

'Surgical strike' on Pak by Javed Akhtar

LAHORE, FEBRUARY 21

The perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks are still roaming freely in Pakistan and Pakistanis should not feel offended when India talks about the 2008 carnage, lyricist and poet Javed Akhtar has said.

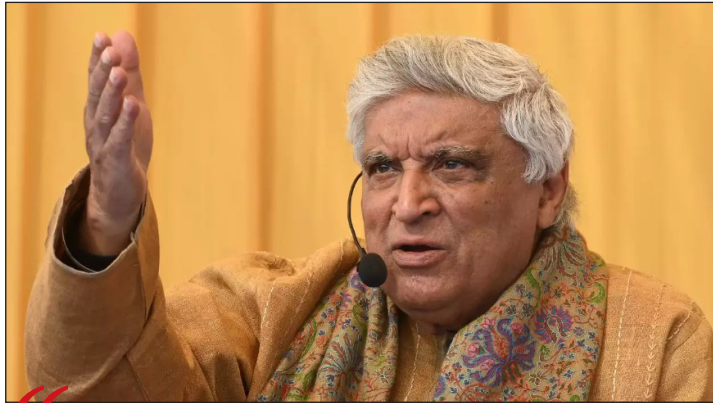
In a viral video from the seventh Faiz Festival organised here in memory of celebrated Urdu poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the writer was seen making these comments in response to a member in the audience who told Akhtar to take with him a message of peace and tell Indians that Pakistan is "a positive, friendly and loving country".

"We should not blame each other. It will solve nothing. The atmosphere is tense, that should be doused," the 78-year-old lyricist said.

"We are people from Mumbai, we have seen the attack on our city. They (attackers) did not come from Norway or Egypt. They are still roaming freely in your country. So if there is a grievance in the heart of a Hindustani, you should not feel offended," Akhtar said at the event that was hosted by Adil Hashmi, the grandson of poet Faiz.

Akhtar also told the gathering that even though Pakistani artists like Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Mehdi Hasan have been warmly welcomed in India, Pakistan has never held a single show of Lata Mangeshkar.

"We hosted big functions of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and Mehdi Hasan. You (Pakistan) never organised a function for Lata Mangeshkar," the poet said, drawing loud cheers and applause from the audience.



"We are people from Mumbai, we have seen the attack on our city. They (attackers) did not come from Norway or Egypt. They are still roaming freely in your country. So if there is a grievance in the heart of a Hindustani, you should not feel offended"

JAVED AKHTAR
Lyricist and poet

On November 26, 2008, 10 Pakistani terrorists belonging to Hafiz Saeed-led Lashkar-e-Taiba arrived via sea and opened fire, killing 166 people, including 18 security personnel, and injuring several others during a 60-hour siege in Mumbai.

The attacks drew widespread global condemnation. Nine Pakistani terrorists

were killed by the Indian security forces. Ajmal Kasab was the only terrorist who was captured alive. He was hanged four years later on November 21, 2012.

India has been accusing Pakistan of letting the key conspirators and planners of the 26/11 attacks remain protected and unpunished there.

Meanwhile, Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut praised Akhtar for his candid remarks about the 26/11 terror attacks, tweeting: 'Ghar mein ghuss ke maara' (He hit them in their own land).

At the Lahore event, Akhtar spoke at length about language, poetry, performing arts, love and friendship and also about his marriage with actor Shabana Azmi.

He left Pakistan on Monday after the conclusion of the three-day festival which attracted a large audience from all walks of life at Lahore's Alhamra Arts Council.

When asked about his marriage with Azmi and love for her, he said: "I share such a strong bond of friendship with Shabana that even marriage couldn't break it."

PTI

Mahapanchayat warns against Manesar arrest, cops chased away

GURUGRAM, FEBRUARY 21

A mahapanchayat organised at Manesar in support of Monu Manesar, an accused in the alleged abduction and killing of two men, on Monday threatened to thwart any attempt by the Rajasthan Police to arrest him without "solid proof". In the meantime, villagers claimed, two "policemen" on a motorcycle had reached the house of Mohit Yadav alias Monu Manesar but were chased away by them.

Angry protesters also blocked traffic briefly on the Delhi-Jaipur highway before police reached the spot and persuaded the villagers to withdraw. After the mahapanchayat at Baba Bhisma Temple, a memorandum addressed to President Droupadi Murmu was submitted to the assistant commissioner of police of Pataudi, demanding the cancellation of the FIR against Monu Manesar registered by the Rajasthan Police and a CBI probe into the matter.

"The Gurugram police should assure that Monu Manesar's family will not be touched. No cop will visit their home without prior information, otherwise they will not go back alive," said advocate Kulbhushan Bhardwaj, a leader of a Hindu outfit. In case of any loss of life or property of Monu Manesar and his family, the government and the district administration will be responsible, the memorandum stated.

A 10-member committee was also

formed for the safety and security of the family of Manu Manesar.

Speakers at the mahapanchayat claimed that a false case has been registered against Manesar, a Bajrang Dal leader and member of a self-proclaimed cow protection team, and that the Rajasthan Police does not have any concrete evidence. They alleged the FIR was part of a conspiracy and demanded its cancellation within 24 hours. They also demanded a fair investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

They said Monu Manesar was not on the run and would appear whenever the administration called. The mahapanchayat, attended by more than 200 people from different villages and Hindu outfits, lasted around three hours.

"If the Rajasthan Police arrests Monu Manesar without solid evidence, a big movement will be organised. Also the Rajasthan Police should stop harassing Monu Manesar, other colleagues and his family without any evidence. The inhuman behaviour of Rajasthan Police which forcibly entered Srikant Pandit's house in Maroda village in Nuh will not be tolerated," said Devinder Singh, the district general secretary of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Monu Manesar and Srikant Pandit are among the five people initially booked in the abduction-and-murder case. Four more accused were later named in the FIR. Only one of the nine accused has been arrested so far.

PTI

Resentment in Congress over last-minute pruning

AURANGZEB NAQSHBANDI

A large number of Congress leaders are up in arms against the massive pruning of lists of party delegates who will have the voting rights at the 85th plenary session, beginning on Friday at Raipur in Chhattisgarh.

Many Congress leaders came in for a shock when they found their names missing in the final list of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) delegates released on Sunday by party general secretary in-charge of organisation KC Venugopal, a clear deviation from the past.

Usually, the lists are signed by the Central Election Authority (CEA) chairperson who is the ex-officio Returning Officer to conduct the organisational polls.

Congress sources said the present CEA, Madhusudan Mistry, did not sign the lists as the last-minute pruning was

done by in-charges of states in consultation with Venugopal and not the designated Pradesh Returning Officers (PROs).

According to people close to Venugopal, it was done in line with the rules prescribed in the party constitution.

However, many leaders argued that the exercise should have been carried after consulting the respective PROs of states. It is further alleged that some of the new delegates included those who have not been elected but directly appointed in violation of the rules and regulations and some of the senior leaders have been arbitrarily dropped from the lists.

Take for example Rajasthan where three former state presidents Girija Vyas, Dr Chandra Bhan and Narayan Singh have been dropped from the list of delegates while one, Sangeeta Sihag, who is not even an elected Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) delegate has been

CONGRESS SOURCES SAID THE PRESENT CEA, MADHUSUDAN MISTRY, DID NOT SIGN THE LISTS AS THE LAST-MINUTE PRUNING WAS DONE BY IN-CHARGES OF STATES IN CONSULTATION WITH VENUGOPAL AND NOT THE DESIGNATED PRADESH RETURNING OFFICERS (PROS)

included. Similarly, Parag Sharma from Faridabad in Haryana has been included while the name of former state chief Phool Chand Mulana is missing from the list.

The leaders quoted above said on one hand the party is mulling to bring amendments to the party constitution by which former AICC presidents and former Prime

Ministers would be made lifetime members of the Congress Working Committee (CWC), and on the other hand former state chiefs were being dropped from the lists of AICC delegates.

It is also alleged that all rules and norms have been broken while including influential leaders in the lists. A close confidante of former Congress president Rahul Gandhi has been made an AICC delegate from Delhi and not from his home state Karnataka, the leaders claimed.

The party has cleared the names of 1,338 elected and 487 co-opted AICC members who will attend the 85th plenary session at Raipur. There would be around 15,000 people present, including 9,915 PCC delegates with 3,000 co-opted PCC delegates.

Others will include district presidents and the 120 who walked with Rahul Gandhi during his nationwide Bharat Jodo Yatra and office bearers of frontal organ-

isations. However, as per the Congress Constitution, only elected AICC members can vote in the elections to the CWC, the party's highest decision-making body.

As per Article 14 of the Constitution: "The co-opted members at the AICC, PCC and lower levels shall not exercise any voting right in any organisational election nor shall they contest any election in the organisation. However, no person who is a co-opted member shall be debarred for that reason from seeking election to full membership of any Committee in normal manner."

If the voting takes place, the party will ensure proper representation from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, women, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and minorities, party leaders said, adding 704 AICC delegates are from general category, 381 from OBCs, 228 from minority communities, 192 from SCs and 133 from STs.

PTI

PUNJAB

Cabinet regularises services of 14,000 employees

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 21

Punjab Cabinet led by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann today gave a nod to the Policy for Welfare of Adhoc, Contractual, Daily Wages, Work Charged and Temporary employees thereby paving way for regularising the services of 14,417 employees.

A decision to this effect was taken in a meeting of the Council of Ministers chaired by the Chief Minister here today.

Divulging the details, a spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office said that the services of 13,000 employees have already been regularised. Under the regime of the earlier governments, various appointments to 'Group C' and 'Group D' level posts, have been made on contract/ temporary basis on the basis of imminent requirement and exigencies of service.

Some of such employees have now put in a period of 10 years and more with state.

The employees who have worked on adhoc, contractual, daily wages, work charged or temporary basis for a continuous period of minimum 10 years till the issuance of present policy will be regularised and placed under a special cadre of posts created especially for them.

The Cabinet also decided to re-employ as many as 2,000 retired Patwaris.

Apart from that, the cabinet also gave



THE EMPLOYEES WHO HAVE WORKED ON ADHOC, CONTRACTUAL, DAILY WAGES, WORK CHARGED OR TEMPORARY BASIS FOR A CONTINUOUS PERIOD OF MINIMUM 10 YEARS TILL THE ISSUANCE OF PRESENT POLICY WILL BE REGULARISED AND PLACED UNDER A SPECIAL CADRE OF POSTS CREATED ESPECIALLY FOR THEM

a nod to the transportation and labour policy for food grains. The vehicles used for transportation of grains from mandis to storage spaces will be tracked using GPS. The government has also decided to increase the wages for labourers in mandis by 25 per cent.

