

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Sahai represents ICC in interaction with Cambodian delegation

NEW DELHI, FEB 24: Reaffirming the deep civilizational ties between India and Cambodia, Rahul Sahai, Chairman, Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Jammu Chapter, presented an idol of Lord Ram to the Official Delegation of the Government of Cambodia during a high-level interaction held in New Delhi. The gesture symbolized the enduring cultural and spiritual connect shared by the two nations, as the Ramayana holds a revered place in Cambodian heritage. In Cambodia, the epic is known as the Reamker and forms an integral part of its classical dance traditions, literature, and temple architecture. The magnificent depictions of the Ramayana at the iconic Angkor Wat stand as a powerful reminder of the centuries-old cultural bridge between the two countries. Sahai remarked that such shared heritage provides a strong foundation for expanding contemporary economic partnerships.

The meeting was held in New Delhi at The Imperial New Delhi, Connaught Place, in a formal setting conducive to high-level deliberations.



The Cambodian delegation was led by His Excellency Tith Rithipol, Under Secretary of State, Ministry of Commerce, Kingdom of Cambodia, accompanied by the Cambodian Ambassador to India and the Head of the Exports Division of Cambodia. The interaction focused on enhancing bilateral trade, deepening private-sector cooperation, and exploring structured engagement between business communities of both countries.

A wide range of business opportunities were discussed during the meeting, including renewable energy, healthcare, agro-processing, MSME partnerships,

tourism, education, and digital commerce. Sahai highlighted the immense potential of Jammu & Kashmir in sectors such as horticulture, food processing, tourism infrastructure, light manufacturing, and renewable energy.

He emphasized that regional industry bodies like ICC Jammu can act as catalysts in translating diplomatic goodwill into tangible economic outcomes through focused business-to-business collaborations.

In a significant development, it was mutually agreed that an ICC Jammu & Kashmir business delegation will visit Cambodia in the near

future to explore on-ground opportunities, interact with industry leaders, and further strengthen trade linkages between the two regions.

His Excellency Tith Rithipol appreciated the constructive dialogue and expressed optimism about expanding economic engagement with India, particularly through enhanced private-sector participation.

The interaction was attended by senior representatives from leading Indian business houses and institutions including Jindal Steel, CK Birla Hospitals, Vikram Solar, Mefcom Group, Institute of Cost Accountants of India, officials from the Ministry of External Affairs, Dr. Bhaskar Chatterjee, former Secretary, Government of India, along with ICC Northern Region leadership, Debmalya Banerjee, Subhash Goyal, Anil Razdan, Ajay Sardana and Pankaj Satija, among other distinguished participants.

The meeting concluded on a positive and forward-looking note, paving the way for deeper economic cooperation and sustained engagement between India and Cambodia.

Australia begins sweeping public inquiry probing antisemitism after Bondi Beach killings

MELBOURNE, FEB 24: A wide-ranging federal inquiry began on Tuesday into a rise in antisemitism across Australia before two gunmen believed to be inspired by the Islamic State group allegedly killed 15 people at a Sydney Jewish festival in December.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced last month that Australia's most powerful form of public inquiry, known as a royal commission, would investigate the Dec. 14 massacre at Bondi Beach.

Alleged shooter Sajid Naveed was shot dead by police. His son, Naveed Akram, faces charges including committing a terrorist act, 15 counts of murder and 40 counts of attempted murder. He has entered no pleas.

Royal Commissioner Virginia Bell, who heads the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, said she did not want evidence that she heard to prejudice Akram's criminal trial.

"One might expect a royal commission set up to inquire into an attack would lead evidence of it and of the heroism of those who sort to confront the shooters and of those who ran toward the gunfire to offer medical assistance to the wounded," Bell said in an opening address.

"The trial of that individual (Akram) will be the occasion to lead evidence of the attack. This commission must do its work without risking any prejudice to that criminal proceeding," she added.

