

Jamia Nagar violence

Sharjeel Imam, 10 others discharged

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

A court here on Saturday discharged 11 people including student activists Sharjeel Imam and Asif Iqbal Tanha, who participated in anti-CAA protests, in the 2019 Jamia Nagar violence case, saying they were made "scapegoats" by police and that dissent has to be encouraged, not stifled.

Noting that the accused were merely present at the protest site and there was no incriminating evidence against them, the court said dissent is an extension of the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, subject to reasonable restrictions.

It said investigative agencies need to discern the difference between dissent, which has to be given space, and insurrection that should be quelled.

The court, however, ordered the framing of charges against one of the accused, Mohammad Ilyas.

"Marshalling the facts as brought forth from a perusal of the charge sheet and three supplementary charge sheets, this court cannot but arrive at the conclusion that the police were unable to apprehend the actual perpetrators behind the commission of the offence, but surely managed to rope the persons herein as scapegoats," Additional

IMAM WAS ACCUSED OF INSTIGATING THE RIOTS BY DELIVERING A PROVOCATIVE SPEECH AT THE JAMIA MILIA UNIVERSITY ON DECEMBER 13, 2019. HE WILL CONTINUE TO REMAIN IN JAIL AS HE IS AN ACCUSED IN THE LARGER CONSPIRACY CASE OF THE 2020 NORTHEAST DELHI RIOTS.

Sessions Judge Arul Varma said.

The court faulted the police for failing to produce any WhatsApp chats, SMS or other proof of the accused interacting with each other and criticised it for "arbitrarily" choosing to array some people from the crowd as accused and police witnesses, saying this "cherry-picking" by the police is detrimental to the precept of fairness.

An FIR was lodged in connection with the violence that erupted after a clash between police and people protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) in the Jamia Nagar area here in December 2019.

Imam was accused of instigating the riots by delivering a provocative speech



at the Jamia Milia University on December 13, 2019.

He will continue to remain in jail as he is an accused in the larger conspiracy case of the 2020 northeast Delhi riots.

"However, the moot question remains -- whether the accused persons herein were even prima facie complicit in taking part in that mayhem? The answer is an unequivocal no," he added.

"Furthermore, such police action is detrimental to the liberty of citizens who choose to exercise their fundamental right to peacefully assemble and protest. The liberty of the protesting citizens should not have been lightly interfered with," it said.

The court said dissent is an extension of the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression, subject to reasonable restrictions.

It said, "It is apparent that the police have arbitrarily chosen to array some people from the crowd as accused, and others from the same crowd, as police witnesses. This cherry-picking by the police is detrimental to the precept of fairness".

The court said photographs of Ilyas showed him hurling a burning tyre and that he was duly identified by police witnesses.

"Therefore, charges levelled in the charge sheet be framed...(against) accused Mohammad Ilyas," the judge said.

The court said the accused were merely present at the spot and there was no incriminating evidence against them.

"No overt act or participation in the commission of offences was attributed to them. There are no eyewitnesses who could substantiate the version of the police that the accused persons were in any way involved in the commission of the offences," the court said.

Quashing the charge of conspiracy, the court said the prosecution did not submit any proof that there was an agreement or conspiracy between the accused.

Supreme Court gets five new judges

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

Five judges were appointed to the Supreme Court on Saturday with the Centre clearing the names recommended by the Collegium on December 13 last year.

Law Minister Kiren Rijju tweeted to announce the appointment of Justice Pankaj Mithal, Chief Justice, Rajasthan High Court; Justice Sanjay Karol, Chief Justice, Patna High Court; Justice P V Sanjay Kumar, Chief Justice, Manipur High Court; Justice Ahsanuddin Amanullah of Patna High Court; and Justice Manoj Misra of Allahabad High Court as apex court judges.

Once they take oath early next week, the strength of the apex court will go up to 32 judges.

At present the top court is functioning with 27 judges, including the Chief Justice of India. Its sanctioned strength, including the CJI, is 34.

Their appointments come amidst strong observations by a Supreme Court bench questioning the delay on part of the government in appointing and transferring judges based on the recommendations of the SC Collegium.

A senior government functionary said the five appointments have nothing to do with the bench's observation and were made after the Centre took a considered decision.

The appointments came in due course, he added. **PTI**

All roads lead to Dera Ballan ahead of Jalandhar by-poll

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JALANDHAR, FEBRUARY 4

As the parliamentary by-poll to this constituency draws near, all the roads have started leading to Dera Ballan in the outskirts of the city. The Dera has phenomenal influence among people in the Doaba area dominated by the Dalit brotherhood.

The Congress party's relatively better show in Doaba area, where it remained neck and neck with the Aam Aadmi Party which otherwise swept almost the entire Punjab, was attributed to the Dera support only.

The then Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi had personally visited the Dera and sought its support ahead of the 2022 Vidhan Sabha elections.

No wonder Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann personally flagged off a special train of devotees to Varanasi, where the



Dera has built a temple at Seer Goverdhanpur, the birthplace of Guru Ravidass.

Shiromani Akali Dal-Badal president Sukhbir Singh Badal personally went to Varanasi to pay homage

there. He also met the Dera head, Niranjan Dass.

Politicians of all hues reach out to all

sorts of deras irrespective of their political inclinations. With so many deras in Punjab, it is difficult to make out which one has the maximum following. Each of the deras claims to have a maximum following running into lakhs.

Even Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Dera Radha Soami Beas in November last year. Earlier the Union Home Minister Amit Shah had also visited the Dera Beas ahead of the Vidhan Sabha elections, signifying the importance and influence such Deras hold in Punjab.

However, Dera Sachkhand Ballan in particular has special influence in the Doaba belt and its supporters will hold key to the final outcome in the ensuing Jalandhar parliamentary by-election, which may be announced anytime now. The bye-election was necessitated by the sudden demise of sitting MP and senior Congress leader Chaudhary Santokh Singh.

PUNJAB



CM flags off first batch of 36 school principals for Singapore

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 4

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday flagged off the first batch of 36 government school principals for their visit to Singapore for professional training.

The principals will participate in a Professional Teacher Training seminar in Singapore from February 6 to 10.

The Aam Aadmi Party had before last year's Assembly polls given a "guarantee" to people that the education system will be completely transformed in the state, Mann said.

"Today, the first batch of 36 school principals is going to Singapore and they will take part in a five-day training camp

At Principals Academy in Singapore, they will learn the latest techniques in the education sector

BHAGWANT MANN
Chief Minister

there. At Principals Academy in Singapore, they will learn the latest techniques in the education sector," the chief minister told reporters.

The first batch will return on February 11 and they will share their experience

with their colleagues, he said. Mann said the way the Delhi government have been transformed by the Arvind Kejriwal dispensation, Punjab will witness the same transformative process.

"We have talented teachers. But there was a need to update them (about the latest teaching techniques), the process for which has started today," the chief minister said, adding that health and education sectors have been the priority of his government from the very first day.

"We will send teachers to Finland as well. We will send teachers to places wherever new and latest ways of teaching are available to learn. We will also raise an outlay for education in the upcoming state budget," he said. **PTI**

Warring urges CM to consider Sidhu's release from jail

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 4

Punjab Congress chief Amrinder Singh Raja Warring on Saturday appealed to Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann to consider early release of Navjot Singh Sidhu who is serving an year-long sentence in Patiala central prison in a 1988 road rage death case.

The appeal comes a day after the Punjab Cabinet approved a proposal of granting special remission to five convicts serving terms in jails. However, the name of Sidhu does not figure in the list.

"I appeal to Chief Minister @BhagwantMann Sahab to consider the early release of senior @INCIndia leader @sherryontopp Navjot Singh Sidhu Ji also. Matters of justice should be treated above the partisan divide," Warring tweeted.

There had been speculations that Sidhu might be granted special remission on the Republic Day.

Several Punjab Congress leaders, including former Punjab Congress chief

Shamsher Singh Dullo, had last month lambasted the AAP government for not releasing Sidhu.

On May 20 last year, Sidhu, the former Punjab Congress chief, was jailed following his surrender before a court in Patiala after he was sentenced to one-year rigorous imprisonment by the Supreme Court.

The top court had, in its order, said any sympathy in imposing an inadequate sentence would do more harm to the justice system and undermine the public confidence in the efficacy of law.

Though the court had in May 2018 held Sidhu guilty of "voluntarily causing hurt" to the man, it had spared him a jail term and imposed on him a fine of Rs 1,000.

The Punjab Cabinet on Friday gave approval for sending the case of special remission to convicts confined in jails of Punjab in the second phase to commemorate the 75th Independence Day of the country being celebrated as 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav'.

ED recovers arms, contraband during raids

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

Arms, ammunition and suspected narcotics weighing about 16 kgs was recovered after raids were conducted in Punjab as part of a money laundering probe linked to a drug trafficking case, the Enforcement Directorate said on Saturday.

The searches were conducted on Friday at 10 different premises in villages like Sheron, Naushera Pannuan and Bugha in the Tarn Taran district. The business and residential premises of Skattar Singh alias Laddi, Gajjan Singh, Makhhan Singh and their family members apart from some associates were searched, the

Enforcement Directorate (ED) said in a statement.

The money laundering case, filed under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), stems from multiple Punjab Police FIRs filed against Makhhan Singh's son Hardev Singh alias Rambo and others under various sections of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS) and the Arms Act.

Hardev Singh, the agency said, is currently lodged in Amritsar central jail in a 2018 drugs case related to recovery of 4 kg heroin.

