

Weak-kneed person can't be EC: Supreme Court

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

The Supreme Court on Thursday said the Election Commission (EC) is duty bound to act in a fair and legal manner and a person who is weak-kneed before the powers cannot be appointed as an election commissioner.

The court said while there may be officers who assist the EC, vitally important decisions have to be taken by those at the helm of the affairs and "it is the chief election commissioner and the election commissioners at whose table the buck must stop".

A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice KM Joseph said these observations have a direct connection with the question with which it is concerned with, namely, the need to take the appointments of the members of the EC out of the exclusive hands of the executive, that is, the political party

which not unnaturally has an interest in perpetuating itself in power.

The bench, also comprising justices Ajay Rastogi, Aniruddha Bose, Hrishikesh Roy and CT Ravikumar, ruled that the appointments of the chief

The bench said, "Undoubtedly, the Election Commission is duty bound to act in a fair and legal manner. It must observe the provisions of the Constitution and abide by the directions of the court. The same being done, it can draw upon

unusual powers." The bench, which dealt with the independence of the EC, said the competence of a man is not to be conflated with fierce independence.

"A person who is weak-kneed before the powers that be cannot be appointed as an election commissioner. A person who is in a state of obligation or feels indebted to the one who appointed him fails the nation and can have no place in the conduct of elections, forming the very foundation of the democracy.

"An independent person cannot be biased. Holding the scales evenly, even in the stormiest of times, not being servile to the powerful but coming to the rescue of the weak and the wronged, who are otherwise in the right, would qualify as true independence," it said.

The top court said it therefore finds that the EC has been charged with the duty and blessed with extraordinary powers to hold elections to both Parliament and state legislatures from time to time. **PTI**

THE BENCH RULED THAT THE APPOINTMENTS OF THE CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER AND ELECTION COMMISSIONERS WILL BE MADE BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE RECOMMENDATION OF A COMMITTEE COMPRISING THE PRIME MINISTER, THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION IN THE LOK SABHA AND THE CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

election commissioner (CEC) and election commissioners will be made by the president on the recommendation of a committee comprising the prime minister, the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha and the chief justice of India to maintain the "purity of elections".

a nearly infinite reservoir of power. Once a poll is notified, which again is a call to be taken by the Election Commission itself and indeed capable of being misused and the subject of considerable controversy, if bias or subservience to the powers that be is betrayed, it assumes

G20 FMs' meet fails to agree on joint communique

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

The G20 foreign ministers' meeting on Thursday was unable to come out with a joint communique due to sharp differences over the Ukraine conflict despite persistent efforts by host India to build consensus.

The meeting, held under India's presidency, adopted a Chair's Summary and Outcome document. There were issues relating to the Ukraine conflict, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said at a media briefing. Several diplomats said there were deep divisions between the US-led West and the Russia-China combine over the Ukraine conflict.

Jaishankar said there were "polarised views" on the issue. The external affairs minister said the Outcome Document and the Chair's Summary reflected the G20's resolve to deal with pressing global challenges. There was a large number of issues where there was agreement, he said.

Jaishankar also said the G20 foreign ministers' meeting unequivocally condemned terrorism.

BJP's mission NE Wins Tripura, banks on regional parties for Nagaland, Meghalaya

AGARTALA/SHILLONG/KOHHIMA,
MARCH 2

The ruling BJP managed to notch-up a morale-boosting win on its 'Mission Northeast' on Thursday by retaining Tripura emphatically, while also piggy-backing to power in Nagaland on Neiphiu Rio-led NDPP's shoulder.

In Meghalaya, it was poised to be part of the ruling dispensation again as a junior partner, given that chief minister Conrad Sangma's NPP has fallen short of majority while winning the lion's share of 26 seats in the 60-member assembly.

CREAM OF THE CROP: TRIPURA
The BJP-IPFT alliance retained Tripura winning 33 seats in the 60-member assembly on Thursday, 10 less than the figure in 2018, but nevertheless a clear majority which will allow it to rule for five years without seeking help from the newcomer Tipra Motha, who bagged 13 seats.

The Left-Congress alliance secured 14

seats while the Trinamool Congress did not win one of the 28 seats it contested.

The saffron party contested in 55 seats and won 32, three less than what it bagged in 2018. While the IPFT was reduced to just one seat, down from eight five years back.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist), which lost power in 2018 after ruling the northeastern state for 25 years, won just 11 seats this time round, down from 16 which it secured five years back.

Fielding candidates in 13 constituencies, the Congress won three.

SEALING THE DEAL IN MEGHALAYA

BJP's pointsman in the northeast, Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, remained in touch with Sangma for the alliance in Meghalaya.

BJP's two seats and the money and influence that New Delhi can help any state government with, is expected to help seal the deal where the old alliance of NPP with United Democratic Party,

which has 11 seats, and the saffron party will be revived, according to political pundits.

Party spokesperson Ampareen Lyngdoh admitted as much, stating there is a "high possibility" that earlier alliance partners will come together, as the ruling party "will have to seek the support of others" to return to power for the second time in a row.

BJP's Meghalaya chief Ernest Mawrie, too, confirmed that the party would "submit a letter of support to NPP".

RIO, NAGALAND'S REAL WINNER

NDPP supremo Neiphiu Rio is set to assume office as chief minister for a fifth term after registering a convincing win for his party and its ally, the BJP.

The Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP) won 21 seats while its alliance partner got 12 seats. Together, the two parties have secured 33 seats in the 60-member Nagaland Assembly. **PTI**



Mann meets Shah: Seeks funds, gets CRPF-RAF Cos

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Thursday met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and said the Centre and the state will work together on the law-and-order issue, even as about 1,900 personnel of the CRPF and its specialised anti-riot unit were being dispatched to the state for strengthening the security grid. The two leaders discussed the law and order issue. Mann told Shah about the circumstances leading to the Ajnala incident, sources said.

On February 23, self-styled Sikh preacher and Khalistan sympathiser Amritpal Singh and his supporters, some of them brandishing swords and guns,

broke through barricades and barged into a police station in Ajnala on the outskirts of the Amritsar city, extracting an assurance from the police that his aide and kidnapping case accused Lovepreet Singh would be released.

The chief minister said in a tweet in Punjabi that the "Centre and Punjab will work together on the issue of law and order".

Official sources added that the Union home ministry last week also directed the deployment of 18 companies to Punjab for "aid of the state government during law and order duties." Out of the 18 contingents, eight are drawn from the anti-riot Rapid Action Force (RAF) while the rest are regular ones. The overall strength of these companies is around 19,000 personnel.

PUNJAB

Budget session to start today amid Gov, CM tussle

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

Amid the ongoing tussle between Punjab Governor Banwarilal Purohit and Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, the budget session of the assembly will begin on Friday with the opposition trying to corner the AAP government over a host of issues, including law and order, particularly after the Ajnala incident.

The session will begin with the governor's address while a discussion on it will take place on March 6.

The governor and the chief minister had been locked in a tussle over summoning the budget session.

The AAP had accused the governor of not responding to the cabinet decision to call the budget session from March 3. The governor indicated last week in a letter to CM Mann that he was in no hurry to summon the session.

The AAP government then moved the Supreme Court against the governor's "refusal", where Purohit said he has summoned the budget session from March 3.

As the budget session is now set to begin, opposition parties are eyeing an

assurance from the police that his aide and kidnapping accused Lovepreet Singh will be released.

"Deteriorating law and order and corruption are the major issues which will be raised (during the session)," deputy Congress legislative party lead-

held in connection with singer Sidhu Moosewala murder case.

The BJP, too, has targeted the AAP government, demanding governor's rule in the state.

Responding to the rising criticism of his government, Chief Minister Mann, who holds the home affairs portfolio, previously said his government would maintain law and order and no one will be allowed to disturb peace.

The budget session will be held in two phases. The first phase will begin on March 3 and continue till March 11 before a break for two G20 meetings to be held in Amritsar.

The second phase of the budget session will commence from March 22 and will continue till March 24.

Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema will present the budget for financial year 2023-24 on March 10. It will be the first full budget of the AAP government. **PTI**

THE SESSION WILL BEGIN WITH THE GOVERNOR'S ADDRESS WHILE A DISCUSSION ON IT WILL TAKE PLACE ON MARCH 6. AS THE SESSION IS NOW SET TO BEGIN, OPPOSITION PARTIES ARE EYEING AN OPPORTUNITY TO CORNER THE GOVERNMENT OVER THE LAW AND ORDER SITUATION IN THE STATE.

opportunity to corner the government over the law and order situation in the state.

On February 23, supporters of radical preacher and Khalistan sympathiser Amritpal Singh stormed a police station in Ajnala on the outskirts of Amritsar brandishing swords and guns to extract

er Raj Kumar said.

Kumar, the legislator from Chabbewal, also targeted the government over alleged extortion calls to businessmen and the recent clash between gangsters in Tarn Taran jail that resulted in the death of two criminals

Superintendent, assistant booked for tampering with records

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

The Punjab Vigilance Bureau (VB) has registered a criminal case against Nirmal Singh Superintendent, Death and Birth Certificate Record Branch, in Civil Surgeon office, now posted in Death and Birth Branch, in Municipal Corporation, Jalandhar, and Harjinder Singh, Senior Assistant, Death and Birth Certificate Record Branch, in Civil Surgeon office, Jalandhar, on charges of tampering with records of registers pertaining to Phillaur tehsil. The Superintendent has been arrested and teams have been formed to arrest Harjinder Singh who is absconding.

Disclosing this here today, a spokesperson of the VB said an has already been registered against both the accused under.

During investigation of the case, it was found that Nirmal Singh and Thomas Masih (agent), had tampered with birth and death record pertaining to village Kala Bahiyana and the old pages in the register were pulled out and replaced with new entries.

Apart from this, the old pages were removed from the registers of village Varyana, village Sohampur, village Talwandi Sanghera, village Kahlwan, village Talwandi Bhare and village Tahli Sahib and new pages were inserted in their places with wrong entries in the registers of births and deaths besides several entries have been distorted.

It was found that Nirmal Singh and Harjinder Singh took lakhs of rupees as bribe in exchange for making forged certificates. Pertinently, Nirmal Singh, Harjinder Singh and Thomas Masih were already nabbed red-handed on August 21, 2018 for accepting a bribe of Rs 5,000.

In this regard, an FIR was registered in VB Police Station Jalandhar.

