges on home turf.

Captaining a depleted batting line-up in the absence of Virat Kohli, KL Rahul and an out-of-form Shrevas Iver, Rohit Sharma has found answers from the young guns, whose performance has been the biggest takeaway from the series so far.

Whether it is Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has maintained an impressive average of 109 with a total of 545 runs, or Sarfaraz Khan, who ended his prolonged wait for a Test debut with a blazing 66-ball 62 in Rajkot, or Shubman Gill, gradually settling in at No.3, India's next generation of batters are showcasing how a seamless transition happens.

As for replacing Bumrah, who has been the top wicket-taker (17) of the series which was expected to be dominated by spinners, it could well be India's Achilles' heel in Ranchi. Bumrah has been rested after bowling a little more than 80 overs in the three gone-by Tests.

His reverse-swing mastery on day two of the Vizag Test during a six-wicket burst, was the biggest contributing factor in the 106-run win that levelled the series 1-1.

On a docile Rajkot wicket too, Bumrah

TEZPUR, Feb 22: Featuring various sporting and

cultural events for three days, the 26th Annual Sports

& Cultural Meet of Tezpur University, a celebration

that brings together students from various disciplines

& Joint Secretary, Board of Control for Cricket in

India (BCCI) graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

The event started with lighting of the Olympic Torch,

followed by flag hoisting by the Vice Chancellor of

the University, Prof Shambhu Nath Singh followed by

crowd, Prof Singh said that Annual Meet serves not

only as an opportunity for the students to demonstrate

their co-curricular activities, but it is also an occasion

WPL has played a big role in

improving standards of domestic

Indian players: Meg Lanning

Addressing the participants and the enthusiastic

Devajit Saikia, Advocate General, Govt. of Assam

of the University, kicked off on Thursday.

BENGALURU, Feb 22: Despite

entering its second year, the

Women's Premier League (WPL)

has already contributed immensely

to improve the standard of domes-

tic Indian players, reckoned Delhi

Capitals captain Meg Lanning here

Lanning, who has the experi-

ence of touring around the world

for several other T20 leagues

alongside winning five World

Cups, has little doubt that the de-

velopment of WPL and the players

would hit the next level in the

nificant improvement in the local

Indian players from what I've seen

so far. I think WPL has played a

big role in that among other fac-

tors," Lanning said here ahead of

the WPL opening fixture between

Delhi and Mumbai Indians on Fri-

"It's (WPL) only going to get

bigger every year. There are a lot

KOHIMA, Feb 22: Nagaland is

all set to host the wrestling event

as part of the Khelo India Univer-

sity Games 2023 Ashtalakshmi

from February 23 to 25 at Indira

Gandhi Stadium (IGS) here, an of-

Addressing a press conference at

the venue, the Secretary of Youth

Resources and Sports (YRS), Na-

galand, Anthony Ngullie, said that

while Assam is the main host the

games 2023, all other northeastern

states, except Manipur, will host

host the wrestling event, he said.

Nagaland has been selected to

Nagaland chief minister Neiphiu Rio will grace the commencement

ficial said on Thursday.

one event each.

"There's been some really sig-

on Thursday.

years to come.

the university song.



made in-roads giving India crucial breakthroughs.

Keeping in mind the seaming conditions in Dharamsala for the fifth Test and the hectic IPL season ahead. Bumrah has been given a break, making Mohammed Siraj the

It will be a toss-up between Bengal duo of Mukesh Kumar and an uncapped Akash Deep for the second pacer's slot in Ranchi.

in Ranji Trophy, Mukesh is not only more experienced but also partnered Bumrah in the Vizag Test. He, however, bowled just 12 overs taking one wicket across both innings.

think-tank will take the gamble of giving another debut cap or persist with Mukesh, who has been average at best.

History suggests that the JSCA Stadium pitch will suit a plan featuring two seamers and three spinners.

tel finished runners up.

to learn camaraderie, community spirit and a sense of

urged the students to take up co-curricular activities.

