

## Patiala MP Preneet Kaur suspended from Congress

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

Senior Congress leader and Patiala MP Preneet Kaur has been suspended from the primary membership of the party. The suspension orders were issued today by Tariq Anwar, member of the Disciplinary Action Committee of the Congress party.

According to a press release issued by the All-India Congress Committee, the Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring had complained to the party president alleging that Ms Kaur was indulging in anti-party activities. He had sought action against her.

Some other senior Congress leaders, according to the press release, had also

complained to the high command against her. The matter was referred to the Disciplinary Action Committee of the party.

"The DAC carefully considered it (complaint against her) and decided that Preneet Kaur, MP (Lok Sabha) from Patiala should be suspended from the party with immediate effect and she has been called to show cause within 3 days as why she should not be expelled from the party," the release signed by Anwar said.

Preneet Kaur is the wife of former Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh, who has since joined the Bharatiya Janata Party. She is a four-time MP from Patiala and has also served as Minister of State for External Affairs between 2009 and 2014.

After Capt Amarinder parted ways



with the Congress and resigned from the party, she remained in the Congress. She continued in the party even after

Capt Amarinder joined the BJP. Although not actively involved with her husband's new party, she had maintained a distance from both the BJP as well as the Congress. She was not seen much in the Congress party programmes.

The PCC president, a vocal critic of Capt Amarinder had been continuously seeking her expulsion and even alleging that she was working for her husband against the interests of her own party.

Kaur is unlikely to offer any explanation and eventually she may be expelled from the party.

This will save her from resigning from the Lok Sabha membership. Since her entire family, besides her husband, her daughter Jaya Inder Kaur and son Ranninder Singh have already joined the BJP, she was the only person left in the family with the Congress.



## No remission for Sidhu

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

Cricketer-turned-politician Navjot Singh Sidhu will have to spend a few more months in jail as the Punjab cabinet on Friday did not remit his sentence.

The cabinet, which met today, approved the premature release of five prisoners that did not include Sidhu.

There were a lot of speculations that Sidhu might be granted remission this Republic Day as he had become eligible for the same. However, given his political position, it eventually led to his case being avoided for the time being. In any case, he will be eligible for release in April.

Sidhu was sentenced to one-year imprisonment after being convicted in a case of road rage. Sidhu has had an acrimonious relationship with the Aam Aadmi Party government as he was a vocal critic of the government both during his tenure in the BJP as well as the Congress.

While Sidhu missed it this time, in any case, he will be released by April. His release is curiously being awaited in Punjab after the Congress leadership promised a role for him.

**SIDHU WAS SENTENCED TO ONE-YEAR IMPRISONMENT AFTER BEING CONVICTED IN A CASE OF ROAD RAGE.**

## Rahul Gandhi writes to PM with 'message' from Kashmiri Pandits

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to look into the "plight" of Kashmiri Pandit employees who do not want to return to the Kashmir Valley without a guarantee of their security, and accused the Union Territory administration of adopting an "insensitive" approach towards them.

In a letter to Modi, Gandhi flagged the issue of the recent spate of targeted killings of Kashmiri Pandits and others by terrorists, which he said, has created an atmo-

sphere of fear and gloom in the Valley. He wrote to the prime minister, saying a delegation of Kashmiri Pandits met him during the Jammu leg of the Bharat Jodo Yatra that was aimed at uniting the whole of India in a thread of love and unity.

"They (Kashmiri Pandits) said government officials are forcing them to go back to work in the Kashmir Valley. In these circumstances, forcing them to go back to the Valley without any surety of their safety and security is a cruel move,"



Gandhi said. "Till the situation improves, the government can take services from these Kashmiri Pandit employees in other administrative and public facilities, the former Congress chief said in his letter in Hindi to Modi.

"At a time when the Kashmiri Pandits are pleading for their safety and families' concerns, and expecting sympathy and affection from the government, use of words like 'beggars' by the Lt. Governor for them is irresponsible. Prime Minister,

you may not be familiar with this insensitive style of functioning of the administration," Gandhi said.

"I have assured the Kashmiri Pandit brothers and sisters that I will try my best to convey their concerns and demands to you. I hope that you will take appropriate steps in this regard as soon as you get this information," he said in the letter on Thursday.

A Kashmiri Pandit delegation had called on Gandhi during his Bharat Jodo Yatra in Samba district and briefed him about their issues, including the "targeted killings" by terrorists. PTI

## Assets of 71 MPs grew by 286 per cent since 2009

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

The assets of 71 MPs, who were re-elected to the Lok Sabha between 2009 and 2019, grew by a whopping 286 per cent on average and the highest increase was recorded by the BJP's Ramesh Chandappa Jigajinagi, according to a report released by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) on Friday.

The total worth of Jigajinagi's assets, which was about Rs 1.18 crore in 2009, went up to Rs 8.94 crore in 2014 and further to Rs 50.41 crore in 2019, registering an overall increase of 4,189 per cent, the report noted, referring to the self-sworn affidavits submitted by the

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader during the Lok Sabha elections held in the respective years.

Re-elected to the Lower House of Parliament for a sixth consecutive term in 2019, the MP from Karnataka's Bijapur served as the Union minister of state for drinking water and sanitation from July 2016 to May 2019 in the previous term of the government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

According to the report by ADR-National Election Watch, another BJP MP from Karnataka, PC Mohan, grabbed the second spot in the list of the top 10 members of Parliament who registered an increase in their assets between 2009 and 2019.

**ACCORDING TO THE REPORT, THE ASSETS OF HARSIMRAT KAUR BADAL, THE SHIROMANI AKALI DAL MP FROM BHATHINDA, WENT UP FROM RS 60.31 CRORE IN 2009 TO RS 217.99 CRORE IN 2019, REGISTERING A RISE OF 261 PER CENT.**

Mr Mohan, who was re-elected to the Lok Sabha from the Bengaluru Central constituency in 2019, had declared assets worth about Rs 5.37 crore in the 2009

parliamentary polls. The figure climbed up to Rs 75.55 crore in 10 years, showing an increase of 1,306 per cent, the report noted.

The assets of BJP MP Varun Gandhi, who was re-elected from Uttar Pradesh's Pilibhit for a third consecutive term in the last Lok Sabha election, rose from Rs 4.92 crore in 2009 to Rs 60.32 crore in 2019, the report noted.

According to the report, the assets of Harsimrat Kaur Badal, the Shiromani Akali Dal MP from Bhathinda, went up from Rs 60.31 crore in 2009 to Rs 217.99 crore in 2019, registering a rise of 261 per cent.

"Assets of Supriya Sadanand Sule of the NCP (Nationalist Congress Party)

from the Baramati constituency (in Maharashtra) have increased by Rs 89.35 crore (173 per cent), from Rs 51.53 crore in 2009 to Rs 140.88 crore in 2019," the report said.

The assets of Pinaki Misra, the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) MP from Puri in Odisha, climbed by 296 per cent (Rs 87.78 crore), from Rs 29.69 crore in 2009 to Rs 117.47 crore in 2019, the report added.

It noted that the average assets of the 71 MPs, including independents, was Rs 6.15 crore in 2009.

The report pegged the average growth in their assets from 2009 to 2019 at Rs 17.59 crore, an increase of 286 per cent. PTI



## PUNJAB

# Cabinet approves new industrial policy

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

The Punjab Cabinet on Friday approved the state's new industrial policy that has infrastructure, power, MSMEs as its key focus areas and a slew of incentives for various sectors.

The new industrial and business development policy, 2022 shall be effective from October 17, 2022, the time when previous policy's period ended, and the new policy will remain in force for five years.

The new policy lays thrust on creating an enabling environment for the industries and businesses for balanced economic growth, job creation and overall development of the state.

The new policy is structured around key strategic focus areas -- infrastructure, power, MSMEs, large enterprises, innovation, startup and entrepreneurship, skill development, ease of doing business, fiscal and non fiscal incentive, export promotion logistic, stakeholder engagement and grievance redressal, said an official statement here.

The Cabinet had met here under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann. As per the policy, the state will develop 15 industrial parks covering general and sector specific requirements of various industrial sectors and 20 rural clusters across the state.

As per the policy, the state will also allow setting up of dedicated country



specific integrated industrial township to attract investment by allowing the infrastructure and other norms of the country.

As per the policy, the manufacturing of auto or auto components including electric vehicle, sports goods including fitness equipment, hand tools including power tools and machine tools, agricultural machinery and equipment, paper based packaging units, circular economy activity including shredding units, and one district one product have been included in the category of thrust sector for the purpose of higher fiscal incentives.

The fiscal incentives include 100 per cent exemption from stamp duty, 100 per

cent exemption from change of land use/ external development charge to the units in thrust sector and anchor units and 100 per cent exemption from electricity duty from 7 years to 15 years.

The policy also envisages investment subsidy by way of reimbursement of net SGST up to 200 per cent of FCI over a period of 7 to 15 years.

MSMEs are also being provided fiscal incentive in the area of technology, finance, marketing, environmental compliance, e-commerce and freight subsidy for exporting units and exemption from ground water charges.

The new micro and small enterprises,

exporting units and service enterprises engaged in providing research and development activities will also be provided 50 per cent capital subsidy on the fixed capital investment up to Rs 50 lakh.

In order to give a boost to the MSME sector, the state under the new policy will set up MSME Punjab, a dedicated wing of the Department of Industries and Commerce with a focus on setting up a common facility and technology centre.