CLU WITHIN 45 DAYS

The Cabinet simplified the process of issuing Change of Land Use (CLU) within 45 days. Now, permission of CLU, layout plan/building plan and license to colony will be given at a single time

which will reduce the current time of 6 months to 45-60 days.

PUNJABI MANDATORY ON BOARDS

The Cabinet approved an amendment in Punjab Shops and Commercial Establishments Rules, 1958 by insertion of new rules 23 and 24, after existing rule 22, to promote the Punjabi Language the mother tongue of Punjab in a big way.

As per the amendment, it will be mandatory for every establishment to display

BUDGET TO BE PRESENTED ON MARCH 10

It was also decided during the meeting that the budget session of the state government will be held from March 3-26. "This is the first full budget of the Aam Aadmi Party government. The budget session will be held in two phases – from March 3-11 and then from March 22 onwards," informed Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann.

BUDGET SESSION SCHEDULE

March 3: Governor's address

March 6: Discussion on governor's address and motion of thanks

March 7: Report of CAG of India to be tabled

March 9: Non-official business

March 10: Finance minister Harpal Cheema to present budget for 2023-24

March 11: Discussion on budgetary proposals

March 12-21: Recess due to G20 meetings in Amritsar

March 22: Discussion to continue

March 24: Official business

used to display name on the board. Those establishments, who have not done so far, will have to do so within six months of coming into force of these rules. Non-compliance will be punishable with fine.

RESERVATION TO RIOT, TERRORIST VICTIMS

The Cabinet extended reservation of 5% to riots/ terrorist victims in allotment of plots/ houses by Urban Estates, Improvement Trusts, Pepsu Township Development Board and others without any financial concession. The policy had expired on December 31, 2021 but with this decision the policy will be extended for five more years, i.e., up to December 31, 2026.

ADVENTURE TOURISM POLICY

The Cabinet also gave a green signal to Punjab State Adventure Tourism Policy for attracting private investment in the state. As per the policy, permissions to commence adventure sports in the state shall initially be given to recognized national adventure sport federations and the sites shall be given free of cost for a period of two years. These sports are expected to generate local employment as well as overall economic upliftment of the area where these will be organised.

WATER TOURISM POLICY

The Cabinet also gave nod to the Punjab State Water Tourism Policy which seeks to give a boost to private investment in the state.

its name on the name board in Gurmukhi script in Punjabi.

However, other languages can also be

VB summons Brahm Mohindra in DA case

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 21

The Punjab Vigilance Bureau has summoned former Congress minister Brahm Mohindra for allegedly having assets disproportionate to his known income sources.

A VB spokesman said on Tuesday that Mohindra has been summoned to the Punjab Vigilance Bureau headquarters in Sector 68, Mohali, on February 24.

He said the VB has made a preliminary inquiry and found that Mohindra and his family members had spent money beyond their known sources of income in the past six years.

Mohindra was minister for health, local bodies, medical education and parliamentary affairs during the Congress rule from 2017-22. He was a five-time MLA, but did not contest the

2022 assembly elections.

The VB has also written to the state revenue authorities to verify some property records, including a farmhouse in New Chandigarh, besides some plots. The role of a Greater Mohali Area Development Authority (GMADA) employee, who worked as an officer on special duty with Mohindra, is also being probed.

Mohindra was second in seniority in the Captain Amarinder Singh-led Punjab cabinet, which was sworn in in 2017.

He is the sixth former minister, who has is under the VB scanner for having disproportionate assets.

The VB had earlier arrested Sadhu Singh Dharamsot in a similar case, while former ministers Sham Sunder Arora, Balbir Singh Sidhu, Gurpreet Kangar, Bharat Bhushan Ashu and at least five other Congress leaders are under VB scrutiny for amassing illegal properties.

4-lane Phagwara-Rupnagar NH will boost road infra: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday said the four-lane wide section from Phagwara to Rupnagar on NH-344A is being executed in hybrid annuity mode at a cost of Rs 1,367 crore.

Under the hybrid annuity model, the government provides 40 per cent of the project cost to the developer to begin work and the remaining investment is made by the developer.

The Ministry of Road Transport & Highways in a statement said the 4-Lane wide section from Phagwara to Rupnagar on NH-344A developed by NHAI would give a major boost to the road infra in Punjab.

The section connects major cities Amritsar - Jalandhar - Chandigarh and extends mobility to Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Ropar, and Mohali.

Patwari held for Rs 1 cr embezzlement

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH FEBRUARY 21

Punjab Vigilance Bureau (VB) on Tuesday arrested revenue patwari Bakar Singh of Palla Megha, Ferozepur district, for committing embezzlement of Rs 1,11,08,236 during acquisition of land in connivance with two private persons.

Disclosing this here today a spokesperson of the VB said the Punjab government had acquired a land measuring 46 kanals for the BSF to set up a border out post at New Mohammadi Wala near village Palla Megha in the year 2002 to 2012.

He further added that the accused patwari, now a dismissed Kanugo, in connivance with other two accused Billu Singh of Palla Megha, Ferozepur district and Amritbir Singh of village Aasal Uttar, Tarn Taran district, had

misappropriated Rs 1,11,08,236 in the said case.

The accused patwari had distorted the revenue records and entered names of his co-accused as owners of the said land. Subsequently, he released two cheques of compensation amounting to Rs 55,54,118 each on the basis of forged record to both the co-accused on November 7, 2012.

In addition to this, the accused patwari had acquired private land measuring 16 Kanals and 16 Marlas instead of adjoining government land in order to provide financial benefit to the other accused.

The spokesperson further added that on the basis of this enquiry, a case has been registered. Further investigation in this regard is under progress and the other accused would be arrested soon as the teams has already been formed, he added.

PUNJAB

Branding of Ayushman Bharat centres as Mohalla Clinics

Centre warns Punjab of blocking health funds

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

The Union Health Ministry has said the Punjab government was converting Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centres into Mohalla Clinics, a pet project of the Aam Aadmi Party, and has warned of stopping the funds for the scheme.

The Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centre (AB-HWC) is formulated with 60:40 contribution ratio by the Centre and state.

In a letter written to the state government on February 6, the ministry said that the state has vitiated the spirit of the scheme and "defaulted" on its commitment by branding AB-HWCs as Aam Aadmi Clinics and "not adhering" to the provisions of the memorandum on the implementation of the scheme.

"The state has violated the provisions of Clause 10.3 and 10.10 of MoU and has stopped implementing the AB-HWC



component of NHM (National Health Mission), therefore releases to the State under NHM do not appear feasible as per provisions of Clause 13 of the MOU," NHM Additional Secretary and Mission

Director Roli Singh said in the letter.

A top health ministry official said, "The Ayushman Bharat Health and Wellness Centre (HWC) is formulated with 60:40 ratio of Centre and state. If a state changes the scheme during implementation, then the funds being released from the centre will be stopped."

The state (Punjab) was asked to stop from deviations of the guidelines and ensure branding as per the guidelines issued earlier by Union Health Secretary Rajesh Bhushan.

The health ministry official said Punjab has been given Rs 1,114 crore in 2022-23 under the scheme.

The official source said that states like Telangana too have partially deviated from implementing the scheme and the ministry has asked for corrections.

The source said around 3,029 sub-health centres, primary health centres and urban Health centres have been converted into Mohalla Clinics in Punjab. **PTI**



Private bus operators seek bailout package

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 21

Members of Punjab Motor Union (PMU) have urged Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann to bail them out of the economic crisis they are facing.

The PMU comprises private bus operators who ply nearly 2,000 buses in Punjab under the 'ordinary buses' category.

The PMU members said that they were incurring huge losses as the result of free travel for women policy, tax burden per kilometre and nil or negligible bus fare hike over the past few years.

The private bus operators said there was a serious threat to the livelihood of around 1.25 lakh families, dependent on the industry.

"Punjab government is keen to attract investments via the Invest Punjab Summit on February 23-24, but before calling for new investments, there is a need to focus on domestic investors, particularly Punjab's indigenous private passenger bus industry," said PMU Secretary RS Bajwa while addressing a press meet here.

Bajwa added, "When Capt Amarinder was CM, he decided to give free travel facility to women in both Punjab Roadways and PRTC buses. As a result, almost 40 per cent of our passengers -mainly women, shifted to Punjab Roadways and PRTC buses, leaving us

in the lurch."

"The former CM had promised reduction in our tax burden to offset the impact but it wasn't done. Now the present government led by CM Bhagwant Mann must revisit the decision and give us suitable compensation," added Bajwa.

Shubhkarman Brar, member, Empowered Sub-Committee, PMU, said, "The tax burden per kilo-metre on private operators was Rs 2.69, to make things worse, 10 percent social security cess has also been levied. The tax burden per km now stands at Rs 2.96. In another harsh measure, a 90 paise per litre cess on diesel has also been imposed a few days ago."

"Our demand is that the tax burden per kilometre be reduced to Re 1 if our industry is to be saved," added Brar.

Sandeep Sharma, another member, said, "Bus fare should also be hiked by 3 percent per year in keeping with the Punjab government notification of 2013. The cost of diesel - which is already more in Punjab vis a vis other states, has gone up manifold but the increase in fare has been negligible or even nil. Since the last three years, there has been no bus fare increase."

PMU members also called on CM Punjab to increase first stage ticket price to Rs 20 from the present Rs 10. First stage ticket price is the minimum base price of a bus ticket.

FCI corruption case

CBI searches 30 locations in Punjab

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

The CBI on Tuesday launched searches at 30 locations in Punjab as part of its probe into allegations of corruption against Food Corporation of India (FCI) officials who procured inferior grains to benefit merchants and rice millers, officials said. The CBI teams started coordinated raids at the premises of grain merchants, rice mill owners, and serving and retired officials of the FCI as part of 'Operation Kanak 2', they said.

The operation was spread across Rajpura, Sirhind, Patiala, Fatehgarh Sahib, Mohali, Moga, Firozpur, Ludhiana, Sangrur among others, they said. This is second round of searches in the FIR pertaining to an organised syndicate of officers at the FCI, who allegedly charged bribes of Rs 1000-4000 per truck unloaded at the FCI godowns from private millers per crop season for covering up lower quality grains supplied by them and other favours.

The first round of searches took place on January 13, they said.

The bribes were allegedly circulated to officers at every level reaching up to headquarters in a well defined percentage of cuts at each level, it alleged.



The FIR gave details of such bribe collection in many FCI depots across Punjab. Officials ranging from technical assistants to executive directors were allegedly part of a syndicate receiving bribes from private millers, they said.

"The bribe amount is collected at the depot level by FCI officials on a per truck basis being unloaded at the FCI depot during storage of grains. Thereafter this bribe amount is distributed to the different ranks of FCI," the CBI has alleged.

The agency has booked a total of 74 accused in the FIR, including FCI Executive Director Sudeep Singh, officials, rice mill owners, and middlemen, among others, who were allegedly indulging in corrupt practices, they said.

