

## Exit polls: Tripura may again go to BJP, hung house in Meghalaya

KOLKATA/AGARTALA/SHILLONG/  
KOHIMA, FEBRUARY 27

Exit polls by various channels predicted a hung house in Meghalaya, a win for NDPP, backed by the BJP in Nagaland, the two states that went to polls on Monday, and seemed to oscillate between predicting a clean sweep for the BJP to a hung house in the state of Tripura, where a new party the Tipra Motha may emerge as a potential king-maker in the polls, held a week back.

### TRIPURA

The crucial but tiny state of Tripura which the BJP had grabbed from the CPI(M) in a surprise win in 2018 had exit results from three pollsters which varied substantially.

India Today-MyAxis indicated that the BJP would get between 36-45 seats in the 60-member assembly by garnering 45 per cent of the popular vote, most of

it in the plains where Bengalis live, giving it a spectacular win.

It also predicted the Left-Congress combine would get a paltry 6-11 seats with just 32 per cent of the popular vote, a huge slide from its 43 per cent voteshare in 2018. The newbie party Tipra Motha, founded by former royal Pradyot Kishore Mankiya Debbarma, is shown as gathering 9-16 seats from the tribal areas with a concentrated 20 per cent of the vote share.

However, the ETG- Times Now poll indicated that BJP would remain the largest party but with a substantial drawdown from its earlier tally of 36 to just 24 seats, while Left-Congress would get 21 seats with Tipra Motha snatching 14 seats in the tribal areas.

The ZeeNews-Matrize exit poll, on similar lines, predicted BJP and its ally would win 29-36 seats in Tripura, while the Left-Congress would get between 13-21 seats, and Tipra Motha Party would get between 11-16.



### MEGHALAYA

Both the Times Now ETG Exit and India Today-My Axis polls predicted a hung house in the state described as 'Scotland of the east', even though Meghalaya's Chief Minister Conrad Sangma remained confident of victory.

The Times Now ETG Exit poll predicted Sangma's NPP would get 18-26 seats, Trinamool Congress led by former chief minister Mukul Sangma would take

8-14 seats, UDP another 8-14 seats while BJP would improve its tally from two to anything between 3-6 seats.

India Today-My Axis predicted that NPP would bag 18-24 seats, short of majority, forcing it to look towards other parties to shore up figures. It also gave UDP 8-12 seats, Congress 6-12 seats, TMC 5-9 seats and the BJP 4-8 seats.

The Zee News-Matrize exit poll predicted that the National People's Party

will retain Meghalaya with 21 to 26 seats. Also It predicted 8-13 seats for Trinamool and 6-11 for BJP.

### NAGALAND

In formerly insurgency-hit Nagaland, the NDPP is slated to get 28-34 seats with a vote share of 33 per cent, according to India Today-My Axis.

The poll also gives BJP a surprising 16 per cent vote share and 10-14 seats, possibly coming from eastern Nagaland where it focused its campaigning. Congress is predicted to get 10 per cent votes and between 1-2 seats and the rump of the Naga People's Front which remained after some 21 MLAs joined NDPP is forecast to get 13 per cent vote share and between 3-8 seats.

Times Now similarly predicts 27-33 seats for NDPP, 12-16 seats for BJP, and 4-8 seats for NPF. While Zee News-Matrize is giving 35-43 to NDPP-BJP, it has also predicted 2-5 seats for the NPF and 1-3 seats for the Congress. PTI

## BJP wants Governor rule in Punjab: Mann

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann Monday accused BJP leaders, including former chief minister Amarinder Singh, of demanding "governor's rule" in the state and said that people know that these leaders have always been "anti-Punjab".

The Mann-led AAP government has been under fire from the opposition which has been alleging a deteriorating law-and-order situation in the state. The chief minister's also involved in a tussle with Governor Banwarilal Purohit.

It worsened last week with the governor indicating that he is in no hurry to summon the Assembly's Budget session, and reminding the chief minister about his "derogatory response" to a letter from the Raj Bhavan.

Purohit's letter to Chief Minister Mann had come two days after the Punjab Cabinet decided to call the assembly session from March 3 and requested the governor to summon the House.

"Capt Amarinder Singh, Kewal Dhillon, Balbir Singh Sidhu, Fateh Jang Bajwa, Raj Kumar Verka, Gurpreet Kangar, Rana Gurmit Singh Sodhi... all Congressmen (who are) in BJP these days can often be seen around the



Governor's residence. They are speaking about governor's rule in Punjab. People of Punjab know that they have always remained anti-Punjab," Mann in his tweet in Punjabi.

AAP MP Raghav Chadha on Sunday said the Punjab government has been forced to move the Supreme Court as the Governor was not responding to the state cabinet's decision of convening the budget session of the assembly.

Meanwhile, Punjab BJP leader Fateh Jang Bajwa demanded governor's rule in Punjab while attacking the AAP gov-

ernment over various issues, including alleged deteriorating law and order in the state.

"Our party, while considering the present situation, demands that governor's rule should be imposed in Punjab," Bajwa said here on Monday and accused the AAP of not being able to run the state.

He said the state government was talking about attracting investments from other states but considering the present law-and-order situation, "there is a fear that the existing industry may leave". PTI

## Sisodia in 5-day CBI custody

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

A special court sent Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia to five-day CBI remand on Monday after the agency sought his custody for effective interrogation to unravel the alleged scam in the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

Special judge M K Nagpal passed the order on a plea of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), which produced the AAP leader before him a day after his arrest and sought his five-day custody.

There was a heavy security presence in and outside the Rouse Avenue Courts premises. During the more-than-an-hour-long hearing, Sisodia's counsel said that it was the lieutenant governor who had approved the changes in the excise policy and that the central probe agency was going after the elected government.

"I can't do anything. It has to be approved by appropriate authority," he submitted.

Sisodia claimed that there was no evidence against him and opposed the CBI's plea for his remand.

"I (Sisodia) am the finance minister. I've to present the budget...what changed yesterday that the finance minister was to be placed under custody? Was he not available for next days? Or was this arrest



done for ulterior motive? This case is an assault on an individual as well as the institution. Remand will send a message, this is a fit case for declining remand," Sisodia's counsel told the court.

He submitted that Sisodia acted as a member of the Delhi government and hence the decision can neither be attributed to him nor can he be questioned.

The counsel for the probe agency submitted that the arrested minister's custody was required for effective interrogation in the case.

Sisodia claimed that he had no role in the case but the probe showed he personally took decisions, the CBI submitted.

Sisodia's counsel, while opposing the probe agency's plea for custody, submitted that the CBI says he changed his cell phones, but that is not a crime.

The counsel said the policy was implemented after taking suggestions even from the Delhi lieutenant governor and that since it required consultations, there was no chance of conspiracy. PTI

## PUNJAB

# Centre waives off RSR condition for coal supply from Odisha

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

The Union government has agreed to waive off the mandatory RSR (Rail-Sea-Rail) condition for coal supply from Mahanadi Coalfields Limited (MCL) to Talwandi Sabo Power Limited (TSPL). Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, who called on Union Power Minister RK Singh, here at his office today, thanked him.

Mann had raised this issue with the Power Minister during a meeting on December 9, 2022 and had also written to him in this regard.

He said that the Union Minister had apprised him that as far as transport of coal is concerned, the Government of India does not specify any particular route or port and transport is entirely the responsibility of the concerned states/generators adding that additional coal can be allotted to Punjab from MCL and



if Punjab can transport it through any other mode, it is welcome to do so.

Flagging another issue, the Chief Minister urged Singh to augment supply of coal from Pachhwarra coal mines which is pending with the Ministry of Coal.

Mann said that the Ministry of Power has already forwarded the case to the Ministry of Coal with positive recom-

mendations and the matter is reportedly referred by Ministry of Coal to Ministry of Law for legal vetting adding he sought the intervention of Union Power Minister for expediting the matter.

The Chief Minister also urged RK Singh to ask Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) for procurement of 3000 MW of Renewable Energy-Round the Clock (RE-RTC) power for the state. He

said that the PSPCL had communicated its in-principle approval to SECI in August 2022 to procure 3000 MW of RE-RTC power.

Mann said that Punjab and Madhya Pradesh have complementarity in power demand and SECI was working on a joint proposal.

However, the Chief Minister said that due to non-finalisation of the standard bidding document, SECI has not been able to proceed forward in this regard. He requested the Union Minister to intervene so that the Ministry may finalise the issue early.

The Chief Minister said that this year the peak power demand of the state is expected to touch 15,500 MW. Therefore, he said that in order to meet demand in excess of 15,000 MW and to meet the additional requirement necessitated by paddy, the state needs assistance from the Ministry of Power for allocating power from its unallocated pool.

## BSF seizes 2.66 kg narcotics along border fence near Tarn Taran

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

The Border Security Force seized over two-and-a-half kg of narcotics, suspected to be heroin, along the International Border in Tarn Taran district on Monday morning.

"On February 27, at about 6.45 am, BSF troops observed suspicious packets lying on the slope of a bundh on the Indian side of the border fencing near Mehdipur village," a BSF officer said.

During a detailed search of the area, BSF troops recovered five packets, weighing 2.66 kg, wrapped with yellow coloured tape, he added. On Sunday night, the BSF had shot down a Chinese drone that had intruded into Indian airspace from Pakistan in the Amritsar Sector.



## 7 gangsters booked after two Moosewala murder accused die in jail fight

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

Seven prison inmates were booked Monday after two men held in connection with the murder of singer Sidhu Moosewala were killed in a gang fight at Goindwal Sahib Central Jail in Punjab's Tarn Taran, police said.

Another inmate, also allegedly involved in the singer's murder last year, was injured in the clash Sunday between the Jaggu Bhagwanpuria and the Lawrence Bishnoi gangs.

Both gang leaders are already in jail, booked in connection with the Moosewala murder and other cases.

Iron strips were among the objects used as gang members clashed.

Mandeep Singh alias Toofan of Batala and Manmohan Singh alias Mohna, a resident of Budhlada were killed, police said. The third man, Keshav, was seriously injured.

The FIR named seven jail inmates – Manpreet Singh Bhau, Sachin Bhiwani, Ankit Sirsa, Kashish, Rajinder, Arshad Khan and Malkit Singh.

Five of them, including Ankit and Kashish – who are described as "shooters" – were in jail in connection with the Moosewala murder on May 29 last year.

Mandeep Singh alias Toofan, Manmohan Singh alias Mohna, Keshav, Manpreet Singh, Charanjit Singh and Nirmal Singh had gone to the jail's block

**THE FIR NAMED SEVEN JAIL INMATES – MANPREET SINGH BHAU, SACHIN BHIWANI, ANKIT SIRSA, KASHISH, RAJINDER, ARSHAD KHAN AND MALKIT SINGH. FIVE OF THEM, INCLUDING ANKIT AND KASHISH – WHO ARE DESCRIBED AS "SHOOTERS" – WERE IN JAIL IN CONNECTION WITH THE MOOSEWALA MURDER ON MAY 29 LAST YEAR**

number 1 where the others gangsters were lodged, according to the FIR.

