

**OPINION 6**  
NEED FOR UNIFORM  
CIVIL CODE IS REAL

**WORLD 8**  
GERMAN LEADER TRAVELS TO  
RUSSIA, UKRAINE AS TENSIONS GROW

**MONEY 9**  
5G SPECTRUM AUCTION  
EXPECTED IN MAY

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## CAPSULE

### ISRO COUNTS DOWN TO 2022 LAUNCH MISSION

**Bengaluru:** The 25-hour countdown for Indian Space Research Organisation's first launch mission of 2022, to orbit Earth observation satellite EOS-04 onboard PSLV-C52, began early on Sunday.

### IL&FS TO RESOLVE DEBT OF ₹55K CR

**New Delhi:** IL&FS group would resolve debt of ₹ 55,000 crore by March 2022, the board of the crisis-hit company has stated in its affidavit filed before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal. **P9**

### ₹26.275 CR FOR POLICE MODERNISATION

**New Delhi:** The Modi Government has approved the continuation of a mega police modernisation scheme for five years up to 2025-26 with a financial outlay of ₹26,275 crore. **P4**

### KARAKORAM GLACIERS STABLE, SAYS GOVT

**New Delhi:** Glaciers in the Karakoram region are in a stable condition, but those feeding the Ganga and the Brahmaputra river basins are melting at a faster rate, the Earth Sciences Ministry has said. In reply to a written question in the Lok Sabha, the Ministry said the mean retreat rate of the Hindukush Himalayan glaciers was 14.9-15.1 metres per annum, which varied from 12.7-13.2 metres per annum in the Indus, 15.5-14.4 metres per annum in the Ganga and 20.2-19.7 metres per annum in the Brahmaputra river basins.

# Big guns on poll trail in Punjab

With week to go for Assembly elections PM to address rally in Jalandhar today

PNS ■ CHANDIGARH

Just a week before Punjab's high-octane Assembly elections on February 20, all mainstream political parties are giving a final push to their poll campaign.

The "super Sunday" witnessed Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal, among many others, going all out to woo the electorate by addressing rallies, corner meetings, and holding road shows.

The top leaders did hectic campaigning a day before Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi is scheduled to visit Jalandhar to address a rally, for which all preparations have been made and security has been beefed up. Learning lessons from the PM's previous visit to Ferozepur, high-level security arrangements have been made.



Delhi Chief Minister and AAP convener Arvind Kejriwal with Punjab AAP president and CM candidate Bhagwant Mann, during a road show ahead of the Punjab Assembly elections, in Amritsar, on Sunday **PTI**

Already, BJP national president JP Nadda and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, besides other Union Ministers and senior leaders have been campaigning in Punjab.

Shah, seeking votes for the BJP-led alliance candidates, addressed back-to-back rallies at Ludhiana, Patiala, and then at Amritsar. Sporting a saffron

turban and starting his speech with slogans of "Jai shri Ram" and "Sat Sri Akal", Shah attacked Punjab Chief Minister Charanjit Singh Channi over Modi's "security lapse" issue, saying if the "person who cannot ensure safe route of the PM, can he secure entire Punjab and its people."

Continued on page 2

# Mamata sends I-PAC packing

Loyalists replace Kishor's team; 3 BJP leaders quit party to join TMC

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

A day after setting up a National Working Committee (NCW) of the Trinamool Congress, Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday constituted a media coordinator committee to be headed by her own loyalists, Cabinet Ministers Aroop Biswas and Chandrima Bhattacharya, and former MP Kunal Ghosh.



Media coordination was earlier looked after by-election strategist Prashant Kishor's Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) — which reportedly enjoyed the trust of her nephew and party MP Abhishek Banerjee.

The Chief Minister who is also the Trinamool Congress president is known to have dissolved all the top posts save her own. New portfolios would soon be declared, senior leaders in the party said. Both, the NCW and the

Coordination Committee were allegedly created to bury the differences between the young brigade and the senior leaders loyal to the Chief Minister, sources said. Most old guards had not taken the meteoric rise of junior Banerjee up the party ladder. The latest conflict between the two groups has been over the one-person-one-post slogan coined by Abhishek.