The role of senior officers of the Punjab government is also under scanner for running 'benami' warehouses outsourced to the FCI. **PTI**

Rs 55.65 lakh released for construction of Bal Ghar for boys

CHANDIGARH: The Punjab Government released an amount of Rs 55.65 lakh as the first installment for the construction of Bal Ghar for boys at village Usman in district Tarn Taran. Social Security, Women and Child Development Minister Dr Baljit Kaur said that the children of Tarn Taran and surrounding districts will get shelter in this Bal Ghar.

Apply light irrigation to wheat crop: IIWBR advises farmers

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 21

Amid minimum temperatures hovering above normal in Punjab and Haryana, the Kamal-based ICAR-Indian Institute of Wheat and Barley Research (IIWBR) has asked wheat growers to apply light irrigation to the winter crop as per requirement.

The advisory came as minimum temperatures in Punjab and Haryana have been staying several degrees above normal for the past few days.

The rising temperature at this stage

has left wheat growers worried as they think it could adversely impact their crop yield. In its advisory, the IIWBR advised farmers to give light irrigation to the wheat crop as per requirement.

In case of strong windy weather, irrigation should be stopped to avoid lodging that may result in yield loss, according to the advisory.

Farmers who have the facility of sprinkler irrigation can irrigate their field with sprinkler for 30 minutes in the afternoon in case of rise in temperature, it further said.

Farmers having drip irrigation facilities

need to ensure proper moisture in the crop to avoid stress, said the advisory.

It further said to avoid the damage caused by terminal heat in case of sudden rise in temperature, two sprays of potassium chloride 0.2 per cent at jointing and heading stage may reduce the losses.

Farmers were further advised to regularly monitor their wheat crop for yellow rust disease.

In case of yellow rust disease, consult the agricultural expert at the nearest Krishi Vigyan Kendra, research institute or state agriculture department staff, it said. **PTI**

Track laying work begins on world's highest railway bridge

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 21

The track laying work commenced on Tuesday on the Chenab railway bridge, located 359 metres above the riverbed, in Reasi district of Jammu and Kashmir.

The 1.3-kilometre-long bridge, which is 35 metres higher than the iconic Eiffel Tower in Paris, forms a crucial link in the 111-km stretch from Katra to Banihal, which is part of the Rs 21,653 crore Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Railway Link (USBRL) project.

"Another milestone in USBRL Project! Track laying work begins on Chenab Bridge. Once completed, this bridge will open up new possibilities for the remote regions of Jammu and Kashmir," the Ministry of Railways tweeted.

The base of the steel and concrete arch bridge between Bakkal and Kauri, 42



kms from Reasi town, was completed in November 2017, allowing for the start of the construction of the main arch which was done in April 2021.

Another milestone on the bridge was achieved in August last year when the overarch deck of the bridge was completed with a Golden Joint, paving way for the laying of the track.

As per the officials, the construction

work on the bridge started in 2004 but had to be suspended in 2008-09 to consider the aspect of safety of rail passengers in view of frequent high velocity winds in the area.

Once completed, the bridge will be able to withstand winds with speed up to 260 kmph and will have a lifespan of 120 years, the officials said.

Besides the highest railway bridge, the

USBRL project has many firsts like the longest railway tunnel having overall length of 12.75 km, first cable-stayed bridge which when completed will be an engineering marvel of the 21st century.

Out of the total 272-km USBRL project, the 161-km was commissioned in phases, with the first phase 118-km Qazigund-Baramulla section commissioned in October 2009 followed by 18-km Banihal-Qazigund in June 2013 and 25-km Udhampur-Katra in July 2014.

The work on the project, which is the most challenging railway infrastructure project being undertaken post-independence, was started in 1997 and has missed several deadlines amid huge cost escalations.

The under-construction 111-km Katra-Banihal section has a total of 37 bridges (26 major and 11 minor), 35 tunnels with a length of 164 kms (main 27 with 97.64 km and eight escape tunnels with 66.40 km).



Farooq visits landslide affected families in Ganderbal

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 21

National Conference president Farooq Abdullah on Tuesday visited the families affected by landslides in Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Abdullah was accompanied by party leaders Nasir Aslam Wani, Tanvir Sadiq and Danish Iqbal.

"Farooq Abdullah visited the families affected by landslides in Rezan area of Kangan. He urged the administration to provide relief and rehabilitation to the affected families," a spokesperson of the party said.

Nine houses were damaged in the landslide on Sunday night. Besides damaging the houses, the incident left 14 domestic animals dead.

4 Kashmiri migrant girls to undergo free skiing course

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 21

Jammu and Kashmir Relief Organisation on Monday flagged off the first batch of four Kashmiri migrant girls for a free skiing course at the famous ski resort of Gulmarg, an official said.

This is the first time that such an initiative has been taken by the organisation, an outcome of the special governance camps held at six locations here from February 4-15 to ensure 100 per cent saturation of social security schemes for Kashmiri migrant pandit community, the official said.

4 held for human trafficking, 5 minor girls rescued

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 21

Police arrested four people, including two women, who were involved in human trafficking and rescued five minor girls here, officials said on Monday.

A police team received input about some minor girls standing near a bus stand. During questioning, the police found that the girls were being trafficked, they said. The police teams tracked CCTV camera footage and rounded up four accused of a gang involved in human trafficking.

Vishwakarma Skill University One seat in each course reserved for displaced J-K students : VC

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 21

Vice Chancellor of Shri Vishwakarma Skill University (VSU) Raj Nehru on Tuesday said one seat in each course has been reserved for displaced students from Jammu and Kashmir in the varsity.

He said the university offers courses that are "hybrid" in nature, with a focus on "you earn while you learn".

Nehru called upon the students from Jammu and Kashmir to pursue skill education for better career prospects.

He the Shri Vishwakarma Skill University, located in Haryana, welcomes the displaced students from Jammu and Kashmir with open arms.

"One seat has been reserved in each course for the displaced students," the vice chancellor of the country's first skill university said.

He said the Haryana government has established Shri Vishwakarma Skill University in Palwal district near Delhi to realise the concept of Skill India.

"More than 40 programmes are running in the university and one seat in each course has been reserved for displaced students from Jammu and Kashmir so that they can make a career by engaging with skill education," Nehru said.

He said the university is directly associated with industry under a dual-integrated model.

'Deserving' shell shocked to find 'discrepancies' in selection list

J&K police cancels results of 2 Border Battalions

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 20

Aspirants seeking job in various government departments in the AUT of J&K are shell shocked once again to find irregularities and discrepancies in the selected list, this time conducted by prestigious SSRB,

even as this is no new a practice seen in erstwhile state during era of popular governments.

However, in order to provide justice to genuine and deserving candidates, the authorities on Monday cancelled the results of 2 Border Battalions of Jammu and Kashmir Police Border Battalion after observing some discrepancies. However, the officials said that revised results will be issued within half an hour.

The examination for 1300 Constable posts in JK Police Border Battalion was

conducted on October 26, 2022 while the results were declared on January 25, 2023.

Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Coordination, PHQ J&K, Danesh Rana said that the exam results for 1300 constable posts in 2 Border Battalions of J&K Police have been cancelled after discrepancies were observed due to technical fault in the software application of the implementing agency—M/S. Timing Technologies Pvt. India Ltd.

Landslide blocks Jmu-Sgr NH again

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
BANIHAL, FEBRUARY 21

Traffic on the Jammu-Srinagar national highway was suspended Tuesday after a landslide in Ramban district. The landslide struck the highway at Sher Bibi near Banihal around 2 am, leaving Kashmir-bound trucks stranded, Deputy Superintendent of Police (Traffic), Asghar Malik, said.

"Despite shooting stones, a major part of the debris has already been cleared. It will take hardly over an hour to clear the remaining part of the road once the rocks stop rolling down," the officer said.

An official in Jammu said, "We have allowed light motor vehicles in the morning but after getting information about continuous shooting stones, the traffic was stopped for the time being"



REGION



Haryana Cong protests against Khattar govt

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 21

Opposition Congress members on Tuesday held a protest outside the Haryana Assembly complex over various issues, including unemployment and demand to sack state minister Sandeep Singh.

Congress MLAs led by leader of

opposition Bhupinder Singh Hooda took out a foot march from the high court chowk and then assembled outside the assembly complex.

They were carrying several placards which read 'yuva ko rozgar do' (give employment to youth) and 'Congress ka haath kisan ke saath' (Congress is with farmers).

Protesters also shouted slogans

against the Manohar Lal Khattar government.

The Congress members sought resignation of Singh, who had been booked in a sexual harassment case.

Among those who were participating in the protest included Kiran Choudhary, Raghuvir Singh Kadian, BB Batra, Aftab Ahmed, Varun Chaudhary and Chiranjeev Rao. **PTI**

Speaker names Abhay for unparliamentary behaviour

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 21

Senior Indian National Lok Dal (INLD) leader and party's lone MLA in the Haryana Assembly Abhay Singh Chautala was on Tuesday named by the Speaker and asked not to attend the House proceedings for two days for alleged unparliamentary behaviour.

Chautala, MLA from Ellenabad, had given calling attention notice seeking to know the status of the report of the special enquiry team (SET) constituted to investigate the alleged liquor scam during the Covid pandemic and subsequent lockdown in 2020 in Haryana.

While the notice was admitted, it was not taken up for discussion on the grounds that the minister concerned was not present.

Chautala reasoned that the home minister's absence from the House was not a ground to defer his calling attention notice for discussion. **PTI**

While referring to the subject on which he had given his calling attention, Chautala used some words, to which Speaker Gian Chand Gupta took strong objection and said he was casting aspersions on the Chair.

"Abhay Singh Chautala you leave the House," the Speaker told the legislator, adding such unparliamentary behaviour "is not tolerable".

After Chautala left the House, the Speaker said the INLD member has been named for two days during which he will not be permitted to attend the Assembly proceedings, till Wednesday.

"Excise Minister (Dushyant Chautala) or Parliamentary Affairs Minister (Kanwar Pal) too could have given reply if the Home Minister was not present, but Deputy Speaker deferred the Calling Attention. Later, I raised the issue when Speaker was in the Chair and asked him to give me a date when the matter will be taken up for discussion, but no date was given," he said. **PTI**

HP Staff Selection Commission dissolved

SHIMLA, FEBRUARY 21

The state government on Tuesday dissolved the Himachal Pradesh Staff Selection Commission (HPSSC) located at Hamirpur, whose functioning was suspended after the recruitment exam paper for junior office assistants (IT) was leaked in December.

"The reports of departmental inquiry and vigilance bureau pointed out irregularities and papers were being leaked and sold to selective people for the past three years, following which the state government has decided to dissolve the commission with immediate effect," said CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, adding that complaints were also received with regards to the exams held recently.