He said that the BCCI has started the Women's Pre-

mier League (WPL), a Twenty20 cricket franchise

league in India, where women cricketers have the op-

portunity to excel. He urged the TU students to pursue

a career in sports as well. Shri Saikia also appreciated

the March past contingent of the University for their

disciplined display of skill. The major attraction of the

first day's event was March Past competition, fol-

lowed by a host of other sports activities and cultural

events. Bordoichila Women's Hostel and Patkai Men's

Hostel emerged winners in the March Past competi-

tion. Transit Men's Hostel and Dhansiri Women's hos-

Speaking on the occasion, Advocate General Saikia

England brought in off-spinner Shoaib Bashir to go alongside Tom Hartley, replacing leg-spinner Rehan Ahmed.

They have another off-spin option in parttimer Joe Root, who has more overs (107) under his belt than runs (77) in this series.

India, on the other hand, have preferred the conventional two-pacer-three-spinner combination and it's unlikely that Axar Patel would be recalled. The team is expected to stick to Ravichandran Ashwin, Kuldeep Yaday and Rayindra Jadeia

Historically, the Ranchi pitch has proven deceptive for the visiting teams.

In the last Test here in 2019, South Africa were blown away by the duo of Mohammed Shami and Umesh Yadav, who shared 10 wickets between them, as against the eight by the spin trio of Ashwin, Jadeja and Shahbaz Nadeem.

History should repeat itself," the local groundsman told PTI.

For the 'Bazball' inspired England, the win in Hyderabad has become a distant memory and a repeat of 2021 looks likely when India bounced back to win the four-

The record 434-run thrashing in Rajkot has triggered criticism of England's socalled aggressive 'Bazball' approach. It seems to have found a match in India after tasting success against New Zealand, South Africa and Pakistan and Australia to an extent. The go-for-strokes style might have helped the likes of Zak Crawley and Ben Duckett, who swung his bat around for a stunning 153 in Rajkot, but it has also doomed the likes of Joe Root and Jonny Bairstow.

Root was seen as their main batter to cope with the spin challenge but the way he reverse scooped to Bumrah at Rajkot summed up the disarray he is in.

The desperation to find a way out can be judged from skipper Ben Stokes expediting his rehab from a knee injury by opting to bowl at the nets ahead of the fourth Test.

The pace attack will once again be led by James Anderson and he will pair up with the fresh legs of Ollie Robinson, who has been

brought in for Mark Wood. Squads: India: Rohit Sharma (C), Yashasvi

Jaiswal, Shubman Gill, Rajat Patidar, Sarfaraz Khan, Dhruv Jurel (WK), KS Bharat (WK), Devdutt Padikkal, R Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Kuldeep Yadav, Mohd. Siraj, Mukesh Kumar, Akash Deep.

England XI: Ben Stokes (C), Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Joe Root, Jonny Bairstow, Shoaib Bashir, Ben Foakes, Tom Hartley, Ollie Pope, Ollie Robinson, James Anderson. Match starts at 9.30am (IST). (PTI)

MUMBAI, Feb 22: After a Fazal who called time on his career month and half of topsy-turvy ride, after the last group stage game, in eight teams have managed to steer which they crushed Haryana by themselves clear of other 24 con-115 runs.

Skipper Akshay Wadkar (431 runs), Dhruv Shorey (427) and former Karnataka batter Karun Nair (391) have been at the forefront of Vidarbha's charge with the bat while Aditya Sarwate and Aditya Thakare have handled the responsibility well in the bowling depart-

ment with 30 wickets apiece. The unavailability of Devdutt Padikkal (556 runs in 4 matches at 92.66) will be felt in Karnataka camp but the likes of Manish Pandey (464) and Sharath Srinivas (429) can shoulder the batting responsibility.

Pacer Vysakh Vijaykumar's allround brilliance will also be a key factor for Karnataka.

Some of Saurashtra's all-time greats have travelled to Coimbatore to take on Tamil Nadu, who have made it to the Ranji Trophy knockouts for the first time in six

Cheteshwar Pujara has piled up 780 runs (at 78.1, 3x100s, 2x50s) this season with skipper Arpit Vasavada (440) and Prerak Mankad (426) in tow.

With both Gaurav Yadav (Pondicherry) and Hitesh Waluni (Maharashtra) out of race for most wickets (41) this season, Saurashtra's Dharmendrasinh Jadeja is in open territory with 39 wickets to establish himself the leading wicket-taker.

