

## 20,000 dead Digging and counting

ANTAKYA, TURKEY/JANDARIS, SYRIA,  
FEBRUARY 9

**A**s people are digging and counting their dead out of the rubble, the earthquake death toll in Syria and Turkey has crossed 20,000, reports Reuters.

Cold, hunger and despair gripped hundreds of thousands of people left homeless after the earthquakes that struck Turkey and Syria three days ago as the death toll continues to mount.

The death toll across both countries has now surpassed the more than 17,000 killed in 1999 when a similarly powerful quake hit northwest Turkey.

With anger simmering over the slow delivery of aid and delays in getting the rescue effort underway, it is bound to play into the vote should it still go ahead.

In Syria's Idlib province, Munira Mohammad, a mother-of-four who had fled Aleppo after the quake, said: "It is all children here, and we need heating and supplies, last night we couldn't sleep because it was so cold. It is very bad."

Hundreds of thousands of people across both countries have been left



homeless in the middle of winter. Many have camped out in makeshift shelters in supermarket car parks, mosques, roadsides or amid the ruins, often desperate for food, water and heat

Authorities say some 6,500 buildings in Turkey collapsed and countless more were damaged.

The confirmed death toll in Turkey rose to 16,546 on Thursday, Erdogan said. In

Syria, already devastated by nearly 12 years of civil war, more than 3,000 people have died, according to the government and a rescue service in the rebel-held northwest. In the devastated Syrian town of

Jandaris, Ibrahim Khalil Menkaween walked in the rubble-strewn streets clutching a white body bag. He said he had lost seven members of his family including his wife and two of his brothers.

"I'm holding this bag for when they bring out my brother, and my brother's young son, and both of their wives, so we can pack them in bags," he said. "The situation is very bad. And there is no aid."

There were still some signs of hope.

A two-year-old boy was picked out of the rubble by a Romanian and Polish rescue team in Hatay 79 hours after the quake, video released by Turkey's Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) on Thursday showed.

The boy, wearing a blue, white and black striped sweater, cried as he was gently lifted from the hole where he had been trapped. He was carried away on a blanket. No other details were immediately available.

Another video from IHH showed a helmeted and dust-streaked rescuer weeping with emotion after successfully freeing a little girl from the rubble of a collapsed building in Kahramanmaraş. **PTI**

## China violated sovereignty of nations across 5 continents: US

WASHINGTON/BEIJING, FEBRUARY 9

**C**hina has violated the sovereignty of not just the United States but of countries across five continents, Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said, days after American fighter jets shot down a Chinese surveillance balloon.

Earlier this week, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman briefed diplomats from about 40 friendly nations, including India, Japan and Australia, over the Chinese surveillance balloon.

The huge balloon was shot down on by a US fighter jet on Saturday off the coast of South Carolina in the Atlantic Ocean. It had hovered over continental America for several days after entering the US airspace on January 30 in Montana.

US officials have described the balloon as being about 60m tall, with the payload portion comparable in size to a regional aircraft.

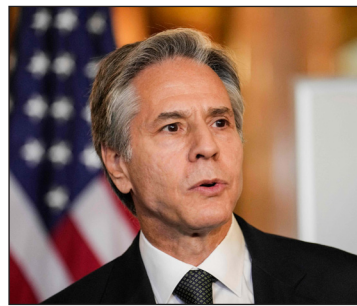
China has acknowledged that the balloon was theirs but denied that it was for surveillance purposes rather than weather monitoring and that it had drifted off course.

The US, however, has asserted that it has enough evidence to prove that this was a surveillance balloon. It accused China of intruding on its sovereignty and violating international laws.

China on the other hand has alleged that the United States has violated international law by shooting down its balloon.

According to a report of The Washington Post, based on interviews with several anonymous defence and intelligence officials, China has operated a fleet of spy balloons targeting several countries including India and Japan.

At a joint news briefing on Wednesday with the visiting NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Blinken said, "The United States was not the only target of this broader programme which has violated the sovereignty of countries across five continents." "In our engagements, we are again hearing from our partners that the world expects China and the United States to manage our relationship responsibly. That's precisely what we've set out to do. We continue to urge China to do the same," he told reporters.



**THE US, HOWEVER, HAS ASSERTED THAT IT HAS ENOUGH EVIDENCE TO PROVE THAT THIS WAS A SURVEILLANCE BALLOON.**

Reacting to the statements from Washington, China on Thursday repeated its stand that the large unmanned balloon was a civilian meteorological airship that had accidentally blown off course and that the US had "overreacted" by shooting it down.

Responding to questions at a foreign

ministry briefing in Beijing, ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said that she has not heard of China possessing a "fleet of balloons." "I am not aware of any 'fleet of balloons'," Mao said.

"That narrative is probably part of the information and public opinion warfare the US has waged on China. As to who is the world's number one country of spying, eavesdropping and surveillance, that is plainly visible to the international community," she said, referring to the US.

On Tuesday, the Pentagon said that China has declined Washington's request for a telephonic call between US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and his Beijing counterpart Gen Wei Fenghe.

On Wednesday, Stoltenberg said the Chinese balloon over the United States confirms a pattern of Chinese behaviour, and it has been seen that Beijing over the last few years has invested heavily in new military capabilities, including different types of surveillance and intelligence platforms.

"We have also seen increased Chinese intelligence activities in Europe – again,

different platforms. They use satellites, cyber, and as we've seen over the United States, also balloons.

"So, we have to be vigilant. We need to be aware of the constant risk of Chinese intelligence and then step up what we do to protect ourselves," the NATO secretary general said while highlighting that security is not regional but global.

What happens in Asia matters for Europe, and what happens in Europe matters for Asia and also North America, he said.

"This message was confirmed during my visit to Japan and South Korea last week, where those close partners of NATO very much highlighted the importance of strengthening the cooperation between NATO and our partners in the Indo-Pacific to address the challenges that China poses to our security, values, and interests," Stoltenberg said.

Defense Department Spokesperson Gen Pat Ryder told reporters at a Pentagon news conference that the US is in the process of updating its international allies and partners. **PTI**



## PUNJAB

# Protesters snatched tear gas handgun, ammunition; tried to kill cops: FIR

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 9

Protesters allegedly snatched a teargas handgun, its ammunition and attempted to kill policemen amid raising of pro-Khalistan slogans during a violent clash with the Chandigarh Police, according to an FIR.

The Chandigarh Police lodged the FIR Wednesday late night in connection with the clash in which around 30 policemen, including the Rapid Action Force personnel, were injured while several police vehicles were damaged.

The incident took place on Wednesday at Sector 52-53 at the Chandigarh-Mohali border when protestors tried to force their way to reach Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann's official residence here.

Police have named seven persons, associated with the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha that is spearheading the protest, in the FIR, and many unidentified persons have been booked under 17 sections including 307 (attempt to murder) of the Indian Penal Code, the Arms Act and the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, according to the Chandigarh Police First Information Report.

The protestors seeking the release of Sikh prisoners on Wednesday had



attacked police personnel and damaged a water cannon vehicle, a "vajra" (riot-control vehicle), two police jeeps, a fire-fighting vehicle and some other vehicles with swords and sticks.

The FIR said the protestors deliberately damaged police vehicles and other police equipment.

It said amid the raising of pro-Khalistan slogans, some protestors on tractors and horses attacked policemen with sticks, swords and spears with the intention to kill them.

Several police personnel who sustained injuries ran to save their lives, according to the FIR.

Had they (policemen) not saved their lives by running away, the protestors would have killed them, it added.

As per the FIR, a tear gas handgun, ammunition from the 'vajra' vehicle and several equipment lying in the vehicles of Rapid Action Force were taken away by the protestors, while around 20 police

barricades were damaged.

The FIR has been lodged on the complaint of Inspector Davinder Singh, the station house officer of Sector 34 police station.

Among those who have been booked included Gurcharan Singh, Balwinder Singh, Amar Singh Chahal, Dilsher Singh Jandiala, all associated with the Qaumi Insaaf Morcha.

The Chandigarh Police has also released the CCTV footage of the incident, in which several protestors, carrying swords and sticks, could be seen attacking police vehicles.

On Monday and Tuesday, the protestors had tried to move towards Chandigarh but were detained by police.

Nihangs (Sikhs armed with traditional weapons), members of several Sikh bodies and others participated in the march.

The protestors have been seeking the release of Sikh prisoners, including Balwant Singh Rajoana, a convict in former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh's assassination, and Devinderpal Singh Bhullar, a 1993 Delhi bomb blast convict.

They are also seeking "justice" in the 2015 sacrilege and police-firing incidents in Faridkot. **PTI**

## 'Water Dept resolved 98% complaints in last 11 months'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 9

Punjab Water Supply and Sanitation Minister Bram Shanker Jimpa today informed that about 98 percent of the complaints received in the Shikayat Nivaran Kender (SNK) of the department during the last 11 months have been resolved. He said it is the priority of the state government to provide clean drinking water in the villages of the state and for this purpose the department is working with all sincerity and diligence. He said that many schemes are also being initiated to keep the villages clean and garbage free.

Jimpa said that on toll free number 1800-180-2468 issued by the department, 18,693 complaints have been registered from March 1, 2022 to February 6, 2023 regarding water supply, RO plants, sewage, individual household latrine and others. Out of these, 18,308 complaints

have been redressed with the rate of redressal being 97.94 percent.

He further said that after resolving the complaint, feedback is also taken from the complainant and if he/ she is not satisfied, appropriate action is taken again on his/ her complaint.

The minister said that the state government is making all efforts to provide clean drinking water and adequate sewage facilities to the residents of State villages. He said that as per the instructions of Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, the Department of Water Supply and Sanitation has also started an online Janta Darbar so that citizens can raise their complaints and problems directly before the Minister.