The ongoing recruitment process by HPSSC has been transferred to Himachal Pradesh Public Service Commission (HPPSC), Shimla, for the convenience of the candidates till an alternative arrangement is made or a testing agency is constituted, he told reporters here.

All the examinations would be conducted by the HPPSC and further action on examinations already conducted and results declared or not declared including interviews and documentation would be taken by the HPPSC, he said.

The options will be given to HPSSC staff to join new departments of their choice, the CM added. **PTI**

Plantation on degraded forest land to be taken up on large scale: CM

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SHIMLA, FEBRUARY 21

Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu while presiding over the first meeting of the governing body of Himachal Pradesh State Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (HP CAMPA), at HIPA late evening on Monday, said that new initiatives for restoration of degraded forest landscapes in

the state will be started under HPCAMPA in the year 2023-24.

"Instead of raising plantations in sporadic manner, it should be done in a planned manner on the barren hills and other large open patches in a phased manner in the entire state," said the Chief Minister.

Plantation should be done keeping in mind the suitable climatic conditions and dedicated staff would be deployed as protectors to take care of the plantations in a responsible and accountable

manner, he added. Reiterating that the state government was working towards 'Vyavastha Parivartan', he said that the campaign would be more focused and barren forest land would be covered to achieve the goal of the 'Green State'.

The Forest Department has identified such areas in all 12 districts of the state covering more than 256 hectare of barren forest land along with 5-year maintenance period with a proposed outlay of around Rs 8.83 crore.

HP govt to deal with heroin smugglers sternly

UNA: Himachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri on Tuesday said stern action will be taken against heroin smugglers so that the youth of the state can be saved from drug abuse.

He said instructions have been issued to the police force to coordinate with its counterparts in neighbouring states to tackle the menace of chitta, which includes heroin. **PTI**

Hailstorm, lightning lash Shimla; visibility plunges

SHIMLA, FEBRUARY 21

A severe hailstorm lashed Shimla and surrounding areas on Tuesday afternoon, reducing visibility considerably and affecting vehicular traffic.

Roads and roofs of buildings were covered with a layer of hail, making the roads slippery and driving hazardous. Sky remained heavily overcast and icy winds swept the region

The hailstorm, accompanied by thunderstorm and lightning, brought down the temperature which stayed 8-10 notches above normal during the past few days resulting in early flowering of stone fruits.

The hailstorm added to the woes of farmers already worried over early flowering.



Meanwhile, higher reaches and tribal areas received another spell of snow, with Koksar getting 17 cm of snow, followed by Gondla (12 cm), Kukumseri (9 cm), Keylong (6 cm) and Kufri (2 cm). Light intermittent rains were wit-

nessed in some parts of the low and middle hills.

Shimla with 19 mm of rains was wettest in the state followed by Manali (14 mm), Hamirpur (6 mm), Bharmaur and Kothi (5 mm each), Narkanda (4 mm)

and Saloni (1 mm).

The local Met office has predicted dry weather in the region for next three days, and snow and rain at isolated places in mid and high hill as a fresh Western Disturbance is likely to affect Western Himalayan Region from February 25.

Keylong in tribal Lahaul and Spiti was coldest at night recording a low of minus 1.2 degrees Celsius, while Dhaulakum in Sirmaur was hottest during the day with a maximum temperature of 29.3 degree Celsius.

As many as 123 roads including 113 in Lahaul and Spiti, six in Chamba, two each in Kangra and Kullu are closed for vehicular traffic due to the recent snowfall. About 76 transformers and nine water supply schemes are disrupted in the state. **PTI**

OPINION

The Express India NEWS

Haryana Gurdwara Mgmt Committee

There was a long pending demand of the Sikh community in Haryana for a separate Management Committee for the gurdwaras in that state. They wanted the management of their gurdwaras independent of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC). In July 2014, the then Congress government led by Bhupinder Singh Hooda passed a legislation and enacted Haryana Sikh Gurdwara (Management) Act, 2014. The Act was challenged and eventually validated by the Supreme Court of India on September 20, 2022.

This has caused outrage among the SGPC controlled by the Shiromani Akali Dal-Badal. The party did not like it. It was not unusual or unexpected to term it as "interference" into the Sikh religious affairs, when the demand for a separate Management Committee was actually raised and pursued by the Sikhs only. There has been overwhelming support from the Haryana Sikh community for a separate Management Committee. The SAD-B obviously does not want to let the control of Haryana Gurdwaras go out of its hands. The party is raising a lot of hue and cry on the issue. It is trying to build up rhetoric accusing the BJP governments at the centre and in the state of trying to interfere into Sikh religious affairs.

Now even the Acting Akal Takhat Jathedar Giani Harpreet Singh has also joined the issue and opposed the formation of the Haryana Gurdwara Management Committee giving the same reason and rhetoric as the Shiromani Akali Dal-Badal. Giani Harpreet Singh should have avoided joining an issue which is nothing but political. The position of Akal Takhat Jathedar is held in high esteem by the entire Sikh community including those living in Haryana who are demanding formation of a separate Management Committee. The Akal Takhat Jathedar cannot be and should not be seen to be partisan.

And it is not that all Punjab Sikhs are opposed to the formation of the Haryana Management Committee. Former Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh has also been a staunch supporter of a separate Gurdwara Management Committee for Haryana. He says there are separate Management Committees like Patna Sahib in Bihar, Hazoor Sahib, Naded in Maharashtra as also the Delhi Gurdwara Management Committee. There is no reason that the Haryana Sikhs should not be allowed to independently manage their own gurdwaras particularly after the Haryana government enacted a law and the Supreme Court of India adjudicated the matter in its favour.

The SAD-B should not make it a partisan issue. It should better appreciate the sentiments of the Haryana Sikhs who want to manage the gurdwaras of their own. By opposing the separate management committee for Haryana, the SAD-B as also the SGPC run the risk of alienating the strong and powerful Sikh community of Haryana. The Akal Takhat Jathedar should ideally have facilitated the resolution of the issue between SGPC and the Haryana Sikhs instead of taking a partisan position. There is no point in playing up a political rhetoric that does not find any resonance anywhere, not even in Punjab, leave aside in Haryana or outside.

A pre-poll opposition alliance inconceivable

BY VIMAL SUMBLY

There have been ideas and suggestions about forming a combined opposition front against the Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of the 2024 General Elections. A pre-poll 'united opposition' front seems highly unlikely and inconceivable for the reason that many opposition parties, which are opposed to the BJP are also opposed to the Congress in several states.

For example, a pre-poll alliance between the Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party is next to impossible, at least in two states of Delhi and Punjab. In both the states AAP is in power and in Punjab it is in direct contest with the Congress.

Similarly, in Kerala, the Congress is in a direct fight with the Communist Party of India-Marxist. Although the two parties did manage an alliance in Tripura, which was duly taunted by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi, an alliance in Kerala is out of question. Even in West Bengal, the local Congress cadres will never go along with the Trinamool Congress, if at all the latter agrees for a pre-poll alliance with the Congress.

In Bihar, Jharkhand and Tamil Nadu the Congress is already in alliance with the local/state parties but as a junior, rather an insignificant partner. In a number of states, the Congress has conceded its space to local parties or the BJP. It is not even in a position of being the principal opposition party in most of the states.

Congress practically and effectively has a presence in Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh where the party is in power as also in the states like Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh,

The Express India NEWS

Punjab, Assam, Kerala and Haryana. That is all the party has in the entire India right now and in rest of the states its presence is nominal and inconsequential. Its being or not being around will not make any difference.

When the Congress leaders talk of 'Congress-centric' opposition front, they have obviously 2004 in mind. Much water has flown down Ganga and Yamuna since that year. Twenty years is quite a

long time in politics. That time the Congress party was in power in a number of states. Right now, it is in power, of its own, only in three states, two of which will be going to polls later this year with no guarantee of returning to power.

Besides, in 2004, there were powerful opposition leaders around. The left parties, particularly the CPI-M, were quite strong as compared to now. There were political stalwarts like Harkishen Singh Surjeet, K Karunanidhi, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh Yadav and others. While Surjeet, Muayam and Karunanidhi are no more, Lalu Yadav's health condition may not allow him to be very active. Moreover, he may not have any love lost for Rahul Gandhi, who tore away the copies of an ordinance that was enacted primarily to provide relief to Lalu Yadav in 2014 during UPA-II ahead of the General Elections.

The Congress no doubt has a nationwide presence, but that presence is insignificant and the party is in no way in a position where it can make any difference. It may emerge as a lead partner in a possible alliance, but it will not be possible for the party to be a dominant partner in any alliance anymore.

The healing touch of Chiropractor



COL CHARANJIT SINGH KHERA (RETD)

The first time I heard about chiropractic mode of treatment without medicine was during a visit to Canada in 2019 and again in 2022.

Chiropractor is becoming the most popular and fastest healthcare system in the world and even in India getting mushroomed.

MY EXPERIENCE

Had a typical physical problem of getting gripping pain in the inner side of both the wrist and inner side of shoulders while walking which restricted my walk up to 500m only. A Chiropractor of Canada diagnosed me for having two of my chest ribs misaligned along with detection of spine and neck misalignment. Three visits cured me without any administration of medicine/therapy by alignment of neck and ribs by twisting the body, which produced cracking sounds from all of them.

SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE THE CAUSE OF PAINS

There are many diseases/disorders we develop due to over use of mobiles, computers with minimum physical activities and leading sedentary lifestyle, stressful schedules, poor ergonomics and processed Junk food culture are some of the reasons that have resulted in people suffering from pain in vital parts of body like neck, shoulder, back, legs, hands, acidity with gas and indigestion, apart from several other health issues. That is one of the main reasons we need to understand more about holistic healing and how chiropractic care offers promising results without any side effects or use of medicines, pain killer ointments, or tablets.

THE PAINKILLERS' BAD EFFECTS

Overdose and addiction are not only the problems with painkillers, but also their possible side effects; leaving patients with more problems than they actually started with. Pain can become a debilitating condition; in fact, the longer you put it off, the worse your situation may become, a holistic approach to health should be the goal in mind for ultimate healing.

WHAT IS CHIROPRACTIC?

Chiropractic provides a safe, natural and drug-free option to locate, correct and prevent joint dysfunctions, thereby playing a vital role in keeping your body balanced, flexible and functioning at its best. Chiropractic is based on the philosophy that all bodily functions are connected, and healing involves the entire body. Chiropractors offer non-surgical solutions for spinal and joint-related conditions.

They use hands-on chiropractic adjustments, soft tissue techniques and joint mobilization.

CHIROPRACTOR IS PAIN MANAGEMENT CLINIC

Basically it is pain management clinic, which successfully treats patients suffering from Back Pain, Pregnancy-related backaches, Joint problems, Neck Pain, Headaches, Migraines, Sciatica, Knee/Ankle & Foot Pain, Shoulder / Arm / Elbow and Wrist Pain, Arthritis and Bursitis, Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Sports injuries, Temporomandibular joint disorder (TMJ), and many more. Chiropractic treatment is a viable solution for various health issues.