After the fight, Toofan and Mohna were declared brought dead at the Tam Taran Civil Hospital. Keshav was admitted there. Police are investigating what triggered the clash between the two groups.

Shubhdeep Singh Sidhu, popularly known as Sidhu Moosewala, was shot dead in Mansa district last year. As he and two others were driving to Jawahar Ke village, their jeep was intercepted and six men opened fire.

Goldy Brar, who is a member of the Lawrence Bishnoi gang, later claimed responsibility for the murder. The men booked after Sunday's clash have been charged under sections 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder) of the IPC. **PTI**

## Barsat assumes charge as chairman of Mandi Board

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

Newly appointed Chairman of Punjab Mandi Board Harchand Singh Barsat on Monday assumed the charge of his office at Punjab Mandi Board in presence of Cabinet Ministers, MLAs and others.

On this occasion, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, Health Minister Dr Balbir Singh, Local Bodies Minister Dr Inderbir Singh Nijjar, Transport and Animal Husbandry Minister Laljit Singh Bhullar and Revenue Minister Bram Shanker Jimpa extended warm words of congratulations to the newly appointed chairman and expressed hope that the Punjab Mandi Board would scale new heights under his leadership.

They assured the newly appointed chairman for all possible help and cooperation.

Barsat thanked National Convener of Aam Aadmi Party and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Chief Minister of Punjab Bhagwant Mann and the senior leadership of the party for entrusting him the responsibility.

He said that he will perform his duties with utmost sincerity and dedication. He said that his sole aim to work for the betterment of the state and its people.

## Health Min flags-off HIV/AIDS awareness vans

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH/SAS NAGAR,  
FEBRUARY 27

With an aim to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS, sensitise people and provide adequate treatment to the infected people, Punjab Health and Family Welfare Dr Balbir Singh on Monday flagged off 11 awareness vans from Dr B.R. Ambedkar State Institute of Medical Science at Phase-6, Mohali. This one-month long HIV/AIDS public awareness campaign was jointly initiated by the Punjab State AIDS Control Society and Health and Family Welfare Department.

These IEC (Information, Education and Communication) awareness vans are equipped with LEDs to exhibit audio-visual awareness films to the

people, while printed material will also be distributed among them. Lab technicians and counsellors have been specially assigned with these vans, who will conduct free HIV/AIDS tests of the people at their doorstep.

Divulging more details, Dr Balbir Singh said that these vans will visit different villages of all the districts in Punjab to sensitise people about this deadly disease — which is preventable but not curable. Each van will cover 4-5 villages daily and these vans will cover as many as 1,650 villages in a month, he added.

Theatre artists will also perform 'nukkad natak' at villages to create awareness. "HIV/AIDS can be avoided by being aware and taking some precautions," he said, adding that due to lack of information, people fall prey to this disease.

## Student stabbed to death in Pbi Univ

PATIALA, FEBRUARY 27

A third year student of the Computer Science Engineering at the University College of Engineering was stabbed to death inside the Punjabi University Patiala campus, in Patiala today.

The incident occurred during the day time when a group of students entered into an altercation. In the meanwhile someone stabbed the student, identified as Navjot Singh from Nabha in the stomach. He was initially taken to the university dispensary from where he

was referred to the Rajindra Hospital. He reportedly died during the treatment due to excessive loss of blood.

The police have ruled out any angle of rivalry. The incident is believed to have taken place at the spur of the moment. Navjot was a day scholar. Some reports suggested that he had tried to intervene in a fight between two groups, when he was stabbed.

The university has expressed its sympathies with the bereaved family and assured that justice will be done. No arrests had been made till the filing of this report. **PTI**

# PUNJAB

## AAP leaders, workers protest in Chandigarh against Sisodia's arrest

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

**A**AP leaders and workers on Monday staged a protest here against the BJP over the arrest of Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, alleging that its government was misusing the central agencies to target political rivals.

Sisodia was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in connection with alleged corruption in the formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

Several party leaders, including Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema and Transport minister Laljit Singh Bhullar, were later taken into preventive custody by the Chandigarh police.

A heavy police deployment was made at the protest site in sector 37 here in view of the demonstration by the AAP.

Several AAP leaders, including MLAs and workers from across Punjab, participated in the protest near the



Punjab BJP office here. Cabinet ministers Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, Anmol Gagan Mann and Inderbir Singh Nijjar were also present.

Speaking to reporters, Cheema accused the BJP of targeting the elected governments of political rivals in the states and booking their leaders in false cases.

"The BJP has become a danger for democracy in the country," alleged Cheema.

Cheema said Sisodia worked hard to provide good education to children of Delhi and accused the BJP-led Centre of sending Sisodia to jail in a "false" case.

Earlier, addressing the protesters during what it called a 'Lok Tantar Bachao dharna', Cheema accused the BJP of trying to suppress the voice of rival party leaders and misusing the central agencies like the CBI and the ED.

He said the BJP was "scared" of the AAP.

"We will continue to fight from the streets to parliament and will oppose the BJP policies," said Cheema.

Punjab Cabinet minister Bram Shanker Jimpa too accused the BJP-led central government of misusing central agencies.

The protesters alleged that the BJP had an "agenda" to stop the AAP from carrying out its welfare programmes as they were feeling "jittery" over the "growing popularity" of the party and its leader Arvind Kejriwal.

They carried placards which read "shiksha mantri tujhe salaam" (salute to education minister) with a picture of Sisodia. The protesters also raised slogans against the BJP. **PTI**

## Mayhem in Punjab, CM busy defending corrupt Delhi AAP leaders: Sukhbir

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

**S**hiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal today said it was shameful that even as Punjab had descended into mayhem with a record number of four murders taking place within 24 hours, Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann was busy defending corruption cases registered against Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi.

The SAD president said, "No one is safe in today's Punjab. Even in jail, executions are being carried out at will as was seen yesterday when two gangsters who were the prime accused in the murder of noted Punjabi singer Sidhu Moosewala were killed. Such acts lend credence to the fact that the AAP government does not want the truth in the Moosewala murder to be revealed."

Badal said Punjab had also been hit by a spate of gruesome crimes in the last 10 days. "Never in the history of the state has gang-war descended on the streets as has happened now. Anti-social elements are also using the complete breakdown of law-and-order machinery to settle scores at will. The police force has been bottled down by the AAP administration as was witnessed recently during the



attack on the Ajnala police station by radicals led by Amritpal Singh. This, as well as other incidents, which have revealed the complete lack of an integrated command structure, have demoralised the state police and compounded the problem," Badal asserted. He said it was shocking that four gruesome incidents had taken place today with a Congress leader and former Market Committee Chairman of Patti Major Singh Dhaliwal being shot dead in broad daylight, a student being killed in Punjabi University, Patiala, a person being killed in Amritsar and a woman being hacked to death in Sangrur.

He said the state had recently also witnessed gangsters chopping the fingers of a youth in Mohali while a woman was attacked in the presence of the police in Ferozepur. He said similarly a man was brutally assaulted with iron rods in Sunam while another met a gruesome death in Phillaur.

## Dhaliwal discusses agri policy with farmer leaders

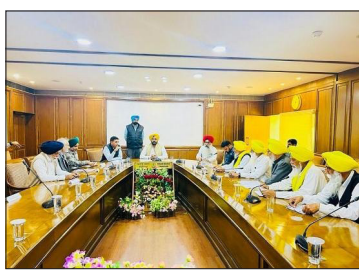
EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

**P**unjab Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal today held discussions with the representatives of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (Ekta-Ugrahan) regarding farmers issues of Punjab and the new agriculture policy.

In the meeting held at Punjab Bhawan, representatives of BKU (EU) Joginder Singh Ugrahan, Sukhdev Singh Kokri and Jhanda Singh gave suggestions regarding agriculture policy.

The farmer leaders said there should be no unfair distribution of land and agricultural equipment, usury should be abolished and all round development of three main resources of agriculture such as water, land and human labour should be ensured. Submitting 39 points for resolution at the government level, the BKU representatives said that due to lack of will power of the previous dispensations, the state of Punjab is facing a deep agrarian crisis.

Dhaliwal reiterated that the Bhagwant



Mann government was fully committed to implementing pro-Punjab agriculture model. He added that issues such as water, electricity, pesticides, fertiliser control are the subject of the state government.

He said, the issues suggested by the farmers union would be considered by the committee constituted for drafting Punjab Agriculture Policy, and their points would also be shared with the public for further discussion.

He said the draft agriculture policy of Punjab would be placed before the people of the state by March 31 to ensure that economic condition of the farmers could be improved by implementing the pro-Punjab agriculture model.

## Hiring non-Punjabi yoga instructors anti-Punjab move: Bajwa

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

**L**ashing out at Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann-led Aam Aadmi Party Government in Punjab for hiring two Delhi-based yoga instructors on hefty salaries, Punjab's Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Partap Singh Bajwa on Monday asked: "Couldn't he (CM) find some Punjab-based yoga instructors?"

He said that the non-Punjabis have been hired at the state-run Guru Ravidas Ayurved University in Hoshiarpur, which is an anti-Punjab move. Bajwa also urged the Governor of Punjab, who is also a Chancellor of Punjab universities, to take serious note of this.

Bajwa said that the CM has been presenting himself as a flagbearer of the Punjabi language.

"Meanwhile, did he check the qualifications of these two instructors before hiring them? Have they cleared the mandatory Class 10 Punjabi language examination with 50 percent marks before taking the jobs in Punjab? CM owes an explanation on this," Bajwa said.

## BJP raps Kejriwal for defending Sisodia

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

**T**he Bharatiya Janata Party today lashed out at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for defending his deputy Manish Sisodia, whose involvement in the massive excise scam worth Rs 1,000 crores has been established beyond any doubt.

"Why are you scared of facing the law?" Punjab BJP vice-president Dr Subhash Sharma asked Kejriwal while pointing out, "when you arrest former ministers in Punjab, it is a crusade against corruption and when your deputy chief minister gets arrested for the same reason and that too after a due process of law, you cry vendetta and victimisation."

Addressing a press conference here today, Dr Sharma said Delhi's excise policy was tailor made to suit a few particular corporate houses. He pointed out, the number of liquor vends was increased with a liquor shop in every street, smacked of massive corruption. As if that was not enough, the commission was increased from 5 to 12 percent and the balance was pocketed by the AAP leadership.

"If your liquor policy was not fraudulent and flawed, why did you



withdraw it?" he asked the Delhi chief minister.

Dr Sharma said the "kattar-imaandaar" (scrupulously honest) image of the AAP, particularly that of Kejriwal had been already shattered. He disclosed that the charge sheet mentions Kejriwal's name also and he will also be held accountable, as he is part of the conspiracy. "That is why he is so scared and crying vendetta," he said.