Two rifles, three pistols and some bullets were recovered during the searches, it said. **PTI**

Aman Arora kick starts 'Khedan Halqa Sunam Diyan'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 4

In order to promote sports culture in the state, Punjab Information and Public Relations, Housing and Urban Development, New and Renewable Energy Sources and Printing and Stationery Minister Aman Arora, on Saturday, inaugurated 'Khedan Halqa Sunam Diyan' organised in the memory of his father and late Punjab Minister Babu Bhagwan Dass Arora at Shaheed Bhai Mati Das Senior Secondary School, Longowal.

It is for the first time in the history of Punjab that as many as 207 teams, comprising 2,037 players, from a same constituency are participating in the rural sports, stated the cabinet minister.

Arora also felicitated Padma Shri Heavyweight International Boxer Kaur Singh, gold medal winner of Asian Games and Padma Shri Sunita Rani, gold medalist athlete of Asian Games, while calling them sports icons of Punjab.

He interacted with players and urged them to play with spirit of sportsmanship. The Cabinet Minister informed that three categories of sports — volleyball shoot-

ing, volleyball smashing and tug of war, are being organised to promote sports culture at the ground level.

Highlighting the projects being carried out in Sunam constituency, Arora said that a stadium will be constructed with the cost of Rs 3.97 crore at Longowal to ensure the state-of-the-art sports infrastructure to the youth.

Apart from this, Shaheed Bhai Mati Das Senior Secondary School, Longowal, and Government Senior Secondary School (Boys), Sunam, will be converted into School of Eminence, Rs 3.62 crore will be spent on completion of the remain-

ing construction of two storeys of Government School (Girls), Sunam, and Rs 1.31 crore will be spent on the bus stand and boundary wall of Civil Hospital will be constructed with cost of Rs 38 lakh.

The Cabinet Minister further said that Babu Bhagwan Dass Arora Memorial Sunam Super League under the banner of 'Khedan Halqa Sunam Diyan' is being organised by the Babu Bhagwan Dass Arora Memorial Foundation.

Arora said that winner teams of these three events will be bestowed with cash prizes along with trophies. Sports kits

will also be distributed to all the participating teams, he added.

Pertinently, Babu Bhagwan Dass Arora Memorial Foundation has been organising medical camps and carrying out other social works for the welfare of public for over a decade.

Recently, Mann government had also organised the three-month long sports gala 'Khedan Watan Punjab Diyan' to identify hidden talent and thereafter hone that talent to produce international level sportspersons from the state and over 3 lakh sportspersons participated in this mega sports event, said the cabinet minister.

PUNJAB

'Cong welcome to take whatever decision it wants'

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 4

Patiala MP Preneet Kaur Saturday said the Congress is welcome to take whatever decision it wants but asserted that she always gave her best to the party.

Her comments came a day after the Congress suspended her and also asked her to explain why she should not be expelled for anti-party activities.

Kaur is the wife of former chief minister Amarinder Singh, who joined the BJP after being ousted from the Congress.

"The Congress is welcome to take whatever decision it wants. I have always given my best to the party and to the people who have repeatedly elected me.

"I owe it to them and will continue to serve them, as always. I derive my strength from my people. Everything else is secondary," Kaur said on Twitter on Saturday.

The Congress' disciplinary panel mem-



ber secretary Tariq Anwar had said the action follows complaints against her from the party's Punjab unit chief Amarinder Raja Warring and other state leaders that

she was helping the BJP in the state.

"The Congress president has received a complaint from Amarinder Singh Raja Warring, president of PCC Punjab, that

Preneet Kaur, MP (Lok Sabha) from Patiala is indulging in anti-party activities to help BJP.

"Some other senior Congress leaders of Punjab also share this view," Anwar had said in a statement.

It was not the first time that Kaur was served a show-cause notice by the party.

In November 2021, the Congress issued her a show-cause notice seeking an explanation for her alleged "anti-party activities". Kaur had then said that she did not receive any such notice, but had only read about it in newspapers and on social media.

In May last year, Punjab Congress chief Warring had also said that Kaur was not with the party anymore.

In the 2022 state assembly polls, Kaur even campaigned for her husband Amarinder Singh who contested the elections as an ally of the BJP. Kaur had been an MP in 1999, 2004 and 2009. She lost the Patiala Lok Sabha seat in 2014 but won it back in 2019. **PTI**

SGPC opposes any move to introduce helmets for Sikh soldiers

AMRITSAR, FEBRUARY 4

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee has strongly opposed any move to introduce ballistic helmets for Sikh soldiers.

A delegation of the SGPC, the apex religious body of the Sikhs, met the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) chief to discuss the issue.

The SGPC delegation said no interference in the matter of Sikh identity will be tolerated. Therefore, under no circumstances the helmets can be accepted on Sikh soldiers, they said.

The remarks come amid reports that introduction of ballistic helmets for Sikh soldiers is being considered. The SGPC delegation on Friday attended the meeting at the NCM office in New Delhi. The delegation included SGPC general secretary Gurcharan Singh Grewal and member Raghbir Singh Saharan Majra. **PTI**

Guru Ravidass Jayanti CM flags off Shobha Yatra in Jalandhar

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JALANDHAR, FEBRUARY 4

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann today gave a clarion call to people to follow the path shown by Guru Ravidass to wipe out various social maladies prevalent in the society.

The Chief Minister, while addressing the gathering before flagging off a Shobha Yatra to mark the Parkash Utsav of Guru Ravidass, said that the bani of Guru is a lighthouse for the entire humanity. He said that Guru Ravidass had shown the path of humanity to the entire world.

The Chief Minister said that following on the footsteps of Guru Ravidass, the state government is making strenuous efforts for carving out an egalitarian society. He said that in consonance with the path of equality shown by Guru Ravidass and Baba Sahib Dr BR Ambedkar, the state government is giving top priority to education and health sectors. Mann said that the schools of the state are being equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure and human resource so that quality education can be imparted to the students from weaker and under-privileged sections of society.

The Chief Minister said that poverty can be eradicated only by providing quality education to the students. He said

that the focus of his government is to ensure that youth become job givers instead for job seekers.

The Chief Minister bemoaned that unfortunately those who had been in power in the state earlier had mercilessly plundered the people for their vested political interests. He said that even the funds meant for welfare of poor students under post matric scholarship scheme were robbed. However, Mann said every single penny looted by these leaders will be recovered from them.

The Chief Minister felicitated the people on this solemn occasion and urged them to tread the path shown by Guru Ravidass.

The Chief Minister said that this 'Parkash Utsav' is an occasion to rededicate ourselves to the task of creating a society where every human being leads a life with self-respect and dignity regardless of any discrimination. He appealed to the people to celebrate the 'Parkash Utsav' of Guru collectively by rising above the parochial considerations of caste, creed, colour and religion.

The Chief Minister said that it is matter of great pride for him that he participates in various events related to great Gurus, martyrs, saints and seers. However, Mann said that he is surprised to note that at most of such places he is welcomed

Govt's majoritarian principles not in tune with Guru Ravidas' philosophy: Sukhbir

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JALANDHAR, FEBRUARY 4

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal today said the government is following majoritarian principles were not in tune with the philosophy of Guru Ravidas who preached equality for all.

The SAD president made these remarks during an interaction with Dera Sachkhand Ballan head Sant Niranjana Das after paying obeisance at the Janam Asthan of Guru Ravidass here.

A joint SAD-BSP delegation led by Badal and BSP Punjab unit president Jasvir Singh Garhi visited the Janam Asthan on the eve of birth anniversary celebrations of the Guru.

Badal said Guru Ravidas' philosophy was as relevant today as it was more than 500 years back and was much needed in today's times.

He also explained how the Sikh religion as well as the Shiromani Akali Dal also followed the philosophy of Guru Ravidas, which was also included in Guru Granth Sahib. "Like the great Guru, Sikhism does not give importance to self but to mankind. Similarly, the SAD has always stood for quality and social justice in the real sense of the word," he said.

Referring to the long association of former chief minister Parkash Singh Badal with Dera Ballan, the SAD president said,



A JOINT SAD-BSP DELEGATION LED BY BADAL AND BSP PUNJAB UNIT PRESIDENT JASVIR SINGH GARHI VISITED THE JANAM ASTHAN ON THE EVE OF BIRTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS OF THE GURU.

"Badal Sahab believed in giving due respect to all religions. Accordingly, he personally ensured sacred occasions of all religions were commemorated by

the state. He also beautified all religious places be it the Bhagwan Valmiki shrine or Guru Ravidas Asthan at Khuralgarh. The philosophy behind this was to insure Sarbat da Bhala."

Badal met and interacted with a large number of pilgrims from Punjab who are here to pay obeisance at the Janam Asthan. He also partook of langar.

The delegation included SAD MLA Dr Sukhwinder Sukhi, Pawan Kumar Tinu, Baldev Khaira, Gurpartap Wadala, Kabir Dass, BSP MLA from Nawanshehar Nachhatar Pal, Avtar Singh Karimpuri, Gurlal Saila and Ajit Singh Bhaini.

Air Marshal reviews security

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 4

Western Air Commander Air Marshal Pankaj Mohan Sinha on Saturday visited forward areas on the northern borders and lauded the strong counter-infiltration grid along the Line of Control (LoC), a defence spokesman said.

The Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief assured that the western command is vigilant for the aerial defence of the sensitive areas of various parts of North, North-West India, the spokesman said.