Saurashtra finished second behind Vidarbha in Group Am while Tamil Nadu have recorded some big wins including a nine-wicket hammering of Puniab.

Narayan Jagadeesan (775) is only six runs behind Pujara in the run-getters' chart while Baba Indrajith has once again showcased consistency in domestic circuit, garnering 606 runs in seven games.

TN spinners R Sai Kishore (38 wickets) and S Ajith Ram (36) have hunted in tandem and Saurashtra batters will be wary of their exploits in home conditions.

At the Holkar Stadium in Indore, hosts Madhya Pradesh will have to put their best foot forward against a dangerous Andhra side who are coming off a three-match unbeaten run.

Ricky Bhui (861 runs at 86.1, 4x100s, 3x50s) has been the season's best performer with the bat whereas India batter Hanuma Vihari (453) has also played some vital knocks.

Andhra finished second behind Mumbai in Group B, indicating their form and confidence coming into this knockout game.

On the other hand, the 2021-22 Ranji Trophy winner MP have had the distinction of being unbeaten this season. Venkatesh Iyer (510 runs) and Kumar Kartikeya (34) have been the players in-form for MP, who have recorded some onesided wins coming into this quar-

sole experienced pacer in the line-up.

26th Annual Sports & Cultural Meet

of Tezpur varsity gets underway

of eyes on you as well. And for the

Talking about their tournament

opener against defending Mumbai,

a fine mix of Indian and overseas

squad and there's been some

camps as well. We have had some

match simulation as well to allow

people out in the middle to get a

little bit of a feel for what their role

sition into the squad and every-

body is really pumped to be able to

kick off the tournament tomorrow

(Friday) against Mumbai, which

will be a great challenge," said the

programme of the wrestling event

around 3.30 pm at the IGI Stadium

on Friday. This is the fourth edition

of the games. This time, the Centre

has decided to let the Northeastern

region to host the event, YRS Di-

rector, Kethosituo Sekhose, said.

athletes and over 80 officials from

the Sports Authority of India,

Sports Ministry, and the Wrestling

Federation of India (WFI) Adhoc

The competition for the

Committee are already in Kohima.

wrestling event will be Greco Ro-

mans and Freestyle for men, while

the women will compete only in

freestyle in ten categories, from 57

Kg to 130 Kg. (PTI)

Sekhose said that around 240

"It's been a really smooth tran-

goes from there.

might be.

Wrestling event of Khelo

India University Games to

begin in Nagaland today

Fresh from his career-best 10-wicket haul

It remains to be seen whether the Indian

Shami ruled out of IPL, to undergo ankle surgery



Sri Lanka wins T20 series despite Afghanistan's 3-run victory in last game

DAMBULLA, Feb 22: Fast bowler Wafadar Momand held Kamindu Mendis to defend 19 runs in the last over and hand Afghanistan Indian locals (players) in particua three-run win over Sri Lanka in lar, it really gives them an opportunity to put their names up and the third and final Twenty20 international. Sri Lanka won the series perform well and then see where it 2-1. Afghanistan captain Ibrahim Zadran won the toss, elected to bat first, and they made 209-5 in 20 overs. In the last over, Mendis hit Lanning said the team balance has Momand for two fours in the first been pretty good after assembling and third deliveries and the bowler was lucky to escape a waist-high players. "Our preparation has been no-ball in the fourth which the leg great. We've had a little bit more time this year to get together as a

umpire failed to spot. Needing 10 off the last two balls. Mendis failed to score off the second-to-last ball and then hit a six to fall three runs short.

Mendis remained unbeaten on 65 off 39 deliveries with two sixes and seven boundaries. Sri Lanka Wanindu Hasaranga captain sharply criticized Sri Lankan umpire Lyndon Hannibal for not spotting a ball higher than the waist saying he is unfit to officiate international games. "This cannot happen in an international match," Hasaranga said. "If it was close it would have been OK but it was so high it was close to striking the batsman's head. If he cannot see such a thing, this umpire is unfit for international matches and it is better for him to find another job."