Royal commissions, which can imprison witnesses who refuse to cooperate, often re-



quest time extensions as more evidence is discovered. Bell is the sole commissioner. As well as lawyers, the commission's staff include analysts, researchers and other office workers, according to Richard Lancaster, who leads a team of lawyers in his role as the Senior Counsel Assisting the Royal Commission. Lancaster's job is to manage the investigation's direction, present Bell with evidence and question witnesses.

Completing her report by the deadline of the massacre's first anniversary is a "matter of critical importance," Bell said. "This imposes a tight time frame and it's going to impose limitations on how the commission approaches its terms of reference," the retired high court judge said.

Bell also acknowledged religions and ethnicities other than Jewish suffered prejudice in Australia. "I expect that social cohesion will be advanced by measures that address discrimination against religious faiths, ethnicities and cultures generally," Bell said. "Nonetheless, against the background of the massacre of innocent people who ap-

pear to have been targeted simply because they were Jewish, I trust everyone will appreciate why the focus of this commission will be on tackling antisemitism."

Bell must make an interim report by the end of April. That report will examine interaction and information-sharing between federal and state agencies, as well as organizers of the Hanukkah celebration that was attacked. She will investigate security arrangements and report on whether intelligence and law enforcement agencies performed to maximum effectiveness.

The commission must identify gaps in legal and regulatory frameworks that might impede the ability of law enforcement, border control, immigration and security agencies to prevent and respond to such an attack.

Bell will make recommendations to help law enforcement, border control, immigration and security agencies tackle antisemitism through areas such as staff training. The commission will examine the nature and prevalence of antisemitism in institutions and society including drivers such as ex-

trism and radicalization.

Bell and her staff also will review security at Jewish places of worship, education and cultural facilities, as well as public events.

The commission staff already has issued government agencies with dozens of notices to provide documents and more would be issued, Lancaster said, adding that dates for public hearings had not yet been set.

Albanese initially resisted calls from victims' families, Jewish leaders and opposition lawmakers to establish a royal commission, arguing it would take too long to provide answers.

Instead, he appointed retired bureaucrat Dennis Richardson to examine the roles of intelligence, security and law enforcement agencies, as well as potential failings in procedures and laws that led to the shooting. That inquiry was to report in April.

Richardson's inquiry has been folded into the royal commission and he has been appointed Bell's special adviser.

Reports of antisemitism Islamophobic behavior have increased markedly in Australia since the Israel-Hamas war began in 2023.

Jews account for fewer than 120,000 people in Australia's population of 28 million and 85% of the Jewish population live in Sydney and Melbourne.

In 2024, the Australian government named a special envoy to confront a rise in antisemitism across the country. Months later, the government also appointed a special envoy to combat Islamophobia. (AP)

Trade, Ukraine and new world order are top concerns on German leader's visit to China

BEIJING, FEB 24: The first official trip to China by German Chancellor Friedrich Merz comes as his country's manufacturers face increasing pressure from Chinese competitors and as US President Donald Trump shakes up a post-World War II global order that Europe has long depended on.

Merz is set to arrive Wednesday for a two-day visit, the latest in a parade of world leaders to visit Beijing ahead of a trip by Trump in about five weeks.

Besides Germany's growing trade deficit with China, Merz is expected to raise Chinese backing for Russia's position in the war in Ukraine, though no change from the Chinese side is foreseen.

China is seeking support from other nations to push back against Trump's challenges to international rules and organisations, but Merz has signalled wariness about China's view of a 21st century order. Success may be measured by finding small ways to cooperate despite differences on major issues.

"As the world's second and third largest economies, sound China-A.C.-Germany relations serve the interests of both sides and meet the expectations of the international community," Chinese

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said Tuesday.

She added that "the Ukraine crisis is not and should not become an issue between China and Europe." China says it has "an objective and impartial position," which puts it at odds with Germany and much of Europe.

Merz opens his trip with talks Wednesday with China's Premier Li Qiang and top leader Xi Jinping, whose reduced international travel means foreign leaders must travel to Beijing if they want to meet him. On Thursday, the German chancellor plans to visit a Mercedes-Benz facility and travel to Hangzhou, a high-tech city that is home to e-commerce giant Alibaba and leading robot developer Unitree Robotics.