Jimpa said that if any village resident has any kind of complaint or suggestion regarding water supply and sanitation, then he/she should not hesitate to submit his/her views. The State Government will leave no stone unturned for people's welfare and lifting the standard of living, added Jimpa.

## 15 kg heroin, Rs 8.40 lakh cash seized from juvenile

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 9

A 17-year-old boy was apprehended in Amritsar after 15 kg heroin and Rs 8.40 lakh cash were found in his possession, a top police official said on Thursday.

The juvenile was held at a checkpoint on Ram Tirath Road in the city by teams of the Counter Intelligence (CI) unit of Amritsar based on human inputs, Director General of Punjab Police Gaurav Yadav said.

The juvenile, along with an accomplice identified as Resham Singh of Khasa village in Amritsar, was going to deliver the drug consignment, he said. Resham Singh, who prima-facie seems to be the mastermind behind the narcotics smuggling racket, managed to flee, Yadav added.

## VB nabs ASE for taking Rs 15 lakh bribe

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH FEBRUARY 9

The Punjab Vigilance Bureau (VB) during its anti-corruption campaign on Thursday, arrested an Additional Superintendent Engineer (ASE), Sukhwinder Singh Multani, posted at Jalandhar for taking a bribe of Rs 15 lakh and demanding more money of Rs 20 lakh.

Disclosing this here today, a spokesperson of the VB said this case has been registered against the above said PSPCL officer, who was earlier posted as Executive Engineer (Xen) Technical Audit, PSPCL Jalandhar, on the complainant of Sharanjeet Singh, store keeper, PSPCL Verka, in Amritsar. The complainant had lodged an online complaint along with evidence in audio-video format on the chief minister's anti-corruption action line.

Giving details, he added that the complainant has alleged that the above said officer had already taken Rs 15 lakh as a bribe, when he was Xen, to send an inspection report of store inventory in his favour and now demanding Rs 20 lakh

**THE COMPLAINANT HAD LODGED AN ONLINE COMPLAINT ALONG WITH EVIDENCE IN AUDIO-VIDEO FORMAT ON THE CHIEF MINISTER'S ANTI-CORRUPTION ACTION LINE.**

more to recommend his reinstatement on the job as the complainant was suspended on the basis of stock verification report. The complainant has recorded the entire conversation as evidence which has been submitted to the VB to probe into the gratification matter.

The spokesperson informed that the VB has investigated the allegations levelled in the online complaint and registered a corruption case against the above said PSPCL officer after finding him guilty for taking a bribe of Rs 15 lakh in three instalments and demanding Rs 20 lakh more from the complainant.

A case under prevention of corruption act has been registered against the accused officer at VB police station Amritsar.



# PUNJAB

## 'Give Chandigarh back to Punjab'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 9

Senior Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Harsimrat Kaur Badal today demanded that Chandigarh be handed back to Punjab.

Participating in the debate on the union budget in Parliament, the Bathinda MP said, "Each state in the country has its own capital city which contributes 30 to 40% to its GDP."

She said Punjab was the only state which did not have its own capital and demanded the situation be remedied immediately.

Badal also called for grant of a special package to Punjab to compensate it for the sacrifices made to feed the nation. She said Punjab had served as the food bowl of the country since decades.

"In doing so, we have depleted our ground water with 117 out of 133 blocks being declared as dark zones. Even the Central Groundwater Board 2019 report



states that Punjab has water for the next 17 years only. There is a real danger of the state turning into a desert," she said adding that the state should be given a special package to offset the losses suffered on this account.

Badal said Punjab was suffering because despite freedom to apply rural development tax, the Centre had withheld accumulated Rural Development Fund (RDF) of Rs 3000 crore and was blackmailing Punjab to reduce its tax if it wanted access to the RDF.

The Bathinda MP also demanded that special tax incentives be given to industries setting up units in the state. She also called for continuation of GST compensation to Punjab.

Meanwhile, terming the budget as a fraud on farmers, labourers and the poor, Badal said it was astonishing that the union government was lauding the Labh Bharathi scheme providing food grains to the poor but had done nothing for the 'annadata' farmer.

She said allocation to the agriculture sector had been reduced and the price support for market intervention being made redundant. Badal also spoke about how the government has refused to make MSP a legal right and reduced fertiliser subsidy by 22%. "How will you double farmers income if adopt such an anti-farmer stance?" she asked.

"The minimum wages for labourers have only increased marginally in the last nine years. How will the poor get 'atmanirbhar' in such a situation?" she asked.

## Banga-Anandpur Sahib Road

## Tewari reiterates demand for completion

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 9

Sri Anandpur Sahib MP and National Spokesperson of the Congress Manish Tewari has written to the Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gakari reminding him about the completion of the Banga-Anandpur Sahib Road in Punjab.

Tewari reminded Gadkari that he had accorded in-principle approval to upgrade the Banga-Sri Anandpur Sahib Road to a National Highway. "In February 2019, you laid the foundation stone of this project which was supposed to cost Rs. 581 crores", he pointed out, but regretted, "unfortunately, since 2019, the project has been hanging fire and there has been absolutely no progress in bringing it to any fruition".

Tewari told the minister, "the Banga-Sri Anandpur Sahib road connects two

of the holiest places in the Sikh Religion—Sri Harminder Sahib and Sri Anandpur Sahib. There are a lot of foreign tourists and even domestic tourists who regularly visit both these shrines and then go on to visit the Naina Devi, which is situated in Himachal Pradesh".

"I would be grateful if this road is adopted as a National Highway under the Bharat Mala Tour Scheme or under any other relevant scheme/policy of the Central Government and this project is taken up on an urgent basis and brought to fruition", he urged Gadkari.

"It would not be remiss to point out that this particular road has a very special place in the entire historiography and culture of Punjab. Therefore, it is imperative that this road must be taken up as a national highway and completed at the earliest", Tewari added.

PTI

## KIY Games

## Bajwa slams AAP for state's performance

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 9

Following the worst performance of Punjab athletes in the 'Khelo India Youth (KIY) Games 2023', Punjab's Leader of the Opposition (LoP), Partap Singh Bajwa on Thursday lashed out at the Aam Aadmi government in Punjab for spending recklessly on the lavish event Khedan Watan Punjab Diyan (KWPD) instead of the improving the sports infrastructure in the state and providing better environments to athletes.

While referring to the position chart, Bajwa said that the games are scheduled to culminate on February 11, but Punjab lags far behind its neighbouring state Haryana. Punjab stands in the 13th position, while in KIY Games 2022, Punjab finished in 9th position. However, the neighbouring state Haryana is holding the 2nd position this year so far, whereas last year it grabbed the 1st position. Maharashtra has stayed in 1st place until now.

Bajwa said, "I can still remember the lofty claims made by Punjab CM Bhagwant Mann from stages of the extravagant KWPD that took place last year. The promise was to refine athletic talent in Punjab. After six months of Khedan Watan Punjab Diyan, Punjab stands nowhere at the national level event, KIY Games 2023."

He added that when the AAP government was busy organising KWPD, players and schools were ruing over poor



**PUNJAB STANDS IN THE 13TH POSITION, WHILE IN KIY GAMES 2022, PUNJAB FINISHED IN 9TH POSITION**

sports infrastructure. The teachers contributed from their own pockets to the block-level primary school games in Muktsar. The Punjab sports department didn't have enough coaches to work at the grassroots level.

"It is not only the sports but in every sector that the AAP government prioritises publicity over paying attention to the situation at ground level. It has already spent crores of rupees to depict its fake performance in Punjab across the states, while the dilapidated ground situation speaks volumes about the reality," Bajwa added.

## Edu dept asked to ensure more nutritious mid-day meals

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 9

Emphasising more nutritious content in the mid-day meals being provided to the children in the schools across the state, Chairman, Punjab State Food Commission DP Reddy said that the cooks deployed for cooking the meals must ensure cleanliness.

Chairing a meeting with the School Education Department here at MGSIPA regarding mid-day meals in the state, the chairman said that health check-ups of the children at regular intervals are also the need of the hour besides taking steps to ensure the making of health profile of the children so as to have proper assessment about their well-being.

The chairman also exhorted the offi-



cers of the department to arrange funds under the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to make sure that the ROs are installed in all the schools in the coming 6 months across the state to provide clean drinking water to the students.

Besides, Reddy also said that the short film made by the commission on the

mid-day meals should be uploaded on the EDUSAT platform of the department. Depending upon the resources, the exhaust fans should be provided to get rid of smoke thus protecting both the children as well as the cooks, said Reddy underscoring the importance of learning from the best practices adopted by the other states in this regard.

Stressing the significance of social media in spreading awareness about the commission's activities, the chairman batted for the Education Department to follow the social media handles of the Commission so as to ensure a wider reach for various initiatives. The notice boards and complaint boxes must be installed at all the places to generate more awareness among the people apart from enabling them to offer suggestions.

## Rs 5.46 cr to be spent on garbage remediation in Khanna, Malout

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 9

Local Government Minister Dr Inderbir Singh Nijjar said that Punjab Government has decided to spend approximately Rs 5.46 crore for remediation of solid waste/ garbage at the dump sites of municipal council Khanna and Malout.

Dr Nijjar said that the Punjab govern-

ment is making continuous efforts to provide basic facilities, clean and pollution free environment to the people of the state.

Giving further information in this regard, the Local Government Minister said that approximately Rs 3.15 crore will be spent for remediation of solid waste at the dump sites of Municipal Council Khanna. Similarly, approximately Rs 59 lakh will be spent to pro-

vide and operate sewer suction-cum-jetting machine of 8,000 liter tank capacity mounted on 16 TGVW BS-VI truck cabin chassis.

