

## Apocalypse unfolding

# Toll crosses 5200; still counting

ANTAKYA, TURKEY, FEBRUARY 7

The death toll in Monday's devastating earthquake in Syria and Turkey has crossed 5200 mark, news agency Reuters reported, adding, 3500 have been reported dead in Turkey and 1700 in Syria.

Meanwhile the Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan on Tuesday declared a state of emergency in 10 provinces devastated by two earthquakes that killed more than 5,200 people and left a trail of destruction across a wide area of southern Turkey and neighbouring Syria.

The death toll, according to the agency, exceeds 3,500 in Turkey, at least and 1,700 in Syria. Bad weather has been hampering search and rescue efforts. UNICEF fears that thousands of children may have been killed, as about 6,000 buildings were destroyed in Turkey alone.

A day after the quakes hit, rescuers working in harsh conditions struggled to dig people out of the rubble of collapsed buildings.

As the scale of the disaster became ever more apparent, the death toll looked likely to rise considerably. One United Nations official said it was feared thousands of children might have been killed.

People are upset and angry as relief has not reached them. Residents in several damaged Turkish cities voiced anger and despair at what they said was a slow and inadequate response from the authorities to the deadliest earthquake to hit Turkey since 1999.

"There is not even a single person here. We are under the snow, without a home, without anything," said Murat Alinak, whose home in Malatya had collapsed and whose relatives are missing. "What shall I do, where can I go?", the Reuters quoted him saying.

Monday's magnitude 7.8 quake, followed hours later by a second one almost as powerful, toppled thousands of buildings including hospitals, schools and apartment blocks.

Tens of thousands of people were injured or left homeless in cities in Turkey and northern Syria.

Winter weather has hampered rescue and relief efforts and made the plight of the homeless even more miserable. Some areas were without fuel and electricity.

Aid officials voiced particular concern about the situation in Syria, already afflicted by a humanitarian crisis after nearly 12 years of civil war.



Erdogan on Tuesday declared the 10 Turkish provinces affected as a disaster zone and imposed a state of emergency there for three months. This will permit the government to bypass parliament in enacting new laws and to limit or suspend rights and freedoms.

The government will open up hotels in the tourism hub of Antalya to temporarily house people impacted by the quakes, said Erdogan, who faces a national election in three months' time.

The death toll in Turkey had risen to 3,549 people, Erdogan said. In Syria, the toll was at least 1,712, according to the government and a rescue service in the insurgent-held northwest of the country

### EVERY MINUTE, EVERY HOUR"

Turkish authorities say some 13.5 million people were affected in an area spanning roughly 450 km (280 miles) from Adana in the west to Diyarbakir in the east, and 300 km from Malatya in the north to

Hatay in the south.

Syrian authorities have reported deaths as far south as Hama, some 250 km (155 miles) from the epicentre.

"It's now a race against time," World Health Organization Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in Geneva. "Every minute, every hour that passes, the chances of finding survivors alive diminishes."

Across the region, rescuers toiled night and day as people waited in anguish by mounds of rubble clinging to the hope that friends, relatives and neighbours might be found alive.

In Antakya, capital of Hatay province bordering Syria, rescue teams were thin on the ground and residents picked through debris themselves. People pleaded for helmets, hammers, iron rods and rope. One woman, aged 54 and named Gulumser, was pulled alive from an eight-storey building 32 hours after the quake. Another woman then shouted at the rescue workers:

"My father was just behind that room she was in. Please save him."

The workers explained they could not reach the room from the front and needed an excavator to remove the wall first.

Turkish authorities say more than 12,000 search and rescue personnel are working in the affected areas, along with 9,000 troops. Some 70 countries are sending personnel, equipment and aid. But the sheer scale of the disaster is daunting.

"The area is enormous. I haven't seen anything like this before," said Johannes Gust, from Germany's fire and rescue service, as he loaded equipment onto a truck at Turkey's Adana airport.

Turkey's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) said 5,775 buildings had been destroyed in the quake and that 20,426 people had been injured.

In Geneva, UNICEF spokesperson James Elder said: "The earthquakes...may have killed thousands of children."

### 'TERRIFYING SCENE'

Syrian refugees in northwest Syria and in Turkey were among the most vulnerable people affected, Elder said.

In the Syrian city of Hama, Abdallah al Dahan said funerals for several families were taking place on Tuesday.

"It's a terrifying scene in every sense," said Dahan, contacted by phone. "In my whole life I haven't seen anything like this, despite everything that has happened to us."

Mosques opened their doors to families whose homes were damaged.

Syrian state news agency SANA said at least 812 people were killed and 1,449 people injured in the government-held provinces of Aleppo, Latakia, Hama, Idlib and Tartous.

At least 900 people were killed in Syria's opposition-held northwest and 2,300 injured with the toll expected to "rise dramatically", the White Helmets rescue team said.

## PUNJAB

# Two shot at near Ludhiana court complex

LUDHIANA, FEBRUARY 7

Two people suffered bullet injuries following a clash between as many groups outside the Ludhiana court complex in Punjab on Tuesday, police said.

Old rivalry between the groups is suspected to be the reason behind the clash.

Gurcharan Singh along with his friend Himanshu were going to the court for a case hearing. Gurcharan was to appear in a 2020 trespass case which was registered against Jaspreet Singh at the Model Town police station.

They had a heated argument with the other side led by Jaspreet, triggering a clash. Both the groups fired at each other, resulting in bullet injuries to Himanshu and Jaspreet, said police.

Both the injured were taken to a local



hospital, said Additional Commissioner of Police Rajesh Sharma.

It was suspected that the Jaspreet-led group wanted to prevent Gurcharan from giving his statement in the court.

A police official said police immedi-

ately responded when it received information about the firing incident at the backside of the court complex.

One person has been arrested in connection with the incident, the police said. **PTI**

## Sports Minister honours Indian hockey players

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 7

Punjab Sports Minister Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer, while honouring the players of the Indian Hockey team at his official residence, said that Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann will soon hand over letters of appointment of class one jobs to the Olympic medal winning hockey players.

Meet Hayer said that the state Government will leave no stone unturned to make Punjab a leader in sports and Punjab, known as the nursery of hockey, will continue to lead the country in this sport. He also sought suggestions from the players to further promote hockey in the state. The Sports Minister also took part in deliberations regarding strengthening the infrastructure of the Hockey and starting a Hockey league in the state.

Meet Hayer said that it is a matter of pride for Punjab that there are 10 players from the state, including the captain of the team. He also wished the players for this year's Asian Games and next year's Paris Olympics Games. Advising the players not to lose heart when the results in the World Cup did not come as expected, he said that winning and losing are part of the game.

Speaking to the Indian hockey players, the Sports Minister said, "You are our pride and a role model for the youth, so you have a great influence on our young players, hence you should encourage the new players in your respective fields."

## 'Implement Punjabi in courts'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 7

In order to promote mother tongue Punjabi, Vidhan Sabha Speaker Kultar Singh Sandhwan, on Tuesday, held a meeting with the MLAs, scholars and language activists to implement the Punjabi language in the high court and lower courts of the state in light of the established laws.

Sandhwan said that the state government was making constant efforts to give due respect to the mother tongue, and the government and private institutions have been urged to write Punjabi as first language on their signage/ boards by February 21, which is International Mother Language Day.

The speaker said that during the discussion, important ideas came out such as implementing Punjabi in the upper and lower courts under the established laws, to enact Library Act in the state, linking mother-tongue with employment, improving Punjabi language proficiency of teachers, correctness of translation, implementation of Punjabi in private schools from nursery level, use of Punjabi language by bureaucrats and strengthening linguistic institutions.

The meeting was attended by Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains, Vidhan Sabha Deputy Speaker Jai Krishan Singh Rori, Manjit Singh

Bilaspur, Kulwant Singh Pandori, Mohammad Jamil-ur-Rehman, Karambir Singh Ghuman (all MLAs) and others.

During the discussion, language activist and legal scholar Mitter Sen Meet, while referring to the established laws, said that legal work in the Punjabi can be implemented in the Punjab and Haryana High Court through the Governor.

Similarly, implementation of Punjabi language can be ensured in the lower courts by the state government. He also spoke on reviving the Punjab State Language Legislative Commission for the purpose of translation of legal norms.

Lakhwinder Singh Johal, president of Punjabi Sahitya Akademi, Ludhiana, expressed views for improving the status of Punjabi at the academic level and connecting the mother tongue with skill development and employment.

Kendri Punjabi Lekhak Sabha president Darshan Buttar asked to empower the language department, while Kendri Punjabi Lekhak Sabha (Sekhon) president Pawan Har'chandpuri suggested that instructions from the secretariat level should be issued in Punjabi language.

Sikh historian and scholar Dr Harpal Singh Pannu said teachers should be aware of the nuances of the Punjabi language.

# Political stability will make state front runner: Mann to industrialists

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
AMRITSAR, FEBRUARY 7

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday said that current political stability and quick decision-making mechanism along with out of box ideas will soon make Punjab a front running industrial state in the country.

The Chief Minister, while interacting with the industrialists here today during the run up for progressive Punjab Investment Summit scheduled to be held on February 23-24 at Mohali, said that Punjabis are born to be number one as they have traits of hard work and dedication in their blood. He said that due to this spirit the Punjabis have always excelled in every sphere adding that the entrepreneurs from the state have carved a niche for themselves across the globe. Mann said that the day is not far when Punjab will be on the high progress trajectory of industrial growth.

Announcing a major boost to the tourism industry across the state by harnessing the immense potential of this sector, the Chief Minister said that the state is blessed with several natural resources which can be developed into international tourist points. He said that the state government is coming up with a concrete proposal for developing Ranjit Sagar Dam, Chohal Dam, Nurpur Bedi and others into state-of-the-art tourist destinations.