Meanwhile, in an unrelated development, the Bengal BJP suffered more blows after three of its leaders from North 24 Parganas returned to the Trinamool Congress. All these leaders are relatives of Barrackpore BJP MP Arjun Singh. **Continued on page 2**

Punjab Kings get Livingstone for ₹11.50 cr, pacers get good deals

**Bengaluru:** England batter Liam Livingstone fetched a staggering ₹11.50 crore deal from Punjab Kings, who also roped in West Indies fast bowler Odean Smith for ₹6 crore on the second day of the IPL mega auction here on Sunday. For their left-arm variety, second-string India pacers like Khaleel Ahmed and Chetan Sakariya got handsome deals of ₹5.25 crore and ₹4.20 crore, respectively.

Continued on page 2

# Experts advise growing more low GI rice to fight spurt in diabetes

'Increasing shift to sedentary lifestyle driving up cases'

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

With sedentary lifestyle increasingly becoming the norm in India — more so in view of the Covid-19 induced work-from-home trend — driving up the num-



ber of diabetes cases, scientists from ICMR-National Institute of Nutrition and ICAR-Indian

Institute of Rice Research have favoured large-scale cultivation of the low Glycemic Index (GI) rice as a fit diet for diabetic people in the country.

Any variety of rice with less than 55 GI is considered diabetic-friendly, according to scientists. A low GI diet helps curb cravings and prevent sugar levels from spiking, reduces heart risks, and aids weight loss.

Continued on page 2

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## FIRST COLUMN MODERNISING THE POLICE FORCE AND POLICING

Following new concepts of safety and security is imperative



SUDHIR HINDWAN

Recently, there has been mounting pressure on the police and paramilitary forces to maintain round-the-clock surveillance after an upsurge in terrorist attacks and attempts at infiltration amid pandemic stress.

The Prime Minister's address for moving towards high-power police technology mission to equip the force with latest technologies exhibits remarkable concern for nipping violence plans of terrorists in the bud and modernise the police force.

It would provide a platform for multi-layered security cooperation that would deal with various issues related to terrorism -- right from funding of terrorist activities, policing cooperation, dealing with cyber threats, secrecy through enhancing technological innovations and tightening the border to maritime security information-gathering exercise. Cooperation



and coordination in communication capabilities and management of security arrangements to deal with any kind of threat are the main objectives of his call.

Besides, a modernization of Police is also imperative given the possible threats from religiously-motivated bands of distraught minds. The Prime Minister has called for a smart way of policing and usage of interoperable and transferable technologies such as drones that would open a new gateway to meet complex security challenges.

Recent challenges to security of India bring to light an important fact that India needs to diversify its strategies to counter the challenges it faces from criminals, drug traffickers, naxals, smugglers and terrorists. Over the years a great deal of literature has appeared on India's police and the need for reforms. Policies are being made to enable the force to adapt to the challenging environment and efficiently implement recommendations suggested by the panels on reforms.

As the threats today are more severe and enemies more organised than ever before, new concepts of safety and security need to be followed. There has been a long debate about police reforms the National Police Commission recommended them in 1979. It suggested reforms in judicial inquiry processes, reducing political interference and the police adopting a more humane approach.

Earlier the government decision to appoint a new panel to look into the recommendations of the Law Commission, the National Police Commission, the National Human Rights Commission and the Vohra Commission provided a major ray of hope for the future prospect of policing. The Ribeiro Committee on Police reforms also made certain suggestions broadly along the lines of the NPC with some additional inputs. While submitting its report in 2000, the Padmanabhaiah Committee made many suggestions including the modifications in the selection process and the commissionerate system. In 2003, the Malimath Committee suggested speeding up the criminal justice process.

Prakash Singh, a former DG of UP Police, filed a PIL and based on that the Supreme Court gave vital directions which included merit-based, transparent appointment of DGPs for a minimum fixed tenure of two years, separating law and order and investigation jobs, setting up of a police complaint authority at the State and district levels, setting up of a Statesecurity commission and a national security commission.

The police also need to play an important role as crime preventer and in this regard, developing qualities such as high level of diligence, intelligence, dedication, determination and the ability to grasp complex situations is a must. It is high time we realized that the police alone cannot stop crime; the entire society should make substantial efforts towards it. 'Sentinel on the qui vive' appears to be the only solution for protection against the new wave of terror we are experiencing.

(The writer is Bharat Gaurav Award winner and strategic affairs expert. The views expressed are personal.)

SHIVAJI SARKAR

(The writer is a senior journalist. The views expressed are personal.)