CERVICAL EXPERIENCE :OTHER MODES OF TREATMENT

Cervical with Vertigo is the worst experience one can have, it all happens due to over-engrossed use

of mobiles/laptops/driving without any physical exercise. The vertigo gives you spinning effects and you feel everything around is rotating and tendency to fall down, losing total control over your limbs. I underwent all types of treatment: acupressure, Chinese needle therapy, Ayurvedic potli, use of painkillers, oils and medicines but got no relief and ultimately only the chiropractor helped.

CHIROPRACTOR LOCATED IN CHANDIGARH

Later came to know that there was an award winning chiropractor who is treating patients from tri-city and nearby dist. of Haryana, Punjab and Himachal Pradesh successfully without medicines. A Canadian Trained chiropractor/ Acupuncturist/ Osteopath Dr. Karan Kakria is running a chiropractic wellness clinic by name of Healing Touch in sector 9C Chandigarh. This is the First and Exclusive

Chiropractic Clinic in Northern India. He has been awarded for his treatment by the then Health minister Balbir Singh Sidhu. Celebrities, Bureaucrats, Crossfit athletes, Runners, Golfers, IT professionals, Bankers, Teachers & yogis, are all benefiting from chiropractor care.

CONCLUSION

It is suggested that we must avoid resorting to painkiller medicines/steroids for any physical related problems like pains in muscle/bones. You can Avoid Drugs and Surgery. Chiropractor is a fasted mode of treatment gaining popularity in India as no medicines or any other therapy is used. Chiropractic care whether at rest or in motion, your lifestyle choices impact the health and function of your joints/muscles.

Last and not the least he has total respect, regard for Defence personnel and gives adequate concession cum priority to Defense Veterans especially Senior veterans.

The Express India NEWS

NATION

NDRF rescuers return from Turkiye

Bring back stories of love, and 'thank you' notes!

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

A paramedic leaving her 18-month twins behind to serve the call of duty, officials processing hundreds of documents to prepare more than 140 passports overnight and rescuers not being able to take a bath for 10 days, the NDRF's mission in quake-hit Turkiye was full of challenges -- emotional, professional and personal.

They returned to India after the difficult mission, a part of their heart still thinking if "we could have saved more lives", yet a part filled with the love and affection they received from the affected people, one of whom, grieving the death of wife and three children, ensured Deputy Commandant Deepak got his vegetarian food wherever he was deployed.

"Anything vegetarian he had like an apple or a tomato. He peppered it with salt or local spices to make it tasty." Deepak said he was deeply moved by what Ahmed was doing for him.

The entry of the 152-members three National Disaster Response Force



(NDRF) teams and six canines into the disaster zone was swift, and their exit "moving and emotional". They said they developed a bond with the people they helped during their most vulnerable times.

Many Turkiye nationals shed tears of

thanks and gratitude to their 'Hindustani' friends and 'Biradars' who came in as saviours and took the combat patches and other military decorations from the uniforms of the Indian rescuers.

The federal contingency force that

began its operation on February 7, rescued two young girls alive and retrieved 85 bodies from the debris before they returned to India last week. Prime Minister Narendra Modi felicitated them on Monday at his official residence at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg.

Shraddha Walkar murder case

Aaftab Poonawala to be produced before sessions court on Feb 24

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

A magisterial court on Tuesday moved the Mehrauli murder case to a higher court for initiation of trial proceedings. Accused Aaftab Amin Poonawala, who allegedly strangled his live-in partner Shraddha Walkar and chopped her body into pieces, will be produced before the Saket's principal district and sessions judge on February 24. Metropolitan Magistrate Aviral Shukla noted that the chargesheet was filed under sections 302 (murder) and 201 (causing disappearance of evidence of offence or giving false information to screen offender) of the Indian Penal Code.

"Scrutiny of documents is complete... Section 302 of the IPC is exclusively triable by a sessions court. Accordingly, the accused be produced before the principal district and sessions judge on February 24 at 2 pm," the magistrate said.

"The case is now committed to the sessions court," he added. Earlier in the day, Poonawala was produced in the Metropolitan Magistrate Aviral Shukla's court and he requested he be allowed to carry a book of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), a notebook and a pen during the proceedings so that he could make notes and assist his advocate. He also requested the court to grant permission to carry a religious book to the court.

Digital transactions to soon exceed cash in India: PM Modi

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday expressed hope that digital transactions will soon surpass cash with Unified Payments Interface (UPI) increasingly becoming the most preferred payment mechanism in the country. Modi after the launch of the cross-border connectivity between the UPI and PayNow of Singapore said about 74 billion transactions amounting to more than Rs 126 trillion, which is approximately 2 trillion Singapore dollar, was done through UPI in 2022.

"Many experts are estimating that very soon India's digital wallet transactions are going to overtake cash transactions," he said. A large number of transactions via UPI demonstrate that this indigenously designed payment system is very secure, he said. Modi along with his Singaporean counterpart Lee Hsien Loong witnessed the launch of cross-border connectivity between UPI and

PayNow via video conferencing.

The facility was launched through token transactions by Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das and Managing Director of Monetary Authority of Singapore Ravi Menon using the UPI-PayNow linkage.

Modi in a tweet said, "Today is a special day for India-Singapore friendship and for our efforts to deepen collaboration in FinTech and innovation. The participation of my friend, PM @leehsienloong made this morning's programme even more special."

Prime Minister Lee said the idea of linking PayNow and UPI was first conceived in 2018, when Modi visited Singapore. "Since then, our two central banks have been working on this in earnest. Digital connectivity was also a key topic discussed at the inaugural India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable (ISMR), which was held in New Delhi last September. So I am very glad that the PayNow-UPI linkage has now become a reality," Lee explained.

Man apprehended for trying to rob bank in Delhi

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

A 30-year-old man was nabbed for allegedly firing inside a private bank and trying to rob it in north-west Delhi's Model Town, police said on Tuesday.

The accused, suspected to be a vagabond, reached the bank on Tuesday afternoon and told an official that he wanted to withdraw cash, the police said.

When the official asked him to hand over the cheque, he took out a pistol from his bag and fired in the air. He later said that he wanted cash, following which the bank staff raised an alarm and informed the police.

A passerby informed a police personnel on patrol duty about the firing, they said.

Around 2.40 pm, a PCR call was received regarding a shooting incident in an HDFC Bank branch at Gujrawala in Model Town. A patrolling team reached the branch and overpowered the "armed robber", Deputy Commissioner of Police (Northwest) Jitendra Meena said.

4 yr old mauled to death by stray dogs horrified, netizens flay dog menace

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
HYDERABAD, FEBRUARY 21

In a distressing incident that sent shock waves across Telangana, a 4-year-old child has been mauled to death by stray dogs here, prompting strong public reactions where some even described the menace as 'terror.'

While a video of the child falling prey to the canines has gone viral, Telangana Minister KT Rama Rao termed the incident "unfortunate" and said he was "pained" over the episode while the city civic body assured of steps to prevent recurrence of such attacks.

Many people took to social media and said stray dog attacks have become a menace in many cities and urged the government to immediately put an end to the issue here.

In the video clip that has gone viral, the canines are seen suddenly attacking the boy while tailing him, following which he falls down. He was walking alone.



The unrelenting pack of strays keep mauling him even as there was nobody in sight that could come to his rescue.

The child was apparently carrying a packet containing some food item when the dogs pounced on him, a Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) official said.

The incident, which occurred at Amberpet locality on Sunday, was caught on a CCTV camera.

The boy's father, who works as a security guard at a car service centre, had taken him and his six-year-old daughter to his workplace located in the area.

NATION

Voice of country cannot be suppressed by fear of 'puppet agencies': Cong

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

Slamming the Enforcement Directorate raids on premises linked to its leaders in Chhattisgarh, the Congress said on Tuesday that the country's voice cannot be suppressed by spreading the fear of "puppet agencies".

The party, which is in power in Chhattisgarh, said it is ready to fight it out and will fearlessly raise people's issues.

A large number of Congress leaders and workers held a protest in front of the central agency's office in Raipur and accused it of taking action at the behest of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The protesters, led by Congress MLA Dhanendra Sahu and former Rajya Sabha member Chhaya Verma, held a sit-in at the ED office building in Pachpedi Naka area.

There was a minor scuffle when slogan-shouting Congress members tried to enter the premises but were stopped by security personnel.

"It is clearly political vendetta. It was expected. We were expecting (raids) as the Congress' plenary session is going to be held and there is an election... we are not scared of anything," All India

THE ED ON MONDAY CONDUCTED RAIDS AT MORE THAN A DOZEN LOCATIONS IN CHHATTISGARH INCLUDING AT PREMISES LINKED TO STATE CONGRESS LEADERS AS PART OF AN ONGOING PROBE INTO THE ALLEGED COAL LEVY SCAM.

Congress Committee general secretary KC Venugopal said.

Venugopal was in Raipur to review the final preparation for the party's 85th plenary session scheduled to be held from February 24 to 26. Assembly elections in Chhattisgarh are due this year-end.

"We are law-abiding citizens. Don't think that the Congress is going to be scared by the name of the BJP or (Prime Minister) Modi. We will fight it out certainly according to the law. You can see, just before the plenary session of a national party, they are doing this type of drama..." Venugopal told reporters at the Swami Vivekananda Airport.

The ED on Monday conducted raids at more than a dozen locations in

Chhattisgarh including at premises linked to state Congress leaders as part of an ongoing probe into the alleged coal levy scam.

Hitting out at the Centre, Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said, "Prime Minister's friend Gautam Adani has been accused of embezzlement through shell companies and many other serious allegations have been levelled against him. But did you see any agency investigating this?" "But, for creating hurdles for the Congress' plenary session, and against the voices talking about the nexus between Modi ji and his friend, an agency has been deployed," she said in a tweet in Hindi.

The Congress will continue to fearlessly raise its voice on issues of the country, Priyanka Gandhi asserted.

"We will take a pledge at the Congress' plenary session to raise our voice against inflation, unemployment and corruption. You cannot suppress the voice of the country by scaring us through puppet agencies," she said.

The Congress and state Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel had cried foul over the raids calling it "vendetta politics" by the Centre, a charge rejected by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The Congress also raised questions over the timing of the raids.



I was Indian grandma's favourite, Priyanka Italian grandmother's: Rahul

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, FEB 21

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has said he was favourite of his Indian grandmother Indira Gandhi and his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra was of their Italian grandmother Paola Maino.