The Chief Minister said that the holy city will be further developed into a hub of religious and patriotic tourism. The Chief Minister assured the local industrialists that while promoting the tourism sector preference will be given to the

**THE CHIEF MINISTER, WHILE STRIKING AN EMOTIONAL CHORD WITH THE ENTREPRENEURS, ASKED THEM NOT TO GO ANYWHERE AND RATHER FOCUS ON EXPANDING THEIR BUSINESS HERE TO SERVE THEIR MOTHERLAND**

local industry.

The Chief Minister also said that the state government is also planning to boost the agro-industry in a big way. He said that Punjab produces 80% of the total basmati produced in the country adding that this production will be further enhanced in the coming days. Mann said that this will revolutionise the industrial sector on one hand and supplement the income of farmers besides saving the precious natural resource in the form of water.

The Chief Minister, while striking an emotional chord with the entrepreneurs, asked them not to go anywhere and rather focus on expanding their business here to serve their motherland.

He also announced that the state government will soon introduce colour coding for stamp papers to facilitate the industrialists for early clearance of their projects. Mann said that massive efforts are also afoot for starting domestic flights from Adampur, Halwara and Bhisiana airports to facilitate the industry.

The Chief Minister said that the state government has introduced the new industrial policy for Punjab to give further impetus to industry and commerce.



## PUNJAB

# AAP has pushed back state into darkness: SAD

AMRITSAR, FEBRUARY 6

**S**AD president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Monday accused the AAP government in Punjab of pushing the state back into the "age of darkness by bankrupting" its power utility and refusing to give incentives to the industrial sector.

Addressing a press conference here, the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief alleged that the Aam Aadmi Party government had not generated a single unit of power during its tenure.

"It is simultaneously not paying subsidy due to PSPCL (Punjab State Power Corporation Limited) which is bankrupting the power utility," he said.

Noting that part of the power needs of the state were being served by two ther-

mal plants in Rajpura and Talwandi Sabo, he said,

"These thermal plants supply power to the state at Rs 2.80 per unit. The short-fall in demand is being filled by purchasing power at Rs 8 to 10 per unit."

"The situation would get worse in the summer. This will threaten paddy crop besides dealing a crippling blow to the industrial sector," Badal said.

The SAD leader claimed that industrialists were already leaving the state as they were "fed up" of gangsters and extortion calls.

The "failure" of the AAP government to address the concerns of the industry through the new industrial policy has compounded matters, he said.

"No new incentive has been given in the new industrial policy and as neigh-



bouring states are providing more incentives, Punjab's industry is shifting to Uttar Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir," he said.

The manner in which the state had been made power surplus along with creation of world class roads and air network during the SAD's tenure, had

given confidence to the Punjab growth story, Badal said.

The SAD president also said Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was trying to "mislead" people by indulging in a name changing spree to show the government had done something.

"The truth is that the AAP government has gone in for a massive exercise to repaint and renovate government buildings to establish so called 'aam aadmi clinics'," Badal said.

"Hundred 'sewa kendras' were converted to 'mohalla clinics' and now, 540 rural dispensaries are being converted to 'aam aadmi clinics'. The government is now also in the process of changing the nomenclature of meritorious schools established by Parkash Singh Badal," he claimed. **PTI**

## Disproportionate assets Ex-minister Dharamsot sent to 3-day police remand

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
MOHALI, FEBRUARY 7

**M**ohali district court on Tuesday remanded former Punjab minister Sadhu Singh Dharamsot to three days' police custody in a disproportionate assets case. The Congress leader was arrested by the Punjab Vigilance Bureau (VB) from his residence on Monday.

Dharamsot's counsel informed the court that the case was registered due to political vendetta. However, the Bureau submitted that there was a big difference between the income and expenditure of the accused.

A case was registered against Dharamsot under sections 13(1)(b), 13(2) of the Prevention of Corruption Act at VB Range police station, Mohali, for amassing wealth disproportionate to his known sources of income.

## AAP neglecting govt medical institutes: Bajwa

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 7

**P**unjab's Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Partap Singh Bajwa on Tuesday lashed out at the Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab government for leaving some of the prestigious government-run medical institutes in the states in lurch.

The senior Congress leader, while citing some media reports that expose the negligent approach of the AAP government towards government-run medical institutes in Punjab, said that the government dental college in Amritsar is running with only eight teachers, whereas sanctioned posts of professor, associate professor, and assistant professor are 56. Besides this, Baba Farid University of Health Sciences (BFUHS), Faridkot, has been functioning without a full-time vice-chancellor for the past six months.

"Under the 11-months rule of AAP,



the future of the medical students in Punjab has been at stake. The government dental college in Amritsar has over 250 BDS and postgraduate students, who find it difficult to carry on with routine study assignments", LoP added.

The Qadian legislator questioned what kind of dentists would such an institute be producing, which has been dealing with acute staff shortage.

Bjawa went on to say that one may call it a lethargic approach or arrogance, but as per some media reports,

the AAP government has not sent a panel of three names to the governor of Punjab as yet to fill the VC's post at BFUHS.

"People of Punjab have already witnessed poor health facilities being provided to them in the name of Mohalla clinics. Instead of improving the health infrastructure and recruiting more staff in the existing health centres, taxpayers' hard-earned money is being spent recklessly on beautifying the outer appearances of Mohalla clinics," rued Bajwa.

He strongly condemned the AAP government's move to divert staff to the Aam Aadmi Clinics which has been grossly impacting the routine functioning of the health centres in the state. "I fail to understand why doesn't the AAP government establish a fresh infrastructure to set up these clinics. People from rural areas have already been up in arms against the government on this", LoP added.

## Police got huge public support in drive against drugs: DGP

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 7

**P**unjab Police have been carrying out cordon and search operations (CASOs) at drug hotspots in the state from time to time and people from all sections of society are very happy with the action of the force and cooperating with the police teams, the police said in a statement here today.

Harpinder Singh, sarpanch of village Kharaurhi (Fatehgarh Sahib), which has been declared as drug-free village by panchayat, thanked Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and the Punjab Police for launching a war against drugs.

Police teams led by Senior Superintendents of Police (SSPs) on Monday conducted CASOs and special check posts in five districts, including Fatehgarh Sahib, Tarn Taran, Pathankot, Hoshiarpur and Amritsar Rural.

Police teams, on the directions of Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav, also visited rehabilitation centres to motivate the people undergoing treatment for drug addiction to return to the mainstream to start a new life.

The DGP said that the police teams have received an overwhelming response and great support from the public during this special operation carried out in five districts. He also exhorted the public to share inputs with the police in case they get to know about anyone selling/ consuming drugs.

Amritsar Rural police visited the rehabilitation centre at Khiyala to interact with the youth, who are under treatment, to motivate them to shun drugs.

## State to reduce stubble-burning by 50%

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 7

**T**he Punjab government Tuesday assured the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) that the state will reduce the number of stubble-burning incidents by 50 percent compared last year.

Chief Secretary Vijay Kumar Janjua said the state government is taking every step to effectively tackle air pollution.

According to an official release here,

the plan for paddy crop residue management was discussed at a high-level meeting in view of the coming Kharif harvesting season in Punjab.

The meeting, chaired by CAQM chairperson in National Capital Region Dr M M Kutty, was attended by senior officers and all deputy commissioners of the state.

The DCs briefed the chairperson about the steps taken by the state government for crop residue management in the state, the release said, adding Kutty was happy

with the steps taken by Punjab to curb stubble-burning and congratulated on 30 percent reduction in the number of fire instances. He directed all the DCs to prepare action plans for 2023 in advance.

Chief Secretary Janjua assured the meeting that stubble-burning incidents will be reduced by 50 per cent compared to last year. He highlighted the initiatives taken by the state government for managing stubble, including solving issues of ex-situ industries, promoting crop diver-

sification and providing adequate in-situ management machines.

He said on the directions of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, the state government is working on using paddy straw as animal fodder, promoting cotton crop and sowing the short duration varieties of paddy. He further said the state government will also hold an awareness campaign for farmers regarding harmful effects of paddy straw burning especially on the soil fertility. **PTI**

## Man dies in police custody, two cops suspended

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 7

A 38-year-old man allegedly died under mysterious circumstances in a police lockup in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district.

The family of the deceased has alleged that he was tortured in the custody.

According to officials, Sonu Kumar was arrested after police recovered 7 grams of heroin from his possession in the Goond area of Kathua. He was sent to a police lockup at Nagari post on Saturday.

He died under mysterious circumstances in the lockup on Monday night. His body has been shifted to the district's government medical college (GMC) for postmortem, they said.

Authorities have ordered a magisterial probe into the matter and suspended two cops, Kathua Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Shivdeep Singh Jamwal said. Kumar's nephew Rahul alleged that he died due to torture in the police custody. A street food vendor, Sonu is survived by wife and three little children. He was the sole breadwinner of the family, his nephew said.

**HE DIED UNDER MYSTERIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE LOCKUP ON MONDAY NIGHT. HIS BODY HAS BEEN SHIFTED TO THE DISTRICT'S GOVERNMENT MEDICAL COLLEGE FOR POSTMORTEM**

## Extortionist impersonating as terrorist held

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK:  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 7

Police on Tuesday arrested an extortionist from Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district.

"Police in Pulwama arrested an extortionist along with fake weapons, who was impersonating as a terrorist," a police spokesperson said.

Acting on a complaint by a private citizen, the police picked up Adil Ahmad Dar, who confessed to robbing the complainant of Rs 3,300 and snatching his mobile phone using fake weapons on Monday, he added.