The state BJP vice president said the Punjab excise policy was also formulated to benefit the same corporate houses that were benefited in Delhi. He demanded that the Punjab liquor policy be also scrapped. He warned the ministers and the officers that they will also be held accountable the same way as has been done in Delhi. "You can't be allowed to loot and rob the public and that too while claiming to be honest," Dr Sharma warned.

# Slain Kashmiri Pandit cremated amidst heart rending scenes

LG reassures action against perpetrators | BJP protest held at several places

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 27

A day after he was shot dead by terrorists, Kashmiri Pandit bank guard Sanjay Sharma was cremated in his native village in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district on Monday, with his Muslim neighbours lending a helping hand to his grief-stricken family.

Lieutenant Governor (LG) Manoj Sinha condemned the killing and said those behind the "extremely unfortunate incident" will be taken care of by the security forces.

While the BJP held protests at several places in Kashmir against Sharma's killing, PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti visited his family and questioned the Centre's claim that militancy has ended in the union territory.

The mortal remains of Sharma, 40, were consigned to the flames as per Hindu rituals amidst the presence of his family members and neighbours, including Muslims, officials said.

The Muslim neighbours helped his family members in performing the last rites, they said.



"We condemn the murder. We stand by the bereaved family. As soon as the news of the incident broke yesterday, people were ready to provide all help -- blood, money or anything else -- to save him. Unfortunately, he succumbed on the way (to hospital)," said a local resident, Bashir Ahmad Malik.

Speaking to reporters here, LG Sinha said, "It is an extremely unfortunate incident. No words are enough to con-

demn the killing. Whoever has carried out the act, our security forces will take care of them."

He said such incidents can create doubts in the minds of people about the security scenario, but the administration and security forces are working "with a 360-degree approach".

PDP president Mehbooba Mufti, who visited the bereaved family, said Kashmiri Muslims are ashamed over Sharma's

killing and hit out at the government for claiming that normalcy has been restored in Jammu and Kashmir.

"The government claims to have ended militancy. If that is the case, who killed him (Sharma)? What is the government doing," Mufti asked while talking to reporters.

Meanwhile, the BJP held protests at several places in Kashmir against the killing.

The main protest was held in Jawahar Nagar area of the city where dozens of BJP workers demonstrated against the killing.

"Our Kashmiri Pandit brother was brutally killed in Pulwama. Terrorists have tried to disrupt the peaceful atmosphere... We won't allow it to happen," said Manzoor Ahmad Bhat, head of the BJP's Media and IT cell.

The protesters also burnt an effigy of Pakistan, holding the neighbouring country responsible for the killings. Protests were also held in Kulgam, Pulwama and Baramulla.

Protests were also held in Kulgam on Monday and a candlelight vigil was organised against Sharma's killing in Pulwama and Baramulla on Sunday night.

## Hurriyat Conference condemns killing

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 27

The Hurriyat Conference led by Mirwaiz Umar Farooq on Monday condemned the killing of Kashmiri Pandit ATM guard Sanjay Sharma, terming it as a "gruesome act".

Expressing sympathies with the bereaved family, the separatist amalgam said, "Killing of human beings in such manner is a tragedy that Kashmir has been witnessing for the past three-and-a-half decades now, with no seeming end in near future."

"The state policy of extreme repression and unilateral interventions countered by equally extreme and viscous vengeance is a vortex we have got caught into, leading to extreme suffering of Kashmiris of all hues," it charged. The Hurriyat said in this situation Kashmiri Pandits living in Kashmir have become "sitting ducks".

Killing of human beings in such manner is a tragedy that Kashmir has been witnessing for the past three-and-a-half decades now, with no seeming end in near future.



## KP employees demand relocation

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SRINAGAR/JAMMU, FEB 27

Scores of protesting Kashmiri Pandit prime minister's package employees on Monday reiterated their demand for relocation outside the valley, saying their worst fears have come true with the latest killing of a community member in Pulwama.

The protesters assembled outside the relief commissioner's office in Jammu and staged a protest against the killing of Sanjay Sharma (40), a bank ATM guard who was shot dead by terrorists in the Achan area of the south Kashmir district on Sunday.

"We were apprehensive about something like this, being fully aware of the ground realities. The latest killing has dealt a severe

blow to our confidence and further increased our concern over our community members' safety in the valley," Yogesh Pandita, one of the protesters, told reporters.

Reiterating their demand for relocation outside the valley, he said the government's claim about a secure atmosphere for their return to join their duties stands exposed. "The administration choked us financially by stopping our salaries to force us to rejoin our duties. We are afraid of working there given the continued targeted killings," Pandita said.

Hundreds of prime minister package employees belonging to the Kashmiri Pandit community shifted to Jammu in May last year following the killing of their colleagues, Rahul Bhat and Rajini Bala, by terrorists.

## SIU attaches four houses for providing shelter to terrorists in Kmr

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 27

Four houses here in which terrorists had taken shelter were on Monday attached by the Special Investigation Unit (SIU-II) Srinagar, officials said. Of the four houses attached by the SIU sleuths, three are located in Barthana area of Srinagar while the fourth is in Sangam-Eidgah area of the city, the officials said.

"The attachment orders were issued in exercise of power conferred under Section 25 read with 2 (g) (ii) of the UA(P) Act," the officials said.

The residential houses in Srinagar belong to Shaheena/Asif Nath, Altaf Ahmed Dar and Mudasir Ahmed Mir. The house attached at Sangam-Eidgah belongs to Abdul Rehman Bhat.

"The SIU team directed the concerned that there should be no alteration or otherwise to the attached properties without the prior permission of the designated authority," they added.

The action has been taken after the investigation into a militancy-related case revealed that a module of ultras was found involved in hiding and providing logistical support to active terrorists.

## Azad's son enters active politics

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 27

Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP) chairman Ghulam Nabi Azad's son Saddam Nabi Azad has joined active politics, party spokesperson said on Sunday.

Saddam (41) was seen at the party's youth convention at Nigeen Club Sunday in the presence of his father and senior party leaders.

While he shared the stage with the

party leaders, he did not address the convention. It was his first public appearance in the Kashmir valley.

Saddam, a businessman, is the eldest among the two siblings. He has studied in England. Sofiya Nabi Azad, his sister, has studied journalism.

Party leaders said Saddam will play an active role in politics and focus on Jammu and Kashmir.

"He will be in active politics now," DPAP chief spokesperson Salman Nizami said.

## AAP workers protest against Sisodia's arrest

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
JAMMU, 27 FEBRUARY

The Jammu province unit of the Aam Aadmi Party gheraoed the BJP headquarters at Trikutanagar and staged protest against the arrest of Delhi Education Minister Manish Sisodia.

The protesters were raising slogans against the BJP government at the Centre.

Aam Aadmi Party leaders and workers from different parts of Jammu province participated in the protest. Expressing their views on the occasion, various leaders lashed out at the Central Government for what they termed as vindictive politics.

In Kashmir province, AAP workers assembled at the party office at Rajbagh and raised slogans like "Shiksha Mantri Tujhe Salaam", decrying Sisodia's arrest.

## REGION

Cleanliness campaign run by Haryana youth gets special mention in 'Mann Ki Baat'

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

In his monthly "Mann Ki Baat" broadcast, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday was all praise for the youth of Dulheri village in Haryana who are enthusiastically running a cleanliness campaign.

According to a state government statement issued here, the Prime Minister said the enthusiasm and dedication shown by these youths have certainly changed the meaning of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar also listened to the radio broadcast in Karnal. According to the statement, encouraging the youth of this village, the Prime Minister said, "These youth have decided to make Bhiwani city a role model in terms of cleanliness. They formed an organization called Yuva Swachhata Evam Jan Seva Samiti.

"At 4 am, they reach Bhiwani and run cleanliness drives at different places in the city. Till now, these people have cleaned tons of garbage from different areas of the city," said the Prime Minister while lauding the efforts of these youth. **PTI**

Scholarship scam

# Grave irregularities found in 13 out of 22 educational institutions

SHIMLA, FEBRUARY 27

Grave irregularities have been found in 13 out of 22 educational institutions which are on the radar of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the Rs 250-crore scholarship scam, agency sources said.

Investigations revealed that these 13 institutions took scholarships in the name of about 2,000 fictitious students, sources in the CBI said. The accounts and other documentation of the remaining institutions are yet to be checked, they added.

Scrutiny of documents, accounts and data procured from computers and other related material of these institutions located in Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh by the CBI revealed that scholarship fund was siphoned and scholarship was taken in the name of students who either did not exist or had left the institutions, sources added.

These institutions bagged a major chunk of the scholarship amount.

The scam started in 2012-13 when the scholarship for pre-matric and post-matric students belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes under 36 schemes were not paid to eligible beneficiaries.

The scam remained hidden for almost five years as the person who created the online portal for disbursement of scholarship was also responsible for transferring the amount.

The matter came to light in 2018 following reports that students of government schools in tribal Spiti valley in Lahaul and Spiti district had not been paid any scholarship for the past five years.

Investigations had pointed out that fake letterheads to show false affiliation were used by some institutions to mislead the education department which failed to ensure physical verification of infrastructure and strength of students.

The other discrepancies included non-submission of Aadhaar numbers of students by institutions, use of same Aadhaar accounts to withdraw scholarships of multiple students who did not exist and opening of fake accounts in nationalised banks.

In order to grab the scholarship money, the institutions allegedly used the blank cheques and vouchers submitted at the time of admission, allegedly in connivance with some employees of nationalised banks which opened the accounts without Aadhaar verification.

The management allegedly gave their own phone numbers as registered numbers of students so that they receive SMSes regarding transactions and withdraw the money.

More than Rs 28 crore of post-matric scholarship money for SC/ST/OBC students was disbursed to nine fake institutions in Una, Chamba, Sirmour and Kangra districts running under one name without affiliation from the competent bodies. **PTI**

Take measures to deal with drought-like situation: Hamirpur DC to officials

HAMIRPUR (HP), FEBRUARY 27

The district administration here on Monday asked officials to be ready to deal with a drought-like situation due to the paucity of rains in December and January.

Chairing a meeting of district officers, Deputy Commissioner Debasweta Banik directed Jal Shakti, Agriculture and Horticulture, Animal Husbandry, Health, Forest, Revenue and other departments to start taking measures to deal with the situation.

Hamirpur is a rain-fed district. A rain deficit can affect water sources, drinking water schemes, agriculture, horticulture and other related activities.

Banik directed the officials of the Jal Shakti Department to ensure regular cleaning of water sources and sampling-testing of water. If there is a shortage of water under any drinking water scheme, then explore the possibility of making alternate arrangements to supply water, she said. Jal Jeevan Mission schemes under which work is in the final stage should be completed on priority so that adequate drinking water can be made available to the people, she added. Due to water scarcity, people turn to natural water bodies and therefore cleanliness of these water sources should also be ensured, the district commissioner said. **PTI**

## Eight heliports to come up in Himachal in 2023

HAMIRPUR (HP), FEBRUARY 27

The Himachal Pradesh government has given clearance for setting up of eight heliports in different districts of the state this year and work for their construction will start soon, officials said on Monday.