THE SUPT HAS BEEN ARRESTED AND TEAMS HAVE BEEN FORMED TO ARREST HARJINDER SINGH

Vegetable vendor booked for sacrilege in Phagwara

PHAGWARA, MARCH 2

Punjab Police on Thursday said they have arrested a man on charges related to the desecration of a copy of a religious scripture in Phagwara.

Deputy Superintendent of Police Jaspreet Singh said the accused, identified as Shankar, is a vegetable vendor from Uttar Pradesh but currently living in Gobindpura area here.

He said Shankar was arrested under Section 295-A (deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs) of Indian Penal Code on a complaint by a local. Singh said the complainant told the police that Shankar came to his shop to get his mobile phone recharged.

The complainant said the accused gave him a religious book which he was using as a diary and on which over half a dozen telephone numbers of his relatives and others were noted.

"I was shocked to notice it and was further appalled when the accused flung it towards me, asking me to recharge the mobile mentioned there," the complainant told the police.

Further investigation is underway. **PTI**

THE ACCUSED WAS USING THE RELIGIOUS BOOK AS A DIARY

H&UD Dept slaps show cause notice on 12 officials

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

Cracking the whip against late comers, Punjab Housing and Urban Development (H&UD) Department has issued show cause notice to its 12 erring officials for arriving late at a departmental meeting. They were asked to submit their replies within three days.

Those who were issued show cause notices include District Town Planners (DTPs) Suman Gupta, Ritika Arora and Harpreet Singh, Assistant Town

Planners (ATPs) Gagan Chopra, Amarinderjit Singh, Planning Officers Paramjit Singh, Bhupinder Kaur, ADO Kuldeep Singh, Private Secretary Satish Kumar, Senior Assistant Vandna Sharma, Clerk Kavi Prakash Amoli, Steno Gurpreet Kaur.

Notably, Aman Arora, Minister of Housing and Urban Development, had called a meeting to discuss and resolve the issues pertaining to NOCs at his office at Punjab Civil Secretariat on Tuesday. However, showing a lackadaisical attitude, these employees couldn't reach to attend the meeting on time.

Taking strict note of the dereliction in duty by these officials, the Cabinet Minister has directed Chief Administrative PUDA to issue them show cause notice while asking them to submit their reply within three days, failing which a strict action would be initiated against them, as per the law.

He said that the Punjab Government has adopted zero tolerance towards negligence in the working, and urged all government employees to join their duties on time for the smooth functioning of offices to ensure seamless services to people in transparent manner.

Govt jobs for farmers' kin

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

Punjab Agriculture Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal today gave appointment letters to four family members of farmers who died during the farmers' movement. He said that under the dynamic leadership of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, significant efforts are being made to fulfill all the promises and guarantees that the Punjab government has made to the people of Punjab.

The names of the four candidates who



were given appointment letters are Jaskaran Singh, son of Kulwant Singh of village Annia, Fatehgarh Sahib; Amandeep Kaur, daughter of Jagtar

Singh, village Dhalewan, district Mansa; Chinderpal Kaur, daughter of Gurmel Singh of village Jatana Kalan, district Mansa, and Iqbal Singh, son of Jagjit

Singh, village Balluana, district Bathinda. These candidates have been given the job of clerk in Group C.

Dhaliwal said that it is the duty of the state government to help the families of farmers who died during the farmers' movement to save the agriculture of Punjab.

He assured that the Punjab government is making serious efforts to make the state's agriculture more profitable and to strengthen the farmers economically. He said that no stone will be left unturned for transforming the lives of the food growers of the country.

Beant Singh Assassination Case

SC reserves verdict on Rajoana's plea seeking commutation of death penalty

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

The Supreme Court on Thursday reserved its verdict on the plea by Balwant Singh Rajoana, convicted in the 1995 assassination case of Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh, seeking commutation of his death penalty to life imprisonment.

A bench comprising Justices BR Gavai, Vikram Nath and Sanjay Karol heard submissions of senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the convict, and Additional Solicitor General K M Natraj, on behalf of the Centre, before reserving its judgement.

Rajoana has been in jail for the past

26 years. Rohatgi said that keeping Rajoana on death row while sitting over his mercy plea for such a long period violated his fundamental right.

His plea for mercy has been pending before the government for over a decade.

On October 11 last year, the top court had said that a three-judge bench would be set up to hear the plea of Rajoana.

Rohatgi had said that his client has a substantive case based on the judgements of the apex court that his rights under Article 21 of the Constitution (the right to protection of life and personal liberty) has been violated.

On September 28 last year, the top court had expressed dissatisfaction over

RAJOANA HAS SOUGHT COMMUTATION OF HIS DEATH SENTENCE TO LIFE IMPRISONMENT ON THE GROUND OF HIS LONG INCARCERATION OF 26 YEARS.

the Centre's failure to take a decision on Rajoana's plea for his death penalty to be commuted to life imprisonment.

Rohatgi had said Rajoana has been in jail since January 1996 and his mercy petition was filed in March 2012.

He said his client has been on death

row since 2007. Rajoana has sought commutation of his death sentence to life imprisonment on the ground of his long incarceration of 26 years.

The top court had asked the Centre on May 2 last year to decide within two months on the commutation plea filed on behalf of Rajoana. Later, in terms of a letter of July 27, 2022, circulated by the counsel for the Centre, the matter was adjourned to September 13.

Earlier, the apex court did not consider the submission of the Centre that Rajoana has been on record saying "he has no faith in the Indian judiciary and the Constitution".

It had said the pendency of appeals of

other co-accused in the case will not come in the way of the authorities deciding Rajoana's mercy plea.

The top court had also questioned the Centre over the delay in sending Rajoana's mercy petition to the President under Article 72 of the Constitution which deals with the powers of the President to grant pardon, suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.

Rajoana, a former Punjab Police constable, was convicted of involvement in an explosion outside the Punjab civil secretariat that killed Beant Singh and 16 others on August 31, 1995.

A special court sentenced him to death in July 2007. PTI

Bajwa slams AAP after testing facility at clinics discontinued

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

Punjab's Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Partap Singh Bajwa on Thursday, while slamming the Aam Aadmi Party-led Punjab Government for its attempts to cause severe damage to the health infrastructure in the state, said that the clinics that were named after the party had started demonstrating its faulty way of functioning.

He said within a few weeks of opening these clinics, testing facilities in numerous clinics had been discontinued because a private firm that was supposed to provide clinical laboratory diagnostic services at these clinics had backed out. As per a report, the private firm was demanding a long-term contract.

"I have already raised the issue on various occasions that the government had not built the required infrastructure and what they did instead was just beautified the outer appearance of these clinics," Bajwa added.

He said the AAP government had announced to build of 16 medical colleges and super-specialty hospitals in the state in five years.

This promise is hanging fire as the government has only been able to commence work on one such institute in Mohali so far. It takes years to set up a proper medical college with all the required infrastructure.

However, the government hasn't even reached on a decision where to build the other hospitals in the state, Bajwa said.

110 suspected hideouts of criminals raided across state

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

Amidst the ongoing drive to make Punjab a safe and secure state, Punjab Police on Thursday carried out massive Cordon and Search Operation (CASO) at over 110 places linked with anti-national and anti-social elements. The simultaneous raids were conducted in all districts across the state on the directions of Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav.

Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Law and Order Arpit Shukla said that CPs/SSPs were directed to personally monitor these raids and make sufficient numbers of police teams available so that raids could be carried out simultaneously. The raids were planned after the questioning of recently arrested gangsters and criminals, he added.



Notably, as many as 110 parties of Punjab Police, involving over 1,000 police personnel, were deployed to conduct these raids at suspected hideouts of anti-national and anti-social elements.

ADGP Arpit Shukla said that police teams have conducted thorough searches at the houses and other premises, and also collected data from mobile phones and other electronic devices, which will be sent for forensic exami-

nations. He said that several persons have also been detained for further verification and incriminating material has been seized from their possession, which is being further examined.

He said that the police teams also checked arms licences and questioned people about the sourcing of ammunition, besides, gathering travel details of foreign-based family members, bank transactions from abroad, and western union and property details for further examination.

142 more Aam Aadmi clinics to be opened by March 31

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

Reiterating the firm commitment of the state government to impart quality health services to people, Punjab Chief Secretary Vijay Kumar Janjua today said that 142 more Aam Aadmi Clinics will be dedicated to people on March 31.

The Chief Secretary, while chairing over a meeting to review the opening of these clinics, said that these clinics have proved to be a cornerstone in imparting quality health services to people. He said that till now around 500 Aam Aadmi Clinics are operational in the state.

He said that these clinics will be opened in five major cities of the state, including Jalandhar, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Patiala and Phagwara. Janjua asked the officers to ensure that no stone is left unturned for opening of these clinics.

'New sports policy will produce world-class players'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

To make Punjab a leading state of the country in sports, the new sports policy will prepare the players for international competitions at the grassroots level, honour the winners of national competitions, give jobs to the players, and give awards to the coaches. This was disclosed by Sports Minister Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer in a press communiqué, after discussing

the draft of the new sports policy with the experts' committee.

Meet Hayer said the sports policy will emphasise that the players should be focused on preparing for international competitions. He said that recently, athlete Akshdeep Singh was given a cash amount of Rs 5 lakh for the preparation for Olympics.

Giving cash to the players is also being made a part of the policy to prepare for other major international competitions in the future. He said that it is a major

step to prepare the players for the competition, after winning the medal, everyone gives prizes and honours, but it is necessary to help prepare before the competition and boost their morale.

The Sports Minister said that the Hockey Olympian Balbir Singh Senior Scholarship Scheme has been started to give scholarships every month to the medal winners of national level senior and junior competitions.

In the meeting, it was considered that its scope should be increased and the

scholarship amount should also be increased. The players will be given job preference according to their medals in international competitions.

An award for coaches will be started on the lines of the Maharaja Ranjit Singh Award given to players. Coaches preparing players at the lower level will not be neglected. In order to raise the level of sports competitions in the colleges-universities, inter-university sports competitions of the universities of the state will be conducted.

J&K

NIA attaches property of Al-Umar Mujahideen chief Mushtaq Latram

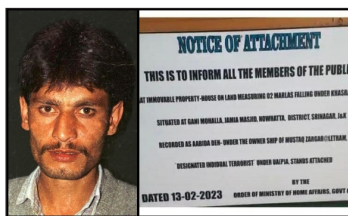
EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SRINAGAR, MARCH 2

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Thursday attached property of terrorist Mushtaq Ahmad Zargar, who along with two other militants was released in exchange of passengers of the hijacked Indian Airlines plane in 1999, officials said here.

An NIA spokesperson said that Zargar alias 'Latram' was wanted in several terror related cases, including kidnapping of daughter of the then Union Home Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed in 1989.