On Dar's disclosure, the police recovered two toy pistols, three wallets, a mobile phone, Rs 3,330 in cash, two ATM cards and other personal documents of the complainant, the spokesperson said.

# Ready to give befitting response: Army Cdr

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK:  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 7

The Army today said it was ready to give a befitting response to any Chinese aggression in Ladakh, maintaining that the integrity of the country was being ensured through physical patrolling and technical means.

Addressing the Northern Command Investiture Ceremony here, General officer Commanding in Chief Lt General Upendra Dwivedi also said that the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war has brought forth many lessons such as employment of disruptive and dual use technologies.

"On the LAC, our response to Chinese attempts to unilaterally change the status quo was a swift, undaunted and synergised action by the Indian Armed Forces. Any adverse aggressive designs or attempts will definitely be met with appropriate posturing of Forces and a strong intent with complete synergy among the three services," he said.

He said measures to resolve the Line of Actual Control (LAC) situation at diplomatic and operational levels are also simultaneously underway.

"I assure you that the LAC in Eastern Ladakh is being dominated by physical patrolling and through technical means and our territorial integrity is being ensured," he added.

Lt Gen Dwivedi said the Northern Command is in a high state of readiness and morale, to face constantly evolving threats and challenges.

"The security situation in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh poses many challenges in terrain and operational dynamics, especially from different adversaries along the Northern and Western borders.

## Army units in Ladakh dominate investiture ceremony

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK:  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 7

Army units involved in the Galwan clashes in eastern Ladakh with the troops of Chinese PLA dominated the commendation and appreciation certificates handed out at Tuesday's Northern Command investiture ceremony, which was held in Kashmir for the first time since Independence.

"It is a matter of immense honour for me to be presiding over the first segment of the investiture ceremony at Srinagar. This event is to commend the inspirational acts of bravery, commitment and sacrifice, in the true

traditions of Indian Army, by selected units of Northern Command which has contributed to stability along the LoC and LAC," General officer Commanding in Chief of Army's Northern Command Lt General Upendra Dwivedi said in his address.

Of the four Chief of the Army Staff appreciation certificates, three were awarded to units involved in Operation Snow Leopard undertaken in the Ladakh sector after the Galwan clashes in June 2020.

Of the 49 GoC-in-C's commendation certificates, 18 were given to units deployed in Ladakh while they also bagged nearly half of the 24 appreciation certificates.

The 6 Bihar unit was awarded the commendation certificate for its "unprecedented contribution" in pushing back the enemy in the Galwan Valley while 22 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles got the certificate for foiling Chinese incursion in a hand to hand fight in Chushul sector.

The 17 Mahar, who took part in the Operation Snow Leopard, were awarded for being the first battalion to remain posted in Operation Meghdoot (Siachen glacier) for eight months.

Zanskar pony breeding and training centre and 26 Dog unit of the army were also awarded appreciation certificates for their roles

We are committed to defending India's sovereignty and territorial integrity while upholding the democratic traditions of the Nation", he said.

"We are maintaining a constant vigil, monitoring all developments and will take all necessary steps to protect our national interests," he said.

The Army commander noted that cyber and space have emerged as new domains of warfare.

"Information warfare, cyber and space have emerged as new domains of warfare. Gray zone warfare in both the kinetic and non-kinetic domains is a challenge and we have adapted well to the ambiguities associated with strategies," he said.

"It is essential that we equip ourselves, progressively factor and consider these peculiarities to facilitate better and more

effective war fighting," he added.

He said the Army is prepared to meet any challenges in the future and will always work for the betterment of the people of the region.

"The last two years have brought to the fore newer challenges in the wake of abrogation of Article 370, the Galwan conflict and multiple waves of COVID-19," he said.

"These challenges have only served to strengthen our resolve to be steadfast and determined in our commitment," he added.

On the steps taken for improving the life of soldiers and local residents of Ladakh, he said special clothing in seven layers and mountaineering equipment are being indigenized to increase the capability of soldiers in high altitude areas (HAA).

"The study of Intermittent Oxygen Inhalation, has been initiated with an aim to improve the overall health conditions in acclimatization of combat soldiers, deployed for more than one year in HAA," he said.

The Army commander said the Pan-India Project of Network for Spectrum has reached completion in the last one year and approximately 57 per cent of this project is rolled out in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

"The Army has in conjunction with the Ministry of Communication identified 144 villages in remote areas of Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir for installation of 4G/5G towers. Assistance in terms of sharing tower space and support infrastructure is being provided to telecom service providers, so that this critical facility reaches population resid-

## Rise in narco terrorism

# Pakistan using it as new tool for proxy war

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SRINAGAR, FEB 7

Kashmir has witnessed a concerning rise in narco-terrorism as Pakistan is now using this as a new tool in its proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir, a senior army commander said here today.

Lt General Upendra Dwivedi, the General-officer-Commanding in Chief (GOC-in-C) of the army's Northern Command, said the neighbouring country is sending drugs and weapons through drones in an attempt to disrupt the social fabric here.

Lt Gen Dwivedi exhorted all ranks

of the Northern Command to be prepared for a variety of challenges on the internal and external security fronts.

"Kashmir has witnessed a concerning rise in narco-terrorism, as Pakistan is now using this as a new tool in its proxy war. Of late, a dual strategy of sending across drugs as well as weapons through drones is being employed to keep the fire burning in an attempt to disrupt the social fabric," he said.

The army commander said the cross-border smuggling of narcotics aided terror activities in the Union territory.

"Security forces are alive to this trend and have already initiated counter-drone measures to curb the menace," he added.

Lt Gen Dwivedi said the situation along the Line of Control has remained stable and the ceasefire understanding with Pakistan continues to sustain.

"A very strict vigil and a robust technology-enabled multi-tier counter-infiltration grid is being maintained to thwart any attempts at infiltration. Ceasefire violations, infiltration bids or any other misadventure attempted by the adversary will be dealt with firmly," he added.

The army commander said numerous infiltration bids have been foiled in the last year while the highest standards of professionalism and synergy displayed by the troops in all dimensions of counter terror operations.

## PDP, AAP protest against eviction drive

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SRINAGAR, FEB 7

Political parties in opposition continued to express anger and resentment against anti encroachment drive launched by the LG administration in UT which has hit many a families and commercial establishments that have occupied the land illegally. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) held demonstrations today against the ongoing anti-encroachment by the Jammu and Kashmir administration.

Holding placards denouncing the use of bulldozers, dozens of PDP leaders and workers took out a protest march from their party office near Sher-e-Kashmir Municipal Park here.

## REGION

# Got empty coffers from BJP govt: Himachal CM

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SHIMLA, FEBRUARY 7

**L**aunching an attack on the previous state government headed by former chief minister and BJP leader

Jairam Thakur, Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu today said he was handed over empty coffers.

The Chief Minister said that besides a whopping loan amount of Rs 75,000 crore, the BJP also left an outstanding amount of Rs 11,000 crore as arrears to be paid to its employees and pensioners.

He said that the previous BJP government, though had announced the pay commission to its employees, but failed to give their arrears. Similarly, dearness allowance was also announced but it was not paid to the employees, Sukhu said, adding that "the BJP handed over empty coffers to us." "The arbitrary decisions taken by the BJP were unwanted and uncalled-for," the Chief Minister said, adding that the BJP government made false promises to take political mileage.

The Chief Minister, who was interacting with the media on his arrival at Una today, said that necessary budgetary



## CM to lay foundation stone of Himachal Niketan in Delhi

HAMIRPUR (HP), FEBRUARY 7

**C**hief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu will lay the foundation stone of the proposed Himachal Niketan building, which will provide accommodation to students from the state in Delhi.

The proposed five-storey building in southwest Delhi's Dwarka area is estimated to cost Rs 18.70 crore and will be completed in two years, a government spokesperson said here on Tuesday. The building will have 81 rooms, including two VVIP sets, and 40 general rooms. It will have a parking facility for 53 vehicles and 87 two-wheelers. Sukhu, who left for Delhi on Tuesday, is expected to visit Goa to take part in a religious function of Himachal Pradesh Governor RV Arlekar before heading to Tripura for the election campaign, the spokesperson added. **PTI**

provisions were made by his government before announcing the Old Pension Scheme in the state.

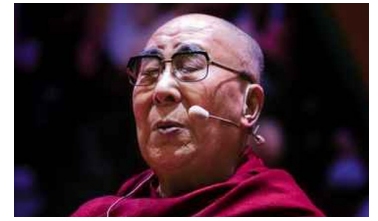
The Cabinet had accorded sanction to OPS in its first meeting after careful deliberations at various levels.

Likewise, all the other guarantees as promised in the Congress Pratigya Patra will be fulfilled in a phased manner after making adequate financial provisions, the CM stated.

He also said that the government was much concerned about resolving the stalemate between the Adani Company

and truck operator unions and had held several rounds of talks with both the parties. However, the truck unions have also had separate table discussions with the company. "I hope that the dispute will be resolved soon," Sukhu said. He further claimed that the government will fight for the rights of the truck operators and their welfare is the utmost priority and would be taken care of.

The Chief Minister, accompanied by his deputy Mukesh Agnihotri, paid obeisance at Kotla Kalan, Radha Krishna Temple in district Una.



## Dalai Lama saddened over loss of lives in Turkey, Syria

DHARAMSALA, FEBRUARY 7

**T**ibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama on Tuesday said he was saddened by reports of the devastating earthquakes that have struck Turkey and Syria leading to extensive loss of life.

"I offer my condolences to those families who have lost loved ones and pray for all those affected by this tragedy," he wrote to the Executive Director of the World Food Programme.