The decision of the state government is aimed at promoting tourism and giving a boost to its economy, officials said.

Deputy Commissioners have selected land for the construction of heliports in six districts and Pawan Hans will start the consultancy work related to the heliport from March 1, an official spokesman said.

He said the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) were being sent to the Centre for getting funds.

The Centre will allocate the budget to the state for the construction of the heliport as per prescribed parameters. Presently, out of five heliports in the state, three are being used commercially.

There is a plan to build a heliport in each district, but considering the high potential of tourism in tribal areas, more than one heliport will be built in those

### HE SAID THE DETAILED PROJECT REPORTS (DPRS) WERE BEING SENT TO THE CENTRE FOR GETTING FUNDS.

areas.

Heliports are proposed to be built at three places in Sissu, Jispa and Rangrik in tribal Lahaul-Spiti district besides Sarvo in tribal Kinnaur district.

In the first phase, heliports will be constructed at Sasan in Hamirpur, Rakkar in Kangra, Sultanpur in Chamba, Pirdi in Kullu, Jispa, Sissu and Rangrik in Lahaul-Spiti and Sarvo in Kinnaur.

The old heliport at Sultanpur of Chamba district headquarters will be developed into a heliport. A place had been selected at Pirdi in Kullu district, but now administrative consultations are being held regarding Kullu's Aloo Maidan as well.

There is a proposal for the construction of heliports at Nahan and Dhar Kyari in Sirmour, Chanshal Larot in Shimla, Jankaur in Una, Galanala in Solan and Pangi and Holi in Chamba in the second phase. **PTI**

## AAP holds protest in Rohtak over arrest of Delhi deputy CM Sisodia

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 27

The Haryana unit of AAP on Monday staged a protest against the Centre in Rohtak over the arrest of Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia, with senior leaders alleging that police "lathicharged" several party workers during the agitation.

Several AAP leaders including Rajya Sabha MP Sushil Gupta, Ashok Tanwar and Anurag Dhanda, along with party workers, held the protest near the BJP office in Rohtak.

Speaking to reporters during the protest, Gupta alleged that "an undeclared emergency prevails in the country" and added "our fight is against that".

"The BJP-led Centre is scared of the growing popularity of AAP and our leader Arvind Kejriwal. They have targeted innocent Manish Sisodia, who is the world's best education minister," he said. "Earlier too, they have misused CBI, ED and other central agencies to target our leaders, but they did not find anything against them," said Gupta. **PTI**

## CM Sukhu stresses on for early forest approvals

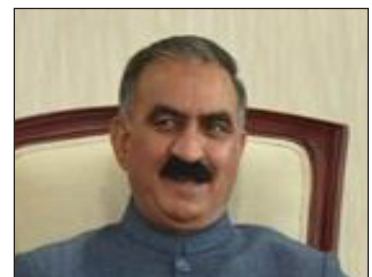
DISCUSSES STATE'S ISSUES WITH UNION E&amp;F

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

Chief Minister, Thakur Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu in a meeting with Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Bhupender Yadav in New Delhi today advocated for early forest clearances for escalating various ongoing development projects in Himachal Pradesh.

Sukhu urged the Union Minister to ensure early forest approvals in a time bound manner for construction of heliports, green corridors as mandated by the State Government for making Himachal as 'Green Energy State' by the year 2025 and other major ongoing projects. The tough geological conditions of Himachal Pradesh, necessitate to construct heliports, not only to facilitate the tourists visiting the State, but also cater to the emergency needs during natural calamities or otherwise. A decision should be taken without delay regarding the necessary forest clearances pending for the construction of the heliports, he urged the Union Minister.

The state government is promoting e-vehicles in Himachal Pradesh and



developing necessary infrastructure for the same by constructing an adequate number of e-charging stations for electrical vehicles. Besides, green corridors would also be constructed on both sides of all National and state highways in the state. In order to speed up the process, various approvals regarding forest land should be accorded in time to achieve the target, said the Chief Minister.

Delay in forest clearances creates unnecessary delay in the construction of development projects, especially educational institutions, roads and bridges and ropeways etc. He urged that these approvals should be given as soon as possible. **PTI**

# OPINION

The Express India NEWS

## Differences within opposition over Sisodia arrest

The fault lines within the opposition camp came to the fore after the arrest of the Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia by the Central Bureau of Investigation in the Delhi excise scandal. While most of the opposition parties rallied behind the Aam Aadmi Party, the Congress supported the arrest. AAP leaders including the Punjab and Delhi Chief Ministers rallied behind Sisodia. Most of the opposition parties have also extended their support for the beleaguered leader. Except for the Congress, most other political parties like the Samajwadi Party, the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Shiv Sena, the Trinamool Congress and other leaders expressed their solidarity with Sisodia alleging that the Bharatiya Janata Party government at the centre was using the central agencies against its political opponents.

The Congress leaders including the Delhi Congress president Anil Chaudhary and Sandeep Dikshit, a former minister and son of former Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit have welcomed the arrest. The fault lines within the opposition camp are indicative of the things happening in future.

The Congress not only distanced itself from criticizing the arrest, rather welcomed it. Senior leader and party spokesperson Abhishek Manu Singhvi had to issue a clarification after he had tweeted in support of Sisodia. Congress leaders from Punjab and Delhi had reportedly raised serious objection to Singhvi supporting Sisodia, when the Congress leaders are facing the massive onslaught from the AAP government in Punjab.

## Rule of law must prevail

Rajasthan Police is currently faced with a piquant situation as it has not been able to nab the accused in the kidnapping and murder of two youth in Bhiwani. The incident relates to the alleged kidnapping, murder and subsequent burning of the bodies of the victims in a vehicle near Bhiwani. The victims are believed to be bovine traders and the accused, the cow vigilantes.

Rajasthan Police is not being allowed to enter the villages where the suspects are believed to be hiding. The villagers held a Mahapanchayat against "harassment" to the youth. Their anger was provoked over an incident where some Rajasthan cops allegedly thrashed a pregnant woman, a relative of one of the accused. This led to her miscarriage. Since then the local villagers have decided not to let the cops enter their villages.

This is an unprecedented situation. No doubt the police do resort to excesses sometimes, but that is no reason to shelter an accused. Even if the accused is innocent, that should be left to courts to decide. Rule of law must prevail and the police should be allowed to do its job.

# Targeting moderate Akalis risks emboldening radicals

BY VIMAL SUMBLY

Whenever moderates are targeted and weakened extremists get an upper hand. This holds true universally. Precisely that is happening in Punjab right now. Rise of Amritpal Singh, a radical preacher, is directly linked to the decline of the moderate Akali leadership. This does not portend well for Punjab. Like George Santayana said, "those who can not remember the past are condemned to repeat it", 1980s are being repeated and replicated now in Punjab. In the 1980s, a politically aggressive Indira Gandhi, who wanted to run over all the opposition parties across the country from Andhra Pradesh to Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir, tried to weaken the Shiromani Akali Dal. In the process Jarnail Singh Bhindrawale emerged and grabbed the entire Panthic political space. What happened subsequently is too well known to need any repetition here.

Compare the situation of that time with the present day situation. The moderate Akalis represented and led by Parkash Singh Badal and later by his son, Sukhbir Singh Badal have been completely marginalized today. There has been a sustained campaign to discredit their leadership and blame everything that is wrong with Punjab and Panthic politics on the father-son duo. So much so, the grand old party of Punjab and probably the second oldest political party in the country, has been reduced to just three legislators in the Punjab assembly.

The decline of Akali Dal is neither in the interests of Panthic politics, nor Punjab and nor the country. Whenever the moderates have been cornered and marginalized, the extremists have filled that space. This is a universally accepted fact. This happened in Punjab in the 1980s. This happened in Jammu and Kashmir in the 1990s and this is threatening again to happen in Punjab now. If other political parties like the Congress, the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Aam Aadmi Party think that they can fill the Akali space, they are grossly mistaken as this space can only be filled by the radicals and extremists.

The Punjabi psyche is basically rebellious. The rebellious streak gets expressed from time to time in different ways. Be it during the independence movement or even afterwards, Punjabis' mind has always been restive and rebellious. And it would be grossly wrong to assume that the Punjabis are drawn towards religious fundamentalism. Yes, at times, religious fundamentalism and extremism may be the medium of expression to vent their anger, but that is always momentary. It did not take much time for the Punjabi youth to "graduate from ultra-leftist Naxalism" to "ultra-rightist Khalistani movement" within a span of a decade or so. No wonder, a number of prominent Khalistani activists were former Naxalites.

Recently some of the farmers' unions, which are supposedly pro-left, were seen sharing stage with some radical groups in their agitation for release of

**THE DECLINE OF AKALI DAL IS NEITHER IN THE INTERESTS OF PANTHIC POLITICS, NOR PUNJAB AND NOR THE COUNTRY. WHENEVER THE MODERATES HAVE BEEN CORNERED AND MARGINALIZED, THE EXTREMISTS HAVE FILLED THAT SPACE. THIS IS A UNIVERSALLY ACCEPTED FACT. THIS HAPPENED IN PUNJAB IN THE 1980S. THIS HAPPENED IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR IN THE 1990S AND THIS IS THREATENING AGAIN TO HAPPEN IN PUNJAB NOW. IF OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES LIKE THE CONGRESS, THE BJP OR THE AAP THINK THAT THEY CAN FILL THE AKALI SPACE, THEY ARE GROSSLY MISTAKEN AS THIS SPACE CAN ONLY BE FILLED BY THE RADICALS AND EXTREMISTS**

Sikh prisoners. And during the protest against three central farm laws, these organizations had taken a clear and categorical stand against radical groups. They also disowned Deep Sidhu and distanced themselves from his Red Fort protests.

Right now Amritpal is not at all popular among the Punjabis. He is facing stiff and strong resistance from within the Sikh community for multiple reasons. People do not subscribe to his separatist ideology and he is being repeatedly cautioned

The Express India NEWS

against pushing Punjab back to the dark days of terrorism. His action of taking the holy Guru Granth Sahib to Ajnala police station during a protest has been widely condemned and disapproved of by all the Sikhs. Prominent Sikh leaders like Ludhiana MP and Congress leader Ravneet Singh Bittu and senior Akali leader Bikram Singh Majithia have openly challenged him.

But eventually it will be only the Akali leadership which can counter and preempt Amritpal swaying the Panthic sentiment. Parkash Singh Badal successfully led the moderate Panthic politics for about three decades in the aftermath of the militancy era. He actually snatched away the space from radical leader Simranjit Singh Mann who had dominated Panthic politics in late 1980s and early 1990s.