# Cong's interneccine intra-party wars

## The two-party domain in Punjab has given way to a multi-alliance contest for the first time in years



AMITABH SHUKLA

On the face of it, elections in Punjab throw up a quagmire of possibilities with multi-party and multi-alliance formations taking one another head-on in a state which has hitherto been a two-party domain for over a quarter of a century.

In this scenario where there are several post electoral possibilities for each of the rival parties if they fall short of numbers, it is only Congress which is going alone in the polls with no tie-ups overt or covert with anyone. So it is now sort of clear that either Congress gets to the magic number of 59 all alone and forms the government or if it falls short, and it will have to sit in the opposition as it has no pre-poll understanding and is unlikely to have a post-poll understanding.

After the formal announcement of Charanjit Singh Channi as the chief ministerial face of the party, there is of course a sense of relief amongst the cadre, fed up as they were with the routine squabbles and interneccine intra-party warfare amongst all the top aspirants.

Channi has been the Congress invention of the last quarter of 2021, plucked out of the Amarinder Singh Cabinet and handed over the post of chief minister to neutralize the image of the Aam Aadmi Party which was rapidly gaining ascendancy. Channi's style of functioning and its contrast with Amarinder was too glaring for the people of Punjab to ignore. One (Amarinder) was from the royal family of Patiala, completely cut off from the people in his second tenure and claiming the post of chief minister as his divine right to rule. The other (Channi) came out with all the right notes, playing to the gallery, doing what a common man is expected to do anywhere in Punjab-dancing to the tunes of Bhangra beats, playing cricket with kids, sipping tea at the roadside dhaba, sitting on a cot in a mustard field, simply doing what you and me would do. The third player was Navjot Sidhu, outspoken with a holier-than-thou, "it's right, because I said so" attitude.

What could have been a smooth election with little obstacles, the Congress high command ensured that the infighting continued for weeks in the run-up to the polls and in the process its chances diminished. Removal of Amarinder Singh may have been a bold decision as far as decision making in Congress is concerned, but it was followed by a series of indecisive steps. Sidhu attacked everybody-left right and centre, whether it was his party colleagues, former colleagues and even central leaders.

Then you have Sunil Jakhar who was overnight portrayed as a Hindu leader and even a chief ministerial candidate.



PUNJAB IS HEADED FOR A PHOTO FINISH. UNLIKE IN 2017 WHEN THERE WAS A DISCERNIBLE WAVE IN FAVOUR OF CONGRESS AND MASSIVE ANTI-INCUMBENCY AGAINST THE SAD-BJP, THIS TIME ROUND THERE SEEMS TO BE NO UNDERCURRENT FOR OR AGAINST ANY PARTY. SERIOUS THREE TO FOUR-CORNERED CONTEST IS TAKING PLACE IN MOST OF THE CONSTITUENCIES

(The writer is Senior Resident Editor, The Pioneer, Chandigarh. The views expressed are personal.)



At one point, Jakhar thought that he could be the chief minister to replace Punjab, never mind his diminishing electoral returns over the years. He then threatened to leave the party and changed his mind and finally decided to quit electoral politics. Clearly, many opinion makers in Punjab believe that only Congress has the bandwidth to tolerate all sorts of dissenting voices without any subtle attempt to reprimand anyone by the central leadership privately or publicly (read Rahul Gandhi).

So, whatever could go wrong with Congress, did go wrong. No two opinions about it. However, what it did right is equally important in this Punjab battle to read the undercurrent. Knowingly or unknowingly, making a dalit chief minister for the first time in the state was of course a masterstroke. The community may have different voting patterns according to their religion, sub-caste and affiliations to deras but Channi has given the community a strong sense of identity. A state where there is dalit music and a strong dalit literature-culture and separate places of worship, there is a sense of euphoria amongst the community. There may not be an open display of this phenomenon but it is playing on the ground in Doaba and also to an extent in Malwa. No wonder, the party central leadership decided to make Channi contest from two constituencies to spread the word around that a dalit son of the soil has risen in the political sphere and is here to stay.

Then comes the Congress grassroots overreach in the state which is as good if not better than the arch rival Shiromani Akali Dal. Aam Aadmi Party, a serious challenger to the power equations in Punjab this time round, has realized that Congress and SAD both have presence in each and every pind (village) in the state and it has to make extra efforts to reach the last person on the ground in the villages where people only know Congress and SAD. But, this has more to do than the traditional two-party power sharing superstructure than actual work by Congress as an organization. Perhaps this very presence in every nook and corner saved Congress from a division as Amarinder Singh walked away and formed his party. This inherent strength ensured that no leader of any significance went to Amarinder's Punjab Lok Congress even though at one point it seemed as if the Patiala royal could walk away with a chunk of the party leaders and workers. In fact, PLC was left high and dry as several candidates on whom Amarinder was banking, simply decided that Congress remained a better bet, not a turncoat.