For MSMEs, the state will also implement the World Bank assisted government of India scheme namely Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP). PTI

## Punjab Electric Vehicle Policy gets nod

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

The Punjab Cabinet under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann approved new industrial and electric vehicle policies here on Friday, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema said.

Talking to media, Cheema said that the Punjab Electric Vehicle Policy and the new Industrial Policy, both have been approved in the cabinet.

The approval of both the policies comes days ahead of an investors' summit to be organised by the state government on February 23-24 in Mohali.

Housing and Urban development minister Aman Arora, who was also present with Cheema, said the new industrial policy pitches Punjab as a favourite investment destination, adding that the chief minister has recently visited some states in the country to garner investments.

Talking about the formulation of new industrial policy, Arora said that suggestions of various stakeholders from the industry have been incorporated. He also talked about various incentives being offered to the industries including low power rates.

Arora also said that Electric Vehicles are the future and that government has already announced incentives for those switching over to electric vehicles under the vehicle scrapping policy.

Charging stations will also be installed on a large scale in the state, he said. PTI

## Petrol, diesel get dearer by 90 paise

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

Aimed at generating additional revenue, the Punjab government has decided to impose a 90 paise per litre VAT on petrol and diesel in a meeting of the state cabinet here on Friday.

When asked if any cess has been imposed on petrol and diesel, Housing and Urban Development Minister Aman Arora said, "Cess (VAT) has been imposed". He was speaking to reporters after the cabinet meeting.

"Cess (VAT) has been imposed because, for a long time, its need was felt.. and I think Punjab today needs revenue generation," he said.

When asked how much cess has been imposed, Arora said it will be 90 paise per litre on petrol and diesel.

The cabinet met here under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann.

"The Cabinet gave its approval for a marginal increase in the VAT rate levied on the sale of petrol and diesel in the state. The increase in the VAT rate will lead to a marginal increase in the price of petrol and diesel by approximately 90 paise per litre."

"This will bring more parity in prices of petrol and diesel in comparison with neighbouring states," said a Punjab government statement after the cabinet meeting.

Notably, with this move, the cash-strapped state government is eyeing to mop up additional revenue. This is the first tax on fuel imposed after the Aam Aadmi Party came to power last year.

Earlier in November 2021, three months before the February 2022 state assembly polls, the then Congress-led government in Punjab had lowered the VAT on petrol and diesel, making them cheaper by Rs 10 per litre and Rs 5 per litre in the state. PTI

## Sand, gravel prices slashed

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

In a major citizen centric decision, under the leadership of the Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, the Punjab Cabinet today gave nod to lower pit head price of sand and gravel to Rs 5.50 per cubic feet as this will translate into lower end cost for the citizens.

A decision to this effect was taken by the Council of Ministers, in its meeting held here at the Punjab Civil Secretariat-I under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister.

Disclosing this here today a spokesperson of the Chief Minister's Office said that in August 2022, the state government had fixed the pit head selling price of sand and gravel at the rate of Rs 9 per cubic feet including loading charges. In recent times there was a significant gap in the demand and supply of sand & gravel which was also hugely contributing to the rise in prices. The Council of Ministers has therefore, authorized the Director to review the



tenders, which were earlier terminated in specific circumstances, in order to increase the local availability of sand in the State. These contracts were originally valid only up to Feb-March, 2023 and as such these can be revived for only two months, during which time the supply will increase and at the same time the Department will strive to complete

the fresh tendering process. The Cabinet also approved the proposal of the Department to increase the sum of royalty and penalty charged from transporters of sand and gravel who are unable to produce any relevant documents at the time of checking. At present these transporters were being charged at the rate of Rs.3.50 per cubic feet.



## PUNJAB

# Punjab becomes first state to start biofertiliser lab

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

Minister of Welfare of Freedom fighters, Defence Services Welfare and Food Processing, Punjab, Chetan Singh Jaudamajra inaugurated the Biofertiliser Laboratory under Horticulture Department at Citrus Estate, Hoshiarpur, today.

Jaudamajra said that this laboratory has been built at a cost of Rs 2.50 crore under Rashtriya Krishi Vigyan Yojana to reduce the cost of chemical fertilisers of the landlords in the state and to protect the soil from contamination from chemical fertilisers.

The minister said that in this laboratory, 10 types of organic fertilisers have been produced through an MoU with ICAR-IARI, which will be made available to the farming community at district



level at reasonable rates as per demand.

Apart from this, the horticulture department will also provide necessary technical information to the landlords regarding

the use of these organic fertilisers by organising awareness camps.

Jaudamajra said that according to the information received from the Indian

government agency ICAR-IARI, the use of chemical fertilisers can be reduced by 15-20% with the use of organic fertilisers prepared from this state-of-the-art laboratory, which directly increases the income of the landlord.

The minister said the state of Punjab has become the first such state in India, which has established this state-of-the-art biofertiliser laboratory to protect the soil, water and air of the state from contamination and to increase the income of the landlords.

Jaudamajra appealed to the entire farming community to use the organic fertilisers prepared at this laboratory in their fields so that the environment can be protected from contamination.

Brahm Shankar Jimpa, Minister of Revenue, Rehabilitation and Disaster Management, Punjab, said that the construction of this laboratory was a major beneficial step for farmers.

## Undertrial commits suicide in Kapurthala jail

KAPURTHALA, FEBRUARY 3

An undertrial inmate allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself in the central jail here, police said on Friday.

Gurcharan Singh, 50, committed suicide by hanging himself with a cloth in the barrack's bathroom on Thursday night, said Kapurthala central jail Superintendent I.S. Dhaliwal.

Dhaliwal told PTI that Singh, a resident of village Bussowal in Jalandhar, was facing trial under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act and was brought to the jail on February 1.

His body was sent to the local civil hospital for postmortem. Police are investigating the case, he said. PTI

## New industrial policy a fraud, says Sukhbir

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal today said the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government was perpetrating a fraud on industrialists in Punjab by announcing a "new" industrial policy to deflect attention from its failure to provide a congenial industrial atmosphere in the State which had led to the flight of industry from Punjab to other States.

Terming the "new" AAP industrial policy as a knee jerk reaction and as one which did not provide any incentive to home grown industries, the SAD President said "The policy is mere hog wash. There are no quantifiable benefits. It is deliberately opaque on benefits except those to the proposed lone anchor units. There is nothing in the policy which makes it competitive with the policies of the neighbouring States. There is no reason why industry from outside Punjab should invest in the state."

Asserting that the industrial climate would get worse in the coming days, Badal said: "We are already witnessing the steady migration of Punjab industry to Uttar Pradesh. The next phase of migration will be worse as mismanagement of the power sector and PSPCL will result in severe power cuts in the summer giving a body blow to industrial sector in the state."

Asserting that investment in Punjab had been severely affected during the



tenure of the previous Congress government which had virtually dismantled the Invest Punjab department, Badal said the situation has become worse now. "This is because the culture of extortions has rattled the business community and sent wrong signals about Punjab both nationally and internationally. This is why despite a multi crore spend, chief minister Bhagwant Mann's trips both in India and abroad have been abysmal failures".

Badal said in stark contrast the novel industrial policy implemented by the erstwhile SAD government had led to record investment. "This was also because we created a one stop department under the name of Invest Punjab which gave all clearances under one window". He said the SAD industrial policy as well institution of the Invest Punjab department had been recognised nationally with Punjab being declared the number one state in ease of doing business. "Sadly, now we bring up the rear on all parameters," he added.

## Raids at 1,490 premises linked with Bishnoi, Brar gangs

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

In yet another massive crackdown against gangster-terrorist nexus, Punjab Police on Friday launched a special cordon and search operation (CASO) at suspected hideouts of persons linked with Gangster Lawrence Bishnoi and Canada-based terrorist Goldy Brar.

The simultaneous raids were conducted on residential and other premises linked to both the criminals in all the districts across the state. The operation was aimed at disrupting the nexus between terrorists, gangsters, and drug smugglers based in India and abroad.

Director General of Police (DGP) Punjab Gaurav Yadav said that over 1,490 suspected hideouts of anti-social elements linked with Bishnoi and Goldy Brar were raided during a day-long operation carried out by at least 200 parties of Punjab Police involving about 2000 police personnel across the state.

He said that the CASO was planned after the questioning of several persons in the recently busted modules backed by Bishnoi and Goldy Brar, besides, infusing fear among the anti-social elements and instilling a sense of safety and security among the common people.

Additional Director General of Police (ADGP) Law and Order Arpit Shukla said that several persons have been



detained for further verification and incriminating material has been seized from their possession, which is being further examined.

During the operation, police teams conducted thorough searches at the houses and other premises linked with these criminals and also collected the data from electronic devices, which will be sent for forensic examination, he added.

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

### Busted 25 terror modules

Punjab Police have busted 25 terror modules with the arrest of 160 terrorists and recovered 30 sophisticated rifles, 200 revolvers/ pistols, and 24 drones since March 2022. Punjab police have also succeeded in busting 140 gangster/ criminal modules with the arrest of 555 gangsters and neutralising two, and recovering 510 weapons and 129 vehicles used in criminal activities from their possession in the same period.



## REGION

# Jaish module busted in J-K's Kulgam, 6 held

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 3

Security forces on Friday busted a module of the Jaish-e-Mohammad in Jammu and Kashmir's Kulgam district by arresting six overground workers and recovering a huge cache of arms and ammunition, officials said.

Acting on specific information on subversive activities in the Mirhama and Damhal Hanji Pora areas, a joint team of police and the army arrested six terror associates, they said.

