Par set for 'EPIC' showdown; Waqf Bill govt's top priority

Waqf bill. Ramesh also said the Congress will also keep raising the issue of irregularities in the election process, alleging that elections are "no longer free and fair" and are being "masterminded and orchestrated".

He said the Congress will raise the issue of Trump's reciprocal-tariff threats during the second half of the Budget session and called for a bipartisan collective resolve to deal with the threats.

The first part of the Budget session of Parliament was from January 31 to February 13. The second part will commence on March 10 and continue till April 4.

MeT predicts wet spell

and 14.

There were chances of another spell of intermittent light rain and snow at many places during March 15 and 16, it said.

Hirdesh among 24 empanelled for central posting

the cabinet, as per the order.

The order says: "The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the empanelment of 24 IAS officers, including Hirdesh Kumar of the AGMUT cadre (J&K segment), for holding posts at the Centre as additional secretary/equivalent level."

Police team formed to investigate Kathua killings

The bodies of Varun Singh (15), his paternal uncle Yogesh Singh (32) and maternal uncle Darshan Singh (40) were recovered from Ishu nullah in the remote Malhar area in the higher reaches of Kathua on Saturday. The trio had gone missing on March 5 during a wedding function.

Accompanied by SSP, Kathua, Shobit Saxena and Additional Deputy Commissioner Vinay Khosla, the DIG met the protesting locals of Malhar, Malad, Marhoon, Deota and adjoining areas in Billawar, and assured them that the security arrangements will further be strengthened.

"A team has been constituted for the investigation of the case and VDGs will be strengthened to make people feel secure. Those willing to be part of the security grid will be given training," Kumar told reporters at Billawar.

He said several police and Special Operations Group (SOG) personnel were already on the ground to secure the area, along with Army and paramilitary forces.

"The teams are working on every aspect of the case and keeping a close watch (on the situation). We are hopeful that the results will be in front of everyone very soon," the officer said.

He said what exactly happened was a matter of investigation and as the probe progresses, information will be shared accordingly.

Meanwhile, the postmortem of the deceased was conducted by a specially-constituted doctors' team at a Kathua hospital and the bodies were handed over to their families for the last rites.

The bodies reached homes of the deceased late on Sunday evening and the cremation will take place on Monday, officials said.

Govt levies 10 pc duty on masur dal

So far, the import of lentils has been exempted from duty.

The government had initially allowed the duty-free import of yellow peas in December 2023 and subsequently extended it thrice till February 28.

As per estimates, India's yellow peas import stood at 30 lakh tonnes out of 67 lakh tons of overall pulses imported during 2024.

India condemns vandalism at temple in California spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "We call upon the local law enforcement authorities to take stringent action against those responsible for these acts, and also ensure adequate security to places of worship," he said.

Cont. From Page 1

Tough challenges in safeguarding territorial integrity: China

second-largest military budget, following the US, whose latest defence spending proposal stood at over USD 890 billion, as put forward by former President Donald Trump. Last year, China increased its defense budget by 7.2 per-

cent, bringing it to about USD 232 billion (1.67 trillion yuan). According to Wu, when compared to major military

powers like the US, China's defense spending remains relatively low in terms of GDP share, national fiscal expenditures, per capita defense spending, and expenditure per service member.

On Tuesday, Lou Qinjian, spokesperson for the National People's Congress, defended China's growing defense expenditure, stating, "Peace must be safeguarded with strength."

China is also said to be continuously further strengthening its defences along the Line of Actual Control with India. It has on multiple occasions showed India's some places along the border as its own, prompting strong reaction from New Delhi.

LG orders probe into Kathua killings

post on X.

"I have ordered a thorough & transparent investigation, and all the necessary support to the families will be provided. I assure the people that the perpetrators will be brought to book at the earliest," the LG added.

"Justice will be ensured and accountability will be fixed," he said.

Lawyers have contributed in nation building, protecting Constitution: Amit Shah

were joining the profession when the Constitution has completed 75 years, the Parliament had made radical changes in all three criminal laws and adopted new laws, and the country is now ranked as the world's fifth largest economy.

He said they will be associated with the responsibility of protecting and smoothly implementing the visionary, transparent and inclusive Constitution that the founding fathers made.

Shah said the lawyers are taking oath a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi has ensured social, economic and political justice through various decisions, like abolishing triple talaq and giving equal rights to Muslim women, bringing in the new education policy that gives youth and adolescents skill-based education, that too in their mother tongue.

In the field of economic justice, Modi has ended the complications of 39,000 laws, merged banks, solved the problems of NPA and made the Indian economy the fifth largest in the world, Shah said.