The spokesman said the Indian Air Force has kept almost all its air bases at a "very high level of readiness" to meet any eventuality relating to China and Pakistan.

Air Marshal Sinha was briefed on the prevalent security situation and operational preparedness along the northern borders, the spokesman said, adding that the air officer interacted with senior officers and deliberated on various defence related issues.



He remarked that the synergized approach will be the way ahead to address the dynamic requirements of modern day warfare, the spokesman said.

He recognised the efforts of the Indian Army and Air Force in J&K, and appreciated the spirit and motivation of troops deployed in active operations and praised

all ranks for their unconditional and selfless service to the Nation.

Air Marshal Sinha also commended the troops of the Indian Army for securing the borders and keeping the internal security situation stable in the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, the spokesman said. **PTI**

Soldier injured in landmine blast near LoC in Poonch

POONCH/JAMMU, FEBRUARY 4

An army jawan was injured in a landmine explosion near the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district on Saturday, officials said.

The landmine went off when a group of soldiers were patrolling a forward area in the Kerni sector in the morning, they said.

The injured soldier, Lance Naik Anshul Rawat, was immediately given medical aid and was later airlifted to the Command Hospital in Udhampur for specialised treatment, the officials said.

As part of an anti-infiltration obstacle system, forward areas are dotted with landmines which sometimes get washed away by rains resulting in such types of accidents, they said. **PTI**



Avalanche hits Gulmarg



SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 4

An avalanche hit the upper areas of the famous ski-resort of Gulmarg in Jammu and Kashmir's Baramulla district on Saturday, police said.

No loss of life has been reported yet, they said.

"The avalanche has occurred in Affarwat Gulmarg today morning. So far, no reports of any loss," a police official said.

The area has already been notified as a "Red Zone" and is restricted for any movement, he said.

Tourists are advised not to venture into the area and cooperate with police, the official said.

On Wednesday, a massive avalanche in the area killed two Polish tourists. **PTI**

Anti-encroachment drive intensified in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 4

The Jammu and Kashmir administration's anti-encroachment drive intensified on Saturday as the land illegally occupied by "influential persons" was retrieved at many places in the Valley, officials said.

Encroachments were removed from many places in Srinagar including at Humhama, Peerbagh, Padshahibagh, Nishat and Chattabal.

At Humhama, one kanal of state land was freed from the occupation of former director (information) Farooq Renzu Shah. Shah said the ancestral property belongs to his family and was not registered in his name.

In Srinagar's Kral Sangri Nishat area, the authorities demolished the outer wall and gate of the residential house belonging to advocate Shabnum Lone, who is the sister of Peoples Conference president Sajad Lone.

In Chattabal area of the city, the authorities sealed a shopping complex claiming it was built on state land.

However, advocate Shoab Zahoor, owners of the property, said the particular chunk of land was allotted to them by the Srinagar Municipal Corporation (SMC) through an open auction in 2004.

"We are not encroachers. The J-K High Court gave me possession completely in 2012. In 2018, the High Court upheld the allotment as legal and valid. I got the commercial building permission from the competent authority (SMC) in 2019," Zahoor said. He said they were not served any notice for the sealing of the building. He appealed to the LG administration to look into the issue.

In Anantnag district of south Kashmir, a total of 50 kanals of land was retrieved from stone crushers oper-

Only against influential people

Jammu and Kashmir Lt Governor Manoj Sinha on Saturday assured people that the administration will safeguard the habitants and the livelihood of the common man. "Only influential and powerful people who misused their position and violated the law to encroach upon the state land would face the law of the land," Sinha said.

ating from state/ Kahcharai lands. The land lies at a short distance from NH44 Srinagar-Jammu National Highway - and is valued in excess of Rs 20 crore.

The officials said the crushers have been given a week to remove the machinery from the spot failing which the machinery will also be seized.

Demolition drives were also undertaken in Bumthan Mirbazar and 14 kanals of land was retrieved from a stone crusher operating on state land.

The officials said such drives, especially against influential persons, will continue.

Democratic Azad Party (DAP) chief Ghulam Nabi Azad, meanwhile, demanded a formal order from the Raj Bhavan to spare the poor in the ongoing anti-encroachment drive. His party members took out a protest march from the party office at Sonwar and blocked the main road near Sonwar Chowk.

The Resistance Front (TRF), a shadow outfit of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), made an attempt to wade into the controversy, a move described by police as an attempt to misinform the general public.

"Harassing and dismantling properties of local Kashmiris in the name of New Colonial Land Laws, is just paving ways for illegal settlements. The hidden agendas behind these draconian diktats is to pave ways for non-locals not only to take local business, but also clear ways for settling these non-locals of particular mentality in Kashmir," the outfit said in a press release. **PTI**

ENCROACHMENTS WERE REMOVED FROM MANY PLACES IN SRINAGAR INCLUDING AT HUMHAMA, PEERBAGH, PADSHAHIBAGH, NISHAT AND CHATTABAL



HIMACHAL

State facing financial crisis, but development won't suffer: CM

HAMIRPUR/UNA (HP), FEBRUARY 4

Development activities in Himachal Pradesh will not be allowed to suffer even though the state is facing a serious financial crisis, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said while addressing a rally in Hamirpur town on Saturday.

He said the previous BJP government's mismanagement was responsible for the crisis and the time has come to address it.

Sukhu said the construction of a bus stand in Hamirpur which had been pending for a long time would be started and funds for this would be allocated in this year's annual budget.

Praising local Independent MLA Ashish Sharma, he said the Hamirpur



Medical College will be made the best in the state and people will get all facilities there in the coming days. He also announced the opening of a nursing

SUKHU SAID EFFORTS WOULD BE MADE TO BOOST TOURISM POTENTIAL OF THE DISTRICT AND WATER-BASED TOURISM ACTIVITIES WOULD BE PROMOTED IN THE NADAUN

college in Hamirpur for the benefit of local people.

Sukhu said efforts would be made to boost tourism potential of the district and water-based tourism activities would be

promoted in the Nadaun areas. Nadaun is the assembly constituency of CM Sukhu.

Meanwhile, Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri, who visited Sri Radha Krishna Temple in Kotla Kalan in Una district on Saturday, said the state government is committed to the development and improvement of all temples of the state and provide the best facilities to the devotees visiting them.

He said that works have been started to provide state-of-the-art facilities to the devotees at Chinnmastika Dham Mata Shri Chintpurni Ji, a major religious site.

The deputy chief minister said an action plan would be prepared to provide bus services to temples in the state for the devotees. Bus services would also be started to various religious places such as Haridwar and Vrindavan, he said. PTI

'Will talk with Adani group to end cement impasse'

HAMIRPUR, FEBRUARY 4

The Himachal Pradesh government is all set to end the impasse created by the closure of two cement factories and indefinite strike by truck operators union and the industries minister will hold talks with the Adani group to resolve the issue, Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said on Saturday.

Talking to reporters at the NIT helipad here, Sukhu, who is on a three days tour of his home district Hamirpur, said the transporters' union representing truckers engaged by the two Adani group-owned cement plants in Bilaspur and Solan districts have proposed their rates and concerned officers have been directed to fix a meeting with the factory management.

Two cement plants at Barmana (Bilaspur district) and Darlaghat (Solan

district) owned by ACC Limited and Ambuja Cements, respectively, have been closed since December 14 due to a dispute over freight charges.

Taking a dig at BJP leaders, especially former chief minister Jai Ram Thakur on the issue of granting old pension scheme to the state government employees, Sukhu said this scheme had been implemented in toto and there was no question of ignoring it as it was one of the main election planks of the party.

Talking about the suspension of the Himachal Pradesh Staff Selection Commission following a paper leak, he said many more cases of paper leaks would come to the fore in the next few days.

He said the Hamirpur-based staff selection commission was the guardian of corruption and his government would not allow graft to survive in the state. PTI



Ahead of 2024 polls, BJP to strengthen position in 'weak booths'

HAMIRPUR, FEBRUARY 4

With an eye on the 2024 general elections, the Himachal Pradesh BJP will take steps to strengthen its position in "weak booths" in the state's four Lok Sabha constituencies and apprise voters of the development work undertaken by the party-led government at the Centre.

The decision was taken at a marathon meeting of the core committee of the Himachal Pradesh BJP in Una on Friday night. The meeting was chaired by state BJP chief Suresh Kashyap, a party spokesperson said on Saturday.

BJP's national vice president Saudan Singh and other top leaders also attended the meeting.

During the meeting, it was decided that "weak booths" will be marked in all four Lok Sabha constituencies of Himachal Pradesh and the sitting MPs will stay at these booths, the spokesperson said.

Besides, the BJP will reach out to the common people in these areas and tell them about the development initiatives and public welfare work undertaken by the party's government at the Centre and in the state during the last five years, he added.

Rajya Sabha MP Indu Goswami will

camp in Mandi constituency, the only Lok Sabha seat held by the Congress, and work on strengthening the organisation, according to the party spokesperson.

In the meeting, which lasted for about four hours, a strategy to corner the Congress government was also discussed. Reasons for the BJP's defeat in the assembly elections in November were also reviewed.

The BJP is a disciplined political party and will not tolerate indiscipline. Strict action is being taken against those who worked against the party in the assembly polls, said state unit chief Kashyap. PTI

Waste management plant to be set up at Tounidevi

HAMIRPUR, FEBRUARY 4

A waste management plant will be set up in the Tounidevi area in Himachal Pradesh's Hamirpur district for the disposal of garbage and fecal waste from Kaswa and its nearby areas.