"At the same time, it is heartening to know that in addition to the UN coordinated health teams, NGOs and many countries from around the world are sending support to help the rescue and relief efforts in the quake zones."

"As a token of my solidarity with the people of Turkey and Syria affected by this tragedy, I have asked the Gaden Phodrang Foundation of the Dalai Lama to make a donation towards the rescue and relief efforts," he added.

The earthquake, which struck on Monday, killed nearly 5,000 people and flattened thousands of buildings in Turkey and neighbouring Syria. It was centred in Turkey's southeastern province of Kahramanmaraş and was felt as far away as Cairo.

The earthquake was followed by multiple aftershocks. **PTI**

## CCPCR organises mock UN parliament for students

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 7

**T**he Chandigarh Commission for Protection of Child Rights (CCPCR) celebrated its 9th Foundation Day by organizing a UN mock parliament for school children. This was the Commission's maiden effort towards facilitating trilateral cooperation among UK, Canada and India towards the issue of children.

Preet Gill, Member Parliament, and Shadow External Affairs Minister UK and Rachna Singh, Education Minister, BC Canada, showed their support on bringing nations closer on the issue of child rights and appreciated the Commission's efforts for empowering girls through 'Girls India Project'.

The event was attended by both public and private schools and was graced by special guests including Anita Pal, wife of Adviser to the Administrator, UT Chandigarh, Padam Shri Hansraj Hans, among others.

The 'Girls India Project' initiative included a UN mock parliament and school twinning programme, both of which are designed to engage and educate children on the 17 SDGs and



their role in creating a sustainable future.

The UN mock parliament brought together students from different public and private schools to participate in a simulated session of the United Nations General Assembly.

During the session, students will learn about the SDGs and how they are being addressed at the global level. They will also get an opportunity to debate and discuss solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems,

including environment, and climate change. Schools from different parts of the country will be paired with each other to share knowledge, resources, and ideas on how to promote the SDGs.

During today's event, best practices of schools and achievers were also awarded.

Harjinder Kaur, chairperson, CCPCR said "We believe that education plays a crucial role in shaping the future, and that's why we're launching this initiative."



## Sanjha Morcha conducts ESM meeting at Pathankot

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
PATHANKOT, FEBRUARY 7

**B**rig Prahlaad Singh, chairman of Sanjha Morcha, conducted an ESM meeting at Pathankot. The meeting was held in most congenial and peaceful environment. All present agreed to resolve the anomalies by remaining united and not falling into the trap of false propaganda by some to confuse the veterans. He said that injustice has been done up to major rank. Brig Singh said justice can only prevail and be achieved when OMJC Report will be implemented and made public and the anomalies of armed forces are addressed as highlighted by the 7th CPC.

## Mercury settles above normal in region

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 7

**M**inimum temperatures settled a few notches above normal at many places in Punjab and Haryana on Tuesday.

In Punjab, Ludhiana recorded a low of 11.3 degrees Celsius, four degrees above normal, according to a meteorological department report.

At 8.1 degrees Celsius, the mercury settled three notches above normal in Amritsar. Patiala recorded a low of 9.9 degrees Celsius, Pathankot 8.9 degrees Celsius, Bathinda 8 degrees Celsius, Faridkot 8.6 degrees Celsius and Gurdaspur 7.5 degrees Celsius.

Chandigarh, the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana, recorded a low of 10.1 degrees Celsius, three degrees above normal. In Haryana, Ambala recorded a minimum temperature of 12.2 degrees Celsius, four degrees above normal. **PTI**

## EDITORIAL

The Express India  
NEWSThe  
Apocalypse!

Over 5000 people have died in Syria and Turkey in one of the most devastating earthquakes in human history, that measured 7.8 on the Richter Scale. Relief and rescue workers fear more casualties. Till the debris is not completely cleared it will not be easy to assess the exact number of people having lost their lives in this natural disaster that was devastatingly cataclysmic. A large number of victims are those who have been displaced during twelve years of civil war in Syria, which has been foisted there by the western powers. Although reference to the Syrian civil war may sound out of context, it is directly related to the intensity of the disaster. Most of the settlers in the areas where the earthquake caused maximum damage are those displaced by the civil war. Maybe had they not been victims of war, they may not have been displaced and may not have died in this earthquake.

Nobody can predict the earthquakes or their intensity. Yet some precautions can be taken. While natural disasters are beyond the control of human beings, still they can help in reducing the intensity or can even contribute to further the extent of disaster. Turkey is accepted to be a high-risk seismic zone prone to earthquakes, which have been taking place at regular intervals. Last one took place in 1999, which again was quite devastating. Reports suggest that the economic boom in Turkey, led to massive but unregulated development. Huge buildings were constructed without taking precautions mandatory for such highly seismic zones. It is now believed that had the buildings been constructed while taking in view the seismic dangers, there might have been lesser casualties.

The heart wrenching scenes are too devastating for any human being to watch. The helplessness and despair of people, knowing that their loved ones are buried in the debris and still not able to do anything, is beyond anybody's imagination. People have been sending voice messages from under the debris they are stuck and trapped in. Yet not everybody is lucky to get rescued. The enormity of devastation is so much that any quantum of aid, rescue and relief will fall far too short. The whole world has come together to the aid of Turkey and Syria. Rescue missions have reached there from across the world. India has also sent the first contingent of National Disaster Rescue Force (NDRF) along with aid and relief material.

Relief, rescue and rehabilitation under such circumstances will be a tall order. First and foremost priority for everyone is to try to save as many lives as possible as thousands of people are still trapped under the massive debris of the huge buildings. Tens of thousands have also been injured, many of whom will need advanced medical care. The two countries, much less Syria, are not equipped to deal with the medical emergency that the earthquake has unleashed. Syria is already reeling under the civil war that makes relief and rescue more difficult. There cannot be more intense despair and helplessness than the world is seeing in the earthquake affected areas right now.

Manish Tewari  
makes sense

BY OUR POLITICAL EDITOR

Senior Congress leader and National Spokesperson, Manish Tewari is known for his strong opinions. The erudite leader has a mind of his own. And a strong and informed one at that. He is among a very few Congress leaders who has the audacity to take an independent line which at times may go contrary to the party line. While this time he articulated the party's line for a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into Adani episode, with some observations with which his party may not agree, earlier he unambiguously supported the government's new army recruitment scheme of Agniveer, which the Congress party opposed. In fact Chairman of the Congress Communications' department, Jai Ram Ramesh distanced the party from what Tewari said and wrote, saying it was his (Tewari's) personal opinion.

This time it was about the crucial Adani issue, which his party believes it can corner Prime Minister Narendra Modi with. Tewari in an article in the Indian Express newspaper has made a strong case for constituting the JPC to probe the entire Adani episode. IN the same article, however he asks, "could it be connected to the larger geo-politics at play, especially given the fact that the strategic landscape is transforming very rapidly? A new history to which all of us are witnesses is being scripted". Tewari also referred to "serious questions...also been raised in the public space about the intent of the Hindenburg report". The Congress party will never agree or subscribe to such a view as it has already held Adani "guilty before the trial".

Tewari has not given a clean chit to Adani to provoke, what former Punjab Congress president Sunil Jakhar, who is now with the BJP, any show cause notice. Rather he has made a strong case for a JPC to find out the truth. But at the same time, unlike the Congress, he has not pronounced Adani guilty ahead of trial. Congress wants to pronounce, rather it has already pronounced, the verdict before the trial and without any evidence against Adani enterprise. The Hindenburg Report makes only allegations without any evidence or proof. Just because those allegations have shaken the confidence of Adani's investors and he has lost about \$100 billion does not mean he is guilty. 'Hindenburg Research' is a known "short seller" with doubtful credentials and vested interests. But for the Congress, each and every word it mentions appears to be the gospel truth.

Tewari has raised a valid point that "could it be connected to the larger geo-politics at play". It looks quite probable that this can be one of the reasons behind the publication of such a damning report. These "geo-political" players would not like anyone from India emerging as a strong and powerful businessman who was the third richest person in the world and was inching towards becoming the number one, before the report came. He has now slipped to below twentieth position. While it is the case for investigators to find whether Adani is guilty of the allegations Hindenburg Research has leveled against it, prima facie he has not done anything wrong. Whatever business he has gained control over, he has done it through open and competitive bids. There has never been any complaint by any of his rivals that he used his influence and connection with the government to grab any port or airport or any



**MANISH TEWARI HAS RAISED A VALID POINT THAT "COULD IT BE CONNECTED TO THE LARGER GEO-POLITICS AT PLAY". IT LOOKS QUITE PROBABLE THAT THIS CAN BE ONE OF THE REASONS BEHIND THE PUBLICATION OF SUCH A DAMNING REPORT. THESE "GEO-POLITICAL" PLAYERS WOULD NOT LIKE ANYONE FROM INDIA EMERGING AS A STRONG AND POWERFUL BUSINESSMAN WHO WAS THE THIRD RICHEST PERSON IN THE WORLD**

other business. These have all been open and transparent deals.

Business has always been part of the geo-political strategy of the strong and powerful nations. Remember the British did not invade India to capture it from the Mughals. They entered India through the East India Company, which gradually started taking control of such a vast country. The point is not to suggest that Adani is to India what the East India Company was to the British. But corporate power does hold and wield strategic influence in the global order.

It is difficult to make out why the Congress party, particularly its leader Rahul Gandhi, has been demonizing Adani. In fact not only Adani, he is demonizing the Reliance Chairman Mukesh Ambani also. His speeches make frequent mention that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has only helped and patronized these two people. He has even coined a phrase, "hum do hamarre do", meaning Narendra Modi and Amit Shah in the government and Mukesh Ambani and Gautam Ambani in the corporate world. Reliance was already a business behemoth much before Modi became the Prime Minister. Rather Reliance rose during the Congress regime only.