The third X factor in Punjab for Congress could be Channi's arrival at the right moment to beat the massive anti-incumbency against the Amarinder Singh government. Though the quantum of anti-incumbency damage reversed by Channi is a matter of debate, there is no doubt that there has been reversal to an extent that the party is now fighting fit. In the last over 50 years or so, Punjab has been known to change governments every five years, except once in 2012 when the Akali-BJP government was repeated. So, in a way anti-incumbency and voting for a new government every five years is a part of Punjab political folklore. Congress sought to bring some modifications in this with the removal of Amarinder and getting Channi on the hot seat. Of course, only the results would help understand the phenomenon but on the face of it, this seems to be working.

In this Punjab election, there are five parties and alliances in the fray-all considering themselves as "serious" players. Besides Congress, SAD-BSP and the AAP, you have PLC-BJP-SAD (Sanyukt) alliance and the newly floated party of the farmers-Sanyukt Samaj Morcha.

No doubt, Punjab is headed for a photo finish. Unlike in 2017 when there was a discernible wave in favour of Congress and massive anti-incumbency against the SAD-BJP, this time round there seems to be no undercurrent for or against any party or alliance. Serious three to four cornered contest is taking place in most of the constituencies and in a few, you even have a five-cornered contest. "This had never happened in Punjab and the margins could be small. This helps cadre-based parties who are able to get their supporters to the polling booths," sums up an analyst here.

## POINT COUNTERPOINT

WE HAVE SEEN PEOPLE'S ANGER AGAINST THE BJP GOVT. THE SP-RLD WILL WIN 400 SEATS, OTHERS WILL GET THE REMAINING THREE.  
—SP PRESIDENT AKHILESH YADAV



DURING ITS TENURE, THE SP GAVE PROTECTION TO THE MAFIA AND TERRORISTS. IT'S SYNONYMOUS WITH HOOLIGANISM.  
—BJP NATIONAL PRESIDENT JP NADDA

# Voters' fears realistic: RBI warns belt-tightening

## The people who normally vote for temples and communal issues also agree they are hit by rising prices

As polls begin in UP, the RBI's monetary policy committee (MPC) lowers growth forecasts to 7.8 percent in 2022-23, against finance minister's 8-8.5 percent. A belt-tightening forecast. It has kept the interest rates unchanged at a low of 4 percent repo rate and 3.5 percent reverse repo rate.

Former chief economic advisor Kaushik Basu notes that growth has been decelerating. It was 8.2 percent in 2016-17; 7.2 percent 2017-18; 4.2 percent 2018-19; and minus 7.3 percent 2020-21, each year growing less, a first since 1947.

The MPC presumes retail price inflation this year to be at 4.5 percent but cautions about hardening of global crude prices on inflation. Overall, it has retained its inflation projection at 5.3 per-



SHIVAJI SARKAR

cent and with closing at 5.7 percent by March on account of unfavourable base effects. However, it ignores 13-plus percent of wholesale inflation.

The voters are not bothered about the nitty gritty but are changing their perception of development - vikas-- to mean they are voting for whosoever would help them grow. Almost uniformly, the voters in UP say that they are voting for vikas, and quizzed further, they say that they are voting for "our own vikas" and name an opposition SP-RLD candidate. For other voters vikas may still mean Yogi Adityanath and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Though it signals a change, it is to be seen how the incumbent BJP fares. The BJP as per the new manifesto is no more contesting the poll on dou-



bling of farmers' income, or ensuring MSP to all. The people who normally vote for temples and communal issues also agree they are hit by rising prices.

The lone voice dissenting the MPC outlook is that of Prof Jayanth R Varma. He had disagreed with the MPC resolution on August 20, 2021 saying: "By creating the erroneous perception that the MPC is no longer concerned about inflation and

is focused exclusively on growth, the MPC may be inadvertently aggravating the risk that inflationary expectations will be dis-anchored. In that scenario, rising risk premia could cause long-term rates to rise".