Probably the moderate Akalis like him would not have been marginalized had the senior Badal not bequeathed the Akali legacy to his son, Sukhbir Badal. Shiromani Akali Dal is not like other family driven regional political parties like the National

Conference, the Indian National Lok Dal, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Samajwadi Party, Shiv Sena etc. Akali Dal, unlike these political parties, is not personal-ity driven but ideologically driven, with Panthic agenda its core ideology.

While the primary onus lies on the Akali leadership not to allow the radical and extremists grab its space, the other political parties will do well by avoiding to demonise the moderate Akalis. There has been a sustained campaign, first by the Congress, then by the AAP and now even by some Bharatiya Janata Party leaders to not only discredit but to demonise the moderate Akali leaders, probably not realising that they are playing into the radical and extremist agenda.

The decline of the moderate Akali Dal in the long term will only benefit the radicals. The Congress and the AAP may have gained in the short term in 2017 and 2022 respectively, but in the long run the moderate Akali space can and will only be filled by the radicals and extremists as happened in the 1980s. The result of the Sangrur parliamentary by-election was an example and an indicator. The AAP lost its strongest bastion, within a short span of two months to radical Simranjit Singh Mann. Political parties in Punjab need to be very careful and must tread a cautious path and avoid dribbling in Panthic politics even from a distance. Politics must not be about winning elections alone without keeping long term interests in consideration.

It is a strange paradox that many radicals and extremists have been supporting Congress and the AAP against the Akalis. It is not for any love for these parties, only because they want to damage and destroy the moderate Akalis. It is not because they have any particular dislike for Parkash Singh Badal or his son, Sukhbir. It is because they do not like the moderates as such. Had it been anyone else, instead of Badal, the radicals would still oppose him/her. They have now successfully managed to set an agenda for the parties like the Congress and AAP to follow. Thanks to social media the radicals built up a strong anti-Akali-Badal narrative. Parties like the Congress and the AAP strengthened it further for their own political interests. With the result the moderate Akalis have been pushed to the margins and their space is now gradually being occupied by the radicals like Amritpal. History seems to be repeating itself.

At the same time, the moderate Akalis in general and the Badals in particular also cannot escape the blame for conceding the space to the radicals. As mentioned earlier, Shiromani Akali Dal can not be a family driven party. The Badal family had completely captured it. At one time, there were four ministers including the Chief Minister in the Akali government from the (Badal) family. Traditional Akali leadership among the moderates was finding itself sidelined and suffocated within the party. They may not have turned hostile, but they did turn indifferent. But it is still not that late for the moderate leadership to make the right amends and course corrections. The situation can very much be redeemed and everybody knows, "how".

## NATION

# Voting in Meghalaya, Nagaland peaceful, no demands for re-poll: EC

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

**V**oting for the Meghalaya and Nagaland Assembly polls went off peacefully on Monday, the Election Commission (EC) said, adding that there was no demand for a re-poll from the two northeastern states.

While both states have 60 Assembly seats, polling was held on 59 seats each, the EC pointed out.

Polling for the Sohiong seat in Meghalaya was adjourned due to the death of one of the candidates. Since the Akuloto seat in Nagaland remained uncontested with only one candidate, no election was required there.

"Polling across 3,419 polling stations in Meghalaya and 2,291 in Nagaland went off peacefully today.... Advance



planning and extensive monitoring by the commission led by Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar...ensured

smooth conduct of elections in the two states with no re-poll reported in any of the 5,710 polling stations," the EC said.

## POLLING FOR THE SOHIONG SEAT IN MEGHALAYA WAS ADJOURNED DUE TO THE DEATH OF ONE OF THE CANDIDATES

In 2018, 11 re-polls were held in Nagaland and one was held in Meghalaya. Voting in the Kasba Peth and Chinchwad Assembly seats in Maharashtra was held on Sunday. No voting was required in the Lumla Assembly seat in Arunachal Pradesh with the seat declared uncontested.

The EC said there was meticulous planning on its part for the hilly regions of Meghalaya, involving travelling through a mountainous terrain, crossing rivers and inaccessible areas.

There were 74 non-motorable polling

stations with two riverine polling stations -- one at Kamsing in the Amlarem civil sub-division and the other at Kalatek under the Sohra civil sub-division.

There were a number of polling stations in the Garo Hills region where the polling parties had to travel across makeshift bamboo bridges and double-decker root bridges.

Meghalaya had 183 polling stations under the "shadow zone". In some of these areas, runners were used to convey messages between the polling parties and the sector officers. A total of 264 police radio stations with 19 repeater stations were set up through the police network to cover these shadow areas, the EC noted.

In West Garo Hills district of Meghalaya, an ex-gratia amount of Rs 15 lakh was given to the family of a polling official who died in a road accident while on duty.

## Cong leaders, workers 'ready' for BJY 2.0

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NAVA RAIPUR, FEBRUARY 27

**T**heir bags are packed and they're ready to go, waiting just for a signal to begin walking the breadth of India. With Bharat Jodo Yatra 2.0 appearing a distinct possibility, several Congress leaders and workers say they are raring to get back on the streets to quickly take forward the gains from the first one.

There has been talk of another Bharat Jodo Yatra ever since the Kanyakumari to Kashmir campaign ended in Srinagar last month. The buzz escalated on Sunday when former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi appealed to party president Mallikarjun Kharge at the plenary session here to formulate a new plan to carry forward the "tapasya" (penance) undertaken through the march.

"The Bharat yatris, as those who completed the entire journey are known, are ready. Our bags are packed and we will leave as soon as we get orders from the party," said Vaibhav Walia, AICC delegate and one of those who walked 4,000 km from India's southern tip to Kashmir.

"All Congress workers and many of us now wish for a second phase of the

yatra so it can go to states it hasn't been to," Walia said.

Lhinkim Haokip Shingnaisui of Manipur, the only woman from the northeast who participated as a Bharat yatri in the Bharat Jodo Yatra, said there is a lot of enthusiasm among the people in the northeast after Rahul Gandhi's comments on Sunday.

Gandhi's comments on Sunday, saying he and the entire country would

participate in the "tapasya", were widely taken as an indication that another such initiative could be in the offing in the near future.

After his remarks, Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said that the Congress is considering a Pasighat-to-Porbandar yatra (east to west), but said its format could be a bit different from the Bharat Jodo Yatra.

Ramesh said there is a lot of enthusiasm and energy among party workers for another possible yatra.

Though the Bharat Jodo Yatra mostly hit the right notes and observers said it went a long way changing Gandhi's image, there were constant questions about the route and why it did not pass through certain important or election-bound states.

## 'ED, CBI, have become instruments of vendetta'

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

**T**he Congress on Monday alleged that institutions like the ED, the CBI and the Income Tax Department have become instruments of "political vendetta" under the Narendra Modi government and opposition leaders are selectively targeted to destroy their reputation.

The assertion came on a day a special court sent Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia to five-day CBI remand after the agency sought his custody for effective interrogation to unravel the alleged scam in the now-scrapped excise policy for 2021-22.

CBI arrested Sisodia on Sunday after around eight hours of questioning.

Without naming anyone or any particular case, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a tweet, "The Congress has always held the belief that institutions like ED, CBI and Income Tax Department have become instruments of political vendetta and harassment under Modi Sarkar."

"These institutions have lost all professionalism. Opposition leaders are selectively targeted to destroy their reputation," Ramesh said. On Sunday, Delhi Congress chief Anil Chaudhary said Sisodia's arrest by the CBI in connection with the Delhi excise policy scam case is a welcome step. He had claimed that the AAP "used power to accumulate wealth". **PTI**

## THE ASSERTION CAME ON A DAY WHEN A SPECIAL COURT SENT MANISH SISODIA TO FIVE-DAY CBI REMAND

## Agnipath scheme in national interest: High Court

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

**T**he Delhi High Court on Monday upheld the Centre's Agnipath scheme for recruitment in the armed forces, saying it was made in national interest and to ensure that the armed forces are better equipped.

A bench of Chief Justice Satish Chandra Sharma and Justice Subramonium Prasad dismissed a batch of petitions assailing the scheme, and said there was no reason to interfere with it.

Besides pleas challenging the Agnipath scheme, the court also dismissed a bunch of petitions relating to recruitment process for the armed forces under certain previous advertisements while clarifying that such candidates do not have a right to seek recruitment. The court had reserved its verdict on the batch of pleas on December 15 last year.

The Agnipath scheme, unveiled on June 14, 2022, lays out rules for the recruitment of youth in the armed forces.

According to these rules, those between 17-and-a-half and 21 years of age are eligible to apply and they would be inducted for a four-year tenure. The scheme allows 25 per cent of them to be granted regular service subsequently. After the scheme was unveiled,



protests erupted in several states against the scheme.

Later, the government extended the upper age limit to 23 years for recruitment in 2022.

Earlier during the arguments, Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati and central government standing counsel Harish Vaidyanathan, representing the Centre, had said the Agnipath scheme is one of the biggest policy changes in defence recruitment and was going to bring a paradigm shift in the way the armed forces recruit personnel.

"More than 10 lakh aspirants have taken advantage of the two-year age relaxation given by us... A lot of things we cannot say on affidavit, but we have acted in bona fide manner," the ASG has said.

The high court had also asked the Centre to justify different pay scales of 'Agniveers' and regular sepoy in the Indian Army if their job profile is same.

## NATION

**'Set your house in order'****SC raps defence ministry over payment of arrears of OROP in installments**EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

The Supreme Court on Monday pulled up the Ministry of Defence over the delay in payment of arrears of One Rank-One Pension (OROP) to eligible pensioners of the armed forces and sought an explanation from the secretary concerned for issuing a communication extending the timeline for payments fixed by the court.

On January 9, the top court granted time till March 15 to the Centre for payment of total arrears of OROP. But on January 20, the ministry issued a communication that the arrears shall be paid in four yearly installments which has been challenged by a group of ex-servicemen.

Observing that the sanctity of the judicial process has to be maintained, a

**THE TOP COURT SAID THE MINISTRY HAD NO BUSINESS TO TAKE THE LAW INTO ITS HANDS AND ISSUE UNILATERAL COMMUNICATION TO EXTEND THE TIME FOR PAYMENT.**

bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud asked the Ministry to "set its house in order" and directed the secretary to file a personal affidavit explaining his position.

"We gave you an extension till March 15 for payment of arrears. Now in the face of our orders of January 9, how can you issue a communication that you will pay the amount in four equal installments? Why shouldn't we proceed against your secretary? In the face of our order, how can you pass an order

by an administrative circular extending time... "You tell your secretary that we are going to take action against him for issuing that communication. The sanctity of the judicial process has to be maintained. Either the secretary withdraws it, or we are going to issue a contempt notice to the Ministry of Defense and that will be very serious," the bench also comprising justices PS Narasimha and JB Pardiwala said.

The top court said the ministry had no business to take the law into its hands and issue unilateral communication to extend the time for payment.