Earlier, Afghanistan openers Hazratullah Zazai and Rahmanullah Gurbaz got off to a brisk start scoring 72 runs in the first five power play overs without losing a wicket. Zazai made 45 off 22 deliveries and Gurbaz ended a lean patch by scoring 70 off 43 deliveries. Gurbaz was named player of the

match. Spinner Akila Dananjaya and fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana took two wickets each for Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's opening batter Pathum Nissanka left the field at 60 because of an injury.

He and Kusal Mendis shared 64 runs for the first wicket giving Sri Lanka a solid start. Kusal Mendis' (23) dismissal and Kusal Perera getting out without scoring with the total on 65 slowed Sri Lanka's momentum. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Feb 22: Senior pacer Mohammed Shami has been ruled out of next month's Indian Premier League owing to a left ankle injury, for which he will un-The development raises a quesdergo a surgery in the UK, a BCCI source told PTI on Thursday.

The 33-year-old, who is not part of the ongoing Test series against England, last played for India in the ODI World Cup final against Australia in November. "Shami was in London in last

week of January to take special ankle injections and he was told that after three weeks, he can start light running and take it from "But the injection hasn't worked

and now the only option left is surgery. He will shortly leave for UK for surgery. IPL seems out of question," a senior BCCI source said on the condition of anonymity.

Shami, who was one of the architects of India's stupendous World Cup campaign with 24 wickets, played through pain as he had problems with his landing but didn't let it affect his performance.

Shami, who was recently conferred with the Arjuna Award, has 229 Test, 195 ODI and 24 T20 wickets in his decade-long career.

tion mark about the injury rehabilitation management programme planned by the National Cricket Academy (NCA) for Shami. Now it is highly unlikely that the

pace bowling artist would be able to make a comeback before India's Test matches at home against Bangladesh and New Zealand (October November).

His target could be the marquee away series against Australia. People in the know of things be-

lieve that the NCA's conservative line of thinking has not worked in Shami's case. "Shami should have gone di-

rectly for surgery and that should have been NCA's call. Just two months of rest and injections wouldn't have worked well and that's what has happened. He is an asset and the Indian team would need him in Australia," the source

sence of seasoned campaigner Faiz terfinal clash. (PTI) Kaun hai tumhara bowler? Tendulkar plays gully cricket in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Feb 22: He aptly called it a "match made in heaven" as Sachin Tendulkar pleasantly surprised a bunch of youngsters playing gully cricket in Uri, turning his bat upside down at one point just to give the boys a shot at dismissing him.

On his maiden trip to Jammu and Kashmir, Tendulkar got down from his SUV when he saw some young boys playing cricket on the road with a cardboard carton and an empty oil can as their stumps.

"Cricket and Kashmir: Match made in heaven," posted Tendulkar on X along with a short video in which he can be seen facing nine balls, watched in awe by the locals. His wife Anjali can also be seen

smiling in the clip which starts with Tendulkar asking the boys, "Hum Khelein? (Shall we play?)." "Kaun hai tumhara bowler (Who is your bowler)?" he probed

further as he gripped a bat. Dressed in a brown jacket Tendulkar, who retired from cricket in



ting straight drives and also a scoop shot.

There was also an attempted paddle sweep before he turned the bat upside down and jokingly stated, "Ye out karna padega (you will have to dismiss me)."

But even with an upside down bat, Tendulkar was not to be dismissed as he signed off with a

applause and several smiles. He wasn't done enthralling the gathered crowd with just his cricket. The iconic former captain, who played six World Cups, took selfies with the fans, giving them a memorable few minutes to cherish.

"Mera dhyan aapke upar hai (I am focussed on you)," he told the

Tendulkar arrived here last week and visited a cricket bat manufacturer in the Sangam area in South Kashmir before heading to Pahalgham where he stayed at the Pine and Peak hotel.

Floored by the hospitality at the hotel, Tendulkar left a signed note for the staff thanking them. "I would love to come back and

spend more time over here," he On Wednesday, he visited the

Aman Setu bridge -- the last point on the Line of Control in Uri sector of Jammu and Kashmir.

Tendulkar interacted with soldiers at the Kaman Post, near Aman Setu, during his visit that lasted around one hour, officials

Tendulkar is also accompanied by his daughter Sara in this trip. He visited a cricket bat manufacturing unit at Chursoo on Srinagar-Jammu national highway and also went to Pahalgam in south Kashmir. (PTI)

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