Apart from this, he said that approximately Rs 1.72 crore will also be spent for the bio-remediation of garbage at the dump sites of municipal council Malout. He also directed the officials to ensure transparency and quality in the work of the department.





# Army, IAF airlift pregnant woman

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 9

In yet another act of their humanitarian service, braving heavy snowfall, the Army and the Indian Air Force today airlifted a pregnant woman in critical condition from a hamlet in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar.

Responding to a distress call, Army troops rushed to the village in remote Nawapachi area and carried the woman on a stretcher through snowfields, officials said.

The IAF flew a MI chopper to Nawapanchi and airlifted the woman,

## RESPONDING TO A DISTRESS CALL, ARMY TROOPS RUSHED TO THE VILLAGE IN REMOTE NAWAPACHI AREA BLU

who was transported to the district hospital in Kishtwar for specialised treatment, they said.

"Indian Army in close coordination with the Indian Air Force evacuated a pregnant lady in critical condition from a remote winter isolated Nawapachi area of Kishtwar district to Kishtwar town where the lady is being treated at district

hospital," Defence Spokesperson Lt Col Devender Anand said.

The people of Nawapanchi expressed gratitude towards the Army and the IAF and some of them also raised slogans praising the two forces.

Lt Col Anand said the Army has been making efforts to reduce the hardships faced by people in the area that has harsh weather and extremely difficult living conditions especially during winters when it gets cut off from the rest of the district due to closure of roads.

"Indian Army has always been rendering life-saving humanitarian assistance to people apart from conducting counter-terrorist operations in the region," he said.

# Over 35,000 acres state land retrieved in Rajouri district

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
JAMMU, FEBRUARY 9

Authorities in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district have retrieved over 35,000 acres of state land as a massive anti-encroachment drive is underway across UT.

Rajouri Deputy Commissioner Vikas Kundal said the drive will continue till the entire encroached land is retrieved.

"A massive anti-encroachment drive in all tehsils of the district is on and over 2,86,875 kanals and 14 marlas (35,859 acres) encroached state land has been retrieved so far," he said.

The state land retrieved from the illegal occupants includes 7,671 kanals and 5 marlas of kacharai land and 2,79,204 kanals and 9 marlas of state land, including the Roshni Land, Kundal said.

As per the eviction plan and on the directions of the deputy commissioner, a series of anti-encroachment drives have been conducted across the district in the past one

month, the officials said.

Teams of police and revenue officials have conducted drives in Rajouri, Darhal, Thanamandi, Nowshera, Qila Darhal, Sunderbani, Siot, Kalakote, Terayth, Beripatan, Manjakote, Moughla and Khawas, they said.

## Commercial building seized in Anantnag

SRINAGAR: Authorities on Thursday took possession of a commercial building,

## THE STATE LAND RETRIEVED FROM THE ILLEGAL OCCUPANTS INCLUDES 7,671 KANALS AND 5 MARLAS OF KACHARAI LAND AND 2,79,204 KANALS AND 9 MARLAS OF STATE LAND, INCLUDING THE ROSHNI LAND

allegedly constructed by a BJP leader on state land at Srigufwara in Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir.

The building was seized as part of the eviction drive launched by the Jammu and Kashmir administration to retrieve state land from encroachers, officials said.

The building, which has 20 shops, was first seized by Revenue Department as it was found that it was constructed on state land, they said.

It was later handed over to the rural development department for public use, officials said.

# 3rd edition of Khelo India winter games begins today

SRINAGAR, FEBRUARY 9

In spite of heavy snowfall, 3rd edition of khelo India National winter games will start from tomorrow. All the participants from different states have reached Gulmarg, Minister for Information and Technology, Broadcating Anurag Thakur has also reached the venue besides LG of J&K Manoj Sinha

Meanwhile, it was a treat for snow lovers and tourists as most areas in north Kashmir received fresh snowfall on Thursday while the rest of the valley was hit by rains, bringing down the mercury levels.

Snowfall started on Wednesday night at Gulmarg ski resort in Baramulla district, which is scheduled to host the Khelo India Winter Games from Friday, officials said.

The snowfall started on Thursday morning in the rest of the Baramulla, Kupwara, and Giurez sector of the Bandipora district. In south Kashmir, snowfall was reported from the Shopian district.

## FRESH SNOWFALL IN GULMARG, WESTERN DISTURBANCES TO HIT JAMMU, LADAKH TOO

In the rest of the valley, light to moderate rainfall was reported that ended three days of sunshine and brought back wintry conditions.

Meanwhile widespread moderate snow or rain is expected in J&K and UT of Ladakh from tomorrow morning till late afternoon.

Met officials said a fresh moderate intensity western disturbance will affect Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh and under its influence light to moderate rain is expected in plains of Kashmir too besides parts of Jammu. As per weather models 60-80 % possibility of snowfall in plains of Kashmir is there and more chances in North Kashmir-Kulgam and Shopian districts as well. A negative fallout of these weather conditions is that this may lead to temporary disruption of major Highways. PTI





## HIMACHAL

# Excise dept inspects Adani Group warehouse in Parwanoo

SHIMLA/NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

**T**he Himachal Pradesh government's Excise and Taxation Department inspected an Adani Group company, scrutinising records and checking the stock at the Adani Wilmar warehouse in Parwanoo, officials said on Thursday.

The officials were apparently investigating possible GST violations by the company, a 50:50 joint venture between the Adani conglomerate and Singapore-based Wilmar.

The inspection on Wednesday evening in the Congress-run state comes at a time when the group finds itself in the middle of a political row at the Centre, triggered by a scathing report by US-based Hindenburg Research.

But a Himachal Pradesh excise department official told PTI that it was a "routine" exercise, a point also made by an Adani Wilmar statement later.

Adani Wilmar sells cooking oil and other food products like rice, wheat flour, sugar, besan and soya chunks under the Fortune brand. In Himachal Pradesh, it

**THE OFFICIALS WERE APPARENTLY INVESTIGATING POSSIBLE GST VIOLATIONS BY THE COMPANY, A 50:50 JOINT VENTURE BETWEEN THE ADANI CONGLOMERATE AND SINGAPORE-BASED WILMAR.**

is a major source of these products for the Civil Supplies and police departments.

A state excise department official said the company's entire GST input was adjusted through tax credit but no payment was made in cash. But, in its statement, Adani Wilmar cited the Goods and Services Tax rules and claimed "the company is not required to pay tax liability in cash".

Another Adani company, which produces cement, has been facing a tough time in Himachal Pradesh.

Two cement plants, in Solan and Bilaspur districts, remain closed since December 14 following a dispute with



truckers over freight rates.

The new government in the state has intervened in the dispute, trying to break

the stalemate between the cement company and the truckers' association.

The Adani Wilmar statement claimed

that officials who visited the warehouse did not find any irregularities. All operations by the company are in "full compliance with relevant laws and regulations", it said.

It said depot operations are functioning normally after the inspection.

"This was a routine inspection carried out by the relevant authorities and there was no raid as previously stated or reported in the media," it said.

The staff extended their support during the inspection, fully cooperating with officials and local authorities, the company spokesperson said.

Adani Group stocks took a severe beating after Hindenburg Research accused it of share price manipulation and other irregularities last month. The conglomerate has dismissed the allegations as lies.

Parliament has been repeatedly disrupted over the row, with the Opposition questioning the rise of the Adani Group over the past decade and demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the allegations in the Hindenburg report.

## CM urges Centre to enhance state share in hydro power projects

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
SHIMLA, FEBRUARY 9

**H**imachal Pradesh Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu urged Union Minister of Power, New and Renewable Energy RK Singh on late Wednesday evening to enhance the state's share in the power projects which were commissioned 25 years back and have completed their loan repayments. He said that state share must be enhanced from 12 to 15 percent.

The Union Minister was apprised that around 12000 MW hydro power potential in the state was yet to be harnessed. Hydro power development is the key engine to the economic growth of the state of Himachal Pradesh, as it makes a direct and significant contribution to economy in terms of revenue generation, employment opportunities and enhancing the quality of life, he said. Besides, the state also has ample scope for setting up solar projects, stated the Chief Minister.

State government has now relaxed the rules and procedures for the inves-

tors and deputy commissioners have been empowered to accord permission.

The Chief Minister said that government was mulling to make agreements with power project in stages. The first part will be for the period of loan repayment and the second part will be after the loan repayment is over on part of the power project. The Chief Minister also raised the issue of Luhri Power Project being executed by SJVNL and advocated for fresh agreement for enhancing the state share as the project is fully viable.

Sukhu said that the Supreme Court has passed its verdict in favour of the state government pertaining to payment of arrears and its share by Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB). He said that BBMB should be directed to pay the arrears to the state government immediately.

He also apprised that the lease period of Shanan project was now over and it will be taken over by the State Government for further execution soon.

Sukhu said that the Union Minister has assured with regard to setting up of Green Energy Plant in Spiti area of the state on the analogy of Leh.



## Fire breaks out in two huts in Una, four killed

UNA (HP), FEBRUARY 9

**T**hree siblings were among four people burnt alive after a fire broke out in two huts in Amb sub-division of Una district, officials said Thursday.

SHO, Ashish Pathania, said the thatched huts of Bhadeshwar Das and Ramesh Das, who hail from Bihar's Darbhanga district, caught fire on Wednesday night.

The deceased included Ramesh Das's three children, Neetu (14), Golu Kumar (7), Shivam Kumar (6) and their relative Kalidas's son Sonu Kumar (17), who was sleeping along with them.

Fire brigade personnel rushed to the spot and stopped the fire from spreading further, he said, adding the cause of the blaze is yet to be ascertained.

Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and Deputy Chief Minister Mukesh Agnihotri have expressed grief over the incident and asked authorities to provide immediate relief to the affected families.

