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## SUNNY LEONE TO STAR IN A COMEDY WEB SERIES



# India to switch to cleanest petrol, diesel

THE COUNTRY LEAPFROGS STRAIGHT TO EURO-VI EMISSION COMPLIANT FUELS FROM EURO-IV GRADES NOW

**NEWDELHI:** India will switch to the world's cleanest petrol and diesel from April 1 as it leapfrogs straight to Euro-VI emission compliant fuels from Euro-IV grades now — a feat achieved in just three years and not seen in any of the large economies around the globe.



India will join the select league of nations using petrol and diesel containing just 10 parts per million of sulphur as it looks to cut vehicular emissions that are said to be one of the reasons for the choking pollution in major cities.

Sanjiv Singh, Chairman of Indian Oil Corp (IOC), the firm that controls roughly half of the country's fuel market, said almost all refineries began producing ultra-low sulphur BS-VI (equivalent to Euro-VI grade) petrol and diesel by the end of 2019 and oil companies have now undertaken the tedious task of replacing every drop of fuel in the country with the new one.

"We are absolutely on track for supplying BS-VI fuel from April 1. Almost all refineries have begun supplying BS-VI fuel and the same has reached storage depots across the country," he said.

From storage depots, the fuel has started travelling to

petrol pumps and in the next few weeks all of them will only have BS-VI grade petrol and diesel, he said. "We are 100 per cent confident that fuel that will flow from nozzles at all the petrol pumps in the country on April 1 will be BS-VI emission compliant fuel."

India adopted Euro-III equivalent (or Bharat Stage-III) fuel with a sulphur content of 350 ppm in 2010 and then took seven years to move to BS-IV that had a sulphur content of 50 ppm. From BS-IV to

**"We are absolutely on track for supplying BS-VI fuel from April 1. Almost all refineries have begun supplying BS-VI fuel and the same has reached storage depots across the country"**

**SANJIV SINGH, Chairman of Indian Oil Corp**

BS-VI it took just three years. "It was a conscious decision to leapfrog to BS-VI as first upgrading to BS-V and then shifting to BS-VI would have prolonged the journey to 4 to 6 years. Besides, oil refineries, as well as automobile manufacturers, would have had to make investments twice — first to producing BS-V grade fuel and engines and then BS-VI

fuel has to be flushed out in depots, pipelines and tanks before being replaced by BS-VI.

"We are confident of disruption-free switch-over to BS-VI supplies across the country," he said. "What we will be supplying is the best quality available anywhere in the world. You don't have any better fuel that is supplied in any part of the world. Perhaps our BS-VI fuel will be better than equivalent fuel in some parts of the U.S. and Europe." India adopted a fuel upgradation programme in the early 1990s. Low lead gasoline (petrol) was introduced in 1994 in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai. On February 1, 2000, unleaded gasoline was mandated nationwide.

Similarly, BS-2000 (Euro-I equivalent, BS-1) vehicle emission norms were introduced for new vehicles from April 2000. BS-II (Euro-II equivalent) emission norms for new cars were introduced in Delhi from 2000 and extended to the other metro cities in 2001.

Benzene limits have been reduced progressively from 5% in 2000 to 1% nationwide. Lead content in gasoline was removed in phases and only unleaded gasoline is being produced and sold from February 1, 2000.

**AGENCIES**

roadmap for the next five years, Mr. Kejriwal sought the Prime Minister "blessings" for fast paced development of the national capital and asserted that people may have voted for different parties, but he would work for all of them. "We have forgiven our Opposition for whatever remarks they made. I would also like to request the Opposition parties to forget what happened during the elections. I want to work together with all the parties for the development of Delhi. I want to work together with the Central government to make Delhi a world-class city."

Mr. Kejriwal termed himself Delhi's "son" and the "Chief Minister of all" people irrespective of the party they voted for. "The two crore people of the national capital are my family," he said. "The AAP invited 50 people from all walks of life as special guests."

**AGENCIES**

## Kejriwal takes charge as Delhi CM



**NEWDELHI:** Aam Aadmi Party supremo Arvind Kejriwal has taken charge as the Chief Minister of Delhi for the third time. Members of his Cabinet, including Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain, Rajendra Pal Gautam and Imran Hussain, also took charge at the Delhi Secretariat.

Senior AAP leaders Manish Sisodia, Satyendar Jain, Gopal Rai, Kailash Gahlot, Rajinder Pal Gautam and Imran Hussain were also sworn in as Ministers in the Delhi Cabinet. All six were Ministers in the previous AAP government.

The swearing-in ceremony, for which Mr. Kejriwal had invited all of Delhi, was turned into an occasion to thank the voters for bringing the AAP back to power. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who had been invited to the event, did not attend.

Setting his government's

## India among countries whose actions compliant with Paris Agreement goal: PM



**NEW DELHI:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday asserted that his government firmly believes in the path of sustainable development and said it is ensuring that development happens without harming the environment.

He also said that India is one of the few countries whose actions are compliant with the Paris Agreement goal of keeping rise in temperature to below two degrees Celsius.

Addressing the 13th Conference of Parties (COP) of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) at Gandhinagar via video, he said India has been championing climate action based on values of conservation, sustainable lifestyle and green development model.

"My government firmly believes in the path of sustainable development. We are ensuring that development happens without harming the environment," Modi said.

He added that India has been traditionally practising the mantra of Athithi Devo Bhava. "This has been reflected in the slogan theme for the CMS COP 13 — 'Migratory species connect the planet and together we welcome them home'," he said.

India proposes to strengthen its association with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and East Asia Summit countries. This would be in sync with the Indo Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI), wherein New Delhi will be playing a leadership role, PM Modi said.

He also said that India will hold presidency of the Convention for coming three years and has prepared national action plan to conserve migratory birds along the 'Central Asian Flyway.'

**AGENCIES**

NIRBHAYA CASE

# Fresh death warrants set for March 3

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court has issued fresh death warrants for March 3 at 6 am against the four death row convicts in the Nirbhaya gang rape and murder case.

Additional Session Judge Dharmender Rana issued fresh warrants against death row convicts — Mukesh Kumar Singh (32), Pawan Gupta (25), Vinay Kumar Sharma (26) and Akshay Kumar (31).

This is the third time that death warrants have been issued against them.

The first date of execution, January 22, was postponed to February 1 by a January 17 court order. Then the trial court, on January 31, stayed, "till further orders" the execution of the four convicts as they had not exhausted all their legal remedies during the proceedings on Monday, Mukesh told the court that he does not want to be represented by advocate Vrinda

Grover, after which it appointed advocate Ravi Qazi to represent him.

The court was also informed that Vinay is on hunger strike in Tihar jail. Vinay was assaulted in jail and has head injuries, his lawyer told the court, adding that he was suffering from acute mental illness and hence the death sentence cannot be carried out.

The court directed the Tihar jail superintendent to take appropriate care of Vinay as per law. Pawan's counsel informed the court that he wanted to move curative petition before the Supreme Court and the mercy plea against the death sentence before the President.

Pawan is the only one among the four convicts who has not yet filed the curative petition -- the last legal remedy available to a person, which is decided in-chamber. He has



not filed the mercy plea either. Akshay's counsel informed the court that he has prepared a fresh mercy petition to be moved before the President.

The court was hearing the applications by Nirbhaya's parents and the Delhi government, seeking fresh death warrants for the convicts after the Supreme Court granted liberty to the authorities to approach the trial court for issuance of fresh date for the execution of these convicts.

Last Thursday, the court had appointed Qazi to represent Gupta after being in-

formed by Tihar jail authorities that the death row convict refused to choose a lawyer offered by Delhi Legal Services Authorities (DLSA) A day before that the court expressed displeasure over the delay in the process from Gupta's side, after convict's father informed it that he had removed his earlier lawyer and would need time to engage a new one.

The 23-year-old physiotherapy intern, who came to be known as 'Nirbhaya' (fearless), was gang-raped and savagely assaulted on the night of December 16, 2012, in a moving bus in South Delhi. She died of her injuries a fortnight later in a Singapore hospital.

Six people including the four convicts, Ram Singh and a juvenile -- were named as accused. The trial of the five adult men began in a special fast-track court in March 2013.

Ram Singh, the prime accused, allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself in Tihar jail days after the trial began. The juvenile, who was said to be the most brutal of the attackers, was put in a correctional home for three years.

The juvenile was released in 2015 and sent to an undisclosed location amid concerns over a threat to his life. He, when released, was 20 years old.

Mukesh, Vinay, Akshay and Pawan were sentenced to death in September 2013 by the trial court which was challenged by them in higher courts.

**AGENCIES**

## Air India fly directly between Amritsar and London

**CHANDIGARH:** The Air India will launch a new flight connecting Amritsar with London Stansted on the 550th anniversary of Guru Nanak, founder of Sikhism, on October 31. The Boeing 787 aircraft, which will bring thousands of Sikhs to their most important pilgrim city, will also sport an important religious symbol "Ek Onkar" or "God is One" to mark the celebrations.

The 256-seater aircraft will operate on Monday, Thursday and Saturday. An airline official said London Stansted as its third point of call was due to the unavailability of slots at the Heathrow airport. The distance between the two airports is nearly 105 km.

"Though we launched the flight on a month's notice, the loads are very good. I look at full flights in the near future"

Air India Chairman and Managing Director Ashwani Lohani told The Hindu about the response from travellers. The menu on these flights will reflect the flavours of Punjab and will include items like Amritsari Kulche, Rajma and rice, among other options.

**AGENCIES**

# Women can get command positions in Army, rules SC

**"There is no reason and justification for the Union of India not to act as per the Delhi High Court verdict. On September 2, 2011, the Supreme Court has clarified this aspect and said there is no stay on the high court verdict. Despite that, scant regard has been paid to the verdict of Delhi High Court and the order of Supreme Court as well"**

**NEW DELHI:** Calling for an end to gender bias in the armed forces, the Supreme Court on Monday opened the way for women in command positions in the Army and directed the Centre to grant permanent commission to all women officers within three months.

A bench headed by Justice D Y Chandrachud termed "disturbing" the government's argument of physiological limitations and social norms for denying women officers command posts and said they had brought laurels to the country in the past.

Marking a milestone on the road to gender parity in the Army, the apex court bench called for a change of mindset on the part of the government to put an end

to gender bias in the armed forces and said there will be no absolute bar on giving women command postings.

The bench, however, clarified that deployment of women officers in combat roles is a matter of policy as held by the Delhi High Court and the competent authority has to look into it.

Slamming the Centre, the court said despite no stay on the 2010 Delhi High Court verdict allowing grant of permanent commission to women officers, the government showed scant regard in implementing the directive in the past one decade.

It said the engagement of women officers in the Army has been an evolutionary process and the Union of India should have acted in



**"The sky is virtually the limit, the apex court judgment has given women officers the same rights as their male counterparts"**

**MEENAKSHI LEKHI, Advocate**

accordance with the Delhi High Court judgment when there was no stay on it.

"There is no reason and justification for the Union of India not to act as per the Delhi High Court verdict. On September 2, 2011, the Supreme Court has clarified this aspect and said there is no stay on the high court verdict. Despite that, scant

male counterparts in the armed forces.

The top court said there is need for a change in mindset with regard to giving equal opportunity to women officers in the Indian Army even after 70 years of post-colonial era.

It said the Centre's submission of physiological limitation is based on flawed notions and there is no constitutional basis to deny them equal opportunity.

There are 1,653 women officers in the Army, 3.89 per cent of the total number of officers in the Army.

According to the court, women officers brought laurels to the country and won several gallantry and Sena medals as well as UN Peacekeeping awards for their contribution in armed forces. To cast aspersions on them on the basis of physiological features is wrong as it is based on fallacy, it said.

The top court said permanent commission can be given to women officers in the Army irrespective of their tenure of service. It

also directed the Centre to grant permanent commission within three months to all women officers in Army who opt for it. The verdict led to jubilation among women officers waiting outside the court for the verdict. Accompanied by her women colleagues, one officer said it will help uplift women across the country and not the armed forces. Whoever qualifies for the job should be given the opportunity to command, she said.

"The sky is virtually the limit," said advocate Meenakshi Lekhi, who appeared for the women officers. She said the apex court judgment has given women officers the same rights as their male counterparts.

Lekhi added that the order gives a long-pending right to the women officers.

On February 9, serving women officers in the Indian Army countered the Centre's stand in the apex court on denying command posts to women on the ground of their physiological limitations, terming it not only "regressive but also completely contrary to the

demonstrated record and statistics".

In their written submission to the court, the women officers sought rejection of the submission of the Centre. They have been serving in the 10 Combat Support Arms, for the last 27 to 28 years and have proven their mettle and courage under fire.

The written submission also said the women officers have demonstrated that they do not lack in any manner in the roles that have been assigned to them.

According to a policy letter dated February 25, 2019, the women officers said, permanent commission to women officers was being confined to "staff appointments only" as against "criteria appointments/command appointments".

They contended that no such confinement of women officers to staff appointments only has ever been contemplated or notified in any of the advertisements or policy decisions since 1992, when women were first inducted into the Indian Army.

**AGENCIES**

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NEWSBRIEF

50 faint after ammonia gas leaks

**CHANDIGARH:** At least 50 people fell ill and many of them fainted after they inhaled ammonia gas, which leaked from a cold storage plant in Haryana's Kurukshetra on late Tuesday night.

"Three people fell seriously ill, but are now out of danger. They have been admitted at the district hospital in Kurukshetra. In all 50 people were taken to local healthcare centres, most of them complained of irritation in their eyes, a few of them failed as well. Ten patients are still under observation while others have been discharged," Dharendra Khadgata, Deputy Commissioner, Kurukshetra, told, The Hindu on Wednesday. "The ammonia gas leaked from the cold storage situated on Thol road in Shahbad and spread in the nearby areas, leaving people gasping. We reached the spot near Nalvi village in the night itself and evacuated the people and cattle as well," said Mr. Khadgata. Mr. Khadgata said the enquiry into the incident has been initiated and necessary action will be taken in accordance with law. "The cause of gas leakage was not known yet, our teams are probing the incident," he added. **AGENCIES**

Punjab mandates all signage in Punjabi in Gurmukhi script

**CHANDIGARH:** The Punjab government has decided to make it mandatory for all government and semi-government institutions, boards and corporations to display all signboards in the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script. Apart from this, milestones on roads will also be written in Gurmukhi script across the State. The Punjab Department of Language has sent a letter to everyone concerned in this regard, an official statement said on Friday. Punjab Languages Minister Tript Rajinder Singh Bajwa said the Department had issued these orders in accordance with the Punjab State Language Act, 1967 under Section 4. "As per the orders, signboards in all government and semi-government institutions, boards, corporations and road milestones will be written at the top in the Punjabi language in Gurmukhi script, and if the need arises in any other language, it will be written below in smaller font," he said. **AGENCIES**

# Akal Takht backs Muslims on CAA

**CHANDIGARH:** Giani Harpreet Singh, chief priest of the highest Sikh temporal seat Akal Takht, has extended support to Muslim groups, who have been protesting against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

Delhi Minority Commission chief Zafarul Islam Khan, who met the Akal Takht chief with a delegation of Muslim groups hailing from Bengaluru, Punjab and Delhi earlier this week in Amritsar, said that the Akal Takht chief had assured his support, saying Sikhs had always stood by the oppressed and would continue to do so.

Giani Harpreet Singh had said there was a sense of fear and insecurity among the minorities and the Sikh community was with them in maintaining communal harmony.

Mr. Khan said the delegation members had informed him about the dangers of the CAA and the NPR, which would not only be detrimental to the Muslims but also for other communities. "Giani Harpreet Singh conveyed to us that the Sikhs have always

stood with the victims and will continue to support all those who are facing any injustice," he said.

"The Akal Takht chief even suggested us to discuss the issue with Hindu leaders to garner support for our cause. There are several factions within the Hindus who are concerned about it," said Mr. Khan. On February 16, several members of over a dozen outfits — including farmers, labourers and students — staged a protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the National Population Register in Punjab's Malerkotla town.

At a gathering in the town's grain market, the participants raised slogans against the BJP-led government at the Centre and demanded repealing of the CAA. They announced a "protest week" from February 24 till February 29 across the State.

"We will hold week-long protests against the CAA, NRC and the NPR and mobilise people's support," said Lachhman Singh Sewewala from the



**"It's target is not only the Muslim minority but also all working people, Dalits, Backward Classes, oppressed nationalities people, secular and scientific thinkers and all allied groups fighting for their rights"**

Punjab Khet Mazdoor Union.

Addressing the gathering, the leaders said they would not allow the country to be divided on religious lines by inciting ultra nationalism and attempts

to crush the democratic rights of the people. The leaders also cautioned the Congress government in Punjab against attempting to implement the NPR. If it does, it should brace

itself up to face the anger of the people.

Those who addressed the gathering included Joginder Singh, president of the BKU Ekta Ugrahan, Boota Singh Burj Gill, president of the BKU (Ekta Dakaunda), Rajwinder Singh, president of the Textile Hosiery Union, Kanwaljeet Singh Pannu, convener of the Kisan Sangharsh Committee Punjab. Members of the PSU (Lalkar), the Inquilabi Mazdoor Kendar, the Moulder and Steel Workers Union, the Karkhana Mazdoor Union, the Naujwan Bharat Sabha (Lalkar), the Naujwan Bharat Sabha and the Inquilabi Naujwan Vidyarthi Munch.

In a joint statement, the leaders said the Central government is attempting to divide the country on communal lines. "It's target is not only the Muslim minority but also all working people, Dalits, Backward Classes, oppressed nationalities people, secular and scientific thinkers and all allied groups fighting for their rights. The RSS-BJP's regime has changed the meaning of patriotism," they alleged. **AGENCIES**

## AAP threatens stir over power prices in Punjab



**CHANDIGARH:** Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Punjab on Friday has threatened to cut off the electricity connection to Chief Minister Amarinder Singh's residence in Patiala, if the Congress government failed to cancel the Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) during the upcoming Budget session of the State Assembly. The PPAs had been signed by the previous SAD-BJP government with private power companies.

The decision was taken during a meeting of party MLAs here, chaired by Leader of Opposition (LoP) Harpal Singh Cheema. Mr. Cheema said the remarkable victory of the AAP in Delhi was clearly visible not only in Punjab but across the country and abroad, for it was a vote for 'performance' agenda against the communal and divisive forces.

"The stupendous Delhi victory had shown thumbs down to the fascist forces spitting fire during the electioneering and decimated the Congress party to zero, which would be replicated in Punjab as well," he said. Mr. Cheema said the 'Badal's' of the Akali Dal ac-

**"The stupendous Delhi victory had shown thumbs down to the fascist forces spitting fire during the electioneering and decimated the Congress party to zero, which would be replicated in Punjab as well"**

cused of being hand-in-glove with the mafia raj as also the desecration incidents in the State. Mr. Cheema asserted that the Kejriwal development model on which the elections in Delhi were fought, would be replicated in Punjab when it goes to the polls in 2022.

Mr. Cheema said if the government did not provide relief to the people from the expensive electricity, the AAP would be forced to cut the electricity connection of Captain Amarinder Singh's residence in Patiala - the 'Moti Mahal'. **AGENCIES**

## 'Punjab to probe sacrilege cases'

**CHANDIGARH:** Punjab Chief Minister Amarinder Singh on Thursday said the State's Special Investigation Team (SIT) will now investigate the Behbal Kalan and Bargari sacrilege cases as the Supreme Court has rejected the CBI plea to investigate them.

He was making a statement during the budget session of the State Assembly here.

The Chief Minister informed the House that the Supreme Court had on Thursday morning allowed the State to carry on its investigations into the sacrilege cases and the subsequent police firing in these cases, which were handed



over to the CBI by the previous SAD-BJP regime.

"These cases will now be probed only by Punjab. The modalities will be announced later," he said. The government had announced in the House last year that the cases would be taken back from the central

agency and would be investigated by the State government.

Two persons were killed in the police firing in Behbal Kalan of Faridkot district in 2015, which followed the sacrilege of Guru Granth Sahib at Bargari.

Aam Aadmi Party MLA Aman Arora welcomed the decision and said that now the Punjab government should ensure time-bound investigations into the cases so that the guilty could be punished.

Before the session started, the Shiromani Akali Dal staged a protest outside the Assembly and demanded a rollback of the power tariff hike in the State. **AGENCIES**

# Mohali building collapse: Debris removed after one dies on the site

**MOHALI:** Debris removal operations were on at the site where a three-storey building collapsed in Punjab's Mohali district, with officials on Sunday saying there were slim chances of anyone still trapped under the fallen structure.

One person was killed in the incident and two others were injured after the commercial building collapsed on Saturday afternoon.

"The debris is being removed from the site. NDRF officials told us that no one appears to be still trapped under the debris. However, NDRF is still on standby for the moment just in case the need arises," Kharar's Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM)



Hisamshu Jain said.

District administration authorities and police have checked with the contractor and company officials at the

site and were told that no labour or any employee of theirs was missing. Taking serious note of the building collapse, Punjab Chief Minister Ama-

rinder Singh had asked the Mohali Additional District Magistrate to conduct a thorough probe into the incident and submit his report within a week.