Terming it as a "major offensive" against terrorists operating from the Pakistani soil, the spokesperson said that Zargar's two marlas (544 sq feet) house (Khasra No. 182) at Ganai Mohalla, Jamia Masjid, Nowhatta, Srinagar, has been attached under the provisions of stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

"The procedure was carried out today by a team of the NIA along with the



KNOWN AS 'LATRAM', ZARGAR WAS RELEASED IN KANDAHAR PLANE HIJACKING, NOW WANTED IN SEVERAL TERROR RELATED CASES. HE HAS SHIFTED HIS BASE TO PAKISTAN AND HAS BEEN BRACKETED AS 'DESIGNATED INDIVIDUAL TERRORIST' BY UNION HOME MINISTRY.

representative of district administration and local police. Zargar is a 'Designated Individual Terrorist' under the UAPA and has been operating from Pakistan ever since his release and funding terror activities in the valley," the spokesperson said.

The NIA team pasted the notice of attachment on his house in presence of the sisters of the absconding terrorist.

After the NIA and police teams departed, the sisters unsuccessfully attempted to create a commotion but returned to their houses after no one joined them.

Zargar, after breaking ranks with banned JKLF terror group in late 1990, had formed Al-Umar Mujahideen terror group that was responsible for several barbaric killings in downtown Srinagar.

Hailing from the downtown city and

a coppersmith by profession before joining terror ranks, Zargar was arrested in 1992. His name was found in the list of terrorists to be exchanged for passengers of 1999 IC-814 hijacking of Indian Airlines plane and he was subsequently released and taken by the then External Affairs Minister of BJP-led government Jaswant Singh to Kandahar in Afghanistan on December 31, 1999.

Zargar, after being exchanged at Kandahar airport, shifted his base to Pakistan occupied Kashmir's Muzaffarabad town from where he attempted to revive Al-Umar Mujahideen.

He has also been involved in other heinous crimes, including murders, and has close association with other terror outfits such as Al-Qaeda and Jaish-e-Mohammed.

Zargar was designated as a terrorist under the UAPA in April last year, a move which enabled the security agencies to attach his property.

The home ministry notification last year said Zargar is a threat to peace, not only to India but around the world.

Always prepared to meet any challenge on borders: N Cdr

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JAMMU, MARCH 2

Northern Army Commander Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi on Thursday said the Army was always prepared to meet any challenge and will spare no effort in ensuring the integrity of national borders.

He was speaking at the northern command investiture ceremony organised at the Mathura military station with military precision and detail, the Army said in a statement here. It said 66 awardees received gallantry and distinguished service awards at the event presided by the General Officer Commanding-in-chief, northern command. This included 49 Sena Medals (Gallantry), one Bar to Sena Medal (Gallantry), one Yudh Seva Medal, four Sena Medals for Distinguished Service, 10 Vishisht Seva Medals and one Bar to Vishisht Seva Medal, the statement said.

The Army said a total of 33 officers, three junior commissioned officers and 29 other ranks were awarded and recognised for various acts of valour and distinguished services.

Congress stages protest against imposition of property tax

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
JAMMU, MARCH 2

Scores of Congress workers on Thursday protested here against the imposition of property tax in Jammu and Kashmir, with senior party leader Vikar Rasool Wani accusing the Union Territory administration of being "anti-poor".

The workers led by Wani, who is the Congress' J&K unit president, assembled outside the party's headquarters at Shaheedi Chowk and tried to take out a march. However, they were stopped by police.

The Jammu and Kashmir administration recently notified the imposition of property tax in municipal areas from April 1. The tax rates will be five per cent of taxable annual value for residential properties and six per cent for commercial properties.

"The (BJP) government (at the Centre) is anti-poor which is evident from its policies over the past nine years. It divided J&K into two Union Territories (UTs) and is afraid of holding assembly elections, knowing fully that the distressed people will throw it out of J&K," Wani told reporters.

Wani alleged that the Lt Governor administration was bent upon to destroy the people economically.



"First, it introduced an anti-encroachment drive to raise down the houses of the poor and now imposed property tax," he said, rejecting the Lt Governor Manoj Sinha's assertion that the rates of property tax are lowest in the country and the majority of the population had to pay below Rs 1,000 annually.

"The same remarks were made when toll posts (on highways) were introduced and today, people are paying three to four times of the toll fixed originally. It will happen with the property tax as well," he claimed.

J&K Congress working president Raman Bhalla and chief spokesperson Ravinder Sharma were also part of the protest.

Members of the Apni Party also staged a protest in Udhampur against the property tax and demanded immediate revocation of the notification.

KVS recruitment exam scam worrying, says Ladakh LG

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
LEH, MARCH 2

Ladakh Lieutenant Governor Brig (ret'd) B D Mishra on Thursday reviewed the progress made in the investigation in the recently unearthed KVS recruitment online exam scam here, saying such incidents were worrying.

Ladakh Police on Tuesday claimed to have uncovered Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS) recruitment online scam with the arrest of one person. It had said the search was on for six more persons -- all hailing from Haryana -- in connection with the case. An official spokesman said Mishra reviewed the KVS recruitment online exam cheating scam in Leh with Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Satish Khandare and Senior Superintendent of Police, Leh, P D Nitya. He inquired about the police teams deployed to arrest the people involved in the scam and also the periodic updates provided to the team, the spokesman said.

The ADGP apprised the Lt Governor of the raids conducted by the police at various places in Bahadurgarh and Rohtak in Haryana, he added.

Demands probe into Kupwara case

Missing incidents 'normalized' due to no accountability: Mehbooba

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
SRINAGAR, MARCH 2

After a missing person, who was allegedly detained by the Army in December last year, was found dead in Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, PDP president Mehbooba Mufti Thursday said "such incidents have been normalised in the absence of any accountability" after the abrogation of Article 370.

"Extremely disturbed to see pictures of the mutilated body of Abdul Rashid from Kunan Poshpora. Wasn't allowed to visit the family under the pretext of security. What transpired after the Army picked him up for questioning months ago is anybody's guess," Mufti wrote on Twitter.

The former Jammu and Kashmir chief minister said "in the absence of any accountability such incidents have been normalised after 2019".

"Probes & inquiries fail to nail culprits & deliver justice," she added.

Mufti, however, said "a genuine probe" needs to be ordered into the incident.

"Until then the least LG administration & Army can do is to take steps by providing a government job & financial assistance to the victim's family who have



THE FORMER JAMMU AND KASHMIR CHIEF MINISTER SAID "IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY ACCOUNTABILITY SUCH INCIDENTS HAVE BEEN NORMALISED AFTER 2019".

lost their sole breadwinner," she said.

The body of Abdul Rashid Dar of Kunan area of Kupwara, who went missing on December 16, 2022, was recovered from Zurhama-PK Galli forests.

Dar's family had earlier alleged that he was detained by the Army after which his whereabouts were unknown.

REGION



Fancy registration number

FIR to be lodged against three Rs 1-cr plus bidders: Dy CM

SHIMLA, MARCH 2

Taking note of three bids of more than Rs 1 crore for a fancy registration number for a two-wheeler, Himachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri said an FIR would be registered against the three "non-serious" bidders.

The Registering and Licensing Authority of Kotkhai on February 16 received three bids of more than Rs 1 crore for the fancy registration number HP 99-9999. "The online auction portal has been suspended and the department has been asked to register FIR against the bidders so that they face the consequences," said Agnihotri, who is also in charge of the transport department. He also said that necessary rectifications would be made in the portal, such as depositing the earnest money while making the bid to eliminate non-serious bidders. The Transport Department had launched a new number series and invited online bids for fancy numbers. Three persons made bids of more than Rs 1 crore for such numbers which baffled the department. It was later found that the bidders tried to play with the system.

However, the officials have not ruled out the pressure tactics of the bidder to oust the competitors and said that there is a need for the imposition of penalty in case the bidding money is not deposited.

The reserve price for the bid was Rs 1,000 and as many as 26 participants had bid for the number, officials of the transport department said. **PTI**

Haryana grants permission to investigate 2 IAS officers in Faridabad civic body 'scam'

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 2

The Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) has been accorded permission by the Haryana government to investigate two IAS officers and seven other officials in connection with an alleged Rs 200 crore scam in the Faridabad Municipal Corporation.

The IAS officers who will be investigated by the ACB are Sonal Goel and Anita Yadav.

The alleged scam came to light in 2020 when several councillors complained to the municipal commissioner that payments had been made to a contractor from 2015 onward

EIGHT PEOPLE, INCLUDING TWO FORMER CHIEF ENGINEERS AND A CONTRACTOR, HAVE BEEN ARRESTED SINCE.

without any work to show against them. Most of the work was related to the paving of streets with interlocked tiles, and the payments allegedly went on till 2020. The then SVB registered four FIRs in March and April 2022. The allegations in the FIRs include cheating, forgery, public servant disobeying law, and various other sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act against multiple

employees. Eight people, including two former chief engineers and a contractor, have been arrested since.

According to The Print, The state government has now given permission to investigate the IAS officers — both former commissioners of the Faridabad Municipal Corporation — and others under both FIRs, as required under Section 17-A of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

In a letter to the director-general of the ACB, dated 7 February the government had given permission to investigate Goel and several former officials of the Faridabad Municipal Corporation under the second FIR, dated 19 April 2022, The Print said. **PTI**

Burglars decamp with Rs 25 lakh from Saral Kendra at Mini Sectt in Karnal

KARNAL, MARCH 2

Burglars broke into the Saral Kendra at Mini Secretariat here on Wednesday night and decamped with around Rs 25 lakh. The miscreants also took with them the Digital Video Recorder (DVR), which had CCTV footage of the Centre. The incident came to light on Thursday morning, when Saral Kendra employees opened the centre noticed the broken locker.

Police suspect that the burglary was carried out after a thorough recce.

Karnal Superintendent of Police Ganga Ram Punia along with forensic experts visited the spot. Police are questioning the Saral Kendra employees about the incident. **PTI**

Car falls into gorge in Mandi, two killed

MANDI (HP), MARCH 2

Two persons were burnt alive, while another was seriously injured when their car fell into a gorge in Mandi district and caught fire, officials said on Thursday. The accident took place late Wednesday night on the Jogindernagar Nohali link road in Padhar sub division of Mandi district. The passengers were on their way home when the accident took place, said DSP, Padhar, Lokender Negi. The deceased were identified as Punjab residents Bhuwan and Sunil, both aged 28.

The injured person identified as Padam Singh (27) has been admitted to the Lal Bhadur Shastri Medical College Nerchowk.