PTI

## Vikramaditya interacts with Himachali players in Bhopal

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
BHOPAL, FEBRUARY 9

**P**ublic Works, Youth Services and Sports Minister Vikramaditya Singh today participated as a special invitee in the 'Khelo India Games' event being organized at Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh. He interacted with the players of Himachal Pradesh participating in these games and encouraged them for better performance.

The Sports Minister also enquired about the steps taken to promote sports activities in Madhya Pradesh, besides

inspected sports infrastructure including boxing ring, shooting range and gym.

"The government is determined to provide better infrastructure and other modern facilities to the youth of Himachal Pradesh and to encourage them to give out their best performances at national and international level", said the Sports Minister. I would like to invite the officials from here to our state to share their expertise in the field of sports, said the Minister. "To develop modern sports infrastructure in Himachal, funds would be managed from the Central Government under 'Khelo India Games'," said Vikramaditya Singh.





## EDITORIAL

The Express India NEWS

Bandi Singhs:  
Case for  
compassion

**O**n February 8, protestors demanding release of 'Bandi Singhs' clashed with police in Chandigarh, as they wanted to march to Punjab Raj Bhawan to present their demand. 'Bandi Singhs' are the Sikh prisoners, languishing in different parts of the country, who have completed their sentence. These prisoners were involved in militancy during the separatist movement in Punjab. They were driven towards the violent movement during which they were arrested and prosecuted under law and sentenced with various punishments.

All of them are believed to have completed their sentence. The natural course of law demands that they should be released. While some of them have been released, some are still languishing in jails, thus causing resentment among people. The anger against their continued incarceration has intensified more after the Supreme Court ordered premature release of those convicted and sentenced for the killing of former Prime Minister Rajeev Gandhi.

Demands for their release have been raised from time to time. The union government had earlier agreed to consider their cases and accordingly direct the state governments to release them. Some of them have in fact been released also, but some are still languishing in jails even after having completed their sentence.

The Punjab government should take up the matter with the central government for their release. Different political parties rake this issue up for a while and then some new issue crops up and it gets into the background. There is definitely some gap somewhere, which needs to be fulfilled. It would be best if the state government constitutes a committee of legal experts to pursue the matter so that the issue is settled once for all. It looks highly improbable that there is any resistance anywhere against their release. Only the matter needs to be pursued and presented to the union government in a proper manner.

Turkey earthquake  
conspiracy!

**T**urkey and Syria faced the worst ever disaster when its regions were shaken off by a high intensity earthquake measuring 7.8 on the Richter Scale. It has caused widespread destruction and devastation all over, claiming the lives of tens of thousands of people in two countries. However, a conspiracy theory has already been generated on social media that the earthquake was caused by the Americans by using HAARP technology to "teach" Turkey a lesson, as it was not succumbing to western/NATO pressure.

Thousands of people tweeted on it and posted messages on Facebook besides sharing these on WhatsApp. The HAARP hashtag was even trending on social media. HAARP stands for "High Frequency Active Auroral Research Programme". According to the University of Alaska "HAARP is the world's most capable high power high frequency transmitter for study of the ionosphere". This actually has nothing to do with creating even simple vibrations, leave aside creating tectonic turbulence, which would measure 7.8 on the Richter scale.

Bharat Jodo Yatra:  
Follow up must to  
reap dividends

**T**he Congress has described the Bharat Jodo Yatra as a "booster dose" but whether it will provide the party a new lease of life in election-bound states such as Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka is a million-dollar question.

Though Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh has time and again reiterated that it was not an electoral yatra but an ideological one aimed at capturing the battlefield of ideas, political pundits say that its real test would be the impact at the hustings and whether it can revive the grand old party's electoral fortunes in the run up to the 2024 elections.

Assembly elections are likely to be held in nine states this year and the yatra passed through four of them -- Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Telangana.

The over 4,000 km Kanyakumari to Kashmir yatra has certainly enthused the party cadres in these states but whether it would have an electoral impact in the assembly polls would depend on whether the respective state units can keep up the momentum and keep answering the question -- what next.

Also, organisational unity is a key challenge especially in states such as Rajasthan, Karnataka and Telangana where traditionally the party has been marred by factionalism.

While in states such as Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh, the Congress seems to have made some gains with the yatra, in Rajasthan its factional fight between the camps of Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot and his bete noire Sachin Pilot continues unabated with the foot march only proving to be a mere "thaw".

As the Bharat Jodo Yatra's Rajasthan leg ended on December 21, the Congress had heaved a sigh of relief as it passed the state without any face-off between the supporters of Gehlot and Pilot despite sloganeering on the roads.

But soon after that Pilot announced a series of public outreach events in the state which many saw as a show of strength and a reminder to the high command that his grievances remain unaddressed. In his remarks at the rallies, Pilot had cornered the Gehlot government over issues such as the repeated paper leaks and political appointments of retired bureaucrats while side-lining party workers.

At the same time, the demand from the Pilot camp to make him chief minister has also started again with leaders loyal to him openly calling for him being given the top job in the state ahead of the elections later this year.

If the Congress has to return to power in the state, the Gehlot-Pilot question needs to be solved otherwise the gains of the yatra would amount to naught, say party workers.

A party worker, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "The Yatra has boosted the party's prospects but issues are still unresolved between the two senior Congress leaders which will certainly have an adverse impact on the prospects of the party in the next elections." Another party worker said it is necessary for all party leaders to



be united and the Gehlot-Pilot fight is bound to weaken the party.

This is also the underlying sentiment among party workers in other poll-bound states such as Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana and Karnataka, as reigning in personal ambitions of leaders remains the sticky point for the leadership.

Congress general secretary Ramesh recently told PTI that personal ambition and personal goals have been a bane of the Congress.

What the Bharat Jodo Yatra has done is that it has brought a sense of collective purpose and solidarity, and that is what is needed in state after state, including in Rajasthan, he said.

In Karnataka, the Congress has been hitting the right notes after the passage of the yatra despite the looming shadow of simmering tensions between chief ministerial hopefuls Siddaramaiah and D K

The Express India NEWS

Shivakumar.

The party has begun a state-wide bus tour called 'Praja Dhvani Yatra', jointly led by party state unit president Shivakumar and Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Siddaramaiah.

The Congress in Karnataka has also promised Rs 2,000 a month to every woman head of households if the party is voted to power in the State. The announcement was made at a convention attended by Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra last month.

In Madhya Pradesh, analysts say the Congress has to keep up the momentum by organising political programmes to get mileage out of the yatra for 2023 polls.

Madhya Pradesh's former director general of

police SC Tripathi said "Post Bharat Jodo Yatra Congress has to take a series of follow-up actions to get mileage out of it in 2023 polls. The party should plan activities for it." "As the yatra was confined to just one part of the state it won't have much impact on other areas unless follow-up action takes place," he said.

Senior journalist and author Rasheed Kidwai said the Yatra from Kanyakumari to Kashmir has enthused the party workers in Madhya Pradesh and energised them but its impact among the voters will be visible only at the time of elections.

Although the 'Bharat Jodo Yatra' led by Rahul Gandhi did not pass through party-ruled Chhattisgarh, leaders, workers and like-minded people from the state joined the march at various places across the country and there has been an indirect impact with the foot march providing a boost to the morale of party workers.

The yatra has enthused party workers ahead of assembly elections scheduled in the state this year and are now working on the 'Hath Se Hath Jodo Abhiyan' to propagate Rahul Gandhi's message of love, equality and brotherhood, said Sushil Anand Shukla, head of the state Congress communication wing.

Political analyst and senior journalist R Krishna Das said the exact assessment of Bharat Jodo Yatra in Chhattisgarh cannot be ascertained as of now but it has undoubtedly given new energy to party cadres to take on the BJP and to retain power for the second term.

The yatra has certainly enthused Congress cadres but for it to have an electoral impact, the upcoming 'Haath Se Haath Jodo Abhiyaan', that seeks to take the message of the march to every household, and settling of factional rifts remain critical aspects, and only time will tell whether the party can reap the harvest sown by the cross-country walkathon.

PTI

# NATION

## PM Modi inspired country, repulsed Oppn's attack: BJP

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

The BJP on Thursday accused the Opposition of conspiring to disrupt Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address in the Rajya Sabha, asserting that he thwarted it and inspired the country with his speech.

BJP chief spokesperson Anil Baluni said that after Modi's Wednesday address in the Lok Sabha that destroyed the "negative and anti-national politics" of the Opposition, its "desperate and frustrated" members disrupted his speech in the Rajya Sabha.

However, Modi's address touched the hearts of India's 140 crore citizens and everyone is "proud" of the country's development journey under his leadership in this 'Amrit Kaal', the Rajya Sabha MP from Uttarakhand said.

He felled every attack from the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, and his address was a story of India's relentless development March, Baluni said.

## Talks on bilateral, regional issues

NSA Doval holds wide-ranging discussions Putin in Moscow

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Thursday held wide-ranging discussions in Moscow and agreed to continue working towards implementing the strategic partnership between the two countries.

The Indian embassy in Moscow said the discussions were focused on bilateral and regional issues, but it did not elaborate on the issues.

"NSA Ajit Doval called on HE President Putin. Wide-ranging discussion on bilateral and regional issues. Agreed to continue work towards implementing the India-Russia strategic partnership," the embassy tweeted.

Doval began his two-day visit to Russia on Wednesday.

On Monday, Russian Ambassador to



New Delhi Denis Alipov said Russia wants to further diversify its relations with India.

The NSA's visit to Russia came three months after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar travelled to the country during which the two sides vowed to expand their economic engagement including

India's import of petroleum products from its "time-tested" partner.