"We have fixed March 15 and you had no business to say that the money will be paid in installments. Here you are not fighting a war. Here you are fighting against the rule of law. Set your house in order. This is not the way the ministry of defence to go about it," the bench observed.

**AAP terms Sisodia's arrest 'dirty politics', demand ex-LG Anil Bajjal also be probed**EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

AAP leaders Monday termed Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia's arrest "dirty politics" while accusing the BJP and the Union government of hatching a conspiracy to trap him and demanded that former LG Anil Bajjal also be probed since he had approved the excise policy.

Several AAP leaders and workers were detained on Monday after they clashed with security personnel in Delhi during a protest march against Sisodia's arrest. A special CBI court remanded Sisodia in CBI custody till March 4.

Senior leader Sanjay Singh lashed out at the BJP and the Centre, alleging the arrest was "nothing but the BJP's dictatorship" and that it was done to divert the public attention from the Adani issue.

"The leader who has been working hard for the development of the children has been arrested by the CBI. Manish Sisodia's house was thoroughly raided but nothing was found. This is happening to divert the attention of the public from outrage over the Adani issue," Singh said.

He described Sisodia's arrest as "dirty politics", and asserted that his party will



"not bow down" before the BJP's "dictatorship". The Rajya Saba MP further claimed that the BJP is "jealous of the AAP's achievements and popularity".

Singh also alleged that the BJP has been "harassing" those leaders and their parties who sought a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) probe into the Adani matter.

"Such explosive report was published on Adani, but the BJP always remained silent over the matter. Manish Sisodia has been arrested because the prime minister is scared of the Aam Aadmi Party. We are not corrupt and we are not scared of going to jail," AAP national spokesperson Saurabh Bhardwaj claimed.

**Remarks against PM SC extends interim bail of Pawan Khera till March 3**EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

The Supreme Court on Monday extended till March 3 the interim bail granted to Congress leader Pawan Khera in a case related to his alleged objectionable remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The Assam Police had last week arrested Khera in the case. A three-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud took note of the submissions of Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for Assam, that the state police wanted to file its reply. Additional Advocate General Garima Prasad, appearing for Uttar Pradesh, also said that she will also be filing the response in the matter. The bench took note of the submissions and fixed Khera's plea for hearing on March 3 making it clear that the interim bail, granted to him on February 23, will remain in force till then.

**RBI lost 46 employees to Covid related complications**EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 27

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Monday said it lost 46 employees to Covid and related complications.

The central bank mentioned about the deaths in the compendium on business continuity measures taken during the coronavirus pandemic.

According to RBI, it introduced a Special Ex-gratia Package and a Special Scheme of Compassionate Appointment for dependents of employees dying in harness due to Covid or due to post-Covid complications happening within six months of last such infection since March 1, 2020.

"As on December 31, 2022, dependents of 46 deceased employees were paid the ex-gratia amount and dependents of 32 deceased employees accepted compassionate appointment in addition to the ex-gratia package," it said. Under the scheme, ex-gratia was extended to the dependents of regular full time/ part-time employees.

In addition, the offer of compassionate appointment was also extended to either the spouse or any one eligible dependent child of full-time regular employees on fulfilment of stipulated age and eligibility



criteria.

To tackle the challenges posed by the pandemic, RBI mobilised at an unprecedented scale and speed to put in place a cross-functional response to safeguard lives and livelihood of the people as well as insulate the economy and the financial sector.

These measures were taken to ensure uninterrupted conduct of its crucial functions and maintaining business continuity; supporting its employees, service providers and other stakeholders.

"More than one hundred measures, both conventional and unconventional, were undertaken during the period. The effort was to be proactive and innovative, while remaining on guard to preserve

**"MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED MEASURES, BOTH CONVENTIONAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL, WERE UNDERTAKEN DURING THE PERIOD. THE EFFORT WAS TO BE PROACTIVE AND INNOVATIVE, WHILE REMAINING ON GUARD TO PRESERVE FINANCIAL STABILITY," IT SAID.**

financial stability," it said.

"An unknown virus, i.e., coronavirus, of the size of 0.125 microns, unleashed a once in a century pandemic and completely redefined our understanding of BCM," he said.

Das said through the troubled times, RBI had to continually assess and revalidate its readiness for uninterrupted operations, leverage varied data feeds for continuous monitoring, consider consequences and impacts of its measures, and design and implement rapid but coordinated responses across verticals.

"Our basic message was: RBI is tirelessly at work to shield the Indian economy from the pandemic," he said.

**EPFO sets May 3 as deadline for subscribers to opt for higher pension**EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

The Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) on Monday set May 3 as the deadline for subscribers to opt for a higher pension.

The Supreme Court on November 4 allowed another change for employees who were existing EPS members as on September 1, 2014, to contribute up to 8.33 per cent of their actual salaries - as against 8.33 per cent of pensionable salary capped at Rs 15,000 a month - towards pension.

The apex court gave a four-month window to enable opting for higher pensions. The deadline accordingly should have been around March 3, 2023, but EPFO only last week came out with the procedure for opting for higher pension under the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS).

"The joint option for employees who were in service prior to September 1, 2014, and continued to be in service on or after September 1, 2014, but could not exercise joint option under the Employees' Pension Scheme can do so now on or before May 3, 2023," EPFO said on its website.



## WORLD

## Oli's party withdraws support to Prachanda govt

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
KATHMANDU, FEBRUARY 27

Nepal's second largest party in Parliament - CPN-UML - on Monday decided to withdraw its support to Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda"-led government in the wake of a renewed political equation in the run-up to the presidential election, dealing a jolt to the two-month-old ruling coalition.

"A high-level meeting of the party held under the leadership of party chief K P Sharma Oli on Monday decided to quit the government and withdraw the party's support to the Prachanda-led government," Bishnu Rijal, deputy chief of the party's central publicity committee said.

The prime reason for the break-up of the alliance between Prachanda and former prime minister Oli was because the Maoist leader decided to support senior Nepali Congress (NC) candidate Ram Chandra Paudel for the President's post.

Paudel is from the Nepali Congress, an opposition party, and from outside the ruling alliance. Nepal's Presidential election will be held on March 9.

## Contemptuous remarks against judiciary

# Petition seeking contempt proceedings against Maryam Nawaz filed

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
LAHORE, FEBRUARY 27

A petition seeking contempt proceedings against ruling PML-N chief organiser Maryam Nawaz for attacking the judiciary and "maligned" judges of the Supreme Court was filed in a Pakistani court on Monday.

Addressing a worker's convention on Thursday, Maryam, 49, slammed three serving judges of the Supreme Court, including incumbent Chief Justice of Pakistan Umar Ata Bandial, and vowed to wage a war against them for being biased against her party's leadership.

The daughter of former premier Nawaz Sharif delivered the hard-hitting speech against the judiciary in Sargodha city, some 200 kms from Lahore.

Advocate Rana Shahid in his petition



submitted to the Lahore High Court said Maryam made "contemptuous remarks" in her speech.

It has never happened in the past that a politician in public rallies displayed the pictures of serving judges of the apex court and maligned them for their vested interests, he said, in reference to Maryam's displaying of the pictures at the convention.

She displayed the pictures of two Supreme Court judges, Justice Ijazul Ahsan and Justice Mazahir Ali Naqvi,

former chief justices Saqib Nisar and Asif Saeed Khosa and former ISI chief Lt Gen Faiz Hameed and said: "The people should see these faces as they were behind the conspiracy against Nawaz Sharif's ouster from power (in 2017)." "What you see on the screen is the cabal of five... those visible on the screen are responsible for Pakistan's crisis," she had said.

Not sparing incumbent Chief Justice of Pakistan Bandial, Maryam said: "You are not paying attention to your basic responsibility — responsibility to make non-controversial benches but you are doing something else." The petition also said Maryam accused the Supreme Court judges of paving the way for Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf chairman Imran Khan to return to power. He urged the court to initiate contempt proceedings against Maryam for bringing Pakistan's top court to disrepute.

## Journalists, police clash at Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
LAHORE, FEBRUARY 27

Chaos descended upon the Gaddafi Stadium, which was hosting a PSL cricket match, after a group of journalists were denied entry to the venue by police officials for wearing masks in solidarity with the slain journalist Arshad Sharif.

Sharif, 49, a former reporter and TV anchor with ARY TV, was shot dead in Nairobi on October 23 last year under mysterious circumstances, sending shockwaves across Pakistan.

On Sunday, television anchor Imran Riaz and his friends donning masks with the picture of Sharif were stopped by police from entering the Gaddafi Stadium, the venue of a PSL-8 match, despite having tickets. The situation quickly escalated after Riaz and his friends began to chant slogans to show their solidarity with Sharif. Video clips showed police officials and the journalists engaged in heated arguments after the police surrounded them and asked them to surrender their masks before entering the stadium. In the video, a police inspector was seen shouting to the journalists that wearing the mask showing the 'face' of Sharif on the premises of the stadium was a clear violation of the regulations of the Pakistan Cricket Board.

## Rishi Sunak declares new Brexit pact as 'decisive breakthrough'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 27

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Monday unveiled a "decisive breakthrough" in achieving a new deal with the European Union (EU) to resolve the post-Brexit trade dispute related to Northern Ireland.

After weeks of intensive negotiations, Sunak was joined by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for a final set of in-person talks in Windsor, south east England, after which the duo addressed the media to confirm a new "Windsor Framework".

It replaces the previous Northern Ireland Protocol, agreed by Sunak's former boss Boris Johnson to prevent a hard border between UK territory Northern Ireland and EU member-state Ireland but eventually proving unworkable and causing much tension between the UK and EU.

"I'm pleased to report that we have now made a decisive breakthrough. Together we have changed the original protocol and are today announcing the new Windsor framework," Sunak told reporters.

"Today's agreement delivers smooth-flowing trade within the whole United



Kingdom, protects Northern Ireland's place in our union and safeguards sovereignty for the people of Northern Ireland... and [removes] any sense of a border in the Irish Sea," he said.

Von der Leyen echoed Sunak's optimism to say that the UK and EU can now open a new chapter in their post-Brexit relationship.

They detailed "big steps forward" to deliver trade flow with goods destined for Northern Ireland travelling through a new "green lane" with a separate "red lane" reserved for items expected to move on to the EU.

"We will end the situation where food made to UK rules could not be sent to and sold in Northern Ireland. This means that if food is available on supermarket shelves in Great Britain, then it will be available on supermarket in Northern Ireland," said Sunak.

## 4 miners killed and 3 injured in attack

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
KARACHI, FEBRUARY 27

At least four coal miners were killed and three others injured when unidentified armed assailants attacked them at a mine in the Khost area of Harnai district in the troubled Balochistan province on Monday, officials said.

According to local authorities, the incident appeared to be a targeted attack by militants belonging to insurgent groups.

"The armed men stormed the mine in the early morning and opened fire on the miners working there. Four died in the firing while three others were injured," one source said.