A case has been registered and investigations are underway to ascertain the cause of the accident, police said. **PTI**

Bhiwani killings

Rajasthan CM announces Rs 5 lakh each for families of victims

JAIPUR, MARCH 2

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday announced a relief package of Rs 5 lakh each for families of Junaid and Nasir, whose charred bodies were found in Haryana's Bhiwani district after they were abducted from Bharatpur.

"The state government will provide Rs 5 lakh compensation each to the wives and children of both the deceased. An amount of Rs 1 lakh each will be provided as cash whereas a fixed deposit of Rs 4 lakh each will be done so that the dependent families do not face any problem in the education and marriage of the kids," he told reporters.

The chief minister had met the family members of Junaid and Nasir at a temporary arrangement made near a helipad in Ghatmeeka village.

He was accompanied by Tourism Minister Vishvendra Singh, Minister of State for Education and local MLA Zahida Khan, Congress state unit chief Govind Singh Dotsara, Chief Secretary Usha Sharma and DGP Umesh Mishra.

Nasir (25) and Junaid alias Juna (35), both residents of Ghatmeeka village in Bharatpur district of Rajasthan, were allegedly abducted by cow vigilantes on February 15 and their bodies were found inside a burnt car in Loharu in Bhiwani in Haryana on the morning of February 16. Nasir is survived by his wife, while

Junaid is survived by his wife, six children and a mentally challenged brother.

Gehlot also said that he will talk to his Haryana counterpart Manohar Lal Khattar to take the incident with utmost seriousness as it is of similar nature to the incident that happened in Udaipur where a tailor was hacked to death.

He said his government is committed to arresting the accused at the earliest and submit the charge sheet. Such a crime deserves nothing less than death penalty, he said. A total of nine accused, including Bajrang Dal member Monu Manesar who runs a cow protection group, and Srikant Pandit, whose mother lodged a complaint against the Rajasthan Police, have been named in the case so far. **PTI**

Outsource Employees Association call on CM

SHIMLA, MARCH 2:

A delegation of Outsource Employees Association of Health and Jal Shakti Departments called on the Chief Minister, Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu here today and apprised him of their various demands. The association representatives urged the Chief Minister for framing a policy for the outsource employees.

The Chief Minister assured the delegation that the State Government would consider their genuine demands sympathetically. He said that the government is working actively to revamp the system. **PTI**



Increase frequency of heli taxi flights from Chandigarh to Shimla: TISA

SHIMLA, MARCH 2

The Tourism Industry Stakeholders Association (TISA) has strongly advocated for increasing the frequency of heli taxi flights from Chandigarh to Shimla so that it leads to longer tourist stays here.

The Pawan Hans company is operating only one helicopter taxi flight with a capacity of 11 seats from Chandigarh to Shimla and at present the heli taxi service does not connect the flights arriving at the Chandigarh airport from Delhi, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru landing between 8.30 am

and 2.30 pm, said M K Seth, the president of Tourism Industry Stakeholders Association.

The tourists willing to come to Shimla by helicopter taxi are forced to stay overnight in Chandigarh because the Heli taxi departs at 9 am from the Chandigarh airport. Moreover, the service is only available six days a week from Monday to Saturday, he said in a statement issued here on Thursday.

The tourist coming for the weekend can't avail the facility of heli taxi service because there is no flight available on Sunday for a return journey, he said and demanded that the service should be made available seven days a week. **PTI**

OPINION

The Express India NEWS

Objection, Milord!

The Supreme Court of India on Thursday ordered that the Chief Elections Commissioner of India and the Election Commissioners should be appointed by the President on the advice of a committee comprising of the Prime Minister of India, the Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament or the single largest opposition party and the Chief Justice of India. In the highly politically polarized atmosphere that is prevailing in the country right now, the reactions to the orders have understandably come along the expected and partisan lines. Most of the opposition parties have welcomed the orders. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party has not come out with any official reaction although the party leaders in private are not happy with the orders.

There is nothing to celebrate about this order. This is complete judicial overreach. This only amounts to weakening the democratic institution of the parliament and the Prime Minister. Legislation is the prerogative of the legislature, not the courts. Courts are there only to interpret the law, not make or dictate it. Second, if the Prime Minister of the country cannot recommend the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner of India, who else can? After all, a Prime Minister, whosoever he may be and to whichever party he may belong, is always a democratically and popularly elected person vested with powers by the Constitution of the country. The Supreme Court order only infringes upon the authority of the democratic institution of the Prime Minister.

The Supreme Court order raises questions on the intent and integrity of the Prime Minister. It suspects by implication that a Prime Minister will necessarily recommend someone pliable or weak-kneed person to such constitutional position. There have never been any credible complaints against the impartiality of the Election Commission of India till now. Even when SS Gill became a Rajya Sabha member and a Minister in the UPA government, after UPA came to power while he was the CEC, nobody raised any questions about his integrity. The institution of Election Commission of India has been deemed as independent and has been functioning independently. Certain grievances may be there. If Narendra Modi has won two consecutive terms, it is not because of the Election Commission of India, it is because the people of India voted for him. Even though the UPA won two consecutive elections in 2004 and 2009, nobody "credited" ECI with the victory.

Those celebrating the Supreme Court orders must realize that it is not against the Bharatiya Janata Party or Narendra Modi. Neither the BJP is going to be in power nor Modi is going to be the Prime Minister forever. Tomorrow it may be the Congress government and a Congress Prime Minister also, who will also not like his/her authority to be infringed upon by such judicial outreach. Compare the orders regarding the appointment of CEC and ECs with the Supreme Court's stand on the appointment of judges to the higher judiciary. There it is vehemently defending its right and authority and does not broker any interference from anyone. But here, in the case of appointment of the CEC and ECs it has made itself to be part of the process.

Playing economics over security, not a good idea



BY MAJ GEN
HARVIJAY SINGH
(RETD, SM)

“They [China] are the bigger economy, what am I going to do? I am a smaller economy. Am I going to sort of pick up a fight with a bigger economy? It is not a question of reacting. It is a question of common sense.” S Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister India.

‘The’ bigger economy (China) is in possession of our territory in Aksai Chin and lays brazen claims over Arunachal Pradesh. Are we ready to throw in the towel? The Ukraine war has proven that the world is still a dangerous place. Also, size does not matter when it comes to nationalism and defence of the motherland. The Hindi-Cheeni Bhai-Bhai slogan did not help in 1962, it will not help now, only a strong military will; that is a question of common sense.

Post-independence, India's relations with China were structured on a grand strategy of India's long-term interests and potential. It was a relationship that articulated optimism and the desire for a peaceful and prosperous neighbourhood. The strategic thought focused on social and economic development. Perhaps, under a false sense of geographic insularity due to the mighty Himalayas and vast Indian Ocean, the factor of military strength in nation building was neglected. With the advantage of hindsight, it evidently was a grave mistake.

The fairly relaxed Indo-China relation of the mid-1950s was a mirage, which started to fog out

in 1958. China, then and even now conscious of its National Interest and Security did not abandon its Military Growth and Military Goals. The desire to win is reflected in their leader's thoughts: President Xi Jinping has ordered China's armed forces to modernise by 2035. They should, he says, become a "world-class" military power, capable of "fighting and winning wars" by 2049. In this flagrant march, they surely are going to pick up fights, do we wait before we react?

The wakeup call came in September 1957, when China announced that they had built a road from Xinjiang through Aksai Chin to Tibet; Aksai Chin was Indian Territory! Patrols were sent out for recce in summer 1958, they not only confirmed the information, but one patrol was actually cap-

The Express India NEWS

tered by the Chinese. Combined with a high level of Chinese military activity in Tibet, the year 1958 cast its shadow on the cordial relations, which India sought. So far, Prime Minister Nehru with all good intentions had ardently professed the notion that Indians and Chinese were Asian brothers.

The Tibetan revolt in Mar 1959 led to militarization on both sides of the neglected frontiers. Dalai Lama's flight over the McMahon Line and pro-Tibetan sentiment in India triggered suspicion in Beijing. The combination of growing Chinese assumptions of ulterior Indian motives in Tibet, high military activity on the frontier and undefined borders finally led to confrontations; Hindi-Cheeni Bhai-Bhai was finally over.

In late 1961, we decided to 'react' with the so-

called Forward Policy; a wakeup call and a coerced reaction. Small numbers of lightly armed Indian soldiers established several 'forward posts' deep inside unoccupied but disputed border areas. Politically the Forward Policy was sold as aggressive defensive measures to safeguard the territorial integrity of our young Republic. Too little too late, and it led to a war (attack by China) in Oct 1962. The soldiers did their honourable duty to the Republic despite great odds, vintage weapons, limited ammunition, dizzy heights and inclement weather. They fought valiantly and many stories of heroism emerged from the debris of an unequal war.

One big takeaway is that political posturing (Forward Policy) must be consistent with military capability. And military capability does not get built up overnight. Measuring the gaps with your enemy in other spheres (economy) does not help one bit. It simply confuses a soldier and in an extreme even weakens his resolve.

Nations, despite the cost, must be prepared to honestly define and meet their regional and global aspirations by pursuing progressive military programmes. By implication, if India aspires for a greater role in world affairs, it must also face the financial burdens of enhancing its strategic reach and protecting its frontiers.

Our humongous trade deficit with China is the real depressing truth and is only growing. It is indicative of a weak political resolve and cause for concern. Another truth is that the Indo-China border dispute is unresolved and bleeding – 1962 must never be repeated. Lesson from Ukraine: Wars will remain unlikely and unexpected before they actually happen. Despite prophecies to the contrary, future wars may not necessarily be short, except for those who are only prepared for short wars.

Inequality; challenge for human dignity



BY
DR PAWAN
SURI

India is the largest democracy in the world and for a country to be democratic in true sense, the most important prerequisite remains Equality for its citizens. This means that every single citizen irrespective of race, religion, gender, caste, class or birth is equal in the eyes of law. However, on ground such an ideal situation does not exist and even today many forms of inequalities are still prevalent in society.

The distinctive feature of inequality in India for centuries together, the caste system, is still prevalent in major parts of the country and unfortunately, with every decade of growth and progress there has been an resurgence of newer forms of inequalities like wealth inequality, treatment and responsibility inequality, political inequality, life inequality and membership inequality. All these inequalities are multidimensional in nature and the interrelationship between these inequalities is such that lack of one kind leads to inaccessibility and unaffordability of services in other sectors. The annexation of these newer intersectional forms of

inequalities to already existing ones has created a wide gap in society and a new type of divide too.