In an interview to the Italian daily "Corriere della Sera", the 52-year-old leader also faced a frequently-asked question on his marriage and said he "would like to have children" though. Asked why he did not get married until now, Gandhi said, "It's strange...I don't know. Too many things to do. But I would like to have children." Gandhi also shared his experiences from the 3,500-km Bharat Jodo Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir.

On a question about his beard that he has grown during the foot march, he said, "I had decided not to cut it for the whole march. Now I have to decide whether to keep it or not..." Gandhi told the newspaper, "I was the Indian grandmother's favourite and my sister Priyanka was the Italian grandmother's favorite." He said she lived 98 years and "I was very attached to her, as I am to uncle Walter, to the cousins, to the whole family".

Paola Maino passed away in Italy in August last year.

In his interview to the newspaper published on February 1, Gandhi alleged that fascism has entered the country as democratic structures were collapsing and Parliament was not functioning properly.

60 MPs, 14 from non-NDA parties seek Vande Bharat train services

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK NEW
DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

With 'Vande Bharat' trains running at almost full capacity on 10 routes, 60 parliamentarians, including 14 MPs from non-NDA parties, have petitioned the railways to begin the operation of the state-of-the-art trains connecting their constituencies.

While most of the petitions have come from BJP MPs, including senior leader Devendra Fadnavis who has asked for a train between Solapur and Mumbai. Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi has requested for a Vande Bharat train from Dharwad to Bangalore and Civil Aviation minister Jyotiraditya M Scindia for a train to Gwalior.

Out of the 10 Vande Bharat trains currently in operation, the Bilaspur-Nagpur Vande Bharat Express had the lowest occupancy till January this fiscal, while the Mumbai-Gandhinagar route recorded the highest, official data



showed. The Bilaspur-Nagpur Vande Bharat Express had a 55 per cent occupancy rate, while the train running between Mumbai and Gandhinagar recorded 126 per cent occupancy rate, the data showed.

Among the opposition parties, one MP each from the NCP, DMK, SP, AAP and the JD(U) have demanded such trains for their constituencies, while three Congress MPs, two each from the

CPI(M) and YSRCP have demanded the same. Other party MPs -- one each from the Apna Dal and the Shiv Sena have also asked for the indigenous trains. The Vande Bharat Express train offers better ride for passengers. The train has automatic plug doors, touch-free sliding doors, revolving seats in executive class, 32 inches passenger information and infotainment system in every coach, among others.

Charred bodies case: Haryana Police registers FIR against Rajasthan cops

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NUH (HARYANA), FEBRUARY 21

Haryana Police on Tuesday registered a case against 30 to 40 unnamed Rajasthan police personnel on a complaint by a woman that her pregnant daughter-in-law lost her child after she was allegedly assaulted by them during a raid to nab her son, who is an accused in the Bharatpur abduction-murder case.

Following the complaint of Dulari Devi, an FIR has been registered under sections 148 (rioting, armed with deadly weapons), 149 (unlawful assembly), 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty), 452 (house-trespass) and 312 (causing miscarriage) of the Indian Penal Code at Nagina police station here, the police said.

"We had exhumed the body of the stillborn baby whose postmortem was conducted by a board of doctors on

Monday and the final report is awaited. Following the complaint of Dulari Devi, an FIR has been registered against unnamed cops of Rajasthan police," Varun Singla, Superintendent of Police of Nuh, told PTI.

Devi is the mother of accused Srikant Pandit and the woman who lost her child is his wife. He is among the five linked to the Bajrang Dal who have been booked for allegedly abducting and killing the two men hailing from Bharatpur in Rajasthan whose charred bodies were found in Loharu in Haryana's Bhiwani on Thursday.

The Rajasthan Police has denied Devi's allegation.

"Nuh police registered the FIR against 30 to 40 unidentified cops of Rajasthan police on Tuesday," an official said.

The cause of death of the child is not ascertained yet as the viscera examination report from the forensic science laboratory is awaited, the official said.

WORLD

China for cooperation to share trans-border rivers

BEIJING, FEBRUARY 21

China's Global Security Initiative, mooted by President Xi Jinping, has called for cooperation to share trans-border rivers, a move which assumes significance in the light of concerns raised by India and Bangladesh over construction of dams by Beijing over the Brahmaputra as they could restrict water supply to the lower riparian countries.

"Call on upstream and downstream countries along trans-boundary rivers to actively engage in international cooperation, resolve relevant disputes through dialogue and consultation, ensure the safety of the shipping on transboundary rivers, rationally utilize and protect water resources, and protect the ecological environment of transboundary rivers," a concept paper released by the Foreign Ministry here said on Monday.



India and Bangladesh, the lower riparian states, have raised concerns over the dams on Brahmaputra known as Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet.

As a lower riparian state with considerable established user rights to the waters of the trans-border rivers,

India has consistently conveyed its views and concerns to the Chinese authorities and has urged them to ensure that the interests of downstream states are not harmed by any activities in upstream areas.

China has downplayed such anxieties,

saying it would keep their interests in mind. Reports say China is building the world's biggest hydroelectric dam over the Brahmaputra river in Tibet close to the Arunachal Pradesh border.

The proposed dam which one Chinese official said has "no parallel in history" will be built in Medog county, where the Brahmaputra Grand Canyon is located. Medog is the last county in Tibet which is located close to the Arunachal Pradesh border.

The Brahmaputra is the longest river in Tibet and its valley in southern Tibet is the world's deepest with a 7,000-metre drop from the highest mountain peak to the lowest basin.

China plans to build a hydropower plant in the valley with an electricity generation capacity reaching 70 gigawatts, about three times that of the Three Gorges Dam, currently the world's largest built by the country, the report said.

PTI

China warns against equating Ukraine with Taiwan

BEIJING, FEBRUARY 21

China is "deeply concerned" that the Ukraine conflict could spiral out of control, Foreign Minister Qin Gang said on Tuesday, and called on the US and its allies to stop equating Russia's military aggression in the European nation with Beijing's claims over Taiwan. Beijing has so far not condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The US has warned China that it would impose strict sanctions if it provided military support to Russia. China views Taiwan, a self-ruled island, as a rebel province that should be reunified with the mainland, even by force. "It has been a year since the Ukraine crisis has escalated in an all-round way, and the situation has attracted international attention," Qin said.

"The Chinese side is deeply concerned about the escalating conflict and potential for developments to spiral out of control," the minister said. China will continue to promote peace talks, provide Chinese wisdom for a comprehensive solution to the Ukraine issue, and work with the international community to promote dialogue and consultation to address the concerns of all parties to seek common security, Qin said.

PTI

Russia developing North-South Corridor to open business routes with India, others

MOSCOW, FEBRUARY 21

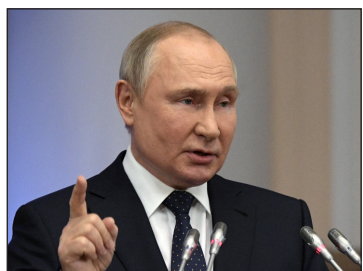
President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday said Russia is developing the ambitious North-South Transport Corridor, which will open up new routes for business cooperation with India, Iran and Pakistan, as well as West Asian countries.

In his one hour and 45 minutes State of the Nation Address to the Federal Assembly, Putin also said that Russia will expand promising international economic connections, as well as build new supply corridors, as the US-led West has imposed crippling sanctions for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine nearly one year ago.

"We will develop the ports of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, we will particularly focus on the North-South International Corridor," Putin said, noting that it will open up new routes for business cooperation with India, Iran, Pakistan as well as West Asian countries.

"We will continue developing this corridor," Putin was quoted as saying by the state-run Tass news agency.

"What areas should the state, regions, and local businesses focus their partnership work on? First, we will expand



promising international economic connections and build new supply corridors," he said in the speech days before the Ukraine war's first anniversary on Friday.

He said a decision has already been taken to extend the Moscow-Kazan highway to Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk and Tyumen, and in the future — to Irkutsk and Vladivostok, and potentially — to Kazakhstan, Mongolia and China, which will particularly expand Russia's economic ties with the markets of Southeast Asia.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a 7,200-km-long multi-mode transport project for moving freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Central Asia and Europe. PTI

Gave no security guarantees to Biden: Russia

MOSCOW/WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 21

Russia gave no security guarantees to US President Joe Biden during his unannounced visit to war-torn Ukraine, Russian intelligence agency director Alexander Bortnikov said on Tuesday.

President Biden slipped into Kyiv on Monday for the first time since Russia invaded Ukraine almost a year ago.

"Indeed, the United States notified Russia about Biden's visit to Kiev - via diplomatic channels. But we gave no guarantees of his security," Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Bortnikov said in an interview with the Shot Telegram channel.

Russia was informed about the trip a few hours before President Biden's departure for "deconfliction purposes", a US official said.

Bortnikov said that Russian and US special services continue to cooperate, especially in what concerns the fight against international terrorism.

"This cooperation continues. Naturally, it is not at the level it used to be at so no one benefits from it. All of us are interested in maintaining ties," Bortnikov was quoted as saying by the official Tass news agency. PTI

2,400 India professionals' visas on offer in first UK ballot

LONDON, FEBRUARY 21

There are 2,400 visas available to eligible Indians under the UK-India Young Professional Scheme in the first ballot to open at the end of this month, the UK government announced on Tuesday.

The scheme, formally launched last month, allows Indian citizens between 18 and 30 years old to live and work in the UK for up to two years.

"This is an excellent opportunity for India's brightest young people between the ages of 18-30 to experience the best of the UK," said the British High Commission in New Delhi as it released the detailed eligibility criteria for the new scheme. Under the reciprocal arrangement signed off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his UK counterpart, Rishi Sunak, at the G20 summit in Indonesia last November, British nationals would also be offered similar visas to live and work in India.

"You must be selected in the India Young Professionals Scheme ballot before you can apply for this visa. To enter the ballot you must declare that you're eligible for the visa - check if you're eligible before you enter," the British government announcement reads. The first ballot, which is free to enter, opens on February 28 afternoon and closes on March 2.



Successful candidates in the ballot need to apply for their visa by the deadline given in a subsequent invitation to apply, which is usually within 30 days. The successful candidate must travel to the UK within 6 months of applying for your visa. The application fee charges have been set at GBP 259 and additional costs involved is a GBP 940 healthcare surcharge and proof that the applicant has GBP 2,530 in personal savings. "You'll be given a visa to live and work in the UK for up to 24 months. You can enter the UK at any time while your visa is valid, and leave and come back at any time during your stay," the eligibility criteria states.

Unsuccessful candidates can apply for future ballots, with the next tentatively scheduled for July. The High Commission of India in London will be handling the ballots and visas on the UK end of the scheme, for British citizens keen to access the new route to apply for a two-year Indian visa. PTI

ENTERTAINMENT



Janhvi gets emotional!

Just ahead of her mother Sridevi's 5th death anniversary, Janhvi Kapoor took to Instagram on Tuesday and penned a heartwarming, emotional note as a tribute to the late superstar.