He is bringing a delegation of business leaders looking to expand sales. China has long been an important market for Germany, a major exporter of manufactured goods. But advances by Chinese companies in recent years have turned them into formidable competitors, notably in the automobile industry, where new electric vehicle makers are challenging Volkswagen and other leading brands.

Last year's foreign trade figures underlined concern

over the imbalance in economic ties. German imports from China rose 8.8 per cent to 170.6 billion euros (USD 201 billion), helping Chinese manufacturers offset a decline in US imports because of Trump's tariffs. Meanwhile, German exports to China fell 9.7 per cent to 81.3 billion euros.

The growing imbalance has stepped up longstanding German demands that China reduce its trade barriers and open its markets further to foreign competitors.

Merz's visit follows French President Emmanuel Macron in December and the leaders of Ireland, South Korea, Canada, Finland and Britain last month.

In an address to the German parliament in January, Merz said Europe needs to "learn the language of power politics" to assert itself in a changing world and become stronger economically and militarily. The emerging world order also opens opportunities for Europe, he said, as democracies with open and growing markets "seek what we have to offer them, namely partnerships on the basis of mutual respect, trust and reliability."

He also said recently that Germany should have no illusions about China, which

he said "asserts the claim to define a new multilateral order according to its own rules."

Shortly after this week's China trip, Merz plans to make his second visit to Washington since taking office in May.

While some countries — notably Canada and the UK — seek to repair ties with China, Germany's goal is to maintain a relationship that has become more complicated in recent years.

Germany still recognizes China as a vital economic partner but now also sees it as a competitor. The government, in what has become known as de-risking, has sought to reduce the country's dependence on China as an export market and for strategic products such as rare earths, which are widely used in the automotive, tech and defense industries.

On a visit to Beijing in December, German Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul discussed his government's concerns over Chinese government subsidies to targeted industries, the manufacturing overcapacity that has boosted exports, restrictions on the export of rare earths and the Russia-Ukraine war. (AP)

Nepal poll results to be out within 24 hours of ballot collection: Acting CEC

KATHMANDU, FEB 24: Nepal's Acting Chief Election Commissioner Ram Prasad Bhandari on Monday said the results of the general elections scheduled for March 5 will be published within 24 hours of collecting the ballot boxes.

A total of 18.9 million eligible voters will exercise their franchise to elect 275 members of the House of Representatives (HoR).

While 165 lawmakers will be elected through direct voting, 110 will be elected under the proportional voting system that allows for the representation of minorities and smaller parties in the parliament. The Election Commission plans to begin vote counting immediately after the ballot boxes are collected, Bhandari told a private news



agency.

He said while it may take one or two days to declare the results under the proportional representation system, the outcomes of the direct voting or first-past-the-post (FPTP) system will be announced within 24 hours of ballot collection.

The proportional representation (PR) system is used to elect 110 of the 275

members of the HoR based on the total votes received by political parties nationwide. Voters cast a separate ballot for a party, and seats are allocated in proportion to each party's share of votes. Parties must ensure inclusion of women and marginalised groups such as dalits, janajatis, madhesis and minorities in their PR candidate lists. This system aims to

make parliament more representative of Nepal's social and ethnic diversity.

Election Commission spokesperson Narayan Prasad Bhattarai said the dispatch of ballot papers to areas outside the Kathmandu Valley has already been completed.

He said the distribution of ballot papers to some constituencies in Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur districts will be completed by Tuesday night.

Polling will be held from 7 am to 5 pm on March 5.

The Commission has allowed political parties and candidates to campaign from February 16 to March 2. The silence period, during which no campaign activities will be permitted, will begin at midnight on March 2.