A JCB machine driver died in the incident, Mohali Deputy Commissioner Girish Dayalan said. The body of Harvinder Singh was taken out by rescuers late on Saturday evening. The commercial building collapsed when a JCB machine was digging an adjoining plot for construction of a basement, Jain had said.

The officials said the heavy earth moving machine might have hit the foundation of the building, but added that the exact cause of the incident

would be known after the inquiry. Three persons were rescued on Saturday, officials had said. A 30-member team of the National Disaster Response Force was earlier engaged in the rescue operation and one more NDRF team from Ludhiana was also called.

Mr. Dayalan had said that the SDM of Kharar has been ordered to inquire into the incident. "How did this happen and did they (builder) have requisite permission to do this will be known only after the inquiry," said Mr. Dayalan. The probe would also ascertain if the construction was illegal or not, a state government statement had said. **AGENCIES**

## Punjab launches drive to check roadworthiness of school buses

**CHANDIGARH:** Days after four children were burnt alive in Punjab's Sangrur when a mini-van transporting them caught fire, the State Transport Department on Monday started a drive to inspect roadworthiness of school vans and buses.



Across the State, as many as 4,504 school buses and vans were checked in which 1,649 challans were issued for various violations.

As many as 253 vehicles were impounded for not complying with the requisite parameters of the Motor Vehicles Act during the drive by joint teams of the Punjab police and the civil administration of districts, according to an official spokesperson.

The drive was launched following directions by Chief Minister Amarinder Singh, who ordered the Transport Department to launch a State-wide checking of all school buses to ensure safety and security of students to avoid recurrence of tragic mishaps like the school van fire in Sangrur last week. Capt. Amarinder had also

directed the district child protection officers of the Social Security Department to keep a strict vigil on schools vehicles violating provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act and also school managements that are using worn-out vehicles for transportation of students.

Aam Aadmi Party MLA and Leader of the Opposition in the Punjab Assembly Harpal Singh Cheema meanwhile hit out at the ruling Congress government in the State for being insensitive to the safety and security of school children travelling in private school buses and vans. **AGENCIES**

## Punjab sanctions ₹650cr for rejuvenation of Sutlej tributary

**CHANDIGARH:** The Punjab Cabinet on Tuesday approved Rs. 650 crore in the first phase for rejuvenation of the highly polluting Buddha Nullah — a seasonal tributary of Sutlej in Ludhiana.

"Under this ambitious plan, an additional sewage treatment plant having a capacity of 275 MLD, including associated infrastructure, would be developed which would go a long way in solving the problems of Buddha Nullah and subsequent pollution of the river Satluj," said an official statement.

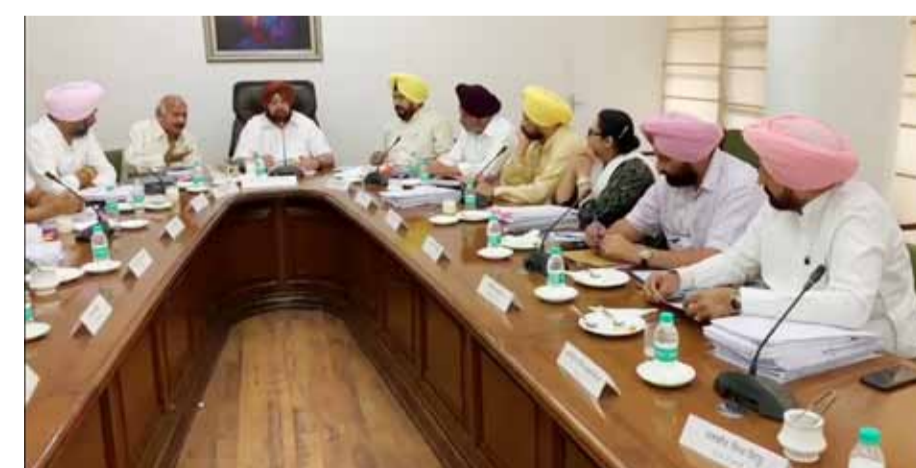
The Cabinet meeting, which was held here, also decided to levy 1% additional stamp duty on registration of sale-purchase of urban properties to finance water supply and environment improvement programmes in the urban areas of the State.

Notably, the pollution in the Buddha Nullah is a major threat to public health and environment and the main sources of pollution in the nullah are direct flow of pollutants by industries

and dairies. Also, treated effluents from existing STPs, based on UASB technology, does not meet the required quality and overflow from sewer lines add to the problem. The NGT has already directed the government to take proactive steps to immediately address the problem.

The Cabinet also approved creation of 550 posts in the Government Medical Colleges at Patiala and Amritsar with the objective of further improving and streamlining the functioning of these institutions, the statement added. Earlier, Haryana Governor Satyadeo Narain Arya had said that the state's BJP-JJP government was committed to securing the state's legitimate share of surplus Ravi-Beas waters through the Sutlej Yamuna Link canal.

The Governor touched upon the contentious issue in his address to the state Assembly on the first day of the Budget Session, which will conclude on March 4. The CM will present the budget on February 28. "The government accords



high priority to ensuring equitable distribution of water to every farmer. Every possible effort will be made to bring to Haryana its legitimate share of surplus Ravi-Beas waters through the SYL canal at the earliest," said the Governor.

"By augmenting the capacity of Western Jamuna Canal (WJC) system during the past two years, the state is already drawing more than 30 per cent additional water from river Yamuna during the monsoons which otherwise used to flow down

the river. My government is working on a plan to increase this additional quantity carried by WJC to 40 per cent by March, 2022," he added. In September last year, the Supreme Court had given four more months to Punjab, Haryana and the Centre to find an amicable solution to break the deadlock between the two states over the Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal.

The Governor concluded his speech in about nine minutes after reading out only a part of the 27-page address

and told the House that the rest of it be treated as having been read. During his address, Arya touched upon the government's various welfare initiatives, including those for farmers and women.

He pointed out how the Haryana government has undertaken a new initiative to promote hygiene among adolescent girls and women from the BPL (below poverty line) families in the age group of 10 to 45 years under which sanitary napkins would be distributed free of cost to approximately 11 lakh families

in the state.

According to the Governor, the state government was committed to making the state safe for women. "The government will strive to improve the safety of women at homes and in public spaces through a mass movement in the state. The government will strengthen the infrastructure and provide all the support required to prevent crime against women. The government will run a comprehensive and focused campaign to bring about requisite behavioural changes and to make everyone sensitive to gender justice and gender equality issues. The government shall continue to make efforts to curb female foeticide," he said in his address.

Arya said that the state government has decided to celebrate the year 2020 as Sushashan Sankalp Varsh. Under this, the focus would be given on launching several new good governance initiatives and on improving service delivery to citizens by every department and across the state throughout the year, he added. **AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIES

## Adityanath is not with the poor: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday lashed out at Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for his remark that the "country needs Ramrajya not Samajwad", terming it against the very essence of the Constitution.

In a tweet, the SP chief said, "Mukhiyaji has said the country does not need socialism this means: he is against the essence of the Constitution. He is not with the poor but with the rich capitalists. He works for some special people and not for society. He is against steps towards ensuring social equality of neglected sections." The SP chief was reacting to the remarks made by the Chief Minister while speaking on the Motion of Thanks to the Governor's address in the Assembly on Wednesday.

AGENCIES

## SC reserves verdict on Devendra Fadnavis' plea to review order asking him to face trial

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Tuesday reserved its verdict on former Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis' plea seeking review of its 2019 judgment asking the BJP leader to face trial for allegedly failing to furnish details of pending criminal cases against him in his 2014 poll affidavit. Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, representing Mr. Fadnavis, told a bench headed by Justice Arun Mishra that the issue will have very far reaching consequences for other candidates fighting elections and the top court needs to re-examine its October 1, 2019 decision. In its judgment last year, the apex court had set aside the Bombay High Court order which gave a clean chit to Mr. Fadnavis and held that he did not deserve to be tried for the alleged offence under the Representation of Peoples Act (RPA).

AGENCIES

## Jagan seeks Prasad's help to move AP High Court to Kurnool from Amaravati

NEW DELHI: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy met Union Law and Justice Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad here on Saturday and requested him to initiate steps to move the main bench of the AP High Court from Amaravati to Kurnool as decided by the state government. During his 50-minute meeting with Mr. Prasad, Mr. Reddy said the state government had decided to have three capitals for AP — at Amaravati (legislative capital), Visakhapatnam (executive capital) and Kurnool (judicial capital) — to ensure equal development of all the regions.

AGENCIES

## ₹50,000 cr due from Centre: Mamata to PM

KOLKATA: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday wrote a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expressing concern over "steady reduction" in central funds to the State and "inordinate delay" in their release. She claimed that while the earning of the Central government is increasing through collection of "cess and surcharges", the "receivables of the State" from the Centre is reducing since the BJP government came to power in 2014. Ms. Banerjee wrote that the West Bengal government has been deprived of an outstanding amount of nearly Rs. 50,000 crore under several heads. One of the key factors is that the Centre is increasingly relying on "cess and surcharges", which have gone up from 6.17% of the Gross Tax Revenue in 2014-2015 to 18.4% in 2019-2020. "Since these do not form a part of the kitty of Central taxes, their devolution to States does not happen", thus reducing the "receivables of the State".

AGENCIES

## No leadership crisis in Congress: Anand Sharma

NEW DELHI: A day after Shashi Tharoor tweeted to press for a "leadership election", Congress leader Anand Sharma said the party has a President. In what appeared to be a snub to Mr. Tharoor without taking his name, Mr. Sharma said that it was only the Congress Working Committee that could decide on such issues.

When reporters asked Mr. Sharma about many Congress leaders voicing their concerns on the issue, he said, "It is clear that those in the Congress express their opinions... But the view of the Congress is decided by the CWC, which takes key decisions."

Meanwhile, a party leader said that the Delhi Assembly elections - where the party again failed to win even a single seat - should not be seen as a parameter for the Congress as the party has won many state elections after the Lok Sabha polls.

Many party leaders have been demanding the appointment of the new party President, including Shashi Tharoor.



"I renew my appeal to the CWC to hold leadership elections to energise workers and inspire voters," he said.

Tharoor also advocated elections for the CWC which are not being held for many years with the Congress President appointing the members.

"Some have asked who should vote for what. I was referring to my earlier call -- eight months ago -- for elections among the 10,000 party

workers who constitute the "AICC plus PCC delegates" list. These should be for the elected seats in the CWC as well as for the party's presidency," he said.

Many Congress leaders have suggested that the party should look beyond the Gandhi family and move on as there is no dearth of leadership in the party.

But rejecting this, a party leader said: "The leader must

be accepted from Mizoram to Porbandar and the party is considering all the factors... The leader has to be a homogeneous entity accepted to all.

"So nobody can guide us to choose our leader. It is the party which will decide who will lead us. And not somebody from outside."

Maharashtra leader Sanjay Nirupam said: "It is an inane discussion. No one from outside the family can lead Con-

gress at this juncture. Rahul Gandhi is the only leader who can lead the party and can save it. Other leaders are just group leaders... such leaders at the helm will encourage more groupism. Period!"

Nirupam's reaction came after late Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit's son, Sandeep Dikshit, in an interview, questioned the party's "continued inaction" mode. He also named senior leaders who should contribute "more" in the decision-making.

While the Congress has reacted sharply to Tharoor and other leaders' statements, chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said: "Those who are talking of CWC should go and read the resolution which appointed Sonia Gandhi as interim head of the party."

Separately, Anand Sharma said there should be "gravitas, seriousness and depth" in Trump's visit as well as "tangible outcomes on substantive issues" that should be announced during the joint declaration to be made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Trump.

## Amend law to make reservation mandatory for States: Kcharge

MUMBAI: Congress general secretary Mallikarjun Kcharge has demanded that the Centre amend law to make it mandatory for the states to implement reservation as envisaged under the Constitution.

He said amendment was necessary to "undo" the BJP-led Uttarakhand government's "mistake" of filling up posts in public services in the State without providing reservation to SCs and STs.

He was addressing a press conference here.

"The Uttarakhand government is trying to weaken the case for reservation," Mr.



Kcharge alleged.

The Supreme Court recently held that states are not bound to provide reservation in appointments and there is no fundamental right to claim quota in promotions.

The apex court passed the order while dealing with pleas regarding the Uttarakhand government's September 5, 2012 decision to fill up all posts in public services in the state without providing reservation to SC/STs. Expressing dismay over the SC verdict, Mr. Kcharge said,

"The apex court made certain observations, like reservation is not a fundamental right, which were not required. "Reservation is mandated in the Constitution to provide equality of opportunities," he added.

AGENCIES

## NPR will not be implemented in MP, says Kamal Nath

BHOPAL: The Congress government in Madhya Pradesh on Monday asserted that there is no move "at present" to undertake the proposed National Population Register (NPR) update exercise in the State.

Chief Minister Kamal Nath on Monday said his government is not going to implement the NPR in the State.

Mr. Nath's clarification came in the wake of Congress MLA Arif Masood threatening earlier in the day to protest against the party-led government's "decision" to update the NPR. The ruling party legislator from Bhopal demanded a rollback of the decision.

"At present, we are not going to implement the NPR in the State. The NPR notification about which talks were going on was issued on December 9, 2019," Mr. Nath said in a statement here.

"After this, the Centre has decided to implement the Citizen (Amendment) Act [passed by Parliament on December 11]. It means the NPR notified by the government is not the one under the CAA 2019, but as per the provisions of the Act's 1955 and 2003's rule 3. AGENCIES

## BJP govt disrespected women by arguing that they don't deserve command posts in Army: Rahul

NEWDELHI: The Congress on Monday welcomed the Supreme Court verdict on leadership roles for women in the armed forces, with Rahul Gandhi alleging that the BJP government disrespected Indian women by arguing in court that they did not deserve command posts as they were inferior to men.

It termed the verdict a "victory" for every citizen who believes in equality bereft of sexes and a "defeat and rejection" of the Narendra Modi government and its "myopic thinking and thought process dating back to the 17th century".

While Mr. Gandhi lauded the women for standing up and proving the government wrong, Congress chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala said the verdict has opened new vistas and new doors to India's daughters and urged Prime Minister Modi to not wait for three months and implement it immediately.

Their attack on the BJP government came after the Supreme Court opened the way for women in command positions in the Army and directed the Centre to grant permanent commission to all women officers within three months, while calling for an end to gender bias in the armed forces.

"The government disrespected every Indian woman, by arguing in the SC that women Army officers didn't deserve command posts or permanent service because they were inferior to men," Mr. Gandhi said on Twitter. He also attached to his tweet a news report of the apex court's judgment in the matter.



At a press conference, Mr. Surjewala said, "The Congress welcomes the path-breaking and the historic judgment of the Supreme Court of India today ensuring complete equality giving permanent commission, combat role and a right to lead men and women in the Army to India's daughters."

"This is a victory for every citizen of this country who believes in equality bereft of sexes. This is a defeat of the Modi government and its myopic thinking and thought process whereby it argued before the Supreme Court that men and women cannot be equal for combat roles, saying women are physically inferior," he said.

Mr. Surjewala said the government's argument that women have to cater to their household duties and which is why they are not fit for command and combat roles in the Army and that male sepoy and jawans will never accept leadership of women in the Army and armed forces are "myopic, backward 17th century arguments of BJP that were rejected". Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra also tweeted saying the "landmark" judgment of the Supreme Court has given new wings of flight to women of the country.

AGENCIES

## Opposition parties in Tamil Nadu slam police action against anti-CAA protesters

CHENNAI: Opposition parties led by the DMK in Tamil Nadu on Saturday lashed out at the police action against anti-CAA protesters here, and sought action against those police personnel who allegedly used force against the agitators.

DMK president M.K. Stalin said the protests were being held in a peaceful manner and sought to know why the police used force to disperse them.

However, BJP leader H. Raja slammed the attack on police personnel, in which four including a woman Joint Commissioner sustained injuries.

"Lathi charge was done unnecessarily on the peaceful people for no reason and this



prompted people across the state to take to the streets," Mr. Stalin said in a statement.

On Friday, an anti-CAA protest by Muslims had turned violent when a group

of protesters clashed with police here, leaving four personnel injured. The incident had led to sporadic protests across Tamil Nadu, including at Washermanpet in the city,

where the violence erupted, but protesters subsequently called off the agitation, following talks with Police Commissioner A.K. Viswanathan.

Agitators had alleged that police used force against them. Mr. Stalin demanded that any cases in this connection should also be withdrawn and sought action against policemen who allegedly resorted to lathicharge.

Hitting out at the AIADMK, the DMK chief said while the ruling party had voted in favour of the amended Citizenship Act in the Parliament, it was also not enacting an Assembly resolution against CAA, a demand put forth by his party.

Amma Makkal Munne-

tra Kazhagam leader T.T.V. Dhinakaran also targeted the government over the handling of the protest. "Using force in peaceful protests amounts to stirring up a hornet's nest," the independent legislator said in a statement.

He wished such incidents did not repeat. The Vaiko-led MDMK adopted a resolution in its district secretaries meeting, slamming the police for allegedly using force against protesters.

BJP leader H. Raja, whose party is an ally of the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, slammed the violence against police personnel in the protests.

In a tweet, he said "rioters should be dealt with an iron fist".

## AAP plans membership drive in Uttar Pradesh



NEWDELHI: Sanjay Singh, AAP in-charge of Uttar Pradesh unit, has said the party would start a membership drive in the State from February 23, starting from Lucknow.

The party aims to take the "Arvind Kejriwal model of development" to Uttar Pradesh and strengthen its base across the 403 Assembly Constituencies, he said, adding that the membership drive will end on March 23.

He added it was for the party's high command to decide on whether or not it will contest the State elections in 2022. "During the membership drive, people can become members of the party by physically reaching out to our offices and getting receipts, by giving missed calls or by enrolling through our website," Mr. Singh said.

Around 5,000 posters and banners will be put up in each constituency, totalling over 20 lakh across the State to talk about our model of politics and development, Mr. Singh said, adding that the party has 60 active district-level units in Uttar Pradesh while maintaining presence in all districts.

He said there are around a dozen AAP leaders hailing from various places in U.P. who have been elected to the Delhi Assembly.

They include Ministers Manish Sisodia, Gopal Rai, Satyendra Jain, Imran Hussain, among others. These leaders will be felicitated in their hometowns and awareness will be raised regarding the "Kejriwal model of development". Mr. Singh also criticised Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath over a host of issues, especially the law and order situation in the State. Stating that Delhi has sent out a message that "politics of hate" will not work against "politics of work", the AAP MP claimed that only a party which gives good education, healthcare, cheap power and water and helps the cause of the common person would win the elections.

AGENCIES

## Manmohan Singh asked me if he should quit: Ahluwalia

"I was part of the Prime Minister's delegation in New York and my brother Sanjeev, who had retired from the IAS, telephoned to say he had written a piece that was very critical of Dr. Singh. He had emailed it to me and said he hoped I didn't find it embarrassing"



NEWDELHI: After the Rahul Gandhi ordinance-trashing episode of 2013, the then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh asked Montek Singh Ahluwalia whether he thought he should resign, the former Deputy Chairman of the now-defunct Planning Commission said.

Mr. Ahluwalia said he told Dr. Singh, who was then on a visit to the U.S., that he did not think a resignation on this issue was appropriate.

Mr. Gandhi had denounced the ordinance brought by the UPA dispensation to negate a Supreme Court verdict on convicted lawmakers. He had termed it as "complete nonsense" that should be "torn up and thrown away." Dr. Singh, while returning home, had ruled out his resignation though he appeared piqued over the entire episode.



"I was part of the Prime Minister's delegation in New York and my brother Sanjeev, who had retired from the IAS, telephoned to say he had written a piece that was very critical of Dr. Singh. He had emailed it to me and said he hoped I didn't find it embarrassing," recalled Mr. Ahluwalia.

The article was widely reported in the media with reference to the author being Mr. Ahluwalia's brother. "The first thing I did was to take the text across to the Prime Minister's suite because I wanted him to hear about it first from me. He read it in silence and, at first, made no comment.

Then, he suddenly asked me whether I thought he should resign," Mr. Ahluwalia writes in his new book "Backstage: The Story behind India's High Growth Years."

"I thought about it for a while and said I did not think a resignation was appropriate. I wondered then, whether I was simply saying what I thought he would like to hear but on reflection I am convinced I gave him honest advice," he reasoned. "Most of my friends agreed with Sanjeev. They felt the Dr. Singh had for too long accepted the constraints under which he had to operate and this had tarnished his reputation. The rubbishing of the ordinance was seen as demeaning the office of the Prime Minister and justified resigning on principle. I did not agree," Mr. Ahluwalia wrote.

ALSO READ | THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TERM 'SECULAR' \* P6 | MAKING THE SUPER-RICH PAY THEIR FAIR SHARE \* P6

# Voda Idea pays ₹1,000cr to DoT as part of AGR dues

**THE AMOUNT IS STILL WAY BELOW ITS TOTAL PENDING AGR DUES OF RS 53,000 CRORE**

**NEW DELHI:** Vodafone Idea has paid Rs 1,000 crore as part of its pending AGR (Adjusted Gross Revenue) dues to Department of Telecom, PTI said citing sources. The latest round of instalment follows after the telco paid Rs 2,500 crore to the DoT on Monday as the Supreme Court issued "contempt" warning against telecom companies and DoT officials.