"Abolishing Article 370, which people were waiting for for years, and reaching 12 settlements in 10 years to ensure peace in the North East are examples of political justice. Providing 33 per cent reservation to women in law-making institutions with the Nari Shakti Vandana Act is also a step in that direction," he said.

He said the trust of the people of the country is still intact in the judiciary, but if it takes 20 years to get justice, then this trust cannot last for long.

"Therefore, three new criminal laws have been brought in to ensure timely justice. In the new laws, some processes have been rationalised, time limits set, and arrangements made to complete small and big cases quickly through summary trials," he said.

Investment proposals worth Rs 1.63 lakh cr received

volving an investment of Rs 9,606.46 crore and providing employment to 63,710 people have come into production in the Union Territory since 2019 till December 2024.

This includes 334 units having employment of 8,443 persons with an investment of Rs 2,977 crores in FY 2024-25 up to December 2024.

As many as 8,306 new applications have been received

Land Allotment Policy 2021-30. These aim to attract investments with incentives like Capital Investment Incentive, GST Linked Incentive, and Working Capital Interest Incentive, it said.

The Centre has rolled out the New Central Sector Scheme (NCSS) with an outlay of Rs 28,400 crores for industrial development of J&K in 2021 which envisages incentives like Capital Investment Incentive, Capital Interest subvention, GST Linked Incentive, Working Capital Interest Subvention.

"This package has received an overwhelming response and has been fully subscribed. As of the registration deadline on 30th September 2024, a total of 971 applications, representing an investment of Rs 10,471 crore and employment of 51,897 have been approved for registration.

"J&K has witnessed the setup of industries with investments exceeding Rs 500 crore. These large-scale ventures have catalysed the development of ancillary industries, enhanced-local employment, and firmly positioned J&K as a competitive investment destination," the survey said.

Forty-six new industrial estates are being developed to boost job opportunities, with PSUs like NBCC, IRCON, CPWD handling the work.

The report said handicrafts and handlooms are vital to J&K's economy, providing significant employment to around 4.22 lakh artisans.

"The sector includes renowned products like Pashmina Shawls, Kashmiri Carpets, and various woodcrafts. The government focuses on skill development with 634 training centers. A unique QR Code-based certification system has been established which ensures authenticity of the crafts. Many crafts have received GI tags, and more are in the pipeline," it said.

Exports have rebounded post-COVID, with total handicraft exports reaching Rs 1,162.29 crore in 2023-24, doubling from 2021-22.

Jammu and Kashmir's start-up ecosystem has also seen a remarkable 287 per cent growth, with DPIIT-registered start-ups increasing from 237 in 2020 to 917 in 2024, including 333 women-led ventures.

Over 1,600 start-ups have been registered with the Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI), marking a threefold rise, the report said, adding the New Start-up Policy 2024-27 and the J&K start-up portal, launched in July 2024, offers strong fiscal and non-fiscal support.

In terms of Ease of Doing Business (EODB), Jammu and Kashmir has made significant progress becoming the first UT to integrate its National Single Window Portal with the national platform.

The region achieved 97 percent compliance with the Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP), with 341 out of 352 reforms approved, and the JK-SW Incentive Calculator was recognized as a Best Practice.

The Regulatory Compliance Burden (RCB) has also been reduced by 3,226 regulatory hurdles, further streamlining business operations, the survey said.

During 2024-25, it said Jammu & Kashmir's cooperative sector made notable progress viz. 664 societies were registered, creating potential jobs for 1,223 people.

India win Champions Trophy, beat New Zealand by 4 wickets

For New Zealand, Daryl Mitchell (63 off 101 balls), Michael Bracewell (53 not out off 40 balls), and Rachin Ravindra (37 off 29 balls) were the main contributors with the willow.

While chasing, India faced some anxious moments when they lost two wickets after being well paced at 183 for three after 38 years, but KL Rahul (34 not out off 33 balls) showed great composure to see his team through after Hardik Pandya's breezy 18-run knock.

India won the trophy without losing a match, reflecting their dominance.

India's previous title triumphs in the tournament came in 2002 and 2013. No other team has won the event thrice. Brief scores:

New Zealand: 251/7 in 50 overs (Daryl Mitchell 63, Michael Bracewell 53 not out, Rachin Ravindra 37; Kuldeep Yadav 2/40, Varun Chakaravarthy 2/45.

India: 254/6 in 49 overs (Rohit Sharma 76, Shreyas Iyer 48; Mitchell Santner 2/46, Michael Bracewell 2/28).

2,800 crore, benefiting 15 lakh individuals.

As many as 489 ambulances have been geo-tagged and integrated with online 108/102 ambulatory services.

These efforts have enabled quick response times (average response time less than half-an-hour) and served more than 4.50 lakh beneficiaries since August 2020.