It suits the "left of centre" ideology and agenda of Rahul Gandhi, which though stands rejected everywhere else in the world, to make the government, more so the Prime Minister, look "pro-capitalist" and "anti-poor". For presenting and proving the Prime Minister as "pro-capitalist" there have to be some "capitalists" and Adani and Ambani fit in

that space and scheme of Rahul Gandhi's things. And the Hindenburg Report, irrespective of its doubtful credibility came quite handy for the party. In all likelihood the Congress party also knows that nothing is going to come out, but it has managed to build up a narrative that Adani has resorted to all wrong doings and he has been patronized, promoted and supported by Prime Minister Modi.

The Congress party unfortunately is either ignorant or deliberately chooses to turn a blind eye to the "larger geo-politics at play", Tewari has referred to. Given the Congress approach and attitude being revealed consistently for a long time, the party can identify with anything as long as it is convinced that it can corner the government and the Prime Minister. And this is going to be its fatal error. Merely accusing the Prime Minister of "crony capitalism" or shielding the shady is not enough. It has to be proved with evidence to convince the masses, who no longer get carried away by the wild allegations.

Compare how the Congress party is treating Adani with how the Chinese promote and support their business houses and corporate entities to grow and expand into the entire world. Although unlike India, there is a one party Communist government in China, it wholeheartedly supports the "capitalist" expansionism of its corporate enterprises. Chinese investors have expanded to the whole world and can be seen anywhere and everywhere, from Canada to America, Europe to Australia. They do not have to fear or worry about anything as the government backs them. If a government backs and supports a corporate enterprise in India, it is made out to be a "cardinal sin".

Congress would do a great service to itself and to the nation, if it gets rid of certain fixations like seeing every business house as an enemy of the masses. World has changed and so has India. The corporate enterprises are part of the Indian growth story. They are not the same as those during the colonial era. They may be making huge profits, but they are creating jobs and contributing to the economy as well. It is completely unfair to demonise them just because they try to identify with the government. Any and every business house does that. There is nothing wrong about it. They did business with the Congress when it was in power. They are doing business with the BJP when it is in power.

Just don't pronounce the verdict and convict them before the trial.

## NATION

## Hindenburg report

## Amid arguments in RS, Congress demands JPC

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

Congress MP Digvijay Singh today reiterated the demand for setting up a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) to probe the Hindenburg Research report that alleges irregularity in the business of the Adani Group conglomerate.

During a discussion on the president's address in the Rajya Sabha, Singh said 'Amrit Kaal' has benefitted only a bunch of people and 21 people hold assets equal to 70 crore people.

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar intervened during the speech and said he may be called to authenticate some documents. The Congress member agreed.

Citing the report by US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research report on the Adani Group, Singh called for an investigation into the resignation of former UK prime minister Boris Johnson's brother who resigned from the firm Elara Capital after the report was released.

He said the Hindenburg report alleges that Adani has a history of controversial business tactics including environmen-



tal violations and fraud.

"It also accuses the company of using its political connections to win favourable treatment from the Indian government...With such allegations, the government of India must come out with a clear report, a clear statement. How far is this correct? Why are SEBI, the regulatory authorities not coming out with a statement? Their silence is something which casts aspersions on the interest, the crony capitalism of the BJP," Singh said.

The Congress leader also called for an investigation in the manner in which the Adani Group company's share reached Rs 4,000 apiece from Rs 130 during the Covid pandemic when people were losing wealth. He said members demanded a JPC under rule 267 but it has not been accepted.

"Hindenburg report... The matter that

has come to the fore from the report, today the world is discussing it but we can't discuss it. If we don't raise it in the House then where will we raise it?"

Singh cited previous JPCs, including on Harshad Mehta on Ketan Parekh, and asked, "What was wrong in our demand...?"

If the prime minister, he said, has courage he will reply.

Dhankar intervened to explain the reason for rejection of the demand under rule 267 and said the notices were not accepted because they were not in order.

At this, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh had some words with Dhankar on his intervention and asked him to let Singh finish his speech.

BJP member GVL Narasimha Rao also objected to the part of Singh's speech under House rule, leading to an uproar.

According to Singh, the Hindenburg report is being discussed overseas and investors have lost Rs 2.07 lakh crore. This, he said, is a matter which needs to be discussed.

The Congress member also raised the issue of Rafale fighter jet deal.

"Allow us to discuss crony capitalism mushrooming in this country," he said.



## Opposition MPs criticize President's address in LS, say 'half-truth'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

Some Opposition members in Lok Sabha on Tuesday criticised the President's address to the joint session of parliament, saying it contained "some half-truths" and did not talk about important issues like the Women's Reservation Bill.

Participating in the debate on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address, BJD's Pinaki Misra said it was "somewhat an untrustworthy document," and it "suppressed" several truths.

The address talked about women empowerment, but it did not mention the Women's Reservation Bill, which is pending for long, he said. "We are deeply unhappy that Women Reservation Bill does not find mention in the address."

He also said the address talked about the poor, but in the Budget, the govern-

ment slashed allocation to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MGNREGA).

The finance minister needs to reconsider this, he added.

The BJD member also said that "some half-truths crept into the statement" on medical colleges also. Most colleges lack good infrastructure and equipment, he said. However, Misra added that government policies on mines, minerals and air connectivity have worked well.

JD (U) member Kaushalendra Kumar said that the government is talking about amrit kal, but there is nothing like that.

Kumar alleged that the Modi-government has failed to provide jobs to people and also failed to bring back black money.

He also demanded special status for Bihar.

Danish Ali (BSP) alleged the government has worked only for the benefit of

## Rahul Gandhi questions surge in Adani's fortunes

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday linked the massive rise in the business fortunes and personal wealth of businessman Gautam Adani to the Modi government coming to power in 2014, as he launched a sharp attack on the BJP dispensation over the Adani issue.

His charges in Lok Sabha drew a sharp response from the treasury benches, with Law Minister Kiren Rijiju asking him to not level "wild allegations" and furnish proof of his claims.

Speaker Om Birla also asked him to focus on the President's address and disapproved of the Congress leader displaying a picture of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Adani in the business tycoon's plane to highlight their alleged proximity.

Participating in the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's



Address in Lok Sabha as the first opposition speaker, Gandhi also questioned the Agniveer scheme for recruiting defence personnel claiming that youths aspiring to be in the army were not on the same page as the government on the scheme.

Senior officers have said the scheme will weaken the army, he claimed.

Gandhi said he learnt a lot during his recently concluded Bharat Jodo Yatra and got the opportunity to listen to the inner voice of India.

He said the highlights of what people told him during the Kanyakumari-to-Kashmir march were the issues of unemployment, price rise and farmers' problems.

## BJP stages protest over 'disrupting' of Mayoral polls

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

Delhi BJP leaders, including party councillors, MPs and MLAs, on Tuesday staged a protest near the AAP office here, accusing the party of disrupting the mayoral election in the MCD House meeting.

The meeting of the newly elected Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) House was adjourned third time in a month on Monday along with the elections of the mayor, deputy mayor and standing committee members.

The House was adjourned amid a protest by AAP councillors and leaders over the presiding officer's decision to

extend the voting right to nominated councillors (aldermen) for electing a mayor.

Leading the protest outside AAP headquarter on Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, Delhi BJP working president Virendra Sachdeva alleged that the Arvind Kejriwal-led party was delaying the mayoral election because of an internal rift.

"The AAP councilors and leaders resorted to hooliganism and subverted constitutional norms inside the house. They snatched presiding officer's mike, created ruckus, climbed on the tables and hurt BJP female corporators and now they are saying that the mayoral election are not being held," Sachdeva said.

## NATION

# Budget has something for all sections: PM Modi

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said the recent Union Budget has something for every section of the society and asserted that the interests of the poor have been at the centre of every budget presented by his government.

Addressing the first BJP parliamentary party meeting after the budget was presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on February 1, Modi said no one is calling it a "chunavi budget" (budget influenced by polls) even though it was the last full-fledged one before next year's Lok Sabha election. Overall development and the interests of every section of the society have driven the budget proposals, he added.

Even those who are ideologically opposed to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have welcomed the budget, Union minister Pralhad Joshi told reporters, quoting Modi's speech to the MPs.

Asking the MPs to inform their constituents, including the poor and middle class, about the relevant aspects of the budget, Modi recalled his electoral experiences as the chief minister of Gujarat to say that when work is recognised by people, there is nothing like anti-incumbency, sources said.

Underscoring the wide acceptance of the budget, the prime minister said it is at times difficult to cater to everyone's taste at a family function of merely 25 guests, but the budget proposals have managed to meet the expectations of different sections of the society in a country of more than 130 crore people.

In his address, Modi said India has organised about 20 G20-related meets at different places so far and foreign guests have appreciated their conduct.

He also spoke about a devastating earthquake that hit Turkey and Syria and noted that India is providing all possible assistance. Modi also recalled a 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, noting the scale of the tragedy and how he can relate to



## India sends NDRF and medical teams, relief material to Turkiye

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

India has sent to Turkiye two plane-loads of relief materials and medical teams for survivors of the devastating earthquake that killed over 4,000 people. India has also despatched various equipment, tools and vehicles to search for survivors of the two powerful quakes that badly hit various parts of Turkey and Syria.

Several countries around the world have extended help to both the countries in their rescue and recovery efforts.

"India expresses its solidarity at this challenging moment," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar tweeted.

The first C-17 transport aircraft of the Indian Air Force, carrying a group of search and rescue personnel, specially trained dog squads, drilling machines, relief material, medicines landed in Adana in the quake-hit country in the morning.