On Wednesday, Doval attended the fifth meeting of Secretaries of Security Councils/NSAs on Afghanistan which was hosted by Russia.

In the meeting, Doval said no country should be allowed to use Afghan territory to export terrorism and asserted that India will never abandon the people of Afghanistan in their time of need.

Besides Russia and India, the meeting was attended by representatives from Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Doval's visit to Moscow comes weeks ahead of the G-20 foreign ministers' meeting in New Delhi.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is expected to travel to India to attend the meeting on March 1 and 2.

The ties between India and Russia remained strong notwithstanding Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

India's import of Russian crude oil has gone up significantly in the last few months despite increasing disquiet over it in many Western countries.

## 60 lakh cases pending in HCs, over 69,000 in SC: Govt

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

Over 69,000 cases are pending in the Supreme Court while there is a backlog of over 59 lakh cases in the country's 25 high courts, Rajya Sabha was informed on Thursday.

Citing details available on the SC website, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said in a written reply that 69,511 cases were pending in the top court as on February 1.

"There are 59,87,477 cases pending in the high courts across the country as per the information available on National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) on February 1, 2023," he said.

Out of these, 10.30 lakh cases were pending in the Allahabad High Court -- the biggest high court of the country.

The Sikkim High Court has the least number of 171 cases.

The government, Rijiju said, has taken several initiatives to provide "suitable environment" for expeditious disposal of cases by the Judiciary.

## Budget a missed opportunity to launch attack on poverty, unemployment: Oppn

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

The opposition today labelled the Union Budget a missed opportunity to launch a frontal attack on poverty and unemployment in the country.

Resuming the discussion on the Budget in Lok Sabha, YSRCP member Margani Bharat Ram said the budget made no special provisions for Andhra Pradesh, which was bifurcated "like a birthday cake" by the previous Congress-led UPA government.

Bharat Ram demanded that the Centre should grant special status to Andhra Pradesh, as promised by the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in Parliament when the AP Reorganisation Bill was passed in 2014.

He said Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has missed the opportunity to rein in the rising prices of cooking gas. "The government missed an opportunity for an electoral gamble," the YSRCP leader added.

Trinamool Congress member Saugata Roy said the Union Budget was anti-farmer, anti-poor and anti-rural.

Lashing out at the finance minister for slashing the Budget for the MGNREGA and the reduction in food and fertiliser subsidies, Roy said, "The Budget has exposed the farmers to the vagaries of the global markets and

rendered the economy of agriculture even more fragile."

The Trinamool leader also demanded an investigation by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) into the allegations of round-tripping against Adani Group made in a report by the US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research. He said the fall in the stock prices of the corporate group caused huge losses to investors and needed to be investigated.

"You send the Enforcement Directorate after every opposition leader but not this company," Roy claimed.

He also said that the Union finance minister could have reduced the prices of petrol, diesel and cooking gas but did not do so as she had to "beautifully balance the Budget".

The finance minister has failed to address the problem of unemployment in the Budget and is leading the country to a "jobless future", Roy alleged.

BSP's Sangeeta Azad described the 2023-24 Budget as "Mungeri Lal Ke Haseen Sapne (daydreaming)" and claimed it only shows dreams to people, without amounting to much on the ground.

JD(U) leader Mahabali Singh said while Budgets have come and gone, the plight of the people has not changed.

## Amidst slogan shouting PM replies on Motion of Thanks in RS, says 'lotus will bloom in dirt'

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Rajya Sabha on Thursday said the more "keechad" (dirt) the opposition would fling, the bigger "kamal" (lotus) would bloom.

Amid slogan-shouting by MPs from TMC, Congress and other opposition parties from the Well of the House, Modi began replying to the debate on the motion thanking the President for her address to the joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha at the start of the Budget Session, and accused the Congress of adopting only "tokenism" to solve problems the country faced. "Keechad unke pass tha, mere pass gulal. Jo jis ke pass tha, usne diya uchhal," Modi quoted Manik Verma's poem in response to the allegations the opposition parties levelled against him and his government. Roughly translated, it means they had dirt and I had 'gulal', who had whatever they flung in the air. "Jitna keechad uchhaloge, kamal utna hee zyada khilega (the more dirt you fling, the bigger kamal - the election symbol of the BJP - will bloom)," he said as opposition MPs shouted slogans linking the prime minister to industrialist Gautam Adani and seeking a joint parliamentary committee probe into the allegations levelled by the US short-seller Hindenburg Research.

## SC agrees to hear plea seeking probe into Hindenburg report on Adani firms

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

The Supreme Court has agreed to hear on Friday a plea seeking a direction to the Centre to constitute a committee monitored by a retired apex court judge to inquire and investigate into the Hindenburg Research report which has made a slew of allegations against the business conglomerate led by industrialist Gautam Adani.

Advocate Vishal Tiwari, who has filed the petition, mentioned the matter for urgent listing before a bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud on Thursday.

Tiwari told the bench, also comprising Justices P S Narasimha and J B Pardiwala, that a separate plea filed on the issue is scheduled to be listed for hearing on February 10. He urged the bench that his plea be also heard on Friday along with the separate plea.

In his public interest litigation (PIL), Tiwari has also sought directions to set up a special committee to oversee the sanction policy for loans of over Rs 500 crore given to big corporates.



Last week, another PIL was filed in the apex court by advocate M L Sharma seeking prosecution of short seller Nathan Anderson of US-based firm Hindenburg Research and his associates in India and the US for allegedly exploiting innocent investors and the "artificial crashing" of Adani Group's stock value in the market.

The Adani Group stocks have taken a beating on the bourses after Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations, including fraudulent transactions and share-price manipulation, against the business conglomerate.

The Adani Group has dismissed the charges as lies, saying it complies with all laws and disclosure requirements.



## NATION

# 20 yr jail to youth for raping 3 yr old as juvenile

NOIDA, FEBRUARY 9

In a landmark judgement, a UP court has sentenced an 18 year old youth to 20 years imprisonment for raping a three year old two years ago. The culprit was a juvenile at the time of committing the crime.

The 18-year-old man has been sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by a court in Gautam Buddh Nagar district of Uttar Pradesh which convicted him of raping a three-year-old girl in 2020 when he was a juvenile.

The convict has also been slapped with a penalty of Rs 40,000 by Additional Sessions Judge of the special POCSO court Chandra Mohan Srivastava on Wednesday.

At the time of the incident, the accused was aged 16 years and he was taken into custody the same day the matter was reported to the police by the girl's family in June 2020. The girl had gone to her neighbour's home for tuition but her teacher's brother had sexually assaulted her.

When the girl recounted the incident to her parents and told them about pain

in her genitals, the family approached the local Dadri police station and an FIR was lodged under Indian Penal Code section 376 (rape) and under provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Charges were also lodged under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe

**AT THE TIME OF THE INCIDENT, THE ACCUSED WAS AGED 16 YEARS AND HE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY THE SAME DAY THE MATTER WAS REPORTED**

(Prevention of Atrocities) Act but were later dropped during trial in the court for lack of evidence.

Arguing for the accused, advocate Haribhushan Giri sought leniency in punishment from the court citing his client's age of 18 years and 8 months and that it was his first offence. He added that the accused is a student and about to take his intermediate examinations.

However, special public prosecutor

Jai Prakash Bhati argued that "fingering the vagina" and "aggravated penetrative sexual assault" on the 3-year-old girl is a heinous crime and reflected the "polluted mindset" of the accused, who should be given strictest punishment.

In his order, Justice Srivastava noted that, "the juvenile has not only committed a social crime of disgusting and heinous nature but also committed a crime which puts society to shame and tarnishes relations and mutual trust among people." "At this time, the accused's age is 18 years and 8 months. Hence, on the basis of the facts, situation, the arguments made besides the nature of the crime and the plight of the victim, the punishment to the accused is justified," the judge stated.

While announcing the 20 years prison term and Rs 40,000 penalty to the accused, the judge also remarked that he would have to serve an additional six months terms if he fails to deposit the fine amount. The judge said tenure spent by the juvenile in correction home and district jail will be included in the prison term.

PTI

# Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's land occupation to be probed

KOLKATA, FEBRUARY 9

After sending two missives to Nobel laureate Amartya Sen for allegedly occupying parts of land leased to his family in an "unauthorised manner", Visva-Bharati University on Thursday said it will conduct a joint survey of the land along with the economist's side.

In a statement, the university sought a suitable date and time from Sen for the exercise.

"With reference to our earlier letters, this is to inform you that the university wants to survey/demarcate jointly the land mutated in your favour for the residual period of lease as per lease deal executed on October 27, 1943 vide resolution no 8 dated September 3, 2006 of the executive council of Visva Bharati and communicated to you on October 31, 2006," the letter said.

The varsity, in the letter, said the joint survey will be conducted on at least two days, and sought to know a suitable date and time from Sen.

One of the previous letters issued by



the university to Sen on January 27 stated, "You are in possession of 1.38 acre of land which is in excess of your legal entitlement of 1.25 acre. Kindly return the land to Visva Bharati as early as possible."

On January 24, the central university had issued a similar letter to Sen.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee last week came out in support of the economist and handed over land-related documents to the octogenarian during a visit to Birbhum.

PTI

# SC to decide whether banned group membership makes person criminal

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

The Supreme Court on Thursday reserved its verdict on a batch of pleas including those seeking review of some verdicts of 2011 which had held that mere membership of a banned organisation will not make a person criminal unless he resorts to violence or incites people to violence.

The top court noted that the Union of India was not heard by its two judges-bench when the 2011 verdict was passed reading down section 3 (5) of Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987 (now repealed).