The amount paid so far is still way below its total pend-

ing AGR dues of Rs 53,000 crore. Vodafone Idea has already warned that it'll have no option but to shut operations if it pays all pending dues. The SC had earlier also rejected Vodafone's plea seeking "no coercive action" to recover the pending dues. As per the latest SC ruling, telcos have to pay up the pending dues by March 17.

The SC's order on Monday has hastened the crisis for telcos facing revenue losses every quarter. Bharti Airtel and Tata Group also made payments of Rs 10,000 crore and Rs 2,197 crore, respectively, on Monday.

Also read: AGR-hit telcos set for another jolt; must pay additional service tax, GST on



unpaid dues

Telecom companies owe Rs 1.47 lakh crore to the DoT, including Rs 92,600 crore as licence fee and Rs 55,100 crore as spectrum usage charges. Bharti Airtel owes Rs 35,600 crore, while Vodafone Idea has to pay Rs 53,000 crore. Reliance Communication

has pending dues worth Rs 21,200 crore and Tata Group has to pay Rs 13,800 crore. Of the total pending amount, Vodafone Idea and Airtel collectively have to pay Rs 88,600 crore.

The amount is supposed to go up as the DoT is in the process of calculating AGR dues

**"As disclosed in the Company's financial statements for quarter ending December 31, 2019, the Company's ability to continue as a going concern is essentially dependent on a positive outcome of the application for modification of the Supplementary Order"**

for FY18 and FY19. Notably, the DoT has so far demanded AGR dues, including licence fees, interest and penalties, till 2016-17 only, while spectrum charges worth Rs 55,100 crore have been calculated till FY19. The jacked-up AGR numbers could also start another round of litigation between the DoT

and telcos, which are already bearing the brunt of SC's October 24 ruling.

Earlier, Vodafone Idea on February 15 had said it is assessing the amount that can be paid towards AGR dues, even as it flagged concerns over the continuation of its business. The company said it is in

the process to pay adjusted gross revenue dues as per the Supreme Court order.

However, the continuation of business in India will depend on favourable order on its modification plea filed before the apex court, it added.

"The Company is currently assessing the amount that it will be able to pay to DoT towards the dues calculated based on AGR (Adjusted Gross Revenue), as interpreted by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in its order dated 24 October 2019. The Company proposes to pay the amount so assessed in the next few days," Vodafone Idea said in a BSE filing.

Vodafone Idea Ltd (VIL), whose liability is estimated to be around 53,038 crore, including 24,729 crore of spectrum dues and 28,309 crore in licence fee, has already warned of shutdown if no relief is given.

"As disclosed in the Company's financial statements for quarter ending December 31, 2019, the Company's ability to continue as a going concern is essentially dependent on a positive outcome of the application for modification of the Supplementary Order," the company said in the filing. The next date of hearing is scheduled for March 17, 2020. **AGENCIES**

## NEWSBRIEF

**Birla Carbon develops mobile app to help customers make relevant choice**

**MUMBAI:** Birla Carbon Ltd. of the Aditya Birla Group has developed a mobile app to enable its customers to make relevant choices out of a range of products and solutions the company offers. Called 'Birla Carbon App,' the app will provide a complete portfolio of solutions across tyres, rubber, plastics, inks, coatings and other niche industries. It has a 'Solutions Guide' which will help its customers to choose the best carbon black alternatives for their specific industry. The app, which will be launched at the Tire Technology Expo 2020, also has a hardness calculator tool which provides guidance on comparative carbon black loading levels for rubber compound formulation development. **AGENCIES**

**Cox & Kings' ex-directors told to submit records**

**MUMBAI:** The National Company Law Tribunal on Monday granted three days to suspended directors of tours and travel services firm Cox & Kings for submitting statutory information and records to the resolution professional (RP). The RP of the tours and travel company told the tribunal that the former directors and the erstwhile auditor are not submitting statutory information and records, which is making the insolvency process difficult. The Mumbai bench of the NCLT in October 2019 admitted an insolvency application against Cox & Kings after the tour operator defaulted on its debt obligations to the company's financial creditor, Ratan India Finance. In November 2019, the tribunal had directed the suspended directors to cooperate with the RP. **AGENCIES**

**Porsche to foray into pre-owned car business in India**

**NEW DELHI:** Luxury sports car maker Porsche is planning to enter pre-owned car business in India in the medium term as it looks to enhance customer base in the country, according to a senior company official. The company, which sells a range of luxury sports cars and sports utility vehicles (SUVs) such as the 718, 911, Macan and Cayenne priced between 69.98 lakh to 1.63 crore, currently has a total of about 3,500 customers in India. "We are seriously looking at the pre-owned car business. Our car parc is more than 3,500 cars. It's a sizable number. We are exploring the right format for used car business," Porsche India Director Pavan Shetty told PTI. Globally, the company sells pre-owned cars under its Porsche Approved brand. **PTI**

## RFL CASE

### Court dismisses bail plea of former Fortis Healthcare promoter Malvinder Singh

**NEW DELHI:** A Delhi court on Monday dismissed the bail plea of former Fortis Healthcare promoter Malvinder Singh, arrested for alleged misappropriation of funds at Religare Finvest Limited.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Gurmohina Kaur rejected the bail application on the grounds that Malvinder was required to be kept in judicial custody for proper investigation in the case.

Malvinder (46); his brother Shivinder, also a former Fortis



Healthcare promoter; former CMD of Religare Enterprises Limited (REL) Sunil Godhwani (58); former CEO of REL, Kavi Arora (48) and former CFO of RFL, Anil Saxena, were

arrested by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of Delhi Police for allegedly diverting RFL's money and investing in other companies. The EOW registered an FIR in March last year after it received a complaint from RFL's Manpreet Suri against Shivinder, Godhwani and others, alleging that loans were taken by them while managing the firm but the money was invested in other companies. "They put RFL in a poor financial condition by disbursing loans to companies with no financial standing and controlled by them. The companies to which the loans were disbursed willfully defaulted in repayments and caused a loss to RFL to the tune of 2,397 crore," the police had alleged. **AGENCIES**

## COVID-19 will cut iPhone production, sales

**CUPERTINO:** Apple Inc. is warning investors that it won't meet its second-quarter financial guidance because the viral outbreak in China has cut production of iPhones.

The California-based company said Monday that all of its iPhone manufacturing facilities are outside Hubei province, the epicentre of the outbreak, and all have been reopened. But the company said production is ramping up slowly.

The health and well-being of every person who helps make



these products possible is our paramount priority, and we are working in close consultation with our suppliers and public health experts as this ramp continues, Apple said

in a statement.

The death toll from COVID-19, a disease caused by the new coronavirus, was 1,770 as of Monday. Apple says demand for iPhones is also down in China because many of Apple's 42 retail stores there are closed or operating with reduced hours. China is Apple's third largest retail market for iPhones, after the U.S. and Europe. Outside China, Apple said iPhone demand has been strong and is in line with the company's expectations. **AGENCIES**

## Don't take industry chambers lightly: Goyal to businessmen



**NEW DELHI:** Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal recently took a dig at the industry for taking business chambers lightly, saying businessmen only approach these bodies when they face problems.

Goyal said that many times he found at functions of CII, Ficci and Assocham only the current president, few past presidents, incoming presidents and possibly a few public spirited office bearers. "Where was the trade and industry and business community when the nation needed them?" he said at an AIMA event here.

The minister requested AIMA President Sanjay Kirlskar and past president Harsh Pati Singhania, who were present at the function, to take this message to "all your colleagues and friends that associations are not to be taken lightly."

"Industry bodies and businesses are not something which you only go to when you are in trouble. These are organisations which have a national duty and a national role to play," he added.

Citing the example of the recent decision to increase import duty on toys, he said the toy industry has now become "super active".

"Why did they not improve

**"Industry bodies and businesses are not something which you only go to when you are in trouble. These are organisations which have a national duty and a national role to play"**

the standards of toys in the past, why did they not give our children better quality toys, why did we kill our domestic industry and become dependent on low quality inferior stuff coming from other countries," Goyal questioned.

The government in the Union Budget raised import duty on toys from 20 per cent to 60 per cent. The toys associations are demanding rollback of the decision.

"I often feel very sad when I go to CII, Ficci, Assocham programmes. I find the current president, few past presidents, and the incoming presidents, possibly a few officer bearers, if at all they are public spirited...I do not know where you all managed to get the rest of the room filled up. What is the level of involvement?," he said. **AGENCIES**

## Air India's disinvestment will not have any problems this time, says Hardeep Singh Puri

**NEW DELHI:** Air India's disinvestment will not face any problems this time as the interest shown by prospective buyers has been reassuring, Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Monday.

He said the government wants Air India to keep flying as a brand for years to come.

The minister also assured the employees at Air India that their requirements would be foremost in the airline and factored in whatever arrangement is decided with the successor.

In the Preliminary Informa-

tion Memorandum issued a few weeks ago for Air India's stake sale, the government had stated that the brand name would have to be kept as it is by the future owner.

"The strongest support that you have on your future comes from the government. We not only want to keep Air India flying as a brand but we want to ensure that continued operation will end the uncertainty of last many years," Puri said at an event here.

The fact that Air India has been facing financial challenges is not something that



is unknown, he added.

"I don't think anyone can run an airline without the people that actually make it," Puri said.

"Somebody asks what will happen to the staff. The staff will be required by whoever will be the new entity managing or owning it. There has been no recruitment for many years. There is no surplus staff," he said.

"Don't ever be under the impression that this time around, there will be any problems (in disinvestment). There will not be. The amount of interest I am seeing in the acquisition and the quarters from where I am seeing it, I am reassured," he added.

Various employee unions

of Air India in the last few months have expressed uncertainty about their future as the government has moved ahead with the stake sale plan.

"Whoever are the eligible bidders, the requirement of the staff the people who run the airline would be foremost," the minister said.

Addressing the concerns of employees, he said, "Your good work is not only being appreciated but will also be factored into the successor arrangement which will come in after this." **AGENCIES**

## M&M arm to sell stake in 3 firms to CLP

**MAHINDRA & MAHINDRA LTD IS SET TO COME OUT WITH A NEW RANGE OF TRACTORS**

**NEW DELHI:** Mahindra & Mahindra's wholly owned arm Mahindra Renewables will sell its entire stake in 3 subsidiaries to CLP India, a part of Hong Kong-based CLP Group, for nearly 340 crore.

Mahindra Renewables Pvt. Ltd. (MRPL) on Friday agreed to sell its entire stake aggregating 100% of the paid-up equity share capital in Cleansolar Renewable Energy Pvt. Ltd. (CREPL), Divine Solren Pvt. Ltd. (DSPL) and Neo Solren Pvt. Ltd. (NSPL), wholly-owned subsidiaries of MRPL, to CLP India Pvt. Ltd. (CLP), Mahindra & Mahindra said in a regulatory filing. The transaction is expected to be completed by May 31, 2020.

In separate development, Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd is set to come out with a new range of tractors, developed in collaboration with Mitsubishi of Japan, to further strengthen its position both in the domestic and overseas markets.

About five years ago, M&M entered into a strategic agreement with Mitsubishi Agricultural Machinery (MAM) to acquire 33 per cent stake in the latter and to jointly develop products to address global opportunities in the rice value chain.

Pawan Goenka, Managing



Director, Mahindra & Mahindra, said at the company's earnings' conference call: "We are working on a programme for developing a new tractor platform called K2. It will have four tractor variants. These will be designed for both domestic and international markets. The work is primarily done in Japan in co-operation with Mitsubishi Agriculture Machinery. This is the most ambitious tractor development we have undertaken."

While more details about the new platform are awaited, the company indicated that it

is also working on intelligent tractors to increase agricultural productivity and address skilled labour shortage issues, among others.

The new K2 platform is expected to be launched in mid-2021 and models will be introduced for two years across horsepower ranges.

Though Mahindra's growth is driven by the strong performance of its tractors under the Mahindra and Swaraj brands, the company has also come out with products with new features under the Novo, Yuvo and Jivo platforms to showcase its technological edge. Goenka

said the tractor market will see positive growth of about five per cent in the current quarter. But the industry will end the fiscal with about seven per cent decline. For April-December 2019 period, the tractor industry saw a decline of about 10 per cent in domestic sales at 5.66 lakh units. Exports declined by 17 per cent to 59,000 units compared with the year-ago period.

"Though it is too early to predict growth for the next fiscal, we expect about five per cent growth, with plus or minus 2. Rabi sowing has been good and reservoir levels are also good. On this year's monsoon, El Nino effect is going to be neutral. So, it is expected to be normal, which will augur well for the tractor industry," said Goenka. **AGENCIES**

**"The work is primarily done in Japan in co-operation with Mitsubishi Agriculture Machinery. This is the most ambitious tractor development we have undertaken"**

## Pharma sector reviews impact of coronavirus

**NEW DELHI:** The Niti Aayog recently held a meeting with the captains of industry in the pharmaceutical sector to discuss the impact of disruption in supplies of active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) following the coronavirus outbreak in China.

According to sources, hosts of measures were discussed aimed at boosting domestic manufacturing of APIs to reduce dependence on imports of the APIs from China.

The meeting was chaired by Niti Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant and attended by Pharmaceutical Department Secretary P D Vaghela and Biocon Chairperson and Managing Director Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, among others.

"Fruitful, constructive & positive meeting with captains of industry in pharmaceutical sector to discuss the options for domestic manufacturing of critical APIs on which



India is import dependent. Consensus arrived at on a range of policy measures for creating ecosystem in India," Kant said in a tweet after the meeting.

According to the sources, Kant told industry captains that they should try to become globally competitive to beat China that accounted for 67.56 per cent of the total imports of bulk drugs and drug intermediates at

USD 2,405.42 million to India in 2018-19. Zydus Group Chairman Pankaj Patel had on Tuesday said that the prices of the key pharmaceutical ingredients could rise if the coronavirus situation in China does not improve soon.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had on Tuesday met the representatives of various sectors, including pharmaceuticals, textiles,

**"Government would soon announce measures to deal with the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the domestic industry"**

chemicals, electronics and IT hardware, solar, auto, surgical equipments, and paints, to review the situation following the outbreak of the deadly virus in China.

She had said the government would soon announce measures to deal with the impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the domestic industry.

Describing pharmaceutical, chemical and solar equipment sectors as the worst affected, the finance minister had said disruptions are visible in these due to delay in shipment.

The Department of Pharmaceutical has already

constituted a high-level panel to assess the impact of the outbreak of the deadly virus in China on the supply of APIs in India.

Official sources had said that Indian drugmakers have told the high-level committee that they currently have stocks for the next two-three months.

There has been no supply from the neighbouring country for the past 20-25 days, mainly due to Chinese New Year holidays, sources had said.

India has a high dependence on China for fermentation-based APIs and intermediates.

Companies have been maintaining 2-3 months inventory of these APIs and intermediates, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (IPA) Secretary General Sudarshan Jain had earlier said. India imports bulk drugs and APIs for producing medicines, including certain essential medicines, from China. **AGENCIES**

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**NEWSBRIES**

**Axis Bank to explore long-term strategic alliance with Max Life**

**MUMBAI:** Axis Bank has entered into a confidentiality and exclusivity arrangement to explore the possibility of entering into a long-term strategic partnership with Max Life. Axis Bank and Max Life were having a bancassurance arrangement for nearly a decade. "Axis Bank, Max Financial Services Limited and its subsidiary Max Life Insurance Company Limited today (on Thursday) signed a confidentiality and exclusivity arrangement to explore the possibility of Axis Bank entering into a long-term strategic partnership with Max Life," the bank said in a regulatory filing. Max Life is currently the largest non-banking entity owned private life insurer in the country. Max Financial Services currently holds a 72.5 per cent stake in Max Life, while Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance and Axis Bank hold 25.5 per cent and 2.0 per cent stake, respectively. **AGENCIES**

**HDFC Bank, Mastercard, SAP Concur join hands**

**NEW DELHI:** HDFC Bank, Mastercard and SAP Concur have joined hands for spending management services for the corporate sector. HDFC Bank will offer a corporate credit card for business travellers, providing a one-stop solution for payment and expense management during business trips, said a release. "The corporate credit card will enable seamless integration of all business-related spend into SAP Concur offerings, enhancing employee experience, increasing visibility, saving money, and improving corporate efficiency," it said. The card is supported by Mastercard. SAP Concur is a travel, expense, and invoice management solutions provider. Parag Rao, country head (payments business and marketing) of HDFC Bank, said, "Corporates can gain greater insights and control, while ensuring regulatory and tax compliance through this solution. Together with SAP Concur solutions, we aim to reinvent the way Indian corporates experience business travel." Mankiran Chowhan, managing director (Indian subcontinent), SAP Concur, said that by automating and integrating travel, expense, and invoice management, the company is helping customers build an intelligent spend management platform. **AGENCIES**

**Raising insurance coverage to 90% to help exporters cut cost: SBI chief**

**MUMBAI:** Facing difficulties in making recoveries from exporters, SBI Chairman Rajnish Kumar on Thursday called for changing the way export finances are done and suggested that enhancing the insurance coverage to 90 per cent can help reduce exporters' cost and boost their business. "The method of bills or receivables of exporters have to be changed. Our experience has been extremely bad when the associates/subsidiaries are involved, wherein bills are raised and business are directed through associates/subsidiaries," Kumar told a banking conclave organised by the apex exporters body FIEO. **AGENCIES**

**Non-life insurers see 7.2% rise in income**

**NEWDELHI:** India's non-life insurance companies registered a 7.2 per cent rise in their combined new premium collection at Rs 17,225.75 crore in January this fiscal, Irdai data showed. The 35 insurers' gross premium collection stood at Rs 16,076.28 crore in the same month a year ago. Among these, the 25 general insurance providers had a collective premium of Rs 14,643.26 crore during the month, up 2.2 per cent from the same period of 2019, as per the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India's (Irdai) data. **PTI**

# Credit growth momentum picking up, says RBI chief

**NEW DELHI:** Amid concerns over economic slowdown, RBI chief Shaktikanta Das on Saturday said credit growth momentum is picking up and ruled out any possible spike in inflation due to Budget proposals as the government is maintaining "fiscal prudence". After the first meeting of the RBI board post 2020-21 Budget presentation, Mr. Das also expressed hope that transmission of rate cuts would improve further.



The meeting, which was also addressed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, discussed various Budget proposals. "The direct inflationary impact of any budget is fiscal deficit number, when borrowing goes up, but the government has adhered to the principle of fiscal prudence. The 'escape clause' under FRBM Act, the deficit number in the current year as well as the next year are very much within the parameters set as per FRBM committee recommendations," Mr. Das said.

Facing revenue shortage, the government raised the fiscal deficit target to 3.8% of the GDP for 2019-20 in the budget, from the 3.3% pegged earlier. "The government has utilised 'escape clause' under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, which allows the Centre to breach its fiscal deficit target by 0.5 percentage points at times of severe stress in the economy. Meanwhile, the finance minister said the government is

monitoring farm credit given by banks in rural areas, adding that she expects to meet the increased target of ₹15 lakh crore for the next fiscal. "Credit limit has been expanded. I am sure it is based on local ground level requirement...we expect the demand to grow and credit requirements to also meet up with it. I am actually closely monitoring banks and their extension of credit facility particularly to rural areas. So I think we'll be able to meet that," Sitharaman said.

The farm credit target for the current fiscal has been set at ₹13.5 lakh crore. Speaking on the inflationary impact of the Budget proposals, Mr. Das said, "The good part of the government borrowing is also budgeted to come from small savings. Therefore, I don't see much of an inflationary impact." "Declining crude prices has definitely positive impact on inflation...The main reason for spike in inflation is because of food inflation, mostly milk,

**RBI board recommends aligning accounting year with fiscal year from 2020-21**

**NEW DELHI:** The Reserve Bank board has recommended aligning the central bank's accounting year, beginning July, with the financial year from 2020-21, an official statement said. The Central Board of Directors of the RBI at its 582nd meeting reviewed the current economic situation, global and domestic challenges and various areas of operations of the Reserve Bank. The board recommended aligning the financial year of RBI, currently July-June, with the government's fiscal year (April-March) from the year 2020-21. It approved forwarding a proposal to the government for its consideration, the RBI said in the statement. Addressing the board meeting, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman outlined the thinking behind the Union Budget 2020-21 and the focus areas of the government.

fish, and various protein related items. Core inflation has slightly edged up because of revision of telecom tariffs," he added.

Retail inflation based on consumer price index (CPI) soared to a near six-year high of 7.59% in January, surpassing the Reserve Bank of India's

**DAS ALSO SAID**

- The direct inflationary impact of any budget is fiscal deficit number, when borrowing goes up, but the government has adhered to the principle of fiscal prudence.
- The 'escape clause' under FRBM Act, the deficit number in the current year as well as the next year are very much within the parameters set as per FRBM committee recommendations

comfort range primarily on account of rising vegetable and food prices. Similarly, wholesale prices-based inflation accelerated to a 10-month high of 3.10% in January, mainly due to costlier food articles, particularly onion and potato. Economic growth has been slowing in recent months and

the RBI has pegged GDP expansion at 5% for the current fiscal ending March 31.