The plant will be constructed at a cost Rs 1 crore and a team in Saturday inspected the land for the project in the Barin gram panchayat.

State coordinator of the Swachh Bharat Mission, Sanjeev Rana, visited the area on behalf of the Panchayati Raj Department along with district coordinator Anil Patial, block coordinator Sujay Katoch as well as Barin panchayat head Ravindra Thakur.

Plants will be set up across the state to tackle fecal waste management, Rana said. He also sought people's cooperation for the setting up the plant in Tounidevi at the earliest. PTI

EDITORIAL

The Express India NEWS

Let the parliament function

Most of the budget session of the parliament is again at risk of getting wasted. The opposition has made it a point to disrupt the Parliament and not allow its functioning till the government does not concede its demand. First the opposition parties wanted to discuss the issue of the Hindenburg report on the Adani companies. When the government agreed to discussion, the opposition has now come out with a demand for the Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the entire saga. The opposition has every right to seek and demand the parliamentary probe into the report that has caused a devastating crash in the Adani business empire, but for that it really does not need to disrupt the Parliament.

It is the sad part of Indian parliamentary democracy that disruptions, instead of debates and discussions, have become the routine. The opposition parties have to compulsively find one issue or the other to corner the government. That is fair enough and in fact is the duty of the opposition parties. A healthy democracy needs a strong and powerful opposition. But that does not mean the parliamentary functioning needs to be disrupted and debate not allowed. If the government has agreed to debate on the Adani issue, the opposition should gracefully accept it and raise the issue in the Parliament through informed debate.

Adani group is a privately run business conglomerate. If it has done anything wrong let the law take its own course. But that is not the purpose of the opposition. It wants to embarrass the government given the fact that Adani is perceived to be very close to the powers that be. That, in fact, should not be held against anyone, neither the government nor Adani. If he has really done anything wrong, he will eventually be held accountable in the courts of law. Moreover, his empire has suffered huge losses, to the tune of Rs eight lakh crores, already. He has been repeatedly denying the allegations. Just because he was perceived to be, or was actually, close to someone in power should not be the reason for the opposition to get him crucified in a summary trial. After all, there is a due process of law, which mandates it to be followed.

If the opposition has a strong case against the government, it should not fight shy of presenting it inside the Parliament. Unfortunately in today's 24x7 media reportage, some of the parliamentarians feel that they will be better and much noticed outside the parliament than inside, where you are supposed to speak, debate and discuss which requires in depth knowledge and insight into issues. Moreover, inside the Parliament you cannot make wild and baseless allegations, which make great headlines, while there is no such limitation outside the Parliament. The Parliament house will always be a better place than Vijay Chowk, to seek and attract the attention of the entire nation. Our parliamentarians must understand and realize that, "parliamentary" behaviour is supposed to be exemplary.

Low annual limit for H-1B petitions affecting US employers

The low annual limit of 85,000 registrations for H-1B petitions is the main problem facing US employers trying to secure foreign talent, according to a new report about the skilled workers' visas, the most sought-after by Indian IT professionals.

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

The report titled "H1B Petitions And Denial Rates In FY 2022" by National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), a nonpartisan research organisation, said the low annual limit on H-1B petitions resulted in the vast majority of H-1B registrations not being selected. H-1B denial rates have returned to low levels following the Trump administration's losses in federal court during Donald Trump's last year in office, meaning the low annual limit for H-1B petitions is currently the main problem facing employers trying to secure foreign-born talent, it said.

The H-1B visa allocations are capped at 85,000 visas per year, with 20,000 of those set aside for workers holding advanced degrees from US institutions. The remaining 65,000 visas are awarded through a lottery system, making the competition for H-1B visas fierce.

In April 2022, US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) reported employers submitted over 483,000 H-1B registrations, almost 400,000 more than the 85,000-annual limit for H-1B petitions. H-1B visas allow skilled foreign workers to work and live in the US for up to six years in specialised fields such as technology, engineering, and medicine. After six years, it opens up pathways to permanent residency or Green Card.

H-1B temporary visas are important because they generally represent the only practical way for a high-skilled foreign national, including an international student, to work long-term in the United States and have an opportunity to become an employment-based immigrant and a US citizen, the NFAP said in a statement on Thursday. At US universities, more than 70 per cent of full-time graduates in electrical engineering and computer and information sciences are international students, it said.

"Despite the end of the Trump administration's restrictive immigration policies that made US companies less competitive in the global battle for talent, companies in America still must deal with the low annual limit on H-1B petitions and employment-based green cards," said Stuart Anderson, NFAP's executive director.

"These and other policies encourage employers to send work and people outside the United States and make it difficult for many talented people to pursue their dreams in America." A 2022 NFAP



H-1B VISAS ALLOW SKILLED FOREIGN WORKERS TO WORK AND LIVE IN THE US FOR UP TO SIX YEARS IN SPECIALISED FIELDS SUCH AS TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, AND MEDICINE

study found 55 per cent of America's startup companies valued at USD 1 billion or more have at least one immigrant founder, illustrating the importance and contributions of immigrants to the US economy, it said.

The denial rate for new H-1B petitions for initial employment in FY 2022 was 2 per cent. The H-1B denial rate declined during the final year of the Trump administration after judges declared many of its H-1B-related actions unlawful, it said.

That forced a legal settlement and changes to restrictive immigration policies that resulted in the denial rate for new H-1B petitions for initial employment in FY 2021 dropping to 4 per cent, far lower than the denial rate of 24 per cent in FY 2018, 21 per cent in FY 2019 and 13 per cent in FY 2020. During the Trump administration, the denial rate for H-1B petitions for initial employment was much higher at 13 per cent in FY 2017, 24 per cent in FY 2018, 21 per cent in FY 2019 and 13 per cent in FY 2020.

Amazon had the most approved H-1B petitions for initial employment in FY 2022, at 6,396. Amazon also had the most new H-1B petitions approved in FY 2021 and FY 2020. Infosys had

the second most H-1B petitions in FY 2022 approved for initial employment at 3,151, which was approximately 2,000 fewer for the company than FY 2021.

Next was TCS with 2,725, also lower than the previous year, followed by Cognizant (2,521), Google (1,562), Meta/Facebook (1,546), HCL America (1,260) and IBM (1,239). H-1B petitions are counted in the fiscal year they are approved, not in the cap year the H-1B visa holder begins to work.

According to USCIS data, the median annual salary for H-1B visa holders was USD 108,000 in FY 2021. In computer-related occupations in FY 2021, the median salary for H-1B visa holders was USD 111,000, and the average salary in computer-related occupations was USD 118,000, the report said. Despite high-profile layoffs in the technology industry, the 85,000-annual limit on H-1B petitions (for FY 2024) will likely be filled when the registration period opens in March 2023. That is because the annual limit is low relative to the size of the US labour force and the demand for talent, the report said.

The 85,000 new H-1B petitions allowed each year for companies represent only 0.05 per cent of the approximately 165 million people in the US labour force. Beginning in FY 2004, the supply of H-1B petitions has been exhausted every fiscal year up to the present. Analysts and technology watchers note that layoffs at tech firms need to be kept in perspective. "Even with all of the layoffs announced in recent weeks, most tech companies are still vastly larger than they were three years ago," reports Fortune.

Large and small tech companies went on a hiring spree over the past several years due to a surge in demand for their products, software and services with millions of people working remotely, the magazine explained.

Still, the layoffs have been difficult for US workers and H-1B visa holders, who often need to find another employer within 60 days to remain in H-1B status. About 79 per cent of workers recently hired after a tech-company layoff or termination landed their new job within three months of starting their search, according to a ZipRecruiter survey of new hires.

That was just below the 83 per cent share of all laid-off workers who were re-employed in the same time frame. Nearly four in 10 previously laid-off tech workers found jobs less than a month after they began searching, ZipRecruiter found in the survey.

"Despite the widespread layoffs, hiring freezes, and cost-cutting taking place in tech, many tech workers are finding reemployment remarkably quickly," said Julia Pollak, chief economist at ZipRecruiter. This NFAP analysis is based on data from the USCIS H-1B Employer Data Hub. **PTI**

NATION

'Opposition not given even a minute to raise Adani issue in Parliament'

Cong hits back at Thakur

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

The Opposition has not been given even a minute to raise the Adani issue in Parliament, the Congress said on Saturday, hitting back at Union Minister Anurag Thakur who said the government has nothing to hide on the matter.

Talking to reporters in Jammu, the information and broadcasting minister had accused the opposition parties of creating a ruckus in Parliament to evade a debate on the "people-friendly" budget.

Hitting back at him, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh tweeted, "I&B Minister, Anurag Thakur of 'Goli Maro' infamy says Opposition running away from debate in Parliament. What a joke. Parliament hasn't functioned for two days as the Opposition isn't even allowed to take a minute to demand JPC on the PM-linked Adani 'Maha mega



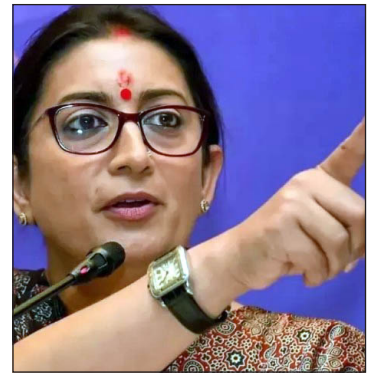
scam'." The Opposition has alleged that the recent meltdown in Adani Group shares is a scam that involves common

people's money as public sector LIC and SBI have invested in them.