A second IAF plane with similar consignments has already left for Turkiye around noon.

"First Indian C17 flight with more than 50 @NDRFHQ Search & Rescue personnel, specially trained dog squads, drilling machines, relief material, medicines and other necessary utilities & equipment reaches Adana, Turkiye," Jaishankar said on Twitter.

Both the first and the second aircraft



carried search and rescue personnel including from the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF).

"Second @IAF\_MCC C-17 with self-contained @NDRFHQ teams including dog squads, search & rescue equipment, extrication tools and vehicles leaves for Turkiye. India continues to support the people of Turkiye in their hour of need," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi tweeted.

It said the 99-member medical team comprises critical care specialists. The contingent includes orthopaedic surgical teams, general surgical specialist team and medical specialist teams apart from others.

The teams are equipped with X-ray machines, ventilators, oxygen generation

plant, cardiac monitors and associated equipment to establish a 30-bedded medical facility.

"The Army mobilised a 99-member medical team to earthquake hit Turkey. The team comprises medical specialists and is equipped with X-ray machines, ventilators, oxygen generation plants, cardiac monitors and associated equipment, to establish a 30-bedded medical facility," an Army official said.

India on Monday decided to immediately despatch search and rescue teams of the National Disaster Response Force, medical teams and relief material to Turkiye following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's instructions to offer all possible assistance to the country.

## 'BJP against division of Tripura even if it fails to form govt'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
AGARTALA, FEBRUARY 7

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the BJP will not compromise with Tripura's territorial integrity even if it fails to form the next government in the state.

Addressing a rally in Sepahijala district's Melaghar, he said the BJP was ready to give everything to empower the indigenous people socially, culturally, politically and linguistically but was against the bifurcation of Tripura.

"I have had two meetings with Pradyot Debbarma who is demanding Greater Tipraland. I directly told him that the BJP is totally against the division of Tripura," he said. "His grandfather (former ruler of Tripura state Bir Bikram Manikya) had not demanded Greater Tipraland, why is it being raised now?" he said.

Sarma, the chairman of the North-East Democratic Alliance, said only the BJP has the guts to take on such an issue, while the CPI(M) and Congress were skirting it.

"The BJP is ready to give everything to empower the indigenous people -- socially, culturally, politically and linguistically but is against the bifurcation of Tripura. We will not compromise with the territorial integrity of the small state even if the party fails to form the next



**SARMA, THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NORTH-EAST DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE, SAID ONLY THE BJP HAS THE GUTS TO TAKE ON SUCH AN ISSUE**

government," he said.

Highlighting the development works of the Centre, Sarma said, "From free rice to free vaccine -- everything has been made available to the people. PM Modi always thinks about the welfare of people." Also speaking at the rally, Union Minister Pratima Bhoumik urged people to vote for the BJP to expedite development in the district bordering Bangladesh.

Bhoumik is contesting from the Dhanpur assembly constituency in the district.



## WORLD

# Pervez Musharraf laid to rest

KARACHI, FEBRUARY 7

Pakistan's former military ruler General Pervez Musharraf was on Tuesday laid to rest with full military honours in an army graveyard here in the presence of his relatives and several retired and serving military officers.

The 79-year-old former president's funeral prayers were held at the Gulmohar Polo Ground in Malir Cantonment in the afternoon in a low key ceremony which was neither attended by President Arif Alvi, nor Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

However, Joint Chiefs of Staff General Sahir Shamshad Mirza and former army chiefs - Qamar Javed Bajwa, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani and Aslam Beg - attended the funeral.

Former ISI chiefs - General (retd) Shuja Pasha and General (retd) Zaheerul Islam - and several serving and retired military officers also attended the funeral prayers.

Politicians including Muttahida Qaumi Movement (Pakistan) leaders Khalid Maqbool Siddiqi, Dr Farooq Sattar, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz leader Amir Muqam, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader and former Sindh governor Imran Ismail, former federal information minister Javed Jabbar, were also in attendance.

No top leaders from the ruling Pakistan Peoples Party in the Sindh province or the Jamaat-e-Islami were present at the final rites.

Musharraf's coffin was draped in Pakistan's green and white flag, though the ceremony was not a state funeral.

The casket of Musharraf was then taken to the army graveyard reserved for top officials on Shahrah-e-Faisal and buried there with full military honours



and protocol.

Tahir Hussain, who has been Musharraf's spokesman in Karachi since the ex-ruler formed his party - the APML - in October 2010, said a large number of military officials, senior bureaucrats and businessmen attended the funeral prayers under military security.

Musharraf, the architect of the Kargil War in 1999 and Pakistan's last military ruler, died on Sunday in Dubai after a prolonged illness. The former president was undergoing treatment for amyloido-

sis in Dubai. He was living in the UAE since 2016 in self-exile to avoid criminal charges back home.

Musharraf's mortal remains arrived here on Monday on a special flight from Dubai.

His wife Saba, son Bilal, daughter and other close relatives arrived with the body on the special aircraft of Malta aviation arranged by the UAE authorities.

The aircraft touched down at the old terminal area of the Jinnah International Airport amid heavy security with the

former president's family and the body was taken to the Malir Cantonment area, officials said.

His mother was buried in Dubai while father was laid to rest in Karachi.

Musharraf enjoyed immense support and popularity among many but also hated and vilified by the bar councils, civil rights groups and political parties for his anti-democratic actions.

On Monday, sharp differences among political leaders came to the fore in Senate over the offering of prayers for the former

military ruler. Pakistani Parliament follows a tradition of offering Fateha (prayers) for the departed soul when a leading politician or personality of the country dies.

The members of the Senate, the upper House of Parliament, hurled allegations against one another for supporting dictatorial regimes and violators of the Constitution when the issue of prayers for Musharraf came up.

The move of supplication was led by the leader of the opposition in the senate Senator Shehzad Wasim of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party and supported by other members of his party.

When Senator Mushtaq Ahmad of rightwing Jamaat-i-Islami, who was about to lead a joint invocation for those killed in the earthquake in Turkey, was asked to also pray for Musharraf's soul, he refused by saying that he would only lead the invocation for the quake victims. The refusal led to vociferous exchanges among lawmakers with some members reminding Senator Mushtaq that his party had also once supported Musharraf. Later, the PTI lawmakers led by Senator Wasim, who was given a break in politics by Musharraf, offered a customary prayer while the treasury senators refused to join them.

The split in the upper House over offering a prayer for a dead person was rare and an apt reflection of Musharraf's chequered legacy.

Musharraf, who seized power after a bloodless military coup in October 1999 and ousted the elected government of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, ruled Pakistan till 2008 as chief executive and President.

He was born in New Delhi in 1943 and migrated to Pakistan after Partition in 1947. PTI

## Memories of Mumbai terrorist attack still vivid: US

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 7

The memories of the brutal attack by terrorists in Mumbai in 2008 are still vivid both in India and the United States, the Biden administration said on Monday.

"The terrorist attacks that took place in 2008 in Mumbai, of course, the memories of that are still vivid. They're still vivid here (and) in India," State Department Spokesperson Ned Price told reporters at his daily news conference.

"They are still vivid in the United States as well. We can all remember the horrific imagery of that day, the assault on the hotel, the bloodshed that resulted, and it's why we've continued

to insist on accountability for the perpetrators of this, not only the individual operatives who took so many innocent lives that day, but the terrorist groups that were behind this, that helped to orchestrate it as well," Price said in response to a question.

In one of the most horrific terrorist attacks in the country's history, 166 people were killed and over 300 injured as 10 heavily-armed terrorists from Pakistan created mayhem in Mumbai on November 26, 2008.

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 after a trial.

## Indian-American student named by Johns Hopkins as 'world's brightest' for 2nd consecutive yr

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 7

Indian-American schoolgirl Natasha Perianayagam was named in the "world's brightest" students list for the second consecutive year by the US-based Johns Hopkins Center For Talented Youth, based on the results of above-grade-level tests of over 15,000 students across 76 countries.

Perianayagam, 13, is a student at Florence M Gaudineer Middle School, in New Jersey.

She also took the Johns Hopkins Center For Talented Youth (CTY) test in Spring 2021, when she was a Grade 5 student.

Her results in the verbal and quantitative sections levelled with the 90th percentile of advanced Grade 8 performance, which catapulted her into the honours list



that year. This year, she was honoured for her exceptional performance on the SAT, ACT, School and College Ability Test, or similar assessment taken as part of the CTY Talent Search, the university said in a press release on Monday.

Perianayagam, whose parents hail from Chennai, said she loves doodling and reading JRR Tolkien's novels in her spare time.

CTY used above-grade-level testing

to identify advanced students from around the world and provide a clear picture of their academic abilities.

According to the university release, Perianayagam was among the 15,300 students from 76 countries who joined CTY in the 2021-22 Talent Search year.

Less than 27 per cent of those participants qualified for the CTY ceremony, receiving either high or grand honours based on their test scores.

In her latest attempt, Perianayagam scored the highest grades among all candidates.

"This is not just recognition of our students' success on one test, but a salute to their love of discovery and learning, and all the knowledge they have accumulated in their young lives so far," said CTY's executive director Dr. Amy Shelton.

## ENTERTAINMENT/HEALTH

# It's official! Kiara-Sid are now married



**B**ollywood lovebirds Sidharth Malhotra and Kiara Advani are now officially husband and wife!

According to reports, the 'Shershaah' couple tied the knot today in a closely guarded yet lavish wedding ceremony at Suryagarh Palace in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer.

The wedding venue was heavily guarded and a strict 'no-phone' policy was imposed on the guests.