A huge cache of arms and ammunition,



including eight magazines and 446 rounds of M4 rifles, a pistol, a pistol magazine and 18 pistol rounds, were recovered on

the basis of the disclosures by the accused.

Other recoveries include a hand grenade, four UBGL shells, 30 AK rounds,

one magazine each of INSAS and AK rifles, two mortar shells, four walkie-talkie sets and a wireless set, the officials added. Preliminary investigation revealed that the terror associates were in touch with handlers across the border via various social media platforms, a police spokesperson said.

"The arrested accused were hell bent on vitiating the peaceful atmosphere in Kulgam district by carrying grenade attacks, intimidating innocent civilians, standoff fire attacks on PRI (Panchayati Raj Institution) members, minority communities etc," the spokesperson added. **PTI**

## 'State land being retrieved to benefit public'

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 2

The Jammu and Kashmir administration on Thursday said the encroached state land is being retrieved from the big "vested interests" only with the purpose of reverting it back for public use.

Chief Secretary Arun Kumar Mehta directed the Deputy Commissioners to safeguard the habitations and livelihoods of the poor and downtrodden.

He was speaking in a meeting of Union Territory Divisional and District administration to take stock of measures being taken to streamline the anti-encroachment drive.

Mehta maintained that these measures are aimed at helping common people.

"This land belongs collectively to the masses and retrieved land shall be used for the benefit of all of them," he said. He said no person has any legal right to usurp the rights of commoners.

The Chief Secretary pointed out that such measures should be supported by the public as the retrieved land shall be used for public utility such as hospitals, schools, playgrounds, bus stands, Industries and parking spaces.

"It shall accelerate all round development in J&K," he said.

Mehta enjoined upon the officers to develop Detailed Project Reports for carrying out developmental works on such lands at the earliest so that fruits of these efforts reach the masses. **PTI**

## Terror-funding: SIA conducts raids in Srinagar

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 3

The State Investigation Agency (SIA) Friday carried out raids at multiple locations in connection with a terror-funding case in Jammu and Kashmir's summer capital, officials said.

The SIA sleuths conducted raids in Parimpora, Jawahar Nagar, Natipora, Chanapora, Bulbul Bagh and Qamarwari areas of Srinagar, they said.

According to them, the raids were part of an investigation into a terror funding case. **PTI**

## CBI searches 37 locations in J-K

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

The CBI Friday conducted searches at 37 locations in six districts of Jammu and Kashmir in connection with alleged irregularities in the recruitment exam of accounts assistants in the finance department held on March 6 last year, officials said.

CBI sleuths swooped down at the premises of middlemen and other accused at 30 locations in Jammu in R S Pura, Karan Bangh and several other areas on Friday morning, they said, adding the operation was conducted in other districts including Udhampur, Rajouri, Reasi and Doda.

The premises of several touts who helped candidates in the selection process were searched during the

operation, officials said.

The CBI registered a case in November last year over alleged irregularities in the examination conducted by the Jammu and Kashmir Services Selection Board (JKSSB), officials said.

It has booked 20 people in the case, including Neelam Khajuria, a former member of JKSSB, section officer Anju Raina, and Karnail Singh, who was then a medical officer of the BSF frontier headquarters and also an accused in the J-K Police Sub-Inspector recruitment examination scam case.

The examination was conducted by the board on March 6, 2022, and its results were published on April 21 that year.

The results showed a high percentage of selected candidates were from the

districts of Jammu, Kathua and Reasi, leading to allegations of paper leak and other irregularities, officials said.

"There were allegations regarding malpractices in the examination and the Government of Jammu and Kashmir constituted an inquiry committee to look into the same.

"The report of the committee revealed the alleged conspiracy among officials of JKSSB, a private company based in Bengaluru, beneficiary candidates and others causing gross irregularities in the conduct of the said examination," the CBI spokesperson had said after the FIR was filed on November 28.

It was also alleged that JKSSB violated rules in assigning the task of setting question papers to the Bengaluru-based private company. **PTI**

# Jammu's Gharana wetland to get major facelift

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3

The famous Gharana Wetland on the outskirts of Jammu city is all set to get a major facelift with a focus on conservation of ecosystem and creating an attractive spot for bird watching, an official said on Friday.

Chief Secretary A K Mehta on Thursday laid the foundation stone for the all round development of the wetland, which is set to become an example of conservation of the ecosystem apart from being an attractive tourist spot.

Gharana Wetland Conservation Reserve is home to more than 170 species of birds like bar-headed geese, gadwalls, common teals, purple swamp hens, Indian moorhens, black-winged stilts, cormorants, egrets and green shanks.

During the peak season, the water body attracts nearly 5,000 migratory birds from Central Asia, Mongolia, Russia, China and other countries across the globe,



offering a great opportunity for bird lovers to .

Highlighting the importance of fresh water reserves like lakes and rivers, the chief secretary said such places are best

tourist destinations that attract nature lovers.

"Our endeavour should be to protect them along with making best out of their beauty and aesthetics," he said, asserting

that along with the nearby Suchetgarh village, Bagh-i-Bhour, this wetland would soon become a tourist hotspot.

Mehta urged the authorities concerned, to carry out a study on the ecosystem

health so that the conservation measures are more focused and result-oriented.

He stressed on taking measures to increase the water level in the water body and attracting more migratory birds coming from distant countries.

Besides developing the water body, the plan includes developing a large park, bird viewing decks, biogas plant, composting plant, wallowing area, STP, perches, reed plantation area and many more common amenities, said Chief Wildlife Warden Suresh Kumar Gupta, giving a detailed outline of the development plan of the Gharana Eco-Spot.

Commissioner Secretary, Forests, Sanjeev Verma said the department has carried out surveys of all wetlands in terms of their significance in biodiversity.

"The Department is in a process of conservation of all of them," he said, adding in the last few years, five of these wetlands have been added to the list of Ramsar sites by UNESCO. **PTI**



## REGION

# CDS Chauhan chairs high-level security meeting

JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3

Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, who was on a two-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir, chaired a high-level security meeting here, officials said on Friday.

The meeting was attended by Udampur-based northern Army commander Lt General Upendra Dwivedi and Director General of Police Dilbag Singh among others, they said.

Additional Director General of Police, Jammu zone, Mukesh Singh and General Officer Commanding of Jammu-based 16 Corps, also known as White Knight Corps, Lt Gen Sandeep Jain and General Officer Commanding 26 Infantry division Major General Gaurav Gautam also attended the meeting, they said.

The Chief of Defence Staff visited forward areas and hinterland formations in Kashmir on the first day of his visit and was briefed about the security situation by field officers.



On his arrival in Jammu this morning, General Chauhan was received by Air Officer Commanding, Air Force Station Jammu, Air Commodore G S Bhullar, officials said.

"#CDS Gen Anil Chauhan accompanied by #ArmyCdrNC, Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi arrived at Jammu. The CDS chaired a high level security meeting

attended by #ArmyCdrNC, DGP @JmuKmrPolice Shri Dilbag Singh, ADGP JKP, Lt Gen Sandeep Jain GOC 16 Corps & GOC 26 Infantry Div," tweeted A Bharat Bhushan Babu, principal spokesperson of the Defence Ministry.

Officials said General Chauhan later returned to Delhi after visiting Nagrota cantonment. **PTI**

## J-K terror funding case

# 4 Hizbul Mujahideen aides plead guilty of money laundering

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

Four people associated with the Hizbul Mujahideen on Friday "voluntarily pleaded guilty" before a Delhi court in a money laundering case related to the Jammu Kashmir Affectees Relief Trust terror funding matter.

Mohammad Shafi Shah, Talib Lali, Muzaffar Ahmad Dar and Musthaq Ahmad Lone told the court that they did not claim trial in the matter and accepted the allegations levelled against them by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Special Judge Shailender Malik recorded the statements of each of the accused regarding the plea of guilt and posted the matter for February 16 for further proceedings, including arguments on the quantum of sentence to be awarded to them.

The four accused, who are currently in judicial custody, were produced before the court during the proceedings.

"After making them understand the process, the accused persons have voluntarily agreed to plead guilty. All the accused persons are being represented by their

advocates who have also made them understand the process and consequences of pleading guilty," the judge said.

The judge also directed jail authorities to produce all the four accused on the next date of hearing.

The court had earlier noted that the case also involved Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) chief Syed Salahuddin and the terror outfit had created a frontal organisation in the name of Jammu Kashmir Affectees Relief Trust (JKART) to fund terrorist activities.

The ED, represented by its Special Public Prosecutor Nitesh Rana, had told the court that the accused persons, along with HM chief Salahuddin and others, laundered funds collected and received from Pakistan through different mediums for its expenditure and distribution to active cadres of the HM and other terrorist outfits, purchase of material used for explosives and terrorist acts and abetment of terrorist acts. The ED submitted before the court that the terror outfit was allegedly involved in funding around Rs 80 crore for terrorist activities in India. **PTI**

## HP BJP suspends 4 members for six years

SHIMLA, FEBRUARY 3

Himachal Pradesh BJP president Suresh Kashyap on Friday suspended four working committee members for six years for indulging in anti-party activities. The suspended members include Tek Chand Chandel from Nalagarh in Solan district, Anu Thakur and Mahendra Thakur from Anni and Balak Ram from Banjar in Kullu district. BJP is a disciplined party. Indiscipline would not be tolerated at any level," Kashyap said in a statement. **PTI**

## Cold weather conditions prevail

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 3

Cold weather conditions prevailed in many places of Punjab and Haryana on Friday with minimum temperatures hovering below normal limits. Bathinda and Faridkot in Punjab reeled under intense cold recording minimum temperatures of 5 degrees Celsius and 6 degrees Celsius respectively, according to the meteorological department.