The top court on February 3, 2011, had acquitted suspected ULFA member Arup Bhuyan, who was held guilty by a TADA court on the basis of his alleged confessional statement before the Superintendent of Police, and said that mere membership of a banned organisation will not make a person a criminal unless he resorts to violence or incites people to violence or creates public disorder by violence or incitement to violence.

**ON WEDNESDAY, THE TOP COURT HAD RAISED A QUESTION OVER READING DOWN A LAW UNLESS ITS VALIDITY IS CHALLENGED AND SAID BEFORE READING DOWN A CENTRAL LEGISLATION**

Similar views were taken by the apex court in two other verdicts of 2011 in Indra Das versus State of Assam and state of Kerala versus Raneef, where the bench relied upon the three US Supreme Court decisions which have rejected the doctrine of 'guilt by association'. A bench of justices MR Shah, CT Ravikumar and Sanjay Karol, which was hearing a reference made by a two-judge bench to a larger bench said, "Arguments concluded. Judgment reserved. It will be open for the counsel appearing for the Union of India and State of Assam to submit short written submissions within a period of two days

from today." During the hearing, the bench observed that the Centre needs to be heard and given an opportunity to put forward a case that this is what the intent of Parliament was.

"This is missing from the verdicts. This court had not said that the Union of India is not required to be heard in the matter," it said, adding that some representation has to be there.

The bench told senior advocate Sanjay Parikh, appearing for the intervenor that there is the supremacy of the courts after Parliament enacted the law.

"Ultimately, it is for the court to review the law passed by the Parliament and to whether declare it as unconstitutional or constitutional but it is the right of the government to defend its laws from being declared unconstitutional," it said.

Parikh pointed out that three verdicts of 2011 have been followed in 26 cases by the high courts.

The bench told Parikh that the high courts are bound to follow the laid down by this court unless that law is upset by the Supreme Court.

PTI



# Smriti Irani's daughter gets married in Rajasthan

JAIPUR, FEBRUARY 9

Union Minister Smriti Irani's daughter Shanelle married Arjun Bhalla in a ceremony in Rajasthan's Nagaur district on Thursday.

The wedding ceremony took place at the 15th century Khimsar Fort, now a heritage hotel, in the presence of close

family members and friends, sources said.

The 'haldi' and 'mehendi' rituals took place on Wednesday. The groom, who arrived on a white mare, was welcomed by Irani, her husband Zubin Irani, former Rajasthan minister Gajendra Singh and other members of the bride's family.

Nearly 50 guests from both sides were invited, the sources said.

PTI



## WORLD

# Reducing visa backlog in India

US State Department implements several recommendations of Presidential Commission

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 9

The US State Department has quietly implemented recommendations of a presidential commission which has suggested steps like opening up American diplomatic missions outside India for visa appointments to reduce the visa backlog in the country.

India was one of the very few countries where applications for US visas saw a major upswing after coronavirus-related travel restrictions were lifted.

Moved by a commission member, Ajay Jain Bhutoria from Silicon Valley, the presidential commission observed that inordinate visa appointment delays were causing huge problems for the students and visitors who have plans to come to study in the US and visit the country.

The State Department should allow virtual interviews where applicable and allow staff from embassies around the world and the US consular staff to help conduct the virtual interviews at embassies with high backlogs and help clear them, the commission recommended.

The recommendations included opening up American diplomatic missions outside



India for visa appointments, having more counters and deploying additional resources to process visa applications.

The US Embassy in India processed over 1 lakh applications just in January 2023, their highest total in a single month and the highest in any month since July 2019. In its December meeting, the President's Advisory Commission on Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders recommended several steps to reduce the growing delay in visa appointment times in India and other countries like Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

It recommended the State Department hire new Full-Time officers/consular or Temporary Staff or contractors or bring back retired consular officers to clear the backlog at Embassies in Asia which have wait times of 400 or more days and shrink the wait time to 2-4 weeks by clearing the visa application backlog.

The State Department could also use staff from other embassies around the world to help clear the backlog in countries in Asia which have huge backlogs

and delays in visa appointments, it had recommended.

The advisory committee noted that in 2012 President Barack Obama issued a memo to reduce the wait time from several months to a few days and this memo streamlined the visa process. The Trump administration had rescinded the President Obama memo, and this is also contributing as one of the factors in causing delays for Visa appointments, it said.

As such, it recommended that President Joe Biden should consider issuing a memo to the State Department to shrink the visa appointment wait times to 2-4 weeks maximum for countries with significant backlogs including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other countries in a similar situation.

There have been growing concerns in India over the long waiting period for first-time visa applicants, especially for those applying under B1 (business) and B2 (tourist) categories.

The waiting period for first-time B1/B2 visa applicants in India was close to three years in October last year.

In January, the State Department not only implemented remote processing of interview waiver cases for applicants with previous US visas but also launched several initiatives, including scheduling special interviews for first-time applicants and increasing the strength of consular staff.

It also conducted "special Saturday interview days" on January 21.

## US wants to be India's 'premier partner' in its extraordinary growth story: Pentagon

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS SERVICE  
WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 9

The US wants to be not only India's security partner of the first resort but also its "premier partner" in its extraordinary growth story, the Pentagon has said.

These remarks were made by Pentagon Press Secretary Brig Gen Patrick Ryder on Wednesday while responding to a question on the recently launched India-US initiative on critical emerging technologies, which has a significant defence component in it.

"The high level of participation from across the US government, US industry, and our universities is unprecedented, and sends a strong signal that the United States wants not only to be India's security partner of first resort – but to be the premier partner in India's extraordinary growth story," Ryder said.

The Department of Defence is excited to work with other US agencies and partners as part of the White House-led United States-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), he said.

"We look forward to sharing more information on our defence cooperation with India as the new initiatives develop moving forward. These initiatives will accelerate a shift from defence sales



to defence joint production and development and promote integration between US and Indian defence firms," Ryder said.

Earlier this month, iCET was launched at the direction of US President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Narendra Modi who after their Tokyo meeting in May 2022 announced to elevate and expand the strategic technology partnership and defence industrial cooperation between the governments, businesses, and academic institutions of the two countries.

Under the iCET, the two countries have identified six areas of cooperation which would include co-development and co-production, that would gradually be expanded to Quad, then to NATO, followed by Europe and the rest of the world.

In January, the Biden administration also said that India is an important partner of choice for the United States.

## Indian-origin businessman in Scotland to hand over big sums in unpaid tax

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
LONDON, FEBRUARY 9

An Indian-origin businessman has agreed to hand over 600,000 pounds linked to unpaid tax over and above 1,000,000 pounds recovered from his bank accounts in what the Scottish authorities have described as a landmark settlement following a civil investigation.

Goljar Singh, 44, from the East Lothian region of Scotland will relinquish the funds under proceeds of crime legislation following an agreement with the Civil Recovery Unit (CRU) and His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

According to Scotland's prosecution service this week, 1,000,000 pounds was remitted from the bank accounts of businesses linked to Singh.

## Pakistan's talks with IMF over bailout package hit a snag

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
ISLAMABAD, FEBRUARY 9

The cash-strapped Pakistan government's talks with the IMF to secure a bailout package to avert a nearing sovereign default hit a snag as the two sides remained short of concluding external financing estimates and precise domestic fiscal measures, according to a media report on Thursday.

A clear roadmap on external financing and domestic budgetary steps, coupled with substantial energy cost adjustments, should have led to sharing of a draft Memorandum of Economic and Fiscal Policies (MEFP) by the visiting International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission with the authorities at least a day before scheduled conclusion of talks on February 9, reported the Dawn newspaper.

"As of Wednesday night, we have not received the draft MEFP," said a senior government official, adding Fund's "reservations on final plan of action both



in terms of fiscal measures and external funding sources were still there".

Pakistan entered a USD 6 billion International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme during Imran Khan's government in 2019, which was increased to USD 7 billion last year.

The programme's ninth review is currently pending with talks being held between IMF officials and the government for the release of USD 1.18 billion.

However, Minister of State for Finance and Revenue Aisha Ghaus Pasha said: "We are very close to the finalisation." She said the MEFP would be handed over to Pakistan by the IMF

once all issues are finally settled. She said a lot of things had been settled and they required clarity on some of them that the government team was trying to address.

In a written statement, the Finance Ministry said the talks with the IMF continued on Wednesday and "focused on fiscal table, financing, etc. There is a broad consensus on the reform actions and measures".

It added the mission chief also called on the finance minister and briefed him about the talks. "The mission is working on putting it all together and will finalise the MEFP," said the finance secretary, who declined to comment on whether the scheduled talks would be extended to achieve a staff-level agreement.

Sources said the IMF had agreed to relax fiscal plan to the extent of about Rs 500 billion spending on flood recovery, leaving about Rs600 billion worth of deficit in primary balance to be met through expenditure cuts and additional taxation measures.

## ISIL-K threatened to launch attacks against embassies of India, China, Afghanistan: UN

EXPRESS INDIA NEWS NETWORK  
UNITED NATIONS, FEBRUARY 9

The ISIL-K have threatened to launch terrorist attacks against the embassies of India, Iran and China in Afghanistan and by targeting them, the terror group sought to undermine the relationship between the Taliban and the UN member states in the Central and South Asia region, according to a UN report. The revelations were made in a report by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the threat posed by ISIL.

"The activities of Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan (ISIL-K) remained a significant terrorist threat in Central and South Asia, and the group retained ambitions to conduct external operations," the 16th report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of member states in countering the threat said here.



## ENTERTAINMENT/HEALTH

# Yami wants to play Madhubala

Portraying screen icon Madhubala and playing a warrior princess in a costume drama are among the roles that "Uri: The Surgical Strike" star Yami Gautam has on her wish-list.

The actor, who shot to fame with her debut in "Vicky Donor", has earned praise for her performances in "Kaabil", "Badlapur", "Bala" and "A Thursday".