The Opposition has demanded a joint

parliamentary committee probe or a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the Adani issue after allegations of financial irregularities and share price manipulation were levelled by the US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research. The Adani Group has dismissed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements. Union Minister Thakur said, "SBI, LIC, Finance Minister, RBI have made their statements on the Adani issue and have made things clear. The Opposition is running away from the discussion and does not want to discuss the President's address and the budget."

"We want discussion on the President's address and 2023-24 budget which will guide India from 'Amrit Kaal to Swarnim Kaal' and will lay the foundation of New India but the Opposition is running away from discussion," he told reporters at the BJP headquarters in Jammu. **PTI**



Smriti Irani slams Congress for disrupting Parliament proceedings

KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 4

Union Minister Smriti Irani on Saturday slammed the Congress for disrupting the proceedings in Parliament demanding an independent investigation into the allegations of fraud against billionaire Gautam Adani's companies that triggered an unprecedented stock crash.

She alleged it is a reflection of the animosity the party has towards President Droupadi Murmu from the day she took office.

Parliament was adjourned for the second consecutive day on Friday without transacting any business after the Opposition stepped up its demand for an independent investigation into the allegations of fraud against billionaire Gautam Adani's companies that triggered an unprecedented stock crash.

Proceedings in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha were disrupted as Opposition members raised slogans demanding a discussion and a JPC probe into the fraud-allegation-triggered rout.

"The government has repeatedly said they are open for any conversation, but why would it not begin (not allow) with a vote of thanks to the President's speech? That the Opposition has always taken a stand which is anti-President of India is known to every citizen of the country," the Union Women and Child Development minister said while addressing a press conference here.

She alleged that it had been the political mandate of the Congress party not to show respect to the President of India.

"That President Droupadi Murmu has given a speech which lays not only the foundation of the future of India but also exhibits our present potential, the issues that need to debate...and thanks to be given to the hon'ble president of India," she said.

"Why would the Congress party deny that respect to the President of India? But I am not surprised that they will deny respect to the President of India because that has been their political mandate from the day the hon'ble President took office," she said.

Reacting to Irani's allegations, the Leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha, Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, dubbed it baseless. **PTI**



CJI hails Rs 7,000 crore budgetary allocation to e-courts project

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

The proposed allocation of Rs 7,000 crore in the 2023-24 budget for phase three of the eCourts Project will enhance judicial institutions and efficiency while ensuring courts reach every citizen, Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud said Saturday.

Addressing the 73rd anniversary of the establishment of the Supreme Court, he said that during the COVID-19 pandemic period, the top court adopted video conferencing of court proceedings to reach out to the people.

"In the recent budget, the Government of India has introduced a provision of Rs 7,000 crore for phase-3 of the e-courts project. This will help enhance the accessibility of judicial institutions and the efficiency of judicial systems in India. Such endeavour will ensure the court reaches every citizen of India," Justice Chandrachud said.

Between March 23, 2020, and October 30, 2022, the apex court heard 3.37 lakh cases through video conferencing, he said. **PTI**

ISRO-NASA built satellite ready to be shipped to India for launch

WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 4

An earth-observation satellite jointly developed by NASA and ISRO that will help study Earth's land and ice surfaces in greater detail is all set to be shipped to India later this month for a possible launch in September.

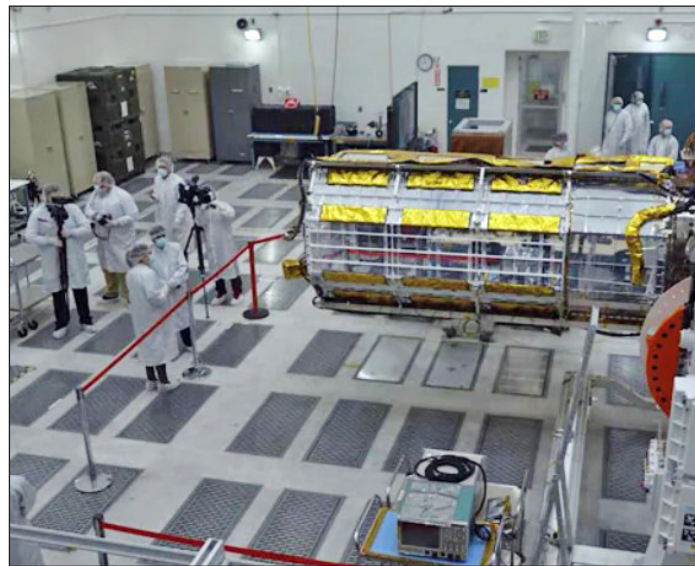
ISRO Chairman S Somanath visited NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in the US state of California on Friday to oversee the final electrical testing of the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite before being shipped to India.

"This mission will be a powerful demonstration of the capability of radar as a science tool and help us study Earth's dynamic land and ice surfaces in greater detail than ever before," Somanath said at the formal send-off ceremony organised at the JPL which was attended by senior scientists from the two space agencies.

Later this month, the SUV-size payload will be moved into a special cargo container for a 14,000-kilometer flight to the U R Rao Satellite Centre in Bengaluru.

ISRO and NASA joined hands in 2014 to build the 2,800 kg satellite. In March 2021, ISRO sent its S-Band SAR payload developed in India to NASA for integration with the L-Band payload built by JPL.

"This marks an important milestone in our shared journey to better understand planet Earth and our changing climate. NISAR will provide critical information on Earth's crust, ice sheets, and ecosystems," JPL Director Laurie Leshin said.



Somanath said that the NISAR spacecraft will be integrated into the satellite bus at the U R Rao Satellite Centre for launch within the next year.

"This is one of the most complex satellites. The elements that are built by JPL are excellent," Somanath said.

The event at JPL was marked by the ceremonial breaking of coconuts in front of a scale model of the satellite by NISAR project heads of NASA and ISRO Phil Barela and C V Shrikant respectively.

The JPL Director also presented the ISRO delegation with a jar of JPL lucky peanuts to be eaten during the launch of the satellite.

NISAR will gather radar data with a drum-shaped reflector antenna almost 12 meters in diameter. It will use a signal-processing technique called

interferometric synthetic aperture radar, or InSAR, to observe changes in Earth's land and ice surfaces down to fractions of an inch.

The satellite will help researchers detect slow-moving variations of a land surface that can precede earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions.

Data about such movements could help communities prepare for natural hazards such as the Joshimath land subsidence.

Measurements of melting sea ice and ice sheets will improve understanding of the pace and impacts of climate change, including sea level rise.

Over the course of its three-year prime mission, the satellite will observe nearly the entire planet every 12 days, making observations day and night, in all weather conditions. **PTI**

NATION

Crackdown on child marriage till 2026

Assam elections: Sarma

GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 4

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday asserted that the drive against child marriage, launched by the state police from the previous day, will continue till the next assembly elections in 2026.

More than 2,250 people have been arrested in the state till Saturday in the crackdown on child marriage, according to an official statement.

Altogether 2,258 people have been arrested so far based on 4,074 FIRs registered against child marriages across the state, it said.

At least 139 people have so far been apprehended in Biswanath, followed by 128 in Barpeta and 127 in Dhubri, the police statement said.

Mr Sarma said parents involved in the underage marriage are currently being let off with notice and not being arrested.



"Our drive will continue till 2026 when the next assembly elections will be due. We are hopeful that by then, there will be no case of child marriage in the state," the chief minister said.

In over 4,000 cases of child marriage, there were more than 8,000 accused.

"If we leave the parents out, the number of accused, who will face arrests, comes to around 3,500," he said.

The CM said the deputy commissioners have been asked to "control the system

of kazis" (Muslim priests who conduct marriages) and create general awareness against the menace.

The state cabinet had recently decided that those having married girls below 14 years of age will be booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The council of ministers also took a decision that cases under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 will be registered against those who have married girls in the 14-18 years age group.

They will be arrested and the marriages will be declared illegal.

If the groom is below 14 years of age, he will be sent to a "reform house".

Assam has a high rate of maternal and infant mortality, with child marriage being the primary cause as an average of 31 per cent of marriages registered in the state are in the prohibited age group, according to reports of the National Family Health Survey. **PTI**

Delhi excise scam

BJP stages protest at AAP office; demands Kejriwal's resignation

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

Delhi BJP leaders and workers on Saturday staged a protest at the AAP office here demanding the resignation of Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal after the Enforcement Directorate named him in a charge sheet in the excise scam case.

Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly, Ramvir Singh Bidhuri alleged the AAP government was "looting" the city that was first looted by invaders like Mohammed Ghori, Mahmood Ghazni and Taimur, the British and thereafter by Congress governments.

"The Enforcement Directorate has named Kejriwal in its charge sheet related to the liquor scam and he should resign from the post of chief minister of Delhi," state BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said.

No immediate reaction was available

from the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) to the allegations.

Several BJP workers were detained by police while trying to cross a barricade erected near the AAP office at DDU Marg.

The BJP will keep on exposing the "corruption" of the Kejriwal government which is weakening Delhi like a "termite", Sachdeva said during the protest.

The ED has claimed in its supplementary charge sheet filed in the court that a part of the alleged Rs 100 crore "kickbacks" generated in the scrapped Delhi excise policy was used in the AAP's 2022 Goa assembly election campaign.

It has also claimed that a close aide of the Delhi chief minister arranged a video call through FaceTime (a video calling facility on iPhone) on his phone for one of the accused Sameer Mahandru. **PTI**

Thousands of orphans will get opportunity to study at DU free of cost: VC

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

Delhi University Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh on Saturday stated that thousands of orphan children, including those who lost their parents to COVID-19, will get an opportunity to pursue higher education free of cost with the university's new initiative to reserve seats for them.