Amritsar also experienced a cold night at 7.2 degrees Celsius while Patiala and

Ferozepur recorded a low of 7.8 degrees Celsius and 5.6 degrees Celsius. Ludhiana's minimum settled at 8 degrees Celsius.

In neighbouring Haryana, biting cold prevailed in Karnal, which recorded a minimum temperature of 6.2 degrees Celsius. Hisar recorded a low of 6.8 degrees Celsius.

Narnaul also experienced a cold night at 6.5 degrees Celsius while Bhiwani's minimum settled at 6.9 degrees Celsius.

Chandigarh recorded a low of 9.2 degrees Celsius. **PTI**



## Houses develop cracks in J-K's Doda, 19 families shifted

DODA/JAMMU, FEBRUARY 3

Nineteen families were evacuated after their homes developed cracks at a village in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda district, officials said on Friday.

The authorities also declared unsafe a mosque and a religious school for girls at Nai Basti village in Thathri, 35 kilometres from Doda town along the Kishtwar-Batote National Highway.

A few structures in the village started developing cracks a couple of days ago but the situation was exacerbated by a landslide on Thursday with the number of buildings damaged reaching 21.

"We have shifted 19 affected families to a safer location after their houses were rendered unsafe. We are observing the situation and taking steps as per need to ensure their safety," Sub-Divisional Magistrate (Thathri) Athar Amin Zargar told PTI.

The deputy commissioner and the senior superintendent of police visited the spot and assured all help to the affected families, he said.

Zargar, however, refused to compare the situation to that in Uttarakhand's Joshimath -- the gateway to famous pilgrimage sites like Badrinath and Hemkund Sahib -- that is facing a major challenge due to land subsidence.



"Comparing the situation in Nai Basti with the sinking town of Joshimath will be an exaggeration. We are faced with a

problem of landslide and geologists from Chenab Valley power projects and National Highways Authority of India have already inspected the site," Zargar said.

While some families have shifted to a temporary shelter set up by the district administration, many others have returned to their ancestral homes.

"We are making all necessary arrangements, including food and electricity, at the campsite," Zargar said.

Zahida Begum, whose family was shifted to a temporary site, said they lived in the village for 15 years and were surprised to notice cracks in concrete houses.

"There is panic among 50-plus households in the village. Majority of the structures developed cracks after Thursday's landslide," she said, demanding proper rehabilitation for the affected families.

Farooq Ahmad, another local resident, said 117 members of 19 families of policemen, ex-servicemen, defence personnel and labourers were relocated.

Nai Basti was developed about two decades ago and there was no such problem, he said.

"We request the NGOs and philanthropists to come forward and provide assistance to the affected people," Ahmad added. **PTI**

## EDITORIAL

The Express India NEWS

Punjab  
Congress needs  
introspection

Senior Congress leader and Patiala MP Preneet Kaur's suspension from the party, which may eventually end up in her expulsion, was a foregone conclusion. Her husband and former Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh, her son Ranninder Singh and daughter Jaya Inder Kaur are already in the Bharatiya Janata Party. She had not resigned from the Congress when Capt Amarinder resigned, as that would have required her to resign from the parliament also. This way, in case she is expelled, she will not need to resign from the Lok Sabha. She can continue as an "unattached" member in the lower house of the Indian parliament.

However, the problem with the Congress in Punjab is much more than the "anti-party" activities and the suspension of Ms Kaur. Her being in the party or not is immaterial as her entire family is already with the BJP. But what should worry and concern the Congress more is the unending exodus of leaders from the party to the BJP. Besides Capt Amarinder, a two-time Chief Minister and a towering and popular political personality, Sunil Jakhar, again a very popular leader, Manpreet Badal, Rana Sodhi, Gurpreet Singh Kangar, Balbir Singh Sidhu, Dr Raj Kumar Verka, all former ministers, and many others have already left the Congress in Punjab and few more are rumoured to be planning and negotiating.

It is quite convenient for the Congress leadership in the state to dismiss their leaving the party as "good riddance", but in reality it is a serious and severe challenge and setback for the party. All these leaders who have joined the BJP have strong and established popular credentials having won multiple elections. BJP as of now does not offer any promise to anyone in Punjab. The Congress high command will need to look at why the party leaders from Punjab are leaving the party and that too when the BJP does not offer any immediate incentive to anyone in the state. There are only 13 parliamentary constituencies and assembly elections are four years away.

If the exodus of the leaders from the Congress continues at the current rate, by 2027, when next assembly elections are due, the party might well find it difficult to find popular faces to fight the elections. And in case the BJP returns to power at the centre in 2024, it is going to be very difficult for the Congress to retain and hold back even the leftover leadership in the state. Congress has a strong grass-roots support base in Punjab as was evident from the response Rahul Gandhi got here during his Bharat Jodo Yatra. It only needs to set its house in order. There is a new belief gaining ground in the Congress in Punjab to get rid of the old guard and bring in fresh energy. That probably explains the lack of concern over the continuous exodus of leaders from the party. That exaggerated complacency might cost the party heavily. It must act before it is too late.

## Ukraine War

Lessons from Asal Uttar;  
1965 Indo-Pak War

BY MAJ GEN  
HARVIJAY  
SINGH  
(RETD, SM)

Pakistani President Ayub Khan (in 1965) boasted that obsolete Indian Sherman and Centurion tanks of World War II vintage would be no match for Pakistan's state-of-the-art American Patton tanks, and, dreamt of a blitzkrieg that would take his forces to Delhi. His dream was however shattered and Asal Uttar in Punjab became a graveyard of the Pattons. The foolhardy plans had failed to take into account the inspiring leadership, bravery and resourcefulness exhibited by the outgunned Indian Army.

The Pak offensive began on 6 Sep 1965. The Indian Armoured Brigade Commander issued strict instructions to his tank crews to wait until the

Pakistani tanks reached close to their hides before opening fire; the adage 'shoot them when you see the white of their eyes' describes the situation well. The Indian tank crews had trained hard for months to reach such precision and proficiency.

Some cultivated areas were also cleverly flooded and the enemy tanks channelized into 'Killing Areas'. While one 'Combat Team' fixed them from their hides, another rallied to the flanks and fired on them pulverising the Paki tanks like a 'sledgehammer battering ram'. In the battle

lasting 6 to 10 Sep, the pride of Pakistan's army, their Armoured Division was humbled by the Indian Army. Pakistan lost 97 tanks including 72 Pattons. Indian losses were 12 tanks.

The Pakistanis had boasted that the Pattons will turn around their fortunes in the war. Will the Ukrainians be able to turn around theirs in their war?

Russia being located closer to their industrial base will have an advantage of logistics and main-

tenance. This may not be an overwhelming factor because NATO facilities can come up in Poland and Hungary. Numbers surely are overwhelmingly in favour of the Russians; 100 odd leopards (two regiments) and six times of T-90. Russian T-80s and T-72s have not been included in this byte but they cannot be wished away! Their numbers are substantial; however, Russia's numbers

have not made much impact in this war so far.

Where will the Leopards be Deployed?

The West would cer-

tainly not want the Leopard to be used as a mobile pill box. They are here to demonstrate and prove their superiority over T-90 in what is the best for a tank and what has been missing in this war – maneuver.

Where would these two regiments get deployed?

■ Anything South and South East of Zaporizhiya would be difficult due to the challenge of providing a secure bridgehead over the Dnieper River and maneuver will be restricted by the North Crimean Canal and its branches.

■ Eastern Ukraine is good tank country: flat and open ground ideally suited for mechanized warfare, Leopards could hunt here. However, portions of South-western Luhansk Oblast, and areas of Donetsk Oblast are highly urbanized. What Ukraine or NATO will need additionally to make this gameplan play out successfully would be Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Short Range Air Defense Systems, Loitering Munitions, Electronic Warfare elements etc. Tanks do not deploy alone, they deploy as Combat Teams; all these elements are complementary to their power. Ukraine therefore needs to hone its tactical skills for combined arms operations before. Salivating over just 100 Leopards alone are likely to meet the same fate as the Pattons at Asal Uttar

India	Pakistan
Three armoured regiments with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 45 American M4 Sherman Tanks</li> <li>● 45 light French AMX-13 Tanks</li> <li>● 45 British-built Centurion Tanks</li> </ul>	Six armoured regiments with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 300 American M47 Patton Tanks</li> <li>● A few M24 Chaffee Tanks</li> </ul>
The Shermans and AMX-13s had 75mm main guns	The 46-ton Patton was one of the best and most modern tank then its 90mm main gun outranged the Indian tanks. Four inches (100mm) of steel armour plating kept the Patton safe except at close range.
Indian tanks were outgunned and outnumbered by a large margin	

Patiala royal family's formal  
closure with Congress

## OUR POLITICAL EDITOR

On Friday, the Congress formally suspended the Patiala MP and senior leader Preneet Kaur from the party, for what it called the "anti-party" activities. This was the culmination of a long relationship the Patiala royal family had with the Congress. She was the last person in the family to have stayed with the party, even after her husband and former Punjab Chief Minister Capt Amarinder Singh had parted ways with the party, formed his own Punjab Lok Congress and later joined the BJP. Her son Ranninder Singh and daughter Jaya Inder Kaur had also joined the BJP.