"I feel there are so many (roles) but one thing I definitely want to do in life... I love costume dramas. I would love to play the role of a warrior princess one day," Gautam told PTI in an interview here.

Asked about her dream role in the biopic genre, she said Madhubala would be her go-to choice.

"I would love to portray Madhubala ji if I am asked to choose a biopic. She remains an icon," she added.

Gautam, 34, was in the city to promote Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury's directorial "Lost" for ZEE5. The actor said as a performer, she looks for interesting projects rather than focusing on the platform.

"I am an actor first. My job is to look for the best of opportunities that I can get. I don't find any difference between OTT and big-screen productions. That is the producer's prerogative (for which platform the film is made)."

Gautam, who is married to her "Uri" director Aditya Dhar, said they discuss creative ideas as two people in the same profession.

"I feel happy when he feels happy that I have done a good job. He is, of course, my husband but, at the same time, a prolific director whose feedback I look forward to," she said. She said one of Dhar's forthcoming films as a writer and producer is "Dhoom Dhaam", an action-comedy.



## Richa, Ali to produce 'The Underbug'

Actor couple Richa Chadha and Ali Fazal on Thursday announced they have boarded the psychological horror film "The Underbug" as executive producers.

The movie, which had its world premiere at the Slamdance Film Festival in Los Angeles, is directed by Shujaat Saudagar and stars Fazal and Hussain Dalal in lead roles.

"The Underbug" marks the duo's second production venture under the banner Pushing Buttons Studios following Shuchi Talati's "Girls Will be Girls".

Chadha said the movie, penned by Saudagar, Abbas Dalal and Hussain Dalal, received a great response at the recently concluded film gala.

"It was a very proud moment for us, especially because it represented Indian cinema on such a huge global platform. This is a great time for cinema as Indian movies are getting wider reach with a global audience.

"The films of this genre are quite tricky since it has a very niche audience, but since it got such a positive response it kind of says it all," the actor-producer said in a statement.

Fazal said he is both physically and emotionally involved with "The Underbug".

"The movie was made in very confused and stressful circumstances. The movie also had the added responsibilities since it was its first screening, and the first reactions were positive, it gave us a lot of confidence," he added.

The film, which revolves around two characters who take refuge in an abandoned house, was shot in the interiors of Maharashtra during the COVID-19 induced lockdowns in late 2020.

"The Underbug" is produced by Vikesh Bhutani, Saudagar and Aman Mann. Besides Chadha and Fazal, Abbas Dalal and Hussain Dalal are also attached as executive producers.

PTI

# Nicotine during pregnancy increases SIDS risk

LONDON, FEBRUARY 9

Infants whose mothers have used snus, a moist oral tobacco product, during pregnancy ran three times the risk of sudden infant death, according to a new comprehensive registry study.

The risk was much lower if the mother had stopped taking snus before the first antenatal visit, the study said.

The researchers, from Karolinska Institutet in Sweden, concluded that all types of nicotine products should be avoided during pregnancy.

The study is published in the journal Pediatric Research.

"Fortunately, the incidence of sudden infant death is very low, but we can see that taking snus or smoking while pregnant is associated with an increased risk," said Anna Gunnerbeck, paediatrician at the Astrid Lindgren Children's Hospital



and researcher at the Department of Medical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Karolinska Institutet.

While it is known that smoking during pregnancy is a risk factor in sudden infant death, little research has been done on

snus and other nicotine products, the study said.

To address this, the researchers conducted a registry study comprising over two million babies born in Sweden between 1999 and 2019, the study said.

During this time, only two out of 10,000 babies suffered sudden infant death, which is when death occurs suddenly for no apparent reason during sleep, the study said.

When registering for maternal care, just over one per cent of the mothers took snus and seven per cent smoked, the study said.

Taking snus while pregnant was associated with a 70 per cent increase in the risk of infant death during the first year, regardless of cause, and a three-fold increase in the risk of sudden infant death, the study said.

The risks associated with taking snus

were comparable to moderate smoking, that is, one to nine cigarettes a day. The highest risks were associated with smoking over ten cigarettes a day, the study said.

Quitting snus and cigarettes early on in pregnancy before the first appointment at the antenatal clinic lowered the risk, compared with continued use, the study said.

"Given the dramatic rise in the use of snus among young women of fertile age in Sweden over the past few years and the growing popularity of e-cigarettes, women need to be informed of the potential risk to fetuses and infants," said Gunnerbeck.

"Our study indicates that nicotine is a risk factor of sudden infant death, so we conclude that all types of nicotine products should be avoided during pregnancy," said Gunnerbeck.

PTI



# BUSINESS

## Google parent, Alphabet loses \$100 billion in market value

LONDON, FEBRUARY 8

Alphabet Inc (GOOGL.O) lost \$100 billion in market value on Wednesday after its new chatbot shared inaccurate information in a promotional video and a company event failed to dazzle, feeding worries that the Google parent is losing ground to rival Microsoft Corp (MSFT.O).

Alphabet shares slid as much as 9% during regular trading with volumes nearly three times the 50-day moving average. They pared losses after hours and were roughly flat. The stock had lost 40% of its value last year but rallied 15% since the beginning of this year, excluding Wednesday's losses.

Reuters was first to point out an error in Google's advertisement for chatbot Bard, which debuted on Monday, about

**ALPHABET SHARES SLID AS MUCH AS 9% DURING REGULAR TRADING WITH VOLUMES NEARLY THREE TIMES THE 50-DAY MOVING AVERAGE**

which satellite first took pictures of a planet outside the Earth's solar system.

Google has been on its heels after OpenAI, a startup Microsoft is backing with around \$10 billion, introduced software in November that has wowed consumers and become a fixation in Silicon Valley circles for its surprisingly accurate and well-written answers to simple prompts.

Google's live-streamed presentation on Wednesday morning did not include

details about how and when it would integrate Bard into its core search function. A day earlier, Microsoft held an event touting that it had already released to the public a version of its Bing search with ChatGPT functions integrated.

Bard's error was discovered just before the presentation by Google, based in Mountain View, California.

"While Google has been a leader in AI innovation over the last several years, they seemed to have fallen asleep on implementing this technology into their search product," said Gil Luria, senior software analyst at D.A. Davidson. "Google has been scrambling over the last few weeks to catch up on Search and that caused the announcement yesterday (Tuesday) to be rushed and the embarrassing mess up of posting a wrong answer during their demo." **Reuters**

## LIC to seek clarification from Adani Group

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 9

LIC chairman M R Kumar on Thursday said the officials of the public sector insurer will soon meet top management of the Adani Group and seek clarification on the crisis being faced by the diversified conglomerate.

LIC's investment into Adani group firms' stock has come under criticism by the opposition parties as well as investors after US-based short-seller Hindenburg Research made a litany of allegations against the Gautam Adani-led group, saying its companies manage and manipulate share prices, run offshore shell companies for round-tripping and lacking in corporate governance practices.

"Though our investor team has already sought clarifications from the Adanis, our top management could contact them yet as we have been busy preparing the results. We are soon going to call them to meet us and explain. We want to understand what is happening in the market and in the group," the chairman told reporters at the earnings conference on Thursday.

"We'll be calling them sometime soon to know how they are managing the whole



crisis," Kumar added.

Kumar, however, refused to give a timeline of the meeting between LIC and Adani group officials.

Since the publication of the Hindenburg report on January 24, three days before the launch of the group's flagship Adani Enterprises' Rs 20,000 crore follow-on public offer (FPO), the value of the group companies' stocks have lost more than USD 100 billion or about 60 per cent from their January 24 value. The FPO was fully subscribed but called off a day later by the management. **PTI**

## PepsiCo reports double digit growth in India

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

Global food and beverages major PepsiCo on Thursday said its Indian unit delivered a "double-digit organic revenue growth" in 2022.

The company has gained market share in beverage and savory snack in markets, including India, PepsiCo said in its earning statement.

PepsiCo's net revenue in Africa, Middle East, South Asia (AMESA) division under which India comes, was up 5.9 per cent to USD 6.43 billion as against USD 6.07 billion, primarily reflecting effective net pricing and organic volume growth.

The AMESA division "delivered more than 20 per cent organic revenue growth for the full year" with Saudi Arabia, India, Egypt, South Africa, and Pakistan "all delivering double-digit organic revenue growth," PepsiCo said.

In the division, PepsiCo's convenient foods unit volume grew 2 per cent, primarily reflecting double-

digit growth in the Middle East and Pakistan and high-single-digit growth in India.

PepsiCo's beverage unit volume grew 14 per cent in AMESA, mainly reflecting double-digit growth in India.

However, its "operating profit decreased 22 per cent, primarily reflecting a 19 percentage point impact of impairment and other charges".

Besides, it was also "negatively impacted by a 74 percentage point impact of higher commodity costs, primarily packaging materials, grains and cooking oil, certain operating cost increases and higher advertising and marketing expenses," the statement said.

For the quarter ended December 31, 2022, AMESA division's net revenue was up 4.35 per cent to USD 2.01 billion as against USD 1.92 billion of the corresponding quarter.

PepsiCo's Q4 operating profit in AMESA decreased 148 per cent on account of impairment and "impact of higher commodity costs". **PTI**



**Twitter Blue Tick to cost up to Rs 900/month in India**

NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 9

Twitter users in India looking to avail the blue tick mark for their accounts will have to shell out Rs 900 under the monthly plan for mobile phones, an update from the microblogging platform said on Thursday.

The social media platform has priced Twitter Blue at Rs 650 for web and Rs 900 per month for mobile app users.

"Blue subscribers with a verified phone number will get a blue checkmark once approved," Twitter said.

The microblogging platform has also rolled out an annual plan that will cost Rs 6,800 for users on web.