Like Vicky Kaushal-Katrina Kaif, Ranbir-Alia and KL Rahul-Athiya Shetty, Sidharth and Kiara, too, opted for an afternoon wedding. The 'pheras' took place at 3 pm near Bawdi.

The 'haldi' and mehendi ceremony had taken place ahead of the 'shaadi', and the reception will also take place tonight. It is learnt that Kiara and Sidharth will throw a Mumbai reception on February 12, followed by another one in the groom's hometown Delhi.

The couple had first sparked dating rumours while shooting for the widely acclaimed 'Shershaah', and later during their separate appearances on Koffee with Karan Season 7.

A host of celebrities, including film maker Karan Johar, designer Manish Malhotra, actor Shahid Kapur and his wife Mira, Juhi Chawal, Isha Ambani and her husband Anand Piramal, attended the 3-day wedding festivities in Jaisalmer.

# Stacey Dash, Taryn Manning to star in 'Four'

**S**pencer Breslin, Stacey Dash and Taryn Manning are set to star in 'Four', a feature adaptation of Ashley Berry's memoir 'Waiting for Rainbows'.

In the film, Meghan Carrasquillo of 'What Lies Behind the Walls' fame, will play the role of Berry, a woman struggling with infertility who eventually turns to adoption.

Breslin, who was seen in 'The Santa Clause 3', will play Berry's husband Cal while Clueless-star Dash will play social worker Beth while 'Orange is the New Black' star Manning will play Dr Brice.

"A small-town couple with big dreams of making their family complete must persevere through infertility and tragedy," reads the longline. "Hope and fear may

come and go, but with love as their rock, they vow to withstand the storm... together." "Watching 'Four' come to life was a very surreal experience to be a part of," Berry says.

"I can only hope that by sharing our story it will give so many others the drive to keep fighting for their dreams."

"Just when you think a heart has been broken beyond repair, a true story like this reminds us that love can bring us off our knees so we can live again," says Megan Williams, CEO of Forbes featured publishing house, TSPA Inc, which published "Waiting For Rainbows."

The screenplay was written by Berry together with Kate Queen from 'Expired' while 'Hard Sun' fame Canyon Prince has directed the film.



# 'Covishield worse than mRNA vaccines'

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

**E**minent British-Indian cardiologist Dr Aseem Malhotra, who has been leading international calls for the suspension of mRNA COVID-19 vaccines, said on Tuesday that Oxford-AstraZeneca's jab, administered in India as Covishield, was even "worse" in terms of cardiovascular effects, heart attacks and strokes.

Dr Malhotra, who has demanded a full

safety review into the use of AstraZeneca's Covid vaccine, told PTI Covishield "should never have been rolled out in the country in the first place".

Dr Malhotra is National Health Service (NHS) trained medic and is in India this week to deliver a series of lectures on COVID vaccines to try and make an "evidence-based case" for their suspension. He said there have already been international calls to suspend mRNA vaccines like those manufactured by



Pfizer and Moderna because of the serious adverse effects especially related to the cardiovascular system.

However, a comparison done up till June 2021, and published in a peer-reviewed research journal, showed that the Oxford/AstraZeneca's Covid vaccine is far worse than Pfizer's mRNA jab in terms of cardiovascular effects, heart attacks, strokes, some death and clotting problem in both younger and older adults, he said. "In the UK, we had 8,00,000 reports of adverse effects which were beyond mild after administering 9.7 million doses, almost 10 per cent," he said.

"This is unprecedented." "Why was AstraZeneca's Covishield administered in India when it was suspended in the UK and some European countries due to severe side-effects?" he said. "There needs to be immediate suspension pending inquiry as to why India got this so very wrong." The World Health Organisation (WHO) had said last year that the Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine is "safe and effective for all individuals aged 18 and above". **PTI**

# BUSINESS

## Reprieve for Adani; shares start to rebound

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

After a USD 110 billion rout in market value, embattled Adani group got some reprieve on Tuesday after shares of most of its listed firms rebounded on bourses and international rating agencies said there was no credit risk for lenders with exposure to the group.

The group, which is in the midst of a political storm after US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research's adverse report dated January 24 triggered a meltdown in group stocks wiping out billions of dollars in market value, also had a mixed day with the quarterly results of four of its entities, particularly Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone reporting a 12.94 per cent decline in consolidated net profit to Rs 1,336.51 crore for the December quarter 2022.

Shares of flagship firm Adani Enterprises settled nearly 15 per cent higher at Rs 1,802.50 apiece while shares of Adani Wilmar jumped 5 per cent to end at Rs 399.40 on BSE.

Shares of Adani Ports & SEZ, Ambuja Cements, ACC and NDTV settled over

1 per cent higher on the exchange, a day after the group said the promoters would pre-pay USD 1,114 million for the release of pledged shares of its firms -- Adani Ports & Special Economic Zones, Adani Green Energy and Adani Transmission -- ahead of the maturity in September 2024.

However, four of the group firms defied the upward trend and settled in the negative territory with Adani Power, Adani Green Energy and Adani Total Gas tanking 5 per cent each, while Adani Transmission fell 0.77 per cent to settle at Rs 1,251.70 on the BSE.

Three of the group firms -- Adani Green Energy, Adani Power, Adani Total Gas -- closed on lower circuits on the bourse.

Meanwhile, global rating agencies Fitch and Moody's said banks' exposure to Adani group is not large enough to affect their credit quality, and bank ratings are driven by expectations that they would receive 'extraordinary' sovereign support, if needed.

"Fitch Ratings believes that Indian banks' exposure to the Adani group is insufficient in itself to present a substan-

tial risk to the banks' standalone credit profiles," the rating agency said in a note.

Similarly, Moody's stated that although the exposures to Adani group are larger for public sector banks than for private sector banks, they are smaller than 1 per cent of total loans for most banks.

"Risks for banks can increase if Adani becomes more reliant on bank loans," Moody's said.

However, the group's access to funding from international markets can be curtailed because of heightened risk perception.

"Yet the overall quality of Indian banks' corporate loans will be stable," Moody's said.

The mixed fortune of the group on the day was also mirrored in the quarterly results of its entities with the country's largest integrated logistics player, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) posting a 12.94 per cent decline in its third quarter consolidated net profit.

APSEZ total consolidated income increased to Rs 5,051.17 crore in the December 2022 quarter from Rs

4,713.37 crore in the year-ago period.

On the other hand, Adani Green Energy's consolidated net profit more than doubled to Rs 103 crore in the December quarter from Rs 49 crore in the year-ago period, mainly on the back of higher revenues. Its total income in the third quarter of the current fiscal rose to Rs 2,258 crore from Rs 1,471 crore in the same period a year ago.

Ambuja Cements, which was acquired by the Adani Group last year, reported a 13.2 per cent increase in its consolidated net profit to Rs 487.88 crore for the December quarter of 2022-23, up from Rs 430.97 crore in the year-ago period.

Its revenue from operations rose 3.69 per cent to Rs 7,906.74 crore as compared to Rs 7,625.28 crore in the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year.

New broadcaster NDTV Ltd, recently acquired by the group, said its third quarter consolidated profit was at Rs 12.9 crore, lower in comparison to the same quarter last year, primarily due to reduction in consumption of advertisement inventory across news genre. PTI

## Rajnath Singh to host Defence Ministers' conclave at Aero India

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
BENGALURU, FEBRUARY 7

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will host the 'Defence Ministers' Conclave' on February 14, on the sidelines of 14th edition of Aero India in Bengaluru.

The biennial airshow would be held at the Air Force Station in Yelahanka here from February 13-17.

The conclave will see participation of Defence Ministers of foreign friendly countries, who would also be attending the Aero India, an official release said.

The conclave would address aspects related to deepening cooperation for capacity building (through investments, R&D, joint venture, co-development, co-production and provisioning of defence equipment), training, space, AI and maritime security to grow together with the broad theme 'Shared Prosperity through Enhanced Engagements in Defence' (SPEED), it said.

The conclave is an opportunity for Defence Ministers of all foreign friendly countries and India to engage with each other to carry forward the Prime Minister's vision of 'Make in India, Make for the World' for a secure and prosperous future for generations to come, it added.

According to officials, Aero India has carved a niche for itself globally as one of the premier aerospace exhibitions with 13 successful editions organised in Bengaluru since 1996.

A total 731 exhibitors have registered -- 633 Indian and 98 foreign for Aero India this time.

## Sensex, Nifty decline for 2nd day on selling in FMCG, steel stocks

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 7

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower for a second straight day on Tuesday due to selling in FMCG, metal and auto shares ahead of the RBI monetary policy.

The 30-share BSE barometer declined further by 220.86 points or 0.37 per cent to close at 60,286.04, as 22 of its constituents ended in the red. The index opened flat amid mixed global trends. It moved in a range of 60,655.14 to 60,063.49 in the day.

The broader Nifty of the National Stock Exchange fell by 43.10 points or 0.24 per cent to settle at 17,721.50, with 31 of its scrips ending in the red. The index touched a high of 17,811.15 and a low of 17,652.55 during the session.

Profit-taking in the FMCG and auto majors was weighing on the sentiment while buying in select heavyweights in banking and financials capped the fall, analysts said.

## India can be superpower in defence manufacturing: Gen Chauhan

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
PUNE, FEBRUARY 7

Lauding the private sector contribution in defence manufacturing, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Tuesday said India has the potential to emerge as a superpower in making military equipment and has displayed wherewithal to develop big and complex platforms.

Referring to the inauguration of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd's new helicopter factory -- India's largest chopper manufacturing unit -- in Tumakuru district of Karnataka on Monday, General Chauhan said post-independence, it was the country's dream to become self-reliant in defence manufacturing.