Preneet had opted to stay with the Congress for the obvious reason that she did not want to resign her seat in the parliament and face a fresh election. But she had tried to maintain a low profile without openly supporting her husband even during the 2022 assembly elections. She managed the affairs of the elections from the back end only. Obviously she did not campaign for the Congress candidate from the Patiala-I from where Amarinder was

seeking election. He lost to the Aam Aadmi Party candidate in a massive wave.

Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh Raja Warring had repeatedly been seeking action against her as also some other leaders like Manpreet Badal. Badal resigned from the Congress and joined the BJP recently. Warring had led an aggressive campaign against Ms Kaur saying she had indulged in anti-party activities. He wanted a clear message to be sent across. But as



Patiala. She got elected for the first time in 1999 and got reelected consecutively for two more terms in 2004 and 2009. In 2009 she became Minister of State for External Affairs and served till 2014, end of the UPA-II term. However, in 2014, she lost her parliament seat to Dr Dharamaveer Gandhi of the Aam Aadmi Party. Gandhi has since resigned from the AAP and was recently seen participating in the Bharat Jodo Yatra of Rahul Gandhi. He may possibly be the Congress candidate from Patiala parliamentary constituency this time.

Preneet Kaur has always been the face of the Patiala Royal Family. She is rather the interface between people and the family, always affable and accessible. No doubt belonging to the Royal Family is an asset, she worked hard and round the clock all through her political career. Even at this age, in her late seventies, she remains actively involved and associated with constituency work. Since her husband Capt Amarinder is not known to be much fond of meeting people, she filled the gap.

The Express India NEWS

usual it took one full year for the Congress party to make a decision. May be the party did not want to do it in the mid term of the parliament. With the General Elections only about a year away, the party apparently found action convenient now.

Preneet Kaur has been a four-time MP from



## NATION

**BBC documentary ban****SC directs Centre to place takedown records before it**

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

**T**he Supreme Court on Friday directed the central government to produce original records relating to its decision to block a BBC documentary on the 2002 Gujarat riots.

A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and M M Sundresh issued notices to the government and others on pleas filed by veteran journalist N Ram, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra, activist lawyer Prashant Bhushan and lawyer M L Sharma.

Sharma had filed a separate petition and it has now been tagged with similar pleas challenging the government's decision to block the documentary.

The matter is listed for next hearing in April.

At the outset, the bench asked the petitioners why they did not approach the high court in the matter.

Senior advocate CU Singh, appearing for Ram and the others, submitted that the government has invoked the emergency powers under the Information Technology (IT) Rules to block the documentary.

The Supreme Court said it is also a fact that people have been accessing the documentary. It had earlier agreed to hear



the plea taking note of the submissions of lawyers Sharma and Singh seeking urgent listing of the petitions against the government's ban on the two-episode BBC series using its emergency powers.

One of the petitioners has also alleged that the ban on the documentary 'India: The Modi question' was "malafide, arbitrary and unconstitutional".

Ram and others, in their pleas, have sought a direction to restrain the government from curbing their right to "receive and disseminate information" on the documentary. "All citizens, including the press, have the fundamental right to view, form an informed opinion, critique, report

on, and lawfully circulate the contents of the documentary as the right to freedom of speech and expression incorporates the right to receive and disseminate information...", the plea said and referred to several apex court orders on freedom of speech and expression.

The plea has also sought quashing of "all orders directly or indirectly censoring" the information, including those shared on social media. The plea has also sought a direction for the restoration of the tweets of the petitioners.

The contents of the BBC documentary are protected under Article 19(1)(a) (freedom of speech and expression) of

the Constitution, it said, adding that the contents of the series do not fall under any of the restrictions specified in Article 19(2).

It challenged the decision of the secretary, information and broadcasting ministry, to ban the two-part documentary titled, 'India: The Modi Question' which critically appraises the role of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was the then chief minister of Gujarat in 2002 when riots broke out in which thousands of people lost their lives.

The impugned directions were issued under Rule 16 of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules 2021 to Twitter India to block 50 tweets with links to YouTube videos of the BBC documentary.

The first episode of the documentary was aired on January 17, it said, adding that the second one was aired on January 24.

Sharma's PIL also sought action against persons who were responsible and involved directly and indirectly with the 2002 Gujarat riots.

On January 21, the government had issued directions for blocking multiple YouTube videos and Twitter posts sharing links to the controversial documentary. **PTI**

**Adani row: BJP MP Jethmalani slams Oppn call for probe**

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

**B**JP MP paron Friday dismissed the Opposition's allegation that investments by LIC in the Adani Group were made at the government's behest and said there was no justification to the demands for a joint parliamentary committee probe into the matter.

Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha proceedings were adjourned till 2 pm and 2:30 pm, respectively, on Friday due to protests by opposition members into the fraud-allegation-triggered rout in the group's stocks, with members in the Lower House demanding a probe by a joint parliamentary committee (JPC).

Wrongdoing in these investments, if any, would be probed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Rajya Sabha member said. **PTI**

**Ramesh takes swipe at 'Cong bashers'****'Arm-chair liberals stayed away from BJI but pontificated on it'**

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

**S**enior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Friday took a swipe at "arm-chair liberals" and "professional Congress bashers" who stayed away from the Bharat Jodo Yatra while continuing to pontificate on it, sharing an animation on them.

Taking to Twitter, Ramesh shared a 40-second animation with a Hindi voice over which shows the "home of an arm-chair liberal". The person is shown sitting on a chair while giving comments on social media, and finally the leg of his chair breaks.

The voice over urges the "arm chair liberal" not to depend on the chair always and "join the struggle".

"Message to the arm-chair liberals, professional Congress bashers and commentators, who stayed away from the Bharat Jodo Yatra while continuing to



pontificate on it," Ramesh, Congress' general secretary in-charge communications, tweeted along with the animation.

The Rahul Gandhi-led yatra culminated at the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee headquarters in Srinagar's Lal Chowk area with unfurling the national flag and a rally at the Sher-e-Kashmir stadium after traversing 12 states and two Union Territories in over 140 days after its launch on September 7 last year, clocking over 4,000 km. **PTI**

**Adani row: Oppn stalls Parliament proceedings for second day**

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

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

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

Speaker Om Birla's appeals to opposition members to stop their protests and sloganeering and participate in the discussions went unheeded while Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar said opposition members, who had trooped inside the well of the House, will be "dealt with".

Earlier in the day, Dhankhar rejected 15 adjournment notices filed by members of various opposition parties to discuss the Adani Group issue in the wake of allegations made against the



conglomerate by a US-based short seller.

Rejecting the notices, he said these are not fulfilling the requirements of rule 267 and are not in conformity with the direction of the chair on December 8, 2022. This led to strong protests from opposition members.

Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, Syed Naseer Hussain, Pramod Tiwari, Kumar Ketkar, Ameer Yajnik and Neeraj Dangi, John Brittas, Sanjay Singh, Santhosh Kumar

Pand Priyanka Chaturvedi were among those who had given notices under rule 267.

A discussion under rule 267 entails that all other listed business of the day will be set aside to take up the important issue raised.

Attacking the government, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said the Narendra Modi dispensation has been "stalling" the Opposition's demand for discussions on every issue which it feels would embarrass it. **PTI**



## NATION

# 2,000 people arrested in Assam in crackdown on child marriage

GUWAHATI, FEBRUARY 3

The Assam Police arrested over 2,000 people on Friday in a massive crackdown on child marriage, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The crackdown began early in the morning across the state and it will continue over the next three to four days, Sarma told reporters on the sidelines of a programme here.

The police had registered 4,004 cases of child marriage in less than a fortnight since the state cabinet decided on January 23 to take action, with the arrest of offenders and a simultaneous launch of an extensive awareness campaign.

The highest number of 136 arrests so far has been made in Dhubri where 370 cases have been registered, followed by

**THE POLICE HAD REGISTERED 4,004 CASES OF CHILD MARRIAGE IN LESS THAN A FORTNIGHT SINCE THE STATE CABINET DECIDED ON JANUARY 23 TO TAKE ACTION**

110 in Barpeta and 100 in Nagaon.

Those having married girls below 14 years of age will be booked under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and cases under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 will be registered against those who have married girls in the 14-18 years age group.

They will be arrested and the mar-



riages will be declared illegal.

If the boy is also below 14 years of age, he will be sent to a reform house as

minors cannot be tried in the court.

The priests, kazis and family members involved in the conduct of such mar-

riages will also be booked, Sarma had said earlier.

"Assam Govt is firm in its resolve to end the menace of child marriage in the state. So far @assampolice has registered 4,004 cases (of child marriage) across the state and more police action is likely in days ahead. Action on the cases will begin starting February 3. I request all to cooperate," the CM tweeted on Thursday.

Sarma chaired a virtual meeting with the superintendents of police in the presence of Director General of Police G P Singh on the state-wide police action.

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

PTI

## EC looks at strategies to enhance voter participation

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

As the Election Commission gears up for nine assembly elections this year and the Lok Sabha polls early next year, it aims to push voter percentage through innovative communication strategies.

In one of the initiatives, the poll panel, in collaboration with Subhash Ghai Foundation, produced a song "Main Bharat Hoon, Hum Bharat ke Matdata Hain" featuring celebrities from different walks of life who appeal to voters to cast their vote and fulfil their constitutional duty. The Commission said on Friday that the song is already beginning to gain traction on social media through celebrities and influencers.

"Within a week since its launch, the Hindi and multilingual format of the song has already got over 3.5 lakh views and 5.6 lakh impressions on four major social media platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube," it said.