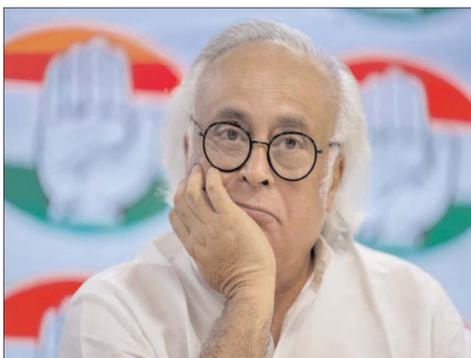
Modi Govt Has Abandoned Palestinians: Cong Slams PM's Upcoming Israel Visit

NEW DELHI, Feb 24: The Congress on Tuesday alleged that the government has "abandoned" the Palestinians and said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is going to Israel despite that country's attacks on civilians in Gaza continuing "mercilessly".

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said the Modi government makes cynical and hypocritical statements on its commitment to the cause of the Palestinians but in reality it has abandoned them.

Israel's dispossession and displacement of thousands of Palestinians in the occupied West Bank has intensified and drawn worldwide condemnation, Ramesh said on X.

Israel's attacks on civilians



in Gaza continue mercilessly, he said.

Ramesh also pointed out that Israel and the US are planning air assaults on Iran.

"Yet the Prime Minister is going to Israel tomorrow (where there is a Modani connection as well) to embrace his good friend Mr.

Netanyahu, who faces very serious corruption charges," the Congress leader said.

"The Opposition in Israel is threatening to boycott Mr. Modi's address to the Israeli Parliament to protest how Mr. Netanyahu is destroying the independence of the judiciary in Israel," he said.

The Modi government

makes cynical and hypocritical statements on its commitment to the cause of the Palestinians, Ramesh said.

"The reality is the Modi government has abandoned them, forgetting that India was amongst the earliest countries to recognise the state of Palestine way back on Nov 18, 1988," he said.

Modi's visit to Israel has gotten entangled in domestic politics, with the opposition threatening to boycott the Indian leader's parliamentary address unless the Supreme Court chief is invited for it as per protocol.

Modi is expected to arrive in Israel on February 25 for a two-day visit, during which he is likely to address the Knesset and meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Isaac Herzog. (Agencies)

Shivraj Singh Chouhan launches agriculture, rural development projects in Assam

GUWAHATI, FEB 23: Union Agriculture and Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Monday launched several initiatives and handed over to the Assam government the approval letter of Rs 1,819 crore sanctioned for road projects in the state under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana.

Chouhan also inaugurated the newly constructed building of Assam Seeds Corporation Limited, launched a new mobile application called 'Krishi Sarathi' for the Agriculture Department and another app 'Rural One' for the Panchayat Department at a programme held here in the presence of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

He also launched the social audit module of the AWAS Plus app with one lakh beneficiaries under the Pradhan

Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin formally performing their house warming ceremonies.

The government signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding with PepsiCo and SBI to secure fair returns for the state under the Chief Minister's Utkarsh Yojana, while Chouhan and Sarma handed over cheques to 10 Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) or Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs).

Sarma said that the day marked a significant milestone for Assam as the Union Minister announced the Centre approved Rs 1,819 crore for Assam under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana to build 1,522 kilometres of roads and 62 bridges.

He added that the state would pave nearly 2,000 new rural roads and begin the tender process on Tuesday.

Referring to Assam's re-

cent economic performance, Sarma said that the Reserve Bank of India's economic survey ranked Assam as the fastest-growing state in the country.

Assam's tea industry has regained its strong position in the global market with the state exporting an additional 40 million kilograms of tea this year, he said.

The CM expressed hope that recent free trade agreements with Britain, the European Union, and Dubai, secured through Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic efforts, would allow Assam's Joha rice, ginger, and lemon to enter international markets without additional tariffs.

Sarma also said that tea garden workers who have lived on the same land for 200 years have ownership rights, and the government

has amended the law to grant them land ownership.

He announced that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would personally distribute the land pattas in March, enabling nearly two lakh families to gain social justice through this move.

The CM also requested Chouhan to allow fresh geotagging so that these workers could receive houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. The Union Minister responded positively.

Urging farmers to adopt modern methods, the chief minister said traditional farming alone cannot double farmers' incomes.

He encouraged farmers to focus on horticulture and commercial crops, and the government would grant special support to FPCs for using drones to spray fertiliser and monitor crops.