The much hyped perception of society that inequality of any kind is primarily related to the lack of equality of outcome is farce as in reality it is actually the lack of equality of access to opportunity that is the root cause of inequality. Even the United Nations endorses this fact and describes inequality as "the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities", thereby proving the fact that if the right opportunity is provided to the right person at the right time, there will be a marked decrease in this gap of inequality.

The Express India NEWS

Inequality in India has increased sharply during the last three decades and this trend is in contrast with the dynamics globally. In fact, the score has markedly been low in almost all social progress categories for nourishment, education, healthcare, income and gender equality. As far as equal access to quality education and healthcare is concerned, out of 163 countries India ranks at 135th and 145th spot respectively. Similarly, as far as equal access to income and wealth is concerned, the top 10 percent earn approximately equal to the bottom

64 percent and the top 10 account for one-third of the income earned. The income profiles have also highlighted a vast pay gap between men and women, calling attention to gender-based inequalities as well.

Both the economic variables like income and labour and socio-economic variables like health, education, and household conditions are closely correlated with each other and are necessary to enhance the standard of living. An unequal distribution of any of these variables is going to alter the growth and progress of other variables as well. Since wealth and income forms the core of these variables, the lower incomes or loss of income leads to inaccessibility and unaffordability of services in the sectors of health and education. Therefore, to narrow down the inequality in all social progress categories, the primary focus needs to be upon the economic variables like wealth and income.

The time has come to adopt the bottom 50 percent of people, who have 13 percent of national income and only 3 percent of national wealth, work for their welfare and take all corrective measures to lift them out of poverty.

Many scholars are of the opinion that rising inequality could be dismissed as a temporary by-product of rapid growth as inequality rises with rapid growth before it eventually subsided.

NATION

BJP succeeds in maintaining momentum in Assembly polls

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

The maiden alliance of the Left and the Congress in Tripura and the emergence of TIPRA Motha as a dominant force in tribal seats did not prove enough to topple the BJP from power in the state as the ruling party's development plank and ideological resonance surmounted local factors to deliver it another victory.

Among the three northeastern states that went to assembly polls, Tripura's verdict was the most keenly watched due to the high stakes for three national parties - the BJP, Congress and the Left - and the results underscored the continuity of momentum in the saffron party's favour despite the occasional setbacks it has suffered in state polls.

The party had benefited from popular anger against the Left "misrule" for 25 years in 2018 and it has now received a positive mandate for the Centre and state government's work, he added.

Party sources said the BJP, like in so many other state polls, succeeded in making its overarching ideological and developmental planks and Prime



Minister Narendra Modi's popular appeal the central theme of its campaign which was also helped by an organisationally weakened opposition unable to match the ruling party either in firepower or in leadership charisma.

The winning momentum is important for the BJP as the crucial state of Karnataka is next headed for assembly polls, expected in May, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan,

Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Mizoram later this year. The BJP-led NDA, in power in 16 states, also romped home to a facile win in Nagaland, where Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party is the senior partner.

But its ambition of emerging as a bigger player in Meghalaya was thwarted as it was leading in only three seats against the two it held in the outgoing 60-member assembly.

Credit for consistent wins goes to BJP govts, workers : PM
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday credited the BJP's consistent victory in elections to a 'triveni' of the work done by its governments, their work culture and the dedication of party workers.

Addressing party workers at the BJP's headquarters here to congratulate them on the party's performance in the Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya assembly elections, Modi said the poll results show to India and the world the people's faith in democracy and democratic institutions in the country.

He said the way the northeast poll results have been extensively highlighted, it shows the region is neither distant from 'Dilli' (Delhi) nor 'Dil' (heart).

JNU VC withdraws new rules stipulating fines up to Rs 50K for violence

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

The Jawaharlal Nehru University on Thursday withdrew the rules that stipulated students can face a fine of Rs 50,000 for physical violence, abuse and holding dharna on campus, with its VC Santishree D Pandit claiming that she was not aware that such a document was prepared and released.

This comes after the 10-page document drew a sharp reaction from students and teachers, who have termed it draconian. Late on Thursday, Chief Proctor Rajnish Kumar Mishra issued a notification saying the document on rules and discipline of JNU students is withdrawn, citing administrative reasons.

The document titled 'Rules of Discipline and proper conduct of students of JNU' had laid out punishments for different kinds of acts like protests and forgery, and procedures for proctorial enquiry and recording a statement. The punishment ranged from a fine of Rs 5,000 to Rs 50,000 or rustication and cancellation of admission.

Pendency of Australian visa applications Issue discussed at bilateral forum: Pradhan

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

The pendency of Australian visa applications from Indians was discussed again at a bilateral forum, Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Thursday.

Pradhan discussed the issue with his Australian counterpart Jason Clare, who is on a visit to India till March 5. Clare informed that clearing the education visa applications of Indian students is a top priority for his country.

"After the COVID-19 pandemic, the visa process for students and the workforce had significantly slowed down. Last year, the Australian government assured us that it would add more manpower and enhance the ease of the process," the education minister told reporters on the sidelines of an event here.

"The pendency of four lakh visa applications from Indians has been reduced in the last five months. Still a sizeable number is pending. The issue was again discussed at a bilateral forum when we spoke of student mobility," he said.

Clare is leading a delegation of

Australian higher education leaders to promote institutional partnerships and boost the collaboration between the two countries.

His visit builds on Pradhan's trip to Australia last year.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar had, in October last year, taken up the issue of visa backlog with Australian authorities, particularly matters related to students seeking to return to educational institutions in the country following the pandemic.

The issue was taken up with the Australian authorities following numerous complaints from Indian students seeking visas either to return to educational institutions or to join new courses.

India is one of the top sources of skilled immigrants to Australia. Approximately 1,05,000 Indian students presently study in Australian universities. After the United Kingdom, India was the second-largest migrant group in Australia in 2020.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese is set to make his maiden trip to India next week, with an aim to boost the overall bilateral engagement in a range of areas, including trade, investment and critical minerals.

Cong's dismal performance in NE A lot left to do to reclaim political turf....!

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

The Congress' loss in the three states in the North-East, a region it had dominated for decades, shows there is a lot left to do to reclaim its political turf despite the Bharat Jodo Yatra which it had touted as a successful experiment in mass public outreach. The dismal results in Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya came immediately after the Congress' three-day brainstorming plenary session in Raipur where the party evolved its future strategy and stressed on unity in ranks to ensure victories in states where elections are slated later this year and 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The results will draw the party's strategists' attention to the people's rejection of an alliance between the Left and the Congress, which it first experimented in West Bengal polls and now in Tripura, where it failed to make a mark at the hustings.

The party could manage to win just five of the all 60 seats it contested in Meghalaya and failed to open its account in Nagaland where it fielded candidates in 23 out of 60 seats. **PTI**

Cross-border terrorism global challenge: LS Speaker

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday said cross-border terrorism has become a global menace and modernisation of defence capabilities is the need of the hour to tackle new challenges.

Addressing the 63rd course members of the National Defence College (NDC), New Delhi in the Parliament complex, Birla said India has a rich and enduring heritage of military strategy.

"India today is making a significant contribution to global progress, development, prosperity, peace and stability. At a time when the national security scenario is becoming complex, cross-border terrorism has become a global challenge," he said.

Birla emphasised that modernisation of defence capabilities is needed to tackle various challenges, such as cyber warfare, drugs, weapons and money laundering, through innovations.

He welcomed the members of the NDC to the Parliament complex and hoped that their visit to the "temple of democracy" would acquaint them better with the



practices and procedures in legislatures.

The speaker noted that India has a long history of warfare and its study is a testimony to the fact that the country has a rich and enduring heritage of military strategy. He also said a strong military foundation has been laid over the last few years by taking initiatives towards making India's defence sector self-reliant.

Speaking on the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence, Birla noted that the panel acts as an important link between the elected representatives and the defence forces.

NATION

'Historic day' for Northeast: Amit Shah

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

It is a "historic day" for the Northeast and it is evident again that for peace, development and prosperity, the BJP led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is people's preference, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said on Thursday after the declaration of results of the assembly polls in Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya.

Shah described the party's re-election in Tripura as a "victory of pro-development politics" and thanked the people of Nagaland for choosing "peace and progress". The BJP, along with its ally Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), secured majority in Nagaland.

He also thanked the people of Meghalaya for their support and blessings to the BJP and said the party under Prime Minister Modi will leave no stone unturned in serving the people and creating a bright future for them.



In a series of tweets, Shah said, "A historic day for the Northeast. I thank Tripura for placing trust in BJP once again. It is a victory of pro-development

politics that the BJP has delivered in Tripura under PM @narendramodi Ji's leadership. Together we will move ahead and build a prosperous Tripura."

The home minister congratulated BJP president J P Nadda, Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha and state BJP leadership for their tireless efforts in securing the BJP's victory.

The BJP has already bagged 30 seats in the 60-member Assembly and is leading in a few others.

"It is evident again that for development and prosperity, BJP led by PM Modi is people's preference," he said. Thanking the people of Nagaland from the "bottom of my heart" for choosing peace and progress by re-electing the PM Modi-led NDA back in power, Shah said the duo of Modi and state CM Neiphiu Rio will continue to advance peace and development in the state and fulfil people's aspirations.

"Congratulations to Deputy CM, Shri @YanthungoPatton, State President Shri @AlongImna, karyakartas of @BJP4Nagaland and our ally @NDPPofficial on this remarkable victory. A new dawn of prosperity begins in Nagaland," he said.

Hathras rape-murder case Main accused gets life imprisonment, 3 others acquitted

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
HATHRAS, MAR 2

A special court here on Thursday sentenced the main accused in the 2020 Hathras rape-murder case to life imprisonment while acquitting the three other accused.

The rape charge could not be proved against the prime accused, his lawyer Munna Singh Pundir said.

The court held Sandeep (20) guilty under section 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) of the Indian Penal Code, a lesser charge than section 302 (murder).

Ravi (35), Luv Kush (23) and Ramu (26) were acquitted in the case that triggered outrage and put the Yogi Adityanath government in the dock over law and order in the state.

The court also slapped a fine of Rs 50,000 against Sandeep. The charge sheet in the case was filed by CBI in the SC/ST court here against all the four accused for murder and gang rape, and under sections of the SC/ST Act.

Opposition parties welcome SC ruling on EC

'LANDMARK JUDGMENT TO PAVE WAY FOR FREE, FAIR POLLS'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

Opposition parties on Thursday welcomed the Supreme Court's verdict on appointments in the Election Commission, saying the judgment will strengthen democracy and pave the way for free and fair polls, with the Congress seeking that the same mechanism be applied to the Enforcement Directorate.