The injured miners were admitted to the district headquarters hospital in Hernia.

Officials said the suspects also set 11 coal mines on fire.

The Levies force cordoned off the area and the search for the suspects was underway, officials were quoted as saying by Dunya news.

This is not the first time that insurgents have targeted coal mine workers in the volatile province.



## Italian PM to visit India on March 2-3

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni will pay a two-day visit to India beginning Thursday to bolster bilateral engagement in areas of defence and security, economy and technology.

It will be the first such high-level trip from Italy to India after five years. Meloni will be accompanied by Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Antonio Tajan and a high powered business delegation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Meloni will hold wide-ranging talks on bilateral, regional and global issues, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, announcing the visit.

Meloni will also be the Chief Guest and Keynote Speaker at the eighth Raisina Dialogue, India's premier conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics.

The Dialogue is scheduled to take place on March 3 and 4.

PM Meloni will call on President Droupadi Murmu in the afternoon of March 2. "Prime Minister Meloni's visit is expected to further strengthen and deepen the long-standing relationship between India and Italy," the MEA said in a statement. "Both sides will take stock of the progress on the key outcomes of the November 2020 summit, strengthen security and defence cooperation, work towards closer economic ties, enhance opportunity for mobility of talent and give strategic guidance to ongoing collaboration in science and technology," it said. The summit in 2020 between Prime Minister Modi and his then Italian counterpart Giuseppe Conte had taken place in the virtual format.

India and Italy are celebrating 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relations this year.

## ENTERTAINMENT

# 'Boycott Bollywood calls baseless'

Actor Ranbir Kapoor, whose upcoming film "Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar" is slated for release on March 8, has dismissed boycott Bollywood calls on social media as baseless. The actor was in Kolkata to promote his film.

"If you ask me about any call about 'boycott Bollywood', I really find that baseless. Films are made for entertainment purposes; we are not saving the world. So, audiences come to theatres to forget worries. They come to watch films on big screen, to have a good time," he told reporters here.

Though the actor did not specify the context of his comments, most recently, Shah Rukh Khan's "Pathaan" faced boycott Bollywood calls over the costumes worn by Deepika Padukone.

The actor, best known for his roles in "Barfi", "Wake Up Sid" and "Rockstar" among others, said though he was not offered any film on Ganguly, he is confident that a biopic on the cricketer icon would be special.

"Dada is a living legend, not just here but around the world. The biopic on him will be very special. Unfortunately, I was not offered this film." "For 11 years, I have been working on a biopic of Kishore Kumar - written by Anurag Basu. I am hoping that is going to be my next biopic."

Asked about the blockbuster performance of "Pathaan", which has earned more than Rs 1,000 crore at the box office, the actor said the spy drama's success has given a boost to the Hindi film industry.

Asked if switching over to a comedy is more relaxing and unwinding, Kapoor said, "I feel rom-com genre is very hard. You don't really have a character there to hide behind, you have to reflect on your personality." The actor, who is sporting a lean look for "Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar", also spoke about the hard work that goes into showing off a chiselled body on the screen.

"Every actor showing abs on screen is a very sad person, he does not have anything to eat for three months, so that he can achieve some abs," he said.



## Ananya wraps Motwane's upcoming thriller

Actor Ananya Panday on Monday announced she has finished filming for director Vikramaditya Motwane's upcoming thriller film.

The yet-untitled movie is produced by Nikhil Dwivedi.

Panday took to social media to share the news with her fans.

"And that's a wrap! @motwayne I can never thank you enough but I hope I made you and continue to make you happy and proud and to every single member of this team who has given everything they have to this magical film - I love you guys and I can't wait for the world to see it," the actor wrote on Instagram.

The thriller is currently in post-production. Makers will soon announce the release date and title of the film.

Panday was last seen in the Telugu-Hindi bilingual "Liger", also starring Vijay Deverakonda. Her future film line-up also includes "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan" and Raaj Shaandilyaa- directed "Dream Girl 2". PTI



## Kareena goes 'Uffffff' over Zendaya

Looks like American actress Zendaya has just earned herself a new fan and it's none other than Bollywood diva Kareena Kapoor Khan!

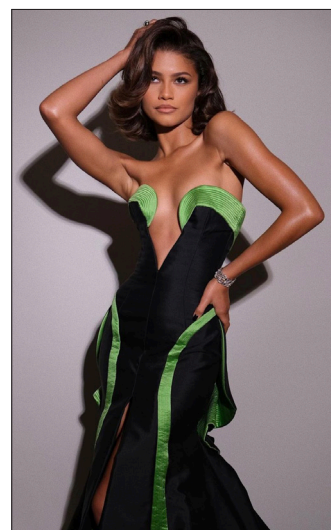
It so happened that Zendaya attended the NAACP Image Awards recently, where she was nominated for Outstanding Actress in a Drama Series (for Euphoria) and Entertainer of the Year.

While the internet has been swooning over Zendaya's stunning black and green dress from Versace, Kareena Kapoor couldn't resist fangirling either.

She took to her Instagram Stories on Sunday to share a video of Zendaya walking the red carpet at the recent awards show. Along with it, Kareena added a bunch of star emojis and wrote, "Uffffff."

In the clip, the Hollywood actor was seen walking the red carpet at the NAACP Image Awards in a vibrant green and black gown with a dramatic, ruffled train.

The NAACP Image Awards honour the accomplishments of Black entertainers, activists and political leaders. This year's ceremony was hosted by Queen Latifah.



# BUSINESS

## Advertisements should not mislead consumers: Centre

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

The Centre on Monday said disclosures in advertisements should be displayed prominently and not in the form of hashtags or links, in the interest of consumers.

Virtually delivering a keynote address at an event organised by the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) in Mumbai on Monday, Consumer Affairs Secretary Rohit Kumar Singh also stressed the importance of conducting social media advertising responsibly at a time when there are 50 crore social media users in India. There is a need for influencers and celebrities to disclose any material connections with advertisers that may affect the credibility of their representation, Singh said.

"Disclosures must be hard to miss and not mixed with a group of hashtags or links," he noted. For endorsements in pictures, the secretary said disclosures should be superimposed over the image, and for endorsements in videos, disclosures should be made in both audio and video formats. **PTI**

## Sensex, Nifty close in red for 7th straight session on weak global trends

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 27

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slid for a seventh straight session on Monday, logging their longest losing run in the past five months, following a bearish trend in global markets amid concerns over aggressive rate hikes by developed economies.

Fresh foreign fund outflows and losses in IT, auto and oil stocks also dented investor sentiments.

The BSE Sensex declined by 175.58 points or 0.30 per cent to close at 59,288.35 with 17 of its shares posting losses. During the day, it tanked 526.29 points or 0.88 per cent to 58,937.64.

The NSE Nifty fell 73.10 points or 0.42 per cent to end at 17,392.70 as 33 of its stocks ended in the red.

Sensex and Nifty fell for a seventh straight session, matching the seven-

### POWER GRID, ICICI BANK, KOTAK MAHINDRA BANK AND STATE BANK OF INDIA WERE AMONG THE GAINERS.

session losing run in the last week of September last year. In the seven sessions, Sensex tanked 2,031 points or 3.4 per cent while Nifty shed 643 points or 4.1 per cent to close below the 17,400 level.

From the Sensex pack, Tata Steel, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, HCL Technologies, Larsen & Toubro, Bharti Airtel, Wipro and Bajaj Finance were the biggest laggards.

Power Grid, ICICI Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank and State Bank of India were among the gainers.

"Bears continued to wreak havoc in

the domestic market as the latest data releases from the US heightened the existing worries of aggressive rate hikes. The personal consumption expenditure in the US, which is Fed's key monitorable of inflation, increased in January, pressuring investors to stay away from equities markets," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

In Asian markets, South Korea, Japan, China and Hong Kong ended lower.

Equity markets in Europe were trading in the green. The US markets had ended sharply down on Friday.

International oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.35 per cent to USD 83.41 per barrel.

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) offloaded shares worth Rs 1,470.34 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

Foreign investors have turned cautious and pulled out Rs 2,313 crore from Indian equities so far this month. **PTI**

## Gold plunge Rs 185 silver plummets Rs 798

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

Gold prices declined by Rs 185 to Rs 55,520 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid weak global trends, according to HDFC Securities.

The yellow metal had ended at Rs 55,705 per 10 grams in the previous trade.

Silver also plummeted by Rs 798 to Rs 63,227 per kg.

"Spot gold prices in the Delhi markets traded at Rs 55,520 per 10 grams, down Rs 185 per 10 grams," said Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities.

In the overseas market, gold and silver were trading lower at USD 1,811 per ounce and USD 20.75 per ounce, respectively.

"COMEX gold prices fell in the Asian trading hours on Monday to their weakest levels in nearly two months after recent hot inflation reinforced expectations that the US Fed will continue to hike rate in the first half of the year," Sriram Iyer, Senior Research Analyst at Reliance Securities, said. **PTI**

## Air India has 'enormous' potential: CEO Campbell Wilson

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

Air India, which is set to buy 470 planes for about USD 70 billion, has 'enormous' potential and efforts are on to make the group a significant international player in the aviation space, according to the airline's chief Campbell Wilson.

Against the backdrop of incidents of unruly passenger behaviour onboard flights and the airline's decision to amend its alcohol serving policy, Wilson said strong action is being taken against such instances of intoxication which is also a multi-faceted issue. "We straightened (alcohol policy) a bit to recognise the signs of intoxication... What has changed in a large respect is the practice of reporting and acting on intoxication... almost everyday there is an incident and usually it is a case of someone drinking their own liquor before getting onboard the aircraft or smuggling their own duty free liquor onto the aircraft and consuming it." This is being reported more often and we are taking strong action when it happens," the Air India CEO and MD said during a virtual media interaction on Monday.

He pointed out that the issue of intoxication is something that has been noted internationally and has been on the rise since Covid. It is something that IATA has called out, he added. **PTI**



IATA (International Air Transport Association) is a global grouping of airlines and Air India is also a member.

Last month, in a span of less than a week, aviation regulator DGCA had penalised Tata Group-owned Air India twice related to incidents of unruly passenger behaviour. On February 14, Air India announced placing an order for 470 planes, including 70 wide-body aircraft. About funding for the purchase of 470 aircraft, Wilson said it would be a combination of many things, including cash flow and financing by shareholder equity. "We will be exploring other opportunities such as sale and lease back of aircraft. It suffices to say that there are a number of funding sources and likely to be a combination of various sources," he added. Out of the firm order for 470 planes, 250 are from Airbus and 220 from Boeing. Among them, 70 are wide-body aircraft. All six wide-body A350s will join the fleet this year, Wilson said. **PTI**

## Essar to invest \$3.6 billion in energy transition in UK, India

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 27

The Essar group on Monday announced a USD 3.6 billion investment in low carbon energy transition projects in the UK and India including the production of green hydrogen and ammonia over the next five years, as it looks at a new phase of growth.