He was speaking at the inauguration ceremony of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) Defence Expo 2023, organised by NIBE Defence and Aerospace Ltd in Chakan on Pune city fringes.

"When we imagine a powerful India, our major focus goes towards the Armed Forces and we feel proud about



their achievements. According to me, a big defence ecosystem is standing behind the Armed Forces, which is making the country powerful and this defence ecosystem works in tandem with the Armed Forces," General Chauhan said.

The people in this ecosystem do not wear uniforms and do not come under the Army, Navy or Air Force Acts, but they have a strong desire to do something for the nation and they are always inspired by that desire, said the CDS.

"I feel that to make the country more powerful, the silent majority has a big

role to play and we should recognise this contribution. Which is why I have come here to give recognition to this silent majority and say that all you people are with us in the process of making the country powerful," General Chauhan said.

Post-independence, it was the country's dream to become self-reliant and independent in the defence sector, and ordnance factories and defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs) have played a major role in realising that goal, he said.

Sometime ago, the defence sector was thrown open to private players and emphasis was given to the Make-in-India initiative (aimed at country becoming a manufacturing powerhouse), he said.

"I firmly believe these two attempts of the government will unleash the power of the youth and entrepreneurs of India. NIBE Defence is a fine example of this entrepreneurship," General Chauhan said.

Considering the contribution of the private sector, it can be seen that India can emerge as a superpower in defence manufacturing, he said.

## Jaishankar, Bhutan's Speaker discuss economic cooperation

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday met Bhutan's National Assembly Speaker Wangchuk Namgyel and discussed the two countries' multifaceted friendship and stronger economic cooperation.

"Pleased to interact with Wangchuk Namgyel, Speaker of National Assembly of Bhutan and his 13 member parliamentary delegation today," Jaishankar said in a tweet. "Discussed our multifaceted and unique friendship, especially ongoing reform, stronger economic cooperation and the priorities of youth," he said.

Jaishankar also expressed happiness that the delegation would have an opportunity to see for themselves the "huge changes" in India over the last eight years.

## SPORT

## Pak cricketer Kamran Akmal retires

KARACHI, FEBRUARY 7

Pakistan wicketkeeper-batter Kamran Akmal on Tuesday announced his retirement from all forms of cricket after being named on the national selection committee.

Kamran told the media on Tuesday that he had taken retirement with immediate effect since he had also taken up coaching as a profession.

"I don't think after you come into coaching or become a national selector you can focus on playing," he said.

Kamran, who appeared in 268 international matches for Pakistan until 2017, was also dropped by Pakistan Super League franchise Peshawar Zalmi for the 8th season and instead signed the wicketkeeper to be on its coaching staff. Kamran, who is the first cousin of Pakistan captain Babar Azam, made it clear he had a lot of respect for the latter's cricketing prowess. "He is one of our great batters and my job as selector and as coach in Zalmi is to help him fine tune himself as a captain and as a batsman. But he has no flaws in his batting this we have seen over the years." **PTI**

# India-Pakistan squash begins today

CHENNAI, FEBRUARY 7

The Indian men's and women's teams have been seeded second and third respectively in the HCL 21st Asian Junior Team squash Championships (under-19) which begins here on Wednesday.

The focus during the tournament will be on fast-rising 14-year old Anahat Singh, who recently won the under-15 title in the British Open and will be a key member of the women's team.

Teams from 10 Asian countries including Chinese Taipei, Hong-Kong (China), Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka and India will be seen in action, the organisers said on Tuesday.

Pakistan, the top seed in the men's category would face challenge from the second-seeded Indian team, which comprises Krishna Mishra (Asian Rank 7 (U-19), Paarth Ambani, Sharan Punjabi and Shaurya Bawa.

India have been placed in Group B in



the men's event alongside Malaysia, Japan, Singapore and Chinese Taipei.

The Pakistan squad for the tournament arrived in Chennai on Tuesday evening.

In the women's event, Malaysia has been giving the top billing while the third-seeded Indian team which includes Anahat Singh, ranked three in under-17 section in Asia), Pooja Arthi, Tiana

Parasrampur and Yuvna Gupta will be looking to do well in home conditions.

The Indian girls will be playing Hong Kong, China, Singapore and Sri Lanka in Group B.

According to Anahat, the team is ready to challenge Asia's best to win the top prize for a second time after having previously done so in 2013 (in Seoul). **PTI**

## Pakistan spinner Asif Afridi banned for 2 yrs

KARACHI, FEBRUARY 7

Left-arm spinner Asif Afridi, who was once selected in the Pakistan squad but did not get a game, was on Tuesday banned for two years after he pleaded guilty to an anti-corruption code violation.

The 36-year-old's ban commenced from September 22, 2022 when he was provisionally suspended by the Pakistan Cricket Board.

He was picked for Pakistan's white ball squad for the home T20 series against Australia but never played for the national side. Asif has 118 wickets from 36 first-class matches. The PCB found him guilty of two breaches of the anti-corruption code for which he got a two-year ban and a six-month ban and both the periods of ineligibility will run concurrently.

"The PCB while handing the ban took into consideration the admission of guilt, expression of remorse, past track record and Asif Afridi's request that the PCB considers his case compassionately, claiming he had unintentionally breached the Code," the PCB said in a statement.

"It gives the PCB no joy to suspend an international cricketer for two years, but we have a zero-tolerance approach towards such offences," PCB chairman Najam Sethi said.

"As the game's governing body, we need to make examples, handle such matters robustly and send out strong messages to all cricketers."

"It is a bitter fact that corruption poses a threat to our sport as selfish corrupters lure cricketers in different ways and methods. That's precisely why the PCB has been investing heavily on player education so that they remain vigilant and can help the PCB eradicate this menace by reporting approaches and if, despite all our best efforts to create awareness, a player falls victim to his greed, then the PCB has no sympathy." **PTI**

## Australia wary of Ashwin, still confident to tackle him

BY KUSHAN SARKAR  
NAGPUR, FEBRUARY 7

Australia vice-captain Steve Smith may have done a week's simulation of Ravichandran Ashwin's doppelganger Mahesh Pithiya but he is not overthinking about the star India spinner's impact in the Border Gavaskar Trophy beginning here on Thursday.

Australian batters have been focussed on tackling the spin threat and there is a team of Indian net bowlers who is helping the visitors prepare for the four Test series.

Is Australia over-thinking about Ashwin?

"There has been many off-spinners we played and Mahesh is one of them. He bowls a similar style (to that) of Ashwin. We are not overthinking things. Ash is a quality bowler but we have the tools in our kit bag to counter that," Smith told reporters during a media conference.

He has had a look at the pitch and good length spot at the far end looks pretty dry.

"Pretty dry, particularly one end. I think it will take a bit of spin, particularly the left-arm spinner taking it into our left-handers. There's a section there that's quite dry," he added.

But Smith also said that he won't be over-reading the track. "Other than that, I can't really get a good gauge on it. I



don't think there will be a heap of bounce in the wicket, I think it will be quite skiddy for the seamers and maybe a bit of up-and-down movement as the game goes on. "The cracks felt quite loose. I'm not entirely sure we'll wait and see."

Smith seemed pretty happy with the preparation. "We had a few good sessions in Bangalore and now here as well. The boys are shaping up well. I think it will be a bit skiddy, slow but not entirely sure," Smith said. However, he did also confirm that Cameron Green isn't in a position to play. "He hasn't faced even the fast bowlers so he's very unlikely to play the 1st Test," he said.

He also indicated that Scott Boland's natural length will suit the surfaces in India. "Hazlewood injury is a big loss for us, but Lance (Morris) is a good bowler. Boland has been good. His natural length will suit this kind of pitch. Lance obviously has a pace in the air," Smith said. **PTI**

## Football factory Manipur, thrilled at date with Blue Tigers

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 7

A tiny state of Manipur in Northeast India, better known as the 'football factory' of the country, is anxiously waiting to host the senior national team.

On Monday, Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh announced that the state for the first time will host the senior India team when the Blue Tigers compete in a Tri-Nation Friendly Football Tournament in Imphal from March 22-26. Kyrgyz Republic and Myanmar are the other teams in fray. As the news trickled in, the state, which has been

the supply line for India by producing quality players, is thrilled at the opportunity. "I was thrilled, happy that at last Manipur is getting something it deserved," said former India footballer Kiren Khongsai, the first player from the state to don India colours way back in 1989. Since then, Manipur has contributed over 50 players to the Indian men and women senior national teams. "I was lucky to play for India when I did... It is an honour and I am glad that I share this honour with many more Manipur players," said Khongsai who has scored one goal in six appearances for India. **PTI**

## Olympian Ma Long 'WTT Star Contender' favourite

PANAJI, FEBRUARY 7

R reigning Olympic champions Ma Long and Chen Meng from China will be among a galaxy of stars to visit India for the World Table Tennis (WTT) Star Contender Goa from February 27 to March 5.

The 34-year-old Ma, widely regarded as the best to have ever played the game, is a two-time Olympic champion and will also have his countryman and rival Fan Zhendong, the current world champion and world number one, for company in the men's singles.



Veteran Sharath Kamal and Sathiyam Gnanasekaran will lead the Indian challenge. Among other leading lights of the

men's game, world number four Tomokazu Harimoto of Japan and world number six Truls Moregard of Sweden, world number eight Lin Yun-Ju from Chinese Taipei and world number nine Darko Jorgic from Slovenia will also be seen in action. In the women's section, besides Chen, her countrywoman and world number one Sun Yingsha has also confirmed participation along with world number five Hina Hayata of Japan, world number eight Kasumi Ishikawa from Japan, world number nine Doo Hoi Kem from Hong Kong, China and world number 10 Ying Han from Germany. **PTI**