Last year, Twitter CEO Elon Musk had announced that Twitter Blue will cost USD 8 (about Rs 660) per month, but it will be priced differently for various markets. **PTI**

## Basmati sales to grow 30 pc on high demand

MUMBAI, FEBRUARY 9

Basmati rice sales are likely to increase 30 per cent to more than Rs 50,000 crore in the current fiscal, mainly due to high realisation and healthy demand, according to a report.

In the report on Thursday, Crisil Ratings said that next fiscal, however, sales will decline 5-7 per cent as basmati rice realisation is expected to soften with anticipated increase in paddy acreage.

The volume demand is expected to remain stable at 6.8 million tonnes, it added.

"Basmati sector sales will likely rise 30 per cent this fiscal, with volume growing 10 per cent and realisation increasing 20 per cent."

"Growth in export volume is driven by two factors -- increased food grain demand amid geo-political issues, and India benefiting from lower basmati exports from flood-affected Pakistan, a key basmati exporter. Next fiscal, sector sales will reduce by 5-7 per cent solely due to moderating prices," Crisil Ratings

Director Nitin Kansal said.

Basmati rice exports, comprising 64 percent of sales by volume, are estimated to log a healthy growth of 11 per cent on-year this fiscal to 4.4 million tonnes following strong demand from key markets like the Middle East and the US, as per the report.

India has already exported 3.19 million tonnes (growth of 16 per cent year-on-year) of basmati rice in the first nine months of this fiscal.

The report said the improved operating profitability will, in turn, result in higher cash accrual, which will improve the financial risk profiles of basmati players.

"Though absence of capex will limit basmati players' requirement of external long-term funds, their working capital borrowings will rise as paddy procurement will increase this fiscal to meet increased demand."

"However, increased cash flows from business will control the overall leverage of the players, keeping credit profiles stable," Crisil Ratings Team Leader Rachna Anand said. **PTI**



## SPORT

# Australia succumb to spin; 177 all out in opening Test

NAGPUR, FEBRUARY 9

**R**avindra Jadeja marked his return to international cricket with a five-wicket haul that knocked the stuffing out of Australian middle order and put India firmly in the driver's seat on the opening day of the first Test, here Thursday.

Jadeja did bulk of the bowling on the Jamtha dustbowl, earning his 11th fifer (5/47) in 22 overs that helped India skittle Australia out for a paltry 177 after the visitors decided to take the first strike in the series-opener.

Ravichandran Ashwin, who probably dominated the Aussie mind space more than his spin colleague, got 3/42 in 15.5 overs and in the process completed 450 wickets in Test cricket.

At stumps, Rohit Sharma's counter-attacking 56 not out put India in complete command with hosts ending the day at 77 for one and trailing by 100 runs. KL Rahul's lean patch continued as he was caught and bowled by Australian debutant Todd Murphy after making a 20-run contribution from 71 balls.

With pitch set to deteriorate further, Indian skipper's decision to attack Nathan Lyon did pay dividends in the final hour. Two of his shots off Lyon stamped his class and authority: a forward



ward defensive jab that rocketed to the fence between bowler and mid-off and a down the ground six. There were also cover driven fours off deliveries that were over-pitched.

On this track, one cannot survive with a defensive mindset and the decision to score quickly seemed to be the right call.

But no accolades will be enough for Jadeja, inarguably the 'MVP' (Most Valuable Player) in the Indian Test set-up. The iconic Sachin Tendulkar has termed him as compete 'package'.

When India plays abroad, he becomes a batting all-rounder, often bailing the team out at No.6 and when it comes to Indian dustbowls, he is just lethal.

On the day he showed that a knee

surgery and five month lay-off hasn't taken away anything from his armoury.

The Australians prepared for Ashwin's guile and variations but perhaps forgot to factor in Jadeja's impact on tracks that offer above average turn.

On turners, the spinners who don't try too much trickery with their fingers and just let the ball land on the cracks and let the pitch do the rest, are more dangerous than others.

Jadeja is a perfect exponent of that art of keeping things simple.

There is no denying the fact that there is considerable turn and bounce on offer but Australian batters too were guilty of playing some bad shots. It seemed they got too much messed up in their heads

and tried to tackle the track more than the bowler.

Save Marnus Labuschagne (49), who got an unplayable delivery from Jadeja, the others either played rank bad shots or erred in judgement.

Labuschagne got a delivery that was tossed up to draw him forward. It hit one of the dry cracks to rear up as well as deviate past his bat. As he was drawn forward, debutant Kona Bharat effected his first official dismissal showing smart reflexes while effecting that stumping.

What was admirable about Bharat was his change of stance after he struggled to collect a couple of Jadeja deliveries in the first session. Both deliveries turned and jumped.

Instead of crouching too low which he does with domestic spinners, he stayed on his haunches and could easily gather deliveries on his waistline in the post lunch session.

Once Labuschagne was dismissed after an 82-run stand with Steve Smith, floodgates opened as left-handed Matt Renshaw fell prey to a Jadeja delivery that hit the same spot and turned back sharply to find him plumb in-front.

Smith (37), who hit a few boundaries, was dismissed when he played the wrong line to an arm-ball from Jadeja and was bowled bat-pad.

PTI

## Ranji Trophy

### MP 56/2 in reply to Bengal's 438 on Day 2

INDORE, FEBRUARY 9

**Y**oung wicketkeeper Abishek Porel hit a half-century before Bengal bowlers struck twice towards the end of Day 2 to find themselves in a commanding position against defending champions Madhya Pradesh in their Ranji Trophy semifinal here on Thursday.

Resuming the day at 307 for 4, Bengal added 131 runs from 54.3 overs on the second day to be all out for 438, thanks mainly to the 78-run sixth-wicket stand between the 20-year-old Porel (51) and captain Manoj Tiwary (42). In reply, MP ended the day at 56 for 2 in their first innings, still trailing by 382 runs.

Tiwary added 37 runs to his overnight 5 as he consumed 129 balls in total from which he hit five boundaries to take Bengal past the 400-run mark.

But once Tiwary was out for the team total of 401, wickets fell in a heap.

Porel was the next Bengal batter to be dismissed, nine overs later, as he was run out. His 102-ball knock had eight fours.

The last four wickets managed 37 runs for Bengal. For MP, Kumar Kartikeya was the most successful bowler on the day, grabbing three wickets, including that of Tiwary, for 95 runs. MP struggled in reply with the opening pair of Yash Dubey (12) and wicketkeeper Himanshu Mantri (23) sharing just 27 runs.

PTI

## Nagpur pitch 'tricked' us: Handscomb

NAGPUR, FEBRUARY 9

**A**ustralia batter Peter Handscomb on Thursday admitted that the Nagpur track "tricked" the visiting side as it did a lot less than what they had feared in the opening Test of the four-match series.

Ravindra Jadeja (5/47) and Ravichandran Ashwin (3/42) shared eight wickets between them as Australia were bowled out for 177 in their first innings. Many Australian batters were out playing poor shots. Some of them played for the turn when there was none.

India reached 77 for 1 at stumps on the opening day.

"It definitely wasn't easy out there. It's tough because when the pitch is playing tricks that starts to play with your mind a little bit as well," Handscomb said at the press conference after the opening day's play.

"The ball that doesn't do as much you expect to do a little bit more and that's where you can come undone with the ball that goes straight on, rather than the big turners we saw out there as well." Handscomb, who scored 31 in the Australian innings, said the Indian team bowled really well as a unit and didn't



give away easy runs.

"It's tough out there, Jadeja was obviously bowling very well, not really giving our batsmen a lot to hit and I found him tough to score (against)," the 31-year-old right-handed batter said.

For Handscomb, it was a comeback to the Test team after four years and he said he was feeling nice to play again in the longest format.

"I've worked really hard on a lot of things on my game, mentally, tactically and on my technique as well.

"To work that hard and get the rewards to come back in, it's a really, really nice feeling. I'm just grateful to be out there and give it a crack at time."

PTI

## Mayank's double ton gives Karnataka advantage over Saurashtra

BENGALURU, FEB 9

**S**kipper Mayank Agarwal hit a double century to help Karnataka post 407 in their first innings and take the upper hand over Saurashtra in their Ranji Trophy semi-final here on Thursday. Resuming his innings at 110, Agarwal carried on his good form and played with more intent on the second day to score 249 off 429 balls. He struck an astounding 28 boundaries and six sixes during his marathon knock. Karnataka added 178 runs in 46.3 overs after resuming their innings at the overnight score of 229 for 5. Agarwal's overnight partner, wicketkeeper Srinivas Sharath (66) added just six runs to his score before being trapped LBW by Chetan Sakariya five overs into the second day's proceedings. Krishnappa Gowtham and Vijaykumar Vyshak failed to trouble the scorers much, departing in quick succession before Vidwath Kaverappa (15) lent Agarwal some support.

PTI



## With Australia favourites, Women's T20 World Cup begins today

CAPE TOWN, FEBRUARY 9

**T**he much-envied hegemony of Australia is likely to continue but a host of teams, led by India and England, will harbour hopes of breaking it when the ICC Women's T20 World Cup begins here Friday.

Packed with proven performers, Australia have lifted the trophy five times in seven editions. They have hardly been challenged in the format since winning the last T20 World Cup in 2020.

In the last 22 months, they have lost

just one T20 and that defeat came against India away from home via a Super Over.

The defending champions will no doubt start as favourites once again and will aim for a second hat-trick of titles, which will be a record-extending sixth trophy.

The return of skipper Meg Lanning after a break is a massive boost for the holders. Star wicketkeeper batter Alyssa Healy, who is back after a calf injury, also seems to have shrugged off the rust which makes the side even more dangerous.

PTI