Over the past four years, J&K has significantly expanded its healthcare workforce, including hiring of 10,919 doctors and paramedical staff under the National Health Mission (NHM), alongside filling up of 36,274 regular positions in health and medical education, besides supporting 13,965 ASHA workers, the report said.

Infrastructural upgradation and consolidation of health institutions include two AIIMS, two state cancer institutes and two bone and joint hospitals, while 3,100 health and wellness centres have been operationalised by upgrading the existing public health centres and Ayush dispensaries, the report said.

Also, bed capacity in hospitals has been increased to 21,966 while medical oxygen generation capacity has been extended from 14916 LPM to 1,27,901 LPM (almost nine times) since August 2020 through 177 operational oxygen generation plants (OGPs), it said.

There has been an unprecedented expansion in medical education with the establishment of new medical colleges, it added.

Ten government medical colleges, including nine offering MBBS, one unani, one ayurvedic and one homeopathy courses have been started.

The capacity of MBBS seats has been increased from 500 to 1,300, the report said, adding that more than 5,000 seats have been added in MBBS, DNB, post-graduate and nursing courses since 2019.

PM transformed anti-incumbency into pro-incumbency in electoral landscape: Nadda

Tripura, Nadda said tax devolution increased five-fold during the Modi era compared to the UPA regime.

"Tripura used to get Rs 9,000 crore as share of tax during the UPA regime, which has risen to Rs 46,500 crore. Likewise, the grant-in-aid, which was Rs 31,000 crore during the UPA time increased to Rs 54,000 crore," he said.

Nadda also announced the modernisation of four railway stations in Tripura - Agartala, Udaipur, Dharmanagar and Kumarghat - over the next two years.

He hailed the BJP-led government for its "big push" in digitisation in the administration.

"Tripura has embraced digitisation with 29 lakh government files being digitised," Nadda said.

2 murders rock Jammu

and booked him under relevant sections of law.

In the second incident, four persons, who were identified as Ashok Kumar, Sahil Badiyal, Aman and Rishi, barged into the house of one Madan Lal at Shakti Nagar and assaulted him and his son Sanjay Kumar over an old enemity, the officials added.

The accused later threw Madan from the rooftop of his house as a result of which he sustained critical injuries.

He was shifted to the GMCH, where he succumbed to his injuries. Police had taken into custody all the four accused and registered a case against him under relevant sections of law.

Govt yet to receive proposals from HCs to appoint ad-hoc judges

ing retired judges as ad-hoc HC judges, sources pointed out.

In a judgement on April 20, 2021 on the appointment of adhoc judges in the high courts, the top court had imposed certain conditions. However, later a special Supreme Court bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna, justices B R Gavai and Surya Kant had relaxed certain conditions and kept some in abeyance.

The verdict, which was authored by former Chief Justice S A Bobde, directed retired high court judges to be appointed as ad-hoc ones for a period of two to three years to clear the backlog.

While one condition said the ad-hoc judges couldn't be appointed if a high court working with 80 per cent of its sanctioned strength, the other said ad-hoc judges could sit separately on benches to deal with cases.

Relaxing the conditions, the court said the requirement

Jaiswal was responding to media queries on the incident.

The Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) on Saturday said that Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills faced desecration.

"In the face of another Mandir desecration, this time in Chino Hills, CA, the Hindu community stands steadfast against hate. Together with the community in Chino Hills and Southern California, we will never let hate take root," the BAPS Public Affairs posted on X. with a proposed total investment of Rs 1.63 lakh crore and the potential to create employment for approximately 5.90 lakh individuals, requiring 79,137 kanals of land as of December 2024, the survey said.

It said the Industries and Commerce Department envisions sustainable, equitable, environment-friendly and balanced industrial growth and economic development of J&K with focus on employment generation. Development of backward regions and nurturing existing units is emphasized upon in the J&K Industrial policy 2021-30.

To attract investment further in the Industrial Sector, J&K Government introduced new policies which include J&K Start-Up Policy 2024-27 and J&K Wool processing, Handloom and Handicraft policy 2020.

Online allotment of land across the Union Territory in a transparent way is ensured through the J&K Industrial

India forex reserves drop USD 1.8 billion to USD 639 billion in latest week

NEW DELHI , MARCH 9 : India's foreign exchange reserves slumped in the week that ended on February 28, as per latest RBI data.

In the week under consideration, the foreign exchange reserves declined by USD 1.781 billion to USD 638.698 billion. Forex reserves had slumped for about four months, recently hitting an 11-month low. Then followed the latest rollercoaster movement, with gains some weeks and declines the next.

Forex reserves started falling after touching an alltime high of USD 704.89 billion in September. They are now about 10 percent lower from their peak.