The song is one such initiative of the Election Commission's Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation programme, which is the flagship voter education programme focused on inclusion strategies and action plans for enhancing participation from all voters.

PTI

**IN ONE OF THE INITIATIVES, THE POLL PANEL, IN COLLABORATION WITH SUBHASH GHAI FOUNDATION, PRODUCED A SONG**

## 'Victim was drunk at time of incident'

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

The Kanjhawala accident victim was allegedly under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, sources said on Friday citing her viscera report.

The Delhi Police has received the viscera examination report of 20-year-old Anjali Singh who was killed after being dragged under a car in outer

Delhi's Sultanpuri. The examination was conducted by the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL), Rohini, and the viscera report was received on January 24, said Special Commissioner of Police (Law and Order Zone II) Sagar Preet Hooda.

The examination is part of the ongoing investigation into the case, he said.

Singh was killed in the early hours on

January 1 after her scooter was hit by a car which dragged her for 12 kilometres from Sultanpuri to Kanjhawala. So far, seven people have been arrested in the case. Earlier, Singh's friend Nidhi too had claimed that she was drunk at the time of the incident.

Initially, six of the seven accused were charged under Indian Penal Code (IPC) section 304 (culpable homicide not

amounting to murder) but later they were charged under section 302 (murder), police said. The murder charge was brought against them after collection of physical, oral, forensic and other scientific evidence, they said.

Police have also suspended 11 of its personnel who were on PCR and picket duty on the route at which the woman was killed after being dragged under a car.

PTI

## Nearly 6.72L cases pending in courts for over 20 years: Rijiju

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

Nearly 6.72 lakh cases are pending in various district and subordinate courts for more than 20 years, government told Lok Sabha on Friday.

In case of High Courts, there are 2,94,547 such cases.

In a written reply, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said, "The number of cases pending for more than 20 years in the Supreme Court of India, as per the data retrieved from the Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS) as on January 27, 2023, is 208 cases."

"In case of the (25) high courts, there are 2,94,547 cases and 6,71,543 cases in the district and subordinate courts that are pending for more than 20 years as per data available on National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) on February 01, 2023," he said. So far as the reasons for



such long pendency of court cases is concerned, the Supreme Court has stated that there is no conspicuous rea-

son which can be depicted for long pendency of cases, he said.

"Pendency of court cases is a multi-

In case of the (25) high courts, there are 2,94,547 cases and 6,71,543 cases in the district and subordinate courts that are pending for more than 20 years as per data available on National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) on February 01, 2023

**Law Minister Kiren Rijiju**

faceted problem. Due to the increase in the population of the country and awareness of their rights amongst the public, filing of fresh cases is also increasing with leaps and bounds year after year," Rijiju said.

PTI



## WORLD

**IMF giving tough time: Pak PM**

# Admits failure to prevent Peshawar terror attack

ISLAMABAD, FEB 3

It has been a tough time for Pakistan. While the economy is reeling under severe strain as foreign exchange reserves are depleting fast, the terror attack in a Peshawar mosque has come as a grave setback for an already demoralised nation.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif himself on Friday said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was giving a "tough time" to the government during talks for the restoration of the loan.

The IMF mission led by Nathan Porter began talks on January 31 with the Pakistan side headed by Finance Minister Ishaq Dar for the ninth review of the USD 7 billion assistance package.

The prime minister made his remarks while addressing an Apex Committee meeting in Peshawar. The committee is the highest provincial body to deal with militancy.

While talking about the security situation, Sharif highlighted the economic challenges faced by the country and said that the "situation is in front of the entire nation".

"As I speak, the IMF delegation is in Islamabad and they are giving Finance Minister Ishaq Dar and his team a tough time," he said. The economic challenge at this point was unimaginable, Sharif



said, adding that the IMF conditions that the country has to meet are "beyond imagination", but it is mandatory to fulfil the demands of the fund.

Pakistan's central bank said on Friday that its foreign exchange reserves have dropped by 16.1 per cent to USD 3.09 billion at the end of the last fiscal week, the lowest in nearly 10 years.

The IMF after a successful ninth review would provide over USD 1.1 billion and the gesture would open venues for bilateral loans from different friendly countries and multilateral insti-

tutions.

Sharif also acknowledged the failure to avert the Peshawar carnage that killed over 100 people and called for "national unity" to tackle the menace.

"There is a need for unity across the political spectrum. This act of terrorism managed to breach the security check post and reach the mosque. We should not feel hesitant in admitting the facts," Sharif was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper.

Pakistan has been hit by a wave of terrorism, mostly in the country's Khyber



Pakhtunkhwa province, but also in Balochistan and the Punjab town of Mianwali, which borders the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Meanwhile, Pakistani authorities on Friday claimed to have made an "important breakthrough" in its probe into the Peshawar mosque attack by identifying the suicide bomber through his DNA samples, and have arrested a woman in connection with the attack that killed over 100 worshippers.

Ijaz Khan, the chief of Peshawar city police, said that the arrested woman is also assisting the investigators in the probe.

The banned Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has claimed responsibility for the attack. However, the group later distanced itself from the attack. **PTI**

## Chinese spy balloon spotted over US airspace

WASHINGTON/BEIJING, FEB 3

A suspected Chinese spy balloon, said to be the size of three buses, was spotted over the United States' airspace, the Pentagon has said, a development that is likely to further strain the already tense bilateral ties ahead of Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Beijing.

Pentagon spokesman Brig. Gen. Patrick Ryder said the US government has been tracking the balloon for several days as it made its way over the northern United States and flying over sensitive installations.

He told reporters on Thursday that the balloon was "travelling at an altitude well above commercial air traffic and does not present a military or physical threat to people on the ground." "NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) continues to track and monitor it closely," he said, adding the balloon was spotted over Montana on Thursday and is "said to be the size of three buses".

Montana, a sparsely populated state, is home to one of only three nuclear missile silo fields in the US, at Malmstrom Air Force Base.

"Once the balloon was detected, the US government acted immediately to protect against the collection of sensitive information," Ryder said. He said the balloon was travelling at an altitude well above commercial air traffic and does not present a military or physical threat to people on the ground. US President Joe Biden has been briefed about the incident, a senior defence official said, adding the Pentagon is exploring various options. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen Mark Milley and US Northern Command Gen Glen VanHerck have recommended not to "take kinetic action" because of the potential risk to the safety and security of people on the ground from the possible debris field, officials said.

"Currently, we assess that this balloon has limited additive value from an intelligence collection perspective. But we are taking steps nevertheless to protect against foreign intelligence collection of sensitive information," said a defence official.

US national security officials have constantly warned about growing Chinese espionage efforts and the balloon's presence in the US comes at a sensitive moment with Secretary of State Blinken expected to travel to Beijing next week, a significant trip meant to follow up on President Joe Biden's meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping last year in November in Bali, Indonesia. **PTI**

## 'Many more nations want to join BRICS'

JOHANNESBURG, FEB 3

Many nations across the globe are showing interest in joining the BRICS, a clear indication that the bloc has remained true to its values of strengthening multilateralism, driving reform as well as boosting global economic growth, South Africa's foreign minister Naledi Pandor has said. BRICS, an economic bloc that includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, was formed on June 16, 2009. South Africa joined BRICS in December 2010. South Africa took over the chair of BRICS from China at the beginning of this year and will host the 15th BRICS Summit from August 22 to 24.

"The significant interest in joining BRICS by many is a clear sign that BRICS has remained true to its values of strengthening multilateralism, driving reform as well as boosting global economic growth and stability," Pandor said, adding that these characteristics are of great attractiveness to many nations in different parts of the world. **PTI**

## British Sikh wanted to avenge Jallianwala Bagh massacre

LONDON, FEB 3

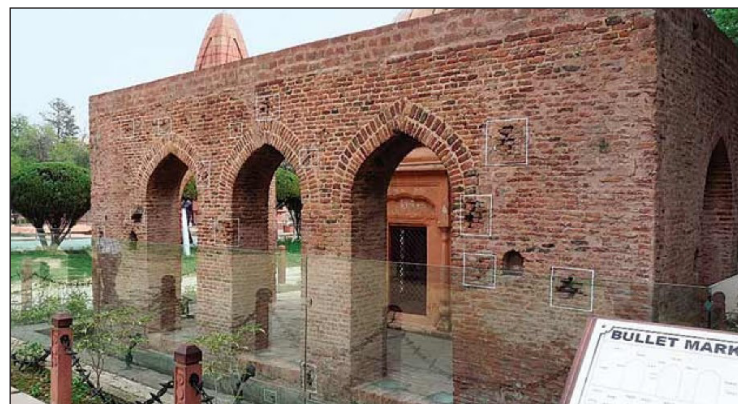
A British Sikh man who wanted to "assassinate" Queen Elizabeth II on Christmas Day in 2021 and was caught on the grounds of Windsor Castle armed with a crossbow has admitted to committing treason on Friday.

Jaswant Singh Chail, who identified himself as an "Indian Sikh", wanted to kill the late monarch as revenge for the 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in a social media video that emerged soon after his arrest.

Chail admitted to an offence under the United Kingdom's Treason Act at the Old Bailey court in London.

The British Sikh man, who is being held at Broadmoor Hospital from where he appeared in court via video link, will be sentenced by the court on March 31.

The 21-year-old pleaded guilty to an offence under section 2 of the Treason Act, 1842; an offence of threats to kill contrary to section 16 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861; and an



offence of possession of an offensive weapon contrary to section 1 of the Prevention of Crime Act 1953.