Essar Group, invested in energy, metals and mining, infrastructure and technology sectors, announced "the formation of Essar Energy Transition (EET) to drive the creation of the UK's leading energy transition hub in North West England."

"EET plans to invest a total of USD 3.6 billion in developing a range of low carbon energy transition projects over the next five years, of which USD 2.4 billion will be invested across its site at Stanlow, between Liverpool and Manchester and USD 1.2 billion in India," the company said in a statement.

The projects will include 1 gigawatt of blue hydrogen project being pursued by Vertex Hydrogen in the UK, a 1 GW of green ammonia facility targeted at the UK and international markets, and developing 1 MT of low carbon biofuels.

Vertex is building a hydrogen manufacturing unit at Essar's Stanlow refinery complex in the UK. The joint venture, in which Essar Oil UK holds 90 per cent, will produce 1 gigawatt



(GW) of hydrogen per year from two units from 2026.

UK's Progressive Energy holds the remaining 10 per cent in Vertex.

Besides, EET will include Essar Oil UK, the company's refining and marketing business in North West England and Vertex Hydrogen, which is developing 1 gigawatt (GW) of blue hydrogen for the UK market, with follow-on capacity set to reach 3.8 GW. It also includes EET Future Energy, which is developing 1 GW of green ammonia in India, targeted at UK and international markets; Stanlow Terminals Ltd, which is developing enabling storage and pipeline infrastructure; and EET Biofuels, which is investing in developing 1 MT of low carbon biofuels.

"In addition to the USD 2.4 billion investment in the UK, EET will also invest USD 1.2 billion in developing a cost-efficient global supply hub for low carbon fuels in India, including green hydrogen and green ammonia. Ammonia will be shipped from India to the UK, Europe and globally to meet expanding market demand for green hydrogen," it

said. EET's investment in India will help deliver on the country's emerging hydrogen ambition.

The Indian government's supportive regulatory framework is designed to help position the country as a leading global hub of green hydrogen production and exports, as set out in its National Green Hydrogen Mission, approved by the government on January 4, 2023.

Prashant Ruia, Director, Essar Capital, said: "The launch of EET is a major milestone in Essar's long-standing commitment to put the UK at the forefront of low carbon energy. We are excited about the opportunity to drive the UK's energy transition by producing low carbon future fuels which will help eliminate around 20 per cent of the industrial carbon dioxide in Northwest England. "In doing so, it will provide a blueprint for how traditional industries globally can be successfully transformed into hubs for the production of future energies."

Tony Fountain, Managing Partner of Essar Energy Transition, said: "EET's ambitious investment plans will not only help deliver the UK's net zero ambitions and the enormous environmental benefits therein, but will also secure the long term sustainable future for Stanlow, protecting and creating new highly skilled job opportunities at the heart of the Northern Powerhouse economy for generations to come." **PTI**

## SPORT

Cricket fraternity hails 'indomitable' Australian force; runners-up SA win hearts

CAPE TOWN, FEBRUARY 27

The cricket fraternity hailed the all-conquering Australian women's team for winning an unprecedented sixth T20 World Cup title, a feat that might not be surpassed in near or distant future.

The peerless Meg Lanning led Australia to another global title when they defended a score of 156 for six. Hosts South Africa put up a brave fight with opener Laura Wolvaardt scoring a combative 61 but eventually they lost the title clash by 19 runs.

Former English skipper Michael Vaughan was one of the first to comment on the Australian milestone.

"Australia's Women's team are absolutely fantastic," the cricketer-turned-commentator posted on his Twitter handle.

"Australian women's team are an indomitable force, and have been for so long. Deserved champions once again. What has been pleasing is to see that South Africa are heading in the right direction," remarked former West Indies pacer turned commentator Ian Bishop. **PTI**

## Swept away by the spin test, Smith and Co concentrate on orthodox cricket

INDORE, FEBRUARY 26

Ravichandran Ashwin's enviable record in Test matches at the Holkar Stadium could make the Australian batters rethink their strategy of playing the high-risk sweep shots, which brought about their downfall in the first two games.

Ashwin has 18 wickets in the two Tests he has played at this venue at an average of 12.5 runs.

Australia, who arrived here a week after their second-innings surrender in Delhi, turned up for the net session before their scheduled time.

They were slammed for their tactics against Indian spinners at the Ferozeshah Kotla with half of the side falling to the poorly-executed sweep shots on a slow and low surface.

Having lost the chance to regain the Border-Gavaskar trophy, Australia looked keen to learn from their mistakes in their three-hour-long training session.

Rather than going for the sweep shot, Steve Smith and Co concentrated on front-foot defence against the spinners besides stepping out to hit down the



ground.

Smith and Usman Khawaja were the first ones to hit the nets and batted for more than an hour against Nathan Lyon and Matthew Kuhnemann.

One of the best batters against spin in the Australian set-up, Smith's performances have been underwhelming so far and he will be keen to correct that in the game beginning Wednesday.

Lyon troubled both Khawaja and Smith as the duo looked determined to firm up their defence. Most of the aerial hits came off rookie Kuhnemann.

It was an hour of madness at the Kotla

that cost Australia the game despite fully understanding the implications of the sweep shots on those Indian pitches offering low bounce.

They will need to trust their defence a lot more and step out regularly to unsettle Ashwin and Co.

Such was their frame of mind on Monday that Khawaja and Smith returned to the nets for a second stint after all the batters had finished training. This time Khawaja and Alex Carey, who has been dismissed four times playing the same shot with a very low degree of success, concentrated on playing the sweep shot.

Marnus Labuschagne, Travis Head and Peter Handscomb faced off-spinner Murphy and leg-spinner Mitchell Swepson, who has reunited with the squad following the birth of his child.

Handscomb, who has looked the most comfortable against the spinners so far on the tour, came down the pitch every time Murphy and Swepson gave the ball some air.

Head, the most aggressive of the Aussie batters in Delhi, was particularly harsh on Swepson as he slog swept with the spin. **PTI**

Anupama, Aakarshi to clash in badminton nationals

PUNE, FEBRUARY 27

Former junior world number one, Anupama Upadhyaya of Haryana and Chhattisgarh's Aakarshi Kashyap will fight for the women's singles title in the 84th Badminton Nationals after winning their respective last-four matches here on Monday.

In the semifinals, Khelo India sensation Aakarshi ended third seed Adita Rao's challenge with a 21-9, 21-19 victory, while fourth seed Anupama prevailed over Asmita Chahal 21-18, 11-21, 21-18.

Anupama played a safe and calculative game and kept Asmita under pressure. These tactics helped, and she won four points in a row to gain a valuable 20-16 lead in the first game.

Asmita bounced back in the second and garnered eight points in a row. With an 8-1 lead, Asmita made sure that her opponent didn't make a comeback. Despite all efforts, Anupama managed to fetch just 11 points in the game.

The decider saw Asmita once again enjoying a 5-1 lead. Her smashes and accurate drops were quite effective and forced Anupama to stay near the net.

However, Asmita failed to take advantage of the momentum and, in a desperate attempt to increase the pace of the game, she lost control.

Several times she committed unforced errors, giving easy points to her opponent. On the other hand, Anupama was patiently waiting for the opportunity, and she received it in a crucial situation when the score read 20-17 in her favour.

Asmita was successful in saving a match point once but that was her only consolation, and again, an unforced error ended her campaign in the nationals. **PTI**

## WPL great platform to make India comeback: Poonam Yadav

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 27

Seasoned India leg-spinner Poonam Yadav believes the Women's Premier League (WPL) will not just provide a great opportunity to senior players to come back into national reckoning, it will also be a boon for young players to learn from international stars.

The Delhi Capitals player, who is hoping to take the WPL route to regain her place in the national side, added the tournament will take Indian women's cricket to the next level.

The 31-year-old last played for India in an ODI against Bangladesh in March last year and was bought by the Delhi franchise for the inaugural WPL edition for Rs 30 lakh.

The WPL is scheduled to commence on March 4 with the match between Gujarat Giants and Mumbai Indians.

"The experienced players can utilise the WPL as a platform to make a comeback and the youngsters will get a chance to showcase their talent in the tournament," Poonam said in a Delhi Capitals media release.

"We can also learn from foreign

players and they will learn from us as well. The WPL will take Indian cricket to great heights."

Delhi Capitals' star-studded 18-member side boasts of Meg Lanning, who became the most decorated captain in the history of the game after leading Australia to a record-extending sixth Women's T20 World Cup title with a 19-run win over South Africa in Cape Town on Sunday.

Having won five World Cup titles for Australia, Lanning surpassed compatriot Ricky Ponting's feat of four trophies and three by Mahendra Singh Dhoni in ICC events.

Delhi Capitals also have South African pace bowling all-rounder Marizanne Kapp along with the star Indian batting duo of Shafali Verma and Jemimah Rodrigues on their roster.

Top-order batter Jasia Akhtar from Jammu and Kashmir said she is relishing the prospect of playing alongside Lanning and Kapp.

"I switched off the TV when my name came up in the WPL auction. I switched off my phone for 15 minutes as well," the 34-year-old recalled. **PTI**

## RSPB, AISP, PSPB win in Hockey India Inter-Departmental C'ship

BANGALORE, FEBRUARY 27

Railway Sports Promotion Board, Air India Sports Promotion Board, Petroleum Sports Promotion Board and All India Police Sports Control Board registered victories on the second day of the third Hockey India Senior Men Inter-Department National Championship here on Monday.

While Railway Sports Promotion

Board defeated Food Corporation of India 2-1 in the opening match of the day in Pool A, Air India Sports Promotion Board beat Sports Authority of Gujarat Hockey Academy 14-0. In another match, Petroleum Sports Promotion Board defeated Canara Bank 7-3 to register their second consecutive victory in the tournament. In the last match of the day, All India Police Sports Control Board defeated Tamil Nadu Police 9-1. **PTI**

## Starc says still not 100 per cent fit but good enough for third Test

INDORE, FEBRUARY 27

Senior Australian pacer Mitchell Starc has still not '100 per cent' recovered from his injury but is ready to make an impact in the third Test against India beginning here on Wednesday.

With skipper Pat Cummins back home to be with his unwell mother, Australia will rely on Starc to provide the odd breakthrough and support the spinners.

Indian pacers have already made a substantial contribution in the series with



Mohammed Shami being the standout fast bowler.

"I am feeling fine. There's going to be a level of discomfort for a while. I don't

think it's going to be a 100 per cent for a fair while, but it's good enough.

"The ball is coming out quite nicely and I am bowling at full tilt. It won't be the first Test that I will play with some sort of discomfort. If I only played when I was 100 per cent, I would have only played 5-10 Tests," said Starc ahead of Australia's opening practice session here.

Like the Indian pacers have done for their team, Starc too wants to make a significant contribution. He bowled full tilt for an hour to Cameron Green in the nets. **PTI**