The voters may not have read it but with their practical intuition seem to agree with the perception. The mood for change is there, for better living conditions. RBI Governor

Shaktikanta Das says that next year's Centre's borrowings would not be as high as projected in the budget. It means shrinkage of borrowings, deposits, uncertain expenses and growth. It is a bit eerie.

Consumption is not rising. That seems to be the concern of the voters, RBI and the government alike. The voters realise that economy would be shaky whatever the official rhetoric.

There is no short-term reprieve for the common man. Governor Das says that rising inflation would continue to peak till the second half of 2022-23 "within the tolerance band of RBI providing room for policy to remain accommodative".

Overall, the MPC notes loss in momentum of near-term growth even as global factors turn adverse. It assesses that

owing to Ukraine-Russia conflict, Iran-US quagmire, fluid Afghanistan and uncertain Middle East the economic situation may deteriorate. In such circumstances, expecting improvement in domestic growth drivers is bit optimistic. These have been the concern for lowering growth to 7.8 percent. It expects a very high growth in the first quarter and then gradually tapering off to 4.5 percent in the last quarter of 2022-23, according to Das.

Though Indian voters need not understand the phenomenon emerging in the distant West, it can hit India hard. The world growth may be hit by the difficult situation in the US. Despite tom-tomming about high growth, the US suffers from the China syndrome. China has bought none of the

\$200 billion it promised from the US under 'phase-I' trade deal. It can lead the US into choppy waters, impacting the global economy. A global inflation and unstable US economy can create turbulence.

The persistent increase in international commodity prices, surge in volatility of global financial markets and global supply bottlenecks can exacerbate risks to the outlook, says Das. Yes, Chinese trade moves in Indian subcontinent might also cause difficulty.

Das says still India can recover with buoyant rabi crop, robust exports, liquidity conditions improving credit offtake and continued push on capital expenses and infrastructure. The hope is a bit high and the MPC's cautions are graver than any voter can expect.









# Madrid held at Villarreal before PSG

AP ■ BARCELONA

The only positive that Real Madrid could take away from its scoreless draw with Villarreal was Gareth Bale, whose good form belied his return to the pitch after more than five months on the sidelines.

The stalemate left Madrid fourth points clear of second-placed Sevilla as the Spanish league leader continues to struggle without injured striker Karim Benzema, and with their Champions League clash against Paris Saint-Germain just three days away.

While Madrid stumbled, an 89th-minute goal by Mario Hermoso snatched 10-man Atlético Madrid a 4-3 victory over Getafe in a wild capital derby that featured a red card, three penalties, and six first-half goals.

Bale had not played for Real Madrid since three appearances in August.

Then injuries and a COVID-19 infection ensured he fell out of Carlo Ancelotti's rotation in favor of younger players such as Vinicius Júnior and Marco Asensio.

During that period, however, he did play three World Cup qualifiers

for Wales, twice in September and once in November.

With Benzema recovering from a left hamstring pull, Ancelotti gave Bale the nod to play as his striker. Bale needed almost the entire first half to finally get involved against Villarreal, but once he did, he showed the same ability he always had to produce scoring chances.

"(Bale) had his opportunity and he made the most of it. He could have scored, he gave us a threat up front, he did all we asked of him," Ancelotti said about the former star who returned to Madrid last summer after his loan to Tottenham.

Only the goalkeeping of Gerónimo Rulli stopped Bale on three occasions, including one shot he pushed onto his bar in the 56th minute. Late substitute Luka Jovic almost grabbed a stoppage-time winner on the break when he sent his chipped shot onto the bar.

Villarreal, which remained in sixth place, was also without its top striker as Gerard Moreno nursed a right leg injury.

Villarreal, however, got the better of Madrid in an intense, and sometimes testy, first half.



Besides his surprise choice of Bale, Ancelotti also started the sparingly used Marcelo on the left side of his defense. Marcelo, whose contract is up in June, was slow to keep up with winger Samuel Chukwueze, while new arrival Giovanni Lo Celso cued Villarreal's passing attack.

"Each side had their half. We did enough to have led the first half, but then they had their chances in the second and we struggled. I think splitting the points is a fair result," Villarreal defender Raul Albiol said. Madrid faces a trip to PSG on Tuesday with only one win in its last four games and doubts if Benzema will be ready.