The Supreme Court (SC) on Thursday ruled that the appointments of the Chief Election Commissioner and election commissioners will be done by the President on the advise of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Chief Justice of India. Terming the verdict as historic, Congress spokesperson Abhishek Singhvi said it is significant as steps are required to be taken to stop the misuse of agencies and institutions by the BJP-led government. "If the Election Commission can have a selection process on the basis of fairness and independence, shouldn't (the members of) an institution like the ED (Enforcement Directorate), which can directly create terror in politics, also be selected through this process? The same ED, which has become the

political ally of the government today," the Congress leader said. In a similar vein, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said the verdict is a victory of democracy. TMC MP Derek O'Brien said the ruling will transform the "Extremely Compromised EC" to an "Extremely Competent EC". The CPI(M) also said it is a step in the right direction to ensure the poll body's independence. AAP leader Sanjay Singh also said the apex court's decision on the appointment of election commissioners will help strengthen India's democracy and the Constitution.

Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Priyanka Chaturvedi hailed the Supreme Court and called the judgment a "landmark" order. Welcoming the top court's ruling, DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin said on Twitter, "... When 'autonomous bodies' are being robbed, this timely intervention by SC is crucial to protect the independence of ECI whose transparent functioning is indispensable for a vibrant Democracy." Hailing the ruling as a landmark decision, NCP chief spokesperson Mahesh Tapase said the verdict will strengthen democracy as the entire nation looks up to the Election Commission to conduct free and fair polls.

Jaishankar meets Chinese counterpart, focus on peace in border areas

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK NEW
DELHI, MARCH 2

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Thursday said his talks with his Chinese counterpart Qin Gang at their first meeting focused on addressing current challenges to the bilateral ties, especially peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

"Met Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang on sidelines of #G20FMM this afternoon. Our discussions were focused on addressing current challenges to the bilateral relationship, especially peace and tranquillity in the border areas," Jaishankar said on Twitter.

India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

The talks came nearly eight months after Jaishankar held a meeting with the then Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi in Bali on the sidelines of a G20 meeting.

At the one-hour meeting on July 7, Jaishankar had conveyed to Wang the need for early resolution of all the outstanding issues in eastern Ladakh.

The external affairs minister had told Wang that the relationship between the two countries should be based on "three mutuals" -- mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interests.

In line with a decision taken at the 16th round of military talks, the two sides carried out disengagement from Patrolling



Point 15 in the Gogra-Hotsprings area in September last year.

But the face-off between the two of the planet's biggest military forces lingered on in Demchok and Depsang regions though the Indian side pressed for completion of the disengagement in remaining friction points at the earliest.

The meeting took place under the framework of Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC). The eastern Ladakh border standoff erupted

on May 5, 2020, following a violent clash in the Pangong lake area.

The ties between the two countries nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

As a result of a series of military and diplomatic talks, the two sides completed the disengagement process in 2021 on the north and south banks of the Pangong lake and in the Gogra area.

WORLD

Under IMF pressure, Pak hikes electricity charges

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
ISLAMABAD, MARCH 3

The cash-strapped Pakistan government surrendered to another IMF demand when it imposed a surcharge of up to Rs 3.23 per unit on electricity consumers across the country with effect from July 1, according to a media report on Thursday.

The government's decision is aimed at generating Rs 335 billion more in revenue over the next fiscal year to finance the power sector's debt and liabilities.

The Dawn newspaper reported that consumers of Karachi-specific company K-Electric would be facing double jeopardy, as the government also gave the Karachi power utility the go-ahead to increase tariff by Rs 1.56 per unit in the current month and then another Rs 6.11 per unit in April and May, to ensure uniform electricity rates at par with other distribution companies in the country.

These decisions were taken on

THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION IS AIMED AT GENERATING RS 335 BILLION MORE IN REVENUE OVER THE NEXT FISCAL YEAR TO FINANCE THE POWER SECTOR'S DEBT AND LIABILITIES.

Wednesday at a meeting of the Cabinet's Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) presided by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, which also approved a Rs 5 billion Ramadan relief package for Utility Stores, Rs 3,900 per 40 kg uniform minimum procurement price for wheat, and a waiver of storage charges on cargoes stuck at ports for letters of credit problems.

On top of this, a separate case would be presented to the Cabinet on Thursday to double the electricity rates for commercial consumers during the peak hours (after 8 pm) after the government efforts failed to create a consensus for

market closures after sunset for energy conservation, a senior power division official said.

He said the Centre could not force provincial governments to close businesses through administrative measures but could use higher pricing as a policy tool to discourage consumption in peak hours or at least generate higher funds to meet this additional demand.

The ECC also "approved the proposal (of the power division) regarding the enhancement of surcharge for the financial year 2024 to cover federal government obligations towards power producers", an official statement said.

"Further, these surcharges for FY24 will also be applied to K-Electric consumers to maintain a uniform tariff across the country," it said.

The government has already approved a Rs 3.39 per unit additional surcharge for the remaining four months (March to June) of the ongoing fiscal year and is currently passing through regulatory procedures for notification.

Pak should not receive any aid from US: Haley

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
WASHINGTON, MARCH 2

Indian-American Republican presidential candidate Nikki Haley has said that Pakistan is home to at least a dozen terrorist organisations and it should not receive any aid from the US, ramping up her attack on America's adversaries.

The 51-year-old two-term Governor of South Carolina and the former US Ambassador to the United Nations formally launched her 2024 presidential bid last month. "Pakistan is home to at least a dozen terrorist organisations. #CutEveryCent," Haley tweeted Wednesday.

Over the past few days, Haley has been speaking on US foreign policy and asserting that the US should not give any financial assistance to countries that are friends and allies of China and Russia. On Sunday, Haley in an op-ed in the New York Post wrote that if voted to power, she will cut foreign aid to countries like China and Pakistan which hate America. In an interview with Fox News on Sunday, she repeated her pledge to cut US foreign aid to countries



that are friends and followers of Russia and China, the two adversaries of the US. Haley, who announced her candidacy on February 14 is all set to appear at Conservative Political Action Conference as a star speaker along with her former boss and former president Donald Trump. As per the schedule, she will speak on Friday morning and another presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy is scheduled for Friday afternoon. According to Haley, the Biden administration resumes military aid to Pakistan, though it's home to at least a dozen terrorist organisations and its government is deeply in hock to China.

Indian national, 3 others arrested in drug cases in Nepal

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
KATHMANDU, MARCH 2

At least four people, including an Indian national, were on Thursday arrested after Nepal Police seized drugs from their possession during raids at two different places in the country.

Bikki Kumar Chauhan, 20, an Indian national from Bihar's Motihari city, and his 17-year-old accomplice were arrested along with four kg and 600 grams of hemp from Raksing Rural Municipality in Makawanpur district while conducting a check on the auto-rickshaw they were travelling in, according to Nepal Police news bulletin.

In another incident, the police arrested two teenagers aged 18 and 15, residents of Raksing Rural Municipality in Parsa district, while conducting a check on the auto-rickshaw they were travelling on the basis of a tip-off, it said.

The police confiscated 15 kg of hemp from them.

The police have launched further investigation into the incidents after taking them into custody.

Russia & China have 'far-reaching plans' to further cement bilateral ties: Lavrov

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
MOSCOW/NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

Amidst growing pressure on China to refrain from sending weapons to support Russia in its war against Ukraine, Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov on Thursday held the first in-person meeting with his new Chinese counterpart and said the two countries have "far-reaching plans" for developing bilateral cooperation.

Lavrov and Qin Gang discussed the situation around Ukraine, including the Chinese Foreign Ministry's stance on the political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a statement following the meeting held on the sidelines of the G20 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi.

"Sergey Lavrov and Qin Gang have also discussed the current situation around Ukraine, including the stance of the Chinese Foreign Ministry on the political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis, and considered a number of topical international issues," Russia's official Tass news agency quoted the statement as saying.

"We have confirmed a high degree of proximity and convergence of positions on all of the issues discussed. The parties expressed unanimous rejection of attempts to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, to impose unilateral approaches through blackmail and threats, and to oppose the democratization of international relations," the Russian



Foreign Ministry said.

"The foreign ministers expressed satisfaction with the high pace of the development of bilateral political dialogue and practical cooperation. They focused specifically on the implementation of the agreements reached by the two countries' leaders," it added.

On Thursday, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz became the latest western leader to urge China to refrain from sending weapons to Russia and support Moscow in its war against Ukraine.

"My message to Beijing is clear: use your influence in Moscow to press for the withdrawal of Russian troops, and do not supply weapons to the aggressor Russia," Scholz said in a speech to German parliament.

The US has said that China is considering supplying weapons and ammunition to Russia for the Ukraine war.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Chinese firms were already providing "non-lethal support" to Russia and new information suggested that Beijing could provide "lethal support".

Such an escalation would mean "serious consequences" for China, Blinken warned recently.

"We have very far-reaching plans for bilateral cooperation, and, certainly, a busy foreign policy agenda, taking into account the role Russia and China have been playing as a stabilising factor in the system of international relations," Russia's top diplomat said.

Indian-origin nurse extradited to Australia on murder charges

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK
MELBOURNE, MARCH 2

A 38-year-old Indian-origin nurse, who fled Australia after allegedly murdering an Australian woman in 2018 was charged on Thursday, a day after he was extradited from India.

Rajwinder Singh was charged by the police with one count of murder and is expected to appear before the Cairns Magistrates Court court on Friday, The Guardian newspaper reported.

Singh is accused of murdering 24-year-old Toyah Cordingley in October 2018, whose body was discovered by her father at a beach after she failed to return home from walking her dog.

The accused, an Australian citizen, fled the country after killing Cordingley four years ago, leaving behind his wife and three children, and was carrying an AUD 1 million reward on his arrest.

Singh was nabbed by the Delhi Police on November 25 last year.

The Interpol had issued a Red Corner Notice against him, following which the Patiala House Court issued a non-bailable warrant on November 21 under the extradition act.

ENTERTAINMENT

Sushmita suffers a heart attack



Actor Sushmita Sen on Thursday took to Instagram to share that she suffered a heart attack a couple of days ago. The 47-year-old actor also revealed that she had an angioplasty done and has got a stent put in her heart.

Sharing a picture with her father Subir Sen on Instagram, the former Miss Universe wrote: "Keep your heart happy and courageous, and it'll stand by you when you need it the most Shona" (Wise words by my father Subir Sen). I suffered a heart attack a couple of days back... Angioplasty done...stent in place...and most importantly, my cardiologist reconfirmed 'I do have a big heart!'"