The vice chancellor said the university has been responsible for providing education to the students seeking higher education without any discrimination on any grounds.

The varsity recently decided to reserve seats in each of its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for orphans under supernumerary quota from the next academic year.

Such students will also be exempted from payment of any kind of fees, he said.

The decision was taken in a meeting of the Executive Council on Friday.

Speaking to PTI, Vice Chancellor Singh said, "The initiative will help thousands of children every year. We are coming out of Covid. Many children lost their parents during the pandemic. The initiative will also help those students." In all colleges and departments of the university, one seat each will be reserved for orphan boys and girls in all classes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.



"The University of Delhi understands the importance of providing higher education to every section of society, including those students who have unfortunately lost their parents and become orphans," he said.

The expenditure incurred for the admission and continuation of studies of such students in the university or its colleges will be met from the University Welfare Fund or the College Students' Welfare Fund.

The vice chancellor said this initiative would be a positive step towards the achievement of 50 per cent gross enrolment ratio (GER) in higher education by the year 2035 as envisaged in the National Education Policy 2020 and would link the ongoing efforts with its Institutional Social Responsibility (ISR) in the centenary year of the university. **PTI**

G-20 Summit: Delhi govt seeks Rs 927 crore from Centre

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Saturday wrote to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman seeking funds for the Delhi government for the preparation of G-20 Summit.

In his letter, Sisodia said, "Hosting the G20 Summit is a matter of pride for Delhi." The Delhi Government needs Rs 927 crore for special preparations for G-20, he added. He pointed out that the Delhi government did not get any funds in the Union Budget. Hence the

Central government should sanction additional funds for the preparations for the G-20. Sisodia assured that the Delhi government will provide full assistance to the Union government in the planning to make the G-20 summit a great success. He added, "In this regard, the various departments of the Delhi government have formulated an outline for events related to infrastructure development. Amongst these, there are proposals for the beautification of spots where G-20 events are set to take place, as well as proposals for the staging of specific events and functions." Sisodia said

Lieutenant Governor VK Saxena is engaged in a continuous review of these preparations. "You would be aware that the Delhi Government has not received any financial support from the Central Government as its share from the central taxes. The Delhi Government also does not receive any extra grants from the Central Government," the deputy chief minister said in the letter.

He said, "In fact, the MCD does not receive the funds that other municipalities across the country receive on account of the population in their jurisdiction." **PTI**

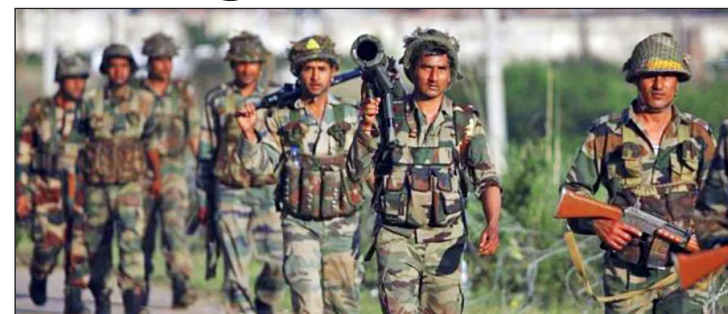
Now, online CEE for Agniveer recruitment

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

The army has announced a change in the Agniveer recruitment process and candidates wanting to join the force will now have to first appear for an online common entrance examination (CEE), followed by physical fitness and medical tests.

While advertisements regarding the change in the process have been put out by the army in various newspapers, sources on Saturday said, the notification for this is expected to be issued around mid-February.

The first online CEE is slated to be held in April at nearly 200 locations across the country and for it all prepara-



tions have been finalised, a source said.

"The changed methodology will ensure increased focus on cognitive aspect during selection. It will have

wider outreach across the country and also reduce the large crowds seen during recruitment rallies to make them more manageable and easier to conduct," the source said. **PTI**

WORLD

India, France, UAE unveil trilateral cooperation framework

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

India, France and the UAE on Saturday unveiled an ambitious roadmap for cooperation in areas of defence, nuclear energy and technology under a trilateral framework.

After a phone conversation among their foreign ministers, a joint statement said the three sides agreed that the trilateral initiative will serve as a forum to promote the design and execution of cooperation projects in the fields of energy, with a focus on solar and nuclear energy.

"It was acknowledged that defence is an area of close cooperation between the three countries. Therefore, efforts will be undertaken to further promote compatibility, and joint development and co-production, whilst seeking out avenues for further collaboration and training between the three countries' defence forces," it said.

The foreign ministers noted that the trilateral initiative will serve as a platform to expand cooperation between their



countries' development agencies on sustainable projects.

The three foreign ministers met on September 19 last year for the first time in a trilateral format on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

In the meeting, they agreed to establish

a formal trilateral cooperation initiative to expand cooperation in various fields of mutual interest.

"It is in this context that a phone call between the three ministers was held today to adopt a roadmap for the implementation of this initiative," the statement said. **PTI**

US lawmakers hail reduction of tariff duty on pecan imports by India

BY LALIT K JHA, WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 4

A group of influential lawmakers from Georgia on Friday celebrated the decision of the Indian government to reduce tariff of US pecan exports by 70 per cent.

It may bring down the cost of pecan, locally called nuts, in India significantly. The move would benefit thousands of farmers and is a big deal for the American pecan industry, they said. Senator Raphael Warnock said he is thrilled to see months of advocacy on behalf of Georgia pecan growers and sellers pay off.

"Georgia produces nearly a third of America's pecans, and this announcement from the Indian government is welcome news that will expand global access to Georgia, and further cement our state's status as a prime agriculture state," said the Senator who is a member of the Senate Agriculture committee. House Agriculture Committee Vice Chair Austin Scott, Ranking Member of the House Agriculture Committee David Scott, and Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug

Administration, and Related Agencies, Sanford D. Bishop, Jr. in a joint statement applauded the decision of India's government to reduce tariffs on US pecan exports by 70 per cent.

The decision reflects over a decade of bipartisan, collaborative efforts on behalf of America's pecan growers, they said. Georgia is the top pecan producing state in the US and the local industry is valued at USD 250 million.

"The announcement that India will lower the tariffs on US pecans by 70 per cent is a big deal for Georgia pecan growers and the American Pecan Industry," Bishop said.

"Much of the global supply of pecans is grown right here in Georgia, and I commend India's decision to reduce tariffs on our pecan exports and allow us into their growing market," said Scott. "This is more than a win for pecan farmers, this is a win for Georgia, and it couldn't have been done without the hard work of my colleagues Representatives Sanford Bishop and David Scott," he said.

Congressman Scott thanked the US Trade Representative and the US Department of Agriculture for the years of hard work that led to this outcome. **PTI**

Traffickers charge Indian \$21k to enter US illegally

BY LALIT K JHA, WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 4

Criminal transnational organisations called cartels on an average charge USD 21,000 from Indians to help them illegally cross over the American border, an Arizona Sheriff has told lawmakers here.

The minimum being charged by a cartel for a foreign national to illegally come into the United States is USD 7,000, Sheriff Mark Dannels of Cochise County, Arizona, told members of the House Judiciary Committee here this week. Informing the lawmakers that the border along Mexico is not secure, Dannels said criminal transnational organisations called cartels control the south of the US border.

"South of it's all controlled. They control who comes across. There's prices based on who you are. You're a terrorist coming from a different country," he said.

"I think India was USD 21,000, for example. But the minimum is, like, around USD 7,000 right now. Most of these people don't have it," he said in response to a question from Congressman Barry Moore. **PTI**

Cancels China visit

First task to get Chinese balloon out of US airspace: Blinken

WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 4

US Secretary of State Tony Blinken on Friday said the first task at their disposal is to ensure that the Chinese surveillance balloon which is hovering over its sky is out of its territory, as he defended his decision to postpone his planned trip to Beijing.

"Job one is getting it out of our airspace. We continue to believe that having open lines of communication is important. Indeed, this incident only underscores the importance, and that's why we will maintain them. That's why, when conditions permit, I plan to go to China. But the most important thing right now is to see that this surveillance asset gets out of our airspace, and we'll take it from there," Blinken told reporters at a news conference here.

At the joint news conference with the visiting South Korean Foreign Minister Park Jin, Blinken said it was very important to emphasize that the presence of this surveillance balloon over the United States skies was a clear violation of its sovereignty, international law, and clearly unacceptable.

"We have made that clear to China.



Any country that has its airspace violated in this way I think would respond similarly. And I can only imagine what the reaction would be in China if they were on the other end," he said.

"What this has done is created the conditions that undermine the purpose of the trip, including ongoing efforts to build a floor under the relationship and to address a broad range of issues that are of concern to the American people, I believe to the Chinese people, and certainly as well to people around the world," Blinken said. "China's decision to fly a surveillance balloon over the continental United States is both unacceptable and irresponsible. That's what this is about.

It's a violation of our sovereignty, it's a violation of international law. And it was very important that we of course take the actions we did to protect any sensitive information, to protect our people, and to make clear to China that again this is an unacceptable as well as irresponsible action," he said in response to another question. "It's even more irresponsible coming on the eve of a long planned visit that followed from the meeting between the two presidents in Bali on the margins of the G-20. In our judgment, it created conditions that undermined the very purpose of the trip, including ongoing efforts, as I said, to build a floor under the relationship as well as to address a very broad range of issues that are important to Americans, to Chinese, to the entire world," he said.