About the Supreme Court order regarding Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) dues to be paid by telecom companies, Mr. Das said the central bank would have internal discussions in case there are any issues arising out of it. The court threatened contempt proceedings against top executives of Bharti Airtel, Vodafone Idea and other telecom firms for failing to comply with its directive to pay an estimated ₹1.47 lakh crore in past dues. The decision might have ramifications on banks in terms of their exposure to the financially-stressed telecom companies.

On moderating credit growth, Mr. Das said there are signs of uptick and the momentum is gathering pace. "Credit flow is slowly and steadily reviving...we do hope and we do expect the credit flow to improve in the coming months," he added. **AGENCIES**

## Govt okays changes to crop insurance scheme



**NEW DELHI:** The government has approved major changes in the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMF-BY) making it optional for farmers with a view to plug loopholes in the farm insurance scheme.

Under the PMF-BY, which was launched in February 2016 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it is mandatory for loanee farmers to take insurance cover under this scheme.

Currently, 58 per cent of the total farmers are loanee. The Union Cabinet has approved many changes in the PMF-BY programme as farmers' body and states were raising some concerns, Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar told reporters here. The minister said the PMF-BY scheme has been made optional. Highlighting the achievements of this scheme, Tomar said the insurance programme has covered 30 per cent of cultivable area. The minister said insurance claims worth Rs 60,000 crore have been cleared, while Rs 13,000 crore premiums have been collected.

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram has termed as "retrograde" the decision of the Centre to make crop insurance voluntary and said there can be nothing more anti-farmer. He said more cropped area needs to be brought under crop insurance and the decision will reduce coverage putting millions of farmers at risk. "Another example of the BJP government's shortsightedness and misplaced priorities," he charged. "Nothing can be more anti-farmer than the central government's decision to reduce its contribution to the Crop Insurance Scheme," he said. In a series of tweets, Chidambaram said, "Making crop insurance voluntary for loanee farmers is another retrograde step." **AGENCIES**

## HDFC Bank SME book doubles to ₹1.48 lakh cr

**MUMBAI:** Private sector lender HDFC Bank doubled its SME book to over Rs 1.48 lakh crore by December 2019 from Rs 74,000 crore in March 2017, cornering over 9 per cent of the around Rs 16 lakh crore market, at a time when credit flow to the segment has been tepid. According to the RBI data, the system-wide SME loan book stood at Rs 15.7 lakh crore as of June 2019, up 10 per cent over the 12 months' period.



With a loan book of over Rs 1.48 lakh crore, HDFC Bank is the clear No. 2 in the SME lending space after the industry leader SBI which leads the segment with around Rs 2.7 lakh crore loan book and around 14 per cent market share. During this period -- March 2017-December 2019, the bank added more than 3 lakh customer accounts -- from 30.74 lakh customer accounts to nearly 34 lakh accounts.

While system-wide lending to the SME sector has been tepid, HDFC Bank has

clocked 19 per cent incremental growth in the disbursement in the December 2019 quarter, serving close to 3.4 million SMEs/MSMEs accounts, says a senior bank official.

Nearly one-third, 30 per cent to be precise, of these customers are in semi-urban and rural areas and come from all segments--manufacturing, services and exports, Sumant Rampal, the country head for business banking at HDFC Bank, told PTI in a recent interaction.

And on the asset quality front, too, HDFC Bank --

which has the lowest NPAs in the system -- shines, with gross NPAs of 1.42 per cent as of December 2019 and the net NPAs printing in at 0.48 per cent.

Refusing to quantify exactly the bad loans in his book, Rampal, who heads a team of Rs 1,700 relationship managers, said the SME book is not largely different from the bank's overall numbers.

It can be noted that SME accounts have been one of the worst hit for banks since the note-ban of November 2016 and the next shock of GST from July 2017. **AGENCIES**

## Govt monitoring agri credit given by banks, says minister

**“CREDIT LIMIT HAS BEEN EXPANDED. I AM SURE IT IS BASED ON LOCAL GROUND LEVEL REQUIREMENT...WE EXPECT THE DEMAND TO GROW AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS TO ALSO MEET UP WITH IT. I AM ACTUALLY CLOSELY MONITORING BANKS AND THEIR EXTENSION OF CREDIT FACILITY PARTICULARLY TO RURAL AREAS”**

**NEW DELHI:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said the government is monitoring farm credit given by banks in rural areas, adding that she expects to meet the increased target of ₹15 lakh crore for the next fiscal.

The government in Budget 2020-21 has raised the farm loan disbursement target by 11% to ₹15 lakh crore for the next fiscal and allocated ₹1.6 lakh crore to implement various plans in agriculture and allied sectors as it chases the goal of doubling farmers income by 2022.

The government has allocated ₹75,000 crore for the PM-KISAN scheme for the next fiscal, which is same as the budget estimate for this fiscal but higher than revised estimate of ₹54,370 crore.

"Credit limit has been expanded. I am sure it is based on local ground level requirement...we expect the demand to grow and credit requirements to also meet up with it. I am actually closely monitoring banks and their extension of credit facility particularly to rural areas. So I think we'll be able to meet that," she told reporters after addressing the central board of RBI.

## Andhra vigilance dept unearths Rs 404 crore scam in ESIC

**AMARAVATI:** The Vigilance and Enforcement Department of Andhra Pradesh has claimed to have unearthed a Rs 404.86 crore scam in the Employees State Insurance Corporation during the period between 2014 and 2019, when the Telugu Desam Party was in power.



Three directors of the Insurance Medical Service (IMS) implementing the ESIC scheme -- B Ravi Kumar, C K Ramesh Kumar and G Vijaya Kumar -- have been found guilty of large-scale irregularities, a report by the vigilance department said. Besides the three directors, at least five joint directors and several other staff members have been named as culpable in the irregularities, it added. State Labour Minister G Jayaram said action would be taken against all those involved, based on the vigilance report.

He said former labour minister in the Chandrababu Naidu cabinet, K

Atchannaidu, and top officials of the department would be brought to book and the swindled amount would be recovered. "We will not hesitate to send them to jail," Jayaram said in a video statement. Atchannaidu, who is currently deputy leader of the Telugu Desam Legislative Party, denied any wrongdoing and claimed he merely implemented the directives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"In 2016, the Prime Minister convened a meeting of ESIC and wanted the states to introduce tele health services and the Centre wrote a letter to all states in December 2016 on the same. We had decided to imple-

**“In 2016, the Prime Minister convened a meeting of ESIC and wanted the states to introduce tele health services and the Centre wrote a letter to all states in December 2016 on the same”**

ment that and I asked our officials to follow Telangana model and issued a note," Atchannaidu said in a video message from his village in Srikakulam district. Maintaining that all relevant records were available and could be verified, the former minister said he was ready to face any inquiry.

The vigilance department said that the three directors were the "kingpins of the procurement scam in the ESIC, where gross irregularities were committed in purchase of drugs, medicines,

lab kits, surgical items and furniture between 2014-15 and 2018-19, causing a loss of over Rs 151 crore to the state exchequer."

Of the total Rs 975.79 crore worth of purchases made during the period, the three directors, along with other staff, violated all procedures and guidelines of the government and ESIC and caused "huge wrongful loss to the exchequer", the vigilance report prepared by Director General K V Rajendranath Reddy said.

While the total budget allocation for the purchase of drugs and medicines during their tenure was Rs 293.51 crore, they made purchases worth Rs 698.36 crore, an excess of Rs 404.86 crore, in violation of procedural guidelines, the report said. Of this, Rs 51 crore was found to be paid in excess as the drugs were purchased from non-rate contract firms, in clear violation of guidelines, it said. **AGENCIES**

The farm credit target for the current fiscal has been set at ₹13.5 lakh crore.

Normally, farm loans attract an interest rate of 9%. But the government is providing 2% interest subsidy to ensure farmers get short-term farm loan of up to ₹3 lakh at an effective rate of 7% per annum.

With regard to proposed mega consolidation of public sector banks, Ms. Sitharaman said there was no discussion on the issue at the RBI board meeting on Saturday.

"I don't see any reason to go back or any reason which is particularly causing any delay for any notification..."

you will hear on it as it when it comes," she said.

Last year in August, the government announced merger of 10 public sector banks into four. United Bank of India and Oriental Bank of Commerce are to be merged with Punjab National Bank, making the proposed entity the second

largest public sector bank (PSB) from April 1 this year.

It was also decided to merge Syndicate Bank with Canara Bank, and Allahabad Bank with Indian Bank. Similarly, Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank are to be consolidated with Union Bank of India.

In April 2019, Bank of Baroda, in the first three-way



**“I don't see any reason to go back or any reason which is particularly causing any delay for any notification...you will hear on it as it when it comes”**

merger exercise, amalgamated Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank with itself.

SBI had merged five of its associate banks-- State Bank of Patiala, State Bank of Bikaner and Jaipur, State Bank of Mysore, State Bank of Travancore and State Bank of Hyderabad as well as Bharatiya Mahila Bank with itself effective April 2017.

## Injection of private funds to boost R&D

The resource for research and development in India is inadequate in every respect – be it in terms of money, personnel and ambition. Ironically, the founders of independent India wanted to base the country's development on science and technology. To this end, even at the expense of universal, free primary education, the country privileged esoteric research such as atomic energy and space over industrial technology, and tertiary research institutions – the IITs – over the spread of technical education in local languages. As a strategy with successes and setbacks, this also saw, as historians have noted, Indian R&D remain beholden to the government. Publicly-funded research has always been encouraged to reinvent the wheel and customise technology to Indian realities, whereas private companies and industrial firms have rarely been incentivised to develop their own intellectual property. It is only after the turn of the millennium that policymakers have pondered on coaxing the private sector to invest more in R&D. Public institutions contribute the lion's share of R&D investment. Private research funding is also boosted more by partnerships among companies. While private funding is increasing, it still has not reached a level where major central funding can make a significant impact. Many CSIR laboratories have had a long history of collaborating with companies to develop and transfer technology to industry, but here too, restrictions on how intellectual property and licence fees can be shared abound. Unless there is greater participation and cooperation at smaller levels among companies and government, central schemes may not be fruitful.



RAJEEV BHARGAVA SAYS IT ENABLES FOCUS ON RELIGION-BASED DISCRIMINATION AND MISRECOGNITION

## The significance of the term 'secular'

What value is added by the term 'secular' to liberal democracies, i.e. states that safeguard liberties of individuals and political freedoms of citizens? For some scholars, virtually nothing. Why? Because, while secularism is against discrimination only on the basis of religion, a 'liberal democracy' is against all forms of discrimination. The term 'liberal democracy' subsumes 'secularism'. Why bother with 'secularism' then? Why not commit ourselves to the priorities of a liberal democracy instead? This is a fashionable view in Europe. Even some Indian scholars argue for the sufficiency of Articles 14-16 and 19 of the Constitution.

This view is inadequate, if not wrong. The word 'secular' is important. Those who claim the sufficiency of 'liberal democracy' must think again. True, their claim has had some validity in Europe, but it is losing relevance there too. But in places like India, it is a virtual non-starter. Why? Let us first get a handle on Europe's specificity. Secular states did not emerge in Western Europe in the immediate aftermath of the religious wars. These wars were stopped by the establishment not of a secular but a confessional state in which people were forced to embrace the religion of the king. Those who did not comply faced death or expulsion. Every European society from then on became religiously homogenous – England became Anglican; Scandinavia, Lutheran; France, Catholic. Over time some dissenting groups were tolerated, but not without paying a price for their dissent. For example, although they were permitted to have their own church, it had to be hidden away in bylanes. Even the rich were forced to build chapels within the premises of their homes. Dissenters lived under the threat of persecution and daily harassment. The tolerant states of early modern Europe were a far cry from modern European liberal democratic states.

Once other religions were eliminated or tamed, a struggle began against a politically meddlesome and socially oppressive church. The demand to separate church and state (which later came to be called political secularism) was supported by those who favoured free markets, private property and personal liberties. The moment this separation was sufficiently achieved, it began to be taken for granted, and slowly receded into the background. In this sense, 'secularism' lost its political and social salience in these religiously homogenous societies. The fight for a liberal state seemed sufficient.

Centuries later, when the general ethos in Western Europe witnessed the further decline of Christianity, the term 'secular' found itself linked to a humanist world view for which religion, whatever its private benefits, was potentially a public problem. While becoming increasingly less salient, it was etched in the bitter collective



memory of these societies as the source of discord from which they had mercifully escaped. A religion, already on the defensive, faced greater devaluation and marginalisation. No one wanted religion-grounded recognition. With this, the idea of separation of state and religion lost its normative value further. These liberal states, where religion was no longer significant, granted formal equality to all citizens and called themselves liberal democratic.

But what if Europeans had to institute a liberty-loving, equality-caring state as soon as religious wars erupted? What if there was not much of a time lag between religious wars and the growth of a serious commitment to the values of liberty, equality and fraternity? Had this been so, demands for ending the religious persecution of dissenters and preventing religious homogenisation would have been immediate. How else could a state live up to the ideals of liberty and equality? Moreover, the dynamics of a multi-religious society is such that religion would not have lost salience. Then, instead of getting rid of religious dissenters and minorities, a general consensus might have been sought to prevent their domination by the majority religious community. Had multiple religious identities been part of the social climate, a commitment to equality would have compelled European states to give impartial public recognition to all religions. Such states would be secular precisely in the sense that Indians conceived it – something with which to fight not just religious fanaticism and intra-religious oppression but also the domination of one religion by another. They would have been forced to call themselves not just liberal (subsuming within it secular in the European sense) but also 'secular' in the sense defended by Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar where it designates impartial public recognition to all religions.

My point then is that the greater the salience of religion and depth of diversity in society, the larger the prospect of intra- and inter-religious domination, and the more pressing the need for a state – given its commitment to liberty, equality and impartial recognition – to call itself 'secular'.

Also, if religion-related bigotry and denial of recognition is present persistently, then it is hard to forget or ignore it. People potentially affected by them need to be repeatedly told that the state is there for them. The function of the term 'secular' is to do precisely that, to reassure anyone threatened by religious or religion-based exclusion, discrimination or misrecognition that the state is committed to preventing all this. To drop the word 'secular' then undermines confidence in the impartial character of the state.

### Why use a specific term?

The point can be made differently. Why lump together all forms of discrimination and oppression under the same general term? If the term 'secular' focuses on one specific kind of domination, why not to use it? Isn't de-cluttering our world and helping us focus on particular features an important function of all concepts? Why not call a flower 'red' when you have a distinguishing word for it? What point would be served by simply calling it 'coloured'? To be sure, in some contexts, this might be sufficient. For example, if our purpose is to differentiate it from all white flowers the use of the term 'coloured' is adequate but not if one coloured flower is to be distinguished from another. Likewise, 'secular' helps focus on institutionalised religious domination, to demarcate it from other kinds of domination based on class, gender, ethnicity, etc. 'Secularism' implores us to resist it.

In religiously homogenous societies, particularly where the importance of religion has weakened, liberal democratic states tend to be relatively indifferent to the term 'secular'. However, in religiously strong and diverse societies such as India, 'secular' is indispensable. It cannot disappear from public and constitutional discourse. Is it surprising then that after a few years of exile, it has recently resurfaced in India?

Here we cannot follow European habits but must embrace both liberal democracy and a form of secularism that fights religion-based misrecognition. Indeed, even Europe is changing. After the migration of workers from former colonies, Europe's new religious diversity has brought religion-based recognition to the fore. Therefore, in Europe too demands for an impartial secular state (in the Indian sense) will become louder.

Rajeev Bhargava is Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. Views expressed are his own.



JAYATI GHOSH SAYS REDUCING FINANCIAL OPACITY REQUIRES MORE THAN EXCHANGE OF TAX INFO WITH OTHER JURISDICTIONS

## Making the super-rich pay their fair share

Transparency seems to have become taboo in India. As the country remains mired in an economic slowdown, with evidence of falling employment and consumption, the government is persistent in its denial. Instead of actually addressing the problem, it seeks to suppress or manipulate official data to somehow provide a more optimistic picture. We saw this once again recently as the Union Budget was presented, based on numbers for revised estimates for the current year and Budget estimates for the coming year that the Finance Ministry itself knows are unlikely.

The opacity of data also extends to cross-border movement of funds generated through a range of activities, including tax evasion, misappropriation of state assets, laundering of the proceeds of crime, and bribery. Even here, India still has a lot to do, as confirmed by the recent publication of the Financial Secrecy Index by the Tax Justice Network, a U.K.-based financial advocacy group. On the surface, India has managed to reduce its contribution to global financial secrecy, with its rank falling from 32 on the 2018 index to 47 in 2020, but this is partly because the new edition of the index covers more countries than it did two years ago.

### Arrangement with Switzerland

It is true that the government has adopted and supported a few transparency reforms, such as the automatic exchange of tax and financial information with other jurisdictions, like Switzerland. Thanks to that, for example, if an Indian citizen has an account with a Swiss bank, and has



a balance over a certain threshold, this information will be sent to the Indian tax authorities automatically.

But stopping the financial haemorrhage and making multinationals and the super-rich pay their fair share of taxes requires much more. Capital flight out of India by Indian elites and foreigners alike has been undermining our country's development for decades. An important part of these flows is the result of artificial profit shifting by multinational companies taking advantage of an outdated international tax system.

These multinationals may be making profits in India but can easily declare those profits in a low tax jurisdiction like Hong Kong and justify that transaction as a payment for the use of a patent. According to one estimate, this strategy represented a loss of \$27.5 billion in 2014 for the Indian government, up from \$142 million in 2000. The government did create a beneficial

ownership register – which would allow the identification of the beneficial owner of an asset regardless of whose name the title of the property is in – but the law is weak, since it exempts a lot of people at the discretion of the authorities. Also, this register is not accessible to the public.

### Onshore financial services

That's not all. Three years ago, the government took the paradoxical decision to set up onshore international financial services in the country. This is how the International Financial Services Centre in the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIIFT-City), Gandhinagar, emerged, modelled after offshore financial centres such as Hong Kong, Singapore, the City of London and Dubai. While this has not created much employment, it has led to growing possibilities for regulatory arbitrage by financial firms, with potentially very problematic consequences.

Meanwhile, the government keeps granting tax incentives on a discretionary basis, even though there is little evidence that these incentives attract investment. Instead, as shown recently in International Monetary Fund research, factors such as quality of infrastructure, a healthy and skilled workforce, market access and political stability matter much more. The massive reduction in corporate tax rates has thus far not led to any increase in private investment – but it has meant a significant reduction in tax revenues, with devastating consequences. It translates into a lack of resources for education, healthcare, food and nutrition and infrastructure. India is already an outlier among similarly placed

developing countries with its low tax-GDP ratio of 18%. The government budget is also highly dependent on indirect taxes like the Goods and Services Tax which are regressive and hit ordinary citizens harder.

### Increasing public spending

It is now beyond obvious that India cannot revive its economy without increasing public spending, and so increasing its fiscal resources is essential. Among other measures, this requires urgent adoption of legislation and institutional reforms to end financial opacity – including, for example, opening the beneficial ownership register to the public and stopping the creation of onshore tax havens.

In addition, the Government of India must also assume a more vocal role in the international debate about how to make multinationals pay their fair share of taxes. This means continuing to appeal for a United Nations tax body, which is much more legitimate than the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the arena where tomorrow's global tax system is being decided. The OECD's proposals, published at the end of 2019, are neither ambitious nor fair enough, as the Independent Commission for the Reform of International Corporate Taxation (of which I am a member) explained in a recent report. If the organisation continues to remain deaf to the demands of developing countries, India must be prepared to go it alone, thinking unilaterally about how to make multinationals pay what they owe.

(Jayati Ghosh is a professor of economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University.)

## FIVE OBSERVATIONS

ON SCRUTINING THAT WOMEN CAN GET COMMAND POSITIONS IN ARMY

- RIGHT TO EQUALITY UPHELD**  
The verdict upholds the right to equality in the Constitution. Gender cannot serve as the basis for inequitable and unequal treatment in any sphere, including in defence forces.
- WOMAN IS NOT FRAIL, SHE NEVER WAS**  
It categorically rejects the arguments of the Centre – which was based on physiological limitations of women and prevailing social norms, including family obligations.
- NOW WOMEN CAN HOLD COMMAND**  
The verdict has very explicitly opened the doors for women in command positions, thus ensuring they will have a role in decision-making in due course of time.
- MEN NEED TO CHANGE THE MINDSET**  
The government shall implement the order both in letter and in spirit. This will involve changing mind sets internally, for male officers continue to see women as best suited for adjunct roles.
- GENDER IMBALANCE WILL END SOON**  
The decision will encourage more women to think of a career in the military. This may begin a process of correcting the gender imbalance in India's forces.

### LETTERBOX

Readers' feedback adds value to the newspaper. Please email comments on reports, features and columns to fwletters@gmail.com. We will publish them on this page.

## THE FINANCIAL WORLD

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## BOOKS: REVIEW

## India a \$5 tn economy by 2025 unrealistic: Montek

Tracing the spectacular trajectory of the life of Montek Singh Ahluwalia a former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission and whose document prepared in 1990 largely influenced the economic reforms from its humble beginnings in Secunderabad to the corridors of power in New Delhi, this book is a classic insider's account of how the India story was shaped and script Ahluwalia played a key role in the transformation of India from a state-run to a market-based economy, and remained a constant fixture at the top of India's economic policy establishment

for an unprecedented period of three decades.