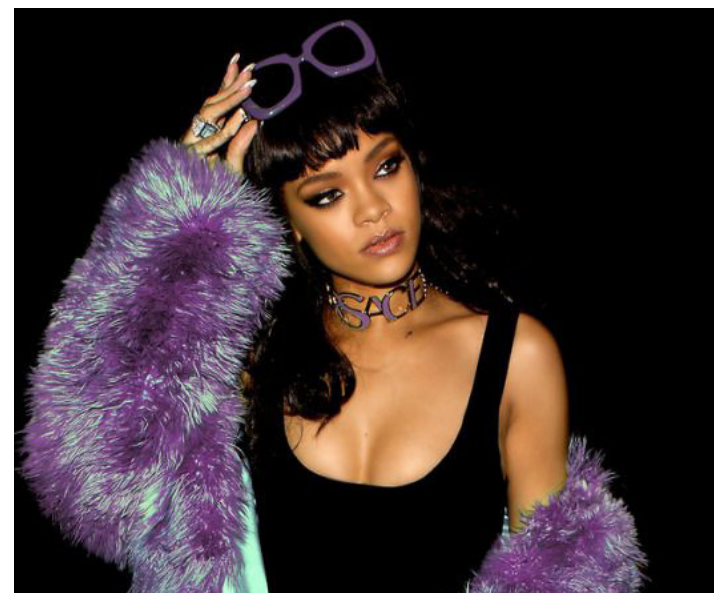
The actress added in her post: "Lots of people to thank for their timely aid and constructive action...will do so in another post."

Thanking her well-wishers, she wrote: "This post is just to keep you (my well wishers and loved ones) informed of the good news ...that all is well and I am ready for some life again. I love you guys beyond!!!! #godisgreat #duggadugga."

Sen is best-known for starring in movies like *Biwi No. 1*, *Do Knot Disturb*, *Main Hoon Na*, *Maine Pyaar Kyun Kiya* and *Tumko Na Bhool Paayenge* and *No Problem*.

She made her acting comeback with the International Emmy-nominated series *Aarya* and also starred in the second installment of the show. The actress will soon be seen in the third season of the series.

Sen a single mom to daughters Renee and Alisah who she adopted in 2000 and 2010 respectively.



Rihanna to perform at Oscars 2023

Rihanna is all set to perform at the Oscars 2023! The 35-year-old pop icon recently made her much-anticipated comeback on stage after 7 long years when she performed at the Super Bowl Halftime LVII Show.

Apart from her stunning act, Rihanna also made headlines for revealing her second pregnancy on stage.

And now, the mommy of one will be seen taking the stage once again at the upcoming 95th Academy Awards, which will air live on ABC from the Dolby Theatre at Ovation Hollywood on March 12.

Rihanna is nominated for an Oscar for the first time for her hit song 'Lift Me Up' from Ryan Coogler's *'Black Panther: Wakanda Forever'*, in the Best Original Song Category.

This was the first song she recorded in 6 years since her 2016 album 'ANTI'.

Apart from this, she also sang the song 'Born Again' for *'Black Panther 2'* and dedicated it to late *'Black Panther'* actor Chadwick Boseman who passed away in August 2020 after a silent battle with cancer.

And now, as per reports, the 'Diamonds' singer will be performing her Oscar-nominated song at the prestigious event!

Apart from Rihanna, other nominees for the Best Original Song in Oscars 2023 include M. M. Keeravani and Chandrabose for 'Naatu Naatu' from *'RRR'*, David Byrne, Ryan Lott and Mitski for 'This Is a Life' from *'Everything Everywhere All at Once'*, Diane Warren for 'Applause' from *'Tell It Like a Woman'* as well as BloodPop and Lady Gaga for 'Hold My Hand' from *'Top Gun: Maverick'*.

Jena Malone was sexually assaulted during 'The Hunger Games'

Jena Malone revealed that she was "sexually assaulted" while filming *'The Hunger Games: Mockingjay — Part 2'*.

The actress, 38, shared a photo on social media of herself in a wheat field after wrapping the Francis Lawrence-directed film in 2015. She gave her followers a "trigger warning" alongside the photo. "This photo was taken right after I wrapped *Mockingjay* part two," she captioned the Instagram post on Tuesday. "We were shooting in a beautiful estate in the countryside of France and I asked the driver to let me out in this field so I could cry and capture this moment."

Malone — who played tribute Johanna Mason in the series — said her time filming in Paris "was extremely hard" as she was going through a "bad" breakup and had been "sexually assaulted" by someone she worked with.

"I was so full of gratitude for this project," she continued. "I wish it wasn't tied to such a traumatic event for me."

The *'Sucker Punch'* star said she "worked very hard to heal and learn thru [sic] restorative justice" and "how to make peace with the person who violated me and make peace with myself."

"Lots of love to you survivors out there. The process is so slow and nonlinear. Please dm me if you need a safe space to be heard," Malone concluded.

The "Antebellum" actress's comments section was quickly flooded with hundreds of supportive messages from fans. "Love you — thanks for this vulnerability," one person wrote, while another added, "thank you for your courage to share this."

Malone rose to fame with the 1996 film *'Bastard Out of Carolina'*, for which she won the Young Artist Award.

Since then, she has acted in a slew of films and TV shows, including 2013's *'The Hunger Games: Catching Fire'* and both parts of *'The Hunger Games: Mockingjay'* alongside Jennifer Lawrence, Liam Hemsworth and more.



BUSINESS

Have lot of admiration, respect for Adani, his company: Abbott

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

Former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott, a known backer of Adani Group's coal mine projects in his country, on Thursday came out in support of the embattled group's Chairman Gautam Adani, saying he has a lot of admiration and respect for the tycoon and his company.

Abbott, who had in 2015 as the Prime Minister of Australia decried a court ruling against Adani Group's Carmichael coal mine project, said the relevant regulators will "do their job" regarding any allegation of wrongdoing by the apples-to-airport conglomerate.

As much as USD 140 billion of the market value of the conglomerate's listed companies was wiped out after US short seller Hindenburg Research on January 24 accused the Adani empire of "brazen stock manipulation and accounting fraud" and using a number of offshore shell companies to inflate



stock prices. Adani Group has denied all allegations and called them an attack on India. "I have a lot of respect and admiration for Adani and Adani Group," Abbott said at a media briefing here.

The coal produced from Adani's Carmichael mines in Australia "will certainly be part of the ongoing process of electrification here in India".

"I am all in favour of Adani mine. I thank Adani and his team for what they

have done to provide electricity to Indians and jobs and prosperity to Australia," he said.

In 2015, when a local court revoked the environmental approval for the Adani building one of the world's largest coal mine in Queensland, Abbott had stated that it was "tragic for a wider world" if legal safeguards are allowed to stall large mining projects. The group, in 2019, received the final and last approval for the project and coal mined from Carmichael is routinely shipped to Indian power plants to produce electricity. On the allegations by Hindenburg Research, Abbott said that he has not seen the details of the report and "I assume if there is anything in them, the relevant corporate regulators will do their job".

"As far as I am concerned I regard Adani as a benefactor to Australia and I admire his success in building up a very large diverse business empire from scratch," he said. **PTI**

Sensex, Nifty fall nearly 1 pc on weak global trends

MUMBAI, MARCH 2

Market benchmarks ended nearly 1 per cent lower on Thursday amid weak trend in global equities and continuous foreign fund outflows.

The BSE Sensex tumbled 501.73 points or 0.84 per cent to settle at 58,909.35. During the day, it tanked 544.82 points or 0.91 per cent to 58,866.26.

The NSE Nifty declined 129 points or 0.74 per cent to end at 17,321.90.

From the Sensex pack, Maruti, Axis Bank, Tata Consultancy Services, Nestle, Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tech Mahindra and Bharti Airtel were the major laggards.

Power Grid, Sun Pharma, HCL Technologies, Larsen & Toubro and UltraTech Cement were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Japan, China and Hong Kong ended lower, while Seoul settled in the green.

Stock markets in Europe were trading lower during the afternoon trade. The US markets had ended mostly lower on Wednesday.

"Global markets turned back to selling

IN ASIAN MARKETS, JAPAN, CHINA AND HONG KONG ENDED LOWER, WHILE SEOUL SETTLED IN THE GREEN. STOCK MARKETS IN EUROPE WERE TRADING LOWER DURING THE AFTERNOON TRADE. THE US MARKETS HAD ENDED MOSTLY LOWER ON WEDNESDAY.

mode with the US 10-year bond yield crossing 4 percent as a fresh set of US data suggested that inflation will remain elevated for a longer period. Rising bond yields are driving foreign money out of emerging markets, and as a result, FIIs were net sellers in the domestic market for the sixth consecutive day," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

International oil benchmark Brent crude advanced 0.51 per cent to USD 84.74 per barrel. Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) again offloaded shares worth Rs 424.88 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. **PTI**

India lends support to Ajay Banga's nomination as World Bank President

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

India on Thursday extended support to the candidature of Ajay Banga as World Bank President, saying his nomination comes at a time when the multilateral lending agency is considering next-generation reforms.

"Congratulations to Mr Ajay Banga on being nominated to lead @WorldBank. India supports Mr Banga's nomination and looks forward to his leadership of the @WorldBank," the finance ministry said in a series of tweets.

Last month, the US President Joe Biden announced that the US is nominating Ajay Banga to lead the World Bank,

saying the Indian-American business leader is uniquely equipped to lead the global institution at "this critical moment in history."

If confirmed by the World Bank Board of Directors, Banga would be the first-ever Indian-American and Sikh-American to head either of the two top international financial institutions: International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

"Mr Banga brings with him unique and wide-ranging expertise in #financial

and #technological sectors, rich experience in guiding large organisations that have invested and created jobs in #DevelopingEconomies, and in mobilising resources on a large scale," said another tweet.

Banga's rich experience will stand him in good stead at a time when the World Bank is considering next-generation reforms to deliver on its ambitious agenda to reduce poverty, expand prosperity and deal with the pressing global challenges of our times, it said.

India and other developing nations are pressing for reforms so that they can have a greater voice in the multilateral funding agency.

Banga, 63, currently serves as the Vice Chairman at General Atlantic. Previously, he was President and CEO of Mastercard, leading the company through a strategic, technological and cultural transformation. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 2016.