Blinken said the world expects the United States and China to manage their relationship responsibly. "And indeed, addressing many of today's global challenges, challenges that affect the lives of our people and people around the world, demands that we find a way to work together as well. The United States will continue to act in a way that reflects that responsibility," he said. **PTI**



Pakistan blocks Wikipedia over 'blasphemous' content

ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 4

Pakistan has blocked Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, for its failure to remove offensive or blasphemous material, the country's telecommunications authority said on Saturday.

The blacklisting of Wikipedia comes days after the Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) degraded Wikipedia services for 48 hours, threatening to block it if the content deemed 'blasphemous' was not deleted.

Wikipedia is a free online encyclopedia, created and edited by volunteers around the world and hosted by the Wikimedia Foundation.

PTA spokesperson Malahat Obaid said the ban had primarily been imposed for non-compliance with the orders. **PTI**

ENTERTAINMENT



Nargis

wants to do 'Charlie's Angels'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK

All set to make her comeback to Hindi films after three long years with her next titled 'Shiv Shastri Balboa', Nargis Fakhri is thrilled about her new innings. In her latest, Fakhri will be seen sharing screen space with veteran actors Anupam Kher and Neena Gupta. She was last seen in 'Torbaaz' in 2020.

In her latest interview, Fakhri said now is the most exciting time to be part of the Indian showbiz industry.

Reason, one asks! "The OTT explosion," she exclaims, before adding, "Different kinds of movies and shows are being made. There are opportunities for all kinds of actors."

About 'Shiv Shastri Balboa', that is set in the US, Fakhri says: "The story of the film isn't set in Manhattan or Los Angeles, but in the small cities where the real people live." She has great expectations from the film and is hoping that exciting offers will come her way.

To begin with, the half Pakistani-half Czech actor has vowed to follow her heart and do films that excite her.

On her contemporaries like Katrina Kaif and Deepika Padukone matching up to the 'heroes' or male actors in terms of roles, performances and remuneration, Nargis says "We three should do a Charlie's Angels together."

"I would love to see women doing action. That will help me push my boundaries as an actor. If anything interesting comes my way, I will surely do it," she concludes.

Benedict Cumberbatch to star in Netflix series 'Eric'

Actor Benedict Cumberbatch is set to headline Netflix's upcoming series "Eric" and will also serve as executive producer on the show.

According to entertainment website Deadline, Cumberbatch will essay the role of a puppeteer whose son goes missing in 1980s Manhattan. Abi Morgan has penned the six-part show. Actors Gaby Hoffman, McKinley Belcher II, Dan Fogler and Phoebe Nicholls round out the cast. The story follows Vincent Anderson (Cumberbatch), a grief-stricken puppeteer on a leading TV show whose young boy goes missing and who finds solace through his friendship with Eric, the monster that lives under his son's bed.

Morgan's Little Chick banner is producing the series. Jane Featherstone, Lucy Dyke and Lucy Forbes are attached as executive producers.

"Eric is a dark and crazy journey into the heart of 1980's New York, and the good bad and ugly world of Vincent. The chance to work with Benedict and the creative team at Sister (Pictures) and Netflix, is irresistible," Morgan said in a statement.

Cumberbatch is also set to star in Netflix's untitled Wes Anderson/Roald Dahl movie.

PTI



Rihanna gears up for huge comeback after Super Bowl gig

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK

Rihanna is gearing for her comeback with a huge tour after she takes to the stage at the Super Bowl LVII on February 12 at Arizona's State Farm Stadium.

The 'Bitch Better Have My Money' singer will perform during the half-time show next Sunday marking the kick off of her new tour and plans to make new

music, it has been reported.

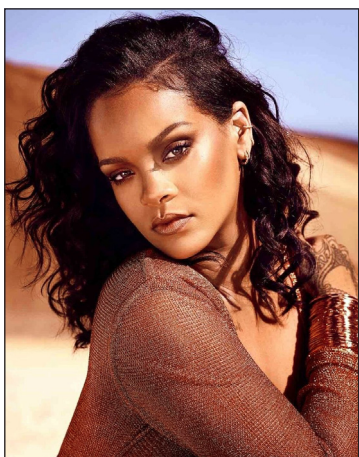
The singer, who hasn't done a live show in over five years, recently teased her look for the upcoming Super Bowl halftime show.

Insiders claim that she has already got her North American dates planned and will soon be focusing on European dates, including her gig in the UK.

Rihanna is said to be "working overtime" as she prepares for the tour.

The 'Umbrella' singer is also said to be planning "mini residencies" in prominent cities for fans to watch her perform.

A music insider told The Sun: "Rihanna's Super Bowl halftime performance will be one of the best of all time. The list of songs that made the cut are pretty comprehensive and touch on every era of Rihanna including the new one she's about to embark on."



BUSINESS

Adani FPO fallout not affected India's image: Sitharaman

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 4

India's economic image is not affected due to Adani Group's recent decision to pull out Rs 20,000 crore FPO amid allegations of financial wrongdoings, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Saturday. The finance minister said there has been an accretion of USD 8 billion to the forex reserves in the last two days alone. "...our macro-economic fundamentals or our economy's image, none of which has been affected. Yes, FPOs (follow-on public offers) come in, and FIIs (foreign institutional investors) get out," Sitharaman told reporters here. The minister said there are "fluctuations" in every market but the accretion over the last few days establishes the fact that the perception of both India and its inherent strengths is intact.

Answering a broader question on the allegations against Adani Group, she said the country's independent financial sector regulators will be looking into the aspect and added that capital markets watchdog Securities and Exchange Board of India has the wherewithal to ensure stability in markets.

"...for keeping the market and the markets regulated in prime condition, the

Sebi is the authority. And it has the wherewithal to keep that prime condition," she said. The finance minister also said that the RBI has already spoken out on the issue, referring to Friday's statement, which said the banking sector is resilient and stable.

About ten days ago, US-based short seller Hindenberg Research made a slew of allegations on the corporate governance front against Adani Group. The Ahmedabad-based group has denied all the allegations and termed it as a calculated attack on India. It has cancelled the FPO even after managing subscriptions to it. Finance Secretary TV Somanathan on Saturday stood by his comment on the controversy where he called it a storm in a teacup, clarifying that this is in the context of macroeconomic terms and the stability of India's public financial institutions. Meanwhile, on the decision to convert outstanding dues into equity at Vodafone Idea, Somanathan said the transaction is being done as a package for all telcos. He said the government share will be held by the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) where the stake will be considered as a public shareholder. DIPAM secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey said the



price has been taken at Rs 10 despite the Vodafone Idea shares trading lower on bourses because, as per laws, preferential allotments have to happen at the face value of a share. The finance ministry officials present at the meet also made it clear that the tweaks on taxation in the insurance front will not impact the policy agenda of deepening penetration and

clarified that there was sufficient data to suggest that investments were masquerading as insurance premiums due to which a decision was taken to tax the same. Sitharaman said there is no timeline which has been decided to end the old tax regime, and the government has only introduced a simpler new tax regime, which has the incentives of lower rates. The officials also denied that this will impact the savings in the economy. Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran said citizens are being given an expanded array of choices to determine what they want to do with their money. Answering a question on introducing the controversial p-notes for GIFT City, Somanathan said it competes with other international financial services centres due to which such provision has to be made and added that India always retains the right to mitigate any perceived risks. Somanathan said the Rs 35,000 crore outlay for green initiatives will be primarily used for retrofitting in petroleum refineries and augmenting strategic storage capacity. "Some of the public sector refineries and other infrastructure facilities in the petroleum sector need retrofitting to meet our ambitious emissions and pollution targets," he said. **PTI**

Budget main focus growth: FM

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 4

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said growth is the main focus of the budget for FY24 presented by her recently. The budget proposals establish both fiscal consolidation and growth, especially inclusive growth, Sitharaman said during her maiden interaction with stakeholders outside the national capital since presenting the budget on February 1.

"Growth is the main focus. We want to sustain that recovery, sustain that growth," Sitharaman, accompanied by the top ministry officials at the outreach event, said.

She gave credit for ensuring growth to the people of the country, who absorbed the relief and policy measures introduced by the government since the onset of the pandemic to make India the second-fastest growing economy.

The finance minister said it was the "express desire" of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to continue with the elevated public capital expenditure, due to which she has proposed a higher outlay of Rs 10 lakh crore under the head. **PTI**

SEBI 'assures' market integrity in wake of Adani crisis

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

Amid a raging controversy over a meltdown in Adani group stocks, regulator Sebi on Saturday said it is committed to ensuring the stock market's integrity and all necessary surveillance measures are in place to address any excessive volatility in individual shares.

Without naming the Adani group specifically, the capital markets watchdog said in a statement that unusual price movement in the stocks of a business conglomerate has been observed in the past week.

Officials confirmed that the statement has been issued in the wake of the Adani matter only.

"As part of its mandate, Sebi seeks to maintain orderly and efficient functioning of the market and has put in place a set of well-defined, publicly available surveillance measures (including the ASM framework) to address excessive volatility in specific stocks.

"This mechanism gets automatically triggered under certain conditions of price volatility in any stock," the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said. Stock exchanges BSE and NSE have



put three Adani group companies -- Adani Enterprises, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone and Ambuja Cements -- under their short-term additional surveillance measure (ASM), which basically means that intra-day trading would require a 100 per cent upfront margin and is aimed at curbing speculation and short-selling in these stocks.