The book traverses the politics, personalities, events and crises in India's recent history. It goes behind the numbers to bring alive the politics of reform, and how policy change was pushed through—at first, slowly, under prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, and then much more boldly in 1991 when the opportunity provided by a severe balance of Payments crisis was seized for wide-ranging reform.

Ahluwalia, who served as commerce Secretary and finance Secretary during this crucial period, makes a convincing case for why, contrary to the accusations at the

time, the reforms that formed part of the conditionality of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) programme in 1991, were

### The book traverses the politics, personalities, events and crises in India's recent history

home-grown and not thrust upon a reluctant India by the IMF.

Ahluwalia discusses the successes and failures of the UPA regime during which period he served as deputy Chairman of the



All the Wrong Turns  
By TCA Ranganathan and TCA Srinivasa Raghavan  
Westland Publications  
349 pp. | ₹799

ic and political history by one uniquely positioned to write it. Ahluwalia says Prime Minister Narendra Modi's dream of India rising to a \$5 trillion economy by 2025 is unrealistic though it will happen at some time. He remains extremely harsh on "two major policy mistakes" of the present government – demonetisation and the hasty implementation of GST.

To become a \$5 trillion economy "calls for an average growth rate of about 9 per cent in real terms over the six-year period from 2019-20 to 2024-25. With growth below 5 per cent in 2019-20, and only a slow recovery expected next year, achieving an average of 9 per cent for the period as a whole is simply not credible. We will certainly get to \$5 trillion, but it will be a few years later," Ahluwalia writes.

VISHNU MAKHIJANI

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NEWSBRIEF

National Cyber Security strategy to go for cabinet nod soon: Pant

NEW DELHI: The draft of National Cyber Security Strategy 2020, that envisages creating a secure cyberspace in India, is ready and will soon be sent to key ministries for comments before seeking the Cabinet approval, an official said on Monday. "We have got industry inputs, the draft of the (National Cyber Security) strategy is ready, we'll do a quick round of sending it to some 2-3 critical ministries and we will put up to the Cabinet for release to the public," National Cyber Security Coordinator Rajesh Pant said at an Assocham event. "The vision of the strategy ... is to ensure a safe, secure, resilient, trusted and vibrant cyberspace for India's prosperity." The National Cyber Security Strategy 2020 is being prepared to fill the gaps and meet the target envisaged in National Cyber Security Policy 2020. Pant said that trials are also going on to use face or iris recognition before processing of payments through mobile phone. "Once the trials are successful, it can be implemented by banks," he said. AGENCIES

Finance Ministry to assess impact of coronavirus outbreak on trade

NEW DELHI: The Finance Ministry will hold a meeting on Tuesday to assess the impact of coronavirus outbreak and any disruptions posed by it to the country's trade or Make in India initiative. "On the impact of #CoronavirusOutbreak and any disruptions to #MakeinIndia or to Indian export/import @FinMinIndia is scheduled to hold a meeting on Tuesday 18 Feb. Stakeholders welcome. If unable to attend please email your inputs at fmo@nic.in," Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tweeted on Sunday. AGENCIES

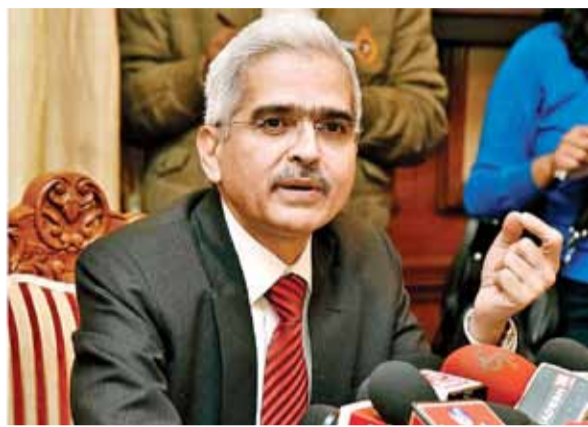
Govt to bar telecom vendors of countries that disallow purchase from Indian firms

NEW DELHI: The Department of Telecom will bar telecom vendors of those countries that would disallow or exclude Indian suppliers from providing network gears used for wifi, fixed line and cellular networks, including 5G services, in their respective local markets, according to an official order. The order is part of government's Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) order 2017 which envisages to source domestically manufactured products to encourage "Make in India". "Any foreign government which is not allowing Indian suppliers to participate and/or compete in procurement of telecom equipment, provision of clause 10 (d) of Public Procurement (Preference to Make in India) order 2017 be invoked in relation to the aforesaid telecom items," the order sent by the DoT to all central government departments and public sector units on February 19 said. PTI

# Reforms to revive demand, support sagging economy

GREEN SHOOTS OF THE RECOVERY VISIBLE NOW NEED TO BE SUSTAINED, SAYS RBI CHIEF

NEW DELHI: Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das has said the government will have to use structural reforms to revive demand and support the sagging economy, and green shoots of the recovery visible now need to be sustained to pull India out of its worst slowdown in 11 years. He said the fallout of the outbreak of coronavirus in China needs to be closely monitored by "every policy-maker" to tailor a swift response.



There are certain positive evidences visible ... things slightly picking up but we have to wait and see whether these positive trends are sustaining themselves and we have to see how durable they are"

SHAKTIKANTA DAS  
Reserve Bank Governor

While Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget for 2020-21 and recent steps have created a facilitating eco-system for reviving demand and consumption, it is necessary to undertake land and labour reforms, bring efficiencies in agri marketing and focus on skill development, he said. Das said the RBI saw an imminent slowdown in growth early in 2019 and used the space that was opened up by the moder-

ation in inflation to cut interest rates on five consecutive occasions. He cited global trade and business uncertainties together with sluggish domestic demand leading to lower capacity utilisation at factories and twin balance sheet crisis of rising non-performing assets (NPAs) or bad loans on the one hand, and heavily indebted corporates on the other, for the slowdown in the economy.

"There are certain positive evidences visible ... things slightly picking up but we have to wait and see whether these positive trends are sustaining themselves and we have to see how durable they are," he said. He refused to say if the growth slowing down to 4.5 per cent in July-September was the bottom of the pit that the economy can see. "As I have said there are evidences of positive devel-

opments. But we have to see how durable are these positive developments before we pass a judgment that from here on it is an upward trajectory."

"By and large, if you look at our projection which we have given, things should start improving in the next financial year. For next financial year,

we have projected 6 per cent of GDP growth against 5 per cent for the fiscal that ends in March." The GDP growth in October-December is expected to drop below its previous quarter rate of 4.5 per cent despite a slight recovery in industrial production and positive manufacturing PMI.

Das, a career bureaucrat who was appointed RBI governor after the sudden exit of Urjit Patel, said he would refrain from characterising current slowdown as structural or cyclical. "My response to such questions is that the response to the current situation has to be both countercyclical as well as structural that I have said earlier also. So, there is a need for counter-cyclical responses, which I think the Budget has attempted to respond through counter-cyclical measures."

"There are structural aspects also which needs to be undertaken. Some of these things have been mentioned in the budget. AGENCIES

## Industry asked to expand export basket



NEW DELHI: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has asked the industry to look for ways to expand the country's export basket by adding more value-added products and cut shipments of raw materials. He said the country's export basket is changing but it is not changing at fast pace.

"We are moving from some raw materials to intermediates. Can we collectively look at changing basket of exports to do more value-added products? Can we reduce exports of, let's say, iron ore and export high-quality steel? Can we stop exporting alumina, and stop importing aluminium products?," he said.

"Can we see how we can become value-added producers so that the Indian basket of manufacturing changes," the minister questioned. He said India's share in the world's trade is in single digit for many products. "Our government has identified a few champion sectors, like textiles, fisheries and IT, to expand and become a world leader in exports. Our government is swadeshi and personally, I am swadeshi. Therefore, we want to encourage our domestic investors on priority. We will fight for their cause," Goyal said. He also said any country, which does not allow equal and reciprocal access to our products and services in their country, by law "we will stop them from participating in government contracts in India".

Talking about scale of production, he said the Indian industry needs to boost its scale to take advantage of the China-US trade war. "Now, with the China-US trade war, we were trying to see how we can get more Indian companies to benefit from it. The sad part is that we are not producing to scale in our country," he said. Citing an example of retail giant Walmart, the minister said the company wanted 40,000 pieces of some footwear product.

On this, a big Indian company stated that they can give 20,000 pieces over the next year. Walmart wanted 40,000 pieces every month without which they cannot place an order as they have 3,000-odd stores all over the world, the minister said. "So, unless we start looking at scale, we are going to get out of the market very soon," he said. He asked DPIIT and the department of commerce to identify sectors where India has competitive advantage and where the Indian industry can see business opportunities.

He also asked the industry to highlight their problems in terms of harassment by inspectors of any sort. Further, Goyal added that although he does not differentiate between domestic and foreign investors, "given a choice, I would urge the domestic industry to invest more than FDI (foreign direct investment)" as "we want to encourage domestic investors". The minister also asked the DPIIT to discuss with the cabinet secretariat about signing a legally binding agreement with states for abiding contractual obligations. He said there are cases where states back out from their commitment, when there is a change in leadership. He asked the industry to identify sectors where the government can promote assembling of products at a lower rate of duty and finished items at a higher rate of duty. "In a phased manner, we will restrict products" import and ensure that domestic industry can achieve scale," he added. AGENCIES

## LPG prices may come down next month

RAIPUR: Union minister Dharmendra Pradhan has said LPG prices may come down next month.



The Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, and Steel, who is on a two-day visit to Chhattisgarh, was talking to reporters on his arrival at the Swami Vivekananda Airport. Replying to a query about the constant rise in LPG prices, Mr. Pradhan said, "This is not true that the price (of LPG) is constantly increasing. This month it was hiked due to the international market. However, there are indications that the prices may come down next month."

to insulate the domestic users, the government almost doubled the subsidy it provides on the fuel to keep per cylinder outgo almost unchanged.

During the winters, LPG consumption increases, which creates a pressure on the sector. This month, the price increased while next month it will reduce, he said.

He will also visit iron ore mines of the Bhilai Steel Plant in Durg district of the state and hold meetings with the plant officials, union representatives and others.

Last week, cooking gas LPG price hiked by a steep 144.5 per cylinder due to spurt in benchmark global rates of the fuel. However,

He will also visit iron ore mines of the Bhilai Steel Plant in Durg district of the state and hold meetings with the plant officials, union representatives and others. AGENCIES

## Zojila tunnel may undergo design changes: Gadkari

NEW DELHI: The strategic Zojila tunnel for all-year connectivity between Leh and Srinagar may undergo some design changes to prevent cost escalation as the government plans to complete the project at the earlier estimated cost of about ₹6,800 crore, Union minister Nitin Gadkari said.



The tunnel project, stalled for about six years, holds strategic significance as Zojila Pass is situated at an altitude of 11,578 feet on the Srinagar-Kargil-Leh National highway and remains closed during winters due to heavy snowfall, cutting off Ladakh region from Kashmir.

cost estimate of a little over ₹8,000 crore has been sent to the Cabinet, "we are deliberating on minor design changes to prevent cost escalation," the minister said. "Besides the escape tunnel, we can do away with vertical shafts not compromising with safety," he said, adding that rebidding for the project was expected in a month or two.

"We are planning to make some design changes that may include doing away with escape tunnel and instead (have) alternative tunnels to cross from one side to the other as it will be my endeavour to prevent cost escalation and build it at the previous estimated cost of ₹6,800 crore," Road Transport and Highways Minister Gadkari told PTI. Though the revised project

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had in May 2018 laid the foundation stone for the ₹6,800 crore project, billed as the Asia's longest bi-directional tunnel, in Jammu and Kashmir. However, barely months after the foundation, the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) on January 15, 2019 terminated the contract awarded to troubled IL&FS group company IL&FS Transportation after it abandoned the project citing financial problems.

## MHA panel on Assam recommends 1951 as cut-off year to define indigenous people, ILP

"WE HAVE MENTIONED THAT THERE IS NO DISSENTING NOTE BUT THERE ARE TWO SUGGESTIONS FOR THE RESERVATION OF ASSEMBLY AND LOK SABHA SEATS"

NEW DELHI: A Home Ministry-appointed committee has suggested that 1951 should be the cut-off year for defining the indigenous people of Assam and introduction of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) to control the movement of people from outside the State, sources said on Monday.

tutional safeguards to Assam's indigenous people.

The committee has also suggested two formulas for the reservation of seats for the indigenous people in the Assam Assembly and Lok Sabha constituencies of the State, including 67% quota for them.

The report is expected to be submitted this week itself. The committee, according to the sources, unanimously recommended that those who were residents of Assam in 1951 and their descendants, irrespective of community, caste, language, religion or



heritage, will be considered as indigenous people of the State.

Besides, the panel suggested that the ILP should be

introduced in Assam so that movement of people from outside the State could be controlled. As per the rules, outsiders have to take permission from designated authorities before entering the areas where the ILP is applicable.

Lok Sabha constituencies in the State, all members, except three, have suggested that 67% seats should be reserved for the indigenous people. The remaining three members suggested that the reservation in legislative bodies should be 100%.

The ILP, notified under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, has been in operation in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram for long and it was introduced in Manipur in December 2019 following an uproar over the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA). In case of reservation of seats in the Assam Assembly and

"We have mentioned that there is no dissenting note but there are two suggestions for the reservation of Assembly and Lok Sabha seats," a source said. In addition to the 67% reservation for the indigenous people, 16% will also be reserved for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities. AGENCIES

## Haryana eyes world-class railway station, high-speed rail tracks

SATISH HANDA

CHANDIGARH: Ministry of Railways after union budget-2020 has started focusing on railways network in Ambala rail division. A ray of hope is seen as regard face lifting of Ambala Cantt railway station situated at the junction of several states from where more than 300 trains pass every day and over one lakh passengers use seven railway platforms daily on this railway station.

get required infrastructure to provide facilities to passengers since then for one reason or the other. Ambala rail division spent over Rs 2 crore for face lifting of Ambala Cantt railway station but it was insufficient to meet international standard recognition to the railway station.

Ambala and Bajrang Goel Senior Divisional Engineer, IRSDC has already started work on this project on Public Personal Partnership (PPP) model to bring Ambala Cantt railway station to international standard. They told media persons that security measures are being introduced on this railway station declared highly sensitive being situated on the national highway, near Army Headquarter, Indian Air Force Station and IOC terminal. The railway station open from every side is stated unsafe. They further disclosed that entry into railway station would be completely banned without



having a ticket and would be permissible only via two security gates to open only by touching the ticket purchased by passengers with the help of censor system.

According to Development Railway Authority, commercial sites would be developed inside railway station complex on lease basis and revenue collected in this regard would be spent on developmental work

inside the railway complex. There is a provision to cover all seven railway platforms under a single roof having number of CCTV cameras on each platform, enough lighting arrangement, stalls serving fast foods to passengers, display board to provide information about arrival and departure of trains, lift facility for passengers and installation of elevators on every platform. There would be provision for luxury rooms for the night stay of passengers at the railway station and Food Plaza offering meals, snacks and fast food facility outside the railway station within complex.

Rattan Lal Kataria, MP Ambala Lok Sabha seat told media persons that green signal has been given to the proposal for long-awaited demand for installation of 91 km rail track between Chandigarh and Yamunanagar via Naraingarh and Sadhaura on which amount worth Rs 901 crore would be spent in present union budget along with laying several other rail tracks in Ambala division in view of fast trains likely to be on rail tracks soon, which include 104 km rail track between Panipat and Meerut to cost Rs 1100 crore, about 33 km rail track between Chandigarh and industrial town Baddi to cost Rs 400 crore, about 81

km rail track between Rohtak and Rewari to cost Rs 350 crore, about 89 km rail track between Jind and Sonapat to cost Rs 712 crore, about 69 km rail track between Rohtak and Hansi to cost Rs 344 crore, 104 km rail track between Delhi and Alwar via Nuh to cost Rs 1249 crore, 93 km rail track between Hisar and Sirsa via Fatehabad to cost Rs 410 crore and nearly 71.4 km rail track between Panipat and Rohtak to cost Rs 714 crore. Kataria said that work for developing a rail coach factory in 161 acre area has already started near Sonapat in the state on which amount worth Rs 484 crore would be spent.

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**NEWSBRIES**

**P-note investments continue to drop**

**MUMBAI:** Investments in the Indian capital market through participatory notes (P-notes) continue to decline and hit a nearly 11-year low of Rs 64,537 crore till the end of December 2019. P-notes are issued by registered foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to overseas investors who wish to be part of the Indian stock market without registering themselves directly. They, however, need to go through a due diligence process. According to Sebi data, the total value of P-note investments in Indian markets -- equity, debt, and derivatives -- slumped to a fresh low of Rs 64,537 crore till December-end after hitting a 13-month low of Rs 69,670 crore at November-end. The fund inflow through P-notes in December was the lowest since February 2009, when the cumulative value of such investments stood at Rs 60,948 crore, according to the data. **AGENCIES**

**Wipro buys CX firm Rational Interaction in Washington**



**BENGALURU:** Wipro Digital, the digital business unit of Wipro Limited, has acquired Rational Interaction, a full-service digital customer experience (CX) company in Washington. The buyout, whose value is not known, is expected to scale Wipro Digital's customer experience through Chief Marketing Officers. "This acquisition comes at a time when companies increasingly compete solely on CX, and the market for CX spending is growing exponentially," said Rajan Kohli, President and Head, Wipro Digital, Wipro Limited. "Discovering, refining and optimising the customer experience from first impression through repeat sale requires best-in-class talent, unique marketing technologies and methodologies, and the ability to scale and demonstrate payback quickly. Together, Wipro and Rational Interaction are a perfect combination for CMOs," he added. Rational Interaction helps brands create sustained CX programme success, with core offerings that include strategic advising, customer acquisition, and customer lifecycle management. Set up in 2009, the CX firm has more than 300 employees worldwide. **AGENCIES**

**Irdai 'yet to get' LIC IPO proposal**

**LISTING IS BETTER FROM GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE: REGULATOR**

**MUMBAI:** Insurance regulator is yet to get any proposal from LIC on an initial public offering, but feels a listing is better from a governance perspective, chairman S C Khuntia said on Tuesday. He also said that there is nothing for the life insurance industry to worry for the time being with regard to government's move on certain income tax exemptions as the alternative to invest still exists. Khuntia also asked insurance companies to "weed out" loss-making products and concentrate only on the better paying ones.

On the IPO of Life Insurance Corporation of India announced in the budget, he said, "LIC proposal has not yet come." "Any company which goes public, there will be better corporate governance and better disclosure," he told reporters on the sidelines of an event of actuaries here.

On being asked if LIC's business will need any restructuring before IPO, Khuntia said that work on the same is being carried out by the government. He said it is a good idea for ev-



ery insurance company to list and the Insurance Regulation and Development Authority of India (Irdai) will nudge entities to go for the same.

It is, however, not making it mandatory to list because smaller companies are yet to achieve the scale for going public, Khuntia said, adding that ideally a company should achieve sufficient scale to list within ten years of its existence. He said the practice of annual product review needs to be carried out in full seriousness by the players and pitched for a weeding out of the loss making ones.

"I would like to encourage companies to weed out products which are not selling and simply adding to the number, then they will be able to manage those products well," he said, adding that the plea was made at a meeting with chief executives recently.

When pointed out about practices where industry players are compromising on financials in the health insurance segment while signing on to group schemes, Khuntia said the Irdai wants players to be sustainable, where they don't create losses nor do they earn excess profits. He, however, said that Irdai

**One crore investors eyed**

**NEW DELHI:** Association of stock brokers ANMI will mobilise one crore investors for the initial public offering of insurance behemoth LIC in order to unlock the true potential of the country's crown jewel, akin to the Saudi Aramco. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her budget speech announced that the government proposes to sell a part of its holding in LIC through IPO. The proposed listing will help the government in achieving its disinvestment target of 2.1 lakh crore for 2020-21. "It would be our endeavour to mobilise one crore investors for LIC's IPO and unlock the true potential of India's crown jewel, akin to the Saudi Aramco in the Middle East and Apple's listing in the U.S.," Association of National Exchanges Members of India (ANMI) President Vijay Bhushan said. LIC's initial share-sale will be the IPO of the decade and ANMI will support the government in its effort to mobilise investments, including the landmark initial offer of the insurance behemoth, he added.

will not intervene on the pricing front but will limit itself to pointing out concerns to the players and issue notices if necessary. Khuntia went public with his disappointment at the low growth levels of the life and general insurance segments despite the under penetration in India. General insurance grew at 14% last year as against its potential to grow at 17-

18%, while the life insurance segment grew only at 10% as against the 12-13% potential, he said. Terming actuaries as conscience keepers of the insurance industry, Khuntia asked the Institute of Actuaries of India to take more efforts to increase the number, adding that inherent skill sets in mathematics and software make Indians very amenable to the stream. **AGENCIES**

**SEBI caps fees for investment advisers**



**MUMBAI:** The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has amended the regulatory framework for investment advisers to introduce a cap on the maximum fee such entities can charge to investors while segregating the advisory and distribution activities to minimise conflict of interest issues.

the regulator was examining the issue of categorisation of funds and would soon come out with a circular"

**AJAY TYAGI**  
SEBI chairman

**2.5% of assets**

The board of the capital markets watchdog, which met in Mumbai, approved the amendment in the SEBI (Investment Advisers) Regulations 2013, which also stipulated that a person dealing in distribution of securities cannot use the nomenclature 'Independent Financial Adviser' or 'Wealth Adviser' without registering as an Investment Adviser with the regulator. While the regulator did not specify the upper limit of fees, a consultation paper floated by SEBI in January had proposed capping the fees at 2.5% of the assets under advice or a fixed fee of Rs. 75,000 per year per family.