### SHOOTOUT AT THE WANDA

Even though Luis Suárez had an early penalty saved by Getafe's David Soria, Atlético looked ready to roll after Ángel Correa and Matheus Cunha gave it a 2-0 lead at their Wanda Metropolitan Stadium. But Getafe roared ahead in less than 15 minutes, helped by two careless touches by the host and the same defensive errors that have undermined its title defense.

Borja Mayoral sparked the fightback by knocking in an errant

shot by a teammate. Enes Unal then put his side ahead after converting penalties in the 37th and 42nd following handballs by Cunha and Thomas Lemar.

Lemar helped make up for his mistake with a cross that Correa headed home for his second goal to make it 3-3 just before halftime.

Atlético's Felipe Monteiro was sent off in the 58th for sticking his studs into the upper arm of Mauro Arambarri during a high speed clash. That came shortly after Unal left the pitch following a knock with Felipe.

Atlético was on the verge of an embarrassing setback on the heels of its 4-2 loss to Barcelona in the last round when Hermoso scrambled in his own miss after fellow substitute João Félix headed down a free kick in the six-yard box.

The hard-earned victory lifted Atlético back into fourth place ahead of Barcelona before its derby at Espanyol on Sunday.

### ELSEWHERE

Cádiz goalie Jeremías Ledesma saved a late penalty by Celta Vigo's Santi Mina to ensure a 0-0 draw, while Osasuna won 3-0 at Rayo Vallecano.

## AIFF condolences demise of N Pappana

AIFF ■ NEW DELHI

The All India Football Federation (AIFF) condoled the demise of former Indian footballer N Pappana, who passed away in his residence in Mysuru on Sunday. Pappana made his international debut against Hong Kong in the 1968 Merdeka Cup and has one goal to his name which he scored against Japan in the Merdeka Cup. He represented India in three matches.

"It is really sad to hear that Mr. Pappana is no longer with us. His invaluable contribution to Indian Football will always remain with us. I share the grief," said AIFF President Praful Patel, in his condolence message.

"Mr. Pappana will remain alive in his achievements. He was a brilliant footballer and was an inspiration for so many. My condolences to his family. We pray for his soul to rest in peace," said AIFF General Secretary Kushal Das.

At the domestic level, Pappana had scored a whopping 115 goals for Mohammedan Sporting, winning the Calcutta Football League in 1967, Bordoloi Trophy (1969, 1970), Stafford Cup (1968,



1970) and many other trophies. He had also represented Bengal in the 1967 edition of the Santosh Trophy and scored 2 goals.

## Kerala Blasters take on SC East Bengal

IANS ■ VASCO (GOA)

There will be no love lost when Kerala Blasters FC take on beleaguered SC East Bengal in the Indian Super League match at the Tilak Maidan Stadium, here on Monday.

Kerala will look to get back into the top-four after suffering a heavy defeat at the hands of Jamshedpur FC in their last outing. For SC East Bengal, it will be about salvaging some pride after being mathematically ruled out of the playoffs race with their loss to Odisha FC in their previous engagement.

While SC East Bengal will look to play party-poopers, for Kerala this game should be one to pick up three points as they take on ATK Mohun Bagan and Hyderabad FC, two teams above them in the league table, in the next two games after Monday. Their final three games see them go up against Chennaiyin FC, Mumbai City and FC Goa.



For head coach Ivan Vukomanovic, his team's set-piece woes would be a cause for concern given SC East Bengal do score a lot from them. The Blasters have conceded just four goals via open play, against ATK Mohun Bagan. In fact, no team has conceded fewer open-play goals this season than Kerala Blasters (6). SC East

Bengal have scored 70.59% of their goals (12 out of 17) from set-pieces. No team scores a greater percentage of goals from set-pieces than the red and gold brigade. Kerala Blasters are also going through a period of injuries and suspension as they may be without Ruivah Hormipam, Harmanjot Khabra and Marko Leskovic for the next game, all of whom are either injured or suspended or not fully fit. "We have enough players in our squad. That's why we have a large squad. Some other players will take the positions. I am not worried. I am confident that these boys can do the job. We will see tomorrow. I am glad these boys will get some game

## Hamilton looks 'totally focused' on the 2022 campaign

IANS ■ DUBAI

Seven-time Formula One world Champion Lewis Hamilton is absolutely committed to fighting for an eighth title in 2022, F1 President and CEO Stefano Domenicali confirmed on Sunday.

Domenicali said that the Mercedes driver's silence spoke volumes over his desire to win what would be a record eighth title. This season of course boasts brand-new F1 cars -- a huge challenge for all 20 drivers on the grid -- with 23 Grands Prix on the calendar.