Sridevi died on February 24, 2018, in Dubai, where she was vacationing with husband Boney Kapoor. She was 54.

Posting a picture of herself with her mother, Janhvi wrote: "I still look for you everywhere mumma, still do everything I do hoping I'm making you proud. Everywhere I go, and everything I do - it starts and ends with you."

Replying to the post, ace designer Manish Malhotra dropped a bunch of pink heart emojis.

Actors Bhumi Pednekar, Rakul Preet Singh and Varun Sharma followed suit.

Janhvi's uncle, actor Sanjay Kapoor and his wife Maheep Kapoor also dropped red hearts under the post.

Janhvi's father, film maker Boney Kapoor also wrote a moving note in the

memory of his late wife, Sridevi.

Along with a beautiful picture of the actress, Boney wrote, "You left us 5 years back... Your love and memories will keep us going and will remain with us forever." Sanjay Kapoor was among the first to drop a comment under the post. He shared a red heart emoji.

Sharing the same photo on Instagram Stories, Boney Kapoor picked lines from the ghazal Jo Na Mil Saka and wrote, "Jo chala gaya mujhe chodkar, woh aaj tak mere sath hai."

A few days back, Boney Kapoor announced that Sridevi's biography - Sridevi: The Life of a Legend - will be released this year. The publishing rights have been acquired by Westland Books.

Sridevi featured in several hits like Chandni, Mr India, Judaai, Khuda Gawah, Nagina and Sadma. She made a powerful comeback with English Vinglish in 2012. She was last seen in MOM, her 300th film, for which she was awarded Best Actress National Award posthumously.



TV audience want better content: Karan Kundra

Television star Karan Kundra says the pandemic has forced the Hindi television industry to provide better and varied programming to keep their devoted viewer base.

"Things have really changed a lot because during COVID-19 there was no new content on TV, except for news. That time, a lot of people, who were watching TV, were forced to go to OTT for fresh content and they are now back and are demanding that kind of work," says the actor known for shows such as "Kitani Mohabbat Hai", "Yeh Kahan Aa Gaye Hum", "Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai" and "Bigg Boss".

Kundra, a hugely successful actor on television, said after his stint in "Bigg Boss 15", he is focused on doing quality projects.

"I was sure I didn't want to do run-of-the-mill stuff because we know that it will be a hit. I want to be part of an interesting script that formalises my position," he added.

"After my first TV show 'Kitani Mohabbat Hai', I chose a crime show, 'Gumrah...' because it excited me. Then, I chose to do things on MTV, Punjabi films, reality shows. After 'Bigg Boss' and 'Dance Deewane Junior', I was waiting for the right kind of stuff that excites me."

The actor said he narrowed his choice down to "Tere Ishq Mein Ghayal", which premiered on February 13 on Colors TV.

"I have never done a massive big budget show like 'Tere Ishq Mein Ghayal'. This is mainstream television but not a typical daily soap drama, it is fantasy, romance, and everything."

The show is a story of a girl next door Eisha (Reem Sameer Shaikh) and werewolf brothers Armaan (Gashmeer Mahajani) and Veer (Kundra) who test the dangerous limits of love and survival.

Of all the formats that he has acted in, Kundra said, fiction TV shows satisfy him the most as an artist.

"It (fiction) is something on which I have to work hard, it challenges you," he said.

Kundra has also featured in films like "Mubarakan", and "1921", and has worked on OTT shows like "Dating Aaj Kal", and "Lock Upp". **PTI**

Abhishek, Vicky to host 2023 IIFA Awards

Bollywood stars Abhishek Bachchan and Vicky Kaushal will host the 2023 edition of the IIFA Weekend and Awards, the International Indian Film Academy (IIFA) announced on Tuesday.

The International Indian Film Academy Awards return to Yas Island, Abu Dhabi, for the second consecutive year and will be held from May 26 and 27.

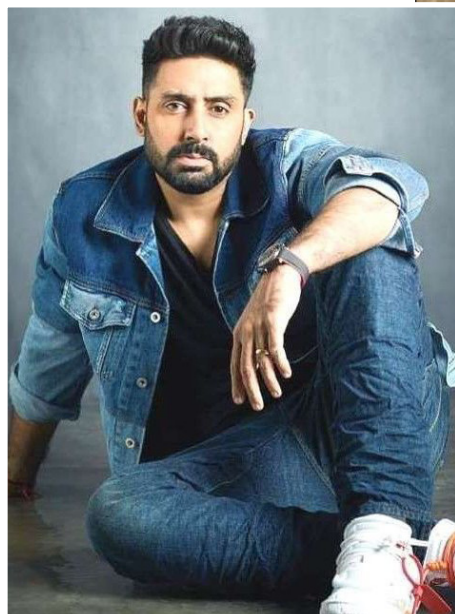
In a statement, Bachchan said he is ecstatic to host IIFA Awards.

"IIFA is like family to me and it gives me immense pleasure to celebrate the very best of the extraordinary range that Indian cinema has to offer. "With IIFA's gigantic global fan following, it is indeed an annual pilgrimage and an absolute honour to entertain and meet the fans there and connect with them globally. I look forward to hosting the IIFA Awards," the 47-year-old actor said.

Kaushal, 34, said he is looking forward to sharing the IIFA stage with Bachchan.

"I feel hugely privileged, my journey with IIFA goes back by seven years to my first film, 'Masaan' when I won the Best Debut Award, followed by Best Supporting Actor for 'Sanju' and Best Actor for 'Sardar Udham' last year," he added.

The annual gala will be held in collaboration with the Department of Culture and



Tourism – Abu Dhabi (DCT Abu Dhabi), and Miral, Abu Dhabi's leading curator of immersive destinations and experiences.

Bollywood stars Salman Khan, Varun Dhawan, and Kriti Sanon will perform at the IIFA Weekend and Awards 2023. **PTI**



BUSINESS

Paddy procurement crosses 700 lakh tonne in current year

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

The government's paddy procurement has crossed the 700 lakh tonne mark in the ongoing 2022-23 kharif marketing season so far, according to the Food Ministry.

The government aims to procure 765.43 lakh tonnes of paddy in the 2022-23 kharif marketing season (October-September). The actual procurement stood at a record 749 lakh tonnes in the previous kharif marketing season.

The paddy procurement is undertaken by both state-owned Food Corporation of India (FCI) and private agencies. The paddy is procured at the minimum support price (MSP) directly from the farmers and is utilised for

ACCORDING TO THE MINISTRY, "PADDY PROCUREMENT... IS PROGRESSING SMOOTHLY WITH PURCHASE OF OVER 702 LAKH TONNE UP TO FEBRUARY 20."

meeting the demand under several welfare schemes.

According to the ministry, "Paddy procurement... is progressing smoothly with purchase of over 702 lakh tonne up to February 20."

Over 96 lakh farmers have already benefitted from the procurement operations as MSP outflow of Rs 1,45,845 crore has been transferred directly into farmers' bank accounts, it said.

So far, 218 lakh tonnes of rice against the procured paddy is in the central pool.

"Adequate rice stock is currently available in the central pool for meeting the requirements of the country," the ministry added.

The estimated paddy procurement from the rabi crop of this year will be finalised in the forthcoming Food Secretaries' meeting to be held on March 1. With the inclusion of the rabi paddy crop, it is expected that around 900 lakh tonne paddy may be procured during the entire 2022-23 kharif marketing season, it added.

Paddy is grown in both kharif (summer) and rabi (winter) seasons. But 80 per cent of the country's total paddy production comes from the kharif season. **PTI**

Goods and services exports may reach USD 1 trillion each by 2030: Goyal

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

India's goods and services exports are growing at a healthy rate and are expected to be around USD 1 trillion each by 2030, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday.

The country's merchandise and services exports touched an all-time high of USD 422 billion and USD 254 billion, respectively, in 2021-22.

"My own estimates seem to suggest that we will converge (goods and services exports) by 2030...seven years from now at about USD 1 trillion of goods and USD 1 trillion of services (exports).

"That is the trajectory I can see which will mean merchandise doing 8-9.5 per cent and services doing anywhere between 16-17 per cent, Goyal said here at an event.

The services sector, driven by the IT industry, has created a potential not only in terms of jobs, giving value to talent, but also providing India with an opportunity to showcase to the world its



strengths, he added.

He also said that every country wants to invest in India because of its startup ecosystem.

"The world wants to engage with our Startups because of their integrity and transparency," the ministry said.

During April-January this fiscal, goods exports rose by 8.5 per cent to USD 369.25 billion and services exports are estimated to touch USD 272 billion this fiscal. **PTI**

Power ministry asks all thermal plants using imported coal to operate at full capacity during summer

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

With electricity demand expected to hit a new peak this summer, the power ministry has directed all thermal plants using imported coal to operate with full capacity from March 16 to June 15 so as to avoid electricity shortage.

The direction under Section 11 of the Electricity Act came amid rising power demand due to higher-than-normal temperature in several parts of the country.

This order shall remain valid for generation and supply of power from March 16, 2023 to June 15, 2023, stated a notice sent to 15 thermal plants that use imported coal.

The 15 imported coal-based (ICB) power plants include Tata Power's and Adani Power's plants in Mundra in Gujarat; Essar power plant in Salaya; JSW Ratnagiri; Tata Trombay; Udipi Power; Meenakshi Energy; and JSW Torangallu.

The country's peak power demand is estimated to touch 230GW in 2023.

In December 2022, Union power secretary Alok Kumar had said that the government will take all possible measures to meet the 230 gigawatt (GW) single-day peak demand. **PTI**

As per official figures, the maximum all-India power demand met at 2:51 pm on April 26, 2022 was 201.066 GW.

The latest data shows that power demand has already started rising this year.

The peak power demand met or the highest supply in the day was 205.52GW while total electricity consumption stood at 4,281 million units (MU) on February 20, 2023.

In contrast, peak power demand met and the total electricity consumption was much lower at 185.80GW and 3,802 MU on February 20 of the previous year.

The data also shows that there would be unprecedented high demand of electricity during summer this year.

The ministry's notice noted that in the likely scenario of a gap in the demand and supply of domestic coal and essential requirement of maintaining coal stock at generating stations, the use of imported coal needs to be increased by way of blending with the domestic fuel in domestic coal based plants and also by ensuring optimum generation from ICB plants.

This will ease the pressure on domestic call supply and also ensure that all the plants are available during the peak demand period, it also noted. **PTI**

Rs 1.5 lakh cr to be invested for setting up data centres in next 6 years: Report

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 21

The data centres industry will witness investments of Rs 1.5 lakh crore over the next six years, a report said on Tuesday.