Further, an Independent Investment Adviser will not be able to provide distribution services, stated a release by the regulator. On a different note, the regulator also said that Karvy Stock Broking, which is under the regulatory scanner for pledging client securities to raise funds for itself, will make good the payout shortfall by March.

Karvy Group is in the process of selling stake in a group company and the term sheet has already been signed, said SEBI chairman Ajay Tyagi while addressing the media after the board meeting. **AGENCIES**

The shortfall in payout, after factoring in the available securities and funds of the group, is estimated at about Rs. 680 crore. As per the SEBI chairman, Karvy Stock Broking's outstanding payment obligations are pegged at Rs. 1,189 crore while the group has available funds amounting to Rs. 511 crore.

Among other things, the regulator has made it mandatory for sponsors of mutual funds to invest in close ended schemes. Currently, such a requirement is mandatory for all kinds of schemes except close-ended ones.

**Circular soon**

Mr. Tyagi added that the regulator was examining the issue of categorisation of funds and would soon come out with a circular. This is on the back of representation from the industry that fund houses were finding it difficult to invest, especially in the small-cap universe.

The regulator has also amended the SEBI (Depositories and Participants) Regulations to include a clause that would state that pledge would include re-pledge of securities for margin and/or settlement obligations of the client. **AGENCIES**

**Efforts on to include G-Secs in global indices**

**MUMBAI:** Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das has said the central bank has already initiated discussions with some institutions and efforts are on for inclusion of government bonds in global indices as quickly as possible.

The development would attract higher foreign flows as many overseas funds are mandated to track global indices. It will help bring in large passive investments from overseas, as a result more domestic capital would be available for industry as crowding out to that extent would be reduced.

"That is work in progress. We have had our discussions with some institutions which maintain these global index...not possible to spell out a timeline, but it is a work in progress. Our effort will be to see that it is taken forward as quickly as possible. I don't want to give a timeline," he told PTI in an interview. This was a long-pending suggestion of foreign investors that was addressed in the Budget this year.

"Certain specified categories of Government securities would be opened fully for non-resident investors, apart from being available to domestic investors as well," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had said in the Budget 2020-21.

The specified securities, which will be listed on the indices, will not



have a lock-in requirement. Globally, there are some large institutional investors that track these indices, such as Bloomberg Barclays Emerging Market Bond index, for positional decisions on sovereign papers. With regard to health of the shadow banking sector, Governor Das said RBI has been monitoring the top 50 NBFCs very closely, in fact much more closely than anybody can imagine from outside.

"Similarly, the health of the other financial sector entities including the banks are also being very closely monitored by the Reserve Bank of India. The Reserve Bank remains committed to maintain financial sector stability," he said.

As far as the NBFCs are concerned, he said, "our close monitoring over the last one year, we have a reasonably good idea about where exactly the stress lies. We are constantly engaged

with the individual NBFCs and only very few of the NBFCs have some liquidity issues." "We are constantly engaging with their management, with their promoters and encouraging them to resolve their problems through market based solutions in terms of getting additional liquidity. The engagement with the NBFCs management is constantly on," he added. Sounding sanguine about the future, Das said the overall flow of credit to the NBFC sector has improved quite steadily over the last few months.

"There are a good number of NBFCs which are able to access funds from the market at reasonably competent rates, even comparable to or perhaps a bit lower than the pre-IL&FS rates. So, therefore, NBFC sector is slowly improving, and it has steadily improved over the years and we will continue to monitor that sector," he said. **AGENCIES**

**NCLAT allows JSW Steel to acquire Bhushan Power**

**NEW DELHI:** The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal on Monday allowed JSW Steel to acquire Bhushan Power & Steel Ltd for ₹19,700 crore by providing it immunity from prosecution by Enforcement Directorate.

A two-member bench headed by Chairman Justice S.J. Mukhopadhaya, said that JSW Steel will be immune from the acts done by the former promoters of Bhushan Power & Steel Ltd (BPSL). However, it also said that prosecution against the former promoters under the money laundering act by the Enforcement Directorate can continue. It has also rejected the petitions filed by operational creditors, seeking higher claims.

The Bench said that the EBITDA (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation

and amortisation) earned by BPSL during its Corporate Insolvency resolution period will be given to JSW Steel.

On October 10, the ED had attached assets worth over ₹4,025 crore of debt-ridden BPSL in connection with its money laundering probe linked to an alleged bank loan fraud by its former promoters.

JSW Steel, which emerged as the successful resolution applicant with its ₹19,700 crore bid for BPSL, filed an appeal against the ED's move before the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT).

The appellate tribunal had on October 14 directed the ED to immediately release the confiscated assets of BPSL in favour of the resolution professional of the debt-ridden firm. **AGENCIES**

**GMR sells 49% stake to French firm**

**HYDERABAD:** GMR Infrastructure Limited (GIL) has announced a strategic partnership with Groupe ADP for its Airports Business.

It has signed a Share Purchase Agreement pursuant to which Groupe ADP will hold 49% stake in GMR Airports Limited (GAL) for an equity consideration of ₹10,780 crore, valuing GAL at the base post money valuation of ₹22,000 crore. This equity consider-

ation comprises: ₹9,780 crore towards secondary sale of shares by GMR group; and ₹1,000 crore equity infusion in GAL.

The first tranche of ₹5,248 crore will be received by GMR Group immediately. The group will retain management control over the airports business with Groupe ADP having the customary rights and board representation at GAL and key subsidiaries.

The deal will also open up

new opportunities for route development, enhanced expertise in operations, retail, IT, innovation, engineering and many more areas, said an official spokesperson. As per 2019 passenger statistics, the combined passengers handled by GMR Airports and Groupe ADP stands at 336.5 million, the highest across the world.

"The partnership with Groupe ADP is in line with GMR's business direction to be-

come a global airport developer and operator," said chairman of the GMR Group G.M. Rao.

Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Aéroports de Paris SA-Groupe ADP Augustin de Romanet said the deal "fits within our strategy to build, only two years after taking control of TAV Airports, a unique worldwide network of airports with a solid industrial expertise and strong development capacities." **AGENCIES**

**PEs, VCs creating jobs, working as anchors for the country's economy**

**NEW DELHI:** Private equity (PE) and venture capital (VC) industry has become a key anchor for the Indian economy with companies funded by them emerging as most significant job creators and also major contributors to the country's tax revenue, industry body IVCA has said.

At the 9th annual conclave of the Indian Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (IVCA) here, a report released by IVCA and Zinnov also showed that 70 per cent of the jobs were created by VC funded companies in India.

On the first day of the two-day event, IVCA Chairman Padmanabh Sinha said, "PE and VC clearly have become anchors of the economy and playing a structural role in economy...it provides the right momentum to the Indian economy as investee companies create new jobs as well as give through increased tax revenues."

However, he added that for the industry to grow, more



capital as well as talent pool to enter the market is needed, as both these factors give momentum to development of the industry. Nearly 80 private equity, 65 venture capital funds, 50 limited partners and family offices, 20 start-ups and 15 government representatives are participating in the conclave.

At the event, KKR India CEO Sanjay Nayar said, "Corporate governance is vital for the industry...Some of the government's reforms may seem painful in the short-term but provide a gain in

**'The rate similar to DDT for distribution of income by debt fund was 25% for individual and HUF and 30% for others'**

the long-term." While talking about the requirement of funds, he said India needs a much larger allocation of local fund for growth. They play a critical role in providing capital, like they do in China.

He, however, said, "Exits in India are not easy as we have a narrow capital market."

Prabhav Kashyap, Manager, Bain & Company, said 2019 was a record year with USD 45 billion invested in the country by the PE industry.

Sujoy Bose, Managing Director & CEO, National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF), stressed on the need for more women fund managers in India and how women in PE, VC industry can give a new perspective to the business.

A report titled "IVCA-EY PE/VC Agenda - India Trend Book - 2020" was also launched at the conclave and it highlighted the key trends in PE, VC industry in India, including the ironic trend of entrepreneurs selling to become investors and private equity firms taking control to become operator conglomerates.

IVCA is the oldest and most influential PE/VC Industry body in India. **AGENCIES**

**Mutual Fund assets rise to record highs in Jan**

**MUMBAI:** The average assets under management of mutual funds hit an all-time high of Rs. 28.18 lakh crore in January, as flows into debt funds increased significantly, while mid-cap and small-cap funds saw a revival in investor interest.

According to the Association of Mutual Funds in India (AMFI), net inflows in the month of January was pegged at Rs. 1.20 lakh crore, as against outflows of nearly Rs. 61,810 crore in December 2019. Further, the total assets under management (AUM) touched Rs. 27.86 lakh crore in January. Further, flows into income and debt category turned positive in January with net inflows of Rs. 1.09 lakh crore, as against the previous month's outflows of nearly Rs. 78,427 crore. Such categories of funds typically see a spurt in outflows at the end of every quarter.

Within the equity segment, both mid-cap and small-cap categories of funds saw net inflows of over Rs. 1,000 crore each, with the mid-cap category registering flows of nearly Rs. 1,800 crore in January. Incidentally, the BSE Midcap index gained a little over 3% in January after losing ground in Decem-

**"With the Union Budget 2020 and subsequent RBI policy leading to several structural changes, we will continue to stay optimistic on the market outlook. The retail investors may continue investing in the markets through SIPs [systematic investment plans], while staying balanced in their investing approach between different asset classes"**



ber. Further, the gains in the broader index came even as the benchmark Sensex lost nearly 1.30% in January. "While the small-cap funds have not been in favour during the last few months, the recent market rally seems

to have driven the inflows into small and midcap fund inflows. As a result, the small cap AUM has also seen the biggest jump in the last nine months," said Sundeep Sikka, ED and CEO, Nippon Life India Asset Management.

"With the Union Budget 2020 and subsequent RBI policy leading to several structural changes, we will continue to stay optimistic on the market outlook. The retail investors may continue investing in the markets through SIPs [systematic investment plans], while staying balanced in their investing approach between different asset classes," added Mr. Sikka.

Meanwhile, the number of SIP folios crossed the three-crore mark, with the number of such folios pegged at 3.04 crore in January - the month saw addition of 12.07 lakh folios.

Further, the flows through SIPs was Rs. 8,531.90 crore in January with the AUM pegged at Rs. 3.25 lakh crore.

According to N.S. Venkatesh, chief executive, AMFI, the SIP contribution and the AUM is a proof that retail investors have accepted mutual funds as a long term wealth creation avenue.

"We expect this positive growth momentum in mutual fund AUMs to continue, driven by growth-oriented Budget and RBI stance on continuing benign interest rate cycle, resulting in 15-20% growth for the mutual fund industry this fiscal," said Mr. Venkatesh. **AGENCIES**



## NEWSBRIES

## Kerala man dies of burn injuries after saving wife from fire in UAE

DUBAI: A 32-year-old Indian man has died in the UAE after sustaining severe burn injuries in his bid to save his wife from a fire at their home in Abu Dhabi last week, according to a media report on Monday.

Anil Ninan, who hails from Kerala, sustained 90 per cent burn injuries in the fire on Monday last week, reported the Khaleej Times. His wife Neenu also suffered injuries in the incident, however her condition is said to be stable.

"This is a difficult time for us. His wife Neenu is still recovering at the hospital. She is safe. But, all of us are shocked at his death," a close relative was quoted in the report.

It is suspected a short circuit caused the fire at Ninan's home. AGENCIES

## Trump says it's an honour that Facebook ranked him no. 1 and PM Modi no. 2

WASHINGTON: U.S. President Donald Trump has said it is a great honour that Facebook has ranked him number one and Prime Minister Narendra Modi number two on their popularity on the social networking site, ahead of his maiden visit to India. President Trump and First Lady Melania Trump will pay a state visit to India on February 24 and 25 at the invitation of Prime Minister Modi, it was announced this week.

"Great honor, I think? Mark Zuckerberg recently stated that 'Donald J. Trump is Number 1 on Facebook. Number 2 is Prime Minister Modi of India.' Actually, I am going to India in two weeks. Looking forward to it!" Mr. Trump tweeted on Saturday. This is not the first time that the U.S. President has claimed to be the number one and Prime Minister Modi number two on their popularity on Facebook. AGENCIES

12 killed in road accident in Pakistan

ISLAMABAD: At least 12 people, including women and children, were killed and over 23 others injured when the vehicle they were travelling in fell into a ditch in south-west Pakistan's Balochistan province.

The accident occurred on Friday on Khuzdar-Jhal Magsi highway near the Bareja area of Jhal Magsi district in the province when the driver lost control of the vehicle due to over-speeding and it plunged into a ditch, The Express Tribune said in a report. Deputy Commissioner Sharjeel Noor said the victims were travelling to Jhal Magsi from Lasbela to attend a wedding reception when the incident happened. As per the initial reports, 10 people died on the spot, while two others succumbed to their injuries later in hospital. AGENCIES

## Judge Sri Srinivasan becomes first Indian-American to lead powerful federal circuit court

WASHINGTON: Sri Srinivasan, a prominent Indian-American judge, has created history by becoming the first person of South Asian descent to lead a powerful federal circuit court, considered next only to the US Supreme Court.

Judge Srinivasan, 52, became the Chief Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit. An Obama appointee who has already been considered for a Supreme Court seat twice, donned the mantle of the chief judge of the DC federal court circuit on February 12. Judge Srinivasan succeeded Judge Merrick Garland, who has been a member of the DC Circuit since 1997 and Chief Judge since 2013. He will remain on the bench, a press release said. AGENCIES

## India urged to extend renewal date of OCI card till Dec 31

WASHINGTON: In view of the inconvenience faced by the diaspora having OCI card in the U.S., an eminent Indian-American social activist has urged the Government of India to extend the date of its renewal till December 31.

The Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card, among other benefits, allows multiple entry, multi-purpose life long visa to an Indian-origin foreign national to visit India.

In December, the Ministry of Home Affairs' Foreigners Division issued an office memorandum directing the relevant government agencies and airlines that Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card holders not between 20 and 50 years of age and who have renewed their passport can travel to India as long as they also have in their possession their old cancelled passport.

They were given time till June 30 to renew their OCI card.

But now, based on the feedback that he has been receiving from Indian-Americans and the diaspora community, Indian-American Prem Bhandari said that June 30 is not enough as it needs a massive awareness campaign on part of the Indian government.

"My humble request to you is to extend the date of



renewal of OCI cards till December 31, 2020 such that the Non-Resident Indian/Person of Indian Origin community had enough time to understand the new requirement and renew their OCI cards," New York-based Mr. Bhandari, who last year took up the matter, said in a latest communique to the Indian government this week.

Mr. Bhandari, who heads Jaipur Foot USA, has sent his communique to the External Affairs Ministry and other relevant ministries including the civil aviation and home affairs.

"This will give ample time to the Indian diaspora to

renew their OCI cards and facilitate a pleasurable visit to India," he told PTI.

This week, the Indian Consulate in New York and other Indian diplomatic missions issued a clarification on the OCI renewal.

"As you are aware with the advisory issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Civil Aviation to airlines, overseas Indians and PIOs have been facing great difficulties in travelling to India during the busy holiday season in December 2019 and January 2020," the letter said.

"As many did not have updated OCI cards or were not carrying their old passports,

## 'As many did not have updated OCI cards or were not carrying their old passports, they were stopped by airlines from boarding'

they were stopped by airlines from boarding. We are grateful to the Ministry of External Affairs and the Ministry of Home Affairs for granting assistance and for helping people to travel to India without their old passports and extending the date of renewal

of OCI to June 30, 2020. This has considerably ameliorated the situation," Mr. Bhandari said in the letter.

However, many Indian-origin travellers faced difficulties at airports in boarding as airlines frequently misinterpret the rules or are inflexible although Indian Immigration has been allowing people to enter the country without new OCI cards or even without old Passports, he said.

"You are aware that a large number of OCI cards have been issued and it is not possible for everyone to be aware of the rules. Many a times I have intervened to get people to board aircraft by using personal influence. Several times, I have sought the help of Consulate in New York to help the people to board," Mr. Bhandari continued. Although the Government of India and Consulates are trying the best to diffuse and disseminate this information regarding renewal of OCI, many people still remain unaware and "we are hearing daily horror stories," he said.

Indian-Americans have complained that they were not aware that every time an OCI card holder below the age of 20 and above the age of 50 years renew their passport they have to apply for the renewable of OCI card too. AGENCIES

## Erdogan raises Kashmir issue in Pak Parliament



ISLAMABAD: Notwithstanding India's objection, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday raked up the Kashmir issue in Pakistan Parliament, vowing that Ankara will support Pakistan's stand. On an official visit to Pakistan, Mr. Erdogan said that Turkey will back Pakistan in its efforts to come out of the "grey list" of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

"I also want to emphasise that we will give support to Pakistan which is subject to political pressure in the Financial Action Task Force meetings," he said on the upcoming meeting of the anti-terror financing watchdog. Voicing his country's support to Pakistan's stand on the Kashmir issue, he said it can be resolved not through conflict or oppression but on the basis of justice and fairness.

"Our Kashmiri brothers and sisters have suffered from inconveniences for decades and these sufferings have become graver due to unilateral steps taken in recent times," Mr. Erdogan said, apparently referring to India revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir in August last year.

"Today, the issue of Kashmir is as close to us as it is to you (Pakistanis)."

"Such a solution (on the basis of justice and fairness) will serve the interests of all parties concerned. Turkey will continue to stand by justice, peace and dialogue in the resolution of the Kashmir issue," the president said.

The Turkish President, in his address, likened the "struggle" of the Kashmiris with that of his country in the World War I against foreign domination. Drawing comparison with the battle of Gallipoli which was fought in Turkey between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire in which over two lakh troops were killed on the both sides, Mr. Erdogan said "there is no difference between Gallipoli and Kashmir." AGENCIES

## Australia names high commissioner to India

MELBOURNE: Australia has appointed former New South Wales premier Barry O'Farrell as the next high commissioner to India, one of Canberra's closest and most significant partners in the Indo-Pacific, an official statement said on Tuesday.

O'Farrell, 60, will succeed Harinder Sidhu who has been in the office since 2016.

"Barry O'Farrell is Australia's next High Commissioner to the Republic of India — one of our closest and most significant partners in the Indo-Pacific. Thanks to outgoing HC Harinder Sidhu," Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne tweeted on Tuesday. The minister said that apart from his new role, O'Farrell will also have non-resident accreditation to Bhutan. Australia and Bhutan enjoy a warm relationship, built on strong people-to-people links and cooperation in international education she said.

## Turkey will continue to stand by justice, peace and dialogue in the resolution of the Kashmir issue

O'Farrell served in the NSW Parliament from 1995-2015, including as the state's 43rd premier. Payne, in the statement, said that as the premier of New South Wales (NSW) during 2011-2014, O'Farrell initiated and led annual trade missions to India to promote economic, cultural and social links between NSW and the Indian states.

"He has served as NSW's special envoy for India and made a significant contribution as the deputy chair of the Australia India Council Board, she said. AGENCIES

## Pak no longer a safe haven for terror groups: Imran

ISLAMABAD: There are no safe havens for terror groups in Pakistan right now, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Monday while acknowledging publicly that this was possibly not the case earlier. Addressing an international conference marking 40 years of hosting Afghan refugees in the country, he said Pakistan seeks peace in Afghanistan and instability in the war-torn neighbouring country was not in its interest.

Mr. Khan's assertion on safe havens for terror groups came as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global anti-

money laundering watchdog, began a crucial meeting in Paris where Pakistan is trying to wriggle out of being black-listed for not doing enough to combat terror financing.

The United States, India and Afghanistan have long accused Pakistan of providing safe havens to terror groups like the Taliban, the Haqqani network, the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed. "I can tell you that there are no safe havens here," Mr. Khan said at a conference here, also attended by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.



"Whatever the situation might have been in the past, right now, I can tell you... there is one thing we want: peace in Afghanistan," Mr.

Khan said. He admitted that it was possible that such safe havens were operating in the country after 9/11 in the Afghan

refugee camps, The News reported.

"How is the government capable of checking how militants operate from the camps," Mr. Khan said, adding that it was not possible because the Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan have had a population of over 1,00,000.

The Prime Minister's assertion came after Afghanistan's second Vice President Sarwar Danish accused Pakistan of allowing the Taliban to recruit new fighters from Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan to launch attacks in his country. AGENCIES

## Afghan people need and deserve peace, prosperity: UN chief

ISLAMABAD: UN chief Antonio Guterres on Monday called on the global community to step up efforts to help bring peace in war-torn Afghanistan, saying the Afghan people need and deserve peace, prosperity and full respect of their human rights.

The UN Secretary-General said this while addressing an international conference titled '40 years of Afghan Refugees Presence in Pakistan: A New Partnership for Solidarity' held in Islamabad.

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan, Ministers and senior officials from around 20 countries are participating in the conference.