"He had made a video of himself stating his desire to harm the late Queen, which he sent to a group of contacts shortly before he was arrested," the Met Police statement said.

"Further enquiries into Chail uncovered evidence of his planning and

motives. Evidence recovered by officers showed that he harboured ill feelings towards the British Empire for its past treatment of Indian people," it said.

The Queen, who passed away in September last year at the age of 96, was in her private apartments at Windsor Castle at the time of Chail's intrusion on the morning of December 25, 2021. **PTI**



## ENTERTAINMENT

# Ranbir-Shraddha song lands in controversy



EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 3

**S**ocial media has been abuzz with talks around Ranbir Kapoor-Shraddha Kapoor starrer 'Tu Jhoothi Main Makkar' ever since the trailer of the film was released last month. While fans are going ga-ga over Ranbir and Shraddha's sizzling chemistry, the film has already landed in controversy.

Netizens claim the music of the new-age romantic comedy has been copied from some of the most iconic English songs. The track in question is 'Tere Pyaar Mein', composed by Pritam, sung by romantic melody king Arijit Singh and Nikhita Gandhi. The song has been penned by Amitabh Bhattacharya and was released this Wednesday.

A video shared by an Instagram account named 'surroorgasm' plays the song in which Ranbir and Shraddha can be seen sharing kisses amid the breathtaking locations of Spain in stylish costumes.

The caption of the reels takes a subtle swipe and hints at a lawsuit for plagiarism: "Tu sample ki huyi beat main lawsuit". As the video plays further along, it shows a clip from the cult comedy film 'Hera Pheri' where Johnny Lever says, "Sahab apka awaaz kahi dekha hua lag

raha". The next songs to feature in the reel include popular Hollywood tracks that 'Tere Pyaar Mein' has allegedly been copied from - Dua Lipa's 'Love again', Earl's 'All that glitters', White Town's 'Your woman', and most interestingly, 'The Imperial March' from 'Star Wars' where Darth Vader is seen walking and taking on opponents.

The video has garnered over 12,000 likes and over 70,000 views.

One netizen commented: "Trust Pritam Da to copy a beat and make it better than the original."

"Copy hi nhi kia to Bollywood kis kaam ka," wrote another one.

Another user wrote, "Pritam jhootha, T series makkaar."

"Pritam being Pritam. He lies, he cheats, he steals, he ends up making a few banger beats," said another netizen.

A Star Wars fan added, "Imperial March>>>>>> everything else".

Produced by Luv Films' Luv Ranjan and Ankur Garg, and presented by T-Series' Gulshan Kumar and Bhushan Kumar, 'Tu Jhoothi Main Makkaar' will release in theatres on Holi i.e. March 8.

The film marks the first onscreen collaboration between Ranbir and Shraddha with stand-up comedian Anubhav Singh Bassi is making his debut in Bollywood.

## I hope it gets its due, Kriti Sanon on 'Adipurush'

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 3

**B**ollywood star Kriti Sanon says she is "extremely proud" of "Adipurush", the big screen adaptation of the Ramayana.

Fronted by "Baahubali" star Prabhas, who features in the title role as Lord Ram, the multilingual period saga sees Saif Ali Khan in the role of Laksh and Sanon as Sita.

"It is just not a film for us, it is way more than that. I hope it gets its due. I have a feeling it will," Sanon told PTI in an interview.

There was some controversy over the depiction of Ravana in the film after the makers launched the teaser in October last year. The film was earlier scheduled to arrive in theatres on January 12 but the release date has now been shifted to June 16. It is directed by Om Raut and produced by Bhushan Kumar-led T-Series.

The "Mimi" star, who did not get to see Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayana" while growing up, hopes the film appeals to the younger generation.

"It is important to make these stories. It is educational for kids. I feel if I had not seen it then, today's children would also have not seen it," she said.

Up next for Sanon is action-drama "Shehzada" opposite Kartik Aaryan. The film is a remake of a 2020 Telugu block-



buster "Ala Vaikunthapurramuloo" and will release on February 17.

She is also reteaming with her "Heropanti" co-star Tiger Shroff for a futuristic action film "Ganapath" slated to release later this year.

Sanon is also excited to be collaborating with Shahid Kapoor for a movie, to be backed by Maddock Films and to be working with stalwarts like Kareena Kapoor Khan and Tabu in "The Crew".

PTI

## Tom Hardy, Zazie Beetz to lead 'Lazarus'

LOS ANGELES, FEBRUARY 3

**H**ollywood stars Tom Hardy and Zazie Beetz are set to feature in an upcoming drama series from streaming service Apple TV+.

Titled "Lazarus", the show is currently in the development phase. It is a co-production between A+E Studios and Range Studios, reported entertainment news outlet Deadline.

"Lazarus" is based on the 'Joona Linna' book series by Lars Kepler, the adopted pen name for Swedish authors Alexandra Coelho Ahndoril and Alexander Ahndoril.

In the show, an emaciated young man is found wandering along a train track. Thirteen years earlier, he and his sister went missing, presumed victims of the notorious serial killer Jurek Walter, to be played by Hardy.

To find the sister, police detective Saga Bauer (Beetz) must go undercover in the maximum-security psychiatric hospital where Walter has been kept since his arrest years ago.

The series will be written, executive produced and directed by Norwegian filmmaker Oystein Karlsen, known for shows such as "Dag", "One Night" and "Exit".

PTI





# BUSINESS

## Metal recycling holds key to export competitiveness: Gadkari

KOCHI, FEB 3

Union minister Nitin Gadkari on Friday said increased metal recycling can bring down the cost of auto components by a hefty 30 percent which will automatically increase the industry's export competitiveness.

Addressing an international conference on material recycling here through a video conferencing, the minister said the government has set a target of doubling the size of the automobile sector to Rs 15 lakh crore and creating an additional 5 crore jobs. But he did not give a timeline for achieving the target.

India overtook Japan to become the world's third largest automobile market in 2022.

The three-day conference is being organised by the Material Recycling Association of India, and is attended by over 2,000 delegates from across the world.

Noting that the country faces shortages in copper, aluminium and steel, he encouraged the recycling industry to get into joint ventures with foreign companies so that the scale of Indian industry which is highly unorganised can go up.

"We need to encourage recycling of material to reduce the cost of the finished product and we will make more exports and that is the reason that the government is propagating the vehicle scrapping policy. Increased scrapping can reduce the cost of auto components by as much as 30 per cent," Gadkari said, adding that next fiscal 9 lakh government vehicles will be scrapped.

He also appealed to the automobile manufacturers to set up large scrapping units and offered them concessions at



the forthcoming new dry ports in Wardha, Sangli and Kolhapur in Maharashtra.

Noting that the whole world is adopting a "waste to wealth" philosophy, he said the government will do everything to encourage more imports of scrap so that our shortage of key metals can be addressed.

By importing more waste tyres, waste plastics, auto parts, automobile units can make more value addition on one hand and on the other the cost of automobile components can come down by 30 per cent. To increase recycling, he said the government will set up a scrapping unit in every district.

With a size of Rs 7.5 lakh crore and employing 4.5 crore people, the auto industry is the largest contributor to GST, he said.

Circular economy is the future as it is going to create more jobs, create more wealth for the country and the material recycling industry can play a very big role in this. PTI BEN.

## Sensex, Nifty jump over 1 pc on banking stocks

MUMBAI, FEB 3

Equity benchmarks Sensex and Nifty rallied over 1 per cent on Friday due to heavy buying in banking and financial counters amid mixed trend in the global markets.

The 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex zoomed 909.64 points or 1.52 per cent to settle at 60,841.88. During the day, it jumped 973.1 points or 1.62 per cent to 60,905.34.

The broader NSE Nifty advanced 243.65 points or 1.38 per cent to end at 17,854.05. "Markets are rising, assuming that we are in the last phase of the rate hike cycle as indicated by the Fed statement," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services.

Some Adani Group stocks revived post the confident statement by TotalEnergies, a French energy company, raising the sentiment of the market, Nair added.

From the Sensex pack, Titan, Bajaj Finserv, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, HDFC, State Bank of India, Mahindra & Mahindra and IndusInd Bank were among the major winners.

HCL Technologies, Wipro and Tech Mahindra were among the laggards.

In the broader market, the BSE small-cap gauge declined 0.47 per cent and midcap index dipped 0.04 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, consumer durables climbed 2.61 per cent, financial services rallied 2.15 per cent, bankex jumped 2.02 per cent, services advanced 1.64 per cent and consumer discretionary

gained 0.85 per cent.

Utilities fell 2.79 per cent, power declined 2.24 per cent, oil & gas (0.88 per cent) and realty (0.53 per cent).

Elsewhere in Asia, equity markets in Seoul and Tokyo ended in the green, while Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

Equities in Europe were trading mostly lower during mid-session deals. Markets in the US ended mostly in the positive territory on Thursday.

International oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.44 per cent to USD 82.52 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) again offloaded shares on Thursday after a day's breather. They sold shares worth Rs 3,065.35 crore, according to exchange data. PTI

## India seeks tax on Amazon's cloud service fees to US

NEW DELHI, FEB 3

Indian tax authority has decided to charge tax on cloud services fees paid by Amazon to the US, a move which will lead to the company coughing up "significant" amounts in taxes including payments for some of the previous years, the company said in a

regulatory filing. Without sharing details of the decision, Amazon said it will contest the decision but it will have to remit a significant amount in taxes unless the matter is resolved.