This will result in addition of nearly 5,000 MW capacity, which is a six-fold increase as compared to the current installed capacity, domestic ratings agency Icria said in the report. The agency attributed the increased interest in investments to data localisation and data explo-

sion for what it termed as the data centre revolution, which is underway in the country. It can be noted that last few years have seen a slew of announcements by companies, including those from the Adani Group, to invest in the data centres space. "The key triggers for digital explosion in India are the increasing internet and mobile penetration, the government's thrust on e-governance/digital India, adoption of new technologies (cloud computing, Internet of Things, 5G etc), growing user-base for social media, gaming, e-com-

merce and OTT platforms," the agency's co-group head for corporate sector ratings Anupama Reddy said. The investments will be further aided by favourable regulatory policies like the draft Digital Data Protection Bill which provides infrastructure status to data centres, special incentives from the Central and state governments like land at subsidised cost, power subsidies, exemptions on stamp duty, discounts on usage of renewable energy and procurement of IT components made locally, Reddy added. **PTI**

Extended trading hours to help in hedging risk from global uncertainties: Experts

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

Longer trading hours in the Indian stock markets can potentially decrease the overnight risk arising from global information flow, experts said on Tuesday. The remarks came amid media reports that the National Stock Exchange (NSE) is looking to extend the trading hours in the equity segment till 5 pm. This is not the first time, when discussion over extended trading hours has created a lot of buzz.

At present, the domestic stock markets are open between 9:15 am and 3:30 pm.

"In today's world, economies are highly connected and the integration of

the global markets is gradually increasing. The Indian stock market reacts to the developments in other major economies and markets in the US and Europe. Therefore, markets which have longer trading hours can hedge the risk arising due to the global information flow in a more efficient way," A Balakrishnan, Executive Director at Geojit Financial Services, said.

Therefore, any move by the NSE to increase the trading time for the equity segment will help the market participants and retail investors, he added.

Tejas Khoday, Co-Founder and CEO of FYERS, said that extending market hours in the equity F&O and currency

segments is necessary for hedging overnight risk from global uncertainties. He, further, said that resistance and negativity regarding this topic could inhibit the growth of our capital markets because financial markets are increasingly interconnected, and cutting off access to hedge will prevent India from becoming a global investment destination.

"Extended trading hours for F&O will maybe signal the maturity of our markets. They also level the playing field for domestic traders against international traders and are also good for capital markets businesses in terms of revenues, but I'm conflicted," Zerodha Co-Founder Nithin Kamath tweeted. **PTI**

SPORT

Sumit Nagal wins thriller in Bengaluru Open

BENGALURU, FEBRUARY 21

Sumit Nagal kept India's hopes alive in the DafaNews Bengaluru Open with an thrilling win over Ly Nam Hoang of Vietnam in the Round of 32 at the KSLTA Stadium here on Tuesday.

Nagal notched up an intensely-fought 7-6 (3), 5-7, 6-4 win over Hoang.

Two other Indians, Prajnesh Gunneswaran and SD Prajwal, however, crashed out of the Round of 32.

Prajnesh had his moments against Serbian Hamad Medjedovic but the latter was way better in the crucial moments, emerging a 6-3, 6-4 winner. Karnataka lad Prajwal, on the other hand, could not counter Taipei's Jason Jung and bowed out after a 2-6, 2-6 defeat.

Nagal made up for those disappointments to a certain extent, getting better of a sticky Nam Hoang. The first set drifted into tie-break after both the players traded a couple of breaks in the early part.

The Indian came up with a solid game in the tie-break to build a 6-3 lead and then grabbed the set. Nam Hoang produced a grittier show in the second set winning it 7-5. **PTI**

Sania signs off sans fairytale ending

DUBAI, FEBRUARY 21

A fairytale ending was not there but Sania Mirza bows out of international tennis after achieving unprecedented success and setting high benchmark for the next generation.

Sania and her American partner Madison Keys lost 4-6 0-6 to the formidable Russian pair of Vernokia Kudermetova and Liudmila Samsonova in exactly one hour at the WTA Dubai event. Just a month back Sania played her last Grand Slam and ended with a runner-up finish at the Australian Open along with compatriot Rohan Bopanna.

Now settled in Dubai, Sania would have hoped for a dream closing at her second home but she bumped into a strong Russian pairing that cut short her stay in the final tournament of her career in which she won 43 WTA doubles titles and one singles trophy.

Success was not the only highlight of her almost two-decade long career as unwarranted controversies chased Sania throughout. Sometimes she remained unfazed and kept going, achieving many a firsts. Sometimes she broke to the extent



that she considered not playing in India.

It was when she had to prove her love and loyalty for India after being accused of disrespecting the tri-colour during the 2008 Hopman Cup in Australia.

Probably the worst jibe thrown at her was when she was called daughter-in-law of Pakistan due to her wedding with Pakistani cricketer Shoaib Malik. This was after Telangana chose her to be their state ambassador. All this, despite her inspiring on-court success. After all, how many from India became a top-30 tennis players? How many excelled at Majors? How many became world number one across formats? How many won the

year-end championships? In men's tennis, just a handful and in women's tennis, it's only Sania. And no player is in sight who looks like even getting near to what Sania has achieved. The gap is huge and the best after Sania are also gradually fading.

The 36-year-old Sania, who turned Pro in 2003, walks out of competitive tennis with six Grand Slam titles, including three women's doubles with Swiss legend Martina Hingis.

She won two of her three mixed doubles with compatriot Mahesh Bhupathi (2009 Australian Open and 2012 French Open). She won the US Open trophy with Bruno Soares. **PTI**

England hammer Pakistan by 114 runs in dead rubber

CAPE TOWN, FEBRUARY 21

The big-hitting Nat Sciver-Brunt smashed an unbeaten 81 off 40 balls as England outplayed Pakistan by 114 runs in a dead rubber of the Women's T20 World Cup here on Tuesday.

With England already qualifying for the semifinals as table toppers along with second placed India, the game was a lot about fine-tuning their preparation for the knock-out game on Friday. Opener Danielle Wyatt gave England a fine start with 59 off 33 balls before Sciver-Brunt unleashed carnage in his knock comprising 12 fours and a six to take her team a massive 213 for five.

Amy Jones also made a quickfire 47 off 31 balls. Pakistan were never in the run chase and crawled to 99 for nine in 20 overs. England remained unbeaten in the group stage.

Katherine Sciver-Brunt and Charlotte Dean picked up a couple of wickets each. Australia are set to face India in the first semifinal on Thursday, while England's semifinal opponent will be decided following the New Zealand-South Africa contest on Tuesday night. **PTI**

Shooting World Cup

Rudranksh wins gold in men's 10m air rifle

CAIRO, FEBRUARY 21

Reigning world champion Rudranksh Patil won the gold medal in the men's 10m Air Rifle competition, while Tilottama Sen, all of 14, claimed bronze in women's category of the ISSF Shooting World Cup here on Tuesday.

India now has five medals in its kitty, including three gold.

World number one Rudranksh got the better of Germany's Maximilian Ulbrich 16-8 in the gold medal contest.

Rudranksh also topped the ranking round with a total score of 262.0, with Ulbrich scoring 260.6.

Tilottama ended the top eight ranking round with a score of 262.0, missing out on the gold medal match by the narrowest possible margin of 0.1. Her medal was India's second bronze of the competition. Great Britain's Seonaid McIntosh beat Switzerland's Olympic Champion Nina Christen 16-8 in the decider to win gold. Earlier, Rudranksh qualified for the ranking matches after finishing seventh in the qualification round with a score of 629.3. The other Indian shooters in the fray, Divyansh Singh Panwar and



Hriday Hazarika narrowly missed out on qualification. In the ranking round, where the top eight qualifiers face-off over five series of five single shots each to determine the top two who make it to the gold medal match, seasoned Israeli shooter Sergey Richter led after the first series with the Indian 1.2 points behind in fifth.

The champion was back in his element from the second series and a perfect 10.9 for his 10th gave him the lead for the first time. He held on to that slender 0.2 points lead over Croat Miran Maricic till the end of the third series and by the end of the fourth, that lead had swelled to 1.1.

In women's event, Britain's Seonaid McIntosh was in her elements from the qualification round itself, topping the 95-strong field with a score of 634.0, after 60-shots. **PTI**

After IPL, Tata bags title rights for WPL

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 21

Tata Group on Tuesday bagged the title rights for the inaugural Women's Premier League beginning in Mumbai on March 4.

"I am delighted to announce the #TataGroup as the title sponsor of the inaugural #WPL. With their support, we're confident that we can take women's cricket to the next level," BCCI secretary Jay Shah tweeted.

The financials of the deal was not revealed.

A BCCI source told PTI that Tata has secured the rights for five years. The Indian multinational conglomerate had last year replaced Vivo as the title sponsor for the Indian Premier League.

The first edition will be played in Mumbai across two venues -- Brabourne Stadium and DY Patil Stadium. The sale of media rights had fetched the BCCI Rs 951 crore and the five teams were sold for Rs 4700 crore.

At Rs 3.40 crore, Indian opener Smriti Mandhana was the most expensive buy at the auction held earlier this month. **PTI**

International Boxing tourney

Thapa, Hussamuddin begin with comfortable wins

SOFIA, FEBRUARY 21

Experienced pugilists Shiva Thapa and Hussamuddin began their campaign at 74th Strandja Memorial International Boxing Tournament on a winning note here on Tuesday.

Thapa (63.5 kg) faced Frederik Jensen Lundgaard in the round of 32 match and started the bout with an aggressive approach. He displayed swift movements and landed some quick jabs on his opponent to gain an early lead in the first round.

The second round also went the Indian boxer's way as he dominated his opponent. Thapa used his experience and top-notch skills to dodge his opponent's attacks. He maintained a safe distance in the third round and only went into attacking mode when there was a clear opening in Lundgaard's defence.

The difference between their experience was evident in the scoreline as Thapa won the match by 5-0 and progressed into the next round of the tournament.

Hussamuddin (57kg) also looked confident and dominated China's Lyu Ping from the start of the bout. The Indian boxer was in control throughout the bout, as he landed accurate punches at his



opponent. He asserted dominance over his Chinese counterpart in every round and eventually registered a 4-1 victory to progress into the pre-quarters. Nishant Dev (71kg) went down 2-3 against Tokyo Olympic bronze medallist Aidan Walsh of Ireland and bowed out of the competition. On the other hand, three female pugilists won their respective matches late on Monday night and progressed into the next round of the tournament. Kalaivani (48kg) defeated Tesara Cleo of the Philippines 5-0 while Anamika (50kg) got the better of China's Chang Yuan 5-0 to progress into the next round. Vinakshi (57kg) won her bout against Azerbaijan's Hamzayeva Aghamaliyeva Mashati by 4-1.

Ankushita Boro (66kg) crashed out of the tournament after going down 1-4 against reigning World Champion Amy Broadhurst of Ireland. **PTI**