Noting that the Afghan refugee crisis is the world's

largest protracted refugee situation in recorded history, Mr. Guterres said there is deep impact on the Afghan people due to the protracted nature of conflict, poverty and forced displacement, a report in the Dawn newspaper said.

Mr. Guterres emphasised that the Afghan people need and deserve peace and prosperity and full respect of their human rights.

"As we look to the challenges ahead, the global community should step up. As we have marked 40 unbroken years of solidarity, but we also despair at the 40 broken years of hostility," he said.

According to a report in The Express Tribune, Mr. Guterres said that a renewed commit-



ment to peace is required in Afghanistan for the success-

ful repatriation of Afghan refugees.

We must be realistic and know big challenges lie ahead.

## UAE temple project marks major construction milestone



DUBAI: The first Hindu temple in the UAE's capital Abu Dhabi witnessed a major construction milestone as the first concrete pouring ceremony for its raft foundation took place here, officials said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the Swaminarayan temple of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) temple in 2018 via video conferencing from the Dubai Opera House.

Pujya Brahmavihari Swami and Pujya Akshaymunidas Swami held special prayers for the project in the presence of Pavan Kapoor, the Indian Ambassador to the UAE and Vipul, the Consul General of India to Dubai. Omar Al-Muthanna, CEO of the Community Development Authority and Mohandass Saini, CEO of Shapoorji Pallonji. During the ceremony, Pujya Brahmavihari Swami said: "Today we are embarking upon the unique Mandir raft which is built using a combination of ancient technology with modern instrumentation."

"This could not have been

possible without the grace of god, the complete support of the community and the love of everyone present here today," he said. "All I can say is that I have to give credit to my predecessor who supported this initiative and most of all the UAE government to take this enormous and very generous decision not just to donate the land but to give the first license to the temple," Ambassador Kapoor said. Al-Muthanna said positive individuals irrespective of their religion are an asset for any community.

"We want to make sure we have selected the right partner; today is an excellent example that we have selected the right partner BAPS," he said. Attendees were ushered to the construction site where the ceremony began with prayers followed by them witnessing the first layer of fly-ash concrete mix being poured. The ceremony marked a single pour of 3,000 cubic metres of the concrete mix, which is made up of 55 percent fly ash, making the temple foundation green compared to most concrete mixtures used across the world. AGENCIES

## Sri Lanka takes 'strong objection' to US travel ban on Army chief

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka has taken a "strong objection" to the U.S. imposing a travel ban on its Army chief Lieutenant General Shavendra Silva, saying the move is based on "unverified information", after Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said the allegations of gross human rights violations are serious and credible.

The Sri Lankan government has officially conveyed its protest to U.S. and taken a "strong objection" to the travel restrictions placed on Mr. Silva and his family, country's foreign relations ministry said in a statement on Friday night. "The government of Sri Lanka requests the US to verify the authenticity of the sources of information and to review its decision," the statement said. The ministry statement said that it was unfortunate that the U.S. was questioning the prerogative of the Sri Lankan President to appoint his Army Commander.

At the time of Mr. Silva's appointment, both the U.S. and the European Union had objected. U.S. Secretary of State Pompeo said that the allegations of gross human rights violations against Silva, documented by the United Nations and other organisations, are "serious and credible". Mr. Silva, 55, was appointed as the Sri Lankan Army Commander last year and previously headed the Army's 58th Division in the final battle against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) rebels of the civil war in 2009. His brigade was accused of attacking civilians, hospitals and stopping humanitarian supplies to trapped Tamil civilians.

Mr. Silva's name was mentioned in the resolution passed by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in 2013, alleging rights abuses by the Sri Lankan Army. The Sri Lanka Army has denied the alleged rights abuses. After the brutal civil war ended, Silva served in New York as Sri Lanka's Deputy Permanent Representative at the UN Mission. AGENCIES



## 'The desert locust swarms are uncommonly large and consume huge amounts of crops and forage'

But the message of this conference and the presence of so many senior government officials from all over the world is a testament of hope and commitment for a new partnership with solidarity and a better future for Afghanistan, Pakistan and the world, he said.

"Our ability to succeed would be a litmus test on the

global impact on the refugees. It's promise of greater responsibility sharing with countries that have shouldered the burden until now, Mr. Guterres said.

Mr. Guterres' comments came amidst renewed Afghan peace talks between the U.S. negotiator on Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad and the Taliban. U.S. President Donald Trump abruptly called off the talks with the insurgents in September last year after a U.S. soldier was killed in a suicide attack in Afghanistan's capital, Kabul.

Pakistan, which had facilitated the nine-month-long painstaking peace process in Doha, had pushed for the resumption of talks. AGENCIES

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# Kohli slips to 10th; Rahul, Rohit static in ICC T20I rankings



**DUBAI:** India skipper Virat Kohli slipped to the 10th position but KL Rahul and Rohit Sharma remained static at the second and 11th place respectively in the latest ICC T20I rankings released on Monday. Batting mainstay Kohli (673 points) dropped down as England captain Eoin Morgan (687), who scored 136 runs including two fifties, during their 2-1 win over South Africa in the three-match series, moved to the ninth place. Rohit, who is nursing a calf injury, was steady at the 11th spot with 662 points in the batting list, which is topped by Pakistan's Babar Azam. In the bowling chart, Indian

pacer Jasprit Bumrah, who recently lost his top spot in ODIs, was static at the 12th spot, which he shared with West Indies fast bowler Sheldon Cottrell. South Africa's left-arm wrist-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi entered the top 10 after climbing nine positions to occupy the eighth spot, while Adil Rashid replaced Andile Phehlukwayo in the sixth position. Tom Curran, who bagged five wickets and bowled the decisive last over in the second T20I to give his side a two-run victory, rose 28 spots to break into the top 30. Among others, South Africa's Quinton de Kock climbed as many as 10

## Can't wait to get Virat Kohli out, announces fit-again Trent Boult

**WELLINGTON:** There are no half measures for fit-again New Zealand pace spearhead Trent Boult who is ready to challenge India captain Virat Kohli on his return to international cricket during the two-Test series starting here on Friday. Boult was out of action for the past six weeks due to a fracture on his right hand sustained during the Boxing Day Test against Australia and missed out on the limited-overs leg of the India series. Back for the traditional format, the left-arm fast bowler made his priorities clear ahead of the

first Test. "That's personally why I play the game, to get guys like that (Kohli) out and test myself against them, so I can't wait to get stuck in. But he's an exceptional player. Everyone knows how great he is," Boult said, sending out a warning after landing in the capital city for the opening Test. The Basin Reserve track will have a lot for the seamers and in conditions conducive to seam bowling, a wily customer like Boult might prove to be a handful. "I'm

preparing for a solid wicket. It generally is very good here and goes the full distance (five days). I do enjoy playing here, the history that's involved, and it's going to be an exciting week building up. I can't wait to get out there," said the 30-year-old who has taken 256 wickets from 65 Tests. It was frustrating for him to watch his side get walloped 0-5 in the T20 series but exhilarating to when it got its mojo back in the subsequent one-dayers. The Black Caps won 3-0 in the 50-over format. "I think it is what it is. I have just got to put the last six or so weeks behind me and just back myself to get out there and do my thing," said Boult, who warmed up by playing a club game at the picturesque Taupo ground. "I was pushing in off the long run. I think a couple of the clubbies from Taupo really enjoyed that.



# Kings XI Punjab set to acquire St. Lucia franchise of Caribbean Premier League

**NEW DELHI:** Kings XI Punjab is set to acquire the St. Lucia franchise of the Caribbean Premier League, becoming the second IPL team to own a CPL outfit after Kolkata Knight Riders. "We are about to sign an agreement to be part of CPL. We are getting the St Lucia franchise. The structure and name of the company will only be communicated after we get BCCI's approval," KXIP co-owner Ness Wadia told PTI on Monday.



**"I welcome the new owners of the Saint Lucia Zouks and hope that their new energy and drive will inspire the team to excel"**

"Mohit Burman (co-owner) is in the Caribbean at the moment to sign the agreement. We want to especially thank the Prime Minister of St Lucia Allan Chastanet and Tourism Minister Dominic Fedde for making this possible. We have been pursuing this for almost nine months," added Wadia. St Lucia Zouks is one of the six teams competing in the CPL. The team is led by former West Indies captain Darren Sammy. Another Indian Premier League franchise Kolkata Knight Riders had acquired Trinbago Knight Riders in 2015. It is the most successful CPL franchise till

date, having won three titles. St Lucia's best performance till date came in 2016 when it finished fourth. The Caribbean Premier League, which began in 2013, is among the established T20 leagues in the world. Pete Russell, Chief Operating Officer of the Hero CPL, said: "We are hugely excited to welcome this ownership

team to the CPL family and we are looking forward to seeing where they take the Zouks during the upcoming season and beyond. "They bring with them a wealth of experience which is fantastic news for both the CPL and St Lucia as a whole." St Lucia Prime Minister Chastanet also welcomed the development. "I welcome the new owners of the Saint Lucia Zouks and hope that their new energy and drive will inspire the team to excel," said Mr. Chastanet. "Saint Lucians continue to root for the Zouks and we are encouraged by the confidence that Mr. Mohit Burman and his team have placed in the players and St Lucia," he added. **AGENCIES**

# How can people start questioning Bumrah's ability after couple of games, wonders Shami

**HAMILTON:** Bumrah went wicketless in all three of India's defeats against New Zealand with questions being raised over his performance. "How can people forget Jasprit Bumrah's numerous match-winning performances just after a couple of indifferent ODI games?" asked a miffed Mohammed Shami on Saturday to counter the criticism levelled at his new ball partner. Bumrah went wicketless in all three of India's defeats against New Zealand with questions being raised over his performance. "I can understand we are discussing on a topic (after a certain length of time) not just after 2-4 games. Just because he hasn't performed in two games, you can't just ignore his ability to win matches," said Shami after the second day's play in the warm-up game against New Zealand XI. "What Bumrah has achieved for India, how can you even forget that or for that matter ignore it? So if you think positively, then it's good for the player and his confidence also,"



**MOHAMMED SHAMI**  
Indian Cricketer  
Bumrah's senior partner said after taking an impressive 3 for 18 against New Zealand XI. The veteran pacer didn't

forget to take a dig at critics who he feels have a job to comment, forgetting that Bumrah is coming back from a stress fracture on his lower back. "As a sportsman, it's very different. From outside, it is very easy to nitpick as some have a job to comment and earn money. Every sportsman can get injured and one should try and look at the positives rather than harp on negatives. I also got injured in 2015 (knee surgery) but then bounced back," Shami said. What baffles Shami is how people's perception changes if a player goes through a sudden slump in form. **AGENCIES**

# Mohun Bagan fined three lakh, asked to clear dues to 4 ex-players and former coach

**KOLKATA:** The All India Football Federation's disciplinary committee on Sunday fined I-League heavyweights Mohun Bagan ₹3 lakh for non-payment of salary to four of its former players. The Mariners, who are front runners to clinch this season's I-League title, have been directed to clear the dues and pay the fine within a fortnight. "The disciplinary Committee under the chairmanship of Ushanath Banerjee directed Mohun Bagan to pay dues of four players within 30 days and pay fine of ₹3,00,000 within 15 days, failing which they will face 'Transfer Ban' for forthcoming successive two windows in whatever name or under banner it plays in any AIFF tournament," the order stated. Mohun Bagan have been directed to pay Kerala Blasters midfielder duo of Raju Gaikwad and Darren Caldera ₹11 lakh and ₹8,70,601 respectively. Abhishek Ambekar (currently East Bengal left-back) and former



goalkeeper Ricardo Cardoze who is currently without a club are due of ₹5,60,000 and ₹7,60,000 respectively since 2017. Former Mohun Bagan coach Khalid Jameel has also not been paid fully but the club have given him assurance to clear his dues within a month. Mohun Bagan have been directed by the disciplinary committee to pay the remaining ₹8,20,000 to Jamil within a month. "Khalid Jamil informed that in the meantime he has been paid ₹4,00,000 with assurance of clearing balance dues within early next month. Other Players however informed that they have not been paid any amount," the order said. **AGENCIES**

# Koneru Humpy triumphs in Cairns Cup

**ST LOUIS:** World rapid champion Koneru Humpy claimed her second title in the last two months by emerging triumphant at the Cairns Cup chess tournament following a draw against compatriot D. Harika in the ninth and final round here. Humpy, who was crowned World champion in the last week of December 2019, finished the tournament with 6 points. The icing on the cake is that Humpy would be gaining five ELO rating points (the basis for international rankings) and moving to no.2 in the world list. The 32-year-old Humpy needed only a draw in the last round to



at least tie for the first place and be in contention for the top prize. She secured the draw late on Sunday without much difficulty by playing a solid line of Four knights opening against Harika. World champion Wenjun Ju finished second with 5.5 points after winning her final round game against Rus-

sia's Alexandra Kosteniuk (5 points). Kosteniuk ended fourth in the tournament. Harika finished tied fifth with 4.5 points. Humpy started with a win over 16-year old American Carissa Yip but suffered a defeat in the second round to Mariya Muzychuk before bouncing back strongly. **AGENCIES**

# India to host 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup

**KUALA LUMPUR:** India will host the 2022 AFC Women's Asian Cup. India was awarded the tournament by the Asian Football Confederation (AFC)'s Women's Committee here on Tuesday. It was felt that India, which will also host the FIFA Women's U-17 World Cup later this year, was best placed among the three bidders — Chinese Taipei and Uzbekistan were the other competing candidates — to maximise the promotion of the women's game. The venues proposed by India — D.Y. Patil Stadium, Trans Stadia Arena and Fatorada Stadium — are also being used in the FIFA tournaments, the AFC said. AFC's Women's Committee chairperson Mahfuza Akhter Kiron said: "India offers the best opportunities to build the event commercially as well as increasing the value and India is also committed to developing the women's game and while all three were strong bids,



**"India is also committed to developing the women's game and while all three were strong bids, India stands out"**  
**MAHFUZA AKHTER KIRON**  
AFC's Women's Committee chairperson  
India stands out." The committee decided that the expanded AFC Women's Asian Cup — from eight to 12 teams — will be

played in three groups of four teams with a minimum of 25 matches with eight teams qualifying for the newly introduced quarter-finals. The committee agreed that the minimum length of the competition would be 17 days and that the administration would be mandated to organise the relevant play-off matches depending on the AFC slots at the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup. The tournament dates are likely to be in late October and early November 2022. **AGENCIES**

# Young India a top contender, says India captain Harmanpreet

**SYDNEY:** The void left by legends such as Mithali Raj and Jhulan Goswami is not easy to fill, India captain Harmanpreet Kaur said on Monday but also asserted that her young side had grown substantially to be a top contender for this month's women's T20 World Cup. The average age of India's squad in Australia is 22.8 with Harmanpreet being among

the seasoned ones. "We already miss the experience they shared with us, but these young girls are showing their talent and ability," said the 29-year-old, speaking at the captains' media day at Taronga Zoo here. The ICC Women's T20 World Cup will open with a clash between India and defending champion and hosts



Australia in Adelaide on February 21. "In the last two years I've gone from being the

youngest to one of the oldest in the team," she said. "They never show that they're young, they can always do what we expect of them. The team is looking in really good shape and showing what they can do with extra responsibility," she said. She is still not over the disappointment of missing the ODI world title in 2017 and

Harmanpreet said the T20 World Cup trophy would go a long way in making up for that debacle. "Our team is growing day by day, everyone is looking so positive," Harmanpreet said. "It's going to be very big if we win, I was very surprised at all the reaction from 2017. My parents didn't tell me, they didn't want us to feel the pressure." **AGENCIES**

# Bhawna Jat qualifies for Olympics in 20km race walk

**RANCHI:** Unheralded Bhawna Jat qualified for the Tokyo Olympics in the 20km race walk event after pulling off a shock win with a national record time at the National Championships in Ranchi on Saturday. The 23-year-old athlete, who hails from a poor farmer's family at Kabra village in Rajasthan's Rajsamand district, clocked 1 hour 29 minutes and 54 seconds, well inside the Olympic qualification time of 1:31:00, to win the gold. Bhawna's effort was a mas-

sive improvement of more than eight minutes from her personal best of 1:38.30s set in October last year during the National Open Championships here. She had, however, clocked 1:36:17s in 20,000m race walk event during the All India Inter-Railway Athletics Championships in August last year in Pune, which was competed on track. Bhawna, who currently trains on her own in Jaipur with her coach Gurmukh Singh, had not taken part in any



international event in junior or senior level. She also has never been in a national camp

under the Athletics Federation of India (AFI). She began her senior career

**"It was pure hard work in the last few months with my coach that I am being able to come up with this kind of performance"**

**BHAWNA JAT**  
in 2016 during the National Inter-State Championships in Hyderabad where she finished fifth with a time of 1:52:38s. Saturday's win was just her second such achievement in a national meet after the National Open in Ranchi last year. "It's a dream come true. I was doing in the range of 1:27:00s during training and so I knew that if the conditions are all right I would be able to breach this Olympic qualifying mark of 1:31:00s," Bhawna who is currently a Train Ticket Examiner in

Indian Railways, posted in Kolkata, told PTI. "It was pure hard work in the last few months with my coach that I am being able to come up with this kind of performance," said Bhawna, who trains on the road around the Sawai Man Singh Stadium in Jaipur. KT Irfan (men's 20km race walk), Avinash Sable (men's 3000m steeplechase), mixed 4x400m relay team and Neeraj Chopra (men's javelin) have already qualified for the Tokyo Olympics from athletics.

Her coach Gurmukh said that Bhawna has given her dope sample, which means that her national record will be valid. An AFI official also said that dope sample collectors from the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) have taken samples from the athletes. Bhawna's next competition will be the Asian Race Walk Championships in Japan on March 15. Priyanka Goswami narrowly missed the Olympic cut with a timing of 1:31.36s to win the silver in the 17-athlete field. **AGENCIES**

# OPENING & LAUNCHES

## Honda Motorcycles launch BS-VI compliant Shine, price starts at Rs 67,857

**NEW DELHI:** Honda Motorcycle and Scooter India (HMSI) on Thursday launched BS-VI compliant version of its Shine bike model price starting at Rs 67,857 (ex-showroom Delhi).

The Shine is powered by a BS-VI compliant 125cc engine with 14 per cent more fuel economy than the previous version, HMSI said in a statement. Commenting on the launch, HMSI President, CEO and Managing Director Minoru Kato said the next generation Shine BS-VI, "unleash another quiet revolution in 125cc motorcycle segment and further strengthen our business expansion in India".

The company has already sold 250,000 units of BS-VI compliant two-wheelers, he added.

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## NELCO launches in-flight wi-fi services in India, Vistara likely to be first customer

**NEW DELHI:** Tata group's NELCO, in partnership with Panasonic Avionics, on Wednesday launched in-flight wi-fi services in India, with Vistara likely to be the first airline in the country to avail the facility.

"Nelco is the first Indian company to provide this service in the country, marking the beginning of a new era of wi-fi on aircraft in Indian skies," it said in a press release. Vistara has already signed up for aero in-flight communication (IFC) services and "is likely to be the first domestic airline company to launch these services very soon", the NELCO press release said. P J Nath, the MD and CEO of NELCO, said, "We foresee a great opportunity for growth in the IFC services in the country in the coming years and intend to be a leader in this market."

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## Police Uber launch Himmat Plus app at IGI airport

**NEW DELHI:** To ensure safety and security of people travelling in cabs, the Delhi Police along with Uber on Monday launched the Himmat Plus app at the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport, officials said. In case of an emergency, the police headquarters will receive the real-time location of a driver or a rider through this app so that a PCR van can be assigned to provide assistance, they said.

Speaking on the occasion, Delhi Police Commissioner Amulya Patnaik said that the department's core mission is to ensure the safety of the public. "This new integration with enhanced location services and travel information will help to save lives. We welcome the use of technology that enables the Delhi Police to react more quickly and efficiently during an emergency," Patnaik said.

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# Realme X50 Pro 5G launch on Feb 24

**NEW DELHI:** Realme X50 Pro 5G is set to launch in India at an online event on February 24, alongside a concurrent event scheduled to take place in Madrid, Spain. It will be the brand's first 5G flagship smartphone that is also a spruced-up version of the X50 5G, which was launched in China last year. A multitude of teasers has inundated the rumour mill wherein key specifications of the smartphone have been revealed. But the most important among the internals is the 5G chip, which will enable the smartphone to connect to 5G networks - something that is uncertainly missing in the Indian market.

Many tech companies have been eyeing the kick-start of 5G networks in India, so as to begin with the deluge of the launches of their respective 5G offerings. It makes sense though - luring consumers with something that does



"Realme 5G handset will be powered with 865 Snapdragon chipset and available at around Rs. 50,000"

not exist in India's telecom ecosystem should be challenging. But, for Realme, it may not be so hard, which is why it planned to beat Vi-

vo's IQOO to be India's first brand that will launch a 5G phone. A Realme official told PTI that it wants to cater to those users who would travel

abroad, largely to the countries that have the commercial 5G framework readily available.

But for what it is worth, Realme is optimistic about the X50 Pro 5G's debut in India. We have cumulated everything that we know about 'India's first 5G smartphone' to make you understand better before you jump into the 5G fray as and when it begins.