The decline in reserves is most likely due to RBI intervention, aimed at preventing a sharp depreciation of the Rupee. The Indian Rupee is now at or near its all-time low against the US dollar.

Economic impact of Holi festival on trade: Business ex-



contrasting with a cumulative

decline of USD 71 billion in

2022. In 2024, the reserves

rose by a little over USD 20

billion. Foreign exchange re-

serves, or FX reserves, are as-

sets held by a nation's central

bank or monetary authority,

pected to surpass Rs 60,000 approximately 10-11 months crore this year' of projected imports.

The latest RBI data showed that India's foreign currency assets (FCA), the largest component of forex reserves, stood at USD 543.350 billion. Gold reserves currently

amount to USD 73.272 billion, according to RBI data.

Estimates suggest that India's foreign exchange reserves are sufficient to cover approximately 10-11 months of projected imports. In 2023, India added around USD 58 billion to its foreign exchange reserves, Pound Sterling.

The RBI often intervenes by managing liquidity, including selling dollars, to prevent steep Rupee depreciation. The RBI strategically buys dollars when the Rupee is strong and sells when it weakens.

Sex ratio at birth improves from 923 to 976

significant improvement, from 923 to 976," the report said.

The percentage of fully-immunised children against preventable diseases has increased to 96.5 per cent, it said.

Institutional births have increased from 85.6 per cent to 92.40 per cent, while life expectancy at birth in J-K has reached 74.3 years - the highest in the country after Kerala and Delhi - against a national average of 70 years, the report said.

Since its inception, 100 per cent families have registered and 86.12 lakh Ayushman Golden cards have been issued under the AB-PMJAY - SEHAT scheme, it said, adding that this initiative has facilitated treatments worth Rs that vacancies should not be more than 20 per cent of the sanctioned strength for the time being shall be kept in abeyance.

The bench said each high court should keep the appointment to two to five ad-hoc judges and not exceed 10 per cent of the total sanctioned strength.

"The ad-hoc judges will sit in a bench presided over by a sitting judge of the high court and decide pending criminal appeals," said the apex court's order.

The rarely used Article 224A of the Constitution deals with the appointment of ad-hoc judges in high courts.

"The Chief Justice of a High Court for any State may at any time, with the previous consent of the President, request any person who has held the office of a Judge of that Court or of any other High Court to sit and act as a Judge of the High Court for that state".

Solar capacity additions to accelerate with 85-90 GW projected for FY26-27: Report

NEW DELHI, **MARCH 9**: New Delhi [India], March 9 (ANI): Solar capacity additions in India will accelerate in the Financial Year (FY) 2026 and FY27, with 85-90 GW of new solar capacity expected to be added during these two years combined, according to a report by SBI Caps.

The report adds that the additions of residential rooftop solar support the sector to drive the expansion.

The report further added that the solar additions could double to 30 GW in FY 25, as solar capacity additions have reached unprecedented levels, demonstrating resilience to demand fluctuations.

As per the report, annual module demand is forecast at 100 GW.

The report, however, added that the realization of the projections hinges on moderate PPA-PSA gap reduction, PM-SGMBY completion by FY28, and enhanced RPO compli-



ance. Land constraints, ALCM implementation, and restrictive state net metering policies pose downside risks. Conversely, timely schemes (especially PM-KUSUM) and project execution could further augment demand, the report said

Meanwhile, as per the government data, India's solar power sector has witnessed an extraordinary 3450 percent increase in capacity over the past decade, rising from 2.82 GW in 2014 to 100 GW in 2025.

As of January 31, 2025, India's total solar capacity installed stands at 100.33 GW, with 84.10 GW under implementation and an additional

47.49 GW under tendering. Solar energy remains the dominant contributor to India's renewable energy growth, accounting for 47 per cent of the total installed renewable energy capacity. In 2024, record-breaking 24.5 GW of solar capacity was added reflecting a more than two-fold increase in solar installations compared to 2023. Last year also saw the installation of 18.5 GW of utility-

scale solar capacity, a nearly

2.8 times increase compared

to 2023. Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh are among the top-performing states, contributing significantly to India's total utilityscale solar installations.

The rooftop solar sector in India witnessed remarkable growth in 2024, with 4.59 GW of new capacity installed, reflecting a 53 percent increase compared to 2023.

According to the government, a key driver of this growth has been the PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana, launched in 2024, which is now nearing 9 lakh rooftop solar installations, enabling households across the country to embrace clean energy solutions.

India has also made significant strides in solar manufacturing. In 2014, the country had a limited solar module production capacity of just 2 GW. Over the past decade, this has surged to 60 GW in 2024.