The White House had said Banga is a business leader with extensive experience leading successful organisations in developing countries and forging public-private partnerships to address financial inclusion and climate change. **PTI**



Airtel reaches 1 million customer mark on 5G network in Mumbai

NEW DELHI, MARCH 2

Telecom operator Bharti Airtel on Thursday announced that it has surpassed the 1 million 5G user mark on its network in Mumbai.

Airtel recently crossed the 10 million unique customer mark on its 5G network nationally. The Sunil Mittal-led telco said it is well poised to cover every town and key rural areas with Airtel 5G services by end of March 2024.

The Airtel statement said it had

surpasses 1 million customer mark on its 5G network in Mumbai.

"Airtel was the first to roll-out 5G in the country and Mumbai was one among the first 8 cities to get ultra fast Airtel 5G Plus. Today, Airtel's 5G services is available in over 140 cities across the length and breadth of the country," it said.

Vibhor Gupta, CEO Mumbai, Bharti Airtel, said "We will continue to advance our network to more locations across the city allowing many more customers to enjoy superfast access." **PTI**

Rockwell acquires Bengaluru-based Knowledge Lens

MUMBAI, MARCH 2

Rockwell Automation on Thursday said it has acquired Bengaluru-based enterprise insights provider Knowledge Lens for an undisclosed sum.

The acquisition of the company, founded in 2013, will help Rockwell expand its capabilities to unlock the power of data, enable autonomous manufacturing, and drive continuous optimization for more manufacturers, a

statement said.

Knowledge Lens, the latest acquisition, will become part of Rockwell's digital services business Kalypso to accelerate transformational outcomes for more manufacturers around the world, it added.

"The acquisition of Knowledge Lens improves our ability to help more manufacturers around the world discover and use the hidden insights in their data to drive game-changing value for their businesses," Rockwell's senior vice

Rupee falls 11 paise to close at 82.60 against US dollar

MUMBAI, MARCH 2

The rupee depreciated by 11 paise to close at 82.60 (provisional) against the US currency on Thursday as a stronger dollar in the overseas market and a muted trend in domestic equities weighed on investor sentiments.

Sustained foreign fund outflows further weighed on the local unit, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened at 82.57 against the greenback and closed at 82.60 (provisional), registering a fall of 11 paise over its previous close of 82.49. **PTI**

president of Lifecycle Services segment Frank Kulaszewicz, said.

During a recent interaction with PTI, Rockwell's head of corporate strategy Veena Lakkundi said the company was actively looking at acquisitions in India to help expand its capabilities.

Apart from outright acquisitions, the company is also looking at early stage investments in startups and will also be tapping into opportunities of working with startup accelerators, Lakkundi had said. **PTI**

SPORT

Lyon devours Indian batting line-up, Australia sniff rare win

BY BHARAT SHARMA
INDORE, MARCH 2

India were staring at a rare defeat at home despite Cheteshwar Pujara's plucky half-century as veteran Australian off-spinner Nathan Lyon flattened the host with his eight-wicket haul on day two of the third Test here Thursday.

India did well to end Australia's first innings at 197, conceding a 88-run first innings lead after Steve Smith's side began at 156 for 4 but negotiating quality spin in favourable conditions remained a challenge for them.

The hosts were bowled out for 163 in their second innings, which means that Australia need just 76 runs to cherish a rare Test win in India as India have lost only two Tests at home in the last 10 years.

Australia bring the best out of Pujara (59 off 142) and that was on full display at the Holkar Stadium but he did not get the support that was needed from the other batters as India came up with



another underwhelming batting performance on a rank turner.

India were in the game as long as Pujara was there but a sensational catch from Steve Smith at leg-slip towards close of play put the visitors on cusp of a memorable victory.

Lyon ended with remarkable figures of eight for 64 in 23.3 overs. Siraj getting bowled while attempting a wild slog brought stumps on day four with India's innings lasting 60.3 overs.

Besides being impressive with the ball, the Australians were brilliant in the

field, especially with the momentum-changing catches of Pujara and Shreyas Iyer (26 off 27).

In the morning session, the pace-spin combination of Umesh Yadav and R Ashwin ran through the Australian batting line-up.

After a rather quiet first hour, when only 30 runs were scored in 16 overs without any wicket, India lost their last six wickets for just 11 runs after starting the day at 156 for four.

Ashwin and Yadav took three wickets each to script India's fightback after a forgettable opening day.

Though India did not pick up any wicket in the first hour, they did not allow Peter Handscomb (19 off 98) and Cameron Green (21 off 57) easy runs with Mohammed Siraj and Jadeja keeping things tight.

As it has been the case throughout the series, the wickets came in a heap after India broke the resistance of Handscomb, whose ultra defensive innings came to end with an inside edge flying to Iyer at short-leg off Aswhin. **PTI**

Saini breaths fire after Rest of India score 484

GWALIOR, MARCH 2

A fit-again Navdeep Saini bowled a brisk first spell to rattle the Madhya Pradesh top-order after Yash Dhull's quick half-century took Rest of India to a commanding 484 on the second day of the Irani Cup, here on Thursday.

Saini (2/15) looked in good rhythm and generated fair bit of pace on a dead track to peg MP back before Yash Dubey (53 batting) and Harsh Gawli (47 batting) added 97 runs for the unbroken fourth wicket to take the hosts to 112 for 3 in their first innings at stumps.

It was Bengal seamer Mukesh Kumar (1/27), who got the first breakthrough for the Rest as he angled one across for debutant southpaw Arham Aquil (0), who clearly didn't look ready for this level during his brief stay at the crease.

Saini then got into the act as he bowled beautifully on the off-stump channel and just got enough movement to force the batters to play his deliveries.

A hint of an away movement saw MP skipper Himanshu Mantri jab at the delivery and Dhull, nicely warmed up and alert at second slip, pulled off a good catch.

Subham Sharma (4) got a boundary but never looked comfortable against Saini, whose nip-backer was good enough to find him plumb in-front.

However once the ball started getting older, Dubey and Gawli didn't face too many problems in negotiating the other bowlers.

With the pitch showing no signs of wear and tear, India A left-arm spinner Saurabh Kumar also didn't trouble the MP batters as there was hardly any deviation from track on offer.

Rest failed to get a breakthrough during the final session of the day but are favourites to get a huge first-innings lead as MP still need 373 runs to get ahead.

Earlier in the day, only Dhull showed positive intent with 55 off 71 balls that had eight fours to his credit. **PTI**

Runs are less but anything can happen on this wicket: Umesh

INDORE, MARCH 2

Australia need only 76 runs to complete a memorable Test win in India but the wicked nature of the pitch has kept the home team pacer Umesh Yadav hopeful going into day three.

Fourteen wickets fell on the opening day while 16 batters got out on Thursday.

The pitch is offering plenty of turn and uneven bounce has also made the batters' job harder.

Nathan Lyon ran through the Indian batting on day two to end with an eight-wicket haul and put his team within touching distance of a rare win in India.

Umesh acknowledged that his team has not put enough runs on the board but it still has an outside chance.

"In cricket anything can happen. We will try our best and bowl tight lines. It is not an easy wicket, whether it is our batters or theirs. It is not easy to step out and hit. "The ball is keeping low as well, so you can't be sure about stepping out.

"The runs are less but we will stick to tight lines and push as much as we can," said Umesh, who did his job with the ball on Thursday morning by providing three wickets. The 35-year-old, who doesn't get to play regularly at home with India going with only two pacers, bowled his heart out in the first session to help the hosts limit Australia to 197 in their second innings after resuming the day at 156 for four. **PTI**

'Youngsters to gain immensely from WPL'

MUMBAI, MARCH 2

The exposure that she got while playing Women's Big Bash League (WBBL) and 'The Hundred' has helped her immensely in terms of cricketing growth and Indian skipper Harmanpreet Kaur is confident that home-bred talent would find Women's Premier League (WPL) equally beneficial.

The five-team Women's Premier League will finally see the light of the day when Gujarat Giants will take on Harmanpreet-led Mumbai Indian in the

opener on Saturday at the DY Patil Stadium in Navi Mumbai.

Harmanpreet feels rubbing shoulders against the best of women's cricket in the world in the WPL will do wonders for the confidence of young domestic players.

"The WPL is great platform to know overseas players, take something from their experience. The amount of experience and confidence I got playing in WBBL and The Hundred, I want the young Indian domestic players to get such," the newly appointed MI women's team skipper told media during a virtual interaction.

"It is a great opportunity for them to spent time with overseas players. The WPL will also personally provide me chance to have a look at some young talent from close quarters," Harmanpreet added.

The dashing batter is pretty sure that a lot of great talent will be unearthed during WPL.

"I think this (WPL) is great platform for all Indian players. We have been missing this tournament for a long time. In Australia the WBBL, and The Hundred in England has produced so so many hidden talent. **PTI**

Delhi Capitals name Meg Lanning as captain for WPL

MUMBAI, MARCH 2

Australia's World Cup-winning skipper Meg Lanning will lead Delhi Capitals (DC) in the inaugural edition of the Women's Premier League (WPL) while India's star batter Jemimah Rodrigues will be her deputy, the franchise announced on Thursday.

Lanning, 30, recently captained Australia to their record sixth title win in the T20 Women's World Cup, where they beat hosts South Africa in the title clash. Lanning is the third Australian cricketer to be named captain by WPL teams with Beth Mooney set to skipper Gujarat Giants and Alyssa Healy taking charge of the UP Warriorz.

"It is a very proud moment for me," said Lanning after being named the Delhi



Capitals captain during an event in Mumbai. "First to be involved in a franchise like Delhi Capitals and to be named the captain is a huge honour and it is something that I am very much looking forward to. Lanning has played 132 T20Is for Australia, making 3405 runs.

"Bringing the team together and gelling and get to know everyone is really

important. It is about enjoying yourself and getting the best out of yourself," she added. Lanning arrived in the city on Thursday morning ahead of the tournament's start on Saturday.

Delhi Capitals had their first training session on Monday with their coach and players reaching Mumbai, host city of the first WPL just a few days ahead of

the tournament.

They play their first match on Sunday when they take on the Smriti Mandhana-led Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) at the Brabourne Stadium.

Talking about her role as the vice-captain of the Delhi side, the 22-year-old Indian batter said, "I am going to make the most of it. She (Meg) is one of the greatest leaders we have ever seen."

India opener Shafali Verma is also part of the Capitals' squad.

Delhi Capitals will be coached by two-time title winner in The Hundred, Jonathan Batty, while former England head coach Lisa Keightley and ex India player and selector Hemlata Kala are assistant coaches. Biju George, who in the past worked with the India Women's team, has been named the fielding coach. **PTI**