The first 5G-enabled handset in India to be launched by Chinese smartphone maker, realme - the X50 Pro 5G, is likely to cost around Rs. 50,000, a company official said on Wednesday. The 'Realme' that came into existence in 2018 is all set to become one of the first brands to unveil 5G ready smartphone in India on February 24, even though the "network is not available in the country", he claimed.

"Realme 5G handset will be powered with 865 Snap-

dragon chipset and available at around Rs. 50,000," an official, who did not wish to be identified, told PTI.

A leading website, which compares mobile phones, estimates that the price of 5G smartphone handset with a lower chipset version could be available at Rs. 25,790 per unit. The company wants to offer future-ready products and people, who travel abroad, can use the handset as the technology is available in many developed countries, the official said.

The Realme X50 Pro 5G handset will be launched simultaneously in Spain and India by Realme after the world's largest mobile trade show, MWC Barcelona 2020, was cancelled due to outbreak of coronavirus. iQoo, a new smartphone brand from China, is also likely to announce its 5G phone on February 25 in the form of iQoo 3.

## ClimaCell comes out with Weather Assistant Consumer App

**BOSTON:** Today ClimaCell, the weather technology company, is excited to launch its Weather Assistant app on Android.

ClimaCell's app is a free consumer app that helps people better plan their lives around the weather. Initially launched in 2019 on iOS, ClimaCell's Weather Assistant has already generated just under 3K ratings in the app store with an average rating of 4.6 stars out of 5. Download Here.

While expanding to Android presents an exciting global growth opportunity, one market in particular to benefit from Weather Assistant is India as more than 90% of phones in the country are on Android. With a lack of hyper-local and actionable weather forecasting capabilities in the region, Indians now have access to an entirely new way to see and plan for life amidst volatile weather.



The magic of Weather Assistant is a combination of hyper accurate forecasts down to the street level detail in real-time, in addition to its ability to send actionable alerts to users. For instance, users receive alerts from Weather Assistant such as

"it will stop raining in Delhi's Main Bazaar in 17 minutes" or "it will start raining in 25 minutes in Mumbai's Gateway of India."

"We initially built Weather Assistant because even though there are plenty of existing weather apps on the market people were still having trouble making decisions about their daily schedule or upcoming plans based on the weather," said Effie Ardit, Chief Product Officer at ClimaCell. "Weather Assistant solves the problem by integrating people's schedules and activities with hyper-local weather forecasts so people can better plan ahead, and that's why we're so excited to expand into the global Android market today."

Users are also able to connect Weather Assistant to their calendar and get updates if the weather changes. For instance, if a user schedules an outdoor party for a certain time during the week when the forecast calls for clear skies and sun, Weather Assistant will send an alert to the user and to all the event attendees if the forecast changes so changes can be made ahead of time.

Weather Assistant is free to download at this link, and in addition to showing current and future hyper local weather, the app also shows air quality, humidity, wind, cloudiness, and visibility.

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## Crio.Do introduces free programme for engineering students



**GUWAHATI:** Learning solutions provider Crio.Do, which raised USD 1 million in seed funding led by Flipkart co-founder Binny Bansal, on Sunday said it has rolled out a free product development programme for engineering students in the country. The programme called 'Crio Launch' is a completely free and app-based solution that promises to offer real product development experience to students and empowers them to learn relevant technical skills.

"Crio Launch focuses on software engineering foundations. Students learn foundational con-

cepts by actually applying them in building real software products," Crio.Do co-founder Rathinamurthy R told PTI.

The participants are handpicked for the programme, which was launched last month, based on a multi-stage selection process and each stage evaluates a student's appetite to learn and grow, he added. "The programme has been launched recently and has already garnered interest from over 500 campuses across the country, making it one of the largest experiential learning programmes for product development in India," Rathinamurthy said.

PTI

## Digital hub 'Novartis Biome India' launched in Hyderabad

**HYDERABAD:** Novartis has announced the launch of a digital innovation hub in Hyderabad. Claimed to be the first in Asia, the "Novartis Biome India" is aimed at boosting connection and interaction between the company and partners from across the digital ecosystem, from nimble startups and academia to the biggest players in the industry, a company press release said on Tuesday.

The Novartis Biome India



will act as a bridge to the external ecosystem, enabling Novartis teams to better discover, develop and drive collabora-

tions that transform innovative initiatives into impactful and scalable solutions for patients, it said. "India has a rich and vibrant technology community. Together, we have a fantastic opportunity to combine our scientific know-how with the expertise of tech players, big and small, to create digital solutions for patients, at scale.

Partnerships are at the core of this effort. The Biome's suite of end-to-end services will ensure we deliver on our commitment to both our internal teams and our collaboration partners," Bertrand Bodson, Chief Digital Officer, Novartis said.

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## Tata Motors to launch 4 products in 18-24 months: N Chandrasekaran

**MUMBAI:** Tata Group Chairman N Chandrasekaran on Wednesday said Tata Motors will launch at least four more products in the next 18-24 months with focus on sustainability and electric vehicles. The company is focusing on - CESS: connected, electric, shared and safe - as the future of mobility.

"Tata Motors is pushing the envelope with other group companies on safety... We have launched two models since we unveiled Tigor in 2017, and Nexa last week, at least four more products will be coming in the next 18-24



months," Chandrasekaran said. He added that Tata Motors is working with seven other group companies, and expects to invest continuously

to expand its endeavours to drive electric vehicles and sustainable mobility in India.

Also read: Auto Expo 2020: Dates, time, venue, tickets,

"We have launched two models since we unveiled Tigor in 2017, and Nexa last week, at least four more products will be coming in the next 18-24 months"

bookings, how to attend

Tata Motors on Wednesday announced four global unveils, a pre-production preview and a commercial launch at the Auto Expo here. It also showcases

the pre-production version of its Gravitus SUV that is scheduled to be launched in the first half of FY2021. The company will allow test drive of its Nexon EV, besides showcasing the new Winger and Prima. Tata Motors also unveiled the HBX Show car based on ALFA ARC architecture, and the Sierra EV concept as well as the Hexa Safari edition.

The company also plans to roll out an electric low-floor bus and an electric truck. Tata Motors is showcasing a lineup of 26 new products, including 14 commercial and 12 passenger vehicles.

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## SpiceJet to start 20 new flights for daily services on domestic routes

**MUMBAI:** No-frills carrier SpiceJet on Wednesday said it will launch 20 new flights on its domestic routes, including some services under the government's regional connectivity scheme, Udan, from late next month as part of the airline's summer schedule.

The new flights, starting from March 29, include services to Patna from Amritsar, Varanasi and Guwahati. Besides, it will also launch flights on Hyderabad-Mangaluru, Bengaluru-Jabalpur and Mumbai-Aurangabad routes, all under the Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS), for the first time on its network, the airline said in a release.

The new services will fly



daily and will be operated by a mix of Boeing 737-800 and Bombardier Q400 aircraft, it stated. These services will enhance connectivity between

key metros and smaller cities, it said. With the commencement of these new flights, the airline will have a total of 52 flights connecting 12

cities under the RCS scheme, SpiceJet said.

"We are excited to announce the launch of 20 new domestic flights. As we add newer cities and flights to our network, our focus remains firmly on connecting the unconnected parts of the country besides enhancing connectivity between metros and non-metros," SpiceJet Chief Commercial Officer Shilpa Bhatia was quoted as saying in the release. SpiceJet said it will also enhance its operations with additional frequencies on the Mumbai-Bagdoga and Mumbai-Chennai routes with the addition of a second and fifth flight, respectively.

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## Ford launches BS-VI compliant Figo, Freestyle, Aspire models

**NEW DELHI:** US auto major Ford on Wednesday launched BS-VI compliant versions of its compact car models Figo, Freestyle and Aspire in India, priced between Rs 5.39 lakh and Rs 8.34 lakh (ex-showroom Delhi).

All three models will come in both petrol and diesel engine options of 1.2 litre and 1.5 litre respectively, Ford India said in a statement. While BS-VI compliant compact hatchback Figo is priced between Rs 5.39 lakh and Rs 7.85 lakh, compact sedan Aspire is tagged from Rs 5.99 lakh to Rs 8.34 lakh.

On the other hand, the company said its new compact utility vehicle Freestyle comes in a price range of Rs 5.89 lakh to Rs 8.19 lakh. The company said it will offer its mobility and connectivity solution, FordPassTM, as a standard feature across all BS-VI compliant Ford cars and the three models will have this feature too.

Commenting on the launch, Ford India President and Managing Director Anurag Mehrotra said, "We have been working relentlessly to make our products surprisingly affordable - both at the point of sale and service."

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## Telangana unveils blockchain district accelerator programme



**NEW DELHI:** IT services firm Tech Mahindra has launched T-Block Accelerator, an accelerator programme for Telangana Blockchain District.

The programme has been launched in partnership with the Telangana government and innovation management firm IBC Media. The launch of T-Block is a step in continuation of the Telangana government's endeavour to make Telangana as the "Blockchain Capital of the World", a statement said.

A pact had been signed between the Government of Telangana and Tech Mahindra to this effect in 2018, it added.

"This initiative is aimed at start-ups that have a strong blockchain use-case, thereby accelerating the start-up growth and therein contributing to the growth of the overall industry," the statement said.

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ability, and consensus.

Blockchain is seen as a technology with the potential to transform almost all industries and economies.

Jayesh Ranjan, principal secretary (information technology, electronics and communications department) in the Government of Telangana, said the accelerator will be a "torch-bearer" to multiple future blockchain accelerators in the country.

"Through this initiative, Tech Mahindra will enable creation of an ecosystem which will empower start-ups to solve tough business problems for clients across diverse industry verticals. The Telangana government will help provide the required regulatory framework to enable and promote Blockchain growth," the statement said.

Rajesh Dhuddu, global practice leader (blockchain) at Tech Mahindra, said the company aims to build a world-class support infrastructure for blockchain start-ups and make Hyderabad a destination of choice among several new-age entrepreneurs and blockchain evangelists.

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# UK launches points-based visa system to attract best talent of the world

**LONDON:** Home Secretary Priti Patel has launched the UK's new points-based visa system, aimed at attracting the "brightest and the best" from the world, including from India, and cutting down numbers of cheap, low-skilled workers coming to the country.

The new system will come into force from January 1 2021 at the end of the transition period after the UK's exit from the European Union (EU) last month, which will formally end free movement of people within the economic bloc for the UK as a non-member.

The new post-Brexit system, which will apply equally to the

**"We're ending free movement, taking back control of our borders and delivering on the people's priorities by introducing a new UK points-based immigration system"**

EU and non-EU countries like India, is based on assigning points for specific skills, qualifications, salaries and professions, with visas only awarded to those who gain enough points.



"Today is a historic moment for the whole country. We're ending free movement, taking back control of our borders and delivering on the people's priorities by introducing a new UK points-based immigration

system, which will bring overall migration numbers down," said Patel, the senior-most Indian-origin Cabinet minister. We will attract the brightest and the best from around the globe, boosting the economy and our

communities, and unleash this country's full potential, Patel, in charge of the UK's visa and immigration system, said.

The UK Home Office said the new system is a direct response to the 2016 referendum in favour of Brexit, which was seen as a vote to end the country's reliance on cheap migrant labour and reduce overall levels of migration with tighter security.

"The new single global system will treat the EU and non-EU citizens equally. It will give top priority to those with the highest skills and the greatest talents, including scientists, engineers and academics, the Home Office said.

AGENCIES

# ANA DE ARMAS

plays  
*Marilyn Monroe*



## Taapsee, Tahir to 'Run' together

Actors Taapsee Pannu and Tahir Raj Bhasin are set to lead the Hindi adaptation of acclaimed German thriller *Run Lola Run*, the makers have announced. Titled *Loop Lapeta*, the film is billed as a new age thriller-comedy and will be directed by Aakash Bhatia. It is slated for a January 29, 2021 release.

The 1998 German original, starring Franka Potente and Moritz Bleibtreu, follows a woman who needs to arrange 100,000 Deutsche Mark in 20 minutes to save her boyfriend.

The actors also took to Instagram to share the news.

"Right, so here's yet another announcement from my stable. I'm on a roll. Or shall I say in a loop? Stoked to announce Sony Picture India and Ellipsis Entertainment's crazy thriller-comedy, 'LOOP LAPETA', an adaptation of the cult classic 'Run Lola Run'. Looking forward to the roller-coaster with my director Aakash Bhatia, my co-star, Tahir Raj Bhasin and the amazing folks at Ellipsis Entertainment (Tanuj, Atul) and Sony," wrote Taapsee, also sharing a picture collage of her and Tahir.

Tahir said he had watched *Run Lola Run* as a child and it was an unbelievable feeling to star in the film's Hindi take. "Stoked to announce our thriller-comedy 'LOOP LAPETA', which will keep you spinning in loops, quite literally!"

"Can't wait to board the roller-coaster with my director Aakash Bhatia, my co-star, the beyond incredible Taapsee, and the amazing folks at Ellipsis Entertainment and Sony Pictures India," he wrote.

*Loop Lapeta* is a Sony Pictures Films India and Ellipsis Entertainment production.

While Taapsee will next be seen in *Thappad*, Tahir's upcoming release is *83*.



**K**nives Out star Ana de Armas says essaying the role of Marilyn Monroe in upcoming movie *Blonde* is a groundbreaking moment for her as it is for the first time that a Cuban actor is playing the Hollywood icon.

The Andrew Dominik film, about the 1950s star, is based on the novel of the same name by Joyce Carol Oates.

In a cover interview with *Vanity Fair*, de Armas said though the director was convinced after the first audition, she had to do more auditions for the "money people."

"I only had to audition for Marilyn once and Andrew said 'It's you,' but I had to audition for everyone else. The producers. The money people. I always have people I needed to convince," the actor said, adding that she was convinced about pulling off the role.

"Playing Marilyn was groundbreaking. A Cuban playing Marilyn Monroe. I wanted it so badly. You see that famous photo of her and she is smiling in the moment, but that's just a slice of what she was really going through at the time," de Armas added.

The actor said her partnership with Dominik for the film was much more collaborative than most of her previous stints with directors such as Rian Johnson, Denis Villeneuve and Cary Joji Fukunaga.

"I have never worked more closely with a director than I worked with Andrew. Yes, I have had collaborative relationships, but to get phone calls at midnight because he has an idea and he can't sleep and all of a sudden you can't sleep for the same reason..." de Armas said.

Her *Knives Out* co-star Jamie Lee Curtis, whose father had famously featured with Monroe in Billy Wilder's 1959 romantic comedy *Some Like It Hot*, told the outlet that she was amazed with de Armas as she disappeared into the role after watching her screen test footage.

"I remember when she showed me a video of her screen tests for *Blonde*, I dropped to the floor. I couldn't believe it. Ana was completely gone. She was Marilyn," Curtis said.

*Blonde*, which hails from Netflix stable, is produced by Brad Pitt's Plan B Entertainment banner. The film is expected to release later this year.

**"I have never worked more closely with a director than I worked with Andrew. Yes, I have had collaborative relationships, but to get phone calls at midnight because he has an idea and he can't sleep and all of a sudden you can't sleep for the same reason..."**

## LYNN COHEN

best known for her role as Magda in 'Sex and the City', dead at 86



**LYNN WAS A STAND OUT IN EVERYTHING SHE WAS A PART OF. ALSO A LOVELY AND INTELLIGENT PERSON. WE WILL MISS HER**

Los Angeles Veteran film and theatre actor Lynn Cohen, best known for playing the role of Magda in the *Sex and the City* series, passed away at the age of 86.

According to *Deadline*, the actor breathed her last on Friday. No cause of death was given in the announcement by her management company. Lynn Cohen played Magda, the hired housekeeper/nanny to one of the show's leads Miranda (played by Cynthia Nixon). The actor also reprised her part in the two film versions — *Sex and the City* (2008) and *Sex and the City 2* (2010) — of the HBO series. Her co-stars Sarah Jessica Parker, Kristin Davis and Kim Cattrall remembered Lynn Cohen as a "beautiful" and "intelligent" person. "Beautiful Lynn Cohen. Miranda's dear and necessary Magda. Our dear SATC colleague. Talent, grace, inspiration. RIP," wrote Ms. Parker on Instagram.

"Lynn was a stand out in everything she was a part of. Also a lovely and intelligent person. We will miss her," tweeted Ms. Davis.

"Our beautiful #lynncohen 'Passing through nature to eternity' RIPx," wrote Ms. Cattrall on the microblogging site.

Lynn Cohen's television credits also include recurring roles on the shows *Damages*, *Nurse Jackie*, *The Affair*, and *Law & Order*. She also featured in guest roles on *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, *God Friended Me* and *Master of None*. On the big screen, she starred as former Israel Prime Minister Golda Meir in the Academy Award-nominated *Munich*, directed by Steven Spielberg. She also featured in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, *Across the Universe*, and *Vanya on 42nd Street*, among others.

Her stage roles on Broadway include *Orpheus Descending* and *Ivanov*.

The actor was a regular in the New York Theater community and earned her Lucille Lortel and Drama League Award nominations. She also earned the New Dramatists' Bowden Award, Fox Fellow, Lilly Award and the Richard Seff Award from Actor's Equity Association.

## Sunny Leone to star in a comedy web series



Actress Sunny Leone has taken up a new comedy show on a digital platform.

"I can't reveal much about it but it's always exciting to be a part of a new project. I really enjoy doing comedy and it's always good to share a laugh or two which puts a smile on someone's face," Sunny said.

A source shared that Sunny has a great sense of humour and that's some-

thing that would reflect in this show. "She has an impeccable comic timing. She also decided to flag off her fees and would be donating it to St. Catherine's Home in Mumbai. The thought of adoption came up when she and Daniel (her husband) used to visit the place often," added the source.

Sunny and her husband Daniel Weber have an adopted girl child Nisha. The couple have two more children — sons Noah and Asher — via surrogacy.

## Tapas Paul, Bengali actor and former Trinamool MP, passes away

Tapas Paul, once a major star of the Bengali cinema, twice MP and MLA, passed away in Mumbai on Tuesday. He was 61.

Mr. Paul's life was nearly as dramatic as some of the characters he played. A boy from middle class

suburban Bengal became an overnight screen sensation for his role of a village simpleton 'Kedar' in the film 'Dadar Kirti'. (Elder brother's actions). In film after film, he played the same character, a typical suburban or village good man, finally defeating the urban bad

## Deepika stars as Kapil Dev's wife in '83'

"I've seen very closely the role a wife plays in the success of her husband's professional and personal aspirations in my mother and 83 for me in many ways is an ode to every woman who puts her husband's dream before her own"



Actor Deepika Padukone on Wednesday shared her first look as Romi Dev, wife of legendary cricketer Kapil Dev, from the upcoming film *83*.

In the photo, which

Deepika shared on social media, she is seen sporting a bob haircut and flaunting a black polo-neck top with cream bottom.

Also in the picture is actor Ranveer Singh, who plays Kapil Dev in the sports drama, in the of-

ficial Team India blazer.

Deepika said, for her, *83* is an ode to every woman who prioritises her husband's dreams over hers.

"To be able to play a small part in a film that captures one of the most iconic moments in sporting history has been an absolute honour. I've seen very closely the role a wife plays in the success of her husband's professional and personal aspirations in my mother and *83* for me in many ways is an ode to every woman who puts her husband's dream before her own," the actor wrote on Instagram.

Ranveer too shared the same photograph on Instagram and wrote, "The wind beneath my wings. The heart of the hurricane."

*83*, directed by Kabir Khan, will chronicle India's win under Kapil Dev's captainship, when the Men in Blue defeated West Indies in the final to clinch their first-ever World Cup trophy in 1983.

It is produced by Madhu Mantena, Vishnu Induri and Kabir Khan, and presented by Reliance Entertainment.

The film is slated to be released on April 10.



man at a time when the CPI(M) was nurturing the countryside. Many film makers and actors of the 1980s rode the political wave making films on emergent rural Bengal. Mr. Paul was perhaps the most successful of the lot whose victory in films symbolised the victory of the village over the city, fitting the Left's narrative.

By the time his career dipped, he associated himself with the rising star, albeit in politics, of Bengal Mamata Banerjee. Ms. Banerjee nominated him in a south Kolkata seat in the 2001 Assembly election and he won it, indicating that his simpleton image on screen can equally charm the voters in the elite south Kolkata constituency. He told this correspondent in 2001, in an interview, that he realised "Mamata Banerjee is the future of West Bengal", perhaps much before the rest of Bengal.

Ms. Banerjee never disappointed Mr. Paul, who was not a particularly bright politician, and gave him the Lok Sabha ticket in 2009 and 2014. He won on both the occasions but made a mistake which triggered his end.

He commented during his 2014 poll campaign in his constituency in Krishnanagar that he would make his "boys enter the houses" of the Opposition "to rape". The video clip went viral and he was publicly admonished by all.

Soon after, his name featured in the multi-crore Rose Valley financial scheme scam and he was arrested by the CBI in the winter of 2016. For nearly one and half years he was in jail. Mr. Paul, who loved playing the good cop in films, was shattered emotionally and physically in the company of convicts. However, on Tuesday his friends and rivals unanimously said "he was a good man at heart". He would be remembered, many said, as the simpleton Kedar which made him a star.