Sebi further said that in all specific entity-related matters, if any information comes to its notice, then, as per extant policies, the same is examined and after due examination, appropriate action is taken.

"Sebi has consistently followed this approach on entity-level issues and would continue to do so in future as well," it added. **PTI**

FCI wheat e-auction on Feb 15

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

The next e-auction for the sale of FCI wheat to bulk consumers like flour millers under the open market sale scheme (OMSS) will be held on February 15, the Food Ministry said on Saturday.

State-run Food Corporation of India (FCI) has been mandated to sell 25 lakh tonnes of wheat from its buffer stock to bulk consumers under the OMSS in order to contain rising prices of wheat and wheat products in the country.

The first sale of wheat through e-auction was held on February 1-2. About 9.2 lakh tonnes of wheat was sold from FCI depots in 23 states. The plan was to hold a weekly e-auction every Wednesday.

However in a statement, the Food Ministry said: "The second sale of wheat through e-auction will be held throughout the country on 15th February on Wednesday." This means the FCI will not hold e-auction of wheat next week and the ministry has not cited reasons for not holding the auction.

Meanwhile, the FCI has directed all winning bidders of the first e-auction to remit the cost and lift the stock immediately from concerned depots across the country and make the same available in respective markets in order to further contain the prices.

"The prices are set to fall further after the wheat sold in the e-auction is lifted



and atta is made available in the market," it added.

Wheat is being offered at a reserve price of Rs 2,350 per quintal plus freight charges.

Last month, the government announced plans to sell 30 lakh tonnes of wheat in the open market from its buffer stock under OMSS in order to check wheat and wheat flour prices.

Out of 30 lakh tonnes, FCI will sell 25 lakh tonnes to bulk consumers like flour millers through e-auction and 2 lakh tonnes to states/Union Territories.

About 3 lakh tonnes wheat will also be given to state-PSUs, cooperatives and Federations like Kendriya Bhandar, NCCF and NAFED at concessional rate of Rs 2,350 per quintal without e-auction for converting wheat into wheat flour and offer it to public at a Maximum

Retail Price of Rs 29.50 per kilogram.

Under the OMSS policy, the government allows FCI to sell foodgrains, especially wheat and rice, at predetermined prices in the open market from time to time to bulk consumers and private traders. The purpose is to boost the supply during the lean season and moderate the general open market prices.

The Centre had banned wheat exports in May last year to control rising prices, after a slight fall in domestic production and a sharp decline in the FCI's procurement for the central pool.

India's wheat production fell to 106.84 million tonnes in the 2021-22 crop year (July-June) from 109.59 million tonnes in the previous year due to heat waves in a few growing states. **PTI**

SPORT

1,500 players to participate in 'Khelo India Winter Games' in Kashmir

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 4

Sports Minister Anurag Thakur on Saturday said 1500 athletes from across the country will take part in the Khelo India Winter Games, scheduled to start in the famous ski resort of Gulmarg in North Kashmir from February 10.

Thakur said the athletes from all over the country participating in Khelo India Winter Games will not only encourage J&K youth towards sports but will also promote tourism in the Union Territory.

"The players and officials enchanted by the beauty of Kashmir and the changes that have been brought about in J&K from the last many years will become brand ambassadors promoting J&K tourism, peace and tranquility," he said.

Thakur was speaking after he and Lt Governor Manoj Sinha launched the third Khelo India Winter Games mascot, theme



song and jersey at the Raj Bhawan here.

He said the launch of Khelo India Winter Games sends a message across the country that J&K is waiting for the people to watch this event, which is expected to provide an unforgettable experience.

Sinha said sports infrastructure has

reached every nook and corner of J&K which is encouraging youth towards sports. "Every panchayat of J&K has sports facilities and the target of engaging 50 lakh youth in sports activities has been surpassed. Through new sports policy, attractive career options will be provided to the sportspersons," he said. **PTI**

Took provisional suspension for swift resolution of doping case: Dipa

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

Handed a 21-month ban for failing a dope test, Indian gymnastics ace Dipa Karmakar on Saturday said she accepted provisional suspension after returning positive for a banned drug to swiftly resolve her case with the international federation.

Karmakar, however, claimed that she "unknowingly ingested" the prohibited substance Higenamine -- S3 Beta-2 Agonists as per WADA prohibited list -- which was found in her dope sample.

"I unknowingly ingested and could not determine the source of (the banned substance). I decided to take a provisional suspension with the hope of a swift resolution with the international federation," Karmakar wrote on her Twitter handle, indicating that she had admitted to the doping rule violation.

Karmakar's dope sample was collected out-of-competition by the International Testing Agency (ITA), an independent organisation that manages the anti-doping programme of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG), on October 11, 2021.

According to the US Anti-Doping Agency, Higenamine is found in several herbs used for traditional medicine and is used in supplements without sometimes naming it. It was added to the WADA prohibited list in 2017. The drug is prohibited at all times, both in and out-of-competition. The 29-year-old Karmakar, who shot to fame after finishing fourth



in the 2016 Rio Olympics in the vault event, has been struggling with injuries ever since she underwent a surgery to treat an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injury in 2017. Her last FIG event was the 2019 World Cup in Baku.

Her ban period will, however, end on July 10 this year as it was counted from the day (October 11, 2021) the sample was collected. Her results have been disqualified from October 11, 2021 onwards.

Karmakar said mentally her doping case has been the "toughest" battle she has fought in her life.

"I didn't even know how it (the banned drug) entered my body and that for any sports person...it would have broken anybody. So it is not only hurtful but also the toughest mental battle that I have ever fought," the gymnast from Tripura told PTI. "I had two surgeries in 2017 and 2019 and when I returned to the field... I mean, I faced one setback after another. I just want to get back on the field." **PTI**

Nagal brings India back into Davis Cup

HILLEROD (DENMARK), FEBRUARY 4

Sumit Nagal brought India back in the Davis Cup World Group Play-off tie against Denmark with a come-from-behind victory in the second singles after Yuki Bhambri was outplayed in the opening match.

It was always a tall task for Bhambri to counter world number nine Holger Rune and there was no surprise as Denmark's top singles player raced to a 6-2 6-2 win to put the hosts up 1-0 on Friday.

Up against a formidable rival, Yuki needed a special effort but he went down in mere 58 minutes.

Nagal, India's number one player, though erased a one-set deficit to pip August Holmgren 4-6 6-3 6-4 in two hours and 27 minutes to make it 1-1 at the end of day one.

The 25-year-old Nagal, ranked 506, dropped serve in the very first game of the match but once he got hold of his nerves, he was his usual fighting self. **PTI**



Border-Gavaskar Test series



Once masters of spin, India wary of turning pitches

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

Fully aware of the current Indian batting line-up's issues of tackling spinners on rank turners, the team management will do well to ask for sporting tracks against Australia in the upcoming four-match Test series, one which offers turn from third day, feel former selectors and experts.

Once known as master players of spin, the Indian teams in recent years have looked more at home against express pace and steep bounce while struggling against slow bowling.

The only noteworthy innings in the last two to three years on a rank turner would be current skipper Rohit Sharma's technically perfect knock of 161 on a wretched Chepauk track where the other top order batters had struggled.

"Playing spinners on a flat deck isn't the problem. We must admit that our batters have struggled against quality spin bowling on tracks that have offered

turn. I don't know what kind of tracks will be in the offing but rank turners could backfire," former Test spinner and noted commentator Murali Kartik told PTI during an interaction.

He also felt that India won't prepare "snake pits" but he would expect the tracks to offer turn from second day onwards. "I have full confidence in Rohit, Cheteshwar Pujara and Virat (Kohli) that they would handle Nathan Lyon admirably," Paranjape said. His former colleague Devang Gandhi concurred on the choice of Axar as the third spinner. "Look, if you have a track that starts breaking right away, then Axar is a better choice than Kuldeep. Kuldeep will release the ball from the back of his hand and hence flight more," said Gandhi. Former chairman of selectors MSK Prasad feels that Shubman Gill's new found confidence should be used to fullest effect and he should bat in the opening slot and not go down the order. **PTI**

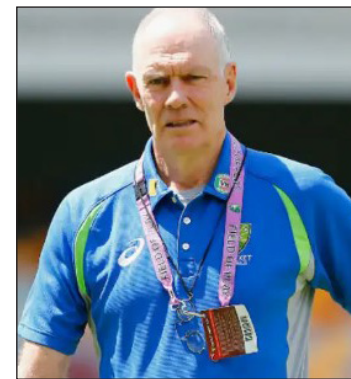
India more vulnerable at home this time: Chappell

MELBOURNE, FEBRUARY 4

Batting great Greg Chappell believes Australia can win the upcoming high-profile four-match Test series as India are "vulnerable" this time with injuries to key players like Rishabh Pant and Jasprit Bumrah.

While the swashbuckling keeper-batter Pant is ruled out for most part of the year as he continues to recover from injuries sustained during a horrific car crash, Indian pace ace Bumrah (back injury) does not figure in the Indian squad for the first two Tests.

"Australia can win this series. India are more vulnerable at home than they have been for some time due to injuries to key players like Rishabh Pant, Ravindra Jadeja and Jasprit Bumrah. They will rely heavily on Virat Kohli," Chappell wrote in an opinion piece for



'Sydney Morning Herald'.

"Visiting teams are often fooled by a game that seems to be going nowhere but suddenly changes at a frenetic pace. The Indians are used to this, so Australia will need to adapt quickly with mind, bat and ball," said the former India coach. **PTI**