"In February 2023, we received a decision by the Indian Tax Authority (ITA) that tax applies to cloud services fees paid to the US. PTI

## Broadband definition raised to 2 Mbps speed

NEW DELHI, FEB 3

In a bid to improve efficiency of internet services, the government has revised the definition of broadband connectivity, specifying a higher minimum download speed of 2 Mbps (megabits per second), according to a gazette notification. Earlier, the definition notified by the Telecom Department in July 2013 had benchmarked it to 512 kbps (kilobits per second) as minimum download speed.

"In supersession of the definition of broadband issued vide notification dated July 18, 2013 and after consideration of the recommendation of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), the Central Government hereby revised the definition of broadband as follows....," the notification said. The recent gazette notification went on to say that "Broadband is a data connection that is able to support interactive services, including internet access and has the capability of the minimum download speed of 2 Mbps to an individual subscriber from the point of presence (POP) of the service provider intending to provide broadband service." The notification dated January 25, 2023 has come into force with immediate effect.

As of November 30, 2022, India had about 825.4 million broadband subscribers, of which 793.5 million were wireless broadband users, and the rest wireline.

As per data released recently by the sector regulator, the top five service providers constituted 98.4 per cent market share of the total broadband subscribers at the end of November 2022. PTI

## No rail travel concession for senior citizens

NEW DELHI, FEB 3

The Indian Railways has not restored the travel concession of the senior citizens above the age of 60. The railways however, gave subsidies worth Rs 59,837 crore on passenger tickets in 2019-20, which comes to an average concession of around 53 per cent for every person travelling, Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw told Rajya Sabha on Friday.

The minister said concessions on top of this subsidy are still being provided to many categories such as handicapped, students and patients, but did not clarify if the government is planning to restore the earlier discount given to those above 60 years of age.

Months after a parliamentary panel recommended that the discount on railway tickets to senior citizens should be restored, the minister was asked in a written question about the government's



position on the concession which was suspended after the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

In a written reply to a question by CPI MP Binoy Viswam on whether the railways has taken cognizance of the parliamentary standing committee's recommendation to restore concessions in trains for senior citizens, the minister

said, "The Standing Committee on Railways has advised to review and consider concession to senior citizens at least in sleeper and 3 AC..." "Government gave a subsidy of Rs 59,837 crore on passenger tickets in 2019-20. This amounts to a concession of 53 per cent on an average to every person travelling on Railways. This

subsidy is continuing for all passengers. Further concessions beyond this subsidy amount are continuing for many categories like Divyangjans, students and patients on Railways. This subsidy is continuing for all passengers," Vaishnaw said.

In response to another question by BJP MP Sushil Modi, the minister informed that revenue foregone due to concessions in passenger fare to senior citizens during 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20 were approximately Rs 1,491 crore, Rs 1,636 crore and Rs 1,667 crore respectively. At present, concessions in passenger fare are admissible to four categories of persons with disabilities (divyangjans), 11 categories of patients and students, he said.

Between 2019 and 2022, the concession for passengers with physical disabilities cost the railways Rs 209 crore, for patients it was Rs 221 crore and for students it was Rs 60 crore. PTI



## SPORT

# Bengal set up clash with defending champions MP in Ranji semifinals

KOLKATA, FEB 3

**W**est Bengal will meet Madhya Pradesh in the Ranji Trophy semi-finals after the two teams won their respective quarterfinals. While Bengal beat Jharkhand, MP beat Andhra Pradesh to reach the last four.

Packed with impact bowlers, a formidable Bengal demolished Jharkhand by nine wickets inside four days to progress to the Ranji Trophy semi-finals for the third time in a row, here Friday.

Bengal had played the final in the 2019-20 season and after a COVID induced break, the team qualified for the semi-finals last year when it lost to eventual champions Madhya Pradesh.

In fact, defending champions Madhya Pradesh, which has been Bengal's "bogey team" for quite a few years, is again pitted against Manoj Tiwary's men.

Under new head coach Laxmi Ratan Shukla, Bengal's pacers Akash Deep (match figures 6/108), Mukesh Kumar (match figures 4/94), Ishan Porel (match figures 2/90) shared 12 wickets amongst



themselves.

Rookie Akash Ghatak (match figures 4/36) and seasoned left-arm spin bowling all-rounder Shahbaz Ahmed (2/45 and

81 runs) also played the supporting role to perfection.

This year's Ranji Trophy could be a special one for Bengal as skipper Tiwary,

also a junior Sports Minister in the Trinamool Congress-run state government, is likely to call it quits if they lift the elusive trophy after 33 years.

Bengal has played back-to-back Ranji Trophy finals without winning one.

Defending champions Madhya Pradesh completed their remarkable fightback as they beat Andhra by five wickets to enter the Ranji Trophy semifinals here on Friday.

After conceding a big first innings lead of 151, MP bounced back on the third day on Thursday by skittling out Andhra for a mere 93 in 32.3 overs in the visiting side's second innings.

Set a target of 245 to win the quarter-final match, MP were 58 for no loss on Thursday and they knocked off the remaining 187 runs in 61 overs on Friday to win the match with a day to spare.

The heroic efforts of Andhra captain Hanuma Vihari who batted one-handed in both their innings after a wrist injury went in vain as his team could not stop MP from reaching 245 for 5 in 77 overs.

MP will now take on Bengal in the semifinals from February 8 in a repeat of last edition's last-four stage match. MP had won that match by 174 runs at Alur, Karnataka. **PTI**

## Punjab on edge to reach Ranji semifinals

RAJKOT, FEB 3

**F**ighting half-centuries from skipper Arpit Vasavada, Chirag Jani, Prerak Mankad and Parth Bhut helped Saurashtra make a comeback in their Ranji Trophy quarter-final against Punjab on day four here on Friday.

Having conceded the first innings lead to Punjab, Saurashtra recovered to score 379 in their second innings to set the opposition a 252-run target.

Vasavada (77) and Jani (77) shared a 160-run stand for the fifth wicket before Mankad (88) and Bhut (51) shared a valuable 92-run stand for the eighth wicket.

The game is nicely poised going into day five with Punjab needing 200 runs with eight wickets in hand. Pukhraj Mann (17 batting) and night watchman Siddharth Kaul (2 batting) were in the middle at close of play. With the pitch offering a lot of turn, 2020 Ranji champions Saurashtra will back themselves to complete the job on Saturday. It will need a special batting effort from Punjab to reach the semi-finals.

Saurashtra got a shot in the arm when they removed the opening pair of Prabhsimran Singh and Naman Dhir, who both struck fine hundreds in the first innings to take Punjab to 431. **PTI**

## Praneeth loses in Thailand Open quarterfinals

BANGKOK, FEB 3

**I**ndian shuttler B Sai Praneeth's impressive run came to an end after he went down fighting to China's world number 23 Li Shi Feng in the men's singles quarterfinals of the Thailand Open Super 300 badminton here on Friday.

Praneeth, who had competed at the Tokyo Olympics, blew a substantial lead of 15-10 in the opening game to lose 17-21 23-21 18-21 to bring down curtains

on India's campaign here.

On a comeback trail, Praneeth, who has been battling with fitness issues in a forgettable 2022, erased a 2-4 early deficit to jump to a healthy 11-7 advantage at the break.

The momentum shifted after the interval with the Chinese dominating the rallies to narrow the gap to 14-15. He reeled off five straight points to move ahead and then sealed the issue comfortably.

In the second game, Praneeth fought back from 3-6 to move to 9-9 but then Li zoomed to 16-10. The Indian then slowly started making a comeback and roared back into contest when his rival went to net.

In the decider, Li jumped to a six-point lead at 18-12 after an initial battle. Praneeth again dug deep to bring it down to 18-19 before a backhand return to net handed two match points to the Chinese, who sealed it with a smash. **PTI**



## Young conquerors of under-19 Women's Cricket

NEW DELHI, FEB 3

**S**even months of meticulous planning by the National Cricket Academy (NCA) top brass ahead of the inaugural U-19 World Cup went a long way in India securing their maiden ICC title in women's cricket.

With India already being the most successful side at the men's U-19 level with five trophies, expectations were high from the U-19 girls.

With the event happening for the first time, VVS Laxman-led NCA was proactive in organising regular camps and back-to-back series in the lead up to the competition in South Africa.

It all started with a camp in June last year with all 25 probables, who were shortlisted considering their performances in the domestic U-19 event.

After that, the players competed in the



Challenger Trophy, a quadrangular series involving West Indies, Sri Lanka and two India teams, bilaterals against New Zealand before the five games in South Africa ahead of the ICC event.

It was crucial since the junior women players did not have much exposure of playing against international teams unlike the men's junior players.

According to team's fielding coach Munish Bali, who was also part of U-19 title winning squads led by Virat Kohli (2008) and Yash Dhull (2022) respectively, said the players got better with every game against international teams and peaked at the World Cup. "The NCA has to be given a lot of credit for how it prepared the players. Compared to the

boys, the girls don't get as many games at the age-group level but the BCCI made sure they got the best possible training cum competition exposure," said Bali.

The other members of the support staff were head coach Nooshin Al Khadeer, batting coach Apurva Desai and bowling coach Rajiv Dutta.

The likes of Shweta Sehrawat, Parshavi Chopra, Archana Devi, Mannat Kashyap and Titas Sadhu become overnight stars with their exploits in South Africa but Bali feels they still have a long way to go. "All the players have the talent, now women's IPL will give them a big boost. We need to see how they perform there and get ready for the big stage. It is the only beginning but the future is bright," Bali told PTI.

The fielding coach revealed even the players, who didn't get to play regularly, could be stars of the future. **PTI**