"From what I see in the picture he has posted, he seems to be totally focused on this year's challenge that, sporting-wise, will be very interesting. We are all looking forward to seeing how the new cars behave and sure this will be as exciting as the last one," he said.

Since that photo, Hamilton has started posting more regularly, with a series of images showing what he's been up to over the last few weeks -- and is well into his pre-season regime.

The 37-year-old lost out on what would have been a record eighth championship when he was passed by rival Max Verstappen on the last lap of the final race of the season in Abu Dhabi.



Aside from a short post-race interview, Hamilton hasn't addressed the 2021 season finale. He is set to partner with new teammate George Russell in the W13 challenger, which is set to be launched on February 18.

## Arif Khan finishes 45th in giant slalom at Beijing 2022



IANS ■ BEIJING

Indian skier Arif Khan finished 45th in the Men's Giant Slalom race at the 2022 Winter Olympics, here on Sunday. The 31-year-old skier from Jammu and Kashmir, who is the only Indian athlete at the 2022 Winter Olympics, ended at 53rd in Race 1 with a time of 1 minute 22.35 seconds. In Race 2, he clocked 1:24.89. The lone Indian athlete at the Winter Olympics 2022, Arif Khan finished overall 45th at the Yanqing National Alpine Skiing Centre. His combined time was 37.89 seconds behind gold winner Marco Odermatt of Switzerland, who clocked a combined time of 2:09.35. Slovenia's Zan Kranjec

(2:09.54) and France's Mathieu Faivre (2:10.69) clinched the silver and bronze medal, respectively. Khan has qualified for the slalom race event also, where he is scheduled to compete on February 16. "It's one of my dreams to be at the Winter Olympics and this is my first time. It really means a lot. It's a great message back to our country, to our people to join winter sports in future," Khan was quoted as saying by Olympics.com. "There were like millions of people watching me live back home. I was trying my best to give the best I have got. But the weather was uncertain, you couldn't see much, like how the slope was used, but it was good," he said.



## Top-seeded Ruud and Schwartzman to play Argentina Open final

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Top-seeded players Casper Ruud and Diego Schwartzman will play in Sunday's final of the Argentina Open.

The Norwegian Ruud, the 8th-best ranked player, and the Argentinian Schwartzman, the 15th-best player, won the 2020 and 2021 editions of the clay court tournament, respectively. Ruud beat Argentinian Federico Delbonis 6-3, 6-3 on Saturday. Hours later, Schwartzman topped third-seeded player Lorenzo Sonego of Italy in a tense match by 7-5, 3-6, 6-2.

Schwartzman had finished just a few hours earlier his quarterfinal tie against his compatriot and 2021 runner-up Francisco Cerundolo.

The match was interrupted Friday night in the third set, tied 1-1, due to rain. Schwartzman won 3-6, 6-2, 7-5.

Ruud overcame Spain's Roberto Carballés Baena and Argentinians Federico Coria and Delbonis to reach the final. Schwartzman bested Spain's Jaume Munar, Argentinian's Cerundolo and Italy's Sonego to play the decider in Buenos Aires.

## Inter's draw with Napoli blows Serie A title race open

IANS ■ ROME

The showdown for the Serie A title between Inter Milan and Napoli ended in a 1-1 draw, as Edin Dzeko's volley cancelled out Lorenzo Insigne's early penalty.

It was a head-to-head for top spot as Napoli ranked second before Saturday's game, one point behind leaders Inter, who have a game in hand.

Napoli made a good start just seven minutes into the game, as Victor Osimhen was kicked down by Stefan De Vrij, and the referee awarded the home side a penalty after a VAR check. Insigne, who will join Toronto FC in the summer, stepped up to convert it.

The Partenopei should have made it 2-0 in the 12th minute, but Piotr Zielinski saw his attempt graze the post.

Napoli were more aggressive in the first half, but Inter scored the equaliser straight after the break when Dzeko's header was blocked, but the Bosnian reacted quickly to smash the rebound into the net.

Napoli still had chances to put the game to bed, but Inter goalkeeper Samir Handanovic performed well to keep the scoreline down.

After the draw, Inter still lead the table, but will be overtaken by city rivals AC Milan if they beat Sampdoria on Sunday.

Also on Saturday, Lazio dominated Bologna 3-0, and Venezia won 2-1 at Torino.



